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The Role of Sustainable Development Goals in Fostering a More Inclusive and Equitable Society for People with Disabilities

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Abstract

In this paper, concepts like impairment, disability, handicap and sustainable development Goals (SDGs) were clarified. SDGs related to People with disabilities were highlighted, implementation was discussed and benefits derivable when related SDGs are implemented were examined. The paper also delves into required actions by various stakeholders for the successful implementation of SDGs and concluded that successful implementation of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) related to persons with disabilities (PWDs) requires united action and collaboration at all levels. By working together, governments, international organizations, civil societies, and the private sector can create inclusive societies that respect the rights and dignity of PWDs, leaving no one behind.

Keywords: SDGs, Inclusive Society, Disability Rights, Equitable Society, Social Inclusion

Introduction

The United Nations' Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) provide a global framework to address the world's most pressing challenges and create a more equitable and sustainable future for all. Central to the achievement of these goals is the inclusion and empowerment of persons with disabilities (PWDs), who make up an estimated 15% of the global population. The SDGs recognize that PWDs face unique barriers and challenges in accessing education, employment, healthcare, and social services. They often experience discrimination, stigmatization, and exclusion, leading to limited opportunities for full participation in society. However, the SDGs also emphasize the importance of leaving no one behind and ensuring that the development agenda is inclusive and accessible to all, including PWDs. In line with this commitment, the concept of being "United in Action" emerges—a call to collective efforts and collaboration to rescue and achieve the SDGs for, with, and by PWDs. It acknowledges the need for inclusive policies, programs, and initiatives that empower PWDs and enable them to actively contribute to sustainable development. United in Action recognizes the inherent value and potential of PWDs as agents of change and contributors to society. It emphasizes the importance of meaningful participation and partnership, ensuring that PWDs are involved in decision-making processes, policy development, and implementation. By embracing the principles of universal design, accessibility, and reasonable accommodation, United in Action aims to remove barriers and create enabling environments that foster the full inclusion and participation of PWDs in all aspects of life.

Rescuing and achieving the SDGs for PWDs requires a comprehensive approach that addresses multiple dimensions of inclusion. It involves enhancing access to quality education, promoting employment opportunities, ensuring universal and affordable healthcare, facilitating accessible transportation/infrastructure, and promoting social and cultural inclusion. It also entails combating discrimination, promoting awareness, and changing societal attitudes towards disability (Oliver, 2009). By harnessing the collective power of governments, civil society

organizations, private sectors, and individuals, United in Action envisions transformative change that leads to a world where PWDs are not only beneficiaries but active contributors to the achievement of the SDGs. It recognizes that the inclusion of PWDs is not solely a matter of social justice but also essential for the realization of sustainable and inclusive development for all.

Concept Clarification

A major drawback in the inclusion of PWDS is the use of inappropriate terms in describing or referring to them. The terms are sometime derogatory and demeaning resulting in issues of self-esteem, it therefore becomes imperative that inclusion should begin with the learning and usage of correct and appropriate words and terms that describe PWDS. Below are very common words that are most a time applied wrongly:

Impairment

Impairment refers to a loss or abnormality of physical, cognitive, or sensory function. It is typically related to a specific body part or system. Impairments can be temporary or permanent, and they can vary in severity (Shakespeare & Watson, 1997). Importantly, impairment is a medical or biological condition. A person with a visual impairment due to a congenital eye condition or an acquired injury that affects their ability to see. Impairments can result in difficulties with mobility, dexterity, or sensory functions, limiting a person's ability to perform certain tasks or participate in activities. Unless impairment results in one or more of the aforementioned functional limitations the individual concerned can only be referred to as impaired. Some impairments may lead to secondary health issues or require ongoing medical interventions. Dealing with the challenges and adjustments associated with impairments can have emotional and psychological effects, such as stress, anxiety, or depression.

