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Inclusive Governance and Disability Rights: Assessing Nigeria and Russia Within Global Human Rights Frameworks

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Abstract

At the dawn of the twenty-first century, governance discourse shifted toward inclusion, equity, and human dignity. The rights of persons with disabilities have become a critical test of how far states have moved from rhetoric to meaningful social justice. This study examines the extent to which Nigeria and Russia have engaged with inclusive governance practices that advance disability rights within global human rights norms. Anchored on a Human Rights-Based Approach (HRBA), a comparative case study design was adopted, relying on documentary sources and qualitative content analysis. The study found that both countries have strong legal commitments under the UNCRPD, but implementation gaps persist: Nigeria is constrained by socioeconomic deprivation and infrastructure deficits, while Russia faces administrative and regional inefficiencies. Access to healthcare, education, and rehabilitation remains highly unequal in both contexts. The study concludes that neither country has translated legal rights into lived equality, weakening progress towards key Sustainable Development Goals. It recommends stronger enforcement through independent monitoring bodies and increased investment in disability-inclusive infrastructure and budgeting.

Keywords: Inclusive Governance, Disability Rights, Human Rights, UNCRPD

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Introduction

Since the turn of the twenty-first century, there has been a sustained effort at both international and domestic levels to reconfigure governance frameworks in ways that recognize the rights and dignity of diverse social groups. This shift reflects a broader normative movement towards inclusive governance, which prioritizes social justice and seeks to build societies that are free from authoritarian tendencies (Hariram et al., 2023; Yates et al., 2024). Within this context, governance is increasingly evaluated not only by its institutional efficiency but also by its responsiveness to marginalized populations. Inclusive governance, therefore, implies that state institutions, policies, and service delivery mechanisms are structured to be accessible, accountable, and responsive to all members of society (Kumije et al., 2025). This conceptual reorientation has influenced policy discourse across regions, particularly in relation to historically excluded groups. Among these groups, persons with disabilities have emerged as a central focus of contemporary governance reforms. Their inclusion raises fundamental questions about equality, participation, and the role of the state in addressing structural inequalities. As a result, disability rights have become deeply embedded in both global and national governance debates.

Persons with disabilities constitute a significant proportion of the global population and remain integral to discussions on equity and human development. The World Health Organization [WHO] (2020) defines disability as a natural aspect of human life, arising from the interaction between individuals with health conditions, such as cerebral palsy, Down syndrome, and depression, and the barriers present within their social and physical environments. Globally, approximately 1.3 billion people, representing about 16 per cent of the world's population, live with one form of disability or another (WHO, 2020; Salako, 2025). Of this figure, at least 190 million individuals experience substantial disabilities, with the majority residing in developing countries. These statistics highlight the scale and urgency of disability inclusion within governance systems. In response, the United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (UNCRPD) has called for the full integration of persons with disabilities into all aspects of societal life. The World Bank (2020) reports that over 170 countries, including Nigeria and the Russian Federation, have ratified the UNCRPD. This widespread ratification has encouraged the development of legal and institutional frameworks aimed at protecting persons with disabilities from discrimination. Consequently, disability rights have become a critical dimension of global human rights governance.

In Nigeria, the question of disability inclusion is particularly significant given the country's demographic scale and socio-economic complexities. With a population exceeding 200 million people (National Bureau of Statistics, 2022), Nigeria represents one of the largest populations in Africa. Despite this, there remains no precise national estimate of persons with disabilities, as noted by the National Population Commission (NPC, 2024). Available data suggest that approximately 25 million Nigerians live with one form of disability or another (National Bureau of Statistics [NBS], 2020; Agbontaen-Eghafona, 2024). Within this group, nearly 40 per cent experience multiple impairments (Thompson, 2020), while at least three million individuals are considered severely affected and unable to function independently in physical or social contexts (Ibekwe & Aduma, 2019). The most prevalent forms of disability in Nigeria include visual, hearing, physical, intellectual, and communication impairments (Umeh & Adeola, 2013; Salako, 2025). These patterns reflect broader structural and environmental challenges. Factors such as untreated preventable diseases, congenital conditions, birth-related complications, and road traffic

accidents contribute significantly to disability prevalence. Additional causes include psychological dysfunction, infectious disease outbreaks, drug misuse, chronic illnesses, and the effects of conflict (Agbontaen-Eghafona, 2024; Uduu, 2020; Ebenso&Eleweke, 2016). These realities reveal the importance of policy interventions that address both prevention and inclusion.

Further, the constitutional and legal framework in Nigeria provides an important basis for addressing disability rights within an inclusive governance paradigm. The 1999 Constitution of the Federal Republic of Nigeria affirms fundamental rights for all citizens, including persons with disabilities, particularly the right to freedom from discrimination, as Section 42(2) prohibits any form of deprivation based on circumstances of birth, a provision broadly interpreted to protect persons with disabilities and guarantee equal rights (Agbontaen-Eghafona, 2024). Nigeria reinforced this commitment by ratifying the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (CRPD) on 30 March 2007 and its Optional Protocols on 24 September 2010, signalling alignment with international human rights standards, although practical implementation remains limited due to institutional and infrastructural constraints.

A major legal milestone was achieved on 23 January 2019 with the enactment of the Discrimination against Persons with Disability (Prohibition) Act (2018), which domesticates the CRPD and prescribes penalties for discrimination (Human Rights Watch, 2019). The Act also introduces reforms such as a five-year transition period for accessible public infrastructure, provision of assistive tools in transport, and the establishment of the National Commission for Persons with Disabilities (NCPWD) to promote inclusion and prevent discrimination. Structured into eight sections, the Act covers non-discrimination, awareness, accessibility to buildings and transport systems, access to public facilities, rights to education, healthcare, employment, political participation, and priority services, while also detailing the roles of the Commission's leadership. Despite these advancements, only nine of Nigeria's 36 states have enacted similar laws, highlighting uneven implementation and ongoing challenges in translating national commitments into effective subnational action (Wahab, Jawando& Oyenuga, 2022).

In contrast, the Russian Federation presents a different but equally complex picture of disability governance. As of 1 June 2025, official statistics indicate that there were 11.4 million persons with disabilities in Russia, including 784,000 children, with approximately 90 per cent of adults classified as having permanent disability status (Russia Presidential Commission for the Disabled, 2025). Earlier data from 2019 recorded 11.947 million persons with disabilities, representing 8.1 per cent of the population, and reflecting a decline of 1.242 million since 2012 (Proklova et al., 2020). The primary cause of disability is general disease, accounting for 85.8 per cent, followed by childhood disability at 10 per cent, while occupational and military-related causes remain below 2 per cent. In terms of disease categories, circulatory diseases account for 35.4 per cent, cancers for 12.2 per cent, musculoskeletal disorders for 7.9 per cent, and mental disorders for 7.8 per cent. Functional limitations are most pronounced in work ability, affecting 72 per cent of individuals, followed by self-care at 42.8 per cent and mobility at 31.8 per cent (Proklova et al., 2020). These figures illustrate the scale and characteristics of disability within the Russian context.

Russia's legal and institutional response to disability rights is anchored in both constitutional and statutory provisions. The Constitution of the Russian Federation (1993), as amended, establishes the state's obligation to support persons with disabilities. Article 7 emphasizes the role of the state in providing social support, while Article 39 guarantees social security in cases of illness and disability. In

2012, Russia ratified the CRPD, thereby committing to international standards on disability inclusion. This ratification marked a significant step in aligning domestic policies with global human rights frameworks. The Federal Law “On the Social Protection of Disabled Persons in the Russian Federation” (2019) serves as the principal legal instrument governing disability rights. Under this law, responsibility for social protection rests primarily with federal authorities, ensuring a uniform standard across the federation. The law guarantees equal levels of social protection irrespective of regional differences. Despite these provisions, the practical implementation of inclusive governance remains shaped by broader socio-political dynamics. The interplay between federal authority and federating units' administration continues to influence policy outcomes.

Despite their differing historical and institutional trajectories, Nigeria and Russia share notable similarities that make them suitable for comparative analysis. Both countries are federal systems with significant regional influence and economies heavily dependent on oil and gas exports. These structural characteristics shape their governance priorities and expose them to global economic fluctuations. Additionally, both countries are marked by high levels of ethnic, linguistic, and regional diversity, which can generate internal tensions and complicate inclusive governance efforts. These complexities extend to the inclusion of persons with disabilities within policy frameworks. Both states formally adopted the 17 United Nations Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) in 2015, committing to their integration into national development strategies by 2030 (UNDP, 2021; Gracheva & Bobina, 2023). Inclusive governance is central to achieving these goals, particularly in ensuring equitable resource distribution and representation. However, the integration and implementation of the SDGs in Nigeria and Russia, especially in relation to persons with disabilities, have encountered challenges unique to each country. Thus, this study seeks to examine the extent to which Nigeria and Russia have engaged with inclusive governance practices that advance disability rights within the broader framework of global human rights norms.

