

ADVOCACY, AWARENESS, AND SENSITIZATION PROGRAMS FOR AI INCLUSION OF PERSONS WITH DISABILITIES IN NIGERIA

Presented by

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Introduction

In an increasingly digital world, Artificial Intelligence (AI) is reshaping how societies function, learn, and communicate. While AI offers immense potential to enhance education, healthcare, employment, and social participation, persons with disabilities (PWDs) in Nigeria remain largely excluded from these advancements due to systemic barriers, infrastructural deficits, and limited awareness. The UNIZIK Digital Inclusion Team recognizes the urgent need to bridge this gap through targeted advocacy, awareness, and sensitization programs that promote digital inclusion and equitable access to AI technologies.

This proposal outlines a comprehensive framework for a roundtable discussion and subsequent programs aimed at fostering inclusive digital environments. It seeks to educate stakeholders—government agencies, academic institutions, civil society, and the private sector—on the rights of persons with disabilities and the transformative role AI can play in improving their quality of life. By addressing cultural stigma, policy gaps, and technological exclusion, the initiative aims to catalyze a national movement toward inclusive innovation.



Background and Rationale

According to the World Bank, approximately 7% of Nigerians above the age of five experience some form of functional difficulty, with higher prevalence among older adults. Despite the enactment of the Discrimination Against Persons with Disabilities (Prohibition) Act in 2018, enforcement remains weak, and many institutions lack the capacity or commitment to implement inclusive policies. Persons with disabilities continue to face barriers in education, employment, healthcare, and civic participation.

AI technologies—such as speech-to-text converters, predictive learning platforms, and assistive communication devices—have proven effective in supporting individuals with visual, auditory, cognitive, and motor impairments. However, these tools are underutilized in Nigeria due to infrastructural deficits, high costs, and limited awareness. Without deliberate efforts to promote inclusion, the digital divide will widen, leaving PWDs further marginalized.

The UNIZIK Digital Inclusion Team proposes a multi-stakeholder advocacy and sensitization program to address these challenges. The initiative will focus on raising awareness, building institutional capacity, and promoting policy reform to ensure that AI technologies are accessible, affordable, and inclusive.

Objectives

1. **To raise awareness** about the rights of persons with disabilities and the importance of digital inclusion.
2. **To educate stakeholders** on the potential of AI technologies to enhance accessibility and independence for PWDs.
3. **To promote policy dialogue** and institutional commitment toward inclusive digital practices.
4. **To foster partnerships** among academia, government, civil society, and the private sector for sustainable inclusion.
5. **To develop a roadmap** for integrating AI tools into educational, healthcare, and employment systems for PWDs.

Program Components

1. Roundtable Discussion

The roundtable will serve as the launchpad for the initiative, bringing together key stakeholders to deliberate on the current state of disability inclusion in Nigeria and the role of AI. Participants will include:

- Representatives from the National Commission for Persons with Disabilities (NCPWD)
- University administrators and faculty
- Technology developers and innovators
- Disability rights advocates
- Policymakers and legislators
- Media and communication experts

Topics will include:

- Understanding disability through the social model
- AI applications for inclusive education and communication
- Barriers to AI adoption in Nigeria
- Strategies for policy enforcement and institutional reform

2. Advocacy Campaigns

Following the roundtable, a series of advocacy campaigns will be launched to promote inclusive digital rights. These will include:

- Public service announcements on radio, TV, and social media
- Community outreach programs in urban and rural areas
- Engagement with religious and traditional leaders to combat stigma
- Distribution of educational materials in accessible formats

3. Sensitization Workshops

Workshops will be organized for educators, healthcare providers, and public service personnel to build capacity in inclusive practices and AI integration. Topics will include:

- Introduction to assistive technologies
- Inclusive pedagogy and digital literacy
- Ethical use of AI in disability support
- Accessibility standards and compliance

4. Youth and Student Engagement

Special programs will be designed for students and youth groups to foster inclusive innovation. Activities will include:

- Hackathons focused on developing AI solutions for PWDs
- Peer education and mentorship programs
- Inclusion clubs and digital literacy training

5. Policy Advocacy and Institutional Reform

The initiative will engage policymakers to strengthen enforcement of the Disability Act and promote inclusive digital policies. This will involve:

- Drafting policy briefs and recommendations
- Hosting legislative forums and consultations
- Collaborating with MDAs to implement accessibility standards
- Monitoring and evaluation of institutional compliance

Expected Outcomes

- Increased public awareness and reduced stigma surrounding disability
- Enhanced institutional capacity to support inclusive digital practices
- Greater access to AI technologies for persons with disabilities
- Strengthened policy frameworks and enforcement mechanisms
- Sustainable partnerships for inclusive innovation

Implementation Plan

Phase 1: Planning and Stakeholder Engagement (Months 1–2)

- Identify and invite key stakeholders
- Develop program materials and communication strategy
- Secure funding and logistical support

Phase 2: Roundtable and Launch (Month 3)

- Host roundtable discussion at UNIZIK
- Publicize outcomes and commitments

Phase 3: Advocacy and Sensitization (Months 4–6)

- Roll out media campaigns and community outreach
- Conduct sensitization workshops and youth programs

Phase 4: Policy Engagement and Monitoring (Months 7–9)

- Host policy forums and consultations
- Track institutional reforms and compliance

Phase 5: Evaluation and Sustainability Planning (Month 10–12)

- Assess program impact
- Develop sustainability strategy and scale-up plan

Monitoring and Evaluation

A dedicated M&E team will be established to track progress, collect feedback, and assess impact. Key indicators will include:

- Number of stakeholders engaged
- Reach and engagement of media campaigns
- Number of workshops conducted and participants trained
- Policy changes and institutional reforms initiated
- Accessibility improvements in targeted institutions

Budget Overview

A detailed budget will be developed based on the scope and scale of activities. Key cost areas include:

- Venue and logistics for roundtable and workshops
- Media production and distribution
- Training materials and assistive devices

- Staff and consultant fees
- Monitoring and evaluation tools

Funding will be sought from government grants, donor agencies, and private sector partners.

Conclusion

The integration of AI into teaching, learning, and public services for persons with disabilities is a transformative imperative for Nigeria. However, without advocacy, awareness, and institutional commitment, these technologies will remain underutilized. The UNIZIK Digital Inclusion Team's proposed program offers a strategic pathway to foster inclusion, empower individuals, and build a society where everyone can thrive—regardless of ability. Through collaboration, education, and innovation, we can ensure that no one is left behind in the digital age.

References

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