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Persons with Disabilities in The Gambia

Supervisor: Prof. David Celetti

Candidate: Oumie Sanneh

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Student's signature

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to be 'S. M.', written over a horizontal line.

## **Dedication**

This thesis is dedicated to the most influential people in my life: my beloved mother, my dear husband, and my precious son.

To my mother your unwavering love, strength, and wisdom have shaped me into the person I am today. You have always been my greatest inspiration, teaching me to believe in myself and showing me, through your actions, that being a woman is never a limitation to achieving one's dreams. Your constant support, especially during my most challenging moments, provided the foundation upon which I built this journey. Your prayers gave me strength, and your resilience as a woman, wife, and mother continues to empower me.

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## **Abstract**

This thesis explores the employment challenges and opportunities for people with disabilities (PWDs) in The Gambia, a group that continues to face exclusion from the labor market despite national policies and international commitments to inclusion. The central problem investigated is the persistent gap between the rights of persons with disabilities as outlined in legal frameworks, such as the Gambia Disability Act 2021, and their actual access to fair employment. Discrimination, inaccessible work environments, and lack of vocational training remain key barriers. The study uses a qualitative research approach, combining semi-structured interviews, online questionnaires, and document analysis. Participants included persons with disabilities, government officials, employers, and disability rights advocates. The research is guided by the Social Model of Disability, which sees disability not as an individual problem but as a result of societal, environmental, and institutional barriers. Findings show that negative social attitudes, weak enforcement of disability laws, poor workplace accessibility, and inadequate support systems limit employment prospects for PWDs in The Gambia. However, the study also identifies opportunities for progress through improved policy implementation, workplace adjustments, and skills development programs tailored to disabled individuals. The research highlights the need for inclusive employment policies, awareness campaigns to combat stigma, and stronger collaboration between government, civil society, and the private sector. These steps are essential to build a more inclusive labor market where people with disabilities can contribute equally and meaningfully to national development. The study also contributes to academic knowledge by filling a gap in research on disability and employment in the Gambian context.

**Keywords:** Persons with Disability, Opportunities, Challenges, Employment, The Gambia

## **Abstract in Italiano**

Questa tesi analizza le sfide e le opportunità occupazionali per le persone con disabilità (PWD) in Gambia, un gruppo che continua a essere escluso dal mercato del lavoro nonostante le politiche nazionali e gli impegni internazionali a favore dell'inclusione. Il problema centrale affrontato è il divario persistente tra i diritti delle persone con disabilità, sanciti da strumenti giuridici come il Gambia Disability Act del 2021, e il loro reale accesso a un'occupazione equa. Tra gli ostacoli principali si evidenziano la discriminazione, l'inaccessibilità degli ambienti di lavoro e la mancanza di formazione professionale. Lo studio adotta un approccio di ricerca qualitativo, basato su interviste semi-strutturate, questionari online e analisi documentale. I partecipanti allo studio includevano persone con disabilità, funzionari governativi, datori di lavoro e attivisti per i diritti delle persone con disabilità. La ricerca è guidata dal Modello Sociale della Disabilità, che considera la disabilità non come un problema individuale, ma come il risultato di barriere sociali, ambientali e istituzionali. I risultati mostrano che atteggiamenti sociali negativi, scarsa applicazione delle leggi sulla disabilità, accessibilità limitata nei luoghi di lavoro e sistemi di supporto inadeguati riducono le prospettive occupazionali per le persone con disabilità in Gambia. Tuttavia, lo studio individua anche opportunità di progresso attraverso una migliore attuazione delle politiche, adeguamenti nei luoghi di lavoro e programmi di sviluppo delle competenze pensati appositamente per le persone disabili. La ricerca evidenzia la necessità di politiche occupazionali inclusive, campagne di sensibilizzazione per combattere lo stigma e una collaborazione più forte tra governo, società civile e settore privato. Questi passaggi sono essenziali per costruire un mercato del lavoro più inclusivo, in cui le persone con disabilità possano contribuire in modo equo e significativo allo sviluppo nazionale. Lo studio contribuisce inoltre alla conoscenza accademica colmando una lacuna nella ricerca sulla disabilità e l'occupazione nel contesto gambiano.

**Keywords:** Persons with Disability, Opportunities, Challenges, Employment, The Gambia

## **List of Abbreviation**

PWDs – Persons with Disabilities

UNCRPD – United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities

GBoS – Gambia Bureau of Statistics

MOGCSW – Ministry of Gender, Children and Social Welfare

NDP – National Development Plan

NaFA – National Family Strengthening Assistance

NHRC – National Human Rights Commission

GFDP – Gambia Federation for Disabled Persons

GFHHD – Gambia Federation for Hard of Hearing and Deaf

TRRC – Truth, Reconciliation and Reparations Commission

NGO – Non-Governmental Organization

SDGs – Sustainable Development Goals

DRR – Disaster Risk Reduction

ICF – International Classification of Functioning, Disability and Health

UNDP – United Nations Development Programme

UNFPA – United Nations Population Fund

ERGs – Employee Resource Groups

IFAD – International Fund for Agricultural Development

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## **CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION**

Persons with disabilities continue to face numerous challenges and barriers, especially when it comes to finding and maintaining jobs worldwide. According to the United Nations (2023), more than 16% of the world's population has a disability, and approximately 80% of these individuals live in developing countries. Often, these individuals are actively restricted from accessing education, medical facilities, and employment opportunities. This increases their vulnerability, especially during natural disasters, emergencies, or pandemics. Persons with disabilities are mostly affected by systemic social bias. The limitations faced by disabled persons are socially constructed, such as the lack of strong policy enforcement, discriminatory mindsets, attitudinal barriers, and inaccessible infrastructure.

The working-age population of persons with disabilities in The Gambia is approximately 4.3% (GBoS, 2022). Their chances of finding suitable employment are significantly lower compared to their counterparts. Only 32.8% of the disabled population are employed in some capacity, compared to 44.1% of the non-disabled population. This gap is caused by discrimination, a lack of accessible education and training facilities, discriminatory policies, weak enforcement of existing policies, and more. Many people with disabilities remain outside the labor market despite the existence of the Gambia Disability Act of 2021 and the recently amended Labor Act of 2023. Although both laws aim to protect the rights of persons with disabilities, their enforcement has been weak, partly because very few academics in The Gambia focus on the daily realities of persons with disabilities.

This paper explores the opportunities and challenges of working with disabilities within The Gambia's labor market. It examines policies, attitudes, and environmental factors that either facilitate or hinder access to employment and retention. Both qualitative and quantitative methods were used to capture a comprehensive understanding of the issue. These included interviews with persons with disabilities, employers, policymakers, advocacy groups, surveys, and content analysis of policy documents. Combining these methods allows for in-depth insights into personal experiences and the analysis of broader trends across groups. The research is grounded in the Social Model of Disability, which argues that disability is not primarily a medical condition but rather a result of societal barriers. It contends that discrimination and inaccessibility pose far greater obstacles than an individual's mental and physical capabilities.

By comparing narratives with survey data and document analysis, this study aims to inform policy, guide employers, and shape public perceptions. The ultimate goal of this research is to advocate for the inclusion of persons with disabilities in The Gambia's labor force, enabling them to fully exercise their rights

## **1.1. Background to the Study**

Globally, persons with disabilities account for about 16% of the population, with 80% residing in the Global South (United Nations, 2023). These people are disproportionately affected by natural hazards, climate-induced disasters, and global health emergencies, such as the COVID-19 pandemic. Disability is widely regarded as a risk multiplier, intersecting with identity characteristics and social determinants such as gender, age, and socioeconomic status. It amplifies pre-existing social inequalities and power imbalances, leaving individuals with disabilities particularly vulnerable. The experience of exclusion varies significantly depending on the type of disability, with persons with cognitive and psychosocial disabilities often facing heightened marginalization and underrepresentation in decision-making processes (McGlinchey et al., 2013).

Until the Sendai Framework for Disaster Risk Reduction 2015-2030, persons with disabilities were identified as an important stakeholder in DRR. It signals the beginning of inclusion through a people-centered approach that brings disability, gender, age, and cultural perspectives into DRR policy and practice. Complementing this is the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, under

which a pledge was made "to leave no one behind." In light of this commitment, it emphasizes addressing those specific challenges persons with disabilities face. Seven of the 17 SDGs relate directly to DRR and cannot be effectively realized and equitably achieved without persons with disabilities. Disability and poverty go hand in hand; each feeds into the other. People with disabilities are also more likely to live in poverty compared to their non-disabled peers, while the poor are more likely to have disabilities. This double intersection further compounds their vulnerability to disasters and social exclusion. Addressing these challenges is key to realizing this SDG goal: eradicating poverty in all its forms. Comprehensive data collection and disaggregation of SDG indicators by disability status lay a cornerstone for monitoring inclusion and well-being, advancing the rights of persons with disabilities. (Undrr, 2023); The Washington Group on Disability Statistics.

Despite global progress in disability rights and accommodations, barriers persist in employment for persons with disabilities. Many face difficulties in accessing and retaining jobs, advancing their careers, and participating fully in the workforce. These challenges arise from systemic factors, including bias, discrimination, and insufficient accessibility. Policies and practices must address the multifaceted effects of disability on employment to foster truly inclusive and equitable workplaces (World Report on Disability, 2011).

Persons with disabilities constitute 4.3% of those of working age in The Gambia, but serious disparities face them in the labor force participation rate. Their participation rate is unusually low-32.8%-compared to 44.1% for persons without disabilities. This may partly result from age factors and retirement, as the current survey recorded an increase in the unemployment rates for persons with disabilities, 7.2%, nearly equal to the rate for non-disabled individuals. Other labor underutilization indicators reflect persistent inequalities(Gambia Bureau of Statistics (GBoS), 2022). The Gambia Disability Act of 2020 and related policies emphasize the requirement for inclusive practices. However, there are still considerable information gaps on the systemic barriers and enablers of employment outcomes concerning this population.

It calls for promoting an inclusive workforce in a holistic way. Governmental and organizational policies should guarantee accessibility and effectively fight against discrimination and promote inclusivity. This calls for tailored accommodations, vocational training, and mentorship programs

to bridge the gap between the disabled workforce's current skills and emerging opportunities. In fact, creating awareness and dispelling various myths about disability will facilitate a culture of valuing diversity and ensure the emergence of persons with disabilities as valuable contributors to the workforce.

## **1.2. Overview of The Gambia: General and Disability Demographics**

### **1.2.1. General Demographics**

The Gambia was a British colony that became independent on 18 February 1965. The Gambia is the smallest country on mainland Africa and is located in West Africa, bordered by all sides except the Atlantic coast, which borders Senegal. The total land area is about 11,295 square kilometers. The population of The Gambia, as of the latest estimates, is approximately 2.4 million people (Gambia Bureau of Statistic, 2024), with an average annual growth rate of 2.9% (World Bank, 2023). However, the official number from the Gambia Bureau of Statistics as of 2024 was 2.4 million people. Females make up the highest number and percentage, with 51% female and only 49% male. The country has a youthful demographic profile, with almost 60% of the population under the age of 25 years (Undrr, 2023)(United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA), 2022). The 2024 GPHC report indicates a very youthful population with a high birth rate. The country has a tropical climate with two seasons; dry and wet seasons.

The Gambia is a culturally diverse country; it has different ethnic groups. Mandinka is the biggest ethnic group, comprising 34.4% of the population, followed by Fula, making up 25% of the population, wolof 15.4%, Jola 9.5%, Sarahule 8.2%, serere 2.9%, while other ethnic groups (aku, manjango, Bambara as well as other smaller groups) makes up 4.6% of the population The predominant language spoken is English, though several local languages, including Mandinka, Wolof, and Fula, are dominant. The main religions are Islam and Christianity, as well as traditional beliefs. Islam is the dominant religious belief in the country (Gambia Bureau of Statistic, 2024).

The country is divided into two main parts, the southern and northern parts. There are eight (8) Local Government Areas, namely Banjul City Council, Kanifing Municipal Council, Brikama Area Council, Mansakonko Area Council, Kerewan Area Council, Janjanbureh Area Council, Kuntaur Area Council, and Basse Area Council. However, Brikama is said to be the most populated among these LGAs, followed by Kanifing, 49.6% of the population, and Kanifing, 20.7%. Banjul

is the capital city of the Gambia, Following the country's urbanization trend from 2013 to 2024, the population density has reduced in Banjul, while there has been a significant increment in Brikama and Kanifing, driven by economic growth making these two urban centers the most densely. Banjul is the Capital city of The Gambia, with Serrekunda and Brikama as the most densely urban center (Gambia Bureau of Statistic, 2024).

Economically, The Gambia is a low-income country, with agriculture, tourism, and remittances forming the foundation of the economy (International Monetary Fund, 2023). Substance agriculture is the most common practice in The Gambia, and the agricultural sector employs a significant portion of the population. In the Gambia, about 47.2% of households participate in agricultural activities. The most common form of agriculture among these households is crop farming, meaning they grow crops such as rice, millet, and maize for food and sometimes for sale. This statistic highlights the importance of agriculture to the economy and livelihoods of many families in the country. The tourism sector is the highest source of foreign exchange earnings in The Gambia (Gambia Bureau of Statistics (GBoS), 2022). Poverty and unemployment are pervasive in the nation, according to the World Bank's 2022 Poverty Report, the poverty rate in The Gambia has reached 53.4%, with more than half of the population living below the poverty line (David Locke & Touray, 2022). This marks a significant rise from previous years, as the poverty rate was reported at 48.6% in the HIS 2015/2016 survey(GBOS, 2020).

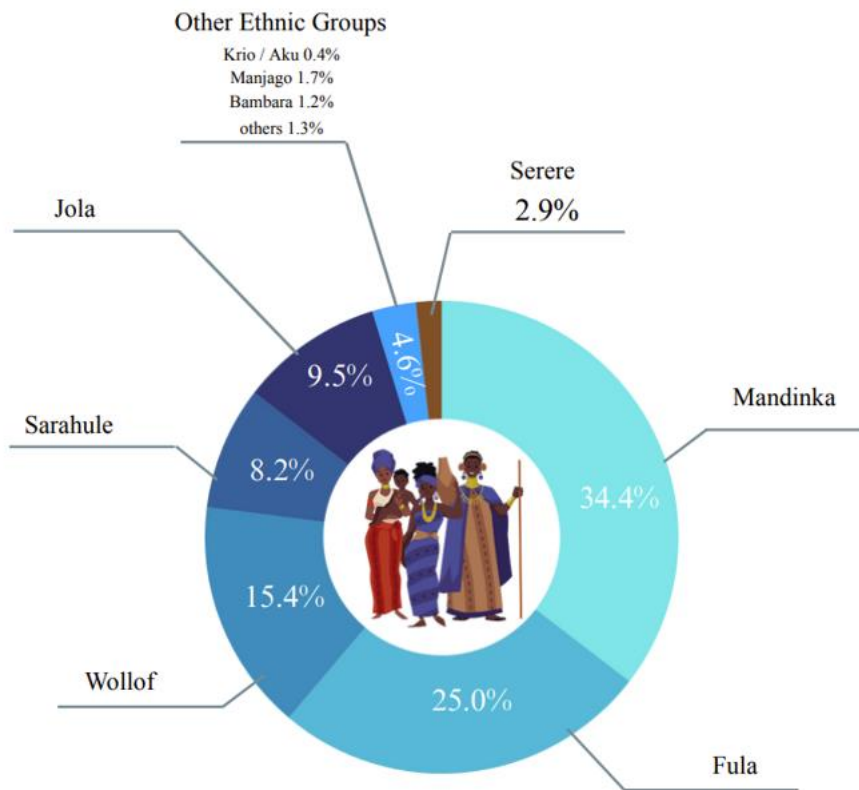
The increase in poverty rates over the past few years signals a worrying trend in the country's socio-economic conditions. The economic disruptions caused by the COVID-19 pandemic have been a major contributing factor to this rise in poverty. The pandemic led to widespread job losses, reduced incomes, and limited access to essential services, which disproportionately affected vulnerable groups, including those working in informal sectors and low-income households. Furthermore, global disruptions in supply chains, inflation, and restrictions on trade and movement have exacerbated the financial strain on many Gambians.

The escalation in poverty rates underscores the need for targeted interventions to address the underlying factors driving this increase. It calls for enhanced social protection programs, economic recovery strategies, and long-term investment in infrastructure and human capital development to reduce the impact of future crises and build resilience within communities. While the country has

made strides in reducing poverty in the past, the current situation highlights the challenges that still need to be addressed to achieve sustainable poverty reduction and improve the overall living standards of Gambians, affecting youth and marginalized groups, including those with disabilities, disproportionately. Urbanization is gradually increasing, and Banjul and the Kanifing Municipal Council are principal economic and administrative hubs(Recovery Focused National Development Plan, 2019).

Politically, The Gambia is a multiparty Republic, and the president is the head of state according to the 1997 constitution. Since independence, the country has been ruled by only three presidents. The first president of the Republic of The Gambia was Sir Dawda Kairaba Jawara; he ruled the country for over 30 years until Yahya Jammeh overthrew him in a military coup in 1994. Jammeh became the second president from 1994 to 2016 when he was defeated in a democratic, free, and fair election by the current president, his Excellency President Adama Barrow. Before Jammeh's defeat in the 2016 presidential election, he was labeled as a dictator who, during his tenure, violated lots of human rights. A truth and reconciliation commission were established immediately after he left power; during this commission, lots of revelations were made about his atrocities, ranging from unlawful arrests to murder and torture of the victims (TRRC REPORT 2020). President Adama Barrow, won the last election, which took place in 2021, making it his second term as the president of The Republic of The Gambia(World Bank, 2024)

Distribution of Ethnic Groups in the Gambia 2024 Census.



### 1.2.2. Disability Statistics

Since gaining independence, The Gambia has conducted housing censuses every ten years. However, before 2003, disabled people were not included (Baboudóttir, 2018). The country conducted only one disability study, which took place in 1998 and served as the first and only study. During this study, it was revealed that 1.7% of the population is male disabled, 1.4% are female disabled, and the total disabled population as of the 1998 study was 1.6%.

People with disabilities constitute a significant proportion of The Gambia's population, even though comprehensive national statistics remain rare. As estimated by the Gambia Bureau of Statistics (2020), 4.3% of The Gambia's working-age population has a disability. Disability in The Gambia is primarily attributed to physical, visual, auditory, and intellectual impairment, with most of these persons facing structural and societal exclusion from complete integration into economic and social life (Bah, 2016).

Employment for disabled individuals is limited, with only approximately 32.8% of disabled individuals in working age being employed in contrast to 44.1% of the non-disabled (Gambia Bureau of Statistics (GBoS), 2022). The most serious barriers to work inclusion include discrimination, inaccessible working environments, and insufficient tailor-made vocational training (United Nations Development Programme, 2022).

The intersection of disability and poverty exacerbates exclusionary mechanisms, as individuals with disabilities have more restricted access to education, health, and social protection (International Classification of Functioning, Disability and Health, 2001). Individuals with disabilities often rely on informal sector employment or family networks, once more indicating the need for targeted policies and interventions to improve their socioeconomic integration.

### **1.3. Legal Frameworks and Policies on Disability in The Gambia.**

#### **1.3.1. Guarding the Rights of Persons with Disabilities within The Gambia's**

##### **Constitution**

The Constitution of The Gambia acknowledges and safeguards the rights of persons with disabilities. The State and society are bound, under Section 31 of the 1997 Constitution, to promote the dignity and rights of persons with disabilities. The key provisions are:

- The state and society must respect and uphold the dignity, rights, and worth of individuals with disabilities.
- Persons with disability are entitled to protection from exploitation and discrimination, especially regarding access to fundamental services like healthcare, education, and work.
- In all judicial proceedings where a person with a disability is involved, it is crucial for the court to take their situation into consideration to ensure fair treatment.
- These provisions show the commitment of The Gambia in ensuring inclusivity, equal opportunity, and legal protection for persons with disabilities.

#### **1.3.2. Integrated National Disability Policy (2009-2018)**

This policy was explicitly for upholding the rights of adults and children with disability. It was intended to promote equal rights, opportunities, and maximum participation of persons with disability in any meaningful social activity. This includes finding and maintaining jobs in The

Gambia. Furthermore, it intends to improve the living conditions of PWD by empowering them in the communities. There are precise actions to be taken, and these include advocacy, health care strengthening, improving transport accessibility, the development and implementation of regulations, and promoting research on disability and matters related to it. Thus, promoting research on disability and related matters is fundamental in The Gambia, as only one National disability survey has been conducted since 1998 ((Baboudóttir, 2018; Nabaneh, 2017).

### **1.3.3. National Development Plan (NDP) (2018-2021)**

In the national development plan, the inclusivity of persons with disability has been identified as a key policy area, which suggests: social and economic empowerment of PWD, which will help put them in programs and projects, for example, providing vocational training programs for persons with disability. This will help them achieve financial independence and also empower them. Awareness campaigns are needed to reduce the negative stigmas in societies and workplaces, as well as inclusive rehabilitation and habitation programs and decentralized services for easy delivery to all. Nonetheless, this was a very well-designed plan, but implementation was challenging due to insufficient funds (Nabaneh, 2017).

### **1.3.4. The Gambia Disability Act 2021**

This is an act intended to guard fundamental rights for people with disabilities, including their employment, rehabilitation, education, vocational training, accessibility, social support, health care, and communication, along with other related issues (PERSONS WITH DISABILITY ACT,2021, 2021). The act was enacted by the president of the Republic of The Gambia and the national assembly. Its key areas are;

#### **1.3.4.1. Employment of Persons with Disability:**

1) It said that persons with disability have a right to the following;

- (a) practice their profession if they satisfy all the professional requirements of the profession concerned
- (b) carry on any lawful occupation, trade, or business of their choice.

