

Disability, political citizenship and the challenge of inclusion in national politics: Analysis of five cases from Ghana

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Abstract

Participation of persons with disability in national politics in Ghana is generally low. This is because of attitudinal barriers, resource constraints and accessibility challenges in the built environment. This study explored the role of political leadership in the perpetuation of barriers to the political citizenship of persons with disability and their inclusion in national politics in Ghana. Using a qualitative approach, five cases involving public commentaries of prominent political figures about disability and persons with disability were analysed thematically. Three themes that emerged from the cross-case analysis of the cases were 1) persistence of traditional beliefs towards disability and persons with disability, 2) stereotypes about functional limitation in persons with disability and 3) the use of insensitive language made about disability and or directed at persons with disability. Given that the laws of Ghana affirm the rights of persons with disability to participate in national politics, these findings underscore the need for the state to ensure that these rights are not curtailed, and that policies and laws that are meant to facilitate the inclusion of persons with disability in political activities are implemented wholly and effectively. It is only when these steps are taken that the political citizenship of persons with disability will be guaranteed.

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Introduction

This study examines the complicity of political leadership in the perpetuation of barriers to political citizenship of persons with disability and their inclusion in national politics in Ghana. The President of Ghana, in his inaugural address to the nation after he was sworn into office in January 2017, implored Ghanaians to be ‘citizens’, and not ‘spectators’ (Akufo-Addo, 2017). He made a similar call exactly four years later during his inauguration for his second term of office (Akufo-Addo, 2021). These calls for ‘citizenship’ were founded on his desire to see all Ghanaians actively participating in a responsible nation building process. As laudable as these calls have been, persons with disability who constitute a significant proportion of the nation’s population remain marginalised and excluded from national politics and governance activities in Ghana (Kyei & Dogbe, 2020; Sackey, 2015). They have mostly been turned into ‘spectators’ who have to watch on while non-disabled people exercise their citizenship in building the nation, sometimes to the disadvantage of persons with disability. While the President’s call is fairly recent, there have been considerable challenges to the inclusion of persons with disability in the national politics and governance in Ghana and several other countries over the years.

The phenomenon of limited inclusivity of persons with disability in politics has been observed in the Global North and in the Global South as well. Countries such as USA, Canada, Norway, and the UK, and territories such as the European Union are usually perceived to be more socially inclusive but persons with disability in these places experience some marginalisation when it comes to politics (Evans & Reher, 2020; Guldvik, Askheim & Johansen, 2013; Hall & Alvarez, 2012; Priestly et al., 2016; Prince, 2007; Schur & Adya, 2013). A similar situation exists in several less developed countries in Africa such as Zimbabwe, Malawi, Gabon, Kenya, and Mali (Oluchina, 2015).

The limited participation of persons with disability in politics has been attributed to the negative attitudes about disability, the lack of material and financial resources for persons with disability who may desire to contest elections, accessibility constraints in the built environment, difficulties in transportation, inadequate access to information and low education background of persons with disability (Evans & Reher, 2020; Kyei & Dogbe, 2020; Mattila & Papageorgiou, 2017; Prince, 2007; Sackey, 2015). Persons with disability, thus, often experience increased isolation and reduced social capital because of their impairments. This constrains their ability to acquire the civic skills which are needed for effective political participation and also limits their participation in political activities and political groups (Prince, 2007; Reher, 2020; Schur, Shields & Schriener, 2003) In addition to these, disability stigma and the discrimination it elicits also create the conditions for the isolation of persons with disability, thereby reducing their interest and participation in politics (Schur & Adya, 2013; Schur & Kruse, 2000).

Political citizenship and political participation

Scholarly works on citizenship usually refer to T. H. Marshall's (1950) definition in his seminal work on 'Citizenship and Social Class' (Siim, 2006; Bruce & Yearly, 2006; Morris, 2006). Marshall (1950) defined Citizenship as "a status bestowed on those who are full members of a community". This definition is founded on the principles of freedom, equality, and solidarity. The idea of citizenship also emphasises the values of equal rights and respect for all categories of persons in a society. These principles have become a means of assessing the level of social and political development of modern societies (Siim, 2006). Nations that grant and protect the rights of its citizens as full members are usually regarded as progressive, whereas those that impede aspects of the rights of a section of its citizens are usually regarded as regressive nations. Citizenship is also concerned with whether people are acknowledged and recognised as equal members of the society to which they belong (Hilberink & Cardol, 2019).

