

Mov-ability:

Inclusive Mobility for Wheelchair Users in Developing Countries (Nigeria)

Overview


Disability is a part of the human condition and almost everyone will be temporarily or permanently impaired at some point in life. A person is referred to as disabled when they have a physical or mental condition that hinders their movements, senses or actions making it difficult or impossible to do normal daily activities.

Disability is a human rights issue because people with disabilities experience inequalities, for example, when they are denied equal access to health care, employment, education or political participation because of their disability. Disability is also a development issue because of its bidirectional link to poverty. Disability may increase the risk of poverty and poverty may increase the risk of disability.

Inclusive mobility is simply, mobility of all, by all, for all. Inclusive mobility for disabled people is a global concern especially in developing countries, and each country is striving to ensure they get rid of discrimination amongst vulnerable groups as well as attain the necessary Sustainable Development Goals (SDG). For example, inclusive mobility of wheelchair users is mentioned in SDG 4, which discusses guaranteeing equal and accessible education by building inclusive learning environments and providing the needed assistance for persons with disabilities. It is also stated in SDG 11 which discusses creating safe, inclusive, accessible and green public spaces and transport to all with special attention to persons with disability.

About 25 million Nigerians (14%) live with disabilities as stated in the World Disability Report, without access to basic necessities and legislations. Nobody is affected more than the victims but the families of people with disability are also likely to experience economic and social disadvantages than those without. The onset of disability may lead to the worsening of social and economic well-being and poverty through a multitude of channels including the adverse impact on education, employment, earnings and increased expenditures related to disability.

3.6 million of the 25 million disabled persons in Nigeria have very significant difficulties in functioning. There are so many different types of disabilities in the country including visual, hearing, physical and intellectual. Of these, the physical aspect is one of the most common disabilities and this is why this paper focuses on the inclusive mobility of wheelchair users. The reasons for physical impairment ranges from being born with it, to accidents, cases of polio and old age. In Nigeria, the most common of these cases is polio. Polio is a usual disease caused by an enterovirus found throughout the world that can lead to paralysis at its worst. According to WHO, there were about 7000 reported cases of Acute Flaccid Paralysis (AFP) in 2011 due to polio.



There are various entities in the country fighting for the rights of people with disability. One of them is the Ministry of Women Affairs and Social Development, which caters for the wellbeing of people with disability and supervises disability affairs. The other is the Joint National Association of Persons with Disability (JONAWPD). Its role is to advocate for full participation and equality of disabled people. In addition, there is the Disabled Peoples Organisations (DPO's), whose key role is to develop disability strategies while aligning it to UN standard rules on equalisation of opportunities for people with disabilities. However, these disability organisations encounter major challenges such as insufficient government funds, to execute projects like wheelchair provision, education, awareness creation and capacity building especially in the rural communities.

The aim of this report is to address the daily challenges faced by wheelchair users in Nigeria and the need for the country to place greater emphasis on inclusive mobility so as to ensure equality for all including disabled people.

Research Methods

Our research was conducted using a wide range of sources like reports, academic journals, news articles, and most importantly a skype interview with a physically challenged friend from Nigeria. Through him, we were able to have a better understanding of the daily challenges of a wheelchair user in Nigeria as well as what he thought could mitigate these challenges. For example, he told us about the difficulties he has encountered including accessing banks in the country because they have very narrow doors for security purposes that are impossible for a wheelchair to get through.

Going forward, it will be helpful to include more wheelchair users in this research as well as interviews with government officials in the ministry and DPO members.

