

# **Communiqué issued at the end of the First National Conference on Equal Opportunity of Access to Higher Education in Nigeria**

Organised by

Joint Admissions and Matriculation Board (JAMB) Equal Opportunity Group (JEOG)

**at the**

**Abuja Continental Hotel,  
Abuja**

**25-26 September, 2023**

## 1.0 Preamble

Disability is the inability to see ability  
– Vikas Khanna

Inclusion is not a matter of political correctness. It is the  
key to growth  
- Jesse Jackson

The JAMB Equal Opportunity Group (JEOG)- a multidisciplinary group of experts was constituted by the Registrar and Chief Executive Officer (CEO) of the Joint Admissions and Matriculation Board (JAMB), Professor Is-haq Olanrewaju Oloyede in 2017 in furtherance of his quest for excellence in the administration of Unified Tertiary Matriculation Examinations (UTME) and improved access to higher education particularly to our compatriots having one disability or the other.

The Group under the auspices of JAMB organised a 2-day conference with the theme “Towards Increasing Equal Opportunity of Access to Higher Education in Nigeria” at the Abuja Continental Hotel, Abuja between the 25<sup>th</sup> and the 26<sup>th</sup> of September, 2023. The overarching objectives of the conference included the following:

- a. bringing the challenges confronting people with disabilities in accessing higher education in this country to the attention of stakeholders in the sector;
- b. analysing the problems confronting higher education in Nigeria especially in relation to people with special needs with a view to providing actionable and sustainable solutions to them;
- c. proposing changes that can be made to the current national policy on education and though that address the inequalities in the opportunity of access to higher education especially by the blind, the albinos, persons with autism, Down-Syndrome and others in correctional centres.

The conference appeared to be *sui generis* in Nigeria’s educational annals not only by the quantum of the attention it garnered but also by the quality of attendance and active participation

from the public and private sectors, international organisations, and other statutory bodies that are involved in the education of people with disabilities. Members of the diplomatic corps were also in attendance. The conference witnessed an assemblage of stakeholders not only in the higher education sector; and the Nigerian economic and social sectors but also the political elite. The occasion was attended by the Chairmen of Senate and House Committees on Education for the Disabled, Heads of tertiary institutions, Heads of Examination Bodies, and over five hundred other registered participants. Perhaps the most important “faces” and “voices” that added verve and panache to the conference were people with disabilities, some of whom are currently students of institutions of higher learning from across the federation.

The opening ceremony of 2-day conference was flagged off with a welcome address by the Registrar/CEO of JAMB, Prof Is-haq O. Oloyede, *CON, FNAL*. The Registrar outlined the many challenges faced by JAMB since inception in facilitating tests and assessments for the disabled candidates. The address was followed in quick succession by the recognition and conferment of awards on the top three Universities, Polytechnics and Colleges of Education in Nigeria with the highest admission of blind candidates and people with special needs in the year 2022. The institutions recognised for these great feats were Nnamdi Azikiwe University, Awka, University of Ilorin, Ilorin and University of Calabar, Calabar; Kaduna Polytechnic, Kaduna, The Polytechnic Ibadan, Ibadan, Kano State Polytechnic, Kano and Federal Polytechnic Damaturu, Yobe State; Federal College of Education (Special), Oyo, Federal College of Education, Zaria, and Federal College of Education, Kano.

The climax of activities during the opening ceremony was the keynote address delivered by the Honorable Minister of Education, Professor Tahir Mamman, *OON, SAN*. In his speech, he expressed the commitment of the Federal Government inclusivity in education and the creation of the right learning environment to facilitate inclusive access for people with disabilities. Thereafter, the Roadmap for Inclusive Access to Quality Higher Education in Nigeria 2024-2028 Strategic Plan was unveiled by the Minister ably assisted by the Registrar of JAMB, Prof Is-haq O Oloyede, the Chairman of JAMB Equal Opportunity Group (JEOG), Professor Peter A. Okebukola and other dignitaries.

The conference thereafter moved into plenaries. These featured nine sessions that were structured under carefully chosen themes. The plenary session began with the exploration of the ‘grammar’ of “Equal Opportunity of Access to Higher Education in Nigeria and the Role of JAMB” which was persuasively presented by the Registrar of JAMB, Professor Is-haq Oloyede. Following in quick sequence were other sessions that focused on “Equal Opportunity of Access to Higher Education in Nigeria - Perspectives from regulatory agencies”, “Field Experiences on Challenges and Solutions to Assuring Equal Opportunity of Access to Higher Education in Nigeria”, “Experiences of Blind and other Students with Special Needs in Higher Institutions in Nigeria: Challenges and Solutions to Retention and Graduation”, “Role of Stakeholders in the Realization of the JAMB Equal Opportunity Agenda”, ‘Inclusivity in higher Education in Nigeria: Practical steps towards implementing the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities and Relevant National Policies’, and “Highlights of the **2024-2028 Roadmap (Strategic Plan) for Inclusive Access to Quality Higher Education in Nigeria**”; “Challenges and solutions to the conduct of UTME for blind candidates and other special groups. **The ninth plenary brought the conference to a close.**

