

# Possible Challenges in The Implementation of the Disability Policy under the Ministry of Community Development and the Department of Social Services in Lusaka Zambia

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doi: <https://doi.org/10.37745/bjmas.2022.04236>

Published January 30, 2025

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**Citation:** Mwalula, M. Y., Simui, F., and Muleya, G. (2025) Possible Challenges in The Implementation of the Disability Policy under the Ministry of Community Development and the Department of Social Services in Lusaka Zambia, *British Journal of Multidisciplinary and Advanced Studies*, 6 (1),13-24

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**Abstract:** *The purpose of the study was to establish possible challenges in the implementation of the disability policy under the ministry of community development and the department of social services. The study used qualitative approach and adopted phenomenological research design. The sample for the study was 10 people with disabilities, 3 headteachers, 2 community development officers and 2 social welfare officers making the total sample of 17 participants. Data was collected using focus group discussion with people living with disabilities. The discussions were in three sessions because they were three in each session and the last session had four participants and data was analysed using thematic analysis. The study found that the challenges which were faced included lack of policy implementation due to lack of funding from stakeholders. It was also found that the lack of special units in the main stream schools brought about exclusion of the children with disabilities because they cannot have equal access to education as other children. Therefore, the intra policy disagreements made the departments of different ministries dealing with people living with disabilities to work in isolation instead of coordinating activities. The lack of professional training for other government employees are enshrined in the policy documents which tend not to have disability disaggregated data for the whole country. The study recommended that the universities and other professional institutions should ensure that they include a component of handling people with disabilities in their training packages so that they can make every profession to be aligned with the disability inclusion policy. This will enable all professional training for other government and public employees be inclusive.*

**Key words:** disability policy, ministry of community development, social services

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## INTRODUCTION

The government of the Republic of Zambia recognizes that disability is a human rights and developmental issue, and therefore in 2010 it ratified to the United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities as a commitment to improve the welfare of people with disability. In addition, the country has put in place a number of laws and policies on people with disabilities, including the Persons with Disabilities Act No. 6 of 2012 and the National Policy on Disability. In line with the CRPD, the *Zambian Vision 2030* also recognizes the need to streamline service delivery for people with disabilities, in order to achieve the goals and objectives of the Vision. Despite huge strides in policy and legislation, the country has not responded adequately to the needs of people with disabilities, who still face challenges in realizing their social, economic, cultural and political rights. This is largely due to the lack of equal opportunities and means to participate fully in all aspects of life (*Zambia-Disability-Survey, 2015*).

However, there are more opportunities to affect things positively. MCDSW (2021) argued that The Ministry of community development and social welfare, the Ministry of sports and child development, Ministry of General education together with other government agencies, Civil Society Organizations (CSOs) collaborate to ensure implementation of the disability policies and enactments. The big question, however, is the extent to which the disability policies have been implemented and how they have benefited the primary target groups. Persons with disabilities have the same rights as non-disabled people and they can contribute to society and therefore, we must give persons with disabilities the same chances and opportunities as everyone else.

Njelesani, et al. (2018) conducted a study on exploring violence against children with disabilities in West Africa. A qualitative study design guided data generation with a total of 419 children, community members, and disability stakeholders. Participants were selected using purposive sampling. Stakeholders shared their observations of or experiences of violence against children with disabilities in their community in interviews and focus groups. Thematic analysis guided data analysis and identified patterns of meaning among participants' experiences. The results contribute that persons with disabilities experience violence more than non-disabled children, episodes of violence start at birth, and that how children with disabilities participate in their communities contributes to their different experiences of violence.

