



Socio-Professional Empowerment of Persons with Visual Impairment (PWVI) in Mezam Division, (Cameroon), 1970-2022

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Abstract: Historically, persons with impairments experienced widespread marginalization, social prejudice, and restricted access to education and employment. However, increasing advocacy, community sensitization, faith-based initiatives, state policy reforms, and vocational empowerment programmes contributed to a gradual shift in their social status. It was against this prism that this paper examined the historical trajectory of socio-professional inclusion of persons with visual impairment (PWVI) in Mezam Division. Emanating from both primary and secondary sources, and interpreted mostly qualitatively, the paper contends that, empowerment has not only enhanced socio-professional inclusion of PWVIs into the labor market but has also positively altered societal perceptions and the self-esteem of these individuals within Mezam Division. Despite these commendable achievements, inherent challenges persisted, with discriminatory attitudes and structural barriers to professional inclusion still very visible. The study recommends that government should provide tax incentives for private sector employers who hire PWVI as well as foster collaboration amongst organizations serving with visual impairment in education, health care and employment services.

Keywords: Persons with visual impairment, Mezam Division, professional inclusion, labor market.

1. INTRODUCTION

Before the late twentieth century, persons with visual impairment in many parts of Cameroon, including Mezam Division, were commonly subjected to social neglect, exclusion, and negative cultural stereotypes. (Njuma, interviewed, 2025). They were frequently perceived as dependents incapable of contributing meaningfully to economic or social life, which limited their access to education, employment, and public participation. Such marginalization not only entrenched poverty but also weakened their self-esteem and psychological well-being. (Njuma, interviewed, 2025). However, increasing awareness campaigns, the influence of Christian missions, disability-rights activism, and emerging national and international policy frameworks redirected public discourse toward inclusivity, with Mezam division of Cameroon's North West Region taking the central stage, in empowerment initiatives from different stakeholders, and socio-professional inclusion after 1982. These empowerment strides gradually expedited the process (Mbua, 2019: 13). Institutions such as the Cameroon Baptist Convention (CBC) Health Services, Catholic-run rehabilitation centers, and various non-governmental organizations in Mezam championed advocacy, rehabilitation, vocational training, mobility training, Braille literacy, and community-based integration. These efforts encouraged persons with visual impairment to pursue education and vocational skills in the different empowerment agencies that were established in Mezam leading to them developing professional skills, and were recruited into various sectors of the labor market across Cameroon (Njuma, interviewed, 2025).

Historically and as noted earlier, after independence, missionary bodies played key roles alongside the government in upgrading the lives of PWVI following the establishment of the first special educational institution realized by protestant Christians in Buea in 1967. This specialized school was later handed to the government of West Cameroon and to the Republic of Cameroon in 1980 (Ngale, interviewed, 2025). From its operation in 1968, students in the Bulu Blind School received trainings

in Braille, agriculture and cane weaving with a good number being admitted from Mezam (Njuma, interviewed, 2025). Also, to show commitment, the government after independence instituted in her preamble the Universal Declarations of Human Rights of 1948 which obliged the government to give consideration to all its citizens irrespective of their status (United Nations Universal Declaration of Human Rights, 1948). Equally, constitutional amendments in 1996 reflected too on the government's interest for PWVI. (Republic of Cameroon 1996 constitution, 1996 2-6). Before and even after the 1996 amendments, the government of the United Republic of Cameroon had created the Ministry of Social Affairs in 1975 designed to care for and ensure the welfare of all Cameroonians especially the vulnerable (Suh, interviewed, 2025).

Generally and although late, progress was made to the point that in 1997 the first visually impaired pupil in Mezam in the person of Peter Ngong sat in for the First School Leaving Certificate and wrote in braille and passed in list A (Ngong, interviewed, 2025). As part of inclusion efforts for PWVI, in 2010, a law on the Protection and Promotion of the Rights of Persons with Disabilities provided free education for persons with impairments or those whose parents are impaired. (Article 13-of Law No. 2010/002 of 13 April 2010: 1-2). Following this law, the recruitment of PWVI into the formal professions gained momentum, with the 25000 recruitment into the public service, some of whom were PWVI. In 2012, a special educational center was earmarked for construction through partnership in the campus of Government Bilingual Secondary High School (GBHS) Bamenda.

