

**REPORT OF A TWO-DAY STAKEHOLDERS ENGAGEMENT MEETING WITH
MDAs AND CSOs ON BREAKING BARRIERS FOR INCLUSIVE EDUCATION FOR
PERSONS WITH DISABILITIES IN BENUE STATE**



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1.0 EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

HealthMedic Support Initiatives (HMSI) convened a two-day Stakeholders' Engagement Meeting with Ministries, Departments and Agencies (MDAs), Civil Society Organizations (CSOs), Organizations of Persons with Disabilities (OPDs), development partners, education stakeholders, school administrators, traditional and religious leaders, and the media as part of the "Breaking Barriers for Inclusive Education for Persons with Disabilities (PWDs) in Benue State" initiative. The engagement aimed to strengthen multi-sectoral collaboration, promote policy dialogue, and develop practical strategies to address the persistent barriers limiting access to equitable, quality, and inclusive education for children and young persons with disabilities across Benue State.



Opening session

The two-day engagement provided a platform for evidence-based discussions on the present status of inclusive education in Benue State, enabling stakeholders to critically examine policy implementation, institutional capacities, service delivery gaps, and opportunities for strengthening collaboration. Through keynote presentations, technical sessions, panel discussions, plenary deliberations, group work, and interactive question-and-answer sessions, participants identified the structural, institutional, financial, socio-cultural, and pedagogical barriers preventing learners with disabilities from fully participating in education.

Key issues highlighted during the discussions included the poor accessibility of public and Private schools due to the absence of ramps, accessible toilets, handrails, and other disability-friendly facilities; inadequate availability of Braille textbooks, sign language interpreters, hearing aids, and other assistive technologies; limited numbers of teachers trained in inclusive education methodologies; weak coordination among government institutions responsible for education, disability affairs, and social protection; insufficient funding for inclusive education initiatives; and persistent negative attitudes and misconceptions that contribute to discrimination and low school enrolment and retention among children with disabilities.

Participants emphasized that inclusive education is both a human rights obligation and a strategic investment in sustainable development. Deliberations underscored the importance of shifting from isolated interventions to a coordinated, systems-strengthening approach that integrates disability inclusion into education planning, budgeting, infrastructure development, teacher professional development, curriculum adaptation, data management, and community engagement. Stakeholders also highlighted the need to ensure the meaningful participation of persons with disabilities and their representative organizations in policy formulation, implementation, monitoring, and evaluation.

The engagement resulted in a shared understanding of the urgent actions required to strengthen inclusive education in Benue State. Participants agreed on priority interventions, including strengthening the implementation of existing inclusive education policies; improving accessibility standards in schools; integrating disability-inclusive budgeting into state education financing; expanding teacher training on inclusive pedagogy; improving the provision of assistive devices and accessible learning materials; strengthening disability-disaggregated education data systems; promoting sustained public awareness campaigns to address stigma and discrimination; and institutionalizing regular coordination and policy dialogue among MDAs, CSOs, OPDs, and development partners.

The meeting further strengthened collaboration between government institutions and civil society organizations by clarifying institutional roles and responsibilities and establishing a framework for ongoing engagement. Stakeholders committed to supporting joint advocacy initiatives, conducting periodic monitoring of policy implementation, strengthening referral and support mechanisms for learners with disabilities, mobilizing resources for inclusive education programmes, and promoting accountability through regular review meetings and evidence-based reporting.

The engagement contributed to a push to improve policy implementation, stronger institutional coordination, increased investment in disability-inclusive education, enhanced teacher capacity, improved accessibility of learning environments, and greater community awareness of the rights of persons with disabilities. These outcomes are anticipated to increase school enrolment, retention, participation, and learning outcomes for children and young persons with disabilities across Benue State while advancing the state's commitment to equitable and inclusive education.

In conclusion, the two-day Stakeholders' Engagement Meeting represented a significant milestone in advancing disability-inclusive education in Benue State. It reaffirmed the collective commitment of government, civil society, OPDs, and development partners to dismantle systemic barriers to education and to work collaboratively towards creating an education system where every learner, regardless of disability, can access, participate in, and benefit from quality education in a safe, inclusive, and enabling environment. The resolutions and commitments reached during the meeting provide a practical roadmap for sustained advocacy, policy implementation, institutional strengthening, and coordinated action toward achieving inclusive education and ensuring that no child is left behind.

2.0 OBJECTIVES OF THE MEETING

2.1 Overall Objective

To strengthen multi-stakeholder collaboration and commitment towards promoting inclusive education for persons with disabilities in Benue State.

2.2 Specific Objectives

1. Increase awareness of disability-inclusive education principles and policies.
2. Identify barriers hindering access to quality education for learners with disabilities.
3. Strengthen collaboration among MDAs, CSOs, OPDs, and development partners.
4. Promote policy dialogue and accountability for inclusive education implementation.
5. Develop actionable recommendations for improving inclusive education systems.

