

Assisting Individuals with Disabilities via the United Nations' Sustainable Development

Goals: A Case Study in Ghana.

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Abstract

Consistently, it has been reported that persons with disabilities face multiple challenges in societies and thus, it is important that deliberate intervention programmes are initiated to empower them to overcome exclusion. The United Nations has taken the lead through the development Sustainable Development Goals project (SDG) which is a framework to assist countries and donors, on how they would assist in effort towards alleviating poverty. This paper documented the experiences of persons with disabilities in light of global efforts towards poverty reduction through SDGs. Face-to-face interviews were conducted with 48 individuals with disabilities (hearing loss n = 11, visual impairment n = 15, and physical disability n = 22) who were drawn from four districts in the Northern region of Ghana. Analysis of the interview data revealed common themes related to hardship, poverty, limited access to education and underemployment. The results indicated that the SDG project had engendered little tangible improvement in the lives of persons with disabilities. The need for concerted effort to address barriers faced by individuals with disabilities have been discussed extensively.

Keywords: *Sustainable development goals, Ghana, poverty, persons with disabilities*

Introduction

In Ghana, which is classified as a developing country, the needs of persons with disabilities are not adequately considered within the nation's framework for social and economic development. In addition, the fundamental human rights of individuals with disabilities as equal citizens are generally overlooked (Danso, Owusu-Ansah, & Alorwu, 2012; Gregorius, 2016; Kassah, 2008; Singal, Mahama-Salifu, Iddrisu, Casely-Hayford, & Lundebye, 2015). Consequently, international donor communities, led by the United Nations (UN), have recognised that existing policies and structures are inequitable, thus they have initiated programs to reduce poverty, increase educational opportunities, and enhance food security for

individuals with disabilities (Anthony, 2011; Kalyanpur, 2014; Singal et al., 2015). In particular, the UN's Millennium Development Goals (MDG) via the Sustainable Development Goals project (SDG) aims to reduce poverty levels and improve living standards of families by 2030 (Griggs et al., 2013; Pisano, Lange, Berger, & Hametner, 2015; United Nations Development Programme [UNDP], 2015).

The SDG with its 17 goals and 169 targets, was an expansion of the MDG which expired at the end of 2015. The MDG attempted to contribute to improving vital areas (such as: healthcare, maternal mortality, education and poverty reduction) at a systems level; but it appears that its narrow system level policy scope may have resulted in the needs of some groups (e.g., persons with disabilities) being unmet and/or overlooked (World Health Organization [WHO], 2015). However, the SDG is a people-centred initiative aimed at enabling individuals to explore business opportunities and thus participate in the local economy (UNDP, 2015). The SDG is focused on improving the well-being of individuals and maximising the potential of individuals who have suffered from long term and systematic exclusion.

This study examines the extent to which the SDG, at the micro- level, has assisted Ghanaian individuals with a disability. In the process, the study also examines efforts made in Ghana to improve the livelihood of individuals with disabilities. For the purposes of this study, poverty is defined as not having basic life essentials which contribute to lack of opportunity, malnutrition, hunger, illiteracy, unhappiness and lack of hope for the future (UN, 2015) and disability refers to physical, mental or sensory impairment including and extending to visual, hearing or speech functional incapacity (Government of Ghana, 2006).

Poverty and persons with disabilities in Ghana

The WHO (2011) has estimated that 10% of Ghanaian's have one or more kinds of disability and, within the education system in Ghana, there are around 30,000 students with disabilities in special education schools and inclusive education schools (Ministry of Education, 2013). Such a volume of numbers creates a unique challenge, not only due to poverty but also in determining how to allocate very limited resources among individuals who have already been marginalised from the mainstream society in term of economic, social, and cultural participation.

Notably, the poverty levels of individuals with disabilities are higher than any other sub-group of individuals without a disability (Filmer, 2008; McClain-Nhlapo, 2007). According to the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF) (2007), poverty affects individuals with disabilities in two ways: firstly, disability lowers family income, as typically an able-bodied family member has to forgo work opportunities to care for the family member with a disability; and, secondly, individuals with disabilities are usually unable to work and thus remain dependent on others. Hence, local and international disability support advocacy groups are adopting pragmatic approaches to creating worthwhile economic opportunities for individuals with disabilities, so that they can engage in the local economy (WHO, 2011).

