

# Factors Influencing Employers' Reluctance to Hire Differently Abled People in Lusaka's Selected Private Companies

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## ABSTRACT

The exclusion of persons with disabilities from economic activities does not only impact negatively the individuals and their families but also the entire nation. As such, it is essential to ensure that all persons, including persons with disabilities, have equal opportunities to become productive and contributing members of their societies to ensure poverty reduction and equitable development. The study aimed to investigate attributive factors to employers' reluctance to hire differently-abled people in selected private companies in Lusaka. Specific objectives were: to investigate factors attributed to employers' reluctance to hire persons with disability and to investigate the challenges persons with disabilities encounter when searching for employment. A mixed-method study design was adopted. The study had a total sample size of one-hundred and sixty-three (163). This included one hundred and nineteen (119) employers from the private sector, thirty-five (35) persons with disability, and nine (9) actors/representatives for various associations. Simple random and snowball sampling techniques were used to select 119 employers. Non-probability sampling techniques: convenience and judgment were used to select 35 persons with disability and nine actors. Mixed questions questionnaires were administered to employers; semi-structured interviews were held with actors and five focus group discussions were conducted with differently-abled people. Additionally, data was analyzed using Microsoft Excel and through the identification of common themes and codes. Findings of the research show that employers cited high job demands, lack of employable skills, and unawareness of the law among others to be factors influencing their reluctance to hire persons with disabilities. On the other hand, differently abled persons mentioned negative attitudes, inaccessible physical buildings, lack of formal qualifications or skills, weak laws and lack of support from family members as major barriers they encounter when searching for employment. Recommendations given are: Bridge the disconnection, intensify awareness campaigns, and highlight success stories.

**Keywords:** differently-abled persons, employers, factors, hire, influencing, private company, reluctant

## I. INTRODUCTION

In Zambia, persons with disabilities are among the most vulnerable groups in society and as such have limited access to infrastructure, health care, education, and employment leading to further social and economic exclusion (Zambia Agency for Persons with Disabilities, 2017). However, the World Health Organization (WHO, 2011) on disability reports that management is increasingly acknowledging the importance of attracting and integrating a diverse and inclusive workforce and that will help recognize those from minority groups. There is a need for a paradigm shift concerning employers' apprehension to hire differently abled. For instance, Lena, et al. (2019), found that employers expressed doubt in hiring people with disabilities due to the financial costs of accommodation and work productivity. A similar study by Kaye, et al. (2011), found a lack of awareness of disability and accommodation issues, concerns over costs, and fear of legal liability and negative attitude by employers to be principal barriers employers faced regarding hiring PWDs. Many other studies (Kim 2020; Ling and Leng 2017, O'Hara, Ranka et al., 2018, MacDonald & Fabian, 2008 and Opoku & Dodbe, 2016) found related and similar factors regarding employers' reluctance to hire or retain persons living with disability.

According to a country situation analysis report by the United Nations (UN) (2018), decent employment tends to be particularly elusive for refugees, migrants, young people, women, and persons with disabilities here in Zambia. Just like other countries, Zambia is still navigating escalating unemployment levels among men and women with disability who are one of the victimized and discriminated minority groups (Zambia Agency for Persons with Disabilities, 2017). Over 15 percent of the Zambian population have some form of physical, mental, intellectual and/or sensory disabilities (ZAPD, 2017). According to the 2010 Zambian census report analysis of PWDs, physical disability was prevalent at 32.7 percent, and the major cause at 35.2 percent was disease (CSO, 2012). The 2012 Act of Persons with Disability (PWDA) is a pillar in protecting and promoting

the interests of PWDs. The act prohibits all forms of discrimination and the use of derogatory names against people with disabilities (act, 2012). It further guides that a percentage of a job quota though not precisely indicated, must be reserved for people with disabilities. It also guides government to give tax rebates of the taxable income to any business organization that employs PWD. All these affirmative actions are there to improve the welfare of PWD.

Currently, Zambia is cooperating with international institutions including; the United Nations bodies such as the International Labor Organization (ILO), WHO, United Nations Development Program (UNDP) in finding ways of improving the welfare of persons with disability in society. Apart from that, local organizations, ministries and agencies like ZAPD, the Ministry of Community Development, Mother and Child Health (MCDMCH), Zambia Federation of People with Disability, (ZAFOD), Technical Education, Vocational and Entrepreneurship Training Authority (TEVETA) among others aim to protect and promote the rights and interests of differently-abled people.

### 1.1 Theoretical Framework

A theoretical framework is a foundational review of existing theories that serves as a roadmap for developing the arguments you will use in your own work. Theories are developed by researchers to explain phenomena, draw connections, and make predictions (vinz, 2022). In a theoretical framework, you explain the existing theories that support your research, showing that your paper is relevant and grounded in established ideas (Vinz, 2022).

