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# **REPORT ON THE 2014 BAMENDA CONFERENCE ON DISABILITY AND REHABILITATION**

**Theme: Barrier Free Learning and Sustainable Development**

*November 27 and 28, 2014*

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## 1. INTRODUCTION

The 2014 annual Bamenda Conference on Disability and Rehabilitation held from the 27<sup>th</sup> to the 28<sup>th</sup> of November. It provided an opportunity for people interested in disability and rehabilitation issues in Cameroon in general and Northwest region in particular to come together and share experiences, ideas, and recommendations. The conference this year was held under the theme “Barrier free learning and Sustainable Development” with major focus on diverse routes to lifelong learning for sustainable development in different spheres of life. From the interactions in the workshop, ample opportunity was provided for information sharing and professional networking over the 2 days of the conference, in both small and large groups. Over two hundred participants were present in the two day occasion.

This report comprises three sections. Day 1, Day 2, resolutions and conclusion.

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### DAY ONE.

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#### 1.1 WELCOME ADDRESS AND OPENING REMARKS

The conference started with registration at 8 am. After registration formalities and breakfast, the conference officially kicked off with the arrival of the Governor’s representative Mr. Nji Joseph. This was followed by the signing of the National Anthem and a word of prayers. After welcoming and introducing the various participants by the SEEPD Program Manager, Ezekiel Benuh, it was time for the Governor to give his opening speech. In his inaugural speech the governors representative amongst other issues underscored the importance of building an inclusive society for persons with disabilities given that from recent statistics, they constitute over a quarter of the population of the country. He highlighted various actions of the government towards improving the lives of persons with disabilities relating to various instruments –national and international that the government has ratified. Mention was made of the exemption of persons with disabilities from school fee and circulars imposing accessible buildings for all future government projects. In conclusion he

identified that much still needed to be done and therefore while declaring the conference open, he encouraged the participants to make the conference fruitful and look for practical ways of building a more inclusive society.

## **1.2 PRESENTATION OF KEYNOTE ADDRESS**

After declaring the conference opened, the keynote address titled: “Accessibility: engaging PWDs in development” was presented by the seasoned journalist –Hilda Bih who thrilled the participants. Her discuss gave an in-depth personal reflection on accessibility and how to engage persons with disabilities in the development process. Drawing examples from her personal experiences as someone living with a disability, she recognized that persons with disabilities have enormous talents but need to be allowed to express them. She challenged stakeholders who are still lagging behind to wake up and create inclusive opportunities for all. While listing a number of prejudices that PWDs suffer, she underlined that the most significant barriers suffered are those erected in the mind leading to stigmatization. Such barriers related to attitude are invisible and hence society, nations and the international community could have good treaties and development goals but if these negative attitudes remain in the minds of people, the attainment of MDGs, and ratification of laws will only be wishful thinking. As a lady she went ahead to underline that women with disabilities even suffer four times their counterparts. While concluding her address in a note of hope, she insisted that everyone has a role to play and if everyone is given the opportunity to showcase their talents, such negative perceptions will be minimized (Appendix I).

Following the keynote address was a session of paper presentations as follows.

## **2. PRESENTATION OF PAPERS**

### **2.1. LANGUAGE USE DISABILITY**

Louis Mbibeh in this paper underlined the use of language as a very important tool for establishing relationships. He emphasized that language could make or mar relationships. In his paper he evaluated language use with specific attention to how it constitutes a barrier to the emotional and

even physical well-being of persons with disabilities and proposed appropriate language use patterns that can lead to positive attitudinal change.

## **2.2. INCLUSIVE EDUCATION AND SUSTAINABLE PEACE BETWEEN PWDs AND SOCIETY**

In this paper, Peter Tonain examined the concept of inclusive education as an indispensable way forward to the attainment of sustainable peace between persons with disabilities and their host communities, which will intend rekindle socio-economic and political progress. The author established socio-economic and political exclusion and marginalization as the major sources of conflict and instability between persons with disabilities and the society, with typical illustrations. The paper finally prescribed innovative inclusive education reforms that could bring about peaceful coexistence.

After this presentation, there was an interlude of music from a student and artist called Story Wander who himself lives with a disability.

