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Disabled Students in Higher Education in Ghana and Tanzania: Towards Equity and Participation

Credit: University of Dar es Salaam, Tanzania

Report for the World Bank Global Review of Tertiary Education

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**Objectives**

1. To provide an overview of the main issues, challenges and successful interventions experienced by disabled students in higher education in different national locations.

2. To scrutinise the interview data on disability from students, academic staff and policymakers in the two sub-Saharan African countries included in this study: Ghana and Tanzania.

3. To provide examples of effective practices to make higher education in sub-Saharan Africa more inclusive for disabled people.

**Methods**

1. A review of a sample of the global literature on disabilities in higher education. Review questions include:
   
   - What challenges are receiving most attention in research studies?
   - What strategies have been employed in different national locations and organisations to make higher education more accessible for disabled students?
   - What theoretical and policy frameworks are informing debates on the subject?
   - What specific evidence is there from sub-Saharan Africa?

2. Socio-cultural analysis and identification of the implications of the interview data with students, staff and policymakers on disability from the ESRC-DFID funded research project ‘Widening Participation in Higher Education in Ghana and Tanzania: Developing and Equity Scorecard’ ([www.sussex.ac.uk/education/cheer/wphegt](http://www.sussex.ac.uk/education/cheer/wphegt)).
3. Abbreviations and Acronyms

ADA               Americans with Disabilities Act
CHEER            Centre for Higher Education and Equity Research
CRPD             UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities
DDA               Disability Discrimination Act
DED                Disability Equality Duty
EFA  Education for All
ECU                Equality Challenge Unit
ESRC              The Economic and Social Research Council
DFID  Department for International Development (United Kingdom)
GER               Gross Enrolment Ratio
HE                 Higher Education
ICT               Information and Communications Technology
MDGs  Millennium Development Goals
NGOs              Non Governmental Organisations
SES               Socio-economic status
SSA                Sub-Saharan Africa
UN                United Nations
UNESCO  United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization

Note

The grammatical errors in the interview data have not been edited in order to retain authenticity.
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Executive Summary

Widening Participation in Higher Education in Ghana and Tanzania: Developing an Equity Scorecard.

This report is based on two main sources of data: i) an international literature review of disability and higher education, and ii) interview findings from the ESRC-DFID funded project (RES-167-25-0078) ‘Widening Participation in Higher Education in Ghana and Tanzania: Developing an Equity Scorecard’. This mixed methods study is a new evidence base contributing to making higher education more socially inclusive in sub-Saharan Africa (SSA) (www.sussex.ac.uk/education/cheer/wphegt). The project studied four programmes of study in one public and one private case study university in each country, utilising the following data sources:

- 200 student life history interviews, comprising interviews with 119 students from public universities and 81 from private universities, registered on different programmes and with a diversity of backgrounds including under-represented groups such as women, mature, low socio-economic status and disabled students. Students were asked about their experiences of primary, secondary and higher education, with questions about their motivations, transitions, support, decision-making and first impressions of higher education, its impact on them and their future plans.

- 200 key staff and policymakers interviews, comprising 172 semi-structured interviews with senior academics, lecturers and staff working closely with students in the four case
study institutions and 28 interviews with policymakers. Academic staff and policymakers were asked about policies, interventions, strategies and challenges for widening participation, and the part that their universities had played in working towards the *Millennium Development Goals* (MDGs).

100 Equity Scorecards compiled largely from raw data on admission/access, retention, completion and achievement, for four programmes of study in relation to three structures of inequality: gender, socio-economic status (SES) and age (see www.sussex.ac.uk/education/cheer/wphegt/equityscorecards).

The research questions included: investigating which social groups are currently and traditionally under-represented as students in the case study institutions and whether these correlate with wider national and international patterns of social exclusion; if there is a relationship between learners’ prior experiences of education, their socio-economic backgrounds and their experiences and achievement in education. Respondents were also asked how the case study institutions are interpreting and responding to the *Millennium Development Goals* (MDGs). While higher education was not specifically addressed in the MDGs, universities have a major part to play in developing and disseminating knowledge for ending poverty, promoting gender equality and universal education, environmental sustainability, maternal and child health and combatting HIV/AIDS. Many African universities are also involved in productive global partnerships for teaching and research.
Questions were also posed about what mechanisms for support have been put in place for ‘non-traditional’ students to facilitate retention and achievement and how students might experience these interventions. Diverse stakeholders were asked about their perceptions of the main barriers to participation for under-represented groups and what strategies the case study institutions can develop to improve the recruitment, retention and achievement of students from ‘non-traditional’ backgrounds.

The three main structures of inequality included in the Equity Scorecards were gender, socio-economic status (SES) and age. However, disability emerged as a category of analysis in the qualitative data. Eleven disabled students were included in the life history interview sample of 200 students. Seven were from the public and two from the private universities in Tanzania. There was one from each of the public and private universities in Ghana. Collectively, they provided original insights into the physical and social challenges involved in accessing and achieving in higher education in two African countries.

Under-representation, barriers, enablers and challenges for disabled students were discussed by twenty-five academic staff in the public university, seven in the private university and three policymakers in Ghana, and by forty-two academic staff in the public university in Tanzania, twenty-five in the private university and ten policymakers in Tanzania. While there is a discourse of disability and disadvantage in both countries, as yet, it is a structure of inequality that does not appear to have received significant policy or research attention in relation to higher education in sub-Saharan Africa. One explanation for this silence is that here have been few opportunities for disabled people in low-income countries to mobilise effectively to assert their
rights (Yeo, 2005). Another view is that disabled people tend to get positioned as beneficiaries, rather than actors (Lord et al, 2010). Erb and Harriss-White (2002) conducted a study into the economic and social context of disability in a number of villages in Tamil Nadu, India. They discovered that the construct of disability was excluded from levels of analysis, policy, and information. These absences reinforced each other. They concluded that:

*This low priority can be explained by the political weakness of disabled people ... high perceived economic costs and low perceived political benefits* (2002: 1-2).

Disabled people in low-income countries are also often excluded from educational opportunities, or educated in segregated, non-academic institutions (Croft, 2010), thereby limiting the development of capabilities and opportunities to progress to higher education. Disabled people’s exclusion from political influence in sub-Saharan African higher education, and the perception that their numbers are too few to merit resource investment, could account for the policy and research silences.

**Summary of Research Findings from Ghana and Tanzania**

1. **Physical and socio-cultural challenges** were revealed in the life history interviews with disabled students. There were the problems of access to the built environment and learning resources and also of attitudes, ignorance and prejudice. Disabled students had to take responsibility for educating others about their needs and identities. They often felt powerless and frustrated with the lack of support and low expectations of their academic
abilities. They were persistently acting to counter misinformation, misrecognition and structural and attitudinal disempowerment.

2. **Educational success** was perceived as a way of mitigating some of the problems associated with disability *e.g.* financial independence, negative social status. Many students had had a lifetime of struggle to enter educational provision, and had to demonstrate their learning capacity and academic potential in the face of marginalisation, low expectations, cultural superstitions and prejudice. For example, many reported that there were popular beliefs that someone with a physical impairment was also cognitively impaired. It was also believed that as disabled people would have difficulties entering the labour market, any investment in their education would be wasted. However, disabled students reported great pride in what they had achieved against the odds - especially in challenging popular prejudices about their capabilities.

3. **Lack of structured support for disabled students** was widely reported by students and by academic staff *e.g.* the absence of resources in Braille, assistive aids, and elevators for those with physical disabilities. Disability was discussed more widely by academic staff in Tanzania than in Ghana. In both countries, however, there were reports of difficulties with physical access in environments designed for the able-bodied, prejudices and cultural mythologies.

4. **Lack of policies and codes of practice** - There is national legislation on disability in both countries. Ghana has legislation that was passed in 2006 - the Persons with Disability Act (Act 715). This Act provides equal opportunities for Ghanaians with disabilities across economic, social and political dimensions and addresses education. Tanzania also has a national policy on disability that dates back to 2004 and also
addresses education. Both countries are signatories to the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (CRPD) (2006), and Tanzania has ratified. However, according to the disabled students interviewed in this study, these acts do not seem to have found their way into systematic practices to support disabled students or inclusive pedagogy and practices in higher education.

5. **Lack of awareness** – Whereas many academic staff and policymakers acknowledged the need to make higher education more inclusive and accessible to disabled people, the disabled students reported that their needs, when recognised at all, were perceived as additional and exceptional, and were not integrated into an inclusive educational environment. The necessary accommodations were either not acknowledged or were seen as a problem for the institution to meet. Furthermore, many disabled students reported a history of segregated school-based education which was often not academically oriented. Hence, their participation was not predicted and provided for in higher education.
International Literature Review

An overarching theme in the international literature is how disabled students face both physical and attitudinal barriers within the university environment (Paul, 2000). There is a burgeoning literature on the sociology of disability in higher education from high-income countries in the Global North. Meekosha (2008) suggests that we need to develop ‘southern/majority’ perspectives on disability. There is very limited knowledge about the experiences and participation rates of disabled students in higher education and system-wide inclusive education in low-income countries (Croft, 2010).

Summary of Key Themes in the Literature

Barriers and Enablers

The UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (2006: Article 1) defines persons with disabilities to include those who have long-term physical, mental, intellectual or sensory impairments which in interaction with various barriers may hinder their full and effective participation in society on an equal basis with others.

