

POST-ELECTION PRESS STATEMENT BY TAF AFRICA ON THE PARTICIPATION OF PERSONS WITH DISABILITIES (PWDs) IN THE 2025 ANAMBRA STATE GOVERNORSHIP ELECTION

Introduction:

TAF Africa, with funding support from the European Union under the European Union Support to Democratic Governance in Nigeria (EUSDGN II) Programme, observed the 2025 Anambra State Governorship Election through the deployment of 150 trained citizens and roving media observers, as well as 25 trained sign language interpreters across the 21 Local Government Areas of the state. The observation was coordinated through the TAF Disability Hub Application, a central data-driven monitoring system designed to track accessibility, assistive tools, and voter experiences of persons with disabilities (PWDs) in real time.

This initiative reflects TAF Africa's firm commitment to advancing the political participation of PWDs and promoting inclusive democratic processes in Nigeria. The 2025 Anambra Governorship Election provided an opportunity to evaluate the extent to which the Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC) and other stakeholders are upholding the rights of Persons with Disabilities to participate on an equal basis with others, in line with the Discrimination Against Persons with Disabilities (Prohibition) Act, 2018.

Sign Language Interpreter Deployment

As part of TAF Africa's accessibility intervention, 25 trained Sign Language Interpreters (SLIs) were strategically deployed to polling units with significant numbers of deaf voters to bridge communication barriers and promote inclusive participation. Some of the polling units where SLIs were deployed include the Village Hall Polling Unit, Ward 1, Njikoka Local Government Area, and Central Primary School, Odoakpu, Ward II, Onitsha South Local Government Area.

The presence of SLIs in these polling units enabled several deaf voters to communicate more effectively with INEC officials and exercise their franchise independently. This pilot deployment demonstrated the practical value and impact of having professional interpreters at polling stations, setting a precedent for future elections and reinforcing the necessity of institutionalizing such measures by INEC.

Key Field Findings

According to INEC data, Awka South LGA, Igwebueze Primary School 1 & 3, Polling Units 001 and 014 (Awka Ward 2), were recorded as having registered voters with albinism. Consequently, INEC was expected to deploy magnifying glasses at these locations. However, our observation teams reported that blind voters also turned out

to vote but could not do so independently due to the absence of braille ballot guides, and even the magnifying glasses expected for voters with albinism were unavailable.

While we commend the issuance of Form EC40H: PWD Voter Information and Statistics form across several polling units, there were instances of non-compliance as some INEC ad hoc staff were unaware of the form's purpose or existence.

In Awka I Ward, Ayom Na Okpala Square II PU, a voter with albinism struggled to vote due to the absence of a magnifying glass. Similarly, at Nise Ward I, Isiakpu Hall III PU, a deaf voter was observed being taken aside by a woman believed to be a party agent, who appeared to be convincing him on whom to vote for, raising concerns of voter manipulation and vote buying involving a person with a disability. A visually impaired woman at the same polling unit also received assistance from someone believed to be a party agent, undermining the secrecy and independence of her vote.

In Nando Ward III, Anambra East LGA, and Mgbakwu Ward I, Awka North LGA, voters with albinism and visual impairment, respectively, were unable to vote independently due to the non-availability of magnifying glasses and braille ballot guides. In Nnewi North LGA, some PWDs struggled to locate their new polling units due to changes not effectively communicated.

Instances of vote trading were recorded in multiple LGAs. In Idemili North (Umuoji Ward, Ideoma Hall I PU), party agents were observed discreetly engaging voters, including PWDs, and offering ₦1,000 in exchange for votes. In Ogbaru LGA (Ogbaru Main Market, Okpoko Ward I), a female party agent was reportedly seen distributing ₦5,000 to voters on behalf of a political party (APGA). It is important to emphasize that vote buying disproportionately affects voters with disabilities, many of whom face socioeconomic vulnerabilities and are often targeted by party agents seeking to exploit their circumstances. Such practices not only undermine the dignity and autonomy of PWD voters but also erode the integrity of the electoral process itself.

