

# AT2030: Para Sport Against Stigma

Learning from Systems, Storytelling  
and Assistive Technology



# Tokyo 2020: Reaching audiences

The Tokyo 2020 Paralympic Games marked a significant moment for Para sport broadcasting in Sub-Saharan Africa. For the first time, Paralympic highlights were broadcast free-to-air across 49 territories, including Malawi.

Alongside the broadcast, Para Sport Against Stigma used localisation pilots and audience research as a way of exploring access, relevance, and ownership. Local language voiceovers and contextual framing were used to examine whether and how increased visibility might resonate at country level, and what forms of engagement this enabled.

While the broadcast expanded formal access to Paralympic content, research suggested that visibility had limitations when it came to the deeper conditions shaping stigma in contexts like Malawi.

## What this approach opened up

- Paralympic highlights reached audiences across 49 African territories
- Local language voiceovers explored accessibility where coverage was available
- Viewers who accessed the content reported greater awareness of Para sport and the abilities of people with disabilities

## What the research brought into view

- Television access remained uneven and largely urban
- Rural communities were mostly excluded from coverage
- African athletes appeared infrequently within global broadcast narratives
- Editorial priorities reflected existing competitive and resource inequalities

Analysis of Paralympic broadcasting in Sub-Saharan Africa points to the structural nature of these constraints:

*“Paralympic broadcasting in Sub-Saharan Africa remains shaped by unequal media infrastructures and production logics that privilege certain bodies, nations and sporting narratives, while marginalising others.”*

– Pullen et al. (2022)



# Learning Over Time: Para Sport Against Stigma as an Evolving Practice

Para Sport Against Stigma did not follow a linear pathway. It evolved through cycles of research, practice, and reflection, as well as the questions being asked – and allowed those questions to reshape practice. Learning was generated through a combination of participatory action research, audience research, practitioner reflection, and iterative testing in live sport and media contexts.

## Early focus

- Broadcast access
- Representation
- Awareness and reach

## Later focus

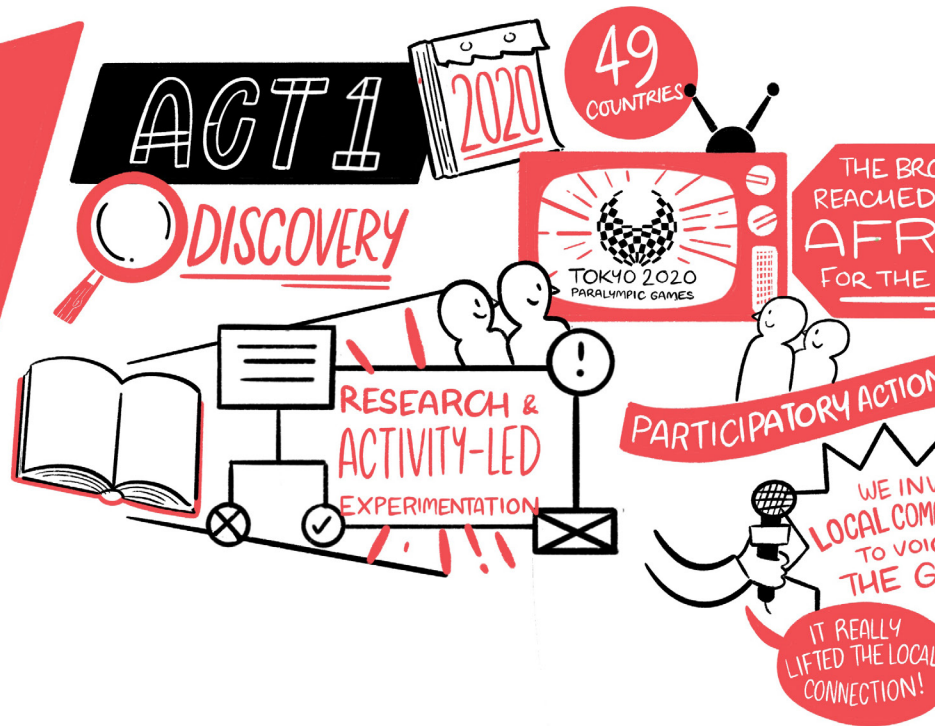
- How stigma is reproduced through systems
- Who holds narrative authority
- What enables participation beyond elite sport
- How locally led processes change outcomes

