

# **SOCIAL INCLUSION AND ACCESS TO EMPOWERMENT PROGRAMMES FOR PEOPLE WITH DISABILITIES IN GUSAU METROPOLIS, ZAMFARA STATE**

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## **Abstract**

Social exclusion, particularly among persons living with disabilities (PLWD), is a significant development concern, particularly in developing nations. It is believed that 9% of adult Nigerians have trouble seeing, hearing, communicating, walking, or caring for themselves. They face more stigma, discrimination, and lack of access to economic opportunities and other essential social services as a result of their physical impairment than the general population. This study argues that, at a time when both the government and the private sector are struggling to address Nigeria's high unemployment rate, more opportunities in the area of skill acquisition should be made available to people with disabilities so that they can become self-sufficient and contribute to the development of the society. The sample size was made up of 30 people living with disabilities. Respondents were chosen using purposeful and snowball sampling procedures. In-depth interview was used as the primary instrument of data collection. Qualitative data generated was analyzed using Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA). Findings from the study indicated that PLWD did not have access to empowerment programmes due to lack of access to transportation, education, negative attitude towards PLWD, lack of opportunities and information regarding the availability of empowerment programmes. The study recommends that PLWD should form associations in other to dialogue with the government on their needs. Government and non-governmental organizations should set up

skill acquisition centres very close to PLWD for easy access.

**Keywords:** Discrimination, Disabilities, Empowerment, Stigma, Skills, Social inclusion.

## **Introduction**

People with disabilities exist in all societies. According to Onalu and Nwafor (2021), disability is a phenomenon that goes beyond national boundary cutting across gender, class and race. Even though disability is a universal phenomenon, the way and manner people living with disabilities (PLWD) are treated vary from one society to another. For example, according to the Hebrew customs as contained in 2Samuel 5:8, the blind and the lame were not supposed to come into the temple. Similarly Deuteronomy 23:1 stated that "No man with crushed or severed genitals may enter the assembly of the lord. From the above scriptures, it can be distilled that people with certain kinds of deformities were not allowed to participate in religious and social gatherings (Henning, 2022). In ancient Greece, people with deformity were believed to have been cursed and were segregated or abandoned to die by exposure to the elements (Sticker, 2019).

In most societies, PLWD are considered to be suffering from curses, ancestral violations, transgressions against the gods of the land, family sins, misfortune, witches and wizards, society taboos, evil spirits, unapproved marriage etc (Institute of Development Studies [IDS], 2020). In Africa, there were also belief systems that discriminated against people living with disability. For example, Okafor cited in Etieyibo & Omiegbe (2016) confirmed that persons

living with disabilities were viewed as social outcasts who served retribution for the transgressions of their forefathers' and those beliefs were rooted in witchcraft, sex, the supernatural, or juju. Similarly, according to Kolawole (2016), disability is viewed as a misfortune in Nigeria, and as a result, people discriminate against persons with disabilities, even within their own families, particularly children with disabilities (CWDs).

Some scholars, however, suggest that some African religions hold both positive and negative views about people with disabilities. Ndlovu (2016), for example, supports the preceding viewpoint by claiming that African belief systems regard disability as a disease. Some indigenous African faiths, in particular, regard people with mental illnesses as victims of witchcraft or ancestor wrath because of their moral defects (Ndlovu, 2016). On the other hand, there are various African teachings, myths and tales, and proverbs that encourage people to treat disabled people with respect. Ndlovu (2016) used the teaching of ubuntu/buntfu/botho, or humanness, as an example of a positive attitude on how persons with disabilities in Africa should be treated. Negatively, most African beliefs tend to characterize disability as affliction.

Over the decades, the need to improve the living conditions of PLWD has attracted global attention due to the increase in the number of people living with disabilities. According to the African Studies Centre ([ASC], 2008) and the World Bank (2020), the number of people living with disabilities is on the rise as a result of factors such as malnutrition, the rise in chronic health conditions, population ageing, environmental hazards, traffic and industrial accidents, civil conflict and war. According to the World Bank (2021), one billion individuals, or 15% of the global population are disabled. This equates to around 15% of the global population, with up to 190 million (3.8%) people aged 15 and older experiencing substantial difficulties in functioning, necessitating the use of health-care services.

