

STORIES OF CHANGE AND COLLECTIVE IMPACT



Strengthening Inclusive and Empowered Feminist Movements for Women and Girls with Disabilities in Africa

Transformative stories from the United Nations Trust Fund-supported project implemented by



Disabled Women in Africa in partnership with Coalition on Violence Against Women



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How Capacity Building Transformed the Engagement of Leaders with Disabilities in the EVAWG Movement



For many women with disabilities in Africa, violence is not only experienced in homes and communities it is reinforced by silence, exclusion, inaccessible systems, and deeply rooted discrimination.

According to DIWA's 2024 Regional report "Powerful yet Overlooked, African women with disabilities and the ongoing struggle for inclusion 30 years after Beijing, Women and girls with disabilities continue to face heightened risks of violence, discrimination, and exclusion across Africa. Yet despite their lived experiences and important perspectives, many women with disabilities remain underrepresented within Ending Violence Against Women and Girls (EVAWG) movements due to barriers such as stigma, inaccessible spaces, limited leadership opportunities, and lack of exposure to advocacy platforms. This exclusion weakens efforts to build truly inclusive feminist movements and limits the visibility of issues affecting women and girls with disabilities.

Inclusive EVAWG Movement in Eastern and Southern Africa



Research conducted in this project by Coalition on Violence Against Women (COVAW) in partnership with Disabled Women in Africa (DIWA) on Assessing the Participation of Women and Girls with Disabilities in the EVAWG Movement in Malawi, Kenya, and Rwanda in 2026, revealed that women with disabilities continued to face multiple barriers to meaningful engagement within EVAWG spaces. The study highlighted challenges such as limited representation in leadership structures, inaccessible communication and advocacy spaces, stigma and discrimination, weak collaboration between disability rights organizations and mainstream feminist movements, and lack of confidence among women with disabilities due to years of exclusion.

The findings also demonstrated that many women with disabilities were often invited into spaces only as symbolic participants rather than active contributors influencing agendas and decisions. This reinforced the urgent need for intentional investment in leadership development, advocacy skills, confidence building, and movement strengthening for women with disabilities.

In response to these findings, DIWA, through the United Nations Trust Fund to end violence against women-supported project titled “Inclusive and Empowered Feminist Movement in Africa” which among its interventions implemented leadership and advocacy capacity-building trainings in Malawi, Kenya, and Rwanda aimed at equipping women leaders and advocates with disabilities with the knowledge and practical skills needed to engage effectively within EVAWG movements.



One participant reflected:

"Before the training, I feared speaking in public spaces and engaging with other organizations. I thought advocacy was for educated professionals and leaders in big organizations. But now I understand that my lived experience is also expertise, and I can confidently contribute to discussions on ending violence against women and girls."

Through the trainings, a total of 52 women leaders and advocates with disabilities were equipped with knowledge on disability rights, gender equality, intersectionality, human rights, frameworks, and violence against women and girls with disabilities. Participants also gained practical skills in advocacy, public speaking, movement building, storytelling, digital advocacy, and engagement with policy and human rights mechanisms.

The trainings intentionally brought together women with diverse disabilities, including deaf women, women with visual impairments, psychosocial disabilities, albinism, physical disabilities, and women of short stature, and in addition, women with disabilities from the refugee camps and the rural were also included creating an inclusive and empowering learning environment.

For many participants, the trainings became transformative spaces where they began to see themselves not merely as beneficiaries of advocacy, but as leaders and changemakers within feminist and ERAWG movements.

The trainings also directly addressed issues highlighted in the research, particularly low confidence, exclusion from leadership opportunities, and limited participation in advocacy spaces. Sessions on confidence building, strengthening personal brand, and understanding advocacy frameworks helped participants overcome internalized stigma and build the courage to engage more meaningfully within movements and policy spaces.

Following the trainings, participants became more active within community advocacy initiatives, disability rights platforms, and feminist engagements in their respective countries. Some began leading awareness sessions on violence against women and girls with disabilities, while others strengthened collaboration with mainstream women's rights organizations and engaged in local and regional advocacy platforms.

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The initiative also strengthened solidarity and networking among women advocates with disabilities across the three countries, contributing to stronger regional collaboration and collective advocacy within the EVAWG movement.

