

## **Election Participation and Assistive Aids for Persons with Disability, During the 2023 General Elections in Akwa Ibom State, Nigeria**

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### **Abstract**

*There has been an outcry over the non-inclusion of persons with disability in Nigeria's elections due to the unavailability of assistive aids. This study investigated elections and assistive technologies for persons with a disability during the 2023 general elections in Akwa Ibom State Nigeria. The objectives of the study were to examine how the provision of voting procedures for hearing-impaired persons enhanced their participation in Akwa Ibom State; to investigate how accessible polling units increased participation of mobility-impaired persons; and to find out how Braille ballots enhanced election participation of visually impaired persons in Akwa Ibom State, during the 2023 general election. The study adopted the social model of disability theory as the theoretical framework. The cross-sectional and descriptive technique were adopted with a population of 1101 registered persons with a disability during the 2023 general elections Akwa Ibom State. Data used in this study was gathered from primary and secondary sources. It was discovered, among others, that the majority of the units had no ramps to support mobility as well as inaccessible polling booths for voting convenience for mobility-impaired persons. Based on these findings, the study recommended that the INEC should ensure that in addition to the voting procedures, each polling station must have trained sign language interpreters to assist hearing impaired persons.*

**Keywords:** INEC, election participation, persons with disability, assistive aids, braille.

### **1.0 Introduction**

Election participation is a critical aspect of democratic governance, allowing citizens to influence public decision-making processes (Udoms et al., 2020; Udoms et al., 2024). In many democracies, efforts have been made to ensure that every eligible voter, regardless of socioeconomic status or physical condition, can actively participate in elections. Elections are the primary mechanisms through which representative democracy operates, enabling citizens to select their leaders and representatives in government. Elections serve other important purposes such as representation, providing the procedure for choosing representatives who will act on behalf of the electorates, making decisions and

creating laws that reflect the population's interests and values. Elections also encourage political participation, engaging citizens in the democratic process and fostering a sense of civic responsibility. A review of the political history of Nigeria, since the return of the civil rule in 1999 highlights that the International National Electoral Commission (INEC) has conducted six general elections, while the 2023 general election was the seventh. This was to be the first general election with the active inclusion of persons with disability, both as electorates and candidates. The political rights of persons with disability cover the right to vote in elections freely and without hindrance and the right to run as candidates, as voting is both a civic right and a responsibility.

No society exists without persons with disability. Their vulnerability stems from an inability to equate with other members of society due to some physical impairments. A person with a disability is simply an individual experiencing a disability (Adiela, 2023). Persons with disability can be found in all religious, social, political and economic groups. They can be born with a disability or can acquire a disability later in life, for example, through accident, genetics, age or armed conflict. Persons with disability are part of society in many enriching ways; they are parents, students, entrepreneurs, artists, athletes, teachers, and also politicians (ODIHR, 2019). However, they are also among the most excluded communities worldwide. For years, societies around the world have regarded disability as something to be feared, pitied or cured. Negative myths and stigmas about PWDs are common, such as the belief that they are incapable of making positive contributions to society. As a result, persons with disability encounter significant barriers in their efforts to access basic rights, including the right to political participation.

While the Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC) has made provisions for the use of assistive aids for persons with a disability during the general elections in Akwa Ibom State, the majority still face unique challenges due to their peculiar disability. For persons with disability in Akwa Ibom State, most of them had never seen or been taught the use of assistive aids, therefore participating in elections involved overcoming various barriers. These barriers include a lack of knowledge in the use of assistive aids like Braille ballots for the visually impaired, lack of accessibility to polling booths for the mobility impaired and lack of sign language interpreters and appropriate channels of communication for hearing impaired persons during elections. This study on elections and assistive aids for persons with disability in Akwa Ibom State, will explore the current state of electoral inclusion, identify the unique challenges faced by PWDs in electoral participation, and propose actionable strategies to create a more accessible and inclusive electoral environment.

