Zambia Federation of Disability Organisations (ZAFOD)

GUIDELINES FOR DISABILITY INCLUSION —IN ELECTORAL PROCESSES— IN ZAMBIA

Summarised Version



Prepared for:
The Zambia Federation of Disability Organisations (ZAFOD)

Supported By:
International Foundation For Electoral Systems (IFES)

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August 2026

Lusaka, Zambia.

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This publication was developed with technical support from the **International Foundation for Electoral Systems (IFES)** to promote disability-inclusive electoral processes in Zambia.

The contents of this publication are intended to provide practical guidance to electoral stakeholders and do not replace the Constitution of Zambia, the Electoral Process Act, the Persons with Disabilities Act or any other applicable law. Where inconsistencies arise, the applicable law shall prevail.

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FOREWORD

Zambia Federation of Disability Organisations (ZAFOD)

Free, fair, credible and inclusive elections are the cornerstone of every democratic society. The right to vote, to be elected and to participate in public affairs is guaranteed under the Constitution of Zambia and is further reinforced through the Persons with Disabilities Act, Zambia's commitments under international and regional human rights instruments, and recent legislative reforms aimed at strengthening democratic participation.

Persons with disabilities constitute an important segment of Zambia's population and make valuable contributions to the country's political, economic and social development. Despite notable progress in the legal recognition of their rights, many continue to encounter barriers that limit their effective participation in electoral processes. These barriers may be physical, communication-related, institutional, technological or attitudinal, and they undermine the principle that every eligible citizen should be able to participate equally in democratic governance.

The enactment of the Constitution of Zambia (Amendment) Act No. 13 of 2025 and the Electoral Process (Amendment) Act No. 12 of 2026 marks a significant milestone in Zambia's journey towards strengthening the political rights of persons with disabilities. These reforms demonstrate the Government's commitment to advancing inclusive democracy and provide an enhanced legal foundation for disability-inclusive elections. They also reaffirm Zambia's commitment to implementing the principles contained in the United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities and other regional and international human rights instruments.

While these legislative developments deserve commendation, legislation alone cannot eliminate barriers to participation. Achieving genuine inclusion requires practical implementation measures, institutional commitment,

adequate resources and continuous engagement with Organisations of Persons with Disabilities (OPDs). These Guidelines have therefore been developed to bridge the gap between legal obligations and day-to-day electoral practice by providing practical standards and guidance for the Electoral Commission of Zambia, political parties, government institutions, election officials, civil society organisations, development partners and other stakeholders.

The Guidelines promote a human rights-based approach to electoral management founded on equality, dignity, accessibility, universal design, reasonable accommodation and meaningful participation. They seek to ensure that disability inclusion is integrated throughout the electoral cycle — from strategic planning and voter registration to polling, counting, announcement of results and post-election evaluation.

ZAFOD expresses its sincere appreciation to the International Foundation for Electoral Systems (IFES) for its continued technical and financial support towards strengthening disability-inclusive democratic governance in Zambia. We also acknowledge the Electoral Commission of Zambia, Organisations of Persons with Disabilities, government institutions, civil society organisations, political parties and all stakeholders whose experiences and expertise informed the development of these Guidelines.

It is our hope that this publication will serve as a practical reference document and contribute to the continued advancement of inclusive, accessible and participatory elections in Zambia.



Mr. Justin Bakali – Federal Director
Zambia Federation of Disability Organisations (ZAFOD)

DISCLAIMER

The views expressed in these Guidelines are intended solely to promote disability-inclusive electoral processes and should not be interpreted as legal advice or official policy unless formally adopted by the Electoral Commission of Zambia or another competent authority.

ACRONYMS AND ABBREVIATIONS

Acronym	Meaning
AU	African Union
CRPD	Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities
ECZ	Electoral Commission of Zambia
ICCPR	International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights
ICT	Information and Communication Technology
IDEA	International Institute for Democracy and Electoral Assistance
IFES	International Foundation for Electoral Systems
OPD	Organisation of Persons with Disabilities
SADC	Southern African Development Community
UDHR	Universal Declaration of Human Rights
UN	United Nations
ZAFOD	Zambia Federation of Disability Organisations
ZAPD	Zambia Agency for Persons with Disabilities
ZSL	Zambian Sign Language

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DEFINITIONS OF KEY TERMS

For the purposes of these Guidelines:

Accessibility means the design of programmes, environments, services, information, communications and electoral processes so that they can be accessed, understood and used by persons with disabilities on an equal basis with others.

