ENHANCEMENT OF ACCESS AND INCLUSION OF PEOPLE WITH
VISUAL IMPAIRMENTS IN THE ELECTORAL PROCESS IN
ZIMBABWE

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

1.1 Background To The Study

It was futile to imagine the total inclusion of people with visual impairment without addressing concerns to do with their unconditional and full participation in governance and electoral issues and systems in Zimbabwe.

This group of people has been disadvantaged and short changed in a number of areas in the country. One of these areas was that of governance and electoral issues where they have not been effectively included as equal citizens. They are citizens who have not been able to access their political rights like other citizens. Human rights are inherent to all human beings whatever their nationality, place of residence, sex, nationality or ethnic origin, colour, region, language or any other status (United Nations, 2002). Being afforded the opportunity to vote in local authority and national elections is a key element of human rights for any group of citizens.

The term, visually impaired, means a medically verified visual impairment, accompanied by limitations in sight that interfere with acquiring information or interaction with the environment to the extent that special education instruction and related services may be needed (National Council On Disability 2012).

Visual impairment, therefore, covers the partially sighted (some type of visual problem that resulted in a need for specialised education) low vision (severe visual impairment, not necessarily limited to distance vision. For example, all individuals with sight who are unable to read the newspaper at a normal viewing distance, even
with the aid of eyeglasses or contact lenses) legally blind (indicates an individual has 30/200 vision in the better eye or very limited field of vision and the totally blind who have to learn using Braille or other non-visual media (American Foundation For The Blind 2011).

Participation of people with visual impairment in the governance and electoral structures of their communities is a right and, therefore, a developmental issue (International Labour Organisation (ILO) (2001). In Zimbabwe, the situation on the ground appeared contrary to both local and international statutes and provisions. Access and inclusion of people with disabilities in the electoral processes seems to be regarded as a charity issue than a human rights issue (ILO 2001). Against this understanding, effective inclusion of people with visual impairment in the electoral process in Zimbabwe remains a pipe dream with chances of making it reality far-fetched. Disability has historically been regarded predominantly as a health and welfare issue (South African Integrated National Disability Strategy - White paper, 1997). This position and stance has regrettably contributed to the continued marginalisation, and limited participation of people with visual impairment in the electoral process in their country of birth.

It would seem a number of barriers continue to stand in the way, thereby, stifling the effective participation of people with visual impairment in the electoral process. The researcher was privileged to have taken part in a number of elections in different capacities in Zimbabwe. These capacities entailed being a presiding officer as well as a polling officer for local authority and national elections and referendums. While
performing the duties that went with the roles indicated above, the researcher noted with concern how people with visual impairment were being short changed by the existing electoral system and structures. Available literature also seems to confirm the observations of the researcher. These grey areas largely prompted the researcher to have an interest to find out more about the electoral system and provisions for the visually impaired people.

Some of the grey areas in the Zimbabwe electoral process include:

- Lack of privacy in the voting process;
- Being assisted to vote by total strangers;
- Lack of Braille ballots or enlarged print for easy reading;
- Unavailability of magnifying material;
- Inaccessible polling stations;
- Being prevented from voting for different reasons;
- Lack of information on the electoral procedures;
- Lack of trained personnel to help people with visual impairment;
- Lack of transport to polling stations; and
- Fear of political violence on the part of the visually impaired.

National Association of Societies for the Care of the Handicapped (NASCOH 2008)

Some visually impaired people could not read conventional print and could therefore not, access vital information. The visually impaired tended to rely on other people to tell them what was taking place in the political arena. This distorted information and sometimes resulted in unnecessary apprehension and out-of-context understanding of otherwise normal situations. Due to this anomaly, what people with visual impairment
heard was polarised, tended to be dramatised and blown out of proportion. According to (NASCOH, 2008), violence, for example, assumed exaggerated proportions when taken in the context of people with visual impairment. The visually impaired might resent participating in the voting process because they saw it as unsafe for them to do so, considering the challenges involved in defending themselves or in running away from violent scenes (Ibid).

According to NASCOH, (2010), in the 2008 elections there were 700 000 potential voters with disabilities. This number also included those with visual impairment as part of the population of people with disabilities. Statistics relating to only those with visual impairment could not be obtained. Out of these, 25.6% of people with disabilities managed to vote, 75% of the potential voters failed to exercise their right to vote due to physical barriers, lack of information and attitudinal barriers. The actual statistics indicated that:

- 36.7% were not registered to vote;
- 16.5% were not willing to vote; and
- 11.75% were afraid of political violence.

(NASCOH 2010).

Other reasons included lack of transport to take people with disabilities to polling stations, ill informed community beliefs such as that people with disabilities were not supposed to vote, lack of resources required to carry out political campaigns and lack of appropriate formats for the visually impaired in particular (Ibid).
The 25.66% who managed to vote raised complaints. These complaints had to do with lack of privacy in the voting process, being assisted by representatives of contesting parties, Zimbabwe Electoral Commission (ZEC) officers and police officers. Other complaints were on voting materials that were not in the format accessible to visually impaired people such as Braille or enlarged print. Inaccessibility of the built environment and the furniture used were also issues of great concern. It was also found out that in Zimbabwe, Braille was a mystery and was reserved for those who did special education. (ibid). This position was unfortunate and at variance with what was on the ground, since, Braille is commonly being taught in a number of schools and many people with visual impairment are using it to communicate.

In addition, many people with visual impairment in Zimbabwe do not have birth certificates, national identity cards or passports to enable them to register as voters (ibid). They could not access voter education and, therefore, can not vote for candidates of their choice or for themselves. People with visual impairment could not even afford to challenge the status quo and to stand as candidates themselves. They could not even be trained or be accredited as observers of elections. The political rights of people with visual impairment have been disregarded to the extent that they cannot be voted into public office or hold positions of authority. (Government of Western Australia 2011).

Buckmaster and Thomas (2009) indicated that exclusion referred to a lack of opportunity to participate in social, economic and/or political life. Article 19 of the
U.N. Convention on the Rights of People with Disabilities (2006) underpinned the importance of life in and as part of the community for people with disabilities. Across the world, people with visual impairment have been subjected to discrimination and alienation from ordinary life and relationships (Disability World 2012). They have also been excluded and exposed to powerlessness within service systems coupled with loneliness and isolation (The National Council On Disability 2012). Sherwin (2010) also argued that social inclusion continued to be inspirational for many people with visual impairment with little authentic and sustained progress having been made in this area.


“We desire a place within the community. This place is not just somewhere to lay down our heads, but a place which brings comfort and support with daily living, friendship, meaningful work, exciting recreation, spiritual renewal, and relationships in which we can be ourselves. And out of this, great things may flourish”

The above quotation effectively captures the extent to which people with disabilities have been excluded, not only in the political arena which forms the thrust of this study, but in other spheres of social inclusion namely active participation in community living.

People with visual impairment have limited hope or no hope at all of going to school, getting a job, having their own home, creating a family and raising their children,
enjoying a social life or voting. For the vast majority of the world’s people with disabilities, shops, public facilities and transport, and even information are largely out of reach (ILO 2001. The extent of the marginalisation and exclusion of people with visual impairment does not only end at the electoral process but spanned to other areas as demonstrated above.

It is argued that people with disabilities make up the world’s largest and most disadvantaged minority. (Government Of Western Australia 2011). “An estimated 20% of the world’s poorest persons were those with disabilities, 98% of children with disabilities in developing countries did not attend school, an estimated 30% of the world’s street children lived with disabilities, and the literacy rate for adults with disabilities was as low as 3%, and in some countries, down to one percent for women with disabilities” (United Nations, 2007).

Over a billion people i.e about 15 percent of the world population lived with disabilities. (World Bank 2011). In every region of the world people with disabilities lived on the margins of society, deprived of some of life’s fundamental experiences (United Nations, 2007).

People with visual impairment face discrimination and marginalisation in various spheres such as education, health, the electoral process and others. There is need to end the violation of rights that confront most persons with visual impairment. Part of these rights could be retrieved through the provision of the power of the vote, but to a large extent this has not been fourth coming. While the coming of the United Nations
Convention on the Rights of people with Disabilities was a welcome development, not much has changed on the ground. (Malawi Union of The Blind, 2013)

Linda Mastandrea, a paralympian and disability lawyer in the United States of America, had this to say about how people with disabilities were seen by the community:

“For people born with a disability as I was, often the family expects very little of them, number one, expectations are low, number two, physical barriers in the community may prevent people with disabilities from accessing their community, and number three social barriers prevented them from accessing their community”

Use of terms like “totally blind” or “completely blind” “absolutely blind” and “deaf” were clearly derogative. Such terms emphasised the disability rather than the person. The statement above demonstrates the predicament of people with visual impairment in their interactions in society. It appeared they are always taken for granted by those who were expected to understand, appreciate and help them.

The history of Zimbabwe shows that in 1899, there was only a minority of elected seats in parliament for the passing of government measures. (Bowman, 1973). The electorate was almost exclusively white settlers, and the proportion of elected seats increased steadily over time. In the Report on Southern Rhodesian General Election (1924), it was highlighted that the colony retained the Cape Colony system, which gave separate voting rights to blacks and whites who owned properties with a minimum value of £150 or had an income of at least £100. The British Broadcasting Corporation (BBC 2013) stated that both of these means tests were accompanied by a
simple language test in English. From 1957 up to 1960, the Southern Rhodesia African National Congress, clamoured for universal sufferage for the majority indigenes to no avail (Africa Heritage 2013). These measures were meant to shut out the majority black people by whites. Under such conditions, the case of political rights for people with visual impairment, let alone other disabilities was a far cry and just a pipe dream. Issues of inclusion in the political process were seen as secondary and did not, therefore, receive any prominence at all. The visually impaired were never part and parcel of the political landscape in terms of their political rights, not even land rights. Due to increasing impatience over the pace of reforms, Africans agitated for political rights and sometimes resorted to sporadic acts of violence and sabotage under the leadership of African parties. (The BBC, 2013)

The war of liberation was in essence all about rights including voting rights. Regrettably, these rights have not been extended to people with visual impairment. It is clear throughout the history of this country that participation of people with visual impairment in governance and electoral issues has been a contentious issue. People with visual impairment were not included in the voting process. They were not taken on board by successive national authorities. They were not mentioned anywhere even by implication. They were sidelined and marginalized as non-citizens. (Africa Heritage 2013). To date, this anomaly appears to have been consolidated and institutionalised. Effective participation in the electoral process still remains highly inaccessible for people with visual impairment. Even successive electoral laws after independence in 1980 have continued to exclude them from the mainstream political arena.
However, it is also important to highlight that in Zimbabwe, there was a time when some people with disabilities were chosen by the President of the country to be Members of Parliament. This was commendable, but it did not last for long. Mr Malinga, who has a physical disability, was once the mayor of Bulawayo. In the present Senate, there are two Senators who represent people with disabilities. Again, this is good but it is a drop in the ocean, considering the magnitude of the problems that people with visual impairment are grappling with. Having said this, it was also incumbent upon people with disabilities, and in particular, those with visual impairment, not to rest on their laurels anticipating that change can just come on its own, without them aggressively fighting to get what belongs to them by birth. Politics was a dog-eat-dog game. Even with legislation in place, they can still be sidelined. People with visual impairment need to keep on putting their heads on the chopping log for them to realise positive results.

Article 29 of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of People with Disabilities (2006) underpinned the importance of embracing and strengthening the right of all people with disabilities to fully and actively participate in the political and public life of their communities.

Reports of the National People With Disabilities and Carer Council in Australia (2009) and the Economic and Social Research Institute of Ireland in Gannon and Nolan (2007) identified the link between disability, social exclusion and poor health which indicated that people with disabilities could not access public facilities and were excluded from taken-for-granted life paths like going to kindergarten and schools, going to work, having a home or a marriage. Lack of access to these basic rights had
been extended or translated to exclusion in more critical rights such as political rights hence the need to establish the true situation in Zimbabwe in as far as inclusion of people with visual impairment in the electoral process is concerned.

Against this background, the study sought to establish the extent to which people with visual impairment have been included in the electoral process. The study also sought to determine whether people with visual impairment were aware of the processes that allowed for their effective participation in the electoral process. Finally, the study sought to establish the barriers that stifled the inclusion of people with visual impairment in the electoral process as well as recommend strategies that could be adopted to address any grey areas.

1.2 Statement Of The Problem

People with visual impairment face exclusion from the electoral process and marginalisation in governance issues in Zimbabwe. It was, therefore, the intention of this study to establish the extent to which people with visual impairment had accessed the electoral and voting processes. The study also intended to establish the strategies to enhance their access to the electoral process.

1.3 Aim of the Study

The purpose of the study was to determine the extent to which people with visual impairment had been included in the electoral process in Zimbabwe with a view to proffering possible strategies that could be adopted to address the issues contributing to their exclusion. The study, therefore, looked at current trends with a view to
isolating the concerns and suggested improvements where possible in order to increase access to the electoral process.

1.4 **Objectives of the Study**

The objectives of the study were to:

1.4.1 Establish the electoral needs of people with visual impairment in Zimbabwe.

1.4.2 Establish how people with visual impairment have been embraced in the electoral process.

1.4.3 Determine the barriers that have contributed to the non-participation of people with visual impairment in the electoral process.

1.4.4 Recommend strategies to improve participation of visually impaired people in the electoral process.

1.5 **Sub Research Questions**

The study was guided by the following questions:

1.5.1 What are the needs of visually impaired people in the electoral process in Zimbabwe?

1.5.2 To what extent have people with visual impairment been included in the electoral process in Zimbabwe?

1.5.3 Are people with visual impairment aware of the processes that allow for their participation in the electoral process?

1.5.4 What are the barriers to the inclusion of people with visual impairment in the electoral process?
1.5.5 How could the electoral process be made more inclusive for individuals with visual impairment?

1.6 Significance of the Study

This research study was of practical significance to a number of critical stakeholders such as the researcher himself, people with visual impairment, policy makers, the electoral commission and future research. Below is the importance of the study to respective stakeholders:

1.6.1 To the Researcher

The researcher immensely benefited from this research in that he widened his horizon in the area of disability studies since he would learn more from the related literature from other studies as well as the findings of the study. He also boosted his research profile through carrying out this study. In addition, the researcher improved his research skills, which was an advantage of immense value to him.

1.6.2 To People With Visual Impairment

If the needs of people with visual impairment were known this would go a long way in determining whether these were being met or not. If they were not being met, strategies could be explored to help in establishing ways of including the visually impaired. If there were any challenges, ways should be found by stakeholders to address these, for example, if it was established that people with
visual impairment were unable to vote, a needs analysis could be done to establish why. People with visual impairment would be allowed to constitutionally exercise their voting rights in Zimbabwe by taking part in the electoral process through accessing voter education and being able to vote without any discrimination or prejudice just like any other citizen. Voting is a right enshrined in the constitution for every \textit{bona fide} citizen and, therefore, there is no reason why some people should not access this right due to discrimination of any kind.

1.6.3 To Policy Makers

The research benefits policy makers in a number of ways. Firstly, it is meant to enlighten policy makers on critical matters to consider when drafting policies and legislation on electoral issues for people with visual impairment. It makes them aware of the important accessibility and inclusion issues such as the voting formats, the role of voter education, human rights for people with visual impairment in the electoral process, international voting practices for people with visual impairment, electoral law policies and research, and the role of the media on voting matters for people with visual impairment. Policy makers stand to benefit on how best to include people with visual impairment in the electoral process paying particular attention to critical issues. They also stand to benefit on what can be done to help those who were medically unable to vote. Above all, the need to focus on reinforcing commitments to ensuring that people with visual impairment were given equal opportunities to take part in the electoral process and access services is critical to all policy makers. Policy makers are also made aware of the need to change the Electoral Act in order to facilitate or empower voters with visual impairment and create an enabling environment through effective legislation.
1.6.4 To The Zimbabwe Electoral Commission

The Zimbabwe Electoral Commission benefits in that they will appreciate the need for an electoral advisory service for people with visual impairment. It was also hoped that the Electoral Commission will see the need for promoting, funding and conducting research into electoral matters. In addition, it is hoped that the Zimbabwe Electoral Commission will realise the need to develop a disability access and inclusion plan in which all key and peripheral issues could be embraced with a view to putting in place mechanisms to facilitate convenient access to an electoral system that would be easily understood by people with visual impairment. The Electoral Commission also benefits through learning the role of continuously updating its website in formats such as enlarged print as well as continue to explore opportunities provided by new technologies such as e-voting. Finally, the need for increased training and community awareness as well as clear electoral information can not be over emphasised. People with visual impairment should, therefore, receive information in a format that will enable them to access the information as readily as other people.

1.6.5 To Future Research

Future researchers on electoral or governance issues can use the results of this study as a stepping stone to the study of other issues that can be critical to their researches. The review of related literature can also provide answers to some questions still to be tackled. The methodology in this study can also be replicated by other scholars.
1.7 Delimitations of The Study

This study was carried out in five provinces of Zimbabwe namely Bulawayo, Masvingo, Mashonaland West, Mashonaland East and Harare. The study was limited to the five provinces because it was felt that these would be representative enough of the electoral situation and experiences of people with visual impairment in Zimbabwe. People with visual impairment who qualified to vote were the main concern of this study. The study also dealt with the Zimbabwe Electoral Commission and organisations representing people with visual impairment. The theoretical delimitation of this study was limited to inclusion. Inclusion is a relatively new paradigm shift in Zimbabwe, and in particular, at the time the research was done. Its belief in positively and meaningfully embracing people with disabilities in the mainstream of community activities and treating them as equally important citizens with an equally important stake in the affairs of their country is considered paramount. Inclusion, therefore, implies taking on board people with disabilities so that they can also take part in activities such as sport and recreation, politics and governance issues, employment, education healthcare as well as other developmental issues taking place in the communities.

1.8 Limitations of The Study

Limitations are generally unavoidable when carrying out research of this magnitude. A number of limitations were, therefore, encountered in the process of carrying out this research study.
One of the limitations of this study was managing the logistics of getting different people with visual impairment to come together for successful focus group discussions in particular. It was not easy finding such participants concentrated at one given area or place. Convincing participants coming from diverse backgrounds to come together and assemble at one place proved quite a mammoth task. Promising participants some form of reward at the end of the sessions was not feasible as it amounted to some form of bribery and this was not in line with ethical and legal rules and regulations. Some way had to be found to go round this challenge.

There was also an added challenge of individual participants in the focus groups who wanted to dominate the group discussions at the expense of input or ideas from other members of the group. If not well handled such group members had the potential to disrupt the session by discouraging participation from other members of the group.

Another limitation was that of accessing the sample that the researcher required for the individual interviews in different parts of Zimbabwe. This was aggravated by the fact that it was not easy to find the sample concentrated in one area. This called for extensive travelling to get the participants and informants who were needed for the study.

There was also an added challenge of some participants and informants who did not wish the interviews to be recorded for varying reasons. This resulted in the loss of critical data generation that could have been retrieved when the researcher replayed the recorded interview in-order to capture verbatim what participants would have said.
Another challenge was that of participants who diverted from the main purpose of the interviews to other issues that were not necessarily related to the study. The challenge emanated from some participants who erroneously thought that the interview presented an opportunity to vent their concerns on other issues especially those that had to do with their social security and how central government was failing to provide for these.

Precautionary measures to help in dealing with logistical challenges and limitations were done by visiting respective organisations representing visually impaired people to seek and agree on ways of going around the limitations.

Visiting organisations such as The Zimbabwe National League of The Blind (ZNL), the Zimbabwe Association of The Visually Handicapped (ZAVH), the Zimbabwe Council of The Blind (CFB) and the National Association of Societies of The Handicapped (NASCOH), helped in addressing some logistical concerns. Making appointments in advance with all the stakeholders also went a long way in addressing the limitations.

The challenge of getting together participants for focus group discussions was addressed by going to an institution of visually impaired people where quite a good number of them were employed. The researcher sought permission from the authorities who agreed to have the focus group discussions to be carried out there. Dates were then agreed on in advance on when the focus group discussions would be done or carried out. This went a long way in alleviating the challenge of getting such a group of hard-to-come-by people together. The authorities at this institution were very co-operative in contributing to the realisation of this goal.
Had it not been for the co-operation the researcher obtained from the authorities of this private institution, incorporating focus group discussions in the study could have proved difficult for the researcher.

The researcher addressed the issue of domineering members of the focus group discussions by indicating whom he wished to answer specific questions in advance. This challenge was also addressed by the researcher being firm and remaining focused.

The researcher also always reminded group members of the objectives of the focus group discussions whenever there were signs of the discussions loosing focus and direction. In addition at the beginning of the session participants and informants were also reminded of being wary of digressing from the purpose of the focus group discussions.

The researcher respected the wish of some participants and informants not to be recorded. This challenge was addressed by carefully listening and taking down notes during the interview. The researcher also made sure that the rate at which the interview took place was such that he could ask questions and take down notes with relative ease and comfort.

The challenge of participants who diverted to unrelated issues was addressed by not paying much attention to the unrelated issues and remaining focused on the critical issues of the interviews. The researcher also tactfully brought back such participants to the focus of the study.
1.9 **Research Philosophy**

This research study was informed by the advocacy and participatory worldview research philosophy. This philosophy has more to do with qualitative research as opposed to quantitative research. This philosophy was largely born out of a realisation that the constructivist position was not convincing enough in helping to cushion marginalised groups from the problems they faced on a daily basis. The philosophy was, therefore, guided by an action agenda that advocated for positive change in the lives of marginalised groups of society.

In line with this philosophy, the study made use of the interpretive research design. This design is a subjective approach used to describe the life experiences of people with a view to gaining insight and “richness” in the complexity of those experiences.

1.10 **Ethical and Legal Implications**

The researcher enlightened research participants on the purpose of the study as well as its implications to them and other stakeholders, such as central government and local authorities, advocacy groups, the Electoral Commission, and future research. After this process, they were given the opportunity to choose to either take part in the study or not. As alluded to earlier, a few had reservations about being recorded. They probably felt that electoral issues were sensitive and were therefore not convinced enough that their views were going to be treated in strict confidence. The researcher assured them of the importance of adhering to, and complying with research ethics and guaranteeing them that it was actually an offence for which a researcher could be sued for violating. Participants were also informed of their right to withdraw from the study any time if they so wished without any interrogation.
Permission was sought from the Zimbabwe Electoral Commission, Organisations of people with visual impairment and M. Hugo School For The Blind to carry out interviews. Consent was also sought from individuals with visual impairment for them to be interviewed for purposes of this research. In all the cases the due processes of research were strictly adhered to and complied with.

1.11 Organisation of the Study

The study is made up of five chapters. Chapter 1 is the introductory chapter. Chapter 2 deals with the review of related literature. The methodology of the study is dealt with in Chapter 3. Chapter 4 focuses on the research methodology used by the study as well as the discussion. Finally, Chapter 5 deals with the findings, conclusions, summary and recommendations of the study.

1.12 Definition of Special Terms and Expressions

Some key terms peculiar to this study were defined and explained below to bring about clearer understanding of their application.

**Visual impairment:** This is a term used to refer to limitations in vision on the part of some individuals. It also includes those with partial sight although some sources prefer to separate low vision and blindness.

**Enhancement:** This implies to increase, further improve, or add value to the existing situation, arrangement or structures in the electoral process especially as it refers to people with visual impairment in particular.
Access: Entails getting the opportunity or right to fully participate in the electoral process as a member of that community and citizen

Inclusion: Inclusion is a relatively new paradigm shift from the way people with disabilities were treated in the past in which they were discriminated against and their human rights were not taken seriously to a system where societal structures should be made in such a way that these people can also partake in any activity in the communities where they live. This includes participating fully in education, healthcare, sports and recreation, politics, community development activities and others, as equally valued citizens. In other words inclusion entails embracing people with disabilities in society.

Electoral process: This entails all the processes and procedures before, during and after elections that result in the inclusion of people with visual impairment in governance issues in their communities.

Voting format: This refers to the provision of suitable ways in which people with visual impairment could vote taking into account their individual needs as dictated by the nature of the disability for example a Braille ballot, enlarged print, audio cassette or use of information technology.

Assistive devices: These are the aids that help people with visual impairment to be able to do different activities that they would otherwise be unable to do without assistance from these aids e.g. video magnifiers, desktop voting screens, magnifying sheets, triangular sheets, specially designed abacuses and others.
Specialised assistance: This refers to the special help that is rendered to people with visual impairment to enable them to vote more efficiently for example through the use of vote assist or audio loops.

Confidentiality in voting: This refers to the provision for voters with visual impairment to be able to vote independently and in private without assistance from third parties.

1.13 Summary
This chapter first provided a brief introduction to the study. It then went on to define the term visual impairment. It also focused on the background to the study as well as the research questions and objectives. The significance of the study to different stakeholders was also put into perspective. The limitations and delimitations of the study were also highlighted. The next chapter focuses on the review of related literature. The idea is to learn from the experiences and researches from other contexts different from what is available in Zimbabwe.
CHAPTER 2
REVIEW OF RELATED LITERATURE

2.1 Introduction

This chapter focuses on reviewing literature related to the issues under study. It starts by looking at the conceptual framework guiding this study. Literature on electoral issues in other contexts in different parts of the world was reviewed. The researcher, therefore, took a closer look at recent research studies in other countries, barriers to the voting process for people with visual impairment, legislative provisions in other countries, the new Constitution of Zimbabwe (2013), the Electoral Act of Zimbabwe, the Amended Electoral Act of Zimbabwe (2014), and voting formats used in other countries and how best information could be availed to visually impaired people. Coverage on the feasibility of internet voting for people with visual impairment, campaign literature, political rights and rationale for voting for people with visual impairment will also be delved into. The situation in other countries is also covered with a view to introspecting into the Zimbabwean practices and experiences. The researcher also took a closer look at the history of the electoral process in Zimbabwe as well as from an international perspective.

2.2 Theoretical Framework

This study was guided by the theoretical framework of inclusion. Inclusion is a relatively new paradigm shift from the exclusionary practices that used to prevail in the past. People with disabilities were regarded as unimportant and dependent on others. An inclusive system is one where individuals with disabilities are regarded more seriously and take part in all the mainstream activities of society. Inclusion is
based on the recognition of capacities and potential of all people, including those with
disabilities if the environment is responsive to their needs (United Nations
further showed that inclusion illustrates the shift from the status quo to personal
development of people with disabilities. Inclusion is the principle applied to
accommodate all human beings, thus the full spectrum of diverse abilities, equal and
quality participation in real life experiences from birth to death (Hall, 2002). It
entails the participation of people with disabilities in the mainstream development
activities of society such as employment, education, governance systems,
healthcare systems, sport and recreation, information and communication technology,
commerce and industry and others. The Convention On the Rights of People with
Disabilities (CRPD 2006) also underscored the right of people with disabilities to
participation in political and public life in Article 29 through guaranteeing the
political rights and opportunity to enjoy them on an equal basis with others. Inclusion
recognises and embraces the need to capacitate people with visual impairment more
effectively in accordance with their strengths and indeed even their limitations. A
good assessment of both the limitations and strengths of people with visual
impairment facilitates coming up with inclusive electoral strategies to cushion
people with visual impairment from a myriad of challenges they experience.

Inclusivity in the electoral process in Zimbabwe formed the basis or thrust of this
study, for it was identified as the most appropriate theoretical framework to guide and
shape the study. People with disabilities have a history of being unduly discriminated
against in many societies. At the time of the study, in the Zimbabwe school system,
placement of learners with visual impairment still favoured special schools, which in
essence were exclusive in nature. The practice of special school tradition has proved to be competing against the noble goals of inclusion. Thus, special schools tend to defeat the essence of inclusion. In the Zimbabwe education sector, some inroads have, however, been made in the direction of inclusion although the process still left a lot to be desired. This has been done through the availing of the following policy circulars to schools: Director’s Circular No. 3 of 2001; Guidelines on Providing Equal Access To Education For learners with Disabilities;, Director’s Circular No. 7 of 2005; Guidelines For The Inclusion Of Learners With Disabilities In All School Competitions; and Secretary’s Circular No. 2 of 2000; Inclusion Of Learners With Albinism. There was need therefore, to confront issues to do with inclusion of people with visual impairment in the electoral process with similar interest, commitment and zeal at policy level. Unfortunately, this has not been the case.

However Zimbabwe cannot afford to ignore or dismiss everything about special schools since there are certain elements of the practice that can be of immense value to people with visual impairment.

Inclusion therefore came in as a realisation of the potential that people with disabilities have and that they could surpass many of those without disabilities in different spheres of life. The electoral process was seen to be one of the important areas in which the theoretical framework of inclusion could play a critical and pivotal role in informing and directing positive change for people with visual impairment. It was in this context that this study borrowed extensively from this theoretical framework.
2.3 **Rationale for the Study**

This study intended to fill in an important gap regarding the electoral process and people with visual impairment in Zimbabwe. The needs of people with visual impairment appeared or seemed not to be taken seriously by successive electoral authorities and yet diversity of differences should be valued at all costs. Specific grey areas noted included: lack of privacy in the voting process, lack of appropriate voting formats, lack of voting information, lack of and limited understanding of provisions of the laws guiding the electoral process and fear of politically motivated violence. (NASCOH 2008). The role of other stakeholders in the electoral process also needed to be put into perspective. For an informed position to be arrived at there was need to first establish the true status of issues pertaining to the electoral process. The need to fill in this critical gap was largely responsible for the decision to have this research study and avoid generalizing issues without evidence of the actual position on the ground.

The concerns outlined above were critical aspects in prompting the researcher to have an interest in uncovering what exactly the position was like, what needed to be done, who was supposed to take action and how exactly all the outstanding concerns needed to be addressed. The study finally sought to make effective recommendations aimed at embracing people with visual impairment in the electoral process in Zimbabwe.
2.4 Evolution of Access to Voting For People with Disabilities

While the evolution of access to voting for people with disabilities differs from one country or region to another, the example of Quebec in Canada goes a long way in helping Zimbabwe gain incredible insight into what exactly could be involved. In Canada, since 1972, there were sixty general elections and four referendums. (Leclerc 2012). During these elections, meaningful provision for people with visual impairment started at a slow pace but fundamental changes began to be recorded as early as the sixties. Gradual progress has been noted in earnest ever since this paradigm shift from exclusionary and discriminatory practices to more inclusive changes meant to benefit individuals with visual impairment.

In Quebec, provisions for people with disabilities to vote were first introduced in the 1960s. During the May 1980 referendum, selected polling stations were made accessible to people with disabilities to vote in advance. In the November 1980 elections people with visual impairment were able to vote with the aid of a template (Leclerc 2012.). Since 1985, the Electoral Act received attention in this regard at all the revision offices, advance polls and returning offices.

In 1989 the electoral law included recognition of the right to vote for people with mental disabilities, unless if they were under guardianship. Mobile polls were also introduced for voters who were unable to leave hospitals, rehabilitation centres, residential or chronic care institutions (ibid). In Quebec, people in these circumstances were allowed to register and vote without necessarily having to leave their rooms.
Still in Quebec, in 1995 it was made mandatory for all ordinary polls, with the exception of extraordinary circumstances, to be accessible to people with disabilities. This made it possible for 90% electoral accessibility rate for people with disabilities (Ibid.). In the 2003 general election, the electoral accessibility rate shot up to 97%.

Electoral officials were also more prepared than ever before to assist people with disabilities to vote. Authorities in Quebec put in place a number of special considerations. These included:

- that voters who could not mark the ballot could ask for assistance from poll workers.
- a template that was made available in order to allow people with visual impairment to vote on their own (the deputy returning officer had to tell the voter the order in which the candidates appeared on the ballot.
- that hearing impaired voters could be accompanied by an interpreter.

Source: (Leclerc 2012)

Another provision for voters who were temporarily away from home for purposes of medical care was added in 1998. This provision also catered for those who were involved in rehabilitation programmes to ensure the safety of their children or their own safety (Ibid). The gradual evolution of electoral systems in the world in particular in the last few decades, shows governments’ renewed interest and intent to accommodate people with disabilities in the electoral process (ibid).

Long back before the introduction of the written vote in countries such as the United States of America, France, Australia and the United Kingdom, there used to be what was called the viva-voce or oral ballot, in which the voters’ roll was announced and
voters were expected to come forward and publicly announce their choice (The Zimbabwe Eye 2013). The results were then considered and noted down. A major concern with this approach was that the ethical considerations of confidentiality and privacy were conspicuously absent. In such cases it could not be ruled out that retribution and reprisals were unavoidable given the system which was too open and exposing on the part of voters (ibid).

Later on, the secret ballot was seen as having the potential and capacity to guarantee voter privacy and confidentiality. According to Mugaradziko, this system was initially started in Australia in 1850. It was then adopted in the United States of America, in 1889. In France, it was introduced in 1795. The system also saw its inception in Great Britain in 1872.

2.4.1 History of Elections in Zimbabwe

The history of electoral issues in Zimbabwe appears to have favoured certain groups of people at the expense of others especially the minority groups such as the visually impaired. Barnes and Mercer, in Phiri (2012), probably best summed up the state in which people with disabilities found themselves in when they indicated that people with disabilities were given a “non-human luminal status”, meaning that the needs of people with disabilities were not a priority and that they were largely considered as second class citizens. This observation applies very well to the relationship between people with visual impairment and the electoral process in Zimbabwe. Electoral segregation is still very common.
This section dwells on the evolution of electoral issues in Zimbabwe in order to demonstrate how visually impaired people came into the picture. A study of the electoral process and people with visual impairment cannot afford to leave out the history of such a cardinal issue.

The evolution of the electoral process for people with visual impairment can only make sense when considered against that of those without disabilities. While electoral provisions for those without disabilities seem relatively better, the same cannot be said for people with visual impairment since the gap appeared to be widening all the time. Before independence in 1980, access to electoral rights was a pipe dream even for those without disabilities. Certain conditions needed to be met for one to be eligible to vote. Some of these conditions included owning properties of a value of 150 pounds as well as income of at least 100 pounds. (BBC 2013).

While this historical perspective needed to be viewed against what was at stake for those without disabilities, it might be difficult to make a clear distinction on these issues.

After independence, a number of factors needed to be considered. The history of elections in Zimbabwe was basically characterised by:

- election fraud;
- voter intimidation;
- ballot stuffing;
- use of deceased people’s names on the voters’ roll to boost numbers; and
- gerrymandering i.e political manipulation of boundaries to favour one party.

Source: (Mugaradziko 2013)
According to The Zimbabwe Eye (2013), The Zimbabwe Electoral Act indicated that the voter should:

- Get a ballot paper;
- Fold the paper in such a way that the ballot marking was not visible; and
- Show the ballot paper to the polling officer.

In the case of voters with visual impairment, there was need for them to be accompanied by someone else who was either a trusted relative or in the absence of such a person they could then be assisted by a polling officer, or a presiding officer.

A person who qualified to vote was expected to vote by secret ballot and his/her choice of a candidate in the election was expected to remain anonymous. In addition it was also expected to be free from any form of influence, fear or intimidation or pressure or bias from any quarter. The choice of a candidate by the visually impaired was supposed to be free in the true sense of the word. Privacy and anonymity were to be the ultimate goal (ibid.).

Traditionally, a voter was expected to cast his/her vote through marking an “X” and then depositing it in a ballot box (ibid). Previous elections in Zimbabwe, with the exception of the July 2013 elections were known to be marred by accusations of fraud and the absence of accountability. There may, however, be varying views or positions on this issue, since others may think otherwise concerning the credibility of these elections. It was vital to point out that over the passage of time the system should gradually improve with some of the hurdles that threatened the process having been
attended to with a view to making the whole thing more democratic, credible and acceptable. A number of issues such as unwarranted intimidation of voters have been attended to and still continued to receive attention (The Zimbabwe Electoral Support Network 2014).

Improvements saw the country using or adopting the use of pre-printed forms or ballot paper indicating the names and symbols of candidates emblazoned on the paper (Mugaradziko 2013). Previously, concerns on transparency and ultimate accountability were questionable to a very large extent because of the procedures used then.

Casting a vote should be seen as the true representation of the true choice of a people. Elections proved to be the ultimate decisive factor in conflict situations and polarised societies where voters faced intimidation and victimisation. (ibid). Zimbabwe began to use the transparent ballot boxes in its general elections some time after independence. To some extent, the use of translucent boxes created some measure of confidence especially against the allegations of ballot stuffing (ibid). Another factor that contributed to the introduction of translucent ballot boxes in Zimbabwe could have been the fact that they were then common across the world. However, translucent ballot boxes could not mean much to voters with visual impairment since many of them could not see the benefits accruing from the actual process by virtue of not having sight. However some of them especially those with residual vision stood to benefit because they were in a position to see whether the transparent ballot boxes worked to their advantage or not.
Rural areas were well known for threats to voters (ibid). This somehow resulted in taking away the right to vote on the part of voters who included the visually impaired. Voters with visual impairment already had a history of disenfranchisement in many other areas of their lives such as in education, health care, sports and recreation as well as employment. The participation of partisan traditional leaders in the issuing out of political threats of various forms to voters had also led to the lack of transparency in the voting process (ibid). There were a number of vested interests on the part of different political competitors resulting in a number of distortions in the whole process.

