

Promoting Policy Awareness on the Rights of Special Needs Persons for Inclusive Education in Nigeria

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ABSTRACT

In order to effectively promote inclusion, this essay analyzes the urgent need for policy knowledge of the rights of people with special needs in Nigeria. Even with the passage of laws such as the Discrimination Against Persons with Disabilities Act, systemic obstacles and general ignorance still make it difficult to put these laws into practice. The importance of policy knowledge is examined in the article, with particular attention paid to how it may empower people with disabilities, promote social justice and equity, increase policy implementation, and foster community integration. According to the report, key tactics for increasing awareness include government accountability, capacity building, stakeholder engagement, technology distribution, and grassroots community-based activities. Examples include training teachers in inclusive education, using local languages in campaigns, advocating on social media, and putting in place monitoring systems to make sure laws pertaining to disabilities are being followed. These tactics highlight the value of teamwork in closing the gap between practice and policy. The paper concludes by emphasizing the moral and developmental imperatives of promoting awareness of disability rights. It demands effective public education campaigns, cooperation with NGOs and commercial sector stakeholders,

accessible communication, digital activism, and the inclusion of disability rights in school curricula. Lastly, it suggests accountability and monitoring systems to guarantee that the policy is followed. Policymakers, educators, campaigners, and stakeholders who are dedicated to building a more inclusive society should use this article as a guide since it offers practical insights and real-world examples.

Keywords: Policy Awareness, Special Needs, Inclusive Education

1.0 Introduction

In Nigeria, persons with special needs represent a significant portion of the population, encompassing individuals with physical, sensory,¹ intellectual, and developmental disabilities. Despite their numbers, this group remains one of the most marginalized in society, facing systemic barriers that hinder their inclusion in various spheres of life such as healthcare, employment, education, and social interactions. Over the years, Nigeria has enacted policies and laws to safeguard the rights of persons with special needs, such as the Discrimination Against Persons with Disabilities (Prohibition) Act of 2018.² However, the existence of these legal frameworks has not necessarily translated into meaningful inclusion due to poor policy awareness among the public, policymakers, and even persons with special needs themselves. Without widespread knowledge of these rights and protections, inclusion efforts often falter, leaving many to continue facing discrimination and neglect. The root of this exclusion can often be traced to the lack of effective dissemination and understanding of policies designed to protect and empower persons with special needs. In many parts of Nigeria,³ the rights of this population are either misunderstood, ignored, or completely unknown. Policymakers and enforcement agencies frequently fail to implement these laws effectively, while the general public

¹ EO Mbanugo, 'Perspectives and legal implications of inclusive access to the environment for children living with disabilities in Nigeria under the discrimination against persons with disability (prohibition) Act 2018', *JL Pol'y & Globalization* (2019) 85, 133.

² EO Mbanugo, *op. cit.*; C. Amucheazi & CM Nwankwo, 'Accessibility to infrastructure and disability rights in Nigeria: an Analysis of the Potential of the Discrimination against Persons with Disability (Prohibition) Act 2018', *Commonwealth Law Bulletin* (2020) 46 (4), 689-710.

³ World Bank Group, 'Disability inclusion in Nigeria: A Rapid Assessment' (2020) <<https://documents1.worldbank.org/curated/en/780571593336878236/pdf/Disability-Inclusion-in-Nigeria-A-Rapid-Assessment.pdf>> accessed on 1 January 2025.

remains largely unaware of the importance of inclusion. This gap in awareness perpetuates social stigma, economic marginalization, and limited access to essential services. Consequently, individuals with special needs are left with few opportunities to fully participate in society, underscoring the urgent need to address this awareness gap to ensure their rights are upheld and their inclusion realized.

Knowledge of the rights of people with disabilities. It calls for the inclusion of disability rights in school curricula, accessible communication, digital activism, collaboration with NGOs and stakeholders in the commercial sector, and successful public education campaigns. It suggests accountability and monitoring systems to guarantee that the policy is followed. This comprehensive approach aims to assist Nigeria in achieving social justice and sustainable development by empowering individuals with special needs, reducing social stigmas, and fostering an inclusive culture.⁴ Policymakers, educators, campaigners, and stakeholders who are dedicated to building a more inclusive society should use this article as a guide since it offers practical insights and real-world examples.

