

Barriers to Domestication and Implementation of the Disability Act in Southeast Nigeria

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Abstract

Persons with disabilities (PWDs) in Nigeria are still being excluded from social, economic, and political spheres of life due to non-functional national policy on disability. Many states are yet to domesticate the Discrimination against Persons with Disabilities (Prohibition) Act 2018 and a lot of barriers prevent its full implementation in some states where it has been domesticated. In Southeast, Nigeria, Anambra state is the only state that has domesticated the Act. Our study sought to investigate how these barriers have hindered the domestication and implementation of the Act in Southeast Nigeria. One hundred and thirty participants (80 PWDs and 50 key informants) were purposively selected through a multi-stage sampling process from the five states in the Southeast. Focus Group Discussions and Key Informant Interviews were used in collecting data while thematic analysis was employed for data analysis. Findings show the barriers to the domestication of the Act differ among the states. They include a lack of political will, neglect of target beneficiaries, lack of funding, and internal altercations within the ranks and files of PWDs. The study recommends that social workers should intensify action for the domestication and implementation of the Act through awareness creation, advocacy, lobbying, and interface with, relevant stakeholders, among others.

Keywords: barriers, domestication, discrimination, disabilities, social work, southeast

Introduction

Disability is not just a health problem or attribute of individuals but reflects the problems persons with disabilities (PWDs) experience in their interaction with society and physical movements (Kuvalekar et al., 2015). These problems contribute to PWDs' exclusion in economic, social, religious, cultural, and political sectors. To address the issue of exclusion, the United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (CRPD) was established in 2006 and has been ratified by more than 170 countries (Groce, 2018). The convention was meant to aid the inclusion of PWDs which will enhance their

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participation in all spheres of life (United Nations, 2014). CRPD was adopted as the Discrimination against Persons with Disabilities (Prohibition) Act, 2018, and signed into law in January 2019 in Nigeria. This was to support and protect the human rights and fundamental freedoms of PWDs without any form of discrimination (Ogundipe, 2019). The Discrimination against Persons with Disabilities (Prohibition) Act, 2018 was designed to provide for the full integration of PWDs into the society and establish the National Commission for People with Disabilities, whose responsibilities were the education, health care, social, economic, civil rights and related matters of the PWDs.

However, the Act has not achieved its purpose in Nigeria, especially in the Southeast where four out of the five southeast states are yet to comply with the federal government mandate of domesticating the Disabilities Prohibition Act. The absence of this law hinders proper and ample funding of disabled organizations and the provision of inclusive welfare services to persons with disabilities (Haruna, 2017). Of the 36 states in Nigeria, only 13 states have domesticated the Discrimination against Persons with Disabilities Prohibition Act. These states include Plateau, Lagos, Ondo, Kano, Ekiti, Anambra, Kogi, Niger, Kaduna, Bauchi, Jigawa, Kwara, and Federal Capital Territory (FCT). Southeast Nigeria comprises five States and out of the five states (Abia, Anambra, Enugu, Imo, and Ebonyi), only Anambra State has domesticated the law. As a result, the general conditions of PWDs have not improved as physical structures and public transportation systems do not have moveable ramps for persons who are wheelchair-bound and crutch users since two years after the Act had been signed. Most PWDs solely depend on their families who equally face economic hardships in the country. PWDs also experience poverty and as such live in greater poverty than their peers who are not disabled due to a lack of support and opportunity of being integrated into the society (Igomu, 2021.).

Extant literature shows that stigma and negative assumptions about PWDs, political, financial, physical, and communication barriers affect the implementation of articles on the CRPD (Barbareschi, et al 2021; Hussey et al., 2017). Also, lack of monitoring and evaluation system, skills required for implementation, lack of effective multi-sectoral platforms, poor governance, lack of clear policy content and organizational structure, and changes in policy priorities were noted as major barriers to policy implementation (Phulkerdet al., 2017). Political rascality, ethnicity, lack of need assessments, corruption, numerous points of agenda, inability to properly discover the problems, lack of continuity and political will and white elephant or impractical policy goals hinder policy implementation in Nigeria (Agbazuere, 2020). This situation has made most African countries including Nigeria go into economic recession due to policy implementation challenges such as unrealistic goal setting, political support, and neglect of target beneficiaries as well as lack of consideration of the policy environment (Ajulor, 2018). This happens due to a lack of strong

legislative, administrative, and judicial measures that hinder PWDs from accessing justice mechanisms because of social, legal, and structural obstacles.

