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Assessing the Effectiveness of Media in Curbing Discrimination against People Living with Visual Impairments: A Case Study of ZNBC Media Channels in Lusaka

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Abstract
This study assesses the effectiveness of the Zambia National Broadcasting Corporation (ZNBC) in portraying people living with visual impairments and examines the broader implications of such portrayals on public attitudes, stigma reduction, and disability advocacy. The research was guided by three objectives: to evaluate the portrayal of people living with visual impairments in ZNBC's programmes; to analyze the effects ZNBC has in fostering positive attitudes toward people living with visual impairments; and to investigate the effectiveness of ZNBC's disability-related content on advocacy efforts in Lusaka. The study employed a mixed-methods approach, combining both quantitative and qualitative techniques. Questionnaires were administered to twenty respondents living with visual impairments, while interviews were conducted with twenty ZNBC staff members and ten representatives from the Zambia Federation of the Disabled (ZAFOD). Quantitative data from the questionnaires was analysed using SPSS and Microsoft Excel, while qualitative interview data was subjected to thematic analysis. Findings from both data sets were triangulated to provide comprehensive insights. The results revealed that ZNBC rarely and inconsistently portrays people with visual impairments, with depictions often cantered on dependency, charity, or victimhood rather than empowerment and professionalism. Positive portrayals exist but are sporadic and lack editorial policy guidance. The study further found that ZNBC programming has had minimal influence in reducing stigma or promoting positive attitudes toward people with visual impairments. Its advocacy role was also perceived as weak, largely due to limited collaboration with disability organizations and the absence of inclusive broadcasting features such as sign language interpretation, and audio description. The implications of these findings point to the urgent need for ZNBC to reform its approach to disability-related programming. By adopting clear editorial guidelines, strengthening collaboration with disability advocacy organizations, incorporating accessibility features, and deliberately portraying people with visual impairments in diverse and empowered roles, ZNBC can play a transformative role in promoting inclusion, reducing stigma, and advancing disability rights in Zambia.

Keywords: ZNBC, visual impairments, disability portrayal, media representation, advocacy, inclusion, stigma reduction.

1.0 Introduction
1.1 Background
Discrimination against people living with disabilities (PLWDs) remains a significant global challenge, particularly in low- and middle-income countries where stigma and inequitable systems persist. In Zambia, about 2.4% of the population has a disability, and individuals with visual impairments face some of the most severe barriers in accessing education, information, employment, and public services. Although Zambia has made progress through national legislation such as the Persons with Disabilities Act of 2012 and its commitment to the UNCRPD, gaps in implementation continue to limit full inclusion.

Media plays a critical agenda-setting role in shaping public attitudes toward disability. This study examines how the Zambia National Broadcasting Corporation (ZNBC), as the country's national broadcaster, influences perceptions of people with visual impairments in Lusaka. The agenda-setting

and framing theories emphasize that media coverage determines what audiences view as important and how issues are understood. Positive portrayals can challenge stereotypes and promote inclusion, while negative or absent representation can reinforce marginalization.

Despite its wide reach, ZNBC's effectiveness in promoting disability rights remains underexplored. Issues such as tokenism, stereotyping, inaccessible content, and limited participation of PLWDs in media decision-making have been documented in African contexts. In Zambia, challenges are compounded by resource constraints and insufficient training for journalists on disability-sensitive reporting.

Grounded in the social model of disability, this study evaluates how ZNBC's programming, editorial choices, and audience engagement contribute to reducing or perpetuating discrimination against people with visual impairments. The research aims to identify strengths, weaknesses, and opportunities to improve inclusive media practices, enhance public awareness, and support broader disability advocacy efforts. Ultimately, the study underscores the importance of deliberate, informed media strategies in advancing equality and dignity for visually impaired individuals in Zambia.

1.2 Statement of the Problem

People living with visual impairments in Zambia continue to experience widespread discrimination, despite progress in developing policies and laws intended to promote disability rights and inclusion. As a key national broadcaster, the Zambia National Broadcasting Corporation (ZNBC) has the potential to play a transformative role in challenging stigma, promoting disability awareness, and shaping positive public attitudes toward people with visual impairments. However, existing evidence suggests that this potential has not been fully realized.

Research indicates that the media often reinforces negative or stereotypical portrayals of persons with disabilities, framing them as objects of pity, charity, or inspiration rather than as individuals with equal rights and capabilities (Moges, 2018). For people with visual impairments, such portrayals are compounded by limitations in accessible content and a lack of authentic representation in mainstream media. Furthermore, the lived experiences and perspectives of visually impaired individuals are rarely integrated into media programming, weakening the media's capacity to promote meaningful advocacy and public understanding.

Studies also highlight that ZNBC faces constraints that limit its effectiveness in combating stigma, including inadequate journalist training in disability-sensitive reporting and insufficient institutional prioritization of disability-related issues (Kasonde, 2020). These challenges are further intensified by broader societal barriers, such as entrenched cultural beliefs and low public awareness of the rights of persons with visual impairments.

