DEFENDERS beyond LIMITS

HER VOICE, HER POWER

ADVOCACY POCKET GUIDE

Her Voice, Her Power

Embassy
of the Federal Republic of Germany
Nairobi

PROTECTION INTERNATIONAL
AFRICA

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Her Voice. Her Power.

Glossary

- **Advocacy -** A deliberate process of influencing decision-makers, institutions, policies, laws, practices, or public opinion to bring about positive change. In the human rights context, advocacy involves actions aimed at promoting and protecting human rights.
- **Duty bearers -** These are Individuals, institutions, or authorities that have an obligation to respect, protect, promote, and fulfil human rights. They may include governments, state institutions, public officials, police, courts, local authorities, and other actors with responsibilities under national or international law.
- **Lobbying -** A specific form of advocacy that involves directly engaging decision-makers or people with influence over a particular decision, law, policy, or practice to persuade them to take a desired position or action. For example, meeting with a Member of Parliament to advocate for amendments to a proposed law.
- **Policy -** A set of principles, decisions, guidelines, or courses of action adopted by a government, institution, or organisation to address a particular issue and guide decisions and actions. Policies can be formal or informal and may influence how laws, programmes, and services are implemented.
- **Campaign -** A coordinated series of activities and messages carried out over a specific period to achieve a particular advocacy objective or bring attention to an issue. A campaign may use public awareness, media, lobbying, petitions, demonstrations, social media, research, and engagement with decision-makers.

- **Narratives -** A collection or system of related stories that are articulated and refined over time to represent a central idea or belief.
- **Positive Narratives -** Stories and messages that promote constructive, empowering, and rights-affirming ideas while challenging harmful stereotypes and negative perceptions.

About PIA

Protection International Africa (PIA) is the regional hub for Protection International, based in Nairobi, Kenya. Our mission is to increase the agency of Human Rights Defenders (HRDs) and contribute to the creation of safe spaces for them to defend human rights.

We work in partnership with defenders to develop comprehensive protection strategies including capacity building in physical and digital security, psychosocial support, and advocacy to ensure that protection is locally rooted, sustainable, and transformative. We stand with HRDs to push back against criminalization and hold duty-bearers accountable.

At the heart of our work is a steadfast commitment to gender equality and disability inclusion. We prioritize support for Women Human Rights Defenders (WHRDs) who face intersecting forms of discrimination based on gender and disability. By creating inclusive, safe, and empowering spaces, we ensure that women HRDs with disabilities are not only supported in their protection but are actively centered as leaders and experts within the human rights movement.

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Background

Human Rights Defenders (HRDs) with disabilities often operate at the intersection of multiple forms of discrimination, facing unique systemic barriers that limit their visibility and influence in public decision-making. Despite their critical role in social justice movements, they are frequently marginalized by inaccessible spaces, tokenistic participation, and a lack of tailored resources. This background highlights the urgent need for advocacy strategies that are not only inclusive but deliberately designed to dismantle the specific hurdles that prevent HRDs with disabilities from fully exercising their agency.

This advocacy toolkit was developed to bridge the gap between intent and impact. Many existing advocacy models inadvertently exclude those with disabilities by failing to account for diverse access needs, from physical venue requirements to inclusive digital communication. By providing a structured, disability inclusive framework, this toolkit ensures that advocacy efforts are accessible, equitable, and effective. It transforms the often-overwhelming process of advocacy into a series of actionable, manageable steps that prioritize dignity and meaningful involvement.

Ultimately, this guide serves as a catalyst for movement building, empowering HRDs to reclaim their space in policy and legal arenas. It is designed to be more than just a manual; it is a practical roadmap for collective action. By equipping defenders with the right tools, strategies, and security protocols, we strengthen the broader advocacy movement, ensuring that when we speak for change, no voice is left behind, and duty-bearers are held truly accountable.

What is Advocacy?

