

# MANUAL ON THE USE OF SIGN LANGUAGE INTERPRETERS TO PROMOTE INCLUSIVE ELECTORAL PROCESS



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**Prepared by**

The Inclusive Friends Association (IFA) in collaboration with the Nigerian National Association of the Deaf and the Association of Sign Language Interpreters of Nigeria with support from the National Endowment for Democracy (NED) and the National Democratic Institute (NDI).

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# 1. EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This manual was developed to guide the Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC) and other public and private institutions on the use of sign language interpreters to communicate effectively with the Deaf persons throughout the electoral cycle. This manual is designed to bridge the communication gap between the Deaf citizens and the Commission in the area of quality sign language interpretation services which is partially unavailable due to the absence of sign language interpreters education programs in Nigeria with no existing certification centres and criteria, not many educational research centres, absence of unified indigenous sign language, and a limited number of qualified professional interpreters; yet with an increasing need for sign language interpretation in a less educated Deaf community.

The objective of sign language interpretation is to effectively communicate the electoral process and procedures to the Deaf in visual languages and help convey the thoughts and feelings of the Deaf persons to the hearing participants in a program. However, this objective is not met many times even with the deployment of sign language interpreters during voter education sessions, passing voter instructions, during result collation and stakeholders meeting due to workload for interpreters, difficult working conditions and media. Whereas INEC is providing sign language interpretation in its activities to communicate to Deaf persons, there is no existing sign language interpretation policy, framework or manual within the Commission to guide the application of sign language services during INEC's programs in the pre-election, election day and post-election processes. This makes it difficult for people to know when, how and where to take needed steps regarding the use of sign language interpreters.

This manual provides a guide on recruitment, deployment and management of sign language interpreters to communicate effectively to the Deaf persons. The key areas of focus in this include code of ethics and role of sign language interpreters, media coverage, working conditions and evaluation of sign language services. This manual seeks to facilitate the inclusion of Deaf Nigerians during physical activities spread across the electoral cycle and media-related activities.

This manual has been put together by Inclusive Friends in collaboration with the Nigerian National Association of the Deaf (NNAD) and the Association of Sign Language Interpreters of Nigeria (ASLIN). This is to ensure the full inclusion of the more than 7 million Deaf Nigerians in the country's political and electoral processes.



**Grace Jerry,**  
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## 2. DEFINITION OF TERMS



**Deaf** - A term denoting a partial or total loss of hearing.

Deaf refers to a person who uses Sign Language as his or her primary means of communication, identifies him/herself with other deaf persons and usually does not hear.



**Deaf person:** they are visual beings whose mode of communication centres around vision using sign language and other visual modalities.



**Sign Language** - Language of the Deaf. Sign language is widely used in the Deaf community. There are about 200 different Sign Language worldwide.



**Sign Language Interpreter** - a person who is trained in translating between spoken and a signed language. This usually means someone who interprets what is being said and signs it for someone who cannot hear but understands the sign.



**Interpreter** - a person who is professionally trained to translate or interpret in between two languages.



**Electoral Cycle** - The Electoral Cycle is a visual planning and training tool designed to assist development agencies, electoral assistance providers and electoral officials in partner countries to understand the cyclical nature of the various challenges faced in electoral processes.



**Indigenous Sign Language** - Indigenous sign language serves as a native language which can be first or second, and how it is used both among deaf and hearing tribal members of the response community.



**Disability** - a physical or mental condition that limits a person's movements, senses, or activities.



**Persons with Disabilities** - Persons with disabilities include those who have long-term physical, mental, intellectual or sensory impairments which in interaction with various barriers may hinder their full and effective participation in society on an equal basis with others.



## 3. INTRODUCTION

Nigeria is a signatory to international instruments on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (PWDs) such as the United Nations Universal Declaration of Human Rights (1948), International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (1966), UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (2006), Continental Plan of Action for the African Decade of Persons with Disabilities (1999-2009) among others. Section 56 of the 2010 Electoral Act (as amended) guarantees rights to the full participation of Persons with Disabilities in Nigeria's political and electoral processes. The 2019 National Person's Disability Act has gone further to prescribe penalties for failure to guarantee the rights of persons with disabilities (PWDs). Following this recognition of the rights and role of PWDs in Nigeria made possible by the persons with disabilities (PWDs) legal frameworks, it becomes very imperative for the Deaf community to make its contribution towards an effortless integration of PWDs into the political and electoral processes in Nigeria.

