

Transcript of audio report:

interview with Gbenga Totoyi, Chartered Institute of Personnel Management (Nigeria)

[Introductory male voice] Hi, and thanks for tuning in. You're listening to an Inclusive Futures audio report, brought to you by our global reporting team.

[Introductory female voice] Hi, I'm Sarah. In December 2019, our Inclusive Futures team in Nigeria spoke to Gbenga Totoyi at the Chartered Institute of Personnel Management, a highly influential membership organisation for HR professionals.

The institute is working closely with us to champion and drive forward disability inclusion in workplaces across Nigeria through our Inclusion Works programme, part of the Inclusive Futures initiative.

[Gbenga] My name is Gbenga Totoyi. I am Director for Market and Membership development at the Chartered Institute of Personnel Management.

We are the premier body, recognised by government and by charter and government I mean, to regulate the practice of HR in Nigeria. To be honest, a part of our charter also gives us some responsibility to the Africa region. So, we are both an association of HR professionals being a member-led body, but also the government-approved professional body for HR practitioners in the country.

We are a national body and we are present and active in about 26 states across the country.

[Interviewer] So what do you think is the benefit for private sector [organisations] when they make their recruitment processes accessible for people with disability?

[Gbenga] It is one area where we are very excited at the Institute, that we are beginning to play a key role in driving this conversation. About 25 to 30 million Nigerians suffer from some form of disability – that's more than the population of Lagos – and that's an active part of the population. And so, it's important that from a numbers standpoint, we need to be more inclusive with our practice as organisations. When it comes to recruitment, I'm sure it's been well researched. A disability of any form does not mean this group of people or this community are completely, in quote, 'useless to the economy'. There's some value that they can add to the environment. So, we strongly believe that as more organisations tap into this environment and use diversity and inclusion practices to promote employee engagement and the like, organisations can begin to reap the benefits in pure numbers.

[Interviewer] So what do you think is the barrier actually facing people with disabilities accessing employment, as an HR professional?

[Gbenga] There are many sides to this, and this is not to push blame, but to be honest. I think as a country and by extension, by profession – I mean the HR profession – we all just got caught up with many other things not going on well with the country and, in quotes, we systematically 'forgot' people in [the] disability community. But if we look at it as a whole, so

from a policy, institution and governance standpoint, I don't think we've paid enough attention to this community. So that in itself has created a huge barrier, which is why, when the federal government released the law, all of a sudden more and more people are paying attention.

Nigeria is part of the global village. You have a number of organisations that either have presence outside of Nigeria or do business with some partners abroad, and things like that. So these conversations have come to the fore. We now have Nigerian companies whose presence are now going beyond the shores of Nigeria. So all that is beginning to force some conversation with increased awareness on the issues around disabilities.

Before now, we would say people weren't really deliberate about making provision for people with disability within their organisations and on the part of the community. I think before now, or say the last two years or three years, it was difficult accessing their community. So, I'll give you an example. You will have a typical company, say in the manufacturing sector, wanting to actually hire persons with disability. Their challenge is: give me the top three, top five places to go to and see these people or this community in a structured manner that enables engagements from corporate bodies with this community. That, before now, was almost non-existent. But now that we are beginning to have conversations in that direction, things are shaping up and opportunities are opening up all over the country.

Another barrier, I think, has been the stigma that comes with it, so a number of people in the disability community have only come to organisations from a standpoint of asking for aid and just looking for some support, so it was difficult for both parties to align and untie the expectations around a core business objective. But now there's a business case for disability and that is breaking down the barriers, as it were.

[Interviewer] People see diversity and inclusion more around gender and ethnicity. Don't you think there's also need to increase the capacity of HR professionals around disability inclusion?

[Gbenga] I totally agree with you, and you're spot on. To the average HR person, diversity and inclusion in itself is not a strange terminology. It's not a strange subject. But I think as a country we've only looked at it, like you said, from a standpoint of some gender balance in the workforce demography or from a standpoint of... even as a government we've pushed a Federal Character Commission largely from a standpoint of having representations of employees from all parts of the country. And that shaped the narrative for a long time.

[Interviewer] Do you think employers are becoming friendly to employees with disabilities in Nigeria? Are there any sectors that you see people with disability working? If not, which of the sectors as an HR professional do you think people with disability can try?

[Gbenga] I would honestly say a few organisations are giving it a go and perhaps we should add, a few states or government institutions are giving it a go; if I can mention: Lagos State Government is really, really ahead of other states when it comes to this and we hope that other states can jump on the train and do more. In the private sector, players in telecoms, banking and largely the FMCG space are all jumping on a train.

I'm particularly excited with what we're seeing in technology, considering the implications of the future of work. A few platforms are having special tracks for people with disability

because that's one sector where, to a very large extent, your university degree or your qualification or experience can be in some way treated in a way that doesn't become an entry barrier for you; so you've not gone to university before, but you're willing to learn how to code and things like that, or pick up digital skills. It's a lot more easy for people in the tech space. So I would largely put the tech sector, as it were, ahead of a lot of other sectors, but we are happy as an Institute to see more players across the board coming on board. Not enough, but we're seeing an increased willingness to participate.

[Interviewer] What do you think are the position of employers? You as an Institute – you relate more with employers – what do you think is the position of employers when it comes to employing people with disabilities?

[Gbenga] Again, like we said when we started, we are a member-led Institute. So our members are working in different organisations across the country – public sector, private sector. What we are happy to see in recent times is the fact that CEOs and business owners are now asking our HR friends, “Yes, I hear you, but what can we do? Tell us, give us some roadmap on what we can do and how we can help from a policy, a programme or a budget standpoint.”

So, we have started; it's not enough, but business owners are a lot more open now than they were, say, two or three years ago.

[Interviewer] Would you recommend Inclusion Works to employers of labour to partner with?

[Gbenga] We're very excited and it's on that basis that I would like to strongly, very strongly, recommend Inclusion Works to different employers out there. Be open, take the test, see what your current readiness is like about disability. And the same reports can give you ideas on what you can begin to do to move from where you are now to a place where you're very confident that you are open and ready to engage more people from the community.

[Introductory male voice] If you'd like to hear more from our citizen reporters, why not visit www.inclusivefutures.org