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Coping with the Unfriendly Working Environment in Public Service Employment in Uganda: Voices of Employees with Visual Impairment

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Coping with the Unfriendly Working Environment in Public Service Employment in Uganda: Voices of Employees with Visual Impairment

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Abstract Uganda has progressive disability laws that guarantee persons with disabilities a right to employment and a favorable work environment. These laws require employers to provide an inclusive and accessible work environment for employees with disabilities. Whereas there is an increasing attempt to recruit persons with disabilities in public service employment, a favorable working environment for them is lacking and persons with visual impairment are more disadvantaged. The situation of an unfriendly working environment had compelled them to adopt coping mechanisms to work. This paper explores how persons with visual impairment cope with an unfriendly working environment in public service employment. The article originates from my Ph.D. study on access to and inclusion of persons with visual impairment in public service employment in Uganda. The theoretical frameworks underpinning this paper are the human rights standard of equality and non-discrimination, the equity principle of social justice, and the social model of understanding disability. A qualitative research approach through interviews and observations was applied to obtain information. Twenty-two (22) participants were reached. The findings indicate that employees with visual impairment cope with an unfriendly working environment by relying on colleagues, using relatives and friends, using part of their salaries to pay for auxiliary and support services, improvising, applying mobility & orientation skills, and showing commitment to work.

The paper recommends that public service needs to equalize opportunities for employees with visual impairment by providing them reasonable accommodation, accessibility, and affirmative action in employment.

Keywords: *affirmative action; coping mechanism in employment; persons with visual impairment; reasonable accommodation; unfriendly working environment; public service employment.*

1. INTRODUCTION

This paper originates from my Ph.D. thesis undertaken at Mbarara University of Science & Technology. The study is on access to and inclusion of persons with visual impairment in public service employment in Uganda.

Globally, 15 percent (approximately 1.1 billion) of the world's population are persons with disabilities [PWDs] (WHO, 2015). It also estimates that globally 253 million persons have a visual impairment, of which 36 million are blind, and 217million have a moderate visual impairment (WHO, 2017; Ackland et al., 2017; WHO, 2017).

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2015; IAPB, 2015). In Uganda, PWDs constitute 14% (estimated 4.5 million) of Uganda's total population (UBOS, 2019), and of which 6.1 percent (approximately 2.1 million) are persons with visual impairment (UBOS, 2016a).

Regarding employment, globally, ILO (2015) estimates that approximately 785 to 975 million PWDs are of working-age. However, data regarding the employment of PWDs is systematically not available in several countries, and employment rates of PWDs are below that of the overall population (WHO, 2015). In Uganda, there is a high level of unemployment in the country generally (UBOS, 2018). In regards to PWDs, there is limited data on their employment and unemployment. Available literature indicates that the unemployment and underemployment rate of PWDs is higher than for the ordinary persons both in the private and public service in Uganda (Mitra et al., 2013; NUDIPU, 2016; Disabled People's Organization-Denmark [DPOD], 2016; Leonard Cheshire, 2018). It also estimates that 57% of PWDs are unable to meet their necessities of life than 45 percent of persons without disabilities in Uganda (Leonard Cheshire, 2018). The main contributing factor to the increased levels of poverty among PWDs is the lack of job opportunities open to them both in the private and public sectors in the country (Nyombi & Kibandama, 2014; NUDIPU, 2016; Nyombi & Kibandama, 2016; DPOD, 2016; Leonard Cheshire, 2018). The above situation is due to the barriers experienced by PWDs to obtaining employment and within the workplace environment such as negative attitudes, inaccessibility, and lack of provision of reasonable accommodation (NUDIPU, 2014; Coffey et al., 2014).

The Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities [CRPD] (2006) in article 27 obligates States to recognize the rights of PWDs to work on an equal basis with others. In so doing, the CRPD requires States to provide PWDs the opportunity to gain a living by work freely chosen or accepted in a labor market and work environment that is open, inclusive, and accessible. The CRPD further requires States to take appropriate steps including through legislation to prohibit discrimination based on disability about all matters concerning all forms of employment, including conditions of recruitment, or hiring, career advancement and to

provide just and favorable conditions of work, including equal opportunities and equal remuneration for work of equal value, safe and healthy working conditions, including protection from harassment, and the redress of grievances. In Uganda, there are also policies and legislative frameworks on disability that promote the right to work among PWDs. Among others, they include the Constitution of the Republic of Uganda (1995) article 40, the PWD Act (2019, Act 9 & 14.), the Employment Act (2006, s.6), National Equal Opportunities Policy (2006), Local Government Act (1997, Sec.10 & 23), National Employment Policy (2011). They all provide that persons with visual impairment have a right to be accorded reasonable accommodation in their employment such as adapted workplace environment & facilities, provision of support staff such as sighted guides and auxiliary aids such as Perkins Braille machines, among others. However, the implementation of these laws has been a challenge, and they are not translating into practical outcomes (Nyombi & Kibandama, 2014; Griffiths et al., 2018). The consequence of that is the employee with visual impairment experiencing a challenge of the unmodified environment at their workplaces (Barclay et al., 2012; ILO, 2013; NUDIPU, 2014; Coffey et al., 2014; Narayanan, 2018). They also lack the required auxiliary aids and supportive services to work effectively like other employees (Sundar et al., 2018). The lack of reasonable accommodation in employment has compelled PWDs to adopt coping mechanisms to be able to work. This paper, therefore, explores how persons with visual impairment cope with the unfriendly working environment in public service employment in Uganda.

II. STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM

Uganda has got progressive disability policy frameworks, some of which are constituted under article 40 of the Constitution of the Republic of Uganda (1995). The policies guarantee PWDs a right to the provision of reasonable accommodation in employment. Besides, despite the existence of such policy frameworks, evidence from the available literature indicates that persons with visual impairment who are employed lack the reasonable accommodation they require to be able to perform work tasks like other employees. The lack of reasonable accommodation compels them to adopt coping mechanisms to be able to work.

III. LITERATURE REVIEW

The theoretical frameworks underpinning this paper are the human rights standard of equality and non-discrimination, the equity principle of social justice, and the social model of understanding disability. The trio provides a grounded explanation of the concept of equality, non-discrimination, equity, fairness, and

inclusion in all matters relating to the employment of PWDs, persons with visual impairment inclusive. Generally, these are the key issues driving disability inclusion and thus vital in regards to persons with visual impairment and public service employment in Uganda.

a) *Equality and non-discrimination*

Equality and non-discrimination are foundational standards of human rights laws based on the idea of the inherent dignity and of the equal and inalienable rights of human beings (UDHR 1948, Preamble & article 1; Emong, 2014). It is well guaranteed in human rights law internationally, the Charter of the United Nations, UDHR (1948) in articles 1 and 2, the international Covenants such as International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights [ICESCR], 1966 art 2(2), International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights [ICCPR], 1966 art2 (1), Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women, [CEDAW], 1979 art 2, and Convention on the Rights of the Child [CRC], 1989 art 2(1) and CRPD article 2. The UDHR (1948) art.1 states that all human beings are born free and equal in dignity and rights. Commentaries on the concept of equality indicate it to be understood in three ways, namely, formal equality, equality of results, and equality of opportunity (Coleman, 1973; Degner & Quinn, 2002; Lawson, 2011; Segall, 2013; Fredman, 2016). All three conceptions of equality significantly provide perspectives on how persons with visual impairment experience employment.

b) *Formal Equality*

Formal equality entails equal treatment in a similar environment (Fredman, 2002; Hardie, 1980). This understanding of equality prohibits direct discrimination based on someone's characteristics. In that way, it guards against a person with a visual impairment from being discriminated against based on his/her disability. Thus in employment, a qualified person should be subjected to similar treatment in the entire employment process without any bias based on his or her condition. In the context of disability inclusion and with specific reference to persons with visual impairment, formal equality requires that persons with visual impairment are entitled to access employment opportunities in the same manner as other ordinary persons in the country. The limitation is that formal equality is meritous. Thus it doesn't emphasize the provision of reasonable accommodations required by persons with visual impairment to be able to work as other employees in the same working environment.

c) *Equality of results*

Substantive equality means treating individuals based on their groups to realize equal outcomes (Coleman, 1973; Lawson, 2008; Lawson, 2011; Fredman, 2016). It is concerned with achieving a fairer distribution of benefits or results and examining

discrimination with outcome analysis (Gardner, 1989; Lawson, 2011; Emong, 2014; Fredman, 2016). The substantive equality or equality of results is being implemented through affirmative action. Thus, the affirmative action or preferential treatment of a disadvantaged group is applicable in attaining specific results in a particular context, i.e., employment of persons with visual impairment. Affirmative action is implemented in Uganda as a deliberate action taken in favor of groups marginalized based on gender, age, disability, or any other reasons created by history, tradition, or custom to address imbalances that exist against them as provided for in the Constitution of the Republic of Uganda, (1995, art. 32), PWD Act (2019, Act.14), and Equal Opportunities Commission (2017). As a result, many PWDs, more so those with visual impairment, are now attaining higher academic qualifications. Consequently, many seek public service employment, and others have been able to occupy political positions both at local and national levels. Besides, legal provisions on affirmative action have been included in many laws in Uganda in favor of PWDs, i.e., PWD Act (2019, Act.14), Employment Act (2006, S.6), National Equal Opportunities Policy (2006), Local Government Act (1997) among others.

