

DISABILITY-INCLUSIVE EDUCATION & EMPLOYMENT
UNDERSTANDING THE EXPERIENCES OF YOUNG MEN
AND WOMEN WITH DISABILITIES
GHANA



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About this report

This report was developed by the International Centre for Evidence in Disability at the London School of Hygiene & Tropical Medicine, and University of Ghana, in partnership with the Mastercard Foundation.

The report aims to inform Mastercard Foundation's disability and inclusion programming and strategy development. It draws on in-depth qualitative interviews with young men and women with disabilities, exploring their lived experiences related to education and employment in Ghana. This report is a part of a series developed for each of the seven countries for this project *Disability-Inclusive Education & Employment: (1) Country brief: Ghana; and (2) Understanding the context: Ghana.*

Contributors



The London School of Hygiene & Tropical Medicine (LSHTM) is a world-leading centre for research and postgraduate education in public and global health.

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The International Centre for Evidence in Disability (ICED) provides evidence to improve the wellbeing of people with disabilities globally.

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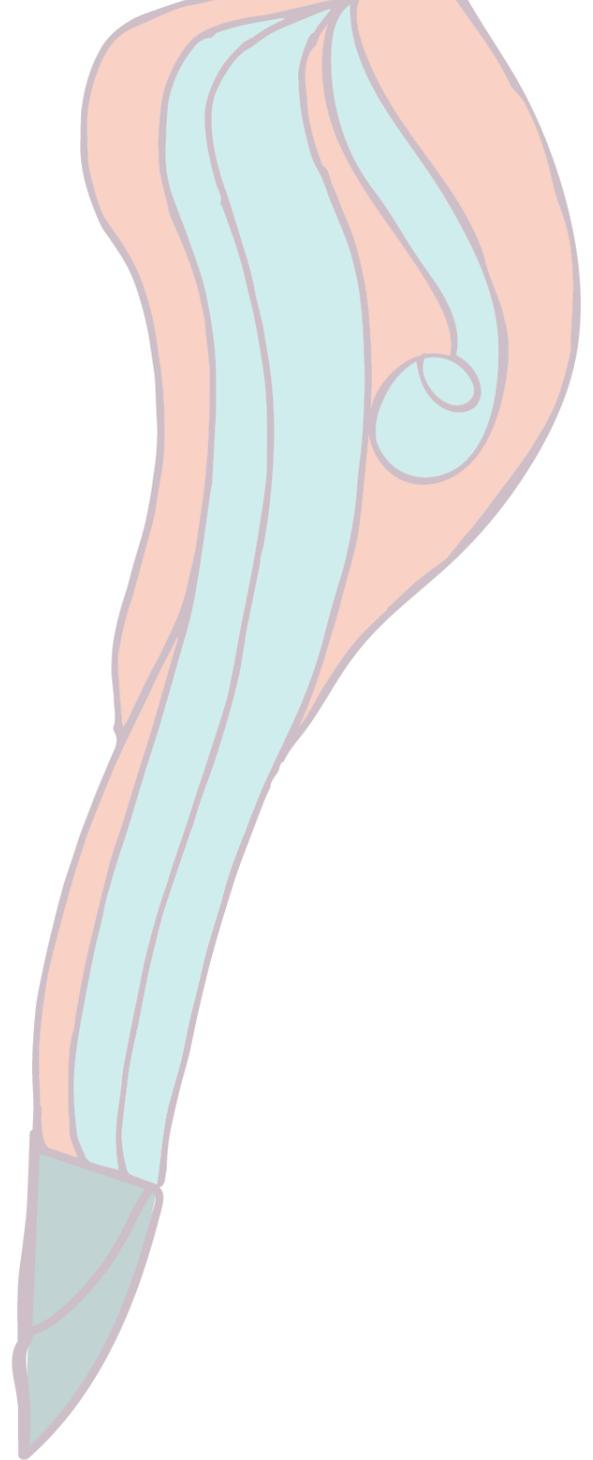
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Disability-Inclusive Education and Employment: Understanding the experiences of young men and women Ghana

Executive Summary

- This research explored the lived experiences of young men and women with disabilities in Ghana through in-depth interviews with 30 young persons with disabilities. The research was guided by a youth advisory committee of another eight Ghanaian youth with disabilities. The participants included a mix of individuals with various disabilities (including physical, visual, hearing, psychosocial, and intellectual impairments, as well as albinism), aged 15-35 years, based in urban and rural parts of Ghana. Participants were purposively selected to reflect varied access to education and vocational training, and employment in the agricultural and the digital sectors.
- Participants reported navigating numerous barriers in their attempts to access education, including difficulties identifying appropriate schools, and managing the costs of education. The Disability Common Fund was found to be a source of support, though financial barriers to education remained for youth with some types of impairments.
- Young people's experiences in education were mainly shaped by the inaccessibility of school infrastructure, few accommodations in schools, and a general lack of inclusive teaching practices. Although these provisions are the responsibility of education providers, in their absence, peers were identified as a source of informal support.
- Most young people with disabilities faced challenges securing employment due to limited opportunities and skills, and discriminatory attitudes from employers. Many undertook vocational training, but the options available to them varied by type and severity of impairment, with people with severe intellectual or communication impairments being less likely to be accepted by vocational training centres.
- Youth with disabilities engaged in work in the agriculture sector faced challenges including those related to type of impairment (such as youth with physical impairments relying on hired labourers for strenuous tasks) and reported needing financial support to realise their ambitions of increased participation in agriculture.
- Youth with disabilities showed great interest in the digital sector. Those engaged in the field reported needing wider access to training, digital equipment and tools, and financial support.
- Access to assistive products and to digital skills training were noted as facilitating factors in education and employment. Support from family members, friends, and peers were also strong enablers of participation.
- Many youth participants had experienced stigma including negative attitudes and stereotypes, bullying, and discrimination, as well as exclusion in education and employment settings. Drivers of stigma included a lack of awareness of the capabilities of youth with disabilities among individuals without disabilities.
- This study also explored the intersectionality of other factors in shaping youth experiences of education and employment. The visibility of a person's impairment influenced how they were perceived and treated by the community. Additionally, women with disabilities experienced compounded discrimination as both disability and gender carry forms of marginalisation and stigma.

- The extent of voice and agency among the young people with disabilities varied with the type of their impairment (such as family members not knowing sign language), family dynamics (such as being an older sibling), and ability to contribute to household finances.
- The evidence indicates a gap between young people's aspirations and the opportunities available to them. This gap was mostly attributable to financial barriers to participation.
- Recommendations arising from this research include the need to strengthen educational institutions and support teachers to better deliver inclusive education; improve policy implementation to increase inclusion of persons with disabilities in education and employment; improve opportunities for young people with disabilities to access assistive products and digital skills; increase efforts to create awareness and sensitise communities to address drivers of stigma; and deliver a wider range of interventions and financial support options which match the aspirations of young people with disabilities with opportunities.

Source: Behance/Ewoud Bon



Introduction

About disability

According to the United Nations Conventions on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (UNCRPD) people with disabilities 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.”* [1]

Estimates suggest that there are 1 billion people (15% of the world’s population) living with a disability globally [2]. People with disabilities often experience barriers to accessing education and employment and this can cement cycles of poverty and exclusion [2, 3]. Globally, people with disabilities also face marginalisation in other aspects of society [2].

Research in Sub-Saharan Africa shows that with the right support, people with disabilities can achieve economic success. Investing in education and employment for people with disabilities should be part of development efforts, as based on an economic rationale, as well as social justice [4].

Disability in Ghana

In Ghana, it is estimated that nearly 8% of the population experience varying degrees of difficulty in performing activities [5]¹. This is higher among females (8.8%) than males (6.7%). Significant rural and urban differences also exist; while 6.5% of people in urban areas have varying degrees of difficulty in performing activities, almost 10% of their rural counterparts experience the same. Further, compared with people without disabilities, there is evidence to show that people with disabilities in Ghana have poorer access to educational and economic opportunities [6] and are at greater risk of poverty [7].

Disability policy context in Ghana

The rights of persons with disabilities are acknowledged in key education and employment policies and legislations in Ghana [8]. In 2006 for example, the Persons with Disabilities Act (2006) was enacted to promote the rights and inclusion of people with disabilities. The aim was to eliminate discrimination on the basis of disability and foster inclusion of the rights of persons with disabilities in all developmental issues including those in education and employment [9]. To provide economic and social support for persons with disabilities, the Disability Common Fund was initiated in 2005. It constitutes 3% of the District Assembly Common Fund, an annual fund transfer from central to local governments. The aim of the fund is to provide beneficiaries with financial support for education, income generating activities, accessing assistive products, and health care [10].

A 2018 report submitted by the Government of Ghana as part of their UNCRPD obligations, outlines efforts made to integrate the UNCRPD into their policy framework, as well as challenges with implementation [11]. Research done for Phase 1 of this project involving interviews with key stakeholders (including government agencies, Organisations of Persons with Disabilities, educators, and employers) revealed that despite a strong policy framework on disability inclusion, people with disabilities continue to experience exclusion from education and employment. Gaps in implementing, enforcing, and monitoring policy and programmes contribute to this exclusion [12].

¹ Disability is complex to measure. Differences in the way disability is measured and defined in different surveys may explain some of the variation in prevalence estimates. This includes the questions used, how they are asked and thresholds applied to define disability for the purposes of disability statistics.

Introduction

Education in Ghana

The right to education for all citizens is guaranteed in the Constitution and the Persons with Disability Act 2006. The Education Strategic Plan (2018 - 2030) states that special education schools must be established for those who cannot enrol in mainstream schools, while the Inclusive Education Policy 2015 states that education systems should be adapted for inclusive education, particularly by developing well-trained human resources [8]. The government has also completed the process of ratifying the Marrakesh Treaty on Persons with Disability. This will support persons with disabilities, especially the visually impaired to have easy access to published works [13]. This is especially important to improve access to education for persons with disabilities.