Given these gaps, it remained unclear how effectively ZNBC's media platforms were contributing to efforts to curb discrimination against visually impaired individuals in Lusaka. There was therefore a critical need to assess the extent to which ZNBC's programming, editorial practices, and disability-related content promote inclusion and challenge societal stigma. This study evaluated the effectiveness of ZNBC's media channels in reducing discrimination against people living with visual impairments and to provide recommendations for strengthening media representation and supporting national disability inclusion goals.

1.3 Objectives
1.3.1 General Objectives
To assess the effectiveness of ZNBC's programmes and news coverage in addressing discrimination against people living with visual impairments.

1.3.2 Specific Objectives
1. To evaluate the portrayal of people living with visual impairments in ZNBC's Programmes.
2. To analyze the effects ZNBC has in fostering positive attitudes toward people living with visual impairments.
3. To investigate the effectiveness of ZNBC's disability-related content on advocacy efforts, in Lusaka.

1.4 Research Questions
1. How are people living with visual impairments portrayed in ZNBC's programmes coverage?
2. What effect does ZNBC have in fostering positive attitudes toward people living with visual impairments.
3. What is the effectiveness of ZNBC's disability-related content on advocacy efforts, policy in Lusaka?

1.5 Theratical Frame-Work
This study was grounded in the Social Model of Disability, Agenda Setting Theory, and Framing Theory. Together, these frameworks provided essential insights into the role of the media in addressing discrimination against people living with visual impairments. They supported an in-depth analysis of how ZNBC's programming influenced societal attitudes and promoted inclusion in Lusaka.

The Social Model of Disability, introduced by Michael Oliver (1996), shifted the focus from the individual's impairment to the societal barriers that limited participation. These barriers included physical, attitudinal, and institutional constraints. In the case of people with visual impairments, such barriers manifested through inaccessible media content, exclusion from public discourse, and persistent stigma. The model emphasized that disability resulted from society's failure to accommodate difference rather than from the impairment itself. This perspective aligned with the study's objective of evaluating how ZNBC contributed to reducing discrimination through inclusive media practices.

Framing Theory, developed by Goffman (1974) and later expanded by Entman (1993), explained how media influenced public understanding by highlighting certain aspects of an issue while downplaying others. The way disability was framed shaped whether people with visual impairments were perceived as capable and equal or as dependent and marginalized. Positive frames promoted empowerment and inclusion, while negative ones reinforced exclusion and stigma. This study analyzed how ZNBC framed visual impairment in its programmes, focusing on the language, visuals, and themes that were employed.

Agenda Setting Theory, formulated by McCombs and Shaw (1972), proposed that the media influenced what the public considered important by selecting which topics to highlight. This theory was particularly relevant in assessing whether ZNBC gave priority to disability-related issues and how often visual impairment was covered in its content. The frequency and depth of such coverage played a significant role in shaping public awareness and attitudes.

Taken together, the Social Model of Disability, Framing Theory, and Agenda Setting Theory offered a strong foundation for understanding how ZNBC addressed discrimination against people with visual impairments. These theories guided the evaluation of representation, issue visibility, and the potential for societal change through inclusive media, thereby identifying areas for improvement and informing strategies for more impactful programming.

2.0 Literature Review

2.1 Evaluating the Portrayal of People Living With Visual Impairments: A Global, Regional, and Zambian Review

The portrayal of people living with disabilities (PLWDs) in media continues to attract significant scholarly attention because of the media's profound influence on shaping public attitudes, informing policy debates, and promoting social inclusion. Research across different regions consistently highlights recurring patterns such as stereotyping, tokenism, underrepresentation, and biased framing, all of which influence the perceptions of disability within society. This literature review synthesises findings from global, Asian, African, and Zambian studies, demonstrating how portrayals of people with visual impairments remain limited, inaccurate, or overly simplistic despite growing awareness and legislative progress.

Globally, researchers have documented persistent shortcomings in disability representation. In the United Kingdom, Shakespeare and Watson (2002) conducted a qualitative content analysis of 200 television programmes and found that portrayals often relied on pity-based or "supercrip" narratives that present PLWDs as either helpless or extraordinarily heroic. These narrow depictions fail to capture the everyday realities of PLWDs and reinforce societal biases. The authors argued that authentic and humanising narratives could counter stereotypes and contribute to greater inclusivity. Similarly, Ellis et al. (2016) examined 1,000 American news articles alongside audience surveys and revealed that disability framing was dominated by medical and charitable perspectives rather than rights-based narratives. This imbalance contributed to maintaining stereotypes and undermining disability advocacy efforts. Haller and Ralph (2001), analyzing 3,000 U.S. newspaper articles, reported severe underrepresentation, with PLWDs appearing in only 1% of stories, often as burdens or subjects of charity. These findings show that despite differences in context, media industries in Western countries have struggled to incorporate accurate, empowering portrayals of disability.

In Australia, Briant et al. (2011) conducted a ten-year longitudinal study of 1,500 articles and found that although representation increased slightly, narratives continued to emphasise limitations and dependency. These researchers recommended greater collaboration between media practitioners and disability rights groups to improve representation.

