



# GENDER EQUALITY AND WOMEN WITH DISABILITIES IN POLITICS

## Policy Brief



**DEMO  
FINLAND**

POLITICAL PARTIES OF FINLAND  
FOR DEMOCRACY



Zambia National  
Women's Lobby (ZNWL)



**DISABILITY RIGHTS  
WATCH**



## KEY MESSAGES

### DISABILITY IS NOT INABILITY

There are a number of models or ways in which to view disability. However, it is important for duty bearers to view disability using the human rights and social models. The human rights model focuses on the inherent dignity of the human being and subsequently, but only, if necessary, on the person's medical characteristics. It places the individual at the centre stage in all decisions affecting him/her and most importantly, locates the main "problem" outside the person and in society. It looks at the person first before the disability. The Social model views disability from the functioning perspective, and says the environment and the attitude from the society limits the functioning of persons with disabilities. Hence this model requires the removal of all barriers and provide reasonable accommodation to enable PWDs functions in the day-to-day activities like any other. The two models believe that the impairment one has is not a problem, but the society which maybe user friendly.





## ACCESS OF PERSONS WITH DISABILITIES TO POLITICAL STRUCTURES REQUIRES PUTTING SPECIAL MEASURES IN PLACE BUT IT IS NOT DIFFICULT

A common misconception is that the inclusion of persons with disabilities is both complicated and expensive. Evidence shows that making infrastructure and political agendas inclusive is often less resource demanding than expected, and small alterations to current practices can lead to great results for the inclusion of persons with disabilities. More inclusive political arena requires, however, data on the party members and their special needs, and both the government and the political parties should step up their data collection to cater for persons with disabilities appropriately.

## PERSONS WITH DISABILITIES HAVE THE RIGHT TO BE INCLUDED IN PUBLIC DECISION-MAKING STRUCTURES

Self-representation is one of the cornerstones of democracy and democratic participation. Equal rights of persons with disabilities have been guaranteed by law, yet discrimination of persons with disabilities continues to be widespread across the society. Women with disabilities must have the same opportunities as others in participating in decision-making that directly affects them, and in public decision-making processes. If persons with disabilities do not have access to political decision-making, their right to self-presentation is not fulfilled.

### INTRODUCTION

Women still represent a small minority of elected representatives and political decision-makers everywhere. According to the UN Flagship Report on Disability and Development, 2018, the limited available data shows an extremely low participation and representation of women with disabilities in political leadership roles worldwide, Zambia included. Promoting gender equality and empowerment of women is essential to the achievement of local and the internationally agreed development goals, including the sustainable Development Goals.

Everyone has the right to take part in government and public affairs, to vote, and to be elected. Women with disabilities are a diverse group who experience various degrees of discrimination and face many systemic barriers to the exercise of their political rights and empowerment because of their gender and disability. These barriers can be of legal, physical, and attitudinal nature, and include an inadequate access to education, health care, employment, and justice.

### DEMOCRACY AND DISABILITY

Democracy underpins the idea that every citizen should have an equal right and opportunity to engage with and contribute to the functioning of these democratic institutions and processes. Therefore, a democratic society should uphold the following;

**Universal suffrage:** Democracy is meaningless until all men and women are given the political right to vote and be voted; The right to vote is a precious right in a democratic set-up

as it enables the people make choices on how they are ruled without which the people are bound to be helpless.

**Sovereignty:** Reside in the people and everyone, with or without disability. Everyone must have the right to vote and participate in the making of the laws that govern them; The right to vote is a public office/function conferred on the citizens for reasons of social expediency.

**Representation:** Democracy demands equality and inclusion. Democracy demands that everyone or any section of society is represented not disproportionately but proportionately. If some sections of society are not represented, their interests are likely to suffer.

## ZAMBIAN ACTS YOU NEED TO KNOW

### *The gender equity and equality Act, 2015.*

Emphasises the provision relating to elimination of discrimination against women in public and political life. The Act defines gender equality as “the state of being equal in terms of enjoyment of rights, treatment, quantity or value, access to opportunities and outcomes by, and in relation to, both sexes.” The objectives of the act are to:

- i. Prohibit harassment, victimization and harmful social, cultural or religious practices.
- ii. Provide for public awareness and training on issues of gender equality.
- iii. Provide for the taking of measures and making of strategic decisions in socio-economic, political, and cultural areas of society in order to ensure gender equality.
- iv. Promote gender equality in the public and private spheres as a cross cutting issue in the socio-economic, political and cultural areas of society and stimulate productive resources and development opportunities.
- v. Enhance the participation of women in public life and decision-making by ensuring equal integration of women and men in society.

### *The Persons with Disability Act, 2012*

The persons with Disabilities Act No 6 of 2012 defines disability as “a permanent physical, mental, intellectual or sensory impairment that alone, or in a combination with social or environmental barriers, hinders the ability of a persons to fully or effectively participate in society on an equal basis with others.” Section 51 of the Act demands that the Minister responsible must ensure the following to maximise the participation of PWDs in political life;

- i. voting procedures, facilities and materials are appropriate, accessible and easy to understand and use,
- ii. Vote by secret vote in elections and referenda without intimidation, and stand for elections, to effectively hold office and perform all public functions at all level of government, facilitating the use of *assistive* and new technologies,



- iii. free expression of the will as electors by allowing assistance in voting by a person of their own choice, when requested,
- iv. Promotion of an environment in which PWDs can effectively and fully participate in the conduct of public affairs, without discrimination and on an equal basis with others and encourage their participation in public affairs.

