

# **Communication and Social Inclusion Advocacy for Persons with Disabilities in Akwa Ibom State, Nigeria**

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## **Abstract**

This study is on communication and social inclusion advocacy for persons with disabilities in Akwa Ibom State, Nigeria, tagged, "Opportunity Equalization Campaign for Persons with disabilities". The aim is to promote equal opportunities for persons with disabilities in terms of fundamental human rights, goods, and services that are enjoyed by the generality of the people. The uses and Gratifications theory of Communication was adopted and used for the study as a framework to guide and systematically relate findings to the entire study. The population comprises all the people with disabilities in Akwa Ibom State. A stratified random sampling technique was used to select a sample of 483 respondents from the three senatorial districts of Uyo, Eket, and Ikot Ekpene in Akwa Ibom State. The instrument for data collection was a 4-point Likert scale questionnaire of agree, strongly agree, disagree, and strongly disagree constructed on 15 item questions. Out of 483 copies of the questionnaire administered to the respondents, 436 copies were properly filled and returned for analysis. Data were computed, verified, processed, and analyzed with the aid of the Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS) software package for Windows using frequency and simple percentages. The results indicate that the inclusion campaign had positive effects on people with disabilities.

**Keywords:** *Communication, Advocacy, Social Inclusion, Disabilities*

## **Introduction**

In Nigeria, as in many countries, advocacy has become a very popular practice in support of vulnerable groups in pursuing fairness, equity, and social justice for all. Unfortunately, a large proportion of people with disabilities and their families faced communication difficulties in the journey to achieving a disability-inclusive society (Effiong, 2019a; Martinez & Vemuru, 2020). This according to United Nations International Children Emergency Fund (UNICEF) is because, disability, carries multiple stigmas which is the basis for exclusion from society, (Okoli, 2010). Here, United Nations Human Convention on Peoples' Rights (UNHCR) re-affirms that communication remains a key element of advocacy for this development.

Interestingly, the United Nations (UN) being the chief advocate for inclusive society confirms the rights of persons with disabilities to "exercise freedom of expression and

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opinion, to seek, receive and impart information and ideas on an equal basis with others via all forms of communication..." (United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (UNCRPD), (2006). Therefore, the denial of expression in this regard absolutely amounts to the denial of rights to advocate for inclusive society (Effiong, 2011; 2019b). This corroborates studies by WHO, UNESCO, ILO & IDDC (2010), that both verbal and non-verbal communications are hampered due to impairment of various sorts, in low-income countries such as Pakistan, Uganda, and Zimbabwe. Painful enough, people with disabilities are often excluded from development policies and programmes that concerned them, (Effiong, *et al*, 2018b).

The social hierarchy marginalizes and divides people into 'sender' and 'receivers' of communication, with people with disabilities being the most marginalized groups - 'receivers' rather 'sender' of information (Parahoo, 2000). People with disabilities in society are silenced and less listened to, and thus, socialized into a communication system of affirmation - that is, confirming the 'correctness' of what others say. This form of communication, as observed by (Cable, 2014), is invariably patterned into agreeing to the decisions taken for them by others who 'claim' higher than them in the class and social hierarchy, excluding them from the societal mainstream, and therefore, calls for the strategically use of information to achieve an inclusive society for vulnerable and disadvantaged groups. However, this study focuses on using communication and advocacy to create, not only a dynamic but, a balanced inclusive society for people with disabilities in Nigeria. The researchers, therefore, narrow their interest to understanding the effects of the "Opportunity Equalization Campaign for Persons with disabilities Campaign that was initiated by National Youth Service Corp Members, 2008 set who served in Ikot Ekpene Senatorial District of Akwa Ibom State. This campaign advocacy was fully supported by National Youth Service, Ikot Ekpene Zonal Office as well as Akwa Ibom State Radio and Television Stations who aired the advocacy campaign repeatedly.