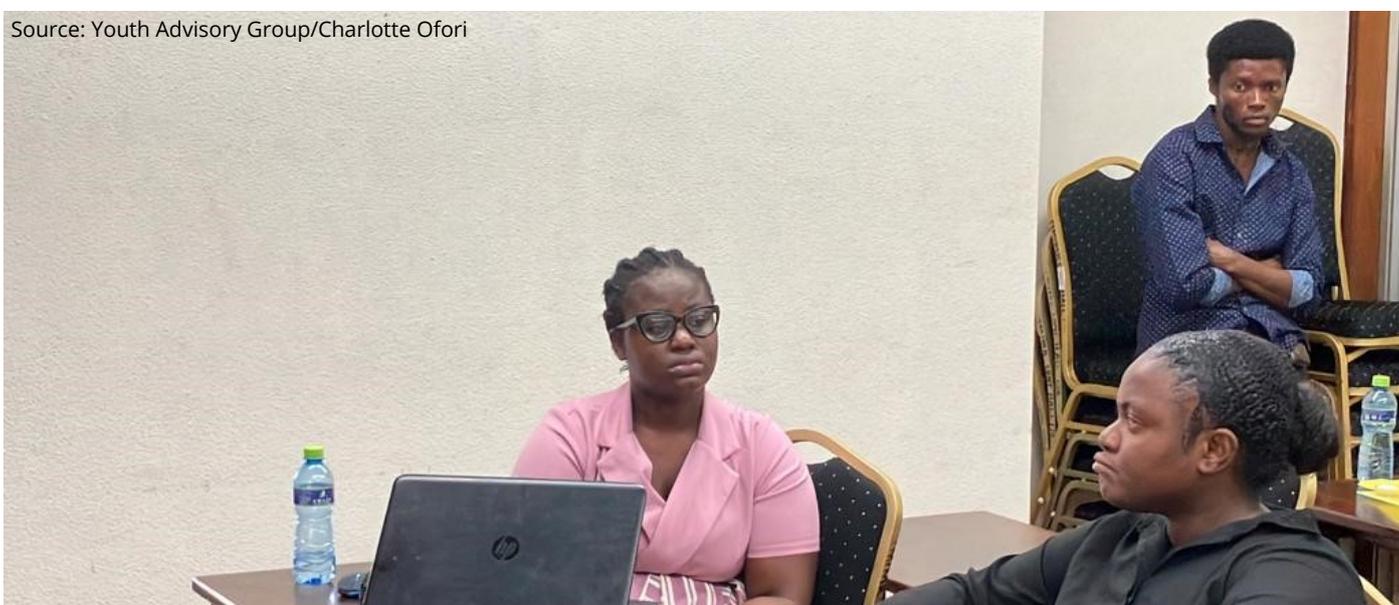
According to the 2017/18 Ghana Multiple Indicator Cluster Survey data (analysed for Phase 1 of this research), youth with disabilities were less likely to have completed junior and senior secondary education or attended tertiary education compared to their peers without disabilities [12]. For example, 38% of women with disabilities and 51% of men with disabilities completed junior secondary school compared to 57% and 67% women and men without disabilities. The same analysis indicated that youth with disabilities were more likely to be out of school (17%) compared to their peers without disabilities (8%). Overall, secondary school attendance (i.e. the proportion of individuals of secondary school age attending secondary school) was slightly lower (43%) among youth with disabilities compared to youth without disabilities (51%). These trends were similar for males and females. (See our Phase 1 report [here](#) for an in-depth analysis).

Employment in Ghana

According to estimates from the ILOSTAT database (using 2017 as reference year) [14], youth (15-29 years) with disabilities (26%) were slightly more likely to be Not in Employment, Education or Training (NEET) compared to youth without disabilities (20%). Monthly earnings for adults with disabilities, who are working, are estimated to be considerably lower (estimated to be 50% of the amount earned by peers without disabilities).

Similar to education, there are strong policies (e.g., Persons with Disability Act 2006, National Employment Policy 2015) that promote the inclusion of people with disabilities in employment. However, our Phase 1 findings indicated a lack of policy prioritisation, discriminatory practices, and insufficient funding to enable and monitor implementation of these policies [12].

Source: Youth Advisory Group/Charlotte Ofori



About this study

This study aimed to explore the lived experiences of young men and women with disabilities in Ghana, highlighting barriers, facilitators, gaps, and opportunities regarding their inclusion in education and employment. This research involved in-depth interviews with 30 young people with various disabilities (including physical, visual, hearing, psychosocial, and intellectual impairments), aged 15-35 years, based in urban and rural parts of Ghana. Regarding education, we collected data from youth with disabilities currently in formal education (secondary, tertiary, vocational), those who had received some formal education but not working, and those not in education and not working. In terms of work, the research focus for Ghana included youth with disabilities engaged in the agricultural and digital sectors.

Further details of methods, and breakdown of participant characteristics are provided in the Appendix.

Source: Sightsavers International/Jenny Matthews



Findings

The findings of this study are presented in five parts: (1) education; (2) transition from education to employment; (3) experiences in the agricultural sector; (4) experiences in the digital sector; (5) reflections on cross-cutting issues that shape the experiences of young people with disabilities in Ghana. Case studies are provided throughout the report to portray stories of selected youth participants (all names and identifiers have been replaced to preserve confidentiality and privacy).

EDUCATION

The Inclusive Education Policy of 2015 aimed to move away from segregated special education schools and instead, build an inclusive learning environment. However, as our Phase 1 research highlighted, implementation of this policy remains weak for reasons that include inadequate resources, infrastructural inaccessibility, and limited teacher training on inclusive education [12]. Inclusive education is where learners with disabilities are in classes together with learners without disabilities in mainstream schools. This differs from special education where learners with disabilities may attend some or all classes separate from non-disabled learners. Typical issues with special education schools are that they may be of poorer quality, while inclusive education, if not implemented well, may include learning material or teaching methods that are not adapted to suit a learner's impairment [15].

Out of the 30 interview participants, 4 had never attended school, 2 had stopped in primary school, and 14 had attained secondary or tertiary education. A few young people reported having dropped out of school or that they did not attend school.

Koku

Koku is a 34 year old young man with multiple impairments. He completed tertiary education at an inclusive institution that included students with different types of impairments, and they all studied alongside others without disabilities. The tertiary institution has a resource centre specifically for students with disabilities, with a focal person to coordinate their needs, such as identifying a sign language interpreter. Koku was able to use the computers in the resource centre to complete his exams because he had difficulties writing. These accommodations made for him were a key reason behind his academic achievements. He noted that it may have been his department that had these accommodations and accessibility measures, because many other buildings were not accessible.

Access to education

Findings in this section will be presented according to key stages along the journey to access education, including (i) identifying and enrolling in schools or other educational institutions; and (ii) paying for education.

Identification and enrolment

Identifying the right school was pivotal for youth with disabilities, a key decision being between inclusive education or special education. This decision to enrol a child with disabilities in an inclusive school or a special education school is shaped by factors including type and severity of impairment, availability, affordability and proximity of schools, and the level of education.

In this study, several participants with sensory impairments (hearing or visual) had attended special education schools for primary and secondary education, before some moved on to universities which were always inclusive and mainstream institutions. Some who acquired disability during schooling years reported being transferred to special education schools. A benefit of starting their educational journey in these schools included being taught impairment-specific communication and learning skills such as sign language and reading braille, which prepared them for further education.

"My highest level of education is tertiary. I completed University of [detail removed] in the year 2013. I started schooling at [detail removed] School for the Blind. I went there in 1998. I started Class 1 there. I learnt how to write in braille. This is a technological means used by those of us who are blind in writing. I started schooling from Class 1 to Class 6 and finally completed my junior high school there. We wrote the Basic Education Certificate Examination like those who are not visually impaired. I passed the exams and continued at [detail removed] Senior High for three years." (Male, 25-35 years, has a visual impairment)

In cases where the impairment was severe or compounded by multiple impairments, families struggled to identify suitable options for education for their children with disabilities, as described by a caregiver of a participant with cerebral palsy:

P: No. Because of her disability we could not send her through the normal education system. That was why we decided to send her to a special school, but she was denied admission.*

I: Did you try gaining admission for her in the subsequent year after your first attempt?*

P: No, I rather got informed of another special school which I followed up to see if I could get her to enrol. I was, however, informed that she could not be admitted because the school was for people with disabilities who already have some vocational skills and seek to improve on those skills. Since my daughter did not have any skill, we were denied admission. So, I gave up on my search to educate her.

(Caregiver of female, 25-35 years, has a physical impairment)

Exclusion from school can significantly impact disabled youth's chances to lead independent lives. For example, one participant with visual impairment, who had no formal education (for reasons she declined to say), described dependence on her siblings who had all received educational opportunities:

"I am really facing financial difficulties. Though I do get help from friends and some family members, the help is not enough to cater for the things that I need. I wish I had formal education or skills training so that I can work on my own to earn a living." (Female, under 18 years, has a visual impairment)

There were some reports of youth with disabilities being denied admission or not made to feel welcome in mainstream schools.

"The first day I entered the school, the headmistress rejected me based on my disability. The headmistress made it known to me that I have a mental problem. The headmistress insulted us. We left and went to another school where I was given an admission." (Male, 25-35 years, has a physical and mild intellectual impairment)

Overall, interviews suggest that much more targeted support is needed to help young people with disabilities and their families navigate key transition points—both into, and through education systems—and to identify facilities that accommodate their specific needs.



Source: IMF Photo/Andrew Caballero-Reynolds

Paying for education

Nearly all participants described the Disability Common Fund (DCF) as a key source of support to pay for their education. As outlined earlier, this is a social protection programme administered by local government, providing beneficiaries with financial support for education, income generating activities, health care, and assistive products [10].

I: How were you able to pay your school fees?

P: Hmm, my parents and sometimes a little support from the Disability Common Fund.

(Male, 25-35 years, has a visual impairment)

Information about the DCF and assistance in applying for it was typically provided by OPDs, community leaders, or in some cases, representatives from the Social Welfare Department.

"In terms of schooling, I received help from the Disability Common Fund for the payment of school fees. Anytime the Disability Common Fund comes, they announce it at our meetings, so I take that opportunity to apply for sponsorship." (Male, 25-35 years, has a physical and mild intellectual impairment)

More evidence is needed to better understand barriers and facilitators of accessing the DCF, but interview narratives indicated that it could be used to meet different costs associated with education, at different levels of education, and that it could be granted multiple times:

I: So, how many times were you able to get the DCF to pay your school fees?