## **1.2 Statement of Problem**

Persons with disability can effectively and fully participate in political and public life on an equal basis with others directly or through freely chosen representatives, including the right and opportunity for persons with disability to vote and be voted for (UNCRPD, 2008). In 2018, Nigeria signed the National Level Discrimination of Persons with Disability (Prohibition) Act. This became a major milestone indicative of the government's increasing prioritization of disability mainstreaming. The enactment of disability legislation in Nigeria marked a significant step towards creating a more inclusive society. The disability act aims to protect the rights of PWDs and ensure their full integration into all aspects of society, including political participation (Mbagwu & Aduak, 2023). Regardless of the legislative efforts, the implementation and enforcement of these provisions remain one of the greatest challenges to the mainstreaming of PWDs in the democracy of the country. Over the years, there has been an outcry over the non-inclusion of persons with disability in Nigeria's elections. Persons with disability

face numerous barriers that prevent them from fully engaging in the electoral processes, these barriers range from political, cultural, economic, institutional, societal as well as legal. Some of the main challenges faced by persons with disabilities that contribute to their unequal participation in elections are institutional. Many persons with disability are unable to participate during elections because the necessary assistive aids to guide them have not been provided. Visually impaired persons, in particular, face unique challenges due to the lack of accessible electoral materials, such as Braille ballots. In many instances, visually impaired voters must rely on assistance from others to cast their votes, which compromises the confidentiality and independence of their voting process (Agbonika, 2018). Mobility-impaired persons also encounter numerous obstacles including inaccessible polling stations, preventing full participation in the electoral process. Hearing-impaired persons are also severely disadvantaged due to the unavailability of election materials that are translated into accessible formats. This lack of autonomy is a violation of their fundamental rights as enshrined in the international agreement of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (CRPD), which Nigeria has ratified.

Although Nigeria has made strides in promoting disability rights, and the Independent National Electoral Commission has made efforts to improve accessibility, persons with disability in Akwa Ibom State still face numerous institutional barriers in discharging their electoral rights. Thus, this research seeks to examine elections and assistive technologies for persons with disability during the 2023 general elections in Akwa Ibom State.

### **1.3 Objectives of the Study**

The main objective of the study is to investigate elections and assistive technologies for persons with disability during the 2023 general elections in Akwa Ibom State, Nigeria.

The specific objectives are:

1. To examine how the provision of voting procedures for hearing-impaired persons enhanced election participation in Akwa Ibom State, during the 2023 general elections.
2. To investigate how accessible polling units increased participation of mobility-impaired persons during the 2023 general elections in Akwa Ibom State, Nigeria.
3. To find out how Braille ballots had enhanced election participation of visually impaired persons in Akwa Ibom State, during the 2023 general elections.

### **1.4 Research Questions**

Three research questions were asked in order to elicit responses from respondents. The questions are as follows:

1. How did the provision of voting procedures for hearing-impaired persons enhance election participation in Akwa Ibom State during the 2023 general elections?
2. How did the accessibility of polling units increase the participation of mobility-impaired persons during the 2023 general elections in Akwa Ibom State, Nigeria?
3. How had the Braille ballots enhanced election participation of visually impaired persons during the 2023 general elections in Akwa Ibom State, Nigeria?

### **1.5 Research Hypotheses**

Based on the research objectives and questions, three hypotheses were also postulated to enhance empirical and statistical operations and computations. The hypotheses include:

1. **H<sub>0</sub>**: The provision of voting procedures did not influence election participation for hearing-impaired persons in Akwa Ibom State during the 2023 general elections.

2. **Ho:** Accessibility to polling units did not increase election participation for mobility-impaired persons during the 2023 general elections in Akwa Ibom State, Nigeria.
3. **HO:** The Braille ballots did not enhance election participation of visually impaired persons during the 2023 general elections in Akwa Ibom State.

