



THE SUPPORT OF NON-GOVERNMENTAL ORGANISATIONS IN THE EDUCATION OF CHILDREN WITH DISABILITIES IN THE BUILSA NORTH DISTRICT OF GHANA

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Abstract

This study explored the role NGOs' play in educating children with disabilities in the Builsa North District of Ghana. A cross-sectional survey approach was applied in the study. The sample size was 150 respondents (75 male and 75 female) for the questionnaire. A mixed method approach involving questionnaires, key informant interviews and focus group discussions were the main instruments used for data collection. The data was analyzed quantitatively and qualitatively. The questionnaire was answered by 150 respondents, 72 respondents answered the focus group questions while eight (8) respondents answered the key informant interview questions. The schools, parents/guardians of children with disabilities, foster homes and NGOs that support the education of children with disabilities were visited for the questionnaire administration. The study realized children with disabilities face discrimination and marginalization in accessing education in the district. Thus, some NGOs support the education of children with disabilities by recruiting and sending them to school as well as providing teaching and learning materials, feeding the disabled children, capacity building as well as caring and showing love for the disabled children. The challenges militating against children with disabilities in their bid to access education were: lack of special educational infrastructure; stigmatization by school mates, teachers and parents; and their inability to move from home to school and back. The study concludes that children with disabilities have the desire to be educated. The study recommends the provision of a disabled children school in the district. Government should formulate legislations against stigmatization and discrimination of disabled children.

Key words: Disability, NGOs, Persons with disabilities, Education, Special education

Introduction

Mantey (2014) has noted in the global arena that children with disabilities are marginalized and discriminated against within the educational system and the society at large. Children with disabilities are not given the needed government support to have accessible primary and secondary education. To this effect, there has been an interest on inclusion as a way to enhance the right of children with disabilities to education. This interest has moved from institutionalization to inclusive issues

that help children with disabilities to have access to mainstream education in areas where the children reside (Ainscow and Sandill, 2010).

In developing countries especially in Ghana, in 1990, the government ratified the international Convention on Children's Rights (CCR) in February 1990 thereby committing herself to protecting and promoting the rights of all children. That report covered the period of 1997-2003. The

CCR was the first convention signed by Ghana in the area of access to quality education by children with disabilities (Afagachie, 2018).

Despite these efforts, in Ghana, for so many years, the plight of children with disabilities is now well known. In the first place, children with disabilities have low enrolments and they drop out of school even if they enroll at all. As a result of the above situation, Afagachie (2018) has noted that over the years a number of Non-governmental Organizations (NGOs) have made efforts in addressing the educational needs of children with disabilities.

Jangannathan (n.d) has noted that NGOs have teamed up with communities to provide trained teachers and teaching and learning materials for schools, organized remedial classes for children who have difficulties in meeting their grade level requirements, prepare children to join school through community-based induction programmes, support schools to act as a net for all unrolled children, support local partners to replicate low-cost early childhood care models and setting up pre-school centres and classes for local communities. NGOs also train government teachers, equip teachers with teaching methodologies, provide technical support for curricular and teaching and learning materials development as well as provide teachers with organizational development skills.

The NGOs that aid the education of children with disabilities in Ghana can be classified as national or international; they may be secular or faith based, they may as well be membership or non-membership. Despite the presence of these NGOs in supporting the education of children with disabilities in Ghana, their numbers have not increased in terms of their enrolment and retention in basic schools. This study thus, seeks to address the following questions: What aspects of education do children with disabilities receive support from NGOs in the Builsa North District? What challenges do children with disabilities in the Builsa North District face in accessing education?

Literature Review

Conceptual and Theoretical Issues

Education, Children with Disabilities and Challenges

Akyeampong (2002) asserted that a philosophical perspective of education is that education is seen as having two broad purposes: preparing the individual for life that is education is life itself and the second strand is that education prepares the individual so as to enable him/her earn a living. Educating a nation remains the most vital strategy for the development of 'society' the world over (Aikaman and Unterhalter, 2005). This is because one widely held aim of education is to equip students with the knowledge, skills, attitudes and competencies that enable them to render useful services to themselves and to the society at large. It is for this reason that the United Nations (UN) Millennium Development Goals adopted in 2000 and Sustainable Development Goals in 2015 place premium on basic education and emphasizes that education at the basic level should be free in order to get all children of school-going age in school.

