

**STRENGTHENING INTERGENERATIONAL SOLIDARITY FOR ENDURING
THE WELL-BEING OF ALL PERSONS LIVING WITH DISABILITIES IN THE
21ST CENTURY NIGERIA: THE SOCIAL WORK PERSPECTIVE**
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Introduction

This paper seeks to explore the concept of intergenerational solidarity and its pivotal role in fostering a socially inclusive and healthy society. The paper seeks to examine the societal strengths of key stakeholders ranging from policymakers to community leaders and family units. It highlights how these strengths can be harnessed to improve the overall well-being of all individuals, particularly persons with disabilities (PWDs) in the area of access, accommodation and inclusiveness.

Persons with disabilities represent a significant yet often marginalized demography in the society. This paper delves into defining who they are, identifying their unique strengths, and addressing the challenges they face in accessing fundamental social services. It emphasizes the importance of inclusiveness in creating an environment where every individual, regardless of their physical or mental abilities, has equitable access to opportunities, resources, and basic services.

Through the lens of social work, this paper underscores the transformative impact of intergenerational solidarity on building an accommodating, accessible, and acceptable society. Social workers play a crucial role in bridging generational gaps, advocating for inclusivity, and empowering both individuals and communities to create a future where all persons, including PWDs, can thrive.

Key Concepts

Intergenerational

Intergenerational refers to general human relationships and occurrences between generations.

Solidarity

Solidarity refers to the unity or agreement of feeling or action, especially among individuals with a common interest.

Persons with Disabilities (PWDs)

The United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (UNCRPD) defines PWDs as individuals with long-term physical, mental, intellectual, or sensory impairments that when in interaction with various barriers, hinder their full and effective participation in society on an equal basis with others.

Access

In the context of persons with disabilities (PWDs), accessibility or access refers to the design of environments, products, services, and systems that enable equitable and independent participation for everyone, regardless of their physical, mental, or sensory abilities.

Accommodation

In this context, accommodation refers to adjustments, modifications, or supports provided to enable individuals with disabilities to participate fully and equitably in everyday activities, environments, and opportunities.

Inclusiveness

Inclusiveness refers to the practice or policy of providing equal access to marginalized person of opportunities and resources.

The concept of strengthening intergenerational solidarity for enduring the wellbeing of PWDs in the 21st century Nigeria is relatively a new idea. Although, the concept of social work is as old as man, its relative effects cuts across generations. Social work was born out of the fact that the society must be safe for all regardless of their race, class, gender and status etc.

Intergenerational Solidarity enhances the collaboration and mutual support across generations, to address societal challenges and improve the general well-being of all. Hence PWDs have been part of local communities from generation to generation. It is expected that issues bothering on access, accommodation and inclusion should have been

properly managed. However, prejudice and discrimination is still the order of the day in most Nigerian local communities. So much so that major interventions concerning the wellbeing of PWDs had always come from the national government. For instance, the Babangida's regime (1985-1993) acknowledged the fact that all PWDs in Nigeria lacked economic independence and should be given employment in government agencies. The policy stated that 2% of the work force in government establishments should be reserved for PWDs. This policy was not adhered to but it was sabotaged at all levels of government. By 2019, the Nigerians with Disability Act (2018) came into effect. This holistically, looked at issues bothering on the access, inclusion and accommodations of all PWDs in Nigeria. The Act came with the setting up of the National Commission for persons with disabilities. It may suffice you to know that after over five years of the setup of this commission; very minimal achievements have been made.

Social work has attempted severally to ensure that vulnerable persons such as PWDs in our society are properly catered for. This can be seen in various advocacy programs, policy programming and the likes. The signing into law of the Nigerians with Disability Act (2018) was a joint effort of social workers, Civil Society and Disability based organizations.

In the post-colonial Nigeria, the advent of western missionaries who set up schools for children with disabilities across the length and breadth of the country was seen. Some of these schools are Wesley School for the Deaf Lagos, Pacelli School for the Blind Lagos, Gindiri School for the Blind Jos, National Orthopedic hospital in Igbobi, Leprosy settlement Uturu, among others, (Okeke, 2003). The

establishment of these missionary schools helped to shape the National Policy on education. The 1981 second edition, recognized special education as an integral part of the Nigerian educational services, and till date, special education is still a division in the Federal Ministry of Education. A division also known as the rehabilitation services was created with the mandate to serve the interest of persons with diverse disabilities in the country. This division was later elevated to a full fledged department and was moved around various ministries. At present, it is domiciled in the ministry of Humanitarian Affairs and Poverty Alleviation where the name has been changed to the Special Needs Department. In all of these changes, you may wish to note that neither the definition of PWDs nor the types of disabilities in Nigeria have changed.

The person living with disability can be referred to as individuals with long-term physical, mental, intellectual, or sensory impairments that when in interaction with various barriers, hinder their full and effective participation in society on an equal basis with others.

