



Barriers to Women with Disabilities Representation in Church Leadership for Spiritual and Socio-Economic Empowerment in Ahero, Kenya

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Cite as: Wasonga, J. A., Ogera, E. O., & Onyango, R. O. (2025). Barriers to Women with Disabilities Representation in Church Leadership Positions for Spiritual and Socio-Economic Empowerment in Ahero, Kisumu County, Kenya. *International Journal of Social and Development Concerns*, 30(3), 24–39. <https://doi.org/10.5281/zenodo.17446589>

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Editing Oversight

Impericals

Consultants

International

Limited

Abstract: *The study aimed at establishing the barriers to women with disabilities' representation in church leadership positions for spiritual and socio-economic empowerment in Ahero town, Kisumu County, Kenya. Despite global and national emphasis on gender equality and social inclusion (GESI), WWD remain significantly underrepresented in religious institutions. Guided by Social Feminist Theory and Epigenetic Theory. The research highlights how institutional barriers, and infrastructural constraints marginalize WWD in leadership roles. Data was collected using a descriptive and cross-sectional survey designs across twelve denominations and engaging 328 participants including church leaders, departmental heads, government officials, and WWD. The study found out that, WWD's leadership roles are minimal compared to their male counterparts with disabilities. Churches have yet to fully integrate GESI policy framework, despite constitutional mandates and the Disability Act of 2025. There is an underrepresentation of women with disabilities of specific disabilities due to financial constraints to accommodate them, causing conflict and discrimination among persons with disabilities. The study stresses that WWD participation requires more than token presence, but transformative action to dismantle deep-rooted inequalities for self-reliance and integration. In regions prone to displacement from floods, churches and government fall short in planning for WWD's needs, reinforcing the view that their advocacy is solely disability-related. Ultimately, the research calls for religious institutions to adopt holistic, inclusive strategies that recognize intersecting identities and promote equal participation, in alignment with the Sustainable Development Goals of leaving no one behind.*

Key words: *Barriers, Women with Disabilities, Gender equality, Inclusion, Representation, Church Leadership, Spiritual and Socio-Economic Empowerment*

1.1 Background of the Study

With reference to the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW) and the UN Women report of 2023 on gender equality and decision-making, the report clearly raised concern on Women and girls with disability (WAGWD) challenges they face, highlighting the barriers in the infrastructure and communication challenges to WAGWD saying "significant barriers to meaningful participation, as some of the meetings and decision-making spaces are frequently inaccessible to and unwelcoming to WWD". This fueled the desire to investigate the existing barriers on

women participation on church leadership with respect to Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) 1 of No poverty, SDG5 of gender equality and SDG10 of reduced inequalities towards the SDG 2030 agenda of leaving no one behind.

According to the UN report (2024), the global 80% of PWDs in developing countries of that only 19.2% are women and girls of 18 years older compared to 12% for males. This shows that WWD are more disenfranchised. Although there are no clear data from various quotas to show the comparison of male and female with disabilities in leadership, or even the comparison of WWD and women without disabilities, the WCC and EDEN that partners with Convention on Right of People with Disability (CRPD) remains committed to advancing gender equality and disability rights that tend to support the UN Women flagship report on disability and development (2018) and UN report of (2024) that calls for gender inequality policy implementation as urgently and critical. This study focused on leadership as an effort to fulfilment of both physical and spiritual needs of WWD in church's holistic ministry.

The CEDAW report of UN Women (2023) recommendation No.18 on women with disabilities, raised concern that GESI realization is still minimal. This was also confirmed by Mbaio, (2020) giving practical evidence from some African countries confirming that the implementation is still insignificant. In particular, in countries like Tanzania where the PWDs are only paraded for public view during international days. Nonetheless, the report acknowledges the gap in data and recommends further studies to determine data especially of WWD in leadership against how many men with disability in leadership from various countries. This was also one of the motivations for the study to investigate WWD in church leadership in relation to the ecumenical call of holistic ministry. The gap of WWD in leadership is wide as raised by Mkutumula *et al*, (2024) saying that gender and disability in leadership is below 10% in representation in many African Countries. The researcher echoes the sentiments of Ajewumi, (2025) that women leadership at community level has not been given prominence it deserve; A matter that resonates with the researcher's interest to ascertain gender and inclusion according to (Galatians 3:28).

In Africa women leadership is recognized notwithstanding the data according to Africa Union Commission report (2022), which says Africa is still a global leader in women's public leadership. The report says "five African countries are in the top 20 nations for women's parliamentary representation, and, at 61.3 per cent, Namibia, Rwanda still leads the world in terms of women in parliament. Four African countries, each with over 45 per cent women's representation in cabinets, are among the top 20 countries globally" However, this positive side is mostly on political and public leadership, whereas women leadership presence should not be confined to national institutions only, but should also extend to other institutions including the church.