The limitation of equality of results is that affirmative action policies mainly address discrimination at the entry point and leave the discrimination intact beyond that point, i.e., it doesn't address the systemic barriers that are excluding persons with visual impairment in employment. Also, focusing on equality of results pays little attention to accommodate human diversity by adapting existing structures, i.e., distinctions such as sex, religion, birth, disability, among others. Besides, equality of results focuses more on outcomes rather than the treatment of persons, which sometimes promotes their exclusion in employment.

d) *Equality of opportunity*

Equality of opportunity is about providing appropriate ways to eliminate all forms of structural or institutional discrimination, i.e., it rejects all policies that tend to bring about discrimination by focusing mainly on outcomes in the form of quantitative results (Lawson, 2008; Fredman, 2010; Elford, 2013; Segall, 2013; Emong, 2014). In the context of disability inclusion, it involves a holistic approach that aims at promoting PWDs' rights without excluding them from mainstream society. It, therefore, requires the removal of systemic barriers in the employment institutions, i.e., the negative attitudes among employers, physical barriers, communication barriers, among others.

The challenge with equality of opportunity is that it criticizes equality of results, and it doesn't prepare persons with visual impairment to get proper treatment in employment. It also takes a long period to address systemic barriers.

e) *The Concept of Non-discrimination*

The broader meaning of the concept of non-discrimination is provided in article 2 of the CRPD. It covers both direct and indirect discrimination, including failure to provide reasonable accommodation. Discrimination based on disability means any distinction, exclusion, or restriction based on disability that has the purpose or effect of impairing or nullifying the recognition, enjoyment, or exercise on an equal basis with others of all human rights and fundamental freedoms. It includes all forms of discrimination, including denial of reasonable accommodation. This understanding is wide enough to capture all discriminatory factors against persons with visual impairment in employment, such as intentional discrimination, accessibility-related factors, practices, criterion, and policy-related.

f) *Reasonable Accommodation*

Reasonable accommodation means the necessary and appropriate modifications and adjustments not imposing a disproportionate or undue burden, where needed in a particular case, to ensure to PWDs the enjoyment or exercise on an equal basis with others of all human rights and fundamental freedoms (CRPD, 2006, Art.2). From the above explanation, the appropriate provision of reasonable accommodation for persons with visual impairment in the employment processes leads to a reduction of discrimination, increase access to the workplaces, and change of negative perceptions about the ability of persons with visual impairment to be productive workers in employment. To provide reasonable accommodations for employees with visual impairment, employers have to employ different approaches, i.e., proactive and reactive.

The proactive approach (also known as anticipatory approach) to reasonable accommodation focuses on eliminating barriers before they occur, i.e., the employers are required to anticipate difficulties that their operations present and take steps to reduce or remove the obstacles (Lawson, 2008; Holt, 2013; Mikola & Kollonay-Lehoczky, 2015; Waddington & Broderick, 2017). In regards to the inclusion of persons with visual impairment in public service employment, the employer, as a matter of implementing the proactive approach to reasonable accommodation involves making existing facilities and information accessible to employees with a disability, modifying equipment, re-organizing activities, rescheduling work, provision of ramps in the workplace to allow access to buildings, provision of specialized materials and equipment such as Perkins Braille machines, Braille papers, adequate railing around hazardous areas, and other accommodations before a specific request by employees with visual impairment.

On the other hand, the reactive approach to reasonable accommodation, the duty to provide



reasonable accommodation is reactive as it is only triggered when the person with a disability demonstrates a need for assistance (Lawson, 2011; Holt, 2013; Mikola, & Kollonay-Lehoczy, 2015; Waddington & Broderick, 2017). In regards to the employment of persons with visual impairment, a reactive approach to reasonable accommodation entails a situation where the employers are only under the obligation to provide a reasonable accommodation if they are aware that employees with visual impairment are facing some difficulties or barriers in employment (Lawson, 2008; Holt, 2013; Waddington & Broderick, 2017). In regards to the inclusion of persons with visual impairment in public service employment, the reactive approach requires employees with visual impairment to disclose what challenges they are experiencing to their employers, and upon receiving them, they can be able to address them through making necessary adjustments and modifications within the workplaces. Thus the employers' duties to provide reasonable accommodation are triggered by the individual employees with impairment, indicating what they need to be able to work like other ordinary employees in the same workplace.

