



Jipange Special Needs Center, Newsletter – 2nd Quarter 2020

Dear friends and partners of Jipange Special Needs Center,

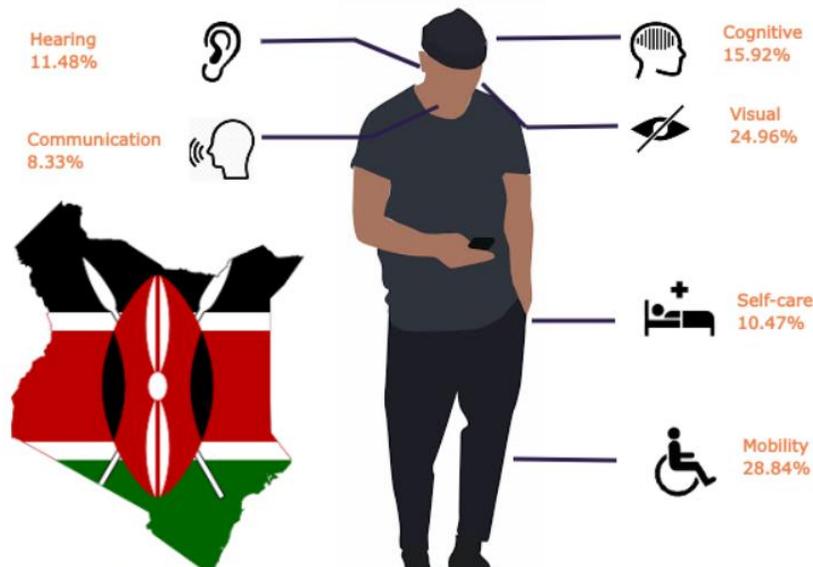
A note from the Founder – Mark Sabwami.



The second wave of COVID-19 has once more brought to the fore the plight of vulnerable groups in the society as the world battles the pandemic. One such vulnerable group is the visually impaired who have to touch on surfaces to move or even depend on other people to hold their hands and help them move.

The 2019 census data on Persons with Disabilities (PWD) is essential for the government to develop inclusive policies to fight COVID-19 that encompass all Kenyans because to effectively fight the spread of COVID-19 means ensuring all persons in the country are taken care of.

Common Disabilities



Kenya has 918,270 persons aged 5yrs and above with disabilities

Source: KNBS 2019 Census

So far, the Kenyan government has taken the following measures to decrease the spread of COVID-19 in the country:

- Closure of educational institutions including Jipange Special Needs Center.
- Urged citizens to practice social distancing/stay at home.
- Self or government quarantine anyone who has recently arrived in the country.
- Sensitization campaigns/messaging calling for citizens to cough into the elbow, wash their hands often and wear masks.
- Erected washing stations and asked all open establishments to have washing stations as well.
- Keeping a safe 1.5 m distance from another.
- Discouraged large crowds/ gatherings.
- Enforced a 10- hour curfew countrywide.
- Enforced a lockdown of inter-county movement for those living in Nairobi, Mombasa and Kilifi.
- A one-person per sit rule in all public transportation.

The Key Challenges Relating to Jipange’s Beneficiaries and COVID-19

The welfare of persons with disability is key in terms of provision of resources and essential goods such as food, groceries, sanitizers, masks and other medical consumables. Jipange’s beneficiaries just like other visually impaired individuals in Kenya are facing several challenges with the measures put in place by the Kenyan government to flatten the curve of COVID-19 in the country.



1. **Social distancing and public transport:** As visually impaired persons, our beneficiaries who rely on their personal assistants are struggling with day-to-day tasks without them, for example; shopping for food and other essentials, household chores, running errands, getting daily exercise and accessing public transport etc. The picture above shows people struggling to board the last matatu (public transportation vehicle) of the day to beat the curfew set by the Kenyan government. On a normal day, persons with visual disabilities rely on a personal aide or the goodwill of touts to board a matatu, yet one measure to avoid COVID-19 is to avoid being touched. However, for a blind individual to get into the matatu he/she will require assistance because public transport in the country is not accessible for all. They also run an increased risk of their white canes being contaminated with the virus by somebody who might be assisting them.

This is the reason Naomi Achieng as shown below has not been able to leave her house because she simply cannot compete with sighted individuals above. She is also afraid to contract the COVID-19

virus because social distancing in this situation is near impossible. Depression is slowly setting in because she is not able to interact with the society. She feels like a prisoner in her own home.

