

TOWARDS IMPROVING SERVICE DELIVERY AND THE QUALITY OF LIFE FOR THE MARGINALISED GROUPS IN NIGERIA

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ABSTRACT

There is a steady increase in the number of children with special needs and disadvantage groups due to poverty, conflicts, disasters, disease and accidents. While service delivery to these groups has been characterized by a humanitarian approach, the Nigerian government is moving towards the compliance approach which necessitates legislation. In 2019, the bill protecting the rights of people with disabilities was passed into law. However, the most appropriate approach recommended is the citizenship approach which implies that people with disabilities are regarded as equal citizens with full rights and responsibilities, economically, politically and morally. Clearly spelt out in the National Policy on Education (NPC) 2014, Education is the right of every individual in Nigeria and the development of individuals into a sound and effective citizen and the provision of equal opportunities for all citizens. The NPC further states in section 7 the provision for special education. This laudable policy is achieved to a certain extent due to barriers such as attitudinal, physical and environmental, systematic, economic and employment facing the majority of children with special needs or disadvantage children in accessing both public and private services. Some recommendations for the way forward include: changing disability image and reducing negative attitudes toward people with disabilities; documentation of all categories of people with disabilities in the state for the purpose of planning and funding for special education; planning for increased enrolment of children with special needs in both public primary, secondary and higher institutions in the state; restructuring of the regular curriculum, placement of pupils and personnel's; restructuring of curriculum, placement of pupils and personnel's in both regular and special primary / secondary schools in Nigeria; improving physical and environmental barriers; provision of legislation to protect the rights of people with disabilities; increasing the number of people with disabilities in the work force and fixing at least 2% of the total budget for special education. As stakeholders, we have moral obligations to extend equity in service delivery to children and adults with special needs.

Keywords: Barriers, People with Disabilities, Special Education, Service Delivery

INTRODUCTION

There is a steady increase in the number of disabled people around the world. According to the World Bank and the World Health Organization (WHO) report people with disabilities (PWD) currently constitute 15% of the world's population and most of these persons live in the rural areas of developing countries (WHO, 2011). People with Disability (PWD) are persons who have limitations or impairment affecting one or more organs of the body. On one hand, the limitations can manifest as intellectual disability, hearing impairments, speech or language impairments, visual impairments, serious emotional disturbance, orthopedic impairments, autism, traumatic brain injury, other health impairments, specific learning disabilities and multiple disabilities (WHO, 2011) and on the other hand, the gifted and disadvantage groups.

The WHO (2011) estimated the population of PWD's in Nigeria to be 19 million, in line with the claim of that, the director (Baiyewu, 2012) Center for Citizen with Disability (CCD) in Nigeria, affirmed in an interview with Punch Newspaper that the PWDs are over nineteen (19) million. This figure was much higher than the Nigerian National Population Commission's Census (NPC, 2015) estimate of 4.8 million. Assuming, in every ten (10) Nigerian one (1) person is disabled, the estimated figure would be about 20 million, in line with the estimated population of 180 million Nigerian in 2014, (NPC, 2015). The statistic of PWDs can only be imagined when we add Seniors aged 55 and above, adults and children with age related impediments to mobility, plus individuals suffering from fall related injuries resulting in short or long term disability or the unrecorded number of individuals who are temporarily challenged for varying reasons be it through injury, illness, or other factors (National Education Data

(NED) 2015). Thus, the PWD would constitute more than twenty percent (20%) of the entire population of the citizenry in Nigeria.

Special Education in Nigeria

It is often believed that PWDs are among those that are socially marginalized and excluded from participating fully in the society by virtue of their poverty, low education or inadequate life skills which distances them from job, income and educational opportunities as well as social and community networks (WHO, 2011). They have little access to power and decision-making bodies thus little to no chance of influencing decisions or policies that affect them, or of bettering their standard of living. Meanwhile, they have rights to education and social inclusion within the domain in which they resides.

History reveals that parents of children with disabilities faced negative attitudes from the communities and these translated into neglect to death in some communities (Abosi & Ozoji, 1985). The missionaries brought relieve and meanings to the life of people with disability by providing services in humanitarian basis, unfortunately this has been the trend of service provision to people with special need. In the perspective of the humanitarian approach, services to people with disabilities are provided out of goodwill by the 'producer', with the intension to help individuals and groups perceived as less fortunate characterized as 'user'. The trend in recent times is gradually moving toward the compliance approach. The present government appoint adviser to federal government on disability matters as well as enact the first bill to protect the rights of people with disabilities, however, these approaches are not without disadvantages, though, in the perspective of the compliance approach, government policy and legislation compel service provision but does not specify adequate penalty for defaulter. Studies has impress that the citizenship approach provides equity by taking considerations for individual differences, for sustaining

equality. In the perspectives of the citizenship approach, the people with disabilities are regarded as equal citizens with full rights and responsibilities. Economically seen as contributing members of society, politically recognized as voters, and a powerful interest group and morally seen as having access to physical structures and environment health care, education and transportation, in terms of rights and responsibilities.