P: I will say I have gotten about nine times to pay my school fees.

I: What about the materials you used for studying, how were you able to get them?

P: Sometimes I work to get some money to buy them. And at other times, when we write to apply for the DCF and we are able to get access to it, then I can use that to buy those things.

(Male, 25-35 years, has a physical impairment)

However, there were variations in experiences which indicate that the DCF may not adequately cover the educational costs associated with some types of impairments. This suggests that financial barriers persist for youth with disabilities, and that a range of options may be needed to address these.

"In fact, I must say that blind education is very difficult and expensive. Our materials that we use to learn, especially the braille papers, are imported from America and England. The government does not give us support in buying them. If you are not lucky to get a sponsorship, you will not be able to buy the braille and the Perkins [braille typewriter] for your notes. What is now used in the system is a laptop that you can use to type your notes and other works. So, our education is very difficult and expensive. If you don't have money, you cannot do it. Most of the visually impaired [people] are not able to go to school." (Male, 25-35 years, has a visual impairment)

Most participants reported school fees being paid, in part or fully, by their families. It was notable that there was little to no mentions of families refusing to pay for participant's education, indicating gains made in changing attitudes about the importance of education for youth with disabilities.

Experiences during education

For those youth with disabilities in Ghana who successfully navigated access to educational institutions, their experiences during education were shaped by three main factors: (i) accessibility and accommodations; (ii) teaching practices; (iii) inclusive environments. These are in addition to the other cross-cutting enablers and challenges reported under Reflections.

Accessibility and accommodations

Accessibility and reasonable accommodations are an essential component of inclusive education, as well as a fundamental human right for people with disabilities, yet they are often inadequate, inappropriate, or entirely non-existent. The participants' experiences varied by type and severity of impairment, as this dictated the nature and level of support required to effectively learn and participate in school.

Students with physical and mobility impairments described facing barriers related to inaccessible infrastructure such as a lack of ramps and lifts, and difficult terrain between buildings.

"Because at the basic school I had easy access to the classrooms, I could walk easily without fear. There are no stairs, so movement was very easy for me. The entire landscape at the junior high school was good, but with the senior high school, I had a problem with the landscape. For most of the classrooms, you have to climb stairs which I am afraid of and have problems with. Anytime I'm climbing the stairs, it feels as if am falling down, because I limp." (Female, under 18, has a physical impairment)

As the quote above indicates, progressing to higher and tertiary education meant larger campuses, which often introduced accessibility challenges. For some, this came at a loss of independence and dignity.

"The facilities and the infrastructure were not made such that persons with disabilities can use them freely. If you are physically challenged, you cannot access the facility. The lecture hall for instance, if you are a physically challenged person who uses a wheelchair, you have to crawl on the floor to climb up the stairs before you can use the lecture hall. Do you understand?" (Male, 25-35 years, has a physical and mild intellectual impairment)

Youth with visual impairments described a similar dependence on peers to find the correct classrooms from their halls of residence, even if campus was generally considered safe and accessible.

"You need someone to assist you in your movement. Now, from where I stay to the lecture halls is very far. So, I always have someone who assists me in my movement from my hall of residence to the lecture halls. You need someone to assist you with your room numbers so that you can get to your room, but generally speaking, accessibility was good." (Female, 25-35 years, has a visual impairment)

There was evidence of some accommodations provided by the school for learners with hearing impairments.

I: What support service does the school provide for students with disabilities?

P: They provide interpreters for those of us who are deaf. At first there was only one interpreter for eight of us. So, the first year was difficult.

I: So, how did you manage to study?

P: We used to rotate. So, on days when he is not available, we used to copy notes from our classmates. It was until our second year that two other interpreters were posted to assist us.

I: Why didn't you request for a note taker to assist you?

P: Note taker? ((pause))

I: You are not aware?

P: No, I did not know it is something we can request.

(Male, 25-35 years, has a hearing impairment)

As the second part of the quote suggests, these measures were not always adequate or comprehensive, and caused learners with disabilities to miss some classes. This experience was echoed by another participant with hearing impairment who reported struggling in non-academic functions organised by the institution because interpreters were not provided for those, despite student attendance being compulsory.



Source: IMF Photo/Andrew Caballero-Reynolds

It was apparent that many youth with disabilities were unaware of the range of supports they could reasonably request, indicating gaps in information about their rights and entitlements. In some cases, this lack of information and accommodations led youth to forgo exams altogether, missing out on opportunities to continue education, highlighting a clear failure of the educational institution in question.

"I decided not to register for the exams due to my condition, but I attended classes with them. The reason why I did not register was I didn't know those of us blind can write the final exams and enrol at a senior high school." (Female, 18-24 years, has a visual impairment)

There were some positive examples of accommodations made by institutions, though these appear to be at the university level. One participant whose physical impairment made writing challenging, reported being allowed to type for his exams, and use the university's computer resource centre located on the ground floor.

"...they have a resource unit in the university that takes care of persons with disabilities. So, at the resource unit, for instance, that is where I wrote all my exams and quizzes. They have a computer lab in that resource room so that is where I mostly go. I use a computer at the resource centre to do my exams. Although I have a personal one, I cannot use it for examinations of course. So, they have all the other avenues where I go and then they also give me extra time, which is part of the accommodations they provide." (Male, 25-35 years, has a physical impairment)

However, he noted that it may have been the fact that it was the special education department that provided these accommodations, reporting that other buildings were not accessible.

Overall, it is evident that infrastructural inaccessibility remains a significant issue for youth with physical and visual impairments. Moreover, despite the provision of some accommodations by some institutions, they are inadequate in uniformity and variety. Most significantly, the data indicated that young people with disabilities were often unaware of the range of reasonable accommodations to which they may be entitled.

Teaching practices

Even when a school or an educational institution does not have accommodation measures in place, inclusive teaching practices can positively shape educational experiences for young people with disabilities. Conversely, where there were no accommodations, students with disabilities were excluded if no informal arrangements were made in their stead. This was apparent in the data. For example, even though one university's policy was to provide sign language interpreters, there were lapses which could have been managed by inclusive teaching strategies. In explaining his poor attendance, one participant reported the following:

"Because we lack enough interpreters. Some days when the interpreter is taken ill, I do not attend because most of the lectures do not make time to accommodate our disability. I don't see any reason why I should be seated in the lecture halls without benefiting [from it]." (Male, 25-35 years, has a hearing impairment)

The approach to teaching employed by educators can also have a significant impact on learners with psychosocial impairments. As described by the participant below, a flexible approach to teaching would have facilitated her experience and learning outcomes:

"I have always had a bit of a struggle learning because with my disability there are days I really can't do much. It's almost like am paralysed, I can't do anything. Regardless of these personal challenges, I have classes I must attend and these classes are mandatory and if I miss these classes I miss out on so much. [...] Yes, in Primary 6 I ended up becoming truant because my mental health was not stable, I was unable to focus on class, neither was I able to do much in class. I wanted to stay home and regroup, but at that time I did not understand what was going on and neither did the people around me. It put me in a difficult situation because no one understood what was happening to me. It later affected my attendance and academic performance as well." (Female, 18-24 years, has a psychosocial impairment)

This quote emphasised a final point about teachers' preparedness for learners with accommodation needs because, as the participants pointed out, no one in the school knew how to support her. While teachers cannot be expected to have immediate solutions for all types of learners, they may be reasonably expected to ask the student what would help, and show an openness to be flexible in their teaching. However, such skills for inclusiveness can be taught through brief trainings. While not a substitute for true and appropriate accommodations, which are the responsibility of the institution and government, such short interventions can better prepare teachers to utilise simple strategies in support of more inclusive teaching.

Inclusive environment

While many participants experienced countless challenges during their education journey, some also described the profoundly positive impact of feeling included among peers in fostering an enabling learning environment.

Several youth with disabilities struggled with feeling included as they transitioned out of special schools and into inclusive institutions at the tertiary level.

"The experience was a bit different from what I was used to. In secondary school, we are all deaf, so it was easy to mingle with other students. You don't need an interpreter because we use sign language. All these are not the same at the tertiary level." (Male, 25-35 years, has a hearing impairment)

This communication barrier had a huge impact on some youth with hearing impairments in mainstream schools, limiting their sense of belonging. In contrast, the experience recapped by another participant with hearing impairment was indicative of how inclusiveness and belonging could be fostered in mainstream schools. In describing activities of a Special Needs' Students Club at his university, he said:

"We teach other non-disabled students sign language. We teach non-discrimination, equity, and equality. We also dealt with issues of deaf culture, our experience in society, superiority, and inferiority complexes." (Male, 25-35 years, has a hearing impairment)

Being included in extracurricular activities alongside non-disabled peers also contributed to an inclusive environment, as described by one youth with a physical impairment who took some special classes separate from his non-disabled peers:

“When it came to activities at school, like PE (Physical Education), playing ball and those other things, we all did it together [...] I was very happy because when we went to play, our classmates without disabilities always included us in the games. So, that made me very happy.” (Male, 25-35 years, has a physical impairment)

Findings from this research indicate that disability sensitisation and increased awareness about the need to create inclusive and enabling environments in schools could vastly improve the educational experiences of students with disabilities.



Source: IMF Photo/Andrew Caballero-Reynolds



TRANSITION TO EMPLOYMENT

Given their varied experiences in education, the transition to work is challenging for many young persons with disabilities. A few participants in this study attributed this difficulty to a general shortage of jobs available in the country:

“What I am saying is that as youth, we say that there are no jobs in the country. It is the truth. This is because when you consider the number of people in the country and the government sector jobs available, not everyone will get a job if we are distributed. There are some people who will also go to school all the way to university and still get no benefit while you are a youth. So, you have to see what you can do with your hands. And try, little by little, so that you can be on your own and not become a burden on your friends, family, and the country.” (Male, 25-35 years, has a physical impairment)

Misperceptions about people with disabilities and their capabilities were also thought to be prevalent, contributing to challenges finding employment.

