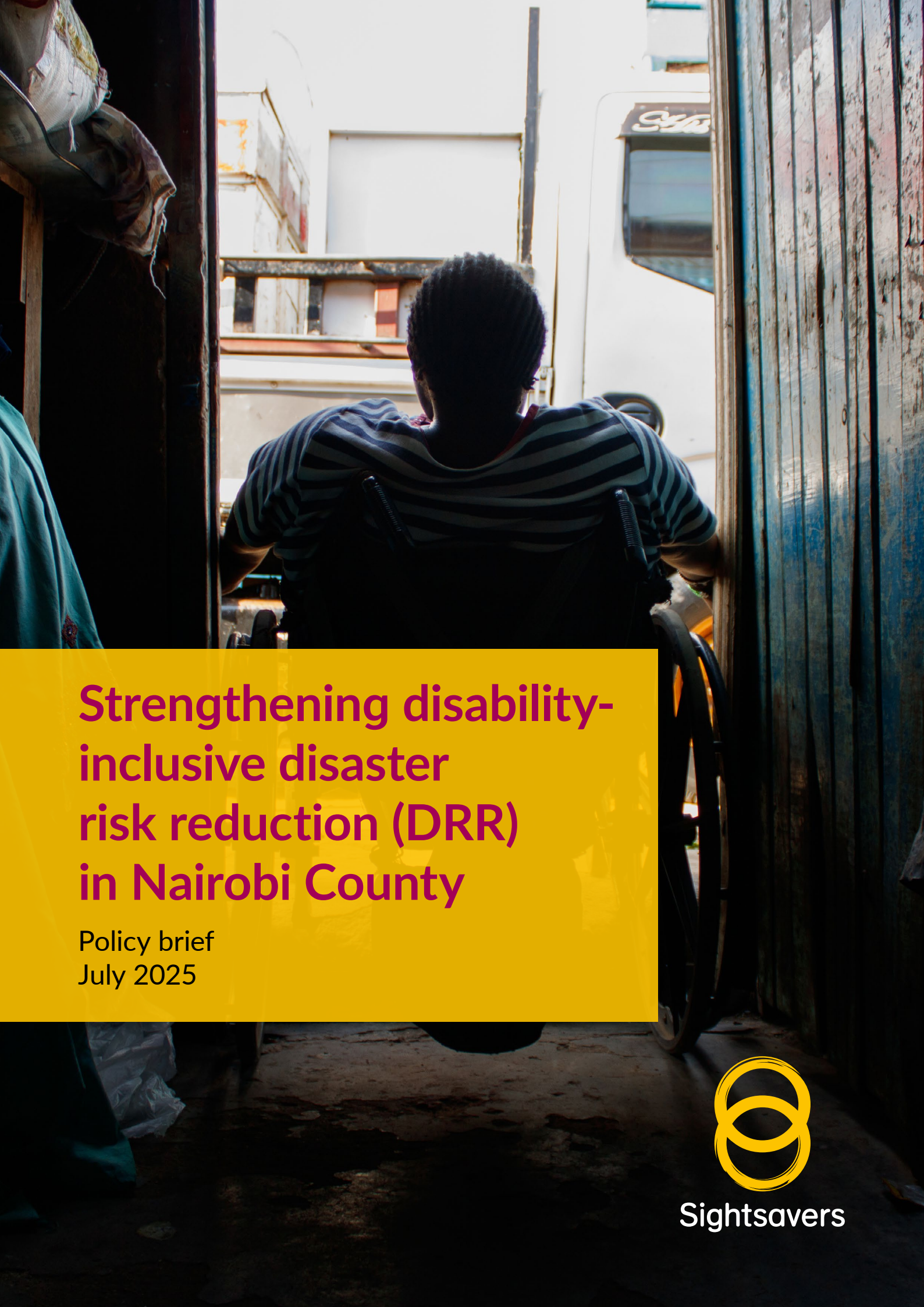




Strengthening disability-inclusive disaster risk reduction (DRR) in Nairobi County

Policy brief
July 2025



Sightsavers

Introduction

This policy brief is based on a collective and participatory accountability review process by people with disabilities - especially women with disabilities, service providers, county government and wider community leaders - around disaster risk reduction (DRR) programming and policy implementation in Nairobi County.

