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# Will the “Disabled” Kenyans cry foul after being left in Coronavirus conversations?

## Author Mugambi Paul

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In order not to live the disabled Kenyans who are the largest minority, who make up 15 % of the population.

I opine, disabled Kenyans they deserve not to be left behind.

There is an urgent need for Ministry of health in Kenya to address the rights and needs of disabled person throughout all COVID-19 planning and response.

In other words, for maximum community results in the recent updates from the national and county governments there is the need to close the glaring gap of inclusivity.

Available facts:

Children and adults with disabilities and older adults are 2-4 times more likely to be injured or die in a disaster due to a lack of planning, accessibility, and accommodation. Most people with disabilities are not inherently at a greater risk for contracting COVID-19, despite misconception that all people with disabilities have acute medical problems.

Kenyan government Actions taken now can make a big difference in COVID-19 outcomes Additionally, the disability sector from both the state and non state actors need to raise the voice not just to remain mum.

Are disabled persons represented at the national emergency committee established by the president?

Are the needs of the disabled catered for in the contingency plans?

Lessons learnt:

One of the greatest lessons in the fight of HIV aids in Kenya is that the disabled persons were not involved nor consulted in the plans strategies for combating the menace.

It took few disability stakeholders to get the national aids control council to ensure inclusivity is realized.

When shall the disabled stakeholders learn not to be left behind?

Should the disability society be involved after the rest of the population? we

Moreover, USAID was very critical in supporting disabled stakeholders in achieving active disability engagements.

Worst still, many disabled persons weren't aware of how to prevent themselves from the HIV AIDS infection. Many disabled Kenyans died, and many being taken advantage of by the society perceptions and behaviours [HI 2007]

This is because of the late response to the needs of disabled persons.

Several studies showed the greater involvement of disabled Kenyans in awareness, contributed to reduction of stigma and discrimination associated with disability and HIV aids.

It also ensured representation in National aids committees, and prevention promoted reduction of spread of the disease. [NACC 2008, Liverpool 2007 HI 2007].

Role of the disability sector:

Needless to say, disability stakeholders can play a crucial role by facilitating support to the ministry of health on inclusive strategies which will address the needs of the disabled Kenyans.

Legal Obligations and Training

On the other hand, Public and private agencies that provide services to persons with disabilities must be aware of their legal obligations and must train their employees appropriately. When public and private agencies and businesses are unclear about their legal responsibilities, there are no limitations in providing greater than minimum levels of support and services to persons with disabilities. Lack of understanding is NEVER an acceptable reason for failing to meet legal obligations, including throughout emergency circumstances.

Furthermore, the ministry of health has a legal obligation to provide equal access to public health emergency services to disabled Kenyans, including throughout a pandemic since our president issued an executive order

Coupled with the support one of the pillars of the big 4 agenda, of Kenyan 2010 constitution on right to access to health services and international conventions.

Needs of disabled Kenyans:

I observe disabled Kenyans require the same resources and assistance that all citizens deserve. In other words, adequate information and instructions, social and medical services, and protection from infection by those who might contract the virus. However, some disabled Kenyans may have needs that warrant specific reasonable accommodation by the public and private sectors that may not be necessary for Kenyans without disabilities. This is not much to ask since the current strategies by both national and county governments have not addressed the reasonable accommodations.

For instance, Communications Authority has approved sending of bulk information messages on coronavirus by the Ministry of Health to all subscribers of local mobile phone operators.

I beg to ask:

Are persons with intellectual impairment, Deaf, Blind, psychosocial disabilities able to consume this information?

1. Can the government provide alternative formats of communication in awareness raising?

Disabled Kenyans need to be informed of why Ministry of health believe that certain actions are warranted, to be given an opportunity to ask questions and receive answers in an accessible

format, and to be afforded the opportunity to object and propose alternative solutions.

2. Another example, the Bagathi hospital has been designated to be the official self-quarantine place.

Has it met accessibility standards?

Are the beds easily accessible and user friendly to Kenyans with mobility impairments?

Moreover, in some places, the distribution of protective equipment, food, and medical supplies might be warranted. If Point of Distribution locations are established, government and private stakeholders must address how these supplies and equipment will be distributed and accessed by disabled Kenyans, elderly and others who have difficulties in movement and lack means of travel. Disabled Kenyans have the right to receive services in the most integrated setting appropriate to their needs.

All in all, the existing legal protections of disabled Kenyans remain in effect under all circumstances. These protections are not subject to waivers or exceptions, even during public health emergencies or declared pandemics.

I Hope there will be no contrition on this journey of ensuring disabled become part of the solutions.

The views expressed here are for the author and do not represent any agency or organization. Mugambi Paul is a public policy, diversity, inclusion and sustainability expert.

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