In response to that UN declaration, the world has seen new forms of international cooperation around the pledge for Education For All (EFA) within the last two decades. The sixth EFA goal aims at improving all aspects of the quality of education and ensuring excellence of all so that recognized and measurable learning outcomes are achieved by all, especially in literacy, numeracy and essential life skills as advocated by the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisation (UNESCO, 2005). However, the EFA Global Monitoring Report issued by UNESCO in 2005 reports that in the various countries that are striving to guarantee all children have the right to education; the focus on access for all is often a challenge (UNESCO, 2005).

In furtherance of the achievement of EFA, nations, organizations and individuals spend huge sums on the provision and consumption of education for their citizenry (UNESCO, 2005). In many developing countries especially in Africa, formal education is the largest industry and greatest consumer of public revenues (Todaro, 1992).

The Governments of Ghana (GoG), over the years, from pre-independence era to date have always adopted policies to fine-tune education to ensure a rapid national development and for the citizenry to also participate in the global world. Education has therefore been identified as an agent of national development (Broni-Afful and Ziggah, 2007). A great deal of human and financial resources is expended to support the public school system in Ghana. Students enrolment rates have seen steady increases as a result of efforts (such as the School Feeding Programme, Capitation Grant and GETfund supported development) by government as parliament approved GH¢4.4bn budget allocation for Ministry of Education in the year 2012 (The Chronicle Friday November, 2013).

Despite all the efforts made by the GoG, UNICEF Ghana (2010) has emphasized that despite the fact that Ghana has made some gains in her educational sector, available statistics provide evidence that the educational system in the country has not been able to provide the needed educational environment for children at all levels especially girls and children with disabilities. The organization went further to say that a large number of children are out of school especially in the case of children with disabilities. These children with disabilities form a critical factor for the achievement of the education for all (EFA) and the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) in the country.

Mantey (2014) and Afagachie (2018) are emphatic that the provision of educational services to persons with disabilities is no longer an issue of charity in Ghana. It is a constitutional right as enshrined in the 1992 Constitution of Ghana. However, the constitution has not lived up to its expectation because the educational sector lacks the capacity to serve the needs of children with disabilities. At present, efforts and programs geared toward serving the needs of children with disabilities have proved to be futile. This seems to suggest that the education of children with disabilities lacks the needed attention that it deserves in the country.

In Ghana, Mantey (2014) found discrimination and marginalization as challenges to the education of children with disabilities. Mantey (2014) found that much of the discrimination is based on stereotypes about the physical, mental impairments and other

forms of disabilities. This culminates into societal exclusion, bullying, aggression and devaluation of the capabilities of disabled children.

Similarly, Afagachie (2018) stated that marginalization includes superstition, ignorance, lack of knowledge and empathy, outmoded cultural systems which influence the exclusion of physically challenged people in the society. Thus, the issue of marginalization of children with disabilities is based on unscientific judgments by society. He concluded that marginalization leads to discrimination which has the tendency to ruin the happiness and success of children with disabilities in society.

Aside discrimination and marginalization, Mantey (2014) and Afagachie (2018) observed that in Ghana policy on inclusive education and the general education of children with disabilities has been influenced by a number of international laws, treaties, policies, and conventions. Ghana has been a signatory and ratified many of these documents related to disabilities which have their main focus to raise the living conditions of persons with disabilities by promoting their rights to various services necessary to ensure full and equal citizenship in the country. However, Ofori (2018) states that Ghana still lacks a specific policy that articulates a philosophy on disability to guide practice.

As a result of these challenges, some Non-governmental Organizations (NGOs) which are seen as development oriented organizations with links to marginalized or vulnerable groups in poor rural areas of the world have ventured into supporting the education of children with disabilities. The NGOs work directly with the marginalized groups themselves in the developing areas of the world. Usually, the NGOs adopt and use bottom-up approaches of project formulation and execution (Rugendyke, 2007). Thus the main aim of the NGOs is to transform the lives of poor and marginalized children.