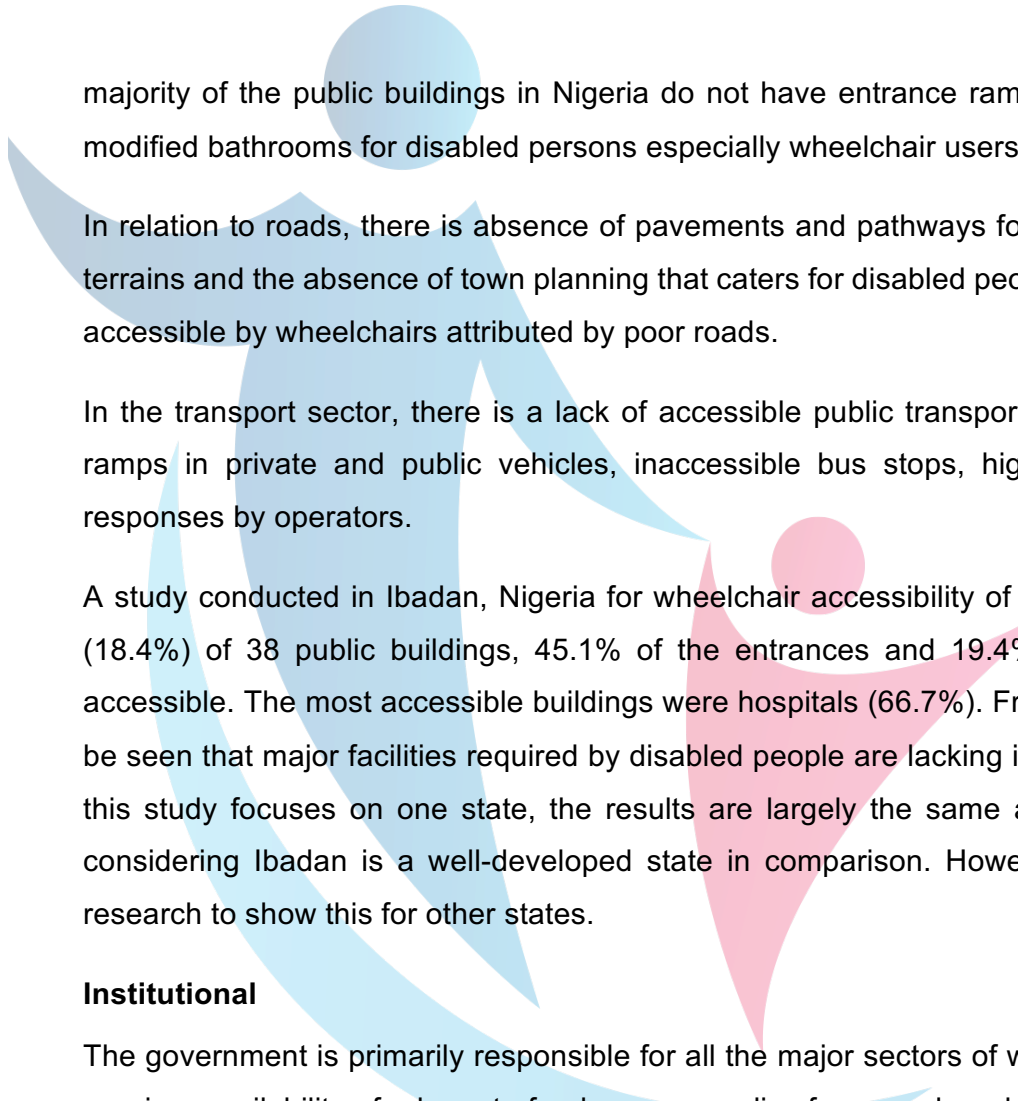
Challenges

Environmental

The environment one grows has an impact on the experience and extent of disability. Inaccessible environments create more barriers for disabled people. The social participation of a disabled person is only possible when environmental support is available.

The environmental challenges in this instance can be classified into the built environment and assistive technology. The built environment consists of ramps, lifts, pavements etc. Whereas the assistive technology consists of equipment's or products, whether acquired, modified or customized, that is used to increase and improve the functional capabilities of persons with disability.