“Well, let me use myself as an example, when someone sees you like this the person will say you can't. They think because of how you are you haven't even been to school, so you don't know anything, but that is not the case. If you tell them to give you the chance, they won't and they will discourage you right there.” (Female, 18-25 years, has a physical impairment)

It is apparent that there is a need for more support for school-to-work transitions for young people with disabilities. Some of this would need to tackle the drivers of difficulty with the transition (e.g. lack of jobs, lack of training, lack of funds), while some of it might also usefully provide practical support to youth to navigate the pathways from education into employment.

Naa

Naa is 16 years old and currently training to become a seamstress. She lives with a physical disability as a result of severe burns from a fire accident she experienced as a child. Due to her physical impairments, she finds it difficult to perform some physical activities, particularly when she does not have the right tools for training and work. This limitation affected her when she first started her training to become a seamstress. She struggled to use her hands for the manual sewing machines to sew properly, and her work was always crooked and not up to standard. However, once her training institution replaced the manual machines with electric machines, her sewing significantly improved, and she was able to develop her skills. She hopes that after her training, she will have an electric sewing machine and a shop to apply her skill to earn an income.

Vocational Training

The data suggests that vocational and technical schools were often a catch-all destination for young people with disabilities who cannot afford further education or were attaining poor grades, or when local schools lack the willingness or capacity to deliver inclusive education. However, some participants described still benefiting from technical schools:

“As for the technical schools, most often people or parents send their wards there when they complete the basic education and did not pass, or [if they] are not very smart children. I went to the technical school before finding out that was not so. When you go to the technical school, they teach you both theory and practical, which is very important. That is why when you complete technical school and do not get funds to further your education, you can still work with the skills you acquired there. So, being there was very good.” (Male, 25-35 years, has a physical impairment)

Young people with intellectual impairments in particular were often transferred to special schools that provided vocational skills training. For many, these were enjoyable learning experiences and included opportunities they might not have had in a mainstream school.

“Now I’m attending school at [detail removed] for special needs children. I came to this school in the year 2019 and am learning how to do tie and dye or batik, as people always call it. [...] The buildings are very beautiful. I can move about freely without any fear. I go anywhere I like, unlike when am in the house. Here, I don’t see electrical wires that will shock me. We have a computer laboratory where I always go to play computer games.” (Male, under 18, has an intellectual impairment)

However, these centres were still unequipped to accept youth with severe and/or multiple impairments.

“I followed up on a vocational training school for children with disabilities at [detail removed]. I was informed the training programme is aimed at improving those who already have vocational skills. Because my daughter had no skills, they could not admit her. I subsequently gave up in search for opportunities for her.” (Caregiver of female, 25-35 years, has multiple impairments)

Stigma remains a barrier for young people with disabilities in their pursuit of vocations. One example was reported by a young woman with albinism.

“After my junior high school, I wanted to learn braiding and styling of hair, but the discrimination made me give up. Because some people were not willing for me to get close to them or touch their hair, that made me lose interest. In fact, I bought all the items I needed to start the training, but I needed to shelve that dream.” (Female, 25-35 years, person with albinism)

Overall, vocational skills were valued by young people with disabilities, as it gave them a way to earn some income during education and in the transition to formal employment.

"I learnt shoe repairing because of financial constraints I was facing at the time, and I thought of that avenue as the opportunity to generate funds. For instance, I sometimes go to school without money for lunch. When it is break and my classmates are enjoying their lunch, I get worried because I have nothing to eat." (Male, 25-35 years, has a physical impairment)

It is clear that vocational and technical training programmes have the potential to provide valuable skills and opportunities for young people with disabilities. However, there are opportunities for systems strengthening, including needs-aligned education and training, and wider range of opportunities for people with different types and severity of impairments.

Source: IMF Photo/Andrew Caballero-Reynolds



EXPERIENCES IN THE AGRICULTURAL SECTOR

Agriculture is a major economic activity for many people in Ghana. It employs approximately 42% of the workforce and contributes an estimated 19.7% of the national gross domestic product (GDP) [16]. The sector is characterised by small-scale rain-fed crop and livestock farming systems; average farm sizes of less than 1.2 hectares account for about 80% of total agricultural production [16]. While agriculture remains a major economic activity in Ghana, there has been limited research on inclusion of people with disabilities in the agricultural sector. One study suggested the majority of people with disabilities working in this sector participate by providing seasonal wage labour and only a small proportion are farm owners [17]. As such, our study explored issues around land ownership in interviews with youth with disabilities.

Seven participants were sampled to provide deeper insight on experiences of people with disabilities working in the agriculture sector in Ghana. All participants were working on farms, and none were engaged in off-farm or value-chain jobs. Although past studies have suggested that agricultural extension services (e.g. practical farming training and advice provided by trained agriculture officers) provided by the District/Municipal Department of Agriculture often do not address the specific needs of farmers with disabilities [18, 19], participants of this study described them as sources of support. Many reported receiving advice and guidance from the Agricultural Extension Officers.

The analysis highlighted one main challenge and two needs that may be addressed by targeted programming.

Fatima

Fatima is 18 years old, and she lives in a rural community in Ghana. Currently, she has two acres of pepper and one acre of garden egg farms. She is planning to expand her farms next year. Her special interest in agriculture was developed as a child who used to keep a garden. When she became blind and decided to stop school, she asked her mother for a piece of land to grow food crops. Her mother agreed and she has since been farming. Fatima indicates that she is successful in her field of work because of the enormous support she receives from her family. Her father takes her to the farm regularly and her brothers ensure that the labourers perform their duties well. Her mother helps her with pricing her goods. She is able to support her family financially through her farming business and she is well respected in her family. She is very active in her community. She supports community projects. Her business is lucrative, and she is able to give loans to people in her community. In the next 5 years, her goal is to become the best district farmer and she hopes to start packaging her products for export and to sell online.

Challenges related to type of impairment

Interview participants with experience in agriculture included three young people with physical impairments, one with hearing impairment, and three with visual impairments, among which two had albinism and thus had additional challenges. Challenges varied depending on the nature of the impairment and type of agricultural activity.

For example, one participant with visual impairment, who is leading the expansion of her family's farm, needs help from her brothers to supervise hired labourers and in dealing with issues like theft:

"My only problem is with the thieves stealing from my farm. Apart from that, I have no challenge in my farming business because the support from my family is very great. My father always accompanies me to the farm." (Female, 18-24 years, has a visual impairment)

Some participants with physical impairments reported not being able to do certain tasks like tilling and weeding themselves, as described by one young woman who has limited use of her right hand:

"I sometimes find it difficult getting a tractor to prepare the land. And you know, I can't weed though I try to. But I can't go at the pace non-disabled people will go with their weeding, so it is sometimes a challenge." (Female, 25-35 years, has a physical impairment)

The data indicates that much like non-disabled people working in agriculture, young people with disabilities too just require people to assist them with certain tasks. Interestingly, a few participants who were not involved in agricultural work speculated that the manual labour might be too strenuous for people with disabilities, indicating that there might be information gaps about the types of work possible and available in the agriculture sector for people with disabilities.

Needs

Analysis of youth narratives highlighted two ways in which youth with disabilities may be supported in the agriculture sector. These are in addition to cross-cutting enablers like assistive products that are detailed under Reflections.

Land

Most participants in this sub-group were farming on land owned or inherited through family.

"As for the land, I don't have a problem with it all because my father has a vast wetland in the village, and they are his personal property." (Male, 25-35 years, person with albinism)

However, this may be atypical, and several participants mentioned needing bigger areas to expand their farms.

"Well, for me I need a big land to increase my production capacity. I need a land which is closer to a stream and a pumping machine because I want to do it very big so that I can sell to more people." (Male, 25-35 years, has a physical impairment)

One participant described renting the land, and her concerns that it may be taken away by the owner:

"It is a little difficult because since it is not your own land, sometimes after terms and agreement and you get the land, the landlord can come in at any time and say he or she wants the land [back]. Or people, when they see you are succeeding on their land, they would want their land back so that they can also farm on it." (Female, 25-35 years, has a physical impairment)

All participants surmised that acquiring land might be challenging or even a disincentive for those wanting to enter the agricultural sector. Suggestions to address this include better advertisements of land available for farming and setting up funds for people with disabilities wanting to acquire land for agriculture.

Financial support

Lack of capital was reported as one of the barriers keeping young people with disabilities from advancing in agriculture. For some, it was a means to expand their business, such as this young okra farmer who aspired to expand to rice farming and poultry.

"I don't face any challenge but all I need is money to expand my production capacity." (Male, 25-35 years, person with albinism)

Even those who had access to land still needed financial support for other necessities related to expansion, such as machinery and infrastructure.

"Yes, I would want to expand my farm. First, I would wish to build structure for the sheep and goats. Secondly, I wish to expand my crop production from its current state of three acres to about 10 acres or more. [...] No, the land is available, but you will need capital to rent tractor to till the land, buy fertiliser and the other chemicals. The acquisition of these farm inputs is my challenge currently." (Male, 25-35 years, has a physical impairment)

Participants empathised with peers with disabilities who do not have the resources to do their work effectively and efficiently.

"Most of them depend on manual methods of farming. They use hoe and cutlass. They lack machines to expand their farms. They do not often use fertilisers nor irrigation. They depend on rain to feed the plants to grow. Few of them use herbicides to control weeds. They lack financial support to procure good seeds to plant, chemicals, and fertilisers, and to pay for labour." (Male, 25-35 years, has a hearing impairment)

The data from these youth with disabilities highlight clear gaps in their access to land and financial support to which programmes could respond, to help them advance as well as attract more youth to the agricultural sector.

Good practice examples

Youth narratives highlighted two examples of good practice that improved their experiences in the agricultural sector.

Farming workshops:

One participant described a series of workshops organised by a private company, three or four times a year. Typically over 1-3 days, these workshops provided information and demonstrations on topics ranging from pesticides, fertilisers, when and which crop to grow. She reported learning alongside farmers without disabilities, and described an accessible, inclusive, and supportive environment.

