



# OPD Capacity Building for a Disability Inclusive Future

Kenya Project Report

## Executive Summary

Kilimanjaro Blind Trust Africa (KBTA), in partnership with the Global Disability Innovation (GDI) Hub as part of the AT2030 programme, funded by UK International Development, implemented a project to strengthen the capacity of Organisations of Persons with Disabilities (OPDs) to enhance their advocacy, organisational effectiveness, digital literacy, and skills in assistive technologies (AT). To support this initiative, Kilimanjaro Blind Trust Africa (KBTA), led by Global Disability Innovation Hub, carried out a comprehensive needs assessment in three counties —Nairobi, Mombasa, and Kisumu — to identify the challenges OPDs face in these regions. The needs assessment gathered actionable insights that informed the development of targeted capacity-building interventions for OPDs.

The needs assessment included focus group discussions and a country-wide survey. Representatives from 84 OPDs across the three counties participated in focus group discussions, and 209 OPDs participated in a needs assessment survey. The results show key challenges OPDs face, including limited access to assistive technologies and digital skills, insufficient policy engagement, and access to funding sources. OPD representatives also highlighted that resource constraints, inadequate leadership and governance, poor access to critical information, limited opportunities for collaboration, particularly with the private sector, and a lack of platforms for knowledge-sharing and advocacy further exacerbate these issues. These challenges significantly impact the ability of OPDs to serve persons with disabilities and advocate for disability rights and access to AT.

The assessment also showed regional disparities in terms of OPD capacity and access to resources. Urban OPDs in Nairobi and Mombasa are generally better equipped compared to their rural counterparts in Kisumu, revealing an uneven distribution of resources across regions. Collaboration and networking emerged as a critical need across all regions, with participants stressing the importance of building stronger

networks to amplify collective impact. Leadership support was another pressing issue raised by OPD representatives, who highlighted the need for targeted assistance to help OPD leaders build leadership and management skills. Furthermore, there was a strong demand for capacity-building initiatives to promote digital skills, advocacy, resource mobilisation, and governance to enhance the operational efficiency and sustainability of OPDs.

The needs assessment led to several key recommendations. These include strengthening OPD advocacy and policy engagement through training and simplified tools, enhancing access to assistive technologies through partnerships and user training, and building organisational capacity through leadership, governance, and financial management programs. Other recommendations included prioritising training to access funding sources, digital skills development, storytelling and advocacy tools for increased online and offline engagement, and the creation of platforms for collaboration and networking with stakeholders.

Building on these insights and recommendations, KBTA and GDI Hub conducted a series of capacity-building workshops, which included bespoke training for OPDs on mobile-based AT and digital skills, grant writing, storytelling for advocacy, and leveraging generative AI-based systems to support access to information and strengthening organisational capacity. Ten OPD representatives also participated in interviews, sharing their experience and motivations for advocating for disability rights and the impact of capacity building and networking for OPDs.

This report sets the foundation for designing and implementing solutions to address the identified gaps. By addressing these needs, KBTA and GDI Hub aim to foster sustainable growth for OPDs, empowering them to better represent persons with disabilities in their communities.

## Funders and Partners

### AT2030

[www.at2030.org](http://www.at2030.org)

Led by GDI Hub, AT2030 is a £51.8m programme funded by UK International Development to explore and test innovative ways to address systematic challenges to get more AT to the people who need it around the world. Supporting emerging AT innovations, innovative service delivery, ecosystems, ventures, and ideas, the AT2030 programme has been enabling potential through life changing AT since 2018. The 'Include' cluster (home to this research project) focuses on advocacy, OPDs, and engagement to address the research question: *Does including and connecting AT users, DPOs, and harnessing major cultural events reduce stigma and improve AT access?* To date, the AT2030 programme has reached 10 million people directly, published over 200 journey articles and worked alongside hundreds of global partners.

### Global Disability Innovation (GDI) Hub

[www.disabilityinnovation.com](http://www.disabilityinnovation.com)

GDI Hub accelerates ideas into impact for a more just world: for disabled people, and all people. We are a world-leading delivery and practice centre, an Academic Research Centre at University College London and the first WHO Global Collaborating Centre on Assistive Technology. We work in 40+ countries, and with a reach of more than 64 million people since 2016, GDI Hub develops homegrown technologies alongside new knowledge and research. Our vision is for disability inclusion and social justice. We work towards a world without barriers to participation, where everyone has the opportunity to live a joyful life.

Launched in 2016 as a legacy of the London 2012 Paralympic Games, we are based on the Queen Elizabeth Olympic Park, at UCL's east London campus. GDI Hub is home to



the UK government-funded AT2030 programme, which tests ‘what works’ to improve access to life-changing Assistive Technology for all.

## **Kilimanjaro Blind Trust Africa (KBTA)**

**[www.kilimanjaroblindtrust.org](http://www.kilimanjaroblindtrust.org)**

KBTA is a charitable Trust based in Nairobi, providing access to quality education for children and youth with visual impairments in six countries — Kenya, Tanzania, Uganda, Rwanda, Malawi & Ethiopia. KBTA uses innovation & technology to provide access to digital Braille literacy & skills. It serves over 3,000 learners with visual impairment in 250 schools across the countries by providing them with multi-functional, digital, Braille assistive devices called the Orbit Reader 20, which allows learners with visual impairment to actively participate in their learning process. This digital Braille technology reduces the overall cost of educating a learner and allows them to transition to higher education. KBTA also supports youth with visual impairment in having access to a wide range of subjects, including science, math, coding, and more, and ultimately provides employability skills support that allows them to access mainstream employment.

Kilimanjaro Blind Trust Africa (KBTA) is a charitable organisation that leverages innovation and technology to enhance access to education, employment, and independence for children and youth with visual impairments. Operating across East Africa and Malawi, KBTA focuses on four main thematic areas:

1. **Access to Digital Literacy and Skills:** Promoting digital literacy for learners with visual impairments through assistive technologies and training.
2. **Access to STEM Subjects and ICT Skills:** Encouraging engagement with Science, Technology, Engineering, and Mathematics for learners with visual impairments.

3. **Employability Skills:** Equipping visually impaired youth with skills for the job market and entrepreneurship opportunities.
4. **Research and Innovation:** Exploring new strategies and solutions to improve accessibility and inclusion for persons with disabilities.

In line with the fourth thematic area, **Research and Innovation**, KBTA has partnered with the Global Disability Innovation (GDI) Hub to strengthen the capacity of Organisations of Persons with Disabilities (OPDs) across three counties: Kisumu, Mombasa, and Nairobi. This initiative seeks to empower grassroots OPDs to address systemic challenges, advocate effectively, and better support persons with disabilities in their communities.

## Acknowledgements

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We would like to express our gratitude to all the OPDs for their enthusiastic contributions to this project. This project aims to draw attention to the significant challenges OPDs encounter in driving long-term change and strengthening the OPD ecosystem in Kenya.

The OPD Capacity Building project is part of AT2030 Inquire cluster under the 'OPD Capacity Building and AT User Engagement' sub-programme, led by GDI Hub and funded by UK International Development.

