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PUSHING FOR INCLUSIVE GOVERNANCE THROUGH STRATEGIC ADVOCACY IN DELTA STATE

The streets of Asaba, Ughelli, and Warri were quieter than usual in some corners, but the voices behind closed doors were growing stronger. TAF Africa, in partnership with

CBM and collaboration with JONAPWD and other Organisations of Persons with Disabilities (OPDs), has been moving steadily across Delta State, not with banners or rallies, but with deep conversations, respectful engagement, and strategic advocacy to breathe life into a law that has too long remained dormant.

Though the Delta State Disability Law exists on paper, its presence in the daily lives of persons with disabilities has been marginal. The Disability Rights Advocacy



Project for Inclusive Development (D-RAPID) is working to change that by making the law not just a legal reference, but a living framework for rights, dignity, and inclusion.

The advocacy team where change is hardest, inside systems. From the Ministry of Women Affairs to Local Government Departments and traditional palaces, the message was that persons with disabilities cannot wait any longer.

At the Delta State Ministry of Women Affairs, the team was received with both warmth and urgency. The Permanent Secretary welcomed the idea of mass-producing the Disability Act in four local languages, a step she described as “long overdue for true accessibility.” She pledged the Ministry’s partnership in technical support,



community outreach, and mobilizing for the digital registration of persons with disabilities. Her colleague, the Director of Rehabilitation, shared a vision that was aligned and practical. “Our goals are shared. But without collaboration, we will continue to work in silos,” she said, committing to bridge the gaps between ministries and communities.

The advocacy reached deeper into the cultural heart of the state through visits to traditional leaders,

whose influence remains strong in rural and urban communities alike. At the royal palace of the Asagba of Asaba, the conversation was not merely ceremonial. His Royal Majesty, Professor Epiphany Azinge, a legal scholar himself, offered both reflection and action. He spoke about the need for wide public sensitization and his concern over the absence of sign language interpreters in critical institutions. “The law is only as powerful as our effort to make it known,” he told

the team, recalling his efforts to influence legal education on disability rights during his time as the Director-General at the Nigerian Institute of Advanced Legal Studies (NIALS).

Further west, in Ughelli, the advocacy team met with the Ovie of Ughelli Kingdom, who responded with encouragement and a willingness to act. He emphasized the need for local ownership of the process and advised the team to work closely with community influencers. “Our people trust what they hear from those they know. That’s how you change hearts,” he noted. He offered his royal blessing, not just in word, but in commitment to community mobilization and ongoing support.



Local Government officials echoed these commitments in practical terms. In Oshimili South, the Director of Personnel Administration spoke candidly about the reality of implementation fatigue but welcomed the project as a revitalizing force. She emphasized the importance of involving all three communities in the LGA and promised to help coordinate with

local actors. Similar sentiments came from rehabilitation officers in Warri South and Ughelli North. Their appreciation for the project was tied to its realism. They didn't just hear a call for change; they saw clear steps, translation of laws, capacity building, registration, and economic inclusion through vocational training. They assured the team that support

would not end with the visit.

The strategy behind the advocacy was multi-layered. At one level, it engaged government decision-makers to build political will. At another, it touched the cultural roots of leadership through traditional rulers. And perhaps most critically, it connected with implementers on the ground who will carry this vision into real-world action.





The next phase of the work will build on this momentum. Oshimili South has been selected for the pilot phase of digital disability ID registration, a move that will support better planning and access to services. Vocational training centers will be activated with inclusive programming. The translation of the Disability Act into four major languages will begin. And through community sensitization campaigns, the law will become more than a document; it will become part of the lived experience of persons with disabilities in Delta State.

What this advocacy visit revealed is simple, yet profound: the law is not enough. What matters is the infrastructure, the willingness, and the relationships that bring it to life. And in Delta State, the groundwork is now in place.



STATE ACTORS AND OPDS STRENGTHEN DISABILITY INCLUSION COMMITMENTS IN DELTA STATE

The stakeholder meeting convened by TAF Africa in Delta State brought together government officials, organizations of persons with disabilities (OPDs), civil society, and development partners to strengthen institutional collaboration on disability inclusion.

Held under the Disability Rights Advocacy Project for Inclusive Development (D-RAPID), the meeting was a deliberate step to align state-level efforts with the needs and realities of persons with disabilities. Participants included representatives from the Ministries of Women Affairs, Justice, Budget and Planning, Education, and Health, alongside OPDs and the Youth Sounding Board.