## This evolution led to:

- Smaller, more embedded initiatives
- Greater local ownership
- Reflection treated as an outcome, not administration
- Stronger links between sport, media, AT, and policy



**LEARNING  
OVER TIME...**  
A EVOLUTION IN  
THINKING



**MAKING  
NOISE  
WORKSHOP**

**⊘ THERE WAS LIMITED ACCESS TO ASSISTIVE TECHNOLOGY AT THIS POINT!**

**BRINGING LOCAL GROUPS TOGETHER ... WE COULDN'T JUST TALK ... WE HAD TO MAKE CONNECTIONS!**

**CO-CREATING ACTION PLANS FOR COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT WITH DISABILITY SPORT FOR SOCIAL CHANGE**

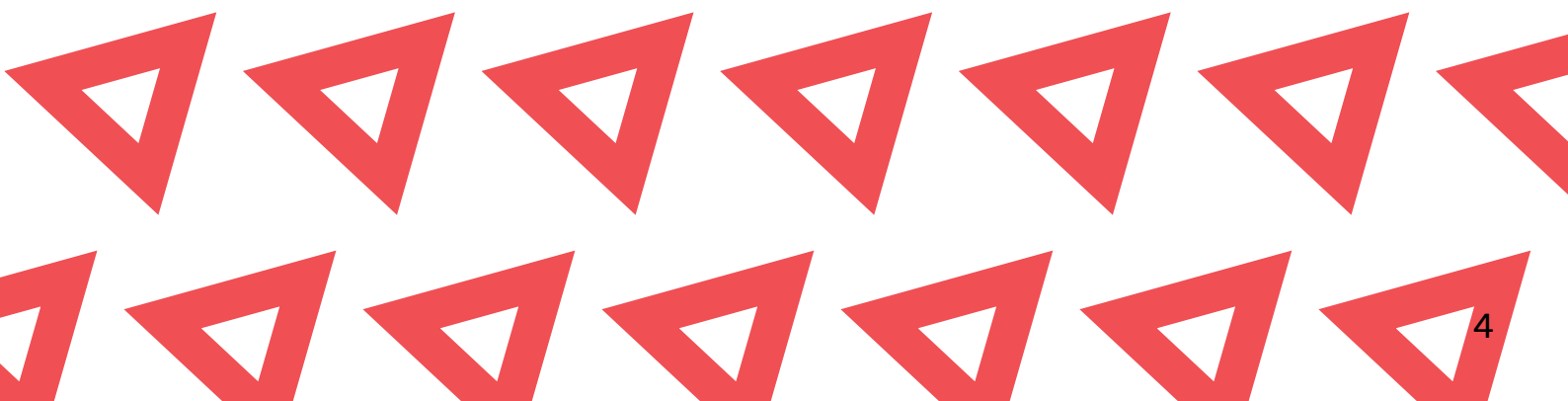
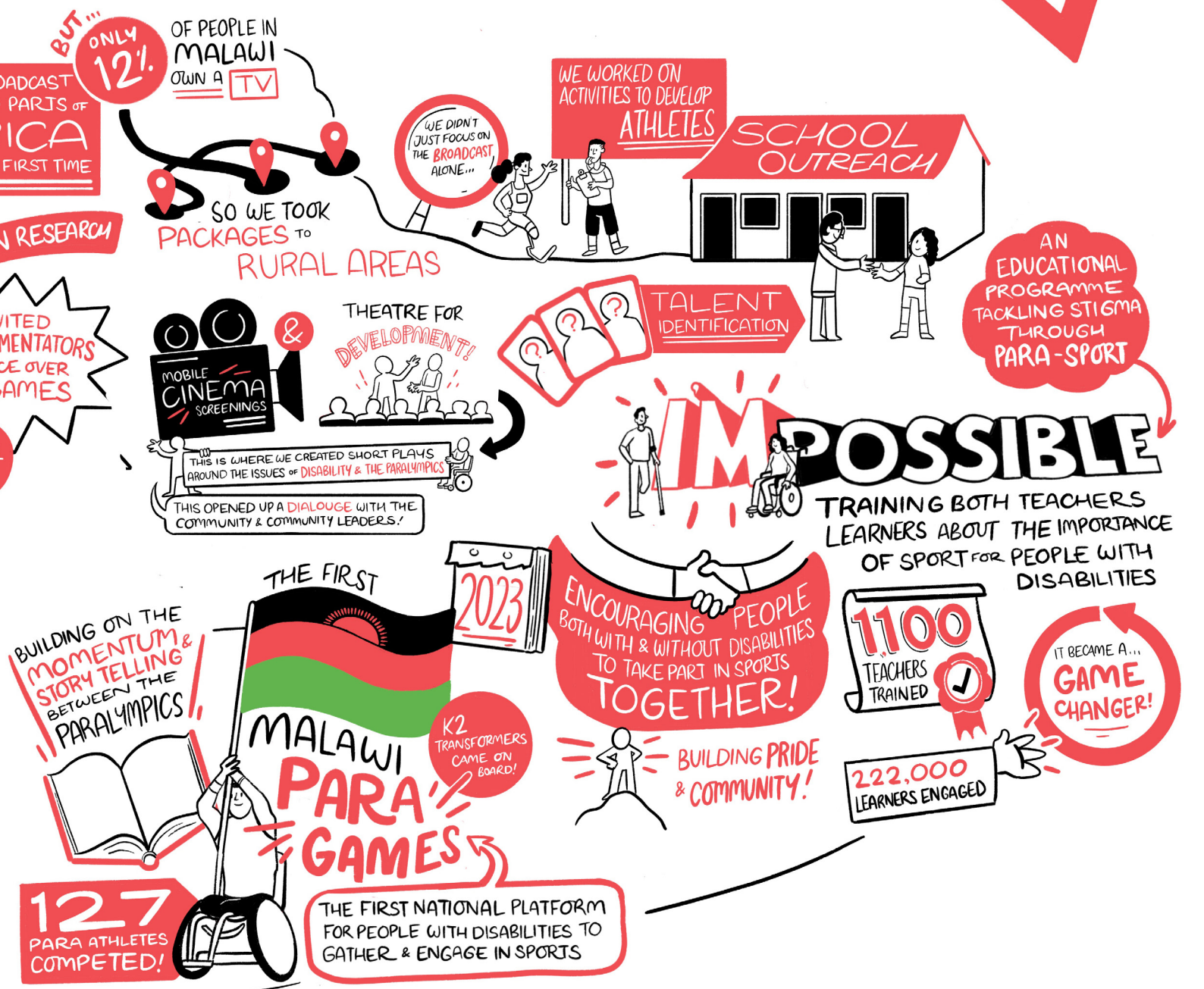
**WE GOT GOVERNMENT TO WORK CLOSER WITH THE MALAWI PARALYMPIC COMMITTEE**