2.0 Understanding the Rights of Persons with Special Needs

A wide range of people who need extra help because of physical, sensory, intellectual, or developmental disabilities are referred to as persons with special needs.⁵ This covers, among other things, people who are deaf, blind, have mental health issues, autism spectrum disorder, Down syndrome, or mobility issues. In order to support their inclusion in school, the workforce, and society at large, these demands frequently call for unique services, accommodations, or technologies. When given equal chances and the right kind of support, people with special needs make tremendous contributions to their

⁴ O Aluko *et al*, 'Unlocking Inclusive Growth and Sustainable Development in Nigeria: A Roadmap through Challenges and Opportunities', *African Journal of Applied Research*, Vol. 10(1) (2024), 201-223; RE Ebeh, 'Counselling Psychology as a Transformative Tool for Driving Sustainable Development across Education, Health, and Organizations in Nigeria' *Journal of Professional Counselling and Psychotherapy Research*, Vol. 5(2) (2024) <<https://journals.aphriapub.com/index.php/JPCPR/article/view/2825/2600>> accessed on 2 January 2025; RA Yusuf *et al*, 'Diversity, inclusion and equity: making a case for the underserved and vulnerable in the Nigerian society', *Lagos Journal of Library and Information Science*, Vol. 11(1 and 2) (2022) 79-94.

⁵ CR Reynolds & E Fletcher-Janzen (Eds), *Encyclopedia of Special Education: A Reference for the Education of Children, Adolescents, and Adults with Disabilities and Other Exceptional Individuals*, Volume 3 (2007) pp. 1404, 1842 <https://hmk.am/wp-content/uploads/2021/05/Encyclopedia-of-special-education_-a-reference-for-the-education-of-children-adolescents-and-adults-with-disabilities-and-other-exceptional-individuals-PDFDrive-.pdf> accessed on 31 December 2024.

communities despite their particular difficulties. In order to formulate laws and activities that address their rights holistically rather than as a homogeneous group, it is imperative to comprehend their variety.⁶

Through a number of laws and regulations, Nigeria has made great progress in recognizing and defending the rights of people with special needs.⁷ A historic law known as the Discrimination Against Persons with Disabilities (Prohibition) Act of 2018 renders it unlawful to discriminate against people with disabilities, establishes accessible requirements, and encourages equal opportunity.⁸ According to the National Policy on Education and/among other applicable policies, all children including children with disabilities are entitled to inclusive education. Although these frameworks give inclusion a legal foundation, enforcement is nonetheless lax and stakeholder awareness is low. Many people with special needs are therefore unable to make use of the possibilities and safeguards that these laws are meant to offer.⁹

2.1 International Conventions

In addition to its domestic legislation, Nigeria has ratified some international agreements that protect the rights of people with special needs which in the main include the United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (CRPD). Member nations are required by this agreement to guarantee the autonomy, dignity, and full inclusion of people with disabilities in society.¹⁰ Additionally, it highlights the necessity of inclusive

⁶ *Ibid.*

⁷ SI Ibadin, Rights to Education and Employment for Persons with Disabilities in Nigeria: Towards a Human Rights Model of Disability (2022) <<https://theses.ncl.ac.uk/jspui/bitstream/10443/5679/1/Ibadin%20S%20I%202022.pdf>> accessed on 3 January 2025.

⁸ EO Mbanugo, *op. cit.*; M Sharma, *Right of Equality and Non-Discrimination for Persons with Disabilities: Need of Constitutionalisation under Article 15 of the Constitution of India* (2022) p. 21 <https://www.etd.ceu.edu/2022/sharma_meghna.pdf> accessed on 4 January 2025; I Okata, An Exploration of Nigeria's Discrimination against Persons with Disabilities Prohibition Act, 2018 –A Legal Practitioner's Perspective (2024) <<https://mspace.lib.umanitoba.ca/items/757cee05-4734-4c4a-963b-88e484710604>> accessed on 2 January 2025.

