



CHAPTER 45

POLITICAL EDUCATION FOR ACTIVE PARTICIPATION OF PERSONS WITH DISABILITIES IN NIGERIAN POLITICS

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Introduction

A society that takes every citizen into consideration in all its plans either able or disabled in some aspect of life is a society that will stand the test of time when it comes to be humane to humanity. The world in general upholds human rights to all levels having everyone inclusive in everything no matter their forms of disability, as recorded in the sixty-first session of the General Assembly by resolution A/RES/61/106. Adopted 13 December, 2006 at the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities. Persons with disabilities are to be treated well in all ramifications including participating in political activities and governance in general.

The society today has to create an inclusive society that is free of barriers in order to benefit persons with disabilities (PWDs), Nigeria as a country has had struggles including this in their different sectors, the bill is on the paper but having it executed is the issue, this can be seen in their buildings in schools and offices. And until this is done the issue of total inclusiveness of persons with disabilities the Nigerian society will be incomplete.

Inability to carry the persons with disability along has extended to their non participation in politics thereby having them occupy about one percent of the voting population of the country Nigeria, this is an indication of the lack of political awareness and involvement of persons of these group. This is worrisome and has become of great concern to stakeholders as to why persons with disability are not carried along or are not participating in political activities. Persons with disabilities have rights like every other person to be exposed to political knowledge, however, there are arguments by disability scholars that, they have been denied these rights hence excluded from participating in political activities, some argue that, even where persons with disability have little knowledge about voter education and want to participate little or no efforts are made to make it easy for their participation. "The last time I checked, poll units remained inaccessible," says David Anyaele, founder of the Lagos-based Centre for Citizens with Disabilities (CCD). "The worst are the state electoral commissions. It is a no-go area for now in



terms of access and participation in the electoral process.” Anyaele, who has lost both arms, was instrumental in lobbying for the passage of a 2018 anti-discrimination legislation in favour of PWDs. He says CCD also reviewed drafts of the INEC framework and has been monitoring its implementation.

“The joy is that we have been able to secure a legal framework that prohibits discrimination and the other harmful practices against citizens with disabilities,” Anyaele said. “We recognise the collaborative posture of some state institutions to our work [but] the election management body must take appropriate measures to [fully] implement the Electoral Act 2022.”

“I feel discriminated [against] on a daily basis as a woman with a disability [but] the framework has given a voice to persons with disabilities,” Auta said. “We are making gradual progress. Where we were 10 years ago is not where we are now.”

These are issues that have become worrisome and should be addressed immediately, what is the level of knowledge of the following among persons with disability? politics, education, concept of political education, active participation, disability and active participation of persons with disability will be discussed, concluded upon and suggestions made with appropriate references to help improve the situation if looked into and considered.

The term “politics”, is derived from the Greek word “Polis”, which means the city state according to Greek Philosopher. Politics (from Greek: Πολιτικά, *politiká*, 'affairs of the cities') is the set of activities that are associated with making decisions in groups, or other forms of power relations among individuals, such as the distribution of resources or status. Wikipedia

The English dictionary sees politics as the actions or activities concerned with achieving and using power in a country or society.

Therefore, politics can be seen as the activities that are done in order to empower people to a state of leadership of a state or country. Every human being is a political element. As stated in Nigeria’s 1999 constitution, every adult that is 18 years and above has the right to vote and be voted for, whether able or disable. It is obligatory that every citizen must carry out civic responsibilities which include active participation in politics. One will begin to wonder why persons with disability are not getting same rights as those with ability in politics when the constitution is unbiased in stating who and who should participate in politics.

The dictionary has the definition of education as the process of receiving or giving systematic instruction, especially at a school or university.

The concept of political education, however, has been subjected to different interpretations by scholars. In traditional socialization studies, the term political education was used synonymously with political literacy to mean the goal of political education. In a similar perspective, Denver & Hands, (2000), have conceived political literacy or education as the knowledge and understanding of political issues, which enable people to perform their roles as citizens effectively.



Westholm et al. describe political education as the basic concept and facts that constitute a necessary condition for comprehending the contents of public debate. Krosnick simply viewed political literacy as political expertise, while Zaller, called it political awareness, which is the extent to which an individual pays attention to politics and understands what he or she has encountered. Moreover, Carol & Celia, have conceived political education as the potential for informed participation in political activities. Annette, in describing political education, employed the concept of education for democracy which he argues is education that is based on the study of politics for the purpose of encouraging civic participation, as well as the development of virtues, and political knowledge through the provision of opportunity for service learning or active learning in the community. Political education is a desideratum for enhanced political skills, knowledge and participation in democracy.

