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**INSIDE  
TAF Africa**  
... Disability Inclusion Champion

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## WE SPOKE UP FOR THE DEAF COMMUNITY, AND THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES LISTENED

We have always believed that inclusion must go beyond symbolism; it must be felt, seen, and institutionalized. In 2024, with support from the National Commission for Persons with Disabilities (NCPWD), we took a decisive step toward real inclusion

by training and deploying professional sign language interpreters to the National Assembly. Their mission? To bridge the communication gap for Deaf Nigerians and enable their real-time access to legislative proceedings.

Yet, despite their physical presence in plenary and committee sessions, our interpreters remained largely invisible. Cameras seldom captured them, and official broadcasts continued without incorporating their work. It was as though



Deaf Nigerians had a seat at the table but were still locked out of the conversation. To address this critical gap, we led an advocacy visit to the Speaker of the House of Representatives, Rt. Hon. Abbas Tajudeen, PhD, GCON. Partnering with the House Committee on Disability Matters, NCPWD, the Centre for Ability Rehabilitation and Empowerment (CARE), the Association of Sign Language Interpreters of Nigeria (ASLIN), and the Nigerian National Association of the Deaf (NNAD), we made a united call for legislative broadcasts to fully integrate sign language interpretation, not as an afterthought, but as a standard.

Our CEO/Founder, Amb. Jake Epelle made our position clear: "Cameras barely capture the interpreters. Their work is critical, but without proper visibility, it amounts





to tokenism. There must be dedicated coverage and full integration into the NASS TV media team. Deaf citizens deserve to follow legislative proceedings in real time, just like everyone else.”

Also present at the advocacy visit was Mr. Lawrence Idemudia, Director of the Social Integration Department at NCPWD, who raised key institutional challenges, including physical inaccessibility to legislative chambers, the absence of protective

gear for interpreters during plenary sessions, and underlying discriminatory attitudes that persist within governance spaces.

John Bamidele, FCT Chairman of the Association of Sign Language Interpreters of Nigeria (ASLIN), emphasized the urgent need to formally recognize Nigerian Sign Language as a national and official language. He also advocated for the creation of a certification and regulatory body for sign language

interpreters, along with employment structures and dedicated budget lines for their sustained engagement across all public institutions.

Together with our partners, we urged the federal government to fast-track the implementation of the Discrimination Against Persons with Disabilities (Prohibition) Act, 2018, and to adopt inclusive policies across sectors, especially in education, healthcare, and the justice system. We also called for continuous professional development and career pathways for interpreters nationwide. In response, the Speaker, ably represented by Hon. Bashiru Dawodu, Chairman of the House Committee on Disability Matters, gave thoughtful







and promising feedback. He acknowledged our partnership and affirmed the House's commitment to disability inclusion. Specifically, he pledged to:

- Direct NASS TV and the ICT Department to adopt a screen-in-screen feature for sign language interpretation during legislative broadcasts
- Institutionalize accessibility

protocols across all broadcast standards

- Propose a joint oversight hearing on the slow implementation of the Disability Act, with a Disability Compliance Scorecard to publicly track MDAs' performance
- Support the creation of a Disability Inclusion Budget Line and back

proposals for a National Disability Infrastructure Fund

- Encourage expedited passage of pending disability-focused bills through bipartisan sponsorship
- Foster deeper grassroots engagement by urging legislators to hold disability-focused constituency town halls and





appoint PWD focal persons

- Champion a National Dialogue on Disability Inclusion before the end of 2025
- And initiate mandatory disability sensitization for legislative aides, protocol officers, and NASS broadcast teams, including co-developing a Legislative Disability Inclusion Handbook with TAF Africa and rolling out sign language training for selected frontline staff

hope. Hope that our voices were heard, not just for ourselves, but for millions of Nigerians who rely on sign language to access the world. This visit was an advocacy milestone and a step closer to institutionalizing equity. Accessibility should never be optional, and the Deaf community deserves nothing less than full participation in the democratic process.

We left the meeting with renewed



## OUR POLITICAL INCLUSION INDEX SHEDS LIGHT ON PROGRESS AND GAPS IN DISABILITY-INCLUSIVE GOVERNANCE

At TAF Africa, we believe that a truly inclusive democracy must reflect the voices and participation of all citizens, especially persons with disabilities (PWDs). With funding support from the European Union through its EU-SDGN II programme, we convened a Reflection Session in Abuja to present the findings of our Political Inclusion Index, a rapid assessment tool we developed to evaluate how inclusive Nigeria's political and electoral landscape truly is for PWDs.

This session provided an opportunity for representatives from political parties, civil society, the media, security agencies, and leaders within the disability community to reflect on our current state, what's working, and where we need to improve.

The Political Inclusion Index was born out of our need to measure institutional efforts to implement the Electoral Act and the Discrimination Against Persons with Disabilities (Prohibition) Act, with a focus on four key stakeholders: INEC, political parties, media institutions, and security agencies.

