**KEYNOTE ADDRESS ON THE 3RD SCHOOL SAFETY SUMMIT WITH THE THEME: SAFETY & EDUCATION FOR THE SPECIAL NEED CHILD DELIVERED BY MRS MONICA NWOSU**

Firstly, I would like to begin by thanking the convener of this summit –Ms Ugochi Obidiegwu aka The Safety Chic and her team for inviting me to address these very distinguished delegates as the Keynote speaker. I feel very delighted and highly honored to contribute to this opening session for the 3rd School Safety Summit 2019 and to share this podium with very eminent personalities as we have lined up today.

I am not only delighted about being here, more importantly, I am also delighted at the theme for this year’s schools safety summit, the theme is coming at such a time when the subject of inclusion of the special needs child has become a lifeblood for their overall development and adequate integration into the society. Thank you once again, for this thoughtful theme

**Special needs children**

* When you say someone or something is special, we all know the amount **of time, attention, devotion, dedication, love, commitment and other resources we put in, just to demonstrate how special that someone or something is to us. In the same v**ein, when we say we have special needs children- it actually means we have someone who requires a  little bit more of our attention, more love, more devotion,  more time and more money in taking care of them
* Special needs children are like every child in our world, they are here with us, they live with us and we cannot ignore that fact, even if we tried
* Every child has the ability to learn, but the way children learn and how much knowledge they can absorb can vary considerably — especially for a child with special needs. Yet, as a society, we owe all children a chance to reach their potential, so it is important to create the best possible learning environment for that to happen. According to World report on Disability and the Center for Disability and Development Innovations (CeDDI, 2016) the approximate number of people in the country living with one form of disability or another is over 25 million. The United Nations (UN) projected that in every 10 people in Nigeria, there is 1 person living with one form of disability
* In  other  words,  special  needs  children  are  those  children  who cannot  benefit  maximally  from  the  regular  classroom  teaching/learning experiences  on  account  of  physical,  mental,  emotional  and other disabilities,  which  may  or  may  not  be  easily  identified. Therefore, special needs  children  are  special  children  who  need  to  be  given  special attention  and care within our world especially within the school environment
* World bank report- 2017 on inclusive education shows that 3 in 10 children with special needs are enrolled in schools and about 50% (that is half) of those who enroll in schools do not complete even primary education.
* Children with disabilities have the same right to an education as any other child, as set out in the Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC) and the United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (UNCRPD).
* We all agree that quality education is the right of every child. This is further re-enforced in the 2030 sustainable development agenda Goal 4 of the 17 SDGs – aim to ensure equal access to education for people with different and diverse backgrounds and needs irrespective of ---ethnicity, age, gender, language, religion, status etc.
* That is why the Salamanca declaration (with the support of UNESCO) during the WORLD CONFERENCE ON SPECIAL NEEDS EDUCATION of 1994 was made and ratified by over 90 countries supporting Inclusive education for the special-needs children into regular classrooms rather than assigning them exclusively to special education classes.
* **Inclusive education** is about ensuring access to quality education for all students – **with or without special needs** by effectively meeting their diverse needs in a way that is responsive, accepting, respectful and supportive in a **common learning** **environment.**
* All Students are supported to learn, contribute, and participate in all aspects of the activities in the education program in a common learning environment with support to diminish and remove barriers and obstacles that may lead to exclusion.
* Inclusive education is carried out in a **common learning environment**; where everyone learns together , where no one is isolated, that is, an educational setting where students from different backgrounds- irrespective of age, gender, religion, ethnicity, language, status and with different abilities- (physically and mentally) learn together in an inclusive environment. Common learning environments are used for the majority of the students’ regular instruction hours and may include classrooms, playgrounds, sports activities, libraries, gym, Art rooms, music rooms, cafeterias, playgrounds and the local community.
* Effective Inclusive education is about how we develop and design our schools, classrooms, programs and activities so that all students learn and participate together.
* **The major focus or objectives** is to provide a positive learning environment that will promote a sense of belonging and ensure each child progress toward appropriate personal, social, emotional, psychological and academic goals;
* Learning and development go beyond academics learning, for the development of the total child, learning must happen in these three key domains- **cognitive** (thinking), **affective**  (emotion/feeling),and **psychomotor** (physical/kinesthetic).

