

# **Achieving equality in education for persons with disabilities, with special reference to persons with visual impairment: challenges and opportunities**

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## **Introduction:**

- 1 Early 19<sup>th</sup> Century Louis Braille developed the Braille code from the 'night writing' before which people who were blind or with visual impairment could hardly access formal education all over the world.
- 2 The 1884 Berlin Conference portioned Africa among various European powers. These European powers introduced into African Western Civilisation including formal education.
- 3 It was not until after the second world war, however, that education for persons who were blind or with visual impairment was sporadically introduced in Africa for the sake of the African blinded soldiers at the war, for example, Thika Primary School for the Blind in Kenya.
- 4 In the early 1960s, African countries began to regain their political independence a trade that took about thirty years (30) to complete.

## **Challenges:**

1. As a developing continent, Africa is placed in the third (3<sup>rd</sup>) developing world, which is characterized by material under development poverty; ignorance, disease; civil wars; and so forth.
2. The concept of special education is moving from the conventional 'residential school concept for any exceptional child category to inclusive education in order to cut down the cost of maintenance, education, facilities and equipment.

3. Teachers of special education require special training, which is quite expensive and limited in Africa.
4. Attractive incentives by way of salary remunerations to encourage teachers to take up special training required for special education is hardly considered important.
5. There is inadequate provision of materials to meet basic needs for persons with disabilities throughout Africa, not only due to poverty but also lack of information lack of equitable distribution of educational facilities and other opportunities and poor planning,
6. Majority of persons with disabilities especially visually impairment have negative self concept, feel insecure and competent in life, hence, they tend merely to watch and listen.
7. Parental failure and ignorance to take their children to school in preference to educating their 'normal' children. In many African countries, many families would rather continue their children with handicaps to the home, or use them as beggars for they still believe that its her 'curse' to parent such children.
8. Modern technology is advancing too fast to assist persons with disabilities. On the contrary, modern technology tends to displace them from work, for instance, in the sector of general communication.

### **Opportunities:**

- First and foremost, there is need throughout Africa for urgent political stability, economic development, social cohesion and welfare for all including those members with disabilities.
- Each state should take a national survey census to provide up to date data on various types of disabilities, and that such data be regularly updated for effective planning and financing of education; training and for providing social services to the persons with special needs.
- Networking and collaboration of all countries in the world in the provision of inclusive education all its phases starting from pre-primary to university, adequate teaching/learning materials, facilities and equipment; and a conducive learning environment for learners with special needs.
- Using modern technology for the improvement for the welfare of persons with special needs.
- Making education free and imperative for all children especially those with disabilities.

In conclusion the states should recognize the principal of equal primary, secondary and tertiary educational opportunities for children, youth and adults with disabilities, in integrated settings. They should ensure that the education of persons with disabilities is an integral part of the (entire) educational system; (The National Assembly, 1948).

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