

Interview with Ms Lydia Rosasi

(Co-Founder of Ladies with Disability Development Forum, Kenya)



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Introduction

Lydia Rosasi is highly-committed to assisting Kenyan youth and adults living with disabilities in Migori County, Kenya through her initiative, 'Ladies with Disability Development Forum'.

In this interview, The Thinking Watermill Society learns more about the LDDF, their impactful activities and future aspirations.



LDDF donating sanitary towels to pupils of Kamondi Integrated Primary in Migori County.

1. The Ladies with Disability Development Forum is an impressive initiative. What inspired its establishment?

The forum was founded in 2020. It is based in Migori County, Kenya.

The occurrence of the COVID-19 is the inspiration behind the formation of the Ladies with Disability Development Forum (LDDF). During the pandemic, people with disability, especially young women were among the most affected. Some of them could not operate their usual businesses. Some of them are the breadwinners in their families but were unable to provide basic necessities. Some of them lost jobs at the time and life became unbearable.

After informal discussions, we decided to come up with this forum with my co-founder, **Sharon Odongo**, that would help address some of the issues caused during the pandemic and to cover the post-pandemic period. We were officially registered in August 2020.

During this period, most of the people we have been able to reach were facing hunger problems and the inability to access medical care.

Amid strict adherence to COVID-19 protocols, we engaged local leaders to help us in addressing the hunger problems. There was a good response and we were able to donate food items to people with disability and their families.

It is at this point we decided to advance the forum to keep helping young women with disability and contribute positively to the community of people with disabilities.



Ms Sharon Odongo, (far right) Co-Founder of Ladies with Disability Development Forum posing with students after donating masks.

2. Why did you choose to register the LDDF in Migori County – Kenya?

We chose Migori because this is where we were located when there was restricted movement in Kenya.

Also, Migori County is one of the counties with high recorded cases of disability according to the 2019 census report.

3. The assistance you give women with disabilities is impressive. Such as helping them start or expand their businesses or by investing in them. What other initiatives does the LDDF conduct within the community?

Table banking is an initiative we came up with as a means of economically empowering young women with disability that are interested in entrepreneurship. This initiative that has made it possible to support new businesses and expansion of existing ones.

Our main activity is advocacy on the rights of people with disability, advocating for inclusivity in support of the SDGs and generally creating awareness and teaching the community to embrace people with disability and expose them to every privilege just like other people.

We also engage with the local authorities on full implementation of policies supporting the rights of people with disability.

We have also partnered with the National Council of Persons with Disability to aid in the registration of people with disability and for easy access to all the council services like disability cards and education bursaries for people with disability.

We have corporate social responsibility activities through which we reach other people with disability. In our most recent activity, we visited Kuja School for the deaf to give masks and register the children there for education bursaries offered by the National Council of Persons with disability and also distributed Christmas gifts to people with disability.

4. The 2019 census in Kenya indicates that 1.9% of men and 2.5% of women live with disabilities within the country. With this in mind, does the LDDF solely focus on women, or is there empowerment given to men with disabilities too?

Despite being dubbed LDDF, our main activity is advocacy which cuts across all groups of people with disability. We also reach out to everyone through our corporate social responsibility initiative.



Giving masks at Kuja school for the deaf in partnership with the National Council of Persons with Disabilities.

5. Kenya also appears to have excluded the statistics of children living with disabilities from the 2019 census, which may make it difficult for forums such as LDDF to address. Does LDDF also cater to the youth living with disabilities, and in what ways?

It is truly difficult for us as a forum that is still growing, but we are always trying whenever we can to address issues generally faced by people having disability. We majorly seek for opportunities like the ones offered by Inclusive Futures that develop the capacity of the youth living with disability with skills that will help them navigate the work environment and be useful.

6. In your experience, what are the major difficulties that people living with disabilities usually face in Kenya?

Disabilities are of different categories and each faces a unique challenge. For example, those with physical disability and are using wheelchairs find it difficult to use public transport.

Generally, these challenges include:

- lack of universal access to the structural buildings;
- living under extreme poverty;
- high unemployment rate among persons with disabilities; and
- poor provisions of education and health services.

Isolation of children with disability still occurs. This means that even in the future, integration with other people will be very difficult for them because they are brought up in an environment where they are alone in those schools or homes.

An inadequate number of special schools in Kenya has been another problem for children with disability.



LDDF receiving relief food to give the vulnerable from the nominated MP for Persons with Disabilities, Dennitah Ghati.

7. The Kenyan Government appears to have ratified international treaties and enacted the Persons with Disabilities Act to safeguard the rights and rehabilitation of persons with disabilities. Are there any practical efforts or assistance you have noted from the Government?

Truly the Government has enacted different laws through the Constitution and Disability Acts. The Government through its National Safety Net Programme - Cash Transfer for Persons with Severe Disabilities (PWSD-CT) helps cushion people with severe disability every month. The programme seeks to enhance the capacities of care givers through cash transfers and as such, improve the livelihoods of persons with severe disabilities as well as reduce negative impact of disability on households. It targets adults and children with severe disabilities, who require full time support of a caregiver.

The Kenyan Government's disability services, benefits, and grants are provided through the National Council for Persons with Disabilities (NCPWD). To take advantage of any of these, individuals must first register with the NCPWD and receive their identification card.

We enlighten people with disability of these privileges and help them to access whenever possible

8. What can we look forward to from the LLDF in the near future?

We look forward to being a national forum that advocates for the rights of people with disability.



LLDF overseeing donation of wheelchairs.

Thank you for your cooperation on behalf of The Thinking Watermill Society. All the best in your current and future endeavours, Ms Rosasi.

Learn More about Lydia Rosasi

VISIT LYDIA ROSASI



Ms Rosasi posing with beneficiaries.



About The Thinking Watermill Society

The Thinking Watermill Society is a non-profit organization. In particular, it promotes the debate and exchange of ideas among its members regarding the changes underway in the economic, cultural and social landscape, together with the analysis of the consequences that said changes entail, so as to identify the possible opportunities of economic, cultural and social growth related to said changes.

Our headquarters are in Rome, Italy.

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