Disability Inclusive Elections: A systematic review of published and unpublished literature

Irish Aid
An Roinn Gnóthaí Eachtracha agus Trádála
Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade

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Background

- Irish Aid grant that supported political participation

- Consolidate learning and experiences in the literature

Aim

- To review experiences and practices taken place in Africa

- Identify the effect of interventions on the participation of people with disabilities

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Research questions

1. What **laws** and **policies** exist in countries in Africa to ensure the participation of people with disabilities?

2. What **barriers to participation** of people with disabilities in electoral processes in African countries have been documented?

3. What **documented approaches and interventions** have been employed in Africa to increase the participation of people with disabilities in elections?

4. What **impact** has been documented in the literature on the interventions applied and how has it been measured?

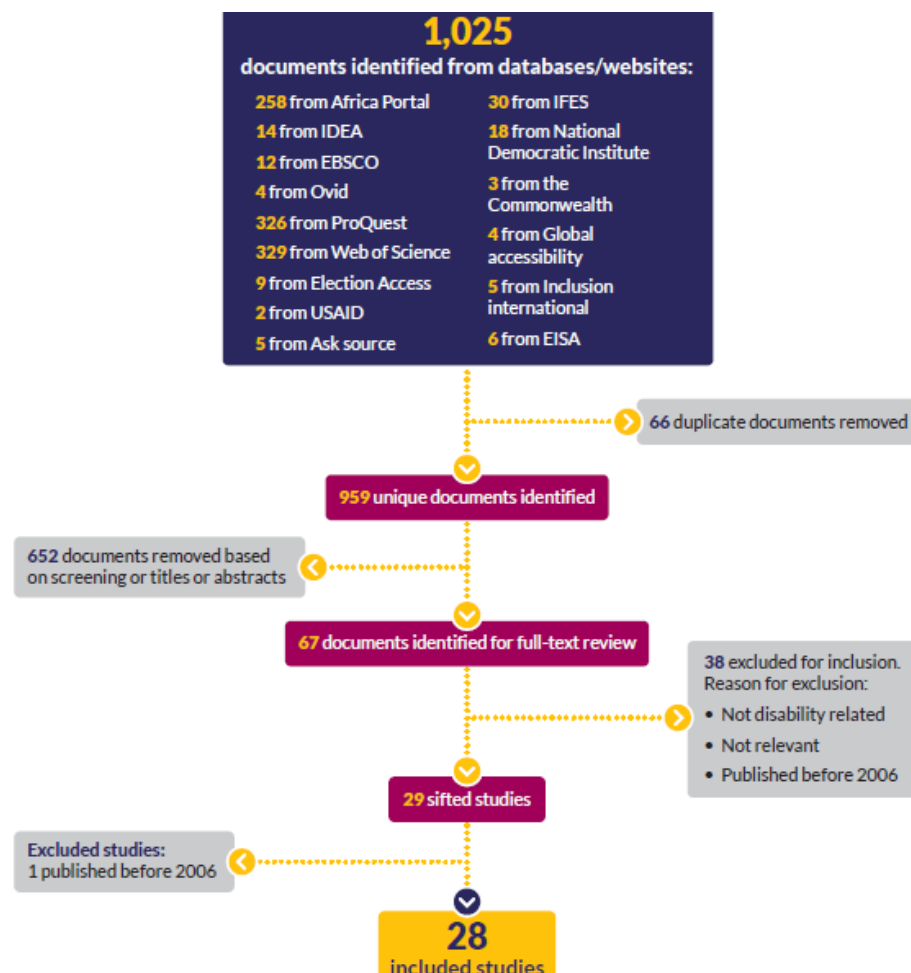Sightsavers

Inclusion criteria

- Empirical primary data

- Written in English, French and Portuguese

- Published from 2006 onwards

- Focused in political participation of people with disabilities

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Literature search

Grey literature:

- National electoral commissions;

- The European Union External Action;

- African Union;

  26 documents identified

1,025
documents identified from databases/websites:

258 from Africa Portal
14 from IDEA
12 from EBSCO
4 from Ovid
326 from ProQuest
329 from Web of Science
9 from Election Access
2 from USAID
5 from Ask source

30 from IFES
18 from National Democratic Institute
3 from the Commonwealth
4 from Global accessibility
5 from Inclusion international
6 from EISA

66 duplicate documents removed

959 unique documents identified

652 documents removed based on screening or titles or abstracts

67 documents identified for full-text review

38 excluded for inclusion. Reason for exclusion:
- Not disability related
- Not relevant
- Published before 2006

29 sifted studies

Excluded studies: 1 published before 2006

28 included studies
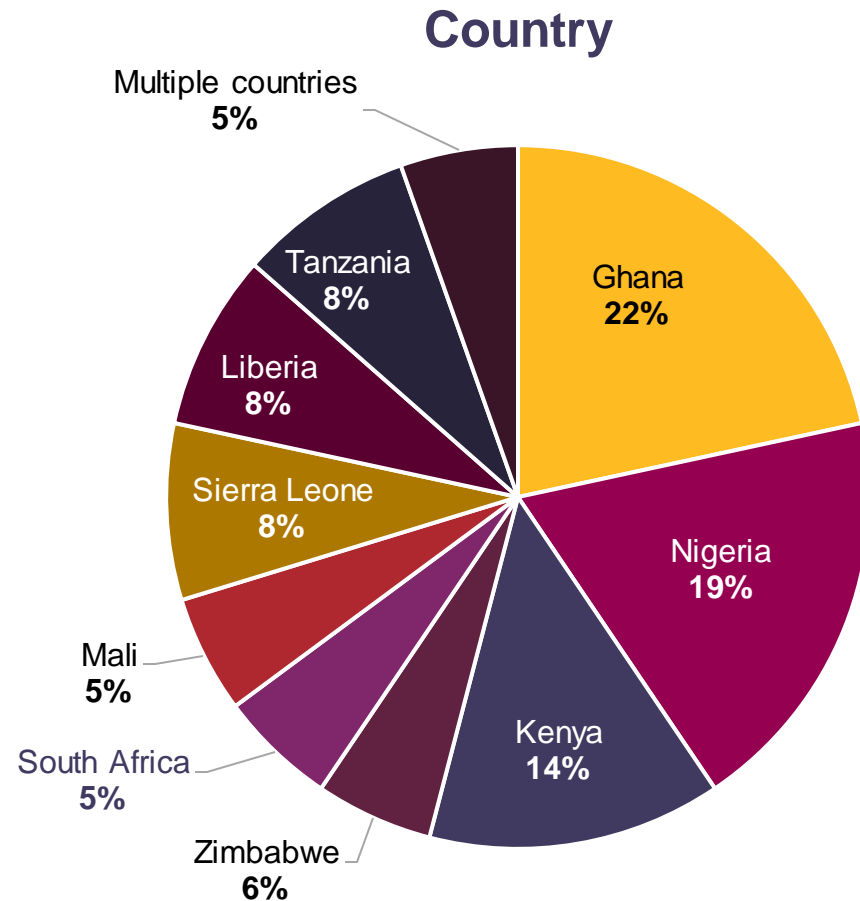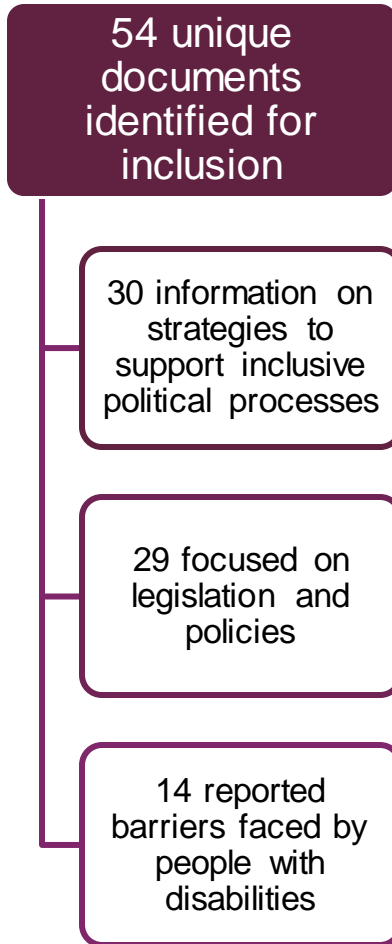
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Data extraction and Critical appraisal

