

## THE BARRIERS TO PROMOTION EXPERIENCED BY PERSONS WITH DISABILITIES IN SOUTH AFRICA

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*Abstract: This paper aims to identify barriers to promotion experienced by persons with disabilities at the selected Limpopo Provincial Departments in South Africa. Furthermore, the paper investigates how persons with disabilities overcome promotional barriers. The study is exploratory and adopts a qualitative approach. It focuses on two provincial departments of the Limpopo Province of South Africa. The departments are the Department of Social Development (DSD) and the Department of Agriculture and Rural Development (DARD). The total population of the study is 189 and comprises 25 (18 from DSD and 7 from DARD) persons with disabilities and 164 (22 from DSD and 142 from DARD) human resource officials. Eighteen (18) respondents were purposively sampled, nine persons with different disabilities and nine human resource officials. Semi-structured interviews were conducted using an interview guide to allow respondents to disclose their thoughts and feelings about promotional experiences. Some interviews were conducted face-to-face and others virtually due to time and financial constraints. Data was collected using secondary information such as government policies, reports, prescripts and publications. Thematic analysis was used and themes were induced from the interview data. Data was presented in the form of tables and percentages. The study was limited to persons with disabilities and HRM officials. The findings show that the majority of persons with disabilities applied for promotion and got promoted. However, they are still in the same positions they got promoted to in previous years and mentioned several barriers to their promotion. The findings revealed several barriers to promotion such as a lack of promotional posts and opportunities, institutional barriers and a lack of assistive devices. The study recommends that a capacity development programme be introduced to persons with disabilities in provincial departments.*

*Keywords: promotion experiences, promotional barriers, persons with disabilities, government departments.*

### **Introduction**

Persons with disabilities are faced with barriers that prevent them from advancing in their careers in government departments in both developed and developing countries. This is supported by a study conducted in the selected government departments in Zambia by Simatimbe, Moonga, Hambulo, Moonga, and Mbozi (2019) which revealed that persons with disabilities were underrepresented, and promotions were not easy in the workplace. Previous researchers noted that persons with disabilities represent the largest minority group facing discrimination in the labour market globally (Khan, Korac-Kakabadse, Skouloudis, Dimopoulos, 2019; Kwan, 2020; Tabares, 2023; and Mzembe & Filimonau, 2024). Although several international laws have been introduced to make changes to the employment of persons with disabilities, including the United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (UNCRPD) which recognises the right for persons with disabilities to perform duties, on an equal cause with others; persons with disabilities still

do not experience equal access to employment opportunities compared to persons without disabilities (Wilson & Shishiwa, 2023). The South African government has developed several policies and frameworks to address the barriers that prevent people with disabilities from fully participating in society since 1994 (Tinta and Kolanisi, 2023). These include the new Constitution of the Republic of South Africa (1996), the Skills Development Act No. 97 of 1998, the Employment Equity Act No. 55 of 1998, the Labour Relations Act No. 55 of 1996, the White Paper on an Integrated National Disability Strategy, Code of Good Practice: Key Aspects on the Employment of People with Disabilities (2002), the Technical Assistance Guidelines on the Employment of Persons with Disabilities, 2005 to name a few. These were developed to enable the successful inclusion of people with disabilities into mainstream society and the workplace.

There is a lack of information on the barriers to promotions since most previous researchers focused on barriers to the employability of persons with disabilities in general. Persons with disabilities constitute about 15% of the world population (United Nations 2018). South Africa has a population of 57.73 million of which 2.9 million (7.5%) are recorded as living with a disability and experience difficulties in functioning and participating in economic activities (Stats SA, 2014). The statistics of South Africa show that persons with disabilities are the minority group that have poorer health, lower educational achievements, fewer economic opportunities, and higher rates of poverty than persons without disabilities. Molefe (2022) further argued that the Limpopo Provincial government has been criticised for neglecting its commitment to employ 2% of persons with disabilities in each of the province's departments, and only a few met the target. Thus, persons with disabilities continue to be affected by the failure of government departments in terms of attending to their issues, especially when it comes to the provision of assistive devices and proper facilities in the working environment. The paper aims to identify barriers to promotion experienced by persons with disabilities at the selected government departments in South Africa and how the barriers are overcome. The findings will be useful to the government, officials of the departments including other stakeholders that focus on improving employment opportunities and reviewing their policies concerning persons with disabilities in having confidence in applying for promotions. The human resource management practices will improve regarding the employment, integration and retention of persons with disabilities which can result in increased promotional opportunities.