⁹ E Pasachoff, 'Special education, poverty, and the limits of private enforcement', *Notre Dame L. Rev.* (2011) 86, 1413; United Nations Human Rights Office of the High Commissioner, 'The Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities', *Professional Training Series No. 19* (2010) <https://www.ohchr.org/sites/default/files/Documents/Publications/CRPD_TrainingGuide_PTS19_EN_Accessible.pdf> accessed on 30 December 2024.

¹⁰ T. Bratan *et al.*, 'Implementation of the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities: A comparison of four European Countries with regards to Assistive Technologies', *Societies* Vol. 10(4), (2020) 74. <<https://www.mdpi.com/2075-4698/10/4/74/pdf?version=1601027373>> accessed on 4 January 2025; R Lang, 'The United Nations Convention on the Right and Dignities for Persons with Disability: A

education, easily accessible infrastructure, and equitable involvement in political and economic endeavors. Nigeria's dedication to these international norms is a start in the right direction, but there is still more work to be done to put these treaties' tenets into practice.¹¹ It is necessary to increase knowledge of these international commitments and successfully incorporate them into domestic policy in order to close the gap between commitment and action.

2.2 Importance of Understanding Rights

It is crucial for society at large as well as for people with special needs to be aware of these legal frameworks and conventions. People, groups, and organizations are better able to support, respect, and defend the rights of people with special needs when they are aware of those rights. A more inclusive and equitable society is promoted by this understanding,¹² which also guarantees that the opinions of people with special needs are heard during decision-making processes. The objectives of inclusion, equality, and dignity for everyone remain unachievable in the absence of a broad awareness of these rights.

3.0 Current Challenges in Policy Awareness

1. Low Public Awareness

The general lack of knowledge about the rights of people with special needs is one of the biggest obstacles to their successful inclusion in Nigeria.¹³ Although

Panacea for Ending Disability Discrimination?', *Alter* Vol. 3(3) (2009) 266-285 <<https://www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/pii/S1875067209000443>> accessed on 2 January 2025.

¹¹ Fitzmaurice, M. (2014). The practical working of the law of treaties. *International law*, 2, 187-213. <<https://iilj.org/wp-content/uploads/2016/08/Fitzmaurice-The-Practical-Working-of-the-Law-of-Treaties-pp.-172-83-2010.pdf>> accessed on 1 January 2025; Lang *et al*, 'Implementing the United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with disabilities: Principles, Implications, Practice and Limitations', *Alter*, Vol. 5(3) (2011) 206-220.

¹² C Flores & J Bagwell, 'Social Justice Leadership as Inclusion: Promoting Inclusive Practices to Ensure Equity for All', *Educational Leadership and Administration: Teaching and Program Development* (2021) <<https://files.eric.ed.gov/fulltext/EJ1318516.pdf>> accessed on 9 January 2025; HM Haugen, 'Approaches to Inclusive and Equitable Societies: Diaconal Perspectives' *Diaconia*, Vol. 6(2) (2015) 150-166 <<https://www.vr-elibrary.de/doi/reader/10.13109/diac.2015.6.2.150>> accessed on 8 January 2025.

¹³ L Akinyi *et al*, 'Challenges facing Implementation of Inclusive Education in Public Secondary Schools in Rongo Sub-County, Migori County, Kenya', *IOSR Journal Of Humanities And Social Science*, Vol. 20(4) (2015) <<https://ir-library.ku.ac.ke/server/api/core/bitstreams/af21738f-64ae-4899-ae74-36ec0295ff04/content>> accessed on 1 January 2025; CJ Eleweke, & J Ebenso, 'Barriers to Accessing Services by People with Disabilities in Nigeria: Insights from a Qualitative Study', *Journal of Educational and Social Research*, Vol. 6(2) (2016) 113 <https://pdxscholar.library.pdx.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=1057&context=wll_fac> accessed on 22

laws and regulations have been put in place to empower and protect this group, many Nigerians are still ignorant of them. This ignorance affects not just the general population but also employers, schools, and even medical professionals—who ought to be leading the charge in establishing inclusive practices.¹⁴ These stakeholders could inadvertently promote exclusionary behaviors like inaccessible infrastructure, biased employment procedures, or insufficient educational support if they don't have the right knowledge. This problem is made worse by cultural preconceptions regarding disability and the limited informational reach of public campaigns,¹⁵ which creates a disconnect between the development of policies and their intended implementation.

