

THE ROLE OF COMMUNITY BASED REHABILITATION (CBR) IN ENABLING INCLUSION OF PERSONS WITH SPECIAL NEEDS IN EDUCATIONAL PROGRAMMES IN NIGERIA

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Abstract

Inclusive Education seeks to provide equal opportunities for persons with special needs to receive formal or informal education alongside their peers. While several countries all over Africa are shifting towards the practice of inclusion, experience suggests that there are surmountable challenges associated with the process of transiting from theory to practice. This paper attempts to draw a link between inclusive education and community-based rehabilitation (CBR), and explains how CBR can contribute towards addressing most of the challenges. The paper also seeks to suggest recommendations that would ensure effective and sustainable inclusive education in Nigeria in particular and Africa in general.

In Nigeria, like many other African countries, achieving meaningful education for persons with special needs has been a difficult challenge. The introduction of special schools in the early 1970s as a solution rather lived much to be desired. Some of the problems associated with the special education system were separation of persons with disabilities from the rest of the society, increased discrimination, and limited participation in community life, among others. Besides, special schools were tailor-made programmes deliberately designed for the exclusive purpose to “fix” the “special needs” of persons with disabling conditions without giving them an option of choice; thus, neglecting other important aspects of their lives like, social development, culture, relevant functional skills, and citizenship etc.

Inclusion of persons with special needs in Education.

The idea of inclusion of persons with special needs in education has been advocated by many policy documents, like the African Charter on the Rights and Welfare of the child adopted in 1990, the Jomtien World Declaration on Education for All, 1990, the UN Standard Rules on the Equalization of Opportunities, 1993, the Salamanca Report and Framework for Action on Education of children with Special Needs, 1994, the Dakar Framework for Action on Education for All, UNESCO 2002. Specifically, some of the provisions of the Salamanca document:

“Every child has a fundamental right to education, and must be given the opportunity to achieve and maintain an acceptable level of learning,
Every child has unique characteristics, interests, abilities and learning needs,
Education system should be designed and educational programmes implemented to take into account the wide diversity of these characteristics and needs,
Those who have special educational needs must have access to regular schools which should accommodate them within a child-centred pedagogy capable of meeting these needs” (UNESCO) 1994)

Defining Inclusive Education

UNESCO 2005 defines inclusive education as a “process intended to respond to students’ diversity by increasing their participation and reducing exclusion within and from education.” It is related to the attendance, participation and achievement of all students, especially those who, due to different reasons, are excluded or at risk of being marginalized. It constitutes an essential element to advance on the EFA agenda.

The focus of inclusive education should be on the transformation of educational system and schools so that they can cater for the diversity of students, learning needs resulting from their social and cultural backgrounds and their individual characteristics as regards, learning, motivations, and abilities. It should no longer be the students enrolled in the school that must adapt to the existing educational provision but rather the schools that should be adapted to the needs of every student since all students are different.

One of the key components of inclusive education is to prepare persons with special needs live and actively participate in community life. Susie Miles 2000 observes that: “inclusive education should incorporate a range of strategies within a community which ensure that all children have equal access to education. This education should equip them for a life as part of that community and help develop their potential.”

Inclusive education, therefore, could be seen as an essential process for achieving inclusive community development resulting to inclusive communities and society. The Nigerian National Policy on Education, 2004 is clearly in favour inclusive education. There is no doubt that the success of inclusive education revolves on the communities in which persons with special needs live. As such involvement of community members as well as Community Based Rehabilitation (CBR) programmes is crucial.

Findings from various researches conducted in Zimbabwe, Zambia, South Africa, Ghana, India and other countries in Africa reveal a lot of concerns from teachers, parents and even policy makers regarding implementation of inclusive education. These include:

- Poor enrolment of children with special needs in public schools
- Inadequate infrastructure to accommodate the teeming population of children with special needs in need of inclusive education
- Present curriculum does not meet the needs of children with special needs

- Inclusion affects the teaching methods being used. Need to modify
- Parents are sometimes worried about the extent to which Individual Educational Plans (IEP) could go in meeting the needs of their children
- Parents of children without disabilities resent inclusive education
- Limited number of teachers/personnel with appropriate professional knowledge and skills to provide quality service needed
- Limited funding to cater for expenses for inclusive education
- Limited resources/educational materials to make inclusive education effective etc.

What is Community-Based Rehabilitation (CBR)?

UNESCO, ILO & WHO 1994, define Community Based Rehabilitation (CBR) as a “strategy within general community development for rehabilitation, equalization of opportunities and social inclusion of all children and adults with disabilities. CBR is implemented through combined effort of persons with disabilities, and the appropriate health, education, vocational and social services.”

