

Adapted Physical Activity in Africa: Problems and the Way Forward

Ignatius Ugo Onyewadume
University of Botswana, Botswana

Abstract—There is paucity of literature, both in international journals and the World Wide Web, on the status and practice of Adapted Physical Activity (APA) in the different African countries. Despite the promises, in the constitutions of various African governments, to guarantee equality of rights and opportunities to all their citizens, people with disabilities have been largely neglected and ostracized. In this paper, efforts were made to review issues affecting the development of APA on the African continent. Challenges facing a number of African countries were identified and discussed. To address the pertinent issues, relevant literature was reviewed and analyzed. The content analysis method was used to identify and discuss the issues. Issues were identified under: a) Governments of various African nations, b) Parents and Guardians of children with disabilities, c) Establishment of separate Ministry for Sport, d) APA professionals and e) Colonization and language barriers. To strengthen the field of APA, formation of strong professional bodies and collaboration among allied professionals on the African continent were recommended, among others.

Key Words: Africa, adapted physical activity.

There is severe scarcity of information, in international journals and the World Wide Web, on the status and practice of adapted physical activity in the various African countries. This state of affair has made it difficult for foreign scholars to adequately keep abreast of the happenings in the field of adapted physical activity on the continent. Despite this paucity of literature, it should be made known that Africa has very rich history and tradition of culture, sport and social institutions. These are demonstrated in the traditions of various tribes throughout the African continent (Amusa & Toriola, 2007). According to Amusa and Toriola, physical activities in Africa were carried out for the purposes of socialization, initiation (into various age-groups), and recreation. Various ethnic groups in Africa, such as the Massais of East Africa, the Zulus of South Africa, the Yorubas of West Africa and the Tuaregs of North Africa, had very rich traditional games, played (daylight and moonlight) games, performed traditional dances and produced traditional art works that have stood the test of time (Amusa, 1999).

Unlike for able-bodied individuals of the African society, the population of people with disabilities in Africa benefited little or nothing whatsoever from this rich tradition (Suarau, 1999). Most African persons with disabilities were ostracized, neglected, forgotten, maltreated and considered useless to their communities even when it pertains to sporting activities. Supporting this view, and as noted in other parts of the world, Matson (2007) stated that people with disabilities have been traditionally excluded from mainstream sports and that their playing has been viewed as rehabilitation or socialization rather than athletic competition. According to Onyewadume and Dhaliwal (in press – b), the National Constitutions of most African countries contain articles and

or clauses that guarantee equality of rights and opportunities (at least on paper) to all their citizens. These constitutions state that no citizen shall be discriminated against on the grounds of disability; among others. However, this does not seem to be the reality on ground as most African leaders have not seriously found it necessary to plan for their citizens with disabilities. This is a very unfortunate situation because as has long been observed by various researchers (Fernhall, 1992; Frey, McCubbin, Hannigan-Downs, Kasser, & Skaggs, 1999; Horvat, Croce, Stadler, & Pitetti, 1996; Pitetti, Rimmer, & Fernhall, 1993; Rimmer, Braddock, & Fujiura, 1992, 1993; Stadler & Pitetti, 1996), people with disabilities constitute the endangered specie in terms of their lack of, and need for, the various components of physical fitness.

A glimmer of hope appeared on the horizon when, in 1998, some efforts were made by few heads of governments in Southern Africa to address this problem. At a meeting of the countries of the Southern African Development Community (SADC), a SADC protocol was activated to mandate all member countries to financially and materially handle some sporting competitions for individuals with disabilities in their domains. This was the first time persons with disabilities were accorded some reasonable degree of attention at the regional level (Onyewadume, 2003).

According to Onyewadume (in press – a), the infusion of the field of adapted physical activity into the curriculum of the broader physical education in some higher institutions in Africa came in the early 1980s. Prior to that time, professionals in the field of physical education and recreation were trained to teach physical education and coach the various sport skills to only individuals without disabilities. At that time, people with disabilities were not in the focus at all. They were largely meant to remain at home.