Aning et al. (2014) argued that blaming the implementers or policymakers for the gap between proposed and actual outcomes as regard policy implementation is not enough. A rather complex interaction of policies with its institutional setting, the relationship between policymakers and policy implementers, and the character of the policy itself should be considered. This is because, it is challenging for policymakers and policy implementers to ensure resolute actions from the formulation to the implementation process, hoping in the end, that the intended and actual outcomes will converge and mutually benefit the stakeholders. This arises as a result of limited capacity by policymakers to use evidence or inaccessibility of research evidence, and use of policy briefs alone (Damba et al., 2022). Teddy et al. (2019) added that complex interaction among actors with the processes and context of implementation, issues of collaboration, discretionary powers, resources, governance, and socio-cultural appropriateness are overarching factors contributing to implementation gaps and policy failures across countries. This is why PWDs in Nigeria are yet to be included in healthcare, education, politics, employment, and other sectors of the economy (The World Bank, 2019).

A lot of factors have helped to explain the barriers to domestication and implementation of the Disability Act in Nigeria (Akinbola, 2016). One factor that appears to have been overlooked is the lack of political will on the part of the state governments in domesticating the Act. State governments are not willing to commit time, funds, energy, and political capital to achieve the inclusion and integration of PWDs. It is also pertinent to unravel interventions social workers can embark upon towards achieving domestication and implementation of the Act as this may go a long way in eliminating discrimination and exclusion of PWDs in the Southeastern states of Nigeria. Social workers are professionals trained as forefront agents to advocate for policy implementations and policy review for vulnerable groups especially the PWDs who are marginalized or oppressed in society. Thus, this study aims to explain barriers that work against the domestication of the Disabilities Prohibition Act and its implementation in Southeast Nigeria especially the role of government and what roles social workers can play in overcoming them.

Methodology

Study area and sampling procedure

Southeast is one of the geo-political zones in Nigeria. It consists of five states namely, Abia, Anambra, Ebonyi, Enugu, and Imo states. The region was selected on the basis that only one state (Anambra) in the region has domesticated and implementing of the disability law. One hundred and thirty (130) participants were purposively selected for the study through a multi-stage

sampling process. PWDs and relevant stakeholders that are directly involved with disability matters in each state were purposively selected. These groups were selected on the basis that they are capable of providing detailed information on the current realities of the PWDs and the Disabilities Prohibition Act in Southeast Nigeria.

In the first stage, the disability clusters to be used for the study were identified and selected. Disability clusters differed across states in the Southeast with some states having seven clusters, others six, five, and four clusters respectively. In Abia state, there are seven clusters of PWDs. Anambra state has four clusters of PWDs while Enugu state has five clusters. Ebonyi state has five clusters while Imo state has five. See Table 1 for further explanations. In the second stage, within each state, availability sampling was employed in selecting two clusters that have at least 8 readily available members. This was done with the help of the executive members of the Joint National Association of Persons with Disabilities (JONAPWD). In the third stage, Chapter chairpersons of the selected clusters in each of the states selected 8 participants. The clusters sampled included persons with spinal cord injury, physically challenged, hearing impairment, visually impaired, and Albinos. From each state, 16 participants were selected, giving a total of 80 participants for the five states. In the fourth stage, 10 key informants including Chairpersons of JONAPWDs, officials from the Ministries in charge of PWDs and Office of the Governor on Disability Matters, legislators/politicians, Civil Society Organizations (CSOs) or Faith Based Organizations (FBOs), and owners of hotels/schools/public buildings were purposely selected from each state. Thus 50 KII participants were selected on the whole.