- Conducted by two reviewers independently

- Critical appraisal tool:

  - CERQual approach

  - Critical Appraisal Skills Programme (CASP) tool

  - Authority, Accuracy, Coverage, Objectivity, Date, Significance (AACODS) tool.

Attribute 'high confidence', 'medium confidence' and 'low confidence'

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Search Results

54 unique documents identified for inclusion

30 information on strategies to support inclusive political processes

29 focused on legislation and policies

14 reported barriers faced by people with disabilities

Country

- Multiple countries **5%**
- Ghana **22%**
- Nigeria **19%**
- Kenya **14%**
- Zimbabwe **6%**
- South Africa **5%**
- Mali **5%**
- Sierra Leone **8%**
- Liberia **8%**
- Tanzania **8%**

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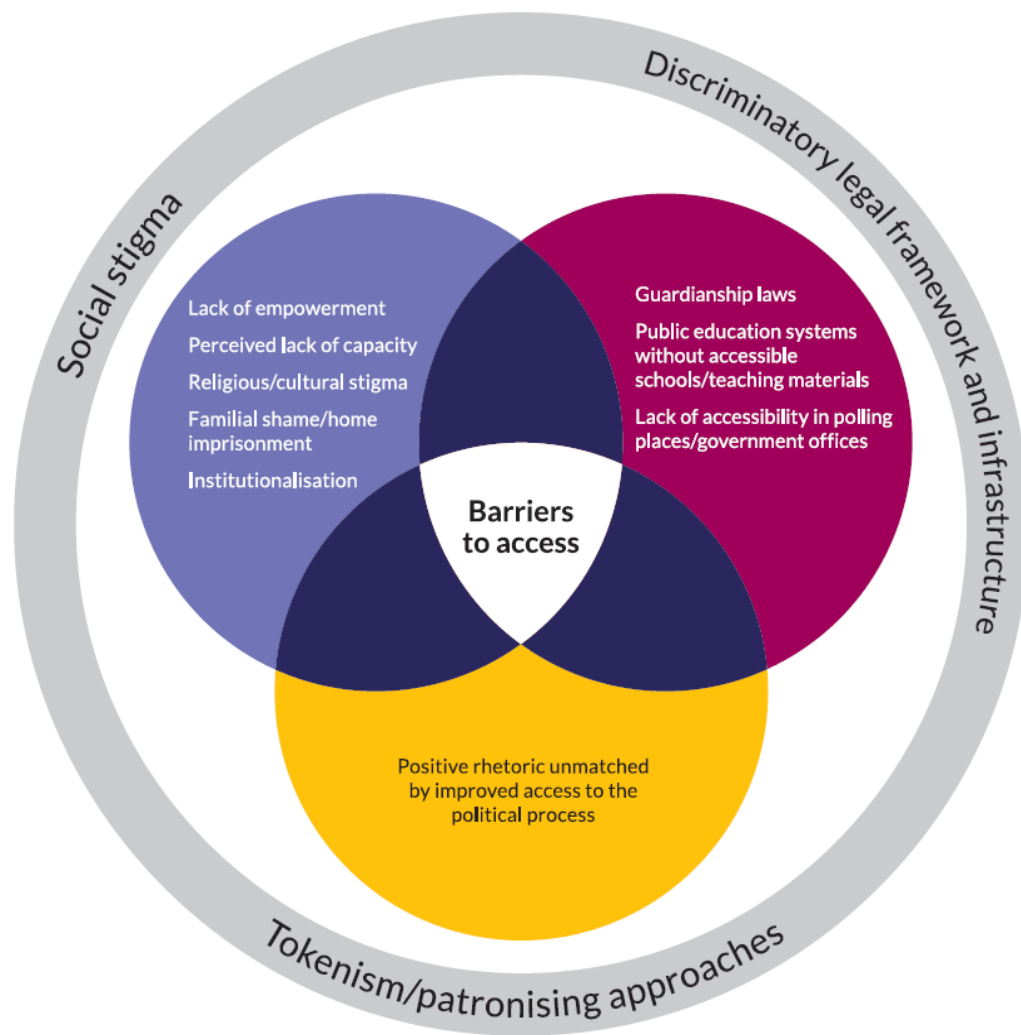
Laws and Policies

