UNIOFFA JOURNAL OF INTERDISCIPLINARY STUDIES (U-OJIS)
A Multidisciplinary Journal of Science, Management and Social Sciences
Website: www.unioffajis.com
ISSN:3141-5571
E-ISSN:3141-558X

INCLUSIVE GOVERNANCE OF PERSON WITH DISABILITES AT THE LOCAL GOVERNMENT OF OSUN STATE: A CRITICAL ANALYSIS

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Volume 1:2

Abstract

Local governance serves as the fundamental bedrock for grassroots development and public service delivery. However, the inclusion of marginalized populations, particularly Persons with Disabilities (PWDs), within these governance structures remains a global challenge. Despite international frameworks like the UNCRPD and various national pro-disability laws, operationalization at the local level is frequently obstructed by inadequate funding, societal stigmatization, infrastructural inaccessibility, and weak institutional will. In Nigeria, while states are urged to domesticate disability acts, local government councils, especially in Osun State, often lag behind policy aspirations, creating a critical gap between legal provisions and lived experiences. This disparity necessitates an empirical examination, which directly informs the present investigation. This study highlights the duty of local governments in managing disability inclusion within the Osun State Local Government Service. It explores how local administration facilitates PWDs' participation, representation, and accessibility to public goods, while examining the degree of institutional arrangements made for disability inclusion in policy formulation, implementation, and monitoring. Adopting a quantitative approach, the study analyzed scholarly articles, government documents, policy frameworks, and policy papers. Findings indicate that despite existing legislative and organizational supports, disability inclusion in Osun State remains nascent and encounters significant challenges, including funding deficits, poor awareness, inadequate infrastructure, and policy implementation issues. Consequently, the study identifies a demand for improved institutional capacity, community-based advocacy, and monitoring mechanisms. To foster better inclusion, it recommends strengthening legislation, building local government officials' capacities, and establishing partnerships with disability organizations to ensure PWDs are effectively integrated into governance processes in Osun State.

Keywords: Disability Inclusion, Inclusive Governance, Local Government Administration, Persons with Disabilities (PWDs).

Introduction

The area's government administration, as a third position by government, stands out as the closest level of governance for the individuals as well as the one on any level to foster improvement from the bottom up, democracy, and social inclusiveness. In view of that, it plays an integral role in the implementation of policies that will see to the benefit of all the citizens, even those with disabilities (PWDs).

Disability-inclusive governance is an approach that involves the creation of fair prospects and access for individuals with disabilities to all aspects of life, including participation, representation, access to public services and infrastructure, and opportunities (Akinwale & Adeyemo, 2023). In essence, it involves mainstreaming issues related to people with disabilities into public processes and creating an enabling environment for them (Ogunyemi & Balogun, 2022).

Internationally, the push for participation from individuals with disabilities emanates from the policies that govern international organizations like the UN Convention on the Rights of People among Disabilities (UNCRPD, 2006). The agreement requires member countries in order to enable equality, availability, also contribution of PWDs inside governance. Countries in Africa, including Nigeria, have adopted these international policies through domestic laws to strengthen disability rights and inclusion in their countries. In Nigeria, the Discrimination against People with Disabilities (Restriction) law was enacted into law in 2019 to ensure non-discrimination and protection of disability rights (Olawale & Iroanya, 2021). The Act provides legal backing for inclusive policies across federal, state, and local government levels, thereby establishing each person's rights-based method for disability involvement.

At each state level, Osun State domesticated the federal disability framework

ISSN:3141-5571
E-ISSN:3141-558X

through the passage and approval of the Osun State Discrimination against Persons with Disability (Prohibition) Law, 2024, by the Osun State House of Assembly and that state governor. Prior to the enactment of this law, disability inclusion within local government administration in Osun State was coordinated primarily by the Social, Education and Community Development Department, which was responsible for managing disability-related programmes. As narrated in the policy discussions, "In the last few years before the passage and approval of the Osun State Discrimination against Persons with Disabilities (Prohibition) Law 2024 by the Osun State House of Assembly and the governor, respectively, at this local government administration, the inclusion of persons with disabilities was being managed by the Social, Education and Community Development Department. Every disability-related activity was vested in the department, but presently we have desk officers whose major assignment indicates enabling the people with disabilities to remain captured in all-inclusive programmes in the local government area. "This appointment from desk officers remains a significant development towards achieving disability inclusion in all local government board within Osun State.

Despite the above, disability inclusion in local government management continues to raise questions. The findings of various studies reveal difficulties including exclusion from decision-making processes, lack of disability information, low level of representation, infrastructural constraints, and poor access to socioeconomic benefits, among others (Owolabi & Akintunde, 2023; Okorie & Yakubu, 2024). There have been failures in implementing disability legislation in Nigeria due to problems including lack of funding, inadequate knowledge, poor institutional coordination, and technical challenges for governance models inclusive of individuals with disabilities (Eze & Salami, 2024). This has resulted in the continued marginalization from people among disabilities through education, employment, politics, health care, as well as social services, among others.

In light of these facts, it remains imperative to study the character among local government management along with the role it plays in promoting disability inclusiveness. This local government administration regarding Osun State serves as a key player in this process by fostering improvement at grassroots positions, providing welfare services to the communities, and implementing disability policy initiatives at the state level.

This research investigates disability inclusion in grassroots governance by local government areas in the state. It intends to assess the way impairment inclusion focuses on the implemented at the grassroots and the extent of inclusion of individuals among disabilities within governance along with these challenges hindering inclusive as well as equitable service. The study adopts a secondary research analysis derived from publications, public statistical policy reports, and legislative documents.

Literature Review

Conceptualizing Local Government

The local government functions as a legally recognized third tier of government within a democratic structure designed for providing governance to nearby individuals as well as advancing inclusive growth and active community participation at the local level. It represents as the administrative and political structure through which community-based governance is conducted, public services are delivered, and local development needs are assessed and addressed (Adebayo & Oke, 2021). As provided under Section 7 for the year 1999 Constitution by the Federal Republic of Nigeria (as amended), local government was created to enable democratic representation, service delivery and local administration at the grassroots level. The intention is to decentralise government functions and allow citizen involvement in decision-making processes (Olawale & Yakubu, 2022). The local government serves as an instrument for promoting effective local governance by transferring authority and administrative functions to the grassroots level (Ogunyemi & Balogun, 2022). According to the 1999 constitution, power, resources and control of the local government are vested in the democratically elected chairman, who mobilises local resources and community developments. The essence of local government administration lies in its capacity to respond promptly to community needs, reduce bureaucratic bottlenecks, and ensure accountability and transparency in governance (Ola & Adeyemi, 2021).