i. *Principle of Equity*

Equity is one of the central principles in social justice that entails recognition of human diversity in all matters of social, political, and economic relations in society regardless of their gender, sexuality, religion, political affiliations, age, race, belief, disability, location, social class, socio-economic circumstances or other characteristics of background or group membership (Rawls, 2001). Therefore, the principle of equity provides a grounded explanation of equality, non-discrimination, and fairness in all matters, including those relating to employment, and among the vulnerable categories of people, including persons with visual impairment. The principle of equity is explained in John Rawls' Theory of Social Justice under the 'Difference Principle.' The difference principle provides that inequalities in the distribution of resources and opportunities are permissible as long as they aim at benefiting the most disadvantaged people in society (Rawls, 2005). Persons with visual impairment are among the most marginalized in Uganda. Therefore the distribution of employment opportunities as a national economic benefit should consider the concerns affecting persons with visual impairment. The difference principle further provides that social and economic inequalities are to satisfy two conditions, i.e., they are to be attached to offices and positions open to all under conditions of fair equality of opportunity. They are to be to the utmost benefit of the least-advantaged members of the society. Rawls claim is that departures from equality of a list of what he calls primary goods-the things which a rational man wants whatever else he wants are justified only to the extent

that they improve a lot of those who are worse-off under that distribution in comparison with the previous equal distribution (Rawls, 1971; Rawls, 2001). His position is in some sense egalitarian, with a provision that inequalities are allowed when they benefit the least advantaged. Thus it requires employers to take every measure not to disadvantage PWDs in all the employment processes such as recruitment, retention, promotion, among other procedures.

ii. *Social Model of Disability*

The social model of disability emerged in the 1960s and 1970s as a shift from the predominant individual models, especially the medical model of disability, as activists in the United Kingdom aimed to define disability as a social-cultural construct rather than a biological construct (Oliver, 1983). The origin of the social model is due to Oliver (1983) as well as the 1976 document on fundamental principles of disability produced by the Union of the Physically Impaired Against Segregation [UPIAS], (1976). Oliver (1990) criticized the medical model for failing to account for broader elements of disability such as social, economic, political, cultural, and environmental barriers. The social model shifts away from consideration of the deficits of the functional, physiological, and cognitive abilities of the impaired individuals to the capacity of society to systematically oppress and discriminate against persons with disabilities and the negative social attitudes encountered by persons with disabilities throughout their lives. As a result, it becomes an agent of change through the associated barriers or supports built into the larger social, economic, political, cultural, and environmental structures impacting PWDs (Oliver, 1990; Lang, 2007). Therefore, a disability is a disadvantage or restriction caused by a contemporary social organization that takes no or little account of persons' impairment and excludes them from participation in the mainstream of social activities (Oliver, 1990). The social model ignores how 'bad' a person's impairment is, and it instead establishes that everyone is equal. However, it is the society that erects barriers that prevent them from participating and restricts their opportunities. The model shifts the emphasis from personal inadequacy or abnormality to physical and societal, legal, cultural, and attitudinal barriers experienced by persons with an impairment. These barriers disable the person and are external to the individual. The social model, therefore, promotes the right to participation in employment by persons with visual impairment through advocating for the provision of reasonable accommodation such as adjusting and modifying the workplace environment, among others. The arguments of the social model of disability concur with the standards provided by the United Nations conventions and the Uganda labor laws that protect and promote the right to employment of PWDs.

IV. METHODOLOGY

a) *Study design and approach*

The study followed a phenomenological research design of a qualitative research approach. It was appropriate for this study because it enabled obtaining detailed experiences of participants in regards to the coping mechanism by persons with visual impairment in the unfriendly working environment in public service employment in Uganda. The qualitative research approach was appropriate for this study because it allowed the generation of in-depth and detailed information regarding the study problem.

b) *Study area and participants*

The study was done in Kampala, Jinja, Iganga, and Mbarara districts of Uganda. The participants included persons with visual impairment employed in public service and their direct supervisors drawn from organs constituting public service employment, namely the Public Service Commission and District Service Commissions. It further comprised of officials from an agency and Uganda National Association of the Blind promoting disability inclusion in Uganda.

c) *Sampling & sampling technique*

The numbers of participants selected per category are as follows: ten employees with visual impairment, five persons with visual impairment seeking employment, one from Public Service Commission, while two were from District Service Commissions, two direct supervisors, one participant from the Uganda National Association of the Blind, and one from the National Council for Disability.

The purposive sampling technique was considered most appropriate for this study because the participants selected were those knowledgeable enough to providing information regarding the problem under study. Employees with visual impairment were reached using the snowball sampling technique as their names and numbers were unknown.

d) *Data collection*

Data was collected using interviews and observation methods. The unstructured interview guides with open-ended questions were designed. These instruments allowed flexibility in data collection and enabled the collection of in-depth responses elicited through seeking clarification and probing for the information. Recording the participants' responses using a voice recorder was also possible. The voice recordings helped to make comparisons with data obtained through note-taking during the interviews. On the other hand, the study employed a non-participant observation method, and it involved designing an observation checklist that guided the observation. The aspects observed were adaptations made in the workplace environment, sanitary facilities, accessibilities,

i.e., ramps, walkways, stairways with rails, a leveled setting with no dangerous objects, and auxiliary aids and supportive services. The method was appropriate in that it enabled naturally watching what was taking place, the physical situations, and interpretation of what is in the area of study without asking from the respondent. It also enabled observing the preparedness of the employment institutions or agencies to accommodate employees with visual impairment.

e) *Data analysis and presentation*

Data obtained through interviews were analyzed using a thematic analysis strategy. It involved transcribing the information from the field, reading through the verbal findings, listening to audio interviews for further evidence, and overall understanding. The method was considered appropriate for this study as it facilitated understanding of the experiences, meanings, and realities of the participants regarding how employees with visual impairment cope in the unfriendly working environment of public service employment.