Advocacy is the deliberate process of influencing decision-makers, institutions, policies, laws, practices, or public opinion to bring about positive change.



Lobbying involves the direct engagement of decision-makers including politicians, government authorities, and leaders of global institutions to influence their actions and support for a specific cause.

Key Distinction: Engagement through advocacy does not always require direct lobbying. For instance, facilitating a dialogue with a duty bearer to outline the necessity of protection strategies constitutes advocacy; however, specifically urging that official to endorse a legislative act to institutionalize such a framework is considered lobbying.

What does advocacy do?

1. Challenge discrimination
2. Influence laws and policies
3. Increase access to services
4. Hold duty bearers accountable
5. Change harmful attitudes and social norms
6. Mobilize community support

Core Principles for Inclusive Advocacy

- **'Nothing About Us Without Us'**: People with disabilities must lead or be equal partners in every stage of advocacy.
- **Intersectionality:** Acknowledging and addressing the overlapping layers of identity, such as gender, disability, and age.
- **Accessibility as a Right:** Providing reasonable accommodation is a fundamental right and a prerequisite for participation, not a favor

Shifts to consider when developing a positive narrative campaign

- Talk more about solutions, not only about problems
- Highlight what we stand for, not just what we oppose
- Embrace positivity

Advocacy Initiative

Steps for designing an advocacy initiative



1. Identifying the key issue and analysing of context

- What is happening?
- Why is it happening?
- Who benefits?
- Who is excluded?
- What opportunities exist for change?
- Analyze accessibility barriers in the current context.

2. SMART Objectives

Ideally, any goal or objective you come up with should fit the following criteria:

- **Specific:** Target a specific area for improvement
- **Measurable:** Quantify or at least suggest an indicator of progress
- **Achievable:** Specify who will do it
- **Relevance:** States why the objective is important, and how it contributes to the broader goal
- **Time related:** Specify when the result(s) can be achieved

Example of an empowering SMART objective: By December 2027, five county governments will have established and operationalized inclusive public participation frameworks, ensuring that Women Human Rights Defenders (WHRDs) with disabilities have the accessible information and reasonable accommodations necessary to influence local decision making and demand accountability.

Below is why it is SMART



Specific: Target the institutionalization of inclusive participation for WHRDs with disabilities at the county level.



Measurable: Measured by the number of counties (5) that adopt and fund these inclusive frameworks.



Achievable: Realized through strategic advocacy, technical guidance, and the collective agency of WHRD networks.



Relevant: Directly addresses structural exclusion and promotes the right to political and public participation



Time-bound: To be achieved by a clear deadline of December 2027.

Case Study: Advocacy for the Persons with Disability Act 2025

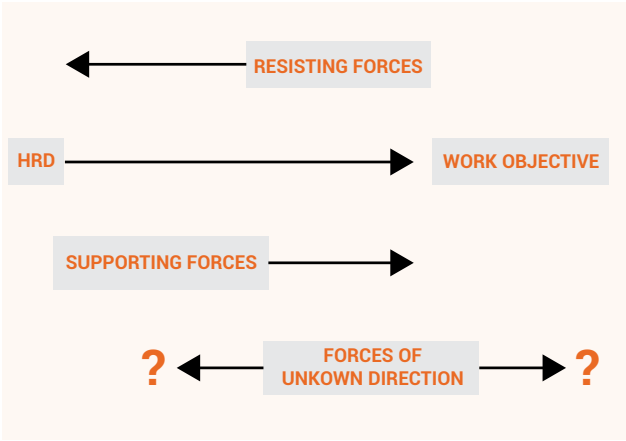
The Persons with Disability Act 2025 stands as a landmark achievement for inclusive human rights in Kenya. This success was driven by a robust collective advocacy network that brought together Human Rights Defenders (HRDs) with disabilities, civil society organizations, and disability-rights advocates.

