

De-colonizing Disability Theory I – Crippling Development
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From Rhetoric to Reality – The Impact of the Models of Disability and the UN Convention on the Lives of PWDs

Disability issues have begun to be of concern to different development practitioners as a result of the coming into force of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of People with Disabilities (PWDs). It's a known fact that PWDs suffer from many social problems in society ranging from negative attitudes to illiteracy and poor health. Various models by different scholars have been put forward to explain the term "disability". Among these is the concept of rehabilitation which includes both medical and social models of disability. Michael Oliver (1990) gave an analysis of these models in his book "The Politics of Disablement: A Sociological Approach". Recent Studies on disability have been centered on these two models. These models are however applied differently in different contexts and environments. While western "professionals" mainly focus on the medical models, the southern world relies heavily on the social model. The reasons for this are numerous and range from technological backwardness to societal beliefs and myths attached to disability. My presentation will attempt to analyze these models and the impact of the UN Convention (as an international human rights instrument) on the lives of PWDs in the global north and global south from a practical point of view. When a child for example becomes deaf, the first thing on the mind of the West is to "cure" the deafness or provide a device to help the person gain his / her hearing. While in the global south, where there are inadequate medical services, the first thing on the mind of the people is to neglect the person or teach that person sign language. Long ago, disability was largely seen as a medical issue. However today, disability is more of a social issue especially to the southern world. In my presentation, I want to look at the UN Convention and the medical and social approaches to disability and their applicability. I also want to talk about my experience as a person with disability (I am deaf myself). I carried out an academic research study in one rural area in Uganda to investigate the factors that influence enrolment of children with disabilities to rehabilitation programs of Non-government organizations (NGOs). I want to focus on some of my findings in this presentation. The findings revealed that a combination of motivating and constraining factors influence enrollment to rehabilitation programs.