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EDITOR'S NOTE.

Democratic governance is still very much a major project in Nigeria given that civil rule is a mere 22 years old in this seventh most populous country in the world. For such a multi-ethnic and diverse country, issues of citizen inclusiveness and participation in the electoral process and governance are always on the front burner, calling for major stakeholders to be on deck.

Accordingly, advocacy groups have been up and doing in sensitizing the citizenry to their rights and obligations in the electoral process through strengthening of professionalism in the media to report and cover the process fairly, accurately and ethically.

Most advocacy groups, particularly those charged with a

mandate under the European Union Support to Democratic Governance in Nigeria, Project, EU-SDGN, have seized every chance to participate in deepening the electoral process and thereby enhance democratic governance in the country. The recent

governorship elections held in Edo and neighbouring Ondo state provided many of the groups with an opportunity.

The Institute for Media and Society, IMS, International Press Center, IPC, The Albino Foundation, Yiaga Africa and CLEEN foundation, to mention a few, braced themselves for the task in spite of the ravaging COVID-19 pandemic and were actively alive to their duties by frequently organizing workshops, seminars and webinars, throughout the electoral process

The diversity of their activities before, during and after the recent governorship polls held in Edo and Ondo states are well captured in some of our stories in this edition for your delight.



We have an interesting interview with Mrs. Mufuliat Fijabi, the Executive Director of Nigeria Women Trust Fund, an implementing partner of the EU-SDGN project. Her experiences in tackling issues related to women participation in politics in Nigeria, the role her organisation has played and is playing in that regard as well as what immediate and long term steps need to be taken in addressing some of the existing societal and institutional challenges, make interesting reading.

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EU-SDGN: IMS Hosts Stakeholders, Presents Publications

The Institute for Media and Society, IMS, organized the 2020 edition of its media stakeholders meeting and book presentation in Lagos on Wednesday, November 18, 2020, with participants drawn from the media, academia, civil society and government agencies.

The meeting which was organized under the European Union Support to Democratic Governance in Nigeria, EU-SDGN, project, Component 4A, Support to Media, was chaired by Mr Lanre Arogundade, Executive Director of International Press Centre, IPC, while Professor Ayo Ojebode of the Department of Communication and Language Arts, University of Ibadan, delivered a special guest address entitled; Focusing on the "In-Betweens"- A Charge to the Media. IMS made a public presentation of 12 publications.

In his opening remarks, the Executive Director of IMS, Dr Akin Akingbulu disclosed that the event and publications were a component of "a project called the European Support to Democratic Governance in Nigeria which IMS was implementing to help reinforce democratic governance in Nigeria, with other implementing partners. He encouraged participants to actively participate in the meeting and come up with recommendations that would help to advance the democratization process in the country.

In his good will message, Mr Arogundade, expressed his pleasure in the existing partnership between the IPC and IMS as co-implementers of the Support to Media component of the EU-SDGN project. (IPC handles Component 4b of Support to the Media (print and online), IMS handles Component 4a (Broadcast). He urged the media to play its role in ensuring that the democracy Nigerians want is what they have and assured participants they were in for an enriching session as IMS unfolded its activities done in the course of executing the EU-SDGN project.

For the Secretary of the National Association of Women Journalists, NAWOJ, Lagos chapter, Mrs Lilian Ario, the meeting provided opportunity for media stakeholders to meet minds on ways to move the media industry forward professionally.



Facilitators and Guests at IMS Event on Media Stakeholders' Meeting and Public Presentation of Publications

Guest speaker, Professor Ayobami Ojebode while giving his key note address on the topic; "Focusing on the in-betweens'-A Charge to the Media, urged the media to sustain its crusader role to help deepen liberties and build strong institutions in the country.

He said; "it seems we are not capturing the whole democracy, the area we need to focus more on as an advocacy group is what happens after election because civil liberties become endangered after election as it deteriorates during the 'in-between's' and constitutional coups are committed during the 'in between.' Also, institutions are built and weakened during the in-between, that is why it is important to be concerned with building strong institutions."

While suggesting ways the media could build and nurture strong institutions, Ojebode drew attention to the fact that the media have a strong role to play by working with institutions. According to him, the media in Nigeria have a track record of supporting the underdog but "they have a common problem."

"They always disintegrate and attack each other after fighting their common enemy and winning. Hence a platform is needed for media organisations to come together. There should be a coalition, a union, a partnership, hand shakes across board if we want to nurture strong institutions. Journalists should have a sense of mission, move to being stimulators of events and not just reporters of events. We need to go back to crusader journalism".