## **2.3. COMMON UPPER EXTREMITY CONDITIONS AND THEIR MANAGEMENT**

Morag Crocker- an occupational therapist from Canada in her presentation explained what causes the following common upper extremity conditions and how they can be treated: Tendonitis and trigger finger, carpal tunnel syndrome, spasticity, post-stroke upper extremity problems and arthritis. The discussion on treatment options included what people can do at home like massage, use of hot and cold water, taking anti-inflammatory like Ibuprofen and consulting a physiotherapist.

## **2.4. IMPROVING EMPLOYMENT OPPORTUNITIES FOR VISUALLY IMPAIRED.**

Nyincho Samuel, President of the Coordinating Unit of Associations of Persons with Disabilities, Northwest region, in his presentation emphasized on improving employment opportunities for persons with visual impairments. From the premise that communication is one of the greatest barriers to employing persons with disabilities, especially persons with visual, hearing and speech impairments the author presented a project in which the coordinating unit of Association of persons with disabilities in the Northwest is initiating which will provide knowledge with regard to ICT so as

to ease accessibility to jobs and livelihood for persons with visual impairment as well as employers wishing to employ PWDs.

### **2.5. AN OVERVIEW OF THE EMERGING FIELD OF INCLUSIVE EDUCATION RESEARCH**

In this paper, L Cockburn et al (presented by Lukong Evelyn) established various conventions backing IE before examining published research studies and grey literature about IE in Cameroon. In conclusion the authors purported that there is a need for research and theoretical conceptualizations about all aspects of inclusive education in Cameroon. Filling these gaps can be seen as part of the process of ensuring that all children are able to realize their rights to education. A question and answer session which lasted for 15 minutes followed the last presentation.

## 2.6. GROUP REFLECTIONS

Workshop participants were divided into 5 groups with different topical issues to reflect on. The table below presents a summary of the different groups, members, and topics of discussion.

Group	Participants	Discussion Topic	Facilitators
Group 1	Health care providers	Hand conditions	Morag Crocker
Group 2	DPOs	Strengthening your organisation	Nyincho Samuel
Group 3	Educators	Understanding education theory and practice.	Louis Mbibeh and Evelyne Lukong
Group 4	Advocates and employers	Bringing inclusive learning to every organisation	Dorcas Waindim
Group 5	Gender advocates	Gender and disability issues	

At the end of the group discussions, rapporteurs from the different groups gave a summary of their discussions.

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### *DAY TWO*

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## 2.7. THE ROLE OF THE CHURCH TOWARDS PERSONS WITH DISABILITIES

Rev Mutanga Joseph in his presentation recognized that the church has not really been playing its role in recognizing the existence of PWDs and mainstreaming them in church activities. Condemning discrimination, Rev. Mutanga emphasized that people with and without disabilities are all God's children created in his image. He insisted that there is need for the empowerment of the clergy to become sensitive to persons with disabilities so as to involve them in church activities. Given that religion involves almost everyone, this presentation provoked lots of questions from the audience especially on practical ways the church is using or could use to empower and accommodate PWDs.

## **2.8. THE STRENGTHS OF NETWORKING FOR SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT**

The second presentation for the day focused on the strength of networking for sustainable development. The author Vivian Fanchingong started off by defining networking as a supportive system of sharing information and services among individuals and groups having a common interest. This to her is fundamental to avoid duplication of services and curb the wastage of resources to promote comprehension and healthy competition. Given the interactive twist of the presentation, it gave participants the opportunity to learn from each other's organization. In conclusion, **it was unanimously agreed that networking should be given priority.**

After the two presentations, there was a pause to digest the knowledge acquired. This light animation from students in DIFOTRONICS Bamenda thrilled the audience preparing them for further presentations.

## **2.9. DISABILITY AND REHABILITATION CENTERS IN BAMENDA AS CONTRIBUTORS TO SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT**

In this paper Solange Kiven explained the importance of center based rehabilitation in sustainable development. She further described the services, training and education offered at these centers. She stated that vocational skills for example hair dressing, shoe making, sewing, weaving are commonly learned by PWDs.

## **2.10. PANEL DISCUSSIONS**

Panel discussions were intended for regional Associations to with the public their mandates, challenges and way forward. The following was presented by the different leaders:

1. The national association of DPOs led by Samuel Nyincho emphasized that the aim of the association is to empower each other to take leadership positions. Their hope is to have one of them as Member of Parliament. The challenge is that of finance and resistance by the public to incorporate members in varied groups where they could take up leadership positions. They are however determined to move ahead despite the challenges
2. The Bamenda Orphans integrated community interest group (BOICIG) led by Kiven said the aim of the group is to assist vulnerable children by sponsoring them in education,



employment etc. The challenge remains that of funding which is always limited due to the increase in such vulnerable children.