In fact, adapted physical education, as it was called when it was introduced, was taught in the departments of physical education of few universities across Africa, as one of the courses needed for obtaining the required credits for graduation. In most African countries, the course was offered only in very few higher institutions other than universities. For want of trained professionals in the area, at that time, the course was even, in some cases, relegated to the status of an elective or an optional course. Even now, most African higher institutions of learning are unable to offer specialist adapted physical activity degree courses due to acute scarcity of adapted physical activity professionals in these higher institutions of learning. The implication of this scarcity is the inability to produce enough graduates who would eventually teach and or coach in various schools across the continent as adapted physical activity professionals.

When scenarios in adapted physical activity from advanced countries of the world are compared with the state of affair in most African countries, one can categorically say that a lot needs to be done in Africa to enhance the status of the content and practice of adapted physical activity (Onyewadume, 1999). It was therefore pertinent to find out from available literature, the factors that constitute the identifiable drawbacks for the progress of adapted physical activity on the African continent. Also, it was a step in the right direction to find out how the drawbacks can be reversed to promote and sustain the development of adapted physical activity in Africa.

To this end, available literature on the issues affecting the development of adapted physical activity on the African continent was therefore reviewed. The current challenges facing a number of African countries were identified and discussed. Recommendations were then put forward to promote and sustain the development of adapted physical activity on the African continent.

Problems facing adapted physical activity in Africa

There are series of problems associated with the status and practice of adapted physical activity in Africa. These problems would be discussed under the following sub-heads:

a) Governments of various African states

Some governments still pay lip-service to the education of individuals with disabilities (Onyewadume, 1999). They have printed in their national education policy guidelines various ways they are expected to educate their people with disabilities; but these never get implemented. Some governments have not yet conceptualized adapted physical activity as a discipline. They are still oblivious of its existence. As such, not much is said about training people with disabilities with special techniques that are utilized in adapted

physical activity programs world wide. Most countries in Africa lack adequate statistics on the population of their people with disabilities. As a result, planning for them becomes almost impossible or inadequate.

b) Parents and guardians of children with disabilities

Most parents and guardians of children with disabilities hide their wards due to the negative stigma still associated with disabilities in Africa. This makes it impossible for willing governments, through population census, to get the adequate number of their citizens with the various categories of disabilities (Onyewadume, 1999). Many children and youth with disabilities still do not have access to education due to poverty or neglect on the part of parents who do not see the necessity for it (Suarau, 1999).

c) Separate ministry for sport

Some countries in Africa still do not have a separate Ministry or Department to identify, and effectively plan and execute programs for, people with disabilities. Hence, most African countries do not have the child-find program in place; a program that enables the identification of all educationally challenged individuals from birth to age twenty-one (Onyewadume, 1999). With a Ministry or Department of this nature, its employees should be able to:

1. formulate the processes for referring, evaluating, developing individual education plans and placement of educationally challenged individuals,
2. ensure that proper evaluation of an identified child is done in compliance with laid down government regulations,
3. ensure that any child diagnosed, by a properly constituted professional diagnostic body, is entitled to free educational opportunity to any level,
4. formulate and enforce a policy of confidentiality,
5. have the powers to hire new, and fire old, personnel in accordance with the needs of the program;
6. recommend its personnel for further in-service training as the need arises,
7. provide parents of educationally challenged children with information about their rights and responsibilities,
8. establish equipment / teaching aids production centers that would cater for the educational (including adapted physical education) needs of these children (Onyewadume, 1999).

