

TAF Africa

ROUNDTABLE ON DISABILITY-INCLUSIVE LOCAL GOVERNMENT ELECTIONS

DENIS HOTEL -- WUSE II, ABUJA
THURSDAY, SEPTEMBER 5, 2024

Diversity
Equity
Inclusion



TABLE OF CONTENTS

Overview	2
Opening Remarks and Goodwill Messages	3
Political Participation of Persons with Disabilities: A Path to Strengthening Democracy at the Local Level	4
Promotion of Accountability at the Local Government Level	6
Identified Challenges Faced by PWDs in Political Participation	7
Strategies for Ensuring Disability Inclusion	8
Plenary Interactive Session	9
Conclusion	10

OVERVIEW

The recent Supreme Court judgment affirming local government autonomy in Nigeria has paved the way for the enhancement of inclusive governance at the grassroots level

The decision which underscores the importance of inclusive governance, has also resuscitated local government elections in the country as witnessed in recent times. Building on the success of the Supreme Court judgment of ensuring equitable participation of all citizens, including persons with disabilities (PWDs),

TAF Africa organised a **Round Table Discussion on Disability-Inclusive Local Government Elections** convened on September 5, 2024, at Denis Hotel, Abuja, drawing participation from key stakeholders including the political parties, **National Commission for Persons With Disabilities (NCPWD)**, civil society organisations (CSOs), the **Forum of State Independent Electoral Commissions (FOSIECOM)**, media, interest groups and leaders from the disability community.

“

The event sought to **foster meaningful dialogue to ensure the upcoming local government elections across Nigeria are inclusive and accessible to persons with disabilities.**

”

”

The event was funded by the **Disability Rights Fund (DRF)**, which featured a keynote presentation by Dr Otive Igbuzor, highlighting the vital importance of political participation by persons with disabilities in strengthening democracy at the local government level. A plenary discussion was anchored by Dr Adebukola Adebayo which focused on how best state and non-state actors can enhance electoral engagement for persons with disabilities at the local government level.

The general conclusion during the round table discussion centred around the need for the inclusion of PWDs in the electoral process and this should not be seen as only a matter of equity but also a fundamental right and step toward strengthening democracy at the grassroots. It was equally resolved that political power is not given but fought for, hence PWDs should stand up and actively participate in the electoral process. PWDs were encouraged to collaboratively develop strategies for holistic stakeholder engagement that will ensure improved representation and inclusivity at the local government levels. The insights gained from the discussion will serve as a basis to inform actionable strategies, ensuring that the upcoming local government elections align with the broader goals of inclusion, equity, and advancement of democracy in Nigeria.



OPENING REMARKS AND GOODWILL MESSAGES

The Round Table Discussion began with a welcome address by the **CEO of TAF Africa, Mr. Jake Epelle** emphasizing that the session, among other objectives, aims to encourage PWDs to actively participate in grassroots politics and aspire to leadership roles, such as chairpersons. This was followed by goodwill messages from notable organizations and individuals, such as the **NCPWD, JONAPWD, National Lottery Trust Fund, DRF, Nigerian Women Trust Funds** and **Mrs. Patience from NCPWD**.

PWDs were collectively encouraged to take full advantage of the provision of the law and the goodwill of President Tinubu to ensure the autonomy of local government administrations in Nigeria. In driving PWD inclusion, it was advised that women with disabilities should be prioritised as they are often faced with dual exclusions of gender and disability.



Select participants in a group photograph

POLITICAL PARTICIPATION OF PERSONS WITH DISABILITIES: A PATH TO STRENGTHENING DEMOCRACY AT THE LOCAL LEVEL

As Nigeria moves toward reactivating a more decentralised (federal, state and local) governance structure, the need for creating an accessible political environment for all citizens at the local government level has never been more critical. In this regard, the round table's keynote address focussed on the **"Political Participation of Persons with Disabilities: A Path to Strengthening Democracy at the Local Level,"** was delivered by **Dr. Otive Igbuzor, the Executive Director/Founder,** of the **African Centre for Leadership Strategy and Development.** Dr Otive emphasised that democracy though with its shortcomings, remains the best form of government as it helps to drive development around the world.

