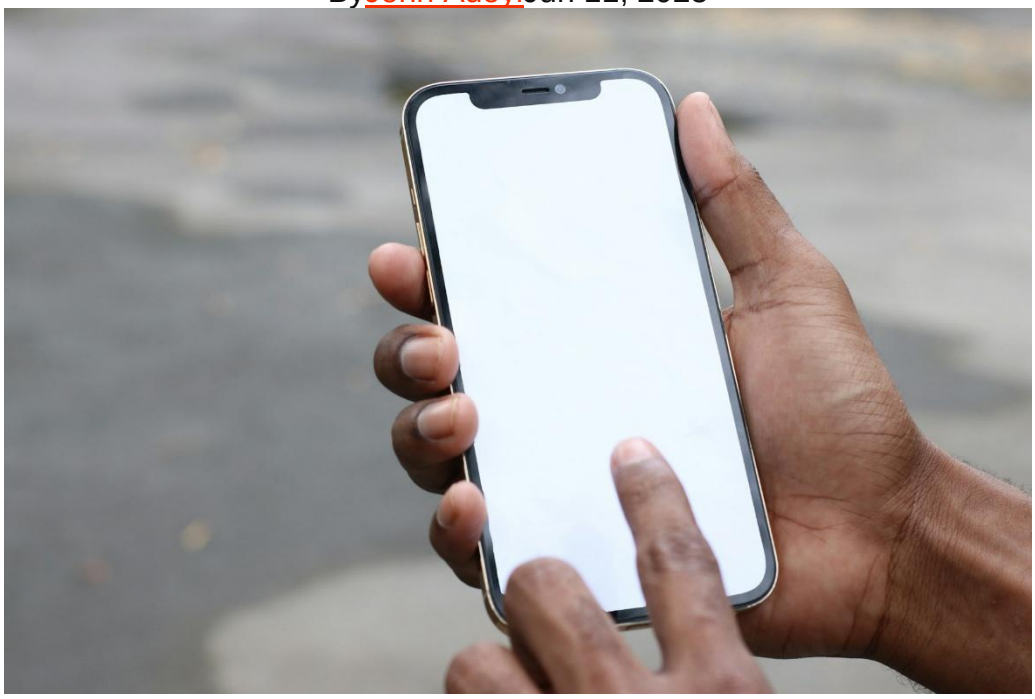
Assistive Tech

Left behind: The millions of Nigerians whose use of technology is an afterthought

ByJohn AdoyiJun 11, 2025



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Nigeria has an estimated 35 million persons with disabilities (PWDs), roughly 15% of the population according to the National Commission for Persons With Disability (NCPWD). This represents a market larger than many African countries' entire populations, yet their digital needs remain invisible to the tech sector.

Professionals, students, entrepreneurs, and civil servants with disabilities are systematically excluded from platforms that ought to improve their lives. Whether government portals or private platforms, complaints abound about inaccessible designs, screen-reader incompatibility, and services that ignore users with visual, auditory, cognitive, or mobility impairments.

"If we want to talk about digital accessibility in Nigeria, we would need more than a 24-hour podcast to scratch the surface," said Saheed Okerayi, a blind tech enthusiast. According to him, most platforms have bits of accessibility for persons with disabilities whilst others completely neglect it, with fundamental issues like unlabelled buttons and missing alt text (alternative text) remaining widespread.

Root causes

In his assessment of Nigeria's accessibility landscape, Olufemi Bayode, a digital accessibility expert who has spent years navigating Nigeria's digital exclusion crisis, gave a stark remark: "If I'm to rate accessibility, be it digitally or otherwise, if I'm not too strict, I would give it 4%."

Bayode said that the exclusion is comprehensive and systematic, affecting every major platform category. The root cause, according to him, is simple: "When it comes to accessibility in this country, nobody cares. Be it individual developers or governments, people are just not concerned."

