

DAILY

BULLETIN

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INCLUSIVITY: INEC IS WALKING THE TALK – DR. OGUNMOLA

Chairman of the Outreach and Partnership Committee (OPC) of the Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC), Dr. Adekunle Ogunmola, has said the Commission is trailing the blaze on mainstreaming marginalized groups and engendering an all-inclusive electoral process.

Dr. Adekunle made the declaration today in Abuja, at the opening of a National Stakeholders' Roundtable meeting on strengthening the capacity of Persons with Disabilities to advance their rights and participate in the political process, organized by Inclusive Friends Association (IFA) in partnership with Participate Today and National Endowment for Democracy.

Represented by the Director, Voter Education and Publicity department, Mr. Nick Dazang, the OPC Chairman enumerated some recent steps taken by INEC to mainstream marginalized groups. He said "because of the premium the Commission places on mainstreaming Gender and all marginalized groups, following its re-organization, it has created a new department of Gender and Inclusivity. So, this shows you that INEC is not just talking, it is walking the talk and INEC is a solid partner you can hold on to. We will continue to work, engage and work with the Civil Society to ensure an all-inclusive electoral process".

Explaining further steps taken by the Commission to mainstream marginalized groups in the electoral process, the OPC Chairman said, "You will agree with me that in time past

the Commission made it a priority to deliver free, fair and credible elections. I am not saying that we have fully succeeded in that, but after making some incremental improvements on that, we have also tried to address the issue of marginalized groups and we have taken concrete steps to mainstream gender and marginalized groups”.

“Based on this effort we were able to articulate a policy on Gender and this policy has been reviewed and is due for implementation. We have also articulated a framework for relating with youths - the Youth Engagement Strategy (YES). we have also articulated a framework for training and engaging with Persons with Disabilities (PWDs), and God willing, tomorrow we are going to have a workshop where we will expose our staff to the four-part disability inclusion guide, which we have articulated in concert with the Albino Foundation and other development partners like the International Foundation for Electoral Systems (IFES) and European Union Centre for Electoral Systems (ECES)”.

He reiterated the Commission’s commitment to the cause of the marginalized groups in the electoral process. His words: “we will continue to make sure that we mainstream all groups because our elections will not be complete if all qualified do not participate. I have always said this that societies that advance quickly are societies that invest in girl child education, in issues that concern gender, in issues that concern peoples with disabilities”.

Further underscoring the importance of an all-inclusive system, Dr. Ogunmola said; “If you check, you will discover that the rapid and exponential improvement that China has witnessed in the past 20 years has had to do with investing in these areas, and if we want to progress, we must invest our resources and time in these areas. We must bring in all talents, all the genius that reside in people who we think are marginalized but are capable. We must harness them and bring them and invest in them in our developmental efforts, that’s the only way to move forward”.

In her goodwill remark, the Chairman, House of Representatives Committee on INEC and Civil Society, Hon. Aishatu Dukku, said the National Assembly and INEC were in discussions on an amendment to the Legal Framework and election policies to address the issues of PWDs.

She said “the issue of widespread barriers to PWDs participation in elections, including inaccessible polling units and the absence of braille or tactile ballots must be looked into. We have been discussing with INEC at the National Assembly on how best to amend our Electoral Legal Framework and election policies to take care of the needs of PWDs in the electoral process”.

She called on INEC to engage the PWD in the design and implementation of voter education and electoral procedure, policy making and training. She also called on political parties to be dynamic and include PWDs in every activity at every step.

Earlier, the convener of the Roundtable meeting and Executive Director, Inclusive Friends Association (IFA), Grace Jerry, said the meeting would present the opportunity to hear first-hand from the community of Persons with Disabilities and to jointly identify good practices in areas of legal capacity reform, policy and institutional reform process, and support decision-making arrangements especially as the Anambra, Ekiti and Osun off-cycle elections draw nearer.

She noted that addressing the many challenges of PWDs as soon as possible is essential to increasing the legitimacy of public institutions and creating more equitable and inclusive societies in which all members can participate fully.

Grace Jerry made four key recommendations on behalf of PWDs. These include; that INEC strengthens the training of its ad-hoc staff on PWD-friendly aids and processes like the braille ballot guide to ensure the inclusion and participation of PWDs in the 2021 Anambra governorship election and other upcoming elections; that INEC brings polling units down from verandas of public buildings to ground floor level or build ramps and handrails at polling units located in public buildings to make them more accessible for PWDs.

Others are: to ensure that training for election officials, election administrators, security and political party leaders includes information and education about the rights and needs of PWDs; and the National Orientation Agency (NOA) and the INEC Voter Education and Publicity Department should collaborate with other media providers to increase accessibility in their output, while media outputs can be made more accessible for PWDs through sub-titles, sign language interpretation and audio descriptions.

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