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## Acronyms and Abbreviations

**AT:** Assistive Technology

**AT2030:** UK International Development-funded programme, 'Testing what works to enable access to life-changing assistive technology for all'

**FCDO:** UK Government's Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office  
(*incorporating what was formally known as DFID*)

**GDI Hub:** Global Disability Innovation Hub

**KBTA:** Kilimanjaro Blind Trust Africa

**LMICs:** Lower-and-Middle Income Countries

**NCPWD:** National Council for Persons with Disabilities

**OPD:** Organisation of Persons with Disabilities

**PwD:** Persons with Disabilities

**SDGs:** United Nations Sustainable Development Goals

**UN:** United Nations

**UNCRPD:** UN Conventions on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities

## Glossary of Key Terms

**Capacity Building:** A process of developing and strengthening the skills, competencies, and abilities of individuals, groups, organisations, or institutions to enable them to effectively achieve their objectives and sustain their activities over time.

**Organisations of Persons with Disabilities (OPDs):** Groups or associations led, directed, and governed by persons with disabilities. OPDs represent the interests, advocate for the rights, and promote the participation and inclusion of persons with disabilities in all aspects of society.

**Persons with Disabilities:** We adopt the UN language (person-first) and definition in this report as ‘Individuals who experience long-term physical, mental, intellectual, or sensory impairments that, in interaction with various barriers, may hinder their full and effective participation in society on an equal basis with others’.

## Background

### AT2030 OPD Capacity Building Programme Background

Access to AT remains a significant challenge in LMICs due to limited resources, weak policy implementation, and inadequate stakeholder collaboration. OPDs, as representative bodies of persons with disabilities, are uniquely positioned to influence policies, raise awareness, and catalyse systemic change. However, many OPDs face challenges, such as limited technical expertise, insufficient funding, and inadequate advocacy networks. Addressing these barriers is critical to empowering OPDs to lead transformative change in AT access and innovation.

This sub-programme aims to strengthen the capacity of OPDs in LMICs to effectively advocate for and improve access to AT. By enhancing the organisational, technical, and advocacy capabilities of OPDs, GDI Hub seeks to foster inclusive and sustainable AT ecosystems, enabling greater access to AT through disability-inclusive policies and legislation and access to opportunities for Persons with Disabilities (PwDs).

### Disability and Contextual Factors

According to the 2019 Kenya Population and Housing Census, approximately 2.2% of Kenyans, equating to about 900,000 individuals, live with some form of disability. However, this figure is notably lower than the global average of 16%, raising concerns about data accuracy and representation.

Disability prevalence in Kenya varies by gender and location. Women have a higher prevalence rate (2.5%) compared to men (1.9%). Additionally, rural areas report higher rates of disability, with the highest prevalence observed in counties such as Embu, Makueni, Kisumu, Homa Bay, and Siaya.

## Disability Policies and Legislation

Kenya has established several legal frameworks to promote and protect the rights of PWDs:

- **The Constitution of Kenya (2010):** Article 54 specifically addresses the rights of PWDs, entitling them to be treated with dignity and respect, access educational institutions and facilities, reasonable access to all places, public transport, and information, use Sign language, Braille, or other appropriate means of communication, and access materials and devices to overcome constraints arising from their disability.
- **The Persons with Disabilities Act (2003):** This comprehensive law covers rights, rehabilitation, and equal opportunities for PwDs. It established the National Council for Persons with Disabilities to oversee the welfare of PwDs and outlined provisions for non-discrimination in employment, education, and access to public facilities.
- **The Persons with Disabilities Bill (2023):** Aimed at aligning Kenya's disability laws with international standards, this bill emphasises the rights of PwDs to legal capacity, family life, privacy, and participation in social, economic, and political activities. It also addresses issues, such as protection from discrimination and access to support services.

Despite Kenya's legislative measures to support PwDs, implementation gaps persist, leading to barriers in various aspects of life. OPDs play a crucial role in addressing these challenges through advocacy, policy engagement, and monitoring to ensure effective enforcement of disability-inclusive laws and policies. Collaborative efforts among government, civil society, the private sector, and OPDs are essential to enhance accessibility, inclusion, and the overall well-being of PwDs in the country.

## OPD Ecosystem

In Kenya, grassroots OPDs are primarily registered under the National Council for Persons with Disabilities (NCPWD), established by the Persons with Disabilities Act of 2003. The Council plays a key role in promoting equal opportunities and human rights for persons with disabilities. For this assessment, the NCPWD provided lists of registered OPDs supplemented by contacts from the County Government of Kisumu. It is worth noting, however, that not all OPDs are officially registered or necessarily associated with the NCPWD.

## Geographical Context

The selection of Kisumu, Mombasa, and Nairobi as focus regions was strategic to ensure diverse perspectives and experiences:

- **Mombasa:** Located on Kenya's southeastern Indian Ocean coast, this port city is a mix of cultures and a hub for trade. Its unique context offers insights into the challenges and opportunities for coastal and urban OPDs.
- **Nairobi:** The capital city and central hub of Kenya, Nairobi represents the country's administrative, economic, and policy-making heart. OPDs in Nairobi operate in a dynamic urban environment with greater access to national-level institutions.
- **Kisumu:** Situated in the western part of Kenya on the shores of Lake Victoria, Kisumu is a key city for the western region. It can provide insights into the challenges faced by OPDs in areas with less economic and infrastructural development.

By incorporating input from each of these regions, this assessment ensures a more balanced and representative understanding of the needs of Kenyan OPDs across different geographic, cultural, and socio-economic contexts.

## Summary of Activities

This project was implemented over the course of six months between October 2024 and March 2025. The project activities took place in two main phases: (1) needs assessment and (2) capacity building. The project team, including workshop facilitators and media engagement personnel, travelled to the three research locations, Kisumu, Mombasa, and Nairobi, to conduct the research activities.

### Phase 1: Needs Assessment Survey and Focus Groups

The needs assessment focused on understanding challenges faced by OPDs in key areas:

- **Advocacy:** Ensuring OPDs have a strong voice in decision-making and policy formulation processes.
- **Access to Assistive Technologies (AT):** Addressing barriers to affordability, availability, and effective use of assistive devices.
- **Policy Engagement:** Supporting OPDs in navigating, influencing, and implementing disability-related policies.
- **Organisational Capacity:** Identifying internal operational gaps and resource constraints.

### Motivation

The needs assessment was conducted to gather critical insights into the gaps, challenges, and opportunities faced by Kenyan OPDs. The findings will serve as the foundation for:

- Designing targeted capacity-building programs tailored to the specific needs of OPDs.
- Informing strategies to improve advocacy, access to assistive technologies, and policy engagement.

- Identifying opportunities for partnerships and collaboration with government institutions, private sector stakeholders, and other disability-focused organisations.

## Objectives

The needs assessment exercise aimed at achieving the following objectives:

- Understanding the specific challenges faced by Organizations of People with Disabilities (OPDs) in advocacy, access to assistive technologies, policy engagement, operational capacity, and resource mobilisation.
- Collecting actionable insights to guide the design of targeted programs and interventions that address the unique needs of OPDs.
- Promote networking and knowledge-sharing among OPDs to strengthen partnerships and collective advocacy efforts.
- Establish a baseline for future capacity-building programs, ensuring that interventions are relevant, impactful, and aligned with the needs of OPDs.

## Phase 2: Capacity Building Workshops

The capacity-building phase was designed to address the challenges and gaps identified during the needs assessment. This phase aimed to enhance the effectiveness, sustainability, and overall impact of OPDs through targeted interventions and strategic support.

### Motivation

The primary motivation behind the capacity-building phase was to equip OPDs with the necessary skills, resources, and knowledge to effectively advocate for disability rights, engage in policy-making processes, and improve access to assistive technologies. Feedback from OPDs indicate that the interventions strengthened organisational structures, enhanced financial management practices, and facilitated sustainable resource mobilisation.