The biggest challenge that disabled people face in Nigeria is barriers to participation and inclusion in society as a result of the built environment. Places of businesses, healthcare, education, employment, transport, recreation, sports and leisure and justice system, have major structural barriers which deny disabled people from accessing services provided by these entities. For example, in terms of buildings,



majority of the public buildings in Nigeria do not have entrance ramps, automatic doors, elevators or modified bathrooms for disabled persons especially wheelchair users.

In relation to roads, there is absence of pavements and pathways for wheelchairs, inaccessible rough terrains and the absence of town planning that caters for disabled people. The rural areas are even less accessible by wheelchairs attributed by poor roads.

In the transport sector, there is a lack of accessible public transport and boarding difficulties, lack of ramps in private and public vehicles, inaccessible bus stops, high costs of travel and unfriendly responses by operators.

A study conducted in Ibadan, Nigeria for wheelchair accessibility of public buildings found that only 7 (18.4%) of 38 public buildings, 45.1% of the entrances and 19.4% of the routes were wheelchair accessible. The most accessible buildings were hospitals (66.7%). From the results of this study, it can be seen that major facilities required by disabled people are lacking in many public buildings. Although this study focuses on one state, the results are largely the same across nearly all the other states considering Ibadan is a well-developed state in comparison. However, there is no tangible data or research to show this for other states.

Institutional

The government is primarily responsible for all the major sectors of well-being and development which requires availability of adequate funds, proper policy framework and effective service delivery for all. It is also responsible for the formation and implementation of disability legislations, mass awareness and publicising of information. It should have proper data base on number and needs of grass root level people including people with disabilities and should be ready with allocation of budget based on that information.

The government of Nigeria have ratified both the United Nation's Convention on the Rights of People with Disabilities and its Optional Protocol on 30th March 2007 and 24th September 2010 respectively. Nigeria was meant to present a country report regarding this issue due in May 2012 but experienced a delay caused by lengthy national processes. The country failed to submit the report therefore no observations were made.

Two bills were further presented within the National Assembly. The most recent one was in 2016 titled "A Bill to Ensure Full Integration of persons with Disabilities into the Society and Vest it with the Responsibilities for their Education, Healthcare, Social, Economic and Civil Rights". The Bill was sent for mandatory assent, but the Former President failed to sign the bill into law.

In Nigeria, the institutional support is missing at all stages. For instance, there is a lack of the presence and implementation of discriminatory and disability laws. There is also a lack of an active ministry, inadequate funding, scarcity of research and insufficient data. Furthermore, there is a lack of awareness, technical guidelines and technical knowledge and expertise.



Attitudinal

According to WHO, the survival of disabled persons is threatened by attitudes, injustice and cultural beliefs and norms usually among non-disabled people.

An example is the stigma within the rural areas of Nigeria. It is assumed that disability is as a result of a curse and a disgrace to the family hence confining them to discrete places which hinders them from accessing their basic human rights. Disabled people are also commonly perceived by the government, policy makers and aid providers in terms of welfare and charity, people who are only good for receiving aid and other humanitarian support rather than active citizens of the country. This view highly militates the social inclusion of persons with disability.

Current Situation

The current situation at the moment is poor because there is still no committee in place to monitor and implement the Convention on Rights of People with Disability hence it is at the theoretical level. There is also currently a National Social Welfare Policy to take care of the developmental needs of persons with disabilities, orphans and vulnerable children, as well as the elderly within society which is on the verge of being developed and has attracted a lot of attention and workshops. Nonetheless, disabled people are still a passive part of any proposed solution and are still confined to begging on the streets to make a living.

The current President, Muhammadu Buhari, has however promised to improve the lives of disabled persons. As at 2016, the senate passed the disability bill which is on standby to become a law.

Opportunities

The president of Nigeria and his administration represent a defining moment in Nigeria's history and its future prospects. Their willingness to drive the country towards achieving its vision 20:2020¹ is promising. This is an opportunity for the country to address other issues such as equality for all and the inclusive mobility of disabled people.

