



INCLUSION OF PERSONS WITH DISABILITIES IN NIGERIA: A PRE-REQUISITE FOR NATIONAL SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT

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ABSTRACT

Globally, several efforts have been made to promote the rights and inclusion of vulnerable members of society, however, persons with disabilities (PWDs) in Nigeria are constantly faced with several barriers to their full participation in social, economic, political, and environmental circles. These challenges which have been discovered to be a result of societal prejudice/misconceptions, limited resources, inability to access necessary facilities/resources, educational discrimination/limitations, employment discrimination, and policy gaps can present significant obstacles to their abilities to acquire and execute skills that will make them self-sustainable and contribute meaningfully to society, ultimately hindering collective national sustainable development. This study adopts a comprehensive study of relevant literature, observation, and interview at centres for PWDs to address the societal attitudes, discriminatory practices, and specific obstacles faced by PWDs in Nigeria. A comparison of inclusive practices in other developing and developed nations were made to show the progress Nigeria has made and the gaps that need to be filled. The study further explores the negative impacts of exclusion on national sustainability, and the implications of disability inclusion on the promotion of economic, social, political, and environmental sustainability in Nigeria. Conclusively, this research proposes some recommendations to address the barriers limiting disability inclusion in Nigeria, through the employment of specific strategies such as creating awareness of disability issues, providing accommodations, promoting inclusive policies, and engaging in community-based rehabilitation programs which when implemented will improve the quality of life of PWDs, thus promoting their contribution to national sustainable development.

Keywords: *Disabilities, Exclusion, Inclusion, Society, Sustainable Development*

1. INTRODUCTION

Societal inequalities which include a wide range of societal divisions and uneven distribution of resources and opportunities have emerged as a cause of concern globally. The United Nations world social report (2020) classifies these inequalities as economic inequality, gender inequality, racial inequality, social class inequality, income inequality, educational inequality, health care inequality, age inequality, geographic inequality, political inequality, and environmental inequality. Societal inequalities often put certain persons at risk of marginalization/ social exclusion and situations such as disabilities, gender, age, poverty, displacement, migration, and belonging to certain ethnic groups increase vulnerability. Studies however have revealed that persons with disabilities are one of the most vulnerable groups to marginalization and social exclusion, which manifest in various forms, including limited access to education, employment, healthcare, and other basic amenities.

Persons with disabilities (PWDs) are individuals who experience one or more of a wide range of impairments or handicaps generally referred to as disabilities. This wide range of disabilities can be classified into specific categories namely physical, mental/intellectual, sensory, cognitive, neurological, and developmental disabilities. Ahmad, Ullah, Shah, and Jan (2020) opined that the presence of these disabilities inherently poses certain debilitating limitations to persons who live with them, unfortunately, these limitations are further exacerbated by surrounding factors one of which is social exclusion. Social exclusion is the process whereby



certain groups or individuals in society are systematically marginalized, alienated, or put at a disadvantage with respect to their full participation in all or specific aspects of society. These dimensions stretch across political, social, economic, and environmental spheres.

Marginalization and exclusion of PWDs pose significant obstacles to their equal and equitable to access education, healthcare, employment, housing, basic amenities/facilities, and positions of political relevance equally and equitably. This in turn limits their opportunities to achieve self-sustainability, attain independence, and ensure meaningful engagement/ contributions to societal development. According to the world report on disability, approximately 16% of the global population, roughly 1.3 billion people, live with some form of disability, and this number is reportedly increasing rapidly (WHO, 2023). The marginalization of persons with disability is thus highly consequential as this results in their heavy dependence on limited national resources which are typically insufficient to cater to the existing societal needs. This state of dependence and unmet specific needs of PWDs places them at risk of poverty, engagement in delinquent behaviours, and criminal activities, as well as debilitating mental and physical health challenges. These adverse consequences can have a ripple effect on the achievement of national social, political, and economic sustainability.

