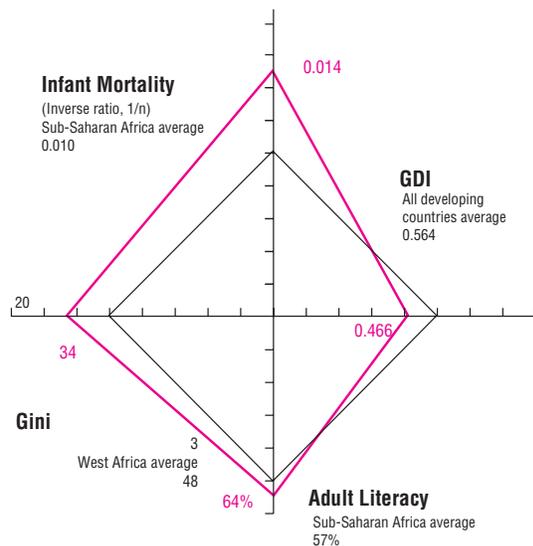


• SARAH OCRAN
NICHOLAS HALM

THE FOURTH COMMITMENT

This report looks at fulfilment of this commitment in relation to people with disabilities (PWDs) for two reasons: 1) because they constitute one of the most disadvantaged and marginalised social groups in Ghana; and 2) because issues related to people with disabilities have received less attention than those related to other marginalised social groups in Ghana.



The Equity Diamond: National values in terracotta compared to regional ones in blue.
Source: **Infant mortality:** UNICEF, *The State of the World's Children, 1998*; **Adult literacy:** UNICEF, *The State of the World's Children, 1998*; **GDI** (Gender Development Index): UNDP, *Human Development Report 1998*; **GINI:** World Bank, *World Development Indicators 1998*. (The regional average for this indicator was calculated by *Social Watch*).

THE RIGHTS OF THE DISABLED

The 1992 Constitution of the Fourth Republic of Ghana contains four major provisions relating specifically to the rights of people with disabilities (Article 29). The first provision protects PWDs against regulations and treatment of a discriminatory or abusive nature. The second stipulates that in judicial proceedings involving PWDs, the legal procedure applied should take their physical and mental condition into account. The third provision mandates that every place to which the public has access shall have appropriate facilities for disabled persons whilst the fourth requires that special incentives be given to disabled persons engaged in business and also to business organisations that employ disabled persons in significant numbers.

While the inclusion of these provisions in the Constitution, constitutes a welcome improvement in official attitudes to PWDs, the full potentials of these provisions are undermined by a number of limitations.

The first is that the provisions are not sufficiently proactive and forward-looking. For instance, **the provisions on employment opportunities for disabled people are dealt with essentially by providing incentives to businesses that employ people with disabilities, rather than through proactive and direct public investment in developing the creative potentials of people with disabilities.** Moreover, the nature and modalities of these incentives have not been identified or clarified.

Another limitation of the provisions is that they do not address the rights of PWDs, as people whose skills and capacities can be developed with the requisite societal support. In some instances, this has clear negative implications for the practical approaches to the issues facing PWDs. For example, in educational matters, the Constitution explicitly or implicitly consigns PWDs to vocational

«We commit ourselves to promoting social integration by fostering societies that are stable, safe and just and that are based on the promotion and protection of all human rights, as well as non-discrimination, tolerance, respect for diversity, equality of opportunity, solidarity, security, and participation of all people, including disadvantaged and vulnerable groups and persons.» Commitment Four: World Summit on Social Development

training in trades and crafts which generally limits and restricts ones opportunities for employment.

These limitations could be surmounted by a more conscious social policy and legislation that would strengthen and promote the rights of PWDs. Unfortunately, it is here that there is the greatest failure so far in relation to action for people with disabilities. Six years after the entry into force of the Constitution, no laws or policies have been enacted to enforce the provisions relating to the rights of PWDs. Three years after the Social Summit, there is no national policy on disability that would amongst other things promote the social integration of PWDs. Only now is the government formulating a draft policy on disability, but this is happening without much public discussion.

