

The Albino Foundation Wants Law Backing Electoral Participation by PWDs



Mr. Jake Epelle
Founder/CEO, The Albino Foundation

Ahead of the governorship election coming up in Edo state on September 19 and Ondo state on October 10, 2020, the Albino Foundation has called for the enactment of laws that would guarantee people living with disability full participation in the electoral process in Nigeria.

The founder and CEO of the foundation, Jake Epelle, in a telephone interview with *The Media and COVID-19*, however, gave kudos to the Independent Electoral Commission, INEC, for its deliberate efforts to ensure “inclusivity” in the electoral process.

Epelle said, “We give kudos to INEC making conscious effort to have people with disability take part in the electoral process. What we want is that apart from the effort, a law should be put in place so that more people can participate in the electoral process.

“Democracy is not exclusive. Inclusivity means that the people with disability can take part in the electoral process. We have launched a project called ElectAbility Mentorship Forum. This project is to encourage people living with disability take part in the electoral process.

“I will urge the people living with disability to take advantage of the effort by INEC to ensure their participation in the Edo and Ondo States governorship elections forthcoming.”

He said ahead of the governorship election in Ondo State, The Albino Foundation has trained INEC staff to ensure that the PWDs are adequately taken care of. He enjoined the international agencies to join in the advocacy for an inclusive electoral process in Nigeria.

Epelle further disclosed that parts of the efforts to ensure that the PWDs fully participate in the electoral process, several activities have been carried out and some are

still being planned.

The Albino Foundation boss stated that in July 3rd 2020, the inaugural Mentorship Class for PWDs for Elective Office in Political Arena in Nigeria, took place.

This took place at a virtual workshop with the title: *Towards Disability Inclusive Electoral Reform in Nigeria*, a European Union Support to Democratic Governance in Nigeria, EU-SDGN project during which ElectAbility Forum for PWDs in Political Arena in Nigeria featured INEC National Commissioner Adedeji Soyebi, and the European Union Ambassador to Nigeria and West Africa Mr Ketil Karlsen.

Epelle revealed also that the foundation is carrying out advocacy and enlightenment programmes in the various media across the country.

“You will recall that a majority of people living with disabilities have been excluded from the electoral process due to their physical limitations,” said Epelle.

What the Government has done so far

In January 2019, before the General Election, the Federal Government signed into law the Discrimination Against Persons with Disabilities (Prohibition) Act 2018.

According to the government; “The Act provides for the full integration of persons with disabilities into the society and establishes the National Commission for People with Disabilities and vests the Commission with the responsibility for their education, healthcare, social, economic and civil rights.”

While ensuring the protection and provision of rights to people with disabilities across all areas, the Act explicitly states that the Federal Government will “promote an environment” that encourages people with disabilities to participate in politics.

INEC Framework on Access and Participation of PWDs 2019

Following a series of consultations with internal and external stakeholders

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dealing with persons with disabilities and the Joint Association of Persons with Disabilities (JONAPWD), INEC went on to release a document it named, *The Independent National Electoral Commission Framework on Access and Participation of Persons with Disabilities (PWDS) in the Electoral Process*.

The policy document seeks to position disability issues as an integral part of election matters at all phases, including PWDs in all aspects of the elections, and also reducing barriers that might hinder said participation as voters, aspirants, candidates, party officials, and staff within the Commission.

Notable objectives of the framework include: Strengthening the Commission as an institution that is inclusive in its human and financial resources as well as in its practices and process; Work with relevant stakeholders to facilitate the development of accessible electoral facilities and infrastructure; Encourage the participation of PWDs in all aspects of the electoral process; Establish strong partnerships with relevant stakeholders to promote access and participation of PWDs in the electoral process.

While these electoral processes are being worked out by the relevant agencies, Epelle urged people with disabilities to take advantage of the support provided by the INEC to participate in the coming election in Edo and Ondo states.

IPOB Threatens Nigerian Journalist

Members of the Indigenous People of Biafra, IPOB have threatened a Nigerian journalist Frederick Nwabufo for a 2019 article he wrote asking the South-east to cooperate with the Fulani group, Miyetti Allah on security in the region.