In Kenya, the National Council of Persons with Disability (NCPWD) act revised in 2017 including the recent enactment of Disability Act 2025, clearly stipulate the rights of PWDs be treated with dignity and respect especially chapter 4 section 54 which says that the WWD should be referred to in a manner that is not demeaning. The researcher translates it to inclusion and representation that should make the WWD not feel demeaned. This is because even at the national level politics, women occupy 23% at the national assembly and 33% at the senate with only 1% of WWD according to (Konrad-Adenauer-Shiftung, (2022) report. Lack of representation by WWD in church is crucial agenda as they are sometimes victims of rape and robbery due to their inability to speak up and report the violation about them (Ajewumi, 2025).

Ahero town is known for the frequent reports on national and local media of deaths caused by floods, waterborne diseases, such as cholera, typhoid and diarrhea due to contamination of drinking water

sources occasioned by floods (GoK 2024:10). The drainage system is poor according to Dennis (2011:35) a matter that affects the WWD logistics and health during such calamities. Through the Ministry of Environment, climate and forestry Kenya meteorological department reports highlighted the evacuation notice mostly during rainy seasons exclude the PWDs because their data is unknown. This concern of on lack of data was also raised by star newspaper (2025) saying that “Kenya has no accurate data on persons with disability” but still using the 2019 data. The study sought to assess barriers and enablers to representation of WWD and comprehend the position in recognizing the WWD into church leadership as a space for advocating and addressing their challenges prophetically, especially in such harsh climatic conditions in relation to GESI and the bible according to Galatians 3:28 in relation to the church mission of holistic fulfillment (John 10:10; Tagwirei, 2024).

1.2 Statement of the Problem

According to the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW) report of (2023) on gender equality and decision-making, Women and girls with disability (WAGWD) face "significant barriers to meaningful participation, as some of the meetings and decision-making spaces are frequently inaccessible to and unwelcoming to them". The World Council of Churches (WCC) and Ecumenical Disability Advocates Network (EDAN) report of (2022) acknowledged the underrepresentation of WWD in church leadership saying its due to logistics. In Kenya *“men still dominate public leadership roles and elected offices, despite efforts to legislate specific quotas reserved for women’s participation in political leadership and other positions in public spaces”* (GLP – GESI 2023:17). As Mbao, (2020) reiterate that WWD are still excluded from decision making platforms for their recognition. Mostly the WWD face oppression due to poor leadership attributed to misplaced priorities by proxies who may misrepresent their unique challenges. This is related to the WWD vulnerability marginalization of individuals who often endure harassment, stigma, and victimization due to their poor physical (Acker, 2021). This also motivated the interest of the researcher to understand the barriers and enablers to their representation in church where they need to seek refuge (Mathew 11:28). In regards to research gap, there are similar studies on gender, women underrepresentation in leadership as mentioned by Awori (2020) and Ajewumi (2025) but not specific on WWD in church leadership. In reference to (UNESCO) report (2021) and Mbao, (2020) it can be estimated as 10%, just slightly below the 16% mentioned that WWD are underrepresented in various institutions including the church, and they are only recognized during major events for publicity, which is negative. The study purposed to establish the barriers to women with disabilities representation in church leadership positions for spiritual and socio-economic empowerment in Ahero, Kisumu, Kenya.

1.3 Study objective

To examine the barriers to women with disabilities representation in church leadership positions for spiritual and socio-economic empowerment in Ahero, Kisumu, Kenya.

1.4 Literature Review

In this section, theoretical framework and empirical review on barriers to women with disabilities representation in Church leadership positions are presented.

1.4.1 Theoretical Framework

Social Feminist Theory

This theory holds that the socio-cultural factors such as customs, traditions, religion, gender stereotypes, socialization process and language found in most societies promote male dominance and deny women equal advantages in various communities. The male perspective that ignores or suppresses the

experiences of women is underlined and the theory recognizes the absence of women in institutions. It further motivates them to come out of their oppressive structures or institutions and participate actively for the benefit of their own development and that of society. This goes with the desire to have the WWD being recognized and given leadership and decision-making spaces within their churches. It raised the issue of human right and representation, power, attitude and decision making. The theory advanced that gender and sexual identity is a product of the way people act and conform to cultural languages and norms and should not be used to oppress women. With this background the study sought to establish cultural, religious, laws, doctrine, stereotype factors that were a hindrance to WWD representation in church leadership. The gap in this theory exposed the barriers to WWD representation in leadership but did not give recommendation on clear way forward. The theory raised the gaps that could be perceived as a hindrance to the realization of representation of WWD in church institutions thought possible strategies for improvement.