The NBA Voter Education and Mobilization Committee, therefore, is charged with the task of sensitizing the public on how to exercise their franchise with a view to ensuring that not only do their votes count, but that elected officials are held accountable to the citizens. The abiding logic of democracy is that a government that assumes power based on its overwhelming electoral support ultimately has the interest in the overall wellbeing of its citizens. Consequently, for there to be a major turnaround in our electoral system, the citizens must be enlightened and educated adequately with both persons with ability and persons with disability.

Political education, therefore, for the purpose of this work is synonymous with political literacy. It is the transmission and acquisition of political knowledge, skill and attitude necessary for informed participation in the political process. A person with disability can be said to be one with political education if, the citizen has acquired the basic political knowledge and awareness that enhance the citizen's involvement in conventional political activities such as registration as a voter, voting in elections, running for political offices, membership of a political party and discussing political matters. Political education therefore, should be focus on the core issues of democracy and good governance. Political education is the exposure of citizens to the terms guiding political operations. When one is exposed to this knowledge, he/she understands how and what it will take to participate and the guiding principles in politics.

Active participation is when a person's involvement in all aspects of their life is enabled, recognising their right to participate in activities and relationships as independently as possible.

The *involvement*, either by an individual or a group of individuals, in their own governance or other activities, with the purpose of exerting influence.

In the context of this discussion, active participation will be seen as the visible participation of persons with disability in political affairs. There is low active participation of persons with disability because, persons with disabilities (PWD), often face systemic, enduring exclusion and discrimination. IRI has supported



active engagement of PWD in political and civic life in more than a dozen countries. In 2021, some researchers took the time to reflect on what makes an effective, successful program focused on building political inclusion through holding an Institute-wide reflection session, as well as targeted discussions about our disability work with IRI's political inclusion experts and relevant program teams. Taking this time to reflect and learn has showcased that relying on four key political inclusion principles through democracy, human rights, and governance (DRG) interventions can advance the cause of disability activists globally.

Concept of disability According to World Health Organization (WHO) refers to the interaction between individuals with a health condition (e.g. cerebral palsy, down syndrome and depression) and personal and environmental factors (e.g. negative attitudes, inaccessible transportation and public buildings, and limited social supports). Recent data for persons living with disabilities in Nigeria is hard to come by, but according to a 2018 report from the World Bank, one in six Nigerians are living with a disability.

According to the World Health Organization's 2011 World Disability Report, about 15 percent of Nigeria's population, or at least 25 million people, have a disability. Many of them face a number of human rights abuses including stigma, discrimination, violence, and lack of access to healthcare, housing, and education.

Nigeria ratified the United Nations Convention on the Rights of People with Disabilities (CRPD) in 2007 and its Optional Protocol in 2010. Since then, civil society groups and people with disabilities have called on the government to put it into practice. In 2011 and 2015, the National Assembly passed the Discrimination Against Persons with Disabilities (Prohibition) Bill 2009, but former President Goodluck Jonathan declined to sign it into law. The bill for the new law was passed by the House of Representatives and the Senate joint committee in November 2016, but was not sent to Buhari for his signature until December 2018.

On January 17, Buhari denied on national television that he had received the bill. Hundreds of people protested, and barely five days later, he signed the bill into law. The law prohibits discrimination on the basis of disability and imposes sanctions including fines and prison sentences on those who contravene it. It also stipulates a five-year transitional period for modifying public buildings, structures, and automobiles to make them accessible and usable for people with disabilities.

The law will also establish a National Commission for Persons with Disabilities, responsible for ensuring that people with disabilities have access to housing, education, and healthcare. The Commission will be empowered to receive complaints of rights violations and support victims to seek legal redress amongst other duties. The enactment of the Discrimination Against Persons with Disabilities (Prohibition) Act is only a first step in the fulfillment of Nigeria's obligations under the CRPD. Authorities should now put effective measures in place for its full implementation to ensure equal treatment and participation of people with disabilities across Nigeria.