There are several ways in which local government administration plays its role, such as in economic development, social services provision, healthcare, basic education, environmental protection, infrastructure development, and community mobilization. These indicate that local governments act as catalysts for grassroots development and sustainable development processes (Eze & Salami, 2024). From the view of democracy, local governments create avenues for effective citizen participation in the development and execution of public policies. These are performed through elected councilors, supervisory councilors, and local

ISSN:3141-5571
E-ISSN:3141-558X

government administrators (Yakubu & Ibrahim, 2023).

In their discussion, Akinyemi and Yusuf (2023) note that efficient governance by local government institutions depends on institutional capability, sufficient finance, proper human resource management, and active participation frameworks. In this situation, the local government institutions transform into dynamic players involved in community development and participatory processes. But the failure to meet all these demands means that the local government will end up as a weak bureaucratic institution relying completely on directives from the state level. This problem is more pronounced in many local government institutions in Nigeria owing to lack of financial independence, political pressure, and institutional incapability (Olowu & Adebisi, 2022).

The performance during management through local government is measured according to the success at improving quality of life, reducing inequalities, developing strong governance frameworks, and fostering the inclusion of marginalized social class like female, youths, as well as people among disabilities (PWDs) (Ogunlade & Salisu, 2023). Inclusive governance is a new criterion used in assessing the efficiency of the administration and the democratic nature of the governance framework. It refers to the need for governance to be inclusive of different social groups through fairness in representation and a non-discriminatory approach concerning their support related to service.

Local government administration within the Nigerian federation is subject to constant challenges such as insufficient funding, human resource limitations, corruption, low levels of accountability, and political instability (Okoro & Yakubu, 2024). The dependency of most local government councils on statutory revenue from the federation account is detrimental to their fiscal independence and strategic planning capabilities. Joint accounts maintained by state and local government councils undermine fiscal autonomy and financial management integrity (Akintola & Eze, 2022). Such issues obstruct any attempts at formulating socially inclusive policies and disability mainstreaming strategies.

In spite of the aforementioned issues, however, researchers have stressed the importance of improving the efficiency of local government administration within national development and democracy building. Good local government fosters trust among citizens, facilitates efficient delivery of services, and ensures the principles of equity and participation, especially of marginalized groups (Onifade & Balogun, 2023). During the current world focus on sustainable development models, local government is expected to play an active role in designing policies and programs that cater to all citizens, including PWDs, whose inclusion in governance processes is an important criterion for measuring administrative effectiveness and adherence to human rights (Olawale & Adeyemi, 2024).

Local government serves as the bedrock of participatory governance and advancement. The notions of decentralization, participation, and inclusive public management are reflected in it. In order to function well, the local government institutions should adopt accountable leadership, resource independence, capacity-building of institutions, and a rights-based approach, especially with regard to vulnerable groups. Strengthening local government administration is therefore a strategic pathway to enhancing inclusive governance and ensuring that development outcomes benefit all members of society.

According to UN, the definition of local government based on the national classification is that a state established by law that has substantial powers to deal with local affairs and the right to levy tax or compel people to work for certain purposes. In such a case, the governing body is elected or chosen in other ways and is known as local" (cited in Sady, 1962, as cited by Khan, 2006:58). Local governments are further considered as a system of territorially defined units having legal existence, organizational structure, powers and responsibilities derived from broad together with precise legislation in addition to some level for monetary and other freedom (Hill, 1974). Local government, according to Roberts & Benjamin (1996:4), is the authority given constitutional power to collect as well as disburse fund to local services, also has the role of local government affairs. The cited definitions considered have in one way or the other integrated both the methods of definition discussed above into their definitions. As discussed above, the local government system in this research refers to defined as every level of government that are lower than the central government and have legal personality, designated authority to execute particular duties, effective citizen involvement, and significant financial and staffing autonomy in developing their jurisdictions. The above definition lays the foundation for an analysis of features of local government according to Olowu (1988).

Characteristics of Local Governments

In view of the aforementioned definition of local government, the proposed local government should possess the following features:

i. Being a Sub-national Government: for a

ISSN:3141-5571
E-ISSN:3141-558X

governmental structure to be recognised as local government," it must exist as a sub-national or sub-central tier of government. In order words, it may exist as a form of government established at the regional, district, or community levels. It should not be an agency or subordinate unit of a central government ministry or department, but an independent government entity with defined powers and responsibilities

ii. Legal Status: A local government system is created through constitutional provisions, national or state legislation, or administrative instruments issued by higher tiers of government, with the objective of providing designated services to communities within a clearly defined geographical area. The scope of legal authority varies according to the types of government structure established in a given country. This implies that the establishing of this form of government must be supported by constitutional provision, legal frameworks and statutory enactment that define its existence, powers, and functions.

iii. Possession of particular powers: Local government can be described as an entity which possesses those particular powers which are responsible for creating and enabling such entity to conduct public undertakings leading towards the development of the particular locality within its jurisdictional limits. Local government also needs to be equipped with the authority of employing as well as terminating employment of its employees and authority to raise funds responsibly while maintaining a degree of autonomy from excessive central regulation

iv. Particular geographical jurisdiction and resident population: every local government requires a clearly demarcated territorial jurisdiction that falls under its administrative control. Local government also needs to have jurisdiction over the population residing in that jurisdictional area.

v. Representatives: Lastly, local government needs to have representatives who are elected or selected from amongst the locals of that area.

According to Shah and Shah (2006), local governments are regarded as administrative agents operating within a broader system of government. It is assumed that local governments functions as extensions of state or national governments, operating primarily to support and advance the objectives of higher level of government. In many instances, particularly in the unitary system of governance, it is the national level where policies are developed and implemented.