3. Cameroon National Association of Women with Disabilities whose objective is to bring together all women and see how they can complement each other. In which case their activities extend from regional to national and even international. The challenge is that of selling the vision to the ministry so that it could strengthen the association. There is hope however that in the nearest future this will be achieved.
4. The Cameroon Clubfoot Care Project represented by the project officer Tina Ashiyo is a project that started in January with the aim of correcting all children born with clubfeet. The challenge is that of resistance by parents of children with clubfeet deformities to bring their children for correction. However continues sensitization continues with the hope of seeing the project acquire national recognition.
5. National Association of Physiotherapists as presented by the physiotherapist of Mbingo Baptist Hospital Mr Nkwenti Alfred is an association that is aimed at extending their services to all needing care. He added that membership is limited to physiotherapist with at least a Bachelor of Science degree. The challenge is the limited number of physiotherapists in Cameroon. There is need for training schools to be open to train many of them.

At the end of these presentations, members went back to the groups set up in the previous day but this time around to discuss lessons learnt.

Group	Participants	Challenge	Way forward	indicator	Responsible persons
Group 1	Health care providers	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Few health care centres</li> <li>• Poor facilities</li> <li>• Lack of information</li> <li>• Cultural beliefs</li> <li>• Accessibility and poor training background</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Volunteerism and advocacy</li> <li>• Road network and professional ethics</li> <li>• Sensitization</li> <li>• Blend between traditional and orthodox medicine</li> </ul>		

		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Negligence and poverty</li> <li>• Communication between doctors and patients</li> </ul>			
Group 2	DPOs				
Group 3	Educators	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Attitude, inaccessibility and training, inflexible curriculum.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Sensitisation of those negative attitudes</li> <li>• Implementation of laws</li> <li>• Supporting Inclusive education</li> <li>• More training, recruitment etc</li> </ul>		
Group 4	Advocates and employers	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Bringing inclusive learning to every organisation is a problem because of lack of communication skills between the employers and PWDS</li> <li>• Inadequate professionals with regards to disability</li> <li>• Lack of information about job opportunities</li> <li>• Negative cultural beliefs and social exclusion.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Inclusive job advertisement</li> <li>• More training</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• When u see PWDs gaining more employment</li> <li>• Inclusive communication</li> <li>• Participation in the society</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• PWDs, Family members, Stakeholders etc</li> </ul>

<p>Group 5</p>	<p>Gender advocates</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The vulnerability of PWDS is more with females than males</li> <li>• Psychologically accepting disability starts at home and parents start to favour females than males</li> <li>• Socially, MWDs are more favour because of cultural influences</li> <li>• Economically, since WWDs don't have academic qualifications, they have little or no economic independence.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• To boost the morals and self-esteem of WWDs</li> <li>• To promote gender equality in all aspects amongst PWDs</li> <li>• Counselling</li> <li>• Education and vocational training</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Change of attitude and improvement in standard of living</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Counsellors, special educators and the community</li> <li>• Families, NGOs, Social affairs, churches, women empowerment, government</li> </ul>
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### 3. ASSESSMENT AND RESOLUTIONS

After these presentations, it was time to do an assessment of the past conferences so as to look for past challenges and a way forward. This segment of the program was coordinated by Ezekiel Benuh and 5 of the main planners for this years' conference. The major challenge discussed for all the past and future conferences was that of funding, bringing all stake holders together especially in planning meetings. These challenges bring about repercussions in other domains. It was agreed that if there is enough funding, the conference could be extended to include other regions etc.

In terms of recommendation for the betterment of future conferences, it was resolved that;

1. Attendees of the Conference should include:

Delegates from APWDS, Church leaders, mayors, politicians, local authorities, educational authorities, teachers, parents of CWDs, teacher trainers, Bike riders, drivers' union, traditional doctors, health care providers and media houses.

