

THE CONUNDRUM OF DISABILITY AND AFRICAN SOLUTIONS IN EDUCATION

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ABSTRACT

Myths and misconceptions about disability are common in Southern Africa. Some people have peddled the false belief that persons with albinism make powerful charms which can make one rich or succeed in business (Thuku); that persons with disability cannot meet the performance standards required at work places or that disability is a health issue (International Labour Organization, 2015), and such other myths. Since these myths are not true in every respect, they tend to misrepresent the facts leading most people to misconstrue what disability is all about. These indecorous assumptions, triggered by fear, lack of understanding or prejudice often lead to maltreatment of others. Most of the time, these negative images create barriers to full membership for people with disabilities. This paper examines disability as a conundrum which confounds both the families in which it inheres and the wider society in which persons with disability have to navigate.

Keywords: Disability, normalcy, atypical, discrimination, misconception, membership, alienation, inclusion, education

1. Introduction

Disability is a conundrum in that it is a phenomenon generally misunderstood by families in which it occurs and by society at large. The fact that some of the disabilities are subtle and invisible makes them difficult to handle. Moreover, if a person fears negative treatment that is likely to occur as a result of this disclosure, s/he may hide the disability. A considerable number of people in Southern Africa live with disability (World Health Organization, 2011). The disabilities in question take many forms. Some disabilities manifest in quite unique patterns which demand substantial effort on the part of society to understand (UNICEF, 2013). Whereas some forms of disability challenge the body, others are confined to the mind. Whereas some are visible, others are not so perceptible (Shaw, *Invisible Disabilities: Stigma and Belonging*, 2012). Whereas some are legal (World Report on Disability), others are medical (WHO, 1980). While some are religious, others are social. In Southern Africa, for example, the various wars of independence have compounded the scale of disability as more and more people got injured during and after the war. The question tackled in this paper is not so much about the instantiation of disability as it is about the processes which disable people leading to banishment and alienation of the victims. In addition, the paper examines challenges to disability education and how local values of *hunhu/buntu* may be harnessed in addressing the problem.

The paper is divided into four sections. The first defines disability and explores, particularly the processes leading to the disablement of persons. The second examines the problems currently faced by disability educational efforts. The third explores the possible roles local values can play as interventions and finally a general conclusion will be drawn in the fourth section.

2. The Conundrum of Disability in Southern Africa

Although disability is highly contested, it is part of our lives. It is a complex, dynamic and multi-dimensional phenomenon (Office for Disability Issues, 2003). But what exactly does it mean to be

disabled? There is no permanent or perfect state of health in a lifetime. Almost everyone at some point may be temporarily or permanently disabled (World Report on Disability). The notable variance in the lives of people is their degree of disability. Yet, we don't seem to be at ease with this fact. The complexity of the phenomenon of disability is due, in part, to the fact that cultures have understood it differently leading to different treatment of the affected persons (Eskay M, Disability Within the African Culture, 2012).

Disability is a relational category shaped by social conditions and varies from one society to another (Ginsburg, 2013). The problem is not with the physical or mental challenges faced by an individual, but the way in which those who are perceived as able bodied view persons with disabilities and the institutionalization of those views and attitudes (Oliver, 1999). However, for the majority of cases across time, people with disability have received negative treatment. Whereas some have been labeled misfits (Garland-Thomson R. , 2011), others have been treated with disdain. Whereas some have been treated as medically abnormal (Newell, Narrating Normalcy: Disability, Medicine and Ethics Commentary on Stowe et al., Journal on Developmental Disabilities , 2007) , others have simply been treated as aliens or outcasts (Halen). Whereas some have been abused, others have been denied their basic sexual rights (Frohman C. a., 2013). Whereas some are stigmatized in one area (Green S. ..., 2005), others have experienced multiple- stigmatization (Gausel, A theoretical model of multiple stigma: ostracized for being an inmate with intellectual disabilities, 2014). Finally, whereas some had been foul mouthed against, others have been cursed as sinners (Allen, Faith and Disability: Comfort, Confusion or Conflict? How does the adoption of the Christian faith influence the lives of people who identify as 'disabled' in Britain in the 21st Century?, 2010). But do we really know enough about disability?

