

Gender and access to Inclusive Education in Tanzania: A Case of Selected Primary Schools in Shinyanga and Mwanza Regions

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ABSTRACT

This study examined gender relations and access to inclusive education for children with disabilities in Shinyanga and Mwanza regions. The study was conducted specifically to examine community attitudes and practices towards girls with disabilities, harmful gender cultural norms, practices, traditions and barriers girls with disabilities face in accessing education. The study employed interpretive phenomenological design and purposive sampling technique to obtain 96 participants. Children with disabilities were identified by using the Child Functioning Module (CFM) questions and participants were purposively sampled. Data were collected using key informant interviews, focus group discussions and observations. Thematic analysis techniques were employed to analyse the data. The study found that there were deep rooted discriminatory cultural practices and gender norms which rendered children with disabilities excluded from school as compared to their male peers and those without disabilities. This was further compounded by poor teaching and learning environment. Girls faced greater barriers than boys, including more hours spent doing household chores, early marriages and pregnancies leading to drop out. It is recommended for government, community and development partners to focus more on children with disabilities, especially girls, increase community awareness on inclusive education and gender as well as improve teaching and learning environments.

Keywords: *Inclusive education, children with disability, gender, culture, traditions*

INTRODUCTION

Inclusive education means to broaden educational opportunities for children with disabilities to have the opportunity to participate in general education programmes (Possi & Milinga, 2017). According to Eldis (2013) it is the kind of education that covers all children including a severely handicapped child in a regular classroom. Is the one that reduces discrimination among children with disabilities within the society and in school settings. According to Mbunda (2017), Tanzania is offering education for some students with different disabilities including visual impairment, hearing impairments, cognitive impairment, physical impairments, autism and multiple disabilities mainly through integration in mainstreamed classes. According to the United Republic of Tanzania [URT] (2011) gender is broadly defined as culturally and socially determined characteristics, values, norms, roles, attitudes and beliefs attributed to women and men through constructed identity in a society.

The issue of inclusion has been on the international agenda for a number of decades now, it has been demonstrated by the different frameworks for action in order to address the different forms of inequality and disparities in education. Such inequalities are based on gender, race, religion, disabilities and ethnic background (Possi & Milinga, 2017). UNESCO (1994 p1), Salamanca Framework of Action, Article 3 states that schools and the education system as a whole *“should accommodate all children regardless of their physical, intellectual, emotional, social, linguistic or other conditions”*. In addition to that, the UNESCO, Dakar Framework of Action (2000) noted that *“in order to attract and retain children from marginalized and excluded groups, education systems should respond flexibly be inclusive, actively seeking out children who are not enrolled, and responding flexibly to the circumstances and needs of all learners”* (UNESCO, 2000 p.16). United Nations agencies and other institutions offer guidance and goals for achieving gender equality in inclusive education, nevertheless the distribution of male and female pupils in education is still very unbalanced (White & Kuper, 2018). UNICEF also argues that, while gender parity has improved, barriers and bottlenecks around gender equality and discrimination remain in place. Literature indicates that only 10% of children with disabilities in developing countries go to school and just 1% of women with disabilities worldwide are literate (UNICEF, 2020). There is abundant evidence that children with

disabilities especially girls, face exclusions and discrimination in different areas of life, among these, exclusion from education is a key concern, they are consistently lagging behind in terms of school enrolment, school completion, mean years of schooling and literacy levels compared to their peers without disabilities (Possi & Milinga, 2017). In bringing about gender equality the government of Tanzania has in place the inclusive education policy of 2009 which states that pupils with disability should be educated with other Children without disabilities in the same classrooms (Mkonongwa, 2014). Also, there were several policies developed in Tanzania such as National Gender Policy (2007) with a view to bringing about gender equality and integrating gender equality in policies, plans, development strategies and actions in all sectors. The government has developed the National Plans of Action (NPA, 2017-2022) as a comprehensive framework with strategies and activities for preventing gender violence and bringing gender equity in Tanzania. In 2008, Tanzania embarked on an inclusive education programme and came up with a National Strategy for Inclusive Education (NSIE) to cater for 2009 -2017 and the second NSIE of 2018-2021.