## Objectives

The capacity-building phase specifically focused on achieving the following objectives:

- Enhancing the leadership, governance, and management skills within OPDs to ensure effective organisational functioning and sustainability.
- Strengthening OPDs' capacity in financial management, fundraising, and resource mobilisation to improve financial stability and independence.
- Increasing awareness and effective usage of assistive technologies among OPDs and persons with disabilities through training and improved access.
- Improving advocacy and policy engagement capabilities of OPDs, empowering them to effectively influence policy formulation, implementation, and monitoring.
- Facilitating strategic partnerships and networks among OPDs, government entities, the private sector, and other stakeholders to support collaborative initiatives and collective advocacy efforts.

# Phase 1: Needs Assessment

## Methodology

The needs assessment employed a holistic, participatory approach to gather data and insights.

## Survey

The survey was designed to capture insights on advocacy, AT access, policy engagement, operational challenges, and resource gaps. It was distributed online via Google Forms to OPDs across the three counties to collect quantitative and qualitative data on their specific needs and priorities. To facilitate effective distribution, KBTA leveraged their collaboration with the NCPWD and the county governments in the targeted regions, enabling them to identify and map existing OPDs. The survey link was subsequently shared with OPDs through these two agencies.

## Focus Group Discussions

The focus groups were developed to steer conversations effectively and ensure a comprehensive exploration of key themes. These sessions were conducted in Nairobi, Kisumu, and Mombasa, facilitating in-depth discussions with representatives from grassroots OPDs. The interactive sessions enabled participants to identify challenges, share experiences, and collaboratively propose practical solutions.



*Figure 1: OPD representatives participating in the needs assessment workshop in Kisumu*

## Key Stakeholders

Key stakeholders engaged in this project were comprised of diverse representatives from OPDs, reflecting varied organisational sizes and areas of focus. Strategic measures were employed to ensure inclusivity across gender, age groups, and types of impairments. Furthermore, all stages involved participants from both rural and urban settings, thereby capturing regional disparities and ensuring broader and more representative insights.

Participant selection for the focus groups was guided by specific criteria designed to ensure representativeness and inclusivity. For instance, organisations actively engaged

in advocacy, AT access, or disability inclusion were prioritised to maintain alignment with the project's overall goals. To capture a broad spectrum of perspectives, both small grassroots organisations and larger regional or national OPDs were included.

Geographic diversity was achieved by targeting OPDs from urban centres and rural areas within Nairobi, Mombasa, and Kisumu counties, ensuring balanced regional representation. Additionally, demographic considerations were central to the selection process; particular efforts were made to include OPDs serving marginalised groups such as women, youth, and individuals with multiple disabilities. Pre-screening exercises were conducted to identify and include organisations representing all types of disabilities prevalent in these regions.

## Findings from the Needs Assessment Survey

### OPD Geographical Distribution

The survey was distributed to OPDs in Kisumu, Nairobi, and Mombasa to collect data in the three regions. A total of 209 OPDs submitted responses, with 36% of them being from Mombasa, 25% from Kisumu, and 23% from Nairobi, as shown in Figure 1 below. 5% of the respondent OPDs were operational in all three regions and 11% were operational in other regions in Kenya.

### 'Distribution of OPDs per County'

■ Mombasa ■ Nairobi ■ Kisumu ■ Others ■ All of the above

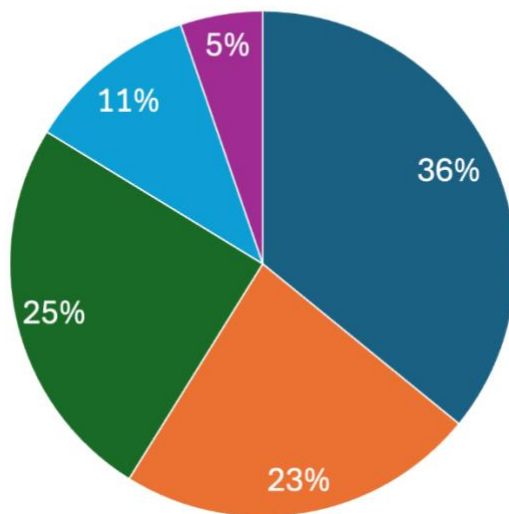


Figure 2: Distribution of OPDs participating in the needs assessment survey

### Community Demographics Served by the OPDs

From the survey, 118 OPDs represented the youth population aged between 16 to 25 years, with only two organisations serving the population aged 65 years and above (as shown in Figure 3). 42% of the OPDs served only females, with the rest serving both males and females, as illustrated in Figure 4 below.