In practice, definitions often vary from one jurisdiction to another. There are multiple conceptualisations of disability e.g. personal tragedy or social oppression (Finkelstein, 2001). How it is conceptualised and classified can determine provisions, services, and institutional responses (Duguay, 2010; Florian and McLaughlin, 2008).

Access for disabled students is highly problematic in terms of the built environment and adaptations, despite developments in international and national legislation and policies.
Statistics on disabled students’ participation, where they exist, can be unreliable as there are issues of disclosure, confidentiality, and representation of diverse disabilities. More generally, there can be problems with statistics on disability as population statistics such as household surveys typically do not include any questions about the disability status of household members (Braithwaite and Mont, 2008; Fujiura et al, 2005).

Universities could play a stronger role as producers of knowledge on disability.

Effective Practices

Academic and pastoral supports are crucial for all students, but especially for those with disabilities e.g. learning aids, personal planning and information, designated staff and resources.

The use of adaptive equipment and assistive technology, in particular, has become an important aspect of higher education provision for disabled students.

Inclusion, voice, advocacy, and consultation of disabled students about environments, programmes and services.

Staff development in inclusive pedagogy and disability awareness.

Accessible built environments are crucial to inclusion.
Recommendations

Mainstreaming Disability into Strategic Management in Higher Education

1. **Policy and procedures** for disabled students should be strategically mainstreamed into all activities and operations of all institutions. Universities need to be systematically working towards inclusive educational practices for all students via action plans, professional development of lecturers, curriculum development, resource allocation and evaluation practices.

2. **Robust management information systems** need to be set up and maintained in universities to monitor disability *e.g.* access, retention and achievement. There should be requirements for systematic collection and analysis of data on retention and achievement as well as access, disaggregated by gender, age, SES and disability, for monitoring purposes and strategic planning (World Bank, 2007).

3. **Professional development programmes** should be introduced for all staff, to develop awareness, knowledge, competencies and skills relating to disabled students and inclusive pedagogies, and to promote non-discrimination and equality of opportunity for disabled people in higher education.

4. **Designated staff and support units** to be established, resourced and widely publicised. Structured support for disabled students should be available *e.g.* bursaries, materials, adaptive technologies, ICT.

5. **Needs assessments** to be included in student induction programmes.

6. **The built environment** should be surveyed to ensure that it meets national codes and regulations for accessible buildings and that all appropriate steps are taken to provide reasonable and accessible accommodation.
The Built Environment

1. Establishing which elements are proving significant barriers to access, and using this as a means of prioritising adjustments in existing environments, and designing-out potential barriers in future proposals is recommended. In the absence of national standards and codes for buildings, there is a plethora of best practice standards that include consideration of the following:

- Navigation around the campus – *i.e.* routes that are: clearly defined, logical and not unnecessarily lengthy or prohibitively steep.
- Investigation into viable external surface finishes which will drain effectively and remain firm, even and slip-resistant in all weather conditions.
- Controlling or eliminating vegetation, which could obscure routes and sightlines.
- Readily identifiable entrances to buildings with level or, if steps are unavoidable, alternative ramped access.
- Doors which are not excessively heavy to operate and which are sufficiently wide enough for people using wheelchairs and other mobility aids. If double doors are used there should be sufficient width available by opening just one leaf.
- Internal horizontal circulation that avoid changes in level, is well-lit (considers natural and artificial lighting), and incorporates logically positioned signage designed to assist people with visual impairments.
- WC facilities to suit wheelchair users and ambulant disabled people in easily accessible locations
- Vertical circulation – if lift(s) are not a realistic option and facilities located on upper floors are unavoidable, stairs should be designed to be more readily
accessible to ambulant disabled people \textit{i.e.} suitable step profile, continuous, easy-to-grip and visually distinguishable handrails, contrasting nosings and sufficient (natural and artificial) lighting.

- Facilities such as libraries, computer suites, cafeteria, dormitories, laboratories, communal spaces located - or duplicated - at ground floor level.
- Flexible teaching spaces – \textit{i.e.} without ranked or fixed seating
- Bedroom/dormitory layouts which can be reconfigured to suit different access requirements, including those of wheelchair users.
- Use of colour (tonal) contrast to define spaces, fixtures and fittings to assist visually impaired people
Part 1: Background and Rationale

1. The Globalised Knowledge Economy

In a globalised knowledge economy, there are questions about who participates, where, what they study and how raising enrolment rates in higher education can contribute to societies’ economic and social development and reduce poverty (Yusuf et al. 2009; World Bank, 2002, 2009; Commission for Africa, 2005). The 2009 UNESCO World Conference on Higher Education in Paris gave special focus to the challenges and opportunities for the revitalization of higher education in Africa – an important tool for the development of the continent (UNESCO, 2009a). Yet it seems that there is still a lot of work to be done to ensure that widening participation is not just a question of ‘a flood of students into increasingly dysfunctional institutions’ (Yusuf et al. 2009: 110).

Global massification of higher education can mask unequal and uneven participation rates. Student enrolment worldwide rose from 13 million in 1960 to 137.8 million in 2005. Sub-Saharan Africa has experienced the highest average regional growth rate in higher education. For more than three decades, enrolments have expanded by 8.7 percent annually, compared to 5.1 percent for the world as a whole, and have tripled since 1990, to almost 4 million students (UNESCO, 2006). The central structure of inequality that has received significant policy attention has been gender (Bloom and Rosovsky, 2000; UNESCO, 1998). There have been some significant changes in gendered patterns of participation. While male students still predominate in sub-Saharan Africa, women’s access has improved markedly in the region, from one out of six students in 1990 to approximately one out of three today (UNESCO (2009b; World Bank, 2009).
However, gross enrolment ratios (GER) for tertiary education – the main indicator of participation rates – are still fairly low in sub-Saharan Africa. In 2005, it was 5 for Ghana and 1 for Tanzania compared to 24 globally and 71 for North America and Western Europe for the same period (UNESCO, 2009b). Both secondary and tertiary enrolment ratios for sub-Saharan Africa are the lowest among the eight major geographical regions of the world.

Disability appears to be a structure of inequality that has not received significant policy or research attention in relation to higher education in sub-Saharan Africa. Yet approximately ten percent of the world's population, or 600 million people, are estimated to have a disability (WHO, 2010). This is the world's largest minority and eighty percent of persons with disabilities are believed to live in developing countries, according to the UNDP (UN ENABLE, 2010). Disabled people in Africa, in low and middle income countries, are among the poorest of the poor as a consequence of their exclusion from school, health care, work, and other societal benefits (Eide et al., 2003; Hoogeveen, 2005). In many sub-Saharan African countries, being disabled at least doubles the chance of having never attended school (UNESCO, 2010), and those who do start school are at increased risk of ‘dropping out’ (Filmer, 2005; Hunt, 2008). The problem is exacerbated in higher levels of education. In sub-Saharan Africa, it has been reported that access for disabled students to higher education or particular programmes can be formally blocked (Karangwa 2008; Sightsavers, 2009), or informally advised against (Howell, 2006). Additionally, exclusion from, or access only to segregated, non-academic basic education means that traditionally there has been a small pool of disabled students qualified to enter higher education (Croft, 2010).
2. Widening Participation in Higher Education in Ghana and Tanzania: Developing an Equity Scorecard

The ESRC-DFID funded project ‘Widening Participation in Higher Education in Ghana and Tanzania: Developing an Equity Scorecard’ is a new evidence base contributing to making higher education more socially inclusive in sub-Saharan Africa (SSA) (www.sussex.ac.uk/education/cheer/wphegt). Via the fieldwork and its analysis, the project has produced statistical data on patterns of participation, retention and achievement and has collected evidence to build theory about socio-cultural aspects of higher education in Ghana and Tanzania (Morley and Lussier, 2009). The study addressed research questions that relate directly to current policy concerns for making African higher education more inclusive. They included investigating which social groups are currently and traditionally under-represented as students in the case study institutions and whether these correlate with wider national and international patterns of social exclusion, and if there is a relationship between learners’ prior experiences of education, their socio-economic backgrounds and their experiences and achievement in education. 172 senior academics, lecturers and staff and 28 policymakers were interviewed about what mechanisms for support have been put in place for ‘non-traditional’ students to facilitate retention and achievement and how might ‘non-traditional’ students experience these interventions. They were also asked about barriers and enablers for non-traditional students and how higher education and the case study institutions are interpreting and responding to the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs).

