

EDUCATION AS A TOOL FOR SOCIAL JUSTICE AND PSYCHOLOGICAL WELLBEING FOR WOMEN WITH DISABILITIES IN A DEVELOPING COUNTRY: THE CHALLENGES AND PROSPECTS IN NIGERIA

Veronica I. Umeasiegbu
Southern University

Debra A. Harley
University of Kentucky

Abstract

Education is universally accepted as an agency for individual and national development. Education should be available for everyone. Women with disabilities in developing countries such as Nigeria have very limited access to education. This lack of access is often a hindrance to their emotional development, psychological wellbeing, and involvement in their communities. This article explores the educational policy, current situations, and practices in Nigeria. Specific attention is given to some discriminatory practices and barriers that hinder the human rights and education of women with disabilities. New directions in the ways that could increase and improve the education of women with disabilities are proposed. Furthermore, it is proposed that a social justice perspective be used in addressing the educational and psychological needs of women with disabilities.

Keywords: Women with disabilities, women wellbeing, women psychological, education, social justice, Nigeria

Introduction

Education is an agency for development and self-reliance. Education is regarded as fundamental human right and a major strategy for poverty reduction, elimination of child labor and promotion of sustainable development (United Nations Children Fund, 2004). The United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) estimates that about 75 million children of primary school age do not attend school globally, of which one third are children with disabilities. Over 90 percent of children in developing countries are out of school (UNESCO, 2011), and this large number reflects an enormous loss in global human development. Nigeria's share of loss of human development is disproportionately large because of its education system that does not meet the needs of learners with disabilities. Disability is an important factor in conjunction with gender, race, and caste, which interacts to impoverish people and keep them poor (Mji, MacLachan, Melling-Williams, & Gcaza, 2009).

The population of Nigeria is estimated to be about 148 million, approximately 49.2% of the population is female, and it has a Human Development Index (GDI) of 0.423, ranking 142th out of 169 countries (United Nations Population Fund [UNFPA], n.d; Human Development Report, 2010). Gender disparity and discrimination exist in various areas of life such as education for women, family decision-making, access to wealth creation and political representation (UNFPA, n.d.). In Nigeria, women with disabilities are discriminated against in job appointments, even when they have the academic qualifications for the job. For instance, "the poor response of the Nigerian constitutional provisions to discrimination against women is evident in the fact that economic, social and cultural rights (ESCR) are not known to the Nigerian Constitution as legal rights enforceable by the rights bearer" (The Nigerian NGO CEDAW Coalition, 2008, p. 2).

Education for women is very important and even more important for women with disabilities. Women who are educated are more likely to apply their knowledge in other areas of their personal lives, such as making informed decisions about marriage relationships, and participation in employment and politics (Stromquist, 2006). Education empowers women with disabilities to get involved in their health care needs, be self-advocates, and participate in community development. The participation of women with and without disabilities in addressing the issues of gender equality is crucial in different areas of life and at every step. This involvement should include policy-making, planning and implementation levels.

Education for people with disabilities should be seen through the lens of social justice (Alston, Harley, & Middleton, 2006). It should be about empowerment, involving provision of equal access to

resources in the community, removal of individual and institutional barriers, and implementation of policies that increase their self-determination. Unfortunately, social justice and human rights are lacking generally for people with disabilities in Nigeria. Women with disabilities are more vulnerable for all types of abuse based on their gender and the traditional beliefs about the role of females in the society (Murthy, Upadhyay, & Nwadinobi, 2010). Women with disabilities in Nigeria suffer multiple forms of discrimination, which results in exclusion from community participation especially in education. Subsequently, there is high incidence of illiteracy, poverty and abuse among the population of women with disabilities in the country (Fryers, 2010). In this article the terms female and women are used to refer to both women and girls and are used interchangeably.

Gender Equality in Education: A Global Perspective

Globally, education is regarded as an instrument for achieving equality between diverse social groups and among men and women (Stromquist, 2006). According to Perry, Ferreira, and Walton (2003), "education is the most important productive asset most people will ever own" (p. 26). Education is regarded as an investment since it leads to the accomplishment of other developmental efforts of individuals, and the society (Basic Education Coalition, 2004; United States Agency for International Development (USAID), 2005). Despite the many known benefits of education, gender disparity still exists globally. Women in many countries lack access to education, and hence are denied the development of their human capital needed for economic growth, which education provides. USAID (2008) defined gender equality to as "males and females have equal opportunities to realize their full human rights and contribute to and benefit from economic, social, cultural, and political development" (p. 5).

The international community has shown a commitment to education with programs such as the Education for All initiative (EFA) (1999), the Dakar agreement of 2000, the *Millennium Development Goals* (MDGs) of 2000 (Stromquist, 2006), and the *United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities* (UNCRPD). There have been increased advocacy for the need to provide women more opportunities for education in order to reduce the existing gender inequality to education at different levels (Stromquist, 2006). The developed nations are more advanced in gender education compared to developing nations. This lack of access to education for women has resulted in limited social progress of many developing countries. Rural communities in developing countries are more negatively impacted by a lack of access for women to education when compared to communities in urban areas and cities. Girls and women who are poor and females with disabilities are highly unlikely to have opportunities to attend school. A report by the UNESCO (2003) shows that the countries of Latin America have accomplished more to increase access to education for females at primary, secondary and tertiary levels when compared to other developing countries.

Education as Human Rights

Education is a basic human right. It is a key to empowerment especially for women with disabilities, enabling them to seek and demand their rightful positions in the society. Various human rights instruments such as the *UN Standard Rules on the Equalization of Opportunities for Persons with Disabilities* (1993) (United Nations, 1993), the *World Programme of Action Concerning Disabled Persons* (1982) (United Nations, 1982), and the *Protocol to the African Charter on Human and Peoples' Rights on Rights of Women in Africa* (African Commission on Human and Peoples' Rights, 2003) have stated the need to eliminate all forms of discrimination against women. A new addition to the previously existing human rights instruments is the UNCRPD. Umeasiegbu, Mpofo and Johnson (2012) stated that the UNCRPD as an international legal and policy instrument is meant to tackle the discrimination and oppression that people with disabilities face in different countries. Using the UNCRPD to tackle the challenges women with disabilities face in developing countries can only be achieved if UNCRPD is implemented. Article 24 of the UNCRPD states that:

States are to ensure equal access to primary and secondary education, vocational training, adult education and lifelong learning. Education is to employ the appropriate materials, techniques and forms of communication. Pupils with support needs are to receive support measures, and pupils who are blind, deaf and deaf-blind are to receive their education in the most appropriate modes of communication from teachers who are fluent in sign language and Braille. Education of persons with disabilities must foster their participation in society, their sense of dignity and self-worth and the development of their personality, abilities and creativity (United Nations, 2006a, para. 16).

