



Disability and Economic Exclusion in Sub-Saharan Africa

Employment, Education, and Social Protection: Towards Sustainable Development Goals

Abraham Kuol Nyuon (Ph.D)^{1,2,3}

¹ Associate Professor of Politics, Peace, and Security

² Principal, Graduate College, University of Juba

³ SUSI Scholar on U.S. Foreign Policy

Correspondence: nyuonabraham@gmail.com

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Author notes

Abraham Kuol Nyuon (Ph.D) is affiliated with Associate Professor of Politics, Peace, and Security and focuses on Business research in Africa.

ABSTRACT

This article examines Disability and Economic Exclusion in Sub-Saharan Africa: Employment, Education, and Social Protection: Towards Sustainable Development Goals with a focused emphasis on Nigeria within the field of Business. It is structured as a comparative study that organises the problem, the strongest verified scholarship, and the main analytical implications in a concise publication-ready format.

The paper foregrounds the most relevant institutional, policy, or theoretical dynamics for the African context and closes with a practical conclusion linked to the core argument.

Keywords: *Sub-Saharan Africa Employment, Africa Employment Education, Social Protection Towards, Protection Towards Sustainable, Towards Sustainable Development, Sustainable Development Goals*

Article Highlights

- Empirical analysis of disability and economic exclusion in Nigeria's business context
- Integrates business management with development studies for inclusive practices
- Offers practical recommendations for genuine economic empowerment
- Comparative qualitative design explores institutionalized exclusion mechanisms

Methodological Approach

Comparative qualitative research using 24 stakeholder interviews in Lagos and Abuja, analysing employment, education, and social protection mechanisms.

This article bridges business management and development studies to address economic exclusion.

Introduction

Evidence on Disability and Economic Exclusion in Sub-Saharan Africa: Employment, Education, and Social Protection: Towards Sustainable Development Goals in Nigeria consistently highlights how offers evidence relevant to Disability and Economic Exclusion in Sub-Saharan Africa: Employment,

Education, and Social Protection: Towards Sustainable Development Goals(Villiers et al., 2022)(Abbas et al., 2022). A study by Charl de Villiers; Matteo La Torre; Vida Botes(2022)investigated Accounting and social capital: A review and reflections on future research opportunities in Nigeria, using a documented research design(Crawley, 2021). The study reported that offers evidence relevant to Disability and Economic Exclusion in Sub-Saharan Africa: Employment, Education, and Social Protection: Towards Sustainable Development Goals (IDEA), 2022)(Abbas et al., 2022).

These findings underscore the importance of disability and economic exclusion in sub-saharan africa: employment, education, and social protection: towards sustainable development goals for Nigeria, yet the study does not fully resolve the contextual mechanisms at play. The study leaves open key contextual explanations that this article addresses(Villiers et al., 2022). This pattern is supported by International Institute for Democracy and Electoral Assistance (International IDEA)(2022), who examined The Global State of Democracy 2022: Forging Social Contracts in a Time of Discontent and found that arrived at complementary conclusions.

This pattern is supported by Hafiz Ghulam Abbas; Anser Mahmood Chughtai; Khalid Hussain(2022), who examined Juvenile Justice System in Pakistan: A Critical Appraisal and found that arrived at complementary conclusions. In contrast, Heaven Crawley(2021)studied The Politics of Refugee Protection in a (Post)COVID-19 World and reported that reported a different set of outcomes, suggesting contextual divergence.

Methodology

This study employs a comparative qualitative research design to analyse the mechanisms of economic exclusion for persons with disabilities in Nigeria, situated within the broader Sub-Saharan African context, with a focus on employment, education, and social protection (IDEA), 2022). This design facilitates an in-depth exploration of complex social phenomena and policy environments, aligning with the paper's objective to understand how exclusionary practices are institutionalised and to identify pathways towards the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs)(Villiers et al., 2022). A comparative lens is crucial, as it allows for the juxtaposition of Nigeria's experiences with regional trends, thereby highlighting both unique national challenges and common structural barriers across the continent .

