



TRANSFORMATIVE DISABILITY INCLUSIVENESS IN THE WOMEN'S MOVEMENT IN ZIMBABWE

Position Paper:
Strengthening Disability Inclusive
Feminist Movement Building

*Perspectives on Disability Inclusive Feminist Organizing
for Women in Zimbabwe*



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partnership with:*

*Centre for Children with Disabilities
FEMPREST
ZWRSN
Pada Platform
Blind Women Trust
Ruvimbo Simulation Centre
Alive Albinism Initiative
Women Space*

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About Us



Deaf Women Included (DWI) is a Deaf-led, grassroots disabled women's empowerment and advocacy trust registered in 2013. Our registration number is MA1404/2013. DWI seeks to advance the rights of women and girls with disabilities, particularly the Deaf. The organization commenced operations in 2010 before subsequently registering as a disabled women's empowerment trust. The trust was founded by a group of concerned Deaf women out of concern and realisation that Deaf women are often left out of social and economic programs, including awareness programs about GBV/SRHR; and are being face all forms of violence and abuse every day, but fail to access justice due to communication barriers and lack of understanding of Deaf Culture and Sign Language amongst service providers. DWI seek to advocate and help overcome these barriers and is one of the most visible disability-led Disabled Persons' Organizations (DPO) in Zimbabwe today.





VISION

An inclusive society in which Deaf women are considered full citizens, enjoying the same human rights as anybody else and participating fully in all aspects of society.



MISSION

To empower Deaf women of all age groups, to claim access to information, health services, education, and employment opportunities, and to advocate for mainstreaming of Deaf women issues across all sectors of societies.



VALUES

Deaf Women Included is founded on the following core values, which guide WAGWDs' organization in all its actions: **Loyalty, Justice, Commitment, Compassion and Tolerance.**





Our Work



CONSTRUCTING HOPE

Our work is premised on empowering women and girls with disabilities to live full, autonomous, and empowered lives so that they attain dignified lives in wake of the rife discrimination which they encounter in their lived experiences.

CONNECTING RESOURCES FOR CHANGE

Our focus is on widening resource mobilization to implement highly impactful initiatives for women with disabilities; thus increasing resource availability and reducing risk are pivotal in ensuring that our work remains sustainable enough to empower WAGWDs.

NURTURING PARTICIPATION

We value a human rights-based participation approach to bringing change. WAGWDs must be knowledgeable of their rights, and use them to participate without discrimination. Sufficient knowledge of their rights will empower WAGWDs to demand them and use them to live empowered lives.

INFLUENCING PUBLIC DECISIONS

The provision and protection of WAGWDs' rights are centred on relevant decision-making



by policy makers. Our role maps out disability-inclusive paths for WAGWDs to participate in decision-making processes so that they can attain positive policy outcomes which transform their lives.

INNOVATING FOR CHANGE

Inclusive programming opens avenues for innovative design in programming. Thus, our members thrive on our sustained progress in designing innovative programming with their input. We firmly believe that WAGWDs must be involved exclusively in innovating for the future as they are equally able to contribute to development outcomes of Zimbabwe.

SAFELY DELIVERING QUALITY GBV SERVICE

DWI is committed to delivering quality service on SRHR and GBV to meet the demands of women and girls with disabilities. Our case management system is designed to specifically provide adequate and essential support for WAGWDs through the layering of services in the referral pathway. This guide will exclusively showcase that.

REINFORCING CONSCIOUS FEMINIST MOVEMENTS

We value the creation of feminist movements as they drive a shared purpose to create lasting change, which empowers WAGWDs. We also advocate for mainstreaming disability issues in feminist movements and do not treat disability issues as merely topical but consider them as transformational to women's organizing.



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The significance of feminist movement building for us is aimed at dispelling the view of women with disabilities being of less value in the mainstream women's movement, which has been slow to make space for them – if not actively resistant as shown by their preference to male collaborations with male-led formations instead of female-led disability organizations.

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Stepping in With Us



“Movement building is an essential aspect of our work. We are driven by the need to build empowerment and agency through feminist-driven organizing as an organization.”

Agness Chindimba - Director

Movement building is an essential aspect of our work. As an organization, we are driven by the need to build empowerment and agency through feminist-driven organizing. Thus, the premise of our work in the past decade has been centered on collaborations and collective actions with women with disabilities, women's rights organizations, activists who are considered non-disabled, civic organizations, INGOs, government institutions, and various stakeholders interested in advancing the rights of women and girls with disabilities.

The significance of feminist movement building for us is aimed at dispelling the view of women with disabilities being of less value in the mainstream women's movement, which has been slow to make space for them – if not actively resistant as shown by their preference to male collaborations with male-led formations instead of female-led disability organizations. We note with concern how they are very few women with disabilities driving a collective feminist agenda in Zimbabwe as observed. Women with disabilities do not even have an exclusive consortium that exclusively represents their needs in a collective space.

In this regard, DWI is presenting this position paper as a foundational knowledge product that elevates the need to build a solid women's rights movement which leaves no woman behind and intersects the marginal needs of the most vulnerable women. We hope that this position paper will inspire a transformative future of disability-inclusive movement building which will create inclusive spaces for feminist engagement to attain the goal of gender equality for all women.

Happy organizing!



Acknowledging

Our Partners, Friends & Staff

DWI is thankful for the contribution of different feminist movement actors toward the development of this position paper. Wider consultations were done with women and girls with disabilities, technical persons who know the subject, and women's rights organizations. The participation of WWDs in producing this position paper is greatly valued as a historical and flagship milestone set to contribute to making the work of women with disabilities visible in the women's movement in Zimbabwe. Special thanks to Womankind who made it possible for this work to be done, and our partners from the Sigrid Rausing Trust and our Feminist sister Diakoumba Gassama. Lastly, we would like to thank Nyasha Sengayi and the DWI Staff, who made a great working partnership in the production of this position paper.

DWI would also like to recognize the contributions of the following organizations in the development of this position paper:

Centre for Children with Disabilities

FEMPREST

ZWRSN

Pada Platform

Blind Women Trust

Ruvimbo Simulation Centre

Alive Albinism Initiative

Women Space



Key Definitions

Agency

The capacity of women and girls with disabilities to take purposeful action and pursue goals, free from the threat of violence or retribution. The three core expressions of agency in this position paper are decision-making, leadership, and collective action in the form of movement building.¹

Gender

Refers to the characteristics of women, men, girls, and boys that are socially constructed.