The intent of the UNCRPD is to equalize access to education for women with disabilities through effective individualized supports. In order for this to occur, a heightened awareness is necessary on the part of educational institutions, government, and individuals. If the goal of full inclusion of women is to be realized in a social context, a key dimension is the provision of educational, economic, political, and gender equality.

The Nigerian government supported the UN standard rules on the equalization of opportunities for people with disability and other human rights instruments. A decree was promulgated in 1993 to protect the rights, and increase the social inclusion of people with disability. Despite the declaration of full participation in the disability agenda of the United Nations by the Nigerian government, Nigerians with disabilities are still faced with many challenges (Amusat, 2009; Michailakis, 1997). Non-implementation of national and international disability-related legislations and policies in Nigeria has been the major tool for discrimination against women with disabilities.

Lang and Upah (2008) stated that within contemporary Nigerian society, there is little appreciation that disability is fundamentally an issue inexorably link to and rooted in human rights. The common perception, held by policy-makers and the public at large, is that people with disabilities and disability issues are viewed in terms of charity and welfare. Consequently, this viewpoint is a significant, entrenched factor that seriously militates against the social inclusion of people with disabilities within the country. The 1993 Nigerians with Disabilities Decree was supposed to protect the rights of persons with disabilities and provide an inclusive society, but none of the stipulated rights has been implemented. Although the UNCRPD is fairly new and was ratified by Nigeria in 2010, the UNCRPD is an opportunity for Nigerian government to secure the human rights of persons with disabilities.

Women, Disability, Education and Work in Nigeria

Education for people with disabilities in Nigeria is an issue that deserves crucial assessment and intervention. The global literacy level for adults with disabilities is as low as 3%. The literacy level for women with disabilities is even lower. Women with disabilities experience discriminations that exclude them from attending school (United Nations, 2003; Parnes, Cameron, Christie, Cockburn, Hashemi, & Yoshida, 2009), are marginalized on the basis of their gender and disability (Honda & Lei, 2003), and are socially isolated due to environmental and discriminatory barriers (Mji et al, 2009). Often, the numerous barriers relegate women with disabilities to a life of psychological problems and low self-esteem. There may be similarities in the types of problems that women with disabilities in developing countries deal with, but different regions may have peculiar issues due to culture and political climate of that region.

Disability Models in Nigerian Society.

Historically, disability was understood in mythological or religious terms, with such beliefs that people with disabilities were possessed by spirits or that disability was a punishment for past wrongdoing. These views are still present in some cultures (World Health Organization (WHO), 2010). In the context of Nigerian culture the prevailing disability models are the religious/traditional model, and the medical model. Disability is still understood by many Nigerians in terms of an act of God, witchcraft activities, reincarnation and punishment for wrongdoing. For example, some tribes in Nigeria still believe that certain disabilities such as mental illness and epilepsy are caused by possession of evil spirits. This belief in evil spirits as the cause of some disabilities is evident by the type of intervention that many family members of the person with mental illness or epilepsy seek for the person. It is common in Nigeria to find people with mental illness put in chains in some spiritual houses, churches and the houses of a medicine man. Prayers and rituals are made, and herbs are given to the person with mental illness or epilepsy for cure of their illness. However, people also seek help from mental health hospitals.

During the nineteenth and twentieth century's development in medical sciences led to the understanding that disability has biological and medical basis. The medical model of disability sees disability as a problem of the individual, which requires a cure. Later during the 1970s, the medical model was challenged, with the development of a social model. The social model focused on the social barriers, negative attitudes and discrimination that people with disabilities face. The social model emphasized that disability is a societal problem rather than a problem within an individual; and removing social barriers is needed, not just a medical cure (WHO, 2010). Because of the influences of

medical and rehabilitation professionals in Nigeria, the public sees disability as an illness that needs medical intervention and, therefore, a person with disability needs to seek medical intervention. However, rehabilitation is usually considered as a type of optional extra to the more “important” medical care (Amusat, 2009, p. 32). There is no focus on the social aspects of disability, and the need to make the society more inclusive of persons with disabilities. The lead government department for disabilities is the Federal Ministry of Women Affairs and Social Development. However, in recent years, the Ministry has been grossly underfunded, particularly for the Rehabilitation Department (Lang & Upah, 2008). The end result is less available services for women with disabilities. In addition, there are high levels of corruption in the government, which trickles down to various officials who are suppose to advocate for and implement disability policies (Amusat, 2009).

Internationally, there is a shift in the way disability is understood and defined. There is a paradigm shift from medical model to biopsychosocial model of disability. Previously disability has been given different definitions. The most current international definition of disability comes from the *International Classification of Functioning, Disability and Health (ICF)* (WHO, 2001). The *ICF* defines disability as an “umbrella term for impairments, activity limitations or participation restriction” (p. 17), which results from the interaction between the person with a health condition and environment factors. The *United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities* (United Nations, 2006b) defines disability as an evolving concept that “results from the interaction between persons with impairments and attitudinal and environmental barriers that hinders their full and effective participation in society on an equal basis with others” (p. 3). A global understanding of the impact of environment on health conditions and disability may probably bring positive reactions to disability and people living with disabilities.