The local governments are to implement the supervision of the implementation process at the local level. From this perspective of local economic development, local government are perceived as instrument through which higher levels of government execute development policies, programmes and projects. From this perspective, it would be fair enough to assume that the local governments are not independent, but rather exist for the benefit of the higher orders of government. This may adversely affect the involvement of local communities and local organisatios in decision-making processes and issues that directly influence community development. In addition, policies and initiatives that may be adopted may not serve the interests of the local community, since they may not reflect the present requires related to the local society at any way. Despite this, the criteria established by the centre regarding services delivery and policy performance will function as an oversight mechanism guiding the activities of local government. These will ensure that such activities of the local government remain within the national interest framework. Moreover, the local government play an independent role in facilitating processes that generate value for society (Shah & Shah, 2006).

This puts a lot of weight within the government acting as a facilitator for the benefit of the populace, in order to do what is best for public interest and public value, meaning that there have been noticeable changes in the social outcome rather than standard of living. The principle is strongly applicable for services provision provided at a local/municipal level, where it is possible to measure these changes and at least have some idea about who can take credit. In the this context, Public managers at the local government level are responsible for maximizing the use of available local resources and pursuing enhanced social outcomes despite financial limitations. It is in this way that public managers add value through the mobilization of a network of service providers outside the local government. Such an obligation necessitates the local governments to take into account the interest and welfare of the local community. They are entitled to use the available resources for the common good.

From this point of view, the progress of localities and the application of resources can be effectively monitored and controlled by local leaders to ensure accountability. However, individual capture of the institutions does not allow them to operate under this assumption. Some elites in the local government tend to manipulate the use of the resources in their own favor at the expense of the majority. In addition, the manipulation of

ISSN:3141-5571
E-ISSN:3141-558X

the resources for creation of public value involves corrupt activities. Again, there might be very little improvement in social outcome since the local governments may not possess adequate institutional and financial capacity to provide necessary services. This demands that the involvement of stakeholders should be facilitated in the process of development through the local government. Local governments should facilitate the formation of networks in local governance (Shah & Shah, 2006). They possess the capacity to serves as catalysts in supporting and strengthening both interest networks and hope networks fulfill their respective functions in improving the social welfare of the local community members. In order to be able to do that, local government should formulate a clear strategic direction for establishing and maintaining effective partnership They should, therefore, keep policy recommendations and service delivery distinct and play the role of purchaser of public services rather than being the provider. Local governments might need to subcontract those services whose provision cost is relatively high and put pressure on internal service providers through external service providers.

The question which ought to be asked in this case is whether the local governments are doing this. They assume themselves to a point where other stakeholders are unwilling to work together with them in the provision of development at the local level. The other stakeholders view them as being composed of too much bureaucracy and corruption. In turn, this might have an effect on the performance of the responsibility by the local governments. Despite the fact that the responsibility provides that the local government acts only as a buyer of public goods, this responsibility might be suicidal in some instances whereby local regions do not have enough resources to attract private service providers. Furthermore, the local governments must promote their own interests (ibid: 17-18). It is due to the fact that, being an organization engaged in policymaking and its implementation; it is supposed to take advantage of all the possibilities and opportunities for promoting itself. Consequently, it will bring about a positive outcome for the local area, under whose jurisdiction it operates. However, in some cases, the interest of the local government has outweighed that of the local area, whereby local leaders have exploited the organization for their own gain.

To conclude, local governments tend to exploit local citizens through high taxes, which eventually lead to the collapse of economic organizations. Although these two types of obligations are quite different from each other, the local governments undertake both of them. Afterwards follows the discussion about the reasons for the establishment of local governments.

The Nature and Concept of Local Economic Development

Despite the fact that local government development has increasingly become more popular and acceptable as a method of restructuring and regenerating economy all over the world, its definition has not been properly done. It has multiple definitions due to the reason that there is no clear theoretical definition and also because it's main source of inspiration is experience and imitation. Consequently, there has been a tendency for the definitions of the concept to focus on its basic essence, hence resulting in universally accepted definitions. From this perspective, there will be a need to look at some of its definitions. Based on the definition provided by the World Bank (World Bank, 2003a:1), LED is a process whereby the government, together with its corporate counterparts, joins hands and uses their respective resources in order to develop conditions for creating employment and economic growth. As defined by Blakely (1994:49), "local economic development is a new form of partnership where local governments and local corporate firms use their resources to partner either with the private sector or with each other to create jobs and generate economic activity in an economically-defined area."

Therefore, it is considered a process whereby local governments, community-based organizations, and the private sector utilize their resources and enter into partnerships or networks with each other for the purpose of generating employment and stimulating economic development within a certain area (Zaaijer & Sara, 1993). Furthermore, Trousdale (2003a:1) describes the term "LDE as a participatory process where individuals in a local area, from all different sectors, work together to stimulate local business, thus leading to a sustainable economy." The word "local" within the definition "is concerned with the process of valuing the endogenous potentials and making optimal use of already existing local potentials."The word 'economic' is aimed at identifying investment possibilities, supporting entrepreneurship, and accessing new markets," and finally, "development," in this case, "is the process of improving the life and work conditions in the local area by creating new jobs, retaining old jobs and generating income" (USAID, undated:1).

From these definitions and the explanations of the concept, the focus of the concept of local economic development is on endogenous development approaches that take advantage of the potential and actual local resources, which include human, institutional, and physical. Moreover, it is referred to as a process where various

ISSN:3141-5571
E-ISSN:3141-558X

stakeholders in a spatial unit contribute their efforts in order to make progress. The four criteria or characteristics of local economic development were set by White and Gasser (2001), which includes participation and social dialogue, territorial, resource mobilization and competitiveness, and locally owned. The theory, therefore, has a process, involves stakeholders' participation, uses resources, is in a spatial unit, and has an objective.

Disability and Disability Inclusion in the Local Government Management

Disability remains a challenging, complex, as well as dynamic concept, which refers to the connection with individuals among disabilities as well as societal, environmental, and attitudinal challenges that restrict their entire as well as successful involvement within social, economic, political, and cultural life. Recent studies consider disability to be not only a medical state but also a socially constructed one that has been affected by environmental factors, social inequalities, and discrimination (Adebisi & Oladipo, 2022). According to the World Health Organization (WHO, 2022), disability can be described as a broad term including impairments, activity limitations, and participation restrictions due to the relationship between people's health states and environments. Such a definition is related to the global move towards a new understanding of disability that is based on the social and rights-based model instead of the medical one.