To have a clear understanding of the paper, key terms like empowerment, socio-professional inclusion as well as visual impairment are to be defined. Firstly, Zimmerman defines empowerment to be both a psychological and socio-structural process that enhances autonomy, self-efficacy, and participation (Zimmerman, 1995: 581–599). Fonyuy views the concept of empowerment to be that process through which individuals, especially those from marginalized or vulnerable groups, are trained and integrated into societal functions and professional environment, through the facilitation of their education, employment, and social participation (Fonyuy, 2021: 51). Kita rather views the phenomenon to be the process of providing an enabling environment, resources and experts to vulnerable groups with the aim of stimulating social and economic participation to societal growth (Kita, 2023: 5). In the context of this paper empowerment encompasses the removal of barriers to participation, provision of accessible education and training, and recognition of persons with impairments as full members of society.

While socio-professional inclusion generally refers to the process of bringing on board different skilled laborers or experts considered as professionals to perform or carryout a well-defined task or operation. These professionals or experts in a particular domain or work of life usually receive training in well-established institutions before being inserted or assimilated into the job market. Socio-professional inclusion to scholars like Oliver refers to the integration of individuals into both social life and the labor market. It involves recognition, participation, equal opportunity, and the removal of barriers that hinder access to employment, education, and social interactions (Oliver, 1990: 34-5). Alexandra on his part, argues that socio-professional inclusion strictly involves the training and transfer of expertise knowledge into individuals, with the purpose of preparing them for specific societal needs. He further illustrates this view by taking the example of the teaching field, where teachers' need to be trained to have the competence of handling children of different levels. These teachers could be trained to have special education skills needed for an inclusive class, be in the primary or secondary sectors (Alexandra, 2011:112). To this paper, socio-professional inclusion is a process by which individuals successfully transition from education into the workforce and become integrated into the society through their work.

According to the World Health Organization, visual impairment encompasses a range of conditions characterized by partial or total loss of sight. It does not inherently limit intellectual capacity or professional ability, but when combined with social prejudice and environmental inaccessibility, it becomes disabling (World Health Organization, 2019). Meanwhile, according to the Center for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), the term Visual impairment refers to abnormalities in a person's eyesight, that cannot be corrected to a normal level(Center for Disease Control and Prevention, 2023: 1-2). Unlike the CDCP, the United States Social Security Administration, contends that, A person is considered visually impaired or legally blind if they have central visual acuity of 20/200 or worse in the better/seeing eye with the best correction "using glasses or contact lenses" at a

distance, or if they have visual field restriction where the widest diameter is 20 degrees or less in the better-seeing eye. (United States Social Security Administration, 2024: 7).

The objective of this paper is to examine the socio-professional empowerment of persons with visual impairment (PWVI) in Mezam Division. The choice of Mezam as the study area is due to the key role the division had historically played in setting the pace for empowerment and socio-professional inclusion in Cameroon, especially as the division is a host to several empowerment agencies, and persons with visual impairment themselves in the socio-professional setting. The paper argues that empowerment has not only facilitated professional inclusion in the labor market but has also reshaped societal perceptions and the self-concept of PWVI in Mezam Division. This paper handles: the formal and informal setting of professional integration, reduction in societal discrimination, increased access to education and digital literacy, improvement in standards of living and increased self-esteem and confidence, empowerment in sport and the entertainment industry and increased self-esteem and confidence.

2. FORMAL AND INFORMAL SETTING OF PROFESSIONAL INTEGRATION

In the recent past, persons with impairments were marginalized, and only a few had access to work in the formal and informal sectors in Mezam Division (Tokoh, interviewed, 2024). This was largely because they were regarded as social misfits and wrongly perceived as unable to contribute to economic development (Tokoh, interviewed, 2024). However, decades of advocacy at international levels and various initiatives by the government of Cameroon helped change these perceptions. In 2022, the government for instance, added five years to the upper age limit for the recruitment of persons with disabilities into the public service, thereby widening their opportunities for formal state employment (Order No. 040/PM OF19 MAI 2022).

