

Not Wallflowers; We Are Here to Dance



Looking at the Protection and Care Needs
of WHRDs with Disabilities in Kenya,
Uganda, and Tanzania

Easy-to-read



This paper is an EasyRead version of the report by Urgent Action Fund-Africa (UAF-Africa) and the National Union of Women with Disabilities of Uganda (NUWODU). You can read the full report for more details.

| | |
|---|-----------|
| 1. Appreciation | 1 |
| 2. About this Report | 2 |
| 3. How the Research was Done | 4 |
| 4. Research Challenges | 5 |
| 5. Who are the Women human Rights Defenders (WHRDs) with Disabilities? | 6 |
| 6. Full Protection and Care for WHRDs | 7 |
| 7. The Situation of WHRDs with Disabilities | 9 |
| 8. How to Keep WHRDs Safe | 12 |

| | |
|---|-----------|
| 9. How to Assist WHRDs | 14 |
| 10. How to Protect WHRDs | 17 |
| 11. What is Missing in the Protection of WHRDs | 26 |
| 12. Suggestions on How to Protect WHRDs | 29 |
| 13. Final remarks | 39 |
| 14. Short Words with Meanings | 40 |
| Credits | 41 |

1. Appreciation



NUWODU and UAF-Africa thanks the women human rights defenders with disabilities from Kenya, Uganda, and Tanzania for sharing their voices and experiences.



We also appreciate the team that helped with interviews, research, and group discussions during COVID-19, as well as the organizations that shared their valuable insights on working with women human rights defenders with disabilities.

**Ford
Foundation**

This project was supported by The Ford Foundation, Office for Eastern Africa, and the feedback from partners that helped improve the report.

2. About this report



The United Nations (UN) adopted a Declaration to protect Women Human Rights Defenders (WHRDs), recognizing their important role and the special risks they face. The United Nations (UN) is a group of countries that work together to help people.



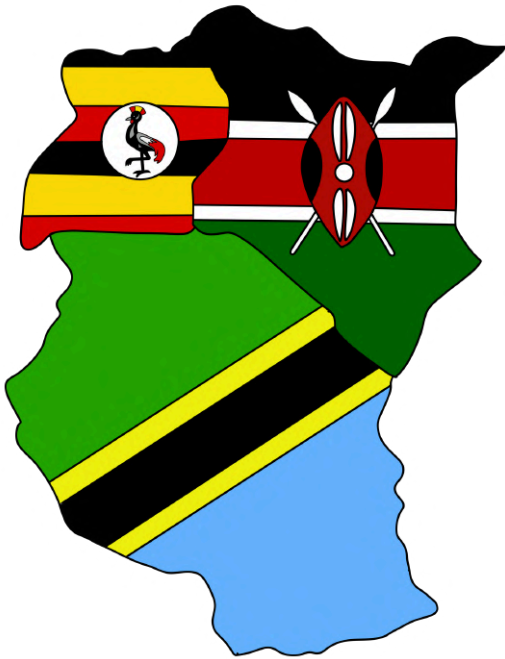
WHRDs with disabilities face challenges due to their disabilities and gender. Their needs are often overlooked in protections and decisions.



NUWODU and UAF-Africa work with women and girls with disabilities and WHRDs across Africa about issues like online violence and restrictive laws. They understand that well-being is crucial for effective protection.



The research found that WHRDs are often burnt out and stressed. Current support mainly focuses on accessibility rather than addressing the root causes of their distress.

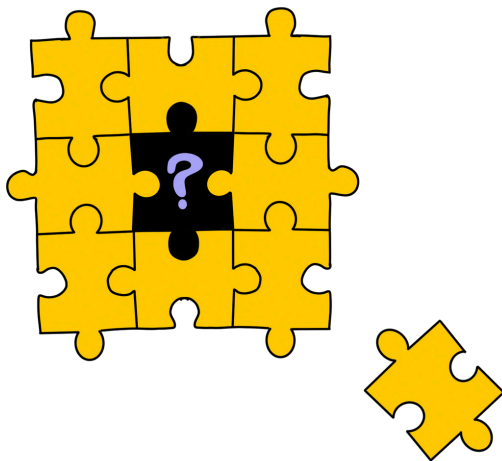


NUWODU and UAF-Africa hope this research will lead to better support and actions from organizations and governments in Kenya, Uganda, and Tanzania. Organizations and governments in Kenya Uganda and Tanzania should help and support WHRDs with disabilities.

3. How the research was done

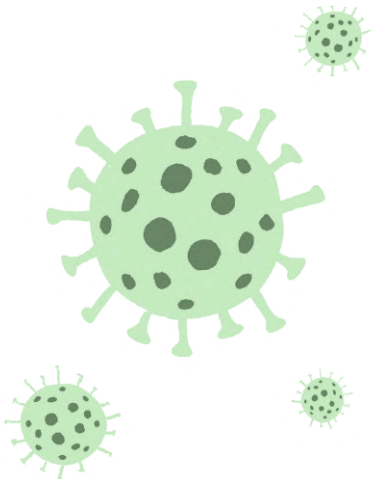


This research was done in Kenya, Uganda, and Tanzania taking four months. We did interviews and focus group discussions with Women Human Rights Defenders (WHRDs) with disabilities and people who know about their issues. We also spoke with disability justice and protection groups.

