
Husishwa: Enhancing Public Participation for Persons with Disabilities

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Abstract

Effective participation can only be realized if citizens have access to information in a timely manner and through accessible formats. For Persons with Disabilities (PwDs), participation is limited by access to information and accessibility of public information. Further, physical participation spaces are not inclusive because of distance or availability of supporting measures such as Sign Language Interpreters or provision of materials in media such as Braille. In response, ADDA implemented a 2-year learning and sharing project using the Design Thinking Methodology in conjunction with Disabled Persons Organizations in Nairobi, Kajiado, Kitui, Nakuru, Makueni and Kwale to study and develop models that would contribute to increased participation of PwDs. The project sought to learn what County Governments and other public institutions can do to enhance participation of PwDs; and, what Persons with Disabilities can do to effectively participate in governance processes. ADDA developed and piloted Husishwa through a Social Design process. The project worked with a cohort of 150 PwDs and 100 County Government officials to develop this tool. Husishwa is a tool that offers a collaborative checklist against which County Governments track their efforts towards inclusion of PwDs; and a digital convergence platform between PwDs and County Governments, for accessing information and participating in County budgets, projects and programs through web based or SMS technology. After implementation, four County Governments undertook to put in place measures that promote participation of PwDs in governance. Further, six County Disability networks were established. It was concluded that Disability Social and Solidarity Economy organizations, can utilize digital technology to break the barriers that exclude PwDs from governance processes. Thus, Social and Solidarity Economy Organization and public institutions should embrace digital technology to democratize access to information and include PwDs in project design, delivery and feedback.

Keywords: Participation; Disability Inclusion; Social and Solidarity Economy; Husishwa

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INTRODUCTION

Persons with Disabilities organize themselves into Social Solidarity Economy (SSE) organizations known as Organizations of Persons with Disabilities (OPDs). These organizations are particularly useful in promoting civic and political agency and enhanced socio-economic inclusion. Despite their level of organizing, it has been observed the participation of PwDs in governance matters continues to be restricted. Effective participation can only be realized if citizens have access to information in a timely manner and through accessible formats. It also requires presence, which has mostly been limited to physical spaces. The County Governments Act (Article 87), the Urban Areas and Cities Act (Article 22) and the Public Finance Management Act (Article 207) outline modalities for citizen participation. These legislations unpack the National Values in Article 10 of the Constitution of Kenya (2010), which includes Public Participation.

Further, Article 54 of the Constitution of Kenya (2010) guarantees political, social and economic Rights for PwDs. Despite this, participation by Persons with Disabilities (PwDs) in governance processes is inhibited by limited access to information, inaccessible locations and inaccessibility of information. In other words, PwDs cannot access information that would be useful for effective participation and where such information is available, it is often voluminous and is not available in formats such as Braille. Furthermore, physical participation spaces are not adequately inclusive because as a result of distance, physical accessibility or availability of supporting measures such as Sign Language Interpreters or guides.

In trying to further understand and address these barriers, the Agency for Disability and Development in Africa (ADDA) implemented a 2-year learning and sharing project in conjunction with the Strathmore University Law Clinic and OPDs from Nairobi, Kajiado, Kitui, Nakuru, Makueni and Kwale to study and develop models that would contribute to increased participation of PwDs.

Conceptual Framework: The learning and sharing project sought to understand the barriers to public participation for PwDs (Table 1). The project hypothesised that, “It is only by eliminating the structural and societal barriers to civic participation that PwDs can actively engage in public participation.”

Table 1: Conceptual Framework Illustration

Dependent Variable	Independent Variables
Participation of PwDs	Access to Information
	Access to Location
	Citizen Agency
	Feedback Loop

From this hypothesis, the project sought to learn what County Governments and other public institutions can do to enhance

participation of PwDs; and, what Persons with Disabilities can do to effectively participate in public governance. The concept of governance refers to structures and processes that ensure accountability, transparency, rule of law, and equity. Public participation is a process which allows citizens to inform and influence public governance. As part of a democratic system, the voice of citizens is particularly important in determining the way laws are made and how resources are spent.

