

The Role of Religious Education in Improving the Image of Disabled Persons in Nigeria

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Abstract

It is the trust of this paper to bring to the limelight the roles religion can play in elevating the image, education and career opportunities of the disabled persons. The objectives include to establish a water-tight revelation of the plights of the disabled persons in Nigeria and seeks the way religion can help in ameliorating them. To achieve these objectives phenomenological method of examination will be employed in the interpretation of data collected, aimed at giving objective and unbiased analysis to issues.

Keywords: Religious Education, Disability, Disabled Persons, Nigeria

Introduction

The disabled in Nigeria are the mostly neglected and excluded groups. People do not think that disabled individual can be fit to perform any function in the society. Because of this erroneous stand, the disabled are deprived of all opportunities for social and economic development, basic facilities like health, education and employment are denied to them. In spite of several international and national pronouncements, the rights of the disabled have remained an illusion. It only exists on paper (if it exists at all in Nigeria). Based on these facts, Amartya Sen succinctly posits that “Disable people are not only the most deprives human beings in the developing world, they are also the most neglected”.

Consequently, irrespective of where the disable people live, they are statistically more likely to be unemployed; illiterates have less formal education and have less access to developed support networks and social capital than their able-bodied counterparts. This means that disability is both a cause and consequence of poverty. No wonder why the disable are most often poorest. And history has proved that poverty is in itself the most important cause of disability.

Most often, the disabled are looked at as not normal. Prejudice starts with this perception. Though many people bear them no ill will and not knowingly seek to abrogate their rights, yet people with disabilities are visibly, sometimes bluntly different from the norm, and people react to this difference. Even if we do not look down upon them, we tend all too often to think of them as somehow apart – not completely one of us.

This is the reason why disabled children and youth are excluded from the main stream education system, rather education is provided for them through isolated institutions (special schools) which operate on charity and welfare mode. Only few special schools have special provisions, like resource rooms, special aids, and special teachers. Painfully also, these special schools are located in urban cities with none in the rural areas. This results in the practice that children with special needs either have to make do with the regular schools in the village or go without education. The later option is mostly the prevailing practice in the rural area. This practice has left millions of disabled people uneducated. Consequently, lack of education deprives the disabled child access to information; opportunities for social and political participation; skill development; and economic empowerment.

Education and employment are therefore closely linked to each other, particularly in the context of disabled people, who need education and vocational training as a pre-requisite for employment. Due to lack of education and vocational training, large sections of disabled people are either unemployed or engage in very low paid jobs. This makes them to be dependent. Though it is not known how many disabled persons in Nigeria are self-supporting, yet it is certain that disability reduces productivity and is a drain on the wealth of the community, state and the nation as a whole. Disability prevents people from working and receiving an income. This generally affects the productivity and purchasing power of the community.

Going by all these, it is glaring that all the targets and policies of achieving social and economic equality cannot be possible to meet if the concern of the disabled are not addressed properly, or as James Wolfenson, former president of the World Bank warned that unless disability issue are addressed that UN Millennium Development Goals target would not be met.

To address these issues, religious studies and religious institutions need to devise a veritable means of educating the disabled through inclusive education and give them necessary vocational training in order to make them competence to fill the career opportunities available in the society. This should start by countering the erroneous beliefs and discriminations against the disabled.

Who are the Disabled?

The word “disable” means to make “unable” or “unfit”, “cripple”, “incapacitated”. The disable in our society are therefore those persons who are “unable” or “unfit”, “cripple”, “incapacitated” by multitude of factors such as congenital defects, hereditary influences, accidents, infections, diseases and other environmental

concomitants (Adima, 2008). Powell (2009) puts that disability is an impairment that limits a major life function as seeing, hearing, walking, performing schoolwork, carrying objects or working out a job. World Health Organisation (WHO, 2002) "Disability is any restriction or lack (resulting from an impairment) of ability to perform in a manner or within the range considered normal for human being". The 1995 Act of person with disability has it as a person suffering from not less than forty percent of any disability as certified by a medical authority. Disability, according to Chuadhuri (2006), is any restriction or lack of abilities to perform an activity in manner within the range considered normal for human being. These however exclude illness/injury of recent origin (morbidity) resulting into temporary loss of ability to see, hear, speak or move. Thus, for Adima (2008), for anyone to qualify as disabled an important characteristic must be manifested and that is, a major limitation of activity must be present.

There are many different types and severities of impairment which lead to disabilities. Some types of impairment according to CODI (2014) are visual impairment, hearing impairment, movement impairment, cognitive/language impairment, seizure disorder, etc. Within each of these major types, there are many variations and degree of impairment. Each of these may present different barriers and need to be addressed with different strategies. There is need to discuss the disability we have in Nigeria.