### **Statement of the Problem**

Globally, approximately one billion or 15% of the world's population, experience some disabilities, (WHO, 2014), with estimated 19 million Nigerians living with significant disabilities (CCD, 2019). In Nigeria, people with disabilities face serious economic challenges, stigma, discrimination, exploitation, denial of rights, and are often socially excluded from the societal mainstream (Effiong, 2018a). People with disabilities are exposed to various types of discrimination (Baba-Ochankpa, 2010; Fatunde, 2009). The social neglect faced by people with disabilities in Nigeria is worrisome (Uzochukwu, Akpala and Onwujekwe, 2004). Describing the challenges faced by people with disabilities, Baffoe (2013), disclosed that public attitudes and beliefs in Africa are often based on fear and misunderstandings, stereotype individuals with disabilities. These misconceptions show that communities are not enlightened about what disability is all about, (Effiong, 2017a). Recognizing the importance of commitment made by the Federal Government of Nigeria in signing into law, the Disability Bill in 2020 and subsequent composition and inauguration of the National Council for Persons with Disability Commission by President Mahamadu Buhari, the majority of Nigerians, with or without disabilities including government officials, have little or no idea of existing disability legislation in the country, which probably, maybe due to inadequate sensitizations either from the government or stakeholders. It is at the instance of these observations that this

study sought to assess the level of awareness and media advocacy on the imperative of disability-inclusivity in Akwa Ibom State of Nigeria

The following questions were formulated to guide this study.

1. How have people with disabilities enjoy equal opportunities with their non-disabled counterparts in Akwa Ibom State?
2. What is the level of awareness on disability-related issues in Akwa Ibom State?
3. How do mass media enhance opportunities for persons with disabilities to advocate their social inclusion in policy-making processes in Akwa Ibom State?

The major objectives of this study were:

- i. To promote equal opportunities for persons with disabilities to enjoy their fundamental human rights, as enjoyed by everyone in the society.
- ii. To examine the level of awareness on disability-related issues in Akwa Ibom State.
- iii. To assess the impact of mass media communication on advocacy for the social inclusion of people with disabilities in Akwa Ibom State.

### **Review of Literature**

A common sense understanding of the reality of disability will be, what is wrong with an individual that makes him not work, walk, talk, see, hear and think well, (Ihenacho, 2009; Howard, et al, 2011 and Ireland, *et al*, 2019). The notion of 'disability in all human society, is generic and evolving, in terms of concept and reality. It is not an abstract concept, but, a reality. We see it, live with it every day, and are physically present with us, (Onota, 2007; Amulu and Abu, 2010). The Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities and its Optional Protocol, (2006) defines persons with disabilities to "include those that have long-term physical, mental, intellectual or sensory impairments which in interaction with various barriers may hinder their full and effective participation in society on an equal basis with others". The issue of disability is still little known by a huge number of the Nigerian population, (Cbm, 2006). Worthy of note is the fact that persons with disabilities are not a homogeneous group, but are faced with multiple and compounding forms of discrimination, on the basis of disability, which on the other grounds, may lead to situations of exclusion (WHO, 2014). To most people, disability is often represented in terms of sadness, helplessness, and hopelessness, and appeals to charitable giving (Effiong, 2018a). Yet, this is not the reality of many families and persons with disabilities, as it is viewed as a positive personal and collective identity, with people with disabilities leading fulfilled and satisfying lives, according to UNESCO, W.H.O, I.L.O (2010); Effiong, (2019a).

People with disabilities are the world's largest minority in society, who live in a situation of utter disadvantages in many areas of human existence (WHO, 2011). They are generally poor, due to neglect and lack of opportunities for self-development, as well as many goods and services that could be of immense benefits to them. Disability exists when impairment limits a person's ability to perform certain tasks in the same way that most persons do (CBM, 2010b). It is the outcome of complex interactions between the limitations arising from a person's physical, intellectual, or mental condition and the social and physical environment, leading to social and economic disadvantages, denial of rights, and limited opportunities to play an equal part in the life of the community, (Hilbert, 2011). However, according to Hilbert, (2011) and Effiong, *et al* (2018a), most

disability studies, capture the fact that bodily impairment, leads to disability. A scenario observed by Haralambos, (2008) and Effiong, (2019a), a social construct or a result of society's reaction to the person with the impairment.