Sherry Arnstein (1969) describes Participation as “the redistribution of power that enables the ‘have-not’ citizens, presently excluded from the political and economic processes, to be deliberately included in the future”. This definition is perhaps one of the underpinning philosophies of citizen participation in the Constitution of Kenya (2010). By establishing devolution and entrenching citizen participation as a National Value, the Constitution redistributed the power to decide and spend between the National and County Governments in Kenya. The Constitution as a legal document, also defines citizenship and the various civic, political, social and political rights and obligations that go with it (Cooper, 1984). This characterization provides a basis for the constant conversation between the state and its citizens that defines who participates, how they participate and what their roles are in these processes. Furthermore, Cooper’s definition creates a framework for developing laws and regulations that govern the relationships between the state and its citizens.

RESEARCH DESIGN

The two year project sought to Co-Design a Public Participation Disability Inclusion Index with 5 County Governments – Nairobi, Kajiado, Makueni, Kitui and Kwale, 5 public entities, PwDs, DPOs and academia; Prototype, test and document an inclusive Public Participation Disability Inclusion Index through a Social Lab; Develop and test best practices of including youths with intellectual, mental, visual and speech impairments in public participation at County

level; Identify clearer opportunities and more transformative approaches and technologies for involving youths with mental, intellectual, visual and speech impairments, their parents / care givers and community in County Public participation; and lobby for adoption of the Disability Inclusion Index for public participation by County Governments and public entities. The County Governments were identified to fit three categories. The first category was for Counties that represented a largely urban population. For this, the project team chose Nairobi, Kiambu and Nakuru. The second category focused on the rural population and for this, the project worked in Kitui, Makueni and Kwale. The third category was for Counties that have a majority pastoralist population. For this, the project worked in Kajiado.

After identification of the Counties, the next step was the identification of specific departments and partners to engage with at the County level. Considering that the project sought to understand the barriers to participation and how those can impact service delivery, the project identified the departments of Social Services, Public Participation, Finance & Planning, Human Resource, Health, Education and Physical

Planning. These departments were specifically selected because they are also the spaces through which Economic and Social Rights (Article 43(1) of the Constitution of Kenya) are realized and represent the functions that were devolved to County Governments by the Constitution of Kenya. (The 4th Schedule of the Constitution of Kenya outlines the functions of the County Governments. Regarding the OPDs, the project used the Snowball Sampling methodology to identify specific networks in the Counties. From this, the project established a cohort of 150 PwDs (30 per County, with 55% female representation). At commencement, ADDA carried out a Disability Inclusion Score Card (DISC) for Public Institutions and the Organizations for Persons with Disabilities. This was done to establish a baseline knowledge and understand the nature of inclusion practices and programs within these institutions.

As a result of these DISC exercises, the various institutions developed response programs on areas of deficiency. The DISCs were carried out at commencement, midpoint and end point. The DISC uses a standardized tool that measures compliance and inclusion against best practice benchmarks contained in