That disabled people have been marginalized across the ages and cultures is a known fact. Many of these remained invisible as societies refused to give them notice (Edmonds, 2005), not even by the Churches (Reynolds). In addition, most of the disabled persons are poor as they are denied access to life-enhancing resources such as education, income, opportunities and dignity (Edmonds, 2005).

Across time and cultures disability has been understood in terms of models (Pfeifer, 2001). The old model is the medical model and the new one dubbed the 'disability paradigm' (Pfeifer, 2001). According to the old model, persons with disability are those with marked bodily and mental differences; normally referred to as physically/psychologically impaired (Garland-Thomson R. , 2011). Persons living with disability were regarded medically as sick (Pfeifer, 2001). This condition, often considered a deficit was unwelcome (Pfeifer, 2001). According to the medical model, once certified by the doctor that a person had disabilities, that person would not be employable, just as anybody declared ill is not fit for work (Pfeifer, 2001). The upshot of this was that persons with disability were prejudiced in terms of employment chances compared to those considered as 'normal'. The 'disability paradigm', on the other hand, is a modern cluster of understandings of disability as socially casted (Thomas C. , Defining Disability: The Social Model, 1999). According to David Pfeifer, the disability paradigm has been interpreted variously as – the social constructivist version, the social version, the impairment version, the oppressed minority version, the independent living version, the humanist version, the continuum version, the human variation version and the discrimination version (Pfeifer, 2001). Whereas the first version focused on the stigma that followed those people labeled as 'disabled' as opposed to the 'normal'; the second focused on the placement of people in relation to the means of production (Oliver, 1999). Whereas

the impairment version stresses on damage as the distinguishing factor between persons with disability and other people; the oppression of minority model lays the charge that people with disability are discriminated against as they are confronted with physical, attitudinal, cognitive and economic barriers (Pfeifer, 2001). Whereas in the independent living model, people with disabilities don't want to be considered as sick but cry for the same opportunities and choices as others; the humanist model attacks the celebration of man as a rational being and criticizes enlightenment assumptions concerning disability (Pfeifer, 2001). The continuum version argues that there are various versions of disability and there is no permanent state of health. The best is to make policies which favour persons with disability and improve social life in general (Pfeifer, 2001). Finally, whereas the human variant model regards persons with disability as another category of marginalized peoples along with racial minorities and women; the discrimination model stresses that it is society which reminds persons with disability that they are in fact disabled and can't do certain things (Pfeifer, 2001).

The underlying element found in most models is that persons with disability lack certain capacities. As a result, they ended up being more socially disadvantaged than the category of persons regarded as 'normal' (Thomas C. , *Defining Disability: The Social Model*, 1999). The idea of normalcy (Jarman, *Theorizing Disability As Political Subjectivity: Work by the UIC Disability Collective on Political Subjectivities*, 2002), needs to be carefully deconstructed as it seems to be the source of the problem. Leonard Davis contends that our sense of what is normal has contributed causally to the crisis:

We live in a world of norms. Each of us endeavors to be normal or else deliberately tries to avoid that state. We consider what an average person does, thinks, earns or consumes. We rank our intelligence, our cholesterol level, our weight, height, sex drive, bodily dimensions along some conceptual line from sub-normal to above average. We consume minimum daily balance of vitamins and nutrients based on what an average human should consume. Our children are ranked in school and tested to see where they fit in a normal curve of learning, of intelligence. Doctors measure and weigh them, to see whether they are above or below average on the height and weight curves. There is probably no area of contemporary life in which some norm, mean, or average has not been calculated (Davis, *Enforcing Normalcy: Disability, Deafness and the Body*, 1995).