2. With regards to raising funds for the conference, it was resolved that appeal letters should be sent to DPOs to support the conference and other stakeholders should be encouraged to support the Conference.
3. External funding should be raised by sending out well addressed appeal and invitation letters to business organizations, government officials as well as companies. Proposals should also be shared with international organizations for funding.
4. Subsequently, the conference should always be held towards the end of November with planning meetings beginning as early as March and the planning committee should consist of representatives from different organizations working with PWDs but also relevant government departments.
5. That the present planning committee members should call a meeting to choose the host organization and set up the planning committee for the next conference. In addition, the present planning committee has the responsibility to follow-up on the implementation of conference resolutions by the planning committee

#### **4. CONCLUSION**

Mr. Nyingcho Samuel, President of CUAPWD, heartily thanked the SEEPD Program for running the conference successfully. He continued by stressing on the need for feedback from the conference which could be a strategy of bringing in government officials, academia and politicians to attend conferences.

Ezekiel Benuh representative of the organizing committee in his closing remarks began by thanking all for coming and being so participative during the conference. He continued by thanking the planning committee members, presenters, International partners from Canada (ICDR) and USA volunteers, for their unwavering efforts towards the success of the Conference. He encouraged participants to be ambassadors of the conference by sharing the information acquired in their various organizations and equally implementing at their own level. While encouraging all participants to stay in the framework of the conference, he expressed his desire for future conferences to be better in the framework of successful planning of conferences. He called on all participants to implement recommendations adopted. He ended by wishing everyone a safe journey to their various destinations.

## 5. APPENDIX

### 5.1 ACCESSIBILITY: ENGAGING PWDs IN DEVELOPMENT

**KEYNOTE SPEECH AT THE BAMENDA CONFERENCE ON DISABILITY PRESENTED BY  
HILDA BIH MULUH.  
December 27, 2014**

I feel truly humbled and at the same time honoured to join you, as we come together to examine the very relevant topic of accessibility for PWDs in Cameroon. As a person living with disability myself, this is an issue that is very near and dear to my heart, but over and above that, I know that for the same reasons we are outlining here, I am one of the very few persons with disability who have been fortunate to get an education in our country and even gain some employment. For one such person to stand before you there are thousands of others languishing behind, simply because they have not been given a chance like me. I, therefore, consider myself incredibly fortunate and blessed.

As I get to think about it, one shouldn't care about accessibility only because they have one form of disability or the other. As members of this community and citizens of this beloved nation, it should concern all of us that some people are cut off from our society and left behind in the development process because the right bridges and investments have not been made for them.

I said, issues of accessibility concern us all-whether you are on a wheelchair like myself, use crutches, a white cane or any kind of cane for that matter, or whether you can stand on one or two feet, whether you use hearing aids or not, or whether you can fully make use of all of your faculties. As you know, there is no human being who is a hundred percent apt, so it should concern us all because all of us have one form of disability or another-disability is just a question of degree or for some, it's just a matter of time. Consequently, creating a more accessible society, is profitable for everyone.

I was born a very normal child, healthy by all standards and the admiration of many. As I grew older, I became increasingly disabled, the result of Muscular Dystrophy, a debilitating disease that weakens the body. It is thanks to this that I have lost almost all use of my hands and legs. As you can imagine, I have had my fair share of witchdoctor rituals, faith healer declarations of healing, names calling and all. Today however, with the benefit of hindsight, I am truly grateful for the experience I have had. I am even more grateful for the family God placed me in.

Much has been made of the fact that I am a disabled person, wheelchair bound, working with the national radio and television service of Cameroon. When I was first recruited into the CRTV in 2006, many people came up to me curious to know how I was going to make it to work each day, on a wheelchair. You may think their question was absurd, but if you have been to the building that prompted their question, where I worked for the most part of seven years, then you will think again. Like most public buildings in our country, there is no provision here for someone like me, who lives and works from a wheelchair-there are flights of steps everywhere, doors that are too narrow for my wheelchair, elevators that don't work most of the time or those that cannot access all the floors on the building. So even as I celebrate that I have a job, I am conscious that my output is greatly curtailed by the inaccessibility of the work place from which I operate.

I alluded to my family earlier. Both of my parents never had any formal education beyond the primary school level, yet they believed in the power of education to transform the lives of their children-boys and girls alike, disabled or not. They threw in all of their energy into helping me overcome the numerous barriers I grew up facing and still face so that I could be educated. If I am anything today, it is thanks to their sacrifice-carrying me on the back for many years when I didn't have a wheelchair, sometimes keeping my other siblings out of school because of poverty, but making sure I never stayed out, even when I wanted to so desperately at times. They helped build bridges that have enabled me surmount otherwise impossible circumstances, they offered themselves the best way they could to make sure I was a part of the community.

