



CHAPTER 29

BARRIERS GLOBALLY FACED BY PERSONS WITH DISABILITIES

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Introduction

The world is on a path of globalization, and with it follows international communities that actively work to enhance the living situation for the majority of the people on the planet. The value of special needs services to sustainable development in bridging the barriers globally faced by persons with disability (PWDs) cannot be over emphasized in the 21st century. For instance, Nigeria has over the years gone through phases of social, economic, political, cultural and technological changes with the advent of Artificial Intelligence (AI), as well as religious and intertribal turmoil with tremendous adverse effect on the psychological wellbeing and quality of life of a greater proportion of the citizenry not to talk of PWDs who are most times completely cut off from the world with unmet needs. This scenario has brought about an increasing need for counselling services and special needs education.

As the world grows closer to inclusiveness, gaps between the local system and the international systems, gaps between services for PWDs and those without disabilities come to light and demand attention. Among various groups, systems or communities that have been marginalized are now in dire need of attention, and support are the PWDs. Disability is part of the human trajectory. Almost everyone will be temporarily or permanently impaired at some point in life. People with disabilities are present in all societies. Many of them are 'hidden' at home or in a particular institution due to social stigma, prejudice and environmental barriers which prevent them from participating productively in the society.

In countries with life expectancies of over 70 years, individuals spend on average about 8 years, or 11.5 per cent of their life span, living with disabilities, in addition, 80% of PWDs live in developing countries as a result, they do not enjoy access on an equal basis as others in areas such as health, transportation and employment and also social participation like politics or entertainment (WHO, 2016). An estimated 15 per cent of the world's population (or estimated 1 billion people) are living with disabilities worldwide and they face many challenges/barriers to inclusion in some key aspects of society. Nonetheless, PWDs are part of the community and as legal citizens, they have the right to enjoy all the



existing facilities in a country and also participate in all aspects of national development without any discrimination. PWD's are a large minority group, starved of services and mostly ignored by society, they live in isolation, segregation, poverty, charity and pity. Universal access for PWDs are the ultimate goals of the disability movement. This means the removal of all cultural, physical, social and other barriers that prevent persons with disabilities from equally accessing opportunities and participating fully in all aspects of life in the global community.

The thesis statement of this chapter is hinged on the fact that the rapid technological development and globalization which characterizethe 21st century also constitute a significant concern for PWDs, yet these persons continue to face barriers that prevent them from enjoying their deserved civil, political, economic, social, cultural and developmental rights. This is largely due to lack of awareness, ignorance and prejudice in our society. It therefore becomes necessary to start this chapter by discussing insights into PWDs and outlining notable barriers faced by persons with disabilities which include; educational barriers, economic barriers, social and political barriers, health barriers. The implications of globally accessing the challenges faced by PWDs on special needs services will be explored. Conclusion and suggestions will end the discussions.

Insight into Persons with Disability (PWDs)

The United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (United Nations, 2006) defined PWDs as persons who have long term physical, mental, intellectual or sensory impairments, who face different challenges that may prevent or limit their full and successful contribution or participation in society on an equal opportunity with people without disability. In Europe, Ishmael (2021), defined PWDS as those who have a physical or mental impairment which has a significant and long-term negative impact on their power to fulfil and perform a normal daily life activities. In Asia, Gross (2022), described persons with disabilities as a people with long term physical, mental, intellectual or sensory impairment which, in interaction with barriers, hindertheir full and effective participation in society equally with others. In America, the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA, 1990) defined a PWD as one who has a physical or mental impairment that substantially limits one or more major life activities, has a record of such an impairment, or is regarded as having such an impairment. In Africa, Ubani and Sanikpege (2020), described PWDs as those who have long term physical, mental, intellectual or sensory impairments; which in interaction with various barriers may hinder their full and effective participation in the society.

Notable Barriers Faced By Persons with Disabilities



Persons with disabilities globally are faced with numerous challenges which discussed under the following subheadings;

Educational Barrier

After more than a century of several missionary and state-sponsored educational initiatives, PWDs are still not entitled to the same type of schooling as their non-disabled counterparts. The reasons behind this include poverty, neglect by family or community, lack of proper enlightenment, among others (Musa, 2016). In Africa, the overwhelming majority of schools, colleges and universities remain unprepared to accommodate and train willing learners with disabilities in inclusive setting. As a result, PWDs are forced to accept segregated 'special' facilities which also lack required resources to equip them with the necessary skills to either get a job or live independently and socially as adults (Elwan, 2017). The educational barrier faced by persons with disabilities is not due to overcrowding in ordinary schools nor is it because of lack of resources but is due to unwillingness to address the educational challenges facing persons with disabilities by government and local dwellers (Tororei, 2019).