## **Literature Review**

The literature review focuses on international policies, South African policies, other government prescripts and empirical literature on the promotional barriers of persons with disabilities.

### *International Policies and Persons with Disabilities*

The International Labour Organisation (ILO) Convention 159 defines a person with a disability as an individual whose prospects of securing and retaining suitable employment are substantially reduced as a result of physical or mental impairment (ILO, 2001). The Code of Practice on Disability in the Workplace introduced in 2002 aims to assist governments and employers to play an essential role in creating a supportive legislative and social policy framework and providing incentives to promote employment opportunities for persons with disabilities. The United Nations Convention on the Rights

of Persons with Disabilities (UNCRPD) introduced in 2008 aims to encourage, protect, and support the equal and full satisfaction of all human rights and fundamental freedoms by all persons with disabilities and to encourage respect for their fundamental dignity (United Nations, 2006). A few articles relate to this paper such as Article 5 on equality and non-discrimination, Article 9 on accessibility, and Article 27 on work and employment. They are all significant when it comes to promoting employment opportunities and career advancement for persons with disabilities, including reasonable accommodation. Although there is an Africa Plan of Action for Managing Disability in the Workplace, Africa is lagging and must face her own challenges. Africa has been facing political wars, illiteracy, human rights violations, poverty, corruption and pandemics. However, countries such as Kenya, Malawi, Ghana, and Nigeria have promulgated disability laws including South Africa.

#### *South African Policies and Procedures and Persons with Disabilities*

This section below focuses on the South African prescripts promulgated to promote the inclusion, equal treatment and participation of persons with disabilities in the workplace.

*The Constitution of the Republic of South Africa of 1996*

The Constitution of the Republic of South Africa (1996) Chapter 2(9)(1) to (9)(5) refers to a clause on equality and the right to protection against unfair discrimination on various grounds including disability. Unfortunately, it can be argued that discrimination in South Africa, even after 30 years of the first non-racial democratic election, is still prevalent.

*The White Paper on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities, 2015*

The White Paper on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (2015) aims to guide employers in implementing interventions that promote and support the rights of persons with disabilities and removing obstacles that prevent persons with disabilities from advancing in their careers (White Paper, 2015).

#### *The Employment Equity Act, No. 55 of 1998*

The Employment Equity Act No. 55 of 1998 (as amended) (EEA) aims to achieve equality in the workplace and the equitable representation of disadvantaged groups in all occupational categories and levels in the workforce (EEA, 1998). Section 6 states the grounds for which people should not be discriminated against including disability. Thus, government departments should take serious steps in order to support persons with disabilities when it comes to removing the barriers to career advancement. The EEA provides for affirmative action, the development of the Employment Equity Plan (EEP), and progress reports on its implementation and monitoring. Thomas and Robertshaw (1999) argue that the progress to achieving employment equity is a holistic one which, together with target setting and related affirmative action strategies, requires leadership, an organisational diagnostic to understand barriers to employment equity, a high degree of employee involvement, targeted interventions, the review of HR policies and practices and ongoing monitoring and evaluation.

#### *The Skills Development Act, No. 97 of 1998*

The Skills Development Act, No. 97 of 1998 (as amended) aims to develop and improve the skills of the South African workforce by providing opportunities for learnership, internships and other training programmes. Section 21(1)(e) states that the purpose of the

act is to improve the employment prospects of persons previously disadvantaged by unfair discrimination and to redress those disadvantages through training and education. Continuous learning can improve the knowledge and skills of persons with disabilities to such an extent that they have relevant qualifications in order to be considered for promotions.