"You know, I didn't [study] agriculture, I just had the passion for farming and fortunately my partner supported the dream. So, we started with the assistance from other farmers. So, the workshop, it helped me gain more knowledge about what I am doing. So, yeah it was really helpful." (Female, 25-35 years, has a physical impairment)

Farmer's groups:

Another participant described registering with an organisation that formed groups of farmers, training each in turn. Some farmers who needed additional support were identified through the training. After the training, the organisation sends regular emails with information relevant to the farming they do, which he finds very beneficial.

Source: AICCRA/Flickr



EXPERIENCES IN THE DIGITAL SECTOR

Ghana has made substantial progress developing its digital economy, with the information and communications technology (ICT) sector contributing about 3.6% of the country's GDP and growing as one of the best performing sectors in the country's economy [20]. Despite these promising developments, a growing digital divide has emerged in Ghana's digital economy where most rural and poor people, including many people with disabilities, lack access to critical digital tools [20].

All 30 participants interviewed for this study were asked about the suitability of the digital sector for employment of people with disabilities. All responded positively and anticipated that aspirations would be limited by the availability of training and equipment. Five participants were sampled to provide deeper insight on experiences of people with disabilities in the digital sector in Ghana. Data from two additional participants with a background in this sector but no longer working in it were included in this analysis. Among these seven participants, five had physical impairments, including one who also had a mild intellectual impairment and communication difficulties. Thus, a key benefit of working in the digital sector, as reported by these participants, was the ease of online or desk-based work, as opposed to more strenuous types of work.

The data highlighted two factors that shaped young people's experience in the digital sector, as well as one major challenge that may be addressed by programmes.

Akua

Akua is a 21 year old trainer who works within the digital sector, with skills in cloud computing, business analytics, and code engineering. As a trainer she provides online training for persons with disabilities in the digital sector. Although Akua has only just over a year's experience in the digital sector, her hard work and perseverance led her to become team leader to a group of skillful and talented young men and women. Akua was diagnosed with a psychosocial condition after she decided to seek medical attention for anxiety and panic attacks which she regularly experiences. Currently, she has been taken off medication and she relies fully on therapy. Following her diagnoses, Akua has been well informed of her disability, and she is taking all the necessary steps to stay on track while managing her condition. She has a clear plan about her future career and how she intends to accomplish her ambition of completing her undergraduate degree and specialise in cyber security.

Access to training opportunities

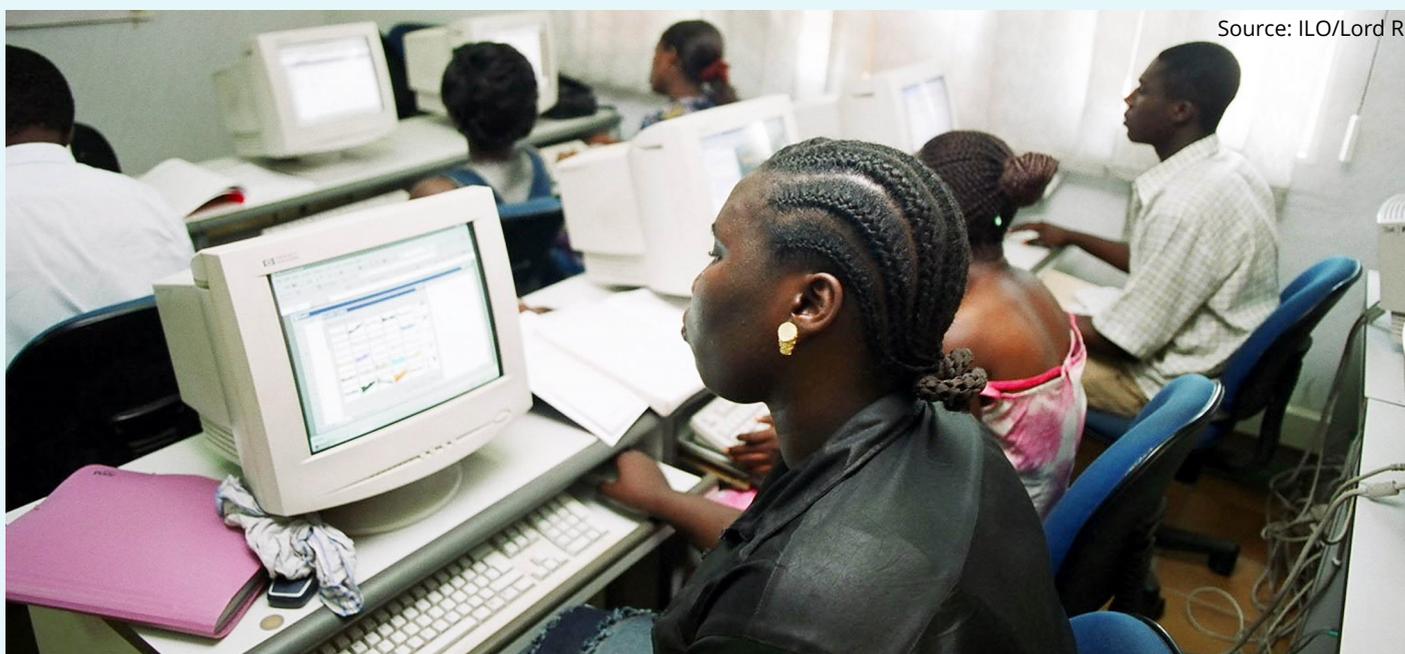
This sub-group included youth who were studying or engaged in various work in the sector including software engineering, computer and mobile repair, cyber security, and cloud computing. A few had learned these through tertiary education, but most had completed trainings that ranged from 3-6 months offered by NGOs, private companies, or technical and vocational training institutions. The data highlighted two key aspects about training that facilitated participants to engage in the digital sector. One was related to cost of the trainings. Nearly all had had their training fees sponsored by an OPD, NGO, or private company.

For more young people with disabilities to benefit from this, it is essential that information about these training, as well as sponsorship opportunities be more widely available. If not, it may be excluding a large number of youth who are not linked to OPDs, or those in rural areas where NGOs or private companies may not have a huge presence. This is evident from this quote from a participant not in the digital sector, but expressed an interest:

"In the ICT sector, [there is a] lack of enough training opportunities for the disabled [people], or lack of knowledge on the available opportunities or avenues for training. Funding available for those programmes are also not known." (Female, 25-35 years, has a hearing impairment)

Most participants described their trainings where people with disabilities were trained alongside those without disabilities. The benefits and challenges of this approach mirror those related to inclusive vs. special education schools (discussed under Education). As in school settings, accessibility and accommodations are crucial in inclusive formats to ensure that disabled participants have training experiences and outcomes that are on par with non-disabled participants.

"...trainers are assigned to persons with disability within a group. The trainer assigned to a person with disabilities is required to do their best to offer any help required. Additionally, there is an inclusion manager who will be available to listen to the needs of the person with disabilities and where required escalate their request." (Female, 18-24 years, has a psychosocial impairment)



Source: ILO/Lord R

Pre-training communication to better understand their needs to optimally participate in trainings was highlighted as key. Here, a participant compares that experience to having to request additional or special measures:

“Yes, sometimes if the structure of the training is made such that they could have a person with disabilities participating, arrangements are made in advance. [...] It is a bit like they are not exposing your vulnerability in the process. It is like they have actually made those arrangements and you are just following them. Like obeying instructions, which is a bit [more] comfortable. But if they have to change the whole thing because of you because they didn't prepare... They could have a person with disability, and you now have to come and like... because you want to do it yourself, it is like you are exposing your vulnerability. And the person with the disability going through that, it affects the person psychologically. So, if structures are already in there and they are already disability-friendly, I just go to the option where the disability accommodations are and then I just pick the accommodation that fits me, I am good to go. I don't feel like I am a burden, I don't feel like I am too exposed on my vulnerabilities. I just feel comfortable as compared to other colleagues on the programme. So, we want that programme to be the same and follow that.” (Male, 25-35 years, has a physical impairment)

The positive impact of training that is accessible and inclusive was evident in all interviews in this sub-group. However, it is also important to address other challenges youth with disabilities may experience, such as their access to IT equipment, to facilitate their advancement in the digital sector.

Access to equipment and tools

Lack of access to IT equipment such as laptops was found to be a key prohibitive factor. While all participants expressed satisfaction and excitement about the trainings, the benefits from these skills could not be maximised because they could not access computers at home.

“Some of the things that were difficult to do was in computer software. If you are taught at the training and you do not have a computer at home to practice on when you come back again and you are supposed to practice what you learnt, then that becomes difficult.” (Male, 25-35 years, has a physical impairment)

Several participants were skilled in computer and mobile phone repairs, a skill they felt was valuable to generate income even on a small scale. However, these required tools, which they could not afford.

“I need help to excel in my future career. I need computer and mobile repairs tools. [...] I need tools box and laptops to assists me in my academics.” (Female, 18-24 years, has a physical impairment)

Although one participant recalls that some trainees were provided tools after their training, most participants reported not receiving them despite assurances that they would be.

P: I brought the tools on my own. Although the NGO promised giving us tools, they were unable to go by their promise. Enough efforts were made to compel the NGO to go by its promise, but our efforts failed.

I: Who sponsored you to buy the tools?

P: My siblings.

(Male, 25-35 years, has a physical and mild intellectual impairment)

Although in this participant's case his family was able to support him, this may not be possible for many families. For example, the participant quoted below is similar in age, impairment type, and training, but having struggled financially throughout his life, he could not buy the tools himself. Thus, the training institute's negligence has had a greater impact on him, and he has struggled to use his skills for income.

"...we were told we will be given tools when we started the training, but they did not give us the tools to use for the mobile phone repairs too. That was also very difficult." (Male, 25-35 years, has a physical impairment)

The data highlighted the importance of training programmes that prioritise disability inclusion and post-training support, such as providing equipment and tools. It has also emphasised the need to address financial barriers limiting young people's access to computers and tools, and consequently, their opportunities in the digital sector.

Need for financial support

While all participants were immensely appreciative of the training opportunities, several felt unsupported to improve their chances of applying the skills to generate income.