### 1.2 Taste-Based Discrimination

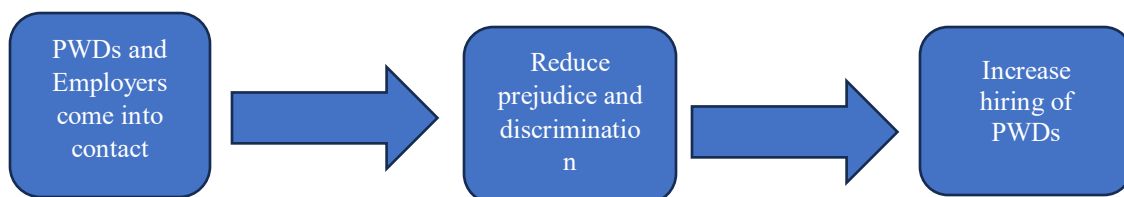
Two theories become important in conceptualizing the employability of the minority groups who in this case are persons with disabilities. To begin with, taste-based discrimination proposed by Gary Becker (1957), posits that employers discriminate against minority applicants to avoid interacting with them, regardless of the applicant's productivity, employers are willing to pay a financial penalty to do so. The taste-based model further supposes that employers' preference for employees of certain groups is unrelated to their preference for more productive employees. According to this model, employees that are members of a group that is discriminated against may have to work harder for the same wage or accept a lower wage for the same work as other employees. Taste-based discrimination can be observed from the side of employers, customers or co-workers.

In the case of an employer's "taste for discrimination", the employer aims to avoid non-monetary costs and does so often based on his own preferences. In the case of co-workers and customers, they may not want to interact with people belonging to a certain group due to the unconscious stereotypical beliefs. Due to the unconscious stereotyping, the employer becomes more careful not to hire from the unpreferred minority group. Becker further states that in the long run, the competitiveness of discriminating employers will suffer, because discriminated groups will sell their labor power to other organizations at lower rates. If these (minority groups) are as productive as other groups on average, non-discriminating employers will have an advantage.

### 1.3 Contact Theory

To perhaps deal with Becker's problem of taste discrimination, Allport's contact theory becomes ideal. Gordon W. Allport has often been credited with the development of the contact hypothesis, also known as Intergroup Contact Theory. The premise of Allport's theory is that under appropriate conditions, interpersonal contact is one of the most effective ways to reduce prejudice between majority and minority group members (Pratt, 2018).

Check below the summarized contact theory.



**Equal Status:** Allport emphasized the importance of having equal status among individuals engaged in contact. When people from different groups have equal status in the contact situation, it reduces the likelihood of one group feeling superior or inferior to the other. This equality contributes to positive intergroup relations.

**Common Goals:** Allport proposed that contact is most effective when individuals from different groups have shared or common goals. When people work together towards a common objective, it fosters cooperation and interdependence, creating a sense of unity that transcends group boundaries.

**Interpersonal Interaction:** Allport highlighted the significance of personal interactions between individuals from different groups. Direct personal contact allows people to see each other as individuals rather than as representatives of a particular group. This personalization helps in breaking down stereotypes and fostering understanding.

**Support of Authorities, Laws, or Custom:** He suggests that contact is more effective when it is supported by societal norms, laws, or customs that promote positive intergroup relations. This support provides a broader context for contact and encourages individuals to engage with members of other groups.

**Personal Interaction in Multiple Contexts:** contact is most effective when it occurs in various contexts and situations. Interaction between groups should not be limited to a single, isolated setting. Exposure in different situations enhances the impact of contact on attitudes and perceptions.

#### 1.4 Discussion

Though the two theories make a significant contribution to this study, the researcher feels there are gaps which are not adequately covered but are significant to the research. Firstly, the taste-based discrimination over simplifies how difficult it is for people in the minority especially PWDs to obtain a job, worse off a formal job. It is not always true that every employer that does not employ PWD has a negative perception toward PWD, for some, it is because they are unaware of the requirement of the law and principles of workforce inclusion and diversity.

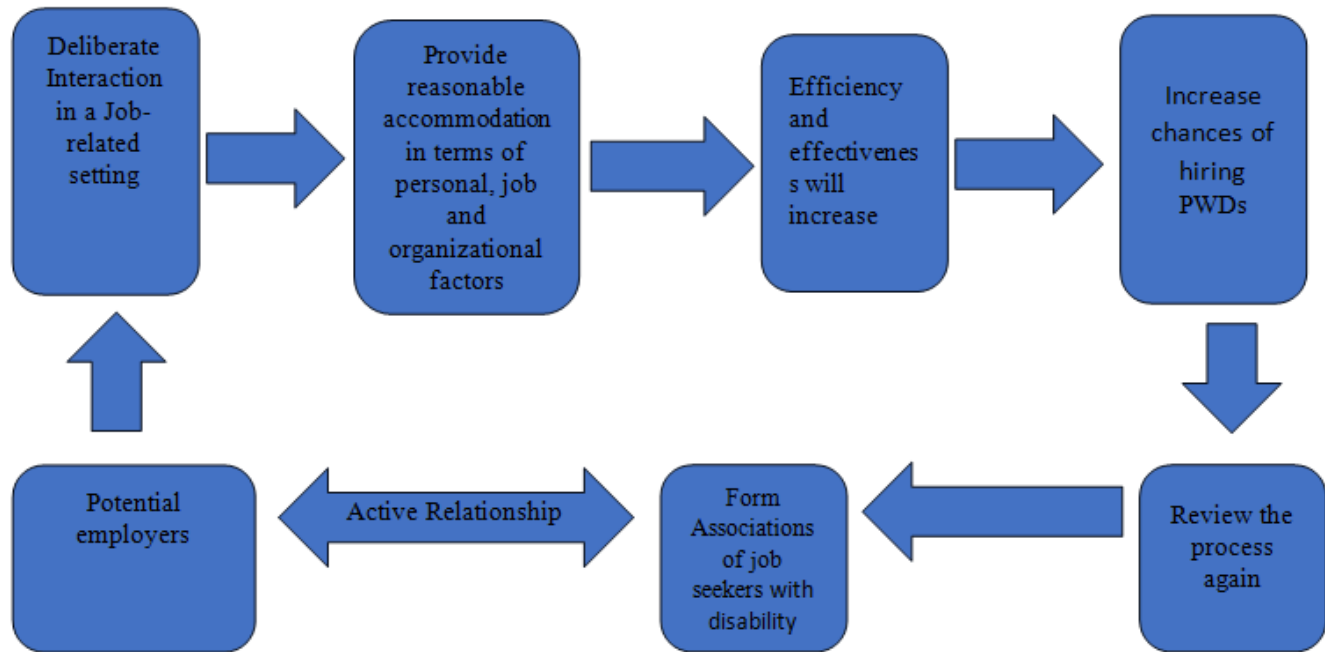
Further, taste-based discrimination seemingly suggests that; PWD should accept any form of a job despite the lower wages and salaries. These sentiments implied are not only infringing on their right to work and obtain equal pay but PWDs need no special attention as they are capable of executing their duties just like any person without a disability. What these people need is a levelled play-ground to showcase their abilities and skills.

