



## Assessing the abilities of people with disabilities for sustainable socio-economic development in Bauchi, Bauchi State, Nigeria

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### Abstract

People with disabilities (PWDs) are often viewed from the perspective of their limitations rather than their abilities. This perception has contributed to their exclusion from education, employment, and decision-making processes despite their enormous potential to contribute to national development. This study assessed the abilities of people with disabilities and their contributions to sustainable socio-economic development in Bauchi, Bauchi State, Nigeria. The study adopted a descriptive survey research design. A sample of 250 persons with disabilities was selected using purposive and snowball sampling techniques. Data were collected through questionnaires, while key informant interviews were conducted with ten (10) participants. Both datasets were analysed using descriptive statistics and thematic analysis, respectively. The findings revealed that people with disabilities possess various abilities and skills, including entrepreneurship, craftsmanship, teaching, information and communication technology (ICT), agriculture, and vocational skills. However, their contributions to socio-economic development are constrained by inadequate educational opportunities, discrimination, inaccessible infrastructure, unemployment, and limited government support. The study concluded that people with disabilities represent an untapped human resource capable of contributing significantly to sustainable development if provided with equal opportunities and an enabling environment. The study recommends inclusive policies, improved access to education and employment, vocational empowerment programmes, and the strengthening of disability rights institutions.

**Keywords:** Abilities, disability, inclusion, sustainable development, socio-economic development

### Introduction

Disability is a critical social, economic, and developmental issue affecting millions globally. According to the World Health Organisation (WHO, 2023) [20], about 1.3 billion people, or 16% of the global population, live with some form of disability. Despite this significant number, persons with disabilities (PWDs) often face marginalisation and economic disadvantage. Historically, disability was viewed mainly from a medical or charity perspective, leading to discrimination, exclusion from education, unemployment, and limited political and social participation (Shakespeare, 2018) [3]. In many developing countries, including Nigeria, disability is still associated with stigma and cultural misconceptions.

Contemporary understandings of disability have evolved significantly, especially following the adoption of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (UNCRPD) in 2006 [17]. This marked a shift from viewing individuals with disabilities as objects of charity to recognising them as rights holders and agents of development. The Convention highlights that disability results from environmental, institutional, and attitudinal barriers, not just individual impairments.

Globally, there is a growing focus on including persons with disabilities in development planning. Organisations like the United Nations and the World Bank stress that sustainable development is impossible without their inclusion in economic, social, and political processes (ILO, 2020) [9]. The principle of "Leaving No One Behind," central to the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), emphasises the need to promote the rights and welfare of individuals with disabilities. The Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs),

established by the United Nations in 2015, promote inclusive development. Several goals specifically address the rights of people with disabilities, including: Goal 1 (No Poverty), Goal 4 (Quality Education), Goal 8 (Decent Work and Economic Growth), Goal 10 (Reduced Inequalities), and Goal 11 (Sustainable Cities and Communities). These goals emphasise the active participation of persons with disabilities in development processes.

Research shows that people with disabilities often face higher rates of poverty, unemployment, and social exclusion compared to those without disabilities, creating a cycle where poverty can lead to disability and vice versa. Nevertheless, many individuals with disabilities are successful in various fields, including entrepreneurship and politics. Inclusive labour markets and supportive policies not only enhance economic productivity but also contribute positively to national development. Excluding these individuals from the workforce results in significant economic losses.

In Nigeria, disability is a major development concern, with millions living with physical, visual, hearing, and intellectual impairments. Many face barriers such as inaccessible infrastructure, limited educational opportunities, discrimination, unemployment, and poor healthcare access (Eleweke & Ebenso, 2016) [8], hindering their potential in socio-economic activities. To address these issues, the Nigerian government enacted the Discrimination Against Persons with Disabilities (Prohibition) Act in 2018 [3], which aims to guarantee equal rights, accessibility in public spaces, and opportunities in education and employment. However, weak implementation means many still experience exclusion.

