

ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

FORWARD

My association with Inclusive Friends Association (IFA) in its work relating to the electoral process over the years has been an enlightening one. IFA has remained committed to the course of improving the lived experiences and thus, the participation of Persons with Disabilities (PWDs) in the electoral process. I am therefore not surprised that it has once again picked the gauntlet at this important stage of Continuous Voter Registration (CVR), embarked upon by the Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC), to examine why few Persons with Disabilities register and obtain Voters' Cards in a way that enhances their election day experience.

This study is critical in view of the truism that no matter how much citizens want a democratic change in government, without a means of identification, eligible citizens may not participate in the elections that throw up leaders. The study thus provides an overview of the various voter registration experiences/realities of persons with disabilities in Nigeria with the aim to promote disability-inclusive voter registration and encourage disability-inclusive civic and public education in future CVR exercises. It established that while the different clusters of persons with disabilities experience difficulty to participate differently, the difficulties are experienced at different levels and degrees for all persons with disabilities.

This report provides pathways to improve the CVR mechanism to ensure accessible voter registration and ultimately improve Election Day experiences and outcomes for PWDs in Nigeria. This is an original study, simply written and based on literature and field survey carried out in six states of the Federation and Abuja, conducted by a credible civil society organization, IFA. I endorse it to the Election Management Body, the national Orientation Agency and other civic education related organisations, Political Parties, Security Agencies, the Media and other stakeholders in the electoral process.

Prof. Antonia T. Okoosi-Simbine National Commissioner, INEC (2015-2020). July 24, 2021



CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

1.1 Contextual Background

Election is a basic feature of every democracy. And the voter registration is a major precursor that enables citizens to be eligible to participate in any election. Since Nigeria's return to democratic rule in 1999, the country has made efforts to improve or introduce measures that would promote the voice of the people in making decisions on who represent them at various levels of government; whether local, state or federal government. At the establishment of the Independent Nation Electoral Commission (INEC) in 1999, one of the foremost tasks to be carried out by INEC was to conduct a national voter's registration exercise! Registration held from 5th to 19th October 1998 and experienced logistical problems, which would later hamper INEC's election efforts at virtually every stage. Shortages of materials, delays in the opening of registration centres, poorly trained officials, and attempts by political party agents to manipulate the process were rife.

Following the 57,369,560 people officially registered to vote exceeding reliable estimates of the total number of eligible voters possible in Nigeria², none of these persons whose data were collected provided any status indicating their

disability or otherwise and the type of disability they had. This foundational and transitional phase was supposed to set a precedent on what would have become a more inclusive process, but it failed to do so entirely. Prior to 2002, the periodic registration of voters' was the practice and the records of registered voters were manually kept. INEC has the legal mandate to register voters and, to maintain and revise the Register of Voters.

¹ https://codesria.org/IMG/pdf/7-elections and governance in nigeria oche.pdf

^{2 &}lt;a href="https://www.cartercenter.org/documents/1152.pdf">https://www.cartercenter.org/documents/1152.pdf

Between September 12th - 22nd, 2002 INEC embarked on a registration exercise ahead of the 2003 general elections. The registration exercise witnessed myriad of problems, which INEC raised concerns around double and multiple registrations³. Though the system provided for manual forms to be filled and computer-based inputs were made for the registration of prospective voters, INEC was unable to identify and include persons with disabilities and plan for their participation in the process of the registration. While other citizens were waking up to the realities of increasing political activities, persons with disabilities were made invisible in the process albeit excluding the growing population of persons with disabilities.

Before 2006, INEC (and the electoral commission preceding it) carried out periodic registration of voters in the period immediately preceding the general elections so as to prepare the Register of Voters. In addition, the voter registration process was manual. The last registration incorporated technology in the process through the Optical Mark Reader (OMR) technology and computerization of the voters' roll. The result was an Electronic Voters Register (EVR), which contained a high percentage of voter dislocation owing to errors in the shading of the OMR forms4. The framework for conducting Voter registration was provided principally for by the Electoral Act (2006) and the Constitution of the Federal Republic. The Electoral

Act (2006) provided for continuous registration of voters. With the introduction of the continuous registration of voters, INEC is in a position to register new voters, compile, maintain and update the Register of Voters continuously for the period immediately preceding a general election.