Data collection

Qualitative data collection tools of FGD and IDI guides were used to generate information on the issues with the disability community, domestication, and the implementation of the Prohibition Act 2018 in Southeast Nigeria. Focus Group Discussions with PWDs and KII interviews with stakeholders were conducted using a semi-structured instrument with probing questions designed to elicit the right response from the respondents. Five researchers visited five different states (Abia, Anambra, Ebonyi, Enugu, and Imo) in Southeast Nigeria. With the help of two research assistants in each state and a sign language interpreter in Imo state, two FGDs and 10 KII interview sessions were conducted in various places chosen by the participants. Discussions with the participants were conducted in English and Igbo language depending on the participant's preference. Permission was taken to use recording devices and those that are willing gave oral consent to participate. One of the researchers anchored the interview while a research assistant took notes of the non-verbal cues. The data collection began in July 2021 and was completed in September 2021.

Data analysis

The recorded data were transcribed and some were translated verbatim from Igbo to the English language. Field notes and conversational observation with PWDs and stakeholders provided a robust narrative for the study and were compared with the transcribed data to ensure that the original meaning of what the participants said was retained. After the transcription process, themes were generated in line with the predetermined objective. This was achieved with the help of thematic analysis. The emerging themes were further reviewed in line with findings from the field. Three common themes were agreed upon by the researchers and the results of the findings were based on these themes: opinions, barriers, and way forward in accelerating the domestication and implementation of the Disabilities Act in the Southeast states. Important quotes from the participants were presented under each theme in the findings of the study.

Ethical considerations

Participants were provided with consent forms with clear explanations regarding the aims and objectives of the study. They were assured of voluntary participation, the confidentiality of information as well as their right to withdraw from the study at any stage without penalty. Also, ethical approval was obtained from the Institutional Review Board of the University of Nigeria, Nsukka (UNN/EC/013-SC/4004-/JUN-06).

Table 1: Sampled disability clusters in each state

<i>S/N</i>	<i>States</i>	<i>Clusters</i>	<i>Clusters sampled</i>
1.	Abia	National Association of Deaf National Association of Blind Spinal Cord Injury Association of Nigeria Nigerian Association of Persons with Physical Disability Albino Foundation People with Leprosy and Intellectual Association People with Mental Disability	Albino Foundation National Association of Blind
2.	Anambra	Anambra National Association of Blind Anambra National Association of Deaf Anambra National Association of Physically Challenged Anambra National Association of Albinism	Anambra National Association of Blind Anambra National Association of Physically Challenged
3.	Ebonyi	National Association of Physically Challenged National Association of Albinism National Association of Blind National Association of Deaf National Association of Intellectual Impaired	National Association of Physically Challenged National Association of Albinism
4.	Enugu	National Association of Blind National Association of Physically Challenged National Association of Spinal Cord Injury National Association of Deaf National Association of Albinism	National Association of Spinal Cord Injury National Association of Blind
5.	Imo	National Association of Hearing Impairment National Association of Blind National Association of Deaf National Association of Spinal Cord Injury National Association of Physically Challenged	National Association of Hearing Impairment National Association of Spinal Cord Injury
Total	5	25	10

Source: Fieldwork, 2021

Result

Demographic characteristics of participants

All of the participants both PWDs and stakeholders were of the Igbo ethnic group and are Christians, The ages of the participants ranged from 30 to 69 years. Educational qualifications of the participants include FSLC, OND, HND, B.Sc, and Master's degrees. Majority of the participants (61.54%) were single while others were married. Only 15.4% of the participants have no source of income while others earn up to 60, 000 and above monthly. For occupation, only 23.1% of the participants were unemployed while majority were civil/public servants, artisans, traders, and retirees

Opinions on the domestication and implementation of the Discrimination against Persons with Disabilities (Prohibition) Act, 2018

Opinions on the domestication and implementation of the Disabilities Prohibition Act 2018 differ across the five states of the South-east. While reports from states like Ebonyi, Enugu, and Imo posit that there are no proactive steps taken concerning domestication of the Disabilities Act for proper inclusion of PWDs in others like Abia state, participants reported that the bill has gone for First and Second reading in the state House of Assembly. Anambra state is the only state in the Southeast that has domesticated the law. Anambra State government domesticated the Disabilities Rights Law in 2018 even before the President assented to the Disabilities Prohibition Acts in January 2019. Below are the illustrations of the stage of Act/law in various states in Southeast Nigeria

