

PROJECT TITLE: Social inclusion of persons with disabilities in Nigeria: Challenges and opportunities.

PROJECT FOCUS: A review of the opportunities in the social life of PWDs

PROJECT TYPE: Social Logistics Project

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INTRODUCTION

The Project we handled reviewed in details the continued alienation of PWDs in the city of Enugu by both the Government owned constructions and individually owned. The community of PWDs which we visited in Enugu, known as Enugu Cheshire Home is a community that has provided succor for these greatly talented individuals for over thirty years.

It was founded by the missionaries immediately after the war, the community was used to house the children of the victims of war who had little or no means of caring for their physically challenged children, alongside the abled one's. So they kept these children under the medical check of missionaries and went about their assignment. Some parents did come back for their children, while many others abandoned theirs for death. It was some of those that were abandoned for death that began to get certain training from these missionaries before their departure. The trainings they received in basic medicine administration and other special arts of skills in car repairs, vulcanizing, mechanic, furniture making etc. has become the source of retaining this community up till date.

Each generation has transferred the learnt skills to the next through practice, and this has helped to sustain the community for over thirty years. Some of the people from this community are today graduates of Enugu's prestigious schools like IMT, ESUT, College of Education etc. Yet, they are all faced with the issue of joblessness, because of the lack of Accessibility to most structures (the house offices) that could employ them. It is on this note that I and my team went into research on the need for the full inclusion of these highly talented and skilled individuals, who though are limited by birth or by accident in their appearance, yet have refused to let their background put their backs to the ground. They have instead overcame the tides and have acquired a lifetime sustainance skills, and are also willing to give their best to the society only if they can be socially included, by breaking the social logistics barrier of Accessibility to their potential places of work.

Some of these persons who were not born with disabilities are the most pained of them all. For example, my brother and friend Mr. Chiuba Ubaka who was a senior government worker before he was involved in a ghastly car accident that has today kept him in a wheelchair. Even though he was great at his job which was shown by his consistent promotion in the office, yet, he is not able to retain such service to the government as his type of persons are not in consideration while the building was constructed.

Today, he is a trainer of car drivers for the disabled. A skill he had to learn out of his doggedness and refusal to be a pitiable case. Such resilience is found almost in all the residents of this community called Cheshire Home Enugu. For in it are those who have built life out of nothing and today are living in their own homes and still sending in support to the community. Some others because of the challenges they anticipate and are indeed real in the outside world, have refused to leave the community. They would rather share the little space with persons of the same understanding than to go and be treated as scum in the so called outside city.

PROJECT FOCUS

So we ask, what is the disability inclusion, and what can it do for the persons involved as a Social Logistics Project?

Disability inclusion means understanding the relationship between the way people function and how they participate in society, and making sure everybody has the same opportunities to participate in every aspect of life to the best of their abilities and desires.

According to ACT 7277

REPUBLIC ACT NO. 7277 . AN ACT PROVIDING FOR THE REHABILITATION, SELF-DEVELOPMENT AND SELF-RELIANCE OF DISABLED PERSONS AND THEIR INTEGRATION INTO THE MAINSTREAM OF SOCIETY AND FOR OTHER PURPOSES.

Institutions are manned by individuals, and individual attitudes shape the environment and institutions. So, when the attitudes of a community are negative towards a particular, vulnerable group, they will struggle much more to realize their potential.

While there is no clear estimation of the number of people with disabilities in Nigeria, data from the 2018 Nigeria Demographic and Health Survey revealed that an estimated 7% of household members above the age of five (as well as 9% of 60 and above) experience some level of difficulty in at least one functional domain—seeing, hearing, communication, cognition, walking, or self-care. Similarly, 1% either have a lot of difficulties or cannot function at all in at least one domain (figure 1).

In fact, social inclusion is an important “determinant factor of health” – without inclusion, people are more likely to experience poor health (including poor mental health), loneliness, isolation, and poor self esteem. Many people with disabilities unnecessarily experience life quite differently.

However, the government of Nigeria, both at the state and federal level, has taken some steps to address the needs of persons with disabilities. One significant step came in January 2019 with the ratification of the Discrimination Against Persons with Disabilities (Prohibition) Act 2018, though implementation is yet to materialize. In addition, nine states in the Federation have enacted disability laws to safeguard the rights of persons with disabilities to varying degrees of implementation.

Persons with disabilities in Nigeria persistently face stigma, discrimination, and barriers to accessing basic social services and economic opportunities. Today, they face greater barriers brought about by the impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic. The Nigeria Rapid Assessment on Disability Inclusion identified a number of these salient barriers.

Undoubtedly, persons with disabilities may experience negative attitudes in family and community levels, including name-calling, negative beliefs, and misconceptions surrounding the causes of disabilities (usually associated with religious or cultural norms, and beliefs). As one woman with a physical disability in Jos puts it – “Some people say the reason why I am visually impaired is because I committed a sin.” These negative attitudes manifest in rejection, neglect, loss of respect, denial of identity or self-worth, and often result in low self-esteem, depression and isolation. These, along with structural limitations and challenges, reinforce barriers for persons with disabilities in accessing basic services such as education, health, public transport, and social safety nets.

Persons with disabilities face difficulties accessing adequate health services, often being limited by the availability of accessible hospitals and personnel who are aware of and specialized in disability inclusion and providing services for persons with disabilities. They also experience poor educational outcomes on account of the absence of adequate facilities, including accessible infrastructure; learning materials; and teachers trained in inclusive education. A man with albinism from Abuja elaborated on the challenge faced – “First there is an educational barrier. Persons with disabilities don’t have access to quality education. Many parents cannot even afford getting them admitted [to school] and then as to continuing education. The system itself is not inclusive enough to cater for their needs.”