Additionally, considerations for persons with visual impairments (PWVI) and other disabilities were taken into account in the construction of both public and private infrastructure. The implication of these measures in Mezam was evident in the increased inclusion of PWVI in various formal professional sectors. In the teaching field, Mezam witnessed significant transformation following the establishment of a resource center for the educational empowerment of PWVI in braille and vocational skills at SAJOCAH Mambu in 1976 (Shulika, interviewed, 2024). At its inception, two former pupils from Bulu Blind Center in Buea, Nicolas Tamanjong and Feta Felix, both from the North West Region recruited as the first teachers of the SAJOCAH resource room (Shulika, interviewed, 2024). Their formal recruitment marked a significant milestone in the inclusion of PWVI in the formal labor market.

The SAJOCAH center initially trained over 45 individuals in braille and later many more. This pioneering group formed the foundation of special education teaching in the division as they went on to work in institutions such as the Nkwen Baptist Center Resource Room for the Visually Impaired, Luc Menorah, the Inclusive Bilingual Teachers' Training Institute, and the Special Education Needs Teacher Training Institute (SENTTI), (Shulika, interviewed, 2024).

A major step towards the professional inclusion of PWVI occurred in 2011, when the government recruited 25,000 civil servants nationwide. During this recruitment exercise, persons with visual impairments from Mezam were also employed. Among them were Daniel Chamba and Emmanuel Bafon Tokoh, who were recruited into the Ministries of Basic and secondary Education, while they served as resource room instructors with the Cameroon Baptist Convention (CBC). Their integration into the public service greatly improved their quality of life (Chamba, interviewed, 2024).

Following this, Mezam also witnessed the graduation and recruitment of the first visually impaired teacher trainer, Amsatou Wirba, in 2013 (Wirba, interviewed, 2024). She was followed by others such as Isabel Wirndzerem, Armstrong Ujong, and Kate Eangwe. In total, over 22 PWVI graduated as teachers between 2011 and 2022 (Wirndzerem, interviewed, 2024). Plate 1 shows one of them, Desmond Kum teaching.



Plate1. Desmond Kum Nji, a Visually Impaired Teacher in the Classroom

Source: Extracted from Desmond Kum’s Album, March 20, 2025

The image illustrates Desmond Kum Nji, a visually impaired teacher actively engaged in teaching, demonstrating empowerment through educational and professional inclusion.

In the media sector, PWVI were also successfully integrated as journalists. This was achieved through educational opportunities offered by the University of Bamenda and private institutions such as HIBUMS Polytechnic. For example, Foncham Dahjoel and Kumo Louisa graduated from the University of Bamenda as student journalists in 2022. Similarly, in 2018, Nsah Edwin and Bafon Collette graduated from HIBUMS Polytechnic, with Nsah Edwin to become a radio and social media reporter at Hot Coco Radio. (Nsah, interviewed, 2025). Plate 2 shows Edwin broadcasting on air.



Plate2. Nsah Edwin, a Visually Impaired Journalist Broadcasting on Hot Coco Radio

Source: Nsah Edwin’s Album, 27th May, 2025.

Nsah Edwin in the picture was chairing a programme on radio Hot Cocoa, to the listening pleasure of the population of Mezam who were fans of radio Hot Cocoa. Just like him, many others chaired radio programs across different stations within and outside the division (Kesah, interviewed, 2024).

Informal sector engagement also enabled many PWVI to successfully engage in vocational activities, through the production and sales of detergents, liquid soap, bead bags, and petty trading. These achievements were largely supported by the work of NGOs in Mezam.

Furthermore, beginning in 1996, empowerment initiatives through the CBC enabled PWVI to acquire skills in cane weaving and furniture production. A notable example is Samuel Nyingcho, who, after training, established a cane weaving workshop at Fish Pond Hill, where he worked for over 15 years before transitioning into disability advocacy and organizational consultancy (Nyingcho, interviewed, 2024). Similarly, individuals such as God-Love Suh, Azingwi God-Love, Ngwa Modest, Amabo Julius, Dinayen Abdul Hasan, and Ngoh Stanley became recognized cane weavers in Bamenda, sustaining themselves and contributing productively to society. Their craftsmanship is illustrated in Plate 3.



