

Sustainable Strategies for Full Caring for the Disabled Persons in a Declining Economy Nigeria

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Abstract

The fact that, the attitude/care of majority of Nigerians towards the disabled persons as economic liabilities. The reason being mainly either to eliminate the unfit, to improve the quality of the society or to improve the society and economic means/ ways of caring for the disabled. This paper focuses on the disabled and the family/parents, disabled and the society, disabled and Nigerian government, emerging issues and challenges, sustainable strategies for full caring/ integration of disabled persons. Also, suggestions were forwarded.

Keywords: *Sustainable strategies, Full caring/ integration for the disabled persons declining economy.*

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Background to the Study

Nigeria, just as other countries across the world, has since transitioned from millennium development goals (MDGS) to sustainable development Goals (SDGS). The federal government of Nigeria to achieving SDGS 4 before 2030. These three components i.e the family, the society and government should come into close contact for sustainable strategies for full caring for the disabled persons in a declining economy. All over the world, a large number of people differ greatly in human traits that are considered abnormal. Thus, they required special help in realizing their potentials. These individuals are called disabled the blind, deaf, dumb and lame are some examples others include the speech impaired, the emotionally disturbed, the mentally retarded and those with behaviour problems. Most often than not, in Nigeria in particular, these set of people have been observed to be despised or rejected, mimicked, ex-communitated, cheated and given some kinds of inhuman treatment. To be disabled therefore is not pleasant, particularly. In Nigeria in fact, the attitude/care of majority of Nigerians towards the disabled as economic liabilities. The reason being mainly either to eliminate the unfit, to improve the quality of the society or to improve the social and economic means/ways of caring for the disabled. The attitude of the government does not improve the situation, but rather worsened it. Whatever is responsible for this, portrays a high degree of civilization. In the developed countries, there is no marked discrimination between the disabled and the normal people.

The resultant effect of these ill-treatments in Nigeria is the disabled sensitivity regarding defects, producing all sorts of unhealthy reactions. Such as fear, timidity, emotional out burst, conflicts, fear of inadequacy, fear of being different, feeling of disregard, disgrace, hopelessness, economic/social dependency and great feeling of suspicion. The mission of this paper is to evaluate the attitude of Nigerian and government towards the disabled persons. Specifically, we tend to examine how much care the disabled receive. Are there adverse effects on the care they receive as a result of the declining economy? In what ways/ means can their condition be improved geared toward sustainable development Goals (SDGs)2030?

The Disabled and the Parents/Family

The literature is very replete with tales of African people's ignorance and superstitious beliefs about disabled person (Abang, 1992 and Ebigbo 1998), as professionals in the vast field of special education and social work, we are quite familiar with these fables. Everyone likes to be the proud parent of the gifted, intelligent and talented child. But the birth of a defective, abnormal, or handicapped or disabled child into the family brings sadness, misunderstanding, fear, resregard, disappointment and sometimes a feeling of guilt and family quarrel.

In some parts of the country the approach was slightly different when the disabled of this nature was born, the parents of the child went on from one native doctor to the other (doctor shopping) seeking for a miraculous cure for their child. The person (disabled child) was taken to Juju priest who claimed he could bring about a cure for the child. After getting money and things such as grains, goats and chicken and palm wine from the parents of the child and yet not able to bring about a change or cure for the child, he then declared that the disabled child was not a human being-see this waste of time, resources and efforts leading to rejection of the

disabled person. The family members of the handicapped person reacted to the person in one of these two manners, they became over-protective of the person and did practically everything for the person, who consequently become entirely dependent on other people, or rejected the person who then had no other alternative but to fend for himself by begging for alms from the community.

Negative reaction to the handicapped often starts from parents. Thomas (2008) reported that parental reaction to the birth of the handicapped child, is often that of rejection, feeling of guilt and family quarrels. In the drive to achieve education for all (EFA) and is contributing immensely towards the provision of inclusive and equitable quality education as outline in the sustainable development Goals 4 (sustainable development knowledge platform, 2016). Parents of the disabled persons still feel reluctant to send their handicapped child to school, habilitation or rehabilitation centers-evaluating that, we have not finished with the abled ones talk less of the disabled children in this declining economic situation.