He further highlighted admirable features of democracy including citizen participation; equality; political tolerance; accountability; transparency; regular, free and fair elections, economic freedom; control of the abuse of power; bill of rights; accepting the result of elections; human rights; multi-party system and the rule of law.

The keynote speaker, however, identified the biggest challenge facing democracy around the world particularly Nigeria to be the issue of declining **citizen participation** due to lack of legitimacy and declining confidence in political leadership and institutions.

Dr Otive stressed that despite the profound importance of democracy it is being threatened by the increasing exclusion of citizens from the democratic process especially Persons with a disability who are often faced with compounding challenges and barriers to participation in the electoral process.



Dr Otive Delivering his Keynote Address

The presenter reiterated that PWDs constitute at least 15% of Nigeria’s estimated population of 232, 679,478 persons translating into 34, 901, 921 persons. Interestingly, President Tinubu who was elected in 2023 had only 8,794,726 votes.

This means that PWDs with an estimated population of 34, 901,921 do not only stand the chance of influencing the outcome of any elections in Nigeria but can be elected even the president of Nigeria if work collaboratively. It was, however, noted with dismay that INEC data had less than 100,000 information about PWDs and their respective disability types.

Dr. Otive also reiterated the importance of an inclusive democratic process especially with the window presented by the Supreme Court judgment on local government autonomy.

He noted that an inclusive political system will be more likely to be responsive to the needs of all (including women, youths and PWDs) citizens. This according to him can only be achieved through the active involvement of PWDs which will eventually bring about more inclusive policies, improved access to services and greater social integration.

34, 901, 921

PWDs constitute at least 15% of Nigeria’s estimated population of 232, 679,478

100,000

INEC data had less than 100,000 information about PWDs and their respective disability types



PROMOTION OF ACCOUNTABILITY AT THE LOCAL GOVERNMENT LEVEL.

The key issues and strategies outlined by Dr Otive to strengthen local government and ensure full political participation of PWDs are highlighted below:

To ensure the recent Supreme Court judgement granting local government financial autonomy is effective and serves the needs of the people, checks and balances must be put in place to promote accountability.

This Dr. Otive pointed out could be achieved through:

<p>Strict internal control mechanisms, such as procurement systems and conflict-of-interest codes, etc.</p>	<p>Encouragement of effective legislative oversight and media engagement.</p>
<p>Adequate monitoring and evaluation systems.</p>	<p>Constant engagement with Citizens and CSOs.</p>

Identified Challenges Faced by PWDs in Political Participation

Dr. Otive in his presentation identified four key challenges PWDs faced in political participation. These challenges if addressed, according to him will help create an inclusive electoral environment for all. Some of the challenges highlighted include:

- Physical barriers (inaccessible polling stations and meeting venues).
- Attitudinal barriers (negative attitudes and stereotypes).
- Economic barriers (poverty and lack of resources).
- Communication barriers (lack of materials in accessible formats such as braille).



Strategies for Ensuring Disability Inclusion

To help address the challenges faced by PWDs, Dr Otive outlined strategies cutting across Policy reforms, Economic and Social Support and Collaboration and Partnerships among relevant stakeholders.

Action points were further outlined as strategies for eliminating barriers, fostering collaboration and promoting political engagement of PWDs in Nigeria. These are highlighted below:

Policy reform strategies include:

- Full implementation of the Discrimination Against Persons with Disabilities (Prohibition) Act of 2018.
- Ensure polling stations and meeting venues are physically accessible (installation of ramps, handrails, etc.).
- Reformation of State Independent Electoral Commissions (SIECs) and training of electoral officials on how to accommodate PWDs.
- Advocate for the domestication and implementation of Disability Act 2028 at the state level.
- Political parties should adopt and implement Gender Equality and Social Inclusion (GESI) principles.

Economic and Social Support strategies include:

- Provide economic empowerment programs for PWDs (implementation of special social protection programmes for PWDs).
- Organize political education programs targeted at PWDs.
- Implementation of 5% employment opportunities in every MDA for PWDs.
- Expand the provisions of federal character to cover PWDs.
- PWDs should be trained in Social Movement Organising.