Efforts have been made globally, as noted by Gupta and Vegelin (2016), to address marginalization and promote sustainable development such as the adoption of the United Nations convention on the rights of PWDs (UNCRPD) in 2006 which was aimed at promoting the rights of PWDs, the World Health Organization's disability action plan, 2014 focused on strengthening health care systems and services to promote the health of the disabled, creation of alliances such as the global partnership for disability and development (GPDD), international labour organization's global business and disability network, and the international disability alliance (IDA) which is a convergence nongovernmental bodies, civil organizations, and other relevant stakeholders to advocate for the development of enhancing policies, provision of support for the economic and overall wellbeing of PWDs. A greater global move was the adoption of sustainable development goals (SDGs) made by the United Nations general assembly in 2015 to address specific global challenges such as marginalization, inequalities, and poverty and promote sustainable economic growth, social development, and environmental protection through the use of specific highlighted targets (Gupta and Vegelin, 2016, Franjic, 2018, WHO, 2023).

Due to the global awareness and push towards the inclusion of PWDs in every society, Nigeria has taken several steps towards achieving that aim. One was the ratification of sustainable development goals (SDGs) in 2015, the development of policies for the protection of the social and economic rights of PWDs, inclusive education has been promoted through the enrolment of children with disabilities in regular schools, government, in collaboration with various organizations and stakeholders, has implemented programs to empower PWDs and enhance their skills for employment and entrepreneurship, efforts have been made to improve physical accessibility for PWDs this includes the construction of accessible infrastructure, such as ramps, elevators, and accessible toilets, in some public buildings and transportation systems.

Despite these aforementioned efforts, the state of inclusion of persons with disability in Nigeria remains relatively low as challenges persist in almost every facet of the society including education, accessibility, mobility, social and political acceptance, and participation, policy implementations amongst others. These challenges significantly hinder the full and equal inclusion of individuals with disability in Nigeria.

This study thereby draws on a comprehensive review of the literature and empirical evidence to prove the extent to which inclusive practices are essential for national sustainable development. The study describes the concept of inclusion, and sustainable development and



highlights the need for collaboration among stakeholders to ensure that PWDs are adequately included in the process of national development.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

Concept of Inclusion

Inclusion is the process of ensuring the full participation of every member of society regardless of their peculiar characteristics, challenges, or differences in societal development (UNESCO, 2017). These peculiarities or differences may be social, physical, economic, religious, or environmental. It also describes the practice of creating a conducive environment that is positive, accessible, enhancing, and one that facilitates the growth and contribution of all members regardless of their abilities, disabilities, ideologies, characteristics, or socio-economic status. It aims at promoting equal and equitable access of individuals in society to education, work, healthcare, politics, and social and economic resources. Inclusion also involves the process of removing barriers to the effective societal involvement/engagement of individual members. In every society, certain groups are at risk of marginalization or exclusion, these can be due to their perceived weaknesses or incapacities by majority members of the society, gender, race, socio-economic status, literacy level, and health status.

Examples of persons at risk of exclusion/marginalization include women and girls, persons from ethnic minority groups, the poor or people from rural areas, migrants, and PWDs. The marginalisation of these set of individuals is often due to certain cultural, religious, social, or economic bias which limits their involvement and access to educational, social, and political opportunities and economic resources. The aim of inclusion however is the promotion of social cohesion, participation, and sustainability among all individuals in the society.

it is pertinent to clarify that although several studies use the terms impairments, handicap, and disabilities interchangeably, slight differences exist between them. Impairment refers to a loss, defect, or damage to a bodily organ, disability is a limitation in the ability to execute definite tasks due to an impairment while handicap refers to a total inability to function in specific areas due to either an impairment or a disability.

This study however focuses on the inclusion of PWDs in societal development and its implication for national sustainable development.

The inclusion of PWDs refers to the systematic process of fashioning society into one that fully understands the nature of disabilities, accepts PWDs, promotes the full participation of PWDs, and ensures their equal and equitable access to the available resources and opportunities. This process covers various facets of society including education, employment, accessibility, healthcare, cultural/recreational activities, environmental maintenance, and politics. For the purpose of this study, these broad areas will be classified into

- (i) Economic inclusion: which covers the equal and equitable access of persons with disabilities to economic resources such as quality education, job opportunities/employment, housing, and healthcare services.
- (ii) Social inclusion: this refers to the state of social acceptance and elimination of prejudices, stigmatization, and marginalization of persons with disabilities in social settings to which they belong.
- (iii) Political inclusion: refers to the provision of equal opportunities for PWDs to participate in the political decision-making process and assumptions of political offices in the society.