The NSIE outlined strategic areas of action from the existing education sector policies and programmes that needed to be reinforced and consolidated to provide access to quality education to all children with an emphasis on children with disabilities (URT, 2009). The government has been working with NGOs and other stakeholders to fight violence against girls and sensitizing the public through the mass media, seminars, workshops and drama, on the need to remove gender inequalities and gender-based violence (Awinia, 2019). According to UNESCO (2018) in Sub-Saharan Africa, girls with disabilities were particularly disadvantaged; boys with disabilities had almost one year more schooling than girls with disabilities. Girls are exposed to multiple discrimination by being girls and as children with disabilities. They face many barriers to completing their education, including early marriage, gender-based violence, sexual abuse, neglect, maltreatment, exploitation and high domestic workload. Education is important for girls with disabilities, as it is well established that the education of women generates multiple benefits, including greater protection against abuse, and improved health and educational outcomes of their children (UNESCO, 2018). Girls with disabilities are among the world's most marginalized groups

of society, resulting from social norms, traditions, customs and cultural bias around both gender and disability. Yet their needs, and the double discrimination they face, have largely been neglected and overlooked in education dialogue and practice and limits their educational opportunities and development potential. In this paper, community attitudes and practices towards children with disabilities, especially girls, were examined, together with harmful gender cultural norms, practices, traditions and barriers girls with disabilities face in accessing primary education.

Models of Disability

There are diverse models of conceptualizing impairments as well as disability. They entail the medical, social, religious and African beliefs models. In the context of this study, these models are crucial in understanding bottlenecks to inclusivity of primary school pupils with disabilities especially, girls. Beginning with the medical model, people with disability are considered as having a problem, thus individualize the plight resulting from disability. It regards disability as the consequence of body impairments caused by damage or disease, which requires medication or rehabilitation to make a person normal or healthy (Berghs et al., 2016). Essentially, the model looks at disability as a result of deviation from 'normal' body performance. In this case disability is deeply rooted in the normality vis a vis deviance discourse (Solvang, 2000). It also presupposes the rehabilitation side of medicine, which strives to correct the disabling defect through surgery, orthopedics and assistive devices such as hearing aids and spectacles (Solvang, 2000). The medical model can catalyze ableism and biased attitudes and practices of pupils with disabilities including girls (Cologon, 2013). The social model counteracts the medical model which sees disability within individual pathology instead considers it as a social concern (Berghs et al., 2016). The canons of the social model rests on viewing disability as the experience of society's oppression and disadvantage as well as a physical, sensory, cognitive or mental health condition (Berghs et al., 2016; Lawson & Beckett, 2020). The proponents of the social model react over the view of associating children with disability to the medical model; instead, they insist on viewing disability in the lens of societal barriers (Rerief & Letšosa, 2018). The basis of their assumption rests on the fact that individuals are disabled by society's structures, attitudes, and obstacles to opportunities to quality life arising out

of such social processes (Purtell, 2013). The social model of disability has faced a lot of criticisms that it neglects the painful realities of impairment. Further, the model's distinction between impairment and disability is artificial since it is hard to distinguish the end of impairment and start of disability (Rerief & Letšosa, 2018). All in all, it is imperative to insist that the social model neither deny that some forms of illness may have disabling consequences nor deny the role of medical professionals in treating various diseases (Rerief & Letšosa, 2018). This is to say that, the social model of disability helps us in understanding the fact that society has a stake in making the people with disabilities and girls with disabilities in this case vulnerable and disadvantaged by their condition of having disability.

Depicting mainly on indigenous African beliefs from African cultures, some African beliefs promote the stigmatization and marginalization of people with disabilities through exclusion and depicting them as objects of pity, ridicule and victims of evil forces (Ndlovu, 2016). In this regard, indigenous African beliefs depict disability as an abnormality. This has implications for community members whose attitudes and practices towards disability and Children with disabilities especially girls could constitute a barrier towards inclusivity of girls in primary schools. Furthermore, harmful gender and cultural norms, practices, traditions and barriers girls with disabilities face in accessing primary education can fully be understood drawing on the indigenous African beliefs.

Intersection of Gender and Disability

Gender and disability appear to have an important connection as far as education is concerned. First, both gender and disability relate with marginalized groups of people in which females are the marginalized majority and people with disabilities are the marginalized minority. Second, there exists a vast gender gap in disability. While gender norms and values ascribed to girls fluctuate extremely depending on the cultural context, girls with disabilities are stereotyped as sick, helpless, childlike, dependent, incompetent and asexual (Ziegler, 2014). This situation greatly limits their options and chances. Another gender inequality concerns the role of girls as daily caretakers for family members with disabilities. This study was conducted to examine access to inclusive education for children with

disabilities in Shinyanga and Mwanza regions. The study was specifically conducted:

- 1) To explore community attitudes and practices towards children with disabilities especially girls,
- 2) To examine harmful gender, cultural norms, practices, traditions and
- 3) To identify barriers girls with disabilities face in accessing education.