A study by Anthony (2014) conceptualized disability in Ghana to reveal implications for EFA and inclusive education. A controversial debate juxtaposes conceptualizations of disability as rooted in social injustice with positions which see disability as an impairment located within the individual. Critically, divergent conceptualizations of disability carry political implications for educational policies and provision. It is argued that meaningful educational opportunities for students with autism in Ghana are limited by this dichotomy of thinking and must be re-conceptualized to account for both the interaction between individual and societal barriers as well as local understandings of disability. Malungo et al., (2018) revealed that the National

Vocational Rehabilitation Centre (NVRC) was created to help impart skills to disabled persons with regardless of the extent. If the disability was in four main areas: visual, hearing, mental and physical/neurological, such persons were regarded as having severe disabilities. Conceptualizations of disability, as entrenched in Ghanaian cultural beliefs, norms and history are explored alongside the implications of these beliefs in designing and implementing national educational policies for students with intellectual disabilities as well as the socio-political pressures to adhere to large-scale international movements such as EFA and inclusive education (IE).

Mittler (2015) conducted a study on the implementation of the United Nations' (UN) Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (CRPD), together with the new UN commitment to ensure the inclusion of people with disabilities in the post-2015 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). The 152 governments that ratified the CRPD entered into a commitment in international law to submit detailed reports to the CRPD Committee of the UN human rights commission. Although some DPOs made good use of their right of access to this Committee, there was cause of concern about resources available to others. The Committee's criticisms of the nature and quality of government implementation highlighted the need for sustained and informed advocacy by civil society and the use of the internet and social media to raise public awareness about the potential of the CRPD to benefit people with disabilities. The study posited that lack of data on persons with disabilities in many countries presented the most serious obstacle to accountability and monitoring. It was suggested that scientific and professional bodies need to work more earnestly in partnership with DPOs in a combined effort to make a reality of the Convention and the emerging SDGs in a new dynamic of “research to practice

Taderera & Hall (2017) study established challenges faced by parents of children with learning disabilities in Namibia. In-depth interviews were conducted with eight parents regarding the challenges they face in parenting their children with learning disabilities. Thematic analysis enabled the researchers to identify, analyse and report on themes that emerged from the qualitative interview data. Analysis of the interviews indicated that some participants had only a vague understanding of learning disabilities, as they did not have access to essential knowledge about this phenomenon. They also lacked an awareness of the availability of programmes, services and policies meant to benefit their children with learning disabilities. Participants voiced that they, their children with learning disabilities and community members have stereotypes and prejudices regarding learning disabilities. In this study, most of the children with learning disabilities were raised by single, unemployed parents who seemed to have access to less support from external sources than married couples parenting children with learning disabilities. These single parents are usually not married and because of lack of financial support from the other parents, the majority of them indicated that they struggle to meet the financial and material needs of their children.

A study by Ashrita (2018) documents that from the European point of view. The stated that the World Health Organization recognizes the Community Based Rehabilitation (CBR) Program as an effective way of equalizing opportunities and creates inclusive societal norms in a

community. Based on this, the CBR in most European countries is based on a description of intervention categories taken from Campbell Collaborators which show different categories and their respective intervention resources. About six areas/categories of interventions are needed to prevent disability related outcomes as listed by Ashrita and her team. These include health, education, livelihood, social, empowerment, advocacy and Governance. It should be appreciated that the WHO has a common mandate to ensure that the disability policy is implemented in different countries to ensure there is equal access to human rights in all countries.

Muzata and Simui (2021) highlights that lack of trained teachers/inadequate teachers was the greatest challenge hindering the successful implementation of inclusive education in Zambia. This was followed by lack of supportive assistive devices, lack of special attention, and stigmatization from other Status of Zambia's Inclusive Education through the Lenses of Teachers. Other factors accounting for limited uptake of inclusive education: (I) poor classroom environment, (ii) severity of disability, (iii) teacher lack of ability to identify learners with disability, (iv) large numbers of learners in inclusive classrooms and (v) non-modification of classroom setting. Other reasons provided for why inclusive education is not working well in Zambia included unmodified curriculum, feelings of inferiority by learners with disability, lack of acceptance by teachers, and failure to bring learners with disabilities along in class implementation of curriculum. Furthermore, at the core of inclusive education is the human rights to education, pronounced in the Ministry of education's educational for all policy and by the Universal Declaration of Human Rights in 1948 (UNESCO, 2000). Arising from the UNESCO inclusive education description, it is not clear the possible challenges in the implementation of the disability policy under the ministry of community development and the department of social services.

