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## **Towards Equality for Women and Girls Living with Disabilities: Inclusion of Women with Disabilities into the Main Stream Economy of Zimbabwe: Opportunities and Challenges, a Case of Masvingo**

**Milton Gwakwa**

Faculty of Commerce, Reformed Church University, Masvingo, Zimbabwe

### **Abstract:**

*The purpose of the paper is to bring aboard the significance of creating a practical all-inclusive operational empowerment policy and developmental strategies that take into account people living with disabilities, especially girls and women. Women with disabilities require protection against exploitation and abuse. Special programmes need to be developed for education, employment and providing of other rehabilitation services to women and girls with disabilities keeping in view their special needs. Such a framework will provide equal opportunities that will result in sustainable economic development, a shared responsibility. Existing literature on inclusive policies and culture focused more on donor support programmes and lacks the rigour on what critical issues need to be addressed in bringing aboard this very important class of our society into main stream economy through active participation. In that endeavour, this paper explored, and interrogated existing literature and re-examined the current status. A qualitative case-based research philosophy was employed. The population of this study comprised women and girls who are living with disabilities in Masvingo. Twenty women and twenty girls living with disabilities were interviewed through in-depth and focus group interviews as well as two institutions that directly support people living with disabilities. Data was analyzed thematically. The study revealed that for a long time there has been 'paper talk and politicking on involvement of women and girls living with disabilities without having practical – implementable solutions. The paper recommends institutionalization of practical programmes from ward to national level with programme evaluation done quarterly to enable corrective measures by government and society in general. The results obtained will inform policy makers and directly benefit the government in formulating relevant policies that has a practical orientation. The originality of this paper lied in its value addition to existing studies on the same area of empowerment of girls and women with disabilities within the Zimbabwean context.*

**Keywords:** Equality opportunities, disability, empowerment

### **1. Introduction**

Gender perspectives on women have tended to raise more interest to society in recent decades as enshrined in the minds of feminist movement. Over sweeping statements on women and development further tend to marginalise, yet another segment of women who require more attention and focus. Thus gender perspectives on disability and the disability on the situation of women and girls living with disabilities are of high concern to this researcher. Promoting gender equality and empowerment of women is essential to the achievement of the internationally agreed development goals, including the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs). Women with disabilities face significant difficulties-in both public and private spheres, pronouncing the inequities in existence. They do experience double discrimination, which places them at higher risk of gender-based violence, sexual abuse, neglect, maltreatment and exploitation.

### **2. Background**

There are thousands of people living with disabilities in all parts of the world, and at all levels in every society. The rights and privileges of persons with disabilities for a long time have been the subject of much discussion in the United Nations and other international, regional and local organisations. People with disabilities in Africa have been taken for granted and no meaningful programs appear to meet their inner needs. They are the poorest and most marginalized members of the communities, yet are expected to play the pillar role in the same communities in which they are marginalized. Over the years, disability policies have been formulated-focusing from elementary care at institutions to education for children with disabilities and rehabilitation for persons who become disabled during adult life. An important development in the history of person with disabilities has been the debates and subjected Articles by the United Nations on people living with special disabilities. The rights of persons with disabilities have been the subject of much attention and the most important outcome of the International year of Disabled Persons, 1981, was the work

program of Action concerning Disabled persons, adapted by the General Assembly by its resolution 37/57 of 3 December 1982. This resolution provided a strong impetus for progress in the field of special needs. Both emphasized the right of persons with disabilities to the same opportunities as other citizens and to an equal share in the improvement in living conditions resulting from economic and social development.

Given that they are more than 500 million people in the world are disabled as a consequence of mental, physical or sensory impairment, it is only common sense needed to know that these people are entitled to enjoy equal opportunities in all sphere of life. Too often their lives are handicapped by physical and social barriers in society which hamper their full participation.