Mantey (2014) has asserted that perhaps the challenges that face NGOs in Ghana in their bid to support the education of children with disability centres mainly on policy (see Ofori, 2018), funding for the support of the children with disabilities,

negative socio-cultural practices that do not support children, wrong attitudes by communities toward children, ill parenting on the part of parents/guardians of children with disabilities, ineffective implementation of laws and policies by government, weak systems and structures to push children's issues forward, and weak decentralised systems.

Aside the above, there is a lack of a data collection, collation and analysis system in the area of the rights and education of children in general and in the area of children with disabilities specifically. This makes it very cumbersome for NGOs supporting the rights and education of children with disabilities to access quality data for intervention and development programming for the development of children with disabilities (Afagachie, 2018).

Theoretical Issues

Theoretically, this study hinges on the theories of social model of disability (Oliver, 1990), and the theory of human capital formation (Schultz, 1961 and Becker, 1964). These theories have been chosen to lay emphasis on the marginalization and discrimination that children with disabilities face in accessing education.

Schultz (1961), Becker (1964) and Mantey (2014) have stated that the social model of disability came around the 1970s but got a boost from Oliver (1990). The social model is based on the primary argument that disability comes as a result of interaction by both the people living with impairments in an environment that is laden with social and economic barriers. By implication, these barriers must be changed to help the people that are living with impairments to be able to participate in the society in which they live on the basis of equality.

Thus, inclusive education is premised on the social model which sees the existing educational system and for that matter, schools in general as meting out discrimination against children with disabilities. Schools need to provide learning environments that suit the needs of all learners. Mantey (2014) captures that the social model of disability sees the challenges persons with disabilities face as

emanating from society and not the medical conditions of the persons.

Oliver (1990) notes that the educational system has not lived up to its mandate because disabled children still do not enjoy their full right to access education. In a similar vein, the special education system has functioned to exclude them from both the education process and wider social life.

Afagachie (2018) has observed that the social model of disability on the one hand has not been able to recognize the real issue of impairment. That is to say that the model ignores or is unable to deal adequately with the subjective experiences of the pain of both the impairment and disability. Thus, Oliver (1990) quips that this is as a result of a conceptual misunderstanding because the social model is not based on the personal experience of impairment but the collective conceptual experience of disablement. The environment is portrayed as a necessary cause, even if not sufficient, and as the predominant factor in all trait-related disadvantages. Thus, it captured the social setting alone as sufficient cause of barrier to persons with disabilities.

Despite the shortcomings of the model, Mantey (2014) is of the opinion that this model is still important to the study of disability and for the purpose of this study because it helps the researcher to understand and examine the social and economic forces that for many years have marginalized and oppressed children with disabilities.

Another model which is closely akin to the social model is the human rights based model to disabilities (see Schultz, 1961 and Becker, 1964). The human rights based approach is based on the grounds that every person has the right to develop his or her talent. It makes societies know the importance of every human being, rather than just their contributions to society. The rights based approach of viewing persons with disabilities is also in line with the United Nations Conventions on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (UNCRPD) declaration.

Methods and Materials

The Builsa North District Assembly was established on the 15th of March, 2012 by an Act of

