

EXAMINING THE STRATEGIES OF DISABLED PERSONS ORGANIZATIONS (DPOS) IN PROMOTING AN INCLUSIVE SOCIETY IN URBAN DISTRICT UNGUJA, ZANZIBAR. A CROSS-SECTIONAL STUDY OF ZANZIBAR FEDERATION OF PERSONS WITH DISABILITIES AND ZANZIBAR NATIONAL COUNCIL FOR PERSONS WITH DISABILITIES.

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ABSTRACT

Background

Disabled Persons Organizations (DPOs) have been nationally and internationally recognized as advocates in promoting inclusion. They lay the foundation for a diversified society. Therefore, the study aimed to explore the strategies of DPOs in fostering an inclusive culture in the Urban District of Unguja, Zanzibar.

Methodology

The study used a qualitative research approach to engage six (6) senior staff from both the Zanzibar Federation of Persons with Disabilities and the Zanzibar National Council for Persons with Disabilities. Ideally, three (3) senior staff from the Zanzibar Federation of Persons with Disabilities were engaged in a Focused Group Discussion, and three (3) staff from the Zanzibar National Council for Persons with Disabilities were engaged in a face-to-face interview. Respondents were selected using non-probability sampling techniques like purposive and convenience sampling.

Results

Findings revealed that Disabled Persons Organizations (DPOs) use various strategies such as media engagement, community outreach, and campaigns to enhance a diversified society. To enhance gender equality, three (3) of the respondents were male, and three (3) were female. Partnership among organizations is an adequate strategy that enhances inclusion. This is evident in the fact that DPOs collaborate on projects that enable the inclusion of persons with disabilities in social activities. In line with the Convention on Rights of Persons with Disabilities (CRPD), the two organizations are very supportive of persons with disabilities, ranging from providing assistive technologies like braille machines, wheelchairs, tricycles, and hearing aids to organizing capacity development training on entrepreneurship to enhance financial independence.

Conclusion

From a clear standpoint, DPOs are fundamental pillars in promoting an inclusive society in Zanzibar. In their efforts to enhance inclusivity, they collaborate with like-minded organizations to enable effective inclusive policies.

Recommendations

Strengthened collaboration is a strong pillar and sustainable approach to promoting a disability-friendly society. Therefore, DPOs must collaborate with like-minded organizations to enable an inclusive society in Zanzibar.

Keywords: *Disabled Persons Organizations (DPOs), Inclusive Society, Persons with Disabilities.*

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Background of the Study

Disabled Persons Organizations (DPOs) are led, directed, and have a stated commitment to the social model of disability in promoting the human rights of disabled people by the United Nations Convention on Rights of Persons with Disabilities (UNCRPD) (DPO Network Position Paper, 2023).

The 1975 UN Declaration of the Rights of Disabled People provided a global framework for the equal treatment of disabled people in all spheres of life. In 1981, Disabled

People International (DPI) held its first conference in Singapore to launch the formation of DPOs to enhance rehabilitation and equalization of opportunities that guarantee full participation of disabled persons in social life and access to opportunities (Cornielje, 2009; National Disability Authority, 2021).

Globally, 1.3 billion people and approximately 16% of the world's population have a disability, and approximately 80% of people with disabilities live in developing countries (WHO, 2022; Grills, Hoq, Wong, Allagh, Singh, Soji &

Murthy, 2020). In addition, Article 4.3 of the UN CRPD (2007) laid an obligation on states to consult DPOs closely on any matters that affect persons with disabilities. It considers disability as having long-term physical, mental, intellectual, or sensory impairments that hinder full and effective participation in society on an equal basis with others. The social model perspective views disability as a socially produced injustice that can be eliminated through radical change (Lawson & Beckett, 2021). DPOs vary in their roles and functions; however, they all have an overarching focus on promoting the rights of disabled people and monitoring the implementation of the UN CRPD (Young, Reeve & Grills, 2016; DPO Network Position Paper, 2023).

Several studies have recognized DPOs as strong advocates in advising policy changes. According to Armstrong (1993), the work of DPOs in Malaysia resulted in the development of a Code of Practice for access to public buildings, reclassification of motorized mobility aids to reduce registration costs for people with disabilities, and adoption of a policy of reduced public transport fares for people with disabilities (as cited in Young et al 2016). Previous findings hold that DPOs help people with disabilities gain wider societal recognition, monitor disability services and support, implement and monitor disability rights, build capacity, and work with local authorities to build an inclusive society (National Disability Authority, 2021).