The continuous registration of voters enables INEC to update the Register of Voters by adding names of persons:





Nigerian citizenship



a different constituency or other centres within the same constituency

It also enables INEC to make corrections to details of voters – upon request – and to delete from the Register of Voters the names of:







³ https://reliefweb.int/report/nigeria/nigeria-focus-problems-voter-registration

https://www.inecnigeria.org/wp-content/uploads/2019/02/ContinuousVoterRegistrationGuide.pdf

For the January 2011-voter registration exercise, INEC introduced the use of direct data capture (DDC) machines and collected biometrics of prospective voters. Like the OMR that was basic and should have captured disability status and type at the point of registration by simply writing it, the newly introduced DDC machines simply created more marginalization as it among others, excluded persons that had no forelimbs for thumb printing. This major inconsideration set the precedence upon which the data of 73.5 million voters were collected in the register without any form of identification of disability. The 2011 voter registration exercise still experienced other issues bordering on: Double registration, insufficiency of time allocated to the voter registration exercise, non-identification of disability type and cluster, etc. Also, PWDs were largely unaware of the registration exercise, partly due to low civic and public education and use of 'disability blind' publicity materials.

In 2015, the Smart Card Reader (SCR) was introduced majorly to reduce incidences of double voting and fraud during voting. This measure however failed to also provide means to identify voters who may have registered without capturing their thumbprints other than photographs taken of them. This group of persons majorly included amputees of lower and upper limbs and persons with leprosy who do not have fingers for the data capture machine and card readers to capture. Again this presented another opportunity for stakeholders to rethink the data capturing process and in particular, and how to capture prospective voters with the peculiarities of their disabilities.

After the 2015 elections, a continuous voter registration exercise was then held between April 2017 and August 2018. INEC conducted this in four phases at local level in 8,809 wards, primarily for people who turned 18 as well as those who had not previously registered. During this exercise, voters who changed their address could apply to transfer their registration or could ask to be added if their names were not on the register. Voters could also request new PVCs if their cards were damaged, contained incorrect biometric data, were lost, or had not been printed. But no form of validation/update was conducted for voters who had different forms of disabilities. INEC then undertook a cleaning and optimisation process to identify duplicate records, during which INEC reported eliminating more than one million invalid entries. Voters were given just five days, after each of the four registration phases, to check their data on the voter register.⁶

On 7 January 2019, INEC announced 14.3 million new registrants harvested during the continuous voter registration exercise, bringing the official total number of registered voters for the coming elections to 84,004,084⁷, a 22 per cent increase from 2015. Sadly in all these numbers, no one can say how many are persons with disabilities in the INEC Voter register. This directly explains the inadequate preparation for the inclusion of persons with disabilities in the electoral process. While the data of all 84,004,084 voters make it possible for INEC to deploy election

⁵ https://www.ndi.org/sites/default/files/Nigeria--recommendations-for-electoral-reform-2011.pdf

⁶ http://www.eods.eu/library/nigeria 2019 eu eom final report-web.pdf

^{7 &}lt;a href="https://www.inecnigeria.org/">https://www.inecnigeria.org/

materials to the current 176,846 it is difficult or impossible to know which of these polling units have persons with disabilities to enable the Commission to deploy appropriate election materials like the braille ballot guides, Election Day written instructions, magnifying glasses, etc. to polling units.

1.2 Objectives of the study

This study provides an overview of the various voter registration experiences/realities of persons with disabilities in Nigeria. The aim of the study is to promote disability-inclusive voter registration and encourage disability-inclusive civic and public education in future CVR exercises. The pathways to be provided would improve the mechanism to ensure accessible voter registration and improve election outcomes for PWDs in Nigeria.

1.3 Methodology

The research methodology comprised two main parts: desk review and field studies conducted in six states plus Abuja. The desktop research included a thorough review of literature, such as relevant electoral legislation, INEC's guidelines and reports of national and international election observation missions. Other literature included media coverage and analysis and works by agencies that have mandates to conduct public and civic education.