Disabled and the society

The current emphasis across the globe for sustainable development is through the equalisation of opportunities for all, irrespective of gender and abilities. For disabled persons equalisation of opportunities and access to social life and efforts are the emphasis in order to enhance social, economic and political integration (Salamanca Declaration, 1994). Unfortunately, in most parts of developing countries like Nigeria, not only are the needs of disabled persons utterly neglected by both societies and government, there are in addition varying instances of denial of disabled persons basic needs (life, education and work).

The scourge of destitution, beggary and idleness among disabled persons in urban and rural communities is first an indication of community neglect (kolo and Isa, 2005) before it is the issue of governments lack of concern. The abandonment of the culture of caring for family members by people in their traditional societies/ communities in Nigeria has only exacerbated destitution, beggary and idleness among disabled persons. And as much as the community must share in this became, the fact still remains that under condition of mass destitution and dependence, disabled persons caught in this trap remain completely excluded from national and community life, under such conditions, full participation in national development efforts becomes undermined. And essentially this is because access to social, economic and political participation has been blocked. In some cultures, these individuals do not have a say in the administration or affairs or matter in the villages in which they live, as other citizens have, neither are they permitted to address themselves to members of their age groups as every member of the group is entitled to. Furthermore, the members of the group do not require them to contribute to celebrations e.g New Yam festival, marriage etc as every member of the group is expected to do. In some places they are not expected to pay taxes and consequently, are looked down by the tax payers. These people are popularly known by labels than by their names- blind, deaf, damp, cripple etc. disability robs you of your independence, but gives you the opportunity to discover how difficult, selfish, inconsiderate and unhelpful other human being can be. As soon as one is disabled, he/she is completely written off. They, show by behaviour that the disabled no longer belong to the human race. This statement is most true in

Nigeria when one considers the condition of the disabled. It is very sad to see the family, society and government adopting such attitude. It is a most hamouring experience for the disabled to note that they are not regarded. In this era of economic down-turn, it has been the problem of increased destitution and dehumanisation of the disabled person.

The disabled and Nigerian government

As pointed out by Dbang (2008:7) in parts of the world persons with disabilities are no longer look down upon as people who could be silenced by dropping a penny or two in their own coin dishes. On contrary, they are looked upon as individuals who have potentials to be developed and contributions to the up keep of the family, community and the nation in general. It is as if the disabled persons, if appropriate habituated, rehabilitated and trained. Obviously, the care of handicapped/ disabled persons in Nigeria has come a long way and this journey has been done in slow stages. The strong feeling and hope of special educators are that the interactions of individuals with non-abled will eliminate the assumed negative and prejudiced attitudes of the non-disabled towards the disabled. Contrary, the Nigerian government does little and slow policies and actions to know or accept that disabled exist in the society. This is so evidenced by the non-provision of amenities for their needs. For example, at one time or the other government has shown concern for different sets of people in Nigeria, but the disabled has always been sadly neglected. For example, in attempt to satisfy some members of society, the Nigerian government increased salaries and fringe benefits, give famers subsidies on inputs, tax holiday to small scale industries, freed jailed politicians and rightly or wrongly introduced the structural adjustment programme (SAP) to salve the economic.

In more recent time corona virus aid, relief and economic security Act (CARE ACTS), relief packages was introduced to pacify citizens. Millions of Naira have been spent on games and sports for inter and intra competitions in Nigeria yet, nothing is done for the disabled in real terms. Unfortunately, both the era of economic prosperity and economic down-turn in Nigeria only exacerbated the ride of isolation for disabled persons. In economic prosperity, comparatively very little was done in terms of provisions and the need to get disabled person fully integrated in national life. While government provisions and programmes for meeting the needs of disabled persons are grossly, inadequate and ill-equipped, for instance as practical evidence in schools, markets roads, airports, railways, offices, banks, hospitals etc. the structures constructed could not make provisions for the disabled, do not exist in Nigeria. It has been said, "Success has many parents, but misfortune is always an orphan."

Legislations are equally either out-fashioned or poorly enforced, it at all.

Who is disabled???

- i. If you fail to see the person but only see the disability

The who is blind?

- ii. If you cannot hear your brothers cry for justice



Who is deaf?

- iii. If you do not communicate with your sister but separate her from you, who is mentally handicapped?
- iv. If you do not stand up for the rights of all persons,

Who is Crippled?

Tony Ovone (person with disability) poet of Africa.

The issue then is that there is more or less a deliberate attempt to exclude disabled persons from social, economic and political life of the mainstream society.

