

Community Volunteers as a Catalyst to Enhancing Inclusive Education in Mainstream Classrooms: Experience from Dodoma Region in Tanzania

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Introduction

- ➔ According to the UNCRPD (2006), UNESCO (2005) and EFA (1990), education is the right for all human beings regardless of gender, ethnicity and conditions.
- ➔ The Sustainable Development Goal 4 strive at achieving quality education by "ensuring inclusive and equitable quality education and promote lifelong learning opportunities for all" (UN, 2016).
- ➔ Tanzania has made several efforts to ensure that her citizens have access to education; for example, through enactment of national policy on disability of 2004 (URT, 2004), ratification of the UNCRPD and the persons with disability Act of 2010 (URT, 2010).

Introduction...

- Tanzania's commitment to education for all has been emphasized in the Education and Training Policy of 2014 (URT, 2014), and the National Strategy for Inclusive Education of 2013-2017, revised 2018-2021 (URT, 2018).
- It's through this atmosphere inclusive education (IE) is implemented in Tanzania.
- However, IE is not only about access, but freedom of participation in family, school and community initiatives (UNCRPD, 2006). Hence, the need for multiple actors in to include community volunteers.

Introduction...

- Over decades formal education has been the role of teachers, parents, government and development partners, especially, religious community.
- Similarly, the notion of volunteering in education has been for foreign and higher education volunteers mostly requiring training and specialization as opposed to the indigenous in local communities.
- Nevertheless, this approach does not adequately involve all children with disabilities (CWDs) in schools since the foreign volunteers are not connected to cultural milieu of the communities. The gravity of their initiatives might decrease with expiry of tenure of volunteering.

Introduction...

- Consequently, it was imperative to involve community volunteers (CVs) with touch to the grassroots to easily encourage parents to send their CWDs in the mainstream (schools) and ensure sustainability of the initiatives.
- The study therefore, explored contribution of CVs as catalyst in enhancing IE for CWDs in primary schools.
- Specifically, the study was set out to: *assess CVs' perception towards education for CWDs; evaluate their roles; and challenges they faced in supporting implementation of IE.*

Methodology

- This study was conducted in ten (10) primary schools in Chamwino district and Dodoma city in Tanzania.
- Data were qualitatively collected from 17 informants (CVs) through Focus Group Discussion.
- Informants were purposefully selected based on virtual of being involved in the IE intervention project by Tanzania Cheshire Foundation (TCF) in collaboration with the Leonard Cheshire for Disability (LCD) – UK, supported by the Comic Relief -UK.

Methodology...

- Before involving the CVs in implementation of IE, they were trained on basics of IE, disability issues, rights of children with disabilities and community sensitization issues.
- Data were thematically analyzed and presented verbatim whereby, themes were developed based on the findings and quotations were used to express informants responses.

Findings

CVs Perceptions

- CVs perceived CWDs as having right to education as others
- They were positive and committed to facilitate CWDs to access education in the community

Roles of CVs

- Served as catalyst in changing attitudes among parents, teachers, community leaders and public at large on disability and education for CWDs/ IE.
- Worked as focal point from which information on specific CWDs could be obtained and intervened.
- Lobbying and advocacy for CWDs rights to education, health and welfare.

CVs Challenges

- Lack of transport
- Lack of support from parents due to local believes and expectation of getting support from government and/or NGOs
- Lack of advocacy skills.



Conclusion

- It was concluded that, community volunteers are highly needed for success and sustainability of IE as they serve as important link between children, parents, teachers and other community members for identification, advocacy and education for CWDs in community setting.
- This model was commended for other community-based interventions.



Recommendations

- ▶ Given CVs role in identification, advocacy and education for CWDs, they should be involvement in planning and implementation of village and school based projects.
- ▶ They need more training in advocacy for CWDs, child rights and other social skills related to health, environment, civic education to enhance positive interaction in the community with an eye open to education for CWDs.

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