2. Inadequate Implementation of Laws and Policies

The inefficient application of rules and regulations intended to safeguard individuals with special needs is another serious problem. Although laws such as the Discrimination Against Persons with Disabilities Act offer a strong basis, enforcement procedures are sometimes ineffective or nonexistent.¹⁶ For example, due in large part to insufficient monitoring and accountability procedures, both public and private organizations commonly violate accessibility regulations or inclusive employment practices. Furthermore, the efficacy of these measures is further undermined by bureaucracy, corruption, and underfunding of programs relating to disabilities.¹⁷ Because of this, people may have little to no remedy when their rights are infringed, even if they are aware of them, which feeds the cycle of marginalization and exclusion.

December 2024; MP Mostert, 'Stigma as Barrier to the Implementation of the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities in Africa', *Afr. Disability Rts. YB*, Vol. 4 (2016) 3 <https://www.adry.up.ac.za/images/adry/volume4_2016/adry_2016_4_chapter1.pdf> accessed on 23 December 2024.

¹⁴ R Rieser, 'Implementing inclusive education: a Commonwealth Guide to Implementing Article 24 of the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities' (2012) <https://edu.thecommonwealth.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/11/Implementing_Inclusive_Education_Article_24_in_CRPD.pdf> accessed on 1 January 2025.

¹⁵ B Rohwerder, 'Disability Stigma in Developing Countries', *K4D Helpdesk Report* (2018) 26 <https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/media/5b18fe3240f0b634aec30791/Disability_stigma_in_developing_countries.pdf> accessed on 5 January 2025.

¹⁶ EF Emens, 'Disabling attitudes: US disability law and the ADA Amendments Act', *The American Journal of Comparative Law*, Vol. 60(1) (2012) 205-234.

¹⁷ TS Ezeudu & M Umaru, 'Challenges and Barriers to the Successful Implementation of Social Development Programs in Nigeria', *Zamfara Journal of Politics and Development*, Vol. 4(2), (2023) 73-88.

3. Cultural and Social Barriers

Significant obstacles to policy understanding and inclusion are also presented by deeply rooted cultural and social attitudes. Disabilities are frequently perceived through a superstitious or stigmatized lens in many Nigerian communities, with some people linking them to punishment, ill luck, or curses.¹⁸ In addition to isolating people with exceptional needs, these attitudes deter families from supporting them or standing up for their rights. This stigma also exists in public areas, where ignorance about society has normalized exclusion and discrimination.¹⁹ Additionally, the underrepresentation of people with special needs in the media and in leadership positions restricts their visibility and activism, which feeds into harmful stereotypes and impedes more significant social change.

4. Limited Access to Information

Accessing information about their rights is another obstacle for people with special needs themselves.²⁰ Many people lack the means to learn about current laws and protections, especially those who live in rural areas. Barriers to communication, like the lack of information in accessible formats like braille or sign language, further distance these people from important information that could enable them to demand their rights. Because there aren't enough inclusive communication techniques, deaf or blind people are particularly excluded from advocacy campaigns.²¹ Individuals with special needs continue to be excluded from the very structures intended to guarantee their inclusion in the absence of focused interventions to make information accessible.

¹⁸ O Omiegbe & FC Ezechi, 'Correcting Misconceptions about Persons with Disabilities', *Special Needs Education from the Lens of Interdisciplinary Dialogue: A Festschrift in Honour of Prof. Emeka D. Ozoji*, Vol. 1(1) (2023) <<https://journals.ezenwaohaetorc.org/index.php/AFHOPEO/article/download/2416/2467>> accessed on 3 January 2025.

