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# INSIDE TAF Africa

... Disability Inclusion Champion

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## DISABILITY-INCLUSIVE DEMOCRACY TAKES ROOT IN ANAMBRA WITH THE ABLE TO VOTE CAMPAIGN

In the heart of Anambra State, an initiative is helping rewrite the narrative of political participation for persons with disabilities (PWDs). With support from the European

Union through its Support to Democratic Governance in Nigeria (EU SDGN) II, TAF Africa has taken its “Able to Vote” campaign to the three senatorial districts; Awka, Onitsha, and Nnewi, delivering one unifying message: voting is not a privilege, it is a right that must be protected and exercised by all.

The campaign, which aimed to reduce voter apathy and promote disability inclusion in the electoral process, brought together key stakeholders, electoral



authorities, security agencies, civil society groups, and the disability community under one shared goal; ensuring that persons with disabilities participate fully in the upcoming Anambra Governorship Election scheduled for November 8, 2025. In Onitsha, Lebechukwu Ugonma Juliana, the Independent National Electoral Commission’s Public Relations Officer, emphasized the Commission’s commitment to making elections accessible to all. “At INEC, we recognize that voting is a fundamental right,” she declared. “Persons with disabilities face unique challenges, from physical barriers to inaccessible voter education materials, but INEC is fully committed to eliminating these obstacles.”

She outlined proactive steps already in place: the Braille ballot guides for the





visually impaired, priority voting for PWDs and elderly citizens, magnifying glasses for persons with albinism, and the development of the EC30 PWD poster, a simplified visual guide that helps PWDs understand and navigate the voting process with ease.

Quoting Section 54 of the Electoral Act 2022, she reiterated INEC's legal obligation to ensure inclusive participation, stating, "This law is not just a policy, it's a pledge of accountability to

every Nigerian citizen, including those with disabilities."

Speaking on behalf of the disability community, Mr. Nwanolue Chukwudubem, former Joint National Association of Persons with Disabilities Chairman, called on the Nigerian Police Force to train officers on how best to assist PWDs at polling units. He also advocated for the inclusion of local sign language interpreters, especially for deaf voters with limited literacy. "Not all our

members can read the EC30E PWD poster. We need real-time, human interpretation at polling units," he urged.

His sentiments were echoed in Nnewi, where INEC's Civil Society Liaison and Disability Inclusion Desk Officer, Eya Vivian, described voting as a non-negotiable right and detailed the Commission's ongoing reforms to make elections more inclusive. From accessible CVR centers to trained support staff, she highlighted how INEC continues to evolve to meet the needs of voters with disabilities.

TAF Africa's Senior Programme Officer, Mr. George Anwayi, led a session on the legal frameworks that protect the rights of PWDs in





elections. “This is not charity work,” he said. “This is about enforcing the law and recognizing the dignity and rights of every citizen.”

In Nnewi, the campaign received strong backing from security agencies, including Divisional Police Officer Udenigwe Chinwuba, who assured participants of a safe voting environment. “It’s your right to vote without intimidation. We will ensure your security in collaboration with other agencies,” he affirmed.

In Awka, the campaign took on a more interactive tone. PWDs engaged with INEC’s Resident Electoral Commissioner (REC), Dr. Elizabeth Agwu, community leaders, and CSOs, voicing concerns about polling unit safety, their inclusion in INEC’s ad hoc recruitment, and the general provisions for accessibility.

Programme Manager at TAF Africa, Adeolu Kilanko, captured the essence of the campaign: “We are here to reduce voter apathy and to entrench the inclusion of PWDs as a non-negotiable part of our democracy.” He emphasized that the voter education sessions were not merely symbolic but part of a sustained strategy to build an inclusive electoral culture in Nigeria.





Ugochi Agalaba-Ehiahuruike, Executive Director of Social and Integral Development Centre, added a poignant reminder: "Anambra has long suffered from low voter turnout. If the disability community shows up in numbers, they could significantly shift the statistics and shape the outcome."

The campaign also struck a personal chord with Comrade Ugochukwu Okeke, current Chairman of JONAPWD, Anambra State Chapter. "We are deeply grateful to TAF Africa and the European Union for choosing Anambra. This gives us hope and a reason to believe that our votes matter," he said.

