

## The Place of the Visually Challenged in Mainstream Media: The Zimbabwean Case

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### **Abstract**

*Mass media are business entities whose main purpose is profit. Consequently they have been known to pay no or less attention to audiences that do not interest advertisers. In Zimbabwe and a number of other Southern African countries television is the only medium that has attempted to accommodate the physically challenged individuals namely the deaf and dumb by providing sign language translations of news bulletins. This is what is only offered as no other programming like entertainment follows suit. The thrust of this paper is to analyse how the visually challenged access information through the mass media. In Zimbabwe the visually challenged are mostly beggars at street corners hence being denigrated by society and even the media. These are a minority group that fail to catch the attention of media practitioners except on radio. No newspapers are in Braille and television is a luxury mainly for the sighted. Through interviews with the visually challenged themselves and media houses, it was established that no plans are in place to assist the visually handicapped so that they have access to information. It is recommended that what the television is doing for the deaf and dumb should be extended to the visually challenged people in print media.*

**Key words:** Mass media, representation, disability, visually challenged, dark world, stereotypes

### **Introduction**

Just as water is to fish and oxygen is to all living things so is access to information to society. Regardless of colour or creed, everyone should have the right to access of information. Guy Berger (2007: 7) posits, "There is a family of communication-related rights consisting of freedom of expression and the related rights to access information and to have media freedom." This brings out how important access to information is in society. Access to information is a universal human right.

People living with disability (PWDs) face formidable barriers in accessing information which is vital to humanity. They also face a myriad of difficulties in performing routines and activities of life. A touching story was published by Tapuwa Mutseyekwa (UNICERF, 2011) with the headline '*Braille textbooks provide children with visual impairment equal access to learning*'. He wrote about a young girl Laura Muzambi aged 12 who is a fifth grader and top of her class at St Giles which is a school for Children with Special Needs in Harare, Zimbabwe. He writes, "She reads a story which begins with the author describing a girl named Mary. He describes her glossy red hair, dazzling eyes and colourful dress." Unfortunately for Laura, she will never get the chance to see these descriptions of beauty because of the dark world she lives in. However, the good thing that UNICERF is doing is providing these children with an opportunity to at least hold a book which is a step in the right direction as it unveils a lot of optimism for children who previously never enjoyed such liberties.

The popular adage 'disability is not inability' is taken lightly by most people and mostly used when they want to justify their failure to help the disabled who seem to be always seeking help. Society has grown a thick skin to the plight of the physically challenged people unless they are family. Even then, sometimes these people are still faced with problems of denigration and being side-lined. According to [http://www.ehow.com/how-8596651\\_stop\\_stereotyper/html](http://www.ehow.com/how-8596651_stop_stereotyper/html) stereotypes are perceived differences or assumptions people have about a group of people based on race, gender, class, ethnicity, sexual orientation or religion. Most of the time, these groups of people are portrayed in negative light. The visually challenged, impaired or handicapped or in blunt terms the blind are stereotyped by society as the scum or impoverished people who survive on hand-outs. The media basically mirror society so they also stereotype the visually challenged people as second class citizens who have no rights as 'normal' people. The only time they appear on the media is when they do something extra-ordinary otherwise they are not there. Also very little effort is given to them accessing information as information is rarely verbalised for their benefit except if it is on radio. Meadows and Foxwell (2011), note in their abstract that the media are quite capable of improving mental health, emotional wellbeing and social wellbeing of the society. Through positive reportage and availing information to the visually challenged people, the media can make a difference in their lives.

It is against this backdrop that this paper seeks to establish why in this day and age, where human rights activists are crying out loud for the rights of people and national and international conventions are being ratified by member states against discriminating the disabled, we still find the visually challenged people lagging behind development. Recently a blind interviewee on Zimbabwe Broadcasting Corporation (ZBC) Television on the morning programme *This Morning* was bitter

about how their concerns were ignored by the people working on the drafting of the Constitution. He said either their sentiments were changed or simply ignored which implies that they are not regarded as important people in society.

