

Educational obstacles for children living with disabilities in Cameroon : The Way forward

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ABSTRACT

It is important to emphasize that all the various types of disabilities have an effect on the formal education of the people living with disabilities at different levels. The representation of children living with disabilities is social because it is elaborated from the social order and values accepted by the society. Concerning education integration very little is often seen concerning the role played by the different stake holders involved in the education of persons living with disabilities. Much has been written about disability and the integration of persons living with disabilities. However, only 5% of children living with disabilities in Cameroon go to school and less than 2% complete the secondary education cycle. This is principally because very few persons living with disabilities can afford funding for their studies and lodging or have facilitating conditions to be educated. Those with disabilities should receive either an education in a normal school, with the probably needed help or specialised programs if the level of disability is an insurmountable obstacle to admission into a normal school. Unfortunately, for many families in Cameroon, this school obligation is not applied to children living with disabilities. The society itself also poses a problem to children living with disabilities. Consequently, many children living with disabilities in regular schools and training centres do not have their needs adequately met by the different partners (parents, the state or society). At the level of the Institutions catering for children with disabilities there are quite a number of difficulties. A conspicuous lack of teachers and infrastructure constitute part of the difficulties faced in their education in Cameroon.

RÉSUMÉ

Il est important de mettre l'accent sur le fait que tous les différents types d'incapacités, à divers niveaux, ont un effet sur l'éducation formelle des personnes vivant avec un handicap. La représentation des enfants vivant avec un handicap est sociale parce qu'elle est construite à partir de l'ordre social et des valeurs acceptées par la société. En ce qui concerne l'intégration de l'éducation, on ne voit pas beaucoup le rôle joué par les

parties prenantes impliquées dans l'éducation des enfants vivant avec un handicap. On a beaucoup écrit sur l'incapacité et sur l'intégration des personnes vivant avec un handicap. Cependant au Cameroun, 5% seulement des enfants vivant avec un handicap vont à l'école et moins de 2% d'entre eux terminent le cycle secondaire. Ceci est dû principalement au fait que très peu de personnes vivant avec un handicap ont les moyens de payer leurs études et leur logement ou jouissent de conditions pouvant faciliter leur éducation. Celles qui souffrent de handicaps devraient soit recevoir une éducation dans une école de type normal, avec l'aide probable nécessaire, soit suivre des programmes spécialisés si le degré de l'incapacité constitue un obstacle insurmontable pour l'admission dans une école de type normal. Malheureusement, pour de nombreuses familles au Cameroun, cette obligation de scolarisation n'est pas appliquée aux enfants vivant avec un handicap. La société elle-même pose un problème aux enfants vivant avec un handicap. En conséquence, les besoins de nombreux enfants vivant avec un handicap et qui fréquentent les écoles de type normal et centres de formations régulières ne sont pas satisfaits de manière appropriée par les différents partenaires (parents, Etat, société). Au niveau des institutions qui s'occupent des enfants vivant avec un handicap, un certain nombre de difficultés se posent. Au nombre de celles-ci, on peut citer pour le Cameroun le manque aigu d'enseignants et d'infrastructures.

INTRODUCTION

Disability refers to impacts that chronic conditions have on people's ability to act in necessary, expected and personally desired ways in their society. It is important to emphasize that all the various types of disabilities have an effect on the formal education of the people living with disabilities at different levels. For this reason, those involved in the educational system must be aware of it in order to work out training programs with respect to the type and degree of disability, thus facilitating the academic integration of persons concerned. « *Is considered a person living with disability any one who because of a physical, mental, congenital or accidental deficiency has difficulties in carrying out activities as a normal person* » stipulates the Cameroonian law (1983 : 57) related to the

protection of persons living with disabilities. In other words, a person living with disabilities is any person who is not able to go about on him/her all or part of the necessary normal activities for an individual or social life because of congenital, physical or mental incapacities. A person is said to be living with a disability when he/she has an inborn or acquired deficiency. The dysfunctioning here could be organic (physical or sensorial) or functional or a mental disorder

Organic deficiency is inborn or acquired when it corresponds to a lost of substance or an alteration of a structure, a psychological, physiological or anatomic function. It is a direct resultant of incapacity which corresponds to all reduction (resulting from a deficiency), partial or total, from the ability to accomplish an activity in a way within the limits considered normal for all human beings. It could also be a disability or social disadvantage for a given individual resulting from a deficiency or from an incapacity which limits or inhibits the accomplishment of a normal role (in relation to age, sex, social or cultural factors). In this presentation disability refers to those hindrances or obstacles which are physical, mental or sensorial that inhibits an individual from going about his/her normal activities including the ability to procure adequate education.