Disability has the meaning assigned under the Persons with Disabilities Act No. 6 of 2012 and includes long-term physical, mental, intellectual or sensory impairments, which, in interaction with various barriers, may hinder full and effective participation in society on an equal basis with others.

Persons with Disabilities include those who have physical, mental, psycho-social, intellectual, neurological, developmental or other sensory impairments which, in interaction with environmental, attitudinal or other barriers, hinder their full and effective participation in society on an equal basis with others.

Electoral Cycle means all activities undertaken before, during and after an election, including planning, voter registration, civic and voter education, candidate nomination, campaigning, polling, counting, declaration of results, dispute resolution and post-election evaluation.

Organisation of Persons with Disabilities (OPD) means an organisation established, governed, directed and led by persons with disabilities to represent and advance their rights and interests, as well as Organisations established primarily by persons who provide disability-related services.

Reasonable Accommodation means necessary and appropriate modifications and adjustments, including the provision of assistive

technologies and support where required in an individual case, that do not impose a disproportionate or undue burden and that enable persons with disabilities to enjoy or exercise their electoral rights on an equal basis with others.

Universal Design means the design of products, environments, programmes and services to be usable by all people, to the greatest extent possible, without the need for adaptation or specialized design.

Disability Inclusion means the meaningful participation of persons with disabilities in all aspects of electoral processes through the removal of barriers and the provision of appropriate accessibility measures and reasonable accommodation.

Participation means the active, informed and influential involvement of persons with disabilities and OPDs in electoral activities and decision-making. Participation shall be assessed by the nature, stage, frequency, accessibility and outcomes of involvement, and not solely by attendance or headcount.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Inclusive elections are fundamental to democratic governance and the protection of human rights. Every eligible citizen, including every person with a disability, has the right to participate in political and public affairs without discrimination. While Zambia has established a progressive constitutional, legislative and policy framework supporting the rights of persons with disabilities, practical barriers continue to limit their full and effective participation in electoral processes.

These Executive Guidelines provide a concise national framework for promoting disability inclusion throughout the electoral cycle. They are intended to support the Electoral Commission of Zambia (ECZ), the Zambia Agency for Persons with Disabilities (ZAPD), political parties, Organisations of Persons with Disabilities (OPDs), civil society organisations, election observers, the general public, media institutions, development partners and other stakeholders in implementing accessible and inclusive electoral processes and advocating for the removal of attitudinal and other barriers.

The Guidelines are anchored in the Constitution of Zambia, the Persons with Disabilities Act No. 6 of 2012, the Electoral Process Act, the Constitution of Zambia (Amendment) Act No. 13 of 2025, the Electoral Process (Amendment) Act No. 12 of 2026, and Zambia's regional and international human rights obligations, including the United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (UNCRPD).

The Guidelines promote disability inclusion across every stage of the electoral cycle, including electoral planning, voter registration, civic and voter education, political participation, candidate nomination, election campaigning, polling, vote counting, electoral justice and post-election evaluation. They establish minimum standards for accessibility, universal design, reasonable accommodation, accessible communication, institutional accountability and stakeholder collaboration.

Successful implementation requires coordinated action by the Electoral Commission of Zambia, other Government institutions, political parties, Organisations of Persons with Disabilities, civil society organisations, the general public, media institutions and development partners. Continuous monitoring, review at least annually and comprehensively after each general election, and stakeholder engagement will be essential to ensuring that electoral processes become progressively more accessible and inclusive.

By implementing these Guidelines, Zambia will strengthen democratic participation, promote equality and dignity, and advance an electoral system in which every eligible citizen, including every person with a disability, can participate fully, effectively and on an equal basis with others.

PART I: INTRODUCTION, PURPOSE AND LEGAL FRAMEWORK

1.0 Introduction

These Executive Guidelines provide a practical framework for promoting disability-inclusive electoral processes in Zambia. They are intended to assist electoral stakeholders in implementing accessible, inclusive and non-discriminatory elections in accordance with national legislation and international human rights standards.

