

Advancing Inclusive Education in Zambia: The Imperative for a Directorate of Inclusive and Special Education within the Ministry of Education

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ABSTRACT

The establishment of Zambia's Directorate of Inclusive and Special Education within the Ministry of Education represents a significant policy advancement towards achieving equitable and inclusive educational outcomes for all learners. It employed qualitative approach to explore the establishment of the Directorate of Inclusive and Special Education within Zambia's Ministry of Education. Drawing upon social justice theory and informed by international mandates such as the Education for All (EFA) agenda, the United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (UNCRPD), and Sustainable Development Goal 4 (SDG 4), the research utilized data from policy documents, ministerial reports, and semi-structured interviews with key education stakeholders. Findings indicate that the Directorate's formation directly addresses historical deficiencies in policy coherence, resource distribution, teacher professional development, and monitoring frameworks, which previously impeded effective inclusive education implementation. Its institutionalization significantly enhances coordination across national, provincial, and district education tiers, thereby bolstering accountability and refining service delivery for learners with diverse needs. With institutionalization offers a robust and sustainable framework for advancing inclusivity, equity, and quality education across Zambia. Hence, the Ministry of Education should formally establish a Directorate of Inclusive and Special Education with clear mandates and adequate resources.

Keywords: Inclusive education, special education, educational policy, administrative reform, equity, Zambia, Ministry of Education, SDG 4.

INTRODUCTION

This document advocates for the establishment of a dedicated Directorate for Inclusive Education within Zambia's Ministry of Education. It begins by outlining the current landscape of inclusive education in Zambia, tracing the historical development of special education and inclusive education initiatives, and identifying existing challenges. Subsequently, it presents a compelling case for a centralized body to effectively oversee and enhance inclusive education efforts nationwide.

Inclusive education is recognized globally as a fundamental human right and a cornerstone of equitable and high-quality education systems. Its core principle is to ensure that all learners, irrespective of their abilities or backgrounds, receive equal access to quality educational opportunities. Despite notable progress in overall education access, learners with disabilities and other special educational needs frequently encounter systemic barriers that impede their full participation and academic achievement. In response to these disparities, numerous countries have successfully addressed such gaps by establishing dedicated Directorates of Inclusive and Special Education within their Ministries of Education. These directorates serve to coordinate policy development, facilitate implementation, and monitor inclusive education practices comprehensively. The establishment of a similar Directorate in Zambia would provide a structured mechanism for ensuring that inclusive education

policies are not only effectively developed but also rigorously implemented and monitored across all educational levels. This dedicated leadership is crucial for addressing prevailing challenges and decisively advancing the inclusive education agenda. Such a reform would also offer a valuable model for other education systems seeking to strengthen their inclusive frameworks.

Current education systems often lack centralized coordination for inclusive education initiatives. As a result:

- Policies may be inconsistently applied across regions and schools.
- Teacher training on inclusive practices remains fragmented.
- Data on learners with disabilities is limited or unreliable.
- Infrastructure often remains inaccessible.

These challenges hinder the attainment of Sustainable Development Goal 4 (SDG 4) on ensuring inclusive and equitable quality education for all. Therefore, to strengthen inclusive education systems by establishing a Directorate of Inclusive and Special Education under the Ministry of Education, responsible for policy coordination, capacity building, early assessment, data management, and inclusive infrastructure development.

The Historical Background of The Education for Learners with Disabilities

The education of learners with disabilities in Zambia has undergone substantial transformation over the past century, reflecting shifts in policy, governance, and societal attitudes. From 1905 to 1968, education for children with disabilities was primarily delivered by missionaries, who operated under a charity model. This approach focused largely on providing basic care and rudimentary education, reflecting a paternalistic perspective where learners with disabilities were seen as dependents rather than as citizens entitled to equal educational opportunities (Chikonde & Mwale, 2020; Kunda, 2015). During this period, access was extremely limited, and educational provision varied greatly depending on the missionary organization and its resources.

In 1968, the Zambian government enacted the Handicapped Act, which shifted oversight of education for learners with disabilities from missionary societies to the Zambia Council for the Handicapped (ZCH) (Government of Zambia, 1968). This legislation marked the first attempt at formalizing state responsibility for educational services for learners with disabilities. However, the administration remained somewhat fragmented, with policy implementation dependent on the Council rather than being fully integrated into the national education system. By 1971, the Zambian government consolidated education under the Ministry of Education, bringing all schools, including those serving learners with disabilities, under direct government administration. Consequently, the ZCH Act was amended in 1972, formally placing responsibility for special education within the Ministry of Education (Government of Zambia, 1972). In the same year, an educational officer for the education of learners with disabilities was appointed at the Ministry headquarters, signalling an early recognition of the need for specialized oversight and coordination.

