

## **Democracy and the Participation of Persons with Disabilities in Politics and Elections: Challenges and Lessons for Human Rights Advocates**

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**Abstract: Background:** world over, democracy is seemingly adopted as the best form of governance for many reasons including the uncompromising promotion, protection; and high regard for human rights. One fundamental characteristics of democratic society is the commissioning of regular elections in which all adults have the same rights and opportunities to participate. Nonetheless, in many parts of the globe, certain constituencies including person with disabilities (PWDs) are denied this right.

**Purpose:** the fundamental rationale for the study was to examine the barriers in the participation of persons with disabilities in politics and elections, share knowledge to spark and inspire a process that will usher rapid growth from all directions in the elimination of these barriers.

**Methodology:** a systematic review of the literatures using information collected from different sources was actuated. Google search engine, google scholar, web of science, scopus database, etc. were used to search for these articles. During the search numerous combinations of words and phrases were used to ensure articles reflect the most recent knowledge and scholarly works.

In essence, only peer-reviewed articles published after 2000 were selected except extracts perceived to be of fundamental mileage to the study. However, articles published by staunch international organizations working in disability for years and has produced indefatigable knowledge in the field were stealthily appraised.

**Results:** the study revealed that there are multifaceted barriers in the participation of persons with disabilities in politics and elections and include those that are institutional, legal, physical, communication and information, voting instruments, lack of trained personnel, transportation, educational, voting methods, lack of partnership with Disabled People Organizations (DPOs), inadequate policy framework, lack of empowerment, lack of public awareness, lack of interest, lack of privacy, lack of social support, attitudinal, cultural, financial, lack of data, lack of inclusion in election commissions; and political in nature.

**Conclusion:** the barriers in the political cycle are numerous and they are negatively impacting the participation of persons with disabilities in politics and elections denying them the right to exercise a fundamental human right.

**Keywords:** persons with disabilities, barriers, participation, politics; and elections

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### **Introduction**

Democracy is one of the most important and widely cherished systems of governance in the world vis-à-vis its core elements like power and civil responsibility is exercised by all adults, majority rule and individual rights, promotion and protection of all human rights, regular elections, free exercise of rights and consciousness of responsibilities; and values, in addition to being a government of the people for the people and by the people (Seoul, 2014). Therefore, voting is a critical element in the democratization process of any nation as it is one of the ways ordinary citizens can elect their governments either through direct or representative system and above all, influence the decisions and actions they take on their behalf that significantly affect their life and living conditions (Virendrakumar, Jolley, Badu, & Schmidt, 2018). Thus, without much emphasis, taking part in politics, elections; and public life in general, is a fundamental element in people realization of their socio-economic and political development since it is through this among other means human rights are exercised and enjoyed (DSPD, 2019).

The rights to participate in politics and elections is deeply enshrined in core international human rights instruments including some national constitutions and electoral laws (DSPD, 2019). However, for years some citizens have never been accorded the opportunities to exercise such a fundamental human right regardless of series of efforts to get their voice heard and listen to (Virendrakumar et al., 2018). For example, PWDs are most of the time if not all the time denied this right in numerous ways and for a variety of unjustifiable reasons as some of them are a direct outcome of stigma and discriminatory practices and beliefs (DSPD, 2019).

In ending these human rights violations, the United Nations General has passed lot of resolutions and conventions to promote and protect the rights of these groups including persons with disabilities (Virendrakumar

et al., 2018). For instant, in 2006, the UN General Assembly adopted the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (CRPD) commonly known as UNCRPD. It is one of the widest ratified international conventions and today, it serves as the principal international guiding instrument in the inclusion and empowerment of PWDs in all aspects of life (Virendrakumar et al., 2018). Therefore, in the case of some disadvantaged communities including PWDs it is through these mechanisms that their voices are heard which will subsequently influence critical decisions and above all, break those barriers that exclude them from realizing their rights and participation in national undertakings (DSPD, 2019). Since one of the ways ordinary people participate in politics is via voting in elections and with such, they have a stronger political voice. Also it is a major strategy of demonstrating being equal with the rest (IFES, 2014).

In view of the rights enshrined in the UNCRPD and demands put on government particularly in Article 29 and the subsequent 2012 Protocol, in which governments are called on to ensure that PWDs participate effectively and fully in all political and public life on equal footing with all citizens by all means more especially to vote and be voted for governments are expected to ensure this happens without delay. However, the rate of participation of PWDs in politics especially in developing nations remains poor and unacceptable and as such they are denied the right to exercise and enjoy guaranteed fundamental human rights (Pauline, 2014). Thus, this study was meant to investigate the barriers in the participation of persons with disabilities in politics and elections.

### **Aims and Methodology**

#### **AIMS**

The fundamental rationale for the study was to examine the barriers in the participation of persons with disabilities in politics and elections, share knowledge to spark and inspire a process that will usher rapid growth from all directions in the elimination of these barriers.

