

SRHRplusD Festival 2021 Report

Background

Women and girls with disabilities in Kenya continue to face double discrimination, as a result of gender and disability, caused by a myriad challenges such as myths and cultural practices that are discriminatory and harmful. According to reports by the World Health Organization¹, persons with disabilities represent approximately 15% of the world's population with 80% living in low and middle income countries, and that 20% of the global female population consists of women with disabilities.



Documented studies² have also shown that, due to several causes, including the higher prevalence of disability among women than men, the increased incidence in gender based violence among women in addition to other factors, women and girls with disabilities are more vulnerable due to the fact that they experience disproportionate levels of exclusion.

Problem Statement

Based on This Ability³ experiences, accessing quality sexual reproductive health services has been challenging for women and girls with disabilities despite healthcare centers and medical professionals' potential to offer these services. These challenges include negative attitudes and unconscious biases of medical personnel, inadequately trained medics to attend to their unique needs, physically inaccessible facilities and lack of measures to make service friendly and adaptable to various forms of disability⁴. Furthermore, information and education on sex education, menstrual health, family planning, and other related sexual and reproductive health services is poorly disseminated - in formats that are inaccessible or unavailable to young women with various disabilities. Due to societal attitudes towards the sexuality of women with disabilities, their sexual and reproductive health needs are often not prioritized at the family level; additionally, due to the link between disability and poverty, access becomes a major challenge for those who are economically dependent. Furthermore, within our patriarchal

¹ WHO/ World Bank (2011). World Report on Disability

² https://this-ability.org/wp-content/uploads/2022/07/Hesabika-Final-Report_final.pdf

³ This Ability is a women-led non profit organization whose mission is to advance the rights and inclusion of women and girls with disabilities in Kenya. We envision a society in which women and girls with disabilities live fully integrated lives socially, economically and politically, with their rights respected and upheld. Our model focuses on using business principles to make the case for investing in amplifying the voices, building skills and creating visibility for the rights of women and girls with disabilities. We work to increase access to sexual reproductive and economic rights for women and girls with disabilities across 8 counties (Kisumu, Kakamega, Uasin Gishu, Kajiado, Nairobi, Kilifi, Kwale and Mombasa).

⁴ Shakespeare, T., Hameed, S., & Kiama, L. (2019). Actions, not words: progress since ICPD on disability and SRHR. *Sexual and Reproductive Health Matters*.

society, decision-making has not prioritized matters of sexual health and rights of women with disabilities, further disempowering them - economically and socially.

SRHRplusD Festival Activities

The Festival provided a platform to enhance freedom of expression using different art forms that support body autonomy. It was a 5 day community event that initiated conversations from a holistic point of view, where women and girls with disabilities could express themselves through dance, community mental health sessions, coordinated graffiti art, spoken word, fashion and an exhibition market for products made by women with disabilities.



Safe Spaces

We used different art forms to create spaces for expression for women with disabilities. We had mixed music, dance, graffiti, sexuality conversations, make-up and skin therapy, yoga and fashion to amplify the voices of women with disabilities in a safe space where they were free to express themselves and exchange information. The Festival was also a platform for other artists with disabilities to showcase their skills and perform their art.

- Sexuality conversations facilitated by Mary Night Nurse⁵, a Kenyan sexual worker and aspiring politician that works to promote sexual reproductive health and rights. She created a safe space where festival participants had the opportunity to share experiences and ask questions.
- Yoga sessions were guided by Loreen Akumu, a Deaf Yoga teacher who is part of The Africa Yoga Project⁶ who promoted accessible ways to practice yoga every morning.
- Make-up and henna spaces, led by Iptisam Issack and Jackie Makyotto, two Kenyan women artists. In these spaces women with disabilities were learning and expressing their bodily autonomy through art.
- Graffiti session by Crea8tive Spills⁷, an artist collective that brings together writers, visual and performing artists to discuss, create and showcase works that are meant to ignite conversations around raising a society that uses expression as a tool for education and progressive development.

⁵ <https://ghettoradio.co.ke/association-of-commercial-sex-workers-leader-announces-bid-for-mca-seat/>

⁶ <https://www.africayogaproject.org/>

⁷ <https://www.facebook.com/Crea8tiveSpills/>

- Guided Drawing and Painting sessions by Thufu⁸ (Bebeto Ochieng) where women with disabilities were expressing their creativity and reinterpreting their sexualities. As a result of this workshop we are developing a sexuality photobook.
- Fashion Runway by women with disabilities. All these spaces promoted bodily autonomy and empowerment of women with disabilities, including intergenerational conversations between Mama Siri and Digital Dada.



