



Coalition of Violence Against Women



Ending Violence Against Women and Girls

Sub Regional Convening Forum
for women with disabilities in
Africa.

**Inclusive and Empowered Feminist
Movements in Africa**



Funded by
the European Union



Photo taken by DIWA: women and girls with disabilities advocates in Malawi

In East and Southern Africa, women and girls with disabilities have long been excluded from feminist and Ending Violence Against Women and Girls (EVAWG) movements. Their voices have often been overlooked, their leadership underestimated, and their access to justice and protection limited.

Through the Inclusive and Empowered Feminist Movements in Africa Project, Disabled Women in Africa (DIWA), in partnership with the Coalition on Violence Against Women (COVAW) and with support from the United Nations Trust Fund to End Violence Against Women (UNTF), is transforming this reality. The project is strengthening the leadership, participation, and advocacy capacity of women and girls with disabilities in Kenya, Malawi, and Rwanda.

About Disabled Women in Africa (DIWA)

Disabled Women in Africa (DIWA) is a pan-African regional network led by and for women and girls with disabilities. Established in 2002, DIWA works to confront and dismantle the multiple and intersecting forms of discrimination faced by women and girls with disabilities across Africa. DIWA's vision is clear: "Empowered women and girls with disabilities in Africa who lead change and enjoy equal opportunities, rights, and access to resources".

Through advocacy, research, capacity strengthening, and movement building, DIWA promotes leadership, equality, and full participation of women with disabilities in social, political, and economic life. DIWA actively engages with national governments, regional bodies such as the African Union, and global platforms including the United Nations to influence inclusive policies and practices.

About Coalition on Violence Against Women (COVAW)

The Coalition on Violence Against Women (COVAW) is a leading national women's rights organisation established in 1995. For nearly three decades, COVAW has been at the forefront of breaking the silence on violence against women and girls (VAWG) in Kenya and beyond. COVAW's vision is clear: "A society where women and girls enjoy equal rights, freedoms, and thrive in safe spaces". Its mission is equally bold: "To champion the rights of women and girls to be free from all forms of violations".

Through policy advocacy, legal reform engagement, community mobilization, and movement strengthening, COVAW has consistently influenced the policy, legal, and practice landscape in Kenya. Its long-standing experience in advancing gender justice makes it a strategic and powerful partner in the Inclusive and Empowered Feminist Movements in Africa Project.



Photo by DIWA: Women with disabilities leaders and advocates trainees in Rwanda

STRENGTHENING FEMINIST AND DISABILITY MOVEMENTS TOGETHER

In partnership with Disabled Women in Africa (DIWA), COVAW is co-implementing the UNTF-supported project aimed at strengthening the sub-regional EAWG movement of women and girls with disabilities in East and Southern Africa.

COVAW brings deep expertise in feminist movement-building, policy advocacy, and gender justice frameworks. Together with DIWA, the partnership bridges feminist and disability rights movements ensuring that women with disabilities are not treated as a separate issue, but are central to mainstream EAWG efforts. This collaboration is shifting the narrative from symbolic inclusion to meaningful leadership. Through COVAW's feminist movement expertise and DIWA's disability-led leadership, the project has: Built bridges between mainstream women's rights organisations and disability rights advocates, Increased representation of women with disabilities in advocacy spaces, strengthened policy engagement grounded in lived experience and evidence and Elevated disability inclusion within regional and global feminist conversations.

WHY THIS PROJECT MATTERS

Globally, nearly 1 in 5 women live with a disability which translates to 19.2% of the female population worldwide. (World Bank, 2023), yet their experiences remain largely invisible in gender-based violence prevention and response efforts. Women and girls with disabilities face higher risks of violence due to stigma, discrimination, economic dependency, inaccessible services, and exclusion from decision-making spaces.

Despite the existence of policies and legal frameworks such as the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (UNCPRD), Gender Equality Acts, and National Gender Policies, women with disabilities continue to encounter barriers in accessing justice, protection, and leadership opportunities.

This project was designed to close that gap by placing women and girls with disabilities at the center of feminist and EAWG movements. The significant prevalence of disability among women worldwide and underscores the importance of addressing their unique needs and challenges. International and national laws and policies on disability have historically neglected aspects related to women and girls with disabilities.

This invisibility has perpetuated the situation of multiple and intersecting forms of discrimination against women and girls with disabilities (CPRD Committee, 2016, para. 3).

Violence against women and girls with disabilities is a gross violation of human rights. The resulting social and economic costs affect both the individuals who experience violence and wider society. The Sustainable Development Goals cannot be achieved without preventing and ultimately ending violence against women and girls with disabilities and without sufficiently including them in the design, implementation, and monitoring of programs that affect their lives.

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Why this project matter cont...

At the start of the Inclusive and Empowered Feminist Movements in Africa Project, baseline assessments revealed critical gaps:

- There were no joint advocacy initiatives led collaboratively by women with disabilities within EVAWG movements.
- No structured capacity-building programmes had been implemented to equip women with disabilities with leadership and advocacy skills.
- There was limited participation of women with disabilities in policy advocacy and decision-making platforms, restricting their influence on national and regional gender equality agendas.

- There were no documented studies or evidence-based reports examining the participation and inclusion of women and girls with disabilities in EVAWG movements.
- There were no documented best practices or learning frameworks to guide inclusive feminist movement building.
- These baseline findings highlighted a significant gap between policy commitments and the lived realities of women and girls with disabilities.

INCLUSIVE AND EMPOWERED FEMINIST MOVEMENTS IN AFRICA PROJECT.

