

## Chapter 22

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# Inclusiveness of Women with Disabilities in Politics and Governance

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### Abstract

Persons with disabilities have always been discriminated against or been completely excluded in most, if not all, aspects of societal life, including the areas of politics and governance. This exclusion is more pronounced in the case of women with disabilities (WWDs). More often than not, most WWDs choose to remain in the background because of the stigma and discrimination that they face when they attempt to live more active lives. Their impairments notwithstanding, they are human and part of our society and also have the right to be included in the decision-making and implementation processes of society. This study examined the situation of disabled women in Nigeria, as it pertains to their inclusion and participation in politics and governance. What difficulties or challenges do they face as they attempt to participate in the politics and governance processes of our nation? Are there any special provisions, legal or otherwise, made to ensure their inclusion? What are the perceived roles of governments and persons in authority in ensuring their inclusion? In an attempt to answer these questions, the author relied on her knowledge and personal encounters, and other primary data sourced from women, all of whom suffer from an impairment. The study concluded that women with disabilities have as much capabilities as those without disabilities and deserve to be included in the political and governance processes for the good of all.

**Keywords:** Disability, Governance, Inclusion, Politics, Women

### Introduction

There are various yardsticks for the classification of the human population, one of which is whether or not they live with a disability. Thus, we have people

living with disabilities and people living without disabilities. According to recent research by the Centre for Citizens with Disabilities in Nigeria titled *Our Nigeria, Our Disability* report, (Guardian, 2021) there are approximately 31 million people with disabilities in Nigeria, with women making up the bulk of this population.

Right from the inception or grassroots to the execution or highest stages, it is apparent to any keen observer that politics and governance in Nigeria are generally organised in ways that particularly favour the non-disabled and this makes it extremely difficult and at times impossible for the disabled to fully participate in them. This aligns with the view by Virendra Kumar et al. (2018), in their investigation of the political engagement of women with disabilities in Africa, that the obstacles faced by people with disabilities are severe. Disabled persons are members of our society and have every right to full participation in politics and governance on an equal footing with the non-disabled. The inclusion of people with disabilities in mainstream decision-making is a major problem because over 90% of the population does not see these individuals as active members who contribute to the growth of society (Haruna, 2017).

Women, whether disabled or not, play important and stabilising roles in every society. It is therefore important that they be included, and their interests adequately protected at all levels and in all societal activities. This author, who currently suffers from some hearing loss, has over the years faced some challenges in her quest to participate fully in the politics and governance processes in Nigeria and this led her to become interested in finding out the experiences of WWDs in similar situations. There is a paucity of literature that focuses specifically on the inclusiveness of WWDs in politics and governance in Nigeria as existing studies focus on PwDs generally. Consequently, there is a lack of research data on the inclusiveness of WWDs in politics and governance in Nigeria. This research sought to fill this existing gap.

The study investigated the challenges or obstacles faced by WWDs in politics and governance in Nigeria, the extent of their inclusion and the roles that governments should play to ensure their full participation. The study made use of primary and secondary data collection methods and the Rights-Based Theory or ideology. The data in this study is analysed explanatorily.

## **Conceptual clarifications**

Disability is an illness, injury, or condition that makes it difficult for someone to do some things that other people do, and that is usually permanent or lasts for a long time: a physical / learning disability (Cambridge Dictionary,

2024). It is a condition that makes someone unable to act in a way that is considered usual for most people (Barton, 2013). It is any restriction or lack (resulting from an impairment) of the ability to perform an activity in the manner or within the range considered normal for a human being (WHO, 1980). Article 1 of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (UN, 2006) states that “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”. It might be congenital (existing at birth), develop later in life, or be brought on by a disease or injury. Disabilities are of different natures, and it is the nature that determines their physical manifestation. It is the severity of the impairment that informs labelling - when the impairment is physically obvious or evokes rejection or pity from others; such impairment is regarded as disability, and vice versa. While some disabilities are slight and may not negatively affect the daily life of the individual concerned, others are more pronounced and are such that the individual concerned needs extra consideration or help to fully participate in societal activities. This chapter focuses on this latter category of disabilities.

