

Disability and Social Exclusion in Somalia.

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Introduction

According to the World Health Organization 10% of the world's population is composed of disabled people, but it is unknown how many Somali are affected as reliable data is difficult to compile due to decades of conflict. A 2011 report titled 'Disability Rights in Somalia' released by the Swedish International Development Cooperation Agency confirms that the number of disabilities in Somalia increases by 20 people daily, and suggests 12-15% of the population are disabled even though there is no real statistics in Somalia.

People with disabilities in Somalia are undoubtedly among the most vulnerable at risk of social exclusion, as this valuable article clearly shows. Poverty and social exclusion are inextricably linked, and a major cause of poverty is the lack of employment. For people with disabilities, the situation with regard to employment is far from ideal. On average, the participation rate of severely disabled people in the workforce is less than half that of able-bodied workers. Efforts have been made in Somali government to improve the participation rate but the obstacles to gaining - and retaining -employment, such as lack of access to education and to vocational training, limited availability of housing, assistive technology and accessible transport are still significant

Denial of opportunities

Economic, social and cultural rights ESCR give people with disabilities, particularly children with disability, the opportunity to reach their human potential and realize their life goals. As it has been reflected in Sustainable Development Goals 4: To ensure inclusive and equitable quality education and promote lifelong learning opportunities and other social participation for all.

Economic challenges:

Disabled persons face a myriad of economic challenges. Mostly they arise out of the discrimination that they face at family, institutional and central government level.

They are less or not educated at all. Their level of participation in the economic arena is thus limited. They are unlikely to be accorded equal access to programs that empower the general populace.

Due to these economic reasons their medical needs cannot be adequately catered for. They cannot even afford to acquire special appliances to aid them whether they are crutches, wheel chairs, hearing aids, braille, and artificial limbs etc. The lack of resources creates a circle of poverty to the disabled as they least afford to send their own children to school. This means even at their old age where they cannot even do the menial jobs of vending, they do not have children who can assist them financially since the children will also be struggling financially.

Physically Challenges: (Albaabka Iga Fur)

The disabled people in Somalia and the region have difficulties in accessing various facilities. They cannot easily maneuver due to the discriminatory manner buildings were built. Even where some buildings have provisions for wheel chairs, disabled persons may require additional assistance to maneuver. They also suffer challenges when using public transport which is the most affordable transport for them. Some operators shun the disabled as they do not cater for the space to accommodate the wheelchair even where it is foldable. The way the vehicles are designed also make it difficult for the disabled to board the vehicles.

The unavailability of the appliances e.g. wheel chairs and artificial limbs result in some disabled having to crawl or being carried on the back in order for them to be move from one place to another.

Even though I initiated a huge campaign about wheelchair accessibility in Somalia 2015 in collaboration with civil society and some ministers of the government of Somalia I have achieved at least to reach some mile stone, this campaign called **OPEN THE DOOR** in local language is **ALBAABKA IGA FUR** the campaign reaches all Somali regions and some public buildings like Hotels and Bars has changed their entry gate.

Socio/Psychological Challenges

Disabled persons also hurt from socio/ emotional and psychological challenges due to the way society view the disabled. People usually pass comments and remarks that are insensitive. Generally, people even use derogatory words when referring to the disabled persons. Even when disabled decide to enter into marriages it affects them as they are stigmatized. Superstitious beliefs frown at marriages between an able bodies and a disabled person. It is regarded as a bad omen by the family of the able bodied person. Able bodied persons are not so keen to marry the physically challenged. Even when the disabled person finds a partner he/she may not accepted.

Education

The disabled persons in Somalia and The region are lack equal opportunities to attain education. This is due to discriminatory practices that have always looked down the disabled and it's what was happen to me when I was childhood I was enrolled to the school at the age of 14 years. The abled bodied children are given first priority to attain education. For the disabled even if there are opportunities to attend school most schools may not be accessible or far away. The majority of the disabled persons also require inclusive schools which is not exist currently in Somalia.