2.5 The Role of Information

Information is key to allowing voters to make informed choices (Leclerc 2012). Thus, targeted information for the visually impaired is critical. This information has to be adapted to meet the needs of people with visual impairment.

In accordance with the information needs of people with disabilities, in 1990, new ways to facilitate voting by people with disabilities were put in place in Quebec. In Quebec these provisions were put to test in the 1992 referendum and had to be improved in subsequent elections. The essence of these measures was to give people with visual impairment and indeed other disabilities as much information as possible on the details of legislation on electoral issues as well as the methods that were availed to create room for easier access to voting (Quebec Referendum Report 1992).
In Quebec, more than twenty different information tools were adapted to cater for the needs of people with disabilities. These included:

- Pamphlets;
- Posters;
- Letters;
- News releases; and
- Advertising messages.

**Source: (Leclerc 2012)**

Of special note was the fact that the manual for voters was adapted to alternative media such as Braille, audio-cassette as well as enlarged print and video cassettes. In addition, all televised messages had to be sub-titled for people with visual impairment and hearing impairment. Throughout the election period, vital information on special measures for those groups was sent to all media in Quebec including twenty specialized media and to some 1,500 affected institutions and organisations (ibid).

In the 2003, General Election held in Quebec, a pamphlet showing the various stages of the election period was produced. The last part of the pamphlet, which was the election day, was turned into a poster to be put at all polling stations.

Attention was given to the visual content of messages to ensure they depicted respect for people with disabilities. Messages had to meet the needs of the client. Language used was also adjusted to meet individual needs. Any message had to be made depending on whether it was meant for those with visual impairment or those with limited mobility.
The Director General of elections in Quebec recommended the promotion of the broadest possible exercise of the right to vote, within the framework of the existing legislation or recommending and supporting legislative amendments adapted to the needs of electors (ibid) as the best way to ensure that various groups of people with disabilities were accommodated in the electoral process. It had been realized that this was going to go a long way in addressing a number of the concerns that negatively contributed to the exclusion of people with visual impairment in the electoral process.

Zimbabwe has a lot to learn from the example of Quebec. In particular it could adopt the use of alternative information media such as audio cassettes, enlarged print and Braille. Information could also be availed through television messages. Supportive legislative provisions could also be used. The use of different information tools such as pamphlets, posters letters and news releases cannot be overemphasised. Above all information needed to be tailor made to suit people with visual impairments’ various needs.

### 2.5.1 Provision of Information to People with Visual Impairment

The provision of information on the electoral process is a critical element in efforts to facilitate access and inclusion of people with visual impairment in mainstream governance activities. Many people with visual impairment encounter technical difficulties in scanning various government and other websites because the design and programming was not sensitive to their needs, hence their continued exclusion from the electoral playing field. (NASCOH 2010).
It is vital to sensitise politicians, governments, non-governmental organisations and other critical stakeholders to put in place intervention strategies that aimed at facilitating and promoting the involvement of people with visual impairment in the electoral systems and processes. This approach will go a long way in dealing with exclusionary practices. One of the possible ways to achieve this is by availing requisite resources and support for those with visual impairment to exercise their right to vote. (ibid).

In order to ensure effective implementation of this provision all the relevant information should be disseminated to people with disabilities through various media. These could include through community gatherings, letters, books, print and electronic media, pamphlets, news releases and advertising messages. Some sections of the disability community strongly advocated for the quota system in all the key sections of governance such as in parliament, local authority councillors, in senate and other decision making organs of both the state and private institutions. The implication of the quota system is that it enables the free flow of information.

In Uganda, section 37 of the parliamentary selections statute of 1996, provides for five seats in parliament for representatives of people with disabilities. Uganda uses the Movement Act of 1998, which provides for councillors with disabilities (International Labour Organisation (ILO) 2001). Thus, in Uganda, the position is that at national level, there are five Members of Parliament who fall under special interest groups. In its 2002 elections, Uganda had more than two hundred (200) people with disabilities among the electoral officials (ibid). Zimbabwe has not yet got to a stage where such a number of people with disabilities actively participated in governance
and electoral issues of their communities. Negative attitudes could be a strong factor in contributing to this sad state of affairs. Unless positive steps to address the state of the electoral process and legislative provisions are taken, individuals with visual impairment risk the ire of continued discrimination in the electoral process. People with visual impairment still remain the least likely to be served adequately in spite of the rhetoric and promises of successive governments. (The Disability World 2012)

2.5.2 Provision of Voting Information in an Appropriate Form

The availing of information in the relevant format that can be accessed by voters with visual impairment is a requirement that no Electoral authority can afford to take for granted. It is one of the single aspects that negatively contributes to the discrimination of people with visual impairment in as far as the electoral process is concerned.

Electoral Authorities prefer to use the one size fits all approach where voter information is provided only in ordinary print to all the citizens who might need to use this information. This is pursued at the expense of visually impaired voters who are unable to access the voter information in that form because they are blind or partially sighted. In some African countries such as Zimbabwe, not even enlarged print has been provided as another viable option for those with low vision or residual sight. Enlarged print is generally cheap to produce but provision of this service has remained a pipe dream for visually impaired voters in the country.

The United Kingdom is probably a shining example in pioneering progressive ideas meant to empower people with visual impairment in their quest to be part and parcel of the global village. The Electoral Commission established a website known as
“about my vote”. This website contains vital information which could be downloaded in not only large print, but other various language formats as well as audio files (United Kingdom Electoral Commission 2013)

Other alternative websites that provide invaluable information about electoral issues include “easy read” and “our vote”. Information can therefore be downloaded or ordered in the form of a digital versatile disc (DVD).

In Northern Ireland, the office of the Chief Electoral officer provides information on details for registering to vote. It also provides information on the various types of elections and guidance for candidates. This information is provided in the form of leaflets, flyers, and statistics. The office generally strives to modernise electoral practices including accessible voting for people with various and differing disabilities (ibid)

The Northern Ireland Chief Electoral Officer has responsibility for administering elections as well as compiling the Register of voters. The office of the Chief Elections officer was independent of government. The staff are not an arm of government and therefore operated autonomously.

The case in Zimbabwe is that the electoral process can not be regarded as absolutely independent of government because it is funded by government for most if not all of its activities. The Chief Elections Officer of The Zimbabwe Electoral commission was initially appointed by government. The Zimbabwe Electoral Commission ZEC only took over the running of elections at a later stage. Since ZEC Is not a profit making organization, it is funded by central government for all its programmes although some
of its funding comes from donor institutions. Because of this background, government has so much interest in what goes on at ZEC.

This heavily compromises the autonomy of the electoral body in Zimbabwe, hence decision making cannot be totally independent of government since many of the government officials have a lot of vested interests in the final outcome of the electoral process as a whole.

### 2.5.3 Accessibility of Information

Communication on elections from political parties and candidates needs to target the visually impaired, who by virtue of their lack of sight miss out on standard publicity (Prince 2014). Voting independently for the visually impaired does not exist in Zimbabwe. This is mainly caused by the fact that the voting forms or ballot paper is available only in print. On the other hand, visually impaired people access most of their information through enlarged print, Braille, audio tape and diskette. These formats can be produced locally, but somehow, the authorities are not forthcoming in addressing this grey area. For the visually impaired people to make informed decisions, they definitely need and are entitled to the same information that the sighted access. It has been demonstrated that 36% of blind people and 75% of partially sighted people were able to use large print comfortably (U.K. Department For International Development DFID 2007).

Absence of clear print guidelines is impacting negatively on the needs of people with visual impairment. The following principles have been missing in the existing electoral process.
Absence of such provisions in the Zimbabwe electoral system is a cause for concern impacting negatively on people with visual impairment.

2.6 Campaign Literature and People with Visual Impairment

Many times people with visual impairment are largely left out of the electoral process right from the campaign stage. No material is printed for their benefit as is done for those with sight. Political parties do not do their homework in this regard. Organs of the state are also not bothered to include the visually impaired in this vital component of the electoral process. In both local government and national general elections this is the unfortunate scenario. The National Council on Disability (2012) also alluded to this position. The following strategies were then identified as solutions to addressing the imbalances:

- Using a good colour contrast;
- Using plain typeface;
- Using lower case letters as opposed to capitals;
• Bold rather than light weight text;
• Providing generous spacing;
• Using non-glossy paper;
• The amount of information on one leaflet should be limited;
• A reasonable font size increases the number of people who would read the leaflets;
• Clear print benefited all readers, but could make a difference for visually impaired readers;
• Campaign literature should be accessible to all potential beneficiaries and it should have clear messages that could easily be read and understood; and
• Campaign material/information should be provided in alternative and relevant formats for the benefit of the visually impaired voters.

Source: (Jamal Mazrui, 2012)

Campaigning material for voters with disability is not designed in such a way that it delivers the message it is supposed to send. Candidates who campaign do not consider the constituency of voters with visual impairment. They don’t articulate a clear message in the form that is accessible considering individual differences. Campaigning candidates seem to assume that the way their message should reach this group should not differ from that of the sighted.
2.7 Alternative Voting Formats

2.7.1 Clear Print

Clear print or ordinary print made a difference for visually impaired voters. To make it user friendly for people with visual impairment, clear print should:

- Allow for generous spacing;
- Give a clear contents list to aid orientation;
- Not be printed over a patterned background, photos, logos or illustrations;
- Use a clear type face and avoid fancy material;
- Ensure good size (12 point minimum) and boldness of print; and
- Avoid jargon.

Source: (The United Kingdom Electoral Commission, 2013)

Clear print was found to be important for visually impaired readers. Six out of ten visually impaired readers considered themselves to be print readers (The National Council On Disability 2012). Well designed text also benefits older people with failing sight who often struggled to read poorly designed text. Optical scanners can read and translate information onto computers, but only if the text was reasonably clear and well designed. (ibid).

2.7.2 Large Print

Large print referred to a minimum of 14 point print. Large print could be produced using most word processors. It was best to use a laser printer since others such as dot matrix did not give clear print resolutions (Government Of Western Australia 2011).
2.7.3 Who Uses Large Print?

About 36% of blind people and 75% of partially sighted people read large print. Some could even read ordinary newspaper print. Documents will therefore be longer and voluminous. This results in higher paper and administrative costs.

2.7.4 Audio Cassette

Cheap audio tapes and tape recorders revolutionized the way many blind and partially sighted people sent and receive messages/information. A third of blind people and those with low vision own a tape recorder in the United Kingdom for example. (U.K. Electoral Commission 2013)

2.7.5 Braille

Braille is a system of raised dots that are read by touch, using patterns of up to six dots to represent each letter or number. Almost anything can be brailed, i.e. from catalogues, bank statements, pamphlets, manuals, music and personal correspondence. Braille is produced using specialist software and a Braille embosser or Braille machine operated manually.

2.7.5.1 Braille Ballot Papers For The Visually Impaired

In Nepal visually impaired people were able to vote for the first time in history (Zirenda 2013). The Nepal Election Commission came up with a position to prepare
ballot papers in Braille. This was a culmination of a long time of deliberations on the issue.

An election commissioner in Nepal indicated that preparations were on course to ensure that polling booths were disability friendly wherever there was road transport to the district offices. He also added that ramps were to be provided for those who used wheelchairs. This was a positive move which all those with visual impairment definitely welcomed as a relief. The issue of privacy was not clearly spelt out. If voters with visual impairment are to be assisted by someone else of their own choice, this can be a good step in the right direction. In some countries such as New Zealand and Canada there is a requirement for someone especially the presiding officer to be present in order to ensure compliance with the voter’s wishes (Youth Forum 2013). This had the potential to spark further controversy in view of the fact that this defeated the purpose of bringing in a “trusted” assistant by allowing for the presiding officer to observe the voter’s choice. Such an arrangement has the potential to cause the victimisation of the voter especially after elections.

Some countries such as Australia and Uganda have regulations in which visually impaired voters are assisted by a person of their choice, but in the presence of an election officer (ILO, 2001). With such a regulation, only one person could assist the other person. No one is allowed to help more than one person. The person assisting must be an adult who does not necessarily have to be a registered voter. (ibid). In the event of an illiterate or incapacitated voter not bringing an assistant, he/she would then be assisted by two electoral officers and the police officer to cast his/her vote.
Such reforms are quite good, but sometimes the real concerns of the visually impaired voters are not taken into serious consideration. The problem can be that the visually impaired voters might not come for the elections for fear of victimisation since they will be aware that presiding officers will be allowed to observe their choice of candidates.

2.7.5.2 Braille Users

Braille is used by people with limited vision or no remaining sight whose blindness occurred early in life or through accidents or chemical explosions such as the Chernobil disaster that happened in the Soviet Union in the early eighties. Other eye problems can also contribute to the lack of sight. Many visually impaired people know enough Braille to use it for purposes of voting.

2.7.6 Information Technology (IT)

Information technology provides information on computer disks for those with Braille keyboards or computers using speech synthesizers, large print displays and other innovations (The National Council On Disability 2012). Information on the internet has also proved to be very helpful to people with visual impairment. Visually impaired people access information on the internet through their assistants who take their time to read the information while they listen or through some computer softwares that are disability friendly to their needs. There is however the danger that people with visual impairment might be excluded if their electoral needs are not taken care of. (Royal National Institute of the Blind (RNIB) 2013).
2.7.6.1 Feasibility of Internet Voting For People with Visual Impairment

The advent of internet voting was meant to enhance the democratic right of all eligible people with visual impairment to a secret ballot. In Australia alone, there were 300,000 people who were blind or visually impaired with about a third of them living in New South Wales. (New South Wales Electoral Commission 2012). In the past, people with visual impairment voted with the aid of a friend or relative or through a large Braille ballot which ran up to 67 pages. In order to give effect to new recommendations to address this issue, there was need for formal legislative amendments. These had to be introduced in the Parliamentary Electorates and Elections Further Amendment Bill passed on 25 November 2010 and became law on 7 December 2010. (ibid)

7.6.2 Users of Information Technology (IT)

People with visual impairment benefit a great deal from information technology. However the number of those with access to computer equipment was extremely small due to prohibitive costs. Many of them are also not familiar with such technology and some resist the use of gadgets that have to do with information technology. (The Electoral Office for Northern Ireland (EONI) 2013). They probably resisted the use of information technology due to the limitations imposed by the lack of sight on accessing the internet for example. Another reason could be mere phobia of information technology or just associating information technology with a myriad of difficulties.
Lack of exposure to information technology at school or at home can also account for the resistance to IT. Exposure to IT at a tender age can also explain the source of the resistance. The effects of such resistance can be detrimental to people with visual impairment in that vital information is lost or distorted through using third parties whose understanding of various issues about the electoral system can be faulty or defective in a number of ways.

2.7.6.3 Accessibility of Polling Places

Some polling places were mostly located in existing public buildings such as schools or clinics, sometimes accessibility can not always be guaranteed because in most cases these buildings are not always designed with people with visual impairment or physical disabilities in mind. They may not have ramps to guide those with visual impairment or those with physical challenges. In addition for the visually impaired mobility and orientation in unfamiliar environments could also prove to be problematic.

2.7.6.4 Drive in Polling Places

The drive in polling service made it possible for voters to cast their ballot without having to leave their vehicle. To access such a service voters drove their cars to a drive-in polling place. Signage at the location helped to direct the voter to this service. Poll workers will help by getting the ballot paper to the car. At all other polling places, polling officials were able to take ballot papers to a voter with difficulty leaving their car. (Government of Western Australia 2011).
2.7.6.5 Vote Assist

The Western Australian Electoral Commission came up with computer-based software that assisted voters with visual impairment to vote in private. This is known as ‘vote assist’. This was piloted in the 2013 state elections. (ibid). In Australia, previously, people with visual impairment had been assisted to vote by a carer, relative, friend or polling official. (ibid). Vote assist allows an individual with visual impairment to cast his/her vote independently. To access vote assist, the voter listens to audio instructions. This enables them to cast their vote using a numeric keypad. The ballot papers are then printed and the voter can place his/her ballot paper in the ballot box. Countries like Zimbabwe can also benefit by way of exploring the use of appropriate computer software to enable people with visual impairment to vote independently.

2.8 Assistive Devices at Polling Places

The U.K. Electoral Commission (2013) outlines the devices for use by people with visual impairment as video magnifiers, magnifying sheets, desktop voting screens, triangular pencils information persons and registration for early voting.

2.8.1 Video Magnifiers

With this device ballot papers are placed on a reading tray, and the ballot paper image is magnified and displayed on the monitor. The effect is that a visually impaired person will be in a position to read with relative ease especially those with residual vision.
2.8.2 Magnifying Sheets

Magnifying sheets enlarged the text on the ballot papers making it easy for those with low vision to access and therefore read the information they need.

2.8.3 Desktop Voting Screens

The voting screens will be at a height that a person using a wheelchair can access. The screens also enable voters to vote sitting down if necessary.

2.8.4 Triangular Pencils

These are easy-grip triangular pencils that are used by voters who have difficulty holding or writing with standard pencils.

2.8.5 Information Person

The information person or queue controller will be available at selected polling stations to provide information and offer assistance to voters. This person should be visible.

2.8.6 Registration for Early Voting

Voters with visual impairment should be allowed to apply for registration as a general early voter. The ballot papers will be sent to voters before the election day.

These devices play a pivotal role in facilitating easy voting for people with visual impairment. Their availability has to be guaranteed at all costs by electoral authorities.
There has been no known literature to the effect that voters with visual impairment have ever used any of these devices for purposes of voting in Zimbabwe. Such information could not be found from the electronic or print media either, or from the electoral authorities themselves. Zimbabwe as a nation therefore may need to learn from countries that have pioneered use of such devices.

2.9 Voting Systems and Assistive Technology

The American Foundation for the Blind (2011) identified some of the voting machines that had been adapted for people with visual impairment. These included:

(i) Direct recording electronic systems (DRES). This system allows voters to enter their choice on an electronic screen in the voting booth. It also allows a voter to confirm his/her ballot before it becomes an officially recorded vote by providing a “summary screen” listing all of the voter’s choices. A voter can therefore cast his/her ballot and be able to make corrections. This is done in complete privacy.

(ii) Touch screen voting systems (TSV’s). These systems are a type of direct recording systems equipment. They have a standard telephone key pad with a raised indicator on the number 5 key, and are accompanied by a headset and detailed audio instructions to make voting private. Their voice guidance features enables blind people to vote unassisted in privacy. This is achieved by sequencing through the entire ballot using verbal prompts.
Some models of touch screen voting machines allow voters to control the speed of the audio ballot. The ballot magnification feature, which can be activated by the voter, enables the visually impaired voter to read the touch screen ballot and make selections.

It is incumbent upon authorities and other stakeholders to ensure that people with visual impairment, their families and caregivers access the facilities and assistive technologies by providing them with the same opportunities, rights and responsibilities enjoyed by all other people in their communities.

It is vital to realise and appreciate that people with visual impairment are not a homogenous group. Because of this, they have varying needs, preferences and specifications when it comes to the electoral process. It is, therefore, impossible to prescribe similar or the same solutions in a bid to address their concerns. Electoral authorities need to guard against entertaining the notion that visually impaired people have the same needs.

In Zimbabwe, this is not what is happening. The one size fits all approach has detrimental effects in that it works against effective access and inclusion of people with visual impairment in the electoral process. Electoral authorities in Zimbabwe are doing this by providing for only one voting format and that was use of ordinary print for all voters with visual impairment without paying any particular regard to the uniqueness of individual electoral and voting needs.
Visually impaired people were different on what they required. If the lack of provision for individual differences in Zimbabwe is due to ignorance or unwillingness to take the initiatives to provide for alternative voting formats, then this is a very unfortunate position. Some visually impaired people were comfortable with using enlarged print or Braille for purposes of voting. There were other alternative formats available such as vote assist but these have not been availed to those who needed them most. Others might indeed need other interventions and these needed to be provided for in earnest. Since it is possible for some visually impaired people to identify currency denominations, it was also felt that it was attainable for them to identify the characters or pictures on a ballot paper if due attention was paid to ascertain what really helped to identify the information highlighted on paper. (Makabayi 2014). As a nation it is therefore incumbent upon electoral authorities to adopt a more serious approach by providing adequate funding in order to kick start investment aimed at making the visually impaired to be in a position to access the electoral process and be unconditionally and effectively included on matters that bordered on fulfilling their birthright. Based on observations made by the researcher, it appeared like electoral authorities in Zimbabwe are treating inclusion of visually impaired people in the electoral process as a privilege that they can keep on postponing using various scapegoats such as lack of funding and expertise.

2.10 Malawi Union of the Blind (MUB) Petitions Electoral Body

In Malawi, the Malawi Union of the Blind (MUB) petitioned the Malawi Electoral Commission on the need to respect voting rights of visually impaired people which had been violated in previous elections (MUB, 2013). In the petition, blind people were requesting the Electoral Body to introduce a tactile ballot guide as well as
sensitising people with visual impairment on how to use the gadget.

Part of the petition indicated that when time to vote came, people with visual impairment have to rely on someone to do the voting for them and this was a challenge and violation of the right to choose a person of their choice secretly. The petition also highlighted the fact that in reality, the blind people’s secrecy was highly compromised, since at times; they did not have the trust in the person who was entrusted with the marking of the ballot paper on their behalf. It was possible that the guide who did the marking for them could cheat and this was their major fear. (Nyasa Times, June 28, 2013).

The petition was also requesting the Malawi Electoral Commission to involve people with visual impairment in civic and voter education, if they wanted this to be done to the satisfaction of everyone. People with visual impairment were arguing that they wanted to be involved right from the start because they were more conversant with their problems and could best mobilize each other for a more efficient and effective participation in elections.

The Malawi Electoral Commission admitted that they were not fully addressing the electoral needs of visually impaired people in the preparations for elections. The commission indicated that they had recently had a meeting with twenty people with visual impairment as a way of trying to understand their concerns as far as electoral issues were concerned (Malawi Electoral Commission (2013).

Visually impaired voters in Malawi were also pushing for electoral reforms that
guaranteed the participation of people with visual impairment in the electoral process. In particular, the visually impaired in Malawi were advocating for tactile ballot guides. The visually impaired advocacy groups in Malawi highlighted the fact that their right to choice of a candidate was being violated on the grounds that they were not sure of the sensitivity of their assistants in the way they marked their ballot papers (MUB, 2013). Tactile ballot guides, therefore, appeared to respond to some of the concerns they had. It was felt that guides could have been manipulating the system for their selfish ends.

A programme manager of the Malawi Electoral Commission agreed that indeed the issue was that the visually impaired voters were not getting the assistance they needed in past elections. There were problems in the Commission. People with visual impairment had a right to vote as human beings and equal citizens of Malawi (MEC 2013).

Malawi had 6,000 visually and hearing impaired people. (Research Survey Report, Malawi, 2010). The same survey further indicated that 2,800 of these were duly registered. The Association of Visually Impaired People in Malawi (AVIPM) was also demanding for time to pre-test the tactile ballot guides and there had been slow progress in this respect (AVIPM 2014). However, the Malawi Electoral Commission had made assurances that there was going to be unassisted voting for the visually impaired. The Freedom Federation of Disability Organisations was reported to be seeking legal redress if the Commission failed to address their concerns (Nyasa Times 2015).
2.11 Litigation on Electoral Rights Of Visually Impaired People

In the United States district court for the Northern District of California, a class action lawsuit was filed on 25 July 2013. In the lawsuit, the county of Alameda was being sued for discriminating against people who were blind and visually impaired (Disability Rights Advocates 2013). In America the issue of voting privately and independently is a fundamental human right. The Alameda county was, therefore, accused of denying voters with disabilities this human right since it failed to ensure that voting machines with accessible features were functioning properly on election day (ibid). The lawsuit, then sought to compel the County of Alameda to make sure that blind and visually impaired voters were in a position to exercise their right to privately and independently vote through the use of accessible voting machines during elections. This lawsuit was filed by the California Council of the Blind and five blind registered voters. The plaintiffs were represented by the Disability Rights Advocates which is a non-profit making disability rights legal centre which specialises in high-impact class actions. (ibid).

A number of the blind voters in Alameda county had experienced several challenges with the audio and tactile features of voting machines during the November 2012 General Elections. When the poll workers were unable to address the problems encountered, blind voters had to be helped by other people as opposed to voting independently. Some of the affected voters had to go to other polling stations, something which was inconveniencing and uncalled for, had the necessary checks and balances been carried out before polling day.
These experiences were very unfair on the part of the visually impaired because they had to share with other people their preferred voting choice, where other voters choices remained their secret.

One of the complainants, who resided in Union City indicated that it was frustrating to find problems with voting machines at his designated poll-site as well as an alternate site during the November 2012 General Election. These barriers prevented him from voting independently on Election Day.

Countries in the USA used voting machines equipped with tactile controls and text to speech audio software that enabled voters with disabilities to privately enter their ballot selections during elections. If functioning effectively, these machines read the information on screen ballots and allowed blind voters to independently input ballot choices using tactile controls. (ibid).

In the USA, July 26, 2013 happened to be the 23rd anniversary of the Americans with Disabilities Act, which was a milestone in the history of people with disabilities. However, people who were blind and visually impaired, continued to be shortchanged in their struggle to attain equal access to a fundamental right clearly enshrined in the constitution and that is the right to vote.

The President of the California Council of the Blind indicated that, it was astounding that on the eve of the 23rd anniversary of the Americans with Disabilities Act, people who were blind and visually impaired were still fighting for equal rights to something as basic as voting. Technology existed to make voting fully accessible to people who
are visually impaired. (Disability Rights Advocates, 2013).

Another complainant, who was blind and a registered voter, expressed the view that as an American, he wanted to fully participate in the democratic process and vote independently and privately in public elections as sighted peers did. (ibid).

Unless clear steps are taken to ensure that machines are fully functioning, the problems encountered by the blind and visually impaired voters continue unabated. Effectiveness in this area could be difficult to achieve if electoral authorities failed to ensure the following before Election Day.

- Training electoral officials on the appropriate set-up and use of the machines;
- Inducting visually impaired voters on the use of the machines;
- Testing the machines to ensure their functioning prior to use of the machines to the public on Election Day; and
- Reliable access to technical support services by poll workers to handle and manage concerns as they arose on Election Day.

Source: (Disability Rights Advocates, 2013)

Voters with disabilities generally had lower turnout levels for elections compared to their peers without disabilities (Disability Rights Advocates, 2013). Thus, forcing voters to dictate their votes to third parties only aggravated the problem through discouraging people with disabilities from voting.
2.12 Related Studies

People with visual impairment find themselves in some kind of a dilemma. Watson (1988:147) observed that

“People with disabilities had been viewed as tragic victims of some unfortunate accident or disease, as people who do not function normally”

Thus, this erroneous thinking has sadly been transferred to electoral issues for people with visual impairment resulting in their exclusion in governance and electoral issues.

For a blind person who cannot read Braille, access to printed material has traditionally been mediated through other people for example a family member, friend, helper or organisation. A number of studies have been carried out on the role of various electoral issues on people with visual impairment and a number of critical issues on this subject are identified and discussed below.

In a study by Piner and Byrne (2010), it was established that visually impaired voters took significantly longer than sighted voters, that is 31 minutes compared to 5 minutes to complete an identical ballot respectively. The study also found that, both the sighted voters and visually impaired voters experienced similar voting error rates (roughly 2%). The sighted and visually impaired voters also experienced similar ratings of satisfaction with the voting method used.

The same study also found that 115 of the visually impaired voters had never used Braille for voting purposes. Only 40% reported being proficient Braille readers. A limited number of visually impaired subjects were also reported to have indicated that
given an option, 34% would prefer to use Braille in the event of a Braille interface having been made available over an audio interface. The majority of these respondents were also quite experienced in the use of computers. On the other hand, the study also established that older people were less skilled in the use of computers. Visually impaired voters also rated themselves more competent than sighted people in terms of computer expertise.

In Zimbabwe, unlike other countries, it still remains to be established through a feasibility study, the number of people with visual impairment who are able to use the computer for purposes of voting.

In another study by Williamson, Wright, Schander and Bow (2001), one participant in Australia indicated that regarding important information on elections, people with visual impairment were provided with a tape recording of the policies of the various parties and their candidates and he felt that a lot had changed for the better in this regard.

The Sensitisation Workshop for Election Authorities in Zimbabwe Report (2010) noted that the option to be assisted by polling officers needed to be left open and may be made available to those who really needed it. The Report alluded to the fact that in Zimbabwe, it took 30 years for people with visual impairment to be accorded a right which other people took for granted. This was evidenced by the striking down of section 60 of the Electoral Act of Zimbabwe in January 2010 which had up to then provided for an individual with visual impairment to be assisted to vote by a presiding officer, two election officers and a policeman and representatives of contesting parties.
However, it is disheartening to observe that despite this historical annulment of a part of the Electoral Act, no definite procedures have been put in place to allow for independent voting by people with visual impairment. It is unfortunate that people with visual impairment are regarded as apolitical. Current electoral laws in Zimbabwe do not help the situation either. There is virtually no protection offered to cushion people with visual impairment from a number of electoral challenges, hence the need for this study.

One study found that a number of people with visual impairment had never used Braille for voting purposes. Such findings appeared to have a lot in common with experiences in Zimbabwe where the use of Braille for voting purposes is also unheard of. On the issue of ability to use the computer by the visually impaired, few people with visual impairment in Zimbabwe are able to use the computer, either because of the prohibitive costs of acquiring one or due to fear of the gadget. The finding in Australia where information on critical electoral policies was readily available on tape, was different to what prevails in Zimbabwe where provision of critical voter information appears difficult to attain for visually impaired voters.

2.12.1 Accuracy and Election Confidence

In a study by Gillian, Piner and Michael, (2005), a number of findings were established on accuracy and confidence in terms of the actual election. They found out that 31.2% of the respondents reported their worries about figuring out how to use the technology to cast their vote. This could be attributed to the fact that election administrators as well as the voting equipment designers did not have a thorough
understanding of the process involved for voters with visual impairment. This was worrying especially when one considers that a substantial number of the voting population was visually impaired. This could be evidenced by the U.S. Census Bureau of Americans with Disabilities Report (2005), which indicated that 19% of the United States population lived with one or more disabilities. In addition 1.3 million people in the same country, which translated to 0.5% reported having legal blindness.

Another study by the National Council on Disability (1998), found that newly blind individuals demonstrated a resistance to new ways of acquiring information and communication. This background could eventually be a contributing factor to the challenges experienced by some of the people with visual impairment in transferring and applying the required technical skills in the voting process.

Much information was acquired through information technology or other forms of modern technology. Part of this information or the skills acquired can then be transferred to computers for example, for purposes of voting or understanding the electoral processes as a whole. If individuals with visual impairment resist new ways or other ways of acquiring information this defeats the essence of the efforts being put on advocating for the total inclusion of people with visual impairment in the electoral process. The unwarranted discrimination will then continue unabated.

The study by The National Council on Disability (1998) further went on to defend the challenge in the use of modern technology by persons with visual impairment. It did this by acknowledging that people with visual impairment had particular needs and requirements that had largely been ignored by software and hardware developers and that obtaining funding for training was a challenge. Training visually impaired people
is also not regarded as a priority and this further compounded the situation. What is clear from the outset is that the issue of continuously upgrading adaptive software with other things to be upgraded remained a major problem.

Another finding in the study by Gillian, Piner and Michael (2005) was that 22.6% of the respondents felt that time pressure in the voting process resulted in their rushing through the process and this ultimately led them to make some mistakes. The implication is that visually impaired voters need to be allowed to take more time when voting since being hurried does not result in effective voting.

Such inconsistencies resulted in 16.3% of the voters failing to review their completed ballot while 38.8% managed to review their ballot. Fifty eight (58%) indicated that they had a way of verifying that their ballot was accurate.

In Zimbabwe, it seemed there is no pressure on visually impaired voters to complete the voting process within given time limits. Voters with visual impairment appear to be given the benefit of the doubt when it comes to the time they spend in the voting booth. Pertaining to the finding on the use of modern technology for voting purposes, indications are that Zimbabwe needs to embrace modern technology inorder to catch up with other countries. Confidence in the electoral process for people with visual impairment can also be realised through the availability of modern technology and other assistive devices.

2.12.2 Voter Assistance

On the issue of voter assistance, many subjects trusted poll workers with assisting them with accurate information, while a quarter of the respondents indicated that poll
workers attitudes were a stumbling block that made it difficult for them to vote. Other multiple obstacles involving getting to the polls were rife in addition to the attitudes of poll workers when it came to assistance.

The breakdown on voter assistance in terms of preference of who should assist people with visual impairment was:

- Assistance by family member: 65, 1%
- Assistance by poll worker: 58, 4%
- Assistance by friend: 41, 0%
- Assistance by other: 9, 6%
- Never received assistance: 7, 8%

Source: Gillian, Piner and Michael, 2005

On the range of obstacles experienced at polls, the study by Gillian, Piner and Michael (2005) also identified general obstacles, inter alia:

- Attitude of poll workers: 24, 4%
- Location of polling station: 21, 1%
- Length of time to vote: 18, 4%
- Physical layout of polling station: 16, 7%
- Long queues: 10, 6%
- No friend / family to help: 10, 6%
- Hours the polls are open: 6, 1%

Many of the obstacles identified in the study above had a great deal in common with what Zimbabwe also experiences as a nation. In Zimbabwe, the effectiveness of
electoral officials was largely questionable. They lacked the capacity to assist a visually impaired voter in accordance with his or her needs. In rural areas, polling stations are far apart although the situation is better in urban areas. The physical layout of polling stations also leaves a great deal to be desired in that visually impaired voters need to be familiar with the arrangement first considering their challenges in mobility and orientation. On a positive note, Presiding Officers and Polling Officers in Zimbabwe normally exempt voters with visual impairment from joining the long queues. This is done on humanitarian grounds though, since there is no provision for this facility in the existing electoral statutes.

2.13 Secrecy in the Electoral Process

The issue of people with visual impairment voting in secret and without assistance remains a contentious issue. Concerns were raised to the effect that there was a high risk of undue influence and compromise on the part of the voter to vote in a particular way (The ACE Electoral Knowledge Network 2013).

Against such a background there is need for some ground rules and guidelines to be set up in order to give guidance and some credence to the whole process so that there is no room for manipulation at any stage whatsoever. Such rules or guidelines can differ from one context to the other. Ideally an individual known to the visually impaired voter is supposed to get preference ahead of any other person and the assistant is also supposed to be of voting age him/herself. (Disability Rights Advocates DRA 2013). Representatives of political parties are not supposed to be in a position that can give them the leeway to influence the choice of the visually impaired voter in any way. The voting needed to be carried out in a voting booth or voting compartment. Visually impaired people have other people they trusted to the
extent that these people can not divulge their secret vote to anyone. In turn, the trusted person is also expected to reciprocate by genuinely and honestly acting within the parameters allowed on behalf of the person they are helping.

Personal assistants are, therefore, obliged to respect the law and protecting the trust given to them. (The ACE Electoral Knowledge Network (AEKN) 2013). While on one hand this is feasible, it is also important to consider the issue more objectively and acknowledge that there is not 100% guarantee that secrecy can be upheld to the satisfaction of everyone involved. Visually impaired people have to put up with the fact that they can be deceived by some assistants or helpers. However, the bottom line remained and it is the fact that at least voting is much better than not voting at all. Those helpers found to be wanting and not complying with the set rules and regulations need to be dealt with by being punished by the provisions of the law. (ibid). Strong, stringent and deterrent laws need to be put in place to effectively deal with those who violate the trust given to them by visually impaired voters.

In cases where the visually impaired person or voter does not designate anyone to assist him or her, only then can an electoral officer or poll worker be called upon to assist. Should such a scenario arise, representatives of the contesting political parties can then be asked to be witnesses of the vote to ensure that the voter’s choice was respected and followed.

While there can be these checks and balances meant to cushion voters with visual impairment from unnecessarily being taken advantage of, an interesting development was noted in Uganda.
One official revealed that during the process of elections of members of parliament of the Electoral College, visually impaired voters were provided with Braille ballot papers and they turned down this facility preferring to use the same ballot paper as the one used by the sighted voters (Makabaiyi 2014.). Their argument was that they felt that their vote was more secret and secure if it was not distinguishable from any other vote. While it had been perceived that the use of the Braille ballot was going to enhance secrecy and confidentiality of the vote by the visually impaired, the visually impaired voters did not see things through the same mirror and clearly indicated that they did not wish their voting pattern to be singled out and become a public secret during the counting process. Another argument to bolster their case was that they felt that those who could read Braille ballots were not many and the way they voted could be easily identified since they could not be camouflaged in numbers” (ibid).

