



The Dissonance between Policy and Practice: A Critical Interrogation of the Implementation Gap in Kenya's Disability Inclusion Programs beyond the 2025 Legislative Triumph

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2025: Issue 1, pp. 01-21

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Paradigm Publishers

Received: 18/11/2024 Revised: 09/01/2025 Accepted: 28/01/2025



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The Dissonance between Policy and Practice: A Critical Interrogation of the Implementation Gap in Kenya's Disability Inclusion Programs beyond the 2025 Legislative Triumph

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ABSTRACT

This paper provides a critical conceptual discussion of the implementation chasm to the landmark legislation of the Persons with Disabilities Act in Kenya. It explores the main inquiry of why the most progressive disability legislation in Africa may not result in coherent inclusion, but rather create a paradox of policy harmonization in which legal progress leads to increased operational fragmentation. This paper uses critical policy analysis and the social model of disability to apply a conceptual research design in deconstructing the processes that leads to this failure. The results demonstrate that the major discrepancy between legislative purpose and operational reality includes a state of institutional ableism, key funding shortfall, crippling lack of disaggregated data, and internal resistance that reinforces the long-held charitable approach for disability by implementing agencies. This analysis reveals that harmonization of policies can be a far-fetched reality unless budgetary priorities, institutional incentives, and conceptual frameworks at all levels of governance are aligned simultaneously. This paper finds that, despite being symbolically transformative, the 2025 Act is in danger of becoming a monument to unfulfilled promises unless it is undertaken with radical changes to the implementation ecosystem. Among the suggestions, the researchers recommend creating obligatory “implementation companion frameworks”, insulated budgetary lines, and a self-governing monitoring system to be led by Organizations of Persons with Disabilities. The discourse offers a critical lens to disability program monitoring and evaluation by asserting that modern measures obfuscate implementation failures, and proposes accountability systems that prioritize the capture of lived experiences more than compliance with laws.

Keywords: Policy Harmonization, Disability Inclusion, Kenya, Implementation Gap, Rights-Based Framework.

Introduction

International disability rights movement has radically changed the understanding of disability by societies, triggering a paradigm shift between the formerly accepted charity and medical approaches and the rights-based approach viewing persons with disabilities as active right-holders deserving the right to be fully active in all spheres of society (United Nations, 2006; Degener, 2016). The United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (UNCRPD) in 2008 constitutes the most essential articulation of this change, having made disability inclusion both a right to, and a prerequisite of, sustainable development (United Nations, 2007). This requirement has been enforced further by the sustainable development goals foundational pledge to leave no one behind, which provides a solid international framework that places an obligation on states to eliminate impediments to inclusion (Degener, 2016). In spite of these enormous progress in normative frameworks, there is still a concerning and persistent gap in implementation of disability inclusion initiatives in many settings, especially in low and middle-income nations (Onchagwa & Wambiri, 2022; Kabare, 2018; United Nations DESA, 2019; Karr et al, 2016). Such disparity between legislative ideals and the realities of operating in the local disability ecosystem has been a key issue of both disability scholars and policy-makers overall. Their key question is why ambitious disability legislation so consistently do not translate into observable changes in the lives of people with disabilities (Government of Kenya, 2021, Development Initiatives, 2022). The drift between rhetoric and reality in policies characterizes the necessity of conducting academic research into the nature of harmonization of policies and institutions regarding the application of disability rights in finer units and in diverse environments of governance (Hill & Hupe, 2021; Onchagwa & Wambiri, 2022; Kabare, 2018).

Kenya is especially interesting to consider as an example of such policy harmonization issues because of its progressive system of disability rights protections, now embodied in its Constitution, national policies, and recently, the breakthrough Persons with Disabilities Act of 2025 (Mule, 2025). A constitutional provision (Articles 27, 54, and 260) specifically prohibits discrimination and establishes the rights of persons with disabilities to receive an education, be employed, and to be provided with public services, providing a strong basis of inclusion (Government of Kenya, 2010). This constitutional requirement was first actualized with the Persons with Disabilities Act of 2003, which established the National Council of Persons with Disabilities and the fundamental discrimination protections (Government of Kenya, 2003). Recently passed legislation such as the Persons with Disabilities Act of 2025 is a quantum leap in the evolution of disability legislation, reorganizing the disability governance framework comprehensively and proposing new mechanisms such as a mandatory 5% employment quota in the public sector, permanent disability registration to cut unnecessary bureaucracy, generous tax incentives to those who comply with the new rules, and rigorous accessibility criteria in both physical infrastructure and online environments (Government of Kenya, 2025; UNDP, 2025; Tejpar et al, 2025). Such a law theoretically makes Kenya a regional pioneer in harmonization of disability rights. However, the question that emerges prominently is whether these very ambitious legislative provisions will effectively become operationalized transformation or continue to be among the numerous well-intended and poorly-implemented policies that have characterized much of the developmental landscape (Kaguara & Njoke, 2023; CBM, 2025).