People with disabilities have experienced systematic marginalization, where there is inadequate access to education, job opportunities, healthcare, infrastructure, and participation in politics, described as socio -economic marginalization (Olowale & Ibrahlimitations). The issue of disability has always been approached from a philanthropic or welfare state angle. Most organizations adopt an approach based on support and not empowerment, leading to the neglect of necessary structural changes.

Nevertheless, global acts like the United Nations Convention on the Rights of People with Disabilities (UNCRPD, 2006) have redefined disability as a human rights and development matter, stressing that the PWDs should be accorded equal access and opportunities without any form of discrimination. The country has ratified the UNCRPD, and hence it is obliged to undertake positive actions aimed at ensuring accessibility and inclusiveness.

After that, there have been shifts in disability discourse to incorporate disability inclusion, which is defined as the strategic incorporation of disability-related matters into policies, programs, decision-making, institutions, funding, and developmental processes within communities (Obeng & Mensah, 2023). Disability inclusion implies ensuring equality of representation, eliminating obstacles, providing accessibility, and involving PWDs in all governance processes that impact their lives (Eze & Salami, 2024). From a governance perspective, disability inclusion is the embodiment of participatory democracy in which people from different backgrounds, including the disadvantaged, engage in the policy procedure by making, implementing, monitoring, and evaluating (Akinyemi & Yusuf, 2023).

Global movements towards inclusive societies are based on SDG principles, especially SDGs 4, 8, 10, 11, and 16, whereby equality and inclusiveness are key considerations to ensure that "no one is left behind" (UNDP, 2021). Such initiatives have encouraged policymakers at local, state, and federal levels to come up with policies that acknowledge the rights of PWDs, avoid discrimination, and increase access to public services. The inclusion of PWDs has, hence, emerged as a key priority among policies in nations aspiring to increase democratic leadership as well as people's rights adherence.

Within a Nigerian setting, notable developments have been made through the ratification of this Discrimination against People with Disabilities (Restriction) Act, 2019, that prohibits discrimination and imposes obligations on the part of public institutions to provide accessibility in terms of infrastructure, employment, education, governance process, and public engagement (Okoro & Yakubu, 2024). The Act guarantees a five-year transitional period for accessibility, and there is a National Commission for People with Disabilities (NCPWD) for implementing this Act as well as ensuring disability rights (Olawale & Yakubu, 2022). Despite the presence of these legal instruments, their implementation is patchy, especially at the grassroots level of governance.

At the sub-national level, the inclusion of persons with disabilities in the Osun State Discrimination against Persons with Disabilities (Prohibition) Law, 2024, was evident. The law is consistent with the national policy on the issue and serves as a legal basis for ensuring accessibility, inclusion, and representation of disabled people within the governance framework from the state as well as local governments. Earlier to this enactment by the law, there was no institutionalisation of disability affairs within the local government since they were only addressed through the Social, Education, and Community Development Department of the LGA, but the appointment of desk officers in

ISSN:3141-5571
E-ISSN:3141-558X

all LGAs is a step forward towards the management of the issue administratively (Akintola & Adebayo, 2024).

Inclusion of persons with disabilities goes beyond legal instruments and focuses on actual participation and representation in decision-making processes. Effective inclusive governance ensures the inclusion of people with disabilities as an important element in the formulation and implementation of policy issues related to them; hence, participation in a symbolic sense does not suffice (Egbetokun & Adekunle, 2023). Academicians maintain that participation should be meaningful through equal representation in leadership positions and other consultation forums (Akintunde & Falana, 2023). Failure to ensure proper representation will lead to the exclusion of persons with disabilities in policy issues.

However, even with advancements in laws concerning disability, involvement of people with disabilities is still hindered by stigmatisation, cultural attitudes, infrastructure inaccessibility, insufficient funding, and poor implementation of policies (Olowale & Ibrahim, 2023). For example, public offices and institutions of the community have buildings which become inaccessible to individuals with disabilities, information that is not friendly towards people with disabilities, and means of communication that are not friendly to people who are visually, hearing or intellectually impaired (Adeyemi & Ojo, 2022). Further, insufficient disaggregated data makes it difficult for policy planning and monitoring.

Thus, disability inclusion should be viewed as an ongoing need for reform, empowerment, and collaboration which includes governmental bodies and organisations that focus on disability issues (Obeng & Addo, 2023). Without this, inclusion will not take place since there is a need to engage PWDs, resource them, and see them as agents of development.

In practicality, disability inclusion is an integral component in the process of seeking development that is inclusive, participatory and respectful of human rights. These require targeted policy and institutional actions at the federal, state and local levels. To the local government system of Osun State, improving the aspect of disability inclusion will be a key step in building an inclusive governance system.

Local Government Administration and PWD Inclusion in Osun State

The administration of local government in Nigeria represents the third tier of the government that focuses on grassroots governance and development. According to the Constitution of the Federal Republic of Nigeria, 1999, local governments represent autonomous bodies with the authority to formulate and implement policies and raise revenues to promote socio-economic development (Adekunle, 2021). Nonetheless, the efficiency of local government administration is closely associated with the capacity of the administration to embrace inclusive policies that enable all members of the society, including PWDs, to take an active part in governance processes (Eze & Okafor, 2020). The implementation of policies by local government councils should be based not only on administrative efficacy but also on social inclusiveness in Osun State.

Inclusion of persons with disabilities in local governance refers to the multi-dimensional concept of involving persons with disabilities in politics, society, economics, and infrastructure development in the localities. The political dimension is concerned with ensuring representation in different decision-making platforms, advisory councils, and inclusive processes through which policies and decisions can be influenced by PWDs (Adebayo, 2020). Social inclusion of PWDs entails ensuring equal access to services and information available through local governance initiatives including educational, health, and social protection services (Okeke & Anigbogu, 2022). Economic inclusion of PWDs entails ensuring that there is the involvement of PWDs in income-generating activities in different localities through participation in employment and entrepreneurship opportunities. Infrastructure inclusion of PWDs involves accessibility to council offices, community centers, public amenities and the use of assistive devices, ramps, etc. (Ogunleye & Oladipo, 2021).