## **Literature Review**

### **2.1 Persons with Disability**

The World Health Organization (2023) defines disability as an umbrella that includes impairments, activity limitations, and participation restrictions. It reflects the interaction between features of a person's body and features of the society they live in. The Canadian Human Rights Commission (2024) define persons with disability as individuals who have a slight and persistent difficulty in performing the typical activities of daily life due to a physical, mental, intellectual, cognitive, learning, communication, or sensory impairment. A person is considered to have a disability if they have a physical or mental impairment that has a substantial and long-term adverse effect on their ability to perform normal day-to-day activities (UK Equality Act, 2010).

The World Bank (2023), defines persons with disability as those who face various types of barriers, environmental, physical, or attitudinal, that prevent them from fully engaging in economic, social and political life. Each of these definitions emphasizes different aspects of disability, reflecting broader debates in disability studies whether disability is primarily a matter of physical impediment or is a result of social, environmental, and attitudinal barriers.

#### **2.1.2 Election Participation by Persons with Disability**

European Union Democracy Observatory (2020) redefines election participation as not just a right but a civic responsibility, emphasizing the role of each citizen in contributing to the stability and legitimacy of democratic institutions. According to Lang & Upah (2008), participation in electoral processes by persons with disability refers to the active involvement of PWDs as both voters and candidates in political elections. This encompasses their right to vote, the accessibility of polling stations, the availability of assistive tools (such as Braille ballots for the visually impaired), and the support for PWDs as candidates in elections. This definition emphasizes the removal of barriers that hinder PWDs from fully exercising their political rights. The United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disability (UNCRPD) defines electoral participation as the full and equal engagement of PWDs in political and public life, emphasizing their right to vote and be elected in a manner that accommodates their specific needs. The convention calls for the development of accessible electoral systems and the provision of facilities such as sign language interpreters, Braille ballots, and other resources necessary for ensuring their participation.

For Agbonika (2018), electoral participation of persons with disability includes the legal and practical mechanisms that allow PWDs to engage in voting, campaigning, and contesting political positions. He emphasized the need for laws and policies that address the unique challenges faced by persons with disability, particularly regarding accessibility, financial barriers, and societal perceptions. Schur et al. (2013) define political participation of persons with disability as the involvement of individuals with disability in voting, running for office, and participating in political activities. Emphasising the importance of ensuring equal opportunities for PWDs to participate in elections, both as voters and candidates, without discrimination or barriers that impede their full potential, Kett (2012) defines electoral participation for persons with disability as the ability to engage in voting processes autonomously, using assistive devices or accommodations, such as ramps in polling stations or braille

ballots. This definition focuses on making voting facilities accessible and the broader aspect of providing the necessary support for persons with disability to actively engage in their civic duties.

### **2.1.3 Assistive Aids and Elections**

Assistive devices refer to any item, piece of equipment, or product system that is used to increase, maintain, or improve individuals' functional performance (Alper & Rahariririna, 2016). Electoral assistive aids exist to assist voters with disability at the polling unit, they include easy-to-read voter education guides, tactile ballot guides, braille ballots, and electronic machines using screen enlargement applications. During the 2023 general elections in Nigeria, efforts were made to ensure that persons with disability can participate fully in the electoral process. This included introducing assistive technologies that help overcome barriers such as limited mobility, vision impairments, and hearing difficulties. The Independent National Electoral Commission began integrating some disability-friendly measures including the provision of braille ballots in 2018 (IFES, 2022). Alongside braille ballots, other materials like magnifying glasses for those with partial visual impairment and assistive materials for those with physical disabilities were deployed to polling stations.

The use of braille ballots is one of the core solutions proposed to facilitate the voting rights of visually impaired persons. Braille ballots ensure that individuals with visual impairments can vote independently, allowing them to make their choices without the need for assistance from another person, thus safeguarding their privacy and autonomy (Schur et al., 2017). Without these accommodations, visually impaired persons are often left to rely on third-party assistance, which compromises the confidentiality of their vote. Polling unit accessibility for persons with disability refers to the extent to which polling stations are designed and managed to accommodate the needs of individuals with physical, sensory, cognitive, or other disabilities.