Some members of IPOB issued threats against the journalist for the suggestion.

In a recent interview *with AFP Fact Check*, Nwabufo said the movement's supporters saw President Muhammadu Buhari as an obstacle to the realisation of their separatist goals and employed the body-double narrative to "de-legitimise" the Buhari government.

"The (Biafran) leadership needs the controversy to stay alive -- to remain relevant," Nwabufo said in the AFP report.

Nwabufo disclosed that he woke up to calls from family members in the South-east, telling him that IPOB was looking for him.

He said, "I woke up to calls from family in the South-East. They told me IPOB was looking for me. They also expressed fear for their own safety."

"This is one threat too many. Members of IPOB had issued similar threats before but this is more targeted -- with my photo and an insidious message, which has been circulated on social media by agents of the proscribed group.

"I have decided to take it without reclining. The security agents will be involved this time."

Nwabufo has vowed to file a petition with the Department of State Services over the threat.

NUJ Urges Govt, Media Owners to Prioritise Welfare of Journalists

The need to prioritise the welfare of journalists as a stimulus to high level of productivity and professionalism has been emphasized.

: Comrade Adeiza Momoh Jimoh, Chairman of the Kogi State Council of the Nigeria Union of Journalists, NUJ, made the call on government at all levels and media owners while inaugurating the newly constituted executive of the Correspondent Chapel in Lokoja, the state capital, at the weekend.

Mimoh Jimoh who was represented at the inauguration ceremony by the Assistant Secretary of the State Council of the Union, Comrade Samuel Atuluku said the place and role of the Media in a democracy system cannot be overemphasized if good governance must be encouraged.

He therefore stressed the need for the welfare of Journalists to be enhanced and ensure proper funding and regular payment of salaries.

Comrade Jimoh said for Journalists and the media to be unbiased in their roles and serve as watch dogs of the society, the need for proper funding and regular payment of salaries to Journalists must be given priority attention.

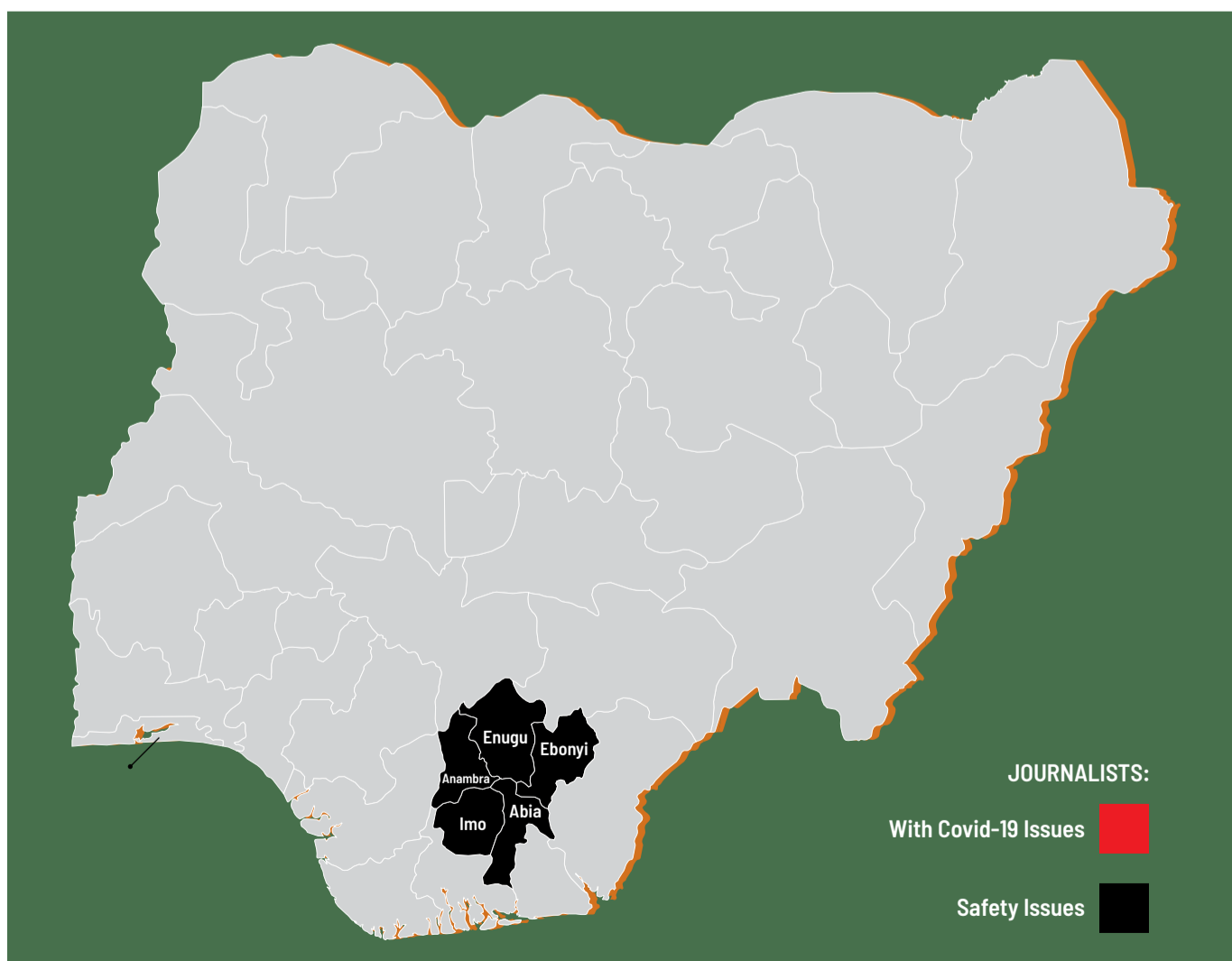
The Chairman charged the newly constituted executives of the Correspondents Chapel to brace up to the challenges and make professionalism their watchwords.