**WE HELPED TO CHANGE THINKING TOWARDS PARA SPORTS! CREATING POSITIVE MEDIA STORIES**

**AND CONTRIBUTED TO POLICY ...**

**BEING RECOGNISED BY THE MALAWI GOVERNMENT WAS A BIG HIGHLIGHT!**

**WE STARTED BUILDING ECOSYSTEM THAT SUPPORTED PARA SPORTS**



LEARNING  
OVER TIME...  
A EVOLUTION IN  
THINKING

2024

ACT 2

WORKED WITH  
RADIO DRAMA  
ON A 6 EPISODE  
PARA-SPORT  
STORYLINE

JULY  
2025

DIGITAL  
CAMPAIGN  
COLLABORATIONS  
WITH THE  
AFRICAN UNION  
SPORTS COUNCIL



PARIS 2024

CONTINUING  
TO GROW

OUTWARD

MORE STRATEGIES  
& STORYTELLING

RESEARCHED  
WITH REAL  
LIVED  
EXPERIENCE

44

REGION

MEDIA STORIES  
PUBLISHED  
AROUND PARIS!

YOUTH GAMES  
IN NAMIBIA

VIEWERS IN  
MALAWI  
VIEWED THE  
GAMES ON  
YOUTUBE



#BEYOND THIS  
LAND

THROUGH THE

MAKING NOISE

PROCESS



A NUMBER OF  
ARTICLES WERE  
PUBLISHED SO THE  
PUBLIC COULD GET  
TO KNOW THE ATHLETES

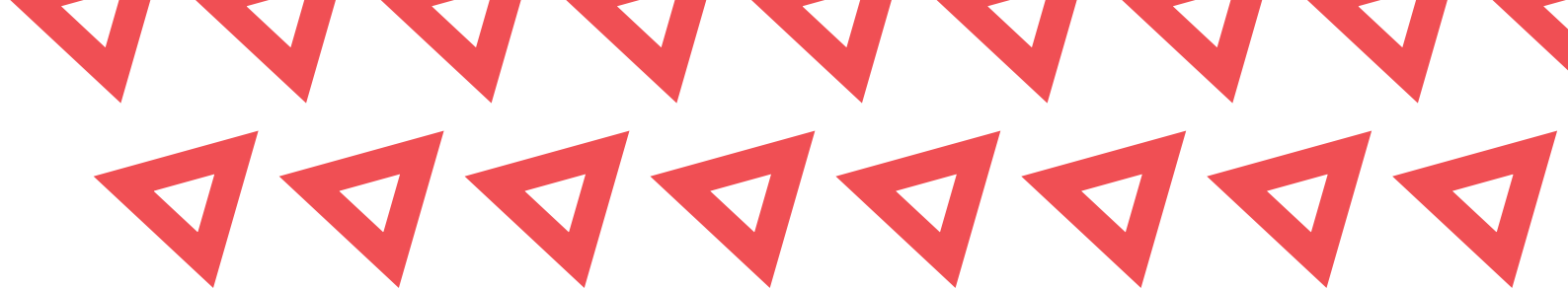
THIS LED  
TO A PARA-  
ATHLETICS & SPECIAL  
SPORTS CAMPAIGN  
AT REGIONS

DIGITAL CAMPAIGN - ATTRACTING NEW AUDIENCES TO PARA-SPORT

THE CAMPAIGN  
HELPED KEY DECISION MAKERS  
TO UNDERSTAND THE COMPLEXITY  
OF DISABILITY INCLUSION

OCT  
2025

REFLECTING  
SEEING WHAT



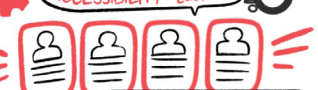
AS A RESULT OF THE GAMES  
 THEY ESTABLISHED  
 A WHEELCHAIR  
 BASKETBALL  
 FEDERATION

ASSISTIVE  
 TECHNOLOGY WAS  
 FINALLY WEAVING  
 INTO THE  
 CONVERSATION

REGION 5 ALSO CONVENED 150 DELEGATES  
 AROUND THE SUBJECT OF

# ASSISTIVE TECHNOLOGY

CREATING CONVERSATIONS  
 AROUND  
 ACCESSIBILITY TO EQUIPMENT



WE SHARED ATHLETE  
 PROFILES & SHOWCASED  
 THEIR STORIES

WE DEVELOPED A



PROMOTING  
 INCLUSIVE TERMINOLOGY!



WE STILL HAVE  
 A LONG WAY  
 TO GO!

# ACT3

LOOKING FORWARD...

