

NEWSLETTER

DECEMBER 2023 - MAY 2024

2ND EDITION

Launching of the Maiden Edition of VDI Newsletter and 5-Year Strategic Plan



Newsletter Highlights

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VDI'S 4-DAY CONVERGENCE HERALDING THE TRANSFORMATIVE ONE-DAY STAKEHOLDERS MEETING IN ABUJA NIGERIA

In a triumphant celebration of the International Day of Persons with Disabilities, Voice of Disability Initiative orchestrated a captivating four days convergence of stakeholders from different parts of Nigeria in Abuja from 17th December (arrival date) to 20th December 2023 (departure date).

The period captured series of lined up activities which included Board and management meeting, stakeholders pre-event data validation meeting, M&E meeting, delegation visit to the National Commission for PWDS and the main event which is a one-day stakeholders meeting at Valencia Hotel, Abuja.

The event saw over 15 powerful stakeholders inclusive of BoTs from Lagos, Delta and Enugu, State Commissioners from Kwara, Ebonyi and Enugu, persons with disabilities and those in developmental work from the three project states (Kwara, Ebonyi and Enugu) and other from Abuja FCT converge in Abuja from 17th to 20th December.

On the 18th of Dec VDI also paid a visit to the ES of NCPWDS Hon. James Lalu, the esteemed Executive Secretary, who

lauded VDI's Board of Trustees and management team as exemplary ambassadors of disability inclusion in Nigeria. Acknowledging VDI's commendable initiatives across states, he expressed the Commission's unwavering support for VDI's impactful endeavors. This recognition stands testament to VDI's commitment to fostering inclusion and equity nationwide.



The ES, NCPWD with VDI BoTs and ED

The main event held on 19th December at Valencia Hotel Abuja unveiled a symphony of initiatives that resonate with progress and empowerment Featuring: The launch of VDI's 5-year Strategic Plan, Launch of Maiden Edition of VDI's Quarterly Newsletter, Launch of 2-Years AMPLIFYCHANGE supported SRHR Project and Presentation of Outcome of Stakeholders Engagement in Ebonyi, Kwara and Enugu States respectively.

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VDI Executive Director with BoTs, Executive Secretary NCPWD Hon. James Lulu and other powerful stakeholders

VDI pursues the principle of Inclusion and is guided by the mantra, nothing about us without us.

The initiatives resonate with progress, inclusion and empowerment. VDI's 5-Year Strategic Plan is a grand revelation of our visionary roadmap, charting a course for the next five years, symbolizing our unwavering commitment to inclusivity.

Our quarterly newsletter emerges as a beacon, illuminating stories, insights, progress, and updates that bind our community together.

The Launch of our two-year AMPLIFYCHANGE-supported project heralds a new era in advancing Sexual and Reproductive Health Rights for women and girls with disabilities.

Our stakeholders engagement delves into the consultation and documentation of SRHR violations faced by Girls and women with disabilities in Ebonyi, Kwara, and Enugu states. In attendance were luminaries of influence, which include The Executive Secretary of the National Commission of Persons with Disabilities (NCPWD), The Director of NCPWD, Mr Lawrence Idemudia, The indefatigable and insightful Kwara state Commissioner of information Comm. (Mrs) Bolanle Olukoju, former USAID Nigeria Development expert Madam Akparanta Emenogu, former Director of Personnel Management at National Assembly Abuja Dr Muhammed Umar, representative sent by NAPTIP and NHRC bosses, and a host of other dignitaries from FCT.

This harmonious collaboration echoes a resounding commitment to sculpting a future where every voice Matters.



Message from the Executive Director



The sexual and reproductive rights of women with disabilities is an important issue that requires attention. When it comes to sexual and reproductive health and rights (SRHR), women and girls with disabilities are the least likely to enjoy these. The barriers that women and girls with disabilities face to fulfilling sexual and reproductive health

and rights are further compounded by the variety and intensity of their disabilities; the more, severe the disability the greater the risk of exclusion. Each type of disability creates specific needs around which SRHR services and information must be tailored, meaning there is no one-size-fits-all approach to guaranteeing the realization of their SRHR. However, attention to these needs is rare, rendering the entire spectrum of sexual and reproductive health services inaccessible to women and girls with disabilities.

