POVERTY ALLEVIATION AND SUSTAINABLE HUMAN DEVELOPMENT OF THE PHYSICALLY CHALLENGED IN A RECESSIONED ECONOMY

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Abstract
Poverty alleviation is a cautious and articulated programme aimed at improving sustained self dependence of the vulnerable (poor) members of a society. The relegation of the poor in formulation and implementation of policies affecting them is adversarial to sustainable development. The paper examined poverty alleviation and sustainable human development of the physically challenged in a recessed economy of Imo State, Nigeria. The theoretical thrust of the paper is the elite theory. Cross-sectional survey design was employed and respondents were the Mbaise members of the Association of Persons with Disability (APWD). The sample size was 150 and they were selected using multi-stage sampling procedure. The major instrument for data collection was questionnaire. The Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS) software was used in data analysis. The result revealed amongst others, that 42.2% of the respondents believed that they were left out of pro-poor policy formulation due to ignorance of policy makers; 31.1% attributed it to wrong perception of their physical challenges, and 5.0% blamed it on corruption. Again, it was found that majority (51.6%) of the respondents indicated that support gadgets (like wheelchairs, walking staff, eye glasses etc) were part of palliatives they usually receive and 25.9% said it was philanthropic stipends/almns. However, 16.9% held the view of periodic entertainments; while just 4.8% indicated skills acquisition/small business establishment. Findings of the study indicate that poverty alleviation programmes have not really impacted the physically challenged persons in Imo State and that without adequate educational (scholarships), or skills empowerment, many of them will continue to live dependent lives. It therefore recommended amongst others, that government should as a matter of fairness and social justice appoint a member of the APWD as a Special Adviser (SA) on disability affairs; poverty alleviation for the physically challenged should be geared towards academic scholarships and skill acquisition/business establishment. Lastly, government should create Ministry of Disability Affairs where a member of the APWD will be the Minister or Commissioner to cushion the effect of years of neglect as to restore confidence of total inclusion in governance.

Keywords: economic recession, people with disability, physically challenged, poverty alleviation, sustainable development.

Introduction
The World Summit draft plan on sustainable development recognizes poverty as the greatest global challenge facing the world today and its eradication seen as an indispensable requirement for sustainable human development. It stressed that unless the problem of poverty is addressed, there can be no sustainable development (World Summit on Sustainable Development, 2002). Poverty alleviation is one of the most difficult challenges facing any country in the developing world, where on the average, majority of the population is considered poor. A recent World Bank’s global poverty rating presented by its President, Jim Yong Kim, at the April 4th, 2014 IMF/World Bank Spring Meeting in New York, placed Nigeria among the five poorest countries in the world. The report emphasized that Nigeria has one of the largest concentration of poor people that live on less than one dollar per day. It stressed that seven per cent of the world poor live in Nigeria, in spite of the rebasing of the country’s Gross Domestic Product (GDP) that ranked it as the largest economy in Africa (Vanguard, 2015).

Poverty alleviation has been the cornerstone of development strategies adopted over the years. In the 1950s and 1960s, large investment focused on physical infrastructure as the instrument for fast economic growth and alleviation of poverty. Beginning from the 70s, development specialists realized that physical capital itself was not sufficient and that human capital was equally important. At this time, there was a major shift of investment funds from physical infrastructural projects to those that focused on human development (Duraiappah, 2000). In Nigeria, poverty is believed to assume a worrisome dimension at the end of the civil war in 1970 (Eboreime & Njoku, 2015). The poverty statistics of Nigeria by the National Bureau of Statistics from 1980 to 2010 is shown in Table 1;
Poverty has been a serious challenge to many persons and its effect, which includes lack and deprivation in the basic necessities of life is worrisome. Poverty humiliates and dehumanizes its victims (Ukpung as cited in Arogundade, Adebisi & Ogunro, 2011). To this end, various governments, people in authority and aid agencies almost always strive to ensure that adequate structural programmes are enshrined to see that, if not eradicated, is reduced to the barest minimum. Surprisingly, one major challenge that appears to frustrate this noble agenda is the non-involvement of the poor (target group) in the formulation and implementation of pro-poor policies. The poor experience social exclusion more strongly, have access to fewer channels through which to exercise their rights and meet with greater barriers to participation (Claeys, 2001). This therefore has continued to be adversarial to sustainable development in Nigeria.