LITERATURE REVIEW

The debate surrounding the subject of inclusive governance has increasingly become a central construct within contemporary development and human rights discourse, particularly in relation to disability rights and social justice. According to the Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD, 2020), governance extends beyond formal government structures to include the broader set of institutions, rules, and processes that determine participation and access to decision-making. OECD emphasizes that inclusion is not merely symbolic participation but a process-oriented engagement that determines whose voices shape policy outcomes and how accountability is exercised. In a complementary but more state-centric framing, Fukuyama (2013) argues that governance is fundamentally about the capacity of the state to design, enforce rules, and deliver services regardless of regime type, thereby shifting attention to functionality rather than inclusiveness. However, Fukuyama's conceptualization has been criticized by scholars such as Kumije et al. (2025), who contend that it underplays structural inequalities embedded in decision-making systems, particularly where marginalized groups such as persons with disabilities (PWDs) are concerned. This limitation becomes clearer when contrasted with the position of the World Bank (2017), which situates governance within a dynamic interaction between state and non-state actors shaped by power relations, thus providing a more relational understanding of inclusion.

Within the inclusive governance discourse, OECD (2020) further distinguishes between process-based and outcome-based inclusion, arguing that genuine inclusivity requires both participation in decision-making and equitable distribution of developmental outcomes. It stresses that inclusion must extend to traditionally marginalized groups, including PWDs, whose participation is often structurally constrained. Similarly, Kumije et al. (2025) reinforce this position by defining inclusive governance as a system that ensures accessibility, accountability, and responsiveness across institutions, with particular attention to disadvantaged populations. However, while Kumije et al. present inclusive governance as an ideal democratic value, their argument is less critical in addressing how deeply entrenched institutional barriers prevent actualization of these ideals in practice. In contrast, the Oxford Review (2025) offers a more operational definition, highlighting equitable access to resources and stakeholder participation in governance structures, thereby bridging theoretical and practical dimensions. This is further extended by Hariram et al. (2023) and Yates et al. (2024), who argue that inclusive governance is strengthened through activism and social movements, a point that exposes the limitations of state-centric approaches such as Fukuyama's (2013). Sánchez-Soriano et al. (2024) further enrich this discourse by introducing community-driven financing as a mechanism for equity and accountability, although their framework underemphasizes the structural power asymmetries that persist in Global South contexts like Nigeria. Collectively, these perspectives provide a conceptual foundation for examining how disability rights are embedded within governance systems, particularly where institutional and societal barriers remain pronounced.

Given the foregoing, diverse academic perspectives on the global efforts towards the protection of the human rights of persons with disabilities converge on the recognition of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (CRPD) as a transformative milestone in international human rights law and movement. Scholars such as Series (2019), Degener (2016), and Aneja (2022) collectively emphasize the Convention's paradigm shift from earlier medical and paternalistic models of disability toward a social and human rights-based framework that prioritizes inclusion, equality, and the removal of societal barriers. This shift is widely regarded as a corrective to the historical invisibility of persons with disabilities in foundational human rights instruments. Similarly, Hoffman (2020) situates the CRPD within broader global initiatives, including the Sustainable Development Goals and the "Leave No One Behind" agenda, highlighting its role in mainstreaming disability issues within development discourse. Empirical illustrations, such as Austria's institutional and legal alignment with the CRPD (Government of Austria, 2020), further demonstrate how the Convention has catalyzed national reforms, monitoring mechanisms, and avenues for redress, reinforcing the consensus that the CRPD represents a progressive and comprehensive framework for advancing disability rights globally.

Despite this shared acknowledgment of progress, the literature also reveals significant divergences regarding the effectiveness and implementation of these global efforts. Jolly (2020) adopts a more critical stance, arguing that the very existence of the CRPD represents persistent global failures to secure basic rights for disabled persons, particularly due to challenges such as weak enforcement, limited monitoring, and the principle of progressive realization, which may delay tangible outcomes. This perspective aligns with Ambrose and Twinamasiko (2025), who stress ongoing structural and developmental barriers that hinder full inclusion in many countries. While Aneja (2022) acknowledges the CRPD as a catalyst for legal and societal change, the author similarly underscores the gap between normative commitments and practical realization, especially in shifting societal attitudes. In contrast, Degener (2016) presents a more optimistic evaluation, emphasizing the Convention's robust legal innovations and transformative equality

framework. Thus, while scholars agree on the CRPD's normative significance and its role in redefining disability rights, they differ in their assessments of its practical impact, with debates centering on the tension between formal international commitments and uneven national implementation.

The gap between inclusive governance ideals and lived realities of PWDs becomes particularly evident in developing countries like Nigeria. Martinez and Vemuru (2020) observe that despite the ratification of the Discrimination Against Persons with Disabilities (Prohibition) Act 2018, implementation remains weak, with persistent exclusion in education, healthcare, transport, and employment systems. The authors note that approximately 7% of Nigerians aged five and above experience functional difficulties, yet structural barriers continue to limit their participation in governance and development processes. This aligns with Agbontaen-Eghafona (2024), who estimates that around 25 million Nigerians live with disabilities, many of whom face discrimination, poverty, and exclusion from basic services despite legal protections. However, while Martinez and Vemuru (2020) focus on institutional gaps, Agbontaen-Eghafona places greater emphasis on socio-cultural beliefs, particularly religious interpretations of disability as a spiritual curse, which reinforces stigma. A limitation in Agbontaen-Eghafona's perspective is the insufficient interrogation of how state governance failures enable the persistence of these cultural barriers. Ayub and Abubakar (2022) further expand the discussion by highlighting intra-familial abuse, educational exclusion, and psychological neglect experienced by PWDs. This demonstrates that exclusion operates at both institutional and domestic levels.

The structural exclusion of PWDs in Nigeria is further reinforced by intersecting socio-economic vulnerabilities, particularly poverty and inadequate access to services. Umeh and Adeola (2013) and Uduu (2020) identify multiple causes of disability, including preventable diseases, accidents, and congenital conditions, while Ebenso and Eleweke (2016) highlight the compounding effect of conflict and infectious diseases. In a more critical analysis, Omiegbe (2021) and Inclusive Futures (2020) argue that disability and poverty reinforce each other in a cyclical relationship, trapping PWDs in systemic deprivation. However, while these scholars effectively highlight structural deprivation, they tend to understate the role of governance failures in perpetuating such cycles. Aluko et al. (2023) argue that households with disabled members experience heightened food insecurity, poor housing, and limited access to healthcare, while Adeworan (2019) calls for stronger institutional intervention and NGO collaboration. Martinez and Vemuru's (2020) emphasis on weak enforcement of disability laws becomes more significant, as it links socio-economic exclusion directly to governance inefficiency. The foregoing academic arguments demonstrate that inclusive governance in Nigeria is not merely a policy concern but a systemic failure embedded in both institutional design and implementation.

In contrast to Nigeria, Russia presents a different historical trajectory of disability governance, shaped heavily by Soviet-era institutionalization and post-Soviet legal reforms. Human Rights Watch (2013) reports that despite Russia's ratification of the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities in 2012 and the introduction of accessibility programmes, significant barriers persist in transport, housing, and employment. Human Rights Watch stress that only about 20% of working-age disabled individuals are employed, reflecting systemic discrimination and weak enforcement of anti-discrimination laws. Nelms (2024) further contextualizes this by tracing historical neglect of disabled persons during the Soviet period, including institutional abuse in orphanages and forced relocation into psychiatric facilities. However, while Human Rights Watch (2013) provides a rights-based critique of policy failure, Nelms (2024) focuses more on institutional violence without fully engaging with

contemporary governance reforms. Nosenko-Stein (2017) adds a cultural dimension, arguing that persistent stigma and “normate” ideologies continue to frame PWDs as dependent or burdensome. However, her analysis arguably overemphasizes cultural continuity at the expense of acknowledging gradual policy improvements. Roza (2015) offers a more balanced perspective by documenting how organizations such as Perspektiva, a regional non-governmental organization of disabled people in Russia, have improved inclusion through education, advocacy, and policy engagement. Nevertheless, Roza’s optimism regarding increasing participation in governance may understate persistent structural barriers, particularly in rural and institutional settings.