The idea of normal persons or persons who function normally, is loaded with ideological baggage and tends to marginalize other people (Amundson, *Against Normal Function*, 2000). Philosophers have also added to this confusion in understanding disability in that from the time of Plato, human normalcy was associated with a balanced psyche (*The Republic IV-IX*). Over the years, philosophers came to privilege reason as the source of -dignity, equality, justice, responsibility and moral fellowship (Carson, *Introduction: Rethinking Philosophical Presumptions in Light of Cognitive Disability*, 2009). As the author puts it:

Reason, in philosophical accounts, is generally taken to be the ground for human dignity, hence the special accord and moral status we attribute to humans. But people with cognitive disability are individuals who have, at best, a diminished capacity for rational deliberation. Yet they are human. How should we think about these individuals? (Carson, *Introduction: Rethinking Philosophical Presumptions in Light of Cognitive Disability*, 2009).

However, as Davis notes, the problem is not with people with disability, but with the way normalcy

has been conceptualized:

The concept of the norm, unlike that of an ideal, implies that the majority of the population must or should somehow be part of the norm. The norm pins down that majority of the population that falls under the curve of the bell-shaped curve. This curve, the graph of an exponential function, that was known variously as the astronomer's 'error law', the 'normal distribution', the 'Gaussian density function', or simply 'the bell curve', became in its own way a symbol of the tyranny of the norm (Davis, *Enforcing Normalcy: Disability, Deafness and the Body*, 1995).

The idea of normalcy, like that of race is not factual (Amundson, *Against Normal Function*, 2000). Just like the former, the concept 'normal' does not seem to be very useful with respect to the health of persons (Horton, *Normality-Toward a Meaningful Construct*, 1971). Perhaps this is due to the fact that the idea of perfect health is chimeric. This is unfortunate as it tends to marginalize and alienate persons with physical and psychological challenges. Some scholars argue that, what is needed is the creation everywhere and for everyone, of conditions for growth, development and well-being. This is what Bengt Nirje coins as the 'normalization principle' (Nirje, *The Normalization Principle and Its Human Management Implications*, 1994). The principle involves making the persons with disabilities to undergo the normal routines of life – bathing, taking a place at table, going to school or work and experiencing the challenges of normal life (Nirje, *The Normalization Principle and Its Human Management Implications*, 1994). This may involve harnessing technology in designing gadgets for making this possible.

The processes of disabling other members of society have profound impact on their participation in politics, religion, economics and personal relationships. The forms of marginalization and alienation manifest at work places (Marumoagae, *Disability, Discrimination and the right of Disabled Persons to Access the Labour Market*, 2012); in matters of sexual orientation (McRuer, *Compulsory Able-Bodiedness and Queer/Disabled Existence*, 2010); the denial of sexual needs (Liddiars, 2011); the limited practice of Christian faith (Einsland, 2002); and the diminishing of self-worth (Reynolds). These developments pronounce a sense of impotence which culminates in low self-esteem and worthlessness in the affected persons (Hossain, *Impact of Disability on Quality of Life of Rural Disabled People in Bangladesh*, 2002). In the field of education be it general or theological, learners with disability find astounding challenges. In the first instance, educational institutions lack the capacity to include learners of different levels of disability (Ebersold, 2011). In additions teachers are not yet equipped to handle the different types of learners (Ebersold, 2011). Thus, there is always the political dimension to disability as all manners of speaking about disability result in certain ways of treating those so labeled. Disability comes to be defined in a certain way for certain political ends. Until recently, the majority of societies in Africa and Asia regarded disabilities either as curses or forms of punishment for sin (Belay, 2005). However, there are exceptions. Among the Abagussi and the Nandi of East Africa, for example, the term disability is non-existent:

...if one person has a problem, then, it is seen as a problem for the whole community. The extension of services, and the reciprocal expectation did and does not exclude persons with impairments. Every person is included in the value system. Both the impaired and the -normalll are overtly treated in the same way; they are neither neglected and/or mistreated nor are they favoured (Ogechi, *Portrayal of Disability*

Through Personal Names and Proverbs in Kenya; Evidence from Ekegusii and Nandi, 2002).