Another good example, was that of what happened in Ghana. Electoral Authorities in Ghana used what is called a tactile ballot folder for blind voters. Using the tactile ballot folder, visually impaired voters were able to vote by counting the dots placed on the folder which in turn identified individual candidates (Ghana Electoral Commission 2013). They then placed their thumb in the box created on the folder for each candidate. In situations where this was not practical, a close confidante in the form of a relative or friend would then be called upon to assist. In the absence of all the above persons or options, an electoral officer could then be asked to help out.

The Nigerian experience could be another milestone from which Zimbabwe could learn. The Nigeria Electoral Act had the critical provision that,
“A voter who is blind or is otherwise unable to distinguish symbols or who suffers from any other physical disability may be accompanied into the polling unit by a person chosen by him/her, and that person shall after informing the Presiding Officer of the disability, be permitted to accompany the voter into the voting compartment and assist the voter to make his mark in accordance with the procedure prescribed by the Commission in the Election Management Body” (Oguegiofor 2014.).

While the provision might have its own flaws, it however, went quite some way in trying to capture critical issues and not only ending in acknowledging these issues but ensuring that they were clearly provided for in the country’s statutes. The challenge of the provision was that while it highlighted assisted voting, the world is moving towards providing for independent voting as opposed to assisted voting. On the other hand Nigeria could have been forced to opt for such an arrangement after realizing that they could not provide for suitable equipment to be used for voting by visually impaired voters. The issue of inadequate consultations on the part of electoral authorities cannot be ruled out as well.

Rights issues are critical and fundamental. Rights can best be demonstrated when the individual decides on whom to trust or assist him/her. (Kebbie 2014). The same source further argued that this might not necessarily be the person helping them for purposes of mobility and orientation since sometimes these people may not be eligible to vote for different reasons or may not be the best choice of the voter.

In some cases or instances, some of the people who assist visually impaired people to
move around are paid for their services of accompanying a visually impaired person and cannot, therefore, be expected to be absolutely relied upon.

With such concerns about those who assist in mind, it may be extremely necessary then for electoral authorities to seriously consider putting in place comprehensive voter education programmes meant to provide relevant and appropriate information directed at those who assist and those who need to be assisted. The major advantage of such an approach will be that, come the election day, this individual will be well knowledgeable and prepared to bring those they trust for assistance knowing too well that both sides were well prepared for the task ahead.

Kebbie (2014) stated that allowing polling staff to assist, especially in post conflict countries, sometimes causes a lot of confusion and has even led to suspension of polls for some hours or minutes. Some political parties have been known to use such situations to discredit the electoral commission and undermine the electoral process which was a high risk for sustainable peace. These concerns need to be taken seriously and are a real threat especially in Africa where election time is characterised by apprehension and emotional instability due to the fear of losing by contestants from parties whose stake will be very high. Measures need to be taken to arrest the explosive atmosphere that goes with losing an election in which individuals and political parties would have invested so much in. To compound matters some individuals will have invested all their life savings, banking on winning the elections at whatever cost.

The stakes will be so high that the law should make a serious attempt at capturing all
these concerns and providing for contingency measures. This observation is so important against a backdrop of the fact that should things go terribly wrong and there are political disturbances as a result of some parties or stakeholders disowning results, visually impaired voters may be the worst affected since violence compromised their safety and individual rights for they will not have an idea where to run to for safety.

2.14 Barriers to Inclusion of People with Visual Impairment in the Electoral Process

A number of barriers continued to stand in the way of electoral involvement of people with disabilities in decision making and governance issues. The experience of Jim Dickson of the American Association of People With Disabilities could be an eye opener to barriers faced by the visually impaired. Jim was blind. He had this to say,

“Once after my wife cast my ballot, she said to me Jim, I know you love me. Now, I know you trust me because you think I am marking this ballot for that idiot”.

(American Foundation For The Blind, 2011). Jim did not end there, but he further went on to express his reservations about whether, on two occasions in Massachusetts and California, while relying on a polling officer to have his vote cast, the polling officer had attempted to change his mind about whom he wanted to vote for. He did not know if his vote was cast according to his wishes. There is therefore a major barrier for blind people in that there is always a level of uncertainty when another person marks their ballots.
Another major impediment to effective access and inclusion to the electoral process, is that people with visual impairment face challenges in exercising their right to vote through laws that disenfranchise them. The challenge with disenfranchisement is that it prevents people from exercising their rights by law without assessment of their capacity to vote (ibid). The other problem is that sometimes out of ignorance, relatives or carers make decisions not to assist people with disabilities who need help in registering to vote, based on the erroneous belief that the person lacks the capacity to vote (Flicker, 2007).

Other barriers include the problem of accessing or entering the building for those with mobility and orientation challenges. Actual marking of ballots can also present serious challenges. Reading visual displays or printed ballots and understanding them is another difficulty for those with low vision (Smith 2014.). Communication challenges with polling officers can also arise. For visually impaired persons with additional or multiple disabilities such as hearing impairment, obtaining auditory feedback can also deter potential voters from exercising their right to vote. The actual voting process can also prove to be physically exhausting.

A blind information technology specialist and electrical engineer, argued that due to inadequate or malfunctioning voting machines, people with visual impairment were short-changed. (Runyan 2013).

People with visual impairment have to ask for assistance, thereby compromising the privacy of their vote. Runyan spent most of his working career developing user friendly assistive technology for the visually impaired. Policy makers and other
stakeholders should, therefore, refrain from imposing unnecessary obstacles to the participation of people with visual impairment in the electoral process. Instead they should be pre-occupied with strategies to modernise the electoral process, thus making voting more accessible to people with visual impairment.

The Help America Vote Act (2002) mandated that all polling places should have an accessible method of voting that provided for privacy and independence. The Direct Recording Electronic voting machines were then regarded as the solution to providing accessible voting.

What is on the ground does not agree with what can be considered as the best practices or arrangement. Gillian, Piner and Michael (2005) stated that the voting process involved critical issues such as:

(a) Logistics of getting to and from a polling station;
(b) Queuing and signing in to vote;
(c) Interactions with poll workers;
(d) Reading and comprehending instructions on how to use a machine or Ballot;
(e) Completing the ballot correctly to show voter intention;
(f) Reviewing the ballot for any errors; and
(g) Casting the vote in a way that ensured that it would be counted.

In Zimbabwe it appears that there is flagrant violation of some of the provisions indicated above and yet there were 1, 3 million people with disabilities (DFID 2007). According to a Disability Sensitisation Workshop for Election Authorities in
Zimbabwe Programme (RDEZP) (2010), the routes to polling stations, were found to be too long, resulting in lack of easy accessibility. This was also worsened by the lack of disability friendly directional signs to polling stations. In addition, there were inaccessible parking space for vehicles and wheelchairs.

At the polling stations themselves, there were hazardous curbs, steps, stairs, inaccessible entrances and walk ways. There were also narrow doors, high thresholds, complex door knobs and handles. Signs and instructions were not in disability friendly formats for example enlarged print, Braille and others. Protruding objects and overhead clearance are also a major stumbling block for the visually impaired voter.

In a Disability Sensitisation Report, NASCOH (2010) pointed out that there were serious challenges on voting furniture. Polling booths were too high or too narrow to allow for easy mobility and orientation of individuals with visual impairment. Voting furniture was clearly not disability friendly.

Electoral laws in Zimbabwe are either not user-friendly or not there. In such a case they became a barrier. Electoral laws and policies of a country can create an enabling and protective environment for people with disabilities to exercise their constitutional right to vote (RDEPZ, 2010). Electoral laws therefore need to be well organised if they are to play their intended role.

Voting procedures in Zimbabwe remain a major stumbling block that requires to be revamped. Assisted voting by election officers, the police, and party representatives violates the principle of secrecy of voting and are therefore a barrier that needs to be
attended to. Voting information that is not in the appropriate format is also a hurdle that requires concerted effort to address.

2.15 Abuse of Visual Impairment by Political Parties

Some political parties and activists have a habit of faking visual impairment to improve their chances of winning the election especially if there was suspicion that one of their own cannot be trusted. To make sure that such an individual toed the line, they demand that such an individual pretends that he/she was visually impaired so that someone else from the party can vote for him or her.

The Masvingo Mirror of 31 July 2013 reported that Leonard Usavi, a Secondary School Headmaster allegedly faked blindness and was among the 207 000 people who were assisted to vote during the July 2013 harmonised elections in Zimbabwe. According to the article, Usavi was the Head of Murambinda B Secondary School in Buhera District and was a candidate of one of the contesting political parties in the primary elections when he lost the primary elections. Another party’s activists threatened him with expulsion from the school and ultimate dismissal from the Ministry of Primary and Secondary Education unless he repented and voted for their party in the harmonised elections.

In another case in Chivi North Constituency in Chivi District, a provincial political commissar, Tranos Huruba, was also said to have been helped to vote after he claimed that he had sprained his arm after an accident a year ago (ibid). In a telephone interview with The Masvingo Mirror Newspaper, Huruba had confirmed that he had indeed been assisted to vote. This was because he was said to have been suspected of undermining his party since he had lost in the primary elections. Contrary to his
justification of having been assisted to vote due to a sprained arm, many people had confirmed having seen him driving and signing documents before the elections. (ibid). Zimbabwe happened to have one of the highest literacy rates in Africa and to have had 207 000 people being assisted to vote was disturbing. In the June 2008 elections in Zimbabwe, some government employees were also forced to act as if they were blind or illiterate and were then assisted to vote by activists from one political party (Mugaradziko 2014).

Such practices only succeeded in defeating the free nature of elections. These reports were worrying in that while there were people with genuine visual impairment who were failing to access the service they wanted for purposes of voting, others were busy taking advantage of situations and were made to claim that they were visually impaired when they were not.

Article 29 of the United Nations Commission on the Rights of People with Disabilities (2006) demanded member states to protect the rights of people with disabilities on ballot elections and referendums through the provision of user friendly equipment and for people with disabilities to exercise secrecy, independence and freedom.

The Zimbabwe System of Secret Ballot can easily be abused. (ibid). Mugaradziko observed that a vote could easily be traced to the voter via the ballot stub. Since every ballot had a stub that connected to the voter, the secrecy of the ballot was in reality theoretical. Mugaradziko argued that it was possible that polling station officials could collude with election scrutinisers who might witch hunt in a bid to find out or
establish how an individual voter could have voted in the secrecy of the voting booth.

Mugaradziko, advocated for the adoption of the system used in other countries where the ballot paper was unnumbered. Only the stump had a number on it and reconciliation was carried out before counting.

2.16 The Electoral Situation In Zimbabwe

While Zimbabwe has been hailed as one of the first countries to enact anti discriminatory legislation, central government has not been able to match this milestone with the necessary administrative infrastructure for effective implementation. Issues to do with disability continue to receive low priority even with the establishment of the National Disability Board. The Disabled Persons Act (1992) provided for non discrimination of people with disabilities in all aspects of their lives including the electoral process, but there is no evidence to suggest that this provision has been put to test anywhere on the ground.

The Disability Scoping Study In Zimbabwe: Final Report (2007) estimated that there were 1.4 million people with disabilities in Zimbabwe then. The study also established that people with disabilities in Zimbabwe face multiple attitudinal, environmental and institutional barriers that militate against their effective inclusion in society. It further went on to indicate that in Zimbabwe it is a common perception that people with disabilities are passive and economically unproductive, and, therefore, constitute a burden upon society. Such attitudes are then transferred to exclusion in the electoral process to the disadvantage of people with visual impairment.
The study also established that people with disabilities are less likely to complete primary education. This further reinforced their marginalisation and social exclusion. This is due to the fact that lack of education and requisite skills makes it difficult for those with disabilities to secure long term sustainable employment, thereby compounding the negative cycle of poverty and disability. The situation is aggravated by the inadequate supply of assistive devices and technology. The electoral process has also not been spared this marginalisation. The lack of education and other requisite skills have a bearing on people with visual impairment in that a person with a limited educational background takes time to be aware of his or her electoral rights and indeed other rights.

The plight of women is also singled out as very worrying. They are subjected to harassment, sexual abuse and exploitation. In Zimbabwe, women constitute 52 percent of the population compared to men who make up 48 percent of the population. It is also pointed out that women with disabilities such as those with visual impairment are less likely to benefit from the scant inadequate services that are available. In such cases, the electoral process may not even be considered as a priority, thus further marginalising individuals with visual impairment. This has the potential to worsen the position of women with visual impairment considering that women are a critical stakeholder in the electoral process regardless of whether they have a disability or not.

While there are a number of Advocacy groups in Zimbabwe, most of them had been singled out as lacking in organisational capacity and are not fighting for the rights of people with visual impairment from a common position. The major problem is the
“single implement” groups’ approach they use. For as long as the situation remains like this, advocating for effective disability policy development in any area, let alone electoral rights of the visually impaired will be in vain for a very long time to come.

The year 1981 was proclaimed the International Year of Disabled Persons (IYDP) by the United Nations. It called for a plan of action with an emphasis on equalisation of opportunities, rehabilitation and prevention of disabilities. For Zimbabwe, it appears this critical proclamation has not made any significant impact on the lives of people with visual impairment. This is evidenced by the continued marginalisation of individuals with visual impairment on the electoral front. Not much has been achieved as confirmation of having identified with the undertaking of being a signatory to the proclamation. The major objective of the proclamation was to promote the right of persons with disabilities to take part fully in the life and development of their societies, enjoy living conditions equal to those of other citizens, and have an equal share in improved conditions resulting from socio-economic development (United Nations 1981). For people with visual impairment in Zimbabwe, taking part in the developmental issues of their communities through actively participating in electoral issues, entails exercising their right to contribute to the governance of the areas in which they live. One of the best ways to be assured that one is indeed a stakeholder in his or her community is to exercise their right to vote thereby determining their destiny. The visually impaired community in Zimbabwe has not yet reached a stage where they can safely claim that their rights and stake in the electoral and governance processes have been respected and fulfilled to their satisfaction and in accordance with United Nations proclamations and other international standards.
The formulation of the World Programme of Action Concerning Disabled Persons marked a milestone for people with disabilities when it was adopted by the United Nations General Assembly in December 1982. It was subsequently recognised in the Preamble of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities. UN (2006), that December 3 was designated the International Day of People with Disabilities. It aimed to promote an understanding of disability issues and mobilise support for the dignity, rights and well being of people with disabilities. It also sought to increase awareness of gains to be derived from the integration of activities of people with disabilities in every aspect of political, economic and cultural life (United Nations 2007).

In Zimbabwe, the impact of the World Programme of Action for people with disabilities appears to have remained a mere document without any significant action to demonstrate commitment and seriousness on the part of electoral authorities. People with visual impairment in Zimbabwe continue to experience many challenges to do with the electoral process. The inclusion of people with visual impairment in the electoral process seems to have identified more with failure than success since not much appears to have been done on the ground.

Awareness on the political front can assist in increasing awareness about the electoral needs of people with visual impairment. Erroneous misconceptions are common in the communities where they live. Understanding that people with visual impairment also have a right to partake in the governance affairs of their communities enlightened society and this in turn facilitates sound co-existence and subsequent inclusion in the
electoral process. Zimbabwe may therefore need to take a number of lessons from other countries that have implemented the programme of action.

2.16.1 Voting By People With Visual Impairment

The Zimbabwe constitution provides for the non-discrimination of any citizen in any sphere of life on grounds of disability. Unfortunately the electoral laws do not adequately cater for the rights of visually impaired people.

People with visual impairment are often denied equal enjoyment of their rights because of a system constructed status ascribed to them by tradition and custom (The Daily News September 13, 2013). As a result of overt or covert discrimination, people with disabilities often faced discrimination of the worst kind in a number of spheres and electoral rights are one of these areas.

Clause 19 of the Electoral Amendment Act introduced a new provision into the Electoral Act allowing for illiterate and physically and visually impaired voters to be assisted by persons of their choice rather than having to rely solely on state officers such as electoral officials and the police (The Zimbabwe Electoral Support Network ZESN 2014) The fact that there is still assistance implies that people with visual impairment are still getting a raw deal. They are supposed to vote independently and privately as is the practice in a number of other democracies. Assistance by state officials allows for the invasion of privacy of voters who are supposed to be exercising their right to vote by secret ballot. This is generally regarded as a thing of
the past in a number of countries.

According to the Zimbabwe Electoral support network, the involvement of the police was viewed against a background of electoral violence and intimidation which were rampant in previous elections (ibid). Members of the police and security forces were often implicated in violence as active participants or for taking a passive role towards opposition supporters. The involvement of the police in the voting process was seen more as a risk of undue influence, fear and intimidation. Free will in the voting process was therefore largely compromised.(ibid).

The new constitution now restricts police officers to maintaining law and order. They should not in any way interfere with voters at polling stations. The language used in the new provision was peremptory and did not give police officers any discretion. It specifically states. “(b) shall not interfere with the electoral processes at a polling station”. (ibid).

Ensuring that a voter brought a person of his/her choice promotes some form of independence although not completely since even a known person can abuse the trust that he/she has been given.

2.16.2 Shortcomings of Clause 19 of the Zimbabwe Electoral Act

The provision of choosing a preferred person to assist is to some extent also not enabling since it has its limitations. One of these is that the voter being assisted may be intimidated into making a choice which is not his/hers. This was common in rural areas where some political activists aligned to certain parties take advantage of the vulnerability of people with visual impairment (ZESN 2014). Another challenge is
that voters with visual impairment may be forced to declare their illiteracy even if they were literate so that someone will eventually vote for them.

In addition, people who assist may not be honest as well. They also have the potential to distort the choice of a blind voter to suit their own interests at the expense of the voter with a visual impairment thereby taking advantage of the person with visual impairment.

Against this background the Zimbabwe Electoral Support Network (2014) made the following three observations:

- Electoral officials and observers should be vigilant to ensure that voters with visual impairment or the illiterate were not taken advantage of by some unscrupulous elements. Voters should not be assisted under duress;

- Visually impaired voters should be afforded the opportunity to use Braille facilities, so that they can vote without assistance. Some Zimbabwean voters were literally being forced to make use of assisted voting when they were Braille literate; and

- Use of thumb imprints on the ballot paper for the illiterate can go a long way in dealing with unprocedural ways to voting. The thumb imprint would simply be against one’s preferred party.

Assisted voting is prone to abuse and legislators needed to guard against passing laws that are not user or disability friendly. None of the concerns above have been
taken note of in Zimbabwe. This implies that the position of people with visual impairment is likely to remain static for some time to come and this did not augur well for individuals with various sight challenges. Action is therefore called for as a matter of urgency especially on the part of electoral authorities.

2.16.3 The Zimbabwe Electoral Act

The Zimbabwe Electoral Act, Section 59 only alludes to voting by physically incapacitated or illiterate voters. It shows that any voter incapacitated by physical causes or is illiterate should request the presiding officer to cast his vote for him in the manner he/she directs. (The Zimbabwe Situation 2014). This clause falls short in a number of critical areas. It discriminates against those with visual impairment. It also ignores the principle of secrecy which is enshrined in the constitution. Contrary to its position, people with visual impairment can vote on their own without assistance, provided the appropriate assistive technology is availed. Countries such as the United Kingdom and the United States of America have successfully implemented this provision. It is an insult on the dignity of people with visual impairment to refer to them as physically incapacitated when many of them had done extremely well in managing their lives, work schedules and families. Physical incapacitation could not, therefore, be equated to blindness in such a simplistic manner.

The Electoral Act also contradicted itself in that while in section 59 it refers to assistance to voters with disabilities, which is a violation of secrecy on its own, in section 75 it makes reference to secrecy in the voting process.

The Act further contradicted itself in section 81 where it stated
“No person shall interfere or attempt to interfere with a voter when making his/her vote or otherwise attempt to obtain in the polling station information as to the candidate for whom the voter is about to vote for or has voted for”.

(ZESN 2014). This was the opposite of what was provided for in section 59. Such issues may need to be revisited in future amendments to the electoral Act. In amendments before 2014, the Bill upheld the choice that officers had to provide such assistance. Although the change was welcome, the risk of an assistant tampering with the voter’s actual choice can not be ruled out. In spite of these limitations the amendment could have incorporated the use of Braille technology to enable visually impaired voters to vote without assistance or interference (ibid)

2.16.4 The Zimbabwe Electoral Amendment Bill 2014

In Zimbabwe the Electoral Amendment Bill was passed into law in May 2014. The Election Resource Centre (2014) and the Zimbabwe Electoral Support Network (2014) raised a number of outstanding issues on this move and indicated that the Bill was fast tracked at the expense of the interests of people with visual impairment.

Against a background where the country carried out a number of public opinion surveys, and invaluable input on a number of pertinent issues concerning the electoral process obtained these two organisations indicated that people with disabilities in particular those with visual impairment had been grossly short changed when the Bill was hurriedly passed in parliament. (Nyaira 2014).

Not all the input from the public had been taken on board. Issues to do with the inclusion of voters with visual impairment were left out. The Zimbabwe Electoral
Support Network had specifically advocated for the provision of accessible formats for voting and access to voter education for the visually impaired. (ibid.) This seemed to suggest the intransigence of the electoral authorities and parliament in Zimbabwe. Problems for the visually impaired voters seemed not to come to an end. The Zimbabwe Electoral Support Network had a very valid point which needed to be given serious consideration in view of the challenges that face people with visual impairment in the country.

Another critical concern was that submissions had been made during public hearings to include in the Electoral Amendment Bill (2014), a provision for full autonomy of the Zimbabwe Electoral Commission to receive its funding directly from the Consolidated Revenue Fund (ibid). Unfortunately, all these requests were not included in the Zimbabwe Electoral Amendment Bill 2014. It was hoped that had the Zimbabwe Electoral Commission been an autonomous body, this could go a long way in empowering it to carry out voter education programmes with a more focused and multi-faceted approach.

It would have given the Zimbabwe Electoral Commission effective ownership of its programmes and mandate to initiate and implement various programmes meant to include people with visual impairment in the electoral process. Zimbabwe can draw from democratic practices from countries like the United Kingdom, where the office of the Chief Electoral officer is independent of government (EONI 2013). The Electoral body in the United Kingdom has autonomy and independence in the way it administers electoral issues such as compiling a Register of voters with disability. The irony in Zimbabwe is that the electoral body does not even have a register of people
or voters with visual impairment let alone a register of people with disabilities in general. This is unfortunate to say the least, for an organisation that had a mandate for ensuring that every citizen was effectively embraced in the electoral process.

The Electoral Amendment Bill lacks the necessary provisions that have an edge over the empowerment and cushioning of people with disabilities in three areas namely the area of voting, access to voting and elections for senators representing people with disabilities (Nyaira 2014). There were serious concerns that the Electoral Amendment Bill that was passed failed dismally to be aligned with the new constitution that was adopted in 2013. The Director of the Zimbabwe Electoral Support Network stated that, failure by the National Assembly to consider findings by the Parliamentary committee as contained in its report to parliament set a bad precedent on its procedure of facilitating public involvement in critical law making processes. (Chimhini 2014).

These were valid sentiments coming from people who took an active role in trying to ensure that people with visual impairment freely participated in the electoral process knowing that whatever they did was mandated and provided for in the country’s statutes.

Although legislators had a prime mandate of making laws for the country, this mandate must not be exercised in isolation of public sentiments and needs. (ibid). Legislators are, therefore, duty bound to ensure that the laws that they pass are a true reflection of the aspirations of all the people regardless of whether they have a disability or not. Laws meant to benefit the visually impaired should be drafted after
consulting the major beneficiaries through a proper needs analysis assessment process and procedures. It appears that in Zimbabwe parliament does not have people who are qualified in the area of disability. Such a person or persons could have helped a great deal in shaping the laws that were passed.

2.17.5 The New Zimbabwe Constitution

While the government of Zimbabwe might see the new constitution as a progressive legal document, it left much to be desired in covering rights of people with visual impairment. In chapter 2, subsection 2 to 2.11 on persons with disabilities the constitution fails to acknowledge types of sensory impairments. It only acknowledges rights for those with physical and mental disabilities.

It talks about other disabilities, and this can not be misconstrued to refer to sensory disabilities because for such a national document “other” can mean different things, since it was not an absolute term, but rather a relative one. On this note individuals with visual and hearing impairment are left out.

Chapter 4 of the new Constitution covers fundamental human rights. In Subsection 4.6 on equality and non-discrimination, it makes reference to equal treatment, including the right to equal opportunities in political, economic, cultural and social spheres. Again it does not specify on the type of political rights. In the same chapter, subsection 4.17 on political rights it clearly shows that every citizen had a right to free, fair and regular elections for any elective public office as well as to make political choices freely. It further stresses the right to vote in all elections and referendums and to do so in secret. People with visual impairment also have the right to stand for
election for public office and if elected to hold such office. While all these provisions appear very noble indeed, reality on the ground was totally different. On the ground secrecy and the right to vote are conspicuous by their absence. This further demonstrates the need to interrogate the existing situation and establish what the real situation was and what can be done to address outstanding concerns. Lack of clearly defined provisions has resulted in the short changing of people with visual impairment to a greater extent, no wonder why they are continually left out on such critical issues about their lives. Against this background, the Constitution needs to be a clearly people-centred and people-oriented document that does not leave any room for inconsistencies or speculation. Should there be glaring inconsistencies, it becomes open to unrealistic and wild interpretations that served the interests of a few misguided elements.

It is unfortunate that the shortcomings identified above are in such a critical document which by its own admission is supposed to be the supreme law of Zimbabwe which renders null and void any other law or conduct inconsistent with it. Clearly the interests of people with visual impairment are not considered. Most of the coverage and provisions have more to do with ambiguity and implication as opposed to being specific, realistic and to the point. One, therefore, wondered whether subsequent laws whose existence are regulated by the supreme law will look like and whether they will protect the electoral rights of people with disabilities.

2.17 Why People with Visual Impairment Should Vote
Political participation is the basis of democracy and a vital part of the enjoyment of all human rights. The right to vote in elections, without any discrimination is one of the most fundamental of all human rights and civil liberties.

The Help America Vote Act (HAVA) passed on October 29, (2002) explains that one of the goals of HAVA was to provide all American voters including the visually impaired with an opportunity to vote both privately and independently. (National Federation of The Blind 2002). Thomas Jefferson, former President of the USA could not have better perceptively observed when he stated that “Should things go wrong at any time the people will set them to rights by the peaceable exercise of their rights.” (ibid).

The reason why the visually impaired should be unimpeded in their right to vote is that governments are obliged to comply with human rights treaties and legislation, which include, The International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (Article 25) and the International Covenant on the Elimination of Racial Discrimination. (Australian Human Rights Commission, 2013). The right to vote is also spelt out in the Universal Declaration on Human Rights (Article 21).

Constitutions of many countries do not discriminate against visual impairment or disability as a whole. The right to vote is a right that many people demonstrated for, fought for and died for so that present and future generations could continue to exercise their right to vote (National Federation of The Blind, 2002). Thus, any person with a visual impairment and is of voting age has a right to vote. Voting enables the visually impaired person to voice their opinion pertaining to elected leaders and
policies. In addition voting provides an opportunity to share the future by choosing candidates of one’s choice and who shared their views, concerns and goals.

Elected officials make decisions and pass various laws on maximum income that a blind person can earn for his/her sustenance through social security disability benefits as well as the minimum wage rates paid to blind workers in sheltered workshops (ibid). In addition the health benefits that blind citizens receive under Social protection programmes, for example, were determined to a large extent by members of Parliament who are elected by among other electors, people with visual impairment. Visually impaired voters should, therefore, have a say in influencing the voting pattern for candidates who share their concerns on various issues. This can be the only way through which visually impaired people can effectively influence policy and legislation on issues that have direct relevance to electoral and governance issues.

A healthy democracy guaranteed that all its subjects have equal access to the political process. When a citizen does not vote they will be giving away their right to influence their government and this ultimately led to government by the will of the majority being replaced by government by the will of the minority (ibid). It is, therefore, imperative to ensure that people with visual impairment are assisted to fulfill their birth right by voting in elections.

People with visual impairment in Zimbabwe do not operate in isolation of the concerns discussed above. They also expect their voice to be heard and to have action taken on their requests and needs especially when it comes to the electoral process. The visually impaired are entitled to vote in their own country without the need for
unnecessary pre-conditions from anyone. People with visual impairment are entitled to monthly stipends whose rates are partly determined by those who represent them in parliament. In addition they have families to fend for. The monthly stipends they receive are too low to sustain their families and all these are issues that need to be ironed out through input from their members of parliament. There are other concerns and needs peculiar to people with visual impairment such as the need for assistive devices such as closed circuit television sets, special magnifiers, white canes, Braille embossing machines and others which will be needed for use during the electoral process. Voter information and education, appropriate voting formats, transport to voting centres are also critical resources to the electoral process. All these issues need attention from those who represent people with visual impairment in parliament. These representatives are also expected to be conversant with parliamentary procedures in order to make a positive impact on the lives of people with visual impairment.

2.18 Strategies For Keeping In Touch With Visually Impaired People

Information concerning visually impaired people should be compiled as a matter of urgency. The Central Statistical Office should work together with electoral authorities and organisations of people with visual impairment to establish a register of information about the visually impaired in the country. This register can then be used as a data base of all people with visual impairment. This helps when authorities want to plan for elections when the need arises. Such information can include the following details:

- Names;
- Physical address and e-mail address;
• Cell phone numbers;
• Associations to which they belong;
• Resource centres;
• Visiting schemes;
• Associations and clubs;
• Information Should be in legible print, tape or Braille;
• Services available;
• Electronic and print media;
• Community centres and places of worship; and
• Talking newspapers.


Charitable organisations such as Royal National Institute of the Blind, Zimbabwe National League of The Blind, Zimbabwe Association of The Visually Handicapped, The Partially Sighted Society, Guide Dogs for the Blind Association, Action For The Blind Association and others can also provide valuable information in the form of newsletters covering various issues of the electoral process.

2.19 Registering To Vote

In order to exercise the right to vote, a visually impaired person has to register with the relevant authorities.

In Zimbabwe, the qualifications for eligibility to be a voter include having attained the age of eighteen, possession of a valid identity document such as a passport or the usual identity card. In addition one should also be a citizen of Zimbabwe by birth. 
One also needs to be on the voters roll. Aliens did not qualify to be voters for a number of reasons. A number of people with visual impairment in the country lack the necessary documents that enable them to be eligible voters.

This can be attributed to a number of reasons such as the stringent requirements of acquiring a birth certificate or identity document in the country, long distances to the Registrar’s office where this is done and limited knowledge about the requirements to obtain the important documents. (NASCOH, 2010). The situation for people with visual impairment was probably worsened by the fact that there were mobility and orientation challenges that also came into play especially in rural areas for example during the rainy season. The situation may be aggravated by failing to get a person who may be prepared to assist them in travelling to the Registrar General’s office especially when distances were long and bus fares will be needed.

Registering to vote was not a process that took long to complete. People with visual impairment in Zimbabwe can, therefore, take advantage of mobile registration facilities or go to the Registrar General’s office.

2.20 Inclusion

Inclusion of people with visual impairment was declared a human rights issue. The UN Convention on the Rights of People with Disabilities (2006) clearly spells out the rights of people with disabilities in the area of inclusion. Like any other human being, people with visual impairment should be regarded as fully fledged members of society in their own right. The United Nations Standard Rules on the Equalisation of Opportunities for Persons With Disabilities (1994) shows that all people with
disabilities had the right to remain in their local communities receiving the support they needed within the ordinary structures of education, health, employment and social services. The United Nations Rule 1 focuses on awareness raising in society in relation to the rights, needs, potential and contributions of people with disabilities. It further demonstrates that policies should be put in place to enable full participation in activities that concerned their welfare. Participation in community activities that excluded electoral interests of people with disabilities is null and void. The right to elect political representatives of one’s choice was a key concern for people with visual impairment. Participation in this critical activity subsequently empowered people with visual impairment to a very large extent.

The UN Standard Rule, Rule 5 (1994) dealt with support services. Rule 4 provided for the provision of assistive devices and equipment to increase independence and enable the exercise of people with disabilities rights. Relevant assistive devices enabled people with disabilities to register to vote as well as vote independently or with the least of assistance in extreme cases. Appropriate assistive devices and equipment help in facilitating easy mobility for people with disabilities and this enables easy access to any voter education strategies meant to benefit them. Assistive devices and equipment should be either free of charge or be available at low costs. Prohibitive costs will continue to promote the status quo at the expense of people with disabilities.

Standard Rule 5 of the United Nations (1994) called on various stakeholders to ensure that buildings and public places were accessible. The physical environment has to be easily accessed by those with disabilities such as the visually impaired. It
further goes on to emphasize the need for information and communication strategies that meet the needs of people with disabilities to be put in place. Appropriate assistive technologies should be made use of to promote easy access to information. These include aspects such as large print, Braille, white canes, magnifying material, closed circuit television sets, Braille embossers and other assistive technology to be availed for the benefit of people with disabilities.

United Nations Standard Rules have far reaching implications for different countries in that they provide critical guidelines on what needs to be done by member nations with the ultimate goal of improving life for people with disabilities. One of the ways to achieve this is through involving people with visual impairment in the electoral process of their country to which they had an equally important stake like anyone else. The standard rules should not be seen in isolation. Rule one for example deals with creating awareness of people with disabilities and their needs. Awareness about including individuals with visual impairment in the electoral process is one of the crucial areas that society has an obligation to fulfil. These individuals have every right to be involved in the process of electing the representatives they want. Standard Rule number 4 stresses the need for people with visual impairment to have services in the form of assistive devices that will facilitate their easy access to the electoral process. They need equipment that enables them to read voter information in various forms as well as being able to vote independently. They also require assistive devices like video magnifiers, magnifying sheets, desktop voting screens and others. Rule no 5 called on the need for accessibility of public buildings and other structures for people with visual impairment. Challenges of mobility and orientation that they experience should be used as a basis for ensuring that everything possible is done to guarantee
accessibility to different places such as buildings, people in authority, as well as to exercise their political rights especially the right to cast their vote in a free and inclusive environment. Furniture used at polling centres and the entrances have to comply with the basic requirements that make it possible for the visually impaired to access them with relative ease.

2.21 Political Rights

Article 2 of The United Nations Universal Declaration of Human Rights states that

“no distinction should be made on the basis of political, jurisdictional or international status of the country or territory to which a person belongs”

(United Nations Universal Declaration Of Human Rights 2007) Article 6 of the same declaration emphasises the right to recognition of everyone as a person before the law.

Both articles 2 and 6 of the United Nations Universal Declaration of Human Rights embrace the basic human rights of all people. They do not discriminate against people with disabilities on any grounds. This is confirmed by the fact that amongst these grounds, political discrimination is one of them. Inclusion in the electoral process is clearly covered in the political provision. This demonstrates that people with visual impairment are human beings first, and were therefore clearly covered by the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. On this basis people with visual impairment have every right to participate in the electoral process without being unnecessarily excluded on the grounds of their disability.

The issue of privacy for people with visual impairment in the voting process is one that has not been looked at closely with a view to addressing it for the better. The continued violation of the privacy of people with visual impairment and uncalled for assistance are matters of
great concern. Article 21 stresses the right for all people to take part in the governance of one’s country, directly or through freely chosen representations. It also emphasises that the will of the people should be the basis of the authority of government, and this should be expressed through elections which should be universal and should be held by secret ballot or by equivalent free voting procedures (Universal Declaration Of Human Rights 2007). Secret voting has been a preserve of the able bodied but it needs to be extended to individuals with visual impairment. Privacy in the voting process is a human right for everyone including people with disabilities and yet this has not been complied with.

The purpose of the Convention on the Rights of People with Disabilities is to promote and ensure the full and equal enjoyment of all human rights and fundamental freedoms by all persons with disabilities and to promote respect for them (The Convention On The Rights of Persons with Disability (CRPD ) 2006 ). Voting rights are a key factor and fundamental element to human freedoms. People with disabilities are entitled to these rights without any pre-conditions. Existing legislative provisions do not appear to acknowledge the critical role of the involvement of people with visual impairment on electoral issues. Article 29 of the Convention is explicit on the right to vote. It refers to the right to vote by secret ballot in elections and public referendums. This section makes it mandatory for states to provide for voting equipment and assistive devices to enable voters with disabilities to vote independently and secretly. This is a crucial requirement. In other countries, visually impaired voters use Braille ballots or paper ballot templates. (ibid). Zimbabwe allows for another person to cast the ballot on behalf of a blind voter (ZESN 2014). The major weakness of this approach is that it does not assure secrecy of the ballot. Most importantly the Convention on the Rights of People with Disabilities requires that voting procedures, facilities and materials should be appropriate, accessible and easy to understand and use (ibid)
The U.N. General Assembly Resolution 3447, states that people with disabilities should be protected against all forms of exploitation, all regulations and all treatment of a discriminatory, abusive or derogatory nature (The Declaration on the Rights of Disabled Persons 2007). It stresses that people with disabilities should enjoy all the rights provided for in the declaration regardless of race, colour, sex, language, religion, political or other opinions, birth or any other situation applying either to the person with a disability himself or to his or her family.

