

## Prioritizing Disability Inclusion in Nigeria

According to the World Health Organization, in 2018, about 29 million of the 195 million people who comprise Nigeria's national population were living with a disability. Data from the 2018 Nigeria Demographic and Health Survey reveal that an estimated 7 percent of household members above the age of five (as well as 9 percent of those 60 or older) have some level of difficulty in at least one functional domain—seeing, hearing, communication, cognition, walking, or self-care; and 1 percent either have a lot of difficulty or cannot function at all in at least one domain. Studies however have revealed that persons with disabilities are one of the most vulnerable groups to marginalization and social exclusion which manifest in various forms, including limited access to education, employment, healthcare, and other basic amenities.

The prevalence rate of disabilities is expected to increase due to the impact of aging, war, conflict, natural disasters, and forced displacement, among other factors. As a group, persons with disabilities are more likely to experience adverse socioeconomic outcomes and face higher rates of multidimensional poverty than the general population. They encounter attitudinal and environmental barriers that hinder their full, equal, and effective participation in society. Their lower rates of economic and labor market participation impose a greater welfare burden on governments and highlights the costs of exclusion.

Signing into law the national-level Discrimination of Persons with Disabilities (Prohibition) Act 2018—a major disability inclusion milestone indicative of the Nigerian government's increasing prioritization of disability mainstreaming. Prior to the signing, a few Nigerian states had enacted similar laws, which are currently being implemented to varying degrees. There is no existing documentation of progress made to date or of lessons learned from the implementation of these laws, which could otherwise be drawn on for the implementation of the national law.

Doing nothing to address the challenges faced by persons with disabilities in Nigeria will have consequences for individuals as well as for the country as a whole, which bears the greatest burden. Given the vicious cycle of disability and poverty, excluding persons with disabilities from accessing basic services would impact the country's economy enormously.

Persons with disabilities in Nigeria face stigma and discrimination in the form of negative attitudes among family and community members, name-calling, and wrong beliefs about the causes of disabilities, which results in low self-esteem, depression, and isolation. Cultural beliefs around gender roles that favor males magnify the challenges of women and girls with disabilities, who may not meet the norms in terms of beauty or of being a wife and mother, compounded by the myth that women with disabilities will give birth to children who also have disabilities, or that they are asexual. This could partly explain the reported experience of exploitation and violence in romantic and marital relationships among women with disabilities.

Education is inaccessible to persons with disabilities due to the lack of adapted learning materials, inadequately trained teachers, school shortages, a physically inaccessible school environment, and inaccessible communication. Inclusive education is typically thought to aid social inclusion, but concerned people have expressed reservations about learning outcomes and the full participation of children with disabilities when school environments, teaching staff, and supports cannot adequately meet the needs of students with diverse disabilities, such as by ensuring sign language immersion.

There is dearth of research into the accessibility of health facilities across the country. Studies identified inadequate access to health services characterized by negative attitudes among health workers toward persons with disabilities, ignorance of health workers regarding disability issues, the prohibitive cost of care, inaccessible information and communications, and inaccessible environments and equipment.

Early medical interventions, such as rehabilitation and speech therapy, are scarce in Nigeria. The lack of expertise in these areas constitutes a major challenge to early intervention, particularly for children with developmental disabilities. The experts who are available are very expensive. Health workers lack disability-inclusion training, representing an enormous gap in addressing the needs of persons with disabilities in the health sector.

A lack of relevant budget allocation is an impediment to the implementation of health policies for addressing issues impacting persons with disabilities. Health-related policies do not address the needs of persons with disabilities. The only

disability-specific national-level policy on sexual and reproductive health for persons with disabilities has not yet been implemented.

Assistive Devices and Technology are not readily available, and if available, are unaffordable because they are imported. Nigeria lacks the expertise needed for the local manufacturing of quality assistive devices and technology. Current attempts are small in scale, obsolete, and often inappropriate for the intended users.

Attitudinal and physical barriers are among the major challenges that prevent persons with disabilities in Nigeria from obtaining gainful employment. These barriers result in the denial of job opportunities, inappropriate job placement, lower expectations at work, a lack of reasonable accommodations, non-inclusive human resource policies, inaccessible workplaces, and denial of leadership roles. Women with disabilities may be even more marginalized due to “beauty” standards required by some employers and because they have fewer opportunities to pursue an education or develop skills.

Top priority for persons with disabilities (men and women) is to be able to earn a living and take care of their families. In this context, entrepreneurship provides them the most convenient means of earning a livelihood and achieving economic prosperity. In recent years, public administrations at national and state levels have invested in the preparation and implementation of public policies to promote entrepreneurship. Thus they have developed bonuses in social security contributions, tax benefits, assessment of the challenging situation when scoring projects, or support to collective entities to promote self-employment campaigns, among other activities. However, no specific measures have been taken to encourage people with disabilities that are self-employed and in situation where subnational try to put some measures in place in form of incentives, the measures are usually perceived inadequate. The provision of financial inclusion in public policies is never respected, accessing funds and loans is difficult as financial institutions usually looked down on persons with disabilities, with the notion that their ventures may not thrive or that they may not be able to pay back loans.

Despite the disproportionate impact of poverty on persons with disabilities in Nigeria, social protection schemes do not adequately include them, and there are no tailored interventions to reduce the impact of poverty. The internal bureaucracies of the organizations of persons with disabilities and a lack of accountability among their leadership further negatively impacts access to social protection.