### **Purpose of the study**

The purpose of the study was to establish possible challenges in the implementation of the disability policy under the ministry of community development and the department of social services.

### **Significance of the Study**

The establishment of gap between policy and practice could help in the improvement of approaches to implementing disability policies more effectively and help to affirm the basic human rights of people with disabilities to equal access to education and social and economic opportunities; and to create environments in which people with disabilities can maximize their capacity for making social and economic contributions (Metts, 2000). The study may also help the policy implementers to enhance their operations holistically without leaving anyone behind especially People with Disabilities (PWDs). The study may further contribute to a body of knowledge and literature that already exist on the issue of disability policies and practice in Zambia.

## **METHODOLOGY**

The study used qualitative approach and adopted a phenomenological research design because it wanted to document the lived experiences of the challenges people living with disabilities faced with regards to the policy implementation in the Zambian community. The study population included the people living with disabilities, school headteachers where the children with disabilities attended school, community development officers and department of social welfare officers. The sample for the study was 10 people with disabilities, 3 headteachers, 2 community development officers and 2 social welfare officers making the total sample of 17 participants. The sample was sufficient because the study was gathering data on the implementation of the disability policy from the perspective of the people involved. The participants were homogenously sampled (Nyimbili and Nyimbili, 2024) because they are the people dealing with the implementation of the policy. Data was collected using focus group discussion with people living with disabilities. The discussions were in three sessions because they were three in each session and the last session had four participants. These sessions were important because they enabled the researchers to learn from their experiences. Meanwhile, interviews with headteachers, community development officers and department of social welfare officers were conducted in their offices.

Data was analysed using thematic analysis. From the findings, data was coded, and themes were generated, and they were used to present the findings in this study. Thematic analysis enabled the researcher to present the data as it was presented by the participants using thick descriptions and verbatims. The study ensured that all the participants were kept anonymous by not mentioning their names, places and any description which could lead to their identification. Ethical clearance was obtained from the university of Zambian to conduct the study. Participants were not influenced to take part in the study through payments but they volunteered to be part of the study. An informed consent form was filled in between the participant and the researcher where they were told of their ability to withdrawal from the study at any time if they wished to do so.

## **FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION**

Data for this research question was obtained using focus group discussion with people living with disabilities, interviews with headteachers, community development officers and department of social welfare officers. The findings are presented under the following themes: policy implementation, lack of special units in the main stream schools, intra policy disagreements and lack of professional training for other government employees.

### **Lack of policy implementation**

There are different policies which are made to help the people living with disabilities to be assisted in the Zambian communities on various issues. The people living with disabilities have some policies which are not implemented in the Zambian communities hence they faced different challenged.

### **Findings from Interviews with Social Welfare Officers**

Participants were asked to explain the biggest challenges faced by the ministry of community development and department of social warfare in implementing the disability policy, and how they are addressed. Participants established that the department had challenges in the implementation of the disability policy due to delayed funding. Participant 1 revealed that:

Zambia has made positive headway in policy development, and a little movement towards policy implementation, especially in the area of special education. Zambia has laws and policies that promote the education of children with disabilities. It is relatively fair to state that Zambia has performed relatively well in developing policies and programmes aiming at providing for promotion and protecting the rights and needs of PWDs.

### **Findings from Interviews from Community Development Officers**

Participants were asked to mention the biggest challenges faced by the ministry of community development and department of social warfare in implementing the disability policy, and how they were addressed. It was revealed that the disability policy documents, though progressive, lacked detailed enforcement mechanisms. Participant 1 observed that:

Even though the policies tend to be quite articulate and rate fairly well with regards to the rights of people with disabilities, accessibility of services and programs, inclusiveness of services and programs and the implementation plans, the same amount of detail is lacking when it comes to enforcement mechanisms.