Special education came to Nigeria through the missionaries. The federal and state government has taking over all schools. The UBEC and SUBEB handles affairs relating to primary and secondary schools. There are at least one or two special school in each state. The UBEC or SUBEB are guided by the National policy on education. (NPE, 2014) section 1 item 4 states that, the philosophy of Education is based on the development of individuals into a sound and effective citizen and the provision of equal opportunities for all citizens of the nation at the all levels, furthermore, section 7 clearly states the responsibilities of stakeholders in special education service delivery. For these objectives to be realized all hands must be on deck to ensure that the following barriers are removed.

Barriers To Special Education Service Delivery

1. Attitudinal Barriers

Attitudinal barriers can manifest in several forms including misconceptions and stereotyping (Jaarsma, Dijkstra, Blecourt, Geertzen & Dekker 2015). Attitudinal barriers have to do with peoples' belief about disability and how society react or attempt to solve disability issues. People may believe that PWD require staying in rehabilitation centers or homes need separate education and low perceived value. Lang and Upah (2008) observe that attitudinal barriers are often created when the society predominantly perceives disability issue in terms of

charity or welfare not in terms of human rights and the lack of understanding of disability issues by the general public. When people do not have a good understanding of social inclusion, in terms of belonging, acceptance and rights, everything will be done without consideration for PWD. Umoh with OHCHR (2014) mentioned that over 90% of the populace still view PWD's from the charity perspective in Nigeria, according to her, PWD's are just good enough to receive aids, support and other form of humanitarian efforts rather than being active citizens in society or National development.

2. Physical And Environmental Barriers

People with disabilities sharing and accessing facilities, amenities and services along others should be considered as a right. However barriers prevent access, whether physical or social. Dierks et al., (2007) differentiate between physical access and social access. The difference is that, the impact of physical or environmental barriers can prevent people with disability from participating in social activities or having shared experiences in the community. The national President of Joint Nigerian Association of People with Disabilities (JONAPWD) pointed out in an interview with the Office of High Commissioner Human Rights (OHCHR, 2014) with Umoh said that "Nigerians with disabilities live in a very inaccessible world, even when we are available to participate; barriers experienced hinder our participation".

Umoh Ekaete in an interview with the OHCHR (2014) stated that the main challenge faced by PWD participating in mainstream is due to the lack of access, which mainly has to do with environmental access. The building act enforces and mandates builders to build by requirements that allow for accessibility. Balmas, Fembek, Hauquier, Heindorf, Kainz, Pitzinger and Saupe (2015) made a qualitative analysis of more than 100 countries and discovered that many governments especially the EU have adopted measures and time frames of up to

five years on average for existing buildings to be made accessible for people with disabilities.

Adedapo (2009) maintains that the National Building code for Nigeria was signed into law in 2007 due to incessant collapse of buildings in Nigeria. He further spelt out that the code has four parts and 14 sections. Part one contains three sections of citation, definition and administration, part two deals with the technicalities in the building process with nine sections that deals with building typology, construction process, environmental requirements, professionals and their responsibilities, building materials /components, construction and post construction technology requirements. The third and fourth parts contain sections, section 13 and 14, control of building works and schedules/ references respectively. Meanwhile, Ojuawo (2012) explained that the aim of the building code is to set minimum standards on building pre-design, designs, construction and post-construction stages with a view to ensuring quality, safety and proficiency in the building Industry” and the scope applies to and controls all matters concerning the design and specification, costing, construction, alteration, addition to, moving, demolition, location, repair and use of any building or structure, for existing or proposed building works within the Federal Republic of Nigeria (FRN) subject to ratification by states. None of the sections or subsections specifically mentioned access considerations for people with disabilities.

Ipadeola et al., (2015) carried out an assessment of 30 government and private hospitals, government schools and banks, using a nine (9) items checklist. The result obtained indicates that, of the ninety (90) facilities visited, all the facilities (100%) has no escalator, automated sliding door, separate toilet or designated parking space for PWD, only thirty seven (37) facilities (mostly hospitals) had a wheelchair ramp (mostly hospitals) and a mere twenty six (26) had a wide enough entrance for wheelchairs. Danso, Tudzi, and Agyekum (2017) assessed 110 buildings in 6 purposively selected Universities in Ghana, using

maximal variation sampling. The result indicates that the buildings of the sampled Universities were not inclusive to a large extent, in situations where built environments are accessible, the need of individuals with visual impairment are often neglected.

