



Disability Inclusion In Infrastructural Development In Port Harcourt Metropolis, Rivers State: A Stakeholders' Perspective

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ABSTRACT

Globally, the issue of how PLWDs gain access to public facilities has attracted the attention of scholars and policy analysts. In Nigeria, especially in Port Harcourt, Rivers state, most of the public buildings do not have provisions for PLWDs, even where they exist, they are grossly inadequate, hence the problem of their exclusion. This study focused on exclusion of PLWDs and examined to an extent to which PLWDs are included in the infrastructural development decisions. The study adopted stakeholders' theory. The study applied the survey design and a sample size of 366 was drawn out of a population of 4,364 using the taro Yamane formula. A set of questionnaire and interview schedule were instruments used in data collection. The sampling technique adopted for this study is the satisfied simple random and purposive sampling technique. The data revealed that the inputs of the people living with disabilities has been marginalized when it comes to consultations on infrastructure conception and implementation of public infrastructure developments projects in the state. 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 non-consultation and negligence on the part of the government makes it difficult for the implementers of these public infrastructure project to have a holistic picture of what is required to provide adequate facilities for the PLWDs. Drawing from the challenges encountered by the PLWDs, this study recommends an integrated stakeholder consultation, state level inclusion framework and a general awareness training.

Keywords: Disability inclusion, infrastructure development, stakeholders, PLWDs, Rivers State

INTRODUCTION

Nigeria is a signatory to the United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (UNCRPD). This convention provides a two dimensional approach to disability inclusion in project and programme developments for nations that agreed to it. The first approach is to ensure that disability inclusion is mainstreamed into all programmes of government in addition to providing a legislative environment for cooperate bodies to do same. The second approach is to embark on targeted activities based on the commitment to protect and promote the human rights of those with disabilities in all policies and programmes (OECD, 2017). Interestingly, most countries especially those found in Africa (Nigeria inclusive), have focused more on target programmes without necessarily making conscious efforts to mainstream and translate disability inclusion policies into action.

Statistical facts show that globally, over 15 per cent of the world population amounting to well over 1 billion people live with one form of disability or the other out of which 36 per cent of the 1 billion live in

Africa alone (WHO, 2017). While there is no agreed statistics or figures for the number of persons living with disabilities in Nigeria, evidence suggest that over 32 million persons live with one form of disability and the Northern part of Nigeria maintains the highest number of these persons (DFID, 2016). While most of the disabilities may not be life threatening on their own, it is critical to note that with every form of disability, infrastructure is very central to the functioning of such persons. This is because, infrastructure is known to have direct impact on the social wellbeing, earnings, education and health of everyone whether disable or not. However, it is a known fact that the disabled become disproportionately affected with adverse returns on the above indicators when enabling infrastructure that supports their disabilities are not available. According Agarwal and Steele (2016), when infrastructure development does not fundamentally take cognizance of this category of persons in any society, they are more likely to be at risk of social exclusion making them unable to participate in and contribute to that society.

On the issue of disability considerations in Nigeria, Ayeni (2015), seems to lay the foundation of thought in this regard by pointing out that disability inclusion policies in the country are almost non-existent as a result, mainstreaming them into institutional programmes and projects is always difficult. This view is supported by Adeniyi (2016), who opine that those living with disabilities in Nigeria have long been marginalized in terms of provision of matching infrastructure when compared to able bodied persons in the country. This according to him, violates several international conventions that provide for the welfare of people living with one form of disability or the other. It should be noted that it took nine years of relentless agitation by persons living with disabilities before the Discriminations Against Persons With Disabilities (Prohibition) Act of 2018 was passed into law. This goes a long way to show how such persons have been relegated to the background in terms of enabling policy or legal framework to address their plights. This law notwithstanding, there is the general concern that implementation as in the case of other existing laws in the country may be problematic. This is because of the fact that most disability considerations such as those associated with infrastructure development may require high level monitoring and sanctions.

Studies focusing on disability inclusion or exclusion in Nigeria are quite scant. Perhaps, this is also an indication of the marginal attention that such people have received in the country. Nevertheless, this study now rests on the shoulders of four empirical works that have focused on disability inclusion or exclusion in Nigeria. The first is that of Ayeni (2015) which examined the issue of disability inclusion policies and concluded that people living with disabilities face challenges due to lack of enabling policies. Hamza (2015) also examined the issue of disability inclusion policy in Nigeria and especially in the Northern part. His study came to the conclusion that people living with disabilities do not attract enough policy considerations and where there are few policies, the target people are never part of its formation, let alone implementation. A third study by Amezue (2016) focused on political inclusion of people living with disabilities in Nigeria. In this study, Amezue found that only 8 per cent of people living with disabilities are in political positions in the country. Based on this, he concluded that this trend has a negative effect on disability inclusion policy formulation in the country. Obalade (2017) and Ubani et al. (2020), took the study further by focusing specific kinds of disability and infrastructure development. In his study, Obalade examined the problem of blindness and enabling infrastructure in the Northern part of Nigeria. His central focus was on how technological support system can enable blind people cope with their everyday lives in the North. On the other hand, scholars like Ubani et al. (2020), coming from architectural and estate management backgrounds focused mostly on the structure of public buildings and associated defects with regards to people on wheelchairs.