Disability

Disability on the other hand refers to the consequences of an impairment in terms of limitations or restrictions on an individual's ability to perform activities or participate fully in society. Disabilities are influenced by the interaction between an individual's impairment and the environmental and social barriers they encounter. Disability is a social construct that focuses on the impact of impairments on functioning and inclusion. A person with a visual impairment may face difficulties reading printed material or navigating unfamiliar environments independently, which can affect their educational and employment opportunities. Disabilities can restrict an individual's ability to fully participate in education, employment, social activities, and community life. Many environments, services, and technologies are not designed to accommodate the needs of people with disabilities, leading to exclusion and unequal access. People with disabilities may face prejudice, stereotypes, and discrimination, which can impact their self-esteem, relationships, and opportunities. It should be noted that disability is situation specific. A person with physical impairment may be disabled in a work situation that requires moving from one place to another, he may be very comfortable in working place that does not require much movement like computer operation. In such a situation, such a person can be rightly referred to as a person with physical disability in the earlier situation and a person with physical impairment in the later situation.

Handicap

Handicap refers to the disadvantages or disadvantages that result from impairments or disabilities. It arises from the interaction between the individual's impairments or disabilities and the societal barriers they encounter, such as attitudes, inaccessible environments, and lack of accommodations. Handicap is a term that highlights the social and environmental factors that limit an individual's participation and opportunities (World Health Organization, 2021). If a person with a visual impairment faces barriers in accessing public transportation due to lack of audio announcements or tactile signage, they may experience a handicap in terms of limited mobility and reduced access to transportation options. Handicaps arise from societal barriers and can result in restricted access to education, employment, transportation, and social participation. In some cases, handicaps can lead to increased reliance on others for support with daily activities or accommodations. Handicaps can impact overall well-being and quality of life by limiting independence, choice, and the ability to fully engage in society. If an individual with either impairments or disabilities are able to whither the societies stereotypic attitudes and have develop coping mechanisms, such individuals are not handicapped by their impairments or disabilities and cannot be referred to as such.

Concept of SDG

The concept of Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) is a global framework that aims to address pressing social, economic, and environmental challenges while promoting sustainable development. The SDGs were adopted by United Nations member states in 2015 as a successor to the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs). The United Nations General Assembly adopted the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development in September 2015, which

includes the 17 SDGs and 169 targets. The SDGs build upon the achievements and lessons learned from the MDGs, which were in place from 2000 to 2015 (United Nations, 2015). The SDGs take a more holistic and integrated approach, recognizing the interconnectedness of social, economic, and environmental dimensions of development.

Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) Related to PWDs

The Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) include several goals and targets that are directly related to persons with disabilities (PWDs). These goals aim to ensure the inclusion, empowerment, and equal participation of PWDs in all aspects of society.

1. **Goal 4: Quality Education**
 - Target 4.5: Ensure equal access to all levels of education and vocational training for the vulnerable, including PWDs.
 - Target 4.A: Build and upgrade education facilities that are disability-inclusive and provide accessible learning environments.
2. **Goal 8: Decent Work and Economic Growth**
 - Target 8.5: Achieve full and productive employment and decent work for all, including PWDs, and promote their equal access to employment opportunities.
 - Target 8.6: Promote policies that support the creation of inclusive work environments for PWDs, including through reasonable accommodations.
3. **Goal 10: Reduced Inequalities**
 - Target 10.2: Empower and promote the social, economic, and political inclusion of all, irrespective of disability status.
 - Target 10.3: Ensure equal opportunity and reduce inequalities of outcome, including by eliminating discriminatory laws, policies, and practices against PWDs.
4. **Goal 11: Sustainable Cities and Communities**
 - Target 11.7: Provide universal access to safe, inclusive, and accessible green and public spaces for all, including PWDs.
5. **Goal 16: Peace, Justice, and Strong Institutions**
 - Target 16.7: Ensure responsive, inclusive, participatory, and representative decision-making at all levels, including the inclusion of PWDs.

Additionally, the United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (UNCRPD) serves as an important international framework for the rights and well-being of PWDs. It aligns with the SDGs and emphasizes the rights of PWDs to full and equal participation in all aspects of life.