Plate3. *Handicraft Works by PWVI in Bamenda*

Source: Jannet Anga'ama, Field Notes (photographs), 19th June, 2025.

Plate 3 depict the craftsmanship of a visually impaired individual, particularly focusing on the production and sales of weaved chairs By Julius Amabo. Also, beadworks and handmade products like bags and necklaces, demonstrated the diversity of products created by visually impaired artisans. Overall, these images illustrate the resilience and creativity of visually impaired individuals in producing marketable goods, contributing to their livelihoods while also promoting their skills and staying relevant in the labor market.

3. REDUCTION IN SOCIETAL DISCRIMINATION

One significant impact of empowerment and inclusion in the labor market for PWVI was the reduction of societal discrimination. This is important because PWVI initially faced strong discriminatory attitudes that limited their inclusion in the labor market and other areas of life. Their challenges did not necessarily stem from the impairment itself, but rather from societal barriers that restricted their ability to fully participate, thereby contributing to social exclusion (Ngala, interviewed, 2024). However, it became evident that through the empowerment of PWVI in Mezam, particularly within the economic sphere, there was a noticeable decline in discriminatory attitudes toward them

(Ngala, interviewed, 2024). This progress was especially evident after 1982, when communities and persons with impairments themselves were sensitized and encouraged to pursue education and vocational skills at the first empowerment agency in Mezam (Nyingcho, interviewed, 2024). As a result, the perception that PWVI were of no value to society gradually changed. Many who had once resorted to street begging are today hardworking individuals with families and children. Therefore, empowerment initiatives at various levels contributed to the restoration of their human dignity (Nyingcho, interviewed, 2024)

As part of empowerment efforts, advocacy messages and sensitization campaigns organized particularly by the CBC Health Services through their SEEPD Program and Community-Based Rehabilitation (CBR) activities played a vital role (Ngala, interviewed, 2024). Communities across Bali-Nyonga, Santa, Bambili, Babanki, and Nkwen were educated on the capabilities of persons with impairments and trained on ways to be socially inclusive. Assistive devices were also provided to enable these individuals to navigate their environments independently. These empowerment initiatives, implemented by different stakeholders in Mezam, significantly helped reduce social stigma and discrimination against PWVI in the division and region.

In addition, community sensitization campaigns carried out by faith-based organizations such as the Cameroon Baptist Convention and Roman Catholic Church institutions, alongside Organizations of Persons with Disabilities (OPDs) and Disabled Persons' Organizations (DPOs), were particularly notable between 2009 and 2019. These advocacy efforts helped promote the inclusion of PWVI in state institutions where they had previously been marginalized or given insufficient attention regarding their basic social needs, academic support, and full participation in public life. Isabel Wirndzerem, a PWVI, reflects on the changing attitudes of society:

While I was a student in secondary school, most of my teachers and classmates initially had an evasive attitude towards me. The social stigma I received while trying to enroll in a state university in 2012 was also discouraging. Most often society was not friendly towards me, except for a few who had sympathy. But when they noticed in school that I was resourceful, that drew people to me. Honestly, through sensitization, the situation changed over time, with almost everyone in Bamenda becoming quite friendly in school, on the street, in the market, and in government offices something hardly experienced by PWVI back then (Wirndzerem, interviewed, 2024).

This experience demonstrates the negative societal perceptions once faced by PWVI and how, through personal empowerment and community sensitization, these perceptions were gradually reversed. It can therefore be said that the reduction of societal discriminatory practices contributed to their steady and progressive inclusion into various social and professional settings in Mezam, positively influencing their overall well-being.