Although the work by Obalade (2017) and Ubani et al. (2020), comes close to the objectives of this study, they are nevertheless considered too narrow to capture the plight of people living with disabilities and their exclusion from infrastructure development in the country. This clearly suggests a gap in existing knowledge on the subject matter. It is against this backdrop, that this study examined the empirical link between infrastructure development and disability inclusion in Rivers State focusing on the city of Port Harcourt.

Aim and Objective of the Study

The aim of this study is to examine the extent to which people living with physical disabilities are included in the infrastructure development considerations in Rivers State, Nigeria. Other specific objectives are to:

- i. Determine the category of people living with disabilities that experience exclusion with regard to public infrastructure development in Rivers State.
- ii. Examine the challenges associated with disability inclusion in infrastructure development in Rivers State.
- iii. Suggest ways of improving on disability inclusion in infrastructure development in Rivers State.

Research Questions

The following questions will guide the study:

- i. What category of people living with disability experience exclusion in terms of public infrastructure development in Rivers State?
- ii. What are the challenges associated with disability inclusion in infrastructure development in Rivers State?
- iii. In what ways can disability inclusion in infrastructure development in Rivers State be improved?

Literature Review

Decision Making in Infrastructure Development

All over the world, infrastructure provision remains a very crucial driver of social and economic development. In fact, Cohen (2011), while discussing the issues surrounding human development in most parts of the developing world especially in Africa, has argued that while human development is key, providing infrastructure suffices as a basic enabler of growth in all sectors of society and by extension human development. Deciding on what kind of infrastructure to implement is as important as the project itself given the fact that putting utility-based (Olakunle, 2017) infrastructure is a product of the choices made at the onset. It is easy to observe two basic cluster of arguments associated with the literature on decision making in infrastructure development around the world. However, this shows a trend-like argument rather than a static discussion on the subject matter. For instance, 1950 and 1960s, the focus of infrastructure development interventions assumed a more authoritative approach in terms of decisions when, where and how to implement them. The works of Madu (2011) and Fagade (2015) are indeed very outstanding in discussing the narrative around what has been referred to as the top-to-bottom approach in infrastructure provision within the broader development literature.

Consequently, the focus of the literature in the above mentioned years was mostly a critique of the traditional approach of clustering infrastructure development decision making and implementation in the hands of a few top management officials in the case of the private sector intervention and government in the case of the public sector. For example, Oswaldo (2011 cited in Olakunle, 2017) a Latin American scholar laid the foremost argument against this approach to infrastructure development when he kicked against some selected projects by the International Monetary Fund (IMF) in Mexico. Oswaldo argued in his book that proper consultations on development interventions by the IMF were not done especially on the decisions to build certain infrastructure in some parts of Mexico. In light of this, he described the projects as predatory and neo-colonial in nature especially because the interventions seem to have served the purpose of the IMF rather than the people.

Following the above line of thought, but only this time looking inwards, Mazden (2009) also opine that the decision making process for infrastructure development in the 1960s through to even the early 1980s in mostly developing countries of Africa followed an autocratic trajectory that edged critical stakeholders out. According to Mazden, governments in Africa building the policy logic on modernization philosophy and hoodwinked by the Breton Wood Institutions imposed several infrastructure projects on their countries without internal consultations with relevant stakeholders on the utility of such development interventions. This created massive problems leading to the failures of such projects in most if not all the countries that followed such philosophy of development.

Within this same top-to-bottom narrative on infrastructure development that characterized most parts of the developing nations, the private sector was not left out especially driven by International Oil Corporations (IOCs). In Nigeria for instance and led by the Shell Petroleum Development Company (SPDC), the trajectory of infrastructure development intervention has been one of massive social exclusion of host communities from the point of conception to decommissioning (See Fagade, 2015). As Adeyemi (2017) has observed, between the 1960s and late 1990s, development intervention activities especially projects such as schools, boreholes, markets, mini-roads among others were randomly implemented in SPDC host communities by the company without consultations with community members. Adeyemi (2017, p.23) further argued that “this level of social exclusion perpetrated by oil multinationals in the country reflects the authoritarian character of development thinking perpetrated by the West through its financial institutions within this period”. It is important to note that decisions surrounding infrastructure and all other development programmes within the period under review above were based on the modernization philosophy which was largely neo-colonial in nature.

However, at the turn of the 19th and 20th centuries, the philosophy shifted from top-to-bottom to bottom-to-top largely defined by the stakeholder philosophy. Part of this reflected the impact of the dependency theories on global development thinking (Makinde, 2016) especially based on the vehement attack they had on the modernization ideology of Western development interventions in Third World countries. In light of this theoretical shift as well as the growing agitations in most countries following the obvious disincentives associated with modernization-styled development interventions, the need for social inclusion in development became inevitable. As a result, subsequent planning, decision making processes, implementation and decommissioning phases in infrastructure development became nested on consultations, needs assessments and broad-based stakeholders’ engagement as ways of getting a significant part of society involved.