By employing strategic engagement with duty-bearers and utilizing national human rights platforms, defenders ensured that the welfare of persons with disabilities was prioritized within public policy. This model of collective action illustrates how meaningful participation and organized pressure can translate legislative intent into a transformative framework for legal and institutional accountability.

3. Actors Analysis - Forced field analysis

When analyzing actors you need to focus on:

- The aims and interests of the different actors
- Actors' strategies in relation to supporting or resisting your advocacy initiative
- Actors' willingness to support or resist your advocacy initiative



4. Develop your advocacy message

An effective advocacy message should explain:

1. What is the problem?
2. Why does it matter?
3. What change is needed?
4. Who should take action?
5. What action should they take?

Example:

Women human rights defenders with disabilities continue to face barriers to participation in public decision-making because many consultation processes remain inaccessible. County governments should adopt and implement inclusive public participation procedures that provide accessible information, reasonable accommodation, and meaningful opportunities for engagement.

5. Select advocacy strategies and activities

Choose activities that are appropriate for your objective and target.

Possible strategies include:

- Policy dialogue and engagement
- Meetings with decision-makers
- Coalition-building
- Public awareness campaigns
- Media engagement
- Research and policy briefs
- Community mobilization
- Strategic communications
- Public forums
- Petitions
- Capacity strengthening
- Digital advocacy
- Litigation or legal advocacy, where appropriate
- Accessibility & Digital Inclusion: Intentional use of sign language interpreters, tactile interpretation, accessible meeting formats, and inclusive digital tools.

Example

Strategy	Possible Activity
Decision Maker engagement	Hold meetings with relevant county officials
Coalition Building	Establish an advocacy working group
Public Awareness	Conduct a social media campaign

6. Develop an advocacy action plan

Activity	Person responsible or organisation	Timeline	Resources needed	Expected results
Conduct public awareness activities	Communications team	6 months	Communication materials- internet, communication person, social media accounts	Increased public awareness and support

Quick Accessibility Checklist

- **Venue:** Is the location physically accessible for all participants (ramps, elevators, wide doorways)?
- **Communication:** Are materials available in Braille or large print? Are sign language interpreters booked in advance?
- **Digital:** Are online meeting platforms and shared documents compatible with screen readers?
- **Mindset:** Is the 'Nothing About Us Without Us' principle actively practiced in the decision-making process

7. Assess risks and develop mitigation measures

Advocacy may involve political, legal, security, digital, reputational, or operational risks.

Security Action Planning Template

Possible Risks (Physical, Digital, Psychosocial or operational	Risk level based on Probability and Impact	How does it affect me or my work	Vulnerabilities	Capacities	Preventative measures	Responsive measures
Physical: Harassment, intimidation, threats, or hostility during public forums or advocacy engagements	Medium to High – Moderate probability and high impact	Participants may feel unsafe, withdraw from advocacy activities, or experience physical or emotional harm.	Visibility as women HRDs with disabilities, gender discrimination, stigma, limited security arrangements, and participation in sensitive public discussions.	Existing protection networks, organisational safeguarding procedures, trusted partners, and established relationships with relevant authorities.	Conduct risk assessments before events; establish security and safeguarding plans; identify safe entry and exit routes; provide clear reporting mechanisms; avoid sharing sensitive participant information unnecessarily	Move affected persons to a safe location; provide medical, legal, or protection support; document and report incidents with informed consent; review and strengthen security arrangements.

Psycho-social: Tokenism or exclusion from meaningful decision-making	High – High probability and medium to high impact	Women HRDs with disabilities may be invited to participate but may not have genuine influence over decisions, reducing trust and limiting advocacy outcomes.	Power imbalances, discriminatory attitudes, lack of accessible information, inadequate consultation time, and limited representation in decision-making spaces	Lived experience and expertise of women HRDs with disabilities, advocacy skills, collective organising, and partnerships with disability-rights organisations.	Ensure meaningful participation from the planning stage; provide information in accessible formats and in advance; establish clear roles; support participants to contribute to decisions; monitor whether recommendations are acted upon.	Raise concerns through established feedback mechanisms; request corrective action; document cases of exclusion; engage allies and oversight institutions where appropriate.