Cultural issues. Cultural beliefs in Nigeria affect every aspects of the life of women with disabilities. Cultural beliefs and practices affect the interaction of the child with disability and her family. Families understand disability from their cultural worldview. Therefore, culture affects the way girls and women with disabilities interact with their family and whether or not they participate in the community. The extended family system practice in Nigeria provides support for the welfare of the members of the family. Primarily, people with disabilities are supported by their families and the government does little in providing for citizens with disabilities. A disability presents a burden on the family, thus, access to education is determined by resources of the family, and by literacy level of family members. The likelihood that a woman with a disability will be educated increases if the members of her immediate family are educated (Oniye, 2004). Different societies have different perspectives about disability and involvement of people with disabilities in such society. According to Kuno (2007) and Chataika, Umeasiegbu, and Mpofo (in press), attitudes towards disability affects the policies and services that are put in place to serve the needs of people with disabilities, and how the policies are implemented. Many people in Nigeria are ignorant about causes of disability. There are negative attitudes about disability. People with disabilities are treated with pity and as unfortunate ones. Expectations on the ability of a person with disability to accomplish great things are very low. A woman with disability suffers more discrimination because traditionally women are given low status. Women with disabilities are the poorest of the poor in Nigeria. Because of the unprecedented level of poverty among this group, women with disabilities often become street beggars. Ironically, since Nigerian society sees people with disabilities as objects of pity and charity, the society is comfortable with people with disabilities in this role and prefer giving them money on the streets to giving them jobs and shelter (Celine, 2010).

Poverty and disability. People with disabilities and their families remain the poorest of the poor in the Nigerian society. Poverty remains the major reason for non-attendance to school for most people with disabilities. Education is expensive; families of children with disabilities may send their children to acquire basic education (primary school level), which may be free. Although primary school is very important, it is not enough for self-sustenance of an individual. Secondary and tertiary levels or education are needed for empowerment of women with disabilities. Most women with disabilities do not have family members that can support them financially for secondary and tertiary education. The traditional practice that denies women inheritance and property rights is one of the harmful traditional practices that disempower women and keep them in poverty.

Nigerian Educational System and Policy

The Nigerian National Policy on Education (NPE) was developed in 1977. The Federal government adopted education as an instrument per excellence, recognizing education as a veritable

tool for affecting national development (Oniye, 2004). The National Education Policy has been reviewed several times over the years with the aim of improving the educational system in a changing world (Ojedokun, Oyewusi, & Oluwatosin, 2007). The national policy specifically address education of women in section 6.1.3, which states that:

For (the) Nigerian women to enjoy the full benefits of contemporary living, they require basic education to contribute meaningfully to the development of the country. Government shall in this regard increase girls and women's participation in education irrespective of their location and circumstances (p. 17).

Women are still expected to fulfill the traditional roles of wife, mother, and home keeper, with the additional responsibility of handling challenges of the modern world of automation and technology. Nigerian women are cannot be effective in these roles unless they are fortified with an adequate and functional education (Oniye, 2004).

The UNICEF is partnering with Nigerian government to promote women education with the initiation of various projects such as the African Girls' Education Initiation. According to UNGEI, the Girls intervention school programs achieved 28% in enrolment rate, and 8% decrease the rate of dropout. The United Nations Girls Education Initiative (UNGEI) has led to the establishment of the Nigerian Girls' Education Initiative (NGEI). The main aim of NGEI is "to improve the quality of life of girls in Nigeria through a collaborative approach to their education" (UNGEI, n.d., para. 6). Yet, the changes in educational policies yielded confusing dividends instead of giving meaningful direction to the best educational policy, and functional programs (Aluede, 2006). During the 1993 UNICEF/UNESCO sponsored Pan African Conference on Education of Girls, the participants of that conference noted that Africa lagged behind in female access to education compared to other regions of the world. It is almost two decades after that observation, yet many countries of Africa still have huge disparities in education of women (Obasi, 1997).

In both developed and developing countries education produces the workforce necessary to keep the wheel of the economy turning (Anugwom, 2009). Over 15 years ago, James Aggey echoed the importance of education for women stating that, if you educate a man, you educate an individual, but if you educate a woman, you educate a family – i.e., a nation (cited in National Commission for Colleges of Education [NCCE], 1998). Today, this sentiment remains true throughout the world.

Education of Women and Girls with Disabilities in Nigeria

Although Nigeria and most other low-income countries of the world are signatories to international instruments related to education, inequalities still persist in those countries. Girls' education has taken center stage in most developing countries. Many young girls do not attend school in Sub-Sahara Africa. Of the 121 million children estimated to be out-of-school globally 65 million are girls. Over 80% of the out-of-school girls live in Sub-Sahara Africa. Girls' access to basic education in Nigeria is low. Only about 20% of women in northern Nigeria have attended school or are literate (Ajuwon, 2008).

Girls are pulled out of school when families are under economic pressure, and for early marriages. The problem of male-female disparity in access to education in Nigeria is almost the same for primary, secondary, and tertiary institutions (Oniye, 2004). Among the population of women with disabilities there exist additional degrees of discrimination according to type of disability. Lack of access to educational opportunity affect women with certain types of disabilities more than others. Obi (2006) stated that even after the Beijing Conference of 1998, and the campaigns against gender discrimination in Africa, women with visual impairments are discriminated more than women with other types of disabilities. The girl-child education in Nigeria for females with hearing impairments is still a mirage, which could be traced to parental factors. Parents view educating a female child as a wasted investment while the male child is a worthwhile asset, and believe that females with hearing impairments are academically lazy. Other factors contributing to the lack of education for the girl-child with hearing impairments are the financial difficulties they encounter because they are left to fend for themselves at a young age and members of society believe that it is a waste if resources investing in the education of persons with disabilities, especially the female ones (Akinpelu, 2007). The education disparities between women with disabilities, women without disabilities, and the general population are alarming. According to Akinpelu, the likelihood of women with disabilities having formal education is low, with 37% being literate compared with 57% of males with disabilities.

In addition, parents in Nigeria consider women's education as a waste of funds (Aluko, 2006).

With the enactment of the 2004 Universal Basic Education (UBE) legislation to help achieve the goals of the Education for All (EFA), there is now mandatory compulsory, free, and nine-year continuous education in Nigeria. All the 36 States of Nigeria have enacted the UBE legislation in their States. A National School Census in 2005 revealed that primary school net enrolment ratio was at 83.71% (female enrolment of 81.39%, and male enrolment of 87.01%).