Closely associated with the idea of citizenship is the notion of Political Citizenship which has been defined as "...human rights, encompassing individual and collective participation in the public sphere, and located within a context of multi-scalar governance from the global to the local" (Priestly et al., 2016, p. 1). This definition also acknowledges the fundamental entitlements that warrant that people living in a community or polity may lay claim to self-determination. Political citizenship, therefore, is about having the right to participate in all aspects of political activities without hindrance, whether normative or legal, just like every other citizen in the state. Political citizenship is more than simply being able to vote in elections. It is also about having the right to participate in activities of governance and the exercise of political power (Guldvik & Lesjø, 2014; Oluchina, 2015). Thus, political citizenship is about having the right to political participation and being able to exercise that right. Political participation has been defined as "the active or direct involvement, engagement in politics or public affairs as contestants vying or seeking to be elected as representatives of a particular constituency" (Sackey, 2015; p. 368). This definition of political participation also accounts for inclusion in public affairs as government appointees or nominees. Central to these two concepts is the idea that political citizenship and political participation transcend the passive activity of voting in elections (Guldvik & Lesjø, 2014; Hall & Alvarez, 2012; Oluchina, 2015).

Disability, Political Citizenship and Political Participation

Persons with disability are often marginalised in social, economic, and political activities in society (Guldvik & Lesjø, 2014; Meekosha, Shuttleworth & Soldatic, 2013; Sackey, 2015). They are sometimes thought of as "passive recipients of benevolent state policy or private charity" (Knight, 2015, p. 100) and are often accorded placement on the fringes of society. Persons with disability are, therefore, not given full recognition as people capable of serving as political representatives (Guldvik & Lesjø, 2014). Their full citizenship is, thus, rarely acknowledged and recognised. This situation occurs because of

the expectation of persons with disability to overcome their impairments by themselves, rather than the society adjusting itself to accommodate them (Knight, 2015). Their impairments are often held as the obstacles that constrain their ability to participate in mainstream activities in society.

Disability tends to reduce the physical mobility and financial resources of persons with disability. It also leads to a decline in the opportunities for the recruitment of persons with disability into political activities (Evans & Reher, 2020; Sackey, 2015; Schur & Kruse, 2000). The latter can be attributed to the generally lower levels of employment among persons with disability and the reduced social contact between persons with disability and non-disabled people (Schur & Kruse, 2000). For persons with disability who desire to engage actively in politics, there are additional barriers that hinder their quest or stifle their progress. For instance, persons with visual impairment and hearing impairment sometimes have difficulties accessing information and interacting with the public during campaigns. Wheelchair users have difficulties in transportation and in accessing the built environment (Sackey, 2015).

Disability and political inclusion in Ghana

In Ghana, the participation of persons with disability in politics is generally low (Kyei & Dogbe, 2020; Mensah et al., 2008; Sackey, 2015). Discussions and interventions on promoting political participation have often been limited to the creation of an enabling environment for the registration of persons with disability and casting of their votes during elections and the provision of assistive devices for same. These interventions are hardly directed towards promoting the participation of persons with as aspirants in elections or as appointees who will hold political offices and exercise political power (Sackey, 2015).

The first time a person with disability was appointed as a Minister of State in the 4th Republic in Ghana (1993 - present) was in January 2013 when Dr Henry Seidu Daanaa, a lawyer who has visual impairment, was appointed as Minister of Chieftaincy and Traditional Affairs (Sackey, 2015). Prior to his appointment, there was minimal involvement of persons with disability in national politics. The participation of persons with disability in local government structure is equally very low (Mensah et al., 2008; Sackey, 2015; Slikker, 2009). Hardly do persons with disability contest public elections in Ghana. The few who do so encounter significant difficulties which ultimately disadvantage them in their pursuit (Sackey, 2015; Mensah et al., 2008).

