

## THE EMPOWERMENT OF PERSONS WITH DISABILITIES: THE ROLE OF THE WAJIR COUNTY PERSONS WITH DISABILITIES ACT

County:	Wajir County		
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### Introduction

A person with a disability is an individual who has physical, sensory, intellectual, or mental impairments that substantially limit one or more major life activities. Disabilities can vary in type and severity, and they may affect a person's mobility, hearing, vision, communication, cognition, or mental health. People with disabilities often face numerous challenges in their daily lives, including barriers to education, employment, transportation and accessibility. According to an article published by Deutsche Welle(DW) on<sup>1</sup> **Why Africa's Physically Challenged Remain Invisible**, millions of African people living with disabilities remain invisible despite laws that call for inclusion and

<sup>1</sup> <https://www.dw.com/en/why-africas-physically-challenged-remain-invisible/a-63863563>

equality. In certain communities, individuals with disabilities are unfortunately often perceived as bringing curses, bad luck, or seen as a form of divine punishment directed at their parents and relatives who may be deemed unjust. To shield their children from the stigma associated with disability, many parents choose to isolate them from the outside world, depriving them of educational opportunities and social interactions. <sup>2</sup>The County Government of Wajir has 1,780 registered people living with a disability. Amongst these individuals are parents who were either born with disabilities or faced circumstances such as accidents that resulted in immobility and loss of jobs. However, despite these challenges, they continue to bear the responsibility of providing for their families. Individuals with disabilities encounter shared obstacles, including the absence of necessary assistive equipment and devices that would enable them to lead normal lives.

To empower individuals with disabilities, the County Government of Wajir has established a disability fund aimed at providing financial support to the disabled community. Through this initiative, a cash transfer of Ksh 4,000 is made to individuals with disabilities, enabling them to address their daily challenges. Additionally, the program also facilitates the provision of assistive devices to assist them in overcoming various obstacles they may encounter in their daily lives.

### **Implementation of the practice**

The County Government initiated the cash transfer program, in the 2014/15 financial year, initially benefiting 175 individuals. During that period, a total of 300 persons with disabilities were registered. However, the selection process for the cash transfer program was based on the level of vulnerability. To prioritize those in greater need, individuals from disadvantaged backgrounds were given precedence over those from more affluent backgrounds. As a result, six members were chosen from each ward, ensuring representation from various areas while focusing on supporting the most vulnerable individuals with disabilities. In 2019 the number of beneficiaries had increased to 208 members. Under the program, a monthly transfer of Ksh 4,000 per

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<sup>2</sup> The Wajir County Chief officer Culture, Social Welfare and Family Affairs listed above as the resource person gave this information during the interview conducted by the CoG officer

person was provided, directly deposited into their bank accounts. To facilitate this, the County Government collaborated with Equity Bank to ensure that accounts were opened for all beneficiaries. Additionally, to make the withdrawal process more convenient, agents were stationed in every ward, enabling beneficiaries to access their funds without having to travel to the main bank branch.

Furthermore, recognizing the diverse preferences and geographical challenges faced by some individuals, the County introduced a direct mobile transfer option. This allows beneficiaries who prefer Mpesa or reside in remote areas to receive their funds directly on their mobile. This program was established based solely on the political goodwill of the County leadership and no legislative backing.

However, in the subsequent three fiscal years (2017/18 to 2019/20), the program faced stagnation, prompting the need for formal legislation. In response, the County Government of Wajir collaborated with the World Food Programme (WFP) to engage experts and develop a Bill in 2019. Due to delays caused by the COVID-19 pandemic, the Bill was eventually passed as the Wajir County Disability Act in 2021.

To comply with the Act, the County Government has taken significant measures. The funding allocated to the cash transfer program has been increased from Ksh 14 million to Ksh 40 million. For sustainability, a regulation to operationalize the Act was passed and officially gazetted in January 2023. Currently, the County Government is conducting a comprehensive registration process with the aim of recording all People with Disabilities (PWDs) in the County.

### **Results of the practice**

The impact of the cash transfer funds allocated to disabled individuals has been substantial in the following ways.

- The County Government has supported 630 registered Persons with Disabilities with the monthly cash transfer program. The project has significantly improved



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the beneficiaries' livelihoods by boosting household purchasing power, promoting increased savings and acquisition of household assets, reducing poverty levels amongst the PWDs, and enhancing food expenditures.

- Over 500 individuals have been beneficiaries of support through the provision of assistive devices, including but not limited to hearing aids, wheelchairs, and other essential equipment. This crucial assistance has empowered them to enhance their mobility, enabling them to carry out various activities and even resume their businesses.
- The monthly cash transfer has boosted income security and improved the well-being of people with disabilities and their families.
- By enacting the Wajir County Disability Fund Act, the long-term sustainability of this practice is ensured.
- The County Government has supported moderately disabled individuals to engage in small business ventures for economic empowerment.

#### **Lessons learnt:**

- There is a need to ensure an adequate budget allocation to cater to individuals with severe disabilities while also empowering moderately disabled individuals to engage in small business ventures for economic empowerment. Collaborate with NGOs to provide support for specific programs.
- Equitably distribute beneficiaries across sub-counties and rely on existing data and assessments from doctors to justify the final selection of beneficiaries.
- There is a need to implement continuous registration processes to ensure that registration is not a one-time exercise, allowing for the inclusion of new individuals with disabilities who may require assistance in the future.
- Coordinating with the National Council for Persons with Disabilities (NCPWD) and the Hospital Assessment Committee to effectively plan and streamline the registration process is key to ensuring convenience and accessibility for all relevant agencies involved.



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### **Conclusion**

In conclusion, the nomadic lifestyle in Wajir County presents unique challenges in tracing and reaching disabled individuals. The constant movement of these individuals, as they search for pasture and water for their animals, makes it difficult to locate and identify them for support and assistance. However, the County Government remains dedicated to improving the lives of disabled individuals and ensuring their integration into society. Through the disability fund and ongoing efforts, steps are being taken to overcome the obstacles posed by the nomadic lifestyle and provide the necessary support to enhance their livelihoods. By recognizing and addressing these challenges, Wajir County is paving the way for a more inclusive and supportive environment for disabled individuals, ensuring that no one is left behind in the pursuit of a better quality of life.

### **Further reading:**

THE WAJIR COUNTY PERSONS WITH DISABILITIES ACT

<https://maarifa.cog.go.ke/publications/wajir-county-persons-disabilities-act>