



Leave no one behind

A comic guide for youth with disabilities in citizenship and political participation

When youth with disabilities rise in leadership, communities thrive and societies prosper!



Government of Ireland
International Development Programme



Sightsavers



The Ministry of Youth Affairs

I want to highlight the extreme importance of fostering an environment that promotes the inclusion and active participation of youth with disabilities in matters concerning citizenship and politics. Our society flourishes on diversity and ensuring equal opportunities for every individual. Our youth, regardless of their abilities, should be encouraged and empowered to make meaningful contributions to our democracy. By actively involving and engaging young individuals with disabilities in the political and civic realms, we can collectively support a more inclusive and representative society.

Enabling the participation of these young men and women not only benefits them personally, but also enriches the quality of decisions made in various spheres. To this end, we must provide the necessary resources, educational programmes, and platforms to equip our youth with disabilities with the knowledge and skills required to engage in citizenship and political processes.

Let us work together to break down the barriers that hinder the full potential of youth with disabilities and forge a path toward a brighter and more inclusive society. I encourage all young individuals, irrespective of abilities, to actively participate in political and civic processes. Your voice matters, and it is an integral part of shaping our collective future.

Together, let us create a society where every young person's citizenship and political participation are cherished, valued and respected. Wishing you all the best in your endeavours.

Hon. Patrick Gibril

Deputy Minister of Youth Affairs



The African Youth with Disabilities Network – Sierra Leone (AYWDN-SL)

The AYWDN-SL is an organisation of youth with disabilities that focuses on promoting an inclusive and barrier-free society for all. AYWDN-SL strengthened partnership with Sightsavers through the development of the A Better World (ABW) project, specifically on Citizen and Political Participation (CPP) of youth with disabilities for which we are one of the key partners. We carried out the research on youth with disabilities participation in politics and public life and captured our findings in this guide. We were also given the opportunity to add our input and ensure disability friendliness into the guide.

This guide is clearly reflective of its title 'Leave No One Behind' by ensuring all types of disabilities are captured, particularly the minority groups. The guide will help readers to understand the concept of disability, identifications and recognitions by duty-bearers to mainstream disability across our institutions and society. The need for reasonable accommodation will be actualised and enhance equity for young people with disabilities, particularly in the participation of public life. This guide will truly make our work easier as an organisation of persons with disabilities (OPDs) particularly when used as a tool when providing training on disability mainstreaming to stakeholders or duty-bearers.

We strongly believe that the guide will influence positive change that can reduce stigma, discrimination and enhance self-confidence, aspiration and determination among young people with disabilities, that will ensure and trigger an inclusive and barrier-free society in Sierra Leone.

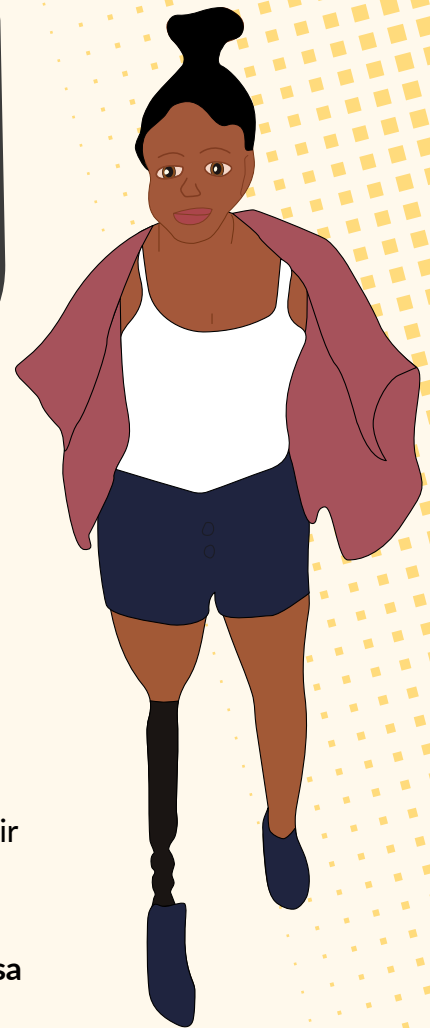
Abubakarr Bangura

Country Representative

Welcome

Hi there!

We are Youth with Disabilities (YWD) and we are here to guide you through this comic.



Acknowledgement

We would like to extend our heartfelt appreciation to all those who contributed to the creation of this invaluable guide for youth with disabilities on citizenship and political participation. Your dedication to empowering young individuals with disabilities is commendable, and your efforts will undoubtedly make a meaningful impact on their lives and our society as a whole. Thank you for your unwavering commitment to inclusivity and civic engagement.

This guide has been written by Beatrice Koroma, Kisimi Kayleemasa Kamara, Laurène Leclercq, Eric Musa and Abubakarr Sesay.