Emerging Issues and Challenges:

In more advanced countries, researchers and technologists have increased their search and developed technical devices to alleviate the hardships of the disabled persons. Also, in advanced countries, changing attitude towards the handicapped has however influenced the thoughts of employers of labour and government. Nowadays cases of blind lawyers, deaf university lecturers and administrators or wheel-chair bankers etc. While in Nigeria, on the part of disabled persons themselves, individual efforts towards preserving self-worth, enhancing independent and striving to get integrated into all aspects of community and national life may be recommendable, many have resigned to fate rather unfortunately. But while this may be linked to ignorance, the emerging culture of beggary as a vocation has become a danger to the institutionalisation of exclusion of disabled from national life and development efforts. The elite ones among disabled persons in some instances do not also help matters as much. The tendency to exploit fellow disabled persons and to take advantage of disability conditions in the long run only poses bigger problems for full notional integration for people with disability.

Socially speaking, attitudes which encourage beggary and destitution among disabled persons are common place. The resort to giving alms to every person with real and feigned disability, the resort to dumping disabled persons in ill-equipped habilitation and rehabilitation centres and schools, the undesirable culture of discrimination against disabled persons in social functions, the inhuman treatment meted out to disabled persons in terms of denial of basic right in their own families and communities, these are typical examples of exclusion of disabled persons from social life of the community and nation.

In the economic aspects of the national life, discrimination practices and deliberate rejection characterise the tendency of exclude disabled persons from participation in economic development efforts. The right to work as enshrined in the constitution and as the goal of poverty alleviation as well (SDGS) for disadvantage persons is what is violated in such instances, cases of denial of admission into regular institutions of learning, discriminant practices in employment and poverty alleviation measures are just some of evidences in contemporary Nigeria which amount to exclusion of disabled persons from full economic integration. Also, little and slow recognition of the political rights of disabled persons, denial of effective participation in political affairs of the nation and poor status of disabled persons in political process and dispensation all amount to political segregation against disabled persons at family, society/ community and national levels.

Sustainable strategies full care/integration of disable persons

In fact, the issue of full care/integration of disabled persons in national life is a human resources development one. And for any human resources development drive to be sustainable, it has to entail effective and efficient commitment by family, society and government, involving of all, acceptable to all, and above all, encompassing as a developmental capital (Kolo, 2020). It is from these principles under guiding human resource development that we can drive out strategies capable of making the care/integration of disabled person sustainable. First the philosophy which must inform the full integration of disabled persons must be based on the rights, rather than the welfare model. The issue must be the fundamental rights of disabled persons (to life, education and work) must be viewed both as a general human rights frame of reference (and not a right granted on the basis of disability) and as a right basis for every other general human right issue (the right to decent treatment, right to be heard, - in deed right to political, economic and social participation).

Also, integration in practice has to be all-round and wholistic to make its practice sustainable- from family, community, national and international. We witnessed welfare scheme for disabled person launched with every zeal only for such programmes to completely phase out in the very shortest time. The problem is the schemes could not involve family community/ society of the disabled, only based in urban areas, there also it could not capture- educational, economic, social, medical etc that is wholistic habilitation/ rehabilitation of the individuals concerned. Lastly, attitude change still remain largely a means of sustaining full integration of disabled persons into all aspects of national life. Positive cognitive attitudes, towards the disabled persons if given would maximise necessary opportunities for disabled personal, social and economic adjustment.

Conclusion

The big task ahead in the struggle to ensure the full care/integration of disabled persons in the social, economic and political life of the Nigerian society is not so much the putting in place of policies, structures and programmes. The condition of things as they are in Nigeria are certainly not good enough. There is need for improvement. As in parts of developed countries, persons with disability are no longer looked down upon as people who could be silence by dropping a penny or two in their coin dishes. On the contrary, they are looked upon as individuals who have personal, social, economic and political potentials- contributions to the upkeep of the community if positive cognitive attitude change, appropriately habilitated and rehabilitated, desirable expectations would be drive from them, as indicated below:

- a. Would enable them have something doing.
- b. To stop such persons from becoming beggars.
- c. To enable them have a share in the economy of the community/ nation
- d. To enable them contribute in the economic development of the nation
- e. To enable them raise families of their own
- f. To bring back the disabled persons from economic isolation and segregation held on them by the normal persons
- g. To enable them regain value, worth, respect and independence
- h. To enable them live normal life.

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