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Why Social Isolation is a Greek term to the disabled Kenyans: Author Mugambi Paul

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Several studies indicate that in an emergency person who are disabled, aged and who have chronic illnesses are mostly left behind and most at risk [Help age 2012, HI 2019, UN 2020, WHO 2020].

This is because persons without disabilities will be fighting and running away for their fate. As evidenced many Kenyans have started to go back to the rural places.

As a public policy scholar and with lived experience of being disabled and advocate for inclusive approaches in both humanitarian and development spheres.

I am concerned on the current and future effects of Corona on lives of disabled Kenyans and chronically ill people who are currently falling into cracks.

In other words, they are

being hit and particularly hard by the virus outbreak and access to support services seem to be becoming scarce and finally

will be cut as the crisis worsens.

Evidently, in Nairobi and other major towns Panic buying of cereals, groceries, toilet papers, hand sanitizers and other protective equipment, which also disabled and chronic ill people need have suddenly doubled the prices and also have started to be scarce.

I observe, Kenyans without disabilities and who can stockpile are the ones who are probably less at risk because they were able to rush out to the shops, whereas a lot of disabled Kenyans like me, elderly, and persons with chronic illnesses just can't get these commodities.

This is coupled with high poverty levels among the disabled Kenyans.

On the other hand, the Cabinet secretary of Health gave a directive prioritizing the elderly and persons with disabilities in the queuing system in the supermarket [daily nation Friday March 2020]

This pronouncement shows that disabled persons have started to be brought in in Corona conversations though much needs to be done in order not to live us behind. If this directive will be followed, we are yet to see.

Could the Kenyan supermarket borrow a leaf from Tesco in the United Kingdom or supermarkets in Australia?

In both nations they have reasonable accommodation for ensuring disabled persons, elderly and persons with chronic illnesses are able to shop comfortable and provision of delivery for those with large shopping.

The Corona virus has equalized us all and it has led to the realization that what works for all works for disabled too] UN 2006 UNDP 2017 ILO 2019 Whiteford 2019].

Dilemma of social distance: you

Social distancing is not an option for disabled Kenyans. The Kenyan government and more so the ministry of health and disability stakeholders need to go back to the drawing board in order to address the needs and priorities of disabled Kenyans so that we can have inclusive corona interventions.

Of course, many Kenyans with out disabilities take things for granted. This is because most will never fit in to our shoes till when they join our disability club.

For instance, Kenyans with a disability, who rely on care givers and support workers for daily living and sighted guide services including washing and dressing.

I am talking about people with spinal cord injuries, muscular dystrophy, cerebral palsy, sometimes people with intellectual disability, psychosocial disability, the elderly, Down syndrome,

that might need assistance with showering, with going to the toilet.

Moreover, social stigma in Kenya is still ripe,

Shoppers who are blind and vision impaired will not get sighted guided assistance in the shopping spree due to the continued pronouncement by Kenyan government that we should be one metre point five away and avoid handshakes.

in case the president issues an executive order of total or partial lock down, I observe the disabled will be worst hit even withing there local surroundings.

Did you know most of the local shopping areas are highly squeezed and have low ventilation?

How will my fellow wheelchair users avoid assistance not being close while many of the wheelchairs in Kenya are manual?

Furthermore, some disabled creep on the floors!

How will they shopwith out contacts?

Most Kenyan roads are inaccessible how will the Blind and vision impaired avoid falling in to ditches and trenches?

Our independence and self esteiem by the use of assistive divides is being questioned!

How can this non handshake apply to mobility impaired persons like Blind, Crutch users, wheelchair users?

Does the Cabinet secretary of Health and policy makers know our devices are metallic?

What if the care giver is infected and need to self-isolate?

This will make Disabled persons become at higher risk,

Additionally, the actual time and effort of finding somebody else, finding the right person that's going to fit, as well

as then training someone up from scratch again, is a huge effort for people with very high support needs who are going to be in that really high-risk category. The ministry of health needs to train its front-line staff on basic disability inclusion tips

Why are the disability sector and stakeholders silent as the lack of disability inclusive Corona continues?

Are they contributing to uninterrupted discrimination and injustice to the larger wanjikus with disabilities?

I suppose they are hiding and later after the Corona era is over, they will claim we were left behind!

The Kenyan media should rise to the occasion and speak on behalf of the disabled Kenyans and persons with chronic illnesses.

Contribution by disability sector:

The disability sector, human right bodies and other policy stakeholders have the role to monitor and report the government organs on the said implementation.

This is actually time for disabled experts, disabled persons organizations, human right bodies state organs practising disability mainstreaming should contribute to more inclusive Corona interventions.

What if the Kenyan disabled stakeholders changed tact and start to advocate for now the silent revolution of reasonable accommodation being implemented?

To put it differently why doesn't the disability sector join the table instead of awaiting to be in the menu?

I opine, Kenya has great public policies on reasonable accommodation now is the right time to, push for implementation.

let me illustrate

What if the disability sector and stakeholders pushed the national construction authority now to publish and implement real accessibility standards of buildings?

Most likely we shall have makeshift hospitals. Will they be accessible?

Why don't the disability stakeholders within their budgets adjust and contribute to the ministry of health on inclusive approaches?

For instance, developing Kenyan sign language clip on how to prevent Corona virus then distribute to the mainstream media and social platforms?

Why don't the disability stakeholders produce material into braille and distribute all over the country through the free matter for the blind service offered by poster corporation as entrenched in the persons with disabilities act 2003?

Does the disability sector know the time is now for implementing the Marrakesh treaty?

Could the global commitment made by Kenya government, private sector and disability stakeholders be revisited in the area of innovation and make non-metallic assistive devices?

All in all, **this coronavirus comes with a silver lining. At least, it will pep up people to take normal civic sense to a higher status. So that besides coronavirus**

we actually end up also fighting other issues like discrimination faced by Kenyans with this will lead to breaking some if not all the barriers that disabled Kenyans face.

The views expressed here are for the author and do not represent any agency or organization.

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