

RESEARCH ARTICLE

The Role of the National Center for the Rehabilitation of Persons Living with Disabilities, (Yaoundé) in the Protection of the Rights of the Disabled to Education in Cameroon

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Abstract: Providing education for persons with disabilities is of great concern to the international community. This issue of late has been the focus of most international educational conferences. Many governments have realized its importance and are striving to attain this goal of proving inclusive education that cater for all its citizens including the disabled. A host of laws has been put in place to ensure education for persons with disabilities. Although laws exist on the protection of the right to education for persons with disabilities in Cameroon, accessibility remains an issue to be addressed. The lack of material to meet the learning needs of the disabled, in addition to the absent of a precise school curriculum to meet up the needs of handicaps. To make matters worse, disabled persons are simply placed under the Ministry of Social Affairs whose area of jurisdiction is too vast, involving a wide range of activities. The society as a whole and parents in particular has a vital role to play in meeting up the education needs of disabled. The purpose of this study is to bring out the role played by the National Center for the Rehabilitation of Persons with Disabilities (NCRPD) Yaoundé (Etoug-Ebe), in the protection of the right of persons living with disabilities to education. The NCRPD is noted for its relentless efforts protecting the right of disabled persons in general and in education in particular. It makes education for persons with disabilities one of its cardinal objectives. It creates awareness on the right of persons living with disabilities, establishes links with the communities and annually joins the international community to celebrate the world's disability day at the NCRPD. The creating of schools at the center for disabled persons to meet up their learning needs is evident. The sources of data collection range from participant observation, interviews, library, internet and photographs. At the end of this piece of work, suggestions were given to NCRPD to improve on the measures aimed at protecting the right of disabled persons to education.

Keywords: *Rehabilitation, National Center, Disabled, Education.*

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Background

Education is a fundamental right for all children including children with disabilities (disabled children), to the extent that it is regarded as having double dimension as a Human Right in itself and as indispensable means of realizing other rights.¹The inclusion and participation of all is essential to human dignity and the enjoyment and exercise of Human Rights. Within the field of education, experience in most countries demonstrates that the integration of children, youths with special educational needs is best achieved within inclusive schools that serve all children within the community. It is within this context that those with special

educational needs can achieve the fullest educational progress and social integration.² The international community through the United Nations Organization for the past decades has been actively involved in the efforts towards achieving an acceptable level of education to all citizens. These efforts led to the UN convention on the rights of the disabled in 2006 and optional protocol in 2008. As concerns education for the disabled, the convention supported the view that Persons with disabilities should be guaranteed the rights to an inclusive education at all levels, regardless of age without discrimination and on basis of equal

opportunities...³ it is clear that persons with disabilities are entitled to all rights including education. The responsibility to ensure the enjoyment of these Rights by all citizens without discrimination becomes that of State and its institutions. It has to put in place an Enabling environment for the enjoyments of all Human Rights by persons with disabilities. From the United Nations fact sheet in 2006, 25% of world's population is affected by disability, 70% of people living with disability are in developing countries and 20% of people living in poverty have disabilities.⁴In Cameroon, According to reports from the Ministry of Social Affairs, 2million persons are affected by disabilities in Cameroon.⁵Children with disabilities face barriers to education, Youths with disabilities face barriers to training, and even adults with disabilities faced barriers to decent work.

Most damaging of all families and communities may think that people with disabilities are incapable of learning skills and working. As it is written "everyone has the right to a standard of living..., to security in the event of unemployment, sickness, disability, widowhood, old age or other lack of livelihood in circumstances beyond his control."⁶ The right to education is widely acclaimed by the international community as an upstream right. This is because the realization of other rights is facilitated through education.

In fact, education is a corner stone that enable the realization of other rights because it creates awareness on the existence of other basic rights of man. According to Nelson Mandela, one of the greatest African leaders, "Education is the great engine of personal development..."⁷ With regards to the international standards set forth by the UN committee on Economic 8Social and Cultural Rights, education has to meet up with certain criteria namely: availability, accessibility, acceptability and adaptability.

Availability implies that the functioning educational institutions and programs must be available in sufficient quantity within the state to cater for all children. This education has to be provided by the state; also it has to be universal, free and compulsory. Furthermore, it propagated the view that accessible education requires that, all children should have equal access to school

services regardless of gender, race, religion, ethnicity or socio-economic status. Efforts should be made to ensure the inclusion of marginalized groups including children of refugees, the homeless or those with disabilities in short there should be universal access to education. There should be no forms of segregation or denial of access to any students. This includes ensuring that proper laws are in place against any child labour or exploitation to prevent children from obtaining primary or secondary education. Schools must be within a reasonable distance for children within the community, otherwise transportation should be provided to students, particularly those that might live in rural areas, to ensure ways to school are safe and convenient. Education should be affordable to all, with textbooks, supplies and uniforms provided to students at no additional costs.

The attributes of acceptability entails that the form and substance of education, curricula, and teaching methods are relevant culturally. It has to be appropriate and of good quality and is regarded as such by parents and learners including disabled children. Also parents have to choice the type of education suitable for their children, which equally implies freedom from censorship and above all the quality of education provided should be void of discrimination. Finally adaptability lays emphasis on the provision of an education that is flexible and able to adjust according to societal changes and it is supposed to be responsive to the needs of learners within their diverse social and cultural settings.

The right to education characterized as a fundamental right can be considered an upstream right because it determines whether other rights could actually be exercised. Without minimum education an individual cannot exercise civil, political and social rights. As such without education, the access to rights for individuals remains in theory. This explains why the right to education has been accorded a place of importance by the entire human race. For instance, the inter-American Declaration of the Rights and Duties of Man held that:

Every person has the right to an education which should be based on the principle of liberty, morality and human solidarity. Likewise every person has the right to an

education that will prepare him to attain a decent life to raise his standard of living and to be a useful member of the society. The right to an education includes the rights to equality of opportunities in every case ...”⁹

With regards to the right of disabled persons to education, it could be affirmed that through education, persons with disabilities can enjoy better opportunities in life in the same capacity as valid persons. A case in point is Franklin Roosevelt one time president of America re-elected for three years though physically disabled his disability was not an impediment to his political career. He successfully executed his duties as head of state while on a wheel chair. As such, people with disabilities on like valid persons have the chances to pursue education and become useful to the society.