The discussions centred around four key objectives: establishing a multi-sectoral platform for dialogue, engaging OPDs to share lived experiences, identifying policy and implementation gaps, and promoting accountability across sectors.

The State Coordinator of TAF Africa, Andrew Adaji, welcomed participants by emphasizing the urgency of coordinated action. He noted that while progress has been made, many structural and systemic challenges persist, especially in





education, healthcare, and service delivery.

Goodwill messages from various ministries reinforced their commitment to inclusive governance. The Ministry of Women Affairs pledged closer collaboration with OPDs and reiterated its intention to fully implement the Delta State Disability Law.

A technical presentation on the status of disability inclusion in the state revealed major gaps, including the lack of disaggregated data, inadequate infrastructure in public institutions, and poor awareness of the Disability Law. Despite the legal framework in place, implementation remains weak due to limited funding and weak institutional ownership.

During the panel session, representatives from the Ministries of Budget, Women Affairs, and Humanitarian Affairs discussed how institutional mechanisms for disability inclusion can be strengthened. They agreed that increased budgetary allocations, stronger monitoring frameworks, and better inter-ministerial coordination are essential for real

impact.

Participants later split into three working groups to explore specific areas of concern. One group focused on legal and policy gaps and called for the establishment of a functional Disability Commission. Another proposed structured collaboration platform and recommended integrating disability indicators in development plans. A third group offered community engagement strategies, including local radio campaigns, inclusive school sensitization programmes, and the involvement of traditional and religious leaders.

Lived experiences shared by OPD leaders gave context to the policy discussions. They raised concerns around inaccessible infrastructure, transportation barriers, and widespread stigma. Yet, they also shared ongoing local advocacy efforts and peer-led initiatives that are helping to change perceptions and promote inclusion.

The meeting concluded with the development of an action plan focused on four priority areas: awareness campaigns, policy implementation and budgeting, data collection, and

monitoring. Specific responsibilities were assigned to ministries and OPDs, with timelines agreed for follow-up.

The outcome of the meeting was not just a set of recommendations, but a renewed sense of shared responsibility. With coordination structures now in place and ministries pledging stronger engagement, Delta State is taking meaningful steps toward disability inclusive development.

COMMUNITIES IN WARRI SOUTH MOBILISE FOR INCLUSIVE DEVELOPMENT



TAF Africa, under the EU-funded D-RAPID project, convened a grassroots-level town hall meeting in Warri South to strengthen awareness, engagement, and advocacy for

disability rights and inclusion. The meeting brought together fifty participants, including OPD leaders, women and youth groups, and local stakeholders.

The town hall provided a community-centred platform to discuss the implementation of the 2018 Discrimination Against Persons with Disabilities (Prohibition) Act and the relevance of the National Commission for Persons with Disabilities (NCPWD) registration portal. Facilitators from TAF Africa used the session to break down the steps for registration and emphasize its importance for access to national disability programmes and services.

Participants identified multiple barriers to registration, including limited access to digital tools, low awareness, and digital literacy challenges among rural residents. In response, participants proposed the establishment of local digital support desks and training for OPD leaders to act as registration facilitators. There were also strong recommendations for using local radio and community communication systems to drive awareness.

Beyond the technical discussions, the town hall also served as a space to reflect on the real-life challenges faced by persons with disabilities. Experiences shared ranged



from stigma in family and community life to housing discrimination and inaccessibility of public infrastructure. One participant shared how her family denied her education because of her deafness; another spoke about customers avoiding her business due to her physical disability.

Despite these painful accounts, the meeting was forward-looking. Participants worked in small groups to map OPDs, women-led groups, and youth networks within the local government area that could support

D-RAPID's objectives. They also outlined strategies to address stigma, promote inclusive vocational training, and demand enforcement of anti-discrimination provisions in the law.

The action plan that emerged from the meeting prioritized local advocacy, community mobilization, and stakeholder collaboration. Participants called for greater involvement of traditional and religious leaders, who continue to shape attitudes in communities.

A representative from the Ministry



of Women Affairs commended the dialogue and called for sustained awareness creation across schools, churches, and community forums. The meeting reinforced a key principle: that inclusion must be

rooted in community participation. When voices are heard and action is shared, the pathway to rights, access, and opportunity becomes clearer and more achievable.





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