



"A wheelchair can transform a person's life. An enabling system ensures that transformation lasts, and Effective accountability protects both programme integrity and beneficiary dignity."





ACTION FOR CHANGE & EMPOWERMENT (A.C.E.)

POLICY BRIEF

Beyond Wheelchair Distribution

Strengthening Sustainable Mobility Support for Persons with Disabilities in Nigeria

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Executive Summary

Access to appropriate assistive technology is recognised as a critical component of disability inclusion and the achievement of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). Wheelchairs enable participation in education, employment, healthcare and community life while promoting independence and dignity.

However, field experience demonstrates that providing a wheelchair alone is insufficient to achieve long-term mobility outcomes.

Since commencing our mobility support programme in 2021, Action for Change & Empowerment (A.C.E.) has distributed **over 1,000 wheelchairs** across communities in Nigeria. Programme implementation has generated important operational lessons regarding beneficiary assessment, infrastructure limitations, equipment sustainability and accountability.

This brief presents those lessons and proposes practical recommendations for governments, donors and implementing organisations seeking to strengthen disability-inclusive programming.

Key Messages

Mobility is not created by a wheelchair alone. Sustainable mobility requires appropriate assessment, accessible environments, maintenance systems and long-term community support.



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Key findings

- More than 1,000 wheelchairs have been distributed through A.C.E.'s community programmes.
 - Poor road infrastructure significantly reduces wheelchair lifespan.
 - Standard wheelchairs do not meet every disability-related mobility need.
 - Demand for assistive devices substantially exceeds available resources.
 - Beneficiary verification is essential but must preserve dignity and trust.
 - Sustainable disability inclusion requires systems—not one-off distributions.
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Why This Matters

“A wheelchair can transform a person’s life. An enabling system ensures that transformation lasts.”

Although wheelchair provision remains an important intervention, mobility outcomes are influenced by broader social, economic and environmental conditions.

For many people living with disabilities in poverty settings they have limited access to required supportive infrastructure due to affordability, availability and other constraints.

Nigeria reflects many of these challenges.

Programmes that focus solely on distribution risk overlooking the factors that determine whether assistive devices remain functional and effective over time.

Context

Persons with disabilities continue to experience barriers across multiple dimensions of daily life, including:

- Access to education
- Healthcare services
- Employment opportunities
- Public transportation
- Community participation
- Physical infrastructure



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Wheelchairs reduce these barriers but cannot eliminate them independently.

Communities require integrated systems that support continued mobility throughout the lifespan of the device.

Evidence from the Field

Programme Reach

A.C.E. Mobility Programme

Indicator	Programme Experience
Wheelchairs distributed	1000+
Communities reached	Multiple states across Nigeria
Primary beneficiaries	Children and adults with physical disabilities
Delivery model	Community-based identification and distribution through local partner

Lesson 1

Infrastructure determines outcomes.

Many communities continue to face significant accessibility barriers.

Common conditions include:

- Unpaved roads
- Severe potholes
- Seasonal flooding
- Uneven terrain
- Limited wheelchair-accessible public spaces

These environmental conditions increase wear and tear on mobility devices and reduce their expected operational lifespan.

Policy implication

Infrastructure investment should be recognised as a disability inclusion intervention.

Lesson 2

Appropriate assessment matters.

Mobility needs differ considerably between individuals.



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Some beneficiaries require:

- Postural support
- Paediatric wheelchairs
- Pressure-relief seating
- Custom positioning
- Specialist mobility solutions

Field observations indicate that requests for replacement equipment frequently reflect inappropriate device matching rather than misuse.

Policy implication

Investment in disability-specific assessment improves both user outcomes and resource efficiency.

Lesson 3

High demand creates operational pressures.

Communities frequently experience demand that exceeds available resources.

Requests for additional mobility devices may arise because:

- Multiple family members require support.
- Existing equipment has deteriorated.
- Household economic hardship limits repair options.
- Functional needs have changed over time.

Occasionally, programmes may also encounter inaccurate beneficiary information.

Such situations should be understood within the broader context of poverty and unmet need rather than viewed solely through a compliance lens.



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Operational Challenges

Challenge 1

Sustainability of assistive technology

Without repair services, spare parts and technical support, wheelchairs become increasingly difficult to maintain.

Challenge 2

Limited rehabilitation services

Many communities lack access to trained rehabilitation professionals capable of conducting comprehensive mobility assessments.

Challenge 3

Resource constraints

Demand for mobility support consistently exceeds programme capacity. This requires transparent prioritisation and equitable allocation systems.

Challenge 4

Maintaining programme integrity

Verification processes remain essential for protecting scarce resources.

However, accountability mechanisms should strengthen—not undermine—the dignity of applicants.



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Recommendations

For Government

- Invest in disability-inclusive infrastructure.
- Expand rehabilitation and assistive technology services.
- Strengthen implementation of national disability legislation.
- Increase budget allocations for community-based disability programmes.

For Donors

- Support multi-year disability programmes rather than one-off distributions.
- Invest in wheelchair maintenance and repair networks.
- Fund monitoring and evaluation beyond initial delivery.
- Encourage locally led disability inclusion initiatives.

For A.C.E & Partners

- Conduct comprehensive beneficiary assessments.
- Strengthen community referral pathways.
- Implement regular post-distribution follow-up.
- Deliver wheelchair maintenance training to beneficiaries and caregivers.
- Establish transparent verification procedures.
- Develop partnerships for long-term servicing and repairs.



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Looking Beyond Distribution

The success of assistive technology programmes should not be measured solely by the number of devices distributed.

Instead, success should be assessed through outcomes such as:

- ✓ Continued mobility
- ✓ Community participation
- ✓ School attendance
- ✓ Employment access
- ✓ Device functionality over time
- ✓ Beneficiary satisfaction
- ✓ Long-term independence

These indicators provide a more meaningful understanding of programme impact.

Conclusion

The experience of A.C.E demonstrates that sustainable disability inclusion requires more than equipment distribution.

Wheelchairs are transformative, but they operate within wider systems shaped by infrastructure, healthcare, social protection and community support.

Future disability programming should therefore move beyond transactional models of assistance towards integrated approaches that combine appropriate assessment, accessible environments, ongoing maintenance and accountable programme management.

By strengthening these systems, governments, donors and civil society organisations can ensure that investments in assistive technology generate lasting improvements in dignity, independence and social inclusion.



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About Action for Change & Empowerment (A.C.E.)

Action for Change C Empowerment (A.C.E.) is a UK-registered charity working in partnership with communities to advance disability inclusion, health equity, education and social empowerment. Through evidence-informed programming and community-led partnerships.

A.C.E. seeks to promote sustainable solutions that improve quality of life for vulnerable populations in Nigeria and beyond.



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