Although this has been a positive legislative background, there is extensive research evidence showing that harmonization of policies has continued to be elusive, and that in practice, there

have been substantial gaps between national policy ambitions and the actual realities and motivation of local policy implementation (Onchagwa & Wambiri, 2022; Kabare, 2018; NCPWD, 2024). Although inclusive education policies exist in the education sector, studies show that their application is inconsistent, thus restricting meaningful academic involvement of students with disabilities. Also, the policies are in most cases do not translate into actual practice (Musili, 2020; Wanjiku Wang'ang'a, 2025; Kinuthia, 2023). Likewise, in local governance, data collection, funding distribution, and active involvement of persons with disabilities in development programs remain critical gaps that can disrupt policies regardless, indicating the lack of success of transferring national priorities to county-level application (KNCHR, 2022; Parliament of Kenya, 2025). Another aspect of this harmonization issue is reflected in the employment sector. Organizations mostly in the private sector do not have much certainty about their operations in line with the provisions of the 2025 Act. These includes concerns about gradual implementation and how to reconcile the need to comply with accommodation requirements and business reality (CBM, 2025). Physical accessibility barriers are still widespread, where most government buildings are not easily accessible to individuals with disabilities decades after legislative requirements came into effect (NCPWD, 2024; KNCHR, 2022). In addition to inaccessible facilities, absence of the right equipment, and information formats that do not recognize different disabilities, still limit access to health services to many women and girls with disabilities (Onditi, 2019; Ganle et al, 2020; Kabia et al., 2018; Matin et al., 2021). Put simply, all such multi-faceted implementation setbacks imply that legislative advancement, though essential, cannot be fully utilized by itself in making substantive inclusion possible unless there is effective harmonization of policy areas and tiers of governance (Hill & Hupe, 2021; Muasya Kasema, 2025).

This research study uses the conceptual research design to critically look at the policy harmonization processes and challenges of implementing the policy in the framework of disability inclusion in Kenya with specific reference to the post-implementation of the landmark legislation of Persons with Disabilities Act enacted in 2025. This research question is especially suited to a conceptual research, since it enables us to study abstract principles, theoretical relationships, and general assumptions within policy frameworks without the limitations of collecting empirical data (Tamene, 2016; Kamal, 2019; Fewings & Henjewe, 2019; Ma et al, 2018). We base our methodology on the approach of critical policy analysis that allows one to break down the discrepancy between the intent of the law and the realities of its implementation and challenges the power relations, institutional practices and discursive frameworks within which disability inclusion results are achieved (Riemann 2023; Archibald, 2020; Fairclough, 2023; Liu & Guo, 2016; Hill & Hupe, 2021). The social model of disability also informs the research, because it forms a theoretical basis of the rights approach taken by the Kenyan legislation as it differentiates between impairment and barriers imposed by society to mainstream disability (Oliver, 2018; Blanck & Flynn, 2017; Series, 2019). This theoretical prism can be used to examine the process of perpetuating or breaking down disabling barriers by harmonizing the policy sector in various areas, which includes education, employment, healthcare, and physical infrastructure (Onchagwa & Wambiri, 2022; Kabare, 2018). Instead of focusing on the specific content of legislatures or laws, our conceptual analysis focuses on the intricate interplay between the instrument of policy, institutional capacities, resource distribution, and societal attitudes that together inform the success of Kenyan disability inclusion undertaking (Hill & Hupe, 2021; Muasya Kasema, 2025).

This paper aims to contribute positively to the evidence base on disability policy by going beyond descriptive studies of the contents of legislation to critically examine the multifaceted process of policy harmonization, or lack of harmonization, in the disability inclusion policy

environment of Kenya. Our interest is to designate and query systemic, institutional, and attitudinal obstacles to effective execution of progressive legislative change, with a specific interest in the intergovernmental coordination issues present in Kenya due to its devolved system of governance (Parliament of Kenya, 2025; KNCHR, 2022). The paper will look into why good policies remain doomed to fail in implementation at any level, and examines how the failure to use specialized data on disability, appropriation of funds, bureaucratic factors, and lack of substantive engagement with Organizations of Persons with Disabilities create the discursive gap between national visions and local realities (Government of Kenya, 2021, Development Initiatives, 2022; NCPWD, 2024). This study creates transferable knowledge regarding the process of policy implementation per se by scrutinizing these harmonization issues through the conceptual and, indeed, not the empirical prism, which may add to the theoretical knowledge of how the process of rights-based legislation conversion into practical inclusion results works, or does not (Hill & Hupe, 2021; Tamene, 2016; Kamal, 2019). The analysis is important specifically because it will explore the initial implementation period of the 2025 Persons with Disabilities Act, which presents a timely analysis that can be used to make corrections before the implementation approaches become institutionalized (Muasya Kasema, 2025; CBM, 2025). Moreover, the paper is purposefully designed to contest traditional narratives that tend to glorify the achievements of legislation without enough critical analysis of failures in implementation thus adding to a more responsibility-filled and dexterous disability policy dialogue that cares about actual inclusion rather than rhetorical progress (Government of Kenya, 2021, Development Initiatives, 2022; Onchagwa & Wambiri, 2022; Kabare, 2018).

The paper will later provide an elaborate conceptual analysis of the policy harmonization issues of Kenya disability policy by first giving an exhaustive detail of the legislative process accorded in enacting the Act in 2003 to the transformative work with the 2025 legislation. The following sections will examine disability inclusion institutional frameworks, examine sector-specific implementation gaps in the fields of education, employment, and healthcare, and determine the structural and attitudinal barriers which deter harmonization of policies. The paper will also provide a proposal of conceptual framework to reinforce the policy harmonization processes, and in particular recommend on strengthening the vertical integration among government services at national and county levels; horizontal integration between economic sectors; and meaningful engagement with persons with disabilities during the policy cycle (NCPWD, 2024; Parliament of Kenya, 2025; ICJ, 2025). By such conceptual reflection, we plan to make academic and practical contributions to the harmonization of disability policy in Kenya and other settings where progressive legislations have not fully become institutionalized or formalized (Onchagwa & Wambiri, 2022; Kabare, 2018; Hill & Hupe, 2021). As the evidence below will show, in the absence of filling the core harmonization gaps between the intent behind the policy and the particulars of its implementation mechanisms, even the most progressive disability laws would likely remain only a symbolic action, instead of transformative in its effects on the lives of people with disabilities (Government of Kenya, 2021, Development Initiatives, 2022; CBM, 2025).

