

**PROBLEMS FACING THE PHYSICALLY HANDICAPPED  
SCHOOL CHILDREN IN ACCESSING KISUMU MUSEUM, KENYA**

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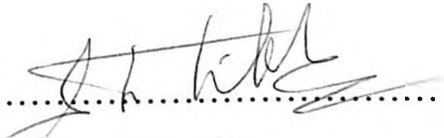
## DECLARATION

I Dan Ogola Ouma do hereby declare that this research project is a result of my own study and findings, except where acknowledged, and that it has not been submitted for a Postgraduate Diploma in any other university.

Candidate's Signature..... 

Date

..... 4/9/2005 .....

Supervisor's Signature..... 

Date

..... 1.8.11.05 .....

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## **Abstract**

The aim of this study was to investigate the various problems that face the physically handicapped in accessing and enjoying museum facilities at Kisumu Museum. The research subjects were the pupils and students of Joy Land School. Data was collected using a structured questionnaire and a key informant interview guide. It was found that obstacles ranged from bad roads, lack of museum assistants, inaccessibility of exhibition facilities, uneven landscape and lack of information on many of the museum exhibitions. These were found to interfere with both the physical and intellectual accessibility of the physically handicapped. It was suggested that all roads leading to museum facilities should be paved to improve accessibility. It is therefore recommended that the landscape of the museum be flattened, and the interior design of the facilities be improved to take care of the special needs of the physically handicapped. It is also recommended that enough trained education assistants be employed to assist and tour-guide these visitors. Lastly, it is recommended that the NMK develop a policy that guides development of the museum in catering for the visitors with special needs.

## **List of Abbreviations**

**NMK** National Museums of Kenya

**PMDA** Programme for Museum Development in Africa

**ICOM** International Council of Museums

# CHAPTER ONE

## BACKGROUND TO THE STUDY

### 1.1 Introduction

The various categories of the members of the public that visit the Kisumu Museum are an issue that has been taken for granted for a long time. More often than not museum visitors are categorized as locals and foreigners without looking at their different socio-economic status, as well as their physical condition. In either category (locals or foreigners) are various groups of persons with diverse backgrounds, and persons with different handicaps. Looking closely at the people who visit the museum, one will discover that the physically handicapped are the least attendants. The physically handicapped persons and their special needs have been taken for granted by museums, especially in Africa. Most of the people visiting museums are able-bodied members of the society.

For the purposes of this research, a physically handicapped person is one who has a loss or failure to develop a specific bodily function or functions, whether of movement, sensation, coordination or speech, but excluding the mentally, hearing and visually impaired. For an operational definition, the term physically handicapped is going to refer to the condition of being physically incapacitated due to loss of or failure to develop a specific bodily function. This research project targeted the physically handicapped as its research population. According to David (1993), a physically handicapped person is said to avoid any attention called to the disability, has the same human desires and

requirements as anyone else, might not want a traditional offer of assistance, operates as diligently as anyone else, wants as much opportunity to visit as the next person, and wants to be treated as an individual, not a stereotype! These physically handicapped members of the community are, for one reason or the other, not able to access and enjoy museum facilities effectively.

Museums, being public institutions in the service of the people, should be accessible to every member of the community irrespective of their handicaps. As Abungu (2000) puts it, museums should be a forum where people can share their views and feelings. The physically handicapped persons must not be left out of this forum.

## **1.2 Problem statement**

The physical infrastructures of Kisumu museum are user unfriendly to the physically handicapped persons. This discourages the physically handicapped persons who might be interested in accessing and enjoying the museum.

The visitor statistics trends for the Kisumu museum show that visitors are locals and foreigners, comprising both children and adults. But among these visitors only a few are handicapped visitors. This is because the National Museums of Kenya (NMK) has largely ignored the interests of the visitors with special needs (the physically handicapped) in the development policies and facilities. This has resulted in the development of museum facilities and infrastructures that are not user friendly to the physically handicapped persons. As a result of this, the department of education at

Kisumu museum has never developed outreach programmes targeting the physically handicapped. The physically handicapped do not access and enjoy museum facilities and so the objective of the National Museums of Kenya to serve the public without any kind of discrimination has been comprised by this problem.

