

# A Review of Sense International Tanzania's Teaching Assistant Approach to Inclusive Education

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## **Research Summary Report**

2020

SENSE INTERNATIONAL TANZANIA

## **Acknowledgements**

Sense International Tanzania (SI Tanzania), in its efforts to promote inclusive education for children with deafblindness/ MSI, commissioned this research study to help establish the needs for teaching assistants in inclusive education classrooms in Tanzania.

SI Tanzania wishes to express particular thanks to Dr. Dinah Richard Mmbaga, the principal researcher of the study, and her assistant, Rebecca Kisenha, who conducted the research and authored the research report “Consultancy Report on Educating Children with Deafblindness and Multisensory Impairment (MSI) in the Ordinary Classroom Setting”.

Additional gratitude is extended to the children with deafblindness/MSI who took part in the study, along with their parents and caregivers. Furthermore, the research would not have been possible without the cooperation of teaching assistants, whose willingness to share knowledge about supporting children with disabilities provided the researchers with great insight and information, and opened up new avenues for discussion.

SI Tanzania also wishes to thank all the individuals who participated in the study, from schools to communities to a national level. The support of Mr. Lazaro Mlanga, the Director of the Special Needs Education Department at the Ministry of Education, Science and Technology in Tanzania, and Mr. Geni Migehe of the President’s Office, Regional Authority and Local Government, are particularly appreciated.

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## List of abbreviations

CSO	Civil Society Organisation
DED	District Executive Director
DEO	District Education Officer
DFID	Department for International Development
DSEO	District Secondary Education Officer
DSNEO	District Special Needs Education Officer
ESRAC	Education Support and Resource Assessment Centres
FGD	Focus group discussion
HDIF	Human Development Innovation Fund
HIV	Human Immuno-Deficiency Virus
MoE	Ministry of Education
MoEST	Ministry of Education, Science and Technology
MoEVT	Ministry of Education and Vocational Training
MSI	Multi-Sensory Impairment
NSIE	National Strategy for Inclusive Education
PO RALG	President's Office - Regional and Local Government
SNE	Special Needs Education
SSA	Sub-Saharan Africa
TA	Teaching assistant
UN	United Nations
UNCRPD	UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities
UNESCO	United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization
UPE	Universal Primary Education

## Preamble

### **Sense International's commitment to support individuals with deafblindness**

Sense International is a non-governmental organisation that supports people with deafblindness and their families in Bangladesh, India, Kenya, Nepal, Tanzania, Peru, Romania and Uganda. Sense International supports people with deafblindness on a journey from isolation to inclusion by ensuring people with deafblindness have the emotional, health and educational support to become active and valued members of their communities.

### **Sense International's Inclusive Education Project in Tanzania**

Funded by the Human Development Innovation Fund (HDIF), Sense International Tanzania launched "Piloting an Innovative Approach to Inclusive Education for Children with Deafblindness in Tanzania". The project's objectives sought to demonstrate to the Government of Tanzania that children with deafblindness/ multi-sensory impairments (MSI) can successfully be included in mainstream schools in Tanzania. The project worked towards achieving inclusive education through the use of an **innovative two-step model**, which comprised of:

**Step 1)** Using a specialist curriculum developed in partnership with the Ministry of Education and Vocational Training (MoEVT), children with deafblindness/MSI were prepared for school through home-based education provided by parents and supported by mainstream teachers.

**Step 2)** Children with deafblindness/MSI were included in mainstream classrooms, with teaching assistants providing communications support. A video training course was used to train parents, teachers and teaching assistants (TAs) on inclusive pedagogy, as well as specific techniques for teaching children with deafblindness in an inclusive setting, covering domains of the deafblindness curriculum including; activities of daily living, communication and orientation and mobility.

The project provided technical support and training to special needs education (SNE) teachers, mainstream teachers, teaching assistants and parents in the Kilimanjaro and Dar es Salaam regions. The project successfully trained teachers and teaching assistants on appropriate methods for teaching children with deafblindness/ (MSI) in an inclusive setting.

To review the impact of our inclusive education work in Tanzania, Sense International undertook a research project to establish the impact of using TAs to achieve inclusive education for children with deafblindness/ MSI in Tanzania.