#### **Methodology**

A systematic review of the literatures using information collected from different sources was actuated. Google search engine, google scholar, web of science; and scopus database were used to search for these articles. During the search numeration combinations of words and phrases were used to ensure articles reflect the most recent knowledge and scholarly works. The systematic searches beget varied and voluminous articles which had to be sieved not only to meet the inclusion and exclusion criteria but to ensure the fundamental objectives of the study are wrangled.

Therefore, only peer-reviewed scholarly publications published after 2000 were selected except extracts perceived to be of basal mileage to the study. However, articles published by staunch international organizations known to have been working in disability for years and has produced indefatigable knowledge in the promotion of equal rights and equal opportunities for persons with disabilities were stealthily appraised.

#### **Inclusion and Exclusion Procedures**

The underneath procedures were followed in articles inclusion. That is, only:

1. Peer-reviewed scholarly articles on the participation of persons with disabilities in politics and elections.
2. Peer-reviewed scholarly articles published from 2000 to 2021.
3. Articles on international or regional perspectives on the participation of persons with disabilities in politics and elections.
4. Articles on the barriers to the participation of persons with disabilities in politics and elections published by international organizations with years of meritorious experiences in disability.

To exclude some articles from the review, the below captioned criteria were applied. That is:

1. Non-peer reviewed articles.
2. Articles published before 2000 unless critical and impactful.
3. Media generated articles including newspapers.
4. Articles not published in English language.

In spite of the fact that both qualitative and quantitative articles were trawled, only 61 (sixty one) articles were qualified for reviewed which is largely due to a dearth of data. In essence, only peer-reviewed articles and publications by international organizations considered being trustworthy because they occasioned standard, ethical and robust studies were reviewed.

### **Discussions**

The literature review has unearthed a wide range of barriers to the participation of persons with disabilities in politics and elections. To discuss these barriers, they are categorized into: institutional, legal,

physical, communication and information, voting instruments, lack of trained personnel, transportation, educational, voting methods, lack of partnership with DPOs, policy framework, lack of empowerment, lack of public awareness, lack of interest, lack of privacy, lack of social support, attitudinal, cultural, financial, lack of data, lack of inclusion in election commissions; and political barriers.

### **Institutional barriers**

Strong institutions are one of the fundamental elements required to ensure democracy and equal participation in politics and subsequent free and fair elections. Therefore, these institutions must not only be independent and trustworthy but must treat all potential voters equal and be accessible to all; anything short of that certain groups or parties could feel marginalized and discriminated resulting in voter apathy, demotivation; and at worst conflict (APA, 2020). This concurs with the participation of PWDs in politics and election is handicapped by numerous factors that generally stem from institutional, social, cultural, physical, infrastructural; and economic factors (WFD, 2019). Governments lack of interest in strengthening key institutions to effectively administer and coordinate the domestication, implementation of international legal instruments meant to ensure PWDs' rights to political participation are respected, observed; and promoted throughout the election cycle demotivate PWDs participation in politics and elections (Cruz, 2015). The participation of PWDs in politics and elections is hugely obstructed by series of factors that are institutional, legal; and social in nature (United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), 2018).

### **Legal barriers**

Conducting national elections regularly is one of the cornerstones of democracy. However, free, fair; and popular election is only possible when it is guaranteed by strong laws that are implemented with no fear or favor. Thus, in the absence of legal frameworks that ensure equal rights and equal participation for all, certain segment of the society will feel discriminated and further debarred and demoralized to participate (Dutton, 2014). This is in agreement with in the majority of African countries, the participation of PWDs in politics and elections is strangled by constitutional or legal provisions that anchored voting on legal capacity (Oluchina, 2015). The lack of adequate laws to promote and protect the rights of PWDs has not only led to PWDs not exercising some of their fundamental human rights but being denied the right to participate in politics and elections (Peprah Opokua et al., 2016). The legal frameworks like other factors has hugely contributed to the lack of participation of PWDs in politics and elections especially the mentally impaired ones who are mostly disenfranchised by some electoral laws (Pauline, 2014). The fact that in some countries legal instruments maintain terms such as illness, incapacity or competency exist, they have legally restricted PWDs' participation in politics and elections as they are sometimes applied to exclude them (Agran, MacLean, & Kitchen, 2016). Fundamental in debarring PWDs from participating in politics and elections are issues such as judicial interdiction, denial of the right to name and identity (HRW, 2012). Person with disabilities' participation in election is thwarted by many factors namely; discriminatory laws (e.g. considering persons with intellectual impairment to be legally incompetent to make decision), policies, practices, lack of national documents; and governments not allocating enough resources to support their participation as citizens with special needs (HRW, 2012).