Two hundred life history interviews with students were conducted to explore their experiences of primary, secondary and higher education, with questions about their motivations, transitions, support, decision-making and first impressions of higher education, its impact on them and their
future plans and aspirations. Quantitative data were also collected and presented in Equity Scorecards (see www.sussex.ac.uk/education/cheer/wphegt/equityscorecards). The three main structures of inequality included in the Equity Scorecards were gender, socio-economic status (SES) and age. However, disability emerged as a category of analysis in the qualitative data. Eleven disabled students were included in the life history interview sample. Seven were from the public and two from the private universities in Tanzania. There was one from each of the public and private universities in Ghana. Collectively, they provided original insights into the physical and social challenges involved in accessing and achieving in higher education in two sub-Saharan African countries. Under-representation, structural barriers e.g. the built environment, enablers e.g. inclusive pedagogy and challenges for disabled students e.g. prejudice and poor quality basic education were also discussed by twenty-five academic staff in the public university, seven in the private university and three policymakers in Ghana, and by forty-two academic staff in the public university in Tanzania, twenty-five in the private university and ten policymakers in Tanzania. The disability issues raised in this project were commensurate with findings from research studies and literature produced more globally.
Part 2: The Global Literature

1. Social Models, Support, and Success

An overarching theme in the international literature is how disabled students face both physical and attitudinal barriers within the university environment (Paul, 2000). Perceiving inclusive education for disabled students as the process of identifying and removing barriers is a common theme in higher education literature in both developed (Fuller et al. 2004a; West et al., 1993; Denhart, 2008; Konur, 2006; Weedon and Fuller, 2004), and less developed contexts (Chataika, 2010; Matsedisho, 2007). Commonly used conceptual frameworks for understanding and responding to disability are the medical and social models of disability (Oliver, 1990; Shakespeare, 2006). In the ‘medical model’, disability is frequently conceptualised as a restriction, or lack of ability to perform an activity in a ‘normal’ manner (Bury, 2000). It tends to conflate disability and impairment and locates the cause of disadvantage and focus for action in addressing disability within an individual disabled person, rather than within wider society. Conversely, social models suggest that disability is a product of economic, social and cultural oppression rather than an inevitable consequence of impairment (Riddell et al., 2002; UPIAS, 1976). Social relational understandings of disability were introduced by Finkelstein (1980). A premise of his theory is:

*Either our tragedy is that the impairments we possess make us incapable of social functioning, or our society is constructed by people with capabilities for people with capabilities and it is this that makes people with impairments incapable of functioning* (Finkelstein, 2001:2).
Social models maintain that many people have impairments, but that it is only by the norms and standards of the able-bodied society in which they live that they are classified as disabled (Bolt, 2004). The medical/social models analysis of approaches to disability has had considerable influence on international development discourse around inclusive education with many writers arguing for a shift from interventions focused on individuals to a social model analysis of the barriers disabled students face within education systems (DFID, 2000; UNESCO, 2001; Pinnock and Lewis 2008; Rieser, 2008). A body of knowledge concerning disablement is continuing to develop and is contributing to the understanding of the socio/cultural dynamics of the process of disablement, as well as physical adaptations. Shakespeare and Watson (2001) have attempted to synthesise the social and medical models by suggesting that disability is caused both by impairment and social exclusion. Thomas (2004:570) also argues that ‘two arenas of the study of disability passively coexist rather than actively engage with one another’. She calls for more relational and interactional models, rather than the binary thinking involved in social/medical models.

Disability is also frequently conceptualised in terms of social inclusion (Jacklin and Robinson, 2007), social justice (Riddell et al 2005), inclusive learning (Bolt, 2004; Hanafin et al., 2007), and the inclusive society (Barnes, 2007). Inclusion is the contradiction or antithesis of the marginalisation that has traditionally framed experiences of disability. The acquisition of higher qualifications can maximize opportunities for inclusion in civil society, employment and provide some financial independence. Concepts of self-determination and independence are prevalent in the literature (Field, Sarver and Shaw, 2003).
It is evident that disability is a complex and contested concept. It is important not to allow
discussion of diverse concepts which according to Oliver (1990:1) ‘obscure the real issues in
disability which are about oppression, discrimination, inequality and poverty’. The enhanced
opportunities and quality of life that are linked to higher education are important not only to
individual disabled graduates, but also to support their contribution to dismantling the social
exclusion that other disabled people face.

2. Widening Participation

In higher education, disability has sometimes received policy attention via countries’ initiatives
to widen participation. In the UK, the Dearing (1997) Report emphasised the importance of
widening participation for disabled students as well as those who experience social disadvantage
(Hurst, 1999; Tinklin et al. 2004). Over thirty years ago, the Warnock Report (1978: 177)
mentioned that: ‘Some universities and polytechnics have taken steps to enable students with
disabilities to pursue courses’. However, Barnes (2007) argued that until the 1990s, most British
universities were virtually inaccessible to disabled students and staff. He also believed that they
had failed to contribute to knowledge about disability, and is pessimistic for the future:

\[
\text{Until recently, the university has contributed relatively little in terms of nurturing our}
\text{understanding of social citizenship for disabled people and, therefore, we cannot be}
\text{confident that it will perform adequately the extra task of nurturing our perceptions of}
\text{technological and cultural citizenship in the future (Barnes, 2007:140).}
\]
In this analysis, higher education needs to go further than just admitting more disabled students. As a pivotal knowledge hub, it also needs to play an enhanced role in the creation and dissemination of knowledge to support and empower disabled people, challenge prejudice, and promote social inclusion.

While disability is just not about increasing representation in higher education, equality of opportunity to participate is important and there have been some global successes. Hadjikakou and Hartas (2007) estimated that internationally 8-10 percent of higher education students have some form of disability. However, they did not declare their data source. Lack of statistical data is a major problem when considering disability in higher education in low-income countries. Many figures that do exist are estimates. The Equality Challenge Unit (2009) in the UK estimates 7.3 percent students and 2.7 percent staff have disabilities. This represents a form of progress as only 5 percent (26,000) of UK undergraduates self-assessed themselves as having a disability in 2000/01 (Fuller et al., 2004b). There are still questions about whether a diverse range of disabilities are represented in higher education. In the UK, the most common disability among university students is dyslexia (Taylor et al, 2009). Statistics can, however, be unreliable as the non-disclosure of disabilities for fear of discrimination is also a consideration. Gorard (2008) reported that in the UK there has been an increase in the proportion of higher education students reporting a disability. However, it is not clear whether this increase in students with a reported disability is evidence of a widening of opportunities or more to do with an increase in reporting. Stigmatisation fears continue to impede disclosure.
3. Supporting Disabled Students

Representation does not automatically lead to equality, or indeed to full participation in academic life. While quantitative increases are important, it is also pertinent to ask about the quality of provision to which disabled students are gaining access. Literature on the experiences of disabled students in higher education suggests that they experience a range of barriers and frustrations once entered (Borland and James, 1999; Goode, 2004; Holloway, 2001; Jacklin et al, 2006). Access needs to be accompanied by support to attain and remain in the sector (Richardson and Wydell, 2003). UK research by Riddell et al., (2002) indicates that even when disabled students start out with comparable qualifications to other students in the same university, they tend to encounter more barriers to learning and to achieve lower outcomes in terms of final degree classification. Hence, support for disabled students has been a subject of much inquiry. Support is often reported to be haphazard and serendipitous. Singleton and Aisbitt (2001) conducted a survey in the UK on students with dyslexia. They identified considerable variation in the provision across different institutions. Many of their findings related to lack and limitations. For example, lack of trained tutors and limited identification of dyslexia and its implications for learning and assessment among staff. Some studies identify successful interventions for support. Lancaster et al. (2001) investigated provision for disabled students in higher education institutions in the USA. They found that the use of adaptive equipment and assistive technology in particular (e.g. spell-checkers, voice-input software, electronic reading machines, talking calculators, computer-screen readers, specialized keyboards, and tape recorders) has become an important aspect of higher education provision. Disability and technology are continuing to be inter-related (Wall and Sarver, 2003).
Jacklin and Robinson’s (2007) UK study found that disabled students identified non-university led support, for example, friends on the course and in the university, and family and friends outside the university, as the most significant sources of support. Jacklin and Robinson (2007) found that, in addition to structural interventions such as concessions for examinations and assignments, personal and interpersonal aspects of support emerged as being of most importance to the majority of students. The type of support that students wanted included:

- Someone to talk to generally, about programme expectations or workload;
- A listening ear when feeling stressed about workload or personal matters;
- Reassurance that you are capable of doing the work;
- Someone to motivate you to do the work;
- Help with essay writing;
- Financial advice;
- Advice about university procedures, for example, if an essay was going to be late;
- Practical support, for example, with everyday jobs.

Vickerman and Blundell (2010) identified five key issues that should be addressed in order to enable access and entitlement to HE:

- Pre-course induction support;
- Commitment by HE institutions to facilitating barrier free curricula e.g. knowledge that can be shared by all students regardless of impairment;
- Consultation with disabled students;
Institutional commitment to develop support services;
- Embedding of personal development planning.

Many of the findings from the above studies resonate with Article 24 of the CRPD (2006) which states that disabled people should receive the support required to facilitate their effective education.

4. Barriers

A further area of inquiry has related to impediments and barriers (Fuller et al. 2004a). This approach incorporates an understanding of the social model by focusing on the built and social environment, rather than on individual disability. West et al (1993) surveyed 40 US college and university disabled students to determine their levels of satisfaction with accessibility, special services, and accommodations at their schools. The majority of the students indicated that they had encountered barriers to their education, including a lack of understanding and co-operation from administrators, faculty, staff, and other students; lack of adaptive aids and other accommodations; and inaccessibility of buildings and grounds.

Barriers also relate to poor pedagogical practices, and lack of effective teaching and learning for diverse student groups (Denhart, 2008; Fuller et al, 2004a; Konur, 2006; Weedon and Fuller, 2004), and lack of attention to curriculum development (Adams and Brown, 2006; Teachability, 2000). One theory is that disabled students can be like canaries in the mine in so far as they highlight systemic and structural failures (O’Rourke 1999). Educational difficulties experienced...
by individuals can be taken to be an indicator of how the curriculum and organisation can be improved for all pupils (Hart, Dixon, Drummond & McIntyre, 2004; Slee, 1991).

