

POLICY BRIEF



Quality Disability Data and The Right to Political Participation of Persons with Disabilities in Zambia



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POLITICAL PARTIES OF FINLAND
FOR DEMOCRACY



Zambia National
Women's Lobby (ZNWL)



**DISABILITY RIGHTS
WATCH**

Fact sheet

The civic and political rights of persons with disabilities to vote and be voted into public office are not fully realized in Zambia partly due to the absence of actual numbers showing how many persons with disabilities there are in the country, where they are, and how many are eligible to participate in the electoral process.

Persons with disabilities continue to be left behind in programmes that promote political rights and engagement in development processes partly because **development programmers and political parties do not deliberately include** them in their initial planning. You cannot plan for what you do not count.

Generally, disadvantaged groups such as women, youths and persons with disabilities in Zambia are severely underrepresented in politics and decision making. Currently, women occupy only 20 of 156 elected seats in Parliament, while persons with disabilities hold just one seat. At local government level, out of 813 persons with disabilities who stood for election in the 2021 General Elections, only 6 were elected to local councils, with only one person being a woman.

Negative perceptions about persons with disabilities are as a result of entrenched stereotypes and misconceptions about the abilities they have to lead and make sound decisions. Persons with disabilities are and will remain invisible until the general negative public perceptions about their abilities change.

KEY MESSAGES

Disaggregated data collection is key to creating a clearer picture of the status of disability inclusion - Data aids development planning: Data contributes to global decisions about development efforts, poverty alleviation strategies and humanitarian response. It is instructive when it comes to policy, programming, and implementation.

Disability specific disaggregated data in Zambia's voter register is important for delivering effective voter education, facilitation of disability friendly electoral facilities and improves the confidence of persons with disabilities in participating in electoral activities,

Quality data on persons with disabilities as a voting constituency improves the attentiveness of political parties to their needs in the development of manifestos and targeted activities aimed at vote solicitation.

Political party collaboration is the foundation of a democratic and inclusive society - Collaboration between political parties is key in the inclusion of persons with disabilities, and inclusion of persons with disabilities is key in building of a sustainable democratic political

system with diverse voices through citizens' participation. Persons with disabilities need the political parties to work towards and enforce common principles and collaborative efforts for increased inclusiveness. Undeniably, political parties do compete for numbers. However, if parties have clear and well managed data systems, political parties can collaborate without fear of losing members or being overshadowed by other political parties. Collaboration for inclusion still remains one of the keyways of advancing inclusion of persons with disabilities and it provides an opportunity for peer learning on matters of mutual interest among political parties.

Quality national level disability specific data is important for planning and delivery of electoral services

The process and system of capture of disability statistics must be human rights compliant and not based only on medical based assessments that tend to result in underreporting as some categories of persons with disabilities tend to be left out.

Political parties in Zambia have significantly progressed in many facets since the return to plural politics prior to the 1991 general elections. This is evident from the demonstration of democratic tenets over the last 3 decades (e.g. multiparty culture and/or peaceful transition of presidential powers) The political situation has improved most recently though there is more room for further and adequate improvement. Political parties do enjoy freedom of association and assembly to some extent.

Despite these progressive developments however, political parties and the party system in the country still remain underdeveloped. This is attributed but not limited to political parties not having the resources, people, equipment or capacity to effectively operate a political infrastructure on a day - to -day basis. Most parties at the provincial and district levels do not have office space or full- time staff to manage these offices. These and many more challenges experienced by political parties such as; the lack of key segments in the legal and regulatory frameworks speaking to disability and/or the discomfort of asking people to declare if they identify themselves as persons with disabilities as they join parties have impacted negatively on collection and management of disaggregated data for PWDs.

A significant challenge facing political parties due to this is membership recruitment and retention. For the party membership recruitment and retention to be effective, members who join political parties should be giving all the required information. This includes disclosing one's gender, disability, geographical location and age just to mention but a few. When this information is captured in political parties' registers, it will be easy to plan and share resources within the political party.

Primary data collected through Zambia National Women's Lobby's (ZNWL) interaction with political parties and also research¹ conducted by other civil society

organisations, entail that political parties do not maintain reliable membership records thus, parties cannot provide accurate estimates of their national membership disaggregated by province, district, constituency, ward, age, gender and/or disability. Furthermore, a study done by WFD on "The cost of politics in Zambia" reviewed that political parties have for a long-time not prioritized management of membership, this is evidenced by allocation of resources as most political parties in Zambia spend their resources on campaigns.

