

# Challenges Facing Persons with Physical and Visual Disabilities in Accessing Housing Needs; A Case Study of Bungoma Municipality

Wamalwa Chrispinus W. Mukoche<sup>1\*</sup>, Kitainge Kisilu<sup>2</sup>, Sempele Catherine<sup>3</sup>

<sup>1,2,3</sup>*School of Education, University of Eldoret, Kenya.*

\*Corresponding author: Wamalwa Chrispinus W. Mukoche (Email: [wamachr@gmail.com](mailto:wamachr@gmail.com))

## ABSTRACT

Persons with disabilities constitute 3.5% of the total population in Kenya. According to the 2009 census, there are approximately 1,330,312 persons with disabilities in Kenya. The disabilities range from visual, audio, physical and intellectual challenges. The study focused on the physical and visual challenges. These persons face discrimination due to socio-cultural and economic factors. Persons with physical and visual disabilities have unique housing needs due to the nature and degree of their disability. It is therefore important that housing design and construction take these unique consumer needs of persons with physical and visual disabilities into consideration. The paper examines the findings of the study that investigated the challenges persons with physical and visual disabilities face in accessing decent and affordable housing in informal and low income settlements within Bungoma Municipality. A sample survey design was employed where interviews, observation checklists and field participatory methods were used. Guided sampling technique was used in identifying research participants or respondents, while a snowballing technique was employed to identify respondents with physical and visual disabilities. The findings showed lack of water borne sanitary facilities in informal and low income settlements in urban areas. The roads and pathways were found to be muddy and narrow to accommodate the needs of persons with disabilities. The sewage and drainage systems were poor and posed great risks to persons with disabilities. The land lords/ladies were found ignorant about the needs for persons with disabilities. The paper concludes that physically and visually challenged persons face numerous challenges in accessing decent and affordable housing in informal and low income settlements. The paper recommends rigorous implementation of Persons with Disabilities Act (2003) and that the persons with disabilities themselves to intensify advocacy and awareness, raising programs that will make housing for persons with disabilities, human rights and development agenda.

**Keywords:** *Physically and Visually challenged, Informal and low income settlements*

## 1. INTRODUCTION

Persons with disabilities constitute 3.5% of the total population in Kenya. According to the 2009 census, there are approximately 1,330,312 persons with disabilities in Kenya. Persons with disabilities consist of blind, deaf, physically and intellectually challenged and those with behavioral disorders. These persons face discrimination due to socio-cultural and economic factors. This discrimination makes it difficult for disabled persons to enjoy basic fundamental human rights. Majority of persons with disabilities have difficulties in accessing housing, food and clothing. They also have difficulties accessing education, training and employment. The discrimination of persons with physical and visual disabilities in accessing basic rights can be traced to African cultural values that portrayed a person with a disability as cursed and a bad omen to the family. Some African communities treated persons with disabilities as special in the sense that they required support in every aspect. This treatment made society assume that persons with disabilities need charity and not rights. In other African societies, persons with disabilities were confined in poorly constructed rooms/houses. They were secluded from the rest of the family. These cultural attitudes were carried over from the rural environment to the urban sector. The situation seems to be worse in urban settlement.

Persons with physical and visual disabilities have unique housing needs due to the nature and degree of their disability. It is therefore important that housing design and construction take these unique consumer needs of persons with physical and visual disabilities into consideration. However, this is hardly done, causing persons with disabilities a lot of inconvenience and difficulties in accessing housing in residential and public buildings.

The problem has been compounded by the rampant poverty that characterizes the lifestyles of persons with physical and visual disabilities in Bungoma municipality. A great proportion of persons with physical and visual disabilities live in informal settlements. A small percentage reside in low and middle income estates. There exists a gap in existing national policies on housing in relation to consumer needs of persons with physical and visual disabilities. There is scanty information and statistical data on housing needs and aspects for persons with physical and visual disabilities. In the absence of such vital data, it becomes quite difficult to plan for this marginalized group. The study examined housing conditions and facilities of persons with physical and visual disabilities both at their residence and workplaces within Bungoma Municipality.

The objectives of the study were as follows:

- i) To find out the challenges persons with physical and visual disabilities face in accessing the decent housing services and facilities in the informal and low-income settlement in urban areas.
- ii) To establish housing conditions of persons with physical and visual disabilities at their workplace and residence.
- iii) To find out the level of compliance by developers (land lords) with the Persons with Disabilities act of 2003.