The blind and visually impaired just like other persons with disabilities have also become a heightened target for discrimination not only because of their disability but because of a recent 'unspoken myth' that PWDs are somehow more likely to have the virus. There is a case in which people refused to board a matatu because an individual with a disability was in the same vehicle. This was done in the guise of social distancing. Our beneficiaries have been affected by this issue because in rural Kitale, the society is primitive, uneducated and uninformed.



2. **Media communication on COVID-19:** So far, the communication has been favorable, the media has been able to pass the information on the pandemic to all Kenyans. Communication on COVID-19 is being channeled in different ways such as; posters and memes. However, this mode of communication disconnects information for persons with visual disabilities; who are not able to read the posters and memes. That is why I have been working tirelessly travelling to my beneficiaries' home to update them on the latest communication by the government.
3. **E-learning:** All of Jipange's beneficiaries do not have access to smart devices or the internet. They also do not have access to assistive devices like Braille paper and Braille readers at home. The sudden disruption from a normal classroom routine has affected their progress.
4. **Personal Protective Equipment (PPE):** The government is yet to roll out mechanisms to get personal protective equipment to PWD's for free. People with visual disability need PPE even more and the average Kenyan, for example, hand sanitizers and latex gloves as they rely heavily on using their hands for tactile feedback. On the other hand, it is unfortunate that, using gloves heavily distorts the detail of feeling different surfaces for the blind and visually impaired.
5. **Curfew:** The panic and chaos caused by citizens rushing to beat the curfew has disoriented the blind and visually impaired caught up in the rush. There is widespread concern over personal safety and security when at home for PWDs who live alone for fear of being taken advantage of. One good example is Immanuel, one of Jipange's beneficiaries pictured below.
6. **Accessing Healthcare:** Our beneficiaries are worried about affording the cost of medical care should they contract the virus now that they do not have a source of income.

Jipange's Activities During the Pandemic

Donation of food and personal hygiene items.

A recurrent issue among our beneficiaries is food shortages and starvation. I have been working to ensure that our beneficiaries are not stripped off their dignity as human beings because of this pandemic. I do not want to allow their dignity to be reduced to begging and praying that they get their next meal, that they may find a well-wisher to give them a few shillings for their next meal. Immanuel lives alone and I recently found out that he does not receive any material or financial help from his relatives. If no one donates food and other personal hygiene items, he literally has nothing. For this reason, one of my major objectives during this pandemic has been to pay home visits to ensure our beneficiaries have food to eat. As pictured below, I was able to purchase sanitizer, sugar, salt, cooking oil, laundry soap among other items. From the look on his face, he was very appreciative. He is looking forward to when we shall resume classes so he can be assured of having all three meals a day.



Home education

The fact that we have not been able to meet in a classroom setting does not mean that Jipange's objective to bridge the literacy gap has come to a standstill. During my home visits, I used those opportunities to recap braille the lessons learnt while we were still in session. As shown below, on this particular day, Immanuel and I were practicing his reading writing skills using a slate and stylus.



Donating sanitizers and COVID-19 Safety Lessons

The pictures below is of Martin Muliro, one of Jipange's beneficiaries who received free sanitizer from Jipange. I embarked on teaching him how to sanitize his walking stick and maintaining a safe distance from other people. Since people like him live in the rural area where information is scarce, I took it upon myself to educate our beneficiaries on how to keep safe and avoid being infected by the COVID-19 virus. As a blind person, Martin's routine life requires making direct contact with other people and surfaces quite frequently as he finds his way around by touching walls, doors, surrounding objects and other people's hands and shoulders. However, to protect himself from becoming infected by COVID-19, he learnt it is better that he uses his white cane. This way, he will be able to keep a safe distance from others and still be able to navigate his surroundings. Although there are times he cannot entirely distance himself from others, he learnt it is better to touch his guide's shoulder rather than his hands to avoid germs. When he must take someone's hand for wayfinding, he learnt to either wear gloves before or use a sanitizer to thoroughly clean his white cane and hands right after he reaches his destination.



