

CHAPTER THREE

BARRIERS GLOBALLY FACED BY PERSONS WITH DISABILITIES

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Introduction

Obviously, in life, all and sundry are challenged by some sort of barriers at one time or the other. However, for persons with a disability, the barriers can have much more profound impact and occur more commonly. The United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (UNCRPD), which was enforced in May 2008, highlighted that persons with disabilities are the people who have long-term physical, mental, intellectual or sensory impairments that, in interaction with various barriers, may hinder their full and effective participation in society on an equal basis with others. According to the World Health Organization (WHO) cited by Clemente et al (2022), there are approximately one billion people with disabilities, making up 15% of the world's population. The forms of the disabilities are either physical, mental, sensory, psychological, social or a combination of some of them and could be congenital or occurring later in life, or due to accident; the disability may be temporary or permanent (World Bank Group, 2018; Mataraarachchi, et al 2018). WHO predicted disability prevalence to rise because of ageing populations and the higher risk of disability in older people, as well as the global increase in chronic health conditions such as diabetes, cardiovascular disease, cancer and mental health disorders (Baghdayan, 2018; Clemente et al 2022).

Globally, persons with disabilities often face barriers in different forms. These barriers according to WHO (2011), can affect the performance of an individual's day-to-day activities in negative ways. They include all the factors in a person's environment that, due to their absence or presence, limit functioning and create disability for example, inaccessible physical environments, a lack of appropriate assistive technology, and negative attitudes towards disability. The [Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities \(CRPD\)](#) in the year, 2010 equally acknowledged that the existence of barriers constitutes a central component of disability. The PWDs have by and large, lower education attainments, poorer health status, less economic opportunities leading to higher rates of poverty than people without disabilities. This is for the most part owing to the scarcity of facilities and provisions offered to them (like information and communications technology (ICT), justice or transportation) and the many barriers they face in their everyday lives. These barriers usually are in diverse types, including those emanating from legislation or policy, the ones due to the physical environment, or those relating to societal attitudes or discrimination

In a bid to work out ways of making persons with disabilities to fully benefit from all human rights and fundamental freedoms, the United Nations Convention on the Rights of People with Disability (UNCNCRPD) recognized the importance of accessibility to the physical, social, economic and cultural environment, to health and education and to information and communication. However, barriers such as inadequate laws, negative social attitudes, lack of financial resources and a lack of data, all together, significantly limit such accessibility for those with disability (Grills et al, 2017; World Health Organization and World Bank, 2011).

Another limiting factor is that there is a general perception that persons with disabilities are a set of people in need of charity in aids, gifts, donations and other items of help. This determines the design and implementation of many social protection schemes and programmes for this category of people. In other words, many people believe that persons with disabilities are the group of persons that lack capacity and are needy, unable to fully participate and contribute to the workplace or society where they belong. This is actually downgrading persons with disability and their families, and damaging to the economy and society at large. Though the sensory, mental, or physical impairments experienced by persons with disabilities can get in the way of their full involvement in the activities of the society, nevertheless, their weakness in some such areas should not be regarded as implying dependency or an inability to participate in society and work and open the way to social exclusion and discrimination. Physical barriers and societal attitudes contribute to their disability and often result in lower incomes, less fulfilling jobs and exclusion.

Going by the UNCRPD, disability is a developing conception that emanates from the interaction between persons with impairments and attitudinal and environmental barriers that hamper their full and meaningful involvement in the general public on an equal basis with other counterparts without disabilities. Therefore, at whatever time the constitutional rights and dignity of persons with disability are promoted, the individuals are given means, tools and skills to achieve, thereby strengthening economic security and elevating society at large. In Nigeria for instance, there is in existence, the Discrimination Against Persons with Disabilities (Prohibition) Act, 2018; the law proscribes any form of discrimination and barriers on the basis of disability and enforces sanctions including fines and jail sentences on those who are in breach of it. The researcher believes that other developed and developing countries have such laws embedded in their constitutions. However, like in Nigeria, these laws are not being fully implemented hence PWDs are still facing a lot of barriers. Therefore, there are facilities and strategies needed to remove, eradicate the barriers standing against the PWDs globally.