Work is a means by which an individual can escape from poverty and secure the necessities of life. This can only be obtained through a sound educational and professional training for all. This situation is glaring in developing countries here people with disabilities are seriously stigmatized in many ways. They stay at home while others go to look for work. This means they are not involved in the developmental process in their communities. As if this is not enough, they have minimal access to mainstream schools, public services and are institutionally based care rather than participating. Thus vulnerability, poverty and impairments move hand in gloves.

In fact, the lives of persons with disabilities as that of minorities is generally a life of fighting. Fighting against discrimination, fighting against exclusion, and to obtain equal opportunity and treatments.¹⁰In some countries persons with disabilities are denied the right to vote. This was the case of Peru before the 2011 presidential election, the election commissions remove over 23000 mental and intellectual disabled from voter’s registry. It was only after massive protest that these people were accepted to vote.¹¹

Viewing disability from a human rights perspective involves evolution in thinking and acting by states and all sectors in the society so that persons with disabilities are no longer considered as recipient of charity or objects of others decisions but as holders of rights.⁹Rights based approach opened the way

for participation by a wide range of people including disabled in all sectors of the society including education. This perspective views disability not as a matter of deficiency or disease but on the contrary disability is viewed as a “pathology of the society “that is the failure of the society to be inclusive and to accommodate individual responding in different ways. Given the general negative attitude towards the disabled, the issue of advocating for disabled persons is a global concern.

The establishment and growth of international disabled persons movements through the disabled Rights Promotion international (DRPI), which is an initiative put in place by the international community geared at realizing a commonality in protecting the Rights of the disabled. This is because disabled persons all over the world face a common problem of multi deprivation, predominantly through a common experience of poverty. As of 2007 this movement represented about 130 national assemblies. The disabled Rights Promotion International aimed at making the voices of disabled persons heard in the developments of all policies and programs that directly affect them with the slogan “Nothing about us without us” this implies that persons with disabilities have to be involved in shading their own destiny. They have to be involved in all decision affecting them.

Education has to envisage the full development of the human person, reinforce the respect for Human Rights and fundamental liberties. The Right to education for persons with disabilities has been of great concern both on the national and international plan. The policies put in place at the international and national levels are generally in favour of a better life for the disabled.

This is through the adoption of laws, and the signing of binding treaties and conventions in favour of the disabled. More especially the putting in place of policy that are disability inclusive. On the National plan the efforts of the International community are been complemented by national efforts namely the government through various mechanisms aimed at protecting the rights of disabled. More especially the outstanding role of the National Center for the Rehabilitation of

Persons with disabilities (NCRPD) which is the focus of our research. “The Republic of Cameroon through the revised constitution of 1972 has made efforts towards protecting and promoting the family which is the natural foundation of the society. It protects women, children the elderly and disabled, and the law of 13th April 2010 that repealed that of 21 July 1983 related to protection of disabled persons. Also the government through a prime ministerial decree has put in place measures aimed at catering street children”.¹² This in most cases is applicable to the disabled because most street children suffer from disabilities.

The governors of different regions have as responsibility to ensure the integration of disabilities in the constructions of public buildings to facilitate access to school for children born with disabilities .This includes children whose parents have disabilities as well as indigenes and more especially the socio- professional insertion of persons with disabilities.

In order to further protect these groups of people, they have been given the rights to beg arms although this act is generally prohibited in Cameroon.¹³ The right to beg exists where the person has no means of support and is unable to work and he may have a compelling reason to prefer life out of the center for the destitute. This explains why the Cameroon penal code incriminate begging if the person involved has other means of survival or is able to work.¹⁴

At the national plan, the Right to education could be justified first at the level of the constitution of 18th January 1996. Also the actions of the ministry of Higher Education and other ministries in favour of education for disabled could be identified. Law no.83/013 of 21st July 1983 relating to the protection of disabled persons and its decree of application No.90/1516 of 26th November 1990 are good examples. This law gives the opportunity for persons with disabilities to enjoy all rights as valid persons and the possibilities to repeat a class twice if their failure in exams is as results of learning disabilities.

The efforts of the government toward protecting the rights of disabled could equally be seen through the adoption of laws orientating education at the different ministries in Cameroon.

The putting in place of law N0.005 of 16th April 2001 by the government of Cameroon on the orientations of higher education in Cameroon.¹² This law which was deliberated by the National Assembly and promulgated into law by the president of the republic, amongst other things the law set out to ensure that higher education in Cameroon is relevant and quality oriented so as to meet up with the needs of learners. At the level of secondary education, law No.98/004 of 14th April 1998 on the orientation of secondary education in Cameroon¹³ this law provided educational guidance in both public and private schools. Welfare services were to be provided to learners and more especially particular support to disabled learners.

The joint letter in circulation No.34/06/LM/MINESEC/MINAS of the 2rd of august 2006 relative to the admission of disable children and children born of disabled parents. At the level of primary education, decree No.2001/041 of the 19th of February 2001 on free primary education. In line with the millennium development goals of attaining an education for all by 2015 and other international commitments the government of Cameroon in February 2000 decided for free public primary education in the country. This has to be accessible to all learners including the disabled.

The Centre Region of Cameroon like other regions of the country is witnessing an increase in the number of disabilities. In most cases disabled persons are denied fundamental rights including the right to education. They are abandoned at home as if they cannot excel in education. This issue has generally called for concern from non-government organizations and common initiative groups. This is the case of the National Center for the Rehabilitation of persons with Disabilities (NCRPD), located at Yaoundé Etoug-Ebe.

Founded by Cardinal Paul Emile Leger, a catholic priest of Canadian origins. It has been working with the government of Cameroon in the protection of the Rights of persons with disabilities in general and the Right of the disabled to education in particular. Given that the problems of disabilities is a worldwide concern, international, regional and local instruments have provided the ground work for the protection of this right.

Most of the international Human Rights instruments urged countries to insert rights set forth in international human rights instruments into national laws. However, left alone the state cannot single handedly ensure an effective respect for citizen's rights due to the vast scope of Human Rights. Thus, the interactions of diverse actors in the society are primordial for the effective guarantee and respect for Human Rights. It is in this light that, international bodies, states and institutions working under the sphere of Human Rights have been playing an outstanding role in promoting Human rights in general and the Right of disabled in persons to education particular. We shall start by defining the main concepts of our work in order to have a clear understanding of what we are talking about.

