



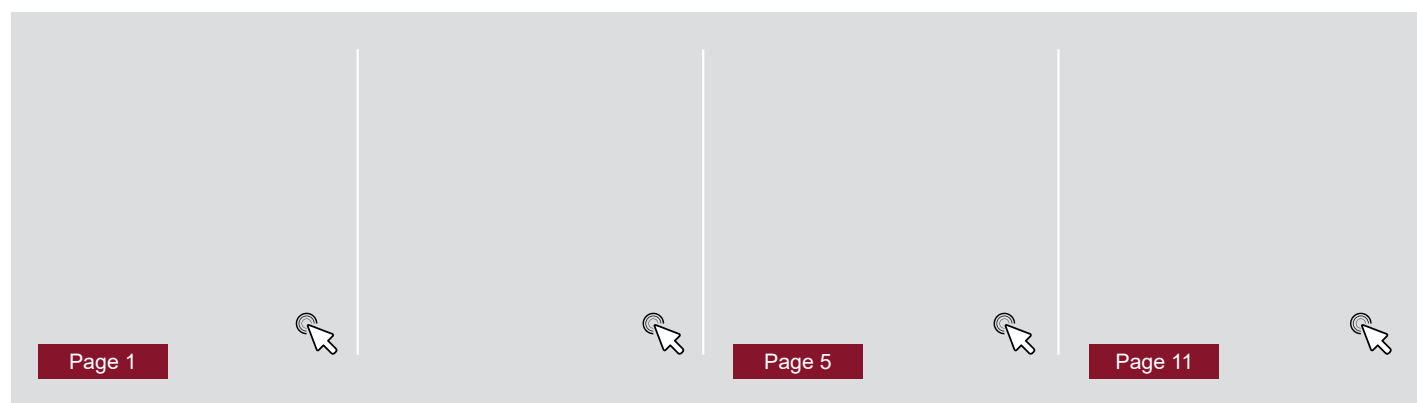
If elections are the moment democracy speaks, then the weeks before election day determine who gets to have a voice.

For many Nigerians, participating in an election begins long before arriving at a polling unit. It starts with having access to voter registration, understanding electoral processes, receiving accurate information, and believing that the system has made room for them. For persons with disabilities, internally displaced persons, and other historically excluded communities, these opportunities are often constrained by physical barriers, limited awareness, inaccessible services and inadequate institutional support.

Therefore, TAF Africa made July about meeting people where they are. Whether in disability communities, internally displaced persons camps, rooms with media executives or in conversations with electoral stakeholders, TAF Africa continued one simple mission: removing barriers before they become barriers to participation. This edition of Inclusion Digest highlights how registration drives, grassroots education, and media advocacy are combining to widen the door to democratic participation.

Read on for Disability Inclusion. Democratic Participation. Real Stories.

TOP STORIES INSIDE THIS EDITION



TAKING DEMOCRACY TO COMMUNITIES TOO OFTEN LEFT BEHIND

The right to vote begins long before election day. Before a ballot is cast, before campaign promises are weighed, and before citizens make their choices at the polling unit, one fundamental step determines whether participation is even possible: voter registration.

For many Nigerians, registering to vote is a straightforward administrative process. For Persons with Disabilities (PWDs) and internally displaced persons (IDPs), registration can become an obstacle in itself. Distance to registration centres, inaccessible public infrastructure, transportation costs, displacement caused by conflict, limited access to information and mobility challenges continue to prevent many eligible citizens from obtaining or updating their voter records.

Recognising that inclusion requires institutions to move closer to citizens, in July, TAF Africa continued its Able2Vote initiative by taking voter registration directly into disability communities and IDP camps, working in partnership with the Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC) under the European Union Support to Democratic Governance in Nigeria (EU-SDGN) II Programme.



The intervention first reached persons with disabilities in the Disability Colony at Alheri Camp in Yangoji, Kwali Area Council of the Federal Capital Territory.

Supported by INEC officials deployed with registration equipment, eligible participants were able to register for the first time, replace lost Permanent Voter Cards (PVCs), transfer polling units and update their voter information within communities that have historically experienced significant barriers in accessing public services.

For residents in Wassa whose lives have been disrupted by conflict and displacement, the exercise represented more than access to electoral services. It was a reminder that displacement does not diminish citizenship and that every eligible Nigerian retains the constitutional right to participate in shaping the country's future.

Throughout the engagements, TAF Africa and INEC officials guided participants and held discussions to highlight how elected leaders influence decisions relating to humanitarian assistance, security, education, healthcare and long-term resettlement, reinforcing the relevance of political participation even in situations of prolonged displacement. The response across all locations reflected a common reality. When electoral services become accessible, citizens are eager to participate.