The manual was drafted in furtherance of the Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC) Framework on Access and Participation of Persons with Disabilities (PWDs) in the Electoral Process. The number one objective of the framework is to strengthen the Commission as an institution that is inclusive in its human and financial resources as well as in its practices and process. The third objective of the same framework also aims to encourage the participation of persons with disabilities PWDs in all aspects of the electoral process. This manual will guide the Commission in the recruitment and management of sign language interpreters and encourage the participation of the Deaf in all aspects of the electoral process.

This manual is developed by the Inclusive Friends Association in partnership with the national headquarters of the Nigeria National Association of the Deaf (NNAD) and the Association of Sign Language Interpreters of Nigeria (ASLIN). This manual establishes the basic principles for sign language interpreting in electoral processes and sets forth a standard for making the Independent National Electoral Commission more accessible to Deaf Citizens in Nigeria. This manual is driven by experiences and feedback from the recently concluded 2019 General Elections for adequate utilisation of sign language interpreters by INEC for the Deaf.



## 4. OBJECTIVES

The following objectives guides this Manual:

1. To facilitate the inclusion and full participation of Deaf citizens in pre-election, election day and post-election activities i.e., INEC workshops, election observation, result collation etc.
2. To develop a standard procedure for INEC's recruitment, deployment and management of sign language interpreters throughout the electoral cycle.
3. To ensure that sign language interpreters have a conducive working environment for effective and efficient service delivery.
4. To provide guidelines for effective and inclusive media coverage of INEC activities i.e., full coverage of sign language interpreters in television stations.



# 5. CODE OF ETHICS FOR SIGN LANGUAGE INTERPRETERS

Sign language interpreters are bound by the Interpreting Code of Ethics widely accepted as a standard and acceptable manual of practice.

The Commission shall hold sign language interpreters accountable to the following code of ethics while working on specific electoral activities:

1. The interpreter shall keep all information (i.e personal information about the deaf persons being served and meeting deliberations) strictly confidential because the participant is the Deaf person(s) and not the interpreter.
2. The interpreter shall accurately translate the spirit and intent of the deaf persons being served and the hearing persons, using language most readily understood by those who are being served.
3. The interpreter shall NOT counsel, advise or interject personal opinion of Deaf person(s) throughout his/her services.
4. The interpreter will accept interpreting assignments using discretion about skill, setting and consumers involved (i.e., interpreters must turn down jobs they are not qualified for and must not send replacements for jobs they are not qualified to do).
5. In the process of carrying out assignments, the interpreter must provide adequate notice (at least 24 hours) declining or accepting the assignment.
6. The interpreter shall be formally and decently dressed while providing services to the Commission and must be dressed in deaf-friendly colours (mostly plain but not dark or red colours).
7. Participants in events shall not become sign language interpreters except such persons switch roles from participants to interpreters where there are no interpreters in the event or program.
8. The sign language interpreter shall not eat or chew while interpreting for the deaf.
9. Sign language interpreters must maintain decorum and sense of respect for the Deaf participant. Familiarization or personal relationship with the Deaf should be set aside during interpreting at a programme or event.



## 6. THE ROLE OF SIGN LANGUAGE INTERPRETERS

A sign language interpreter must be fluent in both the spoken language and the signed language used to accurately convey the message.

The following are the role of sign language interpreters:

1. A professional sign language interpreter translates between spoken language (such as English, Hausa, Yoruba or Igbo) into a form of total communication (sign language).
2. The interpreter facilitates communication so that the parties involved have equal access to information.
3. To convey the communication from Deaf persons to others in spoken words
4. The interpreter is not to be involved in the discussion or do any other tasks.
5. Interpreters ensure that there is an appropriate arrangement to facilitate communication in sign language
6. Interpreter ensures a conducive seating arrangement that would make the communication easily accessible to Deaf participants.

Deaf and hard of hearing persons use a variety of communication modes, including the conventional Sign Language such as; American Sign Language, a true language that does not follow English grammar rules, contact signing (previously referred to as “Pidgin Sign English” (PSE, which borrows vocabulary from ASL while preserving English word order) and the oral method (which depends primarily on lip-reading).

Most professional interpreters have completed a minimum of two to four years of study of the deaf community, deaf culture and sign language before beginning their careers.

However, in the Nigeria context, most interpreters are either related to the Deaf community as Children of the Deaf Adults (CODA) or other family members. Some became interpreters as friends of the Deaf or students of special education who later developed the interest in helping the Deaf as interpreters.