This document is a summary of the extensive research report carried out by an external consultant. The full research report is available upon request. For a copy please email [info@sense.org.uk](mailto:info@sense.org.uk)

## **1. Background**

### **1.1 What is inclusive education?**

According to the National Strategy on Inclusive Education in Tanzania 2009-2017 (2009), inclusive education is defined as “a system of education in which all children, youth and adults are enrolled, actively participate and achieve in regular schools and other educational programmes regardless of their diverse backgrounds and abilities, without discrimination, through minimisation of barriers and maximisation of resources”. Inclusive education refers not only to the process of ensuring that all children and adults have access to education within their community regardless of their gender, age, ability, ethnicity, impairment and HIV status, but also that the education they receive is appropriate to their needs and enables them to fully participate and excel both in their education system and in their community more widely (Kaplan *et. al.*, 2011). ‘Equity’ in education does not mean providing the same for all, but rather ensuring there is an equal opportunity to succeed and achieve one’s potential. In order to provide equal opportunities, there should be a continuum of educational support available to minimise or remove any barriers which learners may experience.

### **1.2 Inclusive education and human rights**

Countries around the world are legally obliged to provide inclusive education as a result of the Salamanca Statement of 1994 which tied inclusive education to the “Education for All” agenda (UNESCO, 1994). The statement instructs governments around the world to adopt the principle of inclusive education through laws and policies so all children are enrolled in mainstream schools, unless there are compelling reasons for doing otherwise. These commitments not only include the rights of all children to be enrolled in a mainstream school, but also to access a child-centred pedagogy capable of meeting their needs (UNESCO, 1994). Signatories of the Salamanca Statement and the subsequent UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (UNCRPD) (2006) are accountable to the United Nations and the wider global community to implement policies for inclusive education (Mittler in Mariga *et. al.*, 2014). However, despite the clear legal imperative, it remains the case that in many parts of Sub-Saharan Africa (SSA), inclusive education is merely legislated rather than planned for.

### **1.3 Inclusive education in Tanzania**

In Tanzania, issues of equity and access to education have been a focus of attention ever since the Government of Tanzania introduced Universal Primary Education (UPE) in 1977. Furthermore, Tanzania has successfully signed and ratified the Convention on the Rights of the Child (1989) and the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (2006). In March 2018, the President’s Office – Regional Authority and Local Government (PO-RALG) engineered a nationwide census to identify children with special educational needs in Tanzania.

Meanwhile in 2018, the Government achieved another milestone by releasing the National Strategy for Inclusive Education (NSIE) 2018-2021, along with an operational plan signifying the readiness for the strategy's implementation. The NSIE redefines inclusive education as an approach which transforms an education system, including its structure, policies, practices and human resources, to accommodate all learners in mainstream education by addressing and responding to learners' diverse needs. More information about Sense International's work on inclusive education in Tanzania can be found in Appendix A.

## **2. Research Methodology**

### **2.1 Key objectives of the study**

1.3.1 The overall objectives of the study were:

- a) To assess the effectiveness and efficiency of the teaching assistants' approach to achieving inclusive education for children with deafblindness/ MSI
- b) To identify areas in the teaching assistants' system that needed to be strengthened.

### **2.2 Data collection**

Data was collected during a two-week period before the end of the school term, from 26 November to 7 December 2018, through in-depth, semi-structured interviews, focus group discussions, observations and a review of literature. Semi-structured, in-depth interviews were carried out with District Special Needs Education Officers (DSNEOs), District Education Officers (DEOs) and a District Executive Director (DED). Interviews were also conducted with parents and carers of children with disabilities, siblings, TAs and classroom teachers. Moreover, focus group discussions were carried out in schools in five districts in Tanzania (Ilala and Ubungu in Dar es Salaam as well as Same, Mwanga and Rombo in Kilimanjaro). Furthermore, in-school observations were held in order to gain an insight into the role of TAs in supporting children with deafblindness/MSI and teachers in the classroom.

## **3. Findings**

### **3.1 The role of teaching assistants in achieving inclusive education**

The study found that TAs played a dynamic role towards the realisation of inclusive education for all children. Findings of the research found TAs carried out a number of integral duties both inside and outside the classroom including but not limited to:

- Providing additional educational support to children with deafblindness/MSI while the mainstream teacher is teaching and helping the child to perform prescribed physical exercises

- Supporting children with special needs to perform various daily living activities, such as going to the toilet, eating, playing, and taking care of the child's wellbeing and safety at school
- Helping bridge the communication gap between the classroom teacher and the child
- Visiting children with special needs at home to follow up on their progress in the homestead
- Assisting children with special needs to get to and from school safely
- Liaising between the school, the parents and the community

### **3.2 Parents' perspectives on Teaching Assistants**

The parents participating in the study expressed sincere gratitude for the addition of TAs in their children's education. They appreciated that, with TA support, their children were benefitting from school like any other child. Achieving milestones, such as being able to smile, hold a cup, move from point A to point B, and perform sanitary and hygiene activities independently, meant a lot to the parents. One parent, who expressed surprise that a child could learn so much when given the opportunity, said: "Kumbe mwanafunzi akifundishwa ataweza" which translates to "if you teach them then they can do it". Parents also reported the following additional benefits from the introduction of TAs into their child's education:

- A greater sense of relief, security and emotional comfort from knowing TAs are present in classrooms providing support to their children
- Parents felt supported by the home visits from TAs which served to ensure children were adequately prepared for their transition to inclusive classrooms
- Parents had greater opportunities for economic empowerment as they had considerably more time to dedicate to running small businesses now that their children were engaged in schooling and did not require full-time care
- Parents experienced having more time for social interaction. Previously parents spent the majority of their time caring for their child at home, but now they have more time to engage socially when their children were at school

### **3.3 Children's perspectives on Teaching Assistants**

The research revealed the following findings regarding the perspectives of children with disabilities towards TAs and the overall Inclusive Education project:

- The children with disabilities who were engaged in the project had a positive response to attending school
- They felt empowered to discover their talents
- Children with disabilities felt accepted and valued by their non-disabled peers in school
- TAs have played an integral role in educating parents, visitors and the surrounding community about the potential of children with disabilities

### **3.4 Case Study: Mkunde's Journey from Isolation to Inclusion**

Mkunde has hearing and sight impairments and does not talk. Her mother left when she was born and Mkunde's grandmother then took care of her. But Mkunde's grandmother used to leave her alone at home, sometimes unwashed and without food. She was unable to walk and had jiggers in her feet. After some time, Mkunde went to live with her aunt instead. When Mkunde joined school, she had to be carried around and faced several barriers.

#### **The Role of Teaching Assistants in Mkunde's progress**

Mkunde's kindergarten teacher taught her how to eat, mingle and socialise with other pupils. Now, she can hold items and draw using crayons. The teaching assistant in Mkunde's classroom is very committed in helping Mkunde.



The teaching assistant prepares food for her and helps her to be involved in activities. The teaching assistant takes Mkunde to the hospital when she falls sick and makes sure all her needs are met throughout the day. Mkunde's teaching assistant visits her at home to follow her progress and to talk with her family about her wellbeing and experience at school. The class teacher stays with Mkunde whenever her teaching assistant is away.

The school day ends at 12pm, however, Mkunde stays at school until 3pm so that she can continue to enjoy the assistance from the teaching assistant. Staying in school later prevents Mkunde from returning to an empty home while her aunt is still at work and the other children are still at school. In the extra hours at school,

Mkunde has her lunch and washes her clothes.

#### **Challenges in Achieving Inclusive Education for Mkunde**

Although Mkunde is experiencing many benefits thanks to her teaching assistant, many challenges remain. There is a lack of mats and carpets in the kindergarten classroom, which hinder the learning environment. The school toilets are in a very poor condition and Mkunde needs assistive devices in order to use the toilet independently. There are steps in the school which Mkunde finds difficult to ascend without assistance and become slippery when it rains. Mkunde likes playing with sensory toys, however, the toys require batteries which are not always available due to lack of funds.

### 3.5 Government Response to the Programme

The Tanzanian government acknowledge that TAs provide invaluable support to children with disabilities and realize that the inclusive education methodology was considerably cheaper than having children with disabilities in special schools and units. Furthermore, the study found that there is still some way to go until the TA approach can be fully realized. Challenges persist, including how the government will afford to sustain the TAs after the project’s end and how to formalise the role of TAs into the educational system.

However, in 2019, the government reached a milestone decision in relation to the inclusion of TAs within the Tanzanian education system by adding their role into the National Strategy for Inclusive Education (2018-2021), coupled with an operational plan signifying the readiness for implementation.

### 4. Key Lessons Learned: An overview of Challenges and Recommendations

<b>Challenges of the TA approach</b>		
<b>Institutional</b>	<b>Attitudinal</b>	<b>Environmental</b>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- A lack of budgetary provisions by government to recruit and pay teaching assistants is a major challenge in realising inclusive education for all children with deafblindness/ MSI.</li> <li>- Schools are under-resourced and the key teaching materials that are required to support students with impairments are not available.</li> <li>- More evidence based on the TA approach is still needed.</li> <li>- The role of TAs is not mainstreamed throughout the Tanzanian education system and is not sufficiently referred to in relevant policies and strategies.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- There is a lack of awareness regarding the importance of inclusive education.</li> <li>- Some parents are hesitant for their children to leave the home and to interact with other children.</li> <li>- It has proven difficult to engage male family members into sensitisation activities.</li> <li>- The study found that some teachers were not driven towards realising inclusive education despite receiving training.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Poor infrastructure which is unsuitable for the needs of children with disabilities limits many schools’ ability to enrol children with special needs thus resulting in children being turned away from schools.</li> <li>- A lack of adequate mobility equipment hinders children’s ability to attend school and avail of the support from TAs.</li> </ul>

