

Learning by Ear

"Everyone's Different – Respect for Minorities"

Episode 02: The Struggle for more Equality – Lois Auta from Nigeria wants to encourage other people with disabilities

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Characters (O-Töne, Clips) / Narrators

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|-------------------------------|--------|----------|---------|
| <i>Narrator</i> | | about 35 | english |
| <i>Lois Auta</i> | female | 31 | english |
| <i>Mathilda Auta</i> | female | 20 | english |
| <i>Sergio Mainetti</i> | male | 44 | english |
| <i>Jamilah Hamza</i> | female | 45 | english |

Pronunciation:

Lois Auta (pronounced like German eu: leus)

Mathilda Auta (pronounced as written)

Sergio Mainetti (pronounced serdjio meinetti)

Jamila Hamza (pronounced like Djamila Hamza; z like English zoo)

Gurgua (pronounced as written, G like German Gustav)

Please note: The disabled persons prefer the expression “people with disabilities”. The term “handicapped” is a swearword.

Intro:

Welcome to the second episode of our Learning by Ear series, "Everyone's different – respect for minorities". In this series we get to know people who for a number of different reasons are discriminated against – for example because they have physical disabilities. Today we are in Nigeria visiting Lois Auta. The 31-year-old woman lives in a tiny apartment in the capital Abuja and every day someone has to come and help her, because Lois has been confined to a wheelchair since she was just 2. Nevertheless, she is in control of her life and she really wants to encourage other people with disabilities.

1. Sound: wheelchair-car

2. Narrator:

The driver Isaak lifts the wheelchair out of the boot of his silver-grey car in a practiced manner. It only takes him a few minutes to reassemble the chair so that Lois Auta can collapse into it. Lois is grateful for the support of her patient driver. If it was not for him, the 31-year-old couldn't get to work. But even though she's managed the most difficult bit it still takes her another 20 minutes to finally get to the massive office complex of the Nigerian National Petroleum Corporation.

3. Sound: wheelchair

4. Narrator:

Lois struggles up a seemingly endless ramp in her rattling wheelchair. It is hot in the sun and the young woman has to keep stopping to take a break. She carefully applies the brakes and wipes the sweat from her brow. But then eventually she's made it and has reached the door to her small office. In spite of the exertion Lois is all smiles.

5. Lois:

"I move around without asking for help from anyone because a ramp is built everywhere. There is a ramp for disabled persons to follow. So my office is very very good with persons with disabilities. They have us in mind and they are really taking care of us."

6. Narrator:

This occurs very rarely in Nigeria. Of the more than 150 million people who live in this huge country, an estimated 20 to 22 million people have disabilities. In spite of this they are as good as excluded from normal social life. Jamilah Hamza also knows how difficult everyday life is for them. She works for the National Commission for Human Rights with responsibility for the interests of people with disabilities.

7. Jamilah:

“Most of our buildings, public buildings are not accessible for persons with disabilities. When you see buildings they don't have ramps, they don't have elevators. So somebody with a physical disability, probably somebody with a wheelchair or on crutches, if he has to get somewhere probably on the fifth floor and there is no ramp, there is no elevator, he can't get there. So whatever services that he ought to get from there, he's now cut away from those services because he cannot get to that floor.”

KW begin

8. Narrator:

Nigeria ratified the UN Convention on the Rights of People with Disabilities in September 2010. It was hoped that this should prevent people with disabilities suffering legal and social disadvantages throughout the entire world. However, in Nigeria nothing has really changed since then. Those affected are waiting for a new Nigerian law that would put into effect the same goals as contained in the UN convention. The law that was passed by parliament in 2011 however is still lying on the desk of President Goodluck Jonathan while we visit Jamila Hamza in her office. Only after the President has signed it, can people with disabilities really put any pressure on the government and have a basis to claim their rights. Jamilah Hamza can hardly wait for this to happen.

9. Jamilah:

“Once the bill is signed by the president rights to education for persons with disabilities would be enhanced, rights to health will be enhanced, rights to access to buildings will be enhanced, rights to information. We have probably on all our national TVs – you understand – there will be sign language interpreters when the news is going on. The person will be interpreting for the deaf community.”

KW end

10. Sound: keyboard

11. Narrator:

Lois sits at her desk and types a letter. Her job is to do secretarial work for the Nigerian National Petroleum Corporation and to take care of the company’s fleet. For example she makes sure the cars are maintained regularly. She usually shares this work with four colleagues, but today she is on her own. As she completes the letter Lois recalls how her illness began.

12. Lois:

“After my two-years-birthday I had a fever and my mum rushed me to the hospital. On reaching there I was injected. After the injection I slept off. When I woke up my mum called me to come and take my drugs and I couldn’t stand up again. And that was the beginning of my disability.”