Persons with disability are also excluded from playing any role within the chieftaincy institution and traditional authority structure. This is because of the prevalence of strong traditional values and religious beliefs that frame persons with disability as people with tainted identities (Mensah, 2008; Ocran, 2019; Sackey, 2015; Slikker, 2009). In some places, traditional authorities are forbidden to interact with persons with disability because of the belief that persons with disability have compromised spiritual identities (Mensah et al., 2008).

Article 29 of the 1992 Constitution of Ghana details the rights of persons with disability. The provisions in the Constitution proscribe any form of discrimination and abusive or degrading treatment of persons with disability. The state is, by Article 29 of the Constitution, obliged to facilitate the integration of persons with disability into mainstream activities in society. Further to this, the Parliament of Ghana passed the Persons with Disability Act 2006 (Act 715) in 2006 to reinforce the rights of persons with disability. In addition to these, Ghana has signed and ratified the United Nations Convention on the Rights of People with Disabilities (UNCRPD) to underscore the commitment of the state to protecting the rights of persons with disability (Ocran, 2019). Despite the existence of these legal frameworks, persons with disability in Ghana continue to experience difficulties when they seek to engage in political activities as political citizens of the country.

According to Schur, Shields and Schriener (2005), an analysis of studies that examine the participation of persons with disability in politics reveals that, even after adjusting for socioeconomic factors, persons with disability are found to have lower levels of participation as compared to non-disabled people. Guldvik and Lesjø (2014) also argue that the political citizenship of persons with disability also tends to be ignored in academic and political discourse in several countries. This study is, therefore, a response to the dearth of literature on challenges that persons with disability face in their participation in politics and governance in Ghana. The study looks beyond socio-economic factors that hinder persons with disability in their participation in national politics and examines some of the barriers that emanate from the public utterances of influential political actors in Ghana.

Methods

Research design

This qualitative collective case study examined the challenges that persons with disability face when they seek to participate in national politics and governance in Ghana. In collective case studies, an issue of concern is identified, and relevant multiple cases are used to illustrate the issue (Bryman, 2016; Creswell & Poth, 2017; Yin, 2016). This research design was chosen to allow for an in-depth description, analysis and understanding of the multiple cases (Bryman, 2016; Creswell & Poth, 2017; Tracy, 2020).

Data collection

The five cases whose examination illustrates the challenges faced by persons with disability in their pursuit of inclusion in politics in Ghana involve public statements made by high profile Ghanaian politicians and traditional leaders. The comments which were widely reported and discussed in the media constitute the data and the units of analysis for the study. The comments were about the involvement of particular persons with disability in national politics and governance, as well as the ability of persons with disability to

perceive and appreciate the successes of various governments. The comments were made between 2013 and 2019 during interviews with journalists, on Facebook, and at political gatherings.

The vignettes of Cases 1 and 2 were constructed through data triangulation (Bryman, 2016; Creswell & Poth, 2017; Tracy, 2020; Yin, 2016). A number of online news portals carried stories on the statements which are discussed in the cases, as well as stories on reactions to the statements. In the case of the vignette in Case 2, the original Facebook post is still available online. The vignettes in Cases 1 and 2 are, therefore, constructed from information available from multiple sources. Videos of the statements presented in Cases 3 and 5 were downloaded from the internet and they provided the basis for the vignettes in Cases 3 and 5. For Case 4, the audio recording of the statement was found online. Related videos of a press conference held to offer a public apology for the statement contained in the initial audio recording were also found online. Consistent with case study research (Creswell & Poth, 2017), vignettes of the five cases which are meant to provide context for the discussion of the themes are presented.

Case 1: Chiefs vs. Daanaa (2013)

Dr Henry Seidu Daanaa is a lawyer who has master's and PhD degrees in law. He has visual impairment. In January 2013, he was nominated by the President of Ghana, John Mahama, for the Minister of Chieftaincy and Traditional Affairs position. Dr Daanaa's nomination was the first time a person with disability had been nominated for a ministerial position in Ghana. His nomination, subsequent approval by Parliament and appointment generated controversy when some chiefs (traditional authorities) raised objections about his suitability for the position. Their arguments were that chiefs were bound by their traditional beliefs, customary practices, and sacred religious obligations not to interact directly with persons with disability including Dr Daanaa. These arguments were made even though Dr Daanaa had worked for about two decades at several Regional Houses of Chiefs in Ghana. He rose through the ranks to become the National Director of Research at the Ministry of Culture and Chieftaincy. This was the same ministry he had been nominated for but under a new designation. The President of the National House of Chiefs, Naa Prof. John Nabila, condemned the objections that had been raised by the chiefs and instead backed the nomination of Dr Daanaa.