The theme and sub-themes from the transcripts were generated to ease data analysis. The next step was to write reflective notices (or explanations) on each sub-themes identified in the transcripts. The process involved a thorough reading of the transcripts several times while reflecting on the issues or aspects related to the research question. This process was so helpful to identify and revise the information missed during transcribing. The findings of this study are in the form of an analytic narrative with data extracts, which are quotations from the participants' reports for the theme and sub-themes identified, followed by the interpretation of findings and discussion.

f) *Ethical considerations*

The researcher began by getting a clearance or approval from the Research Ethics Committee Board of Faculty of Interdisciplinary Studies, Research Ethics Committee of Mbarara University of Science & Technology, and Uganda National Council for Science & Technology. The informed consent form that was in English helped to obtain consent from participants before each conversation. The pseudo names were generated and applied, i.e., VIE (1-10)-persons with visual impairment employed in public service; DSC (1-2)-officials from District Service Commissions; MC-official from Public Service Commission; and DS (1-2)-direct supervisors of employees with visual impairment. Besides, their positions are not revealed to protect them from being traced for the information given.

V. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The results and discussion is structured as follows; relying on colleagues at the workplace, using relatives & friends, using part of their salaries to pay for auxiliary & support services, improvising, applying

mobility & orientation skills, and showing commitment to work.

a) *Relying on colleagues at the workplace*

Out of the ten employees with visual impairment, nine expressed that persons with visual impairment in their workplaces cope by relying on their colleagues to support them in carrying out some work tasks. For example, those in the teaching profession they acknowledged that their colleagues help them in marking of books or papers, supporting their mobility, reading written texts while making lesson notice mostly in Braille, scheming or and lesson planning. The findings also reveal that other employees with visual impairment in the teaching profession rely on their learners to support them, i.e., in mobility, marking books, roll calling, and or dictating notice in class. One of the participants (VIE.5) expressed that:

Sometimes I request my colleagues to assist me in marking students' work and in movement around the school. Also sometimes when I find it hard to reach my class, I tell one of the students that 'when it comes to my lesson come and pick me from the staff-room' So that student when it is time he comes and says 'master it is your time for class' and then picks me. Then he brings me back when the lesson is over. For other issues like maybe to roll call, I entrust it to the class monitor. I tell him that 'please, can you do it,' but of course it is done in my presence, or else he will just tick even the ones who are not present. Now for stubborn classes, I give it more time by telling students that 'if they roll-call your name, you move this end,' and I make sure they move to pass me so that I can know that it is another person going or else the same person may keep answering, so to avoid all that, I have to improvise ways of doing things and it becomes a bit easier.

Another participant (VIE.4) mentioned that:

I make sure I maintain a good working relationship with my colleagues, and they have always helped me in marking books and papers; they support me in mobility, reading for me written texts to prepare my lessons and scheme of work. I don't think that somebody who is blind can be comfortable if he is not on good terms with colleagues.

Another participant (VIE.1) recounts that:

For us people with a visual impairment, we cope difficultly because you must be innovative. For me, I have taught in a school for sighted children only without any child with visual impairment for several years, and what I have always done is to be friendly to my colleagues to help me in marking books and papers, or I get some learners who are good in upper classes to come and tick under my guidance. I do that because I do not have the support staff either. Can I afford to hire somebody I can pay like 100,000/= per month to mark my work?

The above expressions suggest that persons with visual impairment cope in their workplaces by relying on their colleagues for support. It also means that sometimes employees with visual impairment in the teaching profession rely on their learners to support them. However, depending on colleagues has got side

danger, in that it may lead to intrude in someone's privacy, make the employee with visual impairment lose his or her self esteem before colleagues. It may also compromise the quality of the work done by the employee in that a colleague he or she trusts with marking students' work may not be kin to follow the instructions given and ends up either ticking wrongly or even reward excess or fewer marks to some students contrary to what is required. Besides, relying on students may also have challenges. For example, it may be hard for the teacher with visual impairment to discipline the learner he or she relies on to either support him in marking, mobility, dictating notice, and roll-calling learners in classrooms, among others. The finding is in line with Mala et al. (2011), who revealed that persons with visual impairment cope by ensuring that they maintain a friendly working environment through socializing with their sighted colleagues and supervisors, who then provide them with support or assistance they require to be able to work. The above finding and literature suggest that employees with visual impairment cope by relying on colleagues. However, this situation should not be the norm for employees with visual impairment in public service, but it should slightly be made better by public service ensuring that it provides reasonable accommodation, including auxiliary aids and support services required by employees with visual impairment to work like others.

b) *Using relatives and friends*

Seven of the ten participants working in public service revealed that they use relatives and friends to support them in their workplaces. Participants were that most of the employees with visual impairment due to lack of provision of support staff and auxiliary aids, they use their relatives such as wives, husbands, sons or daughters, and friends to support them in their work. Participant (VIE.9) expressed that:

In my first work, I had to use my relatives because I had no money to hire support staff. I am not given a sighted guide, so I had to use my relatives; they are the ones who read the documents they could bring to me and everything I required, like mobility.