The emergence of social inclusion within the narrative of infrastructure development goes beyond mere consultations with direct beneficiaries of the intervention to integrating their needs especially those of vulnerable people. Madu (2011) describes the scenario as a development regime that involves deep-seated considerations, analysis and integration of the concerns of all sorts of stakeholders especially those considered vulnerable like women, children and people living with disabilities. Infrastructure development in this era then becomes highly driven by the input of the people considered to be at the bottom of the social pyramid of society. The bottom-up approach to infrastructure development became the dominant model of ensuring that government and private sector development agents carry a significant portion of the concerned population along.

A good number of the literature that have discussed the bottom-up approach seem to agree that it represents a better framework for ensuring that the concerns of different sets of stakeholders are mainstreamed into any kind of development intervention (Fagade, 2015; Temitayo, 2016; Makinde, 2016; Adeyemi, 2017). Scholars who share their practical sentiments for the bottom-up approach to infrastructure development around the world tend to see the process as a significant shift in ideology that has led to the empowerment of the people. In fact, Temitayo (2016) calls this democratic development because according to him, the bottom-up approach to infrastructure development as well as other kinds of interventions reflects the will of the people. Adeyemi (2017) agrees totally with Temitayo by pointing out that getting people involved in development especially at the community level creates conditions that democratizes the process. Inferably, therefore, when people make their inputs into development projects, they tend to show a lot of commitment to the sustainability of such projects.

Perhaps this is why Fagade (2015) has argued that at the phase of conception especially deciding what kind of infrastructure project to site, government and related development agencies are expected as a matter of necessity to carry out widespread consultations that takes into account all the relevant primary and secondary stakeholders as a way of ensuring that their needs are significantly considered during the decision phase. He went on to point out that if this is not done, there is a strong chance that the power relations within the target area of the project can undermine the implementation phase. In the same vein, Madu (2011), is of the view that democratizing infrastructure development plans especially at the point of taking the decision as to what to do, how to do it and when to do it requires the input of many key

stakeholders. For him, bringing in the tenets of democracy into infrastructure provisions especially at the community level reduces the numerous hazards associated with the top-to-bottom era where government goes ahead to take decisions on development and implement them without any input from the beneficiaries.

Challenges to disability inclusion in infrastructure development

There are quite a lot of challenges associated with disability inclusion and infrastructure development in the literature. However, only a few of them resonate with this study. The first challenge is the issue of government willingness (Sen, 2005). It is in the opinion of Sen, that most governments in Africa have the knowledge of the fact that people living with disabilities exist in their various societies but the challenge is the issue of their willingness to do something about it. This perhaps account for why most governments in Africa do not have any plans not to talk of a policy or even a law on disability inclusion in public or private development interventions that require such. According to Madu (2011), governments in Africa and especially Nigeria have focused more on their personal enrichment more than the social welfare of its people. His argument is that they have not finished with the consideration of providing development interventions for mainstream able bodied persons, how then can they deal with vulnerable groups in society such as people living with disabilities.

The administrative will to integrate disability components into mainstream infrastructure development projects by governments may also be undermined by the absence of a policy framework. Most governments in Africa have not deemed it necessary to provide legal frameworks to drive disability inclusion into the development planning of their various countries. This is perhaps why Olakunle (2017) has argued that providing the right policy environment for the inclusion of people living with disabilities in government development planning is key in terms of achieving disability inclusion targets. However, he lamented that in most cases, even when such policies and legal instruments exist, the lack of willingness to see them through by way of enforcement tend to be a significant setback in this regard. In other words, disability inclusion policies may be in place, but ensuring that they are implemented is usually a challenge in most countries.

The second challenge is that of corruption which is believed to be the highest in countries found in Africa (Sen, 2005; Madu, 2011; Fagade, 2015). While Sen is of the opinion that government corruption is a key challenge to the inclusion of people living with disability in infrastructure development in most countries, Madu, (2011) and Fagade, (2015) believes that the case of corruption in terms of disability inclusion goes beyond just government to contractors and even the private sector. It is the position of these scholars that in most cases, the corruption issue happens in syndicate manner or is a string conspiracy between government officials and contractors who see every opportunity as a way of syphoning money (Raimi, 2017). However, Madu tend to have agreed that corruption in government undermines all kinds of development interventions and not only those related to the inclusion of people living with disability. His opinion is that in Nigeria, widespread corruption hampers the development of the country especially because of massive looting by government officials. This according to him promotes a development scenario where little is done despite huge monies allocated to infrastructure development. In the same vein, Makinde (2016), aligned his thoughts with those of Madu and Fagade when he argued that massive corruption in Nigeria by public office holders is a critical risk factor in terms of implementation of development projects and programmes. While integrating those living with disabilities into mainstream development programmes may not have been much of a problem, the fact that public office holders often syphon monies meant for such kinds of intervention has significant shortcomings for disability inclusion. Makinde's (2016) point is simply that with widespread corruption in government, most infrastructure projects turn out to be substandard and this in his opinion could be dangerous for people living with disabilities.

Next in the line with regard to challenges facing disability inclusion in infrastructure development is the issue of awareness. Madu (2011), also believes that the awareness level of people in Nigeria is quite low when the issue of disability inclusion is taken into consideration.