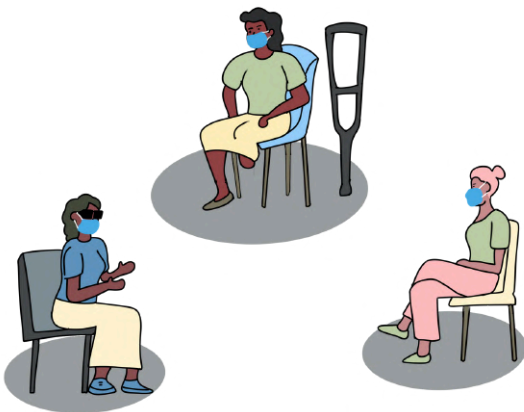


The goal was to understand the needs and challenges of WHRDs with disabilities, to learn about the support they receive, identify gaps in their protection and care, and provide recommendations to improve their safety based on their real-life experiences.

4. Research Challenges



This research happened during the COVID-19 pandemic making it hard to travel and do face-to-face interviews. We had to rely on online interviews but some WHRDs with disabilities couldn't join online because of internet problems.



To solve this, we held in-person group talks with 25 WHRDs and followed safety rules, wearing masks and sitting apart.

5. Who are the womn human rights defenders (WHRDs) with Disabilities?



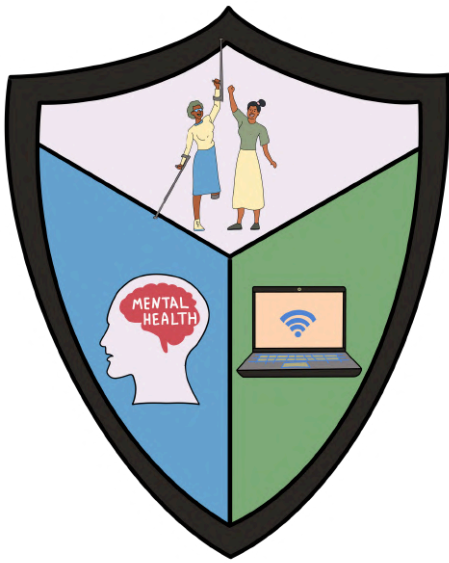
Womn Human Rights Defenders (WHRDs) are womn who stand up for their own rights and the rights of others. This includes womn who are targeted because of who they are or what they do. The term womn includes lesbians, bisexual womn, transgender womn, and women who don't follow traditional gender roles.

They defend womn's rights, or the rights for womn and girls with disabilities. They may be part of womn's rights groups or work alone in their communities. Even if they aren't part of an organization, they are still WHRDs.

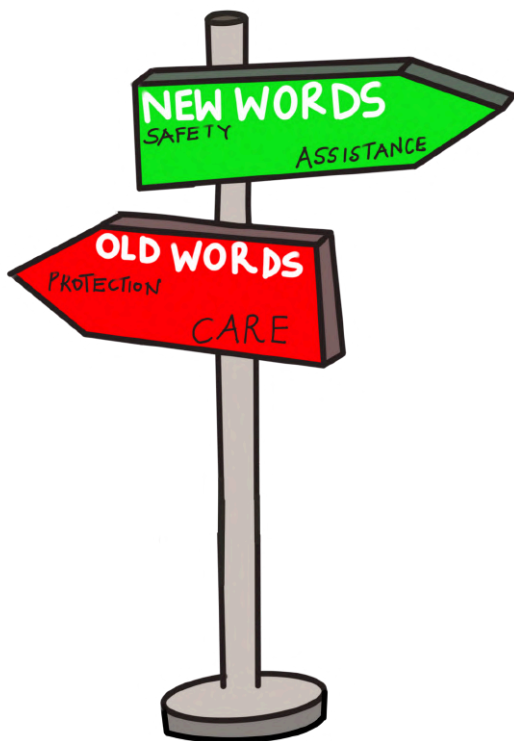


Some of the womn's rights they may protect includes womn owning property, protecting girls from harmful practices and promoting womn leaders.

6. Full protection and care for WHRDS



The idea of protection and care has changed over time. Women's rights activists now see it as more than just staying safe from harm. It includes three main things, namely being safe physically, staying secure online, and looking after mental health. Protection should cover all areas of life—home, work, and public places.



But many WHRDs with disabilities feel the words "care" and "protection" sound negative because they make them feel weak or helpless, as if they cannot do things on their own.

