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## **Gender and Education of People With Disabilities in Tanzania**

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### **Abstract**

This paper discusses the concept of disability, its prevalence and incidence. It highlights on the importance of prevalence and incidence and provides prevalence of various disabilities in the country. The paper also discusses the concept of gender in relation to education of people with disabilities in Tanzania. From the discussions it is apparent that there are more males than females with disabilities in Tanzania. The situation may be due to some bias in determining prevalence of disabilities. The bias may result from the fact that boys are biologically vulnerable than males. Girls with disabilities in Tanzania have not had equal access to education compared to boys, especially at higher institutions of learning. Some of the reasons advanced for the imbalances may be due to negative attitudes towards people with disabilities, lack of role models, as well as lack of teaching-learning materials, and inaccessibility to educational buildings. It is recommended that parents and the Tanzanian community in general, be made aware of the education of children with disabilities; and that role models be used to motivate parents to enrol their children with disabilities in school and make sure they graduate.

### **Introduction**

The standard rules and equalisation of opportunities for persons with disabilities was adopted by the United Nations General Assembly at its 48<sup>th</sup> session on 20<sup>th</sup> December 1993 (Resolution 48/96). The Standard Rule Number 6 states that countries should recognise the principle of equal primary, secondary and tertiary education opportunities for children, youth and adults with disabilities in integrated settings. It further states that in countries where education is compulsory, it should be provided to girls and boys with all kinds and all levels of disabilities. According to UN Standard Rules, equalisation of opportunities implies that the needs for each and every individuals are of equal importance, and that these needs must be made the bases for planning of societies (UNISE Bulletin, 1995. 8: 22.) The Education Act No. 25 (56) (I) of 1978 states that every Tanzanian has the right to receive such category, nature and level of education as his/her ability may permit. Despite this act, many children with disabilities in general, and particularly girls, do not get equal access to

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education. There is however, some kind of equity in education of children with disabilities at primary school level. At secondary school level, enrolment of students with disabilities decreases even further, making it worse for female enrolment at tertiary level. Very few female students with disabilities are enrolled in institutions of higher learning. For example, ever since the University of Dar es Salaam started enrolling students with Visual Disabilities in 1978, only two female students with Visual Impairment have been enrolled. There is need of looking at the education of people with disabilities in Tanzania with a gender perspective. For a fruitful analysis, it is necessary to critically discuss prevalence and incidence of disabilities.

### **Prevalence and Incidence of Disabilities**

*Prevalence* refers to the total number of individuals with disorders or disabilities in a given population. It is calculated for a given period, or for a point in time. Prevalence is often expressed as a percentage of the population; the total number of cases is divided by the total number of individuals in that population.

*Incidence*, on the other hand, refers to the number of new cases of a disorder in a given population. Cases refer to individuals or to episodes of the disorder (that is, an individual might be counted more than once during the incidence period if he/she exhibits the disorder, or subsequently if she/he does not exhibit the disorder or goes into remission, and then again exhibits the disorders). Incidence, like prevalence, may be expressed as a percentage of the population, but this can be misleading when episodes rather than individuals are counted. *Incidence* addresses the question, "*How often does this disorder occur?*" (Kauffman, 1989). For the purpose of this paper prevalence will be used since it is considered more meaningful than incidence. Further, teachers and administrators have most often been concerned about knowing or estimating the number of students with disabilities at a given point in time so as to assess the trend and provide appropriate services.

Literature from developed countries such as the USA indicate prevalence and incidence of a number of disabilities such as Mental Retardation, Emotional and Behavioural Disorders, Communication (speech and language) Disorders, Hearing and Visual Impairment, Physical and Severe Disabilities as well as Health Impairments. However, prevalence of disabilities vary according to gender. (Hallahan & Kauffman, 1997). Hallahan & Kauffman (1997) argue that generally, certain problems are associated with gender. For example, Duchenne Muscular Dystrophy is said to occur much more frequently in males than females. The authors further argue that many types of physical impairments occur with equal frequency in children of both sexes.

In terms of prevalence, boys are over-represented than girls in disabilities.