Special education in Nigeria is defined as "a formal, special educational training given to people (children and adults) with special needs... who fall into three categories: the *disabled*, the *disadvantaged* and the *gifted and talented*" (Nigerian National Policy on Education, 2004, p. 14). Special education services include adult literacy and non-formal education for those who are eligible. Three of the four adult literacy objectives can be valuable for non-formal education of women with disabilities. These objectives are: (a) the provision of literacy and continuing education for youths and adults who did not received formal education, or did not complete elementary school; (b) the provision of remedial education for those who did not complete secondary education, and (c) provision of on-the-job and vocational training for skill acquisition (Nigeria Federal Ministry of Education, 2008). Unfortunately, in Nigeria inclusion still remains in the realm of theory and far from practice (Obiakor & Offor, 2011). However, it must not be considered in the absolute, but approached with cautious implementation and inclusion should be phased in (Garuba, 2003).

Case Study

Maria is a 13 year old girl who lives with her parents in the city of Enugu. She had polio at the age of three years. Although they are not rich her parents are doing everything they can to see that their daughter receive an adequate education. Maria had just graduated from elementary school. Maria says she loves school and is enthusiastic about starting junior secondary school in the coming school year at a popular faith-based private secondary academy. Most of her friends in elementary school plan to attend this same school. A few months before the end of her elementary school Maria applied to the faith-based private school, took an entrance written examination and interviewed. A few weeks later she received a letter of admission.

On the first day of school, Maria and her parents went for registration. The principal told them that Maria could not register; the school does not have the capacity to support a girl with disability and who walks with the aid of crutches. Maria was devastated and refused to attend other schools. Her parents consulted a disability Non-governmental Organization (NGO) to help them advocate for Maria. The NGO visited the school principal and asked that some modifications be made by the school to allow Maria to attend, but this request was not granted.

Discussion Questions:

1. What human rights and social justice issues are involved in this case?
2. What are the modifications that could have been made, and what are alternative options to providing the educational needs of Maria?
3. What effects could the school rejection have on Maria and how can she be helped?

Women and Work in Nigeria

It is increasingly being recognized that inclusion of people with disabilities into the development mainstream will have a significant effect in any plan to reduce poverty in the developing world (Amusat, 2009). The National Policy of Education of 2004 states that the guiding principles of Education in Nigeria are the equipping of every citizen with knowledge, skills, attitudes and values to enable him or her to derive maximum benefits from his or her membership of society, lead a fulfilling life, and contribute his or her own quota toward the development and welfare of the community (Federal Republic of Nigeria, 2004). For people with disabilities, especially women, this philosophy of education is far-fetched (Akinpelu (2007) due to traditions and culture, which are hostile to women (Oniye, 2004).

The disparity in terms of employment for women could be linked to inequality of educational opportunities for boys and girls (Akinpelu, 2007). The need for women education in Nigeria is also informed by the fact that purposeful occupational achievement can only be achieved through the provision of effective and functional education and/or guidance and counseling (Oniye, 2004). Smith (2011) in a survey of disability in Kogi and Niger states found that income for females with disabilities consisted of: (a) no income at 68%, (b) begging at 23%, (c) petty trading at 32%, and (d) housewife at 24%, respectively. Income levels for this population were 89% had no monthly income, 62% had monthly incomes of 2000 Naira (N) or less (US \$15), 33% had up to 5000N and 6% earned over 8000N (US \$38).) In Nigeria there hardly appears to be direct a direct one-to-one relationship between education and employment because the number of women in formal employment is not commensurate with the number of women with formal education. Often, "economically active women are located in the informal sector where education is not a key variable in involvement" (Anugwom, 2009, p. 131).

Situation Report from the Field

Source: Dr Ojini Udezue; Director, Women Initiatives and Support Services Organization (WISSO). Enugu, Nigeria

The Federal and State governments seem to forget the existence of such people in the communities. Policies to recognize or protect people with disabilities that exist in the national or state laws are not implemented. For instance, where there is education policy for people with disabilities, there is no visible implementation by way of provision of facilities and equipment in schools for such children who managed to get admission into secondary schools and higher institutions.

As far as I can recall, there is only one School for the Blind in Oji in Enugu state, serving Enugu and Anambra states. It was established in early 1970s for both boys and girls. By the time our Team in WISSO had the opportunity to administer the USA Ambassador Girls' Scholarship project in 2003 - 2005, the institution was visibly in need of renovation, supplies, provisions and equipment. Most of the teachers were not trained in special education for the blind, not conversant with the Braille. There was sign of negligence by the state and federal government in spite of the education policy for the blind. There is only one School for children with Hearing Disability in Enugu state, there again, the teachers were not specialists in Sign Language. The school lacked teaching equipment and begged for renovation and better facilities.

In effect, there are hindrances, which could be ameliorated with sound and effective government education policies. Since such policies are for the well-to-do, there are no viable structures or system to cater effectively for the welfare of people with disabilities. In the secondary school system, children with disabilities do not receive any special attention, and no special equipment is made available for their special needs, such as provision of Braille machines, Sign Language teaching, audio/ visual aids, etc. Fortunately, intervention of some private organizations and NGOs has brought relief and support to some lucky ones. With scholarships and sponsorship a few have managed to matriculate through secondary and higher education.

Other hindrances come from the communities and families of children with disabilities in the form of neglect and lack of support and motivation. This is attributable to shame, poverty, illiteracy or fear. Poverty and ignorance have made life miserable for such children. However, some benevolent individuals and private organizations and NGOs intervene with sponsorship and scholarships. This affects a low percentage of the population of people with disabilities. All said, only effective government policies and implementation could cause appropriate intervention and rescue for these people.

The USA Ambassador's Scholarship for girls with disabilities guaranteed completion of primary school education for all the girls, and also for those in the secondary schools. At the end of the three-year program we monitored the girls who participated in the USA Ambassador's Girls' Scholarship. Only about 2 out of the 30 girls made it to higher institutions. The two girls were sponsored and supported by their families and well-wishers.