Asian studies reveal similar challenges shaped by cultural norms, developmental differences, and historical framings of disability. In South Korea, Kim and Lee (2019) used a mixed methods design to analyse 50 dramas and survey viewers. They found overwhelmingly negative portrayals depicting visually impaired individuals as dependent or victimised. Likewise, Sharma (2018), analysing 300 Indian television advertisements, found only 2% included PLWDs, and when present, their portrayal tended toward superficial inclusion or tokenism. Japanese scholars such as Yamamoto (2015) noted

that documentaries relied heavily on medical framings, focusing on impairments rather than rights or everyday experiences. Studies from Malaysia (Zainal & Ibrahim, 2020) and China (Wang et al., 2016) echoed this pattern, emphasising the absence of empowerment narratives and calling for disability advocates' involvement in production.

African research between 2015 and 2025 presents a picture influenced by cultural perceptions, economic constraints, and evolving legislative landscapes. Studies from Kenya, Ethiopia, Ghana, Nigeria, and South Africa reveal frequent use of charity-based narratives that reinforce dependency instead of empowerment. Moges (2018), for example, found that Ethiopian television relied heavily on pity framing, while Nkatha and Kilonzo (2021) reported that PLWDs featured in less than 1% of Kenyan news articles. South African studies indicate progress in representation but note the persistence of the "supercrip" trope. Researchers argue that the absence of PLWDs in production roles, combined with limited training and inadequate institutional support, restricts meaningful and diverse representation across the continent.

Zambian literature produced during this period reflects these broader patterns while highlighting contextual challenges specific to local media institutions. Banda and Chansa (2021), through qualitative content analysis of ZNBC disability programmes and interviews with media professionals, found that portrayals overwhelmingly emphasised hardship and dependency. Empowering stories or rights-based approaches were rare, and visually impaired individuals seldom appeared in roles that depicted agency or leadership. Similar concerns emerged in studies by Kangwa (2020) on television advertising, which revealed that only 3% of Zambian advertisements included PLWDs, often reinforcing stereotypes. Research by Mumba (2019) and Simukonda (2018) further demonstrated limited disability-focused coverage in community radio and print media, respectively, largely due to lack of training and exclusion of PLWDs from production processes.

Audience-based research, such as the survey conducted by Kalunga (2021) involving 200 Zambian viewers, shows that public dissatisfaction with disability portrayal is widespread. Respondents noted that ZNBC programming frequently highlights challenges rather than successes, framing disability through narrow and repetitive narratives that fail to reflect the diversity of real-life experiences. The lack of consistent inclusion across genres reduces the visibility and perceived legitimacy of visually impaired individuals in mainstream Zambian society.

Recent Zambian research (2018–2025) suggests slight improvements influenced by advocacy efforts and collaborations with NGOs, yet these remain inconsistent. Scholars argue that the limited presence of visually impaired professionals in ZNBC production rooms perpetuates representational gaps. Editorial decisions continue to rely on dramatic visuals, sentimental narration, and deficit-focused storytelling, which shape public attitudes toward disability in negative or paternalistic ways.

2.2 Analyzing the Effects of Media in Fostering Positive Attitudes toward People Living With Visual Impairments

The literature consistently shows that media representations of people living with disabilities, including those with visual impairments, are shaped by stereotypes, underrepresentation, and deficit-based framing. Studies across Europe, North America, Asia, Africa, and Zambia reveal that while visibility

has slightly increased, portrayals remain largely limited by narratives that position persons with disabilities as victims, dependents, or inspirational figures. Global research demonstrates that television and news media continue to rely on the medical and charity models of disability, emphasising impairment and hardship over agency, rights, and everyday experiences. Scholars such as Shakespeare and Watson, Ellis *et al.*, and Haller and Ralph highlight how Western media often reinforce stereotypes through selective framing, tokenism, and shallow storytelling, which in turn shape public attitudes and limit inclusive policy development.

Studies in Asia and the Pacific show similar trends, with underrepresentation, victimhood narratives, and limited empowerment perspectives dominating television dramas, advertisements, and documentaries. Researchers argue that these portrayals neglect diverse identities and fail to challenge cultural prejudices. Findings from South Korea, India, Japan, Malaysia, and China indicate the need for rights-based storytelling and stronger involvement of persons with disabilities in media production to enhance narrative authenticity.

African research conducted between 2015 and 2025 reveals that portrayals are deeply influenced by cultural beliefs, resource limitations, and insufficient journalist training. Studies from South Africa, Kenya, Ghana, Ethiopia, and Nigeria show persistent charity-oriented framing and minimal inclusion of persons with visual impairments in mainstream programming. African broadcasters frequently present disability as a social burden, and editorial decisions are mostly made by non-disabled producers, perpetuating representational gaps.

Zambian scholarship echoes these concerns. Research indicates that ZNBC and other media outlets rarely feature people with visual impairments in ordinary programming, confining disability content to special segments that emphasise hardship rather than empowerment. Studies reveal that narratives often rely on emotional appeal, lack depth, and exclude visually impaired individuals from the production process. Although some progress is noted through advocacy partnerships and increasing awareness, improvements remain inconsistent and unsystematic. Zambian researchers emphasize that meaningful representation requires structural reforms, better journalist training, inclusion of visually impaired content creators, and more rights-focused storytelling. Overall, the literature concludes that despite policy advances, media portrayals of people living with visual impairments remain limited, stereotypical, and largely shaped by non-disabled perspectives. Scholars agree that genuine inclusivity in broadcasting can only be achieved through narrative integrity, institutional commitment, and the active participation of people with visual impairments in shaping their own stories.