Methodology

The study was conducted in nine (9) primary schools found in nine (9) villages within Shinyanga Municipal, Shinyanga District and Misungwi District councils of Shinyanga and Mwanza regions respectively. This study was informed by a qualitative research approach and phenomenological design which allowed collection of in-depth data on the issues under investigation. According to Heotis (2020), descriptive phenomenological research design entails capturing a vivid and precise description of the perception about lived experience and leads to understanding the essence of the phenomenon under investigation. On the other side, the interpretive phenomenological research design is concerned with studying the lived experience whereby meaning is embedded in the experience. As such, one’s experience of the phenomenon and how meaning is made from it can be understood by means of interpretation. The study is interpretive phenomenological as it examines community attitudes and practices towards children with disabilities especially girls, harmful gender cultural norms, practices, traditions and barriers girls with disabilities face in accessing primary education. The study involved 42 children with disability identified through the Child Function Module (CFM) Washington Group of Questions which is a standard tool for identification of children with disabilities according to the domain of functional difficulties and intensity of their disability. Children with disabilities who participated in the study were from nine (9) primary schools; among them 24 were boys and 18 were girls (Table 1).

Table 1: Children with Disability by Gender and Type of Disability

Type of difficulty	Girls	Boys	Total	Percent (%)
Learning	3	5	8	19.05

Walking	1	2	3	7.14
Multiple	1	0	1	2.38
Hearing	4	6	10	23.81
Seeing	5	6	11	26.2
Albinism	3	3	6	14.28
Communication	1	2	3	7.14
Total	18	24	42	100

Source: Field Data, (2022)

Also, 54 key informants were purposively selected including head teachers, ward education officers and district Special Needs education officers. Others were key local leaders such as Village executive officers (VEOs), Village Chairpersons and Ward executive officers (WEO) and consequently together with the 42 children with disabilities, the total sample was 96 as indicated in Table 2 subsequently.

Table 2: Sample Size and Composition

Type of Respondent	Number	Percent (%)
Children with disabilities	42	42
Head teachers	9	9
Village chairs	9	9
VEO	9	9
WEO	9	9
Ward Education Officers	9	9
Parents	6	6
District Special Need Education Officers	3	7
Grand Total	96	100

Source: Field Data, (2022)

Data collection methods included key informants' interviews, focus group discussions (FGDs) and observations. While key informant interviews (KII) were conducted with Headteachers and District Special Need Education Officers; FGDs were heterogeneous and composed of parents, village Chairs, Village Executive Officers (VEOs), Ward Executive Officers (WEOs) and Ward Education Officers. FGDs sessions were also conducted for children

with disabilities. The researchers chose the schools as convenient places for flexibility of time within school hours to ensure participatory and ease information-gathering exercises. Direct observations were mainly on accessibility of infrastructures, social interactions between children with disabilities, teachers and children without disabilities. The study was heavily geared towards qualitative research and analysis. Thematic and narrative analysis were used to aid data analysis.

Results and Discussion

This section provides findings of the study as per respective objectives.

Attitudes and practices of Community towards Children with Disabilities

During FGDs, it was reported that children with disabilities in the community were regarded as a curse, tragedy or punishment from God to the family, and led to their discrimination. It was found out that the communities in general do not see the value of sending children with disabilities to school, they see them as useless. Only the educated parents took their children with disabilities to school. Girls' potential, especially one with a disability, was not valued by society. This was explained by one VEO during the FGD that:

Girls with disabilities are particularly vulnerable to stigma and more likely to be abandoned or abused. Those with intellectual disabilities and albinism are particularly vulnerable to sexual abuse and violence because some people believe (bad cultural belief and advice from witch doctors) that having sex with them will bring wealth and power, or cure them of AIDS. (VEO A, FGDs, 2022).

