

# Promoting women with disabilities' inclusion and social change in communities – Kenya

## Organization: WARD (Women and Realities of Disability Society)

### Background

Founded in 2011 in Kenya, WARD's main objective is to advocate for issues concerning women and girls with disabilities, including psychosocial health and well-being, empowerment, access to education, employment, access to education on sexual and reproductive health rights, and the promotion of positive attitudes.

### What happened?

According to WARD's founders, women with disabilities in Kenya are invisible within both the disability and women's rights' movements. One of the consequences of this is that the sexual and gender-based violence (SGBV) they face is often disregarded, access to services is difficult, and they face specific issues regarding sexual and reproductive health rights.

The practice, started in 2015, fights against the exclusion of women with disabilities, the violence they experience, and the barriers they experience when accessing services. It promotes social change and social inclusion by creating awareness and demystifying myths around the sexual and reproductive health of women and girls with disabilities through inclusive community dialogue.

WARD's activities involve women with and without disabilities from urban and suburban areas. Women with physical and visual impairments represent the largest proportion of beneficiaries.

The inclusive community dialogues physically take place once a month in Nairobi, Mombasa, Kisumu, Kiambu and Kilifi counties and are broadcasted online through social media networks to extend the reach. They include:

- Discussions with women with disabilities, as well as service providers, policy makers, community leaders and faith-based organizations.
- A space where individuals can share their stories and experiences, which raises awareness and deconstructs stereotypes and misconceptions about the sexuality of women with disabilities.
- Information on sexual and reproductive health by presenting family planning and contraception measures.
- Information on how to contact health service providers and human rights lawyers is provided to help the survivors of GBV.
- A range of themes such as maternal health, sexuality, economic empowerment, education, hygiene and the political representation of women with disabilities.

Additionally, WARD hosts a gala dinner to raise awareness about women and girls with disabilities' sexual and reproductive health rights to develop community support. This platform provided an



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opportunity for women with disabilities to share their experiences of discrimination and violence which increased their legitimacy to make their voices heard. The event was jointly organized by Hope for African Women and Ability Africa Magazine to commemorate the 16 Days of Activism against GBV 2017.

WARD also participated in a Civil Society report submitted to the CEDAW<sup>1</sup> Committee in 2017<sup>2</sup> within the Kenyan Network Advocating for the Rights of Women and Girls with Disabilities.

## What changed?

Overall, the members of the communities who attended the inclusive community dialogues, including men, are now more aware of the discrimination and violence faced by women and girls with disabilities. Men and boys with and without disabilities were targeted through the discussions and social media. Women with disabilities spoke out with increased confidence. Spaces for participating in the feminist movement and society in general were more easily accessed by women with disabilities, including the National Council on Disabilities' structures.

The activities also impacted women without disabilities. They indicated that they were now more aware of the living conditions of women with disabilities and declared their willingness to involve women with disabilities in their discussions.

## Notable Successes

1. Over 50 women, girls, men and various stakeholders clearly indicated their increased interest in and understanding of GBV, rights and legal access to justice for women and girls with disabilities.
2. Indirectly, at least 8,000 persons were reached through the use of social networks and hashtags used to raise awareness.

## Key Success Factors

1. **Women with disabilities' direct participation** in the practice's activities contributes to its positive impact. They are encouraged to promote the implementation of the practice. They make decisions regarding the activities and the choice of subjects discussed and promoted during the dialogues.
2. **WARD used an existing network** which has proven to be very popular among the targeted communities. They use social media to disseminate information and increase the visibility of the organization, the activities, and of women with disabilities in general. This has been fundamental in advocating for policy change at various levels.

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<sup>1</sup> Convention on the Elimination of all forms of Discrimination Against Women

<sup>2</sup> [NGOs submission on Kenya to the CEDAW Committee for the 68<sup>th</sup> Session](#)