Implementation of Related SDGs in Nigeria

The implementation of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) related to persons with disabilities (PWDs) in Nigeria is primarily the responsibility of the Nigerian government at both the federal and state levels (National Bureau of Statistics, 2020). While the specific actions and progress may vary across different states in Nigeria, here are some general examples of how the SDGs related to PWDs are being implemented in the country:

Goal 4: Quality Education: Efforts are made to improve access to quality education for PWDs through the establishment of inclusive schools and special education programmes. Government policies aim to ensure that schools are equipped with necessary infrastructure and resources to accommodate the needs of PWDs. In recent past, the Federal government through the Universal Basic Education Commission has distributed critical infrastructural facilities throughout the nation to the various inclusive schools. Awareness campaigns and capacity-building initiatives are conducted to sensitize teachers and education stakeholders on inclusive education practices. (still ongoing).

Goal 8: Decent Work and Economic Growth: The Nigerian government promotes inclusive employment opportunities for PWDs through the enforcement of policies that prohibit discrimination in the workplace. Skill development programs and vocational training initiatives are implemented to enhance the employability of PWDs. In some states, special employment schemes and incentives are provided to encourage the private sector to hire PWDs. In recent past we have had a Governor who made it compulsory for every civil servant to learn sign language so as to be able to communicate easily with the hearing impaired.

Goal 10: Reduced Inequalities: State governments work towards reducing inequalities faced by PWDs by implementing policies and programs that promote their social and economic inclusion.

Efforts are made to eliminate discriminatory laws and practices, ensuring equal access to services, facilities, and opportunities for PWDs. Awareness campaigns and advocacy initiatives are carried out to challenge negative attitudes and stereotypes towards PWDs states like Plateau, Bauchi, kano, Oyo, and Niger among others have passed law creating commission for people with disabilities and are employing people with disabilities in their

work force so as to meet up with the ten percent affirmation action.

Goal 11: Sustainable Cities and Communities: Some states in Nigeria focus on creating inclusive and accessible urban environments by improving infrastructure, public transportation, and public spaces for PWDs. Accessibility standards are integrated into urban planning and development processes to ensure that PWDs can move around freely and independently.

Required Actions/Activities Necessary for the Achievements of Related SDG

To achieve the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) related to persons with disabilities (PWDs), various actions and activities are necessary.

Policy and Legal Framework: Develop and enforce inclusive policies and legislation that protect the rights of PWDs and promote their full and equal participation in all aspects of society. Establish national action plans or strategies specifically focused on the inclusion of PWDs, outlining clear targets, indicators, and timelines.

Awareness and Advocacy: Increase tempo on the conduct awareness campaigns to promote understanding and acceptance of PWDs, challenging stereotypes and discrimination. Formation of advocacy groups by parents, professionals and civil society organizations that will ensure the rights and needs of PWDs at all levels of government are provided.

Inclusive Education: Ensure access to quality education for PWDs by providing inclusive learning environments, including accessible infrastructure, assistive technologies, and trained teachers. Develop and implement inclusive education policies that promote the inclusion of PWDs in mainstream schools and provide support for specialized education when needed. Government must expand and equip training institutions that will produce teachers in the field of general and special education that will be at home with skills and knowledge requirement of inclusive classes.

Employment and Economic Empowerment: Promote inclusive employment practices by encouraging public and private organizations to adopt disability-inclusive recruitment strategies and create accessible work environments. Provide vocational training, skill development programs, and entrepreneurship support tailored to the needs of PWDs to enhance their employability and economic independence.

Accessibility and Universal Design: Implement accessibility standards and guidelines in infrastructure development, transportation systems, public spaces, and digital platforms to ensure equal access for PWDs. Encourage the adoption of universal design principles to create products, services, and environments that are usable by all individuals, regardless of their abilities. At the moment only people with physical disabilities are able to locally adapt motorcycles to agree with their unique peculiarities, they are also able to use the automatic cars to navigate the environment. However, there is much to be done in the area of accessing public structures, transportation system and digital platforms by PWDs.

Data Collection and Monitoring: Establish robust data collection systems to gather disaggregated data on PWDs, monitor progress, and identify gaps in achieving the SDGs related to PWDs. Regularly evaluate and report on the implementation of policies, programs, and interventions to assess their effectiveness and make informed decisions.