It is disheartening to note that little attention is paid to the disability levels of these individuals (Van-Der-Guyten, 1997); especially in most African countries. For various reasons, according to Jones (1985), the exceptional child is often deprived of experiences that other children take for granted; when in fact, the opposite should apply. Such children need more opportunities, not fewer; and the physical

activity program should provide for those extra experiences which may assist the child to overcome a disability (Jones, 1985).

d) Adapted physical activity professionals

Many countries in Africa still lack professionally-trained adapted physical activity personnel that could plan/design, and execute adapted physical activity programs (Onyewadume, 1999). Such professionals could even develop (through improvisation) and utilize modified facilities and equipment. This has also affected/hampered sports participation by athletes with disabilities. For according to Sherrill and Williams (1996), barriers to sports participation among people with disabilities include, not only insufficient time, lack of equipment and facilities, lack of personal knowledge and lack of transportation but also, not having any one to train or work with individuals with disabilities. Adapted physical activity professionals, particularly of African origin, should be aggressively trained to reverse the current trend. Unfortunately, not many colleges and universities agreed to enlarge their curricula to embrace the training of adapted physical activity professionals. This is not unconnected with the stigma attached to people with disabilities. Such a stigma is automatically extended to an individual if they decide to train as a professional that could work with people with disabilities for life. In their demand for more program diversification in the physical education curricular of most African States, Amusa and Toriola (2003) noted that the current trend of training in human movement studies as practiced in countries like the United States of America, Australia, Britain, Canada, South Africa and others gives room for program diversification and specialization for the professionals.

Currently, there are no strong professional bodies to run the adapted physical activity discipline in the different African countries. In fact, efforts are underway to encourage the few professionals in each country to rally together and form viable associations. It is hoped that this would enable them have a strong voice when dealing with their governments on issues pertaining to adapted physical activity in their countries.

e) Colonization and language issues

Having been colonized by countries like Britain, France, Germany, Portugal, Spain etc., professionals in various African countries now find it difficult to cooperate and collaborate with professionals in other African countries that were not colonized by the same colonial masters as theirs. Paramount among the factors that militate against this cooperation is the difficulty they encounter as a result of differences in language. Supporting this view, Amusa and Toriola (2006) noted that the variation between Anglophone, Francophone, Portuguese and Arab African States make issues more complex. This has made some African countries

to establish international and regional sports associations along the language divide. One recent example is the establishment, in 1994, of Sport for Future of Persons with Disabilities (Jeux de l'Avenir des Personnes handicapées d'Afrique – JAPHAF) by French-speaking African countries (JAPHAF, 2007).

Future directions: Way forward for adapted physical activity on the African continent

When scenes in adapted physical activity from advanced countries of the world are compared with the state of affairs in most African countries, one can categorically say that a lot needs to be done in Africa to enhance the status of the content and practice of adapted physical activity. African countries would need to emulate some practices in developed countries; though this should be in the context of the realities of the various African cultures. In the light of growing awareness of the needs of individuals with disabilities in our societies and to achieve greatness in the field of adapted physical activity therefore, the following suggestions are made to guide future directions in the field of adapted physical activity on the African Continent:

a) The various governments in Africa should update their commitments to the cause of individuals with disability in their communities. This is because, at the moment, most governments in Africa pay lip service to the issue of enhancing the plight of persons with disabilities. Most National Policies on Education in Africa contain beautiful proposals/policy guidelines on how to cater for the education of persons with disabilities; but unfortunately, most of these proposals are not translated into reality in most of these countries.

b) All governments in Africa should be able to set up special Ministries to cater for the needs of persons with disabilities. This will bring about a more focused and coordinated effort towards solving the multifaceted problems confronting persons with disabilities.

c) Since most countries lack adequate statistics on individuals with disabilities in Africa, governments should put machinery in place (like the child-find program practiced in most advanced countries) to obtain a reliable statistic for individuals with disabilities. This will enhance their planning. For a start, governments should enlighten their citizens, in particular the parents/guardians of these persons, about what they stand to benefit from government if their children are brought forward to be counted during national census. To this end, governments should offer a very fat package for the education of these children to enable their parents come forward.

d) Various African governments should pay higher wages to adapted physical activity professionals to attract people to the profession. This strategy worked well with mass production of science teachers in most African countries that needed some technological boost.