2.22 Advocacy

Historically people with disabilities were kept under lock and key, since it was assumed that they could not survive outside an institution (Gwitimah and Kaputa 2007). Although some milestones have been witnessed over the years, a great deal still needs to be done especially in the area of electoral and governance reforms for people with disabilities. This will help counter segregative tendencies that are still rife. Willis, (2000:13) argued that the international community has an obligation to all people including those with disabilities to address those conditions that resulted in social and legal exclusion and maltreatment. A number of laws and policies championed by the United Nations and governments have their basis in the pursuit of justice for all human beings including those with visual impairment. It is against this background that the evolution of people with visual impairment has taken on a new dimension based on both self and collective advocacy from people who recognise the maltreatment of people with visual impairment in the political arena.
People with visual impairment have a great deal of untapped potential. They have not been able to realize their full potential mainly due to the rigid structures of the mainstream society. If properly included and accepted in the existing mainstream electoral structures, they have the capacity to surpass the able-bodied in many respects. The able-bodied remain a real stumbling block. Nelson Mandela, (1999:10 stated that,

‘Those who deny others their freedom are not themselves free, but they are locked behind the bars of prejudice and narrow mindedness.’

People with disabilities also need to do serious self-reflection. They need to be more aggressive in dealing with already elected political representatives in their advocacy strategies if they have to make an impact on the political landscape. Gwitimah and Kaputa (2007) argued that, just sitting, bucking and hoping that the law will take its course is not enough.

2.23 The Electoral Situation in Selected Countries

2.23.1 Zambia
In the 2011 general elections, the Electoral Commission of Zambia noted that there was need to improve on accessibility of polling stations to people with visual impairment. Voter education also needed to improve. The commission also alluded to the fact that the provision of tactile ballot papers for the visually impaired was only limited to the presidential ballot and not to the house of assembly and local government elections (Africa Heritage 2014).

2.23.2 Tanzania
The Information Centre in Tanzania indicated that experience had proved beyond doubt that the political rights of people with visual impairment to vote and be voted for had been infringed (Tanzania Information Centre on Disability (TICD) 2013). Having observed a number of anomalies, the TICD put in place a programme to reverse the inequalities through advocating for their political rights. Among other things, the strategies involved identifying barriers that impeded people with disabilities from enjoying their political rights. The strategies included:

- Mobilising eligible people with disabilities to register as voters;
- Encouraging people with disabilities to run for political office;
- Encouraging visually impaired Tanzanians to exploit tactile voting technology;
- Enabling people with disabilities to access relevant information on their political rights; and
- Providing support to make informed decisions.

Source: (Tanzania Information Centre on Disability 2013).

2.23.3 South Africa

In South Africa according to the White Paper on Integrated National Disability Strategy (1997), there was strong political will right from the President’s Office. South Africa appears to have done well in the way people with disabilities have been included. In terms of political representation at national level, there were ten people with disabilities in the House of Assembly. At provincial level people with disabilities were also represented. There were also strong sentiments towards initiating a disability budget. South Africa is probably the first Southern African country to develop a Braille ballot. The Disability World (2002) argued that the critical question to be asked was whether the constitutional provision prohibiting
discrimination on the grounds of disability was making any impact to the lives of people with disabilities in South Africa.

South Africa recently developed a new and bigger universal ballot paper template. This development was done mainly to ensure that people with visual impairment voted on their own without assistance from anyone. This new system was used in the general elections held in South Africa on 7 May 2014 (Independent Living Institute 2013). It was reported to have been a resounding success.

The template was developed by the Independent Electoral Commission (IEC) with help from the South African Council for the Blind (South African Council For The Blind SANCB 2013). The Independent Electoral commission indicated that the template could accommodate the national ballot paper featuring 29 parties (The Independent Living Institute 2013). It replaced the plastic universal ballot template that was used before. It had windows numbered in Braille and had raised letters to enable people with different tactile literacy levels to benefit from using the template (SANCB 2013). People with various levels of visual impairment are free to get in touch with the Independent Electoral Commission to familiarise themselves with the system. There is also provision for a free call centre in order for the visually impaired to familiarize themselves with what is taking place as well as access any other details relevant to the system.
2.23.4 Canada

In Canada, electoral staff in polling stations were trained to help people with visual impairment on voting issues through the provision of relevant information. (Leclerc 2013). Visually impaired voters who need help to mark the ballot can ask for help from polling officers. Access to information enables visually impaired electors to make informed choices. The same source also proposed the development of a manual for voters, ie in appropriate media such as Braille, large print, video cassettes or audio cassettes. The Electoral Commission of Canada broadcasters used description and described video versions in their programmes. The language used was adapted to suit individual differences. Information on pamphlets can be extended to embrace the demonstration of various stages of the voting process. Above all the terms used should not be stigmatising, but rather be targeted at respecting human dignity for people with visual impairment. Flicker, (2007) advocated for the role of public education and affirmative outreach action in filling the information gap. Through the provision of information, Flicker suggested that the burden to vote easily should be placed on the state and local authorities instead of people with visual impairment.

2.23.5 Northern Ireland

In Northern Ireland local authorities provide information concerning polling stations. Advocacy groups can also assist by providing advice. Specific aspects about polling stations include: physical access i.e. entrance rumps and parking spaces and low level polling booths (EONI 2013). Voting information can also be availed from contesting political parties, the electoral process and other rights groups.
People with disabilities should have opportunities to participate in any public consultations that concerned them (Government of Western Australia 2011.). This should extend to giving people with disabilities the chance to make complaints. They should get information in a format that enables them to access it as readily as other people do. The desired outcome is that people with disabilities should have the opportunity to access services through vibrant information provision systems and structures from both the public and private sectors.

2.23.6 Sierra Leone

A number of African countries have been struggling to effectively include people with visual impairment in the electoral process. Against this background, Sierra Leone is one of the first African countries to have explored and implemented the use of a tactile ballot paper. (The Guardian 2012). After pioneering such a commendable and noble idea in the 2002 elections in the area of voting for people with visual impairment, The Guardian Newspaper of Friday, 16 November, 2012 reported that Sierra Leone had regrettably scrapped the tactile voting system for its visually impaired voters. To aggravate matters, this was done just a few days ahead of their national elections. According to The Guardian article, the system had been designed by the International Foundation for Electoral Systems and Action on Disability and Development. It had received funding from the United Kingdom Department for International Development (DFID) and its American counterpart USAID. It had, therefore, been rolled out in the 2007 elections of that country. The system had been followed up by a national programme to train people on how to operate it effectively. Since Braille literacy was low in Sierra Leone the tactile ballot papers used had a simplified method that made use of a fixed number of raised bumps to each political
party, providing for the voter with visual impairment to first of all identify then mark their choice of candidate (ibid).

The decision to scrap this system came as a surprise to disability advocacy groups in Sierra Leone. This was especially so, considering that the advocacy groups had been involved in inducting and training their constituency on this system for the previous six months in an effort to cut down on the number of spoiled ballot papers (ibid).

According to the National Electoral Commission of Sierra Leone (NEC) one of the major reasons for scrapping off this voting system was that there had been inadequate voter education (ibid). Advocacy groups were not amused and queried this justification and outrightly rejected it. Advocacy groups argued that the National Electoral Commission had clearly breached the country’s 1991 Constitution. It had also gone against the United Nations Convention on Rights for People with Disabilities. (CRPD 2006). In addition it also violated the Disability Act that had been adopted the previous year, ie 2011. The United Nations Convention on the Human Rights for People With Disabilities (2006) requested governments to ensure that procedures for voting, as well as the facilities and materials were appropriate and easily accessible for all voters with disabilities including the visually impaired. (The Guardian, 2012). On the other hand the Disability Act clearly indicated the role of the National Electoral Commission. One of these critical roles was to make voting centres or polling stations more accessible to the extent that everyone could vote freely and confidentially.

The Disability groups argument converged in that in a politically divided society,
being helped to vote by an assistant, even a friend or a family member, was open to
abuse and electoral fraud. Votes could be changed without the voter’s knowledge.
Voters were left vulnerable to political and domestic pressure and manipulation to
vote for a particular party. (The Guardian, 16 November 2012). Disability groups
and other activists in Sierra Leone therefore launched scathing verbal attacks on the
National Electoral Commission.

Another argument from the National Electoral Commission was that tactile ballots
were a cause for concern because of the high number of spoiled ballot papers in the
2007 national election. Despite the National Electoral Commission being reported to
have denied that this drastic move had to do with reducing prohibitive costs,
sentiments expressed by representatives of Advocacy groups indicated otherwise. The
Guardian newspaper report quoted one of these organisations as having said that they
were in a situation where they did not have the resources to provide voting material
and education for the visually impaired voter. They were even having difficulty
funding material for those who did not have difficulties. Instead the National Electoral
Commission indicated that as an option voters with visual impairment could be
assisted by a trusted person of their choice. They justified this position by stressing
that this provision was in compliance with the Public Elections Act of 2012.

Advocacy groups of people with disabilities demonstrated their outrage at the
inadequacies of this very retrogressive move (ibid). An officer for the Equality And
Human Rights Commission had this to say, “For a country that had rectified the
United Nations Convention on the Rights of People with Disabilities and enacted a
National Disability law, to now deny its visually impaired citizens their right to vote
independently and in secret is unheard of. My colleagues cannot vote in confidence” (Taylor 2013). He indicated that the decision was deeply disappointing.

The decision by the Sierra Leone Electoral authority made a mockery of the progress that had been made and registered. Public confidence in the National Electoral Commission and the government was also eroded. The National Electoral Commission had to carry the blame for disenfranchising people with visual impairment by denying them their birth right to vote independently and in guaranteed secrecy. A membership development officer, of the Sierra Leone Association of the Blind indicated that they were not considered as citizens in the country (Daramy 2014). A right had been denied, confidence eroded and secrecy deprived. Instead of improving disability rights, they were retrogressing. Daramy further indicated that when it came to elections, their trust in the system had been dealt a blow (The Guardian 2012). These were strong sentiments coming from someone who had a visual impairment and who knew what it was to live with such a disability and the limitations it imposed on one’s political rights and freedoms.

2.23.7 The United Kingdom

The United Kingdom is one of the countries that introduced the secret ballot for people with visual impairment a long time ago. Visually impaired voters were first exposed to the secret ballot in 2001. The visually impaired were to vote secretly through the use of a gadget, a special template which could be attached to the ballot paper and could enable the United Kingdom’s 1.7 million blind and visually impaired people to indicate their chosen party without help from another person (The BBC 2013.).
The tactile voting device has large scale numbers and Braille letters which visually impaired voters can compare with extra large ballot papers displayed at the voting centre (EONI 2013). This provision does not, however, prevent those visually impaired individuals who are comfortable with being assisted from getting the assistance they need from either their trusted assistants or electoral officers. The Home office Minister then, Mike O’Brien was quoted as having indicated that the changes were part of a wider package of measures such as rolling registration and postal votes on demand which modernised the electoral system and made it simpler and more convenient for people to vote (BBC 2013). The visually impaired community welcomed this move as it opened doors to a more inclusive society in as far as the electoral process in the United Kingdom was concerned.

This came after the Royal National Institute of the Blind (RNIB) carried out a survey which established that more than 50% of visually impaired voters indicated that voting was too difficult. In support of this new paradigm shift, the Royal National Institute of The Blind’s policy director indicated that the new ballot template plus the provision of large print material at polling centres, were important steps towards ensuring that the fundamental right to a secret ballot was guaranteed for anyone with a sight problem.” (Hadi 2014). The Disability Discrimination Act of 1995 indicated that all service providers were expected to be compliant with requirements for reasonable physical adjustments to their premises to make them accessible to people with disabilities.

On the basis of the Disability Discrimination Act, the Electoral office is also expected by law to provide the following:
• Low level polling booths;
• Physical access – appropriate parking space for people with disabilities as well as the entrance ramps;
• Should a person with a disability need help on the polling day, he/she can apply to the presiding officer requesting for the marking of the ballot paper or alternatively be allowed to vote with assistance from one’s spouse, child, friend or any other trusted person; and
• Advocacy groups of people with disabilities are also allowed to give advice and any other assistance as provided for by the law.

Source: (EONI 2013)

2.23.7.1 Voting Devices

The laws in the United Kingdom also provide for the voting centres to put in place any relevant assistance that can be used by visually impaired voters. The law also provides for at least one large print display version of the ballot paper. The argument is that this arrangement facilitates the noble idea of voting without assistance or unwarranted pressure from anyone. Electoral officers can also be asked to read out the list of candidates and their details (ibid)

2.23.7.2 Ways of voting

In the United Kingdom, there are basically two ways used that can also benefit the visually impaired constituency. These are postal voting and voting by proxy. Postal voting entails getting an application form or downloading it from the EONI website. (ibid). There is need to give a clear explanation why an individual can not go to the
nearest polling station, for example, whether it was because of a disability he/she has or some other worthy reasons.

All application forms require another person to confirm the details the voter will have indicated. Lastly this form needs to be returned to the electoral office not later than fourteen days before the date of the election.

2.24.7.3 Voting by Post

With this provision, the ballot paper is sent to the beneficiary about ten days before the date of the election. The visually impaired voter is then expected to mark the ballot paper and have it returned to the area office by ten pm of the day of the election (EONI 2013)

2.23.7.4 Voting by Proxy

Voting by proxy involves nominating or appointing somebody else to go to the voting or polling centre on the day of the election and cast the vote on behalf of the person with visual impairment (ibid). In other words the voters with a visual impairment have to select a person they trust and it is this person who will do the voting on their behalf. A poll card will then need to be sent to one’s proxy informing them of this position (ibid). There is, however, need to tread cautiously here mainly due to the fact that as alluded to elsewhere in this chapter, trusting someone to vote for a person with visual impairment can present serious and numerous challenges of whether that trusted person can truthfully and honestly indicate the voter’s choice of a candidate as objectively as he/she would have done it themselves. Even very close associates can
be tempted to do the dishonest thing of opting for their own choice instead.

2.23.7.5 Power of Attorney and Voting (P.O.A)

A power of attorney is a procedure which involves an individual with a visual impairment authorising another person to manage their affairs in view of the fact that they themselves may be incapable of doing what needs to be done. The voter with visual impairment gives the legal right to someone to sign important documents on his/her behalf but with the voter’s approval first. The power of attorney arrangement does not extend to the electoral process (ibid). This implies that an attorney has no authority whatsoever to cast the vote on behalf of another individual regardless of the severity of disability or incapacity on the part of the person being assisted. This limits the options of the person who should assist to only being able to do so when they have been appointed by proxy. Assistance by proxy will then need to be formally approved by the beneficiary; in this case, the voter with a visual impairment who will carry out the appropriate formalities of going through and signing the specific form used for this purpose.

“about my vote” is a website that contains vital information which can be downloaded in not only large print, but other various language formats as well, such as audio files. (EONI 2013). Other alternative websites that provide invaluable information about electoral issues include “easy read” and “our vote”. Information can, therefore, be downloaded or ordered in the form of a digital versatile disc (DVD).

In Northern Ireland the Chief Electoral Officer has responsibility for administering elections as well as compiling the Register of Electors. The office of the chief
Elections officer is independent of government. The staff are not an arm of government and, therefore, operated autonomously. The office of the Chief Electoral officer, in Northern Ireland, also provides information on details for registering to vote. It also provided information on the various types of elections and guidance for candidates. This information was provided in the form of leaflets, flyers, and statistics. The office generally does its best to modernise electoral practices including accessible voting for people with various and differing disabilities. (ibid).

2.24 Summary

This chapter focused on a number of relevant issues related to the study. These included among others results of studies that had a bearing on this study, availability of information services for the visually impaired, barriers to the voting process, legislation, and voting formats. The issue of what other advocacy groups were doing in different parts of Africa was also explored. It also looked at the issues of failure to reach the ideal expectations for people with visual impairment on the part of political parties and other individuals in Zimbabwe. The broader picture of what exactly prevailed in Zimbabwe also took centre stage of the issues that dominated debate on inclusion of people with visual impairment. The chapter also looked at developments in a number of other countries with a view to identifying those areas that had important implications for Zimbabwe as a country that is still learning the ropes on how best to effectively include people with visual impairment in the electoral process. The next chapter focuses on the methodology of the study and will basically look at the research philosophy, research paradigm, research methods to be used, data generation and recording data, research design, the population, the sample, research tools, analysis of data as well as ethical considerations.
CHAPTER 3
RESEARCH METHODOLOGY AND DESIGN

3.1 Introduction

This chapter examines the methodology used for data generation in this study. It explores the advocacy and participatory worldview research philosophy, the qualitative research paradigm, strengths of the qualitative research paradigm and limitations of the qualitative paradigm. It also focuses, on the interpretive research design, data generation methods, that is the interview method and focus groups. The chapter also covers the data analysis plan as well as trustworthiness and authenticity concerns of the study. Finally the chapter covers recording of interview responses and focus group discussions.

3.2 Research Philosophy

Any research requires that the philosophical ideas underlying it be clearly espoused. This helps to explain and clarify why a particular methodological approach was chosen for the research (Creswell 2009). Slife & Williams (1995) argued that while philosophical ideas remained largely hidden in research, they influenced the practice of research and needed to be identified. Thus, this study was informed by the Advocacy and Participatory worldview research philosophy or worldview (AAP).
3.2.1 The Advocacy and Participatory Worldview Research Philosophy

This is essentially a belief about the way in which data about a phenomenon should be gathered, analysed and used (Creswell, 2006). This philosophy arose in the 1980s and 1990s as a result of proponents who strongly felt that the positivists and post-positivists imposed structural laws and theories that did not take into cognisance marginalised groups of society. This worldview identifies more with qualitative research, although it could also be used as a basis for quantitative research (Creswell 2009). According to Newman (2000), advocates of this philosophy borrowed a great deal from the works of writers such as Marx, Paul Freire, Marcuse and Adorno. It was strongly felt that the constructivist stance or position was not aggressive enough in defending an action agenda to cushion marginalised groups against a number of challenges they experienced in their lives. This research philosophy advocates for research inquiry that has a strong bearing on politics and a political agenda. This research contained an action agenda for reform that was targeted at changing the lives of the participants, the institutions in which individuals worked or lived and the researcher’s life (Creswell 2009).

This research is about the electoral rights of a marginalised group of people namely people with visual impairment. As such, the role of advocacy and participation of people with visual impairment in the electoral process could not be separated from politics and a political agenda. People with visual impairment have had a history of marginalisation for a long time mainly because those in authority believed that it was unnecessary to waste resources on a minority (Chakuchichi and Kaputa 2002).

They forget that even minorities have rights enshrined in some constitutions and
clearly supported by The United Nations Convention on the Human Rights of Persons with Disabilities (2006). Politicians have a critical role to play through their constitutional role of enacting disability friendly laws in parliament. Politics could not therefore be divorced from the essence of this research, because the research was rooted in politics and had serious political connotations for the beneficiaries and society as a whole.

Specific grey areas need to be addressed by politicians, other stakeholders and people with visual impairment themselves in order for them to be effectively included in the electoral and voting process. One of these issues is the need for electoral empowerment against a background of prolonged marginalisation (Disability World 2012.). People with visual impairment in Zimbabwe have experienced gross inequalities, suppression and alienation in trying to access their electoral and voting rights.

Advocacy research provides for a voice for participants and raising their consciousness so that their lives improve for the better (Creswell 2009). The advocacy and participatory philosophy propagates a united voice for reform and change through promoting an approach where the researcher and the participants work collaboratively. Collaborative work in this case advocates for the enfranchisement of participants as a result of the inquiry.

This advocacy and participatory philosophy therefore dwells much on the needs of individuals and groups that will be disenfranchised or marginalised. Against this understanding, it was vital for theoretical perspectives to be integrated with
philosophical assumptions that constructed a picture of the issues being studied, such as the people to be studied, the changes needed and how this could be done. Disability electoral empowerment issues fitted in this philosophy very well.

The advocacy and participatory philosophy is aptly summarised by Wilkinson (1998), who noted that:

(a) The Advocacy / participatory studies often begin with an important issue or stance about the problems in society such as the need for empowerment;

(b) It is intended to free people from unjust structures that limit self-development and self-determination. It aims at creating political debate and discussion to bring about change; and

(c) It is practical and collaborative because it is inquiry completed with others rather than on, for or to others. Advocacy / participatory inquirers therefore engage participants as active collaborators in their inquiries.

3.3 The Qualitative Research Paradigm

This study was premised on the qualitative paradigm because of the nature of the inquiry. Haase and Myres (1988) described a paradigm as a world view of a subject that included its underlying philosophy and the assumptions inherent in that view. On the other hand, Merriam (1998) defined qualitative research as an approach which recognised that meaning emerges through interaction and was not standardised from person to person as in quantitative research. It therefore made provision for the researcher to focus on specific issues in detail without predetermined categorised analysis. The qualitative research paradigm is multi method in focus involving an interpretive, naturalistic approach to its subject matter (Denzin and Lincoln 1994).
Creswell (2003) indicated that qualitative research is an inquiry process of understanding a social or human problem, based on building a complex, holistic picture formed with words, reporting detailed views of informants, and conducting the study in a natural setting.

The qualitative research paradigm could be summed up as reality based in that it seeks to capture original people’s feelings and not put them into some straight jacket with predetermined structures or theories. This was one of the major reasons why this paradigm was chosen over others since the study in question sought to determine the views of people with visual impairment concerning their inclusion and/or exclusion in the electoral process in Zimbabwe, the challenges they had experienced and what they thought could be done to alleviate those challenges. Real meaning could not be standardised from one individual to the other. It should be a result of natural and unhindered interaction.

Understanding social problems could best be understood through reporting views of informants and participants.

The essence of the qualitative paradigm therefore was that the researcher focused on a particular phenomenon and collected participant meanings based on the concept he/she is focusing on. The researcher then brings personal values into the study and is also responsible for validating the accuracy of the findings (Creswell 2009). All this has to be done in the original context or setting of the respondents.

### 3.3.1 Strengths of the Qualitative Research Paradigm

The Qualitative research paradigm can be seen as natural inquiry that utilises non-
interfering data generation strategies to unveil the natural flow of events. Tichapondwa (ed) (2013) summarised some of these advantages. Methods used in qualitative research can be adapted to suit a wide range of subjects such as visual representation for those with low literacy. It is also flexible in that one can adjust the research framework and direction in the event of new information emerging. Data generation in particular can also be more relaxed and informal. This motivates participants to participate in the research. Computer skills may not be necessary with this paradigm. Various social issues can be studied in detail and with the depth and thrust that is needed. Most importantly the research is not limited to a pre-determined set of questions. In the case of interviews, for example, one question can have a response that requires a follow-up question or clarification. Electoral issues which were the focus of this research were not an exception to the justification above, hence, the researcher opted for this paradigm.

3.3.2 Limitations of the Qualitative Research Paradigm

The qualitative research paradigm is not without its limitations. Some of the limitations include the fact that by virtue of the large volumes of data to be collected, this makes the issue of interpretation and analysis time consuming. Interpreting and analysing large volumes of data takes a lot of time. The final research output also heavily depends on the skills of the researcher to a very large extent. Another bone of contention can be that sometimes data is generated from a few participants making it difficult to generalise findings to the larger population. Another dimension to the use of the qualitative paradigm can be that it is not yet effectively understood by potential beneficiaries (Creswell, 2009). Many people, including a lot of researchers and academics harbour the view that the quantitative paradigm is better than the
qualitative one. This makes it difficult to convince society that it contributes immensely to solving various problems in society.

3.4 Research Design

Any research must have a design that is appropriate to the issues being studied. The need for a clear understanding of the research design guiding one’s study enables the researcher to select the most appropriate design in accordance with the specific area being studied. The philosophical orientation or type of knowledge one is seeking guides the choice of design, research methods and sampling techniques as well as data collection strategies. Taylor (2000) defined research design as constructed plans and strategies that were developed to seek and discover answers to research questions.

A research design is a plan or strategy which moves from the underlying philosophical assumptions to specifying the selection of respondents, the data generation and gathering techniques to be used and the data analysis to be done (Anderson 1993). A research design is therefore a plan of action which brings together the philosophical foundations and methodological assumptions of a research approach to its research methods.

3.4.1 The Interpretive Research design

This research primarily made use of the interpretive research design. This design was seen as ideal for the type of research for a number of reasons. A design is a systematic subjective approach used to describe life experiences with the intention of giving them meaning (Best and Khan 1993). The major goal was to gain insight, expose the
depth, richness and complexity inherent in the phenomenon. The interpretive design focuses primarily on the above by analytically disclosing those “meaning making practices” while showing how those practices configured to generate observable outcomes.

The interpretive research design does not start with concepts that are preconceived or predetermined, but seeks to allow these to emerge from encounters in the field. Interpretive research is distinctive in its approach to research design, concept formation, data analysis and standards of assessment. (Flick 2007)

The interpretive design assumes that individuals seek understanding of the world in which they survived. Based on this background, the same individuals develop subjective meanings of their experiences. These meanings are therefore varied and multiple, leading the researcher to look for the complexity of views rather than narrowing meanings into a few categories or ideas (Flick 2007). This research design precisely fits into this scheme as it sought to explore and expose the experiences of visually impaired people on the electoral process in Zimbabwe, with particular reference to how they have been included, the challenges involved and how these can be addressed. Participants gave their varied experiences in relation to the electoral and voting process in Zimbabwe. This approach is more appropriate and very relevant since, according to Flick 2007), the goal of research is to rely on participants views of the situation being studied.

The major characteristics of this design include:

- The basic element of analysis is words;
- It is holistic;
• It believes in open communication;
• It is complex and broad;
• It is subjective;
• It is the basis of knowing meaning and discovery;
• It has shared interpretation;
• It focuses on individual interpretation; and
• It is unique.

Source: Tichapondwa (2013)

3.5 Data Generation Instruments And Procedures

There are no research methods that are confined to either qualitative or quantitative approach. Best and Kahn, (1993) observed that data collection is the process of disciplined inquiry through gathering and analysis of empirical data. This study used two data generation methods, namely, the face to face interviews and focus group discussions.

3.5.1 Interviews

In this research interviews and focus group discussions were used to generate qualitative data. The researcher carried out interviews with individuals with visual impairment as well as an official from the Zimbabwe Electoral Commission. Interviews were also carried out with officials who were representatives of organisations of people with visual impairment. Appointments were made to visit these individuals at their work places depending on the time that was most convenient to the participants and informants.
Interviews entail generating data through face to face interactions with participants. Borg and Gall (1996) indicated that the participants selected for an interview must have had certain experiences that enhanced in-depth understanding of the problem under investigation. An interview is a two-way conversation or oral questionnaire initiated by the interviewer for the specific purpose of obtaining research related information and to learn about the ideas, beliefs, views, perceptions and opinions of the interviewees (Creswell, 2007), Best and Kahn (1993). According to Patton, (1990), the purpose of interviewing is to find out what is in the mind of a person. There are structured and unstructured interview questions. Structured interview questions are pre-planned and enable the respondent to answer questions in a particular way. Unstructured interview questions call on respondents to freely express themselves as well as provide in-depth data about the particular problem being investigated. (Borg and Gall 1996).

3.5.2 Advantages of Interviews

Interviews have certain advantages that a researcher can benefit from. Creswell (2007), Borg and Gall (1996) identified the following advantages of interviews, which the researcher benefited from

- The researcher is assured that no data is omitted;
- Semi structured interviews are flexible, adaptable and provide interaction that enables the researcher to probe and clarify answers with participants, following up on leads, elaborating on original response and obtaining more information with greater detail and clarity;
• The researcher can easily clarify the data being given if he/she suspects that the participant is giving false information through non-verbal cues for example facial expressions and voice tone;

• The interview can successfully be used to obtain data from a cross section of participants such as the illiterate, the aged and the young;

• A conducive environment is created; participants provide useful supplementary information by way of spontaneous reactions, something which cannot be done under other conditions. The data generated is of immense use to the researcher.

• Face to face interaction facilitates verbatim recording of responses, which provides useful feedback that can be further probed and clarified. The researcher can cross-check the data if it is truly authentic; and

• The interview also enables the use of a recording device i.e. a tape recorder this helps the interviewer to concentrate on listening carefully and probing the interviewee. This effectively deals with the problem of having to write down responses to questions before going on to the next question.

The researcher took advantage of these advantages through asking for clarification on aspects he felt had not been clearly explained. The researcher also took advantage of the interviews by asking for more details on some of the critical issues. Leads to the potentially critical concerns of people with visual impairment on the electoral process were followed up in order to get to the root of the issues surrounding the essence of the interviews.

The researcher further took advantage of the advantages of interviews by recording
the proceedings of the interview. This made it possible to replay specific parts of the interview where clarification or important details were wanted or could have been missed. In some cases the whole interview with particular individuals was revisited when it was felt that some of the data generated was too critical and therefore needed to be followed up.

Recording of the interviews went a long way in helping the researcher to familiarise himself with the data generated verbatim. This also facilitated the process of coding the data as well as searching for themes in the data. Reviewing of the themes that emerged and defining and naming the themes also became relatively easy because both the written interview notes and the recorded data were available. The final stage of writing up was then done with all the details clarified.

3.5.3 Disadvantages of Interviews

Interviews also have their own share of disadvantages. Borg and Gall (1996) and Creswell (2007) indicated the disadvantages of interviews, which were also experienced by the researcher:

- Interviews are easily influenced by the personal attributes of participants and informants;

- Interviews may be negatively influenced or affected by the dominance of the interviewer;

- They accommodate a limited number of participants and this has a bearing on failure to go deep enough to provide a reflective picture of opinions and feelings;
• Interviews are costly to conduct compared to questionnaires. In this case the researcher had to travel to different parts of the country to interview participants;

• Interviewing and recording manually at the same time affects the flow of the interaction and this can result in loss of focus in the event of the interviewer getting carried away;

• Interviews do not lend themselves to the same level of anonymity that comes from the use of questionnaires. This can lead to respondents withholding certain vital data especially if the area of study is sensitive; and

• Interviews are subjective, because of this, there is an element of bias on the part of interviewees especially when they want to please the interviewer. Alternatively interviewer bias can also have a bearing on the data generated if the interviewer seeks responses that suit his / her personal ego or preconceived ideas or position.

In order to counter the challenge of interviewing and recording manually, negatively affecting the flow of the interactions, the researcher complemented this process by recording the whole interview. This helped later in identifying specific areas or details that could have been missed during the interview process. The researcher also kept focus of the essence of the interview to avoid getting carried away unnecessarily. The researcher also did his best to refrain from being influenced by the personal attributes of participants and informants. Concerning the challenge posed by the degree of anonymity emanating from interviews resulting in a possibility of participants and informants withholding data, the researcher dealt with this aspect by assuring the participants and informants that the data generated was only for purposes of the study
and that their identities could not be known since in the study pseudonyms were used.

3.6 Focus Group Discussions

This study also made use of focus group discussions in addition to face to face interviews. For purposes of the focus group discussions, the researcher visited M. Hugo Schools for the Blind in Masvingo Province. The advantage with this institution was that there were a number of people with visual impairment who were employed there. It was easier to put them in small groups of six for the focus group discussions. Three such groups were made use of.

The researcher started by providing consistent background information to participants about the purpose of the study in order to minimise erroneous or tacit assumptions. Each group was composed of not more than six people. The researcher was assisted by an assistant who was mainly responsible for recording the focus group proceedings while the researcher concentrated on asking questions, listening and taking down notes.

3.6.1 Opening Question

The researcher began by asking an opening factual question that all the participants were expected to answer. This question was meant to relax the atmosphere in preparation for the main questions. It was designed to be answered quickly (within 10 – 20 seconds) The question required all the group members to say who they were and one thing they enjoy doing most such as a favourite hobby.
3.6.2 Introductory Questions

The researcher proceeded to ask the questions that introduced the general topic of discussion as well as give participants an opportunity to reflect on past experiences and how these connected with the overall research problem. Introductory questions were not critical to the analysis but their purpose was to facilitate conversation and effective interaction among the participants.

3.6.3 Transition Questions

This stage allowed the researcher time to take the conversation into the key questions that drove the study. Transition questions assisted the participants to view the research problem in a much broader sense and scope. They acted as the logical link between the introductory questions and the key questions (Krueger 1994).

3.6.4 Key Questions

In essence these were the type of questions that drove the study. These were the first questions that were used to develop the discussion. They also required utmost attention in the subsequent analysis that followed.

3.6.5 Ending Questions

The researcher brought closure to the discussion with these questions. They enabled participants to take stock of their comments during the time of the deliberations.

A focus group is a small gathering of people who have a common interest or characteristic (Kruger, 1994). This group is brought together by the researcher for
purposes of using it to gain in-depth information about a particular problem. A focus
group is a carefully focused discussion designed to obtain perceptions, attitudes,
feelings and experiences in a defined area of interest in a permissive non-threatening
atmosphere of disclosure from a predetermined and limited number of people
(Silverman 2010). The focus group explores human tendencies where attitudes and
perceptions were developed or nurtured through interaction with other individuals. A
number of pertinent issues were better handled by smaller groups of people who were
familiar to each other by virtue of the common interests they have. According to
Wolcote (2009), the focus group discussion approach is based on the assumption that
group interaction is beneficial in widening the range of responses, activating forgotten
details of experience and dealing with inhibitions that can have the potential to
discourage respondents from disclosing information.

3.6.6 Advantages of Focus Group Discussions

One key advantage of focus groups is that they make it possible for participants to be
able to build on each other’s ideas, experiences and comments to come up with data
that has the detail wanted. This can be difficult to achieve with other research
methods (Wilkinson 2004). The idea of belonging to a group or being in a group gives
participants comfort and relaxation to take part in the discussion freely. New insights
can be explored much more easily within a focus group than other contexts. This is
because participants interact more among themselves as opposed to the interviewer
taking the lead.

Use of less structured set of questions helps the participants to gradually take part in
the discussion of the issues in question (Flick 2007). The researcher’s probing skills
went a long way in determining and strengthening the level of participation and interaction amongst those involved. No individuals were allowed to dominate the discussion.

Homogenous focus groups, for example, of people of the same work grade or level, as opposed to mixing people with varied backgrounds, are very helpful and recommended. The researcher needs not to be overbearing on participants as well. Good rapport between the researcher and participants is of paramount importance in focus groups in order to keep the discussion relevant and focused.

Focus group discussions should not have too many people. Anderson (1993) recommended that six to twelve people are more ideal. Groups with more than twelve people tend to end up as factions while those with less than six are not ideal in providing the focus required. Three or four groups will be good for a study (Anderson 1993). About one to three hours is recommended as the ideal time duration. There is also need to make sure that interview and group discussion proceedings are recorded verbatim. The researcher made use of three groups of participants with each group made up of six people. Each of the groups took one and a half hours of discussion. Participants were allowed to freely take part in the discussion to accommodate a wide range of data from them.

3.6.7 Disadvantages of focus group discussions

Large focus groups can be non productive. A researcher who is not conversant with knowledge of group dynamics may not be able to effectively direct and guide the focus of the group. Domineering members of the group make it difficult for other
members to participate. This resulted in the suppression of relevant data from other members. Generally big groups are difficult to manage and the researcher was very alert to this dimension. The researcher had to work very hard to maintain the focus of the group otherwise direction could have been easily lost as members can end up settling scores than fulfilling the mandate for which they were gathered. The researcher tactfully reminded the group not to lose focus of the discussion.

Another challenge is that focus group research produced a phenomenal amount of data (Kruger 1994). This can be so because each focus group can produce up to 10 to 15 pages of field notes combined with the other pages of transcript. In such cases the analysis needs to be clearly focused since not all questions deserve analysis at the same level. Kruger (1994) advised that the researcher needs to focus his or her attention on areas of critical concern.

3.7 Recording of Interview Responses and Focus Group Discussion Proceedings

Interview responses and focus group proceedings were recorded by the researcher. Recording devices ie a tape recorder and a cellphone were used to do this. The use of recording devices enabled the researcher to concentrate more time and effort to the interviewees or focus group participants. Recording devices can also include the use of video cameras, digital voice sound recorders and other recording devices. Recording proceedings facilitated the flow of the focus group discussions. Recorded data was then replayed later thus providing the opportunity for a more thorough study.

Borg and Gall (1996) observed that the use of recording devices reduces the risk of
making unconscious selection of data favouring biases on the part of the interviewer. It is also possible for another researcher to use the recorded data for evaluation or other purposes. With manual note taking the risk of the interviewer taking notes of only the responses that made immediate sense to him/her was high.

In order to guard against the problems of recording and note taking, the researcher took notes as well as recorded the discussions. He also explained the purpose of recording to participants. He maintained strict confidentiality especially in view of the fact that some participants may think that once recorded, they could find themselves in trouble with authorities or the public since some information could be sensitive. Bogdan and Biklen, (1992) also alluded to this challenge. In the case of participants who were not willing to be recorded using a device, the researcher had to write down notes during the interview or focus group discussions.