4. INCREASED ACCESS TO EDUCATION AND DIGITAL LITERACY

Increased access to education for PWVI had many implications for their status in society and the labor market. To fully appreciate this, it is important to recall that prior to the establishment of special educational schools in Mezam in 1982, and the eventual inclusion of PWVI into regular schools by the 2000s, they constituted the greatest number of uneducated individuals in most, if not all, communities in Mezam (Chamba, 2018: 67) Even more troubling is the fact that families with children living with impairments did not allow them access to education. This was so because they felt that it was a waste of time as the children may not cope with formal schooling. With such a seemingly bleak situation, intense campaigns on their right to education and awareness about existing empowerment institutions were continually carried out among PWVI and the general public through workshops and community outreach activities (Fotzo, interviewed, 2025). The impact of this was that, beginning from the mid-1980s, parents started enrolling their children into some of these special educational establishments, thereby raising the value attached to children living with visual impairment (Niey, interviewed, 2025). This shift in perception among parents and educational stakeholders encouraged PWVI to seek education and empower themselves to become useful citizens within their communities in Mezam. Consequently, persons with visual impairments studied in specialized schools like SAJOCAL as well as in other basic, secondary, and higher educational institutions. Near statistics suggest that from 1982–2022, SAJOCAL alone empowered more than 100 PWVI educationally and retained some of its early students, such as Feta Felix, Nicolas Tamnjong,

and Elizabeth Yilla, as teachers in the institution (Yila, interviewed, 2024). Clearly, their education became a stepping-stone to their social integration and acceptance into several key sectors of Mezam's economy.

One significant aspect of empowerment for PWVI is the introduction of digital literacy. Before this period, apart from receiving education in special and regular schools, this category of persons was often assumed to be unable to use digital tools such as phones, computers, and other ICT devices (Tokoh, interviewed, 2024). It was therefore uncommon to see PWVI using smartphones or computers before 2010. During this same period, many Mezam inhabitants did not know of any visually impaired person engaged in digital activities. However, technological advancements soon outpaced these perceptions, and PWVI were trained to use digital tools to stay relevant and engaged in their careers. Their exposure to these tools became a key empowerment strategy for overcoming exclusion from the digital world (Zhou et al, 2013: S43-53).

With the help of screen readers like JAWS and NVDA, visually impaired persons were able to use computers with ease, navigating different software and applications. This empowerment in digital tools fostered their inclusion in various social and professional environments. They used computers to study, research, work, and run businesses (Zhou et al, 2013: S43-53). Nji expressed: "I am happy that I use digital technologies to teach, study, and remain relevant in my career. At first, I felt I could not adapt, but today I see it as a game changer. I am grateful to those who made it possible" (Nji, interviewed, 2024).

A study by Zhou et al. found that adolescents with visual impairments who had a high perception of computer competence were more likely to gain paid employment than those with lower self-perception. The authors concluded that increased access to ICTs helped overcome barriers to work participation (Zhou et al, 2013: S43-53). ICTs enabled PWVI to organize transportation, read printed material, access job information, complete applications, work as administrative assistants and teachers, and manage customer demands, among other tasks (Zhou et al, 2013: S43-53).

From 2014 to 2020, computer centers specifically designed for PWVI were established in Mile III Bamenda, The University of Bamenda, GBHS Bamenda, and other locations in Mezam. These centers trained PWVI in the use of ICT and facilitated their inclusion in the professional labor market. In this regard, visually impaired persons like Bertrand Bafon Tokoh became highly skilled in the use of digital technology. He integrated technology during his training as a student teacher and as a professional teacher from 2019. He was frequently invited to workshops and training seminars to teach ICT skills to his peers (Tokoh, interviewed 2024). Many PWVI trained under him received donations of accessible materials such as braille, MS Office files, PDF, and audio formats. These donations and trainings significantly enhanced their educational empowerment and digital exposure, narrowing the gap between impairment and access to the digital world.

5. IMPROVEMENT IN STANDARDS OF LIVING AND INCREASED SELF-ESTEEM AND CONFIDENCE

With regard to the fact that PWVI struggled to become empowered and had long suffered social exclusion and limited access to the labor market, their standard of living was initially very low, with severe repercussions on their self-esteem (Yila, Elisabeth, interviewed, 2024). For most of them, acquiring basic necessities was a distant dream (Suh, interviewed, 2025). Denise Macedo notes that they mostly lived in deplorable conditions, with almost no access to social welfare services such as education, healthcare, and public utilities. This reality formed the basis for the medical and charity model of disability, which focused on providing healthcare services and basic food supplies (Ziliotto, 2021: 23-37).