e) To corroborate the point above, various levels of

teacher training (teacher training colleges, colleges of education and universities) for adapted physical activity should be established to produce lots of professionals to manage the various schools for people with disabilities. For instance, the Nigerian Government established the Federal College of Education (Special) at Oyo in 1977 with a Department of Physical Education. In this college, students are specifically trained on how to teach physical education in Special schools after graduation. This college is the only one of its type in West Africa and students are admitted from various countries in the region (Suarau, 1999). In fact, it is probably the only one of its kind in Africa. Therefore, more of this kind of institution of higher learning should be established.

f) African professionals in adapted physical activity should encourage cross-disciplinary approaches to planning resource materials for teaching and learning in schools for persons with disabilities.

g) Cross-fertilization of ideas should also be brought to bear on researches in this area of study.

h) Adapted facilities and equipment should be abundantly produced for these persons with disabilities to break down the barrier that exists between them and the able-bodied even when talent and commitment are equal in both of them.

i) There should be an increased use of computer hardwares and soft-wares in future to enhance their learning opportunities.

j) Multidisciplinary screenings should be done to enable the best placement for children with disabilities for optimal benefits.

k) All efforts must be put in place, by professionals, to make sure that at the end of their interaction with people with disabilities, they should be independent

l) Again, new techniques of integrating persons with disabilities into their communities should be explored and practiced.

m) Professionals in Africa should come up with an African database that will be all-encompassing pertaining to persons with disabilities.

n) The future should also hold out an increasing number of international athletes with disabilities nurtured from a well-planned and executed intramural and recreational sports program for persons with disabilities. Each country in the various African regions should establish an annual sports festival where athletes with disabilities of all categories will meet, compete and socialize. The issue of coaching should also be taken seriously. The continent should then organize sports competition for persons with disabilities biennially where athletes will represent their countries (Suarau, 1999).

o) The cross-disciplinary interaction between various professionals should wax stronger in this millennium for the maximum benefit of individuals with disabilities. For instance, Onyewadume (2007) urged adapted physical activity professionals to consider doubling their efforts in working collaboratively with professionals across the various sub-disciplines and other allied professions to produce numerous

African elite athletes with disabilities in the 21st century. The professionals were further advised not to 're-invent the wheel' but to tap into the enormous strengths in the various sub-disciplines for a faster attainment of their goals. This was an earlier view of other professionals like DePauw (1988) and Doll-Tepper and Depauw (1996).

p) There remains a paucity of literature on the activity patterns and physiological responses to exercise in persons with disabilities (Rimmer, Braddock & Pitetti, 1996). It is therefore recommended that exercise scientists should be encouraged to carry out series of researches using various disability groups as subjects.

q) Arnheim and Sinclair (1985), citing the work of Julien Stein of 1982, project that technology will continue to contribute increasingly to progress and opportunities for individuals with disabilities. Computers, biomechanics, cinematography, satellite communications, biochemistry and sports medicine are just a few of the exciting areas with virtually unlimited potentials for enabling persons with disabilities to help themselves and gain greater degree of personal independence.

r) For the future, DePauw (1988) identifies five areas on which researches in adapted physical activity should be focused: movement efficiency, sports initiation, effects of sports, sports performance and influence of disability upon individuals with disabilities. Quality research in these and other areas are therefore needed. This quality could be achieved, according to Lavay and Lasko-McCarthy (1992) by:

1. utilizing alternative research designs like single-subject designs or case studies and

2. acquiring adequate research training through offering graduate students (including at Ph.D level) a strong background in both qualitative and quantitative research designs; including the use of computer programs in the analyses of data.

s) It is also proposed that new techniques for integrating people with disability with those without be exposed and developed. This, it is hoped, will lead to a deeper commitment to, as well as a keener insight into, the plight of individuals with disabilities with regards to the attitudinal and architectural barriers that are still so prevalent in our society today (Brasile, 1990).

t). On the aspect of access to information in the future, Doll-Tepper and DePauw (1996) document that there is an improved access and exchange of information in the area of adapted physical activity and sport through cooperation of an international network of scientists, athletes, coaches, sport medicine personnel and sport administrators. This is a desirable trend and should be improved upon in the future. They noted that a Paralympic sports database was being developed and this would include technical and scientific information on:

1. the history of the International Paralympic Committee.
2. impairments (neuro-muscular, sensory, learning or developmental),
3. Paralympic sports classification systems,

4. sports science terminologies,
5. annotated bibliography of scientific works relevant to disability sport (sport history, pedagogy, coaching, administration, sport nutrition, sport biomechanics, sport physiology, sport psychology, sport sociology),
6. sport contacts (names, addresses), organizational details, equipment, rules, world records and other performance details (Doll-Tepper & DePauw, 1996). This database would surely enhance the rate of development of the field of adapted physical activity. It is hoped that Africa would feature prominently in this database.

u) There is need for extensive screening as a prerequisite to mainstreaming. This will enable students with disabilities to be placed carefully in educational settings that will maximize their potentials (Arnheim & Sinclair, 1985) in the future.

Summary

Africa has come a long way with its rich history and tradition of culture, sport and social institutions. However, people with disabilities have not been accorded their rightful place in the area of adapted physical activity by governments and people of Africa. Having identified the problems faced by adapted physical activity in Africa, it is hoped that the suggestions put forward in this paper would chart the future direction for the profession. Persons and athletes with disabilities should then immensely benefit from the future direction.

References

- Amusa, L.O. (1999). Prospects and challenges in physical education and sport in Africa during the 21st century. In L.O. Amusa, A.L. Toriola, & I.U. Onyewadume (Eds.), *Physical Education and Sport in Africa* (pp.333-349). Stellenbosch: University of Stellenbosch Printers.
- Amusa, L.O., & Toriola, A.L. (2003). An evaluation of human movement studies curricula of Nigeria tertiary institutions. *African Journal of Physical, Health Education, Recreation and Dance*, 9, (2), 277-292.
- Amusa, L.O., & Toriola, A.L. (2006). Problems of African physical education teachers: Their work conditions, teaching environment and productivity [Edited abstract]. Melbourne 2006 International Sports Studies Conference. "Sport, Communities and Engagement". Retrieved March 31, 2007, from <http://66.102.9.104/search?q=cache:dupg40lau6kj:www.staff.vu.edu.au/alu/confere...>
- Amusa, L.O., & Toriola, A.L. (2007). Current issues in sport: Developing countries. Manuscript submitted for publication.
- Arnheim, D.D. & Sinclair, W.A. (1985). *Physical education for special populations: A developmental, adapted and remedial approach*. New Jersey: Prentice-Hall, Inc.
- Brasile, F.M. (1990). Wheelchair sports: A new perspective on integration. *Adapted Physical Activity Quarterly*, 7(1), 3-11
- DePauw, K.P. (1988). Sport for individuals with disabilities: Research opportunities. *Adapted Physical Activity Quarterly*, 5(2), 80-89.
- Doll-Tepper, G. & DePauw, K.P. (1996). Theory and practice of adapted physical activity: Research perspectives. *Sports Science Review*, 5 (1), 1-11.
- Fernhall, B. (1992). Physical fitness and exercise training of individuals with mental retardation. *Medicine & Science in Sport & Exercise*, 25, 442 – 450.
- Frey, G.C., McCubbin, J.A., Hannigan-Downs, S., Kasser, S.L., & Skaggs, S.O. (1999). Physical fitness of trained runners with and without mild mental retardation. *Adapted Physical Activity Quarterly*, 16, 126-137.
- Horvat, M. Croce, R., Stadler, L., & Pitetti, K.H. (1996). Isokinetic strength characteristics in children with and without mental retardation. *Medicine & Science in Sports & Exercise Abstracts*, 28, S50.
- JAPHAF (2007). Jeux de l'Avenir des Personnes handicapées d'Afrique. Retrieved March 31, 2007, from <http://www.japhaf.org/assoc.php>
- Jones, G.C. (1985). Catering for the exceptional child in physical education. *New-Zealand Journal of Health, Physical Education and Recreation*, 18(3), 8-11.
- Lavay, B. & Lasko-McCarthy, P. (1992). Adapted physical activity research: Issues and recommendations. *Adapted Physical Activity Quarterly*, 9, 189-196.
- Matson, B. (2007, February 25). Taking his shot. *The Boston Globe*. Retrieved March 31, 2007, from http://www.boston.com/news/globe/magazine/articles/2007/02/25/taking_his_shot/
- Onyewadume, I.U. (1999). Perspectives of adapted physical education in Africa. In L.O. Amusa, A.L. Toriola, & I.U. Onyewadume (Eds.), *Physical Education and Sport in Africa* (pp.141-156). Stellenbosch: University of Stellenbosch Printers.
- Onyewadume, I.U. (2003). Sport for individuals with disabilities in Botswana. In L.O. Amusa, & A.L. Toriola (Eds.), *Sport in contemporary African society; An anthology* (pp.183-198). Thohoyandou, South Africa : Africa Association for Health, Physical Education, Recreation, Sport and Dance.
- Onyewadume, I.U. (2007). Producing Africa's elite athletes with disabilities in the 21st century: Need for interdisciplinary approach. Manuscript submitted for publication.
- Onyewadume, I.U. (In press - a). Equality or inequality: Physical education for the children of Africa: Problems and way forward. In M. C. Brown II & R. D. Bartee (Eds.), *Still not equal: Expanding educational opportunity in society*. (Part 5, Chapter 32). New York: Peter Lang. (U.S.A.).
- Onyewadume, I.U., & Dhaliwal, H.S. (In press - b). Provision of sport facilities and coaching for university