The purpose of the study was:

- i) To understand challenges and constraints that people with disabilities face in accessing decent and affordable housing.
- ii) To make recommendations to professionals in the building industry, government officers in ministry of housing and settlement and proprietors that own residential, business and public buildings about practical strategies that they could adopt to modify or improve houses to meet consumer needs of people with physical and visual disabilities.
- iii) To make proposals that will assist policy makers and legislators to formulate policies and laws that will promote access to housing for persons with physical and visual disabilities.

This study falls within the framework of millennium development goals and United Nations Habitat strategic plan of nurturing cities and municipal councils which are guided by the ultimate goal of fostering good governance, promotion of human rights and guarantee of good sanitation and eradication of poverty. This research aims at interrogating socio-political and economic factors that have reduced persons with disabilities into poverty and dehumanizing housing conditions. The worth of a democratic government is measured by its commitment in promoting human rights of marginalized groups such as persons with physical and visual disabilities. The study was an appendage to the global strategy to eradicate violation of human rights of people with disabilities. The world community carried out a convention on disability and human rights. The convention had elaborated clauses on research as a tool of providing data to lobby governments to provide services to disabled people and enact laws to enforce human rights of these people.

In conclusion, this study sheds light on the capacity of the Kenyan government, Architectural society of Kenya, Federation of Kenya Employers and landlords/ladies to effectively implement clauses in the Persons with Disability Act 2003 which elaborately state how modifications on existing housing should be done in the next two to five years to increase access to housing for persons with disabilities. It is also important to note that at the global arena there is an increasing emphasis on universal design. This is a concept that emphasizes taking into account the needs of everyone i.e. persons with disabilities, elderly, children and women in designing all sorts of structures.

The United Nations (2006) came up with the general principles to safeguard the rights of persons with disabilities as follows:

- a. Respect for inherent dignity, individual autonomy including the freedom to make one's own choices and independence of persons
- b. Non-discrimination
- c. Full and effective participation and inclusion in society
- d. Respect for difference and acceptance of persons with disabilities as part of human diversity and humanity
- e. Equality of opportunity
- f. Accessibility
- g. Equality between men and women
- h. Respect for the evolving capacities of children with disabilities and respect for the right of children with disabilities to preserve their identities.

These principles should guide the State Parties in ensuring that persons with disabilities are treated humanely and have their potential exploited to the fullest.

In Kenya, the National Council for Persons with Disabilities derives its mandate from the (Persons with Disabilities) PWD ACT, 2003 which established the Council and outlined its core functions as follows:

- i. Formulating and developing measures and policies designed to achieve equal opportunities for PWDs
- ii. Cooperating with the government during the National Census to ensure that accurate figures of PWDs are obtained
- iii. Issuing orders requiring the adjustment of buildings that are unfriendly for use by PWDs
- iv. Recommending measures to prevent discrimination against PWDs
- v. Encouraging and securing the rehabilitation of PWDs within their own communities and social environment
- vi. Registering persons with disabilities and institutions and organizations giving services to PWDs and
- vii. Raising public awareness regarding PWDs.

(Republic of Kenya., 2008) found out that 4.6% of Kenyans experience some form of disabilities and a bigger portion of them resides in rural areas than urban setups. The survey further puts 65% of persons with disabilities are affected by environmental factors in their daily lives. Majority of persons with disabilities do not work for earning, however a quarter of them work in family business. The physical barriers in the environment present one of the major obstacles to the successful integration of people with disabilities in the society (Nabende, 1999). He says that the problem of access and mobility for people with disabilities starts from the initial process of planning and design. In conclusion, he has observed that building consultants have often pre-occupied themselves in designing buildings, which only meet what is termed as standard requirements for an able bodied person.

Morris (1978) observed that people with disabilities and elderly individuals have special housing needs. They noted that houses for elderly and disabled people should have alterations to ensure that they do not become prisoners in their own homes. Such alterations could include "Altering every doorway in the home to accommodate the wheelchair." Njuguna (1992) has identified the following as key barriers facing disabled people: Entrances to public buildings are inaccessible to wheelchair users, there are no handrails for easy grip, Floor surfaces are not slip resistant, door handles and light switches are placed too high i.e. not accessible to wheel chair users, sanitary facilities are also inaccessible in buildings. Where pit latrines are used, there is no provision for seats to suit the needs of persons with disabilities.

