

Supporting Children with Disabilities in Zimbabwe

92% OF CAREGIVERS TURN TO TRADITIONAL HEALERS FOR HELP FOR THEIR CHILDREN WITH DISABILITIES, INDICATING A CLEAR LACK OF ADEQUATE INFORMATION ON DISABILITY AND OF QUALITY SERVICES

The situation

In Zimbabwe, only around 26% of people with disabilities have access to social welfare programmes. Quality, critical services for children such as education, health, rehabilitation, social protection and child protection are also hard to come by.

Across the country, socio-cultural beliefs, attitudes, stigma and discrimination all affect the lives of children with disabilities and greatly increase their vulnerabilities. Understanding of the causes of disabilities is very limited, with many Zimbabweans attributing them to witchcraft, promiscuity, curses or rituals-for-acquiring-wealth gone wrong. This then leads to families of children with disabilities being stigmatized, which in turn, causes families to reject, abandon, neglect or over-protect their children.

At a policy and programming level, disabilities have long been considered charity or welfare issues, rather than rights issues, with limited resources for disability programming. The Government's approach historically has been for budgets, when provided, to be dispersed through the Ministry of Social Welfare. The approach has had negative knock-on effects to other social sectors including water and sanitation, health and justice.

Stigma and discrimination of children with disabilities prevents or hinders community participation and education and leads to children being isolated in their homes; potential non-disclosure by parents and a reluctance to seek necessary support for disabilities – which in turn, makes data collection more difficult and a lack of knowledge for caregivers, particularly for matters like children's development milestones.

Major barriers for children living with a disability can include accessibility, availability and affordability of critical services, which, beyond education and health, also include social protection, child protection, rehabilitation and access to birth registration.

In recent years, there has been some progress in the legal and policy frameworks. The Ministry of Public Service, Labour and Social Development established in 2019 the Department of Disability Affairs for disability-related programming and implementation, which resulted in the launch of the National Disability Policy in June 2021, and the National Coordination Committee for its subsequent implementation in July 2022.



UNICEF Response

Investment into child protection for children living with disabilities will enable UNICEF to assist the Government further with:

- Technical and financial support to accelerate repealing and amendment of the Persons with Disability Bill
- Training – guided by the new policies – of those who work with children with disabilities, so that the children are free from exploitation and abuse
- Increasing the capacity of parents and caregivers of children and adolescents with disabilities to participate in the design and implementation of disability-inclusion programmes
- Integrating disability policies into social protection services, including for those children who have entered into the case management system; this will include trainings for a wide range of implementing partners on the ground; standardized protocols for identifications, assessments and referrals; and grants to organizations working with people with disabilities

- Boosting the capacity of those working at a community level with children and young people with disabilities
- Increasing our knowledge, understanding and interventions for children with mental disabilities

Target beneficiaries

All children with disabilities in 10 focus districts

5,000 community groups trained in skills for disability care

20,000 parents and caregivers of children with disability

Families and communities in UNICEF programme areas

10,000 children with disabilities with increased welfare

3 YEAR BUDGET \$4,9m

Strengthening and implementing the National Disability Policy and training those who work with children with disabilities	\$300k
Community level cross sectoral capacity building in disability inclusion	\$500k
Strengthening capacity of parents and caregivers of children with disabilities to care, support and protect them	\$1,5m
Addressing communities on misconceptions and myths about children with a disability	\$100k
Rollout of standardized, disability-inclusive, identification, assessment and referral protocols to social protection	\$1,5m
Piloting in 2023 a cross-sectorial disability-inclusive awareness-raising communication campaign in 10 selected districts	\$1m

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