



INEC PWD' COVID 19

PREVENTION

PROTOCOL IN
ELECTIONS



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Back-ground

It is common knowledge that the COVID 19 pandemic has disrupted the way we work, interact, commute, and view the world.

Socio-economic life has been affected in different ways, livelihood disrupted, and the electoral/political process is also faced with a plethora of challenges that must be confronted by all stakeholders to ensure that resilience and strategies are built not only to uphold our democratic process but ultimately to protect the lives of citizens, especially those with disabilities in the exercise of their democratic rights before, during and after elections.



As the Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC) works towards conducting the Edo and Ondo state governorship elections on September 19th and October 10, 2020, all other election stakeholders must also devise safe strategies that would enable them to conduct voter and civic education, advocate for peaceful elections and conduct election observation missions safely. Accordingly, INEC has published a policy on conducting elections amidst COVID 19 that extensively lays out guidelines and procedures for operations before, during, and after the elections, especially to protect its staff and polling agents.

While our preliminary engagements with the community of persons with disabilities (PWDs) in Edo and Ondo states showed concerns regarding the likelihood of a significant drop in the turnout of PWDs in the elections and increase in voter inducements, the greater risk is that, if effective steps are not taken, the elections may upsurge the virus curve.

Low turnout of voters, including those with disabilities, may lead to the hijacking of the process by unscrupulous politicians.

Now more than ever, voter and civic education must be increased particularly in remote and rural areas to counter any misinformation, fake news, and conspiracy theories that may arise in the process of planning for various state elections.

Below are important prevention protocols that INEC and CSOs should put in place to encourage and ensure the better and safe participation of PWDs during the Edo and Ondo state governorship elections.

These recommendations are directly a review of the INEC's Framework on the Access and Participation of PWDs in the electoral process, Discrimination Against Persons with Disabilities (Prohibition) Act, and INEC's PWD provisions in the INEC Policy on conducting Elections amidst COVID 19.

This document reflects the contributions of PWDs from Edo and Ondo, Organization of Persons with Disabilities (OPDs), and PWDs who are independently working in the electoral space to improve the participation of persons with disabilities.

The following organizations contributed to the document: Agency for the Welfare of Persons with Disabilities, Ondo State, Albino Foundation, Association of Lawyers with Disabilities, Cedar Seed Foundation, Centre for Citizens with Disabilities, Deaf Resource Centre, Disabled Persons International, Network for the Advancement of the Rights of Persons with Visible Disabilities and the United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities.



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Pre-election

1.1 Voter Education and sensitization

a. The usual INEC PWD Sensitization events should be adapted into open-air cine rove community outreaches where PWDs are reached in their respective local governments with messages on how to vote, COVID 19 voting protocol, etc. with the use of loudspeakers.

INEC can work directly with OPDs in the states to support this sensitization and voter education outreach.

b. PWD - specific TV and radio jingles should be produced by INEC to educate them on the voting procedure in line with the COVID 19 protocol.

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d. All INEC video messages in circulation should have subtitles and Sign Language Interpretation versions and shared with the disability community.

e. All new/additional provisions made or provided by INEC ahead of the elections should be included in the PWD specific voter/ civic education videos and jingles to encourage participation during the elections.



1.2 PWD Inclusive training modules

a. Short audiovisual illustrations on the use of the braille ballot guides, magnifying glasses, and the form 30D(PWD) should be incorporated during the training of ad hoc staff to improve their capacity to administer them on election day.

b. Election Officials should endeavor to talk through the procedure for voting to blind voters when they come to vote, as they rely on description due to the absence of sight.