As I appreciate my family for the sacrifice they have and continue to make for me, I am reminded that not every disabled child in Cameroon is as fortunate as I was. I can't help but imagine how negatively different things would have turned out for me, had I not been blessed with a family as such. The story of Evelyn Afumbom comes to my mind. Evelyn is a very beautiful, bright, optimistic and assertive young lady, whose only misfortune is that she was born with a severe disability. Her mother was still a teenager and a student when she had Evelyn. Because she could not take care of this severely disabled child, the young mother had to take the child back to its grandmother in the village. Her mother for her part, at first glance concluded that the disabled child, with her frail, distorted body must be a curse, a bad omen to the family and therefore needed to be killed. Before they could snuff life out of her, Evelyn was rescued by a grand aunt, who opted to take care of her. She grew up with this grand aunt until she passed away and Evelyn found herself back with the grandmother who had opted to kill her in the first place. I met Evelyn in 2007, in the National Rehabilitation Center for the Disabled in Yaounde, after she had been expelled by the same grandmother. Her sense of humour and resolve to live would never tell you what she had survived through. Against all odds, Evelyn had taught herself English and French, moved from her village here in the Northwest Region to Yaounde. She has never had the privilege of sitting in a classroom for one single day to learn how to read and write. Without a wheelchair, she had learned to pull

herself with the help of a small stool to go around. She cooks, washes, eats and does her makeup with the help of her feet. She even runs her own small cosmetics business-she has succeeded to prove all the people wrong who thought she was useless because she was born with a disability, and I dare say if she had more assistance, she could accomplish greater things, things that can blow our minds away.

Evelyn's story is a reminder that if given a chance, if provided with the right tools and an accessible environment, we all can achieve great things, disabled or otherwise, God has endowed each one of us with incredible potential that needs to be tapped. I could cite you countless other stories of persons with disabilities who have overcome the hurdles and are serving this nation in varied capacities-from secondary school teachers to university dons, nurses, traders and even politicians. They are all living testaments of a need to break away from obsolete traditions that hamper us and look to the future.

Our minds are quick to race to the building of ramps and the ratification of treaties and conventions when we mention the word "accessibility". But for one brief moment, I would like us to take our minds away from those, important as they may be, and focus in a new direction-let us look inwards. The real barriers that need to be shattered in Cameroon today are the ones that exist in our minds. The barriers that are erected because we feel that someone is inferior simply because they look or speak or walk or even hear differently from us. Those need to be shattered.

The kind of barrier that is erected because some tradition or witchdoctor falsely labels someone a curse an ogbanje an omen or evil child needs to be eradicated if we must progress as a community and as a country. We must all take responsibility as perpetrators of such actions as traditional rulers and leaders in various levels, to let go of those aspects of our tradition that are holding us back.

Another barrier that needs to be brought down is stigmatization and ostracisation. Ours is still a society where children with disabilities are hidden in dark rooms shoved to relatives in remote places to keep them out of the public view. While we are quick to condemn those who perpetrate these acts, let us remember that we as a community are the ones who encourage them. With our words our looks and even our actions, we make it crystal clear to persons with disabilities that they don't belong here. From personal experience, I know that it takes superhuman effort sometimes just to survive as a PWD in our context.

If we are able to deal with the invisible barriers that we have erected, I believe we will be able to deal with the more visible ones. Not until we change our perception of disability and as a society engage in building bridges for PWDs, will things begin to change. As we call on government to

make our country more disabled friendly and more accessible we need to keep in mind that change will only come if we collectively deliberately engage in making it happen ourselves.

Now we know that the government exists to ensure the rule of law and to protect the weak and vulnerable. While there has been a lot of talk about making Cameroon more accessible, the government has to put its money where its mouth is. There needs to be enforcement of laws dealing with accessibility if we expect to make headway—that is what is happening in other places we need to see the government moving to empower PWDs and making sure no one is left behind. As our government embraces and promotes Information and Communication technologies there needs to be a move to make them accessible to PWDs.