Various Types of Disability in Nigeria

The following disabilities can be identified in Nigeria. The disabilities are according to Agwu (2008), Adima (2008) and Chaudhuri (2006) presented as thus.

1. **Visual disability:** Visual disability or blindness refers to a person's inability to see either fully or partially. A visually disabled person is known to be suffering from visual impairment.
2. **Low Vision or Poor Eye Sight:** A person with low vision or poor eyesight is one who continues to have the problem even after going through medically approved corrective measures. This person with poor eyesight is still in a position to continue his task with appropriate assisted devices.
3. **Speech and Hearing Disability:** Speech and hearing disability is referred to as a condition wherein the person is incapable of speaking and hearing sound. Hearing impairments are classified into degrees based on the average hearing level of various frequencies (itches) by decibels (volume) required to hear, and also by the ability to understand speech: Loudness of normal conversation is usually 40-60 decibels. A person is considered deaf when sound must reach at least 90 decibels (5-10 times louder than normal speech) to be heard, and even amplified speech cannot be understood, even with a hearing aid.
4. **Locomotor Disability:** This is the person's inability to execute distinctive activities associated with moving both himself and the objects, from place to place and such inability resulting from affliction of musculoskeletal and/or nervous system. Some common conditions giving rise to locomotor disability could be poliomyelitis, cerebral palsy, spinal cord injury, traumatic head injury, soft tissues, muscular dystrophies, amputation, Arthritis, ALS (Lou Gehrig's Disease), etc.
5. **Mental Illness:** This includes both mental ill health and retardation. Mental retardation is defined as a state of arrest or incomplete development of the mind, which is specially characterized by impairment of skills manifested during development period which contributed to the overall level of intelligence, i.e. cognitive language, motor and social abilities. A person is considered mentally retarded if they have an IQ below 70 (average IQ is 100) and if they have difficulty functioning independently. Mental ill health constitutes of schizophrenia, anxiety disorder and depressive disorder, Alzheimer's disease, dementia etc.
6. **Language and Learning Disability:** Language and learning Disability refers to a wide range of disorders manifested by significant difficulties in listening, speaking, reading, writing, reasoning and calculating integrating perceptual/cognitive information. It affects the basic psychological process of understanding or using written or spoken language. These disorders are presumed to be due to central nervous system dysfunction, dyslexia brain injury, and developmental aphasia. Learner date succinctly observed that though the learning disabled children are not blind, mentally retarded or deaf, they cannot yet accurately perceive things visually, hear or listen attentively or lean like normal children.
7. **Seizure Disability:** seizures can vary from momentary loss of attention to grand mal seizures which result in the sever loss of motor control and awareness. Seizures can be triggered in people with photosensitive epilepsy by rapidly flashing light, particularly in the 10-25 hz range.
8. **Multiple Disabilities:** This is combination of two or more impairments for example, cerebral palsy is accompanied by visual impairments in 40% of case; by hearing and language disorders in 20% of cases and by cognitive impairments in 60% of cases.

These impairments as already discussed, make the affected individual unable to carry on their duty. The table below presents the average number and percentage of persons in any society who are unable to carry on their major activity due to chronic condition.

Statistic of the Disabled in Nigeria

Disabled person comprise approximately 10% of the world population, 75% of whom live in the developing countries, and constitute one of the most poor, marginalized and socially excluded groups in any society (DFID, 2005, Barron and Amerena ed. 2007). The World Health Organization (WHO) estimates that there are approximately 19 million disabled people living in Nigeria, (equivalent to 20% of country's population). There are however no reliable statistic on disability in Nigeria, (DFID, 2008).

Causes of Disabilities in Nigeria

Ugwu (2008), Adima (2008), DFID (2008) and Chaudhuri (2006) identified the following as the major causes of disability in Nigeria.

1. **Old Age:** Old age is a prime cause of disability. This affects both men and women, but women are at greater risk, since they have higher life expectancy and have less access to health care.
2. **Poverty:** Poverty is identified as the greatest cause and effect of disability in Nigeria. Malnutrition resulting from poverty is the greatest single cause of disability. Poverty puts pregnant women and children at greater risk of being disabled. Hence, if one is poor, there is a greater likelihood of being disabled, due to the fact that those who are poor often live in physical and environmental condition (such in adequate conditions, lack of access to health care provision), that will result in disability and the onset of impairment.
3. **Accidents:** Millions of people are disabled due to accidents. Traffic accidents accounts for 30 million disabilities world over. Another 45 percent of the injuries take place at home. This is also applicable to Nigeria.
4. **Hazardous Working Conditions:** Disabilities also results from hazardous working conditions. Factories and mines accidents account for large number of disability. Occupations like electronics industry, carpet making and weaving also cause very high proportion of visual impairment.
5. **Lack of Safe Drinking Water and Proper Sanitation:** These are key elements in spread of infectious diseases that may result in impairment and disability.
6. **Lack of Vitamin A:** This causes millions of children to lose their eyesight each year.
7. **Drug and Alcohol Abuse:** Drug and Alcohol abuse cause disabilities. Abuse of hard and very dangerous drug like cocaine, heroin, etc, lead to mental illness.
8. **Wars:** Wars are disabling. They are fought for human interest and can kill and impair millions.
9. **Depression, Anxiety and other Psychological Disorders:** When these are not treated on time, they may result in chronic mental health cases.
10. **Ignorance and Negative Attitude towards Disability:** This is more disabling than impairment. The stigma and shame attached to disability prevents many people from seeking help.

