

## **(Mis)schooling of Children with Disabilities in Post-independent Kenya**

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### **Abstract**

Kenya adopted Competency Based Curriculum to produce engaged, empowered, and ethical citizens. However, inaccessible school infrastructure is leaving behind children with disabilities. Informed by data from individuals with disabilities and Kenyan and international agencies, this study uses disability studies in education to analyze the interaction of school structures and disability to understand the locus of Kenyan children with disabilities in the society. Findings show that inaccessible school infrastructure investments exclude children with disabilities and threaten Kenya's Vision 2030 poverty eradication goal. Needed is the reconceptualization of disability within a broader model of equity in the Kenyan education system.

**Keywords:** School, Inclusion, Disability, Infrastructure, Prejudice, Accessibility

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## INTRODUCTION.

At the dawn of independence from Britain in 1963, Kenya prioritized war against ignorance, diseases, and poverty (Mazrui & Wiafe-Amoako, 2015; Sifuna & Oanda, 2014; wa Thiong'o, 2011). Five decades later, Kenya is still grappling with these issues, as thousands of children and youth with disabilities are left behind by an exclusionary education system (Kiru, 2019). Challenges stem from lacks, misplaced priorities, and broken education policies that contribute to the mismanagement of allocated resources (Sifuna & Oanda, 2014). The central and county governments provide education to millions of school-age children, yet little government support adequately addresses the educational needs of children with disabilities, because disability is personalized and privatized.

Foreign-based religious organizations started and have run many pre- and post-independence special education programs in Kenya. Examples include the Thika Institute for the Blind established in 1946 (Chikati et al., 2019), Salvation Army Joytown Primary Special School established in 1962, Salvation Army Joytown Secondary School established in 1980, the Nyabondo Rehabilitation Center established in 1963 by the Catholic Church, and the Lutheran Church Special School for Mentally Challenged established in 1980. The Kenyan government's awareness of the significance of special needs education did lead to the 2009 National Special Needs Education policy framework (Kiarie, 2014), and positive results include the incremental attachment of special education units to regular mainstream public schools, starting at 926 schools in 2002 and increasing to 1574 in 2008 (Sifuna & Oanda, 2014). But these efforts have not matched the investment and commitment to educating students without disabilities. So problems with access to (quality) education persist in terms of limited resources, mainly inaccessible buildings, shortages, and a lack of well-trained teachers in schools, despite a national policy that addresses special needs education (Kiarie, 2014; Kiru, 2019; Sifuna & Oanda, 2014). The slow pace of education system reform slows the emancipation of people with disabilities. Investment in inaccessible school infrastructure causes illiteracy and poverty.

In this paper, I examine the interaction of disability and the education system in post-independence Kenya and how the exclusive educational structure perpetuates inequities that condemn children with disabilities to perpetual poverty. The purpose is to understand how the education system, influenced by the free-market economy and ideologies of ability, predisposes children with disabilities to illiteracy and poverty. Taking this approach helps us realize how disability-based discrimination negates children with disabilities, qualifies their relegation, and justifies their inferiority and pushing to the margin of society (Devlin & Pothier, 2006).

Achievement of Kenya Vision 2030 demands the authentic inclusion of children with disabilities in schools. Accessible quality education can help promote the meaningful participation of citizens with disabilities in national development as valued members of society. Following these premises, this paper is guided by the following question: *How does the implementation of building codes impact the inclusion of and access to quality education for children with disabilities in Busia County in the era of universal primary and secondary education in Kenya?*

### Literature Review

#### Kenya Education System

Kenya is a country in the eastern part of sub-Saharan Africa. Its European-style education system can be traced back to 1728, and in 1846, the missionaries of the Church Mission Society established the first mission school in Rabai, Mombasa. Later, more missionaries introduced European-style formal education inland as the construction of the railway eased traveling (Kinuthia, 2009; Sifuna & Oanda, 2014). The initial 7-4-2-3 education system required seven years of primary schooling, four years of secondary schooling, two years of high school, and three years of university education. The 8-4-4 system of education, which required eight years of primary education, four years

of secondary education, and four years of university education, was adopted in 1985. Then in 2017, Kenya adopted the 2–6–3–3 education system, two years in pre-primary, six years in primary (Grades 1–6), three years in junior secondary (Grades 7–9), three years in senior secondary (grades 10–12), and three years in university. The 2–6–3–3 education system is based on the Competency Based Curriculum, which aims to produce engaged, empowered, ethical citizens. Besides the Kenya government-mandated curriculum, some private schools follow the 2–6–3–3–3 British education system, for example to serve children of foreigners and diplomats residing in Kenya (Kiru, 2019).