This conference is holding at a time when the UN is organizing 16 days of activism on violence against women beginning November 25th. It is no secret to most of us that the levels of violence against women with disabilities in Cameroon are among the highest. According to one study, women with disabilities are four times more likely to experience violence in all its forms in their lifetimes than other women because of the lack of access to the very basic services that can protect them. As a disabled woman, I am all too aware of the effects such acts of violence can have on a woman's self-esteem and outlook on life. So when we cry out for more accessibility to structures and services, it is because our very lives are dependent on it.

As we all know, Cameroon is at a defining point in its history. As a relatively young nation, it is sad to say that we have not done much in the area of accessibility and the empowerment of people with disabilities. I am glad that the powers that be are projecting into the future with a vision. We have a chance with this new vision to correct the mistakes of the past, to ensure that nobody—disabled or not—is left behind in the development process. We have another chance to invest in the right infrastructure, the right support services, education, healthcare infrastructure that will engage PWDs in the development process. The question we ask is this: if now is not the right time, then when is the right time?

Franklin Delano Roosevelt was the 32nd American president. Born in 1882, he contracted polio at the age of 39. He is the author of the famous words “The only thing we have to fear is fear itself”. However, those are not the words I want to quote from him. He says’ “No nation however rich can afford the waste of its human resources”

If those are true for the United States, they are true for Cameroon as well. His words should speak to us as a young nation with close to twelve percent of its population living with disabilities, moving towards emergence. If we expect vision 2035 to be realized then we must invest in them. We cannot emerge with 12% of the team out of the field.



We must ensure that all facets of our society are inclusive and accessible. To do this, we must move beyond the rhetoric and begin to take concrete action.

President Roosevelt went on to become one of America's greatest presidents in spite of being crippled by polio because he was in a society that believed that your disability did not suffocate your God given potential.

PWDs in Cameroon just like everywhere else in the world, have immense potential to contribute to the progress of this country but the major problem is this: accessibility is denied them.

We do not ask for your pity or for your hand downs nor your favour. All we ask is for a chance to live freely and to be full participants in the development process. Give us that chance and see what we are capable of.

THANK YOU.

## **5.2 LANGUAGE USE, DISABILITY AND SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT**

### **Introduction**

Basically defined, language is a tool of communication. It is used to transmit a message from one person to the other. As emotional beings, human beings often use language to express specific emotions or to engender them. Language use is thus very essential in human social interrelation and interaction. Referring to someone's spouse as my angel, has resulted in conviviality and harmony within the family circles. This reflects the power of words which in effect are able to create and solve problems. Within the context of disability and development, language use constitutes one of the major impediments that can dampen self-esteem or enhance/boost this self-esteem to the highest positive levels possible and positive attitudes will ensue. This paper thus evaluates language use with specific attention to how it constitutes a barrier to the emotional and even physical well-being of persons with disabilities and proposes appropriate language use patterns that can lead to positive attitudinal change.

Before a detailed analysis of language use, it is necessary to define a few terms

### **Definition of Some key terms**

#### **1 Language**

Language could be defined in as many ways as possible. It could be verbal (spoken and written) or non-verbal (gestures) for example sign language. Peter Trudgill (1983:1) it is also a very important means of establishing and maintaining relationships with other people". This definition ties with the papers' objective of evaluating the kind of relationship established when we use language in particular ways. More so, according to Miler Swift (1980) every language reflects the prejudices of the society that nurtures it. It is within this backdrop that language use is considered in this paper as a consequent barrier to learning and sustainable development to PWDs if not properly used.

#### **2 Disability and impairment.**

#### **3 Attitudes**

Attitudes are a psychological cognate referring to personal view about phenomena, situations, objects etc. This often results in either positive or negative perceptions with consequent effects on livelihood. In Cameroon for example women are considered as weak, men strong, north westerners oppose, people with visual impairment are wicked etc. This engenders varying attitudes which are detrimental to daily functioning. The significance of attitude is captured by Benu (2012) while referring to inclusive education in these words "if infrastructural ameliorations are done, if mainstream schools are ready to admit CWD, if the necessary assistive technology is available and attitudes do not change

then the implementation of IE is bound to fail” . These attitudes develop especially from the way we regard others which is glaringly captured in the language we use.