The Problems of Disabled People in Nigeria

Disabled persons in Nigeria are suffering from multitude of problems which need to be ameliorated or if possible solved, so that they can be truly humans. These problems include:

1. **Lack of Reliable Statistics:** There are no reliable statistics on disability in Nigeria. This compounds the problems of planning and evaluating any services provided by the public sector (DFID, 2008). There is also lack of proper data on the number of disabled in the country and the extent and magnitude of their problems. This affects any intervention on the issue of disabled.
2. **Lack of Political will to address the issue of the disabled:** According to DFID (2008), at the national level there is a lack of political will, commonly held by politicians and senior civil servants, to ascribe to disability issues a sufficient level of importance, as to ensure real progress in terms of disability rights. This has manifested in a number of ways. First, during the past legislative session, two separate disability bills have been introduced into the National Assembly, but both failed to be enacted. Moreover, as both of these bills progressed through the legislative process, their substantive content was so diluted such as to make them meaningless in promoting disability rights even if they were to have become enacted (DFID, 2008).
3. **There is Weak and Disunited Disabled People's Organization in Nigeria:** Though there exists two Disable People's Organizations (DPOs) in Nigeria, namely: the Joint National Association for Persons with Disabilities (JONAPWD) and the Association for Comprehensive Empowerment of Nigerians with Disabilities (ASCEND), yet they both lacked sufficient organizational capacity to become an effective right-based advocacy organization. This is evidenced by questionable democratic credentials, the absence of a strategic plan and a demonstrable lack of transparency in terms of governance and decision making. It is observed also that DPO movements at state and local level in Nigeria is weak, and is characterized by infighting and factions. This state of affairs militates against and frustrates attempt by the disability movement from speaking with one, united voice in effectively advocating for their rights and the ability to be included in their local communities. Further, this scenario is further compounded by the fact that DPOs have themselves been heavily influenced by the charity/welfare approach to disability.

Disabled People's Organisations (DPOs) in their campaign and advocacy activities have tended to focus on tackling environmental barriers than dealing with the more deep seated institutional and attitudinal barriers. The result is that to date the disability movement has not really made any significant progress in taking forward a right-based approach to disability.

4. **Disability Issue Viewed as Charity/Welfare:** The Policy-makers and the public at large have the common perception that disabled people and disability issues are viewed in terms of charity and welfare. This makes the social policy issues in Nigeria categorically not perceived in terms of human rights. Consequent, from public-policy perspective, there is a prevailing attitude that disabled people should be "cared for". This charity ethos has even been embraced by disabled people's organizations. This creates a deep rooted beggar mentality among the disabled people, especially those living in isolation and in rural areas.

Following from this shortfall, there is little appreciation that disability is fundamentally an issue inexorably linked to and rooted in human rights. This militates against social inclusion of disabled people within the country. This is manifested in the facts that:

- At national level, there is no disability discrimination legislation that has been enacted within Nigeria, despite the fact that two bills have been introduced into the National Assembly.
- There is no form of social protection for disabled people in Nigeria which exacerbates the level of poverty that they encounter.
- The Ministry of Women Affairs and Social Development is the lead government department for disability issues in Nigeria. The services they provide are based on charity/welfare approach to disability issue (DFID, 2008). This understanding and attitude of charity/welfare make the disabled to be pitied, protected and sheltered in Cheshire homes as seen in the motherless babies' homes and leprosy centers. In these homes their welfare are promoted and funded. The funding here was by donations, visitations, and church collections. (Anozie, 2007).

5. **Erroneous Beliefs about Disability:** Agwu (2008) points out that early recorded history indicated that the disabled were frequently scorned, persecuted, relegated to most difficult position in the society and often portrayed in drama as an object of caricature. Cruickshank and Johnson (1999) observed that the motions regarding the disabled were linked with mysticism, spirits and occult. Nigerian cultures, like many others, saw them as a punishment or a curse for offenses committed in the past by one's ancestor's (Agwu, 2008). Abosi (2009) noted that infanticide was practical in many parts of globe "as many of the disabled children were often cast out to perish as unworthy members of the human race, while some were used for religious rituals. In Nigeria, many of them were thrown into the evil forest where they died (Agwu, 2008). There was emphasis on man being created in the image of God, and God was perfect. If God was perfect, man in his attempt to be God-like, must also be perfect. The disabled being imperfect were construed to be out of pale of religion.

