

NATIONAL POLICY ON REHABILITATION

Generally, the issue of definition of rehabilitation and disability is more than a matter of semantic, since they can influence how the Society perceive persons with disabilities and how persons with disabilities perceive themselves. This could also influence the type of services provided to meet the needs of Persons With Disabilities.

There are a number of definitions on rehabilitation and disability.

Rehabilitation is defined to include all measures aimed at reducing the impact of disability for an individual, enabling him or her to achieve independence, social integration, a better quality of life and self-actualization. Rehabilitation includes not only the training of persons with disabilities but also interventions in the general systems of society, adaptations of the environment, protection of human rights and empowerment.

The term "disability" embraces a great number of different functional limitations occurring in any population in any Country of the World. The World Health Organization (WHO) uses the medical approach to define disability.

However, organizations of and for people with disabilities are increasingly, adapting definitions of social model. **"Disability"** is the loss or limitation of opportunities to take part in the everyday life of the community on an equal level with others due to physical or social barriers. Disability varies in terms of severity, longevity, causes and consequences. Some disabilities remain static throughout a person's life while others may have periods of remission or regression.

For the purpose of this policy, it is the social model that is more relevant to the lives of persons with disabilities while noting that their medical needs should not be overlooked. However, if disability is perceived as a Social phenomenon, legislators, architects, the family, the community and others who determine' the shape of our environment have a crucial role to play.

DISABILITY AS A HUMAN RIGHTS AND DEVELOPMENT ISSUE

In the past, disability was viewed as a cause, which evokes pity and public sympathy. This resulted in unjust dependency, segregation, isolation exclusion from the Society. Over the past decade, organizations of people with disabilities all over the world have worked to reposition disability as a human rights issue. The results are a social model for disability based on the premise that if society cannot cater for people with disabilities, it is the society that must change. This model requires substantial changes to the physical environment. The goal must be the right of people with disabilities to play a full, participatory role in society.

This changing ethos has taken place within an international context which finally gave rise in 1993, to the UN Standard Rules on the Equalization of Opportunities for Persons With Disabilities. A key principle of movement of Persons With Disabilities throughout the world, and indeed of the social model itself, is the involvement of Persons With Disabilities in the process of transformations.

The principle of equal rights implies that the needs of each and every individual are of equal importance and that planning and policy-making, should be based on those needs. Furthermore, all resources must be employed in such a way as to ensure that every individual has an equal opportunity to participate.

Special attention may be needed to ensure the following:

Access to health and social services; to education; ability training and income generation opportunities; to housing; transportation and to building; to information, to cultural and social life, including sports and recreational facilities; to representation and full political involvement in all matters of concern to them.

As Persons With Disabilities achieve rights, they should also have equal obligations. As those rights are being achieved, societies should raise the expectations of Persons With Disabilities to assume their full responsibility as members of society.

CAUSE OF DISABILITY

Many factors are responsible for rising numbers of People With Disabilities and their consequent isolation from the mainstream of society. Among them are:-

- Communicable diseases (Leprosy, Polio, Trachoma, Onchocerciasis or river blindness, malaria, tuberculosis, bilharzia and other parasitic diseases, sexually transmitted diseases including AIDS and many others.)
- Malnutrition and under-nutrition (Protein-energy malnutrition, Vitamin and Mineral deficiencies)
- Non-Communicable somatic diseases (Arthritis, Back problems, Cardiovascular Problems, Epilepsy, Cancer, diabetes, respiratory Problems etc).
- Female Circumcision.
- Various causes of functional psychiatric illness (schizophrenia etc) chiefly stress related and partly inherited.
- Various causes of intellectual impairments often of unknown origin and usually congenital or innate, Chronic and drug abuse.
- Heredity (such as some blindness and deafness, spinal, bifidal, muscular Dystrophy)
- Home accidents.
- Traffic accidents.
- Prenatal problems (causing cerebral palsy.)
- Work accidents Work accidents.
- Civil wars, unrest, tribal communal war, armed robbery etc.

The casualties of violence often suffer a long life physical disability mental health complication and severe psychiatric diseases. These are evident among people who 'have participated or lived through a war. Examples are women who are raped during war.

EXISTING DISABILITY STRUCTURE

Over the years, the Government of Nigeria has undertaken important initiatives towards the development of a number of policy statements, which address the demands and rights of people with disabilities.

Disability issues in Nigeria have been taken care of by the three tiers of Government, Voluntary Organizations for and of persons with disabilities.