However, Dr Akin Akingbulu, in his project implementation overview of IMS activities explained how far the organisations had implemented its mandate under Component 4A, Support to media component under the EU-SDGN project.

According to him, "our specific objectives are to support the media to provide fair, accurate and ethical coverage of the electoral process in Nigeria. In order to actualize our specific objectives, IMS is working with four pillars, which are: To enhance professionalism of media practitioners; strengthened capacity of media platforms to diversify and deepen civic and voter education; enhanced capacity of media regulator to perform its mandate; improved media engagement in promoting women, youth and marginalised groups in politics."

He also stated that under those pillars, IMS conducted base line studies for media readiness ahead of the coverage of the 2019 general election, conducted media audience research and carried out capacity training for broadcasters on the coverage of COVID-19. Other activities involved monitoring of media content in four locations in the country, namely, Yola in the North-east, Port Harcourt in the South-south, Kaduna in the North-west and Lagos in the South west. He said that in the course of executing the four pillars, four important issues arose. They are:

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(a) Shrinking civil space in our country and attack on media freedom which impacted media professionalism.

(b) How can the media ensure that their own issues are addressed in the ongoing electoral reform, that is, for example, how should the electoral law provide security for journalists on electoral duty and how can the broadcast media give equal airtime to all political parties?

(c) Securing independence for the broadcast industry regulator. How can the media raise their advocacy voice?

(d) How can we build a constituency of journalists across media platforms that would be passionate about disability inclusion and sustain it in professional works in Nigeria?

However, Dr Jide Jimoh of the Department of Communication Arts, University of Lagos, Dr Abiodun Ogidan, Manager, Unilag Radio and Professor Ojebode unveiled the publications at intervals. Jimoh who presented one of the books titled; Conducting Media audience Research, a Guidebook for Nigerian Media Professionals and Organizations, hailed the publication as a timely and good resource book for students, professionals and researchers.

The second book presentation which comprised five quarterly and one final report on Broadcast Media Coverage of the Nigeria Election, October, 2018 to November, 2019 and Towards the Review of the National Broadcasting

Commission (NBC) Act Nigeria, Proposals of Stakeholders, was done by Professor Ojebode.

According to him the six publications are reports of how the broadcast media covered the 2019 general election in Nigeria. Each of the four monitoring offices in Lagos, Kaduna, Port Harcourt and Yola was responsible for monitoring content of a number of broadcast stations during the general election and the activities were carried out within 14 months with an extension during the Kogi and Bayelsa elections held on November, 16 2019. "Each of the series covers three months, with one covering two months. The books show how people with disabilities were treated during the election and it can be used as a model for school curriculum" he concluded.

Dr Ogidan praised IMS for a wonderful job by coming up with the publication, 'Filling Critical Gaps in Broadcasting Legislation In Nigeria'. She stressed that it should be a guide to anybody that would succeed in broadcast media.

After an exhaustive debate on the itemized issues, participants made some recommendations.

Recommendations:

*The participants advocated the need for the media to do a lot of advocacy with considerable attention focused on the political economy of the media industry.

* Media stakeholders were enjoined to support the advocacy to make the NBC

become an autonomous institution, removed from the current vetting structure of the government.

*There is need for insurance policy for broadcasters to guarantee and secure them against eventualities and hazards of the job.

*Sustained advocacy for Media mainstreaming of gender issues, starting with diversity and gender sensitivity in newsrooms

* Urgent funding needed to sustain distressed Print Media

*Traditional media should be visible and heard on the pages of the social media.

*Sign language should be encouraged in all broadcast media houses and in relevant school curriculum. Journalists should be encouraged to learn the language so as to encourage the inclusion of People With Disabilities.

*There is the need for a structure, like a Council for the NBC, which should oversee issues related with infringement on media rights and violation of broadcast Codes.

*'Catching them young' by taking advocacy to campuses so that undergraduates can know their rights before they graduate.

*Institutions should be built according to the dictates of their functions to make them impossible to manipulate by individuals.

*The NUJ and some other organization should be more alive to their responsibilities. They should be more sensitized so that they can take up issues before they escalate or become subject of general debate. NUJ should set up a committee that would represent it during electoral reforms.

*In the area of reporting the marginalized groups, journalists should be more intentional in the coverage of marginalized groups.



