

# STANDARD GUIDE FOR DISABILITY INCLUSIVE ELECTIONS IN ZIMBABWE

**Prepared by:**

FARAI GASA MUKUTA AND WONDER PHIRI

**for:**

INSTITUTE FOR COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT IN ZIMBABWE



# COPYRIGHTS

**All rights reserved.**

**No part of this guide may be reproduced in any manner without the prior written permission of the Institute for Community Deveopment in Zimbabwe.**

**To request permission, kindly contact:  
[info@icodzimbabwe.org](mailto:info@icodzimbabwe.org)**

## Contents

Introduction and Background.....	4
Activities to be undertaken to support WWDs in electoral processes.....	6
Expected Outcomes for the above interventions.....	7
Key considerations to safeguard the inclusion of PWDs in general and women with disabilities in particular, in the Electoral Cycle.....	8
Recommendations for WWDs Inclusion by Respective Institutions.....	9
CONCLUSION.....	12

# Introduction and Background



According to the World Disability Report, the world's one billion persons with disabilities (15% of the world population) face barriers to meaningful participation in political life, including when voting in elections, running for political office, observing elections and serving as election officials. Of that population, Zimbabwe has 900 000 (Ministry of Health and UNICEF Survey 2013) which is a gross under-estimation, hence Zimbabwe should conduct an extensive survey to establish the exact number of PWDs properly disaggregated. Political processes in which all people can safely and equally participate improves democracy as inclusive political participation are human rights issues. The participation of PWDs in general and WWDs in particular, in electoral processes provides the basis for mainstreaming their inclusion in all aspects of society and increases the accountability of elected representatives. Therefore, ZEC has a duty to ensure that persons with disabilities (PWDs) especially WWDs, exercise their political rights alongside their peers. This guide is a roadmap to make ZEC mainstream disability throughout the electoral processes in partnership with PWDs and organizations of people with disabilities including those specifically for WWDs. While it is intended for election officials at every level, it can also provide insights to other stakeholders, such as OPDs, election observers, ministry officials, political parties, and the private sector.



# Introduction and Background Continued

The following important continental statutes, inform and guide African governments, Zimbabwe included to exert maximum effort and allocate resources to ensure the inclusion of all people in development and decision making processes especially the usually overlooked, PWDs:

1. The African Charter on Democracy, Elections and Governance 13 – encourages states to promote participation of persons with disabilities in development processes and decision-making.
2. The African Charter on Human and Peoples' Rights 14 – recognizes the right to participate in government and public service.
3. The African Union Agenda 2063: The Africa We Want 15 – calls for democratic government institutions that enable all citizens to participate actively.
4. The Protocol on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities 16 – recognizes the human and political rights of persons with disabilities and calls on states to provide reasonable accommodations for ballot secrecy and accessibility.
5. The United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities UNCRPD Article 29, on participation in political and public life.

On the other hand, Chapter 12 Commissions especially the Zimbabwe Elections Commission (ZEC), the Zimbabwe Gender Commission (ZGC) and the Zimbabwe Human Rights Commission (ZHRC) are reminded to ensure the inclusion of this disproportionately underprivileged sector of society in the electoral processes. Similarly, the Zimbabwe Media Commission (ZMC) is encouraged to ensure appropriate reportage on disability inclusion with politically correct disability vocabulary (person-first language) not the derogatory language found in both the electronic and print media. This would reduce or eliminate the stigmatisation of PWDs and remove the attendant negative attitudes towards people with disabilities. While the current national constitution and 2021 National Disability adequately cover disability including wwd's especially in the NDP, monitoring the implementation will benefit WWDs.