We engaged an independent consultant, Ms. Omojo Adaji, to lead the research, and the results were both encouraging and instructive. INEC scored a high 95





out of 100; an indication of its strong policies and consistent engagement on disability inclusion. However, we also noted that its current framework, last updated in 2018, no longer fully reflects international standards or the evolving needs of PWDs. The recommendation is clear: it's time for a review.

Political parties earned an average score of 64. While some have begun taking steps toward inclusion, the gaps are still wide, especially in meaningful engagement with Organisations of Persons with Disabilities (OPDs) and in ensuring that their campaign processes are accessible. Our Founder and CEO, Amb. Jake Epelle captured it succinctly during the event:

**"If political parties are not strong internally and democratically, we cannot be strong nationally or sub-nationally. Running exclusive party systems only weakens our democracy."**

Media institutions, with an average score of 56, still have significant room to grow, particularly in making content accessible through captions, sign language interpretation, and inclusive reporting. Security agencies lagged with a score of 45, indicating the urgent need for better infrastructure and communication strategies that support voters with disabilities.





We were honoured to have Mr. Zissimos Vergos, Deputy Head of the EU Delegation to Nigeria and ECOWAS, present at the session. In his remarks, he described our report as a tool that can guide progress and help embed social justice into Nigeria's political systems. He also celebrated the growing impact of persons with disabilities in politics, culture, and science, calling it one of the highest expressions of social justice.

The Political Inclusion Index is beyond a scorecard; it's a call to action. It gives all of us, regulators, institutions, and advocates, a shared starting point for driving reforms, reviewing policies, and improving systems.

As we reflect on the progress made, we recognize that our work is far from over. The Reflection Session concluded with a collective call for stronger collaboration among stakeholders to address identified gaps and use the Index as a working guide toward more inclusive democratic governance in Nigeria.





## SECURITY AGENCIES PLEDGE PROTECTION FOR PERSONS WITH DISABILITIES AHEAD OF THE ANAMBRA GOVERNORSHIP ELECTION



Elections in Nigeria have long been seen as a test of the nation's democratic resilience. But for many citizens, particularly Persons with Disabilities (PWDs), elections are not just about casting votes; they are about safety, access, dignity, and the fight to be seen and heard in a system that too often forgets them.

In Anambra State, the stakes are high as the governorship election approaches. While security concerns remain a major issue in the region, for PWDs, those

concerns are compounded by years of systemic exclusion and a lack of understanding of their rights, both by those meant to protect them and by society at large.

However, in the first week of July 2025, a significant dialogue took place in Awka, the state capital. Thanks to the Able2Vote campaign, an initiative of TAF Africa supported by the European Union through its support for democratic governance in Nigeria (EU-SDGN), leaders of the disability



community and security agencies in the state came together in a rare but impactful engagement. The goal was simple: to build trust, enhance coordination, and ensure that PWDs are not left vulnerable on election day.

The event brought together representatives of the Nigerian Police Force (NPF), the Nigerian Security and Civil Defence Corps (NSCDC), the Department of State Services (DSS), and key leaders from the disability community under one roof. It was a conversation rather than a lecture. And it was one long overdue.

Opening the discussion, ASP Ndoma Akpo Ndoma, representing the Anambra State Commissioner of Police, CP Ikioye Orutugu, assured the gathering that security agencies are ready and committed to protecting everyone, especially persons with disabilities, on election day.

“Every voter matters. The command is working to ensure that at least five officers are stationed at each polling unit. Nobody will be left behind,” Ndoma said.

His words were echoed by Mrs Stella Onwuakagba, Deputy Commandant of







the NSCDC and Head of Campaign and Electioneering, who described the engagement as “timely and enlightening.”

“We’ve gained a better understanding of how to protect and support PWDs, not as an act of pity, but as a fundamental right,” she emphasized. “Our officers will ensure that PWDs are the first to cast their votes. We have been trained and equipped to do this right.”

Mrs Onwuakagba’s passion was evident. She spoke of internal training

spearheaded by their Commandant, Mr Olatunde Maku, and promised that this new knowledge would be shared with officers across the command.

But perhaps the most powerful moments of the event came from the voices of PWDs themselves.

Comrade Ugochukwu Okeke, State Chairman of the Joint National Association of Persons with Disabilities (JONAPWD), challenged security agencies to go beyond promises.

“We need holistic protection. This is



not just about getting to vote; it's about being treated with respect and dignity. Security agencies must work hand in hand with our community," he said. Adding to this, Chidinma Ajemba, Public Relations Officer of JONAPWD, raised a critical issue: the restriction of movement on election day. "For many of us, it's not about whether we want to vote. It's about whether we can get to where we can vote," she lamented. "Our mobility is limited. We need support to ensure we can participate, either as voters or as accredited observers." Mrs Onwuakagba was quick to respond, assuring PWDs that if they carried their



observer tags or permanent voter cards, they would not be hindered from moving to polling units. George Anwayi, Senior Programme Officer at TAF Africa and a person with physical disability, reminded all present that inclusion doesn't stop at the ballot box.