In addition to the above, Olakunle (2017), also came to the conclusion that even the lack of government policies on disability inclusion is a product of insufficient awareness concerning the plight of people living with disabilities in the state and Nigeria in general. He argued further that in most cases, public pressure on issues tend to be all that is required for policies or laws to be put in place to drive some social problems. However, he lamented that due to low level of awareness on the issues of disability inclusion, public pressure has been rather limited to only those who are categorized as people living with disabilities. As a result, the required social force needed to put pressure on government to consider people living with disabilities in public infrastructure development has been rather low or at best disjointed. Another challenge to disability inclusion in infrastructure development is the issue of funding constraints. This challenge rests on the notion that disability inclusion in infrastructure development requires additional funding in most cases. This challenge was highlighted by the World Bank (2017) when it argued that in most poor countries around the world, funding is viewed as one of the principal reason why disability considerations in infrastructure project implementation is usually a challenge. It listed several countries in Africa where process of integrating disability concerns into mainstream infrastructure development have been undermined due to the huge financial implications of doing so. The World Bank is of the view that in countries where funding for even the most basic mainstream infrastructure for able bodied persons is difficult, providing considerations for disability inclusion in such interventions become largely a herculean task to achieve.

World Bank report (2015; 2017), accessing disability in inclusion in Africa argued the bottom-up approach to development has been far more realistic in terms of improving on major indicators of development than the previous top-to-bottom approach. The study of water infrastructure provided by government in countries in the Middle East by the World Bank in 2015 revealed that over 70 percent of the boreholes dug from 2000 to 2015 were all in good working condition. As a result, the World Bank in its report concluded that getting more and more stakeholders involved in infrastructure development interventions provides a social safety net to achieve infrastructure sustainability in the near future.

Similarly, the DFID report (2016) Disability inclusion: making everyone count, study of infrastructure development interventions in Africa revealed a close outcome or result with that of the World Bank. In the study, several countries in Africa were sampled and the decisions on how some infrastructure ranging from road construction to school buildings were arrived at were analysed. The result of the study showed that although minimal consultations derived from needs assessment studies were carried out, wherever this approach was used, the infrastructure lasted longer than areas where little or no consultations were made. In the final analysis, the DFID report revealed that infrastructural sustainability is better assured when a broad-base of stakeholders are consulted and their inputs integrated into the project.

The study by Delph (2016) "The Indian Experience with Disability Inclusion" carried out in India revealed that over 65 percent of government projects in India have been earmarked for reconstruction even when such projects are still in good state. The study revealed that there is the need for reconstruction ranges from bad construction work to none inclusion of people living with disabilities, the latter factor constituted over 52 percent of the reason to redo such projects. It is his belief that if the Universal Design Principle was adopted at the point of the decision making stage of these infrastructure, there wouldn't have been any need to reconstruct them again.

Similarly, research conducted by Birge and Ramon (2018) Disability Inclusion in Mexico showed that most of the development interventions that promote disability inclusion are collaborative ones. These scholars are of the opinion that the uniqueness of partnerships in social inclusion projects is that it allows for robustness and scalability to cover a good population of vulnerable people in society.

In a study of disability inclusion in China, Hangzu (2016) "The Chinese Experience with Disability Inclusion" using the statistical basis came to the conclusion that women and children are more vulnerable among the PLWDs in the country face challenges in terms of access and usage to infrastructure. In fact, his argument is that over 72 percent of women and children living with disabilities in China have difficulty accessing and using infrastructure even when they have been designed to accommodate their peculiar disability needs.

In a study conducted by Olakunle (2017) in Lagos State Nigeria on public knowledge and attitude to people living with disability, it was discovered that over 67 percent of the sample of 1247 persons said they know nothing about disability inclusion in public infrastructure projects. In light of this, Olakunle concluded that one of the problems militating against disability inclusion is the level of awareness of the general public on issues concerning people living with disabilities. This situation makes it difficult for the public to galvanize public action aimed at pressuring government to pursue disability inclusion policies in the State.

Ayeni (2015) which examined the issue of disability inclusion policies and concluded that people living with disabilities face challenges due to lack of enabling policies. Hamza (2015) also examined the issue of disability inclusion policy in Nigeria and especially in the Northern part. His study came to the conclusion that people living with disabilities do not attract enough policy considerations and where there are few policies, the target people are never part of its formation, let alone implementation

A third study by Amezue (2016) focused on political inclusion of people living with disabilities in Nigeria. In this study, Amezue found that only 8 per cent of people living with disabilities are in political positions in the country. Based on this, he concluded that this trend has a negative effect on disability inclusion policy formulation in the country. A study carried out by Umoh (2019), on community based rehabilitation services and livelihood enhancement for persons with disabilities in Akwa Ibom state, set to found how community-based rehabilitation services have enhanced the livelihood of persons with disability in Akwa Ibom state. The study revealed that for such program to achieve its set goals, donors must first address social and cultural norms as well as power relations in those communities where such rehabilitation services are taken. Also in his findings, he argued that, although UN agencies, most donors and Non-Governmental Organisations have disability and development policies, many programmes still perpetuate disability-based discrimination.

