The Level of Participation of Women with Disabilities in Economic Empowerment Programmes in Gweru District

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Abstract
This study was carried to investigate the level of participation of women with disabilities in economic empowerment programmes in Gweru District. The objectives of the study were to find out community views on participation of women with disabilities and to examine barriers that limited the participation of women with disabilities in economic programmes. The descriptive survey method was used to gather the data. Questionnaires and Interviews were used to solicit information from the thirty respondents in Gweru Urban. The researcher also gathered data from Government, Non-Governmental Organisations and Community Leaders. The study findings indicated that women with disabilities were given very little attention and not consulted in issues affecting their lives. Women with disabilities were regarded as charity cases. Cultural, Social, Physical and Psychological barriers were regarded as challenges that limited participation of women with disabilities in economic programmes. The study concluded that government and non-governmental organisations should craft new policies that would promote gender equality and advancement of women with disabilities. More support should be given by government, non-governmental organisations and community leaders to women with disabilities on issues that effect their lives.

Keywords: informal sector, business establishment, small and medium enterprises, government regulations and procedures, regulatory frameworks, rural-based enterprises, entrepreneur.

INTRODUCTION
There are about over 650 million people with disabilities worldwide. Zimbabwe has 218 421 of these are 113 478 women (World Health Organisation 1999). They lack equal access to care in rehabilitation, health, family planning and reproductive health and are among the marginalized in society. Women with disabilities usually suffer discrimination and often ignored as they are not considered to be equal human beings who are capable of taking control of their lives. Frank (2000) says that women with disabilities experience high rates of poverty and negative stereotypes. Not much has been documented in the area of participation of women with disabilities in economic empowerment programmes in Zimbabwe. The little information available just groups together men and women with disabilities yet it is a fact that women with disabilities are more likely than their counterparts to be poor or destitute, illiterate or without vocational skills. They are more likely to be without family support, experience negative stereotypes, high rates of institutionalization and abuse.

Depouy (1993) states that women with disabilities experience inequality in hiring and promotional standard jobs, access to training, access to credit and other productive resources, pay for equal work and occupational segregation and they rarely participate in economic decision making. This assertion was supported by the International Labour Organization (2000) which pointed out that the general trend worldwide is that women with disabilities are less likely to be selected for vocational training, have harder time getting access to rehabilitation programmes and are less likely to get equality in training. This leads to discrimination of women with disabilities hence their situation continues to be inadequately addressed. Often women with disabilities are invisible among those promoting gender equality hence it is time to take women with disabilities as a group of people who need extra attention who often encounter barriers that prevent their full equal and active participation in society.

There is need to focus at issues that enhance the participation of women with disabilities in economic empowerment programmes in a bid to promote their self-reliance hence the investigation into participation of women with disabilities in economic empowerment programmes.

STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM
Women with disabilities find it difficult to actively participate and integrate in economic development programmes due to social, cultural and environmental barriers.

PURPOSE OF THE STUDY
The purpose of the study was to find out the level of participation of women with disabilities in community economic empowerment programmes in Gweru District.
OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY
The following are the research objectives
1. to find out community views on participation of women with disabilities in economic empowerment programmes
2. to establish the major barriers that limit the participation of women with disabilities in community economic empowerment programmes.

SIGNIFICANCE OF THE STUDY
This study should be of benefit to both the Government and Non-governmental Organizations in formulating policies that are user friendly to women with disabilities. The study findings could be used by the communities to deal with some barriers that hinder the participation of women with disabilities in community economic empowerment programme. The study should also help planning and implementing strategies of the government and non-governmental organizations so that their programmes can cater for the needs of women with disabilities. The researcher is going to sharpen her research skills.

This is an area for further for scholars as there is still a gap to be filled in political and empowerment issues of the disabled women. This study is of importance to the readers as they now have an understanding that disability is not a case, there is need to give equal opportunities to the disabled women in order to prove themselves

DELIMITATION OF THE STUDY
The study is focused on women with disabilities only. It also confines itself to Gweru district. Focus was on the number of women with disabilities participating in the community empowerment programmes carried out in the district and the barriers that limit the participation.

DEFINITION OF TERMS
In this study the following key terms were used:-
Disability
The concept of disability must be understood as referring to a limitation which must result from physical, mental or psychological impairments and which hinder the participation of the persons concerned in professional life. (Employment Framework Directive (2000/78/EC) In this study, disability will refer to all forms of impairment that limit the functionality of an individual.