The contact theory emphasizes more on the interaction/ contact between people in the majority and those in the minority group. While interactions between these two groups is essential, it left out other important aspects like where and how the contact should be done, which the researcher feels are important in increasing employability of PWD. To start with, Allport's first stage of equal status is haze and can hardly be achieved. Equal status should not only be looked in the lances of material possessions or wealth but rather stretched to also encompass one's intelligence quotient (IQ), person's level of education, family back ground and the like. As such, there will be some that will feel superior over others making it difficult to achieve equal status.

When it comes to employment, the tenets of contact theory still posit shortfalls. In as much as interactions between the majority and minority group may reduce the stereotype, it may not be the case in workplaces. The concern in a workplace is whether the person with disability is capable enough to meet the demands of the job. It is about impressing the employer so he or she is fully convinced a PWD will deliver. A mere interaction may not result in a possible job offer because employers may have differing reasons such as absenteeism concerns, medical expenses, performance issues which all may not necessarily vanish through mere interaction. Therefore, the context for interaction should be tailored to the desired goal. For instance, if someone with sight impairment wants a lecturing job, the environment for interaction with the employer should be ideal enough for him to showcase his capabilities. That way, the employer makes an informed decision regarding the hiring of a PWD. For this reason, the author proposed a theory that may help increase the number of PWDs being hired and retained in their work places.

#### 1.5 Tailored Contact (Researcher's Theory)

In order to increase employability of people with disabilities, the researcher proposed a theory that she deems more ideal and effective. The theory has seven stages that should accurately be followed to increase levels of employment among persons with disability.



To begin with, like minded PWD seeking for employment should come together and form associations. This is important because they will be more assertive about their abilities and skills which will make it easier for them to be noticed. These associations will also be a source of encouragement and motivation to keep fighting for better standards of living.

There should be an active relationship between the associations that are actively searching for employment and the employers who do not only want to fulfil corporate demands of inclusion but also tap in the talent and skills of these people. It may be easier for an employer to consider hiring PWD if they are aware of PWD seeking for employment.

Mere interaction may not possibly result into a job offer, therefore, there must be a deliberate move to allow the two groups interact in job-related setting. The employer is interested in seeing how the prospect will perform job duties, and the prospect would like to prove to the potential employer about his or her ability to perform the job. By allowing the two parties interact in a work-related setting, it will not only give an opportunity to job seekers to showcase their abilities and skills, but will make the employer make an informed decision on performance, ability and accommodation related issues.

Once the employer decides to hire a PWD he/she must be willing and able to provide individual, job and organizational factors. Individual factors correspond to the characteristics and skills of the employee which will make him/her more or less likely to develop a work-related ill-being. These include the way the person will manage their emotions, communicate with colleagues and hierarchy, the esteem they have for themselves and their work. An employer can train a PWD on interpersonal communication and to effectively manage one's emotions. The employer can as well instill confidence by appreciating small wins and effort shown in performing his duty.

Job-related factors correspond to the reasonable accommodation needed for the employee with a disability to successfully perform his/her job. Reasonable accommodation may range from the physical structures of an organization to equipment and processes that support PWD. It is the employer's duty to ensure that the physical structures can easily be accessed by an employee on the wheel chair and sight impaired. Right equipment and user-friendly tools should be provided for instance braille keyboard for the sight impaired. With the right accommodation, PWD can effectively execute their duties and meet targets.

Organizational factors relate to the policies of an organization, working conditions, job security and the general organizational culture of a particular workplace. Companies' policies should be flexible to change in order to accommodate a given situation. Working conditions should be provided fairly with those without disability. Perceived fairness in wage/salaries and the general treatment a person with disability receives will make them feel part of the company and likely to be more committed to the job.

Efficiency and productivity are likely to increase when the factors alluded to are met. The researcher believes that PWD do not need special attention for them to perform, all they need is reasonable accommodation and the right work environment just like any other employee to be efficient and productive. The researcher also believes that by providing individual, job and organizational factors, persons with disability will effectively carryout their duties without much difficulty.