### **Disability Prevalence**

The 2019 census puts the population of Kenya at about 48 million (Kenya National Bureau of Statistics). This translates to about 7.2 million persons with disabilities (based on the 15% World Health Organization [WHO] estimate of the population of people with disabilities in any society). Since the introduction of free primary education in 2003, the enrollment of children in primary school has climbed from 5.9 million to about 7.6 million (Republic of Kenya, 2006; Society for International Development [SID], 2004). The National Special Needs Education Survey 2014 showed that of the 19 million youth below age 21, about 1.9 million (10%) had a disability, 60% lived in the rural areas, and 40% lived in the urban areas. The Voluntary Services Overseas (VSO) International organization and the Ministry of Education, Science and Technology (MoEST) surveyed the status of special education in Kenya, the prevalence of disabilities of children age 0–21, and the appropriateness and acceptability of the educational structure, learning facilities, and resources. This 2014 report revealed a 13.5% prevalence of disability and that about 19% of children with disabilities were orphaned, and over 16% of children with disabilities were out of school. In 2016, about 45,000 students, prekindergarten through high school, were in special schools, and over 100,000 were out of school. Low enrollment is caused by a culture of deficit (Bunning et al., 2017), inadequate resources in public schools, and a shortage of special education teachers (Kiru, 2019).

The VSO-MoEST Report 2014 also found that only 1% of special education teachers were certified to teach different disability categories (e.g., deaf, blind, albinism, intellectually disabled). A large teacher-student ratio (e.g., 1:58; Kenya Bureau of Statistics, 2017) and a shortage of highly qualified teachers (KIPPRA, 2009; Mulinya & Orodho, 2015) have also made access to quality education difficult for children with disabilities. Overcrowding in schools after the Kenya government implemented its universal education program in 2003 to achieve the global initiative Education for All (Kiru, 2019; Mulinya & Orodho, 2015; UNESCO, 2016) has made it difficult for teachers to practice inclusion and attend to the needs of students whose abilities, needs, interests, and learning preferences differ from those of the majority. The shortage of teachers has compounded this problem, partly due to limited rigor in teacher training programs (Kiru, 2019) and the freeze in teacher employment by the Ministry of Education that started in 1998 after the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund (IMF) introduced economic austerity programs in Kenya (Oketch & Rolleston, 2007). Generally, low school enrollment at nursery, primary, and secondary school levels has negative results on college enrollment (Mulinya & Orodho, 2015). In 2016, only 645 students with disabilities out of a student population of about 450,000 were enrolled in the 22 public universities, 14 chartered private universities, and 13 universities with a Letter of Interim Authority.

### **Right to Education and Deficit Culture**

The right to education of Kenyan children with disabilities is documented in the Persons with Disability Act 2003, the Children's Act 2001, and the Basic Education Act 2013. Section 7(2) of the Children's Act 2001 declares that "Every child shall be entitled to free basic education which shall be compulsory per article 28 of the United Nations' Convention on the Rights of the Child." Unlike previous legislation, which directly addressed the rights of persons with disabilities, including the right to education, the Basic Education Act 2013 guarantees rights to free and compulsory basic education to all children (Republic of Kenya, 2012).

Special education trends in Kenya are informed by practices of the global North, and its disability laws are influenced by the British Special Educational Needs and Disability Act 2001, the America's Education of All Handicapped Children Act 1975 (currently, the Individuals with Disabilities Education Improvement Act 2004), and United Nations (UN) treaties such as the UN Convention on the Rights of People with Disabilities (CRPD) 2006, which Kenya ratified in 2008. The UNESCO Salamanca Statement adopted by the World Conference on Special Needs Education: Access and Quality requires the international community to promote inclusive schools by implementing practical and strategic changes in the education systems (Centre for Studies on Inclusive Education, 2018). The UNESCO (2016) Sustainable Development Goal 4 (SDG 4) of 2030 aims to "ensure inclusive and equitable quality education and promote lifelong learning opportunities for all" by 2030 (p. 7). The Education 2030 Incheon Declaration also reiterates a commitment "to making the necessary changes in education policies and focusing our efforts on the most disadvantaged, especially those with disabilities, to ensure that no one is left behind" (UNESCO, 2016, p. 7).