L-R: Prof. Ayobami Ojebode of the University of Ibadan, Guest Speaker; Executive Director of IPC, Mr Lanre Arogundade, Chairman of the occasion, Mrs. Bisi King-Paul, former. Ass Director of FRCN, Guest and Executive Director of IMS, Dr. Akin Akingbulu.

IMS, IPC, Yiaga Africa, NAWOJ, Seek Professional Coverage of Election by the Media

A few weeks to the conduct of the governorship election in Edo and Ondo states on September 19, and October 10, 2020, some implementing partners of the European Union Support to Democratic Governance in Nigeria project, EU-SDGN, namely, the Institute for Media and Society, IMS; International Press Center, IPC, and Yiaga Africa called on the broadcast media to be professional in the coverage of the polls in both states.

They made the call during voter education live TV programmes in Benin-City, Edo state capital and in Akure, the Ondo state capital.

The Benin-City programme held at the Edo Broadcasting Service and was anchored by Ms Ivie Okoro on the station's current affairs programme, "Day Break". The Akure programme, "Dynamic Diet" held at the NTA and was anchored by Mr Olajide Bello

The Institute for Media and Society, IMS, the International Press Centre, IPC and the National Association of Women Journalists, NAWOJ, participated at the Akure session, while the trio of IMS, IPC and Yiaga Africa participated in the Benin-City programme.

In his introductory remarks at the Benin-City session, Dr Akingbulu disclosed that IMS and IPC are involved in the Support to Media component of the EU-SDGN project. While IMS works with the broadcast media and the regulator, the IPC works with the print and online media, he noted and added that though the media still face several challenges, they have done so much in the area of strengthening the democratic process in the country. He disclosed that IMS has been involved in many capacity building activities for the media to enhance their professionalism.

According to him, the issues of vote buying and election violence occur as a result of the desperation of politicians, which makes it important for

increased voter consciousness as a means to check and minimize the trend. He also called for stiff penalties for electoral offenders, especially those who attack journalists on election duty. He called for provisions for punishment and compensation for journalists attacked while on election duty to be included in the planned amendment of the Electoral Act.

Dr Akingbulu lamented the low number of women contesting for elective offices in the country and gave the instance of the upcoming Edo State

democracy while government work to strengthen institutions to serve the public- their real owners and funders- and not narrow political interests.

In his contribution, Mr Arogundade said that his organization had been engaging the media ahead of the Edo State governorship election. He said though IPC's work deals with the print and online media, its activities and publications speak to all journalists in the media. He pointed out that IPC has a publication on election reporting that would greatly assist professionalism of the media.



L-R: Mr. Lanre Arogundade, Director, IPC, Ms. Ivie Okoro of Edo Broadcasting Service, Dr. Akin Akingbulu, Executive Director, IMS, Ms Cynthia Mbamalu, Project Coordinator Yiaga Africa, During the Live Panel Discussion Programme at the Station, recently.

governorship election that had only two women out of 14 candidates and three deputy governorship candidates.

On her part, the Project Coordinator Yiaga Africa, Ms Cynthia Mbamalu during the Benin-City programme said that the organization had been in Edo State for pre-election and election activities and would be there for the post-election activities. She noted that Yiaga Africa had observed that 13 local government areas in the state had recorded pre-election violence.

While calling for further voter education for a more inclusive participation in the electoral process, Mbamalu urged the women and youths to fully participate in the electoral process.

She expressed the need to include the youths and women in the governance process to give them a sense of belonging and urged political parties to evolve ideologies that promote

In furtherance of its objective, the IPC, he disclosed, recently organized a webinar in conjunction with Association of Communication Scholars and Professionals of Nigeria, on the Edo and Ondo State governorship elections with the theme: Edo/Ondo Elections: Imperative of Safety Consciousness and Conflict Sensitivity in Media Coverage and Reportage.

Apart from helping to build the capacity of the disadvantaged groups such as women, youth and People with Disabilities, PWDs, the IPC also regularly conducts capacity training for journalists to keep them abreast of the new developments and ethics and laws governing the profession. He bemoaned serial violation of rights of journalists by mainly security agencies, noting that the IPC recorded 41 recent cases of violations of the rights of journalists from January to August, 2020, alone.

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Events, People And Places In Lagos, Benin-city, Edo State Stakeholders' Meeting, Presentation Of Publications And E



L-R: Doris Olumoko, NAWOJ Chairperson, Ondo State, Sanmi Falobi, Programme Officer, IPC, Dr. Akin Akingbulu of IMS, Olajide Bello, Programme Anchor, NTA Akure



Legislative Interns at a Workshop Organised by Policy a



Participants at the IMS Media Stakeholders's Meeting and Public Presentation of Publications.