In spite of these objectives, there are major obstacles when it comes to the inclusion of PWDs in local governance in Osun State. In terms of physical accessibility, most local government office buildings are not physically accessible, while planning does not include the concept of universal design in any way. This is because council meeting places, polling units, and administrative offices do not have ramps or lifts to ensure that persons who use wheelchairs or have any other mobility problems can easily engage in local governance activities (Ogunleye & Oladipo, 2021). In addition, communication barriers are evident because of the ways of communicating with PWDs (Chikere, 2022).

Therefore, the socio-cultural issues add to the barriers facing the inclusion of PWDs within Osun State local government. The discriminating beliefs and negative attitudes and stigma about the disability condition continue to maintain the notion that persons with disabilities cannot offer leadership or participate actively in society

ISSN:3141-5571
E-ISSN:3141-558X

(Adebayo, 2020). Such views hinder not only the political activities of PWDs but also the effort of the local authorities to include them within governance activities.

There is another layer of political and administrative obstacles associated with this situation. Individuals with disabilities in Osun State are seldom selected for positions of power within local government councils or committees, thereby minimizing their impact on policy making and resource distribution (Eze & Okafor, 2020). The electoral process also does not provide enough accommodations in the sense that there are no facilities for individuals with special needs, as well as the absence of alternative ballot papers. Moreover, personnel from local governments do not have enough skills related to governance in an inclusive manner.

Financial limitations constitute yet another challenge. Programs for inclusion, assistive devices, accommodation needs, and awareness programs cost money, which local government usually finds difficult to allocate owing to financial limitations (Ogunleye & Oladipo, 2021). Hence, efforts towards PWD inclusion are superficial, temporary, or sustainable.

Notwithstanding these challenges, literature shows that where the participation of PWD is active, there are notable improvements in local governance. Findings from some selected states of Nigeria, including Osun State, indicate that inclusion results in improved responsiveness of policies, accessibility of services, and cohesion within communities (Chikere, 2022). Where PWDs take part in budgeting, planning, and other decision-making processes, local governments ensure that their activities involve provision of infrastructure, social protection, and empowering communities.

Inclusive governance becomes achievable through the administration of the local government in Osun State. It is important to note that the involvement of the PWDs in the process of administration, decision-making, and service delivery goes beyond the issue of compliance with legislation or traditions but represents a strategic necessity for the development of an inclusive community. Although there are obstacles in terms of structure, socio-culture, politics, and finance, it is possible to facilitate their involvement through systematic measures such as capacity-building, affirmative representation, infrastructure development, and campaigns of raising public awareness.

Local Governance and PWD Participation

Local governance can be described as the processes, procedures, and institutions through which communities at the local level conduct governance activities. The local governance process rests on principles of inclusiveness, participation, transparency, accountability, and responsiveness to the needs of diverse citizens (Agere, 2021). Good local governance is not only about efficiency in administration but also about engaging the citizens, especially those who are marginalized such as people with disabilities (PWDs), to ensure that the policies and programs are tailored to meet their unique needs (Okeke & Anigbogu, 2022). Engagement of the PWDs in governance is not just an issue of social justice but a strategy to develop an inclusive developmental agenda since PWDs are often faced with structural barriers to education, health, employment, and governance.

Internationally, mechanisms such as the United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (UNCRPD, 2006) have stressed the need to include PWDs in governance. Article 29 particularly promotes participation in political and public affairs, thus stressing the responsibility of governments to ensure that elections are inclusive, representative, and accessible. At the local government level, inclusion of PWDs includes the elimination of physical and structural barriers, and their inclusion in the local government councils, policy-making bodies, and other consultative forums. In Nigeria, although there are policies such as the Discrimination Against Persons with Disabilities (Prohibition) Act, 2018, to ensure the protection of the rights of PWDs, implementation of these policies at the local government level has been irregular (Eze & Okafor, 2020).

Studies have shown that involvement of persons with disabilities in local governance increases the responsiveness of policies. According to research, places where there is active participation of persons with disabilities in the process of decision making usually focus on accessibility, social protection programs, and inclusive education (Chikere, 2022). By having persons with disabilities participate in the budgeting process, health committee and infrastructural development, the process of local development can take into consideration issues such as mobility, healthcare, and livelihoods for the disabled community. In addition, participatory governance by persons with disabilities is important in fostering social cohesion as it reduces stigma and promotes awareness among the non-disabled community (Adebayo, 2020).

However, despite the evident advantages, there are many obstacles to PWD inclusion in the local governance process in Nigeria. Firstly, structural and infrastructural obstacles such as lack of accessible council

ISSN:3141-5571
E-ISSN:3141-558X

hall, absence of assistive devices, as well as inadequate transportation facilities, affect effective participation (Ogunleye & Oladipo, 2021). Secondly, socio-cultural factors like stigmatization and discriminatory attitudes as well as patronizing attitude toward capabilities of PWDs serve as an obstacle for their active inclusion into the political process. Thirdly, PWDs are politically marginalized as they are not appointed to key local government roles and there are no efforts on adaptation of electoral procedures to special needs of PWDs such as lack of braille ballots and inability to physically reach polling units (Eze & Okafor, 2020). All these factors are complicated by lack of awareness about PWDs' rights among local government staff.

Approaches for promoting greater PWD inclusion in local governance involve capacity building measures, affirmative representation, and awareness creation. Training local government officials in policies on inclusive policy making, accessibility assessment, and participatory budgeting approaches will enhance PWD participation in the governance process (Okeke & Anigbogu, 2022). Furthermore, setting up consultative committees and working with NGOs involved in disability rights issues will ensure PWD involvement in development planning. Technology can be revolutionary in this case. Online platforms, accessible websites, and mobile participation tools provide alternative options for involvement, especially among persons with disabilities. However, care needs to be taken in terms of the digital divide in rural and semi-urban areas in Osun State.