The passage of the disability bill by the senate that is awaiting approval will also provide an opportunity for disability rights to become enshrined. Another opportunity is the conference that will be held in Nigeria which may motivate the Nigerian government to address disability issues more seriously. The civil societies, including the DPOs and the JONAWPD are determined to create effective partnerships with important government and non-governmental organisations to advance disability issues. They are also lobbying the Nigerian Federal Government to implement rights based agenda regarding disability concerns. These opportunities will provide the grassroots for future solutions.

¹ Vision 20:2020 is a long-term plan for restoring Nigeria's growth and leading the country towards achieving sustainable and rapid socio-economic development.

Bridging the gap

To achieve the main objective which is inclusive mobility for disabled people, there is a need to bridge the gap between the challenges, the current situation and the future solutions. Our idea of bridging the gap adopts a holistic approach where the solution involves the traditional approach of the government and other organisations and the innovative approach of skills development which allows disabled people to be active actors in the process.

Comprehensive Solutions

- Formulation and implementation of laws and legislations.
- Funding. Allocation of government budgets and adopting viable financial options from international sources.
- Need for more awareness and capacity building. This could be done through media, use of celebrities, spreading the word and information, honouring someone with disability, public advocacy, organising events and many more.
- Implementation of town planning.
- Building accessible roads. This should include pathways, pavements, zebra crosses, dropped curbs, etc.
- Accessible public buildings. This should include entrance ramps, elevators with accessible buttons, curving ramps, corridors, large doors, modified disabled bathrooms, designed parking spaces, accessible furniture within buildings etc.
- Disability friendly transport. Accessible public transport, accessible ramps and easy boarding for both public and private vehicles, accessible bus stops, low cost of travel etc.
- Skills development and the creation and inclusion of job opportunities.
- Involvement of disabled people at all levels of decision making process.
- Intensifying stakeholder efforts to motivate the government.
- Increased research.

Why Skills Development? (A Success Story)

Disability is not inability. As a Nigerian with disability, Cosmas Okoli, broke all norms through a good education, rehabilitation and equipment. In secondary school he invented his own leg braces which were better, more durable and allowed him to wear any type of shoe. Determined never to be dependent on anyone for transport, he subsequently invented a device that let him drive using only his hands. He later established the Mobility Aid and Appliances Research and Development Centre after noticing how little

support was available for persons with disabilities in Nigeria. It has since enabled thousands of disabled Nigerians to live independently².

There is a famous proverb in Nigeria that “whoever develops skills can never lack anything in life”. The saying suggests that even without a white collar job, an individual can sustain themselves using their skills. We have found after extensive research that a disabled person with skills has a better chance of livelihoods than one without. Therefore, skills development is the best sustainable and long term solution not only in individual perspective but also for communities at large. Skills development is also a multitier solution in the sense that the same solution is applicable to other vulnerable groups such as orphans, prisoners and the less privileged of society.

Mov-ability’s Strategy

1. In order to make mov-ability feasible, the following strategies need to be followed:
2. Attain £30000 to launch project and source seed investment.
3. Use two months to innovate as a group while searching for investment and partners to merge with.
4. The 6-month strategy:
 - Conduct in depth primary research
 - Market ourselves through pop-up shops (mov-ability points)
 - Raise awareness and develop curriculum
5. Source further funding to execute curriculum and deliver the content.
6. Pilot project.

Mov-ability’s curriculum

1. Counselling – To enhance self-awareness and self-realization.
2. Initial Training – General course about skills development.
3. Subject Specific Course – Introduction to individual specializing.
4. Main Course – 3 level specialized programs.
5. Monitoring and Evaluation – Feedback collection.

In a nutshell, skills development is the glue that will hold all other solutions in the long run. Skills development will also generate a virtuous cycle in that it can benefit the society at large and the society can benefit from it.

² <http://www.mitpressjournals.org/doi/pdf/10.1162/itgg.2008.3.3.65>