

Enfranchising People with Disabilities in Zimbabwe

Zimbabwe - Jairos Jiri Association

SUMMARY OF PROJECT

The five-year program has sought to secure the inclusion of people with disabilities in Zimbabwe's governance systems by advocating for their accessibility to polling stations and thus enhancing their ability to vote secretly and independently. The program also aimed at ensuring proportional representation of people with disabilities in Parliament and other decision-making bodies, a quota system in employment, lobbying for the creation of a disability ministry, and the enactment and implementation of disability legislation.

"Overall, the use of the multi-stakeholder innovation with a focus on the rights of people with disabilities contributed greatly to their increased participation in governance systems and other development activities, as well as increased recognition and acceptance of people with disabilities in their communities".

—W. N. RUVERE, National Executive Director, JJA

FACTS AND FIGURES

- Several voter education exercises covered all 29 wards in Mutoko district and the 18 wards in Mudzi district, reaching 2,817 people with disabilities, 750 caregivers, and 200 community leaders in Mutoko, and 2,400 people with disabilities, 410 caregivers, and 200 community leaders in Mudzi.
- A 2009 baseline survey revealed that only 0.01 percent of voters in the 2008 elections were people with disabilities, whereas the number climbed to 3.6 percent in the 31 July 2013 harmonised elections – a significant improvement resulting from this governance program.
- 5 people with disabilities were candidates during the harmonised elections (2 for Parliament, 3 for Ward Councillors) and 174 people with disabilities (99 males, 75 females) were elevated to positions of authority in various leadership structures and committees in their communities.

PROBLEMS TARGETED

The rights of people with disabilities were not explicitly defined in the constitution of Zimbabwe and most sectors of society had no policies that were inclusive of disability. This is because disability, in most sectors of the society, is regarded as a charity issue rather than a development or human rights issue. The Disability Act of 1992, reviewed in 1996, falls short in terms of adequately addressing these rights. The participation of people with disabilities in decision-making processes has been hindered by some restrictions imposed by both physical and attitudinal barriers, including inaccessible buildings and the lack of access to useful information.

SOLUTION AND METHODOLOGY

The project aimed at increasing the number of people with disabilities who (1) participate as election observers in the country's local and national elections; (2) cast their votes in local and national elections; and (3) stand as candidates in local and national elections. Community involvement was key to the success of the program and led to the establishment of local disability committees. These committees, which were trained by Jairos Jiri Association, have a crucial role to play, as they are part of the organization's phase-out and sustainability strategies.

OUTLOOK AND TRANSFERABILITY

The governance program was carried out with the maximum involvement of the beneficiaries and concentrated on empowering communities. The program gives room to communities to apply strategies that work in their own situations, and thus is sufficiently flexible to be transferred to other countries. It is also possible to scale-up the program within Zimbabwe, as it would have an even greater impact if the whole country were covered. Costs can be shared among communities to cover workshops, meetings, and voter education campaigns as well as information, education, and communication materials.

Photo: Yes

CONTACT

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