Compounding the vulnerability and disadvantage of individuals with disabilities are negative societal stereotypes and unhelpful cultural views that prevail in Ghana (Agbenyega, 2003; Avoke, 2002; Kassah, 2008). For instance, superstitious beliefs about causal reasons for disability are pervasive in Ghana; simply put, individuals with disabilities are believed to be receiving supernatural punishment for their supposed wrongdoing. These beliefs are well entrenched within the socio-cultural milieu of Ghanaian society, which further contributes to stigmatisation, labels, and public shaming of individuals by name calling (e.g., sick person, stupid person, retard, idiot, dumb, imbecile). The impact of this negatively devalues the ability and capacity of individuals with a disability. These views further contribute to the

disempowerment of individuals with disabilities, move them to the margins, and restrict their entry to normal means of participation in society through social channels, employment or education (Avoke, 2002; Baffoe, 2013; Danso, Ayarkwa, & Dansoh, 2011; Naami & Hayashi, 2012). Societal attitudes and views about individuals with disabilities in Ghana need to be given urgent reconsideration, by means of public education and providing accurate information. However, it is unclear at a systems level which policies in Ghana empower individuals with disabilities.

In terms of poverty among individuals with disabilities within the Ghanaian context, there is a positive correlation between disability and poverty because individuals with disabilities are usually excluded from active economic participation or often overlooked by the labour market (Avoke, 2002; Kassah, 2008). Even if individuals with a disability are successful in securing a job, they are highly likely to be underemployed or underpaid, which consequently reduces their earning power (Kassah, 2008). This economic disparity, in the case of individuals with disabilities, is further pronounced by deficits in skill levels due to lack of education and formal training (Kassah, Kassah, & Agbotta, 2014; Naami, Hayashi, & Liese, 2012; Opoku, Badu, Amponteng, & Agyei-Okyere, 2015). This deprivation of access to formal learning, coupled with limited access to skills-based education, may account for high rates of unemployment among individuals with disabilities, over and above the rates that might be expected due to antipathetic views concerning disability by Ghanaian society (Kassah et al., 2014; Naami et al., 2012; Opoku, Mprah, Dogbe, Moitui, & Badu, 2017). Individuals with disabilities are arguably one of the most disadvantaged groups in Ghana because they are not welcome in mainstream society and they are not given opportunities to meaningfully engage in community settings; consequently, they are effectively prevented from participating in the local economy.

While some individuals with disabilities are able to rely on the generosity of members of their family or community, there is no other avenue for them to seek more formal government support (Kassah, 2008). If families are themselves poor, individuals with disabilities have to resort to begging as a means of survival, which is a graphic indicator that individuals are living below the poverty line (Kassah, 2008). According to Kassah (2008) and Naami et al. (2012), individuals with disabilities justify their involvement in begging due to the lack of jobs open to them and their limited employability skills. In the global context, the notion of individuals with disabilities being beggars has become a cultural norm in societies across the world, and this has contributed to their visibility in streets, churches, and public places, which further ostracizes them from society (Groce, Loeb, & Murray, 2014).

Proponents of the social model of disability make a strong argument for the removal of obstacles (e.g., poverty, lack of formal and vocational education, etc.) for individuals with disabilities (Oliver, Sapey, & Thomas, 2012; Swain, 2004; Thomas, 2004). Thus, there is an urgent need to investigate the possibility of utilising the SDG to alleviate poverty among individuals with disabilities. Specifically, poverty should be tackled as outlined in Goal 1 of the SDGs, which states that this will occur through:

- Building a resilient population to overcome poverty;
- Promoting equal rights for economic participation through education;
- Committing to improving the livelihood of people living on less than \$2 a day;
- Providing skills training for their marketability; and
- Developing appropriate national social protection to improving the living conditions of individuals with with disabilities (UN, 2015, p. 19).

Accordingly, the question investigated in this study is: what impact has these objectives had on people who are disabled, and thus the most vulnerable members in the community? The dominant discourse on disability issues should revolve around supporting

individuals with disabilities to participate equally in society. This implies listening to the voices of individuals with disabilities to determine how to best overcome social barriers and limitations to equal participations as per the SDG (Goal 1) policy framework.

Method

Study participants

Data was collected by the first author as part of a project to document efforts towards alleviating poverty among individuals with disabilities in Ghana. The data was collected in March-June, 2016 in the northern region of Ghana. Participants were recruited from four of 20 districts in Northern region of Ghana, specifically the four district capitals of Tamale Metropolitan, Yendi Municipal, East Gonja and West Mamprusi. The participants were drawn from the membership of the local Disability Peoples' Organisations (DPO), thus this study was only able to recruit individuals with physical, visual or hearing disabilities. In each district, the DPOs had meetings once a month, so arrangements were made for the interviews to be conducted at these meeting times.