Arguably, the physically challenged persons have been the most vulnerable group to poverty in Nigeria, and Imo State in particular. This is to the fact that they are excluded in policies pertaining to them; and even in cases of employment, where they merit or have the requisite skills, they often find themselves relegated on the ground that they are not able. They are also repeatedly subjected to humiliation and all manner of hardship. It is in view of the issues raised that the paper specifically examines why policy makers exclude the physically challenged in policies pertaining to them and the forms of palliatives they receive in Imo State.

Table 1: Relative Poverty Headcount from 1980-2010 in Nigeria

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Poverty Incidence (%)</th>
<th>Population in Poverty (Million)</th>
</tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1980</td>
<td>27.2</td>
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<tr>
<td>1985</td>
<td>46.3</td>
<td>34.7</td>
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<td>1992</td>
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<td>1996</td>
<td>65.6</td>
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<tr>
<td>2004</td>
<td>54.4</td>
<td>68.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2010</td>
<td>69.0</td>
<td>112.47</td>
</tr>
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</table>


Evidences have shown that the number of those in poverty has continued to increase in Nigeria. Ogwumike (2008 as cited in Muktar, 2011) noted that poverty rose from 27% in 1980 to 46% in 1985 and to 66% in 1996; by 1999 it increased to almost 70%. However, the NBS (2012) index puts Imo State poverty line at ‘Core poor’ 67.0%; ‘Moderate poor’ 30.4%, and ‘Non-poor’ 2.6%. When the moderately poor and non-poor are put together, it just gives 33%; indicating the alarming rate of poverty in the State, despite various poverty alleviation programmes floated over the years by successive governments. This is inclusive of the physically challenged who are believed to be more vulnerable to the present economic down-turn in the country.

A 2011 report by World Health Organization (WHO) in collaboration with World Bank indicates that number of people living with disabilities has overly increased and that a billion or 1 out of every 7 persons is someone with disability. Persons with disability continue to live in extreme poverty due to the unequal power relations witnessed in the society and emphasized by discrimination and negative myths associated with it (Mwangi, 2013). There is no statistics however, showing the percentage rate of poor physically challenged persons in Nigeria, and Imo State in particular. The fact remains that this group of persons are the most disadvantaged, deprived and relegated in scheme of things – especially on recruitment or economic opportunities; thus, making them vulnerable and prone to poverty.

The Nigerian State had been hit by the twin problem of poverty and economic recession. Recently, the International Monetary Fund (IMF) and Central Bank of Nigeria (CBN) stated that Nigeria’s economy has slipped into recession. A recession is a perceivable adverse decline in economic activity or GDP of a nation, leading to increased hardship, low output, unemployment, fall in availability of credit and illiquidity. Tinuke (2012) characterized it by abnormal increase in unemployment, falls in the availability of credit, shrinking output and investment, numerous bankruptcies, reduced amount of trade and commerce, as well as highly volatile relative currency value fluctuations, mostly devaluations, financial crises and bank failure. This has been attributed to a number of factors, some of which are poor economic planning, accumulation of foreign debt service, high inflation and interest rates (Noko, 2016), mismanagement of human and material resources, indiscipline, lack of political will, corruption etc (Oloyede, 2014). Rather than tackle indices of recession and alleviate poverty in the society through the successive programmes, some Nigerian policy makers appear to have used the opportunity to embezzle and enrich themselves to the detriment of the target group.
Conceptual Clarifications
Poverty Alleviation Programmes in Nigeria: Overview of Imo State Implementations

There is no universally accepted definition of poverty. At the same time, there is always the difficulty in deciding where to draw the line between the poor and the non-poor or rich. According to World Bank (2002), poverty is the inability to attain a minimum standard of living. The report has constructed some indices based on a minimum level of consumption in order to show the practical aspect of poverty. These include: lack of access to resources, lack of education and skills, poor health, malnutrition, lack of shelter, poor access to water, and sanitation, vulnerability to shocks, violence and crime, political discrimination and marginalization (Nwanolue, Iwuoha & Obi, 2012). Poverty affects many aspects of the human condition, including physical, moral and psychological (Egbue, 2015). It dehumanizes and even leads the most vulnerable into various forms of crimes.