Many of the disadvantages that people with disabilities and their family members face are because governments and policy-makers do not address some of the main problems of disability, e.g. the social barriers and discrimination. The needs of people with disabilities are rarely at the top of the policy agenda, especially in places where resources are limited. As a result, there are very few inclusive mainstream programmes and disability-specific services. Where disability is addressed in policies, implementation is often poor and as a result there are still many barriers in society for people with disabilities, in this study their inabilities to participate in political activities in Nigeria.

The thesis statement of this discussion therefore will be; Role of Political Education in Empowering Persons with Disability for Active Participation in Politics, Importance of Political Education of Persons with Disability, Ways which Persons with Disability can show Active Participation in Politics and Challenges Facing Persons with Disability.

Role of Political Education in Empowering Persons with Disability for Active Participation in Politics.

A people are said to be educated when they are knowledgeable about their environment and participate in activities in such environment, of cos' one cannot participate in what he/she does not understand therefore, political education if done properly in Nigeria empowers persons with disability in the following ways;

- Ability to form organizations that will protect their rights
- Sponsor and vote in a candidate of their choice to represent their interest
- Understand what is stipulated in the constitution concerning them
- Expose to issues arising from international conferences for their benefits
- Ability to hold government accountable for failed promises
- Ability to demand for their rights and rights of their children on issues of education, accessibility to public facilities, economic interest among others.
- At the start of Nigeria (PWD) Programming which was based on inclusion of PWD into political parties most party leaders were reluctant to include PWD representatives in their work, as they felt these communities would not be able to contribute substantively to the party, but if persons with disability are empowered with political knowledge they can mobilize community members to join political parties and advocacy skills to engage party leaders in discussions about the representation of their community in the party processes.

According to Atkinson et al, 2017, disability-inclusive election observation may provide opportunities to address barriers to political participation and to empower men and women with disabilities to serve in leadership roles.

Importance of Political Education of Persons with Disability

Political education is centered *on teaching individuals to have respect for the rule of law, good governance, free and fair election*, understand the basis of politics and



participate in political activities. A society that is not all inclusive brings in division and discrimination, educating people with disability stands high in building a society that is strong and accommodating for more political exploits, therefore educating persons with disability brings about;

1. Capacity building which enables them understand roles of political parties to them and government's responsibility.
2. Responsibility and demand of dividends of democracy
3. It brings about economic growth and development
4. It brings about equal representation
5. It takes away discrimination

Ways by which Persons with Disability can show Active Participation in Politics.

Active participation in politics is a visible activity and anyone who must engage in it must show evidence. This, is expected of persons with disability as well.

Participation can be evident when such a person;

- Has a voter's card (PVC)
- Get registered under political party of choice
- Join organizations that have people interested in politics
- Getting together and forming organisations of people with disabilities.
- Knows the different political parties and their respective candidates (This will enable him/her understand who his voting for and under which party)
- Understands the election calendar
- Has knowledge about laws guiding electoral act
- His rights and how to make government accountable for such rights

Challenges Faced by Persons with Disability in political participation.

Persons with disability go through a lot of challenges within different spheres of life, it is paramount to say political activities is not exceptional therefore, these challenges include;

1. Attitudinal barriers:

Culture, perception stigma and discrimination. The society views persons with disabilities differently and underestimate their capacities. They are also frequently labelled and called names which they don't deserve. Lack of engagement in mainstream media discussions also affects participation, thus disability does not become a priority. The political scenery is also lacking of opportunities for persons with disabilities through the belief that they are not visible thus political parties tend to rely on a few individuals with disabilities. Persons with disabilities themselves have minimal life skill competences thus most lack to participate due to societal believes that make them not to contribute. Another compelling factor is the lack of education among persons with disabilities thus making contribution.



2. Environmental barriers: This is in reference to physical access. This is very common in the political spaces where we conduct political activities, campaign venues transport and around most built environment. This becomes a hazard can also contribute to insecurity and violence. It is evidenced that when political forums happen in some venues, they turn violent thus making persons with disabilities not to attend.

3. Communication barrier: This affect all Nigerians with sensory impairments, cognitive disabilities where by materials are not in alternative formats. Communication materials are located in far distance not reachable. For example, persons with short stature cannot read high posters.

4. Institutional barriers: these are the policies which affect persons with disabilities. For instance, the new political act 2021 doesn't communicate how persons with disabilities are affected by the coalition partnerships. Lack of data on persons with disabilities thus making stakeholders not to plan.

