Case Study: Breaking Physical Barriers to Accessibility in Public Spaces

Focus Area: Physical Accessibility and Disability Rights
Organization: Disability Inclusion Initiative (DII)
Location: Ethiopia
Theme: Creating accessible environments where everyone can participate equally.

1. Background

Access to public spaces and essential services is fundamental to independence, dignity, and equal participation in society. However, physical barriers such as stairs without ramps, narrow entrances, inaccessible toilets, and poorly designed walkways can prevent persons with disabilities from accessing public buildings and services.

For people with mobility impairments, even a short journey into a public facility can become a significant challenge when accessibility is not considered in its design.

2. The Challenge

Imagine a person who uses a wheelchair visiting a public institution to access an essential service. Although the service is available to everyone, the building entrance has stairs and no accessible ramp.

This creates a situation where the person is effectively excluded—not because the service is unavailable, but because the environment prevents access.

Such barriers can limit independence, reduce participation, and reinforce inequality for persons with disabilities.

3. DII's Approach

The Disability Inclusion Initiative promotes a society where accessibility is recognized as a fundamental right rather than an optional feature.

In addressing challenges like this, DII's proposed approach includes:

- **Promoting Accessibility Awareness:** Encouraging public institutions and communities to recognize and address physical barriers.
- **Advocating for Inclusive Infrastructure:** Promoting accessible entrances, ramps, handrails, pathways, and facilities.
- **Encouraging Participation:** Ensuring persons with disabilities are involved in identifying accessibility challenges and shaping solutions.

- **Supporting Equal Access:** Promoting environments where persons with disabilities can independently access public services and opportunities.

4. Expected Outcomes

Addressing physical accessibility barriers can contribute to:

- Improved access to public buildings and essential services.
- Greater independence and dignity for persons with disabilities.
- Increased awareness of universal design and accessibility.
- More inclusive public spaces and communities.
- Equal opportunities for participation in social and economic life.

5. Lessons Learned

Accessibility benefits everyone. When public spaces are designed to accommodate people with different abilities, communities become safer, more welcoming, and more inclusive.

Meaningful inclusion requires more than providing services. It requires removing the physical, social, and institutional barriers that prevent people from accessing those services.

6. Moving Forward

DII believes that disability inclusion must be part of how communities, institutions, and development initiatives are planned and implemented.

By promoting accessibility, advocating for equal rights, and encouraging meaningful participation, we can help build a society where no one is left behind.

Everyone belongs. Every voice matters. No one is left behind.