3.7.1 Advantages and Disadvantages of Tape –Recording + Note Taking

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Tape Recording</th>
<th>Note Taking</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Advantages</strong></td>
<td><strong>Advantages</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Objective recording.</td>
<td>- It is economic.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Data can be re-analysed.</td>
<td>- Off record statements not recorded.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Retains natural language.</td>
<td>- Important facts are recorded.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Interviewer voice also recorded.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Disadvantages</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>---------------</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- It is time consuming.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Presence of recorder causes discomfort.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Irrelevant information also recorded</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Bias by the recorder.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Status of recorded data is questionable.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Difficult to take notes.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Interview too involving</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>


The researcher benefited from the advantages of recording in that he later replayed the recorded material re analyzing the data generated. The recording was also objective since it was the original voice of the participant. Manual recording was also taken advantage of in that important facts or information was recorded and made use of at a later stage. Some of the disadvantages that affected the researcher were that it was time consuming and it also appeared that the presence of the person who was recording created some discomfort on the part of some participants. The researcher also had to take time selecting what was relevant and leaving out irrelevant data.

### 3.8 Data Presentation, Analysis and Interpretation Procedures

Data analysis was a critical function of this study. Data analysis is the search for patterns in data and for ideas that help explain why those patterns were there in the first place. (Bernard 2002). According to Miles and Huberman (1984), qualitative data comes in the form of words rather than numbers and the question of how to move
from these words to data analysis is essential. Miles and Huberman (1984) suggested that data analysis consists of concurrent flows of activity namely:

- Data reduction – the process of selecting, focusing, simplifying, abstracting and transforming – “raw” data. Data reduction involves making decisions about which data chunks provide your initial focus;

- Data display is an organised assembly of information that permitted conclusion drawing and action taking. It involves assembling your data into display such as matrices, graphs, networks and charts which clarified the main direction and missing links of your analysis;

- Conclusion drawing means beginning to decide what things mean, noting irregularities, patterns, explanations, possible configurations casual flows and propositions; and

- Verification means ‘testing provisional conclusions for’ their plausibility, their sturdiness, their ‘conformability’ – that is their validity.

**Source: Miles and Huberman, (1984)**

### 3.8.1 Data Analysis

Different methods can be used to analyse qualitative data. This study used thematic analysis to analyse data. Thematic analysis is a widely used qualitative data analysis method which focuses on identifying patterned meaning across a data set that provides an answer to the research question being addressed (ibid). It is generally agreed that patterns are a result of a rigorous process of data familiarization, data coding, and theme development and revision.
One of the advantages of the thematic data analysis is that it is theoretically flexible (ibid). Because of this it can be used within different frameworks to answer different types of research questions. It has a great deal to do with people’s experiences or views and perceptions, for example, what were the experiences of the visually impaired in the harmonised elections? It also fits well with questions that have to do with understanding and representation, such as, How do visually impaired people understand specific legislative provisions? It also has a lot in common with questions that have a bearing on construction of meaning for example, how is assisted voting in the electoral process constructed by visually impaired voters?

For purposes of this study, the researcher adopted and made use of a thematic analysis approach developed by The University of Auckland (2014), which entailed following a six phase process outlined below:

1. **Familiarisation with the data:** This phase entailed reading and re-reading the data, to become immersed and intimately familiar with its content;

2. **Coding** – This phase involved generating succinct labels (codes) that identified important features of the data that is relevant to answering the research question. It involved coding the entire data set, after that collating all the codes and all relevant data extracts, together for later stages of analysis;

3. **Searching for themes:** This phase involved examining the codes and collated data to identify significant broader patterns of meaning (potential themes). It then involved collating data relevant to each candidate theme, so that one could work with the data and review the viability of each candidate theme;
4. Reviewing themes: This phase involved checking the candidate themes against the data set, to determine whether they told a convincing story of the data, and one that answered the research question. In this phase themes were typically refined, which at times involved splitting the themes, combining them or discarding them;

5. Defining and naming themes: This phase entailed developing a detailed analysis of each theme, working out the scope and focus of each theme, determining the “story” of each. It also involved deciding on an information name for each theme; and

6. Writing up: The final phase involved weaving together the analytic narrative and data extracts, and contextualising the analysis in relation to existing literature.

Source: University of Auckland (2014).

3.9 Trustworthiness and Authenticity

Issues of trustworthiness and authenticity are critical to the qualitative research paradigm. Lincoln and Guba (2000) were responsible for substituting reliability and validity with the parallel concept of trustworthiness. Trustworthiness involves establishing four aspects, namely:

- Credibility – confidence in the truth of findings;
- Transferability – demonstrating that the findings have applicability in other Contexts;
- Dependability – showing that the findings are consistent and could be repeated;
- Conformability – a degree of neutrality or extent to which the findings of a study are shaped by the participants and not researcher bias, motivation or interest.
Authenticity can best be understood as the reassurance that both the conduct and evaluation of researches are genuine and credible, not only in terms of participants living experiences, but also with respect to the wider political and social implications of research. (James, 2008). Within the specific four aspects were methodological strategies for establishing qualitative rigour such as audit trail, member checking when coding, categorising or confirming results with participants, peer debriefing, negative case analysis, structural corroboration and referential material adequacy (Guba and Lincoln, (2000). Authenticity is therefore regarded as a cardinal aspect in establishing trustworthiness in qualitative research.

### 3.9.1 Techniques for Establishing Credibility

There are a number of techniques used to establish credibility in qualitative research. Lincoln and Guba (1985) indicated the following techniques as key to achieving this goal:

- prolonged engagement;
- persistent observation;
- triangulation;
- peer debriefing;
- referential adequacy; and
- member checking.

Furthermore, specific techniques could be used to realise three important aspects of transferability, dependability and conformability:

- Technique for establishing transferability.

  Use of thick description;
• Technique for establishing dependability.
  
  Use of inquiry audit; and

• Technique for establishing conformability.
  
  Use of a conformability audit;
  
  Use of audit trail;
  
  Use of triangulation; and
  
  Use of reflexivity.

Source: Lincoln and Guba (1985)

Lincoln and Guba (1985) advised that it is not proper for qualitative researchers to commit themselves to a particular set of criteria because there could and should not be one set of criteria used to evaluate qualitative research. This implies that appropriate criteria are only those that have a bearing or emerge from the same tradition, research approach, that is, methods of data collection and analysis, that the researcher uses or is proposing to use.

The researcher made use of some of the techniques outlined above in ensuring trustworthiness and authenticity of this research study. The techniques used were triangulation, member checking, thick description and prolonged engagement. The researcher attained triangulation through asking similar questions to participants during individual face to face interviews and through focus group discussions. The required data was therefore generated from different sources.

Member checking involved a researcher giving research material relevant to a study for checking by people who were the source of those materials (Bryman, 2001).
Member checking was achieved through the researcher asking participants to review the data generated by the interviewer and the researcher’s subsequent interpretation of the interview data. Participants and informants appeared appreciative of this process since it presented to them an opportunity to make sure that their views were captured correctly. This took place during the interview process as well as at the end. The same applied for the focus group discussions.

Thick description is the detailed account of field experiences in which the researcher makes explicit the patterns of cultural and social relationships and put them in context (Holloway, 1997). The researcher achieved this by describing with sufficient detail experiences to do with the electoral process and people with visual impairment to the extent that it was possible for findings drawn to be transferable to other people, settings or situations.

Prolonged engagement was achieved through investing a lot of time in gathering data in-order to have an in-depth understanding of the issues the researcher was looking at. This was also evidenced by the extensive travelling to different places in the country that the researcher did as well as the time spent on interviewing fifty individuals, the focus groups and officials of advocacy organisations of people with visual impairment.

The researcher also took time interviewing each of the participants and informants as well as a senior official of the Zimbabwe Electoral Commission. Some of the participants were interviewed in the streets of Harare, Kadoma town in Mashonaland
West Province, Marondera town in Mashonaland East Province, and Bulawayo and Masvingo towns.

Some of the participants and informants were interviewed at their work places after appointments were made in advance. A few of the participants were interviewed at their homes especially in Harare where the researcher visited homes in the suburbs. Focus group discussions were carried out in the town of Masvingo at an institution of visually impaired people after prior arrangements and appointments were made.

3.10 Target Population

The target population of this study comprised of people with visual impairment who qualified to vote in elections in Zimbabwe. These were over the age of eighteen. It also involved the Zimbabwe Electoral Commission and advocacy groups of and for people with visual impairment.

3.11 Sample And Sampling Procedure

For purposes of this study, opportunity sampling was mainly used. This is a type of non-probability sampling where participants were selected based on naturally occurring groups. It uses people who might be easily available and willing to take part based on convenience. Opportunity sampling is normally used to study hard to access groups of people. The visually impaired constituency is not a homogenous group and one may not easily find them concentrated at a particular place, hence the researcher opted for opportunity sampling.
One of the advantages of opportunity sampling is that it is easy to choose participants and therefore a quick way to sample those who were interested. It can also be a good random sample, depending on the population one was sampling from, for example random people in a crowded place, or students in a library. It was also less time consuming, handy and cheaper compared to other sampling methods and procedures. However, one of the disadvantages of opportunity sampling is that it might not provide a representative sample of the target population as chosen participants may have different qualities to the other people in general. (McLeod, 2014).

A sample of 50 individuals with visual impairment was selected and interviewed from five provinces in Zimbabwe. These provinces were as follows: Bulawayo, Masvingo, Mashonaland East, Mashonaland West and Harare. In addition, an official from the Zimbabwe Electoral Commission was interviewed as well as part of the sample. Three officials who were representatives of advocacy groups of and for people with visual impairment were also interviewed and therefore formed part of the sample.

The following sampling procedures were made use of:

3.11.1 Sample of Individuals With Visual Impairment N=50

Opportunity sampling was used for this sample. It chose individuals who happened to be available at the time (Denzin and Lincoln, 2005). A sample of 50 adults comprising of 31 males and 19 females was drawn from five (5) provinces of Zimbabwe namely Masvingo i.e. Masvingo Rural District, Bulawayo i.e Bulawayo Urban, Mashonaland West i.e. Kadoma and Chinhoyi Districts, Mashonaland East i.e. Seke and Marondera Districts and Harare i.e. Harare Urban.
3.11.2 Sample of Electoral Commission Official N=1

One male senior official from The Zimbabwe Electoral Commission was part of the sample. The official was in charge of the Unit that was responsible for issues to do with people with disabilities at the Electoral Authority.

3.11.3 Sample of Advocacy Groups of People With Visual Impairment N=3

Opportunity sampling was used to select the advocacy groups that took part in the study. Opportunity sampling was similar to convenience sampling (Mclean, 1983). Opportunity sampling involved making use of advocacy groups that were easily available at the time. These comprised 2 males and 1 female.

3.11.4 Sample of Focus Group Discussions N = 18

A sample of 14 males and 4 females was selected for the focus group discussions. Convenience sampling was also used to identify this sample. Males were easily available and forthcoming in taking part in the study hence there were more of them compared to females.

3.12 Handling of Ethical Considerations

Participants and informants were informed of their rights in the research study. Firstly they were informed of the purpose of the study and how they stood to benefit as stakeholders. They were also informed of the other stakeholders who were supposed to benefit from the study such as The Zimbabwe Electoral Commission, organisations
of people with visual impairment and the generality of sighted people as a whole. Participants were also formally informed that the data that they provided was solely for purposes of the study and that their names or identities were not going to be known to anyone as that would constitute a breach of the contract between them and the researcher (ibid). They were assured that the data they provided could not be linked to any particular individual. Pseudonyms were instead used to protect the identity of both the participants and informants. They were also told that they were not supposed to take part in the study against their will. After this process they were then given the opportunity to decide whether they were willing to freely take part in the study or not. Only a few indicated that they could not take part mainly due to commitments to do with their work schedules and other personal commitments. A few were not comfortable with being recorded and their wish was granted without any conditions or strings attached. The Zimbabwe Electoral Commission also gave the researcher written authority to carry out the study.

3.13 Summary

This chapter dwelt on the advocacy and participatory worldview research philosophy, the qualitative research paradigm, the interpretive research design, data collection methods namely interviews, focus group discussions and tape recording and note taking. Advantages of both interviews and focus group discussions were explored. It also covered the population, sampling procedure, data presentation plan as well as ethical considerations. Justification of why the sampling method used was selected was outlined. Data presentation, analysis and interpretation procedures were also covered. In addition issues to do with trustworthiness and authenticity were clearly dwelt on. Finally the management and handling of ethical issues and concerns
pertaining to the study was also covered. The next chapter will focus on data presentation, analysis and interpretation.
4.1 Introduction

The thrust of this chapter is to present generated data. Such data is then critically analysed and integrated. It looks at the following: background information of participants and informants, themes emerging from the four objectives guided by individual interviews with voters with visual impairment, interviews with representatives of organisations of people with visual impairment, interview with a senior official of the Zimbabwe Electoral Commission and finally focus group discussions. N.B. All names used are not the real names of participants and informants but pseudonyms. This was done to protect the identity of the participants.

Table 4.1 Individual Interviews: Background Information of Participants N=50

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>No.</th>
<th>Name of Participant (Pseudonym)</th>
<th>Category / Position</th>
<th>Experience</th>
<th>Age</th>
<th>Gender</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
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<td>Tsitsi</td>
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<td>10 years</td>
<td>33</td>
<td>F</td>
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<td>Themba</td>
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<td>5 years</td>
<td>29</td>
<td>F</td>
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<tr>
<td>No.</td>
<td>Name</td>
<td>Occupation</td>
<td>Age</td>
<td>Gender</td>
<td>Years of Experience</td>
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<tr>
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<td>Clerk</td>
<td>10 years</td>
<td>40</td>
<td>M</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The participants in this group were made up of thirty one males and nineteen females. The discrepancy in the number of male and female participants was caused by the fact
that males were readily available compared to females. Males were also forthcoming in taking part in the interviews. These came from different backgrounds as shown by the diversity of their professions and occupations. Quite a good number were not employed. This was done to generate as much data as possible from people with varying life experiences.

Table 4.2 Focus Group Discussions: Background Information of Participants

N=18

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>No.</th>
<th>Name of Participant (Pseudonym)</th>
<th>Category / Position</th>
<th>Experience</th>
<th>Age</th>
<th>Gender</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1.</td>
<td>Johnson</td>
<td>General Hand</td>
<td>5 years</td>
<td>27</td>
<td>M</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.</td>
<td>David</td>
<td>General Hand</td>
<td>7 years</td>
<td>30</td>
<td>M</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.</td>
<td>Lucy</td>
<td>School Teacher</td>
<td>3 years</td>
<td>35</td>
<td>F</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4.</td>
<td>Farai</td>
<td>Assistant in Furniture Shop</td>
<td>3 years</td>
<td>26</td>
<td>M</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5.</td>
<td>Shorai</td>
<td>General Hand</td>
<td>4 years</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>M</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6.</td>
<td>Ruvimbo</td>
<td>School Teacher</td>
<td>10 years</td>
<td>41</td>
<td>F</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7.</td>
<td>Ronald</td>
<td>Pastor</td>
<td>9 years</td>
<td>38</td>
<td>M</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8.</td>
<td>Shacky</td>
<td>School Leaver</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>M</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9.</td>
<td>Evelyn</td>
<td>Single mother</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>28</td>
<td>F</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10.</td>
<td>Christian</td>
<td>School teacher</td>
<td>2 years</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>M</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11.</td>
<td>Percy</td>
<td>Lawyer</td>
<td>5 years</td>
<td>33</td>
<td>M</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12.</td>
<td>Tryson</td>
<td>School Teacher</td>
<td>6 years</td>
<td>34</td>
<td>M</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>13.</td>
<td>Hlapi</td>
<td>University Student</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>26</td>
<td>M</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
The participants in this group comprised 14 males and 4 females with different backgrounds. Some of them were professionals in different fields. The difference in numbers between males and females was due to the fact that at the institution where the focus groups were carried out there were more males employed there than females. The researcher was given access to the employees especially although he had asked for even those who were not employed there.

Table 4.3 Organisations of People with Disabilities: Background Information of informants N=3

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Organization</th>
<th>Name of Participant (Psedonym)</th>
<th>Category / Position</th>
<th>Experience</th>
<th>Age</th>
<th>Gender</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Org. A</td>
<td>Tomondo</td>
<td>Advocacy Officer</td>
<td>12 years</td>
<td>39</td>
<td>M</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Org. B</td>
<td>Taka</td>
<td>Director</td>
<td>15 years</td>
<td>47</td>
<td>M</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Org. C</td>
<td>Mavis</td>
<td>Acting Director</td>
<td>17 years</td>
<td>50</td>
<td>F</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The participants comprised one female and two males. These were drawn from three different organizations that represented people with disabilities. Two of these organizations only
represented individuals with visual impairment while one represented all people with disabilities.

Table 4.4: Zimbabwe Electoral Commission (ZEC) Background Information of Informant N=1

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Organisation</th>
<th>Name of Participant (Pseudonym)</th>
<th>Category/ position</th>
<th>Experience</th>
<th>Age</th>
<th>Gender</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Zimbabwe Electoral Commission</td>
<td>Mr. Don</td>
<td>Senior Election Officer</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>57</td>
<td>M</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The informant was a high ranking member of staff of the Zimbabwe Electoral Commission.

4.2 Individual Interviews

4.2.1 Themes Emerging From Objective 1.4.1

Objective: To establish the electoral needs of people with visual impairment in Zimbabwe.

Based on objective 1.4.1 of the study, a number of themes emerged from the interviews carried out with different individuals with visual impairment. The following themes were noted:

(a) Participation in voter information;

(b) Availability of information;

(c) Confidentiality in the voting process;

(d) Specialised Assistance during voting;

(e) Choice of person preferred to assist; and
(f) Guarantees of safety by the police.

Table 4.5 Participation In Voter Education N= 50

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Item</th>
<th>Frequency</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Participated in voter education</td>
<td>27</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Not participated in voter education</td>
<td>23</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 4.5.1 Roles Played If Participant Took Part In Voter Education

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Item</th>
<th>Frequency</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Ordinary participant</td>
<td>16</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Observer</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Facilitator</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Peer educator</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td><strong>27</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Table 4.5.2 Reasons for not having participated in Voter Education

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Item</th>
<th>Frequency</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Work Commitments</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Not invited</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lack of interest by individual</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Exclusion of the visually impaired by authorities</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Role of voter education for the visually impaired</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>not taken seriously by authorities</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td><strong>23</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

4.2.2 Participation in Voter Education

On the issue of participation in voter education programmes organised by the electoral authorities, slightly more than half of the participants indicated that they had taken part in these voter education programmes. Some of the participants indicated that they had not taken part in the voter education programmes. Those who had taken part in voter education were further asked to indicate their roles in the voter education exercise.

More than half of the participants who had taken part in voter education programmes indicated that they took part as ordinary participants. A few had taken part as observers. A few others took part as facilitators. Only one had taken part as a peer educator.

For those who had not taken part in the voter education programmes, almost half of
the participants indicated that they had not been able to take part in voter education programmes because of the general exclusion and discrimination of people with visual impairment by the authorities. A good number of the participants indicated that as individuals they lacked the interest to take part in voter education programmes due to various reasons. These ranged from information being availed in formats that were not disability friendly, lack of privacy in the voting process which was mainly compromised by being assisted to vote by third parties and lack of specialised skills by facilitators to ensure that those with visual impairment were attended to in a way that their individual needs were effectively met. A few felt that electoral authorities did not appreciate the critical role of voter education on the part of voters with visual impairment. Some indicated that they were unable to attend voter education programmes due to work commitments and others said they had never been invited to voter education programmes and this left them excluded. Musoni, a lecturer at an institution of higher learning had this to say

“There is a general belief that the visually impaired have nothing to do with the political process or voting. This has left us out and excluded from the mainstream of governance issues.”

Patience, a school teacher narrated how she was treated by electoral authorities. “I was trained as a polling officer for 5 days. When it was time for deployment, they realised that I was blind and indicated to me that I could not be deployed and that it was a mistake to have been invited for training in the first place. On my part I felt that there was nothing that could have prevented me from executing my duties effectively. In addition I had my assistant who could have helped when the need arose. I was not amused at all.” Another school leaver,
Tonderai, pointed out that,

“Electoral authorities should consult those trained in the area of visual impairment. At present, electoral officers are not aware of the electoral needs of individuals who are visually impaired.”

Ruth, a clerk employed by the government indicated that,

“I could not take part in voter education when I had been selected because my employer gave a directive that only those who were on leave could take part in the exercise. I was not on leave then but I really wanted to take part since it was going to be my first time to do this.”

A female street vendor, Nyarai, had this to say,

“I am not sure why I am always left out from voter education programmes, but I suspect that it has to do with the general exclusion of people with visual impairment from governance matters.”

The implication was that not all people with visual impairment had taken part in voter education for different reasons. Visually impaired people felt shortchanged in this area. They therefore lacked appropriate education about what they were supposed to do if they had made a decision to vote. The electoral authorities were not doing enough to ensure that this section of society took part in the electoral process just like any other citizen.
Table 4.6 Availability of information N= 50

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Item</th>
<th>Frequency</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Non availability of information in</td>
<td>50</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>appropriate format.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>50</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The issue of limited or lack of voting information was a thorny subject. All the participants indicated that information contributed immensely to their inclusion in the electoral process. It came out clearly that most if not all the information on voter education was presented in ordinary print. This effectively shut out or excluded individuals with visual impairment. Most of them could not read information in print. They indicated that if this information was availed in either Braille or enlarged print depending on individual needs, this would go a long way in empowering them. They indicated that electoral authorities should avail pamphlets, banners, print media articles and others in Braille and enlarged print. They further indicated that radio and television programmes with content specially prepared and programmed for those with visual impairment needed to be easily accessible to them. Visually impaired voters strongly felt that the system grossly shortchanged them in this respect.

Visually impaired voters who were lawyers and educators in institutions of higher learning were very clear on what needed to be done. Tsitsi a school teacher had this to say:

"Information is vital because of the role it plays in enabling us to make informed decisions on whom to vote for."

Themba, a lecturer at a local university stated that:
“Lack of voter information has resulted in us being represented by people with questionable credentials and characters. The little information that is available is not even user friendly.”

Musoni, who is a lecturer stated that:

*It appeared there was a general belief that the visually impaired were exempted from the political process or voting leaving us out and excluded.*”

Patience a teacher had this to say

“We are left out and not invited for meetings. We are regarded as objects of pity on the grounds that we will be assisted to vote anyway. Because of this no real inclusion will be realised for a long time to come.”

Janet, a high school teacher added that:

“I could not vote last year because I did not have information on what was really involved. Lack of information excludes people with visual impairment. Information was not readily available because authorities preferred use of television, clear print or newspapers all of which were not accessible to many visually impaired voters. As for the recent (July 2013) elections there was very limited information for us.”

Information to do with voting was not availed in the correct format for visually impaired voters. This meant that people with visual impairment were unable to take part in exercising their right to vote which was very unfortunate. Availing important voter education information in the wrong format meant voters with visual impairment were left out of the electoral process.
Table 4.7 Confidentiality in the Voting Process N=50

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Item</th>
<th>Frequency</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>No Confidentially guaranteed</td>
<td>42</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Confidentiality is guaranteed</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Limited confidentiality</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Not sure</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Another theme that came out was that there was lack of confidentiality in the voting process on the part of visually impaired voters. Most participants indicated that their confidentiality was not guaranteed especially on the aspect of how they voted or the choice of who they voted for. Only a few participants indicated that confidentially was guaranteed. Some said that there was only limited confidentiality while a few were not sure.

Those who indicated that there was some measure of secrecy in the voting process justified this on the grounds that since they were helped to vote by their assistants whom they were more accustomed to and trusted, then there was some guarantee of secrecy. The justification however, remained debatable judging from the commonly accepted view and understanding of what secrecy entailed. One expressed reservations at the whole process when he indicated his dismay at having been congratulated for having voted “correctly” because he had voted for a particular party that suited the police officer who had earlier assisted him. Tackson, a street beggar indicated that:

“Sometimes you cannot even trust your own spouse or children to cast the vote on your behalf because spouses and children as human beings have their own
vested interests too and could temper with my choice.”

The absence of confidentiality in the voting process was a major outstanding issue for visually impaired voters. They clearly wanted an arrangement where they were allowed to vote in private without help from anyone and it appears this may not happen in the near future. The need for confidentiality cannot be overemphasized, since it long overdue.

Table 4.8 Specialised Assistance during Voting

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Item</th>
<th>Frequency</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>General Assistance</td>
<td>19</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Exemption from joining queue</td>
<td>14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Limited help</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No help at all</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Not sure</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

On the issue of the form of specialised assistance voters received from electoral officials, the majority of voters felt that besides the general assistance rendered to any other voter, there was no other specialised assistance meant for visually impaired voters. This position was alluded to by many participants. Some of the participants indicated that they were assisted through being exempted from joining the queue to vote. In other words, they received preferential treatment and voted earlier and left to do other things at home or at work. Other participants indicated that there was limited help but did not elaborate. A few said there was no help forthcoming at all.
Participants strongly felt that there was need for training of electoral officers to enable them to offer special assistance for the visually impaired. A number of the participants felt that exemption from joining a queue was just a negligible provision compared to a lot of work that needed to be done.

Phillip, a lawyer commented that:

“The major challenge was that electoral authorities prefer to think and do things for us, without involving us.” He went on to justify his views with the famous quotation “Nothing for us without us.”

Tsitsi, a school teacher said:

“Government thrives on taking the visually impaired for granted. It will be best if visually impaired voters were also represented by other visually impaired people in the electoral structures.”

The message conveyed here was that there was no form of specialized assistance rendered by electoral officials. They only alluded to the general assistance that everyone else was entitled to. There was a gap in terms of the training of those who are supposed to help visually impaired voters and this loophole was a bone of contention on the part of people with visual impairment.
Table 4.9 Choice of person preferred to assist

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Person Preferred To Assist</th>
<th>Frequency</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Presiding Officer</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Polling Officer</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sighted guide or personal assistant</td>
<td>40</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Police Officer</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Myself</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td><strong>50</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

When asked about whom they preferred to assist them to vote, given a choice, the majority of participants indicated that they would prefer their assistant mainly because these were people who were neutral and someone known to them and it was easier to trust this person as opposed to a stranger. They also indicated that this person was more close to them. A few opted for their assistant on the grounds that it was provided for by law. A few others indicated a police officer on the grounds that since they were law enforcement agencies who took oath and were bound by the official secrecy act they were most likely to uphold the issue of secrecy more knowledgeably, reliably and competently as opposed to their assistant, who may be unknowledgeable.

A sizeable number had their doubts about trusting law enforcement officers based on past experiences where police officers became overzealous and demonstrated bias towards certain parties at the expense of others. The example of one respondent alluded to earlier on who had been informally congratulated for voting for a particular party after the elections confirmed the fears of visually impaired voters in not trusting...
people they did not know. Some indicated that they would not need to be assisted by anyone but wanted to do the voting process on their own. This view came mainly from University students who felt that they were empowered enough to do it on their own if appropriate resources such as voting templates were availed. Raviro, a university student had this to say:

“Why should I be assisted by anyone when I can do it on my own. Authorities should copy from Namibia where I was once an observer in their elections.”

Chari, a housewife said:

“I do not even trust my assistant, not even my spouse because they may have their own interests and place the X where I did not instruct them to.”

The indications on the person preferred to help for voting purposes was clearly that of the assistant or sighted guide. Participants trusted this person especially on the grounds that this was someone they knew and who they could trust with confidential or sensitive information. Some who felt that they were more empowered eg university students and other highly literate people with visual impairment preferred to do the voting on their own if the system allowed this. Law enforcement officers were generally not trusted to assist in the voting process.
Concerning the issue of guarantees for the safety of visually impaired voters by law enforcement agencies, an overwhelming majority of the participants and informants indicated that the police did not give any guarantees of protection in the event that violence broke out. Just a few indicated that there were limited guarantees through night patrols in selected areas during the election period. Tsitsi, the school teacher said that:

“Police officers should educate people on the dangers of violence. In addition, when on patrol and if there was need to interact with visually impaired people, it was important for them to identify themselves so that we do not question their authenticity.”

Shelton, a university student indicated that:

“The police do not protect anyone. At this institution when violence erupts, we normally get refugee in the building set aside for all issues to do with students with disabilities that is The Disability Resource Centre and so far this has worked to our advantage.”

Tanaka, a street beggar had this to say:

“Besides the general assurances given to anyone else by the police, there is no special assurances or guarantees of protection from the police and this
The general impression was that the police did not give any guarantees to visually impaired voters whenever there was the threat of violence or any other risk. Visually impaired voters were normally expected to take care of their own safety in the event of risks to do with violence.

4.3 Focus Group Discussions

4.3.1 Themes Emerging From Objective 1.4.1

Objective: To establish the electoral needs of people with visual impairment in Zimbabwe.

4.3.2 Secrecy (Confidentiality) in voting process

On the issue of assisted voting or secrecy in the voting process Focus group discussions helped a lot in generating a lot of interesting and vital in-sight into what was really going on and especially when this was said from a perspective of the people or players who were directly involved and affected. Quite a good number of the participants who took part in the focus group discussions expressed serious reservations about the sincerity and seriousness of being assisted by their own children. Children were seen as one of the major stumbling blocks, alongside some of the spouses. The major concerns here revolved around the fact that some children were naturally untrustworthy maybe because of limited or lack of maturity. They were out to take advantage of the vulnerability of their parents, guardians or elders by misrepresenting the preferred choices of the person they were assisting. To support this argument Johnson, a general hand and parent at an institution of visually impaired learners had this to say: “Many of our teenage children were not trustworthy as well. One of the children I personally know as my neighbour’s child went to the extent of
hiding his mother’s identity document to prevent the mother from exercising her right
to vote. He did this because he knew that his mother’s political affiliation was at
variance with his own political affiliation. The mother in question was very angry
when she finally found out about this dishonesty on the part of her son but then it was
too late when the son’s intentions were uncovered.”

The idea of guaranteed secrecy and confidentiality in the voting process also triggered
very opposing views from participants who took part in the focus group discussions.
One of these opposing positions was that some of them especially those who were
parents strongly felt that the Zimbabwe Electoral Commission should roll out a
comprehensive programme to train children of parents with visual impairment on
issues to do with the integrity of assisting their parents. This also showed that while
some parents were against being assisted by some of their children for the lack of
sincerity on the part of their children, some did not see any hidden agenda on the part
of their children. Instead they believed that what was needed was thorough training on
the part of their children on the voting issues so that they truly and unreservedly
appreciate the importance of upholding their parents’ choice in the voting process as a
right and not some, not so important privilege that they could afford to temper with.
In consolidating this position Victor, an administrative assistant said that: “The
Zimbabwe Electoral Authority should take it upon itself to come up with a training
programme for our children so that they realise the significance of assisting us, their
parents in a manner that was above board and refrain from taking advantage of our
vulnerability.”

Still on the concerns on assistance rendered to visually impaired voters by either their
preferred assistants or electoral officials, a very good suggestion was also brought up. This involved the idea of assisting voters with visual impairment in accordance with their individual and varying needs. It was strongly felt that the one size fits all approach that was currently being exploited by electoral authorities had a number of loopholes that needed to be tightened up for the effective inclusion of people with visual impairment.

The Electoral Authorities were therefore called upon to be more flexible and be open to progressive ideas from the constituency of the visually impaired which inspite of being a minority, was an equally critical and important partner in the electoral process. This was indeed a voice of reason since even the constitution and electoral laws of the nation did not discriminate against the visually impaired as half citizens. Evelyn, a single mother captured this position by indicating that:

"Authorities should concentrate on individual attention and refrain from the group or wholesale approach which does not benefit many of us. Their general and casual approach has disenfranchised the visually impaired in the electoral and voting process and we have had enough of this."

Other participants also expressed the view that what was more important was ensuring that those who assisted the visually impaired in the voting process needed to be specially trained people regardless of whether they were spouses, children or any other close relative. They thought that the bottom line was whether the person helping them was trained. Quite a significant number were in support of this view point. Hlapi, a university student indicated that:
“Electoral authorities needed to put in place a training programme specially meant for people who will be responsible for helping voters with visual impairment. This will be a very good idea since it does not look at whether one was being assisted by relatives or any other person. For me training is more important regardless of who is trained, as long as some cut off point was put in place.”

Visually impaired voters expressed deep rooted reservations on the issue of secrecy in the voting process. The fact that someone was assisting them compromised the whole thing.

4.4 Organisations of People With Visual Impairment

4.4.1 Themes Emerging From Objective 1.4.1

Objective: To establish the electoral needs of people with visual impairment in Zimbabwe.

4.4.2 Effectiveness of Voter Education Programmes

A critical theme that emerged from organisations of people with visual impairment was on how people with visual impairment had been reached by the Zimbabwe Electoral Commission and the effectiveness of voter education programmes by the authorities. One of these organisations indicated that the electoral body did not engage voters with visual impairment in their outreach programmes in the past. This only started in the 2013 national elections. It was highlighted that from about 2009, organisations of people with visual impairment worked together with NASCOH which is an umbrella body for all organisations of people with disabilities. They carried out voter education programmes without involvement or assistance from the
electoral body. The transcription of a few voter education pamphlets into Braille only started in 2013. Some workshops were also held. A serious concern was that despite this, voter information still need to reach the visually impaired. While some positive strides were covered in 2013, a lot still needs to be done. Taka, a Director of one of the organisations of people with visual impairment said that “In Bulawayo province, out of 71 districts, the NASCOH programme of voter education had only covered 14 districts.

This education went a long way in attempting to narrow the gap on lack of or limited information. Tomondo, an advocacy officer of one of the organisations of people with disabilities indicated that:

“The visually impaired had indeed been left out and that in their 5 year plan, the hearing impaired had been targeted in particular leaving out the visually impaired.”

Speaking on the effectiveness of voter education Tomondo. said:

“People with visual impairment had been helped as part of a broader spectrum of other people with disabilities and not separately. Under this programme a documentary had been produced which encompassed a number of issues to do with people with disabilities and electoral issues were also covered.”

He further indicated that a number of people with disabilities had been trained as observers and election officers. It was emphasized that the training was for people with disabilities in general and not the visually impaired in particular. A record of the breakdown of the numbers of visually impaired people who took part in this programme could not be secured since they were regarded the same as other people
with disabilities. There were no special training arrangements meant for people with visual impairment only. To the organizations, this was an indicator of some measure of seriousness and possible effectiveness in their advocacy efforts. Tomondo also indicated the following some statistics of those people with disabilities who were trained.

“In 2008, seventy-seven people with disabilities were trained and 400 observers were also trained.”

These statistics covered different categories of people with disabilities and did not treat the visually impaired separately. Statistics pertaining to the visually impaired alone were not available. One of the elements on which effectiveness could be judged on is budgetary allocation.

It was established that there was no specific budgetary allocation set aside for the training of people with disabilities on the part of the electoral body. Mavis, who was Acting Director of another organisation said:

“The electoral body did not include people with visual impairment in their outreach programmes before the 2013 elections and there was no special budget for this.”

Another representative of one of the organisations of people with visual impairment Taka said:

“The effectiveness of voter education campaigns was relatively successful in the major urban centres. As for the rural areas, I am not too sure whether it was the same as in urban centres.”

Against this background, it was difficult to determine the level of effectiveness of voter education programmes since the statistics that were availed were for all
categories of people with disabilities without a breakdown of the specific role of visually impaired people or how many people with visual impairment benefited from this scheme.

4.4.3 Disability Friendliness of Voter Format

All the organisations representing people with visual impairment concurred that to date only one voting format, that is, ordinary print has been used to enable people with visual impairment to vote and that it has not been disability friendly. They all indicated that this position was regrettable and counterproductive to their constituency. They indicated that the introduction of alternative voting formats would make the process of voting more flexible thereby making it possible to accommodate more visually impaired voters. It was indicated that the current arrangement was highly untenable for the visually impaired.

Other options proposed included electronic voting, Braille ballot, enlarged print, drive in polling places or use of audio tapes. It was therefore, clearly demonstrated that existing arrangements on the voting formats were not disability or user friendly and that something needed to be done as a matter of urgency. Taka, speaking on behalf of one of these organisations had this to say:

“For as long as electoral authorities do not provide our constituency with alternative formats in accordance with our needs, we will continue to be at the receiving end.”

Tomondo, another representative expressed his reservations:

“The process to include the visually impaired was taking too long. The current format obliged people with visual impairment to be helped to vote against their wish.” Mavis, the Acting Director said:
“We do not know why it is taking so long because recommendations for alternative formats based on individual needs were made in the past, but we seem not to be making any headway. There is a lot to learn even from some of our neighbouring countries.”

Based on these sentiments visually impaired voters were therefore being short changed and recommendations already made could be revisited with a view to addressing them.

The major concern coming from this theme is that voter formats were not disability friendly. They needed to pay attention to the individual differences of people with visual impairment. This was a critical area considering that we were looking at a critical right of visually impaired voters.

4.4.4 Guarantees to Secrecy In The Voting Process

Organisations representing people with visual impairment just like individuals interviewed were not amused by the violation of their right to secrecy. While the Electoral law provided for secrecy on one’s choice of who he/she votes for, the opposite was allowed to happen on the ground. This position exposed the double standards being used by the electoral authorities. During voter education campaigns, both the electronic and print media emphasised that “your vote is your secret.” It would appear that this provision was being applied selectively since it did not go on to say the visually impaired were an exception.