This concept encompasses both the physical environment of polling units and the availability of support services, ensuring that persons with disability can exercise their right to vote without encountering unnecessary barriers. Physical accessibility for persons with disability at the polling units should have ramps, wide doorways, and accessible pathways to accommodate wheelchair users. Accessible voting booths are designed to accommodate individuals who use wheelchairs or other mobility aids. A braille is a specialized voting tool designed for visually impaired individuals, it enables them to vote independently and privately. Braille ballots are created using braille, a tactile writing system that consists of raised dots arranged in specific patterns, which can be read by touch. Many countries mandate the use of braille ballots under electoral accessibility laws to ensure that visually impaired persons have equal access to the voting process. The names of political parties or candidates are embossed in braille, so visually impaired persons can feel the raised dots to understand the available options on the ballot. The braille ballots are provided at polling stations that have registered visually impaired persons for an efficient voting process. In 2018, for the first time, voters with visual impairments in Osun state, cast their ballots, unassisted, using a newly developed braille ballot guide. After years of advocacy, pushing for greater inclusion of people with disability in Nigerian elections, the INEC invited AccessNigeria to co-design a braille ballot guide. According to Joseph Oguniran, an Osun-based disability advocate, "Now I feel like a complete citizen. Previously during elections, I had to depend on someone else to cast my vote, with the braille ballot guide in place, I had the opportunity to vote independently" (NDI, 2019). The development of the braille ballot guide has been part of a larger effort to improve accessibility and ensure that Nigerian elections are inclusive for all voters, particularly those with disabilities (Blueprint.ng 2019).

Written or visual guides at polling stations are important for communicating voting procedures. These include large procedures, step-by-step guides, or video screens with instructions, ensuring that hearing-impaired persons can follow the voting procedures.

Sign language interpreters can be provided at polling stations to assist hearing-impaired persons who cannot communicate through sign language. Interpreters help to convey voting instructions, ballot procedures, and general election-related information. Accessible polling booths are specially designed voting stations that accommodate persons with disability, ensuring they cast their vote independently, privately and comfortably. These booths are tailored to meet the needs of voters with mobility, visual, auditory, or cognitive impairments. The ultimate goal is to allow all voters, regardless of their physical abilities, to cast their votes privately without assistance if they prefer. Ramps are sloped surfaces that provide a gradual incline, allowing individuals in wheelchairs or those with mobility impairments to access buildings or elevated areas without the need for stairs. Ramps are not only for persons with disability but also benefit the elderly, parents with strollers or anyone who has difficulty with steps.

Lower decks are specially designed voting areas where tables, booths, or counters are positioned at a lower height, making them accessible to individuals using wheelchairs or those who have difficulty reaching standard height surfaces. This ensures that they can fill out their ballots or interact with voting equipment comfortably. Incorporating lower decks at polling stations ensures that voters with mobility impairments do not need to strain or ask for assistance to cast their votes.

## **2.2 Theoretical Framework**

### **2.2.1 Social Model of Disability**

This study is anchored on the Social Model of Disability. The Social Model of Disability theory is a framework that views disability as a societal construct, rather than as a medical impairment (Oliver, 1983). The Social model of disability has demonstrated success for disabled people in society, challenging discrimination and marginalization, and enabling disabled people to claim their rightful place in society (Owens, 2015). The social model of disability theory views disability as a socially created problem and a subject of total assimilation of individuals into society. Unlike, the medical model, which focuses on individual impairments, disability from the perception of this model is not a trait of an individual but a multifaceted collection of situations, many of which are caused by the social environment and correspondingly require a social approach to address the problem. The model shifts the responsibility from individual to society advocating for systemic changes that remove barriers and create an inclusive environment. Some scholars agree with this position.