Table 2a: Steps toward domestication in Abia and Imo states, Nigeria

States	<i>Steps toward domestication in Abia and Imo states, Nigeria</i>
Abia	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ The bill is at its second reading in the State House of Assembly ➤ Awareness and advocacy are ongoing by CSOs in the State. ➤ PWDs in the state have embarked on several visits to the State House of Assembly in their different clusters to push for the domestication of the bill ➤ The wife of the state governor had visited the State House of Assembly to facilitate speedy passage of the bill
Imo	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Advocacy by PWDs and other disability stakeholders ➤ More awareness creation from the state down to the grassroots level using radio jingles, adverts, and social media

Source: Fieldwork, 2021

Table 2b: Steps toward domestication in Enugu and Ebonyi states, Nigeria

States	<i>Steps toward domestication in Enugu and Ebonyi states, Nigeria</i>
Enugu	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ❖ Engage CBOs, FBOs and other NGOs ❖ Engage political players ❖ Efforts toward domestication are not visible ❖ Make disability bill a public issue
Ebonyi	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✓ Bill has been submitted to the SA to the governor since 2020 ✓ The JONAPWDS, NGOs, and CSOs are the ones working towards domestication. ✓ Consultations is still ongoing but have not recorded success because of insincerity on the side of the government. ✓ Advocacy by CSOs and PWDs in the State.

Source: Fieldwork, 2021

Table 2c: Steps toward implementation in Anambra state, Nigeria

States	<i>Steps toward implementation in Anambra Nigeria</i>
Anambra	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The law has been domesticated in 2018 • The governor has appointed a committee for the implementation of the Disability Rights Law • Created the Office of Governor on Disabilities Matters which is headed by a visually impaired civil servant. • Several sensitization programmes by JONAPWDS in government ministries and State capital • Employment of about 250 PWDs in Anambra Civil Service Commission

Source: Fieldwork, 2021

Barriers to domestication and implementation of Disabilities Prohibition Acts

The data from the field shows that there are two sides to the argument on the issue of barriers to the domestication of the Disabilities Prohibition Act. Some of the participants believed that several obstacles impede domestication in the states. These barriers include internal altercations within the ranks and files of PWDs, lack of political will, neglect of target beneficiaries (PWDs), lack of funding and resources, and lack of effective multi-sectoral platforms for the domestication of the Disabilities Act. Others were of the opinion that the only barrier to the domestication of the Act in various states is a lack of political will. Based on this argument, FGD participants in Enugu stated that the problem of altercations from different factions weakened and encouraged disunity among all the clusters of JONAPWD and this worked against PWDs' efforts in pushing for the domestication of the Act. This to a great extent prevents PWDs from speaking with one voice and intensifying their actions as a group for the domestication of the Act. "PWDs are currently divided and cannot draw the attention of government towards their issues" [IDI/Staff/F/Ministry/Enugu State]. FGD participants added that factionalization in PWDs' community is not only a barrier rather understanding the problems and challenges of PWDs

by the society is equally another great challenge. PWDs are seen and treated badly in the communities due to some cultural beliefs. These beliefs condemn and suppress PWDs from taking part in community activities.

FGD participants in Enugu further stressed that the government is part of the obstacle to the domestication of the Act as they do not recognise the needs of PWDs as provided in the Act or get them involved in matters concerning their welfare. Probably this is because the administration feels that a huge amount of money will be involved in adjusting public structures and maintaining provisions made by the Act to accommodate PWDs. Also, the non-compliance of the state government on established agreements as well as the lackadaisical attitude of the House of Assembly members hinders the passage of the domestication of the disability bill in Enugu state. They further reported that greed is another obstacle to passing this bill. This is because relevant stakeholders are using resources provided for the welfare of PWDs to enrich themselves.

Although the bill has gone for second reading in the Abia State House of Assembly, FGD participants argued that politicians and lawmakers see PWDs as a problem and troublemakers. This is because they do not have PWDs in mind and as such, they do not see the bill as an important issue that needed urgent attention. They added that some members of the House of Assembly think that passage of the bill will affect their monthly allowances due to the economic situation of the state. Their selfish ambition supersedes every other priority in the state. An IDI participant supported this argument and explains thus “...the bill has gone through the 1st and 2nd reading but some hiccups and the vacation of House members have delayed passing it into law” *[KII/Honourable member/M/Abia State]*.