2.3 Effectiveness of Media Disability-Related Content on Advocacy Efforts

This thematic area investigates the effectiveness of ZNBC's disability-related programming in advancing advocacy efforts, influencing policy development, and promoting social inclusivity in Lusaka. It draws from global, African, and Zambian literature to evaluate how disability-focused media contributes to public awareness, rights-based advocacy, and systemic change. Collectively, the reviewed studies show that media has significant potential to support disability rights, but effectiveness remains uneven due to inconsistent coverage, superficial narratives, and weak collaboration with disability

organisations. Globally, media advocacy campaigns have shown mixed but gradually improving outcomes. Studies in the United States, United Kingdom, Canada, Australia, and Japan reveal that disability campaigns successfully raise awareness and sometimes shift public perceptions, but rarely translate into direct policy reform. Research by Haller *et al.*, Goggin and Newell, Briant *et al.*, and Yamamoto shows that campaigns are most impactful when grounded in strategic storytelling, rights-based framing, and partnerships with disability groups. Campaigns that rely on charity or pity-based framing, however, often reinforce stereotypes and work against advocacy goals. Asian studies in India, China, Malaysia, South Korea, and Japan further highlight that while inclusive representation fosters modest improvements in public attitudes, inconsistent messaging and weak audience engagement limit long-term influence.

African studies reflect similar inconsistencies. Research from South Africa, Kenya, Nigeria, Ethiopia, Malawi, Uganda, Tanzania, Ghana, and Zimbabwe shows that disability-related content has the capacity to stimulate debate and mobilise communities, especially when addressing structural barriers or discriminatory practices. However, most studies report that content lacks depth, relies on charity narratives, and fails to challenge entrenched cultural attitudes. Weak follow-up mechanisms, minimal stakeholder engagement, and limited journalist training further constrain advocacy impact.

Zambian literature provides a clearer picture of ZNBC's pivotal but underutilised role. Studies by Banda and Chansa, Kalunga, Mwamba, Simukonda, and Mumba acknowledge ZNBC's capacity to shape national discourse due to its audience reach and public mandate. When ZNBC features rights-based content such as stories on accessibility challenges, discrimination, or the lived realities of visually impaired individuals-advocacy organisations observe increased public engagement, stronger social media discussions, and heightened pressure on policymakers. Disability groups in Lusaka confirm that ZNBC can amplify advocacy when coverage is accurate, consistent, and linked to policy issues.

Despite this potential, ZNBC's effectiveness remains limited by sporadic coverage, charity-driven framing, and a lack of collaboration with disability organisations. Local studies note that disability content is often confined to awareness days, lacks depth, and rarely connects individual experiences to structural inequalities. This weakens advocacy efforts by encouraging sympathy instead of systemic reform. The absence of disabled content creators within ZNBC further restricts authentic storytelling.

Across all contexts international, regional, and local the literature agrees that the effectiveness of disability-related media in supporting advocacy depends on four factors: consistency of coverage, depth and accuracy of information, narrative framing rooted in rights-based approaches, and meaningful participation of people with disabilities in content creation. The reviewed studies affirm that while ZNBC has significant potential to drive disability advocacy in Lusaka, realising this requires editorial reform, stronger partnerships with advocacy groups, and more inclusive production practices.

3.0 Research Methodology

The research adopted a **mixed-methods design**, combining qualitative and quantitative approaches to provide a comprehensive understanding of how ZNBC portrays people with visual impairments and how such portrayals influence

advocacy, public attitudes, and inclusivity. The mixed-methods strategy enabled the integration of statistical data with detailed personal experiences, while the descriptive research design supported the systematic examination of existing trends and behaviours.

The target population consisted of three key groups in Lusaka: ZNBC staff involved in content production; people living with visual impairments; and staff from the Zambia Federation of Disability Organisations (ZAFOD). These groups were selected to capture perspectives from media producers, affected audiences, and disability advocacy specialists.

A combined sampling design incorporating purposive, expert, and snowball sampling was employed. Twenty PLWDs formed the quantitative sample, while thirty participants twenty ZNBC staff and ten ZAFOD officials participated in the qualitative component. Although the Taro Yamane formula recommended 23 PLWD respondents, only 20 consented, which still provided sufficient data given the small and hard-to-reach nature of the population. In total, This brought the total sample size to 50 participants, a number considered sufficient for data saturation and meaningful statistical and thematic analysis. Although the Taro Yamane formula recommended 23 PLWVI for quantitative analysis, only 20 consented, and this was deemed adequate given the small accessible population.

Data was collected using structured questionnaires, in-depth interviews, observations, and secondary document analysis. Questionnaires produced quantifiable data, while interviews provided deeper insights into editorial practices and advocacy issues. Observations and media content analysis enriched the study by examining how disability issues were framed in ZNBC programming. Multiple sources ensured comprehensive coverage of the topic.