When persons with disability are able to deliver on organization's goals and targets just like a person with no disability, then employability of PWD will increase. In a case where employability of PWD does not increase, then there is need to review the whole process. Ensure that job seekers have the necessary qualification and skills and the potential employers meet conditions needed for employees with disability to be productive. The researcher believes that when all stages have been done accurately, then employability of PWD will increase.

## II. LITERATURE REVIEW

### 2.1 Prior Research

Burke, et al. (2013) literature review on employers' attitude towards hiring and retaining people with disability, reports that employers' rate PWDs higher in terms of consistent attendance, dependability, motivation, reduced turnover and collaboration among co-workers. Employers demonstrate positive reactions to hire people with severe disability including autism, cognitive impairments and psychiatric disabilities. However, though they expressed positive attitudes about applicants with disability, it was found that few respondents actually hired PWDs.

Further findings reveal that PWD earned lower salaries than warranted by their academic qualifications. Respondents reveal that government's role in ensuring adequate jobs for PWD is not enough, mainly because the majority are not well educated, hence policies on job quota and job allocation could not solve the problems of unemployment. Addressing unemployment among PWD requires more than just policies aimed at job quotas or allocation. It necessitates comprehensive approaches that address educational barriers, accessibility issues, and discrimination in the workplace. Therefore, it becomes importance to reevaluate and potentially reform existing policies and programs to better support the employment needs of PWD, taking into account their educational backgrounds and the multifaceted nature of the issue.

### 2.2 Local

There seems to be a paradigm shift in Zambia because in July 2014, Zambia federation of employers and the International Labor Organization (ILO) held an unprecedented roundtable on "Unlocking the potential: A Zambia business roundtable on disability and employment". The discussions brought together a wide range of stakeholders from the public and private sector to consider the business case for hiring people with disabilities and concrete actions that contribute to their training and employment.

Some companies like pick n pay, standard chartered bank and Taj Pamodzi who at the time already successfully employed PWDs shared their success story and experiences on how they have been able to successfully employ differently able people. Pick n Pay employed over 25 persons with disability in their stores throughout the country. Standard Chartered Bank Zambia, is taking measures to facilitate a disability-friendly work environment and Taj Pamodzi Hotel reports of doing the same. However, other present employers stated the barriers they faced in hiring PWDs; inaccessible workplaces, lacking the skills and qualifications needed by employers and lack of a database on differently abled job seekers. Establishing a database or platform specifically for differently abled job seekers could help connect them with potential employers and support services. This database could include information about individuals' skills, qualifications, accommodations needed, and employment preferences.

### 2.3 Employers' Challenges with Hiring and Retaining PWD

Mansour, (2009) did a study with 27 selected private companies in Saudi Arabia. Employers express their apprehension over occupational health and safety expenses and higher rate of absenteeism associated with PWD. Productivity is their other major concern for not employing PWD. Similarly, Kaye, et al. (2014) discovers that 82% of respondents expressed concern over costs of reasonable accommodation, 81% did not know how to handle the needs of a worker with a disability on the job. 80% were afraid they would not be able to discipline or fire a worker with a disability for poor performance, because of potential lawsuits.

### 2.4 Reasonable Accommodation for PWD in Workplace

Kaye postulates that the relationship between reasonable accommodations, organizational values and culture is essential to examine. Clear organizational values and policies regarding diversity and disability in the workplace and organizational flexibility are positively related to accommodating employees with disabilities. However, non-inclusive organizational culture and non-responsive management practices are organizational barriers to the provision of reasonable accommodation. Sustaining reasonable accommodations in the workplace cannot be easily achieved without making changes in the values and culture of an organization.

Perceived and actual limitations in resources may play a part in whether an organization responds to accommodation requests effectively and promptly (Bruyere, 2006). Additionally, smaller firms may also lack knowledge of government

incentives for hiring people with disability and related tax credits. For example, some employers believe that job accommodations are too time-consuming or too expensive to handle. Therefore, rehabilitation professionals should identify when employers may have trouble responding to accommodation requests, and be familiar with existing workplace resources and processes that can support an effective response to the request.

### 2.5 Challenges Differently Abled Persons Encounter When Searching for Employment

Opoku, (2017) conducts a study to access employment in Kenya: the voices of persons with disabilities. The study was an exploratory study, using qualitative methods. Three categories of persons with disability were considered: the physically disabled, the visually impaired, and the hearing impaired. A convenient sampling was used to recruit 30 participants from five constituencies. He found that unemployment is one of the major challenges facing persons with disability. They experience significant high rates of unemployment compared with the general population, and are often employed in low-paid jobs. This could indicate a missing link in identifying employment opportunities and impeding factors to the opportunities. Factors responsible for the high unemployment included inaccessible information on employment, negative attitudes, inaccessible physical environment, low educational attainment of persons with disabilities, and ineffective legislation on employment and communication barriers.