The physically handicapped persons just like other members of the public, need to access, enjoy museum facilities and learn about their culture. There is, therefore, an urgent need to improve the museum facilities to cater for the special needs of the physically handicapped persons. This project was designed to investigate and explore the existence of various obstacles that hinder these members of the community from enjoying the services and facilities of the Kisumu museum. Physically handicapped children of school going age constituted the research population. The research, therefore, sought answers to the following questions:

1. What obstacles make it difficult for the physically handicapped to access Kisumu museum?
2. What mechanisms should be put in place to redress this problem of accessibility?

## **1.3 RESEARCH OBJECTIVES**

### **1.3.1 Overall objective**

To identify problems facing the physically handicapped in accessing the various facilities in Kisumu museum, and to suggest ways of addressing these problems.

### **1.3.2 Specific objectives**

- (i) To examine the obstacles that make it difficult for the physically handicapped to access Kisumu museum.
- (ii) To determine the mechanisms that could be put in place to enable the physically handicapped access the museum facilities.

## **1.4 Scope and limitations of the study**

This research focused on factors that hinder the physically handicapped school children from accessing and enjoying facilities at Kisumu museum. However, because of limited time and finances, the research was unable to look at other categories of the physically handicapped such as the visually, hearing and the mentally impaired.

## **1.5 Justification of the study**

Museums are permanent institutions that collect, conserve, research and exhibit, for the purposes of enjoyment and education, the cultural heritage to the public. Museums should, therefore, strive to satisfy the general public that wants to learn and enjoy their cultural heritage without any kind of discrimination. This is the reason why the nature and physical conditions of the museum visitors need to be understood in order to cater for

their specific needs. It is hoped that the results of this study will be used, by the NMK administration, to improve the physical and intellectual access to the facilities at Kisumu museum.

## **CHAPTER TWO**

### **LITERATURE REVIEW**

#### **2.1 Introduction**

This chapter looks at the concept of museum institutions, how they cater for the public (in terms of facilities and services) and the challenges they are facing. Then it also looks at what constitutes museum facilities and examples of what has been done for the physically handicapped by certain museums. In the course of looking at various museums, the focus is to be on policies and guidelines that have been developed by museum institutions for accessing collections and services, and give information about the steps taken to reduce or eradicate discrimination against the physically handicapped persons. The specific issues include access to collections, stores, exhibitions, toilets, lecture rooms and the general landscape of the museum compound.

#### **2.2 Literature review**

According to International Council of Museums' (David 1993) standard definition, a museum is a non-profit making permanent institution in the service of the society and of its development, open to the public, which acquires, conserves, researches, communicates and exhibits, for purposes of study, education and enjoyment, material evidence of people and their environment. Museums today are faced with a number of challenges. These include limited resources, inadequate legal frameworks and competition with other institutions offering almost the same services like game parks and hotels. These challenges compromise museums' efforts to carry out their duty of serving the public.



An institution is an organization or an establishment founded for a specific purpose, such as a hospital, a church, a company, or a college. Institutions for the physically handicapped are organizations or establishments founded for the purposes of catering for the special needs of the physically handicapped persons. Examples of physical handicaps include hearing problems, visual problems and mobility problems.

The needs of the physically handicapped are in the areas of education, health and social services. Institutions of the physically handicapped are established to offer these services to the handicapped. In Kisumu there are special schools such as Kibos for the mentally impaired, Maseno School for the deaf and Joy Land School for children with mobility problems. These institutions offer special services and facilities such as Braille machine for learning (for the visually impaired), and wheel chairs and crutches for those with mobility problems. Facility is defined as the means or equipment facilitating or enabling the performance of an action. Museum facilities refer to the museum infrastructures and objects used in carrying out various museum activities and programmes. Museum facilities include buildings, lecture rooms, exhibition spaces, exhibitions, toilets, offices, landscapes and museum shops. All these facilities should be designed in such a way that they are user friendly to the physically handicapped persons.

The physical infrastructures and facilities, in Kisumu museum, that are user-unfriendly include roads that are in poor condition, while the reception and toilets are not accessible by wheel chair. The exhibit cases (show cases) in the gallery, aquarium and Snake Park are so high that someone on a wheelchair cannot view them. The ramps that exist are too

steep to be used by a wheelchair. In general, attention has never been given to making Kisumu museum facilities accessible to persons with special needs. This is not happening in Kisumu museum only but also in other regional museums of the NMK and African museums in general.

African museums still lack policies and guidelines that make their institutions accessible and enjoyable to the physically handicapped persons. However, various British museums have already taken a lead in developing policies and guidelines aimed at making their museums accessible to the general public with diverse needs. The following are some of the examples.