Studies have revealed that inadequate disability inclusion could have significant detrimental effects on the overall well-being, mental/physical health, and quality of life of PWDs which creates a plethora of disadvantages such as social alienation, low self-esteem, mental health challenges (anxiety, stress, depression, frustration, suicidal ideations), limited formal and informal educational opportunities, employment disadvantages, poverty, and continuous health challenges (Adebisi, Jerry, Rasaki and Igwe, 2014; Eleweke and Ebenso J. 2016; Haruna M. 2017; Ahmad, Ullah, Shah and Ullah, 2020).

History of Inclusion Practice in Nigeria

The concept of disability has been in existence throughout the history of mankind and depending on various societal phases of development, PWDs have been defined and treated according to various societal ideologies Diez, Alcoba, and Hernández-Pedreño (2022).

Nigeria has gone through different phases of inclusion practice. This study categorizes these phases into four, namely the pre-colonial/rejection phase, the colonial/early acceptance phase, the post-colonial/institutionalization phase, and the inclusion practice phase.

The pre-colonial/rejection phase: this period ran from ancient times to the coming of the British colonial masters in the 19th century. Children born with disabilities such as physical deformities or mental impairments were rejected as they were considered to be punished by the gods for the sins of the parents, family members, or community. These children were usually either killed at birth, sacrificed to the gods, or cast into evil forests and left to die.

The colonial/early acceptance phase: this period ran from the advent of colonialism in Nigeria to 1960 when Nigeria attained independence. With colonialism came the missionaries who introduced the Christian religion. Adherents were taught about the essence of love and acceptance. They were made to understand that children born with deformities were just like every other child in the family that should be loved and nurtured. This period brought an end to the killings of children with special needs. The missionaries also established special vocational schools for children with disabilities some of which are St. Mary's rehabilitation centre, Umuowa, Imo state, Wesley school for the deaf, Lagos, Pacelli school for the blind, and partially sighted children, Lagos among others. PWDs were trained in vocations such as cobbling, bead making, weaving, knitting, etc. To enable them to be self-reliant and make an income.

Post-colonial/institutionalization phase: after Nigeria gained independence from the colonial masters, the country was faced with several challenges as to its management one of which was education. Nigerian government then formulated policies to guide the formal education of its citizenry such as the introduction of the universal primary education (UPE) policy in 1976 which aimed at providing free and compulsory basic education, the national policy on education which made provisions for the formal education of all children including those with disabilities. Despite the formulation of these policies, there was a major setback in implementation as many children with disabilities were not enrolled in regular schools. A breakthrough came when Nigeria in 1999 ratified the education for all (EFA) conference organized by the United Nations educational, scientific and cultural organization (UNESCO) in 1990 which enforced the need for the provision of equal and equitable education to all children. After the conference, the Nigerian government revised the national policy on education to place greater emphasis on inclusive education by recognizing education as a basic human right for all individuals regardless of their special needs, the NPE also stated the need for teacher training on special education and emphasized the need for access to education by children with special needs regardless of their location or socio-economic status (Madeuwesi, 2001).



The inclusion practice phase: is the period we are currently in, aside from the revision of the npe, the government in 2007 formulated the inclusive education policy, aimed at provision of support to students with special educational needs in regular schools, the employees compensation act (2010) which provides for compensation for disabilities acquired in the line of work, the government also developed the national policy on special needs education in 2014, this policy is significant as it highlights the need for inclusive education, the adaptation of school curriculums to meet the specific educational needs of learners with special needs, teacher pre-service and in-service training and active parental support in the education of learners with special needs, in 2019, the government signed the discrimination against PWDs (prohibition) act into law for the protection of PWDs from stigmatization and discrimination and the disabilities act in 2018 which made it a necessity for public institutions to reserve at least five percent of available employment openings for PWDs (Thompson, 2020).