Further examining Russia’s disability governance reveals systemic contradictions between legal frameworks and lived realities. Proklova et al. (2020) emphasize the importance of statistical data in planning disability policy, noting regional disparities and rising child disability rates, which suggest weaknesses in preventive healthcare and social protection systems. However, their technical focus on data systems overlooks the broader political economy shaping disability inclusion. Stankevich et al. (2021) highlight labour market exclusion, noting that inaccessible workplaces, lack of education, and weak state compensation mechanisms hinder employment opportunities for PWDs. While their analysis is robust in identifying labour barriers, it insufficiently interrogates the governance structures that fail to enforce inclusion policies. Firsov et al. (2019) introduce the concept of a “digital divide,” arguing that disabled children risk long-term exclusion from the digital economy due to inadequate inclusive education. This perspective is particularly significant as it links governance failure to future socio-economic marginalization, although it arguably overgeneralizes future outcomes without sufficient empirical grounding.

Comparatively, both Nigeria and Russia demonstrate that inclusive governance frameworks exist in principle but are undermined by implementation deficits, cultural attitudes, and institutional weaknesses. In Nigeria, Martinez and Vemuru (2020), Agbontaen-Eghafona (2024) among other scholars illustrate how legal reforms are weakened by stigma, poverty, and weak enforcement. On the other hand, in Russia, Human Rights Watch (2013), Nosenko-Stein (2017) and other studies demonstrate how institutional legacies and cultural stereotypes continue to restrict full inclusion. However, a key difference lies in the nature of exclusion of persons with disability in both countries. Nigeria’s challenges are more rooted in socio-economic deprivation and informal institutional practices, whereas Russia’s are more structurally embedded in bureaucratic systems and historical institutionalization. However, both contexts confirm OECD’s (2020) assertion that inclusion must be process-driven and outcome-oriented, as neither participation nor service delivery is fully realized for PWDs.

A major gap across most reviewed studies is their tendency to analyze either cultural, economic, or institutional factors in isolation, rather than integrating them within a comprehensive governance framework. This fragmented approach weakens comparative understanding and limits policy applicability across contexts. Another notable gap identified across studies is the paucity of comparative analyses that systematically examine how different governance systems shape disability inclusion across diverse socio-political contexts. Most studies focus either on Nigeria or Russia independently, with limited cross-national interrogation of governance mechanisms, cultural influences, and institutional capacities. This study therefore addresses this gap by providing a comparative assessment of inclusive governance and disability rights in Nigeria and Russia, with the aim of contributing to a more integrated

understanding of how global human rights frameworks are interpreted, implemented, and experienced in distinct governance environments.

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

This study is grounded in Human Rights-Based Approach (HRBA). The Human Rights-Based Approach (HRBA) to development is not attributed to a single founding theorist but emerged from the broader evolution of international human rights law, particularly following the adoption of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights in 1948 and subsequent covenants. Its formal articulation in development practice is often traced to the late 1990s, especially with the United Nations' 1997 reform programme under Secretary-General Kofi Annan, and later consolidated in the 2003 UN Common Understanding on a Human Rights-Based Approach to Development Cooperation (United Nations, 2003). Scholars such as Uvin (2004) and Cornwall and Nyamu-Musembi (2004) have been central in theorizing and critiquing HRBA, framing it as a paradigm that integrates legal human rights norms into development policy and practice. Rather than a rigid theory, HRBA is better understood as a normative and operational framework grounded in internationally recognized human rights standards.

At its core, HRBA rests on the principle that development processes should explicitly aim to realize human rights, shifting the focus from charity-based models to entitlement-based frameworks. It identifies two key actors: "rights-holders," who are entitled to certain rights, and "duty-bearers," typically states, who are obligated to respect, protect, and fulfil these rights (United Nations, 2003). Central principles include universality and inalienability, indivisibility of rights, participation and inclusion, accountability, and the rule of law. In practice, this means that development interventions must be participatory, empowering marginalized populations to claim their rights while strengthening institutional capacity for accountability. As Uvin (2004) argues, HRBA transforms development from a technocratic exercise into a political process, embedding justice and equity into policy formulation and implementation.

The approach also emphasizes non-discrimination and prioritization of vulnerable groups, insisting that development outcomes must be equitable rather than merely efficient. By integrating legal standards with development practice, HRBA provides a framework for evaluating policies against internationally agreed benchmarks, thereby enhancing transparency and legitimacy (Cornwall & Nyamu-Musembi, 2004). However, HRBA has been criticized for being overly normative and difficult to operationalize, especially in contexts with weak institutions. Additionally, its reliance on state accountability may be problematic in authoritarian settings where governments are unwilling to uphold human rights commitments.

Applying the Human Rights-Based Approach (HRBA) to the study on inclusive governance and disability rights in Nigeria and Russia foregrounds the extent to which both states operationalise their obligations as duty-bearers in guaranteeing the rights of persons with disabilities as legitimate rights-holders within global human rights regimes. From this perspective, inclusive governance is not merely a policy aspiration but a legal and moral obligation grounded in instruments such as the United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities. This demands participation, non-discrimination,

and accountability in public decision-making. This study within the framework of Human Rights-Based Approach (HRBA) examines how effectively both Nigeria and Russia institutionalises the guiding principles of United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities, particularly in ensuring accessibility, political inclusion, and equitable service delivery. It also interrogates structural and political constraints that may hinder compliance. Thus, observed disparities in the implementation of UNCRPD principles between Nigeria and Russia, may reflect differences in civic space, institutional capacity, and enforcement mechanisms. This will reveal the gap between formal commitment and substantive realisation of disability rights within global human rights frameworks.

METHODOLOGY

Comparative case study research design is adopted for this study. It examines two or more similar cases to identify their similarities, differences, and patterns, helping us understand how and why certain programs or policies succeed or fail (Goodrick, 2014). This research design suits the study because it enables a systematic comparison of Nigeria and Russia to identify patterns, differences, and underlying factors shaping how inclusive governance affects disability rights within global human rights frameworks.

The study adopted the documentary method of data collection, drawing extensively on secondary sources relevant to inclusive governance and disability rights in Nigeria and Russia. These sources included peer-reviewed journal articles from reputable academic publishing platforms, reports from credible media organisations, civil society and non-governmental organisations, as well as publications from international governmental bodies and official documents from domestic government institutions.

In terms of data analysis, the study adopts a qualitative content analysis. This method of data analysis allows for the systematic examination and interpretation of texts, such as policy documents, reports, and academic literature, by identifying recurring themes, patterns, and narratives related to inclusive governance and disability rights across Nigeria and Russia.

DISCUSSION OF FINDINGS

Nigeria and Russia are signatories to the United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (UNCRPD) and have respectively ratified it. Both countries have also undertaken measures to domesticate its provisions through the adoption of various national policies aimed at safeguarding the rights of persons with disabilities in both countries. Notwithstanding these policy efforts, this section examines the extent and nature of the contemporary challenges confronting persons with disabilities in Nigeria and Russia.

A. Challenges of Inclusive Governance and Disability Rights in Nigeria

Inclusive governance remains a critical yet contested aspect of Nigeria's human rights and development agenda, particularly in relation to persons with disabilities. Despite the existence of strong international commitments and domestic legal frameworks, significant gaps persist between policy intent and lived realities across key sectors of social life. This sub-section explores the major structural and institutional challenges that continue to hinder the realisation of disability rights in Nigeria within the broader framework of inclusive governance.

i. Poverty

Poverty remains a profound structural barrier to inclusive governance in Nigeria, and persons with disability are exposed to this harsh reality despite international and domestic legal frameworks designed to protect them. The United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (2006) explicitly addresses this challenge in Article 28, which guarantees the right of PWDs to an adequate standard of living and social protection, including access to food, housing, and poverty reduction programmes. This provision is complemented by Article 27, which emphasizes equal opportunities in work and employment as a pathway to economic independence. At the domestic level, the 1999 Constitution of Nigeria reinforces these commitments through Section 16, which promotes economic welfare, Section 17, which mandates protection of vulnerable populations, and Section 42, which prohibits discrimination. Furthermore, the Discrimination Against Persons with Disabilities (Prohibition) Act, 2019, particularly Section 1, outlaws' discrimination and mandates accessibility and equal employment opportunities. Despite this robust legal architecture, poverty continues to undermine effective implementation. Empirical evidence illustrates this gap. The 2024 United Nations Disability and Development Report revealed that 87% of persons with disabilities in Nigeria live in multidimensional poverty, compared to 67% of persons without disabilities, with an overall national figure of 74.9% (United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs, 2025; Salako, 2025). This disparity highlights systemic governance failures in translating legal guarantees into tangible socio-economic outcomes, thereby weakening inclusive governance structures intended to protect vulnerable groups.