3.0 METHODOLOGY

HMSI and ELIM adopted a multi-stakeholder engagement approach to ensure that the identified barriers were discussed with actors responsible for education planning, implementation, monitoring, and disability inclusion. Relevant government Ministries, Departments and Agencies, education stakeholders, school representatives, CSOs, Organizations of Persons with Disabilities (OPDs), and community stakeholders were engaged through advocacy visits and a two-day stakeholder engagement meeting. The engagements provided an opportunity to share assessment findings, discuss the challenges affecting learners with disabilities, identify practical solutions, clarify stakeholder responsibilities, and strengthen collaboration around inclusive education.

The meeting adopted a participatory and inclusive approach consisting of:

- Opening ceremony and stakeholder introductions.
- Technical presentations on disability-inclusive education.
- Policy review sessions.
- Group work and thematic discussions.
- Experience sharing by persons with disabilities.
- Plenary sessions for validation of recommendations.
- Development of stakeholder commitments and action points.

The methodology ensured active participation from all stakeholder groups and promoted collective ownership of recommendations.

4.0 PARTICIPANTS

The engagement brought together representatives from:

- Benue State Ministry of Education.
- Ministry of Justice.
- Ministry of Health.
- National Association for Persons with Disabilities
- Organizations of Persons with Disabilities (OPDs).
- Civil Society Organizations.
- National Association of Proprietors (NAPs)

- Development partners.
- Media organizations.

5.0 DAY ONE PROCEEDINGS

Opening Session

The meeting commenced with opening remarks from HMSI and ELIM management, emphasizing the importance of inclusive education as a fundamental right and a critical component of sustainable development. Participants highlighted the need for stronger collaboration to address the educational exclusion experienced by persons with disabilities.

Technical Session 1: Understanding accessibility standards and assistive infrastructure in schools, presented by Mis Benedicta Kave:

Key Issues Highlighted

- Disability Awareness and models to inclusive education.
- Rights-based approaches to disability inclusion.
- Negative societal attitudes towards disability.
- Lack of Disability inclusive Infrastructure
- Terminologies for PWDs



Facilitation from the Organization of Persons with Disability

Technical Session 2: National and State Policy Frameworks Supporting Inclusive Education presented by the representative of the Joint Association of Persons with Disabilities (JONAPWD):

- National and international legal frameworks.
- The role of government and non-state actors.
- Weak implementation of existing frameworks.

Technical Session 3: Barriers to Inclusive Education:

The Representative of OPDs narrated her experience as a person with disability and went further to highlight major barriers to inclusive education including:

1) Structural Barriers

- Inaccessible school buildings.
- Lack of ramps and accessible toilets.
- Poor transportation systems.

2) Institutional/Systematic Barriers

- Insufficient specialized learning materials.
- Lack of assistive devices.
- Inadequate teacher competencies.

3) Social Barriers

- Stigma and discrimination.
- Low parental awareness.
- Cultural misconceptions regarding disability.

6.0 DAY TWO PROCEEDINGS

Stakeholder Dialogue Session

Participants engaged in discussions on strengthening institutional responses and improving policy implementation.

Key Discussion Areas:

- ***Inclusive education financing:*** It was highlighted that government over the years have been negligent in addressing issues of disability inclusive education in Benue State, hence the need to advocate strongly in allocating budgets towards its policy implementation.
- ***Teacher capacity strengthening:*** Stakeholders identified limited and/or a lack of trained special educators employed in schools thereby limiting inclusion amongst schools in Benue State.
- ***Disability responsive school infrastructure:*** From evidence, it was clear that 95% of schools in Benue State do not have disability inclusive structures and assistive aids for persons with disability. This has led to a lack of school enrolment for PWDs.
- ***Data collection and disability disaggregation:*** As stated by JONAPWD, there is no evidence of the actual data of PWDs in the state.
- ***Community awareness campaigns:*** With limited awareness of the disability laws, it was agreed that continuous advocacy and awareness be conducted across state actors to influence implementation.



Key discussion sessions by participants

7.0 Group Work Sessions

Participants were to be divided into thematic groups to develop recommendations on addressing the key barriers to inclusive education in the state. But from a consensus deliberation, stakeholders were able to identify the following key gaps:

- Awareness of disability-inclusive education remains low among many stakeholders.
- Schools lack adequate disability-friendly infrastructure.
- Teachers require specialized training to support learners with disabilities.
- Coordination among stakeholders requires strengthening.
- Budgetary allocations for inclusive education are insufficient.
- Disability data remains inadequate for evidence-based planning.
- Stigma and discrimination continue to limit educational access.
- Ultimately, there has been government negligence in addressing issues around inclusive education in the state.

Consequently, a joint stakeholder advocacy committee headed by the Ministry of Education was formed to stimulate actions towards implementation and adoption of the disability laws and policies across public and private schools in Benue State.