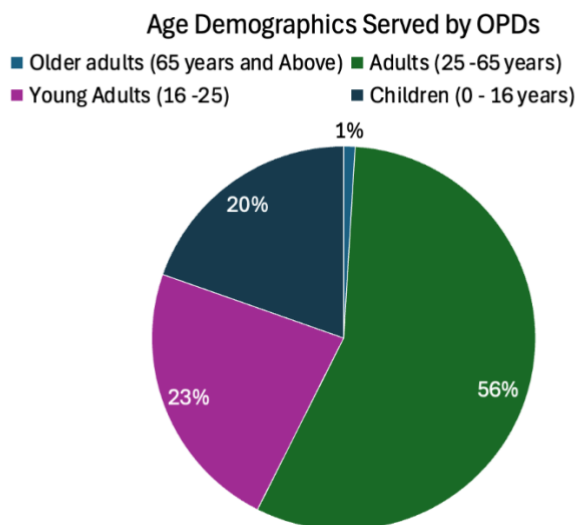


Figure 3: Age brackets served by the OPDs

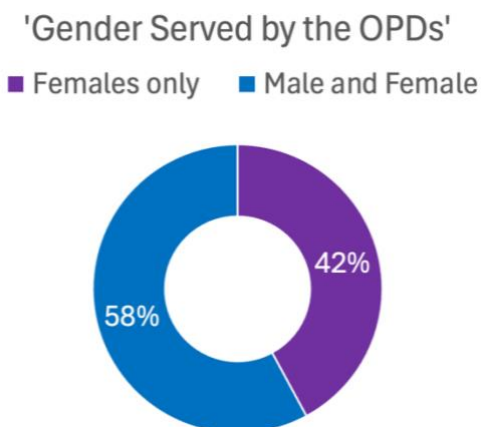
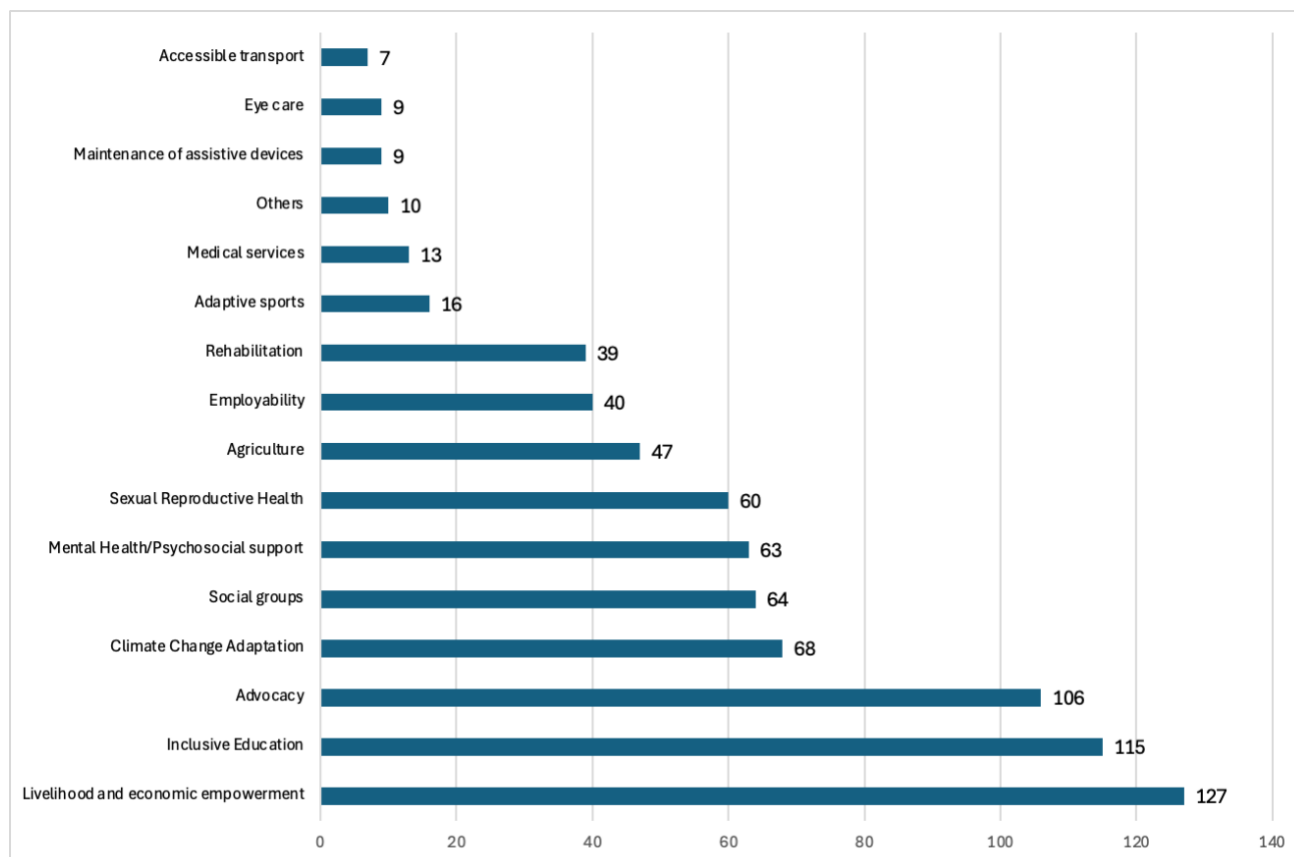


Figure 4: Gender served by the OPDs

## Services Offered by the OPDs



*Figure 2: The services offered by OPDs*

The majority of the organisations reported carrying out activities across the thematic areas of livelihood and economic empowerment (127), inclusive education (115), and advocacy (106), as shown in Figure 2.

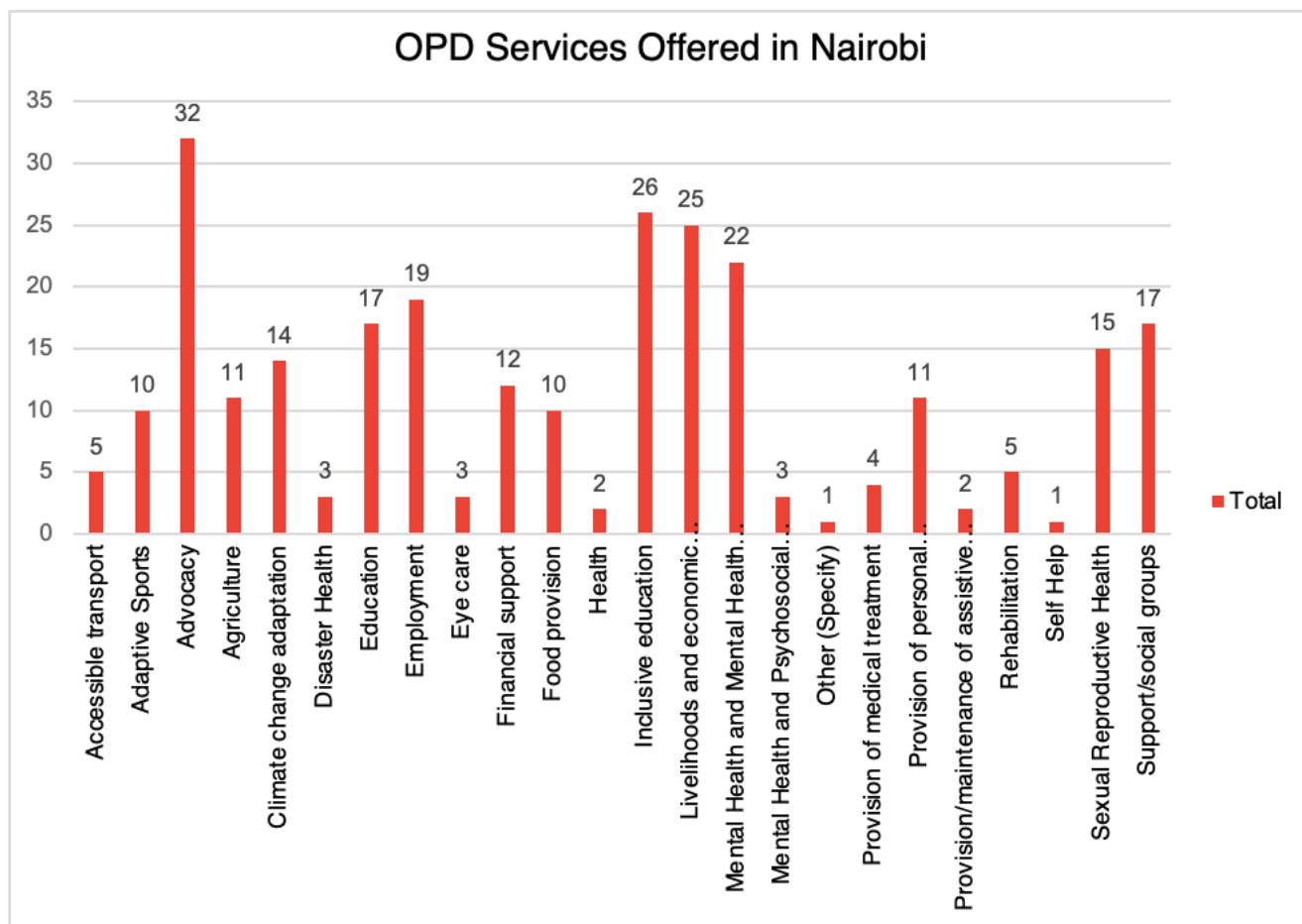


Figure 3: OPD services offered in Nairobi

Generally, the activities OPDs undertake in a community are informed by the needs of said community. The fact that livelihood and economic empowerment activities are most common among respondent OPDs reflects the low economic status of people with disabilities in Kenya. As shown in Figure 4 and Figure 5, Livelihoods and economic empowerment was the leading service offered by OPDs in Kisumu and Mombasa. However, in comparison in Nairobi, more OPDs engaged in Advocacy and Inclusive Education activities. Similarly, Financial and Employment support services were also more common in Nairobi compared to the other two counties, likely reflecting the relatively higher level of economic opportunity and policy engagement in the capital.