He called for a sustainable unity of members of the chapel, and charged the new executives to make welfare of members Paramount.

In his remarks, Friday Idachaba, the newly elected Chairman of the Chapel said he would redouble his efforts in uniting and moving the chapel forward.

He thanked members of the chapel for the confidence reposed in him, assuring that the new tenure would be used to build on the successes of the last administration.

The newly constituted executives are, Friday Idachaba of News Agency of Nigeria (NAN), Chairman, Segun Salami of Channels Television, Vice Chairman, Oyibo Salihu of the Blue Print Newspaper, Secretary, Boluwaju Obahopo of the Vanguard Newspaper, Treasurer, Victoria Nnakaikie of Business Day Newspaper, Financial Secretary, Julius Atabor of the Independent Newspaper, Auditor and Noah Ocheni of the Authority Newspaper, Assistant Secretary.



Media Owner, Staff on Collision Course Over New Business Policy

As part of measures to stay in business and ride over the devastating impact of COVID-19, media houses are adopting survival strategies seemingly strange and unacceptable to staff.

Shortly before the government lifted the lockdown to curtail the spread of Corona Virus pandemic, many media houses in the broadcast, print and online format announced cost-cutting measures ranging from forced leave to downsizing and pay cut to remain afloat in the absence of any form of stimulus package in spite of several representations made by media bodies to the government.

During the week, the management of *Daily Trust* newspaper, which had earlier announced some measures few months ago, alongside sister publications and broadcast stations like *The Punch*, *The Nation*, *Wazobia 95.1 FM* and *TV Continental*, reportedly introduced the policy of pay-per-published article for the editorial staff.

The reaction was instant. In what appears a protest against the new measure by management of *Daily Trust* Newspaper, Weekend Editor, Lawal Danjuma, Sokoto Bureau Chief, Rakiya Muhammad, and many reporters of the media organisation tendered their resignation.

They said that the policy of converting all editorial staff to pay-as-you-publish basis was a negation of the labour rules under which they were employed. In a reply, the management of the newspaper asked all affected staff to sign an oath of secrecy when the news of the unusual casualisation of labour got out in the open.

By this pay-per-published policy, all reporters who were hitherto on permanent and freelance basis have no fixed salary, allowance or any other periodic benefits but would be paid N1,500 per published story.