Politics, on the other hand, represents the nerve-centre of human, peaceful, and organised co-existence (Kolawole, 1997, as cited in Omotso & Abe, 2014), as it deals extensively with the consequences and outcomes of human actions in the quest and struggles for survival, prominence, and relevance (Omotso & Abe, 2014). It involves “the events that happen around the decision-making centers of governments” (De Grazia, 1965, as cited in Omotso & Abe, 2014). To Ernest Baker (1962, as cited in Omotso & Abe, 2014), politics is the activity (negotiation, argument, discussion, application of force, persuasion, etc.) by which an issue is agitated or settled. Politics can be viewed as a process characterised by events or activities that entail rivalry, compromises, cooperation, and so on in the distribution and exercise of political power necessary for decision-making and governance in society.

The word ‘politics’ encompasses the whole essence of people’s wants, needs, sufferings, aspirations, and expectations within any human society. It also encompasses mediums, strategies, and mechanisms for improving upon situations and outcomes which are a result of political decisions and actions. It encompasses all activities involved in acquiring and using power in public life and being able to influence decisions that affect a country or a society. In summary, politics is who gets what, when they get it, and how they get it.

Governance refers to the use of political powers to manage a nation’s public affairs and to shape its economic and social environment in line with perceived notions of public interest and societal process (Omotso & Abe,

2014). This involves the placement of qualified and capable persons in various positions to perform or oversee the performance of various tasks necessary for the well-being of the citizens, and to ensure that the policies and plans of the government are actualised to the letter. The goal of governance should ideally be to meet the needs of society while making the best use of resources at their disposal.

The term *inclusion* refers to the action or state of including someone or something within a group, structure, plan, scheme, and so on. It entails organising any process in a way that every individual (whether disabled or not), who desires to participate in that process, can do so. It refers to the absence of any limiting barriers in the way of any woman with a disability who wishes to participate.

In this chapter, the term 'process' or 'processes' is used to refer to those activities that are necessary for the realisation of political and governance goals. These activities include voter registration, public enlightenment and campaigns, meetings, various political party-based activities, elections, nomination and screening of candidates for political and appointive offices, support mechanisms for occupants of public offices, and so on. The term 'persons in authority' is used to refer to persons directly vested with authority or power, either alone or as a member of a group, to carry out a particular activity or perform some specific tasks.

## Literature review

This chapter adopted the Rights-Based Theory as its theoretical framework. Under this ethical theory the language of rights provides the basic terminology for ethical and political theory; it also maintains that a democratic society must protect individuals and allow all to pursue personal goals.

This Rights-Based Theory is based on basic human rights principles and acknowledges that disabilities are a natural component of human diversity and must be recognised and supported in all of their manifestations. People with impairments are entitled to the same rights as everyone else. A theory of natural rights based on rights to life was established by thinkers including Thomas Hobbes (1588-1679), John Locke (1632-1704), and Jean Jacques Rousseau (1712-1778). Under this theory, all human rights, including those of people with disabilities, should be upheld, promoted, and integrated into all societies in order to ensure their well-being and full participation in socio-economic and political life.

Various laws provide, albeit inadequately, for the inclusion and free participation of WWDs in the political and governance processes in Nigeria.