In Nigeria, there have been attempts as earlier noted concerning the provision of services to PWDs as can be inferred from the Nigerian National Policy on Education. The policy provides that 'every Nigerian child shall have a right to equal educational opportunities irrespective of any real or imagined disability, each according to his or her ability' (Oloto, 2014). This provision is further complemented thus: 'equal access to educational opportunities for all citizens of the country at primary, secondary and tertiary levels both inside and outside the formal school system' (Musa, 2016). However, due to lack of proper legislation, the implementation of such services has not been forthcoming as it has been rightly observed and criticized that, Nigerian education fails to take account for learners living with disabilities. The need to consider individual differences, especially those of PWDs is not unconnected with the fact that children do not all develop the same way. In Nigeria, a major problem in the disability issue is the lack of access to equal education opportunities for PWDs. Though the right to equal education forms part of the directive principles and state policy for even Community-Based Rehabilitation, it is not within the fundamental rights provision. Thus the non-justifiability of equal educational opportunity makes it difficult to be unenforced against government by persons with disabilities. This is contrary to the fundamental right to education for all stated in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and protected through various international conventions (Olade, 2017).

In view of this, there is a difference in the educational opportunities provided for persons with and without disability as it will simply not be possible to realize the goal of Education for All if the Government do not ignite a complete change in circumstances as the current challenges faced by PWDs in realizing their right to education remain profound, even with the increasingly clear set of areas of action from international and local legislations which have not been adequately



explored. The United Nations Convention on the Rights of PWDs (CRPD) was a milestone in this regard as the CRPD established inclusive education as the key mechanism to deliver the right to education for PWDs. Inclusive education systems in this spectrum can be defined as all persons learning together in mainstream classrooms in their locality or community, irrespective of the different range of ability and disability, with teaching methods, materials and school environments that address the needs of all girls and boys (Ubani, 2022). Inclusive education systems are grounded in a rights-based analysis, which can empower learners, celebrate diversity, combat discrimination and promote more inclusive societies (Ubani et al, 2020). This can be a powerful tool in addressing inequalities, as it can tackle discrimination by challenging widely held attitudes and behaviours by helping us to celebrate and embrace the diversities in our societies.

Economic Barrier

Disability is both a cause and a consequence of poverty as there is a strong relationship between disability and poverty and a cyclical tendency in which poverty makes people more vulnerable to disability and disability reinforces and deepens poverty (Osakwe, 2018). Access to employment for persons with disability is inadequate, with the attendant economic and social implications if the status quo is maintained. Instructively, the vicious cycle of disability and poverty has been recognized, which led the United Nations to promulgate rules for equal opportunities for people with disability, with economic rehabilitation as one of the tenets for achieving an optimal level of independence and self-reliance (Osakwe, 2018).

Despite various disability initiatives, accessibility to employment opportunity is far from being achieved for PWDs as the poor perception of the populace towards disability has fuelled the lackluster attitude of governments and private employers of labour to enhance the provision of equal employment for PWD. This is unfortunate because employment is crucial for every individual's economic and social well-being yet in many societies attitudes and practices still demonstrate elements of discrimination against PWD in the realm of employment which are well entrenched in the labour market (Osakwe, 2018). For example, in Nigeria, most of the management positions in organizations specializing in the welfare of persons with disabilities such as schools for PWDs and even ministries responsible for persons with disabilities are been held by non-disabled people.

Social and Political Barriers

There is no provision, for example under the Nigerian Constitution which emphatically accords PWD any special rights to participation in government in the form of equal representation, nor is there any in terms of exercising the rights of franchise.

Although it may be argued that membership of political party of one's choice and participation in elections are guaranteed to PWDs by virtue of the Nigerian



Constitution the reality of this argument is that no such opportunity exists for PWD in term of representation, a special voting environment or contesting for elective position. Unlike Nigeria, some countries have gone a step further in protecting the political rights of PWD by inserting specific clauses that recognize PWD representation in government (Olade, 2017).