Another participant (VIE.10) stated that:

I take the textbooks at home for either my wife, daughter or a friend to read for me to enable me to Braille my notice and I prepare to teach. So I improvise because I have to work.

Another participant (VIE.7) recounts that:

I just get friends such that they help me to do the work because for me as a CDO, I do community sensitization, but because I want to perform that activity, I get a friend to accompany me to the field at my own expense. Also, when it comes to typing reports, I rely on another person because, at my workplace, the computer that we have has no jaws, so at the end of the day, I have to touch my pocket, first, to make a draft, then to type. So you see how your work is affected in the end. You become enslaved.

The above expressions indicate that employees with visual impairment cope by using their relatives and friends to support them in their workplaces. It also shows that employers in public service do not provide employees with visual impairment with support staff to help them in their work and cope by using relatives and friends. This coping mechanism has got ethical concerns. When one uses a relative, how does such a relative be accountable in case of any mismanagement of assets at the workplace or exposing secret information?. So it becomes a challenge to ensure that there is accountability at the workplace, having involved a relative. The finding is in line with Sundar et al. (2018). They pointed out that persons with disabilities strive to work by having a strong tendency to rely on informal networks such as family members and friends to assist them in job preparations. The finding is also in agreement with Mala et al. (2011), Gopakumar (2014), and Auerbach et al. (2016), who mentioned that persons with visual impairment rely on family members, friends, and peers for support such as information, professional advice, support in work tasks, and to do with problem-solving in their workplaces which help them to adjust, cope, and carry on the work. The above expressions and literature create a need for public service to consider providing employees with visual impairment with support services to work efficiently.

c) *Using part of their salaries to pay for auxiliary aids & support services*

Participants expressed that employees with visual impairment use part of their salaries to pay for auxiliary aids and support services. Participants' opinions were that employees use their money to buy auxiliary aids such as Perkins Braille machines, Braille slates & stylus, computers with jaws and to hire support staff such as sighted guides, Braille transcribers, among others to work effectively even when there is no reasonable accommodation at their workplace.

Participant (VIE. 3) expressed that:

When I was employed, they didn't give me a sighted guide, and I have always had to manage myself where I use part of my salary to pay for support services. So when I try to calculate, I find that I am not getting money equivalent to what other sighted employees receive because for them they do everything for themselves and they can get their money as it is but for me I have to pay for the guide, so we can't be the same.

Participant (VIE.5) stated that:

I have always improvised, which means I sacrifice part of my salary to pay somebody to do what I need him to do for me, like supporting me in mobility, transcribing work, and others. So that is how I try to cope with the situation.

Also, a participant (VIE.2) expressed that:

You find that I have to use my resources to hire somebody to do for me some of the work and even to buy some of the

gadgets as I bought for myself a laptop that I use. Even the Perkins Braille machine I use I bought myself because I need to produce results at my workplace.

The above expressions of participants suggest that employees with visual impairment lack the reasonable accommodation they require. As such, they cope by sacrificing part of their resources or salaries to pay for support staff and to acquire auxiliary aids to help them in their workplaces. Whereas to the employees with visual impairment, using part of their income has been their coping mechanism, this has its limitations. For instance, in case a person is employed at a lower position with little pay, not providing him or her the reasonable accommodation might make him or her either to remain with nothing given the fact that gadgets like Perkins Braille machines and even support services are expensive or to even leave work for failing to pay for the reasonable accommodation by him or herself. Also, failure to afford to pay for reasonable accommodation, a person's performance will be affected in the workplace. Thus he or she may be rendered incompetent for the job, which may limit his or her career growth through promotion, which is the norm for public service employment. The finding concurs with the study by Sundar et al. (2018), which found out that some of the persons with disabilities strive to obtain assistive devices or special equipment on their resources to be able to work effectively. Persons with disabilities also use their resources or and salaries to get computer training, job skills training programs, among others, to be able to work effectively in their workplaces (Sundar et al., 2018). The above statements show that it is challenging for employees with visual impairment to use their salaries to get reasonable accommodation they may require to work. It requires that the public service provide the reasonable accommodation needed by such employees as required by the law to enable them to enjoy their right to employment.

d) *Improvising*

Improvising means a way of managing or coping with a situation that may be challenging. It may, therefore, require one to use the minimum or the equivalent of what he or she is to use when the situation is normal. Improvising is sometimes known as 'using locally available resources.'