Importantly, the trainings helped shift the role of women with disabilities within EVAWG spaces from passive participation to informed and confident engagement. Women with disabilities increasingly began positioning themselves as advocates, trainers, movement builders, and contributors shaping discussions, policies, and strategies on ending violence against women and girls.

This story demonstrates the importance of pairing evidence with action. By using research findings to inform targeted capacity building, DIWA and its partners were able to strengthen the meaningful participation and leadership of women with disabilities within the EVAWG movement, ensuring that their voices are not only heard, but influence the agenda for inclusive gender justice across the region.



The Power of Coming Together: How Sub-Regional Convenings Strengthened Collective Action in the EVAWG Movement



In East and Southern Africa, women and girls with disabilities continue to face disproportionate levels of violence, exclusion, and discrimination. Yet despite these realities, organizations of women with disabilities often work in isolation, with limited opportunities for cross-country learning, solidarity building, and collective advocacy within Ending Violence Against Women and Girls (EVAWG) movements.

Many women with disabilities also remain excluded from mainstream feminist spaces, resulting in fragmented advocacy efforts and limited visibility of disability-inclusive approaches within regional gender equality agendas.

Recognizing the importance of collective organizing and movement building, Disabled Women in Africa (DIWA), in partnership with Coalition on Violence Against Women and with support from the United Nations Trust Fund to End Violence Against Women, organized sub-regional convenings bringing together women with disabilities, feminist organizations, advocates, government representatives, and other key stakeholders from Malawi, Kenya, and Rwanda.

The convenings created an important platform for women with disabilities to share lived experiences, strengthen solidarity, exchange good practices, and collectively strategize on advancing disability-inclusive approaches within EVAWG movements



So far, the project has successfully held two sub-regional convenings, each serving as a powerful platform for movement building, solidarity, and advancing disability-inclusive approaches within EVAWG movements.

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Building on the momentum and lessons from Kenya, the second sub-regional convening was held in Malawi under the theme:

“Strengthening Voices, Leadership, and Collective Action: Advancing Sub-Regional Solidarity for Inclusion of Women and Girls with Disabilities in Ending Violence Against Women and Girls.”

The Malawi convening further deepened regional collaboration and strengthened solidarity among women advocates with disabilities across the three countries. It created safe and inclusive spaces for participants to share experiences, discuss common challenges, and identify collective strategies for advancing disability-inclusive EVAWG advocacy.

For many participants, these convenings represented the first time they had engaged in regional platforms specifically centering the voices and leadership of women with disabilities within EVAWG movements.



The gatherings created safe and inclusive spaces where participants openly discussed barriers they face, including violence, discrimination, inaccessible justice systems, exclusion from feminist spaces, and underrepresentation in leadership and policy engagement.

Beyond dialogue, the convenings strengthened relationships and collaboration among organizations of women with disabilities and mainstream feminist actors. Participants identified common challenges across countries and developed shared strategies for advocacy, movement building, and strengthening disability inclusion within gender equality efforts.

One participant reflected:

"Before attending the convening, I thought the challenges we face in my country were isolated. Meeting women from other countries helped me realize that our struggles are connected, but so is our power. We are stronger when we work together."

The convenings also elevated the visibility of women with disabilities within broader regional advocacy spaces. Government

representatives, human rights institutions, UN agencies, civil society actors, and feminist organizations engaged directly with women advocates with disabilities, creating opportunities for dialogue, recognition, and stronger partnerships.

Importantly, the convenings strengthened the confidence and leadership of women with disabilities to engage within regional and international advocacy platforms. Participants left with stronger networks, increased solidarity, and renewed commitment to collectively advancing the rights of women and girls with disabilities,



The impact extended beyond the meetings themselves. Following the convenings, women advocates with disabilities strengthened collaboration across countries, increased engagement with mainstream feminist movements, and amplified advocacy on disability-inclusive EVAWG responses within local and regional spaces. The convenings also contributed to building a more connected and visible sub-regional movement of women with disabilities advocating for gender justice and inclusion.

Additionally, the convenings reinforced the importance of evidence-based advocacy through presentations and discussions on the research assessing participation of women and girls with disabilities within EVAWG movements. These discussions enabled participants to collectively reflect on barriers to participation and identify practical solutions for strengthening inclusion and leadership.

Through solidarity walks, panel discussions, gallery exhibitions, networking sessions, and collective dialogues, the convenings demonstrated that movement building is not only about advocacy it is about creating spaces where women with disabilities feel seen, heard, valued, and connected to a broader regional struggle for justice and equality.

