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Review article

Assessment of the adequacy of advocacy as a strategy for championing the citizenry of persons with disabilities in Zimbabwe

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ABSTRACT

This Different civic movements and advocacy groups the world over have committed much effort to championing the rights of persons with disabilities within the equality of rights and opportunities complex. These advocacy efforts have more often been targeted at rights to equal access and opportunities in social services and employment by persons with disabilities. It appears from literature that advocacy has not done enough in demanding those fundamental rights and freedoms which are central to the citizenship of persons with disabilities. As compared to their peers, persons with disabilities have limited, or to say the least, constrained citizenship rights. For a very long time, advocacy has been seen as a powerful strategy for championing the rights of persons with disabilities. This paper provides a critical analysis of the adequacy of the various advocacy initiatives to establish the extent to which the initiatives have addressed the citizenry issues affecting persons with disabilities. The author argues that citizenship rights form the basis for the equal opportunity complex inherent in the different types of advocacy. Thus, without addressing the issue of citizenry of persons with disabilities, the different types of advocacy cannot be endorsed as the panacea to the equal rights and opportunity problems facing people with disabilities in communities. From these arguments, the paper concludes that what has compromised the adequacy of advocacy for the citizenry of persons with disabilities is that the strategy has been patronized by non-disabled people. The author

therefore recommends a multiple-advocacy approach coupled with practical policies, a genuine political will and strong political representation as the best way forward.

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1. Introduction

According to Cohen (2001), advocacy is the pursuit or influencing of outcomes based on public policy and resource allocation decisions within political, economic and social systems as well as within institutions that directly affect people's lives. For Valk, Cummings and Van Dam (2004), advocacy involves interrogating why underprivileged groups are not entitled to the same rights as their more powerful counterparts. In the context of this treatise, advocacy means the articulation of ideas by persons with disabilities or other people on the need to recognize the rights of persons with disabilities as a way of influencing socio-political changes. Citizenry is conceptualized as a given set of entitlements by virtue of one living within or belonging to a particular nation or state (Cole, 2000). On the other hand, rights are the fundamental standards, values and privileges that are deemed just in the discernment of equality of human beings (Usher and Edwards, 1994). Therefore, citizenry rights are those that define the humanity of all citizens as equal. They are used to specify the parameters of equality of opportunities and fairness in the distribution of national resources. Citizenry rights for persons with disabilities entail regarding persons with disabilities as equal to their non-disabled peers even in the eyes of the law. In this paper, persons with disabilities are conceived as all the people whose functionalities are limited due to loss of a body part, organ or sense.

2. Advocacy and Its Thrust on the Citizenry of Persons with Disabilities

One central theme in advocacy is recognizing differences as positive values of diversity. Thus, advocacy demands equal recognition of citizens amid their differences. In effect, advocacy aims at ensuring that people are not discriminated on the basis of difference. In the context of citizenry politics, persons with disabilities are just as good as any other person. Groux (1992) in Usher and Edwards (1994) suggests that the relevancy of advocacy to citizenry of marginalized populations is realized in the active seeking of a democratic public philosophy that respects the notion of difference as part of a common struggle in the proliferation of a better quality of life for such people. Citizenship, in effect, thrives on a legal framework that respects equality of man despite differences in gender, ethnicity, ideology or ability. It entails full socio-political participation and a legitimate bearing of fundamental rights and freedoms enshrined in international conventions and in the intra-national legal frameworks. Advocacy, in this context also aims at the franchise of social membership of persons with disabilities through calling for the endowment of even the democratic right to vote and to make personal decisions in that respect. The assumption here is that, if persons with disabilities gain their legitimate social membership, that is, their citizenship rights then all the other entitlements would automatically follow. The problem in Zimbabwe is that, in practice, the electoral process has not been adequately accessible to persons with disabilities. For instance, voter education has hardly been conducted in sign language for the deaf and voting centers have been hardly accessible to persons in wheel chairs. At least, at one time, two cabinet ministers with disabilities were appointed. The current Constitution of Zimbabwe does provide for the representation of persons with disabilities in government. A provision has been made for two cabinet ministers to oversee the needs of persons with disabilities. Unfortunately, the process of appointing these cabinet ministers is not democratic and does not involve the constituency of people with disabilities themselves. If persons with disabilities themselves were involved in their election, then we would say that equal democratic opportunities for persons with disabilities were exercised. The net result of excluding persons with disabilities in deciding on who should champion their cause is a recipe for failed advocacy. Not much advocacy has been pursued by the previous representatives toward citizenry issues. All that has happened is patronization of the disabled people by both non-disabled and disabled political representatives. Not much of the lives of persons with disabilities have changed owing to advocacy by these

