



Our voices at the Table A Young woman with disability's Journey at the 4th African Girls Summit

African Union Headquarters, Addis Ababa, Ethiopia, December 2025



1. Background

The African Girls Summit (AGS), hosted by the African Union Commission (AUC) in partnership with civil society organizations and development partners, is one of Africa's leading continental platforms for dialogue, reflection, and action on issues affecting girls and young women. The 4th edition of the Summit was held at the African Union Headquarters in Addis Ababa, Ethiopia, bringing together a rich mix of voices including young leaders, policymakers, government representatives, civil society actors, traditional leaders, development agencies, and activists from across the African continent.

This year's theme, *"Accelerating Investments to End Harmful Practices: Empowering Girls for Africa's Transformation,"* resonated deeply with the continent's commitment to achieving gender equality and protecting the rights of girls in



alignment with the Agenda 2063 – The Africa We Want, the Maputo Protocol, and the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs).

The Summit provided a dynamic platform to review progress made since the previous editions held in Zambia and Senegal, while also identifying gaps and emerging issues in addressing harmful practices such as child marriage, female genital mutilation (FGM), gender-based violence (GBV), and other violations affecting girls' bodily autonomy and dignity.

Disabled Women in Africa (DIWA) took part in the 4th African Girls Summit through Sonke Gender Justice Support as part of its continued advocacy for the inclusion and leadership of girls and young women with disabilities in continental gender equality and human rights dialogues. This participation aligned with DIWA's ongoing interventions under the UN Trust Fund Project "Inclusive Empowered Feminist Movements to End Violence Against Women and Girls with Disabilities" and the SPADRA Project (Strengthening Partnerships to Advance Disability Rights in Africa), which emphasize strengthening inclusive feminist movements and ensuring that disability and gender are integrated into African policy processes.

2 Objectives of DIWA's Participation at the 4th African Girls Summit

To amplify the voices of girls and young women with disabilities in regional policy platforms focused on ending harmful practices.

To advocate for disability inclusion within the Summit's deliberations, ensuring that the final commitments and outcome documents recognize and address the unique barriers faced by girls with disabilities

To support leadership development and mentorship for young women advocates with disabilities through active engagement in continental dialogues.

To strengthen DIWA's partnerships and visibility within African Union-led mechanisms and networks working on gender equality, youth, and human rights.

These objectives reflected DIWA's broader vision of ensuring that African girls with disabilities are not only participants in, but also leaders of, movements aimed at transforming harmful norms and promoting equality.

3. Representation of DIWA and the Young Leader's Role

DIWA was represented by Juvita Sindani accompanied by her assistant Pauline Mtachi a passionate and emerging young leader with a disability, whose participation symbolized the organization's commitment to nurturing a new generation of inclusive feminist advocates. Her involvement was part of DIWA's strategic investment in intergenerational leadership development, ensuring that youth with disabilities gain the exposure, confidence, and networks required to influence continental agendas.

Throughout the Summit, the young leader actively participated in plenary sessions, youth dialogues, and side events that addressed issues of bodily autonomy, harmful practices, inclusive education, and SRHR. She contributed meaningfully to the Youth Pre-Summit, where she shared her lived experience as a young woman with a disability and called for intersectional approaches to ending harmful practices. She was clear in her message that girls with disabilities experience double discrimination and must be recognized as equal stakeholders in shaping solutions.

She also took part in the Intergenerational Dialogue, a flagship session that brought together policymakers and youth leaders to exchange perspectives. Her contribution emphasized that policies and programs on ending harmful practices will only be sustainable when they are inclusive, accessible, and participatory for girls with disabilities.

In addition, she played an instrumental role in the drafting of the Youth Outcome Statement, advocating for explicit references to girls with disabilities and inclusive education, health, and protection systems. Her leadership during the session was widely appreciated and acknowledged by fellow youth delegates and organizers.

4. DIWA's Contribution to the Summit

DIWA's contribution to the 4th African Girls Summit went beyond representation—it was strategic, policy-oriented, and advocacy-driven. The organization's engagement ensured that the Summit's outcomes captured the voices, aspirations, and priorities of girls and young women with disabilities.

Policy and Advocacy Input

In the lead-up to the Summit, DIWA developed and submitted a comprehensive policy paper titled "Proposed Inputs on the Inclusion of Girls with Disabilities in the Outcome Document of the 4th African Girls' Summit". The submission provided practical and actionable language recommendations to ensure that the final document explicitly recognized girls with disabilities as a priority group in Africa's gender equality and empowerment agenda.