It is worthwhile to note the importance accorded to the social representations of social enquiries whose social space should be highlighted. In social psychology particularly according to Jodelet (1989), representation is considered as having the following characteristics :

- It is socially elaborated since it comes from experience and also from information, knowledge acquired and the morality of the thought to be transmitted through education and social communication;

- It has a practical focus on the mastery of the environment (material, social ideals) and the orientation of the conduct of communication;
- It leads to the establishment of the vision of reality which starts from the social (group and classes) or cultural whole.

Social representation is rooted in symbolisation which relies on interpretations which make it more significant. Representation is not a pure reflection of the world; it is an inclination to what it represents (ibid). The topic that we are dealing with in this study is a social phenomenon which is endowed with different ideas, values and models that shape its group of belonging or the ideologies transmitted in the society. The representation of children living with disabilities is social because it is elaborated from the social order and values accepted by the society. It is therefore, a social make-up. Disability is a highly varied and a complex condition with a range of implications for social identity and behaviour. It largely depends on the context and is a consequence of discrimination, prejudice and exclusion. It emphasizes on the shortcomings in the environment and in many organized activities in society, for example on information, communication and education, which prevent persons with disabilities from participating on equal terms.

The concept of disability for children in the educational process can also be elaborated from the functional perspectives. In our study we are looking at the impact of the representational biases of disabilities or obstacles on the education of the children involved and their social economic integration. Even if each parent or teacher had his/her own representation of children living with disabilities, related to personal history, the family and the context in which they live, it will be difficult to envisage children living with disabilities as a social group constituting an entity, sharing a certain representation of persons having specific needs and seeking for a common social identity, or as Jodelet (1989) says,

a social affiliation. This is because; sharing a common ideology and a language is an affirmation of a social relationship or an identity. Instead, this is why in our study we are not looking at children living with disabilities as a group of people seeking for an identity. The social representation given to them does not play an integrative role in their educational process. In other words the representations attached to the needs of these persons emphasize on the function of specific assistance in all its forms which is a kind of alienation that gives rise to particular attitudes towards them.

Concerning education integration very little is often seen concerning the role played by the children living with disabilities themselves. The main cause of this eviction comes from the representations given to disabilities by others and the hypertrophy of the degrading feeling attached to them (Zaffran, 1997). These representations in themselves are obstacles. That is why in our study we had to explore the feelings that others have towards children living with disabilities in the school milieu. This shows in an explicit manner how the social representations of disabilities or children living with disabilities determine the thought of the individual who constitute the real in which he is found and where he/she is given a specific attribute (Abric, 1987).

Much has been written about disability and the integration of persons living with disabilities. However, little has been said about their educational rights or about obstacles in their educational process. By evaluating the level of integration of people living with disability in Cameroon, Kanga (2008) asserts that despite the existence of legislation and the required dispositions, this category of the population is still struggling for survival and social integration. In the same way Ondoua Abah (2002) reveals that only 5% of children living with disabilities in Cameroon go to school and less than 2% complete the secondary education cycle. Therefore, very few persons living with disabilities can afford funding for their

studies and lodging. Their adaptation is still not very evident, only 24.76% (ibid). As Ondoua continues, 22.8% do not have adequate means to displace themselves and a very minimal part (0.95%) are involved in accidents and 1.90% are sick and cannot have access to school establishments.

METHODOLOGY

Although the study was based more on a qualitative assessment of the education of children living with disabilities, qualitative methodologies were applied in the data collection process. However, quantitative data was integrated as it provided further clarification or insight. Following the construction of the research instruments and the adoption of the Questions and Focus Group Discussion Guides, our field work was conducted. To be sure that all information is authentic we worked with some persons living with disabilities as interviewers or enumerators. In our time frame, the data collection process took three weeks including documentary research or literature review.