Recently, workshops are also organized to build the capacity of interpreters in the field as a quick way of injecting more service providers for the Deaf. This was the same situation in other advanced countries like the United States during late 1960 before the advent of degree programs (Humphrey & Alcorn)

Knowing which method an individual or group prefers will determine what type of interpreting skills are needed and what the interpreter should expect upon arrival.





# 7. DEPLOYMENT OF SIGN LANGUAGE INTERPRETERS THROUGHOUT THE ELECTORAL CYCLE

- **Pre-Election Period**

1. INEC shall budget for, identify and deploy skilled and experienced sign language interpreters in consultation with NNAD and ASLIN for activities throughout the election cycle.
2. The Commission shall utilize sign language interpreters for all voter education and information campaigns on television to ensure that Deaf voters are carried along.
3. The Commission shall prioritize radio stations with an online presence for all voter education and information campaigns to ensure that Deaf voters are carried along.
4. INEC shall inform sign language interpreters engaged for specific assignment with terms and conditions 72 hours (3 days) to the event.
5. The Commission shall provide early accreditation for sign language interpreters that will be providing services on election day.
6. INEC shall ensure that sign language interpreters have access to training materials to get acquainted with the vocabularies before the actual day of the event.

- **Election Day**

1. INEC shall deploy sign language interpreters to polling units with a high concentration of Deaf voters i.e deaf schools, Deaf populated area etc.
2. The Commission shall deploy sign language interpreters at the collation centres for all major elections (presidential and governorship) to ensure that Deaf citizens at the collation centres and those watching at home.
3. INEC shall provide a minimum of six (6) sign language interpreters at the collation centres for presidential elections and four (4) for governorship elections to ensure effective and efficient dissemination of information.

- **Post-Election Period**

First, determine the basic information concerning the event (date(s), times, duration, nature of the event) and the kind of sign language the deaf person/group prefers. Second, obtain a referral for a qualified interpreter from either the Deaf Association or Interpreters community. For situations lasting two or more hours, two (or more) interpreters should be used and should rotate every 20 to 30 minutes, at the interpreters' discretion.



## General Principles and Policies for Working with Interpreters in elections set.

1. Interpreting is a distinct role, requiring an interpreter's complete attention. It is not possible for a person to both participate and interpret at an event. Thus, it is unfair to expect a parent, relative or friend who is attending a function also to serve as an interpreter. A third party is needed to allow all to participate fully.

2. Competence is essential in selecting an interpreter. Competence includes necessary fluency in sign language and the language being spoken (English, Spanish, etc.), adherence to the Code of Ethics, and knowledge of vocabulary and signs.

An interpreter is expected to use the mode of communication preferred by the deaf person(s), i.e. American Sign Language (ASL), Contract Signing (Pidgin Signed English), etc. Deaf persons have the right to work with an interpreter whom they understand clearly and with whom they feel comfortable.

3. When hiring interpreters regularly, it is ideal to work with the same interpreter or group of interpreters each time.

4. Interpreters perform a professional function and have professional training; in justice, they have a right to compensation.

Paying interpreters is the responsibility of INEC, not the deaf individual, the family or guardians.

Compensation rates vary from place to place and usually vary with the interpreter's level of certification and experience. Some interpreters prefer to volunteer their services, but that is the interpreter's choice, not the sponsor's. Do not expect all interpreters to volunteer because one or more has volunteered in the past.

5. Good visibility is crucial to interpreting.

Ideally, interpreters and deaf persons are close to each other. Sightlines need to be clear and unobstructed; reserved seating for deaf persons in front usually accomplishes this. Good lighting – bright, but not glaring – is essential. Ideally, an interpreter works in front of a neutral background; i.e., plain, single dull or darker colour, without decorations or persons moving about.

Interpreters generally wear clothing that contrasts with their skin tone and little jewellery to make seeing their signs easier. Lack of contrast or bright background lighting/colours can cause eye strain for deaf persons.

6. Some situations, such as working with a deaf/blind individual, require one-on-one interpreting. In such cases, the interpreter and participant require nearness, i.e., sitting across from or next to one another.

To facilitate the deaf people's "full and active participation" in the election process, the interpreter is best understood as one of the facilitators, with a proper role and function,

1. It is appropriate to utilize more than two interpreters at workshops, Seminar or conferences.

2. Deaf persons must focus on the interpreter for everything that is spoken. For deaf persons to be able to see – Ordinarily, this means that the interpreter will stand near the



speaker at the chair, close to the podium, it may be advantageous for the deaf participants if the interpreter is closer to them be also seating in the front seat without any barrier to the position of the sign language interpreter. In such cases, the interpreter should be in the line of sight with the Podium. It is never appropriate to place an object in between his visibility to the interpreter.