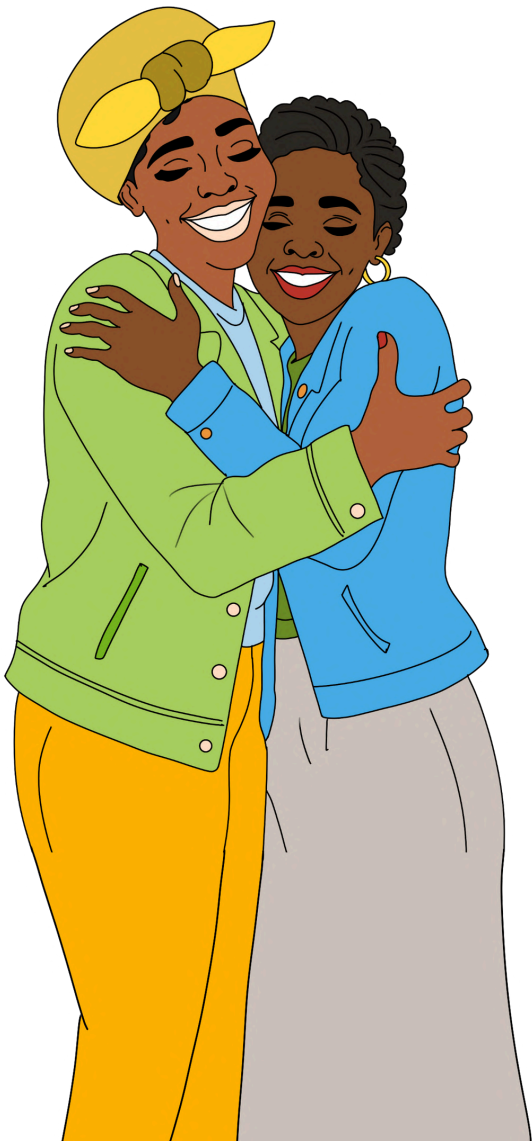
They suggested using words like "safety," "assistance," and "safeguarding" instead. These words make them feel more in control and empowered. They said that "protection" and "care" mean different things depending on their work, where they live, and the risks they face.



Thoughts on Protection

Protection means being in a place that understands and supports the needs of people with disabilities. It also requires flexible resources because activism can change often. Unfortunately, resources for WHRDs with disabilities are often too limited for them to feel safe.

Thoughts on Care



Care is about ensuring WHRDs with disabilities do not feel very tired after their efforts to create change. This can be hard because of deep-rooted beliefs about gender and disability. It includes taking time to reflect, think, and recharge, as well as having emotional support during both good and bad times.

WHRDs believe that care goes beyond physical safety or medical help. It's about feeling safe in their bodies and homes and having their personal needs respected. They want care that values their worth and independence, not sympathy that treats them as charity cases.

7. The situation of WHRDs with disabilities



Women with disabilities face unfair treatment in schools, workplaces, and government offices. Laws meant to protect them are often weak, and many officials do not know how to help.



Women and girls with mental disabilities are often treated like children. For example, in Kenya, if they are raped, it is labeled as "defilement," which results in lighter punishments, making it hard to report and get justice. Survivors face threats, and cases are ignored.

In Uganda and Tanzania, laws meant to protect women are not well known or followed. Women human rights defenders are often seen as troublemakers and face harassment without justice or family support.



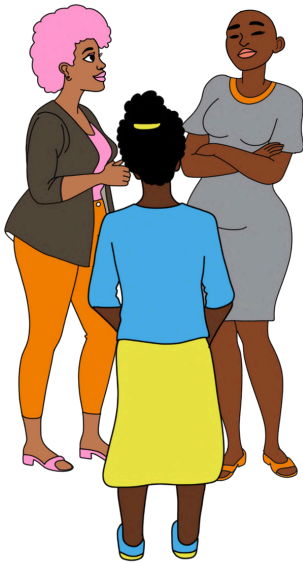
WHRDs with disabilities struggle with accessibility issues. Public transport is not perfect and many can't afford private transport or personal assistants, WHRDs with albinism have trouble reading small text. This limits their participation.



The media often ignores issues related to disabilities, focusing on pity rather than raising awareness about rights. Sometimes, WHRDs have to pay for media coverage, which many cannot afford. In Tanzania, censorship prevents the media from discussing rights violations against women with disabilities, silencing their voices.



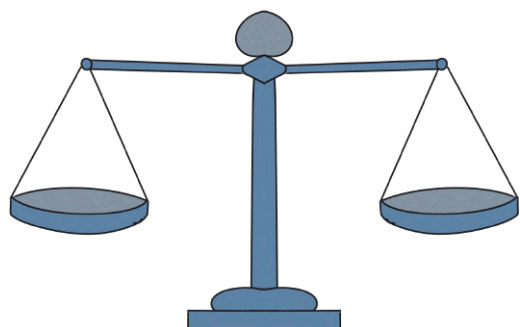
Womn with disabilities feel unwelcomed by other groups that fight for human rights. such as disability movements and women's rights movements. Men leading disability rights often forget their needs, while women's rights groups tell them to only focus on disability issues.



Community opposition is a big challenge. Many people don't understand disability issues and accuse WHRDs of bringing in harmful Western ideas. In Tanzania, WHRDs with albinism face threats from people seeking body parts for witchcraft. Families may also oppose their activism, making their work dangerous.