Participants at the IMS Media Stakeholders's Meeting in L



Participants at a Radio Programme Organised by PLAC in Abuja.



Mr. Jake Epelle, Addressing Participants at a Workshop Organ

State, Akure, Ondo State Where IMS Organised Media Events Organised by other EU-SDGN Project Implementers



and Advocacy Centre, PLAC in Abuja on Oct 6, 2020.



Dr. Akingbulu of IMS Addressing Participants at the Joint IPC/IMS Event ahead of Ondo State Gov. Election



Lagos.



IMS, IPC, Yiaga Africa Officials with Staff of Edo Broadcasting Service



rganised by Albino Foundation in Abuja



Participants at the IMS Media Stakeholders' meeting and Public Presentation of Books in Ikeja, Lagos.

'Why Women Aspirants Avoid Media-Based Discourse'

Mrs. Mufuliat Fijabi is the Chief Executive Officer of Nigeria Women Trust Fund, an implementing partner of the European Union Support for Democratic Governance in Nigeria, EU-SDGN. In this interview with Media4DemocraticNG, she narrates in detail the systemic marginalization of the Nigerian women in appointive and political positions and the need for the media to be more supportive of women in their reportage.Excerpts:



Fijabi

Your organization observed the recently concluded elections in Edo and Ondo states from a gender perspective. Did your observation show any marked difference from what obtained in previous polls?

Yes, there was a marked difference in terms of the participation of women. Of the 14 candidates in the Edo State governorship election, only two were women and two women as deputy governorship candidates while in 2016, only one female candidate participated in same election; though small, I still commend the bravery of the women, believing that subsequent elections in the state will be better. I also observed that more aged women and younger women came out to vote than in the Edo State governorship election.

The case was however different in Ondo State where of the seventeen candidates, there was no female governorship candidate but with three deputy governorship candidates while in 2016, there were three female governorship candidates and five deputy governorship candidates.

However, in Ondo State, it shows that

there has been a reverse in some of the gains women have made in the state in the past. It was further observed that citizens refused the priority voting for pregnant women, nursing mothers, and the aged. They felt that it was not justified giving some groups priority over others. The Adhoc-staff did another round of sensitization for the voters as well as reassured them that all voters will cast their ballots. This, however, goes on to show that there is a need to continue to engage citizens in the electoral process.

Furthermore, a remarkable improvement in the deployment of women as electoral officials, party agents, and security personnel was observed. There was nearly a ratio of 2:2 deployment of INEC ad-hoc staff in most polling units visited. There was also a good gender mix of security personnel and party agents. This was particularly noted among the major political parties in the states. Women also stayed back after voting to protect their votes.

Were your observations in line with your activities so far under the EU-SDGN project?

One of our deliverables under the EU-SDGN project is to support the marginalized groups in the electoral process. For NWTF, our key focus has been women, getting them to participate as candidates, voters, electoral officials, party agents, etc. This is where the Gender and Election Watch (GEW) falls.

Has the media been helpful in that regard?

On media, women candidates reported in the past that they received fewer media coverage than their male counterparts, and a lack of resources prevents women from breaking through into the media. When women do attract the attention of the media, women are generally tagged with more negative news as compared to men. Gender stereotypes and stigmatization were also prevalent in the coverage of female political leaders. The application of double standards for men and women resulted in tremendous caution among many of the female candidates when allowed to participate on television or radio, and as a result, most women avoided media-based public discourse and ultimately lost visibility. NWTF also provided a medium for media personnel and women candidates to dialogue and map out solutions to the issues raised. We have

since received reports that there has been some significant improvement.

There is also the issue of violence against women in elections; the level of gender-based electoral violence experienced by women remains one of the primary barriers to their participation in politics. Party election boards and relevant security agencies failed to implement laws regarding electoral violence, leaving women particularly vulnerable to harassment, intimidation, threats, hate speech, stereotyping, and physical attacks from opponents and their supporters. Women reported that they were subjected to various forms of violence including physical, psychological, and economic violence as well as threats and coercion.

Big political parties in the country often give huge financial waivers to women to encourage participation. But the response of women coming out for elective positions has not been encouraging. What do you think accounts for this attitude?