Data analysis followed both quantitative and qualitative procedures. Descriptive statistics and inferential tests were conducted using SPSS and Excel for the quantitative data. Qualitative data, including interview transcripts and media content, was analysed thematically using coding and categorisation. The study also applied triangulation to validate findings through the convergence of multiple data sources and analytical methods.

The chapter also acknowledges several limitations, including the small number of PLWD respondents, restricted access to ZNBC archives, the single-institution focus, and reliance on self-reported data. Nevertheless, triangulation and methodological rigor helped minimise the impact of these constraints.

Finally, the study adhered to strict ethical considerations, including informed consent, confidentiality, voluntary participation, anonymity, secure data handling, and institutional ethical approval. These measures ensured that the research upheld integrity, respect, and accountability throughout its implementation.

4.0 Results/Findings
4.1 Presentation of Research Findings

Table 1: Presentation of Results on Background Characteristics of Respondents

Gender	Number of respondents (n)	% of 20
Male	12	60%
Female	8	40%
Total	20	100%

Source: Primary data 2025

The gender distribution shows that 60% of respondents were male while 40% were female. This indicates a slight male dominance in the sample, which may reflect existing gender dynamics in terms of visibility, mobility, or willingness to participate in research. Nonetheless, the presence of 40% females ensures that women's voices and perspectives were captured, making the findings reflective of both genders. The difference may also point to barriers faced by women with visual impairments, such as cultural limitations or household responsibilities, which could restrict their engagement with media and research.
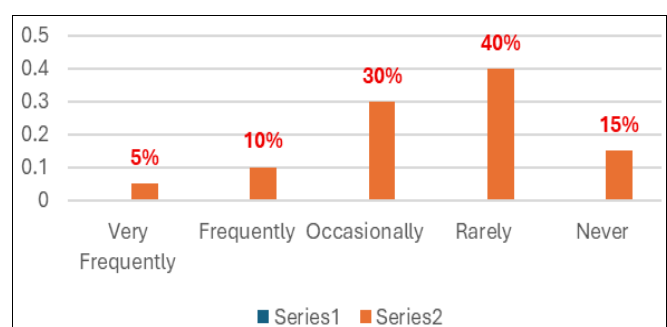
Table 2: Highest Level of Education Attained by Respondents

Education Level	Number of respondents (n)	% of 20
No formal education	3	15%
Primary	5	25%
Secondary	8	40%
Tertiary	4	20%
Total	20	100%

Source: Primary data 2025

The findings reveal that educational attainment among respondents varied, though most had some level of formal schooling. The largest proportion (40%) had reached secondary school, which shows that many people with visual impairments manage to progress beyond basic education despite existing barriers. A smaller but important segment (20%) had attained tertiary education, highlighting that access to higher learning is possible, though still limited. A quarter of respondents (25%) had only completed primary school, which suggests that challenges in continuing education remain significant. The 15% with no formal education at all highlight the most vulnerable group, excluded entirely from mainstream education, possibly due to inadequate support systems or lack of inclusive learning environments. The distribution reflects both progress and persistent inequalities in educational access for persons with visual impairments.

4.1.2 Presentation of Results Based on Thematic area developed from evaluating the portrayal of people living with visual impairments.
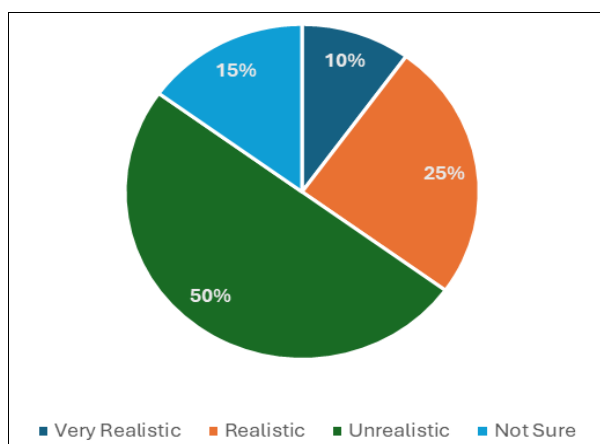

Source: Primary data 2025

Fig 1: Frequency of Featuring People with Visual Impairments in ZNBC Programmes

The responses show that portrayals of people with visual impairments on ZNBC are perceived as minimal. Only 1 respondent (5%) felt that people with visual impairments are featured very frequently, while 2 respondents (10%) described the frequency as simply frequent. This makes up just 15% who viewed the broadcaster as giving fairly regular attention to disability representation. The largest proportion, 8 respondents (40%), stated that people with visual impairments are rarely featured, while 6 respondents (30%) described the