Numerous obstacles negate the perceived benefits of increasing access of women to education and work. These include the patriarchal nature of the Nigerian labor market and few patriarchal counter-influences, lower income in relation to men, low quality employment, sexual harassment and violence, exclusion from retirement and pensions, women's behavioral attitudes and work orientation that show them as not hard working or able to shoulder work related pressures because they do not want to prove the men as wrong, and women's choice of marriage partners who have enough resources to support the family comfortably (Anugwom, 2009; Oniye, 2004). Work and education for women in general and those with disabilities specifically in Nigeria is one of national urgency and development because education is explicitly linked to development. Anugwom summarized the implications of education and work for women for development in Nigeria as follows:

The more educated a nation's citizenry the more likely developed the nation in question. In the same vein, any economic system that fails to consummate its human resources because of gender differences cannot realize real or genuine development. It is in this sense that the education of women in Nigeria, their involvement in work and the effects of this on development becomes important (p. 132).

Women and, especially those with disabilities in Nigeria find themselves victimized by social, cultural, environmental, and economic disadvantages that diminish their chances of realizing their maximum potential and of participating fully in society.

Nigeria still remains physically inaccessible for people with disabilities. The inaccessible physical environment is a huge barrier to participation in learning and employment. Many people with disabilities are excluded in participation because the environment is not accessible, a lack of trained rehabilitation specialists, and accessible information and technology are lacking for people with sensory impairments. People with disabilities lack assistive devices such as manual wheelchairs, which could help them to participate in school and the workforce. Basic technology is very expensive. Another issue is that in developing countries such as Nigeria, wheelchairs are not durable. Even if a person owns a wheelchair, the roads are so inaccessible. The person with mobility challenges will need another person to push her to and from school, and those with visual impairments must have someone to lead them by hand for them to access school, work, and to participate in other aspects of society.

Education as a Tool for Social Justice and Psychological Well Being

Social justice has been defined as the elimination of institutionalized domination and oppression (Young, 1990). Barker (2003) in *The Social Work Dictionary* defines social justice as "an ideal condition in which all members of society have the same basic rights, protection, opportunities, obligations, and social benefits. Implicit in this concept is the notion that historical inequities should be acknowledged and remedied through specific measures" (pp. 404-405). Social justice in education implies the availability of educational opportunities, equal distribution of resources, and removal of constraints to enable individuals' self-development and self-determination. Achieving social justice in a society can be hindered by prejudice, discrimination and oppression (Segal, 2012). Education is a tool in the promotion of social justice (Enslin, 2006) for any group, and of great importance in empowering the powerless. According to Alston, Harley and Middleton (2006) people with disabilities have been humiliated economically and socially. The social justice construct can be helpful in advocating for the wellbeing of people with disabilities, specially the minority groups such as women with disabilities. The social justice concepts used in multicultural counseling can be useful in understanding issues facing women with disabilities in developing countries, since they belong to double minority groups based on gender and disability. Addressing the injustices towards women with disabilities can be achieved in the context of social justice by providing opportunities for them to strive and succeed. The potential psychological benefits of social justice (e.g., activism, empowerment, self-esteem, self-worth) for women in Nigeria may be realized through women's ability to determine choices in life and to influence the direction of change through ability to gain control over material and non-material resources (Mahajan, 2012).

In developing countries as well as developed countries, in order for women with disabilities to increase community participation a substantial amount of works needs to be done in areas of personal development such as self-esteem, confidence, assertiveness, education, and training around rights (Women with Disabilities Australia [WWDA], 2007). Increasingly, the idea of empowering poor women in the Third World has been gaining importance in the agenda of NGO, national governments,

and donor agencies such as the World Bank and the Inter-American Development Bank (Mahajan, 2012). In 2012, the United Nations Commission on Sustainable Development (CSD) made recommendations concerning the importance of psychosocial wellbeing, psychosocial empowerment, and mental health to the achievement of sustainable development (see Table 1). In addition, an examination of the discipline of psychology reveals contributions to social justice for and wellbeing of women on a global scale. Grabe (2012) in an examination of women's empowerment and transformative change in the context of international development found that land ownership and organizational participation among women were related to more progressive gender ideology, and in turn, women's power and control within the marital relationship, individual levels of agency, and subjective wellbeing. Fisher and Bolton-Holz (2010) found that the more a woman experiences sexist events, the less fair and just her life seems; in turn, she feels less control of her life and reports heightened mental health concerns (depression, anxiety, less wellbeing). Finally, Montgomery (2011) interviewed a sample of international senior health psychologist to ascertain how their work has contributed to social justice in the world. Each psychologist responded with positive impact and, provided future perspectives of social justice. Those perspectives included: (a) serious threats to social justice in the coming years because of a global economic crisis, (b) an increasing recognition that health psychology has a social and moral responsibility to contribute to social justice and improve equity in wellbeing globally, (c) the most efficient way of improving the lives of disadvantaged women is to support frontline workers and social care providers who work with them on a daily basis, (d) efforts to engage marginalized groups who have been socially excluded illustrates the need to further expand the role of critical health psychology, (e) reducing inequalities of disability requires keeping issues of social injustice as a focal point, and (f) social justice should be linked to the bigger issue of [a lack of] ethical leadership in public about psychology.

Nigerian educational policies need to be tailored based on the principle of human rights and social justice in recognition of oppressive circumstances that women with disabilities have endured for decades. A number of actions, described below, offer a good opportunity for Nigeria to rethink the way that disability advocacy is conceptualized and how to empower women with disabilities and achieve social justice through education.

Implementation of National and International Declarations

The United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (UNCRPD) (United Nations, 2006a), and the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) (United Nations, 2000) are two instruments that can positively impact the education of girls and women with disabilities globally, particularly in developing countries. Since Nigeria is lacking in implementation of international instruments that protect the human rights of persons with disabilities, the UNCRPD and MDG can give directions to efforts in education and social justice for women with disabilities with emphasis on implementations and monitoring of those international developmental instruments. The ultimate goal is to use the principles of the UNCRPD to construct education in tandem with advocacy to remove disabling barriers, to ensure human rights and fundamental freedoms of individuals with disabilities, and to achieve fundamental attitudinal, social, cultural change. It is suggested by WWDA (2007) that UNCRPD "goes a long way in affirming the rights and dignity of people with disabilities and is potentially a powerful tool in addressing violations of their human rights. In this context, it affords the opportunity to serve as a potent framework to inform and guide domestic disability legislation, policy, programs, and service" (pp.2-3). The next step is for the Nigerian government to identify strategies for implementation and monitoring of the UNCRPD by incorporating it into their developmental efforts at all levels of organizational structure, policy formation, economic priority, cultural and community pursuits, and educational opportunities.