Key contributions included:

Preamble inclusion: DIWA proposed that the preamble explicitly recognize girls with disabilities as a measure of Africa's progress toward equality and justice, urging reference to the African Disability Protocol (ADP) and the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (UNCRPD).

Eliminating Harmful Practices: The submission called for inclusive reporting mechanisms, disability-sensitive psychosocial services, and community engagement with caregivers and OPDs to address stigma and ensure protection of girls with disabilities.

Innovation and Emerging Threats: DIWA advocated for digital inclusion, accessible e-learning environments, and climate resilience frameworks that protect girls with disabilities in crises and displacement contexts.

Accountability and Governance: DIWA proposed the integration of disability-disaggregated indicators, and collaboration between the African Commission on Human

and Peoples' Rights, the African Committee of Experts on the Rights and Welfare of the Child, and National Human Rights Institutions to monitor inclusion.

Call to Action: DIWA's submission urged Member States to ratify and domesticate the African Disability Protocol, adopt inclusive budgeting, and ensure inclusive education through reasonable accommodation. It also encouraged development partners to fund organizations of women and girls with disabilities and research institutions to adopt the Washington Group Questions for data collection

Representation and Visibility

By facilitating the participation of a young woman leader with a disability, DIWA demonstrated practical leadership in inclusive representation. The organization ensured that youth with disabilities were visible and heard, challenging stereotypes and changing narratives about what young African women with disabilities can achieve when given the opportunity.

Networking and Collaboration

DIWA also used the Summit to strengthen relationships with strategic partners such as the Ministry of Gender Principal secretary Esmie Kainja, Kondwani Muhone and from Malawi's Embassy Vyawo Chavula as well as Malawian's Human Rights Defender 2025 Maggie Kathewera Banda from WORLEC, and other feminist and youth networks. These collaborations opened avenues for joint advocacy on upcoming continental processes such as Women Deliver Africa 2026.

Contribution to the Outcome Document

Through its delegate and pre-Summit submissions, DIWA's advocacy influenced the final Outcome Document of the 4th African Girls Summit. The document now includes recognition of girls with disabilities as a vulnerable but capable group, urging African governments to ensure their protection and inclusion in education, healthcare, and leadership opportunities.

5. Key Outcomes and Achievements



- DIWA contributed to the final Summit declaration and youth statement acknowledging girls with disabilities as a priority group for targeted interventions.
- Enhanced Visibility and Representation. DIWA's delegate brought strong visibility to the experiences and potential of young women with disabilities, promoting a positive and empowering narrative.
- Strengthened Partnerships. DIWA expanded its network of allies across the feminist and disability movements, creating stronger regional advocacy linkages.
- Capacity Building and Leadership Growth. The young leader gained valuable advocacy and leadership experience, which will enhance her future engagement in DIWA's regional programs and advocacy platforms.

6. Lessons Learned

1. Intentional Inclusion is Essential. Representation of girls with disabilities must be intentionally planned and resourced to ensure meaningful participation in policy spaces.
2. Mentorship Matters. Mentorship and preparation before, during, and after such events are crucial in strengthening the confidence and effectiveness of young leaders with disabilities.

7. Way Forward

Following the Summit, DIWA intends to:

- Follow up with the organizers on the final Summit Outcome Document so that it can be shared with DIWA member organizations, focusing on commitments that align with the empowerment of girls with disabilities.
- Integrate Summit outcomes into DIWA's ongoing work under the Sonke Gender Justice and SPADRA projects, ensuring alignment with regional and national advocacy frameworks.
- Continue mentoring and supporting young women leaders with disabilities to participate in future advocacy spaces such as CSW70, Women Deliver 2026, and African Union Gender Strategy dialogues.
- Engage in post-Summit advocacy with the African Union and national governments to promote inclusive implementation of commitments made in Addis Ababa.

8. Conclusion

DIWA's participation in the 4th African Girls Summit marked a historic and transformative step toward strengthening the visibility and agency of girls and young women with disabilities in Africa's gender equality movement. Through its direct policy engagement, mentorship, and advocacy, DIWA demonstrated that the inclusion of girls with disabilities is not optional it is central to achieving justice and equality.

The presence and contribution of DIWA's young leader served as a powerful reminder that inclusion transforms spaces, enriches dialogue, and drives real change. The Summit's outcomes now reflect that reality, reinforcing the importance of collective action to ensure that no girl is left behind in the journey toward an equitable and inclusive Africa.