This paper has been motivated by the need to conscientise; awaken persons, society on the ultimate gains of inclusion of disabled women and girls in every area of social, economic and political life or sphere. It may not provide all the solutions but at the least is able to provoke debate and meaningful discussions that can assist policymakers to come up with practical social, economic and business models that can be used to enhance inclusive approaches that will provide equal opportunities or at least near equal opportunities for the disadvantaged women and girls of our time. It is an open secret that governments are responsible for the development of all their citizens. Thus, if people with disabilities are to be included in the national development process, then the development policy, legislation and service provision must be considered and established in full partnership with organisations of people with disabilities and other concerned agencies, which is why this paper was written to mobilize all stakeholders to get engaged. In addition to this, the identification of barriers that act as exclusives is what the paper also tried to do. Essentially by empowering women and girls of this class, the issues of equality are automatically addressed, not in full though but to a certain acceptable degree. With this background of exclusion of women and girls into main stream economy, the paper's outcome acts as a basis for national and sub-regional action platform to ensure that the current situation in Zimbabwe of people living with disabilities changes from exclusion to full participation and equality.

### 3. Statement of the Problem

People with disabilities, especially women and girls are among the poorest in Zimbabwe. Masvingo city houses many women and girls with disabilities and their presents are hardly felt. It is only when you start to move from the city to the rural areas that you will begin to see them in numbers and in poverty state. In both public and private events, institutions and interactions, the women and girls are missing and one wonders where they are, yet they are part of the sociology we live. This absenteeism and unavailability of women and girls living with disabilities from many key platforms makes the scenario a problem child.

### 4. Research Questions

- The following research question is posited:
- To what extent are women and girls living with disabilities included in the mainstream economic activities or programmes of Zimbabwe?
- What empowerment strategies are currently in place and to what extent have they provided equal socio-economic opportunities?
- What role does government play in creating a conducive living environment women and girls with disabilities?
- What are the major challenges faced in the process of equalisation?

### 5. Research Objectives

- To assess the extent to which women and girls living with disabilities are included in the mainstream economic activities or programmes of Zimbabwe
- To examine empowerment strategies currently in place and deduce to what extent they are providing equal socio-economic opportunities
- To discuss the role of government in promoting the welfare of women and girls with disabilities
- To assess the major challenges faced in the process of equalisation

### 6. Significance of the study

This study was carried out against a background of real faith and needy. The results from study are a "kit" tool that governments of developing countries can use to improve on the way they are currently managing the 'lives' of people living with disabilities. The study is useful also as the suggested involvement models can be adopted by the same community of women and girls, donor organisations and other interested stakeholders in the context of their environments and apply them accordingly to improve the lives of women and girls holistically. Any researcher who has interest in this area can use the outcome of this study as a spring board for further research as all areas could not be exhausted due to limitations of resources and the smallness of the project itself was meant just to give insight not total solutions on towards equality for girls and women with disabilities.

### 7. Literature Review

Several related studies have been carried out on this area but few focused specifically on women and girls but generalised both sexes. However, issues raised did not pose much or significance differentiation. Reviewing this literature helped to provide insights into the Masvingo related research which may have a contextual differentiation.

### 7.1. Definition of Key Terms

(These definitions are as per World Health Organisation (WHO) dictates)

- **Disability:** Any restriction or lack (resulting from impairment) of ability to perform an activity in the manner or within the range considered normal for a human being.
- **Human rights:** These are rights which assert that every person is equally entitled not only to life, but to a life dignity. The rights also recognize that certain conditions and resources are necessary to live a dignified life. The state is obliged to protect and fulfil the interests of people with disabilities (socially, economically and otherwise).
- **Equalisation of opportunities:** The process through which the general system of society, such as the physical and cultural environment, housing and transportation, social and health services, educational and work opportunities, cultural and social life, including sports and recreation facilities, are made accessible to all. The principle implies that the needs of each and every individual are of equal importance and that resources must be equally shared among all. These should be made available to persons living with disabilities.
- **Handicap:** This means the loss or limitation of opportunities to take up part in the life of community on an equal basis. It describes the encounter between the person with the disability and the environment. Purpose of this term is to emphasise then focus on the shortcomings in the environment and many organized activities in society, for example information, communication and education, which prevents persons with disabilities from participating on equal basis.
- **Rehabilitation:** This refers to a process aimed at enabling persons with disabilities to reach and maintain their optimal physical, sensory, intellectual, psychiatric and social functionality which will provide them with the tools that provide independence.