The Epigenetic theory

The theory advances the cooperation between the faith and personal human need, which the researcher relates to the ecumenical mandate and holistic mission. It also goes along with human right according to SDG1 of no poverty and SDG10 of no inequality all its forms including religious intolerance to gender equality and development as well as GESI. According to the researcher, the theory views faith as a dynamic response in which specific elements of special dominance are raised. In this theory, faith is taken seriously as a vital component of the life of the individual in whom it appears towards decision making in church. “Why do people go to church? Why must there be leadership in the church? What else should Christians gain from church apart from hearing the gospel? In this token Christians have faith in following Jesus Christ and follow his teaching and mission through his pastors and leaders for the spiritual nourishment is clear. This theory opened door for looking at Jesus mission and conversation to both men and women even in terms of leadership representation in church and development. The gap in the theory, was that the theory emphasizes on faith as a driving force to action, which is positive but it has not mentioned the why that action is taken especially in leadership even when their faith being recognized by Jesus as seen in John 6:1-14. This means that there are values and believes that could affect women participation and representation in church leadership that would be interesting to establish as far as representation of WWD leadership in church is concern.

1.4.2 Empirical Review

Gender, leadership and Disability Policy Implementation in Church Institutions

The SGD5 addresses the fundamental changes in four key areas: (1) opportunity, (2) empowerment, (3) capabilities and (4) vulnerabilities. The Vision 2030 Gender equality is recognized as one of the top priorities for the UN in Kenya through the 2018–2022 United Nations Development Assistance Framework (UNDAF), as it is seen as a fundamental right and a potential accelerator of development in Kenya. For this reason, the study sought to establish the position of the church in recognizing the key policy on gender and leadership looking at the role of WWD as a vulnerable group in the church. The researcher sought to establish if the church is aware of the gender policy in relation to the 2010 constitution and disability policy Act of 2003 which was reviewed in 2017 and enacted in 2025. In Uganda, for example, there is an elaborate constitution providing for equality (1995 Uganda Constitution Article 21 and Articles 33 and 78, on affirmative action). In the Republic of Malawi, through its constitution of 1994 and later through the national gender policy of 2013, which guarantees full rights of women and equal protection, the Africa Development Bank (AfDB) of (2020) report says that the evidence for women in leadership is still minimal leave alone those WWD. However, Rwanda seems to

be leading in Africa as far as women's leadership is concerned, but data to show that of those women in leadership how many are WWD is still unavailable. Secondly according to the 2030 Agenda, women and girls needs equal access to quality education, economic resources and political participation. This means all women and girls” seeks to reinforce the non-discriminatory approach through advocacy on adoption measures and empowerment strategies that promote women with disability to take decision in all areas affecting their lives (CRPD/C/GL/3 2016). The study sought to determine if the WWD are given space for raising their voices and self-confidence as far as leadership participation is concern. In relation to Article 14 of the African Charter on Human and Peoples’ Rights Banjul Charter (1981), every individual has the property right, and the State is responsible for promoting and protecting the human right and fundamental freedom in Africa. However, while legal frameworks exist, the implementation seems weak and not clearer for WWDs leadership and representation (Siemonsen and Carozzo 2023). The fact that WWD are underrepresented in key leadership positions shows that their unique socio-economic needs may not be well highlighted by their proxies who represent them. The researcher reiterated that in recognizing the disproportionate challenges and barriers WWD face in their various socio-economic and political spheres, there was need to establish factors that contributes to WWD’s under-representation in church leadership positions as efforts to their economic empowerment in Africa. The researcher alluded the underrepresentation by WWD in leadership affects efforts of individually and collectively as a power force for implementation of GESI in Africa by all institutions including church.

The Practical Suggestions and recommendation on disability in church leadership

African countries such as Rwanda, South Africa, Uganda, and Kenya, among others, have clear legal frameworks and gender policies on women’s participation in leadership. However, despite these advancements, a number of challenges remain, especially with the implementation of such a policy, according to the UN Women (2024) report. In Kenya the gender gap at 2020 according to world economic forum (2020) ranked Kenya at 134th out of 153 counties in terms of gender parity. This shows a significant gap in various levels such as political participation and leadership between men and women. In reference to East Africa community the gender equality score card of (2020) still ranks Kenya 4th out of 6 East Africa counties in terms of gender equality. The researcher found that report positive in terms the progress but there was still need for reinforcement and implementation of the policy in line with GESI in particular WWD. The establishment of national and institutional gender policies, National Gender Commission, a ministry and department that is in charge of women Affairs, Children and Social Services including the constitution on article 27, the two third gender representation are a testament to positive intention of the government on GESI. The gender department was established to look into the affairs of women and men, but the PWDs are still not included in key leadership position says (Kabira & Kimani, 2012) as confirmed by NGEK (2016) saying that the engagement of PWDs and in particular the WWD in leadership was still low and were disadvantaged in accessing good quality jobs. This study sought to establish if these gains have equally shared with the churches in Ahero town. The study was to establish the position of the church and awareness on WWD in leadership.

1.5 Study Methodology

The study was carried out in Ahero town of Nyando Sub-County in Kisumu County located in the Western part of Kenya which covers an area of about 369 km² stretching along the north-eastern shores of Lake Victoria. Ahero town is nestled in the Kano plains, a rich agricultural area mainly growing rice, sugarcane and soya. The town has a retail market serving as a main trading center for food and goods coming from Kisii, Homabay, and Nandi Counties. This accounts for the town’s trade and commerce, with informal sector activities such as hawking, kiosks, open-air fish-frying, and ‘boda-bodas’ meaning motorbikes, provide a source of income to a significant proportion of the population. The area suffers

perennial rain and floods mostly experienced from river Nyando and Lake Victoria. Ahero town has a total population of 7322 people according to KNBS (2019) of which males are 3448 and females are 3874. This study targeted the twelve churches in Ahero town including church leaders, both male and female, and non-church leaders from the churches in Ahero town.

