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## Strategies for Vocational Rehabilitation of Persons with Special Needs in Nigeria

JULIANA ROTKANGMWA BODANG, C.M. VANDEH, E. UGO  
University of Jos, Nigeria.

**Abstract.** Even though, disabled persons all over the world including Nigeria are gradually but steadily coming up by themselves as far as their economic and social emancipation in the society is concerned, particularly with the creation or advent of an increasing number of opportunities with which they can realize their potentials {such as exposure and access to education enlightenment, societal recognition, medical rehabilitation etc} the discovery is still made that a very large percentage of the disabled persons population are losing out of this new consciousness due to their lack of access to vocational rehabilitation which for all practical purposes can be described as the viable alternative to the continued marginalization of the disabled. How this process is able to serve the employment interests of this group of people is what this paper shall endeavor to present.

### 1. Introduction.

#### 1.1 Definition of Vocational Rehabilitation.

Vocational rehabilitation is a process of restoring a disabled individual to the maximum usefulness of which he or she is capable physically, mentally and

vocationally. According to the International Labour Organization in 1973, the term Vocational Rehabilitation means “ that part of the continuous and coordinated process of rehabilitation which involves the provision of those vocational services e.g. vocational guidance, vocational training and selective placement designed to enable a disabled person secure and retain suitable employment.

Vocational rehabilitation according to McGowan and Porter 1967, is defined as a process of restoring the handicapped individual to the fullest physical, mental, social, vocational, and economic usefulness of which he is capable. This definition envisions a process aimed at helping handicapped individuals reach the highest possible capacity for usefulness. In many of the States, vocational rehabilitation provides services not only to those capable of attaining full-time competitive employment in the labor market, but extends services to those persons who are capable of only part-time, sheltered, homebound, or self-employment. The underlying formation of special programs for the handicapped involves two basic assumptions:

First, that every member of a democratic society has an inherent right to the

opportunity to earn a living, and make his contribution to society.

Second, that society has the obligation to equalize, as best it can by special services, the disabled person's opportunity to earn a living equal to the opportunity possessed by the nondisabled members of the society.

Vocational rehabilitation encompasses an array of services designed to facilitate and ease the return to work (Berkowitz, 1990). Typical services include, but are not limited to, vocational assessment and evaluation, vocational training, general skills upgrading, refresher courses, career counseling, on-the-job training program, job search, and consultation with employers for job accommodation and modification. These service delivery processes are not necessarily unique for people with certain disabilities; the intensity, amount, and the delivery modalities may vary depending on the needs of the individual. In addition, other personal, educational, and environmental factors are taken into account in the process. Vocational Rehabilitation is a program that provides individualized vocational rehabilitation and supportive services to assist eligible individuals with disabilities to get and keep jobs compatible with their skills and abilities. Vocational rehabilitation refers to any programs that seek to restore disabled individuals to their optimal physical, mental, social, vocational, and economic ability. Vocational rehabilitation, also called vocational rehab, is a service typically provided to disabled people, in order to help them secure and sustain steady employment. This process usually includes several stages, such as evaluation, career counseling, training, job placement, and ongoing employment support. Most rehab facilities emphasize individualized treatment for each client. There are many reasons why people may require vocational rehab services. Some may

need it to help them re-enter the workforce after an injury. Young people with disabilities may benefit from rehabilitation when they transition from the school system into the workplace. Others who have suffered from a long-term disability may use new technologies offered by rehab offices to help them manage their work.

Generally, one of the first things to occur when an individual visits a vocational rehab office is a client evaluation by a trained rehab counselor. This evaluation often consists of mental, psychological, and physical testing. Through this, counselors hope to determine whether the client can benefit from a rehabilitation program and what types of services that program should include. The type of rehabilitation an individual receives usually depends on the type of disability he or she experiences. Most vocational rehab centers offer services to people suffering from physical, mental, learning, or emotional disabilities. Each of these general categories of disability requires a different type of treatment, and some clients suffer from more than one of them. Vocational rehabilitation is a process of helping people who have suffered an injury or illness to rebuild their work skills. In some cases, an individual who has been injured can return to his or her previous job. If the injury or illness causes long-term or permanent limitations, it is possible to be trained for a different type of job.

