



Participation and Engagement of Organisations of Persons with Disabilities

Kenya Red Cross and CBM Global: How a decade of relationship building and capacity strengthening led to more systematic OPD participation in humanitarian response



Jackline and her mother Mary who received a wheelchair and cash transfers as part of the CBMG/KRC partnership
Photo credit: CBM/Eshuchi

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Summary

CBM Global, in partnership with the Kenya Red Cross Society and the Association for the Physically Disabled of Kenya (APDK), is working with local Organisations of Persons with Disabilities (ODPs) to address the exclusion of persons with disabilities from humanitarian aid in several Kenyan counties. The aim was to increase the involvement of ODPs in emergency response and resilience programming, leading to a more accessible and inclusive approach for persons with disabilities. The partnership began in 2011 and continues into 2025.

The collaboration tackled several challenges related to disability inclusion, such as oversimplified identification processes, the lack of national identification and disability cards, and inadequate rehabilitation services. To address these challenges, mapping exercises were conducted, inclusion advisers were appointed, data collection tools were redesigned, ODPs were trained and incorporated in direct project implementation, and direct outreach was launched. These measures were aimed at improving identification and assistance for

persons with disabilities. The collaboration resulted in significant policy changes within the Kenya Red Cross Society to ensure inclusivity for persons with disabilities and policy changes at the governmental level.

The partnership created new and more inclusive methods for collecting data and delivering services, which improved access to services for persons with disabilities. Additionally, it allowed persons with disabilities to participate actively in community and decision-making processes, demonstrating inclusive humanitarian practices.

Who was supported and how?

Persons with disabilities in Kenya have historically been excluded from all stages of humanitarian response due to a lack of consultation with Organisations of Persons with Disabilities (OPDs) and inaccessible program design. Identification methods were overly simplistic, often relying on a basic yes/no question that failed to capture the diversity of disabilities, and community consultations were held in central locations without accommodations for accessibility. Essential feedback and reporting mechanisms were not tailored for inclusivity, further marginalizing these individuals.



Additionally, many persons with disabilities could not access aid directly because they lacked national identification or disability cards, which are required for mobile money transfers and social services. Rapid needs assessments conducted by CBM Global and KRCS prior to the most recent humanitarian responses to the current drought revealed that barriers such as limited access to rehabilitation and assistive devices, especially in remote areas, compound the challenges and make it difficult for persons with disabilities to participate in humanitarian aid, community consultations, and resilience programs.

Putting persons with disabilities at the forefront of humanitarian interventions is vital in achieving inclusive humanitarian action. In order to successfully engage with OPDs during a response, building relationships and establishing trust prior to the response is essential.

The aim of this partnership is threefold:

- **To develop and foster relationships between** CBM Global, KRCS and OPDs over time, with each organization bringing relevant skillsets and knowledge to improve the capacity of the others to engage in inclusive humanitarian response.
- To promote **meaningful engagement and participation of persons with disabilities** throughout the humanitarian programme cycle.
- To ensure that **response activities were inclusive** and persons with disabilities were able to access services on an equal basis with others, through engagements with OPDs and the technical skills of each of the partners. The process of consistently involving persons with disability requires participation of OPDs in identification of project participants, and accessible services during the response.

The partnership between CBM Global, the Kenya Red Cross Society, and local OPDs was instrumental in embedding disability inclusion across humanitarian programming in Kenya. Collaborative activities have included:

- **Relationship Building and Community Mapping**
 - Comprehensive mapping exercise in Bungoma County to connect with OPD leaders.
 - Establishing trust through community dialogues and developing a nuanced understanding of the needs of persons with disabilities.
- **Capacity Building and Empowerment**
 - Launch of the Age and Disability Capacity Program in 2016, with dedicated inclusion advisers to integrate age and disability considerations into policies and programs.
 - Advocacy training for OPDs to enhance engagement with government and ensure meaningful participation and representation.
 - Empowering OPD focal points with rights-based advocacy and emergency response training, resulting in many becoming registered Kenya Red Cross Society volunteers.
- **Inclusive Programme Design and Implementation**
 - Co-designing projects with OPDs from the outset to ensure inclusion throughout planning and implementation.
 - Redesigning data collection tools to better capture detailed information about disabilities.
 - Providing targeted training for staff and volunteers on inclusive practices.
- **Targeted Outreach and Service Delivery**
 - Initiating direct outreach initiatives to refer individuals for medical support, assessments, assistive devices, and disability card registration with the National Council for Persons with Disabilities.
 - Adapting drought response in Turkana County to include household-level outreach and home visits, ensuring participation for those unable to attend community events.
- **Integrated Approaches for Sustainability**
 - Implementing integrated methods to lay the groundwork for sustained inclusive humanitarian action in diverse regions.