Despite the plethora of poverty alleviation programmes which past governments had initiated and implemented, by 1999 a World Bank report indicated that Nigeria’s Human Development Index (HDI) was only 0.416 and that about 70% of its population was vegetating below the bread line. Reacting, former President Obasanjo said that Nigeria’s population was growing at 2.4%, a very serious condition for poverty. This alarming statistics prompted the government to review the existing poverty alleviation schemes with a view to improving them (www.aapii.org). Consequent upon these developments, three presidential panels were set up to review the programmes. How well the scheme has fared in addressing the purpose of its establishment is still uncertain.

In Imo State, the poverty alleviation programmes implementation is characterized by corruption, diversion and even exclusion of those it was meant for. Where it appears to have been implemented, it is usually stipends that could not rent a space or start up a business. In the case of persons living with disabilities, it is usually wheelchairs, walking support aids, charity models of assistance and a narrow medical treatment that focuses on finding solution to limitations caused by disability and ignores the need to address the vast array of issues (Lang & Upah, 2008). Aside these, they most times offer some stipends to feed and solve immediate needs, without looking into impactful empowerment or human development for a sustainable self reliance through scholarships or free education.

There have been governmental intervention attempts at poverty alleviation, of which the National Poverty Eradication Programme (NAEP) and National Poverty Eradication Council (NAPEC) are the most recent ones. Quite paradoxically, despite various programmes that have been floated to tackle poverty in Nigeria, majority of its people still live in abject poverty. The physically challenged that are the most vulnerable of this class of persons, are still living a dependent and alms begging lives. Reason being that many of them are not academically and technically empowered.

When Governor Rochas Okorocha’s administration came on board in 2011, it launched the Special Citizens (SCs) programme, directly aimed at alleviating the plights of the physically challenged persons in Imo State. Ironically, the Governor appointed one Mrs. Kate Okoli, who is neither a physically challenged person nor a member of APWD as the programme’s head and Senior Special Assistant (SSA) on same course. After months of alleged neglect and diversion of funds meant for the special citizens, the President of the APWD-Imo State Chapter, Dr. Stanley Nwachukwu in a protest by APWD in Owerri, said that the SSA has nothing to offer to better the lots of his people; and demanded for her sack (Imo-Blog, 2012). Since that agitation, there has neither been change of the SSA, nor the welfare of the APWD any better.

Sustainable Human Development

Sustainability is not a new concept, and Redcliff (1987) in Egbue (2015) traced it back to the ‘limits of growth’ debates of the 1970s and the 1972 United Nations Stockholm Conference. It is a process of meeting human developmental goals. However, human development grew out of global discussions on the links between economic growth and development during the second half of the 20th century, with emphasis on expanding the richness of human life, rather than that of the economy (United Nations Development Programme-UNDP, 2016). The concept was introduced by Economist Mahbub ul Haq, and he defined it as the process of giving people the freedom and opportunities to improve their wellbeing (Measure America, 2016). It is also about creating equitable environment or opportunities for people to individually and collectively harness their full potential with a reasonable chance of leading productive and creative lives.

Brundtland Report (1987) defines sustainable development as "a form of development which satisfies the needs of the present generation without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs.” This definition tries to capture the essence of this study, on the ground that poverty alleviation programmes are meant to satisfy present needs of the poor by empowering them with requisite skills to live self sustaining, reliance and satisfying lives in the future.
At the United Nations Sustainable Development Summit of 25th September 2015, world leaders adopted a set of 17 Agenda for Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), amongst which are to end poverty, fight inequality and injustice. In the words of Helen Clark “World leaders have an unprecedented opportunity this year to shift the world onto a path of inclusive, sustainable and resilient development” (UNDP, 2015). This statement recognized the glaring non-inclusiveness of the target groups in developmental policies in most nations, especially Nigeria. However, when one cannot be self reliant, provide and basically take care of himself, his sustainable development is in doubt. In the view of Mwangi (2013), the physically challenged persons lead more of dependent, support and hopeless lives. In other words, where they often hope to get assistance they usually fail, thus leading to frustration and resorting to the avoidable habit of alms seeking. Until total inclusion and transparent implementation is granted, majority of the poor, especially the physically challenged in Nigeria would continue to live dependent and frustrated lives.