*The Labour Relations Act No. 66 of 1995*

The Labour Relations Act No. 66 of 1995 (LRA) as amended, prohibits direct and indirect unfair discrimination and protects employees against arbitrary dismissals including persons with disabilities, potential employees with disabilities and people who incurred disability whilst in the employ of the employer (LRA, 1995). Therefore, persons with disabilities are protected against any form of dismissal, and the employer must allow the person to state his or her side of the story.

*Other Government Prescripts Impacting on Persons with Disabilities*

The following documents supplement the prescripts mentioned above in the employment and advancement of persons with disabilities in the workplace.

The Code of Good Practice on Employment of Persons with Disabilities, 2002 (Disability Code)

The Disability Code (2002) was introduced to support the EEA. It is intended to help employers and employees understand their rights and obligations, promote certainty and reduce disputes to ensure that people with disabilities can enjoy and exercise their rights at work. The Disability Code (2002) assist employers on how to practically manage persons with disabilities in the workplace. Furthermore, the disability code ensures that persons with disabilities are gainfully employed. Policymakers are then able to utilise the disability code when developing their policies and procedures.

The Technical Assistance Guidelines on the Employment of Persons with Disabilities, 2005 (TAG)

The TAG was introduced to ensure that persons with disabilities who are willing and able to work are identified and trained in terms of the Skills Development Act (97 of 1998) and other prescripts, to obtain qualifications, gain experience and compete successfully in the open labour market, at professional level at a later stage. The TAG states that if persons with disabilities are underrepresented in all occupational levels and categories in the workplace, the employer could seek guidance from organisations that represent persons with disabilities or relevant experts. The TAG states that persons with disabilities should market themselves as suitable persons for the job. They would develop confidence when they see other persons with disabilities holding prominent positions and regard them as role models (Majola, 2009). Hussein, Manthorpe and Ismail (2014) advocate that employees with disabilities who occupy senior positions with decision-making powers are more likely to advance in their careers compared to disabled people in semi-skilled positions.

The Policy on Reasonable Accommodation and Assistive Devices for Employees with Disabilities in the Public Service

The Policy on Reasonable Accommodation and Assistive Devices for Employees with Disabilities in the Public Service ensures that employees with disabilities in the public service are provided with reasonable accommodation and assistive devices to enable them to perform their duties effectively and efficiently. It is based on the principle of non-

discrimination and equal opportunities for all employees. Thus, this policy is relevant for this paper since it states that there should be proper facilities and tools necessary to accommodate persons with disabilities in the departments because it will enable them to perform their jobs and participate in work-related activities, then, they will end up advancing in their careers.

### **Empirical Literature on the Promotional Barriers of Persons with Disabilities**

Previous researchers proved that indeed persons with disabilities are faced with barriers that prevent them from advancing. In a study conducted by Gupta and Priyadarshi (2020), it was found that persons with disabilities are aware that when affirmative action is not enough and has negative consequences as it leads to positive discrimination and therefore, affects their confidence and growth negatively. They showed that persons with disabilities face career development challenges when they are consistently employed in professional occupations (Gupta and Priyadarshi, 2020). Furthermore, Lindsay and Fuentes (2022) conducted a study aimed at understanding the experiences and impact of disability discrimination (ableism) among faculty and staff members. They found that faculty and staff members with disabilities are meaningfully underrepresented in academia and are affected by discrimination, social exclusion, and marginalisation. They reported that despite the existence of legislation to protect the rights of persons with disabilities, they constantly experience ableism, social exclusion, unfavourable environments, and a lack of opportunities. This shows that persons with disabilities are still faced with barriers that prevent them from progressing in their careers as they remain underrepresented.

