

Debate on quality of life report: People with Disabilities

Hon speaker

Hon Committee Chairperson

Hon members

All guests

South Africa is one of the most unequal societies in the world. There is inequality between blacks and whites, men and women, rural and urban people. However, when we talk of inequality and empowerment initiatives, we do not often hear about people living with disabilities. These are the forgotten people in our society. As leaders and as members of communities, we should all be concerned that as we celebrate 21 years of a democratic order, people with disabilities have been left behind.

Honorable Members, our struggle to integrate people with disabilities into the mainstream economy means that we have not yet redressed the legacy of Apartheid. According to the 2011 Census data, black people have the highest proportion of people living with disabilities and disability is more prevalent in women than in men. Black women are already at the bottom of the heap as a result of the policies of the past which were designed to shut them out of the economy, but the situation is

must worse if that black woman also has a disability. We need to address this as a matter of urgency.

The Census also indicates that the Eastern Cape and KwaZulu-Natal provinces have the highest percentage of not economically active persons with a disability. It also shows that there is a low labour absorption for people with disabilities. The NFP does not believe in opposing for the sake of it; we also believe in providing solutions. Last year, during the Social Development Budget debates, I made a proposal to initiate a programme that would benefit disabled persons by providing them with skills opportunities and providing them with an income. I would like to table this plan once more:

We call this the Provincial Disabled Persons Service Programme. The objectives of this project would be to:

- To promote social cohesion; people living with disabilities are often left out and this project would help integrate them into communities, making their own contributions as able-bodied persons;
- The project will also help to develop skills of people living with disabilities instead of depending solely on social grants,

This will also improve the employability through opportunities for skills development, and work experience so that they too can also play a part in the economy.

This programme would be an extension of EPWP programmes but the difference is that it would prioritise persons with disabilities. Chairperson, I strongly believe the committee should consider this proposal and should engage various departments on it.

During the Parliament for people with disabilities, a number of issues were raised by community members and their representatives. Honorable members, some of these issues should make all of us deeply embarrassed. These were cases of ambulances not being able to accommodate wheelchairs, cases of institutions of learning not being facilitated to accommodate disabled persons and there was even a shocking case where a NPO application was rejected because it was written in Braille. This is clear discrimination and as the NFP we condemn this in the strongest terms.

One of the suggestions that was made was that special schools need to be built for disabled persons. As the NFP we do not believe this is the right route to take. We believe that all mainstream schools should make it their responsibility to cater for children with disabilities. We do not believe excluding them is the answer; in fact, this would lead to further discrimination. We need to teach all our children, from an early age, that disabled people are a part of society and that they are as equal as everyone else.

Persons with disabilities have an important role to play to make a positive contribution in the workplace. But in order to integrate them into the broader society, we need to break down the barriers. There is still a lot of ignorance and stereotypes around disabilities and until we can confront that, we will never solve this issue of inequality.

Honorable Members, we have one of the most admired Constitutions in the world; it ensures freedom, fairness and equality for all. But we need to make this a living document by including disabled persons in everything we do. Persons with disabilities must not be an after-thought. Like all human beings; they need to be at the front and centre. Only then, can we claim to be a truly equal society for all.

Thank you.