## INTERNATIONAL INSTRUMENTS YOU NEED TO KNOW

Zambia has ratified many international instruments patterning to issues of gender equality and disability. “Ratification” means the act by which the state signifies its consent to be bound by an international agreement and includes acceptance, approval and accession where the international agreement so provides.

### ***The Convention on the Elimination of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW)***

By ratifying this instrument, the government’s commitment was that;

- They would take all appropriate measures to eliminate discrimination against women through the constitution and abolishing existing law, custom or practice which constitutes discrimination against women.

### ***Maputo Protocol***

By ratifying this instrument, the government’s commitment was that;

- They would combat all forms of discrimination against women through appropriate legislative, institutional and other measures particularly those harmful practices which endanger the health and general wellbeing of women; integrate a gender perspective in their policy decisions, development plans, programmes and activities and in all other spheres of life.

### ***SADC Protocol on Gender and Development***

By ratifying this instrument, the government’s commitment was that;

- They would harmonise national legislation, policies, strategies and programmes with relevant regional and international instruments related to the empowerment of women and girls for the purpose of ensuring gender equality and equity.
- States parties shall endeavour, to enshrine gender equality and equity in their constitutions and ensure that these rights are not compromised by any provisions, laws or policies.
- They would put in place affirmative action measures with particular reference to women in order to eliminate all barriers which prevent them from participating meaningfully in all spheres of life and create a conducive environment for such participation.

## ***The United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (UNCRPD)***

By ratifying this instrument, the government's commitment was that;

- They would promote, protect and ensure the full and equal enjoyment of all human rights and fundamental freedoms by all persons with disabilities, and to promote respect for their inherent dignity. Full and effective participation and inclusion in society is recognized in the Convention as; (i) **a general principle (article 3)**, (ii) **a general obligation (article 4)**, and (iii) **a right (articles 29 and 30)**.

While much has been done towards attaining gender equality and ensuring reasonable accommodation to persons with disabilities in the country, Zambia continues to lag behind and has one of the highest levels of gender and other inequalities. The lives of many women and girls with/without disabilities are characterised by poor access to education, limited participation in decision making processes and lack of representation in key positions in political parties among other things.

### **IMPORTANCE OF WOMEN WITH DISABILITIES HAVING POLITICAL PRESENCE**

- a. Women's full participation in political life is a key factor in reducing poverty and creating fair, safe and secure communities
- b. The full and complete development of a country, the welfare of the world and the cause of peace require the maximum participation of women with/without disabilities on equal terms with men in all fields
- c. Women's political participation results in tangible gains for democracy, including greater responsiveness to citizen needs, increased cooperation across party and ethnic lines, and a more sustainable future.
- d. Women's participation in governance helps advance gender equality and affects both the range of policy issues that get considered and the types of solutions that are proposed.
- e. Participation of women elicits increased prioritization of social issues, like health, education, parental leave, and pensions influential to women in their communities.
- f. Factors such as female voter turnout, female political participation, and public service responsiveness towards women have a positive relationship with the presence of women with/without disabilities in decision-making positions across the public and private sectors.
- g. Women's parliamentary presence could also have a role model effect for individuals of all genders thus, normalize the idea and practice of women holding power.





## RECOMMENDATIONS

Zambia has a rich legal framework patterning to gender and inclusion of women with disabilities in public and political life. However, the Government, political parties, Civil Society Organisations and the general public should;

- i. Apply the human rights and social models when looking at issues of disability and inclusion of women in politics.
- ii. Ensure implementation of gender quotas for women's equal participation in leadership through the full implementation of the Maputo Protocol, the Solemn Declaration on Gender Equality in Africa (SDGEA) and other commitments in the national and legal frameworks as well as the Constitutional quotas. Quotas should be complemented by programmes to prevent future gender discrimination and harassment.
- iii. stimulate women's economic empowerment and working conditions; and strengthen national accountability on gender equality and women's empowerment.
- iv. Ensure that women and girls effectively participate in all the decisions related to the governance and administration of land and natural resources at the local, national and regional levels.
- v. Conduct regular gender-audits in political parties, electoral management bodies (EMBs) and Government Departments should monitor progress towards gender responsive electoral laws that prevent women from becoming candidates in the elections.
- vi. Safeguard women parliamentarians from all sexual assaults and threats against them online and offline.
- vii. Analyse the costs and benefits of the inclusion of women with disabilities in party functions. The returns are likely to be higher than the investment, increasing both the success of political agendas and support for the party
- viii. Promote men's engagement in supporting their female peers in political parties by ensuring nomination of key entry points and influential persons, particularly male champions, of gender equality in these parties.

## References

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