Despite these irregularities, the overall election atmosphere remained peaceful, with minimal incidents of violence or intimidation.

General Observation

Data transmitted from our observers via the TAF Disability Hub Application showed that INEC officials arrived on time at about 62% of the polling units observed. In comparison, voting commenced promptly in 67.6% of those locations. Security personnel were present in 35.2% of the polling units, contributing to a largely peaceful environment in 99.3% of the areas monitored. The provision of assistive devices was, however, significantly low at 32%, even though 89.4% of polling units were physically accessible to voters with disabilities. Priority voting was granted in 74.8% of cases, while 35.2% of polling stations had PWDs serving as INEC ad hoc staff. Encouragingly, 68.3% of the electorate demonstrated a positive attitude towards PWDs during the process. Nonetheless, 5.8% of PWD voters were unable to vote due to accessibility barriers, procedural lapses, or inadequate assistive support.

While the election was largely peaceful, with minimal cases of violence or disruption, the data indicate persistent structural and operational gaps in the inclusivity of the electoral process for persons with disabilities.

Commendable Practices

TAF Africa acknowledges INEC's introduction and partial use of Form EC 40H: PWD Voter Information and Statistics, a step towards improving disability data collection during elections. However, pockets of non-compliance persisted, largely due to insufficient awareness among ad hoc staff.

The peaceful conduct of the election, the professional presence of security personnel, and the generally positive disposition of voters toward PWDs are commendable indicators of progress in Nigeria's democratic space.

Recommendations

To the Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC):

- **Strengthen Disability Data Validation:** INEC should periodically update and verify disability-disaggregated voter data to ensure accurate deployment of assistive tools and materials.
- **Improve Logistics and Deployment of Assistive Devices:** Ensure that magnifying glasses, braille ballot guides, and other assistive tools reach polling units where they are needed.
- **Institutionalize Mandatory Training:** All ad hoc officials should receive compulsory training on disability inclusion, the administration of Form EC40H, and the proper handling of assistive tools.
- **Enforce Sanctions for Non-Compliance:** Supervisors and presiding officers who neglect inclusion protocols should be held accountable to strengthen internal compliance mechanisms.

To Civil Society Organizations (CSOs) and Media:

- Sustain advocacy and voter education targeting both PWDs and the general electorate on the importance of inclusive participation and accessible voting environments.
- Strengthen media monitoring and public accountability efforts to expose and deter voter manipulation or exploitation of PWDs.

To Political Parties:

- Mainstream disability inclusion in party structures and campaign processes, ensuring accessibility during rallies and equitable representation of PWDs as candidates, party agents, and mobilizers.

To Security Agencies:

- Increase Presence and Responsiveness: Strengthen security presence in and around polling units to deter voter inducement, especially where vulnerable groups like PWDs are targeted.
- Protect the Integrity of the Process: Act promptly on reports of vote trading, intimidation, or exploitation of persons with disabilities to preserve electoral fairness.

To Political Parties:

- Mainstream disability inclusion in party structures and campaign processes, ensuring accessibility during rallies and equitable representation of PWDs as candidates, party agents, and mobilizers.

Conclusion

TAF Africa commends INEC, security agencies, and other stakeholders for the largely peaceful conduct of the 2025 Anambra State Governorship Election. However, the continued exclusion of voters with disabilities due to inadequate assistive materials, weak training of officials, and cases of undue influence demands urgent and sustained attention.

As an implementing partner under the EU-SDGN II Programme, TAF Africa maintains its commitment to promoting inclusive, credible, and accessible elections in Nigeria. Through the TAF Disability Hub, the organization will continue to provide data-driven insights to inform electoral reforms, especially for the adequate inclusion of voters with disabilities.

For media inquiries, please get in touch with TAF Africa's Senior Communications Officer, Lynn Agwuncha. Phone: +234 (0) 706 809 1367; email: l.agwuncha@tafafrica.co

Visit www.tafafrica.co to learn more about #PWDElectionHub or follow us on social media: Instagram: taf_africa; Facebook: TAF Africa; X: TAF_Africa.