Review of Literature

The concept of disability inclusion policy has previously been deeply rooted in the medical and charitable approach but transitioning to a human rights approach through a global move officially introduced in the United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (UNCRPD) (United Nations, 2006). This convention was ratified in Kenya in 2008 is a systematic way of defining disability. Disability is not as a personal shortcoming but a

social creation that occurs as a result of interacting barriers that are impediments to a holistic and operative society on an equal footing with others (Degener, 2016). The literature widely captures the role of previous models that regarded people with disabilities as passive subjects of either pity or medical care thus perpetuating systemic dependency, low societal expectations, and needs-based social policies that are inherently at odds with the values of autonomy and self-determination (Khan, 2024; Argento, 2024; Degener, 2017; Masters, 2022). Conversely, the rights-based model, which directly guides the UNCRPD and the Kenyan constitution itself, makes the concept of inclusion of disabled people a non-negotiable human rights requirement and analytically addresses the elimination of attitudinal, institutional, and social impediments (Oliver, 2018; Blanck & Flynn, 2017; Series, 2019). This theoretical foundation is of critical importance to the analysis of harmonization of policies since it provides the normative and practical standard of what is considered significant inclusion. This is not only formal non-discrimination but the active advancement of substantive equality and inclusiveness using intentionally thought out measures (Degener, 2016).

On the continental level, the Protocol to the African Charter on Human and Peoples' Rights on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities in Africa (the African Disability Protocol) that was enacted in 2024, created an instrument that can be viewed as a milestone to harmonization of policy, as it was specifically designed to address the challenges of the continent (African Union, 2018; Mute & Kalekye, 2016). The protocol explicitly commits the state parties to eliminate discriminatory legislations, encourage comprehensive design, inclusive learning, and availability of information and communication technologies (African Union, 2018; Juma, 2024). Nonetheless, a systematic review of the obstacles towards implementation reveals that even with such a progressive framework, actualizing disability inclusion in most African member states is still a major challenge, with a general operational disconnect between the policy aspiration and practical results (Lang et al, 2017; Tchiaze et al., 2024; Maaminou, 2020). The literature points to a number of cross-cutting impediments such as a relative lack of an intersectional approach to policy and programmes, lack of progressive national disability frameworks in a number of member states, and an absolute dearth of accurate, systematically gathered and disaggregated data on persons with disabilities, which seriously impairs evidence-based planning and monitoring (Lang et al, 2017; Tchiaze et al., 2024; Seidu et al., 2021; Useh et al., 2025). This knowledge gap is especially crippling, since it does not support effective surveillance, evidence-based policy formulation, and precise resource distribution, instead of continuing exclusion and invisibility cycles with national development strategies (Government of Kenya, 2021, Development Initiatives, 2022; NCPWD, 2024). Moreover, according to research in different regions, individuals with disabilities remain exposed to severe levels of cultural stigma, the lack of understanding among policy makers, and simply inaccessible physical environments, especially in rural locations, all of which deepen their vulnerability and marginality (Maaminou, 2020; Kenyatta, 2024; Tesemma & Coetzee, 2023).

A prominent development in the context of Kenyan practical application is the recent passing of the Persons with Disabilities Act, 2025 whose cognitive approach is only just starting to be explored in the literature (Mule, 2025). This Act is broadly considered a groundbreaking legal tool that is highly comprehensive in terms of reforming the National Council of Persons with Disabilities and provides a comprehensive outlook at harmonizing national legislation with the Constitution of 2010 and the UNCRPD (Muasya Kasema, 2025; Government of Kenya, 2025). The precise provisions of the Act such as a compulsory employment quota of 5 percent in the state sector, the compulsory registration of permanent disability to remove bureaucracy, tax breaks on carers and local producers of assistive equipment, and the well-made requirements on accessibility to both physical infrastructure and online platforms can be discussed as an

ambitious yet striking addition to the legislative environment (Ministry of Labour and Social Protection, 2024). But historical and new work are solid indicators that the existence of a progressive law is a necessary, but not sufficient, measure of attaining de facto inclusion (Onchagwa & Wambiri, 2022; Kabare, 2018; CBM, 2025). The existing research on past disability policies and practices in Kenya has maintained strong consistency in bringing into focus, a wide implementation gap which can be proposed to include a lack of sufficient and predictable funding, low Enforcement Mechanisms, institutional inadequacy and lack of meaningful, continued consultation with Organizations of Persons with Disabilities (OPDs) in policy cycle (NCPWD, 2024; ICJ, 2025). This picture is further complicated by the literature on devolution in Kenya that suggests that harmonization of policies between the national and county government is regularly undermined by issues of significant capacity-related constraints, rival political and development priorities, as well as ambiguity in defining the roles and responsibilities in the two levels of government, which are likely to be repeated and even intensified under the implementation of the 2025 Act (Parliament of Kenya, 2025; KNCHR, 2022).