### **Findings from the Physically Challenged**

Participants were asked to mention the biggest challenges faced by the ministry of community development and department of social warfare in implementing the disability policy, and how they were addressed. It was established that policies on disability did not disaggregate on types of disabilities that existed such as lack of proper funding and some service providers did not have ideas on how to communicate with differently abled people. Further it was suggested that policies needed to be revised to include and name the omitted disabilities. Participant 1 observed that:

The policies in the social protection domain are elaborate, however, the implementation framework is missing and officers who are supposed to support people with disabilities lack political will. Most policies do not articulate disability disaggregated data leading to, in most cases, people with disabilities being covered under vulnerable populations which reduces the focus of attention on PWDs and the response thereof.

Participant 2 said:

Measures are put in place to support people with disabilities. However, the major challenge is that these measures fall far short of being implemented. Specific challenges encountered include limited funding, poor infrastructure and a shortage of qualified special personnel around disabilities, especially rare disabilities such as deaf/blindness.

Participant 3 noted that:

There are a few disabilities that are highlighted in the policies, such as albinism, and mental and physical disabilities. Others have not been handled, deaf-blindness, autism has been silent.

Participant 4 stated that:

In the previous elections, there were talks that there would be paper jackets for the Visio impaired people, but they were not trained. The VI people still depended on someone to assist them on how to draw a cross and they have never used a pen which takes away their privacy.

It was established that the policy documents also tend not to have disability disaggregated data for the whole country. In most cases, people with disabilities are covered under vulnerable populations which makes the additional challenges that persons with disabilities face in accessing services and makes planning for them difficult. In support of the current findings, Njelesani, et al. (2018) contended that there is prevalence of violence against children with disabilities can be expected to be higher in LMICs where there are greater stigmas associated with having a child with a disability, less resources for families who have children with disabilities, and wider acceptance of the use of corporal punishment to discipline children. Children with disabilities experience violence more than non-disabled children, episodes of violence start at birth, and that how children with disabilities participate in their communities contributes to their different experiences of violence. Despite International and Local interventions, PWDs still face and experience violations of their human rights. This can be through practices in the education sector or policy implementation.

It was established that possible challenges exist in the implementation of the disability policy under the ministry of community development and the department of social warfare. In support, Anthony (2014) conceptualized disability in Ghana to reveal implications for EFA and inclusive education. The Ghanaian government ratified its commitment to Education for All (EFA) and to reaching marginalized students through inclusive education. Conceptualizations of disability, as entrenched in Ghanaian cultural beliefs, norms and history are explored alongside the implications of these beliefs in designing and implementing national educational policies for students with intellectual disabilities as well as the socio-political pressures to adhere to large-scale international movements such as EFA and inclusive education (IE).

### **Lack of special units in the main stream schools**

The other challenge is the lack of special units within the main stream school system so that all learners can have access to education in the same environment. The study found that mainly

special schools are isolated from the main schools and are far from the rural areas. This makes learners and the disabled to fail to have access to quality education. Participant 2 said:

There are many children who fail to access education because the special schools are in the main district schools which are only one per district in most cases. Some of the districts do not have special schools and the children are usually kept at home in this case.

The Community development officer added that:

We have not managed to make the government schools to have special units for them to help the disabled learners. Imagine the children who are in the outskirts of the district and their mobility is a wheelchair, how do they attend school. The rural schools need to have special units to support the children in the country.

Participant 5 mentioned that:

Headteacher who are not qualified in Special Education tend to sideline the children with special needs and their classes are given to the mainstream children and the children with special needs end up learning from old offices with very poor lighting and no space. This demonstrates the lack of knowledge and heart for offering equal education to children with special needs.