Equally, in Sweden, two umbrella federations such as the Unique (Lika Unika) and Swedish Disability Rights Federation (Funktionsrätt Sverige) are greatly involved in raising awareness about disability rights through engagement and interaction on social media handles such as Facebook, Twitter, YouTube and WhatsApp (Gelfgren, Inelan & Cocq, 2021).

In the United Kingdom (UK), there has been significant growth and diversification of DPOs over the years, and they have made a great impact on inclusion. The UK Personalization Agenda encourages and supports DPOs to embark on a sustainable service delivery approach. Some local government areas provide support to disabled people through DPOs (National Disability Authority, 2021).

In India, DPOs embark on regular home visits to enhance the involvement of disabled people in societal activities. In this regard, people with disabilities are encouraged to conduct weekly disability group meetings to facilitate problem-solving, advocacy, and planning (Grills et al., 2020). In the same vein, the South African Organization of Disabled People (SAFOD) considers access to education a basic human right for disabled children and should be realized through the strategy of equalization of opportunities. They strongly condemn segregation against children with disabilities in access to education (Mariga, McConkey & Myezwa, 2014).

In Zanzibar, the Norwegian Association of Persons with Developmental Disabilities (NAPDD) supports local DPOs to implement projects that support and build the capacity of

persons with disabilities. This includes providing capacity training to teachers on the use of sign language, braille machines, behavior modifications, and assistive devices (Mariga, McConkey & Myezwa, 2014). Similarly, the Inclusive Education and Life Skills (IELS) Unit in the Zanzibar Ministry of Education has been firm in providing capacity development to teachers on the implementation of inclusion through action research (Juma, 2015).

Despite the efforts of the Revolutionary Government of Zanzibar and Disabled People Organizations (DPOs) in promoting inclusion, persons with disabilities still face challenges in their access to opportunities as their peers (Juma, 2018). Therefore, this study is set to provide tangible data that guide the adoption of sustainable approaches in the promotion of an inclusive society in Zanzibar.

Objective

To examine the strategies used by DPOs in enabling a disability-friendly society

METHODOLOGY

Research Design

The study used a cross-sectional study design, and data was collected in two phases between the 13th and 30th of January 2025. In the first phase, a face-to-face interview was used to get an in-depth explanation of strategies used by the Zanzibar National Council for Persons with Disabilities in promoting an inclusive society. In phase two, Focused Group Discussion (FGD) was used with the Zanzibar Federation of Persons with Disabilities to get details about their work in enabling a diversified society.

Study Area

The study was conducted between the 13th and 30th of January 2025, with the involvement of the Zanzibar Federation of Persons with Disabilities and the Zanzibar National Council for Persons with Disabilities. In Zanzibar, DPOs have been widely recognized as advocating for and promoting a society that values diversity. Their awareness-raising strategies and challenge redress mechanisms have made the archipelago somewhat disability-friendly (World Bank, 2024). These two organizations are centered in Unguja District, Zanzibar, and the respondents comprise directors, social workers, and Monitoring and Evaluation officers.

Research Approach

The study used a qualitative research approach. In general, the qualitative research approach 'collects the opinions of people and analyzes them using specific interpretive methods. It is a useful method in studying a phenomenon with limited accessible information as its nature is exploratory' (Taherdoost, 2022, p 54). Therefore, this approach enabled a deeper understanding of the strategies of DPOs in promoting an inclusive society in Zanzibar.

Sample Procedures

Sampling is the selection of a subset of individuals from within a population to estimate the characteristics of the whole population (Singh & Musuka, 2014). The study used

non-probability sample techniques to select respondents as representatives of the population. The study used purposive and convenience sampling techniques. These techniques allow the researcher to select respondents based on their resourcefulness. Here is a breakdown of how respondents were selected from the two organizations.

Category of Respondents	Organization “X”	Organization “Y”
Director	1	1
Social Worker	1	1
Monitoring and Evaluation Officer	1	1
Total	6	

Data Collection Tools

The study made use of interviews and Focused Group Discussion (FGD) to collect data on the strategies of DPOs in promoting an inclusive society in Urban District Unguja, Zanzibar.

Interview

An interview involves asking questions and getting answers from participants in a study (Kabir, 2016). The study used face-to-face interviews to ask questions relating to the strategies of DPOs in promoting an inclusive society in Unguja, Zanzibar. The face-to-face interview was conducted with three (3) senior staff at Zanzibar National Council for Persons with Disabilities. This includes a director, a social worker, and a monitoring and evaluation officer.

Focused Group Discussion

A focus group discussion (FGD) is an in-depth field method that brings together a small group of respondents to discuss topics on a study agenda. The purpose of a focus group discussion is to stimulate participants to reveal underlying opinions and views about a specific topic (Kabir, 2016). The study selected three (3) senior staff from the Zanzibar National Council for Persons with Disabilities to participate in a focus group discussion.

