

Ivy Braille Foundation

- Our guest honor, Assistant Commissioner Inclusive and Informal Education (special needs department) Ministry of Education and Sports, Assistant Commissioner Disability and Rehabilitation, Ministry of Health and Sports, our panelists, distinguished guests, ladies and gentlemen, here and online - thank you for honoring us with your presence.
- According to the Uganda Bureau of Statistics Census Report, about 12.4% of the population is living with a disability. Difficulty seeing is one of the highest forms of disability estimated at 6.5%. 23.5% of people in rural areas reported more difficulties in seeing compared to those in urban areas.
- People with disabilities (PWDs) face extreme conditions of poverty, they have limited opportunities for accessing education, health, suitable housing, and employment opportunities.
- As you have just heard, our very own Ivy was born with low vision. There are many more children like her in Uganda, that are faced with a future of uncertainty and unequal opportunity. PWDs can and want to be productive members of society. Over the years, much has been done to promote more inclusive societies and create unlimited opportunities for PWDs, however, there is still a lot yet to be done.
- I ask you all to pause and reflect - Where are all the children born with low vision? Did they receive the necessary medical care? Did they survive their childhood? Are they in school? What support do their caretakers receive? Could their parents afford to travel abroad? Receive counseling? How do they deal with the uncertainties at each step in life? (Education, relationships, employment etc.). Are these children locked up in homes faced with stigma? Or do their parents fight on to support their children?
- IBF was formed with a vision to create an integrated world with unlimited opportunities for visually impaired children. At IBF our mission is to give the blind or low vision children a fair chance at enjoying a full life within their own communities. We hope to highlight the efforts already being done to support PWDs, the successes, challenges faced, and advocate for change. We believe that these will give hope to all those supporting PWDs.
- Today, as we launch IBF, we will host a panel discussion that will feature successful PWD entrepreneurs/leaders, disability rights advocates and public figures who champion inclusion. The discussion will delve into a) overcoming challenges and achieving success as a PWD in Uganda, b) the importance of recognizing and celebrating the achievements of PWDs and c) the pivotal role of inclusion and empowerment in driving positive societal change.
- Thereafter, we will host an award ceremony to acknowledge and celebrate PWDs who have made remarkable impacts in various sectors across Uganda. This ceremony serves as a public platform to showcase the potential and accomplishments of PWDs. This is the the launchpad for a prestigious annual event: **The Disability Is Not Inability awards (DINI) Awards.**

- By acknowledging PWDs achievements and creating a platform for ongoing recognition through the DINI Awards, we can empower PWDs and inspire a more inclusive society that values their contributions. We strive to inspire creative and innovative solutions for PWDs.
- As you have heard and will be hearing throughout the day, much is already being done by the government, hospitals (Mengo, Indian hospital). Schools (Salama school of the blind, Puddle ducks), PWDs, civil society, although more need to be done. So, we are seeking to partner with you all to facilitate these ongoing efforts, to give home to visually impaired children and their families that they can and will live a normal life.
- How do we partner to a) foster education and well-being for visually impaired children b) to create innovative solutions for PWDs, c) to advocate for better health and education equipment and trained staff, e) to advocate for sufficient budget allocation and funds release, and f) to fight stigma and discrimination against PWDs. We are open to ideas and suggestions.
- We have got the right people in the room, and we hope that we will identify the synergies on how we can work together to create an integrated world with unlimited opportunities for visually impaired children. Change starts with us.
- So, as we go through the rest of the program for the day, on behalf of IBF, I invite you all to actively participate in this launch, and in celebrating these remarkable individuals and organizations.
- Lastly, I would like to thank our sponsors for their generous contributions both in time and financially. We are very grateful and do hope that you can stay with us all throughout this journey. We are just getting started.