The huge financial waivers given to women by political parties are not genuine. Political parties are cut out to raise money for party activities, most times, the said waivers are also a means deployed by political parties to keep women from participating in the elections. This is usually seen when it is time for party primaries when women who enjoy the waivers are advised to step down for male candidates who actually paid all the relevant fees. Besides, at other times, parties use 'indirect primaries' to select candidates which means, in effect, that a small number of leaders, mostly male are in a position to choose candidates and in most cases, the women are not chosen.

Has your organization faced some of those challenges facing women because it targets the womenfolk?

Oh yes. While our work is needed to draw the attention of the government and other stakeholders on the various critical issues, including the rights of women and girls, we have also faced our share of some of the challenges. Defending women's human rights is often seen by the authorities, and even by the communities as a challenge to culture, tradition, and sometimes religion.

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He further called on the media organisations to be COVID-19 sensitive and ensure that the journalists they send out on election coverage are equipped with Personal Protective Equipment, PPE, besides getting INEC accreditation and their outfit's identity card to avoid assault.

At the Akure version of the event, the trio on IMS, IPC and NAWOJ made the appeal for media professionalism in the coverage of the electoral process during an appearance at the current affairs programme, *Dynamic Diet*, on NTA in Akure the state capital.

The programme, was to sensitize the media and voting public ahead of the election poll. Dr. Akingbulu, said IMS discovered some critical gaps in media professional after a research conducted by a team led by Professor Ayobami Ojebode, which are published in a book: *Media Readiness and Engagement of Electoral Issues towards the 2019 General Elections in Nigeria*. The findings by the team led to the collaboration between IMS and IPC in conducting some activities designed to strengthen the media for fair, accurate and ethical coverage of the electoral process in Nigeria.

He said "Part of our work is also to strengthen the regulator, which is NBC, ensure women, youths and PWDs participation in the electoral process", he pointed out.

Mr Sanmi Falobi, who represented the Director of IPC, Lanre Arogundade, stated that the organization had been working with the print and online media to enhance their professionalism in the area of election coverage, adding that in the process, the journalist is trained to hold the government accountable and sustain democratic governance.

NAWOJ chairperson in Ondo State, Doris Olumoko, on her part, said women journalists have been sensitizing women on their involvement in the electoral process both as contestants and as voters.

"We do not just want women to vote, we want adequate women representation in politics. The participation of women in the elections has been very... very poor. Here in Ondo State, we have just one female legislator in the House of Assembly, which is very poor", she stated.

Importance of Media Professionalism In Election Coverage Stressed At Workshop



Dr. Akin Akingbulu of IMS Addressing Participants at the Joint IPC/IMS Event ahead of Ondo State Gov. Election

Fair, balanced coverage, language and conflict sensitive reporting was the main thrust of the one-day media stakeholders' roundtable organised by the International Press Centre, IPC, and the Institute for Media and Society, IMS, under the European Union Support to Democratic Governance in Nigeria (EU-SDGN) Project, with the theme, "Professional, inclusive and Conflict Sensitivity Reporting of the Ondo elections".

The event, which took place in Akure, the Ondo state capital, on Wednesday, September 24, drew stakeholders from the media and academia, to also analyze the coverage of previous elections and seek better performance by the media.

The select audience of 40 media stakeholders included the representatives of the Ondo State councils of the Nigeria Union of Journalists, NUJ, National Association of Women Journalist, NAWOJ; online journalists, political reporters/correspondents; broadcast media presenters and editors.

In his opening remarks, Dr. Akin Akingbulu, the Executive Director of IMS, urged all participants to take active part in the discussion and at the end come up with recommendations on media professionalism.

In his goodwill remark, the Chairman, NUJ, Ondo State represented by the secretary Leke Adegbite, described the activity as timely and buttressed his point with experiences drawn from the 1983 and 2007 elections in the state when the media jettisoned professionalism for partisanship and thereby fuelled an already volatile situation. He cautioned the media and journalists to report responsibly and avoid causing crisis.

The Chairperson of the state NAWOJ,

Doris Olumoko lamented that women have been relegated to the background in politics, citing the case of recent Edo State governorship election where only one woman was a governorship candidate with just three others as deputies.

However, Mr. Ayo Aluko-Olokun, Editor, Nigerian Democratic Report, NDR, a publication of IPC, who spoke on the topic; Understanding and Using the Nigeria Media Code of Election Coverage and the Ondo Governorship Elections, urged the media to provide equitable access to all parties or groups, uphold fairness, accuracy and balance and be conflict sensitive in their coverage.