Definition of Terms

Human Rights

Before defining human rights it is pertinent for us to define the linking words. To this effect the word rights means an entitlement to do something. In plural it refers to a collection of entitlements of legal claims¹⁵. To further expatiate on this word it is important for us to make mention of the fact that, human rights are divided into three generations; the first dealing with civil and political, the second with socio-economic and cultural rights and the third generation deals with solidarity rights. This piece of work is premised on the last two generations. Human Rights are defined as those inalienable rights enjoyed by man as a result of being born. This is the natural law point of view. According to Pierre Lantz Human Rights are;

“Number of principles according to which men cannot live or according to which men can live independently of the society”¹⁶

The chambers 20th century dictionary defines Human Rights as, “...belonging or pertaining to the nature of man or mankind which is having the qualities or limitations of man”. The document teaching Human Rights by the United Nations further defines Human Rights as those rights which are inherent in our nature without which, we cannot live as human beings. Human rights and fundamental freedoms allow us to develop fully and use our human qualities, our intelligence, talent and our conscience to satisfy our needs.

Black's law Dictionary defines Human Rights as, “the freedom, immunities and benefits that, according to modern values especially at international levels, all Human beings should be able to claim as a matter of Rights in the society in which they live”.¹⁷ It is equally looked upon as the basic Rights that everyone has to be fairly treated and not in a cruel way, especially by the government.¹⁸ The notion of human rights was further defined by President Rene Cassin, a noble price winner in 1986 at a colloquium in Nice. Thus he defined human rights in 1971 in the following words.¹⁶ Pierre Lantz “Qu'entend – on au juste par Droits de L'homme “ in L'homme et la société, « Les Droits de l'homme et nouvel occidentalisme », Revue internationale de recherches et de synthèses en science sociales, ed. L'harmattan, Paris 1998, nouvelle série n0. 85-86, p74.

The science of human rights is a special branch of social sciences which aimed at studying relations between men in accordance with human dignity, in determining the rights of faculties which together are necessary for the fulfillment of the personality of each human being.¹⁹

Protection

The world dictionary ²⁰defines protection as:

- The act of protecting, or condition of being kept from harm; defense;
- A thing or people that prevent damage.

It is also regarded as a means of keeping someone safe from injury or damages as per Cambridge Advance Learners Dictionary.²¹

Disabled Persons

The United Nations convention on the rights of disabilities which was put in place in 2006, and entered into force in 2008 clearly defined persons with disabilities in the following words;

*Those who have long- term physical, mental, intellectual or sensory impairments which in interaction with various barriers may hinder their full and effective participation in the society on equal basis with others.*²²

Better still disabled persons refers to “all persons who are unable to fulfill by themselves all or part of the requirements of a normal person or social life as a results of physical or mental disability be it of birth or otherwise.”²³

To better through more light into the term disabled person the ILO convention N0. 159 defined it in the following words: An individual whose prospects of securing, retaining and advancing in suitable employments are substantially reduced as a result of a duly recognized physical or mental impairments²⁴

The Right to Education

The rights to education are one among the three generations of Human Rights. Historically, the rights to education was born in France with the proletariat revolution in 1848 in France that was revandicated as borrowed rights in which the state intervenes as the principle debtor²⁵. In Cameroon, article 3 of the 1983 law on the protection of persons with disabilities makes the right to education an obligation for national solidarity which cannot be detached from the second generation of rights. Also the rights to education can equally be defined from the point of view which considers education as a means of physical, moral and intellectual developments. ²⁶It's learning the rules of social conduct and training in the physical, moral and intellectual domain that leads to the growth of a personality. At times education is employed in the same sense as instruction.²⁷ This is a necessity that is more assured in schools than at home. Article 22 of the French declaration of 1793 on education declared that "instruction is a necessity to everybody; the society has to favour its progress with all its strength with reasons of making instructions available to all its citizens." In 1960 UNESCO Convention against Discrimination in Education defines education in its articles 1(2) as "...all types and levels of education, including access to education, the standard and quality of education and the condition under which it is given."²⁸ In the wider sense education may describe "all activities by which a human group transmits to its descendants, a body of knowledge and skill, and a moral code which enables the group to subsist". In this sense education refers to a subsequent generation of those skills needed to perform task of daily living and further passing on the social, cultural, spiritual and philosophical values of particular communities. The rights to education is further defined by the European court of Human Rights as "teaching or instruction...in particular to the transmission of knowledge and to intellectual development.

In its wider sense education as recognized by the UNESCO in article 1(a) of 1974 recommendations concerning Education for International Understandings , cooperation and peace and Education Relating to Human Rights and Fundamental Freedoms²⁹. It's held that Education implies;

"The entire process of social life by means of which individuals and social groups learned to develop consciously within ,and for the benefits of ,the national and international communities, the whole of their personal capacities ,altitude aptitudes and knowledge." In the same vein the Right to Education according to Frederic Sudre³⁰ is defined as;

The right to education is considered as one were the individual receives a complete training ,favoring the physical, moral and intellectual awareness which is part and parcel of economic, social and cultural rights.

The European court of Human Rights is not left behind as its defined education in the following words, "the whole process whereby, in any society, adults endeavor to transmit their beliefs, cultures and other values to the young." ³¹

Statement of Problem

In the world at large and Cameroon in particular there is needed to attain an acceptable level of education for all citizens without discriminations.

One of the principal objectives of the MDG's is geared towards this goal of attaining education for all by 2015. As such the NCRPD and other NGOs seek to uphold the above cardinal objective through general educational and professional trainings of persons with disabilities in various fields of study.

However, despites the adoptions of numerous instruments including the Universal Declarations of Human Rights, the covenant on economic, social and cultural Rights, the UN declarations on the rights of persons with disabilities and the African Charter on Human and People's Rights and a host of national laws.

Objectives of the Study

- Main objectives; to examine the effectiveness of the mechanisms employed by the NCRPD in protecting the rights of

disabled persons to education.

- Specific objectives;
- To evaluate the internal efforts made by the NCRPD in protecting the rights of persons with disabilities to education.
- To assess the successes registered by the center in protecting the rights of disabled persons to education.
- To examine the difficulties incurred by the NCRPD in the protecting the rights of disabled persons to education.