Participant 6 observed that:

People with Hearing Impairment are not disabled as such, they are just limited in their communication just as the people with hearing are limited in their communication with them. Other disabilities like Deaf blindness are lacking interventions, so far there is only one private and Faith-Based Organisation (Bauleni Special Needs Project/School) in Lusaka that offers services to this type of children in the whole country.

Further, it was established that the government system in place supporting people with disability has lack of knowledge and heart for offering equal education to children with special needs. The challenge is that the government has not set up Special Units in mainstream schools due to inadequate funding. People with Hearing Impairment are not disabled as such, they are just limited in their communication just as the people with hearing are limited in their communication with them. Other disabilities like Deaf blindness are lacking interventions, so far there is only one private and Faith-Based Organisation (Bauleni Special Needs Project/School) in Lusaka that offers services to this type of children in the whole country. This organisation has done sensitizations on disability throughout the country. The policies need to be revised to include and name the omitted disabilities so that they are inclusive in themselves. Malungo et al., (2018) revealed that the National Vocational Rehabilitation Centre (NVRC) was created to help impart skills to disabled persons with regardless of the extent. If the disability was in four main areas: visual, hearing, mental and physical/neurological, such



people were regarded as having severe disabilities. They were taught skills on how to live day to day. It is important to note that skills and courses are targeted towards different disabilities when sensitizing the community.

### **Intra policy disagreements**

There are a number of policies which show disagreements within the disability framework. The disability policy talks about respecting the rights of the people living with disability and on the other hand the government is not funding the implementation. This brings about implementation disparities. The community development officer said:

Policy documents also tend not to have disability disaggregated data for the whole country. In most cases, people with disabilities are covered under vulnerable populations which makes the additional challenges that persons with disabilities face in accessing services and makes planning for them difficult.

The social welfare officer said:

We fail to implement some of the policies from the Act and other documents because they do not speak to each other very well. They argue and fail to agree with each other. This organisation has done sensitizations on disability throughout the country. The policies need to be revised to include and name the omitted disabilities so that they are inclusive in themselves.

A school manager also said:

The schools have not made an effort to make the children with disabilities be helped in the different districts of the country. I have not managed to see a school which has implemented the disability policy and provided the listed needs for a school which has this unit. The schools do not have the money to run the units.

Participant 3 added:

I have noticed that some children who are disabled are unable to get help from one ministry or the other, but they are tossed here and there. The children are asked to go to the social welfare department for one thing and for the other thing they go to the community development. When we ask them as to why it happens like that, they say it is policy. We need clear policies.

It was established that even though the policies tend to be quite articulate and state fairly well with regards to the rights of people with disabilities, accessibility of services, programs on inclusiveness and the implementation plan detail is lacking on enforcement mechanisms. The policy documents tend not to have disability disaggregated data for districts, provinces and the whole country. In most cases, people with disabilities are covered in vulnerable populations

which causes the additional challenges that people with disabilities face in accessing services and makes planning for them difficult. What affects them is rarely addressed. Mittler (2015) conducted a study on the implementation of the United Nations' (UN) Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (CRPD), together with the new UN commitment to ensure the inclusion of people with disabilities in the post-2015 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). Although some DPOs made good use of their right of access to this Committee, there was a cause of concern about resources available to others. The Committee's criticisms of the nature and quality of government implementation highlighted the need for sustained and informed advocacy by civil society and the use of the internet and social media to raise public awareness about the potential of the CRPD to benefit people with disabilities. The study posited that lack of data on people with disabilities in many countries presented the most serious obstacle to accountability and monitoring.

**Lack of professional training for other government employees.**

The public does not have the training and understanding on how to handle and treat the disabled in the Zambian communities because it is only teachers who are trained. Other professionals are not trained, which brings about challenges in implementation. The community development officer said:

There is need for government to streamline training across all professions so that everyone has equal access to the services. Knowledge of disability is also a big issue. Some service providers have no idea how to communicate with differently abled people. The challenge is that the government has not set up Special Unit in mainstream schools due to inadequate allocation of resources in this area.