In light of these conditions, empowerment initiatives in the 1970s and 1980s were mostly limited to providing access to healthcare services and basic household necessities such as food and shelter (Denise Macedo Ziliotto, 2021: 23-37). However, beginning from the 2000s, empowerment strategies shifted toward securing sustainable livelihoods through inclusion in the labor market. This shift significantly improved their lives. Through employable skills and access to income, persons with visual impairment were increasingly able to build decent lives for themselves (Tancho, interviewed, 2025). Many were able to acquire property, build houses, and operate businesses that generated substantial income. In Bamenda, a number of them lived in comfortable apartments, owned private

cars, and were able to handle personal expenses, including healthcare costs. Most employed PWVI, particularly those in the public service, lived comfortably and independently (Kiya, interviewed, 2025). Erick Shie, a neighbor to a visually impaired person, observed: “I was shocked when I realized that the storey building near my place in Nkwen is owned by a blind man. The way the house was constructed and furnished, one would not believe the young man was actually blind” (Sheiy, interviewed, 2025). Another respondent, surprised to see a PWVI purchasing high quality household items, exclaimed in Pidgin English: “*I no be know say blind man fit buy expensive chairs, dining table, fridge and gas cooker.*” (Tatah, interviewed, 2025). Improvements in their standard of living, especially in Bamenda, significantly changed social perceptions of PWVI. For example, Samuel Nyingcho was a successful visually impaired individual in the division who constructed his own home and owned a private car (Nyingcho, interviewed, 2024).

Generally speaking, and as emphasized throughout this paper, before the 1980s and 2000s, persons with impairments suffered from severe low self-esteem. This was because they were often undermined and disregarded. This undoubtedly affected their psychology, causing them to become reserved. It also limited their ability to explore and exploit their potentials (Makondo, 2024:1016). In most communities in Mezam, persons with impairments felt that they could never be part of the labor market, let alone be professionally employed and earning a salary. Such feelings made them lose belief in themselves. Through constant advocacy workshops and sensitization campaigns within the division, this situation later changed with the efforts of PWVI and other concerned stakeholders. Notable empowerment initiatives, many of which came from the CBC, the Catholic Church, and the State, encouraged increased integration and participation of PWVI in social functions. Individuals such as Samuel Nyingcho, Sama Chick, and Fidel Tancho, who were themselves visually impaired, emerged as advocates. Their frontline roles gave hope, built confidence, and boosted the self-esteem of persons with impairments (Nsah, interviewed, 2024).

Similarly, the establishment of empowerment centers in the division as early as 1982 eased the challenges faced by PWVI. The negative feeling of being unable to receive education like other children due to impairment was significantly reduced (Tancho, 2020). The training received in these institutions empowered them to carry out numerous activities both at home and outside, which contributed greatly to their sense of esteem (Fru, interviewed, 2024).

As revealed by Eleanor Mbah, children with visual impairments were trained on how to clean; cook, wash clothes, and walk independently. Such empowerment given to these individuals brought about confidence and higher self-esteem, as they did not have to depend on others all the time for simple tasks. At the academic level, donations of learning materials in braille and audio formats by NGOs such as the St. Barbara Johnson Foundation for the Visually Impaired went a long way to boost their confidence and reduce their dependency on classmate (Fuh, interviewed, 2024).

Those who acquired skills in different professions and trades started small enterprises or secured employment in organizations. The income they generated changed their living conditions, moving many from vulnerable states to more stable lives. By being able to meet their own needs, they regained joy and dignity. A mother reflecting on her visually impaired son’s transformation stated:

I enrolled my blind son into a school for the blind just to keep him active and to make him feel like he was actually schooling. Deep within me, I believed he would be my everlasting burden. But the day he passed the entrance examinations into ENS Bambili, I was shocked and overjoyed. Today, he is the one assisting me financially in the family. To his younger siblings, he is like a father, doing things I never imagined he could do (Niey, interviewed, 2025).

Even with ongoing prejudice in families, workplaces, and society at large, their resilience and endurance yielded results. Today, some PWVI are married to sighted partners and enjoy the fulfillment that genuine companionship brings.