During the FGD further, it was generally agreed amongst participants that having a child with disability was not something a family or community accepted positively, it was seen as a curse and abnormal thing. The study indicated that there were negative attitudes towards children with disabilities, they were considered as a source of misery in the family. The parents hide these children as it was considered a shame to allow children with disabilities to be publicly seen. This was supported by Mbunda (2017) findings that in

many societies in Tanzania, Children with disabilities were thrown away, killed or being locked inside the house cages because of being associated with bad luck in the family Some of the parents had no interest in educating their children due to their disability and they do not see the value of taking them to school like other children of their age. In addition, one FGD participant reported that:

Children with disabilities are not treated and cared well within the family. Parents hide them and lock them inside because they are ashamed of them. Others think that disability, especially Albinism, is contagious, one can get it by coming close to them or touching them (Parent C, FGDs, 2022).

The findings that the community had negative attitude over children with disabilities are in akin with the African beliefs models of disabilities which sees some African beliefs as vehicles for promotion of stigmatisation and marginalisation of people with disabilities through exclusion and depicting them as objects of pity, ridicule and victims of evil forces (Ndlovu, 2016).

Gender Roles and Division of Labour

As evidently revealed from the voices of the participants from this study, community members have rigid traditions in which imbalance gender roles within the household are still common due to the prevalence of patriarchal systems. It was said in the FGDs that, socially constructed gender roles influence the lives of girls and boys with disabilities, their experiences, their needs, and their position in the society. The FGD conducted with parents shows that girls are supposed to do all the domestic activities (and not attending school) and spend more time than boys on cooking, cleaning, fetching water and collecting firewood, as well as caring for children, the ill and the elderly people. This affected the girls, especially those with disability to attend school. One participant parent during FDG had the following to say:

In our area there is a clear and strong sexual division of labour between boys and girls which is according to nature and our culture. In this case girls are expected to get married and perform never-ending tasks like managing large households. They always go to sleep late and tired having

worked all day long, wake up early when the hyenas are still out preying, and are not involved in crucial decisions of the family (Parent B, FGDs, 2022).

The study findings imply that these domestic roles put a big burden on girls of a young age and keep them occupied for the whole day while boys have fewer activities compared to girls. Consequently, their school attendance, participation and success are greatly hampered.

Harmful Gender Cultural Norms, Practices and Traditions

The study found out that the study location had a patriarchy and a male dominated society. The society had many beliefs, norms and culture rooted in society which constitutes one of the most significant barriers to the education of children with disabilities, and of girls in particular. Girls with disabilities are continuously impacted by stigma and discrimination because of their disability and being females. A large number of harmful traditional practices are based on a perception of male superiority and women and girls in particular suffer many human rights abuses in the name of culture. Findings from FGD with parents attests these harmful gender cultural norms, practices and traditions as portrayed subsequently:

In our society girls are married immediate after the first menstrual period, some are forced to be married so as to obtain dowry, thus girls and women in general are considered as a commodity. Those with red eyes are accused of witchcraft. Likewise, meeting a child with Albinism is considered as a bad luck and one would run away from the sight to prevent misfortunes to him/her (Parent, FGD, 2022).

This is supported by the findings of Mbunda (2017) that most children with disabilities in developing countries including Tanzania, are not in schools because of social norms and cultural beliefs which affect their rights to education, social living and justice. This implies that harmful traditional norms, beliefs and practices such as early marriages and forced marriages, marriage by abduction, girls regarded as commodity, disproportionate labour, accusations of witchcraft of older women, and early pregnancy were deeply rooted in the study location leading to negative consequences on girls with

disabilities as far as their accessibility to inclusive basic education was concerned.

A Girl Child Regarded as a Commodity

It was found out that, in rural areas community members regard women and girls as commodities due to dowry and bride-price they pay. There tends to be priority given to boy's education over that of girls. The girls' parents use bride price to increase family income and get wealth at the expense of their daughters' education and wellbeing; this increases a girl's chance of early marriage and pregnancy. Girls with disabilities were not an exception in this regard. Girls with disabilities also experience early marriage especially the white ones. This was clearly said by one parent during the FGD that:

Normally in our culture, girls' families receive the bride price for their daughter. The bride price is between 15 to 40 cows, but sometimes where there are men competing over the beautiful white girl, as many as 60 cows were provided. Due to this a woman/girl can endure constant torture from her husband and her in-laws after marriage, createmale domination and female subordination in marriage and man sense of ownership of his wife as a commodity (Parent, FGD, 2022).