The websites of various museums in Europe and North America show that efforts have been made to ensure that their services are accessible to visitors with special needs. For example Hertford Museum has introduced special services for persons with mobility problems who would wish to see the first floor but is not accessible to wheel chair users. These include a virtual tour of the exhibition on the computer on the ground floor and the website. There is an audiocassette that guides the visitors through the exhibition, explaining the texts and accompanying photographs, as well as details of objects and stories from the exhibition. At times some objects can be brought down on the ground floor. This is also done at the University of Dundee Museum services in their areas of exhibitions.

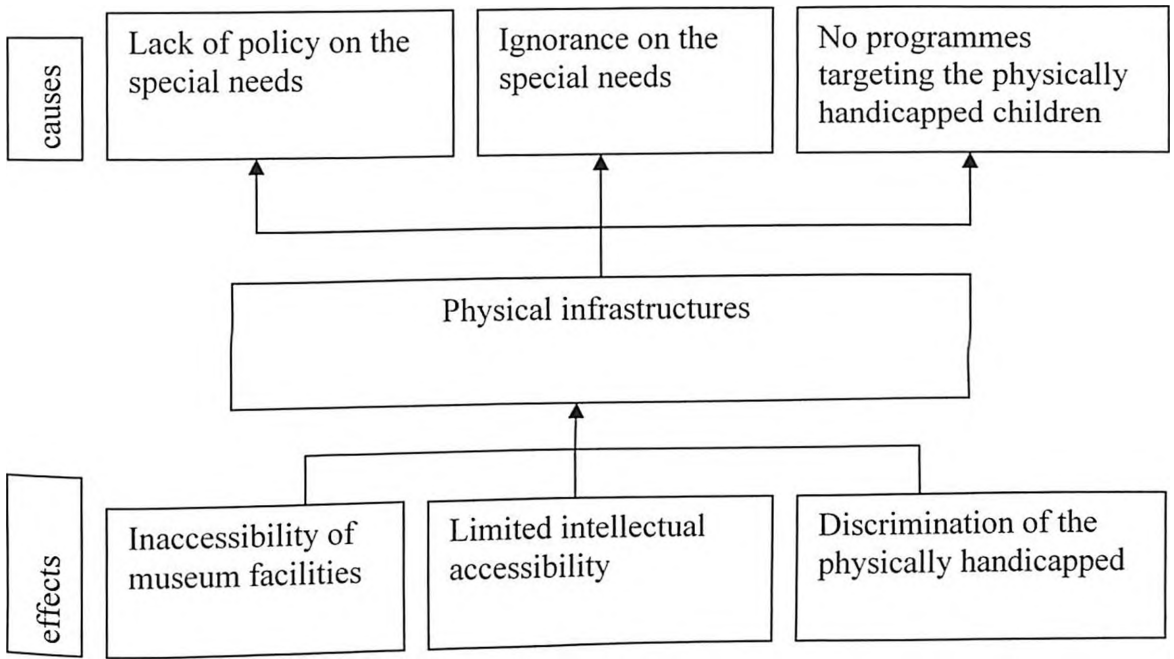
At the University of Dundee, all exhibitions are designed to make parts of the collection more accessible to everyone. Interpretative labels have been produced using large print and font size for objects and the display cases are put at a suitable height. Materials not accessible to people in wheelchairs can be moved from the cases for viewing. Events and lectures in places with access problems are represented by a website version. There is also a guided tour given by the curator to the physically handicapped persons.

The Colchester Museums Service Disability Access Policy has established an Access Advisory group to involve disabled people in the decisions, which need to be taken in order to continue to improve access to the museums, collections and displays. They have a mission statement, which states that ‘Our purpose is to advise and work with Colchester museum Service in order to provide equal access, in its broadest sense, to the monuments and collections in their care...’.

In conclusion, this literature review reveals that the western museums have put in place policies and guidelines to cater for the special needs of the physically handicapped persons. On the other hand, the National Museums of Kenya policies do not take into account the special needs of the physically handicapped.

### **2.3 Conceptual model**

The conceptual model below (Fig. 2.1) shows the causes and effects of the unfavourable physical museum infrastructures.



**Fig. 2.1:** Conceptual model showing causes and effects of unfavourable museum facilities

## 2.4 Hypothesis

The unfavourable physical infrastructures of Kisumu museum lead to limited physical and intellectual accessibility, and discrimination of the physically handicapped children.