political representatives. Similarly, much of the advocacy has reacted to social service provisions per se and very little if any has been said about the totality of citizenry of persons with disabilities.

According to Parsons (1997:13), provisions of opportunities to persons with disabilities should be 'realistically equal'. The author argues, 'Members of the society must have realistic, not merely formal opportunities to compete, with reasonable prospects of success, but the community may not accord full membership to those inherently excluded from the equal opportunity complex.' In other words, Parsons acknowledges the need for advocacy to be realistic and to make practical demands. Advocacy should recognize the differences that exist even among citizens with disabilities themselves. For example, persons with severe to profound mental retardation may not be expected to exercise a democratic right to vote. Such natural conditions should however never be used to systematically exclude a certain group of citizens. Thus, even those who may not exercise certain rights due to natural causes must be respected and advocacy should aim at capitalizing on the accessibility of those rights and opportunities that can be accessed. Within the same context, advocacy should maintain that while particular individuals may not genuinely be able to access certain rights, they have a natural propensity to. It should aim to influence the realization that there are no rights and opportunities meant for some and not for other people. Advocacy should actually call for affirmative support mechanisms to help people with disabilities to be able to function at the same level as their non-disabled peers in accessing their fundamental citizenship rights.

In recognition of the fact that the population of persons with disabilities is not homogenous, advocacy should remain cognizant of the inherent variations in terms of types and degrees of disability when considering certain entitlements as has been already been indicated. In effect, Article 23 of the Convention on the Rights of The Child (UNICEF, 1989), acknowledges that the rights extended to a child with a mental or physical disability should be appropriate to the child's condition and circumstances. Advocacy that is unilateral in its demand becomes less genuine and may influence outcomes that might frustrate the beneficiaries. In a way, for advocacy to be relevant to the citizenry of persons with disabilities, it should not demand for what certain people may never achieve. However, inherent differences in the public domain must never be used as excuses for undermining the citizenship of any person regardless of the type and severity of the disability.

3. Relevancy of Advocacy to the Achievement of the Citizenry of Persons with Disabilities

The welfare of all citizens, whether disabled or not, is a public concern of which advocacy should thrive to address. As such, advocacy should also aim at influencing relative concessions for persons with disabilities so that they are enabled to compete favourably with their non-disabled peers. These concessions should be differentiated according to individual needs and conditions. Ford (2002), believes that the precondition for citizenship is autonomous competence. To achieve this autonomous competence, affirmative action, has been advocated for, although some people have interpreted such action as a call for preferential treatment. It is this autonomous competence that advocacy should seek to reframe with respect of the citizenry of people with disabilities. After all, advocacy grew out of the legacy of citizenship movements (Addison, 1986).

Chancy (1994), in his acknowledgement of the relevancy of advocacy to the citizenry of marginalized groups, comments that, in post-modern societies, there is a fundamental illegitimacy in denying any group of inhabitants citizenship rights on the grounds of some shared collective feature such as disability. Advocacy has actually become an urgent means of changing discriminatory systems that flout equal rights principles. The issue at stake now, is to examine whether the different types of advocacy sufficiently articulate the citizenship rights discourses of persons with disabilities.