"The training started well but the ending was not as expected. We were expecting that after the training we would be given seed capital or resources to enable us to put into practise what we have learnt over the period. Additionally, there should have been a monitoring programme that will assess to confirm whether the project aim has been achieved or the participants have been able to utilise the skills gained to their benefit. None of these expectations were met." (Male, 25-35 years, has a physical impairment)

Some participants benefit from the DCF (outlined in the Introduction), having utilised it to fund their technical training or buying necessary tools.

"I will say the benefit of the DCF in my life to me is that it has helped me complete my technical school. Also, after completing the technical school, the skills I learnt there, are what I am using to work till now, and earning an income so that I can get something to eat. So, the benefits for me are a lot." (Male, 25-35 years, has a physical impairment)

The need for financial support may not be disability-specific — that is, many non-disabled people in the digital sector would likely also benefit from financial support. However, people with disabilities must contend with extra costs related to their impairment, such as procurement of assistive products to aid their functioning (see Reflections). As a result, they are often poorer and require financial support to participate in education and work [3, 21]. Data from this study has emphasised how it can address the barriers faced by young people with disabilities with aspirations to work in the digital sector.

Good practice examples

Youth narratives highlighted two examples of good practice that improved their experiences in the digital sector.

Inclusive training, with pre-training orientation:

One participant described extremely positive experience with a private company that offered digital sector training for African youth. The programme included training on cloud computing, business analytics, and coding engineering, and was delivered virtually. Classes were recorded and spaced out to allow people to learn at different paces. She learned alongside peers with and without disabilities. She described a one-week pre-training programme organised for people with disabilities to manage any experience and educational gaps they might have, and to better prepare them for the training. Moreover, a specific tutor was assigned to check in with trainees with disabilities and their progress, as well as an inclusion manager who was available to address any accessibility requirements.

Training followed by opportunity for employment:

Another participant described receiving information about a 3-month training programme offered by a private company. He recalled that what encouraged him to attend it was the fact that the advertisement clearly stated it was disability inclusive. He was then invited to a pre-training orientation organised specifically for trainees with disabilities to help with fundamental skills needed for the training. After the training, they offered opportunities to work with them, which he could not accept as he was still in education. Upon graduating, he contacted them about being assigned to the company as part of his national service, to which they agreed. He now works as a disability inclusion officer for the company, where his roles include organising compulsory disability inclusion training, identifying and addressing gaps in inclusion, and helping new trainees with disabilities:

“So, with the online training that they provide, after they are done with the training the company is able to accommodate some of the graduates of the training. So, with that, we start the campaign for inclusion. During their training, so we will not only speak about it, but we also practice it and you get to experience it. As part of the experience for inclusion, sometimes during the training, we team up to work on projects with other persons with disabilities. They don't have like exclusive training for persons with disabilities and that of those without disabilities.” (Male, 25-35 years, has a physical impairment)

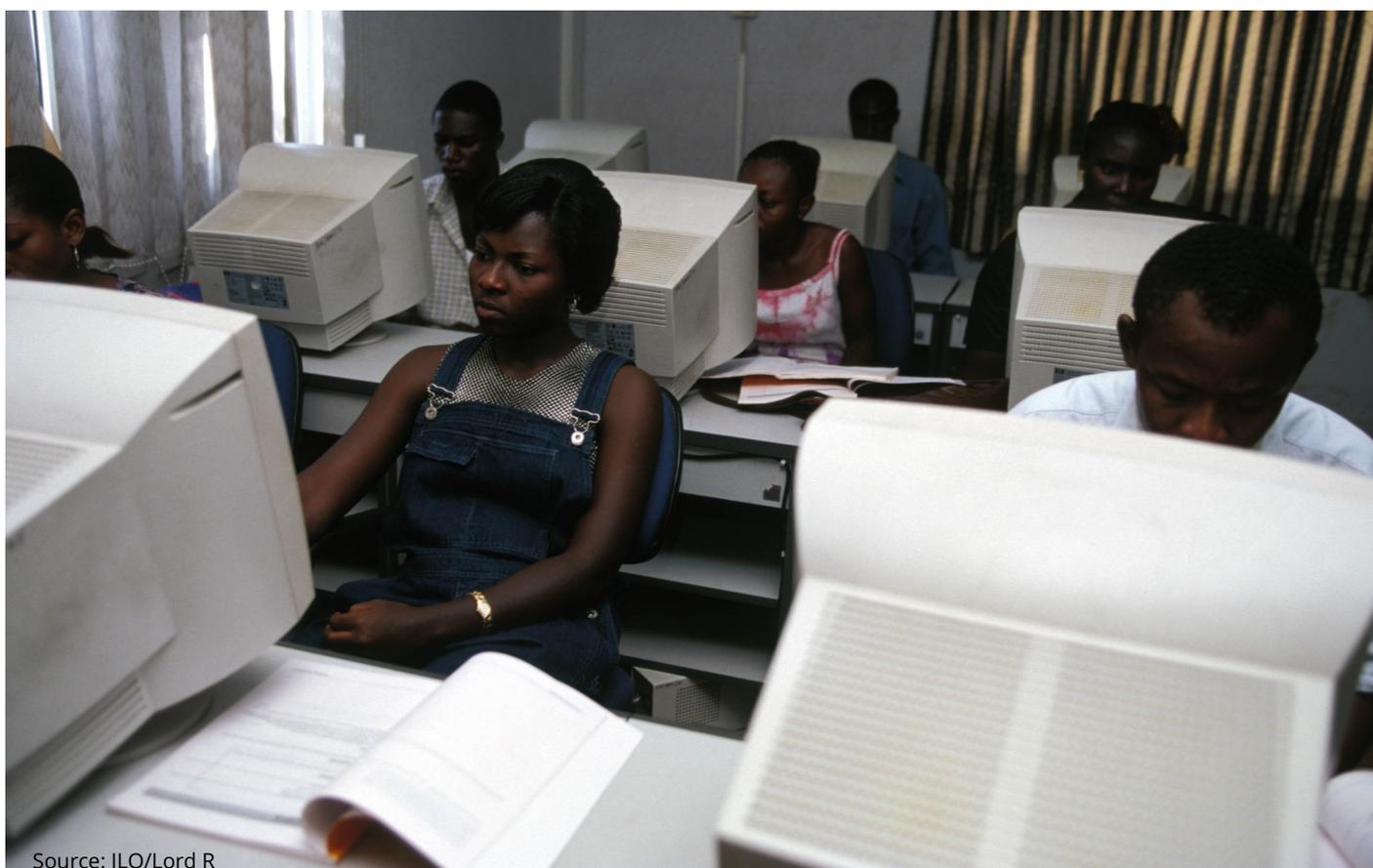
REFLECTIONS

Described below are reflections on cross-cutting factors that shape the experiences of young people with disabilities in Ghana.

Assistive products

Assistive products are equipment or devices that enhance an individual's functioning in education, work, and daily life. The table below shows the type of assistive products used by the study participants, noting that this study did not involve assessing the need (or unmet need) for assistive products.

Impairment type	Number of participants	Assistive products used
 Physical	10 (Of these, 4 could not walk without aid, and this included 1 with cerebral palsy)	Wheelchair = 2 Crutches = 2 Computer (could not write) = 1 No assistive product = 7
 Visual	5 (Of these, 4 could not see at all)	Screen reading software and apps = 4
 Hearing	6 (Of these, 6 could not hear at all)	Hearing aid = 0



Source: ILO/Lord R

The young people interviewed reported using a limited range of assistive products, where their access and use were shaped by factors including perception of need, lack of awareness, and costs.

Participants with physical impairments that prevented them from moving unaided reported using wheelchairs and crutches, which were often gifted and free of charge. There were several more participants who did not use assistive products despite mobility difficulties, such as walking with a limp or inability to walk far or with speed. One of the goals of assistive products is to allow people with disabilities to be more independent, yet the data indicates that many of the young people interviewed still rely on family and friends to assist with tasks that should be made easier with assistive products. For example, one participant who acquired a physical impairment in an accident described relying on his siblings:

“The help I receive is that when I need to go and get something somewhere and I cannot go, when I send my siblings they do not refuse. They go and get it for me. Also, when I need something, they are able to help me such as fetching water and all those types of things.” (Male, 25-35 years, has a physical impairment)

None of the participants with hearing impairments were using hearing aids at the time of data collection. Apart from one, all participants reported having used hearing aids when they were younger, but that they were discarded (sometimes under advice from doctors) because they were not benefitting from them. As the quote here suggests, knowing and being among sign language users may have also contributed to less reliance on hearing aids.

“Yes, when I was about two years old, I was enrolled in mainstream school. My parents gave me that and think it can help me hear speech. I was later transferred to a school for the deaf. When I enrolled in the school for the deaf, I stopped using the hearing aids because I see no benefit from using it. (Female, 25-35 years, has a hearing impairment)

A key step for young people with disabilities is knowing what assistive products are available to them, their rights under the law, and how to advocate for the products they need to navigate challenges they face in education, work, and daily functioning. The data indicated a gap in this information among some young people in rural areas.

I: Let's come to the things that facilitated your studies. Did you use any device or technology that assisted you in your studies when you became blind at the final year?

P: (no response)

I: Do you understand what I mean by assistive device?

P: No please.

I: I mean devices like laptops, computers, and others. Do you have them?

P: No.

(Female, 18-24 years, has a visual impairment)

However, her response was uncommon among participants with visual impairment, as nearly all others reported being familiar with braille. Braille printouts as mentioned earlier under Education, were costly and difficult to use.

"I found it difficult to learn using the braille especially reading and writing [...] Yes. I had someone who read the books for me to convert to braille. It is very difficult to get someone to assist me on such grounds. Now that I have access to computer, I am able to read." (Female, 25-35 years, has a visual impairment)

Several participants described the comparative ease of using laptops with screen-reading software such as Job Access With Speech (JAWS), which, however, was expensive.

"The laptop is more helpful than the braille. Through the help of the JAWS, I am able to use the laptop. The JAWS will enable me to read out sentences I have typed and assist me to make corrections when there is a mistake. In exams, the laptop makes you work faster than the braille. So, it helps a lot. Just that it is expensive and most of our classmates do not have it." (Male, 25-35 years, has a visual impairment)

These narratives highlight the vital need for better overall access to technology and products, improved awareness among young people with disabilities in rural areas, and assistive products which are accessible, affordable, and effective.