“PWDs should not only vote, but they should also be voted for,” he said. “Many of our members are highly educated and capable. They can be ministers, commissioners, or advisers. We must challenge stereotypes and remove the barriers.”

Anwayi also cited Section 54 of the Electoral Act, which mandates the Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC) to provide assistive tools like braille ballot guides, magnifying glasses, and large-font posters to ensure PWDs can vote independently and with dignity.

The room was filled with applause for the sense of possibility that now exists. Persons with disabilities were not merely spoken about; they were spoken with. Their needs were not side notes; they were the focus.

As the Anambra governorship election draws near, the message remains that Inclusion in democracy is non-negotiable. And with platforms like Able2Vote, the gap between policy and reality is beginning to close.

## **MEDIA, DISABILITY, AND THE BALLOT: JOURNALISTS IN ANAMBRA TRAINED TO DRIVE INCLUSIVE ELECTORAL COVERAGE**









In the lead-up to the 2025 governorship election in Anambra State, an important and timely conversation is emerging, one that centers not just on votes but on visibility, dignity, and inclusion. At the heart of this shift is a strategic media engagement organized by TAF Africa, with funding support from

the European Union under its support to democratic governance in Nigeria (EU-SDGN) programme. Themed “Able to Vote: Bridging Media and the Disability Community for Inclusive Participation in Anambra,” the event brought together journalists and disability advocates for a deep and necessary dialogue

on changing the media narrative around persons with disabilities (PWDs) in the electoral space.

The engagement was a deliberate effort to confront and dismantle the entrenched media habits that have long marginalized persons with disabilities in election reporting. Journalists from across







the three senatorial zones gathered to learn, unlearn, and relearn how stories can shape participation and perceptions.

"Too often, stories about persons with disabilities are either reduced to tales of pity," said Mr. Edetaen Ojo, Executive Director of Media Rights Agenda, during his session on

Framing the Media Narrative on Disability.

"The danger is not just in the inaccuracies, but in the harm they cause, harm that can extend to shaping policies, denying rights, and perpetuating exclusion."

Ojo emphasized that media narratives have power, and with that power comes

responsibility. He urged journalists to move beyond passive coverage and take on investigative roles that probe how inclusive institutions like the Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC) and political parties truly are. "Ask questions," he said. "Are assistive tools like braille ballot guides and





magnifying glasses really reaching voters who need them? Are parties fielding candidates with disabilities or merely paying lip service to inclusion?"

Also speaking at the event, Barr. Peter Moneke, Legal Adviser to the Joint National Association of Persons with Disabilities (JONAPWD) in Anambra State, echoed the call for deeper inclusion. He reminded participants that democracy demands not only that

persons with disabilities cast votes but that they are visible and supported throughout the entire electoral process, including as aspirants and political office holders.

"It's not enough to vote," Moneke said. "We must also have persons with disabilities at the table where decisions are made. That's true representation."

Lynn Agwuncha, Senior Communication Officer at TAF Africa, struck a chord with the participants when she acknowledged their presence and dedication. "Your role is not just to report," she said, "but to reflect the realities of every citizen, especially those who



have been historically ignored. This partnership between the media and the disability community is essential if we are serious about building inclusive elections.”

Adding to this, Mr. George Anwayi, Senior Programme Officer at TAF Africa, emphasized the importance of accuracy and empathy in disability coverage. “Words matter. Images matter. Context matters. Every headline, every caption, and every frame should respect the humanity and rights of persons with disabilities.”

The training covered key thematic areas designed to reshape how journalists engage with disability issues:

- Ethical and inclusive language in reporting
- Challenging stereotypes and harmful tropes
- Collaborating with organizations of persons with disabilities (OPDs)
- Crafting story angles that spotlight inclusion in electoral processes
- Holding institutions accountable through investigative journalism

Beyond the sessions and technical know-how, what made the event striking was the shared commitment

to doing better, not just in print or on-air, but in attitude and approach. Journalists at the training expressed both surprise and determination, admitting how much had been missed in past reporting and vowing to turn a new page.

“I didn’t realize how narrow our reporting lens has been until now,” said one participant. “This training has opened my eyes to stories waiting to be told, and more importantly, how to tell them with dignity.”

Another journalist remarked, “Disability is not a tragedy. Exclusion is. That’s what we need to report.”

The event was a gentle reminder that inclusion doesn’t begin at the polling unit; it begins in the stories that shape public consciousness. And with the knowledge and tools shared at the training, journalists in Anambra are better equipped to ensure that throughout the electoral cycle for the gubernatorial elections, come November 8, 2025, the voices of persons with disabilities will be heard, respected, recognized, and represented.





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# Legislative Internship Programme for Persons with Disabilities

## Lessons & Reflections from the National Assembly



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