Kenyan children with disabilities live in a society based on traditional norms (e.g., stigma, superstitions, rituals) (Mugambi & Nicodemus, 1976) and international proclivities (Kiarie, 2014; Kiru, 2019). The global North philosophies of disability are proliferated globally by international establishments such as the WHO, Amnesty International, the UN, the IMF, and the World Bank (Barile, 2003; Barnartt, 2010; Barnes & Sheldon, 2010; Redley et al., 2012). So there is a growing trend recognizing disability as a biological and environmental state (Barnartt, 2010; Oliver, 1996, 2017; Union of the Physically Impaired Against Segregation [UPIAS], 1976), which is reflected in the Persons with Disabilities Act of Kenya 2003 and the 2010 Kenyan Constitution, which prohibits disability-based discrimination. Article 27, Clause 4 of the Constitution of Kenya 2010 accords persons with disabilities equal rights to those accorded to nondisabled citizens of Kenya (p. 24). Article 54, Clauses 1 (a–e) and 2 affirm the entitlement of persons with disabilities to humane treatment: "access to educational institutions and facilities," "to reasonable access to all places, public transport, and information," "to use Sign language, Braille or other appropriate means of communication," and "to access materials and devices to overcome constraints arising from the person's disability" (Constitution of Kenya, 2010, p. 37). Laws, policies, and treaties guarantee state protection to citizens with disabilities as well as access to resources, services, and opportunities, including education, healthcare, and employment (Republic of Kenya, 2010).

The population in schools of children with disabilities remains low despite government efforts (Nyeris & Koross, 2015). Disability remains a stigmatizing condition (Bunning et al., 2017; Danforth, 2014; Goffman, 1963), and many families opt not to school their children with disabilities, to protect them from violence and aggression (2014 VSO and MoEST report). Many families also live in poverty, so they are easily discouraged by unfriendly environments (e.g., a lack of assistive technologies, facilities, equipment, and transportation), especially when they must choose between basic needs (e.g., water, food) and paying school fees. The effort to improve the quality of life of families of children with disabilities has largely focused on school infrastructure.

### **Accessible Buildings in Kenya**

The 2003 Persons with Disabilities Act of Kenya recognizes the significance of involving disabled persons in national affairs and, therefore, of the need to make access to facilities, employment, and services a priority. About accessibility, the Building Code of the Republic of Kenya 2009 (pp. B-44–B-47) has provisions on facilities, such as construction measures for ramps, handrails, wheelchair space, elevators, doors, hallways, curbs, water closets, and water cubicles. The government is responsible for enforcing building standards through the Kenya Bureau of Standards. However, implementation of these standards has been hampered by political inaction, leading to haphazard and low-quality (and inaccessible) construction, which has resulted in collapsing (school) buildings, causing injuries, fatalities, the destruction of property, and the destabilization of people's lifestyles. To rein in the irregularities in the construction industry, Kenya adopted the Eurocode in 2016, which

replaced the British Building code in use since 1926. A part of the *Safety and accessibility* section of the Eurocode states, "... construction works must be designed and built, taking into consideration accessibility and use for disabled persons" (Regulation [EU] No 305/2011, p. 34). It is expected that the adoption of the Eurocode will address new and complex construction challenges in Kenya (Kimani & Musungu, 2010) and will increase the mobility of persons with disabilities as well as access to community schools.

## METHODS

This paper is part of the ongoing study of the education systems of Kenya and their impacts on the education and lives of children with disabilities. I use a disability studies in education (DSE) framework to understand the locus of children with disabilities in the Kenyan school structure. DSE stems from Disability Studies, an interdisciplinary body of sociopolitical and intellectual work that positively positions disability to problematize and which interrogates practices and rhetoric that abnormalizes disability and qualifies and justifies the exclusion of people with disabilities unless they are cured by nondisabled professionals (Oliver, 2017; Prince, 2009; Siebers, 2008; Union of the Physically Impaired Against Segregation [UPIAS], 1976). Then the DSE framework helps with conceptualizing the interrelatedness of ideologies, the politics of education, and the exclusion of children with disability in regular public schools (Baglieri et al., 2011; Danforth, 2014; Oliver, 2017).

The process helps illuminate how principles of education turn Kenyan children with disabilities into invalid citizens who are worthless for the state to invest in (Danforth, 2014; Gabel & Connor, 2014; Prince, 2009). The state of political education suggests that the (social, political, economic, and cultural) stability outcome of a nation is intertwined with its investment in promising healthy children (Danforth, 2014; Gabel & Connor, 2014; World Bank, 2017). This visualization of the outcome of education in terms of a national economy that is dependent on nondisabled adults is the basis of values that contribute to the empowerment of nondisabled children and the disempowerment of children with disabilities (Danforth, 2014; Gabel & Connor, 2014; Oliver, 2017). Based on this reasoning, impairments biologically make an individual less human and, therefore, worthless to invest in. In contrast, a lack of biological impairment makes one a flawless human being who is worth investing in for the sake of the posterity of the society. Unless treatments can normalize the impaired person, they do not merit national interest or, therefore, state funds (Oliver, 2017; Prince, 2009; UPIAS, 1976). Through DSE, we understand how links of access-education-culture influence the marginalization of children with disabilities (Devlin & Pothier, 2006; Siebers, 2008).