LA  
 28

AT2030

WE NEED A  
 FOCUS  
 ON  
 ASSISTIVE  
 TECHNOLOGY  
 FOR  
 PARTICIPATION

STRATEGY FOR  
 ENGAGING  
 CORPORATES

MORE  
 GOVERNMENT  
 LOBBYING

MEDIA  
 WORKSHOP

ON THE GAMES AND  
 CAPACITY WE COULD BUILD

EDUCATION  
 AROUND THE  
 CORRECT  
 TERMINOLOGY

A COMMITMENT  
 FROM JOURNALISTS  
 TO REPORT MUCH  
 DEEPER STORIES  
 AROUND PARA-SPORT



A NEED TO  
 ARCHIVE  
 FOOTAGE

WE LEARNED  
 LOCALLY  
 EMBEDDED  
 PARA & DISABILITY  
 SPORT STORY TELLING  
 CAN SHIFT STIGMATISING  
 NARRATIVES

THE  
 BIG CHALLENGE IS

SYSTEM  
 ALIGNMENT

WE NEED A  
 MEDIA  
 INFRASTRUCTURE  
 TO TAKE IT CONTINENTALLY

WE NEED...  
 MEDIA  
 INFRASTRUCTURE  
 STORY TELLING  
 MORE VISIBILITY FOR  
 ASSISTIVE  
 TECHNOLOGY  
 FOR  
 SPORTS  
 PARTICIPATION

WE'VE GROWING AN  
 ECOSYSTEM!



## Research and Innovation in Practice: Making Noise

As Para Sport Against Stigma evolved, it became clear that broadcast moments alone could not sustain engagement. Paralympic highlights often appeared only during Games time, with limited promotional materials or supporting content for broadcasters or National Paralympic Committees to use before or between events.

This raised a practical question:

### **“What would it take to build visibility and relevance for Para sport outside of the Paralympic cycle?”**

Rather than starting from campaigns, the project began to explore how local and regional activities – around disability, sport, and participation – could become moments for communication, engagement, and learning.

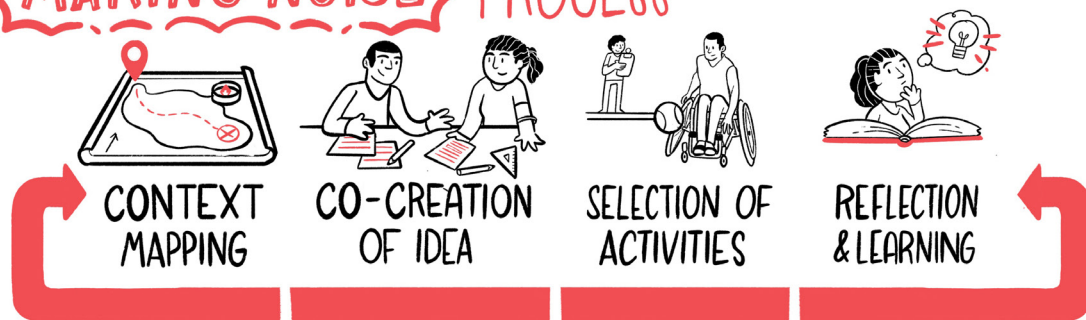
Making Noise is a process for co-creating and sharing stories about disability and sport that challenge stigma and open pathways to participation.

#### **Making Noise is**

- Locally led, rather than externally imposed
- Grounded in existing communication practices and events
- Iterative and adaptive by design
- Reflection treated as an outcome, not an add-on
- Learning valued alongside visibility

At its core, Making Noise draws on participatory action research. Ideas were co-created, tested through local and regional activity, and deliberately reflected upon, generating insight into how narratives circulate, how participation is enabled, and how systems respond over time.

# THE MAKING NOISE PROCESS



## Micro-case: Making Noise Malawi – Why Groundwork Matters

Research from Para Sport Against Stigma demonstrated that visibility at the Paralympic Games, occurring once every four years, was not enough to shift stigma without sustained local sport activity, athlete profiling, and community engagement.