Participation
For this study, participation means taking an active part in an activity. In this respect women with disabilities must take an active part in empowerment programmes.

LITERATURE REVIEW
The Meaning and Importance of Participation
Participation means being involved to some extent. Many people participate in family life in that they are parents, brothers, sisters, sons, daughters, grandparents etc. Outside the home there are many levels of participation for example others may be involved in working as members of a group or organization. (Reed 2008)

Participation entails access to opportunities that are aimed at improving an individual’s position in society (Rehabilitation International, 2000). Participation is enhanced by the availability of political will and resources and an individual needs a community that protects his/her right (Choruma, 2007)

This notion is supported by United Nations (2000) which say that for participation of the marginalized to be effective, there is need for a supportive community which is able to balance both diversity and unity (Despouy, 1988) Where there are structural impediments to a certain sector or cultural group, their ability to exercise personal freedoms is restricted and inequality results (Guijarro, 2002). Thus participation, though it is a fundamental human right, attitudes play a very important role in the participation of women with disabilities in community economic empowerment programmes.

Participation raises awareness of issues that are important to a group, enables the group to take action, thereby doing something about it. In addition participation gets the voice of the disadvantaged like women heard. Such groups as women with disabilities cannot afford to miss such if they are to get off their poverty situation (Choruma, 2007). This results in the redistribution of power that enables the have nots citizens, presently excluded from the political and economic processes value their worthiness as members of the society. Therefore government departments, community leaders, and non-governmental organizations need to make conscious efforts to mainstream disability in their activities (Jairos Jiri Report 2006).

To meet the challenge of including disabled women in society is beyond the capacity of any one organization. It is crucial that the priorities of disabled women be addressed in partnership between development agencies, the regional bodies, national governments and women’s or disability organizations. These organizations should unite on policy issues to have a strong impact on government and societies to emphasise on inclusive approach in all areas of equalization of opportunities.
Legislation On Participation of Women With Disabilities in empowerment programmes

Legislation should not discriminate against disabled people and should include aspects such as social security, environmental access, transport, medical technical facilities. It should take into particular consideration the needs of disabled women as a legal right. In accordance with the United Nations Standard Rule No. 17 national disability committees should be strengthened, if necessary, or established where they do not exist. Disabled women should be actively involved in both disabled people’s self-help organizations and women’s organizations. Participation should be encouraged not just supported when topics related to them are specifically on the agenda. They should be encouraged to participate in training programmes within national bodies. The United Nations general Objectives declared the recognition of people with disabilities in the Decade of Disabled People 1983 –1992. The following are part of the rights that were proclaimed:

1. to promote effective measures on preventing of disabilities;
2. to render rehabilitation of services.

According to the United Nations (2003) women with disabilities face significantly more difficulties in both public and private spheres in attaining access to adequate housing, health, education, vocational training and employment and are more likely to be institutionalised. They also experience inequality in hiring promotion rates and pay for equal work, access to training and retraining, credit and other productive resources, and rarely participate in economic decision-making.

Promoting gender equality and empowerment of women is essential to the achievement of the internationally agreed development goals, including the Millennium Development Goals. Women with disabilities experience double discrimination, which places them at higher risk of gender-based violence, sexual abuse, neglect, maltreatment and exploitation.

Through setting international norms and standards the international community recognizes the need for the gender perspective and the empowerment women with disabilities to achieve the equal enjoyment of all human rights and development for all including persons with disabilities - Zimbabwe included.

The International Labour Organisation (2003) states that the consequences of deficiencies and disableness are particularly serious for women. Generally women are subjected to social, cultural and economic disadvantages, making it more difficult for them to take part in community life.

The Convention on the rights of the persons with disabilities (2007) has taken a two track approach to promoting gender equality and the empowerment of women with disabilities. It has as one of its principles equality between men and women and has called for the incorporation of a gender perspective. It states that special attention to the gender specific needs of persons with disabilities, including taking measures to ensure their full and effective enjoyment of all human rights and fundamental freedoms.

Making the Millennium Development Goals Inclusive (2009) says that Millennium Development Goals cannot be achieved without the full and effective inclusion of persons with disabilities and their participation in all stages of MDGs processes. Specific measures should be taken for mainstreaming disability at global, regional and national levels for short-term, medium-term and long-term results.