Consensus deliberation on gaps in inclusive education in Benue State

8.0 STAKEHOLDER COMMITMENTS

At the conclusion of the engagement, stakeholders committed to:

Ministry of Education

- Strengthen implementation of inclusive education policies.
- Support disability-inclusive planning processes.

Civil Society Organizations

Represented by CSACEFA, committed to:

- Intensify advocacy and accountability efforts.
- Conduct community awareness campaigns.

Organizations of Persons with Disabilities

Represented by JONAPWD, committed to:

- Participate actively in policy dialogue.
- Support monitoring of inclusive education initiatives.

Development Partners

- Explore technical and financial support opportunities.
- Facilitate knowledge-sharing platforms.

Parents Teachers Association (PTA):

- Intensify sensitization of PTA members on disability inclusion laws and policies

Bureau for International Cooperation and Development (BICD):

- Push for enforcement by liaising with the office of the Benue State Secretary General to convey a meeting with all line ministries within the state.

National Association of Proprietors (NAPs):

- Committed to support the implementation of the project at all levels.

9.0 RESULTS ACHIEVED

Indicator	Target	Achieved
Stakeholder meeting conducted	2	2
Participants engaged	15	25
MDAs represented	10	12
CSOs represented	2	3
School Proprietors	4	2
Parents of PWDs	2	2
Media	1	1
PTA	1	2
Stakeholder commitments secured	5	11
Action recommendations developed	5	8

10.0 SUCCESS STORY

Strengthening Government Commitment to Inclusive Education

One of the significant outcomes of the engagement was the commitment expressed by key government stakeholders to prioritize inclusive education within sector planning processes. Representatives from relevant MDAs and CSOs acknowledged existing gaps and pledged to strengthen coordination mechanisms and improve accessibility within public and private schools in the state. This commitment represents an important step toward ensuring that children and learners with disabilities can access quality education without discrimination.

A Joint Stakeholder Action Plan and Partnership framework was established with a five-man committee formed to facilitate advocacy and influence policy action for the implementation of disability inclusive laws in the state.

11.0 LESSONS LEARNED

- Multi-sector collaboration is critical for advancing inclusive education.
- Persons with disabilities must be actively involved in decision-making processes.
- Continuous stakeholder engagement will strengthen ownership and sustainability.
- Evidence-based advocacy enhanced positive responsiveness on policy implementation gaps.
- Capacity building remains essential for effective implementation.

12.0 CHALLENGES

The challenges towards enforcement as identified by stakeholders include:

- Limited funding for accessibility interventions.
- Insufficient disability disaggregated education data.
- Inadequate specialized educational resources.
- Persistent stigma and discrimination.
- Weak coordination among some government and education stakeholders.

These challenges demonstrated that inclusive education is not only an education sector issue but a broader development and social inclusion concern. The barriers are interconnected, and addressing one challenge without addressing others may produce limited results.

Instances such as training teachers without providing accessible infrastructure or adapted learning materials may not sufficiently improve participation. Similarly, improving infrastructure without addressing stigma and discriminatory attitudes may leave learners socially excluded.

The stakeholders therefore emphasized the need for a coordinated, adequately resourced, whole-school and whole-community approach and a immediate action carried out by the Joint Stakeholder Action Committee.

13.0 RECOMMENDATIONS

From the gaps identified by relevant stakeholders in the state, it is recommended that there is need to:

1. Increase budget allocations for inclusive education.
2. Improve accessibility of public schools.
3. Institutionalize teacher training on inclusive education.
4. Strengthen disability data collection systems.
5. Enhance collaboration among government and non-state actors.
6. Support provision of assistive learning devices.
7. Conduct regular monitoring and evaluation of inclusive education initiatives.
8. Increase community awareness on disability rights and inclusion.

14.0 CONCLUSION

In conclusion, the Two-Day Stakeholders Engagement Meeting successfully strengthened dialogue, collaboration, advocacy, and shared responsibility for advancing inclusive education for persons with disabilities in Benue State. It provided a valuable platform for stakeholders to examine existing barriers, share experiences, identify practical solutions, and establish a stronger basis for coordinated action.

While the meeting alone cannot resolve the structural and systemic challenges affecting inclusive education, it has contributed to creating the partnerships, awareness, evidence, commitments, and advocacy momentum required for sustained progress.

HMSI/ELIM recognizes that the journey toward fully inclusive education is a continuous one. The commitments and recommendations emerging from this engagement therefore provide a

foundation for subsequent advocacy, programming, resource mobilization, and institutional action.

Ultimately, the success of inclusive education will be measured not simply by the number of children with disabilities enrolled in school, but by whether they can enter school safely, participate meaningfully, learn effectively, interact without discrimination, receive appropriate support, and complete their education with dignity and equal opportunity.

HMSI and ELIM remains committed to working alongside government institutions, education authorities, schools, teachers, OPDs, CSOs, communities, parents, and development partners to translate the outcomes of this engagement into sustained action and measurable improvements for learners with disabilities across Benue State.

Photos