The persistence of poverty among PWDs is further compounded by labour market exclusion and gender disparities, which directly impede the realization of Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), particularly SDG 1 (No Poverty), SDG 8 (Decent Work and Economic Growth), and SDG 10 (Reduced Inequalities). According to data from the Disability Data Initiative, only 41.2% of persons with disabilities in Nigeria are employed, compared to 53.7% of those without disabilities, with even lower participation among women with disabilities at 39.3% compared to 43.2% of men (Salako, 2025). The situation is more severe in terms of multidimensional poverty, where 80.5% of women with disabilities are affected, placing Nigeria 10th among 15 Sub-Saharan African countries; this is contrasted with Ethiopia at 98.4% and Malawi at 96.5% (Salako, 2025). A 2024 report further exposed systemic barriers such as workplace inaccessibility and entrenched discrimination, which limit employment opportunities and perpetuate economic exclusion (Falaiye, 2024). These conditions often force many PWDs into street begging, reinforcing social marginalization. The cyclical relationship between poverty and disability is evident, as disability restricts access to economic opportunities while poverty increases vulnerability to disability (Omiegbe, 2021). Consequently, the failure to address these intersecting challenges undermines the attainment of SDG Target 10.2 on social and economic inclusion and Target 8.5 on full and productive employment. In effect, poverty not only weakens governance mechanisms but also obstructs Nigeria's broader commitment to global development and human rights obligations.

ii. Access to Healthcare

Article 25 of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities explicitly mandates equal access to healthcare services for persons with disabilities (PWDs), including preventive, rehabilitative, and sexual and reproductive health services, while Article 9 reinforces the obligation to

eliminate physical and informational barriers that impede accessibility. These provisions are complemented by authoritative interpretations such as General Comment No. 14, which clarifies that healthcare systems must be accessible, acceptable, and of quality for PWDs without discrimination (United Nations, 2006). Despite these commitments, Nigeria's domestic legal architecture, including Sections 16, 17(3)(d), 21, and 42 of the Constitution of the Federal Republic of Nigeria (1999, as amended), and Sections 21 and 24 of the Discrimination Against Persons with Disabilities (Prohibition) Act, 2019, reveals a gap between legal guarantees and practical implementation. While these laws establish the state's responsibility to ensure welfare, social security, and non-discrimination, their enforceability remains constrained by systemic weaknesses. For instance, although the National Health Insurance Authority Act (2022) presents an opportunity to incorporate disability-inclusive health insurance benefits, the absence of robust institutional mechanisms has limited its transformative impact. This disconnect between legal obligations and lived realities demonstrate how inadequate healthcare access undermines inclusive governance and weakens the protection of disability rights within Nigeria's human rights framework.

Furthermore, empirical data illustrates the structural challenges that hinder the realization of these rights and their implications for global development commitments such as Sustainable Development Goal 3 (SDG 3), which seeks to ensure healthy lives and promote well-being for all. The State of Disability Inclusion Report (SDIR) 2024, produced by Project Enable Africa in collaboration with the National Commission for Persons with Disabilities (NCPWD) and the Federal Ministry of Humanitarian Affairs and Poverty Reduction, revealed that as of 2024, 28% of health facilities in Nigeria lack basic accessibility features, thereby excluding a significant proportion of PWDs from essential services (Are, 2025). This infrastructural deficit is compounded by chronic underfunding in the health sector, which has persistently remained between 4–5% of national expenditure, far below the 15% benchmark established by the Abuja Declaration (Latifah, 2019; World Bank, 2025). Such underinvestment restricts the development of accessible infrastructure, limits the training of healthcare professionals in disability-inclusive practices, and curtails the provision of assistive technologies (Azubuike, 2025). Consequently, the failure to ensure equitable healthcare access not only violates both domestic and international legal obligations but also obstructs Nigeria's progress towards Universal Health Coverage and SDG 3 targets. The cumulative effect is a cycle of exclusion in which PWDs remain marginalized, thereby highlighting the broader governance deficit in aligning national health systems with international human rights standards and sustainable development imperatives.

iii. Access to Education

In terms of access to education, Article 24 of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (UNCRPD) establishes a clear obligation on States Parties to guarantee inclusive education systems at all levels. This requires reasonable accommodation, tailored support mechanisms, and accessible learning environments. However, despite Nigeria's constitutional and statutory commitments, significant gaps persist between legal provisions and lived realities. Section 18 of the 1999 Constitution of the Federal Republic of Nigeria mandates equal and adequate educational opportunities, while Section 42 prohibits discrimination, including based on disability. These provisions are reinforced by the Discrimination Against Persons with Disabilities (Prohibition) Act 2018, which was assented to in 2019, particularly Sections 17–18 and 25, which explicitly prohibit discrimination in educational institutions and require accessibility. Nonetheless, empirical data reveal systemic failures: over 30% of

children with disabilities lack access to education, and approximately 7 million children with disabilities in Nigeria (Adenireti, 2025). A staggering 95.5% remain out of school due to entrenched barriers such as inaccessible infrastructure, stigma, and cultural biases (Adedeji, 2026).

The persistence of these challenges significantly impedes the realization of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), particularly SDG 4, which seeks to ensure inclusive and equitable quality education, with specific emphasis on Targets 4.5 and 4.a. The State of Disability Report of 2024 indicates that over 85% of schools in Nigeria are not accessible to students with disabilities, while 70% of such children are entirely excluded from formal schooling (Owonikoko, 2025). This exclusion not only contravenes domestic legal standards and international obligations but also perpetuates cycles of marginalization, limiting participation in governance and civic life. The absence of ramps, assistive technologies, and trained personnel reflects a broader institutional neglect that weakens the credibility of inclusive governance frameworks. Furthermore, the failure to integrate persons with disabilities into the education system diminishes the human capital necessary for sustainable development, thereby obstructing Nigeria's progress towards achieving global development benchmarks. In effect, the disconnect between policy commitments, such as those articulated in the UNCRPD and national legislation, and the actual conditions experienced by persons with disabilities reveals a systemic governance challenge. Addressing this gap requires not only legislative enforcement but also sustained investment, policy coherence, and cultural transformation to ensure that inclusive education becomes a practical reality rather than a formal aspiration (Adenireti, 2025; Adedeji, 2026; Owonikoko, 2025).

iv. Access to Building and Transportation Facilities

The United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (UNCRPD, 2006) establishes clear standards through Article 9 on accessibility and Article 20 on personal mobility, alongside Article 19, which guarantees independent living, and Article 28, which affirms the right to an adequate standard of living. These provisions collectively impose obligations on States to ensure that physical environments and transport systems are inclusive and usable. In Nigeria, these commitments are reinforced by Section 42 of the 1999 Constitution, which prohibits discrimination, and Section 43, which guarantees property rights, as well as the Discrimination Against Persons with Disabilities (Prohibition) Act, 2019, particularly Sections 3 and 4, which mandate accessibility in public buildings and transportation. However, despite these legal frameworks, empirical realities demonstrate a significant implementation gap. Reports indicate that as of 2026, only about 2 per cent of buildings in Nigeria are accessible to persons with disabilities, leaving approximately 98 per cent structurally exclusionary (Opata, 2026). These barriers are not abstract but manifest in everyday architectural deficiencies such as stair-only entrances, narrow doorways, lack of ramps and elevators, and absence of tactile signage for visually impaired individuals (Fiyinfunoluwa, 2026). The cumulative effect of these inadequacies is the systematic exclusion of persons with disabilities from civic participation, housing opportunities, and public life, thereby undermining the very essence of inclusive governance envisioned under both national and international human rights laws.