Khupe, Ndlovu, Shava, Zulu, and Shonhiwa (2022) conducted on the employability of people with disabilities in the Zimbabwe hotel industry found that there were few persons with disabilities in supervisory and management positions mainly due to discrimination, culture, prejudice, and to a lesser extent lack of appropriate training and education and poor corporate governance. Another study was conducted by Potgieter, Coetzee, and Ximba (2017) on career advancement challenges facing people with disabilities in South Africa found that people with disabilities experience promotion challenges. The study found that HR practices, especially promotion do not favour people with disabilities as they are prolonged or not suitable for their disability. The study also found that most managers or employees are not knowledgeable about disability. The study found that human resources, especially promotion opportunities, discriminate against employees with disabilities. Lastly, Tinta and Kolanisi (2023) conducted a study on overcoming barriers including the inability to understand tools necessary for vocation, lack of artistry skills, activities that are not stimulating, language and communication difficulties and lack of funds and motivation.

### **Methods**

The study is exploratory and adopts a qualitative approach. It focuses on two provincial departments of the Limpopo Province of South Africa. The departments are the Department of Social Development (DSD) and the Department of Agriculture and Rural Development (DARD). The total population of the study is 189 and comprises 25 (18 from DSD and 7 from DARD) persons with disabilities and 164 (22 from DSD and 142 from DARD) human resource officials. Eighteen (18) respondents were purposively sampled, nine persons with different disabilities and nine human resource officials. It is important to understand the demographic profile of persons with disabilities as the study focuses on their promotion

experiences within the provincial department in Limpopo Province, South Africa. Twenty-three per cent of the respondents had certificates, 11% had Grade 12 certificates, twenty-two per cent (22%) had a degree, 22% had an honour degree and 11% had a master's as the highest qualification. The disability status showed that 78% of the persons with disabilities had a physical impairment, 11% had albinism and 11% had a hearing impairment. The persons with disabilities position within the Limpopo Provincial Department were foreman, HR Clerk, Registry Clerk, Senior Personnel, Social Worker, Assistant Director and Deputy Director. When it comes to years of experience, 45% had between 11 and 15 years of experience and 22% had between 16 and 20 years of experience.

Semi-structured interviews were conducted using an interview guide to allow respondents to disclose their thoughts and feelings about promotional experiences. Some interviews were conducted face-to-face and others virtually due to time and financial constraints. Data was collected using secondary information such as government policies, reports, prescripts and publications. Thematic analysis was used, and themes were induced from the interview data. Data was presented in the form of tables and percentages. The gatekeeper's letter was obtained from the provincial department and ethical clearance from the University of Limpopo was granted. The study was limited to persons with disabilities and HRM officials.

## Results and Discussion

To examine barriers to promotions experienced by persons with disabilities, three questions were asked. The researcher asked people with disabilities all the questions. However, both persons with disabilities and HRM officials had to share their thoughts on one question.

### Promotion Application

The first question asked persons with disabilities whether they have applied for promotion before. This question was directed to people with disabilities only. The themes and responses can be seen in Table 1.

**Table 1: Applying for Promotion**

Themes	Frequency of Responses
Applied for promotion and promoted	6
Applied for promotion but not promoted	1
Never applied for a promotion because no promotional post	2

As it can be seen from above, 67% (=6) of the respondents indicated that they applied for promotional posts and got promoted to other levels. Respondent 5 stated "Yes.... I applied then they considered me and I got appointed". Respondent 6 said, "I didn't start from where I am...I did apply for promotion". It must be noted that one respondent mentioned that when she got promoted, her disability status did not make any contribution. Eleven percent (n=1) of the respondents indicated that they applied for promotion but were not promoted due to a lack of knowledge. Respondent 3 said, "I didn't succeed because of a lack of knowledge concerning the vacant post". Two respondents (22%) indicated that they never applied for promotions because there were no promotional posts. Respondent 2 mentioned that "there were no posts for promotions for my section...so I never applied". The research findings show that 67% of persons with disabilities applied for promotion and got promoted. The results are in line with the UNCRPD which highlights the right to work and the need for inclusive employment policies to ensure that persons with disabilities are