2) Both private and public sectors shall be encouraged by the government to ;

- a. promote the empowerment of persons with disabilities, including those who acquire disability during their employment;
- b. allow persons with disabilities to work on an equal basis with others; and
- c. allow persons with disabilities to earn a living by work through a quota system of
- d. employment.

### **1.3.5. The Labor Act 2023**

It is an act enacted by the president and the national assembly to regulate employment recruitment, apprenticeship, and the rights of employers and employees. The Labor Act 2007 did not have a specific provision for persons with disabilities; however, with the amended act, they have been captured. There are special provisions for the promotion and protection of persons with disability (Labor Act 2023). Some of these are; Special incentives; Notification of employment; Contract particulars; Job security upon disablement; Job transfers; and Training and retraining

**Special incentives:** The act mandates the Department of Labor to promote employment opportunities and career advancement of persons with disabilities in the job market. In addition, employers who hire persons with disabilities and persons with disabilities who are involved in business or entrepreneurship are eligible for special incentives from the government. However, this will be determined by the minister.

**Notification of Employment:** It is important to notify the commission of the employment of a person with a disability by the employer. Failure to do so leads to penalties to be faced by the employer.

**Contract Particulars of Employment:** The contract of employment of the person with a disability should contain or show detailed information about the position, the number of works to be worked, the remuneration, transport allowances, and other privileges they are entitled to at that workplace ((Labor Act 2023, 2023).

**Job Security upon disablement:** This has to do with an instance where an employee becomes disabled while on the job; it states that the employer should not terminate their contract, mainly if they can still perform the same task. In an instance, they cannot do the same task, but there is

another task they can perform in the same office, they should be transferred to that area provided that they have the requirements. If all these are not available, then their termination should be appropriately communicated.

**Training of employed persons with disability:** The employer shall train and retrain an employee with disability with his or her funds when it is necessary for the person with a disability to build their capacity.

The act basically, talks against the unfair dismissal of an employee due to their disability and also discrimination in general.

### **The Gambia Social Protection Policy (2015-2025)**

The Gambia Social Protection Policy 2015-2025 is a comprehensive framework designed to address the social and economic challenges facing the country. Its primary focus is on reducing poverty, promoting social inclusion, and ensuring that all citizens, particularly vulnerable groups like women, children, the elderly, and people with disabilities, have access to essential services and opportunities. The policy sets out specific objectives, including improving access to healthcare, education, and housing, as well as expanding social security systems to protect those at risk. It also aims to enhance resilience to economic and environmental shocks, such as natural disasters or economic crises. The implementation of this policy relies on several strategies, such as conditional cash transfers known as NAFa Cash Transfers to the 35,000 extreme poor households in the Gambia, Family Strengthening cash transfers to 3000 vulnerable persons including person with disability across the country, Program, public works programs such as cash for work to 1406 beneficiaries in Central River Region ,North Bank Region, Lower River Region respectively (The Gambia National Social Protection Policy 2015, 2015)(National social protection Secretariat report 2021,Gambia), and health insurance expansion to the population in which person with disability, children under five year old and old age are main beneficiaries, which provide both financial and social support to vulnerable populations. Despite the policy's ambitious goals, challenges like resource constraints, the need for capacity building, and the sustainability of funding remain important considerations. Nevertheless, the policy provides a foundation for long-term social protection in The Gambia, aiming to create a more inclusive, resilient, and equitable society (policies.gov.gm).

## **1.4. Problem Statement**

Regardless of international and national commitments to inclusivity and equality, persons with disabilities in The Gambia still face immense difficulties in accessing and retaining employment. Whereas the few available data do show large disparities in labor force participation and the persistence of significant barriers toward full integration into employment, there is a great lack of comprehensive research that would account for the nuanced effects of disability on employment patterns, opportunities, and socioeconomic outcomes in the Gambian context.

This knowledge gap prevents the formulation of focused interventions and policy addresses to systemic barriers that improve workforce inclusivity. This study was conducted to provide the critical findings needed by policy and practice, using an explorative approach to challenges and enablers affecting the employment experiences of persons with disabilities in The Gambia. This research will therefore be using a mixed-methods approach to investigate the key factors that affect employment outcomes and make evidence-based recommendations on fostering workforce diversity and equity. It is, hence, of utmost importance to the realization of the wider objectives of social inclusion, reduction of poverty, and sustainable development in The Gambia.

## **1.5. Research Question**

Based on the background and the problem stated above, this study aims to answer the following research questions:

1. In what ways do institutional barriers and social attitudes impact the career prospects of individuals with disabilities in The Gambia?
2. How can policy reforms and workplace modifications be enhanced to address the social and environmental barriers encountered by people with disabilities in the labor market of The Gambia?

## **1.6. Research Objectives**

Having answered the research questions above, the study will attain the following objectives:

1. Describe how institutional barriers and social attitudes impact the career prospects of individuals with disabilities in The Gambia.

2. Explain how policy reforms and workplace modifications can aid in addressing the social and environmental barriers encountered by people with disabilities in the labor market of The Gambia?

Overall, this study's primary goal is to explore the opportunities and challenges faced by people with disabilities in the Gambian labor force.

### **1.7. Relevance of the Research**

This is important research because it tries to address the marginalization of persons with disabilities in the workforce, particularly in The Gambia. While global and national commitments toward social justice and equity are in existence, persons with disabilities face substantial obstacles in accessing employment and achieving full participation in society. Equity and inclusion are basic principles that denote a rightful place for every citizen to contribute meaningfully within their respective communities, regardless of the state of their abilities. Anchored on systems challenges and opportunities for persons with disabilities, this paper makes an effort to fill important knowledge gaps and underpin an enabling environment of policies and practices toward a more inclusive workforce.

This will enlighten government actors and policymakers with more details regarding different factors that influence the exclusion of persons with disabilities in the labor market. Such an understanding constitutes the very foundation upon which evidence-based policies may be designed and implemented to address issues like discrimination, reasonable accommodation, and inclusive workplace culture. These insights shall be informed by the Gambia Disability Act 2020 and other international conventions, such as the UNCRPD, to ensure compliance and accountability among governmental ministries, civil society organizations, and private sector stakeholders.

This study will give way to practical recommendations for development partners, NGOs, and advocacy groups working toward the inclusion of disability in The Gambia. By mapping out the systemic enablers and barriers to employment for persons with disabilities, actionable strategies will be developed to enhance the activity related to vocational training, mentorship, and workplace accommodations. In so doing, it would not only be an empowerment for persons with disabilities

but another broader poverty reduction effort, since inclusive economic participation is key to reaching sustainable development goals.

Thirdly, this will contribute to the repository of knowledge regarding disability and employment, with emphasis on the Gambian context. There is a severe shortage of empirical research material on the subject under review within the Gambian context; therefore, this will be a reference point for any further academic and policy-oriented investigations. This research provides a framework that highlights the intersecting features of disability and poverty with that of employment to better understand the specific challenges faced by persons with disabilities in low- and middle-income countries. The research will also motivate universities, such as The University of The Gambia, to focus on designing more disability research-oriented work, hence enriching the academic discourse on the subject and developing a new class of researchers committed to social inclusion.

The findings of this study will finally ensure an attitudinal change in society's perception and view of disability. This study will bring about increased awareness and a challenge to stereotypes, promoting empathy and understanding towards such persons, which would further open ways for a cultural shift toward valuing diversity and inclusion. The findings will serve as an advocacy tool to empower persons with disabilities and their allies to demand equitable treatment and opportunities within the workforce and beyond.

The conclusion of this research shall create the much-needed comprehensive understanding of challenges and opportunities about disability and employment issues in The Gambia. It gives input into the formulation of policies, institutional practices, and further academic inquiry as parts of a bigger process to enhance rights and dignity for persons with disabilities. It would therefore contribute to fostering a more equal and inclusive society.

In conducting this research, we utilized both primary and secondary sources to gather comprehensive insights. For primary data, we conducted key informant interviews using semi-structured questionnaires, which allowed us to engage with participants in a flexible manner while covering essential topics. These interviews provided valuable qualitative data from individuals with firsthand challenges and experience with disability in finding employments. For secondary sources, we performed a desk review of existing documents and literature related to people with disabilities, including policy reports, Act and Regulations, reports on support systems, training programs, and cash transfer initiatives. To analyze the data, we employed advanced Excel

techniques for quantitative analysis and used CANVAS software to transcribe and code the audio recordings from the interviews. This combination of primary and secondary sources, along with advanced data analysis tools, enabled a thorough examination of current practices and challenges in the field, allowing us to draw informed conclusions about the effectiveness and impact of the research.

## **CHAPTER TWO: THEORETICAL PERSPECTIVE**

### **2.1. Literature Review**

#### **2.1.1. Understanding Disability**

The notion of disability is analyzed within a multi-faceted and fluid structure that differs from nation to society to academics. It stems from historical, medical, social, and political concepts that give disability, limitation, and accessibility a particular context.

##### **2.1.1.1. Defining Disability**

The United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (UNCRPD) perceives disability as the result of an interactional process which dynamic participants with the impediment(s) alongside attitudinal and environmental barriers prevents full and effective participation in societal activities at par with others (Convention on the Rights of Persons With Disabilities, 2006). This definition differs from older, more medical concepts and aligns with the social approach to disability, which focuses on the barriers created by society instead of the individual's limitations (Oliver, 1990).

A handicap as defined by (Kaplan, 2000) is a condition resulting from an impairment that prevents a person from performing an activity in a manner or a scope that is deemed normal. Based on this definition, we see that disability is a restriction which results from impairments which may be functional, psychological, or physical. Nevertheless, International Classification of Functioning, Disability and Health (ICF) by the world health organizations suggested that disability more accurately captures the notion of limitation that stems from the interaction of an individual's capabilities, environmental conditions, and undertaken daily task's demands. From the World Health Organization comes the comment - "disability" appearing in the International Classification is the result of interactions between health conditions and the environmental ones (International Classification of Functioning, Disability and Health, 2001). These might refer to social and physical aspects as well as to personal attributes.

In contrast, the Ministry of Gender, Children and Social Welfare (MOGCSW) defines disability as the loss of the ability to utilize a part of the body or mind, be it physical, mental, intellectual, or sensory, that when combined with other barriers, hinders an individual's full and equal engagement

in society (PERSONS WITH DISABILITY ACT, 2021, 2021). This definition accepts disability as a socially constructed issue and acknowledges the role of social factors in such impairment.

#### 2.1.1.2. The Economic and Policy Perspective

Economically and from a policy perspective, disability is framed in terms of workforce integration and eligibility for social security benefits. Based on the utilitarian model, disability disrupts productivity and necessitates social assistance, once again confirming that individuals with disabilities are helpless, rather than independent, economic participants (Schneider, 2012). The social security system tends to define disability in terms of the inability to work, and this has resulted in policy responses that emphasize economic productivity over social inclusion (Frankfather, 1985). This is a very important perspective with far-reaching implications, as it can exclude people with disabilities by emphasizing limitations rather than facilitating

The medical model of disability, which is dominant in policy and institutional frameworks, views disability as a condition to be treated or managed within the individual. Critics have claimed that the view suppresses the social and environmental origins of disabling experiences (Shakespeare, 2006). Contrary to this, the capabilities approach, advocated by (Sen, 1999) and (Nussbaum Martha C., 2007), is concerned with empowering people with disabilities to gain valued functioning in society. For example, someone with a disability might not be able to walk, but with proper support and adaptations (like a wheelchair or assistive technology), they could still achieve functioning like going to work, meeting friends, or engaging in cultural activities. The goal is not to simply "tolerate" people with disabilities but to actively enable them to engage fully in society.

In simpler terms, Nussbaum is saying that societies should create conditions where people with disabilities are not excluded, but instead empowered with the tools, opportunities, and support to live the life they want, according to their own values and desires. This model argues that disability should not be thought of in terms of deficit alone but as an interaction between social opportunity and individual capability.

### 2.1.1.3. The Social and Cultural Dimensions of Disability

The cultural construction of disability varies significantly across societies and influences policies, attitudes, and support systems. In other societies, disability is stigmatized and excluded, in yet others, it is understood within a model of collective responsibility that is community-based (Ingstad & Whyte, 1995). It has been proven through research that disability attitudes held socially are often more influential on the lives of people with disabilities than the impairment itself (Priestley, 2003). Ableism" or favoritism towards able-bodied individuals is the name given to pervasive social arrangements that exclude people with disabilities (Campbell, 2010).

### **2.1.2. Models of Disability**

There have been several models that inform the understanding of disability, each rooted in different historical, cultural, and ideological contexts. These models not only serve to frame the experience of disability but also influence societal attitude, policy, and intervention.

The moral or religious model is one of the oldest frameworks in understanding disability. Because of its roots in traditional and theological beliefs, it perceives disability as a consequence of sin, divine punishment, or moral failing. According to Retief and Letšosa (2018), while some societies regard disability as a curse, others perceive it as a blessing meant by God to give a person exceptional spiritual insight. In traditional Gambian society, disabled individuals are often regarded with stigma, discrimination, and marginalization. Less dominant in contemporary discourse, this model nonetheless continues to underpin cultural attitudes in traditional settings, withholding the full inclusion of disabled individuals in education, work, and social decision-making processes.

The medical model speaks to a model that has emerged with modern medicine itself, which positions disability as a pathological condition that must be diagnosed and treated. In this view, disability is an aberration from normality that needs to be "cured" by medical intervention. This model is criticized by (Retief & Letšosa, 2018), mainly for portraying disability in a negative light- for instance, the abnormality that characterizes people with disabilities. According to (Kaplan, 2000), this view conceptualizes persons with disabilities as patients who must learn to live with society, not the other way around. Whereas this model informs the basis of many modern disability

policies, inclusive of social security schemes, it perpetuates the marginalization of disabled people through its linkage with incapacity and dependency.

The rehabilitation model is a subset of the medical model and involves dispensing the disabled individual with relevant competencies and equipment to once again fit into society. This model became very prevalent after World War II, with scores of returning military personnel coming back with disabilities. (Kaplan, 2000), maintained that vocational training centers and rehabilitation programs were developed to assist such people in becoming independent and productive again. However, the model of rehabilitation, similar to the medical model, often perceives disability as a lack or an inadequacy, rather than a natural part of human diversity, and thus promotes systemic injustices.

The social model of disability, in contrast to these previous models, reframes the discussion in terms of the following: This model, therefore, suggests that a disability exists because of inequities in practice and the environment that are inaccessible. Thus, societal attitudes and systemic discrimination pose the greatest barriers for disabled people. The social model seeks structural reforms, inclusive policies, and changed societal attitudes toward ensuring equity and participation (Friedman, 2020). Therefore, this perspective fits within the frameworks of contemporary human rights, emphasizing empowerment and inclusion.

### **2.1.3. Disability and Employment**

Work is an imperative part of human life that guarantees economic security, social integration, and self-fulfillment. In the case of persons with disabilities, this path leading to employment is invariably blocked for individuals by several hurdles arising from societal prejudices, structural inequalities, and systemic economic factors. According to (Friedman, 2020) having a job is very important for any individual, irrespective of their capability, since it injects a sense of purpose, self-esteem, and belonging. However, the employment of people with disabilities still faces enormous obstacles that are deeply rooted in both societal attitudes and structural systems.

Amongst the most paramount challenges that confront disabled persons regarding their jobs are societal stigma. Studies has documented that disabled persons are often victims of negative stereotyping, where they are perceived to possess low-earning potential than their counterparts who are not disabled. Stereotyping has greatly affected their employability since potential employers would also be reluctant to provide job opportunities for people perceived to be unfit for

work (Bonaccio et al., 2020). Besides, societal biases go so far as to labor markets, which exclude persons with disabilities and then restrict the availability of jobs and access in the majority of workspaces. (Friedman, 2020) believes that such biases are deeply rooted in the transition from feudalism to capitalism, where productivity and efficiency became the core values determining economic worth. In such systems, persons who have lesser productivity, such as the disabled, become marginalized and excluded from competitive labor markets-a further reinforcement of their economic and social exclusion.

Aside from these attitudinal factors, persons with disabilities also suffer from some of the structural difficulties that hamper their employment opportunities. Indeed, several studies conducted within and outside West Africa have identified many infrastructural barriers, which include inaccessible buildings and facilities, a general lack of assistive technologies, and a general lack of vital resources such as Braille materials (Charles et al., 2023; Ganle et al., 2020). These challenges compound the struggles that disabled persons have in seeking to make their way into the workplace for employment opportunities. Disability and Development Report 2019 identifies stigma and a lack of community education as prominent barriers in The Gambia to the workforce inclusion of people with disabilities (United Nations, 2019). These structural obstacles are complexly entrenched in deep-seated societal attitudes and are therefore difficult to overcome in trying to realize employment equity for disabled individuals.

Accordingly, the problems affecting persons with disabilities within the job market setting are found to be multilayered and deeply embedded in societally as well as structurally enabling causes. Work, according to (Friedman, 2020), helps provide a sense of purpose and belonging; however, there continued major turbulence with respect to significant barriers in getting disabled people into jobs. These can be overcome only by changes in social attitudes about disability, supported by comprehensive structural reforms promoting accessibility and inclusion into the workforce. These matters will have to be addressed through the combined efforts of policymakers, businesses, and communities if people with disabilities are to enjoy equal opportunities in life as others do.

#### **2.1.4. Encouraging Workforce Diversity: How to Empower People with Disabilities and Benefit from It?**

Inclusion in the workforce is an important concept that helps an organization become diverse, innovative, and successful. Workforce inclusion means going beyond hiring different types into

actually creating environments where each person, including those with disabilities, has full opportunity to blossom and contribute significantly. Individuals with disabilities face unique employment barriers as a result of a mixture of both societal attitudes and physical and structural challenges. These are issues that any strategy would need to address comprehensively for the support of disabled people and thus build a more inclusive and fair work culture for all.

Probably the most feasible way to support the employment of people with disabilities would be to provide them with the opportunity for entrepreneurship. Entrepreneurship is an alternative route to conventional employment, and it empowers the disabled individual to take matters into their own hands and create self-generated career paths that bypass conventional barriers to employment. According to (Rozali et al., 2017) entrepreneurship allows the disabled to overcome a number of barriers by placing in their hands the power to determine an ideal work environment, schedule, and business form.

In addition, resource programs with training and mentorship multiply successful disabled entrepreneurs.(Maritz & Laferriere, 2016) affirm that inclusive entrepreneurship programs ensure that the skills and support persons with disabilities need for business success are available to them. Self-employment, on the one hand, not only diminishes gaps in employment but also enhances economic independence. In support, (Ashley & Graf, 2018) contend that self-employment improves the financial self-sufficiency of people with disabilities. Moreover, the gig economy, increasingly prevalent, makes flexible opportunities available to disabled individuals to work at their own pace and convenience, giving them more command over their work. However,(Harpur & Blanck, 2020) indicate that the gig sector, like other areas, suffers from numerous challenges such as inconsistent regulation, which constrains accessibility and sustainability for the disabled worker.

Whereas entrepreneurship offers a great opportunity, systemic changes are also needed to create inclusion at the broader level. According to (Potgieter et al., 2017) there is a need for a holistic approach that would cover such issues as discrimination and career development regarding persons with disabilities. The framework should address nondiscriminatory policies, accessible infrastructure, and public education campaigns that may help in changing societal perceptions about disabilities. In countries like The Gambia, Republic of The Gambia Country Programme Evaluation by IFAD illustrates that community-based education and individual advocacy remain

key instruments of change in societal attitudes that eventually should make sure to trickle down into labor market boundaries and positively affect hiring practices (IFAD, 2019).

Besides such systemic changes, organizations have to put in place inclusive policies and practices so that workspaces are enabled for disabled people to thrive. The workplace needs to maintain fairness and equity through a formal policy on non-discrimination, equality, and flexible working. For instance, it should allow time for employees to care for dependents, practice their religion, or cater to needs related to disability; policies that make sure all employees have equal opportunities in career development, training, and promotion are very important. As (Weideman, 2020) note, this forms a basis for ensuring workplace equity; success is open to everyone regardless of ability.

Other key strategies that will help build an inclusive work environment include unconscious bias and cultural competence training for the leadership and employees. Awareness training in unconscious bias will better equip people to identify and rein in their biases, which often unconsciously affect decisions related to hiring and other workplace interactions. Such biases are acknowledged, and organizations can create work environments where persons with disabilities are not overlooked or undervalued. The training in cultural competence, further helps the employees to understand and respect diverse standpoints of the culture, which builds a work culture that considers diversity on all its dimensions (Olusanya et al., 2018).

Fostering a sense of belonging is another key constituent of an inclusive workforce. Once the employees are made to feel valued and accepted, they are more likely to give their best at work. A culture of belonging is cultivated through initiatives like Employee Resource Groups, providing a supportive community for underrepresented groups, including people with disabilities. They offer a space where employees can share experiences, have access to resources, and network with others who might face similar challenges. Additionally, promoting psychological safety where employees feel free to speak up without fear of criticism helps create an open and inclusive environment where all voices can be heard and valued. This type of environment not only supports disabled employees but also encourages innovation and creativity, as employees are more likely to share new ideas and solutions (Page, et al. 2019; Edmondson, 2018; Roberson, 2019).

