

# Participation of people with disabilities in gastronomy tourism in Zimbabwe: A stakeholders' perspectives

Nangi Alexio<sup>1</sup> Vitalis Basera<sup>2,3</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Department of Tourism, Hospitality and Leisure Sciences, Midlands State University, Gweru, Zimbabwe.

<sup>2</sup> Graduate School of Business, Bindura University of Science Education, Bindura, Zimbabwe.

<sup>3</sup> Department of Tourism, Hospitality and Leisure Sciences, Manicaland State University of Applied Sciences, Mutare, Zimbabwe.

Email: nangia@staff.msu.ac.zw

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## Abstract

Despite the growing global emphasis on inclusive tourism, the integration and participation of people with disabilities (PwDs) in gastronomy tourism remains under-explored in Zimbabwe. This study explores stakeholder perspectives on the level of inclusion of PwDs in gastronomy tourism, with a focus on accessibility, involvement in culinary enterprises and policy implementation. A qualitative research design was employed, involving semi-structured interviews with key stakeholders including government representatives, non-governmental organizations, restaurant operators, and PwDs. Data were analysed thematically. Findings reveal that although Zimbabwe has ratified disability inclusion frameworks, practical implementation in gastronomy tourism remains minimal due to infrastructural barriers, attitudinal biases and limited stakeholder coordination. The study recommends a multisectoral approach involving capacity building, legislative enforcement, and inclusive business models to enhance PwDs' participation in gastronomy tourism.

**Keywords:** Gastronomy tourism, People with disability, Disability inclusion, Stakeholder perspectives, Participation

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## 1. Introduction

Tourism, including gastronomy tourism, has evolved into a multifaceted industry offering economic and social opportunities to diverse populations. However, the participation of PwDs in this sector remains disproportionately low despite international mandates promoting inclusivity (UNWTO, 2021). Gastronomy tourism – which highlights local food culture, traditional culinary practices and indigenous ingredients – presents an opportunity for inclusive economic empowerment. Yet, in Zimbabwe, the integration of PwDs into this niche remains largely unexplored and under-prioritized (Chikuta, 2017). Globally, the United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (UNCRPD) provides a legal foundation for inclusive tourism (UN, 2006). In Zimbabwe, the Disability Persons Act (1992) and the National Disability Policy (2021) seek to promote the social inclusion of PwDs. However, challenges persist in translating policy into practice, especially in sectors like tourism that require multisectoral engagement (Mutenheri & Mudzengi, 2022). Gastronomy tourism in

Zimbabwe is experiencing significant growth, positioning the country as a notable culinary destination in Africa. However, challenges persist, particularly concerning the inclusion of individuals with disabilities in this sector. Zimbabwe has made considerable strides in promoting gastronomy tourism. The nation hosted the inaugural UN Tourism Regional Forum on Gastronomy Tourism for Africa in Victoria Falls in July 2024 (UNWTO 2024) underscoring its commitment to culinary tourism. Additionally, the establishment of the Zimbabwe International Tourism Academy for the Culinary Arts aims to enhance culinary skills across the continent. Initiatives like the First Lady's Cookout Competitions have been instrumental in showcasing traditional Zimbabwean dishes, fostering community pride and promoting inclusivity (Voyages Afriq, 2024). Despite these efforts, studies indicate that culinary tourism in Zimbabwe remains in its infancy, with limited variety and authenticity in indigenous cuisines offered to tourists, (Nyarota et al, 2025).

While Zimbabwe's National Disability Policy (NDP) of 2021 and the ratification of the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (CRPD) of 2006 reflect a commitment to disability rights, implementation gaps remain. Many individuals with disabilities are unaware of available policies due to stigma, discrimination and lack of information. In the tourism sector, accessibility challenges are prevalent. A study by Chikuta, (2015 and Chikanya (2017) on tour guides' experiences with tourists with disabilities revealed that facilities often cater only to physical disabilities, neglecting other forms such as sensory or intellectual impairments. Barriers include inaccessible environments and equipment, and a lack of comprehensive training for tour guides. Although gastronomy tourism initiatives aim to promote inclusivity, specific measures to accommodate individuals with disabilities are limited. Events like the cookout competitions have involved people with disabilities, but broader systemic changes are necessary to ensure full participation and benefit from gastronomy tourism activities. Zimbabwe's efforts in advancing gastronomy tourism are commendable, with initiatives that celebrate cultural heritage and aim for inclusivity. However, to fully realize the potential of this sector, it is imperative to address the challenges faced by individuals with disabilities. This includes implementing comprehensive accessibility measures, enhancing awareness of disability rights policies, and ensuring that all tourism-related activities are inclusive and accommodating to diverse needs. Hence this study seeks to investigate the level of participation of PWDs in gastronomy tourism in Zimbabwe from the perspective of relevant stakeholders.

