

## Women and Girls with Disabilities Call for Action Now by Governments Gathered in Addis Ababa October 2019

Women and girls with disabilities across Africa are calling on their governments to guarantee the promotion and realisation of their human rights in all national and regional policies, according to the provisions of the Convention of the Rights of persons with Disabilities, its Optional Protocol and the African Union Protocol to the African Charter on Human and People's Rights (2018).

No girl or woman with disabilities should be left behind and uncounted in the next review and implementation period of Beijing +25. Each of the 12 areas of action of the Beijing Platform for Action should have specific reference to and policy provision across the lifecourse for women and girls with disabilities.

Globally women are more likely than men to become disabled throughout the course of their lives, with persons over 60 years comprising over half of those with disabilities worldwide and more than 250 million older people experiencing moderate to severe disability. Across the world women comprise up to three-quarters of persons with disabilities in low and middle-income countries, with one in four households having a person with disabilities

Across Africa the prevalence of disability is higher among marginalized populations and people in rural areas. Women and girls with disabilities are at special risk of poverty and face multiple barriers to inclusion and the realisation of their rights. Despite the evidence of disability and efforts of the international community to promote assessment of disability at national level through use of the Washington questions in many countries of the region women and girls with disabilities are uncounted and invisible in national statistics.

It is to be welcomed that disability is recognised as a pressing issue in various of the Beijing +25 reports of the Africa region. Some countries are making policy and budgetary efforts to ensure social protection, education and work opportunities for women and girls with disabilities, and have enacted legal provisions to promote and protect their rights. All countries must do this.

### Findings of the Leave No Women Behind programme

The Global Call for Action Against Poverty (GCAP) and its partners across Africa have been investigating in depth through research and focus group discussions the situation of women and girls with disabilities. Findings are that they are victims of multiple discrimination. Stigma and rejection due to attitudes to disability from families and communities create special barriers to reaching their full potential. Governments have not yet put in place funded inclusive policies and legal provisions are not compliant with human rights obligations.

As a result, women and girls with disabilities not only experience chronic poverty but also sexual abuse, lack of opportunities for education and employment, and are routinely denied social and political rights due to legal and institutional barriers in both peace time and in conflict. Few countries take account of the unique needs of women and girls with disabilities in terms of health, sanitation, education, training, infrastructure, rehabilitation, assistive devices and environmental factors. Their rights to social protection, essential health services, protection before the law and participation in social and development activities, political decision making and in community life are denied.

**Women and girls with disabilities are calling for an end to this. Action is needed now.**

### What do women and girls with disabilities want?

- Equal opportunities to contribute fully to their communities and countries.
- Inclusive policies than enable, rather than prevent their development and contributions.
- To be fully involved and equal participants in developing and implementing policies on disability, gender equality, social development, environmental sustainability and humanitarian programmes.
- Meaningful representation of women with disabilities in national regional and international political processes and within organisations of the United Nations and multilateral bodies.

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## RECOMMENDATIONS

### to governments, the African Union and the international community

1. UNECA and all government ensure availability of up to date regional and national data and statistics on women and girls with disabilities.
2. Governments across Africa ensure that all measurements, indicators, targets and reports for Beijing +25 and the SDGs address issues of women and girls with disabilities and overlap with other markers of identity, including age, location and social identity, making use of the Washington Group on Disability Statistics question sets.
3. Governments across Africa ensure that the provisions of social protection floors reach women and girls with disabilities and that woman and girls with disabilities have full access to health, education, sexual reproductive and social protection programmes.
4. In all countries of the region women and girls with disabilities and their representative organisations be fully involved in developing and implementing policies on gender equality and women's rights.
5. In all countries of the region women and girls with disabilities and their representative organisations be fully involved in programmes and research on issues of climate change and environmental sustainability.
6. Across Africa humanitarian assistance and development programmes should specifically include and be responsive to the needs and rights of women and girls with disabilities.
7. Across Africa, women and girls with disabilities should participate in the planning and designing of national, regional and global level policies and programmes.
8. Meaningful representation of women with disabilities in national, regional and international political processes in all countries of Africa and within the African Union and organisations of the United Nations and multilateral bodies.
9. Governments across Africa redouble their efforts to uphold the commitments set out in the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (CRPD), including the optional protocol and general comment 3 on women and girls with disabilities.



## Voices of women and girls with disabilities across Africa

(All quotes taken from focus group discussions led by GCAP partners July - September 2019)

“ Government is the main actor and the barriers are the lack of political will to improve the lives of persons with disability.” **Ghana**

“ Government must look at the education and health aspects of women and girls living with disabilities. They must also look at inclusion and accessibility for this group in many areas including political participation. Also deliberate steps must be taken to address areas our cultures and tradition that contribute the double discrimination of Women and girls with disabilities in Zambia.” **Zambia**

“ Priority actions of governments should be domestication of the laws that prohibit discrimination and inclusion of the PWDs in decision making positions.” **Nigeria**

“ Social services should target women and girls with disabilities .... Education for women and girls with disabilities is not accessible and its money consuming, they need help in this area.” **Nigeria**

“ We need a change of mindset and perception of how society see women and girls with disabilities ... and special centres for skills training, provide teaching aids to schools for girls with disabilities to learn.” **Nigeria**

“ There should be inclusion of Women with disabilities on all aspects of life, community leaderships and elections and ICT centres established for Women and girls living with disabilities.” **Nigeria**

“ What should be done differently? The community must embrace girls and women with disabilities, mentor them, offer opportunities to participate in developmental programs, education of the public on the capacities of the person with a disability, empowering the woman or girl with disability to rise above the challenges and encouraging parents to educate and allow their girls with disabilities to socialise in society.” **Ghana**

“ The community must change its attitude towards Women and girls with disabilities and fully integrate them into the community. This can be done by fully recognizing the rights of girls and Women with disabilities as equal members of our communities. Communities must also do away with traditions and beliefs that exposes women and girls with disabilities to the elements of double discrimination.” **Zambia**

“ To do things differently we must empower community to understand the rights of women and girls with disabilities. Moreover community should participate the activities that are conducted by the women and girls with disabilities in order to know our talent and capacity that we have.” **Zanzibar**

“ We must develop positive attitudes and promote human rights, and Include women and girls with disabilities in service planning, sexual health and rights conversations and economic empowerment programmes.” **Uganda**

“ Women and Girls with disabilities must be included in all decision making processes, to enable support for their actions and guarantee their security and safety.” **DRC**

“The Government of Kenya and all partners need to strengthen their commitment towards empowering women and girls with disabilities and ensuring inclusiveness and equality through increasing access to the disability cards, which are a prerequisite for accessing medical and other social services.” **Kenya**