The 1980s saw further institutional development with the establishment of an inspectorate for special education at the Ministry of Education headquarters. This inspectorate was responsible for monitoring the quality of education and ensuring compliance with emerging national standards for learners with disabilities (Kalabula, 1991). Despite these measures, gaps remained in terms of strategic leadership and centralized coordination. In 1991, Kalabula authored a position paper advocating for the creation of a dedicated Directorate for the Education of Children and Youths with Disabilities. The paper highlighted the need for a centralized body to oversee policy formulation, teacher training, and resource allocation for special education (Kalabula, 1991). While the government did not immediately establish a standalone directorate, it created a unit under the Directorate of Teacher Education and Specialized Services, reflecting a compromise between the need for coordination and limited administrative capacity.

Significant progress continued through partnerships and system restructuring. In 1997, Zambia, in collaboration with Finland, conducted a comprehensive inclusive education promotion and sensitization program, which encouraged the Ministry of Education to develop inspectorates for monitoring special and inclusive education at district and provincial levels (Ministry of Education, 1997). This initiative aimed to expand awareness, promote

inclusion, and standardize monitoring procedures across administrative levels. By 2003, the Ministry of Education further institutionalized the system by appointing District Education Standards Officers for Special Education, Provincial Senior Education Standards Officers, and a Principal Education Standards Officer for Special Education at the national level (Ministry of Education, 2003). This hierarchical structure provided clearer lines of responsibility and enabled better coordination and oversight of inclusive education policies and programs, although the absence of a dedicated directorate at the national level continued to limit strategic planning and resource allocation.

The evolution of education for learners with disabilities in Zambia reflects a gradual shift from a charity-based model to a more structured, state-led system, integrating inclusive education principles within mainstream education governance. Despite progress in policy, inspectorate systems, and administrative restructuring, the lack of a dedicated Directorate for Inclusive and Special Education highlights persistent gaps in strategic leadership, which continue to challenge the full realization of inclusive education in the country (Chikonde & Mwale, 2020; UNESCO, 2020). The Ministry still refused to grant special/inclusive education a directorate.

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

Grounded in social justice theory and guided by international frameworks such as the Education for All (EFA) agenda, the United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (UNCRPD), and Sustainable Development Goal 4 (SDG 4), the study on Advancing Inclusive Education in Zambia: The Imperative for a Directorate of Inclusive and Special Education within the Ministry of Education was anchored on the principles of equality, human rights, and fairness in educational access and participation. Social justice theory provided the lens through which the study examined structural inequalities and the marginalization of learners with disabilities within Zambia's education system. The EFA agenda emphasized the global commitment to ensuring quality education for all learners regardless of ability, while the UNCRPD offered a rights-based framework mandating inclusive education as a legal and moral obligation for state parties. Similarly, SDG 4 guided the study by highlighting inclusive and equitable quality education as a cornerstone for sustainable national development. Collectively, these frameworks shaped the study's rationale, objectives, and recommendations by underscoring the urgent need for a Directorate of Inclusive and Special Education to strengthen institutional coordination, accountability, and policy implementation in advancing inclusive education in Zambia.

Methods and Materials

The study on Advancing Inclusive Education in Zambia: The Imperative for a Directorate of Inclusive and Special Education within the Ministry of Education adopted a qualitative research design anchored in an interpretivist paradigm, which emphasizes understanding participants' experiences, perceptions, and contextual realities. This approach was chosen to capture rich, in-depth insights into how education administrators, policymakers, and practitioners perceive the existing structures and challenges in implementing inclusive education. Purposive sampling was used to select key informants, including officials from the Ministry of Education, provincial education officers, special education specialists, and inclusive school administrators. Data were collected through semi-structured interviews and document analysis of relevant policies, reports, and international frameworks. The data were analysed thematically, allowing for the identification of recurring patterns and emerging themes related to institutional gaps, policy implementation, and governance structures. This methodology was appropriate for exploring the complex administrative and policy dynamics influencing inclusive education and for providing evidence-based recommendations on establishing a Directorate of Inclusive and Special Education within the Ministry of Education.