Case 2: Presidential staffer vs. Greenstreet (2014)

Ivor Greenstreet is a lawyer and owns a publishing company. He is a former General Secretary of the Convention People's Party (CPP). He has paraplegia and uses a wheelchair. In December 2014, the party of the governing government in Ghana at that time, the National Democratic Congress (NDC), held its National Delegates' Congress. Political parties in Ghana send representatives to each other's delegates' congress to give solidarity messages. These messages are usually characterised by goodwill and light-

heartedness. Greenstreet represented the CPP at the NDC's congress. When he was called to address the gathering on behalf of his party, he used the occasion to criticise the governing party and the approach of the governing government in managing the energy crisis which had hit the country at that time. He also spoke about the failure of the government to purge the government of perceived corruption. Greenstreet's comments enraged the leadership and members of the NDC, because he had used a moment expected to be used for conciliatory speeches to attack the government. Members of the NDC and officials of government chastised him for this. One of the comments that received enormous media coverage was that from a well-known member of the party who was also a presidential staffer. He wrote in a Facebook post that "Ivor Greenstreet apparently needs some elevation to see the Better Ghana." The use of the word 'elevation' in the post was strongly and widely criticised after the presidential staffer was accused of using the word in reference to Greenstreet's paraplegia and use of a wheelchair. The presidential staffer issued another statement on Facebook in which he denied referring to Greenstreet's impairment and instead suggested that he meant Greenstreet needed to 'elevate his thinking' to appreciate the good works of the government. He did not retract his comments but he later, during an interview on radio, offered an apology to those who had been offended by his words.

Case 3: Former Minister of State / Former Member of Parliament vs. Greenstreet (2016)

Ivor Greenstreet was elected by the CPP as the party's presidential candidate in the 2016 general elections in Ghana. That made him the first person with disability to contest the presidential election in Ghana. His election as the party's candidate did not go down well with some members of the party. One person who openly criticised the party's choice was a lawyer and prominent member of the party who served in the first post-independence government of Ghana as a Minister of State and Member of Parliament (MP). He suggested in a TV interview in February 2016 that the CPP stood no chance in the election because of the person they had chosen as their flag bearer. He referred to Greenstreet's paraplegia and wondered how he would rule should he win the elections. He insisted that a "candidate had to walk" to show that he had the capacity to lead. He added that he would have preferred another candidate because that other candidate was not a 'cripple'. He stated emphatically "I don't think a cripple can lead a political party". His statements were condemned by human rights advocates and representatives of disability organisations.

Case 4: Second Deputy Speaker of Parliament/Member of Parliament vs. Omane Boamah and Daanaa (2018)

Dr Edward Omane Boamah is a medical practitioner who served as the Minister for Communications and Spokesperson of the President of Ghana from 2013 to 2017. He served in the same government as Dr Daanaa (already mentioned in Case 1). The

political party of the government they served in was defeated in the 2016 general elections in Ghana. When the party went into opposition, the Second Deputy Speaker of Ghana's Parliament who was also an MP and a member of the NDC met some members of the party at a forum at which he criticised President Mahama, the defeated NDC candidate, for his decision to appoint Dr Daanaa and Dr Omame Boamah to serve in their respective roles in his government. He argued that Dr Omame Boamah was a 'stammerer' who could not communicate effectively, as was required by his position. He added that it was a mistake for the President to have appointed Dr Daanaa as Minister for Chieftaincy and Traditional Affairs because of his visual impairment, since some Chiefs did not want to associate with him because he was not 'whole', as per traditional beliefs. He suggested that these appointments were partially responsible for the party's defeat in the 2016 general elections. His comments were widely condemned by the public and human rights activists. At a press conference he held to issue a public apology, he said the apology was not an admission that he had said something wrong but rather an admission that "it is not all things that you say in public." He also suggested that the President could have considered Dr Daanaa for another position, rather than the one he was nominated for, since that brought him into direct contact with the chiefs, some of whom had issues with his nomination and appointment.