Finkelstein (1990) assessed that physical disability is purely social, once social barriers to the reintegration of people with disability itself are eliminated. The requirements are for changes to society, material changes to environment control systems, changes in social roles, and changes in attitudes by people in the community as a whole. The model calls for societal change, emphasizing the need to remove barriers and promote inclusion, rather than focus solely on individual's impairment. In other words, since disability is a social construct, society must put in place restructured policies, practices, attitudes, environmental accessibility, political structure, and legal and regulatory frameworks to eliminate the various restrictions that prevent persons with disability from fully participating in their political activities (Brekenbach, 2003). In the electoral context, the social model of disability focuses on identifying and dismantling the barriers that prevent persons with disability from participating fully in elections, and ensuring that all aspects of the electoral processes are accessible to persons with disability. This includes not only physical access to polling stations but also the ability to run for office, and the elimination of discriminatory practices.

This Social Model of Disability theory is relevant to this study because it provides a framework for understanding and addressing the barriers faced by persons with disability as candidates. The model emphasizes the need to modify the electoral process and societal attitudes to promote equal opportunities for persons with disability, instead of creating measures and policies that promote segregation or compensate for disability during election participation, the objective should be to remove barriers. The application of the social model of disability to elections is mandatory for creating an inclusive and equitable political process. Election participation of persons with disability must incorporate assistive technologies like the braille, the use of sign language instructors, accessible polling booths and other assistive technologies to ensure equity in electoral participation. Therefore, by focusing on the removal of societal barriers, rather than the limitations of individuals, this model promotes the full participation of persons with disability in elections.

### **2.3 Empirical Review**

This section accessed related literature on the electoral participation of persons with disability. Research by the Joint National Association of Persons with Disability (JONAPWD) (2023) analyzed the participation of PWDs as candidates in the 2023 general elections in Nigeria. The methods employed were data collection of persons with disability candidates and interviews with political party representatives, and candidates. This study revealed that the number of persons with disability candidates increased by 15% compared to the 2019 elections, indicating a positive trend towards greater representation. However, PWDs remained significantly underrepresented in major political parties. Also, political parties often lacked clear policies or programmes to support PWD candidates, resulting in limited access to party resources and networks. The study recommended that political parties should establish dedicated platforms for persons with disability, and integrate disability-inclusive policies into their structures and practices.

A study by the Center for Citizens with Disability (CCD) (2023) assessed the implementation of disability rights laws and policies during the 2023 elections in Nigeria. The methodologies used were legal analysis and interviews with key stakeholders, including government officials, persons with disability, and advocacy groups. The study highlighted that while the Discrimination Against Persons with Disability (Prohibition) Act 2018 was referenced during election preparations, enforcement mechanisms were weak, with only partial compliance by authorities. Some states showed progress in implementing policies that support persons with disability, but others lagged, primarily due to resource constraints and lack of political will. The study recommended strengthening, monitoring and evaluation frameworks for enforcing disability rights laws and increasing collaboration between government agencies and disability organizations.

Inclusive Friend Association (IFA) (2023) evaluated the accessibility of polling units and the participation of persons with disability in the 2023 elections in Nigeria. The study used on-the-ground assessment of polling stations across multiple states and conducted surveys with persons with disability voters. The IFA found that approximately 45% of polling units were assessed by persons with disability, showing a slight improvement from previous elections. However, many polling stations lacked basic facilities like ramps and tactile ballots. 60% of PWDs surveyed reported that they faced challenges related to physical accessibility and inadequate election materials designed for their needs. The study recommended increasing funding for infrastructure improvements at polling stations and providing specialized training for election staff on accommodating PWDs.

Ojo (2019) evaluated the implementation and effectiveness of disability rights in promoting political participation. The methodologies used were legal analysis and interviews with government officials and persons with disability. Findings highlighted gaps in the enforcement of disability rights legislation, noting that only 40% of surveyed states had mechanisms to ensure compliance with national laws. The lack of enforcement contributes significantly to the under representation of PWDs in political processes.