In his presentation, titled "Towards Professional, Inclusive and Conflict Sensitivity Reporting of the Ondo Elections: Issues from IPC Media Monitoring Report and Expectations of the Media on Election Coverage", Professor Tokunbo Adaja, Head of Department, Mass Communications Department, Joseph Ayo Babalola University, JABU, Ikeji-Arakeji in Ondo State, summed up his presentation thus:

He maintained that though the media serves as the link between the government, civil society and the political elite, "its allegiance is to the society because it derives its existence and functionality from the society."

The second presentation, which was on "Ensuring Fair Reportage of the Ondo Elections: Issues for Broadcast Media Coverage from IMS Monitoring of Media and Elections Reportage" was facilitated by Prof. Ayobami Ojebode of the Department of Communication and Language Arts, University of Ibadan, Oyo State.

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PWDs: Inclusivity Dominates Discussions At IMS Webinar



The role of the journalist and the media in speeding inclusivity of People With Disabilities, PWDs in the electoral process in Nigeria dominated discussions at a webinar organized by the Institute for Media and Society, IMS, in collaboration with The Albino Foundation, TAF, and the International Centre, IPC, on Tuesday, November 17, 2020.

The virtual seminar with the theme; *Focusing Journalism on Catalyzing Disability-Inclusive Electoral Process in Nigeria*, drew participants from the media, academia and CSOs.

Organized under the European Union Support To Democratic Governance in Nigeria, EU-SDGN, Project, the seminar had Dr Akin Akingbulu, Executive Director of IMS, Mr Jake Epelle, Founder and CEO of TAF, Mr Lanre Arogundade, Executive Director of IPC, Danlami Basharu, Director, Nigeria Welfare Association for the Blind, as panelists. IMS, TAF and IPC are implementing partners of the EU-SDGN project.

In his welcome remarks, Epelle said the media has a credible role to play in ensuring that PWDs would not only vote but be voted for during polls and urged participants to support the new thinking in this direction by embracing the change in the political slogan from, “free and fair elections,” to “inclusive, free and fair elections.”

For Arogundade, the IPC, in the course of implementing Component 4B of the EU-SDGN, project, which is support to the media (print and online), has held capacity building workshop for journalists on issues of inclusivity and

gender sensitive reportage. He expressed satisfaction that the webinar was coming at a period of Constitutional Amendment in the country whereby issues of inclusivity can be well articulated and canvassed for legislative consideration.

Dr Akingbulu in his opening speech, contextualized the webinar as a consolidation of IMS work on marginalized groups considering the many publications and presentation on inclusivity that had been undertaken by the organisation. He said that the Component 4A of the EU-SDGN project, which is support to the media (broadcast), as handled by IMS, also includes a part that deals exclusively with marginalization of people with disabilities, PWDs.

“Inclusion is a broader initiative. All persons with disability are entitled to all forms of rights in a democratic process and governance. But the reality shows that PDWs are purely ignored in the media in terms of enhancing their voices and their participation in the electoral process. That is why we decided to move the discussion to a higher level by organizing this webinar. One of the outcome of the webinar is to develop a constituency of journalists who will take inclusion as a passion and cover inclusivity issues rigorously in the electoral process”.

Malam Sani Suleiman, the Director of News at the Federal Radio Corporation of Nigeria, FRCN, Abuja, who represented the Director General, used the existing relationship between the station and The Albino Foundation on issues of inclusivity to show how the

media can set agenda on PWDs.

“Radio Nigeria”, he said, “ cooperated with Albino Foundation to ensure all their activities are covered and other people with albinism are invited to participate on programmes apart from those sponsored by TAF on our station.”

He urged the media to expand their coverage and reportage on the PWDs beyond election related issues to Constitutional Amendment matters so that the marginalized groups are represented in the democratization process in the country.

Three papers were presented after the opening remarks were taken. They were Salient Disability Gaps in Nigeria's Electoral Process: Observations From the Field. Epelle handled it. Mainstreaming Disability-inclusivity into Media Agenda at Elections, was done by Arogundade; Dr Akingbulu handled Focusing Journalism on Disability Inclusions: Lessons from International Good Practices, and Basharu spoke on Implementing the Discrimination Against Persons with Disability (Prohibition) Act: The Role of the Media.