Movement Building

Movement Building is the effort of social change agents to engage power holders and the broader society in addressing a systemic problem or injustice while promoting an alternative vision or solution.

Discrimination based on disability

Refers to any distinction, exclusion, or restriction based on disability that has the purpose or effect of impairing or nullifying the recognition, enjoyment, or exercise, on an equal basis with others, of all human rights and fundamental freedoms in the political, economic, social, cultural, civil or any other field. It includes all forms of discrimination, including denial of reasonable accommodation.

1. Agency – The Gender Equality Toolbox accessed at <https://www.gatesgenderequalitytoolbox.org/measuring-empowerment/agency/#:~:text=It%20refers%20to%20the%20capacity,%2C%20leadership%2C%20and%20collective%20action>



Abbreviations

PWDs

Persons with disabilities

WAGWDs

Women and girls with disabilities

OPDs

Organisations of persons with disabilities

UK

United Kingdom

UNCRPD

United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities

WwDs

Women with disabilities

WROs

Women's rights organisations



The Position



“The creation of disability-inclusive feminist-oriented partnerships drives support and informs social change, which promotes disability activism as an essential aspect of strengthening women's movements.”



Our Call for All Women

As Women and girls with disabilities, we are aware of the rife discrimination which occurs in our day-to-day lives mostly due to societies' misunderstanding of disability and the glaring impact of discrimination in multiple spaces.

We are deeply concerned that this discrimination is present in spaces of organizing within the women's movement despite the milestones which have been achieved in influencing Zimbabwe to enact laws and policies on gender equality. The contribution of WwDs to such has been marginal, and mostly an afterthought to strategic inclusion.

We, the WwDs, want this to change as soon as possible. Our vision for Zimbabwe is a feminist inspired nation which drives the interests of all women to contribute to development outcomes without leaving any woman behind. We want a life of dignity for all women and see gender equality as a reality, not as a strategy for convenient organizing.

Women's rights are an integral part of any democratic society and as such they need to be advanced, safeguarded, and protected for every woman. Thus, every woman has to be included in the fight.

As is, we put forward this position paper as a roadmap, a pledge, and a commitment to every woman and girl in Zimbabwe and beyond to ensure that disability issues are also prioritized in feminist organizing and not left as a side issue.

In our feminist fight, we will continue to champion women's rights and gender equality, and disability rights, make politics work for all, and celebrate diversity. We put feminist movement building at the heart of our work, always keeping it as one of the main objectives and core values we strive to uphold to ensure that no woman is left behind.

Because we know that disability-inclusive movements and societies are not just for women and girls with disabilities. They are for societies that turn out to be safer, more developed, resourceful, happier, and prosperous for all.



Women's rights are an integral part of any democratic society and as such they need to be advanced, safeguarded, and protected for every woman.



1 Introduction

A Movement with a History

The Zimbabwean women's movement has a rich history captured for more than five decades of empowerment work of women's rights organizations. It is rich on accounts of organic grassroots movement-building but is however scarred with backlash, longstanding political conflict, and a paucity of empirical documentation of historical milestones, especially regarding the work which has been done by women-led OPDs. This position paper defines the women's movements as groupings of women's activists, women's rights organizations, women-led cooperatives, feminist researchers, women without any affiliation but are interested parties to equality and social inclusion, and female student activists.

1.1 A Summary of the History of Zimbabwe's Women's Movement

Existing literature posits that women in Zimbabwe have been organizing themselves around specific issues of concern since the early 1900s which started in Christian-inspired groups known as Ruwadzano and subsequently transitioned into home craft groups.² These later developed into home craft organizations that reflected the early structured organizing of women for common causes due to colonial tensions.³ As racial tensions and policies progressed before Zimbabwe's independence, the origins of organizing for common issues were drawn from the idea of women's organization at the same time when black political movements were rising.

However, the issues remained focused on improving the lives of women in their specific roles as wives and mothers, rather than challenging gender inequality and gender stereotypes are given that women were considered to be minors at law and were subordinate to their husbands and male children. Historically, the political practice of the Rhodesian government was characterized by policies crafted to exclude women in public spaces. At law, women were minors and were subject to control by men in different aspects of their social and economic lives. These relations continued post-independence. Perhaps the exclusion of gender equality issues during the drafting of the Lancaster House Agreement⁴ can explain these patterns of colonial exclusion.

By 1980⁵, there were women's rights organizations already working to empower women. The major focus of women's organizing at that time centered around complementing the foundational development work being done by the state with the added support of donors. The government adopted a welfarist approach at independence which was largely development oriented. The women's movement was providing a supporting role despite being under-represented in major decision-making processes and the mainstream governance of the newly independent state. As non-profit actors, their work was mostly supportive of the new government.

In the first decade of independence, women's groups were mostly concerned with development-oriented processes such as credit schemes, economic empowerment through agricultural cooperatives, adult literacy, and healthcare projects mostly aligned with public health interventions. These activities aimed at promoting development in the private and

2. Ziyambi N, Women's Groups and the Media in Zimbabwe, University of Oslo, 1996 pg 16

3. Zimbabwe attained independence in 1980

4. The Lancaster House Agreement, signed on 21 December 1979, declared a ceasefire, ending the Rhodesian Bush War; and directly led to Rhodesia achieving internationally recognized independence as Zimbabwe.

5. Zimbabwe attained independence in 1980.



domestic space where the value of women's contributions was confined. In comparison to men within the same period, after the demobilization of liberation armies, men were mostly conscripted into civil service depending on how well-educated they were. There were better employment opportunities for men who were paid more than women, even if educational opportunities were the same at the time.

The population of Persons with Disabilities rose during the war in Zimbabwe. Before independence, there is not much documentation on the organized efforts of PWDs as a movement. The support for PWDs was a welfarist approach for both men and women which adopted a charity model of supporting persons with disabilities. This continued into the independence with a lot of male-led disability-aligned organizations being set up due to the increase in numbers stemming from the war. Of worth noting, was the establishment of the Jairos Jiri association which is the earliest known OPDs in Zimbabwe it was set up in 1950 using Christian principles of charity, patience, and non-judgmental tolerance with legal representation and affiliate-supported groups being founded in some African countries and the UK . More centers proliferated locally, after the war due to casualties caused by the conflict. There is no evidence of organizations, which were overtly created for the specific needs of women and girls with disabilities which were led by women themselves at this point. The complexity of the charity model is that a lot of disability person organizations, created were dominantly male-led and largely not representative of the gendered needs of WAGWDs.