### 7.2. International Normative on Women and Girls with Disabilities

Through setting international norms and standards, the international community recognizes the need for the gender perspective and the empowerment of women with disabilities to achieve the equal enjoyment of all human rights and development for all, including persons with disabilities. A major outcome of the International Year of Disabled Persons was the formation of the world Program of Action concerning Disabled Persons, adopted by the General Assembly on 3 December 1982 by its resolution, 37/52. The world program of Action concerning disabled persons states that the consequence of deficiencies and disablement are particularly serious for women. Generally women are subjected to social, cultural and economic disadvantages, making it more difficult for them to take part in community life.

The standard rules on equalization of opportunities for persons with disabilities, recall the provisions in the conventions on the elimination of all forms of Discrimination against women –to ensure the rights of girls and women with disabilities, and includes references to women and girls with disabilities under several rules such as Rule 4, on support services, Rule 6 on education, and Rule 9 on family life and personal integrity

Additionally, in its two recent resolutions on realizing the Millennium Development Goals for persons with disabilities, The General Assembly called for the incorporation of a gender perspective. General Assembly resolution 63/150 of 18 December 2008 urges States to pay special attention to the gender specific needs of persons with disabilities, including by taking measures to ensure their full and effective enjoyment of all human rights and fundamental freedoms (operative paragraph 8). General Assembly 64/131 of 18 December 2009, calls on governments to enable persons with disabilities to participate as agents and beneficiaries of development, in particular in all efforts aimed at achieving MDGs, by ensuring that programs and policies to promoting gender equality and empowerment of women and girls, are inclusive and accessible to persons with disabilities (operative paragraph 6).

The Beijing Platform for Action adopted by the Fourth World Conference On Women: Action for Equality, Development and Peace, Beijing, 15 September 1995, and the outcome of the twenty third special session on Further actions and initiatives to implement the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action, recognize that women with disabilities face additional barriers to achieving gender equality and call for action at all levels to address and take into consideration their concern. These declarations indicate that there is need for various governments, including Zimbabwe to take into account and address the concerns of women and girls with disabilities in all policy-making and programming. Special measures are needed at all and every level to integrate them into the mainstream economy.

### 7.3. Disability, Poverty and Social Awareness

Literature available suggest that disabled people are not a homogenous group, but have a wide range of needs, interests and circumstances that contribute to the wellbeing and opportunities in life. Different types of impairments and different social, financial and physical environments create very different situations (Guthrie et al., 2001). For many policy makers; a more pressing justification for disability benefits is the close link between disability and poverty. Disability increases vulnerability to poverty, while poverty creates the conditions for increased risk of becoming disabled (Emmett, 2006). Widely quoted UN statistics suggest that one in every five of the world's poorest people has a disability, and 82% of disabled people in developing countries live below the poverty line (European Commission, 2003). The close link between poverty and disability indicate the need for disabled persons to be included in all poverty alleviation initiatives, including social assistance.

#### 7.4. Empowerment and Disability

Empowerment has largely become a widely used term in discussions of disability and rehabilitation issues. Empowerment of individuals with disabilities was first raised as an issue within the independent living movement(De jong,1979) and the self-help movement in the mental health field(Chamberlin,1978; Mowbray& Tan,1992;Tazmanm,1993).More calls of empowerment can be found associated with a variety of groups ,such as people with cognitive impairments (Jenkinson,1993).To provide equal opportunities there is need to empower women and girls, thus moving them towards equal opportunities with other members of society. At the least they will be able to contribute meaningfully and if they fail they have no one to blame but to re-look at themselves.

