

Reserved elected seats for persons with disabilities

Uganda (Parliament, local governments) - CONSTITUTION, PARLIAMENTARY ELECTIONS STATUTE & LOCAL GOVERNMENTS ACT

Around the world persons with disabilities are underrepresented in public life, but this is not the case in Uganda. The country legislated that elected political bodies at all levels must reserve a minimum number of seats for representatives of persons with disabilities.

IN BRIEF

Uganda's Constitution of 1995 rules that the State shall ensure fair representation of marginalized groups – including persons with disabilities – on all government bodies. As a result, legislators have passed several acts to increase the representation of persons with disabilities in the public sphere. Parliament has reserved five seats for Members who represent persons with disabilities; and every village, parish, sub-county, and district council has to include at least one man and one woman with a disability. Uganda's 47,000 representatives with disabilities are easily the largest group of politicians with disabilities in the world.

FACTS & FIGURES

- Initial Years: 1995, 1996, 1997
- At each term since 1995 at least five parliamentarians with disabilities from four regions (Central, East, West, North) and one national woman with disability representative have been elected.
- In 2011 a total of 12 parliamentarians with disabilities were elected.
- Uganda has some 47,000 representatives with disabilities – or some 0.5 percent of the registered electorate – at the local and district level.

INNOVATION

Direct Representation

Only a few countries provide for direct representation of persons with disabilities at all levels of government.

Use of Electoral College

The Electoral College, which ensures a minimum political representation of persons with disabilities in Parliament and local authorities, stretches from the village to the national level and is composed only of persons with disabilities. In addition, there is an emphasis on the principle of gender balance.

CONTEXT

For a long time persons with disabilities remained excluded from political decision-making bodies in Uganda, which in turn reinforced their exclusion through the absence of policies favouring them. In 1987 the newly formed National Union of Disabled Persons (NUDIPU) started to challenge the inconsistencies in policy-making. NUDIPU was the key driver for the inclusion of the Hon. Eliphaz Mazima as a representative with disabilities in the Constitution's drafting committee. Hon. Mazima achieved the inclusion of disability in the Constitution of 1995. Since then many laws have operationalized the constitutional provisions, including the Parliamentary Elections Statute of 1996 and the Local Governments Act of 1997, both of which ensure the representation of persons with disabilities in all political elected bodies. Through this representation mechanism, as well as the National Council for Disability, disabled peoples organizations are directly involved in the development and monitoring of policies.

“Uganda's special system of directly elected representatives with disabilities is the reason why parliamentarians with disabilities are now also elected via the mainstream electoral system.”

—Hon. Ndeezi ALEX, Member of Parliament for Persons with Disabilities – Central Region

KEY FEATURES

Uganda's Constitution requires that Parliament shall consist of a number of representatives of persons with disabilities, and the State shall ensure fair representation of marginalized groups on all bodies. As a result, Uganda has enacted the Parliamentary Elections Statute of 1996 that provides for five seats in Parliament for representatives of persons with disabilities, elected by a national Electoral College. This College is composed of district representatives, four from each district. In this way persons with disabilities elect their representatives through an electoral college composed only of persons with disabilities. Uganda has also enacted the Local Governments Act of 1997, which provides for the allocation of a certain number of seats for people with disabilities in elected political bodies at all levels – from village, to parish, to sub-county, to district council.

OUTCOME, IMPACT AND EFFECTIVENESS

- In 1998 the State Minister for the Elderly and Disability Affairs was created.
- Since 2008 parliamentarians with disabilities have also been elected through the mainstream electoral process.
- Members of Parliament with disabilities have been successful in ensuring that their concerns were addressed in several major laws, including the Children's Statute of 1996.

TRANSFERABILITY, SCALABILITY AND COST-EFFICIENCY

A number of delegations from other countries, including Kenya, Morocco, Nigeria, Rwanda, South Africa, South Sudan, and Swaziland, have visited Uganda to learn about its reserved seats for persons with disabilities. Kenya adopted a similar provision in 2011, but there the party chooses the representatives with disabilities.

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SOURCES

Constitution of the Republic of Uganda, 1995: <http://bit.ly/1u5eYmv>

Uganda's Local Governments Act, 1997: <http://bit.ly/1yC5wrX>

Uganda's Parliamentary Elections Act, 2005: <http://bit.ly/1rZITjM>

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