FINDINGS & DISCUSSION

Current Landscape of Inclusive Education in Zambia

Zambia has made notable strides toward inclusive education, yet significant challenges remain in ensuring equitable access for all learners. The country is home to an estimated 2.4 million persons with disabilities, of which approximately one million are children and youths of school-going age (Zambia Agency for Persons with

Disabilities [ZAPD], 2022). Despite this sizeable population, only about 150,000 children with disabilities are actively engaged in formal education, leaving the majority excluded from the education system (UNICEF, 2021). This low participation highlights persistent barriers that hinder the realization of inclusive education in practice.

Several interrelated factors contribute to this exclusion. Parental attitudes toward the education of children with disabilities often reflect limited awareness and lingering stigma, which may discourage school attendance (Chikonde & Mwale, 2020). School-related challenges—including long distances to accessible schools, negative teacher and peer attitudes, inadequate infrastructure, and administrative inefficiencies further impede access and participation (Ministry of Education, 2016). Moreover, the absence of a strong coordinating mechanism within the Ministry of Education has constrained the effective implementation and monitoring of inclusive education policies (UNESCO, 2020).

Nevertheless, Zambia has established a progressive legal and policy environment that supports inclusive education. The country first embraced inclusive education within its national policy framework through *Educating Our Future* (1996), which emphasized equality and participation for learners with special needs. This commitment was later reinforced by the National Inclusive Education Policy Guidelines (2016), which provide a comprehensive framework for mainstreaming inclusive practices in all schools (Ministry of General Education, 2016). Legislative instruments such as the Persons with Disabilities Act (2012) and the Education Act (2011) further mandate equitable access to education and the provision of necessary support services for learners with disabilities. On the international front, Zambia has demonstrated its commitment by ratifying the Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC) in 1991 and the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (CRPD) in 2010, the latter of which was domesticated into national law in 2012 (United Nations, 2010; Government of Zambia, 2012).

Despite these frameworks, progressive policies and legislation, there implementation gaps persist, highlighting the need for a dedicated Directorate of Inclusive and Special Education under the Ministry of Education to coordinate policy execution, strengthen monitoring systems, and ensure that every child regardless of ability enjoys the right to quality, inclusive education. There is no intentionally or deliberate coordination mechanism to ensure that inclusive education is a reality in the country.

Proposed Zambian Inclusive Education Model

Zambia's model of inclusive education is a work in progress, with significant strides being made through policy reforms, teacher training, community involvement, and international partnerships. Continued focus on these areas will be crucial in creating an education system that truly serves all learners, regardless of their abilities. The description of a proposed Zambian Inclusive Education Model based on a phased approach, tailored to Zambia's context while inspired by the Rwandan model. The implementation of model is in two phases, ensuring gradual integration and capacity building for both learners and teachers.

Phase 1: Early Childhood Education (ECE) to Grade 3

- **Specialized Classes:** Learners with disabilities (including hearing, visual, intellectual, and multiple disabilities) will initially attend specialized classes. These classes will have teachers trained in sign language, braille literacy, and specialized interventions.
- **Curriculum Inclusion:** Learners with disabilities will also be introduced to foundational skills in sign language, braille literacy, and specialized interventions as part of their curriculum. This helps them gradually develop self-reliance and communication skills.
- **Teacher Training:** Teachers will undergo training in inclusive education practices, emphasizing the use of braille, sign language, and individualized interventions. This equips them to identify and support diverse learning needs from the earliest years.

Phase 2: Grade 4 to Form 6

- **Full Integration:** Learners with disabilities will join mainstream classrooms alongside peers without disabilities. This promotes social inclusion, collaboration, and mutual understanding.