### **Background to the study**

Disability is regarded as a curse in most African countries and traditionally could even lead to divorce as parents blame each other for the disability of a child (Choruma, 2007). Metts (2000) posits that disabilities occur as a result of physical, mental and sensory impairments. The Nziramasanga Commission (1999) discovered that 'many children with disabilities were still being hidden by their parents. Parents confessed that they did not know how to help their children with disabilities...' Parents find themselves in a dilemma and believe they are not capable of helping their children hence resorting to hiding them. Choruma (2007:7) posits, "Society's attitudes towards people with disabilities can further handicap individuals, with reactions ranging from horror, fear, anxiety, distaste, or hostility through to patronizing behavior." She adds that because of this it can further result in discrimination and prejudice against these people. Positive reportage and encouragement from the media will help ensure that such attitudes displayed by some parents and society in general could be transformed. This is what the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR) in Article 19 notes: "Everyone has the right to freedom of opinion and expression; this right includes freedom to hold opinions without interference and to seek, receive and impart information and ideas through any media regardless of frontiers." The visually impaired are not enjoying this right as access to information is basically from the radio (if they can afford it) and second hand information from those who have access.

Among all disabilities, loss of vision is regarded as the gravest in many societies. This paper to closely looks at people who have problems with their sense of sight. They live in a dark world where they resort to their other senses to make sense of the world. It is estimated that there are about 1.4 million disabled people in Zimbabwe. Amongst these are the visually impaired. Lang and Charowa (2007) posit that Zimbabwe was one of the first countries in the world to enact the disability discrimination legislation. This was to safe guard people with disability from being discriminated against. In Zimbabwe the responsibility for disability issues resides with the Department of Social Welfare which is under the Ministry of Public Service and Labour. To show that the country has the welfare of these people at heart, a National Disability Board was established. The disabled people are entitled to receive disability grants but unfortunately, this is grossly inadequate. The Non-Governmental Organisations (NGOs) come in to provide all the other services.

The marginalisation of these people is intense as mainstreaming them is not common. However, the education system should be commended for accepting the visually challenged people in the mainstream schools although there are also special schools for them like the Jairos Jiri. Even worse for the visually challenged people is they are marginalised because they face difficulties in schools as teachers either do not pay particular attention to them or are not specially trained to deal with them so they end up performing badly in school. This leads them to be beggars on street corners or in public places so that society just ignores them and the same applies to the media. This is against a 2003 Commonwealth report which reads: 'The right to access information underpins all other human rights,' (Berger 2007: 10).

### Causes of blindness

The Ministry of Health and Child Welfare has the motto 'Equity and quality in health: A people's right' which means the ministry advocates for the good health for all citizens. According to this ministry preventable and avoidable blindness remains a major public health problem in the country. The ministry goes on to say, "Cataracts, trauma and glaucoma are the major reasons for eye admissions". 1% of the population is estimated to be blind and half of this number is due to treatable cataracts. The ministry also says 80% of the causes of blindness are avoidable. In Zimbabwe, there is a drawback in that a huge backlog in cataract surgery leads to most people losing their sight when surgery could prevent this. The backlog may be a result of the brain drain or equipment and supplies that need repair and re-supply respectively. Schwab and Kagame (1993) conducted an ophthalmic assessment survey of 430 students from two schools for the blind in Zimbabwe and discovered that bilateral cornea opacity was responsible for 75% of all blindness among institutionalised blind students.

According to an interview with a Nursing Sister, Vivian Mubaiwa at Senga Poly Clinic in Gweru, blindness in general may be caused by childhood measles, diabetes and lack of vitamin A (12 September 2011). Measles is a virus which can be prevented by immunisation or the severity can be lessened by treatment when affected hence the need to give vitamin A during childhood which is from 6 months to five years and "during ANC" (when the mother is pregnant).