For example Hallahan & Kauffman (1997) indicate that males are over represented in Serious Emotional Disturbance and Specific Learning Disabilities. With Learning Disabilities, boys outnumber girls by about 3:1. The reason behind this ratio is that boys have greater biological vulnerability than girls. Infant mortality rate for males is higher than for females, and males are at a greater risk than females for a variety of biological abnormalities. However, it is worthwhile noting that sometimes there may be referral bias (Hallahan & Kauffman, 1997:168). The bias exists due to biological vulnerability of males. For example, figures from the American Federal Government indicate that all disabilities are more prevalent in males, including conditions that are difficult to imagine resulting from referral or assessment biases. Hearing Impairment for males is estimated to be 53%. Regarding speech, it is estimated that more boys than girls have a problem of stuttering (Hallahan & Kauffman, 1997:294). Also males form 54% of people with Orthopaedic Impairment and 56% of males have Visual Impairment (Hallahan, Kauffman, 1997).

Further, the most common types of problems exhibited by students placed in special education for emotional or behavioural disorders are externalising, i.e., aggressiveness and acting out and males display the behaviour by a ratio of 5 to 1 or more. Overall, boys tend to exhibit more aggression and conduct disorders than girls (Hallahan & Kauffman 1997:281.)

### **Prevalence of Disabilities in Tanzania**

The population of Tanzania is about 30,372,000 people. Currently no census of people with disabilities has been carried out since 1981. It is however, expected that approximately 3,372,000 people or 10% of the population in Tanzania have disabilities. Table 1 shows the number of people with disabilities as estimated by the Ministry of Social Welfare Development, Women and Children (1998)

**Table 1: Estimate of People with Disabilities in Tanzania**

Type of Disability	Number of People
Physical disability	850,416
Mental disability	242,976
Visual disability	820,044
Heavy Impact	607,440
Multiple Handicap	121,488
Others	394,836
Total	3,372,000

Source: Ministry of Social Welfare Development,  
Women and Children (1998): File data

The data in Table 1 does not indicate gender. However, the 1981 census indicates the number of people with disabilities as portrayed in Table 2.

Information in Table 2 testifies that in Tanzania there are more males with disabilities than females. Males with disabilities form 57.22%, while 42.78% are females. There are more women with Physical Disabilities, followed by those with Visual Disabilities and those with Mental Retardation as well as those with Hearing Impairment and Albinism. It can be observed here that the difference in number of people with disabilities among the types of impairments is not alarming.

Table 2: Population of People with disabilities in 1981 Census.

Sex	Physical Disability	Visual Disability	Hearing Impairment	Mental Retardation	Albinism	Others	Total	%
Males	69622 (58.9%)	21176 (51.47%)	12097 (56.18%)	14491 (57.65%)	730 (53.7%)	12785 (56.97)	130900 (57.22)	57.22%
Females	48559 (41.08%)	18962 (46.09%)	9433 (43%)	10644 (42.38%)	629 (46.28%)	9657 (43.03)	97884 42.78	42.78%
Total	118,181 (100%)	41,138 (100%)	21,530 (100%)	25,135 (100%)	1,359 (100%)	22,442 (100%)	228,784 100%	100%

Source: Ministry of Education, Special Education Section (1997)

Naturally one would have expected a similar pattern in the enrolment of children with disabilities in educational institutions.

### Conceptual Issues

Having highlighted on the prevalence and incidence of people with disabilities, there is need of looking into issues regarding gender and disability. The following provide some concepts that may facilitate better understanding of the concepts of gender, and some of the related concepts.

*Gender*: this is a special construct referring to distinctive qualities and roles of men and women that are culturally and socially determined as masculine and feminine respectively (Yona, 1992). Because of many denotative and connotative difficulties with the term *sex*, gender has gradually emerged as the term of choice in discussing male/female differences, identity, social roles, and the like. *Gender* is at times used as sex-relating to males and females.