Bayode breaks down the most pervasive violations into several categories:

Missing alt text and unlabelled buttons: "So many images and unlabelled buttons exist on websites and apps. There's one fintech app where you don't know what's there when entering your password. Your screen reader can't recognise if it's an image or button."

Inadequate markups and semantics: "Developers don't follow the Web Content Accessibility Guidelines (WCAG) promoting basic markups that make web content readable for screen readers, such as heading styles, paragraph tags, navigation tags."

Absence of keyboard navigation: "Nigerian websites don't provide keyboard shortcuts like LinkedIn or Facebook. You have to keep scrolling to find message links or buttons."

Improper form labelling: "Many developers use placeholders instead of accessible labelling. Screen readers don't read these aloud, so users don't know what input is required."

Lack of user-defined experience: Unlike global websites offering text size or colour contrast adjustments, "I've never seen that on a Nigerian website," Bayode said.

These technical shortcomings create nightmares for users across Nigeria's digital ecosystem.

Big and small; public and private

From private to public-owned establishments, telecommunications companies to banks, e-commerce platforms to media houses, the systematic exclusion of

persons with disabilities spans every major platform category and companies of different sizes. This exclusion represents a massive missed business opportunity. Globally, the disability market represents over $13 trillion in annual disposable income, yet Nigerian businesses potentially miss out on this market simply because tech developers and designers do not build with PWDs in mind.

“If a website doesn’t build with persons with disabilities in mind, they’re losing customers double the size of some countries. Imagine collecting ₦1,000 from each PWD; we’re talking billions,” Bayode said.

In the financial sector, for instance, accessibility is fragmented and inconsistent across platforms and devices. Users report vastly different experiences even with the same institution. And challenges span both large traditional banks and their younger fintech counterparts.

Bayode says that “for a fintech app to be certified accessible, I should be able to set it up and use it at least 95% independently without sighted assistance.” Most Nigerian financial platforms fall short of this benchmark.

Olayinka Akinbiyi, a blind entrepreneur using an iPhone, describes her frustration with the Zenith Bank app: “Zenith updated the app and it became inaccessible. I cannot do anything on that app. I have uninstalled it.” Meanwhile, another user reports that the Android version works better, highlighting inconsistency in accessibility.

Similar problems plague other financial platforms. Kefas Lungu, a blind programmer, complained of UBA’s unresponsive buttons, navigation issues, and inaccessible virtual keyboards on the e-banking site. There are complaints about purchasing airtime on the Cash Matrix app and the Wema Bank alert app. Similarly, users have also complained of OPay’s PIN and password entry challenges on Android devices, whilst platforms like PiggyVest and Cowrywise suffer from unlabelled buttons and navigation issues.

Many fintech apps require facial recognition during setup. “Every time I want to set up all these fintech apps, I have to look for someone to hold and direct the camera for me,” Joseph Afolabi, a blind user, explains. Bayode points to OPay as a notable exception, saying they’ve enabled independent setup for blind users through screen reader integration.

E-commerce and service platforms present their own accessibility challenges. “Jumia isn’t perfect but I’ll take it over Temu and Konga in terms of accessibility,” explains Ganiu Emilandu, a blind programmer, citing unlabelled buttons and

missing alt text as major issues. He said he does not open the emails sent to him by Temu because they lack alt text.

Popular food delivery platforms are also inaccessible, with users only able to use them because they have “mastered techniques” to navigate these platforms. Transportation apps fare slightly better, though they still need work on alt text and button labelling. Bayode believes ride-hailing apps like Bolt and Uber are slightly better because they were not developed by Nigerians and are held to international laws that can land them lawsuits if not applied.

Nigerian news websites also lag behind international standards, lacking the keyboard navigation shortcuts and well-captioned images found on sites like the New York Times or BBC.

Government-run digital services present, perhaps, the most serious accessibility barriers. “It’s almost impossible to apply for a passport independently as a blind person,” says Emilandu. Right from the first page, the issues with accessibility begin. “There’s a part requiring you to click something to verify details. No alt text describes what it is, and face scanning isn’t blind-friendly.”