Table 1: Study Target Population

NO.	Category	Target Population
1.	Executive church leaders from 12 denominations including bishops, synod representatives, regional leaders, clergy and legal advisors	100
2.	Churches departmental heads such as women, youth, children, men, missions, worship, choir, widows, development, among others	150
3.	County Government Officials and national government	3
4.	Women church members not in leadership	50
5.	The women with disability	25
	Total	328

Source: Field data, 2025

This study adopted descriptive and cross-sectional survey designs. The descriptive design was proposed to establish the extent of barriers to representation of WWD in various denominations in Ahero town. The cross-sectional design applied both quantitative and qualitative approaches that allowed data to be sourced at only one point in time and allows triangulation. The study collected data using open-ended and closed-ended questionnaires and semi-structured interviews. The study identified WWD as a woman with physical, sensory, intellectual, or psychosocial disabilities, aged 18 years and above with consent. Also, the identified case was supposed to be in a leadership position in church related issues and from legally recognized churches that specifically represent women with disabilities in their leadership; through their leaders, representatives, board members, or leaders willing to participate in interviews/FGDs. They were to be available to participate in interviews, FGDs, or complete questionnaires. The study also included Women without disabilities who were directly involved in or do not have live experiences relevant to leadership/participation in advocacy spaces in the various churches. Individuals unwilling or unable to provide informed consent and participants whose participation may pose ethical concerns like risk of traumatization without adequate psychosocial support were not allowed.

The study employed purposive techniques because the church leaders and women with disability were known in advance.

Sampling Techniques

According to Mugenda (2012) sampling is a process of selecting a number of individuals for study to represent the large group from which they were selected as a sampling fraction of between 10-30% of the total population. Therefore 30% of 7322 is 2197 using a descriptive research design and representative using the formula for sample size according to Fischer's formulae $n = \frac{Z^2 pq}{d^2}$ as quoted by (Chambers, 2012).

$$n = \frac{Z^2 pq}{d^2}$$

$$n^1 = \frac{1}{1/n + 1/N}$$

Where; n^1 = adjusted sample size

n = estimated sample size for infinite population

N = Finite population size

$$30/100 \times 2197 = 659$$

$$659/384 = 1.7 = 1 + 384/2197 = 1.17 = 384/1.17 = 328$$

The study used purposive sampling technique to ensure that all the executive bishops, synod members, archdeacons, provost, regional leaders, vicars and curates and other head of departments from all the five denominations were well represented. Below is the breakdown of sampling procedure. The researcher applied purposive technique of sampling the church or denomination top 100 executive leadership such as synod members, board members, regional board and others using a purposive sampling technique to choose men and women executive leaders. The study sought to establish with their permission, their position on WWD and GESI, including perception and attitude towards church WWD leadership and representation in relation to holistic mission of church. This was purposed to get their perspective on representation of WWD as well as the getting the actual data on leadership by gender / WWD in all the churches in Ahero town. The study sampled 150 departmental heads from the twelve denominations namely (i) Anglican church of Kenya (ACK), (ii) Catholic Church, (iii) Free Pentecostal Fellowship in Kenya (FPFK), (iv) Full Gospel Church of Kenya (FGCK), (v) Voice of Salvation and Healing (VOSH), (vi) Africa Inland Church (AIC), (vii) Israel Church of Africa, (viii) Miracle Provider, (ix) Blessing Church, (x) Sanctification life Ministry, (xi) Harvest Church and (xii) Deliverance church. The departmental heads from each church as the executive committee members like the chairman, secretary and treasurer of each department and their assistants where sampled. The departments varied from church to another church but mainly the ones that were examined were (i) mother's union or women ministry, (ii) youth, (iii) Sunday school or children (iv) Evangelism or missions (v) widows or singles/women's desk (vi) praise and worship/choir (vii) Development and planning (viii) men fellowship (ix) vicars/peoples' warden (x) professionals. This was purposed to get their perspective on representation as well as the getting the actual data on WWD leadership by gender in all the departmental heads. The study sampled the WWD to hear their perspective in relation to their representation and criteria of appointments. At least three or four individuals from each denomination were sampled, making up a total of 25 respondents. The study sampled the 50 women who are not WWD and not in leadership to hear their perspective in relation to WWD representation in leadership and criteria of appointments. At least ten individuals from each denomination were sampled, making up a total of 50 respondents. The county government representatives at the county level dealing with issues of GESI, PWDs and national government line ministries as directors who had a role to play in social development of this country and the law enforcers were sampled. In this study the researcher applied two types of non-probability sampling (a). purposive sampling technique focusing on individuals who have specific knowledge, insights, experiences among others on the subject matter of investigations whereas snow bowling especially where the government official would refer another person of interest to be interviewed. It also applied to the WWD who could know where their colleagues were. They were the Assistant County commissioners and other respective government officials at the sub-county representing the persons with disability and county levels that ensures the government policies are implemented accordingly. They were interviewed to give perspective on policy regulations, implementation, monitoring and reporting.