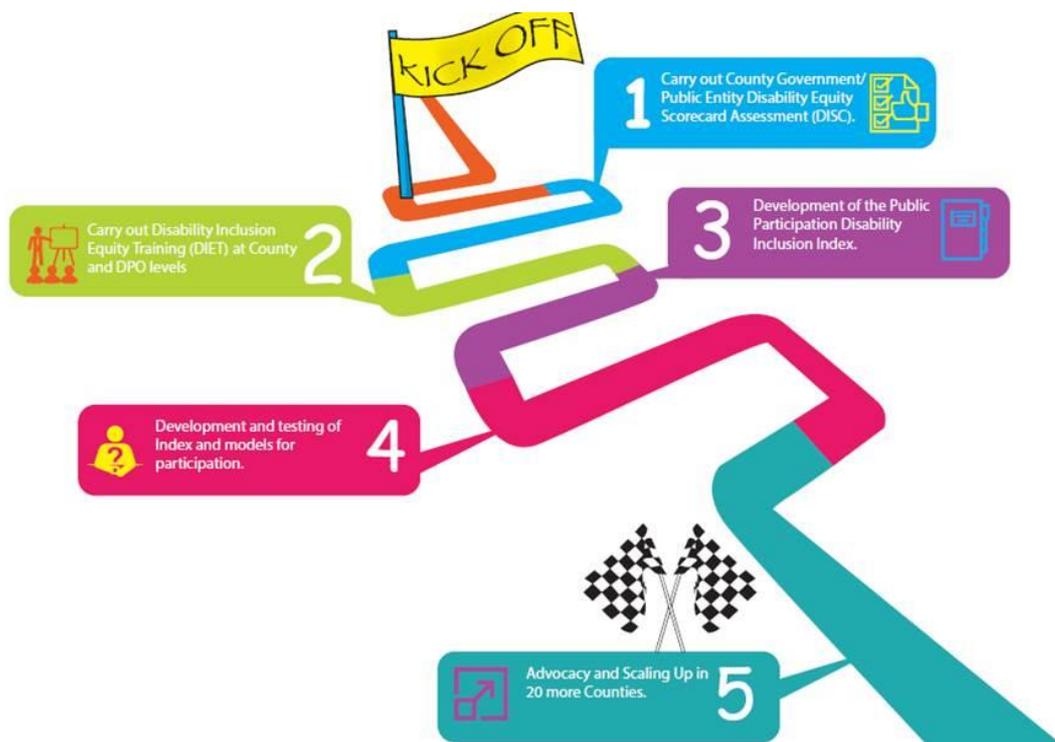


Figure 1: Project implementation plan.

national and international obligations, such as the Constitution of Kenya (2010) and the United Nations Convention on the Rights for Persons with Disabilities (CRPD). Subsequent to the DISC, a Disability Inclusion and Equity Training was carried out as a first step towards implementing the agreements that were considered during the DISC sessions. After the DIET sessions, County level Social Lab forums were held jointly between County Government departments and the OPDs. The idea was to appreciate the opportunities and challenges from each other’s perspectives and to agree on a measurable roadmap toward addressing any shortfalls. It is in these forums that various solutions that enhance public participation for PwDs were considered. The Social Lab considered solutions that focus on access to information and accessibility of this information. It is the Lab that resulted in development of the Husishwa Model. The diagram below illustrates the project approach (Figure 1).

METHODOLOGY

ADDA developed and piloted Husishwa through conventional desk studies and Social Design process in a Social Lab. The project worked with a cohort of 150 PwDs (30 from each County) and 100 County Government officials (20 from each County) to develop the tool. The European Commission (2013) Guide to Social Innovation describes Social Design as an approach that “empower people at local level to invent together solutions to economic and social problems.” In this context, the Social Lab² was a collaborative space that brought together diverse stakeholders including County Governments, PwDs and their care givers as well as citizens to identify challenges and barriers that limit the participation of PwDs in County Governance processes and to develop, test document and scale up the use of emerging solutions. Over a period of six months, ADDA facilitated Social Labs in Nairobi, Kitui, Makueni and Kwale. The diagram below outlines the Social Lab workflow (Figure 2).