In northern Nigeria, especially in Bauchi State, cultural beliefs and socio-economic conditions exacerbate challenges for persons with disabilities. They often face stigma that views disability through superstition, leading to exclusion from education and employment and pushing them into informal economic activities or street begging. Evidence indicates that many individuals with disabilities in Bauchi State have valuable skills contributing to community and economic development. They engage in occupations such as tailoring, carpentry, farming, trading, teaching, ICT, craftsmanship, and small-scale entrepreneurship. Some have even established successful businesses, enhancing family income and participating in community initiatives.

### 1. Statement of the Problem

In Nigeria, individuals with disabilities encounter a multitude of significant barriers that hinder their ability to access essential services such as education, healthcare, employment, and various social services. These obstacles not only limit their opportunities for personal and professional growth but also prevent them from fully participating in and contributing to society. In Bauchi State, a region that reflects broader national challenges, many people with disabilities face systemic discrimination, pervasive poverty, and high rates of unemployment, even though many possess valuable skills and talents.

These challenges are worsened by the government's inadequate interventions and social support programmes, which frequently fail to address the unique needs of individuals with disabilities. Moreover, entrenched societal stereotypes continue to stigmatise disabilities, reinforcing the misconception that disability equates to inability. This negative perception further alienates individuals with disabilities and minimises recognition of their potential contributions.

While numerous studies in Nigeria have concentrated on the hardships faced by persons with disabilities, there is a glaring gap in research focused on their capabilities and the positive roles they can play in driving development. Therefore, it is imperative to conduct an empirical assessment of people with disabilities, exploring their abilities and how these can be harnessed to foster sustainable socio-economic development in Bauchi State. By shifting the narrative from a solely deficit-based perspective to one that recognises and promotes their strengths, it can create an inclusive society that values and leverages the contributions of all its members.

### 2. Aim and Objectives of the Study

The general objective of this study is to assess the abilities of people with disabilities for sustainable socio-economic development in Bauchi State.

The specific objectives are to:

- Identify the abilities and skills possessed by people with disabilities in Bauchi State.
- Examine the contributions of people with disabilities to socio-economic development.
- Identify the challenges limiting their contributions.
- Suggest strategies for enhancing their participation in sustainable development.

#### 2.1 Concept of Disability

Disability is a multidimensional concept that has evolved. Traditionally, disability was viewed from a medical

perspective, where individuals with impairments were considered incapable of functioning independently and were therefore seen as dependent on others. This perspective focused primarily on the physical or mental condition of the individual and often ignored the influence of social and environmental factors (Shakespeare, 2018) <sup>[3]</sup>.

The World Health Organisation (2023) <sup>[20]</sup> defines disability as the interaction between an individual's impairment and the barriers that hinder their full and effective participation in society on an equal basis with others. Such barriers may be physical, institutional, economic, or attitudinal. The adoption of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (UNCRPD) in 2006 <sup>[17]</sup> marked a significant shift in the understanding of disability. The Convention recognises persons with disabilities as rights holders and active participants in development rather than passive recipients of charity (United Nations, 2006) <sup>[17]</sup>.

In Nigeria, the enactment of the Discrimination Against Persons with Disabilities (Prohibition) Act of 2018 <sup>[3]</sup> further strengthened the rights of persons with disabilities by prohibiting discrimination and promoting equal opportunities in education, employment, healthcare, and public development

### 2.2 Types of Disabilities

#### 1. Physical Disabilities

Physical disabilities encompass a broad range of impairments that hinder mobility and overall physical functioning. This category includes conditions such as paralysis, which may result from spinal cord injuries or neurological conditions, leading to a complete loss of motor function in certain body parts. Limb loss, whether due to trauma, congenital conditions, or disease, profoundly affects a person's ability to perform everyday tasks. Additionally, conditions like cerebral palsy can result in varying degrees of muscle control and coordination difficulties, impacting an individual's mobility and independent living capabilities. Spinal cord injuries may result in partial to complete paralysis, dramatically altering the affected person's lifestyle and requiring substantial rehabilitative support.