After collecting data from 48 participants in four districts, data saturation was experienced, that is no new themes were emerging (Fusch, Lawrence, & Ness, 2015), thus the first author decided to halt any further recruitment of participants. Table 1 summarises the demographic characteristics of participants who took part in the study. Eight participants were executives of DPOs and were also members of the fund management committee. The types of disabilities were represented by: 22 participants with physical disabilities; 15 with visual disabilities, and 11 with hearing disabilities. Twenty participants were male and 28 were female. Sixteen participants had no formal qualifications; 11 had primary school qualifications; seven had secondary qualifications; four had tertiary qualifications and ten had

professional qualifications. Twenty-two participants were single; 15 were married; five were divorced and six were widowed.

Table 1: Demographic Characteristics of Participants

Category	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Type of Disabilities		
Physical disability	22	46
Visual disability	15	31
Hearing disability	11	23
Sex		
Male	20	42
Female	28	58
Marital Status		
Single	22	46
Married	15	31
Divorced	5	10
Widowed	6	13
Education Status		
Primary	11	23
Secondary	7	15
Tertiary	4	8
Professional	10	21
None	16	33
Age of participants		
21-30	17	35
31-40	13	27
41-50	7	15
51-60	8	17
61-70	3	6
Occupation		
Farmers	8	
Apprentice	12	17
Teachers	3	25
Students	7	6
None	18	15
		37

Data collection procedure

Face-to-face interviews were organised to gather first-hand information from the participants on their views about poverty, access to education and employment, and their means of livelihood. Interviews were audio-recorded with the permission of the participants. The use of semi-structured interviews provided a flexible and relaxed format for discussion between the interviewer and participants, which was designed to elicit rich data (Denscombe, 2003). Most questions were open-ended and were sometimes followed up by probe questions or other serendipitous conversation, which allowed the participants to freely discuss their views and experiences in detail. The interview was organized into two segments: one about the participants' living conditions and the other focused on coping strategies adopted by participants. The first author conducted the interviews and responded to any questions or concerns raised during the interviewing process.

The Ethics Review Committee of Kwame Nkrumah University of Science and Technology in Kumasi, Ghana approved this study. A letter was sent to the Regional Executive Office of the DPOs in the region and arrangements were made with all District Executives to give their members prior notice about the intended study. The study objectives were explained to all potential participants and those who agreed to take part in the study gave their written informed consent before they were interviewed. In addition, the participants had the opportunity to discuss any issues in detail and without any restrictions. Participation in the study was voluntary and participants were free to withdraw at any point in time without consequences. In addition, the participants were assured that their identity would be kept anonymous throughout the study by the researchers removing participant identification from all recordings and subsequent data files.

Although the interviews were conducted in English, the participants were invited to speak in Twi, which is a common language in Ghana, if they were unable to fully express their views in English. This was translated into English (by the first author who is fluent in

both English and Twi) during the transcription process. In the case of the hearing impaired participants, the researchers hired a sign language interpreter who assisted in the process of communication during the interviews with the participants. The interpreter voiced the translation of sign language to English into the audio recording.

Data analysis

The study was underpinned by a constructivist methodology of capturing lived experiences through perspectives of the participants. Based on this, audio transcripts were sent to participants to confirm whether their views had been accurately represented, and corrected or amended as required. This process enhances the quality of data for reporting and hence improves the rigour of study findings (Creswell & Miller, 2000).

Content analysis, following O’Leary’s (2017) six steps, was undertaken. The steps followed were: reading through data; organising and coding; searching for patterns and interconnections; mapping and building themes; building thematic data and drawing conclusions. The first author and second author began the process by transcribing the audio-recorded interviews verbatim after listening to portions of the audio recording multiple times to ensure accuracy. In the process of reading through the transcripts, a list of concepts and meanings were generated and relationships were established among the concepts. The data were categorised based on the objectives of the study, and relevant quotes were grouped into categories to form themes and sub-themes.

Results

Barriers faced in the communities

The participants discussed the challenges they faced in their respective communities. Several challenges were mentioned, but the majority of the themes were related to poverty, a lack of

education and training, inaccessible physical environments, and a lack of employment or employment prospects.

