

## GFD IN THE NEWS

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### **GIVING VISIBILITY TO PERSONS WITH DISABILITY-PROVIDING HELPING HAND**

The way Persons with Disability (PWDs) are projected and the frequency with which they appear in the Ghanaian media has an enormous impact on how they are perceived and treated in our society. It is rare to find PWDs as part of mainstream media programmes in Ghana.

The World Health Organisation (WHO) has indicated that there are more than 600 million PWDs in the world, of which about 80 % live in low-income countries.

Ghana, like most developing countries in the world have PWDs who constitute a serious marginalised group, facing problems in the area of access to health, education, and other interventions that would ideally support and protect them.

The general perception in Ghana is that PWDs are incapable of contributing in a positive way to society. Most Ghanaians consider such people as constituting an economic and financial burden on the family and the society, thus rejected and left to fend for themselves leaving them in abject poverty.

Even though I have always been supportive to the promotion of disability issues in our media, watching "The Helping Hand" by H4P Crew, a television programme which airs on Metro TV every Sunday at 5.00pm and an article I read on the 5th of June 2012 in the Daily Graphic, gave me a positive urge to do more so as to encourage other PWDs and able bodied people not to see disability as inability.

Recently the Daily Graphic reported on the launch of a campaign to mobilise support from the media, to promote the well-being of PWDs in the society. This was under the patronage of the Ghana Federation of the Disabled, (GFD) an umbrella body for Persons with Disabilities (PWDs) in Ghana.

The campaign according to the GFD forms part of efforts to promote the political and electoral rights of Persons with Disability (PWDs) as enshrined in Article 29 of the United Nations (UN) Convention on the Rights of PWDs and all other related laws governing the country.

They further appealed to the Electoral Commission to appreciate the concerns of the PWDs, while urging the media and the general public to portray PWDs in the society positively.

On the television programme, so far I have been impressed with the PWDs

interviewed on Metro TV, and this clearly underlines the fact that disability must not be viewed as a disadvantage. We must not forget that, just like able bodied people, there are disabled people who are successful and are contributing immensely to national growth and development.

One of such impressive interviews between Apostle Charles Hackman, the moderator and Ms. Emma Lillian Bruce-Lyle, who is a retired Civil Servant (Chief Director) having rendered 41 years of dedicated Service to the Nation. The interview sought to bring to the fore the achievement of a determined and astute woman in the Civil Service, despite the numerous challenges she faced.

Ms. Emma Lillian Bruce-Lyle had her secondary education at St. Louis Senior High School, Kumasi in the Ashanti Region. She holds an Executive Masters in Governance and Leadership from the Ghana Institute of Management and Public Administration (GIMPA).

Whilst in the Civil Service, she served in various capacities in the Ministries of Health, Education, Local Government and Rural Development, Private Sector Development, Chieftaincy and Culture, The Ashanti Regional Co-ordinating Council and The Parliamentary Service.

She spoke about challenges as a person with disability and how she was able to surmount it throughout her work as a top civil servant and highlighted the need for public buildings to adhere to the ten-year moratorium, (a provision in the disability Act 715, which stipulates that all public buildings should have to be made disability friendly). I was indeed impressed and as beautiful as she is at her age, I was more than encouraged with her confidence and achievements.

With her office at the top floor and without elevators in the building, she had challenges going up to her office daily. At times she had to attend meetings at places where access to those places were not user friendly to her.

In some instances, she was discriminated against because she was feminine and probably disabled. However, she managed her way through to success.

One key point that ran through her presentation was the support and love from her family. According to her, her family provided her with the support she needed and took the opportunity to encourage parents and families to show a lot of love to their disabled relatives.

I then said to myself, Ghana could experience total development only if the media continue in a more proactive approach, acknowledging, utilizing and giving visibility to the abilities of persons with disabilities.

I wish these interviews could be given prime time space and published on all media platforms available; that is radio, television, internet and other mediums.

It is true that governments over the years have made efforts to promote the rights of PWDs in Ghana. The passage and ratification of the Disability Act, (Act 715) in June 2006 and the inauguration of the National Disability Council are some of these efforts to help alleviate the challenges faced by PWDs.

But to what extent has the media been proactive in bringing to the fore to overcome the challenges, stigmatisation and challenges that face PWDs. I believe the media should work at eliminating the exclusion of PWDs from all activities as well as representation on matters that are largely related to their enhancement and well-being of their socio-economic development.

Giving visibility to issues of PWDs for me means creating a platform by media institutions and individuals that would promote equality of opportunities and access to services and information for PWDs and help disabled persons integrate into mainstream activities.

When this is properly done, PWDs would be given the needed attention in the media alleviating the issues of stigmatization or stereotypes which makes way for PWDs to appear as either objects of pity or super heroic figures.

The media can also influence the perception of the public and promote positive images of people with disability and help stimulate a sense of non-discrimination and equal opportunity for disabled persons at all levels of the economy and society and further influence the development of a policy on disability.

When these concerns are tackled it would help provide a fair and balanced representation in the media and help to counter stigmatisation and stereotypes that perpetuate negative perceptions of disabled persons and help promote more inclusive and tolerant societies thereby allowing the PWDs to be empowered to take charge of their destiny.

I would like to take this opportunity to encourage media outfits to come up with innovative programmes that will seek to end the long standing negative perception of the physically challenged and eventually empower them to engage in mainstream economic activities.

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