#### 7.5. Mainstream Social Assistance Programmes

A wide range of social assistance programs operates in developing countries to reduce poverty and vulnerability amongst the poorest. The hot debate is whether social assistance is bringing equality or is empowerment scheme (Mitra, 2005) .Giving cash or making transfers will continue to put disabled persons under social prison. Disability organisations argue that social assistance must aim to empower and support people's capacity for independence. Hence it must be seen as a right, underpinned by legislation and be developed with the participation of the disabled people. Efforts by governments and donors seem to gain momentum, yet there is little involvement of the disabled persons themselves.

#### 7.6. Inclusive Issues

The problems of disability in developing countries need to be specially highlighted. Full participation in the basic units of society, family, social groups and community is the essence of human experience. Disabled persons are often denied opportunities of full participation in the activities of the socio-cultural system of which they are part. The deprivation comes through ignorance, indifference and fear. Attitude and behavior often lead to exclusion of disabled persons from social and cultural life. The [pervasiveness of the prejudice and the discrimination affecting disabled women and girls and the degree to which they are excluded from normal social intercourse produce psychological and social problems for many of them. Existing literature shows that there is need to introduce affirmative action for disabled persons, train them and allow them to undertake projects of their choice. As claimed by Sanchez(2008), ' through their enterprise they help to positively shape and influence public opinion and gender-based assumptions about women entrepreneurs to take full advantage of opportunities in their surroundings'. Mehra (2010) argues that it is paramount to bring women and girls who are disabled into main stream economy, if the economy is to realise its full potential.

### 8. Methodology

A qualitative research paradigm was used in this study. The study was both two-thronged. The first stage was on review of existing literature on women and girls with disabilities-thus this part was largely desk review. The second part of the study was field based in which I had opportunity to interview twenty women and twenty girls respectively. COPOTA School of the Blind, Reformed Church University a special needs University in Masvingo; Henry Murray School of the Deaf at located at Morgenster Mission provided the information that was vital. The girls interviewed were drawn from two of the institutions named above.

The sampling procedure for both women and girls was random and convenient respectively. However they were a few referrals by the institutions who knew workplaces of some of the women, whose contact details were given to me and then made physical follow-ups. Two focus group interviews with girls were held, one at Henry Murray and the other at Copota School of the blind. An assistant researcher helped to moderate the focus group through capturing important deliberations and was conversant with sign language which we had to use in some instances.

Data analysis was done with the use of thematic approach. Themes that emerged were categorised and analysed per se.

### 9. Results and analysis

The results of this study are discussed in the next sections of the paper.

#### 9.1. Demographics

The following profile in the next page emerged from the interviews that were carried.

Number of years	Frequency	Frequency %
20-30	5	25%
31-40	7	35%
41-50	5	25%
51+	3	15%

Table 1: Age of Respondents

The majority of the respondents fell in the 31-45 age range indicating that they are still active and it is at this time that they need to fully participate in mainstream economy. Their contributions in the study cannot therefore be taken for granted.

#### 9.2. Educational Qualifications

The results on educational qualifications of the respondents are shown in the pie chart in the next page:

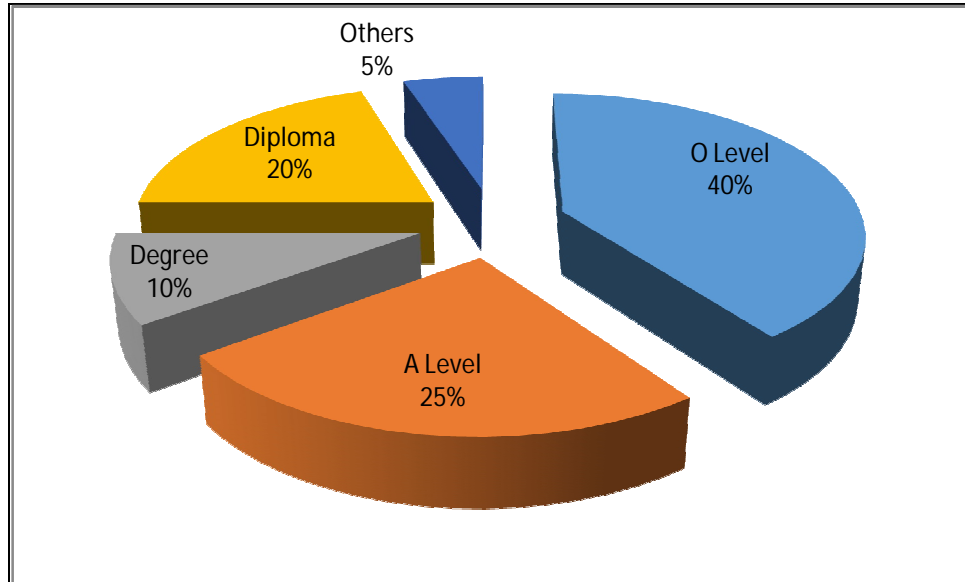


Figure 1: Educational Qualifications

In terms of educational qualifications, 40% had attained an O level certificate, while 25 had “A” levels with 10% holding degrees and 20% are diploma holders. With this high level of literacy and educational background one would assume that these women need to be involved in major economic development programs as they are equally enlightened. Their ability to go that far academically is an indicator of their potential to make meaningful socio-economic contribution, if opportunities are not closed for them.

9.3. Occupation Status

The table below provides statistics on occupation status of people living with disabilities, as per the study outcome.

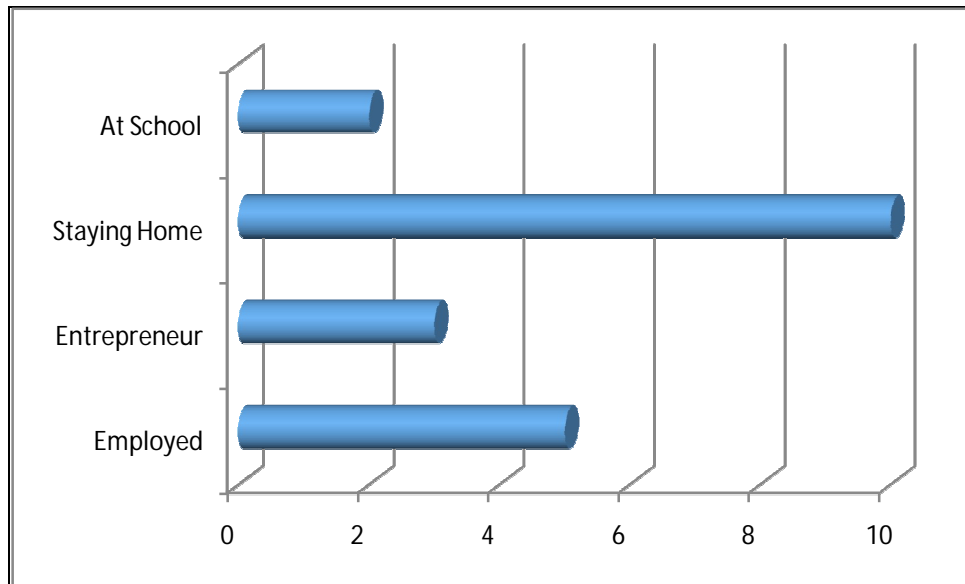


Figure 2: Occupation Status

The above statistics indicate the need to provide equal opportunities for women with disabilities as indicated by the majority who are at home but they do hold necessary certificates to progress. This anomaly can only be addressed through empowerment programs suggested in the study. With 50% staying at home while they have the potential to contribute in one way or another is a sign of society not doing enough to equalise opportunities for the disabled persons.

9.4. Marital Status

The following figure in the next page indicates results from the study in terms of marital status position of the respondents.