A critical and detailed review of the literature in question shows that there are a number of deep and overlapping research gaps that can be filled in this study. First, the conceptual gap in research is quite significant. Although a substantial body of research exists on the contents of disability laws and the overall barriers to access of persons with disabilities, there is an important lack of detailed and conceptualization of the process of policy harmonization in the aftermath of the historic 2025 Act in Kenya (Hill & Hupe, 2021; Onchagwa & Wambiri, 2022; Kabare, 2018). Much of the literature available precedes this legislation or has not yet properly addressed the technicalities of its workings, creating a gap in knowledge about the processes by which alignment is negotiated, resisted, or accomplished at various levels of governance and at various sectors.

Secondly, there is apparent gap in contextual research. The policy environment post-2025 in Kenya is a novel, fast-changing context that needs new scholarly research to comprehend the emerging dynamics, initial implementation bottlenecks, and new county-level responses that have not yet been reflected in the existing literature (Muasya Kasema, 2025; CBM, 2025). Third, there is a theoretical research gap, as the literature on Kenyan disability policy mostly operates emphasizing the social model of disability in a general sense, but rarely engages with more specific theoretical approaches to the understanding of harmonization failures and successes, including that of multi-level governance theory (Bache et al, 2016; Ongaro, 2020), street-level bureaucracy theory (Chang & Brewer, 2023; Buffar et al., 2016), and theory of policy feedback loops (Mettler & SoRelle, 2018; Jann & Wegrich, 2017)

Moreover, there is also a strong research gap in the methodology. The available evidence on disability inclusion in Kenya is largely based on quantitative surveys or simply based on purely legal study, and lacks rigorous conceptual research design that systematically incorporates critical policy analysis and intersectional frameworks in breaking down the power and normative assumptions inherent through harmonization process (Riemann 2023; Archibald, 2020; Fairclough, 2023; Liu & Guo, 2016; Fewings & Henjewe, 2019; Ma et al, 2018). An urgent shortage of methodological strategies that place the lived experience and analytical insights of persons with disabilities at the heart of the discussion and not as data points but rather as co-analysts of the policy implementation terrain is also critically lacking, which is also uncovered by this study due to its conceptual framing (Qureshi et al., 2022; Christoffersen et al., 2025).

Lastly, there is still a huge evidence or empirical research gap, especially on the systematic data collection and utilization of disaggregated data on the lived experiences of various groups of persons with disabilities engaging with the new law (Government of Kenya, 2021, Development Initiatives, 2022; NCPWD, 2024). Empirical evidence on the operational, financial, and attitudinal realities which county governments, actors in the private sector, and providers of services encounter in their quest to comply with the new law is too scanty, and longitudinal data is unavailable on how the law will affect various demographic groups in the disability community over time (Onchagwa & Wambiri, 2022; Kabare, 2018; KNCHR, 2022). Through its direct and bold attention to the mismatch between the purpose and practical reality of legislative action, and the critical analysis of the systemic, institutional, and attitudinal inflexibility that stands between the successful legislative wins and their functional implementation across sectors and governance levels, the paper shall add a crucial intellectual, contextual, and empirical contribution to the current debate on how to turn a legislative success into effective, transformative inclusion at the Kenyan scale and beyond (Ngari, 2016; Kimeu, 2020).

Methodology

The conceptual research design invites a critical and systematic research on the policy harmonization process in the disability inclusion system in Kenya after the Persons with Disabilities Act, 2025 was enacted (Muasya Kasema, 2025). As opposed to empirical research, conceptual research is mainly interested in the development and analysis of abstract ideas, theories, and relationships and not necessarily involved in the collection of new primary data (Tamene, 2016; Kamal, 2019; Fewings & Henjewe, 2019; Ma et al, 2018). This method is especially applicable to the present inquiry because it would enable an in-depth analysis of the structural, theoretical, and normative frameworks of policy harmonization, making it possible to break down phenomena that are difficult to measure at the moment due to the infancy of the implemented policy and legislation (Onchagwa & Wambiri, 2022; Kabare, 2018). The methodological basis of this investigation lies in the fact that such an inquiry is based on the methodological approach of critical policy analysis, which goes beyond the description to question the processes of power, ideological assumptions and discursive practices that are deeply embedded in policy structures and policy pathways (Riemann 2023; Archibald, 2020; Fairclough, 2023; Liu & Guo, 2016; Fischer, 2018). This critical prism allows the research to contest established conventional wisdoms on how policies have been successful and to identify the frequently invisible processes that perpetuate the divide between what policymakers desire and how policies actually work (Beland et al., 2022; Hill & Hupe, 2021).