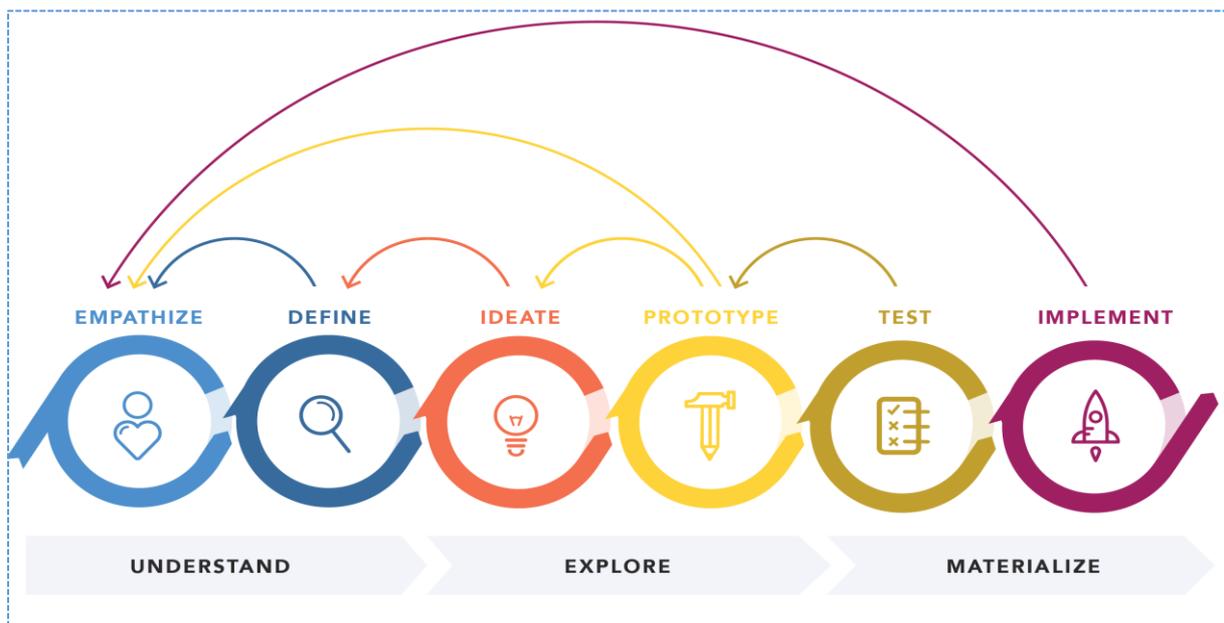


Figure 1: Social Lab workflow

² The Design Thinking approach anticipates establishment of a Lab as a space where participants analyze and understand socially

complex problems, explore possible solutions and test them iteratively to identify those that work.

FINDINGS

The Social Labs focused on two key areas that present challenges to PWDs. These are access to information on public participation³ and accessibility⁴ of public participation events. On access to information, the key challenges lie in the publishing and dissemination of meeting notices, overall complexity of participation issues (such as County legislation and financial budgets), information dissemination channels (mostly on print media and occasionally on vernacular radio) and information formats which are not accessible for those who are visually impaired, speech impaired and intellectually disabled. It was further noted that while the Constitution expects County Governments to make information publicly

available, there is a limited number of documents that are available on County Government portals and websites as shown below (Table 2).

From this analysis, it is evident that the available information on government portals is not standard across all Counties. For instance, out of the three Counties that were sampled, it was only Makueni County that had made available their Annual Procurement Plans. On accessibility of meeting venues, the main challenge is in the selection of inclusive and accessible venues and lack of in-meeting accessibility such as presence of sign language interpreters, accessible sanitation facilities, physically accessible meeting spaces and accessible moderators.

Table 2: Analysis of available information in Nairobi City County, Kitui County and Makueni County

		2016	2017	2018	2019
Nairobi City County ¹	Annual Development Plan	0	0	1	1
	County Fiscal Strategy Paper	0	0	1	0
	County Budget Implementation Report	0	0	1	1
	Citizens Budget	0	0	1	0
	County Integrated Development Plan	1	1	1	1
	Annual Procurement Plan	0	0	0	0
Kitui County ²	Annual Development Plan	1	1	1	1
	County Fiscal Strategy Paper	1	1	1	0
	County Budget Implementation Report	0	0	1	0
	Citizens Budget	0	0	0	1
	County Integrated Development Plan	0	0	1	0
	Annual Procurement Plan	0	0	0	0
Makueni County ³	Annual Development Plan	1	1	1	1
	County Fiscal Strategy Paper	1	1	1	1
	County Budget Implementation Report	0	1	1	1
	Citizens Budget	0	1	1	1
	County Integrated Development Plan	1	1	1	1
	Annual Procurement Plan	1	1	1	1

Source: ¹<https://nairobi.go.ke/downloads/>; ²www.kitui.gov.ke/downloads/;

³<https://makueni.go.ke/reports>

³ Specifically notices about the participation events, the agenda of the events and content that helps citizens understand the issues under discussion.