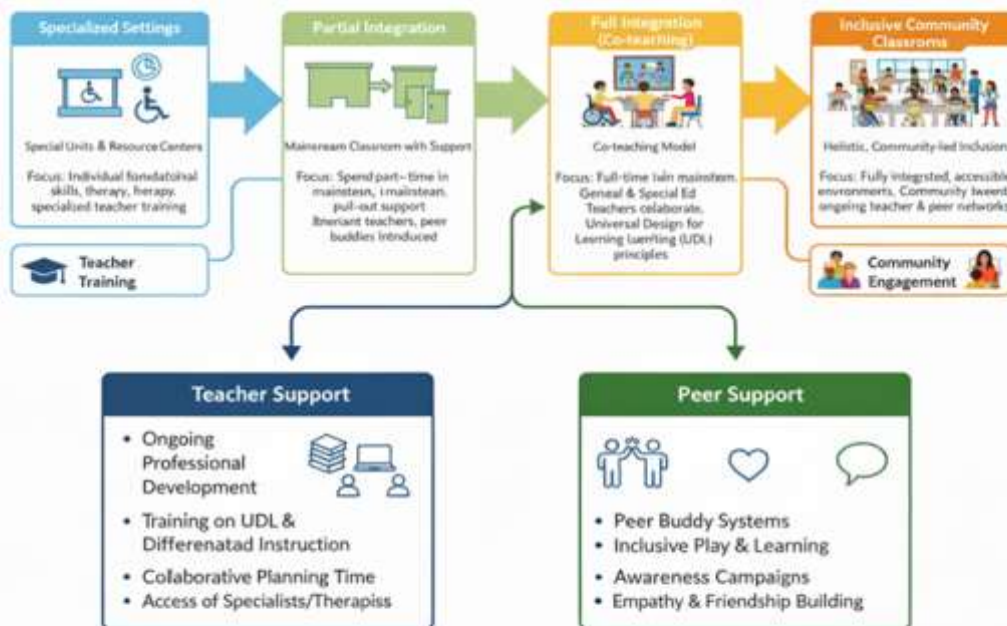
- **Peer Support:** Learners without disabilities will be trained in sign language, braille literacy, and specialized intervention skills, enabling them to actively support their peers with disabilities.
- **Inclusive Teaching:** Teachers will implement differentiated instruction, co-teaching, and universal design for learning (UDL) strategies to ensure all learners can participate and succeed. Regular monitoring and individualized support plans will guide interventions for learners with complex needs.

Key Features of the Zambian Model

1. **Phased Integration:** Gradual transition from specialized to inclusive classrooms ensures learners with disabilities are adequately prepared and supported.
2. **Capacity Building:** Continuous professional development for teachers ensures sustainable inclusive practices.
3. **Peer Involvement:** Engaging non-disabled learners fosters empathy, social skills, and collaborative learning.
4. **Specialized Support:** Use of assistive technologies, AAC, braille, and sign language ensures meaningful participation for learners with disabilities.
5. **Alignment with National Policy:** The model supports Zambia's inclusive education goals under the Education for All (EFA) agenda, UNCRRPD, and SDG 4, ensuring equity and quality education for all.

The Zambian Inclusive Education Model, through its phased transition from specialized settings to fully integrated community classrooms, establishes a clear pathway for systematic progress. This journey is critically underpinned by robust teacher and peer support systems, ensuring that both educators are equipped and learners are holistically supported at every stage of their inclusive educational experience.

Zambian Inclusive Education Model: Phased Transition & Support Systems



Towards an Equitable Education System
for ALL Zambian Learners

The Case for a Directorate of Inclusion and Special Education

The Ministry of Education in Zambia is organized to manage a broad range of educational functions, including policy formulation, curriculum development, teacher education, standards monitoring, and infrastructure planning (Ministry of Education, 2020). At the national level, the Ministry is headed by the Minister of Education, supported by Permanent Secretaries and Directors who oversee various portfolios such as General Education, Teacher Education, Technical Education, and Specialised Services. Under this structure, specialized areas, including inclusive and special education, are managed as units within broader directorates, rather than as standalone entities (Ministry of Education, 2020). Currently, inclusive education falls under the Unit for Special and Inclusive Education, which is situated within the Directorate of Curriculum Development (DCD), Directorate of Teacher Education and Specialized Services (TESS) and Directorate of Standard, Evaluation and Assessment (DSEA) at ministry of education Headquarters. Under the DCD in Zambia's Ministry of Education, the Special Education or Special Needs Education Unit (sometimes referred to as the Special Education Section) is responsible for ensuring that the national curriculum is inclusive and responsive to the needs of learners with disabilities and special educational needs. For TESS is responsible for coordinating policies, monitoring special schools, and facilitating teacher training in special needs education. Under (DSEA) it provides oversight and guidance on educational standards, evaluation, assessment, and quality assurance to promote equitable and inclusive learning outcomes. At the provincial and district levels, inclusive education activities are supported by Senior Education Standards Officers (SESOs) and District Education Standards Officers (DESOs) for Special Education, who report to the national level (Ministry of Education, 2003). This structure, while functional, reflects a limited institutional focus, as inclusive education is subsumed under broader teacher education and specialized services, rather than having an autonomous voice within the Ministry's leadership. The absence of a dedicated Directorate of Inclusive and Special Education in Zambia's Ministry of Education severely limits strategic leadership, accountability, and resource allocation, resulting in fragmented and inconsistent service provision for learners with disabilities. The core issues stemming from this administrative gap include:

Hindered Policy Coordination and Strategic Direction: Without a single, authoritative directorate, the government lacks a central body to harmonize inclusive education policies across different administrative levels. This results in inconsistent implementation of initiatives and limited oversight of crucial resource distribution (Chikonde & Mwale, 2020; UNESCO, 2020).