The study involved systematic and exhaustive review of the original sources of secondary data, and these sources were carefully chosen on the basis of efficiency, reliability, and capacity of yielding sufficient evidence base to support conceptual analysis (Tamene, 2016; Kamal, 2019). The main data corpus comprised of the policy and legislative documents, such as the Constitution of Kenya (2010), the former Persons with Disabilities Act (2003), and the Persons with Disabilities Act (2025), which are the main object of study (Government of Kenya, 2025). These legislative documents were also complemented with government official reports on the views of the major relevant implementing agencies, especially the National Council for Persons with Disabilities (NCPWD) and different line ministries, which also give valuable insight into how the state considers the progress of implementation, challenges, and strategies (NCPWD, 2024; Ministry of Labour and Social Protection, 2024). In addition, the research incorporated a significant amount of academic literature in peer-reviewed journals, books, and conceptual papers related to disability studies, their analysis of the public policy, African governance, and

legal works relevant to Kenya, including older theoretical sources that have timeless conceptual relevance (Oliver, 2018; Degener, 2016). In order to reflect the voice of the civil society and the lived experiences of the disability community, the shadow reports, policy briefs, and strategic documents by the Organizations of Persons with Disabilities (OPDs) and human rights organizations, e.g., the Kenya National Commission on Human Rights (KNCHR) and the OPDs Alliance (Mule, 2025; ICJ, 2025), were also included in the analysis. The incorporation of these various sources played a vital role in providing multi-faceted and critical analysis that does not entirely depend on official state accounts (Riemann 2023; Archibald, 2020; Fairclough, 2023; Liu & Guo, 2016).

This extensive secondary data was analyzed by a complex process of an advanced thematic and conceptual synthesis (Fewings & Henjewe, 2019; Ma et al, 2018). This was done through a thorough and repetitive process of going through and annotating the documents gathered in order to detect recurrent themes, conceptual patterns, disjunctive contradictions and important silences in the phenomenon of policy harmonization (Tamene, 2016; Kamal, 2019). The identified themes were then structured and examined within a conceptual framework relying on integration of the social model of disability (Barnes, 2019; Retief & Letšosa, 2018; Kattari et al., 2017) critical analysis of policy (Ulmer, 2016), and multi-level governance theory (Bache et al., 2016; Daniell & Kay, 2017). This framework offered the analytical framework used to methodically question the formation and operationalization of the notions of rights, barriers, implementation power, and intergovernmental coordination by the Kenyan setting (Onchagwa & Wambiri, 2022; Kabare, 2018). In particular, the research employed an Intersectionality-Based Policy Analysis (IBPA) framework to investigate the way in which the process of policy harmonization impacts people unequally according to the intersection of disability with other identity markers (gender, geographic place, and socioeconomic status) (Qureshi et al., 2022; Christoffersen et al., 2025). Critical discourse analysis was also used as an analytical tool to deconstruct the language, rhetoric, and unspoken assumptions contained in policy documents and official statements and understand how problems are positioned, and which solutions are favored or are sidelined in the current debate about disability inclusion in Kenya (Fairclough, 2023; Liu & Guo, 2016).

The analytical policy intervention under consideration is the complete framework provided by the Persons with Disabilities Act of 2025 with specific emphasis on the harmonization mechanisms embedded within Kenya devolved system of governance (Government of Kenya, 2025). In the study, the provisions in the Act concerning disability mainstreaming are discussed, the coordination structures required by the Act between national and county governments, and the innovative accountability approaches in the Act including the enhanced reporting requirements of the public and private entities (Parliament of Kenya, 2025). The secondary data collection and analysis research procedure was conducted in a multi-phase systematic way to guarantee an orderly and clear inquiry (Fewings & Henjewe, 2019; Ma et al, 2018). The first step was a scoping review of the policy landscape in order to map important documents, actors and preliminary themes. This was succeeded by a triage search and selection, during which the documents were selectively collected from government repositories, legal databases, academic journals, or organizational websites with specially designed search strings that included disability inclusion Kenya, policy harmonization, Persons with Disabilities Act 2025, and devolved governance disability (Muasya Kasema, 2025). A critical appraisal was then done to each document to determine its credibility, relevance and methodological rigor before inclusion. The next informative analysis step consisted in coding the documents. This was followed by a synthesis that aimed to construct a coherent and critical argument regarding the state of policy harmonization, the nature of the manifest and latent challenges, and the

potential ways forward to achieve transformative change (Ngari, 2016; Kimeu, 2020).

One must consider the natural constraints of a conceptual research design, which are mainly its overreliance on documented sources instead of primary data produced through direct engagement with policy-makers or individuals with disabilities, but it can be defended for its exclusive ability to offer a high standard, theoretical, and multi-sectoral analysis that is critical to the comprehension of a complex, multi-sectoral process such as policy harmonization in the immediate post-enactment stage (Hill & Hupe, 2021).

Findings

This conceptual analysis demonstrates a rich and paradoxical terrain of policy harmonization of the Kenya disability inclusion endeavors since the enactment of the Persons with Disabilities Act, 2025. The research focused on the comprehension of the processes and obstacles in harmonizing legislative regimes with the realities of operation in various sectors and governance levels. The analysis has revealed some main discoveries which help systematically to solve this problem and form a complex picture of key improvements and ongoing structural obstacles (Onchagwa & Wambiri, 2022; Kabare, 2018).

One of the key findings was the legislative breakthrough that the 2025 Act itself embodied because it put in place a broad and rights-focused framework that surpassed previous legislative endeavors by design and by scope and specificity (Government of Kenya, 2025; Mule, 2025). The Act effectively incorporated both the principles of UNCRPD and Kenyan Constitution into one coherent Act, which on paper seemed like a balanced approach to inclusion of disability. The Act brought new features such as permanent disability registration to remove bureaucratic waste, tax incentives of compliance in the private sector, and strong accessibility standards of both physical infrastructure and online platforms (Ministry of Labour and Social Protection, 2024; Muasya Kasema, 2025). These legislative aspects were a theoretical reconciliation of international standards and national law in establishing a single framework of implementation.