Ogechi concentrates on equal treatment of members of society without unpacking the meaning of disability in these contexts. However, from the above passage the categories of the 'normal' and the 'impaired' suggests the potential for differential treatment. In other African communities however, disability was recognized as a category of people with atypical bodies. Beliefs abound pertaining to the causes of disabilities and annexed to these are a plethora of attendant attitudes. Some people believe that the various disabilities are caused either by evil spirits or are a result of witchcraft (Jackson H, *Disability and Rehabilitation: Beliefs and Attitudes Among Rural Disabled People in a Community Based Rehabilitation Scheme in Zimbabwe*, 1988). However, variously the causes are understood, persons with disabilities are subjected to abuse, discrimination, torture and other forms of injustice. Religion has not helped either. Some cases of disability are regarded as transgression against God (Ogechi, *Portrayal of Disability Through Personal Names and Proverbs in Kenya; Evidence from Ekegusii and Nandi*, 2002). Generally in African Traditional religions, disability is believed to result from angry ancestors:

A major transgression that injures vertical relationships is dishonour to the ancestors and/or God. God is omniscient but can be manifested through thunder, earthquakes or storms. Ancestors' anger is seen as being provoked by the living relatives either by not behaving properly while the person was still alive (for instance, by not providing for an ageing relative) or by not nourishing the relationship after death through proper offerings and rituals. The belief in the retributive power of the ancestors/God to the present and future generations is strong (Ogechi, *Portrayal of Disability Through Personal Names and Proverbs in Kenya; Evidence from Ekegusii and Nandi*, 2002).

As Ogechi expounds, according to the said African traditions, nothing just happens without cause and in this case when a phenomenon such as disability occurs, there has to be a reason associated with grieving ancestral spirits. The impairments or mental derangements, which can attack anyone, would be symptomatic of the disgruntlement of the ancestors and/or the Creator. According to this view, the affected person or his/family or relatives need to reconcile with and pacify the world of spirits. There is therefore no need to concentrate on person with disability but rather address the cause since it can be corrected with the appropriate rituals to appease the ancestors or creator (Ogechi, *Portrayal of Disability Through Personal Names and Proverbs in Kenya; Evidence from Ekegusii and Nandi*, 2002).

At a practical level, however, once the causes of disability assume the agency of spirits or gods/God, it becomes extremely difficult to eliminate the biases and prejudices embedded in those views. The affected individuals or their families will be considered at fault for unsettling the spirit world and deserving judgement as the ancestors or God sees fit. As a result, other people would simply look on or condemn also what God or the ancestors have denounced. Eiesland aptly captures this puzzle thus:

As long as disability is addressed in terms of the themes of sin-disability conflation, virtuous suffering, or charitable action, it will be seen as a fate to be avoided, rather than an ordinary life to be lived (Eiesland, 1994).

Whenever disability is approached in terms of sin, it would appear as if the persons concerned deserve the suffering as a way of making them morally reformed and in turn would make us develop

appropriate moral sentiments of feeling compassion for them (Lowe, –Rabbi, Who Sinned?! Disability Theologies and Sin, 2012). However, it becomes a serious problem in theological circles to regard disability as punishment (Roberts, 2014). Eiesland challenges such a theological standpoint that qualifies some people as ‘normal’ by nature and condemns others as ‘abnormal’ on account of their physical constitution. She would rather define God (the Son) also as disabled to allow for a person living with disability to also relate with Him!

Thus far, one can decipher myriad challenges associated with disability. Apparently, notwithstanding how one approaches the subject, an inescapable fact is that; throughout history, persons with disability have suffered a lot on account of being defined as people outside the bracket of the ‘normal’. Even the Church, which was supposed to be a sanctuary for the all, has played a part towards their decimation. The next section examines challenges by people with disability in education.