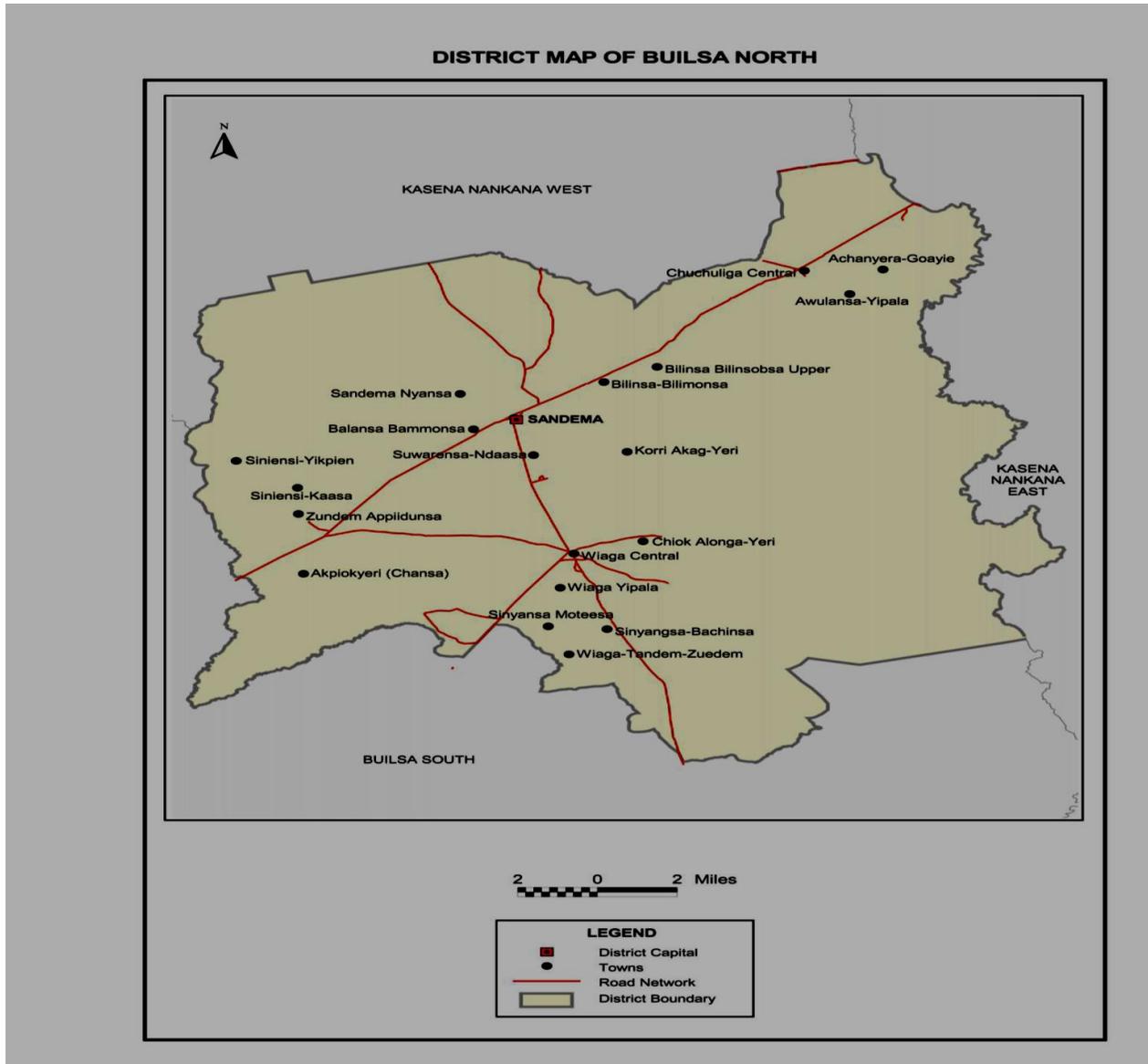
Parliament, 1993 (Act 462), with Sandema as its administrative capital. The Legislative Instrument (LI) that established it is LI 2148. The rationale behind carving out the Builsa North District from Builsa South was to ensure that governance was further brought closer to the doorsteps of the local people. The District currently has about ninety-eight (98) communities with a population size of about 56,477. At present, it has 28 Junior High Schools and 71 Primary Schools and 6 private schools as well as three Senior High Schools and (The Composite Budget of the Builsa North District Assembly, 2015). Figure 1 shows the district map of the Builsa North District.