afforded equal promotional opportunities in the world of work (United Nations, 2006). South Africa has promulgated prescripts such as the Constitution (1996) and the EEA which promotes equality and protects the rights of persons with disabilities. However, successful promotion does not mean that persons with disabilities are occupying positions at junior, middle and senior management levels in the provincial departments. Some respondents who indicated that they had been promoted complained that they were still in the same positions that they got promoted to without moving to other levels. The demographic profile of persons with disabilities above showed that 11% had a Grade 12 certificate 23% had a certificate and most of them had tertiary education from a diploma to a master's degree as their highest qualifications.

### Barriers to Advancement

The second question asked the respondents about barriers that prevent them from advancing in their careers. This question was posed to both persons with disabilities and HR officials from both provincial departments. Therefore, there are two separate tables, one indicates the persons with disabilities perspective and another one, is the HR official's perspective.

#### *Barriers to Advancement from Persons with Disability Perspective*

It must be noted that some of the respondents mentioned more than one barrier when responding to this question.

**Table 2: Barriers to Advancement from Persons with Disability**

Themes	Frequency of Responses
Lack of promotional posts or preference	6
Undermined and underestimated	4
Lack of assistive devices	3
No barriers	3

As it can be seen from Table 2 above, 19% of the respondents indicated that they have never faced barriers when it comes to applying for promotion or advancement. Respondent 6 said, "I have experienced no barriers". Respondents 8 and 9 said "None". However, the majority of persons with disabilities are faced with barriers that prevent them from applying for promotion or advancement. Six respondents stated there is a lack of promotional posts or did not receive any first preference as persons with disabilities. Respondent 2 further noted, "Promotional posts are not available or advertised". Respondent 4 said "For my side, I am the one who is more experienced than them, even though they are old. So, I was told that I was working at another place, and I came here with 14 years of experience but here in the Children section, I do not have 14 years of experience. So, there are lots of barriers. So in terms of first preferences, it is not according to the experience according to the way I see it, it is according to who you are".

Twenty-five percent (n=4) of the respondents indicated that persons with disabilities are being undermined and underestimated within their departments due to their conditions leading them not to be promoted. Respondent 1 pointed out "I don't know whether people judge our disability before they can see us or they undermine us because of our conditions". Respondent 7 said "I think when people know your disability they associate it with your working environment, they start to check if there will be any benefit with you being there.

What they check in most cases are the challenges that they are going to encounter if they appoint you in that position due to your disability”. Three respondents (19%) indicated that there is a lack of assistive devices and facilities for persons with disabilities. Respondent 3 commented that “The issue of not having a car to work because when you go to work with your own car is better than asking someone to take you to work in order to attend to home visits. A car is also an assistive device to work”. Respondent 5 further remarked that “My problem is when I want to do something that requires me to use a computer, and we have normal computers of which I can’t use because of my eyes. I take time looking at one thing and you find people already ahead”.

The research findings show that 38% of persons with disabilities pointed out that there is a lack of promotional posts or opportunities. In addition, they are not getting the first preference when posts are advertised and during the recruitment and selection phase. This is in contrast to various prescripts promulgated by the South African government after the first non-racial election in 1994. For example, the White Paper on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (2015) exists to guide employers in implementing interventions that promote and support the rights of persons with disabilities and removing obstacles that prevent persons with disabilities from advancing in their careers (White Paper, 2015). The EEA and the LRA are failing to protect persons with disabilities against unfair discrimination based on their disability status. When 30 years of freedom in South Africa, persons with disabilities feel that they are undermined and underestimated concerning promotional opportunities, one can deduce that the government does not disability issues seriously except on paper. The findings of this study prove that persons with disabilities are aware that when affirmative action is not monitored and effected continuously, it has a negative consequence as it leads to positive discrimination and therefore, affects their confidence and growth negatively, as stated in Gupta and Priyadarshi (2020) study

*Barriers to Advancement from a Human Resource Perspective*

From the HRM officials’ side, it must be noted that some of the respondents mentioned more than one barrier when responding to this question.