The Physically Challenged and Palliatives

The physically challenged are group of persons with one form of identifiable deformity, which could be as a result of polio, accident (medical mistakes or unforeseen circumstance of automobile, fire outbreak etc) or even biological. These categories of people are challenged in certain aspects but are very much able or functional in some aspects. Often, they are referred to as the disabled and thereby perceived by the society as not competent enough to carry out certain tasks. As a result of this, many of them have experienced humiliations, deprivations – even when they are qualified.

In the views of Mji, MacLachan, Melling-Williams and Gcaza (2009), there is a strong relationship between disability and poverty with a cyclical tendency; as poverty makes people more vulnerable to disability and disability reinforces and deepens it. They argued that disability is an important factor, along with gender, race and caste that interacts to impoverish people and keep them poor. This could be traced to social exclusion and discrimination that the physically challenged persons often face in various societies, especially Nigeria. Kelemen, Haig, Goodnight and Nyante (2013) noted that the resources are not equally allocated and reasons for the mis-allocation are many and complex. Among developing countries, it is estimated that only 2% of people with disability receive any rehabilitation whatsoever (Department for International Development-DFID, 2004). However one probable reason is difficulty in obtaining information on the extent and cost of disability (Urimubenshi, Sagahutu, Kumurenzi, Nuhu, Tumusiime & Kagwiza, 2015).

People with disability are often excluded from the mainstream of society, hence, they are deprived of meaningful contribution to the development of the society. It is increasingly being recognized that bringing people with disabilities into the development mainstream will have a significant effect in any plan to minimize poverty in the developing world (Wolfensohn in Amusat, 2009). This is especially true given that disability affects not only the individual but also the family and the larger society. In Africa, previous efforts to put disability in the forefront of the development agenda have not yielded all the expected results. This was as a result of poor resources blamed partly on the lack of commitment on the part of governments (Mji et al, 2009).

Disability is not peculiar to any nation; but a prevalent issue affecting both developed and developing countries. World Health Organization (WHO, 2011) indicates that more than one billion people live with disability; and about 75% living in the developing countries (Lang & Upah, 2008). In Nigeria, the estimate puts the number of people with disability at 19 million or approximately 20% of the country’s population (Amusat, 2009). There are no credible and robust statistics in Nigeria about most things, including disability. There is therefore a big knowledge gap on the accurate statistics of the physically challenged persons in the country, especially in Imo State.

Nigerian persons living with disability are no better off when compared with their counterparts in other parts of the developing world, in terms of the challenges they face — they are poor, marginalized and excluded (The Guardian, 2009; Lang & Upah, 2008). Despite the declaration of full participation in the disability agenda of the United Nations by the Nigerian government, Nigerians with disabilities are still faced with these challenges (Amusat, 2009). They are often treated as second-class citizens, shunned and segregated by physical barriers and social stereotypes. This discrimination occurs in a range of arena, including the workplace, schools, health centres, recreational facilities, and many societal contexts. As a fall-out of social discrimination, economic marginalization and a broad range of other human rights violations, people with disability face difficult challenges in living a normal life. Unlike in Uganda, where disabled people were involved in the development of the third phase of the Poverty Reduction Strategy Paper (PRSP)/Poverty Eradication Action Plan (PEAP), their Nigerian counterparts have not had such a fair privilege (Dube, 2005).
Study by Leonard Cheshire Disability in Lang and Upah (2008) noted that while some governments and societies have adopted a social inclusion and rights-based approach to disability issues, Nigeria relies on charity models of assistance and a narrow medical model that focuses on finding medical “solution” to limitations caused by disability and ignores the need to address the vast array of issues created and imposed by discrimination, exclusion, ignorance, and lack of access. Fund meant for this scheme is usually embezzled or slots hijacked by the political elites and given to their comfortable family members. According to a former Permanent Secretary in the Imo State Poverty Alleviation Office, the scheme suffered frustration and have not addressed its main objective due to unnecessary interferences of politicians. He noted that more often than none, the influential and powerful members of the state send unverifiable names for inclusion in the scheme.