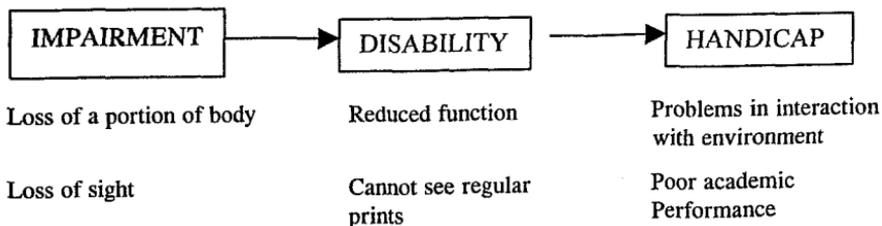
*Gender* is understood as the way in which women and men are socially constructed from birth and throughout their lives by institutions of family, civil society, and the state to adopt female and male identities. Each individual's

gender is influenced by class, tribe, religious beliefs, able body, sexual relation, age, current family roles (daughter, sister, wife, mother, exposure to alternative ways of being, geographical location, among other things (Department of Education, South Africa, 1995). In this paper gender will refer to the concept of sex differences and roles of males and females.

The concept *gender ideology* refers to a set of ideas that are basically given justification of relationship between men and women in the household in a society at large (Yona, 1992).

The term *disability* means a physical problem that limits a person to perform certain tasks that most other people can perform. A person with disability is not handicapped, unless his/her physical problem leads to educational, social, vocational or other difficulties. In this text I will adopt Kelly's (1991) definition of disability as the reduced function or loss of a particular part or organ. It is often used interchangeably with the term impairment.

A disability limits one to perform certain roles (to see, hear, or walk). Disability may lead to educational problems. For example, a student who has lost both legs uses artificial limbs but does every school work without any problem he/she is not handicapped but impaired. On the other hand, handicap refers to problems that a person with disability or impairment encounters in interaction with the environment. The disability may pose a handicap in one environment but not in another. An example may be a student who has lost sight and is unable to read regular prints. The student may not be able to perform well in his/her academic activities that require reading. The visual disability in this case is a handicap. We may wish to differentiate the terms impairment, disability and handicap by using Figure 1.



**Figure 1: Impairment, disability and handicap**

### **Gender and Education**

When discussing issues on gender, disability and education one has to look into issues pertaining to gender stereotypes, types and severity of disabilities, enrolment as well as number of schools and programmes available for both male and female students. All people with disabilities, regardless of their sex have the right to live and participate fully in education. Special education must therefore continue to expand and provide education for all people with disabilities. Also, all men and women have to be treated equally. But equal treatment in all cases has a potential of reinforcing inequity. Equity is necessary in education for students with disabilities. Contextually defined, equity can mean both equal treatment and preferential treatment. Equity also is concerned with the need to set standards and reorganise the nature of environments which were previously exclusive preserved for men, ensuring that they support the development of both men and women.

People with disabilities tend to be invisible and denied important services such as education. Fine and Asch (1988) argues that:

.... Having a disability has always been synonymous with dependent, child-like, and helplessness, an image fundamentally challenging all that is embodied in the ideal male-virility autonomy and independence. Women with disabilities have been traditionally ignored by those concerned about disability, and also by those examining women's experiences. Even the feminist schools to whom we owe great intellectual and political debts have perpetuated this neglect. The popular view of women with disabilities has been one mixed with repugnance (Fine and Asch, 1988:8.).

Women with disabilities suffer double discrimination; first, as women, and secondly as people with disabilities. The discrimination leads to marginalisation of women. A person with disability should not be discriminated. The UNISE Bulletin (1997) shows that many women with disabilities in Uganda are not sent to school. The Bulletin further points out that if you send a disabled girl and a disabled boy together for registration, the boy would be left behind.

Mhoja (Mwalutambi, 1995) also shows that most women with disabilities in Tanzania do not get education beyond primary school. Consequently, they lack good education background, which makes them live in poverty. The author argues further that the disabled women are exposed to all forms of social ills and harassment and live as beggars, dependants, or as prostitutes.

