

The 21st Century Person with Disability and Politics under Inclusive Development Agenda¹

In this 21st Century, all nations including African countries and for that matter Ghana have come to recognize the inherent dignity, the equal and inalienable rights of all members of the human family as the foundation of freedom, justice and peace in the world.

In that respect, everyone including persons with disabilities are entitled to all fundamental rights including political rights without discrimination.

Thus, guaranteeing persons with disabilities the right to vote and to be voted for; and to be holders of political and public offices including ministerial appointments.

Society has awakened to the global illumination that, deepened democracy corresponds with effective representation and the participation of persons with disabilities as active participants in the national and local governance.

To this end, the Fourth Republic of Ghana witnessed an indelible history when some persons with disabilities were given the opportunity to exercise their civic rights as ministers.

History is made and the inclusion of persons with disabilities in political decision-making activities is in fulfilment of their social responsibilities as Ghanaians.

The global illumination of democracy embraces diversity and more especially disintegrates historic understandings associated with disability.

Consequently, the use of stigmatizing terms such as “dumb,” “mental retardation,” “unsound mind,” “disabled,” “not whole” among others are of the past.

Apparently, persons with disabilities are no more considered as victims of their disabling condition, worthy of charity or objects to be fixed, cured and pitied.

In Ghana, the ideology of the 21st Century person with disability was embraced by Article 271 clause 3 sub-clause (c) of the 1992 Constitution. This provision disintegrated the historic prejudice and stereotype that worked against disability, and charged the National House of Chiefs accordingly.

The National House of Chiefs are obliged to “undertake an evaluation of traditional customs and usages with a view to eliminating those customs and usages that are outmoded and socially harmful.”

¹ GraphicOnline *The 21st century person with disability and politics under inclusive development agenda*
<https://www.graphic.com.gh/features/opinion/the-21st-century-person-with-disability-and-politics-under-inclusive-development-agenda.html>

In other words, customs and traditions including practices and understandings that restrict persons with disabilities to hold high level responsible positions such as; to vote, stand for or to be appointed into public office is frowned upon.

So, it is not a mystery that, in this 21st Century, there are no laws— both internationally and locally that confines and restrict persons with disabilities to specific geographic areas and categorized political or public offices.

Remarkably, there is hence a growing trend towards an inclusive society towards a sustainable growth and Ghana is towing that line. Albeit the 2030 Agenda stresses the self-representation of persons with disabilities in all socio-economic and political activities.

Specifically, the SDG 10 recognises that persons with disabilities have duties on an equal basis with others. Ghana as a nation cannot achieve sustainable development if the Nation is not able to embrace diversity and create an inclusive society.

Remarkably, physical structures, academic curriculum, the work environment are undergoing massive transformation so as to accommodate all persons with different kinds of abilities, respecting their qualification and expertise.

With this realisation, the life of the 21st Century person with disability is a life with dignity, it has purpose and it is descent.

Governments have a commitment under international and domestic laws, in the order of standard and best practices to appoint persons with disabilities to hold political and public offices; because “leave no one behind” a commitment central to the Sustainable Development Goals has no place for stereotype.

In conclusion, “leave no one behind” requires a change in the attitudes and actions of all people concerned — particularly you. In that respect, each and everyone has a role to play in creating an inclusive Ghana.

First and foremost, Governments ought to pursue development agendas, programs and policies that are disability-specific oriented.

Essentially, state agencies have a duty towards the citizenry to adopt laws that specifically and categorically address the effective inclusion of persons with disabilities; for the simple reason that the Persons with Disability Act is not “all” exhaustive but guides the adoption of other laws to address issues of disability.

At the heart of all these obligations, Parliament is urged to pass laws that make conscious effort to include and cover persons with disabilities.

In the same vein, policy makers have obligation to implement policies that benefit persons with disabilities on equal basis.

Primarily, service providers —both the public and private sectors must consider widening their market as well as the employment spheres to engage with persons with disabilities.

It is past time and imperative, that policies on universal support systems are adopted to effectively include persons of all abilities in Ghana's inclusive society, "leaving no one behind."