In both the disability communities and the IDP camps, long queues formed as participants patiently waited to complete their registration, while limited registration equipment, internet connectivity challenges and the number of available INEC personnel slowed the process considerably. Rather than viewing these operational constraints as setbacks, TAF Africa regarded them as evidence of unmet demand

and an opportunity for further action by stakeholders.

The interventions reaffirmed an important lesson, whether living with a disability or rebuilding life after displacement, citizens should not have to overcome extraordinary barriers simply to exercise an ordinary constitutional right, and registration is only the first step in democratic participation. Once citizens are registered, they must also understand the electoral process, know their rights and feel confident that they can participate fully on election day.

FROM REGISTRATION TO PARTICIPATION: THE UNFOLDING ABLE2VOTE STORY

Obtaining a Permanent Voter Card is an important milestone, yet it is only the beginning of meaningful participation in a democratic process. As preparations intensify for the Osun State Governorship Election, TAF Africa shifted focus from registration to readiness.



Through the flagship Able2Vote initiative, we embarked on a series of community outreach programmes across Ede North, Ifelodun, Osogbo, Iwo, Ilesha and Ile-Ife, bringing civic education directly to persons with disabilities ahead of the August election. Our belief is simple, a voter who understands their rights, recognises electoral malpractice, knows what support is available at the polling unit and feels confident that their voice matters, is far more likely to participate than one who simply possesses a voter card. The outreach recognised a simple but often overlooked reality: information is one of the most powerful tools for inclusion.

While legal protections and accessibility measures have improved over time,

many persons with disabilities continue to encounter uncertainty about voting procedures, available accommodations and the broader opportunities for political participation beyond election day. Addressing these knowledge gaps was central to the Able2Vote campaign.

Across the six communities visited, more than **300 persons with disabilities** participated in interactive engagements designed not simply to deliver information, but to encourage dialogue. Facilitators used discussions, demonstrations, voting simulations and question-and-answer sessions to explore issues that participants themselves considered most relevant. Yoruba interpretation and sign language services ensured that the conversations remained accessible across different disability clusters.



The discussions also challenged conventional perceptions of political participation. Participants encouraged to see themselves not only as voters, but as potential candidates, public servants and leaders capable of influencing governance from within public institutions. Facilitators emphasised that disability should never determine the limits of civic contribution. Perhaps the most valuable aspect of the outreach, however, was the opportunity to listen.

Participants openly shared experiences from previous elections, describing issues of inaccessible polling units, elevated ballot boxes that could not be reached by wheelchair users, inconsistent implementation of priority voting, inadequate deployment of assistive devices, delays in PVC collection, transportation challenges

and poor treatment by some polling officials. Others highlighted broader concerns including unemployment, discrimination and limited political representation.

These conversations transformed the outreach from a voter education campaign into a listening exercise. Rather than assuming the barriers affecting persons with disabilities, TAF Africa gathered first-hand evidence directly from those who experience them. By the end of the engagements, participants had gained a stronger understanding of their electoral rights and responsibilities, while TAF Africa had gained something equally valuable: a clearer picture of the changes still required to make elections fully inclusive.

FROM TRAINING TO OBSERVATION: PREPARING THE EYES AND EARS OF DEMOCRACY

The integrity of Elections is seen when they are observed, documented and assessed by citizens who take on the challenge of such responsibility—watching how the process unfolds and ensuring that what happens on election day is captured accurately. For the Osun State Governorship Election, TAF Africa's election observation effort is built around this principle.



The organisation will be deploying 150 observers across polling units in Osun state. To ensure their effectiveness, these citizen observers were recruited and trained to monitor the participation of persons with disabilities and assess whether electoral processes were accessible and inclusive.

During the two-day training, participants were introduced to the principles and ethics of election observation, including neutrality, professionalism, security awareness and accurate reporting. Particular attention was given to disability inclusion, accessibility, priority voting and the provision of assistive devices, equipping observers to assess the electoral process not merely from the perspective of whether voting took place, but whether citizens with disabilities could participate meaningfully. Among the participants were persons with disabilities as well as able-bodied citizens, reflecting TAF Africa's commitment to ensuring that election observation itself is inclusive.

With their training complete, the observers are equipped to become the eyes and ears of TAF Africa across Osun state on election day. The training reinforced the importance of preparing citizens to observe the democracy that affects their lives. Election observation requires more than simply being present at a polling unit. It requires an understanding of electoral procedures, a commitment to neutrality, the ability to identify relevant indicators and the discipline to report observations accurately.