Another young woman also added:

When my parents were given my bride price from one of the rich families in the village, I lost my freedom of choosing who to marry as I was forced to get married to the one who paid many cows to my parents. Many young girls in our society are married to elderly suitors because those men have more cows (Parent, FGD, 2022).

When men were asked during the FGD on the bride price and girls being the commodity, they said that paying bride price to the family of the bride has been a culture to the society, a sign of expressing love and thanking the girl's family for taking care of the girl, is not a bad thing to do. Another parent reported further:

Marriage in our culture is not recognized without paying bride price. Women/girls are not regarded as commodities by

paying bride price, but it is a guarantee that she will not go back to her family when there is mis-understanding (Parent, FGD, 2022).

Despite the thinking that bride price was regarded as thanksgiving sign, it could be argued that this tendency jeopardized the freedom and dignity of girls including those with disabilities. It also deprived them of their opportunity to access education,

Having a Child with Disability is a curse and Bad Luck

It was found out during the FGDs that, Children with disabilities were segregated and stigmatized, labelled 'Nsebu,' (*one who is sickly and brings bad luck*). This was a sign that parents did something bad in the past, having them in the family is regarded as a curse and bad luck. The situation was very bad when the child was a girl. They have been suffocated at birth by the midwife or such children are left to die in the bush and their burial is done secretly at night. This was explained by one parent during FGD that:

Children with disabilities were regarded as a tragedy in a family. A good example is meeting a child/person with Albinism on the road. It is believed by the society that it creates and brings bad luck. So, when one sees an Albino, he or she was supposed not to look at him/her and spit on themselves on the chest to remove bad omen. (Parent, FGD, 2022).

This was supported by one Child with disability in one of the FGD done with children:

People say I am a curse to my family because I cannot help much at home, play with other children and even go to school alone. (Child with Disability, FGD, 2022).

One village chairperson also added:

In our area people with Albinism are normally killed so that their body parts were used as a charm and medicinal ingredients for diamond and gold miners' good luck. They are not treated well like other human beings. As a government, we

sensitize the community to protect them and educate people to abandon this belief. (Village chairperson, FGD, 2022).

These findings are in akin with the assumption by the African beliefs from African cultures. Thus, some African beliefs promote the stigmatization and marginalization of people with disabilities through exclusion and depicting them as objects of pity, ridicule and victims of evil forces (Ndlovu, 2016).

Early Marriage and Forced Marriage

It was found during key informant interviews that early marriage and teenage pregnancies were still problems which hinder education for girls in the study location. Girls marry under the age of 15 before they are physically, physiologically, and psychologically ready to shoulder the responsibilities of marriage and childbearing even when legislation condemns this practice (Article 16(2) of the Universal Declaration of Human rights), the laws are usually weakened by customs and norms as well as corruption. This was supported by head teachers' quotes who said:

Girls were considered ready for marriage when they reached puberty. Parents say marriage protects girls from premarital pregnancy that affect family honour and decreases the amount of bride price. (Headteacher, KII, 2022).

One parent [man] during FGD said that the society in the study location, believed that women (girls) are for marriage and a girl who stays long without being married was usually not respected, she was seen as having a problem, whom they refer to as *Nshimbe*. The participant parent reported that:

Girls marry early, some do not go to school at all, others drop out of school to get married, and others marry immediately after completing primary school (12 to 14 years) they are told by their parents not to write well on their Standard seven national examinations and fail. Consequently, girls aged 12 to 17 years are married, divorced or widowed (Parent, FGD, 2022).

Government statistics demonstrate that 4 in 10 Tanzanian girls got married before turning 18 (Human Rights Watch, 2018). Both the men and women during FGD explained that, in the society there is such a thing as forced

marriage or marriage by abduction. This was explained by one parent participant who said that:

There is a traditional custom during traditional dance normally during harvest season called “Chagulaga” where a girl as young as 12 years old is grabbed and kidnapped from the street and taken away by a man after the agreement between the families without the girls’ knowledge or willingness. So, the girls were not married to the suitors of their own choice, but the suitors of their parents’ choice. (Parent, FGD, 2022).

The FGDs also indicated that there was a problem of early and forced marriage for girls in the society. The village and ward leaders revealed that forced marriage was perpetuated by a unique tradition called *chagulaga*, where men would line up and ask the girl to choose one as a lover. In this case one VEO explained:

It is true that Chagulaga is a practice in this society where the girl was abducted although most of the time there were prior arrangements between families. It is a bad practice but the by-laws and society education has reduced this habit of bride kidnapping in the society. (VEO D, FGD, 2022).