Health:

most of the disabled people in Somalia and east and horn of African countries have no access to the health care services due to social economics challenges that is why most of the disabled people are deteriorating their health situation.

Discrimination against PWDs:

In Somalia, generally people with disabilities are stigmatized and segregated in the community and they are called a name referring to their Disability like Handicapped (Curyaan) or Blind

man/woman (Indhool). they don't get their role about social life such as dating and marriage. If you are disabled person, it is hard to marry women or man without Disability and they even believe if they marry someone disabled they envisage their future babies or children will be disabled.

Parent's attitude

Parents play an important role in training and socialization of their child. When they identify their child is a person with disability they face problem to cope up with that situation. Denials of reality, self-pity, guilt feeling, shame, depression, rejection of the child are the common reactive patterns. The presence of the child increases the stress level of the family. Defensive reactions are likely to occur; they think it is because of their sin. At times parents deny the fact that their child is a person with disability. They reject the child because of resentment. So child is also doing the same. But he is not able to express his blame so he becomes prey of guilt, anxiety and self-hostility. Some parents started overprotecting their child out of sympathy. This will also spoil child's future. Having a child with disability increases the financial burden of the family. If the parents are economically stable most of the time it leads to a positive attitude towards the child.

Media and Disability exclusion

According to the **Internews**, outside of disability issues, media in Somalia has its problems. The country is ranked 172 out 180 countries on the 2015 World Press Freedom Index produced by Reporters without Borders. According to InternetLiveStats, only 1.5% of the population or approximately 163,185 Somalians are online. (See Internews' Somalia Media and Telecoms Landscape Guide).

For people with disabilities, getting the information they need and getting their voices heard is compounded by problems of invisibility, representation and access.

Accurate, comprehensive coverage of disability issues can help alleviate stigma and discrimination and increase understanding of the capabilities of disabled people, which can lead to increased employment and educational opportunities and the ability of disabled people to participate in and contribute to society. Increased awareness can also help decrease abuse — disabled women and children and people in institutions are particularly vulnerable.

Disabled people need access to accurate information (on health, education and employment) in accessible formats to become empowered, participate in society, make decisions about their lives and fight for their fundamental rights of access to information.

Amnesty International report 2015

Mar 11, 2015 as Amnesty International released a press release concerned the plights of people with disabilities in Somalia Amnesty International called on the Somali Federal Government to take concrete steps to tackle the continued abuses of people with disabilities, including through the development of a national legal and policy framework and ratification of the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities.

“People with disabilities face greater abuse in Somalia, are often seen as a burden or as easier targets to attackers. Somalia must do more to protect their rights, rather than allow them to be subject to further abuses because of their disabilities,” said Gemma Davies, Amnesty International’s Somalia Researcher.

The briefing builds on previous research by Amnesty International, which documented widespread human rights abuses including rape and sexual violence. It reveals how the lack of respect for the human rights of people with disabilities exposes them to further human rights abuses.

Conclusion

There is a clear link between social exclusion and discrimination. Discrimination and violation of human rights lead to social exclusion and poverty. Every citizen in Somalia has a right to a decent income, education and training, employment, housing, healthcare, a social and cultural rights. Depriving a person from those rights leads to isolation, and poverty. Furthermore, it is necessary to fight discrimination faced by disabled people and their families in their daily lives, in order to tackle social exclusion. Regional states and central government must complement social inclusion policies with legislation fighting discrimination on the ground of disability, in order to overcome barriers and prevent social exclusion in transport, access to goods and services, education, and in the communication environment.

The courage it takes to accept and live with disability is something most of us will never ever know. Society must stand shoulder to shoulder with its most vulnerable to fight discrimination and hate crime which are built on the foundations of ignorance and prejudice.

Disabled people, label aside are people and they have enormous amounts to contribute to society and this contribution will be forever lost if the governments Somali allow ignorance to side line them. Disabled people in these different places do not need charity but policies that protect their interests and give them the opportunities they need to succeed.

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