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... Disability Inclusion Champion

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## HOW TAF AFRICA'S INTERNSHIP IS REDEFINING DISABILITY INCLUSION IN NIGERIA'S NATIONAL ASSEMBLY

For three months, the corridors of Nigeria's National Assembly quietly welcomed a new kind of participant, nine young legislative interns with disabilities, trained and deployed by TAF Africa with funding from the European Union through its Support

to Democratic Governance in Nigeria (EU-SDGN II) programme. Their mission was not symbolic. It was practical, rigorous, and historic: to prove that persons with disabilities not only belong in governance but are essential to shaping it.

The Legislative Internship Programme, which ran from May to July 2025, gave these interns firsthand exposure to lawmaking and oversight. They researched motions, attended public hearings, engaged directly with committee clerks and



lawmakers, and contributed to policy discussions that impact millions of Nigerians. At a reflection meeting convened to evaluate its impact, one truth became clear: the programme did more than train interns; it challenged the very architecture of exclusion in the nation's highest legislative chamber.

The House of Representatives Committee on Disability Matters gave the initiative high praise. Representing the committee's chairman, Hon. (Dr.) Dawodu Bashiru, the committee clerk, Mrs. Chinemerem Njoku commended the interns for their discipline and intellect. "What we need is not strength, but intellect, and they have it in abundance," she said. "Many of them have the brainpower to move this country forward. We must make room for them in policymaking."

For the interns, the experience was life-changing. Omowunmi Ogundare, who



worked with the House Committee on Basic Education and Services, called the programme “proof that PWDs have a place in governance. Our disabilities do not define our value.” Another intern, Aver Akighir, who worked with the committee on women affairs, emerged from the programme with new ambition: “I attended proceedings, studied debates, and saw how decisions are made. Politics is for

everyone, disability or not. I am going into politics because I can make a difference, and I think the world needs someone like me to make that difference.” The internship also revealed gaps in Nigeria’s governance system. Rex Erameh, attached to the House Committee on Disability Matters, joined oversight visits to parastatals and government agencies. What he discovered was sobering. “It was

shocking to see that many institutions were unaware of the 2018 Disability Act,” he said. “The committee had to sensitize them on the law and make it clear they must comply with its provisions, especially on accessibility and employment.” Chief Ayuba Burki Gufwan, Executive Secretary of the National Commission for Persons with Disabilities, described the programme as



a “turning point for inclusive governance,” applauding TAF Africa and the European Union for a bold initiative that gave young people with disabilities practical exposure to legislative work.

Amb. Jake Epelle, CEO and Founder of TAF Africa, emphasized its long-term vision. “My dream is that some of these interns will become lawmakers,” he said. “This pilot is

just the beginning. We are scaling it up to ensure more persons with disabilities find their way into the National Assembly. But we must also improve infrastructure, including sign language interpretation, to make the legislative space truly accessible.”

Kevin Ogburie, Special Assistant to the Speaker on Equal Opportunities, called the programme “awesome and apt,”

praising the interns’ performance and professionalism.

The Legislative Internship Programme demonstrated not only that persons with disabilities can thrive at the heart of policymaking but also that their perspectives enrich governance. These nine interns did not merely occupy seats in the National Assembly; they brought perspectives that are





critical to creating policies for all Nigerians. Far beyond its three-month duration, the PWD legislative internship programme has proven that when given a seat at the table, persons with disabilities do not just participate; they lead, inspire, and shape the future.



## TAF AFRICA SECURES STRONG COMMITMENTS FOR DISABILITY-INCLUSIVE GOVERNANCE IN RIVERS STATE

TAF Africa has stepped up efforts to make Rivers State a model of disability-inclusive governance through a second round of high-level advocacy visits to ministries, departments, and agencies (MDAs) as well as traditional leaders. The three-day mission, held from August 19 to 21, 2025, is part of a two-year Disability Inclusion Project funded by the Disability Rights Fund (DRF), aimed at aligning government programmes and policies with the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) and Nigeria's Discrimination Against Persons with Disabilities (Prohibition) Act of 2018. Led by Mr. George Awanyi, Senior Programme Officer of TAF Africa, the delegation visited the Ministry of Justice, Ministry of Transport, Ministry of Health, Ministry of Women's Affairs, the Office of the Head of Service, and the Rivers State Traditional Council. These engagements built on earlier advocacy visits in February 2025, where initial commitments were made to establish Disability Desk Offices, integrate inclusive education, and support the domestication of the Disability Act in the state.

During each visit, TAF Africa presented its Charter of Demands, which calls for:

- Mainstreaming persons with disabilities (PWDs) into government planning,





budgeting, and service delivery.

- Enforcing the 5% employment quota for PWDs in line with the Disability Act.
- Recruiting or designating Gender and Disability Desk Officers across ministries.
- Guaranteeing accessible infrastructure in public buildings and learning environments.
- Ensuring access to justice through sign language interpretation and accessible information formats.
- Supporting the passage of the Rivers State Disability Bill currently awaiting presentation to the governor.