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Sightsavers

National Consortium for the Enhancements of Persons with Disabilities (PWDs) (NaCEPeD)

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Introduction

As you embark on the journey through this guide, you'll gain insights into disability and inclusion, citizenship and political participation, and your rights as a citizen. You will also discover strategies to overcome stigma and discrimination, build essential leadership and communication skills, and learn how to advocate for accessibility and information. You'll explore the importance of representation and participation in local governance, and you'll find resources and support networks that stand ready to assist you in your endeavours.

You'll find also real-life stories of youth with disabilities just like you who have defied stereotypes, broken down barriers and made their voices heard. These stories demonstrate that you have the power to shape your destiny and create a more inclusive Sierra Leone. So, remember that you are not alone.

Let's get started. Your journey to empowerment begins now.



Section 1




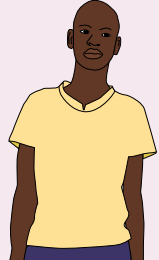
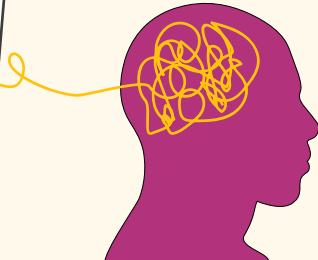
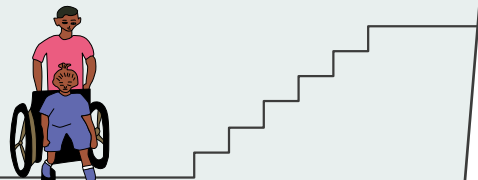
Disability and inclusion

Definition of disability

The United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (CRPD) defines disability as: "Persons 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."

This definition emphasises the links between an individual's impairment and societal barriers, highlighting that disabilities are not solely a result of an individual's medical conditions but are also shaped by the obstacles present in society that restrict their full inclusion and participation.

Common disabilities in Sierra Leone

 <p>There is ability in every disability</p>	<p>Sensory: Conditions that impact the senses, like blindness or deafness.</p> 	
<p>Physical: These include conditions that affect a person's mobility, such as being unable to walk.</p>		<p>Intellectual: Cognitive disabilities that affect a person's ability to learn and understand.</p>
	<p>Disability is also shaped by barriers (like traditional norms, perceptions, beliefs, lack of access to information and physical spaces) present in society that restrict the full inclusion and participation of youth with disabilities.</p>	
<p>Social: Disabilities related to communication and social interactions, e.g autism.</p>		<p>Mental health: Conditions like anxiety, depression, or bipolar disorder.</p>

Disability and societal barriers

Fatu, a youth with disability, constantly encountered whispers and stares from some of her classmates. Some children made hurtful remarks about her disability, while others questioned why she bothered attending school when she was “different.” These hurtful words began to weigh heavily on Fatu’s heart. Despite her determination, the stigma and discrimination grew more pronounced over time. Teachers, though well-meaning, struggled to accommodate Fatu’s needs in a school system that wasn’t adequately equipped for students with disabilities. Fatu, feeling increasingly isolated and misunderstood, started to doubt herself and her capabilities. One day, the burden became too much for Fatu to bear. Overwhelmed by the taunts and the feeling of not belonging, she tearfully confided in her parents. Reluctantly, Fatu made the heart-breaking decision to stop attending school.

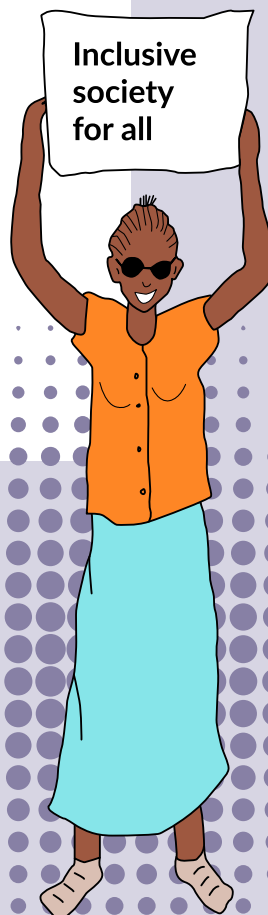
**#SayNoToSocietalBarriers
AgainstYWDs**