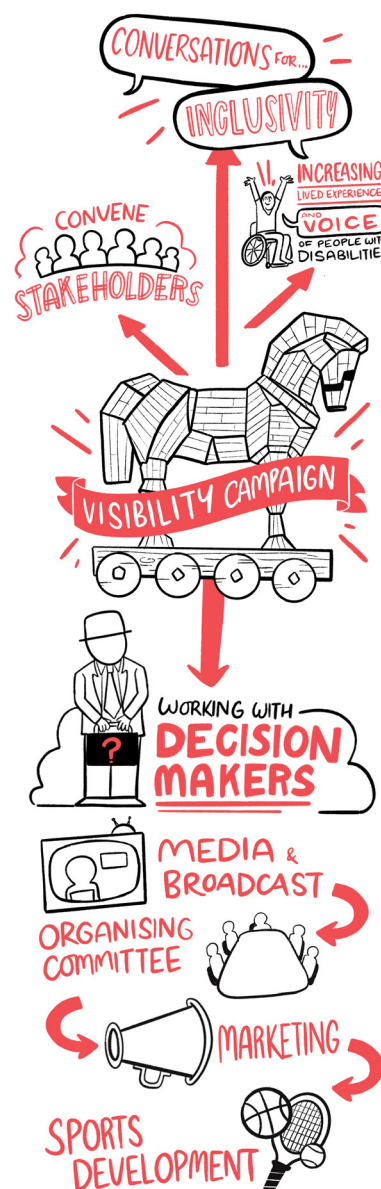
## Micro -case: Making Noise Namibia - Reframing Inclusion

Making Noise entered the AUSC Region 5 Youth Games in Namibia as a Para sport inclusion campaign, intentionally designed to go beyond awareness. Framed through the familiar language of sport, it functioned as a **Trojan horse**—embedding inclusion within the Games system to test what happens when participation must be delivered, not just declared.

As Para sport was integrated into a live, multi-sport regional event, inclusion shifted from aspiration to practice. Games systems were required to respond in real time, revealing how institutional design shapes participation. In this process, three realities became unavoidable:

- Inclusion functioned beyond communications, requiring the deliberate breaking of silos across sport delivery, transport, infrastructure, media, and policy systems that do not typically operate together.
- Assistive technology and accessibility emerged as foundational infrastructure, not supplementary considerations, with participation dependent on equipment, venues, and logistics being in place before competition could begin.
- Public and media interest exceeded system readiness indicating a viable market for inclusive sport currently constrained by system readiness rather than lack of interest.

The pressure created was not confrontational, it was structural. By altering how the Games operated, Making Noise Namibia made system constraints visible without assigning blame, reframing inclusion as an engineering and governance challenge and demonstrating how sport-centred campaigns can be designed to generate the conditions for participation at scale.





# Storytelling, Media and Structural Visibility: Beyond This Land

Storytelling plays a powerful role in shaping how disability and Para sport are understood. Para Sport Against Stigma showed that storytelling does not operate independently of structure.

Production systems, editorial priorities, and content infrastructures determine which stories are told, but even more importantly which stories never exist.

## What Para Sport Against Stigma observed

- Visibility is shaped by production decisions
- Global content systems privilege podiums and power
- Archives reinforce historical inequality
- AI-driven systems amplify existing visibility gaps
- Across Paralympic cycles, African athletes were often absent from global content feeds – not by choice, but by system design.

## Key shift

- From representation → narrative power
- From stories → the systems that produce stories

## Micro-case: Beyond This Land – Who Gets Seen, and Why

Beyond This Land was developed in the lead up to the Paris 2024 Paralympics as a reflective test of how African Para athlete stories could be told by African creatives and how they move through digital content systems. Rather than evaluating the film itself, the focus was on what the process revealed about visibility, access, and imbalance in content circulation.