Communication is the way information and messages are transferred from one person to another and are the means by which social relationships between individuals and communities are built and maintained, (WHO, 2010). Successful advocacy depends on important messages being communicated and heard. However, persons with disabilities experience barriers to communication, so frequently their voices are not heard and they have few opportunities to influence decisions on the issues, policies, and services that affect their lives, (Chadwick and Fullwood, 2018). Mass multi-media are valuable tools that offer opportunities to widen perspectives, share best practices, troubleshoot, and provide support for promoting and supporting empowerment initiatives. Many people with disabilities do not have opportunities to communicate, for example, the deaf person, especially where there is unavailable sign language interpreter(s). Hence, an advocate might assist in this regard to access information, and sometimes speak on their behalf in difficult situations, (Pearson and Trevisan. 2015). The United Nations Convention on Rights of Persons with Disabilities highlights the importance of communication for persons with disabilities, (UNCRPD, 2006). Article 9 calls on the State parties to ensure that persons with disabilities have access on an equal basis with others to '... information and communications...' and Article 21 confirms the right to 'freedom of expression and opinion, including the freedom to seek, receive and impart information and ideas on an equal basis with others and through all forms of communication of their choice' (WHO, 2010).

In many settings, persons with disabilities experience stigma and discrimination, and it can be difficult to voice their opinions, wants, and needs. Communication is a key element in the process of empowerment and underpins inclusion and equal rights of all people, with or without disabilities, in every human society, (WHO, UNESCO, ILO & IDDC, 2010). Communication is used to build social relationships through effective advocacy which is an aspect that focuses on ensuring people with disabilities, their families and communities have the right skills, environment, and medium to communicate, (Cbm, 2010). This must be inconsonant with the extant law of the land. However, as pointed out by Effiong, (2018a), communication is critical for all transactions and for organizing collective action. Without effective communication individuals and groups cannot act as advocates for change, (Effiong, 2019b). The opportunity to communicate is essential if people are to gain communication skills and be empowered to be part of their community (UNCRPD (2006). Supporting people with disabilities in self-expression and breaking down barriers to communication contribute to the empowerment of people with disabilities. Suffice it to say, that, the best advocacy results are often achieved by both helping the people with disabilities and linking it to an inclusive community.

On the other hand, social inclusion is the process of improving the terms on which individuals and groups take part in the society – improving the ability, opportunity, and dignity of those disadvantaged on the basis of their identity (Cbm, 2010 and Onota, 2010). It is also, the recognition of the need to transform the cultures, policies, and practices in societies to accommodate the differing needs of the people, and an obligation to remove the barriers that impede that possibility. People with disabilities are often excluded from the mainstream of society and hence, unable to contribute to the

development of the society at all or optimally (Lang & Upah, (2008); Effiong *et al*, (2017a). This inequality corroborates the idea of Global awareness of disability-inclusive development which seeks to promote the full integration of persons with disabilities in societies, (UNCRPD, (2006); WHO, UNESCO, ILO & IDDC, (2010). Studies by Effiong, *et al*, (2017b) reveals that people with disabilities, the world's largest minority, are often times, faced with intrinsic barriers to participating in all aspects of society. This revelation, as confirmed further by W.H.O., (2004 & 2011) and Effiong, (2011) includes limited access to institutional rehabilitation and basic services available to others, in most rural communities of the world. An inclusive development denotes the concept that ALL stakeholders (people with disabilities, women, children, indigenous people, elderly, etc.,) have equal rights to be participants in, and beneficiaries of the global development agenda (Effiong 2011 & 2019a).

The observation above is further re-affirmed by Barron & Amerena (2007), that an inclusive development approach is the global development community's response to attempt to rectify this situation. Empowering people with disabilities can be done by sharing information so that people can better understand the imperative of mainstreaming people with disabilities in society. Adesokan, (2003), observed that "many persons with disabilities are excluded and alienated from their own society and are no longer treated as respected citizens of their own society". These negative and stigmatized attitudes deprive persons with disabilities of inalienable rights to social services (Guar *et al*, 2010), resulting from inadequate knowledge about disability, (WHO 2011). Social change, which is an aspect of an inclusive society, is a process of transformation in the way society is organized, within social and political institutions, and in the distribution of power within those institutions, (Effiong, *et al*, 2017a). For behaviours to change on a large scale, certain harmful cultural practices, societal norms, and structural inequalities have to be taken into consideration. Social change approaches, thus, tend to focus on the community as the unit of change, (Effiong, 2008).