Inclusive society

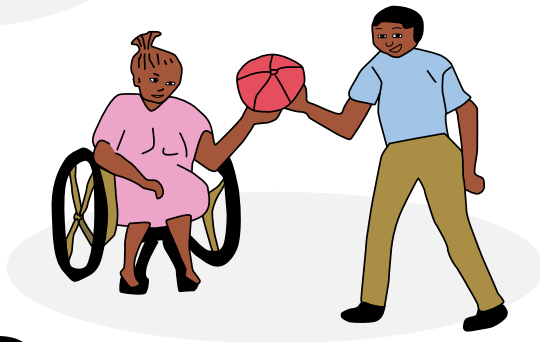
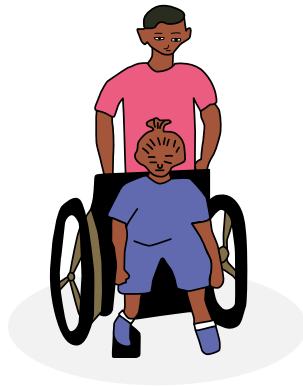
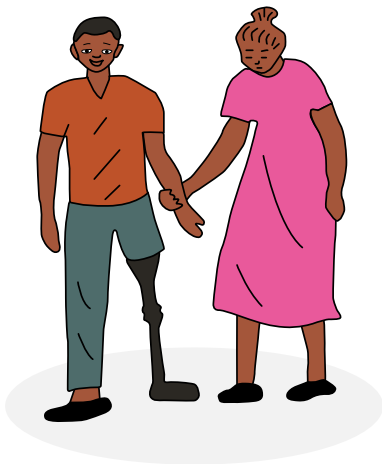
Inclusion means that every individual, regardless of their abilities or disabilities, should have the opportunity to participate fully in society and decision-making processes. An inclusive society respects and values diversity. It recognises that every person has unique strengths and contributions to offer. Overall, the inclusion of youth with disabilities in decision-making processes is not only a matter of rights but also a way to build a more just inclusive and empathetic society for everyone.

Features of an inclusive society

- Breaks down barriers and promotes equal access for all to education, employment and public services.
- Celebrates diversity and values the unique perspectives and talents of all its members, including youth with disabilities.
- Encourages active participation of everyone, creating a sense of belonging for all.



Carrying each other in an inclusive society

An illustration of a young man in a yellow shirt and blue shorts, using a cane and holding a sign that says "A world for and with youth with disabilities". He is on a purple background with a white grid pattern.

A world for and with youth with disabilities

Meet Musa

Musa, a young man with a disability, experienced discrimination when he tried to attend a local event. Instead of feeling defeated, Musa contacted local leaders and organised a workshop on disability awareness. He showed them that people with disabilities deserve respect. Together, we can rewrite the policies that shape our society, ensuring that everyone has equal access and opportunity.

#InclusionMatters

Section 2

Citizenship and political participation

Citizenship

Citizenship is when an individual, a family or a group is officially recognised as a citizen or member of a particular state. Citizenship for youth with disabilities involves recognising their rights and ensuring they have equal opportunities to participate in decision-making processes. As a citizen, you have certain rights like freedom of speech, the right to vote and to be voted for, just like everyone else. These rights are protected by laws to ensure fairness and equality.

Political participation

Your participation in politics contributes to more inclusive and representative decision-making, ensuring that policies and initiatives consider the diverse needs and perspectives of all members of society. Advocating for the full inclusion of youth with disabilities in public life (particularly within political parties, e.g. in the Political Party Registration Commission) including the ability to stand as candidates for public office, a role in local leadership, and the right to vote or be voted for, is crucial for fostering an inclusive society and democracy.

Inclusive citizenship and political participation

Inclusive citizenship emphasises creating an environment where youth with disabilities have the same rights, opportunities and responsibilities as their peers without disabilities. Political participation refers to your involvement in political processes and activities, such as engagement in voting, advocacy, leadership in decision making and community engagement.



Citizenship in action

Meet Agnes, a youth with a disability. She learned about her right to education and decided to attend school. Agnes faced challenges, but she knew her rights. As a citizen and youth with disability, you should know your rights. Agnes and her family worked with their community to make the school accessible. Agnes is now a computer scientist, an entrepreneur and a strong advocate for inclusive education.

Balancing rights and responsibilities

Balancing your rights and responsibilities is essential for a harmonious society. It ensures that everyone's rights are protected, and everyone can live in peace.

A community's success

Imagine a community where everyone understands their rights and responsibilities. People respect each other, and together, they create a vibrant and inclusive place to live.

This balance leads to a successful community where youth with disabilities, like you, can thrive and contribute.

Community engagement

To be good citizens, you should actively engage in making your communities better. Here are some examples of activities you can engage in:

Youth with disabilities (YWD) engaging their communities

The image consists of six panels arranged in a 2x3 grid, each with an illustration and a text box. The panels are: 1. Top-left: A man in a wheelchair is taking a selfie with a woman and a man standing behind him. Text: 'We should celebrate disability (Disability Pride)'. 2. Top-middle: A landscape with trees and tree stumps. Text: 'No to deforestation, no to littering, no to drug abuse, no to crimes!'. 3. Top-right: A woman and a man in a wheelchair are planting a tree together. Text: 'YWDs plant trees to help address climate change'. 4. Bottom-left: A man in a blue shirt holds a sign that says 'I VOTED!'. Text: 'YWDs have the right to vote and to be voted for'. 5. Bottom-middle: A man in a wheelchair is speaking at a community meeting. Text: 'YWDs should take part in community meetings'. 6. Bottom-right: A group of people, including a man in a wheelchair, are gathered around a laptop. Text: 'YWDs should join or form youth associations'.