This story highlights the power of convening as a strategy for transformation. Bringing together women with disabilities, feminist actors, and key stakeholders across countries, DIWA and its partners strengthened collective voice, regional solidarity, and coordinated action toward building a more inclusive and disability-responsive EVAWG movement in Africa.





A Historic Shift:

Women with Disabilities Influencing Global Gender Equality Spaces at Women Deliver

For many years, women with disabilities have remained largely invisible within global gender equality platforms, despite facing multiple and intersecting forms of discrimination. Major feminist conferences and convenings often discussed inclusion without meaningfully ensuring the participation, accessibility, and leadership of women with disabilities themselves.

As a result, women with disabilities frequently encountered barriers ranging from inaccessible venues and communication systems to limited sponsorship opportunities and exclusion from outcome documents and decision-making spaces.



Recognizing the importance of ensuring that women with disabilities are fully represented within global feminist movements, Disabled Women in Africa (DIWA), through the United Nations Trust Fund-supported project implemented in partnership with Coalition on Violence Against Women, actively participated in the Women Deliver Africa Regional Convening held in Nairobi, Kenya. Alongside 4 other women with disabilities advocates and leaders trained in this project were supported to participate in the Women deliver Africa. The convening served as an important preparatory platform ahead of the global Women Deliver 2026 conference in Melbourne, Australia.

DIWA's participation was intentional and strategic to ensure that the voices, experiences, and priorities of women and girls with disabilities were not left behind within the Women Deliver movement and its outcome processes.

During the convening, DIWA worked alongside African women with disabilities and feminist allies to advocate for stronger disability inclusion within the outcome statement and broader Women Deliver agenda. The organization emphasized the need for meaningful participation of women with disabilities, accessible conference spaces, disability-inclusive sexual and reproductive health and rights (SRHR), and recognition of intersectional discrimination affecting women and girls with disabilities.

Importantly, DIWA contributed recommendations and perspectives from African women with disabilities into the Women Deliver Africa Outcome Statement, ensuring that disability inclusion was explicitly reflected within the commitments and recommendations emerging from the convening



The impact of this advocacy became even more visible during the main Women Deliver 2026 conference held in Melbourne, Australia.

Compared to previous Women Deliver conferences and more recent held in Rwanda, the Melbourne conference demonstrated significantly improved accessibility and inclusion of persons with disabilities. More women with disabilities were sponsored and supported to participate than in previous years, reflecting a growing recognition of the importance of disability-inclusive feminist engagement.

While in Melbourne, women with disabilities also had a unique opportunity to directly contribute to discussions shaping the **Melbourne Declaration on Gender Equality**. Through consultations and dialogue spaces, women with disabilities provided input to ensure that the declaration reflected principles of inclusivity, accessibility, intersectionality, and meaningful participation of persons with disabilities.

This was a significant milestone. Rather than being consulted after decisions were made, women with disabilities were actively involved in shaping one of the key global declarations on gender equality. Their contributions helped strengthen the visibility of disability rights within international feminist commitments and reinforced the message that gender equality cannot be achieved without disability inclusion.

Participants highlighted issues such as barriers to sexual and reproductive health services, exclusion from leadership and decision-making spaces, stigma and discrimination, and the need for accessible systems and policies that recognize the rights and dignity of women and girls with disabilities.

The final Melbourne Declaration is expected to go a long way in influencing global conversations, policies, and advocacy efforts on gender equality and disability inclusion. For women and girls with disabilities around the world, the declaration represents a growing recognition that their voices, experiences, and leadership matter

within global feminist movements.

Beyond the conference itself, the experience increased the visibility, confidence, and recognition of women with disabilities within international advocacy spaces. Women with disabilities contributed not only as participants, but as advocates and thought leaders shaping global conversations on inclusion and gender justice.

This story demonstrates the power of sustained advocacy and collective influence. Through intentionally engaging in regional and global feminist platforms, DIWA and women with disabilities helped transform Women Deliver into a more inclusive and accessible movement one that increasingly recognizes that there can be no gender equality without the meaningful inclusion and leadership of women and girls with disabilities.