Field studies were conducted in six states and Abuja to gain an in-depth understanding of the processes; procedures and past approaches used in voter registration and gauge the participation experiences of persons with disabilities. The criteria used for selecting the six states ensured coverage based on different geographic diversity, as well as electoral participation levels of PWDs.

Between May 20 and June 30 the field studies were conducted across the seven different locations. The team deployed Key Informant Interviews and Focused Group Discussions to elicit qualitative responses, opinions and feedback from the research population. These targets included largely PWDs, INEC and NOA staff and Directors. The FGDs comprised PWD cluster leaders who participated in the discussion to broaden the analytical aspects of the research.

The INEC and NOA directors in particular showed great support for the study, enabling the research team to collect as much information as possible. Cross-referencing is largely used in the study as the variables are identical across these states, but with distinct peculiarities relating to context and perception of disabilities in the different geographic zones of Nigeria.

A sad reality for many persons with disabilities is that they travel the distance, sometimes incur disability-related costs, and end up unattended to



1.4 Summary of Findings

In the previous CVR exercises, INEC was unable to capture the full details of persons with disabilities (their disability status and cluster). However, INEC has been deploying the 'Special Enrolment' process/facility. This process allows INEC to snap the individual indicating that they do not have thumbs for capturing. Also, this is mostly done for persons with leprosy.

They are simply asked what figures they want, and in some instances, the registration officers simply allocate numbers to their weight and height without taking such measurements. These forms of treatments further strengthen the differences created by society regarding persons with disabilities.

Awareness creation by INEC and NOA targeting persons with disabilities is largely inadequate across the various geographical zones. While INEC provides general awareness around the previous CVR exercises, PWDs are usually unaware of the details of the CVR. Among the various disability cluster groups, some are affected differently, especially those with hearing impairment/deaf.

Knowledge about persons with disabilities is still limited among the staff of INEC and those of the NOA. Most staff of both agencies are not familiar with little people and those with leprosy across the board.

A sad reality for many persons with disabilities is that they travel the distance, sometimes pay disability-related costs (for an aide and or their wheelchairs, etc.). And most of them are unable to get registered on the first day, this forces them to go back and incur another cost or choose to stay back for lack of finances. It is extremely difficult for those in rural places who are usually very poor and may not afford the transportation costs to the LGA centres, despite their interest to participate in the process.

Registration centres like polling units are largely inaccessible for persons with disabilities. Only a few among the 37 INEC state offices are physically accessible with ramps in place.

Family members or caregivers usually assist most persons with disabilities when they go to register. This assistance includes carrying them to climb the elevated platforms, corridors, or verandas, assisting them to participate in other aspects of the registration, etc. which may be undermining their abilities to be independent.

To combat some of the challenges recorded,

- Registration centres should be located on flat surfaces within the premises (designated location), to ensure that registrants in wheelchair and other forms of reduced mobility participate with ease.
- 2. Priority on queue for PWDs should be fully implemented across the registration centres to encourage them to participate in the process.

- 3. The National Orientation Agency (NOA) and Political Parties should support creating awareness and public education targeting PWDs at the grassroots through their various LGA offices, local officers, and at national levels.
- 4. Media organizations should provide pro bono airtime or reduced fee in support of public education and awareness creation to reach citizens with disabilities.
- 5. OPDs should partner with NOA and INEC in developing messages that resonate with different clusters to enable both agencies to penetrate various clusters of disabilities appropriately with the relevant messages.





CHAPTER 2: NIGERIA'S CONTINUOUS VOTER REGISTRATION AND DISABILITY INCLUSION

2.1 Continuous Voter Registration

Continuous Voter Registration (CVR) is an exercise meant for the registration of citizens who turned 18 years of age after the last registration exercise; or those who for one reason or another could not register in the previous exercises. The 2010 Electoral Act (as amended) mandates the Commission to carry out CVR nationwide and to make it available to every political party at least 60 days before an election⁸.

The continuous voter registration process is based on an initial Register of Voters that is constantly maintained and updated by electoral officers. It evolves over time and is used for successive elections. Under the process, the initial Register of Voters is continuously updated by adding names of eligible voters as well

⁸ https://www.inecnigeria.org/news-all/nationwide-continuous-voter-registration-exercise/

as deleting the names of those have died or who have been declared legally incompetent. In addition, the registration officials may, upon request, update the information of registrants⁹.

