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CHALLENGES OF EMPOWERING PEOPLE WITH DISABILITIES IN NIGERIA FOR NATIONAL DEVELOPMENT

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Abstract

Introduction: This paper reviews issues affecting the empowerment of people with disabilities in Nigeria so they can be productive and contribute to the development of the nation. The questions of concern are: What is known about the extent people with disabilities are empowered to contribute to national development in Nigeria? What challenges do people with disabilities in Nigeria encounter in their attempt to contribute to national development? What are the implications of these challenges regarding strategies that could enhance the empowerment of people with disabilities to facilitate their contribution to national development?

Method: This paper addresses these questions by reviewing available research on issues pertaining to (1) legislative mandates on provision of services to individuals with disabilities in the country, (2) funding for services by the government, (3) accessing education and related services, which can ensure that people with disabilities are able to develop their potential and be able to contribute to national development as workers, administrators or employers of labour.

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Findings: Available evidence indicates that people with disabilities in Nigeria encounter challenges in accessing essential services that could enhance their contribution to national development due to factors such as the absence of legislation protecting their rights to receive these services, inadequate funding of services, absence of effective inclusion programmes, and lack of facilities, personnel, and resources.

Suggestions and conclusion: The author recommended some strategies that could produce better outcomes and enhance the opportunities for people with disabilities to be empowered so that they can contribute their quota to national development. These strategies include: enacting and implementing a national disability legislation, utilisation of community-based strategies in the provision of services, and increased advocacy activities by disability organisations.

Keywords: Nigeria, developing countries, people with disabilities, empowerment, service provision, national development, community-based rehabilitation

Introduction
Empowerment has been described as the process of enhancing the capacity of individuals or groups to make choices and to transform those choices into desired actions and outcomes (1). It is argued that empowered people have freedom of choice and action. This in turn enables them to better influence the course of their lives and the decisions which affect them. Clearly, empowerment is a cross-cutting issue. From education and health care to governance and economic policy, activities which seek to empower people with disabilities are expected to increase their development opportunities, enhance development outcomes and improve their quality of life (1). It has been argued that empowering people by providing quality education will prepare them to have careers, hold jobs, earn incomes, and advance in positions. Opportunities to work enable them to utilize their knowledge and skills for the good of their families and the society at large. They live independently and productively by earning income. They are able to provide
better standards of living for their families and support the development of their communities by paying taxes, for example (2).

Access to education and related services is crucial to empowering people with disabilities to effectively contribute to national development (2). In this paper, the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Disabled (UN CRPD) definition of ‘disability’, which refers to those who have long-term physical, mental, intellectual or sensory impairments which may hinder their full and effective participation in society on an equal basis with others, is adopted (3).

National development refers to the ability of a nation to improve the lives of its citizens. Measures of improvement may be material, such as increase incomes and in the gross domestic product, or social, such as gains in literacy, schooling, healthcare services, and provision of housing (4). In a wider context, national development is redefined to include reduction or elimination of poverty, inequality and unemployment within the context of growing economy in order to improve the quality of people’s lives. That is, for any country, if poverty, inequality and unemployment have all declined from high levels, then that implies some level of development for that country (4, 5).

The United Nations has devised a Human Development Index (HDI) to measure national human development of both developing and developed countries on annual basis. The HDI comprises demographic, social and economic factors such as life expectancy, literacy rate, and per capita purchasing power (6). Citizens in each country contribute to national development when they are able to work, operate businesses, earn income, support their families, and communities at large, for example, by paying taxes, becoming employers, and contributing to the progress of the society in some ways.

According to Dube, people with disabilities can work in various fields, provide leadership and contribute actively to various aspects of national development just like citizens without disabilities, if there are services and education to enable them acquire the knowledge and skills essential for contributing to national development (7).
Што се знае за степенот до кој луѓето со инвалидност се еманципираат до придонесат за националниот развој во Нигерија? Какви предизвiziци лицата со инвалидност во Нигерија се соочуваат во нивниот обид да придонесат за националниот развој? Како импликациите од овие предизвiziци во врска со стратегиите кои би можеле да го зајакнат еманципирањето на лицата со инвалидност и да го олеснат нивниот придонес за националниот развој? Овој труд се обидува да одговори на овие питања со разгледување на досегашните истражувања. Пред да продолжиме, неопходен е кус преглед на земјата, како и информации за лицата со инвалидност.