Case 5: The President vs. Persons with Hearing and Visually Impairments (2019)

At a political rally in January 2019, the President of Ghana sought to highlight the successes of his government in the two years he had been in office. He took a swipe at his political opponents who had suggested that his government had not done much in that time. The President suggested at that meeting that, it was only those who were either visually impaired or hearing impaired who would fail to recognise the achievements of his government in his brief time in office. His comments received immense criticism and condemnation from civil society and the public. The condemnations centred on the fact that the President practiced as a lawyer and a prominent human rights activist for several years and also served as a Member of Parliament for three terms prior to his election as President. In a message posted on Facebook shortly afterwards, the President described his statements as a 'political metaphor' and offered an apology for the 'unintended slight from the political metaphor'. At the beginning of his second term of office in 2021 however, the President appointed a person with disability as a Regional Minister.

Data Analyses

Data for the study were analysed using the cross-case analysis approach (Burns, 2010; Eriksson & Kovalainen, 2010; Khan & VanWynsberghe, 2008; Creswell & Poth, 2017). This approach was used in order to identify the themes that were common in the five cases as well as those that were particular to any the five cases in the study (Creswell &

Poth, 2017). As part of the analyses processes, detailed descriptions of the five cases were written. This involved the description of the events in the cases and the transcription of interactions and statements that had been made in each case. The five incidents have been chronicled from multiple sources of information. These sources include Facebook posts, videos and reports from online news portals. Synthesising data from multiple sources was done to increase objectivity in the analysis. After this, within-case analysis was done to identify various themes and issues of relevance in each case. The within-case analysis was done to allow the themes to emerge from each case without any comparison across the cases or interference across the different cases. This was followed by cross-case analysis using the thematic network approach (Attride-Sterling, 2001). This involved an iterative process of repeatedly comparing the themes that had emerged from the five cases to establish an adequacy in the analyses. The cross-case analysis led to the identification of similarities and differences in the themes across the five cases as well as the linkages between them. Analyses of the data led to the emergence of themes that constitute the barriers to political inclusion identified in the study as well the implications of the themes for the inclusion of persons with disability in politics and governance in Ghana.

Findings

Three themes emerged from the cross-case analysis of the five cases. These are the persistence of traditional beliefs, stereotypes about functional limitation in persons with disability and the use of insensitive language.

Persistence of traditional beliefs

The opposition of some chiefs to the nomination and subsequent appointment of Dr Daanaa as Minister for Chieftaincy and Traditional Affairs demonstrates the deep-seated abhorrence of traditional beliefs towards disability and persons with disability. The chiefs were emphatic in expressing their displeasure because of their sacred obligations within the chieftaincy institution. Their position was supported by the Second Deputy Parliament who argued that the President ought to have heeded to their call and should have appointed a different person to that ministerial position and moved Dr Daanaa to a different position, out of reverence to the chiefs and the chieftaincy institution as the custodian of the culture of the Ghanaian people. The desire for the persistence of these oppressive customary beliefs and practices is common even though Article 29 of the Constitution of Ghana and the Persons with Disability Act (Act 715) clearly prohibit any form of discrimination towards persons with disability. The suggestions of Dr Daanaa's unsuitability can have far-reaching consequences. Other persons with disability, seeing how his nomination and appointment were received may seek to avoid the discomfort that active political engagement comes with. They may consequently stay away political participation beyond voting during elections. The persistence of such customs and practices that inhibit persons with disability denies persons with disability their rights as full citizens of the country.

The opposition to Dr Daanaa's appointment also brings to the fore the challenges posed by customary beliefs and practices to the supremacy of the Constitution of the country. Article 11 (2) of the Constitution of Ghana recognises customary laws as a legitimate source of law in Ghana. Article 1 (2) of the Constitution, however, emphasises the supremacy of the Constitution above any other laws in the country. This means that the position of the Constitution should prevail at all times, whenever any law appears to be inconsistent with the Constitution. The seeming conflict between customary law and the Constitution should ordinarily not occur but the pervasiveness of tradition and customs in Ghana, and the enormous influence they wield have made this a sensitive matter. Any attempt to dismiss these customary beliefs and practices and enforce the constitutional provisions to the latter may be seen as an attempt to denigrate the culture of the people and by extension, their very identities. Therefore, the constitutional provisions that guarantee the rights of persons with disability are there, but they remain largely ineffective and unenforced because of the preponderance of these repressive aspects of culture and tradition. Persons with disability are consequently living under the weight of oppression that tradition and customary beliefs exert.