In developing countries, this figure is higher (WHO, 2011). In Nigeria for example, the World Health Organization cited in World Bank (2020) stated that in 2018, about 29 million of the 195 million people who comprise

Nigeria's national population were living with a disability. In a similar vein, the 2018 Nigeria Demographic and Health Survey found that 7% of household members over the age of five (as well as 9% of those 60 and older) have some level of difficulty in at least one functional domain, such as seeing, hearing, communication, cognition, walking, or self-care; and 1% have a lot of difficulty or cannot function at all in at least one domain (World Bank, 2020).

People living with disability face more discrimination and lack access to essential services more than other members of the society. This view was echoed by the World Bank (2020) when it stated that people living with disability are more likely to experience adverse socioeconomic outcomes such as less education, poorer health outcomes, lower levels of employment, and higher poverty rates. In Africa, people living with disabilities are excluded from schools and opportunities for work, virtually guaranteeing that they live as the poorest of the poor (ASC, 2008). School enrolment for the disabled is estimated at no more than 5-10 percent and as many as 70-80 percent of working age people with disabilities are unemployed (ASC, 2008). Similarly, people with disabilities are denied equal access to health care, employment, education, or political participation because of their disability (WHO, 2011, pp.9). The social stigma associated with disability results in marginalization and isolation, often leading to begging as the sole means of survival (ASC, 2008).

These imbalances are caused by a number of reasons. They include physical, social, economic, and/or environmental barriers (WHO, 2011). These barriers have huge impact on PLWD. First, it prevents persons with disabilities from enrolling in school, restricting their skills, knowledge, and future ability to work and contribute to the economy (WHO, 2011). Second, these same hurdles may hinder people with disabilities from entering the labor market or limit the types and amounts of work they can undertake and their earnings (WHO, 2011).

Though there are several laws in Nigeria that are meant to protect the rights of people living with disability but these laws are never enforced. For example, Chapter four, section 42 of the 1999 Constitution (as amended) states

clearly that no Nigerian should be discriminated against on the basis of ethnicity, sex, place of origin, religion or political opinion. In addition, the National Commission for Persons with Disability has also been set up to address the challenges of PLWD. In addition, Nigeria is signatory to several regional and international treaties such as the African Charter on Human and People's Right (1990), International Declaration of Human Right, Declaration of the Rights of Disabled Persons (1975), Convention on Right of People Living with Disability ([CRPD], 2007). These treaties were all designed to protect the rights of PLWD, yet stigmatization and discrimination against people living with disability in all facets of life has not received the attention it deserves. It is against this backdrop that this study examines social inclusion and access to empowerment programmes among people living with disabilities in Gusau Metropolis, Zamfara state.

### **Statement of the Research Problem**

Social exclusion and lack of access to essential services are some of the major challenges facing people living with disability in Nigeria. PLWD are subjected to more discrimination, prejudice and stigmatization than other members of the society. According to Ndlovu (2016), PLWD suffer a great deal of powerlessness, social isolation, marginalization, denial of utilities and privileges and a condemned at the lower rung of the society.

Over the years, there has been growing concern and concerted efforts by the international community on the need to improve the condition of people living with disability and their inclusion in the society. Some of these efforts include the African Charter on Human and People's Right (1990), International Declaration of Human Right, Declaration of the Rights of Disabled Persons (1975), Convention on Right of People Living with Disability ([CRPD], 2007). In Nigeria, efforts made to improve the living condition of PLWD include the passage into law of the National Disability Act in 2018, National Policy on Albinism 2012 as well as the establishment of the National Commission for Persons with Disability. In spite of these efforts, people living with disability have continued to suffer exclusion from essential social services such education, health, shelter. For example, youths with disabilities

have a literacy rate of 36%, whereas those without disabilities have a literacy rate of 64% (IDS, 2020). In terms of poverty, it is believed that 9 out of 10 people with disabilities in Nigeria are poor (IDS, 2020). Similarly, the unemployment rate for adults with disabilities in Nigeria is 61 percent, compared to 23 percent for non-disabled people (IDS, 2020). It based on the above fact that this work examines social inclusion and access to empowerment programmes among people living with disabilities in Gusau metropolis, Zamfara state.