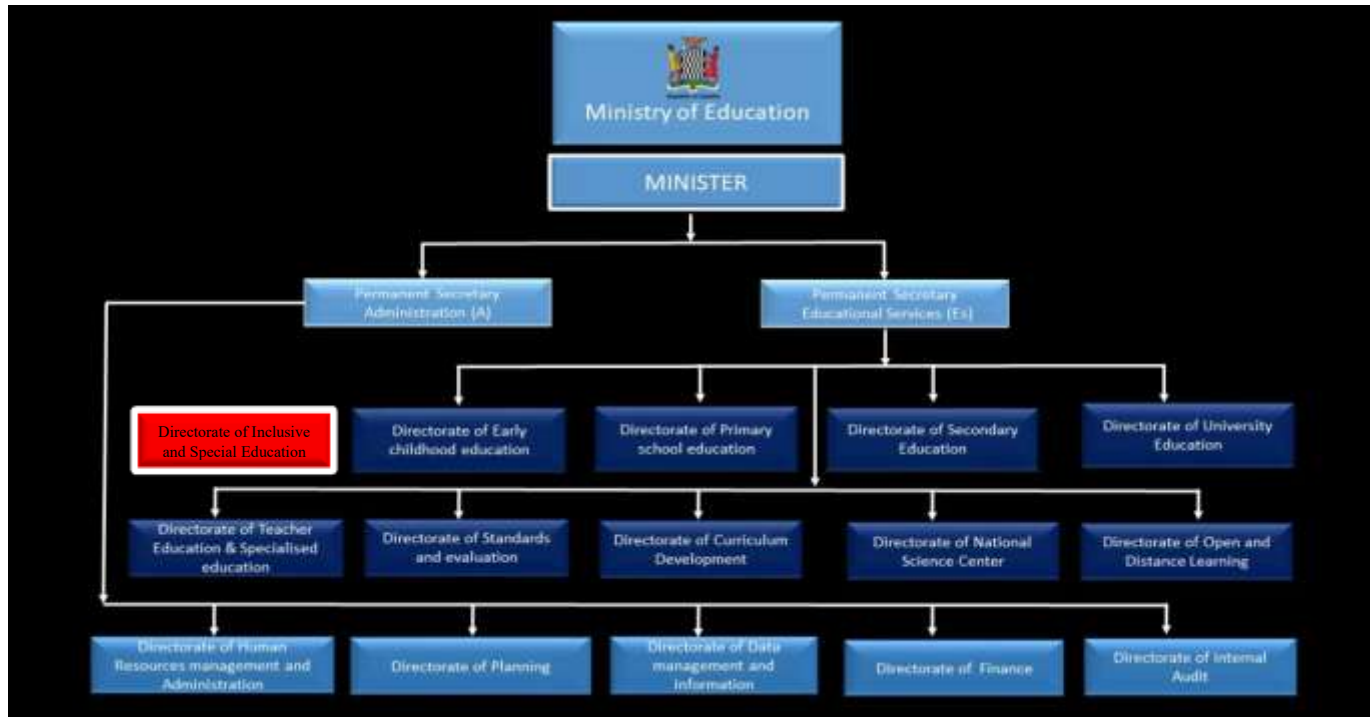
Fragmented Monitoring and Evaluation (M&E): While programs are monitored at district and provincial levels (by DESOs and SESOs), reporting structures are diffuse and decentralized. This undermines the collection of complete, national-level data (MOE, 2003), making evidence-based planning difficult and hindering the accurate tracking of progress toward inclusion goals.

Inadequate Advocacy and Visibility: Inclusive Education is often managed within a larger department (like the Directorate of Teacher Education and Specialized Services), forcing it to compete with other priorities. This dilutes advocacy efforts and significantly limits the profile and consideration of learners with disabilities in national-level planning, budgeting, and policy discussions (Kalabula, 1991).