The National Population Commission website and National Identity Management Commission app present equally frustrating barriers. “NPC said you can apply for [a] birth certificate online. But when it gets to the point of facial recognition, as a blind person, get ready to be rejected,” Eja Manifest explains.

For users with hearing impairments, the challenges take different forms. “We are not even included physically, you are talking about online accessibility, let us start from sign language interpreters on TV, events and worship centres, before we go online,” Hanu James, a deaf advocate, remarked.

Why do these problems exist?

Nigeria’s legal framework for disability rights contains a significant blind spot when it comes to digital accessibility. While Nigeria’s Discrimination Against Persons with Disabilities (Prohibition) Act of 2019 establishes general protections against discrimination, it makes no explicit mention of digital accessibility, leaving a legal vacuum. The Act does address physical accessibility through Part II (Sections 3–4), Part III (Sections 10–12), and Part IV (Sections 13–15), but digital spaces remain unaddressed.

This stands in contrast to Ghana, Nigeria’s West African neighbour, which amended its Persons with Disability Act in 2020 to specifically mandate “adequate accessibility to information, communications, including age-

appropriate technologies and systems," requiring public and private service providers to ensure formats like screen-reader compatibility, and sign-language interpretation.

"Nigeria doesn't have a policy driving digital accessibility," Bayode explains. "That's why we're doing nearly nothing." Whilst general anti-discrimination provisions could theoretically apply, the lack of specific requirements creates enforcement challenges.

At the root of the problem are fundamental misconceptions. "Many don't believe visually impaired persons can use phones or afford them. They think people with visual impairment can't do anything without assistance," Bayode explains. This leads to a vicious cycle where developers don't really see accessibility as a prerogative.

The web design community presents a mixed picture of awareness and priorities. Anastasia Edusi, a Lagos web designer, represents the conscientious end of the spectrum. She's familiar with WCAG and applies them across projects, using proper colour contrast, avoiding colour-only indicators, implementing alt text, and consulting people with disabilities during design.

However, her approach isn't representative. Other designers don't bother with accessibility because clients don't care. Clients "basically pay for quick apps and don't bother with accessibility," one designer said. Ayodele Babalola, another designer, points to deeper systemic issues—many developers "didn't take professional courses" and "don't consult UI/UX designers" on their projects.

What can change?

Despite the challenges, some progress is emerging across Nigeria's digital landscape. Bayode acknowledged that "Zenith Bank, GTBank, FCMB, Paystack are trying. They include some accessibility," but he emphasises that there is room for improvement.

Government agencies are also beginning to acknowledge accessibility requirements, with NITDA Director General Kashifu Inuwa committing to champion digital accessibility policy frameworks. He admitted that the current framework targeting 95% digital literacy by 2030 does not adequately address the needs of PWDs.

NCPWD has also partnered with other agencies, launching the Accessibility Compliance Dashboard in March 2025, to help drive accessibility advocacy and

monitor compliance. MTN is making giant strides in terms of providing digital skills and literacy to blind Nigerians.

Bayode believes companies should use the Act's mandate that employers ensure at least 5% of their workforce comprises individuals with disabilities as an opportunity to employ tech-savvy PWD professionals who can inform practical technology development for persons with disabilities.

For developers wondering where to start implementing accessibility guidelines, Bayode recommends WCAG guidelines: "It's robust and has a whole lot that will help platforms grow." Building accessibility from the start is more economical: "It's cheaper to build with accessibility from scratch because you're not changing layouts and forms later. Including accessibility later might require changing your entire design."

Blind tech enthusiast, Okerayi, recommends that companies should include persons with disabilities in building their products. While automated accessibility testers can help, real human users need to make up a part of product testing prior to launch, he argues. "But the users of the product should be consulted before any product is launched. "This is being done outside the country. Why can't we do the same here?"