

NEW ERA, 31 OCTOBER 2014

## Inclusive education for the disabled

By George Sanzila

### KATIMA MULILO

- A two-day inclusive education workshop for people living with disabilities was held in Katima Mulilo under the auspices of the Mainstream Foundation, a charity that cares for children living with disabilities in Zambezi Region.

The workshop provided an opportunity for adoption of approaches meant to make education easily accessible to disabled people.

Speaking on behalf of Zambezi Regional Governor, Lawrence Sampofu, at the opening of the workshop, the Councillor for Katima Mulilo Urban Constituency, Bernard Sibalantani, said government was committed to the welfare of people living with disabilities.

He said doing differently would be tantamount to the past's suppressing rule of apartheid.

"The government has expressed its unwavering commitment to the upliftment and improvement of the conditions of those members of our society who are dis-



*People living with disabilities gathered at the inclusive education workshop where a plan to build a special school was revealed by the education director.*

criminated against on account of their impairments. If we perpetuate these practices, we will not be acting differently from apartheid rulers who discriminated against us because we were black," stated Sampofu.

Sampofu said the National Disability Policy gazetted in 1997 paved the way for inclusion of people with disabilities and their access to all services as the constitution requires.

"The National Policy on Disability paved the way for persons with disabilities to be included at all levels of the Namibian society.

We have an obligation to provide equal education, employment, information and health services among others," stated the Zambezi Governor.

Zambezi Regional Education Director, Austin Samupwa, who also spoke at the meeting brought a sigh of relief for people with disabilities after announcing that the education directorate plans to build a state-of-the-art government special school for disabled learners in the Zambezi Region.

"We will be building a modern special school for the disabled in this town very soon.

The school has already been approved by the Office of the President. We are in the feasibility study phase. It will be built next to Mavuluma Combined School," Samupwa said amidst loud applause.

He however stated the school would accommodate everyone as inclusive education does not categorise or segregate learners based on their physical/mental ability or inability.

"The school is not only for the physically challenged, it will be inclusive. However, we have made provision such as adequate facilities for those with

special needs. Inclusive education means ending segregation or deliberate exclusion of individuals or groups," Samupwa said.

The Ambassador of Finland Anne Saloranta whose speech was read on her behalf by Elisabet Kivimaki, a counsellor in the Finnish Embassy, stressed the importance of the meeting stating it came at an opportune time for parents, policy makers and other stakeholders to find solutions that would address the needs of children with disabilities.

The Embassy of Finland has been supporting the Mainstream Foundation for the past two years.

Over two weeks ago it became evident at one of the meetings called by the Mainstream Foundation that the Zambezi Region does not have a single government special school for disabled learners despite the region having over 4 000 people living with disabilities, according to data from the Namibia Statistics Agency (NSA).

The workshop started on Wednesday and ended on Thursday.