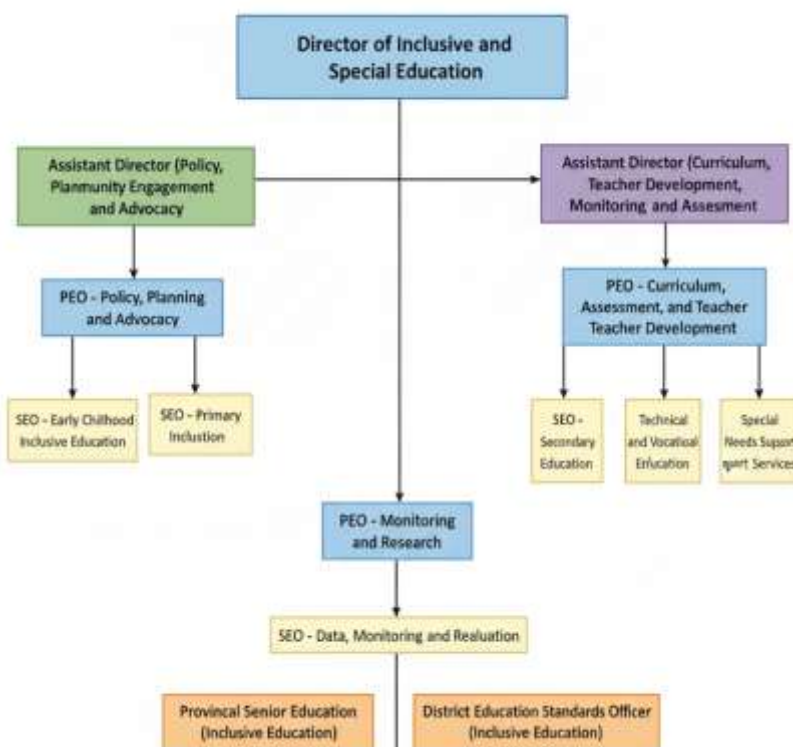
Limited Resource Mobilization and Capacity Building: When managed under a broader mandate, key activities like teacher training, curriculum adaptation, and provision of assistive devices receive a reduced and diffused focus. Consequently, access to specialized resources, professional development, and infrastructure support becomes uneven and inadequate across Zambia's provinces (Ministry of General Education, 2016).

Weak Integration into Mainstream Planning: The absence of a dedicated directorate prevents inclusive education from being fully and strategically embedded in national educational strategies and budgets. This leads to ad hoc implementation, over-reliance on external partners (NGOs and development agencies) for program support (UNICEF, 2021), and a failure to make inclusion a core, systemic component of the education sector.

Structure diagram



The pursuit of equitable and quality education for all learners in Zambia, significant strides have been made in expanding access to education, although the fragmented approach to inclusive education has hindered comprehensive implementation, necessitating a more centralized and coordinated strategy (Kalabula, 1991). Therefore, this paper obliges for the establishment of a dedicated Directorate of Inclusive and Special Education within Zambia's Ministry of Education. The confirmation from interviews and documents analysis the Ministry of Education should formally establish a Directorate of Inclusive and Special Education with clear mandates and adequate resources. The directorate to have the following structure:



This structure delineates a robust hierarchy and functional specialization, ensuring effective policy development, program implementation, and quality assurance for inclusive and special education across national, provincial,

and district levels. At Directorate of Inclusive and Special Education (National Level) the proposal are as follows:

- **Director of Inclusive and Special Education-** Overall leadership and policy oversight. Provides executive leadership and strategic policy oversight for the entire portfolio of inclusive and special education services. Responsible for establishing the national vision, ensuring legal compliance, managing inter-sectoral collaborations, and securing necessary resources to guarantee equitable educational opportunities for all learners.
- **Assistant Director (Policy, Planning, Community Engagement and Advocacy)** Drives strategic policy architecture, ensuring alignment with national legislation and international conventions (e.g., CRPD). Oversees strategic planning cycles. Manages high-level community engagement, awareness campaigns, and parental empowerment initiatives. Cultivates and manages partnerships with Non-Governmental Organizations (NGOs) and development partners to leverage external expertise and funding.
- **Assistant Director (Curriculum, Teacher Development, Monitoring, and Assessment)** Provides leadership in the pedagogical and programmatic dimensions of inclusion. Focuses on inclusive curriculum design and adaptation. Directs teacher professional development and in-service training programs. Oversees national assessment frameworks, data collection methodologies, and rigorous quality assurance processes for all-inclusive education programs.

The Principal Education Officers drive the specialized functions supporting the Assistant Directorates, providing expertise and operationalizing national strategies.