The population for this study was from six of the ten regions of Cameroon as follows: Bamenda, Bafoussam, Douala, Ebolowa, Maroua and Yaounde. Data was obtained from the application of 45 interviews or probe guides to parents, non-specialised teachers, specialised teachers, pupils and students including heads of institutions catering for the educational needs of children living with disabilities as well as Principals of schools for each site. Three Focus Group Discussions (FGD) of between 7 and 10 persons were conducted in each site. Fifty questionnaires were administered in each of the six sites to come out with some of the identification data.

SAMPLING TECHNIQUE AND SAMPLE

A stratified sampling procedure was used to choose the respondents for each of the six study sites. The justification for this

procedure is based on the fact that children living with disabilities constitute a distinct subgroup which can be identified from the global population. Other criteria included the area of origin of the informants, marital status and number of children for the parents and heads of institutions, religious background, educational background and profession.

Our sample was made up of parents of children living with disabilities, heads of institutions dealing with disability issues, teachers involved with their education and persons living with disabilities themselves.

Difficulties faced in the education of children living with disabilities in Cameroon are as numerous as the causes of disabilities themselves. These range from the individual to the society and to the institutions involved in the education of children living with disabilities in the country.

From field data our respondents were mostly children below the ages of twenty years. This age bracket is the school age in Cameroon especially at the secondary and basic levels. Most of them are found in care-giving institutions or structures involved in the education of children living with disabilities.

Most of the children living with disabilities in Cameroon are from the catholic and protestant religious backgrounds. This reveals the involvement of religious bodies in the education of children living with disabilities in the country. Most of the institutions that are involved in some form of education for these children are owned by either the catholic or the protestant religious bodies.

Table 1 : Children living with disabilities according to Sex

Sex	Percentage
Female	37.3
Male	59.3

On the field almost all the institutional heads involved with education of children living with disabilities expressed how difficult it is to recruit students/pupils for their institutions. The difficulty comes from the fact that most parents are unwilling to allow their children in such places which to them are very insecure. However, this difficulty varies according to the sex of the children. It is more difficult to recruit and keep the girls than the boys. This explains why in most of the mixed institutions boys are dominating the girls in terms of numbers.

The children found in normal schools are less numerous than those in the specialised schools. *“The reason is obvious; in normal school there is a kind of inclusive education mean while in the specialised schools we could only address to those who have some form of disability”*. For the purposes of this study, our first target was to research on those that we could identify and who are only found in the institutions. It is these institutions that we refer to as specialised schools. However, there were some of the children who because of their degree of disability could not be involved in any schooling even though they are found in the institutions.

Table 2 : School repetition because of disability

School repetition	
Frequency of repetition	Percentage
Once	33.8
Twice	17.5
Three times	7.0
Never repeated a class	33.3
Others	8.4

It could be expected that the frequency of repetition be high among people living with disabilities. This is not the case from the above results. This is important because apart from their disabilities

this category of children can also perform well in school like their valid mates. Hence disabilities do not mean inability or incapacity in terms of educational performance. Disabilities themselves are not obstacles for their educational process.

THE EDUCATION OF PERSONS LIVING WITH DISABILITIES : A PROBLEMATIC CONTROVERSY

All children have the right to education irrespective of their status. The state on her part has an obligation to provide all the children with well equipped and accessible infrastructures in all schools and public establishments. Those with disabilities should receive either an education in a normal school, with the probably needed help or specialised programs if the level of disability of the child is an insurmountable obstacle to his admission into a normal school.

Unfortunately, for many families in Cameroon, this school obligation is not applied to children living with disabilities. This constitutes one of the major obstacles for their educational process. Therefore, to strengthen the bridge between the normal environments and the social medical centres most of which help to provide better ways for their education and sensitize the different stake holders (parents, teachers, institutional heads and leaders of associations) in their educational process need specialised programs and the enabling environment which integrate persons living with disabilities in the process. The identification of difficulties or obstacles that children living with disabilities face contributes to the success of actions which are out to promote their education.