The new policy was not limited to editorial staff. Also affected are some staffs in operations. The editorial staff had to resign following the discovery that while this policy was being implemented, the company also sacked a reasonable number of staff. "Basically, the newspaper decided to casualise labour by paying reporters only

for stories they write. That means reporters are now easily expendable. They can only be paid based on their stories published," said the aggrieved staff in their letter of resignation.

"Only Bureau Chiefs, title editors, and some few line editors were exempted. As a result of this policy, some staff have started tendering resignation."

A management staff of the organization, who spoke on condition of anonymity to The Media and COVID 19 confirmed the development.

He said, "The policy which was suggested by a consultant to the Board of the organization will be implemented in phases among categories of editorial staff considered to have fallen below the required standard in their output." He added that the organization had earlier "sent away some editorial staff," as part of measures to cut running costs.

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New Par-As-You Go Tariff Reflects Business Climate in Nigeria, Says StarTimes Boss

The pay-as-you go tariff charged by cable service providers in Nigeria may appear high but in reality it reflects the cost of doing business in the country.

Chief Operating Officer of StarTimes, Mr Tunde Aina made this submission during the week.

Aina who said the management of StarTimes is justified in its recent the increment in tariff, disclosed that, "The organisation is currently operating the 'pay as you watch' tariff to meet the aspirations of a section of the Nigerian society, who are sparsely at home all day, all week, all month and all year round."

According to him, the increment would enable StarTimes offset extra costs incurred in the course of its operations, brought about by the high exchange rates in the acquisition of equipment outside Nigeria as well in power generation to run its operations.

StarTimes, which is domiciled with the Federal Government owned Nigerian Television Authority, recently increased its subscription rates by 30 per cent, claiming VAT increment and increase in number of channels provided.

Aina was responding to the summons by the House of Representatives Ad Hoc Committee Investigating the Non-Implementation of 'Pay As You Go' Tariff by Satellite Broadcast Service Providers to appear before it on Tuesday, August 25, 2020, alongside DSTV, owned by South Africa-based Multichoice.

The committee the cable service providers two weeks to review its subscription fees to reflect the current new 7.5 per cent Value Added Tax at its investigative hearing in Abuja.

Chairman of the committee, Mr Uyime Idem, said the directive was to allow StarTimes to have a tariff that reflect the current economic realities, including the VAT and the exchange rate.

The federal lawmakers decried that the tariff hike came at a time when Nigerians were suffering serious economic hardships caused by the COVID- 19 pandemic.



Broadcast Association tackles NBC over N5m fine imposed on Nigeria Info

The board of the Independent Broadcasting Association Of Nigeria (IBAN) has asked the Nigerian Broadcasting Commission (NBC) to refer cases of alleged infractions to the Nigerian Press Council before imposing sanctions on broadcast stations.

Reacting to the N5 million fine imposed on Nigeria Info for allegedly promoting hate speech, the board said NBC should have consulted an independent body on what constitutes hate speech before imposing sanctions.

In a statement by Guy Murray-Bruce, its chairman, IBAN accused the NBC of taking on the position of the accuser, judge and executioner of matters “without fair hearing”.

IBAN said. “While we concede the right to regulate broadcasting in Nigeria to NBC, we wish to point out some cogent issues that must not be ignored in this instant case,” the statement read.

“The Five Million Naira (N5m) fine imposed is excessive, as it is a creation of the now disputed amendments to the 6th broadcasting code. We feel that in the absence of a universal buy into the amendments of the code, it is premature for the management of the commission to implement any aspect of the disputed amendments.

“The commission's determination of what amounts to hate speech ought to be verified by an independent body before sanctions are imposed. As it stands now, the commission could on a whim label anything hate speech and then go ahead to impose a fine without the accused having the benefit of a fair hearing.

“In our view, the Nigerian Press Council which is made up of representatives from the following institutions, The Nigeria Union of Journalists (NUJ), Nigerian Guild of Editors (NGE), Newspaper Proprietors' Association of Nigeria, The Broadcasting Organization of Nigeria News Agency of Nigeria, the Federal Ministry of Information and the general Public is best suited to determine what might amount to a media infraction.

