

NGO Fights for Disabled School Children

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A project in Malawi to give handicapped children a good education is underway. It's an initiative of the Federation of Disability Organizations in Malawi (FEDOMA).

The organization's executive director, Mussa Chiwaula, says it's intended to help solve the disparities in school attendance between able-bodied children and those with disabilities. Statistics show that about 35 percent of the country's handicapped children do not go to school. Chiwaula says this is largely because of negative attitudes from both teachers and fellow pupils, who often laugh at them. Chiwaula says the project, which is funded by the United States charity Firelight Foundation, targets six primary schools in the southern part of Malawi:

"The campaign entails some drama, music and speeches by role models -- these are people with disabilities who have able to get educated and are working in institutions and government departments. They came and talked about their experiences. We felt this was very important so that children and teachers should understand the challenges children with disabilities face," says Chiwaula.

Chiwaula adds the effort is making a difference, "Since we started the project, there have been a lot of changes. We have seen more children being sent to school. Even the attitude of teachers toward them has changed."

He adds that the organization has also asked the government to train more specialized teachers who are able to handle children with disabilities.