Several factors and norms that are discriminatory are continually upheld by families and communities. Healthcare providers instead of helping matters for our women, poses even more challenges that put us at greater risk of exclusion and higher mortality rate. Challenges in accessing healthcare services inclusive of accessible information, maternal health, reproductive health inclusive of family planning, etc are often encountered by women with disabilities on daily basis in Nigeria. Although the advocacy is currently gaining momentum to create awareness, a lot of work is needed in the area. Reason Voice of Disability Initiative (VDI) prioritizes raising awareness on the underlying issues and challenges faced by women and girls with disabilities, offers good practices in this area, as well as call stakeholders to action to advance the recognition and realization of these sexual and reproductive health and rights.

Women and girls with disabilities have the same sexual and reproductive health and rights as other girls and young women, as recognised in the Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC), the Convention on the Elimination of all Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW), and the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (CRPD), as well as in other international policy documents, including the Programme of Action of the International Conference on Population Development.

We further recognize the significant role of sanitation, water and hygiene (WASH) in sexual and reproductive health rights service delivery and realization to reduce health risks on our women and girls with disabilities in the areas of prevention and control of exposure to infections, healthy menstrual health, confronting harmful WASH related gender practices that affects SRHRs among others.

Consequently, VDI has been able to navigate the intersection from SRHR to WASH in the past months through series of project and activities implementation in partnership with other stakeholders, in pursuance of our mandate to advance the rights of women and girls with disabilities and confront harmful gender norms and other forms of GBV against our women as captured in this newsletter. With this I welcome you to the second edition of Voice of Disability Initiative Newsletter.

Sincere regards,
Edeh Catherine Esq
Executive Director

FROM THE BOT CHAIRMAN



Unlocking Potentials through Disability Inclusion In our diverse world,

VDI ardently commits to inclusivity, not just as a social duty but as the foundation of our shared strength. As the acting chair of VDI's Board of Trustees, I stress the vital importance of seamlessly integrating disability inclusion into our very essence. Disability inclusion isn't a mere concept; it's an undeniable truth that our collective power thrives in embracing every unique story. VDI stands as a beacon, advocating for environments that transcend barriers and welcome diverse abilities. Our call to action extends beyond words – it's an earnest invitation to potential donors, partners, and advocates to join this transformative journey. By cultivating an inclusive world, we amplify individual voices and the symphony of our shared humanity. Supporting disability inclusion and NGOs like VDI in advocating for an inclusive society contributes to building a world where every talent, irrespective of disability, is recognized and celebrated. Our vision isn't just an aspiration; it's a commitment to unlocking untapped potentials, reshaping a world where everyone stands on equal ground. Join VDI in this noble pursuit. Together, let's craft a narrative of empowerment that transcends limitations, fosters unity, and sets the stage for a future where disability inclusion is an everyday reality.

Voice of Disability Initiative (VDI) Welcomes Delegates from Wesley University, Ondo State



Voice of Disability Initiative had the esteemed privilege of hosting a delegation from Wesley University, Ondo State. Led by the Vice-Chancellor, Rt. Rev. Prof. Samuel Sunday Obeka, alongside the Deputy Vice-Chancellor, Dr. Edwards Oyekanmi, and other distinguished members of their team, the visit aimed at exploring collaboration and partnership opportunities to advance the institute's goals of inclusive education.

Building Momentum for the Year Ahead



In January, we had our first in-house meeting of the year to set the tone for all our upcoming activities for the year.

During the meeting, we delved into a myriad of topics aimed at maximizing the potentials of our staff and enhancing operations within the organization. From brainstorming sessions to strategic discussions, every moment was dedicated to charting a course for success in 2024.

Our discussions were comprehensive and forward-thinking, focusing on diagnosing, treating, and upgrading our work plans, policies, and operational modes for more effective outcomes. Through collaborative efforts and innovative thinking, we refined our strategies to ensure alignment with our mission and vision.

In addition to refining our organizational framework, the meeting served as a platform for sharing invaluable insights and lessons learned. Each team member brought their unique perspectives to the table, enriching our collective understanding, promoting a culture of continuous learning and growth.

With the enriching insights from various team leaders, we were invigorated and inspired to renew our vigour and commitment to making a meaningful impact in the year ahead. Armed with renewed purpose and clarity, we are poised to navigate the challenges and seize the opportunities that lie ahead, and making lasting impacts in the Nigerian society where the needs, and rights of women girls and children with disabilities are guaranteed without discrimination.

We are stronger as a Team, and together, we will continue to advance our mission of promoting inclusion and empowerment for persons with disabilities.