Challenges to Inclusion Practice in Nigeria

Although Nigeria has taken significant steps towards the adoption of inclusive education, actual implementation and practice of inclusion are still in the infant stages. The poor implementation of inclusive education in Nigeria is due to several challenges such as:

- Inadequate funding: this includes funding for the construction and remodelling of educational and vocational institutions, provision of technological and non-technological resources needed in schools by those with special needs (Ofuani 2011), provision of assessment and management services for persons with special needs, access and mobility services such as access roads, bridges, and personal assistant services (Ipingbemi 2015), construction and maintenance of therapy clinics and mental health centres (Khan, Owolabi, Amatya, Ogunniyi, Oshinowo, Elmalik and Galea, 2018), and payment of special needs teachers and other trained professionals.
- Communication barrier: regular people might find communication with people with speech and hearing impairments difficult because they do not know sign language Eleweke and Ebenso (2015). This serves as a barrier for persons with those impairments to fit into mainstream academic, business, organizational, and social spaces.
- Lack of adequately trained personnel, including teachers and other special needs professionals has resulted in a gap in the provision of assessment, teaching, and management, which has affected the implementation of inclusive education and in the long run societal inclusion Adebisi, Jerry, Rasaki and Igwe (2014).
- Lack of adequate infrastructure which includes roads, buildings, vehicles, instruments, technological devices, hospitals, and care centers which are essential for the effective participation of persons with special needs (Yusuf, Fakomogbon, and Issa 2012).
- Stigmatization and discrimination toward persons with disability leading to their exclusion from educational, religious, social, and political spheres (Ewang 2019).
- Limited understanding of inclusion and the abilities of persons with special needs in Nigeria is a barrier to the implementation of inclusion in Nigeria.

These challenges to inclusion in Nigeria can present serious limitations to the achievement of national sustainable development due to the fact that lack of proper practice of inclusion restricts adequate social cohesion of PWDs, and limits their access to educational, vocational, and formal workspaces which impedes their ability to be self-sustainable, independent, and active contributors to the economic, social, political, and environmental development of the nation.



Comparative analysis of current disability inclusion practices in Nigeria, other developing countries and developed countries

In Nigeria, this study utilises reports from PWDs and their support staff in five centres for disability care in Lagos and Ibadan respectively. A total of 80 PWDs (27 persons with visual impairment, 44 physically challenged, 5 persons with mild intellectual disability, and 4 persons with speech and hearing impairments), 10 administrators and 15 support staff were interviewed. The findings of the study revealed some limitations in the inclusion of PWDs in Nigeria.

- (i) PWDs in Nigeria are still institutionalized (meaning they are not integrated into regular schools but are given formal/informal instruction in special schools) as many regular schools refuse to admit them due to their disabilities.
- (ii) Stigmatization and alienation of PWDs in Nigeria is at an all-time high as many children in these centres are victims of roadside abandonment by parents. The individuals enrolled in these centres by their parents are often abandoned shortly after admission and left at the mercy of these institutions. PWDs and their careers in this study infer that the reason for this is because of the social stigma attached to being a parent of PWDs.
- (iii) PWDs, administrators and their carers at these centres also bemoaned lack of adequate learning resources, assistive aids, lack of funds, no government support and lack of access to adequate health care facilities. Most of these organisations depend on donations from non-governmental organisations and other individuals to keep them running.
- (iv) This study gathered that very few numbers of PWDs succeed in attaining formal tertiary education and they are mostly persons with visual impairments and the physically challenged. Most PWDs are limited to practicing menial jobs and basic vocational occupations like bead making, cobbling, wireworks which are often times not economically viable. They also reported that PWDs who are not opportune to be part of these institutions and do not have access to specialised care often resort to begging and other criminal vices to survive.
- (v) The study also discovered that special institutions owned by the government in these areas are mostly dilapidated, with very few trained workers tending to the ever-growing populations of PWDs enrolled in these centres.
- (vi) On their interaction with the world outside of these institutions, PWDs reportedly experience great difficulty in mobility as most roads, buildings and transportation systems are not disability friendly. Furthermore, securing employments in formal institutions outside of special needs organisations is a herculean task as most employers side-line them as a result of their disability.
- (vii) PWDs however reported that although individuals and organizations doubt their abilities and capabilities, they are often treated with kindness and consideration by members of the society.
- (viii) On the area of political participation, PWDs report a high level of disenfranchisement as they experience significant difficulties in getting their voters card and being involved in the voting process. They reported that no measures are put in place to make the process seamless for them.