The choice of a candidate of a visually impaired voter was more like a public secret. The following example demonstrated how the visually impaired voters’ right has been violated. Taka had this to say
“A colleague was congratulated for having voted for a “politically correct” candidate by a police officer he knew after the election. It turned out that this person had been a witness through being asked to assist a visually impaired person to vote at the polling station. This is a clear violation of our rights and to aggravate matters it was a law enforcement agent who had helped the visually impaired voter.”

This example which was a clear indication of the conflict of interest came from a number of people with visual impairment who were aware of it. While there had been an amendment allowing for only an assistant to help the visually impaired voter, discrepancies were noted that even after this amendment some presiding officers continued to make use of the old arrangement where several witnesses including political party representatives and electoral officers were obliged to take a keen interest on the choice of a visually impaired person when voting. Mavis one of the officials had this to say,

“We are aware of some of our members who were assisted to vote using the outdated procedure at a number of polling stations.”

Another representative Taka said,

“A good number of our members appeared not to be aware of the implications of the amendment, and many were not even aware that there was such an amendment. If voter education was done effectively it could have helped in creating awareness on the part of voters with visual impairment.”

4.4.5 Articulation of Voter Needs of the visually impaired To Authorities

One organisation indicated that they had come up with the idea of a documentary as
one way to reach out to electoral authorities in the country. Another organisation said that they had worked with their umbrella organisation to articulate a number of programmes through advocacy. Availability of information had been targeted as one of the major areas that needed to be attended to in earnest. These programmes were targeted at the visually impaired voters as well as potential voters and electoral authorities. Another organisation indicated that they had also worked with their umbrella body to do advocacy work mainly through the exploitation of new technologies meant for the visually impaired. They had demonstrated to electoral authorities the need to embrace new technologies that benefited people with visual impairment such as electronic voting, or other forms of information technology.

Tomondo said,

“We have held a number of workshops and conferences with electoral authorities. We have a good relationship with the electoral body and we hope that with time our efforts will be rewarded.”

Taka also indicated that,

“While we have engaged electoral authorities, and remain focused, we strongly feel that our efforts need to be backed up by comprehensive legislation in this area. Experience elsewhere has taught us that it is only effective legislation and policy that compels government arms to do what they are supposed to do. Clear legislation does not leave room for excuses on the part of authorities.”

Mavis indicated that,

“On their part electoral authorities also needed to employ experts in the area of visual impairment since it appeared there were gaps in this respect.”

Articulation of voter needs was mainly being done through advocacy through forms
such as use of documentaries, workshops and use of information technologies. While these efforts were quite noble it would appear very few of the targeted beneficiaries have benefited. Availability of voter information needs to be redoubled to include many of the people with visual impairments.

4.5 Individual Interviews

4.5.1 Themes Emerging From Objective 1.4.2
Objective: To establish how people with visual impairment had been embraced in the electoral process

Table 4.11
Voting Format Used in Zimbabwe

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Item</th>
<th>Frequency</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Ordinary print</td>
<td>50</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Enlarged print</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Audio cassette / tape</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Braille</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Drive in polling places</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Vote assist</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Information technology (Computer disks for voters with Braille Key)</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Boards</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td><strong>50</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
All the participants were unanimous in indicating that to date the country had only been able to avail one voting format, that was, the use of ordinary print. Alternative formats were not available. These included enlarged print, audio cassette, or tapes, Braille, drive in polling places, vote assist and internet voting. The respondents felt that this was a gross violation of their voting right as enshrined in the United Nations Convention on The Rights of People with Disabilities. One voting format had left voters with visual impairment with no other option except to be assisted with a format that was not user friendly. On the contrary, Elizabeth, a vendor said

“The use of a Braille format will expose visually impaired voters, If I am the only voter who used Braille at a given polling station in the event of political victimisation which was common in this country anyway, it was easy to be identified so the present arrangement was much better.”

Table 4.12: Participation in Voting

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>ITEM</th>
<th>FREQUENCY</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>45</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>50</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Many of the participants had voted at one point or the other. Only a few had not voted. Some of the reasons for not voting included lack of relevant documents. Others were registered voters but just lacked the interest. A few indicated that they were discouraged by the absence of secrecy and confidentiality in the voting process.
They preferred to vote independently as opposed to being assisted, sometimes by total
strangers. They indicated that they could not risk getting assistance from people they
did not know. Ratidzai, a housewife had this to say:

“I have voted once, but as soon as I found out that I had to be assisted by
electoral officers, I never went back to vote in subsequent elections because I
never trusted that they would be impartial since they also had their own
interests in the whole process.” Tendai, who was unemployed, said

“After voting, I felt empowered at least to the extent of choosing whom
I wanted to represent me in parliament.”

Table 4.13: Accessibility of Voting Centers (Polling Stations)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Item</th>
<th>Frequency</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Accessible</td>
<td>40</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Not accessible</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Not sure</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

On whether voting centres or polling stations were easily accessible to voters with
visual impairment, considering their mobility and orientation challenges, the majority
of the informants indicated that these centres were quite accessible. They were
however, quick to point out that it was much easier to get to these stations in urban
areas as compared to rural areas where sometimes terrain was really bad and things
were worsened in the event that it rained. Only three participants indicated that the
centres were not accessible. Only a handful indicated that they were not sure since
they had not really bothered to vote even if they were registered voters. Janet a
teacher said that;

“In terms of geographical accessibility, polling stations were accessible but practically these centres may be inaccessible in terms of resource allocation.”

Another informant, Jospat, who was a street beggar said that: “Some polling stations were too distant apart. In urban areas one centre can have two or three polling places and this made it possible to reach a number of visually impaired voters.”

Charity, who was a vendor in the streets of the city said: “The aspect of physical accessibility may not be an issue but sometimes from personal experience your assistant may not be in the mood to accompany you to the polling station, or may have other commitments and this compromise our right to vote.”

Voting centres were generally found to be accessible especially in the urban areas. Rural areas still presented some challenges especially for those voters who may have mobility and orientation challenges or during the rainy season.

Table 4.14: Accessibility of Electoral Officials

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Item</th>
<th>Frequency</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Accessible</td>
<td>36</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Not accessible</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Not sure</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Concerning accessibility of electoral officials at voting centres many participants indicated that while these were accessible, there were serious challenges in that the majority of these officials lacked the requisite skills to enable them to assist visually
impaired voters. Visually impaired people were treated more or less like the sighted. Examples cited involved use of terms such as “Dip your finger in that container.” The electoral officials erroneously thought that the visually impaired voter was seeing the container. Another example was the use of terms like, “Go to the next ballot box” when the visually impaired person had not even been oriented to the order of the ballot boxes and his/her mobility was also limited considering that it could be his/her first time to be in such a place. Other examples, included statements such as the following “Come over here” or “Go over there” Words like “here” or “there” were not absolute words but relative terms which could mean different things to different people. When using such words with the intention of conveying meaning to people with visual impairment one had to be very careful because he/she may not be communicating anything at all and yet we all know that communication is supposed to be a two way process involving a receiver on one end and a sender on the other.

Just a few participants indicated that electoral officials were not easily accessible and that accessibility really depended on individuals’ willingness to help or not. Some electoral officers behaved more like mercenaries who were only interested in finishing the job at hand and get paid for their services. A handful were not sure since they highlighted the fact that while they were registered voters they had not bothered to vote due to lack of interest, work commitments or suspicion of the lack of transparency in the whole voting or electoral process.

Charles a street beggar with visual impairment said.

“I suspect that some electoral officials mislead us on candidates to be voted for and end up indicating the wrong place taking advantage of the assistance they will be giving us.”
Mukoni, a school teacher stated that:

“From my experience electoral officials were accessible, may be because at my local polling station they were people I knew since we lived in the same area.”

Electoral officials were said to be generally accessible but reservations were expressed on their ability to specifically assist voters with visual impairment who needed special assistance.

Table 4.15: Outstanding Inroads Made By ZEC

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Item</th>
<th>Frequency</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Involvement of the visually impaired, as electoral officials</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Making it possible for the visually impaired to vote freely</td>
<td>13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Provision of voter education information</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nothing substantial</td>
<td>15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Not sure</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Regarding the aspect of outstanding inroads so far made by the Zimbabwe Electoral Commission (ZEC) in ensuring the effective inclusion of voters with visual impairment, the majority of the participants indicated that there was nothing really substantial to point at. Some of the participants mentioned that they were at least grateful that ZEC had done something in making it possible for the few visually impaired voters to cast their vote. They singled out the last election (July 2013) as
having been much better than previous elections.

Some of the participants alluded to the issue of involvement of the visually impaired as electoral officials and the limited provision of voter education. Only two participants indicated that they were not sure and based their assessment on the fact that they had not taken up the challenge to vote despite being registered voters. Tom, a teacher at a school of the blind pointed out that:

“ZEC still had a mammoth task to carry out since they have not done much. I am aware that some of the information pamphlets in Braille that were distributed to the visually impaired last year were done at one school and ZEC did not have a hand in that exercise.”

Ephraim, who was unemployed stated that:

“I was happy to realise that some visually impaired people participated in the last election as electoral officials something that had never happened before to the best of my knowledge.”

He also added that;

“Upholding the facility to have visually impaired voters to be helped to vote by their assistants was a good move on the part of ZEC. In the past we were assisted by officials we never knew and this was unfortunate.”

Jaravaza, a street vendor commented that:

“The last elections (July 2013) were a marked improvement in embracing voter needs of the visually impaired on the part of ZEC especially on the issue of help in voting given by one’s assistant or sighted guide.”

Chasi, a telephone switchboard operator with one local bank had this to say:
“ZEC cannot be given the credit on the use of sighted guide assistants because that facility was an initiative of the advocacy done by organisations of the visually impaired. Theirs was just to implement the electoral amendment.”

A university lecturer, Chombo, said

“Some visually impaired voters had sight of the draft constitution that was in Braille and ZEC needed to be applauded on this development.” He added that;

“There may be need to establish how many visually impaired people accessed the draft constitution.”

Stanley, a flea market vendor commented that

“By inviting organisations that represent us to take part in voter education, although inadequate, ZEC needed to be congratulated for that.”

A major issue that came out of this theme was that there were no real inroads that the electoral body had made for the benefit of people with visual impairment. However, the issue of the involvement of a few people with visual impairment as electoral officials was commended by people with visual impairment as a step in the right direction. Provision of some voter information even in the formats that were not user friendly was also singled out as a positive step.

**Table 4.16: Knowledge of Individuals with V.I. who were electoral officials**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Item</th>
<th>Role</th>
<th>Frequency</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>None</td>
<td>Not applicable</td>
<td>27</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Observers</td>
<td>-observing elections</td>
<td>14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Polling officers</td>
<td>-assisting voters to vote</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Voter education facilitators</td>
<td>-educating voters</td>
<td>14</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
On participants’ knowledge of other visually impaired people who had taken part in elections in various capacities as either observers, polling officers or any other capacity many of the participants, that is, slightly more than half of the sample indicated that they did not know of visually impaired people who were electoral officers. A few of the participants indicated that they knew of visually impaired individuals who were observers. Others alluded to knowing of somebody who was either a polling officer or voter education facilitator. Higher numbers of those who indicated to have known of visually impaired people taking part in elections doing different roles came from two provinces namely Harare and Mashonaland West where a number of visually impaired people had indeed confirmed having been electoral officials in various capacities.

James a school teacher had this to say,

“Yes, I know of a visually impaired person who was based at the command centre although I have forgotten the name.”

Tsitsi, a school teacher also indicated that,

“I am aware of four visually impaired people with whom I trained as election observers. We were all selected through organisations that represented us.”

Philip, a lawyer stated that:

“I am not sure if the issue of visually impaired persons being engaged as electoral officials had been implemented because proposals to that effect were made in the past.”

Andrew, a schoolteacher indicated that:

“I am aware of one of my former teachers who worked as a hotline co-ordinator at the command centre.”
Tonderai, another schoolteacher said:

“Yes, I know of a few visually impaired people who took part in the last elections as observers, voter education facilitators and polling officers in Harare.”

Casper, who was a clerk had this to say:

“I personally took part in voter education as a facilitator. Two other visually impaired people I know were observers and others were doing general administrative duties.”

Sharmain, a street vendor stated that:

“I am not aware of anyone with a visual impairment who had specific duties as an electoral officer.”

The involvement of some people with visual impairment in different roles as observers polling officers and voter education facilitators was hailed as a noble idea. It was felt that if many more people with visual impairment could be involved in such roles it was going to help empower them.

### 4.6 The Zimbabwe Electoral Commission

**Themes Emerging From Objective 1.4.2**

**Objective:** To establish how people with visual impairment had been embraced in the electoral process.

**4.6.1 Spreading Voter Information and Awareness To The Visually Impaired**

One of the themes that emerged from the interview with an official from the Zimbabwe Electoral Commission was that of voter information and awareness. It was
indicated that for purposes of voter education and awareness, voters with visual impairment were not treated as a separate entity from the rest of the other sighted voters. In this regard, there was a general arrangement where voter education was spread through organised meetings meant for this purpose only, taking advantage of church gatherings and any other forums where people assembled. A slot would be sought to educate those gathered on the role of voter education. Sometimes door to door voter education campaigns were also organised. These did not specifically target the visually impaired. In other words, there was no form of specialised voter education meant to benefit the visually impaired voter only. With this in mind, it demonstrates that visually impaired voters were clearly excluded, in that, firstly all the information was provided in normal print which they could not read. In most cases, the oral presentations did not accommodate the visually impaired because pictures and diagrams were not in the format that visually impaired participants could read or understand. Mere explanations without appropriate illustrations did not mean much to people with visual impairment. No adaptations were made therefore. There was a difference between explaining an aspect of the electoral process to a sighted person and a visually impaired person. Visually impaired voters understand concepts presented in a concrete manner much better than in an abstract manner. They understand concepts and ideas when they handle concrete things or manipulate them, making use of their tactile sense. They rely very much on their tactile sense. Diagrams should not have too many details to avoid confusing them.

All these adaptations could not be catered for in the general approach in which voter education was presented. This obviously compromised people with visual impairment. There were serious limitations in the area of voter education for the visually impaired mainly due to assumptions on the part of electoral authorities that they benefited from
the same strategies as the sighted.

Mr. Don, an official of the electoral body had this to say:

“I must admit, there is need for creating something that will be beneficial. The visually impaired have complained that their needs were not being met and wanted something to be done as a matter of urgency, for example on the issue of pamphlets which they could not read or diagrams and pictures which were inaccessible to them. They would hear the message but could not see some important illustrations.”

Mr. Don added that:

“No specialised voter education was given except at the election centre. Our problem from a service provider point of view was that we don’t have the resources to do everything that needed to be done. It is a process and we hope to do our best.”

It was also indicated that from the electoral body’s point of view, that voter education IS a continuous process that takes place in two components.

Mr. Don indicated that:

“There were basically two components to voter education. There was ordinary voter information and education and voter education related to a particular election. The latter referred to aspects such as requirements for registration as a voter, registration centres, polling stations in given constituencies, wards, date of election, nomination court dates and the polling process. Voter education took place throughout an electoral cycle of five years.”

4.6.2 Accessibility of the Electoral Process

While ZEC acknowledged its constitutional mandate to ensure that visually impaired
voters exercised their right to vote, it however indicated that they were limited because of lack of resources. They had however managed to provide for this right through making sure that visually impaired voters were assisted to vote by their assistants in the presence of a witness. According to ZEC, and in view of the challenges they faced, they were fulfilling their mandate. It was also indicated that since visually impaired voters were regarded as part of the general seeing public, they felt that they were doing what they were supposed to do and therefore ensuring that visually impaired voters accessed their voting right as individuals and citizens. Voting centres were also within easy reach for any voter who wished to exercise his right to vote. It was further indicated that where it was felt that use of storey buildings or voting centres would inconvenience the visually impaired, arrangements had been made to use the ground floors. Such decisions had however been left to the discretion of the presiding officer at a particular polling station. Mr. Don, on behalf of The Electoral body had this to say:

“While no special arrangement had been provided, the visually impaired had been taken as part of everyone else and appropriate adjustments had been instituted at polling stations at the discretion of the presiding officer of the station.”

He added that:

“Another issue that presiding officers had taken care of was exempting the visually impaired from joining the long queues of sighted voters.”

Another adjustment made was that:

“Streams would be created at one polling station if it was established that there were too many voters as evidenced by very long queues.

These streams basically entailed creating a separate arrangement with all the
While ZEC had acknowledged its mandate of ensuring accessibility of the electoral process, it had however indicated that it was mainly handicapped by the unavailability of the required resources. Voting centres for example were isolated as one area where they had done well in ensuring that centres were within easy reach of every voter.

4.6.3 Involvement of Visually Impaired individuals as Electoral Officers

The involvement of qualified individuals with visual impairment in the electoral and voting process also came out as an important theme. Visually impaired voters wanted to be part and parcel of the electoral process and this request was presented to ZEC with a view to finding out what had been done to cater for this position. It was revealed that some people with visual impairment had indeed been engaged as polling officers and support staff in a supportive role. There was however no readily available statistics to complement this involvement.

Involvement of visually impaired people in this regard would go some way in indicating that they were indeed regarded as part of the society and confirming that they were not discriminated on grounds of their disability unnecessarily. Asked how visually impaired individuals performed in the roles as polling officers or other support staff, it was indicated that they were not found wanting in this respect. They performed just like anyone else.

Mr. Don indicated that:

“Yes we have had individuals with visual impairment taking part in elections as polling officers or other support staff, but not to the extent we would have wished. We would wish to have more of them doing different tasks depending
on their capacity to do so. We however do not have statistics on how many were able to do this since we do not have a register of people with visual impairment.”

He also added that:

“Even organisations representing the visually impaired do not have registers of people with visual impairment, where they were, what they could do or their specific needs.”

Against this background, there was therefore need for stakeholders in this area to liaise and come up with a realistic position to tackle these and other challenges.

4.6.4 Voter Format

The official from the Electoral body indicated and confirmed that to date, only one voting format had been used and that was ordinary or clear print. This format had been used without taking cognisance of the individual preferences of voters with visual impairment based on needs that were properly assessed. Due to the limitations created by the use of one format, voters with visual impairment were being assisted to vote against their will. This was also being done in violation of a constitutional provision. No other voting format was available for use by people with visual impairment. This was a gross violation of rights that were clearly enshrined in the country’s statutes.

Mr. Don said that;

“It was difficult to cater for every category of visual impairment. On the issue of those who would need to make use of Braille, we would need to find out how many needed this facility based on particular polling stations or wards.”

The issue of the voting format was one that electoral authorities could not afford to
ignore. It also required the coming together of different stakeholders such as academics, other organisations, civic society and the Zimbabwe Electoral Commission if clear inroads were to be registered.

4.7 Focus Group Discussions

4.7.1 Themes Emerging From Objective 1.4.2

Objective: To establish how people with visual impairment had been embraced in the electoral process.

4.7.2 Accessing Voter Information and Awareness

Regarding how voters with visual impairment accessed information pertaining to voter education, many of the focus group participants indicated that they had accessed most of this information through the radio as well as rallies co-ordinated by different political parties. None of the participants alluded to any voter education gatherings organised by the electoral authorities. Many of them were not amused by this development. A few of those who had residual vision also alluded to the fact that they got voter education information through their television sets at home. Participants however pointed out that this information was meant for the sighted people and not properly packaged for use by the visually impaired and this presented a number of challenges.

Participants were further asked to indicate the specific nature of this information which they said covered the following, procedure of voting, location of polling stations, the requirements for one to be able to vote and how to indicate the preferred choice on the ballot paper.
The issue of secrecy in the voting process was also emphasised. Candidates representing various parties provided this information. Political activists of the contesting parties also gave information. Radio and television also played a significant role in executing this role. One participant, Johnson, who was a general hand at an institution of the visually impaired, had this to say:

“We have obtained most of the information through gatherings of political parties. Gatherings by some parties were normally tense and attendance was compulsory.”

David, another male general employee indicated that:

“Some of the visually impaired people are lured to attend the charged gatherings or meetings not because of the information only but also the material things that they got at the end, which could be in the form of caps, t-shirts, torches, groceries and other food items.”

Lucy, a partially sighted school leaver and beggar indicated that:

“Inspite of the tense atmosphere of these meetings, we got valuable information on the voting procedures including how to place your X, where to put it, how to identify your preferred candidate and putting your ballot in the ballot box provided.”

It was clear, therefore, from the participants that most of the voting information came from representatives of political parties. A major concern however was that this information was not provided in the formats that were disability friendly and that one had to be a very good listener when at the meetings.
Another interesting dimension to this issue was that visually impaired people did not attend meetings out of the good will to learn but were motivated by what political parties offered them in the form of material things which included food and other non food items. Visually impaired people also attended meetings against their will. This meant that they were coerced to attend or attended under duress. Party activists were in the habit of threatening them with loss of certain privileges and rights if they did not attend the meetings. Such threats ranged from losing an acquired residential or business stand which would then be allocated to someone else if they did not tore the line. In some cases, these stands might not have been acquired procedurally and the threats could be real in such cases. Food donations could also be withheld and with the current difficult economic conditions, this could be a serious cause for concern if one had to lose out on free food handouts when he or she had a big family that he or she could be struggling to fend for. This was tantamount to bribery of the electorate at its worst and was very unfair to the visually impaired community.

Tecla a street vendor had this to say:

   My family was openly told by some political activists of a particular party that we risked losing our small plot if we continued supporting another party. To worsen matters we did not have any title deeds to that residential property”

4.7.3 Voting Formats

All the participants unanimously indicated that the only voting format availed to voters with visual impairment was ordinary print or clear print. No other format was available. The general consensus was that this shortchanged voters with visual impairment especially the blind and others with profound or severe visual loss.
Farai a male participant who worked in the furniture unit of an institution of the blind said:

“Electoral authorities in this country appear not to have the slightest notion of the voting needs of visually impaired people and had a lot to learn from countries like Namibia or South Africa.”

Shorai, another male participant who was a general hand said:

“The problem was the voting format which was in print, which most of us could not access unless there was assistance. Sometimes depending on the level of education of your assistant, important parts of the information could easily be missed through distortion or limited understanding especially if it was in English.”

Ruvimbo, a female schoolteacher chipped in and indicated:

“Provision of information in clear print is not helpful to most visually impaired voters because most of them could not read it anyway. Even a good number of those with residual vision were unable to read clear print unless individual adjustments had been made for the enlarged print format.”

The main issue was that the voting format was not disability friendly. There was need for other formats such as enlarged print, Braille, electronic voting, drive in polling places, vote assist or use of audio cassettes or tapes to enable voters to make use of what was most convenient to them.

### 4.7.4 Voter Education

Voter education was regarded as a vital starting point for most voters with visual impairment. Participants in focus groups highlighted the fact that electoral authorities appeared not to fully appreciate the essence of voter education for someone who did not see or had low vision due to various reasons such as eye diseases, accidents,
albinism, chemical poisoning or any other complications or conditions.

It was highlighted that voter education ideally needed to start at secondary school level even before the children were eligible to vote because of its cardinal importance in the lives of people with visual impairment. Some schools were singled out as contributing to the lack of participation in voter education by not allowing students who were above eighteen years of age to vote or even take part in voter education. Very strong sentiments were expressed indicating that some schools were circumventing and shortchanging the rights of some students by deliberately taking away their voting right.

Tecla, a vendor and young mother bared her school experiences commented that:

“Some schools, notably boarding schools were in the habit of preventing students who were above 18 from voting using school rules as a scapegoat. When I was in Form 3, I was already 18 and quite good number of students had attained the voting age of 18 making them eligible to vote. School authorities prevented us from not only accessing voter education, but they also made sure that we did not get anywhere near the polling station. At one time, we contemplated going on strike but the threat of expulsion or other forms of punishment weighed heavily against us. Most students were not amused at all.”

Tirivanhu, a teacher, also agreed:

“There was rampant intimidation in schools. There was no free choice in schools due to the intimidation perpetrated by school authorities. I went through similar experiences expressed by the lady who has just spoken.”

In addition, Shacky, a school leaver also indicated that:
“Electoral authorities needed to work very closely with the Ministry of Primary and Secondary Education to deal with the challenge of school authorities who prevented students who qualified to vote from attending voter education meetings as well as not allowing qualifying students to vote.

At my former school which was a boarding school, I also experienced the same fate. Schools should instead make proper arrangements for voter education to cater for all willing students who are above eighteen years of age as well as facilitating the actual voting for such students.”

Ronald, a pastor said:

“Voter education should be an essential opportunity for visually impaired people to prepare for the ultimate voting itself. Voting is a fundamental right that all learners who are above the age of eighteen should be accorded and school teachers should not take it upon themselves to deny learners this right just on the justification that they were doing so in loco parentis.”

Another issue highlighted was that The Zimbabwe Electoral Commission needed to seriously consider reaching out to people with visual impairment at churches. It was felt that there was need to engage church authorities with a view to requesting for time slots where issues to do with voter information for not only the visually impaired could be tackled. This would not only benefit congregants who were visually impaired but other members of the church who might not necessarily be visually impaired. Participants also pointed out that this had to be done with an open mind without any form of intimidation. Political parties were also singled out as being able to take advantage of this facility for as long as they did not use intimidatory tactics as
witnessed in some previous elections.

Farai, who worked as an assistant in the furniture workshop of an institution for the visually impaired was the one who brought up this dimension and commented:

“The Zimbabwe Electoral Commission should consider taking voter education to the various churches in the country where many visually impaired people came to worship with others. This could prove to be more plausible considering that bringing together people with visual impairment for voter education gathering purposes could prove to be a real challenge because they were scattered in different places. Taking advantage of church services could be effective in the long run.”

Farai added that:

“Political parties could also take advantage by bringing pamphlets with voter information or their manifestos, but again, the challenge could be that political parties might not have the capacity to produce these pamphlets in either Braille or enlarged print. Such a development could be of immense benefit to people with visual impairment.”

Participants also called upon electoral authorities to carry out researches pertaining to the electoral process and people with visual impairment so that relevant and critical information is unveiled for the benefit of people with visual impairment in the country.

Another important issue highlighted was that pamphlets dealing with voter education information could be availed in all public libraries and in formats that the visually impaired people could easily access and this referred to Braille and enlarged print or
Tinashe, a lawyer said:

“Voter information could be made available in the form of pamphlets or flyers in public libraries such as municipal libraries, university libraries, school libraries and other public and private libraries. Caution needed to be taken though because these pamphlets had to be in formats or language that people with visual impairment also understood. Doing this makes the information disability friendly so that all sections of society benefit since it is a right for everyone, regardless of whether one section is a minority or not.”

Still on the critical role that information played in conveying important messages to people with visual impairment, there was unanimous agreement or concurrence that both the country’s new Constitution of 2013 and the electoral law together with the subsequent amendments of 2014 urgently needed to be availed in Braille, enlarged print or audio tape or compact disc. This would obviously enable people with visual impairment to be part and parcel of what was going on in the country.

4.8 Individual Interviews

4.8.1 Themes Emerging From Objective 1.4.3

Objective: To determine the barriers that had contributed the non-participation of people with visual impairment in the electoral process.

Table 4.17: Provisions of the Electoral Law
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Item</th>
<th>Frequency</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Not conversant with electoral law/not Read it</td>
<td>39</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Right to vote</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Amendment on use of assistant</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Use of word “may”</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lack of secrecy</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Not sure</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

On their knowledge of provisions of the electoral law the majority of visually impaired voters indicated that while they had heard about the electoral law, they were not conversant with its provisions. A few alluded to the provision of the right to vote. Two informants referred to the amendment on provision for an assistant to assist while another one made reference to his reservations with the use of the word “may” which he said did not have the necessary force at law.

Janet, a school teacher had this to say about the theme on provisions of the electoral law:

“While I did not quite read everything, an outstanding area I remember very well was the information on electoral offences and what exactly constituted electoral offences.” She went on to indicate that “However, I am not very clear on how to go about it in the event that I notice an electoral offence being committed by anyone.”
Nyarai, a street vendor stated that:

“I am aware that there is now provision for two senators to represent the constituency. I am also aware of another provision which was a recent amendment providing for the use of an assistant to help a visually impaired voter to cast his/her vote”.

The implications from this theme were that people with visual impairment were not conversant with the provisions of the electoral law. They may have heard about it, but very little is known about the specific provisions. Some of them knew about their right to vote but were not quite sure how to go about it. The issue of an amendment to do with being assisted to vote was alluded to by only two of the participants indicating that many of the people with visual impairment lacked knowledge about these critical issues.

Table 4.18: Extent to Which Visually Impaired Voters Had Been Empowered

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Item</th>
<th>Frequency</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Empowered as Voters</td>
<td>32</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Participation In Governance issues</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Independent voting</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Parliamentary representation</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Not empowered</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Not sure</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
On the question of to what extent visually impaired voters felt they had been empowered by ZEC, a majority of the participants indicated that they appreciated the fact that at least they had the opportunity to vote although this was against a number of odds. Some of them said that they had not been empowered in any significant way. A few indicated that they had been empowered through taking part in governance issues in their respective communities. A few others felt that the new constitutional provision for representation through two members in the senate had empowered them in terms of decision making at policy and legislative levels.

Shorai, a female school leaver and was unemployed said:

“The fact that people with disabilities now had two senate representatives provided for by law gives us some measure of confidence and empowerment. The two will be our eyes and ears and we know their track record.”

Rumbidzai, a Form 4 graduate who sold various wares at a flea market indicated that:

“It boosts our confidence to be represented in senate by two of our own people who really appreciate our feelings and needs” Fatima, another ‘O’ level graduate but unemployed at the moment said: “Participation in the last harmonised election boosted my self-esteem since it was my first time to vote in a national election. A few of my friends that I talked to felt the same.”

Sarudzai, who worked as a switchboard operator at a school of the blind had this to say:

“By exercising my right to vote, I felt that I was indeed part of the society.”

Josephat, who was not employed and a beggar observed that:

“Participation in national programmes like elections made me feel that I was
a full citizen.”

Tichaona, who was a clerk noted that:

“The visually impaired have been left out of mainstream electoral activities for too long and there had not been any meaningful empowerment.”

Another visually impaired lawyer Dennis indicated that:

“Senate representation by a visually impaired person was a very good starting point.”

Table 4.19: Barriers In The Electoral Process

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Item</th>
<th>Frequency</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Lack of Braille ballot/enlarged print</td>
<td>25</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lack of information</td>
<td>23</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Threat of violence</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Being assisted to vote</td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Limited participation by VI people</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Political exploitation and mileage by politicians</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Regarding barriers in the electoral process, many of the informants indicated the lack of an appropriate voting format. Braille or enlarged print constituted one of the most serious barriers. An almost similar number also indicated that lack of information on voter education issues was a major stumbling block in the electoral process. A few participants mentioned being assisted to vote by sighted guides as a barrier as well since it compromised their secrecy and independence.
Tsitsi, the teacher noted that:

“Involvement of people with visual impairment in electoral issues is limited, there is no maximum participation up to the highest level and this is a real drawback.” Tariro, a street vendor said: “Authorities should refrain from unjustified discrimination of visually impaired voters. Instead, people with visual impairment should be included in the whole process as observers, polling officers, presiding officers and administrators.”

John, a general hand at a school of the Blind commented that:

“Information should be availed in Braille or enlarged print. In addition, the introduction of a Braille ballot is long overdue.”

Josephat, a street beggar stated that:

“One of our major challenges is that politicians use us to gain mileage. The playing field should be leveled.”

Themba, a lecturer also observed that:

“I am concerned that politicians take advantage of vulnerable sighted people whom they instruct to fake visual impairment so that they can be assisted to vote for particular parties and the number of people who vote for them will increase.”

Dennis, a lawyer by profession said that:

“the lack of effective legal guarantees for the visually impaired was a major barrier and serious drawback.”

4.9 Zimbabwe Electoral Commission

4.9.1 Themes Emerging From Objective 1.4.3

Objective: To determine the barriers that had contributed to the non-participation of
4.9.2 Barriers Experienced By ZEC

The Zimbabwe electoral authority also experienced a number of challenges. These were indicated as shown below: lack of expertise, limited financial resources and the lack of comprehensive research services to establish needs of voters with visual impairment.

It was shown that there was lack of expertise on the part of The Zimbabwe Electoral Commission. It was also found out that the Electoral body did not have people qualified in the area of visual impairment in its structures. Professional and technical guidance on specialised equipment, gadgets and assistive devices needed for electoral purposes was also not available. No one was in a position to repair the gadgets or assistive devices used by visually impaired voters. No research work was being initiated into the electoral needs of visually impaired voters.

It was also indicated that there was need to deliberately and effectively channel financial and material resources in the electoral process in order to embrace people with visual impairment.

Mr. Don indicated that:

“ZEC needed to look into the issue of statistics of visually impaired voters. Organisations of the visually impaired did not know these statistics because they did not have registers as well.”

He also indicated that:

“There was need for research into issues to do with the visually impaired. Financial resources were our biggest challenge. The lack of Braille services
It was clear that a number of barriers were hampering the inclusion of people with visual impairment in the electoral process and these ranged from lack of trained personnel and the requisite expertise. Lack of financial resources as well as research work to help determine what needs to be done were also singled out as impediments being experienced by ZEC.

4.10 Focus Group Discussions

4.10.1 Themes Emerging From Objective 1.4.3

Objective: To determine the barriers that had contributed to the non-participation of people with visual impairment in the electoral process.

4.10.2 Empowerment of Voters By ZEC

Asked how they had been empowered by the electoral process in its present form, most of the participants said that not much had really been done except for a few things. Some of the areas that they indicated as having empowered them included the availability of polling or voting centres within reasonable distances especially in urban areas. In rural areas it was quite different as most of the participants from rural areas indicated that distances between voting centres were too spaced considering the mobility challenges experienced by some of them where the terrain was not user friendly. Some said that in the event that their assistant (sighted guide) was unwilling to accompany them, due to other commitments, it was very difficult to exercise their right to vote. Polling stations therefore needed to be easily accessible.
Some of the participants identified the issue of being assisted to vote by their chosen assistants as one of the ways through which they had been empowered. This could have been out of ignorance because this facility was not an initiative of the electoral body, but actually a constitutional amendment. A few others identified the provision of a few copies of the new draft constitution in Braille as a positive move. However, it could not be ascertained whether this was an initiative of the electoral body or because of funding from other stakeholders outside government.

Trivanhu, a schoolteacher had this to say:

“Compared to other neighbouring countries ZEC has not done anything substantial to improve the electoral playing field for visually impaired voters. There is need to establish a special task force to determine our needs as equal citizens of this country.”

Ronald, a pastor indicated that “ZEC is state funded, and government must fund ZEC so that it puts in place specific affirmative action programmes aimed at cushioning the visually impaired voters against numerous challenges that they face with the electoral process in its present form.”

When probed to specify some of these electoral challenges Ronald isolated the following:

“Being assisted to vote is unnecessary in view of technological inroads made in other countries, lack of funding for voter education, failure to expand the voting formats available for people with visual impairment to chose from, failure to ensure secrecy in the voting process and the threat of violence which was counterproductive in a democracy.”

Shaky an unemployed school leaver said that:

“In the area he lived in “Information availed in Braille had not been
produced by ZEC but was done at a local school for the Blind which had the resources to do so."

Victor an assistant administrator with a non-governmental organisation said:

“Real empowerment for visually impaired voters could remain a pipe dream unless we were represented in the Commission itself by other educated people with visual impairment or other specialists and experts who appreciated our needs.”

4.10.3 Political Violence

Regarding political violence, the majority of the participants indicated that violence placed them at serious risk of their safety. Many of them were worried that with the exception of the last elections in July 2013, previous elections compromised their safety to a very large extent. Many of the visually impaired people cited the electoral atmosphere of the 2008 elections in which they indicated that some people with visual impairment were injured in the disturbances. Evelyn, an unemployed single mother said that:

“If political violence breaks out, the risk of running towards the source of the violence was high especially when considering the fact that during disturbances or riots the sighted forgot about the plight of visually impaired people. You will be left on your own as others consider only their own safety as important”.

Some of the participants gave harrowing experiences of how they narrowly escaped injury or death as a result of political violence. Christian, who worked as a temporary teacher shared his experience:

“As I was running away to safety, I fell into a ditch at my rural home. As a result I
suffered a dislocation and had to be rescued by other villagers who heard my calls for help. I won’t forget that encounter because I had to get treatment and physiotherapy at a local hospital for about three months.”

Political violence therefore exposed visually impaired people to numerous forms of risk including serious injury or even death. Another schoolteacher, Tirivanhu noted that:

“It is very bad, we do not know where to run to or who to trust when there is violence.”

