



## **Mainstreaming Disability Into Infrastructure Projects In Rivers State**

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### **ABSTRACT**

Presently, the focus on disability inclusion in infrastructural development has remained strong on public and private sector investment agenda. Interestingly, the situation in Nigeria is quite different with minimal attention on mainstreaming of disability considerations into project implementation. Hence, People Living With Disabilities (PLWDs) are often times neglected in the conception and implementation of public infrastructure. This study focused on identifying how disability issues are mainstreamed into public infrastructural development in Rivers State, Nigeria. The study adopted social inclusion theory. The study applied the qualitative design and a sample size of 24 interviewees was drawn for the purpose of gathering information. An interview schedule was used in data collection. The sampling technique adopted for this study is the purposive sampling technique. The data revealed that people living with disabilities have been largely edged out with regard to infrastructure conception and implementation in Rivers State. This clearly shows that PLWDs have been socially excluded from such project implementation. Findings also revealed that facilities in public infrastructure are grossly inadequate to the extent that the PLWDs are subjected to excruciating deprivation or exclusion. Based on findings, the study concludes that the inability of government to mainstream disability into public infrastructure development undermine the social existence of PLWDs. Drawing from the challenges encountered by the PLWDs, this study recommends a state level disability inclusion framework as well as a related taskforce to enforce disability mainstreaming in Rivers State.

**Keywords:** Disability mainstreaming, infrastructure projects, social inclusion, PLWDs, Rivers State.

### **INTRODUCTION**

Infrastructure and how it is provided is particularly an important driver in terms of achieving social, economic and other development outcomes. The development of infrastructure is expected to take into account, the peculiar needs of the end users and especially nature of the area where a designated infrastructure is to be situated. This is perhaps why Agarwal and Steele (2016, p. 4), argued that “Infrastructure is critical to social functioning with direct impact on social wellbeing, earnings, education as well as health and when infrastructure is inaccessible to any social group, that group is at risk of social exclusion, unable to participate in and contribute to society”.

Globally, the issue of how infrastructure is provided to a wide range of people either through the efforts of government, corporate bodies or Non-governmental Organizations (NGOs) continue to attract the attention of scholars and policy analysts. The concern has always been to understand how different kinds of infrastructure projects influence the lives of various groups or stakeholders in the area where such development interventions are implemented. In the words of Mugano (2016), if the provision of infrastructure to people is undertaken without considering the issues of ownership, access and utility in terms of the different target population or stakeholders, there is a strong chance that such a project is likely to be counterproductive in the end.

Reports show that in most developed countries of the world, public consultations in the form of stakeholders' engagement is a major formative procedure when any kind of infrastructure is to be provided. Brian (2016) reports that in the United States, infrastructure development begins with widespread consultations especially with the target group that such projects are made for. This is the case with countries like Britain, France and Germany (Green, 2017). However, in most developing nations of the world especially those found in Africa, oftentimes, development interventions are done without widespread consultations. The Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) in one of its reports pointed out that due processes in the provision of infrastructure are rarely followed in most countries in Africa (OECD, 2017). The end result is that poor people and other vulnerable groups are often left out.

Evidence shows that the issue is even worse when the discussion on disability inclusion in project or infrastructure development is brought to the fore. Makinde (2016) is of the opinion that over 62 percent of government policies tend to exclude vulnerable groups in the country especially, People Living With Disabilities (PLWD). This is supported by a survey conducted by the United Kingdom Department for International Development (DFID, 2014) on global indicators for disability inclusion in national policies across 157 countries in the world. The report tagged 'leaving no one behind' revealed a shocking outcome as countries in Africa occupied the bottom place in this regard. In fact, to be specific, Nigeria is ranked as the 136<sup>th</sup> nation in terms of disability inclusion policies. This goes a long way in providing a clear picture of how people living with disabilities are neglected in the country. According to DFID (2014), disability can take many forms. However, it went on to identify six (6) broad areas of disability including: difficulties with regard to; seeing, hearing, walking or climbing steps, remembering or concentrating, difficulty (with self-care such as) washing all over or dressing, and difficulty communicating. While some forms of disabilities may exist, the categorization by DFID provides a useful guide since in most cases, people living with disabilities are considered to be those having one or more of the difficulties identified above. Drawing from global information on the gross neglect of people living with disabilities in the wider Nigerian context, it is indeed necessary to provide insight into the issue especially in major cities like Port Harcourt in Rivers State.