World Bank (2020) asserts that physically disabled individuals encounter numerous obstacles including inaccessible polling stations, lack of transportation, and poor accommodation of their needs during elections. These challenges hinder their ability to exercise their voting rights.

Aderemi & Irinoye (2013) explored the socioeconomic challenges faced by persons with disability in Nigeria that affect their political participation. The methodology was a mixed-method approach, using surveys and focus group discussions with persons with disability and political stakeholders. The study found that 78% of PWDs considered financial incapacity a significant barrier to running for office. Additionally, only 15% reported having access to resources or funding to support their political ambitions.

Lang & Upah (2008) studied the challenges faced by persons with disability in Nigeria concerning political participation. The methodology adopted was a purposive sampling of a combination of surveys and interviews conducted with PWDs across different regions in Nigeria. 65% of respondents cited physical inaccessibility as a primary obstacle, while 72% reported experiencing societal discrimination. The study found that physical inaccessibility of polling stations, negative societal attitudes, and lack of political support are significant barriers to persons with disability as candidates.

### **3.0 Methodology**

The study adopted qualitative research methods of cross-sectional and descriptive research design. The study population of the research was 1101 (One Thousand, one hundred and one) consisting of the total number of persons with disability registered by INEC in Akwa Ibom State (INEC report, 2024).

This study adopted both primary and secondary sources of data collection. For primary sources, data were obtained from interviews with persons with disability. Secondary sources like textbooks, journal articles, magazines, national dailies and library publications, secondary data were also gathered through in-depth published materials from the internet, which many works of other scholars were viewed and referenced.

Information gathered from both primary and secondary sources was organized and presented. The quantitative data was presented and analyzed with the use of descriptive statistics showing summaries of the data sets in simple percentages, and tabular form for easy calculation and comprehension.



**Data Presentation and Analysis**

The study investigated the elections and assistive technologies for persons with disability during the 2023 general elections in Akwa Ibom State.

**Table 4.1.1 Sex Category of INEC Registered PWDs in Akwa Ibom State**

Sex	Population	Total
Male	828	75%
Female	273	25%
<b>Total</b>	<b>1101</b>	<b>100%</b>

*Source: INEC Uyo Office, 2024.*

Table 4.1.1 shows the total registered persons with disability eligible to vote during the 2023 general election in Akwa Ibom State as 1101 representing 100% of which 828 were male representing 75% and 269 were female representing 25%.

**Table 4.1.2 Analysis of Required ASSISTIVE aids for the Voting convenience for PWDs in Akwa Ibom State**

S/N	State	No. of Voters with Albinism	No. of Polling Units with Magnifying Glass	No. of Visually Impaired Voters	No. of Polling Units with Braille Ballot Guides	No. of Voters with Hearing Impairment	No. of Polling Units with Ec30p Posters	No. of Polling Units with Physical Mobility Impairment	No. of Voters with Physical Mobility Impairment	No. of Polling Units with Other	No. of Voters with Other Disabilities
1	Akwa Ibom	367	328	136	128	131	100	186	268	233	300

*Source: INEC Report, 2024*

In Table 4.1.2, it was observed that across the thirty-one (31) local government areas, the Independent National Electoral Commission, Akwa Ibom State, complied substantially in the distribution of assistive aids for persons with disability on the categories of albinism, visual and hearing impairments, making available the needed electoral materials as provided from the Commission headquarters to aid voting during the 2023 general elections in Akwa Ibom State. It was observed that while efforts were made to provide electoral materials for the different categories of persons with disability, it was not enough, and many categories like the physically impaired, the Down syndrome, and little stature category were not provided with the assistive aids to vote conveniently.