Нигерија и лицата со посебни потреби
Нигерија, земја во Западна Африка со процената на населената земја со Африкаци во светот (8). Како што се однесува и на други земји во развој, лицата со посебни потреби претставуваат значителен дел од населението како резултат на неадекватноста во исхраната, здравствената заштита, социјалните услуги, конфликтите, како и поради влијанието на природните катастрофи (9–12). Валиден попис на лица со инвалидност не бил спроведен во оваа земја уште од нејзиното осамостојување од Велика Британија во 1960 година. Сепак, Светската здравствена организација и Светската банка (12) проценуваат дека инвалидност се појавува кај најмалку 15 проценти од светската популација. Може да се претпостави дека во Нигерија има околу пет до шест милиони луѓе со инвалидност. Лилата со посебни потреби во Нигерија имаат капацитет да придонесат значително за националниот развој ако се еманципираат преку обезбедување соодветно образование и слични услуги потребни за развој на нивниот потенцијал. Кога ќе бидат соодветно опремени, тие можат да работат во различни полиња, да попаднат лидерство, активно да учествуваат во различни аспекти на националниот развој и да придонесат за постигнување на целите на одржлив развој (SDGs).

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Nigeria and People with Disabilities
Nigeria, a country in West Africa with an estimated population of over 177 million people, is the most populous nation in Africa. (8). (Look for appropriate reference) As pertains to other developing countries, individuals with disabilities constitute a significant portion of the population due to inadequacies in nutrition, health care, social services, conflicts, and the impacts of natural disasters (9,10). It has been suggested that 80 percent of people with disabilities in the world live in Nigeria and other developing countries (11,12). Reliable data on the population of people with disabilities in Nigeria is lacking. No valid census on people with disabilities has been conducted in the country since independence from Britain in 1960. However, according to World Health Organisation and the World Bank (12) estimates that disabilities occur in at least 15 percent of the world’s population (i.e. one billion people) , it can be assumed that there are several millions of people with disabilities in Nigeria. Like other segments of the population, people with disabilities in Nigeria have the capacity to contribute meaningfully to national development if they are empowered through education and related services necessary. When properly equipped, they can work in various fields, offer leadership roles, actively participate in various aspects of national development, and contribute to achieve the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). On September 25, 2015, over 190 world
leaders gathering at the United Nations committed to the implementation of 17 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) aimed at eradicating extreme poverty, fighting inequalities, discriminations, etc. (13).

It is clear in the 2015 Sustainable Development Goals (SDG) document that the empowerment of people with disabilities and other marginalised groups to contribute to national development is one important key to unlocking, accelerating, and sustaining national and international developments. This is so because everyone has a role in the achievement of the goals of more prosperous, equitable, and sustainable world by 2030 (14).

The extent each country is able to take actions that promote equality, access to services, and contribution to national development by marginalised groups such as people with disabilities is an indicator that will be used to assess progress in implementing the SDGs worldwide (13).

In a wider context, empowering people with disabilities must be seen not only in terms of facilitating their participation in national development, but also as a strategy to enable them to enjoy their right to equal opportunity, participation, and choices as well as contributing in moving the country and world forward in all spheres. Thus empowering people with disabilities can be put simply as improving their capacity to be who they wish to be and to be the actors in development that they desire to be and which that development demands. From the foregoing, it is apparent that there is a direct relationship between empowerment and ability to contribute to national development. Vic posited that people with disabilities desire independent, contributing, and productive living just like those without disabilities (15).

