

Managing the Potentials of Artists with Special Needs, for Sustainable Development in Nigeria.

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Abstract

This article discusses the need to maximize the potentials of artists with special needs for sustainable development in Nigeria. The qualitative research design was adopted and interviews were applied. The findings show that though some artists live with severe, mild or moderate disabilities, they are resourceful. They have the ability to perform artistic and inartistic activities. Regrettably, Nigerian governments, the management of arts institutions and civic bodies have not usefully engaged or explored the capabilities of the artists with disabilities into the nation's work force. This paper concludes that one of the ways to manage the potentials of artists with disabilities, and improve their lives is for the government, civic bodies and arts administrators to provide them full and productive employment, and work. Alternatively, they should be provided with infrastructure to enable them establish, manage and own artistic business ventures towards self-reliance and self- sufficiency.

Keywords: Managing, Potentials, Disabilities, Artists, Sustainable, Development.

Introduction

There is a great deal to man...so a great deal can be made out of him. He does not have to stay the way he is now, nor does he have to be seen only as he is now, but as he might become... (Bertolt Brecht, Cited in Iji, 1991, 13)

Globally, the concern to address the plight of the world's poor in all nations reached a crescendo in the 21st century. In September, 2010, the world leaders gathered at the United Nations Headquarters in New York, and vowed to halt global poverty and hunger among other things to meet the Millennium Development Goals deadline, all by 2015 (Aloja, Ukwuoma and Akanda, 2010: 1). Arguably, there exists a special population with disabilities in Nigeria, comprising the blind, physical and health impaired, hearing impaired, and intellectually disabled to mention some. This special population constitutes the poorest of the poor in Nigeria. Significantly, they are faced with a legion of challenges ranging from poverty, unemployment, unequal opportunities and discrimination to stigmatization. Among this special population are those persons who are gifted and talented in the arts, especially, the performing arts, yet they are ignored by the government and society. They are spread in the nooks and crannies of Nigeria. A quick glance at some of the arts institutions in Nigeria shows that arts administrators, directors, and producers have focused attention on maximizing the human, technical and financial potentials of the able-bodied persons, ignoring the persons with disabilities, in the management of the arts institution.

This paper presupposes that artists with disabilities are endowed with the capacity to perform theatrical activities contrary to our expectations if given equal opportunities to excel like their counterparts without some impairment. To this end, Brecht's dramatic world (as stated at the beginning of this paper) becomes particularly applicable to this study. It is thus germane to figure out ways to usefully engage artists with special needs so as to alleviate their poverty, and improve their standard of living.

Who are the Persons with Special Education Needs or Disabilities?

The persons with special needs constitute a special population who are limited in their ability to perform physical activities which normal persons of equivalent age and sex can perform. These include the blind, physical and health impaired, hearing impaired, intellectually disabled to mention some (Abone, 2008: 86; Okeke, 2001: 21-301). Adams (2008, Dec 2) avers that a person

with special needs is one whose impairment substantially impairs his/her ability to perform at a normal level. Without any doubt, this special population is found in our towns, villages, ghettos, slums, refugee camps and streets.

Historically, their social status have often been abused or stigmatized. Some people regard persons with disabilities as unwanted individuals, outcast, morons, and idiots. They are seen as misfit and useless in the society (Abone 2008: 90). Others look at them as aggressive, disobedient, witches and wizards, cursed as a punishment by the gods or ancestors (Okeke 2001:21-301). Akaye(2010 : 1), a blind, laments over the stigmatization of the persons with disabilities and argues that “the society believes that it is only the able bodied who are normal. God is the maker of every one. The persons with special needs are marginalized because they see them as abnormal beings. We want an affirmative action to correct the imbalance”. What is more, they are deliberately discriminated against, unemployed and neglected, snubbed by peers and the government. They suffer from unemployment, poverty, hunger, unequal opportunities, insecurity, social discrimination and status loss (Okeke 2010: 94, Abone 2008: 85). To this end, Akaye (2010, 1) succinctly suggest: *We want the Federal Government to have an affirmative action towards this set of special creatures. When you look at all the ministries, there is no access for these people ... the more we bring these people inside the system, the more people know that they exist in our society.* David Mathew, a blind, and Principal of the Christian Mission in Maryland (CMML) Special School, Iyale, Dekina Local Government Area, Kogi State, Nigeria, defines the social status of the persons with disabilities when he states:

I know what we have suffered and are still suffering in the hands of members of the society. They make us see ourselves as nothing; clear evidence is where they have situated this school, on a hill very far from the main town and among bushes. That is to say that we are secluded people to them. Imagine that stigma, it will tend to give these children a misconception of their personality, or who they can ever be (Personal Interview, Oct 24, 2010).