### Data Collection and Analysis

This study is based on two batches of data on the education status of children with disabilities in Kenya. The study started in 2006–2007 and then continued 2017–2020. I adopted the study periods to trace the changes happening within the education system relative to the schooling of children with disabilities after disability legislation and treaties. During these periods, I collected data through observations, field notes, and photography in 50 public schools, that is, 40 primary schools and 10 secondary schools, in Busia County, Kenya. Thirty-five primary schools were commuter/day coeducational schools, while five were single-sex residential schools (two boys' schools and three girls' schools). Five were coeducational secondary day schools, and five secondary schools were residential; one was coeducational, two were boys' schools, and two were girls' schools.

One of the girls' high schools is considered a national school. These are prestigious public schools that admit students that have scored over 300 out of 500 points in the Kenya Certificate of Primary Examination. They perform quite well in the national exams (i.e., Kenya Certificate of Secondary Education-KCSE), so these schools are sought after by parents. I also collected data in the rural parts of western Kenya, around Lake Victoria. I focused on rural schools because, like today, most Kenyan families live and work in rural areas, and many children attend rural-based schools.

I collected data through photographs, document analysis, observations, interviews, and field notes. I decided to take pictures, because they capture the essence of rural life and people's culture (with respect to education and infrastructure) that can help readers visualize the locus of people with disabilities in Kenyan society. Documentary photography is the use of picture language to present information (Stryker, 1963, cited in Wang & Burris, 1997). It presents facts about events and objects as perceived by the senses in ways that words may not adequately relay. Documentary photography principles include taking a proximal position to capture the authentic image; staying steady and focusing faithfully on the object or subject or activity; finding unusual angles; making a quick survey of circumstances; capturing moments that promote harmony; getting identification; respecting and valuing subjects; avoiding fear of other people in the vicinity; practicing photo shooting; and protecting photos and what they represent (Bogre, 2012). Guided by the principles of documentary photography (Bogre, 2012), I took images using a digital camera and iPhone, because of their portability and ability to store the images in the iCloud. Data in my iCloud account could only be accessed with my password. When it came to taking photos, I chose what, how, and where to shoot to capture (in)accessible infrastructure. To understand the interactions between access, buildings, and schooling of children with disabilities, data were thematically analyzed using NVivo software and guided by the DSE framework (Danforth, 2014; Erevelles, 2014; Oliver, 2009). Next, I focus on the school system, with attention on school buildings, to highlight the issues of accessibility to education.

## FINDINGS

Physical infrastructure impacts access and the participation of children with disabilities. I collected data from 50 public regular day and boarding primary and secondary schools in the rural parts of Busia County in Kenya, and none of the school buildings and classrooms and latrines I visited met the Eurocode building standards to support the inclusion of children with disabilities. The infrastructure was either inaccessible or in a dilapidated state or located far away from the classes (e.g., the latrines). Nine out of ten schools had no ramps or had ramps constructed in disregard of the Eurocode guidelines. Eight out of ten school buildings had raised floors or a verandah of at least 30 cm to control rainwater from flooding classrooms. Some buildings had stairs only, while others had stairs with ramps added. Ramps were significant modifications to the premises, but some were at inappropriate locations or were very steep, had inadequate landing spaces, were very smooth and slippery during rainy seasons, or had no rails or side barriers/stops to protect users from sliding. All these factors made them dangerous, predisposed users to further injury, and made mobility inefficient. Also, all schools had pit latrines far away from the main classes to reduce a foul smell. However, this made them difficult to access especially during rainy season.

Lacking or limited facilities were also prevalent in both primary and secondary schools, from low-endowed schools to nationally designated "well-endowed" schools. Figure 1 shows a model, inclusive public residential girls' high school, one of the high-performing schools in Busia County. It is one of the few schools that had modified its environment to practice inclusion. The school buildings originally had no ramps, but after 2010, ramps were added on specific blocks to accommodate the needs of children with mobility disabilities. The slopes are at specific areas of the building blocks (mostly at the center), which makes access to the classrooms possible, but only from one direction. The ramps are also steep, and even though they are relatively rough and have grooves to increase friction and reduce slipperiness in case of rain, they lack a proper landing at the bottom and top and have no hand bars or side barriers to prevent accidental sliding in the wrong direction. The ramps' bottom landings are open to bumpy marram ground, which makes them challenging and dangerous for people with mobility issues, especially wheelchair users.