It makes recommendations based on shared analysis and underscores that the participation of people with disabilities, often through engagement with organisations of people with disabilities (OPDs), is crucial to effectively implementing and delivering disability inclusive national and county DRR policies and programmes.

The 'Hear Me See Me' project was a pilot initiative in Nairobi County aimed at empowering women with disabilities to influence climate policy, particularly around DRR. Led by Sightsavers, Lensational, and the Gifted Community Centre, the project used the disability-inclusive social accountability (DASA) approach, aligned with photography and storytelling, to amplify the voices of women with disabilities - making their experiences visible and impactful for policymakers.

Disasters disproportionately affect vulnerable communities, including people with disabilities - particularly those living in informal settlements, often resulting in displacement and a higher mortality rate compared to the general population. Cities are home to more than 50 per cent of the 1.3 billion people with disabilities worldwide, who are twice as likely to die in disasters due to limited mobility, lack of timely support, and inaccessible safety measures.

Disabilities, including mobility limitations and communication challenges, can significantly impact evacuation and response capabilities, making individuals with disabilities more vulnerable to harm.¹ This is affected by the intersection of disability with other identities and bases of discrimination - including age, geographical location, gender, ethnicity, religion, sexual orientation, gender identity, indigeneity, severity of disability, or other status. In collaboration with people with disabilities, these barriers need to be addressed during all phases of the disaster risk management process - i.e. mitigation, preparedness, response, and recovery.²

Cover image:

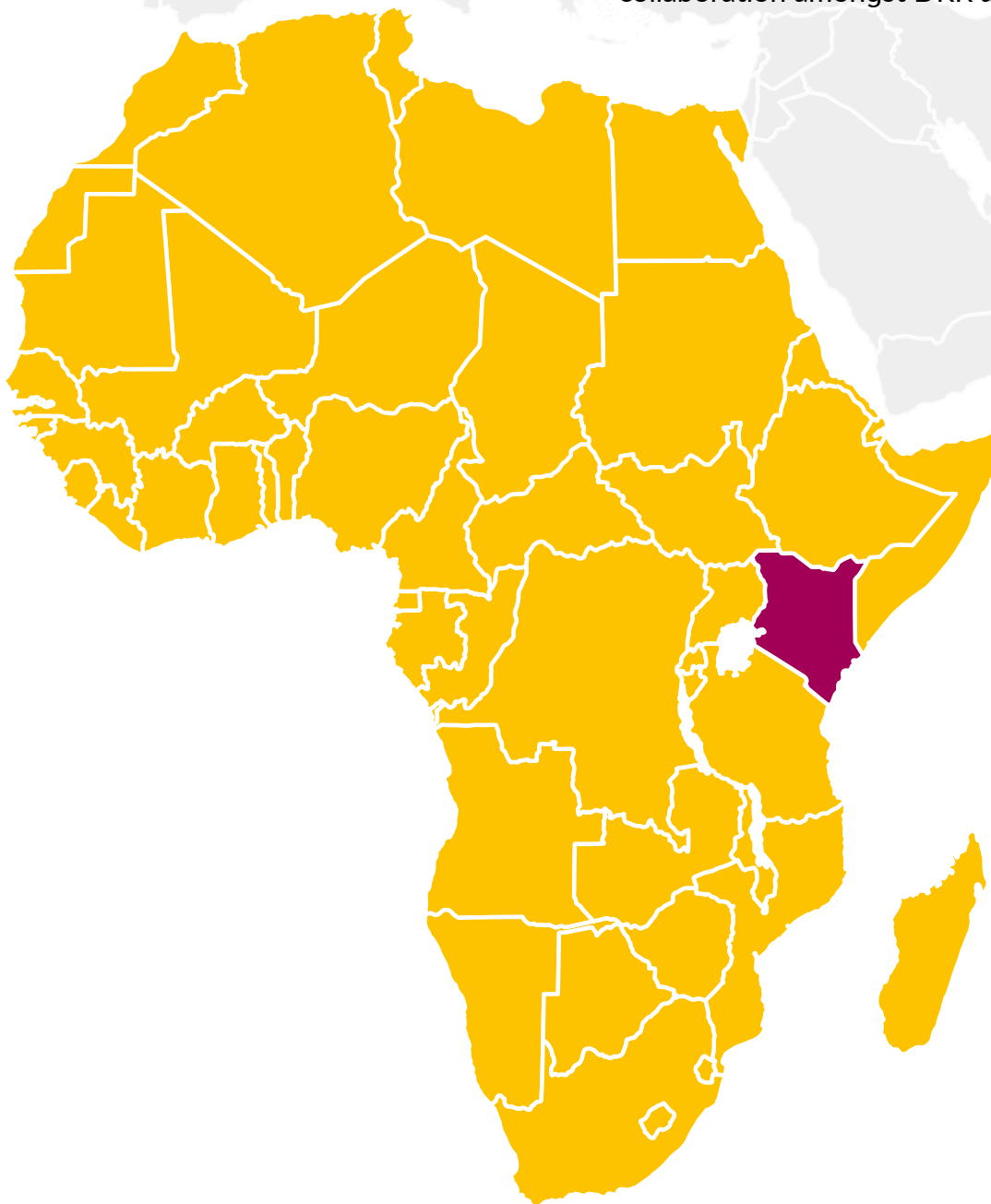
A silhouette of Teresiah a wheelchair user forms as she wheels herself through the doorway of her home in Riruta Satellite, Nairobi. Low income has been Teresiah's shadow for a long time, but she continues working toward financial freedom, hoping that her efforts will one day flourish. March 2025. © Sightsavers/Caterina Nyambura