Furthermore, the word advocacy has its origin in law and has been defined as 'the process of using information strategically to change policies that affect the lives of disadvantaged people', (Onota, 2007; Cbm, 2010). It is a means to achieving equity and social justice through the empowerment of disadvantaged groups, including people with disabilities, to actively participate and be directly included in decision-making processes affecting their lives, (Amusat, 2009). However, Cbm, (2010), pointed out that advocacy is the act of pleading or arguing in favour of something, such as a cause, idea, or policy, with active support and endorsement. Advocacy assures that people '*all people*' have their voices and wishes heard on issues that are important to them. Regardless of the type of advocacy used, it is important to bring people with disabilities into the process and get them engaged in the development, implementation, and evaluation of key communication materials, (Onota, (2007); Effiong, (2018a). Advocacy is to protect, defends, and creates a safe, confidential, and open-minded environment for the expression of needs and desires, (UNICEF, 2014). Generally, it is about speaking on behalf of others to bring about a positive change to the lives of the voiceless and the weak to achieve equal citizenship for them.

Succinctly, the rights of persons with disabilities have over time unenforced, hence, the need for advocacy to re-orientate about the capacity and limitations of persons with disabilities in Nigerian society. Interestingly, advocacy plays a leading role in changing the practice of exclusion to total inclusion by integrating people who are excluded from

the mainstream of society into all facets of society on equal terms, (Gelfgren, Ineland & Cocq (2021). In this sense, advocacy is aimed at equalizing opportunities for persons with disabilities to enable them to enjoy on equal terms, rights, goods, and services that are enjoyed by the generality of the people, (WHO, *et al*, 2010). Advocacy challenge barriers to full inclusion, equality, and advancement and improve policy, environmental and attitudinal factors that engender deprivations of the right to employment, health, social life, and all sorts of discrimination, (Gelfgren, Ineland & Cocq (2021). Advocacy focuses primarily on changes in policies and laws or implementation; as well as, the awareness of existing policies and laws. It uses knowledge, and sometimes funds, to alter and influence policies, practices in favour of disadvantaged groups, (Adesina, 2003). Advocacy plays a key role in working with people with disabilities to improve their ability to express themselves and to engage with others, (Effiong, 2019a).

However, Onota (2007), posited that if advocacy becomes too distant from the primary stakeholders (persons with disabilities), it will lose its legitimacy. To achieve an inclusive society, it is therefore very helpful and important to carry out advocacy in close collaboration with persons with disabilities, who are the primary stakeholders. This is because persons with disabilities are often the most powerful advocates on issues that affect them, as they could speak with direct experience of the issue and its consequences, (Effiong, 2011; Cocq and Ljuslinder, 2020.). The United Nations (UN) has been the chief advocate for persons with disabilities, all over the world. Dignity and justice for all persons are established universal principles. Since its inception, the UN has recognized that the inherent dignity and the equal and inalienable rights of all members of the human family are the foundations of freedom, justice, and peace in the world. (UNCRPWD,2006). These principles, along with equality and non-discrimination, have guided the work of the UN for several decades, and enshrined in various instruments, such as the UN Charter and the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, as well as in treaties, such as the International Covenants on Human Rights and the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities.

These instruments are among those which make up the international human rights framework are complementary and reaffirmed that all human rights are universal, indivisible, interrelated, interdependent, and mutually reinforcing. It can be deduced here that the UNCRPD marks a 'paradigm shift' in attitudes and approaches to persons with disabilities. It takes to a new height the movement from viewing persons with disabilities as '*objects*' of pity, medical treatment, and social protection towards viewing persons with disabilities as '*subjects*' with rights, capable of claiming those rights and making decisions for their lives based on their free and informed consent, as well as, being active members of the society, (UNCRPD, 2006). There is, therefore, a need to take into account and address their concerns in all policy-making and programming. Special measures are needed at all levels to integrate them into the mainstream of development.