However, as much as there has been dramatic increase in Universal Primary Education (UPE), this has not been so with Children With Disabilities (CWDs) (Dube, 2005). He stressed that in many cases, PWDs get less or no education and skills due to social exclusion and lack of facilities, thus limiting their ability to get a better source of livelihood in terms of good employment or possibility of being economically active. He therefore submits that approximately 80 percent of people with disabilities live in conditions of long-term poverty in the country.

Economic Recession

The National Bureau of Economic Research (NBER) defines a recession as a significant decline in economic activity spread across an economy, lasting more than few months, normally visible in the Gross Domestic Product (GDP), real income, employment, industrial production and wholesale-retail sales. It is also a period of temporary economic decline during which trade and industrial activity are reduced, generally identified by a fall in GDP in two successive quarters (Magaji, 2016). He described economic recession as a period of general economic decline and accompanied by a drop in the stock market, an increase in unemployment, and a decline in the housing market. To Noko (2016), economic recession is a negative real GDP growth rate for two consecutive quarters (first and second quarters); and he argued that Nigeria is currently experiencing economic recession since her first and second quarter growth in 2016 were -0.36% and -1.5%. However, Fapohunda (2012) perceived it as a period of economic slowdown featuring low output, illiquidity, abnormal increases in unemployment, falls in the availability of credit, shrinking investment, numerous bankruptcies, reduced amounts of trade and commerce, as well as highly volatile relative currency value fluctuations, mostly devaluations.

The global economic downturn of most developed economies like the United States and Western Europe appears to be taking some ugly tolls on weaker and dependent economies of developing societies, like Nigeria. World Bank estimated that 130-155 million people fell into poverty amidst sharply rising food and fuel prices and about additional 53 million were pushed into poverty due to weaker economic growth in most countries (Orozco, 2009). Prior to recession, the Nigerian economy was swimming in a pond of false confidence in an imbalanced growth and disequilibrium in revenue generation. In other words, almost every other sector of the economy was neglected and the focus was on oil. At the beginning of Muhammadu Buhari’s administration, oil was sold at about $100 per barrel; later the price dropped sharply to 37 dollars and now it is in the range of 40-45 dollars per barrel. The fall of oil prices, high inflation and the shortage of electricity, as well as the humanitarian crisis in the northern region have had a negative impact on the recession of Nigeria’s economy and a country with a leading economy in the continent suddenly became poor and lost that to South Africa (Obasanho, 2016).

The impact of the recession has been felt by virtually everyone in the country and it is more severe among the less privileged. Prices of most food commodities have skyrocketed into double of what it used to be (FDC in Noko, 2016). In Imo State, the situation appears to be more worrisome, especially, among the physically challenged persons. Many of these classes of persons are not well educated, with little or no skills that could sustain them to live self reliant lives. As a result, majority of them are seen around the streets of Owerri (the State’s capital), and other strategic places begging for alms.

Causes of Economic Recession

Efforts have been made to identify the leading factors to economic recession. In the view of Noko (2016), the major causes of economic recession in any economy may include;

- **High Inflation Rate:** This is a general rise in price of goods and services, leading to low purchasing power. Nigeria inflation rate currently stands at 18.63%, which is extremely the highest for the past decade. The government ban on the importation of certain essential agricultural products like rice
without considering the gestation period is error (Noko, 2016). He stressed that the removal of subsidy shouldn’t be simultaneous with the banning of these essential agricultural products. Ever since 20th June, 2016 that the Central Bank refused to support the stability of the national currency with the help of rapidly melting dollar reserves, Nigerian Naira exchange rate fell by 40%. As a result – prices of imported goods and food increased drastically.