## What this surfaced

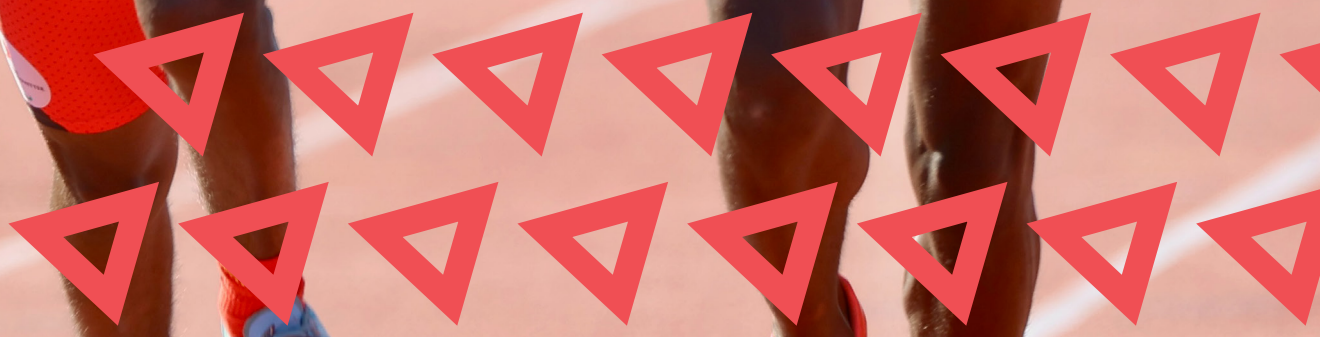
- Digital visibility relies on existing content histories
- Athletes with limited prior footage are less likely to surface
- New stories struggle to travel without established archives
- Inequalities seen in broadcast are reproduced in digital spaces

As one media practitioner reflected:

**“If athletes or countries haven’t been visible before, their stories struggle to travel – even when the content exists.”**

## Key learning

Visibility is shaped by systems of circulation, not just creativity or intent.





jumping  
kids  
IS ABILITY

photo credit: Jumping Kids SA

# Assistive Technology as the Foundation of Participation

In the early phases of Para Sport Against Stigma, assistive technology sat at the margins of the work. The focus was on stigma, visibility, and storytelling, with the assumption that improved narratives would help unlock participation. As the project evolved a more basic constraint was revealed. In many of the African contexts Para Sport Against Stigma worked in, participation in sport was not possible without first addressing access to assistive technology and everyday infrastructure.

Across athlete interviews, mobility and transport were consistently cited as barriers to regular training. Athletes described limited access to mobility aids, accessible transport, toilets, and changing facilities – conditions required simply to leave home and reach training venues. These were precursors to participation itself.

As Para Sport Against Stigma began working with national and regional Games, the absence of sport-specific assistive technology became clear. Equipment was scarce, often donated, poorly fitted, or in disrepair, with no local systems for purchase, maintenance, or repair.

*“In addition to fundamental assistive technology, there is a basic sport-specific AT requirement including items such as gloves, wrist supports, blindfolds, sport wheelchairs with regulation tyres and safety features, weight benches and adaptive cycles. These are very scarce indeed.”*

## - Athlete interviews 2021

This shifted how assistive technology was understood within the project. Rather than a health issue or a high-performance concern, AT emerged as foundational infrastructure for participation.

## A Holistic Model in Practice: Jumping Kids

Through Para Sport Against Stigma, an example of a holistic assistive technology model emerged in South Africa. Jumping Kids combines innovative, high quality prosthetic solutions with ongoing clinical support, school inclusion, and pathways into sport.

By treating assistive technology as part of a wider participation ecosystem, the model demonstrates how consistent access to appropriate equipment, combined with social and educational support, can shape participation across the life course for children using lower-limb prosthetics.

[www.jumpingkids.org.za](http://www.jumpingkids.org.za)



## Contributions to the Global Field

Para Sport Against Stigma does not offer a single model to replicate. Instead, it contributes a set of insights relevant across sport, assistive technology, media, communication and policy contexts.

While grounded in Southern Africa, these insights resonate across other low- and middle-income settings where access, infrastructure, and narrative power are uneven.

### **Key contributions include:**

- Stigma is structural and cannot be shifted through short-term or periodic campaigns or broadcast coverage
- Visibility without access can reinforce exclusion
- Campaigns can function as research when they are designed to learn and adapt
- Assistive technology is foundational to sport participation
- Systems change requires time, trust, and local leadership

These insights challenge short-term, siloed approaches to inclusion across sport, assistive technology, media, and policy.

