

## RECREATION: A VERITABLE TOOL FOR ACHIEVING HANDICAPS INTEGRATION IN NIGERIA

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### ABSTRACT

*This paper focuses on the recreation as a veritable tool for achieving handicaps integration in Nigeria. The non-participation of the handicaps in community recreation throughout Nigeria is matter of concern. The handicapped persons require recreational activities like any other normal persons. The discrimination, either explicit or implicit in nature is so obvious in many developing countries like Nigeria. The handicaps should be integrated into societal recreational activities. They are aware of the importance of participation in recreational activities in fostering unity, peace, harmony, concord, oneness, togetherness and cohesiveness which are essential for community solidarity, integrity and security. They need recognition and wish to voluntarily engage in leisure time activities with their non-handicapped relations as to promote mental health, rehabilitation, happiness and physical fitness. It was recommended that there should be competitions, also philanthropists and charity organizations should help the government to fund recreational programmes for the handicaps in Nigeria.*

*Keywords: Obstacles, Disability, Integration, Discrimination, Transformation*

### INTRODUCTION

Handicap refers to the sum total of obstacles, difficulties or problems a person encounters on account of a particular disability. History has it on record that in then Nigeria, handicap was associated with evil, hence they were thrown away in the evil forest to die or even destroyed at birth if identified. No one wants to associate with such people. But today, due to modern civilization they are accepted with mercy, sympathy, believing that they are not qualified to be involved in any form of community recreation and functions. (Orunaboka 2004; Griffey & Housner, 1991; Adedeji 1985).

Meaningful political, economic, educational, social and successful technological developments cannot be achieved without the integration of all individuals in a society. Awosika (2000) stated that advanced nations all over the world who have attained greatness in diverse ramifications do not misappropriate the necessity of working towards those steps that promote the integration of all individuals in their communities for the purpose of achievement. A sketchy and meaningful account of how handicapped persons have been discriminated against as regard their participation in community recreation, buying and selling in market places in Nigeria-were asserted by many authors. Adedeji (1985) opined that Western Society nurses an ambivalent attitude of both acceptance and rejection of the handicapped persons participation in physical education and sports. He further stated that in the United States of America where society, is fast moving towards acceptance of broadening spectrum of life-style, physical prowess for handicaps have gathered momentum. Up till today, the handicapped in our society (Nigeria) continually contend with the problems of relationship and dependency.

Scholars in the study area of social psychology of the disabilities have observed that when tools are in parts, they become imperfect and less effective, that holistic is often more preferred to patristic. Fragmentation of instrument makes it to loose its power of productivity. A fragmented nation where ethnicity, discrimination and sectionalism are allowed to dominate instead of united force cannot in reality think of pulling resources together for national development as the case in Nigeria. There are glaring cases of rejection of handicapped persons during employment, admission into public schools, unity schools and universities.

They are confronted with the problems of choosing a vocation, preparing for it, finding a job and keeping it. These problems have grave consequences for the total development of the society if not well handled (Orunaboka 2005).

### **Integration**

The concept of integration refers to an act of inter mixing naturally of persons previously separated. It is a combination of diverse human elements designed to achieve national unity. Included in the process of integration according to Bucher and Krotee (2002) are cohesiveness, harmony, concord, oneness, conformity, unity, sense of loyalty and common understanding. These are strong weapons in positive transformation of the society.

The appreciation and acceptance of individual differences, weakness, strength and acceptance of God's handiwork should be the order of the day, believing that each individual has a contribution to make for the success of the society. Integration of the handicapped persons into recreational activities means more than living together with them. The handicaps should not be mimic, ridicule, abuse, hooting at making of signs to portray the disabled, for their mistakes due to their nature. (Awosika 2002; Nwazuoke & Eni 1998; Adniran 1989; Brolin & Alonze 1979).

### **The Nature of Handicaps in Nigeria**

All handicaps all over the world are the same. The current population of Nigeria is about 188 million people with 37 states including Abuja as the capital Territory (Census 2006) there are many tribes and ethnic groups with more than 300 languages and complex geographical environment with major occupation of fishing, farming and trading.