coverage as occasional. Taken together, 70% of respondents believed that representation is inconsistent and infrequent. Additionally, 3 respondents (15%) reported that ZNBC never features people with visual impairments, which suggests that some audiences do not notice any visibility of disability issues at all. This distribution indicates that although disability is occasionally represented on ZNBC, it is neither systematic nor prominent.
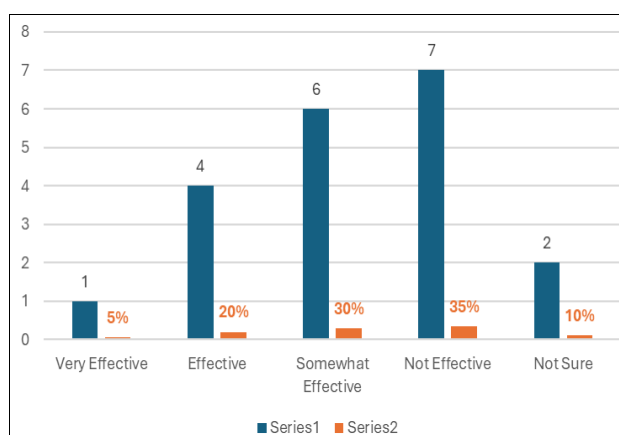

Source: Primary data 2025

Fig 2: Realism of ZNBC's Portrayals of People with Visual Impairments

Half of the respondents (50%) considered ZNBC's portrayals of people with visual impairments as unrealistic, which suggests that audiences feel the broadcaster does not adequately reflect real-life experiences of disability. Five respondents (25%) said the portrayals are realistic, while two respondents (10%) considered them very realistic, meaning that 35% overall believed ZNBC sometimes gets it right. However, 3 respondents (15%) were unsure, which could point to either lack of exposure to such portrayals or mixed feelings about how disability is presented. Overall, the data suggests that most portrayals fail to align with the lived realities of people with visual impairments.

4.1.3 Presentation of Results Based on thematic area developed from analyzing the effects of media in fostering positive attitudes toward people living with visual impairments.
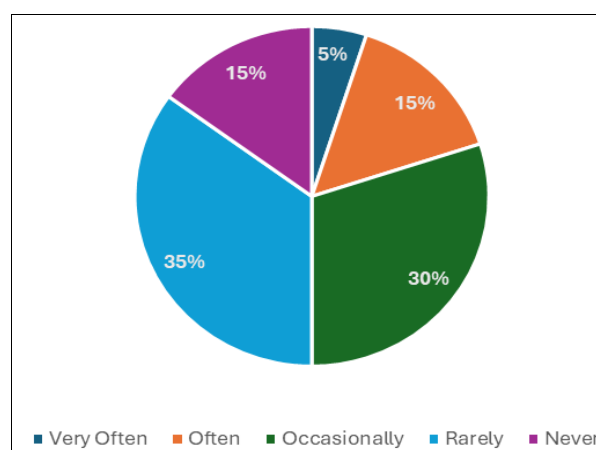

Source: Primary data 2025

Fig 3: Effectiveness of ZNBC in Promoting Positive Attitudes toward People with Visual Impairments

The responses indicate that ZNBC is generally perceived as weak in promoting positive attitudes toward people with

visual impairments. Only 1 respondent (5%) rated ZNBC as very effective, and 4 respondents (20%) said effective, meaning just a quarter of respondents saw the broadcaster in a positive light. Six respondents (30%) believed ZNBC was somewhat effective, suggesting partial but insufficient progress in fostering inclusion. A larger group, 7 respondents (35%), rated ZNBC as not effective, showing outright dissatisfaction with its role. Two respondents (10%) were not sure, possibly due to limited exposure or uncertainty about how much programming influences public opinion. Overall, the balance tilts toward negative assessments, with most respondents unconvinced of ZNBC's effectiveness in shaping attitudes.

Source: Primary data 2025

Fig 4: Frequency of Messages Challenging Stereotypes About Visual Impairments

Findings show that most respondents did not believe ZNBC frequently challenges stereotypes about visual impairments. Only 1 respondent (5%) said this happened very often, and 3 respondents (15%) said often, while 6 respondents (30%) indicated occasionally. Together, this means half of the sample acknowledged some effort by ZNBC to address stereotypes, though not consistently. On the other hand, 7 respondents (35%) said rarely and 3 respondents (15%) said never, meaning half of the respondents believed ZNBC either rarely or never addresses stereotypes. This balance demonstrates that efforts to challenge negative perceptions are sporadic, insufficient, and not embedded in regular programming.

4.1   Discussions of Research Findings
The study set out to investigate how the Zambia National Broadcasting Corporation (ZNBC) portrays people living with visual impairments, and the broader impact of such portrayals on public attitudes, stigma reduction, and disability advocacy. The results from both the quantitative (questionnaire) and qualitative (interviews) data reveal strong patterns of underrepresentation, stereotypical framing, and weak advocacy influence, despite some evidence of positive efforts. These findings closely mirror the conclusions of several studies reviewed in Chapter Two, both globally and regionally, which collectively highlight persistent issues of limited representation and charity-driven narratives within disability media portrayals.