In developing countries like Uganda, PWDs have access to free primary education in inclusive schools. Cuba, Sri Lanka, South Africa, Vietnam, Indonesia, Guyana, India, and Zimbabwe



also heavily invest in and prioritises the education of PWDs despite being enmeshed in economic crisis (Charema, 2010). While many developing countries like Kenya, Ghana, and other previously mentioned countries have enacted laws and policies guiding the promotion of inclusive practices, just like Nigeria, they are faced with challenges of policy implementation, inadequate funding, stigmatization, lack of awareness, inadequate provision of assistive aids and technologies which further limits the ability of PWDs to integrate fully in the society and contribute maximally to societal development.

In developed countries like Italy, a legislation which led to the end of institutionalization (i.e., closure of special education centres) was enacted in 1971 and all children with special educational needs were transferred to regular schools with adequate support provided). Germany, Netherlands, and France operate both inclusive education practice and special school systems simultaneously with provision of adequate support (Charema, 2010), in America and Britain, comprehensive frameworks and policies have been laid down and are strictly enforced with legal measures to promote inclusion and protect the rights of persons with disabilities. These include anti-discrimination laws, accessibility standards, and affirmative action measures to promote inclusion. Examples include the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) in the United States and the equality act in the United Kingdom. These laws ensure that PWDs have equal access to education, employment opportunities, housing facilities and health care system. Also, reasonable accommodations, free health care services and subsidized specialized support services are provided. In many parts of America, the United Kingdom and Europe, provisions have been made for accessibility and mobility through the use of advanced infrastructure such as disability friendly cars and trucks, wheelchair ramps, accessible public transportation, curb cuts, accessible buildings, and accommodations for visual and hearing impairments. Sweden also regarded as the leader in disability inclusion has implemented comprehensive legislation, adopted sign language as a secondary medium of communication, invests heavily in accessible infrastructure and modern assistive technologies (European agency for special needs and inclusive education, 2019).

Concept of Sustainable National Development

The concept of sustainable development describes the process of a nation or society's efforts at ensuring the adequate provision of the present needs of its citizens/members while also making provisions to ensure the ability of future generations to meet their own peculiar needs adequately and without restrictions. Sustainable development in a nutshell merge past experiences, current trends, and techniques into long-term strategic solutions to meet needs while putting current realities and future prospects into perspective. To achieve sustainable national development, every nation needs to put in place viable strategies and policies that facilitate economic growth through efficient usage and conservation of environmental and natural resources, improvement of social welfare, maximization of manpower, and creation of employment and training opportunities, provision of quality health care and education.

Taking this into consideration, the United Nations general assembly in 2015 introduced the sustainable development goals (SDGs) as part of the 2030 agenda for sustainable development. A total of 17 goals and 169 targets were adopted by all member states of the United Nations, Nigeria inclusive and the aim was to end world poverty, environmental protection and achieve world peace by the year 2030 (United Nations, 2015). Nigeria ratified the SDGs in September 2015. The 17 SDGs are highlighted below:

- (i) SDG1 - end poverty in all its forms everywhere
- (ii) SDG2 - end hunger, achieve food security and improved nutrition and promote sustainable agriculture.



- (iii) SDG3 - ensure healthy lives and promote well-being for all at all ages.
- (iv) SDG4 - ensure inclusive and equitable quality education and promote lifelong learning opportunities for all.
- (v) SDG5 - achieve gender equality and empower all women and girls.
- (vi) SDG6 - ensure availability and sustainable management of water and sanitation for all.
- (vii) SDG7 - ensure access to affordable, reliable, sustainable, and modern energy for all.
- (viii) SDG8 - promote sustained, inclusive, and sustainable economic growth, full and productive employment, and decent work for all.
- (ix) SDG9 - build resilient infrastructure, promote inclusive and sustainable industrialization, and foster innovation.
- (x) SDG10 - reduce inequality within and among countries.
- (xi) SDG11 - make cities and human settlements inclusive, safe, resilient, and sustainable.
- (xii) SDG12 - ensure sustainable consumption and production patterns.
- (xiii) SDG13 - take urgent action to combat climate change and its impacts.
- (xiv) SDG14 - conserve and sustainably use the oceans, seas, and marine resources for sustainable development.
- (xv) SDG15 - protect, restore, and promote sustainable use of terrestrial ecosystems, sustainably manage forests, combat desertification, and halt and reverse land degradation and halt biodiversity loss.
- (xvi) SDG16 - promote peaceful and inclusive societies for sustainable development, provide access to justice for all, and build effective, accountable, and inclusive institutions at all levels.
- (xvii) SDG17 - strengthen the means of implementation and revitalize the global partnership for sustainable development.