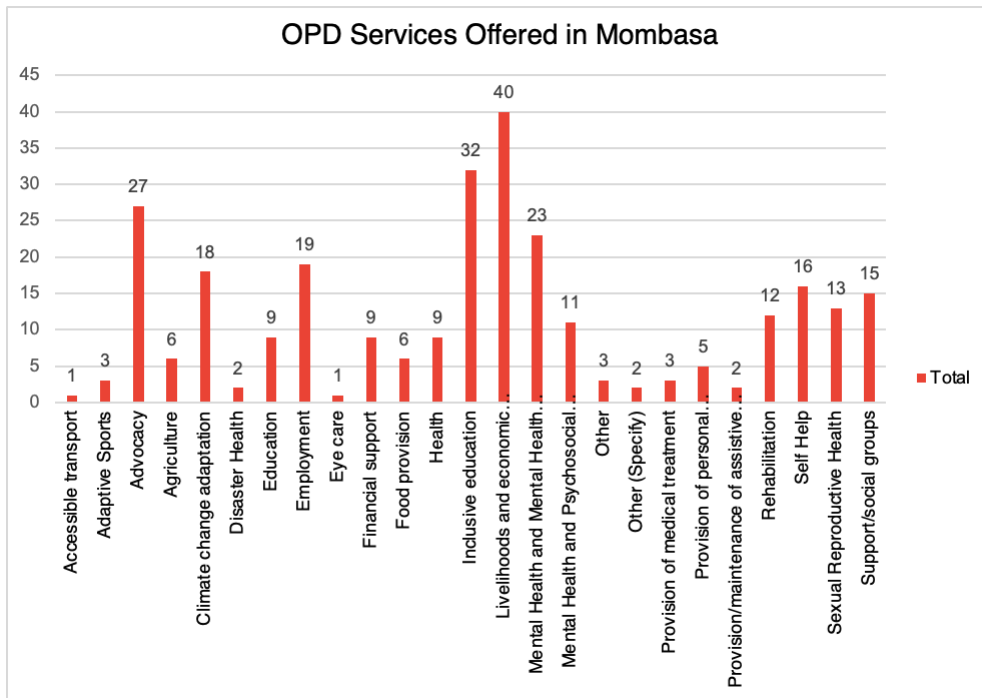


Figure 4: OPD services offered in Mombasa

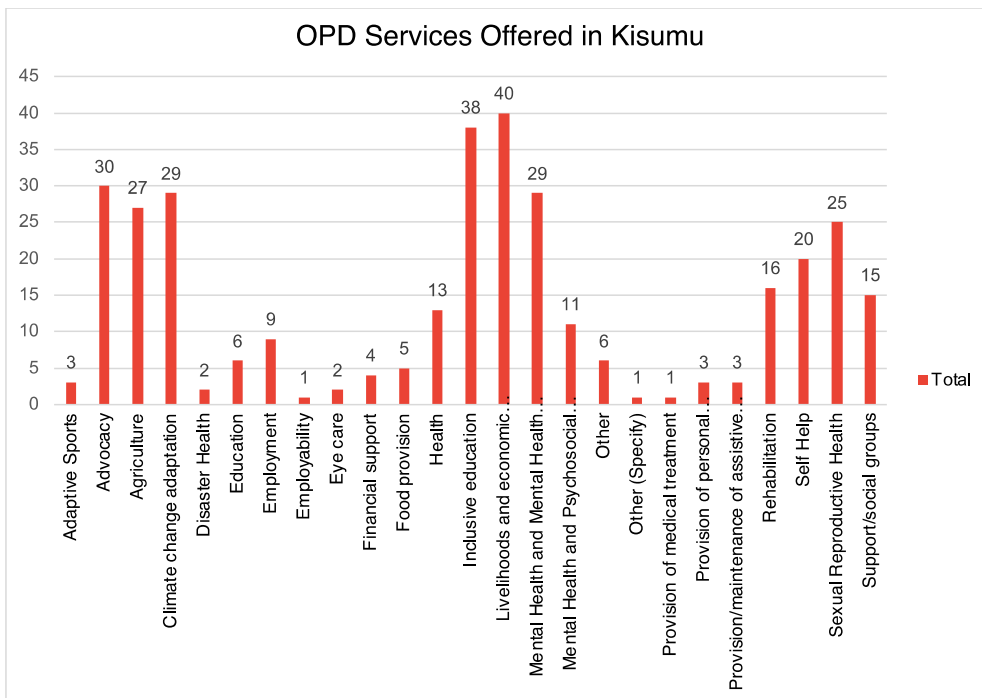


Figure 5: OPD services offered in Kisumu

## Sources of Funds

The main source of funding for OPDs was membership subscription (41%) followed by grants (23%) partnerships (13%), local community support (11%), and individual donations (6%).

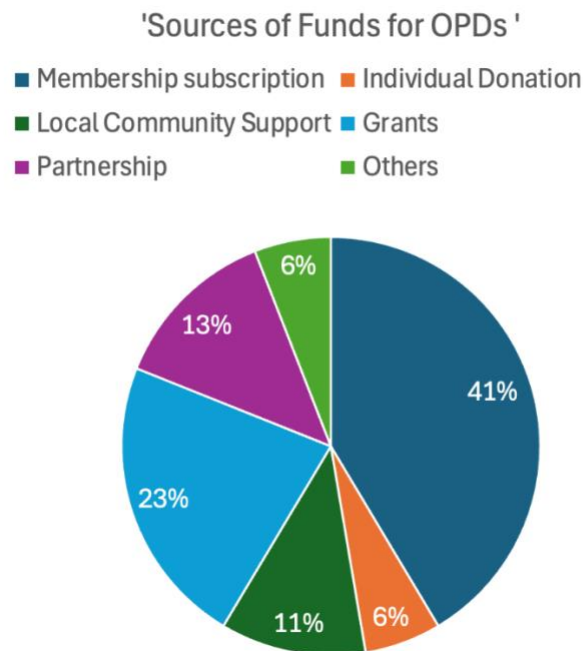


Figure 6: Sources of funding for the OPDs

## Access to Assistive Technology

As illustrated in the graphical representation below, over 70% of the OPDs reported not having access to AT to effectively support PwDs. This comprises a critical barrier that impacts the ability of OPDs to adequately address the diverse needs of their members/communities, thereby underscoring the urgent need for targeted interventions and increased resource allocation to enhance AT availability and access across the regions surveyed.

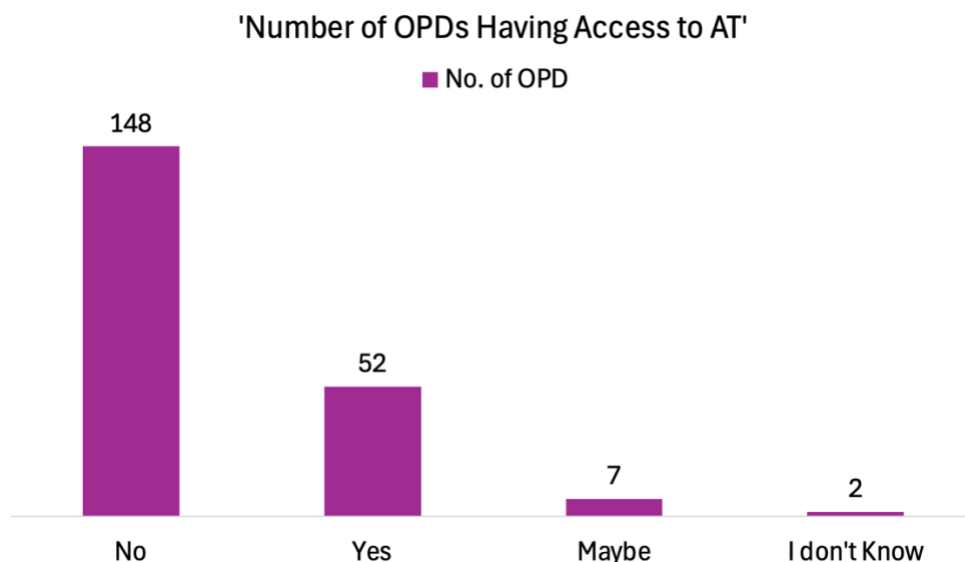


Figure 7: Number of OPDs having access to AT

## Key Challenges and Recommendations

Over all, 84 OPDs (Mombasa = 31, Kisumu = 31, Nairobi = 22) participated in the focus group discussions across the three counties. The challenges identified by Organisations of Persons with Disabilities (OPDs) across Nairobi, Kisumu, and Mombasa counties highlight several critical and common issues.