### **Theoretical Framework**

This study is best explained within the framework of the uses and gratification theory because the theory provides an insight into why media is widely used to stabilize an imbalanced society. Propounded in 1974 by the trio of Elihu Katz, Jay Blumler and Michael Gurevitch, to explain why audiences deliberately seek mass media to provide them with the information they need, like and use, (Akpan, Nwankpa and Agu, 2015). Analyzing uses and gratifications theory, Defleur and Dennis (1994), submit that it

presupposes that members of the public actively select and use specific forms of media content to fulfill their needs and interests. In this context, it explains how people use the media to satisfy their advocacy needs for a disability-inclusive society, to ensure that all people in the society are able to have their voice heard on issues that are important to them, protect and promote rights, have their views and wishes genuinely considered when decisions are made about their lives. It was developed to explain the effects of mass communication on society, audiences, and people (Akpan, *et al*, 2015). Without far-reaching media advocacy, it is impossible to guarantee or assume a disability-inclusive society, (Hale, 1990). Similarly, Folarin (1998) observes that the approach perceives the recipient of media messages as actively influencing the effect process, since they selectively chose, attend to, perceive and retain the media messages on the basis of their needs and beliefs. This is apparent in studies by Epsein, (2010); and Guo & Saxton, (2018), that the media offer meanings for interpretations of the social reality of disability, in the drive for an inclusive society for persons with disabilities in all human societies.

According to Roberts (2010) cited in Akpan, *et al* (2015), the uses and gratifications theory is based on the assumptions that (1) the audience is active, (2) the media choice lies with the audience member (3) all media compete with other sources of need/goal fulfillment, (4) mass media goals can be found in the message of the source, and (5) cultural value judgments should not be taken into consideration as the audience explores their own opinions. By directly applying these assumptions to this study, a few observations can be made. First, people with disabilities are active in their demands, as they willingly seek to effect actions to change the hitherto existing disability discriminatory policies in Nigeria. Next, the person with disabilities chooses mass media over other channels (sources), of communication, to fulfill their advocacy needs or goals. Essentially, the people with disabilities may have chooses media advocacy, probably, to alter negative public views about disability to bring into the limelight more disability-inclusive policies.

### **Methodology**

The study adopted a survey research design. The population comprises all the people with disabilities in Akwa Ibom State. The record from the National Bureau of Statistics, 2012 shows that 300,000 persons are with different forms of disabilities in Akwa Ibom State. A sample size of 811 was selected using a stratified random sampling technique.

The researchers decided to over-sample because of the peculiar challenges facing the respondents. Akwa Ibom State was stratified into three senatorial districts of Uyo, Eket, and Ikot Ekpene. The respondents were 289 from Uyo, 248 from Eket, and 274 from Ikot Ekpene. The instrument for data collection was a set of questionnaire with 4-point Likert scale questions of agree, strongly agree, disagree, and strongly disagree constructed on 15 item questions. The researchers met with the respondents in their association's monthly meetings where the instrument was administered to them. The respondents were categorized into: deaf, physically impaired, visually impaired, former leprosy-affected person, spinal cord injury victims, and persons with psychosocial disabilities.

The deaf were able to fill the questionnaire through the use of sign language which was aided by a Sign Language Expert (Research Assistant). This campaign understudy, "Opportunity Equalization Campaign for Persons with disabilities" was conducted in 2008 by National Youth Service Corp Members in Ikot Ekpene and was aired on Akwa Ibom State Radio and Television. This justified the inclusion of Uyo and Eket Senatorial

District in the study. A total of 436 copies of the questionnaire were properly filled and returned for analysis. This was earlier envisaged as; reason for oversampling. Data were computed, verified, processed, and analyzed with the aid of the Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS) software package for Windows using frequency and simple percentages.

## Results and Discussions

**Table 1: Distribution of Respondents' Socio-demographic data**

<b>Age</b>	<b>Frequency</b>	<b>Per cent</b>
18-37	180	41.3
38-57	251	57.6
58 and above	5 1	.1
Total	436	100
<b>Gender</b>		
Male	395	90.6
Female	41	9.4
Total	436	100
<b>Marital Status</b>		
Single	123	28.2
Married	248	56.9
Cohabiting	5 1	11.7
Divorced	6 1	.4
Separated	3 0	.7
Widowed	5 1	.1
Total	436	100
<b>Educational level</b>		
Primary	111	25.5
Secondary	277	63.5
Tertiary	48	11.0
Total	436	100
<b>Religion</b>		
Christianity	415	95.2
Islam	30	.7
Traditionalism	11	2.5
Others	71	.6
Total	436	100
<b>Location/residence</b>		
Ikot Ekpene	148	33.9
Uyo	148	33.9
Eket	140	32.1
Total	436	100