# Activities to be undertaken to support WWDs in electoral processes

There are a number of initiatives floating around to increase the participation of WWDs in governance and electoral processes. These include a strategy on women empowerment and gender equality in political participation and decision making which was developed and launched by the Zimbabwean government early this year. Other important considerations are the National Disability Policy, the pending Persons with Disabilities Bill, the current drive on disability inclusive development; the work of the recently established Disability Parliamentary Caucus and the Women Parliamentary Caucus. Operationalizing the coalition between the women and the disability movements signed by two OPD umbrellas, NASCOH and FODPZ, and the Women's Coalition of Zimbabwe (WCoZ) in 2022, the advent and advocacy work of women led OPDs; the UN Disability Inclusion Strategy; increased consciousness on gender equality and women's rights by WWDs. Possible actions that can enhance WWDs participation and representation in the electoral processes are that:

- 1) The inclusion of WWDs should take advantage of the advancement of technology which is enabling WWDs to receive and disseminate information.
- 2) At Government level, make available assistive technologies and communication tools to increase access and participation of WWDs in elections.
- 3) In the 2023 Budget, a total of \$5 billion was allocated for the Constituency Development Fund translating to \$23 million for each Constituencies. These funds aid MPs in their respective constituency development programs. Pressure could be put on all MPs to ensure that a pre-determined percentage of the CDF is allocated to address barriers that prevent WWDs from participating in the entire electoral cycle.
- 4) As noted by key informants, WWDs are involved in electoral planning and management to a lesser extent. Involving WWDs means they can bring their unique perspectives and insights to the table, which can help to identify and address issues that may have been overlooked or ignored in the past.
- 5) Strengthen the capacity of DPOs that work with WWDs to plan effectively the monitoring of the electoral processes, provide training in leadership, advocacy and influence.
- 6) Addressing communication challenges through improved communication skills such as training of Sign Language at every level, designing and printing of Braille and other easy formats of disability-friendly materials.
- 7) DPOs and women's organisations can play the role of advocating for the inclusion of WWDs in elections, and raise awareness about the barriers that WWDs face in the electoral cycle. This includes engaging with policymakers, the media, and the public to promote disability-inclusive policies and practices.
- 8) DPOs work should target both public and private institutions to put in place accessible infrastructure such as accessible polling stations and public buildings, to enable WWDs to participate at all stages in the electoral cycle.
- 9) Mobilise funding for WWDs in electoral processes. OPDs lack resources to fully promote the inclusion of WWDs in general and WWDs in particular. DPOs and OPDs cited a decline in funding for their activities with some having to scale down or shut operations.

# Expected Outcomes for the Interventions

The following are expected changes that should result from the actions of the above:

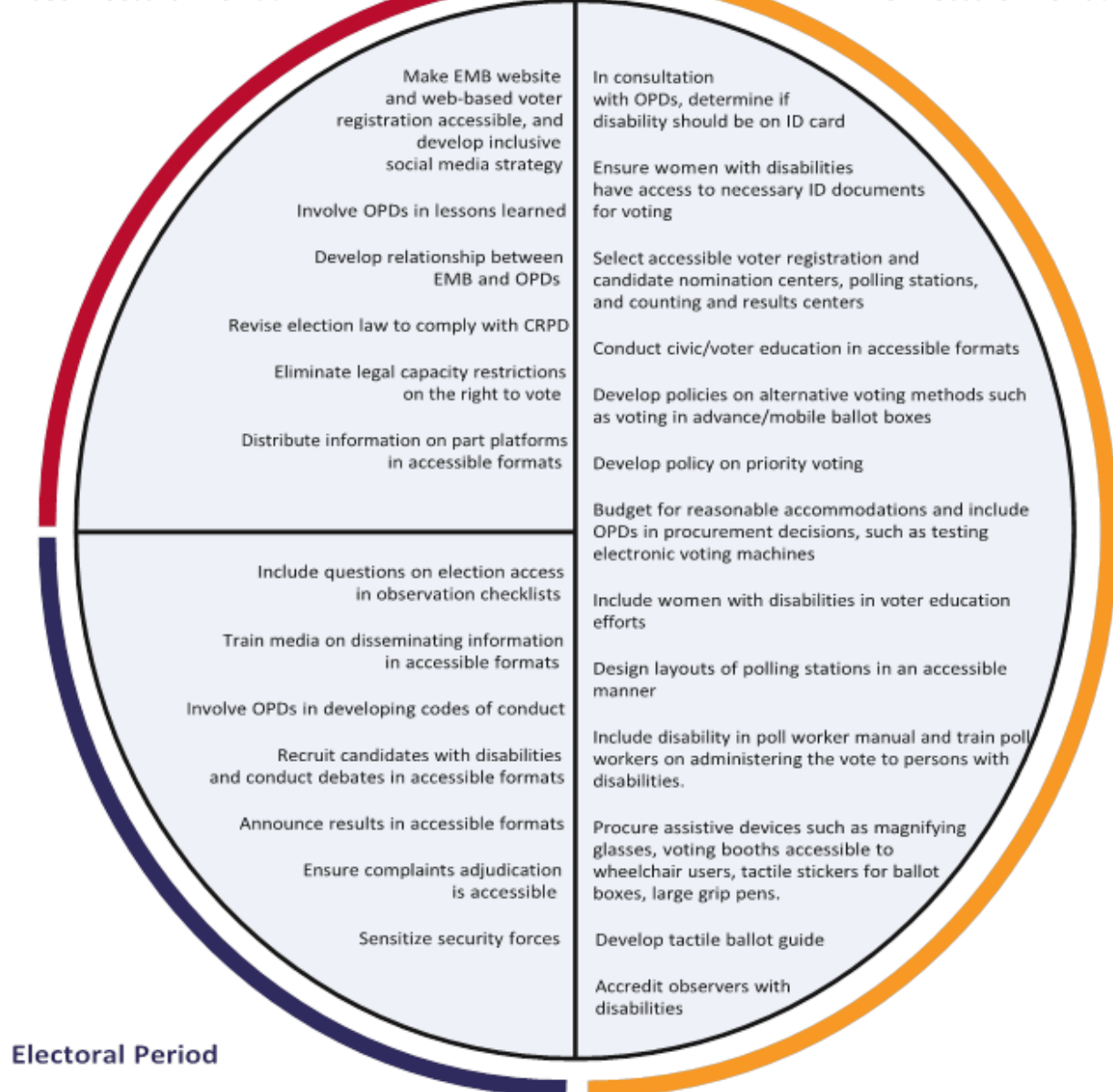
- a) Accessible and inclusive voter civic education programmes and materials suitable for WWDs available on websites and social media platforms.
- b) An increase in percentage of WWDs who have access electoral processes information.
- c) Appointment of WWDs as rights focal point programmes persons at ZEC
- d) Deliberate policies at election management bodies for hiring of permanent and temporary staff, election monitors and election observers
- e) Trained ZEC staff and poll workers who understand and communicate well on WWDs inclusion issues.
- f) Advisory role of OPDs in procurement of assistive devices and accessible election technology
- g) Accessible voter registration and candidate nomination locations, polling stations, and counting and results centres
- h) From the Political Parties Finance Act, lobby for the creation of access funds for WWDs candidates



# Key considerations to safeguard the inclusion of PWDs in general and women with disabilities in particular, in the Electoral Cycle:

## Post-Electoral Period

## Pre-Electoral Period





# Recommendations for WWDs Inclusion by Respective Institutions

It is imperative to address identified barriers that inhibit the promotion, full participation and representation of WWDs in politics. This requires extensive advocacy, awareness-raising, and support for WWDs to ensure they have equal access to opportunities for political participation and other democratic processes.

## Legislature

### *For the House of Assembly*

- a) Ensure that the country's annual budgets allocate funds to facilitate the effective implementation of the provisions of the 2021 National Disability Policy to guarantee improvements in the social and economic lives of women with disabilities.
- b) Conduct strict legislative oversight to enforce and ensure public and private institutions implement and comply with the Disability policies and legislations providing for inclusion and protection of PWDs
- c) Develop a policy document that enforces political parties to field women with disabilities as candidates
- d) Parliament to review all affirmative actions to include WWDs eg the Women quota in parliament and in the 30% in local authorities.

## Zimbabwe Electoral Commission (ZEC)

- (a) Ensure the 2023 budget allocation of \$101.6 billion is used to enable PWDs to actively participate in all electoral processes responding to their specialised needs in ways that evidence credibility, citizen inclusion and participation.
- (b) Work with DPOs to recruit and train PWDs as election staff and election observers in order to dispel any fears of exclusion or helplessness especially in election periods.
- (c) Strengthen its co-operation and collaboration with other Chapter 12 Commissions to make election campaigning safe for WWDs.