## 2.5 Operationilization of the variables

**Unfavourable physical infrastructures:** In this study these include bad roads, bad stairs, high show cases, and narrow doors, uneven field and high walls.

**Physical accessibility:** User-friendliness of the physical infrastructures.

**Intellectual accessibility:** Ease of understanding of museum facilities.

**Physically handicapped children:** children who have been incapacitated due to loss of or failure to develop specific bodily functions.

# CHAPTER THREE

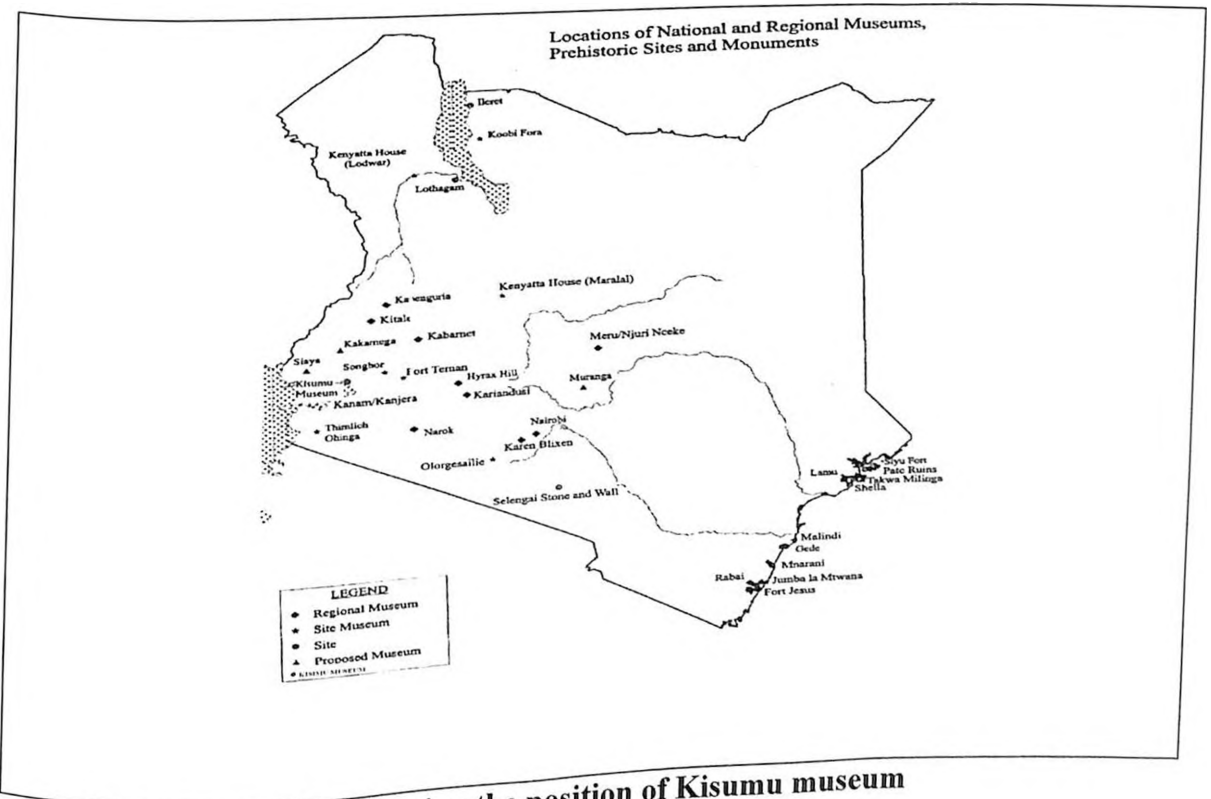
## METHODOLOGY

### 3.1 Introduction

This chapter describes the strategies that were used in collecting data. The types and *nature of data collected are also covered in this chapter.* Methods of data analysis, problem(s) and ethical issues are also dealt with.

### 3.2 Research Site

Kisumu museum is one of the regional museums that comprise the National Museums of Kenya. It was established in 1980 in Kisumu town, in the western part of Kenya. It is approximately two kilometres from the town centre off the Kisumu- Nairobi road (Map 3.1).