Transportation systems further compound these challenges, creating a layered exclusion that directly contradicts the obligations under the UNCRPD and domestic legislation. As documented by Fabunmi (2023), most public transport vehicles in Nigeria lack essential accessibility features such as wheelchair ramps, lifts, or designated seating spaces, effectively rendering mobility difficult or impossible for

persons with physical impairments. This problem extends to transport infrastructure, where bus parks and train stations are largely devoid of ramps, elevators, tactile paving, and accessible sanitation facilities, significantly restricting independent movement and dignity. Such systemic neglect has far-reaching implications for the actualization of the Sustainable Development Goals, particularly SDG 11, which seeks to ensure access to safe, affordable, and sustainable transport systems (Targets 11.2 and 11.7), and SDG 10, which emphasizes social, economic, and political inclusion (Target 10.2). The persistence of inaccessible infrastructure not only entrenches inequality but also perpetuates cycles of dependency and marginalization, as many persons with disabilities are forced into informal settlements or reliant living arrangements due to limited access to habitable and accessible environments (Opata, 2026). Consequently, the disconnect between legal commitments and practical realities highlights a governance deficit, where the failure to enforce accessibility standards undermines both human rights protections and sustainable development objectives. Addressing these issues requires not merely legislative compliance but a deliberate restructuring of public infrastructure, enforcement mechanisms, and policy priorities to align Nigeria's development trajectory with its international obligations and inclusive governance aspirations.

v. Political Representation

Political representation of persons with disabilities (PWDs) in Nigeria sits at the intersection of progressive legal commitments and persistent structural exclusion, hindering inclusive governance. At the global level, Article 29 of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (UNCRPD) affirms the political rights of PWDs to vote and be elected, thereby obligating state parties to guarantee accessible and participatory electoral systems (United Nations, 2006). In Nigeria, this commitment is domesticated through the Discrimination Against Persons with Disabilities (Prohibition) Act 2018, where Part IV, Section 30 provides that PWDs "shall be encouraged to fully participate in politics and public life," while also mandating government to create enabling environments for non-discriminatory participation. Similarly, the Electoral Act 2022 strengthens procedural inclusion under Sections 54(1) and (2), allowing voters with disabilities to be assisted by persons of their choice or through Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC) support mechanisms to ensure independent voting. The same Act, in Part III Section 9(a & b), further requires the electoral register to include eligible voters with disability classifications, signaling an intention toward data-driven inclusion. Complementing these statutes, INEC introduced its Framework for Access and Inclusion for PWDs in 2018, aligned with Article 29 of the UNCRPD, with explicit guidance in Section 7(a & b) emphasizing accessible polling units for all voters, including PWDs (INEC, 2018; INEC, 2022:7). However, despite these layered legal instruments, the persistence of inaccessible electoral environments and weak enforcement mechanisms reveals a gap between normative commitments and practical implementation, thereby constraining inclusive governance and weakening the rights-based architecture intended to protect political participation.

Empirical realities demonstrate that Nigeria's political representation system continues to marginalize PWDs despite these legal safeguards, thereby undermining both inclusive governance and global development commitments. According to Centre for Ability, Rehabilitation, and Empowerment report, over 35 million Nigerians with disabilities remain largely excluded from meaningful political participation, reflecting a severe systemic inclusion crisis (News Central, 2026). This exclusion is further evidenced in the 2023 general elections, where data from the European Union Support to Democratic

Governance in Nigeria (EU-SDGN, 2024) indicated that only 85,363 PWD voters participated out of more than 24.9 million accredited voters, representing a mere 0.34 per cent turnout from the disability community. In the same election, out of 4,716 candidates who contested various political offices, only 37 were PWDs, accounting for just 0.78 per cent of total candidates, thereby reinforcing the near invisibility of disability representation in elective politics (EU-SDGN, 2024). Chike Okogwu of the Centre for Ability, Rehabilitation, and Empowerment further emphasized that despite PWDs constituting approximately 15 per cent of Nigeria's population, there are currently no disabled governors or senators in office, attributing this outcome to inaccessible polling infrastructure, high political campaign costs, and inadequate implementation of the 2018 Disability Act (News Central, 2026). These realities significantly obstruct the realization of Sustainable Development Goal 10, particularly Target 10.2, which promotes social, economic, and political inclusion for all. Ultimately, the persistence of these barriers illustrates how weak institutional enforcement and structural inequality continue to limit the transformative potential of both domestic legislation and international human rights frameworks in advancing equitable democratic participation.

v. Cultural and Religious Discrimination, Exploitation, and Violence

The governance of disability rights in Nigeria operates within a complex intersection of international obligations and domestic legal frameworks, yet cultural and religious interpretations continue to weaken their effectiveness in practice. The United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (CRPD) establishes a robust normative foundation through provisions such as Article 5 on equality and non-discrimination, Article 8 on combating stereotypes, Article 12 on legal recognition, and Article 16 on protection from exploitation and abuse. These provisions collectively demand that state parties eliminate structural and attitudinal barriers that undermine inclusion. Nigeria's 1999 Constitution reinforces similar guarantees through Sections 17(2)(a), 34(1), 38, and 42, which collectively affirm equality, dignity, freedom of religion, and protection from discrimination. In addition, the Discrimination Against Persons with Disabilities (Prohibition) Act 2019 strengthens domestic enforcement by prohibiting discrimination (Section 1) and criminalizing exploitation and harmful practices (Sections 27–29). Despite these frameworks, deeply rooted socio-cultural perceptions persist, particularly where disability is interpreted through religious or traditional belief systems. Agbontaen-Eghafona (2024) observes that Nigeria's ethno-religious diversity is historically anchored in indigenous belief systems, many of which still shape disability perceptions despite the dominance of Christianity and Islam. In the same vein, Doma (cited in Agbontaen-Eghafona, 2024) highlights how traditional cosmologies continue to frame disability as spiritual consequence or moral punishment. Such interpretations are further reinforced through derogatory linguistic constructions, including Yoruba terms such as *Abirun*, *Abami*, *Didinrin*, and *Alawoku*, which not only stigmatize but also entrench exclusion (Adeworan, 2019). These cultural dynamics collectively challenge inclusive governance by undermining the implementation of CRPD principles and weakening institutional accountability mechanisms intended to protect persons with disabilities.

Furthermore, the persistence of culturally and religiously motivated violence against persons with disabilities in Nigeria demonstrates the gap between legal commitments and lived realities. Etieyibo and Omiegbe (2016) document extreme violations including trafficking, ritual killings, and sexual violence targeting persons with mental illness, oculocutaneous albinism, and angular kyphosis. In 2011, two particularly disturbing incidents were recorded in South-South Nigeria: in Ugbogui village, Edo State, a

person with albinism was beheaded while farming, while in Abraka Urhuoka Quarters, Delta State, another victim was murdered with body parts removed, allegedly for ritual purposes linked to beliefs about wealth and longevity (Etiyibo & Omiegbe, 2016). These events illustrate how superstition transforms disability into a perceived resource for exploitation. Earlier, in 2002 in Ikot-Akpan Abia, Akwa Ibom State, police arrested a man who confessed to trafficking body parts of individuals with angular kyphosis for over a decade, supplying them to herbalists and ritual practitioners, revealing a sustained network of abuse (Etiyibo & Omiegbe, 2016). Women with mental illness face compounded vulnerability, often subjected to sexual violence justified by spiritual stigma, thereby deepening cycles of marginalization and social abandonment (Etiyibo & Omiegbe, 2016). These practices directly violate CRPD Articles 15, 16, and 17, which guarantee freedom from degrading treatment, exploitation, and protection of personal integrity. Although Nigeria's legal instruments formally prohibit such abuses, enforcement remains weak due to institutional limitations and the persistence of belief-driven justification of violence, which ultimately undermines the constitutional promise of dignity and equality.

Beyond overt violence, structural exploitation remains a significant barrier to inclusive governance and sustainable development for persons with disabilities in Nigeria. Evidence shows that children with disabilities are frequently coerced into street begging by parents or guardians, often under threats of violence, deprivation, or abandonment, exploiting cultural norms of obedience and sympathy-driven almsgiving in urban centres (Etiyibo&Omiegbe, 2016). This practice is further compounded in northern Nigeria through the Almajiri system, where boys aged approximately 4–18 years are sent to informal Qur'anic schools and compelled to beg in cities such as Damaturu in Yobe State to sustain both themselves and their teachers (Etiyibo&Omiegbe, 2016). Such arrangements blur the line between cultural practice and systemic exploitation, raising serious concerns under CRPD Article 24 on inclusive education and Article 26 on habilitation and rehabilitation. These conditions also obstruct the achievement of Sustainable Development Goal 16, particularly targets relating to access to justice, reduction of violence, and development of effective institutions. The persistence of ritualized killings, forced begging, and discriminatory labelling demonstrates the extent to which governance structures fail to translate legal protections into tangible outcomes. Consequently, inclusive governance remains weakened, as persons with disabilities continue to experience exclusion from justice systems, education, and social protection frameworks.

