



CHAPTER 42

CREATING JOB OPPROTUNITIES FOR PERSONS WITH DISABILITIES (PWDs): ATTITUDE AND COMMITMENT OF NIGERIA EMPLOYERS

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Introduction

In Nigeria, large numbers of people are suffering as a result of poor economic situation and high level of unemployment of which persons with disabilities (PWDs) are the worst victims. PWDs are people affected with one or more types of disabilities. The definition of PWDs varies from place to place as various local and national laws define disability differently. A person with disability is one who has a physical mental and emotional condition that kept him or her from living a functional social life which is deemed to be normal with their peers (Hapur, 2012). Osukwu (2019), identified PWDs as those living with impairment, which indicates people who are faced with limited involvement in some events. United Nations (2018), acknowledged that 'disability is an evolving concept and so does not explicitly define disability but merely elucidates who a PWD is. To United Nations, PWDs include 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 society on an equal basis with others. In Nigeria, PWDs are regarded as individuals who are physically, mentally, intellectually, or emotionally disabled, and are also unable to fully and effectively engage in the society. They are faced with the reduction in the ability for interaction with people, which is associated with their physical growth, mental, intellectual, or senses in the long run. These aspects also harm their full involvement in community-related activities (Adebisi, Jerry, Rasaki & Igwe, 2014).

PWDs have much in common with people without disability. They include women and men of all ages, living in urban and rural settings, with different personalities, aspirations and desires. Their individual service needs differ significantly in that the type of job for which a disabled person is suited may be influenced by whether he or she has an intellectual disability, physical disability, sensory disability, mental health difficulty, or a combination of these. But this is less important than one's knowledge, skills and general abilities when it comes to performing in a job (Ihedioha, 2015).The ability of disabled persons to work whether the disability is from birth or acquired later in life is closely related to the extent to which they have come to terms with the disability and are able to live independently. PWDs are entrepreneurs, self-employed workers, artisans, and



technicians among others, and they have continued to demonstrate capability despite their conditions.

As at 2020, a World Bank report showed that over 27million Nigerian are living with some forms of disability (World Bank 2020), while World Health Organization (2011) put the number of Nigerians with disabilities between 25 million and 27 million. While available data may not show the precise number of PWDs 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 those above 60 years experience some form of difficulty in at least one functional domain.. A study conducted by Leprosy Mission, Nigeria, a few years ago showed that out of the 1, 093 PWDs surveyed, 61% had no job. This affirms the fact that working-age PWDs tend to experience significantly lower employment rates and much higher unemployment rates compared to people without disabilities.

The Disabilities Act of 2018 in Nigeria also requires by law that all public organisations must reserve at least five per cent of employment opportunities for persons with disabilities across the 36 states and Abuja through the operation of the federal character principle. Under this fresh arrangement, it is criminal for ministries, extra-ministerial departments and agencies of government to deny persons with disabilities the opportunity to work provided they have the required skills. Though the bill has been passed, only few states of the country have implemented the act. .(Owonikoko, 2020).

PWDs are often excluded from access to economic opportunities even as they face discrimination from employers (Unger, 2016). One of their biggest obstacles is the stigma surrounding their disability which excludes them socially and economically. Due to this stigma, the unemployment rate among PWDs significantly exceeds the general unemployment rate. It is no news that PWDs are disadvantaged in the labour market. The system in Nigeria subconsciously deprioritizes the value of employment for many disadvantaged groups.

Uduu (2020), regretted that People With Disabilities struggle with prejudices, narrow-mindedness, and maltreatment. Botha and Leah, (2020), added that this situation has brought many questions on how the public serves them socially and economically. Concerning PWDs' employment, their source of income and wellbeing are frequently being neglected and has greatly depreciated. Besides, their type of disabilities, public misconception due to their perceived inability and lack of professional competence to fulfil job responsibilities contribute to major decisions when hiring them, hence their continued unemployment.