I also found the classrooms overcrowded, all the way to the entrance. All the classrooms were about 20 meters square, with a capacity of 20 students, but they held double the number because of the high demand for admission. This would make navigation and peer-peer and student-teacher interactions challenging and would make the interactions of students with disabilities with the learning materials difficult. In such congested classrooms, it is hard to include children with disabilities and, in

some situations, is impossible to accommodate those with assistive technologies that take extra space (e.g., wheelchair users). The lack of enough space makes these spaces uncondusive to learning for children with disabilities. The challenge of class size adds to the problems of natural and built barriers to education (i.e., muddy paths during the rainy season, rugged paths due to marram and pebbles, unevenly constructed ramps).



**Figure 1.** Collage of a residential regular national public girls' high school in the rural part of Kenya, which practices inclusion. Photo 1: Theo is standing on the path next to a partial building; Photo 2 shows combined stairs and ramps to the principal's office; Photo 3 shows an open marram area with the classroom building block in the background; Photo 4 is the entrance to the classroom building, consisting of the stairs and the added-on ramp; Photo 5: Theo is standing on the path next to the added-on ramp to the classroom building; and Photo 6: Theo in the foreground on the marram path to the assembly ground and with classroom buildings in the background.

## Description of the Pictures

In Photo 1, Theo is standing on the marram path next to an entrance to a verandah of a partially visible classroom building, with two stairs of unequal height and breadth. The smallest stair is about eight inches high and 48 inches wide, while the more prominent stair leading to the verandah is about 12 inches high. In the background are two building blocks. One houses the principal's offices at the extreme right, and the partially visible section is part of the form-three classrooms. The second building block at the back holds form-two classrooms that obscure another building block at the back for form-one classrooms. The distance between the building blocks is about 30 meters. In between the classroom blocks are trees, hedges, a curbside, and uneven grounds. The path is flat, with some bumps made of loose gravel and protruding tree roots. The picture was taken around 11 a.m. on a bright sunny day, so there are light and there are shadows of buildings, trees, and other paraphernalia (e.g., bags). I took Photo 1 in 2007 when there were no accessible structures such as ramps. Photos 2–6 were taken in 2017 after public schools started building accessible structures, primarily ramps.

Photo 2 is the front part of the entrance to the principal's offices, about 20 meters from the main gate (on the right side of the building, not visible in the image). The entrance to the building has both stairs and ramps. The gradient of the first ramp outside the verandah seems well laid for wheelchair users. The second ramp that directly leads to the principal's offices is reasonably steep but has enough landing at the foot of the ramp. Both ramps are relatively polished and are likely slippery in the rain. Nor do they have sidebars or side barriers, which again makes them dangerous to wheelchair users. The two ramps are at the end of the 20 cm stairs and seem to be add-ons. The polished stairs are big and wide (about 20 cm high by 2 m depth by 3 m wide). The verandah on the principal's offices' side has a concrete wall dividing it from the rest of the verandah of the building, which houses four form-three classes. The trimmed green hedge also demarcates the boundaries of the settings. In the background, and less visible, is the form-four building block.

Photo 3 shows an open marram area with the classroom building in the background, trees at the front, and canopies at the back, with a trimmed hedge. This is the route to the assembly open ground and is used by vehicles, such as the school bus and other commercial vehicles that deliver products and school supplies. The marram is bumpy because of footprints created when people walk on soggy ground. In front and in the back of the building block are trees (three in the front) and a well-trimmed hedge about 1 m high, 30 cm wide, and 50 m long (though not wholly visible in the picture). There is also a stretch of a curbside that prevents rainwater from running into the classrooms as well as a 10 m long, 2 m wide, 15 cm high paved stretch without a ramp that leads to the entrance of one of the classrooms in the form-four building block. Along the curbside are three trees, just next to the form-four building block.

Photo 4 shows part of a classroom building, with two wooden door openings and three metallic and glass windows and a combination of a ramp and stairs leading to the verandah. This add-on ramp is steep but has spacious landings at top and bottom. The landing at the bottom joins a rugged marram path to the open space that runs from the main gate through the assembly space back to the dining hall and other school buildings and open spaces around the school compound. Also, the ramps are relatively rough and have grooves to increase friction and reduce slipperiness in the event of rain. Like all ramps in the school, this one does not have hand bars or side barriers to prevent one from sliding in the wrong direction. On the left side of the ramp is a 68 cm wall, part of the flowerbed barrier. The ramp is universally designed to be used by both persons with and without disabilities. Although the ramp is meant for students and teachers and staff with mobility issues, there is a 20 cm curb at the entrance to the one of the visible classrooms. On the verandah is a girl walking past a sleeping security dog, and inside one of the four classrooms are students seated at the desks and studying; one is quite near the door, which indicates overcrowding.