During the meeting, the Vice-Chancellor emphasized Wesley University's commitment to deaf education, boasting of a robust support system including 15 interpreters, as well as deaf lecturers and students. Recognizing the importance of fostering partnerships with organizations dedicated to enhancing deaf education and career prospects, the delegation sought out Voice of Disability Initiative for collaboration.

The discussions centered on areas of collaboration and partnership, aligning with VDI's mission and vision. Both parties expressed mutual enthusiasm and interest in working together to drive positive change in the field of inclusive education.



Wesley University VC and his team during the visit

As the deliberations concluded on a positive note, plans for further engagement and collaboration were set in motion. Stay tuned for more updates as we embark on this journey towards promoting inclusive education and empowering individuals with disabilities.

Voice of Disability Initiative Empowering Lives, Creating Opportunities

Recognizing Progress: Highlighting Success in Inclusive Education!

Share success stories and positive outcomes to inspire others and showcase the impact of inclusive education on students' lives.



The Voice of Disability Initiative (VDI) recently had the privilege of hosting the Deputy Vice Chancellor of Nassarawa State University (NSUK) and his esteemed team at the VDI headquarters. The purpose of their visit was to engage in discussions regarding potential collaboration between NSUK and VDI in establishing a support center for students with special needs.

Led by the Executive Director, Barr. Kate Edeh, the entire VDI team warmly received the NSUK delegation, reflecting the organization's commitment to fostering partnerships that advance disability inclusion in educational settings.

During the meeting, the Deputy Vice Chancellor expressed NSUK's keen interest in collaborating with VDI to establish a support center tailored to meet the needs of students with disabilities. He emphasized Nassarawa State's commitment to providing free education for persons with disabilities and reiterated the university's desire to ensure that NSUK becomes a welcoming and inclusive environment for all students, including those with special needs.

Barr. Kate Edeh, in her response, welcomed the NSUK delegation and commended their proactive approach towards promoting disability inclusion in higher education. She highlighted the importance of collaborative efforts between academic institutions and advocacy organizations like VDI in creating supportive environments that empower students with disabilities to thrive academically and socially.

As discussions progressed, both parties exchanged ideas and explored potential strategies for the establishment of the support center. Topics of discussion included accessibility enhancements, academic accommodations, student support services, and faculty training on disability awareness and inclusion.



The meeting concluded on a positive note, with both VDI and NSUK expressing enthusiasm for future collaboration. By working together, they aim to create an inclusive educational landscape where students with disabilities can fully access and benefit from higher education opportunities.

The visit from the NSUK delegation marks a significant milestone in VDI's ongoing efforts to promote disability inclusion in academic settings, and the organization looks forward to furthering this collaboration for the benefit of students with special needs.

VDI Explores Collaboration Opportunities with NAPTIP



Voice of Disability Initiative (VDI) took a significant step towards fostering collaboration and partnership as the team, led by the Executive Director, Barr. Catherine Edeh, paid a courtesy visit to the National Agency for the Prohibition of Trafficking in Persons (NAPTIP).

The purpose of the visit was to explore avenues for collaboration between VDI and NAPTIP in advancing disability inclusion effort across Nigeria. This initiative aligns with VDI's ongoing project focused on improving access to Sexual and Reproductive Health rights for women with disabilities, generously supported by AmplifyChange.

During the engaging discussions, both parties delved into various areas of potential collaboration. Key topics included the Sexual and Reproductive Health rights of women with disabilities, raising awareness and sensitization on Gender-Based Violence affecting women and girls with disabilities, combating child trafficking, and advocating for the implementation of Violence Against Persons Prohibition (VAPP) Laws in special schools. Additionally, strategies to address issues such as harassment and sexual exploitation of girls with disabilities were thoroughly examined.

In her opening remarks, Barr. Catherine Edeh expressed appreciation to the Deputy Director of NAPTIP for warmly receiving the VDI team. She commended NAPTIP for its commitment to accessibility and inclusion programs, noting the evident passion for disability inclusion within the organization and the current administration. Barr. Edeh emphasized the potential for significant impact through collaboration towards a common goal.

In response, Mrs. Tolu Odugbesan, the Deputy Director of NAPTIP, lauded Barr. Edeh for her leadership in championing disability inclusion in Nigeria. She echoed the sentiment that collaboration between NAPTIP and VDI holds great promise and affirmed the agency's commitment to supporting initiatives that promote disability rights and inclusion.

As both organizations look forward to future collaboration, the visit marks a pivotal moment in advancing the rights and inclusion of persons with disabilities in Nigeria.