Mainstreaming Disability in Education: Community-based Rehabilitation

The World Health Organization initiated Community-based rehabilitation (CBR) after the Alma-Ata Declaration of 1978. CBR was described as "a strategy to improve access to rehabilitation services for people with disabilities in low-income and middle-income countries, by making optimum use of local resources" (WHO, 2010, p. 1). The principles of CBR are based on the principles of the UNCRPD. The concepts of CBR have been expanded to include five components: health, education, livelihood, social and empowerment. The education component of CBR facilitates education for people with disabilities by working with education sector to see that people with disabilities have access to education, and to facilitate inclusive education at primary, secondary, tertiary and vocational levels.

According to WHO (2010), the desired outcomes for the role of CBR in education are to: (a) access to personalized and human rights sensitive learning to all people with disabilities, (b) access to inclusive education for all children with disabilities, (c) accessible and friendly local schools, with flexible curriculum, trained and supported teachers, and availability of resources, (d) involvement of people with disabilities in education as role-models, decision-makers and contributors, and (e) awareness creation in the community on education of people with disabilities, and (f) build multisectoral collaboration, and institutional advocacy at all levels to enhance policies that facilitate inclusive education. The CBR model can be used to implement the national and international policies that will enable people with disabilities enjoy fundamental rights just like other citizens (Chataika, Umeasiegbu, & Mpofu, 2011). There are NGOs and organizations of people with disabilities doing advocacy and developmental work in Nigeria. These organizations should be incorporated as partners and stakeholders by the government in delivering functional services for women with disabilities. This partnership is needed because most of these organizations work at grass root levels and have valuable knowledge about the needs in the communities. The focus of these collaborations should not be so much on advocacy models, but on how best to achieve outcomes for women with disabilities.

Counseling Intervention and Mentoring

Counseling and mentoring services can be used to support women with disabilities, their families, service providers, teachers and educators. People with disabilities and their families are sometime frustrated in the process of seeking medical, education and social services. Lack of knowledge on where, how and what services to look for can hinder educational goals. In some cases, teachers and school staff may not know what to expect or do when they have a student with disability. Moreover, girls and women have their developmental and biological challenges that may require counseling interventions. Ratts, D'Andrea and Arredondo (2004) stated that social justice counseling identifies the effects of unequal power, and oppression on minorities with disability (e.g., women) and how these effects are related to psychological stress. In addition, women with disabilities have low-esteem, lack of confidence, lack of awareness about their rights, and experiences of abuse, harassment and discrimination, which need to be addressed. Counseling is one way to empower these women and to increase opportunities for community integration. Unfortunately, this form of counseling may not be possible in developing countries because of absence of such rehabilitation professionals. Nevertheless, empowerment and social justice may be achieved in other ways such as through support groups and mentoring. In fact, women with disabilities report that the best ways for them to develop knowledge, confidence, self-esteem and skills, to develop personal identities, personal autonomy, and a sense of personal worth is to work together with other women with disabilities on common issues (WWDA, 2007).

Mentoring of women with disabilities by other women who have disabilities can be used to recruit, and retain women with disabilities in school. On a broader level, the mentoring of women with disabilities by other such women enables for the formation of a collective identity where these women are able to speak about their experiences and take action to collectively improve the quality of their lives (WWDA, 2000, 2007). One of the authors of this chapter participated in mentoring of girls and women with disabilities, and girls in disadvantaged situations (i.e., orphans) who were in primary and secondary schools under the American Ambassador Girls Scholarship Program. The girls in the scholarship program were sponsored in school for three academic years. The scholarship covered the tuition, pocket money and school supply. Mentoring was offered to the girls once a month and involved: (a) visiting the girls at school, (b) finding out their academic and personal needs and providing for such needs, (c) counseling the students based on their needs, and (d) listening and answering whatever questions the girls may have. During school holiday the girls participated in extra curricula activities such as girls' camps and excursions. The mentoring program proved to be a good role modeling exercise for the girls, most of whom did not have role models in their families. The grades of the girls improved and none of the girls dropped out of school for the period of the project.

Conclusion

The challenges faced by women with disabilities in Nigeria are multiple, including social isolation, discrimination and stigma, and denial of their human rights, and chronic poverty. Lack of access to education leads to disempowerment of women and affects personal and societal developmental efforts. The government of Nigeria has done very little to address the needs of this population. The Nigerian educational system requires a reform that will take into account the needs of people with disabilities, especially women. The ratification of UNCRPD by Nigeria is a step in the right

direction to adequately provide social justice in the education of women with disabilities. Using UNCRPD to address the educational needs of women with disabilities will provide the required comprehensive intervention in conjunction with implementation and monitoring of disability-related legislations and policies, support and funding of education of women with disabilities at all levels, awareness creation in the community about the importance of education for women with disabilities, training of special education teachers and educators, and mentoring services that focus on recruitment, retention, engagement of women with disability in education.