Discriminatory traditions make it hard for WHRDs with disabilities. Communities often expect them to be quiet and see them as weak. At home, they may face rejection and are discouraged from speaking out, especially about sexual health or LGBTQI rights.

8. How to keep WHRDs safe



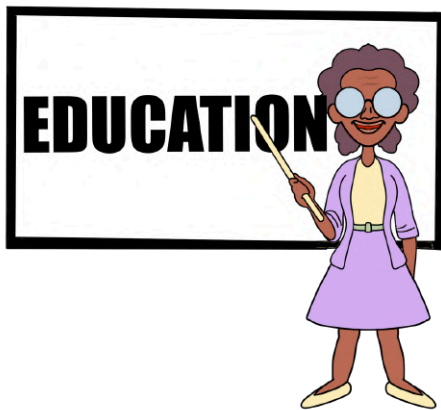
WHRDs with disabilities need laws that protect their rights and ensure their safety. These laws should be accessible, easy to read and understand. The laws should include the specific needs of women with disabilities and be available in local languages.



WHRDs with disabilities often use online platforms for activism but face harassment. They need training on staying safe online and tools to protect their work. Providing security updates in accessible formats and creating disability-friendly apps can help them stay informed about threats.



Fair treatment is crucial when WHRDs face oppression. They need access to lawyers, police, and courts that understand disability issues, ensuring their complaints are taken seriously and investigated quickly.



Educating the community about disability rights can create support for women with disabilities who protect human rights. This helps change attitudes and makes it safer for them to do their work.



WHRDs with disabilities need funding to ensure their safety. This money can be used for medical care, personal assistants, disability-friendly shelters, and security training. Support from women's organizations also helps create safer conditions.

9. How to assist WHRDs



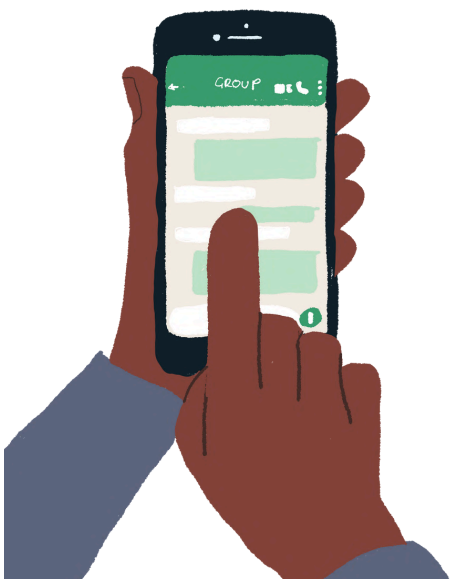
Removing normalised violence in healthcare.

WHRDs with disabilities often face unfair treatment in healthcare due to harmful beliefs. To improve their well-being, we must challenge these ideas and ensure equal healthcare for all.



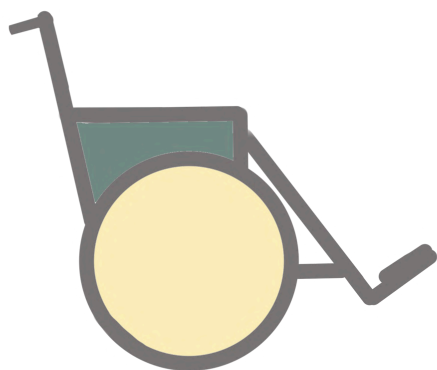
Making their own choices.

WHRDs with disabilities want the freedom to choose the assistance that suits them best. They feel frustrated when organisations make decisions for them. Proper funding is needed so they can choose their own support, with organisations listening to their needs.



Borrowing from existing methods.

WHRDs with disabilities already support each other in meaningful ways, like through WhatsApp groups for emotional, financial, and practical help. These methods can be expanded to create larger networks for better well-being.



Having assistants and assistive devices.

Assistance is vital for WHRDs to fully participate in their work. This includes personal assistants, like sign language interpreters, and devices like screen readers, wheelchairs, walking sticks, and eyeglasses.



Being respected, not tolerated.

WHRDs with disabilities have valuable skills, but people often focus only on their disabilities. They want to be treated with respect as professionals and rights-holders.



Self-Care to challenge disability stigma.

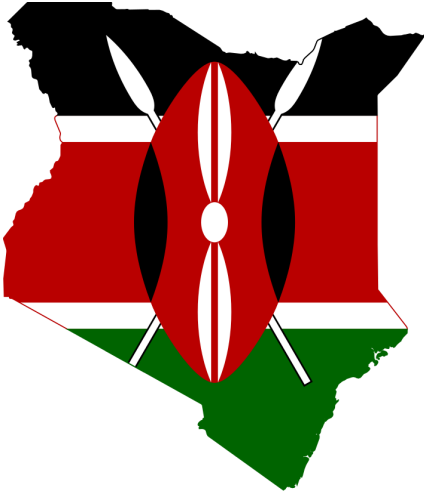
Some women with disabilities feel self-care is out of reach because society sees them as less valuable. Collective care is important to challenge this view and show that people with disabilities are just as capable and worthy.



Building a support community.