The study employed a cross-sectional descriptive design which involved using a questionnaire, Focus Group Discussions (FGDs) and Key Informant Interviews (KIIs) to generate qualitative data with some quantitative data. The respondents for the questionnaire were chosen randomly using a purposive and simple sampling techniques in selected basic schools (40 disabled children and 50 teachers). Community members that is (parents/guardians of disabled children) and staff of NGOs that supported the education of children with disabilities in the District numbering about 30 with 10 NGOs were recruited. About 10 staff of the Presbyterian Community Based Rehabilitation (Presby CBR), and 10 physically challenged children of the Horizon Children's Home, were chosen to complete the questionnaire. This was done in order to recruit participants who had first-

hand knowledge on the issues that fell within the purview of this study. In all, 150 questionnaires were administered to communities, children with disabilities in basic schools, field staff of the Presbyterian Community Based Rehabilitation, etc. The number of schools with physically challenged children were five (5) with a total population of 40. Thus, in each school, the researcher randomly selected any student, teacher or parent of a physically challenged child the researcher met until the targeted number of respondents was attained. This approach was used for both the quantitative data collection. This was to enable the researcher give all qualified respondents an equal opportunity of being part of the study.

Purposive sampling was used to select the respondents for the KIIs and FGDs. People knowledgeable on disability issues in the Ghana Education Service Office in the District, the Presbyterian Community Based Rehabilitation (Presby CBR), staff of Horizon Children's Home, teachers, disability organisations, and parents/guardians of children with disabilities were chosen for the KIIs and FGDs. In all, there were eight (8) FGDs. Four (4) FGDs were for males and four (4) FGDs for females. Each FGD comprised of nine (9) participants. This gave a total of 63 participants. A total of 72 people participated in the FGDs. For the KIIs, there were also eight of them. Four (4) KIIs were for males and four (4) KIIs for females. This was done to give each sex an equal chance of participating in the study.

Figure 1 District map of the Builsa North District.



The data was analyzed using qualitative and quantitative techniques. The qualitative analysis took the form of descriptive narratives involving discussions on the data gathered from the District. This entailed the coding of the data and drawing out themes according to the research questions. The Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS) software was used to facilitate the generation of tables and figures. The software generated the

tables and figures. This was followed by descriptive explanations of the tables and figures.

Empirical Results

The contribution of NGOs in Educating Children with Disabilities

NGOS through CBRs have recognized that the pivot of development of children with disabilities is for NGOs to work closely with the children and

their parents in the communities to provide and support the needs of the disabled children. All the respondents indicated that NGOs worked with disabled children and their parents to improve their access to education in the Builsa North District. All the respondents (100%) stated that NGOs played a role in educating children with disabilities. This implies that in the Builsa North District, NGOs play a role in educating children with disabilities. The NGOs support the education of children with disabilities through the provision of food to enable them stay in school and learn. Nineteen (12.7%) of the respondents stated NGOs pay the school fees of

the physically challenged children. Thirty-two (21.3%) respondents said NGOs provide the children with disabilities uniforms, books and other learning materials. One hundred and eleven respondents (representing 74%) mentioned that the respondents take care of the health of the beneficiary children. Ten respondents stated that the NGOs provide means of transport (bicycles, tricycles and walking crutches) to the physically challenged children to enable them get to school. Table 2 indicates the role NGOs play in educating children with disabilities in the Builsa North District.

Table 2: The contribution of NGOs in educating children with disabilities in the Builsa North District

Role	Number of respondents	Percentage
Provide food	19	12.7
Pay school fees	32	21.3
Provide uniforms, books and others	111	74
Provide health care	3	2
Provide means of transport	7	4.7
Total	150	100

Table 2 indicates that the most important area NGOs support the education of children with disabilities is by providing them with uniforms, books and other learning materials followed by paying their schools fees. The next area is providing them with food to enable them stay in school and learn, followed by giving them means of transport in the form of bicycles, tricycles and crutches while the least area is providing for their health care. This is confirmed in KII with beneficiary children's parents:

"We received support such as uniforms, bicycles, tricycles and crutches, school bags, their school fees were also paid (those in special schools) and we as well received a stipend for their feeding. In fact, we were very grateful."

The above findings are in line with the human rights based model to disabilities (Schultz, 1961 and Becker, 1964) which argues that every person has the right to develop his or her talent. This is in line with with several declarations such as the United Nations Conventions on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (UNCRPD), The World Declaration on education for All, the Framework for Action To Meet Basic Learning Needs, the E9 Declaration for Education For All, and the 40-year old Universal Declaration of Human Rights. All these

declarations made a clarion call for strengthening partnerships with NGOs in providing accessible and equitable education for all.