Research Questions

Main research question; how effective is the NCRPD in the protection of the right of disabled persons to education in the central region of Cameroon?

Specific Research Questions

- Which are the legal instruments put in place on the protection of the right of disabled persons to education?
- To what extent are the mechanisms employed by the NCRPD appropriate in protecting the rights of disabled persons to education?
- . Is the NCRPD facing challenges in its struggle towards protecting the rights of disabled persons to education in the central region of Cameroon?

Justifications of Study

The education of persons with disabilities has not been properly addressed by the present educational system in Cameroon. The available trained teachers and professional in the field are basically insufficient. This problem is aggravated by the lack of special learning devices for learners. Actual government emphasis is on training regular and general education teachers. Such teachers lack the skills of special education. Most special schools in Cameroon are owned by private individuals or NGOs. Although the government at time gives them subventions, as such most parents tend to send their disabled children to public schools because of lack of finance. The large class sizes in public schools with teacher student ratio 1 are to 60 and above makes class managements very difficult. As such the protection of the Right of

disabled persons to education becomes an important aspect in the attainment of the millennium development goals in particular and a just and acceptable society in general.

It is expected that this piece of work will benefit students, Human Rights activist, researchers and the government as it provides a way forward for better protection of the Rights of disabled persons in general and the right to education in particular.

Research Methodology

Yaoundé which is the capital of Cameroon, situated in the Centre region was chosen for this research due to the primordial role played by the NCRPD in the protection of the rights of disabled persons as a whole and the right to education in particular. It is worth nothing that the outstanding role played by this center and other NGOs in this region towards protecting the right of disabled persons has gone a long way to improve upon the lives of persons with disabilities.

In other to be rigorous in our research we adopted various techniques such as documentary research, interviews and participant observations. These techniques helped us to assemble materials that led to the realization of our work.

As concerns documentary research, books, texts and historical documents that helped to give general scheme to the work were consulted. In this light, books, articles, memoires and thesis were consulted at the master's doctorate library at the University of Dschang and certain documents that enable us to come out with the general scheme of our work were gotten at the archive of the NCRPD.

Apart from this technique, we went as far as questioning or interviewing actors in the center involved in promoting the right to education for persons with disabilities. An interview as defined by Madeline Grawitz is seen as "the production of scientific investigation, using verbal communication, established between two persons aimed at collecting certain information on a précised object."³¹ This technique became indispensable for us to achieve our objectives and obtained better results for our work. The following persons were interviewed at the NCRPD;

- Chief of education service Mr. Mkong David

Ngum

- Director of the inclusive school of NCRPD Mr.Ebonoko Jean Marie.
- Head teacher at the special needs school of NCRPD, Madame Fukah Fuen Relindice.
- Researcher in special education for disabled people's prof. Dieudenne Lissome
- Mbele Mvondo Fidele Alain, chief of service department of professional trainings.
- Madame Nchifi Constance physical education teacher for persons with disabilities at the NCRPD.
- Madame Ngo Peni Paulette chief of service at the department of sport and cultural activities.
- Some parents of disabled children
- Some disabled pupils at the center.

Participant observation: it is one type of data collection method typically done in qualitative research paradigm. This is widely used method in many disciplines particularly cultural anthropology .During our research at the NCRPD, we had the opportunity to observe while participating in the activities of the center. We were chanced to observe especially the organization of the 2015 National Youth Day Celebrations. At the level of the center the pupil's were regularly trained during this period on how to march. On this day, the pupil's were led into the marching ground by a team from the Center. This event witnesses the active participation of persons with disabilities.

For the smooth functioning of every structure, there has to be put in place a good mechanism. This is indispensable for the realization of its objectives and eventually yields fruits. The objectives however must be in conformity with the goals of the organ in question while functioning is refers to the law in place. In this chapter we shall begin with a brief presentation of the NCRPD (section 1), organization and functional framework

Brief Presentation of the NCRPD and its Objectives

The NCRPD is located in Yaoundé, the Centre region of Cameroon. Found at the west of capital city, in the Mfoundi division and the Etoug-Ebe neighborhood considered as its

main location. Once one enters the Etoug-Ebe handicap Center, there are well kept gardens to the left, a chapel on the right, and offices straight ahead.

Entering the further, one sees that it is a vast compound with several long narrow buildings connected in the middle to make rectangles and an open space in the middle including a swimming pool and a basketball court. Going down a hill on the right, one passes buildings to reach the two schools at the bottom of the hill which are in the form of an L-shape; the offices lord the horizontal portion and the two schools occupying the vertical portion. There is wide open parking lot for the students to have recess and a cafeteria building at the far end. Inside the school, there is first a large open courtyard for assembly and large gatherings of the

organization. To the right is a long gray hallway, split by a gate halfway down to separate the special needs school from the inclusive school. The NCRPD, founded by a priest of Canadian nationality by name Cardinal Paul Emile Leger is a public administrative structure having a legal personality and financial autonomy.

Paragraph 1: Origins

The NCRPD was created in 1971 by a priest of Canadian nationality Cardinal Paul Emile Leger as a center to help fight polio .This structure was inaugurated on the 15th of January 1972 by the then president of the Federal Republic of Cameroon, president El Hadj Amadou Ahidjo. At this time it was named center for re-education of Yaoundé. It was handed over to the government of Cameroon to continue the fight against polio and physical disabilities. It was in 1978 that it was named NCRDP as an institution under the minister of social affairs to take charge of physical and mental handicaps.

In 2009, the president of the republic Paul Biya in line with the policy of fighting against exclusion erected the center as a public administrative establishment, by decree N0.2009/096 of 16 March 2009. On the creation, organization and functioning of the center with an extension of its mission taking into account all categories of persons with disabilities. This was to better protect the Rights of the disabled and to meet up with international commitments on promoting and enhancing the respect for the fundamental

Rights of all without discriminations.

Paragraph 2.Objectives

The initial mission of the center was the re-education of children attacked by polio, meningitis and congenital malfunctions. Later its mission was geared towards taking charge of disabled persons both physical and mental. But since 2009, by decree NO.2009/096 of the 16 march 2009, the NCRPD was charged with a new mission involving all types of disabled persons.

Principal Objectives

The NCRPD has as main goal to implement the policies of the government in matters of rehabilitation and retraining of persons with disabilities.