Counselling Session



Counselling our beneficiaries has been high on my list of activities due to the negative impact of curfews and the inability to move around. One such session was when I visited Naomi Nanjala as shown in the picture on the left. Like other blind/visually impaired individuals, since the pandemic began, she has been forced to stay at home for fear of being infected with the COVID-19 virus. As a result, depression was slowly setting in. To her, it felt like she was back to the old days when it seemed like there were no opportunities for her due to her disability. Just like Immanuel, she has no means of earning a living and therefore depends on her family or well-wishers for her food and other needs. During the visit, I learnt that she had lost her grandfather and in a short span of one month, her brother also died. These two events compounded an already stressful and depressing life situation caused by the pandemic. Naomi was overly excited to see me and became optimistic that things will change for the better. I used that opportunity to mourn with her as well as to encourage and lift her spirits. She was happy to know that in January of 2021, the Kenyan government had allowed schools including Jipange to re-open safely. At the end of the visit, I felt I had accomplished the objective of the counseling session I had with Naomi. She is looking forward to resuming classes when we re-open.

Marketing of Jipange's Services



Though we have officially closed since the government issued the directive to stop operations, I have used this opportunity to personally market our services by word of mouth, telephone calls, and personal visits. The motorbike pictured on the left, that was generously given to us by a donor, has been instrumental in transporting me from one location to another. As seen in the picture, I had it branded with Jipange's logo which serves as a conversation starter as I move around the community. Since I am unable to operate the motorbike due to being visually impaired, I have a volunteer who willingly takes me to all the places I need to go. As a result, Jipange is now well known and we have been receiving numerous inquiries from blind individuals who hope to attend our classes when we re-open in January, 2021.

Preparation for the re-opening of Jipange in January 2021

In preparation to re-open the center, through donations, I was able to secure several bags of maize that will be used as food for our beneficiaries. During this time of year when almost everyone in Kitale is harvesting maize, the price per bag is relatively cheap. The plan is to purchase several more bags to sell later in 2021 when the price per bag has gone higher due to maize shortage. The proceeds will then be used to fund some expenses at the center. We are also thoroughly cleaning and sanitizing all surfaces at the center before our beneficiaries arrive.



Personal Development

I have continued to utilize this time to develop my skills and increase knowledge which will make me more successful in offering services to our beneficiaries. I have been attending numerous webinars offered by One Young World (OYW). Every month, the Coordinating Ambassador for Central & Eastern Europe, Gosia Rychlik, hosted a series of webinars focused on hot topics among OYW Ambassadors, from corporate intrapreneurship and circular economy to leveraging tech for good. Each webinar I attended offered the opportunity to gain exclusive insight from senior representatives of some of the world's biggest firms as well as Ambassadors who have experience in navigating these matters internally. They shared their advice on how to navigate and succeed in endeavors to accelerate impact. For example, some of the firms represented during the webinars were Unilever and GoodBrand.

One Young World seeks to address societal issues at grass roots by providing young leaders such as me, with skills, information and insights that are instrumental to bring about social change in communities. Through key note and influential speakers, I have undergone a rigorous training at the One Young World Academy to understand how to challenge the status quo. I have also been trained on how to find solutions to issues faced in the, Financial sector, Education, Gender Parity, LGBTQI+, Agriculture, Sports among other sectors.

After I am done undergoing the One Young World Academy, I will attend a Pre-Summit at the Hague, Netherlands and the Enterprise for Peace Summit organized by the Ministry of Dutch Foreign Affairs in conjunction with One Young World held in Munich, Germany in April 2021. The one-week Summit will be a great opportunity for young leaders like me to pitch their initiatives to other leaders and potential collaborators, network and make their initiatives known more to the World through One Young World and mainstream media while at the Summit.

A word of Gratitude

Jipange will forever be grateful for your generosity. Through your giving, we have been able to bring positive change to the lives of people who had been written off by the society. The activities mentioned above would not have been achieved had it not been for your donation. Your donations also helped us maintain our current premises because we were able to pay rent and utilities. This means our beneficiaries have a place to return when we resume. To many of them, this is the place they are assured of all three meals in a day and above all and education that will better their lives in the future. Once again, **THANK YOU VERY MUCH!!**