B. Challenges of Inclusive Governance and Disability Rights in Russia

i. Access Environment

Accessible environments constitute a foundational requirement for the realization of inclusive governance for persons with disabilities, yet in the Russian Federation persistent structural barriers continue to undermine compliance with global human rights obligations. The United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities, particularly Articles 9 and 21, obliges State Parties to guarantee equal access to the physical environment, transportation systems, information, and communications. In Russia, where persons with disabilities are estimated at over 11 million people, representing approximately 9% of the population, significant legislative efforts have been undertaken to align domestic policy with these international standards(United Nations, 2006). Key among these is the Federal Law "On the Social Protection of Disabled Persons in the Russian Federation," especially Article 15(2), which mandates equal access to transport, communication, and information systems.

Furthermore, the 2019–2025 “Accessible Environment” state programme and Government Decree No. 1742 (2020) were introduced to strengthen regulatory coherence and standardize accessibility across infrastructure and public services. Despite these frameworks, implementation remains uneven, particularly in transport systems, adapted housing, healthcare facilities, and cultural institutions, thereby weakening the practical realization of inclusive governance (High Commissioner for Human Rights in the Russian Federation, 2020). Over one million housing units occupied by persons with disabilities remain unsuitable, reflecting deep infrastructural deficits that contradict both domestic law and UNCRPD commitments (High Commissioner for Human Rights in the Russian Federation, 2020). Additionally, although more than 200 disability-focused public associations exist in Moscow and its surrounding region, their contribution to policy monitoring and service delivery remains underutilized, limiting participatory governance structures (High Commissioner for Human Rights in the Russian Federation, 2020). These gaps highlight a persistent disjuncture between normative frameworks and lived realities, ultimately constraining progress towards Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) 11, which emphasizes inclusive, safe, and accessible cities and communities.

The persistence of accessibility barriers in Russia also reflects systemic weaknesses in data governance, enforcement mechanisms, and institutional accountability, all of which significantly affect the attainment of SDG 10 on reduced inequalities. Data indicates that only 68.2% of regions employ personalized disability information systems, while a mere 34.5% utilize these systems for statistical reporting, thereby limiting evidence-based policymaking and targeted service provision (Proklova et al., 2020). Moreover, approximately 250,000 children with functional limitations are estimated to lack formal disability status, resulting in exclusion from essential social protection and support mechanisms (Proklova et al., 2020). These shortcomings illustrate how administrative inefficiencies directly impede equitable access to rights guaranteed under the UNCRPD (United Nations, 2006). Complaints submitted to human rights bodies further reveal widespread barriers, including inaccessible public transport, inadequate healthcare and sanatorium facilities, and insufficient disability-friendly infrastructure at the municipal level (High Commissioner for Human Rights in the Russian Federation, 2020). Although enforcement provisions exist within national legislation, weak penalties for non-compliance significantly reduce deterrence, prompting calls for stronger oversight by institutions such as the Procurator’s Office to ensure adherence to accessibility standards (High Commissioner for Human Rights in the Russian Federation, 2020). Consequently, the gap between legal commitments and practical implementation continues to hinder meaningful social inclusion, restricting persons with disabilities from full participation in civic, economic, and political life. This slows down progress towards the attainment of SDG 10, which aims to reduce inequality within and among countries by promoting social, economic, and political inclusion for all, and SDG 11, which focuses on making cities and human settlements inclusive, safe, resilient, and sustainable.

ii. Healthcare, Medical and Social Assessment

The global legal framework established under the United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (UNCRPD) situates healthcare as a core entitlement, particularly under Article 25, which affirms the right to the highest attainable standard of health without discrimination, and Article 26, which mandates habilitation and rehabilitation services that enhance independence and social participation (United Nations, 2006). Within the Russian Federation, however, the operationalization of these principles is significantly constrained by the structure and practice of the medical and social

assessment (MSA) system that determines disability status and access to state support. Each year, approximately 2.5 million individuals undergo this assessment process, with nearly 2 million formally recognized as disabled, yet systemic inefficiencies continue to undermine fairness and accessibility (High Commissioner for Human Rights in the Russian Federation, 2020). Findings from the Accounts Chamber in 2019 revealed persistent administrative shortcomings, indicating that the Strategy for Health Care Development to 2025 has not substantially improved service delivery or equity in access.

Procedural barriers remain entrenched, including difficulties in obtaining medical referrals, delays in documentation processing, and inconsistencies in certification outcomes that weaken trust in the system. Approximately 50% of applicants contest MSA decisions, while about 1 in 8 pursue formal appeals, reflecting widespread dissatisfaction and perceived institutional unreliability (High Commissioner for Human Rights in the Russian Federation, 2020). Although electronic document exchange mechanisms were introduced in 2018 to streamline procedures, their impact has been limited by structural bottlenecks and uneven implementation across regions. The absence of an independent MSA mechanism, despite being proposed in a governmental roadmap originally planned for completion by 2017, further illustrates a significant governance gap in aligning domestic practice with UNCRPD expectations. Compounding these issues, staffing shortages, weak professional protections, and infrastructural inaccessibility contributed in 2019 to the temporary closure of 31 assessment bureaus in the Moscow region, demonstrating institutional fragility (High Commissioner for Human Rights in the Russian Federation, 2020).

Legal and policy inconsistencies further complicate the realization of inclusive governance for persons with disabilities in Russia, particularly in the healthcare and pharmaceutical sectors. Under Federal Law No. 61-FZ (2010) on the Circulation of Medicines and Article 4 of the Law on Health Protection, individuals with disabilities are entitled to essential medicines, yet in practice many encounter unlawful refusals due to restrictive drug lists, funding shortages, and regional disparities in budget allocations. Although courts frequently rule in favour of claimants, the repeated necessity of litigation highlights a structural gap between formal legal guarantees and practical enforcement. Between 2019 and 2020, federal policy expanded funding for orphan diseases, increasing coverage from 7 to 14 conditions, yet many affected individuals remain dependent on under-resourced regional healthcare systems (High Commissioner for Human Rights in the Russian Federation, 2020). Persistent challenges also include the absence of reimbursement mechanisms for out-of-pocket medical expenditures, creating additional financial strain on households already facing disability-related vulnerabilities. Furthermore, burdensome re-examination requirements, even for individuals with irreversible conditions, undermine both dignity and administrative efficiency, contradicting the rehabilitative intent of Article 26 of the UNCRPD (United Nations, 2006). The lack of international agreements enabling disability reassessment abroad further restricts mobility and access to equitable evaluation standards, reinforcing systemic isolation. Collectively, these governance and implementation deficits directly hinder progress towards Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) 3 on good health and well-being and SDG 10 on reduced inequalities, as they obstruct equitable access to healthcare, rehabilitation services, and social inclusion for persons with disabilities.

iii. Work and Employment

Work and employment for persons with disabilities in the Russian Federation continues to expose a persistent gap between formal legal commitments and lived realities of inclusive governance. The UNCRPD establishes in Article 25 the entitlement to the highest attainable standard of health and in Article 27 the right to work on an equal basis, obligating states to eliminate discrimination and ensure reasonable workplace accommodation (United Nations, 2006). Within Russia, these commitments are reflected in domestic instruments such as Federal Law “On Social Protection of Disabled Persons,” especially Article 24, which mandates employer responsibilities including job creation, adaptation of working conditions, and quota compliance. The Labour Code further supplements these protections through provisions regulating working hours (Article 94), night work (Article 96), overtime restrictions (Article 113), and extended leave entitlements. Despite these frameworks, implementation data reveals structural limitations: between January and September 2019, approximately 66.8 thousand persons with disabilities were placed into employment through state services, while only 28.8 per cent of working-age disabled persons had stable employment by October 2019 (High Commissioner for Human Rights in the Russian Federation, 2020). These figures reflect a governance gap between legislative intent and labour market integration outcomes, raising concerns about the effectiveness of rights-based inclusion mechanisms.