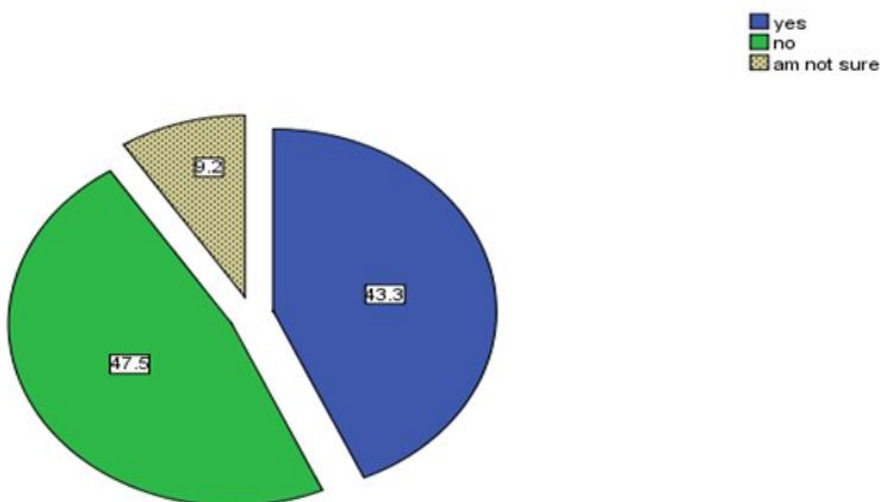
## III. METHODOLOGY

A mixed-method study design was adopted. The study had a total sample size of one-hundred and sixty-three (163). This included one hundred and nineteen (119) employers from the private sector, thirty-five (35) persons with disability, and nine (9) actors/representatives for various associations for persons with disabilities. Simple random and snowball sampling techniques were used to select 119 employers. Non-probability sampling techniques: convenience and judgmental were used to select 35 persons with disability and nine actors. Questionnaires were administered to employers; semi-structured interviews were held with actors and five focus group discussions were conducted with differently-abled people.

## IV. RESULTS

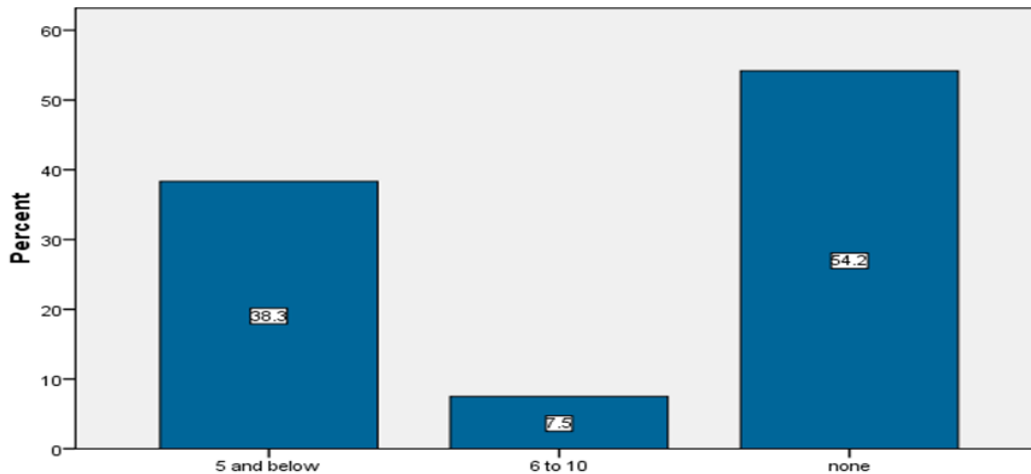
The figure below shows that 47.5 percent said had not hired a person with a severe disability at their work place. This suggests that a substantial portion of the surveyed group has not actively engaged in employing or retaining individuals with severe disabilities.

has your company hired or retained a person with severe disability PWSD before?



The statistic below indicates that 54.2 percent of companies have not employed or retained a person with severe disability raises important questions about inclusivity and diversity in the workforce. Several factors may contribute to this situation, and it's crucial to consider both challenges and potential solution

**how many employees of persons with disability does your company have?**



**Table 1: Factors Influencing Employers**

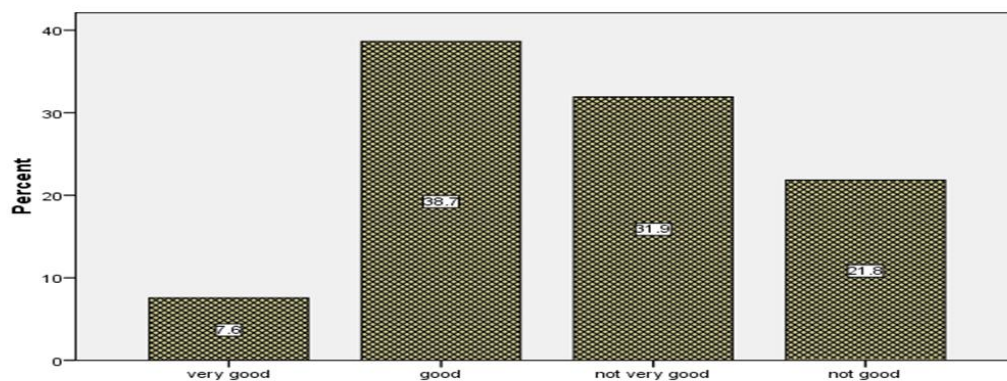
Challenges for employers	Number of participants on this question
High job demands	88
Lack of employable skills	79
Unawareness	65
Cost of accommodation	63
Close supervision	38
Absenteeism	15
No response	9

The table above shows the attributive factors employers cited for their reluctance to hire persons with disability. These responses were written by employers themselves and were free to give more than response.