Narratives of poverty

There was a general consensus among the participants that it is inevitable that persons with disabilities will experience poverty. The participants acknowledged that they were poor as a result of their inability to access the necessities of life and due to their respective families being poor. Some of the responses are summarised as follows:

Many disables do not have money to feed them[selves]. I agree that disabled are poor because there are some jobs non-disabled can do to earn more money, disabled people can't do. That is why we are poor. Most disables are idle without jobs. [Visual disability 6]

Many disabled are poor because of the families they are coming from. Most families do not care for them because they don't have the means. I always pray to God to help me to survive. There is no money and at times what to eat is a problem for me. [Hearing disability 2]

I'm suffering in life as I don't have anyone to help myself. My father is a poor farmer who has so many responsibilities. Now he is old, so he is unable to work as expected. There is no one to sponsor my education. [Visual disability 10]

Lack of education

Most participants reported limited opportunity to access education at any level. All participants recognized that formal education was a major stepping stone towards accessing jobs. They believed that without education, they had no chance of having access to a well-paid job. Some participants wished that they had tried harder to pursue higher education (that is, tertiary education) in order to have marketable skills or abilities that might be attractive enough to employers to counter their disability. Some of the responses are summarised as follows:

I do hope that if I get the opportunity to go to school, I will be able to do something meaningful in life without relying on others. There is no one who is

ready to listen to me. I need genuine help but just that people don't want to help. They won't listen to you and what do you have to say. To them, disabilities are unimportant. [Visual disability 13]

To me, I suggest that society should help invest in the education of persons with disabilities. Once they do that they will be able to have a good life for the future. My immediate family is poor, and the extended family is not helping. They will tell you they are taking care of their children they don't have excesses to give out. I know what is ahead of me so I won't give up on education. [Physical disability 5]

Since I completed Senior High School, life has been difficult for me. It is now that I made up my mind that I have to do further education because I don't know what will happen tomorrow. I'm strong today and maybe tomorrow I will not be strong, so I have to further my education so that in future I will be able to support myself and my family. [Physical disability 18]

Physical learning environment

Some participants mentioned the nature of the physical environment as a barrier which did not enable them to continue school. According to participants, schools were built without considerations to their needs, for instance no signs in Braille for visually impaired individuals. It was worse for participants with a physical disability whose schools were more than one storey high, as they could not access classrooms and facilities above the ground floor. Some of the responses are summarised as follows:

The school is not accessible to me. When I'm on campus, without anyone helping me, I couldn't cope. The building was tall and not friendly, so if I want to go to class, somebody would have to carry me before I could attend lectures. I didn't report to the school authorities, but I'm blaming them for not thinking about persons with disabilities. [Physical disability 10]

In fact, I struggle in school with my wheelchair, and at times I feel like quitting the school. They have not put accessible places in schools. Disability could happen to either the rector or some lecturers in the school. I'm only pleading to them that if they want to put up infrastructures, they should make it in such a way that people with disabilities could move freely. [Physical disability 5]

Access to school

On the other hand, some participants discussed that poverty denied them the chance to even attend school. According to them, their low-income family background resulted in their inability to pay for an education. They mentioned that since their family members were unable to provide them with the needed support for their education, other persons within the society were also unwilling to support them to go to school. Some of the responses are summarised as follows:

Hmmm! It is not easy. As at now, I'm not staying with my parents. I'm in this town because of education. My dad is not there, and my mum too is old so she can't support me in school. When I got admission, I was running helter-skelter for school fees. My friends were in class while I was looking for money to go and pay school fees. [Physical disability 10]

As a person with disabilities, you will not get support to further your education. Most of us lack support from our families. It wasn't easy, so I wrote to the assembly for funds, but they kept postponing and didn't give me the money for the fees. I couldn't go to school because of money. [Physical disability 16]

Due to lack of funds, some participants who were attending school had to combine petty trading with study to support themselves whilst at school. One physically impaired person said, "now I'm selling recharge cards in my leisure time. I have little time to study due to the work I have to do [to] survive." Another visually impaired expressed that he struggled to pay school fees, buy books and pay for food. In general, multifaceted factors contributed to the inability of persons with disabilities to gain access to education.