Participation of women with disabilities in Zimbabwe is also supported by the disabled Persons’ Act of 1992 which calls for non discrimination on the basis of disability and the shift that is being promoted by the disability movements to move away from service provision to the articulation of disability as a human rights and development issue and the demand for equal participation and inclusion of disabled people in all issues concerning them. Manombe et al (2001) argue that there are no specific policies in place to ensure the implementation of the Act or the need to intensify programmes that uplift the status of women with disabilities in particular. Thus women with disabilities are assured to be participating without having strategies in place to remove barriers that hinder their full participation. It is against this background that the researcher felt compelled to carry out this study.

Obstacles that may hinder full participation of women with disabilities in empowerment programmes

The Convention on the Rights of Person with disabilities recognizes and seeks to eliminate the discrimination experienced by all people with disabilities, particularly women. Some of these obstacles are stigma, isolation, sexual and gender-based violence. They also lack equal access to care in rehabilitation, health, family planning and reproductive health, including HIV testing treatment and prevention (Human Rights Watch August 2010). They usually are subjected to social, cultural and economic disadvantages which impede their full participation in community development programmes (Camay and Gordon, 1998). If they are physically or mentally disabled, their chances of overcoming their disableness are diminished which makes it all the more difficult for them to take part in community life. In families, the responsibility for caring for children lies with the women and this considerably limits their freedom and their responsibilities of taking part in other initiatives ILO (1998)
Gender discrimination compounds the discrimination of women with disabilities as they are already discriminated against on disability basis. They live in complete deprivation with very little control over their lives and totally dependent on their families and they are treated as helpless and unable to do anything for themselves or for their families (Development Initiatives Services 2001).

Women are disadvantaged because they are seen as secondary to men. Since education and vocational training are seen as investments instruments for higher value employment a woman with disability is likely not to have such opportunities. While public attitudes are changing, illiteracy rates among women are falling and more women are entering the labour market, the situation is different for women with disabilities who remain a burden to their families or state and likely to be a dependent for the rest of their lives (Rehabilitation International, 2000).

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK
This study was guided by the Feminist theory. It situates the disability experience in the context of rights, isolation and exclusions – which results in poverty. It aspires to retrieve dismissed voices and misrepresented experiences. It underscores the dual silence of women with disabilities who remain largely unheard. Their position as an oppressed group in terms of opportunity, rehabilitation and access still lacks equal access. (Employment Framework directive 2000/78Ec) According to Charowa (2005) women with disabilities are invisible both among those promoting the rights of persons with disabilities and those promoting gender equality and advancement of women. The author continues to say that very little has so far been done to deal adequately with the problem of disabled women. In this study the research will want to analyse the respondents’ attitudes towards economic empowerment of women with disabilities.

Research Trends
Lee (1999) states that very little or few researches targeting women with disabilities have been carried out . The following are the international, regional and local trends on participation of women with disabilities.

INTERNATIONAL TRENDS
Canada
According to a study carried out by the Alliance for Equality (2005) the majority of women with disabilities live in poor and isolated conditions, and very few women with disabilities are trained for them to be engaged in meaningful productive activities. The study highlighted the urgent need to find and create increased and more economically beneficial opportunities to develop women with disabilities potential.

REGIONAL
Botswana and Namibia
Studies carried in the regional trends indicated that disabled people have particularly experienced social exclusion, marginalisation, vulnerability, isolation and other social, economic, political and cultural factors. There is need to promote the inclusion, integration and human rights of women with disabilities in all work across all sectors. It is important to encourage and support the participation of women with disabilities in structure and processes that affect their lives. No decision that affects women with disabilities should be made without their input. According to Alliance for Equality (2005) the women have said ‘After all, there is “nothing about us without us”.

Zambia and Uganda
(Mobility International USA, 2002) stated that in a study carried out in Zambia and Uganda, findings indicated that women with disabilities continued to face significant obstacles to equal participation in development initiatives. International development programmes rarely addressed the needs of disabled women. The study also highlighted that these women could be empowered by funding common ground, to exchange ideas and to collaborate on initiatives to end poverty. The study recommended that organisations working on development, human rights and women organizations must support women with disabilities to achieve the full range of options available to women to be workers, partners and citizens.