- **Principal Education Officers (PEO) – Policy, Planning, and Advocacy:** Leads the development, rigorous review, and implementation of comprehensive inclusive education policies. Coordinates national strategic frameworks and action plans. Serves as the primary advocate for the rights and full inclusion of learners with disabilities. Engages critical stakeholders and communities to build consensus and support for policy implementation.
- **PEO-Curriculum, Assessment, and Teacher Development:** Focuses on pedagogical innovation, including the development and adaptation of national curricula and assessment tools to ensure universal design for learning (UDL) principles are integrated. Oversees the implementation and quality of Individualized Education Plans (IEPs). Coordinates and standardizes pre-service and in-service training programs for educators, school administrators, and support personnel.
- **PEO-Monitoring, Evaluation, and Research:** Manages the national monitoring and evaluation (M&E) framework for inclusive education programs at all levels. Directs the systematic collection and sophisticated analysis of data on learner access, retention, progression, and learning outcomes. Coordinates and promotes action research and the adoption of evidence-based and innovative approaches in special and inclusive education.

The Senior Education Officers provide focused technical expertise and support across specific educational levels and critical service areas.

- **Senior Education Officers (SEOs)-Early Childhood Inclusive Education:** Supports the development and implementation of high-quality, inclusive programs for young children. Provides specialized training to early childhood educators on inclusive pedagogical practices. Monitors access, screening, and developmental outcomes for children with disabilities at the pre-primary level to ensure early intervention.
- **SEO-Primary Inclusive Education:** Guides primary school teachers in the effective implementation of inclusive classroom strategies. Monitors curriculum adaptation, resource accessibility, and barrier removal. Provides technical assistance for the development and review of IEPs for primary-level learners.
- **SEO-Secondary Inclusive Education:** Assists secondary schools with curriculum differentiation and adaptation for learners with special educational needs. Delivers specialized training on inclusive teaching methodologies and transition planning. Monitors retention, transition rates (to higher education/employment), and learning outcomes at the secondary level.

- **SEO-Technical and Vocational Inclusive Education:** Promotes physical and instructional accessibility within TVET institutions. Ensures learners with disabilities receive specialized career guidance and appropriate skills training. Fosters strategic partnerships for resource mobilization and technical support to enhance TVET inclusion.
- **SEO-Special Needs Support Services:** Coordinates the provision of critical related services (e.g., speech-language, occupational, and physical therapy). Oversees counselling and psychological support for learners and their families. Trains school staff on effective referral pathways and evidence-based learner support strategies.
- **SEO-Data, Monitoring, and Evaluation:** Manages the systematic data collection, analysis, and reporting pertaining to learners with disabilities. Monitors the fidelity of program implementation at the district and provincial levels. Generates evidence-based reports to inform policy adjustments and resource allocation.

Provincial Level-Provincial Senior Education Standards Officer (Inclusive Education): At the Provincial Level, this officer provides regional coordination and quality assurance for all-inclusive education programs. Serves as the primary link between national policy and district implementation, ensuring resource equity and standardized practices across the province.

District Level-District Education Standards Officer (Inclusive Education): At the District Level, this officer is the key operational implementer. Responsible for the direct implementation of policies, on-site monitoring of school-level inclusion standards, providing direct support to schools, and systematic reporting on progress and challenges to the provincial office.

Therefore, establishment of a dedicated Directorate of Inclusive and Special Education within a Ministry of Education, such as in Zambia, holds profound significance for transforming an education system into one that is truly equitable and inclusive. This institutionalization goes beyond mere policy statements, providing a concrete framework for action and accountability. Its significance can be understood through several key dimensions:

Policy Development and Legal Frameworks: The Directorate would ensure the formulation and implementation of comprehensive inclusive education policies, promoting the rights of learners with disabilities. It would align national education laws and policies with international conventions such as the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (UNCRPD). For example, in South Africa, dedicated directorates have successfully guided the implementation of inclusive education policies such as the National Inclusive Education Policy (2016) and Education White Paper 6 (2001).

Providing Strategic Leadership and Governance: A Directorate would offer clear institutional leadership in inclusive education by formulating inclusive education strategies, guidelines, and standards. It would act as the central authority for interpreting, enforcing, and updating inclusive education policies. Having such leadership helps avoid fragmented interventions and ensures national consistency.

Teacher Training and Professional Development: One of the largest gaps in inclusive education is the shortage of trained professionals. The Directorate would be responsible for developing and overseeing in-service and pre-service training programs tailored to inclusive education. It could also standardize curriculum for teacher colleges and provide continuous professional development. A dedicated Directorate would strengthen teacher capacity by integrating special needs and inclusive education modules into pre-service and in-service training. It would collaborate with teacher training institutions to build competencies for managing diverse classrooms. For Example, in Ghana and Uganda have achieved improved teacher preparedness through partnerships between their directorates and universities

Early Identification and Assessment Services: The Directorate would coordinate early screening and assessment of children with disabilities, ensuring timely interventions and proper placement. This would prevent learning delays and support early learning outcomes. For example, in Botswana and Kenya have successfully implemented national screening and assessment programs through their special education directorates.

