

Strengthening OPD Capacity for Inclusive Development in Mombasa County, Kenya



Executive Summary

During consultations in Mombasa, Jemima Kutata, an OPD leader, captures a recurring reality: while disability rights are increasingly recognised in law, translating these provisions into meaningful change at the community level remains a challenge. This reflects a broader gap between Kenya's progressive legal frameworks, particularly the Persons with Disabilities Act, 2025, and their implementation in practice.

In Mombasa, a coastal urban hub shaped by tourism, trade, and a large informal economy, persons with disabilities face distinct barriers in accessing services, employment, and assistive technologies. While Organisations of Persons with Disabilities (OPDs) play a critical role in addressing these gaps, many continue to face structural and capacity-related constraints that limit their influence.

A series of regional training sessions and consultations brought together 18 OPD leaders to examine these challenges and identify pathways for strengthening organisational effectiveness. A

key insight emerged: impact is not defined by presence alone, but by the ability of OPDs to organise, communicate, and influence systems and structures. This case study draws on these insights to explore capacity gaps, contextual realities, and emerging opportunities, while contributing to practical strategies for strengthening governance, leadership, advocacy, and access to assistive technologies in Mombasa.

Mombasa-Specific Insights: From Participation to Influence

Findings from the needs assessment show that access alone does not guarantee inclusion. While policies exist, barriers in awareness, affordability, and institutional capacity continue to limit their impact.



Figure: Group discussion among OPD representatives during regional training in Mombasa.

Awareness of the Persons with Disabilities Act 2025 remains uneven among communities and institutions. Although the law provides a strong foundation for equality and non-discrimination, many OPDs lack the tools and knowledge to leverage it effectively for advocacy and accountability.

“The current Act includes provisions for inclusion in education, employment, and public services... Persons with disabilities must not face discrimination in any form. The Act emphasizes equality and equal opportunities.” – Jemima Kutata, APDR Disability Consultation

Access to assistive technologies remains a major constraint. In Mombasa’s urban and informal settlements, affordability and supply challenges prevent many individuals from accessing essential devices, limiting independence and participation. Participants also highlighted delays in adapting national policies to the county context, resulting in slow implementation and limited impact at

the grassroots level. In addition, gaps in disability data continue to hinder planning and service delivery, leaving many individuals uncounted and underserved.

*“The lack of adequate data and effective monitoring systems means many individuals remain uncounted, creating significant gaps in planning and service delivery.” –
Cleoppar Mwawasi, COMUTAC*

What is Working in Mombasa

What is Working

Strong grassroots OPD networks

OPDs across Mombasa are active at ward and sub-county levels, providing critical community representation and support.

Positive collaboration with the government and partners

Constructive relationships between OPDs, the National Council, and other stakeholders are enabling dialogue and joint action. OPD leaders demonstrate strong commitment to advancing inclusion and strengthening their organisations. From the interaction, most of them are working out of passion to serve persons with disabilities in their communities.