Table 2: Target population and Sampling frame for the study

Category	Target Population	Sampling Technique	Sampling Size	Instrument
Executive church leaders including synod members, Clergy pastors	100	Purposive	5-10 church leaders from each of to 12 denominations in Ahero town	Semi structured Questionnaire
Churches departmental heads	150	Purposive	8-12 departmental leaders from 12 denominations (i) Children/Sunday school (ii) Youth (iii) Women/ Mothers Union (iv) Men/fathers ministry (v) Missions/Evangelism (vi) Praise team/Choir (vii) Development/ planning (viii) Professionals (ix) Widows (x) Vicar/Pastor's warden	10 FGDs
County Government and National Government	3	Purposive	Assistant County commissioner, and other officials	KII
The women with disability	25	Purposive	5 from each of 5 churches	IDI
women church members who are not in leadership	50	Purposive	10 members from each denominations 10 x 5	5 FGDs
Total	328			

Source: Field data, 2025

The quantitative findings were presented in tables, pie charts and graphs followed by interpretations while the qualitative findings were presented in narrative form and discussed in support of the tables. The quantitative data was analyzed through Statistical Package for Social Scientist (SPSS) version 23.0. The results presented in three sections according to respective objectives or research questions.

1.6 Study Findings and discussion

Respondents' Demographic factors

A total of 100 semi structured questionnaires (SSQ) were administered to the respondents, through the church leadership in twelve churches namely, (i)The Anglican church of Kenya (ACK), (ii)Catholic Church, (iii)Free Pentecostal Fellowship in Kenya (FPFK), (iv)Full Gospel Church of Kenya (FGCK),(v) Voice of Salvation and Healing (VOSH), (vi)Africa Inland Church (AIC), (vii)Israel Church of Africa, (xiii)Miracle Provider, (ix)Blessing Church, (x)Sanctification life Ministry, (xi)Harvest Church and (xii) Deliverance church.

The study administered 20 SSQ to twelve churches each, some churches had a few branches while others had only one main church in Ahero town. A total of 100 SSQ were administered with the 12 churches getting minimum of 5 and maximum 20 from each church. Out of the 100 SSQ administered, all the 100 were returned, however, after quality control, 5 questionnaires were found to be incomplete, ineligible, as seen to have missing data and therefore only 95 questionnaires were used in the analysis, which translates to 97.5% response rate. Subsequently, a total of 18 FGDs were carried within 12 churches having a total of 218 respondents with each having minimum 8 participants while others had up to 12 participants. The key informant interview (KII) for national and county government official was administered to officers, while the in-depth interview (IDI) was done with WWD. Most of the WWD

had physical impairment, only two had vision impaired and one with hearing impaired challenge with a total of 30 respondents.

Gender and disability composition of departmental leaders

The research revealed that the churches in Ahero have women represented in their various leadership positions. However, the representation of women with disability (WWD) is insignificant. The study found out that “WWD are well represented in church leadership, governance and decision making at all levels” but the WWD are not included in leadership as provided for by the Kenyan constitution through the two thirds gender rule and the disability Act for inclusive participation and representation of both genders in formulating policy to build sustainable and equitable leadership roles based on: women inclusivity practices and improved church coordination linkages between the genders. The women with disability representation were at 0.2% even between women without disability and men both with disability and without. The study revealed that out of 2450 leaders both women and men from the twelve churches in Ahero town, the women with disability were only 5/2450 which is 0.2% whereas men with disability were 54/2450 which is 2.2% showing men with disability are more in church leadership as opposed to WWD. Consequently, of those 5/2450 were mostly with physical impaired but could still move from one point to another though with difficulties.

There were very few respondents with vision and hearing-impaired cases. This also shows that their nature of disabilities was more severe than other form of disabilities for example someone with vision impaired may not walk alone, read and write as oppose to a hearing impaired who can walk, read and write and can communicate through sign language just as well as someone with walking challenge but using scratches is far better than one with vision and hearing impaired. The study found out that there is underrepresentation even with disability cases. Those with albinism, short stature, vision and hearing impaired are not adequately represented in key leadership positions. There is no data of various disabilities for the purpose of planning for their respective support that need more focus and attention as confirmed by the (Star Newspaper of May 2025).