4. Challenges of Disability Education in Southern Africa

As highlighted above, the challenges of disability are widespread. They are also instantiated in educational institutions. It affects learners as it affects the curriculum. Learners with disabilities bear the brunt of exclusion and marginalization while the curriculum suffers from incapacity to transmogrify itself to suit the changing demands. There is need to interrogate both social practices and the learning environments as we glean through them and harness opportunities for growth. It is a fact of life that the people society has chosen to label as ‘disabled’ have suffered oppression, alienation and marginalization in church and beyond:

There is no question that the people whom we have decided to label as disabled do often suffer aversion terrible oppression and injustice inside and outside of the church. Such injustice and oppression must be addressed powerfully and forcefully, with seriousness and urgency (Swinton, *From Inclusion to Belonging: A Practical Theology of Community Humanness*, 2012).

Although it is doubtful whether disabled people are the only oppressed and marginalized people in different communities in Southern Africa, the problem becomes compounded if the person is a woman or a child living with disability. The person with disability is prone to marginalization and exclusion even by her peers (Simone, 2012). Consequently, women and children with disability end up being sidelined as the marginalized other!

However, it is with great relief that efforts are being made to remove barriers blocking the integration of persons living with disabilities in Africa (Viljoen, 2013) and the wider world (Tennessee Disability Coalition, online). Communities in Southern Africa are now deliberating on transformation in the field of education. Providentially, this is extending to include the Christian Church’s capacity to better handle persons living with disability. The greatest challenge though is the appropriate inclusion of persons living with disability in educational and congregational institutions. Full inclusion in the Churches and in educational institutions is proving to be a formidable challenge:

Studies of disability and religion identify barriers to inclusion and provide resources and instructional guides for physical accessibility, ways to address and change attitudes,

and lesson plans for children's classes and self-contained classrooms of people of all ages with disabilities. Along with those barriers that affect people of all ages with disabilities, this manual will address three barriers to full participation that is specific to adults with disabilities. The three barriers include religious leaders' lack of training or understanding; the attitudes of the congregation; and the absence of planning that fosters participation (Tennessee Disability Coalition, online).

Inclusion in education means the combination of philosophy and methods of teaching to achieve the provision of education to all in a non-discriminatory manner out of the realization that all learners have the right to it (Peters, *Inclusive Education an EFA Strategy for all children*, 2004). It goes beyond normalization (Culham, *Deconstructing Normalization: Clearing the Way for Inclusion*, 2003). Inclusion is amenable ideals such as equity, social justice and opportunity for all learners (Thomas G. &, 2001). Evidently there is no unanimity as to how to achieve this goal. However, according to John Swinton, disabled people need more than just being included in society, but a sense of belonging (Swinton, *From Inclusion to Belonging: A Practical Theology of Community Humanness*, 2012). A sense of belonging allows a member to transcend loneliness and isolation (Pitonyak, 2014).

The other challenge is reasonable accommodation of people with disability in the classroom (Anderson, *Hospitable Classrooms: Biblical Hospitality and Inclusive Education*, 2011). It would seem as if teachers in theological institutions are unable or unwilling to provide the requisite modifications to accommodate students with disability (Moon, 2012). Some theorists have emphasized the inclusion model, however, one wonders whether 'one-size-fits-all' or 'one-method-suits-all' approach is the best (Anderson, *Hospitable Classrooms: Biblical Hospitality and Inclusive Education*, 2011). This may disadvantage some students with hidden or least understood disabilities. Thus, there is a sense in which training institutions need to modify their curriculum and integrate instructional methods that are amenable to learners with disability or those who prefer different instructional methods to those offered by traditional models (Anderson, *Hospitable Classrooms: Biblical Hospitality and Inclusive Education*, 2011).

Anderson underlies the need for accommodation and hospitality. He observes that people tend to restrict the term 'hospitality' to the industry called by that name, but it has a wide and useful application. In the Bible, there are considerable teachings about it:

Jesus described everyday acts of mercy that all Christians can perform regardless of their economic condition, intellectual level, or able-bodied. He spoke of acts of hospitality toward people who are strangers, hungry, in prison, poor, diseased, or disabled. Jesus said that as we practice hospitality, it should be done as if Jesus himself were the recipient (Anderson, *Hospitable Classrooms: Biblical Hospitality and Inclusive Education*, 2011).