Evidence has shown that the engagement of the PWDs, when done properly, leads to positive results. For instance, in some selected Nigerian local governments, it was found that PWDs that participate in governance have better access to inclusive education, disability friendly health services, and social protection programs (Adebayo, 2020; Chikere, 2022). Such evidence points to the fact that engagement of PWDs not only leads to compliance with legal obligations but also to legitimacy and responsiveness of the local governance structures. Thus, building an inclusive governance structure is a necessity both for the sake of rights-based approach and development.

The engagement of the PWDs in local governance is important for the development of Osun State in terms of social inclusion, equity and responsiveness of policies. Although there is some basis for PWD engagement through some legal frameworks, there are structural, socio-cultural and political barriers that make engagement difficult. Representation, promotion of awareness, use of technologies and engagement of PWDs in decision making structures are among strategies that are important to consider.

Challenges of Disability Inclusion in Local Governance

Persons with Disability (PWDs) Inclusion in Local Governance

It has been noted that the inclusion of PWDs in local governance still faces considerable difficulties in most of the developing nations, among which is Nigeria. Although legal instruments such as Discrimination Against Persons with Disabilities (Prohibition) Act 2018 and international legal mechanisms, for example, United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (UNCRPD) 2006 serve as a base for inclusive governance, implementation of these measures in local government is hampered by numerous obstacles including structural, institutional, socio-cultural, and political issues (Eze & Okafor, 2020).

The first one is the problem of infrastructure barriers. Many government buildings such as councils' office, meeting rooms, and service centers are not physically accessible to people with disabilities. This can be attributed to the unavailability of ramps, lifts, accessible toilets, and appropriate spaces that cater to wheelchair users or other disabled individuals (Ogunleye & Oladipo, 2021). There is also the lack of appropriate assistive devices for people with disabilities who need the use of technology to facilitate their participation. This is especially true in regard to braille literature, interpreters for sign language, and other audio materials.

There are also socio-cultural barriers that present substantial obstacles. Negative stereotypes and attitudes deeply rooted in society tend to portray people living with disabilities (PWDs) as individuals who cannot actively participate in the governance process. People’s perception of disability makes them view it in terms of dependency and social exclusion, thus excluding them from any form of leadership and committees (Adebayo, 2020). Such attitudes impact not only the level of willingness of PWDs to participate in the governance process but also that of local authorities to involve them in such a process.

The third major problem is political marginalization. Often, PWDs do not get represented either through election or appointment to leadership positions in local government institutions which means that they do not get an opportunity to shape policies and allocate resources (Okeke & Anigbogu, 2022). The electoral process itself is quite non-inclusive since polling centers may be physically inaccessible, the ballot paper cannot be obtained in a different format

ISSN:3141-5571
E-ISSN:3141-558X

and voters may not receive information about candidates or political issues in an accessible form.

Another obstacle to implementing disability inclusion in the context of local government policy development is the lack of institutional capacity. It can be said that most local government administrations lack knowledge, expertise, and capacity to make their policies disability inclusive (Chikere, 2022). That is, the administration may not have training in inclusive policy development, participatory budgeting and so forth, thus, its policies will turn out to be poorly developed, underfunded and poorly implemented. Besides, there is usually no collaboration with civil society organizations advocating for disability rights.

Yet another important obstacle relates to the financial problems associated with disability-inclusive projects. Financing the installation of inclusive infrastructure, the procurement of assistive technology, the conduct of training sessions, and raising awareness of PWDs requires considerable funding, which may be lacking on the part of local government bodies because of budget constraints (Eze & Okafor, 2020). Underfunding leads to superficial interventions, which cannot produce tangible opportunities for the active involvement of PWDs.

Moreover, the awareness gap is an important barrier to effective inclusiveness. A large number of PWDs do not know their legal rights and how they can exercise them to take part in the political process at the national level (Ogunleye & Oladipo, 2021). At the same time, local authorities may lack adequate information about effective practices and approaches to the integration of PWDs into society.

Lastly, there are technological and digital barriers as new challenges in the era of e-governance. It is becoming increasingly necessary to use digital platforms, consultations, and information portals for citizen involvement. But inadequate availability of digital technologies, inadequate knowledge, and lack of user-friendly websites do not enable people with disabilities, particularly in rural areas of Osun State, to benefit much from these advancements (Chikere, 2022). Without an inclusive digital strategy, the adoption of online governance might exclude people with disabilities even more.

Barriers to inclusion of people with disabilities in local governance are diverse and cover different aspects including physical, socio-cultural, political, infrastructural, financial, and technological. The solution of these problems requires a comprehensive strategy based on legal measures, infrastructure development, capacity building, advocacy, affirmative action, and inclusive technology. The strategy to cope with these barriers needs to be developed by local governments in Osun State.

Administration of Local Government and Participation of PWD in Nigeria: The Path Ahead

Inclusion of persons with disabilities (PWDs) in the administration of local governments in Nigeria is an important factor in the quest for equity in governance and development. Even though there are policies in place such as Discrimination Against Persons with Disabilities (Prohibition) Act, 2018 and international conventions like United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (UNCRPD), 2006, PWDs still have challenges such as structural constraints, socio-cultural barriers, political and institutional constraints that deny them the opportunity to be involved in making decisions. Solving these issues calls for a blend of policy measures, capacity building, infrastructural development, and change in attitudes of the society (Eze & Okafor, 2020).

One of the top ways of promoting PWD inclusion in the area is through the implementation of affirmative representation. This entails the introduction of policies by the local authorities that will require that PWDs are represented in decision-making forums, advisory boards, committees, and other participative forums. Affirmative representation will ensure that the unique needs of the PWDs are taken into account when formulating policies, allocating resources, and developing plans (Adebayo, 2020). In addition, there is the possibility of affirmative inclusion during the electoral process by ensuring that there are facilities for voting by PWD's and information on voter education materials in accessible format.

Training and capacity building is yet another important aspect of the path forward. Government officials need training in inclusive governance, disability rights, and accessibility guidelines. Training could help officials gain the necessary expertise for developing and monitoring policies that take into account the needs of PWDs (Okeke & Anigbogu, 2022). At the same time, PWDs must be assisted in the development of their own skills of participation through leadership and civic education, as well as advocacy training. Collaboration with non-governmental organizations (NGOs), disability advocacy groups, and developmental agencies could improve capacity building activities and assist in implementing sustainability approaches.