Significantly, apart from being on the bottom scale in terms of impoverishment, people with disabilities have experienced much powerlessness, social exclusion, marginalization, and denial of amenities and privileges (Charlton, 1998, p. 24; Norwich, 2008; Shiriko, 2011, p. 172)

This observation shows that the real challenges and barriers faced by people with disabilities do not necessarily emanate from their different forms of impairment – physical, mental, intellectual, or sensory. On the contrary, the main challenges are a number of environmental barriers that prevent people with disabilities from full enjoyment of life and to unconditional inclusion in society.

Some of these barriers are cultural, religious, social, physical, historical, and personal. Thus, what people with disabilities mostly seek within any society is to be empowered to become self-reliant, independent, and equal in dignity to the so-called normal people.

### **Research Questions**

The research was designed to answer the following questions:

- i. What is the level of social inclusion of PLWD in the empowerment programmes in Gusau Metropolis?
- ii. What is the impact of empowerment programmes on people living with disability in Gusau Metropolis?
- iii. What are the factors limiting people with disability from accessing empowerment programmes in Gusau Metropolis?

### **Methods and Materials**

The location of this study was in Gusau Local Government Area. The research design adopted

for this study was cross-sectional research design. In-depth interview (IDI) was used as the primary instrument of data collection. The population of the study comprised only respondents with disability living in Gusau Local Government Area. Purposive and snowball ball sampling techniques were used in selecting respondents for the study. Therefore, 30 respondents living with disability were interviewed in the study area. Qualitative data generated from the study was analyzed using Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA).

## **Results and Discussion**

This section of the paper focuses on data presentation and analysis with the view of establishing the inclusion and access to empowerment programmes by People living with Disabilities in Gusau Metropolis, Zamfara State. Findings from the study have been presented below.

**Research Question 1:** What is the level of social inclusion of PLWD in the empowerment programmes in Gusau Metropolis?

This question was meant to find out from the respondents whether they have been part of any empowerment programme in Gusau Metropolis. Responses elicited through in-depth interview showed that majority of the PLWD said they have not been included in empowerment programmes in the study area. A sixty year old physically challenge with clutches who was interviewed on the 19<sup>th</sup> of January, 2022 in Tudun Wada Market of Gusau expressed his views as follows:

I have never benefitted from any empowerment programme from the government. However, we have been invited severally to register in so many skill acquisition and empowerment programmes but we were never trained or given anything.

Similarly, one of the respondents who shared his thoughts with the researcher stated that he had benefitted from government empowerment programme. He shared his thoughts with the research team as follows:

During Ramadan [fasting], individuals, government and non-governmental organizations always assist us with millet, sugar, rice. I also remember that

in times of election, some politicians in our area also give us some clothes and financial assistance [Interviewed on the 21<sup>st</sup> January, 2022 at Lalan Round About, Gusau].

Another respondent also explained that during the time of Abdulaziz Yari administration as the Governor of the state, government used to invite them during fasting [Ramadan] and share food items for them. He however lamented that the current Governor has never invited them to collect food items or money. It can be inferred from the discourse given above that PLWD do not access or have not benefitted from any skill training or empowerment programme in Gusau metropolis. From the testimonies above, it is obvious that respondents had a contrived understanding of what skill acquisition and empowerment was all about as they associated alms giving or charity during Ramadan (fasting) and items shared by politicians during political campaigns as part of empowerment programmes. This is not surprising because the mindset of many individuals and organizations working with PLWD and other vulnerable groups in Nigeria consider sharing of food, money, clothes as empowerment. However, it must be unequivocally stated that sharing of food items, clothes, pittance etc to PLWD during Ramadan or political campaigns is not empowerment. In fact, Woomer (2004) believes that charity causes more harm than good because it does not address the root cause of the problem. Similarly, the International Development Studies (2020) contends that many of the organizations working with people living with disability adopt a charity and welfare approach as opposed to a right or social based approach. Furthermore, the organizations and people working with PLWD have been criticized for paying too much attention on charity/welfare with a mindset fixed on immediate gratification (IDS, 2020). It can therefore be concluded that charity has been misconstrued to mean empowerment. Empowerment is a long term approach that focuses on empowering people in areas such as shoe making, tailoring, hair dressing and computer application (Sabat 2014, IDS, 2020). Therefore, juxtaposing the meaning of empowerment against the testimonies of the respondents, it is obvious that PLWD have not

been included in empowerment programmes in Gusau Metropolis.