Within the rural areas, it is common belief that disability is a result of "curse". Therefore, the disabled people are commonly perceived as being "dependent", "helpless" and in need of charity". Due to these wrong conception of the disabled, they find it extremely difficult to complete primary education, as well as finding it virtually impossible to obtain long term, sustainable employment (DFID, 2008).

6. **Discrimination:** Disabled people in Nigeria suffer from both social and material disability. Adima (2008) stated that there are widespread prejudice towards the disabled in many homes and communities. Gellman (2009) attributes such prejudice to three deep and often unconscious mechanisms.
 - i. A belief that physical abnormality is a retribution for evil, and hence the disabled person is evil and dangerous.
 - ii. A belief that a disabled person has been unjustly punished and is therefore under compulsion to do an evil act to balance the injustice and hence that he is dangerous.
 - iii. The projection of one's own unacceptable impulses upon disabled, and hence that he is evil and dangerous.

By imbibing these, people's attitude concerning the disabled in Nigerian society is derogatory one. There is a lot of stigma attached to disability which hinders their normal social interaction. This discrimination occurs in a range of arena including the workplace, schools, health centers, recreational facilities, and many societal contexts (Cheshire, 2007). As a fall-out of social discrimination, economic marginalization and broad range of other human rights violation, people with disability face difficult challenges in living a normal life. To add salt to their injuries, they are ignored and sometimes excluded from development policies and programmes. While some government and societies have adopted a social inclusion and right based-approach to disability issue, Nigeria relies on charity model of assistance and narrow medical model that focuses on finding medical "solution" to limitations caused by disability, and ignores the need to address the vast array of limitations created and imposed by discrimination, exclusion, ignorance and lack of access (Cheshire, 2007). The employment opportunities available to them are very low. In fact the disabled suffer from triple jeopardy of being disabled,

poor and stigmatized.

Disabled women are the worst victims of social exclusion. Stigma and discrimination attached to disability deprives them from enjoying their social and cultural rights. (Oliver, 1983).

7. **Education:** Education is yet another thing crucial for the persons with disability. But generally, people with disability face insurmountable barriers in their quest for education. In Nigeria, education to the disabled is not provided as part of mainstream but through other isolated institutions which operate on a service and charity mode. Most of the times, these institutions are not fully integrated into the mainstream education system. This makes the number of disabled children in school to be desperately low and the number of those in mainstream is less.

Apart from the physical and sometimes mild mental disability, which obviously create setback for disabled children, the discriminatory attitude of dumping all children with disability in special schools robs many children of important association and friendship in life; they lose the opportunity of having close contact and healthy interaction with large community, hence perpetually further their exclusion from mainstream society (Agwu, 2008).

Lack of training and inadequate funding in mainstream schools leads many disabled children to become “refugees” in special schools forced out of mainstream classes because of lack of capacity to meet their needs (DFID, 2008).

The education problem of the disabled in Nigeria is further compounded by the fact that:

- i. number of special school is inadequate;
 - ii. most of the special schools are residential;
 - iii. the few special school that exists in Nigeria, are concentrate around big cities, which are inaccessible to large number of disabled people in the rural areas;
 - iv. Since most of the special schools function in isolation, the students from these schools find it difficult to adjust with children from regular school.
 - v. the most important shortcoming of these schools is that they are educationally inferior – special schools are less proficient in basic literacy and numerical skills, has lower expectations about their own capabilities and lacked confidence in social setting.
 - vi. only few special schools have special provision like resources rooms, special instructional aids and special teachers.
 - vii. there are no special curricula content and special methodology (Agwu, 2008 and Adima, 2008)
8. **Access:** A cursory look at the access related issues brings into limelight that in spite of international conventions access is still an issue of concern. In Nigeria, access to public transport, toilet, hospital, government offices, public places like: parks, educational institutions, place of worship are still inaccessible to the disabled. Still, whatever interactions that are made are restricted to the physical access. The areas like: education teaching aids, book in Braille and interpreters for hearing and special impaired are still not available to large sections of the disabled in Nigeria (Agwu, 2008). Based on this, DFID (2007) asserts that a disabled person has a great statistical probability of being poor than their able-bodied counterparts, because of lack of access to education and employment. This mutually self-reinforcing negative cycle is driven and fuelled by underlining structural factors; the most prominent of which are social exclusion, negative social attitude and human right violation.
 9. **Employment:** Disabled people constitute at least 20% of the county’s population (WHO, 2002), still their basic needs for social security, individual dignity and meaningful employment remain unmet. They are at the mercy of the government and civil society which have lackadaisical attitude towards them.
 10. **Health:** Disabled people also face health problems. They face these problems on two accounts, one, identifying the health problems and other access to health care. Disabled people have very minimal chances of receiving health care. They encounter both physical and financial problems. Most of the times their access to health care is determined by the willingness and the ability of caregivers.