Map 3.1: Map of Kenya showing the position of Kisumu museum

The museum has an ethnographic gallery, snake-park, tortoise pen, crocodile pen, fresh water aquarium, a traditional Luo homestead, a lecture hall and a picnic ground as the main facilities to be used and enjoyed by all museum visitors. There are also various sites and monuments under the custody of Kisumu museum that are found in Nyanza Province. These include Fort Ternan Prehistoric Site, Songhor Prehistoric Site, Rusinga, Maboko and Thimlich Ohigni.

### **3.3 Population or Universe**

In Kisumu municipality there are no official statistics showing the total number of the physically handicapped persons. However, there are various categories of physically handicapped persons and institutions that deal with these people. The former include mobility related problems, hearing impaired, visually impaired and also the mentally impaired. These people are found in all public and private institutions. For example, physically handicapped persons can be found in offices, restaurants, business activity areas, public transport vehicles and even schools and colleges. There are also a number of institutions that specifically focus on providing for the special services and facilities for the physically handicapped persons. In the Municipality there are special schools such as Kibos and Lutheran Special Schools for the mentally impaired, Joy Land Special School for children with mobility problems and Maseno Special School for the hearing impaired.

There are also schools that offer integrated programmes where able-bodied and physically handicapped children learn together. Examples are Joel Omino and Kasagam primary schools. These schools support the education of handicapped children by

offering special equipment and make their facilities accessible to every child. The special equipment includes walking crutches, calipers and wheel chairs. These are the schools that I drew my sample from. The units of analysis were the individual physically handicapped children. It is out of these institutions that the project targeted pupils and students of Joy Land Primary and High Schools.

### **3.4 Sampling method**

Since Joy Land Primary and Secondary Schools have the highest number of physically handicapped children in one place, they were taken as the sample population from which sampling unit was obtained. In both schools 30 children were selected. Sample design was simple random sampling method where the variable was sex. The sampling frame consisted class registers of the two schools.

### **3.5 Methods of data collection**

Data collection was done through interviews using a structured questionnaire (Appendix 1) a key informant interview guide (Appendix 2) and direct observation. The structured questionnaire was administered on pupils of Joy Land Special Schools and key informants included an officer from Kisumu Municipality concerned with special education programmes, a teacher from Joy Land Special Schools and the Education Officer of Kisumu Museum.



### 3.5.1 Structured interviews

This was done using questionnaire that was administered on the pupils of Joy Land Special Schools after they were taken on a tour of the museum (Plate 3.1). Information collected was on specific obstacles and problems that make it difficult for the physically handicapped persons from accessing and enjoying the Kisumu museum facilities. The solutions to the various obstacles were also sought.



**Plate 3.1:** Respondents filling the questionnaires

### 3.5.2 Key informant interviews

A key informant interview guide was administered on individuals that work in the institutions dealing with the physically handicapped children. This instrument aimed at collecting information on the attitudes and level of awareness of persons with special needs, among the individuals working in these institutions. The existence and contents of policies for persons with special needs in these institutions, was also looked at. These institutions included the Education Department of Kisumu museum, Joy Land Special Schools and the Directorate of Municipal Education, Kisumu Municipality.

### **3.5.3 Direct observation**

The physically handicapped children were observed during the tour of the museum, how they used the museum facilities, and this enabled me to identify the problems.

### **3.6 Data analysis**

Information obtained from the structured questionnaire was first gleaned then coded. Then it was put into the computer and analyzed using excel. The results were then presented on a bar graph (Fig. 4.1). The information from key informant interviews was analyzed thematically and presented in the form of quotes. The observations of the children using the museum facilities, and the problems identified, were recorded on still photographs which are used in the study as plates.

### **3.7 Problems encountered and solutions**

Kisumu Municipality has a number of institutions that cater for the special needs of the physically handicapped children. However, due to limited time and bad weather, it was not possible to organize for all the various categories of the physically handicapped children as was originally planned. June is a season of the long rains in western Kenya and there were only 12 days to use in all the preparations. These institutions too had their own schedules and time was only available on the last weekend of the field work. Due to these problems only pupils from the Joy Land Special schools were selected and taken on a tour of the museum.

### **3.8 Ethical issues**

This refers to moral and logistical issues that had to be catered for before and in the course of carrying out this research. First were the logistical issues. These included the need to seek for permission from the Provincial Director of Education, Nyanza Province, to carry out research in their schools. Permission was also to be obtained from the curator of Kisumu Museum, which was the research site, as well as the Head teachers of Joy land Special Schools.