The Guidelines apply throughout the electoral cycle and are intended for use by the Electoral Commission of Zambia (ECZ), Government institutions, political parties, Organisations of Persons with Disabilities (OPDs), election officials, election observers, the general public, civil society organisations, media institutions and development partners.

2.0 Purpose

The purpose of these Guidelines is to:

- promote equal participation of persons with disabilities in all electoral processes;
- establish minimum standards for electoral accessibility;
- support the implementation of Zambia's constitutional and legal obligations;
- strengthen institutional capacity for disability-inclusive elections;
- improve stakeholder coordination; and
- provide practical guidance for implementing accessibility measures throughout the electoral cycle.

3.0 Legal and Policy Framework

These Guidelines are informed by:

- Constitution of Zambia;
- Constitution of Zambia (Amendment) Act No. 13 of 2025;
- Persons with Disabilities Act No. 6 of 2012;
- Electoral Process Act;
- Electoral Process (Amendment) Act No. 12 of 2026;
- United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (UNCRPD);
- International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR);
- African Charter on Human and Peoples' Rights;
- African Charter on Democracy, Elections and Governance;
- SADC Principles and Guidelines Governing Democratic Elections.

These legal instruments affirm that persons with disabilities have the right to participate fully and effectively in political and public life without discrimination.

Disability rights and electoral accessibility are binding obligations, not optional measures. Where constitutional or statutory provisions use discretionary wording for measures intended to protect disability rights, Government, Parliament and responsible institutions should review that wording and, where appropriate, replace terms such as 'may' with clear mandatory duties. Any future introduction of electronic voting would require prior enabling legal reform and full accessibility, security, privacy, auditability and consultation safeguards.

PART II: GUIDING PRINCIPLES

All electoral stakeholders shall implement these Guidelines in accordance with the following principles:

Equality and Non-Discrimination

No eligible citizen shall be denied participation in any electoral activity on the basis of disability.

Accessibility

Electoral infrastructure, information, communication and services shall be accessible to persons with disabilities.

Universal Design

Electoral facilities, technologies, programmes and systems should be designed to be usable by the widest range of people without requiring adaptation or specialised design wherever possible.

Reasonable Accommodation

Necessary modifications shall be provided to ensure equal participation by persons with disabilities, without imposing disproportionate or undue burdens.

Participation

Persons with disabilities and their representative organisations shall participate meaningfully at every stage of the electoral cycle, including planning, implementation, election-day monitoring and post-election evaluation, in accordance with the principle of "Nothing Without Us." Meaningful participation requires timely and accessible information, reasonable accommodation, an opportunity to influence decisions, and

documented feedback explaining how stakeholder contributions were considered.

Dignity and Independence

Persons with disabilities shall be recognised as equal citizens, treated with dignity and supported to exercise their electoral rights independently while maintaining the secrecy and integrity of the vote.

Transparency and Accountability

Electoral institutions shall implement these Guidelines in a transparent and accountable manner supported by effective monitoring and reporting.

PART III: MINIMUM STANDARDS FOR DISABILITY-INCLUSIVE ELECTIONS

4.0 Electoral Planning

The Electoral Commission of Zambia shall integrate disability inclusion into:

- strategic plans;
- operational plans;
- budgets;
- budget provision for personal assistants or support persons, including reasonable fees, transport, accommodation and other necessary costs, where required to enable participation;
- procurement;
- staff recruitment;
- infrastructure development;
- electoral manuals and applicable codes of conduct; and
- monitoring and evaluation.

Persons with disabilities and OPDs shall be engaged meaningfully at every stage of the electoral cycle, with accessible information, reasonable accommodation and documented responses to their recommendations.

5.0 Voter Registration

The ECZ shall ensure that:

- voter registration centres are physically accessible;
- registration information is available in accessible formats;
- recruitment and deployment processes promote the inclusion of qualified persons with disabilities among registration officials, and all registration officials receive disability inclusion training;
- reasonable accommodation is provided where necessary; and

- mobile registration is designed and implemented inclusively and reaches persons with disabilities and other underserved communities, particularly in rural and remote areas.

6.0 Civic and Voter Education

Electoral information shall be provided in accessible formats, including:

- Braille;
- large print;
- Easy-to-Read;
- audio;
- interpretation by qualified and accredited Zambian Sign Language interpreters;
- captioned audiovisual materials; and
- accessible digital platforms.