Voice of Disability Initiative Empowering Lives, Creating Opportunities

VDI Forges Collaborative Partnership with Federal Ministry of Justice to Advance Disability Rights



Voice of Disability Initiative (VDI), under the leadership of Executive Director Barr. Catherine Edeh, recently embarked on a significant courtesy visit to the Federal Ministry of Justice (FMOJ). The team was graciously received by the esteemed Head of the Sexual and Gender-Based Violence Response Unit, Barr. Yewande Gbola-Awopetu, and her dedicated team, who represented the Permanent Secretary.

The primary objective of this visit was to forge closer ties with the FMOJ and explore potential areas of collaboration and push for a greater inclusive Nigeria. This initiative shows VDI's commitment to building partnerships that advance the rights and well-being of persons with disabilities across Nigeria. By engaging with key stakeholders like the FMOJ, VDI seeks to leverage collective efforts in addressing pertinent issues surrounding disability rights, legal frameworks, and access to justice.

During the productive meeting, Barr Gbola-Awopetu highlighted the difficulties in interpreting legal terminologies to a deaf while in court and also sought for support in the areas of basic sign language trainings as this will also make justice easily accessible to all especially the deaf and hard of hearing. Both parties exchanged insights and perspectives on various aspects related to disability rights and legal advocacy. VDI had the opportunity to familiarize itself with the functions and initiatives of the FMOJ, while also highlighting its own ongoing projects and advocacy efforts. This interaction laid the groundwork for future collaboration aimed at enhancing the legal and social inclusion of persons with disabilities within the justice system.

As an organization dedicated to championing the rights of persons with disabilities, VDI recognizes the pivotal role that partnerships play in effecting positive change. By collaborating with institutions like the FMOJ, VDI aims to drive meaningful impact and contribute to the creation of a more inclusive and equitable society for all.

“Effective communication underlies the entire legal process: ensuring that everyone involved understands and is understood. Otherwise the legal process will be impeded or derailed.”

VDI ADVOCACY & COURTESY VISITS (CONT'D)

VDI's Visit to FIDA Headquarters

On the 26th of February 2024, Voice of Disability Initiative (VDI) embarked on a visit to the headquarters of the International Federation of Women Lawyers (FIDA) to discuss potential collaborations and interventions concerning justice and issues affecting persons with disabilities (PWDs).

The purpose of the visit was to foster partnerships aimed at addressing challenges faced by PWDs within the legal framework. Mr. Fikili Obaro and his team graciously welcomed VDI representatives on behalf of the country representative.

During the meeting, fruitful discussions were held to explore avenues for collaboration and identify strategic interventions to enhance access to justice for PWDs. Both organizations expressed their commitment to promoting the rights and well-being of PWDs through collaborative efforts.

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VDI Strengthens Partnership with NHRC to Champion Disability Rights



Voice of Disability Initiative (VDI) recently embarked on a meaningful visit to the National Human Rights Commission (NHRC) with the aim of fostering collaboration and mutual understanding between the two organizations. Led by the esteemed Executive Director, Barrister Edeh, the VDI team was warmly received

by Director Obinna Nwankonye and his dedicated team on behalf of the Executive Secretary.

During the visit, Director Nwankonye highlighted the significance of such engagements in broadening the scope of the commission's work. This sentiment was echoed by Dr. Edward Ogenyi, VDI's Programs Manager, who emphasized the shared vision between VDI, a woman-led rights-based organization, and NHRC, a government agency tasked with coordinating rights-based matters, particularly for vulnerable populations.

The purpose of the meeting was twofold: to acquaint NHRC with VDI's mandate and to explore potential areas of collaboration.

Barrister Edeh highlighted the impact of NHRC's efforts nationwide, citing examples of increased accessibility for people with disabilities in higher education, including the field of law. She commended NHRC's commitment to inclusion, evident in its employment practices, which align with VDI's mission of promoting equal opportunities for all.

Discussions centred on:

1. Advocacy for the rights of persons with disabilities Leveraging NHRC's authority and expertise to advocate for the rights and inclusion of persons with disabilities.
2. Collaborating on training programs aimed at sensitizing stakeholders, including law enforcement agencies and legal practitioners, on disability rights and inclusive practices.
3. Collaborative efforts to advocate for the implementation and enforcement of disability inclusive policies
4. Collaborating on research initiatives to gather data on the prevalence of human rights violations against persons with disabilities and inform evidence-based advocacy efforts.
5. Jointly organizing campaigns and events to raise awareness about disability rights issues, challenge stereotypes, and promote inclusive attitudes and behaviours in society.