Disability is not an emerging concept for it has been with mankind since ever and it continues to exist in the society at any point in time. Formerly it was defined from a medical perspective as a loss functional capability due to illness, injury, accidents or other similar causes (Ajobiwe et al 2020). This definition sees

disability only as pathology and as a result of impairment not recognising the societal aspect of the concept. Disability is defined as, an umbrella term for difficulties encountered due to impairments (problems in body functions or anomalies in body structure), activity limitations (difficulties in executing activities) and participation restrictions (problems with involvement in any area of life) (WHO 2018; Mataraarachchi et al 2018). This is more embracing for it touches the body functioning, executing activities and participation in a group. The term disability can be seen as the interaction between an individual's impairment and his living in an environment. This angle of definition means that when the environments are conducive and fully accessible, a condition of impairment on its own would not result to a disability.

It is worthy to note that disability as a concept is not uniform in its meaning and experiences in the lives of persons with disabilities. For instance, individuals with physical disabilities may experience disability in ways that vary significantly from how those with learning or intellectual disabilities do. Those that have congenital impairments may likewise have a very dissimilar experience of disability than do those who acquired impairments later in life (Ouellette-Kunz, H. et al. 2010).

Moral model: Views disability as a sign of moral failure or the result of a divine or supernatural act.

Charitable model: Views persons with disabilities as having minimum capacity, requiring care and protection.

Medical model: Focuses on 'curing' disability or providing medical interventions to treat the diagnosis rather than the individual. It considers a person with a disability as either sick or unhealthy (Donoghue, 2003).

Social model: This model asserts that what inflict and highlight disability are the human, material structural barriers experienced by PWDs in an environment. It shifts blame away from the individual with the disability and instead examines societal responses to such people focusing on the disadvantages that they experience due to social and environmental barriers (Siminski, 2003).

Rights-based model: Centres on disability rights as human rights and promotes and protects equal social, economic, and physical accessibility and inclusion.

(Delineated from McCloskey & Meyers 2018).

From the above models it can be seen that regardless of the good purposes of the medical and the charitable models, both have demonstrated to be more marginalizing and discriminating to PWDs by restricting their social and economic participation in the society as well as their independence. Many international organisations including the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (CRPD) uphold the use of social and rights-based models of disability in preference. This is due to the regards the models accord persons with disabilities

because discriminations and denial of rights are more disabling to these individuals than the disability group they find themselves.

The thesis statement of this chapter is thus to briefly discuss the different barriers that persons with disabilities encounter globally such as social, physical environmental, learning, communication, economic and legal barriers. In doing this the concepts of persons with disabilities will be highlighted, so also some ways of breaking such barriers will be proffered.

Different barriers experienced by persons with disabilities

Economic barriers

Persons with disabilities are economically shoddier and at greater peril of poverty than their counterparts without disabilities. The percentage of employment of working-age persons with disabilities is significantly poorer than the percentage among the general population without disabilities. Anand, and Sevak, (2017) gave example with the report of Kraus (2015) in which it was stated that among civilians age 18 to 64 in 2014, the employment rate is 34.4% for people with disabilities versus 75.4% for people without disabilities. Studies suggest that this employment gap is especially evident in low- and middle-income countries (LMICs) because of the underlying socioeconomic and political reasons affecting the employment market and social welfare policies (Heymann, et al 2014; Ebuenyi et al 2018). In many instances employed workers with disabilities earn considerably less than similarly situated workers without disabilities (Maroto&Pettinicchio 2014a; Morris et al. 2018). Compared with non-disabled persons, persons with disabilities are less likely to be in full-time employment; more likely to be unemployed; and significantly more likely to be economically inactive. Moreover, persons with certain types of disability, including intellectual and psychosocial disabilities, face greater barriers in finding and retaining employment

Given the inability of the private and public sectors to take in the growing number of job applicants, increasing interest has focused on entrepreneurship and new business creation. However, it is of the essence to recognize entrepreneurial barriers that affect the people with disabilities that are involved in it. These range from lack of access to financials/capital, poor social capital and network, discrimination by customers on the basis of their disability, training not always tailored to individual needs, difficulty accessing the training centers, negative feedback from the populace about their business ideas lack of mobility devices such as wheelchairs, crutches, canes and limbs and the rest of the like barriers.

Legal barriers

Persons with disabilities are not equally recognised before the law and legal protections. Though in some countries, there are acts stating that persons with disabilities have fundamental rights for equal access to justice, however, such acts are on paper and are not implemented in reality. Persons with disabilities are barred from accessing their justice due to the fact that they lack physical

accessibility to courts and legal documents. In addition they have inadequate awareness of procedures and implications of the justice organisation. Furthermore, the PWDs are not able to obtain legal advice when they need one. United Nations (UN) (2019) stated that in some countries, more than 30 per cent of courts and police stations are not accessible and more than 90 per cent of persons with disabilities who need legal advice are not able to receive it.