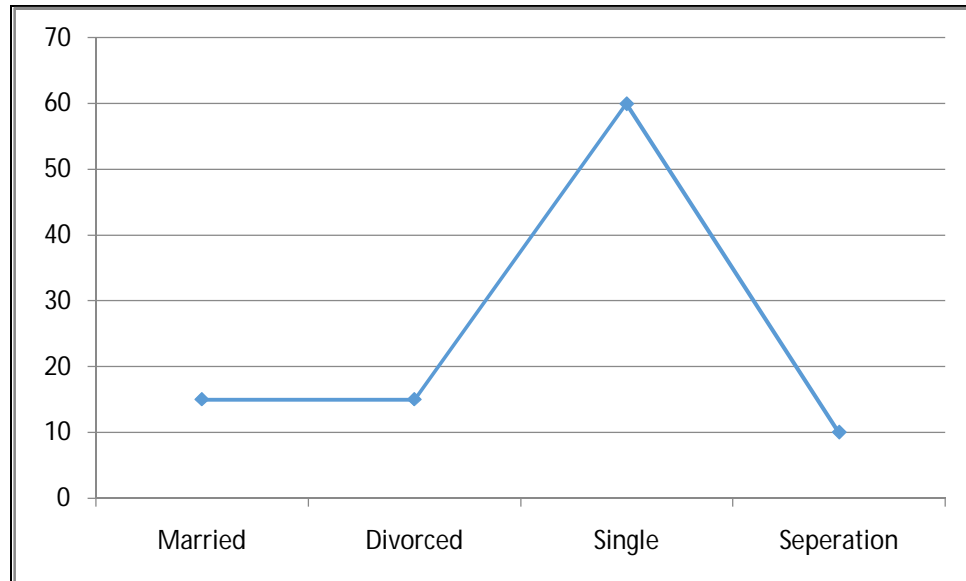


Figure 3: Marital Status

It is uncommon of Zimbabwe's culture to have women reach the age of thirty without getting married as reflected in this study (60%). The implication could rest on society's perceptions on women with disabilities that they shun to marry them. Again there is need to conscientise society as marital status have implications on confidence building among the unmarried and society in general.

#### 9.5. Inclusion in the Mainstream Economy

The major research question pivoted on the need to understand the level of involvement and inclusion of women and girls with disabilities in the mainstream economy as a way of creating equality for all persons as enshrined in the United Nations Charter on people with disabilities especially women and girls. The same responses, here touches on issues of empowerment raised in the second question of the study. The results of the study were stunning as reflected in the feedback from the respondents. Close to 96% of the respondents expressed high levels of dissatisfaction with the way society regarded their role. They expressed more anger towards government which they accused of 'prodigaling them' as alluded to by one of the participants. Many government initiated projects and community projects seem to exclude the disabled women and girls as they are taken up by people who 'claim to be able bodied'. The government is mum when it comes to information dissemination on key schemes which can also benefit the disadvantaged members of society. The following sentiments were echoed by the respondents giving a clear view of their position on this matter:

"There is a general assumption that we are a waste, hence deliberate exclusion from major socio-economic programs of Zimbabwe"

"We have heard about Donor funds coming in, but we hardly get consulted on how those funds should be used, latter alone reach us. They have meetings in expensive hotels, drive porch cars, sleep in mansions and they make decisions for us...*manje ndochiiichocho?* (Literally meaning, so what is that?)

"Funds coming from Donors should be directed to persons with disabilities directly and benefit them per se. Half of these are chewed by those who already have, it is a disturbing scenario"

"We have entrepreneurial zeal like anybody, my project has been affected now because I do not have capital to finance it, when you go to the bank on crushes, the moment they say come in, and see you, and they see failure. This mind set with our banking institutions should be aggressively dealt with. *Tirivanhuwo mhani*". (Literally meaning we are people like you).

"That we are excluded from many projects makes us unheard again, if we have concern to rise. We acknowledge that we have some representation in a number of our organisations representing the disabled-but you know what these friends of ours have slowly become corrupt and forget to do what we chose them to do for us. I do not want to give names but corruption is everywhere even among ourselves the disabled".