Negative attitudes and discrimination can make WHRDs with disabilities feel isolated. They need funding to organize gatherings where they can connect, celebrate successes, and support each other. Spaces for art, dance, and healing help build a strong community.

10. How to protect WHRDs



1. How Kenya protects them

Kenya has various ways of protecting human rights, but none are specifically dedicated to women Human Rights Defenders (WHRDs) or persons with disabilities.



The National Council for Persons with Disabilities (NCPWD) was created in 2004 to assist people with disabilities through funding (NDFPWD), cash transfers for persons with disabilities (PWDs) and job placement.

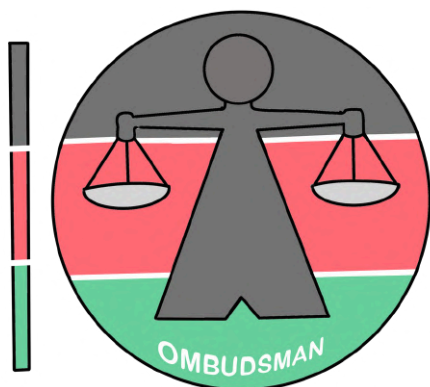


**DEFENDERS
COALITION**

The Defenders Coalition, formed in 2007, supports the safety and well-being of human rights defenders by helping them work more effectively and advocating for protective laws.



The Kenya National Commission on Human Rights (KNCHR), established in 2010, investigates human rights abuses and promotes public education on these issues.



The Commission on Administrative Justice (Ombudsman) addresses complaints against government agencies and provides witness protection.



The Independent Policing Oversight Authority, created in 2011, oversees police conduct to improve professionalism and discipline.

2. How Tanzania protects them



Tanzania, has several laws and policies to protect the rights of people with disabilities, although they do not focus on the specific needs of women Human Rights Defenders (WHRDs) with disabilities.



The United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (CRPD), signed in 2009, is the main one.

Other agreements also mention fair treatment, care, and inclusion of people with disabilities in society



The National Advisory Council for Persons with Disabilities, which supports healthcare, education, and job training.



The National Fund for Persons with Disabilities finances education and rehabilitation programs.



The Commission for Human Rights and Good Governance (CHRAGG) helps protect human rights and receives complaints about violations, but it does not specifically address the rights of WHRDs with disabilities.

3. How Uganda protects them

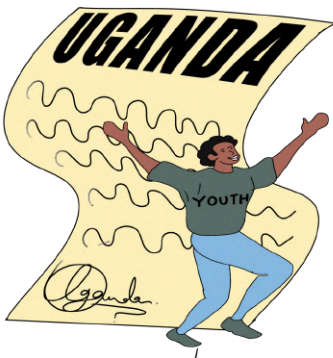


Uganda has several policies to protect people with disabilities, but they do not focus on women with disabilities or WHRDs with disabilities.

The National Council for Disability was created by the Persons with Disabilities Act (2020).



The Equal Opportunities Commission of Uganda was set up to fight discrimination based on various factors like gender, age, and disability.



The Uganda National Youth Policy created in 2016, outlines support for young people including youth with disabilities.



The Uganda Human Rights Commission, established by the 1995 Constitution, monitors if the government follows human rights.



4. Regional and International ways

There is no specific regional or international protection way but there are some special ways that are used to defend their rights, including the following.

United Nations (UN)

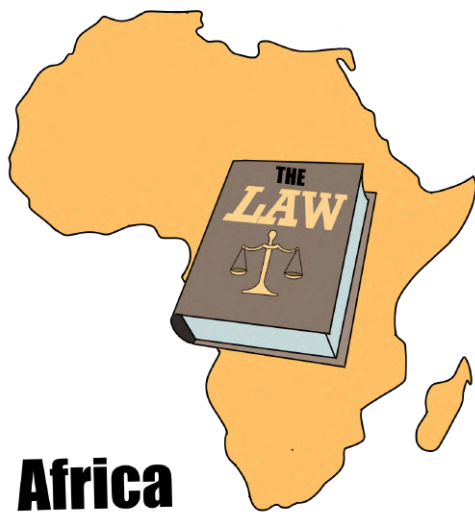


UNITED NATIONS

The United Nations (UN) is a group of countries working together to solve global problems. It has important agreements that help protect women Human Rights Defenders (WHRDs), such as the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (CRPD), and the Convention on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW).



The UN also gets reports on issues like human rights for people with albinism, the rights of persons with disabilities, the situation of human rights defenders, violence against women, and the unfair treatment of women and girls.



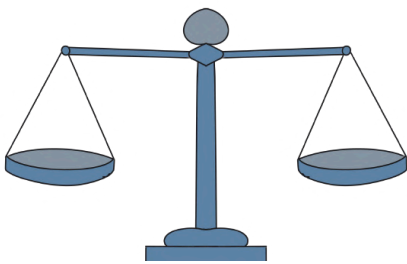
African Commission on Human and Peoples' Rights (ACHPR)

They protect human rights in Africa. It ensures that people with disabilities in Africa are treated fairly and have all their rights respected.