Forced marriage was arguably a sense of victimisation to the girls including those with disabilities. Marriage was not only ought to go with one’s suitor but needed to come in a timely manner.

Menstrual Period for Girls

Taboos and harmful traditional practices surrounding menstruation period is one of the major barriers to girls’ education. It was found out during the FGD with a group of women it was found out that, cultural beliefs (women/girls during menstrual period are impure, contaminated, dirty, or sinful), combined with limited access to sanitary products, results in girls missing school completely during their menstrual period. Female parents talked much on this regard, one said:

The society believes that a girl's first period is a signal that she is ready for marriage and childbearing. Having a period is regarded as something secret and shameful. Also, as parents we fail to provide assistance to our daughters to buy safe sanitary pads, as a result girls stay at home until the period is over. (Parent, FGD, 2022).

It was found during the study that lack of water, sanitation and hygiene (WASH) and menstrual hygiene management facilities at school are a barrier for adolescent girls with disabilities who are regularly forced to stay home during their menstrual period eventually resulting in dropping out permanently. When asked about the contribution of lack of girl's special rooms, water and sanitation in many schools to assist girls attend schools even during their menstrual period, one of the Head teachers said:

It is true that most of our primary schools lack access to water and sanitation, but the government and ministry of education are working hard to ensure that all the schools have enough toilets, water and special rooms for girls; and where possible to assist them with sanitary pads, especially those coming from poor families. (Head teacher B, KII, 2022)

Also, during FGD with children with disabilities, the menstrual period was reported as one of the hardest times for them to attend school. Some of the reasons provided were the lack of water, sanitary pads and toilets. One girl said:

It is shameful for others to know that I am in my period, so during that time I opt not to attend school. I usually have stomach pain during my periods and I fail to have sanitary pads. In our school we do not have enough toilets, water and even education during the menstrual period. (Child C, FGD, 2022).

These findings are similar to UNESCO (2018) by the studies done in Kenya, Ethiopia and several countries in Sub-Saharan countries which found that menstruation affects girls' attendance and participation in education, as one in 10 girls in Sub-Saharan Africa missed school, they miss between 1 and 4 days of school every month due to menstruation. The inaccessible school

infrastructures including the absence of changing rooms for girls including those with disabilities greatly interferes their access, participation and successful completion of their basic education.

Women with Red Eyes Accusations of Witchcraft

The study found out that there has been an increase in the violation of the women right to life through killings and torture in relation to witchcraft beliefs in the study location. Old women with red eyes were punished by mob justice and murdered. This was clearly said by one male participant during the FGD session. Results of a lifetime of cooking in unventilated kitchens using smoky firewood and sometimes dry cow dung was responsible for having red eyes as he reported:

In our community witchcraft is normally used as an excuse for violence against older women. Red eyes are perceived to be a sign of one engaging in witchcraft practices. Traditional healers normally point out witches in the society. The government and NGOs have been working to educate people on the rights of women and stop the belief that misfortune; such as illness, death or financial problems are the results of witchcraft. (Parent E, FGD, 2022).

Another parent during FGD added that:

The killings of older women have been increasing in our society despite various education and awareness campaigns and the government must take serious efforts to stop them. (Parent C, FGD, 2022).

It could be argued that, the innocent killings of women adversely affects children including girls by making them orphaned. Orphaning of girls with disabilities makes them more vulnerable leading to drop outs. Motsoeneng (2022) report that women were accused of witchcraft and murdered and that the community did not have concrete evidence of their accusations. This implies that the killings in the study location over women with red eyes was not only detrimental to future schooling of their granddaughters with disabilities but needed serious interventions regarding proof of the accusation as well as respect of rule of law.

Barriers to access Inclusive education for Children with Disabilities Poor School Infrastructure for Children with Disability Especially Girls

As observed by researchers, in most primary schools visited for the study, the school infrastructures were not conducive for accessibility of children with disabilities. Schools have shortage of classrooms, narrow doorways for children with disabilities, no ramps, no handrails, shortage of toilets for Children with disabilities including girls. Girls require safe and separate toilet rooms from those of boys, they also need facilities to dispose sanitary products and a special changing room for menstruating girls; which is not available in all the schools visited for study. This is supported by Awinia (2019) who found that schools in Tanzania lack clean and accessible water, toilet and sanitation facilities (SWASH) for girls due to overcrowding and financial problems. Girls need safe, private and hygienic space to manage their menstrual hygiene. This was explained by one girl during FGD that:

For Girls to change during the period, we need a safe and very private place to avoid the shame and sexual harassment. Other girls change their sanitary towels in the bushes following the washroom crisis. Our school has no water and has very few toilets and no place to throw our used sanitary pads, as a result we sometimes opt to stay home during our periods. (FGD with Children with disabilities,2022).