5. Disability as One Structure of Inequality

Knowledge on disability is growing in its own right, and also as one of several structures of inequality that impede opportunities and life chances. Disability is unlikely to be the sole defining element in an individual’s identity (Thomas, 1999). Gender, ‘race’, sexuality, ethnicity and age need to be considered as these also have an impact on life chances. Hence, a theory of intersectionality is important, as people have multiple identities (Crenshaw, 1989). Barnes (2007:142) identified how disability intersects with other structures of inequality including gender, age, ethnicity and socio-economic status. His research suggested that:

Disabled students are more likely to come from upper/middle-class backgrounds and are less likely to be members of minority ethnic groupings. The majority are male and tend to be slightly older than non-disabled peers. Particular types of impairment predominate, including dyslexia and ‘hidden’ impairments such as epilepsy and diabetes. Equally important, most disabled students are reluctant to adopt a disabled identity and only a small minority are aware of disability politics and the disabled people’s movement.

This analysis suggests that socio-economic privilege and social capital can be determining factors in enabling some disabled students’ participation in higher education. Poorer, female and severely disabled students are less likely to be in higher education (Barnes, 2007). This is exacerbated in low-income countries where there are strong connections between gender,
disability, and poverty (Davies et al., 2009; Ghai, 2002; Rousso, 2003). Disabled women and girls are also at higher risk of gender-based violence, sexual abuse, neglect, maltreatment and exploitation. Social hierarchies, it seems, are reproduced within the structure of disability. However, Braathen and Kvam (2008) found that disabled women in Malawi saw education as a way to become empowered.

Social hierarchies are reproduced within the structure of disability, and the demographics for disabled students resemble non-disabled, but also marginalised communities. For example, in the UK, there is still a toxic correlation between access and poverty. Only four percent of UK poorer young people enter higher education (David et al., 2009; Hills Report, 2009). Five percent of this group enter UK’s top seven universities (HESA, 2010). In Ghana and Tanzania, higher education students are drawn from the top economic quintile (Morley et al., 2007; Morley and Lussier, 2009). On average a student from the lowest socio-economic quintile in sub-Saharan Africa has fifteen times less chance of entering a university than one from the highest quintile (Brossard and Foko 2007). Bernstein’s famous caution that education cannot compensate for society (1970) has particular resonance in sub-Saharan Africa.

There are cycles of disadvantage, with connections between disability, educational attainment and poverty (Yeo and Moore, 2003; Yeo, 2005). While there are questions about the reliability of statistics on disability (Braithwaite and Mont, 2008; Fujiura et al. 2005), disability rates appear to be significantly higher among groups with lower educational attainment in the countries of the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD). On average, nineteen percent of less educated people have disabilities, compared to eleven percent among the better educated. Ninety percent of disabled children in developing countries do not attend school (UN
ENABLE, 2010). There are particularly strong correlations between poverty and disability in sub-Saharan Africa. ‘Disability is both a cause and consequence of poverty’ (DFID, 2000:1).

Factors that contribute to the growing number in Africa include:

- Birth defects;
- Poor maternal health (every minute more than 30 women are seriously injured or disabled during labour);
- Female Genital mutilation
- War and conflict;
- Ageing population;
- Injuries at home, work and on the roads;
- Violence;
- HIV/AIDS;
- River blindness;
- Environmental degradation;
- Natural disasters;
- Malnutrition;
- Population growth.

Disabled people in Africa are among the poorest of the poor as a consequence of their exclusion from school, health care, work, and other societal benefits (Exodus Guild, 2010).

Higher education can play a complex and contradictory role in both reproducing and challenging social privilege. It can contribute to elite formation by reinforcing the capital of those already in
possession of social privilege. It can also lead to social mobility and identity transformation for disadvantaged groups.

6. Anti-Discriminatory Legislation

Disrupting persistent inequalities and driving change are universal challenges. Globally, widening participation of disabled people in higher education has been supported by the introduction of anti-discriminatory legislation, treaties and policy frameworks. For example, the United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (CRPD) (2006) is an international treaty that identifies the rights of disabled people as well as the obligations on States parties to the Convention to promote, protect and ensure those rights. Under Article 24 of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (2006) ratifying States are charged with ensuring an inclusive education system at all levels partly by providing appropriate staff development. In terms of its content, the Convention represents a significant change: it establishes disability not only as a social welfare matter but as part of human rights law. States that ratify it are legally bound to implement the provision of the Convention. At the time of writing this report, there had been 145 signatories and 87 ratifications. Ghana and Tanzania had both had signed, and Tanzania has ratified the CRPD.

The impact of public policy on opportunities for disabled people has been a central concern for several researchers (e.g. Tinklin et al. 2004). There are questions about implementation gaps and whether policy translates into strategy and action for change (Yeo, 2005). Legislation has begun to appear and be strengthened in a range of national locations. The Disability Discrimination Act (1995) (DDA) in the UK has widened definitions of disability to include ‘a physical or mental impairment that has a substantial and long-term adverse affect on (a person’s) ability to carry out
normal day-to-day activities’ (Fuller et al., 2004a:303). The Disability Discrimination Act (2005) amends the DDA 1995 and includes the introduction of a new ‘Disability Equality Duty’ (DED) which came into force in December 2006 placing a legal requirement on public institutions, including universities, to be proactive in ensuring that disabled people are treated fairly and equally and that the opportunities available to disabled students and their achievements are equal to those of their non-disabled peers. The specific responsibilities of the DED require all public bodies to draw up ‘Disability equality schemes’ on a three yearly basis and actively involve local disabled people, disabled staff and students in the process, thus reinforcing the consultation and empowerment of disabled people agenda (Vickerman and Blundell, 2010; Zepke, Leach, and Prebble 2006). There has been a general shift in UK equity legislation away from grievance procedures and complaints from individuals to proactive, anticipatory measures and institutional support. Universities now need to predict disabled students’ needs and modify application, registration and administration procedures. Teaching and learning is also supposed to consider difference and diversity.

The USA has the Americans with Disabilities Act of 1990 (ADA), and the Australian Government introduced a Disability Discrimination Act in 1992. Legislation is being introduced in low-income countries too - often as part of national initiatives to alleviate poverty and promote human rights. Ghana passed the Persons with Disability (PWD) bill in 2006 (Ghana Center for Democratic Development, 2006), and Tanzania introduced its National Policy on Disability in 2004 (United Republic of Tanzania. 2004). Zimbabwe also passed their Disabled Persons Act in 1992 and amended it in 1996 (Chataika, 2010). However, in the global policy
architecture, only forty-five countries have anti-discrimination and other disability-specific laws (UN, ENABLE, 2010).

Legislation, in some countries, has been accompanied by the introduction of inclusive education practices, the use of ICT and accessible facilities and educational programmes. UK higher education institutions now are expected to have a disability statement and officer and provide financial support via the Disabled Student Allowance Fund. Still, there are discrepancies between declared aims and lived experiences. Barnes (2007) is pessimistic about the extent to which equality practices are mainstreamed and embedded in organisations. He argued that, while higher education institutions now have dedicated disability services, resources and units, ‘the rhetoric of support is rarely matched by the reality of provision’ (p. 142). Other researchers have found that while there have been potent moral and legal arguments to widen participation and promote equality of opportunities, legislation and penalties for non-compliance seem to have been more effective than moral arguments about exclusion (Burke, 2006. Deem et al., 2005).

7. The Built Environment

The participation of disabled students in higher education is often discussed in terms of physical access and the shape and design of the built environment (Chard and Couch, 1998; Chataika, 2010). An inclusive environment needs to take a holistic, or universal approach to diversity, and not simply provide adjustments for separate groups. A sensitively, universally designed estate can help make buildings and facilities accessible for all organisational members without relying on assistance. For example, Gallaudet University in the USA is the world's only university so far in which all programmes and services are specifically designed to accommodate deaf and hard of
hearing students. Since September 2005 (under the DDA 1995) post-16 education providers in
the UK have been required to make reasonable adjustments to the physical features of premises
(Code of Practice (Revised) for providers of post-16 education and related services). Despite the
duty, disabled students in the UK still face architectural obstacles within the university’s existing
environment. Some of the main pressure points include getting into buildings, horizontal and
vertical circulation, toilet facilities and emergency egress. These problems are exacerbated in
SSA where university campuses frequently cover expansive and uneven terrains- made worse in
the rainy season. The natural world e.g. extreme weather conditions and tropical and sub-tropical
vegetation can be particularly challenging for people with mobility and visual impairments, even
if the terrain is level. In addition, power cuts tend to be common so the use elevators and other
electronic devices can be unreliable and costly. Class sizes can be very large, and space for all
students is at a premium, but almost non-existent for students in wheelchairs. Resources are
limited, so the lack of ICT, adaptation of estates e.g. widening doors, flexible spaces, colour
coding to define different spaces for those with residual vision, and the supply and training of
specialist support staff remain significant barriers to universal access.