In a legal sense, vocational rehabilitation is a workers' compensation benefit in some states, which involves programs designed to help workers who have become physically or mentally disabled and who can no longer hold the same jobs they had prior to their disabilities. Most vocational rehabilitation programs—whether part of workers' compensation or not—aid the disabled in receiving training for new occupations, locating jobs, retaining jobs, and building

permanent careers. The Social Security Administration defines a disability generally as a limitation in the type or quantity of work someone can perform, stemming from a chronic condition with duration of six months or more. Hence, this definition includes those who cannot work regularly or at all and are considered "severely disabled" as well as those who must seek new occupations because of their limitations and those who can continue to perform the same job but not the same amount of work..

Vocational rehabilitation will help identify your abilities, skills, and work interests so you can be matched with a good job. It is one of your most important benefits provided by law. Act early or risk losing this benefit. Your Vocational Rehabilitation Counselor will work closely with you, your doctor, your employer and other professionals to help you return to work when the time is right. Vocational rehabilitation helps maintain work activities or a return to the work force after an individual have been injured or become ill. It takes into account one's existing work skills and the effects of the individuals medical condition, and a range of other rehabilitation needs that may be addressed concurrently (such as psychological or social interventions).

## **1.2 Rationale for Vocational Rehabilitation**

The rationale for vocational rehabilitation is the principle that in an organized society, each member should have a right to an opportunity for a living and to make some contribution to the development of the society. It is the responsibility of the society to equalize by means of special services, a disabled person's opportunity to earn a living equal to an opportunity available to a non-disabled individual. Again, in support

of this principle, an American- Parker & Thomas wrote in 1999 that "the status of independence is self sufficiency, hard work, industriousness, contribution to society and upward social mobility of the individual, to the extent that if the disabled individual in unable to meet or reach these goals, he suffers a loss of personal dignity, prestige, both as a member of society and as member of a family". The rationale for vocational rehabilitation is to provide the individual with the skills and knowledge necessary to obtain suitable work. The rehabilitation coordinator cannot offer any employment, but may refer the individual to a rehabilitation provider who will recommend ways to help the individual to obtain suitable work.

If an individual is considered suitable to undertake a vocational rehabilitation program, he/she will be closely involved in the development of the program to make sure it meets his/her reasonable needs and that it recognises and builds on his/her skills, abilities and work experience. At the end of the vocational rehabilitation program, the division responsible and its rehabilitation providers will take all reasonable steps to assist the individual to obtain suitable work.

## **1.3 Scope of Vocational Rehabilitation Services.**

Vocational rehabilitation {as a process of overcoming disabling conditions associated with disability} will involve building new lives because the services of vocational rehabilitation generally include professional services rendered by physicians, teachers, psychologists, physiotherapist, guidance counselors and social workers. These services should be made available to the rehabilitees on an individual basis. In developed countries of Europe and America, some of the many disabling conditions

receiving attention from vocational rehabilitation include blindness, heart diseases, hearing impairment, speech defects, Orthopedic impairment and even alcoholism. It is believed that the scope of those conditions not included in the aforementioned. For these people, services should be provided for both those capable of achieving full-time competitive employment afterwards and others so severely disabled that they are only capable of part-time or sheltered employment. Furthermore, eligibility for vocational rehabilitation services in most countries is based on the existence of a vocational "handicap" resulting from disability and not on the financial condition of the disabled person or his family. In general it means all persons who have major employment handicaps as a result of disabilities and who are likely to benefit from the services provided by the vocational rehabilitation administration are eligible.