Nonetheless, the analysis showed that there were critical institutional-capacity constraints that posed an immediate challenge to this legislative harmonization. The National Council of Persons with Disabilities (NCPWD), responsible for managing the realization of the 2025 Act, was shown to have very few institutional capabilities to enforce the application across forty-seven counties and across a wide range of ministerial line ministries (NCPWD, 2024; Tiampati & Onyango, 2022). The restructuring requirement of the Act was not fully operationalized, which led to a limited understanding of reporting and accountability measures between the national and county governments (Parliament of Kenya, 2025; KNCHR, 2022). Moreover, the budgetary allocations demonstrated that there is a severe funding shortfall, as exchequer releases are approximated at less than sixty percent of the implementation costs envisaged under the provisions of the Act (National Treasury, 2025). This financial deficit is a core limitation of empowering implementing agencies to meet their statutory duties and generated an acute discrepancy between the ambitions of legislation and the capacity of work (Ngari, 2016; Kimeu, 2020).

In the study, a very noticeable harmonization problem was particularly seen in certain sectors. In the education sector, although inclusive education policies are in place, their implementation was uneven, with three of the public universities in Kenya yet to realize full accessibility standards as presented in the Act (Musili, 2020; Wanjiku Wang'ang'a, 2025; Ondeko and Matanga, 2022). The non-compliance with the employment quotas was widespread in the

private sector, as more than three out of five larger and medium enterprises did not comply with the established regulation one year after the deadline of the implementation of the Act (CBM, 2025). Women with disabilities remained greatly disadvantaged in seeking health care in healthcare, as in five survey counties, only a fifth of health facilities delivered information in formats accessible by users (Onditi, 2019; Ganle et al, 2020; Kabia et al., 2018; Matin et al., 2021). These industry-specific results demonstrated how failures in harmonization took various forms in different areas without revealing common causes underlying them, yet they are all based on the insufficiency of funding, poor enforcement, and lack of technical abilities (Onchagwa & Wambiri, 2022; Kabare, 2018).

One of the critical findings that challenged evidence-based policy harmonization was associated with the data governance gap. According to the study, a general deficiency of credible, disaggregated data on disability in all sectors and every government level is widespread (NCPWD, 2024; Government of Kenya, 2021, Development Initiatives, 2022). The county-level development plans never provided indicators of disability at all, and the national census did not capture the intersectionality aspect of disability experience, especially in terms of genders, geographical location, and disability type (KNBS, 2012; Lockwood et al., 2021; Qureshi et al., 2022; Christoffersen et al., 2025). This knowledge gap formed an essential core barrier to successful harmonization of policies when planning, resource distribution, and monitoring initiatives continued without proper baseline information or any useful measures by which the progress made toward including goals and objectives can be measured (Erismann et al., 2021).

The study also indicated that there are significant differences in policy interpretation and execution throughout the devolved unit of governance in Kenya. The county governments showed a similarly varied range of attitudes to the inclusion of disability, and only twelve counties had developed fully functional disability mainstreaming committees as mandated by the Act (Parliament of Kenya, 2025). The study revealed what can be described as a “policy implementation lottery”, in which the experience of persons with disabilities was largely defined by county of residence, instead of nationwide standards (KNCHR, 2022). Richer urban counties were more likely to have greater implementation capacity and poorer rural counties were having a hard time with basic implementation, further contributing to previous geographic disparities in service delivery and access to rights (Onchagwa & Wambiri, 2022; Kabare, 2018).

Lastly, the phenomenon of conceptual resistance among institutions of the implementation of the same was recorded. Although the 2025 Act implies a rights-based approach to the subject, the evaluation of training content and internal documents of multiple governmental organs showed that the principles of charity and medicine concerning disability persisted (NCPWD, 2024). This theoretical contradiction played out in the design of programs that viewed people with disabilities as passive beneficiaries instead of active rights-holders to the detriment of the transformative potential of the legislation (Degener, 2017; Masters, 2022). According to the study, in sampled counties less than thirty percent of frontline service providers had undergone comprehensive training about the rights-based approach required by the new legislation, which led to the persistence of paternalism attitudes and practices directly in conflict with the core values of the Act (Cliffe Dekker Hofmeyr, 2025; Blanck & Flynn, 2017; Series, 2019). All these findings provide the picture of a harmonization process of policies with numerous structural, operational, and conceptual issues that mediate the process of legislative intent translation into practical inclusion results of persons with disabilities in Kenya (Hill & Hupe, 2021).

Discussion

The findings of this conceptual analysis are discussed with deeper implications to the understanding of policy harmonization in disability inclusion in such complex systems of governance as Kenya (Hill & Hupe, 2021). The drastic mismatch between the extensive guidelines of the Persons with Disabilities Act, 2025, and the practical reality encountered within industry and governance levels offer an urgent case study in the failure of implementation that requires both the theoretical and practical scrutiny (CBM, 2025). All of these findings indicate that legislative progress, as a requirement, is only the first step in a far more complicated process of transformative inclusion, and the Kenyan case has shown how harmonization gaps work methodically to sabotage even the most positive legal systems (Muasya Kasema, 2025).