Theoretical Framework: Stakeholder Theory

The stakeholder theory has its roots in the works of Edward Freeman and can be easily traced to his book titled "Strategic Management: A Stakeholder Approach" (Arkof, 2013, p. 25). The theory initially set out to counteract the traditional stockholder perspective initiated by Thomas Friedman. As a theory, the stakeholder approach debunked what it described as a narrow approach to development as it relates to the theory of the firm. Its basic argument or assumption is that the theoretical premise of the stockholder perspective that views shareholders as the sole beneficiaries of returns on investment in any development endeavour especially within a firm is flawed. The stakeholder theory rests its argument on the fact that the activities of the firm affect several categories of people that may be considered direct or indirect stakeholders. As a result, development concerns especially through social responsibility frameworks (Raimi, 2019) should be extended to such categories of persons.

While the stakeholder theory seems more applicable as a theory of the firm, its basic tenets have crept into development theory and practice especially due to its emphasis on the need to integrate the concerns of a broad spectrum of persons considered as stakeholders in any development intervention. According to Mosley (2015) the stakeholder theory is particularly relevant in development studies given the fact that it provides a significant theoretical platform for the understanding of the many social linkages to government and private sector programmes and projects. In other words, stakeholder theory especially its emphasis on the mapping and engagement of social actors that are related to specific development interventions makes it a theoretical lifeline for a study of this nature.

The theory describes a stakeholder ecosystem which is anyone that is involved in either directly or indirectly in the social relations associated with a given society's development programmes. In this regard, applying the theory to the study of infrastructure development and disability inclusion, it becomes easy to see that people living with disabilities in the city of Port Harcourt are considered stakeholders in every public infrastructure development project. This is because one way or the other, PLWDs are more likely to come in contact and use such infrastructure as much as their abled bodied counterparts in the city (Ekpenyong, Raimi & Ekpenyong, 2012). In this sense, any attempt not to see them as stakeholders in such infrastructure development, would amount to undermining their social relevance in the society and

by extension their exclusion from the process leading to the decisions, planning and implementation of such projects.

In the final analysis, the stakeholder theory provides a healthy analytical platform for this study by exposing the fact that PLWDs are actually supposed to be considered as stakeholders that must be consulted in order to integrate their views and concerns into any infrastructure development activity in society. It is only by seeing them as stakeholders that the actual move to engage them and integrate their concerns into infrastructure development projects can be successful.

METHODS

The research design adopted for this study is the survey design. This is because; a survey design makes correlational research strategy possible. 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). The choice of targeting registered members of PLWDs is for accessibility to the target population in the course of this study. According to the Rivers State Ministry of Social Welfare and Rehabilitation (2018), the total number of registered PLWDs with the different associations in the State is 4,364. This constitutes the study population. The sample size for this study is drawn using the Taro Yamane formula. The formula is expressed thus: $n = \frac{N}{1+N(e)^2}$. Therefore, using 0.05 level of significance for the computation, the sample

size is 366 The sampling techniques adopted for this study is the stratified, simple random and purposive sampling methods. To select the respondents for the study, a sampling frame for all the PLWDs was developed by assigning a number to each element in the stratum. The assigned numbers then formed the parameter for a ballot system. Based on this, numbers were assigned to PLWDs on pieces of papers and thrown into a basket and each element was selected without replacement until the required sample size of 366 was arrived at. In addition to this, 12 government officials from the Ministry of Works, Social Welfare and Rehabilitation, as well as PLWDs leaders among others were purposively selected for the Key Persons Interviews. This made the total sample size for the study to be 378. The primary and secondary methods of data collection were utilized in the course of this study. The data collection instrument applied in the study was a self-designed questionnaire. In addition, the Key Persons Interview technique was applied to get qualitative data from 12 selected members of the Ministry of Works as well as key government officials and leaders of PLWDs in the state. This helped the data triangulation process in the course of data analysis. Data from the survey were analysed using the statistical package provided in Microsoft Excel 2010. Hence, descriptive statistics such as, percentages and frequencies represented in simple tables, charts and trend graphs were used to present socio-demographic characteristics of respondents and to answer research questions relating to infrastructure development and disability inclusion. Finally, the thematic approach was adopted to analyse the qualitative data from the Key Persons Interviews. This approach was combined with Strauss and Corbin's (1990) grounded theory method especially the use of axial and selective coding techniques to link thematic expressions together.

RESULTS

In this section, the research questions are presented using simple percentage represented in descriptive models such as bar charts, trend graphs and histograms. In addition, the qualitative data are presented in thematic format and discussed based on the outcome of the transcription.