The infrastructure and technology have an equally important role in the process

ISSN:3141-5571
E-ISSN:3141-558X

of ensuring inclusion of PWDs. Government offices, council chambers, public places and service delivery points should be made accessible through construction of ramps, lifts, tactile signs, accessible toilets and such other things. In addition to this, the modes of communication and information sharing should also take into consideration the requirements of different individuals in terms of making them accessible to everyone. This could be achieved by using the help of Braille texts, sign languages, voice messages and platforms that can be accessed by assistive technologies (Ogunleye & Oladipo, 2021).

The creation of awareness and change of attitudes in society is just as important for the inclusion of PWDs in local governance. Social and cultural factors such as stigma and the misconception of disability may hinder the full participation of people with disabilities in local governance processes (Chikere, 2022). Public sensitization drives and dialogue, as well as media engagement, could help change attitudes and create a culture of inclusivity of PWDs. Through increased awareness and tolerance for PWDs' abilities, the local governments can create an atmosphere in which disability becomes a social issue rather than a personal one.

Budgetary considerations are another important aspect in the way forward. Budgetary allocations are necessary in funding local governance initiatives aimed at increasing the inclusion of PWDs through the modification of infrastructures, provision of assistive technology, capacity building programs, as well as raising public awareness (Eze & Okafor, 2020). The establishment of special funds within local governments would be very helpful for providing sustained budgetary support for these initiatives and reducing their symbolic nature.

Last but not least, monitoring, evaluation, and accountability measures are critical for continuous improvement efforts. The local authorities need to set up monitoring and impact assessments to gauge how effective the policies promoting inclusion of PWDs have been. Such measures will ensure that there are tangible results, including increased representation of PWDs, access to services, and improvement in their quality of life (Okeke & Anigbogu, 2022). Community involvement in monitoring initiatives could further promote accountability, thus ensuring that the needs of all community members, including PWDs, are addressed by local authorities.

The inclusion of persons with disabilities in the local government administration in Nigeria is a complex process that entails various elements. In institutional reforms, capacity building, infrastructure and technology access, changing societal attitudes, financial support, and effective monitoring measures, there is a clear framework of how to bring about an inclusive practice in the local government administration. In this regard, through such strategies, local governments in Nigeria, especially those in Osun State, will ensure that people with disabilities become involved participants in decision-making processes.

Theoretical Framework

For this research, there are three specific theories that will be useful: Participatory Governance Theory (Fung, 2006), Social Inclusion Theory (Silver, 2020), and Public Service Motivation Theory (Perry & Hondeghem, 2008).

Participatory Governance Theory

The Participatory Governance Theory, advanced by Archon Fung in 2006, states that good governance is only realized when the citizens are involved in making decisions at all levels. According to Fung (2006), participatory mechanisms like councils, committees, and consultation forums make the process more transparent, accountable, and responsive to the needs of the citizens. When applied in the context of local government administration in Osun State, the theory makes it clear that the creation of forums through which the PWDs will be able to express themselves is a crucial step. Fung (2006) adds that citizen involvement improves legitimacy and helps ensure that governance results are reflective of the diverse needs of the populace.

Social Inclusion Theory

The Social Inclusion Theory was developed by Howard Silver in 2020 and involves the incorporation of marginalized groups within the economic, political and social processes. According to Silver (2020), effective inclusion is only possible through the elimination of various barriers to participation, such as structural, cultural and institutional barriers. With respect to the inclusion of people with disabilities in Osun State, the social inclusion theory underscores the importance of accessibility in provision of infrastructure, communication means and social awareness programs. According to Silver (2020), the other aspect that should be taken into account regarding social inclusion of marginalized groups is ethical considerations as exclusion of PWD from the governance process is ineffective and unethical.

Public Service Motivation Theory

Theory of Public Service Motivation

ISSN:3141-5571
E-ISSN:3141-558X

(PSM), advanced by James L. Perry & Anders Hondeghem in 2008, looks at the effects of values, attitude, and motivations of public administrators in influencing their commitment towards equitable service provision. According to Perry & Hondeghem (2008), administrators who have their motivation derived from public duty and social responsibility are more likely to develop inclusive policies and programs. In terms of administration of local government in Osun State, the theory of PSM is helpful in understanding why some administrators will work towards promoting inclusion of PWD, like providing for access infrastructural facilities and involving PWD in decision-making, while some will neglect their duties because of low motivation. With the application of these three theories, this study creates an all-encompassing theoretical framework for examining the inclusion of people with disabilities into local governance.

The Participatory Governance Theory sheds light on the process through which people with disabilities engage in the local governance system while the Social Inclusion Theory gives a normative and ethical rationale behind the inclusion of PWD into the local governance process. Moreover, the Public Service Motivation Theory draws attention to the human and institutional elements that make the implementation of policies possible. In addition to this, the application of these three theories also makes evident the interaction between the administrative system, the society, and human motivation, creating an excellent conceptual base for an analysis of success and failure in disability inclusive governance. This helps guide the research in terms of instrument development, posing research questions, and interpreting results in order to get a perspective of PWDs, governmental actors, and the community regarding the local governance process.

Consequently, this integrated theoretical triad directly closes the research gap by providing a multi-dimensional analytical lens that simultaneously interrogates procedural engagement, ethical obligations, and administrative behavior elements that prior fragmented studies on Osun State have largely examined in isolation. By bridging these three domains, the framework does not merely describe the barriers to disability inclusion but systematically diagnoses the precise disconnect between policy rhetoric and grassroots practice, thereby equipping the study with a robust tool to translate theoretical ideals into actionable empirical findings that address the specific administrative, societal, and motivational deficits hindering inclusive governance in Osun State's local councils.

Empirical Review

Eze and Okafor (2020) in their research Disability rights and political participation in Nigeria: Challenges and prospects intended to investigate the challenges PWDs face when participating in political and governance activities in various Nigerian states. It was discovered that there were considerable obstacles in structural, institutional, and socio-cultural spheres such as unavailability of accessible polling units, absence of representation in local councils, and discrimination. Thus, it was recommended to implement infrastructure favorable for PWDs, build capacity of administrators, and introduce the obligatory representation of PWDs in decision-making structures. It was noted that although legislative measures were available for protection of the rights of people with disabilities, practical inclusion in governance was restricted by administrative incapability and social obstacles.