6. EMPOWERMENT IN SPORT AND THE ENTERTAINMENT INDUSTRY

The empowerment and inclusion of PWVI in Mezam went beyond to include even sports and music. For sporting activities, goal ball was the most common and played nationally and internationally. As part of empowering and socially including PWVI, The government through its regional delegation for social affairs, Ministry of Sport and Physical Education donated Goal balls to some special educational institutions like GBHS Bamenda (Tancho, interviewed, 2025). This enlivened them and

brought them in the world of sports. Also, students with visual impairment in The University of Bamenda participated in Goal ball competition with other visually impaired sporting clubs in UBa campus and Yaoundé, in 2018-2019. In 2022, the team performed powerfully in the national competition amongst the different visually impaired clubs organized by the national federation for the visually impaired, under the auspices of the Ministry of Sport and Physical Education. The team from Bamenda, made up of some individuals like Desmond Kum Nji, Simon Tafah, Silas Mbuh, Clement Ndim Yuh and a host of others were highly supported. In fact, each time there was a competition organized by the Ministry of Sport, persons with visual impairment from Mezam who either participated in goalball, short put or diskuss were transported to Yaoundé, lodged, fed and paid participation dues. Ndim Clement from Mezam revealed that:

I have won several national and international champions on Paralympics, during which I obtained the first price for Short Put in 2022, and African champion for Diskuss. Within 2021-2022, I participated in different competitions at the regional, national and international level. Being the very first from Mezam to have achieved so much in the domain of sport, I decided to start training others who were visually impaired in the sporting exercise so we could together secure more championships. My outstanding performance drew many sighted people towards me. I have made friends with uncountable persons (Yuh, interviewed, 2024).

In 2016, competitions in sports were organized by the CBCHS SEEPD programs for PWVI. During this sporting competition, visually impaired in the division converged in Bamenda town, grouping themselves into club (Fai, interviewed, 2024). A Goal Ball match was organized in the CBCHS field in Nkwen during which teams of three persons competed among themselves, until a club wins the competition. Each team was made up of three players on each side.

Added to the Goal Ball competition was the marathon race organized too by the CBCHS for the visually impaired. During this race, which took place from Saint Paul Junction Nkwen to Commercial Street, Vitalis Nde emerged victorious winning the first position (Tangeh, interviewed, 2024). His victory in the running race signified how vibrant persons with impairments were in the field of sport. It should be noted here that, this was a profession that some of them earned a living from it like Ndim Clement. (Yuh, Clement Ndim, interviewed, 2024).

Empowerment and inclusion strives made PWVI to be involved in the entertainment industry as musicians and dancers. They went as far as creating a group/club referred to as “Generation 2000.” Members of this group were known to be perfect in dancing and in singing. Though its days were short lived in SAJOCAH, their eventual enrolment into the university resulted to individuals coming up with new brands of music to the listening and dancing pleasure of their fans. Persons like Nsah Edwin, Louisa Kumo, Midrate Moki and Blaise Mishie gained grounds in the division as veritable entertainers (Moki, interviewed, 2024). In this sector, some of them organized shows while others were focused on producing albums and marketing online. One of such albums produced by a visual impaired person in Mezam was released in 2018 by Nsah Edwin titled “I am Me”. (Nsah, interviewed, 2024).



Prince Nsah Edwin

Plate4. *Nsah Edwin and New Breed Africa Music team*

Source: Extracted Nsah Edwin’s Album, 12, July, 2024

Plate 4 highlights the involvement of Nsah Edwin a visually impaired person in the entertainment industry. Nsah Edwin is performing on stage, during a music event. Events like this he received significant pays and tips which boosted his finances and consequently living standards.

7. CONCLUSION

The essence of this paper was to examine the implications of empowerment on the socio-professional inclusion of persons with visual impairment (PWVI) in the labor market in Mezam Division from 1970-2022. To this, elaborate discussions were made on aspects such as the formal and informal professional setting, reduction in societal discrimination, increased access to education and digital literacy, amongst others. The paper reveals that empowerment did not only facilitate professional inclusion in the labor market but also reshaped societal perceptions and the self-concept of PWVI in Mezam Division. This was achieved through advocacy, rehabilitation services, livelihood training, and increased educational opportunities. Due to this, PWVI transitioned from socially dependent roles to active participants in economic and social life. However, lingering societal prejudices and infrastructural limitations continue to impede full inclusion.

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