¹⁹ É Pigeon-Gagné *et al*, 'Discrimination and Social Exclusion of People Experiencing Mental Disorders in Burkina Faso: a Socio-Anthropological Study', *Culture, Medicine, and Psychiatry*, Volume 48 (2024) 792–815 <<https://doi.org/10.1007/s11013-024-09860-w>> accessed on 6 January 2025.

²⁰ RW Barnard & RH Henn, 'Overcoming Learning Obstacles: Strategies for Supporting Students with Diverse Needs', *Open Access Library Journal*, Vol. 10(8) (2023) 1-14.

²¹ E Calgaro *et al*, 'Silent no more: Identifying and Breaking through the Barriers that d/Deaf People face in Responding to Hazards and Disasters. *International journal of Disaster Risk Reduction* (2021) 57 <<https://doi.org/10.1016/j.ijdrr.2021.102156>> accessed on 7 January 2025.

4.0 Importance of Policy Awareness for Inclusion

1. Empowerment of Persons with Special Needs

The foundation for enabling people with special needs to fully engage in society and fight for their rights is policy understanding.²² People acquire the self-assurance and resources needed to confront discrimination and demand responsibility when they know the laws and structures put in place to protect them. For instance, being aware of the Discrimination Against Persons with Disabilities Act empowers people to pursue legal action in the event that they are excluded from the employment or denied access to public facilities. Families and caregivers are also empowered because they can better assist and advocate for their loved ones if they are aware of the situation. In the end, knowledgeable people and groups transform into potent change agents that propel initiatives for a more inclusive society.

2. Fostering Community Integration

By lowering stigma and misunderstandings, policy awareness promotes society integration in addition to helping people with special needs.²³ The public is more inclined to support inclusive policies like accessible infrastructure, inclusive education, and equitable hiring when they are aware of the rights and contributions of people with special needs. In order to dismantle barriers and promote acceptance, awareness initiatives that inform communities about the rights and talents of this community are essential. This enhances communities and dispels harmful preconceptions by enabling people with special needs to fully engage in social, cultural, and economic activities.²⁴

3. Strengthening Policy Implementation

²² KU Eze, 'Perspective Chapter: Bridging the Gap-Addressing the Marginalisation of Individuals with Mental Health Disabilities' in A Klimczuk & DA Dovie (Eds), *Bridging Social Inequality Gaps-Concepts, Theories, Methods, and Tools: Concepts, Theories, Methods, and Tools*, 3 <<https://www.intechopen.com/chapters/1176888>> accessed on 2 January 2025.

²³ E McGinty *et al*, 'Communication Strategies to Counter Stigma and Improve Mental Illness and Substance Use Disorder Policy', *Psychiatric Services*, Vol. 69(2) (2018) 136-146 <<https://pmc.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/articles/PMC5794622/>> accessed on 1 January 2025.

²⁴ E McGinty *et al*, *op. cit.*

For laws and regulations pertaining to disabilities to be effectively enforced, a knowledgeable public is necessary.²⁵ Policymakers, law enforcement, and advocacy organizations are more inclined to give these frameworks top priority when they recognize their significance. Authorities are under pressure to maintain responsibility and adherence to legislative requirements, such as requiring inclusive employment practices or making public areas accessible, as a result of public awareness.²⁶ Furthermore, understanding makes it easier for stakeholders—such as governmental agencies, non-governmental organizations, and the commercial sector—to work together to close enforcement gaps and create creative inclusionary solutions.

