Organisations of People with Disabilities and COVID-19 in Nigeria

Disability Inclusion Helpdesk, October 2021

Rapid Assessment by the Disability Inclusion Helpdesk

- Rapid literature review

- Interviews with 16 OPDs (5 in Nigeria)

- Focus Group Discussions with 27 representatives of 23 OPDs

People with disabilities and OPDs were largely excluded from governments' planning and delivery of COVID-19 responses

- Article 11 of the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (CRPD) states that governments must ensure the protection and safety of persons with disabilities in humanitarian emergencies.

- Compared to experiences of OPDs in other countries, there is evidence that the Government of Nigeria did work with OPDs to an extent.

"Our relationship with government even before the pandemic had not been quite encouraging… So during this period we were not expecting anything to really happen, not that we have given up. We still reach out to them. We did a virtual meeting with government. In all fairness, they came on board. They made the usual promises and everything, but after that nothing happens… So when we talk about partnership with the government, it's not a very encouraging partnership because it's more or less one sided from our part." OPD representative in Nigeria.

The exclusion of people with disabilities and OPDs from planning and delivery of responses resulted in increased pressure on OPDs.

- OPDs played a critical role in the pandemic response, sometimes interceding to provide direct support with severely limited resources.

- OPDs also drove advocacy with the Nigerian Government to increase, target or change their support to people with disabilities.

Increased pressures on OPDs to deliver services or advocate for more inclusive services:

- **Accessible information**

- **Social Protection**

- **Health**

- **Gender-based violence**

- **Education**

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Limited access to technology

- OPDs adapted to using digital technology for outreach and information sharing.

- But it was difficult to reach people with disabilities online due to their limited and unequal access.

An accessibility audit is carried out at Maitama COVID-19 testing centre in Nigeria as part of Inclusive Futures' COVID-19 work. © Sightsavers

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Dramatic reductions to funding and operational capacity

- Donors and INGOs redirected, paused, or reduced funding.

- CSR funding also reduced.

- Representatives from organisations of women with disabilities noted that before and during the pandemic there was a lack of specific funding for women with disabilities.

Psychological impacts

- OPD staff were traumatised by distressing phone calls from people with disabilities who were left behind.

- OPD staff worked overtime and without pay.

- She Writes Woman, an organisation of people with mental health conditions and psychosocial disabilities, paused its ongoing advocacy on rights-based mental health legislation to focus on expanding its mental health services. They received 800 calls requesting mental health services between October and December 2020.

The pandemic highlighted the importance of long-term, co-operative relationships between OPDs, governments and civil society.

- The disability movement could be more inclusive and cohesive.
- There are power dynamics between INGOs and OPDs that can inhibit OPDs.
- Women's rights organisations need to collaborate with organisations of women with disabilities.

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"Movement building is very, very important to us now. Persons with psychosocial disabilities do not have a network, nor do youth with disabilities or women with disabilities... so we have a movement that is not so inclusive. So for us to be able to collectively drive the kind of advocacy we want to see in Nigeria about disability and development, we have to have our movement building straight. We also need to build very strong institutions." OPD representative in Nigeria

Implications:

- Disability inclusion in disaster planning
- Disability data disaggregation, registration and needs assessments
- Long-term engagement with diverse OPDs
- Accessible information and digital inclusion
- Disability-inclusive social protection
- Mental health responses to emergencies
- Coordination for inclusive GBV services
- Inclusive education during emergencies
- Sustainable funding for OPDs
- Use diplomatic influence for disability inclusion during COVID recovery.
- Need for further research

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