East African Community

Countries like Kenya, Uganda, and Tanzania must ensure the safety of WHRDs with disabilities, following the community's agreements.



5. Groups that help to access justice

They include:

Women Enabled International (**WEI**) supports women with disabilities around the world. They look at health rights, gender violence, and promote inclusion and fairness, connecting WHRDs with protection groups to ensure their safety.





Article 48 Initiative (A48) promotes access to justice for people with mental disabilities in Kenya. They advocate for the rights of persons with disabilities to ensure everyone can access justice fairly



Centre for Human Rights in Pretoria (**SALC**) raises awareness about human rights and helps marginalized groups. They offer legal support to WHRDs and are known for their disability-friendly services.



6. Protection Organizations Supporting WHRDs with Disabilities

The organizations listed below were mentioned by Womn Human Rights Defenders (WHRDs) and support groups. They do not focus specifically on WHRDs with disabilities, but they provide general support that can help these individuals.



Defend Defenders is a regional group that supports human rights defenders. They are starting to give special help to WHRDs with disabilities.



Frontline Defenders is an international organization that helps HRDs, including WHRDs.

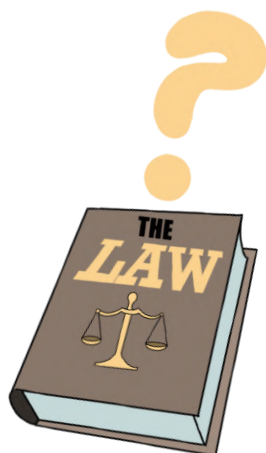


Protection International Kenya (PI Kenya) aims to create a safe space for HRDs and help communities at risk protect themselves from discrimination and harm



Missing Voices is a network that helps womn with disabilities who protect human rights in cases of illegal killings and forced disappearances. They also provide training on protection and how to work with the law, how to engage with the media, and how to set up safe places.

11. What is missing in the protection of WHRDs



There are no special laws to protect WHRDs. Many use informal groups, like WhatsApp, to share problems and get help.



People in communities often do not understand disability rights or the work of WHRDs with disabilities, so they do not support them.



There are not many groups for women Human Rights Defenders (WHRDs) with disabilities although there are general groups of WHRDs that help each other stay safe.



Justice systems do not fully support people with disabilities. WHRDs face challenges when reporting to the police because there are no sign language interpreters. In prison, their needs are often ignored.



There is little information about safety for WHRDs with disabilities. Many do not know about helpful organizations, especially in rural areas. Most information is not easy to understand for people with hearing or visual disabilities.



WHRDs with disabilities receive very little funding, which doesn't meet their needs. Most of the support goes to other areas, and male-led groups get more help. The complicated funding process also limits their growth.

Organizations helping WHRDs do not cover extra costs, like hiring personal assistants or sign language interpreters. They usually only pay medical bills from attacks, but WHRDs with disabilities need more support.



WHRDs with disabilities often miss important women's rights events because they lack mobility aids or sign language services, making it hard to join discussions.



Online safety tools are not friendly for people with disabilities. They make it hard for those with visual or hearing disabilities to report attacks or ask for help. Important information can be lost, slowing down responses to safety problems.



Some organizations say their budgets limit the help they can give to WHRDs with disabilities. They often cannot provide medical support or assistive equipment. Because of these budget limits, they mainly offer relocation, legal, and mental health support.

12. Suggestions on how to protect WHRDs



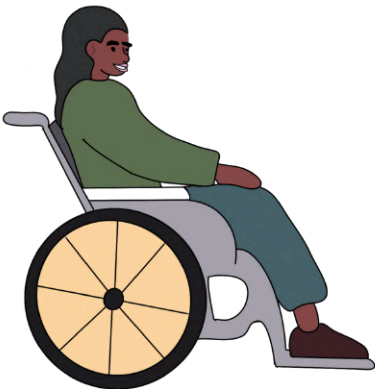
1. Suggestions to womn rights groups

They need to make sure their programs include womn with disabilities and as well as important womn rights discussion.



They need to have open conversations and remove barriers in feminist spaces so WHRDs with disabilities can succeed.

They should make sure womn with disabilities are part of decision-making roles.



Feminist organizations should help protection groups understand how to support WHRDs with disabilities, considering both gender and disability.



2. Suggestions to the governments of Kenya Uganda and Tanzania

Have laws and policies to protect WHRDs and WHRDs with disabilities, based on the UN guidelines for protecting WHRDs.

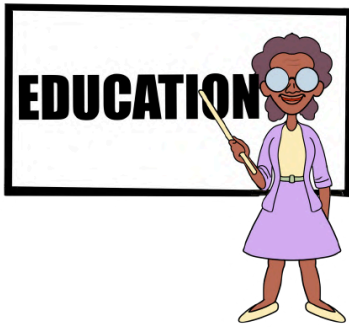
Create systems to make sure national policies protecting the rights of womn with disabilities are being followed.



