

Sharing of knowledge

The initiative to carry out the studies in Namibia, Zimbabwe and Malawi was developed in a joint project between Southern Africa Federation of the Disabled (SAFOD), the Norwegian Federation of Organisations of Disabled People (FFO), and SINTEF Health Research. Major stakeholders in the three countries were the following:

- Namibia: National Federation of Disabled People in Namibia (NFDPN), University of Namibia, Multidisciplinary Research and Consultancy Centre (MRCC), and Ministry of Lands, Resettlement and Rehabilitation.
- Zimbabwe: National Council of Disabled Persons of Zimbabwe (NCDPZ), University of Zimbabwe, Departments of Psychiatry and Rehabilitation, and Ministries of Health and Child Welfare and Social Welfare.
- Malawi: Federation of Disability Organisations in Malawi (FEDOMA), University of Malawi, Centre for Social Research (CSR), and Ministry responsible for People with Disabilities in the Office of the President.

Participation and control

The uniqueness of this research project is the inclusion of people with disabilities and their organisations in the entire research process where they play a particularly active role in designing, data collection and implementation of the results of the studies.

The studies are integrated in SAFOD's long-term strategy for strengthening the organisations of disabled people in Southern Africa.

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Copies of the reports can be ordered from SAFOD Disability Documentation, Resource and Training Centre.
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Living conditions among people with disabilities in Southern Africa



Representative surveys on living conditions among people with activity limitations in Malawi, Namibia and Zimbabwe

A joint project of
SAFOD, FFO and SINTEF

Disability and society

The last 20 – 30 years have seen an important change in our understanding of disability. From a previous individual perspective on causes and interventions, a social and civil rights approach has taken over. Much of the focus is now on the human and physical environment and how this might reduce or enhance an individual's level of activity and social participation.

Contributing to improved living conditions

National policy development aimed at improving living conditions in general and among people with disabilities in particular is dependent on the availability of quality data. In many countries these have been lacking, and both the United Nations and National authorities have emphasised the need for this information in order to further develop disability policies. Information about people with disabilities and their living conditions have the potential for contributing to an improvement of the situation faced by this group in many low-income countries, as has been demonstrated in high-income countries.



An enumerator interviewing a woman in Malawi.

Data for a dialogue on disability policy

The first three representative studies are part of a Regional initiative to establish baseline data on living conditions among people with disabilities in Southern Africa. The Namibian survey was carried out in 2001-2002, Zimbabwe in 2002-2003 and Malawi in 2003-2004. In these studies it was found that people with disabilities, and their households, have lower standards of living than people without disabilities and their households.

Some selected results:

Education

- Although primary education is considered a right for all, a majority of people with disabilities in Namibia, Zimbabwe and Malawi have no formal education. School attendance is clearly lower among disabled people compared to non-disabled.
- Among those who have access to education, people with disabilities have achieved lower levels of education than their non-disabled counterparts.
- Very few disabled people receive vocational training and counselling services.

Accessibility

- Fewer than 20 percent of disabled people who need an assistive device actually have one.
- Most public facilities and even homes are not accessible to many people with disabilities.

Employment and income

- Households with disabled family members have lower income than households without disabled members.
- Unemployment is known to be high in Southern African countries, but even higher among people with disabilities.
- Households with disabled family members have less access to information than households without disabled members.

Civil rights

- Almost 50 percent of people with disability interviewed, state that they are not consulted when important decisions about their lives are made.

A question of human rights

The studies in Namibia, Zimbabwe and Malawi have demonstrated that level of living conditions among disabled people is systematically lower than among non-disabled people. This implies that people with disabilities are denied the equal opportunities to participate and contribute to their society. It is in this context that people with disabilities are denied their human rights.

Capacity building

A component of the living conditions studies among people with disabilities was capacity building workshops for organisations of disabled people, public authorities and other stakeholders. These workshops focussed on further understanding of the research process, and how data collected locally can be better understood and used as tools for advocacy and influencing the disability policy.



Photo: Tone Odenud SINTEF