## **2. Literature Review**

The participation of people with disabilities (PWDs) in gastronomy tourism is an emerging area of research that intersects with broader themes of accessible tourism, inclusive practices, and social sustainability. Zimbabwe, with its rich cultural heritage and diverse culinary traditions, presents a unique context for exploring the involvement of PWDs in gastronomy tourism (Angel of Hope Foundation, 2024). The hosting of the First UN Tourism Regional Forum on Gastronomy Tourism for Africa in Victoria Falls in July 2024 underscored Zimbabwe's commitment to this sector. The forum emphasized the role of gastronomy tourism in promoting cultural heritage, community empowerment and sustainable development. Initiatives such as the First Lady's Cookout Competitions have been instrumental in showcasing Zimbabwean cuisine and promoting inclusivity. These competitions have involved various community groups, including women, youths and people with disabilities, fostering a sense of pride and social cohesion, (Ministry of Tourism and Hospitality Industry, 2025). Furthermore, the proposed establishment of the Zimbabwe International Tourism Academy for the Culinary Arts aims to enhance culinary skills and education, positioning Zimbabwe as a leader in gastronomy tourism in Africa.

### **2.1 Accessible Tourism and Disability Inclusion: Policy and Practice**

Accessible tourism emphasizes the importance of creating environments and experiences that are inclusive and accessible to all individuals, regardless of their physical, sensory, or cognitive abilities (Darcy & Dickson, 2009).

Studies have shown that accessible tourism not only benefits PWDs but also enhances the overall tourist experience (Buhalis & Michopoulou, 2011). In the context of Zimbabwe, where tourism is a significant contributor to the economy, promoting accessible tourism can attract a broader market and foster social inclusion. Zimbabwe has made strides in promoting the rights of persons with disabilities through legislative and policy frameworks. The Disabled Persons Act [Chapter 17:01] and the National Disability Policy (NDP) of 2021 provide a foundation for protecting the rights and promoting the inclusion of persons with disabilities. Additionally, Zimbabwe is a signatory to the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (CRPD), reflecting its commitment to international standards. Despite these frameworks, challenges persist in the practical implementation of disability-inclusive policies. Studies indicate that many individuals with disabilities in Zimbabwe remain unaware of their rights due to limited dissemination of information, societal stigma, and discrimination. Moreover, accessibility barriers in infrastructure, communication, and services continue to hinder the full participation of persons with disabilities in various sectors, including tourism. Organizations such as the Jairos Jiri Association have played a pivotal role in advocating for and supporting persons with disabilities in Zimbabwe. Established in 1950, the association provides training, rehabilitation, and advocacy services, contributing to the empowerment and inclusion of persons with disabilities.

### **2.3 Participation of Persons with Disabilities in Gastronomy Tourism**

The intersection of disability inclusion and gastronomy tourism in Zimbabwe presents both opportunities and challenges. While initiatives like the First Lady's Cookout Competitions have included persons with disabilities, there is a need for more systematic and comprehensive approaches to ensure their full participation in gastronomy tourism.

Accessibility remains a significant barrier. Many tourism facilities and services are not adequately equipped to accommodate the diverse needs of persons with disabilities, (Kashangaki & Mazonde, 2024; Peta, 2024). This

includes physical accessibility, as well as accommodations for sensory and cognitive impairments. Furthermore, there is a lack of training among tourism professionals on how to effectively engage with and support tourists with disabilities (Chikanya, 2021). Economic factors also play a role. Persons with disabilities often face higher levels of unemployment and poverty, limiting their ability to participate in tourism activities, whether as consumers or service providers. Addressing these economic disparities is essential for fostering inclusive participation in gastronomy tourism.

### **2.4 Gastronomy Tourism and Cultural Heritage**

Gastronomy tourism, often referred to as culinary or food tourism, has emerged as a significant segment of the global tourism industry, driven by increasing interest in local cuisines, traditional food practices, and the cultural meanings attached to food consumption (Ellis et al., 2018; UNWTO, 2021). It represents not merely the act of eating while traveling, but an immersive experience where tourists engage with the history, identity, and social fabric of a destination through its food culture (Bessière, 2013; Okumus et al., 2021). As such, gastronomy tourism is deeply intertwined with cultural heritage, serving as both a medium of cultural expression and a tool for heritage preservation. Gastronomy tourism, which focuses on experiencing local food and culinary traditions, is increasingly recognized as a vital component of cultural tourism (Hall & Sharples, 2003). In Zimbabwe, gastronomy tourism can serve as a platform for showcasing local cuisine and cultural heritage, thereby contributing to economic development and community empowerment. However, the involvement of PWDs in this sector remains underexplored.