### Occupation

Trading	246	56.4
Craft/art work/shoe making	75	17.2
Computer Operator/business centre	39	8.9
Hair barbing/hair dressing/tailoring	31	7.1
Civil/public service	45	10.3
Total	436	100

Source: Survey, (2021)

Table 1 shows that majority of the respondents were between the age of 38 and 57 years, while those between the age of 18 and 37 years are 41.3% and those who are more than 58 years of age are only 1.1%. This implies that the highest number of respondents in the study is adults and is of active age. The table further shows that 90.6% of the respondents were males, while females were 9.4% only. This tends to reveal that majority of people with physical disabilities in Akwa Ibom State are males. The table also indicates that more than 50% of the respondents were married. The table further shows that while 63.5% of the respondents had formal education to secondary level, 25.5% ended at primary school and 11% only attended tertiary institutions. The implication is that majority of the respondents are not illiterates. On religion, the table reveals that 95.2% of the respondents were Christians, traditionalists were 2.5%, and Muslims were 0.7%; 1.6% were members of other religions. This implies that Christians dominated Akwa Ibom State, and that is why the majority of the respondents are Christians. The table also shows that while 33.9% of the respondents resided in Ikot Ekpene and Uyo Senatorial Districts respectively; 32.1% of them resided in Eket Senatorial District. The respondents' trade, business, or occupations are also shown in table 1. It indicates that 56.4% of the respondents were traders, 17.2% were into craft/artwork/shoemaking, 10.3% were civil/public servants, 8.9% were computer/business centre operators, and 7.1% were barbers/hairdressers and tailors.

Table 2: Persons with disabilities are now having a high sense of belonging in my Community

		Ikot Ekpene		Uyo		Eket	
Social Inclusion		Frequency (n)	Percentage (%)	Frequency (n)	Percentage (%)	Frequency (n)	Percentage (%)
Valid	Strongly disagree	1	0.75	1	0.57	1	0.57
	Disagree	6	4.51	5	2.89	2	1.53
	Agree	113	84.96	149	86.12	113	86.92
	Strongly agreed	13	9.77	18	10.40	14	10.76
	Total	133	100	173	100	130	100

Source: Survey, (2021)

As shown in Table 2, 94.73%, 96.52% and 97.68% of the respondents respectively agreed that they now have a sense of belonging in their community. However, 5.26%, 3.43%, and 2.1% of the respondents respectively disagreed with the view. Thus, re-affirming the position of Effiong (2008; 2011 & 2018a) that the hitherto forced displacement of people with disabilities into rehabilitation institutions or centres, ensue high incidence of difficulty in moving, hearing, seeing, communicating, or learning, and hence, amounting

to a direct breach of freedom and denials of rights. These findings reveal a significant improvement in disability inclusion contrary to the hitherto negative attitudes at family and community levels and misconception surrounding the causes of disabilities which, according to Ihenacho, (2009); Effiong, (2018b) and Johansson(2019) had compelled people with disabilities to live marginal lives in the society.

Table 3: People are now becoming friendly with me than before, in many communities in Akwa Ibom State

		Ikot Ekpene		Uyo		Eket	
Social Inclusion		Frequency (n)	Percentage (%)	Frequency (n)	Percentage (%)	Frequency (n)	Percentage (%)
Valid	Strongly disagree	2	1.50	1	0.57	1	0.57
	Disagree	8	6.01	7	4.04	3	2.30
	Agree	110	62.70	148	85.54	112	86.15
	Strongly agreed	13	9.77	17	9.82	14	10.76
	Total	133	100	173	100	130	100

Source: Survey, (2021)

Table 3 shows that 92.47%, 95.36%, and 96.92% of the respondents from Ikot Ekpene, Uyo, and Eket strongly agreed respectively that people were becoming friendlier with them than before as a result of the public enlightenment programmes in the State through several media strategies adopted. However, 7.1%, 4.6%, and 2.87% respectively of the respondents disagreed

Table 4: Persons with disabilities feeling more socially accepted now, than before