The gospels of Saint Matthew (Chapter 25:34-45) and Saint Luke (Chapter 14: 16-23) attest to the rich application of hospitality in the Bible. In this sense, hospitality encompasses the possibility of welcoming even the least ones, who do not even have the capacity to return the deed. In the words of Anderson, -distinctively of Christian hospitality (is): the possibility that in welcoming -the leastl we may actually be welcoming Jesus, and an orientation toward those who have little to offer by means of reciprocity. (Anderson, *Hospitable Classrooms: Biblical Hospitality and Inclusive Education*,

2011).

Broadly speaking, God has a way of accommodating all people irrespective of the accidents of our lives. This conception of hospitality is quite wide to envelop many spheres of social life:

Scripture shows clearly God's hospitality in the many passages that declare God's concern for justice, particularly in the case of those who tend to be marginalized: aliens and strangers, people in poverty, widows, orphans, the diseased, and the disabled. Jesus continually crossed barriers of religion, ethnicity, gender, ability level, and other walls of separation erected by the culture. The parable of the good Samaritan helps us understand that when we see someone in need, that individual is not to be avoided; rather, we are to make ourselves neighbor to that man or woman. The parable is an illustration of how hospitality should be evidenced in the life of a Christian, and demonstrates the crossing of artificial barriers that are often erected (Anderson, *Hospitable Classrooms: Biblical Hospitality and Inclusive Education*, 2011).

Can the concept of hospitality be applied to the classroom situation? This involves making teachers conscientious and responsible for the instruction of all students under their care. It also charges them with the responsibility to create a sense of community and membership (Soodak, *Classroom Management in Inclusive Settings*, 2010). African cultures are replete with instances demonstrating the value of hospitality. Thus, in the pursuit of inclusion or hospitality, can we exhume and highlight African values that have social and educational utility to integrate persons living with disability?

6. Intervening African Values in Disability Education

7.

As we look for solutions to the problem of disability in Southern Africa, one way is to turn to the cherished value of *hunhu* or *ubuntu* – the African conception of humanism. The Shona use the term *Unhu* or *hunhu* while the Nguni languages (Zulu/Ndebele e.t.c) use *ubuntu*. The Sotho and Tswana people use *botho*. Basically the concept is the same henceforth it shall be used interchangeably. The concept bears the essential characteristic of perfect human being (Sibanda, *The Dimensions of _Hunhu/Ubuntu_(Humanism in the African Sense): The Zimbabwean Conception*, 2014). According to this view, *hunhu/ubuntu* is humanness at its best and noblest sense:

Samkange and Samkange (1980:89) implore that *hunhu/ubuntu* connotes, –The attention one human being gives to another: the kindness, courtesy, consideration and friendliness in the relationship between people, a code of behaviour, an attitude to others and to life...! Thus, a person with *hunhu / ubuntu* is one who upholds the African cultural standards, expectations, values and norms and keeps the African identity (Sibanda, *The Dimensions of _Hunhu/Ubuntu_(Humanism in the African Sense): The Zimbabwean Conception*, 2014).

Ubuntu is defined also as –an ancient African worldview, based on the primary values of intense humanness, caring, sharing, respect, compassion, and associate values, ensuring happy and qualitative human community life in the spirit of family! (Engelbrecht, *The role of Ubuntu in Families Living with Mental Illness in the Community*, 2012). *Hunhu* places emphasis on communitarianism (Nondo, *Philosophy for Children: A Model for Unhu/ Ubuntu Philosophy*, 2014) while pursuing a common good (Makuvaza, *Early Childhood Development (ECD) and Educatedness in an Afro- Zimbabwean Context – The role of philosophy of hunhu /ubuntu*, 2014). However, the values stated above, may have been affected by European modernity and pluralism (Hapanyengwi-