At the Federal level¹ all the line Ministries collaborates with the Federal Ministry responsible for rehabilitation of Persons with Disabilities towards achieving the goals of rehabilitation. The line Ministries and Agencies are:-

- Federal Ministry of Education,
- Federal Ministry of Health,
- Federal Ministry of Labour and Productivity.
- Federal Ministry of Justice,
- Federal Ministry of Women Affairs and Youth Development,
- Federal Ministry of information and National Orientation,
- Federal Ministry of Works & Housing,
- Federal Ministry of Communication
- Federal Ministry of Transportation,
- National Planning Commission,
- National Poverty Eradication Program me (NAPEP),
- National Directorate of Employment (NDE) etc.

In Nigeria, there are Organizations Associations for and of persons with disabilities such as: - Associations of the Blind, Deaf and physically Handicapped. There are no legal provisions mandating the representatives of persons with disabilities to participate in policy-making and to work with Government institutions. The Government gives financial and organizational logistic support to existing or new organizations of persons with disabilities. The organizations have the role to advocate rights and improved services, mobilize persons with disabilities, identify their needs and priorities,

participate in the planning, implementation and evaluation of services and measures concerning the lives of persons with disabilities, contribute to public awareness, provide services, and promote/organize income generating activities.

DECLARATIONS OF THE UNITED NATIONS

The International year of Disabled Persons in 1981 served as a catalyst in rehabilitation issues in Nigeria. During the UN Decade of the Disabled (1983-1992), awareness was created and organizations of persons with disabilities were encouraged.

The Government of the Federal Republic of Nigeria accepts the principles of participation, integration and equalization of opportunities as defined by the United Nations in the World Programme of Action concerning Disabled Persons and by the Standard Rules on the Equalization of Opportunities for persons with disabilities.

The Federal Government of Nigeria further accepts the principles incorporated in the following declarations proclaiming the necessity of protecting the rights and assuring the welfare and rehabilitation of the physically and mentally disadvantaged; the Universal Declaration of Human rights; the International convention of human rights; the United Nations Development Decade for Women, the Declaration on the rights of mentally retarded persons; and the Declaration on Social Progress and Development.

NATIONAL POLICY FRAMEWORK ON DISABILITY

OBJECTIVES

It is important that a sound and comprehensive national policy on rehabilitation of persons with disabilities is developed, for the following reasons:-

- To ensure that disability issues are on the agenda in all spheres of social, economic and political life.
- To ensure maximum access of people with disabilities to all mainstream Services and facilities.
- To promote the coordination of services and avoid unnecessary duplication. To develop appropriate disability prevention and rehabilitation programmes throughout the nation.
- To promote coordination between rehabilitation services and all other sectors.
- To promote an equitable national distribution of services.
- To prevent discrimination against persons with disabilities in all spheres.
- To provide persons with disabilities with the tools to change their lives and to give them a greater degree of independence.
- To take into account the specific needs of different disability groupings.
- To increase awareness on disability issues and support national/international advocacy- for persons with disabilities.

GENERAL PRINCIPLES

The principle is guided by the belief that the Nigerian society has a moral responsibility to cater for the needs of its citizens including persons with disabilities. Consequently, the government will give priority to persons with disabilities to enable them participate fully in all spheres of life thus removing obstacles which have hitherto hampered their active-participation and integration.

The proposed departure from the past is informed by the principle of inclusion, which seeks to enhance full participation of persons with disabilities in all domains of Nigerian society. In implementing the rehabilitation policy, the government should aim at the following:-

- Assisting and supporting persons with disabilities to reach and maintain their optimal human potentials.
- Making the various systems of society and the environment such as services, activities, information and documents available and accessible to all citizens in formats they can understand, for example, Braille for the blind and sign language for the deaf who use this form of communication.
- Preventing or reducing the occurrence of physical, intellectual, psychological or sensory impairment and permanent functional limitation or disability.

OLDER PERSONS WITH DISABILITIES

The prevalence of disability increases drastically with the onset of old age. It follows that, as the life expectancy of Nigerian population increases, so too will the prevalence of disability among the older persons in our society.

The problems of older Persons with Disabilities in Nigeria are increasing for the following reasons:

- There is increasing number of older Persons with Disabilities in the population as life expectancy increases.
- Urbanization and rural-urban migratory labor mean that many older persons with disabilities are left to look after subsistence farms with inadequate support from the younger generation.
- Few older Persons with Disabilities have adequate State or any other social security, pension or savings, even after a lifetime in employment.
- Nigeria is increasingly experiencing intensified hardship which disproportionately affects vulnerable groups such as the elderly persons with disabilities. The social security is being further eroded by prevailing economic realities.
- Poor access to home-based health and social services, especially in rural communities, means that older Persons with Disabilities are often confined and neglected.