The recruitment process/strategies are also not definitive or uniform across political parties. Some parties have clear strategies to include women and PWDs whilst most do not. Because of these inadequacies and the lack thereof of an agreed standard procedure of recruitment among other interventions that can ensure women and persons with disabilities are deliberately included in party structures, PWDs continue to encounter significant discrimination in fully exercising their right to participate in political processes and still face significant barriers to access positions of power at all levels of decision making despite being entitled to participate and represent themselves in processes and institutions where decisions that affect their lives are made.²

This policy brief targets political parties but also other stakeholders/institutions involved in political processes.

Political participation and quality disability data

Political parties

Over the past two decades, recognition of the centrality of political parties to the achievement of disability inclusion in politics and decision making has increased and is widely acknowledged by advocates and policy makers around the globe. Comprehensive frameworks such as the United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with

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https://www.ndi.org/sites/default/files/The_State_of_Political_Parties_in_Zambia_2003_Final_Report.pdf

² The persons with disabilities Act of 2012 section 51

Disabilities (UNCRPD) as well as other instruments on civil and political rights express these global commitments.

In Zambia, these commitments are reinforced by the domestication of the CRPD following the enactment of “The Disability Act of 2012”. Given the importance of political parties in realizing the rights of PWDs and democracy building, political parties are increasingly becoming an integral part of national and international disability-responsive initiatives. The need for alignment between national and global commitments that Zambia has made on disability inclusion in politics, public leadership and decision making especially at political party level cannot be overemphasized having that it is at the political party level where access to political power, leadership and decision making basically begins. The role of political parties has thus, long been essential to the functioning of modern representative democracy as they are seen to be among the key institutions for inclusive participation and accountable representation.

Quality data

The disability access audits conducted in 2020/21 with 10 of the political parties under the project promoting disability inclusion in politics implemented by ZNWL and DRW reviewed that most of these political parties did not have clear records of their members. The only information available is for members who hold recognized positions and not the general membership. Also observed was that political party registers which should provide information about membership of political parties were not available. While most political parties claimed to have members with disabilities, they were unable to share the actual names or disability categories of those members.

This is a significant gap in data having that, proper membership registers at political party level will enable political parties to have a clear picture of the support they have on the ground as well as, having clear data of members which in turn help in projecting performance of any political party in an election. In other words, membership data collected by political parties at recruitment stage must be disaggregated by disability,

gender, age, geographical location etc. and the records stored in a way that enables the party to refer to for more sensitive planning and budgeting.

An effective political party data management system makes it easier for a political party to keep track of its supporter, raise money and plan for any event. Through a party data management system, members should be kept updated and informed with all party proceeding. As political parties intensify on membership recruitment and retentions, it will be vital that a party put in place a party data management system that should also store disaggregated data for its members.

What does the UNCRPD say about recording and storing disability data

Article 31 of the UNCRPD outlines the following obligations to collect data.

- It calls for all kinds of data to be gathered, from official data to research data. It makes it very clear that data should be used to inform policymakers to support the implementation of the CPRD.
- It includes data collection principles. It requires the use of ethical principles and accepted norms to protect human rights and fundamental freedoms. This is particularly important for persons with disabilities as they face discrimination and stigma, and misusing data can have detrimental effects of their lives.
- It asks State Parties to identify, through data, the barriers that persons with disabilities face which impact on their participation in society on a basis equal to that of persons without disabilities.
- It calls on State Parties to ensure that data relevant to their situation is made available to persons with disabilities and their representative organisations.

The benefits of disaggregated data and the importance of keeping records

In order to understand the importance of disaggregated data, it is important to first understand exactly what is

aggregate data versus disaggregated data. Aggregate data is data that has been collected from two or more sources. To aggregate data means to gather separate sets of data and present it as a whole. Data aggregation is any process in which information is gathered and expressed in a collective or summary form.

Disaggregated data is data that has been taken from aggregated data and divided and broken down into smaller information units. Disaggregating data is another critical step to gaining increased knowledge from collective or aggregated information. Disaggregating data involves delving more deeply into a set of results to highlight issues that pertain to individual subsets of results and/or outcomes of aggregated data. Collective or aggregate data can be broken down or disaggregated, for instance, by: gender, urban/ rural location, income, socio-cultural or ethnic background, language, geographical location, political/administrative units, or age groups.