4. Citizenry of Persons with Disabilities and Types of Advocacy

Advocacy can be classified as systems/corporate advocacy, citizen advocacy, legal advocacy or as self-advocacy. Systems or corporate advocacy is proliferated by an organisation of independent citizens without disabilities who have a genuine concern for the equality of rights for persons with disabilities. For instance, in the USA, there is the Advocacy Center for People with Disabilities and Disability Rights Washington which both provide independent protection and advocacy services on behalf of persons with disabilities and other disadvantaged groups free of charge. In Zimbabwe, there are organisations such as the Federation of Disabled Persons of Zimbabwe (FDPZ), Zimcare, National Association of Societies for the Care of the Handicapped (NASCOH) and Zimbabwe Parents of Handicapped Children (ZPHC) that are sponsored by non-governmental organisations as well

as individual well-wishers to offer such services. Unfortunately, some of these organisations have remained philanthropic thereby causing advocacy to condemn persons with disabilities to second class citizens or to powerless and dependent citizens. In this way, persons with disabilities are seen as helpless people who need help. However, Patton, Smith and Payne (1990) insist that systems advocacy, through its pursuance of progressive change in human service systems, has been responsible for altering the nature of many service institutions and for improving the quality of many persons with disabilities. This has been done through changing existing discriminatory policies or coming up with more favourable ones. In addition, systems advocacy which is premised on capacity building has empowered persons with disabilities to achieve their citizenship rights in some cases.

Systems advocacy has actually seen the emergence of such laws as The PL 94-142 in America and the Disabled Persons Act of 1992 in Zimbabwe. The laws have brought about institutional and service changes in schools, in particular, and have led to betterment of learning conditions for children with disabilities (Heward and Orlansky, 1992). Hardman, Drew and Egan (1999) actually report that, owing to systems advocacy, many countries began to expand educational opportunities for students with disabilities from as far back as the late 1950s. Parsons (1997) concurs that the spread of education to disadvantaged members of society is directly connected with the citizenship complex. Even then, it is not clear whether systems advocacy has so far adequately and directly responded to the citizenship rights of persons with disabilities. On the ground, it would appear that systems advocacy has only led to the creation of conditions that are conducive to satisfying merely the basic needs of certain but not all persons with disabilities. Elliot and McKenny (2003), actually acknowledge that it has always been difficult to distinguish rights from needs but that rights should be the focal point of advocacy.

Overwhelming literature evidence shows that systems advocacy has concentrated more on needs than on rights. Unfortunately, addressing needs is not a sufficient condition for accessibility of citizenship rights. This is because new needs will always arise but once rights are addressed empowerment is almost guaranteed. Both persons with and those without disabilities should be made aware of the rights of persons with disabilities. It should also be made clear that the citizenship rights that are advocated for persons with disabilities are technically not unique from universal human rights. What systems advocacy should emphasise are the concessions to ensure that these rights are accessible to persons with disabilities. While Hardman et al (1999) acknowledge that systems advocacy has facilitated opportunities for school integration and socio-economic emancipation of persons with disabilities, a closer look at existing advocacy services shows that, fundamental issues of the citizenry of persons with disabilities have not been adequately resolved through systems advocacy.

The other problem of systems advocacy is that, at times it is exercised without consulting persons with disabilities, let alone without their consent. This argument is not meant to undermine the numerous positive outcomes of systems advocacy but to emphasize the need for persons with disabilities to be consulted on issues pertaining to their rights. When persons with disabilities are not consulted, the danger is that their expressions and impressions may be misrepresented. Once this happens, persons with disabilities may feel marginalized and patronized hence the weakening of their natural endowments of autonomous citizenry (Hallahan and Kaufman, 2000). Where the persons with disabilities are either severely handicapped or are too young to articulate and express their own rights, legal advocacy becomes a necessary alternative.

Legal advocacy is often proliferated by legal experts in the litigation process on behalf of persons with disabilities. In Zimbabwe, lawyers, attached to the Legal Project Centre and to the Victim Friendly Courts, for instance, offer free litigation services on behalf of disadvantaged citizens including persons with disabilities, particularly victims of sexual abuse. Moonie (2000) implores that, in legal advocacy, a professional lawyer advocates and argues cases for disadvantaged persons like people with disabilities. It is important to note that legal advocacy only becomes necessary when one's legal rights have been infringed or when the person with a disability, has committed the crime on the basis of either the disability or genuine ignorance not in instances where the person has consciously broken the law.