There are diverse disabilities that can be found in the 21st century Nigeria. These include physical impairment, visual impairment, mental disorders, speech disorder, cerebral palsy, autism, intellectual impairment, learning disability, cognition, neurological disorder, sensory, attention deficit, hyperactivity disorder, albinism, hearing impairment, deaf blindness, dyslexia (Okeke, 2003; Orzogi, 2005, Ebifa, 2018).

In ensuring that persons with disabilities are adequately catered for in our society, three issues are basically considered and these are; Accommodation, Access and Inclusiveness.

Accommodations are designed to address barriers that may arise due to disabilities and ensure inclusivity. The different examples of accommodations to consider include Physical Adjustments; Educational Accommodation, Work place accommodations and policy accommodations. The above examples of accommodations are critical part of promoting inclusion and creating an environment where PWDs can thrive alongside others without limitations imposed by physical, social, or systemic barriers.

Accessibility on the other hand ensures that PWDs can fully engage in societal activities and enjoy their rights on an equal basis with others. This includes: Physical Access, Digital Access, Social Access and Service Access.

The ultimate goal of accessibility is. to foster inclusion and remove the physical, social, and systemic barriers that hinder PWDs from thriving within their communities. It's a cornerstone of creating a truly inclusive society.

Inclusiveness is deliberately ensuring that all PWDs are included in every facets of the society, be it educationally, socially, economically, politically, financially and otherwise.

Strengthening Intergenerational Solidarity Among Persons Living With Disabilities In Nigeria; The Social Work Perspective.

Disability is part of being human and is integral to the human experience. Over 27 million Nigerians are reportedly living with some forms of disability or the other. Globally, an estimated 1.3 billion

people or 16 % of the global population experience a significant disability today ((WHO Global Report, 2023).

It is pertinent to note that human activities are largely responsible for a greater percentage of disabilities globally, Nigeria inclusive. Some of these activities may include: wars, (World war I, World war ii, Gulf war, Arab/Israeli war, Russia/Ukraine war), religious crises, communal crises, manufacturing and sales/distribution of fake and substandard products, accidents (road, air and sea crash), harmful cultural practices, illegal dumping and disposition of waste that are harmful to humans, oil spillage, etc.

Hence, there is the need for all humans to come together to make policies and enact laws that would make the world very comfortable and pleasant for all. Social work is expected to bridge this gap or become a catalyst that will necessitate the needed change.

Firstly, a social work advisory council should be set up at all levels of government to guide the formulation of all government policies and ensure that it is inclusive, accommodating and accessible to all. Secondly, the advocacy machinery of social work should be employed to sensitize all religious and faith based organizations to begin to preach love and peace among their congregants and not animosity and violence.

Thirdly, a National social work institute should be established to carry out the following functions; reward groups and individuals that are creating conducive living environment for all; train law makers on how to make laws that are accessible, accommodating and inclusive to all sundry; to promote peace and conflict resolution. Fourthly, the social

worker should continue to advocate for continuity in the formulation and promulgation of good government policies that is all encompassing.

Fifthly, the newly established Social Work Advisory Council should carry out awareness and sensitization campaigns on the disability related issues in the country. This laudable effort will help reduce prejudice and stereotypes within the society. Additionally, professional social workers are engendered to support PWDs and their families to access services and opportunities.

Recommendations

- Inclusive Policies to advocate for laws that will protect and empower PWDs should be enshrined in the statutory books.
- Capacity Building opportunities are required to train social workers and community leaders to foster solidarity.
- To encourage collaboration between families, communities, and policymakers in the area of creating enabling laws that will make the environment more conducive for all.

Conclusion

In conclusion, strengthening intergenerational solidarity for the total and overall well-being of persons with disabilities in the 21st century Nigeria is not just an ethical imperative, but a necessity for fostering a truly inclusive and equitable society. Social work, with its deep rooted values of advocacy, inclusiveness, and empowerment, plays a pivotal role in bridging generational divides and ensuring that PWDs are not left behind in the societal progress. By addressing key issues of accommodation, access, and inclusiveness, we can collectively dismantle the barriers that hinder the full participation of PWDs in all aspects of life.

The establishment of inclusive policies to the promotion of intergenerational collaboration and the advocacy for systemic changes are crucial steps toward achieving this goal. The role of social workers both in policy formulation and in community engagement remains vital in pushing for an environment where individuals with disabilities can thrive alongside their peers, without limitations.

Ultimately, the vision of a just and equitable society for all, including PWDs is achievable through the concerted efforts of all stakeholders, governments, families, community leaders, and individuals. The active engagement of social workers, armed with knowledge, passion, and a commitment to inclusivity is central to creating a world where every person regardless of ability, is afforded the dignity, opportunities and resources they deserve. As we move forward, the collective strength of intergenerational solidarity will be the foundation upon which the well-being of all persons, especially those with disabilities can be secured for generations to come.