**Gastronomy as Intangible Cultural Heritage:** UNESCO (2003) classifies traditional culinary practices as part of the intangible cultural heritage (ICH) of communities, encompassing knowledge, skills, rituals, and social practices related to food preparation and consumption. Gastronomy is not merely a material product but a symbolic representation of a community's identity, values, and historical continuity (Richards, 2012). According to Long (2019), local dishes, food preparation techniques, and mealtime rituals provide an entry point for understanding regional traditions, religious practices, and intergenerational knowledge transfer. In this context, gastronomy tourism contributes to cultural sustainability by valorising and transmitting traditional knowledge systems, especially in rural and indigenous communities.

**Cultural Heritage Preservation Through Gastronomy Tourism:** The intersection of gastronomy and cultural heritage has been recognized as a powerful driver of sustainable development and community empowerment. Several studies highlight that engaging local communities in food-related tourism fosters pride in cultural identity and motivates the preservation of endangered culinary practices (Björk & Kauppinen-Räsänen, 2016; Sims, 2009). Gastronomy tourism also offers economic incentives for maintaining traditional foodways, which might otherwise be lost under the pressures of globalization and homogenization (Hall & Gössling, 2016). For example, in parts of Asia, Latin America, and Africa, the revival of indigenous ingredients and recipes has gained traction as a form of resistance against cultural erosion and as a means of community-based tourism development (Timothy & Ron, 2013).

**Authenticity, Representation, and Tourist Expectations:** A central theme in gastronomy tourism scholarship is the negotiation of authenticity. Tourists often seek “authentic” food experiences as a way of connecting with the cultural essence of a place (Mkono et al., 2013). However, authenticity is a contested and socially constructed concept. As Cohen and Avieli (2004) argue, food prepared for tourists is frequently altered to meet foreign tastes, which may dilute the cultural significance of the dish. This raises concerns about cultural commodification and the risk of presenting a sanitized or exoticized version of heritage. Nevertheless, scholars such as Lu and Fine (1995) suggest that such adaptations represent a form of emergent authenticity, reflecting the dynamic and evolving nature of cultural practices in tourism contexts.

**Gastronomy Tourism in Africa: A Developing Discourse:** While gastronomy tourism is well-documented in Europe, Asia, and Latin America, scholarly attention to its development in Africa remains limited (Boesen et al., 2023). In the African context, food is a repository of history and identity, yet it has not been adequately leveraged in tourism strategies. In Zimbabwe, for example, traditional cuisine such as sadza, mopane worms, and indigenous vegetables form part of local heritage, but their promotion in formal tourism circuits is minimal (Chikanya, 2021). Efforts such as national and provincial cook-out competitions have attempted to integrate local dishes into tourism offerings, yet the lack of infrastructure, training, and marketing remains a barrier (Peta, 2024). The African Union's

Agenda 2063 acknowledges culture and gastronomy as integral to African Renaissance, yet implementation at the national level varies significantly.

Current literature underscores the potential of gastronomy tourism as a platform for heritage preservation, cultural exchange, and economic empowerment. However, empirical studies examining the lived experiences of local chefs, home cooks, and indigenous communities remain scarce, especially in the Global South. Moreover, the integration of gastronomy into heritage tourism requires a cross-sectoral approach involving tourism boards, local

governments, cultural institutions, and education providers (UNWTO, 2021). The literature also calls for greater attention to issues of inclusivity, particularly the roles of women, youth, and people with disabilities in gastronomy tourism and heritage preservation.

## **2.5 Stakeholders' Perspectives on Disability Inclusion**

Stakeholders in Zimbabwe's tourism sector, including tourism operators, local communities, and disability advocacy groups, play a crucial role in promoting the participation of PWDs in gastronomy tourism. Research indicates that stakeholders' attitudes and perceptions significantly influence the implementation of inclusive practices (Shaw & Coles, 2004). In Zimbabwe, understanding the perspectives of stakeholders on disability inclusion in gastronomy tourism is essential for developing effective strategies to enhance participation though there are several challenges in achieving it. There is a consensus on the need for increased awareness and training to address attitudinal barriers and improving service delivery for persons with disabilities, (UNDP & UNESCO Zimbabwe, 2024; Vision Ability Zimbabwe, 2023). Additionally, stakeholders emphasize the importance of involving persons with disabilities in the planning and implementation of tourism initiatives to ensure that their needs and perspectives are adequately represented, (UNESCO & UNRPD Zimbabwe, 2024). Collaborative efforts between government agencies, non-governmental organizations, and the private sector are crucial for advancing disability inclusion in gastronomy tourism. This includes investing in accessible infrastructure, developing inclusive policies, and promoting economic opportunities for persons with disabilities within the tourism value chain. This includes investing in accessible infrastructure, developing inclusive policies, and promoting economic opportunities for persons with disabilities within the tourism value chain. These efforts are critical to advancing disability-inclusive tourism, which not only fulfills human rights obligations as outlined in the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (CRPD), but also contributes to sustainable development by enabling full participation in economic and social life (Darcy & Buhalis, 2011; United Nations, 2006). Accessible infrastructure—such as barrier-free transport systems, adapted accommodation, and inclusive communication technologies—enhances mobility, autonomy, and safety for tourists with disabilities (Buhalis & Michopoulou, 2011). Moreover, inclusive policies that are co-designed with persons with disabilities ensure that their diverse needs are not only recognized but also systematically addressed throughout tourism planning and operations (UNWTO, 2021). Integrating persons with disabilities into the tourism value chain—as entrepreneurs, service providers, artisans, or tour guides—can create dignified livelihoods, reduce dependency, and foster inclusive economic growth (Poria, Reichel & Brandt, 2010). These structural investments and policy shifts are vital to transforming tourism from a traditionally exclusionary space into one that is equitable and accessible to all.