3. The interpreter should be given a copy of all text used in the event in advance.
4. It is also helpful to inform an interpreter of any special aspects or elements to the event, such as a pre-meetings or post-meeting review. Interpreters are expected to be available to sign for any of such pre-announcements or practices.
5. Interpreters may wish to consider wearing colours that are in contrast with their skin complexion without so many patterns or destructive objects.





## 8. BEST APPROACHES IN RECRUITMENT AND DEPLOYMENT OF SIGN LANGUAGE INTERPRETERS

An interpreter should be made available in the following events:

- i. Any event that is public, that INEC has the intention of making it public.
- ii. The Commission's press conferences and media briefings.
- iii. Workshops should also be made accessible in sign language, not only such workshops designed for PWDs but also workshop involving youths, women and entire stakeholders.

The preference of the Deaf Association should be honoured; it is the responsibility of INEC to make every effort to provide the interpreting service according to the format requested.

Offering a sign language interpreter when advertising an event such as a conference or workshop will encourage deaf people to attend, and will equalize access to opportunities that previously have been available only to the hearing population.

The United Nation Convention for the Rights of Persons with Disability, Article 29 state accordingly: States Parties shall guarantee to persons with disabilities political rights and the opportunity to enjoy them on an equal basis with others, and shall undertake:

(b) To promote actively an environment in which persons with disabilities can effectively and fully participate in the conduct of public affairs, without discrimination and on an equal basis with others, and encourage their participation in public affairs.

The Discrimination against Persons with Disability (Prohibition) Act 2019, Part XI (1) also states that persons with disabilities shall be encouraged to fully participate in politics and public life.



## 9. MEDIA COVERAGE FOR SIGN LANGUAGE INTERPRETERS

1. INEC should ensure that at all of their media events, sign language interpreters should stand side by side with the speaker to ensure that both persons are captured in the camera frame.
2. INEC should inform media reporters ahead of time that sign language interpreters will be hired in the event or program because deaf participants will be present.
3. INEC should also insist that camera operators do not pan away from speakers at events when a sign language interpreter is translating messages. When the camera goes away to capture reaction shots, deaf participants miss out on vital information when it is a live event.
4. In the event that multi-cameras are used in a live program, a separate camera should be dedicated to a sign language interpreter to give real-time interpretation or translation to the deaf audience (both live and at home).
5. During result collation, the media must provide a separate camera to capture the sign language interpreter to avoid interference with the returning officer's role at collation. And where the TV station may not be able to provide a separate camera, the camera frame must capture both the speaker and the interpreter.
6. INEC should also give the media instructions to frame interpreters from below the waist level up above the head. This will ensure that all signs are captured and visible.



# 10. THE CONDUCTIVE WORKING ENVIRONMENT FOR SIGN LANGUAGE INTERPRETERS

Be comfortable with the interpreter; the interpreter's job is to facilitate communication. Everything that is interpreted will remain confidential for the interpreter; it is a violation of interpreting ethics to reveal anything communicated to an outside party. Speak naturally, clearly and at a normal rate; the interpreter will inform the speaker if he or she needs to adjust the rate of speaking. Allow extra time for responses and discussion; the interpreter will be a little behind the conversation. Face the deaf person(s) while speaking; this will feel awkward at first since the deaf person(s) will be watching the interpreter and may not always be in direct eye contact with the speaker. Avoid phrases such as "Tell him..." or "Ask her..."; speak as if the interpreter were not there. Avoid asking the interpreter for an opinion or to explain something.



# 11. MONITORING AND EVALUATING PERFORMANCE OF SIGN LANGUAGE INTERPRETERS

The beneficiaries of sign language interpretation are deaf. The deaf has the unilateral role of evaluating the performance of any sign language interpreter in any event or program. This is because Nigeria doesn't have a certification body to attest for an interpreter's competence.

The following can, therefore, be adopted to evaluate the performances of sign language interpreter/interpretation:

1. A feedback system should be in place. If training has deaf participants and they don't participate in answers, questions and suggestions or recommendations, then the interpreter's role may not have been effective enough.
2. The deaf can also be given a survey or evaluation form (hard or e-copy) to evaluate the performance of any interpreter.
3. In the case of training, the voter educator should make deliberate efforts to engage the deaf participants through questions and answers to ensure that they follow and understand the conversations or training modules.
4. The interpreter(s) should also be administered an evaluation to give feedback on their program, the working environment, etc. to ensure that subsequent events/programs create better working space/conditions.





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