### **Objectives**

1. Find out the level of inclusion of people living with disabilities in infrastructure development in Port Harcourt, Rivers State.
2. Determine the adequacy of disability mainstreaming in infrastructure project development in Port Harcourt, Rivers State.

## **LITERATURE REVIEW**

### **Models for disability inclusion in infrastructure development**

The literature on models for disability inclusion whether theoretical or empirical all converge on very important areas. These aggregations may not be exhaustive as they are presented in this section, however, they reflect an in-depth attempt to provide a wide scope of understanding concerning the theme under discussion here. The various models are discussed below.

The first model is what has been referred to as the *rehabilitative* approach. This model is mostly found in the discussions in health infrastructure provisions (Sen, 2005; Madu, 2011; Raimi, 2012). However, the earliest application of this model or approach where the inclusion of PLWDs into infrastructure development as a health consideration has been traced to the United States of America (USA). A study by Sen (2005) on the health considerations of PLWDs in the USA using selected health related projects found that a good number of autism facilities followed the health model of social inclusion. Although this is not related to those living with autism alone, the larger framework for inclusion within this model clearly sees the building of infrastructure that takes cognizance of the people living with disability as a health concern. In doing this, the PLWDs were considered as people needing health assistance. It is worthy to mention that from the USA, the health model for disability inclusion in infrastructure development became widespread especially around Europe. Madu (2011) reports that France, Britain and Germany all adopted the health model at some point. This approach largely underscored the policy of

disability inclusion in development for these countries and disability inclusion issues were treated for the large part as health intervention for PLWDs.

The next approach in the literature is the *statistical* model which came on-stream as a policy framework for disability inclusion in development interventions also in the United States of America around the early 1990s (Lollar & Crews, 2003). With this approach or model, demographic concerns found its way into the theory and practice of disability inclusion in infrastructure development. This model went beyond disability inclusion as a health consideration to consider the statistical dimension of disability as a basis for inclusion. In this regard, the number of people living with disabilities, the gender spread, types of disabilities as well as the age demographics were all indices put into consideration before any form of decision or action on disability inclusion is taken. Mosley (2015) believes that the demographic model provided a better platform for disability inclusion especially because it led to an inclusive process that allowed for outreach. In essence, many persons living with disabilities were considered and included in various disability related development interventions in the United States. This approach actually spread like wildfire across Europe given the fact that it provided a framework for integrating a large number of people in infrastructure development implementation.

The statistical approach went beyond the inclusion of demographic indicators into disability considerations and implementation of infrastructure development project to ensuring that statistics of usage and other challenges are recorded. By doing this, improvements in future development interventions became quite easy.

The next model in the literature is the ecological approach. This model though largely different from the two discussed above, is viewed as an extension rather than a deviation from them. This is because it believes that all attempts at disability inclusion in development interventions should focus on first inclusion of a large number of the target population as well as ensure that their immediate health and other relevant concerns are considered. The key proponent of this approach is the DFID (2016) whose concern was to ensure that disability inclusion into the conception, planning, design and implementation of any kind of infrastructure should go beyond health, statistics to consider ecological indicators. By doing this, it is the belief of the World Bank, that countries and or regions would be able to have better designs that fit their specific environment while also taking learnings from other environments on similar interventions. The ecological model is more comparative than the previous one discussed below resting on the premise that societies or countries have different ecological situations and as such, would require different interventions while learning from other societies.

Following the ecological model closely is the *policy* perspective which is actually an enabler of the previous approaches. The policy approach is hinged on the notion that for every disability inclusion model or intervention to work, the policy environment must be suitable enough. The focus of this approach is that a policy framework on disability inclusion is a necessary tool that must be in place if a workable development intervention is to be achieved. Madu (2011) also subscribes to this school of thought especially because the Nigerian scenario presented a picture of the absence of policy and as such he believed that for a long time in the country, nothing has been done by way of disability inclusion at the project and programme level due to this lacuna. Similarly, the World Health Organization (2017) is in support of the perspective especially because of its study that revealed that most countries in Africa do not have enabling policies to drive disability inclusion in any kind of development intervention. This according to the WHO goes a long way to undermine progress when it comes to mainstream infrastructure development in African countries. However, the organization went further to point out that the issue of disability inclusion through policy instruments of the state is almost a thing of the past in developed countries like the United States, Germany, France, Britain among others. Countries grappling with disability inclusion challenges are those that do not have the right policy in place.