The continuous voter registration process involves:



The role of voter registration is especially important when it comes to emerging democracies like Nigeria; it can build or alter the integrity of an election. The quality of the process and the outcome – that is, the provision or availability of or issuance of the voters' cards to prospective voters can influence the outcome of an election and consequently the stability of the democratic institutions in a country. Trust in democracy is promoted when the voter registration process is open and transparent and allows for the participation of all electoral stakeholders¹⁰ including PWDs. Nigeria's continuous voter registration methodology allows for onwards registration of voters on a rolling basis and continuous update of the voters register to accommodate new registrants.

1.2 Apathy or Lack of Civic Education?

Public and civic education is a major activity that promotes the civic participation of citizens in every society. In Nigeria, there are several organizations that are responsible for promoting public and civic education to build popular and massive participation of citizens. In its 2017- 2021 Strategic Plan; the National Orientation Agency (NOA), commits to continually sensitize Nigerians on their political rights and how to exercise those rights within the ambit of the law. It further provided that voter education programme is also intended to educate the electorate on appropriate political behaviour, the voting process, party symbols, and how to cast their votes during election¹¹.

Spotlighting the CVR exercises in 1998, 2002, 2006, 2011, and post-2015, huge gaps are seen in the process of building Nigeria's 84,004,084 register of voters. Clearly, from Nigeria's transition to its two decades of unbroken democratic rule since

1999, it does not seem that persons with disabilities have mattered. Among the many lessons learned by INEC and other critical electoral stakeholders, disability inclusion was never brought to the table especially from 1998 to 2011. The 2015

⁹ https://www.inecnigeria.org/wp-content/uploads/2019/02/ContinuousVoterRegistrationGuide.pdf

^{10 &}lt;a href="https://www.africaportal.org/publications/voter-registration-in-africa-a-comparative-analysis/">https://www.africaportal.org/publications/voter-registration-in-africa-a-comparative-analysis/

^{11 &}lt;u>https://www.noa.gov.ng/wp-content/uploads/2018/04/Draft-OF-STRATEGIC-PLAN-FOR-NATIONAL-ORIENTATION-AGENCY.pdf</u>

general elections seem to have had so many issues that disability inclusion was yet again given the backbench and was easily forgotten.

In the post-2015 period, various OPDs intensified advocacy actions for the inclusion of PWDs in the electoral processes (pre, during and post elections). The series of pre-election activities in the post-2015 saw INEC's attempts to register PWDs during the different CVR exercises held. However, disability status and types were not captured in the voter register. Where there are voters with the same names and polling unit details, it is impossible to tell who among them is a PWD. Again, the series of CVR exercises failed to clearly identify this unique group.

For a huge community of citizens who pay taxes (directly and directly), and contribute to national building, exclusion from planning means that their voices do not matter. In defying the odds the few who have access to information regarding the CVR and other electoral activities, do so much to disseminate information among the growing cluster groups that currently exist. To date, the Joint National Association of Persons with Disabilities (JONAPWD) remains the largest network where PWDs can be reached. Unfortunately, a lot of PWDs still don't identify with JONAPWD in their various communities, local government areas and states. These realities draw from various reasons, which may include shock, withdrawal, stigma, self-denial, etc.

In the series of the off-season and national elections organized by INEC, distinct civic education forums have been organized for a sizeable number of PWDs in various states as master sensitization programs for replication in their communities. Unfortunately, reduced mobility, limited time and resources, among other factors negatively affect these voter and civic education initiates. Over the years also, various civic education initiatives have been organized by the NOA in various states, though these initiatives are not targeting the

disability community in the same way that those of INEC. These are steps worth commending. However, we are thousands of miles still separating us from dealing with the low participation of PWDs in the electoral processes.