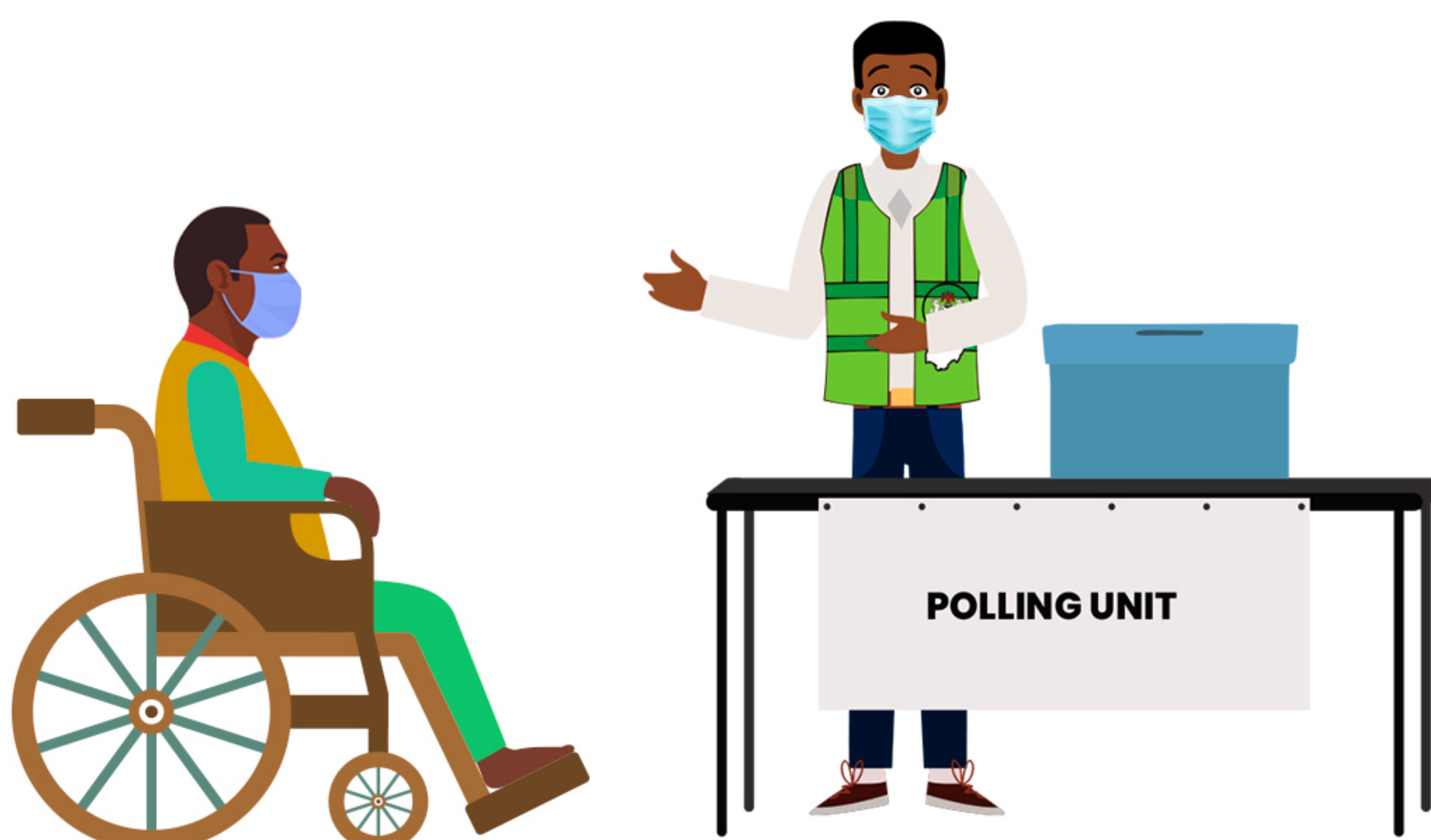
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Election Day

2.1 Locate polling units in flat/ground surfaces

In line with INEC's polling unit redesigned plan for COVID 19, kindly ensure that polling units are located on flat surfaces to reduce the incidences of PWDs being assisted by other voters/ad hoc staff/security to climb corridors or platforms to vote, which would increase the risk of infections.



2.2 Priority voting

As a measure to ensure that all PWDs are protected from being exposed at their polling units, Priority Voting must be emphasized to polling **officials in their pieces of training** and observed/practiced on Election Day for all PWDs, irrespective of their cluster group amidst INEC's **two-tier queuing** provision.

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2.3 Hand Sanitizing

“ During accreditation and voting, INEC must provide hand **sanitizers for all PWD voters**, especially those on wheelchairs, roller skates, the deaf, and the blind as they do a lot of touching in the course of their daily activities under their impairments.

Their safety and that of others must be prioritized in the provision of sanitizers.”