Participants mentioned that employees with visual impairment improvise using the existing locally available resources to cope with a lack of reasonable accommodation. Participants' views were that persons with visual impairment sometimes make use of local radios to access information on the available job opportunities, use of Braille slate & stylus which are relatively cheap as compared to the Perkins Braille machine, use of any stick to serving as a white cane, and many others to be able to perform at their workplaces. One participant (VIE.6) expressed that:

I chose to improvise by using Braille slates & stylus and Braille papers, so when I am in a meeting, I use that to take notice, or minutes, then I go back and read for someone to type for me on the computer. I am also using mostly a small radio to access information because it is more affordable, so even many of my colleagues have bought small radios and can listen and hear an advert, or they can listen to a radio on the phone which is very cheap, and if they are lucky to have power, or cells because most of them could be in rural areas where even electricity is a challenge. So in case, they have cells or electricity they listen and then get these adverts, and they walk so many miles to go and apply.

Another participant (VIE.4) stated that:

I improvise, for example, because the white cane was not available, I decided to get this stick, and I said that let it act as my auxiliary aid, and it has worked because the white cane was expensive for me and no one was willing to give it to me.

The above expressions suggest that employees with visual impairment cope with improvising, where they use the locally available resources to be able to work effectively. It also means that public service employment is neither proactive nor reactive in providing reasonable accommodation, especially the provision of auxiliary aids required by employees with visual impairment to work effectively. However, such a coping mechanism may not be applicable in all settings. For example, using a Braille slate may be limited in a situation where one is required to produce Braille material on a large scale. Therefore, the person might be rendered irrelevant and incompetent worker. Even using any stick to serve as a white cane does not bring out its exact meaning and purpose, which its real sense used to not only help in mobility of an individual but also to identify the person that he or she is blind and thus requires either assistance or given the reasonable accommodation he or she needs like to cross the road, the car driver may notice and be allowed to move safely without knocking him or her. The finding contravenes with article 4(g) of the CRPD (2006), which obligates state parties to undertake or promote research and development of, and to promote the availability and use of new technologies, including information and communications technologies, mobility aids, devices, and assistive technologies suitable for persons with disabilities, giving priority to technologies at an affordable cost. The finding also contravenes with the PWD Act (2019), act 9, subsection 2(c), which provides that an employer shall provide an employee with a disability reasonable accommodation in the performance of the job or task. The above finding and provisions in the laws indicate a need for public service to consider providing reasonable accommodation to their employees with visual impairment they require to work like any other person as guaranteed by the laws.

e) *Applying mobility and orientation skills*

Participants' opinions were that persons with visual impairment apply mobility and orientation skills to move in an inaccessible workplace environment. Employees with visual impairment affirmed that they ensure that they master the set-up of their workplaces and move independently because their employers have not given them sighted guides to help them in mobility. As a participant (VIE.8) recounts that:

I had to master the environment in the school, and because of that, I am now able to move even if I have no sighted guide, but at least I am aware of the environment I am in, and I try to move independently, maybe the challenge comes when I go to a new place.

Another participant (VIE.9) expressed that:

Haaa, here some of the buildings require ramps, but they do not have them, so I find a way of climbing the steps to access them because I have to enter classes and teach.

The above opinions of the participants reveal that employees with visual impairment cope by applying mobility and orientation skills to be able to work when the workplace environment is not well modified. It also implies that public service is not proactive in providing reasonable accommodation for employees with visual impairment. The coping mechanism might, however, be limited as it is dependent upon one's ability to master the workplace environment to be able to move independently and safely. It, therefore, means that when an individual is slow at getting used to the workplace environment, then his or her ability to maneuver independently and safely becomes very difficult and consequently limits his or her work performance. The finding is in line with Shakespeare et al. (2019). They reported that persons with disabilities decide to try to be independent in their workplaces where they strive to cope by not asking for help unless it is required. The finding is also in agreement with the results from studies by Nyman et al. (2010), Mukta and Gopakumar (2014), and Stevelink et al. (2015), which revealed that persons with visual impairment ensure that they learn skills of mastering tasks and the workplace environment to work where reasonable accommodation is lacking. The above expressions and literature indicate a need to change the status quo. It thus requires that public service ensure that the workplace environment for employees with visual impairment is well modified. Also, they should provide sighted guides to support them in mobility.

f) *Showing commitment to work*

Participants expressed that persons with visual impairment cope by showing commitment to work. Participants' views were that persons with visual impairment are honest and committed to accomplishing tasks as given to them without reasonable accommodation. As a participant (VIE.1) expressed that: It is supposed to be within you as a visually impaired

person. For me, I have shown them that I am committed, and they may feel ashamed to deny me any opportunity. Also, I am honest, once they say 'you have to be here by 7.00 am' I surprise them, and they feel embarrassed when at 7.00 I am already here and yet they did not get me a sighted guide.