**Table 3: Barriers to Advancement from a Human Resource**

Themes	Frequency of Responses
Lack of experience and or qualifications	6
Unambitious	3
Institutional barriers	3
Lack of assistive devices	2
No Barriers (Barriers Free environment)	1

From Table 3 above, it can be seen that five themes emerged from the responses received from respondents. Forty percent of the respondents indicated that a lack of experience and or qualifications prevent persons with disabilities from being promoted. Respondent 6 pointed out that “The issue of not meeting the requirements because as the department, we are obliged to promote persons with disabilities but in the process of promoting them, we should promote those who have relevant qualifications and experience....”. Respondent 7 alluded that “The barrier is about the relevancy of qualifications against the post, it serves as a barrier.... They are considered and given a chance only when they qualify”. Twenty percent (n=3) of the respondents stated that persons with disabilities are unambitious.



Respondent 1 pointed out that “Employees with disabilities themselves don’t develop themselves, as I mentioned earlier when someone has Grade 12, he/she doesn’t want to study further in order to apply for other positions.... The other barrier is that they don’t want to apply for bursaries issued by the department in order to further their studies”. Respondent 2 noted that “They don’t apply for posts when advertised. They don’t develop themselves. They don’t further their studies”. Respondent 3 stated, “They are not furthering their studies and the competition is too high”.

Three respondents (20%) indicated that government departments have institutional issues that prevent persons with disabilities from succeeding when applying for promotional posts. Respondents mentioned barriers such as the work environment, bursaries and financial constraints and budgetary issues. Respondent 3 stated “The other barrier from the side of the government is the issue that there is no financial assistance like a bursary. We don’t have bursaries because we don’t have enough money. We’ve got a serious budget problem. So, the budget that we have for the financial year, we got from HWSETA and we will only give a few, maybe 10. But most people want to study and they don’t have money, so that will be a barrier to them. The other barrier for them to not get appointed or promoted is the issue that we don’t have enough money to fill the vacant post, so budget generally is a challenge”. Thirteen percent of the respondents indicated that persons with disabilities are not provided with assistive devices or the working tools to perform their duties effectively. Respondent 5 said, “not having the working tools that they are supposed to have. And this will make a person not be competent at his/her work”. One of the respondents (7%) pointed out that persons with disabilities do not face barriers. Respondent 4 mentioned that “There are no barriers because they are treated equally. But, I wouldn’t know what would be their challenges but like I said when there are posts.....the posts are open to everyone, however, they are encouraged to apply”.

The research findings show that HR officials were of the view that persons with disabilities lack experience and or do not have qualifications. This is in contrast to the demographic profile of persons with disabilities which indicates that the majority had tertiary education. Furthermore, the demographic profile of persons with disabilities mentioned above showed that 67% had between 11 and 20 years of work experience. The experience is adequate for a person with a disability to be at the senior management level. It is the role of HR to develop and implement policies and procedures that accommodate persons with disabilities. When HR officials state that persons with disabilities are unambitious and there are institutional barriers, it means disability issues are not taken seriously. The Disability Code (2002) encourages employers to recognise, respect and support the rights of persons with disabilities. The literature states that the TAG (2005) practically guides employers, employees and trade unions on how to promote equality, diversity, and fair treatment in employment through the elimination of unfair discrimination. HR officials and senior management have limited information regarding the contents of the Disability Code (2002) and the TAG (2005).

### *Overcoming Barriers*

The last question of the interview guide asked the respondents from Provincial Departments about how they overcame the barriers to advancement regarding promotions to the next level. The responses are tabulated in Table 4 below. It must be noted that this question was posed to persons with disabilities only.