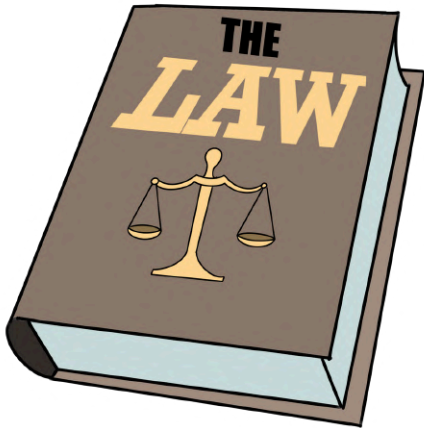
Improve education so that schools include children with disabilities, and train teachers to support students with different disabilities.



Build safe homes for womn and girls with disabilities who have been hurt by sexual violence, and make sure there's enough money to support them.



Train government workers on how to assist people with disabilities.



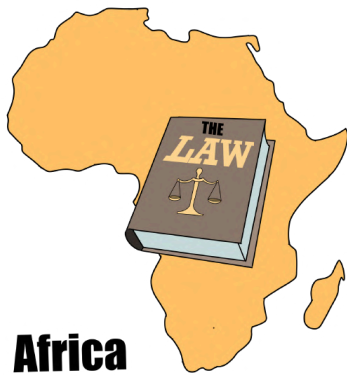
Change laws that treat womn with intellectual disabilities like children in the courts.



Make sure there are people who can translate sign language in all government offices.



Provide information about lawyers, doctors, and support for mental health to womn with disabilities who defend human rights.



Put the African Charter on Human and Peoples' Rights for people with disabilities into action and approve and adopt the laws needed to support it.

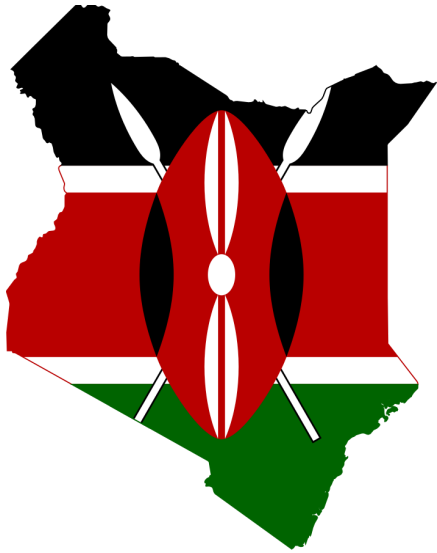


Make sure there are cost free phone lines for womn with disabilities who defend human rights to call when they need help. This means they can call for help even when they have no airtime.



Provide womn with disabilities who protect human rights with a lawyer who can help them for free.

Ensure womn with disabilities and WHRDs can keep their privacy and make their own choices in the criminal justice system.



3. Suggestion to the government of Kenya

Kenya should carry out the promises made at the second Global Disability Summit and fund organizations for people with disabilities.



4. Suggestions to the government of Tanzania

Take steps to stop the killing of people with albinism in the country. Create community-based systems to keep WHRDs with disabilities safe, especially those defending the rights of people with albinism.



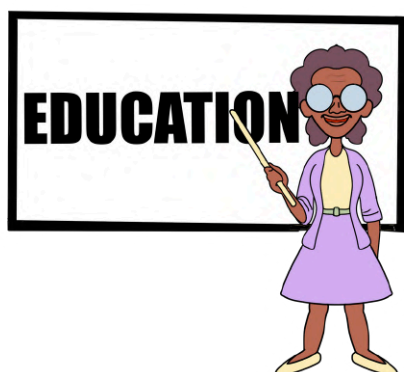
4. Suggestions to the Government of Uganda

Uganda should Include the needs of womn with disabilities in the Persons with Disabilities Act of 2020 and provide accessible copies of important laws in local languages and disability-friendly formats.



They need to follow through on promises from the second Global Disability Summit to increase funding for empowering people with disabilities and improve mental health policies.

5. Suggestions to protection groups



Internally

They should train their workers on the issues of people with disabilities and consult WHRDs with disabilities who protect human rights when making rules about their funding.



They should also make their websites disability-friendly and change the language used in protection and care to match the needs and experiences of WHRDs with disabilities.



They should employ women with disabilities and put them in money overseeing and money seeking teams.



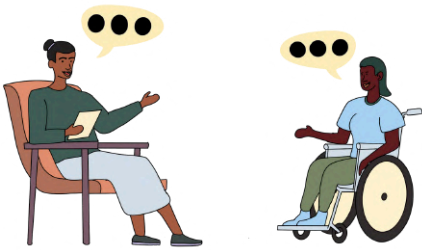
How they give out money

They should make sure the process of applying, receiving and reporting issues about money is easy and focuses on the needs of WHRDs with disabilities. They should also provide money support for women with disabilities, even if they don't ask for it, because they might not know what to request.

Externally



Protection groups should create and support networks or groups for Women Human Rights Defenders (WHRDs) with disabilities.



They also should always consult women with disabilities before starting any projects for or with them.



Provide support on research and documentation projects on issues of WHRDs with disabilities. This helps create better assistance and safety for them inspires others.