CHILDREN WITH DISABILITIES

Nigerian children with disabilities have over the years suffered neglect owing to the fact that they are perceived to be incapable, ill, misfit and a burden to their families and the society at large. Their case represents a problem to be dealt with differently from other children issues.

The fact that such children are unable to defend themselves, they are often left alone at home and are undervalued by those around them hence they become vulnerable to physical, sexual and emotional abuse. Such children, when born into families of poor social-economic backgrounds, are often confronted with many problems, which tend to have negative effect on their emotional growth and development.

WOMEN WITH DISABILITIES

Women with disabilities in general unlike their male counterpart suffer double jeopardy; first as women and second, as women with disabilities. They have continued to experience a lot of setbacks in all spheres of life not only because they lack educational opportunities, but also because of negative attitudes, stereotypes and lack of understanding which exist among the larger non-disabled group in the society.

Many Nigerian Women with disabilities still live in obscurity, silent misery, and socio-economic dependency. One of the most serious obstacles preventing the participation and integration of women with disabilities is the fact that the greater majority of them have not yet been encouraged to take on their duties as citizens which is an essential measure of claims to success. They are entitled to love and family life.

PEOPLE WITH DISABILITIES LIVING IN RURAL AREAS

In Nigeria, services enjoyed by people with disabilities in urban areas are not readily available in most rural areas. This is owing to the disparity between the level of development in rural and urban areas.

Disability in rural areas is synonymous to deprivation, abandonment, curse, burden and complete societal ostracism in political, social and economic life. Persons with disabilities in rural areas apart from dehumanizing stigma attached to them by their immediate community are completely cut off from rehabilitation services and other opportunities that are prevalent in urban areas.

It is a vital problem that parents and relations of children with disabilities in the rural areas are often not mentally prepared to recognize: the disability in a correct sense. This prevents them from stimulating the children to develop in a positive way.

Parents often put the children behind the curtains 'or send them out to the street to beg. Many poor families fully depend on their disabled children's income from begging and cannot afford the offer of sending them to school. This attitude affects the children's development and personality in different ways. As infants, children with disabilities are deprived of stimulation that could lessen their difficulties that arise when they go through the normal stages of development.

POLICY GUIDELINES

One of the greatest hurdle persons with disabilities face when trying to access mainstream programmes is a negative attitude. It is these attitudes that lead to the social exclusion and marginalisation of people with disabilities.

The changing of attitudes is not something that happens spontaneously. Attitude changing is a complex process, which involves moving in a series of stages, from one set of attitude to another. Thus, raising awareness is central to the changing of attitudes.

- To raise awareness of disability as a Human Rights and Development issue targeting every component of government and society at large.
- To reduce discrimination against persons with disabilities based on archaic beliefs and customs.
- To give adequate publicity on issues affecting persons with disabilities.

IMPLEMENTATION STRATEGIES

- Design and promote programme for raising awareness to change public attitude towards persons with
- Publicize activities of persons with disabilities.
- Address the issue of the lopsided portrayal of persons with disabilities as object of pity and public sympathy.
- Ensure that persons with disabilities have access to mass media especially those with sensory loss.
- Promote effective partnership among the inter - governmental organizations, governments and organizations of and for persons with disabilities.
- Develop programmes of social mobilization and awareness generation so as to abolish those practices that have encouraged discrimination against persons with disabilities.
- Promote partnerships. With government, the independent press and alternative media practitioners at community level on issues concerning persons with disabilities

PREVENTION, EARLY INTERVENTION AND HEALTH EDUCATION

One of the cornerstones of disability policy is prevention. The majority of disabilities are preventable. The Federal Government of Nigeria has in place a National Health Policy with the goal to establish a comprehensive health care system based on Primary Health Care, that is promotive, protective and preventive, Restorative and rehabilitative to every citizen of the Country within available resources. However, because of poverty and ignorance people with disabilities could not avail themselves of these opportunities.

- To Strengthen the vaccination of children and pregnant women against the identified endemic and preventable diseases that cause disabilities.
- To educate about health and social issues as well as helping people to develop the ability to make informal decisions about their own health. It shall include information about institutions, which can offer support to persons with disabilities.
- To prevent diseases and accidents which may cause impairment and disabilities?
- To develop specific protective-measure such as immunization, protection against accidents and protection against occupational hazards.
- To develop and strengthen early intervention programmes to prevent impairment and disabilities.