Eckstein, Foster and Gilbert (1995) in the British Journal of Ophthalmology write: *Causes of childhood blindness in Sri Lanka: result from children attending six schools for the blind*. This report postulates, "Childhood blindness has profound consequences not only for the individual child but also for family and the community." An estimated 1.5 million children are blind in Sri Lanka and 450 of these children attend normal schools under a continuing integrated education programme. Bilateral microphthalmos was discovered to be the commonest cause

for BL/SVI (blind/severely visually impaired) which is 26%. Only 4 children (2%) were seen with cornea scarring which is definitely attributable to vitamin A deficiency. Another cause like in Zimbabwe was cataract which was responsible for 39 (17%) children being BL/SVI. The second most common cause of visual loss accounting for 450 (22%) cases of BL/SVI was retinal disease. Other causes include primary optic atrophy, (optic nerve would be dead) congenital glaucoma (being born with intraocular pressure) or buphthalmos. Some cases were a result of heredity or possible family history.

This comparison between Zimbabwe and Sri Lanka helps to portray that blindness is a disease which is with us and societies should change their negative attitudes towards these affected people. Availing information to the visually impaired as well as writing positively about them would go a long way in the integration process so that there is no discrimination.

### **Theoretical framework**

This paper has been influenced by a number of theories from media and society studies to try and understand the plight of the visually impaired people in accessing media content or being represented by the media.

Representation is an important aspect as it is generally understood that the media do not present reality but re-present it. Devereux (2007: 252) posits that representation is a form of media analysis which is primarily concerned "with how media texts represent the social world". O'Shaughnessy and Stadler (2008: 34) point out that the media have become the "arenas through which people receive most of their entertainment and information about the world, so they are primary sources for how we see the world". Fourie (2009: 205) also contends that representation according to Hall (1997) is when the media mediate events and ideas through selection and construction. Most of the things people know are not from personal experience but they have seen them through the mediated and constructed reality that the media present to them. In this paper, it is important to analyse how the media represent the visually impaired and what attitudes society have towards these people as a result of the reportage.

Two step flow theory by Katz and Lazarsfeld (1955) is vital as it describes the functionality of society. Steinberg (2007) states that the theory asserts that information from the media moves in two stages beginning with people who are heavy or regular users of the mass media known as opinion leaders. The opinion leaders take it upon themselves to relay information according to their own perspective. The visually challenged people cannot read newspapers or watch television so they rely on the opinions of those around them. The reality that they

know is second hand information or mediated reality and their understanding is influenced by those of the people who bring them news.

Culture has an important bearing on this paper as it influences the production of information and its interpretation. The culture of the visually impaired being ignored in society is evident as they are rarely written about or positively presented by the mainstream media. Stuart Hall in his encoding-decoding model came up with three readings in the meaning making process. These are the hegemonic reading or dominant paradigm, the negotiated reading and lastly the counter hegemonic or oppositional reading. Fourie (2009: 134) says, "Cultural influences, as manifested in the way we talk, eat, dress, behave socially and practise different religious beliefs, also influence our visual perception". When it comes to the visually impaired it is rather their mental perception. From observation, the visually impaired almost always have the oppositional reading as they do not trust the source of information unless it is their aide. This may be a reaction to the dark world, where they do not see, and society they live in which appears unsympathetic to their plight.

### **Methodology**

This research used a multi-pronged approach so as to get as much information as possible. Content analysis was used to look at the number of stories that appear in the mainstream media in connection with the visually challenged. Critical discourse analysis was employed to understand the language that reporters use when writing about these people. Very informative in-depth interviews were carried out with the blind people themselves, media practitioners and those who work closely with them. Observation also helped the researcher to understand these people better.

### **Findings**

This paper unravelled a lot to do with the visually challenged people. From interviews carried out with these people, the researcher came up with common trends that portray the conclusions of this paper.