8. Globalising Disability Studies

As in evident in the above discussion, there is a burgeoning literature on the sociology of
disability in higher education from high-income countries in the Global North. There is also
literature offering meta-level analysis of the literature. For example, Paul (2000) has produced a
comprehensive literature review on disabled students in the USA. Comparative and national
studies, of variable scale, are emerging from diverse global regions (Hurst, 1998). Hadjikakou
and Hartas (2007) discussed Cyprus in the context of the large-scale PERSEAS study funded by the European Union. The study reported results regarding the current state of provision (e.g. concessions for exams and assignments, infrastructure, teaching modification, counselling services), as well as issues of social inclusion, equality of opportunity and entitlement to education. Shevlin et al (2004) researching in Ireland found that physical access remains a serious obstacle to full participation, and generally, there was a low level of awareness of student needs in relation to assistive provision and assessment. Other studies are often small-scale and based in one institution. For example, Polo and Lopez (2005) conducted a study of difficulties faced by 23 students with mobility disabilities at the University of Granada, Spain. Girgin (2006) wrote about deaf students in Anadolu University in Turkey. In the age of borderless higher education and credit transfer, the international mobility of disabled students is also an issue. McLean et al., (2003) considered the implications of internationalisation for students with a disability e.g. study abroad, exchange and international students travelling to Australia, and Australian students travelling to universities outside Australia. The facilities that exist in their home universities might not be available to disabled students when they participate in international student exchange programmes.

Sub-Saharan Africa tends largely to be represented by studies from South Africa (e.g. Howell, 2005). The country now has comprehensive policies on disability that address higher education including the Social Assistance Amendment Bill (2010), and the Integrated National Disability Strategy (1997). However, Duguay (2010) has criticised these initiatives for being too fragmented and for using different definitions of disability that can cause confusion when disabled persons apply for state-funded assistance. Matsedisho (2007) is also critical of South African policies on disability and argued that while legislation has developed, provision for
disabled people has traditionally been based on disempowering constructs of philanthropy, welfarism and benevolence.

Scholarship and initiatives for disabled students are beginning to emerge from some other SSA countries. Some of the momentum and awareness raising has come from NGOs. For example, World Vision (2007) indicate that there are around 250 blind students in higher education institutions in Ethiopia, and that Addis Ababa University has 183 blind undergraduates and postgraduates. Other initiatives have come from the universities themselves. For example, the University of Namibia has enrolled physically disabled and students with severe sensory difficulties since 2003, and the students themselves have some clear recommendations for change:

- the need to run a disability sensitisation campaign in the university;
- the application form should be re-designed to make it more sensitive to those with disabilities;
- the government student loan should be reviewed to make it more responsive to those with severe disabilities;
- the appointment of university staff to support disabled students;
- the placement of tactile signage to facilitate mobility (Haihambo, 2008).

Chataika (2010) has conducted research on disabled students in Zimbabwe. This study found that although the University of Zimbabwe appears to be inclusive by accepting participation of disabled students from 1982 in some of its programmes, once entered, these students experience
marginalisation and disempowerment. This included negative attitudes, problems with the admissions process and a built environment that was not inclusive.

Karangwa (2008) has written about inclusive higher education in Rwanda. The author reports how a team in the Kigali Institute of Education reviewed application and selection criteria and advised the Ministry about adjustments and equipment needed to assist disabled students. The Ministry, with the National Examination Council and the National Federation of the Disabled, provided a list of applicants with various disabilities who had qualified but could not get into university. There were over 250. Now three Rwandan public universities have opened their doors to male and female students with visual and hearing impairments for the first time. Karangwa (2008:1) reports how:

*The first few days in the university were shocking for the disabled students, and their non-disabled peers. Everyone knew from the media that these students would be enrolling. But sighted students were still surprised to see blind students on campus asking to share their notes, though many were eager to help.*

This account indicates how, in the absence of institutional support, disabled students were often dependent on their peers for basic services.

In Uganda, there has been a political initiative to ensure that disabled people are represented by disabled MPs (Adams-Spink, 2003). While working for the BBC World Service, Adams-Spink witnessed a meeting between the disabled MP - James Mwandha- and a group of disabled students. He reports how the students told the MP how inaccessible their university library was, and how they had encountered much prejudice. However, the subject that they chose to discuss
the most was their relationships and the attitudinal and structural difficulties that they encountered *e.g.* accessing places where they could meet partners.

While these studies and reports illuminate some of the challenges and initiatives to support disabled students, there is very limited knowledge about the experiences and participation rates of disabled students in higher education generally in low-income countries. Meekosha (2008) suggests that we need to develop ‘southern/majority’ perspectives on disability. This view articulates with a wider call to value, recognise and include voices, theories, and understandings from the Global South in the process of knowledge production and development of social theory (Ake, 1996; Connell, 2007; De Sousa Santos, 2007; De Sousa Santos and Meneses, 2009, Smith, 1999).
Part 3: Disability and Difference in Ghana and Tanzania

1. Normative Assumptions, the Built Environment, Learning Support and Self-advocacy

The eleven disabled students interviewed talked mainly about the support they received or lacked, some positive experiences, the problems they faced accessing education, poor facilities for disabled students, negative attitudes, prejudice and socio-cultural exclusion. Some talked about being different while growing up and the importance of education to help mitigate the social and material effects of disability. One of the most common motivations for students to enter higher education in the study of Ghana and Tanzania was their desire to ‘become a somebody’. This was especially the case for disabled students who were keen to demonstrate capacity and achievement in societies that dismissed their human potential. For example, instead of being compartmentalised as ‘poor’ or ‘disabled’, professional status can mean reclassification as a lawyer, teacher or doctor (Roberts et al. 2004).

Many findings in this two-country study of Ghana and Tanzania were commensurate with earlier UK studies. For example, Tinklin and Hall (1999) identified obstacles in five areas in relation to higher education:

- Entrance to higher education;
- Access to information;
- The physical environment;
- Assumptions of 'normality';
- Levels of awareness.
One of the central findings from the study was the way in which the built environment was designed solely with persons without disabilities in mind. This created the obvious access barriers, and impeded independence, as disabled students had to rely on peer support in order to engage with their environment.

I am facing difficulties because of my condition. In our building there is no elevator lifts so whenever I have to use the computer rooms, they're up stairs, so I cannot go there. So the problem, I have to use some friends they have to go there and borrow books for me or ask them about computers. They’re trying to bring them down in the ground floor so this is the first problem I have been facing. Other problem is the latrines. Latrines you can find some doors are very small, so I can never turn inside there. So there’re challenges we’ve been facing possibly from last year till now (Male, mature student, private university, Tanzania).

Lack of physical and social access for disabled young people to basic education was a major barrier to creating a pool of appropriately qualified students to enter higher education (Croft, 2010). This feature of sub-Saharan African education combined with the lack of accessible infrastructure prevented disabled students from entering higher education (Chataika, 2010):

The disabled... the issue of the infrastructure may also limit enrolment of these students. Some qualified -very few, qualified but like those people with physical disability look at the physical infrastructure and all along you say that they are not appropriate. So infrastructure development is also been a limitation to accommodate some of these students (Male academic, public university, Tanzania).
There were some clearly stated connections between the built environment and barriers to learning. The library, science laboratories and many classrooms were only accessible by stairs:

*Myself I can say that there are difficulties which I face because of how I am disabled...yah... so during the rainy season of course my legs pain much, so at that time I feel difficult because am supposed to go to the Chemistry Lab to make the practicals because without practicals we are not allowed to proceed with another lecturer. At that time, of course I feel difficult, more difficulties* (Female student, public university, Tanzania).

*One big problem we have here as students we need to study but the library as it is constructed actually we don’t have access to books ...because it has some upstairs that we have to climb that restricts people with disabilities to access to some books* (Male, low SES student, public university, Tanzania).

*There are some lecture rooms some students fail to attend lecture there because some upstairs some can fail to climb to go up* (Male student, public university, Tanzania).

Lack of attention to inclusive, universal architectural design was also noted:

*Another thing is about the environment of this school of course is not good for the disabled people, students...Because let us say library. There is these stairs but we have the disabled students, which they don’t walk and therefore that... at least when there is...I don’t know who designed it in the first place* (Female student, public university, Tanzania).
The problem of overcrowded classrooms, lack of seating and standing space and poor acoustics were especially difficult for disabled students:

*And even during the lectures, lecture rooms we are too many especially in Education. When you come late they decided to be in back bench which is very difficult to hear well and this is so difficult…* (Female student, public university, Tanzania).

It was believed that the prestigious public universities should model good practice for the whole sector:

*First of all I think as your focus is on enrolment, then just to recommend the environment to be well-structured to allow a person with disability to join, because this is a mother university, a public university... So the university should put good strategies of admitting a person with disability serving them because to this moment there are no facilities for those with physical mobility who cannot move. We are facing a lot of problems. The environment is not user-friendly for a person with disability, not enough specialists* (Male student, public university, Tanzania).

Problems with the built environment and normative assumptions about physical mobility involved residential as well as teaching accommodation:

*But when I reached the room to find out we stay four of us, and then I was supposed to stay on the upper bed of the double decker, I looked at it ‘my God! I cannot use the upper bed?’*
There were some who decided to shift so that we can exchange, truly when I remember a lot those things, I feel so happy (Female student, private university, Tanzania).