At the Ministry of Transport, Mr. Chukwuma Ndudi Augustine, Permanent Secretary, pledged to work with the Head of Service to expedite the deployment of a Disability Desk Officer and to champion TAF Africa's demands at the highest administrative level.

The Ministry of Justice, under Dr. (Mrs.) Vera Sam Dike, Permanent Secretary, welcomed the advocacy and pledged to partner with TAF Africa to review and advance the draft Rivers State Disability Bill. She also assured that the ministry would nominate a representative for disability inclusion training scheduled for September 2025.





At the Office of the Head of Service, Mrs. Brown, Acting Head of Service and a polio survivor, affirmed her office's commitment to enforcing the 5% employment quota for PWDs in upcoming recruitment exercises. She also promised to coordinate the deployment of Disability Desk Officers across ministries and highlighted ongoing efforts to improve accessibility in government buildings.

The Rivers State Traditional Council, led by King Chike A.A. Worlu Wodu (Eze Oha Apará IV), pledged to use traditional institutions as strong allies in eliminating discrimination against persons with disabilities. He reaffirmed that inclusion is a shared responsibility and assured TAF Africa of the Council's tireless support.

In follow-up visits, Dr. Wanchukwu, Acting Permanent Secretary of the Ministry of Health, and Dr. Comrita, Director of the Ministry of Women's Affairs, expressed their ministries' readiness to integrate accessibility measures and nominate staff for the upcoming Disability Desk Officer training. Both commended TAF Africa for ensuring that PWDs are recognized as key contributors to the state's development.

These engagements have yielded concrete commitments to:

- Establish Disability Desk Offices and nominate staff for training in September 2025.
- Review and advance the draft Rivers State Disability Bill for presentation to the governor.
- Enforce the 5% employment quota for qualified PWDs in state recruitment.
- Integrate accessibility initiatives into health, education, and social welfare programmes.
- Mobilize traditional institutions to promote disability rights at the grassroots level.

Proceedings from the visits were carefully documented, with agreed action points to ensure systematic follow-up. TAF Africa will formally communicate next steps to stakeholders, confirm timelines for implementation, and continue to provide technical support to ministries and agencies to translate commitments into tangible results.

## DRIVING DISABILITY ACT IMPLEMENTATION THROUGH STRATEGIC ADVOCACY IN DELTA STATE



TAF Africa, in collaboration with CBM and partners, has taken another decisive step toward ensuring the domestication and full implementation of the Disability Act in Delta State.

During a high-level advocacy engagement, the TAF Africa team, led by the Programme Manager, Mr. Adeolu Kilanko, met with the Ministry of Economic Planning and the Ministry of Women Affairs, securing strong commitments to mainstream disability inclusion in state governance.

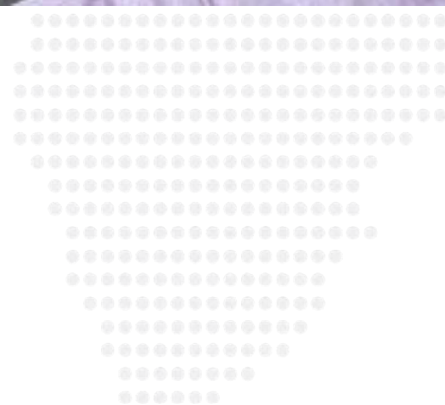
### **Key Outcomes:**

- **Budget Commitment:** The Ministry of Economic Planning assured that disability issues will be integrated into the 2026 state budget, ensuring financial and institutional backing for inclusion programs.
- **Government Support:** The Ministry of Women Affairs reaffirmed its ongoing support for advancing the rights and welfare of persons with disabilities.
- **Strengthening OPDs:** The visit reinforced the role of the Joint National Association of Persons

with Disabilities (JONAPWD) state chapters and clusters in driving legislative and policy advocacy at the state level.

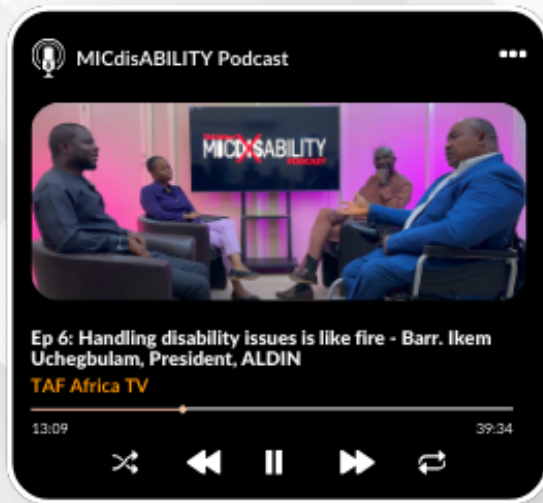
TAF Africa also enhanced its logistical capacity by securing a dedicated office space and delivering a project vehicle to improve coordination, mobility, and overall project efficiency.

This engagement demonstrates growing political will to prioritize disability inclusion. If realized, Delta State's integration of disability concerns into the 2026 budget will serve as a model for other states.





## EPISODE 6 of MICDISABILITY PODCAST



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