### **Physical barriers**

For people to participate effectively and efficiently in any undertaken including politics and national elections, the location must be accessible socially and physically. In the event the location is accessible to only a fragment of the society, the rest will ultimately feel disregarded which if not properly managed can be chaotic as others will feel stigmatized, frustrated; and disenfranchised (Escobar, Cardona, & Moncada, 2018). This supports, PWDs want to take part in politics and elections, but because of inaccessible built environments, transports system, information; and lack of voters cards, they are hugely demotivated resulting in some of them supporting candidates who give them something in exchange for their votes (Namukasa, 2017). In view of the fact that most polling stations, meetings and debates venues, election offices; and town halls are located in old buildings without ramps, elevators, safe and easy to negotiate doorways, roads and sidewalks; makes it almost impossible for PWDs to participate in politics and elections (OSCE/ODIHR, 2014). In spite of some legal international instruments requiring governments to ensure PWDs are registered during voter registrations, the existence of inaccessible polling stations, voter registration centers; and voting systems are substantial barriers to the participation of PWDs in politics and elections (Schur, Shields, Kruse, & Schriener, 2002). The presence of physical barriers at the entrances of public buildings including courts, voter registration centers; and even polling stations has significantly forestalled PWDs to participate in politics and elections and their associated activities (DSPD, 2019).

Similarly, PWDs' participation in politics and elections is equally balked due to poorly accessible roads to polling stations whose main entrance are sometimes littered with holes, big puddles of dirty water, loose gravel, street vendors, vehicles; and similar huddles that make reasonable access nearly impossible discouraging participation (IFES, 2016). Fleet of stairs, lack of ramps and lift, narrow doors; and tight door handles at the entrance of polling stations make it all the more difficult for PWDs to easily enter and leave registration and polling stations (IFES, 2016). The effective participation of PWDs in politics and elections is debarred by the lack of special socialization, disability-friendly polling stations; and special ballot facilities (Mamonto, Niode, & Tulungen, 2019). The fact that polling rooms are small to accommodate wheelchair users and voting boxes or booths being placed on high tables has made PWDs' voting independently and secretly next to being impossible (DSPD, 2019b). In some instances, the voting booths were too high for PWDs in wheelchairs to easily deposit their ballots in complete secrecy (IFES, 2016).

### **Communication and information barriers**

Effective and efficient method of communication is a critical tool in the socio-economic and political development of all societies as it stimulates understanding and commitment toward common goal. Thus, with effective communication people do not only build and maintain interest in a discourse or endeavor but they feel being part of it. Therefore, the lack of proper, affordable, accessible; and appropriate medium of communication can be a strong threat to the effective participation of peoples in politics and elections more especially, the vulnerable communities (Turska, 2013). This concurs with the lack of effective and efficient means of communication has deeply discouraged PWDs to partake in politics and elections since some of them can hardly understand what is happening especially, the deaf and the visual impaired who are more disadvantaged (Peprah Opokua et al., 2016). Due to lack of equal access to political information and activities, on which the exercise of political rights is contingent upon, the participation of PWDs in politics and election remains a dream far fetch (Priestley et al., 2016). Person with disabilities' participation in politics and election is highly constrained by inaccessible communication methods that automatically exclude them from the outreach strategies, activities or even civil education, a critical component in the election cycle (OSCE/ODIHR, 2014). Because there are limited or no accessible information on voting procedures, some PWDs don't even care to vote though it is critical in their life like all other citizens (DSPD, 2019). The absence of voting guides and ballots in a disability friendly format hinders the active participation of the visually impaired voters and those with mental impairment since they neither vote independently nor secretly (IFES, 2016). Person with disabilities' efforts to participate in politics and elections are sometimes frustrated due to language barriers and illness (Hall & Alvarez, 2012). The participation of PWDs in politics and elections is largely impacted by five key barriers that are architectural and physical; attitudinal and cultural; informational and communication, legal and policy; and those emanating from the socio-economic conditions (Prince, 2012). In addition to the inaccessible infrastructures that deter PWDs participation in pre-electoral and electoral periods, their lack of access to basic political information such as how and where to register, what is on the different parties' political agenda; and worse of all the lack of valid national documents are all huge impedements (Virendrakumar et al., 2018).

### **Trained personnels barriers**

To successfully work with communities regardless of their level of development it is critical that one is adequately prepared. Therefore, it is fundamental that in politics and during elections officers are fully conversant with the electorates to both mobilize them to participate in politics and cast their votes. Thus, it is important that they are trained in how to work and support communities especially the disadvantaged ones otherwise they could feel unimportant and uncounted and most importantly, every vote count (NDI, 2013). This supports, the lack of or inadequate staff training in disabilities and related matters is a great obstacle to the participation of PWDs in politics and elections since most people and party members do not know how to work with them resulting in their being provided with inadequate and inefficient services at best; at worst, they are insulted, pushed aside, completely disregarded or given low priority (OSCE/ODIHR, 2014). The lack of trained election officers to support PWDs to vote and be voted for has further frustrated their participation in politics and voting (DSPD, 2019). The lack of sign language interpreters at the polling stations and registration centers makes it extremely difficult for the deaf and hard-of-hearing to be interested in voting during elections (IFES, 2016).