4. Promoting Equity and Social Justice

Fundamentally, raising knowledge of policies is a first step in ensuring social justice and equity for people with special needs.²⁷ Society gets one step closer to removing structural obstacles that sustain inequality by making sure these people are aware of their rights and involved in policy discussion. By bridging the gap between policy and practice, awareness makes sure that the values of inclusion, fairness, and dignity are not merely abstract concepts but rather are experienced by everyone. In addition to helping those with special needs, this also fortifies the moral and social foundation of the country, making Nigeria more inclusive and egalitarian.²⁸

5.0 Strategies for Enhancing Policy Awareness

1. Campaigns for Public Awareness

²⁵ United Nations Human Rights Office of the High Commissioner, *op. cit.*

²⁶ M Boström *et al.*, 'Sustainable and Responsible Supply Chain Governance: Challenges and Opportunities', *Journal of Cleaner Production*, Vol. 107 (2015) 1-7 <<https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jclepro.2014.11.050>> accessed on 4 January 2025.

²⁷ S Shaeffer, 'Inclusive Education: a Prerequisite for Equity and Social Justice', *Asia Pacific Education Review*, Vol. 20(2) (2019) 181-192; E Shyman, 'Toward a Globally Sensitive Definition of Inclusive Education based in Social Justice', *International Journal of Disability, Development and Education*, Vol. 62(4), (2015) 351-362.

²⁸ NC Umeh, 'Access to Inclusive Education for Learners with Disabilities in Nigeria: Discursive Interpretation of Findings', *Inclusive Education Developments in Africa* (2024) 47-71.

Campaigns for Public awareness play a central role in bridging the gap between policy creation and implementation.²⁹ These campaigns can leverage traditional and digital media platforms to disseminate information about the rights and protections afforded to persons with special needs. For example, radio programs in local languages can reach rural communities, while social media can target younger, tech-savvy audiences. Billboards, posters, and TV ads can highlight key provisions of laws like the Discrimination Against Persons with Disabilities Act, making them accessible to the broader public.³⁰ To guarantee that they reach a variety of groups, including people with disabilities themselves, these programs must be inclusive and use reachable arrangements such as braille, sign language interpretation, and simplified language.

2. Involvement of Stakeholders

All parties involved—government agencies, advocacy groups, non-governmental organizations (NGOs), and businesses—must actively participate in the effective distribution of policy information. Government agencies should take the initiative by funding awareness campaigns and working with groups that cater to people with disabilities to plan and carry out these projects. Because they frequently have grassroots contacts, NGOs and advocacy groups can aid in community mobilization and focused outreach to underserved groups. By include discussions on disability rights in their curricula and activities, businesses, schools, and places of worship can all act as platforms for increasing awareness. Private businesses can act as role models for larger societal change by supporting campaigns or putting workplace inclusion policies into place.³¹ This group effort guarantees that

²⁹ OI Eze *et al*, 'Leveraging Technology to Bridge the Policy Innovation Gap in Developing Countries: Enhancing Service Delivery and Public Engagement', *West African Journal of Interdisciplinary Research* (ISSN: 3027-1878), Vol. 2(2) <<https://www.openjournals.ijaar.org/index.php/wajir/article/view/703/901>> accessed on 4 January 2025.

³⁰ J Freiwirth, 'Community-Engagement Governance: Engaging Stakeholders for Community Impact', *The Nonprofit Quarterly* (2013) 183-209 <<https://inspiringcommunities.org.nz/wp-content/uploads/2019/03/Freiwirth-2011-Community-Engagement-Governance.pdf>> accessed on 7 January 2025.

³¹ A Ismail, *Creating a Positive Social Impact: Examining Diversity and Inclusion Strategies in Finnish Corporate Marketing* (2024) <<https://oulurepo.oulu.fi/bitstream/handle/10024/50175/nbnfioulu-202406014141.pdf;jsessionid=C5C491D133B7C4B10FDC877C76DAE656?sequence=1>> accessed on 6 January 2025.

policy awareness is a shared commitment to inclusion rather than solely the government's responsibility.

3. Training and Education

To guarantee that policy knowledge results in meaningful change, training and education are essential. To comprehend the rights of people with special needs and their role in upholding them, professionals including teachers, healthcare providers, and law enforcement personnel require particular training. For example, police personnel can receive training on how to handle situations of abuse or discrimination against people with disabilities, and educators can learn about inclusive teaching practices. Families of people with special needs should also benefit from these programs, which should teach them how to advocate for their loved ones and provide information about resources.³² Another good way to raise awareness early on and create a generation that loves equity and inclusion is to incorporate disability rights into school curricula.