Regarding representation and portrayal, the evidence consistently shows that people with visual impairments are rarely featured in ZNBC programming. Questionnaire results indicate that most respondents felt portrayals occur only occasionally or rarely, while a small minority said they never

occur at all. The interviews with ZNBC staff confirmed that disability-related content is mostly tied to commemorative events such as the International Day of Persons with Disabilities rather than being systematically integrated into programming. These findings align with international studies by Shakespeare and Watson (2002), Ellis *et al*. (2016), and Haller and Ralph (2001), who found that people living with disabilities are frequently underrepresented and often framed through dependency or charity-oriented narratives. Similarly, African and Zambian studies by Banda and Chansa (2021), Adomako (2017), and Moges (2018) highlighted that media portrayals tend to emphasize victimhood rather than empowerment.

Both ZAFOD staff and persons with visual impairments observed that when portrayals occur, they often emphasize dependency, charity, or victimhood. In contrast, portrayals that frame visually impaired persons as empowered, capable, or professional remain uncommon. This echoes the findings of Briant *et al*. (2011) in Australia and Sharma (2018) in India, who found that disability portrayals frequently reinforce deficit-focused images. The absence of editorial guidelines for disability coverage identified by ZNBC staff themselves also resonates with Nkatha and Kilonzo's (2021) Kenyan study, which emphasized the need for clear editorial policies to improve inclusion. Taken together, the findings suggest that ZNBC's portrayal of visual impairment is inconsistent and heavily shaped by charity-driven or inspirational narratives, which ultimately reinforce stereotypes rather than challenge them. The social model of disability, which underpins this research, posits that such portrayals perpetuate societal barriers by framing disability as personal tragedy instead of a social construct a view well reflected in ZNBC's content patterns.

The study also examined how these portrayals shape public attitudes and perceptions. The questionnaire revealed that most persons with visual impairments do not find ZNBC's portrayals realistic, with half describing them as unrealistic and only a minority finding them realistic or very realistic. Similarly, a large proportion rated ZNBC as only somewhat effective or not effective in promoting positive attitudes. These findings are consistent with Ellis and Goggin's (2016) and Briant *et al*.'s (2011) studies, which observed that when media emphasize medical or charitable frameworks, they fail to improve audience perceptions or challenge stigma. The interviews support this view: while some ZNBC staff described efforts to foster inclusion through documentaries or talk shows, they admitted that little systematic effort is made to monitor or measure audience impact.

ZAFOD staff were even more critical, stressing that ZNBC has had minimal influence in reducing stigma and often reinforces pity instead of empowerment. Respondents noted that disability stories are usually framed as human-interest features designed to evoke sympathy rather than as opportunities to build understanding of disability rights. This mirrors findings by Kim and Lee (2019) in South Korea and Yamamoto (2015) in Japan, who both concluded that charity-based narratives fail to encourage societal inclusion or policy engagement. The convergence of perspectives in this study makes it clear that ZNBC's programming has had limited influence on improving societal perceptions of people with visual impairments. The findings also reflect Kalunga's (2021) study of ZNBC audiences, which found that viewers were dissatisfied with shallow and repetitive disability narratives that emphasized hardship over success.

When considering ZNBC's effectiveness in disability advocacy, the findings reveal similar weaknesses. The majority of questionnaire respondents indicated that ZNBC has not influenced public policy or advocacy discussions, with another quarter uncertain about its impact. Only a small minority could identify instances where ZNBC programming contributed to raising awareness in policy forums. This corresponds with international evidence from Haller *et al*. (2010), Goggin and Newell (2005), and Briant *et al*. (2013), who all found that while disability coverage may raise awareness, its direct policy influence remains weak without sustained collaboration with advocacy groups. In the Zambian context, Banda and Chansa (2021) and Mumba (2019) reached similar conclusions, noting that ZNBC's disability programming contributes to visibility but fails to influence policy reform due to lack of strategic follow-up.

ZNBC staff acknowledged that while occasional collaborations with advocacy organizations such as ZAFOD exist, these are rare, ad-hoc, and not systematically institutionalized. ZAFOD staff were especially critical, arguing that ZNBC cannot be considered a reliable partner in advocacy. They pointed out that coverage seldom translates into sustained debate or legal reforms and highlighted the absence of inclusive broadcasting features such as sign language interpretation, or audio description. This aligns with the conclusions of Moges (2018) and Nkatha and Kilonzo (2020), who found that weak partnerships between media houses and disability organizations undermine advocacy outcomes. Questionnaire results reinforce this critique, with 85 percent of visually impaired respondents stating that ZNBC programming is not inclusive to viewers with disabilities. Both ZAFOD and PLWVI respondents rated ZNBC's overall role in advocacy as low to moderate, indicating a perception that the broadcaster has not lived up to its responsibility in shaping disability rights discourse.

The challenges underlying these findings reflect both structural and cultural barriers within ZNBC. Staff highlighted resource constraints, limited training, and competing editorial priorities as reasons why disability content remains marginal. News and entertainment were said to take precedence over disability coverage, which is often sidelined. These explanations parallel findings by Mumba (2019) and Simukonda (2018), who also cited lack of training, limited resources, and weak institutional support as major hindrances to inclusive media in Zambia. ZAFOD staff, however, insisted that the problem goes beyond resources, pointing instead to entrenched stereotypes and a lack of institutional commitment within the newsroom culture. The persistence of charity-driven or victimhood narratives reflects not only the absence of training but also the influence of long-standing social attitudes toward disability an issue documented in studies such as Adomako (2017) in Ghana and Banda *et al*. (2020) in South Africa.