Few respondents from Imo State argued that lack of funds poses the greatest barrier but majority stated that the major barrier is the lack of political will in the state. “This is because the issues of disability are being politicised hence domesticating the bill is not making any headway” *[KII/Government official/M/Imo State]*. Another respondent blamed the lack of domestication on the federal government and also the Ministry of women affairs as he stated thus:

The federal has not been doing anything to enforce this Act in various states. On another note, the Ministry of women affairs does not want the bill to be passed because PWDs are a source of their revenue. They make money from the allocation gotten for PWDs’ empowerment. This results in going back and forth with stakeholders manipulating the process of passing the bill *[IDI/CSO/M/Imo State]*.

Ebonyi state is not an exception on the issue of the domestication of the Disability Act. FGD participants emphasized that the bill has not been passed

in the State due to government insensitivity to the plights of PWDs in the state and the right power brokers to push for domestication have not shown positive attitudes. On their part as JONAPWD, they have the problem of funds to lobby for the domestication of the Act. One of the participants affirms thus; “the economic situation of the state contributed in prolonging the domestication of the Act. If the bill has financial implications or burden on the government, they will not show commitment towards its domestication and implementation” [KII/Legislator/M/Ebonyi State]. Another participant added; “without the financial will power, the government might not be able to pass the bill and implement it” [KII/CSO/M/Ebonyi State]. Another participant differed by saying; “SSA to the governor on disabilities is not pushing for the domestication and implementation of the bill in the State. He is busy enjoying his salary and position” [KII/CSO/F/Ebonyi State].

However, in Anambra State where the Act has been domesticated and signed into law in 2018, the views of the FGD participants suggest that its implementation has not been fully embraced. An IDI participant argued:

A lot of laws exist just like Disabilities Rights Law on paper or a document but they are hardly implemented except when there is a case in the court of law. This is the reason people feel that already existing buildings should not be destroyed because of ramps. Again, funding is another barrier because making provisions for ramps in an already completed building is capital-intensive. Rather it is better or easier for a building under construction to make provisions for ramps [KII/State Director Orientation Agency (NOA)/M/Anambra State].

These mentioned barriers to implementation of Disabilities Rights Law were disputed by one of the participants as he said; “nothing can stop the implementation process because I know that our governor has the political will to make it happen except if he does not want to do so” [KII/JONAPWD /M/Anambra State].

Way forward in accelerating the domestication and implementation of the Act
Our findings identified different ways to accelerate the domestication and implementation of the Disabilities Prohibition Act. From the general opinion, most of the participants suggested sensitization and enlightenment programmes to the general public as one of the means. Also, it was opined that the media, lawyers, social workers, statutory organizations, NGOs, and every organization concerned with the issues of PWDs should intensify action on awareness creation and advocacy visits to members of the states' Houses of Assemblies. JONAPWD and NGOs on the other hand should engage stakeholders and development partners to ensure domestication of the Act in other states of the federation, yet to do so.

According to the Enugu FGD participants, the first step to achieving this goal is to stop factions that exist among JONAPWD clusters. “.....there is a need for PWDs to come with one voice to draw the attention of the government towards their issues” [*KII/Staff of the Ministry /F/Enugu State*]. Secondly, leadership and clusters of the JONAPWD should be well organized to ensure that none of the clusters were left out in the struggle for inclusion. All the clusters in disabled communities (deaf, blind, spinal cord, albinism, and physically challenged) should come under one umbrella of JONAPWD to meet with the House of Assemblies to resolve all issues surrounding the passage of the bill in the various states. However, a battle of such magnitude is not what PWDs can fight alone without the help of NGOs and faith-based organisations. Even if they succeed in domesticating the bill, they need the assistance of these groups to see to its implementation for the benefit of PWDs in the states. Another participant put his thoughts thus:

The issue of domesticating the Disabilities Act should be made a public issue. Apart from the media, there is a need to engage Faith Based Organisations and Community Based Organisations to join JONAPWD in paying courtesy calls/advocacy calls to politicians/political leaders and present their positions eloquently on the need for the domestication of the bill [*KII/ Human rights’ activist/M/Enugu State*]

FGD participants in Abia State believed that some level of force should be applied in pushing for the domestication of the Act. This could be in the form of blocking the House of Assembly and government house or mounting pressure on local government councils and relevant stakeholders to broker for the domestication of the Act. They also emphasized the need for consultations with NGOs to provide the best way to address the issue. They further suggested that international donors or the federal government should be contacted to protect the rights of PWDs by lobbying or providing financial support to motivate States to domesticate the Act.