Adding to this exclusion in organizing of WwDs, the premise of women's organizing was focused on promoting the efforts of government in development which were on the formation of the Women in Development ideology . The Unity Accord in 1987, ending Gukurahundi and creating a de facto one-party state, minimized the opening up of fair space for women to participate in political activities. In the wake of this, most of the political decisions made in the early 80s were gender-blind and exclusionary of all women. Women had been both direct and the majority of indirect victims during Gukurahundi, suffering rape, torture, and killings particularly during the Gukurahundi period. In addition to this, women across the country were arrested on the streets indiscriminately through Operation Restore Order, a campaign limiting women's freedom of movement where many women were arrested falsely for soliciting as prostitutes.

From these concerns, a more autonomous women's movement was created, especially after 1985. This led to the disassociation of the women's organizations from state attachment to creating an agency for women's rights resulting in a call for clear, rights-based, demands towards the end of the 1980s. Women's organizations began to take up a strategic transition of confronting the state's quasi-authoritarian authoritarian governance stemming from the one-party state from the late 80s into the early 90s . The outcome of such actions led to the creation of more women's organizations with a focus on governance and human rights.

The exponential growth of women's solidarity was essential in framing the advocacy activities through interconnected actions and strategies within the women's movement, especially in the

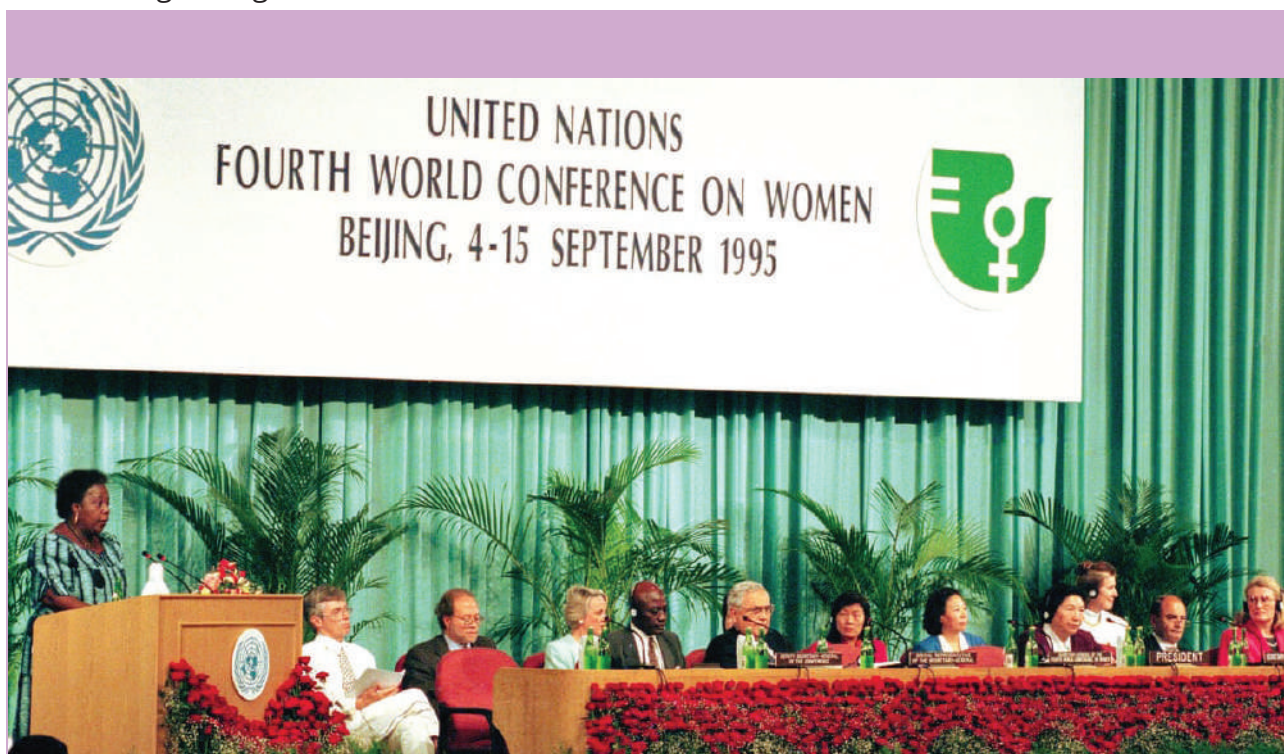
6. Wikipedia

7. An approach to development projects calling for the integration of women in development issues and economies by improving their status.

8. The Gukurahundi was a genocide in Zimbabwe which arose in 1982 until the Unity Accord in 1987. It derives from a Shona-language term which loosely translates to "the early rain which washes away the chaff before the spring rains"

9. Nyasha Sengayi, Civil Society Gender profile on Conflict and Security Assessment in Zimbabwe, March, 2021 created for Women and Law in Southern Africa, Zimbabwe.

wake of consciousness raised by the Beijing Conference in the mid-90s.¹⁰ At this point, the source of women's grievances is drawn from the impact of civil conflict on their lives. There was a realization that the contest for political power made women pawns, who were expected to play a supporting role in politics rather than active agents. The trend shows women beginning to organize strongly around the impact and effects of the economic, social, and politically driven conflict. A culture of women's organizing was birthed and strengthened due to the impact of conflict. Most organizing efforts occurred within the setting up of formally structured women's rights organizations.



Beijing 1995 was a defining moment for women's rights, acknowledging the importance of women's and girls' rights and the need to ensure greater equality and opportunities.