Aspects of Education NGOs Support in Educating Children with Disabilities

The NGOs that support the education of children with disabilities in the Builsa North District were the Presbyterian CBR and Horizon Children's Home. Although majority of the NGOs that support the education of children with disabilities in Ghana have a very weak base in terms of resources in supporting the children with disabilities, they have been contributing positively to the welfare of the children with disabilities.

This was the case for the two NGOs that supported the education of children with disabilities in the Builsa North District. Though the two NGOs had a weak resource base, they supported the education of children with disabilities in the district. The respondents indicated the aspects of support the NGOs gave in educating children with disabilities. One hundred and three (representing 68.7%) of the respondents stated that the NGOs supported disabled children's education in the area of recruiting and sending them to school as well as providing teaching and learning materials. Ninety four (62.7%) said the NGOs supported the feeding

of children with disabilities, 47.3% respondents mentioned capacity building for children with disabilities while five (5) (that is 3.3% of the respondents) mentioned caring and loving disabled children. An overwhelming majority, 99.3% of the respondents agreed that these aspects fall in line with the standards set by the government of Ghana for the education of children with disabilities in Ghana. Figure 2 indicates the aspects NGOs support in educating children with disabilities. This

is confirmed in a KII with an officer from the Presbyterian Community Based Rehabilitation Centre when he said:

“We (Presby CBR) recruit the children from the various communities, coordinate with educational authorities to absorb them into schools, pay their school fees, buy school items for them and provide means of transport to enable them get to school or give them lorry fare”.

Figure 2: Aspects NGOs support the education of children with disabilities

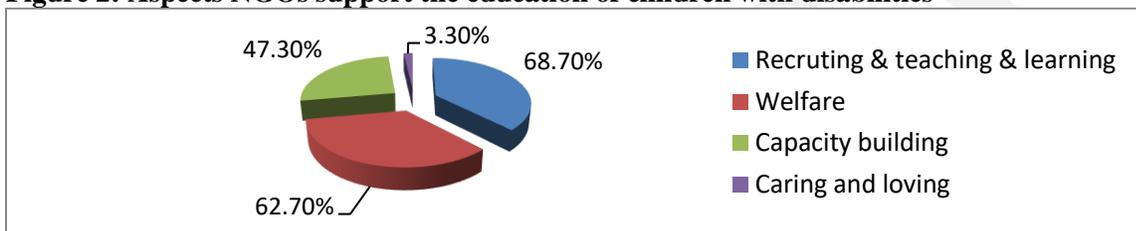


Figure 1 clearly shows that the priority area NGOs support in educating children with disabilities is their teaching and learning followed by their welfare, capacity building and caring and loving disabled children in the Builsa North District. This reflects the findings of Jagannathan (n.d) in his study that NGOs provide teaching and learning materials for basic education. This contribution by the NGOs indicates that basic education, especially for children with disabilities serve as a strong foundation for their future growth and contribution to national development.

Challenges Children with Disabilities face in Accessing Education

Mantey (2014) has stated that children with disabilities experience marginalization within the educational system and traditional forms of discrimination from mainstream society. Mantey’s (2014) claim is supported by the social model. The model is based on the primary argument that disability comes as a result of interaction by both the people living with impairments in an environment that is laden with social and economic barriers. By implication, these barriers must be changed to help the people that are living with

impairments to be able to participate in the society in which they live on the basis of equality.

This study supports the above studies as the challenges faced by disabled children are internal and external. Internally, forty four (29.3%) respondents said that transportation to and from school has been a challenge to the disabled children in accessing education, 11.3% of the respondents said that there is not enough food to feed the children so they can stay at school and learn, 12% of the respondents mentioned that the children with disabilities fall sick frequently, 35.3% said they (children with disabilities) experience psychological trauma as a result of mockery and discrimination from their colleagues, family and community members. This finding falls in line with the theoretical social model of disability (Oliver, 1990), and the theory of human capital formation (Schultz, 1961 and Becker, 1964). Twelve percent (12%) of the respondents stated that there are no learning devices to aid the children with disabilities to learn alongside the other children since they all sit in for the same lessons.