## **2.6 Challenges and Opportunities**

PWDs face various challenges in participating in gastronomy tourism, including physical accessibility barriers, lack of awareness, and attitudinal barriers (Darcy, 2010). However, there are also opportunities for innovation and growth, such as the development of accessible culinary experiences and the promotion of inclusive practices among tourism operators (*Okumus et al., 2024; Hayden et al., 2023; Ateş et al., 2024*). While Zimbabwe has demonstrated a commitment to developing its gastronomy tourism sector and promoting disability inclusion, significant work remains to ensure that persons with disabilities can fully participate in and benefit from these initiatives. Addressing accessibility barriers, enhancing awareness and training, and fostering economic empowerment are critical steps toward achieving inclusive gastronomy tourism. Future research should continue to explore the experiences of persons with disabilities in this sector and evaluate the effectiveness of inclusion strategies from the perspectives of various stakeholders.

People with disabilities face a range of challenges in accessing and participating fully in gastronomy tourism, which often remains inadequately equipped to meet their diverse needs. Studies highlight persistent **physical barriers**, such as inaccessible restaurant layouts, kitchens, and dining areas, alongside a lack of adaptive utensils or menus in alternative formats, which significantly hinder inclusive participation (Buhalis & Michopoulou, 2011; Darcy & Buhalis, 2011). Furthermore, **attitudinal barriers** prevail, with tourism staff frequently lacking disability awareness and training to effectively engage and accommodate these tourists, leading to substandard service experiences and social exclusion (Chikanya, 2021; Peta, 2024). The paucity of accessible culinary experiences and information compounds these challenges, restricting the ability of persons with disabilities to enjoy gastronomic offerings on equal footing with other tourists (UNWTO, 2021). Additionally, there is often limited involvement of persons with disabilities in tourism planning and decision-making, resulting in initiatives that do not adequately represent their needs or preferences (UNESCO & UNPRPD Zimbabwe, 2024). This confluence of infrastructural, social, and systemic barriers underscores the ongoing marginalization of persons with disabilities within the gastronomy tourism sector.

Conversely, the field of gastronomy tourism presents significant opportunities for inclusion and innovation that can empower persons with disabilities and enrich the sector as a whole. Investments in **accessible infrastructure**, such as barrier-free dining spaces, alternative sensory experiences, and adaptive technologies, can improve accessibility and enhance autonomy for disabled tourists (Buhalis & Michopoulou, 2011; UNWTO, 2021). Moreover, promoting **inclusive policies** and providing disability awareness training for tourism professionals can dismantle attitudinal barriers, foster respectful engagement, and improve service quality (Darcy & Buhalis, 2011; Chikanya, 2021). Integrating persons with disabilities as entrepreneurs, chefs, or cultural ambassadors within the gastronomy tourism value chain offers opportunities for economic participation and social inclusion, contributing to broader sustainable development goals (Poria, Reichel & Brandt, 2010; UNWTO, 2021). Furthermore, co-creation approaches that involve persons with disabilities in designing accessible culinary experiences not only enhance authenticity but also drive innovation and market differentiation, creating a more diverse and competitive gastronomy tourism landscape (Okumus et al., 2024). Such opportunities illustrate that with targeted efforts, gastronomy tourism can become a platform for disability-inclusive growth, cultural celebration, and social equity.

### 3. Methodology

This study employed a qualitative research methodology, which is suitable for exploratory investigations that aim to understand phenomena from the lived experiences and subjective meanings of participants (Creswell & Poth, 2018). The approach allowed for in-depth exploration of stakeholder perspectives on PwDs participation in gastronomy tourism. This enabled the researcher to delve into the socio-cultural, economic, and institutional dimensions influencing PwDs' integration in gastronomy tourism following van Manen 2014's approach. Purposive sampling was used to select participants who possessed relevant knowledge and experience regarding disability inclusion and gastronomy tourism. The sample included fifty stakeholders comprising ten officials from the Ministry of Tourism and Hospitality Industry and its parastatals, ten representatives from disability advocacy NGOs, ten restaurant operators, and twenty PwDs engaged in tourism activities as gastronomy tourism consumers, entrepreneurs, and employees. Some of the stakeholders were identified and interviewed during gastronomy cook out competitions. Other interviews were done on appointments with the respondents at their work stations.