As the 2025 governorship election approaches, the "Able to Vote" campaign has not only raised awareness but also rekindled a sense of civic ownership among Anambra's disability community. The message was clear in every senatorial zone: disability inclusion is not a favor; it is a democratic imperative.



With renewed enthusiasm, new knowledge, and reinforced partnerships as a result of the Able to Vote campaign, the PWD community in Anambra is preparing to show up and show out at the poll









## **TAF AFRICA AND LEGEND GOLDEN CARE FOUNDATION CHAMPION INCLUSION THROUGH FOOTBALL TOURNAMENT FOR CHILDREN WITH DISABILITIES**

In commemoration of this year's Children's Day, TAF Africa, in partnership with Legend Golden Care Foundation, organized an innovative football tournament tagged "Able2Play" to celebrate and showcase the abilities of children with disabilities in sports and other recreational activities.

Held in Abuja, the inclusive event brought together children with and without disabilities in a vibrant display of unity, strength, and potential. The tournament served not just as a sporting activity, but as a bold advocacy platform for disability inclusion, sending a clear message that Disability is not inability.

Speaking at the event, the Honourable Minister of Humanitarian Affairs and Poverty Reduction, Prof. Nentawe Yilwatda, delivered a heartfelt keynote address that resonated with many. Sharing his personal story for the first time publicly, the minister revealed that he was born with a learning disability and credited his parents' solid support for his life's successes.









“Stand by your children; don’t be ashamed of them because they have a disability. The future of these children is very bright. I’m living proof that in every disability, there is ability. If someone like me with a learning disability could get help and succeed, then these children can become anything they set their minds to,” said Prof. Yilwatda.

He urged parents to be pillars of support and encouraged the children to dream big, envisioning a future where they rise to positions of influence, from Chief Executives and international

personalities to Ministers and even the President of Nigeria.

The minister also highlighted government interventions to support inclusive education, including the provision of assistive devices to schools catering to children with disabilities.

In his address, Mr. Jake Epelle, Chief Executive Officer of TAF Africa, emphasized the importance of changing the prevailing narrative around disability, particularly during national celebrations.

“This event sends a strong message



that disability is not inability. Every child deserves the right to play, dream, and belong. Often, children with disabilities are excluded from mainstream celebrations



like Children's Day. This year, we decided to change that by promoting a spirit of inclusion," Mr. Epelle noted.

He called on stakeholders across all sectors to strengthen efforts in protecting and promoting the rights of children with disabilities to ensure an equitable and inclusive society.

Adding her voice, Mrs. Kanayo Olisa-Metuh, Executive Director of Legend Golden Care Foundation, reaffirmed the commitment of the Foundation to the cause of inclusion.

"History is filled with people who were once written off due to disabilities but went on to achieve great things. We want these children to know that disability should never be a limiting factor," she stated.



A highlight of the event was the inspiring participation of 13-year-old Samuel Onoja, a child with albinism, who expressed joy at being part of the match. He called for an end to discrimination against children with disabilities and urged the government to expand its support and empowerment initiatives.

The event was graced by several dignitaries whose presence emphasized national solidarity for children with disabilities, including the Head of the Civil Service of the Federation, Mrs. Didi Esther Walson-Jack, OON, mni, and Dame Pauline Tallen (OFR), former Minister of Women Affairs.



# COMMUNIQUE: DEMANDING INCLUSION, JUSTICE, AND ACCOUNTABILITY FOR PERSONS WITH DISABILITIES IN RIVERS STATE

**Theme:** The Impact of Political Instability in Rivers State on Persons with Disabilities

**Date:** 14th May 2025

**Venue:** The Grace Place Events Centre, Port Harcourt, Rivers State

## PREAMBLE

We, the united representatives of the Persons with Disabilities (PWDs) community in Rivers State, having convened on this 14th day of May, 2025, under the theme “The Impact of Political Instability in Rivers State on Persons with Disabilities,” issue this urgent and unequivocal communiqué. Our assembly, a crucial precursor to the News Central Town Hall Series themed “From Crisis to Resolution,” brought together disability cluster leaders, civil society organizations, media and legal experts, and advocates for inclusive governance. We gathered to confront the harsh realities of our existence under the current political climate, to dissect the failures of governance, and to demand an end to the systemic

exclusion that plagues our lives.