¹ UN 2013 global survey explains why so many people living with disabilities die in disasters

² Disability inclusion in disaster risk management: Promising practices and opportunities for enhanced engagements www.bit.ly/3IXebF8

Despite being one of the smallest counties in Kenya, Nairobi County - which is also the capital city and home to the largest slum in Africa, Kibera - is the most populous county, with a population estimate of 4.3 million.³ The county is the most populous city in East Africa and faces recurrent disaster risks - including floods, fires, building collapses, and a diverse range of public health emergencies.

Notwithstanding existing legal frameworks, such as the recently enacted Persons with Disabilities Act (2025) and the Nairobi City County Disaster and Emergency Management Act (2015), operationalisation of inclusive DRR remains limited. Focusing on inclusive DRR in Nairobi County is both urgent and strategic due to a combination of urban vulnerability, population density, existing inequalities, and limited collaboration amongst DRR actors



³ 2019 Kenya Population and Housing Census: Volume I

Policy context

Kenya is making commendable efforts toward strengthening its policy framework for disaster management, climate adaptation, and the rights of people with disabilities. This reflects a growing, though still fragmented, commitment to integrating disability inclusion within disaster risk reduction (DRR).

The foundational National Policy for Disaster Management (2017) provides broad guidance on DRR and emphasises community participation and risk awareness; however, it lacks explicit mechanisms to ensure inclusion or accessibility for people with disabilities in disaster preparedness, response, and recovery.

In contrast, the proposed National Disaster Risk Management Bill (2023) marks significant progress as it aligns more closely with the Sendai Framework and acknowledges the importance of inclusive risk governance. When enacted, the Bill will mainstream vulnerable groups, including people with disabilities, in DRR planning and implementation, and proposes the establishment of devolved structures, such as county-level disaster risk management (DRM) committees, which opens space for inclusive participation and accountability. However, clear linkages to the disability rights framework, including enforceable accessibility and reasonable accommodation standards, could still be strengthened.