Section 42 in Chapter IV of the Nigerian Constitution (Federal Republic of Nigeria, 1999), which prohibits discrimination, provides as follows:

*42. Right to freedom from discrimination*

*(1) A citizen of Nigeria of a particular community, ethnic group, place of origin, sex, religion or political opinion shall not, by reason only that he is such a person –*

*(a) be subjected either expressly by, or in the practical application of, any law in force in Nigeria or any executive or administrative action of the Government, to disabilities or restrictions to which citizens of Nigeria of other communities, ethnic groups, places of origin, sex, religious or political opinions are not made subject; or*

*(b) be accorded either expressly by, or in the practical application of, any law in force in Nigeria or any such executive or administrative action, any privilege or advantage that is not accorded to citizens of Nigeria of other communities, ethnic groups, places of origin, sex, religious or political opinions.*

*(2) No citizen of Nigeria shall be subjected to any disability or deprivation merely by reason of the circumstances of his birth.*

*(3) Nothing in subsection (1) of this section shall invalidate any law by reason only that the law imposes restrictions with respect to the appointment of any person to any office under the State or as a member of the armed forces of the Federation or member of the Nigeria Police Force or to an office in the service of a body corporate established directly by any law in force in Nigeria.*

A close look at the foregoing provision on discrimination reveals that there is no specific aspect of it dedicated to the inclusion of WWDs. The section only guarantees the right against discrimination of citizens generally, without distinction between disabled or non-disabled citizens.

The Electoral Act no. 13 of 2022 (Federal Republic of Nigeria, 2022), in Section 12 provides the qualifications for registration as a voter without any reference to disability.

*12. (1) A person shall be qualified to be registered as a voter if such a person—*

*(a) is a citizen of Nigeria;*

*(b) has attained the age of 18 years;*

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*(c) is ordinarily resident, works in, originates from the Local Government, Area Council or Ward covered by the registration centre;*

*(d) presents himself to the registration officers of the Commission for registration as a voter; and*

*(e) is not subject to any legal incapacity to vote under any law, rule or regulations in force in Nigeria.*

Section 54 of the Electoral Act 2022 provides specifically for visually impaired and incapacitated voters as follows:

*54. (1) A Voter with visual impairment or other form of disability who is otherwise unable to distinguish symbol or who suffers from any other physical disability may be accompanied into the polling unit by a person chosen by him or her and that person shall, after informing the Presiding officer of the disability, be permitted to accompany the voter into the voting compartment and assist the voter to make his or her mark in accordance with the procedure prescribed by the Commission.*

*(2) The Commission shall take reasonable steps to ensure that persons with disabilities, special needs and vulnerable persons are assisted at the polling place by the provision of suitable means of communication, such as Braille, large embossed print, electronic devices, sign language interpretation, or off-site voting in appropriate cases.*

It appears that Section 84 of the Electoral Act 2022 seeks to impose a equal conditions for both WWDs and other persons in contesting for elective positions by providing thus:

### *S. 84 Qualifications of Aspirants and Candidates*

*(3) A political party shall not impose nomination qualification or disqualification criteria, measures, or conditions on any aspirant or candidate for any election in its constitution, guidelines, or rules for nomination of candidates for elections, except as prescribed under sections 65, 66, 106, 107, 131, 137, 177 and 187 of the Constitution.*

The Independent National Electoral Commission's (INEC) Regulations and Guidelines for the Conduct of Elections, 2022 (INEC, 2022) contain certain provisions meant to ease voting for PwDs generally which are also applicable to WWDs. The relevant sections are:

*24 (a) The Presiding Officer shall allow a voter who is visually impaired or with other forms of disability, who is unable to distinguish symbols or*

*who has any other physical disability to be accompanied into the Polling Unit and be assisted to vote by a person chosen by him/her, other than an Election Official, a polling agent or a security personnel on election duty.*

*(b) Visually Impaired registered voters may, where available, use Assistive Voting Devices such as the Braille Ballot Guide or magnifying glass.*

*(c) No person shall accompany a voter to the voting area or assist a voter in marking a ballot paper, except as specified in these Regulations and Guidelines.*

*25 PwDs, visibly pregnant women, nursing or breast-feeding mothers and the elderly, shall be granted priority access to voting at the Polling Units.*

The Discrimination Against Persons with Disabilities (Prohibition) Act, 2018, (signed into law in January 2019, and hereafter referred to as the ‘Disabilities Act’) (Federal Republic of Nigeria, 2019) is meant to provide a general framework for the complete integration of people with disabilities into Nigerian society and to ensure that their rights as contained in the Nigerian Constitution are realised.