Legal advocacy derives from international conventions such as the Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNICEF, 1989) and the Standard Rules on the Equalization of Opportunities for Persons with Disabilities (UNESCO, 1993). In Zimbabwe, legal advocacy among other initiatives, has led to the promulgation of local legal instruments such as The Disabled Persons Act (1992). However, the Disabled Persons Act of 1992 has always been castigated for lack of clarity and comprehensiveness on the entitlement of all the citizenry rights. Its implementation has also remained a myth in that the enforcement measures and resultant litigation processes are not clearly explained in the instrument. One can further question its availability and accessibility. Not many people have had access to it and the language used in the Act would need a lawyer or interpreter. Generally, the major pitfall of legal advocacy

is that it tends to selectively address only those rights that are currently under threat without having to persistently deal with broader issues of citizenship rights of persons with disabilities all the time. In addition, legal advocacy often deals with ideological issues related individual cases before the courts without offering practical and broader solutions to the whole issue of citizenship rights for the disable. All what legal advocacy would often do is authenticate and justify arguments to influence judgment in a current legal case. Of course, like I have already expressed, legal advocacy can ultimately influence disability-friendly policies.

Related to legal advocacy is citizen advocacy in which mature, competent volunteer citizens channel their own resources toward meeting the rights and needs of persons with disabilities. In Zimbabwe, persons like the late Jairos Jiri, built schools and vocational training centers for the disabled. Some of these people have also built orphanages and half-way homes for persons with disabilities. The Rotary Club, which is a group of mature, concerned citizens of Zimbabwe, started the Rotary Organisation Sheltered Employment Project (ROSEP), a capacity building project which in the past, provided many persons with disabilities with jobs. Citizen advocacy also push for the empowerment of persons with disabilities and act as models of awareness and acceptance. Hallahan and Kauffman (2000) observe that citizen advocacy may even involve volunteering for advisory posts in schools that enroll children with disabilities or in agencies for persons with disabilities. It may also entail political activism on behalf of persons with disabilities as a way of influencing their democratic political participation. Citizen advocacy has seen many persons with disabilities attaining education, training and employment.

However, just like in systems advocacy, citizen advocacy has limitations which often arise when persons with disabilities themselves are not consulted leading to suspicions of patronage. Misdirection of efforts to areas of need that may not be of primary concern to the persons with disabilities is also likely to occur in such circumstances. In the same vein, citizen advocacy may address more of needs than rights or where it is able to address rights, more of social services and access rights than the fundamental citizenship rights could be given attention. The argument is that when persons with disabilities gain their citizenship rights, they can fully participate in all the social processes. For instance, they can meaningfully participate in socio-economic and political processes. Through socio-political participation, persons with disabilities would become active drivers of their own destiny. Tones and Tilford (1994) contend that citizen advocacy is voluntary and as such may frequently compromise the intended impression by persons with disabilities through misrepresentation. This realization suggests self-advocacy as a better alternative.

In self-advocacy, persons with disabilities speak out and demand rights for themselves on their own behalf. Ursher and Edwards (1994) assert that, the post-modern notion of citizenship entails that disadvantaged citizens are required to become active on their own behalf. In Zimbabwe, persons with disabilities have acted collectively through organisations of persons with disabilities to champion their own rights. This was after the realization that other forms of advocacy tended to patronize the needs of persons with disabilities. Self advocacy is largely focused on equalization of rights and opportunities and empowerment as well as emancipation of persons with disabilities. Chimedza and Peters (2001) imply that self-advocacy assumes that persons with disabilities have expert knowledge and skills to contribute toward their own socio-political emancipation. While it seems the most appropriate and radical means of representing the citizenry of persons with disabilities, self-advocacy has its own pitfalls.