Voter education and sensitisation shall be continuous, targeted and accessible; cover electoral rights, procedures, available accommodations and complaints mechanisms; reach rural and underserved communities; and be planned, delivered and evaluated in partnership with OPDs, media institutions and civil society organisations.

7.0 Political Participation and Election Campaigns

Political parties shall promote the participation of persons with disabilities by:

- adopting disability-inclusive internal policies;
- ensuring inclusive and accessible nomination procedures;
- conducting accessible campaign meetings;
- encouraging persons with disabilities to contest elections; and
- promoting women and youth with disabilities in political leadership.

8.0 Accessible Polling and Voting

The ECZ shall ensure that polling stations are accessible by providing:

- accessible entrances and pathways;
- clear signage;
- adequate lighting;
- priority service where appropriate;
- accessible polling layouts;
- accessible voting information; and
- reasonable accommodation in accordance with the law, including budgeted provision for personal assistants or support persons where required and permitted.

Recruitment and deployment processes shall use lawful affirmative measures to promote the inclusion of qualified persons with disabilities among polling officials. Recruitment notices shall expressly encourage qualified persons with disabilities to apply, be issued in accessible formats and be widely disseminated through mainstream and OPD-supported channels. All polling officials shall receive mandatory disability inclusion training and shall treat every voter with dignity, respect and impartiality.

Assistance provided to voters with disabilities shall preserve the secrecy, independence and integrity of the vote.

9.0 Electoral Administration and Accessible Information

The Electoral Commission of Zambia shall mainstream disability inclusion by:

- adopting institutional accessibility policies;
- allocating adequate resources;
- integrating accessibility into procurement;

- training all relevant staff on disability inclusion, applying lawful affirmative measures and progressively working towards at least 10 per cent representation of qualified persons with disabilities among recruited and deployed electoral personnel, subject to applicable law, merit-based selection and the availability of qualified candidates;
- issuing all recruitment advertisements in accessible formats, expressly encouraging applications from qualified persons with disabilities and disseminating them widely through mainstream and OPD-supported channels;
- publishing aggregate and privacy-protective data on the number and percentage of persons with disabilities who apply, are shortlisted, recruited, trained and deployed, disaggregated where appropriate and lawful;
- conducting accessibility audits;
- collecting disability-disaggregated data where appropriate and lawful; and
- collaborating with ZAPD, OPDs and other stakeholders.

Electoral information shall be disseminated in accessible formats through print, broadcast, digital and community-based communication channels.

Digital platforms used for electoral purposes should comply with recognised accessibility standards and be compatible with assistive technologies.

The Commission shall promote innovation, including accessible ICTs and emerging technologies, to improve access to electoral information and services while ensuring privacy, security and equal access. Electronic voting is not introduced by these Guidelines; any future consideration would require prior enabling legal reform, inclusive consultation with OPDs, independent accessibility and security assessment, transparent piloting, voter-verifiable auditability and reliable non-electronic contingency arrangements.

PART IV: ELECTION OBSERVATION, ELECTORAL JUSTICE AND COMPLAINTS MECHANISMS

10.0 Election Observation

Election observation is an essential component of transparent, credible and inclusive elections. The Electoral Commission of Zambia (ECZ) shall promote the participation of persons with disabilities as election observers and facilitate accessible observation processes.

Election observation missions should:

- integrate disability inclusion into their observation methodologies;
- recruit and deploy qualified observers with disabilities;
- provide reasonable accommodation, where required;
- monitor compliance with disability rights standards;
- assess the accessibility of voter registration centres, polling stations and electoral information; and
- include disability inclusion findings and recommendations in their reports.

11.0 Electoral Complaints and Dispute Resolution

Persons with disabilities shall have equal access to electoral complaints and dispute resolution mechanisms.

The ECZ, courts and other competent institutions shall ensure that:

- complaints procedures are accessible and easy to understand;
- complaint forms and guidance are available in accessible formats;
- hearing venues are physically accessible;
- qualified and accredited Zambian Sign Language interpreters and other reasonable accommodations are provided where necessary;
- complaints are resolved fairly, impartially and within prescribed timelines; and
- decisions are communicated in accessible formats.