According to participants in Imo State, radio jingles, advertisements, church announcements, and social media platforms should be used in publicizing the domestication and implementation of the Act in different states. A KII participant said; “...Ministry of Women Affairs and Vulnerable Groups in the state should be in the forefront advocating for the passage of the bill in the state. This is because it is in their jurisdiction to fight for the rights of PWDs” [*Acting HOD/M/Imo State*].

Furthermore, FGD participants in Ebonyi state added that government should do the needful by working towards the domestication and implementation of the Act. If this Act is about them, they would have signed it into law a long time ago. Some KII participants added; “JONAPWDS, NGOs, and philanthropists should meet with the government to push and lobby for its domestication”

[CSO/F/Ebonyi State]. “Fund and continuous advocacy can help mitigate the challenges facing the domestication of the Act” **[KII/CSO/M/Ebonyi State].**

In Anambra state, the FGD participants narrated that since 2018 the Act was signed into law, little has been done for its implementation. They suggested that the best way for the implementation is through the use of social media such as radio and television programmes, and announcements in churches to educate members of the society about the law and its provisions. They also pointed to the fact that the inclusiveness of PWDs from the national to grass root level is a very important course. Every sector especially the House of Assembly and House of Representatives should include PWDs in every established committee concerned with the implementation of the law. This will enable PWDs to speak for themselves to better their conditions. One of the IDI participants said; “developing inclusive policies that will include PWDs within a policy platform will enhance the implementation of the law” **[KII/SA/M/Anambra State].** The FGD participants further suggested that already erected buildings should not be destroyed rather the owner should add a moveable ramp or improvise one. “Alternatively, the government should mandate owners of new buildings under construction to ensure that ramps are provided for PWDs” **[KII/Hotel Operation Manager/M/Anambra State].** Another participant added:

There is a need for donor agencies to partner with the government for the implementation of the law especially on the issue of funding. This is necessary because the government does not pay much attention to issues concerning the implementation of the Disabilities Act because of the expenditures associated with it. They see us as a disturbance because they have already known why we always come around **[KII/CSO/F/Anambra State].**

Discussion of findings

Nigeria is still struggling with basic developmental needs, especially in the area of policy implementation even though effective and successful policy implementation is key to national development. This is evident in the issue of domestication and implementation of the Discrimination against Persons with Disabilities (Prohibition) Act, 2018 in various states. From the findings, PWDs in Abia, Enugu, Imo, and Ebonyi states are yet to witness and enjoy the dividends of the Disabilities Act. From our findings, the Abia state government has made a step by pushing the bill on Disability Act as it has passed the First and Second Readings at the State House of Assembly. In Ebonyi State, the only action taken is the submission of the bill to the SA to the governor on Disability in 2020. This is as a result of several internal squabbles and conflicts within JONAPWD. The State House of Assembly has not helped matters either, as both public and private institutions in the state have equally failed to champion the domestication of the Act. These issues are similar to what is obtainable in other states of the Southeast. This implies that many of the states in Nigeria and

Southeast have not domesticated the Act as required by the Federal government of Nigeria and as such cannot be said to be protecting the interest of PWDs in their various states. The domestication of the Act in Nigeria is an important way in which the federal government seeks to demonstrate its zeal in including and integrating PWDs to observe internationally agreed rules and principles for the protection and enjoyment of their rights. This raises serious political questions on the status of the domestication of the Disabilities Act, especially with selective domestication by some state governments and where their non-domestication renders the Act not legally binding on state governments. It seems therefore that the domestication of the Disabilities Prohibition Act is not a straightforward process in Nigeria. This however is not limited to Nigeria as Kremte (2019) noted in a study in Lesotho.