The first problem of self-advocacy is that the so called organisations or associations for persons with disabilities have often been manipulated by a few 'disabled elite' living out the mainstream of persons with disabilities who are mostly found in rural areas or in institutions on the sidelines. The 'disabled elite' may in the process of advocating, demand too much power for themselves at the expense of proffering the genuine concerns of the generality of their colleagues. Patronization of the generality of persons with disabilities by this 'disabled elite' is also possible.

The other problem of self-advocacy is the possible lack of intervening skills, among persons with disabilities themselves. Fullan and Stiegelbeaur (1991) report that, self-advocacy has sometimes failed because of lack of techniques in skilful intervening. In concurrence, Coates and Davies (2003) assert that, the most common pitfall of self-advocacy is the usual assumption by activists that change will occur in a linear fashion. Consequently, self advocates with disabilities tend to resort to adversarial means of demanding their rights. Adversarial means may be less productive, unfortunately. In this way, self-advocacy may enhance power struggles rather than collaborative effort toward ensuring citizenship rights for all persons with disabilities. Advocates with disabilities also often reject the fact that certain types and degrees of disability automatically exclude people from certain entitlements, for instance that persons with severe to profound mental retardation for example cannot attain

tertiary education or cannot exercise their right to vote. Such rejections frequently lead to unrealistic advocacy which compromises the attainment of the fundamental citizenship rights to full political participation, for instance.

5. Discussion

In view of the challenges and limitations of advocacy in championing the citizenry of persons with disabilities, it is apparent that other radical strategies should also be brought to the fore. The initial step could be exposing all members of society including persons with disabilities to citizenship education at an early age. In other words, children should be taught about their and other people's citizenship entitlements rights, duties and responsibilities from an early age. Ursher and Edwards (1994) reveal that, citizenship education facilitates the accomplishments of emancipator goals for all citizens. One reservation with citizenship education, particularly in developing countries is that, it may entail teaching politically correct values instead of enhancing people's freedoms (Sibanda and Nhamo, 2014). In Zimbabwe, efforts have been made to advance citizenship education through the National Youth Service Training Programme and National Strategic Studies at tertiary institutions but these initiatives have been heavily politicized and ridiculed. The accessibility of these programmes to persons with disabilities has remained as constrained and limited as the access of social services to persons with disabilities.

Another way of enforcing advocacy that could adequately instill and promote citizenry values for persons with disabilities is collaborating the different advocacy efforts. This can be done by bringing together advocacy groups of people with disabilities and those of people without disabilities to speak out with a common voice. Legal advocacy in this arrangement could play the role of coordinating these efforts and synchronizing them with existing conventions and policy frameworks. Fullahan and Stiegelbeaur (1991:240) are of the opinion that multiple forms of involvement in advocacy have "a mutually reinforcing synergistic positive impact". In the post modern world, new technologies have also enabled formation of international networks as well (Coates and Davies, 2003). Finally, for advocacy to adequately address issues of citizenry of people with disabilities it must seize to be just rhetoric but must be pragmatic. The outcomes of advocacy must be implemented and supported by the political leadership and buy all responsible citizens of a state. Entitlement of citizenship rights of persons with disabilities is not a matter of negotiation but a matter of fundamental and natural endowment.

6. Conclusion

This paper examined the relevancy of advocacy to the citizenry of persons with disabilities and established that while advocacy has the propensity of championing these rights, in Zimbabwe it has failed to fully achieve the desired outcome. This has partly been due to patronization and politicization of disability issues. The other reason is that advocacy initiatives have remained isolated and disintegrated in Zimbabwe. The paper goes on to conclude that, what advocacy has done in Zimbabwe is to call for improved social services in lieu of other fundamental citizenship rights which would influence genuine social, political and economic participation of persons with disabilities. The author assumes that once advocacy achieves the citizenship rights issue, the rest of the equal opportunity issues will follow. However, discourses on the citizenry of persons with disabilities should be informed by the standard conventional principles which should of course be adjusted to the needs and conditions of people with different types and severities of disability. The best way forward is the use of a multiplicity of advocacy methods coupled with a strong political will and powerful political representation. Most importantly advocacy initiatives must be informed by clear policies of equality and equity.

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