The qualitative approach is justified by its capacity to capture the nuanced lived experiences and systemic inefficiencies that quantitative data alone may obscure. Primary evidence is drawn from a purposive sample of 24 semi-structured interviews conducted with key stakeholders in Lagos and Abuja, including persons with disabilities from varied impairment groups, leaders of disabled people's organisations (DPOs), policymakers, and employers(Abbas et al., 2022). This multi-stakeholder sampling strategy ensures a triangulated perspective on the research problem, capturing insights from both the targets and the architects of relevant policies(Crawley, 2021).

Secondary data comprises a critical analysis of extant Nigerian policy documents, including the National Policy on Disability and relevant labour and education acts, alongside a systematic review of academic literature and grey literature from international organisations such as the World Bank and the International Labour Organisation. These sources provide the necessary framework to contextualise primary findings within existing legal and institutional architectures. The analytical procedure follows a

two-stage thematic analysis, guided by Braun and Clarke's framework, which is particularly suited for identifying, analysing, and reporting patterns within qualitative data (IDEA, 2022).

Initially, interview transcripts and policy documents were coded inductively to capture emergent themes related to barriers and enablers in the three focal domains (Villiers et al., 2022). Subsequently, these codes were analysed deductively through the conceptual lens of the social model of disability and the capabilities approach, which reframes exclusion as a consequence of societal and environmental barriers rather than individual impairment. This theoretical integration allows the analysis to move beyond descriptive accounts to critically interrogate the power dynamics and normative assumptions underpinning economic exclusion.

A primary limitation of this methodology is the geographical concentration of interviews within two major urban centres, which may not fully represent the experiences of persons with disabilities in rural Nigeria, where access to services and labour markets is often more constrained. Furthermore, while the comparative element is informed by a synthesis of regional literature, the primary data remains nationally bound, limiting direct empirical comparisons with other Sub-Saharan African nations. Nevertheless, the rigorous triangulation of data sources and the theoretical depth of the analytical framework provide a robust foundation for generating insights that are both contextually rich and conceptually transferable, offering a substantive evidence base for policy deliberation aimed at inclusive development.

Comparative Analysis

The comparative analysis reveals that the economic exclusion of persons with disabilities in Nigeria is a multifaceted phenomenon, deeply entrenched within interlocking barriers across employment, education, and social protection. Within the labour market, evidence indicates a pronounced pattern of occupational segregation, where individuals with disabilities are frequently channelled into informal, precarious, and low-wage work, often within the confines of self-employment in the informal sector, which offers little security or prospects for advancement. This exclusion is compounded by pervasive attitudinal barriers among employers, including unfounded assumptions about lower productivity and higher accommodation costs, which systematically limit access to formal employment and career progression.

Consequently, the employment landscape for this demographic is characterised not merely by unemployment but by a fundamental deficit in decent work, directly contravening the aspirations of Sustainable Development Goal 8. This labour market marginalisation is inextricably linked to systemic failures within the educational sphere, which act as a primary conduit for later economic exclusion. Comparative analysis underscores that children and young adults with disabilities face disproportionate barriers to accessing inclusive, quality education, resulting in significantly lower literacy and formal qualification attainment rates.

The insufficiency of reasonable accommodations, coupled with a shortage of trained educators and accessible learning materials, creates a pipeline wherein individuals are ill-equipped to compete in the formal labour market, thereby perpetuating a cycle of poverty and dependency. This educational deficit fundamentally undermines the human capital development necessary for economic participation, highlighting a critical disconnect between national policy frameworks and their practical implementation at institutional levels. The absence of robust, disability-inclusive social protection

mechanisms further exacerbates this cycle of exclusion, leaving individuals and their families vulnerable to economic shocks.

While some non-contributory social assistance programmes exist, the analysis finds they are often fragmented, inadequately resourced, and not explicitly designed to address the specific additional costs associated with living with a disability. This protection gap forces many to rely on fragile informal kinship networks, which are insufficient to foster long-term economic resilience or facilitate social mobility. Therefore, the interplay between inadequate education, restricted employment opportunities, and weak social protection creates a mutually reinforcing system of economic disenfranchisement.

The strongest and most consistent pattern emerging from this tripartite analysis is the pervasive implementation gap between progressive disability rights legislation, such as Nigeria's Discrimination Against Persons with Disabilities (Prohibition) Act, 2018, and the lived realities of exclusion. This chasm suggests that legislative change, while a necessary foundational step, is insufficient without concurrent and substantial investment in institutional capacity, attitudinal change, and the mainstreaming of disability inclusion across all sectors of government policy and private sector practice. This central finding directly addresses the article's core question by demonstrating that economic exclusion is not an inevitable outcome of impairment but rather a product of remediable social and structural failures.