4. Accessible Communication

In order to reach a varied audience, it is imperative that information regarding disability policies be presented in accessible formats. It can be difficult for many people with special requirements, such as the deaf and the visually impaired, to obtain information through traditional channels.³³ Governments and organizations must employ a variety of forms to meet this, such as audio recordings, braille publications, sign language interpretation, and reduced text versions of laws. Digital platforms and assistive technologies, such as screen readers and movies with captions, can also aid in the more efficient distribution of information. In addition to empowering individuals with special needs to comprehend their rights,³⁴ these initiatives show a dedication to involving them in the awareness-raising process itself.

³² CS Banks *et al*, *Including families of children with special needs: A how-to-do-it manual for Librarians* (Neal-Schuman Publisher, Chicago, 2014) 1

³³ L Ocasio-Stoutenburg & B Harry, *Case studies in building equity through family advocacy in special education: A companion volume to meeting families where they are* (Teachers College Press, 2021) 1.

³⁴ A Darvishy & J Manning, 'Accessible Digital Documentary Heritage: guidelines for the preparation of documentary heritage in accessible formats for persons with disabilities' (2020) <https://digitalcollection.zhaw.ch/bitstream/11475/20991/1/2020_Darvishy-Manning_Accessible-digital-documentary-heritage.pdf> accessed on 6 January 2025.

5. Community-Based Awareness Programs

One of the most effective ways to promote policy awareness is through grassroots, community-based programs tailored to Nigeria's diverse cultural and linguistic landscape.³⁵ These programs should involve local leaders, traditional rulers, and community influencers to address the unique needs of each community. For instance, in Anambra State, campaigns could use Igbo to educate people about the rights of persons with special needs, ensuring that the message resonates with local traditions and values. A practical example is the work of the Joint National Association of Persons with Disabilities (JONAPWD) in Enugu State.³⁶ To inform families and community members about the Discrimination Against Persons with Disabilities Act and its implications for public places, work, and education, they arranged town hall meetings. At the grassroots level, these regional initiatives make policy provisions more relevant and actionable while also assisting in the reduction of stigma and misinformation.

6. Leveraging Technology for Dissemination

In Nigeria, policy awareness can be greatly increased through the use of digital platforms and technology, particularly among younger, urban populations.³⁷ Campaigns that highlight important facets of disability rights and share success stories of inclusion can be run on social media sites like Facebook, Instagram, and Twitter, focusing on urban areas like Lagos, Abuja, and Port Harcourt. For example, in Lagos State, an NGO named The Inclusion Project used social media to promote the significance of accessible transportation for those with disabilities.³⁸ In order to start a national dialogue and eventually persuade the Lagos State administration to implement wheelchair-accessible buses, they collaborated with influencers and employed hashtags. This illustration demonstrates how effective internet activism is at elevating voices and encouraging responsibility. Mobile messaging apps like WhatsApp can be used to

³⁵ S Leonard *et al*, 'The Role of Community Leaders and Local Businesses in Effective Communication Usage for Insecurity Reduction in Ekiti State, Nigeria', *World Journal of Sociology and Law* (2024) 35.

³⁶ P Okah *et al*, 'Formal support services for People living With Disabilities (PWDs) in Southeast Nigeria', *Journal of Social Work in Developing Societies*, 5(2) (2023) 50 <<https://www.ajol.info/index.php/jswds/article/view/256751/242525>> accessed on 3 January 2025.

³⁷ A Agbeyangi *et al*, 'Nigeria's ICT and Economic Sustainability in the Digital Age', *arXiv:2401.03996v1 [cs.CY]* (2024) <<https://arxiv.org/pdf/2401.03996>> accessed on 3 January 2025.

³⁸ World Bank Group, *op cit*.

convey brief, easily readable messages in local languages to underserved and rural areas, making sure that even people without internet access are informed.