Fully disaggregating data helps to expose hidden trends, it can enable the identification of vulnerable populations for instance, or it can help establish the scope of the problem and can make vulnerable groups more visible to policy makers. Moreover;

- i. Disaggregated data in political party registers can provide a better comparative picture of what works and what doesn't work; and can help inform and promote evidence-based policy that would go a long way to ensuring no one gets left behind.
- ii. The disaggregation of data by disability is important for identifying areas of exclusion and subsequently supporting efforts to monitor and evaluate progress towards eliminating barriers within the context of the political party. This is because a more accurate understanding of the reality of marginalised populations will allow for better planning and budgeting for reasonable accommodation. Otherwise, if persons with disabilities remain invisible in data, they remain unaccounted for.

- iii. Disaggregated data on disability within political parties is a step towards achieving the sustainable development goals (SDGs). Disability is referenced in various parts of the SDGs and specifically in parts related to education, growth and employment, inequality, accessibility of human settlements, as well as data collection and monitoring of the SDGs. Closely linked is Goal 10, which strives to reduce inequality within and among countries by empowering and promoting the social, economic and political inclusion of all, including persons with disabilities.

Planning of electoral services

The inclusion of persons with disabilities in political processes requires provision of inclusive electoral services, delivery of information on political rights in accessible formats and other institutional measures.

The role of the Electoral Commission of Zambia in facilitating accessible and inclusive electoral services is dependent on the quality of data it has on persons with disabilities eligible to vote and participate in various processes related to the conduct of elections.

It is important that the ECZ maintains a voter register that has disability specific data to allow the electoral management body to effectively plan for services to persons with disabilities as well as train all individuals tasked with the management of elections on disability management skills.

10 REDUCED INEQUALITIES



SDG GOAL 10 AND AGENDA 2030

Reducing inequality and ensuring the inclusion of all regardless of age, sex, disability, race, ethnicity, origin, religion or economic or other status is at the heart of the pledge that “no one will be left behind”. SDG 10 encompasses the universality of the 2030 Agenda in which goals and targets involve the entire world, developed and developing countries alike. Inequality in this respect is not only about closing gaps, but about doing so in a way that lifts the bottom up and guarantees the equal realization of individual’s basic rights

Organizational focus on SDGs

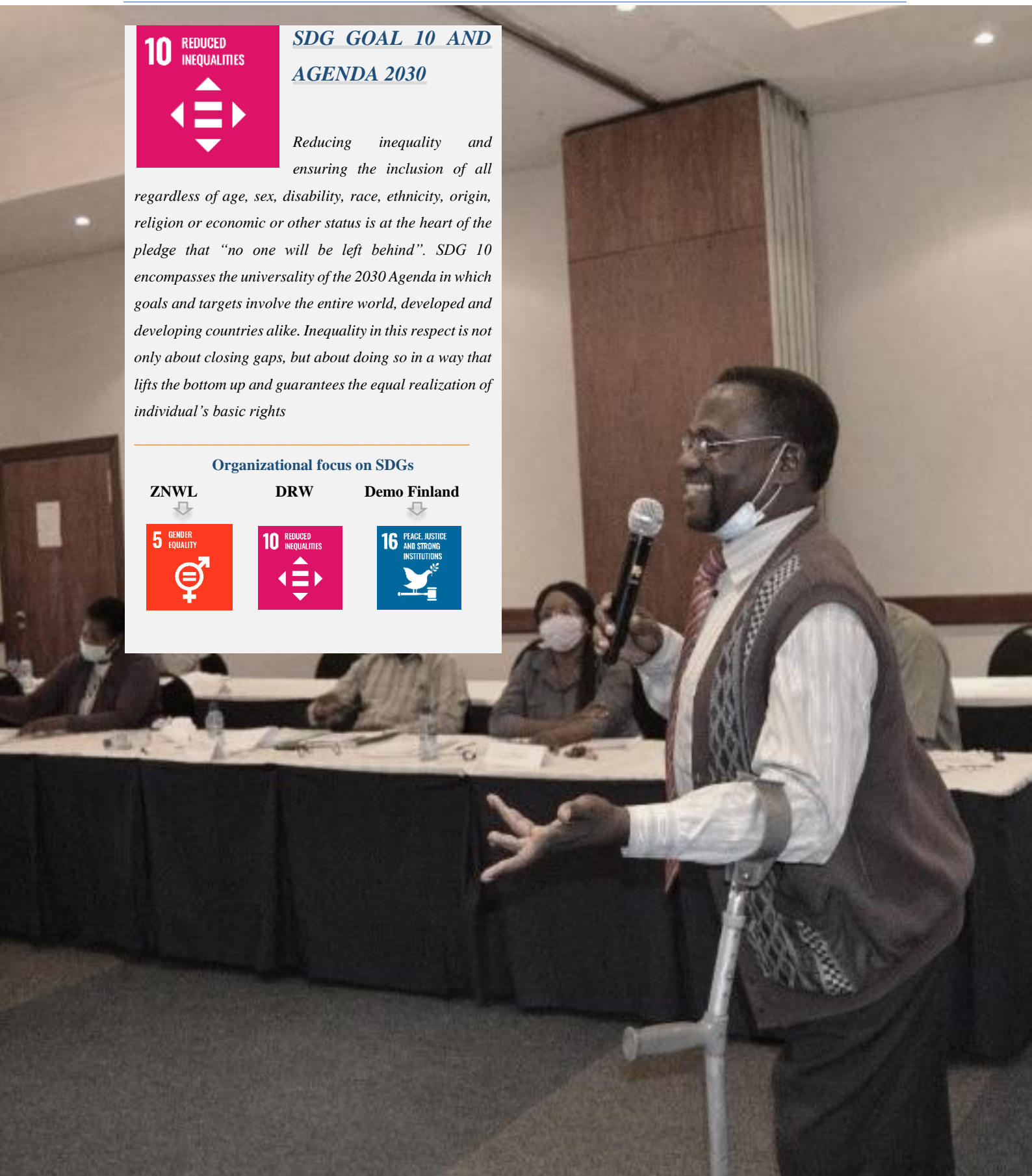
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Recommendations