The social welfare officer said:

We are also not trained to handle the people who use sign language in the community and yet they fall under our department. We fail to communicate because we are not trained to handle such. The department has challenges it faces in the implementation of the disability policy such as delayed disbursement of funds, limited participation in projects and high costs related to information and technology.

One school manager added that:

I have done special education as a course, but I needed to do the program in full because the students need to be helped. I cannot understand what sign language the children use and yet I have to give them help. Even other teachers need to be helped so that the correct thing can be done.

Additionally, it was established that there is need for government to streamline training across all professions so that everyone has equal access to the services. Disability affects everyone in

the community. Whether one has a relative or not, they are all affected. As such there is need for everyone to understand that disability is not inability. What a person without any disability can do can also be performed even better by a physically challenged person. Knowledge of disability is also a big issue. Some service providers have no idea how to communicate with differently abled people. The challenge is that the government has not set up a Special Unit in mainstream schools due to inadequate allocation of resources in this area. In support of the current findings, Taderera & Hall (2017) showed communities lacked awareness of the availability of programmes, services and policies meant to benefit their children with learning disabilities. Participants voiced that the children with learning disabilities and community members have stereotypes and prejudices regarding learning disabilities. The study concluded that the participants in this study experienced a range of challenges in parenting their children with learning disabilities. The main challenges emanate from financial instability, as well as lack of knowledge regarding services and programmes for children with learning disabilities. This lack of knowledge on the part of participants could indicate poor policy education by policy implementers at grass-roots level.

The theoretical implication on the possible challenges existing in the implementation of the disability policy under the ministry of community development and department of social warfare is that inadequate data collection and management may be seen as a system design issue which can be addressed through improved data systems and management processes. Poor monitoring and evaluation can be disputed by systems theory which suggests that monitoring and evaluation can be improved through better systems. On the other hand, social theory sees stigma and discrimination as a reflection of societal beliefs which can be addressed through awareness and advocacy. Further, the findings on inequitable distribution of resources and support are disputed by social theory which suggests that distribution is influenced by societal priorities and values and that opportunities are influenced by intersectional factors.

## **CONCLUSION**

The intended to establish the possible challenges that exist in the implementation of the disability policy under the ministry of community development and the department of social warfare. The findings established that Zambia has made positive headway in policy development, and a little movement towards policy implementation, especially in the area of special education. However, the department has challenges it faces in the implementation of the disability policy such as delayed debasement of funds. On the implementation challenge, it can be concluded that the lack of special units in the main stream schools brought about exclusion of the children with disabilities because they cannot have equal access to education as other children. Therefore, the intra policy disagreements made the departments of different ministries dealing with people living with disabilities work in isolation instead of coordinating activities. The lack of professional training for other government employees are enshrined in the policy documents which tend not to have disability disaggregated data for the whole country. Different professionals being trained needed to have a course on how to deal with the disabled so that they can find peace and love in all government and private space unlike leaving the task to the teaching profession only. Due to this, people with disabilities are covered under

vulnerable populations which makes them face in accessing services and this makes planning for them difficult.

### Recommendations

From the findings and discussion, the following recommendations are made for the study:

- i. There is need for ministry of community development and social welfare who are directly working with people living with disabilities to work together and save the interests of the disabled in the Zambian communities. This can be done through policy implementation from stakeholders and government units which promote their engagement.
- ii. The ministry of education and district education officers should ensure that they support the construction and consequent establishment of the special units in the main stream schools to enable children with disabilities access quality education also. This will help the community members to have an educated disabled community.
- iii. The Zambia universities and other professional institutions should ensure that they include a component of handling people with disabilities in their training packages so that they can make every profession aligned with the disability inclusion policy. This will enable all professional training for other government and public employees to be inclusive.

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