## 2.0 Observations

From the opening ceremony through to the last plenary, and from the presentations and the robust discussions that they generated, the following represent the major observations of the conference:

1. The Demographics
  - a) That Nigeria's higher education with 1000 institutions and enrolling about 2.8 million students remains probably the most expansive in sub-Saharan Africa
  - b) That by 2050 a doubling of enrolment is envisaged, a leap that will be driven by the quantum jump in population from the current estimate of 213 million to 400 million in 2050.
  - c) That recent statistics, including that of the WHO, estimates Persons With Disabilities (hereafter PWDs) in Nigeria to be around 15 percent (about 25 million of the total Nigerian population)
  
2. Challenges
  - a) **Non-Implementation of Governmental Policies**
    - i) Whereas several attempts have been made by previous governments to cater to and indeed care for the education of PWDs some of which resulted in the formulation of National Policy on Education (2013) and the National Policy on Special Education (2018), the implementation of the provisions of these policies has largely failed to meet the expectations of stakeholders in the sector.
  
    - ii) that the failure of policies hitherto formulated on inclusive education in Nigeria have not achieved their goals due, in part, to lack of political will and commitment at all levels of government. This is evident in inadequate funding of the sector, lack of special schools and teaching aids for people with special needs, non-provision and promulgation of legal instruments or mandates that would motivate appropriate action, lack of awareness about special schools/programmes for special people, inadequate support by individuals and NGOs, poor remuneration of teachers, increasing rate of insecurity, increasing rate of poverty, cultural beliefs and negative perceptions of people with disabilities, ethnic/regional factors, and social class of the parents or caregiver.
  
    - iii) that emphasis placed by government is on basic education for PWDs, not those in tertiary education.
  
    - iv) that lack of integration of the precolonial education system into the formal education system has led to grave disconnect between citizens' cultural heritage and the demands of modernity.

## **b) Weak Institutional Capacities.**

Recognised that most tertiary institutions in Nigeria do not have or have outrightly not dedicated enough resources to the provision of facilities that would cater to the needs of people with disabilities or special needs on their campuses. This is axiomatic in:

- i) lack of innovative and up-to-date pedagogical and assistive tools for teaching and learning for people with special needs. For example, there is no valid model or method for teaching mathematics for the visually-challenged. Not a few institutions of higher learning have declined admission to high-flying PWDs even in instances when such people have met the basic requirement for admission into highly competitive academic programmes such as the MBBS or other science related disciplines as a result of this huge deficit in pedagogy. This equally strengthened the notion that the only course of study that PWDs may pursue in life is special education even when they have the strong belief in their ability to excel in other fields of human endeavor despite the physiological challenges they are facing.
- ii) lack of adequate manpower and resources, on the part of examination bodies and agencies, to cater to the eclectic needs of people with disabilities during the time of admission exercise and by tertiary institution consequent upon their admission.
- iii) extremely unfriendly facilities and infrastructures on our campuses such as potholes-ridden campus-roads that impede easy movement of the disabled, building facilities that were constructed without any thought or attention given to people with special needs and lack of dedicated routes to lecture rooms and libraries for people with disabilities.
- iv) Libraries that are completely lacking in resources dedicated solely for learning and research by people with disabilities (hereafter PWD)
- v) lack of provision of interpreters for easy digestion of lectures

## **c) Inter-institutional Challenges**

Increasing access to quality higher education to PWDs also faces encumbrances from lack of synergy among agencies that are usually involved in the process. These often come to the fore through:

- i) lack of consensus on the methodology of administration of the various qualifying tests and texts that different candidates have to sit for and read respectively.
- ii) commission of examination misconducts by candidates in cahoots with correctional or CBT centres

- iii) discrimination between university graduates and HND holders that has stifled the interest of PWDs in seeking admission into polytechnics with consequential attrition in the number of graduates from the latter.

**d) Challenges posed by PWDs**

Without prejudice to their desires to have quality higher education, PWDs sometimes pose grave challenges to stakeholders' efforts to improve quality access. These include:

- i) insufficient or total non-disclosure of the extent of their disability at the point of registration for admission tests or examinations
- ii) preferences for some institutions of higher learning that are not based on the availability of facilities for PWDs in the latter but their proximity to their places of origin.
- iii) non-provision of full contact details by PWDs at the point of registration for examinations and tests.