The Persons with Disabilities Act and the Persons with Disabilities National Policy (2024) provide a robust foundation for the rights of people with disabilities, including

the right to protection and safety during emergencies. The Persons with Disabilities Act recognises the rights of people with disabilities to protection in situations of risk, including situations of armed conflict, humanitarian emergencies, and natural disasters. The national policy calls for the inclusion of people with disabilities in disaster preparedness, response, and recovery initiatives. It promotes the use of disaggregated data, universal design, and accessible early warning systems, aligning well with international disability rights obligations under the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (CRPD). Implementation of these recently developed and enacted frameworks is underway and will require proactive intersectoral coordination and sufficient resource allocation.⁴

The National Policy on Gender and Development adds another layer by recognising the intersectionality of gender and disability in the context of vulnerability. It provides for gender-responsive and inclusive development planning, including in emergencies and climate change adaptation. Operationalisation of this policy, in synergy with both disability and DRR frameworks, is critical to ensuring coherence across sectors.⁵

⁴ Including persons with disabilities in disaster risk reduction in Africa

⁵ State department for gender and affirmative action strategic plan 2023-2027
Kenya: Gender and Vulnerability-Sensitive Disaster Risk Reduction and Community Resilience in Turkana and Tana River Counties

The Nairobi City County Disaster and Emergency Management Act mandates the establishment of disaster committees and plans in Nairobi County, but could be expanded to integrate disability-inclusive standards.

While the Act offers opportunities for public participation and local-level coordination, the absence of explicit provisions on

accessibility, reasonable accommodation, and representation of people with disabilities on disaster committees, may point to incoherence between national policy commitments and county-level implementation frameworks. Recent efforts to capacitate the county staff on disability are notable and are likely to strengthen disability inclusion in the county's DRR priorities.



Juliet, a local dedicated community health promoter smiles during one of the clean-up initiatives she has organised with the residents of the Motherland slum in Eastleigh, Nairobi. March 2025

Where are the policy gaps?

The disability accessible social accountability tool (DASA)

The DASA, a rights-based social accountability process, promotes collaborative actions between people with disabilities, service providers and local government. The initiative aims to build the capacity of both rights-holders and duty-bearers, whilst fostering collective advocacy led by women with disabilities and the lead OPD partner, Gifted Community Centre (GCC). By supporting the localised implementation of Kenya's National Disaster Risk Management Policy frameworks, it aims to institutionalise disability-responsive planning and accountability mechanisms within the county's DRR and urban resilience agenda.

It integrates participatory tools, such as disability inclusive community scorecards and the Photovoice approach, to document and assess the accessibility and responsiveness of DRR services in Nairobi County. The Photovoice process was led by women with disabilities, bringing to light the lived experiences and voices of often

unnoticed and marginalised vulnerable communities within disaster risk management efforts. It demonstrates the capacity, voice and agency of people with disabilities, especially women with disabilities, to monitor services actively, engage duty-bearers, and advocate for inclusive DRR systems.

Through structured dialogue on collectively scoring a DRR indicator framework (developed with OPDs) and interface meetings with service providers and county officials, women with disabilities presented evidence and lived experiences to local authorities - including ward administrators and the Nairobi City County Disaster Management Unit. Service providers also had an opportunity to share constraints and opportunities for improvement. As a result, a joint county-level action plan has been developed in collaboration between people with disabilities, OPD members and county officials.

The Hear Me See Me project used a participatory methodology (the DASA) to identify key policy gaps and challenges. These included:

1. Inconsistent references to disability inclusion across DRR and emergency laws

Kenya has a growing legal and policy framework for both disaster risk management and disability rights. Whereas the two have traditionally operated in a siloed way, the rollout of the new National Disability Policy and the enactment of the Persons with Disabilities Act present a unique opportunity to promote inclusive DRR, given their targeted focus on promoting disability inclusive approaches to disaster risk management.