Kwame

Kwame is a 33-year-old deaf man who is unemployed despite having completed tertiary education. He only started using the computer at the tertiary level of education because his primary and junior secondary schools were in a remote part of Ghana, and he was not taught anything about computers. He added that even at the secondary school, his access to digital tools was just theory-based because they had no ICT equipment. Now Kwame can use the computer a bit since he learned how to type, browse the internet, download documents, send emails, and engage in online classes.

Digital Skills

Digital skills were powerful facilitators to enhance young people's independence, participation in society, education, and work. Exposure to digital skills varied greatly across young people with disabilities interviewed for this study.

Three participants were mobile money merchants, proficient in using their mobile phones for this business. Helped by OPDs or family members to set up, some reported having used the Disability Common Fund to buy the mobile phone and acquire the necessary license. As one participant noted, other youth with disabilities could also be trained as mobile money merchants:

"Not everyone was able to go to school, and also [just] because you didn't go to school doesn't mean you can't do it. There are some people who didn't go to school but when you teach them one or two [things], it gets stuck, and they can do it to use it for a living. All that is needed is that they will be trained, so that they can participate." (Female, 18-24 years, has a physical impairment)

In contrast, there were a few participants who had had little to no exposure to digital skills and tools, or their various uses. This seemed closely linked to their lack of formal education.

I: Please have you heard of the word ICT before?

P: Yes, my younger sisters who are in school always mention it when they come home after school. One day I asked more about it from one of my sisters who is studying computing at her secondary school, and she told me that even the mobile phone that I am using is like the computer and I was very surprised.

I: Why were you surprised?

P: Because she told me the computer is used for communication purposes, while I thought that it's [only] the phone that we use for communication. She just collected my phone and then opened Facebook accounts, WhatsApp, and others for me. She then installed a voice software where if someone is calling it tells me who is calling.

(Female, under 18 years, has a visual impairment)

Most participants knew about using smart phones for social media and communication, and several of them had received basic digital skills, such as typing and using spreadsheets. It was notable that all participants wanted to learn more digital skills.

"I think computer training or skills should be made compulsory for all students in our schools and everyone should get access to the computer training." (Female, 18-24 years, has a visual impairment)

For those who received little to not digital skills training in school, it was mostly related to inadequate resources in schools, particularly those in rural areas.

"In fact, while at primary and junior high school, [because] our school is in a remote part of the country, I wasn't taught anything about computers until I entered tertiary [education]. Even at secondary school it was just theory. We don't have the ICT equipment." (Male, 25-35 years, has a hearing impairment)

According to another participant, the COVID-19 pandemic accelerated the use of digital tools in education, and they benefited from organisations that collected information about the digital tools needed by the students, subsequently arranging laptops to support their learning.

The shortage of equipment in schools was evident in another participant's description of her ICT classes.

P: The place [where computers were kept] was quite small but all the other students entered the place before I did. This is because some of the other students were always overexcited when we had to use the place, and always went in in a rush. So, I wait till they all enter before I go.

I: Why do you have to wait for all of them to enter before you do?

P: Some of the students want to sit in front, others want to sit on the chairs and because there were a lot of us, if you did not go early you might have to stand since the chairs were not enough. When they enter the [computer] lab, they are struggling for chairs they push each other. And when I try to go in with them, they might push me too and I may fall down. This is why I wait for them to all go in, then go to the next class for a chair to sit down.

(Female, under 18 years, has a physical impairment)

As her quote highlights, young people with disabilities may get left behind when there are shortages of resources. Moving forward, significant effort is needed to improve the accessibility and affordability of digital skills and tools in Ghana, as well as increasing awareness and digital literacy in both urban and rural areas.

Source: IMF Photo/Andrew Caballero-Reynolds



Stigma

Youth participants described experiencing stigma and in many aspects of their lives, including from family members, peers, teachers, prospective employers, and the community at large. Below, we outline the ways in which stigma affects education and employment, highlighting key forms of stigma that young people with disabilities often experience including (i) negative attitudes and stereotypes; (ii) bullying, physical violence, and sexual violence; and (iii) discrimination and exclusion.

Negative attitudes and stereotypes

For some young people, negative attitudes towards disability were experienced first within their own family, which created distance between them.

"I had a grandmother whenever I wanted to touch her, she avoids me, because she said she could give birth to someone like me. But now, I will just have my own lane. If you are comfortable with me, I am okay. If you are not, I will just develop myself to overcome those issues, so I don't really see them anymore." (Male, 25-35 years, has a physical impairment)

This extended to peers and community members too, where people with disabilities were thought of not deserving of respect.

"Especially here in Ghana it is almost as if people with disabilities are not regarded as humans. They are regarded as a different breed of people who do not deserve respect. It is either you are treated as a child or an outcast." (Female, 18-24 years, has a psychosocial impairment)

Participants described stereotypes and assumptions made about their capabilities, which led to lack of opportunities in school, work, and community participation.

"For the community, about disability issues, they believe that once you are blind you cannot do something. So, they don't accept our views in decision making." (Female, 25-35 years, has a visual impairment)

Bullying

The young people interviewed also described experiencing bullying, such as being subject to derogatory language, harassment, or being demeaned by peers or members of the community.

"People sometimes laugh at me, [saying] that I have a mental and intellectual problem, [that] am weak in learning. And [they] also point their fingers at me. When there is a programme and I want to participate, they say that I am not part." (Male, under 18, has an intellectual impairment)

They experienced this in the community, and in learning institutions and work environments.

"I once encountered a guy while I was travelling to school. When I asked directions from him, he told me point blank that he sees no value in my going to school. [That] if he was [deaf like] me, he would have committed suicide because he sees no value in being a deaf person" (Male, 18-24 years, has a hearing impairment)

Kokuua

Kokuua is currently unemployed and has never been to school. She says she was never sent to school because of her intellectual impairment even though it is not severe. She learnt how to use beads to decorate sandals and hats, which she sometimes sells for small amounts of money. While Kokuua herself has not faced much stigma and discrimination, she knows that people with disabilities frequently experience it. She believes that this is because people do not have much knowledge on disability issues and also do not see anything good in people with disabilities. Kokuua thinks that to stop discrimination, there should be community education on disability issues and people who mistreat persons with disabilities should be confronted.

The data indicates that more sensitisation around disability awareness needs to be done within communities.

Discrimination and exclusion

Discrimination and exclusion based on disability is a pervasive form of stigma highlighted by many of the participants. In the interviews, young people cited examples such as schools denying the young person enrolment, being denied public services, and exclusion from community groups.

"It happened when I was boarding a taxi home. The driver was trying to ask where am going or where I want to alight, but because I could not respond or understand him... when he saw that I am deaf, he stopped the car and asked me to get out." (Female, 25-35 years, has a hearing impairment)

Exclusion, as this participant explained, could happen indirectly, and had the potential to isolate youth with disabilities from community groups and social spaces:

"A lot, for stigmatisation and discrimination a lot though some are indirect, and some are also direct. With the indirect [forms of stigma] they will not tell you that they are stigmatising against you. But there are a lot of things you feel like you can do it, but they will not involve you. It even cuts across in our churches, everywhere we find ourselves, in the communities that we find ourselves, even in the family. Sometimes you have an idea, and you feel like if they contact you, [you] can also give it. But they will not, so that is the indirect one." (Male, 25-35 years, has a visual impairment)

Many participants expressed the desire for increased inclusion in communities, as well as to feel more belonging and acceptance from peers.

Drivers of stigma

Understanding the drivers of stigma towards people with disabilities can highlight ways to address it, to better include young people with disabilities in education and employment. Nearly all participants attributed stigma and discrimination to a general lack of awareness about disabilities.

“For me I think it's total discrimination and low level of knowledge on disability issues on their part...” (Male, 25-35 years, has a physical and mild intellectual impairment)

The young people interviewed suggested that sensitisation on disability would be an important part of the path forward.

“People do not know how to interact with people with disabilities, which, I think, is a gap that needs to be closed through education and awareness.” (Female, 18-24 years, has a psychosocial impairment)

It is evident that stigma remains a significant issue for young people with disabilities in Ghana. As such, it is imperative that any intervention to support education and employment for these youth also address these beliefs held by family members, peers, and community members.

Source: Youth Advisory Group/Charlotte Ofori



Support structures

Despite the intense stigma and discrimination people with disabilities continue to face, the young people also shared encouraging examples of support from family, friends, teachers, and community members.

Family

Family support was reported to make a fundamental difference in the lives of many young people, most commonly by helping them achieve personal aspirations:

"The laptop was given to me by my sister as a gift. One of my friends bought the phone for me. I had the tablet too from one of my father's nephews. That is how I had access to the tools." (Male, 25-35 years, has a physical and mild intellectual impairment)

Positive attitudes and support within the family can have a significant impact on young people's self-esteem, belief in their capabilities, and resilience toward challenges.

"I did not allow their activities to bother me. It was my younger sister who would always retaliate and sometimes fight those who discriminate against me. As for me, I do not even attempt to utter a word to people who discriminate against me." (Female, 25-35 years, person with albinism)

As noted above in the section on stigma, negative attitudes from within the family created a huge barrier to advancement for people with disabilities. The data here shows that, conversely, family support makes a positive contribution to participation in education and employment.

Friends and peers

Positive attitudes and support from friends or peers fostered an environment for more meaningful participation in education and work.

"One of my classmates assisted me with my movements within the campus. When I don't understand anything, he explains to me. They give me private tutorials on the things that I don't understand after lectures. Sometimes, when I don't move out during break time, one of my friends comes to me to talk on some certain important issues. He goes to the extent of even buying me food using his own pocket money. We eat together and then talk." (Male, 25-35 years, has a physical and mild intellectual impairment)

Although there were instances where friends and peers helped overcome inaccessibility of buildings and teaching practices, these are responsibilities of the education provider or employer.

I: How were you able to participate in the sporting activity?

P: It was a class activity, so my friends motivated me to take part. And I always become happy for that because although I'm a person with disability, they don't consider that. But instead [they] motivate me to take part in sports.