“We hereby respectfully call on the management of the NBC to hold off on imposing any sanctions until the above-stated issues are addressed.”

NB Code: NBMOA Urges NBC board to Submit to Ministerial Inputs, Regulation

The Board of the National Broadcasting Commission, NBC, and its Chairman, Alhaji Aliyu Ikra Bilbis has been asked to

submit to the inputs and regulation by the Federal Ministry of Information in respect of the controversial Nigeria Broadcasting Code six and work with all stakeholders to further review the grey areas in the amended Code in no distant future.

Making this call on Monday was the Northern Broadcast Media Owners Association (NBMOA).

Chairman NBMOA, Alhaji Ahmed Tijjani Ramalan, stated this while commending President Muhammadu Buhari, the Minister of Information, Lai Mohammed and the Ag Director General of NBC, Professor Armstrong Idachaba, “for the revolutionary and positive clauses introduced in the 6th edition of the NB Code and the for the growth and development of broadcasting in line with global standards,” and “pledged to cooperate with the Idachaba for the full Implementation of the NB Code.”

It would be recalled that the Board of the NBC has rejected the controversial addendum of the NB Code 6, stating that the Minister, Mohammed, orchestrated the amended Code.

The NBMOA said the law was followed by the Minister and Ag D-G, sating that, “subject to the provision of the NBC Act, the Minister may give the Commission directives of general character relating to particular matters with regards to the exercise by the Commission to its functions, and it shall be the duty of the Commission to comply with such directives.”

The NBMOA Chairman commended the revolutionary steps in creating the Public Service Broadcasting (PSB) Act intended for public benefit free from political and commercial interference, which “shall derive its funding from public funds, that is, first line charge of the federation account, corporate and individual donations and grants by Nigerian entities, among others.”

NBMOA, however requested for review of Section 15.2.2 on sanctions for an acceptable process that will allow for judicial transparency in the sanctioning procedures, while adopting a two- layer level of implementation and imposition of sanctions like the Advertising Practitioners Council of Nigeria (APCON), which is also a regulatory body under the same Federal Ministry of Information.

Dr. Ramalan however appeals to the NBC to temper justice with mercy by waiving the fine of N5m imposed on Nigeria Info as a first offender under the new Code addendum

Human Rights Lawyer Sues FG, Minister, NBC Over New Hate Speech Fine

For, “arbitrarily amending the Broadcast Code and increasing the fine for hate speech,” a Lagos-based human rights lawyer has sued the Federal Government, the Minister of Information and Culture, Alhaji Lai Mohammed and the National Broadcasting Commission, NBC.

In the originating motion filed before a Federal High Court in Lagos, the lawyer, Inibehe Effiong challenged what he called the imposition of N5m fine on Nigerian Info 99.3FM, Lagos and the threat by the NBC to punish the broadcast stations in the country over alleged hate speech.

The NBC recently fined Nigeria Info for granting an interview to a former Deputy Governor of the Central Bank of Nigeria, Dr. Obadiah Mailafia, in which the former banker claimed that an unidentified northern governor was commander of the terrorist group, Boko Haram.

The lawyer, therefore, prayed the court to make “a declaration that broadcast stations in Nigeria, broadcasters, guests and callers during radio and television programmes are entitled to a fair trial before a court of competent jurisdiction as guaranteed by Section 36 of the Constitution of the Federal Republic of Nigeria, 1999 (as amended) and Article 7 of the African Charter on Human and Peoples' Rights (Ratification and Enforcement) Act, Cap. A9 L.F.N. 2004 before a sentence of fine or other penalties can be imposed on them over comments, views or opinions expressed on radio and television”.

Effiong equally asked that the court should set aside the provisions of the extant National Broadcasting Code and any amendment made thereto, which purports to prohibit, criminalize or penalize comments or views expressed by citizens about the government and public office holders considered by the NBC, Lai Mohammed and the Federal Government to be “abusive”, “insulting” or “hate speech”.



Lai Mohammed
Minister of Information and Culture

Editor's Note

For an election to be truly representative, free and fair, all shades of opinion and interest must be accommodated as well as ensured full participation.