3. Systematic Barriers

Systematic barriers relate to efficiency of policies or program within the system, sometimes rules, regulations and order about participation exclude people with disability. In situations where program exist, staffs implementing the programs may lack experience in effective program adaptation or strategies for inclusion of people with disabilities. Fundamentally, inclusion is the principle which demands valued recognition of all people and the entitlement of all, to meaningful interaction, involvement and engagement in every part of the complex, multifaceted societies in which we live. Whether at school or work, in clubs or cinemas, in playgrounds or at beaches, at the health centre or the supermarket, the right to inclusion requires that people with disabilities are not merely seen, but are heard and acknowledged (Jones, 2011) the human right perspective believed that discrimination in whatever form should not be encouraged.

Madans, Loeb, and Altman (2011) narrated the work of the Washington group on disability statistic as dealing with challenge of disability definition and measurement in a way that is culturally neutral and reasonably standardized among the UN member states, while, it's mandate added importance with the passage and ratification of the UN convention on the rights of persons with disabilities as it includes provision for monitoring whether those with and without disabilities have equal opportunities to participate in society. Tavee and Chomanad (2012) reviewed twenty five studies, in order to compare whether policies conform to actual situations, in terms of educational provisions and facilities in Thailand. The findings revealed that discrepancies exist between

legislations and practice due laxity on the part of law enforcement agencies, negative attitudes of service providers and society, therefore, there had been no further educational provisions and facilities for students with disabilities despite indication within the law.

El Refaei (2016) adopted a mixed methods approach to understand Egyptian social service delivery, the findings suggest that there are discrepancies regarding service providers and service receiver, first service providers and regulators hold more positive views towards the services they provided while the beneficiaries (PWD) hold contrary view because they are unable to exercise their full rights as a result of receiving little information about the services. Also, the study discovered structural issues that depict lack of clarity of roles and responsibilities for several stakeholders, which had an impact on the quality of services provided. McColl, Jarzynowska and Shortt (2010) discovered that despite all protocols, health care system in Canada have failed to meet the needs of adults with disabilities. Fembek et al., (2013; 2014; 2015 & 2016) noted over the years that, the existence of legislation certainly does not guarantee that it is always implemented.

4. Economic And Employment Barriers

Employment barriers relate to denial of employment for PWD, those who become disabled while on the job and issues relating to employment support schemes. Balmas et al., (2015) reported that many countries have restrictions within legal frameworks in taking actions to provide reasonable accommodation for employees. For example, support schemes and legal provisions in Germany are extended to existing employees who become disabled on the job, while in Bangladesh, Ireland, Norway, Peru and the Philippines, provisions apply to both existing and new employees. In Portugal and Serbia, in addition to support schemes and incentives, there is provision for social security contribution rates,

salaries supported by states and competition for architectural adaptations according to the needs of employed persons with disabilities. Gustafsson, Peralta and Danermark (2014) study employers perspective and the result show that attitude, matching, economic incentives and accommodations are important for the employment of people with disabilities surrounded by subsidy in earnings. Economic and material access is required to gain acceptance among the labor force or to start a small scale business, while some employers are willing to employ PWD (Tiun , Lee & Leng, 2011; Jakovljevic & Buckley, 2011) but handicapped due to company policies, accessible environment or a means of handling issues relating to persons with disabilities. Vomholt, Uitdewilligen and Nijhuis (2013), reviewed thirty eight journals between 1996-2011 relating to factors affecting the acceptance of PWD at work, the analysis of the articles showed three main factors, they include characteristic of the coworkers, of the person with disabilities and of the employers or organization.

In addition, Lindsay (2011) identified socio-demographic as factors that influenced barriers to working and these includes severity of disability, type and duration of disability, level of education, gender, low income, geographic location and the number of people living in the household all influenced the kind of barriers and work discrimination for these young people. Heera (2016) analyzed factors influencing employers perspectives toward employing PWD and discovered that employers perspective plays an important role in providing and maintaining employment opportunities for people with disabilities, though, Vornholt et al., (2013) stressed the needs and demand of workers. Santuzzi and Waltz (2016) explains that a worker's decision to adopt a disability identity in the workplace depends on various factors that function at the intra-individual, interpersonal, organizational, and societal levels. In order to create accommodation for PWD's, some country enact laws to protect the rights of people with disability to gainful employment, an example of such law, is the

American Disability Act (ADA) other countries simply have a policy or political statements. Houtenville and Kalargyrou (2012) found some concerns and challenges regarding employment of persons with disabilities and one of the challenges and concern was the unspecified accommodation cost under the provisions of the Americans with Disabilities Act and another concerns was the possibility that persons with disabilities would not have requisite skills or be as productive as other staff and supervisors maybe uncomfortable supervising persons with disabilities due to lack of knowledge on how to discipline or evaluate them.