 **Types of special needs:**

* There are different special needs- may be physical, cognitive, mental, sensory, emotional and developmental or some combination of these and may be present from birth or occur during a person’s life.
* Physical disability, Sensory Disability, Visual Impairment, Intellectual Disability, Mental Health and Emotional Disability, Developmental Disability

**Types of special needs children**

* Autism
* Down syndrome
Cerebral palsy
Dyslexia - learning disorders
Mental retardation
Learning disorder
Emotional and behavior  disorder
* ADHD-Attention Deficiency Hyperactive Disorder
* Speech impaired & Communication disorders
Hearing impairment and hearing loss
Visual impaired/ low vision
Physical disabilities
* Bipolar disorder
* Deaf/blindness
**Extremely Gifted and talented child- with very unique skills and abilities.**

**Policies and conventions – With clearly defined roles and responsibilities**

* Lagos state special people’s law 2011
* LASODA- Lagos state office of disabilities affairs – established in 2012 for the implementation of Lagos state Special people’s law 2011:
* National Policy on Special needs Education in Nigeria- 2015- Policy states free education that is inclusive at all levels, provision of infrastructure
* Discrimination against people with Disabilities Prohibition Act – Jan 2019
* National Policy on Special Needs Education in Nigeria (SNE)- 2015
* Many International Acts and conventions

**Challenges & Way Forward- Educational & Safety challenges**

**Educational Challenges:**

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| **S/N** | **Challenges**  | **Way forward**  |
| **1** | * No accurate census or comprehensive & holistic data on the special needs population – Most special needs children are mainly found in special needs schools and not in the regular schools.
 | * Starts with identification of the Special needs child**.- Early identification and intervention**
* Adequate census to know the population of the special needs child- through the healthcare centres, schools, national Population commission, NGOs
* We need to collect data to build on objective evidence, in order to monitor data
* UNESCO report – March 2018 showed analysis of 49 countries – data collated between 2005- 2015
* Title - Education and Disability analysis of data from 49 countries
* **Sub-Saharan Africa: Benin, Burkina Faso, Cameroon, Congo, Ethiopia, Gambia, Ghana, Kenya, Liberia, Madagascar, Malawi, Mali, Mozambique, South Africa, South Sudan, Togo, Uganda, United Republic of Tanzania, Zambia**
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|  | **NOTE:** Reliable statistics on children with disabilities remain limited in quantity, quality and scope, especially in low- and middle-income countries. This makes it difficult to gauge how many are in or out of school, why they are out of school, and what the environmental barriers are that can affect their full participation in school settings. | * **Adequate budgeting and resource provision – 2005 survey conducted by the Special Education Expenditures Program (SEEP) showed that it costs 3 times more to educate a child with special needs than a child without special needs does.**

**Nigeria annual budgets for Education – 5-7%** **UNESCO – recommended 15-20%**  |
| **2** | General lack of awareness and knowledge on inclusive education and the special needs child hence overall pubic attitude is mainly negative and discriminatory  | * Effective advocacy: public enlightenment awareness and orientation- to stop discrimination and negative attitude
* Lack of involvement and active participation of the media.
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|  | No adequate training for the teachers, parents and caregivers – lots of myths-**MAXIMIZE TECHNOLOGY FOR TRAINING**  | * Invest in teacher training for inclusive education
* Special schools can also serve as training and resource centres for staff in regular schools
* Highly specialized training for selected teachers on the techniques for effective education of the special needs child
* Update and review of the current teachers curriculum in the teachers’ training schools to include specialized training on special needs education

**STORY ON MYTHS- PhD research works**  |
|  | Curriculum of regular schools has not been modified to accommodate inclusive practices  | * **Curriculum modification and alterations**
* Update and review of the current school curriculum