		Ikot Ekpene		Uyo		Eket	
Social Inclusion		Frequency (n)	Percentage (%)	Frequency (n)	Percentage (%)	Frequency (n)	Percentage (%)
Valid	Strongly disagree	2	1.50	0	0	1	0.76
	Disagree	5	3.75	4	2.31	2	1.53
	Agree	110	82.70	147	84.97	110	84.61
	Strongly agreed	16	12.03	22	12.71	17	13.07
	Total	133	100	173	100	130	100

Source: Survey (2021)

Table 4 shows that 94.73%, 97.68%, and 97.68% of the respondents from respective study areas of Ikot Ekpene, Uyo, and Eket senatorial districts strongly agreed, that they felt more socially accepted than before because of their empowerment through media campaigns programmes. However, 5.25, 2.31%, and 2.29% of the respondents disagreed with the view that they felt more socially accepted than before. This corroborates with studies by Effiong, et al, (2017a); Lindgren and Cocq, (2017); Guo and Saxton, (2018), that linkages between persons with disabilities and their communities show wide gaps, making them to slide back to the society to remain isolated and inactive; hence, lost hope to lead a productive life. To them, vigorous advocacies are needed to aggressively change the scenario of social exclusion that they are still been faced in the State.

Table 5: Persons with disabilities now taking part in community development processes in Akwa Ibom State

		Ikot Ekpene		Uyo		Eket	
Advocacy skills empowerment		Frequency (n)	Percentage (%)	Frequency (n)	Percentage (%)	Frequency (n)	Percentage (%)
Valid	Strongly disagree	4	3.00	3	1.73	4	3.07
	Disagree	6	4.51	5	2.89	3	2.30
	Agree	110	82.70	148	85.54	110	84.61
	Strongly agreed	13	9.77	18	10.40	13	10.00
	Subtotal	133	100	173	100	130	100

Source: Survey, (2021)

Table 5 shows that in Ikot Ekpene, 7.51% of respondents disagreed that PWDs had been part of decision-making processes in communities while only 92.51% agreed on the issue. The urbanization factor must have influenced their choice on this. In Uyo, 4.62% disagreed while 95.94% agreed on the issue, and in Eket, 5.37% disagreed and only 94.61% of respondents agreed with the view. It can be deduced from data across the study areas that their responses here resulted from their access to financial services. This consolidates similar studies by WHO, UNESCO, ILO (2004 & 2010); WHO (2014) that the non-adapted means of communication and the non-integration of persons with disabilities into development programmes posed adverse socioeconomic outcomes, such as less education, poorer health outcomes, lower levels of employment, and higher poverty rates.

Table 6: Media advocacies organized in the State have afforded many persons future opportunities for social inclusion in public/private sectors in Akwa Ibom State.

		Ikot Ekpene		Uyo		Eket	
Advocacy skills empowerment		Frequency (n)	Percentage (%)	Frequency (n)	Percentage (%)	Frequency (n)	Percentage (%)
Valid	Strongly disagree	2	1.5.0	3	1.73	4	3.07
	Disagree	6	4.51	5	2.89	3	2.30
	Agree	105	78.94	137	79.19	104	80.00
	Strongly agreed	19	14.28	24	13.87	19	14
	Total	133	100	173	100	130	100

Source: Survey, (2021)

Table 6 shows that 93.22%, 93.06%, and 94.61%, and also 30%, 39%, and 31% of the respondents in each of the senatorial districts marked for the study agreed and strongly agreed respectively, that the awareness campaign programmes had afforded many persons with disabilities opportunities for social services in the near future in public/private sectors in Akwa Ibom State. However, 6.01%, 4.62%, and 5.37% of the respondents respectively disagreed with the view. In as much as, this finding shows that communication barriers for people with disabilities have been significantly reduced, a significant proportion of people with disabilities still experienced some level of difficulties in accessing basic services such as education, health, public transport, and social safety nets. (Barnes, 2007; Martinez & Vemuru, 2020, and Stefan Gelfren et al, 2021).

Table 7: The public disability awareness media campaigns/sensitization programmes in the State have equipped me with the skills needed to survive in life.