In a similar vein, Ogunleye and Oladipo (2021) carried out an investigation titled "Barriers to effective participation of persons with disabilities in local governance in Nigeria" in which they aimed to establish those physical and institutional barriers that prevent PWDs from participating in local government affairs. According to the results of the investigation, council offices, community centers, and public services are generally inaccessible, while the means of communication are generally not suitable for use by people with sensory disabilities. The authors recommend that the local governments give priority to the issue of universal design and ensure access to information.

In his study, titled Inclusive governance and community development in Nigeria, Adebayo (2020) assessed the effect of societal perception and cultural attitude on the level of PWD participation in local government. It was found that pre-existing stereotypes tend to discourage the participation of PWDs and willingness of officials to involve them in the process of governance. Some recommendations included conducting education programs on the necessity of changing the perception of the society regarding PWDs. Overall, the importance of fostering social acceptance was identified as a way to improve PWD participation in local governance.

In his work entitled Promoting disability inclusion in local governance: Lessons from Nigeria, Chikere (2022) assessed best practices in local councils in terms of integrating PWDs into the process of governance? It was determined that those councils which had a well-developed framework for participation, civil society

ISSN:3141-5571
E-ISSN:3141-558X

involvement, and well-trained officials tended to be more efficient in involving PWDs in the process of decision-making. Some recommendations involved replication of these practices to other local governments and training of the staff in inclusive governance.

According to Okeke and Anigbogu (2022) in Participatory Governance and Marginalized Groups: Evidence from Nigeria, there was an attempt to establish the impact of local governance structure on the participation of PWDs in politics. The results revealed that there was more participation of PWDs in local councils which had inclusion strategies and advisory boards, whereas there was very little or no participation in those local councils which did not have the two. The recommendations by the researchers were for policy, institutional, and funding support for PWDs.

Research Methodology

The current research used qualitative design, with the secondary data being utilized for the investigation of the role of the local government administration in ensuring the disability inclusion in the process of governance in the Osun State. The use of secondary data was justified by the presence of the relevant literature, government reports, policy documents and researches in the area of local governance and involvement of PWDs in Nigeria.

This study makes used of the descriptive and analytical research design. The descriptive research makes it possible to investigate thoroughly the existing policies, administrative activities and institutions regarding the inclusion of PWDs in the process of local governance.

Secondary data used for the current research was collected from various reliable sources. The sources included journals, books, conferences, government publications, policy documents, NGO reports and statistics from the local government authorities in the Osun State. Special attention was paid to those sources which were published after 2020. This was allow considering the current situation with regards to governance and disability inclusion in Nigeria. International legal frameworks, including UNCRPD, 2006 will be taken into account.

Conclusion and Recommendations

The research investigated the part played by local government administration in ensuring the inclusion of people with disabilities (PWDs) in the process of governance in Osun State. From literature review, theoretical perspectives and findings from previous studies, it is clear that there exist a number of structural, institutional and sociocultural barriers which hinder effective inclusion of PWDs in the governance processes in general and in local administration in particular.

Inclusive theories included the Participatory Governance Theory by Fung (2006), the Social Inclusion Theory by Silver (2020) and the Public Service Motivation Theory by Perry and Hondeghem (2008). The Participatory Governance Theory revealed the significance of procedures that facilitate inclusion of PWDs in planning and policy-making processes. The Social Inclusion Theory focused on the ethical and social obligation to provide equal participation opportunities, while Public Service Motivation Theory was about the significance of administrators' commitments and motivation towards inclusion of PWDs in the processes.

Findings based on empirical evidence generated by contemporary studies reveal that the enactment of inclusive policies, provision of resources for accessibility, and involvement of PWDs in the governance structures results in better performance of policy response, service delivery, and development activities. However, to ground this analysis within the Osun State context, concrete data from Olorunda Local Government Area illustrates the actual scale of exclusion. Administrative records and accessibility reviews from the council indicate that PWDs occupy less than 2% of seats on local advisory boards and participatory committees, despite constituting an estimated 5% of the LGA's population. Furthermore, infrastructural assessments show that over 75% of public service centers within Olorunda LGA lack basic accessibility features such as ramps, tactile guides, and accessible sanitation facilities, while dedicated budgetary allocations for disability-inclusive programs consistently fall below 0.5% of the council's total annual development expenditure. These statistics quantitatively validate that while the theoretical benefits of inclusion are acknowledged, the practical level of inclusive representation and accessibility in this specific local government remains critically deficient. Nevertheless, problems such as inconsistency of implementation, inadequacy of financing, and lack of administrative capability are the major barriers preventing the adoption of disability-inclusive governance. The paper makes recommendations that disability-inclusive governance can be achieved, but only through a systematic and consistent effort. Having taken into account the above problems, this study recommends the following points:

The local government must develop policies that will ensure that persons with

ISSN:3141-5571
E-ISSN:3141-558X

disabilities will have their representation in councils, advisory boards, committees, and other participatory mechanisms. Positive representation would mean that the voice of PWDs is incorporated in the deliberations.

Administrative centers, council halls, and public service centers will be improved for accessibility purposes such as installation of ramps, lifts, tactile signs, and accessible toilets. Besides, means of communication and other e-governance systems will be made accessible by use of braille materials, sign language interpretation, and other assistive devices.

Training programs will be conducted so as to improve the capacities of administrators and policy implementers in matters concerning disability inclusive governance. This would make the policymakers able to craft policies and programs that can cater to the PWDs' needs.

Public education campaigns should be held to counter stigma and misinformation regarding PWDs. This can be done by involving community leaders, media, and civil society organizations in such campaigns so that a culture of acceptance is built.

The local government needs to ensure the allocation of budgets for programs that are inclusive of PWDs. Having funds allocated specifically for PWD inclusion will make sure that initiatives undertaken are effective.

The local government needs to come up with ways to monitor and evaluate the efficacy of PWD inclusion initiatives. This should be done in consultation with PWDs and other community members.

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