Possible Risks (Physical, Digital, Psychosocial or operational	Risk level based on Probability and Impact	How does it affect me or my work	Vulnerabilities	Capacities	Preventative measures	Responsive measures
Digital: Online harassment, gendered abuse, smear campaigns, or threats targeting women HRDs with disabilities	High – High probability and high impact	Online attacks may damage reputations, cause emotional distress, discourage participation, and undermine the credibility of the advocacy initiative.	Public visibility, limited digital security knowledge, exposure of personal information, weak privacy settings, and discriminatory narratives related to gender and disability.	Digital security training, secure communication platforms, organisational communication policies, and access to digital protection partners.	Conduct digital risk assessments; strengthen account security through strong passwords and multi-factor authentication; review privacy settings; develop a communications and online engagement protocol; limit the sharing of personal information	Preserve evidence; report abusive content; provide psychosocial and digital security support; issue factual responses where appropriate; activate protection partners and review digital security measures.

Digital Advocacy & Online Safety



Encrypted Communication: Use Signal or Wire for all sensitive advocacy discussions to ensure end-to-end privacy.



Privacy Hygiene: Audit social media privacy settings monthly and disable public location sharing to minimize your digital footprint.



Incident Response: Establish a clear protocol for documenting and reporting online harassment or doxing to trusted protection networks.

8. Develop monitoring and evaluation indicators

Expected Result	Baseline	Interven-tion	Indicators	Means of Verification

Steps for Designing an

STEP 01



Identifying the Key Issue and Analysing of Context

What is happening? Why is it happening? Who benefits? Who is excluded? What opportunities exist for change? Analyze accessibility barriers in the current context

SMART Objectives

Specific: Target a specific area; **Measurable**: Quantify an indicator of progress; **Achievable**: Specify who will do it; **Relevance**: States why the objective is important; **Time related**: Specify when the result(s) can be achieved



STEP 02

STEP 03



Actors Analysis - Forced Field Analysis

What is happening? Why is it happening? Who benefits? Who is excluded? What opportunities exist for change? Analyze accessibility barriers in the current context

Develop Your Advocacy Message

What is the problem? Why does it matter? What change is needed? Who should take action? What action should they take?



STEP 04

Advocacy Initiative

STEP 05



Select Advocacy Strategies and Activities

Policy dialogue & engagement, Meetings with decision-makers, Coalition-building, Public awareness campaigns, Media engagement, Research & policy briefs, Community mobilization, Strategic communications, Public forums, Petitions, Capacity strengthening, Digital advocacy, Litigation or legal advocacy, and Accessibility & Digital Inclusion

Develop an Advocacy Action Plan

Is the location physically accessible, Are materials available in Braille or large print? Are sign language interpreters booked, Digital, and Mindset



STEP 07



Assess Risks and Develop Mitigation Measures

Possible Risks (Physical, Digital, Psychosocial or operational, Risk level based on Probability and Impact, How does it affect me or my work, Vulnerabilities, Capacities, Preventative measures, and the Responsive measures

Develop Monitoring and Evaluation Indicators

Expected Result, Baseline, Intervention, Indicators and Means of Verification



Lobbying



Note: Lobbying can also be used especially when seeking to influence the decisions, policies, or laws of government officials. During a lobbying session, we seek to provide lawmakers with expert data, technical insights, and sector specific views on a specific subject matter to which they are about to make a decision.

There are 2 types of Lobbying

Direct Lobbying: Communicating face to face or directly with lawmakers and government staff regarding specific legislation and or policy.

Grassroots Lobbying: Trying to shape public opinion so citizens contact their elected officials to take action.



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