Secondary Objectives

Apart from the above mentioned goals, NCRPD equally has as secondary objectives the following;

- Taking charge of the psychosocial needs of persons with disabilities.
- To take charge of the medication and sanitation of persons with disabilities
- Apprenticeship, training and retraining of persons with disabilities.
- Socio-economic integration and socio-professional reinsertion of persons with disabilities.
- Promoting research aimed at ameliorating and intervening in matters of rehabilitation
- To carry out technical cooperation with other national and international centers for the rehabilitation of disabled persons, and to organized associations with humanitarian goals.
- To participate in all activities in line with its mission which are geared towards attaining developments

Section I. Successes Registered by the NCRPD in Responding to the Educational Needs of Persons with Disabilities

The NCRPD has undoubtedly registered enormous successes in responding to the educational needs of persons with disabilities.

The putting in place of schools at the center to meet up with the special needs of persons with disabilities have gone a long way to improve upon the lives of such persons. The successes registered by the NCRPD in responding to the educational needs of disabled persons worth noted are;

Combating Ignorance Amongst Persons with Disabilities

The NCRPD in the first place helped to create awareness on the rights of disabled persons. This is done by orientation of the parents of disabled children not to relent efforts in educating their disabled children while following up medical treatment at the center.

Also through initiation into education at the center some persons with disabilities have improved upon their status. Some of them have successfully completed studies at the center and have enrolled in mainstream secondary schools and universities. The erroneous views held by some Cameroonian societies that disabilities are punishments from ancestors with no prospects have largely been defeated. Some educated disabled persons have gained employments at the center.

The Construction of Disability Friendly Buildings at the Center to Enhance Accessibility to Education and Medical Treatments

At the NCRPD, the buildings are constructed in a disability friendly manner. These disability inclusive buildings are built to facilitate access to all categories of persons including persons with disabilities. Ensuring that there is easy access into classrooms, offices and other facilities provided at the center. For instance at the entrance into all buildings at the center, Ramps are constructed to facilitates the entry of disabled persons on wheel chairs, tricycles, the verandas are large enough to ease movements. This has gone a long way to improve upon the accessibility of persons with disabilities to education at the center.

Preparedness for Life and Social Skills

The center through education has greatly improved upon the behavior of children with disabilities especially those with mental disabilities. The mentally challenged students at the special school section have the

opportunity to be drilled on basic life skills. These include skills as; greeting people, brushing their teeth, bathing by themselves and even eating by themselves. It should be noted that before being admitted into this center, most of these students defecated and urinated on themselves. As such the basic life skill taught at the center especially helped the mentally retarded students to interact with peers. This at large have helped in preparing the children for a better life.

Promoting the Exhibition of Talent by Persons with Disabilities

Physical education is an important aspect of school program at the NCRPD. Sporting activities have gone a long way in improving upon the lives of persons with disabilities. It provides an opportunity for disabled persons to expose their talents. The accomplishments made by disabled persons through sports competitions have given them a sense of pride and fulfillment. This is especially after winning medals at the handicap sports competitions. For instance, in February 2015 athletes from the center were chosen to take part in a sport competition at Dubai and FENASCO B games to take place in Bafoussam.

Creating Positive Social Interaction between Peers

Interactions between students at the center have made some of these disabled students who have been dormant at home to start communicating. It is the wish of every parent for their children to communicate. Children with mental disabilities often face difficulties expressing themselves. Thanks to the influence of teachers at the center and interactions with other students at the center some disabled children could now expressed themselves. A parent of a disabled child at the center in an Interview confirmed that her child was able to talk after going through initiation one class.

Promoting Self-reliance Among Persons with Disabilities

After completing trainings in the various professional fields, upon graduation from the center provisions are made by the center to resettle the graduates to be engaged in income generating activities. This has greatly helped in making disabled persons to become independence and to take care for themselves.

This is an important step as persons with disabilities are now engaged and contribute to the development of Cameroon as a whole.

Equal Opportunities

The NCRPD has provided equal learning opportunities between disabled learners and other learners. This is within the framework of an inclusive education put in place at the center. As such educated disabled persons unlike valid persons have the opportunities of gaining employments. For example some of the staff working as teachers and administrators at the center has disabilities. Also in the domain of professional training, disabled learners are given the opportunities to earn a living out of a trade like valid persons.

Section II: Achievements of the Center Towards Inter Grating Persons with Disabilities in the Society

The provisions of educational opportunities to persons with disabilities have greatly helped in the integrating of these groups into the society. Thanks to education most disabled persons have aspirations for better life .like valid persons; they strive to make major accomplishments to improve upon their lives.

Learning has created awareness with disabled persons that they could do better in life. This has made some disabled persons to think positive of themselves which is a cornerstone towards integrating into the society. The achievements made by the center towards the integrations of persons with disabilities into the society are as follows;

Sense of Belonging

According to some authors sense of belonging stands out as one of the outstanding hierarchy of human needs which is essential and a prerequisite for human need that has to be met before one could ever achieve a sense of worth³². Inclusive education stands for the idea that all students in schools, regardless of their strength or weaknesses in any area are considered as part of the school.

As such giving children the right to belong is equal to giving them the right to their diversity. The NCRPD through general education and professional training has given persons with disabilities the sense of belonging to the society.

Development of Self-Esteem

Through general education and professional trainings at the center, some disabled persons have gained a certain degree of satisfaction and self-esteem. It thus becomes easy for them to relate with other valid persons and integrate into the society. Disabled persons can now work and earn money with knowledge acquired from professional trainings.

Combating Helplessness Among Disabled Persons

Most persons with disabilities are of the view that they cannot do better in life. The society has placed some disabled persons in a helpless situation. Most families tend to abandon their disabled children at home and education is not seen as a priority for such children. The NCRPD has been very active in fighting against this phenomenon as it draws the attentions of parents on how useful such disabled. Social Affairs to award prizes for the products fabricated by disabled persons. Thus inculcating the spirit of hard work among persons with disabilities, which is plays a big role toward improving upon their wellbeing.