**Table 4.1.3 Summary of Assistive Aids Percentage**

Eligible PWDs	Population	Percentage %
Total No. of Voters	1101	100
No of PWDs provided for	556	51
No. of PWDs not provided for	545	49

**Source: Researcher’s Compilation**

In Table 4.1.3, it was observed that the different categories of persons with disability exist across the 31 local government areas in Akwa Ibom State. The assistive aids were distributed based on the polling units and registration areas with PWDs and their peculiar disability, which was captured during the registration process.

**4.2 Discussion of Findings**

**Voting Procedures and Hearing-impaired Persons in Akwa Ibom State**

Findings from Table 4.1.3 shows that a total of 136 persons with hearing impairments registered to vote during the 2023 general elections in Akwa Ibom State and only 100 voting procedures were provided across the states. Interviews with hearing-impaired persons suggest that in most polling units, the voting procedures were not displayed by the poll officials. Also, most of them in the rural areas were not conversant with the procedures due to a lack of awareness. These findings align with the submission of Mahmud (2019) that during the 2019 elections, certain polling units did not properly display or follow the procedural guidelines set by INEC. This included the lack of visible instructions and procedures for the hearing-impaired voters, regarding accreditation and voting processes, This calls for policymakers to ensure sign language interpreters are available at polling stations and that electoral materials are produced in multiple accessible formats.

**Physical Accessibility to Polling Units and Mobility Impaired Person with Disability**

Findings from Table 4.1.3 show that during the 2023 general elections, a total of 268 physically impaired persons registered to vote, and only 186 units were accessible. INEC polling stations are situated in public spaces including public schools, market squares and village halls, and these places are not easily accessible to physically impaired persons. The majority of the units had no ramps to support mobility as well as inaccessible polling booths for voting convenience for this category of persons. These findings corroborate TAF's (2023) report on the accessibility of polling units for persons with disability during elections, that 96% of the polling units observed were accessible for PWDs, while priority voting was observed in 77% of the polling units. Also, studies by Shittu et al. (2024) observe that the lack of accessible election materials and inadequate provisions for mobility-impaired persons during the process results in low voter turnout among demographics.

### **Braille Ballots and Visually Impaired Persons in Akwa Ibom State**

The results obtained from Table 4.1.3 show that while 136 visually impaired persons registered to vote during the 2023 general elections in Akwa Ibom State, 128 braille ballots were provided to aid electoral participation during the 2023 general elections in Akwa Ibom State. However, interviews with the visually impaired persons revealed that many of the polling units had no braille ballots, also, the poll officials were not trained on the use of the braille ballots to sufficiently guide the visually impaired who came out to participate in the electoral process.

### **5.0 Summary and Conclusion**

The study investigated elections and assistive aids for persons with disability in Akwa Ibom State, Nigeria, during the 2023 general election, and in compliance with the United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disability (UNCRPD), the study observed significant progress by the Independent National Electoral Commission in their attempt at election participation and inclusion of persons with disability. This study agrees with the summation of Agbonika (2018) that further reforms are necessary to fully include persons with disability in Nigeria's electoral processes.

### **5.1 Recommendations**

Based on the findings of this study, the following recommendations were made:

1. The Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC) should ensure that in addition to the voting procedures, each polling station must have trained sign language interpreters to assist hearing-impaired persons, and the Akwa Ibom State should partner with JONAPWD to spread awareness about voting rights and the electoral processes.
2. The Independent Electoral Commission must ensure polling stations are accessible for the physically challenged. This includes the provision of ramps, sufficient wheelchairs and accessible pooling booths. The Independent National Electoral Commission should coordinate accessible transportation services for individuals with physical disabilities to help them reach polling stations on election day.
3. INEC should ensure the training of a special category of poll staff on how to assist visually impaired voters respectfully and efficiently, as well as the provision of the full complement of braille ballots during elections. The Independent National Electoral Commission should collaborate with advocacy organizations for the visually impaired to conduct voter education programmes that address the unique needs of this community.

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