Following the economic challenges ushered in by neo-liberal policies such as ESAP¹¹, women realized that their struggle was not limited to the politics of representation only, but to economic and social struggles as well. As in most African countries, and indeed most countries of the world, Zimbabwean women are confronted by multiple inhibitory factors - structural, economic, social, and cultural – and these are made inhibitory when there is endemic political violence. The result of understanding all these factors was a pursuit of political consciousness and much more vibrant activism by the women's movement but still, the double burden faced by women with disabilities remained invisible in the issue-based struggles presented. Their efforts were directed towards redressing the impact of conflict in their day-to-day lives by placing demands on the development of new policies and legal reforms that can be ascertained within the frame of gender equality and economic empowerment.

10. The Fourth World Conference on Women: Action for Equality, Development and Peace was the name given for a conference convened by the United Nations during 4–15 September 1995 in Beijing, China

11. **Economic Structural Adjustment Programme (ESAP).** A major objective of ESAP was the reorientation of the economy from the production of non-tradable to the production of tradable goods. Had a devastating economic impact on Zimbabweans and led to poverty at the household level



Thus, with the adoption of the economic and structural adjustment program in 1991, the government reduced spending on social services, education, and health which greatly affected the welfare of women who were marginalized economically at the time. The removal of the social welfare safety net resulted in a decline in living conditions for many people, especially in the feminization of poverty since women had minimized control of economic resources from the household level to the national level thrusting women with disabilities into a much deeper abyss of poverty since they were benefiting the most from the welfarist provision. This however did not lead to a rise of a notable disability-aligned women's rights movement at the time. Representation remained male-led and marginal to this end. A lot of factors contributed to this, with most women and girls with disabilities being mostly hidden and not valued within Zimbabwean society. This has continued to date making it difficult to provide a fair space for inspiration to fight for their rights.

During this period, many women took up the fight for service provision as the focal point of their organizing, as this was the best indicator of the economic structural violence that greatly reduced the capacity for people to fend for themselves. Adding onto the economic challenges, some provisions of the constitution continued to provide legitimacy for excluding women. Thus, there was growing consensus on questioning the provision of power to women and the impact of the power on delivering resources for survival for women.

This made women realize the extent of their exclusion and promoted the drive toward democracy and governance within the women's movement. The voices of women with disabilities remained invisible at this stage though they were most affected as they relied on the charity model for provision offered by Government. With little or no opportunity for survival, they were the most affected and doubly marginalized and still left exposed without a notable representation within the movement to air their grievances. Their representation largely remained at the periphery in male-led organizations and movements which they did not have visibility or agency on issues specifically affecting them. Within this decade there was notable growth in activism within the broader civic society, signposted by the formation of the National Constitutional Assembly in 1997 (by 5 men and two women)¹², Women's Coalition¹³, and subsequently the Movement for Democratic Change¹⁴ in September 1999.

Post 2000, the political crisis intensified as the government found itself with formidable opposition for the first time. The most notable source of conflict within this period was the crackdown on opposition supporters characterized by widespread gross human rights violations, especially during elections. This led, as pointed out earlier, to a deeply polarized nation, a large lack of political trust in the state and the government, and the increasing reliance by the government on coercion as its primary method for achieving compliance in the citizenry.¹⁵

Thus, the culture of polarization and apathy became rife as it became increasingly difficult for both men and women to freely participate actively or support the politics of their choice. The result of apathy has been a widespread disengagement of the general populace from being

12. The NCA a movement created in 1997 as a grouping of individual activists and civic society organizations to drive inclusive and broad based constitution making process in Zimbabwe. Women's organizations were also an active group within the constitutional movement and they later on, created their own consortium known as the Women's Coalition in Zimbabwe.

13. Women's Coalition in Zimbabwe is a national membership based network of women's rights activists and women's organisations. It provides a focal point for activism in Zimbabwe.

14. Movement for Democratic Change was the first opposition political party created outside the foundations of liberation war in Zimbabwe. It was a formidable opposition that brought in real political opposition to the ruling ZANU PF.

15. Nyasha Sengayi, Conflict, and Gender Assessment in Zimbabwe for WLSA



involved in civic processes as they are considered political and partisan. Women are always at serious risk of political violence when any form of a contest for political power takes place, whether this is during elections or at times of public protest.¹⁶ The sustained effect of many decades of political violence leads to women being discouraged from political participation, apart from voting.

Hotly contested major political events such as elections and referenda took place in 2000, 2002, 2005, 2008, 2013, and 2018. Women experienced the greatest brunt of political violence in each event, although some elections were considerably more violent than others. 2000, 2002, and 2008 can stand out as the most violent. Politically motivated violence employed assault and SGBV as forms of silencing opposition.¹⁷ A lot of organizing was done to address the challenge of political violence. In terms of progress within the movement, not much has changed and much focus is on SRHR work and the political participation of women at present. A lot of women's rights-focused programming is characteristic of the work which the movement is mainstreaming in its wake.

At this stage within the movement and with the coming of social media, there were new organizations formed with a movement dubbed the young women's movement. This movement emerged from this and was made visible through social media. A lot of innovative advocacy campaigns on various thematic issues such as GBV, SRHR, economic empowerment, personal branding and leadership, and other information-based initiatives. This emergence has also widened the platform for adding a voice to women's rights issues as there is now much access due to such. This has seen the proliferation of new-age young feminists who are driving their activism in different aspects. From this emergence, there is evidence showing that younger women with disabilities are creating their own space to organize for causes worthy of them. The period marks the establishment of a visible action of WwDs in fighting for their rights.

1.2 Women-led DPOs: A History with a Paucity of Data

From the 1970s, PWDs began to create their agency after realizing that a lot of their issues were not being addressed adequately at the global level. The projects which were being designed to support them were not inclusive and were being done in ways that they would have not chosen and that ultimately, they were not in control of their lives. This challenge has remained even up to this day as evidenced by the continued creation of initiatives on behalf of PWDs by persons considered to be non-disabled. A need for an agency specifically for PWDs led to the creation of self-help and single-issue Persons with Disability organizations (OPDs) run by and for disabled people, addressing needs identified by their members. This form of organizing marked the beginning of the disability movement. Some sources argue that the creation of exclusive disability organizations was a form of resistance against charitable models of support which were not empowering PWDs. Thus, international OPDs created local models of organizing together and campaigning for rights, not charity. They drew strength from and were influenced by the rise of feminist, civil rights, and anti-racist movements in setting their aims and in

16. RAU (2010), Women, Politics and the Zimbabwe Crisis, Report produced by Idasa (An African Democracy Institute), the International Center for Transitional Justice (ICTJ), the Research and Advocacy Unit (RAU), and the Womens' Coalition of Zimbabwe (WCoZ). May 2010. Harare: Research & Advocacy Unit; RAU (2010), Preying on the "Weaker" Sex: Political Violence against Women in Zimbabwe. Report produced by IDASA (An African Democracy Institute), the International Center for Transitional Justice [ICTJ] and the Research and Advocacy Unit [RAU]. November 2010. Harare: Research & Advocacy Unit.