Partnerships and Collaboration: Foster partnerships among Professionals, governments, civil society organizations, the private sector, and PWDs themselves to ensure coordinated efforts and shared responsibility in achieving the SDGs. Engage PWDs and their representative organizations in decision-making processes, policy development, and program implementation to ensure their meaningful participation.

Benefits Derivable when Related SDGs are Implemented

Implementing the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) related to persons with disabilities (PWDs) can bring about several benefits at individual, societal, and global levels.

Inclusive and Equitable Society: Promotes social inclusion and equal opportunities for PWDs, ensuring their full participation in all spheres of life. Reduces discrimination, stigma, and marginalization faced by PWDs, fostering a more inclusive and equitable society. Enhances social cohesion and solidarity by valuing diversity and recognizing the rights and contributions of all individuals, regardless of their abilities.

Enhanced Quality of Life for PWDs: Improves access to essential services, such as education, healthcare, employment, and transportation, leading to an improved quality of life for PWDs. Enables PWDs to reach their full potential by providing them with equal opportunities for education, skill development, and economic empowerment. Ensures the provision of assistive technologies, accessibility features, and reasonable accommodations that enable PWDs to overcome barriers and participate fully in society.

Economic Empowerment and Productivity: Harnesses the untapped potential of PWDs in the workforce, contributing to inclusive economic growth and reducing poverty. Increases productivity and innovation by leveraging diverse talents, skills, and perspectives of PWDs. Reduces dependency on social welfare systems as PWDs gain access to decent work, income generation, and entrepreneurship opportunities.

Sustainable Development and Resilience: Advances sustainable development by ensuring that development processes are inclusive, leaving no one behind. Contributes to building resilient communities by recognizing and addressing the specific vulnerabilities and needs of PWDs in disaster risk reduction and emergency response. Supports the achievement of other SDGs by integrating a disability-inclusive lens into various development sectors, such as education, health, gender equality, and urban planning.

Human Rights and Social Justice: Upholds the human rights and dignity of PWDs, ensuring their equal access to civil, political, economic, social, and cultural rights. Strengthens legal and policy frameworks that protect the rights of PWDs and promote non-discrimination and equal opportunities. Promotes a culture of respect, acceptance, and support for PWDs, challenging ableism and promoting social justice.

Global Collaboration and Partnerships: Fosters international cooperation and partnerships to share best practices, knowledge, and resources in disability-inclusive development. Strengthens solidarity and collaboration among governments, civil society organizations, and other stakeholders to collectively address the challenges faced by PWDs.

Conclusion

The successful implementation of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) related to persons with disabilities (PWDs) requires united action and collaboration at all levels. By working together, governments, international organizations, civil society, and the private sector can create inclusive societies that respect the rights and dignity of PWDs, leaving no one behind. Through United in action, we can effectively rescue and achieve the SDGs for PWDs by recognizing and valuing the diversity and unique contributions of PWDs, we must ensure that their voices are heard, their rights are protected, and their needs are addressed in all aspects of development. Governments must develop and enforce inclusive policies and legal frameworks that promote the rights and inclusion of PWDs. National action plans and strategies should be adopted with clear targets, indicators, and timelines. Raising awareness about the rights, capabilities, and contributions of PWDs is essential to challenge stereotypes, discrimination, and ableism. We must advocate for the inclusion of PWDs in decision-making processes and engage civil society organizations as partners in driving change. Promoting accessibility and universal design principles in infrastructure, technology, public spaces, and services is crucial. By removing physical, communication, and attitudinal barriers, we can create environments that empower PWDs to participate fully in society. Guaranteeing access to quality education for PWDs and promoting inclusive employment practices are key. By providing appropriate support, training, and reasonable accommodations, we can enhance their educational and employment opportunities.

Suggestions

1. Government should include national action plans with clear targets, indicators and timelines to promote the inclusion of persons with disabilities in achieving the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs).
2. Civil society organizations should form coalitions to empower PWDs and ensure their voices are included in decision-making processes to promoting their active participation in policy development.
3. Educational institutions should include training teachers in inclusive practices and make sure schools are equipped with necessary infrastructure and integrating assistive technologies to support diverse learning needs.
4. Private sectors need to implement disability-inclusive recruitment strategies and create accessible work environment to encourage their economic empowerment.

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