Semi-structured interviews were the primary data collection tool. These interviews provided flexibility and depth, allowing participants to express their views in detail while enabling the researcher to probe for clarifications, (Kvale & Brinkmann, 2015). Interviews were audio-recorded and transcribed verbatim for analysis using artificial

intelligence on Meta. Thematic analysis was employed to analyse the qualitative data using Braun and Clarke's (2006) six-step framework: familiarization with data, generation of initial codes, searching for themes, reviewing themes, defining and naming themes, and writing up. NVivo software was used to manage and code the data systematically. Informed consent was secured from all participants, who were briefed on the purpose of the study, their right to withdraw, and confidentiality measures were ensured. Pseudonyms were used to protect participants' identities, and data were stored securely for the researchers use only.

#### 4. Results

The results showed participation of people with disabilities in gastronomy tourism in Zimbabwe from stakeholders' perspectives. The stakeholders included **local communities and indigenous groups** (custodians of traditional recipes, culinary knowledge, and food heritage). The local communities are the ones involved in authentic food production, preparation and cultural storytelling. **Tourists and visitor are the other group of stakeholders who happen to be** the consumers seeking authentic, unique, and culturally rich culinary experiences. **Restaurants, chefs, and food vendors** were discovered to be primary providers of gastronomy experiences through menus, cooking demonstrations and food festivals. **Tour operators and travel Agencies as gastronomy tourism stakeholders** design and market gastronomy tours, culinary trails, and food-themed travel package as reviewed from the study. **Hospitality sector stakeholder (Hotels, Lodges, Resorts)** integrates local cuisine into their offerings and create gastronomic events to attract tourists. **Government and tourism authorities** develop policies, provide funding, and promote gastronomy tourism at local, regional, and national levels. **Agricultural producers and food Suppliers** who happen to be farmers, fishers and producers of indigenous ingredients essential for authentic gastronomy. **Cultural and Heritage Organizations** as stakeholders in gastronomy tourism were found to preserve culinary traditions and support food heritage festivals and events. **Academic and Research Institutions, Non-Governmental Organizations (NGOs) and Community-Based Organizations (CBOs)** were found to be advocating for sustainable, inclusive gastronomy tourism and support capacity building through conducting studies on gastronomy tourism. Lastly the other stakeholder in gastronomy tourism reviewed in the study are **media and influencers** that promote destinations and culinary experiences through food writing, blogs, and social media. A number of themes affecting participation of disabled persons in gastronomy tourism were threaded with sub themes for better analysis.

##### 4.1 Infrastructural and Physical Accessibility

Under infrastructural and physical accessibility, the study found out three sub themes which include physical design, transportation and support services as key for analysis.

###### 4.1.1 Physical design

Many respondents cited infrastructural limitations as a significant barrier. An official responsible for registration and grading of tourism facilities indicated that a number of restaurants lack basic facilities for PwDs. All restaurant operators confirmed this with PwDs advocacy groups lobbying for operators to design their facilities with inclusivity. Most gastronomy establishments in Zimbabwe lack wheelchair ramps, accessible restrooms, and assistive signage. This confirms earlier findings by Chikuta, du Plessis, and Saayman (2019), who found that over 70% of tourism facilities in Zimbabwe are inaccessible to people with mobility impairments. Furthermore, a report by the Southern Africa Federation of the Disabled (SAFOD) and the Federation of Organizations of

Disabled People in Zimbabwe (FODPZ, 2021) found that hotels, workplaces, recreational facilities, and banks in Zimbabwe are accessible to less than 30% of individuals with disabilities. This indicates that a significant majority of these facilities are not accommodating to persons with disabilities. For instance, a study by Chikuta (2015) on national parks in South Africa and Zimbabwe revealed that most facilities remain inaccessible to people with both permanent and temporary impairments. The research identified several barriers, including inaccessible transport, restrooms, trails, and accommodation, which hinder the participation of persons with disabilities in tourism activities.

#### **4.1.2 Transportation**

Transportation options that are accessible include adapted vehicles, specialized transfer services and accessible public transportation that enable disabled persons to reach and navigate tourist destinations. All the hospitality operators interviewed confirmed that they do not have special transportation that might be needed by disabled persons to move to their facilities. Registration authorities indicated that they are coming up with registration requirements that award a quota of specialized transportation as a requirement to register as a tour operator. Persons with disabilities noted that they cannot visit certain places due to transport challenges as it is expensive for them to hire specialized transport. This is in line with Chikuta (2015) observations that traditional tourism destinations do not have accessible transportation to disabled persons.