A Historic Shift:

Women with Disabilities Leading Global Conversations at CSW69

For many years, women with disabilities have remained largely invisible within global gender equality spaces, despite facing multiple and intersecting forms of discrimination. International platforms often discussed inclusion without meaningfully centering the leadership, voices, and lived experiences of women with disabilities themselves.

At global forums such as the Commission on the Status of Women (CSW), women with disabilities have historically faced barriers to participation, visibility, accessibility, and influence within mainstream feminist movements.

Through the United Nations Trust Fund-supported project implemented by Disabled Women in Africa (DIWA) in partnership with Coalition on Violence Against Women, women with disabilities increasingly strengthened their confidence, advocacy capacity, and engagement within regional and global feminist movements.

This progress culminated in a historic milestone during the CSW69 held in New York in March 2025.

For the first time, DIWA and its partners organized and hosted a side event at the margins of CSW69, creating a dedicated platform that centered the realities, leadership, and advocacy priorities of



African women with disabilities within global gender equality discussions.

The side event highlighted findings from the regional report

“Powerful Yet Overlooked:

African Women with Disabilities and the Ongoing Struggle for Inclusion, 30 Years After Beijing,”

a landmark report led by DIWA in collaboration with Humanity & Inclusion, International Disability Alliance and World Federation of the Deaf. The report examined the ongoing barriers faced by African women with disabilities in relation to leadership, inclusion, participation, access to services, violence, and representation within gender equality processes thirty years after the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action.

The discussions at CSW69 reinforced a powerful message: despite progress made globally on gender equality, women with disabilities continue to be left behind in many policy, advocacy, and development processes.

As part of the side event, participants also showcased a video documentary capturing the lived realities and barriers faced by women with disabilities, developed during the leadership and advocacy capacity-building trainings conducted under the project. The documentary highlighted issues such as stigma, inaccessible systems, violence, exclusion from leadership spaces, and barriers to justice and participation faced by women with disabilities across communities.

For many participants, the documentary created an emotional and powerful moment of reflection, helping bring real human experiences into global policy conversations.

Beyond hosting the side event, women with disabilities also

actively participated in several high-level platforms and panel discussions during CSW69. These engagements created important opportunities for women with disabilities to contribute directly to global conversations on gender equality, disability inclusion, leadership, sexual and reproductive health and rights (SRHR), feminist movement building, and ending violence against women and girls.

For many women with disabilities, CSW69 marked a historic shift from attending global spaces as observers to actively shaping conversations as speakers, panelists, organizers, and advocates.

The participation also strengthened visibility and recognition of organizations of women with disabilities within international feminist spaces. It created opportunities for networking, solidarity building, and collaboration with feminist organizations, development partners, UN agencies, and global advocacy movements.





Importantly, the experience demonstrated the impact of investing in leadership and movement building for women with disabilities. Women who had previously lacked confidence to engage in advocacy spaces were now confidently speaking in global forums, influencing discussions, and amplifying the realities of women and girls with disabilities on international platforms.

The side event and broader engagement at CSW69 reinforced the message that women with disabilities are not merely beneficiaries of gender equality efforts rather, they are changemakers whose voices are critical in shaping inclusive feminist futures.

This historic milestone demonstrated that when women with disabilities are intentionally supported and given space to lead, they move beyond visibility they influence global agendas, shape policy conversations, and transform international feminist spaces toward greater inclusion, accessibility, and equality.

The Assessment on the Participation of Women with Disabilities in EAWG Spaces:

Research Findings
from
Kenya,
Rwanda and
Malawi

We attend the meetings, but we are often not asked for our opinions when decisions are made." Participant during the assessment consultations.

This powerful reflection captures the reality faced by many women and girls with disabilities across East and Southern Africa present in spaces, yet excluded from influence and decision-making.

To better understand these realities, Disabled Women in Africa (DIWA), in partnership with Coalition on Violence Against Women and with support from the United Nations Trust Fund to End Violence Against Women, contributed to a regional assessment titled:

“Participation of Women and Girls with Disabilities in Ending Violence Against Women and Girls (EVAWG) Movements in East and Southern Africa.”

The research was conducted in Kenya, Malawi, and Rwanda to assess the level of participation, representation, leadership, and inclusion of women and girls with disabilities within EVAWG movements and feminist spaces.

The findings revealed that despite the existence of vibrant feminist and EVAWG movements in the region, women and girls with disabilities remain systematically marginalized, underrepresented, and excluded from leadership and decision-making spaces.