Providing Parental Care Over Abandoned Children

Some disabled children trained at the center have been abandoned by their families. As such the center has that responsibility to cater for the upbringing of the children. Most of these children who are either mentally or physically challenged are sheltered at the center. There is a house kept aside for abandoned children. Thus, the center ensures that such children are educated and trained in particular fields of studies, while others have the chances of pursuing higher education. The efforts made by the center in this domain cannot be underestimated as its efforts have greatly improved upon the lives of persons with disabilities.

Also, the center has put in place strategies that enable them to trace family relatives and unite them with their abandoned children. During the international disability day the Director General, Madame Fumulu Grace Nubonyin stated that out of eleven abandoned children at the center, five have been reunited and integrated into their families. Integrating persons with disabilities into mainstream institutions is still an issue in most countries.

Transnational studies carried out in African in Cameroon, Kenya, and Ivory Coast on inclusive education showed that in most African countries the implementation of an inclusive education is yet to be a reality⁶². Even in the United State of America it was only with the introduction of education for all Handicapped Children Act of 1975 that children with disabilities had access to mainstream schools. The system of education that existed before then did not pay attention to the special needs of persons with disabilities. As such, most disabled children were excluded from mainstream schools and from being educated with their peers.

Current trends in education however focus on the importance of inclusive practices characterized by valuing all, respect for differences, enabling the full participation of all learners including and addressing a sense of belonging for all. This is the path followed by the NCRPD in it's strive towards protecting the rights of disabled persons to education. However, the relentless efforts made by the NCRPD are not without challenges which are both internal and external

Some Challenges Encountered by the National Center for the Rehabilitation of Persons Living with Disabilities in the Protecting the Rights of the Disabled to Education

Section 1: Internal Challenges

These are challenges that are evident within the institution. These challenges are faced by the institution in the course of putting in place mechanisms geared towards protecting the rights of persons with disabilities to education. Such internal challenges include a limited number of trained teachers in special needs, lack of collaboration from parents, a variety of disabled persons in a single class, feelings of despair within some disabled persons, inadequate infrastructure, lack of sufficient funds, stigmatization of disabled victims by families.

Limited number of trained teachers in special needs education at the disposal of students

Persons with disabilities need special attention in school, to be backed by special materials, staffs trained in special needs as well as a flexible curriculum.

The number of teachers trained in special needs education is limited given that more emphasis is laid on general education. Also, at least two teachers are needed per class to adequately meet up with the demands of learners. Unfortunately these teachers are not readily available as some classes at the center still have one teacher thus making the work to be tedious.

Lack of Collaborations from Parents

Most parents of disabled children are reluctant to send their children to school. Given the situation of the child, most parents do not think education is a fundamental right to such a child. Even when forced to send them to school, they pay less attention to their disabled children enrolled at the center. Worst of all when it comes to providing school needs, they discriminate against disabled children. They prefer to satisfy the needs of their valid children first at the detriment of children with disabilities. This is because such parents are of the view that disabled persons are unproductive.

This neglect on the part of the parents as attested by most teachers at the center is demonstrated when it comes to helping their children do their homework. They equally allow their children to remain at the center for hours after closing time. To make matters worse, some parents try to allow their disabled children to stay at the center at the end of the term since they find it difficult to live with them at home.

A Variety of Disabled Persons in a Single Class

The NCRPD harbors a wide variety of disabled persons in a single classroom. Some are physically disabled, while other suffers from mental disabilities. The levels of disabilities are not the same as the situation of some disabled persons warrants much attention than others. This is a challenge to teachers as they have to be very tactful to attend to the needs of the different students in class.

While some disabled students follow up lessons, others take a longer time depending on their disability. This poses a major challenge to teachers who spend much time to ensure that intellectually retarded learners can catch up with lessons.

A Longer Time Required to Train Disabled Students at the Center

One of the problems encountered by the center in providing both general and professional education to persons with disabilities is the issue of spending much time before attaining an objective.

The time range set for disabled persons to be trained at the workshops is three years. This is not the case with a majority of students who spend a longer time to understand lessons. Given this situation, teachers are forced to spend extra time to attain their objectives. The didactic materials needed for special needs students is expensive and needs many resources to put them in place. This situation is aggravated by the existence of varied categories of disabilities.

Lack of Self Confidence

Some persons with disabilities think that all hope has been lost and they cannot carry out any accomplishment that could better up their situation no matter the efforts. Such persons think begging is the only way out for them. From findings at the center, some persons with disabilities have acquired helplessness and refused to better up their conditions. This is an unfortunate situation that has negatively worked against efforts made by the NCRPD towards protecting the rights of disabled persons in general and their right to education in particular.

Inadequate Financial Resources

In 2009, the President of the Republic of Cameroon promulgated lawN0. 2009/096 on the 16th of March 2009, reorganizing the NCRPD. The passing of this law led to an expansion in its jurisdiction. The NCRPD by this law had to take charge over all categories of disabilities. This law unfortunately fails to make provisions for an increase in financial resources to meet up with the new demands. This has led to an inadequate infrastructure at the disposal of the growing number of disabled persons at the center.

Sports are an important aspect of the curriculum but the center lacks all sport facilities, for example a football field to train athletes is not readily available at the center. Also even class rooms have not increased to meet up with the different categories of persons with disabilities.

Absentees on the Part of Some Students

Some disabled learners are not regular in school attendance. This is either because of neglect on the part of parents to follow up and ensure that they attend classes, or as a result of their disability. As such irregular learners find it difficult to pick up lessons. This situation put much burden on teachers as they have to constantly follow up the parents to bring their children to school.

Section II: External Challenges

These are negative factors outside the center that hinder the smooth functioning of the activities of the center geared towards protected the rights of disabled persons to education. These factors include the absence of a defined school curriculum for special education in Cameroon, no defined policy in schools to promote inclusive learning, construction of public buildings are not disability friendly, the perception of the Cameroonian society on disabilities, the absence of parents, teachers in the definition of policies, inadequately trained personnel to control this system of education and the absence of a ministry in charge of special needs education in Cameroon.