#### **4.1.3 Support services**

Tourism providers investigated revealed that they do not offer support services like accessible information, staff training on disability awareness, and assistance with language and personal care needs. Only two facilities had orders being announced on a louder speaker which assist also those with visual challenges to get to know their orders through audios. Organisation of Disabled People in Zimbabwe indicated that they are working with other stakeholders in designing and coming up with assistive devices for use even in tourism to enable disabled persons to experience gastronomy tourism just like everybody else.

### **4.2 The participation of people with disabilities in gastronomy tourism in Zimbabwe**

The participation of people with disabilities in gastronomy tourism in Zimbabwe is influenced by several key themes including:

#### **4.2.1 Negative Perception of Disability**

Societal attitudes often view people with disabilities as incapable or limited, rather than recognizing their potential and contributions (Shakespeare, T. 2018). This perception can lead to exclusion from opportunities, including gastronomy tourism. According to the Zimbabwe National Disability Expo, a mindset shift is necessary to empower persons with disabilities and recognize their capabilities (**President Mnangagwa, 2025**).

#### **4.2.2 Social Exclusion and Isolation**

People with disabilities often face social exclusion and isolation due to inaccessible environments and lack of accommodations (World Health Organization. 2011). This can limit their ability to participate in gastronomic activities and experience the cultural heritage of Zimbabwe. UNICEF notes that children with disabilities are vulnerable to violence, neglect, and abuse, highlighting the need for inclusive programs (UNICEF, 2022).

#### **4.2.3 Financial inclusion**

Financial inclusion of people with disabilities is a crucial aspect of promoting their participation in gastronomy tourism in Zimbabwe (Vision Ability Zimbabwe. 2024). The findings suggest that people with disabilities in Zimbabwe face significant barriers in accessing financial services, which limits their ability to participate in gastronomic activities. This is consistent with current literature, which highlights the challenges faced by people with disabilities in accessing financial services, including lack of accessibility, high costs, and discriminatory practices (Financial Inclusion for Persons with Disabilities. 2024).

#### **4.2.4 Barriers to Financial Inclusion**

The barriers to financial inclusion faced by people with disabilities in Zimbabwe include physical Inaccessibility: Financial institutions may not have accessible infrastructure, such as ramps or accessible parking, which can limit the ability of people with disabilities to access financial services (Reserve Bank of Zimbabwe. 2022).

#### **4.2.5 Digital Exclusion**

People with disabilities may face challenges in accessing digital financial services due to lack of accessibility features, such as screen readers or voice commands (Alliance for Financial Inclusion. 2024).

#### **4.2.6 Lack of Awareness and Understanding**

Financial institutions may lack awareness and understanding of the diverse needs of people with disabilities, leading to inadequate support and service provision, (Alliance for Financial Inclusion. 2024).

#### **4.2.7 Discrimination and Bias**

People with disabilities may face discrimination and bias in financial institutions, which can limit their access to financial opportunities, (Alliance for Financial Inclusion. 2024).

### **4.3 Strategies for Promoting Financial Inclusion**

To promote financial inclusion of people with disabilities in Zimbabwe, stakeholders can implement the following strategies as proposed by the Reserve Bank of Zimbabwe (2022).

1. **Accessible Financial Infrastructure:** Financial institutions should prioritize accessible infrastructure, including digital platforms and physical branches.
2. **Disability Awareness Training:** Financial institutions should provide training for staff on disability awareness and inclusion.
3. **Tailored Financial Products:** Financial products should be tailored to meet the diverse needs of people with disabilities.
4. **Collaboration and Partnerships:** Stakeholders should collaborate with disability organizations and people with disabilities to develop inclusive financial services.

Financial inclusion is essential for promoting the participation of people with disabilities in gastronomy tourism in Zimbabwe, (Vision Ability Zimbabwe. 2024). By addressing the barriers to financial inclusion and implementing strategies to promote accessibility and inclusivity, stakeholders can create a more equitable and sustainable gastronomy tourism industry. The launch of innovative financial solutions, such as the Mukuru Wallet, demonstrates the potential for technology to bridge the financial inclusion gap for people with disabilities in Zimbabwe, (Mukuru. 2025).

### **4.3 Attitudinal Barriers**

Negative attitudes towards disability can create significant barriers to participation in gastronomy tourism. These attitudes can manifest in various ways, including lack of accessibility and inadequate support services, (Shakespeare & Watson, 2021). The Disabled Persons Act of 1992 emphasizes the importance of accessibility, yet many public spaces in Zimbabwe remain inaccessible, (Zimbabwe Government, 1992).

