

## Amplifying the voices of women with disabilities – Kenya

**Organization: UDPK (United Disabled Persons of Kenya)**

### Background

Kenya's total population is 49.7 million; the prevalence of disability in Kenya is 4.6%.<sup>1</sup> According to the 2009 Kenya population census:<sup>2</sup>

- Women represent 52% of the total population of persons with disabilities.
- 26% of women aged 15-49 years have suffered from intimate partner physical and/or sexual violence.<sup>3</sup>

There is, however, no specific data regarding violence against women with disabilities.

UDPK is the federation of Organizations of Persons with Disabilities in Kenya whose mandate is to advocate for the rights of persons with disabilities in all aspects of life, especially in the socio-economic and political spheres. The organization is committed to ensuring that persons with disabilities share an equal platform and that their rights are upheld across all sectors of development. Their goal is to obtain a barrier-free society that fully recognizes the rights of persons with disabilities.



**Sally Nduta, Programs Manager**

### What happened?

The practice entitled “Amplifying the Voices of Women with Disabilities in Kenya” is a shared project between three organizations: UDPK (the lead organization), the Federation of Women Lawyers (FIDA)-Kenya (which provides its experience of gender mainstreaming and women's rights), and Light for the World (LFTW)-Netherlands (which provides its disability mainstreaming expertise). It started in 2017 and is a three-year project. The activities target organizations of women with disabilities to amplify their voices when advocating for their rights, to improve gender equity and inclusion and develop capacity-building on how to mainstream the needs of women with disabilities in their advocacy activities.

UDPK's work targets six counties - Laikipia, Kakamega, Taita Taveta, Meru, Homabay and Mombasa - selected based on the regional prevalence of disability (between 5% and 6% of the total population).

The practice's objectives are:

- To increase the visibility and capacities of women-led DPOs and women's rights' organizations to effectively represent and advocate for their rights at national and local government levels;
- To work with authorities at all levels to ensure the rights of women and girls with disabilities are included in policy framework development and implementation;
- To establish links with the women's rights movement for the inclusion of women with disabilities in the organizations which make up the Kenyan movement.

<sup>1</sup> [Kenya National Survey for Persons with Disabilities, 2007, National Coordinating Agency for Population and Development](#)

<sup>2</sup> [2009 Kenyan Housing and Population Census](#)

<sup>3</sup> [UN Women Global Database on Violence against Women, Kenya page](#)

The practice's participants are DPOs operating at grassroots level and women's rights organizations; they are mostly women-led organizations and the majority of their members are women and girls with disabilities. The overall national target reach is 60 DPOs comprising 6,000 women with disabilities with different types of impairments. The practice reaches women with hearing, psychosocial, or intellectual impairments and women living with albinism.

The practice was accomplished in seven parts:

1. A Memorandum of Understanding<sup>4</sup> (MOU) was drafted with UDPK's partners.
2. Members of the DPOs were trained on disability awareness and sexual and gender-based violence (SGBV) targeting women and girls with disabilities.
3. Trained members of DPOs passed on the information and messages to women with disabilities and community members
4. Women's organizations were put into contact with women with disabilities in order to include women with disabilities' rights in the women's organizations actions.
5. Women with disabilities participated in activities to develop their empowerment, were informed about loans and saving schemes, introduced to government initiatives to support enterprises owned by women, youth and persons with disabilities, and given access to training sessions on how to apply for and manage grants and find platforms for participation at county, government and school levels Six mobilization activities were implemented with women with disabilities to encourage them to join pre-existing groups.
6. Male engagement activities were implemented. They engaged men from the local administration, community members, parents and caregivers of children with disabilities as male champions to encourage other men and boys to take part as community gatekeepers and decision makers.
7. The organizations worked with the authorities at all levels to ensure the inclusion of women and girls in policy formulation and implementation. For example, women with disabilities held dialogue forums with service providers in the health and judicial sectors to improve service delivery.

## What changed?

Women with disabilities have shown increased confidence in asserting their rights and becoming agents of change. Thanks to the awareness-raising and information on persons with disabilities' rights delivered to community members, a change in attitudes and preconceived ideas was observed. Women with disabilities are better accepted and play a greater role in the community. They have obtained more recognition since they can now seek out platforms for participating in government planning processes, committees at county and neighborhood levels, and school management boards.

## Notable Successes

- Women with disabilities are asking for disability-friendly facilities in public offices, for more inclusion in decision-making positions, and are able to respond to SGBV incidents by going to the police and accessing judicial services.
- 36 persons were trained as peer advisors and 1,842 women with disabilities and their families were made aware of human rights, women's rights and SGBV responses.
- The mobilization activities allowed 579 isolated women with various forms of disabilities to join groups of women, such as DPOs and women's organizations.

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<sup>4</sup> A memorandum of understanding is a type of agreement between two or more parties. It expresses a convergence of intention between the parties, indicating an intended joint line of action.

- Grants were attributed to 20 women-led DPOs to implement advocacy and social activities to ensure that women with disabilities can access services. Several networks of organizations of women with disabilities were registered in Laikipia and Kakamega counties, which reinforced the visibility of the rights of women with disabilities.
- Two dialogue forums were organized to develop access to justice for women with disabilities. Health and judicial workers took part in these forums.
- Training was also provided for 41 elected representatives of persons with disabilities at the County Assemblies on using the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (CRPD) as an advocacy tool at county level.

## Key Success Factors

1. **The organization worked collaboratively with different partners.** Working with DPOs that have a significant local reach and understand local cultural dynamics is important to deliver messages effectively to women with disabilities and local community members. At national level, there are links with human rights and women's rights movements such as the Kenya National Human Rights Commission (KNHCR), the National Gender and Equality Commission (NGEC), the Centre for Rights Education and Awareness (CREAW), the Coalition on Violence against Women (COVAW) and Women's Empowerment Link (WEL). These partners are instrumental in providing technical expertise on human rights, gender rights and SGBV response. This means that the most precise information available is used when developing the practice's activities which increases accuracy. Regionally, the project works with the East Africa Federation of the Disabled, the African Disability Forum (ADF), the Africa Disability Alliance and the International Disability Alliance (IDA) to obtain technical support on disability issues, as well as information on emerging trends in the sector. At regional and international levels, this cooperation contributes to increasing the visibility of persons with disabilities' and women with disabilities' rights and living conditions.
2. **Male engagement** is a clear strategy in the practice. The working sessions held with a number of male-led DPOs contribute to encouraging male participation in the activities. This also reduces suspicion and tensions among the community members in relation to aims of the practice.

**Be gender transformative with UPRD**

**WOMEN'S LEADERSHIP**

**Empowering women through financial institutions and participation at local levels:**

- **Obtaining a place in the community**
- **Gaining confidence**
- **Challenging gender inequalities**

This practice proves that collaborative work is an effective way of making progress to achieve specific goals. In this case, cooperating with organizations at the grassroots, local and regional levels is a good way of raising awareness of the rights of women with disabilities by leveraging each organization's network of influence.