Writing on the condition of PWDs in Nigeria, Lindsay, (2011), noted that they face physical as well as attitudinal barriers to employment. Having a good education alone does not guarantee employment for people with disabilities. Negative attitudes and misconceptions about capacity and productivity also act as barriers. In agreement, Akubo (2020), lamented that lack of opportunities available for PWDs in Nigeria as well as weak implementation and enforcement of



legislation reduces their employment participation. Economic empowerment for PWDs is low, despite their desire to work and in some cases high levels of education. They are given certain jobs due to misconceptions and stereotypes, regardless of skills and education and in some instances; they are employed as token gestures.

The Nigeria employers according to Iroanusi, (2019), are stake holders ,private sectors, local and national organisations, which include registered companies operating in Nigeria. The attitude and misconceptions harboured by these stake holders against the PWD create an atmosphere of disregard on them. More often than not, these employers deny PWDs employment regarding them as less competent or even a burden to the entire organisation. Most of the PWDs in Nigeria continually face barriers to their participation in society and are often marginalised and afforded little or no opportunities to express themselves and to contribute to their development or that of their families, communities and nation. They are regarded as people to be pitied rather than as people who can contribute to the development of Nigeria. As such, they face stigma and discrimination and lack access to opportunities guaranteed by law, such as education, rehabilitation, employment, and the like. Even when they have been educated or rehabilitated and meet the necessary requirements for employment, they are often denied employment because of their disability (Osukwu, 2019).

Consequently, PWDs have to depend on family members, well-wishers and charity groups for assistance to sustain themselves as they have no source of income for their livelihood. Their situation is dire because the opportunities for them to emerge from poverty are limited, in many cases by the lack of enabling legislation to promote their access to skills development and employment opportunities or by weak implementation and enforcement measure where such legislation is in place.

Despite the Nigeria Disabilities Act of 2018 and UNESCO (2020) Global Education Monitoring Report, many researchers have surveyed employers about their attitudes and commitment toward hiring and retaining workers with disabilities and their experiences with accommodating such workers. The picture that has emerged is generally rather rosy, reflecting a veneer of employer acceptance of workers with disabilities. According to report, the percentage of PWDs is excessively high compared to the percentage of individuals who get hired in the employment sector, which indicates mistreatment towards the PWDs especially in terms of job opportunities. Although individuals with disabilities are identified with long-term physical, mental, intellectual, and emotional disabilities, they should have the same rights as others. Disabilities should not be made the reasons for denying their rights as they are part of the community. Besides, Nigeria employers, particularly those in the private sector, are mandated to implement the five percent occupational disability policy.

In view of the above, this paper therefore, identifies the factors that hinder the PWDs from being employed; barriers from employers, work place, employees



and wider contexts. Pre-conditions needed for improved job opportunities for the PWDs were discussed as well as strategies to improve the ugly situation.

1. Factors that hinder the PWDs from gaining employment

Three major barriers are identified as factors hindering PWDs from being gainfully employed. They are the employer's attitude, commitment and work place, the person with a disability and some which existed in the wider context (Elekwe & Ebenso, 2016).

A. Employers attitudes and Workplace

There is often a level of scepticism and doubt that comes with the decision to hire a person or persons with disabilities, as they are considered as liability by many employers. These scepticisms and doubts often come from speculations, assumptions and fear of the unknown. The following are common barriers seen amongst employers and in the workplace when considering hiring, retaining or promoting persons with disabilities in formal employment:

i. **Negative attitudes, stigma, abuse and discrimination:** One of the primary determinants of employment is the attitudes and commitment of employers. Persons with disabilities have consistently raised the concern that the attitudes of employers and peers at the workplace have a strong influence on their interest to work. Persons with disabilities experience a high percentage of unemployment because they face judgment with regard to their productivity and discrimination at the employment stage. Misinterpretations regarding disability generates stigma that persons with disabilities are not capable of doing their jobs adequately. This is one of the many reasons why unemployment is one of the biggest social issues of PWDs. The stigma associated with disabilities of any kind especially visible disabilities still exists. Stigma, comprises stereotyping, prejudice, and discrimination, whereas discrimination is the behaviour that results from negative stereotypes