The Absence of a defined School Curriculum for Special Education in Cameroon

Unlike general education that has a defined curriculum from various ministries of education in Cameroon, special need education for persons with disabilities lack a defined school program. Given this situation teachers have to come up with what they deem necessary for students and teach them in class. This situation is unacceptable because it creates disorder in our educational system. The absence of a defined curriculum has put much burden on teachers and even confusion as each special need school in Cameroon has its own program for students framed by the teachers which is not unique. No defined policy in mainstream schools to ensure effectiveness of inclusive learning

Mainstream institutions in Cameroon are fashioned mostly to meet up the needs of non-disabled learners. Stigmatization against persons with disabilities in mainstream school settings becomes a reality. This situation is aggravated by the absence of a defined policy to ensure an inclusive

education in Cameroon. Although laws have been put in place on the protection of the rights of persons with disabilities, there is no defined policy in schools to ensure the effective implementations. Even the National commission on Human Rights and Freedom that has been existing in Cameroon since 2004 has not responded to the situation.

Most of the staff involved in general education are not aware of an inclusive policy and as such out of the center, most disabled students have difficulties to enroll into mainstream schools which in most cases are not disability inclusive.

Constructions of Public Institutions in Cameroon are Not Disability Inclusive

Disabled persons are not taken into considerations when public institutions are constructed in Cameroon. Looking at the way the buildings, classrooms, lecture halls are constructed in Cameroon there is no room for physical accessibility on the part of disabled persons. In most cases public institutions are constructed with steps at the entrance and no provisions for disabled persons to gain access into such buildings.

Also most of these public buildings lack access Ramps, access gates and even the width of the corridors are small. Therefore, disabled persons seated on tricycles cannot easily move into such buildings without assistance. Intellectual accessibility

is also a problem, in most public institutions. No appropriate measures are being taken to ensure that the learning materials and curriculum are disability inclusive.

The Perception of the Cameroonian Society About Disabled Persons

The perception of the society on persons with disabilities most often damages their interaction. This perception is usually in the religious and cultural context the society lacks acceptance of disabled people because of their perception of "African magic". Some people claimed that disability is a result of witchcraft and ancestral curses that do not warrant medical and educational help. Some parents with such perceptions feel uncomfortable to identify with their disabled children. They equally consider it needless to bring their children for medical attention and to pursue education at the center.

Children with disabilities who are unable to talk are often referred to as snake children and as such are abandoned at home. Since families failed to accept such children, they try to get rid of them. Some people within Cameroonian society consider disabilities as ill-luck as attested by a parent of a disabled child at the center.

The Non-Involvements of Parents and Teachers in Policy Making

The putting in place of policies geared toward persons with disabilities is often done in the absence of the main actors involved; namely, parents of children with disabilities, the disabled or their representatives, teachers who are involved in this field, and more especially institutions and common initiative groups involved in the gesture. This has often resulted into ill-defined policies that do not tackle the problems faced by the disabled. It is pertinent that these groups of people namely; parents, teachers, and representatives of disabled persons disabled are better placed to make meaningful proposals that can go a long way improving the conditions of the disabled in the society.

Misconception of Disability

In the Cameroonian society, the notion of disability for long has been affiliated with incapacity. Viewing disability from this perspective has caused most families with disabled children not to consider education as a fundamental right to such children. This is because they believe that persons with disabilities cannot do better in life. This misconception about persons with disabilities has led to general discrimination against persons with disabilities. The family and the society has failed to give them equal opportunities with other citizens on grounds that their disability is an impediment for them to do anything productive. This has made some persons with disabilities to be traumatized psychologically. Consequently, these disabled persons in most cases have resorted to begging.

Shortage of Experts to Manage Special needs Education in Cameroon

The notion of special education for persons with disabilities is not common in the Cameroonian society. Most educational institutions are geared towards meeting the needs of learners in general education setting. This situation is compounded by the absence

of trained teachers, staffs and administrators to managed institutions occupied by persons with disabilities. Cameroon has few institutions on special needs. This situation has called for much attention as most disabled persons in the country are relegated into the background.

This situation drew the attention of the international community especially the UN committee on economic, social and cultural rights which made a call on Cameroon to integrate disabled persons in her education system. In respond to this call, the government of Cameroon in her 2011 reports to this committee, made mention of the creation of an institute in Buea.⁶³ And a program on special needs in the faculty of science of education at the university of Buea.

Although other institutions exist in the country, most people are not aware and the turnout is generally low. As such, the number of trained staff in special needs in relation to the growing number of disabled persons in the country is inadequate.

The Absence of a Ministry in Charge of Special need Education in Cameroon

In Cameroon, disabled persons are simply placed under the Minister of Social Affairs whose competence covers a wide range of activities in the country. Unlike general education that has particular ministries that orientate and organize its programs, Special education in Cameroon lacks a specific ministry that follows up its programs and recruits specialist in this domain. The educational needs of persons with disabilities are neglected since the ministry of social affairs has no specific school program for this group of people. In most cases persons with disabilities cannot attend mainstream schools due to inaccessibility into most institutions and teaching methods which are not disability inclusive.

The Absence of a Constitutional Definition of Disability in Cameroon

In Cameroon, there is no constitutional definition of disabilities. The law on disabilities of 1983 tried to fill this gap but the law looked at disability from a deficiency approach rather than as a social and Human Right issue. The 1983 law forbids all forms of discriminations against persons with disabilities, but lack enforcement measures

leading to consistence practices. This is manifested in the form of poor enrollments of the disabled in schools. Although persons with disabilities in Cameroon are entitled to the enjoyment of all rights as other citizens guaranteed by the constitution, including the right to vote and in theory enjoy access to free education, and health services, in practice, their rights are limited by lack of physical accessibility.

Conclusion

Human rights protection is a global concern and it is as old as mankind's existence on earth. Awareness dates as far back as the 1215 Magna Carta, the 1776 American declaration and the 1789 French Revolution. The promotion of the right to education for persons with disabilities gained momentum following the Universal Declarations of Human Rights in 1948, the signing of the 1966 Covenant on Economic Social and Cultural Rights more especially the UN convention on the rights of persons with disabilities in 2006 which laid the ground work for the protection of the right of disabled persons to education. In Cameroon, a host of national laws and decrees have been directed towards the protection of the rights of disabled persons in general and education in particular.

This explains why the government alongside some NGOs has been active in this domain. The laxity on the part of the government in implementing laws put in favour of disabled person's accounts for many efforts needed, to create disability friendly institutions that value all. This laxity has led to the creation of institutions in Cameroon that are not disability friendly, thus making accessibility very difficult.