By investing in the preparation of observers and placing inclusion at the centre of their mandate, TAF Africa demonstrated that citizens themselves can play an important role in strengthening electoral accountability.

PREPARING FOR ELECTION DAY THROUGH DIALOGUE AND EVIDENCE



One of the strongest indicators of a healthy democracy is its willingness to ask and

respond to difficult questions raised before citizens cast their votes.

- Are electoral institutions adequately prepared?
- Will voters with disabilities be able to participate independently?
- Are security agencies ready to protect the process?
- Have political actors created an environment that encourages peaceful participation?
- And perhaps most importantly, are citizens confident that the election will reflect their will?

These questions rarely have simple answers. Yet creating opportunities for stakeholders to examine them openly remains one of the most effective ways of strengthening electoral integrity before election day arrives.



As preparations for the Osun State Governorship Election entered its final stages, TAF Africa joined partners under the Civil Society Network on Election Integrity to convene a Citizens' Town Hall as well as launch the Pre-Election Observation Report. The event brought together representatives of the Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC), security agencies, political parties, civil society organisations, development partners, disability advocates, the media and citizens to assess the state's preparedness for the forthcoming election and identify areas requiring urgent attention.

By creating a platform where citizens could engage directly with different stakeholders, the Town Hall encouraged collective ownership of the election rather than placing responsibility solely on institutions.

While providing evidence for some issues examined during the Townhall launch of the **Pre-Election Observation Report**, revealed a comprehensive assessment of the electoral environment ahead of the poll. The report examined key issues likely to influence the credibility and inclusiveness of the election, including election security, logistics, voter education, political participation, misinformation, vote buying and the accessibility of electoral processes for persons with disabilities. By documenting these observations before voting commenced, the report served not only as an assessment of current realities but also as a roadmap for timely interventions by institutions responsible for managing the election.

For TAF Africa, disability inclusion remained central to these conversations. While electoral preparedness is often measured through logistics and security arrangements, genuine preparedness must also consider whether persons with disabilities can participate safely, independently and without discrimination. The Townhall and Pre-election Observation Report reinforced the understanding that inclusion should not be treated as a specialised concern but as an essential component of electoral credibility itself.

Get the Pre-Election Observation Report here: <https://eusdgn.org/pre-assessment-report-on-the-osun-state-o%ef%ac%80-cycle-governorship-election/>

LISTENING THAT TURNS COMMUNITY VOICES INTO INSTITUTIONAL ACTION



The most effective advocacy begins with listening. Throughout TAF Africa's voter



education and registration activities across Osun State, one message emerged consistently from persons with disabilities: while progress has been made in making elections more inclusive, significant barriers continue to limit equal participation. From inaccessible polling units to limited awareness among election officials of the needs of voters with disabilities. For TAF Africa, community engagement serves a dual purpose. It empowers citizens with the information they need

to participate in elections while generating evidence that can inform institutional reforms. These conversations were never intended to end in the communities where they began.

As preparations for the Osun State Governorship Election gathers pace, TAF Africa held a series of strategic engagements with electoral stakeholders to ensure that the experiences shared by persons with disabilities would contribute to improving the administration of the election. One of such significant engagements was a meeting with the Resident Electoral Commissioner (REC) for Osun State, Oluwatoyin Babalola, where TAF Africa joined partners under the Civil Society Network on Election Integrity to present observations from community-based voter education activities and discuss practical measures that would strengthen disability inclusion throughout the electoral process.

The meeting fostered discussions that reflected a shared understanding about how credible elections are measured not only by peaceful conduct and procedural

compliance but also by the extent to which every eligible citizen can participate independently, safely and with dignity. The dialogue focused on practical improvements that could remove barriers on election day and reaffirmed the value of collaboration between electoral institutions and civil society organisations (CSOs). While INEC brings constitutional responsibility for delivering elections, CSOs contribute insights that help identify gaps which may not always be visible through administrative processes alone.

For TAF Africa, these engagements represent an important principle that extends beyond a single election. Evidence gathered from communities becomes most valuable when it informs institutional decision-making. These institutional conversations represent a part of the ecosystem that shapes democratic participation.