### **4.4 Impact of Stigma on Travel Experiences**

Stigma and discrimination can significantly impact the travel experiences of people with disabilities. This can lead to feelings of embarrassment, low self-esteem, and exclusion, (Bigby & Knox, 2020). Aribino Nicholas (2024) highlights the lack of collective access for people with disabilities in Zimbabwe, citing inaccessible buildings and transportation as major obstacles.

To promote inclusive gastronomy tourism in Zimbabwe, stakeholders must prioritize accessibility, universal design, and social inclusion. This can involve inclusive infrastructure by developing accessible buildings, transportation, and public spaces that accommodate people with disabilities, (Darcy, Cameron & Pegg, 2017).

### **4.5 Disability Training and accessible communication**

Darcy, Cameron, & Pegg, (2017) posits that stakeholders should provide training for tourism industry staff on disability awareness and inclusive practices and accessible communication to ensure that information is available in accessible formats, such as Braille and sign language. Stakeholder Collaboration and partnerships between government, private sector, and civil society to promote inclusive tourism practices should be fostered. By addressing these themes and promoting inclusive practices, Zimbabwe can create a more accessible and enjoyable gastronomy tourism experience for people with disabilities, (Darcy, Cameron & Pegg, 2017).

## **4.6 Discussion of findings**

### **4.6.1 Policy Implementation**

The findings suggest that policy implementation is a critical factor in promoting the participation of people with disabilities in gastronomy tourism in Zimbabwe. While the country has made significant strides in developing policies and frameworks to promote disability inclusion, such as the Disabled Persons Act of 1992, the implementation of these policies remains a challenge, (Zimbabwe Government. 1992). Research has shown that policy implementation is often hindered by lack of resources, inadequate training, and limited awareness of disability issues among stakeholders, (Groce, Kett, Lang & Trani 2011). To address this challenge, stakeholders must prioritize the development of clear guidelines and protocols for implementing disability-inclusive policies in the tourism sector.

### **4.6.2 Information Gaps**

The study revealed significant information gaps among stakeholders regarding disability inclusion in gastronomy tourism. Many stakeholders lacked awareness of the needs and experiences of people with disabilities, which limited their ability to develop inclusive products and services, (Darcy, Cameron & Pegg, 2017). Research has highlighted the importance of providing accessible information and promoting awareness of disability issues among tourism stakeholders, (Darcy, Cameron & Pegg, 2017). To address this challenge, stakeholders must prioritize the development of accessible information and training programs that promote disability awareness and inclusion.

#### **4.6.3 Data Collection and Research**

The findings highlighted the need for more research and data collection on disability inclusion in gastronomy tourism in Zimbabwe. Currently, there is a lack of data on the experiences and needs of people with disabilities in the tourism sector, which limits the development of effective strategies to promote inclusion. Research has shown that data collection and research are critical components of promoting disability inclusion in tourism, as they provide valuable insights into the needs and experiences of people with disabilities. To address this challenge, stakeholders must prioritize the collection and analysis of data on disability inclusion in gastronomy tourism.

#### **4.6.4 Collaboration and Partnerships**

The study emphasized the importance of collaboration and partnerships in promoting disability inclusion in gastronomy tourism. Stakeholders must work together to develop inclusive products and services, share best practices, and promote awareness of disability issues. Research has highlighted the benefits of collaboration and partnerships in promoting disability inclusion in tourism, including the development of more inclusive products and services and the promotion of disability awareness among stakeholders. To address this challenge, stakeholders must prioritize the development of partnerships with organizations that specialize in disability inclusion and accessibility.

By addressing these challenges and promoting disability inclusion, Zimbabwe's gastronomy tourism sector can benefit from the contributions of all individuals, regardless of ability. Stakeholders must prioritize the development of inclusive policies, accessible information, and training programs, as well as collaboration and partnerships, to promote the participation of people with disabilities in gastronomy tourism.

#### **4.6.5 Accessible Food Preparation**

Accessible food preparation is crucial in gastronomy tourism, particularly for people with disabilities, (**KIM, GASSIOT-MELIÀN & PRATS 2025**). This involves providing food options that cater to various dietary requirements and preferences. To achieve this, gastronomy tourism stakeholders in Zimbabwe should prioritize training staff on disability awareness and accessible food preparation practices. Research has shown that culturally sensitive food preparation can enhance the dining experience for people from diverse backgrounds. Similarly, adapting food preparation to meet the needs of people with disabilities can promote inclusivity in gastronomy tourism (**Cipriano-Crespo, Rodríguez-Hernández, & Cantero-Garlito 2020**).