Madriaga (2007) found that without information to make informed choices, disabled students in his UK study not only experience stress and anxiety, but also difficulty in preparing themselves for higher education study. Lack of information about support services was a constant theme in the study of Ghana and Tanzania. It was not always clear to disabled students who was responsible for analysing needs and facilities or what entitlements or rights were available to them e.g. the legal notion of reasonable accommodation. The void was often filled by the students themselves:

But the environment of course is not good. It is good for the able-bodied but not for the people with disability... yah... And that because I was two years leader of disabled students most of the time they come with that problem... even myself I experience that but not much because myself I can walk... but others... ...(Female, mature student, public university, Tanzania).

As Karangwa (2008) reported in Rwanda, the absence of institutional interventions meant that support was often provided by peer communities in the case study universities in Ghana and Tanzania:

First of all I was given accommodation from first year to fourth year because as a physically handicapped student and I used to be with my fellows there to help me but to
some extent, for instance, to fetch some water there it was a problem. So I used to get support through that...my fellow student... my room mate.... the warden does not provide that. ... The warden is there just to give us accommodation as it is indicated from room allocation... (Male, mature student, public university, Tanzania).

Agency and self-advocacy were strong themes, suggesting that disabled students needed to be especially resourceful and resilient:

What I think myself that people with disabilities have to fight they to have to fight for their own rights and that is what we were doing (Male, low SES student, public university, Tanzania).

Powerlessness and frustration were expressed by several disabled students. What appeared to be missing was a seamless system that provided the necessary support and had the crucial institutional mechanisms in place to ensure that the support was in fact received. Equality models should recognise that there are necessary ‘special measures’ needed to ensure equality. Equality is not about treating everyone exactly the same but about providing equal opportunity towards equality i.e. levelling the playing fields. The absence of this support or understanding of disability equality meant that disabled students were often pushed into the equality model of individual grievance procedures and complaints, rather than supported by predictive institutional measures and duties:

When I was first year, hall two but was upstairs. It was difficult for me and fourth third
Year and fourth year I was at hall seven which was sometimes good for me to access various environments. I wrote a letter to complain. I exchanged the room with the lower stairs with a certain student who was living at the lower stairs (Male, mature student, public university, Tanzania).

The support that did exist was often difficult to locate, and unfortunately named:

*The University Association of the Handicapped.* I joined it in two thousand and six. When I was in third year... it provides various services such as seminars to promote those students with physical handicaps and sometimes those who are blind. It co-ordinates those students with various handicaps. I didn't know it but I came to realize when I was in third year... It was there but to me I was not I was not familiar with that kind of association (Male, mature student, public university, Tanzania).

The use of language is important in challenging inequalities, as disadvantaged groups have experienced centuries of negative labelling. Terms like ‘handicapped’ and ‘special education’ have been replaced with less pejorative constructs of ‘disability’ and ‘inclusive education’ in many national locations. These represent paradigm shifts in how disability is conceptualised. However, the former terms were sometimes used in this study:

*There are people who are handicapped which I think are under-represented... well the University is trying. We see blind people in the campus, we see people who may be disadvantaged, who are living in campus... But am not sure if they are doing enough for*
that...am not sure if the Government is doing enough, am sure there are others out there who probably could have come here. Maybe they are well intelligent but maybe they couldn’t come here ... I don’t think we have really facilities for these people (Female academic staff, public university, Tanzania)

The handicapped they need special arrangements ...where they are staying, in the dormitories there will have to be something special.... we have to start thinking about them (Male academic staff, private university, Tanzania).

Tinklin and Hall (1999) found that in their UK study, students’ experiences in higher education—whether good or bad—depended to a great extent on the level of awareness of the members of staff they came into contact with. The same applied in Ghana and Tanzania. Support seemed precarious and often only a result of helpful, empathetic individual members of staff, as a visually impaired student explained:

Maybe let me start with the incident that made me sad, almost nearly to cry. Once I joined the University ...I stayed for 3 months without getting the assisting devices ... the typing machine, tape recorder so I was attending class without any assisting device/ learning device in my first year class and what I decided was just to struggle and see those top management of University- by that time it was the Prof of Undergraduate Studies... I presented the issue to him of missing those facilities. He was good and he called upon those top officials ... A month later they ordered and facilities were brought but it was among the saddest time of my life because I was thinking now it is the end of my programme (Male
student, public university, Tanzania).

Unhelpful and sometimes obstructive attitudes of certain staff, lack of advocacy, resources and facilities made academic life a struggle for disabled students in Ghana and Tanzania, a finding also reported in Zimbabwe (Chataika, 2010):

There are so many things that have not been given solutions. For example, there are those typewriters that we use for our exams, they are broken down. And there were some computers but they are also not functioning. We often have meetings and we plan what needs to be done, but, now, the Head of this Unit, you can plan what needs to be done, for example, what to purchase, such as a machine, or something be purchased for you, but when he goes to the administration he goes against us and claims that the equipment [at the Unit] is not faulty. So it becomes a problem because of this person (Male student, public university, Tanzania).

For some staff, there was a fatalistic acceptance of the absence of disabled students. For them, this was not a significant group to take into consideration for planning purposes:

The accreditation board came ... so then they were looking at things like ... how accessible is our building for disabled students ... and my secretary was very annoyed. She said ‘well we don’t know, we don’t have those people ... we don’t have them that’s it!’ ... So it’s just like they’re out and we just can’t and so we don’t do it (Female academic staff, public university, Ghana).
It would be erroneous to suggest that all student experiences were negative. Sometimes support was reported positively, even though some of it could also be constructed as a form of benevolence (Matschedisho, 2007):

*Every year the administration give us money to welcome other disabled people. So we arrange the party and then we welcome others. That is the good thing because we can understand each other, through that we can understand the problem of others, and therefore they give us the special unit there at the library and called it disabled unit, so when you go there, if you have the problem you go there...they help you, they find other things for you and what, and what that is a good thing* (Female, mature student, public university, Tanzania).

When disabled students successfully encountered support, it provided a potent counterpoint to all the struggles with the built environment, lack of awareness and negative attitudes that dominated their experiences of university life.

**2. Staff and Policy Awareness**

Disability existed as discourse in both countries. Under-representation, barriers, enablers and challenges for disabled students were discussed by twenty-five academic staff in the public university, seven in the private university and three policymakers in Ghana, and by forty-two academic staff in the public university in Tanzania, twenty-five in the private university and ten policymakers in Tanzania. Exclusion was seen to start early on as a consequence of lack of inclusion in primary and secondary education. The private sector in both countries noted that
they received few applications from disabled students. It is questionable how they knew this when so few social indicators are monitored on application. However, there was awareness about how university populations did not reflect national statistics. For example, according to Slikker (2009) the disability population in Ghana is estimated at 10 percent of the total population, which equates to approximately 2.2 million people.

*I would say persons with disabilities are under represented straight up because even though we don’t have any aggregate statistics, but if you look at what we use which is the WHO figures, that’s between 7-10 percent of the population being disabled and we have far less that 10 percent of the University population being persons with disability. Even then, they are limited to certain, especially the blind students, are limited to certain subject areas, OK. They are not able to do just any subject, so they are limited. So getting to that category is the first barrier and then the fact that not many of them too have the basic education to even qualify into the University so that becomes a limitation. And then also, we don’t have too many persons at the helm of the affairs that would actually speak on behalf of persons with disability. Some people, yes, but you know how it is, nothing about us without us, we need to do it themselves at the top so they could also help influence policies that would directly affect students with disability* (Male policymaker, Ghana).

Male and female staff in both countries and both public and private sectors discussed disabled students in terms of their absence. Their views were based largely on their professional experiences and observations, rather than on any statistical analysis or strategic planning. They also classified disability as something that could be observed:
From what I see, the kind of students I teach, I think the disabled are not represented, not very much. Because in the whole program, I have been in the university for about 4 years getting to 5 years and in my department I have not seen a disabled student, for the 5 years I have been there I do not remember seeing any disabled student there (Female academic staff, public university, Ghana).

While staff had a range of observations, these were largely drawn from lived experiences, and were based on particular understandings of disability. No robust management information systems recording disability as a category of analysis in higher education appeared to exist, nor was disability formally included in widening participation policies.

3. Social Isolation, Myths and Taboos: Being ‘Other’ in Able-Bodied Communities

A key theme in the study was that disability involved being positioned as different or ‘other’. (Mature students also described these feelings). Assumptions of homogeneity meant that the ideal norm for students was young and able-bodied. For many disabled students, there had been a long history of ‘othering’ associated with educational experiences. For one, it had meant isolation and lack of voice:

I am a stammerer. I stammer ... like there is one thing I realised that, when you are growing up, people will shy away from you because nobody wants to be the friend of the stammerer or whatever it is. So as I grew up, because of that I was shy, and even if there was something in me that I if really wanted to bring out I couldn’t express because I knew
that when I brought it out I will be laughed at and probably that question will be thrown away or something like that. So I wasn’t really… that… during any primary education that way my main challenge, trying to speak up, trying to be heard. I think that was my main problem yeah (Male student, private university, Ghana).

The social isolation of people who do not conform to normative prescriptions was a constant theme:

To be honest, at home I do not have any friends... This is because when I got these problems, the friendship that I had with those that I knew became soured. So I am alone (Male student, public university, Tanzania).

Prejudice against disabled people was often associated with poor, rural communities who were isolated from modernising influences:

In my society where I come from -the Maasai- still we see people like me as bad omen and to get an opportunity to study, to get education, is difficult. (Male student, public university, Tanzania).