(Female, under 18 years, has a physical impairment)

Peer groups were also important sources of motivation for youth with disabilities, particularly for those who may not have had supportive families.

Belonging with other persons with disabilities

Many of the young people interviewed are actively involved with OPDs and reported the positive impact of engaging with other people with disabilities, encouraging one another, and working to be role models for others.

I: You told me earlier you have a deaf youth wing club in your school. What is your motivation for joining the club?

P: It is to learn to lead in the future and also to share ideas of how we can solve our problems as deaf people. My ideas are always welcome in the club, so I feel happy to join them.

(Male, 18-24 years, has a hearing impairment)

Connecting with other youth with disabilities who share similar experiences provided a powerful support system and offered opportunities for mutual empowerment.

Intersectionality

How, where, and in what ways young people with disabilities are included or can participate in education and employment varies greatly based on factors like gender, location, severity and type of impairment, and other aspects of identity. It is important to examine this intersectionality, to better support their inclusion.

Type of impairment

The type and severity of impairment can impact a young person's experiences. Those with more severe impairments experience disproportionate discrimination, and more barriers to participation in education and work. Similarly, the visibility of a person's impairment can influence how they are perceived and treated by the community, as exemplified by this participant with visible scars from burns:

"When I go out, people stare at me so much, And some of the children run away when they see [me]. That is why I do not go out." (Female, under 18 years, has a physical impairment)

People with albinism often contend with added discrimination because of their appearance:

"Previously, other people would not want to get close to me. Do you get me? They would not even try to touch me. Sometimes when they see me, they regard me as a monster and begin to run away. They sometimes use derogatory words against me. I don't know but perhaps they believe if they get in contact with me, they will also develop the same complexion. So, I had a lot of instances where people avoided me. Now that there has been some level of awareness on the television and the radio about persons with albinism, such acts have reduced." (Female, 25-35 years, person with albinism)

Thus, participants with ‘invisible’ impairments such as psychosocial and mental health conditions found it easier to avoid disclosing their disability status.

I: Could you share any experience in relation to stigma and discrimination?

P: I have not had situations of being stigmatised because I don't disclose my mental health disability to people I am not close [with]. So, most people cannot identify my disability.

(Female, 18-24 years, has a psychosocial impairment)

These findings emphasise the need to address the drivers of stigma as part of promoting access to education and work for youth with disabilities.

Gender

Women with disabilities experience compounded discrimination as both disability and gender carry forms of marginalisation and stigma. The data indicated that young women with disabilities face unique challenges such as having to argue their suitability for marriage, which, in turn, have implications for their safety, financial security, as well as community acceptance. Based on her personal experience, one young woman with albinism described the power dynamics in relationships and how they are perceived:

“When two persons with albinism get married, it is very easy, without any trouble. I have some friends in such relationships. But if the lady has albinism and the man does not have it, that relationship is extremely difficult one. If you are not patient, you may not succeed in marriage. Pressure from your in-laws can discourage you.” (Female, 25-35 years, person with albinism)

The data reflects the complexities associated with the intersection of disability and gender which beg further research, awareness, and accessibility efforts.

Nana

Nana is a young farmer in a rural community in Ghana. He believes that his voice is heard in his family and says that in his family, they make decisions together. When there is an issue to be addressed, he actively takes part in the decision-making and resolution process.

Nana added that he is also consulted on many issues in the family and supports his family financially. In his community too, Nana participates actively, and participated in a community clinic that was constructed. He hopes to become a big rice and vegetable grower who will ultimately become known as the best farmer. Nana is 26 years old and lives with albinism.

Voice and agency

Voice and agency in decision-making varied among the young people with disabilities, usually by type of impairment. For some, it meant communication barriers, making some young people with disabilities feel unheard and frustrated.

"I am not often involved in family discussions. Their excuse is the lack of communication ground. I can't understand them, and they can't understand me either." (Male, 25-35 years, has a hearing impairment)

For others, it appeared to be linked to family hierarchy, gender, and their ability to contribute to the household finances.

I: With your family, that is your mother and siblings, when it comes to decision making is your voice being heard?

P: Yes please.

I: How?

P: We take decisions together in the family. When there is an issue to be addressed or resolved, I actively take part in the resolution process. I am also consulted on many issues in the family. So, I can say that my voice is being heard in the family.

I: So, what specific role do you play in the house?

P: I also support the family financially. Aside from that, there is no specific role that I play in the house.

(Male, 25-35 years, person with albinism)

There were several examples of young people with disabilities playing crucial advocacy and leadership roles in OPDs, which not only developed their self-belief in their voice and agency, but also made significant contributions to their communities. Below are two examples:

"I pay money for community developmental projects like the construction of pipe-borne water which recently took place in this community. There was a problem with our electricity, so I intervened. And within three days the problem was solved." (Male, 25-35 years, has a visual impairment)

"Through my own initiative we have established a micro finance scheme for only women where we do savings and use to support ourselves and I am the leader." (Female, 18-24 years, has a visual impairment)

While it was encouraging to see some positive examples of young people with disabilities exercising their voice and agency, it seems closely linked to their ability to get an education, work, and earn an income. This indicates that a focus on their economic empowerment is key to promoting their agency, voice, and participation in society.

Aspirations and opportunities

The data indicated a gap between young people's aspirations and opportunities available to them. Most participants described wanting more training opportunities and education, as well as needing funding as start-up capital to expand their work. Notably, both are linked to financial challenges. While this may be a common barrier to the non-disabled population too, it is likely to be particularly challenging for people with disabilities who face extra costs of disability and are on average poorer [3].

I: What do you need to achieve some of these visions?

P: To further my education, I will need finance. Education is now expensive these days. (laughing) It's not easy. Without money it will be difficult.

(Male, 25-35 years, has a hearing impairment)

Aspirations often included establishing or expanding their own businesses, which may be tied to a desire to be independent after having relied on family, friends, and peers.

"Expand my business [as a mobile money merchant] by adding the operation of provision [grocery] stores because here is a village and there is no big provision store here." (Female, 18-24 years, has an intellectual impairment)

It is notable that several participants expressed a desire to become teachers as a way to help others like them. This highlights that it is young people with disabilities that will be the drivers of change for their peers to thrive in their communities.



Source: Arne Hoel World Bank

Recommendations

This study has built on findings from past phases of this research, highlighting several areas for change to promote inclusive education and employment for young people with disabilities in Ghana. These include:

Improving access to education and vocational training

- Build the institutional capacity of schools to foster better inclusion for individuals with a diverse range of impairments by investing in human resources, inclusive learning tools, assistive technology, and structural accessibility requirements.
- Improve advocacy and awareness of government support and programmes for young people with disabilities to ensure funding reaches and benefits those who need it.

Improving access to employment

- Implement policies and programmes to support young people with disabilities specifically in the agriculture economy and ensure they are inclusive.
- Increase access to digital skills for young people with disabilities to improve their opportunities in formal and self-employment.

For general programmes and policies

- Develop tools and policy implementation mechanisms to assess, measure, and improve disability inclusion in policy and programmes.
- Increase financial support for families of young people with disabilities to offset the economic costs associated with disability, education, and transport costs, and improve access to assistive products.

For researchers

- Investigate the underlying factors related to health and quality of life among young people with disabilities that may hinder their access to education and employment opportunities.
- Improve the coverage and visibility of up-to-date disaggregated data on young people with disabilities, including educational attainment, skills, and needs to inform policy, programmes, and financing.



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Appendix: Methodology

This report is based on in-depth qualitative interviews with 30 young men and women with disabilities in Ghana to explore lived experiences around education and employment. For education, we collected data from youth currently in education (secondary, tertiary, vocational), those who were educated but not working, and those not in education and not working. For employment, the research focus for Ghana was the agriculture sector and digital sector, selected in discussion with the Mastercard Foundation.

Qualitative data collection

In Ghana, the interviews were conducted by three research assistants (Daniel Baah Appeadu, Anthony Akowuah Manu and Cosmos Wuaka), among whom two were young people with disabilities. They were led by Dr John Ganle and Dr Charlotte Ofori from University of Ghana, who monitored data quality and progress. Prior to data collection, the research team participated in training workshops (jointly with other country teams) facilitated by LSHTM that covered ethical protocols, interview techniques, maintaining data quality, and in-depth discussion of topic guides. Draft topic guides were pilot-tested, and research teams participated in feedback workshops after conducting at least one pilot interview.

Topic guides for the interviews were developed in discussion with the broader project team, Mastercard Foundation and Youth Advisory Groups comprising youth with disabilities based in Uganda and Ghana. Interviews were conducted in local Ghanaian language and English between September to December 2022.

Ethical approvals for the study were obtained from the Research Ethics Committee at the London School of Hygiene and Tropical Medicine and the Ghana Health Service. All participants were provided with information about the study and written informed consent was obtained before the interview. Interviews lasted between 30-90 minutes. Interviews were conducted face-to-face, via phone and also via phone call and were audio-recorded after informed consent was given by the participant. Interview recordings were transcribed in local language and translated into English by Daniel Baah Appeadu, Anthony Akowuah Manu, and Cosmos Wuaka for analysis.

After data collection and transcription, the researchers participated in a data analysis workshop held in Uganda with other East African country teams to discuss approaches to coding and analysis. A coding scheme and codebook were developed based on the study objectives and emerging themes. Transcripts were coded using the Atlas.ti software and analysed thematically.

Participants were identified in collaboration with local disabled persons organisations (DPOs) in Ghana and through snowball sampling. The following table provides a breakdown of participant characteristics.

Table 1. Breakdown of participant characteristics

		Male	Female
Age	15-17 years	1	4
	18-24 years	1	5
	25-35 years	13	6
Impairment type (Note: Some participants had multiple impairments, therefore these totals are different from actual total)	Physical	5	7
	Visual	2	3
	Hearing	5	1
	Psychosocial	0	1
	Intellectual	1	2
	Albinism	2	1
Education	Currently in education	3	4
	Educated but not working	4	1
	Not in education, not working	0	3
Employment	Working in Agriculture	5	2
	Working in Digital	3	2
	Working in other sectors	3	1
Location	Urban	8	7
	Rural	7	8
Total		15	15

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