4.10.4 Awareness of Legislative Provisions

Awareness of the legislative provisions governing one’s rights and privileges as a citizen was one area that could not be taken for granted, by anyone, let alone for people with visual impairment who had a history of discrimination and disenfranchisement. The history of marginalization for people with visual impairment could be traced back to a very long time ago. Some of the participants acknowledged some of the progressive ideas regarding people with visual impairment in the new constitution and the electoral laws. They however bemoaned the fact that these important documents were not available in either Braille or enlarged print. Information on the rights of visually impaired voters could best reach them if it was in the appropriate format.

Josh, another lawyer observed that:

“If the constitution could be availed in Braille, or enlarged print, I think such a move has the potential to enlighten many people with visual impairment on their rights as enshrined in the constitution. The same applies to the electoral law together with its amendments. Although these laws have their known flaws,
they are better than starting from nowhere. Some of the provisions covered were quite plausible from a legal point of view and only needed to be simplified for anyone with a level of education say of at least form four to understand and appreciate”.

The issue of laws and their provisions or what they were supposed to provide for made the focus group discussions quite stormy sometimes. Participants with a legal background took a very educative and active role in simplifying and enlightening the other participants on what exactly was there for people with visual impairment in the legal provisions.

4.10.5 Barriers In The Electoral Process

Participants in the study cited a number of barriers they encountered in the electoral process. Many of the participants cited the following barriers as hindering the electoral process for voters with visual impairment; lack of voter information in formats that could be accessed by different categories of visual impairment. These included enlarged print, Braille, use of audio cassettes or tapes and information technology. The concern was that at the moment they were forced to use only ordinary print with assistance from another person. Information on voting matters was only available in ordinary print which was not accessible to the visually impaired. Somebody had to read out information to the visually impaired. The voting format itself was also another bone of contention.

Another barrier they identified was that of being assisted to vote by others which they said compromised the ethical consideration of privacy and secrecy. They preferred to vote independently without help from another person, not even their own spouses.
Another barrier cited was not being consulted where issues concerning them were involved.

Participants also expressed concern that not many of them were being considered to take up roles as electoral officials when they were able to perform many of these roles. Another issue brought up was that of aliens. Some of the participants indicated that perhaps the constitution needed to clarify the issue of aliens when it came to voting. This came up as a result of some of the participants having been turned away from voting centres because the law did not allow aliens to vote. Another barrier indicated was that politicians did not have time for people with visual impairment and were only interested in their own political mileage after which they disappeared soon after elections. Participants also expressed reservations at the fact that they were left out in the important processes of elections. They also wanted to take part in elections as electoral officials such as polling officers, presiding officers, observers and others. Participants from Mashonaland West and Harare Provinces were the ones who mostly indicated this development. This was probably because the two provinces could have been outstanding in having taken the challenge to give meaningful roles to people with visual impairment. If the same facility could be spread to other provinces it could go a long way in including the visually impaired in the electoral processes. They wanted this facility to be spread to all the provinces and districts in the country.

Another barrier cited was that the laws of the country did not offer binding guarantees to enable visually impaired voters to be effectively included in the electoral process. Tinashe who is a lawyer noted that:

“There is need for the existing laws to be amended so that they allowed for
secrecy in the voting by the visually impaired and the illiterate. There was also
need for budgetary provisions to ensure that what was provided for by the law
was implemented.”

Percy, another lawyer commented that:

“The challenge with our present laws and policies is that where critical issues
to do with people with visual impairment were involved there is use of words
like “may”, or “depending on whether resources were available.”

There were these conditions which in essence did not really ensure that things were
done because they were a right. Use of words like “may” do not help matters either
because they do not oblige authorities to implement anything. Use of words such as
“shall” is the best from a legal perspective because they oblige authorities to act in
accordance with the requirements of the law.” Use of words like “shall” which were
peremptory and did not leave room for discretion to certain individuals”. Visually
impaired voters therefore implored electoral authorities to do things as they were
supposed to be done and there was no issue of options, alternatives or conditions.

Tecla, an airtime vendor commented that:

“Politicians pester us when they want our vote. Soon after elections they
disappear because they will have made the political mileage they wanted.”

Tryson, who is a teacher stated that: “From experience, the performance of a few of
the visually impaired who were electoral officials in the last election has not been
found wanting. We expect more of this to happen where more people with visual
impairment also take up roles as polling officers, observers or voter education
facilitators.”
4.10.6 Secrecy (Confidentiality) in voting process

On the issue of assisted voting or secrecy in the voting process focus group discussions helped a lot in generating a lot of interesting and vital in-sight into what was really going on and especially when this was said from a perspective of the people or players who were directly involved and affected. Some of the participants who took part in the focus group discussions expressed serious reservations about the sincerity and seriousness of being assisted by their own children. Children were seen as one of the major stumbling blocks, alongside some of the spouses. The major concerns here revolved around the fact that some children were naturally untrustworthy maybe because of limited or lack of maturity were out to take advantage of the vulnerability of their parents, guardians or elders by misrepresenting the preferred choices of the person they were assisting. To support this argument

Johnson, a general hand and parent at an institution of the visually impaired learners had this to say:

“Many of our teenage children are not trustworthy as well.” One of the children I personally know as my neighbour’s child went to the extent of hiding his mother’s identity document to prevent the mother from exercising her right to vote. He did this because he knew that his mother's political affiliation was at variance with his own political affiliation. The mother in question was very angry when she finally found out about this dishonesty on the part of her son but then it was too late when the son's intentions were uncovered.”

The idea of guaranteed secrecy and confidentiality in the voting process also triggered
very opposing views from participants who took part in the focus group discussions. One of these opposing positions was that some of them especially those who were parents strongly felt that the Zimbabwe Electoral Commission should roll out a comprehensive programme to train children of parents with visual impairment on issues to do with the integrity of assisting their parents. This also showed that while some parents were against being assisted by some of their children for the lack of sincerity on the part of their children, some did not see any hidden agenda on the part of their children. Instead they believed that what was needed was thorough training on the part of their children on the voting issues so that they truly and unreservedly appreciate the importance of upholding their parents’ choice in the voting process as a right and not some not so important privilege that they could afford to temper with.

In consolidating this position Victor, an administrative assistant, said that:

“The Zimbabwe Electoral Authority should take it upon itself to come up with a training programme for our children so that they realise the significance of assisting us, their parents in a manner that was about board and refrain from taking advantage of our vulnerability.”

Still on the concerns on assistance rendered to visually impaired voters by either their preferred assistants or electoral officials, a very good suggestion was also brought up. Percy, one of the lawyers, suggested the idea of assisting voters with visual impairment in accordance with their individual and varying needs. It was strongly felt that the one size fits all approach that was currently being exploited by electoral authorities had a number of loop holes that needed to be tightened up for the effective inclusion of people with visual impairment.
The Electoral Authorities were therefore called upon to be more flexible and be open to progressive ideas from the constituency of the visually impaired which inspite of being a minority, was an equally critical and important partner in the electoral process. This was indeed a voice of reason since even the constitution and electoral laws of the nation did not discriminate against the visually impaired as half citizens.

Evelyn, a single mother captured this position by indicating that:

“The Zimbabwe Electoral Authority should seriously consider taking us on board through providing for individuals attention and refrain from the group or wholesale approach which does not benefit many of us. Their general and casual approach has disenfranchised the visually impaired in the electoral and voting process and we have had enough of this.”

A few participants also expressed the view that what was more important was ensuring that those who assisted the visually impaired in the voting process needed to be specially trained people regardless of whether they were spouses, children or any other close relative. They thought that the bottom line was whether the person helping was trained. Quite a significant number were in support of this view point.

Hlapi, a university student indicated that:

“Electoral authorities needed to put in place a training programme specially meant for people who will be responsible for helping voters with visual impairment. This will be a very good idea since it does not look at whether one
was being assisted by relatives or any other person. For me training is more important regardless of who is trained, as long as some cut off point on who is to be trained is established.”

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Item</th>
<th>Frequency</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Violence compromises safety of the VI</td>
<td>41</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Have not experienced violence</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Not sure</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Regarding the impact of political violence on visually impaired voters, the majority of the participants indicated that violence had a negative impact on people with visual impairment. They indicated that violence compromised their safety to a very large extent. A few indicated that they could not make an objective assessment on the impact of political violence since they had not experienced it. Tsitsi, a school teacher told the researcher of her ordeal at a political rally where she was almost physically attacked.

She said:

“I attended a rally organised by a political party. When it was time to do the slogan, I was not aware that there was a time when one is supposed to raise a clenched fist in the air as well as bring down the fist. I just said the words that others were saying innocently. For example, Forward with Chimuti or Gwatakwata, that is the name of a candidate. Unknown to me this did not go down well with some of the political activists who were watching me because I
did not complete the slogan out of ignorance and they singled me out for being a sell out and not being patriotic. I had to tell them that I did not see and did not know what exactly had to be done and that no one had cared to teach me how to do it”.

“At first they did not even believe me and it took the effort of those who knew me to convince the activists. The experience was very embarrassing for me.”

Tsitsi also added that:

“In one of the elections houses of people with visual impairment were burnt during political violence, seriously compromising the safety and security of visually impaired voters.”

An example was given of a visually impaired person who was seriously injured as a result of political violence because this person ran in the direction where the violence was coming from and was caught up in the confusion. Chaparadza, who was a student at one of the universities had this to say:

“Visually impaired people had shunned politics due to their vulnerability in the event of violence erupting. Some have lost property. Things will be very tense during violence.”

Elizabeth, an airtime vendor noted that:

“Political violence compromises our safety as a marginalised group. We have to avoid risky trouble spots. For this reason I applaud the ruling that no singing, sloganeering or political regalia should be allowed within a 100 metre radius of the polling station.”

Thabani, an unemployed youth observed that:
“Political violence puts us at serious risk and this results in us not going to the voting centres.”

Tackson, who is unemployed, commented that:

“Violence of any form makes us insecure and compromises our safety. Some visually impaired voters were badly injured in the 2008 elections”.

4.11 Organisations of People With Visual Impairment

4.11.1 Themes Emerging From Objective 1.4.3

Objective: To determine the barriers that had contributed to the non-participation of people with visual impairment in the electoral process.

4.11.2 Electoral Barriers Encountered

One of the issues that was brought up was the lack of a clearly defined budgetary allocation supported or authorised by the law. In the absence of a budget on the part of electoral authorities the organisations felt that most of the good ideas they had engaged the authorities on risked gathering dust on the shelves. Funding was needed because no serious programmes would take off without adequate funding. The need for a policy framework targeting electoral needs of people with visual impairment and indeed other categories of disability was essential. This policy would be complemented by the relevant laws, such as the electoral laws and the constitution.

Another barrier identified was the absence of a voting format that acknowledged specific voting needs of individuals with visual impairment. It was indicated that the current situation where all visually impaired voters were obliged to use a “one size fits all” voting format regardless of the individual differences, needs and preferences was
very unfortunate, unaccommodative and exclusionary to many people with visual impairment. It was against the spirit of the convention on the Rights of People with Disabilities.

Another bone of contention indicated was the lack of comprehensive legislation itself. The organisations felt that their efforts through advocacy could be effectively strengthened by good laws that spelt out clearly what needed to be done, who was supposed to do what, when it was supposed to be done and how it was supposed to be done.

They also indicated that the issue of what constituted electoral violations and the penalties for violating the electoral provisions needed to be clearly outlined in the legislation. The major concern was that the electoral process for individuals with visual impairment was not backed up by meaningful legislative provisions.

The other issue highlighted as a barrier was the infringement of visually impaired voters’ right to secrecy or confidentiality during the voting process. This was being done through being asked to be assisted by either the sighted guide or some other person they trusted or did not even know. It was demonstrated that many of the visually impaired voters had the capacity to execute the process on their own.

Finally the other outstanding area indicated was that they were excluded through withholding of vital voter information. This was being done through availing information through the ordinary print form only and not through any other form.
Most people with visual impairment were unable to access ordinary print. Even many of those with residual vision were also unable to benefit from ordinary print due to variations in individual needs. Use of ordinary print was therefore seen as a blanket provision that did not accommodate the majority of those with visual impairment. Instead, it only succeeded in short changing them and further excluded them from mainstream governance issues and concerns.

Tomondo, observed that:

“A good electoral Act should recognise challenges faced by visually impaired voters. At present the visually impaired were not recognised.”

Mavis, said that:

“Elections were not only for politicians. The process to include everyone should be ongoing and the visually impaired were an important stakeholder in this process.”

Taka, added that:

“Government needed to do a lot more inorder to come up with mechanisms for the implementation of comprehensive programmes to empower voters with visual impairment.”

The role of civil society also needed to be streamlined to enable a clear way forward for the benefit of all citizens.

4.12 Individual Interviews

4.12.1 THEMES Emerging From Objective 1.4.4

Objective: To recommend strategies to improve participation of visually impaired people in the electoral process.
Table 4.21: How ZEC Could Improve The Voting Process

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Item</th>
<th>Frequency</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Ensure secrecy in voting</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Provision of information</td>
<td>21</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Braille Ballot and Enlarged print</td>
<td>30</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Amendment of current laws</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Representation in electoral Commission</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

On what ZEC could do to improve the voting process, the majority of participants strongly felt that there was urgent need to include a Braille ballot and enlarged print as alternative formats. They indicated that this had to be done as a matter of urgency to enable many people with visual impairment to vote independently. Some participants indicated the provision of information as a key issue. A few indicated that there was need to have some people with visual impairment representing them in the electoral commission. A few others indicated that they wanted the amendment of the current electoral law in order to strengthen provisions for visually impaired people in areas like secrecy in voting, guarantees of protection during violence, provision of alternative voting formats and others. Other participants interviewed raised the need for electoral authorities to provide adequate information as a critical area.

Rumbidzai, an unemployed school leaver stated that:

“Our greatest challenge is that we do not get the relevant information when we want it most.”

Ephraim who was unemployed said:

“Authorities should include visually impaired people who are educated in the
Chiremba, an airtime vendor in one of the towns indicated that:

“I suggest that we should be represented at the highest level and that is in the Zimbabwe Electoral Commission.”

Peter, another airtime vendor said

“The commission should consider use of a Braille template like is done in a number of developed countries.”

On the issue of provision of information the vendor said,

“Pamphlets in Braille should be availed so that information gets to many people with visual impairment.”

Dennis, a lawyer said:

“The electoral law is segregative against the visually impaired and we are advocating for unconditional inclusion into the electoral system. There was therefore urgent need to introduce a Braille ballot and enlarged print as acceptable voting formats”.

Andrew a school teacher said:

“Authorities could also consider setting aside voting centres specially for the visually impaired.

He added that:

“Only specially trained electoral officers should be assigned to these special voting centres.”

Taita, an unemployed youth commented:

“The absence of a Braille ballot was discriminatory against us, and therefore a violation of our human rights.”
There was however no unanimous agreement that the Braille ballot was the best since as alluded to earlier on, some of the participants expressed reservations about this saying that in the event of victimisation by political activists, the use of Braille could expose them since they could be easily isolated as having voted for a particular party which could be either a minority or even majority party.

**Table 4.22: Overall Accessibility of the Electoral Process**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Item</th>
<th>Frequency</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Use of Braille Format and Enlarged Print</td>
<td>20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Security guarantees</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Provision of information</td>
<td>28</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Specialised training for electoral officers</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Electronic voting</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Effective legislation</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Provision of identity documents</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Concerning what could be done to improve the overall electoral process an overwhelming majority of the participants singled out two major areas which they said needed to be attended to and these were the provision of information and the introduction of a Braille Ballot as well as enlarged print.

Tsitsi, a teacher indicated that:

“There was need for the inclusion of more educated individuals with visual impairment to be engaged as voter education officers, polling officers,
observers. This will go some way in reaching more people who are visually impaired since such officials genuinely understand the electoral needs of their peers.”

Elizabeth, an air time vendor said:

“More information should be availed to us through radio for example, which is relatively affordable for many of us.”

A number of participants were emphatic on the need for a Braille ballot.

Scoliwe, a street beggar stated:

“Our greatest need is the provision of information in the formats that we can read and understand as opposed to ordinary print which most of us cannot even read.”

Shelton, a University student said:

“A number of visually impaired people do not have identity documents and this prevents them from voting and something needs to be done to address this.”

He added that:

“Voter education was lacking among many voters with visual impairment to the extent that we only get to know of the critical information at the polling station on the voting day.”

A rather interesting dimension came from Peter, who sells various wares who indicated that: “Voting using the present arrangement appeared the best for me because it had the advantage of making the voter unknown in case there was victimisation. One of the challenges is that if I am the only person who voted using a Braille ballot at a polling station, it will be easier for those with a hidden agenda to identify me and victimise me, because of who I voted for.
We have witnessed this happening in the past and therefore a Braille ballot exposes us to such risks.”

This viewpoint was repeated by a number of participants.

4.13 The Zimbabwe Electoral Commission

4.13.1 Themes Emerging From Objective 1.4.4

Objective: To recommend strategies to improve participation of visually impaired people in the electoral process.

4.13.2 Suggested Solutions

Some solutions were proffered to the challenges confronted by the Electoral body. One of these was that there was need for concerted effort in carrying out research to determine the needs of visually impaired voters in accordance with the electoral process in Zimbabwe. It was highlighted that this could be a good starting point and that all the other issues would follow. Based on research analysis and results a register of all voters with visual impairment could then be set up and their individual needs established. This information would assist the Electoral body in planning for future elections since they would have statistics of the people who needed a particular service. The issue of where these people could be concentrated would have been catered for. Only then can specific individual needs be ascertained and appropriate electoral services provided.

The need to introduce a Braille ballot could be catered for as a result of research as well. The number of people who were Braille literate would need to be known first. A Braille ballot was also singled out to be long overdue since the current system did not provide for difference by making available only one voting format which was ordinary print. Registers for the visually impaired would complement the availability
and effectiveness of this facility. It did not always follow that anyone with a visual impairment needed a Braille ballot. Some visually impaired voters might need enlarged print.

The issue of hiring relevant expertise to be part of the structures of the Electoral body was also singled out as one area that could go some way in addressing the challenges currently bedeviling the inclusion of visually impaired people in the electoral process.

There was also need to spread information on the appropriate forms that would be accessed by the visually impaired community. The electoral authority alluded to this position as well. This requirement was alluded to by all the participants and informants who took part in this study. This confirmed the powerful role of information in empowering people with visual impairment through the electoral process.

Mr. Don had this to say:

“The current arrangement where visually impaired voters only got assistance when casting their vote at the polling station in the presence of a witness needed revisiting so that provision of information is ongoing. Voter education is a continuous process that takes place over a period.”

4.14 Focus Group Discussions

4.14.1 Themes Emerging From Objective 1.4.4

Objective: To recommend strategies to improve participation of visually impaired people in the electoral process.
4.14.2 Addressing Challenges To The Electoral Process

A number of possible solutions were highlighted as having the potential to address a number of challenges identified. One of these solutions which was alluded to by the majority of the participants in the focus group discussions was the need for the introduction of a Braille ballet as well as enlarged print as alternative voting formats for people with visual impairment. These two voting formats topped the list of solutions. Most of the participants were not comfortable with being assisted to vote, not even by their spouses or children. They justified this through a number of reasons including the fact that some spouses were illiterate and may not be able to assist. Some justified this position on the grounds that some spouses and children had limited capacity themselves in terms of voter education or general education to the extent that they may not quite be conversant with what was involved. This compromised their choice or preference to a large extent. Many of them clearly indicated that they were just not at ease with being assisted and said they could vote on their own if appropriate formats were availed. Some said assistance violated their constitutional right to privacy of choice in the voting process and this needed to be addressed.

Another solution proposed was the availability of information in the form that they could easily access. The present situation where voter information is in ordinary print which cannot be read by the visually impaired community was untenable. There was need for pamphlets to be in either enlarged print, or Braille or any other format which was disability friendly. This consideration was long overdue considering strides made by other countries in this respect.

Visually impaired people were also very eager to be consulted on matters that concerned them. At present it appeared they just had issues given to them where they...
did not even have a say on how decisions were arrived at. To compound issues the 
electoral body did not have specialists representing the disability fraternity like is the 
case now in parliament beginning July 2013. Electoral authorities therefore needed to 
attend to issues of adequate representation and consultation from national level 
cascading down to provincial, district and ward level. They also wanted to be given 
roles or posts of responsibility in voter education as well as at the polling stations and 
national and provincial electoral command centres. These responsibilities or roles 
should not be cosmetic inorder to give the picture that all was well when it was not.

The issue of strengthening electoral laws by way of amendments in parliament was 
also suggested as an effective way of effectively dealing with electoral imbalances for 
the visually impaired. Participants who worked in the legal field articulated the role of 
comprehensive policies and legislation. The role of legislation was to provide realistic 
guarantees since voting matters were a rights issue rather than a charity issue.

Representation in senate of two senators who were people with disabilities was also 
acknowledged as a positive move towards the total inclusion of the visually impaired 
person.

A number of the participants who indicated that they had been turned away on voting 
day on the grounds of being alien also wanted the laws of the country to be explicit on 
this issue and that those affected needed to be appraised on their true position. They 
said that at present this issue was shrouded in misunderstanding and misrepresentation 
in terms of information reaching them.
Tirivanhu, a school teacher echoed these sentiments:

“Being assisted to vote lowers my self-esteem. I did well in my education and I have a level of education that enables me to comprehend most of the issues at hand if necessary resources were availed. I do not need anyone's assistance. In any case some of those who assist visually impaired voters were illiterate or have limited capacity in terms of educational attainment.”

Hlapi, a university student had this to say:

“ZEC may not have adequate funds, but the introduction of a Braille ballot in particular is long overdue especially for those of us who are blind.”

One of the legal practitioners, Tinashe, said:

“Most of our concerns about the inadequacies of the electoral process may not mean much if they are not backed up by comprehensive legislative provisions. The amendment that legalised being assisted to vote by an assistant of one’s choice came as a result of advocacy work and lobbying of our organisations and was not an initiative of ZEC and that is what we need.”

Percy, another legal practitioner indicated that:

“The new constitution needed to be aligned with the electoral law so that all loop holes are closed. The law also needs to be explicit on what are electoral offences and what are the penalties for each type of electoral violation. There is a lot we can learn from other countries in this regard.”

4.15 Organisations Of People With Visual Impairment

4.15.1 Themes Emerging From Objective 1.4.4

Objective: To recommend strategies to improve participation of visually impaired people in the electoral process.
4.15.2 Improving the Electoral Process

On the issue of what could be done to improve the electoral process with a view to making it disability friendly a number of suggestions were brought up.

The first suggestion hinged on strengthening the legal framework regarding electoral concerns and people with visual impairment. They indicated that the existing laws were not cushioning visually impaired people against the many challenges that they were grappling with. It was felt that comprehensive laws would go some way in making the electoral process accessible to people with visual impairment. Issues to do with confidentiality in voting for example would be effectively dealt with.

Another proposal was that voter information be availed in forms that the visually impaired would be comfortable with. In previous elections the availability of information was biased towards the sighted at the expense of the visually impaired. Invitations for participation in voter education also needed to be extended to the visually impaired.

The visually impaired also wanted to be involved beginning from the planning stage up to implementation and evaluation of the strengths and limitations of what would have been done. Organisations concurred that nothing should be done for them without their input.

Improving funding levels for programmes and activities aimed at leveling the electoral playing field was also identified as one of the ways through which the present situation could be improved for the benefit of visually impaired voters. Organisations for the visually impaired indicated that they had observed low funding levels as contributing to the exclusion of people with visual impairment in the
electoral process. Funding could best be improved alongside effective legislation if this had to bring about practical benefits.

The role of research in determining the grey areas and mapping the way forward was also proposed as a strategy to improve and strengthen the electoral process for visually impaired voters. The electoral body could initiate relevant research in partnership with other experts in this area. It was felt that this could contribute immensely to the improvement of the electoral body’s internal systems.

The introduction of alternative voting formats was another concern where all the organisations also agreed to as an area that needed to be attended to urgently. Zimbabwe had never used any other voting format for its visually impaired population except ordinary or clear print. There was therefore need to carry out feasibility studies on the applicability and relevance of other voting formats.

Taka, indicated that:

“The electoral body should seriously consider having in its ranks qualified people who may be visually impaired or not. People who are aware of the needs of visually impaired voters could make a difference compared to what is prevailing now.”

Mavis, the other informant suggested the use of the quota system in the electoral body’s structures. She said:

“ZEC could look at the feasibility of a quota system in its work force and this system should favour not only the visually impaired but other categories of
disabilities. Better still affirmative action biased towards engaging qualified people with visual impairment or other disabilities could be considered so that practical ideas are tried out and relevant evaluation done at the end.”

Tomondo added that:

“There was urgent need for a National Disability mainstreaming policy that would address a number of the challenges negatively impacting on the electoral process to date. This policy should be a product of many stakeholders such as people with disabilities, their organisations, academics, the Zimbabwe Electoral Commission, government and other experts for it to be adequately all embracing.”

Improvement of the electoral process could not be left to government or the electoral body alone, but should involve many people for it to be a truly shared responsibility acceptable to many stakeholders. However the electoral body needs to take the lead in co-ordinating this mammoth task directed at the effective empowerment of people with visual impairment in the electoral process.

4.16 Discussion

Discussion of Findings of Objective 1.4.1

Objective: To establish the electoral needs of people with visual impairment in Zimbabwe.

4.16.1 Participation in the electoral process and availability of Information

The study established that there was a glaring lack of information coupled with limited information on the electoral and voting processes. This position came out
clearly from the visually impaired people themselves, organisations representing people with visual impairments, focus group discussions as well as the electoral authority who all concurred on the issue of inadequacy of information.

This could be explained by the fact that visually impaired people and their advocacy groups, being people on the ground and mostly affected by any loopholes were indeed the best to give a realistic picture of how things stood. They were the ones who had been affected most. This was supported by the experiences they highlighted. Some of them had not taken a keen interest in voting because they lacked the information that enabled them to make informed decisions. Some stayed away because they felt that the system deliberately excluded them from taking an active role in electoral issues. This was further supported by the fact that almost half of the participants who took part in face to face interviews had not taken part in any form of voter education programme. A similar scenario applied for participants in focus group discussions.

Another concern that compounded issues could have been that critical voter information was availed in the form of ordinary print, which to all intents and purposes could not be accessed by visually impaired voters, most of whom had either very low vision or were blind. This shortcoming could have given rise to the non availability of voter information to a very large extent.

This finding could also be accounted for by the fact that electoral authorities may not have had specific funding set aside for producing voter information in other disability friendly formats such as Braille, enlarged print or other relevant formats. Their budgets could have been strained by other obligations in which case sidelining issues to do with visually impaired voters could always provide a way out on grounds that
they were a minority. Adjustments for people with visual impairment were normally expensive since they involved importing a lot of the resources required such as Braille paper or specialised machinery and assistive devices. These resources were not locally available in the country, but had to be imported from other countries. One supplier quoted the following prices at the time the research was carried out: one Braille embosser was going for $7 000, a Perkins Braille machine – cost $2 000 and one ream of Braille paper cost close to $1 000. These prices were prohibitive and one could not rule out these costs being used as a scapegoat for not providing for visually impaired voters.

Lack of expertise on what exactly needed to be done could also be a factor in explaining why voter information had been lacking. Electoral authorities appeared not to have qualified people in the area of visual impairment to advise them on what had to be done and how it had to be done and when it had to be done. It would appear relevant consultancy had not been sought either from people who were knowledgeable in the area.

This finding was at variance with the positive strides registered in Quebec, Canada. The role of voter information for the benefit of people with visual impairment was well captured in Quebec.

In one Referendum Report it was indicated that the manual for voters was adapted to alternative media such as Braille, audio-cassette as well as enlarged print and video cassettes. The essence of these measures was to give people with visual impairment
and other disabilities as much information as possible on the details of legislation on electoral issues as well as the methods that were availed to create room for easier access to voting (Referendum report, Quebec, 1992). The finding did not also agree with what was happening in the United Kingdom where the Electoral Commission was obliged to provide information to visually impaired voters through its website called “about my vote” and other appropriate media (EONI 2013. The electoral Commission was also compelled by law to provide campaign material and information in alternative and relevant formats for the benefit of voters with visual impairment without undue delay or extra costs (National Council On Disability 2013).

This finding, however agreed with what was highlighted by the National Association of Societies For The Care Of The Handicapped (2010, which demonstrated the fact that ill-informed community beliefs that people with disabilities were not supposed to vote were common hence the withholding of information was not surprising. The finding also concurred with a request by visually impaired voters in Malawi in which the Electoral Commission petitioned Electoral Authorities to involve people with visual impairment in civic and voter education (Nyasa Times June 28, 2013.).

### 4.16.2 Confidentiality in The Voting Process

The study demonstrated that secrecy in the voting process was highly compromised for voters with visual impairment. This could be because visually impaired voters felt that their independence was not being respected by electoral authorities. While the law specified and upheld the principle of secrecy and independence in the voting process, they were probably questioning why they had to be assisted. The fact that there was assistance effectively ruled out any semblance of secrecy. Assisted voting
was counter-productive and law-makers needed to jealously guard against rubber stamping laws that were not disability friendly. By virtue of not having sight, visually impaired voters might never know whether the person they were supposed to trust indeed cast their ballot in accordance with their choice. They were not in a position to prove this. This rendered the secrecy null and void since it existed only in theory. They never knew how the person they trusted handled their choice. Assistance to vote by electoral officials or a relative or friend was a clear violation of privacy and a breach of the right to vote independently.

An interesting dimension was that other voters with visual impairment had faith in this arrangement of being assisted because they felt that instead, it actually acted as a blessing in disguise. They justified this on the grounds that since the person who assisted them was their trusted confidante, there was no way their choice of candidate could end up a public secret. It was much better than being assisted by a total stranger who they only met on the voting day and could have vested interests in the form of being a representative of a political party or a state official.

This finding does not concur with Zimbabwe Electoral Support Network (2014 which indicated that ensuring that a voter brought a person of his choice promoted some form of independence, although, not completely since even a known person could abuse the trust that he/she had been given. The Zimbabwe Electoral Support Network also indicated that visually impaired voters should be afforded the opportunity to use Braille facilities so that they voted without assistance. Some voters were literally being forced to make use of assisted voting when they were Braille literate. The risk of visually impaired voters being intimidated into choices contrary to what they wanted could not be ruled out. The findings on the issue of confidentiality
did not agree with the provisions of The Help America Vote Act (2002) which indicate that:

“Voting systems shall permit the voter to verify in a private and independent manner the votes selected by the voter on the ballot before the ballot is cast and counted”.

This finding was also in contrast with findings in a study by Gillian, Piner and Michael (2005) which revealed that 65.1% of participants in a study indicated that they preferred to be assisted by a family member more than anyone else. This finding was also contrary to a case that happened in the Uganda parliament where an official of the Electoral Commission indicated that during elections for members of parliament of the Electoral College, visually impaired voters turned down a facility to vote secretly in Braille and opted for the one used by the sighted, arguing that, they did not want their vote to be distinguishable from that of the sighted and that this would make it secret. (The ACE Electoral Knowledge Network 2013). Their request was granted and this shows contradictions and variances of the preferred choice of voting format even among the visually impaired themselves.

This finding agreed with The Malawi Union of The Blind which on June 28, 2013 complained that when it was time to vote, they relied on someone to do the voting which was a challenge and violated their right to choose a person of their choice in secrecy. The finding was also in agreement with an observation by The Zimbabwe Electoral Support Network (2014 which indicated that in the case of previous elections when law enforcement agencies assisted voters, police involvement in voting was seen more as a risk of undue influence, fear and intimidation.
4.16.3 Specialised Assistance during Voting

This study found out that besides the general assistance that every other voter was entitled to, there was no other specialised form of assistance that was targeted at visually impaired voters. This was a critical area of concern considering that some of the sighted guides (assistants) who helped visually impaired people to vote could be illiterate or semi-literate. Some may be literate but not necessarily to a level that enabled them to appreciate and understand the details of what was required in the voting process. In such cases there was strong justification for specialised assistance by electoral officers.

This scenario could have arisen from a number of reasons. One reason could be the lack of expertise and capacity on the part of the electoral body. The electoral body needed to have competent human capital in its structures. These were people with relevant qualifications, expertise and experience in the area of visual impairment.

These could be specialists with knowledge of alternative formats such as Braille, drive in polling places, and vote assist or information technology. In the absence of such specialists effective inclusion of people with visual impairment in the electoral process could remain a pipe dream which would take a very long time to be realised.

Resistance to embracing expertise on the grounds of ignorance could also be a factor on the part of electoral authorities since they might not really appreciate the essence of involving people with visual impairment in such a critical process. Unwarranted and unjustified resistance was unproductive, at the expense of those who were really supposed to benefit from progressive ideas that were genuinely meant to empower minority groups of society. Erroneous beliefs that providing for minority groups was
not a priority and could therefore be shelved until such a time when resources were next available were a key driver in the disenfranchisement of voters with visual impairment in the electoral process.

The absence of comprehensive legislation on electoral issues and voters with visual impairment could also account for this finding. At present, the constitution and the electoral law lack effective provisions for voters with visual impairment. In the case of the new constitution for example, it does not even allude to sensory disabilities under which visual impairment falls. It acknowledges physical and intellectual disabilities. The electoral law had its own flaws as well in that it did not comprehensively deal with all electoral concerns that had to do with people with visual impairment. Unless the country came up with an all embracing legal framework, issues of specialised assistance might not be tackled head on.

If laws clearly articulated issues to do with specialised assistance for visually impaired voters substantial ground could be covered to address a number of other peripheral issues in the electoral process.

Lack of funding to provide for expertise in the area of disability could also be contributing to the absence of specialised assistance. The electoral body’s structures might not have the financial resources to support this area either in the form of hiring qualified personnel or affording consultancy services from relevant organizations or individuals. The authorities might not even have the slightest notion of such a structure where qualified people could be hired as employees to be responsible for research and advisory services on such matters.
This finding confirmed the challenges that took place in the United States of America in the Northern District of California where a number of blind voters had challenges with the audio and tactile features of voting machines during the November 2012 General Elections (Disability Rights Advocates 2013). Sadly though, electoral officers were unable to address the problems experienced by the blind voters. Some of the affected voters had to go to other polling stations, which was very inconveniencing. Against this background, electoral officers therefore need specialised skills to be in a position to assist promptly. In a subsequent law suit one of the complainants, Mr. Richard Rueda who lived in Union City said,

“It was frustrating to find problems with voting machines at my designated poll site as well as an alternative site during the November 2012 General Election. These barriers prevented me from voting independently on election day” (Rueda 2013.)

4.16.4 Safety of Visually Impaired Voters
The study found out that the safety and security of visually impaired voters was highly compromised in the likely event of political disturbances through violence. This position was probably justified based on the history of political violence that the country witnessed especially in the 2008 harmonised elections and other elections in the past. Violence was rife in previous elections unlike the 2013 elections which had very few reports of violence or the threat of violence. The tense political and electoral environment in the past could have given rise to fears of violence. Other elections in the past were characterised by violence perpetrated by opposing political parties to an extent where people were maimed and others could have lost their lives.
The situation of people with visual impairment was probably aggravated by the fact that should they want to run away and take refuge somewhere, this was risky because for those without functional residual vision, the risk of running towards the trouble area was inevitable. This could result in serious injury to the visually impaired themselves as well as damage to their properties.

This could prove to be a major limitation for people with visual impairment. It could be exacerbated or compounded by the lack of guarantees for protection from law enforcement agencies that were not neutral based on previous experience. When violence broke out no one really thought about the safety of another person let alone that of a visually impaired person. This could have been a major source of the concerns that worried individuals with visual impairment. Judging from previous elections, they were probably justified in taking such a position.

This finding could also be accounted for by the fact that during disturbances, it might not be easy to identify a visually impaired person unless he/she had a white cane, a sighted guide or was known to the person who might wanted to help. The risk of a stampede places further risk to the safety and security of a visually impaired person. Stampedes by their very nature could result in injury, additional disability or death. People with visual impairment could have had a point in expressing serious reservations to their safety and security during political violence since some of them were victims or had relatives who were victimised in the past and knew what was involved. In the event of political disturbances erupting there was need for individuals with visual impairment to be evacuated to safe places. This was the practice in countries like the United Kingdom. Such unconditional guarantees were
critical and without them, people with visual impairment remained at risk. Raising concerns about their safety and security was probably a key issue for consideration by law enforcement agencies.

Another dimension could be that people with visual impairment could be exaggerating the extent of the danger to which they were exposed. Lack of vision can contribute to either the lack of appreciation, or limited appreciation of the magnitude of a problem or its exaggeration, depending on whether one has a congenital or acquired visual impairment. The way an individual with acquired visual impairment perceived violence may differ with the way the same violence was perceived by someone who was congenitally blind. Previous experience of violence could also be a critical factor in the way a visually impaired person viewed violence. Previous experience of violence could heighten or even lower the fear of violence and it could also result in a more realistic perception of the dangers of violence.