### **Transportation barriers**

In exercising democratic rights, the free movement of the electorates and political aspirants is fundamental. Therefore, there must be a strong, affordable; and dependable transport system and good road network. In the absence of such critical infrastructures, voters could find it extremely difficult to exercise their political rights particularly the disadvantaged communities and above all, deterring them from voting and being voted (Gurley, 2018). This concurs with inaccessible transport system both in the urban and rural areas have

greatly contributed to the absence of PWDs in the political arena since they cannot freely move from one place to another to engage electorates(OSCE/ODIHR, 2014). The absence of accessible transport system has somehow banned PWDs from attending political meetings, voter registration; and going to polling stations to vote(DSPD, 2019). Persons with disabilities (PWDs) participation especially during the election days is impeded by many factors namely, lack of access to transport and congested traffic debarring them from arriving on time to cast their votes with comfort (IFES, 2016). Inaccessibility which includes lack of reasonable access to transportation, political information, education, internet, technical tools, network; and polling stations in multi-resident buildings, etc. have contributed significantly to the lack of participation of PWDs in politics and elections(House, 2014).

### **Educational barriers**

Education is one of the most critical tools for the socio-economic, cultural; and political development of the human race. In view of this, to participate in any national endeavor including politics, education is critical for it is the main ingredient in making well informed choices and decisions. Thus, without education, electorates are like not to properly understand programmes and policies presented to them by their politicians and as such some may vote in exchange for material or financial gifts while others may completely lose interest in the whole election cycle(Persson, n.d.). This assertion supports the fact that PWDs' lack high degree of societal acceptance, good education; and freedom to express themselves it has significantly contributed to their inability to make informed decisions including participation in politics and elections(Lord, Stein, & Fiala-Butora, 2014). Universities and other tertiary higher learning institutions failing to identify and nurture PWDs interested in political science is one of the greatest factors in deterring PWDs from engaging in politics and elections(Waltz & Schippers, 2020). Person with disabilities' participation in politics and elections is besets by many factors such as lower levels of internal efficacy, political interest; and trust which is largely due to illiteracy, low income, unemployment, discrimination; and lack of or inadequate social contacts(Reher, 2020).

Similarly, because PWDs are hardly offered the chance to go to school, most of them cannot read or write thus, greatly restraining them from participating in politics and elections since they cannot benefit from the civil and political education to be effectively engaged in public or political life and above all, build the necessary interest, experience; and qualifications for the needed political leadership(Agran et al., 2016). Public education systems without accessible schools and teaching materials, shroud in discriminatory legal framework and infrastructures that encompasses guardianship laws, lack of access to polling stations; and government offices have played critical roles in constraining the political participation of PWDs both in politics proper and elections(Virendrakumar et al., 2018).

### **Voting methods barriers**

Democracy requires that the political rights of all are promoted, protected; and guaranteed and above all, people are allowed to exercise these rights without constraints particularly during elections. However, some methods of vote casting are too cumbersome for certain constituencies and with the absence of alternatives; they are automatically debarred; frustrating their efforts to participate in politics and elections(OSCC/ODHR, 2013). This concurs with: PWDs' participation in politics and election is frustrated by many factors namely; stigma and discrimination, lack of proper logistics of getting access to them in their remote locations, absentee of ballots and voting proxies; and legal injunctions(Okwerekwu, McKenzie, Yates, Sorrentino, & Friedman, 2018). The lack of participation of PWDs in politics and elections are highly associated with series of obstacles including public negative attitudes, low literacy, poverty, cumbersome electoral systems, lack of inclusive election materials, access to financial resources; and accessible built environment (Attanayake et al. 2015) as cited in(Pauline, 2014). The lack of alternative mechanisms to allow PWDs to participate in politics and voting especially those institutionalized is a strong indicator of marginalization from mainstream society and politics(Schur et al., 2002). The lack of alternate means of voting has massively frustrated the efforts and interest of PWDs who wish to participate in politics and elections(DSPD, 2019). The absence of mobile voting systems for PWDs especially, those in residential institutions has demotivated PWDs and DPOs to support and promote the participation of PWDs in politics and elections as they feel somehow discriminated(DSPD, 2019). The lack of diversity in the method of voting such as mail ballot, no-excuse absentee voting; and permanent absentee voting are huge impediments in the participation of PWDs in politics and elections(Miller & Powell, 2016). The disenfranchisement due to legal provisions in some national constitutions and electoral laws, the hardship PWDs encounter in accessing voting booths and machines furthermore isolate them from the political arena(Mattila & Papageorgiou, 2017).

### **Lack of DPOs partnership barriers**

To promote, protect and guarantee the rights of communities particularly the disadvantaged ones it is a near must prerequisite to support and work with them for many reasons which include their being experts in their own problems and above all, there is nothing about them without them especially when it comes to persons with disabilities. Therefore, to ensure communities' participation, a community based approach in which communities take ownership of programmes through partnership is inevitable (APFM, 2013). In the absence of this, stakeholders feel discriminated and marginalized concurring with: the consistent lack of adequate support to Disabled People Organizations (DPOs) is large attributable to PWDs not wanting to associate themselves with politics and elections since they are not sufficiently empowered to understand their rights and responsibilities during political campaigns and elections (WFD, 2019). The lack of engagement and incorporation of key people from the DPOs to serve in the election commissions or committees has equally contributed to PWDs' voices being not heard and to some degrees being totally ignored (Atkinson, Aaberg, & Darnolf, 2017). The absence of quotas in parties to engage the selection of PWDs and the fact that most political institutions don't work with Disabled People Organizations (DPOs) is a strong obstacle to PWDs' participation in politics and elections (Waltz & Schippers, 2020).