#### 2. Visual Disabilities

Visual disabilities can range from minor visual impairments to complete blindness and significantly impact an individual's ability to engage in day-to-day activities that rely on sight. People with partial sight may struggle with tasks involving reading, recognising faces, or navigating environments, often necessitating the use of assistive technologies such as magnifying devices or screen readers. Complete blindness, on the other hand, requires a total reliance on alternative sensory inputs and may involve the use of mobility aids like canes or guide dogs, as well as training in orientation and mobility techniques to enhance independence and safety in various settings.

#### 3. Hearing Disabilities

Hearing disabilities vary widely in severity, from mild hearing loss, which can make understanding speech in noisy environments challenging, to profound deafness, where individuals cannot hear sounds at all. These conditions often necessitate the use of assistive technologies, including hearing aids, cochlear implants, or special communication devices. Additionally, individuals with hearing impairments may rely on sign language, cued speech, or other visual

communication methods to interact effectively with others. The need for interpreters in educational and professional settings can also play a crucial role in ensuring access to information and social interactions.

#### 4. Intellectual Disabilities

Intellectual disabilities are characterised by significant limitations in both intellectual functioning and adaptive behaviour, which encompasses everyday social and practical skills. These conditions can originate from various causes, including genetic factors, prenatal exposure to toxins, or complications during birth. Individuals with intellectual disabilities may experience challenges in learning, reasoning, problem-solving, and processing information, which can affect their ability to perform tasks associated with personal care, communication, and social interaction. Support from caregivers, educators, and specialised programmes is often essential to help individuals develop skills that promote greater independence and enhance their quality of life.

#### 5. Psychosocial Disabilities

Psychosocial disabilities include a range of mental health conditions that can significantly affect a person's daily functioning and ability to participate in various activities. These conditions may encompass mood disorders, anxiety disorders, schizophrenia, and other mental health issues that impact one's emotional well-being and social relationships. Individuals may face challenges in managing stress, maintaining relationships, and fulfilling responsibilities in personal and professional settings. Support systems, including therapy, counselling, medication, and community resources, are critical in helping individuals manage their conditions and improve their ability to engage effectively in day-to-day life.

##### Abilities and Capacities of Persons with Disabilities

Contrary to societal stereotypes, numerous studies have demonstrated that persons with disabilities possess considerable abilities and talents.

**Entrepreneurial Abilities:** Many persons with disabilities establish and manage small and medium enterprises in areas such as tailoring, fashion design, trading, catering, and information technology (ILO, 2020).

**Agricultural Skills:** In many rural communities in Nigeria, persons with disabilities engage in farming, livestock rearing, and agro-processing activities.

**Educational and Professional Skills:** A growing number of persons with disabilities are employed as teachers, lawyers, accountants, healthcare workers, and university lecturers.

**Technological and ICT Skills:** Advancements in assistive technologies have enabled persons with disabilities to become software developers, graphic designers, digital marketers, and computer technicians.

**Leadership and Advocacy Skills:** Many disability advocates have emerged as leaders in community development and social justice movements.

#### Some Contributions of Persons with Disabilities to Socio-Economic Development

Individuals with disabilities play a vital role in the development of society through various meaningful contributions across multiple sectors:

##### Economic Contributions

**Entrepreneurship and Business Ownership:** Many people with disabilities start their own businesses, demonstrating creativity and resilience while providing services and products to the community. These entrepreneurial ventures not only create jobs but also inspire others to pursue their own business ideas.

##### Employment and Labour Force Participation:

Individuals with disabilities contribute to the workforce by sharing their unique talents and skills. Their participation enriches diverse work environments and can lead to increased productivity. Employers benefit from the diverse perspectives and problem-solving approaches that individuals with disabilities bring to the table.