Therefore, plan/design for civic and voter education mechanisms must treat PWD separately. This is due to the peculiarity of the community and the various clusters of disabilities that the message ought to reach. Also, all stakeholders, agencies of government, civil society organizations and OPDs must prioritize the civic education of the PWDs early in the election cycle. It is important to note that a voters' register that is up to date, inclusive, and accurate is critical for building stakeholder confidence prior to Election Day¹². It is heartwarming to note that INEC's current 2021 CVR form has a disability status and different clusters of disability captured. This commendable step would ensure that all voters with disabilities could update their disability information during the CVR exercise, and new registrants will have their disability status and cluster captured from registration.

The ECOWAS Protocol on Democracy and Good Governance (signed by Nigeria on 21 December 2001) stipulates "The voters lists shall be prepared in a transparent and reliable manner, with the collaboration of the political parties and voters who may have access to them whenever the need arises." Article 5

Why is PWD targeted messaging or public education a big deal? I will tell you why. The fact that a radio jingle is produced and broadcast on radio across Nigeria does not mean that every citizen has access to such information. Among the different disability cluster groups, there are those that the radio information or jingle is appropriate for; for others, television would do better, and yet for others, physical micro sensitization or awareness is appropriate. Clearly therefore, a single radio or television messaging cannot reach everyone. Social media messaging in video format also requires subtitling and or sign language interpretation in the video message.

There is also a huge gap of information deficit that must be filled in order not to experience participation deficit among the community as in the past. A lot can be achieved if PWDs know what to do, how to do it and when and where to do so.

1.3 Regular and Marginal Voters in Nigeria's elections

In every election cycle, there are two categories of voters whose participation is desirable during elections: one group is the regular voters, and the other is the marginal voters. Regular voters are persons whose participation is driven or affected by their internal convictions that are not deterred by the external factors during an election season. They simply believe that it's election time, and they must participate. They may not form the best opinions about candidates, but participating in the process is just very important for them. These category of voters stay the long hall, days unending to register and possess their voters' cards, just so that they can be ready whenever the call is made for them to participate.

The second group is the marginal voters whose decisions to participate are affected by external factors. Conditions affect their willingness to participate in the process. This is where most PWDs fall. It's no choice, it's the circumstances that society has created (barriers of the built environment), accompanied by the stereotypes and poor attitudinal experience they get when they show up to participate. Consequently, where certain preconditions are not provided (to say, we know that you want to participate and we have made reasonable accommodations for you to participate equally with us), they are less likely going to show up. Some have shown interest severally but the conditions were not favourable and that information has become popular in the community of persons with disabilities that so many duel on that and refuse to try for themselves.

For key electoral stakeholders to reverse trends that would encourage the marginal voters to participate, reforms must first be made around these barriers. This is a step to restore PWDs trust in the system. Secondly, a measure must be put in place to broadcast messages that would retell the narrative for them to know that conditions have changed, and they are being expected to be there.

Pathways to Accessible Continuous Voter Registration

1.4 Importance of Voter Registration

Voter registration is a prerequisite for participation in elections in Nigeria, and it is significant in the following ways:



Provides information that assists with election planning and logistics



Enables one to run for office or participate in an election



Determines allocation of voters to polling units.



Assists to ascertain electoral participation of various segments of the population in an election.



Supports key stakeholders to plan for voter education especially for PWDs and other traditionally marginalized groups.



CHAPTER 3: OUR FINDINGS

3.1 Systems

3.1.1 Registration requirements

During voter registration, certain information was elicited from registrants. These include height and weight, but most persons using wheelchairs, roller skates, etc. don't go through the scale. They are simply asked what figures they want, and in some instances, the registration officers simply allocate numbers to their weight and height without taking such measurements. These forms of treatments further

strengthen the perception of differences created by society regarding persons with disabilities.

3.1.2 Data Capturing

In the previous CVR exercises, INEC was unable to capture the full details of persons with disabilities (their disability status and cluster). However, INEC has been deploying the 'Special Enrolment'. This process allows INEC to snap the individual, indicating that they do not have thumbs for capturing. This is mostly done for persons with leprosy.

3.1.3 Collection of Voters Cards

The majority of voters with leprosy have expressed that they have been unable to collect their permanent voter's cards since they registered years ago. This they explain is one of the reasons why they don't go to the polling units on Election Day: to avoid embarrassment because election sensitization always emphasizes that only persons with permanent voters cards can vote on Election Day.

