Chapter 88
Experience of Female Entrepreneurs With Disabilities in Zimbabwe

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ABSTRACT

The global population of people with disabilities is estimated to be around one billion which represents 15% of the population. It is further estimated that the majority of people with disabilities are found in developing countries to which the majority are women. Adding on to the challenge, 82% percent of disabled people live below the poverty line and can barely employ sustainable means of earning a living and neither can they widen livelihood options due to their circumstances. Thus, they are languishing in absolute poverty. Developing countries are lagging behind in promoting the economic rights of women with disabilities. This is mainly shown by their absence in formal employment because many developing countries do not have policies which facilitate the employment of women with disabilities. Women with disabilities in Zimbabwe are concentrated in light industry entrepreneurship. The majority are found in vending, buying, and selling of cloth and electrical items, others are involved in cross-border trading.

INTRODUCTION

There are over one billion people with a disability, 80 per cent of which reside in developing countries (WHO and WB, 2011). People with disabilities (PWDs) have less success socially, economically, in school and in their work life resulting in a greater chance of poverty (Elwan, 1999). Data reveal that one in five is living under the $1.25 a day poverty line, has a disability (WHO and WB, 2011). Hence, it is important to implement measures directed towards PWDs to ethically achieve the first Millennium Development Goal; of halving the number of people living in extreme poverty by 2015 (McClain-

Nhlapo, 2010). Developing countries are lagging behind in promoting the economic rights of women with disabilities. This is mainly shown by their absence in formal employment because many developing countries do not have policies which facilitate the employment of women with disabilities.

The WHO uses the following definition of disability:

Disability is a generic term that includes impairments in the body functions and structures, activity limitation and participation restrictions. It indicates the negative aspects of the interaction between an individual (with a "health condition") and his context (environmental and personal factors). (WHO, 2006 in Barron and Ncube, 2010, p. 7)

Global Context

Regarding this, the global community has facilitated some strategic plans such as the Sustainable Development Goal with the purpose of making sure women with disabilities are not left out in the global development plans. There are specific goals which talks about the inclusion of people with disabilities in the development agenda. Given this strategic provision, the challenge has been the adoption of the SDGs and other policies into the national policy framework of protecting and promoting the economic rights of women with disabilities. Thus, the illustrative impact of implementing the policies and global frameworks intended for such is yet to reflect in the day to day lives of this identified target. The implementation of such strategies has been a challenge from the era of the MDGs which came and went but did not benefit much people with disabilities as most governments failed to implement them in ways that benefited people living with disabilities.

Regional Context

More so, women with disabilities are viewed as broken objects in Southern Africa from a cultural perspective. They are treated as people without the potential to think positively and build creative spaces to widen their livelihood options as individuals or even as a collective. Most of them are confined at home, where they are expected to be taken care of by family and well-wishers. This cultural perception of women with disabilities has resulted in them receiving unfair and inhuman treatment. Women with disabilities still constitute one of the most discriminated groups in Southern Africa and the discrimination is exacerbated by intensified discrimination largely due to the fact that they are women.

Whilst the treatment of people with disabilities is changing positively the world over, Southern African governments still lag behind in promoting the rights of persons with disabilities particularly women. Government policies adopt a charity model approach to disability issues which is largely not rights based. The most critical aspect of the rights based model is premised on provision and protection of rights for people with disabilities. Failure to achieve such results in an unequal distribution of resources based to their peculiar needs. The state has neglected its role in ensuring that it takes a leading role in providing for persons with disabilities. Most of the empowerment programmes and initiatives are donor funded with government taking a back role.

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