All institutions responsible for electoral justice shall safeguard the dignity, privacy and procedural rights of persons with disabilities.

PART V: ROLES AND RESPONSIBILITIES

Disability-inclusive elections require collaboration among all electoral stakeholders.

Electoral Commission of Zambia

The ECZ shall:

- provide overall leadership in implementing these Guidelines;
- integrate accessibility into electoral policies, plans and operations;
- ensure accessible voter registration, voter education and polling;
- provide reasonable accommodation;
- train election officials;
- monitor implementation and publish progress reports, including aggregate, privacy-protective data on persons with disabilities engaged, employed, trained and deployed in electoral processes; and
- review implementation at least annually and undertake a comprehensive review after each general election through an accessible process involving ZAPD, OPDs and other stakeholders.

Zambia Agency for Persons with Disabilities

ZAPD shall:

- exercise its statutory and technical role by providing advice on disability inclusion and applicable accessibility standards;
- support independent and joint accessibility assessments;
- assist with capacity building and the identification of qualified and accredited accessibility service providers;
- collaborate with the ECZ in monitoring implementation without displacing the ECZ's responsibility for administering accessible elections; and
- promote compliance with disability rights standards.

Organisations of Persons with Disabilities

OPDs shall:

- participate meaningfully at every stage of the electoral cycle;
- provide representative, lived-experience and technical expertise on meaningful disability inclusion;
- co-design and support continuous accessible voter education and civic sensitisation;
- monitor implementation of these Guidelines;
- identify barriers to participation; and
- advocate for continuous improvement.

Political Parties

Political parties shall:

- adopt disability-inclusive policies;
- promote equal participation within party structures;
- conduct accessible campaigns and meetings;
- encourage the nomination of persons with disabilities; and
- eliminate discriminatory practices.

Other Stakeholders and the General Public

Government institutions, civil society organisations, media institutions, election observers, development partners, traditional leaders and members of the general public shall support the implementation of these Guidelines within their respective mandates and spheres of influence. They should use the Guidelines as an advocacy and awareness tool, challenge stigma and discriminatory attitudes, promote respectful disability-inclusive communication, and support the full participation of persons with disabilities in electoral processes.

PART VI: IMPLEMENTATION, MONITORING AND EVALUATION

The successful implementation of these Guidelines depends on effective planning, adequate resources and regular monitoring.

Implementation

The ECZ shall develop an implementation plan that includes:

- priority activities;
- implementation timelines;
- responsible institutions;
- resource requirements, including personal assistants or support persons and qualified and accredited Zambian Sign Language interpreters where required;
- monitoring arrangements; and
- performance indicators.

Monitoring

The ECZ shall establish a monitoring framework to assess implementation through:

- accessibility audits;
- accessible stakeholder consultations with OPDs at every stage of the electoral cycle;
- disability-disaggregated data, where appropriate and lawful;
- implementation reviews; and
- annual reporting, including aggregate data on persons with disabilities engaged, employed, trained and deployed by the ECZ.

Evaluation

Implementation of these Guidelines should be reviewed at least annually and comprehensively evaluated after each general election to reflect:

- legislative reforms;
- technological developments;
- lessons learned;
- stakeholder feedback; and
- emerging international best practices.

Monitoring and evaluation findings should be used to strengthen future electoral planning and implementation.

IMPLEMENTATION CHECKLIST

The following minimum actions should be undertaken during every electoral cycle.

Area	Minimum Requirement
Electoral Planning	Disability inclusion integrated into strategic plans and budgets, including provision for personal assistants or support persons where required
Stakeholder Engagement	OPDs engaged meaningfully at every stage of the electoral cycle, with documented institutional responses
Voter Registration	Accessible registration centres and reasonable accommodation provided
Civic & Voter Education	Continuous accessible sensitisation and information in accessible formats, using qualified and accredited Zambian Sign Language interpreters where required