- High-interest rate- that could discourage investors: The present interest rate in Nigeria is between 26.77-27%. This is extremely high for investors and can discourage them from looking for elsewhere. As a result, the poor or slow investment culminates into high rate of unemployment in the country. Others include, accumulation of debt servicing, especially foreign debts; poor economic planning; fall in aggregate demand, fall in wages or income; mass unemployment and general loss of confidence on the government due to economic indices; high taxation; policy conflict etc.

Exclusion of Target Groups in Policies pertaining to them

The aim of any civilized society is to give equal and equitable opportunities to all segments of its population, irrespective of gender, cast, creed, sexual orientation, place of origin, and physical status. However, some of these groups face major hurdles in performing functions of daily life, and people with disabilities often top this list (Murtaza, 2016). While a lot has been said about inclusion and inclusive development, people with disabilities usually live in isolation—away from the mainstream—and depend upon their caregivers or family members for performing even the basic functions of life, let alone making a major decision like schooling, job or marriage.

Although disability is a public issue, the resources to manage it are not equitably allocated (Kelemen, Haig, Goodnight & Nyante, 2013). Among developing countries, it is estimated that only 2% of people with disability receive any rehabilitation whatsoever (Department for International Development (DFID), 2004). The reasons for the misallocation of resources or exclusion are many and complex. However, one probable reason is difficulty in obtaining accurate information on the extent and cost of disability in low-resource regions (Kelemen et al., 2013).

In Nigeria, the government is yet to sign into law the Disability Bill (DB) as to protect the rights and provide opportunities for people with disabilities to fully participate in the scheme of things and be productive part of the society. A review of disability issues in Nigeria identified many factors on why the disability agenda continues to suffer set-backs. Notable among them were the absence of disability discrimination laws, lack of social protection, poor understanding of disability issues by the public, and poor access to rehabilitation services (Lang & Upal in Amusat, 2009). Therefore, it could be said that “disability-inclusive agenda” is lacking in Nigeria, especially in Imo State.

In November 2013, over 1000 physically-challenged persons drawn from the 27 Local Government Areas of Imo State converged in Owerri and took over the popular Warehouse junction. They bore placards with various inscriptions like “We need employment”; and “We are tired of marginalization” to drive home their grievances (Okoro, 2013). He noted that even the presence of the State Commissioner of Police and some military men could not open the barricaded roads, as they were chanting all sorts of anti-Okorocha songs. Again, the association’s President accused the State Governor of making so many promises to them without fulfilling any. He recalled that the Governor promised in 2011 to employ their qualified members into the State Civil Service, but was yet to fulfill that and also that he was yet to appoint a physically challenged person into his cabinet as also promised. This is therefore, the politics of empowerment or poverty alleviation in the state.

Theoretical Orientation: Elite Theory

The leading proponents of elite theory are Alex de Tocqueville (1824) and David Truman (1950). Elite theory seeks to describe and explain the power relationships in contemporary society. The theory posits that a small minority consisting of members of the economic and policy-planning networks, holds the most power and that this power is independent of a state's democratic election process. Through positions in corporations or on corporate boards, they influence policy-planning networks through financial support of foundations or positions with think-tanks or policy-discussion groups, members of the "elite" are able to exert significant power over the policy decisions of governments (Wikipedia, 2016). Elite theory opposes pluralism, a tradition that assumes that all individuals, or at least the multitude of social groups, have equal power and balance each other in contributing to democratic and emergent aggregate will of the society. The theory argues either that democracy is a utopian folly, as it is traditionally viewed in the conservative Italian tradition, or that democracy is not realizable within capitalism, as is the view of the more Marxist-compatible contemporary elite permutation.
Charles (2005) argued that a major distinctive feature of the elite is the tendency to influence, control, and superimpose their ideas, beliefs, values and practices as acceptable and ideal in the management of societal affairs. Relating to Karl Marx’s opposing classes to the available means of production, Gaetano Mosca (1858-1941) classified elites into ‘those who rule (ruling or policy making class) and ‘those who are ruled (subjects, like the physically challenged persons in this case). This explains the contention by APWD and call for the removal of the present Senior Special Adviser (SSA) on Disability (Special Citizens) Affairs to Imo State Government; and equally the dependent, exclusion, and poverty occasioned by the deprivation and denial of social welfare benefits by the policy makers (ruling or deciding class). The SSA is not a physically challenged person, hence, she may not really know where it pinches, and again, it is a social injustice to appoint her to act in that capacity, when there are learned persons among the PWDs in the State.