We should celebrate disability (Disability Pride).

No to deforestation, no to littering, no to drug abuse, no to crimes!

YWDs plant trees to help address climate change.

YWDs have the right to vote and to be voted for.

YWDs should take part in community meetings.

YWDs should join or form youth associations.

Section 3

Rights and legal framework

Political participation rights

Voting rights

Youth with disabilities have the fundamental right to both vote and be voted for, contributing their perspectives and leadership to enrich our societies with diversity, inclusivity and innovation.

Accessibility

Accessible avenues and material are vital to enable your full participation in shaping our collective future through democratic processes. There should be efforts to ensure that polling stations, ballots, political events, campaigns, and information are more accessible and that staff are trained.

Representation

There should be efforts to ensure self-representation or a quota of people with disabilities in political offices, in Election Commission of Sierra Leone and decision-making bodies.

The importance of understanding your rights

Understanding your rights is a crucial step in doing the following:

- Become a knowledgeable and empowered citizen who actively participates in youth associations and in your community projects.
- Make informed decisions about your education, employment, health and life choices.
- Advocate for yourself and others if you encounter unequal treatment or access to services.



Meet Sarah, a youth with disability

Sarah's courage and drive redefine possibilities. As she campaigns for council, she embodies the strength within us all, proving that barriers are meant to be surpassed, not accepted.

Legal and institutional Framework

Globally and in Sierra Leone legal and institutional frameworks have been established for people with disabilities to promote their rights and inclusion. See the grid below for more information:

Legal and institutional framework

International Legal Obligations

Article 29 of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (**CRPD**) addresses participation in political and public life. Sierra Leone ratified this convention on 4th May 2009, which emphasises the right to participate fully and equally in political and public life.

Sustainable Development Goals (Goals 10 and 16):

Goals 10.2 and **16.7** recommend the integration and participation of people with disabilities in order to promote their social integration, economic and political participation.

Sierra Leone Disability Act and Constitutional Rights

Disability Act n°3, 2011 Sierra Leone has a Disability Act that aims to protect the rights of persons with disabilities, including their political participation.

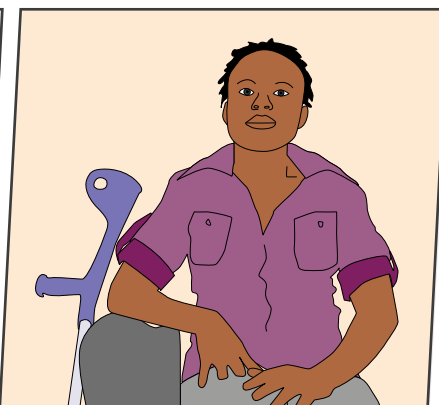
Constitutional Rights, Act n°6 & Cluster 6.3.1

Sierra Leone's constitution 1991 recognises the rights of persons with disabilities and their entitlement to equal treatment and opportunities.



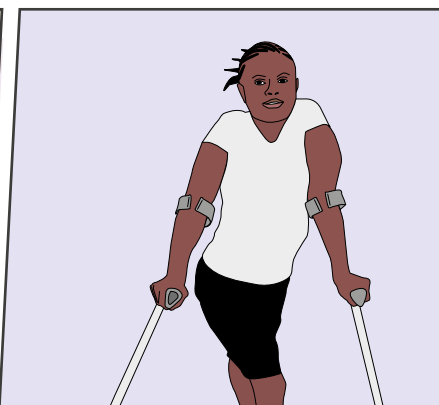
Alie, a young man with disability, wants to aspire for the position of a councillor to represent his ward.

UNCRPD advocates that youth with disabilities participate in politics and public life



Mariama, a youth with disability, is empowering herself with education with the goal to represent her district as a member of parliament.

SDG 10.2 and **16.7** promotes reduced inequalities



Agnes, a young woman with disability, launched a movement that advocates for the inclusion of YWDs in all decision-making processes in Sierra Leone.

The 2011 Disability Act protects the rights and responsibilities of Agnes

Section 4

Stigma and discrimination

Stigma and discrimination against people with disabilities refer to the negative attitudes, beliefs and behaviours directed toward people with disabilities. This discrimination can manifest in various ways, limiting opportunities, access and societal inclusion. Here are some examples:

Inaccessible political structures

Often, political structures and buildings are not designed to accommodate individuals with disabilities. This physical barrier prevents their access to political meetings, rallies or voting booths, limiting their participation.