3.2 Procedure

3.2.1 Civic education and outreach

Awareness creation by INEC and NOA targeting persons with disabilities is inadequate across the various geographical zones. While INEC provides general awareness around the previous CVR exercises, PWDs are usually unaware of the details of the current CVR. Among the various disability cluster groups, some are affected differently, especially those with hearing impairment/deaf. They usually have limited access to information except where it is passed through their cluster network. Also, sign language interpretation varies from location to location, locality to locality.

Persons with Albinism also noted that information of registered voters pasted for verification is usually not accessible for three reasons: small-sized prints, absence of magnifiers and that papers (white) used for print out always stress their sight. They unanimously asked for printouts to be done on yellow papers against white ones so that all persons can have access to such information.

The NOA has indicated series of challenges in carrying out awareness creation activities and sensitization. Paramount of these challenges is that which is posed by limited funds to recruit Sign Language Interpreters to interpret in localized sign language and to organize small forums to conduct these sensitization exercises.

3.2.2 Communication barrier

Some NOA and INEC staff expressed concerns that they are not usually able to communicate with the deaf, because they do not understand sign language. In like manner, the deaf also expressed dissatisfaction when they are not understood and efforts to write their intents are not attended to by ad hoc staff.

3.2.3 Priority on Queue

In the northern part of the country, most persons were given priority on queue to register during CVR. But in other parts of the country, only a few PWDs were given priority on queue during the CVR exercises.

3.2.4 Knowledge on Disability

Knowledge about persons with disabilities is still limited among the staff of the

INEC and those of the NOA. Most staff of both agencies are not familiar with little people and those with leprosy across the board.

Most ad hoc staff also specifically disregard Albinism and little stature as disability clusters. They are subjected to wait in long queues under the sun before they are registered during the CVR exercises. Where a list of voters is published, it is in small prints that are pasted high on the wall, making it difficult for those on wheelchairs and those with Albinism to have access to the information posted.

Persons with hearing impairment or the deaf are often not believed to have such disabilities. Even when they write on paper and present same to the registration officer(s), they are usually subjected to wait to be attended to after everyone else is done.

3.3 Location

3.3.1 Distance to polling units

In comparison to distance to polling units, the registration centres are fewer. A limited number of registration centres mean that persons with disabilities have to travel father distances to register. A sad reality for many persons with disabilities is that they travel the distance; sometimes pay disability-related costs (for an aide and or their wheelchairs, etc.), yet most of them are unable to get registered on the first day, this forces them to go back and incur another cost or choose to stay back for lack of finances. It is extremely difficult for those in rural places who are usually very poor and may not afford the transportation costs to the LGA centres, despite their interest to participate in the process. This contributes to the low turnout of persons with disabilities during the CVR exercises across Nigeria.

3.3.2 Physical Access

Registration centres like polling units are largely inaccessible for persons with disabilities. Only a few among the 37 INEC state offices are physically accessible with ramps in some places. Persons with disabilities say that most of the places are not physically accessible due to numerous built barriers like steps, corridors, drainages, hilly grounds, sandy grounds like in the northwest and northeastern parts of Nigeria.

INEC observed that even where a venue is designated for registration officers, and canopies are provided, they tend not to use the flat surfaces to work but recline to the corridors of such facilities. That results in creating barriers between them and persons with disabilities who are supposed to participate in the process.

While the different clusters of disabilities experience difficulty to participate differently, the difficulty is experienced at different levels and degrees for all persons with disabilities.

3.4 Personnel

3.4.1 Registration Officials

In previous CVR exercises, lack of patience has also been identified as a poor attitude expressed by ad hoc and INEC registration officers. Due to the impairment of some PWDs, they are less likely to be a fast as everyone else. Consequently, both ad hoc staff and other citizens become hostile and aggressive towards PWDs.

Participants stated that having PWDs as registration officers would significantly influence or increase the turnout of PWDs for the CVR exercise because such officers would empathize more with other PWDs.

3.4.2 Persons with disability

Some persons with disabilities indeed become aggressive in registration centres. For many of them, the registration officers usually disagree that they have any form of disability, especially the deaf. This is because it's usually not visible, and so they get frustrated trying to convince the officers that they are deaf or hard of hearing.