#### **1.4 Contents of a Good Vocational Rehabilitation Service.**

Services provided through state or public vocational rehabilitation programmes are supposed to be planned to meet the needs of the disabled on an individual basis. The rehabilitation process should be a planned orderly sequence of services related to the total needs of the disabled individual and the attempts of the vocational rehabilitation personnel to help solve these problems and thus bring about the vocational adjustment of the disabled person.

Attainment of the objectives of vocational rehabilitation may require many services including services rendered by physicians, hospitals, special clinics, rehabilitation centers, trade centers, employers \_ in both public and private sectors, etc. The range of rehabilitation services may naturally vary

from country to country and from one locality to another in the same country. However, services commonly made available and which should form the basis of any standard and effective programme include

(a) Full evaluation of the disabled person, including medical diagnosis to determine the extent of the person's handicap and to relate this to the kind of work such person will be able to do.

(b) Guidance and counseling to assist the individual to achieve good vocational adjustment.

(c) Surgical, psychiatric and hospital care and therapy, if these are necessary to reduce or eliminate the handicap.

(d) Supply of mobility aids such as artificial limbs and other prosthetic and orthotic services which the disabled person needs to enable him work efficiently.

(e) Providing training for the right job for the disabled persons, including personnel adjustments training and remedial education where these are necessary.

(f) Providing all other services usually made available by special rehabilitation centres, including sheltered workshops for the severely disabled and work adjustments centres for those who need such facilities.

(g) Payment of maintenance allowance to the disabled person {or his immediate family} and provision of transportation for him during the training period.

(h) Provision of tools, equipment and licenses need by the disabled individual for work as trainee employee or an established independent business entrepreneur.

(i) Placement services including follow up on placement to determine if the employer and the rehabilitee and other employees are satisfied with the placement.

(j) training of special personnel e.g. vocational rehabilitation counselor,

instructors (with the right sort of temperament etc) to suit the training needs of the disabled, including some other special services and facilities like interpreting for the deaf and reader services for blind rehabilitees.

## 2. Case for Pre-Vocational Training.

As a general practice, vocational training should ideally be preceded by pre-vocational training. In fact, Roessler & Livneh 1999 observed that the rehabilitation process begins at school since the quality of education which the disabled child gets to a large extent} determines his vocational aspiration. It is necessary for special schools in Nigeria to provide pre-vocational education to children from primary three upwards. Some of the more severely handicapped children might be unable to reach the Junior secondary level academically; hence the need to orientate such children and others towards some vocations. Pre-vocational training is an exploratory kind of training, aimed at familiarizing the disabled student with a variety of available job opportunities and job skills. Pre-Vocational training is systematic training, by which an individual acquires such skills and behaviours which are necessary for a particular vocation. The ultimate goal of rehabilitation is to develop optimum personality, potentials, and functions of the individual through training. Pre-vocational training is part of a total rehabilitation programme. The training enables the students to acquire a general knowledge of the various fields of work, open to persons in specific categories of the disabled. Pre-vocational training also provides ample opportunity for adjustment training including discovering aptitudes and developing proper attitudes and good work habits.

Skills and behaviours which are essential for any kind of vocation are:

- (i) **Cognitive Skills:** Individuals should have adequate comprehensive abilities, he should be able to understand oral and written instructions. He should have adequate cognitive skills in reading, arithmetic, time and money concept.
- (ii) **Personal Skills:** Individual should be independent in self-skills of eating, dressing, toileting etc. He should have proper personal hygiene and able to groom himself properly. He should be able to take care of personal belongings, he should be able to use telephone and public transportation.
- (iii) **Social Skills:** Individual should have good inter-personal relationship i.e. he/she should be able to relate or interact healthily with his co-workers and supervisors. He/she should have good social language i.e., he/she should be able to use phrases such as "Please" and "Thank you". He/she should be aware of community facilities and how to use them e.g. post office, hospitals, bank etc. He/she should cooperate with and have consideration for others.
- (iv) **Emotional Skills:** Individual should be emotionally sound enough to perform his work and should not have any psychological pressures on him i.e. family tension, anxiety, worries etc. He/she should have adequate frustration tolerance i.e., he/she should not react adversely to any criticism or