Despite these challenges, the findings point to a shared recognition across groups of what needs to change. Respondents from ZNBC, ZAFOD, and the visually impaired community consistently recommended improvements such as incorporating inclusive features like sign language, and audio description to make content accessible. They also highlighted the need for stronger collaboration between ZNBC and disability organizations to ensure that programming reflects authentic experiences rather than external assumptions. Many argued that visually impaired persons should be featured in diverse roles, including as professionals, leaders, and experts, to counter stereotypes of dependency.

This echoes recommendations by Briant *et al.* (2011), Banda and Chansa (2021), and Mwamba *et al.* (2020), who all emphasized media collaboration, training, and the inclusion of PLWDs in content creation as key to transforming portrayals. Training of journalists in disability awareness and inclusive reporting was also identified as a critical step toward institutionalizing balanced coverage a reform consistent with the media responsibility framework discussed in Chapter Two.

Overall, the findings present a consistent picture of limited, stereotypical, and sporadic portrayals of people with visual impairments within ZNBC programming. Such portrayals have had little impact on reducing stigma, promoting positive attitudes, or influencing advocacy. While resource and training constraints are part of the challenge, the evidence suggests that entrenched editorial practices and weak institutional commitment play an equally significant role. These conclusions align with the social model of disability, which underscores that societal and institutional barriers rather than individual impairments are the true causes of exclusion. To move forward, ZNBC must go beyond tokenistic coverage and develop a deliberate strategy that embeds disability inclusion into both content and practice. This includes not only technical accessibility but also meaningful representation of visually impaired persons as empowered actors in Zambian society a direction supported by the global and local literature on inclusive media and advocacy.

Conclusion

From the analysis of both questionnaire and interview data, it is clear that ZNBC has not met the expectations of persons with visual impairments, advocacy groups, or its own staff when it comes to disability representation. The portrayals that dominate programming continue to reflect outdated and limiting narratives that position the visually impaired as dependent or pitiable rather than capable contributors to society. This framing has limited effect on reducing stigma, as most respondents felt that ZNBC content has done little to change attitudes or increase understanding of disability rights. In terms of advocacy, ZNBC has not played a significant role in shaping policy or legal reforms, nor has it consistently partnered with organizations such as ZAFOD to strengthen its programming. The absence of inclusive production features such as audio descriptions, clear narration, and screen reader–compatible content has further alienated audiences with visual impairments, reinforcing exclusion rather than promoting participation. While resource and training constraints were frequently cited by ZNBC staff, advocacy groups pointed to deeper cultural and institutional barriers, including the persistence of stereotypes and the lack of editorial commitment to disability issues. In sum, the study concludes that ZNBC has not sufficiently advanced the representation, inclusion, or advocacy needs of people with visual impairments, though it remains an institution with the potential to transform this narrative if meaningful reforms are adopted.

Recommendations
The fin#dings of this Study Highlight the Urgent Need for ZNBC to Consider the Following
Strengthen its role in disability representation and advocacy through deliberate institutional change. First, programming must become inclusive by design, incorporating features such as sign language interpretation, and audio description to ensure accessibility for audiences with different needs. This is not only a technical adjustment but also a recognition of disability rights as part of mainstream broadcasting.

Equally important is the development and enforcement of editorial guidelines that establish clear standards for how persons with disabilities should be portrayed, ensuring that coverage is accurate, respectful, and free from stereotypes. Training and capacity-building initiatives for journalists and producers are also essential, equipping them with the knowledge and skills required to cover disability issues in a balanced and empowering way. Beyond internal reforms, ZNBC must cultivate sustained partnerships with disability advocacy organizations such as ZAFOD, involving them in content development and ensuring that the voices of persons with disabilities are not only represented but also actively shape programming.

The portrayal of people with visual impairments should extend beyond charity and hardship narratives to highlight them as professionals, leaders, and active participants in society. Furthermore, ZNBC should institutionalise disability-related programming by allocating regular slots and integrating disability issues into mainstream content, rather than confining them to commemorative events.

Finally, the broadcaster should establish mechanisms for monitoring and evaluating the societal impact of its disability-related content, particularly through feedback from persons with disabilities and advocacy groups. By pursuing these reforms, ZNBC has the opportunity to reposition itself as a national platform that genuinely promotes inclusion, challenges stigma, and advances the rights of people with visual impairments in Zambia.

Finally, the study identifies the need for further research to deepen understanding of disability representation and advocacy in the Zambian media landscape. Firstly, future studies could explore audience perceptions of disability portrayals across multiple media platforms including radio, online, and social media to determine whether newer media environments foster more inclusive narratives than traditional broadcasting. Secondly, comparative studies between ZNBC and other regional public broadcasters, such as those in South Africa, Kenya, or Ghana, could be undertaken to examine how institutional frameworks, cultural contexts, and media policies influence disability representation and advocacy effectiveness. Such studies would build on the current research and provide broader insights into how media institutions in Africa can better promote inclusion, accessibility, and equal representation for people with disabilities.

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