#### 9.6. Response from Institutional Representatives

The same issues that were raised by the women participants came out when two representatives were interviewed, of course separately. What emerged is that they all acknowledged the presents of policies on disabled persons but had reservations on the level of commitment by both government and their institutions to wholly adopt and implement UN resolutions and the Beijing Platform and The MDGs for people living with disabilities especially women and girls. Some of the sentiments were:

"We cannot talk holistically on creating equal opportunities as long as we stick to 'charity model of disability'. A move towards 'social model of disability' is what we need to think of and adopt. Then we can think of establishing a fair plying ground. This cannot be left to government or donors but to every member of society. Together we can do it"

The other representative from the other institution had this to say:

“We need an all-inclusive national policy based on need analysis not imposed solutions. We seem to lack the rigor and zeal needed to talk the issue of Human rights for the disabled persons. I work with them day and night. I know their plight—they are continuous beggars, we do not give them autonomy to make their own independent decisions. We do not believe in them, but these people are more gifted than some of us. A few of them have successful businesses, they have extraordinary skills, you cannot believe that. All we need is coming up with an indigenous approach to empower our mothers and sisters”.

Girls appeared to be worried more on closed education system. After completing their ‘O’ Level, most of them have nowhere to go. The majority of the girls retreats to the rural areas and plunge into poverty. Their sentiments were echoed by their mothers too. This is what they had to say:

“We are hopeless, I do not even know what I will do after completing my ‘O’ Levels? My parents are all blind and do not have money to send me further. We are eight in our family and all of us are going to school”

After completing my ‘A’ Level at COPOTA I want to go to University but the points required by our Universities do not take the plight of us”.

“My sister finished her ‘A’ Level and she is sitting home with her five months pregnant”

“My parents are only sending boys further to tertiary education, and I am sited doing nothing here”

### 9.7. Challenges

The study wanted to establish specific challenges faced by women and girls. The revelation is that they are more challenges than opportunities and most of these have been highlighted above. Some of the challenges that they alluded to include: barriers to access including limited public information, physical inaccessibility and bureaucracy. The other challenges included negative perceptions, prejudice, ignorance and apathy of policy makers and community.

“Our government offices are not user friendly. How do I get to 15<sup>th</sup> floor?”

“The entrances have non provision just for a simple wheelchair”

“Information does not reach us in time, what about those in the rural areas, it’s just pathetic”

“Society thinks we are not capable of performing”

“This general apathy on us should go”

### 9.8. Discussion

Although without specific targets, many mainstream social and economic schemes identify disabled women and girls as a potential target group. However, there is little information available on the actual inclusion of disabled women and girls in these schemes. Monitoring and evaluation systems for empowerment schemes are generally weak or non-existent in Zimbabwe, particularly in the poorest sections of the country. With the exception of a few schemes, attempts to find evidence of the inclusion of disabled people were unsuccessful. Nor does the need to monitor inclusion appear to have been widely identified within the literature. Much of the information that is available is out-dated. The majority of disabled women are not even aware of government efforts to uplift the lives of the disabled through a number of projects. The implication is that there is lack of information dissemination, a clear indication of slack structures to take heed of people living with disabilities, the most vulnerable group of which are women and children. The currently debated indigenous policy by the Zimbabwean government is clear testimony of over sweeping policies that assumes that people in Zimbabwe are all able-bodied. There is nothing much discussed specifically for women and girls with disabilities and how they can benefit from such national projects. These are denied opportunities and create disparities between the have and have-nots, the poor and the rich, the disabled and the non-disabled persons (Devereux et al 2005).

Progressive and monitored inclusion in mainstream education and health facilities, combined with short-term measures (such as waiving conditions or providing additional assistance to help disabled women and girls to comply) might be the most realistic and desirable approach to date in Zimbabwe. However, this requires substantial commitment to the improvement of such facilities – an on-going challenge within the schemes, for example social welfare for fees payment.

Evidence on the impact of social assistance for disabled people is extremely limited. Guided by suggestions from disability organisations and disabled people, as well as the limited anecdotal and research evidence that does exist, the study considers social and economic impacts. There are indications that social assistance may have a positive impact on self-esteem by enabling a contribution to the household budget and encouraging mobilisation of disabled people. However, there are also reports that disabled people often lack control over spending of the grant. There is evidence that social assistance can improve access to health services, but the picture on education is more mixed, with access depending on provision of adequate services. Social assistance seems to improve household health and economic status. However, evidence on the economic status of the disabled individual is less clear, particularly regarding employment. This last point leads to the long-standing concern around balancing social assistance with support for employment. Experience in high income countries suggests that support during the transition to work is critical.