Evaluation of Research Questions

Q1: *What category of people living with disability experience exclusion in terms of public infrastructure development in Rivers State?*

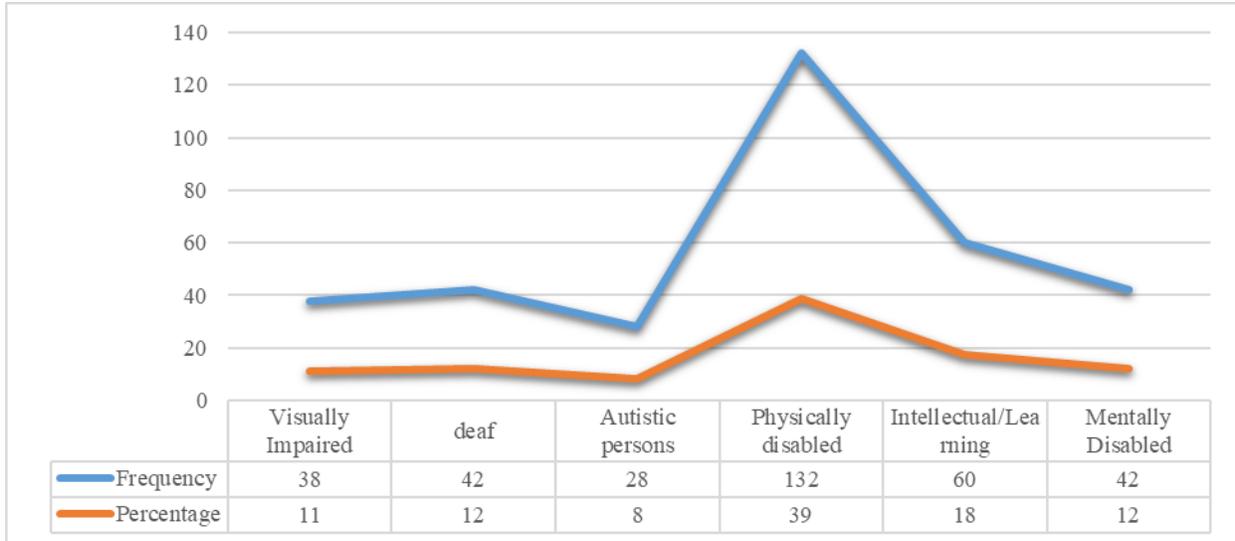


Fig. 1: Category of PLWDs that are excluded the most with regard to infrastructure provision

Figure 1 above presents data on the category of people living with disabilities that are most excluded with regard to public infrastructure provision in Rivers State. Based on the data presented in the Figure, it is easy to see that 38 (11%) of the respondents said it is the visually impaired, 42 (12%) of the respondents said it is the deaf, 28 (8%) of the respondents said it is persons living with autism, 132 (39%) of the respondents said it is the physically challenged, 60 (18%) of the respondents said it is those having intellectual and or learning disabilities, while 42 (12%) of them said it is those with mental disabilities.

It is important to point out that the response leading to the data presented in the Figure above and the analysis that ensued, may be a direct reflection of the fact that more of the participants in this study were physically challenged. However, the number (132) who said that those with physical challenges are the ones mostly marginalized in terms of public infrastructure provision is quite higher than the number (118) who took part in the study. In this regard, there is every need to agree that physically challenged persons are more excluded than others when it comes to public infrastructure provision in the state.

Q2: What are the challenges associated with disability inclusion in infrastructure development in Rivers State?

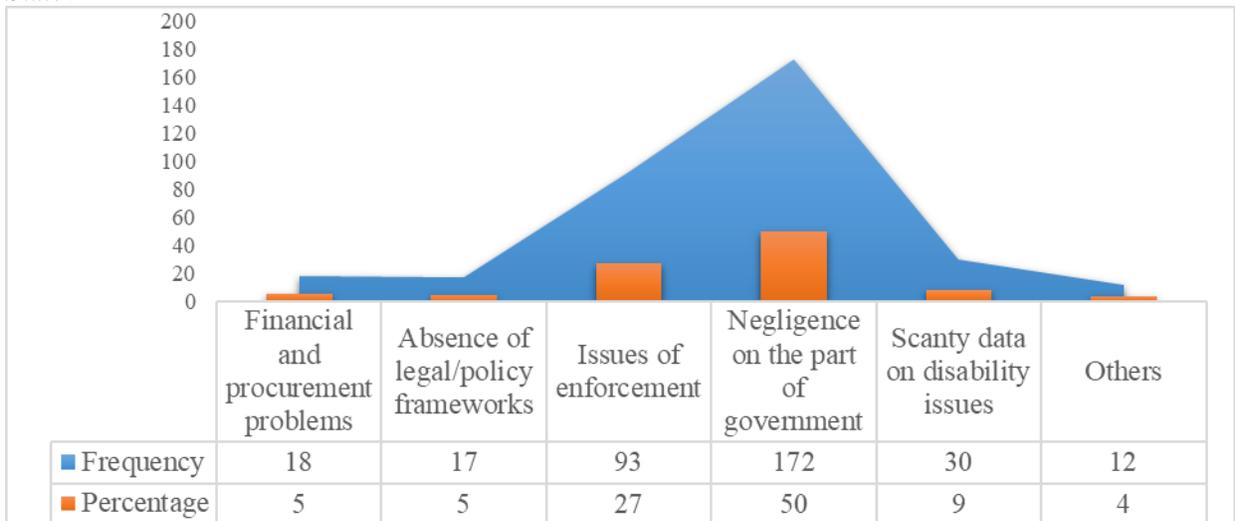


Fig. 2: Challenges to disability inclusion in public infrastructure implementation in Rivers State

Figure 2 above provides data on the possible challenges associated with ensuring disability inclusion in public infrastructure in Rivers State. Drawing from the data in the chart, it is easy to see that 18 (5%) of the respondents point to financial and procurement problems as a challenge, 17 (5%) of the respondents said the absence of legal or policy frameworks is a major challenge, 93 (27%) of them said the challenge is the issue of enforcement, 172 (50%) of the respondents said the challenge is associated with negligence on the part of the government, 30 (9%) of the respondents said scanty data on PLWDs is a major challenge, while 12 (4%) of the respondents said there are other challenges. The outcome of the data shows that most of the respondents hold on to negligence on the part of government as the major challenge to disability inclusion in public infrastructure in the state.