Reflecting on 25 years of the Americans with Disabilities Act, Dollar noted that apart from ensuring structural barriers to accessing buildings were modified or removed and providing the necessary accommodations to ensure success in education for those with disabilities, the legislation is important because it aimed at dispelling stereotypes, ensuring parity and fairness, and creating
the acceleration of national development (20).
Absence of Legislation on Service Provision

Ensuring that people with disabilities in Nigeria have human right protections, freedom from discrimination, equality, and access to education and other services that will enable them to develop their talents and contribute to national development requires the Nigerian government enact and implement the necessary laws. Sadly, it remains the case that the there is no federal legislation in Nigeria that guarantees the rights of people with disabilities to receive these essential protections and services (9). There has been disability legislation in the pipeline since Nigeria returned to civilian rule in 1999. The bill was passed and harmonised by both chambers of the Nigerian Parliament in 2010 but has been awaiting presidential assent (21).

Interestingly, Nigeria signed and ratified the UN Convention on the Rights of People with Disabilities on September 24, 2010 (22). The 50 Articles in the UN Convention are basically aimed at ensuring that people with disabilities in each ratifying country are provided the services to develop their talents and contribute to personal and national development (3). It has been argued that the UN Convention is significant in that it is the first internationally legally-binding instrument that will hold nations that sign it to account regarding ensuring that appropriate robust policies and effective implementation procedures are established to uphold the rights and dignities of persons with disabilities as well as enhance their access to services and contribution to personal and national development (23). Nonetheless, there is no evidence in Nigeria that the government has taken positive actions such as enacting laws to support the implementation of the promises in the document (9,10). Although, over three decades ago, Nigeria developed a “National Policy on Education” (NPE), with a section entirely dedicated to the education of learners with disabilities or special needs (24). In the absence of supporting legislation, the provisions in the NPE document cannot be implemented to enable
people with disabilities to receive educational and other services that could empower them to become productive and to contribute to national development. Some states in Nigeria, such as Lagos, Ekiti, and Plateau, have enacted some type of legislation to protect the rights of citizens with disabilities living in these states to receive specific services (25). While this is commendable, a federal legislation has not been enacted so that the rights of such individuals to receive quality education and related services everywhere in the country will be protected.

Lack of Funding

It is not surprising that, in the absence of legislation supporting the provision of services for people with disabilities in the country, services will not be adequately funded. In general, there is evidence indicating that educational services, for instance, are deteriorating as a result of severe decrease in funding in many countries including Nigeria (12). In 1988, the Salamanca Statement and Framework for Action on Special Needs Education adopted at the World Conference on Special Needs Education reaffirmed the commitment of the world community (including Nigeria) to give the highest policy and budgetary priority to improve their educational systems to enable them to include all people regardless of their individual differences and difficulties and enhance the contribution of all to national development (26). It seems to be the case that in Nigeria and many other countries funds for the provision of services to empower people with disabilities and enhance their participation in national development will NOT be a priority of government policy and expenditure (27, 28). Some of the reasons for this according to these authors are: (1) meeting the needs of citizens with disabilities is considered too costly, (2) it is argued that the needs of the ‘normal’ majority will have to be met prior to meeting those of individuals with disabilities who are in the minority, and (3) due to lack of awareness of the potential of people with disabilities, expenditure on services for them is considered a waste of

Недостаток на средства

Не е чудно што во отсукство на законодавство за поддршка на обезбедување на услуги за лицата со посебни потреби во земјата, услугите нема да бидат соодветно финансирани. Во принцип, постојат докази кои покажуваат дека образовните услуги, на пример, се вликуваат како резултат на сериозно намалување во финансисањето во многу земји, вклучувајќи ја и Нигерија (12). Во 1988 година, Изјавата и рамката од Саламанка за преземање акција за образование на лицата со посебни потреби, ја потвrdи заложбата на светската заедница (вклучувајќи ја и Нигерија) да се даде највисок политички и буџетски приоритет за подобрување на нивните образовни системи со цел вклучување на сите гуѓе, без оглед на нивните индивидуални разлики и проблеми, како и за подобрување на придонесот на сите за национален развој (26). Се чии дека во Нигерија, и во многу други земји, средствата за обезбедување на услуги за поттик на гуѓето со инвалидност, како и подобрување на нивното учиство во национализмот развој нема да бидат приоритет на владината политика и буџет (27, 28). Можни причини за ова се: (1) исполнувањето на потребите на граѓаните со инвалидност се смета за премногу скапо, (2) се тврди дека ќе мора да бидат исполнети потребите на „нормалното“ мнозинство пред оние на лицата со посебни потреби, кои се во маалцинство, и (3) како последица на недостаток на свет за потенцијалните на лицата со инвалидност, трошоците за услуги за нив се сметаат за губење на ограничени ресурси. Дали на овие
Marginalization in Accessing Education and Related Services