⁴ Physical accessibility of the venues & WASH, in-meeting accessibility (for

example sign language), inclusive rapporteur & facilitator as well as accommodations that enable PWDs to attend (e.g. transport reimbursement)

Key issues emerging from the labs is that overall, there is a dearth of information on County public participation events across the five Counties. First, information about public participation events is provided to citizens without adequate notices. This affects how citizens plan to attend the events. Secondly, often, such notices are provided on the website and print media which is not readily available to PWDs. Thirdly, available documentation about the issues under discussion is not only not provided on time but comes in inaccessible formats and language. For example, those with visual impairments do not get the information in braille or audio. Those with intellectual impairments or low literacy levels have no access to simplified versions (except in Nairobi County). Moreover, those with intellectual disabilities are not planned for, especially in regard to support for caregivers. Finally, the flow of information between Government and Citizens is inefficient.

Access to Information: This takes a twin track approach. This section looks at what the County Governments need to do and what PWDs need information flow and accessibility. It was agreed that there is need for County Governments to improve how to communicate public participation meetings information to the PWDs; increase disability awareness among County staff and invest in accessible tools, technology and human resource to facilitate inclusive dissemination of information. For this to be achieved, the following strategies were suggested:

- Share Meeting notices, agenda and related documents in appropriate formats over multiple channels including, providing information to PWDs and the Public in appropriate formats and Channels; and
- Involve PWDs and their leaders when developing development programs that target not just that the community. As community members they are part of all programmes. Be part of the process as

well as monitoring/seeking for accountability.

Inclusive Public Participation: Further to this, in order to improve the attendance and contribution of PWDs during public participation events, two strategies are needed. First, County Governments should make it easy to attend meetings or participate through other means such as written memorandums. Secondly, during the actual meetings, the County should implement strategies that make it possible for PWDs to provide quality contribution and enjoy the public participation process. Some of the strategies proposed by the lab include to make alternative participation approaches legal and more effective. For example, while written memorandums are legal, this instrument is not used by PWDs. Specific affirmative actions should target DPOs to improve their capacity for developing written memorandums. In addition, feedback is essential in motivating PWDs to attend. Most PWDs consider public participation as a waste of time since they feel their input is never implemented. Effective Communication can improve relationships between DPOs and the County Government. Additional strategies that may be taken by the County Governments include to:

- Implement affirmative actions for PWDs that empower them to become economically independent as part of the County inclusive development process. Economic independence improves the self-esteem of PWDs and makes them view the Government as a partner.
- Focus of on deliberate selection of accessible venues and provide information about these venues to enable PWDs and their caregivers plan.
- Implement basic minimum accommodations to support PWDs and their caregivers attend public participation meetings
- Integrate inclusiveness including presence of sign language interpretation.

Social Labs

From the Social Labs, the following issues were noted and tabulated as follows:

From the perspective of PwDs:

Table 3: Perceptions of PwDs on barriers to participation

	Nairobi	Kitui	Makueni	Kwale
The PwDs lack access to information on public participation meetings. The information is either provided in bulk, very close to the event dates or mostly not accessible for persons with visual impairments.	The County provides information 14 days in advance. Challenges are in accessibility of the information	Yes	Yes	Yes
Information is provided in complex language. Due to other challenges that affect access to education for PwDs, it is difficult to understand most of the content.	A simplified version is usually made available	Yes	No	Yes
The PwDs have poor attitude since they feel the government uses the same PwDs in all meetings just to “rubber stamp” the events.	Yes	No	Yes	Yes
Poor resource allocation by the government on the PwDs problems hence poor implementation	PWD budgets are often not fully used	Yes	Yes	Yes
Poor feedback from the government	Yes	Yes	From village level committees up County Level, PwDs are involved. However, there is a disconnect between DPO leaders and the Public Participation department	Yes

	Nairobi	Kitui	Makueni	Kwale
Information formats such as Audio, braille and accessible websites is not available or included as part of the participation documents	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
The PWDs also fail to avail themselves in the meetings	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Low self-esteem on the side of PWDs	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
DPOs have a common voice	Yes	There are several DPOs in the County and mostly they spend their time fighting each other	Yes	There is a registered group of DPOs who often engage the Government as one
Meeting Venues are not accessible for the physically challenged	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes

From the perspective of County Government officials.