Stereotypes about functional limitation in persons with disability

It is usual, although not acceptable, for disability to become the master status of persons with disability. When this happens, other statuses that persons with disability occupy are discounted or ignored within their social encounters. In the cases examined in this study, Greenstreet's other statuses beyond his impairment, and his employment history and experience did not matter when his ability to lead the party in the general election was called into question by a senior member of the party. His professional experience as a lawyer, his long service to the CPP as General Secretary, his candidature for a parliamentary seat on the ticket of the CPP in the 2004 general elections, and the fact that he was elected by the party's electoral college all seemed irrelevant. This is similar to the criticisms made against the appointments of Dr Daanaa. Dr Daanaa had worked in a number of Regional Houses of Chiefs and had risen through the ranks to work at the Ministry in very senior roles. In these positions, he worked with many chiefs. There seemed to be no problem with him but once he was mentioned as the President's nominee for the ministerial position, voices in opposition emerged.

The remarks in opposition to their respective endeavours also attest to the pervasiveness of misconceptions about disability. The senior member of the CPP who questioned Greenstreet's ability to lead because of his paraplegia got it wrong when he said that Greenstreet had to walk in order to campaign and prove himself as a leader. Indeed, Greenstreet campaigned throughout the country ahead of the 2016 general election and placed fourth in the elections out of seven candidates. He was again selected by the party as its candidate for the 2020 elections, an indication that the party was satisfied with his output in the previous election. The negative comments about the

capacity of persons with disability to participate fully as citizens in mainstream political activities lead to the production and reproduction of such disability stereotypes which fuel hate and disaffection towards persons with disability. This has the propensity of restricting persons with disability's pursuit of political citizenship.

Some of the comments made by the political actors ascribe various forms of incompetence to persons with disability. The point about Greenstreet not being able to walk was to suggest that he was immobile, but that was not the case. He demonstrated his mobility by campaigning across the country in the two presidential elections he contested in 2016 and 2020. Dr Omane Boamah's style of speech was also criticised because it does not appear to be boisterous enough within the context of political communications in Ghana. People's preference for more animated political communication does not mean that other styles of communication are inferior. Another manifestation of the ascription of incompetence is seen when the President suggested at a political rally in 2019 that those who could not perceive the successes of his government were either visually or hearing impaired. His use of visual and hearing impairment as a metaphor draws on an assumed lack of or diminished intellectual abilities of people with visual and hearing impairment. There is a perception that people with visual and hearing impairments do not have access to information or perhaps may not have had a lot of formal education. They are, consequently, thought of as not being capable of comprehending matters that require high intellectual capacities. While this may be true for some persons with visual and hearing impairment, it cannot be the universal fact because there are some persons with visual or hearing impairment who are more knowledgeable and better informed than some of their non-disabled peers. Visual and hearing impairment can, therefore, not be seen or used as a sign of being unformed or lacking intellectual abilities. Such comments can limit the aspirations of persons with visual impairment and hearing impairment, given the persistence of the perception that they lack critical intellectual abilities.

Insensitive Language

While it is difficult to know the true intentions of people who make comments that may be offensive to persons with disability, political actors ought to be more alert and mindful of their public commentary and the implications of their statements. Some of the comments that are made about disability and or directed at persons with disability may not have been made out of malicious intent, but from a lack of awareness about how offensive and inappropriate the comments are. The suggestion from the Presidential Staffer that Greenstreet needed 'elevation' to see the successes of the then government is a typical example. The Presidential Staffer stated in his clarification that he had not referred to Greenstreet's use of a wheelchair in his Facebook post. He insisted that the term was about Greenstreet's ability to discern the progress that had been made in the time the government had been in office. This type of ambiguous communication from

political actors does not help persons with disability's pursuit of political participation because it reinforces disability stereotypes, even if it is not intended by the speakers.

