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HIP HOP TAKES CENTER STAGE IN THE STRUGGLE TO OVERCOME DISABILITY IN UGANDA



Kampala, Uganda: In a powerful show of support, stars of Uganda's entertainment industry joined government officials, business executives and local activists to raise more than \$4,500 for disabled survivors of the country's long and violent internal conflict.

The funds will help displaced people with disabilities in the war-damaged north move out of camps and return home.

The money was raised during a fundraising dinner February 18, as part of a major campaign by the [Gulu Disabled Persons' Union \(GDPU\)](#) to include the needs of the disabled in Uganda's reconstruction. The campaign, which is supported by [Survivor Corps](#) and [The Advocacy Project \(AP\)](#), recently won a commitment from local officials to make government offices and health centers in two northern sub-counties accessible.

The fundraiser, organized by [AP Peace Fellow Annelieke van de Wiel](#) (above right) represented an unprecedented commitment by Uganda's business and entertainment communities toward helping people with disabilities. The event's 13 sponsors included The Sheraton Hotel in Kampala, which provided free space, and several prominent corporations. Survivor Corps and AP both contributed and are appealing for [donations](#).

The event was attended by Uganda's State Minister for Elderly and Disability Affairs, five

members of parliament, and Dorah Mwima (Miss Uganda) shown in the photo on the left. Among the Ugandan artists who performed were BSG Labongo and Sam Gombya, who also have disabilities. The event was widely covered in the Ugandan media.

"The participation of people, especially corporate organizations, is perhaps more significant than the actual amount of money raised," said GDPU Chairman Simon Ong'om. "This is the first (event) of its kind in Uganda where...a number of people came together for the cause of people with disabilities."

The long and brutal rebellion by the Lord's Resistance Army has disabled and displaced thousands of Ugandans. Although the government is now closing camps for internally displaced persons (IDPs), survivors with disabilities are being left behind because they lack the resources and mobility to restart their lives. The funds raised through the dinner and online appeal will purchase roofing supplies, farming tools to cultivate land, and basic household items.

At the same time, the GDPU has launched a campaign to better integrate people with disabilities into reconstruction in the north, by making 25 health centers and 12 district offices in Gulu and Amuru districts accessible by the end of 2009. The campaign achieved a breakthrough on December 28, 2008, when local parish representatives from two sub-counties met in Lamogi and issued a written pledge to include budget funds for accessibility at health centers, schools, sub-county offices and water wells.

AVSI, an Italian organization, has also pledged to construct five ramps on key buildings in Gulu district. An accessibility team trained by Survivor Corps will advise on construction.

The campaign is also seeking to open the justice system up to survivors with disabilities. After meeting with a delegation from AP and Survivor Corps in January, the International Criminal Court (ICC) in Kampala has begun special programs for survivors with disabilities in northern Uganda.

The ICC recently held a seminar for survivors in Soroti District in Eastern Uganda and plans to expand to Gulu, Lira, Amuru and Adjumani districts. At the seminars, survivors are given information about participating before the ICC and receiving reparations.

- [Donate](#) to help IDPs with disabilities return home
- Learn more about [AP and Survivor Corps' program in Africa](#)