About 3 million (10% of Tanzania's population) have disabilities, of which women are 1,530,000 (51%) (Mwalutambi, 1995). Wimile and Kondo (1997) argue that because of the lack of education, women with disabilities lack

functional skills necessary to enhance independent living. Most women with disabilities, like any other people with disabilities in Tanzania are “pushed” into streets as beggars. They are homeless, illiterate and neglected

In America, one out six disabled woman has had fewer than eight years of formal education as compared to only one out of every 28 non-disabled women in the country. Only 16% of all disabled women are likely to report some college education, compared with 31% of all non-disabled women (Bowe, 1984). Similar experiences are also found in Tanzania. For example, in 1997 there were 1787 boys in primary schools, and 1374 girls out of a total enrolment of 3221 disabled children in primary schools (Possi, 1998(b)). There is need of discussing education of people with specific attention to gender. It is for this reason that this article is written to portray the situation of gender and disabilities in education in Tanzania.

### **The Primary Education Situation in Tanzania**

Statistics on Table 3 show that in the recent five years (1992-1996) there has been an increase in the number of students with disabilities in primary schools.

**Table 3: Number Of Students of Major Type of Disabilities in Primary Schools from 1992-1996**

<b>Year</b>	<b>Type</b>	<b>Boys</b>	<b>Girls</b>	<b>Total</b>
1992	VI	495	295	790
	MR	267	142	409
	HI	431	292	723
1993	VI	579	476	1055
	MR	288	208	496
	HI	490	357	847
1994	VI	560	419	987
	MR	341	273	614
	HI	504	367	871
1995	VI	640	508	1148
	MR	641	431	1072
	HI	552	433	985
1996	VI	511	422	933
	MR	876	587	1463
	HI	594	440	1034
<b>TOTAL</b>		<b>7769</b>	<b>5650</b>	<b>11419</b>

**Source:** Special Education Unit, 1997

**Key:** VI= Visual impairment  
HI = Hearing Impairment  
MR = Mental Retardation

For example, in 1992 there were a total of 1922 students receiving primary education. In 1996 there were 3442 students: an increase of 1520 students (55.84%). It should be noted here that children with other disabilities like Learning Disabilities (LD) and Emotional Disorders (EBD) are not indicated. For one to determine access to education by students with disabilities, there is need to know the exact number of children with disabilities who are of school age.

Data available indicate that in 1996 there were 7769 boys (68.03%) and 5650 girls (49.47%) in Tanzania getting special education in primary schools. There were more students with Mental Retardation, followed by those with Hearing Impairment, and than those with Visual Impairment (See Table 4).

**Table 4: Students with Disabilities in Programs  
For Students with Disabilities in Tanzania**

Category	Boys	Girls	Total
Visual Disability	709	627	1,236
Hearing Impairment	520	380	900
Physical Disability	186	123	309
Mental Retardation	438	433	781
Autistic			10*
Deaf Blind	1	2	3
Cerebral Palsy	9	5	14
Total	1863 (57.27%)	1380 (42.4%)	3253 (100%)

\* Break down in gender was unavailable

Source: Mboya and Possi (1996).

The data in Table 4 show that there are a total of 3,253 students enrolled in Special Education programmes in Tanzania: 1,863 (57.27%) boys, and 1,380 (42.4%) girls. Therefore boys outnumber girls by 14.85%.

### Secondary Education

Table 5 shows that there are 170 students with visual impairment receiving secondary education in the country, and of these 123 (72.35%) are boys, and 47 (27.64%) are girls.

The data in Table 5 indicates that enrolment of students with disabilities decrease even further at secondary school level. Also the number of disabilities being catered for keep on decreasing: only two are being catered for in secondary schools as far as Special Education is concerned.

**Table 5: Number of Students with Visual Disabilities in Secondary Schools of Tanzania**

Type of Disability	Type of School	Number of Schools	Boys	Girls	Total
VI	Integrated	8	84	34	118
HI	Integrated	3	39	13	52
Total		11	123	47	170

**Key:** VI = Visual Impairment  
HI = Hearing Impairment

**Source :** Possi, M. K. (1998)

The decrease in the number of girls, and the type of disabilities catered for in secondary schools may be due to a variety of factors. For example, negative attitudes towards girls' education, coupled with overprotection of girls by their parents, may affect enrolment of girls with disabilities.