References

- Adepoju, A., & Fabiyi, A. (2007). *Universal basic education in Nigeria: Challenges and prospects*. Retrieved August 20, 2013 from <http://uaps2007.princeton.edu/download.aspx?submissionId=70830>.
- African Commission on Human and Peoples' Rights. (2003). Protocol to the African charter on human and peoples' rights on the rights of women in Africa. Retrieved November 18, 2013 from http://www.achpr.org/english/info/women_en.html
- Ajuwon, P. M. (2008). Inclusive education for students with disabilities in Nigeria: Benefits, challenges and policy implications. *International Journal of Special Education*, 23(3), 11-16.
- Akinpelu, F. O. (2007). 'Dr' girl-child education: A reality or a mirage among females with hearing impairments in Nigeria. *The International Journal of the Humanities*, 5(3), 87-92.
- Amusat, N. (2009). Disability care in Nigeria: The need for professional advocacy. *African Journal of Physiotherapy and Rehabilitation Sciences*, 1(1), 30-36.
- Alston, R.J., Harley, D.A., & Middleton, R. (2006). The role of rehabilitation in achieving social justice for minorities with disabilities. *Journal of Vocational Rehabilitation*, 24, 129-136.
- Aluede, R. O. A. (2006). Universal basic education in Nigeria: Matters arising. *Journal of Human Ecology*, 20(2), 97-101.
- Alkuo, Y. A. (2006). Women in higher education in Nigeria: Progress and constraints. *Gender and Behavior*, 4, 550-567.
- Anugwom, E. E. (2009). Women, education and work in Nigeria. *Educational Research and Review*, 4(4), 127-134.
- Barker, R. L. (2003). *The social work dictionary*, (5th ed). Washington, DC: National Association of Social Workers.
- Basic Education Coalition. (2004). *Teach a child transform a nation*. Washington, D.C.: Author.
- Celine. (2010). The place of women with disabilities in Nigeria. Retrieved May 23, 2014 from <http://www.worldpulse.com/node/18821>
- Chataika, T., Umeasiegbu, V. I., & Mpofu, E. (2011). Community-based rehabilitation. In E. Mpofu, & V. I. Umeasiegbu (Eds.), *Distance learning module*. Harare, Zimbabwe: Zimbabwe Open University.
- Disability Awareness in Action. (n.d.). *Resource kit No. 6, disabled women: An international resource kit*. London, UK: Author. Retrieved June 10, from <http://www.daa.org.uk/uploads/resources/Resource%20Kit%206.pdf>.
- Enslin, P. (2006). Democracy, social justice and education: Feminist strategies in a globalizing world. *Educational Philosophy and Theory*, 38(1), 57-67.
- Federal Republic of Nigeria. (2004). *National Policy of Education*. Lagos, Lagos State: Federal Government Press.
- Fischer, A. R., & Bolton-Holz, K. (2010). Testing a model of women's personal sense of justice, control, well-being, and distress in the context of sexist discrimination. *Psychology of Women Quarterly*, 34(3), 297-310.
- Fryers, T. (2010). Women and disability. In P. Murthy & C. L. Smith (Eds.), *Women's global health and human rights* (pp. 353-369). Sudbury, MA: Jones and Bartlett Publishers.
- Garuba, A. (2003). Inclusive education in the 21st century: Challenges and opportunities for Nigeria. *Asia Pacific Disability Rehabilitation Journal*, 14(2), 191-200.
- Grabe, S. (2012). An empirical examination of women's empowerment and transformative change in the context of international development. *American Journal of Community Psychology*, 49(1), 233-245.
- Helander, E. (2004). *The world of the defenseless*. Iasi, Romania: ASROM.
- Honda, H., & Lei, P. (2003). *Women and disability: The challenge of triple discrimination. Statement of recommendation. Final Report of UN ESCAP Workshop on women and disability in Bangkok*, Thailand: UN ESCAP.
- Human Development Report. (2010). *Country profile of human development indicators*. Retrieved December 19, 2013 from <http://hdrstats.undp.org/en/countries/profiles/NGA.html>.

- Kuno, K. (October, 2005). Development & Disability: CBR - Questions from Malaysia. Presentation for CBR seminar at JICA NET, Malaysia.
- Lang, R. & Upah, L. (2008). Scoping study: Disability issues in Nigeria. Retrieved June 10, 2014 from http://www.ucl.ac.uk/lcccr/downloads/dfid_nigeriareport.
- Mahajan, V. (2012). Women empowerment and social justice: A socialist feminist social work approach. *International Proceedings of Economics Development and Research*, 34, 69-73.
- Michailakis, D. (1997). *Government action on disability policy: A global survey*. Stockholm, Sweden: United Nations. Retrieved June 10, 2014 from http://www.independentliving.org/standardrules/UN_Answers/UN.pdf.
- Mji, G., MacLachan, M., Melling-Williams, N., & Gcaza, S. (2009). Realizing the rights of disabled people in Africa: An introduction to the special issue. *Disability and Rehabilitation*, 31: 1-6.
- Montgomery, A. (2011). Social justice: What has health psychology contributed? *The European Health Psychologists*, 13(1), 3-12. Retrieved August 5, 2014 from http://www.ehps.net/ehp/issues/2011/v13iss1_March2011/EHP_March_2011.pdf.
- Murthy, P., Upadhyay, U., & Nwadinobi, E. (2010). Violence against women and girls: A silent global pandemic. In P. Murthy & C. L. Smith (Eds.), *Women's global health and human rights* (pp. 11-24). Sudbury, MA: Jones and Bartlett Publishing.
- National Commission for Colleges of Education. (1998). *Newsletter*, 6(1), 2.
- National Council on Disability. (2002). Understanding the role of an international convention on the human rights of people with disabilities: An analysis of the legal, social, and practical implication of policy makers and disability and human rights advocates in the United States. Retrieved January 15, 2014 from www.ncd.gov
- Nigeria Federal Ministry of Education. (2008). *The development of education national report of Nigeria*. Retrieved September 8, 2013 retrieved from http://www.ibe.unesco.org/National_Reports/ICE_2008/nigeria_NR08.pdf.
- Obasi, E. (1997). Structural adjustment and gender access to education in Nigeria. *Gender and Education*, 9(2), 161-178.
- Obi, F. B. (2004). Women, environment and development in Boki. In O. O. Oshita (Ed.). *Towards self-knowledge: Essays on the Boki nation*. Ibadan, Oyo: Hope Publications.
- Obi, F. B. (June, 2006). *Equalizing educational opportunities for the Nigerian-Ghanaian blind girl-child*. A paper presentation at the 12th International Council for Education of People with Visual Impairments (ICEVI) World Conference in Malaysia. Retrieved September 8, 2013 from <http://tinyurl.com/26jdvz>.
- Obiakor, F. E., & Offor, Fr. M. T. (2011). Special education contexts, problems, and prospects in Nigeria. In M. A. Winzer & K. Mazurek (Eds.), *International practices in special education: Debates and challenges*, (pp. 138-148). Washington, DC: Gallaudet University Press.
- Ojedokun, O. E., Oyewusi, L. M., & Oluwatosin, S. A. (2007). Policy, philosophy and pedagogical initiative to HIV/AIDS education in the Nigerian secondary school's social studies curriculum. *Educational Research and Review*, 2(6), 117-123.
- Oniye, A. O. (2004). Women education: Problems and implications for family responsibility. *The Nigerian Journal of Guidance and Counseling*, 9(1), 255-269.
- Parnes, P., Cameron, D., Christie, N., Cockburn, L., Hashemi, G., & Yoshida, K. (2009). Disability in low-income countries: Issues and implications. *Disability and Rehabilitation*, 31(14), 1170-1180.
- Perry, G., Ferreira, F., & Walton, M. (2003). *Inequality in Latin America & the Caribbean: Breaking with history?* Washington, DC: The World Bank.
- Ratts, M., D'Andrea, M., & Arredondo, P. (2004). Social justice counseling: 'Fifth force' in the field. *Counseling Today*, 47(1), 28-30.
- Save the Children Fund. (2008). Making schools inclusive: How change can happen. London, UK: Author. Retrieved August 20, 2013 from <http://www.savethechildren.org.uk/en/docs/making-schools-inclusive.pdf>.
- Segal, E. A. (2012). *Social welfare policy and social programs: A values perspective*, (3rd ed). Belmont, CA: Brooks/Cole, Cengage Learning.
- Singh, R. (1998). *Gender autonomy in Western Europe. An imprecise revolution*. Houndmills, UK: MacMillan Press.
- Smith, N. (2011). The face of disability in Nigeria: A disability survey in Kogi and Niger states. *Disability, CBR and Inclusive Development*, 22(1), 35-47.
- Stromquist, N. P. (2006). Gender, education and the possibility of transformative knowledge. *Compare: A Journal of Comparative Education*, 36(2), 145-161.
- The Nigerian NGO CEDAW Coalition. (2008). *The Nigeria CEDAW NGO coalition shadow report*.