ii. **Misperceptions and lack of awareness:** Misperceptions about the ability of persons with disabilities to perform jobs are an important reason both for continued unemployment and if employed, for the exclusion from opportunities for promotion in respective careers. Such attitudes may stem from prejudice or from the belief that PWDs are less productive than their non-disabled counterparts. Employers' perceptions of whether a job is suitable or not often strongly influenced by stereotypical images of PWDs. There are ranges of misconceptions of employers related to the skills and abilities of PWDs, with implications for their view of the individual's capacity to work. These misconceptions can lead employers to associate employment related risks, such as safety risks with PWDs. It is also common that many employers have a limited understanding of disabilities and how to support them in terms of challenges that they may face in the workplace. Besides a common lack of knowledge concerning disabilities in general, employers are often not aware of the workers' needs and are not informed about how to accommodate them at work. Negative attitudes towards PWDs are often



accompanied by a misunderstanding of disability, such as distrust and fear of co-workers or managers concerning disability'

iii. **Employers' demand, capacity, and cost:** Most employers prefer employees that are flexible and able to do more than one task. An employer perception that employees with disabilities cannot perform to full capacity is a serious problem for the PWDs. Employers may dismiss the idea to employ a worker with disability, or they believe that their types of work are unsuitable or that access to their premises would cause difficulties. For persons with physical disabilities the environment is a major factor as to whether or not an employment site is accessible. This ranges from wheelchair, ramps to elevators and everything in between. If a business is not located on the ground floor and the building doesn't have a working elevator, a person who relies on crutches or a wheelchair cannot work there.

Misperceptions exist that PWDs are unable to work and that accommodating them in the workplace is expensive. Expected additional costs are one of the major reasons why the rate of unemployment among the pwws is high. The costs of the hiring process both affect the jobseeker and the organization. The concern about the perceived cost of accommodations for pwws was identified as a limiting and negative attitude among employers, thus they are not committed to helping PWDs

Employees and Job seekers (Persons with Disabilities)

The barriers faced by pwws seeking employment opportunities, job retention or promotion vary from individual to individual, depending on a range of factors. In many cases, the disability itself may prevent persons from working in certain jobs, whilst in other cases, there is a range of preventable physical, historical and attitudinal barriers that can make it more difficult to work for PWDs.

The following are common barriers emanating from PWDs seeking or already engaged in formal employment:

i. **Lack of skill and education:** In Nigeria access to economic opportunities for PWDs is limited and this is compounded by lack of vocational skills and practical experience. This can be partly attributed to the policy barriers and negative attitudes of the employers. The challenges of accessing education means PWDs often lack the formal qualifications and skills needed to access employment.

ii. **Lack of confidence:** This includes barriers that originate from the biased and subjective perception public had on the PWDs which employees with disabilities harbour in them. These include the anticipation of stigmatization. Concerning access to work, PWDs more frequently anticipate stigmatization than they actually experience it. Some persons with disabilities have low self-esteems about their ability to be employed and may not even try to find employment. In Nigeria, persons with disabilities face problems related to self-esteem in a number of ways, these results from issues like lack of employment opportunities which is associated with poverty. Social isolation is also a factor leading to a lack of employment opportunity. The most significant issue for candidates with disabilities is finding



employment opportunities that they feel confident to apply to, that is, finding truly disability-friendly employers.