Q3: *In what ways can disability inclusion in infrastructure development in Rivers State be improved?*

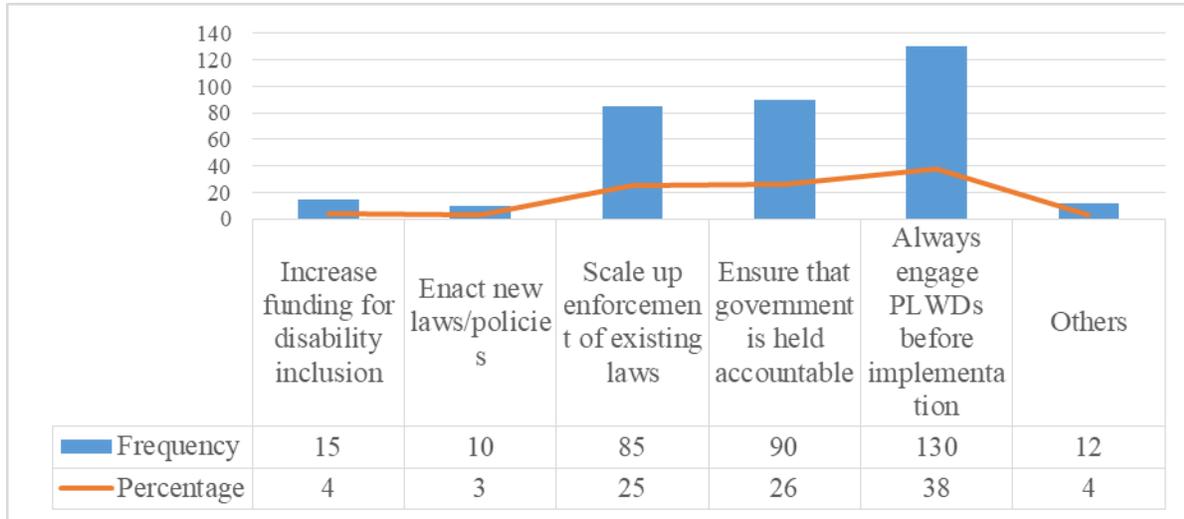


Fig. 3: *Ways to improve on disability inclusion in public infrastructure implementation*

Fig. 3 above presents data on the possible ways that disability inclusion can be improved in the study area. Following the data in the Figure above, it is easy to see that 15 (4%) of the respondents said the best way to do this is to increase funding that reflects disability needs and interests, 10 (3%) of them said there is need to enact new laws and policies on disability inclusion, 85 (25%) of the respondents said enforcement of existing laws should be scaled up, 130 (38%) of the respondents believe that there is need to always engage PLWDs before any public infrastructure is implemented, 12 (4%) of the respondents said there are other ways such as getting PLWDs involved in construction processes.

Key Persons Interview Data

Theme 1: Integrating Different forms of Disability into Public Infrastructure

Theme three represents a cluster of themes that relate to how the different forms of disabilities such as the deaf, mentally disabled, the visually impaired among others, are integrated into public infrastructure development in the state. Following the discussion that ensued and the selective filtering of outcomes, it is clear that ensuring that the needs of the different forms of people living with disabilities are taking into consideration when implementing public infrastructure projects is a difficult task. This is because without proper engagement and integration of PLWDs, it becomes obviously difficult to mainstream their collective concerns into such projects not to talk of individual forms of disabilities. One of the KPI participants who is one of the leaders of the PLWDs association in the state had this to say:

The fundamental thing is to first have the will to include the needs of PLWDs into public infrastructure in the state. Where this is not the case, how can we then integrate the numerous forms of disabilities into such projects. For me, the Rivers State

government has not displayed genuine attempt to satisfy the provisions of the disability laws and policies of the country (*Male member of the PLWDs /KPI participant, aged 44 years*).

Most of the KPI participants just simply maintained that without getting it right in terms of a holistic approach to mainstreaming disability needs into public infrastructure development in the state, it will be difficult to address the peculiar challenges of the different forms of disabilities. One of the Ministry worker pointed out that often times, the category of persons living with disabilities that are most often considered are those with physical challenges. In her own words:

Most times, those with physical challenges especially those on wheelchairs are the ones who get the highest form of consideration in most public infrastructure. This is not because of the love that government has for them over others, but because it usually costs less to provide for instance a ramp in buildings for them. Nevertheless, you still find public buildings in the state without ramps (*Female Ministry worker/KPI Participant, aged 48 years*).

