

Speech: Career Fair for Persons with Disabilities: speech by Jemima Gordon-Duff

Honourable Minister,

Ladies and Gentlemen.

It's a pleasure to join you today at this annual Career Fair – thank you for inviting DFID to speak.

As you may know, the UK government has a growing focus on disability. In DFID, our aim is to ensure that people with disabilities are systematically and consistently included in everything that we do.

Our Secretary of State became the first Cabinet Minister in British history to use sign language to make an announcement at the dispatch box in Parliament.

We held a Global Disability Conference in London to support the effort to advance disability inclusion. At this, the Governments of Ghana, UK and many others committed to drive forward implementation of the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities.

And yesterday, DFID launched its new Strategy for Disability Inclusive Development which prioritises action on: inclusive education, social protection, economic empowerment, and humanitarian action.

This focus on disability is no accident. For too long, disabled people have faced discrimination, stigma and a lack of practical support. And this harms not only the individual but also the society in which they live.

In Ghana, persons with disabilities have lower education attainments; are less likely to have a job; and face significant social discrimination and stigma compared to those without disabilities. A BBC documentary in 2015 described Ghana as the “Worst place in the world to be disabled”.

I want to include a particular focus on those with mental health conditions as a form of disability. They have a higher risk of experiencing violence, homelessness and wrongful incarceration. They can become trapped in a cycle of poverty and mental health. We must break this cycle.

So as the broad partnership between the UK and Ghana matures and we support Ghana move beyond aid, this will also include a focus on disability.

His Excellency the President's vision for a self-reliant Ghana is truly inspiring and is applauded by the UK and all development partners. In the long term, economic development is the sustainable pathway to self-reliance.

But as the UN Special Rapporteur on extreme poverty and human rights found “the benefits of Ghana’s economic growth so far have overwhelmingly been the wealthy”. Inequality is rising and the poor and marginalised, including the disabled, risk being left behind.

So, Ghana Beyond Aid must be about more than “self-reliance” through industrialization. It must be broader. It must be more inclusive. It has to address the “self-reliance” of the most marginalized Ghanaians. Because unless every citizen reaches their full potential, nations, including Ghana, never will.

That means supporting the 2.8 million Ghanaians who suffer from some form of disability. We need to work together across our governments but also within society to address the barriers that prevent economic empowerment; enhance economic and social participation; and promote accessibility and usability so that services are accessible to all.

DFID Ghana is designing a new programme that will focus on supporting those with disabilities, in particular mental health conditions. It aims to:

- to strengthen policy frameworks on disability and mental health;
- support a shift towards providing health services to those with disabilities through the primary health care system; and
- reduce the stigma and discrimination towards those with disabilities and tackle human rights abuses.

Empowering people with disabilities does not just affect the individuals – it leads to better decisions and more effective outcomes for communities, for nations and for the world.

Thank you.