## Political Actors Dialogue (POLAD)

- a) Intensify inter-party dialogue to press home the need for parties to promote peaceful elections in order not to disenfranchise vulnerable persons such as WWDs who need guaranteed protection to participate and contribute to the credibility of the elections.
- b) Press political parties to include WWDs in their quota systems.
- c) Support WWDs candidates with financial, moral and material support during campaign periods.

## The Media

- a) Raise awareness on positive disability policies and practices to justify the demands by WWDs.
- b) Promote the adoption of an inclusion culture that enables WWDs to participate and contribute in community development associations
- c) Disseminate content that discourages discrimination against women with disabilities.
- d) Highlight stories that celebrate success stories of WWDs inclusion in decision-making structures.
- e) Use politically correct disability vocabulary (person first) in reports/stories

# Recommendations for WWDs Inclusion by Respective Institutions cont

## **Economic, Political, Social and Physical Security**

- (a) More girls with disabilities should be sent to education institutions for them to grow up as bold and confident women who are equally capable leaders.
- (b) Dedicated funding for WWDs in form of grants that improve their economic disposition, protect their dignity and build self-reliance.
- (c) Elimination of all forms of electoral violence to enable women with disabilities to participate in elections.
- (d) Building the capacity of all service providers to professionally respond to the physical and psycho-social needs of WWDs.
- (e) Legislate councils, government and private institutions for rural and urban planning Infrastructural development laws that promote the dignity of WWDs

## **Civil Society**

- a) Undertake awareness raising and campaigns/debates on voter education and information (involve disability musicians and poets).
- b) Produce and disseminate accessible information education and communication (IEC) materials (such as large print, braille, simplified language, pictorial).
- c) Strengthen collaboration and synergy to support each other in closing capacity gaps and provisioning for persons with disabilities through all the election processes, particularly on election day
- d) Ensure effective election monitoring to scale up information that leads to the mitigation of any challenges WWDs may be at risk of or are actually victims.
- e) Lobby for more support in the form of resources and efforts towards disability inclusion.

## **WWDs**

- a) Sensitise WWDs (peer to peer) and their families on Civic, political and economic rights regarding participation and representation.
- b) To strengthen their participation in electoral processes, WWDs to attend trainings on confidence building and self-esteem for WWDs
- c) Organise themselves at the lowest level to jointly speak with one voice on issues concerning WWDs.

## **Development Partners**

- (a) Sustain the calls to government, politicians, security and the election management bodies to ensure that WWDs participate in electoral processes.
- (b) Recognize and address potential opportunities and threats in order to promote the full participation and representation of WWDs in decision-making platforms.
- (c) Make available specific grants targeting DPOs supporting WWDs programming.

# Recommendations for WWDs Inclusion by Respective Institutions cont

## ICOD Zim

- a) Engage political parties and advocate on the change of their policies regarding the place of WWDs vis-à-vis election cycle.
- b) Monitor and report on efforts by the government and EMBs with a view to ensure voting rights of WWDs are not threatened
- c) Collect data on WWDs in the areas of operation as disability statistics are very limited at local and national levels.



Chiredzi Consultations

# Conclusion

It is important to monitor the implementation of policies and strategic plans on a periodic basis by ICOD and other players. Detailed indicators can provide more meaningful insight into the effectiveness of policy activities and their impact on PWDs in general and WWDs in particular. Because they include a variety of disability rights stakeholders beyond ICOD, this can make monitoring more effective. The newly formed Parliamentary Disability Caucus could be an asset to this process to determine whether actions have been completed and milestones achieved, as well as to provide recommendations for next steps. For example, if the strategic plan included as a milestone “25% of all polling stations made accessible,” The Disability Parliamentary Caucus, ICOD and DPO umbrella bodies could help to develop guidelines by which the ZEC determines if a polling station counts as being made accessible. During the evaluation, the team could review where accessible polling stations are located to see if they cover areas where there are larger populations of persons with disabilities, or to note if, for example, all accessible polling stations are located in cities. This level of detail is not always possible when an evaluation is conducted by a staff member with less expertise on disability inclusion. This is an opportunity to effectively assess all aspects of WWDs inclusion in electoral process as voters, election workers and candidates in both local and national elections