Economic and Social Support strategies include:

- Institute collaborative advocacies between political parties, PWD advocacy groups, Electoral Management Bodies (EMBs), lawmakers, judiciaries, governors' forums, security agencies and other relevant stakeholders to ensure inclusive elections.
- Launch collaborative public awareness campaigns to combat negative stereotypes about PWDs.

PLENARY INTERACTIVE SESSION

The interactive discussions focused on **Building an Inclusive Local Government and the Role of State and Non-State Actors in Supporting PWDs' Electoral Engagement**. The session was moderated by **Dr. Adebukola Adebayo**, a Disability Inclusion Development Consultant. The session explored practical strategies for ensuring that local elections reflect the participation of all citizens, particularly those with disabilities, in line with democratic principles and recent legal advancements in Nigeria.

Dr Adebayo led the discussion which identified some state and non-state actors who directly or indirectly have the potential to influence disability inclusion in local government political participation. This is highlighted below.

State and Non-State Actors

Actors	Engagement strategy
Religious leaders and community leaders	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Get them interested in the need for the participation of PWDs in the electoral process. • Work with religious bodies to mobilise support for PWDs' political inclusion
Media	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • To get them involved in inclusive reporting regarding inclusive political participation by PWDs
Security agencies e.g. Police, DSS, NSCDC etc	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • To get them to provide the enabling environment for political participation by PWDs
Community-based organisations e.g. women's groups, market associations, trade unions, CBOs, CSOs	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Get them interested in the need for the participation of PWDs in the electoral process. • Work with them to understand that is the right of PWDs to be part of the governance structure at the local level. • Ensure non-disability CSOs also include the issues affecting PWDs in their advocacies.
Executives: President, governors, chairmen and councillors	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Engage them to formulate/review existing policies, strategies and election guidelines to ensure PWDs' participation in the electoral processes. • Made budgetary commitment for the advancement of PWDs' participation in electoral processes. • Development of PWDs framework for local government elections.

Actors (cont'd)	Engagement strategy (cont'd)
Judiciary	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Get them involve and ensure compliance to the implementation of the Disability Act 2018.
Legislators: national and state houses of assembly	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Lobby them for the review of the SIECs laws to ensure they are disability compliant.
Political parties	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Engage political parties to make provisions for PWDs to contest on their platforms both at the national and local levels. • Work with political parties to make nomination forms affordable and waive certain dues for PWDs. • Work with political parties to activate affirmative action of 5% of both councillorship and chairmanship forms for PWDs.
PWDs and OPDs	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • PWDs should present themselves for political positions. Political power is not given but taken and it is not always cheap, Hence they should be willing to pay the price. • OPDs should encourage PWDs to contest for political offices. • OPDs should continually collaborate to enhance the inclusive participation of PWDs in political processes.
INEC and SIECs	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • INEC should be encouraged to update PWDs' voter register to reflect the true voting strength of PWDs.



Cross-section of Participants at the Roundtable Discussion

CONCLUSION

The **Round Table Discussion on Disability-Inclusive Local Government Election** concluded with a vote of thanks from the CEO of **TAF Africa, Mr. Jake Epelle** assuring all participants that the outcome of the deliberation will be compiled and shared with them in the coming days.

The stakeholders at the event collectively emphasised that the inclusion of PWDs in the local government electoral process is a vital step toward strengthening grassroots democracy.

Stakeholders emphasized that PWDs must be seen as voters and potential candidates, advocating for proactive participation and leadership aspirations. Key takeaways included the need to remove barriers, such as physical inaccessibility, attitudinal biases, and economic limitations while ensuring that electoral frameworks are inclusive. Collaborations among political parties, civil society, and electoral bodies were encouraged to make elections representative and accessible to PWDs.

CONNECT WITH US

TAFAfrica



Office Address

**990 NAL Boulevard, Central Area,
Abuja**



Email

info@tafafrica.co



Website

www.tafafrica.co

TAF AFRICA

ROUNDTABLE ON

DISABILITY INCLUSION FOR LOCAL GOVERNMENT ELECTIONS

DENIS HOTEL -- WUSE II, ABUJA
THURSDAY, SEPTEMBER 5, 2024