**Objective Two: Assess the Modalities Put in Place to Accommodate a Differently-Abled Person at the Work Place.**

Figure below shows 38.7 percent of employers to have their physical buildings accessible to differently-abled individuals.

**how would you describe your company with regard to accessibility of the physical building for persons with disability?**



**Objective Three: Establish the Challenges Persons with Disability Encounter When Searching For Employment.**

The table below shows the summary of the findings from persons with disabilities. The findings are related to objective number three; the challenges that PWD encounter when searching for employment.

**Table 2:** Factors affecting PWD

Challenges for differently abled persons	Participants out of five groups
Negative attitude	5
Infrastructure inaccessible	5
Lack of information about employment	5
Law is weak	5
Lack of employable skills	4
Lack of support from family members and the community	4

**V. DISCUSSION OF FINDINGS**

**Objective One: Factors Influencing Private Employers' Reluctance to Hire Persons with Disability.**

Eighty-eight (88) out of one hundred and nineteen (119) participants cited high job demand as a leading factor to employers' reluctance to hire or retain a person with severe disability. While it's crucial to recognize that individuals with disabilities can be highly skilled and capable, certain aspects related to job demands may create barriers, here is what an actor said;

*Persons with disability should be counseled on the type of jobs they should take to suit their condition. They are differently abled and can perform way better in some jobs than others. For instances I have seen many blind people as cashiers in big supermarkets and are brilliant at what they do. So, acceptance here is the key, certain jobs cannot be performed effectively by PWD.*

High stress levels associated with a busy work environment can be particularly challenging for individuals with mental health conditions or cognitive disabilities. Stress can exacerbate symptoms and impact the overall well-being. Below is a mental health activist that shared her experience.

*"At some point in my life, I had a mental break down. Before that, I was a regional director for some big companies in the country. All was okay, till one day I became sick. Health professionals attributed it to work stress, I was retired on medical grounds" A7*

The apprehension is that should such a person be brought back or given a job in a high demanding job environment it may exacerbate the symptoms which becomes a danger to a person's well-being. A study by Hanga and Wilken (2015) found that of the 32, half (50%) reported that in the last 30 days, their health condition was unstable. They noted pain, fatigue, exhaustion, and problems with concentration and memory to have reduced their work capacity.

However, with digital transformation sweeping the world towards the Fourth Industrial Revolution, it is imperative to ensure people with disabilities are not excluded from the workforce of the future (we forum, 2021). Digital transformation linked with remote working and networking can drive people with disabilities towards greater success and help to tap into their potential and unique skill set. With this new technology, issues of productivity differences between PWDs and people without disabilities will become even more insignificant. Using the internet, individuals with disabilities can communicate with colleagues, participate in meetings and complete other work with less trouble. One respondent attested to this.

*"Braille is expensive yes, but a common laptop can be used as well, I just need to download a software that will enable me to type, and can easily communicate with others. That is how I manage to do my studies. Currently, I am teaching other blind people on how to operate it. With this software, I can do any work efficiently without any struggle." A8*



In the quest for disability inclusion in the work place, employers should be willing to embrace technology that helps to solve current problems. Creating an inclusive workplace involves recognizing the diverse needs of employees, fostering a supportive culture, and promoting understanding among all members of the workforce.

Lack of employable knowledge, skills and abilities (KSA) was cited as the second major contributor to employers' reluctance to hire a differently-abled. People with disabilities are disadvantaged in the labor market. For example, their lack of access to education and training or to financial resources may be responsible for their exclusion from the labor market (Handicapped International, 2019). One actor said this;

*"At the family level, a child with disability is secondary to one without a disability. In terms of resources and education, there is preferential treatment which most likely puts a child with a disability at a disadvantage in terms of personal development."*

However, it is also imperative to note that some differently-abled are born with talents that are employable, while some have acquired skills through informal education and are able to earn an income through that. One FGD agreed having skills despite not completing their formal education.

*"Amongst ourselves, we have different skills, we might not have completed school but at least with the skills we have we help our families. We have skills, some in welding, painting, I am also landscaping but it has been hard to find a permanent job."*

Environmental barriers such as lack of nearby special schools and special aids the child may need further hinder the progress of this child. Due to these barriers faced at their early age, it becomes difficult for them to acquire formal education or life skills. Education and training are fundamental to good and productive work. Differently-abled persons should take advantage of the free education and the CDF government is offering to enroll in a trade school to acquire any survival skill that will enable them to earn a living. Through CDF, skills development programs for persons with disabilities can be implemented to improve their living standards and bridge perceived skill gaps. These programs could include training in specific technical skills or soft skills relevant to the job market. One actor that was interviewed testified having received CDF for their projects. Here is what she said;

*We have been able to get funding from the government through the Constituency Development Fund which helped us acquire a peanut butter-making machine. We are very happy about this development though we wish others could benefit too. A8*

Results show that 65 employers were unaware of the 2012 Act for Persons with Disabilities and its provisions. If employers are not aware of the law, it becomes hard to solve unemployment problems among PWD. Awareness of the laws and regulations regarding the employment of differently-abled people is crucial for addressing unemployment issues within this demographic. Here is what one actor said;

*"The levels of unawareness among the people are generally high. Few know how to handle a differently-abled person, especially in workplaces and learning institutions. Others are not aware of the incentives available for them when they hire or retain a person with a disability." A6*

In Zambia, there are specific laws in place that protect the rights of people with disabilities and promote their inclusion in the workforce. Therefore, employers must be well informed about issues as sensitive and crucial as this one because they are often required to make reasonable accommodations to enable differently-abled to perform their job duties. Employers that are unaware also miss out on the incentives or tax breaks available for them and perhaps can give them a competitive advantage.