The other model is the socio-economic approach. This perspective although resting on the shoulders of previous models, is viewed as the most holistic especially because of the fact that it weaves a good number of indicators into its argument. The DFID (2016) is still considered one of the leading proponents of this line of thought given that it sees socio-economic considerations as an integral part of the rights of all human beings that should be considered when development interventions are implemented. In light of

this, this model argues that a significant part of the considerations for disability inclusion in development interventions should be social, legal and economic in nature. With regard to social, the DFID points out that people living with disabilities are first and foremost human beings and as such should be considered as part of the social milieu of the places where they find themselves. In doing this, it will not be hard to find policies springing up that are aimed at ensuring their inclusion in mainstream development interventions whether infrastructure or otherwise. Next, disability inclusion should be seen as a legal need especially as part and parcel of the rights of the people. When disability inclusion is viewed as the right of the disabled, the DFID believes that governments all over the world will make sure that policy and legal instruments are put in place to protect such rights. Lastly, the DFID argues that disability inclusion in infrastructure development should also have an economic dimension. By so doing, implementers of infrastructure development projects will see disability inclusion as a way of providing equal opportunities for PLWDs to have access to livelihood options and chances.

It is important to note that the tripod understanding of disability inclusion in infrastructure development by the DFID is indeed holistic when benchmarked against other models discussed earlier. This is because in considering social, legal and economic dimensions of disability inclusion, PLWDs stand a chance of living a better life especially because of the fact that social dimensions involve a lot of things including, demographic considerations and social support systems among others.

### **Theoretical Framework: Social Inclusion Theory**

Related to the stakeholder theory is the social inclusion perspective or model developed by the World Bank (1990). The social inclusion theory rests in the assumption that all categories of people in any society should be located and included in all attempts at development whether by the government or private sector practitioners. However, in the World Bank's application of the theory, it describes the need to socially include mostly vulnerable or disadvantaged people into mainstream activities in any society. It is the belief of the World Bank that several groups in society confront serious barriers due to their disadvantaged positions and that these barriers tend to rob them of their dignity, security, rights and as such opportunity to lead a better life.

According to the World Bank (1999) social inclusion more than anything else rests on the need and process of improving the chances as well as the terms for individuals and groups to take part in society. This is especially based on the understanding that the access to and use of power by the different members in society are not always equally shared. In this regard, it becomes clear that people who do not have access to the instrumentality of power may become far removed from the benefits of governance and development interventions in general (Raimi, 2017). The concern of the social inclusion perspective, therefore, is on how vulnerable groups in society can be properly integrated or included into the decision making, planning and implementation of development interventions. Also, the social inclusion theory espoused by the World Bank concerns itself with all the processes that are followed by public or private sector development agencies to improve the ability, opportunity and dignity of those that are either physically, socially or biologically disadvantaged on the basis of their identity so that they can effectively take part in society. Applied to this study, the social inclusion theory provides a clear understanding of the need to progressively integrate people living with disabilities into the infrastructure development plans and implementation of government and corporate bodies operating within Port Harcourt.

### **METHODS**

The study adopts the qualitative research design. The study area is Port Harcourt, Rivers State, Nigeria. The population of the study is the entire number of People Living With Disabilities that are registered with their association in Rivers State. These associations are Great Mind Foundation (GMF) and the Rivers Chapters Joint National Association of Persons With Disabilities (JONAPWD). Given its qualitative nature, the study made use of a small sample size which is 20 persons. The sampling technique was the purposive method. Hence, 4 government officials from the Ministry of Works, Social Welfare and Rehabilitation, as well as 20 PLWDs among others were purposively selected for the Key Persons Interviews. This made the total sample size for the study to be 24. The primary and secondary

methods of data collection were utilized in the course of this study. The data collection method applied in the study was the Key Persons Interview (KPI) technique. Hence, the thematic approach was adopted to analyse the qualitative data from the Key Persons Interviews.

## RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

### **Theme 1: Inclusion of PLWDs in the Conception / Implementation of Infrastructure**

The narrative that emerged regarding the level of inclusion of people living with disabilities in the conception and or implementation of public infrastructure projects in the state was very interesting. This is because even government officials alluded to the fact that this is seldom the case. The reason for this is because of the reactive rather than proactive nature of the delivery of projects in the state. Although the staff of the Ministry of Works were more in terms of the number of interviewees who shared the opinion that PLWDs are seldom consulted or integrated into public infrastructure conception and implementation, at least one of the government official who partook in the interview supported this view. For instance, the government official who functions as an adviser to the state governor on development matters, had this to say:

“The truth is that when projects are conceived, even without consulting with the PLWDs in the state, the project contractors are often directed as a matter of priority to take cognizance of such persons. However, in the end due to oversight, you find out that the facilities required to successfully integrate PLWDs into such projects tend to be inadequate (*Male government KPI participant, aged 48 years*).”

Drawing from above, it can be deduced that stakeholders’ engagement on public infrastructure development in the state does not sufficiently target those living with disabilities for inclusion. In so doing, the interests and concerns of the PLWDs tend to be marginal with regard to the public projects in the state. In relation to this, one of the PLWDs who is among the executives of her association pointed out that:

“Her concern is not that some of these projects do not reflect the needs of the PLWDs, but that there is this feeling of neglect that goes with the absence of related facilities for those living with disabilities. The interviewee stated that for her, carrying PLWDs along whenever government intends to introduce any major change such as infrastructure development gives us a sense of belonging and by extension happiness (*Female PLWDs KPI participant, aged 39 years*).”

The position of the PLWDs key informant clearly shows that there is little practice of stakeholder consultation as well as social inclusion when it comes to public infrastructure development. Interestingly, a good number of the participants from the Ministry supported this view. In their opinion, government is doing its best to integrate the concerns of PLWDs in the state. However, this would require patience and more funds.

Based on the above analysis of the interviews related to Theme 1 above, it is safe to submit that the Rivers State Government has not sufficiently created the enabling environment for the inclusion of PLWDs with regard to public infrastructure development in the state. This clearly supports the data presented in Fig. 4.1 above where it was established that 83% of the questionnaire respondents shared opinion that PLWDs are not consulted during the conception and implementation of public infrastructure in the state.

### **Theme 2: Adequacy of Disability Facilities in Public Infrastructure**

On the issue of whether disability facilities are adequate or not with regard to public infrastructure in the study area, a good number of the interviewees expressed some sense of discontent with the situation. Interestingly, all the participants from the Ministry of Works believed that even where there are some facilities for PLWDs in public infrastructure in the state, these facilities are mostly inadequate. One of the staff of the Ministry of Works expressed the following opinion on the matter:

I think government is trying its best to provide for people living with disabilities in the state, but in the area of equipping public infrastructure with facilities that will make life easy for people with disabilities, I want to strongly say that the government has not really tried in this regard. For instance, if you move round the Ministry building where we work, you will not find any single facility that supports people living with disability. This is quite bad (*Female Ministry worker/KPI participant, aged 42 years*).

In the same vein, several of the interviewees decried the state of facilities that support or enable the activities of PLWDs in the state. Most of the participants shared the view that the state government is not doing enough to mainstream disability concerns into government projects. This according to some of the KPI participants, has made life even more difficult for those living with disabilities. In defence of government, one of the participants pointed out that “it is not as if the government does not want to include facilities for people living with disabilities, but according to him, the funds are not enough”. On the other hand, one of the PLWDs felt that the issue is not about funds, but that of the lack of willingness to mainstream disability inclusion into project planning and implementation. In his own words:

When I hear people talk of government not having money to integrate facilities for PLWDs into public infrastructure, I find it rather amusing. For me, the challenge is not the absence or lack of funds, but the absence of genuine willingness to carry us along whenever government is planning any project (*Male PLWDs KPI participant, aged 46 years*).

In all, the outcome of the interviews point to the fact that government is not doing enough to include facilities that will cater for people living with disabilities in public infrastructure such as roads, schools and other public buildings. This outcome of the KPI clearly supports the data presented in Fig. 4.2 above where it was established that 80% of the questionnaire respondents believe that disability considerations are not usually mainstreamed into public infrastructure in the state.