For political parties

- There is need for political parties to revise their recruitment forms to include sections that will enable them to collect and accurately store data on disability. Political parties are encouraged to utilize the time in between elections to organize their membership and devise a mechanism to ensure their members register and data collected is stored in a proper party register. Membership data collected should be easily disaggregated by gender, disability categories, geographical location, age and any other vital information is recorded.
- Political parties must take consideration of all ethical concerns as they collect data on persons with disabilities.
- Political parties must not subject persons with disabilities to medical based disability assessment criteria but use the simplified Washington Group questionnaire to assess for disability.
- Political parties need data storage mechanisms for their members in order to decentralize their data storage point. Most political parties currently only have their membership database in Lusaka.
- The improved data management of internal party affairs of the three structures – main body, women and youth wings to have the responsibility of capturing disaggregated data of persons with disabilities. The management of this data can be guided by the revision of the political party constitution and other by-laws from time to time.
- Having operational political party constitutions and manifestos that has specific sections and commitments on capturing disaggregated data of PWDs and inclusion in effective participation leadership and decision-making processes.
- [Social media as a tool for data collection](#). As the online space has become an active part of

people's lives, it is only natural for political parties to replicate the mobilization of its ranks online too to facilitate political membership. Despite the known risks of social media to the health of democratic dialogue in society, parties should take digital activism to be a new way of rendering political party membership useful and more accessible to potential members.

- Periodic review and sharing of disaggregated statistics of party members. This form of transparency may attract potential members wanting to join.

For Government

- The Zambian government should devise a mechanism to integrate data collection points for persons with disabilities such as the Disability Information Management System (DIMS) sitting at the Zambia Agency for Persons with Disabilities with election management bodies such as Electoral Commission of Zambia for triangulation with the voters register.
- Smart Zambia platform which has digitally integrated government services needs to be a vehicle for inclusive digital access to information on persons with disabilities and for persons with disabilities to be captured and to access government services in a disability friendly manner.
- The Electoral Commission of Zambia should not only rely on the presentation of a disability registration card when registering persons with disabilities as voters as these are not readily available due to capacity limitations at ZAPD. The ECZ officer should use their discretion to register a person with a disability by administering the Washington Group Questions.
- Government should ensure to use functional based criteria when collecting data on persons

with disabilities through population-based surveys such as the national census on population and housing and embed questions that inquire on the extent to which persons with disabilities feel included in political participation and processes. The Electoral Commission of Zambia should disaggregate election results by gender and include information on persons with disabilities

- Support institutions like the electoral commission of Zambia in data collection as it is needed to planning of an inclusive electoral process.

For CSO's

- Organisations for persons with disabilities and other CSOs focused on SDGs linked to goal 10 should actively advocate for the inclusion of PWDs in political party registers.

- Civil Society Organisations involved in election monitoring should ensure to collect elections monitoring data that is disability inclusive. They should monitor the extent to which electoral services are inclusive and accessible, the parameters to include:
 - a) The turnout of voters with disabilities disaggregated by disability category.
 - b) The experiences of candidates with disabilities in the run up to elections.
 - c) The extent to which polling stations are accessible including the choice of location, size of doors, provision of tables for voters who use wheelchairs
 - d) Provision of measures to assure visually impaired voters the secrecy of the ballot.
 - e) The capacity of electoral officers to avail reasonable accommodation measures to persons with disabilities.

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