A closer examination of institutional practice reveals that enforcement deficits, employer resistance, and uneven regional compliance significantly weaken Russia’s disability employment framework. Employers frequently cite perceived productivity limitations and costs of workplace adaptation as justification for avoiding compliance with employment quotas, while documented violations include failure to report vacancies and refusal to hire persons within mandated quotas (High Commissioner for Human Rights in the Russian Federation, 2020). Oversight bodies in several regions have also been identified as underperforming in monitoring quota fulfilment and workplace accessibility standards, thereby reducing accountability in implementation. Although legal remedies exist under administrative, disciplinary, and criminal provisions, sanctions under Article 5.42 of the Code of Administrative Offences, ranging from 5,000 to 10,000 rubles, are widely regarded as insufficient deterrents. This has prompted discussions around strengthening enforcement through proposed reforms such as draft Article 8.22, which seeks to increase penalties. Additional policy interventions include an experimental quota enforcement model running from 2021 to 2026, which introduces a Fund for Assistance to Employment of Disabled Persons financed through employer contributions. Furthermore, Federal Law No. 245-FZ (2019) introduced “social entrepreneurship” status to stimulate inclusive hiring, resulting in approximately 1,200 recognized enterprises by April 2020 (High Commissioner for Human Rights in the Russian Federation, 2020). However, despite these reforms, inconsistencies in national data systems remain evident, with the Pension Fund reporting over 15 million beneficiaries compared to Rosstat’s estimate of around 12 million persons with disabilities, alongside discrepancies in child disability figures ranging from 586,900 to 670,000 (Proklova et al., 2020). Russia’s broader poverty rate of 12.1 per cent in 2020 further complicates labour inclusion efforts, as economic vulnerability disproportionately affects disabled populations (Nelms, 2024).

The implications of these structural and policy gaps extend directly into the attainment of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), particularly SDG 1 on No Poverty, SDG 8 on Decent Work and Economic Growth, SDG 10 on Reduced Inequalities, and SDG 16 on Peace, Justice, and Strong Institutions. Employment exclusion reinforces poverty cycles among persons with disabilities, limiting access to stable income and social protection mechanisms aligned with SDG 1. At the same time, persistent barriers

in workplace accessibility, discriminatory hiring practices, and weak enforcement of employment quotas undermine SDG 8's objective of promoting full and productive employment for all. SDG 10 is equally affected, as systemic inequality is reproduced through fragmented labour market participation, inconsistent institutional coordination, and uneven regional enforcement of disability rights legislation. Moreover, SDG 16 is challenged by weak accountability structures, limited institutional capacity in oversight agencies, and insufficient legal deterrence mechanisms, all of which restrict access to justice and equal protection under the law. Taken together, these dynamics illustrate that while Russia has established a comprehensive legal architecture aligned with the UNCRPD, the translation of policy into equitable employment outcomes remains incomplete. The persistence of enforcement gaps, data inconsistencies, and socio-economic exclusion demonstrates that inclusive governance in this area is still evolving, with significant implications for both human rights realization and sustainable development commitments (High Commissioner for Human Rights in the Russian Federation, 2020; Nelms, 2024; Proklova et al., 2020; United Nations, 2006).

iv. Access to Education

as earlier stated, Article 24 of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities articulates a binding obligation on States to ensure an inclusive education system at all levels. Within this global framework, the Russian Federation situates its domestic commitments through constitutional and legislative instruments, most notably Article 43 of the Constitution, which guarantees the right to education for all citizens. Further legal articulation is provided by Federal Law No. 273-FZ "On Education in the Russian Federation" (2012), which formalizes inclusive and special education provisions across educational institutions. In addition, the alignment with Sustainable Development Goal 4 (SDG 4) reinforces a global policy expectation that education systems must be equitable, inclusive, and accessible for learners with disabilities. National policy initiatives such as the "Education" and "Demography" projects, launched in 2019, further reflect attempts to operationalize these obligations through infrastructural and institutional reform. These frameworks collectively establish a governance structure that, in principle, integrates disability rights into education policy. However, the translation of these commitments into lived realities remains uneven and contested, particularly in relation to accessibility and institutional capacity.

Despite the presence of strong legal guarantees, implementation gaps significantly hinder inclusive education for persons with disabilities in Russia. Reports submitted to oversight mechanisms, including the High Commissioner for Human Rights in the Russian Federation (2020), highlight persistent structural barriers such as inadequate physical accessibility in schools and limited availability of accessible learning materials. A recurring challenge is the shortage of trained specialists, including psychologists, speech therapists, and special education teachers, which constrains the ability of schools to deliver individualized support as required under the UNCRPD framework. Regional disparities further complicate access, with urban centres often better resourced than rural areas, thereby producing uneven educational experiences for learners with disabilities. Enforcement of Federal Law No. 273-FZ (2012), particularly Article 79, reveals inconsistencies in the provision of entitlements such as free meals for children with disabilities, especially for those receiving home-based education. In practice, compensation mechanisms for such provisions are irregular and vary significantly across regions, reflecting weak administrative coordination. Although administrative liability exists for failure to ensure accessibility, enforcement mechanisms remain inconsistent and limited in effectiveness. These gaps collectively

illustrate a disconnect between formal legal obligations and institutional practice, thereby weakening inclusive governance structures intended to protect disability rights.

The COVID-19 pandemic further exposed systemic weaknesses in the educational inclusion framework, particularly in relation to digital access and continuity of learning. According to the High Commissioner for Human Rights in the Russian Federation (2020), the rapid shift to distance learning revealed insufficient digital infrastructure, limited access to devices, and inadequate digital literacy among both learners and educators in many regions. These challenges disproportionately affected students with disabilities, who often require tailored support and accessible technologies that were not readily available during the crisis period. Rural and remote areas experienced more severe disruptions, intensifying pre-existing inequalities in educational provision (High Commissioner for Human Rights in the Russian Federation, 2020). Although efforts have been made to modernize correctional schools and expand resource centres, concerns persist regarding funding adequacy, staffing levels, and the sustainability of accessibility improvements. Within the broader SDG 4 agenda, these constraints demonstrate the difficulty of achieving equitable and inclusive education outcomes in contexts where structural inequalities remain entrenched.

v. Access to Rehabilitation

Central to Article 26 of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (UNCRPD), is the responsibility of States Parties to establish comprehensive habilitation and rehabilitation systems designed to maximize independence, functional capacity, and social participation of persons with disabilities (United Nations, 2006). This obligation is not isolated, as it is closely connected to Article 25 on the right to health and Article 19 on independent living, both of which collectively require states to dismantle barriers that prevent meaningful community integration and equal access to services. Within this rights-based paradigm, rehabilitation becomes more than a medical intervention; it is a governance instrument that shapes inclusion, equity, and participation in public life. From a Sustainable Development Goals perspective, these obligations align strongly with SDG 10, which seeks to reduce inequalities and ensure the social, economic, and political inclusion of all groups, including persons with disabilities (United Nations, 2015). In practical terms, inclusive governance is therefore measured not only by the existence of policies but by the extent to which rehabilitation services are accessible, affordable, and responsive to individual needs. Consequently, states are expected to embed rehabilitation into broader systems of social protection, healthcare, and labour inclusion, ensuring continuity of support across the life course. In theory, such alignment positions rehabilitation as a cornerstone of rights protection and inclusive development, linking legal obligation to measurable development outcomes.

In the Russian Federation, access to rehabilitation services is shaped by a combination of international commitments and domestic policy frameworks aimed at strengthening inclusion and aligning with global development agendas. Following its engagement with the UNCRPD and the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, Russia has expanded institutional and financial mechanisms to support persons with disabilities, particularly through the provision of technical rehabilitation aids. Notably, the Government approved a Strategy for the Development of Rehabilitation Products up to 2025, signaling a structured approach to improving service delivery and innovation in assistive technologies. Financial investment has also been substantial, with approximately 31 billion rubles allocated in 2019 and planned annual

funding of around 35.5 billion rubles for the period 2020 to 2022 (High Commissioner for Human Rights in the Russian Federation, 2020). During 2019, the Social Insurance Fund reportedly delivered about 385 million technical aids and services to approximately 1.2 million beneficiaries, reflecting the scale of state involvement in rehabilitation provision (High Commissioner for Human Rights in the Russian Federation, 2020). Legislative adjustments have further attempted to improve accessibility, including a 2020 federal law permitting persons with disabilities to receive assistive devices not only at their place of residence but also at their place of stay. Additionally, proposals for an electronic certificate system were introduced to reduce bureaucratic delays and increase user autonomy in selecting rehabilitation products (High Commissioner for Human Rights in the Russian Federation, 2020). These reforms illustrate a governance shift towards administrative flexibility and user-centred delivery, which is consistent with UNCRPD principles of accessibility and autonomy. However, the effectiveness of these measures depends heavily on implementation capacity and equitable distribution across regions.