Moreover, there is a need for inclusion to periodically assess and measure the effort in organizations so that progress can be observed. Key metrics on workforce demographics, employee satisfaction, and retention rates among various groups will provide quantifiable insight

into the efficacy of the inclusion strategies at play. By taking employee surveys and making transparent reports regarding their progress, organizations make leadership accountable for inclusion efforts and prove their commitment to having an inclusive workplace. These tools also offer organizations the relevant data to crystallize their work and take action in case any anomalies come forward.

Recruitment and retention strategies round out the most important tactics that create an inclusive workforce. Diverse talents mean that an organization should use inclusive language while describing its job posting and make its recruitment processes accessible to all, including persons with disabilities. When hired, retaining diverse talent is equally important, and mentorship programs provide guidance and career development opportunities for disabled employees. These programs offer support, help build networks, and promote career advancement, ensuring that disabled individuals not only join organizations but also have the tools and resources they need to succeed in their roles (Rosales et al., 2023).

Thus, promoting inclusion in the workforce offers significant benefits to both employees and organizations. Encouraging policies supporting disabled people, promoting diversity, and making all people feel appreciated result in higher levels of job satisfaction and improved employee engagement, as well as better organizational outcomes. Inclusion of all staff requires, however, continuous assessment and the need for flexibility due to continuously changing needs. By embracing both individual and systemic changes, organizations will create an increasingly inclusive, innovative, and successful workplace that allows all people to bring forth their fullest capability.

#### **2.1.5. Research Gap (Novelty)**

Taking cues from the works of literature reviewed and the background of the study, it can be argued that an extensive study has been done on the subject of disabilities and the challenges and opportunities on people living with a disability. The review was designed to map out the conversation on the study area which enables me to identify a gap which this study shall filled. From global to regional level, the subject was covered extensively, but in the national context (the Gambia) the subject is understudied. Based on my search, I came across with one study by Bah, (2016), who focuses on stigmatization and proper education. The current study takes a different direction hence, it is going to explore the challenges and opportunities faced by people with

disabilities in the Gambia's labor force. Thus, this study will contribute in addressing the gap in the Gambian context, by providing insight on the challenges and opportunities people with such a condition faced.

## **2.2. Theoretical Framework**

### **2.2.1. Social Model of Disability**

This research is based on the Social Model of Disability which postulates that disability originates from social exclusion and stigma instead of focusing on individual impairments. The Social Model, developed by Michael Oliver in the 1980s, differs from the Medical Model, where impairment dominates concern. The Social Model asserts that disability results from societal constructs, existing views, and spatial obstructions, and not a certain degree of physical or psychological pathology (Petasis, 2019).

This model was developed mainly by the Union of the Physically Impaired Against Segregation (UPIAS) in 1970, who contended that patterns within society disable individuals by not meeting their needs. In the work of (Petasis, 2019), Mike Oliver (1983) argued that the social, cultural, and ideological beliefs and attitudes that create environmental obstacles are what cause the physical, economic, and social barriers that disabled populations confront rather than their mental or physical impairments (Petasis, 2019). These barriers are the way society is structured, i.e. through inaccessible environments, poor or weak institutional system supports, and also attitudinal or cultural barriers of the society.

The Social Model of Disability is especially relevant to this study, as it offers a structured way of exploring the obstacles that individuals with disabilities (PWDs) encounter in accessing and retaining jobs in The Gambia. By employing this model of understanding disability, the study will illustrate how work discrimination is caused by institutional, cultural, and environmental factors rather than trying to remedy individual impairments.

In the context of this study, I applied three layers of analysis utilizing this theory: the institutional layer, which examines policies, procedures, and law; the cultural and attitudinal layer, which examines perceptions, social stigma, and workplace attitudes; and the environmental layer, which examines physical infrastructure and accessibility. All these three levels shall be reviewed to establish the structural factors limiting employment opportunities for PWDs in The Gambia.

#### 2.2.1.1. Institutional Layer

Institutional layer focuses on the role of governance, workplace policy, and legal framework in influencing the employment prospects of persons with disabilities (PWDs). In this research, to what degree current employment law, policy, and recruitment practices facilitate or create obstacles to inclusion in the workplace shall be explored. Insufficiently robust inclusive policies continue to be a major predicament as the Gambia Disability Act (2021) promises the right to work for PWDs with limited enforcement. Lack of monitoring and accountability affects the work prospects of PWDs. Hiring and promotional discrimination also discourages their work prospects, as most employers hire non-disabled workers due to productivity myths. The chances of promotion for PWDs are derailed systematically by bureaucratic rules that do not account for their contributions. Additionally, most firms are not ready to implement workplace adjustments such as adaptive technology and flexible work arrangements. Through the examination of such factors, this research will show that employment inequalities are not caused by impairment itself but by systemic barriers within institutional systems that do not value inclusivity.

#### 2.2.1.2. Cultural/Attitudinal Layers

The attitudinal and cultural layer addresses ingrained social attitudes that marginalize individuals with disabilities and promote negative stereotypes. The Social Model argues that disability is a result of how society perceives and treats individuals with impairments and not a result of the impairments. In this study, discrimination in employment will be reviewed since the majority of employers have a perception that PWDs are less capable or that it costs more to employ them. Interviews with both employees and employers help investigate these biases.

Social stigma and hostility within the workplace are also significant concerns, with PWDs being likely to experience workplace bullying, discrimination, and general lack of peer support. Such mindsets cultivate a negative professional atmosphere which creates challenges for a person with a disability to progress in their career. Societal apathy combined with a paternalistic attitude results in neglect where there is an absence of strong expectations, which causes a lack of skill development and career advancement possibilities.

This study will explore the ways in which these attitudes affect the recruitment process and career advancement. Adopting the Social Model, this study will argue that these negative attitudes are

socially constructed and can be deconstructed by awareness-raising campaigns, workplace training, and fair recruitment procedures.

#### 2.2.1.3. Environmental layers

The environmental layer deals with how workplace accommodation and the physical environment affect the employment of PWDs. The Social Model explains that disability is largely due to environmental barriers rather than the impairment itself. A majority of office structures do not provide ramps, lifts, or accessible toilets, which handicaps the ease with which physically disabled persons are able to work. Examining barriers and facilitating workplace accessibility will be demonstrated through case studies. In addition, most workplaces do not provide necessary accommodations such as Braille materials for blind workers and sign language interpreters for deaf workers. This study will examine how the absence of these facilities affects job retention and career advancement among PWDs.

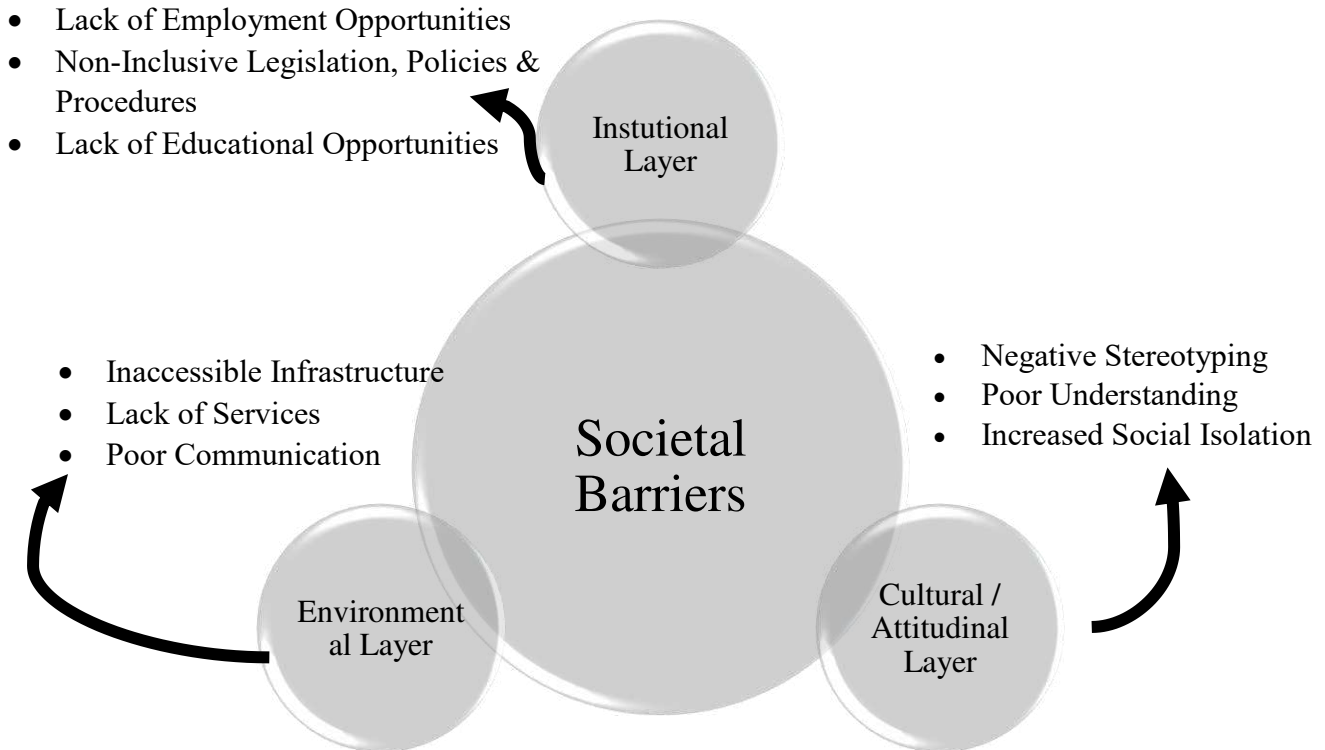
Through the exploration of these factors, the research will argue that barriers to employment are in fact created by poor infrastructural design and not by a person's impairment, validating the imperatives of universal approaches to accessibility. Thus, the theory is utilized as the context in which the work problems for PWDs in The Gambia are explained and resolved. By breaking down the issue into institutional, cultural, and environmental levels, the study will provide evidence-based policy reform suggestions to promote workplace inclusivity. It will set out pragmatic solutions for reducing social stigma and making workplaces disability-friendly. It will also identify infrastructural deficiencies and suggest measures to improve workplace accessibility.

The study will contribute to national and international disability rights discourse by demonstrating that labour market issues for PWDs are not caused by their disability but rather structural and systemic ones embedded in society. The study will reinforce the argument that inclusive employment can only be realized by addressing societal, policy-based, and environmental barriers rather than attempting to "fix" individuals. By utilizing the Social Model of Disability, this study will emphasize that inequalities in the employment of PWDs are not intrinsic but a direct result of structural barriers.

The three levels investigated in this research institutional, cultural, and environmental will provide an exhaustive account of the employment prospects and predicaments of PWDs in The Gambia.

This model will guide policy change proposals, workplace reforms, and social awareness campaigns to create a more inclusive workplace with equal opportunity. With a focus on changing society rather than individual disability, this research is aligned with international disability rights campaigns demanding a more inclusive and accessible society for all.

Figure 2.1. Utilization of Social Model of Disability Theory in Current Study



## **CHAPTER THREE: RESEARCH METHODOLOGY**

### **3.1. Research Approach**

The present study adopts a qualitative research approach that aims to investigate and probe into the challenges and opportunities of persons with disabilities in Gambian employment. According to (CRESWELL, 2013) and Creswell & Creswell (2018), qualitative research is a type of investigation that gains an elaborate understanding of real-world problems through people's experiences, values, and viewpoints within social, political, cultural, religious, and economic issues. This therefore makes the approach very relevant, as it will bring deep and complex insights into the living experiences of people with disabilities that might not be fully captured by the quantitative methods alone. Since the nature of disability in the workforce is complex and multifaceted, a qualitative approach would ideally work on the perceptions of people with disabilities regarding challenges and opportunities out there in the labor market. This study will allow an in-depth look into the experiences within a context that has rarely been discussed in the mainstream and will present critical lessons on the inclusivity and accessibility of the labor market in The Gambia.

In this regard, a phenomenological design is adopted for this study to investigate the phenomenon of disability in the Gambian workforce. Phenomenology, as a qualitative research approach, focuses on understanding individuals' lived experiences of a particular phenomenon (CRESWELL, 2013). It seeks to uncover the essence of these experiences by analyzing how participants make sense of their world and the meanings they attach to their experiences. This design befits this study, as it allows an in-depth investigation into the subjective experiences that people with disabilities have in relation to the workforce, which is the central phenomenon of interest. The phenomenological design will ensure that a unique view and feelings of persons with disabilities are elicited in order to have a better, holistic view of the challenges and opportunities which persons with disabilities face within the labor market. It is an important design since it will shed light on personal lived realities of persons with disabilities and give voice to a group within employment discussions that are often muted.

### **3.2. Selection procedure for persons with disabilities (PWDs)**

This study utilizes a purposive sampling technique to identify and recruit persons with disabilities (PWDs) who are either currently employed or actively seeking employment across both formal and informal sectors. Purposeful sampling is a non-random selection method in which researchers deliberately select participants who possess specific characteristics or experiences directly related to the research phenomenon. Such a method befits studies that seek to obtain deep insight from persons who have lived or experienced the phenomenon being investigated. Persons with disabilities will have personal experiences of barriers and opportunities in working situations. Overall, 20 PWD participants will be targeted for the interview. Data collection was conducted through a structured questionnaire administered via a referral-based (snowball) sampling approach. Specifically, after interviewing an initial PWD participant within the study area, the data collection team requested that individual to refer the interviewers to another eligible PWD, thereby facilitating a chain-referral process. This method ensures targeted access to a relevant population of PWDs while leveraging existing social networks to enhance participant selection.

### **3.3. Identification of participants for key informant interviews**

The selection of participants for key informant interviews focuses on four primary stakeholder groups to ensure a comprehensive analysis of disability employment dynamics in The Gambia: social welfare officer, policymakers (from the Ministry of Gender, Children, and Social Welfare), and leaders from advocacy organizations such as the Gambia Federation of Disabled Persons (GFDP) and the Gambia Federation for the Hard of Hearing and Deaf. Participants were purposively selected based on their direct experience with disability inclusion in the labor market, ensuring representation across key perspectives. Employers provided insights into hiring practices, workplace accommodations, and attitudinal barriers, while advocacy groups highlighted systemic challenges such as discrimination and accessibility. Policymakers contributed expertise on existing legal frameworks and potential policy improvements to enhance inclusivity. A total of 8 key informant interviews were conducted, with at least 2 participants selected from policymakers, 3 from social welfare, 2 from NGOs/advocacy groups, and one 1 disabled persons as well to ensure balanced and representative insights. This multi-stakeholder approach ensures a well-rounded understanding of the opportunities and barriers faced by persons with disabilities in The Gambian workforce.

### **3.4. Data Collection Methods**

This study employed two data collection methods: semi-structured interviews and document analysis. These methods allow for a comprehensive exploration of the challenges and opportunities faced by people with disabilities in the Gambian labor market, providing both qualitative insights and contextual understanding.

#### **3.4.1. Semi-Structured Interviews**

The semi-structured interview is adopted as one of the tools utilised for data collection in this study because this technique combines flexibility and depth in the capture of participants' experiences. According to (Denzin & Lincoln, 2018), the semi-structured interview method is one of the effective ways through which one can acquire in-depth insights into participants' perspectives on a particular social phenomenon. This approach is much suited to exploring challenges and opportunities workers with disability face.

Hence this allows for a balance between structure and flexibility. The researcher used an interview guide whereby open-ended questions are posed to guide the conversation. During these sessions, flexibility was allowed by adjusting the sequence of questions and probing further based on the participants' responses. I continued asking questions related to interesting and surprising responses. In this way, all important topics concerning the research questions were discussed, but at the same time, any participant is allowed to express their thoughts and experiences. This format has flexibility that allows for the presentation of diverging standpoints and narratives from various stakeholders, including persons with disabilities, employers, advocacy organizations, and policymakers, which are important in capturing the intricacies of the problem.

This method is highly applicable in studies dealing with complex social issues that involve the experiences of persons with disabilities within a labour market, such as the Gambian context. It also allows me to be able to explain participants' views in detail while preserving a structured framework that would ensure coverage of all relevant research topics. Open-ended questions tend to foster a conversational environment in the rapport-building process, thus putting the participants at ease to tell their personal experiences relating to employment and disability.

Moving on, I interviewed 8 people at least 2 from each category mentioned above, including a person with disability, social welfare officers, policymakers, and the Advocacy network. These individuals are selected because they are believed to have direct experience related to both the labour market and disability issues. Considering that the Google form questionnaire was limited to offering detailed insights from participants, these interviews are necessary to enrich the data collected through the Google form questionnaire.

One of the many advantages with semi-structured interviews involves the depth they afford for personal experiences. Participants elaborated on their struggles and successes with rich, contextual data. For example, while explaining challenges at the workplace, participants describe barriers that affect daily living or solutions found, enhancing the depth of response. It helps to depict the underlying factors that shape the participants' experiences.

Besides that, follow-up questions within a semi-structured format allow for a more profound level of understanding of the experiences of the individuals. By informally discussing issues, the researcher discovers not only the superficial facts but also subtler information about the personal and structural variables affecting disability and employment. Finally, this approach allows for the pooling of varied perspectives, as the different constituencies represented, employees with a disability, the advocacy networks, and the government/policymakers bring unique insight born out of experience and role within the labor market. Thus, the wide-ranging perspectives have served to bring many insights into focus regarding challenges and opportunities that affect persons with disabilities vis-à-vis the labor market in The Gambia.

**Table 3.1.** List of key informants interviewed Participants

<i>No.</i>	<i>Names</i>	<i>Sex</i>	<i>Portfolio</i>	<i>Institution</i>
1	Mr. EJ	M	Regional Coordinator	Ministry of Gender, Children and Social Welfare
2	Mr. EC	M	Coordinator	Gambia Federation for Hard of Hearing and Deaf
3	Mr. OS	M	Freelance Data Collector (Disabled)	Gambia Bureau of Statistics

4	Mr. HB	M	Principal Social Welfare Officer	Ministry of Gender, Children and Social Welfare
5	Ms NS	F	Senior Social Welfare Officer	Ministry of Gender, Children and Social Welfare
6	Ms NF	F	Social Welfare Officer- Multidisciplinary Facilitation Team	Department of Social Welfare
7	Mr. MK	M	Chairperson	The Gambia Federation for Disabled Persons
8	Mr. MS	M	Director of Disabled Unit	Department of Social Welfare

### 3.4.2. Google form Questionnaire

Considering the geographical positioning of the researcher in Italy and the respondents in The Gambia, the adoption of an online data collection tool such as Google Forms is pragmatic and effective. Online questionnaires have numerous strengths, such as being cost-saving, having easy access, and being able to reach more individuals without geographical restrictions (Bryman, 2016). The process provides room for collecting, organizing, and analysing the data effectively and prevents biases associated with face-to-face interviews.

Google Forms facilitates systematic and standardised responses, hence promoting consistency in data collection. Moreover, it provides flexibility through the inclusion of quantitative and qualitative responses, making it very effective in capturing complex realities of employment opportunities and challenges of individuals with disabilities (CRESWELL, 2013). Furthermore, online questionnaires provide respondents with anonymity, which can foster honest and unadulterated feedback, especially when dealing with sensitive matters such as workplace discrimination and accessibility (Bowen, 2009).

This study aims to examine the structural enablers and barriers that influence the employment prospects of disabled individuals in The Gambia. A critical component of this work is obtaining first-hand reactions from disabled individuals, social welfare workers, policymakers, and advocacy organizations. In light of difficulties in undertaking face-to-face data collection from a remote location, an online medium presents a practical alternative.

It provides widespread participation across a number of geographic areas, therefore increasing the generalizability of the results (Palinkas et al., 2015). Furthermore, the utilization of an online tool is consistent with conventional best practices in qualitative inquiry within the social sciences, where technology has improved both the availability and variety of data gathering techniques (Denzin & Lincoln, 2018). Furthermore, Google Forms provides automatic data storage and organization, hence minimizing the potential for loss of data and inaccuracies commonly linked with manual transcription processes (Braun & Clarke, 2006). Hence, this is relevant to the research objectives as the use of Google Forms plays a crucial role in tackling the research questions:

- i. In what ways do institutional barriers and social attitudes impact the career prospects of individuals with disabilities in The Gambia?
- ii. How can policy reforms and workplace modifications be enhanced to enhance the addressability of the social and environmental barriers encountered by people with disabilities in the labor market of The Gambia?

With the use of this method, the study ensures a systematic and exhaustive collection of data from different stakeholders. This strategy enhances the validity of research outcomes by facilitating the contribution of a wide range of insights, thereby developing a more complex and evidence-informed explanation of disability employment issues in The Gambia. This strategy is especially applicable in light of the expanding literature advocating the use of digital platforms in carrying out disability-inclusive research (Friedman, 2020; McLennan et al., 2021).

Therefore, the rationale for using Google Forms as a tool for data gathering is its ease of access, functional effectiveness, and ability to cover a broad spectrum of opinions. It allows the researcher to transcend geographical distances without compromising on stringent standards of data integrity and reliability. This approach serves to further the general objective of the study, which is to make policy suggestions for promoting an inclusive labor market in The Gambia.