- failure in performances etc. He/she should have good motivation and interest to work. He/she should have self-confidence and good concentration.
- (v) **Physical and Sensory Motor Skills:** Individual should be physically fit to take any kind of job. He/she should have good psycho-social tolerance to work for the required number of hours. He/she should have adequate preceptor motor skills i.e., individual should be able to perceive the environment (work) as it is through tactile, visual, auditory sensation and understand it properly and then act accordingly.
- (vi) **Life Survival and Safety Skills:** Individual should have adequate life survival and safety skills i.e., he should know how to put out fires, treatment of minor cuts and burns, basic poison antidotes. He/she should be able to read basic signs e.g. Danger, Caution, Exit, Keep Off, Explosives, Traffic signals, Keep left, No Smoking, Stop - Look - Listen, Cross Roads etc. He should be able to take care of his/her health, eating habits and diets, good working posture. He should be able to take care of himself while working with sharp tools or working on a machine etc.
- (vii) **Work Related Skills:** Individual should be punctual in attendance and regularity i.e. , he/she should attend the class on every working day and on time. He/she should not remain absent without valid reason. He/she should be able to

work alone as well as in a group. He/she should be able to seek for help from co-workers or supervisors when required. He/she should be able to take initiative in his/her work i.e. He/she should start his/her regular work on his own without waiting for supervisors to tell him/her. He/she should ask if there is anything else to be done etc. He/she should be aware of his safety as well as care for other's safety.

### 3. A Model of Functional Vocational Rehabilitation.

In order for the disabled to benefit from the earlier mentioned contents of good vocational rehabilitation and thereby support themselves and their immediate families, all the special; vocational training institutions for the disabled need to be well developed and sustained by the appropriate authorities to become real models for the implementation of vocational rehabilitations. Given the right guidance and enabling environment, persons with disabilities can individually or collectively engage in activities to generate income such as:

- Typing
- Computer training
- Traditional Weaving
- Tie and Dye {Adire} product making
- Shoemaking
- Poultry
- Piggery
- Fishery
- General Agriculture.
- Knitting
- Pottery
- Cornflakes production
- Maize production
- Pure water processing
- Polythene bag making

- Soap making
- Garment making
- Hair dressing
- Mat making
- Door blind ornaments
- Calabash decoration
- Bakery
- Farming (crops)
- Fruit production
- Groundnut oil processing
- Snacks and fruit drinks
- Gari processing
- Soya beans processing
- Canteen
- Yam processing

#### **4. Sustaining Vocational Rehabilitation**

In discussing this aspect of the paper, it is proper to lay a kind of foundation which should be incorporated into core policy framework regarding rehabilitation of the disabled. One need to lay foundation in the philosophy of International Labour Organization adopted as far back as 1955 and the main thrust of the philosophy states that:

- (a) All disabled people have a right to vocational rehabilitation services meaning they have a right to skills training that can make them get jobs.
- (b) Vocational training for the disabled also has to identify the obstacles a disabled person may face in the workplace and try to find ways of getting rid of them.
- (c) Governments should take responsibility for developing and financing vocational rehabilitation services.

If we are to agree on these principles and the internationally recognized norm, then, it stands to reason that everything must be

done to ensure sustenance of vocational rehabilitation as a fundamental requirement for the rescue of disabled Nigerians particularly those presently without any hope of economic viability. Of course as suggested by the I.L.O, Government { at all levels in Nigeria} should be in the vanguard of sustaining the programme by making sure it provides a major part of the funding requirements for it. For a developing country where facilities are yet to be in their optimum level, Government is expected to provide many of the vocational rehabilitation services e.g. the establishment and sustenance of vocational training institutions. Even in other advanced countries, government {through many of its agencies} controls vocational rehabilitation services. In such countries, either the Central Labour Ministry or Social Welfare and Social Insurance is made responsible for them.