Like the able-bodied, the persons with special needs are desirous of education so as to enable them work and contribute in building our society. Without any doubt, the Federal and State Governments of Nigeria have considered the educational, vocational, social and spiritual needs of the persons with disabilities by swiftly designing vocational and rehabilitation programmes and

services to assist them to become independent, self reliant, self confident and self sufficient members of the society. To this end, numerous special educational institutions have been established in some states of the Federal Republic of Nigeria. For instance, the Abia State Government has established at Umuhia a special education centre for the blind. In Adamawa State, the government has also established a special education centre at Yola. (Okeke 2010: 255-266). Others include the Wesley School for the Deaf in Surulere, Lagos State. In Kogi State, the Christian Mission in Maryland (CMML) is a special school for persons with disabilities in Iyale.

Interestingly, the special education centres are designed to train their students academically and vocationally in the acquisition of skills for self-reliance and gainful employment, life adjustment and meaningful contribution to national development (Okeke 2010: 253). It has been observed that, after graduation from these special educational centres, the persons with disabilities have not been usefully and gainfully employed into the national work force in both private and public sectors in Nigeria. Some are self-employed and are practicing their trade as praise singers, instrumentalists, composers, dancers, and entertainers. They are mostly found on the streets, and around the precincts of the restaurants, mosques, churches, hotels, government guest houses, and residences of wealthy politicians and businessmen performing to the delight of guests and passers-by. Others are found at the market places and motor parks. We can thus refer to them as performing artists.

It needs to be stressed that what these artists need is not pity or to be constantly reminded obliquely that they are different from the able-bodied. Rather, what they deserve is understanding, respect and dignity. It should be understood that every person, whether normal or handicapped, has certain capabilities or abilities, needs and interest. Despite the disabilities which tend to limit their physical activities, they are desirous to work hard to achieve those goals which seem so easily for the able-bodied. Many artists with disabilities have excelled more than the able-bodied in the performing arts, globally. These include, David Blunkett, Andrea Brocelli, Stevie Wonder, Amadou Bagayoko Mariam, Ray Charles, and Francisco Goya, to mention some (DFID 2007: 38-39). It becomes imperative for us to think of ways to redirect the potentials of the artists with disabilities for their benefits and the development of the arts institutions in Nigeria.

Research Methodology

Research Design

The needed data for this study were obtained using the qualitative and descriptive research design. The qualitative oriented involved the field work and took the researcher into the field using the personal interview and experiment as data collection procedures to appraise the capabilities of the persons with disabilities and the extent to which they are engaged in artistic endeavors in arts organizations in Nigeria. The descriptive design was also considered appropriate for this study because it enabled the author to describe the observable, dependable information and data obtained from the population of study.

Research Area

The study was carried out in the following arts institutions namely; Kogi State Arts Council, Lokoja; Imo State Arts Council, Owerri, and Nigerian Television Authority (NTA), Lokoja. The choice of these arts institutions is unique. They demonstrate similar principles and practice of arts management and administration, specifically, the application of human, technical and financial resource management towards the attainment of its organizational goals. Besides, the main aims of these organizations are the production of artistic goods and services for consumption. These arts institutions are non-profit oriented. Besides, they engage in the promotion, preservation and presentation of culture through music, drama, dance, mime, pantomime, organizing cultural festivals, galleries, film, and folklore, to mention these few.

The study was also carried out in the CMML. This educational and vocational institution caters for boys and girls with disabilities, namely, visual impairment, hearing impaired, physical impaired cripples, intellectual and multiple handicaps drawn from different Local Government Areas of Kogi State, and its surrounding states. The school provides vocational, educational and social needs for the pupils so as to enable them become independent, self confident and self reliant in future. This school is therefore an ideal laboratory to conduct an artistic experiment aimed at arriving at a dependable conclusion to the study.

Population of Study

The population of study therefore consisted of the students of CMML, Iyale, Dekina Local Government Area, Kogi State, Nigeria. Significantly, the population consisted of twenty (20) students with various form of disabilities and who are members of the school's choir musical group as well as fine arts club respectively.

Research Sample

Significantly, the study performed two experiments using two groups of cast comprising twenty (20) students with disabilities comprising four persons with hearing impairment, four persons with visual impairment, four persons with physical and health impairment, four persons with intellectual disabilities and four persons with multiple impairment. All are drawn from members of CMML choir band and fine arts club respectively. The rationale for choosing four students from each category is informed by our desire to ascertain whether the persons with special needs in categories of disabilities can perform artistic and inartistic activities if giving equal opportunities like the able-bodied persons. The first cast of ten (10) students with disabilities was members of the school choir musical band, and is exposed to performing arts of singing, music, dancing, instrumentation, and composing lyrics. The second cast of ten (10) students with disabilities was members of the fine art's club of the school. The research sample also consisted of the Head of Department, Social Development Unit, Imo State Council for Arts and Culture; Head of Department, Performing Arts Unit, Kogi State Council for Arts and Culture; and the Director of Operations, Nigeria Television Authority, Lokoja, all in Nigeria. This study considered them as interviewees. Their choice was informed by our research interest which is to find out whether some of the artists with special needs who have been exposed to performing arts activities have been usefully and gainfully employed by the management of the arts institutions in Nigeria.