There is a need to cross-examine challenges which persons with disabilities experience in urban informal settlements in Kenya. Measures should be taken to address limitations in existing buildings and by-laws be put forward to address these limitations to ensure that future buildings are disability friendly (Karuri, 1998). Ideal housing for the deaf and blind is one in which the steps and stairs are neither open risers nor square protruding nosing. Sound reflecting houses are preferred to sound absorbing walls. Changes of material finishes in walking surfaces can be used to indicate the proximity of entrances, wet core, steps, stairs or potential hazards. The deaf require warning and directions equipped with noticeable visual signals such as flashlights (Nguuri, 1982).

There has been a great attempt to reduce the gap between persons with disabilities and the normal ones in public institutions, accessibility to health and educational services. The Persons with Disabilities Act 2003 is the only comprehensive legislation that guarantees accessible housing for persons with disability. Article 21, 22 and 24 of the Act has emphasized the need to make public buildings and physical environment accessible to persons with disabilities. The articles state that persons with disabilities are entitled to a barrier free and disability friendly environment to enable them have access to buildings, roads, social amenities, assistive devices and other equipment to promote their mobility (Persons with Disability Act 2003). However, the challenges facing persons with disabilities at their private places of work and residence has not been adequately addressed. Such responsibilities have been left to the family members who lack capacity to meet the housing needs for this special group.

## **2. METHODOLOGY**

This study utilized a sample survey design where persons with physical and visual disabilities were investigated at their private places of residence and work. The informal and low-income settlements were investigated. Mjini, Mufutu, Mandizini and Mashambani settlements within Bugoma municipality were investigated. The methods ranged from interviews, observation checklist and field participatory. In the field there were two research tools namely; focused group discussions and questionnaire. Guided sampling technique was used in identifying research participants or respondents. The department of Social Services in the Ministry of Gender, Social Services, Culture and Sports was used to identify respondents from the community while a snow balling techniques was employed to identify respondents with physical and visual disabilities. The department of Social

Services has a register of community based organizations. Persons with physical and visual disabilities know each other and it was easy to use their network to identify respondents with disabilities. The snow balling technique was also used to identify land lords/ladies. A total of 50 respondents participated in this study. There was a focused group discussion, held at the Red Cross hall in Kanduyi. The group had three representatives of persons with disabilities from their organizations within Bungoma municipality, six persons with disabilities (two youth, women and men), four representatives of land lords, one from each estate and two researchers giving a total of fifteen members. Participants of focused group discussion were selected on basis of gender, estate of residence and type of disability. The focused group discussions enabled researchers to get an in-depth insight of housing problems faced by persons with visual and physical disabilities. The focused group discussions were conducted at the end of the oral interviews so that issues that were not clear in the interviews could be posed as discussion agenda in the focused group discussion.

### 3. RESULTS

The results of the study are presented as follows:

**Table 1.** Toilets and Bathrooms facilities used in the Informal and low-income settlement within Bungoma Municipality.

Estate	Structure		No.	Type		Doors		Neatness	
	Permanent	Temporary		Water-borne	Pits latrine	Wide enough	Narrow	Clean	Dirty
Mjini	0	12	12	0	12	0	12	0	12
Mufutu	0	12	12	0	12	0	12	0	12
Mashambani	1	9	10	0	10	0	10	0	10
Mandizini	0	16	16	0	16	0	16	0	16
TOTAL	01	49	50	0	50	0	50	0	50

**Table 2.** Roads and Pathways in the residential areas and town centres with Bungoma Municipality.

Estate	Roads and Pathways width					Type		
	< 1M	1-2M	2-3M	3-4M	>4M	Tarmac	Graveled	Earth
Mjini	√	√	√	none	none	none	none	√
Mufutu	√	√	none	none	none	none	none	√
Mashambani	√	√	√	√	none	none	none	√
Mandizini	√	√	none	none	none	none	none	√
Town centre					√	√		√

√ means the size was found to exist and 'none' implies none existence.

