

# Adapted Physical Activity in Africa: Problems and the Way Forward

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**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.