### **Policy framework barriers**

Policy as a guiding operational tool is indispensable in national endeavor. To ensure all have equal rights to participate for collective benefits while promoting equal rights and equal opportunities, it is critical that a framework that is not discriminatory exist as anything short of that translates to discrimination, demotivation; and denying others their fundamental human rights (Franko, 2012). This supports the marginalization of PWDs in public life, politicians and campaigners lack of strategic methods of reaching and engaging them; and the lack of formalization of best practices including policies at government and political institutions level continue to inhibit PWDs participation in politics and elections (Priestley et al., 2016). The nonparticipation of PWDs in politics and elections is highly embedded in the legal and policy system at government and party levels (Waltz & Schippers, 2020). Governments and development partners lack of policy and peer support which consequently resulted in lack of support for PWDs to run for offices, peer support organizations, insurance covers, non-inclusive media campaign messages, not championing PWDs, not having PWD model in politics; and the non-existence of political party guidelines to identify and encourage PWDs to participate in politics and elections are serious and overwhelming barriers in politics and elections that cannot be ignored (House, 2014).

### **Lack of empowerment barriers**

For citizens to effectively participate in national development they need to be fully empowered especially the disadvantaged ones. When citizens are empowered, they can demand and exercise their rights while fully conscious of the corresponding obligations. In the absence of empowerment, people hardly make rational decisions including participation in politics and elections (GSDRC, 2014). This lends support to the major barriers to PWDs' participation in politics and elections which include lack of empowerment, government not domesticating and implementing international conventions, not incorporating DPOs and partners in the CSO family in election committees; and political parties not being supported to reach out to PWDs (IFES, 2014). The lack of access to education and financial resources are other impediments that largely frustrate the efforts of PWDs to take part in politics and elections since technical knowledge and good financial resources are needed for mobilization campaigns that entail radio and television advertisements, flyers and banners printing; and organizing rallies (Virendrakumar et al., 2018).

Similarly, the nonparticipation of PWDs in politics and elections stems from different but complex factors including lack of education and resources; stigma and negative social attitudes; and built infrastructures (Virendrakumar et al., 2018). Because of lack of empowerment, PWDs like other disadvantaged groups could not claim their rights including the political ones however, with empowerment PWDs are turning things positively in view of their political campaign achievements (Postle & Beresford, 2007). The empowerment of PWDs through education and employment can be significantly helpful in supporting them to participate in communities' engagements including politics and elections since they can challenge and fight against structures including cultures which cannot be divorced from the fueling of stigma and discrimination against them (Postle & Beresford, 2007). Women with disabilities' participation in politics is low due to many factors namely unemployment, social isolation; and lack of financial empowerment or income (Schur, 2003). PWDs' lack of representation in the political arena can be associated with numerous factors such as stigma and negative public attitudes towards their capabilities, lack of resources, finance and logistic; inaccessible built environment, communication methods and materials, information; and poor or lack of quality education (Sackey, 2015). Organizations of and/or for PWDs including DPOs are not adequately empowered to empower their membership to be able to clearly articulate their concerns and frustration, did not only result in their lack of

employment opportunities and independent living but also not being able to exercise their political and civil rights (Schriner & Shields, 1998).

### **Lack of public awareness barriers**

Public participation is a critical element in national and community development. To ensure people participate they need to be empowered through different methods including education and public sensitization to raise their awareness and consciousness with the ultimate objective of creating space for all as equal partners. However, due to inadequate public awareness, erroneous beliefs and misconceptions are still existing and impacting negatively on lives and living conditions of certain groups to the point of depriving them from exercising their fundamental human rights including participation in politics and elections. Thus, without strong and consistent public sensitization, some disadvantaged groups will remain discriminated and underdeveloped (Gizynska, 2002) and (Khasnabis, 2010). This is in agreement with, societal lack of awareness of the rights and capacity of PWDs, the harsh stereotypes, prejudices; and harmful practices towards them all constrained their participation in politics and elections (WFD, 2019). The lack of education, high costs associated with politics, lack of grooming by politicians; and the public lack of awareness of their political right to partake in politics and elections frustrate the efforts of PWDs to participate in politics and elections (WFD, 2020). Inadequate public sensitization through education and advocacy to raise public awareness and comprehension of PWDs' abilities, eradicate misperceptions, educate people about the skills of PWDs, ensure PWDs access quality and relevant education, encourage PWDs to join politics, access resources to join politics; and ensure young PWDs join politics at younger age has all disadvantaged PWDs to participate in politics and elections (House, 2014).