PWDs also confirmed that most of the registered voters with disabilities are those who are registered due to the influences of the Joint National Association of Persons with Disabilities (JONAPWD). This is because most information regarding the CVR exercises are mostly distributed through meetings and social media

platforms of their cluster groups. As a result, most PWDs who are not within the networks, hardly get any or quick information in this regard.

3.4.3 Aide

Family members or caregivers usually assist most persons with disabilities when they present themselves to be registered. This assistance includes helping them in the process of movement to registration centres, carrying them to climb elevated platforms, corridors, or verandas, and assisting them to participate in other aspects of the registration, etc. This usually affects their dignity as persons who are supposed to have equity grounds to participate like every other citizen. Also, their independence in the process is mortgaged by their dependence on the aides.

3.5 Other Factors

3.5.1 Failed Political Promises

Most PWDs have also raised concerns about neglect and exclusion from social and economic life after they vote candidates into office. They say that most politicians get into office and forget the promises they made during their campaigns. Consequently, most PWDs who have voters' cards don't vote on Election Day. And those yet to obtain theirs are also influenced by those who don't vote.

3.5.2 Security

Beyond Election Day activities (voting), a sizeable number of PWDs have also expressed fear to participate in any exercise that involves a crowd other than their families and worship centres. They identified that even when trying to ensure that they are served first regardless of the queue, some citizens become hostile towards them. Additionally, many PWDs have also suffered one form of injury or the other as a result of uncontrollable queues during previous CVR exercises. As a result, most of them resort to not participate in any crowd or rowdy exercise no matter the later benefits.

Others fear that they may never vote on Election Day due to the scares and rumours around Election Day violence. Hence, they conclude that if they wouldn't vote on election days, why bother to go through the trouble of obtaining the voter's card under stressful conditions.





CHAPTER 4: TESTIMONIALS OF PARTICIPANTS

"I believe we are having a very low level of awareness among people with disabilities because maybe they feel marginalized and they not aware that they should be part of the electoral process. But we try to ensure that they are carried along in our activities" - **INEC**

With the introduction of the online pre-registration process, it would go a long way in decongesting the registration centres when the physical registration commences. That way, the chaos in registration centres would be reduced. INEC is prioritizing disability inclusion every day. We also believe that organizations like yours would also assist to make our work better.- **INEC**

With the additional polling units, we will sensitize them to register close to their residential areas or relocate their polling units to the ones closest to them so that issues of distance can be reduced. - **INEC**

"I will feel that each time we discuss persons with disabilities, we forget one of the most stigmatized and excluded persons among the various disability cluster, and that is persons with leprosy"- **INEC**

"We will rely heavily on the data of registered voters with disabilities from INEC. This will assist us in planning how to reach these categories of persons during all our civic and public education programs" - NOA

"As a person with leprosy, INEC registration officers kept asking me to wash my hands with detergent. That was because the data-capturing machine couldn't read my fingerprints. And after all the hassles, they told me the fingerprints have been captured, but then I didn't want to believe them because I thought they just wanted me to leave so they can continue"

- Person with leprosy, Sokoto state

"I cannot use a motorcycle due to my disability. So I hired a car and went on the first day of registration but I wasn't registered. I had to hire the car again and go the next day before I was registered. I was able to do that because I am a business owner. Imagine what happens to others who even struggle to feed. It means they cannot go through the same trouble I went through. Though they are willing, their circumstances hinder them. INEC can assist to go round and register clusters of persons with disabilities in their communities"

- A person with a physical disability, Sokoto

"So, when others were going on the scale and their height and weight taken, they just asked me what figures I want them to capture and I said 6,5 based on what I heard other people saying. I didn't know what it meant" - A person using a wheelchair, Adamawa

"So the thing here is this; I go through the troubles of obtaining my voter's card, go and vote someone on Election Day despite the dangers we see these days. Then they get elected and do nothing. Do you think I will feel good about voting the next time? That's why we are sometimes discouraged to encourage other PWDs to go and register for their PVCs" - A person with visual impairment, Enugu