### **The power of language**

When a clergyman says you are now husband and wife, we all know the implications. This is just to say language has what some linguists and psychologists like Jung and Levi-Strauss have called magical powers. (Smith and Williamson 1981) Words have that power to heal and to destroy. That is why it is believed that words can be used to effect change. people have died, some ostracized from their village just because they have been declared witches. Language and words thus embody inherent meaning that the user only invokes (to use the magician’s jargon) while speaking. Words matter. Words can open doors that enable people with disabilities to lead fuller, more independent lives. Words can also create barriers or stereotypes that are not only demeaning to people with disabilities, but also rob them of their individuality and dignity.

It is within this backdrop that we examine language use and disability. Of course persons with disability have witnessed a lot of prejudice not because of the action on them but in a majority of cases because of the consideration the society has against them. This consideration is mostly expressed in the words we use while referring to persons with disabilities. So this paper examines such usage within the context of the North West region of Cameroon with specific regards to its impact and how it retards learning as well as sustainable development.

### **Language use within the North West Region**

A majority to languages in the North West Region of Cameroon are of the Bantu and Semi Bantu linguistic families. This section of the paper presents an inventory of words in the different divisions of the North West region that refer to persons with disabilities or their related actions and activities. At the end an analysis of the social and semantic implications is done with proposals on remedial terminologies that can be used to refer appropriately to persons with disabilities without prejudice.

Bui, Boyo, Menchum Mezam , Ngokitungia, Momo, Ndonga-Mantung,

in a table insert, language, word, meaning in english, remediation in local language

### **The case of English language**

According to Miller and Swift (1980), every language reflects the prejudices of the society that nurtures it. In our societies it is observed that women have been linguistically dominated by men in several ways.

**Lexical generic** The use of masculine gender words despises the contribution of women to civilization. This is the case of job titles, professions etc. For instance, chairman, human, man-made, men of letters, pressman, manager, businessman, class master, superman, headmaster. Awa and sons, Awing Brothers Ltd

1. Academic degrees: Bachelor (BA) and Masters (MA)
2. Others, Frenchmen, my countryman, O Cameroon cradle of our fathers. Someone is knocking: who is he instead of her or she or they
3. Triviality in feminine words master/mistress, (mistress now turns to be a concubine, but master is respectful Madam/sir (terms of respect but madam refers more to a brothel manager). Governor/governess, major/majorette, host/hostess, mr/mrs/miss (mis and mr are under some control) Equally, women are seen to play passive roles and some people even consider them as food. My honey, tomato, sugar, jelloff rice etc and men as my lion etc

Apart from language and gender discussed above, the domain of disability displays just a similar phenomenon. Through language use, the prejudice suffered by persons with disability is very glaring. There has been some literature on the various expressions that are not disability friendly in different societies. While recognizing such efforts, this paper identifies such expressions common within the North West region of Cameroon and proposes ameliorations in this regard. The policy of most conferences on disability or other related issues is often very clear insisting on person first language. At times this is not well understood and people turn to patronize instead which is even more detrimental. A number of expressions in English have been found wanting in this regard. The table below presents an inventory of some of these words and expressions especially common within the North West region and necessary ameliorations.

### Interactive presentation here

#### Vocabulary to avoid

Instead of	Use
Despite their disability	Because of their ability, skill in ...
Disable toilet, disable parking space	Accessible toilet or parking space
Disadvantaged	Persons with a disability
Confined to a wheelchair	Wheelchair user
Visual impairment (not beautiful)	Vision or sight impairment
A defect	Congenital disability. Blind etc from birth
Person with disabilities	Person with a disability
the) handicapped, (the) disabled, abnormal, sufferer	Persons with disabilities
mental patient, insane, mad, lunatic	Person with a mental health condition. person

	with a mental health condition, or use the medical schizophrenia
afflicted by, suffers from, victim of	has [name of condition or impairment]
mentally handicapped, mentally defective, retarded, subnormal	with a learning disability (singular) with learning disabilities (plural)
Spastic (the term is derogatory and outdated)	person with cerebral palsy
confined to a wheelchair, wheelchair-bound	wheelchair user
deaf and dumb; deaf mute, mumu	person with a hearing impairment
the blind	people with visual impairments; use it only when referring to an organization
An epileptic, diabetic, depressive, etc	person with epilepsy / diabetes / depression or someone who has epilepsy / diabetes / depression
dwarf; midget	someone with restricted growth or short stature
fits, spells, attacks	Seizures