The first experiment involving the 1st cast of 10 students with disabilities took place in the CMML School's chapel where the choir musical band set was used to conduct the experiment. In the process, we placed the members of the group on musical drills and provided them with contemporary and traditional musical instruments. This group consisting of two persons with hearing impairment, three persons with visual impairment, three persons with physical and health impairment, and two persons with multiple disabilities and who have been exposed to the performing arts of composing lyrics, music, singing, dancing, and instrumentation was given the opportunity to compose, sing, play the musical instruments, and dance without our assistance. This experiment lasted for 6 hours; from 12 noon to 6pm. The second experiment consisting of another 10 students with disabilities was considered. This group which consisted of three persons with hearing impairment, two persons with visual impairment, three persons with physical and health impairment, and two persons with multiple impairment and who had been exposed to fine arts, graphic arts, carving, plastic arts, and visual arts were instructed to do anything meaningful that they could sell for money. This experiment was also conducted within 6 hours; from 12 noon to

6pm on the same day.

Discussion

The data and information generated from the personal interview and experiments were analyzed using descriptive and tabular techniques of data analysis. Table 1 shows the response categories of data and information gathered from the personal interviews with some of the executives of the arts institutions.

Table 1: Showing the Statistic of Able-bodied and Physically Challenged Artists in Arts Institutions in Nigeria

Arts Institutions	Total Staff Strength	No of Able bodied	No of Physically Challenged Artists
Kogi State Council for Arts and Culture, Lokoja, Kogi State	109	108	1
Imo State Council for Arts and Culture, Imo State, Nigeria	470	465	5
Nigerian Television Authority, Lokoja Nigeia	70	70	Nil

Sources; Field work, 2010

As can be deduced from table 1, it is obvious that in Kogi State Council for Arts and Culture, the total staff strength is 109. Whereas, the total number of ablebodied staff employed is one hundred and seven (107), only one is person has some disabilities. In Imo State council for Arts and Culture, the total staff strength is four hundred and seventy. Significantly, four hundred and sixty five employees are able-bodied, while 5 employees are persons with disabilities. In the Nigeria Television Authority, Lokoja, the total number of staff is seventy. All are able-bodied. The analysis shows that there a wide gap between the employment ratio of the able-bodied to the artists with disabilities. In Imo State Council for Arts and Culture, one of the respondents argues that besides academic qualifications, physical fitness is among the criteria for recruitment of potential artists into the services of the arts councils in Nigeria. He posits that the management of arts councils normally demands for a medical report of physical fitness for employment. This places the artists with disabilities in a disadvantaged position. This is among the reasons why many artists with disabilities are discouraged from seeking employment in private or public arts institutions in Nigeria. Also in the Nigerian Television Authority, another respondent argues that there are

abundant areas of specialization and job opportunities in the arts institutions for the artists with disabilities to explore. The interviewee thinks they can serve as managers, administrative officers, actors, musicians, composers, sound designers, and computer elites. They can also serve as video camera operators, or directors of photography, costume designers, make-up artist, movie producers, dancers, and instrumentalists. They could also serve as graphic artists, script writers, film editors, singers, stenographers, light designers, box office staff and attendants in the arts institutions depending on their degree of disability.

Besides, the interviewee's responses further show that even when artists with special needs are employed, they are not given fair opportunities to perform like their able-bodied counterparts in the arts institutions studied. Again, one of the interviewee argues that during stage performances, artists with disabilities are not allowed to play major roles except when the director wants to stimulate the audience to laughter principally to raise money for the performers. He further that argues even when they are employed, the management of the arts institutions studied do not provide them with special aids or working tools like wheel chairs and hearing aids for their work.

Research findings also indicate that there are no adequate legal backings to the employment of artists with special needs. The interviewees agreed that there is no specific provision under the Labour Act, Cap 1 for the employment of persons with disabilities. According to them, section 17 (3) of the 1999 Nigerian Constitution provides that the state shall direct its policy towards ensuring that all 'citizens without discrimination on any group whatsoever have the opportunity for securing adequate means of live hood as well adequate opportunity to secure suitable employment". The interviewees further reason that that the constitution guarantees the artist with disability the right of employment provided he or she is not incapacitated and can perform the duty expected or required of the occupier of such office.