Superstition contributed to exclusion:

There were also some traditions where they think if you have a handicapped child there is a curse or something like that. So they don’t even want to put that child into public let
alone to encourage him or her to go to education... (Female academic staff, public university, Tanzania).

Higher education was seen as playing a role in empowering graduates to work with socio-economically disadvantaged communities to liberalise their thinking:

*If many of us decide to do something in a certain society, after sometime we’ll find that we’ve managed to change the negative mindset into positive which for sure shows one group is better than the other which is not good as in the Maasai society which sees a physically challenged person as a bad omen. And if so why s/he continue to live in our family, so what they do is to kill or to leave him/her in the forest to be eaten by wild animals and from they believe they have cleaned the bad omen and they go to celebrate* (Female mature, low SES student, private university, Tanzania).

Being visibly different can constitute considerable personal risk. Mythologies about different skin colour have led to some instances of albino killings in Tanzania:

*There is a group, which in reality has been forgotten, and everyday I like to talk about the groups of people who are physically challenged.... For example our fellows who have skin challenges, albinos are being killed - an issue which has recently brought a lot of fear in our society* (Male student, public university, Tanzania).

Fears about personal safety meant that some disabled people with felt that they had to hide from
the public gaze. This excluded them from educational opportunities: The albino issue has received political and press attention in Tanzania, as a policymaker indicated:

*The disabled too are under-represented. now that maybe well because the output from the secondary schools is low for example I was listening to debate in the parliament, the disabled were getting the budget from the Ministry of Education and Vocational Training. One speaker was saying that the Albinos are under-represented they are afraid of going to school ... they need protection and she was asking the Government to provide protection for these people to go to school and move up to secondary so that they can also join the race for higher education* (Male policymaker, Tanzania).

While students could analyse and understand, though not accept discriminatory values in societies where formal educational opportunities were scarce, they found it unacceptable to witness similar views in lecturers who were assumed to have the knowledge to support inclusion of all students. Slikker (2009) reported that disability awareness in her Ghanaian study was highest among respondents with a high level of education and disabled respondents who are members of disability organisations. However, some students reported prejudice and low knowledge bases and expectations from their university lecturers:

*Maybe something that has shocked me is the little recognition of persons with disability that I can do something is not only on the side of the students but even university staffs. They are much surprised to see a man with disability doing something, presenting a thing in a right way. I think they thought maybe he is not a human being so it’s something which*
has shocked me to see them. The mindset of people who are learned that they can be
surprised of something which is normal. Because it is on the normal set that we are human
beings because as a human being you can have a certain type of disability due to different
circumstances (Male student, public university, Tanzania).

It seemed as if even educated people characterised disabled people as too poor and
disadvantaged to study:

Actually there are some negative attitudes towards people with disabilities which are from
lecturers and our fellow students. For instance when I was joining first year I met some
lecturers whom they thought that I can’t even afford to study so, that was a challenge to
me and actually it discouraged me...because I thought that lecturers and professors and
Doctors and the whole community at the University ... can’t have that negative attitude
towards people with disabilities because.... here is where people they have...maybe a good
way of just looking at a certain ... phenomenon - maybe in a positive way and negative way,
and I thought that to them, they could even know more about people with disabilities
because there are some books which explain about people with disabilities. Yeah! (Male,
low SES student, public university, Tanzania).

Matshedisho (2007) indicated that disability in SSA is often associated with benevolence, and
this construction disempowers and positions disabled students as objects of pity and philanthropy
who lack capacity and efficacy. This was also noted in Tanzania:
Generally, now, I think there is no negative attitude towards me to many of my friends here at school, even my family, but also with my teachers. I think, even they have that negative attitude towards me... We met with lecturers here, who have negative attitude towards us. ... they didn’t even know that people with disabilities can even manage to study. They thought that we can’t do anything. They discouraged us very much because if you need some assistance or any assistance from your lecturer, if you approach him/her, they put their hands in their pocket to take some thing to give you, maybe money. Some of them, they told us especially me ‘today I don’t have anything please would you come tomorrow?’ Or ‘would you come later?’ So, this shows that, people with disabilities can’t join the university. They can’t study and they can’t perform...So, staffs, teachers and students, some of our fellow students felt very painful. Some they were explaining to me that we are very sad to see you at school, were just crying everyday (Male, low SES student, public university, Tanzania).

Disability was associated with constraints, misrecognition and frustration and exclusion e.g. of student voices, and this had an impact on educational performance:

But if you look... in general you find that there are some people who can restrict maybe you cannot provide your knowledge to people. You are restricted ... you can refer maybe here at the University ...we are free really to give out our views .... Even if we give out our views, for instance especially people with disabilities here ...we are not considered and this can lead us not to receive in a good way...or you find that we don’t perform well (Male student, public university, Tanzania).
These accounts suggest that disabled students had to take the responsibility for educating others about their needs and identities. They were persistently acting to counter misinformation, misrecognition and structural and attitudinal disempowerment.

4. Disability as a Challenge to Overcome: The Transformative Potential of Education

Students reported mixed educational experiences of growing up with disabilities. One student recalled teacher encouragement and support in primary school:

> Whether it’s because of my ... disability or something but they (the teachers) ... related to me more ... so I was actually enjoying (primary school)...those days when I go to form two ... they were forcing me to write a common entrance so that I could go to ... the secondary school and I actually didn’t want to go to secondary school at that time (Female, mature student, public university, Ghana).

Disability was sometimes a motivator to succeed, as educational attainment was a way of countering negative identities:

> You know what, once you have a problem it will make you work better so that you can fix that problem, you know. I am a disabled, I have to study hard, even people who are normal can understand ‘ooh even a disabled student can work with this, yes, that’s good’. Now they will exclude you from the people who can’t and put you in the people who can...Of course it’s a challenge, a very big challenge (Male student, public university, Tanzania).

The transformative potential of education- at all levels- but particularly for socio-disadvantaged
groups - was a recurring theme in the study:

Some of my teachers were encouraging me ... and actually looking at me being physically challenged but there isn’t anything I could do...unless ... I go to school...so that also motivated me to ... do what I’m doing now (Female mature student, public university, Ghana).

The intersection of disability and age is a common theme in the Global North. In the Global South, disability is frequently intersected with poverty (DFID. (2000):

For example currently there is not any system which people with physical challenges can have affirmative action to get probably loan from the Government, there isn’t. There is not any system which can help this student with physical challenges. For example, in primary or even secondary, to have education without any problem because these are the same who will be chased for not being able to pay school fees. I have learned that many people with physical challenges are coming from poor families.

And because of this, many families have failed to send them to school because first they see clearly their eating income is difficult. Because also even that family do not have education, it sees, even if the family has money, is the wastage of money...

Now your energy should be focused on this special group of people with physical challenges which has been forgotten in the society (Female, mature, low SES student, private university, Tanzania).
Discrimination against disabled students can involve either treating them less favourably than other people, or failing to make a reasonable adjustment thereby placing them at a substantial disadvantage compared to other people for a reason relating to their disability (Disability Rights Commission, 2002). However, educational attainment was also perceived as an antidote to discrimination and prejudice, with disabled people’s achievements having the potential to change people’s negative attitudes:

In my first class, when I joined first year, under those difficult environments I was assigned some cases to present in the class. What I did was I went to the library with my friend, he read them for me then I presented there. Everyone was surprised and it was a challenge that if this blind person can do this what about me?! Most of them, of course, they approached me telling me the same thing, ‘how have you managed within this single time that you can stand in front of people and present cases nicely?’ Of course, it was a challenge, not even to them, but even my lecturers who assigned me those cases. And of course, it changed most of the students and it made them to be close to me (Male student, public university, Tanzania).

Some students noted particular agents of support who valued and encouraged educational success:

My mum. She used to encourage and congratulate me... even my brother... they are such kind people who encouraged and influenced me to study up to this level. I am really thankful to them. Generally, I thank my family because even with the discrimination that
was existing, sometimes even my mother was discriminated because of my disability... she used to tell me “my daughter study hard, all of these will one day come to an end”.

Nowadays we [my mother and I] remember that time of discrimination and we are just happy for my achievement (Female, mature, low SES student, private university, Tanzania).

Physical impairment could mean the inability to earn a living from manual labour, leaving mental labour/ knowledge work as an option:

It was the year 2000; one eye started getting problems and finally lost vision completely... I was at home at that period. The eye could not see completely. I even went to Dodoma, there was a German Doctor, but he told me that the eye had no cure. When I came back, with one eye having lost sight completely, the other eye began having problems. The first eye also began hurting a lot. I then used to go to hospital and they would give me painkillers. But it reached a point where even if I use drugs the pain does not cease, and when it was examined, they said there is no alternative except to take it out. So in 2001 one eye was removed. After that I saw that the only option for my life was to study (Male student, public university, Tanzania).

Education was perceived as having a cascading or multiplier effect:

In addition, due to the reason that I am disabled and the way my society perceived my disability... that also influenced me to study due to the discrimination that was existing... that she cannot do anything and I was not supposed to belong to that society. That was a
challenge and a force to me that I have to be educated so as one day to come and educate my society. I am grateful that what I have been aiming to is what I am doing now (Female mature, low SES student, private university, Tanzania).