Ethical Considerations

A research permission letter was issued by The State University of Zanzibar on the 20th of December, 2024, with the Ethical Clarence Number **PA.95/353/01/04**. The letter was shared with the heads of the organizations as well as the respondents. The consent of respondents was sought both in written and oral form. The study maintained confidentiality and anonymity throughout the process. This involves not taking the names and contact details of any of the respondents.

Findings/Results

Using thematic analysis, the findings suggest that strategies employed by DPOs are functional in promoting an inclusive society in Zanzibar.

Theme 1: Partnerships

Enhancing a society that recognizes the rights and dignity of everyone requires strong collaboration from all sectors. Therefore, effective partnership is a fundamental principle for promoting an inclusive society. The study shows that DPOs partner with like-minded organizations to provide support and change societal perspectives towards people with disabilities.

“We partner with organizations/institutions like Madrassa Early Childhood Programs Zanzibar, Noha Organization-Korea, Ministry of Education, Health, and Blue Economy. During partnerships, we collaborate with organizations on projects to improve livelihoods for disabled persons” [Res 1, Organization “X”].

Equally, in another discussion, it reveals that;

“Our partners include Madrassa Early Childhood Programs, Catholic Based Mission, CBID, UNDP, and the National Council for Persons with Disabilities. However, we receive funds for our projects from the Norwegian Association of Persons with Developmental Disabilities. As an organization, we do not support individuals directly; instead, we provide funds to our partner organizations to implement projects that improve livelihoods for persons with disabilities” [Res 1, Organization “Y”].

From the findings, it could be seen that effective collaboration among organizations is key to promoting an inclusive society. Therefore, effective collaboration has a long-lasting impact on inclusive policies in Zanzibar.

Concurrently, Suleiman, Shaame & Juma (2024) consider collaboration a fundamental pillar promoting inclusive education in Zanzibar. That is to say, stakeholders, including the Ministry of Education, Science and Technology (MoEST) and Non-Governmental Organizations (NGOs), need effective collaboration to provide primary schools with necessary assistive technologies and to establish the required supportive infrastructure.

Theme 2: Awareness Campaigns

The participating organizations were found to have various strategies for creating an inclusive and disabled-friendly society. These strategies have improved the effectiveness of inclusive and disability policies within Zanzibar. Thus enhancing a high awareness level among communities on inclusive education policies and minimal discrimination towards persons with disabilities.

“We organize awareness campaigns during elections to ensure that persons with disabilities are greatly involved in the electioneering process, organize open meetings and campaigns, forum communications, and sports. December 3rd of every year, we organize an event to celebrate International Day for Persons with Disabilities, engage radio stations and TV stations to raise awareness on the rights of persons with disabilities” [Respondents from both organizations].

The findings depict those effective strategies are used by the two organizations in promoting a society that does not discriminate against people based on their disabilities. With the effective adoption of these strategies, persons with disabilities will be considered part of society.

Theme 3: Support of Assistive Technology

Findings illustrate that the two organizations have been of great support to persons with disabilities in their access to functional and basic facilities. They are a great hope for persons with disabilities. They provide assistive devices and entrepreneurship training to persons with disabilities to enhance financial independence.

“As part of our effort to provide a safe, reliable, and conducive environment for disabled persons, we provide them assistive devices such as braille, hearing aids, wheelchairs, white chairs, tricycles, magnifier lenses, glasses, and computers with special programs. Disabled persons are also provided skills training on entrepreneurship and financial management” [Respondents from both organizations].

A previous study highlights that for “effective utilization of assistive technology for students with visual impairments in Zanzibar primary schools, the government, in collaboration with other educational stakeholders, should intensify their efforts and commitment to providing adequate and relevant personnel and material resources to make sure that students with visual impairments are equally learning as that of their fellow sighted students” (Suleiman et al, 2024, p.700).

Theme 4: Capacity Development Training

Building the capacity of teachers and school heads is crucial to ensuring inclusive classrooms. This is because teachers and school heads are the main drivers of inclusive education; therefore, providing them with trainings on inclusive curriculums help in fostering an education system that accepts diversity.

“We partner with the Inclusive Education Unit (IEU) at the Ministry of Education to provide capacity-strengthening

training to teachers on improvement on the use of sign language, behavior modification, and teacher training for science subjects. In addition, our staff also receive capacity development training from partner organizations on areas such as human rights advocacy, Inclusive Education, and BID development” [Res 2, Organization “X”].

The various capacity training help teachers and practitioners to address challenges faced and adapt new mechanisms in fostering a diversified society.