Another participant (VIE.2) stated that:

For me, I have made sure that I am contented with myself and committed to continue working even when my employers have not given me the reasonable accommodation that I need to work well.

The above expressions mean that employees with visual impairment cope by showing commitment to work. It also implies that being committed to working helps them to get recognized in their work. Although this coping mechanism may not be sustainable given the fact that most times being committed to work may also be dependent upon the nature and conditions of the job, in that in case there is no improvement in work conditions, some one's commitment is suppressed as he or she gets demoralized to work effectively. Also, being committed to working by employees with visual impairment may result in their employers taking them for granted, exploiting them, and becoming inconsiderate to their demands with the thinking that they are just helping them to remain in employment, and they have nowhere they can get another job opportunity. The finding agrees with Ta and Leng (2013). They revealed that employees with disabilities are usually loyal to their employers and committed to working given that switching jobs is not easy for them and as such, their employment is a highly valued privilege. The finding also concurs with WHO (2011), which reported that persons with visual impairment ensure that they have appropriate skills for given tasks, show strong loyalty, and maintain low rates of absenteeism, which makes them remain in good working relationships with both fellow employees and employers in workplaces even when a reasonable accommodation is lacking and thus able to survive or retain their work positions during reshuffles. Therefore, based on the above expressions and literature, it is essential for public service also to consider providing reasonable accommodation employees with visual impairment do require to sustain their commitment to work.

Besides, participants also expressed that employees with visual impairment cope by having self-esteem & confidence to work and perform even if they lack reasonable accommodation. Participants' expressions were that persons with visual impairment are confident to work even when not given sighted guides by their employers. Participants also revealed that persons with visual impairment adopt self-advocacy personality behaviors as a coping mechanism and request auxiliary aids & supportive services from their employers to perform effectively in their work. Participants' opinions were that being assertive has

enabled some of them to get some of the auxiliary aids, although they do not get all as requested. One of the participants (VIE.7) expressed that:

Some of us believe in ourselves. For instance, when I went for the interviews, I demonstrated that I could, and so I was appointed, and now, as an employed person, I do work even better than the sighted people.

Another participant (VIE.6) expressed that:

Yeah, for us people with a visual impairment, we are sure of ourselves because a person like me, I know what I am, what I am supposed to do, and I know I can manage, that has enabled me to access public service employment. I perform although my bosses have refused to give me a sighted guide. But there are some persons with visual impairment who look upon themselves and have failed to get employment in as far as the public sector is concerned. For me I know we can get when we are also sure of ourselves.

Participant (VIE.3) recounts that:

I informed the employer that I needed a laptop, and that is how I got it and by then, the CAO was very positive; he just directed that whether from what vote, I want a computer for him, and it happened. I also tried to ask for a sighted guide for me; they told me the wage bill could not allow it.

The expressions above reveal that employees with visual impairment cope by having self-esteem & confidence to work and perform even when their employers have not provided the reasonable accommodation they require. It also means that public service is not proactive and reactive in providing necessary and appropriate modifications for their employees with visual impairment. It further shows that having self-esteem among employees with visual impairment is essential to work and perform well, including being able to assert their needs from their employers. The finding concurs with Weber and Wong (2010) and Stevelink et al. (2015), who stressed that persons with visual impairment gain self-esteem & confidence by comparing themselves with others they classify as worse off, and also make a comparison with colleagues with visual impairment who manage to carry on work successfully, hence get inspired and motivated to move on with life. To have persons with visual impairment serve effectively in public service, the DPOs, and other stakeholders need to empower persons with visual impairment to have the self-esteem and confidence in matters of employment and even to assert for provision of reasonable accommodation from their employers. Also, public service needs to provide a reasonable accommodation that their employees with visual impairment require to work.

VI. CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The study concluded that the unfriendly working environment in public service employment in Uganda, characterized by lack of provision of reasonable accommodation, had compelled employees with visual

impairment to adopt coping mechanisms such as relying on colleagues at work, using relative & friends, using part of their salaries to pay for auxiliary services, improvising among others to be able to perform work tasks. Based on the findings and conclusion, the study recommends that public service employers provide employees with visual impairment the right to reasonable accommodation they require as guaranteed by both the United Nations Conventions and Uganda labor laws to enable them to perform work tasks. Thus it requires the employers in public service employment ensuring equality and non-discrimination in all employment processes and provision of auxiliary aids such as Perkins Braille machines, Braille slates & stylus, computers with jaws, white canes, dolphin pens, and supportive services such as sighted guides, Braille transcribers, among others required by employees with visual impairment to perform work tasks.

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