VDI Collaborates with Legal Aid Council of Nigeria to Promote Inclusive Justice



On April 17th, 2024, the VDI team, led by Program Manager Mr. Edward Ogenyi, embarked on an advocacy mission to the headquarters of the Legal Aid Council of Nigeria in Abuja.

Mr. S. A. Banjo, Director of Planning, Research, and Statistics, welcomed the VDI team on behalf of the Director-General. During the meeting, Mr. Banjo highlighted the Council's recognition of the unique challenges faced by women and girls with disabilities in accessing justice. He acknowledged the need for collaborative efforts to address systemic barriers and ensure equal access to legal services and protection under the law.

In response, the VDI team expressed appreciation for the Council's dedication to promoting inclusive justice.

Additionally, both parties explored the possibility of establishing referral networks to streamline access to legal assistance for PWDs. Overall, the meeting laid the groundwork for a fruitful partnership aimed at advancing the rights and well-being of persons with disabilities within Nigeria's legal system.

Promoting Inclusive Healthcare: VDI's Visit to the Ministry of Health



On the 19th of March, Voice of Disability Initiative (VDI) embarked on a significant visit to the Ministry of Health, where they engaged in constructive discussions with Dr. John Ovuoraye, Director of GASHE, and Madam Adaeze Ike, SNO on Gender.

The focal point of the meeting was to explore avenues for collaboration between VDI and the Ministry of Health, particularly in identifying and addressing barriers to healthcare access for persons with disabilities (PWDs). Discussions also delved into interventions and solutions aimed at enhancing healthcare services for PWDs and addressing their specific needs.

One of the key highlights of the discussion was the importance of adopting inclusive policies and practices within healthcare facilities to ensure equitable access to healthcare services for all individuals, regardless of disability status. Additionally, the meeting emphasized the need to address gender-specific healthcare needs of persons with disabilities, ensuring that healthcare services are tailored to meet their unique requirements.

VDI reiterated its commitment to partnering with the Ministry of Health to champion inclusive healthcare initiatives and advocate for the rights and well-being of persons with disabilities within the healthcare system.

VDI Courtesy Visit to National Agency for the Control of AIDS (NACA)



On the 4th of April 2024, VDI had the privilege of paying a courtesy visit to the National Agency for the Control of AIDS (NACA) to build collaboration and address the intersectionality of disability and HIV/AIDS within Nigeria's public health framework.

The director of NACA, Mrs. Temitope Illori and her esteemed team warmly received VDI representatives.

During the courtesy visit, led by Executive Director Barrister Catherine, VDI outlined its purpose of familiarizing NACA with its work and exploring potential collaboration opportunities. Fruitful discussions ensued, focusing on advocating for the inclusion of disability perspectives in HIV/AIDS prevention, treatment, and support programs. Additionally, opportunities for partnership in raising awareness about HIV/AIDS among persons with disabilities (PWDs) were explored, alongside strategies to enhance their access to HIV/AIDS services and support across Nigeria.

The meeting served as a platform for meaningful dialogue, addressing barriers faced by PWDs in accessing HIV/AIDS services, such as stigma, discrimination, and physical accessibility. Best practices and innovative approaches were shared to ensure inclusive HIV/AIDS programming that caters to the diverse needs of PWDs. The importance of collaboration between VDI and NACA to promote disability-inclusive policies and initiatives in the fight against HIV/AIDS was emphasized.

The visit resulted in several positive outcomes, including agreement on the need for joint efforts to mainstream disability inclusion in NACA's HIV/AIDS programs and policies. Both parties committed to ongoing collaboration to ensure the voices and needs of PWDs are integrated into national HIV/AIDS strategies. Potential areas for partnership, including advocacy campaigns, capacity building initiatives, and research collaborations, were identified.

Together, VDI and NACA are poised to advance inclusive approaches in combating HIV/AIDS and promoting the well-being of all individuals.

VDI Collaborates with Christian Blind Mission

On 12th of April 2024 vdi's Team led by the Executive director Barr Kate Edeh paid a courtesy visit to Christain Blind Mission (CBM). The purpose of the visit is to familiarize with CBM and seek Collaboration. CBM acting country Director, Mr Omoi Ozovehe and team received VDI team warmly. He acknowledge VDI's efforts and express CBM's readiness for a strategic collaboration, indicating a promising future ahead.