Externally, 5.3% of the respondents mentioned that school structures are inaccessible to the

children with disabilities, 14.7% of the respondents said that there are insufficient teaching and learning materials for the children with disabilities. About 23.3% respondents stated that there is stigmatization against the disabled children from school mates, teachers and at home, 20% said that there is lack of finance to support the lives of the disabled children daily while 20% of the respondents

indicated that the disabled children receive less support from NGOs. The implication of the above results is that physically challenged children still do not enjoy their full fundamental human rights as they continue to face many challenges in their lives. Table 3 indicates the internal and external challenges children face in their bid to access education.

Table 3: Internal and external challenges disable children face in their bid to access education 2017

Internal Challenges	Number of respondents	Percentage	External challenges	Number of respondents	Percentage
Transportation to and from school	44	29.3	School structures are inaccessible	8	5.3
Inadequate food for feeding	17	11.3	Lack of professional teachers in the area of disability to teach	7	4.7
Falling sick frequently	18	12	Insufficient learning materials for the disable children	22	14.7
Psychological trauma resulting from mockery and discrimination	53	35.3	Insults from family and outsiders	18	12
Lack of teaching and learning devices	18	12	Stigmatization from school mates, teachers and at home	35	23.3
			Lack of finance to support their daily expenses	30	20
			Less support from NGOs	30	20
Total	150	100		150	100

The table indicates that the most serious internal challenge children with disabilities face in their effort to access education is psychological trauma emanating from mockery and discrimination both in school and at home while the most serious external challenge they faced is stigmatization from school mates and others. It appears clearly that in the Builsa North District, the major challenge children with disabilities face in accessing education is psychological trauma resulting from stigmatization in and out of school. In a key informant interview with a teacher of children with disabilities, she summarized the challenges as:

“Some of the school structures are not accessible to them. There are few trained teachers in the disability areas to teach. There is no special school in the district so they are forced to sit in the same classes with the abled children to learn the same subjects. Sometimes, they don’t eat before coming to school and so they sometimes lose concentration in class. Their parents lack the interest of sending them to school and above all, they are stigmatized.”

Confirming some of the above challenges, UNICEF Ghana (2010) notes that despite the fact that Ghana has made some considerable gains in her educational sector, available statistics show that the educational system has not been able to implement equitable access to and participation in quality education at all levels, especially girls and children with various forms of disabilities. The children with disabilities manage their challenges through the support of community members (4.7%), 63.3% stated that they get support from family members and teachers, 8.7% respondents mentioned that they rely so much on the support they get from the NGOs that help them while 22% of the respondents indicated the disabled children depend on friends for direction and motivation.

Conclusions

In conclusion, children with disabilities need to be educated in the Builsa North District. However, they face discrimination and marginalisation in accessing education. To this effect, NGOs (Presbyterian Community Rehabilitation Centre and the Horizon Children’s Home) play a role in supporting the education of children with disabilities. The NGOs give help to the physically challenged children in accessing education by recruiting and sending them to school, providing teaching and learning materials, support the welfare of the children, build their capacities and care and show them love. The challenges the children face are lack of special educational infrastructure in the district; and stigmatization by school mates, teachers and parents.

Recommendations

Thus, the following are recommended: government should enforce the legislation and formulate policies that protect children with disabilities from discrimination and stigmatization both in and out of school. The research revealed that one of the key challenges of children with disabilities is stigmatization by their school mates, teachers and at home. It is proper that government through metropolitan, municipal and district assemblies enforce the laws on disability for the rights of these children to be upheld and respected.

There is also need for the sensitization of parents and guardians of children with disabilities on the need to send them to school. The National Commission for Civic Education (NCCE), the media, Social Welfare Department, Ghana Education Service and NGOs operating in the area of children with disabilities should make it a duty to sensitise all community members, parents of children with disabilities on the need to send their children with disabilities to school.

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