The study established that many women with disabilities experience participation that is largely symbolic rather than meaningful. In fact, 64% of respondents described their participation as largely consultative and lacking substantive influence, demonstrating that while women with disabilities may be invited into spaces, they are often not fully engaged in shaping decisions and agendas.

The research also highlighted alarmingly high levels of violence experienced by women and girls with disabilities, including emotional, physical, economic, sexual, and institutional violence. Structural barriers such as inaccessible reporting mechanisms, negative stereotypes, poverty,

inaccessible services, and discrimination further limited access to justice and support systems.

One hearing-impaired participant explained:

"Even when we report abuse, the system often cannot handle the specific needs of women like me, and we are left without support."

The study further revealed low leadership representation of women with disabilities within EVAWG movements and related structures, with leadership representation standing at 52% in Kenya, 47% in Malawi, and 44% in Rwanda. Accessibility was identified as a major barrier, with 71% of respondents reporting that meetings, advocacy spaces, or services were inaccessible.

Importantly, the assessment highlighted the weak collaboration between mainstream feminist movements and Organizations of Persons with Disabilities (OPDs), contributing to disability issues remaining insufficiently prioritized within broader EVAWG agendas.

However, beyond exposing barriers, the assessment also became a powerful advocacy and movement-building tool.

The findings were presented at major regional and global advocacy platforms, including the CSW70 and the Women Deliver 2026 conference in Australia, where they contributed to global conversations on inclusive feminist movements and the participation of women with disabilities in gender justice spaces.

Importantly, the findings were also submitted and shared during bilateral engagements with the Working Group of the African Commission on Human and Peoples' Rights (ACHPR) in Banjul

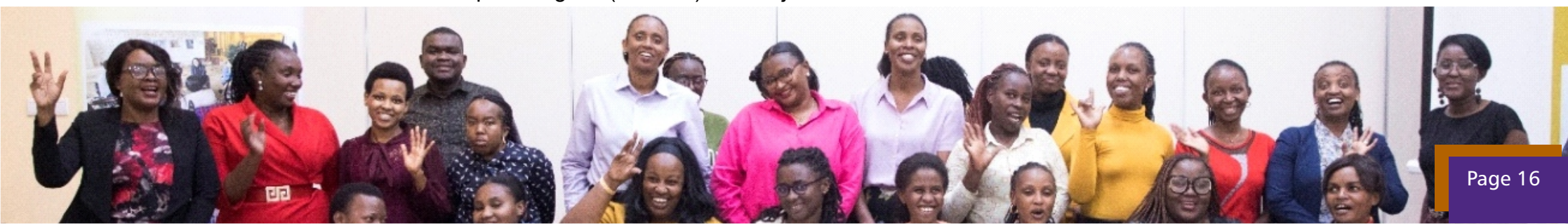
during discussions on the review of the Maputo Protocol. Through engagements involving women with disabilities from Kenya and regional disability rights actors, the research provided evidence on the realities, exclusion, and barriers faced by women with disabilities within gender equality and EVAWG spaces.

For many women involved in the consultations, the assessment process itself became empowering because it created safe spaces to openly share lived experiences of exclusion, violence, discrimination, and invisibility within feminist movements.

The assessment also reinforced a critical message: women and girls with disabilities are not merely beneficiaries within EVAWG movements, they are leaders, advocates, and experts of their own realities whose voices are essential in shaping inclusive feminist movements and responses to violence.

Today, the findings continue to influence advocacy, partnerships, and conversations around disability inclusion within gender justice movements across the region. Organizations will continue using the evidence to advocate for accessible systems, stronger representation, targeted funding, and meaningful inclusion of women with disabilities in leadership and decision-making spaces.

This story demonstrates the transformative power of research and evidence in making invisible realities visible. Documenting the lived experiences, barriers, and aspirations of women and girls with disabilities in Kenya, Rwanda, and Malawi, the assessment strengthened advocacy, informed action, and amplified the collective voice of women with disabilities within the movement to end violence against women and girls across Africa.





Contact Us

Disabled Women in Africa (DIWA)
 Amina house, Unit 11 , Chilambula road, opposite
 cashbuild
 P.O Box 2009,
 Lilongwe, Malawi

info@diwaafrika.org

www.diwaafrika.org

Follow us on Facebook : disabledwomeninafrica1/



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