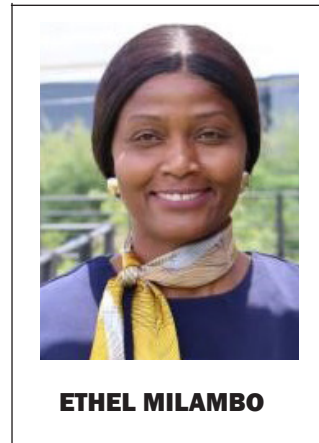


# Bridging the gap: Infrastructure for people of all abilities



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DISABILITY is broadly defined as any physical, mental, or sensory impairment that, when combined with environmental and societal barriers, limits an individual's full and effective participation in society on an equal basis with others. One of the most persistent challenges people with disabilities face is the physical environment barriers that prevent them from moving freely, accessing services, or participating fully in community and work life.

From inaccessible buildings and poorly designed public spaces to transport systems that fail to consider the needs of all users, these barriers represent more than just inconvenience; they are obstacles to equality. For instance, the lack of ramps, handrails, wide entrances to toilets, sufficient lighting, and properly maintained lifts in public buildings can make daily life extremely difficult for people with disabilities. On the roads, the absence of thoughtful design in highways, feeder roads, bridges, pavements, and walkways make travel unsafe or

even impossible for many. However, disability inclusion and achieving a sustainable road fund are not conflicting goals; they can and must work hand in hand. Disability inclusion in transportation means that roads, public transport systems, and other infrastructure are designed to be accessible for everyone. This includes features such as ramps, pedestrian-friendly walkways, audible signals, low-floor buses, and tactile paving for people with visual impairments. These enhancements benefit not just people with disabilities, but also the elderly, children, and others who may experience mobility challenges.

A sustainable road fund, on the other hand, is about securing consistent and adequate financial resources to maintain and improve the country's road network over time. This involves leveraging various sources of revenue such as fuel levies, tolls, weighbridge fees, road taxes,

finances, and government grants or loans. The mission of agencies charged with managing these funds is to ensure that roads are safe, durable, and accessible to all, including people with disabilities.

By integrating accessibility into the planning and design of infrastructure projects, funds can be used efficiently and inclusively. It is not about spending more, but about spending wisely, ensuring that each investment in infrastructure delivers long-term value and inclusivity. Making accessibility a core part of road construction and maintenance does not mean depleting funds but rather using them in a way that supports national development and social equity simultaneously.

Workplace inclusion is another key aspect of this balanced approach. People with disabilities should have equal opportunities to work in road fund agencies and other sectors, with reasonable accommodations to support their performance. This might mean adapting office layouts, providing assistive technologies, or allowing flexible arrangements that enhance productivity. Importantly, inclusion also means representation, ensuring that people with disabilities have a voice at decision-making tables, helping to shape the very policies that affect them.

Examples such as appointing persons with disabilities to work at toll stations or involving them in operational roles within road agencies show a positive shift towards recognising their potential and contributions. When supported with the right

next week and channel your feedback to: National Road Fund Agency, Plot 33 Fairley, P.O. Box 50695, Lusaka.

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tools and adjustments, people with disabilities can and do play a vital role in achieving sustainable development.

Incorporating disability-friendly features into infrastructure is not an extra cost but a long-term investment in a more inclusive and efficient society. By increasing the revenue base, improving financial oversight, and committing to inclusive service delivery, the road sector can serve all citizens effectively. It is this holistic approach combining accessibility with sustainability that ensures roads remain safe, reliable, and inclusive for generations to come.

Ultimately, building a road network that includes everyone, regardless of ability, is not just a matter of social responsibility. It is a strategic move towards national progress, where every citizen can contribute and benefit equally from development.

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