Lack of employment

There was a divergence in opinion as to why persons with disabilities were underemployed or unemployed. While some individuals said a lack of education accounted for lack of employment, others claimed that it was negative attitudes towards persons with disabilities in their society that accounted for them not having employment. Even if individuals had the appropriate qualifications and skills, employers were generally unwilling to employ them due to their disability. Some of the responses are summarised as follows:

Persons with disabilities are mainly poor because most employers won't employ them. Even where I'm working, my employer told me I'm disabled, and I won't be able to do the work. I responded that I could do the work since it's not my legs which I will use to do the work. We agreed that all of us would do the sweeping. I accepted since I wanted to prove a point to them. It pained me that they were using my disability as a basis to deny me a job. I didn't create myself so there is no need for people to judge me based on how I look. [Physical disability 19]

Although I'm disabled, it doesn't restrict my ability to function. I finished secretariat school in 2009, so I went for an internship in one organisation. Few weeks into the internship, they asked us to reapply for permanent employment. When we sent the applications, they only rejected mine. It was because of my disability that is why I was unable to get that opportunity. They picked all of them except me. [Physical disability 11]

Begging for a living

Due to a lack of family or community support and the general difficulty for persons with a disability to support themselves, some persons with a disability had no option other than to engage in begging to survive. Begging had become the only viable method to support themselves and their families. Some of the responses are summarised as follows:

Others are begging to survive due to lack of finance. So many of them resort to begging because they are always able to get money for their children every day. Most are not working, and if they don't get support from their family, they go to the street to look for help. [Physical disability 9]

Life is very hard for us, so it is not surprising that there are so many disables begging. They have to live, that is why some of our colleagues are begging on the roadside. I do understand them since I'm a disable. [Visual disability 4]

A lot of disables are by the road side due to lack of support. I feel pity for them whenever I see them by the roadside. Those I know, I always talk to them to stop begging and find something else to do. I'm not working, but I have been trying to live. [Physical disability 2]

Although persons with a disability were poor, they were not comfortable begging, but circumstances have led them to do so. Similarly, others persons with disabilities who were not beggars were against those who were involved in begging. Those who were not begging believed that begging degrades the collective identity of persons with disabilities, hence the

need for them to quit begging and find something to do. Some of the responses are summarised as follows:

When I see people begging on the street, I feel sad because how much can they make in a day to cater for their family especially in educating, feeding and clothing their children. I normally advise people who are on the street begging, but they will not take the advice so I think they are benefiting from the begging. [Physical disability 5]

I feel bad when I see disables begging in the streets because it leads to disrespect for disable persons. I sometimes talk to them and most of them will not listen to the advice. My last words are that, even though life is difficult for disabled but I will encourage them to look up to God. [Physical disability 1]

I don't support the disables who are begging in the streets because they should also learn skills and use them for a living. I sometimes talk to some of them because God himself doesn't support begging. I always tell them to stop and even if they will beg I tell them they shouldn't solely depend on it but should find something to do but some will tell you they can learn any employable skills. [Physical disability 4]

The notion of persons with a disability being beggars is the general perception that people have of the identity of persons with disabilities. For those who were not begging, it depicts an image of self-pity and hopelessness. Some participants said:

People see disables as beggars. At times I will be in my wheelchair and move by the roadside somebody will meet you on the way and give you money. They think all of us are beggars. That is the perception people have about us. They will eat faeces if they stop the begging. I'm totally against it. They should stop it and leave all to God. [Physical disability 8]

Now people in this community see every disabled person as beggars. They have made it general to cover everyone. At times someone will see me in my wheelchair going to town or taking a walk around, and they will come and give you money. I have been rejecting such things I'm proud to be employed. [Physical disability 10]

Although there is evidence of poverty among persons with a disability, begging as an alternative means of survival is abhorred by others who were practising it. There is the need to survive, but begging was seen as an embarrassment that tarnishes the collective image of persons with a disability.

Discussion

This study explored the extent to which individuals with disabilities were supported to have a means of livelihood as outlined by Goal 1 of the SDG. The SDG aims to alleviate all forms of poverty among all persons with disabilities who have been found to be consistently poor. The MDG saw a financial injection into Ghana between 2000 and 2015 that addressed some core issues, but it did not prioritise challenges faced by persons with disabilities. Unfortunately, it appears that the SDG, which has a 15-year lifespan (2015-2030), is an exercise in political rhetoric because little has been done to remove barriers to education and employment or to alleviate family poverty. In terms of personal thematic narratives, this study found the following themes: serious hardship, chronic poverty, inability to cope with everyday expenses, limited access to formal education, obstacles in the physical environment that limited mobility, and lack of employment opportunities (Gregorius, 2016; Kassah, 2008; Naami et al., 2012; Opoku et al., 2015). Specifically, when participants' responses were aligned to the goals of the SDG, it was found that there was little evidence to suggest that any policy or funding initiative of the SDG directly assisted individuals with disabilities. For example, the notion that all individuals should have a minimum standard of living that is adequate was not supported by the findings.