The individual handicapped children had to be informed of the objective of the research in order to enable them give an informed consent. Informed consent is 'the procedure in which individuals choose whether to participate in an investigation after being informed of facts that would be likely to influence their decision' ( Frankfort-Nachmias and Nachmias, 2004). It involves four elements: competence, voluntarism, full information, and comprehension.

## CHAPTER FOUR

### **Problems Encountered by the Physically Handicapped Children in Accessing Kisumu Museum Facilities**

#### **4.1 Introduction**

This chapter deals with the findings on the problems encountered by physically handicapped children in accessing Kisumu museum.

#### **4.2 Policy on the needs of the physically handicapped school children**

The National Museums of Kenya does not have specific policy on the special needs of the physically handicapped visitors. According to the education officer, there is no particular document concerning special needs of visitors. When asked how they assist visitors with special needs she said, 'We serve them according to their needs, say school for the blind needs more guides and for the hearing impaired they require more time but there is no one to communicate in sign language'. The education officer believes that the physically handicapped should be able to access the learning of the cultural heritage equally as anyone else. Lack of policy on the special needs of the physically handicapped hinders the museum in providing equal opportunities of learning about their cultural heritage.

#### **4.3 Inaccessibility of Kisumu museum facilities**

The first problem that these visitors face is the poor condition of the road entering and going around the museum. This starts from the junction of the Kisumu-Nairobi highway to all museum facilities. Inside the museum compound, the roads are made of loose

pebbles that were just poured on and never pressed. This makes it totally impossible for visitors with wheelchairs to wheel through. Neither to the visitors with crutches have it any easier. The loose stones, for the road, make it very difficult and dangerous to walk through with crutches. This obstacle interferes with the physical accessibility of persons with mobility problems.

The entrances to the museum facilities were also found to be user unfriendly to visitors with mobility problems. The main buildings of Kisumu museum, the education building, the gallery, the snake park, the ticket office and the public toilets, have stairs that are too high for visitors with mobility problems and that walk with the help of aids. The ramps to these buildings are too steep to be used either by wheel chair users or other walking aids (Plate 4.1). In fact, the ramps were designed for loading and offloading but not for persons with mobility problems. This situation makes it difficult for the physically handicapped to access and enjoy the museum facilities at will. The only option is to have an assistant or keep away from the museum. This situation interferes with the physical accessibility to the museum facilities.



**Plate 4.1:** Student visitors being helped through the stairs and the ramp of the education building

#### 4.4 Unfavourable interior design of museum facilities

The interior designers of museum facilities never considered the special needs of the physically handicapped persons. The showcases are so high that visitors on wheel chairs cannot view the exhibitions. This situation is seen in the main gallery, the snake park, the aquarium, and the snake pit that has a wall completely blocking the wheel chair users from viewing the snakes and the tortoises! The toilet facilities are another area of difficulty. These facilities are completely not adapted to special needs of the physically handicapped persons. Poor design of interior facilities *interferes with the intellectual and physical accessibility of the physically handicapped persons to the museum.* This discriminates against the physically handicapped (Plate 4.2).



**Plate 4.2:** The high show cases of the exhibitions

#### 4.5 Uneven physical landscape

Off the roads, the physically handicapped still find it very difficult to enjoy the open space in the museum compound. This is due to the rough terrain that makes it difficult for visitors with wheel chairs and crutches to move with ease. This situation is also seen in the Luo traditional homestead that has a lot of stones in the compound and a very uneven surface.

#### 4.6 Inaccessibility of information on the exhibition

Nearly all the exhibitions in Kisumu museum do not have adequate information (Plate 4.3). The situation is worsened by lack of sufficient personnel in the department of Education, who are supposed to give the guided tours to the visitors. According to the education officer, 'Kisumu museum relies on teachers that come with these pupils to tour the museum'. This factor compromises the museum's objective of educating the public.



**Plate 4.3:** Students viewing exhibition objects that have no information

Many exhibitions are not intellectually accessible due to poor lighting. This is evident in the aquarium and traditional homestead houses. The traditional homestead houses do not have any source of light and visitors coming from outside can not adjust to the total darkness in the houses.