B. Wider Context

PWDs experience environmental obstacles that make access to employment difficult or impossible. The following are the common external barriers:

i **Accessible and physical barriers in Nigeria:** 65% of PWDs regard the environment as a major problem in their daily lives more than their impairments and more likely, less than a quarter of persons with disabilities are employed in public and private sectors, only a quarter of PWDs work in family businesses, but a third do not work at all.

ii **Lack of ICT and Assistive Technology services:** Members of marginalised groups, including those with disabilities, are reported to have unequal access to computers and internet technologies. PWDs often experience economic and linguistic restrictions in addition to accessibility barriers. Lack of access to assistive devices is due to a number of factors including high costs, limited availability, lack of governance, inadequate financing in many settings, as well as a widespread lack of awareness and suitably trained personnel. Furthermore, there is a concern that due to lack of awareness, manufacturers of workplace related devices or technologies (i.e. information and communication devices, software, telephones, etc.) may not have designed the devices for all users, or do not optimally design them to be adaptable for a wider array of user characteristics.

iii. **Employment process:** PWDs may not know that the job opening exists. For example if the job is only advertised on inaccessible online job boards, many persons will not be able to see it because it was advertised on platforms that they are unable to access. The recruitment process itself can sometimes become a barrier, when there is a lack of flexibility or adaptation to meet the needs of an applicant with disabilities. Adapting job descriptions for better understanding, working on alternative interview formats and setting roles into smaller, manageable tasks have helped a lot.

iv. **Lack of implementation of laws and policies:** There is lack of political commitment towards the issues related to the PWDs in Nigeria. In Nigeria, poor monitoring and enforcement structures also contribute to non-compliance. The position of politicians and others involved with policy making process, elites, is particularly tricky as they do not oppose policy formulation and enactment of laws in favour of disabled persons but progressed very slowly when question of its implementation arises.

2. Pre-conditions needed for improved job opportunities for the PWDs

i. **Data at user level and provider level (ICT and AT):** An online job platform-database for employees and employers may help address the most difficult stage in the employment process. Whilst there are many challenges in the current context, there are also opportunities and potential solutions. The potential of digital



platforms for employment of PWDs which may address some of the key barriers with the right support include; online job platform-database for employees and employers, online sensitization training for employers and employees, online skills development and remote working support.

ii. **Funding and budget for training programmes organised for PWDs..** Government, stake holders, philanthropists and companies could shoulder this responsibility by donating materials for training PWDs, providing accommodation and adequate funds

iii. **Collaboration among Governments, NGOs, DPOs, Employers, Training Institutes, Schools, families and PWDs.** This will enable the public to understand the predicaments of PWDs and provides solution to ameliorate their condition

- i. **Access to good education and acquisition of employable skills**
- ii. **Write something here no matter how little.**

3. Strategies to Improve Hiring and Retention of Workers with Disabilities by Nigeria Employers

How could a company update its thinking and strategies related to this neglected category of talents?

1. Identify and change processes that support unconscious bias.

Employers should change their recruiting and hiring processes that are discourage applicants with disabilities, or limits their ability to demonstrate their strengths. For example, if managers realized that people with autism weren't getting hired despite clearly having the required knowledge and intellect, then the problem may be with the interview process and need review. Employers should begin working with a local autism-support organization to bring in candidates for a different type of evaluation process. The assessment program involved a series of exercises designed to test teamwork and technical skills; it also provide real time training for all applicants irrespective of his/her state of being. This will make employer feel confident they haven't overlooked a strong candidate simply because a common assessment practice doesn't play to their strengths. This way of thinking also applies to people development and training processes. Even small changes in standard training programs can make a big difference.

2. Help all employees understand the challenges that PWDs face and contribute to solutions.

A little extra effort in this area will go a long way toward creating a work environment where every employee can contribute his or her best. Companies should consider required training for all employees with and without disabilities especially anyone in a management or supervisory role. The primary goals of this training are to help people better understand and empathize with the challenges their colleagues may face and reduce the stigma of being disabled. Everyone should also know about tools and accommodations



that are available to PWDs, so that the burden of figuring out solutions is not solely on the person with the disability.