The President's use of visual and hearing impairment as a metaphor to describe his opponents is characteristic of an oppressive linguistic order that disadvantages persons with disability. There are a number of disability labels, metaphors, idioms and proverbs that stigmatise and frame persons with disability as incapable of full social participation. The use of these comments show a lack of empathy on the part of persons who make those comments. Persons with disability are oppressed and marginalised in so many ways. It is, thus, not proper for anyone to use their negative experiences as a basis for political commentary, especially when it is not about advocating for the inclusion of persons with disability but about reproducing the basis for disability stigma and marginalisation. The comments by the Second Deputy Speaker on the appointment of Dr Daanaa and Dr Omane Boamah also show how public commentary can be used to degrade and sometimes harass persons with disability. The description of Dr Daanaa as not being 'whole' was as offensive and insensitive as it could ever be.

Discussion

Persons with disability who have stronger ties to groups within communities may also have higher commitments to political matters and also possess higher civic skills (Schur et al., 2003). This is true for the persons with disability whose experiences are examined in this study. Each of them rose through the ranks of their political parties and on that basis, earned the opportunity to serve in their respective capacities. It is in these appointed or elected positions that they were exposed to lowered social expectations and the ascriptions of incompetence. This is because some people wrongly assume that the presence of an impairment means that the person who has that impairment may have other associated impairments and characteristics such as lack of formal education, lack of access to information, lack of intelligence and lack of social skills (Joachim & Acorn, 2010; Miller et al., 2009; Ocran, 2022). The conduct of people towards persons with disability demonstrates these erroneous beliefs. Statements made by influential public speakers, as has been identified in this study, tend to make the stereotypes and disability stigma seem socially acceptable, further entrenching the 'othering' and scapegoating of persons with disability (Burch, 2020; Davies, 2020).

The metaphor of persons with visual and hearing impairment lacking access to information or the intellectual ability to process information is a recognition of the social deficiencies that a number of persons with visual and hearing impairment live with. Similarly, the assumption that physically challenged people will be unable to move through the built environment is indicative of how exclusionary the built environment is. The recognition of these inadequacies and barriers in society ought to ignite a drive among politicians and public office holders towards contributing to the elimination of the inequalities that result from such deprivation. The drive should be towards the expansion of opportunities for persons with disability to participate in public and political activities

more broadly (Priestly et al. 2016).

Citizenship emphasises the importance of being able to contribute to society. Given that it is a democratic principle, there ought to exist communal bonds between the citizens in a society, with the citizens having the responsibility to work towards ensuring the protection of their collective and individual freedoms (Hilberink & Cardol, 2019). Condescending statements made about persons with disability reinforce the stigma that they experience and also ascribe negative attributes to persons with disability, thereby adding to the marginalisation and discrimination that they experience (Sherry et al., 2020). The stigmatisation and marginalisation become manifest in the limited number of persons with disability who participate actively in mainstream political activities in society, and the denigration of the few who get the opportunity to participate in national politics.

Heyman, Sprague and Raub (2020) posit that overt discrimination, implicit bias and the failure of the state and institutions to take steps to ensure that there are equal opportunities have resulted in persons with disability becoming the most disadvantaged minority group in the world. This position is true when the outcome of the analysis of the vignettes presented in this study are considered. With persons with disability being questioned about their claim to political offices and their capacity for full political participation, and others being stigmatised because of insensitive commentary about them, the participation of persons with disability in politics in Ghana is low and, therefore, largely limited to civil society advocacy (Sackey, 2015). Even though civil society advocacy is good in itself, the expectation has been that the provisions in Article 29 of the Constitution, the passage of the Persons with Disability Act 2006 (Act 715) and the ratification of the UNCRPD would encourage the state to do more to ensure the inclusion of persons with disability in mainstream political activities. This expectation has, however, not yet been met fully (Ocran, 2019).