Public information and communications—especially on websites of public organizations and the various ministries, departments, and agencies—are seldom accessible to persons with disabilities in Nigeria, particularly those with cognitive or

sensory impairments, including people with albinism. Findings indicate that public information and communications are not available in accessible formats, such as in sign language, easy-to-read and plain language, audio, and large print. High levels of illiteracy among persons with disabilities and the poor quality of sign language interpretation services further contribute to the inaccessibility problem, along with other factors.

Nigeria’s electoral and political processes are characterized by inadequate knowledge regarding disability inclusion among Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC) staff; inaccessible election procedures and facilities, and a dearth of opportunities for persons with disabilities to participate in politics or to serve in leadership roles. In addition, the implementation of the INEC’s Framework on Access for Persons with Disabilities in the Electoral Process is inadequate.

There are multiple barriers to transportation for the disabled, including inaccessible vehicles and negative attitudes toward persons with disabilities among commercial drivers and co-passengers. Regarding the aviation sector, there is a lack of facilities for safe, convenient, and dignified boarding. Discriminatory attitudes among airline and airport staff are major challenge, driven by an approach that views passengers with disabilities as ill and incapable of caring for themselves while onboard. Generally, there is little awareness among commercial drivers, airline staff, and airport staff of the transportation-related rights and needs of persons with disabilities, including the handling of assistive devices.

Nigeria’s civil society is weak with regard to disability inclusion. Disability inclusion is also not a priority for government ministries, departments, and agencies in their policies, budget allocations, basic services provision, programs, and infrastructure. The Federal Ministry of Humanitarian Affairs, Disaster Management and Social Development, which has the mandate for disability inclusion, has an immense opportunity to enhance technical capacity on disability know-how/expertise in the ministry to spearhead this agenda. There is a shortage of disability-related service providers, and the few available services are provided by private individuals and organizations, which are often unaffordable and concentrated in large cities. Assistive devices and technology are expensive and not readily available. Capacity development and local production are key to increasing such availability.

Nigeria recently signed the national-level Discrimination of Persons with Disabilities (Prohibition) Act 2018—a major disability inclusion milestone indicative of the Nigerian government’s increasing prioritization of disability mainstreaming. Prior to the signing, a few Nigerian states had enacted similar laws, which are currently being implemented to varying degrees. No documentation currently exists of

progress made to date or of lessons learned through the implementation of these laws, which could otherwise be drawn on for the implementation of the national law.

## **RECOMMENDATIONS:**

- Raise awareness among stakeholders, including decision makers and policy makers, and advocate for disability to be viewed as a development issue that should be mainstreamed into all sectors of the economy.
- Ensure the active participation of persons with disabilities and their organizations in the design of data collection instruments, capacity building, data collection, monitoring.
- Address the current programming gap between gender and women's rights actors on the one hand and disability rights actors on the other to strengthen interventions that target the intersection of gender and disability;
- Develop and implement inclusive policies regarding sexual and reproductive health and rights and gender-based violence.
- Raise awareness of girls, boys, women, and men with disabilities with regard to their sexual and reproductive health and rights and develop their capacity to advocate for their rights in this regard.
- Make early intervention services more available by promoting skills development in related fields, such as speech therapy and pediatric neurology, and through the provision of relevant equipment.
- Deliver disability management services, including care-taking, access to education, and health services through the formation of and networking with support groups.
- Provide inclusive basic services to children and young persons with disabilities, including recreational activities, transportation, and education.
- Address disability as a cross-cutting issue in emergency, relief, and recovery interventions by humanitarian actors.
- Raise awareness of the existing international frameworks and resources on inclusion of persons with disabilities in humanitarian actions among relevant actors.
- Provide technical support and resources to relevant actors to implement frameworks on the inclusion of persons with disabilities in humanitarian actions;
- Develop the capacity of humanitarian actors to mainstream disability into their work.
- Government at all levels to put in place the educational support necessary for inclusive education to work in Nigeria.
- Integrate the learned experiences of other African countries where inclusive education is working.
- Strengthen early detection and early intervention efforts for children with disabilities by developing relevant expertise, providing equipment, and developing referral pathways.
- Establish disability support centers to provide educational support services to learners with disabilities in tertiary institutions.
- Promote the active participation of men and women with disabilities in skills development programs and in leadership roles.
- Increase advocacy efforts for inclusive employment that target all private and public sectors.
- Provide assistive technologies to make public information accessible to persons with disabilities. Public Information and Communication.
- Develop and implement inclusive information and communications policies.
- Review, document, and provide assistive technologies and apps for persons with different types of disabilities, such as for a mathematics student with weak hands.
- Develop expertise to foster the local production of assistive technologies.
- Ensure that the government provides accessible transportation for passengers with disabilities.
- Develop and implement an inclusive transportation policy.
- Provide health information, education, and communication in accessible formats.
- Train health workers to provide inclusive health services and to understand the rights that men and women with disabilities have to health care services.
- Raise awareness among persons with disabilities of their right to health services, including sexual and reproductive health care.
- Make health insurance accessible to persons with disabilities to reduce exorbitant out-of-pocket expenses.
- Government to address disability as a cross-cutting issue in the current National Social Protection Policy.
- Develop an implementation plan for the National Social Protection Policy, including monitoring and evaluation with disability-specific indicators and disaggregation of data by disability.
- Ensure the active participation of persons with disabilities, their organizations, and/or disability-focused actors in the development of the implementation, monitoring, and evaluation plan for the National Social Protection Policy.
- INEC should foster the active participation of persons with disabilities and their organizations, develop the capacity of electoral officials to adequately implement the INEC framework for the access and participation of persons with disabilities to the electoral process, guided by an implementation plan.

*Extracted from the disability inclusion assessment report – Titled: “Disability Inclusion In Nigeria- A Rapid Assessment” by WORLDBANK GROUP*