When implementing Goal 1 of the SDG, it is apparent that countries have a crucial role to play when it comes to developing effective social programs to enhance the lives of the poor. This study found that Ghanaian society still envisions persons with disabilities as dependents. It seems apparent that Ghana has done little to improve negative cultural perceptions about persons with disabilities, which has had the consequence that persons with disabilities receive inadequate assistance to overcome societal barriers. This finding corroborates the findings of previous studies, which have reported that in the global context most societies have low expectations for persons with disabilities and, as such, little is done

to help them to access services that could improve their lives (Filmer, 2008; Kassah, 2008; Palmer, 2011).

The participants explained that their inability to access education was mainly due to restrictive physical environments that were not modified to cater for their disabilities and the lack of financial support for them to pursue further education. In particular, this study found that participants had to contend with hostile environments, which prevented them from accessing teaching and learning spaces in some school settings. Secondly, as expected, poverty was cited by participants as one of the main reasons for their inability to access education. This concurs with other studies (Anthony, 2011; Danso et al., 2011, 2012; Filmer, 2008; Kassah, 2008; Opoku et al., 2015; UNICEF, 2007; WHO, 2011), which have reported that poverty and hostile physical environments restrict equitable participation in education by persons with disabilities.

Given their limited education, it is not surprising that the participants reported that they had difficulty securing jobs. Moreover, Ghana faces significant difficulties in terms of job creation for its growing populace of approximately 29 million people. Since most of the participants did not have relevant academic qualifications, the finding that employers were disinclined to consider them for positions of employment was expected. This is in line with Kassah (2008), who reported that low academic qualifications could account for high rates of unemployment or underemployment among individuals with a disability in Ghana. It is pertinent to reiterate that, in Ghana, negative cultural perceptions about the work capacity of persons with disabilities mitigate against their efforts to find gainful employment. The belief that persons with disabilities are cursed, and thus their part in society is to survive on charity rather than seek employment, is widespread in Ghana (Agbenyega, 2003; Avoke, 2002; Baffoe, 2013).

The engagement by individuals with disabilities in begging is a means to an end. Consequently, participants recounted that this has resulted in some persons with disabilities becoming involved in begging. According to Kassah (2008), individuals with disabilities engage in begging due to unreliable income, rejection by their community, and the absence of systems to cater for their basic needs. Although some participants were unenthusiastic about the act of begging, it was apparently a necessity for survival. The incidence of begging by persons of disability is a setback in Ghana's efforts towards achieving an inclusive society because persons with disabilities are not being treated with fairness and dignity and, moreover, are not perceived as being capable of contributing to the economy. This reinforces the need for Ghanaian society to work towards empowering individuals with disabilities by enabling them to participate in the economy and thus receive recognition of their equal status in society. After such recognition, additional strategies and processes can be implemented. To this end, disability needs to be demystified in Ghanaian society so that persons with disabilities can be perceived as productive members of a developing society.

Conclusion

This study presents an opportunity to the international community to pay attention to key issues which appear to be barriers to achieving SDGs. The study provides a range of evidence of the challenges that persons with a disability in Ghana face every day and this should give pause for serious thought by policy makers, the UN and its development partners with respect to addressing poverty. The incidence of poverty among persons with disabilities in Ghana is a problem that needs urgent attention, thus the SDG and Ghanaian government agendas need to be in alignment.

The international development and donor community could consider ways to positively affect the lives of persons with disabilities who were not helped by the MDG

(which expired in 2015). Issues of education and employment, as well as developing a blueprint for an inclusive society, should be prioritised as part of broad efforts to combat poverty and discrimination.

The study was limited to four districts in the northern region of Ghana (Tamale Metropolitan, Yendi Municipal, East Gonja and West Mamprusi), thus the results may not be generalizable to the entire population of persons with disabilities in Ghana. In addition, the study participants were all members of DPOs, whose views may not be representative of all persons with disabilities in the northern region of Ghana, given that they were already actively involved as advocates for equality. It is important for future studies to examine the experiences of persons with a disability who are not members of DPOs or reside in rural areas. Despite these limitations, the study presents a snapshot of the lived experiences of persons with a disability in the northern region of Ghana and, when considered in terms of the notion of ‘fuzzy’ generalization of case study findings (Bassey, 1999), it could be reasonably considered to inform contexts in other regions of the country.

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