The adoption of the UNCRPD means that the state has assumed the responsibility of upholding the principles set in the Convention and overseeing the integration of persons with disability into mainstream activities in society (Guldvik & Lesjø, 2014; Hilberink & Cardol, 2019; Sackey, 2015; Oluchina, 2015; Waldschmidt & Sépulchre, 2019). The General Principles in the UNCRPD stress on respect for the dignity of persons with disability, non-discrimination, equality, full and effective participation and inclusion of persons with disability in society, respect for difference and the acceptance of persons with disability as part of human diversity and humanity (United Nations 2006). The Constitution, the UNCRPD and the Persons with Disability Act 2006 (Act 715) place responsibility of integration on the state but that is not what prevails. Some of the most significant people whose mandate it is to ensure that the rights and dignity of persons with disability are upheld sometimes err in their disposition towards disability and persons with disability. The failure of the state to uphold the constitutional provisions, laws and international treaties also contributes to the alienation and political exclusion of persons with disability (Ocran, 2019; Sackey, 2015).

The need for participation of persons with disability in politics is about the issue of representation (Evans & Reher, 2020; Guldvik et al., 2013; Oluchina, 2015). Political citizenship of persons with disability can become obvious when persons with disability self-represent themselves in national politics (Evans & Reher, 2020; Guldvik et al., 2013; Sackey, 2015). Political participation of underrepresented groups contributes to the eradication of political marginalisation (Hall & Alvarez, 2012). The participation of persons with disability in governance and politics can also have a positive adjoining effect by improving persons with disability's access to other socio-economic opportunities in healthcare, education and employment (Kyei & Dogbe, 2020). Persons with disability should have the right to participate in political affairs without hindrance, especially when these rights are enshrined in law. The participation of all groups of citizens in the governance and national politics strengthens political systems, enriches deliberations and enhances the levels of trust and acceptance of the political system (Knight, 2015).

In agreeing with Heyman et al. (2020), governments and their institutions and agencies have to do more to ensure that they build on the successes of the past and present to ensure that persons with disability are guaranteed their full rights as citizens, as provided for by the legal frameworks. The importance of the presence of persons with disability at the core of governance and decision-making processes cannot be over-emphasised. As posited by Hilberink and Cardol (2019), equality is a fundamental principle when the idea of citizenship is considered because society has to be both socially and physically accessible to all, and in this case, to persons with disability.

Conclusion

This study has drawn attention to the complicity of the political leadership (traditional authorities, elected and appointed officers) of the country in the public harassment, stereotyping, discrimination and oppression of persons with disability in Ghana. The unpleasant comments about disability and persons with disability reinforce the negative stereotypes about disability and also show the persistence of traditional beliefs, both of which are against the full political participation of persons with disability in society. The comments perpetuate the traditional beliefs that marginalise persons with disability. Some of the comments reinforce stereotypes about disability and ascribe various forms of incompetence to persons with disability. Some people also use words and metaphors that may be construed as offensive to persons with disability. The study also highlights the failure of the state to uphold the rights of persons with disability, as provided for by the constitution, acts of parliaments and international treaties that the country is a signatory to. The outcome of these is that persons with disability are alienated from political processes and are also severely constrained in their quest to engage in national politics as full citizens of the nation. Their rights as political citizens of the nation are restricted in the face of the insensitive and stigmatising utterances that offend the dignity of persons with disability and demean their roles and efforts in society. Given that persons with disability

have the rights that every other citizen of the country has, the state and agencies of the state, together with civil society organisations, have to do more to sensitise people on the rights of all persons, as provided for by the laws of the state. They have to strengthen the advocacy about the need for the inclusion of persons with disability in national politics. Beyond this, the state has to commit to creating opportunities for persons with disability by making the necessary accommodations in education, information dissemination, employment, the built environment and transportation, as these will facilitate the inclusion of persons with disability in mainstream social, economic and ultimately political activities. A strong and functional state thrives on respect for rule of law and protection of the rights of the citizens. Therefore, administrative and traditional leaders have to be more measured in their public commentary. They should be more sensitive to the dignity and rights of the people over whom they preside. They do not have to assume the position of holding a section of the citizenry above or below other groups of citizens. The legislative, judicial and executive arms of government should commit to working towards the protection of the rights of all people, asserting their dignity and respecting their rights and freedoms as established by the laws of the country. It is only when the political leadership of the country commit to enforcing the anti-discriminatory laws and protecting the rights of persons with disability that full political citizenship of persons with disability can be attained.

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