Dembo (1991) indicates that there are no gender differences in general intelligence, even though girls excel at verbal tasks, and boys at mathematical and visual-spatial tasks. On standardised tests, girls score higher than boys in subjects requiring verbal ability, while boys surpass girls in subjects requiring various reasoning and spatial skills. Part of this may be due to the nurturing process, whereby boys are encouraged to participate in science activities and science-related fields. Research also shows that more boys are non-readers than girls, hence more likely to receive special education (Hallahan & Kauffman, 1997).

### **University Education**

The University of Dar es Salaam started enrolling students with Visual Impairment in 1978. So far only two female students with Visual Impairment have been enrolled, and graduated from the University of Dar es Salaam. Data from the resource centre at the University of Dar es Salaam indicate that in the 1997/1998 academic year, there was a total of 24 students with disabilities at the University of Dar es Salaam, and of these only four (25 %) were girls. Further, the data indicate that the majority of the students were majoring in Education; and a few in sciences, Law and Economics. For example, there was only one student in Engineering, and two in the Faculty of Science. It should be noted here that most of the students enrolled at the University of Dar es Salaam have mild disabilities, with the exception of those with total blindness.

### **Adult Education**

The Directorate of Adult Education in the Ministry of Education and Culture is making every effort to make literacy programmes accessible to all. However,

some people with disabilities have not had access to literacy programmes (Ministry of Education and Culture (1997). It has been indicated that there are 193,599 disabled learners out of whom 14,324 showed interest in joining literacy classes. Table 6 indicates the number of people with disabilities requiring literacy education. The data presented are for 1981 since there has never been any other census.

**Table 6: Number of adults with disabilities and their education levels in Tanzania**

Sex	Formal Education	Literacy Programme	Illiterates	Others	Total
Males	34729 (70.56%)	9038 (63.09%)	62869 (49.03%)	1361 (73.08%)	107997 (57.78%)
Females	14496 (24.44%)	5286 (36.9%)	65340 (50.96%)	480 (26.07%)	85602 (44.21%)
Total	49225 (100%)	14324 (100%)	128209 (100%)	1841 (100%)	193599 (100%)

*Source:* Ministry of Education (1998)

The data in Table 6 indicate that there are less women (29.44%) compared to men (70.56%) who have formal education. Further, the data show that there are more illiterate women (50.95%) than men (49.03%). Also there were fewer women with disabilities (36.1%) than men (63.09%) who showed interest in literacy classes.

When asked what programmes they wanted, more male adult learners (55.78%) showed interest in functional literacy programmes than women (44.21%). The respondents were interested in activities such as agriculture and animal husbandry, domestic science, and carpentry (See Table 7). Other activities that learners with disabilities could participate in included commerce, leathers work, tailoring and secretarial duties, depending on the type and severity of disabilities. Table 7 indicates several income generating activities that people with disabilities can participate in. The data do not indicate the activities according to type of disabilities.

The data in Table 7 shows that many adults with disabilities joined neither formal education classes nor literacy programmes. Information from the Ministry of Education and Culture (1998) showed that there had been a problem of lack of well-trained specialist teachers. The fact that there were some people with disabilities who participated in literacy classes demonstrated that they could integrate with able-bodied people in their day-to-day activities if given conducive conditions for learning. They were also ready to participate

and give advice in decision-making processes in their study groups as well as respective communities, and contribute to community development.

**Table 7: Number of Adults With Disabilities and Their Involvement in Income Generation Activities**

1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12
Sex	Tel. Oper-ators	Tea-ching	Agric-ulture	Animal Hush-andry	Tal-oring	Carp-entry	Com-merce	Secre-tarial	Unem-ployed	Other	Total
Male	743	732	30003	475	285	1131	608	664	72247	1109	107997
Female	485	256	20578	159	69	161	148	160	63097	462	85602
Total	1228	988	50581	634	381	1292	756	824	135344	1571	193599
%	0.6	0.5	26.1	0.327	0.196	0.667	0.39	0.4	69.9	0.8	100. %

Source: The National Census of the Disabled Report compiled in 1981 by the Ministry of Labour and Social Welfare

### **Why Such a Situation for Students With Disabilities in Tanzania?**

Literature on gender issues show that low enrolment of girls with disabilities in schools does not differ much from that of the non-disabled girls. After all, they are essentially females. It is however noted that the overprotection of children with disabilities may be one of the reasons for their low enrolment in school. Kizito (1993) argued that overprotection of children with disabilities in Uganda was one of the biggest problems facing children with disabilities. He contended that some parents may do almost everything for their children with disabilities, and this may hold back the children from developing life skills and learning. This situation may be worse for girls with disabilities. Kizito (1993) also reiterated that some families in overprotecting their handicapped children they often kept them hidden away from the public. It is important that children with disabilities are not hidden, but be provided with education that will allow them to live as self-reliant as possible.