Discussion

The findings highlight DPOs as fundamental pillars in promoting an inclusive society in Zanzibar. In a thematic analysis, the four key themes- partnership for inclusivity, awareness campaigns, support with assistive technologies, and capacity development are considered to have direct alignment with the study objective.

It was noted that collaboration among the DPOs is the primary consideration for inclusivity. This is augmented by the proactive partnership of DPOs with Government Ministries, Non-Governmental Organizations, and Foreign Aid Organizations for effective lobbying and advocacy on behalf of the welfare of people with disabilities. In essence, collaboration eases access to resources. These results support Suleiman et. al.'s (2024) position, which argues that active stakeholder collaboration, including the Ministry of Education, Science and Technology (MoEST) and various NGOs, is necessary to promote inclusive education with assistive technologies and adequate physical facilities. It seems that effective partnerships significantly influence policies and the provision of services to people with disabilities.

The study stresses the importance of awareness campaigns regarding social attitudes towards disability. Organizing events like the International Day for Persons with Disabilities and using social media helps DPOs to raise awareness and campaign for the rights of persons with disabilities. This conforms with what other practitioners do, where engagement is viewed as a means of fighting stigma and discrimination. The achievements of these campaigns indicate that there should be more efforts towards public awareness for attitude change in the society over a longer term, making the society in Zanzibar more inclusive. Suleiman et al. (2024) recommend that both the government and other stakeholders make more vigorous attempts at providing students with disabilities with other forms of assistive technology. DPOs also provide important assistive devices together with entrepreneurship training, which aid people with disabilities to be more self-sufficient. These findings show that the provision of assistive devices like braille, wheelchairs, and hearing aids goes beyond empowering people. It aids in creating equal opportunities in education and employment. Such initiatives in Zanzibar are likely to have a positive impact, and more funding towards assistive technology will result in more people with disabilities, economically and socially.

Equally, the professional development of teachers and educational administrators is critical for achieving inclusive education. Offering sign language, behavior change, and inclusive teaching curriculum training courses enables teachers to assist learners with varying needs. This is consistent with earlier studies regarding the level of teacher preparedness and the success of inclusive education (Mariga et al., 2014; Suleiman et al., 2024). The effectiveness of such programs indicates that a more systematic and comprehensive approach to these programs can greatly improve inclusive education in Zanzibar. Given all that has been discussed, it is important to note the uniformity in the activities of DPOs-henceforth making the strategy of one DPO to be synonymous to the other.

Conclusion

The support of DPOs is great and highly recognized in visualizing a society that values the rights and dignity of all sets of people. The findings reveal that organizations use different strategies and techniques to enhance an inclusive society, and it involves organizing awareness campaigns and supporting assistive technology. Furthermore, capacity-strengthening trainings help teachers to easily adapt inclusive curriculums as well as aids development practitioners in the implementation of sustainable projects. To enhance a conducive environment for persons with disabilities, assistive devices like wheelchairs, braille machines, and hearing aids are provided to persons with disabilities.

Despite the support provided to persons with disabilities and disabled students in schools, there is a huge gap in reaching an ideal inclusive society in Zanzibar. This is because the materials and equipment are not enough to address the challenges faced by persons with disabilities. In the same vein, societal stereotypes and discrimination remain the biggest challenges faced by persons with disabilities. Therefore, in achieving an inclusive society, DPOs need to use a sustainable inclusive approach by conducting needs assessment surveys and implementing projects in line with the needs of disabled persons.

Limitations

Generally, the study was carried out with only two Disabled Persons Organizations (DPOs) due to the unavailability of funds.

Author Contributions

Mansour Jallow collected and analyzed data and made a draft of the manuscript with guidance from Dr. Maryam Ismael Jaffar.

Data Availability

Permission to reuse this work may be granted with written authorization by the Postgraduate Office, State University of Zanzibar, Tanzania.

Recommendation

The study recommends Disabled Persons Organizations collaborate with the Ministry of Education, community stakeholders, and all concerned parties to enhance a society that embraces diversity. This is because inclusion requires a collaborative effort from diverse groups or parties.

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List of Abbreviations

DPOS: Disabled Persons Organizations

UN: United Nations

CRPD: Convention on Rights of Persons with Disabilities

DPI: Disabled Persons International

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This research did not receive any funding.

Conflict of Interest

The research is conducted by an individual; therefore, there is no conflict of interest.

Author Biography

Mansour Jallow is a Queen Elizabeth Commonwealth Scholar from Sierra Leone who holds a Bachelor of Science with Honors in Sociology and is presently pursuing a Master of Education in Youth, Gender, and Development at the State University of Zanzibar, Tanzania.

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