Chemhuru O. &, 2014). Perhaps there is need also to emphasize the evolution of the concept (Chimuka, "Ubuntu": The Itinerary, Import and Utility of the Idea, 2015). The scale and magnitude of selfishness and personal aggrandizement witnesses in present day Zimbabwe, according to Lindiwe Ndlovu, is alien to traditional Ndebele culture which was basically informed by Ubuntu (Ndlovu, *„Neglected Objects or Valued Human Beings“: The Ndebele People’s Perception of the Disadvantaged as Expressed in the Proverb*, 2013). If the values of ubuntu have been sidelined by forces of history, the imperative then is rejuvenate them in order to bring out their practical utility (Ndondo, *Philosophy for Children: A Model for Unhu/ Ubuntu Philosophy*, 2014). Accordingly, Ndondo and Mhlanga have this to say:

Immorality by an individual was a disgrace to the whole community. On the other hand, the success of a community member was a community’s success. This was because any behaviour pattern was supposed to be a reflection of the community’s values. Although not much formalised, traditional education had the main aim of producing people who were acceptable in that particular community. Ubuntu was not confined to individual communities as the values could be exhibited beyond the bounce of these communities (Ndondo, *Philosophy for Children: A Model for Unhu/ Ubuntu Philosophy*, 2014).

Mucina augments the richness of ubuntu above by adding the ideas of courtesy and hospitality (Mucina, 2011). However, it is unfortunate that these twin values were, in the eyes of former colonial masters, folly and were abandoned. Yet, in the Ubuntu world view; –life is connected by the cycle of reciprocal relationships; no relationship is greater than the other! (Mucina, 2011).

It is interesting that there is a paradigm shift in Southern Africa with regards to the education and integration of persons living with disability. There is a movement towards de-institutionalization. Thus, in the context of de-institutionalization of persons living with disability, it is prudent to resort to those practices which either promote full inclusion or hospitality. It is in this vein that ubuntu (botho /hunhu) holds the promise. The School of Graduate Studies at the University of Botswana reports about how the Batswana understand botho. It states:

The Botswana people use the term botho to describe a person who has a well-rounded character, who is well-mannered, courteous and disciplined, and realizes his or her full potential both as an individual and as a part of the community to which he or she belongs. Botho is an example of a social contract of mutual respect, responsibility and accountability that members of society have toward each other and defines a process for earning respect by first giving it, and to gain empowerment by empowering others (School of Graduate Studies).

Further, the same source suggests that, as a philosophy, ubuntu promotes the common good of society and includes humanness as an essential element of human growth. This places primacy on the community. The individual is produced by the community and therefore will always be part of the community. Thus, the values of interdependence, communalism, sensitivity towards others and caring for others are emphasized (School of Graduate Studies). This point is reinforced by Mabovula who following Ramose who says:

African community is an ongoing dynamic association of men and women, who have a special commitment to one another and have developed a distinct sense of their common life. The common life, in this sense, is perceived as any public discursive space which members construct through action – in concert. In this context, the history of a person's life is the story of his or her transactions with the community's material and moral worlds, which, in effect, is the story of his or her relations with particular sets of social goods. This is called a social contract in which an individual's choice of a way of life is a choice constrained by the community's pursuit of shared ends (Mabovula, *The erosion of African communal values: a reappraisal of the African Ubuntu philosophy*, 2011).