The marginalisation that people with disabilities in Nigeria encounter include challenges in accessing education and related services. Although most educational institutions for learners with disabilities in Nigeria are segregated, the need for these learners to be educated in regular schools was acknowledged in the NPE document (24, 25). The question is: Are the necessary resources and supports, to ensure the success of inclusive programmes, available in the country? Clearly, the provision of effective education and related services to individuals with disabilities in the country requires more inclusive environments to assist with fighting discrimination and enhancing equality and access to programmes and services (10, 25).
Suggestions and Concluding Remarks

It is strongly advocated that the Nigerian government should take positive actions that

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will empower people with disabilities and enhance their contribution to national development. It is evident from the foregoing discussion that people with disabilities in Nigeria may not have access to the services essential to the development of their talents. Clearly, for this situation to change for the better, actions are required in several areas. Despite the prevailing developmental difficulties, economic and political upheaval in the country, improvements in provision of services is possible if the government would strive to take appropriate actions and utilise the available resources as efficiently as possible.

There is an urgent need to enact a federal disability law to give legal support to the provision of the required services for people with disabilities. It is expected that the disability law will address the following, among other issues, relevant to ensuring people with disabilities are able to contribute to national development: (a) a goal for providing full educational support services to all learners with disabilities, (b) a funding system that will cater for all the steps and/or stages in the provision of relevant services, (c) a provision of quality control especially with regards to productivity and funding, (d) a powerful safeguard for both parents and children on issues such as identification, evaluation, educational training, and placement for services, (e) a commitment to providing the necessary materials and facilities for meaningful services to people with disabilities, (f) a mandatory order guaranteeing the rights of individuals with disabilities to receive services in inclusive settings in their local communities where materials and personnel to meet their learning needs will be available, and (g) provision for evaluation and accountability. Enacting and implementing a legislation that addresses these goals will facilitate achievement of the objectives in the UN CRPD and SDGs documents for people with disabilities in the country. Article 1 of the UN CRPD aims to promote, protect, and ensure the full and equal enjoyment of all human rights and fundamental freedoms by all persons with disabilities, and to promote respect for their inherent dignity (3). Similarly, the SDGs aim to achieve extraordinary things in the next 15
Enacting and implementing this law will ensure people with disabilities in the country will receive services that will enable them develop their potential and contribute to national development (9, 34). Certainly, there will be challenges in implementing the provisions of the mandate, given current developmental challenges in the country. However, the existence of the law will have significant impacts. For example, it will provide individuals with disabilities the basis to seek redress in law courts in cases where it is considered that the provisions of the law are not followed. Recently, a university in Nigeria expelled a deaf student because of ‘speech and hearing challenges’ (37). A federal disability legislation would have given this person a good platform to fight for justice.