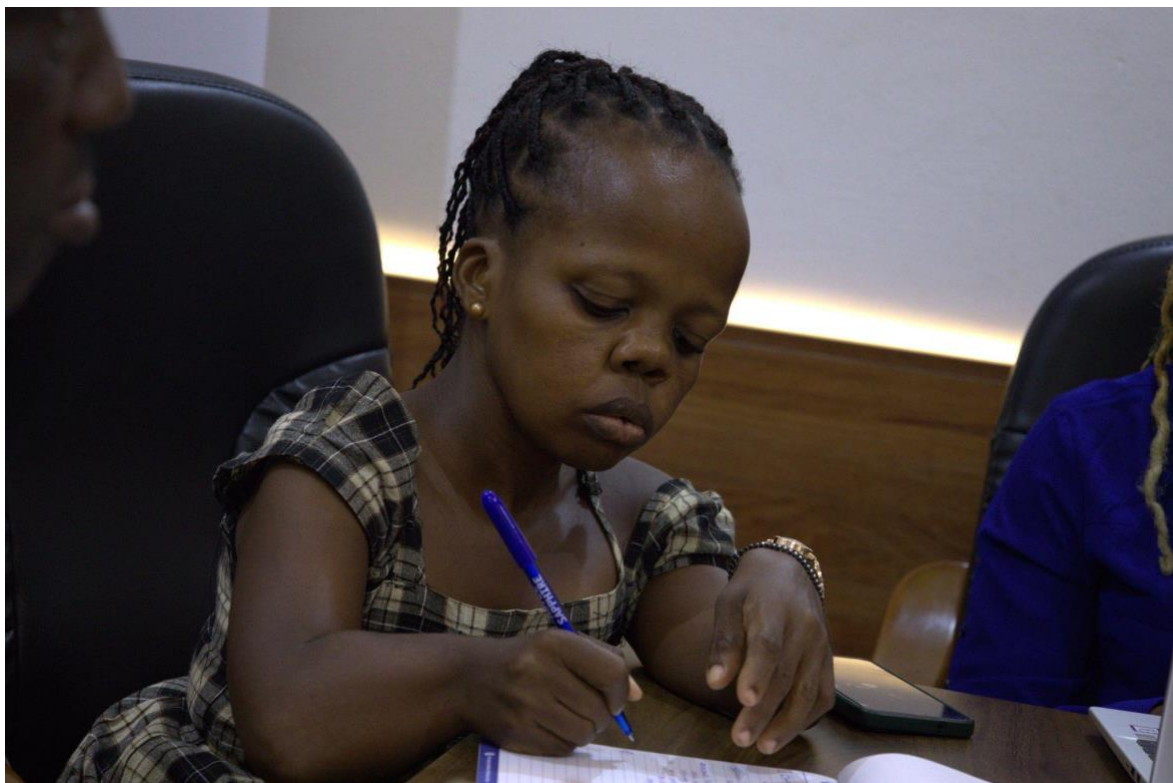


Figure: Florence Mkaha, Chairperson of Be-Muzungu Disability OPD, taking notes during the training session

Case Example: Strengthening OPD and Government Collaboration in Mombasa

In Mombasa, collaboration between OPDs and government institutions is emerging as a key driver of more effective disability inclusion. Juliet Ruwa, who works with the National Council for Persons with Disabilities in Mombasa, highlights how recent efforts are strengthening both policy implementation and grassroots engagement.

She notes that the Persons with Disabilities Act, 2025, marks a significant shift, as it now recognises all eight domains of disability, expanding inclusion across a wider range of individuals.

“This Act covers all eight domains, which means more persons with disabilities are recognized and included. It makes implementation much easier at the grassroots level.”

This expanded scope is already contributing to visible changes. Caregivers are increasingly forming groups, strengthening peer support and collective advocacy, while more stakeholders are engaging in disability inclusion efforts across the county. A key factor in this progress is the strong working relationship between OPDs and the National Council. The Council plays an active role in building OPD capacity, while recognising OPD leaders as critical actors at the community level.

“We work closely with OPD leaders because they are the soldiers on the ground. They are best placed to sensitise communities and ensure that persons with disabilities understand their rights.”

The collaboration with Kilimanjaro Blind Trust Africa (KBTA) and the Global Disability Innovation Hub (GDI Hub), and the OPDs in Mombasa, is further strengthening how assistive technology is understood and applied. Through joint efforts, OPD leaders are being sensitised on assistive technology, while inclusive engagement spaces are bringing together people of different ages and backgrounds.

This approach is helping to shift how OPDs operate. Rather than working in isolation, organisations are increasingly connecting, sharing knowledge, and learning from one another. The emerging framework provides a clearer roadmap for integrating assistive technology into advocacy, service delivery, and community engagement. These efforts are beginning to translate into more coordinated outreach at the grassroots level, with OPDs better equipped to sensitize communities and connect persons with disabilities to services and assistive devices. The Council also supports OPDs in applying for grants and securing funding, particularly for assistive devices, helping to expand access within communities.

While challenges remain, this example reflects a broader shift in Mombasa, from fragmented efforts to more coordinated, partnership-driven approaches that are strengthening disability inclusion in practice.



“Through the framework we are developing, we must step out of our cocoon, speak up, and amplify our voices... we have the power and capability to make a difference.”

Emily Juma, Amazing PWD

Conclusion

The Mombasa case study highlights a critical shift from participation to influence. While legal frameworks exist, their impact depends on awareness, implementation, and OPDs' capacity to engage effectively. In a county shaped by rapid urbanisation and economic activity, strengthening OPDs is essential to ensuring that persons with disabilities are not left behind. Evidence from Mombasa shows that when governance, digital capacity, access to assistive technology, and partnerships are strengthened, OPDs are better positioned to influence systems and drive inclusive development. When OPDs are equipped to influence, not just participate, inclusion moves from policy into practice, enabling persons with disabilities to realise their rights and opportunities fully.