The Disabilities Act contains some provisions that can have a positive impact on the inclusion of PwDs in politics and governance. In Section 1 it prohibits discrimination against PwDs in any manner or circumstance, while Section 2 mandates the Federal Ministry of Information to make provisions for the promotion of awareness regarding them. Sections 4 and 5 mandate the inclusion of accessibility aids in public buildings, and Section 6 mandates the modification of existing public structures to make them accessible by PwDs. Section 15 provides for any general information to be translated into an accessible format appropriate to the PwDs. Other sections of the Disabilities Act contain laudable provisions meant to promote and protect the welfare and interest of persons living with disabilities. It is, however, instructive to note that the Act is meant for PwDs generally and not specifically for WWDs. Furthermore, the Disabilities Act is not applicable nationwide, as only about 17 States of the Federation have domesticated it so far. Amongst those States that have domesticated the Act, there is little or no compliance, which supports the assertions of Evans and Reher (2022) and Osakuni (2011), that low levels of compliance with existing laws is an issue faced by WWDs in their quest for political inclusion.

A look through the Constitutions of the major political parties in Nigeria (Peoples Democratic Party, All Progressives Congress, Labour Party) revealed that it is only the All Progressives Congress that made express provisions for the inclusion of a Special (Physically Challenged) Leader in all its Committees, from the Polling Unit level to the National Executive level.

However, the provisions do not specify the gender of a Special (Physically Challenged) Leader. The Constitutions of the other two parties are silent on the issue.

Again, under the Constitution of the Federal Republic of Nigeria, the Electoral Act, and the political parties' Constitutions, nominations and contests for elective offices are open to all: men, women, disabled, and non-disabled. No special consideration, regard or exemption is given to WWDs.

From the above, it is safe to conclude that to the best knowledge of this author, there is no special provision available to ensure the inclusion of WWDs in politics and governance in Nigeria.

## Methodology

Qualitative methods were utilised in gathering and analysing data used in this study. Copies of the same questionnaire were sent out via e-mail, Facebook and were also posted in various WhatsApp groups, but responses were received from only five WWDs in the country. The questionnaire was physically administered by the author to two more people. Two officials of a national Disabled People's Organization (Joint National Association of Persons with Disabilities) were contacted via email and social media, but no positive feedback was received from either.

This chapter is therefore primarily based on the experiences of eight women (including the author who suffers from some hearing loss). The respondents were all living in urban areas and were assured of anonymity and confidentiality of the information they provided. The questionnaire contained the following questions which were open-ended, allowing the respondents to express themselves in whatever way they desired to.

1. Which of the 36 states of Nigeria does your response relate to? (Edo: 1, Delta: 3, Lagos: 3, Anambra: 1)
2. What is your level of education? (First School Leaving Certificate: 1, Bachelor of Science: 5, Postgraduate Degree: 2)
3. What type or nature of impairment do you suffer from? (Hearing impaired: 2, Deaf-mute: 1, Mobility impaired: 3, spinal cord injury: 1, visually impaired: 1)
4. Has this impairment ever affected your participation in politics and governance?
5. What challenges have you faced while trying to participate in the political process in Nigeria?
6. Did you complain to the person in charge of the process?
7. What was the response of the person in charge?
8. Were you satisfied with the response of the person?

9. Have you ever, on the basis of the impairment or disability, been discriminated against in appointment or employment into a public office or civil service?
10. Have you ever, on the basis of the impairment or disability, been discriminated against in nomination for an elective position or office?
11. Do you desire to participate in politics and governance in Nigeria?
12. If no, why?
13. If yes, what do you think the government or persons in authority should do to ensure or improve your inclusion?