Education holds the key to employment, advancement, and ability to contribute to national development. The disability law, awaiting assent of the president, covers issues of access to education for people with disabilities in Nigeria. In 2014, for the second time, the Nigerian Senate passed a federal Disability Bill that (a) prohibits all forms of discrimination against people with disabilities, (b) demands equal opportunities in all aspects of life for individuals with disabilities, (c) stipulates that all public buildings be accessible to people with disabilities, and (d) includes punitive actions for corporate bodies and individuals found discriminating against people with disabilities (38). However, the bill has not been signed into law by the president (9, 34). The enactment and meaningful implementation of this law will promote access to educational programmes for people with disabilities in the country. Individuals able to obtain education to the optimum of their abilities would be able to earn diplomas and degrees will be able to seek fulfilling employment, earn years: end poverty, promote prosperity and well-being for all, and protect the planet. The 17 Sustainable Development Goals set a course to achieve these objectives — for people everywhere (6). Thus, legislation on service provision is essential to achieving these goals and ensuring people with disabilities develop their potential, live productive, and contributing lives.
издржуваат себеси и нивните семејства, како и да придонесуваат за самата заедница (9, 28). Се препорачува нигериската влада да посвети соодветно внимание на прашањето за овозможување на достапни услуги за инклюзивна на лицата со инвалидност во контекст на на- соките од Рехабилитација на заедницата (CBR), започнати во главниот град на Нигерија, Абуза, во 2010 (39, 40). Овие насоки се наменети за еманципирање на лицата со по- себни потреби со цел да го развijат својот потенцијал, да живеат продуктивно и да при- донесат во националниот развој преку поддршка на нивното вклучување во здравствено- то, образованието, вработувањето, рекреаци- јата, вештините за обука, како и другите служби во заедницата (39, 40). Пристапите на CBR се од суштинско значење, бидејки пого- лемиот дел од луѓето со инвалидност во Ни- герија живеат во руралните области и треба да имаат пристап до овие услуги во нивните локални фери со цел да го развijат својот потенцијал и да придонесат во националниот развој (41).

Ефективните програми на CBR се позитивно средство за обезбездување на лицата со инва- лидност да придонесуваат во националниот развој со тоа што ќе се обезбеди луѓето да имаат пристап до овие програми и услуги во нивните локални сфери (29). Важните аспек- ти на CBR кои што треба да се спроведуваат во заедницата, во интегрирани средини, вклучуваат информација од јавен карактер, зашти- та, образование, технологија (медицински средства, опрема и уреди), социјални, психолошки и професионални програми. Пристап- пот на заедницата за обезбездување образова- ние и слични услуги ќе гарантира дека луѓето со инвалидност ќе имаат пристап до овие услу- ги во нивните локални сфери. Ова ќе га- рантира можнотизите за развој да бидат дос- тапни за сите вклучувајќи ги и лицата со по- себни потреби. Поначалу, овој пристап отвора пат за пониковизивни, реални и одржливи иницијативи (40).

Постојат некои докази на овој пристап во Нигерија. Alade извести за стручна програма за рехабилитација инициирана од страна на Меѓународната организација на трудот и Програмата за развој на Обединитите нации (ILO/УНДП) во држава во Западна Нигерија во 2004 година (36). По успешниот пилот проект во држава во Западна Нигерија, шест други држави во земјата инициираат слични income, support themselves, their families, и the community at large (9, 28).

It is recommended that the Nigerian government should give adequate attention to the issue of making services accessible and inclusive for people with disabilities in the context of the new Community Based Rehabilitation (CBR) guidelines launched in Nigeria’s capital city, Abuja in 2010 (39,40). These guidelines were designed to empower persons with disabilities to develop their potential, live productively, and contribute to national development by supporting their inclusion in health, education, employment, recreation, skills training, and other community services (39,40). CBR approaches are essential because the vast majority of people with disabilities in Nigeria live in rural areas and need to access these services in their localities in order to develop their potential and contribute to national development (41).

An effective CBR programmes is a positive means of ensuring people with disabilities can contribute to national development in that it will ensure these people access programmes and services in their areas (29). The important aspects of CBR to be implemented in the community at integrated settings include public information, prevention, education, technology (medical, aids, equipment and devices), social, psychological and vocational programmes. A community-based approach to the provision of education and related services will ensure that people with disabilities are able to access these services in their localities. This will ensure that development opportunities are available to all including people with disabilities. Further, this approach facilitates more inclusive, realistic, and sustainable initiatives (40).