Illustratively, the participants in the different states narrated that lack of political will, neglect of target beneficiaries (PWDs), lack of funding and resources, lack of effective multi-sectoral platforms for the domestication of the Disabilities Act, and internal altercations within the ranks and files of PWDs were barriers to the domestication of the Act. Lack of political will on the side of the state governments which of course may be termed government's negligence entails the extent to which government officials are committed to supporting key decisions about a particular policy as a solution to a particular problem. In this sense, political will is all about making those positive interventions and breaking the chains of barriers to PWDs' inclusion and integration into the society (Barnes & Sheldon, 2010). This is because improvement in the conditions of PWDs' can only happen when political leaders demonstrate political will in the domestication of the Act. This will help to overcome the problems of the inclusion and integration of PWDs in Nigeria. This to a great extent will shift and change viewing PWDs as objects of charity that needed medical treatment and social protection towards viewing them as subjects with rights (Schulze, 2018). In other words, domestication of the Act would be an instrument with an explicit social development dimension that reaffirms PWDs' franchise in enjoying all human rights and fundamental freedoms (Schulze, 2018). However, achieving this level ground by breaking the chains of barriers to the inclusion of PWDs will be difficult if state governments feel that implementation of the Act is a financial burden to them especially as it means adjusting public structures and maintaining provisions made by the act to accommodate PWDs.

Furthermore, the lack of effective multi-sectoral platforms for domestication means weak intention and collaboration between two or more sectors such as utility, health, transport, education, housing, and community services, to accomplish goals and achieve outcomes for PWDs in the states. This also shows that pooling resources and formulating the common objectives for their integration and inclusion in the society are lacking. Hence, by engaging

multiple sectors, the government can leverage knowledge, expertise, and resources as well as benefit from their combined and varied strengths as they work towards the shared goal of producing better outcomes for PWDs (Baffoe, 2013). To buttress this point, Phulkerd (2017) reported that successful implementation of policies requires attention towards improving the capacity and authority of government agencies, infrastructure to support multi-sectoral platforms and inter-organizational networks, and adequate resources.

PWDs, on the other hand, have a role to play as the findings suggest that problem of altercations from different factions which encourage disunity among all the clusters prevent PWDs from speaking with one voice and drawing government attention to the domestication of the disability Act. This has made PWDs dissolve into competing factions, fragments, formations, and vertically mobilized networks, and tend to be seemly unorganized crowds and congregations of individuals without focus. Many respondents believe that expectations to have organized and focused clusters of PWDs are dim. This is because there are many battlefields and wider disarray in the clusters of JONAPWD. Frustrated members and individuals of the group are right to note the problems posed by a fragmented union. According to Eleweke (2013), such fragmentations make conflict more violent, long-lasting, harder to resolve, and impossible for them to come together to push for the domestication of the Disability Act.

Abia State has made some headway towards passing the bill as indicated by the findings. However, the perceptions of the lawmakers towards PWDs override their concern in recognizing the bill as an important issue that needs urgent attention. This connotes that the legislative house is the problem for the domestication of the law in the state. Furthermore, the government's insensitivity to the plight of PWDs in the states, having power brokers with positive intentions to push the bill, the hard economic situation in the state, and problems of funds to lobby the members of the State House of Assembly who appear to be a cog in the wheel of progress. This is a wake-up call to all the Senior Special Assistants (SSA) on disabilities to the governor to represent the office he occupies to ensure the domestication and implementation of the Act for the wellbeing of PWDs.

Nevertheless, Anambra state has undergone the first phase of the domestication of the Act but its implementation has not been achieved to a very large extent. This is a result of the establishment of implementation working plans, and people's perception that already existing buildings should not be destroyed because of the lack of provision of ramps. Eleweke and Ebenso (2016) stated that the inaccessibility of buildings denied PWDs their rights to access services in the country. As a result of this, participants argued that making provisions for ramps or improvise in completed buildings is capital intensive. Government

should make funds available for them to make such provisions as building ramps. Participants noted that the Anambra State government has all it takes to implement the law to create favourable conditions for PWDs in the state except if the government does not have the political will to do so.