Courtesy visit to CBM

Boost for Inclusive HIV Response in Nigeria: VDI and UNAIDS Chart the Way Forward



The advocacy for an inclusive HIV response in Nigeria gained significant momentum on May 18, 2024, as the Voice of Disability Initiative (VDI) team met with UNAIDS to plan future strategies. During the meeting, VDI's Executive Director, Barr. Catherine Edeh, highlighted the specific challenges faced by women with disabilities living with HIV. She emphasized the widespread ignorance and denial of HIV status among people with disabilities, underscoring the urgent need for targeted interventions in Nigeria.

Barr. Edeh called for inclusive policies and programs that address the intersection of HIV and disability, while expressing gratitude to AMPLIFYCHANGE for their support.

In response, Dr. Gabriel Udelikwo, UNAIDS Community Mobilization Advisor, welcomed the VDI team on behalf of the UNAIDS Country Coordinator and praised their initiative. He assured the team of UNAIDS's unwavering support. Additionally, Barr. Fisayo Fakayode, UNAIDS Advisor on Human Rights and Laws, commended VDI for being the voice of the voiceless, affirming that disability inclusion in the national HIV response remains a top priority for UNAIDS.

INTERNATIONAL WOMEN'S DAY 2024



In a significant event held on March 13th, 2024, VDI hosted an Interactive Session aimed at assessing the progress of the implementation of the Discrimination Against Persons with Disability (Prohibition) Act 2018. This session, generously funded by AMPLIFYCHANGE, was part of the activities organized to mark the 2024 International Women's Day.

The gathering saw the presence of esteemed personalities, including VDI's Executive Director, Barrister Catherine Edeh, alongside other distinguished figures such as Barrister Florence Marcus, Barrister Toyin Falaiye, Barrister Dumitri Prophen, and Barrister Calister Ugwuaneke. Notable figures like Queen Janet of Ability Plus TV, Ms Avir Akighir, and Ms Constance Nneka Onyemaechi, among others, graced the occasion with their presence.

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During the session, participants engaged in a thorough evaluation of the implementation of the Discrimination Against Persons with Disability (Prohibition) Act 2018. They identified several challenges and issued calls to action, urging:

- i. The Federal Ministry of Works & Housing, The Nigerian Institute of Quantity Surveyors, Surveyors Council of Nigeria, and Nigerian Institute of Estate Surveyors & Valuers to enforce accessibility standards for public structures, facilitate the modification of public buildings, and approve building plans in accordance with the provisions of the Act.
- ii. The Federal Civil Service Commission, Office of the Head of Civil Service of the Federation, Federal Ministry of Labour and Employment, and other relevant agencies to monitor the fulfillment of the 5% employment quota for persons with disabilities, with specific attention to gender considerations such as allocating 3% of employment opportunities for women and 2% for men with disabilities.
- ii. The Federal Civil Service Commission, Office of the Head of Civil Service of the Federation, Federal Ministry of Labour and Employment, and other relevant agencies to monitor the fulfillment of the 5% employment quota for persons with disabilities, with specific attention to gender considerations such as allocating 3% of employment opportunities for women and 2% for men with disabilities.

The session underscored the imperative for all government agencies at the federal and state levels, as well as inclusive of the private sector, to embrace and uphold the principles outlined in the Discrimination Against Persons with Disability (Prohibition) Act 2018, ensuring its comprehensive implementation

As a non-governmental organization dedicated to advocating for the rights of persons with disabilities, particularly women and girls, the Voice of Disability Initiative (VDI) stands ready to collaborate and form partnerships aimed at addressing existing knowledge gaps and facilitating the full realization of the Act's objectives.



EMPOWERING DEAF LEARNERS IN INCLUSIVE EDUCATION



Barr Catherine Edeh, the Executive Director of VDI was a keynote speaker at the recent International Conference at Wesley University, Ondo State.

She spoke on the "Inclusion of Deaf learners in Mainstream Education" highlighting the importance of inclusive education for deaf students, and also emphasizing the need for support and resources to ensure their success in mainstream settings.



As we embark on the journey into the first quarter of 2024, we are reminded of the profound wisdom captured in the proverb: "Perseverance leads to victory." This timeless adage encapsulates the essence of our work here at Voice of Disability Initiative.

At VDI, we are committed to the pursuit of inclusion and empowerment for individuals with disabilities. We

understand that progress often requires unwavering dedication and resilience in the face of challenges. Just as the proverb suggests, we firmly believe that by persevering through, we can ultimately achieve triumph.