### **Objective Two: Evaluate Modalities Put in Place to Accommodate Differently-Abled Persons at the Workplace.**

Accommodating differently-abled persons in the workplace is crucial for promoting diversity, and inclusion, and ensuring equal opportunities for all employees. This study's results showed that; among the employers sampled, 7.6 percent had very good user-friendly physical infrastructure for persons with disability, 38.7 percent said the buildings were moderately good and 21.8 percent of their infrastructure was not good in terms of accessibility by PWDs. Despite 38 employers citing having accessible work environments for the differently-abled, all five FGDs mentioned inaccessible infrastructure as one of the leading barriers encountered when they search for employment. One of the actors said the following.

*"Issues of mobility and accessibility of the physical infrastructure are all clearly guided by the law with regards to being disability friendly, especially for the blind and those in the wheelchair. Not much is being done, as this has remained to be one of the major challenges PWD are facing." A3*

Ensuring that the workplace is physically accessible with features such as ramps, elevators, accessible restrooms, and designated parking spaces for people with disabilities is important to ease their mobility. Providing reasonable accommodation is not limited to the physical infrastructure only, but also to the details of the job. Modifying job tasks, roles, or responsibilities to better suit the abilities and needs of employees with disabilities and ensuring they perform their duties effectively and contribute to the organization's goals. This could be done by providing specialized software, hardware, or assistive devices such as screen readers, braille, ergonomic keyboards, and speech recognition software to facilitate productivity and communication for deaf and blind employees.

Limitations in resources may play a part in whether an organization responds to accommodation requests effectively and promptly. Bruyere, (2006) explains that organizational resources have an impact on the provision of job accommodations. Organizational resources (in terms of size and type of employment sector) affect the company's ability to provide accommodations, compared to larger firms, smaller firms, in general, may have fewer internal resources which would make them less likely to provide adequate accommodation for employees with disability (Bruyere, 2006). In Germany, accommodation-related costs are offset by the German government Gröschl (2012). This allows the employer not to worry about expenses related to providing reasonable accommodation. This is a good strategy that perhaps can be implemented in Zambia.

### **Objective Three: Challenges Persons with Disabilities Encounter When Searching for Employment in Private Companies.**

Negative attitude by employers and the general public was the leading factor. All five focus group discussions that were held cited the negative attitudes of employers toward people with disabilities as the leading factor. Some even referred to it as a "mother of all other barriers." Though it is now rife to see PWDs as entrepreneurs and some in formal employment, as teachers, doctors and the like, current studies have shown that biasness and discrimination are still rampant (World Health Organisation, 2011). In Malaysia, Ling Ta and Leng (2013) found that the notion of 'equal employment opportunities' for people with disabilities was neither a priority nor a practice with Malaysian employers. PWDs were discriminated and exploited both by their coworkers and employers. For instance, a physically disabled person had this to say;

*"With the few times have been privileged to find piece works somewhere, my performance has been judged before I can actually do the job. Being on the wheelchair has never been a limitation because in most instances, I have outperformed abled people to the shock of the supervisor who later confessed that he had thought I would not manage the job." FGD2*

Further, participants discussed lack of support from family members and their communities and how it impacted their employment opportunities. Some mentioned that their family members abandoned them when they acquired their disability. As a result, they could not acquire any skills that would make them employable. They depend on well-wishers or social cash transfer from government. Here is what they said:

*My family abandoned me when I had this disability, so I could not develop myself. I have no family; I rely on well-wishers for support. No one from my family members check on me to give me money or food or any support I take care of myself. FGD3  
Family members need to be educated on how to handle a disabled person. They don't seem to understand us. We only rely on cash transfer from the government because family support is not there. FGD2*

It was also observed that actors were concerned about the law which they described as not having "teeth to bite". The apprehension is that the law is weak which makes it easy for companies to disregard it and no one questions them. The effectiveness of laws related to the employment of differently-abled individuals often depends on various factors, including the clarity and strength of the legislation, enforcement mechanisms, and the presence of a culture that promotes compliance. If there is a perception that the law is weak or that enforcement is lax, it can indeed undermine the intended impact of the legal framework. When laws addressing the employment of differently-abled people lack clarity, specificity, or enforceable provisions, it creates loopholes that companies may exploit. Strengthening the legal framework with clear guidelines and consequences for non-compliance is essential.

## **VI CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS**

### **Conclusion**

People with disabilities face barriers in accessing the necessary education and training to prepare them for the labor market. 54.2 percent of companies have not employed or retained a person with severe disability, only 38.3 have hired five or less PWD. This raises important questions about inclusivity and diversity in the workforce. Addressing these questions

requires a comprehensive and multi-faceted approach that involves collaboration between employers, policymakers, advocacy groups, PWD and the wider community. Employers cited high job demand, lack of employable skills, cost of accommodation as one of the major barriers attributed to their reluctance to hire or retain PWD. Findings of this research illustrate the importance of analyzing the type of support employers need as a starting point for building trustful partnerships between authority actors and employers in order to enhance employment of PWDs. On the other hand, both actors for PWD and persons with disabilities themselves cited negative attitude by employers, inaccessible infrastructure, weak laws and policies among other barriers they encounter when searching for employment. Conclusive consultations with the affected parties is cardinal in coming up with lasting solutions to these challenges.