- undergraduates in Southern Africa: A comparative study of students with and without disabilities. In M. C. Brown II & R. D. Bartee (Eds.), *Still not equal: Expanding educational opportunity in society*. (Part 5, Chapter 31). New York: Peter Lang. (U.S.A.).
- Pitetti, K.H., Rimmer, J.H., & Fernhall, B. (1993). Physical fitness and adults with mental retardation: An overview of current research and future directions. *Sports Medicine*, 16, 23-36.
- Rimmer, J.H., Braddock, D., & Fujiura, G. (1992). Blood lipid and percent body fat levels in Down syndrome versus non-DS persons with mental retardation. *Adapted Physical Activity Quarterly*, 9, 123-129.
- Rimmer, J.H., Braddock, D., & Fujiura, G. (1993). Prevalence of obesity in adults with mental retardation: Implications for health promotion and disease prevention. *Mental Retardation*, 31, 105-110.
- Rimmer, J.H., Braddock, D. & Pitetti, K.H. (1996). Research on physical activity and disability: An emerging national priority. *Medicine and Science in Sports and Exercise*, 28(11), 1366-1372.
- Sherrill, C. & Williams, T. (1996). Disability and sport: Psychological perspectives on inclusion, integration and participation. *Sport Science Review*, 5(1), 42-64.
- Stadler, L.V., & Pitetti, K.H. (1996). Isometric and isokinetic leg strength of youths with and without mental retardation. *Medicine and Science in Sports and Exercise Abstract*, 28, S49.
- Suarau, M.A. (1999). Adapted physical education and sport in West Africa. In L.O. Amusa, A.L. Toriola & I.U. Onyewadume (Eds.), *Physical Education and Sport in Africa* (pp.157-165). Stellenbosch: University of Stellenbosch Printers.
- Van-Der-Guyten, G.W. (1997). Sport as a tool in rehabilitating persons with physical disabilities. *Journal of the International Council for Health, Physical Education, Recreation, Sport and Dance*, 33(4), 49-55.

Author's note

Dr. Ignatius Ugo, Onyewadume,
 Africa Representative on IFAPA Board
 Department of Physical Education, Health & Recreation,
 Faculty of Education,
 University of Botswana,
 Private Bag 0022,
 Gaborone,
 Botswana.
 Tel No.: +267-72112701
 Fax No.: +267-3185096
 E-mail: onyewadu@mopipi.ub.bw