Table 3: Gender and disability composition of departmental leaders

No	Departments	Women Without Disability	Women With Disability	Men Without Disability	Men With Disability	Total
1	Children	166	1	40	0	207
2	Women Ministry	490	2	18	0	510
3	Youth	148	0	181	4	333
4	Missions/Evangelism	66	0	127	1	194
5	Men/Fathers	0	0	176	40	216
6	Choir/Praise Team	178	0	118	5	301
7	Development Team	75	0	99	0	174
8	Widows	223	2	0	0	225
9	Professionals	25	0	50	2	77
10	Pastor's Asst	33	0	71	2	106
11	Christian Community	52	0	55	0	107
	Total	1456	5	935	54	2450

Source: Field data, 2025

The barriers of Women with disabilities in church leadership

The study looked at the demotivation of WWD in church leadership specifically the barriers for the WWD representation in church leadership. The study revealed the following points.

Logistics and infrastructure arrangement

About 90% of the respondents lamented poor infrastructure affecting their mobility. All respondents from SSQ confirmed during the Focus group discussions (FGD), the In-depth interviews (IDI), Key Informant Interviews (KII) and from Semi-structured questionnaires (SSQ) all cited the issue of infrastructure saying it was a big challenge locally affecting mobility. The respondents said, the roads were impassible in many parts of Ahero town due to wet lands nature poor road conditions affecting those with wheel chairs. Their mobility is affected in that, the WWD find it difficult to move from one place to the other especially going to churches and even to eventually participate in leadership or activities of the church more so as leaders. They said that the meeting venues and churches were far away. Further 100% of respondent highlighted that there were no spaces demarcated as foot paths for PWDs for easy access to various destinations. The study established that the availability of good infrastructure and demarcated pathways could comfortably enable or aid WWD including other PWDs with easy access to churches and other places. Through observation and going round, there are no such foot bridges in Ahero town especially in between the rice farms. The homes which are within the rice growing farms and floods that needs wide and deep terraces block their mobility without food bridges. The WWD said during floods they are usually submerged in floods and the family struggles with saving properties which are destroyed as the family is torn between rescuing the WWD or properties. They said most of their properties are destroyed due to logistics and heavy burden of rescuing themselves. On the same note when asked if the government knows about them and evacuates them during such calamities. They said this was unfortunate and politicians and leaders do come when calamity has happened therefore only their relatives, but government and red-cross only support them with food and clothes at the camps where they are taken when all their properties have been destroyed. They added that those without disabilities rescue their properties in the event of floods. The WWD said they suffer more and are carried by their relatives sometimes when it's too late. Ask if the church where they attend is aware of their challenges, 24/30 thus 80% of WWD from the IDIs confirmed that the church was not aware of their plight and only comes during the emergency period to give them food items at the camps and that is for those who would have survived the terrain.

On the affirmative action fund through women representatives budget, when asked if the women fund knows their challenges and has a budget to support them. Majority of WWD actually 21/30 thus 70% mentioned that they have never received any support from member of county assembly or Member of Parliament and women representatives. They added that the two leaders have never visited them or even invited them for any discussion on their plight and therefore they are not aware even if there could be any budget allocation for WWD to cushion them during such harsh climatic conditions. This was also confirmed by the church leaders. The WWD said most of the support they get from such politicians is only education bursary, a small fraction for their children of which some of them said due to their inability to reach the schools on time and queue they do not get. On a follow-up question if their political leaders give them preference due to their disabilities. One lady said the leaders in those committees are the ones who determine such support. "*Wan gini ngama ong'ewa*" meaning people like us who knows us. The study found out that the elected leaders, church leaders and government does not conduct follow-up to ascertain the plight of WWD even in relation to harsh climatic conditions and infrastructure. One added that for the church they can only look for them if they need finance meaning for those WWD if they do not have money to give otherwise they won't bother with them.

About 12/30 respondents acknowledged that the church visits them at the camps to pray for them while others give them relief food. Others added that they only come with food items during floods to give us at the camps year in year out” one lamented to the voice saying or “*are they waiting for deaths and calamity to happen then they come to burry*”. One lady reported that during the camps in churches, they are put together and sleeping is a challenge, going to the toilet is a challenge. Nobody cares to check where boys and girls sleep. There people who take advantage of them during such calamities which they said could be avoided with having proper drainage systems. One lady said she was raped but she fears to report because she didn’t know how they would look at her. Another one said she was raped by a relative whom she trusted to support her, now she didn’t know what else to do. Another with vision impaired was raped and became pregnant and doesn’t even know the father of her daughter. When she went to hospital the mockery was too much from the nurses. The study revealed that the WWD are left at home most time and so getting their data or voice in public forums was minimal.