Similarly, people lack of understanding of the capability of PWDs has significantly impacted the mobilization of support and resources from the public, governments; and development partners to demolish political participation barriers while ensuring effective participation in politics and elections (Cruz, 2015). The inadequate participation of PWDs in politics and elections in Europe is attributable to narrow opportunities to participate in public life, the presence of legal and administrative hurdles, lack of public awareness of the rights and capabilities of PWDs; and lack of access to disability-friendly methods of participations (Priestley et al., 2016). Persons with disabilities participation in politics and elections is debarred by the built environment and documents; lack of resources to conduct events and activities; open prejudices, lack of awareness and inclusiveness (Evans & Reher, 2020).

### **Lack of interest barriers**

Interest is a strong prerequisite in all that man does as without such it is either not done or poorly done. Therefore, interest is an indispensable motivating factor. It can be naturally acquired or build over a period of time. To develop interest some need to be supported otherwise, they can hardly participate even whereas they have the right to do so (Lilleker & Koc-Michalska, 2017). This lends hands to critical obstacles to the participation of PWDs in politics and elections entail lack of interest, group consciousness, voter resource; and strategic political recruitment methods whether formal or informal (Priestley et al., 2016). The limited social networks, disability friendly transport system, support for independently living; and information that can enhance their possibilities to be recruited in parties and political activities, are all contributing factors for PWDs lack interest to take part in politics and elections (Schur & Adya, 2013). In addition to lack of interest in politics and elections, the participation of PWDs is hugely hampered by the poor social and political environment, lack of voters cards and trust in politicians (Mulyadi & Danial, 2020). The travel distant between communities and polling stations, poor road conditions; and inaccessible transport systems significantly demotivate the participation of PWDs in politics and elections (Gimpel & Schuknecht, 2003). The fact that some PWDs citizenship is not recognized by certain governments, campaign rallies and meetings are held in inaccessible places; and PWDs representatives are only expected to be concerned with matters affecting PWDs, dampened their interest in politics and elections (Gimpel & Schuknecht, 2003). In addition to disability itself, the associated public stigma and discrimination significantly made PWDs not to have interest in politics and elections (Mattila & Papageorgiou, 2017).

In the same vein, the hostile attitudes of registration officers and polling staff towards PWDs have greatly contributed to their lack of interest and trust in the whole electoral process (Virendrakumar et al., 2018). Lack of security and support has further made PWDs not to have interest in politics or think of standing for election into positions (Evans & Reher, 2020). Persons with disabilities are not taking part in politics and elections since they have no interest to register and subsequently vote (Hall & Alvarez, 2012). Persons with disabilities especially the mentally impaired ones are not interested in politics and elections because by law they feel they are already disenfranchised (Postle & Beresford, 2007). Persons with disabilities do not want to be involved in politics and elections since politicians lack interest in matters that directly affect them (Postle & Beresford, 2007).

### **Lack of privacy barriers**

One of the fundamental requirements in the citizens, exercising their rights to participate in politics and elections is the states to ensure that elections are held freely, fairly; and secretly. Thus, to be able to independently and secretly vote and be voted is a principal prerequisite in electorates' participation in politics and casting their votes. In the event that this cannot be guarantee, affected groups' political dreams are not only assassinated but their fundamental human right violated resulting in low participation at best and at worst, nonparticipation(Johnson, 2011). This concurs with the lack of freedom and privacy for PWDs to independently vote great frustrate their attempts to partake in politics and elections(Priestley et al., 2016). The fact that there are some complicated ballots to read and comprehend, others not being physically accessible to be independently and secretly completed and deposited; and above all, the requirements to request absentee ballot for every election frustrate PWDs' interest in politics and elections(Schur & Adya, 2013).

### **Lack of social support barriers**

Support though easy to give but difficult to ask for in some cases if not in all, is very important in life particularly for the disadvantaged constituencies. In view of this, social support as simple as a mere appreciation can be a very critical impetus in the psychological development of a person. Thus, it is a great motivator in ensuring that the disadvantaged groups take active part in their socio-economic development, communities; and by extension participate in politics and elections(Singh, 2020) and (Isaksson, Lexell, Skär, & Ot, 2007). Therefore, anything short of it can have profound negative impacts on the exercise of even their basic human rights concurring with persons with disabilities (PWDs) including those with mental impairment are interested in politics and elections, however, they lack the necessary support from the families and service providers, above all, they receive little education on political issues or how to make decisive voting decisions(Agran et al., 2016). The lack of or inadequate support from PWDs' family members significantly impact their participation in politics and elections(WFD, 2020). The fact that some governments do not provide personal assistant and other support to PWDs it has significantly demotivated some of them who are interested in politics to seek nominations to be elected into political positions(Waltz & Schippers, 2020). Persons with disabilities do not participate in politics and elections even if they have the desire to do so because their friends, families; and /or community members always discouraged them instead of giving them the required support(Agran et al., 2016). The participation of PWDs in politics and election is highly thwarted by lack of societal support; and the erroneous belief that PWDs are not interested in politics and elections (Agran et al., 2016). In addition to the inherent mobility constraints deterring PWDs from participation in politics and elections, the lack of social and psychological support makes it more difficult for them to join their fellow citizens to exercise their right to vote and be voted for(Schur et al., 2002). Because of inadequate support both from the government and the public, the participation of PWDs in politics and elections is far below expectations(Cruz, 2015).