Unemployment rates among persons with disabilities are almost double than that of the general population, owing to attitudinal, mobility-related, technological, and physical barriers (lack of accessible workplaces). Assistive devices are expensive and not easily available, which limits the mobility and access to technology for persons with disabilities. In addition, many will experience frequent denial of job opportunities, employers’ negatives attitudes, inappropriate job placement, lower expectations at work, and a lack of reasonable accommodation.

These challenges among others compound the vulnerability of persons with disabilities, especially during COVID-19. A distinct absence of data pertaining to disability prevalence and the different forms of disabilities persist in Nigeria, which in turn challenge effective policy responses and data driven programming.

It is important that government officials, policymakers, and decision makers are aware of the importance of disability as a development issue and enhance data collection on disability. A concerted effort to raise

awareness surrounding disability issues would serve to shift negative perceptions and stigma against persons with disabilities among families and communities.

In order to forge a disability-inclusive recovery from COVID-19, support for existing disability inclusion legislation in Nigeria is imperative. This means promoting the implementation of the Discrimination Against Persons with Disabilities (Prohibition) Act 2018 and strengthening the institutional landscape for disability inclusion through the Disability Commission. A woman with a physical disability from Abuja captures the issue well – “Persons with disabilities should not relax and think ‘we now have a law, everything we need will fall into place.’ No, we must continue to work, to advocate for implementation.”

In spite of the lack of implementation surrounding the 2018 Act, the government has made progress elsewhere. The 2018 Nigeria Demographic and Health Survey included a disability module based on the Washington Group on Disability Statistics Short-Set of Disability Questions. This, in turn, is aligned with the World Bank’s 10 Commitments on Disability Inclusion, with Commitment 3 focusing on data collection related to disability.

Furthermore, investments in inclusive employment and livelihood interventions are critical to addressing unemployment challenges among persons with disabilities. These could include entrepreneurship training and business advisory services, as well as the promotion of locally produced assistive devices and accessible workplaces. Disability-focused organizations in Nigeria should be empowered to support this process and provide services to persons with disabilities and caregivers.

Persons with disabilities are more likely to experience adverse socioeconomic outcomes and face higher rates of multidimensional poverty than the general population. President Muhammadu Buhari’s goal of lifting 100 million Nigerians out of poverty by 2029, in addition to achieving inclusive economic growth, will be challenging without the inclusion of persons with disabilities.

Why Social Inclusion?

It is clear that people can be present in community without being socially included. Being socially included means that a number of things are present in people’s lives. Social inclusion means that people:

Experience a sense of belongings

Are accepted (for who they are) within their communities

Have valued roles in the community

Are actively participating in the community

Are involved in activities based on their personal preferences

Have social relationships with others whom they chose and share common interests

Have friends

When those people experience some or all of these conditions in their life they are more likely to be happier and healthier. In fact, social inclusion is an important “determinant of health” – without inclusion, people are more likely to experience poor health (including poor mental health), loneliness, isolation, and poor self esteem.

Many people with disabilities unnecessarily experience life quite differently. They may not have a “sense of belonging” in the community and may not have access to activities they prefer or desire. Such a people lack opportunities to work, play, learn and develop social relationships with others (particularly with people who do not have a disability). People with disabilities are often not acknowledged in the community, or if they are, it may be in a negative way. Too often, those people do not have close friends with whom they can share their desires, time and lives with.

How does this lack of social inclusion for people with disabilities get addressed? There are many possible pathways to inclusion. The good news is that we are getting better as a society in opening up our schools and workplaces to people with disabilities. New Brunswick has one of the best inclusive education systems in the country and this holds much promise for inclusion in the broader society. While there are still many barriers to employment, forward thinking workplaces are slowly recognizing the real contributions that people with disabilities can make. Recreation holds particular promise for achieving true inclusion because of the meaningful connections that recreation can facilitate.

Our Recommendation

A. Contrustuction consideration room for all PWDs with a representative in person for all Federal, State and local structures within the country.

B. A PWDs skill acquisition scheme for all states in Nigeria, with the leads fully manned by persons with disabilities.

C. A constitutionally recognized platform for funding all privately and government established PWD community with PWDs as heads of department.

D. Special learning environment for skill Acquisition and basic subject learning for PWDs all over the country, fully headed by persons from the community.

E. Reviving all PWD centers of special trainings with periodic funding from the Federal budget yearly.

F. Special consideration for persons with disability in job applications and consideration, especially in every part of the government.

G. Special Talent discovery shows hosted on National TV stations periodically for PWDs and fully hosted by persons with disabilities.

H. Constant mental health programme for the PWDs to reduce suicidal thoughts and negative vices.

We believe that from such platform, and with the power of media, many of them who are talented would have been given the opportunity to be seen and heard by all who may be in need of their expertise.

In conclusion

It is no longer a case of who or what the PWDs are or can do. We must know that they are first humans like us and have rights to equal participation in all that humans do in Nigeria. Therefore, we root that they be carried along in issues of construction of commercial or governmental building structures. This would have reduced drastically the rate at which we alienate these fully talented Nigerians from bringing in their quota in this our quest for National transformation. Also, we would have it that they are given the same opportunity to be free from poverty by being considered for personal defence over that job hunting and skill based examination. We therefore Advocate for full inclusion.

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Please find attached;

Below is the video interview and some pictures of what we were able to gather as first hand information on this project in the community of PWDs within the city of Enugu.