A good point of reference is the Constitution of Malawi that provides for the representation of various interest groups including PWDs in the Senate while the Constitution of Uganda requires that Parliament shall consist of a certain number of representatives of persons with disabilities (East, 2019). Similarly, the Kenyan Constitution provides that Kenyan citizens shall be protected from discrimination on the grounds of race, colour, and disabilities, among others; and no law shall be made in any provision that is discriminatory either of itself or in its effect. So also, no person shall be treated in a discriminatory manner by a person acting by virtue of any written law or in the performance of the functions of a public office or a public authority (East, 2019). In this section, the expression 'discriminatory' means affording different treatment to different persons, attributable wholly or mainly to their respective descriptions by race, tribe, place of origin or residence or other local connotation, political opinions, colour, creed or sex.

Incidentally, while constitutional anti-discriminatory provision may appear to be a way forward because of the supremacy of the constitution, it is claimed in most countries with a written constitution that these constitutions give no justiciable rights to citizens in areas relating to the state's social policy (Baker, 2021). The implication is that, PWDs may not be able to invoke antidiscrimination provisions to seek redress against any violation in court. From this perspective the application of constitutional rights appear to be limited to public rights only, therefore while constitutional provisions protect PWDs against discrimination by state entities, it does not offer protection against discrimination, for instance by private employers or private providers of goods and services (Baker, 2021). Even with the justiciable provisions in the constitution relating to discrimination such as the right to freedom against discrimination under Chapter IV of the Nigerian Constitution, it does not confer any special rights to people with disability as one of the prohibited grounds (Musa, 2016). Be that as it may, by general inference from the wording of the section, a person with disability should not suffer any form of discrimination as a result of his or her disability.

Another important area which inappropriately exposes persons with disabilities to discrimination and neglect is in the realm of accessibility to public facilities as the existing structural design of buildings in public, private and community spaces do not take into account of making them accessible for persons with disabilities. In order to secure the rights of PWDs (the physically impaired and visually impaired) globally, government and policy makers should ensure through the town planning departments particularly in Nigeria, that new buildings are constructed in accordance with codes and guidelines for accessibility while old buildings should be remodeled to meet the codes. Similar efforts are required in



the area of road construction and transportation that are adaptable to the particular circumstances of persons with disabilities in society.

In its quest to promote, protect and enhance the sociability of PWDs, Nigerian government's efforts in this area are commendable as the government has allowed persons with disabilities to be actively involved in its sporting programmes at the national and international level. To this end Nigerian PWDs have participated in almost every arena of big sporting events like the Olympics with tremendous achievements.

Health Barriers

Having access to basic healthcare services is a precondition to equal opportunities, as outlined in the United Nations (UN) Standard Rules for Equalization Opportunities and an essential component of being a valued and productive member of society (Fada, 2020). But in Nigeria, PWDs often experience inequality in securing sufficient healthcare services as a result of barriers to accessing health care facilities and the discriminatory attitude of health practitioners and the general public. This is because there is no special educational training or interpreter package for healthcare staff to handle the medical care of PWDs, particularly with hearing impairments or visual impairment. Lack of an equitable health service for persons with disability is spread across the spectrum from health promotion and disease prevention services to lack of health insurance or coverage for necessary services such as specialty care, long-term care, prescriptions, durable medical equipment and assistive technology (Fada, 2020).

It is contended that, without adequate education on how to handle the specific medical care of persons with disabilities, the attitudes of healthcare providers will remain similar to those held by the general public to people with disability (Fada, 2020). It is thus posited that medical practitioners in all settings either at urban areas or rural areas should be educated in providing medical care for patients with any form of disability. Thus there is a need for department/ministry of health commitment to providing a fair and equitable health service that is responsive to the health needs of PWDs.

These health barrier if not adequately resolved will definitely affect the quality of life, productivity and well-being of persons with disability globally. Some countries for instance, South Africa has a legislation that directs all public health institutions to provide free medical and health care service including general medical needs to the vulnerable (Ganle, 2016). This type of provision, if implemented, would achieve the promotion and protection of the affected class of people in this paradigm. Likewise, given the challenges, PWDs are still experiencing in the health sector, it is especially important to understand the complex and interrelated factors that contribute to health and healthcare inequalities and to identify practical solutions. It must be the foremost duty of the government at all levels to protect PWDs and this can be achieved by promoting and enhancing access to free medical care and facility.