These and other problems trail the disabled in the country. These problems are presented in three columns table below which has the problems distributed under environment, institutional and attitudinal. Role of Religion on Elevating the Image, Education and Career Opportunities of the Disabled through Religion

Religion is believed to be an influential agent of change that can motivate grassroots and urban people into action that is capable of alleviating the problems of the disabled. Religion has it as duty to emphasize on justice that recognizes that all men are equal and that what is good for the goose is also good for the gander, and to convince the people that all shall give account of what man did on earth to God and fellow man. In its definition, religion is variously defined, but in this study the only definition that will help to achieve the aim of the study is used. According to Encarta (2009), religion is people’s beliefs and opinions concerning the existence, nature, and worship of a deity or deities, and divine involvement in the universe and human life (Microsoft,

Encarta). It is also man's spontaneous response to forces outside to himself. These forces, according to Ukoha and Nnachi (2013), manifesting severally and variously are attributed to the handwork of the Ontological reality who controls all things. This is common to all men. Under God's divine providence all men are considered equitably from perspective of natural law. According to Ukoha and Nnachi (2009), Religion is a social agent that expresses basic moral canons. They itemized its function as:

- behaviour and character modification of people;
- discouragement of negative behaviors adjudged as being inimical for the functioning and survival of the society, and
- provision of social cultural structure that works towards the maintenance of social order.

The listed functions of religion serve to induce each society to think of what is good for them and to ensure that they are compelled by the same functions to fashion out durable material structure and capacity building to enhance the society. Religion as it were, is not just a set of beliefs and rituals but ethical code of conduct providing guide for the constituents of the society. It teaches both the old and young on what is good for the society and the positive contribution for the advancement and preservation of the society. From this perspective Yinger sees religion as a system of beliefs and practices by means of which a group of people struggle with the ultimate problems of human life (Hailton, 1995).

In this sense, religion helps man to see the world as God/gods would want it to be seen; to play a unique role to help government in building a harmonious society; to build the consensus which is necessary for order and stability in society, to promote the quality of life; to promote human rights (e.g. U.N. character, on Human rights and Banjul Declaration on Human rights); and to make a preferential option for the poor and marginalized (Nwanguma, 2012). There is no doubt that when these aims of religion are applied upon the ordeals of the disabled, they will lead to reduction of multiple deprivation (poverty) and social exclusion which prevent them from participating on important areas of society activities like, work, participation in leisure, access to education, active politics, etc. The roles of Religion on Image Improvement, Education and Career Opportunities of the Disabled are examined below.

1. Image Improvement.

Religion should starts its campaign for the disabled by fighting against the stigma and discrimination attached to disability in Nigeria. People should know that the causes of illness and consequent disability are not caused by 'sins' committed by the person or his ancestors. Again that disability is not contagious. To stop all discrimination and segregation, the scriptural perspective of disability should be employed. Powel (2009) noted that the Bible teaches that every member of the body of Christ is valuable and worthy of honor, just as every part of our physical bodies has special purpose. The eye cannot say to the hand, 'I don't need you!' and the head cannot say to the head, 'I don't need you!' on the contrary those parts of the body that seem to be weaker are indispensable and the parts that we think less honourable we treat with special honour" (1 Corinthians 12:21-22). In addition the bible teaches that each member of the body of Christ is related to the other member in such a way that if one part suffers, every part suffers with it, if one part is honoured, every part rejoices with it' (1 Corinthians 12:12-14). This implies that people with disabilities are integral part of the body of Christ and belong to our society. Religion here teaches us that the disabled are weak part of the body of Christ and as such we treat them with special honour.

Jesus taught His disciples how to treat people with disabilities with honour. When he advised them that "when you give a luncheon or dinner, do not invite your friends, your brother or relatives, or your neighbours, if you do, they may invite you back and so you will be repaid. But when you give banquet, invite the poor, the cripple, the lame, the blind and you will be blessed. Although they cannot repay you, you will be repaid at the resurrection of the righteous" (Luke 14:12-14).

Moreover, concern for the people with disabilities was one of the prominent notes of Jesus' earthly ministry. When asked by John's disciples, "Are you He who is to come or do we look for another?" Jesus responded with words re-calling the prophecies of Isaiah, "Go back and report to John what you hear and see, the blind recover their sight, the lame walk, the lepers are cleansed, the deaf hear, dead men are raised to life, and the poor have the Gospel preached to them".