### **Objective 2: Impact of Empowerment Programmes on PLWD in Gusau Metropolis.**

The interaction the researcher and his team had with some of the respondents indicated that out of the 30 respondents interviewed, only 1 respondent actually benefitted from genuine skill acquisition training. Specially, one of the respondents interviewed on the 24<sup>th</sup> of January, 2022 in Damba settlement of Gusau stated that the skill acquisition training on rice production assisted him greatly to improve his rice farming skills. In addition, the equipment and loans that were given to him helped him to expand his business.

Wasu daga cikinmu suna cikin koyarwar sana'o'inmu na gobnati. Nida sauran manoman jihar Zamfara tahanyar taimakon kungiyar manoman shinkafa na Nageriya (RIFAN) an koyar damu sababban hanyoyin zamani noman shinkafi na gobnati [Translation: Some of us have been part of skill acquisition programme of the government. I and other farmers in Zamfara state through the help of Rice farmers Association of Nigeria (RIFAN) were trained in new farming techniques in rice farming by the government].

The respondent continued his testimony as follows:

Bayan ankoyamana yadda zamu bunkasa nomanmu, gobnati tabamu kayayyakin aiki, kamarsu taki, kwayan shinkafa, gobnati tabamu kayan aiki Taki, bunkasa kwaya shinkafa. Bashi sabon kwaya shinkafa da aka kawo mana ta hanyar bunkasa amfinsa. Lokocim dana girbe shinkafa. Amfanin dana samu yafi wanda nasaba samu a shekarun baya kuma dukha yake a gona daya nayi kuma girmansu daya. [After the training on how to improve our rice farming, government provided us with equipments, fertilizers, improved rice seeds, pesticides and loans. The new rice seeds we were introduced to improved our yields. When I harvested the rice, the quantity of harvest was

more than the previous years even though it was on the same size land].

The above expression clearly shows the benefit of empowerment programme over charity. Empowerment programmes have a long lasting impact on the lives of beneficiaries more than charity. Empowerment and training, as Sabat (2014) points out, can help beneficiaries of such skills and information become more competent, confident, and ready for the world. Empowerment is akin to the famous Chinese proverb that says: "Give a man a fish and you feed him for today. Teach a man to fish and you feed him for a life time" (Lao Tsu cited in Sabat, 2004). Stressing the importance of skill training and empowerment on PLWD, Ofuani (2011) maintained that through formal and informal educational programmes, PLWD can acquire knowledge and skills required to carry out some works for personal and community development. Empowerment by skill development and training is important because it can make recipients of such skills and knowledge more competent, confident and ready to confront the challenges of the modern world (Sabat, 2014).

Another key point from the above interview is the importance of associations or cooperatives in accessing empowerment programmes by PLWD. In other words, for PLWD to benefit from empowerment programmes and access loans from the organized private sector and the government, they must form associations. The advantage of forming associations by the PLWD is that the group will engage and dialogue with government on behalf of its members. Besides, they will receive more attention and support as a group more than as individuals.

### **Objective 3: Challenges facing PLWD in Accessing Empowerment Programmes in Gusau Metropolis**

This section examines the challenges confronting people living with disability in accessing different types of empowerment programmes in the study area. The study discovered that there are several factors limiting people living with disability from accessing empowerment programmes in Zamfara State. According to the interview held on the 21<sup>st</sup> of January, 2022 at Tudun Wada Market with one of the respondents who has been crippled from

birth stated that her inability to move easily from one location to another prevents her from benefiting from empowerment programmes. She explained further that even when she was aware of any empowerment programme, some transporters were unwilling to pick her even with her money.

A 32 year old male respondent interviewed on the 27<sup>th</sup> of January complained of discrimination against them as the major challenged. He lamented as follows:

Some people look at us as if we are the cause of our problem. I am tired of begging for money and food. If government can provide money for me to start a business and feed my family, I will be grateful.

Another respondent who was interviewed on the 29<sup>th</sup> of January, 2022 complained that his inability to read and write has denied him from benefitting from different empowerment programmes and requested that government should look for ways to pass information to them.