### Lack of Networking Opportunities

Participants from all three counties highlighted the need for networking opportunities and information sharing. They emphasised that OPDs often operate in isolation, leading to fragmented and often duplicated efforts, and missed opportunities for collaboration. Competition among OPDs further inhibits the sharing of essential information. Consequently, access to timely updates on funding opportunities, training, and policy developments is significantly constrained.

Moreover, participants also reported a lack of umbrella OPD networks, particularly in Mombasa. Most OPDs in Mombasa operate in isolation due to the lack of a unified umbrella network that could bring them together. This fragmentation hinders their ability to collectively advocate for their shared interests and pool resources to address common challenges. This lack of unity prevents OPDs from working collaboratively and bridging individual gaps through information sharing, and building strong networks that could amplify their advocacy and resource mobilisation efforts.

### Inadequate Funding Sources

OPDs frequently face challenges due to limited skills in fundraising, grant proposal development, and report writing. Reliance on donor funding, coupled with insufficient alternative revenue streams and weak strategic partnerships, significantly undermines their financial stability.

Most OPDs have limited funding streams due to a lack of skills in resource mobilisation, particularly in areas such as grant proposal writing, report writing, and networking with potential partners and donors. Over-reliance on inconsistent donor funding leaves many OPDs financially vulnerable and unable to sustain their operations.

## **Lack of Governmental Support and Unfavourable Policies**

Government support for OPDs remains limited, particularly in areas of funding, policy enforcement, and regulatory backing. The absence of strong disability-related legislation and the weak enforcement of existing policies at the national, Senate, and county levels—especially in Kisumu—have significantly impeded the inclusion and empowerment of PwDs. This lack of a robust legal framework undermines OPDs’ ability to advocate effectively and access critical resources needed to sustain their activities.

At the county level, policy shifts have further disadvantaged PwDs. In Mombasa County, for example, business-friendly measures previously offered to PwDs, such as a 100% waiver on business licenses and free parking, have been reduced or withdrawn under the current administration. These changes have increased economic barriers for PwDs. Moreover, the lack of devolved disability-specific legislation in counties like Mombasa and Kisumu continues to limit budget allocations and support for disability inclusion initiatives. Internally, many OPDs also struggle with limited operational policies, relying mostly on their constitutions, which restricts their ability to meet the eligibility criteria of potential development partners.

At the community level, unfavourable policies adversely affect PwDs and caregivers, including reduced business license waivers and limited access to critical government services. Moreover, participants and caregivers frequently experience burnout due to high workloads and inadequate support systems.

Moreover, OPDs noted that support for PwDs tends to focus primarily on impairment types with higher societal awareness, such as visual and physical disabilities, while neglecting other less-recognised forms of disabilities, including intellectual and

psychosocial disabilities. This disparity has left certain disability groups underrepresented and underserved.

## Organisational Management Challenges

Many OPDs face significant organisational challenges that hinder their effectiveness and sustainability. A widespread absence of formal organisational structures, including governance systems, leaves many OPDs ill-prepared to meet donor and government compliance requirements, despite holding registration certificates. Weak financial management practices, such as poor budgeting, inconsistent record-keeping, and lack of transparency, further limit their ability to secure funding and maintain operational stability. Additionally, a lack of leadership and governance capacity among OPD leaders contributes to poor decision-making, operational inefficiencies, and, in some cases, organisational collapse.

Internal organisational challenges are compounded by unclear missions, visions, and objectives, leading many OPDs to spread their limited resources across too many areas without strategic focus. Leadership fatigue and burnout, resulting from heavy workloads and limited support, weaken organisational resilience. Furthermore, misaligned expectations between members and leaders, along with conflicting internal dynamics, create tensions that disrupt cohesion and effectiveness. The absence of strategic planning severely limits OPDs' ability to measure progress, adapt to challenges, and achieve long-term sustainability.

## Skills Gap

Awareness and accessibility of assistive technologies remain low. For example, communication with individuals with hearing impairments is often difficult due to the insufficient availability of sign language interpreters during meetings. Additionally, OPDs lack training on effectively utilising digital tools and platforms such as social media, websites, and newsletters for advocacy and outreach.

Many OPD members lack basic financial literacy, including skills in budgeting, record keeping, and financial planning. This gap weakens the financial management and accountability of their organisations.

A significant gap exists in the capacity of OPDs to develop and implement effective fundraising strategies. The absence of skills in grant proposal writing and donor engagement restricts their ability to access and secure available funding opportunities.

There is an urgent requirement for targeted capacity-building initiatives in critical areas such as leadership development, governance, resource mobilisation, and financial management. Tailored training programmes are essential to equip OPDs with the necessary skills to overcome these systemic barriers and enhance their overall effectiveness.

Although some OPD members are knowledgeable about disability rights, they often lack the necessary skills and capacity to effectively advocate for these rights. Limited awareness of existing disability policies and exclusion from critical decision-making forums due to poor information networks further exacerbate the situation, weakening the overall impact of advocacy efforts.

## Recommendations for Capacity Building

To strengthen the capacity of Kenyan OPDs to fundraise and mobilise resources, training on resource mobilisation, fundraising, and proposal development was highlighted by the OPDs as a top priority. Most OPDs depend financially on member contributions to operate, a source of income that is not sustainable and sufficient to cover operational costs. When OPDs have the capacity to fundraise and mobilise resources, they will be able to run the organisation and implement activities more easily. Once the capacity to fundraise and proposal development has been strengthened, donor mapping skills will also be needed to identify funding partners that support their thematic areas.

### Assistive Technology and Digital Skills

There is a need for higher awareness of the available assistive products that PwDs can utilise for communication and accessibility. Some persons with disabilities are not aware of the available AT, and if they are aware, only to a small extent. The awareness creation on these aspects will help OPDs understand the potential of AT in their lives.

**Recommendation:** Development and availability of resources to increase awareness about assistive products (AP) and technologies. For example, resources such as the WHO Training on Assistive Products (TAP)<sup>1</sup> can help grassroots organisations gain awareness and understanding of APs and ATs and their uses. Additionally, developing digital skills training in using digital platforms for advocacy, resource mobilisation, and networking can help OPDs expand their remit and represent PwDs beyond their local area and have a greater impact.

### Advocacy and Network Building

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<sup>1</sup> <https://www.gate-tap.org/>



Many OPDs, particularly in Mombasa, operate in isolation and lack opportunities for collaboration and building networks to consolidate advocacy efforts. As a result, there is duplication of efforts and unhealthy competition between OPDs in targeting funding opportunities.

**Recommendation:** Create structured opportunities and platforms where OPDs can interact and build relationships with potential funders, partners, and other stakeholders. These connections can help OPDs access resources, mentorship, and support for their initiatives.

### Leadership, Group Dynamics and Management

Most OPD founders have either lived experience of disability or have a close family member who has a disability. They have a strong understanding of disability and its impact on the individual and their community. However, they need additional support in organisational skills such as leadership, management skills, and expertise in disability rights advocacy.

