

Kenya Project Description
Brenda Jo Brueggemann

"Disability Rights in Kenya: Networks, Practices, and Resources" is a collaborative initiative between OSU and Kenyan researchers designed as a long-term project to study various aspects of disability-related issues in Kenya. This collaboration began in early 2005, and is entering its second phase. The long-term goals of this project are

- a general assessment of the cultural, social, economic, and political aspects of disability in Kenya
- enabling the Kenyan collaborators to conduct research on US disability initiatives during a stay at OSU
- developing collaborative research projects to study disability-related issues in Kenya

The issue of disability rights in Kenya has received increasing attention in the last couple of years. Genetic, work-related, disease and poverty-related, and HIV-related disabilities are widespread throughout Kenya, causing considerable damage to the economic and social fabric both in the cities and in the countryside. Initial legislation in support of the rights of disabled persons ("The Persons with Disability Act, 2003") was promulgated into law on 16 June 2004, but awareness regarding social attitudes and the needs of disabled persons is only beginning to emerge and actual implementation of the law is still largely lacking.

In response to the pressing situation and inspired by the passing of "The Persons with Disability Act," a group of Kenyan scholars and activists, among them Dr. Kimani Njogu and Dr. Mbugua wa-Mungai, approached faculty at OSU with their plan for a collaborative initiative. During the first phase, Dr. Berman met with Kenyan collaborators and visited sites in Nairobi and Naivasha in July 2005, followed by a week-long visit of Dr. Njogu and Dr. Wa-Mungai to OSU in November 2005. The second phase of the project culminated in a four-day interdisciplinary workshop in Nairobi in June 2007, attended by five OSU scholars (Dr. Armstrong, Dr. Berman, Dr. Brueggemann, Dr. Lupo, and Dr. Stone) and about thirty Kenyan researchers and activists. A quarter-long visit of Dr. Wa-Mungai to OSU is scheduled for Autumn 2007. During this visit we plan to finalize and submit grant proposals for the third phase, a long-term study of various aspects of disability-related issues in Kenya, involving researchers and PhD students from OSU and Kenya.

To this day, no systematic study addresses disability-related questions in Kenya. The collaborative project is unique also in that it brings together scholars from Kenya and the United States. It provides an opportunity to learn from each other, collaborate with each other, and produce the kind of interdisciplinary knowledge that is needed to address global questions related to disability— questions which involve cultural, social, political, and technological factors that are both vastly diverse and yet sometimes also remarkably common no matter where one goes on this planet.

FOR MY OWN PART:

As a scholar of both Deaf Studies and Disability Studies, Dr. Brenda Brueggemann plans to continue research and advocacy specifically related to two areas: 1) deaf students, deaf schools, and deaf adult workers in Kenya, particularly in the Kwale District; 2) advancing disability studies (especially from a humanities-- literature and history--perspective) in Kenyan schools and universities.