Holler (2014) analyzed the disability and employment policy in Israel, the findings from the primary and secondary sources revealed that disabled people, mainly immigrants, were at the lowest echelons of Israeli society and the labor market, though, the welfare state's stated adherence to social justice but more limited, and even contradictory, outcomes of its policies. On the other hand. Clayton, Barr, Nylen, Burstrom, Thielen, Diderichsen and Whitehead (2012) believed incentives to employers can work if applied generously because complex relationships were found between legislative intent and policy outcomes (Maroto & Pettinicchio, 2014). WHO (2011), narate the 2003-2005 report from some selected countries show employment ratio of less than 1% , with highest percentage of employment rate in Switzerland and lowest in South Africa. Fembek et al., (2013) discovered that, the percentage of employment for PWD in 65% (36) of countries under study is decreasing and some countries had no available figures to show. Studies have shown that some countries provide stipends for individual with disabilities. Though, there are lots of controversies as to who is entitled or whether an individual is disabled enough to receive these packages, moreover, entitlement to such benefits differ from one country to another. Fembek et al., (2013) discovered that 71% of the countries surveyed had such financial packages mandated by law, but it not available to all and very

limited in extent, further report revealed that, legal entitlement to all necessary finances was available in only four countries (Germany, Italy, Slovakia and Sweden) and about ten (10) countries had no provision of financial aids to persons with disabilities.

Recommendations

- Improve negative attitude toward people with disabilities by changing societal perceptions, enhancing their strenght rather than their weakness. These can be achieves through public enlightenment through radio, television programs, periodic workshops and seminars. Research and innovations in Special Education can also be improved through regular training and workshop for personnels working with Special needs children and adults.
- Documentation of all categories of people with disabilities in each state, through census, records from private and public schools registers, records of children and adults in centers across states and the federal capital territory. Appointments of special education adviser at the state level and the eastablishment of a Commission for special education, charge with the above responsibilities.
- Establishment of more inclusive schools/centere and planing for increase enrolment of children with special needs in both public primary, secondary and higher institutions in all states of the federation. Provide giudlines of new strategy for enterance into public primary schools. Planing new strategy of admission into public secondary schools and public tertiary institutions within Nigeria.
- Restructuring of the regular curriculum and placement procedures of pupils in both regular and special primary and secondary schools in Nigeria. This can be achieved through Curriculum adaptation for all the

categories of special needs children. Enhance teaching methods by application of audio/visual materials, use of assistive technology and restructuring examinations rules and regulations.

- Training and re-training of special education personnel's in both regular and special primary / secondary schools in Nigeria can be achieved by staff development through sponsorship for certified course in special education Sponsorship for national and international conferences on best practice in special education and the approval of 30% special education allowance and provision of other incentives for special education workers.
- Improving physical and environmental barriers by adjustment or reconstruct the existing structures, build access into new structure and Fine-tune the building and construction guidelines in Nigeria.
- Provision of legislation to protect the rights of people with disabilities, such as laws on educational provision, laws to remove institutional, legislative barriers, employment and economic barriers and proving penalties for defaulters and compensations for adherence.
- Make provision for increase number of people with disabilities in the work force, this can be achieved by reserving at least 2% of the workforce in Nigeria for PWD. Provide incentives such as tax waver for campanes willing to provise accessable environment and employ people with disabilities. Provide empowerment of PWD in small and medium scale enterprises.
- Fixed at least 2% of the total budget for special education for the administration and management of special education service delivery in the state, and for purchase of materials and equipment for successful delivery of special education in schools, centers and hospital.
- Provision of more assessment centers in all local goverments and primary health care facilities in each state.

- Promotion and sustainance of braille reading and writing, sign language usage in all regular schools and by extention in all private schools.

Conclusion

Special needs education is an expensive venture, which must be upheld and sustained. The end results is always increadable for all, including the parents, children and the society. Statistics are bound of many people with disabilities who are successful in their vocation, employment or business. The focus is to plan to achieve stated objectives and social inclusion for all.

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