**Below is the links for reference materials:**

[https://docs.google.com/document/d/1xtyD3\\_o31\\_wHuYMEXvrA6aFjffQ2goDi/edit?usp=sharing&ouid=102057047314760356197&rtpof=true&sd=true](https://docs.google.com/document/d/1xtyD3_o31_wHuYMEXvrA6aFjffQ2goDi/edit?usp=sharing&ouid=102057047314760356197&rtpof=true&sd=true)

<https://docs.google.com/spreadsheets/d/1RvVz9bLHO8eiRaKmIXrembzXDeiTNYHp/edit?usp=sharing&ouid=102057047314760356197&rtpof=true&sd=true>

PWD: <https://ee.kobotoolbox.org/single/YaDrq1dw>

PolicyMakers <https://ee.kobotoolbox.org/single/cihpRXOB>

NGO/Advocates: <https://ee.kobotoolbox.org/single/oCx6pafO>

Welfare Officers: <https://ee.kobotoolbox.org/single/b026uL89>

Characteristics of the sample and significance in relation to the studied population. The sample consists of persons living with disabilities because they have a unique perspective that is often overlooked in general population surveys or studies. By specifically choosing this group, we can gather important insights about their lived experiences, challenges, and needs, which are crucial in shaping policies and interventions. Their feedback is especially valuable in understanding how they are affected by societal factors, including access to jobs, education, healthcare, and more.

In the case of the Gambian population, understanding the challenges faced by people with disabilities can inform policy directives aimed at improving their quality of life. For example, they are often excluded from the job market due to barriers like discrimination, lack of accessible infrastructure, or limited opportunities for skill development. This exclusion can perpetuate inequality and prevent them from fully participating in society. Because of the rare and specific characteristics of this group, we have limited the sample size to 20 respondents. The feedback from these individuals can significantly influence the development of policies that are more inclusive and responsive to their needs. Policy interventions may include better job accessibility, improved education systems, and enhanced social services, all aimed at reducing barriers and promoting equal opportunities for persons with disabilities. In conclusion, their feedback is vital for informing policy changes that can help break down barriers and create a more inclusive society where people with disabilities are fully integrated into the workforce and other aspects of community life

### **3.4.3. Document Analysis**

In addition, primary data shall be complemented by document analysis. Document analysis refers to the review of relevant written materials on the subject in terms of policy documents, employment records, and reports from advocacy organizations and international bodies on disability and employment. According to (Bowen, 2009), document analysis is a helpful data triangulation technique for reaping a richer understanding of the study area. Indeed, from the document analysis of disability and labor market issues, this study will be privy to the formal policies and practices guiding the employment of people with disabilities in The Gambia. These documents will supplement the data on interviewees through a wider contextual understanding and the triangulation of information obtained from the interviewees. In addition, scrutiny of documents from various advocacy groups and international organizations will provide the influence of such external entities on the local labor market and disability policies and thereby increase the overall understanding of opportunities and barriers that people with disabilities face in the workforce.

Collectively, the semi-structured interviews and document analysis will ensure that data collection is well-rounded and comprehensive, where the interview data delves into personal insights of an in-depth nature and the document analysis provides contextual and policy-related information.

### **3.5. Data Analysis**

The data from the semi-structured interviews and relevant documentation were analyzed using thematic analysis, a widely recognized qualitative data analysis technique. Utilizing this technique involves the identification, analysis, and reporting of patterns or themes within data, thereby enabling a detailed and comprehensive understanding of a research topic (Braun & Clarke, 2006). This allows me to extract themes representing the central aspects of participants' experiences and issues associated with the workforce inclusion of persons with disabilities in The Gambia.

This allows me to understand how different participants, including persons with disabilities, employers, advocacy groups, and policymakers, experience or view both challenges and opportunities that exist within the labor market. Thematic organization of data clarifies the key issues; thus, deep insight into the intricacy of the subject matter can be obtained. The analysis was inductive, meaning themes emerged directly from the data rather than being imposed before the study based on theoretical assumptions. The inductive approach allows the analysis to be open-

ended and flexible, which enables the identification of themes naturally emerging from the participants' responses. In doing so, I avoided predefined categories, which might capture the richness of the data and perhaps provide unexpected insights that will contribute to a more nuanced understanding of the phenomenon.

Thematic analysis is an appropriate approach to this kind of research, since the latter offers some possibilities for addressing complex, context-dependent issues. According to Braun and Clarke (2006), thematic analysis can be used effectively in the research of phenomena when the objective of the investigation is to gain a better insight into participants' views and experiences. This approach is taken in the current paper to explore the social issue of workforce disability inclusion, whereby perspectives can radically differ.

Thematic analysis is rigorous in its systematic process in various stages, including familiarization with the data, coding, theme generation, reviewing and refining themes, and, not least, writing up the findings. Expounding on this, the thematic analysis was done on the primary data collected from interviews and documents. First, I transcribed the interview audios using the TurboScribe transcriber, and then listened to the audios while reading the transcript to verify authenticity in participants' voices. All eight interviews were transcribed and later coded manually at the first stage of the analysis. This was done to better immerse myself in the data and then extract relevant information for the report. First, I read the transcripts to familiarize myself with the data, and assigned codes and highlighted texts on the transcripts based on relevance. The systematic nature of the process means all the aspects are closely observed, hence increasing the trustworthiness and validity of the results. After that process, I used Quirkos software to reanalyze the data based on two purposes. One to generate themes and observe patterns in the data. Two, to triangulate the manual analyses, ensuring that they are relevant for the research report. Moreover, thematic analysis is transparent; that is, it allows the researcher to account for and describe each step in the analytical process, right from data collection to theme identification.

This structured and transparent approach is pivotal in ensuring that the outcomes of the study are reliable as well as comprehensive. The thematic analysis provides a flexible framework with a clear structure that fits different types of qualitative data; hence, it is especially useful in research that aims to explore complex social phenomena-for example, barriers faced by people with disabilities in the labor market. Thematic analysis, moreover, will help to identify key themes,

but on the other hand, it will make the analysis rigorous, transparent, and emanate from the data itself, therefore contributing to a well-rounded conclusion.

The sample audio interview recordings with respondent x from institution x is accessible here:

<https://youtu.be/YvMq2QCHub4>

[https://youtu.be/yzV9LkIx\\_EY](https://youtu.be/yzV9LkIx_EY)

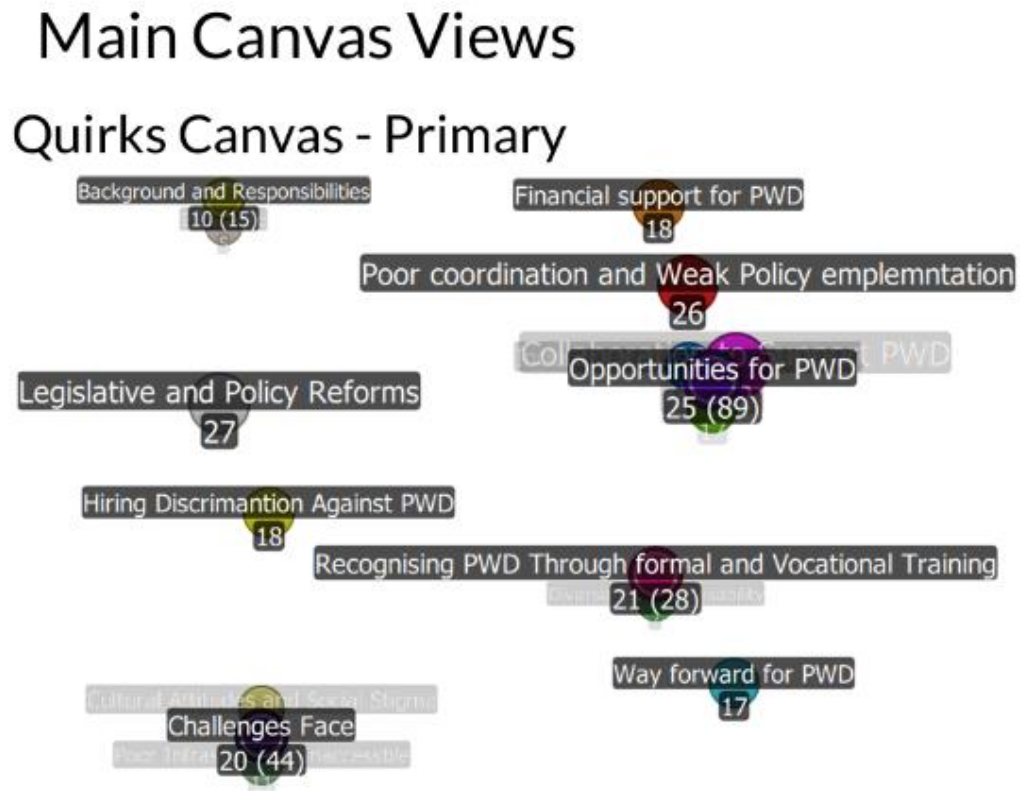
Example 1: the study includes interviews about challenges that PWD faces, I take note that many participants mention difficulties in transportation, inaccessible public buildings, or lack of assistive technologies and discrimination in terms of employment. This helps to grasp the broader challenges participants are facing.

Example 2: In the interviews, codes like “difficulty with mobility,” “lack of adaptive technology,” and “social stigma” could be generated based on direct quotes or general statements that reflect common challenges faced by disabled individuals, in this regards I pay attention to details.

Example 3: Theme 1: Physical Accessibility Challenges – This theme encompasses the difficulties participants face in navigating public spaces, such as the absence of ramps or elevators, and the inaccessibility of transportation systems.

Theme 2: Technological Barriers – This theme captures issues related to inadequate or unavailable assistive technologies that hinder participants’ ability to engage fully in daily life.

Figure 1: Quirkos Main Canvas View (Data Analysis Using Software)



## **CHAPTER FOUR: FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION**

### **4.1. Findings**

The employment landscape for persons with disabilities (PWDs) in The Gambia is shaped by a complex interplay of societal attitudes, structural barriers, and policy shortcomings. While international frameworks and national legislation advocate for inclusivity, the lived experiences of PWDs tell a different story one marked by discrimination, lack of accessibility, limited educational opportunities, and weak enforcement of legal protections.

This study seeks to answer two critical research questions:

1. How do societal attitudes and structural barriers impact the employment opportunities of people with disabilities in The Gambia?
2. In what ways can policy reforms and workplace accommodations be improved to address the social and environmental challenges faced by people with disabilities in the Gambian labor market?

Through firsthand narratives and expert insights, this research unveils the persistent struggles PWDs face when seeking employment and identifies opportunities for policy and systemic improvements. The findings highlight the exclusionary hiring practices that prevent PWDs from securing jobs, the infrastructural inadequacies that hinder their participation in the workforce, and the cultural prejudices that reinforce their marginalization. Furthermore, it explores potential pathways for change, including enhanced legislative enforcement, improved workplace accommodations, and increased access to vocational training programs.

At the heart of this inquiry is the recognition that economic empowerment for PWDs is not just a social justice issue but also an economic imperative. Creating a more inclusive workforce benefits not only individuals with disabilities but also the broader Gambian society. The narratives presented in the findings section amplify the voices of those affected and serve as a call to action for policymakers, employers, and community stakeholders to foster a more equitable labor market.

The sections that follow will delve deeper into the realities faced by PWDs, illustrating how discrimination, lack of accessibility, and weak legal enforcement shape their employment experiences. These insights provide a foundation for targeted interventions that can pave the way

for a more inclusive and sustainable workforce in The Gambia. It is important to note that the findings are presented in accordance with the research questions to ease the narration of the findings.

#### **4.1.1. Research Question 1: How do societal attitudes and structural barriers impact the employment opportunities of people with disabilities in The Gambia?**

##### 4.1.1.1. Discrimination in Hiring Practices

The study reveals that systemic discrimination remains a significant hurdle for persons with disabilities (PWDs) seeking employment in The Gambia. Employers frequently perceive PWDs as less capable or assume that accommodating their needs would impose an undue financial burden. This perception results in a workplace culture that is unwelcoming and exclusionary, ultimately leading to limited job prospects and financial dependence among PWDs.

HB, a Senior Social Welfare Officer, underscored how deeply ingrained biases limit PWDs' opportunities, noting that many businesses fail to recognize the professional potential of individuals with disabilities:

"Many businesses do not see the potential of persons with disabilities in professional settings. This mindset leads to their exclusion from employment opportunities, regardless of their qualifications or competencies." (Telephone Interview, 9<sup>th</sup> February 2025).

Similarly, OS, a physically disabled respondent, shared his personal experiences with hiring discrimination:

"I have been turned away from numerous job opportunities simply because of my disability. It didn't matter that I had the necessary skills or qualifications; employers just couldn't see past my physical condition." (Telephone Interview, 9<sup>th</sup> February 2025).

These testimonies illustrate the exclusionary hiring practices that persist due to entrenched stereotypes, a lack of disability awareness, and insufficient policies promoting inclusive employment. Employers may also hold the misconception that hiring PWDs will require extensive modifications to the workplace or additional training for existing employees, further discouraging them from offering opportunities.

#### 4.1.1.2. Lack of Accessible Work Environments

The physical inaccessibility of workplaces remains a major barrier for PWDs in The Gambia. Many office buildings, whether in the public or private sector, lack essential infrastructure such as ramps, elevators, and accessible restrooms. These structural limitations create significant challenges for individuals with mobility impairments, restricting their ability to enter workplaces and effectively perform their job responsibilities. Moreover, even when workplaces do provide some form of accessibility, it is often inadequate or poorly maintained.

EC, a sign language interpreter, highlighted the urgency of prioritizing workplace inclusivity:

"Inclusive workplace infrastructure should be a priority for all businesses and institutions. Without accessibility, even the most skilled persons with disabilities are denied the opportunity to contribute to the workforce." (Telephone Interview, 25<sup>th</sup> February 2025).

Despite advocacy efforts, the slow progress in ensuring disability-friendly workspaces underscores a broader issue: employers rarely invest in necessary structural modifications, often citing financial constraints. This reluctance perpetuates employment disparities and reinforces the marginalization of PWDs. Additionally, the lack of inclusive work environments limits PWDs' ability to advance in their careers, as many are unable to access higher-level job opportunities that require mobility within office spaces.

#### 4.1.1.3. Limited Education and Vocational Training

Education is a fundamental enabler of employment, yet PWDs in The Gambia face considerable challenges in accessing quality education. The lack of specialized teachers, disability-friendly learning materials, and inclusive curricula limits their ability to acquire the skills necessary for employment. Many educational institutions are not equipped with the necessary accommodations, such as braille materials for visually impaired students or assistive technology for students with learning disabilities.

For instance, deaf students frequently experience barriers due to the shortage of trained sign language teachers. MK emphasized how the inadequacy of educational support further disadvantages PWDs:

"Without access to specialized education and vocational training, PWDs are left at a severe disadvantage in the job market. The system fails them before they even get a chance to compete." (Telephone Interview, 20<sup>th</sup> February 2025).

Additionally, vocational training programs tailored to the needs of PWDs remain insufficient. Many PWDs lack access to skill-building initiatives, further limiting their career advancement and self-sufficiency. Without structured pathways to employment, individuals with disabilities often find themselves trapped in cycles of poverty and dependency.

#### 4.1.1.4. Weak Enforcement of Disability Laws

Although, The Gambia introduced the Persons with Disabilities Act (2021) to guarantee employment rights and inclusive hiring practices, its implementation remains weak due to a lack of enforcement mechanisms. Many employers are either unaware of the legislation or disregard it due to the absence of strict monitoring and penalties for non-compliance.

NF, a disability rights advocate, pointed out the gap between legislative intent and actual practice:

"While the Act promotes non-discrimination, enforcement remains inadequate. There are no strict monitoring systems in place, which allows employers to disregard inclusive hiring practices without consequences" (Telephone Interview, 23<sup>rd</sup> March 2025).

This lack of accountability means that many employers do not actively seek to accommodate PWDs, rendering the legislation ineffective in addressing employment inequalities. In addition, government agencies responsible for overseeing disability rights enforcement often lack the resources or political will to take meaningful action against non-compliant businesses.

#### 4.1.1.5. Cultural Attitudes and Social Stigma

The social stigma associated with disability plays a crucial role in shaping employment outcomes for PWDs. Negative societal perceptions lead to marginalization and exclusion in professional environments. Many interviewees reported experiencing mockery and social isolation due to their disabilities. Cultural beliefs that view disability as a form of punishment or misfortune further discourage employers from hiring PWDs, fearing that they may bring "bad luck" to the workplace.

OS shared his personal experiences:

"People attribute my disability to divine punishment. This belief discourages me from even trying to seek job opportunities, knowing the bias I will face" (Telephone Interview, 10<sup>th</sup> February 2025).

Such cultural attitudes reinforce dependency and prevent PWDs from actively contributing to the economy. Overcoming these prejudices requires a fundamental shift in public perception and sustained awareness campaigns to highlight the capabilities and rights of individuals with disabilities. Community engagement programs that showcase successful PWDs in various professional fields could help challenge existing stereotypes.

#### 4.1.1.6. Limited Government and Private Sector Support

Despite existing government initiatives aimed at supporting PWDs, these efforts remain insufficient in addressing their employment challenges. Employers are not incentivized through tax breaks or subsidies to hire PWDs, which reduces their motivation to promote workplace inclusivity. Additionally, financial assistance programs designed to support PWDs in acquiring vocational skills or starting small businesses are often underfunded or difficult to access.

NS noted the absence of robust frameworks that would compel businesses to accommodate PWDs:

"There are no robust legal frameworks ensuring that companies provide reasonable accommodations. Without such policies, businesses remain disincentivized to promote inclusivity" (Telephone Interview, 06<sup>th</sup> March 2025).

The lack of government and private sector support further exacerbates employment challenges for PWDs, making it difficult for them to secure stable jobs and achieve economic independence. Strengthening collaboration between public institutions, private enterprises, and disability advocacy groups could foster a more inclusive labor market.

Hence, findings from this study highlight the significant societal attitudes and structural barriers that continue to restrict employment opportunities for PWDs in The Gambia. Addressing these challenges requires a multifaceted approach, including stronger enforcement of disability laws, improved workplace accessibility, expanded educational and vocational training opportunities, and a shift in societal perceptions. Collaboration between the government, private sector, and advocacy groups is essential to fostering an inclusive labor market where PWDs can fully

participate and thrive. Moreover, targeted initiatives such as mentorship programs, disability-focused job fairs, and inclusive corporate policies can serve as effective strategies in promoting equal employment opportunities for all.

#### **4.1.2. Research Question 2: In what ways can policy reforms and workplace accommodations be improved to address the social and environmental challenges faced by people with disabilities in the Gambian labor market?**

##### 4.1.2.1. Government Initiatives and Social Programs

In The Gambia, the government has implemented various social programs aimed at supporting vulnerable groups, including persons with disabilities (PWDs). Among these is the Family Strengthening Program, which provides quarterly financial assistance to families and individuals in need. This initiative, while valuable in offering short-term financial relief, does not effectively address the broader challenges that PWDs face in accessing sustainable employment opportunities. Many PWDs remain unemployed or underemployed due to systemic barriers, including workplace discrimination, lack of accessible infrastructure, and limited vocational training opportunities.

EC, a program officer overseeing social initiatives, highlights the limitations of the current system:

"This initiative offers quarterly financial aid to help recipients cover basic needs. While it provides some relief, it does not address long-term employment and empowerment needs" (Telephone Interview, 25<sup>th</sup> February 2025).

Financial assistance programs serve as temporary solutions, but they do not equip PWDs with the necessary tools to enter and thrive in the labor market. Many individuals with disabilities remain dependent on these stipends due to the lack of employment opportunities, workplace accommodations, and inclusive hiring practices. Therefore, systemic reforms must prioritize long-term employment solutions over short-term financial relief. Government efforts should focus on expanding access to quality education, promoting inclusive hiring policies, and ensuring that social protection programs include pathways to economic independence.

##### 4.1.2.2. Vocational Training and Internship Programs

Various organizations have established vocational training programs to bridge the skills gap and enhance employability. These programs aim to equip PWDs with marketable skills in tailoring,

catering, crafts, and even digital skills such as computer literacy and online business management. The importance of these initiatives cannot be overstated, as they offer individuals a pathway toward economic independence and self-sufficiency. EC, Coordinator for The Gambia Federation for Hard of Hearing and Deaf who coupled as an advocate for disability rights, emphasizes the role of such training and says the following:

"Vocational training plays a crucial role in fostering economic independence for PWDs, but more comprehensive training programs are needed" (Telephone Interview, 25<sup>th</sup> February 2025).

Despite the significance of these programs, many remain limited in scope, often lacking specialized training modules that align with current labor market demands. Furthermore, the absence of structured internships and mentorship opportunities means that many trained individuals struggle to transition into the workforce. Expanding these programs to include advanced technical skills, digital literacy, and entrepreneurial training would provide PWDs with a broader range of career options. Additionally, integrating internship placements within government and private sector institutions would ensure that trainees gain practical work experience, increasing their chances of long-term employment.

#### 4.1.2.3. Legislative and Policy Reforms

The Persons with Disabilities Act (2021) was a landmark step in ensuring equal opportunities for PWDs in The Gambia. However, weak enforcement and lack of accountability mechanisms have hindered its full implementation. Many employers remain unaware of their obligations under the law, and accessibility standards in workplaces are often not adhered to. Without stringent monitoring, the law remains a symbolic gesture rather than a transformative policy tool.

HB, a policy analyst, underscores the need for stronger enforcement:

"Stronger advocacy and systematic policy implementation can significantly improve employment prospects for PWDs" (Telephone Interview, 09<sup>th</sup> February 2025).

Effective policy reforms must include clear enforcement strategies, incentives for inclusive hiring, and penalties for non-compliance. Government agencies should collaborate with private sector entities to promote workplace accommodations such as adaptive technologies, flexible work

arrangements, and barrier-free infrastructure. Additionally, greater investment in awareness campaigns can help combat discrimination and change societal attitudes toward disability inclusion. The inclusion of PWDs in decision-making processes regarding labor policies is also crucial to ensure their voices are heard and their specific needs are addressed.