### **Attitudinal barriers**

Attitudes, though very critical in life as a determinant of people's altitude, it can be very destructive especially, the negative ones. People's negative attitudes toward certain groups in the communities has not only resulted in holding back their development but has fueled conflicts costing lot of lives and properties. Because it is our attitudes among other things that determined how we perceive, interact; and treat others including promoting and respecting their rights, it is critical that the negative ones are fought against and eliminated otherwise it could result in further denial of people their rights and support to participate in all spheres of life, participation in politics and elections inclusive(Newkirk, 2018). This concurs with: because the participation of PWDs in any social activity including politics and elections is secondary in nature due to societal discrimination, they are hardly enthusiastic to partake in politics and elections both at national and regional level(WFD, 2019). The participation of PWDs in politics and elections is notoriously hindered by social stigma, stereotypes, discrimination; and negative public attitudes towards them (WFD, 2020). The negative perceptions that society holds against PWDs and disabilities has not only resulted in them being shunned by some members of the society but equally being regarded as mentally incapable and at worst, they are excluded from national and local politics and elections(Peprah Opokua et al., 2016). Negative attitudes that encompass stigma and discrimination, poor treatment by the general public, being perceived as incompetent; and lack of recognition by employers including the government has ultimately resulted in PWDs not being valued as a political human beings with equal rights in politics and elections(House, 2014).

Similarly, the fact that polling stations are located in inaccessible premises, is a clear demonstration that PWDs are considered second class citizens and as such their votes and political participation is not valued in the political arena(Schur et al., 2002). Because PWDs and disabilities is still look at from the medical and charity perspectives it has consistently made some members of the society question the ability of PWDs to take part in politics and elections demoralizing their participation more and more(Cruz, 2015). One of the fundamental

barriers debarring PWDs from participating in politics and election include governments' lack of recognition, attitudinal, legal, informational; and physical barriers that exist within the elections cycles (Atkinson et al., 2017). The participation of PWDs in politics and elections is constrained a lot due to public attitudes towards inclusive decision making, lack of disability friendly information to participate in meetings, consultations, voting; and voter registration(DSPD, 2019b).

### **Cultural barriers**

Culture the compass of life is one of the most important assets of the human race. Culture as a product of human creation including tangible and intangible ones is a formidable force for development if properly applied. However, it can equally be very harmful especially the bad ones if not adequately manage and gradually disintegrated in the best interest of cohabitation and respect for humanity. Some cultural practices and beliefs are parallel to science and human rights causing lot of fear, stigma, discrimination; and even deaths in some societies. Under such circumstances, some fundamental human rights especially those of the minority and disadvantaged groups are most of the time trampled upon; perpetrators hiding behind erroneous beliefs to legitimize their barbaric actions(Umer, Othman, Bt, & Hassan, 2016). This substantiates the erroneous cultural belief that PWDs are not fit to represent other members of the community greatly harming their political participation either to elect or be elected into office(WFD, 2020). Persons with disabilities's participation in politics and elections is frustrated by many obstacles including the culture, lack of access to public services, public awareness, respect; and adequate support for their daily living(Prince, 2012). The participation of PWDs in politics and elections is circumvented by many barriers that are cultural, economical; and physical in nature(Waltz & Schippers, 2020). Persons with disabilities' participation in politics and elections both at national and local level is checked by series of obstacles that are social, economic, cultural; and physical in nature(Peprah Opokua et al., 2016).

### **Financial barriers**

In this modern world to be successful in most things if not in all things no matter how small it is, one needs to be financial strong as nearly everything cost money. Therefore, it goes without saying that even to exercise certain fundamental human rights including participation in politics and elections one needs finance and as such being nominated by a party for political office has become beyond the reach of ordinary people particularly, the disadvantaged communities. Therefore, modern politics seems to be a no-go zone for the financial and academically deprived communities(Jean, 2015). This fortifies, persons with disabilities not accessing quality and relevant education and decent employment opportunities hugely contributed to their absent in the political arena as leadership emerges from parties where the space for nomination is sometimes very small (Waltz & Schippers, 2020). Because PWDs are hardly gainfully employed and in most cases if not in all cases come from poor families, it makes it almost impossible for them to foot the expenses associated with running for office or becoming a member of strong political parties debarring them from participating in politics and elections (OSCE/ODIHR, 2014). Financial backwardness which entails PWDs living in poor communities, disability being expensive, politics being costly, not being supported by parties, etc. are all fundamental barriers to PWDs' participation in politics and elections(House, 2014). The participation of PWDs in politics and elections is hindered by factors such as strategic governments institutions lack of implementing signed and ratified international conventions because of lack of budgetary allocation by the executive(Cruz, 2015). Social stigma which includes lack of employment, perceived lack of capacity, religious and cultural stigma, familial shame or home imprisonment; and institutionalization has all contributed to PWDs not being able to actively participate in politics and elections(Virendrakumar et al., 2018). While disability itself is a strong barrier to PWDs' participation in politics and elections, one of the biggest is the socio-economic inequalities embedded in the social structures(Schur & Adya, 2013).

