



**SUBMISSION TO THE PARLIAMENTARY COMMITTEE
ON NATIONAL GUIDANCE AND GENDER MATTERS**

**“WELFARE OF WOMEN AND GIRLS LIVING WITH
DISABILITIES”**

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“Welfare of Women and Girls Living With Disabilities”

1.0. INTRODUCTION

One of the most precise and widely accepted definition of Disability inclusion is understanding **the relationship between the way people function** and how they **participate in society**, and making sure everybody has the **same opportunities** to participate in every aspect of life to the **best of their abilities** and desires.

Nations world over are working towards **creating enabling environments** in which persons with disabilities (PWDs) will fulfill all their aspirations to the best of their abilities, who equally have **the obligation to participate in social, economic, political and cultural development**.

In Zambia, the efforts to creating this enabling environment date as **far back as pre independence**, but to date, we **still grapple with the challenges** being faced by persons with disabilities.

Notable among these efforts, is the **2012 National Policy on Disability**, a document intended to reflect the aspirations of persons with disabilities in Zambia and a starting point for **addressing meaningfully the many challenges** being faced by persons with disabilities. Further, the policy would guide Government, Non-State Actors and the nation at large in the **design and implementation of various programmes targeting persons with disabilities**. Although the policy showed Governments commitment to partnering with persons with disabilities, Disabled Persons Organizations and other stakeholders towards the realization of the rights of persons with disabilities as enshrined in the **UN Convention on Rights of Persons with Disabilities**, as it provided a specific framework relevant to Zambia in its efforts to create an enabling environment for persons with disabilities, the struggle to creating a truly **inclusive society**, continues.

In 1996, the Zambian government passed the Disability Act of 1996, which banned discrimination based on disability, which was later repealed in 2012 and replaced with the Persons with Disability Act of 2012. The Disabilities Act, No. 6 of 2012 Section 21, Sub section (1)(c), **provides for women with disabilities to have equal opportunities to participate** in all aspects of life and to ensure the full development, advancement and empowerment of women with disabilities. This particular piece of legislation, provides for the **mainstreaming of gender** into policies, programmes and activities relating to the equalization of opportunities

for and integration of persons with disability. The Disability Act of 2012 ensures full and equal human rights and freedoms to persons with disabilities.

Further, the Persons with Disabilities Act 2012 provides for **free primary education**, ensures **that persons with disabilities are not excluded from accessing secondary and higher education** in the communities in which they live, ensures vocational training on the basis of disability and guarantees special schools for persons who cannot be enrolled in schools offering inclusive education. It also ensures **physical access to educational institutions**, ensures individualized support and access to alternative forms of communication, as well as allowances to cover extra costs attributed to learning. However, these measures fall far short of being implemented. However, there was the perception of a gap between this Act and its implementation at local level.

The challenges are worse for women and girls as even the Gender Equity and Equality battle is yet to be won.

This paper is a response to the request by the parliamentary committee on National Guidance and Gender Matters, to submit a memorandum on *“Welfare of women and Girls Living with Disabilities”*

(a) Efforts and progress made by the church and faith-based organizations in addressing the welfare of women and girls living with disabilities (indicating projects and programs if any)

(b) Opportunities that are available for women and girls living with disabilities

(c) Challenges, if any, faced by women and girls living with disabilities in various aspects of socio-economic life and their impact on the quality of life.

(d) Make suggestions/recommendations on how to enhance the welfare of women and girls living with disabilities.

2.0. Efforts and progress made by the church and faith-based organizations in addressing the welfare of women and girls living with disabilities (indicating

The Catholic Church is the largest single Christian denomination in Zambia, and it is also the most influential. The church is spread throughout the provinces of Zambia. Among its beliefs are that **all human life comes from God and it is sacred**, no matter the condition of the person – whether disabled or abled. The church also believes in the principle of the **preferential option for the poor**, meaning that

'Christians are called to look at the world from the perspective of those who are marginalized and to work in solidarity with them for justice'. It further believes that standing with the poor and the weak, being present to them, seeing the world from the perspective of them (the poor), advocating for them, is essential to being a follower of Christ. **It basically means that the needs of the poor should take priority over the wants of the well off.**

The Catholic Church in Zambia has made a lot of effort and progress in addressing the welfare of women and girls living with disabilities. It has **built various institutions** in almost all the provinces of Zambia. Some of these institutions are schools to provide education to the vision or hearing impaired persons; some are homes for the physically impaired, some are institutions for the mentally disturbed. Notable among these are institutions like: **Da gama school** in Luanshya, schools for the deaf in Kalulushi and Solwezi, Holy cross skills training school in Mongu, Holy family training facility for various persons with disabilities in Ndola, school for the blind in Kawambwa and Mporokoso, St. Mulumba school in Choma and many others. There are **also Chesire** homes that provide rehabilitation.