Despite notable policy commitments, persistent structural and operational challenges continue to affect the actualization of inclusive governance and the protection of disability rights in Russia. Evidence from prosecutorial reviews in 2019 revealed widespread violations across multiple regions, including delays in procurement processes, failure to comply with individual rehabilitation programmes, and inconsistencies in the provision of assistive devices (High Commissioner for Human Rights in the Russian Federation, 2020). These deficiencies have had disproportionate effects on vulnerable groups such as children with disabilities and veterans, where delays or inadequate provision directly undermine daily functioning and social participation. Furthermore, issues of quality control remain significant, as procurement systems often prioritise lower-cost devices, which may not meet functional or durability standards required for effective rehabilitation. Additional barriers have been identified in the inconsistent application of reimbursement policies for independently purchased assistive devices, often requiring affected individuals to pursue legal remedies. In 2020, the Supreme Court clarified that such expenses may be recoverable when state obligations are not fulfilled, particularly in cases involving disabled children, reinforcing judicial recognition of rights violations (High Commissioner for Human Rights in the Russian Federation, 2020). These systemic weaknesses highlight a gap between formal legal guarantees and lived realities, thereby limiting the transformative potential of rehabilitation policies. In relation to SDG 10, these challenges demonstrate that inequality persists not only in access to services but also in the quality and timeliness of support provided. Ultimately, while Russia has established a relatively extensive legal and financial framework for rehabilitation, the effectiveness of inclusive governance remains contingent on addressing implementation gaps, strengthening accountability mechanisms, and ensuring that rehabilitation systems function as genuine enablers of equal participation in society (High Commissioner for Human Rights in the Russian Federation, 2020; United Nations, 2015).

C. Comparative Assessment of Challenge to Inclusive Governance that Protect the Rights of Persons with Disability in Nigeria and Russia within Global Human Rights Frameworks

A comparative assessment of Nigeria and the Russian Federation reveals a shared structural gap between strong legal commitments under the UNCRPD and the practical realities of implementation, though the nature of the constraints differs significantly across contexts. In Nigeria, exclusion is driven largely by entrenched socioeconomic deprivation, where poverty operates as both a cause and consequence of disability marginalization. Despite robust legal instruments such as the Discrimination Against Persons

with Disabilities (Prohibition) Act 2019 and constitutional guarantees, empirical data showing that approximately 87% of persons with disabilities live in multidimensional poverty (UN DESA, 2025; Salako, 2025) reflects a governance system where enforcement deficits and labour market discrimination severely weaken SDG 1, SDG 8, and SDG 10 outcomes. By contrast, Russia demonstrates comparatively higher levels of institutional resourcing and structured policy frameworks, including significant investment in rehabilitation systems and administrative reforms; however, exclusion persists through bureaucratic inefficiencies, procurement challenges, and uneven regional implementation (High Commissioner for Human Rights in the Russian Federation, 2020). While Nigeria's challenge is fundamentally socio-economic and capacity-driven, Russia's barrier is more administrative and procedural, yet both contexts converge in producing outcomes that fall short of UNCRPD expectations on equality, participation, and accessibility.

Across both countries, healthcare, education, and rehabilitation systems reveal persistent gaps between legal guarantees and lived experiences, though the mechanisms of failure differ in character and intensity. In Nigeria, weak infrastructure, underfunding, and systemic neglect result in significant service exclusion, with 28% of health facilities lacking basic accessibility features and over 85% of schools remaining inaccessible, leaving approximately 95.5% of children with disabilities out of school (Are, 2025; Owonikoko, 2025; Adedeji, 2026). These deficits directly undermine SDG 3 and SDG 4, reinforcing a cycle of exclusion rooted in structural inequality and limited state capacity. In Russia, by contrast, legal entitlements under Federal Law No. 61-FZ (2010) and rehabilitation provisions aligned with Articles 25 and 26 of the UNCRPD are relatively well developed, yet implementation is fragmented due to procedural inefficiencies, contested medical assessments, and uneven regional delivery systems (United Nations, 2006; High Commissioner for Human Rights in the Russian Federation, 2020). Although Russia allocates substantial funding to rehabilitation and medical-social systems, recurring challenges such as delays in assistive device procurement, quality inconsistencies, and reliance on litigation for enforcement reflect governance bottlenecks rather than outright absence of provision. In both cases, however, the outcome is similar: limited realization of SDG 3 and SDG 4, alongside weakened inclusive governance systems that fail to translate rights into consistent service delivery.

The most pronounced divergence between the two contexts emerges in the domains of infrastructure, political participation, and institutional accountability, where both countries struggle to meet SDG 10, SDG 11, and SDG 16 targets, albeit through different pathways. Nigeria exhibits extreme infrastructural exclusion, with only about 2% of buildings accessible and minimal political representation of persons with disabilities, as evidenced by the 0.78% candidacy rate in the 2023 elections (EU-SDGN, 2024; Opata, 2026). These conditions are further compounded by socio-cultural stigma and instances of exploitation and violence, which directly violate core UNCRPD protections relating to dignity, safety, and equality. Russia, while comparatively stronger in institutional design, still faces significant barriers in accessibility compliance, with over one million housing units unsuitable and transport systems inconsistently adapted, alongside limited integration of disability organizations into policy processes (High Commissioner for Human Rights in the Russian Federation, 2020). However, Russia's challenges are more closely tied to weak enforcement of existing standards and data governance gaps, rather than the near-total infrastructural inaccessibility observed in Nigeria. Ultimately, both cases demonstrate that inclusive governance under the UNCRPD is constrained not only by legal adoption but by enforcement capacity, institutional coordination, and socio-political will. These deficiencies collectively slow progress

toward SDG 10, revealing that rights-based frameworks alone are insufficient without sustained implementation mechanisms capable of translating commitments into measurable inclusion.

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Evidence has shown that inclusive governance for persons with disabilities in Nigeria and the Russian Federation is shaped less by the absence of legal and policy frameworks and more by persistent implementation deficits within existing structures aligned to the UNCRPD and the Sustainable Development Goals. In Nigeria, exclusion is largely driven by structural poverty, infrastructural inaccessibility, and weak enforcement of progressive disability legislation, resulting in widespread deprivation in education, healthcare, employment, and political participation. This severely constrains progress towards SDG 1, SDG 3, SDG 4, SDG 8, and SDG 10. In contrast, Russia presents a more institutionally resourced system with extensive rehabilitation and accessibility policies. However, its challenges are embedded in administrative inefficiencies, regional disparities, and procedural inconsistencies that weaken the practical delivery of rights and services, despite relatively strong fiscal commitment and formal legal alignment with UNCRPD standards. Within both countries, a recurring pattern emerges in which persons with disability rights recognition at the legislative level does not consistently translate into their lived equality. This is largely due to enforcement gaps, weak accountability mechanisms, and limited participatory governance structures involving persons with disabilities. Therefore, for both countries to achieve meaningful progress in inclusive governance requires moving beyond legal compliance towards strengthening institutional capacity, ensuring equitable resource distribution, and embedding disability inclusion into all sectors of governance. Without such systemic transformation, both Nigeria and Russia risk continued shortfalls in achieving SDG 10 and related development goals, as the promise of equality remains largely aspirational rather than substantively realized.

Given the foregoing, the Federal Government of Nigeria and the Government of the Russian Federation should strengthen enforcement mechanisms for disability rights by establishing independent monitoring bodies empowered to audit compliance with UNCRPD obligations across health, education, employment, and other public infrastructure sectors. This should be done through routine national and subnational inspections, in collaboration with private sector actors, media organizations, and disability advocacy groups to ensure accountability and participatory oversight. Such mechanisms would close the persistent gap between legislation and implementation that currently undermines SDGs realization in this area.

Again, ministries and other public institutions responsible for finance, health, education, and social welfare in both countries should increase targeted investment in accessible infrastructure, rehabilitation services, and inclusive education systems, ensuring that budget allocations are explicitly tied to measurable disability inclusion outcomes. This should be implemented through disability-inclusive budgeting frameworks and results-based financing models developed in partnership with civil society organizations, development partners, and organizations of persons with disabilities (OPDs). Strengthening funding accountability in this way would improve service delivery and accelerate progress towards SDG 3, SDG 4, and SDG 8.

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