Lack of representation

Youth with disabilities may struggle to find representation in political offices or decision-making bodies. This absence can lead to policies and decisions being made without considering their unique perspectives and needs.

Negative stereotyping

There are negative stereotypes that individuals with disabilities lack the capacity to make informed political decisions or contribute meaningfully to governance.

Limited access to information

Information about political processes and candidates might not be provided in accessible formats such as Braille, sign language, or easy-to-read materials, making it challenging for youth with disabilities to stay informed and engage effectively.

Societal and intra-familial struggles

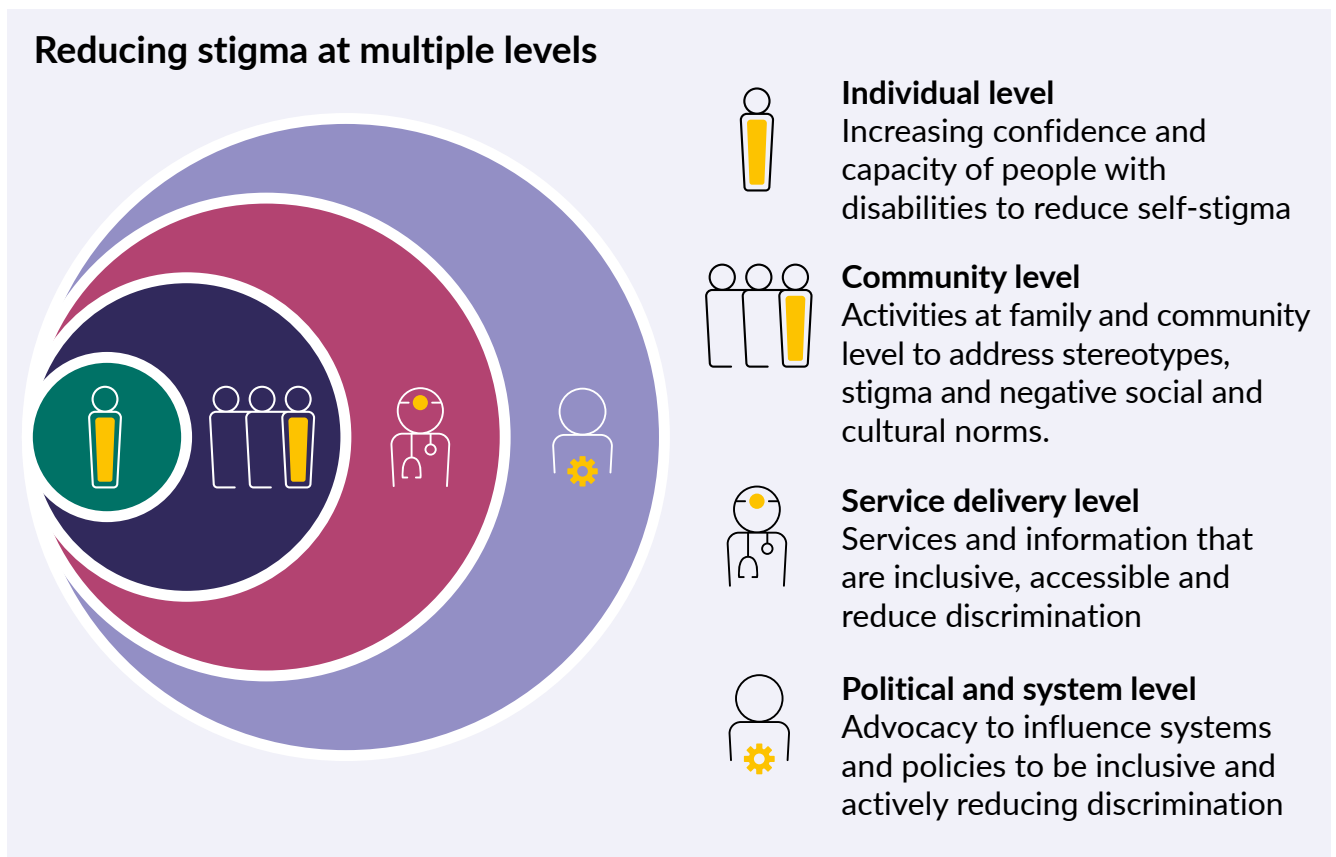
Discrimination within closest circles is compounding the struggles they already contend with in the broader community attributed to them for their own poverty, neglect, ridicule and occasional instances of abuse.

Reducing stigma

Youth with disabilities, especially women, face stigma, gender stereotypes, discrimination and more as barriers in participating in politics. To reduce stigma, discrimination and negative attitudes, we need to address individual behaviours but also the cultural and social norms, systems and policies that surround people.