LOCAL
Zimbabwe
Disabled Women’s Organisation (2005) indicated that in Zimbabwe women experienced extreme discrimination, which was compounded by their disability. Many in society viewed disabled people as useless, liabilities who had no role to play in society. Sadly the situation is similar to that of Botswana and Namibia. The disabled women had this to say: ‘many of our sisters who instead of showing us empathy and supporting us, discriminate against us’. It is against this background that the study sought to investigate the level of participation of women with disabilities in empowerment programmes in Gweru District.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY
Research Design
Research design can be thought of as the structure of research, it is the ‘glue’ that holds all of the elements in a research project together (Cano, 2008). It is an overall plan for how the research will be conducted. For the purpose of this study, descriptive survey research design was chosen. A descriptive survey is a research that attempts to describe existing conditions without analyzing relationships among
variables. (Central African Correspondence college, 2000)

The descriptive survey was used to extract opinions and knowledge of disability issues and it was chosen because of its flexibility over the study population and its ability to obtain current information about the situation under study. It therefore helped in depicting the current situation of women with disabilities in relation to their participation in economic empowerment programmes. The descriptive survey method has shortcomings which include the need for resources like transport and funds. The researcher controlled the shortcoming of funds by utilizing the opportunities availed by the nature of her duty as it involves travelling.

The Population
The population of this study comprised of women with disabilities in Gweru urban. There were 100 women with disabilities in Gweru urban.

Sample and Sampling Procedure
Sampling is the selection of some units to represent the entire set from which the units were drawn Grinnell (1993) He further says a sample should therefore be representative of the target population. Thirty (30) women with disabilities were selected basing on them being accessible. Three government departments and three non government organizations and two community leaders were chosen.

The sampling procedure that was employed in this study was convenience sampling to select the women with disabilities. Purposive sampling was used for choosing community leaders and government departments. Names of women with disabilities were obtained from the disability register kept from the Social Offices.

Research Instruments
The Questionnaire
The questionnaire was used in this study because it was cheaper for collecting data, did not require much training and it was free from bias as it was a totally impersonal probe; it promoted anonymity as well as privacy. To control the weaknesses of the questionnaire the instruments were pilot tested to determine effectiveness.

Interview
Kahn (2000) refers to interview as a meeting done face to face which is usually formal or official. He further says an interview can be referred to as a conversation or questioning for the purpose of eliciting information.

In this study interviews were used to solicit information on one to one basis or as a group through the focus group discussions. Open ended questions gave freedom to adjust and supplement the questions on issues pursued. The interviews enabled the interviewer to observe the non verbal cues hence she could ask for adequate explanations to be made to issues that were not clear.

Validity
The different types of validity according to Leedy (1993) include face, content, construct, criterion related and concurrent validity. For the purpose of this study, content and construct validity were used. Content validity was ensured by making sure those questions answered by respondents were related to the problem and objectives.

Reliability
In this study the researcher used triangulation, which is the use of multiple methods in research in order to collaborate data sources as it increases the reliability of research (Grinnell, 1993). The idea behind triangulation is that the more agreement of different data sources on a particular issue, the more reliable the interpretation of the data.

Pilot Study
Before the production of the final questionnaires and the structure interview sheets, a trial run was done with a similar target population in Kwekwe District. Kwekwe District was chosen as the situation is almost similar to that in Gweru District. The preliminary study was done to determine effectiveness of the chosen instruments in soliciting information. The inadequacies of the instruments were addressed before starting the study.

Data Collection Procedure
The researcher sought permission from Social Services, and other different organizations. The letters seeking for the permission were presented to the relevant authorities. The interviews were carried out the day the questionnaires were distributed. The researcher explained the purpose of the study so as to get honest and unbiased responses.

DATA PRESENTATION AND ANALYSIS
Raw data seldom provide direct answers to a research question, such an answer can only emerge when the data are organised, the patterns that exist within them are identified and the meaningfulness of the patterns assessed (Kahn, 2000)

Ten (10) 33.4% respondents were in the age range of 30 to 41 year. In the 42 to 53 age range there were fourteen (14) 46.7% women with disabilities. Six (6) 20% were in the 54 – 59 years age range. There was no one in the 54 to 65 age range. The results show that most of these women were in the middle age range and needed to be part of that conversation which ensures that women with
disabilities participate in the development process as decision makers, implementers and participants.

This was also noted by Depouy (1993) who noticed that women were regarded as minors in societies despite being mature.

Government Departments, Non Governmental Organisations and Community Leaders responded to the objective which sought to find out community views on participation of women with disabilities in economic empowerment programmes. Four (4) 13.2%, advocated for women to be trained for them to make meaningful contributions. Sixteen (16) 53.4% said there was need to be relevant and change policies and in-cooperate women with disabilities in most decision making positions. Ten (10) 33.4% mentioned that there was need to assess the level of disability before engaging these women.