#### 4.1.2.4. NGO and International Support

International organizations have played a critical role in addressing the social and environmental challenges faced by PWDs in The Gambia. Organizations such as the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) and the United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA) have launched disability-focused initiatives aimed at promoting small-scale enterprises and providing training for PWDs, particularly women with disabilities. These programs empower individuals to start businesses, generate income, and contribute to their communities.

While these programs have proven beneficial, they remain limited in scale and reach. Many rural communities, where disability-related stigma is prevalent, lack access to these resources. Expanding international collaboration and securing additional funding can help scale up these initiatives, ensuring they reach a larger segment of the disabled population. Additionally, the government should work in partnership with NGOs to establish microfinance programs specifically designed for entrepreneurs with disabilities. This would provide PWDs with capital to start and sustain their businesses, fostering long-term economic stability.

Figure one (1): The breakdown of disability types among people or individuals is seen in the figure below. According to the data that was collected from the respondents/interviews, the most common demographic is five persons with physical disabilities, followed by four people with hearing impairments, three people with visual impairments, and three people with intellectual disabilities. While no cases of chronic illnesses were reported, two people reported learning difficulties, one person reported neurological disabilities, and two people reported mental health conditions, which are less common but still require attention. These findings underscore the need for a wide range of support services that are customized to the various types of disabilities, guaranteeing that everyone has access to the resources they require.

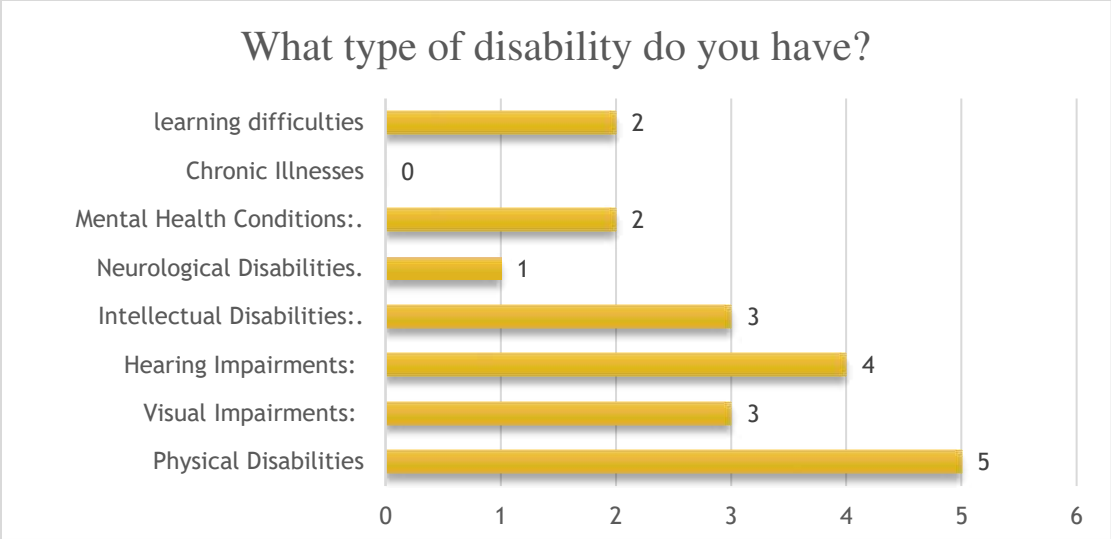


Figure two (2): According to the study's findings, all 20 participants (100%) said they had trouble finding employment. None of the respondents claimed to have encountered no difficulties. This response demonstrates how difficult it was for the respondents to find work.

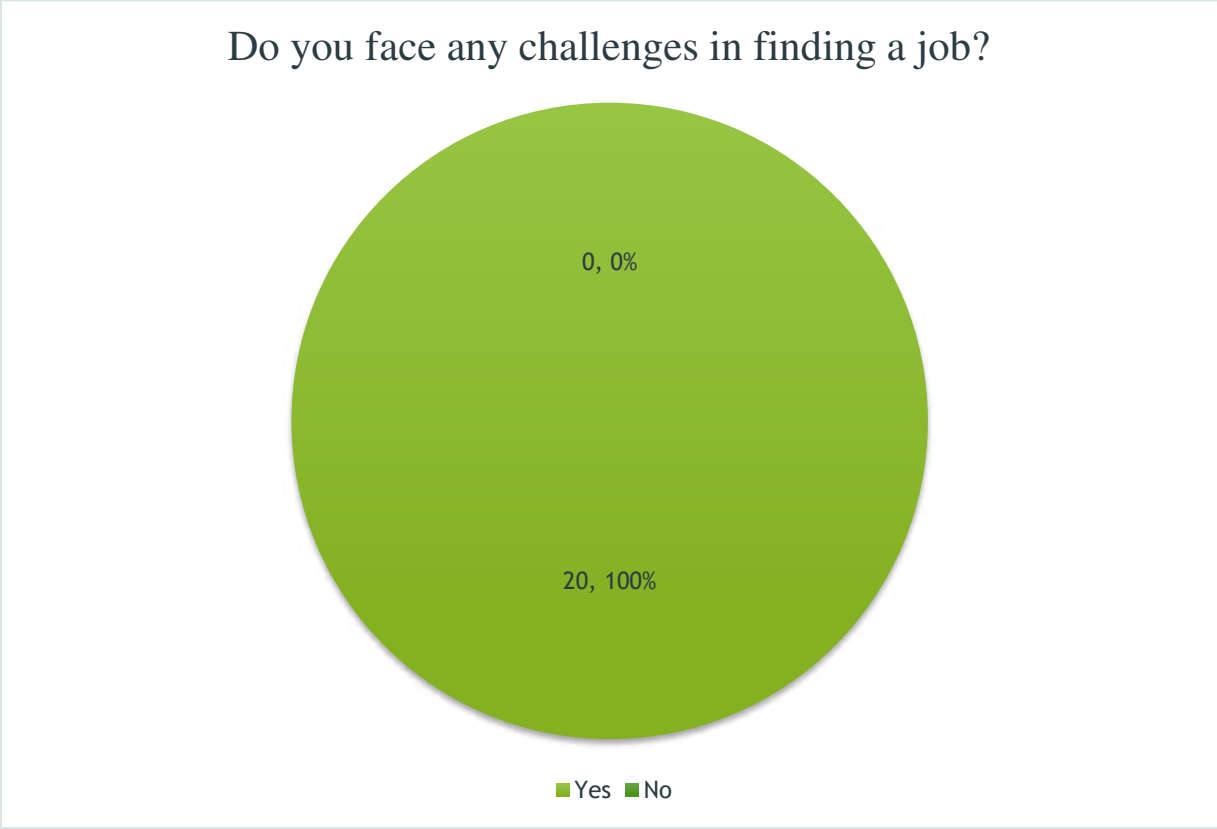


Figure three (3) below indicates what specific challenges the PWD faced in finding employment due to their disability status?

#### Prejudice and Discrimination

Five (5) individuals stated that discrimination and prejudice are the main barriers at work. According to them, these issues arise when individuals receive unfair treatment due to their gender, age, race, religion, or other characteristics. Employee morale may suffer, the workplace may become toxic, and the business may face legal ramifications. Prejudice and discrimination must be addressed in order to promote a diverse and inclusive workplace

#### Physical Obstacles

Physical barriers are tangible impediments that prevent people from participating fully in the workplace, according to three (3) respondents. These could include things like buildings that are inaccessible, poorly designed workspaces, or insufficient accommodations for people with impairments. These kinds of obstacles have the potential to reduce output and even exclude exceptional employees.

#### Barriers posed by technology

According to four (4) respondents, technical hurdles arise when employees lack the right tools, equipment, or digital resources, or when they do not receive the training or support, they need to use these technologies efficiently.

#### Limited Possibilities

According to two (2) people, a lack of opportunities for professional development, career advancement, or skill enhancement can have a significant effect on employee motivation and retention. They point out that employees may become distant when they see that their prospects for growth are limited, which reduces productivity and raises turnover. Organizations must prioritize offering clear career paths in order to retain exceptional personnel.

#### Possibilities for Training

One (1) respondent stated that training opportunities are essential for staff development and

business success. However, insufficient training could impair performance. Continuous training programs must be available to staff in order to keep their expertise up to date and relevant. This will enable them to meet the evolving demands of their roles.

### Stigma in Society

Three (3) people agreed with that social stigma in the workplace can result from a variety of factors, such as impairments, mental health issues, and non-conforming identities. This could lead to exclusion from workplace events, social isolation, or harassment at work. Social stigma needs to be addressed in order to create a productive workplace where all workers feel valued and included.

### Additional Obstacles

Two (2) people mention Additional challenges may include linguistic issues, cultural misunderstandings, or external economic forces. These could make it challenging to communicate, cooperate, and keep a positive work atmosphere. By identifying and eliminating these barriers, a cohesive and productive work atmosphere may be guaranteed.

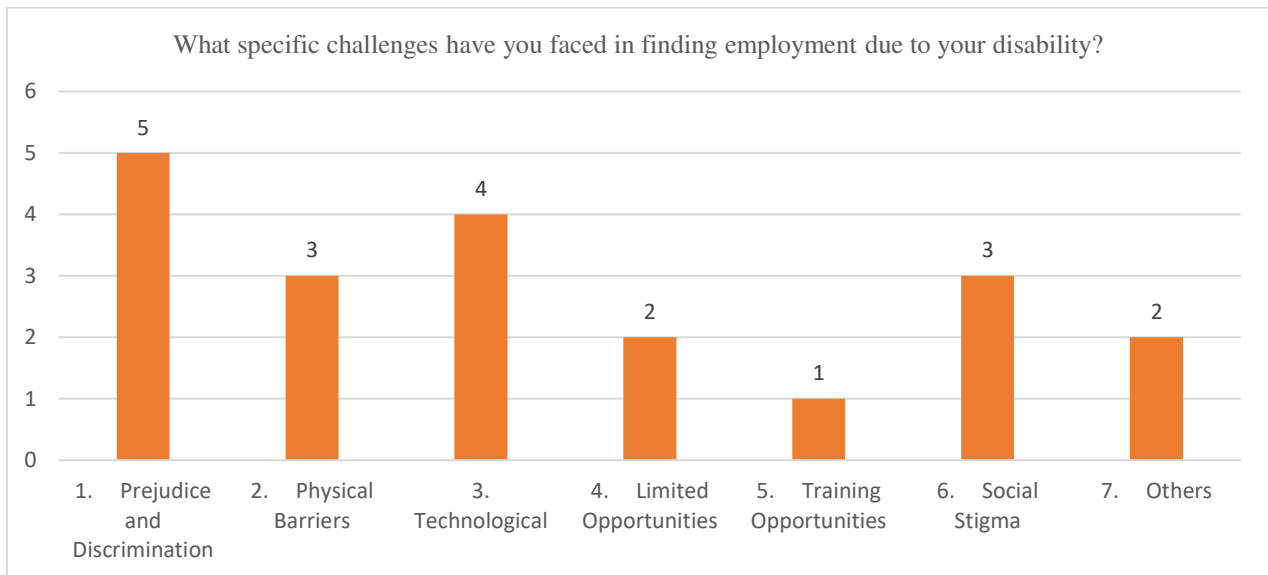


Figure four (4) below: Based on the data gathered, the particular skills training courses and vocational rehabilitation services that have been most helpful are listed in the chart below.

Numerous trades, including welding, electrical, plumbing, carpentry, hairdressing, and tailoring, were the focus of the data that was gathered.

#### Welding with Two People

Training in welding was shown to be especially helpful. There were more job chances as a result of the participants' reported notable gains in technical abilities. Their confidence and proficiency in the trade were greatly enhanced by the practical experience they were able to obtain due to the hands-on nature of the training.

#### Electrical (one person)

Positive results were also obtained from the electrical training program. Even though there was only one participant, the program offered thorough knowledge and useful skills that are necessary for employment in the electrical industry. The participant said they were happy with the training and felt ready for the workforce.

#### Plumbing (three people)

Participants held plumbing training with high respect. Three participants completed the program, and it was observed that the skills they learned were immediately relevant to a range of employment options. It was one of the most advantageous programs available because the training was comprehensive and covered both academic knowledge and real-world applications.

#### One participant in carpentry

The benefits of the carpentry training program were moderate. The participant acknowledged that the program would benefit from more practical experience, even if they valued the skills they had learnt. Nonetheless, the program gave them a strong basis for future advancement in the industry.

#### Hairdressing (two people)

The participants responded favorably to the hairdressing program. They emphasized the

training's innovative and enterprising components, which created chances for independent work. The curriculum received recognition for its hands-on approach and ability to put newly acquired skills to use right away. Documents for different programs that person with disabilities benefited from:

[Gambia Youth Empowerment Project \(YEP\), Q2 2020 Update, April to June 2020](#)

<https://docs.google.com/document/d/1aa9ARExL3K->

[BDfvz9T2J29cKdyYNvjMF/edit?usp=sharing&oid=102057047314760356197&rtpof=true&sd=true](https://docs.google.com/document/d/1aa9ARExL3K-BDfvz9T2J29cKdyYNvjMF/edit?usp=sharing&oid=102057047314760356197&rtpof=true&sd=true)

[https://drive.google.com/file/d/1X8QhXHneaR2A6J2cs\\_scWUMB2zXAOT0S/view?usp=sharing](https://drive.google.com/file/d/1X8QhXHneaR2A6J2cs_scWUMB2zXAOT0S/view?usp=sharing)

[https://drive.google.com/file/d/1xZxS\\_xorFlShyJ8fSH5AalamXE1ZCGb3/view?usp=sharing](https://drive.google.com/file/d/1xZxS_xorFlShyJ8fSH5AalamXE1ZCGb3/view?usp=sharing)

<https://docs.google.com/document/d/1fupKNtIKZwtgcaR8hRutxdK6vtWQdBM/edit?usp=sharing&oid=102057047314760356197&rtpof=true&sd=true>

<https://docs.google.com/document/d/18NU4T8pRu7->

[zJKAwG630hDxVxBbaZnfo/edit?usp=sharing&oid=102057047314760356197&rtpof=true&sd=true](https://docs.google.com/document/d/18NU4T8pRu7-zJKAwG630hDxVxBbaZnfo/edit?usp=sharing&oid=102057047314760356197&rtpof=true&sd=true)

[https://drive.google.com/file/d/10KiH3riuod13c2iBUj1O\\_xZGDa0soBVc/view?usp=sharing](https://drive.google.com/file/d/10KiH3riuod13c2iBUj1O_xZGDa0soBVc/view?usp=sharing)

Customizing (One Person)

Training that was tailored was helpful, especially for individuals who wanted to launch their own companies. Essential skills in clothing design and manufacturing, which are highly sought after, were taught in the curriculum. After finishing the course, the participant expressed confidence in their capacity to thrive in the field.

## Types of Beneficial Skills Training Programs and Vocational Rehabilitation Services

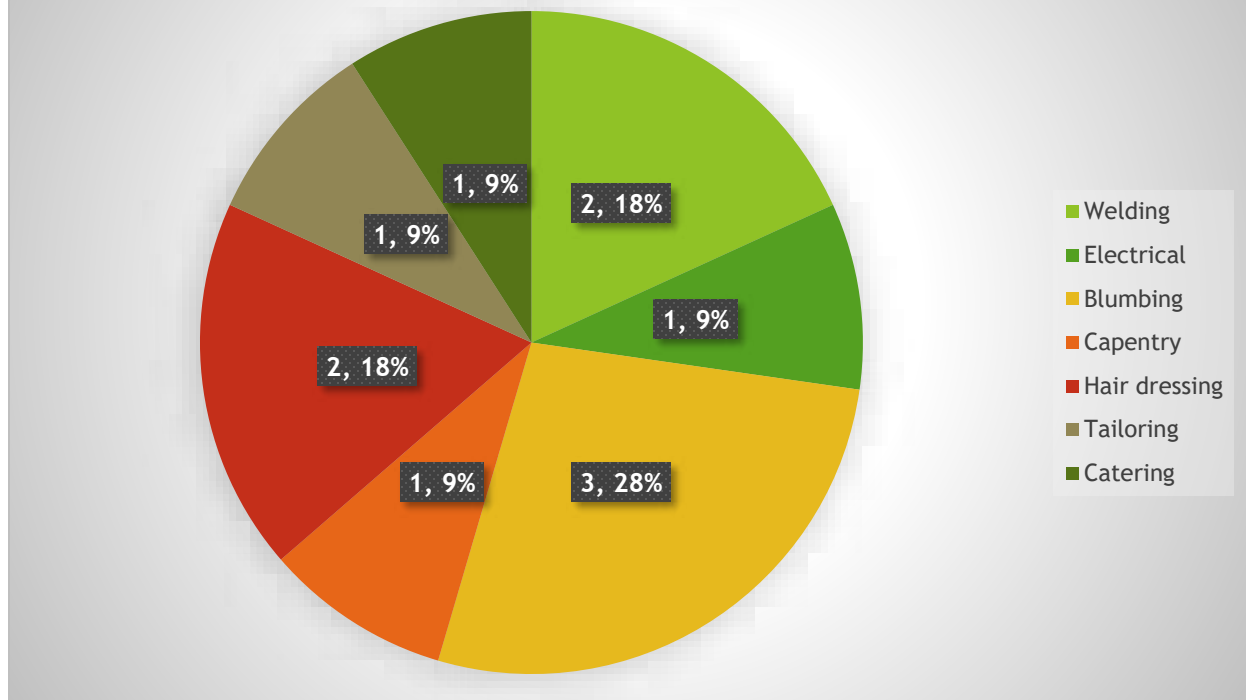
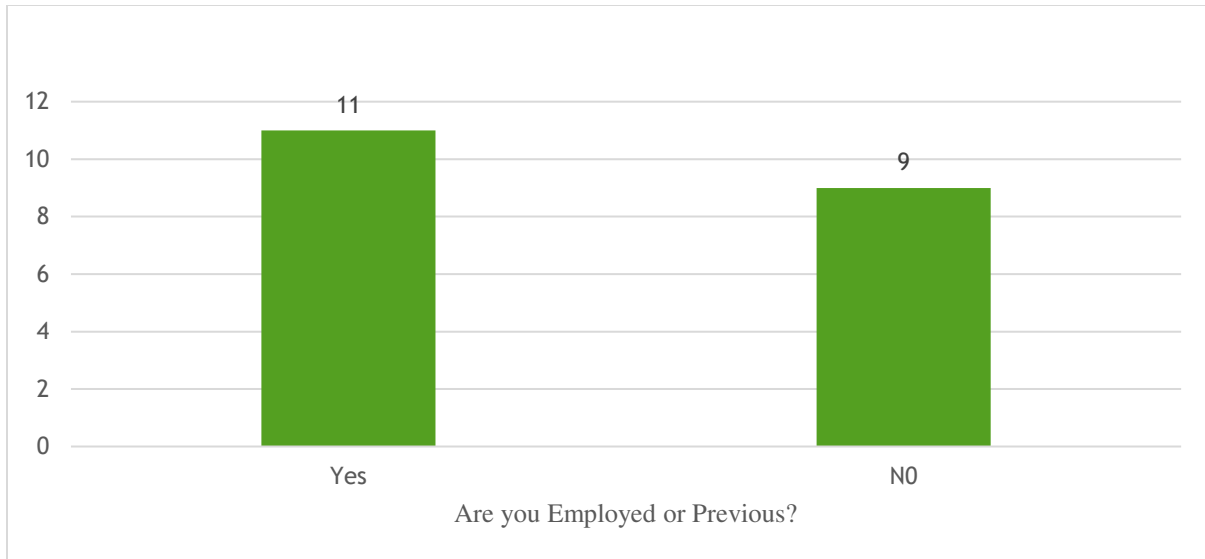
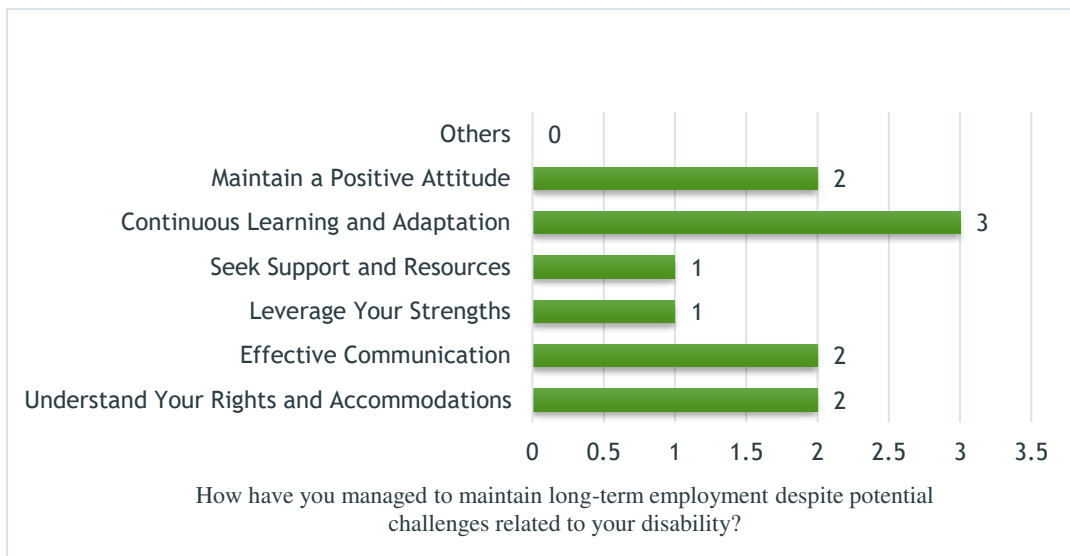


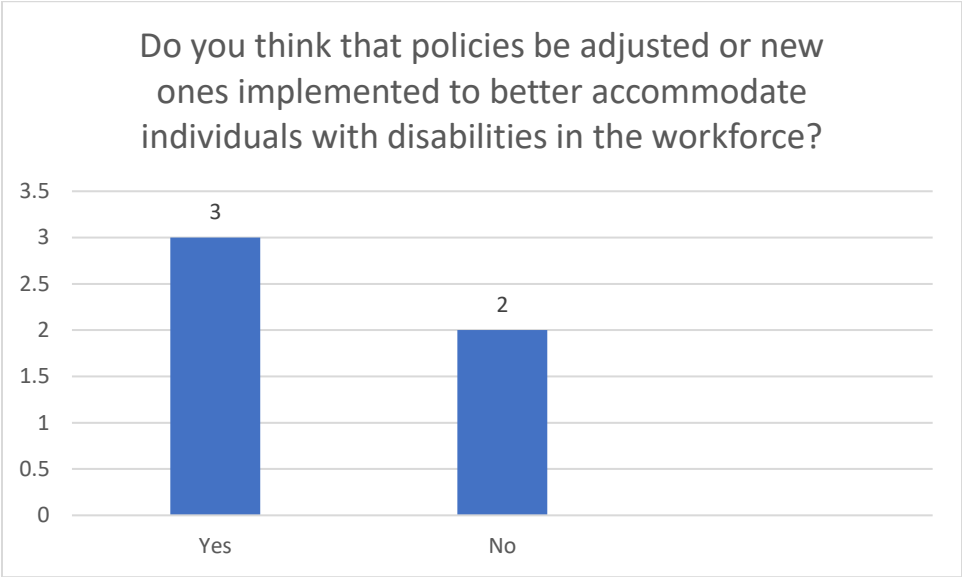
Figure five (5) below indicates the employment status of the respondents: Eleven out of the twenty (20) respondents claimed to be employed or to have worked in the past, while nine (9) reported not having a job.