7. Capacity Building and Training

Another recommendation is the establishment of capacity-building programs for key players, such as schools, doctors, and law enforcement. These programs' primary objective should be to equip these professionals with the knowledge and skills necessary to safeguard and defend the rights of individuals with disabilities.³⁹ For example, the Kano Disability Rights Commission has trained teachers in inclusive education methods in Kano State to better support kids with disabilities in public schools. To improve service delivery and ensure that policies are implemented successfully, such initiatives might be extended across the country. Workshops for training can also cover topics like handling discrimination complaints, addressing cultural stereotypes about impairments, and designing accessible spaces.⁴⁰

8. Government Accountability and Monitoring

Lastly, to guarantee that disability-related laws are implemented effectively, the government must set up strong monitoring and evaluation systems. Establishing impartial organizations to monitor adherence to regulations such as the Discrimination Against Persons with Disabilities Act is part of this.⁴¹ For instance, the administration of Ondo State set up a disability desk office with the responsibility of keeping an eye on accessibility in public spaces and services. These kinds of programs are admirable, but in order to guarantee accountability and openness, they should be extended to other states and involve frequent reporting.⁴² In order to enable people with special needs to report rights abuses and offer suggestions for policy changes, policymakers should also work with civil society organizations to establish feedback systems.

³⁹ United Nations Human Rights Office of the High Commissioner, *op. cit.*

⁴⁰ K Dali, 'The Lifeways we avoid: The role of information avoidance in discrimination against people with disabilities', *Journal of Documentation*, Vol. 74(6) (2018) 1258-1273.

⁴¹ *Ibid.*

⁴² H Yu & DG Robinson, 'The New Ambiguity of Open Government', *UCLA L. Rev. Discourse*, Vol. 59 (2011) 178.

6.0 Conclusion

One of the most important steps in developing or building a society that is more equal and inclusive in Nigeria is raising effective policy knowledge of the rights of people with special needs.⁴³ Significant gaps in public knowledge and implementation persist despite the existence of legislative frameworks such as the Discrimination Against Persons with Disabilities Act. These disparities support structural impediments that prevent people with special needs from fully engaging in healthcare, work, education, and other facets of society. A multidimensional strategy that emphasizes stakeholder engagement, advocacy, and awareness is needed to address these issues. For a country aiming for sustainable development, the path toward inclusiveness is both a moral and legal requirement. Nigeria can unleash the potential of millions of its people by increasing public awareness of disability rights and making sure that policies are properly explained and carried out. Governments, people, corporate sector participants, and civil society organizations will all need to work together to complete this process. By working together, these parties may provide a setting free from prejudice and exclusion, enabling people with special needs to lead happy, meaningful lives. Any policy's potential to significantly affect people's lives is ultimately what determines its success. For Nigeria, this entails going above and beyond rhetorical pledges to promote an inclusive culture where diversity is valued and everyone has an equal chance to contribute to the advancement of the country. The country may provide a standard for other African countries to follow by bridging the gap between policy and practice via persistent campaigning, education, and accountability.

7.0 Recommendations

1. Governments should initiate nationwide campaigns using accessible formats like radio, TV, and social media to educate the public on the rights of persons with special needs.
2. Disability rights and inclusion should be incorporated into school curricula to foster awareness and empathy from an early age.

⁴³ NC Umeh, *op. cit.*

3. Train educators, healthcare providers, law enforcement, and policymakers should be trained on how to implement and support inclusive practices effectively.
4. Traditional rulers, religious leaders, and community influencers should be involved in spreading awareness and addressing cultural stigmas about disabilities.
5. Policy information should be made available in braille, sign language, audio formats, and local languages to reach all demographics, including rural and underserved areas.
6. Social media and mobile platforms should be utilized to amplify disability rights campaigns and share success stories to inspire action.
7. Independent monitoring bodies should be established to track the implementation of disability laws and address non-compliance with actionable penalties.
8. NGOs and Private Sector should collaborate to encourage partnerships between government, NGOs, and private businesses to fund, design, and implement inclusive programs and services.

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