Christian religion should teach the people to have this mind that is Christ on the disabled. Also Paul's Social philosophy in Colosian 3:11 and Galatians 3:28-29, Leveled all men (to be equal) before God. "...there is neither Greek nor Jews, circumcision nor un-circumcision, Barbarian nor Scythian, bond nor free; but Christ is all, and in all". By emphasizing these biblical teachings, people will see the reason to treat all men with equity and see the disabled as the true image of God.

On Human Rights of the Disabled

UN through the universal declaration of Human Rights affirms the right of all people, without discrimination of any kind to marriage, property and social cultural rights. The rights of the disabled follow from the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. This entails that the disabled have equal rights with every other individual, as Pope John XXIII expressed in *Pacem in Terris* that "in an ordered and productive community, it is

a fundamental principle that every human being is a ‘person’ ... (one) has rights and duties flowing directly and spontaneously from (one’s) very nature. These rights are therefore universal, inviolable and inalienable” (No.9). Through this, the Christian religion defends the rights of the disabled.

The unrelenting efforts of religion on upholding the rights of the disabled can be seen in the statement of the U. S. Bishops on people with disabilities (1978). The Bishops declared that it is not enough merely to affirm the rights of people with disabilities that we must actively work to make them real in the fabric of modern society. Recognizing that individuals with disabilities have a claim to our respect because they are persons, because they share in the one redemption of Christ, and because they contribute to our society by their activity within it. The Church must become an advocate for and with them. It must work to increase the public’s sensitivity towards the needs of the people with disabilities and support their rightful demand for justice. Moreover, individuals and organizations at every level within the Church should minister to persons with disabilities by serving their personal needs. The Bishops advocated that all of us can visit disabled persons unable to leave their homes, offer transportation to those who cannot drive, read to those who cannot read, speak out, for those who have difficulty pleading their own case. These should be done in such a way that they will not lead to the prevailing culture of charity and welfare.

Religion should rather persuade the policy makers to make legislation that will make the service provision to the disabled to have a long term sustainable impact upon the lives of the large majority the disabled. In Nigeria the disabled must have access and ability to vote in elections and have access to inclusive education.

On Inclusive Education

Religion should through its educational institutions introduce inclusive education; and through their position and role, influence the government to do the same in their schools. Inclusive education can be interpreted as the philosophy and practice for educating students with disabilities in general education settings (Bryant, Smith and Bryant, 2008). Ogbue (1987) sees it as the process of educating all students regardless of the physical or mental handicaps along with their non-handicapped peers”. The practice anchors on the notion that every child should be equally valued as a member of the school culture.

The section 7, of the revised National Policy on Education (2008), explicitly recognizes that children and youth with special needs shall be provided with inclusive education services. The commitment is made to equalize educational opportunities for all children irrespective of their physical, sensory, mental, psychological or emotional disabilities. Religion should work for inclusive education because of its numerous merits. The benefits include that inclusive education paradigm envisage that:

- Children are more likely to learn social skills in an environment that approximates to normal conditions of growth and development.
- Children during their formative years develop language more effectively if they are with children who speak normally and appropriately (Mitchell & Brown, 1991).
- It is gratifying that where school and community environments can be made physically and pragmatically accessible, children and youth with physical disabilities can function more effectively than would otherwise be the case (Ajuwon, 2008)
- Such modifications to the environment often enable others who do not have disabilities to access their environment even more readily (Ferguson, 1998).
- It reduces or removes the stigmas that go along with their segregated placement in special education classes, and makes them more acceptable to other children (Agwu, 2008).
- It is cheaper to run as most materials could be used in common.
- It enhances the modeling of desirable behaviour by the exceptional children expected to eventually live in society (Agwu, 2008)
- It is more acceptable to the public than the segregated schools meant only for exceptional children.
- The segregated schools make the children to ‘miss’ the stimulation, interests and social learning got from interacting with others, in addition to traveling away from their neighbourhood which reduces the opportunities of making friends locally (Aduwo, 2008).
- It involves bringing the ancillary services to the child, and requires only that the child will benefit from being in the class.

These benefits of inclusive education should be the motivational points to move religions and religious education to promote inclusive education for all disabled children.

It is necessary to point out that not all categories of disabled children/people can benefit from inclusive education, like people with mental illness. Religion should establish special schools where the special needs of the mentally ill will be attended to adequately. Examples of such special schools are Special Education Centre, Oji River, Enugu State and The Ginidrin School for the Blind, Mangu Plateau, among others (Agwu, 2008).

Following the benefits of Inclusive Education, Religion and its institution should make the following provisions:

- i. make inclusive education possible for all children with mild disabilities in regular schools,

- ii. make provision for the training and education of children with severe disabilities in special schools,
- iii. make vocational training to be part of education for the disabled,
- iv. organize re-orientation of teachers training programmes to include education of disabled.
- v. help in training adequate numbers of teachers with special training in primary level,
- vi. specialization of teachers should be sought for single type of disability training,
- vii. multi disability training or the general teachers training course should be remodeled in a way to equip all the teachers to address concerns of disabled children,
- viii. provision of educational materials for disabled,
- ix. ensure that physical, curricular and pedagogical changes are put in place to benefit people of all learning styles without adaptation or retrofitting.