**Table 3.** Buildings/Houses within the Informal and low-income settlement in Bungoma Municipality.

Type	Facilities		Doors			Rooms			Finishes /Painting		
	Stairs/Ramps		Wide	Narrow	standard	Tiny	standard	spacious	Good	Fair	Poor
	Stairs	Ramps									
Public offices	χ	χ	√	χ	√	χ	√	√	√	χ	χ
Place of work	χ	χ	χ	√	χ	√	√	χ	χ	√	√
Residential places	χ	χ	χ	√	χ	√	χ	χ	χ	χ	√

√ means the facilities exist and χ means the facilities do not exist.

#### 3.1. Toilets and Bathrooms

These are essential facilities required and used by human beings for the disposal of human waste. The table shows the facilities that were found to be used by the persons with physical and visual disabilities.

The results in Table 1 show that only one (1) structure was found to be permanent in Mashambani estate, the rest were found to be temporary with mud/earth wall and non-cemented floors. There were no water-borne sanitary facilities at the residence of the physically and visually challenged persons. All toilet facilities were found to be pit latrines. All doors were found to be narrow for wheelchair users and the floors were found to be dirty.

### *3.2. Roads and Pathways*

These facilities are essential for mobility of persons with disabilities. The results were as presented in the Table 2.

The results in Table 2 show that the roads and pathways in the estates were narrow below 4 meters wide. The roads and pathways are made of earth therefore muddy during the rains and dusty during the dry seasons. It is only at the town centre where the roads and pathways are above 4 meters wide and are tarmacked.

### *3.3. Buildings/Houses*

The buildings both public and residential are critical in providing accessibility to persons with physical and visual disabilities. The results of physical assessment of the houses used by persons with physical and visual disabilities were as presented in the Table 3.

The results in the Table 3 show that there were no facilities such as stairs and ramps in all public and residential buildings used by persons with disabilities within Bungoma municipality. The doors at the place of work and residence for the persons with physical and visual disabilities are narrow to accommodate wheelchairs. The rooms at place of work and residence are tiny and poorly painted.

## **4. DISCUSSION**

### *4.1. Toilets and Bathrooms*

In the low income and informal settlement i.e. Mjini, Mufutu, Mandizini and Mashambani latrines are mud walled with tiny doorways. The floors are not cemented. The toilets in the municipality are pit latrines. They were built at the corner of each residential block. One is required to squat for long call. Similarly bathrooms are made of makeshift i.e. old iron sheets and mud. The bathrooms have tiny entrances. Bathrooms and toilets are built on raised grounds. These features make toilets inaccessible to people with physical and visual disabilities. A respondent with visual disabilities pointed out that pit latrines are not accessible to them and other users wet the floors with urine which make it a health hazard for them. There were no physical marks around the hole, which could be used by a visually challenged tenant to identify location and size of the hole. Usually non-disabled people consciously or unconsciously deposit all the human waste on the floor of the latrine. A person with a visual disability finds himself/herself stepping into the filth when he/she enters the toilet.

### *4.2. Roads and Pathways*

Proper road and pathway network are lacking in informal settlements and low-income states in Bungoma. The pathways available have been created by human traffic. These pathways are narrow and do not facilitate movements for a person with a wheelchair and crutches. There is garbage heaps, stones and stagnant wastewater along the pathways. The estates have very poor pathways, overcrowded poor roads and pathways. The roads and pathways are poorly maintained by tenants and land lords only care for their houses. The pathways are muddy during rainy season and are inaccessible. They are dusty during the dry season. On the whole, Bungoma municipality has poor road network in residential areas. In the town centre, main streets and roads lack pavements, which a person on a wheelchair could use. It is difficult for a visually challenged person to move independently in the town centre because of immense, traffic i.e. bicycles, people and vehicles.

### *4.3. Sewage and Drainage Systems*

There exists the sewer line through Mjini and Mashambani settlements however the toilets are mainly pit latrines. The sewer line is used by very few able land lords who do not house persons with disabilities. The Municipal Council has not made provision for surface water drainage thus all dirty water creates its own drainage pathway along pathways in the estate. People with physical and visual disabilities have problems in crossing these water drainage channels.