Besides, the Nigerian National Film Policy (2000) directs that 'in order to give a positive orientation to locally produced films, the state should encourage the use of film potentials to counter prejudices and misconceptions', especially, against children with disability in general and the persons with disability in particular(Abone, 2008: 90). He further posits that section 4.1.4 (b) of the policy stipulates that the state shall through appropriate legislation encourage the adoption of themes which shall emphasizes the desirable, rather than the negative aspect of our present social existence, including, belief in the capacity of our people (especially the persons with disability) to overcome extreme adverse conditions of nature and socio-cultural arrangement.

However, one of the respondents argues that these legal provisions do not specifically authorize the employer of labour to integrate or usefully engage persons or artists with disabilities into the nation's work force. He posits that there is need for the Federal Government of Nigeria to promulgate and implement a law that would break down the barriers that keep people with disability from achieving gainful employment. According to him, the Americans with Disabilities Act, Equal Opportunity Act, and Disability Discriminatory Act (1995) in United States become particularly applicable in this regards. He also argues that Nigeria needs a commission to cater for the rights and employment of persons with disabilities like the Commission for Equality and Human Rights, Disability Right Commission (DRC) and Equality Opportunities Commission (EOC) in United States

The result of the experiments conducted at the CMML shows that some persons with disabilities are gifted and talented in performing and fine arts. Specifically, we identified some blinds that possessed talents and skills in drumming and singing. We also identified some deaf who are skillful in craft and painting. This study believes that there are many persons in the CMML who could be very skillful in the performing arts after graduation, and could be useful in the production and sale of artistic goods and services in our arts institutions if their potentials are adequately maximized.

It is instructive that the responses from the personal interviews demonstrate the wide gap between the employment ratio of the able-bodied and the artists with special needs in the arts institutions studied. Thus implies that the management of the arts institutions studied are inclined to engage the able-bodied artists while ignoring the potentials of the artists with disabilities. Yet, the experiments conducted with the pupils of CMML show that some persons with severe disabilities are gifted and talented in performing artistic and inartistic activities. The study further observed that the Labor and Constitutional Laws does not adequately guarantee the useful engagement of the physically challenged persons, specifically, artists, into the services of the arts institutions in Nigeria. We are aware that the law is very important in the employment relations in any organization. All in all, we believe that there is ability in disability as long as one's mental reasoning is functioning well.

Recommendations

To empower these people, the following recommendations are offered.

(a) There is need for the three tiers of government in Nigeria and the private sector to

- integrate or employ the gifted and talented artists with special needs into the work force of the arts institutions in Nigeria.
- (b) There is a abiding need for the government of Nigeria to amend the enabling labour and constitutional laws to create a common platform on the basis of equal employment opportunities, and some form of affirmative action which should take care of their special circumstances
 - (c) In addition to this motivational realignment, there is need to provide them with mobility and information aids, and performance enhancement aids to enable them perform their duties efficiently and effectively.
 - (d) If employed or integrated into the workforce of the arts institutions, there is the need for a systematic and continuous education, training and retraining of the artists for capacity building and manpower development. Such training should be made regularly, and as a matter of rights, and not a privilege.
 - (e) There is a need to provide physically challenged artists with incentives and wherewithal to enable them establish and manage their own artistic businesses. This policy framework, if systematized, should markedly help them to be more industrious, competitive and productive in diverse fields of arts and human pursuits.

Conclusion

In this study, we have examined the artists with special needs as people living with severe disabilities but have the ability to perform artistic and inartistic activities which have been denied them. We believe that the key to self reliance and self- sufficiency of artists with disability is to usefully engage them in services of the arts institutions, private and public. Alternatively, we must provide them with wherewithal and adequate finance that would enable them to manage and own artistic businesses towards self reliance and self- sufficiency. If the foregoing suggestions are implemented, society would be on the right path to adequately addressing the plight of the artists with special needs for sustainability.

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APPENDIX 1

PERSONAL INTERVIEW QUESTION ON THE PHYSICALLY CHALLENGED

ARTIST IN NIGERIAN ARTS INSTITUTION

- 1(a) Is your organization private or government owned?
- (b) In your opinion, who are the artists with special needs?
- 2 Does the law guarantee the employment of the artists with special needs?
- 3(a) what is the staff strength of your organization?
- (b) How many of them are artists with special needs?
- 4 What are the available areas of specialization which the artists with disabilities could fit in, in your organization?
- 5 What are the facilitates put in place to enhance good working conditions for the artists with special needs in your organization?
- 6 Are the artists with special needs in the organization given a fair chance to Compete favorably with their able-bodied counterparts?
- 7 In your own view, what do you think is the way out towards redirecting the abilities of the Artists with special needs in the arts institutions.?