Further, the conference through its development wing, **the Catholic Commission for Justice, Peace and Integral Human Development**, has programmes and projects such as; the Zambia Food Security (ZFSP), Kumena, Child Protection projects and the Election Project among others that aims at **mainstreaming disabilities**. The ZFSP has activities towards increasing household income which are mainly; trainings in entrepreneurship skills and value addition, mentorship in small enterprises management and participation in village banking scheme to access small loans to expand their businesses. One of the outputs under this outcome of increasing house hold income is to ensure that the number of people with disabilities involved in project income generating activities is increased.

The total **PWDs** participants in the programme is **425** and a total of **96 PWDs** (This figure comprises of PWDs whose household heads and those in target households involved in viable income generating activities) are actively engaged in income generating activities. The agro enterprises being managed by the PWDs include; Grocery shops, small livestock sales and vegetables.

PWDs are engaged in value addition activities, with efforts in food processing, branding and packaging.

Despite PWDs being part of the participants engaging in all these economic activities, there is **still the aspect of accessing potential markets** that has been the

biggest challenge. The products, especially perishable ones, goes to waste and most times they sell at very low prices as compared to the production costs. To help women with disabilities, who face a bigger challenge due to restricted movements to sell their produce, the programme **promotes preservation and value addition of locally produced crops.**

Also through the KUMENA project, the conference through its development wing Caritas and its diocesan partner, Caritas Kabwe, has taken the inclusion of persons living with disabilities (PWD's) very seriously and caritas ensured that it had **its staff, under the Kumena project trained in Inclusive education** and Community based rehabilitation.

The knowledge and skills gained was later shared with communities who now lead the identification and engagement of persons living with disabilities in their respective localities. As of May 2021, **Caritas Kabwe had about 25 PWD's** who were receiving individualized mentorship. Further, **the skills were very useful in ensuring that field officers become aware of the social-political contexts that the PWD live in**, how culture shapes the life of PWD's and the best way through which inclusion can be realized to ensure their maximum social, political and economic participation.

The first step to inclusion has been ensuring that the PWD's are **members of a farmer group**, called a society of their choice formed under the Kumena project in various villages and communities. Later, **individualized community-based rehabilitation education and mentorship** is provided by staff and volunteers to motivate and encourage those identified so that they can fully participate in project activities.

Further, Caritas under the **Election Project** has been able to monitor the participation of people living with disabilities' levels of participation in the electoral process by including specific questions on disability mainstreaming in the election monitoring checklist.

Further, realising that **children a great resources** and also the leaders of tomorrow, the conference through the child protection project under Caritas Zambia has been ensuring that children living with disabilities have also been deliberately targeted by way of including one special school from Sianzongwe district (Maamba Special school) as part of the project target schools. On the other hand, the project has also been able to identify and incorporate 8 children (4

boys and 4 girls) who have also been exposed and liked to the Caritas established Child Led Groups.

With regard to participating in project activities, the Conference through Caritas Zambia have been able to strengthened the capacities of community leaders and or/ traditional leaders, who make a significant part of community awareness on inclusiveness and gender mainstreaming.

While the children (girls) living with disabilities have been empowered with knowledge and skills to defend their rights and be accountable to take responsibility measures to protect themselves against all forms of violence, exploitation and abuse.

3.0. Opportunities that are available for women and girls living with disabilities

Social barriers and physical obstacles are especially daunting to girls and women with disabilities". **Differently abled women and girls have few opportunities** for education, vocational training, and employment.

Although opportunities are few, there are some that can be mentioned. The fact that there are schools and other institutions built specifically to address the welfare of people with disabilities that is an opportunity that can be fully utilized. However, our role should be to **encourage /create awareness on the** availability of these opportunities so that they (PWD) take advantage of such opportunities to break that barrier.

A key approach by the conference to give equal opportunities to people with disabilities, including women and girls, **is mainstreaming**, ensuring that wherever possible women with disabilities should **receive training** with and under the same conditions as non-disabled persons, however, there is as yet not enough action or results, at least to the extent that women with disabilities everywhere are able to experience a tangible improvement in their lives. **Despite these few efforts, women and girls with disability remain in a difficult situation.**

Promoting more **inclusive societies and employment opportunities for people with disabilities** requires improved access to basic education, vocational training relevant to labour market needs and jobs suited to their skills, interests and abilities, with adaptations as needed, hence the opportunity for education is key.