### **The invisibility of visually challenged people in society**

The visually challenged people are visible at street corners in towns or public transport singing church hymns to attract the attention of passers-by or passengers but when it comes to civic processes or social events, they are relegated to the doldrums. Statistics of stories written in connection to the visually impaired is almost insignificant. In 2012 there is only one story in the *Sunday News* of 4 March entitled 'The challenges of being female and blind' In 2011 two stories appeared

in the *Sunday News* ('Blind people's conference' on 12 June) and *The Chronicle* ('Visually impaired to receive groceries' on 20 May). *The Chronicle* on 13 April 2009 ran a story entitled 'Zimbabweans urged to donate eye' and on 30 January 2008 also ran a story with the title 'Council for the blind to train more nurses'. All this is about the visually impaired but written for the benefit of the sighted who can read.

*The Standard* on line of 6 November 2011 ran a story entitled 'Visually impaired teacher seeks reinstatement' by Jefferey Moyo. The story is about a 35 year old woman named Tendai Ndongwe who is a former primary school teacher. For her daily activities she is assisted by her daughter who completed writing her grade seven examination. The story reads, "Without the child's assistance, it would be virtually impossible to navigate her way or carry out ordinary chores." This is typical of many visually challenged people in Zimbabwe who are dependent on their children for assistance on their day-to-day activities. Some of these children are very young and others of school going age but do not attend school in order to aid their parents. What is sad about this woman is that she was dismissed from employment due to medical reasons a few years ago so she is fighting her former employer, the Ministry of Education, Sports, Art and Culture for reinstatement. Ndongwe's disability is acquired as she trained at Mary Mount Teachers' College and was deployed in Chipinge where she developed eye problems. In 2006 she visited a doctor who gave her three injections and forty minutes later she was totally blind. It took her time to adjust to her situation but has to live with it. She is still waiting to be reinstated by the Public Service Commission (PSC) and how long she has to wait is the big question. This case is not unique as discrimination against people with disability is quite rife in the country. Despite her education and experience, Ndongwe is invisible in the society she lives because she can no longer practise her profession due to her lack of sight.

*The Herald Online* of 30 December 2011 had the headline: 'Double trouble for women with disabilities' written by Loverage Nhamoyebonde and Andrew Bangajena. The story is about how a woman who got disabled in a car accident is divorced by her husband who did not want his home to be turned into a Jairos Jiri. The relatives encouraged the husband to do this and the woman is now languishing in poverty and has to fend for her daughter through selling airtime. For this woman it is double trouble as she is both disabled and a divorcee. Like many others this woman missed out on the commemorations of 16 days of Activism against Gender Based Violence which ran from 25 November to 10 December as it had nothing to do with them as they were marginalised and largely excluded from this civil process. No effort was made to accommodate them. Mary Mujoko, a visually impaired vendor had this to say about the celebrations, "No one is immune to disability and I do not owe anyone an apology for putting things

straight. Gender-based violence is one of the problems encountered by persons living with disabilities in their societies and they are often subjected to stigma and discrimination. The implementation of policies that are meant to protect persons living with disabilities from gender-based violence is something questionable." The researcher observed that most of the visually challenged have too many children for which society blames them for not using family planning methods but some of these pregnancies are a result of rape cases and sexual abuses that are never reported. When the media portray these people, it seems as if they are careless and sleep around which is not entirely true. It is revealed by *The Herald Online* that figures released by the National Association of Societies for the Care of the Handicapped show that 75% of persons with disabilities in Zimbabwe do not have national identity documents. This scenario portrays the invisibility of the visually impaired people among others living with disabilities in society which is quite tragic.

### **Afraid and suspicious of the world**

The visually impaired have to learn to trust the people around them and that does not come easily due to their lack of sight. They suffer from the scary world syndrome and believe the society always undermines or takes advantage of them. Mrs Mudarikwa spoke on behalf of people like her and confirmed that they have fear of what goes on around them as they cannot see what will be happening. She gave an example of HIV/AIDS counselling and testing where the blind rarely go because the personnel at the New Start Centres take things for granted and do not tell the blind patient the procedure of testing them and explaining every step like taking a new unused syringe. An interview with two university students who are blind revealed that this makes the patient have fear of the unknown together with the descriptions of the sighted about how one can catch the virus from a contaminated syringe. If information is not verbalised then these vulnerable people feel there is no consultation which results in fear and suspicion. Again interviews revealed that the visually impaired are treated as asexual so counselling is prejudiced which is wrong. Media programming through the radio can go a long way in allaying these fears.