The figure six (6) below illustrates the tactics used by people with disabilities to manage and maintain long-term employment in spite of possible obstacles associated with their condition. Knowing their rights as stated by two people, good communication Continuous learning is mentioned by two people, while one person mentions utilizing strengths and seeking support. Three people say that, and two people say that by keeping a positive outlook, they have been able to succeed in their careers.

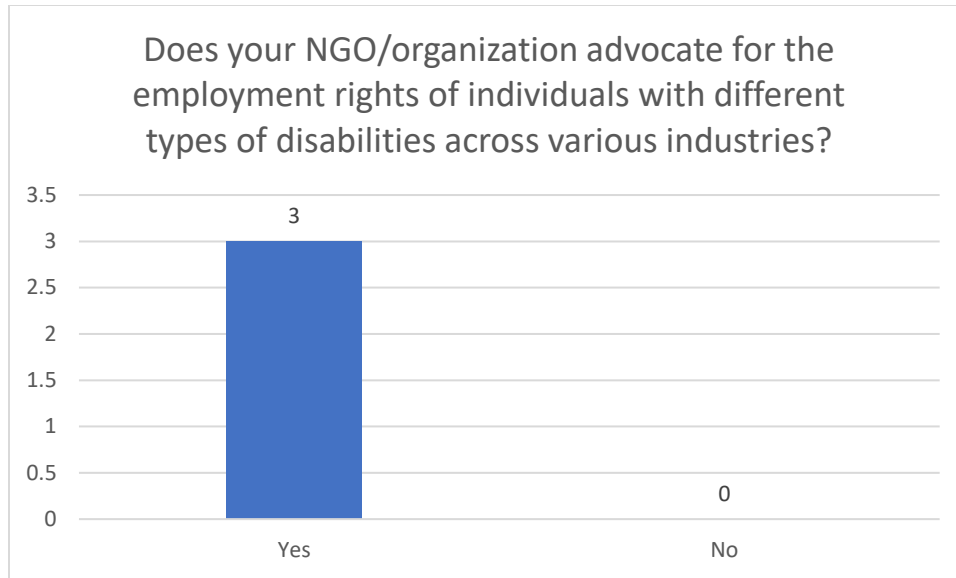


suggests that there is a recognition of the need for changes in current policies to better support individuals with disabilities. This could imply that the current policies may not be fully effective or inclusive, and there is room for improvement. Opposition or Satisfaction with Current Policies (2 votes for "No"): The minority indicates that some people believe the existing policies are sufficient or that additional changes are unnecessary. This could also reflect a minority opinion. The data reveals a slight majority (3 out of 5) in favor of adjusting or implementing new policies



All respondents strongly agreed to work with people with disabilities and legislators to promote greater job possibilities, as seen by their resounding "Yes" votes. This shows a strong dedication to advocacy and inclusive employment policies.

No Negative Responses: The lack of "No" responses indicates that no respondents are not currently working together on these projects, which is encouraging for the organization's or focus group's activities in this area.



**Does your NGO/Organization advocate for the employment rights of individuals with different types of disabilities across various industries?**

According to the statistics, there were three responders, and they were all "Yes" when asked if they work with legislators and people with disabilities to promote improved job prospects.

**How does your organization advocate for the employment rights of individuals with different types of disabilities across various industries?**

Promoting the work rights of people with disabilities is a crucial part of creating an inclusive society in which everyone has the chance to make a significant contribution. Our company is dedicated to making sure people with all kinds of disabilities have equitable job possibilities in all kinds of industries. This paper describes the tactics and programs our company uses to support these rights and encourage a more diverse workforce. Campaigns for Public Awareness  
Our organization runs public awareness programs that showcase the abilities and achievements of people with disabilities in the workplace, with the goal of changing society attitudes and reducing the stigma associated with disability. These advertisements highlight:

Media Engagement: Making use of media channels to highlight the achievements of people with disabilities in a range of professions.

Workshops & Seminars: To increase knowledge of the value of inclusion and the advantages of a diverse workforce, educational workshops and seminars are arranged for companies and employees.

**What strategies have been successful in promoting inclusive hiring practices and workplace accommodations in different sectors?**

The data provided reflects the effectiveness of different strategies in promoting inclusive hiring practices and workplace accommodations across various sectors, with the success levels indicated numerically.

Partnerships and Community Engagement. This strategy appears to be the most successful among the ones listed. It suggests that collaborating with external organizations, community groups, and advocacy groups can be highly effective in fostering inclusive hiring. These partnerships can help tap into diverse talent pools, provide support systems, and ensure that hiring practices align with community needs and values.

Policy and Compliance. This strategy seems to have had no significant impact according to the data. This could indicate that simply having policies in place or ensuring compliance with regulations is not sufficient on its own. There might be a need for more active measures beyond policy implementation to see tangible results in inclusive hiring practices.

Awareness and Training. This strategy has shown moderate success. It implies that raising awareness and providing training on inclusive practices can lead to some improvement, but it may not be as impactful as partnerships and community engagement. However, awareness and training are still valuable as they help build a foundation of understanding and commitment among employees and management.



### **How does government policy support vary across different industries or job sectors in promoting disability inclusion?**

Government policy in The Gambia provides a broad framework for disability inclusion across various industries, but support varies depending on the sector. The Persons with Disabilities Act 2021 is central to this framework, mandating that both public and private sectors adopt a quota system for employing persons with disabilities (PWDs). The Act also requires employers to modify physical work environments to accommodate PWDs and offers tax exemptions for such modifications. In sectors like services and manufacturing, where physical accessibility can be more easily addressed, compliance with these provisions may be more straightforward. However, in sectors like agriculture or informal employment, where work environments are less controlled, the implementation of these policies is more challenging. Furthermore, the Women's Act 2010 provides additional protections for women with disabilities, ensuring their access to employment and vocational training tailored to their specific needs.

### **What measures are being taken to ensure that policies are responsive to the diverse needs of individuals with disabilities seeking employment in various sectors?**

To address the diverse needs of individuals with disabilities, The Gambia has enacted several measures through the Persons with Disabilities Act 2021 and the Women's Act 2010. The Persons with Disabilities Act requires employers to ensure that their premises do not disadvantage PWDs and to make necessary adjustments to accommodate them. The Act also mandates vocational training and job retention strategies tailored to PWDs. Additionally, the National Development Plan (NDP) emphasizes integrating PWDs into youth and sports initiatives, focusing on vocational training, combating stigma, and promoting financial inclusion. The Women's Act specifically targets women with disabilities, mandating measures that facilitate their access to employment and vocational training while protecting them from discrimination and violence.

### **How are the effectiveness and inclusiveness of current policies assessed across different types of disabilities and industries?**

The effectiveness and inclusiveness of current policies are assessed through various mechanisms, including legislative oversight and feedback from PWDs. The Persons with Disabilities Act 2021 obliges the government to monitor the implementation of employment quotas for PWDs across sectors and to ensure that employers are compliant with accessibility and non-discrimination mandates. Additionally,

institutions like the National Human Rights Commission (NHRC) and the Office of the Ombudsman play a critical role in monitoring and addressing complaints related to the mistreatment or discrimination of PWDs in employment. These bodies provide platforms for PWDs to report issues, thus enabling continuous assessment and adjustment of policies to ensure they are inclusive and effective.

### **What steps are being taken to adjust policies based on feedback from job seekers and employers with disabilities in different sectors?**

The Gambia has established several mechanisms to adjust policies based on feedback from PWDs and employers. The National Human Rights Commission (NHRC) and the Office of the Ombudsman actively monitor and investigate complaints from PWDs regarding employment discrimination or accessibility issues. The Persons with Disabilities Act 2021 also mandates the Minister responsible for employment to promote affirmative action and make necessary adjustments to employment environments based on feedback from stakeholders. Furthermore, the NHRC's Thematic Committee on Vulnerable Groups provides a structured platform for continuous dialogue with PWDs, ensuring that their concerns are addressed in policy revisions

## **4.2. Discussion**

This section provides a comprehensive discussion of the findings for this study on the employment opportunities and challenges faced by persons with disabilities in The Gambia. The discussion integrates the insights gathered from semi-structured interviews and questionnaires, drawing connections to existing literature on disability, employment, and inclusion. Utilizing the Social Model of Disability as a theoretical framework, this analysis emphasizes the interplay of societal, institutional, and environmental factors that influence the employment experiences of individuals with disabilities in The Gambia.

### **4.2.1. Employment Challenges for Persons with Disabilities**

The findings of the research underscore that persons with disabilities in The Gambia encounter a triad of barriers societal attitudes, institutional obstacles, and physical environmental constraints that significantly impede their access to employment.

#### 4.2.1.1 Societal Attitudes and Stigmatization

One of the most pressing challenges identified in this study is the pervasive negative societal attitudes towards individuals with disabilities. Participants reported experiencing stigma and discrimination that not only reduce their self-esteem but also affect their employability. This resonates strongly with earlier research conducted by (Friedman, 2020) , which emphasized that societal stigma can label disabled individuals as less productive or capable, thereby discouraging employers from considering them for job opportunities. The findings of (Bonaccio et al., 2020) further corroborate this point, illustrating how negative stereotyping contributes to employer biases that reinforce discrimination in hiring practices. The qualitative data from participants reflects a consciousness of these perceptions; for instance, several respondents indicated that PWDs are often less valued and overlooked in professional scenarios, which detracted from their confidence in job-seeking efforts. Moreover, these societal attitudes are deeply entrenched and are reflective of historical perspectives on disability that stigmatize rather than empower. Participants maintained that there is a pressing need for awareness campaigns that can dismantle these harmful stereotypes, similar to initiatives highlighted by(Maritz & Laferriere, 2016), which have shown to change public perceptions and create more inclusive spaces.

#### 4.2.1.2. Institutional Barriers

The research also reveals significant institutional barriers that hinder persons with disabilities from accessing employment opportunities. Despite the existence of the Gambia Disability Act (2021), participants noted that enforcement of policies protecting the employment rights of disabled individuals is often inadequate. Many employers remain unaware of their obligations under the law, leading to a lack of compliance and accountability. This gap between policy and practice echoes findings from Bah (2016), which indicated that while legislation exists to support the rights of persons with disabilities, the effectiveness of such laws is ultimately undermined by a lack of awareness and enforcement mechanisms. Additionally, interview responses highlighted procedural inequities within hiring practices, where candidates with disabilities faced disproportionate scrutiny compared to their non-disabled counterparts. This aligns with the findings of United Nations (2019), indicating that an absence of systematic reforms in recruitment processes contributes to the exclusion of disabled individuals from the job market. For example, participants detailed how they had been required to submit extensive documentation of their

abilities, unlike their non-disabled peers, thus creating a perception of disability as a deficiency rather than an opportunity for diversity.

#### 4.2.1.3. Accessibility Issues

In conjunction with societal and institutional barriers, the study identified significant physical environmental obstacles as critical impediments to employment for persons with disabilities. Participants expressed frustration regarding the lack of accessible infrastructure in workplaces—many employers did not provide necessary accommodations such as ramps, elevators, accessible restrooms, or assistive technologies. According to (Ganle et al., 2020), these infrastructural barriers not only prevent individuals from pursuing job opportunities but also perpetuate feelings of isolation and exclusion. (Charles et al., 2023) further emphasize that accessibility must extend beyond mere compliance with legal standards; it should foster an inclusive environment that empowers all employees to thrive. Several participants shared anecdotes of being unable to perform their job functions effectively due to inaccessible workspaces, reflecting a systemic neglect for the needs of disabled employees. This evidence clearly demonstrates that workplace design must prioritize accessibility to ensure that it is inclusive for all, aligning with broader initiatives for universal design in the workplace.

#### 4.2.2. Opportunities for Inclusion

Despite the myriad of challenges, the findings of this study also highlight several opportunities that have the potential to enhance employment outcomes for persons with disabilities in The Gambia. Among these are the policy reforms and awareness campaign, employment alternative through entrepreneurship and self-employment, and inclusive workplace policies.

##### 4.2.2.1. Policy Reforms and Awareness Campaigns

Participants expressed a strong desire for comprehensive policy reforms that would strengthen existing disability rights legislation and bolster enforcement mechanisms. Such changes must be supported by robust awareness campaigns aimed at informing both employers and the general public about the capabilities and potential of individuals with disabilities. (Maritz & Laferriere, 2016) identified inclusivity training as an effective strategy for changing perceptions in the workforce, and participants in this study echoed the need for similar initiatives in The Gambia. By

fostering an environment of understanding, these campaigns can dismantle negative biases that impede the employment of disabled individuals and cultivate a culture that embraces diversity and inclusion.

#### 4.2.2.2. Entrepreneurship and Self-Employment

Interestingly, the study found a notable interest among persons with disabilities in entrepreneurship as a viable alternative to traditional employment. Many participants articulated that self-employment affords them greater control over their work environments and conditions. This perspective aligns with (Rozali et al., 2017), who argue that entrepreneurship enables individuals with disabilities to bypass conventional barriers to employment, fostering autonomy and economic independence. However, for this potential to be realized, there is a pressing need for targeted support programs that provide training and mentorship in business development specifically designed for disabled individuals. Entrepreneurship not only serves as a means of financial self-sufficiency but also acts as a platform for advocacy and the normalization of disability within business contexts. Empowering disabled entrepreneurs to participate actively in the economy can significantly shift societal perceptions by demonstrating their capabilities and contributions.

#### 4.2.2.3. Inclusive Workplace Policies

Furthermore, the research underscores the importance of implementing inclusive workplace policies that create supportive environments for individuals with disabilities. Employers must actively integrate policies focused on non-discrimination, equitable opportunities for career advancement, and flexible work arrangements. As noted by (Weideman, 2020), such policies act as critical mechanisms for ensuring proper representation and support for disabled employees. The creation of Employee Resource Groups (ERGs) and mentorship programs can also play a pivotal role in fostering belonging and support networks, thereby enhancing job retention and satisfaction among disabled employees.

### 4.3 Implications for Policy and Practice

The findings of this research underscore an urgent call for robust policy measures aimed at tackling systemic barriers faced by persons with disabilities in The Gambia's labor market. It is essential for the government to not only enhance enforcement mechanisms of existing disability rights

legislation but also to engage multifaceted stakeholders, including civil society organizations and advocacy groups, to promote awareness and accountability around inclusive practices. Moreover, this study contributes vital insights that can inform the development of targeted policies that foster accessibility, equitable participation, and economic empowerment for disabled individuals. Addressing these interconnected challenges requires collaborative efforts from policymakers, employers, and community organizations, who must work together to shape an inclusive labor market. In conclusion, while substantial challenges impede employment for persons with disabilities in The Gambia, targeted initiatives focusing on awareness, policy reform, and the promotion of entrepreneurship present promising pathways toward fostering inclusion. A comprehensive approach that encompasses societal attitudes, institutional frameworks, and physical accessibility is vital to creating an environment where individuals with disabilities can fully engage and thrive in the workforce. By shifting the focus from adapting individuals to addressing systemic barriers, this research underlines the need for an inclusive society that values diversity and champions equal opportunities for all.

## **CHAPTER FIVE: CONCLUSION, RECOMMENDATIONS, AND LIMITATIONS**

### **5.1 Conclusion**

This study explored the multifaceted challenges and opportunities experienced by persons with disabilities in the Gambian labor market. Despite the existence of legal frameworks and policies aimed at promoting inclusion, significant barriers persist that inhibit the full participation of individuals with disabilities in employment. The findings reveal a complex interplay of societal attitudes, institutional obstacles, and physical accessibility issues that collectively marginalize this demographic. The research underscores that societal stigmas and negative perceptions continue to shape employer attitudes towards disabled individuals, creating an environment where capabilities are often overlooked in favor of stereotypes. Institutional shortcomings further exacerbate these challenges, with insufficient enforcement of disability rights legislation leading to widespread non-compliance and inadequate workplace accommodations, omitting a crucial support system for disabled employees. Additionally, physical barriers to access remain prominent, hindering disabled persons from both accessing job opportunities and thriving once employed. However, this study also identified significant opportunities for improvement. There exists a strong desire among

participants for comprehensive policy reforms that would enhance disability rights and an acknowledgment of entrepreneurship as a viable pathway to economic independence. The findings further highlight the importance of implementing inclusive workplace strategies, emphasizing the need for awareness campaigns, mentorship programs, and supportive corporate environments that prioritize diversity and accessibility. Ultimately, the study asserts that a paradigm shift is necessary—not merely to accommodate individuals with disabilities but to actively dismantle the systemic barriers that prevent them from achieving equitable economic participation. By fostering a culture that values diversity and champions inclusion, The Gambia can take meaningful steps toward creating an equitable labor market that benefits all its citizens.

## **5.2 Recommendations**

In light of the findings and conclusions drawn from this research, several key recommendations are proposed to enhance the employment outcomes for persons with disabilities in The Gambia. First and foremost, the government should take decisive steps to strengthen the implementation of existing disability rights legislation, such as the Gambia Disability Act (2021) and the (Labor Act 2023, 2023). This can be achieved by conducting regular audits and assessments to monitor compliance among employers, ensuring that disability rights are upheld across various aspects of recruitment, retention, and promotion policies. Additionally, there is an urgent need for awareness and sensitization campaigns aimed at raising public consciousness regarding disability rights, abilities, and the benefits of employing persons with disabilities. Such campaigns should target employers, community leaders, and the general public to combat the prevalent stigma and to foster inclusive attitudes. Furthermore, promoting entrepreneurship can be a vital strategy for improving economic outcomes for disabled individuals.

The government, alongside non-governmental organizations, should develop targeted entrepreneurship programs that provide training, mentorship, and financial support tailored specifically for individuals with disabilities. Collaborating with business incubators or agencies specializing in entrepreneurship will enhance the effectiveness of these initiatives. Moreover, organizations are encouraged to implement inclusive hiring and retention practices actively. This includes adopting bias training, establishing accessible recruitment processes, and making workplace accommodations for employees with disabilities. Creating Employee Resource Groups (ERGs) can also offer supportive networks for disabled employees and help foster a sense of

belonging within the workplace. To enhance the employment landscape further, employers should prioritize creating physically accessible work environments. Investments in universal design and assistive technologies are essential steps toward ensuring workplaces can accommodate the diverse needs of disabled individuals, thereby increasing their potential to contribute effectively within the workforce.

Finally, a focused effort on ongoing research and data collection is imperative. Systematic data collection initiatives should be intensified to better understand the employment landscape for persons with disabilities in The Gambia. This approach will inform policy interventions, facilitate tracking of progress, and enhance the measures taken toward greater inclusivity in the labor market. By addressing these recommendations, stakeholders can help create a more equitable and inclusive labor market that not only benefits individuals with disabilities but also contributes positively to society at large.

### **5.3 Limitations**

Although this research offers useful information on the work challenges and opportunities of individuals with disabilities in The Gambia, it is not without limitations:

Moving on, this study is confronted with a number of limitations that must be recognized. To begin with, the use of qualitative data, although yielding rich information, may constrain the level to which the findings can be extrapolated to the general population of individuals with disabilities in The Gambia. Moreover, the highly subjective nature of qualitative data would have the tendency to introduce biases that would influence the analyses that are constructed from the interviews and focus groups undertaken.

Moreover, the selection criteria and sample size of participants might not adequately represent the varied populations within the disabled population in The Gambia. As a result of limited time and resources, the research targeted a small group of people and organizations, and hence it might lack some views and opinions that can contribute value to the final result. There is also a limitation on available data on disability and work in The Gambia concerning accessibility and reliability.