Communication barriers

Persons with disabilities are faced with physical and virtual barriers in accessing and sharing information that have effect on hearing, reading, writing, speaking, including understanding. This is because they need varied approaches to communicate which are not the same with the rest of people without disabilities. For instance, there are many health or other promotion messages without the use of large-print adaptation of materials and brailled versions for people with visual impairments. Equally there are oral communication on themes and topics affecting people's lives without sign language interpreters. There are also systems of communication where videos are used and they do not comprise of captions in which case the persons with hearing impairment are lost and more so where there is lack provision of hearing induction loops. Furthermore making use of technical languages, words with many syllables and long sentences without easy-reads, significantly affect the understanding of persons with intellectual disabilities.

In the present day information and communication world, PWDs suffer setbacks in accessing the network of communications. According to UN (2018), there is a significant gap between persons with and without disabilities in the use of the internet. This may be attributed to the lack of accessibility of such technology, as well as the lower capacity of households with persons with disabilities to afford internet access. UN gave instance that more than 60 per cent of online national portals include features that are not accessible for persons with disabilities. Also compared to households without persons with disabilities, households with persons with disabilities are also less likely to own a mobile phone.

Learning barriers

Disabilities vary widely in severity from individual to individual, from an extreme diagnosis to a more minor diagnosis. The level of the severity affects students with disabilities in the following areas: physical ability, behaviour or ability to socialise, ability to understand things, concentration levels and reading and writing skills. These notwithstanding, schools, colleges and systems create different barriers to PWDs deterring them in learning.

There are lack of accommodations, such as to permit special extra credit, provide copies of lecture notes, allow replacements for required courses, ignore some spelling, incorrect punctuation and poor grammar, and give extra credit assignments. In some cases, little accommodations such as extra time is granted

only to those with physical disabilities and rejecting the same needs of others with invisible disabilities.

Disability awareness and training is shallow among both teaching and non-teaching staff of schools. Therefore many of the staff do not relate well with the PWDs in schools. The staff equally have insufficient understanding of major federal disability laws. In an APA (2009) survey, a student narrated that disability is never really mentioned at all, especially as it relates to diversity, social inequality, discrimination, life outcomes, or social identities.

Largely, teachers are badly prepared to concentrate to the learning needs of students with disabilities in the regular classroom. This is due to the fact that schools are filled with many unqualified teachers and they hinder the development of programmes for learners with disabilities. Osuorji (2009) affirmed that most coordinators of special education programmes are not special educators and they lack knowledge of strategies used in teaching and training children with special needs. Sometimes, regular classroom teachers are upset by the sheer appearance of a student with an obvious disability and could even send them out of the class for whatever reason.

Another issue is that teachers lack the understanding of the individuality of the persons with disabilities. They often use the same teaching and learning strategies on them, not recognising their individual differences. The strategies or techniques that can aid learning for learners with intellectual disabilities may not necessarily be effective for students with cerebral palsy, hearing impairment nor learning disabilities. In such cases, the learning needs of the students will not be satisfied.

Many schools and colleges including universities do not have accessible environments students with disabilities. They have storey buildings without ramps or elevators. Their toilets are not wheelchair-accessible. Even the school compounds are restrictive to movement of students with visual impairment and physical disabilities. There are no transportation services organised for children with disabilities. This can bring the education of a lot of students with disabilities to an end.

Moreover there is the barrier of unavailability teaching and learning materials. This barrier is faced by most of students with disabilities in general and this is perhaps the biggest impediment for them. Study materials in accessible formats such as brailled papers, pencil grips, audio books, charts/slides, manual alphabet, models of speech and hearing mechanism, talking books, magnifying glasses, toy games and the rest of them. Many of the instructional and learning materials are either unavailable or available at a cost unaffordable for a student. Even in this contemporary society where technology can be used to resolve and work out the matters without much exertion, yet conditions have not changed much for students with disabilities.

