

BRAILLE LITERACY: AN ESSENTIAL TOOL TO DEVELOPMENT.

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Introduction

Malawi government is implementing adult literacy programs. It is however sad to note that blind women who score very low on the literacy profile in the country are not included. Blind women suffer discrimination in almost all sectors of life. The government should begin prioritizing issues of persons with disabilities which should include facilitating Braille literacy to enable blind women access essential information.

The inclusion of the blind women in the literacy programs would need a number of activities to be accomplished.

One such activity is raising awareness to the general public on the importance of Braille as a mode of communication. Use of electronic media would probably be the most effective means of reaching out as it is an undoubted fact that radio communication reaches the remotest parts of the country.

Similarly, conducting sensitization meetings locally would be another mechanism for channeling Braille literacy information to the community. This would help the community know the existence of Braille as a means of communication among blind people. It is only when people are made aware of a product that they respond positively and are ready to welcome the same.

Besides the use of media and sensitization meetings, a Braille National day in the country would play a very great role to bring about awareness on the need and use of Braille as a means of communication both locally and internationally. This requires lobbying with government and stakeholders to set aside the national day.

In addition there is need to establish a Braille press centre for production of Braille materials. Our libraries should also be supplied with Braille books for easy access by blind women. This will enhance strong recognition of Braille as a mode of communication among blind people especially women. Malawi Union of the blind as an organization that advocates for the rights and needs of visually impaired people in the country should take a leading role.

For positive results to be achieved in any activity, provision of adequate and sustainable resources is a must. It has to be well understood that soliciting of resources is not the duty of the government alone but remains the responsibility of stakeholders and the general public. Money should be provided to purchase Braille printing materials such as Perkins Braille machine, slates and embossers. There should also be people trained to pass on Braille literacy skills to blind women in their communities

If Braille literacy is to be achieved.

It would be worthwhile for the government and the organizations that are involved in the adult literacy programs to seek advice from countries that are currently running similar programs. Once blind women acquire Braille literacy skills, they are likely to be transformed. This will ensure their involvement in decision-making and full participation in socio-economic development.