Table 4: Lamentations on Logistics and infrastructure arrangement

No	Lamentations: arrangement	Logistics and infrastructure	Out of	Yes	NO
1	Are you affected by road condition on your Mobility?	2450	2205	245	
2	Are there space demarcated as foot path for PWDS?	2450	0	2450	
3	Are there foot bridges available for PWDS?	2450	0	2450	
4	Do churches you attend know of your challenges?	30	6	24	
5	Before calamities, do GoK representatives visit/support?	30	9	21	
6	Do churches visit you in the camps to pray for you?	30	12	18	

Source: Field data, 2025

Churches with special disabilities friendly equipment

Through observation and follow-up questions on disability awareness and plans: 60% of the churches in Ahero town had no ramps for wheelchairs entering their church premises. Nearly 100% of the churches had no toilets with special space and arrangement for WWD. The respondents said without such arrangement movement to the sanctuary remains a challenge. The WWD said in most cases they are forced to stay outside as there is no space for their wheel chairs to fit inside the church especially how it is arranged. Secondly, in the even they want to visit the facilities such spaces were not provided. Therefore, they are forced to stay outside the church which is disappointing and victimizing causing them not to be regular church attendant. 100% of the respondents requested the construction of buildings with disability framework and creating a pathway for easy movement as well as spacious toilets for their accommodation. They said even at home it is still a challenge. Additionally during the raining season and with lots of mud, the wheelchairs cannot move and so their movement is restricted, frustrated and minimal. One respondent regretted that she was not a regular church attendee due to poor infrastructure that hinders her mobility yet she is a very good singer and even admire to minister in church.

From the IDIs with WWD about 27/30 thus 90% of them confirmed that they feared that most churches in Ahero town had no proper toilets that they could comfortably visit considering that they were pit latrines. They lamented that it’s a common problem even in their homes, but at home they put on dirty clothes so that even when they crawl on the ground they do not fear much shame as compared to when they have clean dresses for church. Subsequently, at home they also have people taking care of them as opposed to church where mostly they are left alone and the caretakers or the church ushers sees it a bother to also push them to church while they are supposed to attend to other church members entering

Those with care givers say on such days they give off to their personal caregivers especially for those with care givers. The WWD complained that during the menstrual period they could not go to the church's toilets, because the toilets are mostly dirty and no place to put their used pads, leave alone how to reach the toilet is a big challenge, where to put their handbags is not in place. They lamented most toilets are full and human waste that is spread all over the toilet the ground especially during rainy season. About 80% felt they feared for their safety as they feared falling down into the pit latrines since some are wide and not suitable for their status. The study also revealed that most toilets are poorly constructed and almost full at most times, claiming the water table is high and so pit latrines are not deep and therefore within a short time the human wastes are spread all over the ground, which is very unhealthy to them and the entire community.

Table 5: Summary on Churches with special disabilities friendly equipment

No	Response
1	60% of churches in Ahero lack ramps for wheelchairs entering church premise
2	100% of toilets miss proper spacing and arrangement for WWD
3	100% requested for proper infrastructures in church areas for PLWD
4	27/30 (90%) feared visiting church because of no frameworks set in place for PLWD
5	80% feared to falling in pit latrines.
6	Most toilets are poorly constructed and almost full at most times.

Source: Field data, 2025

Sign language interpreters for hearing impaired and Brails for vision impaired

The study revealed that nearly 2205/2450 respondents thus 90% of the respondents felt that WWD with hearing impaired were excluded in the church services in Ahero town. The researcher confirmed with the various church leadership who affirmed that it was a gap due to financial constraints of having the sign language interpreters during the church services which automatically locks them out from hearing the word of God and to fully participate in the church holistic mission. Other church leaders confessed of not aware of them and where they live. The study also revealed other disability equipment's needed in the church such as brails for the vision impaired. It was exposed through the 2100/2450 which is 85.7% of church leadership confirmed that it was difficult to afford them or even to hire someone to interpret during the services especially in the rural areas. However they also admitted that they had never thought that it was necessary as they regretted for not being considerate of their WWD as well as the entire PWDs. The hearing impaired said she were discriminated and mostly she did not attend church services leave alone being in leadership. She explained her ordeal with a rapist who got her when she went to fetch firewood. Because she could not shout for help nobody could rescue her. She later went to church to report to her pastor who could not understand her as well at the same time she feared opening her panty to show him that she was raped. Later she tried to go to hospital in Ahero there was no one to understand her since there was no sign language interpreter. She moved to police station which is just adjacent to report the case, the policemen could not understand her. Jumbo not her real name said she suffered and later gave up. She found herself infected with sexual virus, but to her pain the man is walking free even after committing such Irenaeus act. This is because she cannot be understood, yet at the same time she is illiterate. She added that she could not have written to the pastor and even the doctor as well as the police what really happened to her. The study found out that the church projects or programs are not inclusive and therefore a segment of the society is still suffering.

Lastly, the study revealed that women with vision impaired are more disfranchised since they are unable to read the documents due to lack of brails for them to follow the discussions and sermons including reading of the bible. They requested for church to support them get brails and train them so that they can communicate what their heart desires. Consequently, they also said they needed training of a larger group of church members so that communication can be enhanced. They requested the church to purchase brails so that they can participate in church activities and even participate in the community leadership.