5. Financial barrier: This is one which inhibits participation of persons with disabilities. The poverty levels among persons with disabilities is a clear indicator that makes them not to participate. Most political parties are funded by individuals in Nigeria despite having the political party funds. Economic Resources required in political activities like campaigns are very expensive

Active Participation of Persons with Disability in Nigerian Politics

In Nigeria persons with disability have not been seen in political arena so much, most have complained of the different difficulties and discrimination they face. This can be seen in the low participation of persons with disability.

Political participation includes a broad range of activities through which people develop and express their opinions on the world and how it is governed, and try to take part in and shape the decisions that affect their lives. These activities range from developing thinking about disability or other social issues at the individual or family level, joining disabled people's organizations or other groups and organizations, and campaigning at the local, regional or national level, to the process of formal politics, such as voting, joining a political party, or standing for elections.

Persons with disability have not been seen so much in political participation in Nigeria not until 2019 a disabled lady by name Lois Auta who has been paralysed from polio since she was two years old, cause to worry - for herself and other people living with disabilities (PWDs) decided to run for a federal lawmaker position in the capital Abuja, under the Accord Party. "It was filled with good and bad moments," she told Al Jazeera. "Coming out to run showed resilience and courage, despite the factors that can stop a woman with disability."

She also outlines other challenges which till date are issues facing persons with disability, these challenges she says; "Some of us who don't have fingers cannot vote,". "People with albinism and visual impairment too. Not all polling units have access to Braille ballot paper." During her campaign, she had gone on a



radio programme alongside two male opponents angling for the same position. A male listener called in to say there was hope for the men, but not for her. “Go home and sleep,” he said. “People see disability and gender before the credibility and capacity of the candidate,” Auta told Al Jazeera. She lost that election but says she was inspired to keep trying to get more PWDs involved in the electoral process. The vehicle for that has been Cedar Seed Foundation, a nonprofit she founded in 2011 to help others feeling “excluded and underrepresented”, get social protection. Its first project provided 120 wheelchairs to people in need. Yet, Auta is one of very few to run for political office or even participate in an electoral process that has historically given little attention to the needs of this significant population, even though she lost it was a huge attempt in overcoming discrimination of persons with disability, one can judge her lost on her disability this also is worrisome on why an individual should be judge on the persons disability in leadership. Little wonder then that as of May 30, a month to the end of registration, PWDs accounted for less than 1 percent of completed registrations.

Experts say the marginalisation of people with disabilities extends beyond elections, to other facets of life in Nigeria. Many complain of inadequate healthcare, lack of access to public buildings, and the effects of continued economic instability in a country where nearly half the citizens live in poverty. If persons with disability are educated politically such will be found in the Nigerian political environment, Rothe (1999) listed the following as the roles of political education in enhancing democracy:

- To develop and strengthen liberal democratic value awareness.
- Understand the basic task of politics as being to solve current problems by introducing binding decisions on contentious issues.
- To gain basic knowledge in all of the most important political issues with regard to the future, such as democracy and its threats and the relation between the economy and the ecology.
- To learn certain skills such as how to approach information, media and others.

Onuigbo, Eme and Asadu (2018) state that “Access to political education increases engagement in politics by developing the citizens cognitive skill which in turn enables them to process complex information about political system, and to enhance feeling of “civic duty” while Nie et al (1996) opine that “political education increases the verbal proficiency and related intellectual’s ability to understand political event and act in an instrumentality rationale manner. Delli and Keeter (1996) listed the following as the importance of political education.

- Interest identification and articulation
 - Comprehension of political system
 - Consistency of political views
 - Building political trust
 - Building democratic supports and values
 - Building political participation
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- Alteration of political view.

“The worst illiterate is the political illiterate. He hears nothing, sees nothing, takes no part in political life. He doesn’t seem to know that the cost of living, the price of beans, of flour, of rent, of medicines, all depend on political decisions. He even prides himself on his political ignorance, sticks out his chest and says he hates politics. He does not know, the imbecile, that from his political non-participation comes the prostitutes, the abandoned child, the robber and worst of all, corrupt officials, the lackeys of exploitation, multinational corporate” BERTOLT BRECHT.

The Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities, Article 29 on participation in political and public life, mandates that “States Parties shall guarantee to persons with disabilities political rights and the opportunity to enjoy them on an equal basis with others”. People with disabilities face many barriers to political participation, and many choose not to participate in politics because the issues that concern them are often ignored and/or they feel they have limited power to influence change and decision-making. Promoting political participation for people with disabilities is an important part of the empowerment process. Until more people with disabilities participate, their voices will not be heard and their right to equity and access to the health, education, livelihood, and social sectors will be restricted, even though stated in the Nigerian 1999 constitution, section 32. Persons with disability needs to be expose to knowledge about Political System in Nigeria and its operations and how they can participate and benefit like every other person in the society.

Conclusion

The Country Nigeria has to put all hands-on deck and all stakeholders involved in educating persons with disabilities in order to bring them to participate in political activities. These cannot be achieved if materials are not made available materials like, means of communication, accessibility to voting points, enhancing devices to read the right and desired place to vote and above all general education.

Involvement in political activities is key to enabling persons with disability accept and participate in political activities, a society can only be great if it is run on an all-inclusive philosophy and practice. Until this is done the cries of the persons with disability will remain unattended to. Identifying the different disabilities, spreading political knowledge in language and signs that, all will understand, designing ballot papers to suit every disability, ensuring voting centers are situated in areas accessible to all is first evidence of a society that intends to solve the issue of inactiveness of persons with disability in politics, can we say Nigeria has overcome this stage? One will expect that, the allocated budget for disability inclusion in the 2023 elections is being channeled into creating awareness about the process and procuring magnifying glasses, tactile ballot guides, signage posters, sign language interpreters and other aids, lack of the aforementioned are things that stand discriminatively against persons with disability.



Suggestions

Persons with disabilities cannot just be educated politically except they are understood therefore, the following suggestions should be put into considerations when talking about political education of persons with disabilities. The government should consider the following;

1. **“Nothing About Us Without Us”**: This principle is essential to bringing about transformative change, as it prioritizes the lived experience of local partners that represent and come from marginalized groups. With diverse types of disabilities and varying priorities among these communities, in addition to social norms that often exclude members of the PWD community from the conversation, it is necessary to seek meaningful input from partners throughout the program to ensure interventions are both accessible and relevant. This can be seen through IRI’s USAID-funded CEPPS
2. **“Do No Harm”**: Interventions must be anchored in the principle of “Do No Harm,” which necessitates understanding how the program is affecting diverse groups of participants, particularly those who have been traditionally marginalized, in order to avoid inadvertent harm to the populations with whom we work. Applying this principle to programs focused on building disability inclusion requires a rights-based approach that empowers PWD to engage in political life. IRI has applied this principle through our CEPPS program in the Maldives by disaggregating indicator data by disability status to better understand the extent to which participants with disabilities are achieving intended outcomes following IRI support.
3. **Intersectional Approaches**: PWD are represented across all historically marginalized communities. Programs should take an intersectional approach because effective programming must recognize and respond to the ways in which social categorizations interact to create overlapping, interdependent systems of privilege or marginalization. For instance, IRI has done this through its CEPPS Mexico project, where our local DPO partner led a wide-reaching campaign to expand citizens’ awareness of the specific barriers women with disabilities face in Mexico
4. **Engage Across Sectors**: A conscious effort must be made to include cross-sectoral elements in programming where feasible, as building more equitable, inclusive societies requires going beyond DRG programming. For example, IRI's CEPPS programs in Tanzania and Uganda partnered with local civil society and political parties to advance access to education and social inclusion for PWD, recognizing that political engagement cannot happen without progress on these fronts.
5. **Targeted Programming and Mainstreamed Programming**: A targeted, or standalone, approach specifically works with PWD to build the skills and confidence to represent their rights and needs within political processes, as



well as opportunities to connect and collaborate with one another on priority issues. On the other hand, mainstreamed programming approach focuses on integrating PWD into all aspects of program implementation, which can also play an important role in shifting social and political norms around why the inclusion of persons with disabilities matters.

Implication of Political Education of Persons with Disability

By taking part in politics, people with disabilities can make sure that governments make laws and decisions that are good for people with disabilities. The right to vote and stand for elections is respected for all, they are given opportunity to make decisions, they are able to protect the law of equal rights of citizens. But, situation where persons with disability do not have political education they will be discriminated against, their rights will be denied, they will deny dividends of democracy, decisions can be taken on their behalf with their knowledge and consent.

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