The questions were about their experiences in the political and governance processes, in line with the objectives of this research, and to enhance the generalisability of findings to Nigerian society. A limitation to the data collection was the few people with disabilities who participated, but despite this, the disabling barriers encountered by them were recurring themes in all the responses provided by the participants. This provided consistency and reliability to their responses which are analysed explanatorily below.

## Results

**Access barriers:** The respondents were unanimous in stating that Nigeria's political and governance processes are not designed or run in a way that eases or encourages their participation. The environmental factors, materials in use, mode of execution of the processes and the qualification of the staff are pointers to this assertion. Voter registration centres and polling units are commonly cited without considerations given to ease of access to those who may have mobility issues. When we consider the environment, we live in having physical obstacles practically everywhere, we realise that those with mobility issues will have a lot of challenges moving around. This is compounded by the challenges of lack of ramps, lifts, use of narrow entrances and corridors, and so on.

A respondent in the study who is confined to a wheelchair stated thus:

*I had no difficulty accessing my polling unit in my wheelchair. The ground was flat and I was able to manoeuvre around with ease,*

A second respondent with mobility issues stated that access to the voter registration centres and polling units was difficult. According to the visually impaired respondent:

*Although things are not designed to favour us, I am lucky. Just lucky. I asked people for directions and they were very helpful. I can move around on my own and I was able to easily access my polling centre during the last*

*elections. The way things were easy for me, it wasn't that way for others. I am aware that other people with mobility issues had a lot of challenges and I feel for them, but I am just lucky I didn't experience any.*

**Information and communication barriers:** Public information in both processes are usually first passed orally through television or radio broadcasts, which is a challenge to those with hearing impairments. Some of these women rely on sign language alone and most television stations do not have sign language interpreters. There are also women who do not understand sign language and have to rely on reading the captions on the screen, which turn out to be grossly inadequate and incapable of providing even just a basic summary of the news. Such women have to depend on third parties, or online and social media sites for news updates with the inherent danger of fake or distorted news and the distractions that come with it. What about situations where mobile data is not available? What about the women who are so impoverished that they either have no Internet-enabled device or do not have funds for regular mobile data subscriptions? Again, some bits of news items are never reported online. Where the information is summarised in written format and distributed in the form of pamphlets and handbills, the summary is often not enough to give a full story of what is happening and more clarifications are often necessary which may prove difficult to obtain.

At most physical events and gatherings there are no sign language interpreters and most times the officials in charge of the processes are not patient enough to give more explanations or simply do not make any effort to communicate with them. A casual observer would get the impression that those in authority want WWDs to stay away from both processes. WWDs are most times left to figure out ways to cope on their own. In other words, their participation was always at their own expense. They either find a way to cope and fit into the processes as they are or stay away. It is the complaint of hearing-impaired respondents that when they asked questions for further clarification on issues that they did not hear or understand properly, they were shouted at, and their requests were ignored most of the time. A respondent based in Lagos often had to depend on considerate citizens or neighbours for detailed explanations and answers to her questions. Although such good neighbourliness is commendable, the fact remains that the duty is first that of the government or persons in authority and not that of the citizens or neighbours.

A respondent stated that most times she just watched what others were doing and followed suit, at times not sure if she was getting things right.

**Rejection by society / Attitudinal barriers:** Generally, people with disabilities are not accorded the same respect or regard as non-disabled individuals.

Negative or oppressive social attitudes towards them include outright hostility, pity, distrust, patronising behaviour, and so on. People generally move further away from disabled persons, perhaps afraid that they might become infected with the disability if they go too close. Such attitudes make the WWDs lose their self-esteem, withdraw themselves and choose to stay quietly in the background.