3. Strengthen the hiring pipeline by engaging with community groups.

One of the challenges companies encounter in tapping the talent pool of PWDs is the first step of identifying candidates. It's a connection issue. Persons with disabilities may be reluctant to apply for jobs they don't think they will get, and so their talent and interest remain under the hiring radar. But the fix isn't difficult. Companies can start to build a robust recruitment pipeline in part by engaging with groups that support PWDs. If employers remove unfair discriminatory barriers to their employment and make reasonable commitment and accommodation for their needs, they will perform. As such, employers, including the government, should be willing to give PWDs an opportunity to prove their capability and earn a living by ensuring that jobs are available to them. Employers should also afford them the opportunity to hold leadership positions to enable them use their initiative in handling responsibilities and also allow them to join labour unions to enable them to express their views on problems and issues affecting their lives.

4. Create a mutually supportive community.

Training programs and opportunities to connect with other employees will help ensure that PWDs develop and succeed. Mentoring and coaching initiatives are also vital lifelines. PWDs who serve in senior positions should strongly consider becoming mentors or champions both internally and externally.

5. Educate employers to change their mentality and perception about PWDs.

Training that changes organizational perceptions of disability including an orientation for supervisors and managers about not discriminating against a person with a disability is very vital. Employers frequently regard disabled persons as unsuitable for employment. Employers are urged to change their attitudes and skeptical beliefs on PWDs, while the culture of the organization should perceive PWDs as similar to other human beings and create a positive atmosphere in the organization to facilitate the employment of PWDs. To prevent the exclusion of PWDs from the employment market, the imperative role from industrial players is needed for the appraisal and identification of the value of PWDs from the industry views.

Implications of job opportunity for the PWD

Employment of PWDs is one of the most powerful indications of social inclusion. It is the most effective and efficient way of eradicating poverty among persons with disabilities and ensuring their participation in mainstream development activities. The following implication are drawn from the discussion for the lives of PWDs

i. **Earning a livelihood:** Work provides income to disabled persons to meet their basic needs. Work provides the means to meet the additional costs associated with



having a disability. PWDs tell how getting a job changed their lives; those without a job talk of misery and despair.

ii. **Social contact:** Disabled persons have limited opportunities to meet people. Work provides such opportunities. PWDs find that having a job reduces frustration and loneliness. Not having a job reinforces social isolation. Having a job makes huge difference to their whole life. They may be able to marry, have and financially support a family, and their attitudes to others became more positive.

iii. **Self-esteem:** Work, particularly paid employment, provides disabled persons with an opportunity to show they can contribute to national development. PWDs tell how work builds positive attitudes in them. Those without jobs lack pride and confidence in their own ability. They usually feel gloomy, depressed and unfairly treated.

iv. **Societal participation:** PWDs are provided with the resources, opportunities, knowledge and skills needed to increase their capacity to determine their own future and fully participate in community life and the wider society. Getting employed affords them a variety of opportunities to discover themselves, understand their environment, be aware of their rights, take control of their lives and partake in important decisions that lead to their destiny.

Conclusion

1. For PWDs employment is particularly important, because having a disability often means being socially isolated coupled with the discriminatory stereotyping negative attitude of employers that focuses on a person's disability rather than ability. These negative social attitudes have fuelled the unemployment of PWDs
2. Poor treatments at work and lack of opportunities are significant barriers to continuing successful employment for most PWDs
3. To address these barriers, there is need for a wide-range of collaboration of the Government and stakeholders to enhance and educate employers on the employability of PWDs in Nigeria
4. Empowering PWDs with digital skills, creating accessible digital platforms as well as ICT integrated training, with access to education in various social development and organizations, would provide opportunities for the majority of PWDs to be empowered, in both urban and rural areas

Suggestions

1. Future research on PWD skill and training empowerment shall be addressed to mitigate the employment needs.
2. Education and skill acquisition shall be mandated to PWD thus improving their talent and skill development holistically.
3. Concerning the decision of hiring PWDs, challenges, concerns, and perceptions of PWDs, the career development for PWDs, including the



strategies and incentives to promote PWDs as employees of the organizations are suggested.

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