*“If disability stigma is produced by systems, then it can only be addressed by changing how those systems shape people’s ability to participate.”*

**– Para Sport Against Stigma research insights**





MALAWI  
Paralympic Committee

K42  
TRANSFORM



Global  
Disability  
Innovation  
Hub

UK aid  
From the British Government

INTERNATIONAL  
OLYMPIC  
COMMITTEE



Loughborough  
University  
London

MALAWI  
Paralympic Committee

Ireland



Liverpool  
John Moores  
University

## Looking ahead

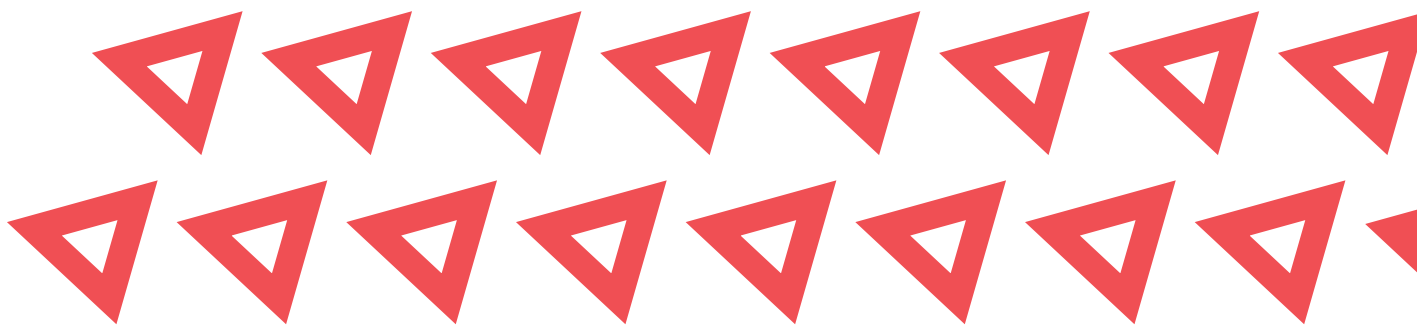
Para Sport Against Stigma was never intended to solve disability stigma. What it has helped to clarify is the nature of the challenge, and the kinds of work required to engage with it.

Efforts to shift stigma through Para sport must go deeper than increasing visibility once every four years. They require work across sport, assistive technology, media, and policy systems, and closer links to advocacy that address the everyday realities shaping how people with disabilities live, move, and participate.

### **What is needed next**

- Collaboration across sport, assistive technology, media, research, and policy
- Stronger alignment between health, education, sport, and social policy systems
- Investment in processes that support learning and adaptation, not only short-term outputs
- Support for locally led, context-specific approaches grounded in lived experience

This publication is an invitation to work differently: to take learning seriously, to recognise assistive technology as central to participation, and to focus on the conditions that enable people with disabilities to take part in sport and physical activity over time.



# Selected Publications and Resources

Para Sport Against Stigma has produced a range of outputs spanning academic research, practice-based tools, and applied case studies, including:

## Academic publications

- Paralympic Broadcasting in Sub-Saharan Africa: Production Politics and the Reimagined Postcolonial (Pullen et al. 2024)
- Communication for Localisation: Making the Paralympics Malawian (Noske-Turner et al. 2025)

## Practice toolkits and resources

- Making Noise practitioner toolkit
- Community engagement and storytelling resources

## Applied case studies

- Beyond This Land (digital storytelling and content flow)
- Zimachitika (radio drama)
- National and regional Games engagement pilots

All publications and resources are available via the Para Sport Against Stigma project website.



# People and Partnerships

Para Sport Against Stigma was shaped through long-term collaboration across research, sport, disability, media, and policy. The work evolved over multiple phases, with partners contributing in different ways as the project developed and its focus shifted.

## **Phase 1 (2020–2024): Research and Broadcast Foundations**

- Loughborough University
- International Paralympic Committee
- University of Malawi
- National Paralympic Committees in Ghana, Malawi, and Zambia

## **Phase 2 (2024–2026): Systems, Participation, and Regional Engagement**

- Loughborough University
- University of Malawi
- Malawi Paralympic Committee
- African Union Sports Council Region 5

Wider collaboration included Hogan Lovells (pro bono legal and governance support), broadcasters and media practitioners, disability organisations and DPOs, athletes, youth leaders, researchers, and community partners across Southern Africa.

Para Sport Against Stigma forms part of the AT2030 programme, funded by UK Development Office.