From November 2024, DIWA in collaboration with COVAW have been implementing a project titled “Inclusive and Empowered Feminist Movements in Africa”. The project is being implemented in Kenya, Malawi, and Rwanda. The movements led by women with disabilities have often been excluded from mainstream and feminist movements, resulting in their advocacy efforts being seen solely as disability issues rather than being included in the broader women's and feminist movements. This exclusion has prevented the Elimination of Violence against Women and Girls (EVAWG) movements from accessing resources, expertise, and collaboration that could bring substantive results in tackling violence against women and girls (VAWG) in the East and Southern region of Africa.

Project Goal

The project aims to strengthen the sub-regional movement of women and girls with disabilities in East and Southern Africa so they can collaboratively advocate for their rights, influence policy, and lead efforts to end violence against women and girls. It seeks to ensure that women and girls with disabilities are increasingly at the center of EVAWG efforts, rather than at the margins.

The goal of the project is to ensure that the sub-regional EVAW/G movement of women and girls with disabilities in East and Southern Africa is strengthened and well organized to collaboratively and proactively advocate for their rights, participate and lead EVAW/G movements.



Project activities undertaken

Outcome	Activity implemented
Outcome 1: Women and girls with disabilities and mainstream EVAW/G actors collaborate effectively through strengthened capacity and joint advocacy to address violence against women and girls with disability in East and Southern Africa.	Conducted 3 capacity building workshops in Rwanda, Malawi and Kenya targeting 52 women with disabilities advocates and leaders to advocate on EVAWG. DIWA and COVAW training reports.
	Coordinated and financed 33 women with disabilities with their assistants to attend and influence in key spaces such Commission on the Status of Women (CSW70) in USA, Women Deliver Africa in Kenya, sub regional convening in Kenya and Malawi and African Commission on Human and people's rights (ACHPR) in Banjul.
	Conducted 2 EVAWG Sub regional movement convening in Kenya and Malawi.
	Conduct virtual sub regional workshops and community of practice
Outcome 2: Evidence-based advocacy strategies, informed by project learnings and data, strengthen sub regional efforts to end violence against women and girls with disabilities.	undertook a research in the three countries, Kenya, Malawi and Rwanda. The research was entitled: “Assessing the participation of women and girls with disabilities in EVAWG movement in East and Southern Africa.”

Impact of the project intervention

The project has already created significant and measurable impact.

One of the most powerful outcomes of the project has been the transformation of women with disabilities into confident leaders and advocates.

- Women with disabilities now have increased confidence, knowledge, and leadership skills to advocate for their rights. Their participation in national and regional policy discussions has strengthened disability inclusion in EAWG frameworks. Through targeted capacity-building workshops across Kenya, Malawi, and Rwanda, women with disabilities gained critical skills in leadership, advocacy, and policy engagement. Participants enhanced their understanding of national laws, gender frameworks, and disability rights, enabling them to effectively advocate for inclusive policies and services.
- Women with disabilities are now actively participating in national, regional, and global advocacy platforms such as the Commission on the Status of Women (CSW), African Union forums, and national policy consultations.
- New networking forums and communities of practice have been established, creating sustainable spaces for collaboration, peer learning, and collective action.
- The project has also strengthened collaboration between disability rights organisations and feminist movements, ensuring that violence prevention efforts are inclusive and intersectional. Women with disabilities are increasingly engaging feminist movements and building strategic alliances with women's rights organisations such as FEMNET.
- Most importantly, the project has amplified the voices of women and girls with disabilities, enabling them to influence policies, challenge discrimination, and shape solutions that affect their lives.

Outcome 2: Evidence-based advocacy strategies, informed by project learnings and data, strengthen sub regional efforts to end violence against women and girls with disabilities.

The research entitled:

“Assessing the participation of women and girls with disabilities in EAWG movement in East and Southern Africa.”

Was conducted in Kenya, Malawi and Rwanda to Map EAWG Movements/Networks in East and Southern Africa, identify unique forms of sexual and gender-based violence faced by women and girls with disabilities in East and Southern Africa, assess the level of inclusion and participation of WAGWD in EAWG movements in Kenya, investigate and analyze the barriers that hinder the participation of women and girls with disabilities in EAWG movements and collect and document best practices for strengthening the participation of women and girls with diverse forms of disabilities in EAWG movements.



Summary of findings

Research conducted in Kenya, Malawi, and Rwanda reveals that women and girls with disabilities experience high levels of violence, including emotional, physical, sexual, economic, and institutional violence. Despite some participation in Ending Violence Against Women and Girls (EVAWG) movements, their inclusion remains largely symbolic rather than meaningful. While 58% of women with disabilities participate in committees, their representation in leadership positions remains low at 47%, limiting their influence over decision-making, budgeting, and strategy. Program accessibility gaps remain significant at 66%, highlighting persistent communication and accessibility barriers. Across the three countries, EVAWG movements are active but uneven, with urban areas having stronger networks while rural and humanitarian settings remain underserved. Disability inclusion within EVAWG structures is inconsistent, and women with disabilities continue to face systemic exclusion, limited engagement in advocacy platforms, and minimal influence in policy processes.

The study further identified multiple structural, institutional, environmental, economic, and attitudinal barriers that hinder meaningful participation. These include inaccessible policies and systems, lack of inclusive institutional frameworks, inaccessible venues and information, limited funding opportunities, and negative societal attitudes such as stigma and discrimination. Women with disabilities, particularly those in rural areas or with physical and sensory impairments, face compounded vulnerabilities due to dependence on caregivers, poverty, and limited access to justice and protection services. Overall, the findings highlight an urgent need to strengthen disability-inclusive approaches, promote leadership opportunities, and remove systemic barriers to ensure women and girls with disabilities can fully and meaningfully participate in EVAWG movements and influence policies and programmes that affect their lives.





Inclusive and empowered feminist movements in Africa



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