

Transcript of audio report:

interview with Naome, jobseeker in Nigeria

[Introductory male voice] Hi, and thanks for tuning in. You're listening to an Inclusive Futures audio report, brought to you by our global reporter, Kimberly Middleton.

[Introductory female voice] Hi I'm Kim. I spoke to Naome, a jobseeker and wheelchair user in Uganda. After getting her qualifications in social work and social administration, Naome was offered a couple of jobs. But they were all based in buildings which were not accessible. She decided to set up her own business instead, but she still dreams of finding a job. I spoke to her about the barriers she's faced as well as the impact that COVID-19 has had on her life.

[Naome] My name is Naome, and I'm 29 years old. I live in Uganda.

[Kimberly] And so you're a job seeker, Naome?

[Naome] I actually stopped looking. It was hard for me to get a job in Uganda when you have a disability. Then I now started doing my own thing. I work from home; I've been self-employed for four years now. I do knitting, I do crocheting, I do embroidery, I do interior decor.

[Kimberly] So how long did you look for a job before you decided to be self-employed?

[Naome] It took me three years there. I was applying for social work and the administration, most of those are in those organisations that are for people with disability and without disability. I applied in schools as well because in the social work, I can be a counsellor. But still it didn't have any fruit. I think the challenge wasn't because I wasn't qualified for the job, the challenge to me was the working environment that was not wheelchair-friendly. The buildings were inaccessible, there was not a lift, there was no toilet that is accessible, there are no ramps, there is nothing. And to me now, that was like living in prison. I couldn't work in that kind of environment because if where I'm going to work is on the fourth floor or the second floor, and then someone has to carry me in and carry me out, they might drop me and that is not safe enough for someone like me. I did talk to some of them, but the ones who are willing to employ me also told me that the owners of the buildings are the ones to act on the inaccessibility part of it.

[Kimberly] How did it make you feel being offered a job, but the barrier of the building being inaccessible, stopping you from being able to take it?

[Naome] It was awful. It was heart-breaking with all that comes with that. It was not good at all. One of my worst experiences over the years. That was the experience that made me decide to start working from home instead.

[Kimberly] Are you hoping that you will still be able to find a job then?

[Naome] I think if it's a place that is accessible, I would still want to get one. I would love to do social work, but especially for people who are able bodied, who are not disabled, I want to work with those people. Because in my opinion, I think people with disability have been empowered enough, we've been taught about our rights, and those that we've lobbied, we've advocated for all these things. But now if I could get a job and work with people who are not disabled and then to me, they are the ones that should be equipped with the information that I have and all these things, so that they can think beyond themselves.

[Kimberly] What experiences have you had that make you want to change people's attitudes and help other people with disabilities? Where does that motivation come from?

[Naome] The motivation comes from living in a world where I feel people who don't have disabilities in Uganda, completely don't know what it is to live with a disability and how to work in a world where people with disability are included. If we're talking about inclusion, like under the sustainable development goals, where we're talking about including people and then the people without disabilities are left behind. Then to me, we are not going to achieve it. They are completely green about anything to do with people with disability. They don't know. We've done enough lectures to people with disability, we have equipped them enough, they can now lobby for funds, they can now get out and look for a job like I did. But now people who are to employ us don't even know how to handle us and to me, I think that is the mindset that has to be changed. That's where I get my empowerment from.

[Kimberly] How has coronavirus affected you as a person with a disability?

[Naome] It has affected me so badly, I would say. So bad. Medically, let me start, because it has affected my medical, my health, more than every other aspect of my life. Living with spinal cord injury, most people with spinal cord injury are on medication every day. So for my case, there is a medication that I have to take twice a day. Now, during this period of the coronavirus, everything has been on lockdown. So I can't go to the place where I have to access the medication from. There was a time when you needed permission to even go to a health facility. The Chairman, the one who has to give me a letter to permit me to go, stays two kilometres away. If I'm to get from the police station, it's three kilometres away. And the hospital where I have to get this drug is 25 kilometres away, so accessing medical care, was very hard.

[Kimberly] And has the coronavirus affected your work at all?

[Naome] Yeah, it has affected my work as well because I had already pending work and my clients had already paid me before the coronavirus came. Then now, [the] time when coronavirus came, we were on lockdown. The shops where we access this material are shut down, even up to now. And that has made me lose some of my clients. It has not been good. They paid me, their demand was not met on right on time, and I don't know when this whole thing will be ending. So they've really, really been very disappointed business wise, which has affected me as well.

Then physically, I'm into sports. I do wheelchair basketball, but now since the coronavirus came, I can't access the court because most of us here in Uganda, especially people who play wheelchair basketball, we use public means of transport.

It has become more expensive to travel because according to the presidential guidelines on his approach to COVID-19, he said taxis that we use here in Uganda, they are licensed to carry 14 or 16 passengers, and now they have to take half of the capacity they used to take before. So if the person who used to sit paid 2,000 and I also paid 2,000, now I have to pay double for even the space where there is no one. With my business being down, my capital is what I'm now living on or picking from. So I can't go for sports anymore. I have to be home.

[Kimberly] How do you think the coronavirus might impact on your search for a job?

[Naome] I think it's going to impact negatively in a very big way.

Before the coronavirus, it was even hard for a person with a disability to find a job. And now if you had applied to an organisation they have slashed on the number of people that they're employing right now. So organisations closing down and then stop the people they had on their payroll. I don't think it's going to be easy for persons with disabilities to get a job right now.

Training lighted the fire back inside me to maybe look for a job again then things started happening. And the last thing that someone was thinking was looking for a job. How are you going to survive without catching the coronavirus, is what was on my mind. But if I had the opportunity to work, I would really be willing to work if I get one.

[Kimberly] What's the positive side?

[Naome] My positive side, in my opinion, would be that over the years we've been advocating for inclusion, we've been asking organisations to include people with disability. Since, in my experience, I told them if this place cannot fit me, it's not accessible, maybe I could work from home. And they used to say, "No you can't, you need to report here every day." They didn't accept the fact that I could work from home, but when COVID came, the president said people should be on shut down and people were now working from home.

Now, to me, I think I can go back to the company and tell them, you know what? I told you the other time that I could work from home. During COVID, everyone was working from home and they could deliver. Meaning a person with a disability, we can work from home and deliver. So to me, that is a positive thing.

[Introductory male voice] If you'd like to hear more from our citizen reporters, why not visit www.inclusivefutures.org