#### 4.7 Narrow entrances

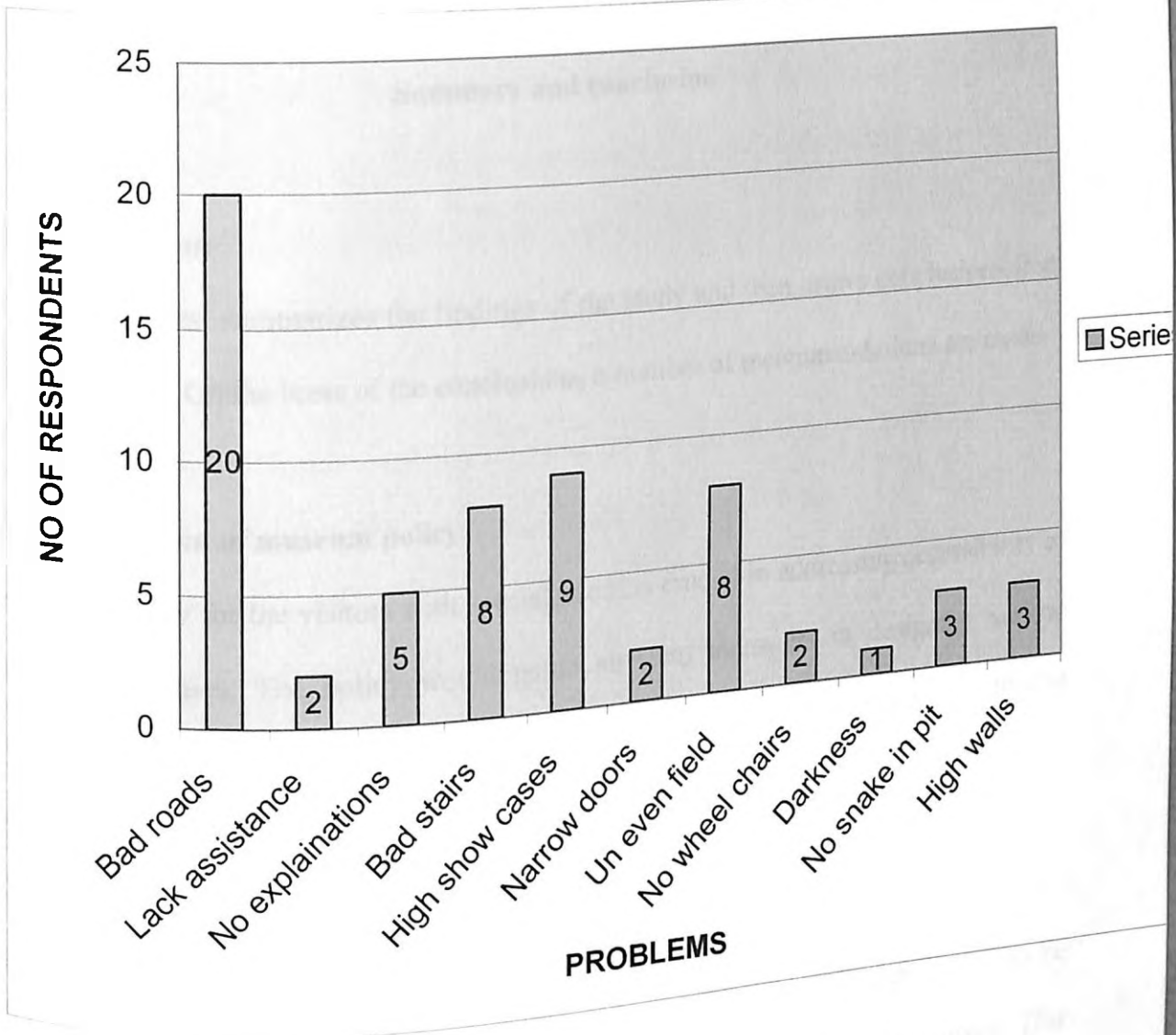
This situation is seen in the Luo traditional homestead where the doors are too narrow for the wheelchair users to wheel in with ease (Plate 4.4). This interferes with their physical access to the exhibitions at the traditional homestead.



**Plate 4.4:** A disabled museum visitor coming out of a house in the traditional homestead

All the problems identified by the respondents are summarized in Fig. 4.1





**Fig. 4.1:** Summary of the problems facing handicapped children visiting Kisumu museum.

## CHAPTER FIVE

### Summary and conclusion

#### 5.1 Introduction

This chapter first summarizes the findings of the study and then draws conclusions from these findings. On the basis of the conclusions, a number of recommendations are made.