## KEY OBSERVATIONS: A LITANY OF NEGLECT AND INJUSTICE

Our deliberations have revealed a damning indictment of the Rivers State administration:

**Systemic Marginalization:** PWDs are routinely and deliberately excluded from all meaningful governance structures. We are denied representation in government appointments, policy development, and implementation processes, rendering us invisible and voiceless in the decisions that shape our lives.

**Brazen Disregard for the Law:** The National Disability Act, a hard-won victory for our rights, is treated with contempt in Rivers State. The state government has utterly failed to operationalize or localize this crucial legislation, perpetuating the denial of our fundamental rights to accessibility, inclusive education, and employment.



**Betrayal of Past Promises:** Previous administrations initiated vital projects and programs aimed at supporting PWDs. The current administration has heartlessly abandoned these initiatives, demonstrating a callous disregard for our well-being and a complete lack of vision for an inclusive society.

**Perpetual Barriers:** Public infrastructure across Rivers State remains a cruel obstacle course for PWDs. Markets, schools, malls, and government facilities are largely inaccessible, blatantly violating our right to move freely and participate

fully in society.

### **Abuse of Power and Public Trust:**

The current administration operates with a shocking lack of transparency, particularly concerning the use of public funds. Vast sums of money are being spent with no discernible improvement in the lives of ordinary citizens, especially PWDs, raising serious questions of corruption and misappropriation.

### **RESOLUTIONS AND IMPERATIVE DEMANDS**

Therefore, we, the PWD community





of Rivers State, issue the following demands, which are not negotiable:

**1. Immediate and Meaningful Dialogue:** The state administrator must immediately engage in structured and respectful dialogue with PWD

representatives. This is not a request but a demand for our voices to be heard and our expertise to be valued in the co-development of an inclusive policy and planning framework.

**2. Establishment of a Dedicated**

**Office:** We demand the immediate appointment of a Special Adviser or Liaison Officer on Disability Affairs within the executive cabinet. This is essential to ensure direct advocacy for our rights and to guarantee our



inclusion in all state decisions.

### **3. Skills Development and Guaranteed Employment:**

The state government must launch accessible and inclusive skills acquisition programs and create meaningful employment opportunities for PWDs in the public and private sectors. This is not charity; it is our right to economic empowerment and self-sufficiency.

### **4. Unconditional Educational Support:**

We demand targeted scholarships and education grants for learners with disabilities, including comprehensive support for aides

and assistive learning tools. Education is the key to our future, and it must be made accessible to all.

### **5. Sustainable Economic Empowerment:**

The government must roll out inclusive and sustainable empowerment programs, providing access to small business grants, vocational training, and entrepreneurship development. We are not asking for handouts; we are demanding the tools to build our prosperity.

### **6. Local Government Accountability:**

Functional PWD Desk Offices must be established

and adequately resourced in all 23 Local Government Areas. This is crucial to ensure that inclusion reaches every corner of Rivers State, leaving no one behind.

### **7. Inclusive Electoral Processes:**

INEC and development partners must actively support the organization of independent and inclusive leadership elections within the PWD community. We have the right to choose our leaders and advocate for our interests.

### **8. Full Public Accountability:**

The state administrator must, without further delay,

release a detailed and transparent report on all public funds received and expended since assuming office. This report must explicitly detail the allocations made to PWDs. We demand to know how our resources are being used.

#### **9. Immediate End to Emergency Rule:**

We vehemently demand that the Federal Government terminate the ongoing emergency rule in Rivers State and reinstate democratic governance. The continued suspension of our democratic rights is unacceptable and unjustifiable.

#### **10. Dignity, Not**

**Tokenism:** We categorically reject any attempts to appease us with token gestures or acts of charity. We demand dignity, respect, and full systemic integration into every aspect of governance and development.

#### **CONCLUSION: A CALL TO ACTION**

We, the PWD community of Rivers State, reaffirm our unwavering commitment to the principles of democracy, inclusion, equity, and good governance. We issue a call to action to the media, civil society organizations, and development partners to amplify this communiqué and to stand in solidarity with us in the fight for our rights.

We will not be silenced. We will not be ignored. We will continue to fight until marginalization is replaced with meaningful inclusion, and until justice and dignity are a reality for every person with a disability in Rivers State.