The responses indicated varying meanings. Women with disabilities remain largely unheard and an oppressed group. Participation is not a right but a privilege and this affirms a study which was carried out in Uganda by Human Rights Watch (2010) which highlighted that women with disabilities were discriminated, marginalized, vulnerable, isolated and experienced exclusion. There was every little that had been done to incorporate gender mainstreaming approach specially addressing women with disabilities. Promotion and awareness raising about persons with disabilities as individuals who can participate in all areas of social life, hold a right and responsibility to work and live independently are still missing in the communities.

Data gathered showed that ten (10) respondents were in the age range of 42 to 47 years. Six (6) respondents were in the age range of 36 – 41 years. Eight (8) were in the 48 – 53 age group, while two were in the 54 – 59 age group. The results indicated that most the respondents were in the middle age range which meant they were mature and capable of making sound decisions on their own. In this case to participate in economic development programmes or not.

The likert scale was used to solicit information on the objective which focused on barriers that limit participation of women with disabilities in economic empowerment programmes as shown below:-

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Table 1 : Barriers to Participation</th>
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<td>N = 30</td>
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<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Item</th>
<th>KA</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Legal, cultural, institutional barriers discriminated against women in general and then as women with disabilities.</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>66</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>30 (100%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Women with disabilities experience high levels of poverty</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>60</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>26</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>30 (100%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Women with disabilities are stigmatized</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>73</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>30 (100%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>There is little documentation on the involvement and participation of women with disabilities in community development programmes</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>54</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>13.3</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>13.3</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>30 (100%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Women are more marginalized in economic development than their male counterparts</td>
<td>28</td>
<td>93</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>30 (100%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Violation of women’s rights emanates from social stigma and negative stereotypes</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>79</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>30 (100%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Women with disabilities need improved literacy levels, vocational skills, family support and general equal opportunities in economic spheres.</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>77</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>30 (100%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Access to training, credit and other productive resources should be based on merit rather than gender or disability</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>33</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>40</td>
<td>30 (100%)</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Women with disabilities face more challenges in their quest to be economically independent than their male counterparts.</td>
<td>26</td>
<td>87</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>30 (100%)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Twenty (66%) strongly agreed that certain cultural, legal and institutional barriers discriminated against women with disabilities. Six (20%) agreed to the statement, while 2 (7%) disagreed. The results showed that respondents viewed the participation of women with disabilities as limited by a number of factors which were beyond their disability. This concurs with UNESCO (2000)’s assertion which said that the challenges faced by women with disabilities are largely the result of negative cultural and societal attitudes rather than of the physical experience of disability. The results of the study also confirm the findings by the International Labour Organization (2000) when the organization showed that women with disabilities face barriers to full equality and advancement, they often meet attitudinal and environmental barriers that prevent their full equal and active participation in society.

Eighteen out of 30 (60%) felt that women with disabilities experienced high levels of poverty eight (26%) agreed whereas two (7%) strongly disagreed and two (7%) disagreed. The results show that the majority of the respondents concurred with the notion that women with disabilities experience high levels of poverty the same findings came out of the study conducted by the United Nations which indicated that women with disabilities were illiterate, without
vocational skills and destitute hence they are frequently deprived of all human rights

On the question which sought to find out whether women with disabilities were being stigmatized and highly stereotyped. Twenty two (73%) strongly agreed, two agreed (7%), four (13%) strongly disagreed, two (7%) disagreed. The results depicted that women with disabilities were stereotyped and stigmatized and this confirms Frank’s (2000) assertion that women with disabilities experience negative stereotypes and they are likely to be without family support and experience high rates of abuse.

On the question which sought to find out on documentation and involvement of women with disabilities in community development programmes sixteen (54%) strongly agreed, four (13.3%) agreed, four (13%) strongly disagreed and six (20%) disagreed. The results showed that there is general consensus on the need to make necessary adaptations in the environment to allow for maximum participation of women with disabilities in community economic empowerment programmes. The results of the survey conducted by Disabled Women’s Organization also showed that there is urgent need to find and create increased and economically beneficial opportunities to mainstream girls and women with disabilities. It also highlighted the need for alternative vocational skills so that women with disabilities could develop their potential and be assisted in becoming economically independent

On the question which sought to find out whether women with disabilities were marginalized than their male counterparts. The results showed that 28 (93%) strongly agreed that women with disabilities were more disadvantaged than their counterparts. This confirms Charowa’s (2005) study which showed that women with disabilities were more vulnerable and at even a greater risk.