Candidate Participation	Accessible nomination procedures and inclusive political party practices
Campaigns	Accessible venues, communication and campaign materials
Polling	Accessible polling stations, trained officials, accessible voting procedures and budgeted personal assistants or support persons where required and permitted
Electoral Information	Accessible websites, publications and media communication
Election Observation	Disability inclusion incorporated into observation missions
Complaints	Accessible complaints and dispute resolution mechanisms
Monitoring	Accessibility audits and stakeholder feedback conducted
Reporting	Annual implementation reports and aggregate ECZ disability-employment data published, recommendations acted upon, and a comprehensive review completed after each general election
Inclusive Recruitment	Accessible and widely disseminated recruitment notices encourage qualified persons with disabilities to apply, with aggregate application, recruitment, training and deployment data published

KEY PERFORMANCE INDICATORS

Implementation of these Guidelines shall be measured against an approved baseline and time-bound targets using the following indicators. Data shall be collected consistently, disaggregated where appropriate and lawful, and reported in aggregate form to protect privacy and the secrecy of the vote:

- Percentage of accessible voter registration centres.
- Percentage of accessible polling stations.
- Number of election officials trained on disability inclusion.
- Availability of electoral information in accessible formats, including the proportion of required interpretation assignments filled by qualified and accredited Zambian Sign Language interpreters.
- Participation of persons with disabilities as voters, candidates and election observers, measured by: (a) the number and percentage of registered voters who voluntarily self-identify as persons with disabilities and, where lawful and practicable, the aggregate turnout rate among them; (b) the number and percentage of nominated candidates and elected representatives who voluntarily self-identify as persons with disabilities; and (c) the number and percentage of accredited election observers who voluntarily self-identify as persons with disabilities.
- Number of accessibility-related complaints received and resolved.
- Participation of OPDs in electoral planning and monitoring, measured by the number and diversity of OPDs engaged, the stages of the electoral cycle at which they are engaged, attendance at consultations and monitoring activities, the accessibility measures provided, the recommendations submitted, and the proportion of recommendations adopted or formally responded to.
- Number and percentage of persons with disabilities who apply, are shortlisted, recruited, trained and deployed as electoral personnel, and publication of the corresponding aggregate report.

- Percentage of ECZ recruitment advertisements issued in accessible formats, expressly encouraging qualified persons with disabilities to apply and disseminated through OPD-supported channels.
- Number and coverage of continuous accessible sensitisation activities conducted with OPDs throughout the electoral cycle.
- Completion of the annual implementation review and comprehensive post-general-election evaluation within approved timelines.
- Percentage of accessibility audit findings implemented, calculated as the number of audit recommendations fully implemented divided by the total number of applicable audit recommendations, multiplied by 100.
- Stakeholder satisfaction with disability-inclusive electoral processes, measured through an accessible and standardised post-activity or post-election survey of persons with disabilities, OPDs and other electoral stakeholders. Results should report the percentage rating accessibility and inclusion as satisfactory or better, together with qualitative feedback, and should be disaggregated by stakeholder category, disability type, sex, age and location where appropriate, lawful and statistically safe.

CONCLUSION

Disability-inclusive elections are fundamental to democratic governance, constitutionalism and the protection of human rights. Ensuring the equal participation of persons with disabilities strengthens the legitimacy, transparency and credibility of Zambia's electoral processes while advancing the constitutional principles of equality, dignity and non-discrimination.

These Executive Guidelines provide a practical framework for integrating disability inclusion throughout the electoral cycle. Their successful implementation requires strong leadership from the Electoral Commission of Zambia, sustained collaboration among Government institutions, political parties, Organisations of Persons with Disabilities, civil society organisations, the general public, media institutions, development partners and all other electoral stakeholders.

Electoral stakeholders are encouraged to mainstream accessibility into every aspect of electoral planning, administration and evaluation, recognising that disability inclusion is a continuous process requiring commitment, adequate resources and ongoing improvement.

Through the implementation of these Guidelines, Zambia will continue to fulfil its national, regional and international obligations, while promoting an electoral system in which every eligible citizen is able to participate fully, effectively and on an equal basis with others.

ENDORSEMENT

These Executive Guidelines are intended to serve as a practical reference for disability-inclusive electoral processes in Zambia. They should be implemented in conjunction with the Constitution of Zambia, the Electoral Process Act, the Persons with Disabilities Act and other applicable laws and policies.

Plot 7, Mukwikile Street, off Mosi-O-Tunya Road,
Woodlands, Lusaka, Zambia.

+260977785099 or +260973653227

bbakalij@gmail.com
www.zafod.org.zm