13. Narrator:

The disastrous diagnosis was Polio, an infectious disease that can cause extensive paralysis. Since then, Lois can't walk. Her mother cried her eyes out. Her father got angry with the doctors and raged and cursed. In his opinion it is their fault that Lois can't walk. Nevertheless he sent Lois to school. After finishing school and working as an intern she was given her present job. And now the woman with the big smile has a new goal: this year Lois wants to begin studying Public Administration. One thing is clear to her. She would never have got where she is today without the support of her family. Her parents, brothers and small sister not only encouraged her but also protected her from discrimination. Lois cannot forget one incident:

14. Lois:

"I can remember a good day when we came back from school, I and my younger brother. Then one boy called me gurgua¹. And gurgua in Hausa language means disabled girl. So when my brother heard it he became annoyed and he went after that guy and he gave him a serious warning. This should be the first and the last time he would call me with that name."

¹ Aussprache: Im Prinzip so wie es geschrieben ist: g wie Gustav im Deutschen, das U verschwindet ein wenig. Höre auch den O-Ton, in dem sie es benutzt.

15. Narrator:

Lois beams when she thinks back on her younger brother who defended her. Because such dedication does not happen very often. In Nigeria, as well as in other countries, a disabled child is a big disgrace. Jamilah Hamza of the Human Rights Commission hears of many cases of prejudice in her daily work:

16. Jamilah:

“There are families that believe that is a bad omen. Some even try to kill them. If they don’t kill them they lock them up in the house. They feel: oh, this is an embarrassment or this is a curse, you understand. And they don’t want to be associated with them. And then coming out of the society they are really looked upon: These are the lowest of the low.”

17. Narrator:

The consequences are devastating. People with disabilities have no lobby and nobody worries about improving their quality of life, unless a family supports them as in Lois’ case. She wants to knock off work a bit earlier today and gets taken back to her small apartment. This is in a barracks on the outskirts of Abuja. Lois’ uncle used to be stationed here and although he has been deployed somewhere else Lois is allowed to keep living here for free. This is very lucky in Abuja, because the competition for apartments is very tight. Nevertheless her life is quite difficult at the barracks. Life there cannot be described as disabled people „friendly“ on account of the many steps and uneven surfaces.

18. Sound: wheelchair

KW begin

19. Narrator:

Lois' old wheelchair is another problem. It complains loudly with every movement and she needs lots of strength to get it moving at all. Privately she hopes for an electric model that suits her needs. But it is almost impossible to get one of those in Nigeria. Sergio Mainetti, the head of the Christoffel-Blinden-Mission in Abuja, explains why:

20. Sergio

“All what we get here in Nigeria is usually a standard Chinese-made wheelchair. You can go in almost any well-equipped pharmacy. And then they will tell you: Oh, yes. We can give you a wheelchair without even asking: what is the situation of the person you want to put on this wheelchair? What is the size of the person, what is the environment the wheelchair is used in?”

KW end

21. Narrator:

Lois comes to a halt in front of her front door. It is only another 10 cm until she is actually in her home but she can't get further than her front door. For this apparently small barrier is insurmountable for Lois. She has to have help.

22. Lois:

“It is not accessible the way I wanted it because of the pavement by the door. The wheelchair has to be lifted before you are able to come into the room the way you like it.”

23. Sound: call

24. Narrator:

And so Lois has to call her sister, Mathilda Auta. Working together they finally manage it and Lois is at home. 20-year-old Mathilda has already made dinner. She is studying sociology but has holidays at the moment and so she is living at her sister's.

KW begin

25. Mathilda:

"I assist her. Yes I do. Like washing her clothes. All these household stuff. Whenever I am around her."

KW end

26. Narrator:

Lois is happy for the support. After a full day at the office she is exhausted. Tired, she sinks down on to the mattress on the floor of her room. Mathilda fetches her a bottle of water. Her younger sister, who seems quite shy, says proudly of Lois on her way to the kitchen:

27. Mathilda:

"Really, she is a person like being determined and focussed. Like wanting to get nothing but the best".

28. Narrator:

However, in spite of all of her determination she has not managed one thing: Lois wants children and would like to find the man of her dreams. She wants to have a family of her own. A couple of years ago she thought she's made it. But then everything went wrong, as she recalls:

29. Lois:

“I dated a guy for three years. The guy loved me and he took me to his own house for introduction. But when we got there it was a different story entirely because his parents sent me out of the house. That why should he bring a disabled person as daughter-in-law? It is not going to be possible when they are still alive.”

30. Narrator:

Lois Auta has not given up the hope of finding Mr Right though. She doesn't believe in the prejudices that make her sad but also angry. For Lois wants at all costs to prove the opposite to men.

31. Lois:

“Most of the guys see us as women that will not be able to take care of the homes. Some of us even think we cannot make love, we cannot have sex. But whereas we can do it. And we can do it very well. We are homemakers, we are the best homemakers as far as I am concerned.”

32. Narrator:

Apart from having her own family Lois has another ambition: she wants to be taken as seriously as other Nigerians and not always as a woman in a wheelchair who needs to be felt sorry for. Because everyday she proves again and again that she is in control of her life.

Outro:

Today we met Lois Auta from Abuja. We hope you enjoyed visiting the young woman who in spite of her disabilities copes with her life very well. Our reporter was Katrin Gänslar. If you'd like to learn more about how minorities are treated in Africa, then please listen to this or other stories in our Learning by Ear-series. You can also visit our website at www.dw.de/lbe. Thanks for listening and don't forget to tune in again next time. Bye for now.