Individuals with disabilities not only contribute to economic growth but also enhance social structures, influence political landscapes, and enrich educational environments, making their involvement essential to holistic development in society. Research by the International Labour Organisation (2020) <sup>[9]</sup> indicates that excluding persons with disabilities from labour markets may cost countries between 3 and 7 per cent of their Gross Domestic Product (GDP).

##### Challenges Facing Persons with Disabilities

**Discrimination and Stigmatisation:** One of the most significant barriers to the full inclusion of persons with disabilities in society is the prevalence of negative societal attitudes. Discrimination manifests in various forms, such as social exclusion, negative stereotypes, and misconceptions about the capabilities of individuals with disabilities. These attitudes often lead to stigmatisation, which not only affects the self-esteem and mental well-being of persons with disabilities but also limits their opportunities for engagement in social, economic, and political activities.

**Limited Access to Education:** Access to education is a critical factor in fostering independence and improving the quality of life for persons with disabilities. Unfortunately, many educational institutions lack the necessary inclusive facilities, such as ramps, adjustable desks, and assistive technologies, which are essential for accommodating diverse needs. Furthermore, there is often a shortage of trained personnel who are equipped to support students with disabilities, leading to an education system that does not adequately provide equitable learning opportunities.

**Unemployment and Poverty:** Persons with disabilities face disproportionately high unemployment rates compared to their peers in the general population. Factors contributing to this disparity include employer bias, lack of accessible job training programmes, and insufficient workplace accommodations. As a consequence, many individuals with disabilities are trapped in a cycle of poverty, which limits their access to healthcare, adequate housing, and other essential services, further exacerbating their challenges.

**Inaccessible Infrastructure:** The built environment poses significant obstacles for persons with disabilities. Poor road networks, inaccessible public buildings, and inadequate transportation systems severely restrict mobility and independent living. These infrastructure deficiencies not only hinder individuals' ability to access essential services such as healthcare and education but also limit their participation in community life.

**Weak Policy Implementation:** While Nigeria has enacted various laws and policies aimed at protecting the rights of persons with disabilities, the challenge lies in their implementation. Often, these well-intentioned policies are undermined by a lack of resources, inadequate training, and insufficient enforcement mechanisms. As a result, the intended benefits of such laws fail to materialise, leaving many individuals with disabilities marginalised and without the support they need to thrive in society.

### Empirical Review

A study by Smith (2011) [15] in Kogi and Niger States found that persons with disabilities actively participated in petty trading, farming, and craftsmanship but faced barriers relating to discrimination and lack of education.

A study by Eleweke and Ebenso (2016) [8] revealed that social exclusion and inaccessible public services significantly affected the socio-economic well-being of persons with disabilities in Nigeria.

A study by Bickenbach *et al.* (2018) [3] found that inclusive labour policies significantly improve the economic participation of persons with disabilities in developing countries.

A study by the ILO (2020) demonstrated that empowering persons with disabilities through vocational training and employment opportunities contributes significantly to economic growth.

A study by Ishola *et al.* (2025) [10] found that persons with disabilities in Nigeria continue to experience exclusion despite possessing valuable skills and capabilities.

The reviewed studies concentrated primarily on challenges and welfare issues and paid limited attention to assessing the abilities and development potential of persons with disabilities in Bauchi State. This study, therefore, fills this knowledge gap.

### Theoretical Framework

The study is anchored on the Social Model of Disability developed by Michael Oliver (1990) [12].

The theory emerged as a reaction against the medical model of disability. The medical model viewed disability as an individual's problem that required treatment or rehabilitation. In contrast, the social model argues that society itself creates disability by constructing physical, social, and institutional barriers that prevent persons with impairments from participating fully in society.

### Assumptions of the Theory

The theory's major assumption is that: Disability is socially constructed. Meaning that society creates barriers that limit participation, and that persons with disabilities also possess abilities and capacities similar to those of any other person. Removing barriers can promote inclusion and socio-economic and politico-technological development.