Table 6: Summary over Hearing and Vision Impaired PLWD Findings

Aspect	Findings	Statistics	Implications
Exclusion of hearing-impaired persons in church	Majority of respondents reported that women with hearing impairments were excluded from church services in Ahero town.	2205 out of 2450 (~90%)	Exclusion due to lack of sign language interpreters and awareness of their needs.
Church leadership awareness	Some leaders were unaware of the existence or location of people with hearing impairments.	Firsthand from respondents	Indicates poor community integration and lack of inclusive planning.
Financial constraints	Churches cited financial challenges as the main barrier to hiring interpreters or acquiring assistive devices.	2100 out of 2450 (~85.7%)	Churches struggle to afford interpreters and assistive materials, especially in rural areas.
Neglect and regret among leaders	Leaders admitted they had not considered inclusion of persons with disabilities (PWDs).	Firsthand from respondents	Reflects lack of sensitivity and planning for inclusion.
Case study – hearing impaired woman ('Jumbo')	Victim of sexual assault; unable to communicate incident to pastor, doctor, or police due to absence of interpreters.	Firsthand from respondents	Highlights systemic communication barriers, lack of justice access, and social vulnerability.
Impact on hearing-impaired participation	Hearing-impaired individuals face exclusion from both worship and leadership roles.	Firsthand from respondents	Limits spiritual growth, social inclusion, and empowerment.
Requests from vision-impaired women	Requested churches to provide Braille materials and training.		Aim: to improve participation in church and community leadership.
General conclusion	Church programs are not inclusive, leaving segments of women with disabilities marginalized.		Calls for investment in interpreters, Braille materials, and inclusive communication training.

Source: Field data, 2025

1.7 Conclusion

After carrying out this study, it was revealed that, there exists barriers to women with disabilities' representation in church leadership positions for spiritual and socio-economic empowerment in Ahero, Kisumu County, Kenya. Despite global and national emphasis on gender equality and social inclusion (GESI), WWD remain significantly underrepresented in religious institutions. There barriers exist in different forms including but not limited to the following: - Logistics and infrastructure arrangement; lack of special disabilities friendly equipment; lack of sign language interpreters for hearing impaired and Brails for vision impaired leaders among others in the churches in Ahero.

1.8 Recommendations

The following are recommended for action from the findings of the research on WWD inclusivity in leadership. The findings are aligned with the focus areas of the gender policy strategic framework.

- a) There is a critical need to enhance the inclusion of women with disabilities (WWDs) in church leadership by intentionally supporting their participation and leveraging available opportunities by church leadership to enhance their spiritual and socio-economic needs.
- b) There is good reason to build initial capacity of WWD who prove capable in leadership and provide support through training on curriculum-based activities by the church leadership so that they become the voice of their fellow WWD in advocating and addressing for issues that directly affects their unique challenges.
- c) The Church leadership should develop conducive environments that include WWD in decision making within the church.
- d) Church leadership should have strategic plans and have various department including WWD, widows as separate department with their core agenda to be addressed. This will improve the church response towards WWD inclusivity, youth, and widows among others welfare issues affecting them in the long run.
- e) The church should support the institutionalization of women inclusivity in church leadership and gender issues to enhance communication and information technology including having pathways and rams.
- f) The church should build linkages to share lessons and best practices within different contexts and engage in formidable roadmap with the other church organizations that have progressed well with the programme on women inclusivity and gender equality issues, to learn what works and what would be a challenge to undertake to make it easy to implement.
- g) The church should partner with relevant government ministries and other development partners on mainstreaming disability and awareness for both the church and the public on general unique challenges of PWDs and the need to have WWD in leadership.

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Jayne is an accomplished Social Science Researcher, Gender, Advocacy, and Project Management Specialist, with over 15 years of expertise in project design, gender mainstreaming, advocacy campaigns and participatory monitoring and evaluation. A Master of Arts Degree in Project Planning and Management backs the foregoing experience. Proficient in capacity building, policy development, and research, with extensive consultancy experience across Africa. Skilled in gender equality advocacy, rural women's socio-economic empowerment, and participatory planning using a Human Rights-Based Approach. Nationally, Jayne is working with women and girls with disabilities in land rights, agriculture, environmental resilience, and livelihood. Globally, she participates in advocacy for rural women's agriculture, digital, Land rights, and socio-economic empowerment through the Stand for Her Land (S4HL) campaign, platform, Gender Is My Agenda (GIMAC), FEMNET, African Union Development Agency, and Pan African Climate Justice, Alliance (PACJA) as a civil society leader whose work sits at a critical nexus of access to justice, women's development, and resilience. Jayne serves as the Chief Executive Officer of Friendly Integrated Development Initiatives in Poverty Alleviation (FIDIPA) and a member of Kenya Land Alliance, Landesa, a civil society network advancing women's land rights and sustainable development through advocacy, policy dialogue, and grassroots interventions. With over two decades of experience, Jayne has championed the understanding that women's rights are human rights and access to justice is crucial at all levels, supporting food security, clean water, and resilient livelihoods. Jayne's leadership promotes integrated approaches that address environmental degradation, climate change, and poverty simultaneously. Through FIDIPA networks, she leads multigrassroots initiatives on climate change, ecosystem restoration, and climate-smart agriculture, while advocating for stronger governance and inclusive community participation.