CBR has evolved as a strategy to ensure that persons with special needs have their rights protected, that they recognize the value of their own responsibilities and that they have the opportunity of living lives with dignity and fulfillment, on an equal basis with others – in accordance with UNCRPD. It is a multi-sectoral approach rooted in the four key principles of inclusion, participation, self-advocacy and sustainability; and concentrating on the domains of wellbeing (health, education, livelihood social participation and empowerment). CBR is one of the strategies deployed to a) change community attitudes and eliminate barriers to inclusive development, b) address the causes of disabilities and c) facilitate delivery of quality services and programmes.

CBR and Inclusive Education.

Both CBR and inclusive education seeks to protect and promote the rights of persons with special needs. They also encourage inclusion of issues regarding persons with special needs in planning and implementation of community development, as well as facilitating their active participation of persons with special needs and their families/community members in activities of community development.

Community-Based Rehabilitation programmes has been used as a tool for facilitating inclusion of persons with special needs in educational programmes (formal or informal) in many countries including Malawi, Uganda, Kenya, India, Bangladesh, and Nigeria to mention but few countries (Hartley & Okune 2008)

In Nigeria, CBM, an international non-governmental disability and development organization commenced support of CBR programme in 1992. These programmes are implemented through Government and faith-based organizations. CBM supports 10 CBR programmes in different geopolitical zones across the country. Other INGOs supporting

CBR in Nigeria also include, Sightsavers International, Netherlands Leprosy Relief and the Leprosy Mission.

How CBR Promotes Educational Inclusion of Persons with Special Needs

1. Increasing school enrolment

CBR programmes, through fieldworkers and volunteers in Nigeria do counsel and create awareness to parents and community members regarding the importance of inclusive education for children with disabilities, this increases parent's interest in sending their children to school. The CBR Fieldworkers also help in getting the children "ready" for school through implementation of pre-educational activities, as well increasing their functional abilities through functional rehabilitation activities, like exercises to stimulate their physical & mental development e.g. the use of a walker or parallel bars to stimulate movement, and puzzles to develop logic and mathematical skills.

Through their advocacy activities, CBR Fieldworkers and volunteers advocate with school authorities on the rights of children with disabilities to education and the need for such schools to accept and offer them unconditional admission.

As part of her strategies to ensure access to services and participation of community members in contributing towards improving the quality of life for persons with special needs, CBR programmes do engage in mobilization of financial resources through encouraging the formation of self-help groups or direct sourcing from community members. Churches, Mosques, well-to-do individuals are seen contributing money towards payment of school fees and covering other educational expenses for poor children who on their own would not have been able to afford education. The programmes also get some local and state governments to fund certain educational activities to benefit persons with special needs.

2. Provide personnel and contribute to improving professional knowledge & skills. In Nigeria, CBR Fieldworkers and physiotherapists, Occupational Therapists etc, do work closely with teachers in schools in assessing children with special needs and carrying out relevant activities needed to facilitate inclusion of children with special needs. CBM runs a National Training Programme which conducts short-term trainings in various special education areas like, pre-school education, Sign Language, production and maintenance of Assistive Devices, Counseling, Management of disabilities, etc. Currently, CBM is working with other INGOs involved with disability activities on starting a Diploma programme in CBR at the University of Jos in Plateau State, Nigeria; this will help to produce more professionals to support inclusive education for persons with special needs in the country.

3. Facilitate the provision infrastructure, and educational materials. CBR programmes do work together with local government and communities to facilitate provision of classrooms, resource rooms, educational materials like, educational videos, books, writing frames, Braille machines, Braille papers, special seats and other essential equipment to enhance inclusive education.
4. CBR programmes are very effective in organizing and carrying out advocacy activities. CBM's Disability Rights Unit in Nigeria do work closely with OPDs, Human Rights Commission and legal practitioners in advocating for rights of persons with disabilities, as well as pursuing cases of human rights abuses.

Heinicke-Motsch(2009)

summarized the role of CBR in facilitating inclusive education as below:

1. CBR needs to campaign with local authorities or higher ups to make the education disability inclusive or inclusive education – “local children local schools
2. It facilitate schools to become inclusive in terms of physical access, skills, knowledge and attitude of teachers
3. It makes parents aware about the need for and benefit of the education for their children
4. It ensures that the child with a disability goes to the school and stays in the school, some might need assistive devices
5. It organizes better livelihood opportunities for the family to ensure they send their children to school rather than expecting them to help generate household income during school hours
6. It works with other children, parents and community members to develop attitudes which support equal opportunities and participation.

Recommendations for achieving Effective and Sustainable Inclusive Education.

1. Need for each country to conduct comprehensive Situational Analysis in order to identify the existing resources and gaps for effective planning
2. Develop a clear National Policy
3. Develop a comprehensive strategic plan
4. Conduct National dissemination and sensitization campaign to educate the general public on the policy
5. Mobilize for a sizable budget
6. Ensure appropriate infrastructure, curriculum and adequate materials
7. Develop teachers capacities
8. Develop robust support system

9. Develop partnerships and collaboration with families, community members and community based initiatives
10. Develop professional networks to share best practices
11. Establish monitoring and evaluation system.
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