

Spring 2024 Professional Fellow

Name: Vera Robi Machera
Country: Kenya
Job Title and Employer: Program Officer, Women Challenged to Challenge (WCC)
Project Title: Preventing and Responding to Sexual Violence Against Women and Girls with Disabilities in Kenya

Issue: Kenya, as a signatory to various international and regional human rights agreements, is committed to upholding sexual and reproductive health as a fundamental human right. However, a 2014 study conducted by Women Challenged to Challenge (WCC), a national organization uniting women with disabilities in Kenya, shed light on the significant challenges women and girls with disabilities (W/GwDs) face in accessing sexual and reproductive health rights (SRHR) services (Aloo, 2014). They are generally more vulnerable and therefore at greater risk of abuse or violation (Humanity & Inclusion, 2019). The study, comprising 73 key informant interviews, 55 focus groups, and 7 case studies, unveiled troubling findings. While the primary focus was on SRHR services, it also exposed a stark reality: over 80% of respondents reported prevalent sexual violence against W/GwDs, with some even suggesting it is seen as a norm (Aloo, 2014).

The report highlights that violence persists due to lack of awareness and understanding, along with stigma, exclusion, and poverty. Unfortunately, survivors of such violence often do not receive the support they require, as they are unaware of their rights and thus vulnerable to mistreatment and inadequate responses. Additionally, they expect dismissive and discriminatory attitudes and treatment from service providers who lack the necessary knowledge about addressing cases of sexual and gender-based violence against W/GwDs.

Project Objective: Vera's project aims to empower W/GwDs to address sexual violence risks through tailored training and support groups, while engaging local duty bearers to enhance community violence prevention and response.

Project Activities: Vera will recruit 30 W/GwDs, ages 12 to 49, through her network of local disabled people's organizations and engage them in tailored training sessions. These sessions will equip them to effectively address and reduce the risks of sexual violence they face. Leveraging her experience with WCC, Vera plans to adapt the existing SRHR Knowledge and Empowerment materials to directly tackle issues of sexual violence.

Following the training sessions, the women and girls are encouraged to establish psychosocial support and self-advocacy groups. They will take on the role of mentors for other W/GwDs, educating them about their rights and offering support.

Concurrently, Vera will engage 15 duty bearers, comprising local government officials, healthcare providers, religious leaders, and other community members, and provide them with the Prevention and Response training using WCC's curriculum and materials. The goal is for them to join in establishing a network of Community Champions to enhance violence prevention and response by promoting gender and disability-friendly attitudes within the community, while also improving referral pathways among these entities.

Rather than establishing new structures, the project emphasizes support and enhancement of existing actors, structures, and platforms.

References:

- Aloo, C. A. (2014). *Study on Gender Based Violence against Women and Girls with Disabilities in Kenya* (Report). Retrieved from: <https://grassrootsjusticenetwork.org/wp-content/uploads/2015/06/WCC-GBV-Study-Report.pdf>
- Humanity & Inclusion (2019). *Gender and Disability: Inspiring Practices from Women and Girls with Disabilities Addressing Discrimination and Violence in Africa Report*. Retrieved from: https://www.makingitwork-crpd.org/sites/default/files/2021-03/MIW_Gender_and_Disability_Report2020_LL11.pdf



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