

By Rhyman Agaba

Tour operators in Uganda have been challenged to develop inclusive tourism packages that cater for persons with disabilities (PWDs), older persons, and families with young children in order to unlock the largely untapped tourism market.

Tour operators challenged to create packages for tourist PWDs

The call was made on Wednesday by Safia Nalule Juuko, the Equal Opportunities Commission (EOC) chairperson, during a training on accessible tourism, sports

and the creative arts industry.

The one-day training, which was organised by the commission at its headquarters in Kampala, brought together over 40 tourism ministry officials, tour operators and stakeholders from the sports and creative arts sectors.

DISABLED, BUT ABLE

Juuko said inclusive tourism is not only a human rights obligation, but also a major economic opportunity that Uganda must tap into as the country seeks to expand its tourism industry and promote equitable growth.

"The tourism, sports and creative arts sectors represent a powerful integrated sector that drives economic

development, enhances destination branding and fosters community engagement," Juuko said.

According to Juuko, the commission organised the training to equip tourism players with the knowledge and skills required to create barrier-free experiences for all travellers, including persons with disabilities.

"The global accessible tourism market was valued at about \$97.5b (sh361.5 trillion) in 2024 and is projected to reach \$232.8b (sh863.3 trillion) by 2033," she said, adding that the sector is growing at an annual rate of over 10%.

She noted that the market serves more than 1.3 billion people with disabilities worldwide, representing about 16% of the global population, alongside a rapidly growing ageing population.

Juuko explained that locally, Uganda also has a significant population that could benefit from accessible tourism services.

"Uganda has approximately 5.5 million persons with disabilities

STRATEGIES FOR INCLUSIVITY

Dr Anna Ninsilima, a lecturer from the Institute of Gender and Development Studies at Makerere University, who facilitated the training, suggested several strategies for inclusive tourism. These include improving infrastructure, training staff to support tourists with disabilities, and ensuring proper handling of specialised equipment and persons with disabilities assistive devices.

"Inclusive tourism requires appreciating that people are different and their needs are unique," she said. Ninsilima urged participants to be innovative in tourism and she affirmed their importance to Uganda's development.

and about 2.3 million older persons aged 60 years and above. In addition, the country has more than 22 million children aged between zero and 17 years," she said.

travel," Kalyango noted.

Bosco Omaria, the director of communications at the Uganda Secondary Schools Sports Association, commended the training.

"I have come to realise that persons with disabilities need to be considered in everything we do in sports, from infrastructure development to activity implementation," he said.

The EOC was established under the Equal Opportunities Commission Act in line with Article 32 of the Constitution of Uganda to promote equal opportunities and eliminate discrimination against groups or individuals facing marginalisation.

A MOVE TO BOOST TOURISM

The session moderator, Moses Kalyango, a senior compliance officer at EOC, said the training presents a major opportunity for Uganda to package its rich biodiversity and tourism endowments in ways that appeal to marginalised groups.

"I'm talking about persons living with disabilities and senior citizens in Europe, the US and Asia, who have retired and now have the time to



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Juuko, Chairperson Equal Opportunities Commission