There is also need to emphasize that ubuntu is not, at all times, a panacea of glad tidings as it has its own shortcomings (Broodryk, *Ubuntu: African Life Coping Skills*, 2006). Much as proponents praise its humanistic aspects, it did not fully integrate women and children. Thus, it seems ill adapted to accommodate persons with disability. Since we are consciously involved in the reconstruction of cultural institutions, there is need to hold on to the promise of the conceptual elasticity of ubuntu by stretching to denote a wider range of objects (Mani, *Dynamic Elastic Behavior of Cotton and Cotton / Spandex Knitted Fabrics*, 2014). It is quite promising that if the values of hunhu as espoused above may be stretched to apply to contemporary African societies, this can help re-integrate persons with disability in education. Ubuntu is full of promise as it has inbuilt aspects of tolerance, togetherness and bonding. This in no way suggests that the hunhu philosophy is pure and without defects (Chitumba, *University Education for Personhood Through Ubuntu Philosophy*, 2013). The strength in hunhu, is –its capacity for the pursuit of consensus and, in the process, also reconciliation (Chitumba, *University Education for Personhood Through Ubuntu Philosophy*, 2013). This prospective conception of hunhu is underlined by Elza Venter who observes that the concept is very important in educational discourse (Venter, *The notion of Ubuntu and Communalism in African Educational Discourse*, 2004). In the area of education therefore ubuntu is amenable to the principle of inclusion and consequently has a role to play in disability education. It is curious that approaches to education have been undergoing transformation in the region as a result of inequalities produced by race, class, ideology, gender and so forth (Open Society Initiative for Southern Africa). Now the demand is to meet the needs of persons with disability in education. The placement of learners in special classes, far removed from others and in which they do not mingle and mix is not equal education (Hay, *Implementation of the inclusive education paradigm shift in South African education support services*, 2003). Since ubuntu focuses on the group's well-being, there is a sense in which the individuals, no matter their incidental misfortunes still matter. Thus, in keeping with the value of inclusivity, the needs of every learner are to be taken seriously within the group:

The biggest shift (and challenge) to ESS is probably to keep the learner in the inclusive class as against removing him/her from the setting. Stated in other words, it implies that — as ESS staff member — one should from now on focus on assisting the learner (and teacher) in the inclusive classroom and not place him/her in a separate setting. This is a huge shift and will imply substantial creativity. ESS staff members will also have to resist the (old) implicit agenda of referring teachers to remove the learner from the classroom setting (Hay, *Implementation of the inclusive education paradigm shift in South African education support services*, 2003).

Hay is discussing inclusion in the context of education support services (ESS) in South Africa and emphasizes the need by teachers to allow the full immersion and participation of the learners. The same applies to leaders of institutions to utilize values consistent with ubuntu. Although ubuntu can be useful as an approach, it needs to be augmented by other efforts such as the rights-based approaches as enunciated by the Convention on the Rights of Disabled Persons (CRPD) and the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) (United Nations, 2011). According to the UN report:

Mainstreaming is at once a method, a policy and a tool for achieving social inclusion, which involves the practical pursuit of non-discrimination and equality of opportunity: mainstreaming disability is about recognizing persons with disabilities as rights-holding, equal members of society who must be actively engaged in the development process irrespective of their impairment or other status, such as race; colour; sex; sexual orientation; language; religion; political or other opinion; national, ethnic, indigenous or social origin; property; birth or age. Mainstreaming is also recognized as the most cost-effective and efficient way to achieve equality for persons with disabilities (United Nations, 2011).

Some of the best practices in making the needs of persons with disability to be adequately catered for include rights based approaches to mainstreaming disability:

... each mainstreaming initiative should contribute systematically to the implementation of the CRPD, which aims to promote, protect and ensure the full and equal enjoyment of all human rights and fundamental freedoms by all persons with disabilities, and to promote respect for their inherent dignity. This means promoting barrier removal and inclusion in all sectors, including health, rehabilitation, assistance and support, environments, education and employment (United Nations, 2011).

Perhaps, as we glean for local solutions to the problem of disability in Southern Africa, we need also to consider the role played by the rights based approach as it has pioneered the cause of persons with disability. The two can complement one another in advancing solutions to the problem of disability

6. Conclusion

In this paper, we have seen that the problem of disability is rife in the sub-region; its causes legion and dates way back in history. In this story, the persons with disability were experiencing a rough time. Even in church, the language used suggested that there was something wrong with persons with disability. Even in educational institutions, persons living with disability experience a myriad of problems all suggesting a severe restriction of their space. Although communities in Southern Africa are warming to the idea of reform, a lot still needs to be done. The paper argues that the philosophy of *hunnhu/ubuntu* can be harnessed to ameliorate the problem of disability as the values of inclusivity and humane consideration are built into it. This can help formulate sound educational policies in theological institutions and foster attitudes of accommodation in the classrooms.

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