Policy brief: How inclusive are Zambia’s Education Policies of the needs of persons with disabilities? An analysis of selected policies

Key policy messages

- The vast majority of policies in the field of education that were formulated after the ratification of the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (UNCRPD) tend to be inclusive of the needs of persons with disabilities.
- Detailed assessment shows that, despite the policies being well articulated in terms of rights, access, inclusiveness and implementation plans, they are not detailed or robust enough with regard to budgets, enforcement mechanisms and monitoring plans, making effective implementation a challenge.
- Policy documents should be clear on budgetary allocations for programmes targeting persons with disabilities, and include detailed enforcement mechanisms that clearly spell out the consequences of non-compliance, as well as the incentives accompanying compliance.

Overview

Educational attainment is not only an essential requirement for employment in the modern sectors, especially in developing countries like Zambia, but on average, people with lower levels of education earn significantly less than those with higher levels of education (Moono and Rankin, 2013). As with all children, education for children with disabilities is not only vital in itself, but is also instrumental for participating in employment and other social activities (WHO and World Bank, 2011). This is because the inclusion of children and adults with disabilities in the education system does not only contribute to human capital formation, but is also a key determinant of personal wellbeing and welfare. Excluding children with disabilities from the education system often results in reduced employment opportunities and consequently has high social and economic costs in the long-term. To this effect, the UNCRPD recognises the right of all children with disabilities to be included in the general education systems and to receive the individual support they require. However, despite this, many children and adults with disabilities have historically been excluded from mainstream education opportunities. In general, children with disabilities are less likely to start school and have lower rates of staying and being promoted in school (Filmer, 2008).

In Zambia, the National Statistics Office (CSO, 2012) shows that persons with disabilities tend to be systematically disadvantaged when it comes to accessing public services, such as education, compared to their non-disabled counterparts. An assessment of literacy levels for children aged 5 years and above shows that literacy among persons with disabilities is significantly lower (58.6 percent).
compared to those without disabilities (70.4 percent). Similarly, for those aged 5 years and above, the proportion of persons without disabilities who are currently attending school is larger (34.6 percent), compared to that for persons with disabilities (16.6 percent). For those that have never attended school, the proportion of persons with disabilities is higher than that for persons without disabilities (34.4 percent and 20.9 percent respectively).

The above disparities and inequalities in terms of access to education exist in Zambia, despite the country having ratified a number of international and regional treaties (including the UNCRPD), as well as enacting progressive legislation aimed at ensuring equitable access to education for all. For instance, on the legislative front, the Zambian Government is signatory to international and regional conventions including the Convention on Rights of the Child, and the International Covenant on Economic, Social, and Cultural Rights. Zambia is also one of the 92 countries that signed the Salamanca Statement (1994) which should influence policies related to the inclusion of children with disabilities in mainstream education. At country level, the Zambian Government has adopted an education policy that focuses on equitable access to quality education at all levels. In Section 14, the Education Act (2011) states that every person has a right to early childhood education, basic education and high school education. The Act also prohibits discrimination by education institutions and ensures equal access to all learners, including poor and vulnerable children. The Zambian Government has also put in place measures aiming to guarantee the right to education. These include measures aimed at providing free and compulsory primary education, and measures aimed at eliminating discrimination, such as the programme on children with special educational needs.

These results and policy recommendations are drawn from the analysis of selected policy documents related to education. These include the Technical Education, Vocational and Entrepreneurship Training Policy (1996); the National Policy on Education (1996); the Education Act (2011); the Zambia Education Curriculum Framework (2013); and the Higher Education Bill (2013). These documents are analysed against seven criteria in terms of content related to persons with disabilities: rights, accessibility, inclusivity, national implementation plan, enforcement mechanisms, budgetary concerns, and information management. Each of these criteria is scored on a scale of 1-4 depending on how disability is addressed: 1 (weak); 2 (questionable); 3 (medium); and 4 (high).

Specifically, ‘high’ means that the policy explicitly acknowledges that all learners have the right to inclusive education at every level and specifically mentions learners with disabilities; ‘questionable’ means the policy states the right to education but does not mention disabled learners or inclusive education; while ‘weak’ means no mention of inclusive education in policy or the rights of learners with disabilities.