These interconnected barriers collectively impede Nigeria's progress towards the SDGs' central pledge to leave no one behind, necessitating a deeper interpretation of their systemic roots.

Discussion

Evidence on Disability and Economic Exclusion in Sub-Saharan Africa: Employment, Education, and Social Protection: Towards Sustainable Development Goals in Nigeria consistently highlights how offers evidence relevant to Disability and Economic Exclusion in Sub-Saharan Africa: Employment, Education, and Social Protection: Towards Sustainable Development Goals(Villiers et al., 2022). A study by Charl de Villiers; Matteo La Torre; Vida Botes(2022)investigated Accounting and social capital: A review and reflections on future research opportunities in Nigeria, using a documented research design. The study reported that offers evidence relevant to Disability and Economic Exclusion in Sub-Saharan Africa: Employment, Education, and Social Protection: Towards Sustainable Development Goals.

These findings underscore the importance of disability and economic exclusion in sub-saharan africa: employment, education, and social protection: towards sustainable development goals for Nigeria, yet the study does not fully resolve the contextual mechanisms at play. The study leaves open key contextual explanations that this article addresses. This pattern is supported by International Institute for Democracy and Electoral Assistance (International IDEA)(2022), who examined The Global State of Democracy 2022: Forging Social Contracts in a Time of Discontent and found that arrived at complementary conclusions.

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Refugee Protection in a (Post)COVID-19 World and reported that reported a different set of outcomes, suggesting contextual divergence.

Conclusion

This comparative study concludes that the economic exclusion of persons with disabilities in Nigeria, and by extension Sub-Saharan Africa, is a multifaceted phenomenon sustained by interconnected barriers in employment, education, and social protection. The analysis indicates that discriminatory hiring practices and inaccessible workplaces severely restrict labour market participation, while an often-inadequate educational foundation, stemming from a lack of inclusive infrastructure and resources, perpetuates this cycle of exclusion. Crucially, the research demonstrates that fragmented and non-inclusive social protection systems fail to provide an adequate safety net, thereby cementing poverty and vulnerability rather than fostering empowerment and economic agency.

Consequently, the pursuit of the Sustainable Development Goals, particularly those concerning decent work, reduced inequalities, and poverty eradication, is fundamentally compromised without targeted interventions addressing this triad of exclusion. The primary contribution of this work lies in its integrated, comparative framework, which moves beyond siloed examinations to critically analyse how failures in one domain—such as education—exacerbate disadvantages in others, like employment, while being inadequately mitigated by social protection. This systemic perspective challenges policymakers to move beyond piecemeal solutions and recognise the interdependent nature of the barriers faced.

For Nigeria, the most pressing practical implication is the urgent need to mainstream disability inclusion explicitly within its national social protection policy frameworks, ensuring programmes are designed with accessibility at their core and are linked to active labour market policies that promote skills development and supported employment pathways. A critical next step for research and policy would be to conduct a comprehensive audit of existing social protection programmes and employment legislation against the provisions of the Discrimination against Persons with Disabilities (Prohibition) Act, 2018, to identify specific gaps in implementation and coverage. Future work must also prioritise participatory action research that centres the voices and lived experiences of persons with disabilities in designing and evaluating inclusive economic policies.

Ultimately, achieving the SDGs' imperative to 'leave no one behind' demands a concerted, systemic shift from viewing disability inclusion as a charitable afterthought to recognising it as a cornerstone of sustainable economic development and social justice in Nigeria and across the region.

Contributions

This study makes a distinct contribution by empirically analysing the intersection of disability, economic exclusion, and business practices within Nigeria's specific socio-economic context. It provides a contemporary, evidence-based framework for policymakers and corporate leaders to develop more inclusive employment and social protection strategies aligned with the SDGs.

Furthermore, the research advances scholarly discourse by integrating a business management perspective with development studies, highlighting how inclusive practices can drive sustainable economic participation. The findings offer practical recommendations for designing targeted

interventions that move beyond compliance towards creating genuine economic empowerment for persons with disabilities in the Nigerian market.

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