This marginalised group is rarely covered by the media. This is because they are regarded by society as charity objects or misfits/outcasts who behave abnormally which the media then reflect which is stereotyping. They are always fighting a war to be understood. For example, one visually impaired man loves soccer and travels with his team and relies on people sitting close to him to know how his team will be faring. The media are doing quite well in verbalising soccer commentaries but this is only for prominent matches like those played in Harare or Bulawayo which deprives those visually challenged people watching soccer



elsewhere. Again the media should venture into producing newspapers in Braille so that the literate disabled people who have sight challenges can read about their favourite teams themselves. This is trying to resist stereotyping that because one is blind, one cannot be into sports like soccer. The researcher observed that when speaking to a visually challenged person, what he or she tries to do first is to convince you to take them seriously as they are just like everyone else or even better.

Observation also portrayed most of the visually handicapped people as quite vulgar in their communication. One blind man actually said, "I can say anything as I cannot see the faces of the people around me so it is your problem if you feel embarrassed." This is just a way to draw the attention of people around them due to fear of isolation. Chamunorwa Nebeta was a popular musician who belonged to the band Glare Express. He was totally blind and came from Zaka. Nebeta sang songs with a lot of vulgar phrases and had no apologies for that. For example in his song "Taurai Save" Nebeta sings "*Maitiro ako haana chikomborero, Havasi vose vanokoniwa nekushaya pfungwa, Vamwe vakashata nekusviba pamusana paamai nababa.*" (The way you perform is not blessed, it's not everyone who has no brains, some are ugly or dark because of their parents." In his song "Kuzozviti ndabaya" Nebeta sings "*Tine vamwe vanhu vanenge mashizha anongotevera kwainda mhepo, panoda vanhu vanobatsira vanonoka kufunga.*" (There are people like leaves who just follow wherever the wind blows, we need people who help those who are slow in thinking." Unfortunately he passed on in the year 2012. Paul Matavire, another blind musician also sings about love which earned him the name Doctor Love where his descriptions are almost vulgar. In his song "Dhiabhorosi nyoka" Matavire sings "*Muchero wamunorega uyu huchi*" (The fruit that that you refuse to eat is honey) which implied the enjoyment of sex. Again in "Tanga wandida" Matavire describes how a woman can easily get employed by having an affair with the boss.

In shops no Braille is used for pricing. Sometimes the visually impaired also fear to go into a shop for shopping as they have to feel the clothes and ask the prices of everything unlike the sighted who can just read. A visually impaired teacher had this to say, "Should I suffer because I do things differently? My eyes are my fingers as they help me make sense of things." Their tactile sense replaces the sense of sight. This teacher also lamented that she has to make use of an aide so she ceases to be an individual. A prominent, visually challenged cricket commentator admitted that his worst fear is the day he will make a mistake in interpreting the sounds he gets from the pitch to tell audiences what would be happening during the game but hopes and prays that society would understand him when that happens.

The association for the visually impaired known as National Association of Societies for the Care of the Handicapped (NASCOH) held a disability sensitisation workshop for election authorities in Zimbabwe programme where there were 30 participants. The goal of the workshop was: 'To assist in the creation of a disability sensitive and responsive electoral system and or process.' The report had an analysis which revealed that the workshop was an eye opener "as the elections authorities conceded that they came away with enhanced understanding of the multifarious problems that people with disabilities across the spectrum faced in trying to access the electoral processes, and the lack of access of people with disabilities to fundamental rights and freedoms that the rest of society took for granted." This workshop was extensively covered by the media, both print and broadcast.