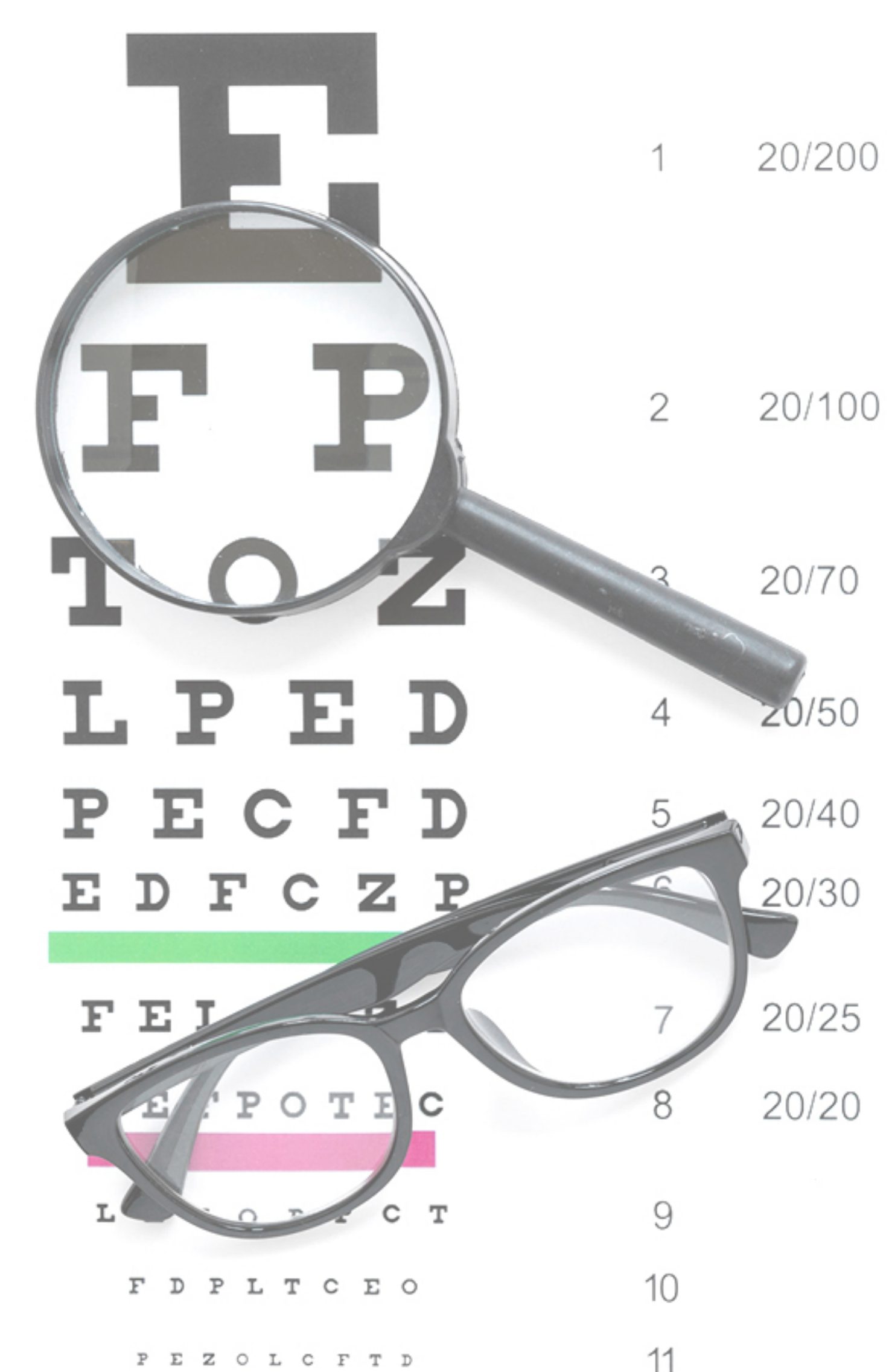


2.4 Hand washing

INEC should ensure those hand washing facilities are placed on surfaces that all PWDs can access to enable them to use facilities and reduce the chances of carrying and/or spreading the virus. This is very crucial due to the high frequency of surface touching by PWDs especially those on wheelchairs, roller skates, the deaf, and the blind.

2.5 Use of braille ballot guides and magnifying glasses

INEC should make adequate plans for persons using the braille ballot guides to sanitize and dry their hands before touching the guides and ensure that magnifying glasses are sanitized before and after use to ensure the safety of all PWD voters on Election Day.



2.6 PWD Assistants

Due to the COVID 19 pandemic, the need for PWD assistants has become very pertinent.

The assistant is an integral part of the blind or visually impaired voter who is expected to assist his/her partner and should be treated as one person in the electoral process.

This would obviate the need for any polling official on Elections Day.

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Post-election

3.1 Result collation

a. During the collation and announcement of the election results, a Sign Language Interpreter should be hired by INEC to ensure the translation of all the process of collation and announcements of election results for all deaf citizens to participate in the process from their homes.

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b. The use of facemasks by Sign Language Interpreters may hinder the proper communication to the deaf community as Interpretation involves all body parts to make meanings for the deaf because not all deaf persons understand the formal and standard Sign Language.

All Sign Language Interpreters should lower their facemasks and stand behind persons speaking while interpreting.

In the implementation of all these provisions, INEC would be achieving more results on its framework on Access and Participation of PWDs in the electoral process



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