Absence of previous experience of violence on the other hand could result in underestimating or underplaying the magnitude of the risks involved or expression of a hollow concept or perception of violence. It could also overestimate that risk. There was therefore need to tread carefully in the way society understood violence as explained from the position of someone with either a congenital or acquired visual impairment.

This finding confirmed fears of lack of safety on the part of visually impaired voters highlighted in a NASCOH report (2008 in which it was indicated that in the 2008 general elections, out of the 700 000 potential voters with disabilities 11.75%
indicated that they were afraid of political violence.

This finding also concurred with The Zimbabwe Electoral Support Network (2014 which alluded to the fact that in previous elections members of the police and security forces were often implicated in violence as active participants or taking a passive role towards opposition parties. Political violence was a key issue that needed to be addressed by authorities to enable people with visual impairment to have not only the interest to vote but take the initiative to go to the voting centre and exercise their right.

4.17 DISCUSSION OF FINDINGS OF OBJECTIVE 1.4.2
Objective: To establish how people visual impairment had been embraced in the electoral process

4.17.1 Alternative Voting Formats
The study established that there was only one voting format used for all categories of voters with visual impairment. The need to introduce alternative voting formats was long overdue. There was an erroneous assumption that all visually impaired voters had the same needs and could therefore easily fit into a straitjacket. This was a gross misrepresentation and underestimation of reality on the ground. In reality many visually impaired people could not even access ordinary print. Against this background, ordinary print was found to be non-compliant with the needs of visually impaired voters. This anomaly formed the basis of why voters with visual impairment had to be assisted to vote by their assistants or sighted guides. This was found to be very unhealthy since it infringed on the visually impaired peoples’ right to secrecy.
There was therefore need for the introduction of other voting formats. These included use of Braille, enlarged print, audio cassette or tape, drive in polling places, vote assist and electronic voting. Large print referred to a minimum of 14 point print and could be produced using most word processors. A laser printer was the best for this task.

Justification for this finding could lie in the fact that indeed, the majority of voters with visual impairment were unable to read ordinary print, hence they would have to be assisted even against their wishes. For some this was outright embarrassment. Most of them were not comfortable at all with this arrangement. It highly compromised their independence and autonomy in the voting process. Even those with residual vision, for many of them the remaining vision may not be functional. Independent voting instilled a sense of self-esteem to the visually impaired.

Some of the visually impaired voters had contradicting propositions to this position. They indicated that they were more comfortable with the present arrangement on the grounds that it somehow protected them from possible political victimisation. Their argument was that in the event of victimisation for example, no one would easily identify them because they would have used ordinary print like anyone else and will be covered. If they had used Braille they could easily be exposed because if one person with a visual impairment voted at a given polling station it would be easy to tell that it was the visually impaired person who voted for candidate X or candidate Y. In the event that a contesting candidate lost with a small margin, blame could then be apportioned on the visually impaired voter since secrecy could not be upheld to protect him or her. This fear or apprehension could be justified especially when one looked at it from a position of the political victimisation and violence that
characterised previous elections, such as in 2008 or other previous years. Violence was common then and quite a good number of people fell victim to severe beatings or arson and several properties were destroyed with many people remaining homeless.

The need for alternative formats could also be accounted for on the grounds that visually impaired voters were probably aware of technological advancements in other countries where a number of alternative formats were in use. They might have advocated for similar facilities in this country not aware of some of the challenges that had characterised use of alternative formats in those countries. These challenges included breakdown of equipment and malfunctioning of some of the accessories and gadgets on the election day. A comprehensive needs analysis could need to be carried out before introducing sweeping changes in the name of technological advancements or inclusion of the visually impaired.

Another reason for demanding for alternative formats could be viewed from the fact that visually impaired voters did not really see the introduction of alternative formats as a serious problem that could not be easily implemented. Some of them cited examples of countries they had visited either as official observers or ordinary visitors as leaving examples of how the status quo could be challenged and subsequently improved on through continued advocacy.

This finding did not concur with developments in Canada where according to Leclerc (2012 among the special considerations put in place was the fact that a Braille template was made available that allowed people with visual impairment to vote on their own with the deputy returning officer telling the voter the order in which the candidates appeared on the ballot.
The argument for enlarged print was vital since about 36% of blind people and 75% of partially sighted people read large print although documents might be longer and voluminous (National Council On Disability (NCD)2012). The call for alternative formats was attainable. Use of vote assist allowed a person with visual impairment to cast his vote independently. The voter listened to audio instructions and cast their vote on a numeric keypad (Ibid.).

This finding was also not in agreement with developments in the United Kingdom where all polling stations were obliged by law to provide tactile voting devices and at least one large print display version of the ballot paper. This made it easier to vote without assistance (EONI 2013.).

The findings also had a lot in common with developments in Malawi where the Federation of Disability Organisations indicated that they were going to seek legal redress if the Electoral Commission failed to address tactile voting concerns.

This finding did not also agree with what was developments in India where visually impaired people were able to vote independently with effect from January 2012. Global Accessibility News 2013) As a nation Zimbabwe needed to adopt similar measures for its visually impaired voters. The Zimbabwe Electoral Support Network also alluded to the need to provide for accessible voting formats for the visually impaired voters (ZESN 2014).

This finding agreed with developments in Sierra Leone where according to The
Guardian, (2012) Sierra Leone took a decision to scrape the tactile voting system for the visually impaired voters on grounds of lack of adequate funding as well as inadequate voter education.

4.17.2 Accessibility of Polling Stations and Electoral Officials

The study revealed that, generally polling stations were within reasonable distances apart in urban areas and therefore relatively accessible. However, the situation needed to be revisited in the case of some rural areas. In rural areas it was found out that considering mobility and orientation challenges faced by visually impaired people, polling stations (voting centres) needed to be evenly distributed if they were to serve their purpose.

A major concern in the urban areas was that while the physical or geographical accessibility may not be an issue, realistic accessibility in terms of availability of the required resources still left a lot to be desired. Resources such as enlarged print, or Braille were not availed and this made the polling stations inaccessible.

Accessibility of electoral officers at polling centres was also found out to be heavily dependent on individual personalities. Some officials were very willing to assist while others were unwilling to assist not because they did this deliberately, but they did not know how to assist a visually impaired voter. They also did not have the specialised skills to help and this compromised the extent to which they could help which rendered them largely inaccessible.

The finding that polling stations were within reasonable distances in urban centres could have been arrived at on the basis that generally in urban centres it was not
surprising to find two or three voting centres all at one place. The Electoral Commission called this practice, streaming. This obviously positively impacted on ease of movement to the polling centres. Another explanation could be that even if polling stations were far apart, the transport network in urban areas was such that visually impaired voters could easily get transport to a voting centre of their choice in a given area because travelling by road was relatively easy.

The situation was different compared to rural areas where terrain may be really bad for visually impaired voters to travel easily. They might be faced by constraints such as slippery roads when it rained, a poorly linked road network or rough terrain, having to travel in mountainous or rocky areas and flooded rivers. Flooded rivers could prevent one from accessing the nearest polling station in rural areas. Flooded rivers carried with them the risk of drowning, serious injuries or even death.

All these factors compounded the issue of accessibility of polling centres for voters with visual impairment in rural areas. Sometimes one’s assistant might not be willing to accompany the visually impaired person to the voting centre for various reasons. He/she might be committed with other things or may not be in the mood to accompany a visually impaired person to a polling station or may not be feeling well.

While electoral officers may be physically accessible at a polling station, their relevance heavily depended on whether they had the requisite specialist skills to help meaningfully and whether they were up to date with any changes. The presence of electoral officers could really be meaningless unless they could do the job for which
they were appointed and for which visually impaired voters needed them. They should be in a position to repair specialised equipment if it broke down. Prompt assistance for visually impaired voters needed to be availed before and during the voting and electoral process. The lack of requisite skills had been a handicap as evidenced by some electoral officers who continued to deny visually impaired voters the opportunity to be assisted by someone of their choice and opting for the outdated provision where police officers and some party representatives had to help. This was further aggravated by the fact that this provision of being assistance came as an amendment to the electoral law but some of the electoral officers and law enforcement agencies appeared not to be aware of such a critical development.

Such anomalies made these officers inaccessible in real terms. They needed to be up to date with developments in the electoral and voting process so that they could respond positively to any challenges that might crop up.

This finding agrees with the requirement that before any election a needs analysis of all possible places from where voting could take place needed to be done so that it will be established beyond doubt that the places were accessible for voters like the visually impaired some of whom experienced mobility and orientation challenges to access voting centres (National Council on Disability (2012).

This finding also agreed with the United Nations Charter On Human Rights for People with Disabilities (2008) when it made a passionate call for the governments to ensure that voting procedures, facilities and materials were appropriate and accessible for all voters.
This finding was in contrast with findings in a study by Gillian, Piner and Michael (2005) which established that the majority of participants had indicated that electoral officials’ attitudes at polling stations were a stumbling block that made it difficult for people with visual impairment to vote. The same authors demonstrated that in the same study, a number of people with visual impairment had difficulty getting to polling stations and therefore expressed their reservations at the organisation of the whole electoral system. This finding also contradicted a NASCOH Sensitization Report (2010) which expressed reservations on the lack of easy accessibility of polling stations due to long distances to the polling stations. These concerns and reservations also extended to the shortage of parking space for vehicles and signs which were in either large print or Braille.

4.18 DISCUSSION OF FINDINGS OF OBJECTIVE 1.4.3
Objective: To determine the barriers that had contributed to non-participation of people of visual impairment in the electoral process.

4.18.1 Knowledge of Electoral Laws
The study revealed that amongst individuals with visual impairment, there was very limited or no knowledge at all about provisions of the laws regarding electoral issues. The few who had at least some knowledge about electoral laws had very limited knowledge about the provisions.

This finding could be accounted for through a number of reasons. Firstly this could be because there were no deliberate efforts by the authorities to spread awareness about
the role and importance of legislative provisions pertaining to electoral issues. This found people with visual impairment on the receiving end. It also resulted in those with some basic knowledge even distorting some of the provisions. On the other hand, some confused legal amendments with other adjustments for example the legal amendment of assistance given to usually impaired voters to enable them to vote was viewed by some as merely an adjustment used at the discretion of presiding officers or an initiative of ZEC when it was actually an electoral amendment passed by parliament as a result of lobbying by organisations of people with visual impairment, Another dimension could be that visually impaired voters were also to blame by not taking the initiative to learn more about the provisions of laws that had to do with electoral issues such as the constitution and electoral law. Only the visually impaired legal practitioners appeared conversant with some critical elements of the laws which was understandable because of their professions. The cost of acquiring these laws from government printers could also be prohibitive considering the fact that the country was going through an economic meltdown making life difficult for many families to earn a living. This could be a deterrent to any interest in finding out more about these laws on the part of visually impaired voters.

The literacy rate among people with visual impairment could also be a factor in the limited understanding of laws on the electoral process. Most laws are written using legal jargon. Many people with visual impairment did not go to school or did not attain high levels of education and could not comprehend legal jargon. The evolution of disability demonstrated that erroneous beliefs about disability issues in society perpetuated the view that educating those with visual impairment was a waste of resources. Given an option parents would prefer to send able-bodied children to
school and not those with disabilities whom they believed could not do much in life and relegated them to the status of non-citizens. Because of this there might be need for concerted efforts to simplify legal jargon so that it could be understood by everyone especially in view of the fact that ignorance had no defense.

Another very critical issue relating to this finding was that these laws were mainly available in the form of ordinary print. Regrettably, the majority of people with visual impairment could not read ordinary print. If these laws were provided in either enlarged print or Braille, maybe this would assist in heightening interest to read through the laws and finding out what was there for them. Provision of information in appropriate formats that could be accessed by individuals with visual impairment was a critical issue but unfortunately this issue has not been given the seriousness it deserved by electoral authorities. In some countries, such loopholes provided very fertile ground for suing of the electoral authorities.

Maybe the constituency of people with visual impairment in Zimbabwe could also seriously consider suing government and the Electoral body for shortchanging them in the area of provision of information in appropriate formats that they could also easily access. These included enlarged print, Braille, audio cassette or tape or through other appropriate forms of information technology.

Knowledge about one’s rights enabled you to make informed decisions that included when to sue for infringement of rights, how to do this, and where to do so. This
finding agreed with the concerns raised in one lawsuit in the United States of America. Lack of information or limited information on the electoral process in Zimbabwe disadvantaged the visually impaired in that they would never be in a position to sue electoral authorities because they would not fully appreciate their rights. Knowledge about laws resulted in a lawsuit in the United States District court for the Northern District of California where a class action lawsuit was filed on 25 July 2013 (Electoral Office of Northern Ireland EONI (2013.) Electoral Authorities were sued for discriminating against the visually impaired who were not allowed to vote privately and independently. In America the issue of independent voting was a fundamental human right (ibid).

4.19 DISCUSSION OF FINDINGS OF OBJECTIVE 1.4.4

Objective: To recommend strategies to improve participation of visually impaired people in the electoral process.

4.19.1 A number of strategies to address outstanding concerns were given by participants. Amongst one of the major concerns noted by participants was the fact that people with visual impairment should be recognised by the electoral system or process. People with visual impairment were advocating for recognition just like their sighted peers. For them all other considerations and provisions would follow as they were secondary to recognition. For people with visual impairment recognition should begin with the electoral laws including the constitution.

This finding might have been arrived at on the grounds that a thorough analysis of the prevailing situation showed that right from the first stage which was the availability of
information; people with visual impairment were left out. Voter information and education were presented in ordinary print which the visually impaired could not access by virtue of limited sight or not having the sight at all. They probably read this to be a signal that they were not being taken seriously by the electoral authorities and yet provision of information should be the starting point for any system that was serious about including all its people in the electoral process. In arriving at the position that they were not recognised by the system, they were probably justified.

The absence of a Braille ballot in Zimbabwe could also have compounded matters for people with visual impairment to arrive at a position that they were not recognised as equals in the electoral process. The lack of a Braille ballot appeared to have been used to justify the issue of people with visual impairment having to be assisted by third parties to cast their vote thereby removing any trace of privacy or confidentiality in the voting process.

Lack of recognition could also be accounted for by the erroneous notion that people with visual impairment were not entitled to be part and parcel of the electoral and governance processes of the country. People view them as if they had to depend on the sighted for most if not all of their needs. Society consciously or unconsciously regarded people with visual impairment as having been condemned to perpetual poverty. This probably stemmed from the fact that the concept of a visually impaired person that most people had was that of those who begged in the streets of major towns and cities. This was a very misinformed position. Contrary to such attitudes people with visual impairment had excelled in a number of spheres in their lives. When supported with the requisite skills and education, people with visual
impairment could surpass the able-bodied in managing various issues of their lives.

The finding on the perceived lack of recognition could also be accounted by the fact that there was no disability budget set aside for cushioning people with disabilities against the many challenges that they grappled with on a daily basis. In the absence of a budget targeted at including people with visual impairment in the electoral process not much could be expected to come out.

A lot of noble ideas could be generated, or planned, but for as long as there was no funding to kick start the programmes the ideas would gather dust on the shelves of planners, and would never be implemented. People would only talk about the good ideas in theory.

The lack of recognition of people with visual impairment could also be explained by the absence of comprehensive legislation meant to support the efforts of people with disabilities to gain effective entry into the electoral process. Lack of legislation meant that no one would really be obliged to do anything to help people with visual impairment access the right to vote without any pre-conditions. Legislation could effectively be used to make policy makers and other stakeholders accountable and responsible for implementing government programmes without an option. Good policies and legislation gave administrators power to do what they were supposed to do within set timelines. The situation in Zimbabwe was at variance with such a position and this had led to the stagnation of critical issues meant to ensure development of people with visual impairment through the electoral process.
The finding on lack of recognition of the needs and aspirations of people with visual impairment in the electoral process was at loggerheads with practices elsewhere. In Northern Ireland for example the office of the Chief Electoral Officer provided information on issues to do with registering to vote, types of elections, guidance on candidates as well as other important details (EONI 2013). In addition, the Electoral Commission had a website that contained information that could be downloaded in large print, audio files, digital video discs and other languages (ibid). This was not happening in Zimbabwe.

This finding also differed with what was happening in South Africa where according to Disability World (2002), there was a strong position to have a disability budget to cater for the electoral needs of people with visual impairment.

The same finding was also in agreement with Flicker (2007) who advocated for the promotion of public voter education and information targeting the visually impaired in the outreach programmes in-order to fill in the information gap. The finding also concurred with a report in The Guardian Newspaper of 16 November, 2012, where Sierra Leone had abandoned provision for a tactile ballot paper citing funding challenges. This was unfortunate especially when one considered the strides that had already been made in that country.

4.20 Summary
This chapter focused mainly on data presentation, analysis and interpretation. Themes emerging from the four objectives set before doing the actual study came out through the interviews carried out with representatives of organisations of people with disabilities, an official from the electoral authorities and individuals with visual impair-
ment. Themes emerging from focus group discussions were also considered and explored in greater detail. A number of the themes had a lot in common. There was consensus on a number of issues such as the need for alternative voting formats, the need for information that was availed in formats that the visually impaired could easily access, easy accessibility of polling stations and the electoral officers, the threat of politically motivated violence, the unfairness of assisted voting with its lack of confidentiality and a number of other barriers that needed urgent attention. The next Chapter covers the summary, findings, discussion, conclusions and recommendations of the study as a whole.
5.1 Introduction

This study sought to determine the extent to which people with visual impairment were being included in the electoral process in Zimbabwe. It also sought to establish how people with visual impairment had been embraced in the electoral process in the country. It was also the intention of the study to find out the specific barriers that contributed to the non-participation of people with visual impairment in the electoral process. Finally the study sought to determine strategies that could be used to address any grey areas.

This chapter summarises the main findings of the study; draws certain conclusions and makes pertinent recommendations.

5.2 Summary of Research Findings

This study yielded some important results regarding the electoral process and people with usual impairment. Some of these results were strengths on the part of what had already been done or was on-going. Some of the results were in the form of limitations that had a negative impact on the electoral process in the way it affected people with visual impairment.
A number of grey areas were revealed through this study. One of these was that there was need to redouble efforts in the provision of voter information to people with visual impairment. This would eventually lead to more people with visual impairment participating in the electoral and voting processes. Indications were that at the time the study was carried out, many people with visual impairment were excluded from mainstream governance issues by virtue of not accessing the mode through which information was relayed to them. Authorities, for reasons best known to themselves preferred and continued to provide voter information in the form of ordinary print. Many of the people with visual impairment had either very low vision or were blind making it impossible for them to read this clear print. In the case of those with functional residual vision enlarged print was not availed either. This revealed complete disregard for the inclusion of voters with visual impairment, presumably on the grounds that they were a minority and could always be attended to when resources were next available. Pamphlets, books and newspapers need to be availed in either Braille or enlarged print for the benefit of visually impaired voters. Radio and television programmes also need to be specially packaged to be understood by the visually impaired. This area needs to be attended to by electoral authorities as a matter of urgency. Voter information in the media also needs to be specially tailor made so that it becomes disability friendly to those for whom the message is intended, namely the visually impaired voters.

Another area of concern raised was the lack of guarantees to the safety and security of visually impaired voters. In view of the fact that political disturbances could erupt at any given time in the form of violence, visually impaired voters felt that they were exposed because of the limitations imposed on them by the lack of sight.
In the event of political violence erupting, they felt that they needed protection more than others because their capacity to escape from trouble spots was highly compromised in that they were unable to distinguish between safe and dangerous or risky areas. They wanted law enforcement agencies to protect them through realistic guarantees of safety passages away from the trouble areas.

Another area of concern raised was the lack of guarantees for their safety and security. These guarantees were non-existent and sometimes law enforcement agencies were interested parties in political violence. They took sides with certain parties and thereby compromised their role as custodians of law enforcement in the country. This resulted in the police taking lukewarm action against some perpetrators of violence and being heavy-handed with supporters of opposition parties in particular. Against this background, this aspect was therefore singled out as requiring prompt action.

People with visual impairment also clamoured for realistic guarantees of confidentiality in the voting process. The major complaint was that secrecy in the voting process was at present seriously compromised because someone had to assist them to exercise their right, and yet the law provided for privacy in voting. The existing law contradicted itself in this respect because on the other hand it also upheld assistance to the visually impaired through an amendment to the law. Their argument was that if provided with the necessary resources in the form of alternative voting formats like enlarged print or Braille they could vote independently. The case for assistance was compounded by the fact that some of the close relatives or spouses expected to help could be illiterate or semi-literate themselves. Accuracy in the form of the preferred candidate became highly questionable when it was done by someone.
The chances of the person assisting deliberately tempering with the visually impaired person’s choice could not be ruled out.

The issue of electoral officials with the requisite specialised skills at each polling station was also felt to be another sticking issue. The majority of electoral officials manning polling centres did not have any specialised skills that enabled them to competently help voters with visual impairment. Training in this area was lacking. In the event that specialised machinery or assistive devices malfunctioned or broke down, the need for prompt action by way of repairs or back up material or services was needed there and then. In other countries the right to exercise one’s voting right was a fundamental issue in empowering people with visual impairment and Zimbabwe needed to take a leaf from practices in other countries.

The introduction of alternative voting formats was yet another aspect that was singled out for urgent attention on the part of electoral authorities. The current practice where only one format, that is ordinary print, was considered as a one size fit all was regarded as highly counterproductive by the visually impaired. The format was not disability friendly and left a great deal to be desired. However some of the visually impaired voters felt that they were comfortable with maintaining the status quo on the grounds that it made their choice remain unknown and that this protected them from perceived victimization, since no one really knew who they could have voted for. Visually impaired voters strongly advocated for authorities to do a thorough needs analysis to determine what could be done, how it could be done as well as set timelines on what could be done and when it could be done.
Limited knowledge of existing electoral laws including the new constitution was also highlighted as a major stumbling block to the inclusion and empowerment of people with visual impairment. Electoral authorities did not take the initiative to ensure that relevant provisions of electoral laws were known by individuals with visual impairment. Some positive steps needed to be taken to arrest this glaring anomaly. Electoral authorities needed to reach out to people with visual impairment with information being provided in modes that the visually impaired could also easily access.

Another outstanding issue was that visually impaired people wanted to be involved and take part in electoral and voting issues to do with their welfare from the lowest levels to the highest. This was going to help in ensuring that people with visual impairment were not passive recipients of decisions which they were not privy to in the first place. Electoral authorities needed to take serious note of the famous position by people with disabilities which emphasizes the notion that ‘nothing for us without us’. The visually impaired people themselves should continue to lobby for their rights in the face of limited political will to do what was right for them. They identified this as a major weakness on the part of arms of the state when it came to electoral and voting issues in the country. They indicated their willingness to take part in what went on through involvement as observers, polling officers, presiding officers, and doing other duties of an administrative nature or involvement in the decision making processes and structures of the electoral system. They justified this on the grounds that, the few visually impaired persons who had been part of such duties through various roles had demonstrated that like the sighted, they had the capacity and had not been found wanting in any respect.
The provision for two senators to represent the needs of people with disabilities was acknowledged as a stepping stone to better things to come.

One area that was singled out as being relatively accessible for people with visual impairment was that of distances between voting centres especially in urban areas. However, the situation was not the same compared to the rural areas. In rural areas voting centres were seen as far apart from each other making it difficult for visually impaired voters to access them especially in view of the fact that they experienced mobility and orientation challenges when it came to travelling from one place to the other. Transport services to carry people to and from various places were not easily available. The terrain in rural areas was mainly found to present challenges by way of mountains, rocks, and slippery roads. Road networks in rural areas were also found to be not well linked for the needs of the visually impaired.

Contrary to the situation in rural areas, in urban centres road networks were generally well linked and transport services were readily available to ferry people to different places.

5.3 Conclusions
A number of findings were established as a result of this study. These were:

- People with visual impairment are not being effectively included in the electoral and voting process. This was revealed by the evidence obtained from participants of the study.
• Visually impaired people lack critical voter education information since it is presented in the form of ordinary print which is not accessible to them by virtue of lack of sight or low vision.

• There is no confidentiality for voters with visual impairment in the voting process. A majority of the participants concurred that secrecy and confidentiality were heavily compromised for people with visual impairment due to a number of reasons, chief among them was the issue of assistance to vote by third parties.

• There is no specialised assistance in the voting process for those with visual impairment notwithstanding whether the visual impairment was acquired or congenital.

• There are no alternative voting formats for people with visual impairment. At the time the research was carried out only one voting format was being used regardless of individual needs.

• While polling stations are physically accessible in urban areas, in rural areas a lot of ground still needs to be covered. In urban areas, concerns were raised on the accessibility of resources to be used by visually impaired voters at the polling stations. Rural areas have to work on narrowing distances between polling stations.

• The safety of visually impaired voters is not guaranteed in the event of political violence emanating from any disturbances or confusion. Experiences of people with visual impairment who were victims of politically motivated violence complemented the reality this issue.
• Knowledge about the provisions of electoral laws is very limited on the part of visually impaired voters. Electoral authorities are expected to do more to ensure that beneficiaries of these laws were aware of laws that affected them.

5.4 Recommendations
In view of the findings of this study, the following recommendations are made:

5.4.1 For The Zimbabwe Electoral Commission

- The Electoral Authority needs to put in place clear strategies to ensure that they reach out to voters with visual impairment with voter information that is packaged in formats that are accessible to the visually impaired such as in Braille, enlarged print and appropriate information technology.
- There is also need for a comprehensive needs analysis by the Zimbabwe Electoral Commission to determine and establish all the major and peripheral needs of voters with visual impairment.
- The Zimbabwe Electoral Commission needs to seriously consider embracing the issue of qualified people with or without visual impairment or other disabilities in their structures. This will enable participation of people with visual impairment in areas that concern them. Other specialists who might not necessarily have a disability can also be considered with a view to engaging them and then take advantage of their expertise.
- The Zimbabwe Electoral Commission also needs to carry out more focused research on how best people with visual impairment can be effec-
tively included in the electoral process from grassroots level up to the Commission level.

- The Zimbabwe Electoral Commission also needs to empower voters with visual impairment by introducing alternative voting formats other than ordinary print which they were literally forcing on people with visual impairment to use regardless of individual needs and preferences.

5.4.2 For Legislators

- Legislators need to do their homework before passing laws in parliament and should guard against being used to rubberstamp laws that are not disability friendly.
- Parliament should also consult widely before coming up with legislation pertaining to people with visual impairment and the electoral process.
- Parliament should come up with a legal framework that is targeted at closing all the existing loopholes for the meaningful inclusion of people with visual impairment.

5.4.3 For People With Visual Impairment

- People with visual impairment should redouble their efforts in lobbying and advocating for disability friendly voting formats as well as creating awareness among the general public about their electoral needs.
• People with visual impairment should also engage cabinet ministers, civic society, arms of government and other stakeholders with a view to sensitising them on their electoral and voting needs.

• People with visual impairment should refrain from taking comfort in the self-fulfilling prophecy but continue to stand up for the meaningful upholding of their birth right of voting and meaningful inclusion in the electoral process as a whole.

• Organisations of people with visual impairment should seriously consider suing the electoral authorities for not providing tactile voting formats, enlarged print or other alternative voting formats as well as failure to comply and adhere to provisions in the constitution that were targeted at guaranteeing privacy and confidentiality in the voting process for people with visual impairment.

5.4.4 For The General Public

• The public is urged to take a keen interest in disability issues and strive to learn more about the needs of people with visual impairment so that despite being a minority group, the visually impaired could be included in governance issues in the communities where they live or stay.

5.4.5 For Future Research

• Other scholars are encouraged to pursue further research in the area of people with visual impairment and any other area to do with the electoral process. A number of related concerns, controversies and peripheral issues could be ex-
explored through research using this research as a starting point or stepping stone. One area of study that can be pursued by other scholars can be to determine the appropriateness and relevancy of specific voting formats that people with visual impairment can use to vote. Another area can be the role that can be played by Information Communication Technology in enhancing and facilitating voting by people with visual impairment. Lastly, another area that can be considered is the effectiveness of the Convention on the Rights of People with Disabilities in creating awareness on electoral and voting rights of people with visual impairment.
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APPENDIX A

Zimbabwe Open University
P.O. Box MP 1119
The Education Secretary  
The Reformed Church in Zimbabwe  
Harare  

Dear Sir

RE: REQUEST FOR PERMISSION TO CARRY OUT A RESEARCH STUDY WITH VISUALLY IMPAIRED PEOPLE AT M. HUGO SCHOOL FOR THE BLIND

I am a Doctor of Philosophy candidate studying with the Zimbabwe Open University. I am kindly requesting for your permission to carry out a Focused Group Discussion with your employees who are visually impaired at M. Hugo School For The Blind in Masvingo. The title of my study is “Enhancement of Access And Inclusion of People with Visual Impairment In The Electoral Process In Zimbabwe.” The intention is to elicit information on how people with visual impairments have been included or excluded in the electoral process with a view to making recommendations on improving the situation.

May I thank you in advance for considering my request.

Yours sincerely

................................
Emmanuel Munemo

APPENDIX B

Zimbabwe Open University  
P.O. Box MP 1119
The Zimbabwe Electoral Commission
Harare

Dear Sir

RE: REQUEST FOR PERMISSION TO CARRY OUT A RESEARCH STUDY

I am a Doctor of Philosophy candidate studying with the Zimbabwe Open University. I am kindly requesting for your permission to carry out an interview with a representative of the Commission. The title of my study is “Enhancement of Access And Inclusion of People with Visual Impairment In The Electoral Process In Zimbabwe.” The intention is to elicit information on how people with visual impairments have been included or excluded in the electoral process with a view to making recommendations on improving the situation.

May I thank you in advance for considering my request.

Yours sincerely

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Emmanuel Munemo

APPENDIX C

INTERVIEW SCHEDULE FOR VOTERS WITH VISUAL IMPAIRMENT
Voter information and awareness

1. Have you ever taken part in voter education campaign? Yes ☐ No ☐
   - If Yes what was your role in the campaigns?
     Facilitator ☐
     Peer Educator ☐
     Ordinary participant ☐
     Observer ☐
   - If not what were the reasons?
     ………………………………………………………………………………………………………
     ………………………………………………………………………………………………………
     ………………………………………………………………………………………………………

   - Who invited you to the voter campaigns?
     - ZEC Officials ☐
     - a neighbour ☐
     - a friend ☐
     - a local political leader ☐
     - a church leader ☐

   - Where you able to meet other visually impaired voters at the campaigns?
     Yes ☐ No ☐
   - How did you feel?
     ………………………………………………………………………………………………………
     ………………………………………………………………………………………………………
     ………………………………………………………………………………………………………

2. How has the availability of information on voting issues affected people with visual impairments?
   ………………………………………………………………………………………………………
   ………………………………………………………………………………………………………

Actual Voting

3. Have you ever voted in any national elections in Zimbabwe?
   - What were the reasons?
     ………………………………………………………………………………………………………
     ………………………………………………………………………………………………………

4. How is secrecy guaranteed when voters with visual impairment vote?
   ………………………………………………………………………………………………………
   ………………………………………………………………………………………………………

5. What form of assistance have voters with visual impairment accessed from
6. Who do you trust to assist you in voting for a candidate of your choice?
- The Presiding Officer
- A polling officer
- My sighted guide
- A police Officer

7. Which voting formats have been used to facilitate voting by individuals with visual impairment of Zimbabwe?
Clear print (use of clear type face, nothing fancy)
- Enlarged print (audio tapes and tape recorders)
- Audio cassette (audio tapes and tape recorders)
- Braille (raised dots read by touch)
- Drive in polling places (casting ballot without having to leave your vehicle)
- Vote assist (computer based software providing for voting in private)
- Information technology (computer using speech synthesizers or computer disks for voters with access Braille key boards)

Accessibility of the electoral process

8. How have provisions of the electoral law in Zimbabwe affected voters with visual impairment?

9. How accessible were voting centres to people with visual impairment in the last election?

10. How accessible were electoral officials to people with visual impairment before and after voting?

11. What has been done by the Zimbabwe Electoral Commission (ZEC) to effectively include voters with visual impairment in the electoral process?

12. How have the measures you identified above empowered voters with visual
13. Which individual with a visual impairment has been an electoral official? 
   - What were his or her duties?

14. How can ZEC improve the voting process for visually impaired voters in Zimbabwe?

Barriers

15. How has political violence affected people with visual impairment in the electoral process?

- How were voters with visual impairment provided with guarantees against political violence in the last election?

16. What barriers have you experienced in the electoral process as a voter with visual impairment?

17. How can the electoral process as a whole be made more accessible to people with visual impairments in Zimbabwe?

APPENDIX D

INTERVIEW SCHEDULE FOR ZIMBABWE ELECTORAL COMMISSION OFFICIAL
Voter information and awareness

1. How has ZEC reached voters with visual impairment for purposes of voter education in Zimbabwe?
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2. To what extend has this exercise been successful?
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3. What challenges has ZEC experienced in the area of voter education for voters with visual impairment?
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4. How have these challenges been addressed?
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Accessibility

5. How has ZEC guaranteed the accessibility of the voting rights of individuals with visual impairment in Zimbabwe?
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   ..........................................................................................................................

6. Has ZEC ever had an individual with visual impairment as an electoral official?
   Yes □ No □
   - If Yes what role did this person play?
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     ..........................................................................................................................
   - How effectively did this person(s) perform their role?..........................
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7. Which voting formats were used by voters with visual impairment in the last general election in Zimbabwe?
   - Braille
   - Enlarged print
   - Audio cassette
   - Clear print
   - Drive in polling places
- Vote assist
- Information technology

8. How accessible were voting centres for voters with visual impairment in the last national election in terms of mobility?

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Barriers

9. What barriers have been encountered by ZEC in trying to include voters with visual impairment in the electoral process?
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10. How has ZEC addressed these barriers?
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APPENDIX E
INTERVIEW SCHEDULE FOR OFFICIALS OF ORGANISATIONS OF PEOPLE WITH VISUAL IMPAIRMENT

Voter information and awareness

1. How has ZEC’s voter education campaigns reached voters with visual impairment?
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2. How effective were there campaigns to people with visual impairment?
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   - Does ZEC have a register for visually impaired voters? Yes □ No □
   - Does your organization have a register of V.I.?

3. In what capacity have individuals with visual impairment taken part in voter education programmes.
   - As peer educators □
   - As Observers □
   - As facilitators □
   - As ordinary participants □

4. How has your organization assisted people with visual impairment on voter education issues?
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Actual voting

5. Which voting formats have been availed by ZEC for use by voters with visual impairment?
   - Clear print □
   - Enlarged Print □
   - Audio cassette □
   - Braille □
   - Information technology □
   - Drive in polling places □
   - Vote assist □

6. How user friendly have these voting formats been to voters with visual impairment?
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7. How has secrecy in the voting process been guaranteed for voters with visual impairment?

Accessibility
8. How accessible have voting centres been to voters with visual impairment in terms of mobility?

9. How has your organization articulated the electoral and voting needs of voters with visual impairment to relevant authorities in Zimbabwe?

- Does ZEC have training for personnel who assist voters with visual impairment?
- If Yes do these people have a disability or not?
- Does ZEC have a budget for special voters like the visually impaired?

Barriers
10. What barriers have you encountered in advocating for electoral reforms for the benefit of voters with visual impairment?

11. How best can the electoral process be improved for the benefit of voters with visual impairment?
APPENDIX F

SCHEDULE FOR FOCUS GROUP DISCUSSION

Voter information and awareness

1. How do you access information on voting matters?
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2. What voting information did you access in the last election in Zimbabwe?
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   - Who provided this information?
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3. How did you access electoral officials when you wanted assistance in the last election?
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4. What assistance did you get from electoral officials before and during the election period?
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Actual voting

6. What voting formats were used by voters with visual impairment in the last election in Zimbabwe?
   - Enlarged print
   - Braille
   - Clear print
   - Audio cassette
   - Drive in polling place
   - Vote assist
   - Information technology
7. How was confidentiality guaranteed in the voting process in the last national elections in Zimbabwe?

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Accessibility

7. How accessible were voting centres for voters with visual impairment in the last election in Zimbabwe?

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8. How user friendly were voting formats used by voters with visual impairment in the last election in Zimbabwe?

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9. How has the ZEC empowered voters with visual impairment in Zimbabwe?

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10. Which individual(s) with visual impairment have been electoral officials in elections in Zimbabwe?

11. ………………………………………………………………………

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- What was their role in the elections?

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12. How best can the electoral process be made more inclusive for voters with visual impairment in Zimbabwe?

13. ………………………………………………………………………

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14. To what extent has politically motivated violence affected voters with visual impairment in Zimbabwe?

- How effectively did this person(s) perform their role

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15. Which voting formats were used by voters with visual impairment in the last general election in Zimbabwe?
   - Braille
   - Enlarged print
   - Audio cassette
   - Clear print
   - Drive in polling places
   - Vote assist
   - Information technology

16. How accessible were voting centres for voters with visual impairment in the last national election in terms of mobility?

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Barriers

17. What barriers have been encountered by ZEC in trying to include voters with visual impairment in the electoral process?

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18. How has ZEC addressed these barriers?

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