It could be said that there is a form of conspiracy among the elites to enrich themselves or amass wealth and deprive the less privileged the dividends of good governance. They appear to be a clan of highly skilled puppeteers who know exactly how to create the world they desire, while giving the public (in this case, the physically challenged) just little to feel free and significant. They control the media and propagandize society in a way that makes everything appear as though the common man’s best interest is being represented. It is usually a sight of political or ceremonial mockery of entertainments to the helpless challenged persons; perhaps, for praises or accolade over what ought to be the social responsibility of a responsible government. But because they have conspired and hijacked programmes meant to alleviate the plights of the less privileged for selfish gains, from time to time, they gather to offer them some support apparatus or stipends. In Nigeria, mostly those loitering around the corridor of public service are selfish, power hungry, and wealth minded leaders, that manipulate state institutions in a way that best suit their common interest. It is naïve therefore, to believe that the social structure is set up in a manner that is truly democratic, independent, or free. In sum, the successive poverty alleviation programmes appear to be part of elites instituted avenue for political and economic exploitation.

Methods

The study was carried out in Mbaise, Imo State, Nigeria. Administratively, Mbaise was sub-divided into its three local governments of Aboh, Ahiazu and Ezinihitte. The target population was members of the Association of Persons with Disability (APWD) in the area. Data from the association’s record show about 3,204 members and the purposive sampling method was used in drawing a sample of 150. The multi-stage random sampling technique of paper balloting method was used in selecting 50 persons from each of the three LGAs. They were reached and selected through the association’s monthly meetings at the council headquarters. A uniform set of 150 questionnaires were administered to the participants and out of which, 26 were not accounted for; hence, 124 that were properly filled and returned, which represent 84% response rate were used for analysis.
Results

Table 2: Socio-Demographic Data of the Respondents

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<th>Variables</th>
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<td>Artisan</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>5.6</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Trade/Business</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>12.1</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Civil Servants</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>3.2</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Marital Status</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Single</td>
<td>62</td>
<td>50.0</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Married</td>
<td>47</td>
<td>37.9</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Divorced/Seperated</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1.6</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Widowed</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>10.5</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dependants</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>0-5</td>
<td>82</td>
<td>66.1</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6-9</td>
<td>27</td>
<td>21.8</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10&amp;Above</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>12.1</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Field Survey, 2016

A cursory look at table 2 shows that majority (61.3%) of the respondents fell within the age range of 31-40 and the mean age was 44-yrs. This implies that they were matured and adults. It can also be deduced from the table that the educational level of the majority (51.6%) was SSCE/GCE. This implies that they were enlightened and knowledgeable to answer questions pertaining to the objectives. However, the majority (62.9%) were unemployed; indicating why many of the physically challenged persons beg for alms in strategic places in the state. Moreso, (50.0%) of them were single, with an average mean of 4 dependants; implying that they have some responsibilities to carter for.

- Reason Policy Makers Exclude the Physically Challenged in Policies Pertaining to them

Table 3: Respondents Perception on why policy makers exclude them in policies pertaining to them

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>S/n</th>
<th>Reasons for Exclusion</th>
<th>n=124</th>
<th>%</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>i.</td>
<td>Poor level of education</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>3.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ii.</td>
<td>Wrong perception of physical challenge</td>
<td>40</td>
<td>31.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>iii.</td>
<td>Discrimination/Stigmatization</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>18.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>iv.</td>
<td>Ignorance of policy makers</td>
<td>51</td>
<td>42.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>v.</td>
<td>Corruption</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>5.0</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Field Survey, 2016
• Forms of Palliative Physically Challenged Persons Receive in Mbaise, Imo State