Alignment is still required in the county specific instruments - such as the Nairobi City County Disaster and Emergency Management Act, which emphasise public participation and early warning systems but make limited or no specific reference to accessibility, universal design, or disability-specific vulnerabilities.¹

2. Inadequate budget allocations for disability-inclusive DRR

Budgets for DRR have not generally included allocations for disability-related accommodations or assistive technologies. A study by the Center for Inclusive Policy found that, while there are commitments to disability inclusion in policies, these are not always reflected in budget allocations. This disconnect may also limit the implementation of inclusive DRR measures.²

3. Lack of explicit mandates for the representation of people with disabilities in county disaster structures and participation in DRR design, planning and monitoring

Kenya's commitments under the Constitution (Article 54) and the CRPD are well reflected in the National Disability Policy and the recently enacted Persons with Disabilities Act. County specific disaster management frameworks do not currently mandate the inclusion of people with disabilities or their representative organisations in disaster committees. For instance, while the Nairobi City County Disaster and Emergency Management Act establishes disaster committees, it lacks provisions mandating the participation of people with disabilities or OPDs in these structures.

This can translate to DRR plans that fail to address essential accessibility needs, such as early warning systems in multiple and disability friendly formats, accessible shelters, and inclusive evacuation protocols.³ The enactment of the Persons with Disabilities Act and the rollout of the National Disability Policy, which both reflect a cohesive approach to mainstreaming inclusive DRR, provides a clear opportunity for a review of county specific laws and policies on gender and disaster response.

¹ Nyeri county formulating regulations for disaster management and person with disabilities <https://new.kenyalaw.org/akn/ke-019/act/2021/12a/eng@2022-04-04/source> Minimum Standards for Protection and Inclusion of Person's with Disabilities in Kenya in Situations of Disaster

² Focusing a disability lens on budgeting – example from Kenya

³ Nairobi City County disaster and E emergency management act

1. Lack of disability in disaster risk data

The United Nations Office for Disaster Risk Reduction highlights that inclusive risk assessments and planning require disaggregated data, including by disability, to effectively manage disaster risk.

Kenya's disaster risk assessments often do not disaggregate data by disability, hindering the identification of specific vulnerabilities faced by people with disabilities in all their diversity. The United Nations Partnership on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities notes the lack of accurate and representative disability-disaggregated data, which may also inhibit the development of inclusive disaster risk reduction strategies in Kenya.¹ The National Disaster Risk Management Policy emphasises the importance of disaggregated data and statistics to strengthen disaster risk modelling and assessment, and the Persons with Disabilities Act mandates the National Council to advise on the systematic collection, analysis, and use of national statistics and disaggregated data on issues relating to people with disabilities. However, a well-defined implementation framework that effectively integrates the various data stakeholders remains absent.

2. Lack of disability inclusion guidelines in community DRR structures

Community-level DRR structures in Kenya lack clear disability inclusion implementation guidelines for the meaningful inclusion of people with disabilities, resulting in their marginalisation during disaster preparedness and response.² The Minimum Standards for Protection and Inclusion of Persons with Disabilities in Kenya in Situations of Disaster outlines the need for explicit guidelines to ensure the inclusion of people with disabilities in DRR policies and practices. However, the implementation of these standards remains limited, particularly at the community level.³

¹ Situational analysis of the rights of persons with disabilities in Kenya

² European Journal of Humanities and Social Sciences; Community-based rehabilitation support programmes and social inclusion of persons with disabilities in Tigania East, Kenya Vol 4, Issue 4, August 2024

³ Minimum standards for protection and inclusion of persons with disabilities in Kenya in situations of emergencies; mainstreaming accessibility and disability inclusion in disaster risk reduction in Kenya (2023)

Recommendations

1. Use new laws and policies as entry points for mainstreaming inclusive DRR

The Persons with Disabilities Act, the Kenya Disability Policy, and the National Disaster Risk Management Bill (when enacted) provide the legislative and policy framework for a genuinely inclusive DRR system in Kenya. With the required regulatory frameworks in place, appropriate structures should be established to support the implementation of the progressive aspirations outlined in the policy and legal frameworks, along with accompanying monitoring mechanisms.

2. Amend county legislation

The imminent review of the Nairobi City County Disaster and Emergency Management Act presents an opportunity to integrate inclusive disaster management in the county's priorities, supplemented with disability-responsive implementation guidelines. This Act establishes disaster management structures within the county that could be expanded to include explicit provisions for the inclusion of people with disabilities in disaster planning and response.