In view of the above, it is no coincidence that there has been no significant improvement in the situation of PWDs in spite of the government's signature of the Social Summit commitments on social integration and inclusion.

LACK OF DATA AND MANY BARRIERS

The lack of data on the nature and extent of disability in Ghana points to the haphazard approach to the issue of disability since no comprehensive policy of social integration can be developed without precise knowledge of the situation of people with disabilities. Limited data available in the 1997 Core Welfare Indicators survey, however, show that «one per cent of the country's population are either physically or mentally handicapped with slightly more males than females». The survey also revealed that the level of handicapped persons is higher in the rural areas of the country (1.1%) than in the urban areas (0.9%).

PWDs continue to face barriers which prevent them from participating fully in society. These barriers include negative social attitudes; lack of opportunities for employment and education; infrastructural and architectural barriers; lack of access to resources, eg, finance, equipment and information. **For girls and women with disabilities, discrimination and general prejudices about the status of women reinforces these barriers.** As a result girls with disabilities have less chance of being sent to school and getting jobs than their male counterparts.

These barriers in turn create a vicious cycle of higher levels of unemployment, low educational attainment, poverty and destitution among PWDs.

According to a report by the National Advisory Committee on Disability, employers often saw PWDs as: (a) someone else's responsibility; (b) needing constant supervision; (c) best served in an isolated self-contained setting; and (d) incompetent. Given these social prejudices it is unlikely that employers will offer employment to PWDs. In the words of one disabled person «employers tend to look at the disability rather than the capabilities».

One would expect under these circumstances that a public education programme would be put in place to help dispel these negative impressions or attitudes held by employers. Unfortun-

nately, no public education programmes or policies exist at the present time.

Similarly, inaccessibility of many offices and buildings to PWDs also limit their employment opportunities. Many qualified and skilled PWDs cannot be employed in public or private sectors because buildings are either inaccessible to the physically impaired or do not cater for the needs of the hearing and visually impaired.

There is a labour regulation (L.I. 632.1969) that specifically enjoins employers to set aside a quota of 0.5% of their total labour force for PWD's, but this regulation is not enforced in the public or private sectors.

These barriers to the employment of PWDs deprive the majority of persons with disabilities of the opportunity to earn a livelihood and control over their lives.

At the basic level, there are only 12 schools for the deaf, approximately one per region. Total enrollment for deaf students at this level was 1,782. Female enrollment was 682 whilst male enrollment was 1,100. There is only one secondary/technical school for deaf people, with an enrollment of 164 students. Again males enrolled at this level (121) outnumber females (43). Almost all schools for the deaf maintain a waiting list of people requiring admission.

At the tertiary level, deaf students are integrated with students who are not disabled. However, the restrictive range of course options and entry conditions, lack of interpreter services and high costs of hearing aids are such that many students with hearing disabilities cannot go to college. At present only one student with hearing impairment is studying at a teacher training. Some of the few students who manage to reach this level and who can afford it opt for education outside the country.

People with visual impairment face similar problems. There are only two schools for the blind at the primary level and very few blind students reach tertiary education.

The performance of adults and children with disabilities in education is undermined by a combination of factors such as communication constraints, inadequate specialised equipment, lack of hearing aids and learning materials, and lack of qualified personnel.

A proposed bill on the rights of the disabled prepared in 1993, which would go a long way in removing these barriers, remains on the shelves of the Ministry of Employment and Social Welfare. Similarly, a National Council on the Disabled, which should have been established after the passage of the bill, has also remained on hold. Hopefully, when implemented this bill will ensure the integration of PWDs into the wider society.

- This report was produced through the joint collaboration of a number of organisations, including: The Africa Secretariat of Third World Network, Ghana Federation of Disabled Associations, Action on Disability and Development-Ghana Branch and the Ghana National Association of Teachers.