Further, low enrolment of girls with disabilities may be attributed to the general negative attitudes towards education for women, as well as differential treatment, expectations and reinforcement given to girls (Bendera, 1997). Negative attitudes toward the education of people with disabilities in general has been indicated somewhere else by Mboya and Possi (1996).

Another reason for low enrolment of children with disabilities, and specifically girls, may be due to the lack of accessible facilities in schools such as toilets for students with handicapping conditions. Most of the buildings in our schools do not facilitate mobility for the disabled. It is hard to imagine a student who walks on fours using the common toilets in schools.

Lack of teaching learning materials in schools is another problem. Possi (1986) and Mlimahadala (1996) found out that there was shortage of teaching and learning materials for students with Visual Impairments. Such shortage may affect the academic performance of students hindering them to perform well in examinations. For example, when the shortage of materials leads to sharing of them among students, girls might feel shy to share learning materials with boys. Another observation is that some disabilities are not catered for. Such disabilities include Behavioural and Emotional Disorders, Multiple Disabilities, Learning Disabilities as well, as low vision.

Lack of correct information about causes of disability and the cognitive ability of children with disabilities may hinder parents from taking their children to school (Mboya and Possi, 1996).

The degree of disability may also affect the education of children with disabilities. For example, Tanzania children with severe disabilities are not catered for in educational institutions since there are no services for severe disabilities.

### **Summary and Conclusions**

This paper attempted to provide a discussion of conceptual issues regarding gender and disability, as well as to look at education of people with disabilities in a gender perspective. The discussion has indicated that parity in education opportunity (enrolment) does not paint a bad picture at the primary school level. In primary schools the performance of girls in relation to that of boys has not been inversely proportioned. However, upward the ladder toward higher education, the number keeps on decreasing, like that of the non-disabled girls in ordinary schools. Further, it has been indicated that there are very few girls with disabilities who have had University or college education. It has also been observed that students with Behavioural Disorders, Learning Disabilities, and severe disabilities are not catered for in special education. The low enrolment of students with disabilities might be due negative attitudes towards girls' education, as well as overprotection of children with disabilities by their parents. Lack of conducive environment or facilities for students with disabilities has also been advanced as one of the reasons for low enrolment. Another reason is lack of role models, or successful educated people with disabilities, who can motivate students with disabilities to join school, work hard, stay in school, graduate successfully, and then get a job or become self-employed.

Despite the aforementioned factors there is a need of revisiting our curricula and find out whether or not they are friendly to students with disabilities and whether or not what is offered may assist in making them self-reliant.

### **Recommendations**

Consistent with the above discussions, the following recommendations are made:

1. Efforts should be made by the Ministry of Education and Culture, together with the Ministry of Higher Education to increase enrolment of children with disabilities, with particular emphasis on women.
2. Educators and associations of people with disabilities, as well as those working for the disabled, should conduct awareness seminars on education of people with disabilities.
3. Educators should play the leading role in educating people about the disabled, and developing positive attitudes towards people with disabilities. This can be done through seminars and workshops.
4. Attempts should be made by the Tanzanian government to create conducive physical environments for students with disabilities. For example, physical barriers should be removed by making all rooms accessible for students with disabilities.
5. Early identification, assessment and intervention is necessary for successful provision of education to students with disabilities.
6. Role models visitations to schools of children with special needs should encouraged to motivate children with special needs.
7. Parent education should be provided to ensure that they understand the concept of equality and equal opportunities for education of their children with disabilities.
8. Arrangements should be made to have relevant teaching and learning materials which are gender friendly.

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