As we set sail into the new year, we do so with a clear vision and ambitious goals. We are determined to navigate through the currents of change, advocating for inclusion, accessibility, equality, empowerment and dignity for all.

From initiatives aimed at promoting inclusive education to campaigns focused on breaking down barriers in employment, each endeavour is a proof to our steadfast commitment to promoting a more inclusive society.

With the support of our dedicated partners and allies, we are confident that we can turn our aspirations into tangible victories. Together, let us march forward with courage, conviction, and unwavering perseverance, knowing that every step brings us closer to our shared vision of a world where every individual, regardless of ability, can thrive.

Here's to a year filled with progress, growth, and triumphs. Together, we can make it happen.

Dr. Edward Ogenyi
Programs Coordinator

VDI IN THE NEWS

UNILORIN to institutionalise Disability Day-VC

By Tajudeen Babamale

In a move towards supporting individuals with one form of disability or the other, the Vice Chancellor of the University of Ilorin, Prof. Wahab Egbewole, SAN, has announced plans for the University to institutionalise a disability or programme in the institution. This initiative aims to spotlight issues affecting people living with disabilities in Nigeria.

Prof. Egbewole unveiled this while playing host to a team from the Voice of Disability Initiative (VDI) last week (November 21, 2023) which paid a courtesy visit in his office.

The Vice Chancellor, who explained that the visit reinforced the University's standing as a bastion of inclusive education, commended the group on its efforts.

Prof. Egbewole said that he was delighted that some distinguished alumni of the University of Ilorin were part of the visiting team as he welcomed them to the University.

Assuring VDI of the University's commitment, Prof. Egbewole pledged to partner with the organisation in executing the VDI programmes at the University of Ilorin and the larger Ilorin community.

He, however, advocated extension of collaboration to the Disability Law Advocate Project of the Faculty of Law and the Centre for Supportive Services of the University of Ilorin for better service delivery.

The Vice Chancellor highlighted the University's proactive stance towards changing the institution's Centre for Supportive Services for the Deaf to a more comprehensive Centre for Supportive Services for Persons with Disability.

The UNILORIN's Chief Executive Officer said that the University is also forging a partnership with the Joint Admissions and Matriculation Board (JAMB) for the purpose of advancing inclusive education.

Prof. Egbewole reiterated the University's readiness to provide facilities that would assist students with disabilities during JAMB examinations.

Anticipating a fruitful collaboration, the Vice Chancellor expressed hope that the two-year stay of VDI in Ilorin would foster a stronger synergy between the organisation and the University of Ilorin as he said that such a relationship would solidify their joint commitment to inclusive education.

Earlier, the Executive Director of the Voice of Disability Initiative (VDI), Barr. Edeh Catherine, said that her team came to solicit for support of the Vice Chancellor and his management team in realising the group's mandates.



■ A Delegate from Voice of Disability Initiative led by Its Executive Director, Barr. Catherine Edeh

She said that the VDI would be implementing a two years project (2023-2025) in Kwara State on the rights of persons living with disability especially women and girls, adding that the project will be funded by AMPLIFYCHANGE, a UK-based International development organization.

Barr. Catherine, who is a law graduate of the University of Ilorin, recalled the University's pioneering role in disability inclusion, breaking protocols to accommodate individuals with disabilities, even in professional courses like law and medicine.

Reflecting on her own experience, Barr. Catherine recalled that the University of Ilorin uniquely supported her pursuit of law despite her disability, unlike some other universities in Nigeria that often redeploy students living with disability to study special education.

She said that the University of Ilorin is a beacon of hope and that as a product of both the University of Ilorin and Kwara State, VDI considers the University a potential beneficiary of grants.

The VDI Executive Director said that the grant, which originated from a UK-based organisation, focuses on projects in Enugu, Kwara, and Ebonyi States.

Barr. Catherine noted that the group had previously spent 18 months in Enugu, observing varying levels of passion for inclusive disability initiatives across regions.

Before arriving in Ilorin, the VDI team was pleasantly surprised to find that Kwara state is one of Nigeria's leading States prioritising disability law, despite the law's pending implementation.

In the process of identifying stakeholders to support their cause, Barr. Catherine singled out the Vice Chancellor of the University of Ilorin, a Professor of Jurisprudence and International Law, as a passionate advocate for people with disabilities and the University itself.

Also speaking, the Programme Manager of the Voice of Disability Initiative (VDI), Mr Edward Ogenyi, expressed admiration for the University of Ilorin's

inclusive programmes and its treatment of people with disabilities.