### **Recommendation**

In Zambia, something needs to be done to increase labor market participation of differently-abled people. Having completed this study, I have given the following recommendations which I believe can help minimize hurdles PWDs encounter on a daily basis especially when it comes to employment, while at the same time encourage employers to hire more of persons with disabilities.

### **Bridge the Disconnection**

Bridge the disconnection between employer's/ policy makers, those in authority and the differently abled. When coming up with solutions to the problems PWDs are faced with, the best way is to consult differently-abled people themselves because they know exactly what they need and what should be done to address the problem. As long as such consultations are not happening, no meaningful progress will be made in curbing or minimizing the challenges. This could be achieved through the following:

**Establish Inclusive Platforms.** Create dedicated platforms that bring together employers, policy makers, and representatives from the differently-abled community. Ensure these platforms are inclusive, accessible, and provide a safe space for open dialogue.

**Engage Differently-Abled Individuals.** Actively involve differently-abled individuals in the decision-making process by inviting them to share their experiences, challenges, and suggestions and also conduct surveys, focus group discussions, and interviews to gather diverse perspectives.

### **Education is Key**

We cannot talk about employment of persons with disabilities if the population in question does not have any formal education. Ensuring that differently-abled individuals have access to education is crucial for fostering inclusivity and enabling them to reach their full potential. Education not only imparts knowledge and skills but also empowers individuals to participate more fully in society, both socially and economically.

We recommend the Zambian government for the initiatives it has introduced like free education from primary to secondary education and sign language in schools. Free education ensures that all children, including those with disabilities, have access to learning opportunities regardless of their socio-economic background. This helps to break the cycle of poverty and inequality and provides pathways for personal development and future employment. Integrating sign language into schools is also a crucial step towards inclusivity. For deaf or hard-of-hearing students, sign language is their primary means of communication, and by teaching it in schools, the government is promoting accessibility and ensuring that these students can fully participate in the educational experience

In spite of these good initiatives, the majority of PWD come from humble backgrounds and may not afford special aid the child may need to be in school. Not only that, there are few special schools in Zambia and may require a child to cover long distances which may not be ideal for someone in a wheelchair or using crutches. Moreover, some of these schools lack funds to offer specialized learning resources, adaptive technologies, and support services to accommodate various disabilities and learning styles. Therefore, the government should ensure that disability-related concerns in every district are prioritized and a certain percentage of CDF is channeled toward meeting the various needs of PWDs. when we provide tailored educational opportunities, we can address the unique needs and challenges that differently-abled individuals may face because education plays a vital role in breaking down barriers and dispelling stereotypes about disabilities.

### **Success Story**

Highlighting employers who have successfully embraced differently-abled persons in their workplaces is a good strategy to motivate and inspire other businesses to follow suit. Allow successful employers to share practical insights into their inclusive practices. This could include details on the types of accommodations they have implemented, how they have fostered an inclusive culture, and the strategies they have used to overcome challenges.

Highlighting these stories provides tangible examples of how inclusion benefits both the employer and the employees. Some employers may hesitate to hire differently-abled individuals due to misconceptions, success stories can debunk these

myths and showcase that, with the right support and accommodations, hiring differently-abled individuals can be a positive and feasible choice.

### Recognition and Awards

Establish recognition programs and awards that celebrate businesses for their commitment to inclusivity. Publicly acknowledging and rewarding employers who embrace diversity can serve as a good incentive for others to follow suit. Company branding and positive organizational reputation have become important in the business world; therefore, such awards and recognition could offer just what businesses are looking for.

### Enforce the Law

The loud cry from the actors and the PWD is that the law is weak and does not protect their interests. Out of nine actors, seven said the law was weak and does not have the “teeth to bite”. By enforcing the law, companies will comply but for as long as it remains the way it is it will take a long time to curb challenges of unemployment among PWDs. In other countries, a fine is charged to companies that seem reluctant to hire PWDs, perhaps Zambia should adopt the same, maybe employers will be compelled to employ PWDs.

Apart from that, job quotas, tax rebates provided in the 2012 act for persons with disability should be revised. For instance, the law does not specifically state the percentage of job quota that should be allocated to PWDs, it is assumed that it is ten percent but the law is not specific about it and that becomes a loophole for abuse. When laws addressing the employment of differently-abled people lack clarity, specificity, or enforceable provisions, it creates loopholes that companies may exploit. Strengthening the legal framework with clear guidelines and consequences for non-compliance is essential.

Revise the incentives provided so that they are good enough to allure employers into hiring PWDs. Every employer aims to make profit by all means and given the challenges employers gave for their reluctance to hire and retain PWDs it is likely that the narrative will remain the same unless something disrupts them. Therefore, incentives should be lucrative enough. For instance, the Germany government offsets any costs associated to providing reasonable accommodation for PWDs so that the employer does not incur any cost. I believe this could work well for Zambia too.

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