THE EDUCATION OF CHILDREN LIVING WITH DISABILITIES IN CAMEROON

In Cameroon, we find people living with disabilities at all academic levels (nursery, primary, secondary schools, Universities) working as teachers, researchers or being taught. A superficial look

on the Cameroonian educative system gives us the impression that people living with disabilities face no major difficulties to fit in; but unfortunately many of them abandon school for reasons closely linked to their disability. Thus we can conclude that the Cameroonian government is making some efforts but there is still much to be done in order to guarantee the fulfilment of children living with disabilities in the Cameroonian educative system.

Further more, the Cameroonian children living with disabilities or born of parents living with disabilities do not have adequate access to free education as it is written in a circular signed by the Ministers of Secondary Education and Social in September 2008 in Yaoundé. This measure if really applied is aimed at improving upon the integration and the care for those vulnerable children. This measure could be reinforced if persons living with disabilities are introduced into the educational supervision unit and also in the practice of “*school partitioning*” for children living with disabilities or children born of parents living with disabilities. According to the data of the Ministry of Social Affairs, Cameroon numbers 1.6 million persons living with disabilities. However, we do not have the statistics on the schooling rate and the rate of school desertion (drop out) at our disposal.

The Cameroonian state based its intervention in favour of children living with disabilities in the declaration of children’s right and notably on remarks made by the commission on the maladjusted children’s right. “*The maladjusted children have a right to the entire education that they are able to undertake; one could add to the notion of education that of perfectibility*”.

EDUCATION : AN INTERNATIONALLY ADMITTED HUMAN RIGHT

Education is widely considered as a key issue since it is a means of passing on culture to the next generation; and it also

serves as the strength and means of protection for those who are properly educated.

Following the convention on children's right, education is a right guaranteed by the state and it should have the following goals (objectives) :

- Provide a suitable framework for the full expression of the child's personality and talents as well as his mental and physical abilities without any restrictions.
- Train the child to have respect toward parents, ensure his identity, and learn his mother tongue and cultural values. Also to pay attributes to national values of the country where he lives in and to the national values of the country of origin and civilization different from his.
- Prepare the child to face life's responsibilities in a free society with a sense of understanding.
- Teach the child to have some respect for his natural milieu.

Education is a right in which many countries are involved. There are many reasons for which the government has to carefully take charge of the education carried out in his territory and the way teachers are being trained for this service:

OBSTACLES RELATED TO THE INTELLECTUAL DEVELOPMENT OF PERSONS LIVING WITH DISABILITIES : A BRIEF EXPLORATION OF SOME LITERATURE

According to P. Alexandre (1967), the intellectual development of people living with disabilities can be hindered by the physical discomfort which depends on the type and seriousness, especially if this disability is congenital or very precocious in so far as the spacio-temporal organization, the building of the body structure can be entirely disrupted by the difficulties encountered by the concerned person involved in a coordinated activity. The

intellectual troubles are not originally linked to the physical troubles, but they can become one of their consequences. Jean Piaget (1956) thinks that all the cognitive mechanisms are linked to motility. The development of the intellect is tied to the sensory-motor development and so can be affected when someone presents motor or physical deficiency.

In a study on mental activity and the academic performance of children suffering from myopathy as opposed to a group of healthy children having a rather physical deficiency and not a motor deficiency, P; Dague and M. Tembourg (1970) demonstrated that children with myopathy generally appear inferior to others in some aspects of mental efficiency (perception, memory) and of the school performance (ability to understand, concentrate etc.).

For M. Garelli, J. Meyer and P. Rossi (1961), an observation of children living with disabilities reveals an improvement in their capacity to connect with real life. They experience alienation while very young and their liberty of action is also hindered. They feel and perceive the world of objects as something beyond reach. Those difficulties constitute a serious obstacle to the person. They also make the task of the teachers to be more difficult and uncertain.