There is some evidence of this approach in Nigeria. Alade reported the community-based vocational rehabilitation programme the International Labour Organisation and the United Nations Development Programme (ILO/UNDP) initiated in a state in Western Nigeria in 2004 (36). After the successful pilot project in the state in Western Nigeria, six other states in the country had initiated similar community based approaches to the provision of services to individuals with disabilities. A
Effective advocacy activities by organisations or associations of people with disabilities in the country will promote awareness of the needs of people with disabilities. For instance, peaceful demonstrations by people with disabilities at the federal parliament and presidential villa could put pressure on the government to enact the disability legislation. Essentially, people with disabilities, through their organisations, must take a leading role in their own empowerment. Obviously then the various associations of people with disabilities in Nigeria have significant roles in persuading the government to recognise the needs of citizens with disabilities by enacting a law to support the development of their talents and contribution to national development. This goal can be achieved if they can collaborate effectively under the national umbrella of all disability organisations in the country called the Joint National Association of Persons with Disabilities (JANOPWD). Presenting a united front, their advocacy activities could have more impact in pressurising the government to enact and implement relevant laws, for example. Another strategy that they could utilise in the struggle is to embark upon actions that involve promoting public

programme like this could be one means of enabling more people with disabilities in the country to acquire skills that could lead to self-employment, independent, productive, and contributing living. However, reliable data on the progress of the programme in the country are scarce. It appears that too much bureaucracy and inadequate funding adversely affected this programme (9, 10, 34).

A ministry responsible for disability and rehabilitation should be created at federal, state, and local government levels. Presently, the ministry of social welfare and women affairs is charged with disability issues in Nigeria. Disability issues, such as developing and implementing CBR programmes, will likely be at the back burner because issues affecting people with disabilities are not taken seriously (9, 10). Nonetheless, it can be argued that if adequately planned and implemented CBR will address many of the challenges of people with disabilities in Nigeria in accessing education and related services.

Effective advocacy activities by organisations or associations of people with disabilities in the country will promote awareness of the needs of people with disabilities. For instance, peaceful demonstrations by people with disabilities at the federal parliament and presidential villa could put pressure on the government to enact the disability legislation. Essentially, people with disabilities, through their organisations, must take a leading role in their own empowerment. Obviously then the various associations of people with disabilities in Nigeria have significant roles in persuading the government to recognise the needs of citizens with disabilities by enacting a law to support the development of their talents and contribution to national development. This goal can be achieved if they can collaborate effectively under the national umbrella of all disability organisations in the country called the Joint National Association of Persons with Disabilities (JANOPWD). Presenting a united front, their advocacy activities could have more impact in pressurising the government to enact and implement relevant laws, for example. Another strategy that they could utilise in the struggle is to embark upon actions that involve promoting public
обезбедените ност на натжеле треби да пример от Авторите влијание и да извршат притисок врз владата да донесе и спроведе релевантни закони, на пример. Уште една стратегија што тие би можеле да ја користат во борбата, е да се започнат активности што вклучуваат промовирање на јавната свет за потребите и недовољно обезбедените услуги за лицата со ивалидност во земјата со помош на масовните медиуми (телевизија, радио, вестици, списанија, социјалните медиуми, како Фејсбук) за да обезбеди форум за националната политика за дискусија на различни теми со цел подобрување на нивните потреби и благосостојба.

Исто така, треба да добираат заинтересирани и хумани јавни личности и политичари во земјата во обид да влијаат на владата да ги земе предвид и потребите на граѓаните со ивалидност при донесувањето и имплементацијата на законите. Директното добирање за подобрување на одредени услуги од страна на хуманите јавни личности и политичари често може да биде многу влијателно (42). Со ваквите активности во оваа земја ќе се донесе и имплементира закон за поддршка, еднаквост и пристап до услуги на лицата со посебни потреби. Како резултат на тоа, би можело да дојде до подобрување на услугите и можностите предвидени за лицата со посебни потреби во земјата, со цел да ги развijат своите потенцијали и да придонесат во националниот развој.

Конфликт на интереси

Авторите изjavуваат дека не постои конфликт на интереси.

Референции / References