### Tips to note on language use and disability

- ❖ Person first language is recommended in all communications to give dignity to the human being and not the disability
- ❖ Be a bit patient allowing the interlocutor to finish their sentence. Don't try to complete it for them
- ❖ Some people are victims of war, crime, or exploitative wages. It is inappropriate to describe people as victims of a particular disability
- ❖ Make sure your language use does not reinforce a negative stereotype
- ❖ Do not refer to anyone as they cannot do it or that they lack ability. May be he/she has challenges in doing something. Everyone is endowed with abilities that simply need to be developed.
- ❖ Use a normal tone of voice, do not patronize or talk down.
- ❖ Do not refer to a learner as does not know. He/she has challenges in math for example
- ❖ Do not identify a person with a disability by their impairment. It causes offence to be given a medical label.

- ❖ When communicating with or about people with a disability, always remember that they may have one disability – but they have many abilities. Try to highlight their abilities
- ❖ Don't be too precious or too politically correct - being super-sensitive to the right and wrong language and depictions will stop you doing anything.
- ❖ Communicate directly to a PWD, even if accompanied by an interpreter or companion.
- ❖ Take care to ensure that language used does not reinforce a negative stereotype.
- ❖ Avoid using descriptions that do not privilege the person but instead reinforce the impression that the PWD is sick or dependent.
- ❖ Avoid using excessive hyperbole to refer to achievements of PWDs. While it is important to recognize and applaud the achievements it is important not to sensationalize giving the impression they could not have done anything better.
- ❖ While addressing PWDs, use language in the same way you use with everyone else.
- ❖ Dehumanizing language is not advisable, use instead a person first language and avoid saying 'a victim of' or 'suffers from'. Avoid collective nouns, such as 'the disabled'. One exception is that many deaf people whose first language is British Sign Language (BSL) consider themselves part of 'the deaf community.' They may describe themselves as 'Deaf', with a capital D, to emphasize their deaf identity.
- ❖ Use the word "special" with extreme care when talking about persons with intellectual disabilities. The term, if used excessively in references to Special Olympics athletes and activities, can become a cliché
- ❖ **Carer** Should be reserved for the 'family' of a person with a disability who provides unpaid support. Paid workers should be referred to as assistants, attendants or care workers

Don't use **Disadvantaged** to describe a person just because they have impairment. An impairment in itself (although often society's response to a person's **impairment** can be a disadvantage) may not necessarily be a disability.

Don't use **Handicap** to describe impairments. However this term can be used to describe the obstacles that restrict an individual's participation, eg. *Handicapped by lack of accessible learning material.*

**Patient** Should only be used when a person is actually receiving medical care or treatment, or in hospital. At other times use the same adjective as you would for a person without a disability, eg *client, consumer, customer, commuter, visitor, patron.*

**Normal** This is a statistical term. In order to distinguish from people with a disability it is acceptable to use double negatives such as *non-disabled* or *person without a disability* or descriptive terms such as *sighted, hearing, ambulant*

## Conclusion

The paper has so far examined language use and disability from a general perspective before applying it to the North West region of Cameroon. The aim has been to identify those vocabulary items in the languages used in the region that pose a communication barrier to PWDs in varied dimensions and the ensuing consequences as well as ameliorations within these lines. From the analysis, it is glaring that language use constitutes an essential element of human development and growth. Words matter. Words can open doors that enable people with disabilities to lead fuller, more independent lives. Words can also create barriers or stereotypes that are not only demeaning to people with disabilities, but also rob them of their individuality and dignity.

It is therefore very imperative for us to consider the language we use as it could build cities as well as destroy nations, build characters and destroy personalities, boast someone's moral and destroy their integrity, build a person and destroy a people, develop a community and destroy a country, it can make a session and destroy a whole conference like this one. Thank u for your kind attention.

**See complete paper for details.**

**Louis MBIBEH (mbibeh16@yahoo.com)**

### 5.3 TIPS ON LANGUAGE USE

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#### **5.4 EDUCATION AND CHILDREN WITH DISABILITIES IN CAMEROON: AN OVERVIEW OF THE EMERGING FIELD OF INCLUSIVE EDUCATION RESEARCH**



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#### **5.5 DISABILITY AND REHABILITATION CENTRES: CONTRIBUTORS TO SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT**



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#### **5.6 IMPROVING EMPLOYMENT OPPORTUNITIES FOR VISUALLY IMPAIRED**



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