We need to support youth with disabilities to act as equal actors in their community. This can be done by highlighting positive role models who have successfully overcome stereotypes and barriers to become active citizens and political participants. Sharing their stories and achievements can inspire and motivate other youth with disabilities to do the same.

Interventions at multiple levels can include:



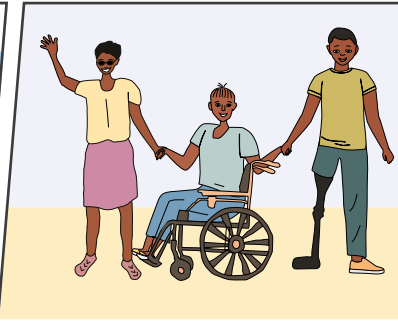
We can do this through a number of different activities:

- Communication such as media activities, educational talks and interpersonal communication to improve, for example, people's knowledge, attitudes and empathy towards people with disabilities.
- Community activities to promote change at the community level, in particular by acting on negative social norms and attitudes. This can take the form of community dialogues, community mobilisations, community meetings, etc.
- Creating space to discuss with community leaders such as traditional leaders, religious leaders, political leaders, etc. on how to reduce stigma.
- Advocacy to change systems and policies that are accessible and inclusive.

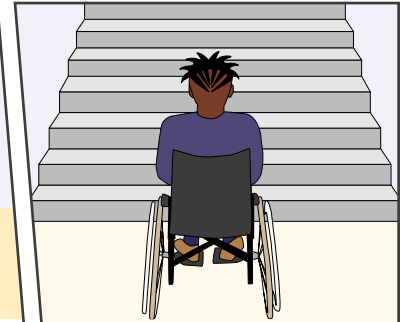
Breaking stereotypes



No one left behind



We should demonstrate that we are differently abled and that we are not inferior to anyone



Remove all barriers

“Silence is the last thing the world will ever hear from me”

Marlee Matlin

“Just because a man lacks the use of his eyes, doesn't mean he lacks vision”

Stevie Wonder

“Know your limits, but never stop trying to break them”

Kyle Maynard

Section 5

Self confidence and leadership

Self-esteem

You should think about your self-esteem to promote how you feel about yourselves as a whole. You should be patient with yourselves and stay committed to your personal growth. It's a journey that can lead to a more positive self-image and a happier, healthier life.

Self-confidence

You should be self-confident. Self-confidence is the foundation of effective leadership. It's the belief in yourself and your abilities. Embrace your strengths and acknowledge your achievements; set achievable goals and celebrate your progress; and practise self-care and maintain a positive mind-set. When

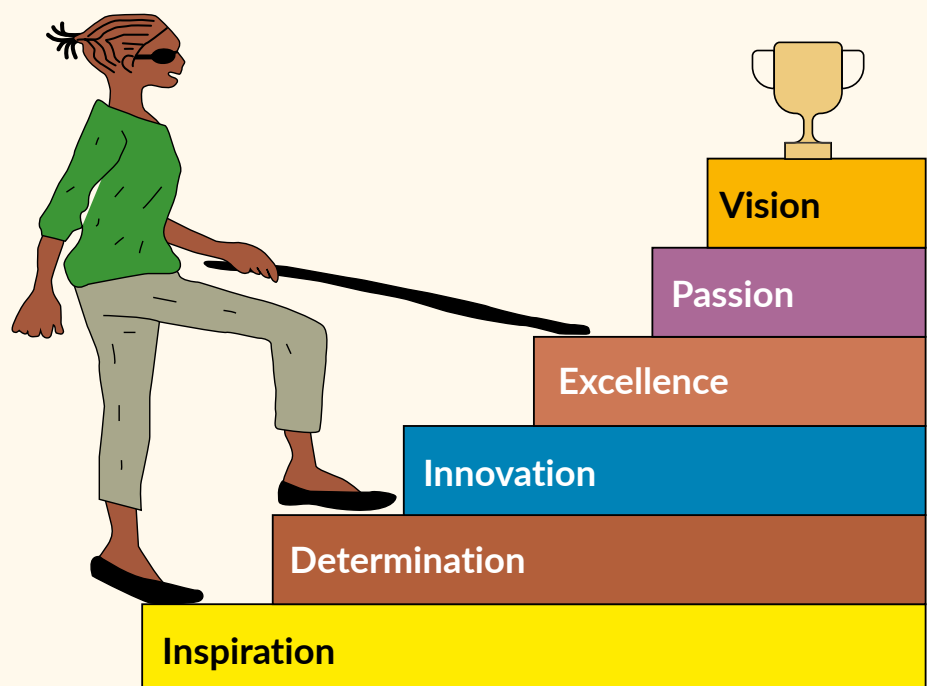
you have self-confidence, you can inspire and lead others; make decisions without self-doubt; and stay determined, flexible and hopeful, finding ways to navigate obstacles, and using them as opportunities for growth.