**Table 4: Overcoming the Barriers**

Themes	Frequency of Responses
Nothing (failed to overcome barriers)	5
Accepting their conditions	3
Assistance from co-workers	1

The majority of the respondents (56%) indicated they did nothing to overcome the barriers because it is beyond their control and needs serious interventions. Respondent 1 said, “Nothing, because those issues need management intervention or the above, perhaps the president must come up with a mechanism on how people living with disabilities can overcome these barriers because, at a lower level, there is nothing we can do... there is absolutely nothing we can do”. One of the respondents said “There is no way you can overcome them because obviously when there are no promotional posts there is nothing you can do” (Respondent 2). Respondent 4 remarked “I did not overcome them because they are still there”. Thirty-three percent of respondents (n=3) mentioned that they accepted their conditions. Respondent 7 stated “Learning to live with it in a sense that you learn to understand that as long as I have this disability I will be stuck in the position where I am”. Eleven percent (n=1) of the respondents indicated that they overcome the barriers by receiving assistance from their co-workers. Respondent 3 pointed out “Sometimes I book a work car and one of the employees accompanies me as a driver for home visits, and it becomes better that way even when we are doing campaigns”. It is clear that the respondent was referring to the performance of duties, which could lead to promotional opportunities when responding to this question. This also refers to the lack of assistive devices or facilities and institutional barriers experienced by persons with disabilities.

The findings of the study show that persons with disabilities are doing nothing to overcome the barriers they are faced with concerning promotional opportunities in the Limpopo Provincial Departments. The results support the study by Molefe (2022) who reported that the Limpopo Provincial government is neglecting its commitment to employ 2% of persons with disabilities in each of the province’s departments, as only a few met the target. When HR officials blame persons with disabilities for being unambitious, it shows that they have failed to understand the importance of the participation of persons with disabilities in the labour market. The SDA states in section 21(1)(e) that the purpose of the act is to improve the employment prospects of persons previously disadvantaged by unfair discrimination and to redress those disadvantages through training and education. However, this act is not fully utilised as persons with disabilities are not receiving priority. They have completely lost hope of being promoted to higher levels. The results are in line with the study by Simatimbe, et al (2019) which revealed that persons with disabilities were underrepresented, and promotions are not easy in the workplace.

### **Conclusion**

The study identified barriers to promotion experienced by persons with disabilities at the Limpopo Provincial Department in South Africa and how the barriers were overcome. The findings show that the majority of persons with disabilities applied for promotion and got promoted. However, some persons with disabilities who got promoted in previous years are still in the same positions. A large percentage of persons with disabilities mentioned that their career advancement is hindered by the lack of promotional posts or opportunities, and they are undermined and underestimated. When posts are advertised persons with

disabilities do not get the first preference. On the other hand, HR officials pointed out that persons with disabilities lack experience and or qualifications and are unambitious. Furthermore, HR officials revealed that there are institutional barriers and both HR and persons with disabilities agreed that there is a lack of assistive device provisions by the provincial departments. Lastly, the study found that persons with disabilities have lost hope in overcoming the promotional barriers and they are doing nothing about it. South Africa may have the best policies that promote equal employment opportunities and career advancement for people from historically disadvantaged backgrounds, practically on the ground, there is no serious implementation. If the situation is to remain this way, persons with disabilities will continue to be the most marginalised group in South Africa.

It is recommended that provincial departments embark on a capacity development programme focusing on persons with disabilities development by partnering with different stakeholders. Commitment from senior management is required to monitor the progress concerning the implementation of employment policies, especially the human resource plan and the employment equity plan. Furthermore, it is recommended that positions be ringfenced for persons with disabilities who meet the minimum requirements of the post. Finally, persons with disabilities should take themselves seriously and represent themselves in all the structures where decisions that affect them are made within the provincial department. As Thomas and Robertshaw (1999) put it, which is relevant even today, the progress to achieving employment equity is a holistic one which, together with target setting and related affirmative action strategies, requires leadership, an organisational diagnostic to understand barriers to employment equity, a high degree of employee involvement, targeted interventions, the review of HR policies and practices and ongoing monitoring and evaluation.

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