In the process of physically administering the questionnaire, most of the persons whom this author spoke with claimed not to know any WWDs and this made the author wonder just how invisible WWDs have become. Some did not even wish to hear or discuss anything about disabilities. We all know that disabled women are around us but the constant rejection that they experience from other members of society has made a great number of them choose to withdraw and remain hidden because of the stigma and discrimination that they face when they go public or attempt to go public. This withdrawal is so deep that most of them are not even willing to discuss their issues with anyone. Only a few dare to brave the social and environmental barriers and make attempts to live their lives in the fullest possible way.

A respondent who had suffered the loss of some limbs wrote that when she indicated interest in contesting for a particular position in her area, she was told that *there are better people*. This respondent was the only one who said that she had shown interest in contesting for an elective position. All others were not interested in holding any elective office and some remarked that the reason for their lack of interest was the unfavourable environment.

A hearing-impaired respondent stated that whenever she made inquiries or made complaints, she always received responses like

*wait, we will attend to your type later.*

However, she always waited in vain but was never attended to. Another stated that she was often ignored.

The findings in this regard support the view that stigmatisation may lead to self-stigma, especially where WWDs and their family members internalise society's negative attitudes towards them. They may even actually start to believe what others say and think about them, which often leads to self-blame and a decrease in self-esteem. Anticipation of rejection because of stigma may result in many people with disabilities reducing their social networks and not taking advantage of life's opportunities. Experienced or anticipated discrimination is the main reason why many people [women] hide their disabilities and do not seek help (Michael, 2013, as cited in Ibrahim & Abdulraheem-Mustapha, 2016).

**Lack of or mismanagement of resources:** These can be seen on the part of the government, its agencies and persons in authority on one hand, and on the part of the WWDs on the other hand.

Some of the challenges faced by WWDs, such as information and communication barriers, and access barriers are a direct result of either a lack of resources or the mismanagement of available resources on the part of the government, its agencies and persons in authority. The visually impaired respondent stated that she could not affix her thumbprint on the ballot papers without assistance because of the non-availability of Braille ballot papers. Lack of or mismanagement of resources also manifests in the absence of other provisions which are necessary for the inclusion of WWDs in the processes. Such provisions include ramps, lifts, sign language interpreters, necessary software for automatic and real-time speech transcription, documents in Braille or audio formats, suitable alternatives to thumb printing (for those who have lost their fingers), bad conditions of access roads, properly trained and well-motivated staff, and so on. This author suspects that the reason why some staff of the Independent National Electoral Commission and various State Independent Electoral Commissions ignore or give vague responses to inquiries or complaints from WWDs may be that because of improper training, they lack knowledge of what is being inquired about. Continuous training and professional development are necessary for staff to stay up-to-date on the latest trends in their industry, and resources are necessary for this to be achieved.

Regarding the participation of a WWD in the 2019 elections, it was reported in an online media (Falodun, 2022) thus:

*After voting, she asked to fill out the INEC-designated form for feedback from PwDs to help in its planning. None of the staff was aware of its existence there or at several other polling units, as she found out later.*

On the other hand, WWDs also face the challenge of lack or mismanagement of resources. In a lot of cases, WWDs have no choice but to bear the cost of their participation, which requires some expenditure on their part. Because of their disabilities, a good number of them do not have a stable or reasonable source of income and would rather apply the meagre income that they have to more urgent needs. Of what immediate use is participation in politics and governance to a WWD who cannot afford even two meals in a day and lives with five other people in a single room with no amenities?

Those who decide to contest for an elective seat also have to consider the high cost of nomination forms and incidental expenses, in a country with high levels of poverty and unemployment. From where would a WWD get the

huge funds to purchase nomination forms and campaign for the elections? Simply put, they are on their own. They have no choice but to accept whatever is made available to them, and they are considered lucky or privileged to receive any aid at all.

***Selfishness on the part of non-disabled individuals:*** One of the reasons WWDs (particularly the educated ones) have a hard time obtaining nominations or appointments into positions of governance is the selfish attitudes of the non-disabled. They are willing to use WWDs in the background for their selfish aggrandisement or benefit, but they are unwilling to put WWDs forward for their own benefit or growth.