### **Lack of data barriers**

Data is no longer mere information but a critical development element. Without data development is nearly impossible because it is data that organizations including the government use to plan, implement, monitor; and evaluate developmental programmes. Thus, in the absence of accurate and dependable data it is hard to reach communities with developments including opportunities to participate in politics and elections more especially the vulnerable ones(Bank, 2019). This concurs with, the lack of authentic data on PWDs has made it extremely difficult to plan their political and elections participation since most governments and their development partners hardly know the factual number out there to be supported and tapped(Waltz & Schippers, 2020). For PWDs to participate during elections it is fundamental that transports are made accessible, inclusive voter education campaigns conducted, accessible buildings are designated as polling stations, building strong partnership with Disabled People Organizations (DPOs), training election officers how to work with PWDs,

revised critical laws, encouraging road authorities to remove barriers and build disability friendly roads in the future, encourage and support PWDs to work as election officers; and conduct studies to be scientifically informed about the election barriers and aspirations of PWDs (IFES, 2016).

### **Lack of inclusion in election commissions barriers**

Recognition and societal acceptance, is a powerful motivation tool for the minority and the disadvantaged communities. With recognition backed by political commitments; they feel being valued and above all, being part of the wider society with seemingly equal rights and equal opportunities. Demonstration of recognition and acceptance is possible via numerous methods, for instance, quotas location, incorporation into national and local boards, commissions, committees, etc. guaranteed by laws and policies. In national agenda such as ensuring democracy flourish, the nomination, appointment; and recruitment of the disadvantaged groups as members of commissions, technical committees, observers; and staff would be a significant breakthrough as it indicates that a space exist for all to participate in the political arena. In the absence of such, some groups could feel disregarded and their rights disrespected (Radke, Kutlaca, Siem, Wright, & Becker, 2020). This is in agreement with, the fact that PWDs are rarely recruited as election officers, observers, commissioners, monitors; and committee members and these don't only demotivate them to come forward to participate in politics and elections but equally debar them seeking for candidature for any political position (Lord et al., 2014).

### **Political barriers**

Politicians and parliamentarians as the chief promulgators of legislations and watchdog of the executive are very critical in the promotion and protection of the rights of all particularly the vulnerable communities. With strong political commitments, laws; and policies, a number of things including the financial and human resources can be made available to the executive and the judiciary to promote, protect; and enforce legal and policy instruments meant to create a space for vulnerable groups to realize and enjoy their fundamental human rights including the right to participate in politics and elections. In the absence of such, the realization of these rights becomes a mere wish (Lee, 2009). This substantiates, the lack of mentorship for PWDs by states, political parties; and social organizations has not only resulted in being unable to motivate PWDs to develop interest in politics but has equally contributed to their marginalization in politics and elections (Waltz & Schippers, 2020). The lack of promotion and protection of the rights of PWDs' plus unconducive political environment, PWDs' participation in politics and elections is almost impossible (Peprah Opokua et al., 2016). The fact that politicians hardly talk about the needs and aspirations of PWDs they are rare interested in participating in politics and elections (Peprah Opokua et al., 2016). Persons with disabilities' participation in politics and elections is heavily battered by many factors such as feeling less confident in their ability to participate, believing that politicians are less responsive to their needs and aspirations, lacking interest in politics and voting and above all, they have lower trust in parliamentarians, parties; and politicians (Schur & Adya, 2013) as quoted in (Reher, 2020).

Similarly, tokenism or patronizing approaches which entails positive rhetoric unmatched by improved access to political processes has left many PWDs demotivated to consider being involved in politics and elections activities (Virendrakumar et al., 2018). Because parties hardly have any strategy to recruit and support potential PWDs candidates both at the level of voters, debates, membership, campaign workers and volunteers it has largely frustrated the efforts of PWDs to partake in politics and elections (Waltz & Schippers, 2020).

### **Summary and conclusion**

The barriers debaring PWDs from participating in politics and elections are multifaceted and include those that are institutional, legal, physical, communicational and information, voting instruments, trained personnels, transportation, educational, voting methods, lack of DPOs partnership, policy framework, lack of empowerment, lack of public awareness, lack of interest, lack of privacy, lack of social support, attitudinal, cultural, financial, lack of data, lack of inclusion in election commissions; and political in nature. Therefore in conclusion, the barriers in the political cycle are numerous and they are negatively impacting the participation of persons with disabilities in politics and elections denying them to exercise their fundamental human right.

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I declare that there is no conflict of interest with respect to the study, authorship and/or publication of the manuscript.

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