17. Makamure, J. (2012). ALP Zimbabwe Country Report. Capetown: African Legislature Project.



refining their tactics.

For purposes of developing this position paper, DWI conducted a mapping exercise to identify organizations working exclusively on women and girls with disability and could only find nine WROs in the whole of Zimbabwe. A lot of organizations working and representing issues of women and girls with disabilities are either male-led or are just integrating disability issues into their programming work as per funding requirements. However, women with disabilities have been doing work within the women's movement, especially at the grassroots level but there is little or no documentation of their contribution to the women's movement.

Internet searches on movement-based action on WAGWDs denote their participation in organizations they are affiliated with most, not on initiatives that they out rightly lead. This is a result of the charity model of supporting PWDs, which drives a narrative of doing things on their behalf, thus limiting their chances to define their agency resulting in a paucity of information on their contribution to the mainstream women's movement. A charitable perspective, imported into many colonized African countries Christian ideologies resulted in the creation of welfare-style charities aiming to assist PWDs but generally run by non-disabled people.

There is oral evidence of women with disabilities have been active within the movement but these are unreliable as there are perception-based on individual experiences.

“Women with disabilities have been largely neglected when it comes to research, state policies, the disability and women's movements, and rehabilitation programs... This reality is especially true of women with disabilities in cultures where the role of wife and mother is considered to be the primary role for a female.” (Feika in Rao 2004)¹⁸

It is, however, worrying to note that, there is no established research or any form of documentation on the emergence of women with disabilities' collective organizing in Zimbabwe.¹⁹ This position paper attempts to at least contextualize the nature of the participation of women with disabilities in the movement and to give an insight into how transformative women's movements can be if they intentionally structure disability inclusion within the women's rights movement. Such under-representation of WAGWDs and lack of empirical visibility is not commensurate with a statistical background of 1 in 5 women being estimated to have a disability in Zimbabwe. Adding to this Disability prevalence in Zimbabwe stands at 9.2%. National Disability Policy (2021)²⁰, the government of Zimbabwe recognizes the lack of precise and reliable data on disability and the need for the country to use the WHO-World Bank (2011) disability prevalence of 15%.²¹ Thus, there are 2 250 000 people with disabilities in Zimbabwe. The ICDS also indicated a higher prevalence among females (10.2%) than males (8.4%).

18. Rao, I. (2004). Equity to Women with Disabilities in India. A strategy paper prepared for the National Commission for Women, India. CBR Network (South Asia). Retrieved from http://www.disabilityworld.org/09-11_04/women/india.shtml

19. Inter-censual Demographic Survey 2017, ZIMSTATS accessed at https://www.zimstat.co.zw/wp-content/uploads/publications/Population/population/ICDS_2017.pdf

20. National Disability Policy accessed at <https://www.veritaszim.net/node/5125>

21. World report on Disability accessed at https://disabilitydata.ace.fordham.edu/wp-content/uploads/2022/Main_text_2022_Disability_Data_Report.pdf



In wake of this, there is a need to develop research as a critical aspect and fundamental component of feminist movements, which drives change. Feminist movements are sites of knowledge production for most work that is done by feminist-led organizations and should therefore document the stories of all women without leaving anyone behind.

POSITION: A Call for Documentation

We call for accurate documentation of historical and present accounts of the contributions of women with disabilities in the women's rights movement. The documentation of the work which WwDs are doing towards advancing women's rights is equally valuable as the work which women considered to be non-disabled are doing. Capturing the history of women with disabilities in the movement amplifies their voices as transformative partners in movement building. Disability is an analytical tool that packs the intersectionality of a women's movement with a lens that acknowledges that all women's experiences must be documented if we are to strategize for equality without leaving any woman behind.



Documentation is an enormously powerful tool for feminist advocacy. It is invariably the key to success when fighting for rights. It exposes women's rights violations and calls for accountability in the protection of women's rights, and keeps track of the incremental steps in movement building.



2 Women with Disabilities

Movement Building

The disability movement in Zimbabwe has created different forms of action toward laying a claim on the empowerment of DPOs. Several aspects of disability organizing and politics have worked against disabled women and greatly excluded them from building movements which were specifically addressing issues affecting them. To this date, men and male concerns have dominated the disability movement. Male, instrumental, public, rational, and material concerns are still seen as more real and more pressing than “domestic” issues to which WAGWDs are mostly confined. Furthermore, despite WWD's desire to be a part of women's movements, most non-disabled women largely see no necessity to campaign and advocate together with them around the issues they specifically face. Non-disabled feminists continue to treat disability as a side issue, an optional extra, a funding requisition, and in no way part of the so-called mainstream movement-building issues. The disabled people's movement - while many and sometimes the majority of its activists are women - is still informed by political and theoretical debates which strangely side-line their experiences and do not allow them to lead in fair spaces.

2.1 Disability-Inclusive Project Designs

During consultations, DWI established that a lot of organizations and notable movements largely leave out women with disabilities because they are not knowledgeable on disability issues and how they can incorporate them in their program designs. This is especially true for organizations that do not exclusively implement disability programming. However, the nature and design of a movement bring together diverse actors who should be able to consolidate their lived experiences as women to find common ground to advance their causes. With this in mind, the Zimbabwean women's movement needs to know how they can in-cooperate disability-inclusive programming as a starting point to enhance their partnership with WWDs.

2.1.1 Disability Inclusion: Definition

Disability inclusion is the integration of relationships that denote how women function and how they participate in society. It involves making sure that every woman has the same opportunities to participate in every aspect of life to the best of their abilities and desires. Thus, including WWDs in projects and movements and encouraging them to have roles similar to their peers who do not have a disability is disability inclusion. This involves more than simply encouraging their involvement; it requires making sure that adequate policies and practices are in effect as a project or a movement is being run. Disability inclusion should lead to increased participation in socially expected life roles and activities- in this case, an increase in participation of WWDs in a project. Disability inclusion allows for WWDs to take advantage of the benefits of the same project activities experienced by women considered to be non-disabled.