		Ikot Ekpene		Uyo		Eket	
Advocacy skills empowerment		Frequency (n)	Percentage (%)	Frequency (n)	Percentage (%)	Frequency (n)	Percentage (%)
Valid	Agree	120	90.22	153	88.43	109	83.86
	Strongly agreed	13	9.77	20	11.56	21	16.15
	Total	133	100	173	100	130	100

Source: Survey, (2021)

Table 7 shows that 90.22% in Ikot Ekpene, and % of Uyo while 83.84% of Eket of the respondents agreed and 9.77%, 11.56%, and 16.15% strongly agreed respectively that the disability media advocacy programmes have empowered persons with disabilities with the necessary skills for social inclusion advocacy in Akwa Ibom State. However, none of the respondents disagreed with the view, as gone are the days where the transition from school to employment had extremely been difficult for those people with disabilities that had received an education, as unemployment rates double that of the general population, owing to frequent denial of job opportunities, employers' negatives attitudes, inappropriate job placement, lower expectations at work, and a lack of reasonable accommodation, (Effiong, 2011 & 2017b).

Table 8: Barrier due to communication challenges for persons with disabilities

Barrier due to communication challenges of women with deafness										
	Physically impaired		Visually impaired		Epilepsy (Psycho-social)		Leprosy affected persons		Hearing impaired	
	n	%	N	%	N	%	n	%	N	%
Agree	8	15.69	10	40.00	3	17.66	2	13.33	15	46.87
Strongly Agree	7	13.72	3	12.00	2	11.76	2	13.33	17	53.13
Disagree	22	43.14	6	24.00	6	35.29	6	40.00	0	0.00
Strongly disagree	14	27.45	6	24.00	6	35.29	5	33.34	0	0.00
Sub total	51, 36.43%		25, 17.88%		17, 12.14%		15, 10.71%		32, 22.86%	
Total	140, 100%									

Source: Effiong (2019b): Gener and Healthcare Inequalities amongst Rural Women with Disabilities in Ikot Ekpene L.G.A. of Akwa Ibom State, Nigeria

Amongst all categories of WWDs sampled for this study, women with deafness (hearing impaired) with 100% respondents are being most vulnerable to communication barriers, while the visually impaired with 52%, are second-most challenged, and the physically impaired (29.41%), epilepsy (29.42%), and leprosy affected persons (26.66%) agreed with the hearing impaired on the communication challenges also experienced same in the course of accessing health care services in the area, whereas, majority of leprosy-affected persons with 73.34%, physically impaired with 70.59%, and 70.58% of those with epilepsy and while the least with 48% of the visually impaired did not see communication as an impediment in that regard. This further affirms the position of Ellis and Kent (2011) and Effiong (2019a), who observed that every person, irrespective of disabilities, are most times, take a passive view or conditioned to adopt the above

position, and thus, anticipate that media advocacy may help develop a stronger collective voice for constructive dialogue with policy-makers and disability stakeholders.

### **Conclusion and Recommendations**

Disability is part of the normal human experience. The findings of this study show that discrimination and other practices that result in exclusion from mainstream society are alarming and require a paradigm shift to make the society respect the human rights of persons with disabilities taking into account, the necessary access to all human activities in Nigeria. Persistent cultural and institutional barriers make persons of all ages, with any form of disabilities, are more vulnerable and marginalized forcing them to live on the margin of society.

Based on the findings, it is, therefore, recommended that:

- (1) People with disabilities should be empowered in advocacy programmes, to become key actors in the process. Limited barriers should be pulled down, while significant progress to equalize opportunities for them should be made, as society is morally bound to do justice;
- (2) The Disability Rights Advocacy Center (DRAC) should provide the much-needed voice and lead a movement that champions a more organized and strategic response to disability issues with a development-oriented mindset;
- (3) People with disabilities should be well-equipped with communication strategies for rigorous self-advocacy as they are best suited to advocate for themselves.
- (4) A concerted effort to raise awareness surrounding disability issues would serve to shift negative perceptions and stigma against persons with disabilities among families and communities should be put in place.
- (5) Furthermore, investments in inclusive employment and livelihood interventions are critical to addressing unemployment challenges among persons with disabilities. These could include entrepreneurship training and business advisory services, as well as the promotion of locally produced assistive devices and accessible workplaces.
- (6) Disability-focused organizations in Nigeria should be empowered to support this process and provide services to persons with disabilities and caregivers, in the drive towards more inclusive development.

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