Zambia has adopted a number of **laws and policies** relating to people with disabilities, all of them either directly or some insinuating that special needs of

people with disabilities will be taken into consideration. These are clad in statements or phrases such as “Regardless of personal Circumstances or capacity” reference to “vulnerable groups” and “all people will be provided with opportunities to improve their well-being”. These laws and policies are opportunities for women, girls and all person with disabilities to care and support services. These include among others: The Technical Education, Vocational and Entrepreneurship Training (TEVET) Act, the Workers’ Compensation Act, The Education Act Number 23 of 2011, the Employment Code of 2019, Labour Market Policy, the National Youth Policy, Zambia’s Vision 2030, the 7th National Development Plan (SNDP), the Citizen Economic Empowerment Commission Act and the Persons with Disabilities Act among others.

4.0. Challenges, if any, faced by women and girls living with disabilities in various aspects of socio-economic life and their impact on the quality of life.

Challenges facing PWD in general include: **inaccessible physical environments, particularly infrastructure, such as buildings**; under-representation at decision-making level; inadequate availability or affordability of assistive devices, such as wheel chairs, hearing aids and interpreting machines; and exclusion from vital information, owing, partly, to the inadequate means of communication like sign language services and Braille translations.

The situation of PWD is further compounded by their **vulnerability to HIV and AIDS**. Generally, they have little access to HIV and AIDS IEC materials and other underlying interventions. The situation is further compounded by the perception that individuals with disabilities have a lower risk of HIV infection than people without disabilities, as it is felt that they are sexually inactive. This belief leads to sexual abuse of PWD, especially women and girls.

These challenges are widespread for women and children. A majority of disabled women and girls live **in poverty and lack access to basic health services** and rehabilitation opportunities from being excluded from the allocation of resources. As such, they are highly susceptible to the risk of missing out on essential developmental opportunities. **In rural areas, the main problem is that many services and facilities are simply not available to persons with disabilities.**

In the communities where we work, Disability and poverty are strongly interconnected. It is a vicious cycle as poverty is a factor that will contribute to an

increase in disability and simultaneously the presence of disability potentially create poverty. Women and girls play a critical role in rural household economy, with them potentially being the backbone of improving household income.

Lack of employment opportunities for women with disability is owing to the fact that there is generally a **lack of employment opportunities in Zambia, but also that even when PWDs are educated, the jobs that people with disabilities can take up are also few**. For the women and girls with disabilities, this problem is bigger compared to others. The other thing is that **Poor education is also one of the challenges**. Some women and girls with disabilities have a challenge to learn properly, as a result they find it difficult to cope.

In the grassroots, **stigma is also a major challenge for women and girls with disability**. This can be attributed to strong cultural values that are already demeaning of women and worse still towards women with disability. This in itself makes them lack confidence to do certain things because they are not sure of themselves.

Another challenge faced in this work has been **financial support** needed to respond to the special needs of the majority of the identified PWDs and also the **resentments** by some PWDs where some parents were found to be hiding their differently abled children.

5.0. Make suggestions/recommendations on how to enhance the welfare of women and girls living with disabilities. Make recommendation on way forward

- a) Existing laws should be reviewed, improved and harmonised to ensure that persons with disabilities have equal and effective protection and equal benefit of the law without discrimination.
- b) There is still need for a comprehensive policy framework that will help guide any future legal reforms meant to improve the lives of persons with disabilities.
- c) Inequality is one of the important indicators of poverty, as such disability should be one of the main focus areas for designing economic programmes aimed at poverty reduction, to make them accessible to them (PWDs).

- d) Government should guarantee Promotion of gender equality and empowerment of women, with a systematic approach to strengthen the inclusion of the rights of women and girls with disabilities is essential to the achievement of the internationally agreed development goals, including the Millennium Development Goals.
- e) Prioritization of education, vocational training and employment for PWDs, especially women and girls.
- f) Ensuring a disability perspective in all aspects of policy and labour legislation, effective implementation
- g) Enforcement of existing disability laws and policies and providing for equal employment and training
- h) Deliberate creation of opportunities and inclusion of people with disabilities to contribute to the social and economic inclusion of people with disabilities in Zambia.
- i) Establish and/or strengthen institutions and systems that cater to People with disabilities.
- j) increased government spending on disability