Table 4: Perceptions of County Officials on the barriers to participation of PwDs

	Nairobi	Kitui	Makueni	Kwale
Do the DPOs trickle down the information to the PWDs on public participation?	Yes. Communication is sent to DPO leaders who in turn support PWDS to attend meetings. However, it's not clear if this is effective.	Yes	No. PWDs complain that participation information does not reach them through DPOs.	Yes
Do the PWDs make use of the structures they have for information flow?	No. There is no information why DPO leaders who have information do not participate	No.	The Government has a very clear setup on public participation including committees that start from the village level. These committees include PWDs and their leaders at every level. Low PWD voices are attributed to social stereotypes and stigma	Yes
PWDs are full of negative energy, especially the DPOs, who are always ready to fight on a drop of a pin.	Yes	Yes	Yes	Some DPO leaders are accommodating
The county government has ensured that in every public participation committee levels there is a PWD representative elected by the PWDs themselves.	No such structures exist specifically for DPOs but when planning for public participation, youth, women and PWDs are invited	Yes	The structure exists but for some reason, PWDs are not effective within these structures	Yes
The PWDs wants to be treated as special group from the others and forget that resources are limited.	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes

KEY RECOMMENDATION: HUSISHWA

Based on the findings, the following recommendations were suggested as tabulated below.

Solutions**Table 5: Summary of solutions for enhancing participation of PwDs**

	Nairobi	Kitui	Makueni	Kwale
Avail public participation information for all in on time, 14 days before the event.	✓	✓	✓	✓
Information and notices should be accurate and easy to understand	✓	✓	✓	✓
Information should be provided in accessible formats including audio, soft, printed, braille.	✓	✓	✓	✓
Information should be availed in multiple channels including radio, TV, online, Printed and in forums	✓	✓	✓	✓
Involve DPOs and PWD leaders in the dissemination of information	✓	✓	✓	✓

From these solutions that were derived in the Social Labs, the OPDs and County Governments suggested the development and promotion of a system that holds County Governments to account, while enhancing involvement of PwDs in governance spaces. This was the basis for development of the Husishwa model. Husishwa is a two-pronged concept that offers a collaborative checklist against which County Governments track their efforts towards inclusion, especially for PwDs. It also includes a digital convergence platform between PwDs and County Governments, for accessing information and participating in County Budgets, Projects and programs through web based or SMS technology. Husishwa can be seen both as a tool and a process. It responds to participation barriers from two perspectives. From the supply side, Husishwa collaborative County Inclusion checklist or Index that allows County Governments to develop and track their commitments on the inclusion of PwDs in governance, based on local and international best practices. The checklist consists of a list of weighted statements that are anchored in law and best practice, based on the Arnstein Ladder of Participation. The ladder scores participation through 8 levels, with the lowest level being Citizen Manipulation and the highest level being Citizen Control. As a tool, Husishwa

works through an interactive digital portal that democratizes access to County information by making it available through a variety of formats. It leverages on the ubiquity of mobile telephony and the wide reach of broadband internet connectivity in Kenya. The portal can be accessed through husishwa.addafrica.or.ke. Through the portal, leaders can post calls for Public Participation to registered members. These notices are received through registered phone numbers (as SMS), the member portal and the member's email address whenever it is provided. Members can send their ideas through SMS or online posts, which are both accessed through the relevant thread. From this, DPO leaders can craft and submit memoranda either through physical or online spaces while banking on a legitimate civic constituency.

Husishwa has been tested in urban and rural settings and promises to address some of the problems that had had been identified, especially in relation to access to information and accessibility of information. Specifically, it has been tested in Nairobi, Makueni, and Kwale and currently has a user base of over 160 unique members. It was concluded that Disability Social and Solidarity Economy organizations, can utilize digital technology to break the barriers that exclude PwDs from governance processes. Thus, Social and

Solidarity Economy Organization and public institutions should embrace digital technology to democratize access to information and include PwDs in project design, delivery and feedback.

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