**Recommendation:** OPD founders should be trained in leadership and group management to equip them with the requisite skills to offer leadership to organisations and solve ever-emerging issues among members. The training should also include resources and toolkits for OPDs to create clear missions, visions, and governance structures for their organisations.

### Organisational Policies and Financial Management

OPDs need to be enlightened on the policies that should be in place to streamline their operations and eligibility for funding. Most organisations are not aware of the donor requirements that an implementing organisation needs to meet to be eligible for funding. These policies and procedures would strengthen and streamline the operations of the organisations. Due to a lack of expertise in financial management, most Kenyan OPDs do not have appropriate financial management and reporting procedures. As a result,

they are unable to secure funding due to their inability to provide evidence of financial management for the due diligence conditions of development partners.

**Recommendation:** Training resources in financial management and success stories from other OPDs (local and international) can help Kenyan OPDs streamline their financial procedures. Additionally, networking among Kenyan OPDs can also help share information that can benefit smaller, grassroots organisations.

The recommendations highlighted above are essential for OPDs to succeed and better represent PwDs at local and global scale. To address some of the challenges OPDs face, we developed training resources and workshops which were delivered to participating OPDs in Kisumu, Mombasa, and Nairobi. Additionally, we conducted interviews with OPD representatives to gather feedback and understand the impact of the training.

## Phase 2: Capacity-Building Workshops

The needs assessment survey and focus groups highlighted the challenges that Kenyan OPDS face. The prevalence of these challenges has affected the growth of the OPDs, thus adversely affecting their quest for Disability inclusion and empowerment of persons with disabilities. To address the OPD needs identified and strengthen the capacity of OPDs, we developed a two-day bespoke capacity-building workshop, which was run in the three counties with 59 OPDs.

The key areas addressed in the training workshops included smartphones as assistive technology, creating accessible content for people with sensory disabilities, storytelling as a tool for advocacy, and leveraging Artificial Intelligence (AI) tools to enhance storytelling and grant writing skills. The workshops encompassed practical demonstrations where the participants were given the opportunity to practice how they could leverage the available assistive technology for communication, information sharing, and fundraising.

Day one focused on building effective group dynamics, leveraging assistive technologies for communication, and enhancing advocacy through storytelling. Participants also explored innovative methods of information sharing and were supported in establishing online platforms to broaden their outreach. On the second day, the workshop delved into specific assistive technologies for individuals with hearing and visual impairments, followed by practical sessions on grant writing, donor mapping, and the use of digital tools in resource mobilization. The workshop concluded with a networking session that fostered collaboration and experience sharing among OPDs, setting the stage for continued peer learning and joint advocacy efforts.



Figure 9: Carol Joseph Emoyo delivering a sewing skills training.

**“Personally everything changed after I attended the workshop, I was able to hold a very big evening, empowered few caregivers in my organisation. Looking forward for more of the same. I didn’t have this courage before but see me now!”**

**Carol Joseph Emoyo**

Founder | Smile for Neurodiversity

## Key Insights from Capacity Building Workshops

The workshops provided important insights into the participants’ needs and the remarkable impact of capacity building for the participating OPDs.

## Leveraging AI Support for Grant Writing

The participants fed back an appreciation for the training sessions, sharing that it was an eye-opener on where and how they can write grants and fundraise for their organisation. Insufficient grant writing skills had been the main reason stated to why most organisations were stagnating or being inactive in their operations. The leaders were taken through the steps and format of writing a grant. A key focus was placed on why donors reject or accept proposals. The session highlighted key factors to consider when writing a proposal, such as Donor priorities, clarity and evidence, and Realistic Budgeting.

The use of AI in grant writing was transformative to the conversation. Participants were taught how to leverage the available AI tools to write grants, and were introduced to ChatGPT. The need for them to edit and align the information given by the AI tool to suit their context was highlighted. OPDs were able to develop their own proposal in their areas of interest, an aspect they termed as a game changer in their fundraising efforts.

The capacity building sessions highlighted both:

**Lack of awareness:** Most participants had heard about ChatGPT but were not knowledgeable about how the tool works.

**Lack of grant writing experience:** Most OPDs had never written a grant due to a lack of skills in grant writing. This made them depend on members' contributions to the operation of the group. Attendees requested more training in order to continue to build their fundraising capacity.

**“How I wish we knew how to use the ChatGPT earlier, we would not be in our current state as an organisation.”**

**Emily Juma**

Executive Director | Amazing Group of Persons with Disabilities

## Mobile and Emerging Technologies for Persons with Disabilities

The training focused on equipping the participants with how best to use their already available smartphones as assistive devices. The key focus areas were phone navigation, introduction to accessibility features and the demonstration of how the accessibility features work. Participants were most excited to learn how TalkBack and Live captions work as accessibility features for persons with disability.

The training sessions highlighted:

**Learning Enthusiasm vs. Practical Limitations:** Despite the challenges, participants demonstrated enthusiasm and a willingness to learn. However, due to the time limitations, many left the session feeling underprepared to apply their knowledge effectively.

**Need for Additional Training:** To ensure meaningful learning and application, future sessions should allocate more time for Smartphone accessibility features, particularly hands-on practice with TalkBack. A structured step-by-step approach, combined with follow-up sessions, would enhance participants' confidence and ability to support visually impaired individuals.

**“Digitally my knowledge was very low as compared to now after the workshop. Many apps that are key to our daily interaction with different types of disabilities were brought to light, that we can have a meeting of both deaf and blind without interpreter and yet have a single meeting running smoothly.”**

**Teresia Wambui**

Director | Coast Cerebral Palsy | An organisation of parents with cerebral palsy

## Storytelling as a Tool for Advocacy

Many participants had limited prior experience in using storytelling to enhance grant applications. This session was conducted right after the proposal writing session, making it easier to relate how storytelling can be incorporated into the grants and wider advocacy efforts. The session built knowledge around the elements and tools to support impactful storytelling, and involved dividing OPDs into groups to discuss how they could best use storytelling in writing a proposal for it to be more persuasive. The OPDs in attendance valued the practical examples of how personal and organisational stories can align with funders' priorities.

The storytelling session resonated deeply with participants. Many had powerful stories but lacked structured methods to document them effectively. The participants appreciated learning simple frameworks to capture, organise, and present impact stories that can be used in reports, proposals, and social media platforms.

This session also highlighted the importance of networking for OPD representatives. The participants were encouraged to leverage professional connections to strengthen their advocacy efforts. This included an introduction to platforms such as LinkedIn to engage with potential donors, partners and other OPDs doing similar things.

The key challenge identified during the capacity building sessions were the inconsistency in sharing organisational work on social media. Many OPDs are doing amazing things in society, but there is no documentation of their impact. After the session, OPDs expressed commitment to improving their digital presence by adopting storytelling techniques to humanise their content and engage their audiences better.

**“For so long, people living with disabilities have been put as second in policy making. More research should be done worldwide, so that even as policies are made from the top positions, it may also trickle down to the person living in the village. The policies should be emphasized from the top level to the lowest level. Each person should feel as part of the society.”**

## Bill Clinton, Advisory Officer, Million Reasons to Smile



## Key Insights from OPD Interviews

Following the capacity-building workshops, interviews were conducted with the OPD representatives across the three counties to hear their perspectives on the role of capacity-building in strengthening the OPD ecosystem in Kenya. Overall, twelve interviews were conducted: 5 in Kisumu, 2 in Nairobi, and 5 in Mombasa. These interviews provided valuable individual insights into their challenges, successes, and aspirations. The interviews highlighted key areas such as:

### Personal Motivation and Leadership Journey

Most participants were personally affected by disability, either as PwDs or as close allies (family members, caregivers, or professionals). They were motivated to work in disability rights advocacy due to their own lived experiences, societal barriers, and a desire to create systemic change. A significant number highlighted that advocacy work is both a passion and a responsibility.

