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Disability and Technology

'Disability and Technology' is an interdisciplinary and international research project aiming to contribute to the filling of the gap in scientific research focusing on the influence of technology in the context of disability in Sub-Saharan Africa. Technology – the appropriation and use of different kinds of assistive technologies like hearing aids, wheelchairs or artificial limbs as well as for example sanitation or computers – must be seen as important factors influencing the daily lives of people with disabilities.

Today it is commonly assumed that Western technological aid for people with disabilities in developing countries leads to an improvement of their situation. Wheelchairs, hearing aids and other assistive technologies are seemingly widely distributed, though not accessible for all. The project's research points to the fact that the actual appropriation of assistive technologies – developed for people with disabilities in Western countries and exported to developing countries – frequently leads to unforeseen consequences, such as secondary disabilities or social exclusion. Furthermore, existent competences of people with disabilities in dealing with technologies are usually disregarded, hindering people with disabilities' social, economic and political participation and emancipation. Within a holistic approach disability is connected to the physical body as much as it is to society – it is regarded as a socio – cultural construction as well as a lived experience. To understand processes of disability means to focus on the complex interactions of body, society and environment. The aim of the project is to improve empirical research and theoretical approaches in order to get a deeper understanding of these complex processes.

Research about the entanglement of disability and technology is concentrated in and on the countries of the North. Scientific contribution on the topic in African countries is scarce. According to the 2005/2006 Ugandan National Household Survey, however, seven per cent of Uganda's population have a disability, making it a phenomenon that has an impact on many Ugandan lives. This project was established in 2010 as a young scholars research project including a student exchange of ten students from the *Makerere* University in Kampala (Child Health and Development Centre / Department of Social Work and Social Administration) and from the University of Zurich (Ethnographic Museum/ Department of Social and Cultural Anthropology). In 2011/2012 research was carried out by all project members in Uganda leading to various scientific outputs (theses, conferences, workshops). Furthermore, members of the project are involved in lectures and seminars teaching the subject at hand at their respective institutes.

In this presentation I would like to focus on the importance of joint international projects with researchers from the so-called developed and developing countries. As one example of such an effort I will give an insight into the research project Disability & Technology, its organization, the premises of the project, an overview of first research results achieved so far and an outlook on ongoing and future applied research activities.