2.1.2 Barriers to Disability-Inclusive Project Design

Including WWDs in the project activities begins with identifying and eliminating barriers to their participation.



- A physical environment that is not accessible to the nature of the disability.
- Lack of relevant assistive technology (assistive, adaptive, and rehabilitative devices).
- Absence of data to design disability-inclusive programming.
- Negative attitudes of people towards disabilities.
- Services, systems, and policies that are either non-existent.
- Stereotyping WWDs as incapable of doing certain tasks in the project.
- Discrimination, marginalisation.
- Denying qualified WWDs the opportunity to participate in or benefit from projects, services, or lead in movement-building activities.
- Denying WWDs access to programs, services, benefits, or opportunities to participate as a result of physical, communication, social, or economic barriers.
- Denying reasonable accommodations²² to qualified WWDs, so they can perform the essential functions of the project. (as participants, allowing them to contribute to project buy-in, involving them in project design, sitting on your organizational boards, partnering in projects with DPOs, etc).

2.1.3 Factors to Consider in Inclusive Movement Building and Project Design

Engagement in the society of people with disabilities can vary depending on several factors:

- The severity of the underlying impairment.
- Social, political, and cultural influences and expectations.
- Aspects of natural and built surroundings.
- Availability of assistive technology and devices
- Family and community support and engagement

2.1.4 Organisational Preparedness for Disability inclusive project design

- Review and/or develop organizational policies, guidelines, and tools (including indicators, assessment, and focus group discussion forms, etc.) to ensure that they affirm the rights of persons with disabilities to access and inclusion; ensure include related actions into organizational procedures throughout the project cycle
- Ensure feedback and complaints mechanisms are designed to ensure accessibility for persons with disabilities
- Staff is trained on the inclusion of persons with disabilities, and – as a consequence – can identify persons with disabilities, involve them in implementation, and propose measures to overcome barriers to organizational management.
- Engage regularly with Organisations of Persons with Disabilities to increase understanding of the general situation of persons with disabilities, barriers to accessing services and assistance, capacities and existing coping mechanisms, and actions that organizations can take to strengthen inclusion.
- Where required, seek advice, guidance, and support from organizations and coordination platforms (movements) specialized in working with persons with disabilities and mainstreaming inclusion.

22. A reasonable accommodation is an adjustment made in a system to accommodate or make fair the same system for an individual based on a proven need. That need can vary



2.1.5 Disability-Inclusive Project Actions

- Promote meaningful participation – WWDs in all phases of the project cycle in a meaningful way, ensuring that input and feedback from persons with disabilities are acted upon
- Remove barriers - identify attitudinal, physical, and institutional barriers to accessing assistance and services which exist in the community, the general context, and within your organization and take measurable actions to remove these.
- Empower persons with disabilities - provide persons with disabilities the opportunity to engage in the project in various capacities e.g. monitoring committees, as staff, local liaisons, etc., and enable them an opportunity to develop their skills.
- Disaggregate data for monitoring inclusion - ensure that all data collected in assessments and implementation monitoring is disaggregated at a minimum by gender, age, and disability to better understand the extent to which persons with disabilities are reached and engaged in projects, and to provide information on gaps and needs to facilitate project adjustment.

This failure to widen the space for participation in the mainstream movement of WwDs by non-disabled women clearly showed that they have not invested in finding strategies to ensure that their movement building is disability inclusive in practice. During consultations, DWI established that most organizations nominally invite WwDs to their activities without ensuring that access conditions are fully met or without providing information on access where it's needed. In addition, most agenda set within movement building fails to recognize that WwDs have their analysis of feminist issues that differ from mainstream views.

POSITION: A Call for Disability Inclusive Movement Building

Disabled women have long been a force in feminist and disability activism. Outside of mainstream feminist spaces, WwDs have pioneered many different groups and projects which have benefited both WwDs and women considered to be non-disabled. The Zimbabwean women's movement is a landscape of intersecting and overlapping movements and grassroots activism with disability being one of them. It is therefore imperative for the mainstream movement to integrate disability movements into its mainstream organizing and give special consideration to promoting the participation of WwDs in strengthening the movement. Women with disabilities must be equally able to influence the structure and form of the women's movement to the benefit of all women. To end women's movement must address the following exclusionary practices common within the movement: -

- Inclusion of WwDs in their programming without adequate planning for access and budgetary requirements for such, e.g. sign language interpretation, braille for knowledge products for programming, making special considerations for women and girls with mobility challenges, and engaging specialists if they are working with women and girls with intellectual challenges.



- Desist from including WwDs superficially in their feminist actions. WwDs must participate on an equal footing with other women considered to be non-disabled. A lot of organizations include women with disabilities as funding requirements and not from their own strategic planning. Thus, they are almost always ill-prepared to include women and girls with disabilities.
- Consider institutional mentoring for local organizations being created to advance the rights of women with disabilities. Support in form of networking, advice on organizational strengthening, and connections for resource mobilization are greatly appreciated in contributing to the growth of women-led DPOs.
- Research and consider disability inclusion from an informed perspective. Disability is a study discipline on its own. Being rightly informed about disability issues will drive the mainstream women's movement to work on developing relevant feminist actions and prioritize disability issues within the context of movement building.
- Move away from the practice of preferring collaborations with male-led initiatives whilst leaving WwDs because they are not visible enough or big enough. The support of mainstream movements is needed to proffer growth-aligned partnerships in this regard.

2.2 WwDs Organising

To organize and campaign for their rights, disabled women face challenges that women who are considered to be non-disabled also face, however, WwDs have a greater agency to build because their disability intersects with gender and other factors which places double vulnerability in their lives. This exacerbates their fight against family-level discrimination, multiple occurrences of abuse, limitations in pursuing high-value employment and livelihood opportunities, abuse, difficulty in holding down jobs, and navigating a world that is full of barriers – both physical and attitudinal, to manage the difficulties, discomfort, and pain that can accompany some disabilities. Thus, a need to find other women to create agency needed to relate and share experiences, sparking the need to grow the demand for empowering autonomy is greatly needed making the beginnings of consciousness, self-help groups, and political organizing a reality that guarantees dignity and empowering autonomy.