Table 4: Recession Palliatives to the Physically Challenged in Mbaise, Imo State

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>S/n</th>
<th>Palliative Measures</th>
<th>n=124</th>
<th>%</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>i.</td>
<td>Support gadgets, like wheel chairs, walking staff,</td>
<td>64</td>
<td>51.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>eye glasses etc.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ii.</td>
<td>Scholarship/Free education programmes</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>iii.</td>
<td>Philanthropic Stipends/Alms</td>
<td>32</td>
<td>25.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>iv.</td>
<td>Skills Acquisition/Business/Trade Establishment</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>4.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>v.</td>
<td>Reserved Employment Quota for Qualified Members</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>vi.</td>
<td>Inclusion in the Political Office Appointments</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>vii.</td>
<td>Free Housing Scheme</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>viii.</td>
<td>Free Medical Treatment</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ix.</td>
<td>Free Public Transportation</td>
<td>-</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>x.</td>
<td>Periodic Entertainments</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>16.9</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Field Survey, 2016

Discussion

Table 3 indicates that 42.2% of the respondents believe that ignorance is a major reason policy makers exclude them from policies pertaining to them. This was followed by 31.1% that attributed it to wrong perception of their physical challenge; and 18.5% hinged it on discrimination/stigmatization against them. However, 5.0% blamed it on corruption, while (3.2%) of the respondents were of the view that poor level of education of the physically challenged. This implies that ignorance on the inherent abilities in disability is responsible for policy makers’ exclusion of the physically challenged in making policies pertaining to them. This agrees with the findings of Leonard Cheshire Disability in Lang and Upah (2008), that Nigeria relies on charity models of assistance and a narrow medical model that focuses on finding medical “solution” to limitations caused by disability and ignoring the need to address the vast array of issues created and imposed by discrimination, exclusion, ignorance, and lack of access. It also corroborates Mwangi (2013), findings in Kenya that negative myths are associated with disability. The implication being that, until this is corrected and total inclusion granted; programmes aimed at empowering and alleviating the plights of the poor would continue to elude them.

Moreover, in a bid to identify the forms of palliatives put in place to cushion the effect of recession, majority (51.6%) of the persons with disabilities in Table 4 indicate that support gadgets like wheel-chairs, walking staff, eye glasses etc were given to them; and 25.9% were of the view that it was more of philanthropic stipends/alsms. However, 16.9% and 4.8% said periodic entertainments and skill acquisition/business establishment respectively. Lastly, just 0.8% indicated free medical treatment as part of the palliatives they receive in the state. The findings align with Dube (2005) who observed in Uganda that PWDs get less or no education and skills due to social exclusion and lack of facilities.

Conclusion

It can be deduced from the findings that majority of the Physically Challenged Persons (PCPs) were unemployed and poorly educated with inadequate skills. Moreso, the utmost reason for the exclusion of the physically challenged persons in policies pertaining to them is ignorance of the policy makers. Perhaps they believe that the physically challenged persons do not possess the intellectual abilities to think, contribute to the alleviation of their plights, and development of the society. It is usually said that he who wears the shoe knows where it pinches. Therefore, one who is not in that category may not accurately get it right on policies geared towards alleviating the plights of such persons.

Unarguably, there is ability in every form of disability. That someone is challenged or deformed in a particular part of the body which perhaps affects the locomotion or posture, does not necessarily imply he or she cannot perfectly perform in many other areas. This therefore, calls for reorientation on the prevalent wrong perceptions about the physically challenged persons. However, the study concludes that poverty alleviation programmes have not actually alleviated the plights of the physically challenged persons in Mbaise, Imo State, and that without adequate educational (scholarships), or skill acquisition, many of them will continue to live dependent lives.
Recommendations

The following recommendations are made for possible policy implementation:

i. Government should as a matter of fairness and social justice appoint a member of the APWD as Special Adviser (SA) on disability affairs.

ii. There should be continuous enlightenment campaign that being physically challenged does not imply impediment to other abilities that could help better the lots of the society.

iii. Poverty alleviation for the physically challenged should be geared towards academic scholarships and skill acquisition/establishment, than only on walking-support gadgets or stipends.

iv. The government should create Ministry of Disability Affairs where a member of APWD will be the Minister or Commissioner to cushion the effect of years of neglect as to restore confidence of total inclusion in governance.

References