They should also establish disability-friendly shelters where WHRDs with disabilities can feel safe and comfortable.

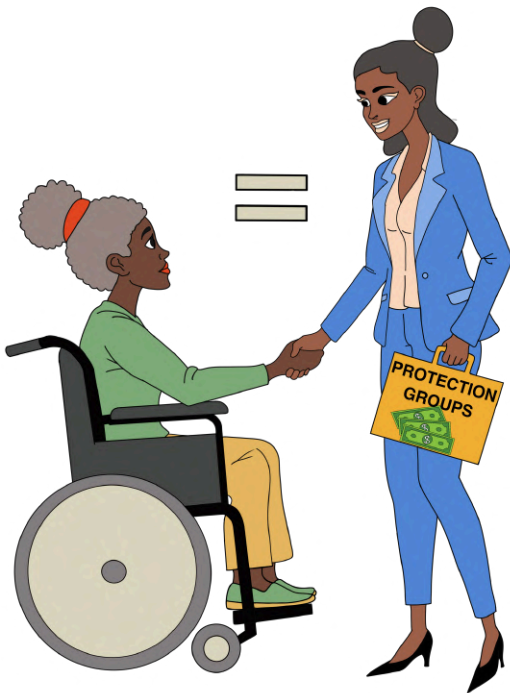


Outreach programs by protection groups.

Program officers should reach out to WHRDs with disabilities to share information about available support and options. They should also help build their skills in important areas, like speaking up for their rights, raising money, and keeping themselves safe.

Protection groups should change from a giver and receiver to equal partners.

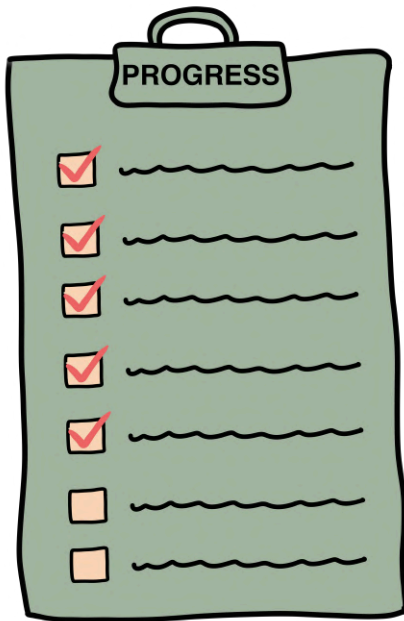
This promotes openness and transparency, focusing on building relationships that benefit both the funder and the grantee.



Providing funding to womn disability organizations and trusting them helps to improve their management systems.



Protection groups should create travel laws for womn with disabilities organizations that attend to their specific needs.



Protection groups should look at the progress made by their support. This helps them focus on understanding how their support is given and how it affects womn with disabilities who protect human rights.

13. Final remarks

Womn Human Rights Defenders (WHRDs) with disabilities face many challenges and often lack proper support. They are frequently seen only as disability activists, even though they have skills in other areas.



More funding is needed to research and help recognize their contributions. Their needs are usually different, so it's important to include them in decision-making to understand what support they require and that their voices are heard.

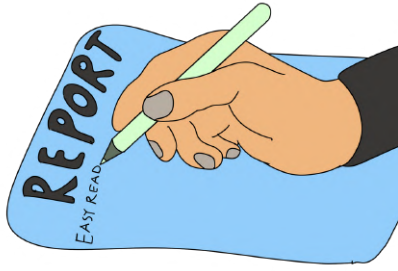


14. Short Words with meanings

- **CEDAW**: Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women
- **FGD**: Focus Group Discussion
- **HRDs**: Human Rights Defenders
- **KNCHR**: Kenya National Commission on Human Rights
- **LBTQI**: Lesbian, Bisexual, Transgender, Queer, and Intersex
- **PI KENYA**: Protection International Kenya
- **PWDs**: Persons with Disabilities

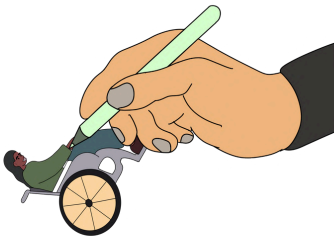
- **NCPWD:** National Council for Persons with Disabilities
- **NDFPWD:** National Development Fund for Persons with Disabilities
- **NUWODU:** National Union of Women with Disabilities of Uganda
- **SALC:** Centre for Human Rights in Pretoria
- **UAF-Africa:** Urgent Action Fund-Africa
- **WEI:** Women Enabled International

Credits



Writer and Visual artist:

Oganga Khadudu



Visual Artist:

Njung'e Wanjiru

njungewanjiru.com

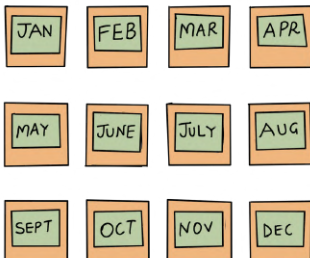


Commissioned by:

Urgent Action Fund-Africa
(UAF-Africa)

www.uaf-africa.org

2024



2024