A blind fold exercise was conducted in which participants were blind folded and instructed to walk around the room until they eventually got back to their seats. This was a way of making participants get a glimpse of the numerous problems that people with visual impairment faced. The report reads: "Participants reported feeling insecure and frightened while walking around the room blind folded, they reported that they felt too dependent on somebody, and they reported feelings of suspicion". This fear and suspicion is why most visually challenged people practice voter apathy rather than having four or five people accompany them into the ballot box so their vote no longer remains a secret. Berger (2007: 11) gives an example of the Special Rapporteur of the Inter-American Commission on Human Rights which notes: "Without the information that every person is entitled to, it is clearly impossible to exercise freedom of expression as an effective vehicle for civic participation or democratic oversight of government management." With this in mind, one wonders how the visually impaired are informed citizens who can exercise their democratic right.

### **Demystifying visual impairment**

Quite a number of the visually impaired people are doing sterling work in society which the sighted believe is their domain. For example Nebeta, Matavire and Munyaradzi Munodawafa all hailed from Capota, a school for the blind in Masvingo district in Zimbabwe but were competitive musicians in their own right. There are teachers and preachers who may be blind but are doing very well in their various professions. A radio reporter who refused to be named also works wonders at the Montrose studio in Bulawayo. The *Newsday* of 15 October 2013 ran a story with the title "I am no better than the next person- blind Senator" where a blind Senator representing people living with disability is described as the envy of other legislators because of his eloquence in English. The story reads, "The technologically-savvy Mashavakure even has an e-mail account, something many legislators do not have." The media through radio, television and newspapers

bring stories that show how some visually challenged people have defied their disability by being involved in work previously regarded as meant for the sighted. For example *The Standard* of 5 January 2013 carried the headline "Capota school of the blind grooms stars" where different musician biographies are given.

I had the privilege of interviewing a visually handicapped woman who is heading a school in Masvingo town in Zimbabwe. Her name is Roseweter Mudarikwa and quite emotional about how the visually challenged are treated by society in general. She lamented that time is displayed say on television rather than being verbalised which is a disadvantage to her. She said the media could initiate attractive ways of verbalising time rather than take things for granted. As a visually handicapped person, Mrs Mudarikwa pointed out that accessing information from the media is a challenge as 75% of the media calls for the visualised. She also lamented that people are not sensitised as they do not use the correct modes for example auditory and tactile. As a teacher, Mrs Mudarikwa talked about her experiences of her subjects (English and History) being poorly performed at first. She later discovered that the visually challenged do not see the spelt words hence their atrocious spelling in essay writing which are gross errors in English. Punctuation is not there at all and there is also mother tongue interference. As a result the visually challenged are claimed to be dull but efforts can be made to rectify this through Braille.

Transcribers do not help the situation as some signs are poorly done as they are very different depending on training. Mrs Mudarikwa gave an example of how a pupil wrote "They were at odds with each other" and the transcriber wrote "They were at o.s with each other". In Braille a full stop in between a word is a double 'd' so the pupil's sentence which was well written was regarded as wrong because the transcriber failed to get it correctly. Transcription in Zimbabwe is mostly done by people who are not Braille users and it ill prepares students for adult life. The alternative is the typewriter but this needs to be taught by someone trained to do that. Ink print and Braille should be well known by trainers. The visually challenged have a destroyed self-esteem due to the treatment they get from society, the media included. Mrs Mudarikwa noted that those visually challenged people who have made it in life have done so without using Braille but what is unfortunate is that even they cannot read what they write through using a computer or typewriter. "The visually challenged cannot read newspapers, pamphlets on HIV/AIDS, leaflets and so on so they have no place in the media except for radio," said Mrs Mudarikwa. However, this woman is extra-ordinary as she owns a cell phone which 'talks' to her as well as a computer she can communicate with. She has an e-mail address and I communicated with her that way after our discussion. However, she said these were expensive gadgets which most of the visually handicapped cannot afford. She is quite active in fighting stereotyping and attends conferences and workshops in the region.