Increased Enrolment and Access: The Directorate would drive the expansion of inclusive and resource

schools, ensuring equal access to education for all learners. It would support inclusive school models that encourage participation of learners with disabilities in mainstream education. In Namibia, inclusive education initiatives led by directorates have improved enrolment and retention rates for learners with disabilities.

Collaboration and Multi-Sectoral Support: A Directorate would strengthen partnerships with NGOs, civil society, and development agencies, mobilizing technical and financial support for inclusive programs. In Lesotho and Malawi, directorates have worked with UNICEF, Sightsavers, and Save the Children to enhance inclusive education interventions and provide assistive technologies. Currently, inclusive education efforts are often scattered among various departments, NGOs, and donor agencies. A Directorate would streamline communication and coordination among all stakeholders including the Ministry of Community Development, ZANEC, teacher training colleges, and international development partners. This would maximize the impact of available resources.

Resource Allocation and Budget Oversight: The Directorate would be able to lobby for and manage a dedicated budget line for inclusive education, ensuring that schools are equipped with necessary assistive technologies, accessible infrastructure, learning aids, and transportation where necessary. Centralized financial oversight would also allow the government to track spending effectiveness and adjust based on data. After creating the directorate will enhance the increase in budgetary provisions for inclusive education infrastructure and training.

Infrastructure and Accessibility: The Directorate would promote inclusive school infrastructure, ensuring that all learners can physically access learning spaces. It would provide guidelines for the construction of ramps, resource rooms, and accessible sanitation facilities. In Namibia and South Africa have integrated inclusive design standards through their directorates.

Curriculum and Assessment Reforms: The Directorate would lead the adaptation of curricula and assessments to meet diverse learning needs. It would ensure the production of Braille, sign language, and simplified learning materials. In Tanzania and South Africa have introduced differentiated assessments and learning materials for learners with disabilities.

Data Collection and Monitoring Systems: The Directorate would establish robust data systems for tracking the enrolment, retention, and performance of learners with disabilities. Integration of disability indicators into the Education Management Information System (EMIS) would support evidence-based planning. In Uganda's Directorate of Special Needs Education has successfully expanded EMIS to include disability-disaggregated data. To ensure that policies translate into practice, the Directorate would establish monitoring and evaluation mechanisms, including inclusive education indicators in EMIS (Education Management Information System). Annual progress reports could be used to inform improvements and guide policymaking.

Community Sensitization and Advocacy: A Directorate would spearhead awareness campaigns to combat stigma and promote the inclusion of learners with disabilities in schools and communities. In Kenya have used inclusive education campaigns to shift public attitudes toward acceptance and participation of learners with special needs. Changing public perceptions is key. A dedicated Directorate can drive national advocacy campaigns to reduce stigma, engage parents and communities, and promote a culture of acceptance and participation for all learners, including those with disabilities.

CONCLUSION

The establishment of the Directorate of Inclusive and Special Education is a critical institutional reform, providing a robust framework to address systemic barriers and advance equitable educational opportunities for all learners in Zambia. Its structured approach to policy, curriculum, teacher development, and monitoring is essential for coordinating efforts across all educational levels. Eventually, this Directorate institutionalizes a commitment to inclusivity, requiring sustained support and engagement to effectively transform Zambia's education system into one that truly serves every child. It would address existing challenges, coordinate efforts, and ensure that all learners have equitable access to quality education. Launching such a Directorate aligns with

Zambia's constitutional and international obligations and demonstrates a true commitment to "Leaving No One Behind."

RECOMMENDATIONS

- The Directorate must immediately implement comprehensive and ongoing capacity-building and professional development programs for all education personnel, focusing on inclusive pedagogies and assistive technologies, supported by continuous training and partnerships.
- The government must commit a dedicated, sufficient, and protected budget for the Directorate to cover accessible infrastructure, specialized materials, support services, research, and staff remuneration, ensuring sustainable inclusive education initiatives.
- The Directorate should actively foster robust multi-sectoral partnerships across government and with civil society to ensure holistic support, early identification, integrated service delivery, and sustained community advocacy for learners with disabilities.

Consent for participants

Informed consent was obtained from all participants in the research.

Conflict of Interest

The authors declare no conflict of interest, financial or otherwise.

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