In Zimbabwe, WwDs do not have a notable consortium of activities and representation of organizations in an attempt to build their agency in Zimbabwe. So the absence of exclusive organizing amongst women with disability themselves is almost non-existent, to begin with. It is therefore difficult to have the concerns of the WwDs in the mainstream movement if their concerns are not seen as central to both the disability and feminist agendas. It is therefore not surprising, despite the greater percentages of the population of women with disabilities in Zimbabwe only nine feminist-oriented organizations have been identified to work exclusively on disability-oriented programming for women and girls. They are not only involved in establishing local disabled people's organizations but are contributing to the growth of national-level bodies and inter-country linkages. There is a need to realize that WwDs are equally able to contribute to the development outcomes of Zimbabwe in their form of organising



In Zimbabwe, the consultations which DWI conducted established that most women WwDs are involved in advocacy and awareness-raising, particularly about women's rights and Article 6 of the UNCRPD. Even though there is under-representation, a lot of emerging organizations are building on innovation. For organizations that have been able to organize, resource mobilization has been a huge challenge thus threatening the sustainability of most of their movement-building activities. There is a consensus that drives to the fact that leading advocates, women's rights donors, and development aid agencies should do to include women with disabilities in agenda setting, movement building, and funding.

At present, one of how WwDs are making strides in connecting with each in wake of limited resources other is through the internet, which has helped overcome at least some of the challenges disabled women organizing face in mobility with physical access and communicating. Disabled women are slowly discovering that the internet can act for them as a political tool, enabling contact, building communities, and enhancing political action. However, this is accessible to a privileged few who were able to access education so that they can use the internet to organize. A greater population of the disability movement has not been able to participate in movement-building activities due to mobility issues.

POSITION: Increase WwDs' Organizing

The creation of organized groups of disability-led organizations by WwDs is needed urgently if a formidable agency is to be created in Zimbabwe for WAGWDs. A need for an increase in movement actors has been identified in the historical account in this position paper. WAGWDs remain underrepresented within the women's rights movement whether it's in formal or informal organizing. Strategic coalition building can potentially pull together local disabled women organizations and offers the support needed to proffer their potential ability to undertake broader initiatives to advance the rights of all women

2.3 Organizing and Visibility

The worrying challenge is that women with disabilities are invisible in a movement that is supposed to lead in fighting for change in their lives to transform. The perception that women with disabilities as dispensable and dependent on others is conducive to exclusion, a reductionism concerning their position as legal subjects which at the same time leads to oblivion and invisibility within the women's movement²³. The existing relationship between vulnerability and invisibility further increases the impact of stereotypes and assigned roles even within an issue-based movement claiming to advance the rights of all women.

23.

https://www.researchgate.net/profile/Sivakumar-I/publication/348682437_The_Collision_of_COVID-19_Livelihood_analysis_of_Women_with_Disabilities_through_a_Gender_Lens/links/600b0b2e92851c13fe2c5cbb/The-Collision-of-COVID-19-Livelihood-analysis-of-Women-with-Disabilities-through-a-Gender-Lens.pdf



The problem of making the contributions of women with disability in movements invisible begins with their portrayal within society as needy, dependent, and passive, all of them typically feminine features, whilst they are construed as incapable of assuming roles (even those which are feminine). Notable discrimination in that regard can be identified. The capacity of women with disabilities to contribute to a functional movement should not be limited to attitudinal and physical barriers. The movement must make special considerations to ensure that their participation is guaranteed and their issues are central to the cause of the movement.

Non-disabled feminists strategically exclude WwDs when they are oblivious to the fact that women with disabilities can greatly contribute to the feminist movement building too. Women with disabilities want more than visibility in women's rights convening. They want other advocates and donors to see their identities as women who are equally able and support their activism. To address the invisibility of women and girls with disabilities, it is important to collect data on women with disabilities, what barriers they face, and what support they need. More and better quantitative and qualitative data would support governments to allocate adequate resources for disability and gender-inclusive budgeting, as well as policy development for women and girls with disabilities.

POSITION: Positive Framing of WwDs in Feminist Movements Essential

The framing of WwDs in feminist movements as vulnerable and in need of support must not take precedence over their ability to drive their empowerment initiatives. Whilst there is evidence of double discrimination in their lives, it is no justification to drive a movement agenda spotlighting vulnerability that does not highlight their capacity to be solution makers for their challenges in a collaborative effort with other women as well.



Disability inclusive feminist movements that cast a positive light on women with disabilities are the essence of intersectional feminism, which challenges a myriad of barriers that hinder women with disabilities and discriminate against them based on their identities. Positive framing of women with disabilities in feminist movements is essential.



3 The Inclusive Feminist Movement Building Model

3.1 Introduction

Following consultations and an extensive literature search, DWI has developed a model for disability-inclusive model for feminist movement building. The model factors in the contribution of multiple actors within the movement, giving program direction on disability to organizations and institutions working with women and girls with disabilities, intra-movement advocacy on feminism and disability, and knowledge production on the intersection between gender and disability.

3.2 The Model



Knowledge Production and Data Collection - This reports laments the absence of knowledge and data on women with disabilities, therefore, the creation of robust and accessible feminist knowledge is required to strengthen disability-inclusive feminist movement building. A lot of organizations and movement actors are not aware of how they can engage and partner with women and girls with disabilities organically, it is therefore imperative to develop knowledge products to this end so that there is a standard guide of disability inclusion that can be monitored and evaluated to ensure that propositions are made in line with available data to promote inclusion at movement level.



The investment in the use of this data and knowledge will ensure that women and girls with disabilities are engaged directly and their experiences are reflected and used to prioritize their contributions to the mainstream movement. In addition, the creation of knowledge products and collection of data will complement existing data and knowledge sets, which have been developed for women considered to be non-disabled.

