



Uzoamaka Anita Asiegbu speaking on the various disability inclusion efforts of UN Women at the Children's Day Celebrations organized by the Inclusion Magazine for Children with Disabilities in Abuja.

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The importance of putting unique ability before disability

Uzoamaka Anita Asiegbu is a UN Volunteer Programme and Inclusion Analyst with UN Women. Prior to becoming a UN Volunteer, Anita Asiegbu had always been enthusiastic about volunteering. As a woman with a disability, she shares how volunteering has enabled her to learn and prove her capabilities. Her assignment is fully funded by the the Swedish International Development Cooperation Agency (Sida).

My primary role is to spearhead disability inclusion at the Nigeria Country Office. I manage the inclusion of women and girls with disabilities and the youth in UN Women's activities in Nigeria.

I have pioneered a Disability Inclusion toolkit tailored to the ongoing programmes in the

country. This toolkit simplifies the steps for programme managers and partners to provide access to women and girls with diverse disabilities to contribute, participate and benefit from development programmes.

I also conduct capacity building sessions for staff and implementing partners, fellow UN Volunteers and other external partners. I work with programme managers and consultants to plan and develop concept notes and proposals that are inclusive of the various marginalized groups in Nigeria, including women and girls with disabilities and youth.

I actively work with managers and partners to ensure the participation of persons with disabilities by reviewing and providing access and reasonable accommodations for each activity or programme.



I represent UN Women at the UNCT Disability Inclusion Technical Working Group, as well as the UNCT Youth Technical Group. In these fora, we review and recommend ways the UN in Nigeria can be inclusive for youth and persons with disabilities. When needed, I also represent my host agency at partnership events with organizations of persons with

disabilities.

The challenges I face

My initial challenge was figuring out how to make people look past my disabilities and focus on my skills. Unfortunately, this challenge is one I have faced in almost every stage of my life.

However, through the years, I have learned most stereotypes are unconscious and people are willing to do better with the proper education. Accordingly, I usually conquer the stereotypes with advocacy, patience, active contributions and participation in relevant programmes and activities.

“ As a UN Volunteer, I don't hesitate to attempt to change mindsets. I have commenced capacity building sessions for my host agency. With time, people realize that I am a person first, with unique abilities, that come before my disability.

Lessons learnt and messages for future volunteers

While serving as a UN Volunteer, there have been remarkable moments within each task, role, or activity I fulfil.

As a young person and a woman with disabilities, everything about my volunteer role is personal. The UN is often the standard-setter for governments, private and public organisations and others.

“ I am pleased to be a part of such inclusive processes and I love that I am actively contributing to leaving no one behind in achieving the 2030 Agenda.

Indeed, becoming a volunteer is an incredible experience. It opens one up to valuable opportunities to effect positive change. I would encourage everyone, particularly persons with disabilities, to seek volunteering opportunities as this is a fantastic way to prove yourself.

For those who are interested in volunteering, try to be a valuable addition, not just by

diligently carrying out your tasks, but also by contributing to other general tasks and thematic areas. That way, you will expand your experience and gain expertise in different fields, while ensuring that managers are aware of the value you bring.

“ As a person with disabilities, the first response you receive will often be pity and sympathy, but do not get carried away by those. Ensure that you help your host entity understand that you are capable in your field, despite your disabilities.



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