Photo 5 is a continuation of Photo 4, though from a slightly different angle. The image shows Theo standing on the patchy marram path next to the ramp to the partially visible building block that houses form-four classrooms. The front wall of this building has two inscriptions in black paint: “SELF DISCIPLINE” and “TEAM WORK.” The ramp is centrally placed to allow students with mobility issues to access the 2 m wide, 60 m long, 60 cm high verandah (at the highest point). The ramp is an add-on to the existing structure.

In Photo 6, Theo is in the foreground, standing in the middle of the open patchy dry marram path. On the left is the building block housing four form-four classrooms. On the right is the building block that houses four form-three classrooms and the administration offices. In the middle is the yet to be completed outdoor water fountain, and at the farthest distance is the dining hall. There are curbsides on both sides of the path, primarily to control rainwater from flooding in the buildings. Along the curbside on both sides of the open spaces and paths are the well-trimmed 1 m high hedges.

## DISCUSSION

### **(In)accessible Education Infrastructure**

Both natural and built environments can either enhance or hinder the participation in learning of children with disabilities. Accessible infrastructure greatly influences the schooling of these children in community schools. School buildings affect administrators’ perspectives on a child’s behavior and, therefore, on the child’s admission to, enrollment in, attendance at, and ability to be involved in learning activities and events. Buildings also influence teacher-student relationships and peer-peer interactions as well as the education perspectives of families of children with disabilities and the likelihood of such children calling the school another home. Oluremi and Olubukola (2013) studied the effect of facilities on the academic performance of students with disabilities in inclusive learning settings in Nigeria. They found that dilapidated or limited facilities or a lack of essential facilities and materials contributed to the low academic performance of students with disabilities. The Children’s Act 2001, the Basic Education Act 2013, the Persons with Disabilities Act of Kenya 2003, the 2010 Constitution of Kenya, the Eurocode 2016, and the 2009 Special Needs Education policies recognize the significance of access to early childhood, primary, and secondary education for children with disabilities and emphasize the significance of accessible environments and the rights of children with disabilities to educational opportunities. Yet building codes are flouted, and resources are mismanaged (Mulinya & Orodho, 2015) by education personnel least prepared for or interested in empowering children with disabilities (Chomba et al., 2014).

Beginning with the introduction of universal primary education, there has been increased construction of schools nationwide and, in Busia County, increased modifications to old schools to improve accessibility. But many changes have fallen short of the standards. Current assessment of school infrastructure reveals it does not meet the Eurocode building standards needed to be accessible to children with disabilities. Much of the failure is caused by inadequate funds, due to corruption, mostly by government officials. As happens in a distribution chain with many middlemen, officers in the educational chain often claim “their share” as funds allocated to school infrastructure are distributed from the Treasury to the Ministry of Education and all the way to the school. School administrators also take illicit pay for awarding tenders to construction contractors. By the time the funding reaches the school and is given to the contractor, there is not enough to buy needed resources and pay for labor. Besides the disincentive due to inadequate resources and little pay, many contractors/masons have little knowledge of building codes or disability laws to allow them to construct a facility amiable to the needs of children with disabilities. The 2019 corruption index ranks Kenya at 137 out of 180 countries (Transparency International, 2020). Besides corruption, infrastructural problems are exacerbated by inadequate government funding of special education programs (Chomba et al., 2014), by lacking or limited technology (Kinuthia, 2009), by underprepared teachers, by a shortage of teachers with training to teach children with disabilities, and by inadequate

policy implementation in the education system (Gathumbi et al., 2015; Kiarie, 2014). The possibility of children with disabilities performing to their potential is unlikely in such learning environments, which increase academic, cognitive, and social demands. Inadequate disability facilities and services are most likely to hinder students' school attendance and participation in learning.

Moreover, many children with disabilities and their families do not receive adequate support despite increased disability awareness. Even though the special education system requires implementation of an individualized education program (IEP) for every child with disabilities, all families and four out of five teachers in this study were not aware of IEPs or the processes involved. Because of ignorance on the part of school administrations, teachers, and parents, no effort is made to demand accountability from the administration, even where barriers are obvious. The inaction of these stakeholders in education not only leaves education inaccessible to most children with disabilities in Busia County, but it also contributes to ongoing biased practices whose effects will reverberate for generations. Thus, the low enrollment in schools of children with disabilities is projected to continue, as current community schools remain exclusionary spaces.