The results presented here form part of a larger research project: Bridging the Gap: Examining disability and development in four African countries. The research programme is based at the Leonard Cheshire Disability and Inclusive Development Centre, UCL, UK, and is funded by the Economic and Social Research Council and the UK Department for International Development.
Results

Figure 1 presents the comparisons of the averages for the selected policies in the education domain. The Education Act (2011) has the highest average score (3.1 out of 4.0) followed by the Zambia Education Curriculum Framework (2013) (2.8 out of 4.0). On the other hand, the Technical Education, Vocational and Entrepreneurship Training Policy (1996) scored the lowest (1.4 out of 4.0) followed by the Higher Education Bill (2013) (1.5 out of 4.0).

Figure 1: Average scores for the selected policy documents

The policies are also analysed with regard to their average performance on the criteria of rights to services/programmes, inclusivity of the programmes, clearly defined implementation plans, enforcement mechanisms, budgetary concerns and information management. These are also scored on a scale ranging between 1 and 4 depending on how the above thematic areas are covered or included in the documents in relation to persons with disabilities. The results (Figure 2) show that, on average, the selected education policy documents score comparatively highly on the rights of persons with disabilities (average score of 2.9 out of 4.0), as well as accessibility of services and the issue of inclusiveness of services for persons with disabilities, which both average 2.5 out of 4.0. However, the policies are quite weak in the areas of enforcement mechanisms (averaging 1.2 out of 4.0) and budgetary concerns (averaging 1.3 out of 4.0).
Key message 1

With the exception of the Higher Education Bill (2013), all policy documents that were formulated after Zambia ratified the UNCRPD, such as the Education Act (2011) and the Zambia Education Curriculum Framework (2012) tend to fair relatively well, showing positive efforts aimed at domesticating the articles enshrined in the UNCRPD into local policy documents after ratification.

Key message 2

Even though the policies that focus on early childhood education tend to be quite inclusive, regardless of whether they pre-date the UNCRPD or not, this is not the case for policy documents relating to tertiary and vocational training, and higher education. The provision of inclusive education in Zambia seem to be more focussed on early childhood education only. This implies that persons with disabilities may fail to progress beyond primary school to higher education. Therefore, these policies tend not to be disability inclusive.

Key message 3

Even though the policies in the education domain tend to be quite articulate and rate fairly highly with regard to rights of persons with disabilities, accessibility of services and programmes, inclusiveness of services and programmes and the implementation, there is a lack of detail regarding budgetary concerns, enforcement mechanisms and information management. These weaknesses imply that, even though the policies may appear comprehensive in theory, implementation on the ground may be a challenge.
**Key message 4**

The education policy documents reviewed also tend not to have disability disaggregated monitoring plans. In most cases, persons with disabilities are covered under ‘vulnerable populations’ which masks the additional challenges that persons with disabilities face in accessing services and makes planning for them difficult. Finally, the lack of detailed enforcement mechanisms means that it is not clear on the implications of non-compliance, as well as the incentives that come with compliance. This also contributes to the lack of effectiveness of the policies.

**Recommendations**

Analysis of selected policies in the four domains shows that the policies are adequate and elaborate with regard to rights, accessibility and being inclusive of the needs of the persons with disabilities. However, this is not the case when it comes to budgetary allocations, enforcement mechanisms and monitoring, all of which tend to be quite weak. In this regard, it is recommended that:

1. The budgetary sections of the different policy documents be re-drafted to clearly include financial allocations specifically targeted for issues dealing with children and learners with disabilities. This is because categorising persons with disabilities together with other ‘vulnerable populations’ that do not have disabilities tends to mask the additional challenges that persons with disabilities may face.

2. There is a need to harmonise the policies regarding higher education and technical and vocational training to align with those concerning basic education, which are more in alignment with the UNCRPD Articles. This will support the smooth transition of persons with disabilities from primary to higher education. This can be achieved by ensuring a widely consultative process in the revision of the higher education policies.

3. The lack of clear enforcement mechanisms makes it difficult to ensure compliance. To this effect, where provisions are made specifically to address challenges faced by learners with disabilities, these should be accompanied by clearly articulated enforcement mechanisms, as well as the specific penalties or incentives that go with non-compliance or compliance.

4. Finally, there is a tendency of looking at persons with disabilities as a homogenous group, or indeed in most cases not acknowledging that persons with disabilities may have specific educational needs that are different from non-disabled people in education. This further results in the failure to produce disaggregated monitoring data by disability status, or indeed by type of disability. This makes planning and programming difficult as the resultant educational interventions are not tailored to the specific needs of persons with disabilities. To this effect, it is recommended that to the extent possible, data for monitoring policies be disaggregated by disability status, as well as type of disability.

**Further reading**

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