



Advancing
Gender Equality
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Breaking Barriers and **Building Inclusion:**

Highlights from
the DIGI National
Dialogue 2023

On 31 July 2023, the ‘Disability Inclusive GBV Initiative’ (DIGI) constituted by FIDA-U, UGANET and ADD Uganda held a national dialogue, as one of the joint activities since they started their two-year collaborative intervention to respond to Gender Based Violence (GBV) against women and girls with disabilities (WGwDs). The dialogue was held under the theme: *Breaking Barriers, Building Inclusion: A National Dialogue on Disability Inclusion, Accountability for Protection of Rights of Women and Girls with Disabilities in Uganda*.

The dialogue sought to:

- 1** To discuss ways to promote the inclusion of persons with disabilities in various aspects of life, such as education, employment, and social activities and to also discuss ways to remove barriers to inclusion, such as physical barriers, communication barriers, and social barriers.

- 2** Accountability for the protection of the rights of women and girls with disabilities: This involved discussing ways to ensure that the rights of women and girls with disabilities are protected and that they have access to services such as healthcare, education, and employment.

- 3** To launch the FIDA Uganda study on Access to Justice to Women and Girls with Disabilities in Arua, Kampala and Moroto.

- 4** To promote awareness and understanding of the challenges faced by persons with disabilities with focus on women and girls, and to develop a consensus on the need for continued and sustained efforts in promoting disability inclusion, strengthening accountability mechanisms, and enhancing access to justice.

- 5** To provide a platform for sharing experiences and best practices, and for developing practical and actionable strategies for improving disability inclusion, strengthening accountability mechanisms, and enhancing access to justice for women and girls.

As the theme highlighted, the discussion analysed the barriers to disability inclusion and opportunities to change the status quo, starting at family level up to national level. In addition, the definition and role of what accountability really means when it comes to serving women and girls with disabilities looks like was spotlighted, including what this may entail for the different stakeholders.

The responsibility of being inclusive is never a favour and it is everybody’s duty, regardless of one’s position or sphere. The practice of providing reasonable accommodation is possible at every level. At family level for example, one of the speakers shared how her father would forego income from a specific vehicle, just to enable his daughter to go for therapy, one day, every single week. At organizational level, employers and colleagues can adjust processes, procedures, budgets, the way a workspace is laid out or even work schedules to leverage and maximize flexibility - which has most times resulted in higher productivity as people feel valued, trusted, and understood.

It is not a favour but rather a strategy to bolster access on an equity basis. In her address, the keynote speaker, Hon. Hajjat Safia Nalule Jjuuko, who is also the Chairperson Equal Opportunities Commission illustrated the importance of accountability at all levels, starting from family to national level. The Disability Inclusive GBV Initiative’ (DIGI) further highlighted areas that need urgent attention and provided evidence to inform programming and policy actions.

For instance, one of the findings of study reaffirmed earlier evidence that the World Health Organization and the World Bank shared before. About 10 per cent of the world’s populations are Person with Disability (PWDs). Out of this number, 80 per cent of them live in developing countries. The government of Uganda, in its government statistics estimated that PwDs constitute 14 percent of Uganda’s population with more women (9 percent) than men (7 percent) age 15 and older have a disability. Disability in this regard is considered in respect of the six core functional domains—seeing, hearing, communication, cognition, walking, and self-care.

Despite Uganda's efforts to include people with disabilities in its legal framework, particularly *The Persons with Disabilities Act of 2006*, which calls for the abolition of all forms of discrimination against people with disabilities and the promotion of equal opportunities, more has to be done. Additionally, it offers a tax break of 15% to private employers who hire ten or more people with disabilities on a full-time basis as regular employees, apprentices, or learners. According to research done by FIDA Uganda, women with disabilities are more likely than women without disabilities to have their economic and financial rights violated. They are more susceptible to poverty and violations of their rights since they do not have access to equitable economic possibilities or knowledge of government funding opportunities. Due to their lack of knowledge of their rights and infrequent use of them, people have limited access to justice to seek compensation for violations of their economic and financial rights. Additionally, some justice law and order sector (JLOS) actors lack adequate knowledge and training on disability rights, which undermines the equal and effective access to justice for women with disabilities. Formal courts frequently lack user-friendly infrastructure, including braille systems and sign language interpreters.

And so, while as there have been steps taken to improve inclusion, the meeting had consensus on the need to do more, by people taking responsibility at all levels as these feed into each other. The dialogue attracted representatives from Organizations of persons with disability (OPD), government officials from the Justice Law and Order sector, The office Directorate of Public Prosecution (DPP) , government agencies such as KCCA, Equal Opportunities Commission and the National Planning Authority etc.

Four takeaway points stood out for me from this dialogue.

1. *The office Directorate of Public Prosecution (DPP) called upon OPDs, funders and other CSOs to design interventions that support the "whole" as working with one or two out of the four justice arms can only be frustrating since each work autonomously yet are interdependent.*
2. *Secondly, to exercise reasonable accommodation, responsibility taking starts with attitude - rather than with resources/ money.*
3. *Inclusion is everyone's responsibility, and it is not a favour!*
4. *We must all be accountable to PWD, and not just to the donors.*



I hope that when a woman living with disabilities comes to you, you can provide reasonable accommodation, reasonable accommodation is a necessary requirement for anyone wishing to serve the public.

- Catherine Mugabo, CivSource Africa

#NationalDialogueOnDisability



Dear reader, how can you exercise inclusion and reasonable accommodation for persons with disability (or limitations) in your work daily?

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