In all, the KPI participants were unanimous in their submissions on the above theme. All interviewees shared the sentiment that it is difficult to mainstream the concerns of all categories of PLWDs without first providing a genuine framework that mainstreams the general interest of all PLWDs in the state.

Theme 2: Challenges to Disability Inclusiveness in Public Infrastructure

On the issue of the challenges to disability inclusion in public infrastructure development in the state, the various KPI participants shared different opinions. While some of them, especially those from the Ministry and government divide, point to the issue of funding as a key challenge in this regard, those from the leadership of the PLWDs hold on to the lack of willingness from the government as the major challenge. In this regard, one of the Ministry workers expressed the following opinion:

While I do not support the non-inclusion of the needs of people living with disabilities in the planning and implementation of public infrastructure in the state, I want to state that the major challenge to this is paucity of funds. Where there is little money, there is equally very little that the government or its agency can do to carry everyone along (*Male Ministry worker/KPI participants, aged 39 years*).

However, the view expressed above clearly contradicts that of the PLWDs that were interviewed. For example, one of the PLWDs leaders that partook in the study had this to say:

It is important to stress that money is not the problem as the state government has enough money. The problem is the fact that government does not want to genuinely carry PLWDs along in the state. While the government is trying for PLWDs in sports, integrating our needs through adequate facilities into public infrastructure development is a major problem (*Male member of the PLWDs association/KPI participant, aged 46 years old*).

The outcome of the data presented and analysed in Fig. 4.4 above supports the outcome of the KPI presented here. This goes to buttress the fact that the government has either by omission or commission neglected the PLWDs when it comes to mainstreaming their needs into public infrastructure development in Rivers State.

DISCUSSION OF FINDINGS

The first objective in this study is to determine the category of people living with disabilities that experience exclusion with regard to public infrastructure development in Rivers State. This led to asking the question, what category of PLWDs experience exclusion in terms of public infrastructure development in the state? The data collected in this regard was presented in Figure 1 above and the analysis that followed revealed physically challenged persons are the category of PLWDs that are excluded the most in terms of facilities that enable the wellbeing of PLWDs in the state. However, the

findings from the KPI especially those conducted with government officials contradicted this claim when most of them presented the opinion that those who are physically challenged are the ones who get the most attention when it comes to public infrastructure development in the state. In this regard, even where consultations are not done, attempt is usually made to provide ramps in some cases. Interestingly, the finding from the questionnaire presented in Fig. 1 above contradicted that of the DFID (2016) who found that outside physically challenged persons, most public infrastructure in Africa do not take cognizance of the needs of other categories of PLWDs such as the deaf, visually impaired, intellectually and mentally disabled among others. Nevertheless, the finding from the KPI sessions is in line with that of the DFID. The second objective of the study focused on investigating the challenges associated with disability inclusion in public infrastructure development in Rivers State. This led to the question, what are the challenges associated with disability inclusion in infrastructure development in the state? Data gathered in this regard were presented in Fig. 2 above and the analysis that followed highlighted two major challenges that tend to limit the inclusion of PLWDs in public infrastructure development in the state. These two limitations or challenges are 1) the lack of enforcement of existing laws and policies that require disability inclusion in project conception and implementation and 2) the absence of the will or outright negligence on the part of the government of the state to ensure that disability concerns are mainstreamed into public infrastructure development. This finding was largely supported by the outcome of the KPI where participants unanimously pointed out that one of the big challenges with disability inclusion in the state is the issue of oversight and negligence. Both findings strongly corroborate that of the World Bank (2017) where it was revealed in a global study of how various countries mainstream disability issues into policy actions that the problem is not the absence of policies, but that of enforcement and willingness to pursue outcomes.

The last objective of the study focused on suggesting ways that disability inclusion in infrastructure development can be improved in Rivers State. This generated the question, in what ways can disability inclusion in infrastructure development be improved in the state? The data related to this was presented in Fig. 3 above and the analysis that followed revealed that the respondents mostly reversed the weaknesses identified into prospective strengths. In this regard, two suggestions stand out and these are 1) the need to ensure compliance with existing laws and policies on disability inclusion by enforcing them and 2) the need to always engage PLWDs before any public infrastructure development project is embarked upon. The above suggestions clearly underscored the assumptions of the theory adopted for this study.

The stakeholders' perspective refers to the need to ensure effective engagement and inclusion of all social groups in society as a way of mainstreaming their concerns into any project. By so doing, it becomes easy to involve everybody there by reducing the feeling of exclusion.

CONCLUSION

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:

Integrated Stakeholder Consultation: Given that it is clear that people living with disabilities are hardly consulted before public infrastructure are conceived and implemented, it would be a step in the right direction for the government agencies involved to begin to have proper consultations with PLWDs. This can be done in an integrated manner where leaders or representatives of the various associations of

PLWDs in the state are invited alongside all other stakeholders in a town-hall manner to discuss such infrastructure development.

General Awareness and Training: There is need for a widespread awareness campaign on the need to promote disability inclusion in the state. This can be done through radio jingles, television discussion and newspaper publications. However, the most important aspect of this is the need to train the staff of the various government agencies on technical skills for disability inclusion in public infrastructure development in the state.

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