### Relevance of the Theory to the Study

The theory is relevant because many persons with disabilities in Bauchi State possess employable skills and talents but remain economically marginalised due to social barriers rather than inability. The theory also provides an appropriate framework for understanding how removing barriers can improve their contributions to sustainable socio-economic development.

### Criticisms of the Theory

The theory has been criticised for not paying sufficient attention to the medical and psychological realities of impairment (Shakespeare, 2018) [3]. However, it remains one of the most influential theories in the study of disabilities.

### Research Methodology

#### 1. Research Design

The study adopted a descriptive survey design supplemented by qualitative interviews. The mixed-method approach enabled the researcher to obtain both numerical data and detailed personal experiences.

#### 2. Study Area

The study was conducted in Bauchi Metropolis, the capital of Bauchi State, Nigeria. Bauchi metropolis comprises several communities with diverse socio-economic activities, including trade, farming, public service, and artisanal work.

#### 3. Population of the Study

The target population consisted of registered members of disability associations in Bauchi State. The population categories included: Persons with physical disabilities, Persons with visual impairments, Persons with hearing impairments and Persons with intellectual disabilities. The estimated population was 1,350 registered members.

#### 4. Sample Size Determination Formula

To determine the sample size of quantitative data for the study, the Taro Yamane (1967) formula was adopted:

$$n = N / [1 + N(e^2)]$$

Where:

n = sample size

N = population (1,350)

e = level of precision (0.05)

$$n = 1,350 / [1 + 1,350(0.05^2)]$$

$$n = 1,350 / [1 + 3.375]$$

$$n = 1,350 / 4.375$$

$$n = 308.57 \approx 308 \text{ respondents.}$$

The Taro Yamane formula indicated a required sample size of 308 respondents, but only 250 questionnaires were successfully distributed and collected due to challenges in accessing certain categories of persons with disabilities.

### Sampling Technique

The study adopted Purposive and Snowball sampling techniques.

### Instruments of Data Collection

**Questionnaire:** The questionnaire consisted of four sections: Demographic information, Abilities and skills, Contributions to development, and Challenges facing people with disabilities.

**Key Informant Interviews (KII):** Ten interviews were conducted with Disability Association leaders, government officials, NGO representatives, community leaders, and persons with disabilities.

## Results and Discussion

**Table 1:** Demographic Characteristics of Respondents (n = 250)

Variable	Category	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Gender	Male	148	59.2
	Female	102	40.8
	TOTAL	250	100.0
Age	18-30 years	90	36.0
	31-40 years	82	32.8
	41-50	48	19.2
	51 and above	30	12.0
	Total	250	100.0
Marital Status	Single	95	38.0
	Married	125	50.0
	Divorced	12	4.8
	widowed	18	7.2
	Total	250	100.0
Educational Qualification	No Formal Education	38	15.2
	Primary Education	50	20.0
	Secondary Education	85	34.0
	Tertiary Education	77	30.8
	Total	250	100.0
Types of Disability	Physical Disability	105	42.0
	Visual Impairment	58	23.2
	Hearing Impairment	52	20.8
	Intellectual Disability	35	14.0
	Total	250	100.0

Source: Fieldwork, 2026.

**Table 2:** Abilities Possessed by Respondents

Ability	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Entrepreneurship	65	26.0
Vocational Skills	58	23.2
ICT Skills	37	14.8
Agriculture	30	12.0
Teaching	28	11.2
Arts and Crafts	32	12.8
Total	250	100.0

Source: Fieldwork, 2026.

The findings reveal that respondents possess numerous productive abilities capable of contributing to socio-economic development.

**Table 3:** Contributions to Development

Contribution	Frequency	Percentage (%)
<b>Self-employment</b>	85	34.0
Skill Transfer	55	22.0
Agricultural Production	40	16.0
Community Service	30	12.0
Educational Services	25	10.0
ICT Innovation	15	6.0
TOTAL	250	100.0

Source: Fieldwork, 2026.

The findings demonstrate that people with disabilities actively participate in economic activities and contribute to community development.