Drawing from his field experiences, Epelle listed five gaps in Nigeria's electoral process that deals with issues of disability. According to him, they are; inadequate training and transportation of material for electoral and adhoc staff of INEC; inaccessibility of electoral materials and venues by PWDs; inadequate reportage of PWDs' participation before, during and after elections. Others are disability disaggregated data that are not captured at the polling units and the non-availability of sign language interpreters at polling and collation centers.

Arogundade upheld his position that PWDs are citizens in all countries by citing international instruments such as the United Nations Convention on the Rights of Person with Disabilities, which all countries, including Nigeria have ratified and local statutes such as the 1999 Constitution which confers rights on all citizens as well as the country's law on Discrimination Against Persons with Disabilities (Prohibition) Act, 2018.

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Though he observed some lacuna in the implementation of some of the laws, he urged journalists to study many of the global and local instruments on inclusion and disability to do robust reports on PWDs.

“For example, we need to be able to study the 2018 Act signed into law by President Buhari to be able to report adequately on PWDs in all spaces,” he said and disclosed that in pursuit of its involvement with inclusivity issues, the IPC produced a Charter on Election for the PWDs.

He drew the attention of participants to the fact that PWDs are a diverse group including people with albinism, people with leprosy, people with hearing impairment and stated that each group needed to be specially categorized and accommodated in the electoral process.

He called on the media to ensure the voices of PWDs are, as a matter of right, heard in their reportage; to provide the platform or open forum for PWDs to participate in the electoral debate; increase the frequency and prominence given to disability in the electoral process; use language of reporting that reckons with sensitivity to PWDs; avoid derogatory report.

International best practices on inclusivity with lessons for Nigeria was the topic handled by Dr Akingbulu, who compared broadcast regulations as it affects PWDs in countries in the European Union such as the United Kingdom, France, Australia, Canada, Portugal with what obtains in Nigeria.

He contended that though sections in the Nigeria Broadcasting Code including the recent Code 6 in Chapter 3, (38) 1 C, provided that broadcast stations shall ensure that the mentally and physically challenged are not presented in a manner that is embarrassing to them or the public, the media was still wanting in its reportage of the PWDs.

He buttressed his point, thus: “IMS has been involved in some monitoring work over a period of 18 months on electoral reform process in 2019. The work is in various parts. The final report provided information that was valuable. During the 2018-2019 elections in Nigeria, PWDs had 5.2 per cent visibility while other groups had 98 per cent visibility during the period”. He said the report concluded that it was like PWDs did not exist in media coverage during the period.

To refocus the discussion, he said international instruments such as the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and the African Continental Plan of Action on PWDs, 2010 to 2019 had sections urging the media to protect the interests of PWDs, raise awareness on issues affecting them and combat stereotypes. Other obligations on the media are that audio-visual commercial materials shall not discriminate against people on the basis of age, sexual orientation, religion and ethnicity.

“So in the global landscape, there are instruments that provide roles the media should play on PWDs,” he said, adding, “In France, the regulatory body since 2007 has been measuring media diversity annually through a diversity barometer and submitting reports to parliament. In Australia, the broadcasting law was reviewed to accommodate new developments such as advent of social media and then mandated all platforms to capture news on PWDs. Similar regulations happen in Canada and Portugal where obligation to take care of PWDs is a condition of the licensing procedure.

Accordingly, international media best practices on PWDs issues had been enhanced by enabling regulations as shown by the examples mentioned above.

What Are the Lessons for Nigeria? Akingbulu asked in the course of his discussion.

He answered.

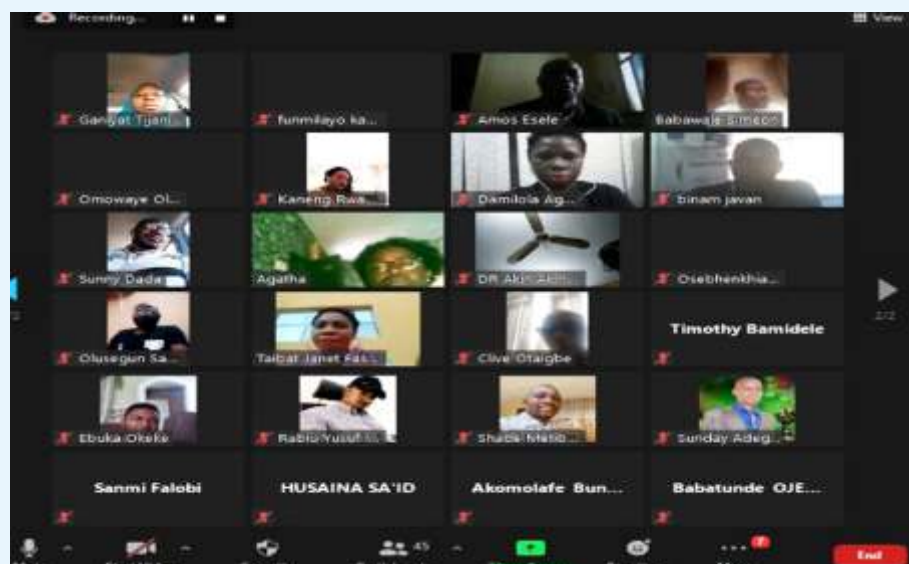
First, engagement on disability inclusion by the media flows well when policy and regulation go together. Second, regulation and practice are relevant when they are regularly updated. Third, good,