Table 3 : School repetition and reasons

Reasons for repetition	
Reasons	Percentage
Disability	28.1
Poverty	11
Bad health	19.5
stigmatisation	11.9
Others	19.5

One of the main reasons for school repetition among children living with disabilities is their physical condition. Although

stigmatisation and poverty equally play a role, it is ascertained from this study that if adaptive devices are provided for children with disabilities they can overcome their disabilities and perform better in school. Incidences of disability are thought to be inadequate because many people are believed to avoid declaring a disability due to the stigma associated with having a disability.

THE SOCIAL INTEGRATION OF PEOPLE LIVING WITH DISABILITIES IN CAMEROON : A FALSE PROMISE

Besides the disdainful attitude adopted towards children living with disabilities, we could mention among other factors in disfavour of their development some structures whose very nature and working system contribute to their exclusion. We claim that a legal provision for the protection and promotion of social integration of people living with disabilities does exist for their fulfilment. But then, it is necessary to conceive a human and protective legislation for the motivation of a good conscience as it seems to be the case in Cameroon. Is it always for the interest of those in need that we organize spectacular media campaigns to collect gifts for them? The law is only a hyphen between the desirable and that which is positive and between the two stands the rock of the mentality and self centeredness. Social integration of persons living with disabilities in Cameroon is synonymous to the distribution of tricycles and crutches in the face of television cameras. To many all the persons living with disabilities in Cameroon have no problem of integration, simply because much is being talked about this long awaited integration. The laws are there and even better laws but who can apply them? Thus, it is the duty of the public authorities to ensure that the law is actually applied. The law stipulates for instance that public structures be constructed in such a way as to facilitate access by people living with disabilities. Within the scope of studies and the realization of housing projects, the managers of public works can in their plans provide a place for a

their children. The non collaborative attitude of public school administrative officials stems from the fact that government has not stressed on the applicability of the existing laws. This has brought persons living with disabilities to have a different representation of the purpose for their education.

DIFFERENT STAKE HOLDERS AND THE PERSPECTIVES OF EDUCATIONAL INTEGRATION OF CHILDREN LIVING WITH DISABILITIES INTO THE EDUCATIONAL SYSTEM IN CAMEROON

Children living with disabilities themselves

First of all, at the level of the individuals, they should give themselves to hard work in order to avoid being too dependent or becoming street beggars.

Children living with disabilities should erase any stigma they may have in their minds, go to school, learn and practice a trade that is acceptable by their degree of disability.

Some proposals made by some of the children living with disabilities themselves, particularly the blind include :

- The recording of their lessons in subjects like history, literature so that they are spared a lot of papers.
- Their teachers should be more understanding and patient with them and give them a little more attention to enable them to understand their lessons.
- Provision of distractions like guitars, pianos, for example and for their training provide computers so that they can equally learn how to use them and type.
- The public needs to be educated on the blind people because even with the white stick, sometimes a blind person

can be hurt or even knocked down because many people do not even know the white stick.

- Persons living with disabilities in Cameroon should regroup themselves into Common Initiative groups with the determination to better their lot. Should they become organised and network with other national, regional and international organisations interested in improving the plight of the disabled, then things will certainly change in their favour.
- Viable persons living with disabilities could open up and manage training centres for people living with disabilities. This could boost the capacity of the disabled to be useful to them and to the society. They could also aspire for positions of power and occupy them.

Parents and the society

Parents and the society as a whole should be educated on the rights of children living with disabilities. The society should be sensitized to accept them as normal human beings except for their disability. Another suggestion involves the parents of children living with disabilities who should be advised to form associations to guaranty the protection of their children. Such associations should be able to sanction parents who abandon their children. Normal teachers should be sensitised to encourage children living with disabilities to study. school administrators should equally be sensitised to respect legislation decreeing the admission of children living with disabilities into schools.