Disabled people consulted for this study stressed that inclusive policies and creation of a fair playground, empowerment and social assistance must be part of a bigger programme of support. There are indications that governments do see social assistance and empowerment as one option within a wider framework of support for education, employment and other rights, but there seems to be little integration between empowerment and these other measures. Instead there is a tendency to divide disabled people into two categories: those in need of social assistance, and those deemed capable of productive activity and handled through disability mainstreaming in training or employment; possible links between the two are not explored. In balancing empowerment with other measures, policy makers need to consider appropriate sequence of measures and the role of equality in compensating for the extra

costs associated with disability. Possible strategies to improve integration include a more comprehensive assessment for disabled individuals that consider a range of needs, and clearer understanding of empowerment as a means rather than an end.

### 9.9. Recommendations

From the study findings, the following recommendations are suggested:

- Adoption of an indigenous Feminist empowerment model for people with disabilities. The model stresses the need to establish from ward levels databases of people with disabilities and the creation of projects that are funded by a central bank (bank for the disabled women and girls of Zimbabwe) which will not ask for collateral security. The model allows individuals or groups to start enterprises of their choices and permits the disabled persons to partner with the able-bodied while remaining major shareholding (51% stake).
- Important resources for rehabilitation exist in the families of disabled persons in their communities. In helping disabled women and girls, every effort should be made to keep their families together, to enable them to live in their communities and to support family and community groups. In planning rehabilitation and supportive programmes, it is essential to take into account the customs and structures of the family and community and to promote their abilities to respond to the needs of the disabled individual.
- Whenever pedagogically possible, education should take place in the ordinary school system, work be provided through open employment and housing be made available as to the population in general. In that endeavour, the duty of government is to ensure that the disabled gets a share in the process and are not left out in the cold. The extra services which the disabled persons must need, should, as far as possible, be part of the general services of the country. This should not only apply to government but be every individuals responsibility be there in private or public spheres.
- The cooperation of the public media should be sought to bring about presentations that would promote an understanding of the rights of disabled persons aimed at the public and the persons with disabilities themselves and that will avoid perpetuating traditional stereotypes and prejudice.
- An analysis of the situation of disabled women and girls has to be done within the context of different levels of economic and social development and different cultures. World over, the ultimate responsibility for remedying the conditions that lead to impairment and for dealing with the consequences of disability rests with the government. Governments should take the lead in awakening the consciousness of populations regarding the gains to be derived by individuals and society from the inclusion of disabled women and girls in every area of social, economic and political life. Government must also ensure that persons who are dependent by severe disability have an opportunity to achieve a standard of living equal to that of their fellow citizens.

### 9.10. Further Research

Given the outcome from this study and its limited scope, the researcher recommends that a number of grey areas need in-depth research. A participatory research is required on disability versus empowerment. Further research can be carried out on societal perceptions on persons with disabilities. One more lacking area is, while there has been a lot of research by NGOs on disability, little evaluation research has been undertaken. If this is done, it will help to reshape and reformulate further practical oriented empowerment programmes for women and girls with disabilities. Lastly as an offshoot from this study, there is need to look at the question: Social assistance or empowerment? The way forward!

## 10. Conclusion

The principles of equal rights for the disabled women and girls implies that the needs of each and every individual are of equal importance and there must be made the basis for the planning of societies, and that all resources must be employed in such a way as to ensure, for every individual opportunity for participation. Women and girls with disabilities should be expected to fulfil their role on society meet their obligations as a people. This is only possible against a background of equalisation of opportunities and its quick philosophy for the achievement of full participation of persons with disabilities in all aspects of socio-economic life. An important principle that should underline this theme is that issues concerning persons with disabilities should not be treated in isolation, but within the context of normal community service.

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