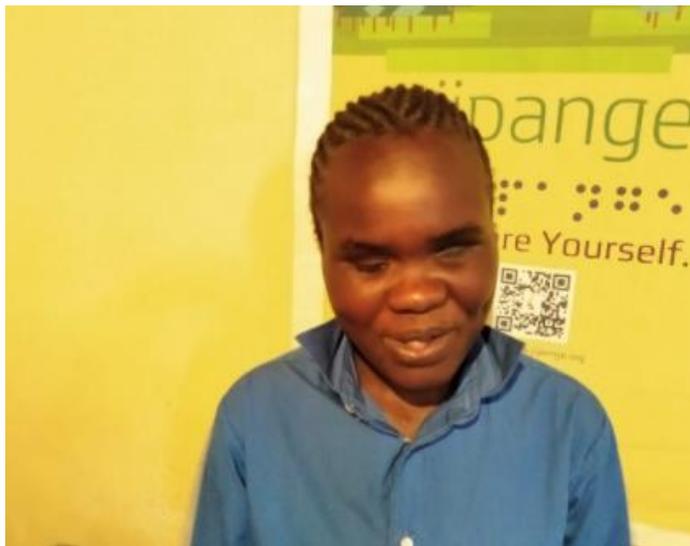
Looking Forward to 2021

We plan on resuming classes in January of 2021 per the Kenyan government's directive. We shall embark on our current short-term goal which is to eliminate the gap between blind learners and assistive devices, ensuring that each blind learner who attends Jipange has access to a braille assistive device including adaptive computer technology. By doing this, we shall meet the immediate need of the blind/visually impaired people of Kitale and surrounding areas. We will resume using JAWS software, which is a screen reader for computers to teach different computer skills. Regarding Braille, which is a system for tactile reading and writing, the training will empower students to be able to read and write. Literacy—the ability to read and write—is vital to a successful education, career, and quality of life in today's world.

A Dire Need

As I was making the home visits, I saw first hand the poverty in which our students live in. Immanuel pictured above, lives in a one room mud hut with an earth floor smeared with cow dung to keep it from being dusty. He is an orphan depending on well wishers to provide food among other needs. Teresa Rono picture below was born blind and comes from a very poor family. For the three months Jipange was in operation, she was unable to pay the small tuition fees Jipange charges to help with

administrative and other operation costs including room and board. As a result, I had to use personal finances to cater for her expenses.



The fees structure per student, for a six months program is shown below.

Item	Kenya Shillings	US Dollars
Room and board including meals	20,000	\$200
Registration Fees	1,000	\$10
Caution money	5,000	\$50
Student ID	500	\$5
Medical Insurance	3,500	\$35
Total	30,000	\$300

However, due to poverty, out of the six enrolled students, only one managed to pay 6,000 (\$60) and another 10,000 shillings (\$100). The rest were unable to pay after three months of receiving training. Out of goodwill, decided to enroll them anyway considering lack of finances had played a big role in their lives stagnating.

I am kindly appealing to you to help Immanuel and Teresa in paying their six-months fees so they can comfortably train without the added stress caused by lack of finances. This help will also help Jipange comfortably pay operations costs including room and board for the students to be accommodated and fed comfortably while at the center.

Monthly Donation

We are very grateful for the positive impact the monthly donation of \$200 has had. Since we have been in operation, we have seen an increase in inquiries about Jipange's services by blind persons interested in bettering their lives. This gives us the indication that we will have an increase of students as we resume operations. In a small way, we have seen the lives of our beneficiaries be impacted positively even though we came to a big halt due to the pandemic. The hands-on training,

they received for three months, in a small scale, instilled in them a new sense of self confidence. They now know, disability is not inability and as a result of the self- confidence, they have hope about being able to prepare for, obtain or retain employment. The seed of literacy was planted in their minds and hearts. They are excited about being able to expertly use computers which will pave a path for them to operate other devices like smart phones, other software and devices.

Jipange Special Needs Center was also a safe home for our beneficiaries where they felt, their most basic needs were met i.e. shelter and food. The fact that lived together at the center, it provided the atmosphere of a loving home where everyone felt safe to share life's experiences.

With this in mind, I am humbly requesting for you to consider continuing with the monthly donations of \$200. Apart from the impact mentioned above, the donation will go a long way in buying things such as food, pay the cook including other utilities necessary for the operations to go on. As it stands, I am doing this work on a volunteer basis including our braille teacher. There are times I rely on personal finances, but that is inadequate. It is my hope that one day, we will have well wishers who will donate towards a stipend that will enable volunteers be able to meet their personal needs.