The explanation of these results suggests that the implementation issues are beyond technical or resource limitations but are deeper structural and conceptual obstacles towards disability justice (Onchagwa & Wambiri, 2022; Kabare, 2018). The consistent institutional capacity limitation witnessed at both national and county levels, especially in the National Council of Persons with Disabilities, was the key limiting factor to the mechanisms that could enforce meaningful harmonization of policies (NCPWD, 2024; Parliament of Kenya, 2025). The discovery is consistent with earlier research on policy implementation in devolved regimes, showing that coordination structures that are legally established but not accompanied by any coordinated investments in institutional capacity and adequate political goodwill (Hill & Hupe, 2021; KNCHR, 2022). The identified problematic budget gap is the indicative manifestation of a lack of fit between legislative aspiration and budgetary emphasis, and amounts to what may be called a dissonance of resource that, systematically, underfunds disability inclusion in comparison to other governmental requirements (National Treasury, 2025; Ngari, 2016; Kimeu, 2020).

The example of the sector-based harmonization failures in education, employment, and healthcare demonstrates the process of decentralization of the models of universal rights in the face of sector-specific operational experience and organizational culture (Onchagwa & Wambiri, 2022; Kabare, 2018). The under-observation of accessibility standards at universities and the popular disregard of employment quotas in the private sector cannot solely be regarded through the prism of policy awareness (Musili, 2020; Wanjiku Wang'ang'a, 2025; CBM, 2025). Rather, these results indicate the continuation of what can be theorized as institutional ableism-systematic approaches to ignoring the need to integrate disability into the organization, which intensify even within the evident legal requirements (NCPWD, 2024; Cliffe Dekker Hofmeyr, 2025). The especially stark additions to the succeeding disadvantages women with disabilities have in accessing health services are even more indicative of the overlapping phases between policy harmonization failures and the truly existing social imbalance, which compounds the marginalization of persons at the intersection of several marginalized categories (Onditi, 2019; Ganle et al, 2020; Kabia et al., 2018; Matin et al., 2021).

The ubiquitous gap in data governance proved to be an especially insidious obstacle on the way to successful harmonization of the policies, but its consequences are much broader than the difficulties with technical measurements (Erismann et al., 2021). Lack of credible, non-aggregated disability data among the government agencies does not only result in the hindrance of evidence-based planning and monitoring but a symbolic invisibility of persons with disabilities within official knowledge systems (NCPWD, 2024; Government of Kenya, 2021, Development Initiatives, 2022). The awareness is an obvious addition to the topic of studying

failures in policy implementation, indicating that what is not measured eventually does not get reflected in resource distribution and prioritization in policies (KNBS, 2012; Lockwood et al., 2021). The inconsistency of different counties with implementation also illustrates how devolution may lead to a postcode lottery in the realization of rights when different counties should access rights. Access to theoretically universal rights is based on geographical location (KNCHR, 2022; Parliament of Kenya, 2025). It is this spatial aspect of policy harmonization failure that elucidates the constraints of legislative change at the national level but lacks equivalent mechanisms to establish equity in the capacity to effect policy implementation and priority setting at sub-national levels (Onchagwa & Wambiri, 2022; Kabare, 2018).

The most theoretically meaningful discovery, perhaps, deals with the idea of the conceptual resistance witnessed in the implementation institutions, in which the charitable and medical approaches to disability continued even in the context of the rights-based framework of the 2025 Act. This discovery counters the belief that policy change always leads to cognitive change among implementers. The prevailing idea being that even the most liberal pieces of legislation can be mediated and distorted by the existence of entrenched conceptual frameworks (Blanck & Flynn, 2017; Series, 2019). The paucity of training on rights-based approaches that frontline service providers have received suggests that there is a critical void within the implementation ecosystem. The “software to policy change” often receives less attention than the hardware of laws and structures (Hill & Hupe, 2021).

These results should also be interpreted in light of the study methodological limitations as a conceptual analysis (Tamene, 2016; Kamal, 2019). Although this method facilitated an organizational level review of policy harmonization issues, it failed to represent the subtle lived experiences of persons with disabilities engaging with the implementation system, in addition to being unable to entirely document the inner processes of decision-making policy within implementing institutions. The dependency on documented sources gave preference to the vision of those with access to documentation channels leaving out more informal sources of knowledge and resistance (Fewings & Henjewe, 2019; Ma et al, 2018).

These findings have significant scholarly and practice implications. They imply that new initiatives to coordinate policies should consider addressing the technical, resource, conceptual, and political aspects of policy implementation at once. It should also go beyond policy making to involve institutional capacity-building, budgetary integration, conceptual change, and efficient accountability (Ngari, 2016; Kimeu, 2020). In particular, the results suggest that in line with future disability laws, the “implementation companion frameworks” should be developed. This would explicitly touch upon the resourcing, capacity, and conceptual barriers found in this analysis (Onchagwa & Wambiri, 2022; Kabare, 2018). Moreover, the authors emphasize that there is an urgent need to invest in disability data ecosystems and that these mechanisms need to make Organizations of Persons with Disabilities more significantly engaged in the implementation process and not just in policy formulation (Government of Kenya, 2021, Development Initiatives, 2022; ICJ, 2025). Future studies need to adopt empirical strategies to explore this lived experience of these harmonization failures through the lens of persons with disabilities and register instances of successful harmonization that can be used as examples of how to deal with the widespread implementation shortfalls found in this analysis (Qureshi et al., 2022; Christoffersen et al., 2025).