The importance of professional training being given to children living with disabilities was underlined by the Director of CARH who stated *“the academic training is important for the blind and the deaf and the dumb because if they do not have professional training, they are not trained. Therefore, the training institutes*

given proportion of lodgings adapted to receive people living with disabilities with a reduced mobility or in a wheel chair (article 35, chapter 111. title 111 of the law no 83- 013 of the 21st July 1983 in relation to the protection of persons living with disabilities)

In article 39 of this law, it is stated that “*public squares, public constructions, housing facilities do have reserved parking space, special phone booths and equipments adapted for the physical condition of persons living with disabilities.*” However, public places are continuously being constructed as if this category of persons did not exist. As one person living with disabilities stated “*One night I was travelling to Yaoundé, we stopped at Makenene (a transit station) where we could relax and ease ourselves. I went out to urinate only to realise that I could not do so because the new existing toilet facilities in the area are so high that I could not arrive there*”

It is actually obvious that the gap which exists between facts and reality is very wide. Which public buildings in our Cameroonian towns have facilities corresponding at least to the legal demands? How many Cameroonian companies have accepted policies concerning the integration of people living with disabilities as recommended by the law? The assistance in the restructuring of jobsites and professional re training are then nothing but empty promises. It is a similar situation when we come to invalidity allowance, exemption from school fees and health expense of children born of parents living with disabilities and school grants to these children. Their disability does not spare them from the payment of school fees and the purchase of food. At the university level, their privileges are in the attribution of rooms in the university hostel. They participate as the other students to their courses in the same conditions and in the same difficulties. This makes us to ask whether there is mainstreaming in the education for children living with disabilities in Cameroon. All these shortcomings raised so far gives room to the thought that the state limits its role to

the establishment of laws meanwhile the law does not transform the lives of individuals and worse still that of people living with disabilities.

It is true that the greatest challenge for children living with disabilities is first of all the acceptance of their disability and overcoming it and to live with it. Further, children living with disabilities often have to cope with the spite and superiority complex of normal children because as Mebometa (Douala) argued, *“Some friends who are valid children look low on us. This makes us feel rejected and inferior. The truth is that academically, they are not better than some of us.”*

In addition, Boba Roger (CISPAM-Bafoussam) says, *“those who are living with disabilities have a hard time letting people understand that they are not sick and that they are only living with disabilities”. As he continues, apart from our disability, we are just as normal as all other children”*. Family members can get to understand this but for the rest of the society, it is not possible to explain, and so they keep considering them as patients who need to be treated as such.

Then we have financial difficulties which is a more generalised problem of all children living with disabilities. While parents and families do not generally expect much from them, they equally do not want to invest much into them. This leads to a generalised situation of need among almost all children living with disabilities in all the regions of Cameroon.

SOCIETAL OBSTACLES

The society itself also poses a problem to children living with disabilities. In many cases in Cameroon the society does not readily receive them as normal human beings. Often they are despised and denied opportunities for competition and employment even when they are well qualified. As the Director of one of the training institutions

in the country revealed, they have trained 1200 children living with disabilities, yet integrating them to work has not been easy because employers are reluctant to employ them. Sometimes, or rather, often, working conditions do not favour them and some abandon their jobs. Children living with disabilities all over the country argue that they need the collaboration, attention and the assistance of their friends and even the family which considers them as a burden. Consequently, many children living with disabilities in regular schools and training centres do not have their needs adequately met by their parents. A director of one of the training centres in the country noted that many parents use the training centre as a home in which to abandon their children living with disabilities. As noted, in some regular educational institutions in the Western regions many teachers ignore the fact that they are dealing with children living with disabilities as well and simply teach and go ahead as if all the children were valid. This leaves the children living with disabilities in quite a frustrating situation (although most of the children in the institutions we visited showed proof of plenty of courage and the readiness to face the future and succeed.

LACK OF PEDAGOGICAL MATERIAL AND PERSONNEL

At the level of the Institutions catering for children with disabilities there are quite a number of difficulties. Firstly, there is the inadequacy of didactic material especially for the dumb and the deaf like SIGNS (in English or French) for use to teach SIGN language, IMAGES (TV) to teach children through images, AUDITIVE CABINES for determining the degree of deafness and dumbness, specialised equipment to test the degree of blindness or sight.

Equally lacking is the all-important Manila paper (special paper used to brail). A conspicuous lack of teachers and other infrastructure constitute part of the difficulties faced in the education of children living with disabilities in Cameroon. The lack of specialised personnel is very serious matter. Generally, the first difficulty mentioned in most of the institutions was that of a

shortage in specialised personnel. The Director of CISPAM wished he had eight specialised teachers (transcribers and teachers) for his training centre. In some of the institutions, even just securing the full collaboration of the personnel is a great difficulty.