In the U.S.A where voluntary agencies are involved in vocational rehabilitation, the national government or its agencies, usually supervises operations and also provides financial support. In these days, when even the United Nations has embraced the philosophy of community – based vocational rehabilitation as a compliment to present rehabilitation efforts, Government is still expected to discharge its role in sustaining all existing rehabilitation centres, especially in a society not as developed as ours, where even the community is yet to understand its role in the rehabilitation of the disabled. To further sustain the programme, people need to see vocational rehabilitation as an investment. This is because the programme {in the long run} enables the disabled to support themselves and others, to remove the burden of care from his community and to contribute to the development of the community through paying of his taxes and is no longer a tax



consumer but a tax contributor. Above all, rehabilitation has given him ‘the enhancement of personal dignity through the ability to work. According to McGowan and Porter {1967}, the U. S. Rehabilitation Administration maintains that in 1966, rehabilitated disabled persons earned additional 33 dollars for every dollar of Federal, state and private funds spent on their rehabilitation. There is no reason why this cannot be so in Nigeria. We need not regard the problem of rehabilitating the disabled as a special interest investment limited to the disabled and their sponsors but as a difficulty that touches the lives of many people in different positions.

There is the need for the institution of a legal framework to give protection to the disabled in this area as well i.e. vocational rehabilitation to be guaranteed by law for any deserving disabled individual and also for an employment quota for products of vocational rehabilitation and even disabled school leavers. This is the only way by which funds expended on the rehabilitation of the disabled will not be wasted. This is not to say that other measures {e.g. dialogue, persuasion and enlightenment campaigns} should not be pursued to achieve cooperation of the employers of labour in the country. There are certainly similar parallels that can be drawn from other countries in Europe, Asia and the Middle East. In all these places employment for the disabled is provided from the law.

There is a very important need for research and development if the vocational rehabilitation programme is to endure for a long time. In the advanced world sponsored investigations are conducted by hospitals, science institutions and Universities on issues on the disabled. In the U.S. for instance, special research and training centre set up by legislative enactments work

continuously to discover new information about disability and to initiate new procedures and techniques for controlling and reducing the effects of disabilities and disabling conditions. Now with the computer age, many countries have established national data systems in rehabilitation and they use computers for storing analysis, retrieving and disseminating scientific, industrial and technological data relevant to rehabilitation. Right now, research studies that provide practical solutions to pressing needs in the fields of vocational rehabilitation are carried out in many of these countries. These needs include:

- (i) Techniques and methods of vocational assessment and vocational training
- (ii) Employment opportunities for the handicapped
- (iii) Methods of enhancing motivation of disabled people undergoing training
- (iv) Adaptation of jobs to suit some special categories of the disabled
- (v) Co-operative schemes for the disabled
- (vi) Suitable forms of rehabilitation for severely handicapped persons
- (vii) Drug addiction problems vis-à-vis vocational rehabilitation

For Nigeria, the basic vocational rehabilitation research necessary for action is a comprehensive census of the disabled. This may involve classification of handicaps according to type and degree of severity. After this a survey of jobs suitable for the various categories of the disabled could follow. Pre- vocation arrangements in special schools and vocational training programmes could be based on the job information. Other research –worthy

subjects in the field of vocational rehabilitation in Nigeria may include:

- (a) Determination of effectiveness of vocation counseling;
- (b) Family and societal influences on the attitudes of the disabled;
- (c) Barriers to social integration of the disabled;
- (d) Architectural barriers in the Nigerian society;

## 5. Conclusion

In conclusion, we need to bear in mind that there is no country or society which is free from the problems of chronic diseases, old age and disability. The stability and orderly progress in any community are threatened if the community has to maintain a large number of its members who, because of disability, are unemployable and hence idle. To ignore such members or to pretend that they are less deserving than the rest of us are sowing future economic distress and social unrest. A comprehensive programme of vocational rehabilitation is what is needed to ensure maximum usefulness of the potentials for our country's manpower.

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