Global Legislation

- 54 African countries ratified and signed the UNCRPD

- Except for 5 countries:

  - Botswana

  - Equatorial Guinea

  - Eritrea

  - Somalia

  - South Sudan

National Legislation

- Equal opportunities to elect and be elected;

- Specific legislation such as Disability Act

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Barriers to participation

Social stigma
- Lack of empowerment
- Perceived lack of capacity
- Religious/cultural stigma
- Familial shame/home imprisonment
- Institutionalisation

Discriminatory legal framework and infrastructure
- Guardianship laws
- Public education systems without accessible schools/teaching materials
- Lack of accessibility in polling places/government offices

Barriers to access

Tokenism/patronising approaches
- Positive rhetoric unmatched by improved access to the political process

Source: International Foundation for Electoral Systems. Equal Access: How to Include Persons with Disabilities in Elections Processes. 2014

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Barrier: Discriminatory legal framework

- Person of "unsound mind", "mental capacity" and "mental infirmity" used in several provisions and restricts participation of people with intellectual disabilities.

- Terms not defined

- Restrict participation of people with intellectual disabilities

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Barrier: Social Stigma and negative social attitudes

- Cultural norms

- Punishment of God

Approaches

No evidence, but these can be tackled by:

- Involving people with disabilities in decision-making processes (e.g. . Disabled people's Organisations, Civil Society Organisations)

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Barrier: Physical accessibility of registration and electoral points

- Poor status of the local roads

- Distance to the nearest registration center or pooling station

- Registration centers not accessible for people with physical and sensory disabilities

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Approaches

- Recognition of exclusion of people with disabilities in the electoral laws:

  - Kenya, Sierra Leone a person with a disability can be accompanied into the pooling station unit and use assistive tactile facilities

- Voting premises adapted by ramps

- Booths at height of wheelchair-using voters

- In South Africa, people with disabilities could request a home visit from their registration officer in order to register or amend their registration form

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Barrier: Lack of education and financial resources

- Lower level of education

- Political campaigns can be expensive

Approaches

African countries received financial support:

- In Zimbabwe, DFID provided a grant for education of people with disabilities on their right to vote

- In Mauritania, DPO representatives were financially supported to take part in national, regional and international meetings

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Interventions

- Accessible elections, Cameroon:

    - 12 pilot voting booths in six regions of Cameroon

    - Training DPOs and people with disabilities on legal aspects

    - Supporting six spokespeople representing accessible elections in the campaign

    - Supporting radio/television programmes encouraging people with disabilities to participate in the electoral processes

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Interventions

- Ghana

    - In 2000, the Electoral Commission (EC) piloted a tactile ballot guide;

    - In 2004 elections, the Ghana Federation of the Disabled worked with the EC to raise awareness among people with disabilities of their right to vote and on the inclusion of the sign language interpretation.

    - Ghana Association of the Blind (GAB) trained on how to use the tactile ballot guide in every polling station.

    - 117 disabled people trained as election observers

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Impact

No data/information documented

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Conclusion

- Legal framework is available, however people with intellectual disabilities are still excluded

- Implementation of the legislation varies, but we need to better understand how vulnerability varies within disability

- People with disabilities continue to suffer from discrimination and exclusion

- Barriers occur at pre-electoral, electoral and post-electoral stages

- Clear need for impact studies on interventions and high quality studies

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Thank you

For more information:

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