Concerning the need or the lack of didactic material modern equipment like computers for schools are not adapted to the use of the visually impaired children. When their valid mates go to the Computer Pool, they have to stay in the classroom and /or do something else. This brings some degree of frustration to them as they are left aside or abandoned to take care of themselves. Equally serious is the lack of documentation and teaching aids. Documentation is not readily available especially for the visually impaired because extra documentation in brail are hardly ever to be found except provided on very special command which the children cannot afford. Material needs, always frequently in short supply include the white stick , brail paper and tablet, adapted computer equipment, the regular paying of bills, just to name a few.

The near absence of Social Welfare and active government involvement in general in the education of children living with disabilities in Cameroon is something to be reckoned with. Most of the efforts to educate them in Cameroon are furnished by private concerns. From the North to the South and from the East to the West we find numerous institutions that cater for their education all created and directed by Clergymen and laymen some of whom are heavily involved in church activities. The lack of government support in the education of these children in Cameroon is deplorable considering that educating a child with disabilities is an expensive undertaking. Some types of disabilities are difficult to manage in matters of education because equipment needed for their education is expensive. For example, the cane of the blind costs 35,000 FCFA, tricycles for the rehabilitation of some types of disabilities costs 100,000 FCFA. Brail material for one year for a blind child cost 300,000 FCFA.

Further difficulties include the inadequacy of specialised schools themselves. Especially for the visually impaired, there are not enough specialised training institutions. Many visually impaired children have to manage to go to regular schools with valid children. When blind children attend regular schools, they face the problem of adapting to structures that are not constructed for their convenience. Sometimes they have to take the stairs and walk across rough terrain unguided. In an attempt to help himself, a child with disabilities of the Etoug-Ebe Government Bilingual High School in Yaoundé, addressed a correspondence to the Principal of the college asking that the class of *Première C* be brought from the third to the ground floor. This was in order that he will be able to get to the classroom. Children living with disabilities in some colleges in the Western Region said they stayed home for one academic year because they were refused admissions as a result of their disability.

As noted from some secondary schools in the West region of Cameroon, blind children are sometimes rushed on because either their mates or even the school authorities do not recognise that they are blind and therefore cannot run and jump over barriers like their valid mates. They are sometimes even knocked down and hurt. This presents another form of discrimination against people living with disabilities in the schooling process and enrolment.

PERSPECTIVES AND THE WAY FORWARD

This study resulted in a number of recommendations coming not only from the trainers but from the children living with disabilities as well. Actually, the whole exercise of examining the situation of the education of children living with disabilities in Cameroon has consisted in diagnosing the disability, the obstacles and how they could be managed in order to enhance their education. Consequently, we have identified the problems or proposed solutions. What appears here thus as recommendations are really

just additional proposals coming from different stake holders that could be implemented to enhance the education of children living with disabilities.

As the Director of some of the training institutions expressed, *“every problem can be solved. It requires only the means and it will be solved. Problems can be solved as long as there are means and the will”*. In order to enhance the education of children living with disabilities in Cameroon, a number of measures must be taken by various stakeholders.

From field data it is obvious to study speeches of the respondents and their actions in order to envisage any action. In fact this action should come from the ideas which are primarily the discourse and social relationships that bring about this concept of disabilities. The social fabrication of disabilities has set up mechanisms of social markage for people living with disabilities. Whenever these mechanisms are at work there is an establishment of an objective probability for them to become handicapped or people living with disabilities in every form both psychologically and socially. According to the south regional delegation for social affaires, *“confusion is observed as far as education is concerned. People who are living with disabilities are trained in teachers training institutions but known is sent to go and teach where he will help others who are like them. They could have been better specialists for those who are like them”*.

In the different structures visited, schooling is a priority to both the so-called normal children and those living with disabilities. In each school there is a specific mechanism for enrolment and care taking for children with special needs. Field data reveal that the will for integration has modified the internal circuits of education than the sector concerned with the problematic of integration. This is explained by the fact that parents who are the first actors in the education of their children are unwilling to collaborate with the institutions involved in the enrolment and education of

should collaborate with other centres for the professionalization of their trainees”.