Disability Pride

With Disability Pride, the identity, culture, and achievements of people with disabilities are celebrated. Disability Pride emphasises self-acceptance, empowerment and challenging societal stigmas. It aims to foster a sense of belonging, equality and respect for individuals with disabilities, and the recognition of their diverse experiences and contributions to society.

The steps: Tips to success

Through unwavering **inspiration** and **determination**, fostering **innovation** and **excellence** fuelled by **passion**, you can realise their **vision** and achieve resounding **success**.



Disability in Leadership (DiL)

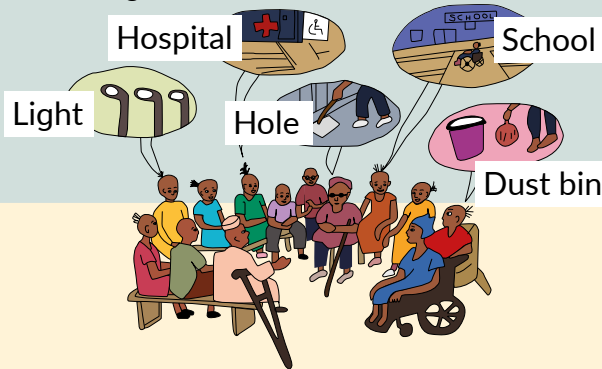
Disability in leadership is an emerging and important area of discussion and advocacy. Historically, society has often overlooked or underestimated the potential of individuals with disabilities to hold leadership positions.

However, this perspective is evolving as awareness grows about the diverse talents, skills and perspectives that individuals with disabilities bring to leadership roles.

Disability sensitive leadership

Participatory leadership

This is a style where leaders involve others in the decision-making process. Instead of making all decisions themselves, participatory leaders encourage collaboration, seek input from everyone including youth with disabilities, and consider their perspectives when making choices.



Give us the Disability in Political Participation (DiPP) Act now: People with disabilities in leadership positions

Participatory sensitive leadership

This refers to a leadership style that combines participation, inclusivity, and sensitivity to the needs, perspectives, and contributions of all individuals involved including youth with disabilities.



Inclusive political participation

This refers to creating inclusive opportunities and accommodations that enable people with disabilities to engage fully in the political process. This approach aims to ensure that they have equal access to voting, campaigning, holding office and engaging in political discussions and decision-making processes.

Leadership skills

Youth with disabilities benefit immensely from developing leadership skills because it empowers them to advocate for themselves, engage in their communities and create positive change. Leadership skills foster self-confidence, communication abilities and problem-solving, allowing them to navigate challenges, influence others and contribute meaningfully to society, despite barriers they might face. Leadership also helps in promoting inclusivity, breaking stereotypes and creating a more accessible world for everyone.

Leadership skills include:

- **Communication:** The skill to convey ideas, listen and inspire.
- **Decision-making:** The ability to make informed choices.
- **Problem-solving:** Finding solutions to challenges.
- **Empathy:** Understanding and connecting with others.
- **Representation:** The skill to consult and listen to others' ideas, and to speak for the majority of your peers, not only for yourself.



Ramatu's leadership journey

Ramatu, a young woman with hearing impairment, discovered her leadership potential when she started a campaign for youth with disabilities in leadership roles in her city. Her self-confidence grew and she developed strong leadership skills by organising events, speaking in public and building a team of passionate advocates.

#LeadershipMatters

Section 7

Representation and participation

In an inclusive society, it is important to take into account the needs, aspirations and rights of youth with disabilities through their representation and full participation in decision-making groups such as youth councils and associations.

Representation

Representation is about having youth with disabilities like you in positions where decisions are made. If you are designated or elected as representative in a working group or an association, you will first have to understand what your disabled peers think and want to communicate. Their voices will be heard through your voice, so you will not talk for yourself if you are in a leadership position. You will also need to respect what others want to say.

Participation

Youth with disabilities bring unique perspectives and talents to society, and their active participation is crucial. It means that being only consulted is not enough. Change will happen only if you are able to make meaningful suggestions, and if your ideas are listened and taken into account by other leaders and decision-makers. This is the only way to ensure that disability will be integrated within youth projects and budgets, so that youth with disabilities are not left behind in education, health and livelihoods services.



Adama, a youth with disability, leading a committee that is working on the introduction of the Disability in Political Participation (DiPP) Act.

Levels of participation

The steps below measure and illustrate the levels of quality in your participation, in your membership in existing organisations and the impact of your participation. Why not have a go at rating your current level of participation on the different ladders. Where are you now and where do you hope to be, say in five years time?

