

Critical reflections on WiCDS' 'Listen Hear' 'Hayibo! Video Launch

By Precious Muzite

Yesterday (the 15th of July) was a rather unusual day. Besides the fact that it was the day France and Croatia were logging heads in a much anticipated World Cup football final; for most 'Joburgers', this was attributed more to an alarming eccentric chilly weather (as it seldom rains in the dead of winter) rather than the fact that it also happened to be the internationally recognised day for Disability Awareness. Apparently, here in South Africa as anywhere else in the world, issues concerning disability policies and awareness seldom attract more attention than a bizarre weather condition or a football match. Apart from a few odd posts from South African based disability advocates such as the Wits Centre for Diversity Studies (WiCDS) and Wits disability awareness movement, there was little hint of disability awareness from local and international social media platforms. There seems to be a tacit agreement among academics, public and private practitioners alike that issues of disability awareness are not 'sexy' enough to warrant the effort, attention and privilege that more traditional areas of study enjoy.

It is against this backdrop that WiCDS in collaboration with the Rosa Luxemburg Foundation, Wits Drama for Life (DFL) and Uhuru decided to launch the 'Listen Hear' YouTube video as part of its 'Hayibo' Bystander series launch. WiCDS' Bystander project aims to develop the capacity of individuals and communities to understand how silences and passivity operate to reproduce social injustices. The 'Listen Hear' YouTube video launch targeting to raise disability disclosure and inclusion awareness in the workplace cleverly coincided with the International Disability Awareness Day. It manages picturesquely to depict warts and all the dynamics of disability disclosure and exclusion in the workplace. Disclosure referring to the complex borderline experience of the Deaf supermarket worker in the video who is neither completely excluded nor included and therefore society expects him to be

overly graceful for the opportunity to work and operate in spaces that are usually assigned to the normative able body. Society at large is misdirected in the physical inclusion of people living with disabilities in institutions without critically engaging and questioning epistemic inclusion and the systemic nature of exclusion. This means that most public and private sectors in South Africa are obsessed with chasing the 2% mandated employment opportunity for people living with disabilities (Employment equity Act 1998) whilst barely scratching the surface of inclusion. Therefore, the WiCDS 'Listen Hear' YouTube video manages to convey the negation or absence of disability inclusion in corporate South Africa rather than the eviction implied in exclusion.

It is clear that the disability scholar in the global South faces a huge task. There is a need to shift the discourse of disability away from a medical/rehabilitation perspective towards a critical one. This can be expedited through channelling more effort in projects such as the 'Hayibo!' Bystander project which gives society a platform to critically engage in social justice issues and rolling up the proverbial sleeve, so to speak.