Social work intervention towards accelerating the domestication and implementation of Disabilities Prohibition Acts

The findings from this study have implications for the social work profession. The social work profession has a strong history of working with those who are disadvantaged and oppressed in society. Social work has the mandate to assist those who are marginalized as well as fight for the rights of PWDs by intensifying actions for the domestication of the Disabilities Act and its implementation. This is driven by the core values of the social work profession and its ethical code which affirms social workers' commitment to ensuring that PWDs receive needed supports that maximize their independence and autonomy to make choices that will impact their lives (National Association of Social Workers [NASW], 2022). However, the identified barriers to the domestication of the Act in southeast states are surmountable as some of the participants disclosed in this study. It was found that domestication of the Act should be a priority of the general public, lawyers, statutory organizations, social workers, and NGOs through sensitization and enlightenment programmes to draw attention to the need to domesticate and implement the law. The interface between JONAPWD, NGOs, other relevant stakeholders, development partners, and social workers is very crucial (Chitereka, 2010).

Also, the internal cohesion of JONAPWD is very crucial in this regard to avoid factions and fragments that exist among clusters of PWDs. Conflict is inevitable but social workers can help contain given their training. They can work with various clusters on the PWDs in the various states to help them achieve that internal cohesion needed to stay focused and push for the domestication of the Disability Act in their states. Apart from social workers helping on the issue of internal conflict among the PWDs, there is a need for the PWDs to use the services of social workers who are key players in tackling, serving, and advocating for vulnerable populations. They will also be in a position to create the enabling environment for the domestication of the Act and its implementation (National Association of Social Workers, 2006). Social workers can also make the issue of domestication of the Act a public concern through awareness creation, sensitization, and enlightenment programmes as well as round table meetings with members of the Houses of Assemblies in the different states. Also, consultations with NGOs and international donors to proffer solutions on the best way to address these issues can be achieved through social workers' intervention by brokering between JONAPWD and international organizations that can help in lobbying or provision of supportive services and funding that will aid the inclusion of PWDs. This is necessary to

build the political will to domesticate the Act by reducing the financial burden of implementing the provisions contained in the Act.

Social workers should be at the forefront of campaigning for and championing the welfare of PWDs through advocacy and peaceful demonstration in extreme cases to remove all forms of negligence and insensitivity in domesticating the Act and its implementation from state governments. In addition, the advocacy role/skill of social workers is required in engaging the various state governments as well as coordinating the activities of JONAPWD and other stakeholders towards the signing of the bill in each state of the Southeast. Additionally, social workers should sensitize the general public on the need to have an inclusive environment for the general public by making provisions for moveable or improvised ramps in already completed buildings.

Conclusion

This study has tried to analyze the barriers to domestication and implementation of the Disability Act in Southeast Nigeria. It argues that the most prominent barrier to the domestication of the Act is the lack of political will by the state governments in the Southeast region. The study also posits that internal altercations within clusters of disability organizations undermine building a strong platform for mobilizations and acting as a pressure group to push for the domestication of the Act and implementation of the Act where it has been domesticated, like Anambra state.

The study is not void of some limitations. Some supposed targeted clusters for the study were not accessible due to a lack of funds to pay for their transportation and that of their aides to the agreed venue in some states. This challenge was surmounted by selecting another cluster that is accessible and available at the time scheduled for the study. Secondly, members of the House of Assemblies were on break. As a result, none of them including their Personal Assistants (PAs) were available to be interviewed. The opinions of these important stakeholders were therefore not included in the study.

In concluding this paper, we emphasize the importance of political will in domesticating the Disability Act. Such political will can be by way of funding and provision of other resources that will enhance effective multi-sectoral platforms for the domestication of the Disabilities Act in Southeast Nigeria. Second, we posit that the internal cohesion of JONAPWD is very crucial in restructuring its clusters to build internal unity as a body to enable it to avoid factions and fragments that exist among them. Finally, we recommend the need for social workers to be involved in advocacy with state governments; coordinating the activities of JONAPWD and other stakeholders on disability matters as well as sensitizing the populace on the need to domesticate the Act and also implement it where necessary.

Acknowledgment

The research team would like to thank the African Polling Institute [API] with support from Ford Foundation for providing funds for the Nigeria Disability Research Project, which allowed us to conduct the study in five States in Nigeria's South East geopolitical zone.

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