## **FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION**

The first objective of this study focused on examining the whether the decisions on what public infrastructure development project to implement reflects the input of people living with disabilities in Rivers State. The findings from the KPI showed that PLWDs are marginal when it comes to consultation and engagement of PLWDs with regard to infrastructure conception and implementation As indicated under the analysis in theme 1 above. Here, participants alluded to the non-consultation of people living with disabilities in the state in terms of conception and implementation of public infrastructure. This finding corroborates that of OECD (2017) who found that in most countries in Africa, disability concerns have not been effectively mainstreamed into public project implementation. This goes a long way to undermine global efforts at promoting inclusiveness for PLWDs which has been variously implemented in most parts of the developed nations. In the words of the OECD:

Most African countries still have difficulties integrating the concerns of PLWDs into mainstream infrastructure development projects especially at the onset of planning and implementation. This challenge makes it difficult to provide adequate facilities that support the wellbeing of the PLWDs in general and in particular the various forms of disabilities. The end result is that social inclusion is defeated and marginalization sets in (OECD, 2017, p. 182).

The second objective of the study is to investigate the adequacy of disability inclusion through specific provisions for people living with disabilities. Findings in this shows that most public infrastructure in the state do not have adequate facilities for people living with disabilities. This makes life quite difficult for PLWDs. Similarly, the finding corroborates that of DFID (2016) and OECD (2017) who both found that where facilities are provided for PLWDs in public infrastructure in most parts of Africa, the facilities are usually in adequate in such a manner that they do not entirely serve the needs of members of the disable community in a holistic sense. According to the DFID:

Public infrastructure in most African countries fall short of the global standard or best practice when it comes to the adequacy of facilities for people living with disabilities in such places. Most times, the facilities are haphazardly integrated as a

proof of poor consultation with those who the facilities are actually meant for. This practice has serious adverse implications for the wellbeing of those living with disabilities in this part of the world (DFID, 2016, p. 73).

Based on the findings presented above, it is safe to submit that question two has been conveniently answered by pointing out that the facilities for PLWDs in public infrastructure, where they exist, are not adequate and do not serve the wellbeing of these category of persons.

### CONCLUSION

The study sets out to examine the link between infrastructure development and disability inclusion in Rivers State, Nigeria. The major aim of the study was to find out the extent to which people living with physical disabilities are mainstreamed into the infrastructure development considerations in Rivers State, Nigeria. Apart from guiding the collection of primary data, the research objectives were largely derived from the gaps in existing literature. Hence, they are products of a vast literature review covering related areas in disability inclusion in infrastructure development around the world. The literature review equally provided a basis for the choice of the social inclusion theory as the best theoretical framework for the study.

It is important to stress that participants in this study showed high level enthusiasm and willingness to respond to issues concerning public infrastructure development and disability inclusion in Rivers State. This was actually expected given that most of the respondents were PLWDs in the state who already share some discontents on how they are being marginalized when it comes to conception and implementation of public infrastructure development.

The study concludes therefore, that people living with disability in Rivers State have been largely marginal with regard to the conception and implementation of public infrastructure. As a result, this marginal position makes it difficult for the implementers of these public infrastructure to have a holistic picture of what is required to provide adequate facilities for the PLWDs. Hence, where such PLWDs facilities exist, they are usually not adequate. The marginalization of PLWDs is facilitated by the lack of will on the part of the government to enforce existing laws on disability inclusion. This scenario in addition to gross oversight and negligence by the government makes it difficult to mainstream disability inclusion into the conception and implementation of public infrastructure in the state.

### RECOMMENDATIONS

Based on the findings and conclusions reached in this study, the following recommendations have been proffered:

**State Level Inclusion Framework:** There is every need for Rivers State to develop its own specific state level disability inclusion framework. Besides the existing national laws on disability inclusion, Rivers State can benefit from developing a framework or roadmap on how best to mainstream disability inclusion into public projects. This can be achieved by constituting a committee that is saddled with not just developing the framework but making sure it works.

**Disability Inclusion Taskforce:** While the setting up of a committee to develop a framework for disability inclusion is very critical, there is need for a taskforce on disability inclusion as a separate body. This would ensure some kind of checks and balances. The taskforce will ensure that the work of the committee is enforced.

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