#### **4.6.6 Dietary Needs**

Understanding and catering to the dietary needs of people with disabilities is essential in gastronomy tourism, (Pompurová, et al.2025). This includes providing options for people with specific dietary requirements, such as halal or kosher food. Gastronomy tourism stakeholders in Zimbabwe should develop clear policies for accommodating diverse dietary needs and provide training for staff on disability awareness and dietary requirements. By doing so, they can create a welcoming environment for people with disabilities and promote inclusivity in gastronomy tourism.

#### **4.6.7 Cultural Sensitivity**

Cultural sensitivity is vital in gastronomy tourism, particularly when catering to people with disabilities from diverse cultural backgrounds (Hursts, et al., 2021). Gastronomy tourism stakeholders in Zimbabwe should prioritize cultural sensitivity training for staff, focusing on understanding diverse cultural norms and values. Research has shown that cultural sensitivity can enhance the dining experience and promote adherence to dietary recommendations. By being culturally sensitive, gastronomy tourism stakeholders can create a welcoming environment for people with disabilities from diverse backgrounds (Viken, Höckert, & Grimwood 2021).

#### **4.6.8 Business Startup Support**

Business startup support is crucial for promoting inclusivity in gastronomy tourism in Zimbabwe, (Ncube, M. 2025). Stakeholders should prioritize providing support for businesses that cater to people with disabilities, including training and resources on disability awareness and accessible tourism practices. Research has shown that cultural sensitivity training can benefit startups in diverse cultural contexts. By providing business startup support, gastronomy tourism stakeholders can promote inclusivity and create opportunities for people with disabilities (United Nations World Tourism Organization, & Basque Culinary Center. 2025).

#### **4.6.9 Tourism Operations**

Tourism operations play a significant role in promoting inclusivity in gastronomy tourism in Zimbabwe, (Rwodzi, 2024). Stakeholders should prioritize accessible tourism practices, including providing accessible infrastructure and services for people with disabilities. By doing so, they can create a welcoming environment for people with disabilities and promote inclusivity in gastronomy tourism.

#### **4.6.10 Disability Organisations**

Disability organisations play a crucial role in promoting inclusivity in gastronomy tourism in Zimbabwe, (Tigere, D. 2024). Stakeholders should prioritize collaborating with disability organisations to gain insights into the needs and experiences of people with disabilities. By working together, gastronomy tourism stakeholders can create inclusive and accessible tourism experiences that cater to the needs of people with disabilities.

#### **4.6.11 Policy Makers**

Policy makers have a significant role in promoting inclusivity in gastronomy tourism in Zimbabwe, (Rwodzi, B. 2025). Stakeholders should prioritize advocating for policies that promote disability inclusion and accessibility in tourism. By doing so, they can create a framework for inclusive gastronomy tourism practices that cater to the needs of people with disabilities.

#### **4.6.12 Disabled People**

Disabled people are critical stakeholders in promoting inclusivity in gastronomy tourism in Zimbabwe, (Zimbabwe Tourism Authority, 2025). Stakeholders should prioritize involving disabled people in the development of inclusive tourism experiences and services. By doing so, they can ensure that gastronomy tourism experiences are accessible and welcoming for people with disabilities.

On being asked how the stakeholders were working together to ensure participation of PwDs in gastronomy tourism, they did not relate their strategies to link. Some did not even appreciate tenants of legal frameworks tourism (UN, 2006), in Zimbabwe, the Disability Persons Act (1992) and the National Disability Policy (2021) Participants emphasized the need for better coordination among government ministries, local councils, NGOs, and tourism operators. Fragmented efforts were seen as a hindrance to sustainable inclusion strategies.

## 5. Conclusion

The study reveals that while policy frameworks for the inclusion of PWDs in tourism exist in Zimbabwe, their practical implementation in the gastronomy sector is limited. Physical infrastructure, social attitudes, policy enforcement gaps, and poor stakeholder coordination all contribute to the marginalization of PWDs in this growing niche. **Persons with Disabilities and Advocacy Groups**, agree that inclusive gastronomy tourism has the potential to empower PWDs. Zimbabwe's culinary tourism landscape, but targeted and coordinated efforts are necessary. The study was purely qualitative and this poses some limitations which arises the need for a quantitative study with bigger sample and use of statistical analysis to enable broader acceptance of findings.

The government and stakeholders at all levels should strengthen the implementation and monitoring of the National Disability Policy across all tourism sub-sectors, including gastronomy. Tourism operators should be incentivized for adopting universal design standards to improve physical accessibility in gastronomy venues. In addition, Government and all tourism and hospitality stakeholders should provide targeted training and funding to PWDs interested in culinary entrepreneurship, in partnership with tourism and vocational training institutions. Nationwide awareness campaigns and advocacy to shift societal attitudes and promoting inclusive practices in tourism and hospitality activities should be conducted. Furthermore, inter-agency task forces involving government, NGOs, private sector, and DPOs (Disabled Persons' Organizations) collaborations to coordinate disability-inclusive tourism development should be established.

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