The mentality of a good number of non-disabled persons is *why should WWDs be allowed to contest for and win elective seats, or obtain appointments when able-bodied persons like us are in abundance?* The general assumption is that non-disabled persons are better in all respects than WWDs.

According to the visually impaired respondent in this research,

*They [non-visually impaired persons] think they are better than I am. I may be physically blind but mentally, I can see and I'm very alert. My mind is open and nothing is wrong with me. I interact with people a lot and I can tell what some of them think. I have achieved in my life things that those who can see have not been able to achieve....*

In many situations where WWDs happen to obtain appointments, the non-disabled individuals who facilitated the appointment would prefer to restrict them to the background, even though they (the WWDs) might be responsible for the major activities in the establishment. They are also often subjected to various forms of abuse, oppression and suppression, disrespect, and their dues and benefits are often kept from them. They serve at the whims and caprices of their benefactor and more often than not for their benefit and glory. Most times they are looked upon as being incapable of delivering on corporate goals. This is the experience of this author.

***Unwritten and unspoken barriers to contesting for positions:*** The conversation about the inclusion of WWDs in politics focuses most times only on the right to vote. It would take a whole lot for a WWD to win an election in Nigeria given the huge costs involved, topped with the additional factor of her impairment. This is corroborated in the work of Waldschmidt and Sépulchre (2019).

In this part of the world, there is a prevailing and deep-rooted culture that tends to suppress women in favour of men, particularly concerning public office and public affairs. Despite the efforts of women generally to overcome this hurdle, a lot still needs to be done.

The patriarchal structure of Nigerian society discourages WWDs from participating in contests for elective positions (Shittu et al., 2022). Where positions are reserved for a disabled person, they are more likely to be given to a disabled man than to a WWD. So WWDs encounter two discriminations here: being a woman and being disabled. Most people focus on disability and gender before the capacity and credibility of candidates. This writer has never heard of a WWD winning an election in Nigeria.

## **Conclusion and recommendations**

This chapter analysed some of the barriers facing WWDs in politics and governance in Nigeria and argued that the responsibility for ensuring their inclusion rests mainly on the government and persons in authority. The Nigerian State [through its leaders at the Federal and State levels, and through its institutions (agencies, parastatals, ministries, civil and political office holders)] and persons in authority have the responsibility to play the leading role in the empowerment of all Nigerians as a prerequisite for the prosperity of the people.

Wherever and whoever they are, WWDs always have the fear of domination and oppression so mechanisms need to be put in place to allay their fears. In view of this, the findings of the study show that disability issues should be taken as important by policymakers to ensure that disabled people are considered and not abandoned. There is therefore the need for the government to build a strong institutional mechanism that will ensure the inclusion of WWDs in politics and governance. WWDs have as many capabilities, talents and knowledge as those without disabilities and have a lot to offer in the collective quest to build a better and more prosperous nation.

Nigeria is a very good boy of international human rights; that is, if you consider the number of international human rights conventions which the country has ratified and even domesticated. These include the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UN, 1948), the African Charter on Human and People's Rights (AU, 1981), the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, the International Covenant on Social and Economic Rights (UN, 1966), the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (UN, 1979), and the UN Convention on the Rights of People with Disabilities (CRPD) (UN, 2006), amongst others. Nigeria is usually a signatory to such covenants and ratifies them without putting any reservation(s), unlike countries like Saudi Arabia and the United States that have reservations on some of the provisions. Ratification and domestication of these conventions and agreements is one thing, implementing and/or

enforcing them is a completely different thing. Unfortunately, Nigeria has not fared well in the latter.

The following recommendations are a summary of the roles which the respondents in the study want the government and persons in authority to play in order to ensure their participation or inclusion in the politics and governance processes in Nigeria.