- Retrieved June 10, 2014 from <http://www.fidh.org/IMG/pdf/Nigeria-report.pdf>
- Umeasiegbu, V. I., Mpofu, E., & Johnson, E. T. (2012). Disability and rehabilitation in the international context. In P. Toriello, M. Bishop, & P. D. Rumrill (Eds.), *New directions in rehabilitation counseling: Creative responses to professional, clinical, and educational challenges*. Linn Creek, MO: Aspen Professional Services.
- United Nations. (1982). *World programme of action concerning disabled persons*. New York: Author. Retrieved January 21, 2011 from <http://www.un.org/disabilities/default.asp?id=23>.
- United Nations. (1993). *The Standard Rules on the Equalization of Opportunities for Persons with Disabilities*. New York: Author. Retrieved January 21, 2011 from www.un.org/esa/socdev/enable/disrec00.htm.
- United Nations. (2000). *Millennium Development Goals*. Geneva, Switzerland: Author. Retrieved September 13, 2013 from <http://www.un.org/millenniumgoals/poverty.shtml>.
- United Nations. (2006a). The convention on the rights of persons with disabilities. The convention in brief. Retrieved February 2, 2014 from <http://www.un.org/disabilities/convention/convention.shtml>.
- United Nations. (2006b). *Convention on the rights of persons with disabilities and its optional protocol*. New York, NY: Author. Retrieved February 2, 2014 from www.un.org/disabilities.
- United Nations. (2010). Summit on the millennium development goals 20-22 September 2010. Retrieved on March 19, 2010 from <http://www.un.org/millenniumgoals/poverty.shtml>.
- United Nations Children Education Fund. (2004). *A world fit for children*. New York, NY: Author.
- United Nations Commission on Sustainable Development. (2012). *Psychological contributions to the achievement of sustainable development*. Retrieved June 5, 2013 from <http://www.apa.org/international/united-nations/rio20-sustainable-development>.
- United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization. (2003). *Gender and education for all: The leap to equality*. Paris, France: Author.
- United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization. (2011). *Children with disabilities*. Retrieved December 3, 2013 from <http://www.unesco.org/en/inclusive-education/children-with-disabilities>.
- United Nations Girls Education Initiative. (n.d.). *Promoting girl's education: The experience of Nigeria*. Retrieved September 5, 2013 from http://www.ungei.org/news/nigeria_1809.html?q=printme.
- United Nations Population Fund. (n.d.). *The domains of focus of United Nations population fund in the 6th country programme of assistance (2009-2012) that may be relevant, women and youth empowerment foundation (WYEF) work*. Retrieved December 3, 2013 from <http://nigeria.unfpa.org/pdf/womenyouth20092012.pdf>
- United States Agency for International Development. (2005). *Education strategy: Improving lives through learning*. Washington, D.C.: Author.
- United States Agency for International Development. (2008). *Education from a gender equality perspective*. Washington, DC: Author.
- Women with Disabilities Australia. (2000). *Taking the lead – A leadership and mentoring resource kit for women with disabilities*. WWDA, Rosny Park, Tasmania.
- Women with Disabilities Australia. (2007). *Women with disabilities (WWDA): Submission to the National Disability Advocacy Program (NDAP) consultation paper: "Working towards a common understanding of advocacy."* Retrieved September 3, 2013 from <http://www.wwda.org.au/ndapsub07.htm>.
- World Health Organization. (2001). *International Classification of Functioning, Disability and Health (ICF)*. Geneva, Switzerland: Author.
- World Health Organization. (2010). *Community-based rehabilitation: CBR guidelines*. Geneva, Switzerland: Author.
- Young, I. M. (1990). *Justice and the politics of difference*. New Jersey: Princeton University Press.

Author Information

Veronica I. Umeasiegbu

Southern University

Email: veronica_umeasiegbu@subr.edu

And

Debra A. Harley

University of Kentucky

Email: धारl00@email.uky.edu