**e) Societal challenges**

- i) The conference observed that PWDs still suffer negative stereotypes, discrimination and lack of acceptance not only from their peers suffering no disability but indeed from the larger society.
- ii) PWDs experience the negative effects of insecurity and poverty probably more than other members of the society particularly in our institutions of higher learning.

**3. Resolutions**

Pursuant to the above observations, the conference resolved as follows:

**a. General**

- adopted the Strategic Roadmap for Inclusive Access to Quality Higher Education in Nigeria 2024-2028 unveiled at the opening ceremony
- recommended the Strategic Roadmap to government as an instrument for inclusion in the development of new policies that would rein in and put an end to the disfavor and discrimination being experienced by PWDs in our institutions of higher learning
- called on government to increase financial and legislative support to help JAMB actualise its vision of inclusivity in tertiary education through the activities of JEOG.
- Consider the possibility of introducing federal scholarships for PWDs
- Consider waivers for the importation of assistive tools and devices for teaching and learning by PWDs.
- establish more special colleges of education in the remaining five geopolitical zones of this country.

- equip tertiary institutions with e-learning devices, tools and materials such as talking dictionaries that should be distributed across the six geopolitical zones.
- expand job opportunities for people with special needs and, in fact, ensure compliance with extant legal provisions for at least 5 percent ratio in favour of PWDs in all recruitment exercises
- aggressively pursue improved welfare for PWDs and their teachers
- amend education loan bank such that scholarships are released to students' institutions directly (covering school fees and accommodation), rather than to the students
- scale up efforts to combat insecurity and poverty in the nation as a whole, while paying special attention to the education sector
- integrate pre-colonial education system into formal education
- consider collaboration with the Universal Basic Education Commission (UBEC) in order to improve access to quality education to PWDs as a whole using the bottom-up approach
- attach conditions to awards/funds given to institutions for promoting the welfare of PWDs to ensure that the funds are spent for the specific purposes they are meant
- that TETFund, in extending grants to tertiary institutions, should include clauses that would guarantee increased access to higher education to people with disability.
- TETFund should consider special fund for research into the production of assistive devices locally

## **b) Specifics**

### **i. Resolutions Concerning JAMB**

- That the Board, while leveraging ICT tools, should establish counseling and development centres for candidates with special needs
- That the Board should liaise with other government agencies and institutions in the higher sector to provide Guidance and Counselling services to candidates with special needs
- Stop negative and undue interference by parents in the admission of PWDs into tertiary institutions

### **ii. Resolutions concerning Higher Educational Institutions**

- Increase capacities of lecturers and administrative staff to discharge their duties and responsibilities to PWDs with empathy; not only as mentors but also as *in loco parentis*.
- Consider the introduction of dual certification programmes for PWDs with the potential to change the negative perception of polytechnic education
- Waive the requirement for mathematics for admission into tertiary institutions for blind candidates and other visually-impaired candidates until adequate provisions are made for teaching the subject.
- Give adequate attention to provisions of ramps and other conveniences for PWDs in the construction of new lecture theatres and hostel facilities.
- Establish special needs library for PWDs that should be well-resourced with facilities that are specifically meant to ease learning and research of PWDs.

- Ensure the engagement of staff with expertise in sign languages and deploy them as interpreters in lectures halls, seminars, and libraries
- Give priority to PWDs in hostel room allocation especially rooms on the ground floor of halls of residence
- Improve accessibility of facilities to PWDs through provision of ramps, removal of potholes on roads in institutions of higher learning among others
- Demanded that physically challenged candidates that meet the minimum qualification requirements for admission into any tertiary institution should no longer be denied admissions
- Called for one hundred percent pro rata rise of equitable space in admission for PWDs
- Provide adequate information about facilities that are available for PWDs in each institution at the point of advertisement for application for admission.
- Give adequate attention to the training of experts that will attend to individual needs of persons with disability
- Celebrate PWDs particularly those who excel in their individual fields in line with the UN Charter.
- Appoint PWDs focus-persons in each institution
- Establish PWDs forum in institutions of learning that would meet regularly under the chairmanship of the heads of tertiary institutions
- Establish Disability Support Office (DSO) whose sole mandate would be that of attending to the needs of PWDs
- Give automatic employment to PWDs upon graduation particularly those who distinguish themselves among their peers.
- Provide audio-visual aids (assistive devices) for PWDs for learning
- Organise seminars and workshops that would target attitudinal change and correct negative perceptions of PWDs among all stakeholders in the higher education sector.
- Mandated a committee of six constituted at the conference to administer, in conjunction with JEOG, all the resources generated for persons with disabilities during the conference.

*“Inclusivity in tertiary education would become a reality when those with ability begin to appreciate the challenges in disability”*

- Comfort Ekwo 2023

Comfort is a person with disability