All these are important in inclusive education because according Salamanca (1994), regular school with inclusive orientation are the most effective means of combating discrimination, creating welcoming communities, building an inclusive society and achieving education for all (Art. 2).

Religion or religious education institutions should however ensure long-lasting success in inclusive education, there is the need to eradicate all forms of superstitious beliefs about disabilities that for long in education and community.

On Career Opportunities for Disabled in Nigeria

The National Policy on Education (2008) stated that adequate education skill for all disabled children and adults will be provided in order that they may fully play their roles in the development of the nation. Through Education, the disabled can secure a sustainable job. The disabled should not only be educated they should also be trained in various careers depending on their aptitude. They should have access to vocational schools, and information on available careers should first and foremost be made known to them through various religious organizations and institutions. This is necessary because the disabled lack information on career opportunities (Adima, 2008). Many career opportunities available are shown in the table below:

To help the disabled to be fit for these careers, adequate trainings need to be given to them. The trainings should start with evaluation of the disabled. This is the heart of career opportunities for them. Without evaluation, it would be difficult to determine the appropriate training which could enhance or promote the disabled person's career opportunities. Religious groups can provide the pre-career education in their schools, vocational training institutes and even the Church. When carried on in these institutions, vocational educators have the facilities and the skills necessary to aid in the provision of evaluation. Working in close cooperation with special educators and rehabilitation counselors, the schedule and the precise evaluation test should be developed (Adima, 2008).

According to Obiedina (2011), the evaluation is based on:

- the level of education of disabled individual;
- marked skills of the disabled persons;
- community and employer prejudice (attitude concerning the disability);
- long history of dependence of the disabled; and
- poor attitude of disabled towards work and the community. Careful evaluation of disabled persons produces store of information about him/her.

Such evaluation according to MC Gowan and Porter (2010) lead to

- identifying the disability problem;
- determine the nature of the disability
- understand the meaning of the medical findings about the disability;
- determine the possibility of alleviating or removing the disability;
- determine the eligibility or potential for rehabilitation;
- determine the feasibility of service best to be provided;
- appraising the results of service through continued education;
- appraising the capacities and limitations of the disabled.

These evaluations are done to help the disabled participate in the training that would enhance his/her career opportunities.

Apart from evaluation and training, religion should lobby and persuade the state to make legislations that would guarantee career opportunities for the disabled persons. The churches and other religious institutions should empower, inform, engage the disabled in a meaningful career. The religious institutions should therefore help people to accept the disabled limitations, foster their independence and provide them with privileges similar to those given to non-disabled persons. The capabilities of the disabled which were frequently minimized by the public should be enhanced. The disabled have good work habits and do a job well if it is within the range of their interest and ability, (Adima, 2008). Religion through its various institutions should enhance the attitude of respect for the disabled as this will further their acceptance, happiness and career opportunities in the society.

The engagement on the meaningful career opportunity will make the disabled useful to themselves and to the society.

Conclusion

In Nigeria, there are various disabilities, such as visual, speech and hearing, low vision, locomotor, mental illness, learning, seizure and multiple disabilities. The population of the disabled person living Nigeria is estimated to 19 million, which is equivalent to 20% of the country's population. The causes of disabilities in Nigeria are old age, poverty, accidents, hazardous working condition, lack of safe drinking water and proper sanitation, lack of vitamin A, drug and alcohol abuse, wars, depression, anxiety and other psychological disorders and ignorance and negative attitude towards disability.

Disabled persons in Nigeria face numerous and varied problems which include: lack of reliable statistic; this affects any intervention on the issue of the disabled; lack of political will to address the issue of the disabled. This has led to absence of legislation for the rights of the disabled in Nigeria. Weak and disunited Disabled People's Organisations (DPOs) in Nigeria, this militates against and frustrates attempt by the disability movement from speaking with one united voice. Disability viewed as charity/welfare makes the social policy issues in Nigeria not perceived in terms of education, access to government office, places of worship, employment and health issue, etc.

These problems of the disabled persons make the Nigeria society seem to be unfair to them. To elevate the image of the disabled, religion becomes veritable tool to restore the prestige of the disabled and the integrate them into the mainstream society and inclusive education, and also to help to provide for them career opportunities which will help to alleviate their poverty problems and make them useful to themselves and to the society.