The World Health Organization in 1948 defined health to be according to Berman, Snyder, Kozier & Erb (2008) a state of complete physical, mental, and social well-being, and not merely the absence of disease or infirmity.

It seems that this definition is very difficult to come by. It is assumed by the researchers that no perfect health or 100 percent wellness in all living individuals, as Berman et al further stated that every person is mad each day depending on the degree of madness.

The nature of handicaps in Nigeria may fall into one of the six following categories stated by Siedentop and Tannehill (2000)

- (a) Visually impaired
- (b) Physically and other health impaired
- (c) Mentally challenged
- (d) Behaviourally challenged
- (e) Hearing impaired and
- (f) Multiple handicapped.

There are others along the roads and market places that are hyperactive or have disruptive tendencies, very untidy and disorganized. Still a few more are dull and unresponsive. According to Fait (1994), all these are categorized as handicapped.

It is well understood that handicapped condition naturally precipitates some psychological, philosophical, sociological and educational problems both on the side of the handicapped person and the society. It should be noted that handicapping in Nigeria are caused by either of the following factors: accident, illness, diseases, natural, ignorance, drugs, environment and others, just like other develop and under developed countries of the world.

### **The Place of Recreational Activities in Nigeria**

Recreational activities from time in memorial worldwide have been used as a potent tool to bring people together in the human race. Adedeji (1985) remarked that, primitive Yoruba people often set aside open places in front of their houses where both children and adults usually converged for recreational activities having realized its role in promoting unity. It was emphasized further that at such gathering, matters crucial to family and community developments were often discussed. Salient issues capable of aggravating peace and harmony were permanently resolved during such informal recreational leisure activities. Akintunde (2001) stated that health, counter balance and other aspects of living are benefits derived from promoting and engaging in positive as well as active recreational activities. Omolewa (1988) opined that recreational activities had been used to achieve moral purity in Nigeria setting. Awosika (2000) remarked that sports in terms of recreation has been found as an instrument of patriotism. Ajala (1985) asserted that man is in dire need of activity which provides some sense of satisfaction and achievement; to achieve self realization under any circumstance most people need some opportunity to be creative and to express their own individuality.

Recreation in our contemporary society could be used to hold people of different culture, status, attitudes, race, religion, body types, together for constructive purposes and practices, if well organized. The society saw all the above benefits as expressed by authors and researchers, falling out of the handicapped persons social orbit as such they should not have the desire to participate in any recreational activities. With the assistance from various international agencies and organizations, still the standard of recreational and sports activities available to individuals with special needs (Handicaps) are at its lowest ebb. The reasons may be due to poor funding, ignorance about the benefits, discrimination, traditional belief and that nothing good comes out of the handicaps. (Biddle 1991; Nwankwo 1988).

Awosika (1986); Adeyemi (1986); Amusa & Onyewadume (1988) found recreation useful in promoting social, mental and physical health. In a confused country like Nigeria, where frustration and tension are at the climax owing to political, economic and social instability, many have developed mental complications and brain drain which eventually render them less productive. The affected can be rehabilitated by recreation in collaboration with other therapies.

However, there has been an increased awareness at national and international on the benefits of recreational activities on the health and social promotion of the handicapped persons in Nigeria and the world in general.

### **The Social Stereotype of Handicaps in Nigeria**

The handicapped individuals have not as a general rule been exposed to comprehensive career education most particularly in recreational activities and sports. Social stereotypes have frequently led to the assumption that the handicapped are characterized by limitations in intelligence and by severe restrictions in vocational capabilities (Orunaboka 2005). The Nigerians assumption was that these group of individuals should live in begging for charity to survive. Also attitudes of Nigerians towards these handicapped individuals are characterized by fear, antagonism and apathy. Some people regard

them as wicked and evil, as such they can only destroy not creative. Such responses, often results in misconceptions regarding the limitation that handicap impose and form perceived inability to deal with them. Even in the developed countries, like United States of America as McGrowan and Porter (1967) reported that many employers have an aversion to employing handicapped either in sports or any other job as they believe them less effective and more accident prone. According to McGrowan & Porter (1967) some employers and sports coaches seem to have either conscious or unconscious abhorrence of physical disability, fear arise in insurance rates and disturbance in their pension systems if they retired handicapped.