Participation in political decision making

Level 4:

You are providing clear recommendations (which are taken into account)



Level 3:

You are providing some suggestions (some of them are taken into account)



Level 2:

You are consulted (but they don't listen to your ideas)



Level 1:

You are only informed (but no interaction)



Level 0:

You are unaware of what's happening



Membership of youth organisations



Levels of impact of youth with disabilities' active membership and participation





Case Study: Maria Kamara, a Community Champion

Maria, a young woman with disability, experienced a change in her life when she joined a youth movement focusing on climate action. Initially marginalised and overlooked, her involvement in civic activities empowered her. She actively engaged within the youth association, ensuring that she would also sensitise kids in the school clubs about climate change. She gave good examples on how youth with disabilities were involved in the initiative of plastic recycling, and how they contributed to cleaning the environment in the community. Thanks to the participation of all youth, including those with disabilities, the youth association won the price of the Freetown Environmental Agency, and was rewarded with money for additional inclusive projects.

Case Study: Mamoud Jalloh, CEO of the Deaf People organisation

Mamoud's representation of deaf people in decision-making instances was evident through his involvement in various community initiatives where he actively participated and advocated for the rights and inclusion of the deaf community. Mamoud actively engaged with policymakers to ensure that the needs and concerns of the deaf community were represented in legislative discussions. He is now a member of the Youth Council that lobbies for policies promoting accessibility, education and employment opportunities for the youth. With his organisation he is also lobbying for the introduction of Sign Language in the school curriculum.

[#SignLanguageForALL](#)





Youth with disabilities holding a community meeting with elders to discuss the importance of their involvement in decision-making processes

Section 8

Electoral system and local governance

Understanding the electoral system in Sierra Leone

The electoral system, the voting process and the role of youth with disabilities in local and youth councils have an impact in the decision-making chain from local to national levels.

Electoral system in Sierra Leone

It is a combination of elements from both first-past-the-post (FPTP) and proportional representation (PR) systems.

FPTP: The country is divided into constituencies. The candidate with the most votes in each constituency wins a seat in Parliament.

PR: Additional seats in Parliament are allocated based on the proportion of votes received by each political party. These seats are filled by candidates from party lists.

Voting process for youth with disabilities

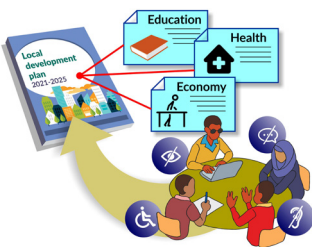
Make sure you register to vote. On election day, bring your voter ID card and any needed assistive devices. Polling staff should provide assistance if requested. If you face discrimination or barriers to participation, report it to the Sierra Leone Human Rights Commission or other relevant authorities.

Local governance system: local councils

Decision-making occurs through local councils. These councils are responsible for local governance, managing resources and making decisions on various community matters.

Your participation in local governance

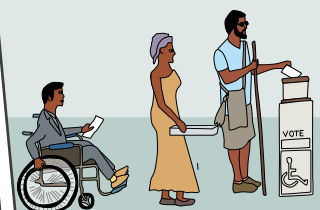
You can engage in local governance by raising concerns through advocacy groups or representatives; participation in council meetings; attending meetings and voicing opinions; and being consulted on matters concerning disabilities in the community.



Disability friendly projects and budgets in the local council plan

Your participation in youth councils

As elected representatives, you can participate in youth councils by running for positions within youth councils, advocating for policies and programs that support inclusion; and collaborating with other council members to ensure that disability is addressed in youth-related decisions.



Disability friendly polling stations

Link between local governance and national governance

In Sierra Leone, national governance allocates responsibilities and budgets to local levels, ensuring decentralisation. This transfer empowers local authorities to manage resources and make decisions that align with community needs, while fostering broader national development goals.

Likelihood that youth with disabilities will be voted for?

To increase the likelihood of being voted for, you should engage actively with the community; join a political party; gain experience by volunteering or interning with politicians or organisations that work on issues related to disabilities; utilise social media platforms to share your messages, engage with followers and educate the public about your vision; develop a strong campaign strategy that resonates with voters and highlights your qualifications, regardless of disability; mobilise support from your communities, friends and individuals who believe in your visions.



Edna, a youth with disability, participating in a local council meeting

Sightsavers believes in a world where everyone has the opportunity to live a life full of possibilities. Its mission is to eliminate preventable blindness and promote the inclusion and well-being of people with disabilities worldwide.

www.sightsavers.org

eWomen SL is an innovative organisation that sees challenges as opportunities. Creating opportunities from challenges is therefore the main focus of eWomen SL. This guide is an opportunity that is created from the challenges youth with disabilities are facing.

www.ewomensl.com



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