Successes

The partnership between CBM Global and the Kenya Red Cross Society has delivered tangible improvements in disability-inclusive humanitarian response across Kenya:

- **Inclusive Registration and Access**
 - Over 8,000 persons with disabilities registered with the National Council for Persons with Disabilities (NCPWD), enabling access to services and entitlements.
 - Persons with disabilities gained direct access to assistive devices, medical referrals, and disability cards through inclusive outreach efforts.
- **Institutional Change and Mainstreaming**
 - KRCS adopted a disability and social inclusion policy and revised its SOPs to embed inclusion across operations.
 - Inclusion became a cross-cutting priority in KRCS programming, with budget lines allocated and leadership commitment secured.
- **Improved Data and Targeting**

- Data collection tools were enhanced to disaggregate by sex, age, and disability, improving the accuracy of targeting and service delivery.
- Inclusive data enabled tailored responses, such as household-level medical outreach and prioritisation in evacuation planning.
- **Community-Level Impact**
 - Persons with disabilities reported increased participation in community events and decision-making processes.
 - OPDs contributed to county-level contingency and security planning, influencing local disaster preparedness strategies.
- **Attitudinal and Social Shifts**
 - Community sensitisation activities led to reduced stigma and greater recognition of the rights and capacities of persons with disabilities.
 - OPDs were recognised as legitimate and essential actors in humanitarian response.
- **Scalable and Sustainable Practice**
 - The inclusive model piloted in Bungoma and Turkana has been scaled across multiple counties.
 - The partnership is formalising through a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU), ensuring long-term collaboration and institutional learning.

Challenges and Difficulties

The most significant obstacle to OPD engagement was the initial reaction to involve OPDs only at the response stage rather than during the preparedness stage. If disability considerations are not part of the preparedness plans, the response will not be inclusive. In addition, persons with disabilities were considered a vulnerable homogenous group, forgetting that persons with disabilities face different risks and have different capacities and intersectionalities.

At the beginning of the engagement, this challenge occurred due to low levels of awareness of disability inclusion among the KRCS staff and volunteers as well as the community leaders and the community itself. However, by consistently engaging with OPDs in subsequent responses, building awareness and capacity of the KRCS team and building relationships with OPDs during non crisis times, trust and understanding were established and it became quicker to engage with OPDs from the design of new responses.

OPDs could still be better included within longer-term programs that would essentially build capacity of the organizations to function even in the absence of projects. The current activities for OPDs are largely as Self-Help groups, with opportunistic advocacy activities that are not necessarily structured. Such structure could come through longer-term capacity building and programming which could enhance inclusion qualitatively, even as numbers of OPDs and their membership increase.

Ongoing challenges with integrating inclusion into government programs still exist. The project partners have been working over the years to foster relationship with national and county government stakeholders to work towards translating inclusion from policy into practice.

What could others learn from this?

1. Building relationships with Organisations of Persons with Disabilities (OPDs) during non-crisis periods fosters trust and enables rapid, meaningful engagement during emergencies. Their involvement in planning, implementation, and monitoring enhances programme relevance and accountability.
2. Appoint inclusion advisers and train staff to integrate age and disability considerations into all program design and organisational management. This should extend to policy development and strategic planning. Institutional change is essential for sustainable disability-inclusive programming.
3. Revise data collection methodologies to be more inclusive, ensuring they capture the diversity of disabilities.
4. Tailor outreach and services to diverse needs. Adapt physical spaces and program designs to be accessible to all individuals, especially persons with disabilities, to ensure their full participation in programs and services.
5. Allocate a portion of project funds to disability inclusion and advocacy efforts. This should be coupled with training focal points within OPDs on rights-based advocacy and emergency response.
6. Encourage and support OPDs to engage effectively with government structures for more inclusive disaster risk reduction and policy making. Sustained engagement with national and county governments is crucial to translate inclusive policies into practice and scale impact.