The findings reflected twenty four (79%) strongly agreed that social stigma and negative stereotypes that were prevalent in the society influenced human rights violation of women with disabilities. Thus even though the United Nations mandated the recognition of women with disabilities in particular, negative attitudes and stereotypes continued to influence the violation of those rights. Tizun (1995) also indicated that despite their significant numbers, women with disabilities especially in developing countries remain hidden and silent, their concerns unknown and their rights overlooked.

The state on the need for improved literacy levels, vocational skills and general equal opportunities for women with disabilities was answered by all the thirty respondents. Twenty three (77%) strongly agreed, three (9%) agreed, two (7%) strongly disagreed and two (7%) disagreed. The results depicted that most people supported the ideas of improving literacy levels for women with disabilities, the vocational skills and to accord them equal opportunities as well as maximum family support. The same sentiments were also echoed by Woman with Disabilities Australia (WWDA 2007b ) when she indicated that it is important to create a conducive environment that encouraged and supported the participation of women with disabilities in structures and processes that affect their lives.

On the question which sought to find out whether the access to training, credit and other productive resources should be based on merit rather than gender or disability. Six (20%) strongly agreed, 2 (7%) agreed, ten (33%) strongly disagreed and 12 disagreed. The results indicated that most people believe that disability or gender should not be a determining factor in having access to economic development services offered within the community. This is in line with the United Nations Convention on the Elimination of Discrimination Against Women goals, that requires states to take measures to ensure that women with disabilities have equal access to education, employment, health services and social security Smith (2005).

Twenty six (87%), strongly agreed to the statement that women with disabilities face more challenges in their quest to be economically independent than their male counterparts, two (7%) agreed, One (3%) strongly disagree and One (3%) disagreed. The results showed that most respondents concurred with the statement that women with disabilities face more challenges than their male counterparts. This confirms Hunt’s (2002) studies which started that women with disabilities may be particularly at risk due to stigmas associated with both disability and gender. They are more likely to suffer from discrimination than able bodied women or men with disabilities. Women with disabilities are more vulnerable than their male counterparts because of the well established double or multiple forms of discrimination they experience in every culture and every economy.

CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS
The purpose of the study was to find out the level of participation of women with disabilities in economic empower programmes in Gweru.

Thus the study was set to meet the following objectives:-

a) to find out community views on participation of women with disabilities in community economic empower programmes.
b) to establish the major barriers that limit the participation of women with disabilities in community economic empowerment programmes.

The descriptive survey method was used to solicit data. The sample consisted of thirty women with disabilities, three Non government Organizations and two Government departments and three community leaders. Questionnaires and interviews were used to collect data. Descriptive statistics were used to interpret data.

MAJOR FINDINGS
The conclusions were:-
Participation by women with disabilities in economic empowerment programmes was very low. Not much has been made to enhance the participation of women with disabilities in their activities to integrate them into community programmes.

The community did not understand issues regarding women with disabilities.

There are a number of barriers that limit participation of women with disabilities in economic empowerment programmes. These include cultural, social and psychological.

CONCLUSION
Little is understood on disability as people with disabilities are regarded as charity cases. Cultural, social and psychological and physical barriers are regarded as the major problems that limit the participation of women with disabilities in economic empowerment programmes.

RECOMMENDATIONS
The following recommendations were made:
- There is need to strengthen the role of government officials at all levels representing persons with disabilities in planning meetings and, decision making. This will ensure that the perspectives of persons with disabilities, particularly women with disabilities are included in all aspects of programmes.
- When government funding is disbursed to groups of persons with disabilities specific plans for targeting women with disabilities should be designed.
- There is need to undertake targeted efforts to inform women with disabilities about mainstream government programmes, services and encourage participation. This include arranging appropriate transportation, enabling environment, education and providing sign language interpretation.
- There is need to incorporate information on respecting the rights and dignity of women with disabilities into existing training of police officers, justice officials, health workers and others who interact with women with disabilities on issues of sexual and gender-based violence.

IMPLICATIONS FOR FUTURE STUDIES
Participation is an important element when it comes to empowerment there is need to incorporate a gender mainstreaming approach, addressing women with disabilities. Promotion and awareness of persons with disabilities as individuals, who can participate in all areas of social life, hold a right and responsibility to work and live independently. When this has been done women with disabilities will not be charity cases.

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