Meanwhile, another respondent who was interviewed on the 30<sup>th</sup> of January, 2022 at the Federal College of Education (Technical) Gusau insisted that even after obtaining NCE in education and biology, most schools in the state were unwilling to employ her because of her disability. She narrated her experience as follows:

I completed my NCE in 2019 through the help of my family. Since then, I have been looking for work. I have applied for teaching job in many schools but I was not given the job. I recently came back for my degree programme since I have nothing to do

The import of the above discourse is that there are several factors limiting the effective participation of PLWD in socio-economic activities. These factors include physical impediments, lack of access to funds and skill acquisition, education and the inability to move easily from one place to another. These challenges are in tandem with the conclusions of the Institute for Development Studies (2020) where it summarized the challenges of PLWD to include inadequate access to transport, education, negative attitude towards PLWD, lack of opportunities for PLWD and ineffective

implementation and enforcement of legislation regarding PLWD.

#### **Objective 4: What can be done to help PLWD access to Empowerment Programmes?**

This section of the paper examined what needs to be to enhance people living with disabilities access to empowerment programmes. One of the physically challenge who said he was 29years and had no formal education narrated his experience as follows:

Due to my condition, I hardly hear information about skill acquisition programme because it is not easy for me to move from one place to another in my wheel chair. Since I cannot read or write, it is difficult for me to know where some of these skills and empowerment centre are located. Government needs to give us the information [27<sup>th</sup> January, 2022 at Lalan Round About, Gusau]

Another respondent who expressed his opinion on the topic under investigation revealed that he was not crippled from birth. He stated that some people look at some of them as if they were the cause of their problems. He explained further that he was tired of sitting all day under cold and sun and that most of the times, what he usually got was not enough to feed him and his family. He therefore pleaded with philanthropists, government and non-governmental organizations to train and provide him with equipments so that he can start shoe making business and take care of his family.

A female respondent, who was interviewed at Federal College of Education Gusau on the 27<sup>th</sup> of January, 2022 argued that government should enact a law to provide automatic employment for people living with disability who have gone through higher education. Hear her:

Government should make it a law to provide employment for every physically challenge person that have been opportuned to be a graduate in the country. I believe this will not only assist the physically challenged to take care of themselves but also encourage others to go to school.

Another respondent expressed his views as follows:

I will really be grateful if the government set up schools where people like me will have access to education

and also properly taken care of [interview held on the 22<sup>nd</sup> of February, 2022 at Damba]

Based on the foregoing, it is obvious that PLWD have been excluded from empowerment programmes in the study area despite the fact that social inclusion is critical in improving their standard of living.

### Conclusion

Based on the data gathered and analyzed, it is obvious that PLWD have not been included in empowerment programmes in Gusau Metropolis. Respondents misconstrued philanthropy for empowerment programmes. They considered the provision of food items, clothing and little pittance given to them by politicians during the period of fasting (Ramadan) and political campaigns as part of empowerment programmes. Therefore, government must take purposeful actions to dismantle the cultural, economic, and political realities in Nigeria that promote and support marginalization of PLWD. This can be achieved if the provisions of the National Disability Act in 2018 are enforced. As far as people or organizations continue to discriminate against PLWD whether in public or private sectors and no punishment is meted out to them to serve as a deterrent to others, access to social services will still remain a huge challenge to them.

### Recommendations

Drawing from the above discourse, the paper makes the following recommendations:

1. It is obvious based on the data collected that associations play a critical role in protecting and advancing the interest of its members. In line with this, PLWD should come together as a group in other

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to get the support of government and non-governmental organizations.

2. It must be noted that charity work is not synonymous with empowerment programmes. The practice of giving alms to PLWD is not sustainable. This is akin to the popular sayings that "Don't give me fish but teach me how to catch fish". Government and non-governmental organizations must stop giving pittance to PLWD and should set up and equip skill acquisition centres such as shoe making, tailoring, catering services etc near to PLWD so that they can undergo training and set up their businesses.
3. Nigeria has enough laws prohibiting the discrimination against PLWD but in reality, this social category suffers from discrimination more than any other group in the society. Therefore, Government must ensure that individuals and organizations that discriminate against PLWD are punished to serve as a deterrent to others.
4. Government and non-governmental organizations should be constantly involved in sensitizing and educating PLWD and other vulnerable groups in the society on the opportunities for skill acquisition programmes to enable them key into it.
5. In the same spirit as government set up National Youth Investment Fund (NYIF), National or State Investment Fund should also be established for PLWD to enable them access funds to invest in businesses of their choice.

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