Partners:

Some of our partners who attended the festival had an opportunity to showcase their work and to create awareness to communities of women and girls with disabilities. These partners included Special Olympics of Kenya (SOK)⁹ who serve athletes with intellectual disability in sport training. They created awareness of their work to women and girls with disabilities during the festival. We also had Riziki Source¹⁰ who work on job employment for persons with disabilities. They demonstrated how women with disabilities should present themselves during the interviews and documents to carry when going for interviews. We also had Polycom¹¹ who educated the community on micro income generating activities such as soap making. They demonstrated how sanitary pads are being made locally during the festival.

Visibility

Over 600 women with disabilities took part in the festival, and allowed us to increase visibility on the rights of women with disabilities during the 16 days of Activism against Gender-based Violence. We held interviews with the UNFPA¹² Media team, Capital FM¹³ during the event. During the 5 day Festival¹⁴ we were able to increase our number of engagements, Facebook increased reach to 2,038, Instagram increased reach 195 and Twitter got 4,000 impressions.



⁸ <https://bsqart.com/portfolio/bebetothufu/>

⁹ <https://www.specialolympics.org/>

¹⁰ <https://www.rizikisource.org/>

¹¹ <https://polycomgirls.or.ke>

¹² <https://kenya.unfpa.org/en/news/srhrplasd-festival-celebrates-bodily-autonomy-women-and-girls-disabilities>

¹³ <https://www.capitalfm.co.ke/news/2021/12/toll-free-service-launched-to-help-women-with-disabilities-fight-gbv/>

¹⁴ <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=A57eVqaFRHA&t=17s>



Partnerships

We had advocacy meetings with Kenyan Government representatives during the Festival. CAS Nadia Abdalla from the Ministry of ICT, joined intergenerational conversations between Mama Siri's and Digital Dada's.

CAS Linah Jebii Kilimo from the Ministry of Public Service and Gender joined conversations with Mama Siri and service providers on ways to strengthen the referral pathway and ensure we are providing a better quality of service for women and girls with disabilities.

We also agreed to establish MOUs with the service providers such as Kituo cha Sheria to support Mama Siri in legal aid referral cases.

Lessons Learned:

- The first of its kind in Kenya that prioritized women and girls with disabilities. It is critical to create safe spaces exclusively for women with disabilities where they can freely share their experiences and enjoy themselves.
- The focus on using creativity and fun was powerful as it provided important tools to work on issues of bodily autonomy and sexual and reproductive health and rights.
- The festival became a space for artists with disabilities to perform their arts and increase their exposure, e.g.
 1. DJ WIWA, a young woman with a disability performed music during the 5 days festival and now she is part of our Digital Dadas program. DJ Wiwa also got additional jobs from UNFPA and the Ministry of ICT to perform in events, including financial support to purchase additional equipment.
 2. Loreen Akumu, a Deaf yoga teacher guided all the yoga sessions and has been able to increase her customers as a result of the visibility.
 3. Sungura¹⁵ a Kenyan film about pleasure and disability. The protagonist, a young disabled woman, participated in the festival sharing her motivation and the experience. Through our partners at AWID, Sungura film was selected to be part of a feminist film screening festival.
 4. A space for women with disabilities to showcase their different products and skills. Items ranging from handmade crochet designs, clay piggy banks, African wear and customized soap were all on display for guests to interact with and purchase. It is important to create such spaces to enable women with disabilities to highlight their business skills.

¹⁵<https://www.filmandlaundry.com/sungura>

- We invited media houses to increase the event's visibility and guided them to respect our communication protocols and policies. The Festival became a space to train journalists on how to change negative narratives on women with disabilities in media.
- During the Festival we hosted several national government authorities and facilitated discussions between them and women with disabilities. We believe there is goodwill to advance the rights of women and girls with disabilities but there is an absence of knowledge in how to do this.
- Our advocacy with the government needs to take a strategic approach. One of the ways we are using the festival is to design it as a space to support movement building and strengthen advocacy strategies and increase accountability processes including capacity building and validation for our national agenda. Our roadmap towards increasing the leadership and participation of women with disabilities and ensuring their voices in governance and accountability are included is key.

Festival Outcomes:

- The SRHRplusD Festival is an important space to strengthen movement building and networking for women with disabilities.
- The SRHRplusD festival provides valuable interaction, momentum and validation for national policy dialogues with relevant government and civil society stakeholders.
- The SRHRplusD Festival is a safe space for women with disabilities to gain and share knowledge on their bodily autonomy and legal capacity through creative arts.