**“The reason I started Smile for Neurodiversity is to advocate for men and encourage them that disabilities exist and acceptance is key because when you accept, it becomes much easier.” Carol Enoyo**

**“So I decided to advocate for the rights of persons with disability because there is a lot of discrimination and oppression within the community, because many people do not understand disability.” Feisal Abdalla**

### Impact of Advocacy in Achieving Meaningful Change

Success stories shared by participants included increased access to assistive devices, improved policy implementation, and enhanced awareness of disability rights. Many participants recalled instances where advocacy efforts led to policy changes at local and national levels, resulting in better accessibility in public spaces, education, and

employment opportunities. Emotional highlights included moments when individuals they supported gained independence through advocacy-driven interventions.

**“One instance my advocacy has brought an impact, and I come from Likoni, and you know, people from Likoni have a lot of issues or problems with the Kenya Ferry. So you see, back then, people with disability used to pass with other people when they bought the ferry. But now we came together as people with disability from Likoni, we united and we did lobbying to Kenya Ferry. We went there and complained that persons with disability should be given first priority. So through that we were given first priority and now person with disability, they are normally treated as VIPS.”**

**Christine Titus | Tunaweza CBO**

## **Challenges Facing Persons with Disabilities in Kenya**

Participants shared their observations regarding the challenges faced by PwDs in Kenya. They highlighted the impact of inaccessible public infrastructure, including transportation and buildings, which creates significant mobility barriers. Additionally, they noted that limited access to quality AT and the high costs associated with AT devices restrict their usability for many PwDs. A lack of awareness and understanding of disability rights among the general public and policymakers was also frequently mentioned.

**“The first thing that we need to change is our perception towards people living with disability. Most of them, most of us take them like sometimes beggars or people who can’t be productive. If you change that perspective towards them, we’re going to have a world that is inclusive to everyone and can accommodate everyone, all of us.”**

**Feisal Abdalla | Likoni Ability Network**

## Transformative Role of Assistive Technology

Participants emphasised that while AT is transformative, affordability and accessibility remain key concerns. The high cost of AT prevents many PwDs from benefiting from available technologies. Participants also mentioned that limited local production of AT leads to over-reliance on expensive imported AT solutions which are often not fit for purpose. This is further exacerbated by a lack of government funding and inadequate policy enforcement, to make it accessible and affordable for PwDs.

**“The changes I wish to see are that we need to be on par with the increase in technology. For example, I am in the field of music, I can only use once two software to make my music. The advanced ones are not friendly to me.”**

**Bill Clinton Ochieng | Million Reasons to Smile**

## Message to Decision-Makers and Partners

Participants urged decision-makers to prioritise disability inclusion in national development plans. They emphasised the need for improved funding and investment in disability services, particularly in assistive technology and the importance of involving PwDs in the design, testing, and distribution of AT to ensure user-centred solutions.

**“Policy makers should encompass the needs of the caregivers, who are actually the people bearing the burden of people living with disabilities, especially children and those who are completely disabled.”**

**George Onyango Otieno, Chairperson | Caregiver, Special Smile**

The participants appreciated the partnership between GDI Hub and Kilimanjaro Blind Trust Africa in bringing them together to amplify their voices and learn a few things on digital accessibility.

The insights from these interviews highlight participants' resilience in overcoming the challenges and advocating for disability rights. While progress is being made, systemic barriers remain, particularly in accessibility, policy implementation, and access to assistive technology. The need for strategic partnerships, continued advocacy, and increased investment in disability inclusion is clear. By strengthening OPDs and equipping them with the right tools, their impact in transforming the lives of PWDs can be amplified.

## Next Steps and Recommendations

- Follow-up Support: Consider organising virtual check-in sessions to track progress and offer further guidance.
- Resource Sharing: Provide templates, sample grant applications, and AI toolkits for ease of implementation.
- Continued Collaboration: Explore partnerships with digital platforms to support OPDs in enhancing their storytelling capacity further.

### Recommendations for Policy and Decision-makers:

- Develop and implement comprehensive county-level disability legislation to ensure clear policy guidelines and budgetary allocations that support disability-inclusive development.
- Strengthen enforcement mechanisms for existing disability-related national policies at both national and county levels to ensure practical implementation and compliance.
- Allocate targeted funding specifically aimed at capacity-building initiatives for OPDs, focusing on financial management, governance, and leadership development.
- Facilitate platforms for regular consultations and engagements between OPDs and government entities to foster collaboration and enhance inclusive policymaking processes.
- Introduce incentives and waivers to encourage businesses and services that cater to persons with disabilities, enhancing economic participation and access to services.

## Recommendations for Industry (Funders, NGOs, INGOs):

- Provide additional support for OPDs in fundraising, grant proposal development, and financial management through structured training and mentorship programmes.
- Encourage and facilitate strategic partnerships and networks among OPDs and between OPDs and the private sector to improve resource mobilisation and sustainable development.
- Fund initiatives aimed at increasing access to assistive technologies and enhancing digital literacy for persons with disabilities and OPDs.
- Establish robust information-sharing platforms that regularly disseminate timely and relevant opportunities, policy updates, and resources to OPDs.
- Support research and advocacy initiatives that address systemic barriers faced by OPDs and persons with disabilities, ensuring evidence-based interventions.

## Recommendations for Community (OPDs):

- Prioritise internal capacity-building in leadership, governance, financial management, and strategic planning to enhance organisational effectiveness and sustainability.
- Develop clear strategic plans with measurable objectives and defined roles to reduce internal conflicts and duplication of responsibilities.
- Foster collaboration and information-sharing between OPDs to strengthen collective advocacy efforts, increase resource mobilisation opportunities, and improve access to essential resources.
- Actively engage in digital literacy training and leverage digital tools and platforms for effective advocacy, outreach, and improved communication.
- Promote realistic and manageable expectations among members, aligning organisational goals with achievable commitments and responsibilities to maintain motivation and group cohesion.

## Recommendations for Academia and Research Institutions:

- Conduct targeted research to identify innovative solutions and best practices in disability inclusion and assistive technology access.
- Facilitate knowledge transfer through collaborative engagements with OPDs to strengthen evidence-based advocacy and intervention strategies.
- Include disability studies and accessibility considerations in mainstream curricula to foster widespread awareness and professional competence.

## Conclusion

The needs assessment provided valuable insights into the challenges faced by OPDs in Kisumu, Mombasa, and Nairobi. These challenges, rooted in both internal and external factors, hinder the ability of OPDs to fulfil their roles effectively and to advocate for the inclusion and empowerment of persons with disabilities. Addressing these challenges is essential for fostering the growth and sustainability of OPDs and ensuring the active participation of persons with disabilities in all aspects of life.

Kilimanjaro Blind Trust Africa, in partnership with the Global Disability Innovation Hub, is committed to addressing these challenges through strategic, targeted interventions that strengthen OPD capacity, enhance access to resources, and promote collaboration. However, achieving the vision of a fully inclusive society for persons with disabilities requires collective effort. We call upon like-minded partners, government agencies, private sector stakeholders, and other development organisations to join hands in supporting this important cause.