### **Role of Government for Citizens with Disabilities**

Poverty reduction is both a national and a global goal. Kenya is committed to improving the quality of life of its citizens, as evidenced in Vision 2030, launched in 2008 to spur economic growth and development to eradicate poverty (Kenya National Bureau of Statistics-b; Mulinya & Orodho, 2015; Rose, 2013; United Nations, 2013). The economic development initiative aligns with the 2030 United Nations' goal, which is a "plan of action for people, planet, and prosperity." The UN goal needs member states to eradicate poverty to achieve viable progress (<https://www.un.org/sustainabledevelopment/development-agenda/>). As noted by the World Bank Group (2019), "Reducing poverty and inequality are central to the UN's Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) and the World Bank Group's twin goals for 2030: ending extreme poverty and promoting shared prosperity in every country in a sustainable manner." Kenya's high-cost investment in educating its young citizens reveals that the government values education as a human resource essential to national growth and development and to the reduction of poverty and inequality. Kenya's major funding of the education system comes from taxes, although the budget is also supplemented by loans from international financial institutions, such as the African Development Bank, the World Bank, and the IMF, and by grants from foreign governments (Kiru, 2019; World Bank Group, 2016). Whereas Kenya realizes and recognizes that its growth, development, and success in the global sphere depends on the quality of education young citizens can access (Republic of Kenya, 2007), the education system remains binary and exclusionary to vulnerable groups because of lack of political will. Much of the language of disability rights articulated by government officials is rhetorical and insubstantial. Education officials and government agencies often raise disability matters in public forums to win supporters, but few measures are enacted to implement policies. Balsera (2011) examined the interactions of human rights and human capital discourses in post-genocide Rwanda and the impact they have on education of disadvantaged children— children with disabilities, girls, and orphans. The study found that capital discourse although created awareness about educational resources, it also promoted disparities and biases against marginalized groups. Considering that education is a basic human right, tackling exclusionary education practices becomes a priority. Talk without action stifles disability rights and makes it difficult to implement inclusion and address infrastructural problems, therefore predisposing children with disabilities to a perpetually failing adult life.

Not prioritizing the education of children with disabilities continues the colonial tradition after formal education was introduced in Kenya by European explorers. The education structure enabled formal learning for Europeans, semiformal learning for Asians, and a vocational/manual-related curriculum for nondisabled Africans (Gebrekidan, 2012; Kiru, 2019). Missing in the picture were disabled Africans, whom the colonial government considered worthless (Gebrekidan, 2012). Now it

seems that the racial hierarchies in pre-independent Kenya that valued Europeans over Asians and Africans, and Asians over Africans, have been replaced by the dis/ability and social-economic hierarchies in which majority nondisabled and elite Africans are valued over disabled and poor Africans (Wesseling, 1996). As in pre-independence Kenya, when Africans with disabilities occupied the lowest point in human nomenclature (Gebrekidan, 2012), in post-independent Kenya, individuals with disabilities are excluded in schools and denied a good quality of life. Thus, ableist practices emanate both from African traditions and the global North's conceptualization of disability as a deficit. The traditional prejudice against people with disabilities, coupled with the pre-independence notions of disability as a human flaw as well as the notion of competition and greed for wealth and power, now influence government-sponsored disability programs for Africans with disabilities. The belief that impairments make one less human has been weaponized to invalidate and deny education to children with disabilities.

The social construction of a child with disability as an inferior and alien being continues to influence governments denying their responsibilities. Even during the colonial period, a few lucky children with disabilities were admitted to special residential schools established by religious organizations (Kiru, 2019). These fortunate children received formal or vocational education that increased their functionality in the capitalist world. Unfortunately, any progress made by religious organizations in educating children with disabilities before and after independence is likely to be lost unless government and society recognize the benefits of inclusive education for all learners. It seems that post-colonial Kenya governments, as in the pre-colonial era, have retained the legacy of relegating the education of children with disabilities to nongovernmental agencies. Support for educating children with disabilities is demoted and consigned to the realm of family and private or (foreign) philanthropists rather than to the government (Kuper et al., 2015; McKenzie, 2011; McKenzie & Formanek, 2011). Considering that the Kenya governments control the purses, the laws and policies, and the systems of (dis)empowerment, this delegation misses key facts about the nation-state's responsibility to its citizens with disabilities (Prince, 2009). It also mischaracterizes the materiality of people with disabilities and their potential to contribute to national development. While investment in the education and welfare of children with disabilities by individuals and by non-state agencies is important, the government's commitment to the education and welfare of citizens with disabilities is equally significant. Currently, the educational support for children with disabilities seems to oscillate between commitment and noncommitment often dictated by the political economy. This contributes to unachievable goals and to the outright neglect of these children. It is critical to change education systems, especially school infrastructure, starting with existing biased, stigmatizing beliefs about disability (Bunning et al., 2017).