The children's findings were supported by parents, head teachers and VEOs during interview and FGDs. Head teachers reported poor school infrastructures and inadequate teaching and learning facilities such as textbooks, learning and teaching materials. One head teacher had this to say:

Our school lacks a lot of facilities for our children to study. The school has a shortage of classrooms and toilets for children to use. Children with physical disabilities, it becomes a problem when he wants to use a toilet. Entering the classroom and moving around the school is a challenge to him. (Head teacher D, KII, 2022).

These results are somewhat similar to results from the study by Mbunda (2017) who found that there was shortage of teaching and learning resources,

shortage of supportive aid to children with disabilities and poor school infrastructure in most of primary schools in Tanzania. Lack of these facilities implicitly affect inclusivity of children with disabilities including the girls.

Gender based Violence and Abuse

The study found that Gender Based violence (GBV), sexual abuse, neglect, maltreatment and exploitation was prevalent in the study location due to male dominated patriarchy system present in the area. It was found out that other children without disabilities assist and protect children with disabilities especially girls in some situation of abuse or violence. GBV happens in schools and on the way to school and greatly constitutes one of the barriers to inclusive primary education among girls with disabilities. This was found out during FGDs with children with disabilities:

Some children here at the school mock us, especially girls, because they are regarded as weaker. Other children act the way those with physical disabilities walk and laugh at them when they fail to do some activities. At the street, we normally get bullied and sometimes other children help us. (FGD with children with disabilities, 2022).

It was further found that Children with disabilities were bullied by other pupils at school and when outside the school. This negatively impacts the children leading to poor school attendance, poor learning and school dropout. This problem was also reported by parents during FGD when reported:

Due to presence of gender-based violence in our area, families often resist sending their children especially daughters with disabilities to school for fear of their safety and the lack of protection from violence and sexual abuse. We have few examples of girls with disabilities who got pregnant, while the parents did not know who gave them pregnancy (Parent, FGD, 2022).

Most advocacy campaigns conducted by the government in the study location were on issues of gender, and gender-based violence. However, overall, the effectiveness of the gender awareness campaigns is questionable since this study revealed that violation of gender-based rights, gender-based violence,

unbalanced domestic chores and preference of educating boys over girls were still prevalent in the project location. According to one of the WEO FGD participants:

In these areas, gender equality is still a problem, women and girls still suffer the men's chauvinism, violence and oppressed culture and traditions (WEO A, FGD, 2022).

These findings are supported by different studies done around the World especially in developing countries. Similar findings are provided by Plan International (2013) and Shah *et al.* (2016) which indicated that women and girls with disabilities are twice as likely to experience gender-based violence compared to girls without disabilities. This implies that, while girls without disabilities face gender based violence, the situation is likely to be worse to those with disabilities.

Conclusion and Recommendations

Conclusion

From the evidence gathered, it was found that there were some quite strong and distinctive gender disparities in the study location, especially in terms of gender roles and division of labour among the community members. Girls with many responsibilities in both the home and in the family farming activities, spend more hours a day working than boys whose role is mostly to do with farming activities. Girls are often arranged into early marriages not of their choice. Girls with disabilities are often at greater risk from harm emerging from cultural misconceptions and superstitions that increases their social exclusion and isolation and even at times their death.

Recommendations

It is recommended that education systems focus more on children with disabilities, especially girls, to empower and support them to reach their full potential. Community members need to change the mindset of gender inequality, cultural norms, and traditions that hinder the development of girls with disabilities. The government needs to engage in public awareness campaigns and community engagement on the importance of taking girls with disabilities to school. The government with the help of community and development partners should strive to strengthen gender equality and

disability inclusion in education systems in Tanzania. There is also a need for stakeholders to support families of children with disabilities to develop resilient livelihoods and enhance their economic capabilities and manage educational expenses of the children including those with and without disabilities as well as refrain from considering girls as a source of income through dowry/bride price.

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