Such amendments could include mandates for accessible early warning systems, inclusive response and evacuation plans, and representation of people with disabilities in disaster management committees. For instance, Nyeri County is

formulating regulations to operationalise its Disaster Management Act and Persons with Disabilities Management Act. These regulations aim to provide a legal framework that ensures people with disabilities enjoy government services without discrimination, particularly in disaster situations.

3. Standardise disability inclusive disaster risk reduction indicators

The United Nations Office for Disaster Risk Reduction (UNDRR) emphasises the need for standardised indicators to ensure the inclusion of people with disabilities in DRR policies and practices.¹ A research study by the Disability-inclusive Disaster Risk Reduction Network (DiDRRN) found that most disability-inclusive DRR initiatives are project-based and lack integration into national systems, partly due to the absence of unified indicators.²

The Disaster Management Bill includes gender mainstreaming as a key priority and aspirations to develop an electronic information system to consolidate the various repositories held within counties and ministries. The National Disability Policy and the Persons with Disabilities Act have set out clear disability disaggregated data requirements that should be harmonised with the DRM legislative process to ensure coherence.

4. Strengthen localisation and budget integration at the county level

¹ Including persons with disabilities in disaster risk reduction in Africa

² Including persons with disabilities in disaster risk reduction: a research study from eight countries of Africa, Asia and South/Central America

Implementation of national policies at the county level remains inconsistent, with limited budget allocations for disability-specific initiatives. For example, a risk-sensitive budget review by UNDRR revealed that Kenya's public investment in DRR lacks a systematic approach to integrating disability considerations, especially at the county level.¹ The new Disability Act and policy provides a good opportunity to ensure the integration of disability priorities in the county disaster management plans.

The DRM Bill proposes the establishment of County Disaster Risk Management Committees whose scope includes formulating county disaster risk management plans and making recommendations on the resourcing requirements for disaster risk management in the counties. Efforts to influence the progression of the Bill to enactment should be heightened to strengthen the overall legal framework for disaster management in the country.

1. Use inclusive monitoring and evaluation tools

The current monitoring and evaluations frameworks on DRR in Kenya should include the standardised disability-specific indicators, to assess the effectiveness of inclusive DRR strategies. The UNDRR's snapshot report on including people with disabilities in DRR in Africa highlights the lack of inclusive monitoring and evaluation tools as a significant barrier to effective implementation.

The Global Facility for Disaster Reduction and Recovery notes the importance of developing these inclusive tools to ensure that the needs of people with disabilities are adequately addressed in disaster recovery efforts.² The Disaster Risk Information Management System that is proposed in the DRM Bill provides an opportunity to enhance disaster risk coordination at the national and county levels. Integrating the standardised disability-specific indicators into this process will help promote the protection of the rights of people with disabilities, as set out in Article 11 of the CRPD.³

¹ Kenya: risk-sensitive budget review

² Disability inclusion in disaster risk management

³ Disaster inclusion in disaster risk reduction

Conclusion

Advancing disability-inclusive DRR in Kenya requires a strategic approach that leverages existing national frameworks - including the National Disaster Risk Management Bill, the Persons with Disabilities Act, and the Kenya Disability Policy - to push for the full inclusion of people with disabilities in DRR planning and implementation.

The National Disaster Risk Management Bill outlines a robust structural framework to steer management of disaster risk in the country and needs to be passed soon. The proposed establishment of the County Disaster Risk Management Committees will promote localised solutions that respond to the disaster shocks in each county.

The imminent review of the Nairobi Disaster Management Act and accompanying County DRR guidelines should integrate the

provisions on the new Disability Act and the National Disability Policy to promote coherence. Moreover, promoting integrated, cross-sectoral implementation frameworks that address the intersection of gender, disability and disaster risk will enhance coherent, equitable and resilient disaster management practices across all levels of governance. This will mean that people with disabilities face fewer risks and less discrimination when disasters occur.



Peter is a wheelchair user who was badly affected by the 2024 April floods seated outside on his old wheelchair at his compound in Salama village, Juja, Kiambu. March 2025.

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