In Nigeria, employers of labour, parents, teachers of physical education, sports coaches, relatives, and friends regard the handicapped persons as helpless and unable to perform any job and sports skills or any type of recreational activities. They would rather give a large sums of money to an individual handicapped person than job or recreational activities. They are only allowed to watch the normal children or adults perform the recreational activities or sports skills while they clapped and cheer the normal children or adults up at school inter-house or intramural sports competitions or during society recreation, they are only allowed to contribute money but not allowed to participate because of Nigerians social stereotype of the handicapped not fit for any recreational activities (Orunaboka, 2005; Orunaboka & Nyenke, 2005).

### **The Role of Recreation to the Health of the Handicaps in Nigeria**

Recreation is any activity (ies) pursued during leisure, either individually or collectively, that is free and pleasurable. It is worthwhile, socially acceptable leisure experience that promotes and provides immediate and inherent satisfaction to the individual who voluntarily participates in the activity. The World Bank Encyclopedia (2000) viewed recreation in terms of activity that people voluntarily pursue for personal enjoyment and satisfaction usually during their free time.

Recreation, if planned and designed with the help of a medical doctor, could be adapted for the handicaps from the recreational activities of the normal person. Such recreational activities will contribute mainly to an all round development of the handicapped person which include the cognitive, affective and psychomotor development (Bucher 1979, Nwankwo 1988).

The unique contributions of recreational activities are unlimited to the handicapped persons, it serves as a necessary rehabilitation steps, it enhances the persons movement abilities and increases his level of fitness. Socially, it enhances upward social mobilities. According to Awosika (1986), selected social activities for leisure of the handicapped may lead to desirable group relationship such as in formation of the Polo clubs; Tennis clubs, Dart association, Chess fans and a host of others for the handicaps. With these associations people know others, advise and assist them, relate to them not only in the games or the sports but also in several other social problems and situation.

Recreational activities are one of the essential ways of promoting unity and solidarity among people. The traditional recreational activities are very significant, in the promotion of cultural heritage, there is an ample opportunity for the members who are involved into it, to imbibe certain desirable habits and virtues such as leadership, followership qualities, cooperation, supportive role, honesty, empathy and consideration for others.

The Nigerian cultural heritage has a lot of recreational activities, if well planned and administered, will serve as corrective measures to some disabilities as well as rehabilitation activities like in the Ancient towns of Bonny, Okrika, Hausa, Yoruba, Ogoni, Ibo, Benin, Kalabari among others, some handicaps acquired some skills through recreation, and today they are self employed and are earning their living with their families through cultural dancing, acrobatic display, playing of locally made drums, singing, canoeing, net casting to catch fish. Other handicaps should not be left to begging for charity. They should be expose to varieties of recreational activities within their society.

## CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

This paper focuses on recreation, as a veritable tool for achieving handicaps integration in Nigeria. Recreation is an effective tool that assists to socialize the individuals, that share experiences for common goal and also enlarges the area of mutual understanding between persons whose experiences may differ.

At this crucial period of development in Nigeria every person should be carried along by providing formal recreational programmes that will integrate the handicaps and non-handicaps into a social setting of mixing together, where discrimination, and stereotype will be a thing of past. Recreation helps to keep the youths and adults constructively busy. They are able to avoid juvenile delinquency such as involvement in cultism and other social vices capable of destabilizing and disintegrating the nation as some of these handicaps are informants to leaders and members of these social vices in our society (Nigeria) now. Philanthropists and charity organizations should help the government to fund recreational programmes for the handicaps. There should be a level of interaction and competitions among the handicaps and non-handicaps on different categories, starting from Local Government Area, state to national levels.

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