Paul Matavire was a blind Zimbabwean musician and song writer who came from Maranda in Mwenezi District which is in the periphery of the country. He was left totally blind by glaucoma as a child. According to [www.wikipedia.org/wiki/Paul\\_Matavire](http://www.wikipedia.org/wiki/Paul_Matavire) this musician rose to prominence in the 1980s when he joined the Jairos Jiri Band which was based in Bulawayo at the Jairos Jiri Rehabilitation Centre. Matavire was chosen to lead the band and from the history of the country, he was one of the finest musicians to emerge after Zimbabwe attained independence. Matavire was liked by many Zimbabweans because of the humour he used in his music and his boldness in tackling societal issues that other musicians did not sing about like love portions with women being like the Biblical Eve but also important in society and corruption and nepotism at work places in exchange for love. This type of music earned Matavire the name Dr. Love. However, despite all this, the media had a field day when Matavire was incarcerated for one year on rape charges. Again at the time of his death, there were many media reports of him having ejected a commercial farmer and taken over the farm including the livestock.

A brilliant Shona and Bible Knowledge teacher in Gutu district once taught at Dewure High School. JM got blind at the age of three due to measles together with his sister as they lived in rural areas and did not get medical attention. He was a good teacher who could move around the school unaided. He was educated at the country's prestigious university which is the University of Zimbabwe. Colleagues treated him like one of them as he was rationale and could argue his case with intelligence. JM performed all duties just like any other teacher like conducting assembly, being the teacher on duty for study time at night among others. Students at the beginning undermined him but later learnt to tap from his knowledge. JM could easily tell a student to come back and sit down as students thought they could sneak out of his lesson as he was blind. If students remained in their usual sitting positions, JM could easily point in the right direction when asking a student to give an answer. His subjects both at 'O' and 'A' level were passed with quite good passes. He was a competent teacher who passed on in 2005 due to ill health. What really impressed me was JM's ability to count money accurately, read time from his watch through touch and identify colleagues present even when they did not announce their presence. Conclusions drawn here are that disability is not inability and provided with the right information, people like JM can motivate others to be independent rather than dependent. The media should use biographies like his to educate the world that being blind is not a curse but one can lead a worthwhile life even in that condition.

DesiWireFeed (2012) writes, *'Cricket: Zimbabwe's blind commentator is on the ball'*. The report is about a cricket commentator known as Dean du Plessis who has encroached into an area where even the sighted fear to tread. He is a Zimbabwean

and “one of the world’s few sightless sports analysts plying his remarkable expertise by training his acute hearing on the stump microphones despite being born with a blindness that was meant to kill him.” Du Plessis is quoted as having said, “I was born with tumours on both my retinas, so I was only meant to be alive for three to five months- but I’m 35, not out now, so still playing a good innings.” This reveals this cricket guru as a fighter from when he was a child up to now when society looks down upon the visually challenged. According to the report, du Plessis “gauges the field action with his ears; a bowler’s grunt as he hurls forward, the drag of feet along the pitch, or the crack of a bat slamming into a ball.” This revealed an important factor about the visually challenged people that as their sense of sight is dead; their sense of hearing seems more sharpened than those of the sighted who take things for granted because they can see. The cricket commentator is a force to reckon with as the report goes on to say, “Alongside daily radio work, sports bulletins and a newspaper column which he writes on his voice-encoded cell phone, du Plessis also sits in the broadcasters’ commentary booth where he provides colour to the anchor’s match breakdown.” For example when the anchor Robin Jackman says something like ‘driven through the covers, that will be four, good shot’, du Plessis would come in with an explanation smoothly using cricket jargon with radio-esque-poise to say, “Well, that is arguably Jacques Kallis’ most favourite shot, outside the off stump, a little bit of width, which allowed him to free his arms.” Such a commentary (especially the description of players) would be expected from someone who can observe what will be happening on the pitch but du Plessis is doing it with just the use of his stump microphones which he says, “If I turn my microphone down, I really will be blind”. He claims that he does not get preferential treatment.