Social/Attitudinal barriers

Human beings learn and make sense of the world by the means of interacting with their fellows. When this kind of interaction is lacking it becomes a barrier for the person concerned to thrive fully in any environment. The barrier is as result of people's intolerable attitudes and this is the plight persons with disabilities in the society. The PWDs experience lack of acceptance by and large which is regularly symbolized by: being belittled, name calling, feared, yelled at, made fun of, despised, stared at, impolite remarks, debased, given labels, or such condescending and detrimental responses which are evidence of no tolerance of their presence in the environment. In all these, one observes discrimination, stigma, isolation and exclusion and frustration may set in on the PWDs. According to Morin et al (2013), negative attitudes of others toward persons with disabilities affect the potential for and the quality of integration in their communities, the types and quality of the services they receive, and their ability to live full and complete lives on the same basis as their peers do.

Although there is evidence that negative attitudes toward persons with disabilities are changing, members of the public still report feeling uneasy, uncomfortable, and unsure how to act when with persons with disabilities (Morin, et al. 2013; Scior, et al. 2013). Such attitudes as the degree of social distance which people prefer to keep between themselves and persons with disabilities, suggesting that the less well members of the public understood persons with disabilities, the less likely they were to want to work with, live near or be associated with persons with disabilities.(Ouellette-Kunz, H. et al. 2010). All these are brought about by certain factors which include:

- Lack of practical contact as well as experience to persons with disabilities
- Myths of disabilities as being a curse, contagious, anger of gods, repayment for sins committed by parents, emanating from evil forests and a result of infidelity of mothers.
- Being short of emotional preparedness, on both persons with and without disabilities.
- Lack functional inclusive education
- paternalistic attitudes of the society against person with a disability

Physical environment barriers

The physical environment is one of the most important aspects of disability studies. Though their importance varies greatly when specific areas and severity of disability is taken into consideration, however, the impact is felt among almost all the disability categories. It hampers the involvement and contribution of the PWDs in society where they belong. The barriers equally have a negative consequence on the psychological health of the individuals with disabilities. These barriers include all the factors in a person's environment that, due to their absence or presence, limit functioning and create disability (WHO 2001). The physical

environmental barriers that are most commonly faced by individuals with disabilities are:

- Lack of architectural designs such as ramps, elevators, narrow doorways, congested seats in halls
- No disability friendly toilets in one's dwelling and in public environments
- Inadequate or poor visual, tactile or acoustic signalling
- No part ways along streets for PWDs
- Scarcity of road/traffic signs indicating crossing, U-turn
- No provision for wheel chairs on numerous overhead bridges
- Lack of adapted transportation, among others.
- Lighting, noise and crowds, in workplace or education institution
- Landscapes such as hills including weather and climate
- Insufficient supply of wheel chairs, artificial limbs and pros, mobility canes and thesis

Ways of breaking the barriers globally faced by persons with disabilities

Inclusive London (2023) coming from a social model perspective of disability outlined some strategies that could support and enable PWDs to achieve independent living and counter the effects of the range of the barriers they are faced with which are as follows:

- Appropriate and accessible information
- An adequate income
- Appropriate and accessible health and social care provision
- A fully accessible transport system
- Full access to the environment
- Adequate provision of technical aids and equipment
- Availability of accessible and adapted housing
- Adequate provision of personal assistance
- Availability of inclusive education and training
- Equal opportunities for employment
- Availability of independent advocacy and self-advocacy
- Availability of peer counselling

Conclusion

The persons with disabilities are amongst the vulnerable groups in the society. Due to their vulnerability, international organisations and nations of the world have gathered in different occasions promulgating standards, setting laws and fight for the human rights, education, health and better life of this group of individuals. In spite of all this, there remains a range of barriers affecting the life and activities of PWDs. This work has highlighted some of the barriers which are social, physical environmental, learning, economic and legal in nature. The nature of these barriers were discussed, their impact on the PWDs and their roots were

brought to fore. At the end of it all, ways of breaking such barriers and setting the persons with disabilities at independent living were proffered.

Suggestions

1. The government should set a task force on implementation of national policies, programmes and legislation to promote the full and equal participation of persons with disabilities;
2. PWDs should be encouraged to apply for formal employment opportunities and there should gender equality in the group.
3. The government should intensify awareness creation efforts towards disability policies and legislations to public and private sectors' employers as an attempt to encourage them employ people with disabilities.
4. Ensure and improve access to rehabilitation, education, training, employments, sports, the cultural and physical environment;
5. The government should issue order for construction of roads, private and public buildings to accommodate the needs of PWDs

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