We also see stigmatization in some areas to be the causal factor responsible for the low turnout of PWDs to participate in the process, and this comes from the public" – **INEC**

"Ever since INEC created Desk offices for PWDs across the country, it has drastically reduced communication gaps between PWDs and the Commission. However, I think that there is still so much that can be done to improve this communication and the gaps that currently exist in inclusion" - INEC

"NYSC corps members need to be reached to support the mobilization of PWDs to come and register. In return, an award of excellence can be given to any outstanding corps member(s) who do this act"

NOA

"Some people affected with leprosy complained that ever since quite a number of them registered, they are yet to get their PVCs to date".

Persons with Leprosy, Ondo state

"Beyond making recommendations to INEC, OPDs and CSOs should provide technical support in forms of prototype building, samples or models of ideas suggested" **INEC**

"Crowd is a fundamental challenge that gives rise to most other challenges and the issue of overcrowding also affects other citizen" - INEC



CHAPTER 5: PATHWAYS TO ACCESSIBLE CONTINUOUS VOTER REGISTRATION



Independent National Electoral Commmision Nigeria

- Data of voters with disabilities by cluster should be published to assist organizations of persons with disabilities to plan better initiatives to encourage more participation of the PWD community in the CVR exercise.
- 2. Registration centres should be located on flat surfaces within the premises (of designated location) to ensure that registrants on wheelchairs and other forms of reduced mobility participate with ease.
- 3. Priority on queue for PWDs should be fully implemented across the registration centres to encourage them to participate in the process.
- 4. To reduce the incidence of neglect of deaf registrants, written instructions should be provided to aid literate but deaf registrants to read and understand procedures for participating in the CVR exercise at the various centres.
- 5. INEC should provide training for election officers, ad hoc staff and registration

- officials on disability inclusion to assist them to efficiently interact with PWDs in the CVR exercise.
- 6. Due to the socio-economic status of most PWDs, travelling to the registration centres may not be feasible for so many, mobile / roving registration centres should be deployed on designated days for PWDs and some vulnerable groups like pregnant women and the aged to register.
- 7. Every effort should be made to prepare and distribute PVCs in a timely and efficient manner, to facilitate identification and voting.
- 8. INEC should produce and disseminate jingles to call out PWDs on radio, television and social media to participate in the ongoing exercise. The jingle should also specify that those who registered when they had no disability but currently do should go and update their new information/status.
- 9. While fingerprints are extremely important for minimizing double registration and fraud during elections, INEC should consider other forms of technologies to capture the data of persons who do not have upper or lower limbs for data capturing. This will for instance help those with leprosy and ensure that they also have their permanent voters distributed to them like other citizens
- 10. Beyond the disability desk officer, NOA and INEC and election officers should be properly trained on disability and disability inclusion. OPDs can assist to drive this.
- 11. INEC should also consider recruiting more persons with disabilities into its offices and as ad hoc staff to assist in building an environment that promotes more inclusion for PWDs during electoral activities.



- 1. The National Orientation Agency (NOA) and Political Parties should support creating awareness and public education targeting PWDs at the grassroots through their various LGA offices, local officers and national levels.
- 2. During the National Youth Service Corps (NYSC) orientation program, information and components on disability and persons with disabilities should be taught to corps members to familiarize themselves before they are deployed during electoral and other civic exercises.



- 1. Media organizations in their work should plan series of awareness creation activities including discussions and jingles to promote participation.
- 2. Media organizations should provide pro bono airtime or reduced fees in support of public education and awareness creation to reach citizens with disabilities.
- 3. Media organizations should employ sign language interpreters during news / discussion programmes, etc. to be aware of what is going on around them.



Organizations of Persons with Disabilities

- OPDs should partner with NOA and INEC in developing messages that resonate with different clusters to enable both agencies to reach out to clusters of persons with disabilities with the right message.
- 2. OPDs should lead grassroots activities to organize persons with disabilities who have registered previously to come and update their disability information. Additionally, this information should extend to persons who did not have any form of disability when they first registered but currently do due to violent conflict or accidents.
- 3. OPDs should deliberately invest in raising community agents across their programming to support awareness and public education activities.