#### 5.2 Formulation of museum policy

Museum policy for the visitors with special needs is crucial in addressing accessibility of museum facilities. The policy would guide museum managers in designing various development projects and construction of museum facilities. The document should also define specific facilities that must be put in place in the museum.

#### 5.3 Improvement of accessibility to museum facilities

Easy and free movement in the museum is vital if the physical accessibility has to be improved. Users of wheel chairs and crutches require a flat and stable surface. This should start from all the roads leading to the museum gate. Visitors coming from all directions should never find any difficulty in approaching the museum. The paths leading to all areas of exhibitions and any other facility should be paved. The general landscape of Kisumu museum needs to be flattened. This would improve accessibility for the visitors with mobility problems. Flat surface is convenient for wheelchair users and individuals using walking aids. In addition to the flat surfaces, the museum must have, not less than two, wheel chairs, in good condition, at any particular time.

Building entrances should be friendly to the users of wheel chairs and crutches. The ramps should have a gentle slope so that a visitor on a wheel chair can go up and down without much difficulty. The exhibitions should be designed in such a way that the special needs of museum visitors are catered for. This would involve lowering of the showcases to a reasonable height so that those on wheel chairs get good view. This should be done in the museum gallery, the Snake Park and the aquarium. The area around the tortoise pen and the snake pit should be raised so that visitors on wheel chairs get a good view of the tortoises and snakes, respectively.

To improve intellectual accessibility there should be an improved lighting in areas of exhibitions, particularly in the aquarium and the traditional homestead houses. A support desk should be put in the gallery where these children can put their note books while writing. All these, put in place, will undoubtedly promote the image of the NMK as an institution that is sensitive to the needs of its clients without any discrimination. According to one key informant, 'Every member of the society should be sensitive towards persons or children with disabilities and expose them for assessment and consequent placement since disability is not inability'.

#### **5.4 Capacity building of museum personnel**

The Education department of Kisumu museum requires at least five education assistants. These can help in tour guiding and assist visitors with the special needs. At the time of doing the project, the department had only one education assistant who was a casual and had no training in museum activities. When asked how they assist visitors with special

needs, she said, 'The education department depends heavily on the teachers that come with these children and it is quite challenging to serve all areas of physical disability in Kisumu museum unless the NMK were to employ another education officer with a background in special education'.

## 5.5 Conclusion

The problems faced by physically handicapped children in accessing and enjoying Kisumu museum facilities are as a result of ignorance on their special needs. This is due to lack of museum policy for visitors with special needs. As a result of this, facilities and infrastructures have been developed that ignore the special needs of physically handicapped children. Such facilities include bad stairs and roads leading to and going around museum facilities, high showcases, narrow doors, an uneven field landscape, and high walls. These interfere with the physical accessibility of the physically handicapped children to the museum facilities and services.

Another problem is the failure by museum management to put in place enabling mechanisms that could promote both physical and intellectual access to museum facilities and services. These include lack of trained personnel on the special needs of the physically handicapped children, inadequate lighting and limited information in exhibition areas, failure to replace exhibition specimens and lack of a wheel chair on standby for children who might need to be wheeled around.

## **5.6 Recommendation**

The National Museums of Kenya should develop and implement a policy for museum visitors with special needs. A museum policy would guide the development projects in catering for the special needs of the physically handicapped children.

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## Appendix 1: Structured Questionnaire

### INSTITUTE OF AFRICAN STUDIES UNIVERSITY OF NAIROBI

The aim of the questionnaire is to gather information regarding the problems faced by the physically handicapped in accessing Kisumu museum and suggest the possible solutions.

The information is to be used specifically to improve accessibility in Kisumu museum and not for any other purpose.

Answer all questions

#### Background information of the respondent

1. Name.....
2. Age.....
3. Gender: Male   
Female
4. Education level attained  
Primary   
Secondary

## General information

1. What problems did you find in reaching the following places:

Museum buildings.....

Traditional Homestead.....

Toilets.....

Snake Park.....

Open Field.....

2. What problems did you find in understanding and enjoying the following areas?

The gallery.....

Aquarium.....

Snake Park and Snake pit.....

How would you like the services of Kisumu museum to be improved to meet your needs? .....



## Appendix: 2 Key Informant Guide

1. Name of the respondent.....
2. Position.....
3. Does your institution have a policy concerning the physically handicapped?

4. How do you assist persons with special needs?

5. What are your personal views concerning persons with physical disabilities?

Thank you very much.