

2015 ZERO PROJECT CONFERENCE

Ensuring equal access
for Members of Parliament

SOUTH AFRICA



Hon Hendrietta Bogopane-Zulu, MP
Deputy Minister of Social Development

Introduction to the South African Parliament

- 490 Members of Parliament in total
- Two houses –
 - National Assembly, with 32 Portfolio Committees
 - National Council of Provinces, representing the 9 provinces, with 11 Select Committees



Self-representation of Persons with Disabilities: 2014



Self-representation of Persons with Disabilities: 1994 – 2014

- Only one political party – the African National Congress - has a policy of self-representation of persons with disabilities – negotiated with Disabled People South Africa pre-1994
- The number of MPs with disabilities therefore directly linked to the representation of the African National Congress
- Focus on gender and cross disability representation (Deaf, blind, physical disabilities)
- 1994: One Member of Parliament with a disability
- 2009: Sixteen Members of Parliament with disabilities
- 2014: Eleven Members of Parliament with disabilities

Rationale for the Reasonable Accommodation Policy

- The Bill of Rights in the Constitution of Republic in South Africa guarantees rights to substantive equality and prohibits discrimination on basis of disability
- South Africa ratified the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities and its Optional Protocol without declaration in 2007
- Reasonable accommodation support an important measure to ensure equitable access to and participation in Parliament and its programmes

Beneficiaries of Reasonable Accommodation Policy

Direct:

- Members of Parliament with disabilities
- Members of Parliament with dependent family members with disabilities

Indirect:

- Citizens with disabilities making representations to Parliament
- A similar policy was developed in 2009 for employees with disabilities (under the Employment Equity Act)

Reasonable Accommodation Measures

Environmental:

- Heritage buildings
- Ramps and accessible bathrooms in all buildings in the Parliamentary complex
- Accessibility signage across the complex
- Central Braille facility
- Five permanent South African Sign Language interpreters employed in the Language Unit
- Convertible Members' seating in all Chambers and meeting rooms to allow for seating for wheelchair users
- Sub-texting facilities for public announcements
- Electrical scooters to navigate the complex faster

Reasonable Accommodation Measures

Environmental:



**Heritage
buildings**

Reasonable Accommodation Measures

Environmental:



Ramps and accessible bathrooms in all buildings in the Parliamentary complex

Accessibility signage across the complex

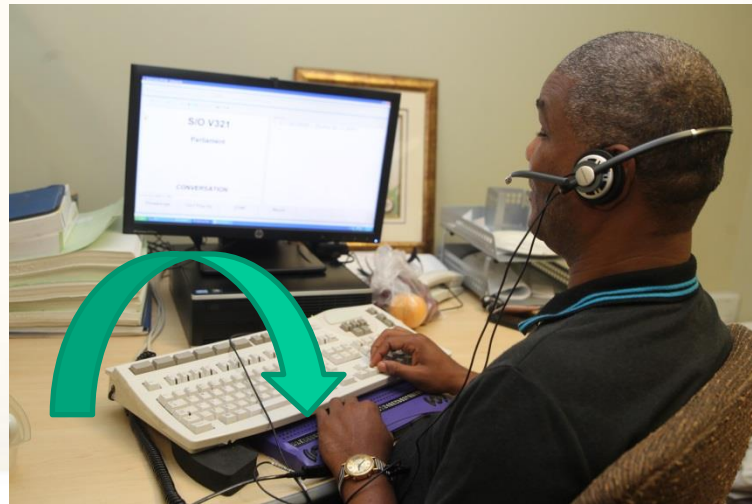
Reasonable Accommodation Measures

Environmental:

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Braille facilities



Reasonable Accommodation Measures

Environmental:



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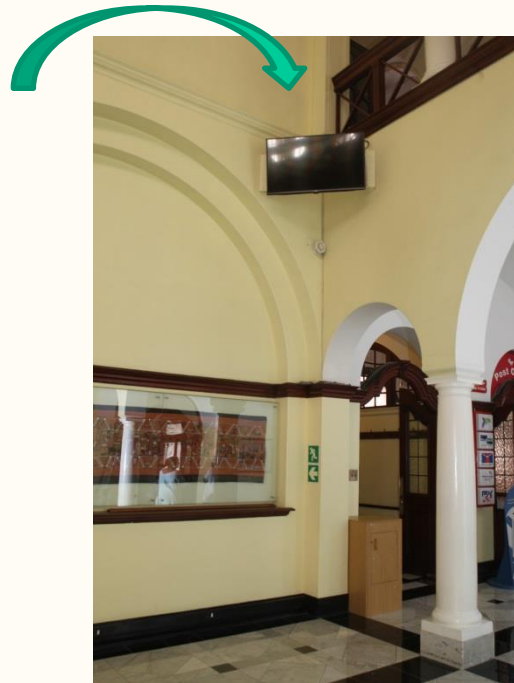
Large screens for MPs with low vision

Reasonable Accommodation Measures

Environmental:



Electrical scooters



Sub-texting facilities for public announcements

Reasonable Accommodation Measures

Individual:

Requests submitted to Party Whips

- Brailled/large print documents
- Electronic and voice formatted text
- Personal assistants
- South African Sign Language interpreters for Parliamentary and Constituency work
- Specialised computer technology
- Adjusted office space and furniture
- Specialised transport
- Additional travel facilities to improve mobility and independence and attend to dependents with disabilities

Outcome, Impact and Effectiveness

- Enable Members of Parliament to focus on their responsibilities
- Members with disabilities regularly serve as Chairpersons of Committees/ members of the whipper
- Currently one Minister and two Deputy Ministers with disabilities in Cabinet
- In-house facilities also available when citizens participate in Parliamentary programmes and activities
- Implementation and review is a work in progress with participation by Members directly affected

Scalability and Transferability

- Policy gives effect to the rights guaranteed in the South African Constitution as well as obligations contained in the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities;
- Policy can easily be costed;
- Therefore easily transferable within the country, e.g.
 - Provincial legislatures
 - Municipal Councils
 - Ministerial Handbook
- As well as outside the country

CLOSING REMARKS

- This Policy is no longer a stand alone policy, but has been integrated into the Members' Benefits Policy, which is reviewed every five years;
- Our next important step as a country is to popularise the policy with legislatures in the other spheres of governance to encourage them to put in place and implement similar policies;
- We thank the Zero Project for providing this platform for us to showcase, but also an opportunity to reflect, the policies and practices which strengthen political self-representation of persons with disabilities.

thank you



“The new South Africa should be accessible and open to everyone. We must see that we remove the obstacles. Only then will the rights of disabled persons to equal opportunities become a reality. “

—Nelson Rolihlahla Mandela