**Issued this 15th Day of May 2025**

**Port Harcourt, Rivers State**

**S i g n e d :  
Representatives of the  
PWD Stakeholders'  
Coalition**



## HOW ACCESSIBILITY AUDITS ARE OPENING DOORS FOR ECONOMIC EMPOWERMENT

In a world striving for inclusivity, one of the most powerful tools to bridge the gap between persons with disabilities and meaningful employment is often overlooked: accessibility audits. These systematic evaluations of the physical environment, services, and products are fast becoming a cornerstone for private sector organizations committed to inclusive growth.

Under the Economic Empowerment Project funded by Sightsavers, TAF Africa recently concluded a series of accessibility audits in private sector

organizations across Lagos, Port Harcourt, and Abuja. The findings were eye-opening, not just for what was lacking, but for the untapped potential that inclusive spaces hold.

Accessibility is no longer just a compliance issue, it's a business strategy. In a competitive job market, attracting diverse talent is vital, and creating an environment that welcomes all employees, including those with disabilities, is a strategic advantage.

"Many employers want to be inclusive but don't always know where to start," explains Mr. George Anwayi,







Senior Programme Officer at TAF Africa. “Accessibility audits give them a roadmap, not just for physical infrastructure, but also for service delivery and workplace culture.”

The audits conducted under this project examined everything from entryways and restrooms to digital systems and recruitment practices. The aim was to identify and address barriers that limit the participation of persons with disabilities in the workforce.

There’s a direct line between accessible workplaces and economic empowerment. Persons with disabilities in Nigeria face higher rates of unemployment and underemployment,

often not because they lack skills, but because the systems around them aren’t built to accommodate differences.

“Employment is one of the most powerful ways to lift people out of poverty and dependency,” says Mr. David Okorafor, Project Officer at Sightsavers.

“But employment can only happen when workplaces are designed with everyone in mind.”

TAF Africa’s audits have sparked important internal conversations within participating companies. Several are now developing accessibility action plans, some for the first time. Others are seeking guidance on policy reform, staff training, and accessible

recruitment.

While the names of the companies remain confidential, the momentum generated is anything but silent. This initiative signals a shift in how the private sector views inclusion, not as charity, but as a pathway to innovation, productivity, and equity.

The Economic Empowerment Project demonstrates that real change happens when commitment meets action. Accessibility audits are not just a checklist; they are a mirror that shows what needs to change and a window into what’s possible when everyone is included. With continued collaboration and support, accessibility

can shift from a special initiative to a standard expectation. And in

doing so, we not only change the workplace, but we also change

lives.





## TAF AFRICA AND LEGEND GOLDEN CARE FOUNDATION SIGNS MOU TO ADVANCE JUSTICE FOR PWDS

TAF Africa and the Legend Golden Care Foundation signed a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) to advance access to justice for pre-trial detainees, especially those with disabilities.

Under the partnership, both organisations will jointly provide pro bono legal services, advocate for reforms in the justice sector, and lead targeted legal and policy initiatives that promote inclusion, rehabilitation, and human rights education.

At the signing ceremony, the CEO/ Founder of TAF Africa, Amb. Jake

Epelle described the ceremony as “long overdue” and the beginning of a commitment to measurable action.

According to him, the primary objective of the MoU was to serve people, particularly those who lack a voice.

“So we took that into consideration in determining what level of intervention we can collectively roll out. We also want to look at how we can mobilize human and material resources and then get into an intervention area where we both share a common vision.

Areas like access to justice, violence



against women, things that touch the heart and core of the child, not just the girl child, but the boy child as well,” he stated.

On potential policy obstacles, Epelle expressed optimism, stressing that successful implementation often hinges on leadership and willingness to act.

“Policies succeed not when people remember who wrote them, but when others implement

them because they see value in them,” he said. Also speaking, Mrs Kanayo Olisa-Metuh, Executive Director of the Legend Golden Care Foundation, described the MoU as an ideal partnership driven by shared values and a desire to support the most vulnerable.

“This collaboration will support people who would otherwise have no one to speak for them,” she said.

Kanayo Olisa-Metuh noted that the interventions will begin in areas where the organisations already have a presence, to expand across the country.

She added that the partnership was a mission-driven model that leverages human and material resources to secure funding, execute interventions, and report outcomes transparently.





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