

THE POWER OF COLLABORATION AND DIALOGUE



STORY OF KACHANA WATSON MABUKU FROM BOTSWANA



KACHANA WATSON MABUKU forms part of the Mutual Learning Program about Family and Community Based Care. Below, Kachana shares an inspiring story that illustrates how collaborative dialogic practices have **opened many possibilities in the context of rehabilitation of people with disabilities in Botswana.**

As a Community-Based Rehabilitation Officer with a background in rehabilitation medicine, I had the opportunity to coordinate a home-based care program for people with disabilities—an endeavor that at first seemed overwhelming for any one person or institution to manage alone. However, it became clear that through genuine **collaboration and dialogic engagement**, complex challenges could be met with collective strength and creativity.

From the outset, we embraced a dialogic approach: **creating spaces for listening, mutual learning, and co-construction.** We brought together a diverse group of stakeholders—people living with disabilities, their families and caregivers, health care providers, the business community, justice and social welfare representatives, the police, planners, and district leadership, among others. We did not assume expertise but rather **approached each interaction with curiosity and humility**, listening closely to the lived experiences of those directly affected.

In our community meetings, people living with disabilities and their caregivers openly shared the barriers they faced: discrimination in education and employment, inaccessibility of services, and exclusion from decision-making spaces. These conversations were not one-sided; they were spaces of **shared reflection and collective problem-solving**, where each voice carried weight and shaped our course of action.



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In one particularly transformative gathering, the community raised a powerful proposal: to seek an audience with the President to advocate for the creation of a permanent disability coordination desk within his office. The idea emerged not from a single individual, but through a **dialogic process that honored local knowledge and agency**. We moved forward together, grounded in the belief that solutions must be co-created with those who live the realities we seek to transform.

The outcome was groundbreaking. The President welcomed the proposal and agreed entirely. A person living with a disability was appointed as National Disability Coordinator, through the Botswana Council of the Disabled. This office became a catalyst for systemic change: we witnessed increases in school admissions for learners with disabilities across all levels, the creation of a National Disability Policy and the 2024 Disability Act, and the inclusion of special elected councillors with disabilities.

Further changes followed—mandates for accessible infrastructure, tax incentives for companies employing people with disabilities, and broader recognition of disability rights across sectors. None of these advances came from top-down interventions; **they were the fruits of relational work, of dialogue that crossed professional and social boundaries**.

By nurturing a **collaborative culture rooted in communication, respect, and shared purpose**, our work was transformed. Each partner brought valuable contributions—transport, funding, secretarial support, technical advice—and we learned continually from one another. We held regular dialogues, valued openness, and ensured everyone felt informed and included. This communication-oriented collaboration allowed us not only to coordinate effectively but to **build trust and ownership across all actors**.

Collaboration, when grounded in authentic dialogue, fosters inclusion, transparency, and collective action. In Botswana, this approach has led to profound and lasting change for people living with disabilities. And even today, the ripple effects of this shared journey continue to unfold—proof that **dialogue and collaboration are not only methods but transformative practices**.

Thank you.

I hope you will find my story interesting and that you will learn something from it.

GOD BLESS YOU AS YOU READ MY STORY