IMPLEMENTATION STRATEGIES

- Ensure improvements in primary health care, immunizations activities, Hygiene, nutrition and occupational health and safety.
- Improve the educational, economic and social status of the poor.
- Identify impairment and develop appropriate intervention.
- Design appropriate, accessible and affordable health services at primary, secondary and tertiary levels for persons with disabilities.
- Include general medical and nursing assistance on an in-patient, out-patient or community home care bases and specialized health professional assistance.
- Develop measures to identify and reduce discrimination on the basis of disability in the health sector. Particular attention should be given to the elimination of discriminations against Persons With Disabilities.
- Ensure comprehensive free health care for all children with disabilities under twelve years including free access to assistive devices and rehabilitation services.
- Carry out and encourage research on diseases that cause disabilities.

TREATMENT, THERAPEUTIC AIDS AND ORTHOPAEDIC TECHNICAL SERVICES

The Government of Federal Republic of Nigeria shall ensure the development and supply of support services, including assistive devices for Persons with Disabilities in order to minimize the consequences of disability and to increase their level of independence.

- To ensure that all Persons With Disabilities shall have full access to rehabilitation, the therapeutic aids and orthopedics technical services within their communities as part of Community-Based Rehabilitation. Their families, their families, where possible, will informed and involved in these rehabilitation programmes.
- To design a programme for the provision and supply of appropriate prosthesis, orthoses and technical aids.
- To ensure treatment, provision of therapeutic aids and orthopedics services for persons with disabilities.
- Provide regular medical treatment and medicine, persons with disabilities may need to preserve or improve their level of functioning.
- Provide prostheses, orthoses and technical aids to Persons With Disabilities.
- Provide Community-Based Rehabilitation Programmes.

The way in which the environment is developed and organized in Nigeria contributes to a large extent to the level of and equality that people with disabilities enjoy.

There are a number of barriers in the environment, which prevent persons with disabilities from enjoying equal opportunities with non-disabled people. For example, structural barriers in the built environment, in accessible service point, inaccessible entrances due to security system, poor town planning and poor interior design. There should be a national requirement for an accessible built environment because this is an important development in the equalization of opportunities for persons with disabilities.

Development agencies do not have clear policies on environmental access. The result is that hundreds of schools, Clinics and other public buildings are presently being built with no regard for barrier free requirements.

OBJECTIVES

- To introduce programmes of action to make physical environment accessible to all persons with disabilities.
- To develop standards and guidelines and to consider a lasting legislation to ensure accessibility to housing, buildings, public transport services and other means of transportation, streets and other outdoor environment.

- To ensure that architects, construction engineers and others who are professionally involved in the design and construction of the physical environment have access to the disability policy and the requirements for making places accessible to People With Disabilities.
- Develop standards and guidelines for accessibility to all public buildings and facilities, for example, transport, telecommunication:- sports and recreation facilities.
- Enact legislation to ensure compliance.
- Professionals who are involved in design and construction of the physical environment have access to adequate information on disability policy and measures to achieve accessibility.
- Include barrier free design in the academic curriculum of the construction design.

ACCESS TO INFORMATION AND COMMUNICATION

In Nigeria, people with disabilities have limited or no access to information and communication on their rights, diagnosis, and medical record and available services and programmes pertaining to their disability as well as on those services which are generally available to the general public. Communication and information are Important aspects of access to public services. Access to communication and information therefore forms an integral part of the equalization opportunities for people with disabilities, such as the Deaf, people with speech disabilities and people with visual disabilities.

OBJECTIVES

- To develop strategies to make information and communication service and documentation accessible to all Persons With Disabilities.
- To make available in formats that can be used and understood by people with hearing, visual and other communication needs.
- To promote the development and implementation of standards and best practices to make information and communication accessible to persons with disabilities.
- Develop strategies to make information and communication services and documentation accessible for persons with disabilities.
- Television stations shall provide sign language inset or subtitles in at least one major newscast programme each day and in all special programmes of national significance.
- Telephone and Telecommunication companies shall provide at reasonable price special telephone and telecommunication devices for the hearing impaired.
- Postal agencies shall provide for persons with disabilities free postal services for all materials to aid the learning or improvement of persons with disabilities.
- Develop strategies to make information, communication and documentation accessible for different groups of persons with disabilities. Braille, tape services, large print and other appropriate technologies should be used to provide access to written information and documentation for persons with visual impairments. Similarly, appropriate technologies should be used to provide access to spoken information for persons with auditory impairments, or comprehension difficulties.