

discussion by
GENCED

#BREAKING BARRIERS WEST AFRICA



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What can we learn about the involvement of young women in politics, and in particular, young women living with disabilities who wish to pursue political careers?

We recently had a conversation on Twitter with GenCed representatives, as well as Eva Andorful, and many joined the conversation to come up with strong conclusions and guidelines for better inclusion of more diverse groups in political spaces. Most shared the opinion that there is a lot of difficulty to include persons with disabilities in political processes - because the state is not making it possible for them.

Opinions were unified in agreeing that much more needs to be done for PWD in politics:

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"Young women with disabilities can transform politics in the ECOWAS sub-region with their creativity and innovation if all structural, negative perceptions and cultural barriers are broken."

"Democracy and development ought to be inclusive irrespective of whether citizens are disabled or not. Passing laws and legislation is good. Nevertheless, implementation is a herculean tasks"

"People with disability have so much potential that most African states fail to tap from"

"The challenge of PLWD generally is the way we treat which makes them disabled not really the physical or psychological conditions affecting them. Their condition should not limit their contributions to development. Humanity should be our guide when it comes to PLWD."

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During the chat, we answered some important questions:

What is the status of young female politician with disabilities in Ghana. Is there any policy that addresses their needs in politics?

We have the PWDs act 715 that seeks to promote & protect the rights of PWDs in Ghana but implementation of this act is a problem. In the act the government gave a 10 year period to make all public places accessible to PWDs but it still a nightmare. All the political parties in Ghana have their offices on story buildings without elevators, this makes access to them very difficult. Not only the political party offices, even the district assembly offices and most of the national structures/buildings are not accessible. That is why the few PWDs that are willing to venture into the political terrain must be encouraged and supported by all in order to be involve at the decision making table and also to ensure that policies passed are implemented to the later.

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We asked Eva about her personal journey as a young woman and PWD in politics:

Eva, can you tell us a bit more about your own political journey? What have been some of the biggest challenges, and how did you overcome them?

It has not been easy. For instance, my constituency is situated in and around the Volta lake, therefore had to be moving around sometimes with a canoe. Accessibility has always been a problem for young women with disabilities in politics. We need to work this. Whilst a lot is being done to erase the stigma attached to women in Politics, it seems there is another one to tackle in terms of PWDs involvement in Politics. My family and a few friends who believe in my passion and dream came on board to support in kind. Based on these issues affecting young women in Politics I finally decided to embark on this journey despite the challenges involved.

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Would you say that the state imposes many barriers for the political participation of persons with disabilities?

Yes, because the state does little to nothing in ensuring their full inclusion and participation and also woefully fail to implement laws enacted to ensure their inclusion.

What steps are taken by lawmakers in Ghana to create platforms for young women with disabilities to participate in national politics without discrimination?

Currently nothing is being done, previous government appointed a visually impaired lawyer who has all the capabilities deliver but unfortunately stigmatism from some members of his own party and that of the people, The traditional leaders (chiefs) he was appointed to work with were also not comfortable with accepting a PWD as the mediator so all these are few of the issues one has to battle with.

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What recommendations would you propose to political parties and government stakeholders to help enhance the inclusion of young women into the political space?

It should start from education and mentorship as GenCED is doing in Ghana/West Africa. Bcos a lot of young women have been made to understand and accept the fact that; they can only be political "cheerleaders" and not legislators.

Advocacy groups need to rise up, fight and intensify advocacy for a radical affirmative action in the distribution of parliamentary seats in favor of young women with disability. Yes, this should be led by PLWD themselves and have allies from support groups to generate momentum.

Speaking of state failure to enable accessibility, what is the situation in West Africa in regards to accessibility and inclusion in educational institutions? Is this another barrier towards developing a political career?

They experience the same problem - they find it difficult to access the lecture hall, even the students hostels. A great break barrier affecting their education in most institutions in West Africa.

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