Institutional Support – There is a need to strengthen the capacities of organizations of women and girls with disabilities, their representative organizations, organizations of persons with disabilities, and women’s organizations, in general, to ensure that programming for WAGWDs is designed to allow for wider integration of ideas, and scope of their representation to wider audiences. This should be done in consideration of the diversity of women and girls with disability and with a clear intention of adding on to existing partnerships for them to have reach which allows them to carry out advocacy initiatives that give them a voice and guarantee effective solidarity within the women’s movement towards the common goal of equality. Institutional support should be in the form of: -

- Training on Disability Rights Programming and its design
- Funding Investment in Disability inclusive activism

Disability Rights Education – it is very clear from the historical account in this position paper that disability rights have never taken center stage in the major thematic activism transitions in Zimbabwe ever since the women’s movement defined its agency, especially after the independence of Zimbabwe in 1980. This denotes a need for disability rights education that gives direction to prioritize mainstreaming disability rights from a gendered perspective within the feminist movement in Zimbabwe. This will assist in the identification of feminist disability issues which require the movement to advance from a solidarity perspective.

Intra-Movement Advocacy – Apart from training and institutional support, there is a need for the mainstream movement to advance disability issues from a feminist perspective in advocacy form within the women’s movement itself. Advocacy is essential for raising consciousness to movement actors to take on disability-inclusive action as well. This can be done in form of creative actions through the use of media, creative tactics which draw attention to disability issues, and collaborations in issue-based advocacy actions with actors considered to be non-disabled.

3.3 Roles of Movement Actors in Implementing the Model

Women and Girls with Disabilities – As leading actors seeking to benefit from a disability-inclusive women’s movement, it is imperative for women and girls with disabilities to set up platforms for leadership within the movement whether they have been provisioned for or not. This can be done by establishing exclusive spaces for disability rights activism taking



advantage of the digital platforms which are providing widened spaces for extending their voices for change. There is also room for organizing in organic forms without relying on technology. A lot of the work which WWDs activists undertake is at the community level but it is largely unaccounted for and not recognized. In addition to this, women and girls with disabilities are custodians of disability rights knowledge, thus they ought to disseminate widely rights information and should be leading in the production of rights knowledge. This proposition is made with the understanding that women with disability have been marginalized for a long time and may not have the capacity to develop, however, the creation of synergies as recommended by the model can be integrated to reach this result.

Women's Rights Organizations – Women's rights movement as the major actors in the women's movement in Zimbabwe need to build organized and visible solidarity with women and girls with disabilities. This can potentially be set out with intra-movement advocacy, disability rights education, resourcing for disability-inclusive movement building, and project implementation. A holistic inclusive social design in programming and networking is urgently needed to address the disparities identified in this position paper. Thus, wider interaction with WWDs in the women's movement is premised on the willingness of WROs as primary actors who invest in their institutional growth towards disability inclusiveness both at the organizational level and as movement actors.

Researchers – There is a glaring paucity of data regarding the work which WWDs have been doing and in mapping gaps that have led to such. A lot of the discrimination and exclusion of WWDs in the women's movement has alluded to a lack of knowledge on disability rights and intersectional changelessness that WWDs face. As is, more knowledge that should be disseminated in an accessible way is needed in this regard. Researchers can feed into each aspect of the model to bring in new knowledge for organizing, strengthening intra-movement advocacy, and building on creating practical knowledge products which are essential in guiding movements on disability inclusiveness.

Investors /Donors / Funders – – Resourcing for disability-inclusive work is a challenge due to several factors. WWDs remain at the periphery of accessing knowledge and information to the work of most donors. A lot of them rely on recommendations that rightly sourcing for resourcing due to mobility and accessibility challenges. Adding on, the funding space is competitive, with most actors have had more opportunities for accessing knowledge through formal education (especially tertiary) which is not privy to a lot of WWDs. This presents challenges in resource mobilization as most WWDs may have an idea of what needs to change in their society but may not have the technical know-how of how to design any processes which lead to that change. Resource mobilization requirements may need to be flexible in a way that remains impactful but makes resourcing accessible still. As a result, resource mobilization is greatly a challenge. Secondly, whilst there are opportunities for funding projects which are disability-inclusive by a lot of funders, the absence of monitoring tools and mechanisms to ensure that the organizations receiving the resources are equipped to implement disability-inclusive projects are largely missing. The efforts to include WWDs largely remain



nominal in that regard. The funding needs identified by DWI are here presented in summary just as recommendations: -

- Training on Disability Rights Programming and its design (For WROs in Disability Rights Programming and those which are not).
- Funding Disability inclusive activism.
- Consideration of accessibility needs budget lines for projects expected to be disability inclusive.
- Investing development of disability inclusive policies for projects expected to be disability inclusive.

3.4 General Recommendations

- *The creation of an exclusive coalition for WWDs will drive the agency of women and girls with disabilities. Its work can be potentially merged into the mainstream movement.*
- *To that end, the Women's Coalition in Zimbabwe is encouraged to build and establish a committee on disability issues as the major umbrella body of women's rights organizations.*
- *DWI was encouraged to set up a continuous platform for feminist dialogue between women with disabilities and women considered to be non-disabled*
- *To build the capacity of women with disabilities in feminist movement building and give them solid opportunities to contribute especially where they are qualified to do so.*
- *DWI will develop model disability organizational policies and share them with participants who were part of participants who contributed to the development of this position paper*
- *The research was widely encouraged with the dissemination of disaggregated data on the same.*
- *To organically capture the expectations of WWDs of the women's movement and allow them to communicate them through intra-movement advocacy*
- *Encourage positive shifts in attitudinal changes in working with WWDs in the movement.*
- *A Reconstructive Approach that infuses non-discriminatory values and cultures driving the movement is needed. This will look at influential of societal beliefs and how they can be used to build inclusive movements.*



Deaf Women Included (DWI) is a Deaf-led, grassroots disabled women's empowerment and advocacy trust registered in 2013. Our registration number is MA1404/2013. DWI seeks to advance the rights of women and girls with disabilities, particularly the Deaf. The organization commenced operations in 2010 before subsequently registering as a disabled women's empowerment trust. The trust was founded by a group of concerned Deaf women out of concern and realisation that Deaf women are often left out of social and economic programs, including awareness programs about GBV/SRHR; and are being face all forms of violence and abuse every day, but fail to access justice due to communication barriers and lack of understanding of Deaf Culture and Sign Language amongst service providers. DWI seek to advocate and help overcome these barriers and is one of the most visible disability-led Disabled Persons' Organizations (DPO) in Zimbabwe today.



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