**Table 4:** Challenges Facing Persons with Disabilities

Challenge	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Unemployment	70	28.0
Discrimination	62	24.8
Inadequate education	45	18.0
Poor infrastructure	40	16.0
Limited government support	33	13.2
Total	250	100.0

Source: Fieldwork, 2026.

The results agree with studies showing that persons with disabilities in Bauchi State face significant barriers in accessing opportunities and services.

### Thematic Analysis of Qualitative Data

Five major themes were identified from the Key Informant Interviews.

#### Theme One: Disability Does Not Mean Inability

Most participants argued that they possess valuable skills and can contribute meaningfully to society.

One participant stated:

"We are disabled only in the eyes of society. Many of us are business owners and skilled workers" (Kii with a respondent, 2026).

Another participant said:

"If given equal opportunities, we can compete with anyone" (Kii with a participant, 2026).

This finding supports the social model of disability.

#### Theme Two: Economic Contributions of Persons with Disabilities

Participants emphasised their contributions through business, farming, teaching, and vocational activities.

One participant remarked:

"I employ three people in my tailoring shop even though I have a physical disability" (Kii with A participant, 2026).

Another interviewee stated:

"Many disabled people in Bauchi are self-employed and support their families" (Kii with an interviewee, 2026).

#### Theme Three: Discrimination and Social Exclusion

Nearly all participants identified discrimination as a major challenge.

One of the respondents explained:

"Employers often reject us immediately when they notice our disabilities" (Kii with a respondent, 2026).

Another respondent stated:

"People pity us instead of recognising our abilities" (Kii with a respondent, 2026).

#### Theme Four: Inadequate Government Support

Participants complained about insufficient empowerment programmes.

One respondent said:

"Government programmes rarely reach us" (Kii with a respondent, 2026).

Another respondent observed:

"Policies exist on paper, but implementation is poor" (Kii with a participant, 2026).

#### Theme Five: Need for Inclusive Development

Participants unanimously advocated for inclusive policies and equal opportunities.

One participant stated:

"Development cannot be sustainable when persons with disabilities are excluded" (Kii with a Participant, 2026).

Another respondent said:

"We do not want charity; we want opportunities" (Kii with a Participant, 2026).

### Discussion of Findings

The study presents compelling evidence that individuals with disabilities possess a diverse array of valuable skills and capabilities across multiple sectors, including entrepreneurship, vocational pursuits, information and communication technology (ICT), agriculture, and education. Despite their significant contributions to socio-economic development, many face considerable challenges due to existing social and institutional barriers that hinder their full participation in society.

These findings strongly support the Social Model of Disability, which posits that the challenges encountered by people with disabilities primarily arise from societal attitudes and structural obstacles rather than the disabilities themselves (Oliver, 1990)<sup>[12]</sup>.

### Conclusion

Individuals with disabilities in Bauchi State possess a diverse array of abilities and talents that can significantly contribute to promoting sustainable socio-economic development in the region. When given equitable opportunities, these individuals can engage actively in various economic activities and social initiatives, thereby adding considerable value to their communities. Nevertheless, several barriers continue to impede their full participation. Discrimination in the workplace and society at large often results in social exclusion, while high unemployment rates restrict their financial independence and professional advancement. Additionally, insufficient educational resources hinder their ability to acquire the skills necessary for meaningful employment and personal growth. Compounding these challenges, inadequate infrastructure, such as inaccessible transportation and facilities, further isolates them from opportunities and diminishes their capacity to contribute to societal progress.

### Recommendations

1. The State government should strengthen the implementation of disability rights laws.
2. Inclusive education policies should be expanded.
3. Vocational and entrepreneurship programmes for persons with disabilities should be increased.
4. Public infrastructure should be made accessible.
5. Employers should adopt inclusive employment practises.
6. Financial support and credit facilities should be provided to entrepreneurs with disabilities.
7. Disability organisations should be involved in policy formulation and implementation.

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