SHAPING DEMOCRACY THROUGH INCLUSIVE ELECTION REPORTING



The narrative of an election is formed not only by experiences at polling units but also through the stories that inform public understanding of the democratic process, and a key player in shaping these narratives is the media. The media determines which issues receive attention, whose voices are represented, and how citizens understand questions of participation, accountability and inclusion. For persons with disabilities, fair and accurate media coverage has the potential to challenge stereotypes, highlight barriers to participation and promote greater public understanding of disability rights. Conversely, the absence of inclusive

reporting can reinforce exclusion by rendering these experiences invisible within national conversations.

Recognising the influence of the media in strengthening democratic participation, TAF Africa in collaboration with the Nigeria Women Trust Fund, Center for Media and Society (CEMESO) and the International Press Centre (IPC) joined media executives, journalists, regulators and representatives of Organisations of Persons with Disabilities at a high-level reflection meeting to examine the role of the media in promoting inclusive elections.



The meeting provided an opportunity to reflect on lessons from previous election cycles and assess the progress that has been made in integrating disability inclusion into election reporting. Participants acknowledged that while greater attention is now being given to accessibility and political participation for persons with disabilities, significant opportunities remain to improve both the quantity and quality of reporting on disability-related electoral issues.

Discussions centred on practical ways to strengthen inclusive journalism before, during and after elections. Participants examined existing media guidelines on election reporting, explored strategies for amplifying the voices of women and persons with disabilities, and reflected on how journalists can move beyond reporting isolated accessibility challenges to examining the broader structural issues that affect political participation. The meeting also encouraged greater collaboration between media organisations, civil society and electoral institutions to ensure that election reporting reflects the experiences of all citizens rather than

only the majority.

For TAF Africa, the understanding that when election coverage consistently includes the perspectives of persons with disabilities, it reinforces the understanding that they are not merely beneficiaries of inclusion initiatives but equal citizens whose participation strengthens the legitimacy of democratic processes. As preparations for the Osun Governorship Election continue, the conversations held throughout July demonstrated that inclusion is achieved not through a single intervention but through sustained collaboration among institutions committed to ensuring that every citizen can participate fully in Nigeria's democracy.

BUILDING INCLUSION THROUGH BETTER DATA

Every public policy that allocates resources, every government programme that determines who receives support, and every law that seeks to protect the rights of citizens determines the extent of democratic participation, and effective policies can only be developed when governments understand the populations they serve. For many persons with disabilities in Nigeria, one persistent challenge has been being invisible within official data systems. Without accurate and reliable information on the number, location and needs of persons with disabilities, governments are often constrained in planning inclusive education, healthcare, employment, social protection and infrastructure. Data, therefore, is more than statistics; it is the foundation upon which inclusive governance is built.



Recognising this, TAF Africa continued its disability rights advocacy beyond the

electoral space by engaging Organisations of Persons with Disabilities (OPDs) and community leaders in Delta State on the importance of disability registration. The town hall meeting, held with members of the Joint National Association of Persons with Disabilities (JONAPWD) in Oshimili Local Government Area, introduced participants to the National Commission for Persons with Disabilities (NCPWD) Disability Registration Portal and examined how comprehensive disability data can strengthen policy implementation and improve public service delivery.



The discussions encouraged participants to view registration not simply as an administrative exercise but as an opportunity to make disability more visible within national planning processes. Facilitators explained how accurate disability data supports evidence-based budgeting, enables governments to design more responsive programmes and strengthens advocacy for the

implementation of the Discrimination Against Persons with Disabilities (Prohibition) Act. Participants also explored the broader responsibilities of public institutions in promoting equal access to education, healthcare, employment and other essential services.

The engagement also empowered participants as advocates within their own communities. Members of OPDs committed to encouraging eligible persons with disabilities to register once the portal becomes fully operational while continuing to promote awareness of disability rights and available government services. The meeting also reinforced the importance of sustained collaboration between government institutions, disability organisations and civil society to ensure that

inclusion is reflected not only in legislation but also in everyday governance.

Inclusion is a continuous process rather than a series of isolated interventions, whether supporting voter registration in disability communities, engaging internally displaced persons, preparing voters for elections, working with electoral institutions, or strengthening disability data systems, each activity reflects the same underlying principle: every citizen deserves the opportunity to participate.

LOOKING AHEAD

July serves as a reminder that credible elections are built long before polling units open.

- They begin when registration services reach underserved communities.
- They grow stronger when citizens understand their rights and responsibilities.
- They are reinforced when institutions listen to evidence from communities when the media tells inclusive stories, and when governments invest in policies that recognise every citizen.

TAF Africa remains committed to working alongside electoral institutions, Organisations of Persons with Disabilities, development partners, the media and communities to advance an electoral process that is accessible, representative and responsive to the needs of all Nigerians.



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