Osuagwu (2021), noted other barriers globally faced by PWDs to include the following:

- Attitudinal barriers which involve perceptions, behaviours and assumptions made about PWD which are usually brought about by ignorance about disability issues and erroneous misinterpretations about PWDs. Like the erroneous belief that most disabilities are infectious and such persons should be avoided.
- Technological barriers describe situations when a device or Hi-tech is not accessible to the expected user or when the PWDs are unable to properly use assistive devices as intended to serve them hence the process of usage becomes frustrating to the intended user and the aim of serving the PWDs adequately becomes defeated. For instance, it is frustrating to give a sound recorder to the person with hearing impairment who cannot hear or interpret sounds except these persons are carefully taught by an audiologists or speech therapist on how to interpret sounds.
- Organizational barriers involve intentional or unintentional policies or practices put in place by systems which marginalize PWDs or discriminate widely against them. For instance, making a curriculum or program that places all persons with learning disabilities to take the full course without considering their different learning difficulties, strengths and aptitude.
- Communication or information barriers: these barriers exist when messages are not properly passed or received by either the sender or the recipient. For PWDs who have hearing needs or sensory needs, Information must be made available in forms that can easily be interpreted either by sign language or total communication, braille and others to adequately serve these particular group.
- Architectural barriers also referred to as physical barriers are structures or elements which do not consider all persons with or without disabilities. These barriers come in form of buildings or infrastructures that are not universally designed to accommodate all persons as a safe place. These structures may be in form of sidewalks that do not consider persons on wheel chair, or in form of doorknobs that do not consider persons with muscular atrophy and other disabilities.

Implications of Globally Accessing Barriers Faced By PWDs on Special Needs Services

In the light of the foregoing, there are some implications to consider to ensure necessary provision of special needs services for PWDs which could further the course of good delivery system and attainment of barrier free society for PWD. Firstly, all hands must be on deck for collaborative effort in serving PWDs, this implies there should be supportive policy enactment and integration of the society



that will enable inclusiveness and collaborative work of stakeholders to understand their roles and responsibilities in providing special needs services that will reduce these barriers faced by PWDs.

Secondly, there should be improved special needs counselling awareness campaigns and sensitization programs to educate the populace on disability issues especially at occasions like 3rd December World disability day in a bid to curb wrong attitudes or misconceptions about PWDs. Thirdly, Professional Association support like –National Association for Exceptional Children (NAEC) and National Association of Special Education Teachers (NASSET) Which is the umbrella professional body of Special Needs Education must interface with the Government, school management Associations of PWDS and other stake holders at promoting special needs access to PWDs.

Fourthly where is the third factor?, it is the duty of the 21st Century Special needs educator to improved special needs service delivery for PWDs which should meet the global needs of the 21st century, in form of modern facilities, equipment and Information, Technology and Communication (ICT) which could cut off organizational and information barriers for PWDs. Lastly, education of PWDs is an integrated and recurrent process that has no end because of the dynamism of the system in trying to meet the goals of the 21st Century, hence training and retraining of special needs educators or rehabilitation counsellors should be encouraged as they in turn train PWDs on positive mindset and high self-esteem amidst barriers that are confronting their right adjustment to the disability.

Conclusion

Persons with disabilities have been described as individuals who have long term physical, mental, intellectual or sensory impairments, and who face different challenges that may prevent or limit their full and successful contribution or participation in society on an equal opportunity with people without disability. The challenges confronting these persons have been highlighted as educational barrier, economic, social/political and health barriers. These barriers do limit PWDs opportunities they need to lead happy life. It is therefore recommended that to guarantee fairness, equity and successful social integration for PWDs, these barriers should be eliminated through concerted efforts of Government, Non-Governmental Organizations (NGO's) and the general public.

Suggestions

The following suggestions are made:

1. efforts should be made into making Special Needs Rehabilitation possible through funding and the provision of the needed facilities that will meet the global needs of PWDs.
2. there is need to improve the education of PWDs in order to improve their knowledge and orientation towards disabilities and others. This will go a



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- long way to make them build positive schemas at confronting all the barriers in the society while also ignoring negative attitudes.
3. universal designs for all learners and users is needed with all programmes used in teaching PWDs and should be made available with little or no cost to special needs educators and parents to reduce organizational, architectural barriers or even communication barriers.
 4. assistive aids provider for PWDS must be user friendly so that all the technological barriers that frustrates these persons will be eradicated completely or managed at barest level.

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