acceptable models are achieved in regulation and practice when stakeholders work together. Fourth, innovations are constantly emerging on the international scene. Regulators and practitioners should be alert to developments which they could regularly update to be relevant.

In his contribution, Basharu, urged the media to be more proactive than they have been on the coverage and reportage of PWDs. He said the African milieu with its heavy reliance on mystical and religious interpretation of occurrences fuels stereotyping and discrimination against PWDs, who are often seen as outcasts.

He urged the media to get their language right on issues relating to PWDs and called for a change in perception and notions about PWDs. He called for legislation that eliminate discriminatory policies and regulations in the country.

After a robust question-and-answer session handled by the moderator, Dr. Oludare Ogunyombo, the participants made the following recommendations. That a Journalism Group with strong interest for issues on PWDs be set up; the teaching of courses on PWDs in relevant departments of tertiary institution should be encouraged so that students get better perspectives of inclusivity issues and become ready advocate after graduation; the media and relevant NGOs should collaborate more on development reporting rather than special beats should be made to handle reports and coverage of PWDs activities.



Cont. from page 9

Professor Ojebode stated that in a survey IMS conducted 12 months to the 2019 polls, involving the Broadcasting Organisation of Nigeria, BON, the Nigeria Association of Women Journalists, NAWOJ, NUJ, Journalists, listeners and viewers across the country, the result showed that radio was the preferred choice of the electorate when it came to clarity of information, confirming the veracity of news and following up on stories.

This was closely followed by privately-owned TV stations and online mediums, which upload videos in addition to news materials.

The survey also found that Journalists were concerned with issues of security, staff welfare, requisite training and poor equipment.

A brief presentation on talking points on broadcast media elections coverage was also facilitated by Dr. Akin Akingbulu, Executive Director, IMS.

The four-hour programme was rounded off with a stakeholders' engagement and interactive session on the topic: "Re-focusing Perspectives: Proactive Measures to Ensure More Professional Reporting and Coverage of the Ondo Electoral Process".

At the end of the workshop participants made recommendations, highlighted as follows:

Recommendations:

*Journalists covering the

Ondo election would find it professionally enriching to read, digest and make use of the provisions of the Nigeria Media Code of Elections Coverage in reporting of the Ondo electoral process and the election;

* There was need for Journalists covering the Ondo elections to be guided by the Media code in professional and ethical coverage of the elections;

* The media needed to ensure that balanced reporting of all political parties is guaranteed and candidates are given equal access to the media.

*Journalists in Ondo State were urged to embrace and exhibit high standard of professionalism in order to earn and sustain public confidence.

* Journalists were enjoined to embrace the principle of multi-perspective in covering the elections, particularly in engaging and presenting all available views, opinions and perspectives;

* Journalists were urged to make their reports more inclusive and robust by providing platforms for the voiceless (youths, women, the poor, the needy, PWDs, etc);

* Journalists needed to explore the provisions of Freedom of Information Act (FOIA) in getting and disseminating correct information that would enable the citizenry make informed decisions and choices.

*Journalists covering the Ondo elections were advised to be conflict sensitive in reporting the elections;

* INEC was advised to make accreditation process for journalists covering the Ondo State Governorship Election a thorough one to ensure that fake journalists were not given accreditation.

* Security agencies were urged to provide adequate security for journalists during the upcoming Governorship Election.



L-R: Dr. Akingbulu of IMS, Prof. Ayobami Ojebode, University of Ibadan, Mr. Ayo Aluko-Olokun of IPC and Prof. Tokunbo Adaja, of Joseph Ayo Babalola University at IMS/IPC Media Stakeholder's Roundtable in Akure

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