This has been aggravated by the belief that disability is the doing of ancestors or the gods. However, it is in this light that the NCRPD has not only made education for persons with disabilities its primary mission but consider it an important issue to be handled alongside medical treatment. For there to be an inclusive learning that meets the needs of persons with disabilities, the creation of a disability friendly environment becomes indispensable. It is the belief that until we have a disability friendly environment, the whole endeavor on the protection persons to education may continue to assume a pigmy at a time we need to fight hard to attain the

millennium development goals.

Recommendations

Having looked at the challenges faced by NCRPD, both at the internal and external levels, it now becomes imperative for us to make certain recommendations for changes to be made, to better ensure that persons with disabilities have equal educational opportunities as other non-disabled learners. These recommendations are directed towards the followings:

- NCRPD,
- Government and her institutions,
- Parents of disabled children and the society at large

Recommendations Directed to NCRPD

In the struggle to provide educational opportunities to persons with disabilities, NCRPD has a wide sphere of influence that involves different categories of disabilities. As such, in each classroom setting are found persons with different categories of disabilities which cannot be easily handled by the teachers. It is therefore strongly recommended that the students be regrouped according to their disabilities. This will go a long way to improve upon effectiveness as teachers can better attend to students with common disabilities.

Another suggestion directed to the NCRPD is that it should make available funds for nationwide campaigns on the rights of disabled persons in general and education in particular. This campaign could be organized once a month. It is discovered that many people are still ignorant of human rights and cultural barriers have kept most disabled persons out of mainstream societies. It is the hope that through a nationwide sensitization, more people will get to know of the importance of education to disabled persons.

The NCRPD could create other offices especially in remote areas of the country. This should serve as basis for persons with disabilities to meet and share ideas. This is because most activities carried out by the center actually benefit disabled persons located in Yaoundé. It becomes inevitable for NCRPD to put in place offices at the peripheries of each region so as to make

indigenous people to put aside negative customs that relegate disabled persons into the background.

It is equally recommended for the NCRPD to establish strong links with primary and secondary schools in Yaoundé and Cameroon at large. As such periodic visits should be made to talk with teachers and parents in the different educational institutions existing in the country.

This could be a cornerstone towards creating an inclusive environment. Exchange learning programs could be organized and trained teachers from the center could give lessons in schools of general education. Also, given the increasing number of disabled persons at the center, it is suggested that the center could recruit more experts in special needs to meet up with the demands of students. NGOs and CSOs could be solicited to work hand in glove with the center to enhance effectiveness.

Recommendations Directed to Government and Her Institutions

In the first place, it is strongly recommended that students at teacher training institutions namely higher teacher technical institute (INIET), Higher Teacher Training College (ENS), National Institute of Youth and Sports (INJS) and a host of others should be trained on special education needs. This is to ensure that disabled learners are taken into considerations while programming class lessons. Even in -service teachers should undergo a compulsory training on special needs to reverse the existing inequalities in education that prevail in Cameroon. Also disability inclusive pedagogy, competence for inclusive education should be put in place by government.

The government of Cameroon is called upon to put in place measures aimed at ensuring that, the 2010 law on disabilities in Cameroon is accompanied by a decree of application as the case of the 1983 law on disabilities in Cameroon. Also, it is recommended that the government should ratify the UN Convention on the rights of disabled persons so as to effectively implement it on Cameroon. It is hoped that if this is done, the protection of the rights of the disabled in Cameroon could be sphere headed.

Also, the government and her institutions are advised to carry on policy reforms, new

legislation for practice in schools and for training and educating teachers both at initial and in service levels. It is true that Cameroon has a policy for inclusive education but strategies for implementation are absent, not apparent and not visible in the field. It becomes imperative for the government through her educational institutions to put in place well defined curriculum for special need in Cameroon. At the level of each ministry in charge of education, there should be a department responsible for special needs .It is hoped that if new legislations are geared towards this direction with better implementation mechanisms, the protection of the right of disabled persons to education shall be greatly enhanced.

Also, in dealing with vision 2035 it is suggested that government should practically involve persons with disabilities in all the domains of its developmental strategies. This is to ensure an equitable development that involves all citizens of the state. Since education is among the top investments of a state on its citizens, the involvement of all citizens is indispensable for better outcome.

Furthermore, government and her institutions are called upon to establish networking to share knowledge and resources on inclusive education. It could be realized within the framework of south-south cooperation, north-south partnerships, for strong collaboration in research, teaching and capacity buildings. Government should double efforts towards an inclusive learning by making resources available at the disposal of existing schools. Enough financial and material resources to meet up the needs of disabled persons could be made available.

Inclusion of disabled persons should be considered at all levels and in all aspects of the societies. In planning an economy, it should be a prerequisite for stake holders and policy makers to endorse inclusion of all in its objectives. It is thus proposed that government should engage in re- structuring of existing institutions so as to ensure accessibility to persons with disabilities. Government has to oblige all contractors to execute contracts in a disability inclusive manner by making provision for disabled person to have access into all institutions.

Recommendations Directed to parents and Cameroonian Society

Recommendations Directed to the Society

It is argued that the first primary role of a parent towards a child is to be a parent to that child, and this has a great impact on that child's moral, social, physical and cognitive development. Studies have proven that parents accept their role as being parents to these children. They give their mutual love, care, assistance and security to their children with disabilities⁶⁴

From the study, it is seen that parents have a great role to play on their children's education and they try to invest more energy and resources in supporting their children's education in whatever way they feel is appropriate whether by helping with school work at home, by involving themselves in school activities, assisting teachers as partners, or by making their dissatisfaction felt. It should be pointed out that the home is the center for teaching and learning and parents are the children's first and most enduring educators. This is supported by some authors who are of the view that, the home is the first classroom and parents are the first and most essential teachers.⁶⁵

It is therefore suggested that parents of disabled children should consider education as a fundamental right for their child. This should be done by following up their children in schools, providing them necessary learning materials and more especially helping them to do their home works.

For there to be a disability friendly society it is strongly recommended that, our society should learn to include disabled persons in all aspects of life. This should start at the level of families. Families with disabled persons should treat them with equality and give them opportunities to take decisions by themselves and involve them in decision makings. Disability does not mean incapacity. Thus employers are called upon to involve persons with disabilities in recruitment processes when job opportunities are available. If disabled persons are included in all sectors of the society, they can improve upon their status, and equally make remarkable contributions towards the attainment of our developmental vision [33-52].

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