*Suitable legal frameworks should be put in place by the lawmaking bodies to ensure the inclusion of WWDs in politics and governance.* Existing laws can also be built upon to achieve this goal. Without a legal framework, there is no foundation for WWDs to stand upon and demand their rights to participate in politics and governance. Those States that have not domesticated the Disabilities Act should be encouraged to do so. Certain percentages or quotas of appointments and elective positions should be statutorily reserved for WWDs; and where reserved generally for PwDs, should be split equally between male and female PwDs.

*Adequate implementation of our laws.* It is not enough to have laws or rules; necessary steps should be taken by the Executive arm of government and its agencies to implement them, or else they might not be worth the paper that they are written on. Implementation requires the necessary political will and funding.

*Funding is necessary for the provision of those materials and structures needed to grant access to WWDs.* Sufficient provision for these needs should be made in the relevant or applicable budgets. It is also important that funds released for this purpose be closely monitored to ensure they are properly managed and put to correct use by those to whom they are entrusted. Industries for the production of the materials can be established as these items can be manufactured within the country at cheaper rates. This will also help to reduce the level of unemployment amongst our people. The visually impaired respondent in this study stated that she was assisted to affix her thumbprint on the ballot papers because Braille ballot papers were not available. She added that she was a bit sad as there was no way she could personally verify that her helper placed her thumb in the spaces meant for the party of her choice.

*The government and persons in authority must listen to and understand WWDs.* WWDs should be allowed to express their views and desires in the same way that non-disabled people are given the opportunity to express themselves. A lot of WWDs are exceptionally brilliant and talented, and ignoring them only results in immeasurable losses and delays. This author has witnessed so many instances of this. Understanding a challenge is very necessary in any quest to solve that challenge.

*The government, her agencies and persons in authority need to utilise various channels in raising societal awareness of the plight and rights of WWDs. One of the reasons why WWDs are regarded poorly in society is because of some age-old cultural beliefs and practices which in some places condemn and suppress WWDs from taking part in community activities. Many people believe that associating with WWDs brings bad luck or is a bad omen. Such people forget that some of these disabilities are not the making of the WWD but were brought about by misfortunes such as different kinds of accidents, untreated or improperly treated sicknesses, acts of God, and so on, and the victims were just unlucky to have been the ones involved. When WWDs are better understood, they will cease to be targets of oppression and suppression and will thus be more open to participation in societal activities.*

*The political and governance processes need to be made accessible to WWDs. As far as is practicable, voter registration centres, PVC collection centres, polling units and other public buildings should be sited on flat terrain to ease access by WWDs who have mobility challenges. If the environment is made disability-friendly, WWDs will be able to carry out their activities independently, and this will result in less pressure or demands on others. Accessibility aids should be included in the construction of public and major buildings. Existing buildings and structures do not need to be demolished and rebuilt; slight modifications can be made to make them accessible.*

*Human resources are a vital aspect of the political and governance processes. Employers of labour (both public and private) need to make proper investment in the recruitment, training, and compensation of competent staff that can adequately handle issues relating to WWDs.*

*The government and regulatory agencies should mandate or encourage the news media and other public information outlets to make their services and programmes available in a way that will meet the needs of WWDs. Detailed subtitles or captions can be introduced on television channels, for example, to replace the current practice of scrolling a few headlines repeatedly across the screen. Any general information should be translated into the accessible format appropriate to the WWDs. It is more economical to access news on television than on the Internet or social media, which are given to so much manipulation, falsehoods and destructive narratives that look real until time exposes their falsity.*

*WWDs who desire to contest for elective offices should be supported in any way possible. The government can make laws to limit the cost of nomination forms. From where will a WWD get millions of naira to purchase these forms? Political parties should also be encouraged to reduce their fees and members' dues so that more WWDs can afford them. Nomination forms*

can also be given to WWDs at a discount. It is common knowledge that most WWDs lack finances and sponsors. CSOs and well-to-do individuals should be encouraged to lend their support, especially in situations where the WWDs are capable of carrying out the functions of the office in view.

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