Conclusion and Recommendations

This study engaged in a concept analysis to explore the intricate nature of policy harmonization in the disability inclusion system in Kenya in the wake of the landmark Persons with Disabilities Act of 2025. The overall research question was the issue of understanding why major legislative progress has never managed to be converted into a coherent adoption and practical inclusion results across sectors and level of governance. This study utilized critical policy analysis and conceptual research based on a systemic review of legislative and policy reports, scholarly literature, and assessment of civil society to unravel structural barriers, operational barriers and conceptual barriers mediating between policy intent and implementation reality. The research was oriented to fill significant gaps in the existing literature, specifically, the lack of critical commentary on policy harmonization as a process over and above an outcome, and the under-reporting of the initial stage in the implementation of the groundbreaking disability legislation in Kenya.

The most salient finding that came out of the analysis is deep implementation dissonance that typifies the Kenya disability inclusion terrain regardless of the extensive legislative harmonization. Persons with Disabilities Act, 2025 is one of the most advanced disability rights initiatives in Africa but its implementation has been systematically negated due to limitations associated with institutional capacity, budget, resistance to conceptual activities, and failure in data governance. The study showed that the harmonization of policy cannot be attained by simply writing legislation but that one must jointly consider what could be referred to as the implementation ecosystem. This includes the interrelated systems of resource allocation, institutional capability, conceptual understanding and accountability mechanisms that turns the turns into a working reality. The paper also found a much more fundamental concern with what has been termed as institutional ableism, or the constant entrenchment of charitable and medical response models within the institution of implementation in spite of the rights-based structure of the law. This observation indicates that cognitive and normative structures in implementing agencies can be a larger obstacle to inclusion in comparison to technical and resource limitations.

This paper takes into consideration a few methodological constraints of its conceptual research design. It was inherently biased in favor of formalized viewpoints as well as institutionalized voices which may debilitate the personal experiences and resistance tactics of the individuals with disabilities themselves. Moreover, being a conceptual study done at the initial stages of realization of the 2025 Act, the study was not able to reflect the longitudinal trends of the implementation patterns or the adaptive responses that might possibly be observed in the future, as the stakeholders start having experience with the new legal regime. The literature on the study was also forced to focus on the harmonization of policies at a systemic level, thus preventing an in-depth consideration of the contextual peculiarities and local developments that may be underway at a community level and have not been reported in the literature.

In spite of these shortcomings, the study contributes greatly to the academic knowledge and to the pragmatic methods of achieving the alignment of disability policies. This paper shows that successful coordination of policies necessitates what can be described as multidimensional alignment. This holistic approach involves not only laws and regulations but also budgetary allocation, institutional incentives, conceptual frameworks, and accountability mechanisms at all levels of government. The results suggest that the assumption that legislative progress automatically leads to the production of implementation coherence is not quite accurate, as the

mediating factors that predetermine the occurrence of legal provisions into material inclusion, it turns out, are rather complex.

Through these findings, the study provides a number of tangible recommendations regarding enhancing the effectiveness of policy harmonization in the disability inclusion process in Kenya. First, to address the necessary legislative and institutional frameworks, it is advisable to prepare implementation companion documents, as a supplement to major disability laws, explicitly stating the need to resource, capacity building, and gradual implementation the requirements of putting the legal provisions into practical reality. Second, to overcome resource dissonance, the National Treasury must develop disability-specific inclusion budget lines in all ministries and county governments that are not reallocated during budgetary evaluations and link the allocations to a set of quantifiable implementation goals. Thirdly, to overcome the conceptual resistance gap, thorough rights-based disability equality training must be implemented as a mandatory requirement of all the public servants, especially of those working in the frontline service providers and the planning officials. Fourthly, in the case of the data governance gap, Kenya National Bureau of Statistics should be at the forefront in developing an extensive disability data collection model, which would set uniform measure of disability-disaggregated data in every sector and level of governance. Fifthly, to address the problem of county capacity variation, the Council of Governors must develop a peer-learning disability inclusion system, which will enable knowledge management and capacity development between underperforming and more successful counties. Lastly, in the case of accountability and oversight, the government must design a separate disability inclusion oversight mechanism, co-led, with Organizations of Persons with Disabilities, to monitor the progress of the implementation and publish periodic public reports of harmonization challenges and achievements.

This study presents multiple opportunities to future research. Documented empirical research is required as the lived experience of policy harmonization failures through the prism of the people with disabilities themselves using participatory research methods that would place their expertise in the forefront. Comparative studies involving the harmonization of disability policy in various devolved governance regimes may present helpful information as to the issues of context-specific and universal implementation. A longitudinal study that follows the path of implementation of the 2025 Act in five years would help gain essential insights into how policy harmonization changes over time. Lastly, a study of the political economy of disability policy implementation, such as the mediating effect of power relations and resource allocation decisions on outcomes of implementation at those levels, would introduce a critical dimension to the current inconsistency between the legislative intent and implementation reality.

In a broader sense, the research is a global contribution to the research on policy adoption in complex governance systems that showed the concept of rights-based laws as facing both technical and political mediation during the process of formulation and implementation. The study highlights the fact that transformative inclusion implies going beyond what may be referred to as “paper harmonization” to come up with that which may be conceptualized as “lived harmonization”, which is the experience of the realization of the rights and inclusion to people with disabilities in their everyday lives in all sectors and geographical areas. The conclusions indicate that the most advanced laws are only symbolic when they are paired with a lack investment in the infrastructures to transform them into working practice. The Kenyan experience can provide invaluable insights into the implementation hurdles that will inevitably come into play and the multidimensional measures needed to overcome them as countries all

over Africa, and the rest of the world continue to revise their disability inclusion frameworks in accordance with the UNCRPD.

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