### *4.4. Houses*

Houses in low income and informal settlements do not have staircases a key barrier to housing for people with physical/visual disabilities in Bungoma middle income estates. Houses in informal and formal settlements have tiny rooms with small doorways that act as barriers to people with physical disabilities. However respondents took issues with houses in the town centre. They singled out the office of the District Commissioner as an excellent demonstration of an inaccessible housing in the public sector. This office has numerous staircases. A person with a wheelchair and crutches can only access services in the District Commissioner Office through proxy. Other inaccessible public buildings in Bungoma town include Co-operative and Barclay's banks. A

respondent on a wheelchair stated that he could only access services in these banks through a personal Assistant. This exposes his financial status to a third party. However, respondents were quick to point out that Kenya commercial bank has made ramps into the banking hall. In the focused group discussion in Bungoma respondents stated that commercial banks should adjust their counters to enable a person on a wheelchair to access banking services without obstacles. Respondents also observed that over time banking institutions had continued to design their floors to be very slippery. This is a barrier to access for a person on crutches.

#### *4.5. Land lords*

The land lords appeared surprised that there were considerations for persons with disabilities in their housing needs. They argued during the focused group discussion that they thought it is the responsibility of the family members to take care of such special group. They further claimed that whenever they are approached by a tenant with disabilities then there must be a family member or a friend who will take care of him/her. To the land lords, it is the returns that guide their investments in real estate not the nature of the tenants.

## **5. CONCLUSIONS**

The study based on the findings above made the following conclusions:

- i) The persons with physical and visual disabilities face numerous challenges in accessing decent housing in informal and low in-come settlements. They face challenges in accessing suitable sanitation, walk ways, roads and care in their places of residence.
- ii) There is insufficient concern about this special group in the community by the citizens. The government has made an attempt to legislate on their rights to access education, health and other services, however little have been done towards the accessibility to adequate housing at their private places of residence and work.
- iii) The responsibility of providing for housing to persons with disabilities is solely left for the family. Those ones from poor families and who are majority continue to suffer the consequences of neglect.
- iv) Much has been done to modify the housing conditions to accommodate persons with disabilities at public institutions and offices but little concern has been realized at their private places of residence and work.
- v) Majority of those persons with disabilities who reside from informal settlements do odd jobs like shoe repairing and shining, knitting, etc. those with formal employment are generally at the reception place in public offices where still face the challenges of mobility and huge task of meeting employers expectations.

## **6. RECOMMENDATIONS**

The study recommends the following:

- i) Community leaders have a duty in improving access to housing for people with physical and visual disabilities. These leaders should raise awareness on housing needs of persons with disabilities. Sensitize landlord/ladies to make housing accessible to persons with physical and visual disabilities by making the environment around their houses and rooms friendly.
- ii) The government through devolution should establish house development committees in each estate that would compel landlord/ladies to provide accessible housing for persons with physical and visual disabilities.
- iii) Reduce poverty among tenants with disabilities by facilitating them to initiate income-generating projects.
- iv) Landlords/landladies should be educated about laws and policies that guide house development. These proprietors should be made aware of fines and punishment that provided in the existing legislation in regard to landlord/land ladies who violate building codes.
- v) There should be an ambitious programme to ensure that all legislation on persons with disabilities is implemented to the letter.

All the above recommendations can be implemented if there is a good will by the government and civil society organizations that have programs on shelter. It is the responsibility of persons with disabilities themselves to intensify advocacy and awareness, raise programs that will make housing for persons with disabilities, human rights and development an agenda.

## **FUNDING**

This study received no specific financial support.

## **CONFLICT OF INTEREST**

The authors declare that they have no competing interests.

## ARTICLE HISTORY

Received: 30 January 2014/ Revised: 20 August 2014/ Accepted: 2 October 2014/ Published: 30 December 2014

**Copyright:** © 2014 by the authors. This article is an open access article distributed under the terms and conditions of the Creative Commons Attribution (CC BY) license (<https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/>).

## REFERENCES

- Morris, E. (1978). *Housing family and societies*. Washington.
- Nabende, J. (1999). *Violation of human rights of people with disabilities case study of University of Nairobi and central province*. Nairobi: KSPH Publications.
- Nguuri, M. (1982). *Spatial planning for needs of the physically handicapped in skill training centres*. Nairobi: University of Nairobi.
- Republic of Kenya. (2008). *The Kenya national survey for persons with disabilities*. Nairobi: National Coordinating Agency for Population and Development.
- United Nations. (2006). *Comprehensive and integral international convention on the protection and promotion of the rights and dignity of persons with disabilities*. New York: United Nations.