These goals are targeted at balancing economic growth, social welfare, and environmental protection which helps to achieve sustainable national development. Of the 17 specific SDGs, 5 of them relate to the facilitation of disability inclusion and promotion of the well-being of PWDs in every society. Hence re-establishing the need for proper inclusion of PWDs in all segments of society.

Inclusion and its implications for sustainable national development in Nigeria

Nigeria is a country in west Africa with a population of about 196 million people and it is rich in natural resources which includes oil and gas (Thompson, 2020). Despite its abundance of natural resources and manpower, Nigeria still experiences significant sustainable developmental challenges, and one major challenge is the inclusion of PWDs. Inclusion which is the process of ensuring every individual's equal and equitable access to a nation's resources and opportunities is still in its infancy stage in Nigeria and it has considerable implications for the nation's sustainable development. The SDGs formulated by the United Nations recognises the importance of inclusion in achieving sustainable development. Specifically, SDG 1 aims to end poverty, SDG 3 aims to promote good health and well-being, SDG 5 aims to achieve gender equality, SDG 10 aims to reduce inequalities, and SDG 11 aims to make cities and human settlements inclusive, safe, resilient, and sustainable. Proper inclusion of PWDs is a prerequisite for the achievement of these set goals. This study will take into consideration the different areas of inclusion and their implications for national sustainability.



Economic inclusion is a critical aspect of ensuring equal and equitable access to economic resources for all members of society, irrespective of their peculiarities. Nigeria has been struggling economically due to the uneven distribution of limited resources amongst its population, resulting in the marginalization of certain groups. PWDs are a major group that faces significant marginalization in Nigeria. Due to the nature of their disabilities, societal misperceptions, and inadequate specialized provisions made for them, they are unable to access educational, social, environmental, and political opportunities. This lack of access prevents many PWDs from obtaining proper formal and informal education or finding suitable employment to become independent and self-sustainable (Omeda 2016). Consequently, they are left with no other option than to engage in menial jobs, beg for survival, or even engage in delinquent social vices such as stealing, violence, and harassment. As a result of these conditions, many end up impoverished, and depressed, in juvenile homes, prisons, or government rehabilitation centers (Vemuru And Martinez, 2020). This vicious cycle leads to the government using limited economic resources to care for individuals who are unable to make meaningful contributions to society. Therefore, promoting economic inclusion for PWDs is essential to the reduction of poverty and it ensures financial independence, self-sustainability, and prevention of deviant and destructive behaviors which is a key element for sustainable national development in Nigeria.

Social inclusion is the process of ensuring equal access of PWDs to social services and amenities and further enhancing social cohesion by eliminating stigmatization/discrimination. PWDs should be granted equal rights to health care services, relaxation facilities, social welfare facilities, and social amenities and these services should be designed to ensure that their specific needs such as access, mobility, and assistive services are provided. Social inclusion paves the way for sustainable national development by promoting equity, social and economic growth, and social cohesion (Isuwa & Lengenen, 2014).

Political inclusion of persons with a disability involves the provision of equal participation in politics and the political decision-making process. PWDs should be allowed to vote, contest for political positions, make significant contributions to political issues via print and technological media, and be appointed as stakeholders in the decision-making processes in the nation. This would enhance democracy, improve policy formulation and implementation processes, and make for good governance at all levels of administration.

Environmental inclusion is the process of ensuring that PWDs are actively involved in environmental protection, conservation, and management processes through the creation of job opportunities in those areas, environmental education, and involvement in decision-making on environmental conversation and management. It also involves the provision of accommodations for PWDs in the advent of environmental disasters.

Ensuring the economic, social, political, and environmental inclusion of PWDs makes for a more sustainable and equitable society as it will promote their improved standard of living, improved health, and well-being, equip them with necessary survival skills and education, promote good governance and quality decision making, reduce their vulnerability to environmental disasters which can make them displaced and impoverished, and promote social cohesion which will, in turn, enhance the achievement of national economic growth and sustainable development.