### **Normalizing the Invisible Child and Intentional Inclusion**

Despite the good intention of Kenya governments to include children with disabilities in their community schools, infrastructural barriers remain, meaning that millions of these children remain in limbo. Many of them age out and miss the prospects that schooling provides, so they join unemployed youth and adults living in poverty. A 2010 UNESCO report referencing the 2008 Ministry of Education (MoE) findings revealed that in 2003, only 86,424 children with disabilities were in school. Of that population, 13,303 were enrolled in special schools, and 73,121 were in special units and integrated programs (attached to regular schools). That number increased in 2008 to 37,202 students in special schools and 171,079 in special units. In contrast, the 2009 MoE report showed that most children with disabilities had no access to education. The report also revealed that the total population of students with disabilities enrolled in special schools, units, and integrated programs was 26,885 in 2003 and 45,000 in 2008. The reality is that millions of children with disabilities have no access to education (going by the 15% WHO population estimate).

The lack of planning regarding educational needs of children with disabilities, whether at the national or school levels, indicates a disregard for these children's right to education. The theory of

supply and demand (Hicks, 1986) shows that an increased supply lowers the prices of goods and services, leading to more buying, and vice versa. Based on this concept, an improved education system or school environment (i.e., accessibility and high performance) is likely to create a high demand for admission (Mulinya & Orodho, 2015; Todaro, 1994). Todaro (1994) noted that the demand for education is influenced by costs, school infrastructure, and prospects for a better career. Thus, it is evident that county and national governments are aware that implementing universal primary and secondary education and enacting disability laws would cause demands for education and the need for more well-built schools. Unfortunately, this has not fully been considered in the implementation of universal primary and secondary education and the introduction of inclusive education. In turn, this leads to the establishment of inaccessible school infrastructure that has made schooling costly and prohibitive for children with disabilities.

Violence against people with disabilities in Kenya is multifaceted and complex, because it is perpetrated both by individuals and by state agencies (Prince, 2009). It involves overt actions, such as killings of children with albinism, and covert actions, such as stealing resources meant for disability programs. In the mix of difficulties, people with disabilities and their allies are involved in challenging norms that have long pushed these people to the margin of society. The resistance is causing shifts from an understanding of disability as an individual misfortune to the understanding of disability as a natural human phenomenon. Conversations about disability are informed by the internationalization of disability, primarily through scholarships and international organizations such as the UN. The globalization of understanding disability as a biological, material, and social phenomenon is a growing trend in Kenyan society. It has contributed to the enactment of disability legislations and the introduction of inclusive education to address historical injustices.

Inclusion is the viable option to increase schooling opportunities for children with disabilities, who continue to be left behind because a few special schools scattered across the country cannot accommodate them. The concept of inclusive education involves educating children with disabilities, together with their peers without disabilities, in community schools (Aseka, 2013). To achieve this process, schools are required to change their infrastructure to accommodate different, diverse learning styles and educational needs of children to facilitate their functionality and belonging. Inclusive education aims to right the school system to allow the learning involvement of children with disabilities. However, it is a gradual process of correcting the wrongs in the education system to promote equity and equality through individual transformation and school reforms (Danforth, 2014; Gabel & Connor, 2014).

## CONCLUSION

In this paper, I have argued that Kenya's education system is contributing to the miseducation of children with disabilities and that their treatment as second-class citizens hinders access to quality education, which is vital in order for Kenya to achieve the 2030 Kenya Vision of poverty eradication and to attain the 2030 United Nations plan of action for people, planet, and prosperity goals. Kenya's realization of these 2030 visions will require prioritization of the education of children with disabilities. This in turn will require building accessible learning institutions and creating a climate and culture that nurtures the inclusion of children with disabilities in schools and in the broader community. However, this requires political will and a grassroots movement to change the culture of hegemony. Although Kenya, in conjunction with development partners, is investing in poverty reduction programs (e.g., education), successful poverty reduction requires a wholistic approach that considers the multifaceted nature of poverty and the ripple effect of ignorance, disease, and poverty on communities. Future studies could focus on the role of the families of children with disabilities in the inclusion movement and on the perceptions of teachers in the community schools.

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