School enrollment for disabled people in SSA is between five to ten percent. Many disabled children and young people around the world are denied sustained access to basic education. According to Croft (2010), some never enter school, others start but make poor progress eventually ‘dropping out’, and a relatively small proportion are educated in a parallel system of ‘special’ schools, running alongside mainstream schools. Disabled informants in this study often reported a lifetime of effort to access formal education. When they did, it was often segregated and stigmatised. The experiences and negative labelling of disabled children in Ghana’s schools has received some critical attention (Agbenyega, 2003). An issue that some informants raised was how their disability disrupted their formal schooling:

Because of my disability I was moving from place to place ... they took me to ... one of the disabled schools...so I stayed there for about one year- moved to this place- moved to the other place before ... which makes it very difficult for studying ... if you are shifting ... from one place. and always having to make new friends...there wasn’t anything {my mother} could do about it you know ... she was told to take me to that place, and she was then a single mother so she had to leave me with my aunties ...so I went to my aunty ... stayed there for some time before coming to here (Female, mature student, public university, Ghana).
Children’s labour is sometimes an important contribution to the family economy - particularly in rural agricultural and subsistence economies. This can deter families from sending children - including those with disabilities - to school. A student described how he was integrated into the labour of his rural community, but discouraged from going to school:

I would like to take this opportunity to thank my grandmother, relatives, and my uncles. Because they treated me like other kids. I was performing any kind of activities...we are just taking cows to..... we call them to pastures. We are taking them there. I was not even feeling that am different to my fellow so I was very happy with that life and I grew like that until I reached the age of thirteen when I decided to join standard one but they discouraged that ... going to school (Male student, public university, Tanzania).

For some staff, disability and rural communities seemed to be falling outside of the Education for All initiatives:

The constitution says that everybody has a right to an education. And if it says everybody, there is no exemption for those who are disabled... But you go to the rural area and you will see that we have a lot of them whom even basic education they have not had it. So it means that one way or the other the Government has failed them....If some of the abled are not in school then when you come to the disabled it is going to be even more difficult....So we have to look at the monitoring again. You see that the year we have set for ourselves 2015, by then that everybody should have an education will come to pass (Male academic public university, Ghana).
Higher education was perceived as a way of enhancing capacity and capital. It also has transformative potential for ‘spoiled’, or stigmatised identities (Green, 2007). Some students reported how disability was associated with what they could not do - especially if this involved being visible in highly interactive professions such as teaching:

*I am trying to decide on my own... without regarding that I am a disabled or not. Yes, even being a teacher, some of my friends said ‘no, you cannot do this, you cannot do teaching, you are disabled! How can you stand at a board for a long time? You cannot do this, you know’. What is to do? You just go and exchange the programme, you go and ask the Dean of Faculty that you want to shift to what, to Economics... what, B.Com? .I said ‘no let me be there, let me be there’. I hope I can teach* (Male student, public university, Tanzania).

Students with physical disabilities reported how it was assumed that this included cognitive impairment:

*We have to ...to educate people.... if you face people who have negative attitude towards you and yourself.....you are competent that you can manage then you have to educate them, that is what I tried my best when I faced people whom I thought ... that they have negative attitude towards me. I told many, many of them that I can manage to do this; I can manage even to...... to study! I can manage to do..... each and everything but the only problem which we have is just maybe running..... because if you are physically disabled, for instance, you are not mentally disabled. Your brain works well so, that is what I tried to educate people even some ...some of my teachers I met them I told them like that.., my*
friends, so through that I managed to get many friends whom initially they thought that I can’t even manage to study (Male, low SES student, public university, Tanzania).

The responsibility of positive role modelling was also reported:

Of course my target here is just to make it known to them that even people who are disabled can do something so that I have been trying to cope to be in closer relationship with each and everyone whom I am blessed to come closer to (Male student, public university, Tanzania).

Entering education was perceived as a major triumph over adversity and a public re-badging of stigmatised and spoiled identities.

5. Analysing Needs

When asked about their support needs, disabled students in Ghana and Tanzania, like those in Namibia (Haihambo, 2008), were very clear and articulate. A visually impaired student was keen to be independent from readers who had to read all his set texts out loud to him. He wanted more impersonal and less humiliating technological support:

First of all, I think there is a need to improve the means of getting materials and relevant things. This can be done by getting a very big embosser which can convert those materials in a short time. And we can get them before time. And the use of other modern devices because there is no need of using these readers... We have computers, we have those things
that can read out from the computer those legal books or the books needed are in Braille prints. There is no need to use readers (Male student, public university, Tanzania).

A commonly expressed need was for more strategic and systematic support for disabled students:

So I believe if these people are given education and even for those physically challenged the government to put a strategic plan to provide them with education, truly it will help them (Female, mature, low SES student, private university, Tanzania).

Needs also related to materials, specialist staff, adapting the built environment and a more disabled-friendly ethos:

Shortage of learning facilities for people with disabilities, these absence of books which are converted into Braille, shortage of specialists, these are what I can say and the harshness of the environment because the environment at the university is not the one I expected. I thought maybe the environment is so friendly to a person with disability (Male student, public university, Tanzania).

Often, minor adaptations were thought to be able to make a significant difference:

At that cafeteria you know there is these disabled they come with that Bajaj and then they seat them aside looking for the follen (queue). Of course I proposed that why you don’t select people supposed to look for that disabled students instead of this... Somebody should
not have to stand up when they stay in the follen(queue) why?... I think that is the other thing. And the other I see, about the lecture rooms, there are not enough. I don’t know, I can say like that... you know let us say in this period of Education in Science subjects there is no problem of course we are 24, we are 15, we are very few, but in Education subjects we are many...(Female, mature student, public university, Tanzania).

Professional development of staff - particularly in relation to the legislative framework and disability awareness training - was seen as a priority:

We have two Laws talking about a person with disability but they never trouble themselves in looking through them or trying to find the rights for a person with the disability. So I think one way of changing the society or the system is to put this (special education) a compulsory topic in those faculties where it is possible to be fixed ... and maybe the university staff to be given seminars and workshops to understand about the causes of disability, who is a disabled person and how to work with a person with disability, or how can they help Liberating this increasing group (Male student, public university, Tanzania).

The need for policies, awareness-raising and implementation of legislation, inclusive design, allocated resources, staff training and effective needs analysis, information and consultation were seen as priority areas for development by all the disabled students in the research sample.
6. Summary

Globally, participation rates in higher education are rising, but a range of social groups are still excluded in many national locations, including Ghana and Tanzania. While awareness about exclusion and equalities is developing, disability is a structure of inequality that has not yet received significant policy or research attention in higher education in low-income countries. There is still much to do in relation to gender and socio-economic status too. However, gender, in relation to women’s access and participation in higher education has begun to be a priority for international policy frameworks and donor communities (Bloom and Rosovsky, 2000). The part that higher education can play in poverty alleviation is also beginning to receive policy and research attention (Morley et al. 2010; UNESCO, 2009a). There are always questions about correlation and causation, but it is possible that these policy discourses have combined with the work of social movements and NGOs to create some discursive space e.g. for reflecting on women’s access and achievement in higher education in SSA (Morley et al., 2006: 2010).

However, gender is rarely intersected with other structures of inequality such as disability, SES, ethnicity or age. Nor is gender mainstreamed yet into every aspect of higher education services (Morley, 2010). However, there have been some observable quantitative gains. Female enrolment, as well as overall expansion, is noteworthy (UNESCO, 2009b). Now is the time to create a similar international policy and research momentum for disability, and to intersect it with a range of other inequalities.

The lessons from the study in Ghana and Tanzania suggest that equality interventions need to ensure full and effective participation and inclusion of diverse social groups. Much of the equalities infrastructure that has been put in place to mainstream gender – particularly in East
African countries e.g. the collection of gender disaggregated statistics, sensitisation programmes and affirmative action initiatives (Kwesiga and Ssendiwala, 2006; Lihamba et al, 2006) needs to be reviewed to include consideration of other structures of inequality including socio-economic status, ethnicity and disability. The study of Ghana and Tanzania, like those from the Global North, suggests that the design of higher education environments, programmes and services should ensure that they are usable by all people, to the greatest extent possible, without the need for adaptation or specialised design. The development of inclusive higher education requires resources that many low-income countries do not have. Hence, the crucial role of the international community in supporting initiatives for change.

Disability is a complex and contested construct. Disability- restricted activity—should be understood as the product of multiple bio-psycho-social forces (Thomas, 2004). Ultimately, disability is about power - to define, participate and make decisions. As this report has demonstrated, there is a persistent toxic correlation between disability and poverty. Although not officially included in the Millennium Development Goals, higher education, as a knowledge hub, is powerfully placed to contribute to the achievement of all the goals. It has the potential to help to uncouple disability and poverty by enhancing the human capital of disabled people and also by producing and disseminating knowledge and skills for social and technical innovation and change. Knowledge can be generated to challenge prejudice and negative attitudes towards disabled people in wider society, and to develop forms of technical support that enhance the quality of life for disabled people. In a globalised knowledge economy, the value of higher education needs to be seen in terms of social justice, wealth distribution and poverty alleviation as well as wealth creation.
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http://www.educationengland.org.uk/documents/warnock/


Further Resources

- “Sign Design Guide” by Peter Barker and June Fraser. Published by the Sign Design Society and the RNIB. A practical guide to accessible signage and wayfinding.
- “Colour and Contrast Guide (T21027)” A CD available from Dulux Trade providing guidance on the use of colour to assist people with visual impairments