The absence of comprehensive statistical information poses challenges to building a more detailed contextual understanding of the work setting for people with disabilities. Without a sound data basis, it is progressively complicated to assess correctly the variety of challenges and opportunities.

In addition, socio-cultural factors could have influenced the readiness of participants to volunteer information freely. Stigmatization that accompanies disability may lead individuals to shun open communication about their problems, thereby potentially resulting in underreporting of the issues encountered in the labor market. Furthermore, a concentration in urban areas may undercut the rural viewpoint where disabled persons encounter different adversities associated with employment.

Rural regions tend to have special problems associated with accessibility, transportation, and economic opportunity that were not dealt with in this study. Such a consciousness is crucial in determining how well the results can be interpreted and where the study was done. Despite these constraints, the study offers useful insight into work facilitators and barriers to people with disabilities in The Gambia, informing the ground for additional policy-making and research.

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## **ANNEX**

### **Sample Transcript Reports**

#### **Full Interview Transcript of HB 09th February 2025**

**Interviewer:**

Yes, I'm going to record this. My name is Suleyman Fatih. I'm conducting this interview on behalf of Umi sane, who is currently in Italy pursuing her Master's degree. The research topic focuses on the challenges that disabled people face in our society, particularly in The Gambia.

So, can you kindly introduce yourself? I'm recording this so that when we are writing the narratives, it will be easier to refer back to.

**Interviewee:**

Thank you very much, Mr. Fatih. I am Harun Apache, a Senior Social Welfare Officer, working at the Ministry of Children and Social Welfare.

**Interviewer:**

That's a good area, Harun. Thank you very much. So, the first part: as a Senior Social Welfare Officer, do you know of any policies that are currently in place for disabled people?

**Interviewee:**

Thank you very much. This is a very good question. Yes, I have been working at the Department of Social Welfare for more than a decade now.

**Interviewer:**

More than a decade, huh?

**Interviewee:**

Yes, more than a decade—almost 15 years now.

**Interviewer:**

Wow, so you're seasoned, huh?

**Interviewee:**

Yeah, absolutely. So, certainly, I have at some point interacted with or participated in policy formulation, implementation, or perhaps program design on issues related to persons with disabilities.

So yes, I know that we do have some policies regarding persons with disabilities, especially when it comes to issues such as the employment of persons with disabilities in the public sector or other sectors.

But again, although we have some of these policies, there are also some gaps, and perhaps we'll get to that point. But yes, they do exist.

**Interviewer:**

Do you know any specific policies that are currently in existence?

**Interviewee:**

Yes, one of the key policies—and I think it would be great to capture this—is that The Gambia ratified the International Convention on the Rights of Persons with Dago.

Further to that, we also enacted our first-ever Persons with Disabilities Act in 2021.

**Interviewer:**

2021, okay.

**Interviewee:**

Yes, the Persons with Disabilities Act 2021 is one of the most comprehensive legal policies. It is the first time The Gambia has had such a policy or law that specifically talks about the welfare, rights, and promotion of issues affecting persons with disabilities across the country.

The same policy also calls for equal employment opportunities, inclusive employment, and mainstreaming disability issues into national discourse.

**Interviewer:**

Discourse. Okay. That's a key milestone, Harun.

**Interviewee:**

Yes, again, if you look at the National Development Plan, one of its key pillars also captures inclusive employment opportunities for persons with disabilities.

The Department of Social Welfare is the key government actor placed under that pillar. We are responsible for raising awareness.

Further to that, with the coming into force of the Persons with Disabilities Act, we also established the National Disability Council.

**Interviewer:**

Council, okay.

**Interviewee:**

Yes, the National Disability Council brings together a good number of organizations—from public sector entities, government ministries, agencies, and departments, to civil society organizations and parastatals.

This was how we mainstreamed disability issues within government operations.

**Interviewer:**

That's a good step moving forward. You mentioned that we have policies, but there are some gaps.

Can you tell me one or two of those gaps? And do the policies address unique challenges faced by persons with disabilities?

**Interviewee:**

Yes, like I said, the Persons with Disabilities Act 2021 is very comprehensive. It addresses communication and media, particularly in information dissemination.

For example, it outlines how to capture the needs of persons with disabilities—ensuring that blind or visually impaired persons and those requiring sign language are included in media and communication strategies.

It emphasizes that persons with disabilities should not be left out when important information is being disseminated.

Also, when it comes to employment, the Act states that employers must not discriminate against persons with disabilities on the basis of their disability, but instead hire them based on competence and qualifications, regardless of disability.

**Interviewer:**

Very good—no discrimination. Now, let's talk about challenges. How do you implement and monitor such policies? How do you ensure that this important policy is being implemented effectively?

How do you track what is happening and who may be going against the provisions of the Persons with Disabilities Act 2021?

**Interviewee:**

Monitoring inadequate monitoring is one of the key gaps. We have institutional gaps, especially in terms of capacity to monitor implementation. Also, to truly ensure inclusion, we need to look at transport systems, sporting infrastructure, buildings, and even household structures they should all be accessible to persons with disabilities. If we are serious about an inclusive society, these are critical areas that need attention.

**Interviewer:**

So now, would you agree that the existing policies you mentioned at least address some of the challenges faced by persons with disabilities?

**Interviewee:**

In theory, yes. For example, the issue of non-discrimination is clearly stated in the law.

It says that the government shall ensure that all persons with disabilities are treated equally and without discrimination. They are to receive equal protection and benefits under the law.

That's a strong commitment from the Persons with Disability Advocacy Council.

Another key provision is raising awareness. The Council is the oversight body. It is supposed to advise government entities and policymakers on how to implement programs related to persons with disabilities.

Awareness is crucial. It's one thing to fight structural injustice—like stigma and discrimination—but another thing is knowing how to address these issues. That's where awareness comes in.

**Interviewer:**

So, can we say these policies are effective or not effective? What do you think?

**Interviewee:**

The policy itself, as a law, is very important. But like I said earlier, it's one thing to have a policy and another thing to establish the structures needed to implement and enforce it.

Without those structures being functional and operational, the law stays only on paper.

So, these are some of the gaps that we need to address as a country if we are truly committed to ensuring that issues affecting persons with disabilities are properly handled.

Otherwise, it will be difficult. Disability is a big issue in our society. Awareness is improving, and people are beginning to understand that having a disability doesn't make someone less capable.

Previously, if a person with a disability existed in a family, they were often hidden or treated as though they were a curse or punishment from God. Families would go to great lengths to hide them, treating them as outliers. This mentality is harmful to persons with disabilities. I believe having the policy in place shows some government commitment. But how far we want to go depends on how much effort we put into addressing these challenges. Over time, we have made progress in this area. We also have other structures, like the National Disability Rehabilitation Center, hosted by the Department of Social Welfare. They handle rehabilitation for persons with disabilities, providing assistive devices, mobility aids, and other support tools as required.

**Interviewer:** This center has been in operation since colonial times, right?

**Interviewee:** Ndiyo na? Yeah. The policy—we are yet to evaluate to see how effective it is. Because, like I said, it came into effect in March—if I'm not mistaken—2021. So we are almost

four years into its implementation, halfway perhaps. We do conduct a mid-term review to assess it and see where we are.

But again, one thing that is lagging is the desire to have the law accompanied by a policy. We are yet to have, let's say, a specific policy aside from the law that focuses solely on persons with disabilities. That is a serious gap. Yes, we have the law, but we don't have a dedicated policy yet. So, currently, there's only the Act.

**Interviewer:** How about regulation?

**Interviewee:** Regulation—as in what?

**Interviewer:** You know, if you have the Act, you should have regulations that support it.

**Interviewee:** That's what I'm saying. The Act actually made provisions for an Advisory Council—do you understand? That has already been constituted. Okay? But again, it requires a lot of funding to support the Council and its committees.

I remember there was a plan for us to have a policy. But the issue of disability itself is mainstreamed in our Ministry's strategic plan, which is a broader document beyond disability. It is embedded under the Department of Social Welfare. It's also integrated into the National Development Plan.

So when we start looking at other government policies—like the national development blueprint, the Ministry of Children and Social Welfare—you'll find some aspects of disability included there.

**Interviewer:** Oh, okay. I get your point now. So, we may not have a specific policy that targets people with disabilities, but elements of it are integrated into other ministries' strategic documents.

**Interviewee:** Exactly.

**Interviewer:** How does the government support different industries or promote initiatives for people with disabilities, especially now when we don't have a specific disability policy?

**Interviewee:** Yeah, we may not have a specific policy focused entirely on persons with disabilities, but the Department of Social Welfare has been implementing a lot of programs through government funding to promote the rights and welfare of persons with disabilities.

One of the key programs is the National Rehabilitation Center. It's specifically designed to provide assistive devices required for persons with disabilities to access various facilities. All these are part of the programs we implement.

We also conduct community outreach activities across the country through our Disability Unit. They travel nationwide, providing services both at home and hospital levels. Additionally, we support disability organizations in The Gambia. Organizations like GOVI and the Gambia Federation of the Disabled all receive support from the Department of Social Welfare.

**Interviewer:** I've heard that most of these disabled organizations receive significant funding to implement programs. That's a good move.

**Interviewee:** Yes, indeed. The government's allocated Social Welfare Program is another aspect we consider. Currently, we also implement the Family Strengthening Program. It is a very important initiative supporting a sizable number of the disabled population across the country—covering areas like West Coast, LRR, North Bank, CRR North and South—where beneficiaries receive a monthly cash transfer of 1,000 dalasis. That demonstrates the government's commitment to promoting access and inclusion.

One of the key measures taken is ensuring that persons with disabilities are part of the design process for laws and policies. They are included in the Advisory Council. In fact, the chairperson of the Disability Advisory Council is himself a person with a disability. That shows the government's readiness to ensure their involvement in policy formulation and implementation. They are also leading awareness campaigns about the Persons with Disabilities Act and available programs.

**Interviewer:** So, in your 15 years of experience, Haruna—at both policy and implementation levels—have you ever conducted a disability forum where stakeholders and disabled persons were brought together?

Interviewee: Yes, yes. I have participated in and implemented several forums related to persons with disabilities—both national and regional. At the regional level, stakeholders were invited, and we established Regional Disability Advisory Councils or Boards across all regions.

I also took part in donating items like wheelchairs, mobility aids, and other assistive devices to organizations. I was involved in numerous interventions and implementations, including the Family Strengthening Program.

Like I said earlier, evaluating the effectiveness of any policy requires thorough assessment of its implementation. So far, we have not conducted a full evaluation. So, if I speak on how effective these policies are, I'd only be offering a personal opinion based on my experience in the sector—not an official assessment.

Yes, we may be addressing some issues, but there are still many challenges—like the lack of necessary tools and resources for institutions to implement policies. Having a policy alone is not enough.

Some strategies do exist, even at the Ministry level. But the question is: how far are we in implementing them to ensure, for instance, that persons with disabilities are included in employment initiatives? That's one concern.

Two, how do we ensure that they are not discriminated against? In The Gambia, we often see persons with disabilities in our homes and think the only option for them is street begging. That perception needs to change. Being disabled should not automatically mean resorting to street begging.

Also, look at our TIVET programs or mainstream education. How are persons with disabilities included in these programs? The Ministry of Basic and Secondary Education may have some life skills initiatives, but what's needed to make these programs effective is lacking.

Imagine a student with a disability at the University of The Gambia. Without access to Braille or assistive software on laptops, or devices to help with hearing or mobility—how can they compete with their peers?

Public transportation is another issue. Most of our buses aren't disability friendly. If a person with a disability tries to board, they struggle—not because they can't pay, but because drivers

often see them as a burden. Drivers don't want to spend an extra two or three minutes helping someone board.

These issues call for more awareness and also resource mobilization. For example, maybe the Gambia Transport Service Corporation needs special buses dedicated to people with disabilities. Right now, the system is not disability friendly.

Even accessing the Ministry of Gender is a challenge. A person with a disability would struggle to climb the stairs to the Minister's office. There is no elevator. No ramps. The buildings are not designed for accessibility, yet we expect persons with disabilities to access services like everyone else.

Interviewer: Do you receive feedback from job seekers with disabilities?

Interviewee: Yes. Sometimes people come to complain. For instance, someone might say they've applied for a job in the private sector, but they're denied employment. The company won't say directly, "We can't hire you because you're in a wheelchair." It's their private company; we have no control over that.

Most people don't come out and say, "I was discriminated against due to my condition." This highlights the need for a complaint mechanism—so the voices of the voiceless can be heard.

Interviewer: Two more questions, Haruna. Let's talk about barriers and accommodations. In your opinion, what are the top three challenges preventing persons with disabilities from maintaining employment?

Interviewee: One is education. Our education system is not designed to cater for the needs of persons with disabilities. To get a job, you need the required qualifications. If a person with a disability does not have access to appropriate education, that becomes a barrier.

Two is skills. Even if it's a skills-related job, without the necessary competence, it's difficult. Employers may see hiring persons with disabilities as a liability—because it's perceived to be expensive. You need to provide mobility aids, ensure the work environment is accessible, and possibly invest in specialized equipment like screen readers or other technologies. These are some real challenges.

Interviewer: And legal and policy barriers?

Interviewee: As I mentioned earlier, we still lack a standalone policy for persons with disabilities. I believe the Ministry is working on it, but I'm not aware of any completed one—apart from the Act and some sectoral policies that might reference international standards.

So, the absence of a dedicated disability policy, inadequate funding, and social stigma are all policy gaps. Physical barriers are also a big part of the problem. Most public buildings are not accessible. Honestly, they are not disability friendly.

Interviewer: So do you think the policy should be adjusted so that persons with disabilities are better accommodated in the labor force?

Interviewee: Absolutely. We need to adjust it. First, we need a strong monitoring and evaluation framework to track the implementation of laws and policies. Second, we must ensure persons with disabilities and their organizations are included in all strategies and policymaking. We need a holistic approach—not just isolated, targeted interventions.

What about health? Education? Security? Communication? All these areas matter when it comes to persons with disabilities. Until we start thinking that way, we'll continue to face challenges.

Interviewer: Finally, who are your stakeholders? Can you name a few that you work with to enhance the Gambia Federation of Persons with Disabilities?

Interviewee: We work with the Gambia Federation of Persons with Disabilities (GFD), the Gambia Organization of the Disabled (GOPI), and LERTS for Africa. LERTS supports the Department of Social Care through the Rehabilitation Center—providing logistics, technical training, and capacity building.

Other stakeholders include the Ministry of Health, the Ministry of Basic and Secondary Education, and UN agencies like UNFPA, UNDP, and UNICEF. These partners are all essential in implementing disability-related programs.

**Interviewer:** Thank you, Haruna, for your time. What final recommendation do you have?

**Interviewee:** Some of my recommendations I've already mentioned, but one key point I want to emphasize is mainstreaming disability issues across all sectors and ensuring we fully implement the Persons with Disabilities Act of 2021. Also, we must uphold the international convention on the rights of persons with disabilities, which The Gambia has ratified.

We should strengthen the institutional capacity of the Department of Social Welfare, especially the Disability Unit. That includes mobility, capacity, equipment, and increased budget allocations to support family strengthening programs and other initiatives.

Future projects, whether in agriculture, data collection, health, cash transfers, or other sectors, must integrate disability considerations. We must also shift societal perspectives through awareness raising. And our transport system must become more disability-friendly.

**Interviewer:** Okay. Thank you very much.

**Interviewee:** Thank you.

## **Interview Transcript of OS 10th February 2025**

Interviewer:

Hello Ousman. As-salamu alaykum. Thank you for agreeing to this interview. We are conducting it on behalf of Umi, who is doing a study on the experiences of persons with disabilities, particularly the challenges they face and the kinds of support that are available or needed. So, let's begin. Could you please tell us a bit about yourself?

Ousman:

Okay. I'm currently residing in Molde.

Interviewer:

Alright. So, before we move into the questions, may I ask: what type of disability do you have?

Ousman:

I have a problem with my right hand. I was playing football in 1995 when I injured it. That injury eventually resulted in a permanent disability.

Interviewer:

So it's a physical disability?

Ousman:

Yes, it's a physical disability.

Interviewer:

Thank you. Now, do you face any challenges in finding a job?

Ousman:

Yes, I do. But before we get into that, I want to say that this disability affected me a lot during my education. I used to write with my right hand, but after the injury I had to switch to using my left hand. That was a big challenge. After school, I also struggled to continue my education.

With the limited certificates I managed to get, I couldn't secure a job.

Interviewer:

So you mean that your disability has affected your chances of finding employment?

**Ousman:**

Yes, definitely. Every time I applied to government departments, they would question my ability to work due to my disability. It's discrimination, honestly.

**Interviewer:**

So you believe this is discrimination?

**Ousman:**

Yes, it's actually discriminatory. They tend to prefer people without disabilities over us.

**Interviewer:**

That must be very difficult. Do you also face discrimination from people in your community?

**Ousman:**

Yes, sometimes. If I'm around people who are not happy with me for whatever reason, they'll say things like, "This is why God made you disabled." Not long ago, some people said that my disability was because I was wicked—and that God punished me. It was hurtful, but this is the reality.

**Interviewer:**

Have you ever been employed?

**Ousman:**

Yes. I used to work with the National Environment Agency as an Environmental Inspector. But because of my disability, I was eventually terminated.

**Interviewer:**

Can you explain what happened?

**Ousman:**

I was posted in the provinces and had to use a motorbike to carry out my duties. When I could no longer use the motorbike due to my condition, I informed them that it was difficult for me. Because of that, I was automatically terminated.

**Interviewer:**

That's really unfortunate. What about your work as a data collector?

**Ousman:**

Well, with the Gambia Bureau of Statistics (GBOS), they didn't actually employ me permanently. I was given short-term contracts—maybe one or two months for data collection. After each contract, I had to go home and wait for another opportunity.

**Interviewer:**

That must be tough, especially with a family.

**Ousman:**

Yes, as a family man, it's hard to sustain yourself under such circumstances. The statistical sector is the only place I get contracts, and even that is because I know one or two people there who advocated for me. Without them, I wouldn't have been selected.

**Interviewer:**

So generally, would you say people with disabilities face a lot of challenges in society?

**Ousman:**

Absolutely. Disabled people face a lot of difficulties—in the workplace and elsewhere. Even during data collection exercises, people would look at my disability and assume I couldn't handle the tablet with one hand. But I proved them wrong. I managed it and even worked effectively in the community.

**Interviewer:**

Apart from NEA and the statistical sector, have you applied to other places?

**Ousman:**

Yes, I applied to many other departments, but I wasn't offered any opportunity.

**Interviewer:**

So your only source of livelihood now is through these contracts with the statistical sector?

**Ousman:**

Exactly.

**Interviewer:**

Let's now talk about support and resources. I'll mention some types of support, and I'd like you to choose up to four that you think would be most helpful in overcoming employment challenges. These include:

1. Physical accessibility
2. Disability awareness training
3. Skills development
4. Reasonable accommodation
5. Counseling services
6. Support groups

**Ousman:**

I would say counseling services, disability awareness programs, and skills development.

**Interviewer:**

Have you benefited from any of these supports?

**Ousman:**

No, not really. I tried. I even visited the Ministry of Youth and Sports to seek training, but the director told me they weren't conducting any at that time. He asked me to wait, but I waited for a long time without hearing back, so I eventually gave up.

**Interviewer:**

Have you received any training at all?

**Ousman:**

When I finished school, I did take some IT classes. I studied at an institute called Interdisciplinary Communication and Multimedia. After that, I worked on some contracts with GBOS doing data collection

**Interviewer:**

Let's now talk about policy. In your opinion, how can employers and policymakers better support individuals with disabilities?

**Ousman:**

They need to encourage us and make us believe we are capable. They should have anti-discrimination policies and disability laws that compel employers to hire persons with disabilities. Awareness programs are also important—both for the departments and for society. People need to know that disabled individuals are part of the community and can work just like everyone else.

**Interviewer:**

So you're suggesting that there should be laws in place?

**Ousman:**

Exactly. Laws that protect people with disabilities, along with strong support systems. For example, they could create business opportunities or identify specific areas where people with disabilities can be supported to take care of themselves and their families.

**Interviewer:**

Are you currently employed?

**Ousman:**

No. As I mentioned, I'm currently not employed. I rely on short-term contracts from GBOS.

**Interviewer:**

How do you manage during the periods when you don't have a contract?

**Ousman:**

It's difficult. But I've been trained in data collection and I'm very good at it. Before each project, we undergo two to three weeks of training. That training really helps me perform well, even when I'm deployed to interior regions of The Gambia. I'm very grateful to GBOS. But after each contract ends, I just go home and wait again. Exactly. Because of the effective communication and the belief they had in me—that I could do the job—that really helped me a lot.

**Interviewer:**

Okay. So, what would you like to see improved, especially in the workplace?

**Ousman:**

Workplaces need to make certain adjustments. And also, the mindset that most people have about disability—this needs to change. That's why we need continuous learning and awareness, especially at workplaces, so that policies and programs can be more effective. That way, persons with disabilities and other vulnerable groups will not face discrimination.

**Interviewer:**

Exactly. Now, to the final part. Have you experienced any significant career advancement or opportunities?

**Ousman:**

Hmm, no. I wouldn't say so. The career path I wanted to pursue—given the sector I'm in now—it's not currently possible for a person with a disability to move forward in that direction.

I've been trying to go into livestock management and wanted to take that as a career.

Unfortunately, I searched for sponsorship to support this plan, but I couldn't find any. Even though I started on my own—I currently have six animals—there was no support. I had to pause everything, and now I'm just at home with the children.