Speaking about the success of the University's policies, Ogenyi highlighted the potential for other institutions to learn from the virtues embedded in UNILORIN's approach.

Mr Ogenyi explained that VDI has a two-year grant for its project as he emphasised the need to collaborate with key allies for success.

In this context, he opined that the University of Ilorin is considered a formidable partner, aligning with VDI's mission to promote inclusivity and advocate for the rights of individuals with disabilities.

On his part, the VDI Focal Person for Kwara State, Dr O.K. Ogungbade, expressed gratitude to the Vice Chancellor for his instrumental role in ensuring the continuity of the University's inclusive education policy.

Dr Ogungbade, a former Interpreter at the University and now a lecturer in the institution shared his personal connection to the initiative.

Acknowledging Prof. Egbewole's contributions as a lecturer in the Faculty of Law, Dr Ogungbade highlighted jurisprudence as a crucial area of collaboration between VDI and UNILORIN as he noted that the focus is on ensuring that the University continues to play a pivotal role in implementing the disability law passed by the Kwara State House of Assembly.

The Vice Chancellor was joined by the Deputy Vice Chancellor (Management Services), Prof. Suleiman Funsho Ambali; the representative of the Ag. Bursar, Mr. Abiodun Lawal; the Principal Assistant Registrar, Office of the Vice Chancellor, Mrs Azeezat Ibrahim; to receive the VDI team.

Other members of the visiting team were the Consultant for Mapping, Mr Douglas Izuu; the Communication Officer, Mr Samson Ayodeji, and the Sign Language Interpreter, Miss Joy Olojede.

VDI Advocates for the Passing of Disability Bill into Law in Ebonyi State



The push for a disability rights law in Ebonyi State has gained significant momentum as advocacy groups Voice of Disability Initiative (VDI) and the Ebonyi State chapter of the Joint National Association of Persons with Disabilities (JONAPWD) have urged the state government to enact the Disability Bill.

During a meeting with the Speaker of the Ebonyi State House of Assembly on December 1, 2023, Barrister Catherine Edeh, Executive Director of VDI, emphasized the importance of legal protections for people with disabilities. She pointed out that the ongoing two-year project in Ebonyi State, supported by AMPLIFYCHANGE, can only achieve its intended impact if there is a law safeguarding the rights of persons with disabilities.



Barr Edeh's appeal resonated with the Speaker, who assured a prompt legislative process for the bill. She stressed that advocacy and initiatives for disability rights are most effective when led by persons with disabilities (PWDs) themselves, embodying the principle of "Nothing About Us Without Us." This slogan emphasizes belief that policies and decisions affecting PWDs should not be made without their direct involvement and input.

This advocacy effort highlights the critical need for formal legal protections to ensure that persons with disabilities in Ebonyi State have their rights recognized and upheld. The passage of the Disability Bill would represent a significant step toward achieving equality and inclusion for the disabled community, empowering them to contribute fully to society.



VDI Team Participates in "Kick Cancer" Walk

On the 3rd of February, the VDI team joined the "Kick Cancer" walk event organized by Project PINK BLUE at Transcorp Hotels, Abuja. This initiative aimed to raise awareness and support for cancer patients, showcasing our commitment to health advocacy and community support.



Deaf E3 International Conference, Wuye Abuja.

On the 13th of March, The Executive Director of Voice of Disability Initiative, Barrister Catherine Edeh was at the Deaf E3 International Conference, themed "Strengthening Deaf Education, Empowerment, and Employment." The event was organized by Gallaudet University in collaboration NNAD and USAID.

VDI is one of the local NGOs recognized by Gallaudet University in partnership with USAID for the Conference where the ED was invited to present an award of excellence to the US based partner in recognition of their inclusive work in Nigeria



UN Women Orange the World Event held at Reiz Continental Hotel, Abuja tagged Eliminate VAWG on 14th December, 2023



VDI representatives at the Commissioning of TLM Wellness Connect Call Centre held on 25th April, 2024

On the 9th of May, VDI team was at the UN house, for "Accessing the Landscape of VAWG" Organized by UN Women with support from Ford Foundation.

VDI team was present at the "Review of an interactive peer to peer and advocacy Toolkit for ASHWAN" event organized By ASHWAN with support from UNwomen on 16th and 17th May 2024 at Chelsea Hotel Abuja.



AT VDI, WE SPEAK INCLUSION AND EQUITY