We lay emphasis on sensitisation or rather the education of the society on the fact of the education of children living with disabilities in Cameroon. This is so because in the Northern Regions of Cameroon, most parents and relatives still keep their children living with disabilities at home even with the publicity of specialised institutions.

The education of the entire society on the situation of the education of children living with disabilities in Cameroon is highly recommended. A case of the Far Northern Region in particular, in order to improve the situation of children living with disabilities, one must start with the education of their families laying emphasis on the woman and the girl child, then the society in general for them to accept that disability does not mean ‘*social and intellectual death*’ as one parent put it during the Focus Group Discussion.

Stake holders from on the field suggest very strongly that :

- The state must encourage their insertion into the public service because it has done nothing along those lines for too long. One of them stated “*whenever we ask for integration we are interpreted to be asking for wheel chairs. We need the wheel chairs and other things that can help us to move but that are not all about us*”.
- The state should subsidize their education. While registration into schools is free.
- The state should ensure the follow-up of the education of children living with disabilities by specialised personnel.
- There should be disciplines for brail and sign language in the Teachers Training Institutions in the country so that

specialists for the blind, the deaf and the dumb are trained there also.

- Teachers should undertake in service training in specialised programs during summer holidays. Many institutions expressed the need for a counsellor, a psychologist in each training institution to cater for the ever growing needs of the trainees. The authorities of the Bilingual Grammar School in Bafoussam in agreement with the directors of the training institutions that send visually impaired children to the school decided that these will carry badges in order that they should be easily identified and in the event of a rush should be given due considerations. This is a measure worthy to be emulated by other institutions (regular schools) that admit and train children with impairments.
- The provision of transport facilities to these children.
- National and international organisations interested in the welfare of this category of persons, should network for strategies to enhance the situation of persons living with disabilities, at the same time respecting conventions applicable to them.
- International organisations like the UN, UNICEF, AU and others should monitor the respect and application of the laws protecting persons with disabilities.
- Considering the severity of the issue of their education in Cameroon, the government needs to step in a very evident move, create more centres for children living with disabilities, and/or public schools, and support existing ones in order to contribute to the education of children living with disabilities.
- The government should ensure that all legislation and international conventions protecting the rights of the people living with disabilities be respected and applied.

- The decree concerning their protection is full of conditional verbs. Everything is conditional, if possible. The law should be reformulated with univocal action verbs.
- The state should envisage a reflexive approach which integrates all these social actors in order to talk out things.
- People living with disabilities should cease to behave as « *citizens of social affaires* » ;
- The first action should come from people living with disabilities, since they have to come out of super protection which they have the tendency to take as being enough;
- There should be a vision of togetherness. The person living with disabilities is not an object of commercialisation for NGOs, leaders of association or business capital for the ministry of social affaires.

One of the leaders of an association for people living with disabilities calls for an end to such affinity regrouping or association. *«Perspectives should be changed; people living with disabilities should avoid exclusive associations. On the contrary they should open up to integrate associations of people not living with disabilities; they should be mainstreamed in normal associations. If they function exclusively alone, others will not know their problems. Those who are governing us are less informed that people living with disabilities are being marginalised. People living with disabilities should mix with others in order to express their differences».*

Some training Institutions suggest that the government should step in, provide material for their trainees so that at graduation they are enabled to get settled in some useful activity so that they do not waste the rest of life looking for money to settle until the trade is even forgotten or they give up.

The big problems can be easily handled but if the small ones that concern those who feel the pinch or who suffer the stigma of the disability itself are solved, it will go a long way to ease and enhance the situation of the education of children living with disabilities in Cameroon.

The integration of children living with disabilities is a permanent construction. It is not the devotedness of teachers, school heads or administrative officials and NGOs. It needs an external effort from the state, NGOs and also an internal effort from the persons living with disabilities themselves. The persons or person involved should at the same time find and install a consensus between the partners participating in their integration. In this regard, some elements have to be taken into consideration:

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