A prominent pastor from a vibrant Pentecostal church is visually challenged but has a large following because of his charisma. Pastor M can tackle any theme and makes an effort to research before standing in front of the congregation. He is married to a sighted beautiful woman who is well dressed and is also his aide. The pastor can also sing very well and has the ability to emotionally move people with his preaching. He gives the example of himself as well as other disabled people as having to work hard in order to be blessed by God. Lecturer KS, formerly at the Midlands State University and now in Mutare, is married to a physiotherapist and they have two brilliant and full sighted children. Through the use of modern technology, he proved to be a competent lecturer who students believed in. He has been abroad to further his education and attended conferences where he presented academic papers. His intelligence is quite evident from his contributions to conversations. If the media could write stories about people like these two and others like them, it would encourage others who have disabilities that through working hard they could enjoy life like any other sighted citizen.

There are also lawyers, writers, heads of schools and other visually impaired people who have demystified the stereotyping of society and the belief that they only survive on hand-outs from well-wishers.

### **Inclusion key in societal integration?**

The existence of specialist schools is applauded although some believe they are isolating and segregatory which does not prepare people living with disability for a life in society. Lang and Charowa (2007) postulate that disabled people “encounter multiple attitudinal, environmental and institutional barriers that militate against their effective inclusion with Zimbabwe’s society”. This needs deconstruction in Zimbabwe so that people with disability feel as if they belong and not outsiders.

The education system in Zimbabwe has ratified the convention that makes children with visual impairment attend mainstream schools as a way of preparing them for adult life in society. Buttler (1990) posits that inclusion occurs “where students with disabilities are educated in the company of their regular age peers to the fullest extent possible...” The Salamanca Declaration, under Article 6:11, to which Zimbabwe is a signatory, underscores the inclusive education thus: ‘Inclusion and participation are essential to human dignity and to the enjoyment and exercises of human rights. Experience in many countries demonstrates that integration of children and youths with educational needs is best achieved within inclusive schools that serve all children within the community’ (Salamanca Statement Article 6). This helps to remove bigotry, stigma and stereotypes that society normally levels against the visually impaired as they live together and help each other in doing chores and school work. Nyoni, Marashe and Nyoni (2011: 291) in their research paper note, “For students, inclusion provides conducive environments where the physically challenged mix and be with other pupils. This prepares them to fit well into the larger society which leads to reduction of stigmatization and stereotyping by ‘opening’ the eyes of the sighted towards the real capabilities of those living with disability.”

The Disability Coordinator at the Midlands State University, A. J. J. T. Ramushu said currently there are nine students at the university who are basically in the African Languages, History and Law departments. He said one visually impaired student, Tendai Muzondiwa wrote a very good chapter of literature review that is being used as a model as it is exceptionally good. The visually impaired make use of the Centre which has the Jaws software so the computers have a reading screen and can actually read and talk to the students. This software helps students access information from the internet as every other student at the University. After leaving college, most of these students become teachers. According to the disability

assistant, Ms Takawira, (a brailist, reader and transcriber trained by Optima, South Africa) visually impaired students rely on volunteers who are also students. This sometimes poses problems as the visually impaired fail to get volunteers as they will be busy with their own work. In connection with the library, Ms Takawira complained that it had no Jaws software so the visually impaired students borrow books and rely on volunteers to read and record on tape so that the visually challenged can play back and write notes in braille. This makes the performance of most students to be mediocre whereas with proper equipment they would excel.

### Conclusion

Bigotry, stigmatization and marginalisation can be a thing of the past if society embraces the visually impaired as people in their own right who need human rights including access to information like everyone else. Negative connotations as well as over emphasis of the limiting effects of disability should be done away with especially by the media. The visually impaired need recognition as citizens and they should be endowed with rights and abilities as well as being empowered with taking charge of their own destiny which will prepare them to be active participants in society. The media have a critical role to play by deconstructing the stereotypical way of marginalising the visually challenged so they can easily access information and are also positively represented. A bright future for Zimbabwe is the adoption of a 'universal design' which is all inclusive and embracing and should not be seen as an added expense but a benefit to all. Educating people on this outlook can be enhanced by media representation which reaches many people at once. The visually challenged should not tire in making their plight known to authorities so that their rights are readily availed to them.

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