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|  | No Adequate facilities, materials and equipment , no use of technology to aid the education of special needs child | * **Adequate provision of infrastructures, devices, assistive materials and equipment**
* **Adequate use of equipment**
* **Maximize the use of technology automation,  machines and equipment Wheelchairs and special chairs Special needs tables,**
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|  | * **For inclusive education to work, there is an urgent need to revisit the current schools structures /buildings**
* **How adequate are the current school structures**
 | * Promote accessible and adequate learning spaces free from obstructions
* provision of adequate toilets, ramps, enlarged entrances, spacious classrooms, administrative offices, Health care centres, speech and language laboratories, doorbells, as well as indicators on doors and elevators shall be provided
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|  | * Lack of mobility and transportation
 | * The Discrimination against persons with Disabilities Prohibition acts- Jan 2019
* Walking with local government and community leaders – provision for transportation for these persons should be provided
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|  | **SAFETY CHALLENGES**  | **WAY FORWARD**  |
|  | Lack of awareness and training on some of the basic safety measures- aside from fire extinguishers & fire alarmsSafety policies and procedures  | * Develop a robust safety management system manned by a competent person
* Safety is not cheap and it is not costly.
* Ignorance is costlier!
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|  | No trained safety officers in most schools- teachers can be given general awareness but this is not sufficient  | * Trained /Competent safety personnel
* Trained and certified first aiders – if medical personnel is not available.
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|  |  | Robust Hazard identification and risks assessment – adequate controls – Risk Assessment procedures- Update and matrix  |
|  | Development of some basis Safety policies and procedures- Some of the basic safety policies and procedures include:**The building, structure and the environment – Safety consideration in buildings- ease of movement, ramps, emergency exits*** Building plan and permits should be monitored to include safety arrangements
 | Movement register for all the persons – Visitors & Staff Safety policies & proceduresPolicies on the use of drugs & alcohols- driver’s testing Visitors management policy Laboratory polices – Safe use of chemicals (MSDS)Periodic health surveillance & checks- Food handlers , teachers and caregivers Health insurance policies * Use of adequate and sufficient safety signage
* Emergency preparedness & response – potential safety emergencies – Design of the plan, stakeholders engagements, testing of the plans
* The building & structures of the regular schools not adequate for inclusive learning – overcrowded classrooms –
* no blockage of aisles and exit ways-

**Teacher - Pupil Ratio– shall be 1:5-10 in inclusive classroom, 10 being the maximum and 5 being the normal. Are we really ready for this arrangement ?** |
|  |  | * Active participation and engagement of relevant stakeholders in the safety arrangements
* Effective communication, Roles & responsibilities- for teaching and admin staff
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|  | * Incident reporting and investigations
* Safety performance monitoring and trends
* Periodic Safety Audit of the school facilities
 | * Have policies , Monitor trends
* Track your Safety performance
* Carry out periodic performance evaluation – Safety & Quality Audits
* Mandatory safety Management policies and procedures for schools – Audit to ensure compliance
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|  | **GENERAL RECOMMENDATION:** |  |
|  | **Lack of framework for the implementation of Discrimination against persons with Disabilities Act 2018- Jan 2019**  | **National Commission for persons with Disabilities vested with the education, safety, health care, Social, economic and civil rights**  |
|  | **Setting aside a National day for Persons with special needs by all relevant stakeholders** | * National commission on the persons with special needs should be constituted as prescribed in the just signed Act of Discrimination against persons with Disabilities – Jan 2019
* A competent person should head the Commission as Chairman with adequate knowledge and expertise in the management of children with special needs
* Development of a National framework for the implementation of the Jan 2019 Act on people disabilities.
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|  | * **Volunteering & getting involved**
* **Multidisciplinary approach and collaboration**
 | * **Volunteer your skills, your time, resources – volunteer something because you have something to give, you can make a change!**
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|  | * **Effective partnership and collaboration - synergy between the Federal Ministry of Education and other Government ministries, agencies and IDPs.**
 | * All the relevant stakeholders - Experts in various specific special needs, Government,  NGOs, private and public schools, educational  institutions, educational experts, religious organizations/groups,  OHS professionals- occupational health and safety experts/ therapist,  Health, Parents/Caregivers, experts- should collaborate and have a National day for Persons with disability
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|  |  | * The Federal Ministry of Education, in collaboration with relevant Ministries and bodies e.g.
* **Federal Ministry of Sports,**
* **Federal Ministry of Women Affairs and Social Development,**
* **Federal Ministry of Health,**
* **Federal Ministry of Labour and Productivity, Federal Ministry of Justice,**
* **National Human Rights Commission, Non-Governmental Organizations as well as International Development Partners (IDPs), - UNICEF, UNESCO, UNDP, WHO, DFID, World Bank, USAID, ILO etc.**
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**CONCLUSION**

* To conclude, it is possible that a child with special needs that is not diagnosed and identified may spend his/her entire lifetime not releasing their full potential because their special needs was never identified.
* Quality education is a right for every child. The Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC) and the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (CRPD) both clearly express the aim of guaranteeing quality education for all and the importance of providing the required holistic support to develop each child’s potential.
* To achieve inclusive education for all, regular schools must be given adequate inclusive education orientation- this is the most powerful and effective means of fighting against discrimination- once the regular schools accepts these special needs persons they will foster their learning development and growth in a friendly, social environment
* Quality education can only be achieved, when each child, including the most marginalized and excluded children, are in school receiving inclusive quality education that provides them with the learning required for the total development of the total child- that covers Cognitive, affective and psychomotor domains of the child development