CONCLUSION

Proper and adequate promotion and practice of inclusion can facilitate national sustainable development through the promotion of social cohesion, economic growth, and environmental sustainability. This can be achieved through strategic formulation and implementation of



inclusive policies, removal of communication and access barriers, adequate funding, provision of specialized resources, services, and technological aids, investing in inclusive schools and teacher training, creating awareness, increased representation in decision-making processes, stakeholders' collaboration, and provision of accessible services (Adetoun, 2003; Andrew 2016 and Riesern, 2012). Consistent provision of all these will help create a more equitable and sustainable society.

Recommendations

Considering the fact that despite the efforts invested towards the inclusion of PWDs in Nigeria, there still exist several mitigating challenges to the appropriate practice of inclusion in Nigeria (Lang, Kett, Groce and Trani 2011), this study, therefore, highlights some measures that can be taken to promote the economic, social, political, and environmental inclusion of PWDs in Nigeria.

- Social media platforms such as Facebook, twitter, and TikTok should be leveraged as tools for awareness creation, sensitization, and information dissemination on issues of disability and inclusion of PWDs. Special needs experts, health professionals, celebrities, influences, and other stakeholders can create interesting videos, audio, and written contents on issues surrounding disability inclusion that will rouse the interest of individuals across all age levels and influence their perception of these concepts.
- There is a need for continuous research by experts and stakeholders on the state of inclusion of PWDs, their challenges, and their peculiar realities as the results of these studies will be useful to design improved policies, programs, and specialized interventions suited to meet the specific needs of PWDs.
- Taking a cue from the policies formulated and implemented in developed countries with functional inclusion programs, the government should collaborate with local and international special needs experts to modify current policies and practices to give PWDs a better chance at participation in and contribution to national development. These policies should state specific strategies that will remove all barriers to inclusion and promote equal and equitable access of all persons regardless of their special needs to national resources and opportunities.
- Adequate efforts should be made at all levels of government to ensure adequate implementation of the nation's formulated inclusion policies in their areas of jurisdiction.
- The government should construct free fully equipped inclusive schools in every state. These schools be equipped with all the resources, technological aids, and access facilities that are needed by both special needs students and regular students. The inclusive schools should have special needs teachers and teaching assistants for every class, at least one speech-language pathologist, a special needs resource room cum library, and one school psychologist. This will help prepare and equip these individuals for the work of work.
- Special needs education courses should be included in pre-service training for every teacher-trainee at all tertiary institutions and continuous in-service training on special needs education and management should be provided for regular teachers, special needs teachers, special needs professionals, and other members of school management.
- Every local government should provide a designated assessment/ therapy centre with professional occupational therapists, speech pathologists, psychologists/counsellors, and educational therapists to serve persons with special needs in that area.
- There should be an inclusive vocational centre built in every local government for the education of persons with special needs and their peers without special needs. These



vocational centers can be day or boarding to suit the specific needs of the enrollees. It should be open for those who fully want to acquire informal vocational skills, and for those who want to add a skill to their formal education.

- Private and public work institutions should be redesigned to ensure easy mobility of persons with special needs and job opportunities should be made open to persons with special needs as long as they have the required qualifications and ability to execute given tasks.
- Persons with special needs should be encouraged to contest for political positions, express their views about societal issues, and perform and interact during social activities. This will help quell the problem of marginalization and promote societal cohesion. There should also be increased representation of PWDs in the processes of decision-making, policy formulation, and implementation by the government.
- Government and other stakeholders should create awareness about special needs and how individuals with these needs can contribute meaningfully to society. This awareness should highlight the dangers of marginalization and intolerance to the personal safety and security of the society, the nation's economy, and overall-wellbeing. This will help promote an adequate understanding of the need for inclusion in national sustainable development.
- Government, private organisations, special needs professions, non-governmental organisations, and other stakeholders should collaborate in the promotion and awareness of inclusion and the provision of inclusive amenities/facilities in the nation.

Suggestions for further research

Further research can evaluate the impact of inclusive education policies in Nigeria and other developing countries. This could involve assessing the enrollment rates of students with disabilities in regular schools, the availability of support services and resources, and the academic outcomes of students with disabilities and longitudinal studies can be conducted to assess the long-term impact of disability inclusion policies and practices.

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