More than a year after President Muhammadu Buhari signed into law the Discrimination Against Persons with Disabilities (Prohibition) Act 2018, people living with disabilities, PWDs, are yet to be fully integrated into the electoral process.

Though the Act takes care of education, healthcare, social, economic and civil rights of the PWDs, through a Commission, it said rather nebulously, that it would "promote an environment" that encourages people with disabilities to participate in politics.

But if the low level of participation of this disadvantaged set of persons at the 2019 polls is anything to go by, it is quite clear that a specific law needs to be enacted to ensure that they fully participate in future elections. That is the contention of Mr Jake Epelle, Executive Director of Albino Foundation, in an interview we present in our opening story.

Journalists are still at the receiving end of acts of threats and job uncertainty. If they are not assaulted in the course of doing their work, they are faced with unfriendly labour policy that ridicules professionalism. Media owners are devising all manners of measures to stay in business even if it means paying as low as a ridiculous N1,500 for a story researched, investigated, written by journalists. Check out our story on media business to get a full gist of this new, frightening development.

Nigerians are still railing against the new revised Nigerian Broadcasting Code 6 and the recent N5m fine slammed on a radio station, Nigeria Info 99.3 FM by the National Broadcasting Commission for an interview in which a former Deputy Governor of the Central Bank of Nigeria, Dr. Obadiah Mailafia, claimed that an unidentified northern governor was a commander of the terrorist group, Boko Haram.

While the Independent Broadcasting Association Of Nigeria (IBAN) has asked the Nigerian Broadcasting Commission (NBC) to refer cases of alleged infractions to the Nigerian Press Council, NPO, for adjudication, a Lagos lawyer, Inibehe Effiong, has sued the Minister of Information, Lai Mohammed, the Federal Government and the NBC over the fine and amended code. The stories make an interesting read. These stories and many more are included in this edition for your. Happy reading.


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NCDC Confirmed COVID-19 Cases by State, August 21, 2020

States Affected	No. of Cases (Lab Confirmed)	No. of Cases (on admission)	No. Discharged	No. of Deaths
Lagos	17,360	2,634	14,525	201
FCT	4,932	3,468	1,418	46
Oyo	3,017	1,319	1,664	34
Edo	2,508	197	2,211	100
Plateau	2,109	1,044	1,036	29
Rivers	2,048	112	1,879	57
Kaduna	1,986	253	1,721	12
Delta	1,696	153	1,497	46
Kano	1,692	227	1,411	54
Ogun	1,594	186	1,382	26
Ondo	1,487	682	775	30
Enugu	1,030	159	850	21
Ebonyi	947	9	911	27
Kwara	920	221	676	23
Katsina	768	287	457	24
Osun	757	118	623	16
Borno	739	57	646	36
Abia	726	141	579	6
Gombe	709	90	596	23
Bauchi	607	54	539	14
Imo	519	334	175	10
Benue	430	282	139	9
Nasarawa	389	105	272	12
Bayelsa	352	6	325	21
Jigawa	322	3	308	11
Akwa Ibom	271	43	220	8
Niger	232	52	168	12
Ekiti	216	102	110	4
Adamawa	206	32	159	15
Anambra	181	4	159	18
Sokoto	156	2	138	16
Kebbi	90	0	82	8
Cross River	80	27	45	8
Zamfara	78	1	72	5
Taraba	78	19	55	4
Yobe	67	0	59	8
Kogi	5	0	3	2

Highlights

- On the 21st of August 2020, 340 new confirmed cases and 4 deaths were recorded in Nigeria.
- Till date, 51,304 cases have been confirmed, 37,885 cases have been discharged and 996 deaths have been recorded in 36 states and the Federal Capital Territory.
- The 340 new cases are reported from 19 states - Kaduna(63), FCT(51), Plateau(38), Lagos(33), Delta(25), Gombe (21), Adamawa(21), Edo(20), Katsina(17), Akwa Ibom(11), Ekiti(10), Rivers(9), Ondo(5), Ebonyi(4), Cross River(3), Ogun(3), Sokoto(2), Imo(2), Nasarawa (2)
- A multi-sectoral national emergency operations centre (EOC), activated at Level 3, continues to coordinate the national response activities