They are always going out. Some even get caught up in really difficult, unfortunate situations...

**Interviewer:**

Yes, Ousman. Thank you very much for sharing all of this. Before we close, what would you recommend—generally—to the public, to policymakers, or to your fellow colleagues?

**Ousman:**

I would recommend that policymakers reflect seriously on their responsibilities and consider the needs of people with disabilities. We are part of society—these are our own people. Once we are educated, we should be given opportunities to showcase our talents and contribute meaningfully.

**Interviewer:**

Anything else to add?

**Ousman:**

Not really. That's all I have to say.

**Interviewer:**

Okay. Thank you very much. We really appreciate your time.

**Ousman:**

Thank you for having me.

Interview Transcript - MK, 20th February 2025

Interview Transcript of MK – 20th February 2025

Interviewer

Yes, welcome. Okay, now let me do the formal introduction. My name is Suleyman Fatih. I work for the World Bank Project on Harmonizing and Improving Statistics in West and Central Africa.

I'm conducting this interview on behalf of my wife. She's currently in Italy pursuing her Master's degree.

Interviewee:

Okay.

Interviewer:

She's writing her thesis on disability.

Interviewee:

Right.

Interviewer:

So, can you kindly introduce yourself, Mr. Kurubally?

Interviewee:

Okay. I am Mohamed Kurubally. I am the youngest and the only visually impaired magistrate currently serving. I am the Principal Magistrate at the Banjul Magistrate Court. I also serve as the Chairman of the Gambia Federation of the Disabled, the Chairman of the National Advisory Council for Persons with Disabilities, and the Secretary General of the West African Federation of the Disabled, which comprises 15 West African countries.

Interviewer:

Wow, that's great.

Interviewee:

I am also the Vice Chairperson of the Civil Society Organizations on National Elections in The Gambia, the Secretary General of the Gambia Organization of the Visually Impaired, and the Vice Chairperson of the Gambia Special Needs Interpretation Fund. And there are many more roles I hold.

Interviewer:

Wow, you handle a lot of responsibilities. That's truly impressive. So, you are the only visually impaired magistrate in the country?

Interviewee:

Yes, the only visually impaired magistrate.

Interviewer:

That's remarkable. Thank you very much, Mr. Kurubally. Welcome on board.

Interviewee:

Thank you.

Interviewer:

Let's begin. Are you aware of any policies in place to support persons with disabilities or differently abled individuals?

Interviewee:

Yes. First, let's use the term "persons with disabilities" because it is the universally accepted and adopted nomenclature. As far as I'm concerned, there is already an approved National Disability Policy for the period 2022 to 2031. This policy exists to address the plight of persons with disabilities in The Gambia.

Interviewer:

That is fantastic. Does the policy identify any of the key challenges faced by persons with disabilities?

Interviewee:

Yes. Persons with disabilities continue to face multiple forms of discrimination based on their disability. They face stigma, stereotypes, and prejudice. In terms of full and effective participation and inclusion, many barriers still exist. Discrimination occurs across economic sectors, workplaces, education, transportation, financial services, and even in achieving independence and inclusion in their communities.

Interviewer:

Does the policy address these unique challenges—like stigma and stereotypes?

Interviewee:

Yes, it does. Despite the profound nature of these challenges, the policy aims to address them in alignment with the eight key principles outlined in Articles 1, 2, and 3 of the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (CRPD), Section 4 of the Persons with Disabilities Act 2021, and Section 33 of the Gambian Constitution.

These principles include:

Respect for inherent dignity, individual autonomy, and freedom to make choices.

Non-discrimination.

Full and effective participation and inclusion in society.

Equality of opportunity.

Respect for difference and acceptance of persons with disabilities as part of human diversity.

Accessibility, including access to the physical environment, services, information, and infrastructure.

Equality between men and women.

Respect for the evolving capacities of children with disabilities, including the preservation of their identity.

The policy aligns with Article 3 of the CRPD, which Gambia ratified in July 2015, and with our own domesticated disability law—the Persons with Disabilities Act—specifically in Section 4.

Interviewer:

Thank you. Since the policy is in place from 2022 to 2031, do you think it is currently effective?

Interviewee:

Not entirely. The issue in The Gambia is often with implementation. The CRPD, as well as Section 6 of the Persons with Disabilities Act, emphasizes that State Parties, including The Gambia, must take all necessary legislative and administrative measures for effective implementation. However, in reality, implementation is not up to expectations.

Interviewer:

So we have good policies, but poor implementation?

Interviewee:

Exactly.

Interviewer:

Does the policy target specific categories of disabilities, such as visual impairments, hearing loss, or intellectual disabilities, to improve employment outcomes?

Interviewee:

Yes, absolutely. The policy identifies and addresses several categories of disabilities: visual impairments, hearing impairments, physical disabilities, intellectual disabilities, albinism, among others. It provides guidance on how to support these groups in areas like employment.

Interviewer:

How does the government support the promotion of these sectors and groups?

Interviewee:

Support typically comes through the Ministry of Gender, Children, and Social Welfare, which has a disability unit. The Minister plays an advocacy role by championing disability issues in the National Assembly and Cabinet. Funding allocations are made through the Ministry in consultation with the Gambia Federation of the Disabled—which I chair—and the National Advisory Council for Persons with Disabilities, which I also chair. Based on identified needs, financial support is allocated.

For example, just yesterday, we were able to present six laptops to four tertiary institutions with students with disabilities. These laptops came pre-installed with JAWS screen reader software to aid inclusive education.

Interviewer:

That's great news! It shows responsiveness to the needs of persons with disabilities.

Interviewee:

Absolutely.

Interviewer:

Do you receive feedback from persons with disabilities about employment challenges?

Interviewee:

Yes, regularly. Many report challenges when seeking employment, including rejection and discrimination. They often reach out to request support or to voice concerns.

Interviewer:

What do you see as the main barriers preventing persons with disabilities from accessing or maintaining employment?

Interviewee:

There are multiple factors. Many employers are judgmental, assessing candidates solely based on their visible disability, without recognizing their talents or skills. Illiteracy is another factor—some individuals haven't had access to education or training. Additionally, the nature of some jobs may be too complex or require specific skills that the applicant may not have due to lack of access or accommodation.

Interviewer:

Do you believe the current 2022–2031 policy needs adjustment or revision to enhance implementation?

Interviewee:

Policies are not static. Just like legislation, they should be reviewed regularly. The policy should be revisited to include input from persons with disabilities and identify any gaps. Every policy or law should undergo periodic review to ensure it remains relevant and effective.

Interviewer:

Thank you very much, Mr. Kurubally. Before we wrap up, do you have any final contributions that might improve our research?

Interviewee:

Yes. As I mentioned, we have the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities—a strong international instrument calling for full implementation of rights. Our own disability legislation—the Persons with Disabilities Act 2021—reinforces this in Section 6. Additionally, we now have the African Charter on Human and Peoples’ Rights on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities, which Gambia ratified on June 7, 2024.

So, government, NGOs, individuals, and other stakeholders must all ensure the full realization and implementation of the rights of persons with disabilities. That includes putting an end to discrimination. If this is achieved, people with disabilities can live independently and happily in society.

Interviewer:

Absolutely. Thank you very much, Mr. Kurubally, for your time.

Interviewee:

Thank you very much. It was a pleasure, Mr. Fatih.

## **Interview Transcript of MS 25th March 2025**

Interviewer

Yeah. Good morning. I'm Slayman Fatty. I'm collecting data on behalf of Ana, who is currently in Italy doing her master's in development. I currently work as a social, civil, and gender specialist consultant at GA Science for the World Bank Project. So can you kindly introduce yourself as well?

Interviewee:

Okay. I'm working with the Department of Social Welfare under the Ministry of Gender. I'm a Social Welfare Officer and also the Head of the Disability Unit.

Interviewer:

Oh, okay. You're the Head of the Disability Unit. Fantastic. It's a pleasure having you. So let me take you through some questions. How do the existing policies address the unique challenges that are normally faced by people with different types of disabilities?

Interviewee:

Currently, we have the national public policy, which came following the enactment of the Disability Act in 2021.

Interviewer:

Okay, go ahead.

Interviewee:

Yeah. The disability policy is very important. It empowers persons with disabilities in many ways, especially in ensuring their rights are respected. They are also given equal opportunities to survive like any other person in the country.

Interviewer:

Okay, so the policy uniquely addresses the challenges these people face when it comes to looking for employment or accessing benefits, right?

Interviewee:

Yes, it does. It ensures that most of their rights are respected, especially in areas like education, employment, and so on.

Interviewer:

Is there any policy initiative specifically targeting the improvement of employment outcomes for people with disabilities?

Interviewee:

The disability policy covers all those aspects—employment and other factors that empower them. It includes provisions on accessibility and creating a disability-friendly workplace. So yes, those are all embedded in the policy.

Interviewer:

That's fantastic. So how does government policy support different industries when it comes to including people with disabilities in the workforce?

Interviewee:

The disability policy promotes inclusion. However, we don't yet have a specific policy solely focused on disability inclusion in the workforce. That's something we still need to work on. Some countries, for example, have a quota system to encourage hiring of persons with disabilities.

Interviewer:

Exactly, institutions that are disability-friendly could be required to have a certain percentage of employees who are disabled.

Interviewee:

Yes, that's true. For instance, I know that Singapore has a quota system where a certain percentage of employees must be persons with disabilities. But that's not yet the case for The Gambia.

Interviewer:

Okay, so is there any plan to have that kind of system in the future?

Interviewee:

Yes, plans are in place. However, some of these things require resources. We need to align our policies with sectoral policies to ensure they are disability-sensitive and promote inclusion. So it's not only the disability policy that needs to be implemented—other policies also need to align with the Disability Act to promote adequate inclusion.

Slayman:

That's great. You also mentioned a disability guide?

Interviewee:

Yes, we have the Disability Guide, which is intended to ensure the provisions in the policy and the Act are implemented effectively.

Interviewer:

Fantastic. So do you have any measures in place to make sure the policy responds to the diverse needs of persons with disabilities, especially in employment? Since you said the quota system isn't in place yet, are there other measures?

Interviewee:

Yes, I think one issue now is...

Interviewer:

Hello, are you there?

Interviewee:

Yes, I'm here. I lost connection for a moment. You were asking about the Act and the policy?

Interviewer:

Yes, about the measures in place.

Interviewee:

Some operational measures we have include the establishment of the National Steering Committee, which is currently functional. The ministry is also working with the Ministry of Justice to ensure the Disability Act is enforced. The Act covers a broad range of empowerment and rights that need to be protected.

Interviewer:

That's important.

Interviewee:

Also, the policy that supports the Act needs to be put into practice. But the most important thing is that resources need to be allocated. The Act calls for the creation of employment and support for persons with disabilities to acquire skills—like vocational training, for example. Employment is important, but without the right skills, they won't be able to get jobs. That's why government funding through the consolidated funds is necessary to support their education and make them fit for the workforce.

Interviewer:

Wow, that's fantastic. I like the idea of the Steering Committee. They provide oversight functions, right?

Interviewee:

Yes, that's their mandate.

Interviewer:

Those are good initiatives. Moving forward, how is the effectiveness and inclusiveness of the current policy assessed across different types of disability?

Interviewee:

I think there's still a long way to go. In my opinion, the implementation is still very minimal. For example, in 2024, the government only allocated 5 million dalasis in the national budget, which is very small. At least 10 million should be allocated as a starting point.

Interviewer:

Exactly. That's a big gap.

Interviewee:

Yes, and also in terms of empowerment, a lot more needs to be done. There's still a lack of strong commitment from the government.

Interviewer:

That's important. In every policy, there are always some gaps. So in your opinion, what are the gaps in the current policy and how do you plan to address them?

Interviewee:

Some of the gaps include lack of harmonization with other sectoral policies. The disability policy needs to be harmonized with these in order to achieve its objectives. Another gap is limited commitment from government, and also lack of capacity among staff and stakeholders to enforce the policy effectively.

Interviewer: That's a good point. As the Head of the Unit—some may even call it Director—you are involved in recruitment. Since the Personnel Management Office hires on your behalf, and your department develops the TOR, how do you tailor employment services to meet the specific needs of persons with disabilities?

Interviewee:

Honestly, I don't think we have anything formal in place yet. One thing we try to do is be flexible in our requirements when reviewing applications from persons with disabilities. If you set equal requirements for everyone, it might make it difficult for disabled persons to qualify.

Interviewer:

Exactly. In some countries, persons with disabilities have flexible working hours because they may not be able to work the same hours as others.

Interviewee:

Yes, and such flexibility is currently not available in our schemes of service. We also lack specific quotas or reduced qualification requirements for persons with disabilities. Inclusion is still a challenge.

Interviewer:

That makes sense. I understand that as the head of the unit, you can recruit for Grade 1 and Grade 2 positions. Is that correct?

Interviewee:

Yes, that's correct.

Interviewer:

Do you plan to hire persons with disabilities into those grades?

Interviewee:

It depends on the manpower needs and the availability of positions. Currently, some of our staff are retiring—one has retired already, and two more are about to. So we plan to promote some of the existing staff and then fill the lower positions. Grade 3 is currently the lowest we have, so we're thinking of opening some Grade 1 and 2 positions and recruiting young people, especially youth. Most of our current staff are in their 40s and 50s.

Interviewer:

That's good. At your department, are there any specialized programs or resources available for persons with disabilities looking for employment?

Interviewee:

Yes, we have internship opportunities. Some are currently working at the office. We encourage youth to apply and give them opportunities when resources allow. We also conduct training programs occasionally, depending on support from development partners. We train stakeholders and organizations, and we also educate persons with disabilities about their rights.

Interviewer:

Do you get support from organizations like UNICEF?

Interviewee:

Yes, we get support from UNFPA and UNICEF, among others.

Interviewer:

Now let's focus on sector-specific challenges. What are the main employment challenges faced by persons with disabilities in accessing jobs in various industries?

Interviewee:

One major challenge is lack of adequate skills. They are often not given the opportunity to be trained like others, so they lack the required qualifications. Another challenge is the lack of

mechanisms from government to encourage the private sector to employ persons with disabilities.

Interviewer:

The government should have a reward system, right?

Interviewee:

Exactly. The government could have developed strategies such as co-paying salaries—like covering 40% or 60% of the salary of a disabled person employed by a private company. That would incentivize hiring. They could also give national awards to organizations that meet certain quotas. These mechanisms are missing, and that's why persons with disabilities are left behind.

Interviewer: That's true. How do you collaborate with employers in various sectors to promote disability-friendly hiring practices and workplace accommodations?

Interviewee:

Unfortunately, we're not doing much in that area at the moment. There have been a few occasions when ministry officials visited institutions to check whether they have ramps and other accessibility features, especially in educational facilities. But in terms of regular and structured collaboration with other sectors, we're not doing enough.

Interviewer:

Okay. Now let's move to impact of support programs. As Head of the Unit, do you have any social assistance programs for persons with disabilities?

Interviewee:

Yes, we have the Family Strengthening Program, which provides relief support to vulnerable households, including households with persons with disabilities. They receive D2000 on a regular basis. We also support disabled organizations through financial support or equipment. For instance, we liaise with JS to provide laptops for visually impaired students at the University, MDI, GTTI, or Gambia College, so they can use the computers for reading and assignments.

Interviewer:

Oh, that's fantastic. So you support them through...

Interviewee:

Yes, we support them through the ministry and our development partners.

Interviewer: Do you have any social support for these people?

Interviewee: Yes, we do. We have some support for them, like the Family Strengthening Program.

Interviewer: Okay.

Interviewee: It's a relief initiative provided to vulnerable households. And some of the people targeted are usually... you know, on a needs basis.

Interviewer: Okay.

Interviewee: For instance, we have a program called CAST 2000. We also work with disability support organizations.

Interviewer: Okay, go ahead. I'm getting you.

Interviewee: We have an annual budget, and from that, we provide some financial support or assistance—sometimes in cash, or through equipment.

Interviewer: Oh, interesting.

Interviewee: For example, we distribute laptops in collaboration with the JS (Joint Support) for visually impaired students.

Interviewer: Okay.

Interviewee: This helps residents who are attending university, MDI, GTTI, or college to have access to computers to read and complete their assignments.

Interviewer: Oh, fantastic.

Interviewee: Yeah, so those supports are provided through our partnerships. We also monitor and check among others who are in need.

Interviewer: That's fantastic.

Interviewee: We also provide items like white canes. Recently, we distributed some to those in need.

Interviewer: Okay. Do you receive any feedback from the people you support? Like, is there a mechanism in place for them to lodge complaints or grievances?

Interviewee: Yes, but it doesn't go directly through our office. It's handled by the Social Protection Secretariat.

Interviewer: Okay.

Interviewee: Beneficiaries of these programs can file complaints or feedback through that office.

Interviewer: Oh, that's fine. Well, it's a pleasure having you. Thank you very much for the wonderful interview.

This report was generated by Oumie Sanneh on May 27, 2025 3:23:50 AM for the following file: C:/Users/Hp/OneDrive/Documents/Oumie Sanneh.qrk

## Sources Summary

<b>Title</b>	<b>Author</b>	<b>Date and Time</b>	<b>Length</b>	<b>Quotes #</b>
Interview Transcript - EC, 25th February 2025	Oumie Sanneh	May 24, 2025 10:57:24 PM	10698	38
Interview Transcript - EJ 24th February 2025	Oumie Sanneh	May 24, 2025 10:57:24 PM	6676	28
Interview Transcript - HB 09th February 2025	Oumie Sanneh	May 24, 2025 10:57:24 PM	19739	59
Interview Transcript - MK, 20th February 2025	Oumie Sanneh	May 24, 2025 10:57:25 PM	8615	24
Interview Transcript - NS, 06th March 2025	Oumie Sanneh	May 24, 2025 10:57:25 PM	9020	36
Interview Transcript - OS, 10th February 2025	Oumie Sanneh	May 24, 2025 10:57:25 PM	8686	36
Interview Transcript_MS, 25th March 2025	Oumie Sanneh	May 24, 2025 10:57:25 PM	13328	55
Interview Transcript_NF, 23rd March 2025	Oumie Sanneh	May 24, 2025 10:57:25 PM	6451	6

## Quirks Summary

<b>Quirk Title</b>	<b>Parent</b>	<b>Grandparent</b>	<b>Description</b>	<b>Author</b>	<b>Date</b>	<b>Total Codes</b>
Background and Responsibilities				Oumie Sanneh	May 27, 2025 2:58:05 AM	10
Experience	Background and Responsibilities			Oumie Sanneh	May 26, 2025 7:31:40 PM	5
Opportunities for PWD				Oumie Sanneh	May 26, 2025 7:31:51 PM	25
Advocacy	Opportunities for PWD			Oumie Sanneh	May 26, 2025 7:31:31 PM	17
Inclusion of Person with Disability	Opportunities for PWD			Oumie Sanneh	May 26, 2025 7:31:48 PM	15
Collaboration to Support PWD	Opportunities for PWD			Oumie Sanneh	May 26, 2025 7:31:25 PM	32
Recognising PWD Through formal and Vocational Training				Oumie Sanneh	May 26, 2025 7:32:31 PM	21
Diverse Form of Disability	Recognising PWD Through formal and Vocational Training			Oumie Sanneh	May 26, 2025 7:32:10 PM	7
Poor coordination and Weak Policy emplemntation				Oumie Sanneh	May 27, 2025 2:57:59 AM	26

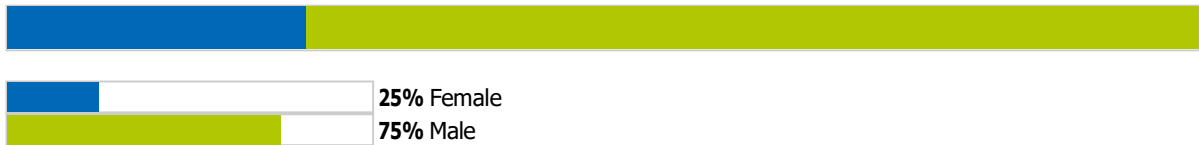
<b>Quirk Title</b>	<b>Parent</b>	<b>Grandparent</b>	<b>Description</b>	<b>Author</b>	<b>Date</b>	<b>Total Codes</b>
Hiring Discrimination Against PWD				Oumie Sanneh	May 26, 2025 7:32:28 PM	18
Way forward for PWD				Oumie Sanneh	May 26, 2025 7:32:12 PM	17
Legislative and Policy Reforms				Oumie Sanneh	May 25, 2025 9:32:19 PM	27
Challenges Face				Oumie Sanneh	May 26, 2025 7:30:56 PM	20
Poor Infrastructure Inaccessble	Challenges Face			Oumie Sanneh	May 26, 2025 7:30:49 PM	11
Cultural Attitudes and Social Stigma	Challenges Face			Oumie Sanneh	May 26, 2025 7:30:53 PM	13
<b>TOTAL NUMBER OF CODES</b>						<b>282</b>
<b>TOTAL NUMBER OF QUIRKS</b>						<b>16</b>

# Properties Summary

## Condition



## Gender



## Institution











## Nationality



# Portfolio



	<b>13%</b> Social Welfare Officer- Multidisciplinary Facilitation Team
	<b>13%</b> Principal Social Welfare Officer
	<b>13%</b> Coordinator
	<b>13%</b> Regional Coordinator
	<b>13%</b> Chairperson
	<b>13%</b> Senior Social Welfare Officer
	<b>13%</b> Freelance Data Collector
	<b>13%</b> Director of Disabled Unit

## Main Canvas Views

### Quirks Canvas - Primary