Recommendations

1. The Nigerian government should pass disability discrimination legislation, and should develop an effective and efficient administrative infrastructure for its effective implementation.
2. Disability movement in Nigeria should be united and speak with one voice and effectively lobby the government.
3. Nigeria should undertake strategic, well-focused interventions that will facilitate the promotion of disabled people in the country.
4. Disabled people and disable issue in Nigerian should not be perceived in terms of welfare and charity, rather these should be based on terms of human rights.
5. Accurate and robust data of the number of disabled people should be provided by the department of women affairs so that it can be possible for Nigerian government to effectively plan and implement forms of service provision.
6. It is essential to develop effective mental health care policies and programmes in Nigeria. This will not only increase access to health care but also promote the respect of human life.
7. Access to education should be provided to the disabled as it is the key to development. Not only access to schools but also reservation of seats, access to reading materials on Braille, appliances like hearing aids should be made available to all with hearing disabilities.
8. The government should take it as a priority that all disabled people in Nigeria are brought within the network of social security.
9. Religion should fight tooth and nail to see that discrimination against the disabled persons, especially in the work place is stopped.
10. Religion should ensure that inclusive and valued education is given to the disabled to encourage them have valued life.

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Table I: Average Number of Persons Who Are Unable to Carry on Their Activity Due to Chronic Disability Condition.

S/N	Selected Disabilities	Number in thousand	Percentage of total with activity limitation
1	Heart Disabilities	1,004	24.4
2	Arthritis and Rheumatism	697	16.9
3	Vision Impairments	535	13.0
4	Paralysis or extremity or trunk	434	10.5
5	Mental disorders	425	10.3
6	Impairment of hearing	184	4.5
7	Asthma	183	4.4
8	Orthopaedic Condition	160	3.9
9	Diabetes mellitus	167	4.1
10	Malignant Neoplasm	108	2.6
11	Ulcers	113	2.7
12	Hernia	118	2.9
13	Sinusitis and bronchitis	94	2.3
14	Tuberculosis	46	1.1
15	Benign and Unspecific neoplasm	53	1.3
16.	High blood pressure	554	12.9
	Total	4,857	117.8

Source: Adima, (2008).

Table 2

The table presents the magnitude of the number of disabilities existing in Nigeria.

Environment	Institutional	Attitudinal
Inaccessible public building	Lack of disability legislation.	The curse of impairment often attributed to a "curse".
Inaccessible transport system.	Lack of robust and reliable disability statistic	Disability issues are predominantly perceived in terms of charity/welfare not in terms of human rights.
Lack of access to computer and internet.	No social protection.	Lack of understanding of disability issues by the general public.
Lack of accessible information	Inadequate provision of medical and rehabilitation services	
	Lack of access to micro financial and banking services	
	In accessibility to mainstream public service, especially education.	

Source; DFID (2008)

These numerous problems of the disabled point to the fact that Nigeria society is unfair to them. This injustice need to be addressed. It is the intention of this paper to redress these injustices through religion.

Table 3

S/no	Industry Type	Career Opportunities	Job Title
1	Graphics	Photo engraver, Photo copy, Paper Technician, Film Technician, Printer, Photographer, Lithographer, Operator, Print developer, and Book binder.	Graphic Artist
2.	Product Development	Industrial Designer, Reproduction Technician, Auto Body Designer, Architectural, draftsmen, Draftsman Detailer, Blue print Machine Operator, Records Keeper.	Technical Assistant
3.	Fine Arts	Advertising Layout, Interior Designer, Artist, Commercial Artist, Sign Painter, Cartoonist, Painter	Artist
4.	Officer Practice	Purchasing Agent Programmer, Accountant, Bank Officer, Book Keeper, Teller, Stenographer, Computer Operator, Mail Clerk, Typist, Clerk Messenger	Officer Work
5.	Stores	Sales Clerk, Stock Clerk, delivery Person, Cleaner	Store Helper
6.	Hotels	Waitress or waiter, Short-order, Cook, Dish Washer, Meat Cutter, Baker's helper	Service Assistant
7.	Domestic Service	House Cleaning, Laundress, Baby Sitter, Cook, Dish Washer	Domestic Assistant
8.	Hospital Service	Nurse aid, kitchen helper, laundry worker, cleaner, supply room worker, clerical assistant, elevator operator, motor park attendant, watch man,	Hospital worker
9.	Transportation	Road maintenance, Dock worker, driver, petrol station attendant, car washer, loader	Transport and Allied worker
10.	Health	Medical technology, Dental laboratory technology, nurse's aide, cosmetologist, barber, hospital attendant, shampoo.	Health officer
11.	Performing arts	Actor, musician, dancer, singers, athlete, comedian	Performing artist

Source: Adima, 2008.

The above table shows the career opportunities that the disabled can engage on. This does not mean that the disabled cannot for higher profession. Religious institutions should inform the disabled of the existence of these careers. Many disabled are not aware of the career opportunities because of many reasons such as (i) ignorance (ii) frustration and (iii) lack of motivation (Adima, 2008).