<b>Recommendations for the TA approach</b>		
<b>Institutional</b>	<b>Attitudinal</b>	<b>Environmental</b>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- A review of existing policies to strengthen the gaps in inclusive education strategies is needed.</li> <li>- The teaching assistants programme needs to be brought to scale so children with disabilities in all regions of Tanzania can access inclusive education.</li> <li>- The use of individual learning plans needs to be introduced and fully recognised in the curriculum in order to prevent students remaining indefinitely at the pre-primary education level.</li> <li>- Greater financial commitment by district councils is needed in order to ensure students with disabilities to avail of TA support and education that is truly inclusive.</li> <li>- This initiative should be complemented by the introduction of resource rooms with qualified specialist teachers to attend them.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- More community-based sensitisation is needed.</li> <li>- It is suggested that religious leaders can play an integral role in advocating against attitudinal barriers that hinder inclusive education being realised.</li> <li>- On-going specialised knowledge and skills development of teachers and TAs regarding the needs of children with special needs is needed.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- New buildings should work to ensure all facilities are fully accessible to all.</li> <li>- Refurbishments are needed to ensure schools are accessible to all students with and without impairments</li> </ul>

## **5. Programme Sustainability**

In order for this programme to be sustained and scaled up to meet the educational needs of all children across Tanzania a number of key steps are required including:

- The government needs to recruit and employ TAs and ensure they are incorporated into the existing educational system effectively, in order to ensure their obligations to provide inclusive education are adhered to.
- The government needs to scale up the TA approach across the country in collaboration with Civil Society Organisations (CSOs) and educational partners.
- The basics of the TA role should be added into the In-service teachers' development plan on inclusive education to enable teachers to support children with disabilities in classroom

- Teachers should be trained further on how to foster an inclusive class.
- The government should consider including some elements of vocational education and designing individual learning plans in order to meet the needs of children with disabilities as well as those who may not be suited solely to academic learning.

## **6. Conclusion**

This study by SI Tanzania adds value to the existing knowledge on inclusive education in Tanzania. It demonstrates that it is possible for all children to be educated in ordinary classrooms, provided that additional assistance is made available for teachers and teaching assistants.

Numerous respondents involved in the research commended the valuable work of TAs and gave them credit for the immense progress that has been made by every child compared to the baseline assessment.

While positive gestures by the Tanzanian Government in reviewing the National Strategy for Inclusive Education are encouraging, much more needs to be done including the introduction of TAs to schools across the country in order to see inclusive education a lived reality for all children in Tanzania.

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## Appendix A: Policy Recommendation Paper on Inclusive Education



### POLICY RECOMMENDATION PAPER ON INCLUSIVE EDUCATION SENSE INTERNATIONAL TANZANIA

June 2019

#### Introduction

Sense International congratulates the Government of Tanzania for embarking on the implementation of inclusive education, following its commitments under the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities and the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child, among other international agreements. Sense International salutes the Government of Tanzania's plan for inclusive education for children with disabilities to be a nationwide movement, starting from the ward level.

Based on discussions with Ministry of Education officials, the Tanzanian Government is not opposed to the introduction of TAsto support children with complex needs to learn in mainstream classrooms, as part of a system of inclusive education. Such a system would be new to Tanzania, and the main barriers appear to lie in the perception of a lack of resources and lack of experience.



*Figure 1: Two students together with their teaching assistant in school in Tanzania*

Over the last three years, through working with 100 students in 78 schools in the Kilimanjaro and Dar es Salaam regions, Sense International Tanzania has demonstrated how effective TAs can be in enabling children with deafblindness/Multi-sensory Impairment (MSI) to learn in school. Sense International Tanzania commissioned an independent study to review effectiveness and also looked at how other governments have initiated TAs programmes in their national education systems.

#### Key learnings from the pilot project:

- a. Children with complex disabilities such as deafblindness and other multisensory impairments can be educated alongside those "without disabilities" and their improvements in communication, social interaction, confidence and participation in the classroom are proof of this.
- b. The TA model provides one-to-one support to each child within a classroom setting, with reference to the operational plan under the National Strategy for Inclusive Education (2018- 2021) pages 19 and 49.

- c. The key enabling factors which supported children with deafblindness/MSI to learn were:
- Training and guidance for teaching assistants: Sense International has created guidelines for the most effective ways of teaching children with deafblindness in a mainstream classroom and has teaching assistants in inclusive pedagogy.
  - Preparation of the children before enrolment in school: Some children require a period of home-based education before they are ready to join a mainstream class.
  - Improved Learning Environment: Schools need accessible physical infrastructure such as ramps and accessible toilets for children with impaired mobility, as well as appropriate teaching and learning materials.

## RECOMMENDATIONS

### 1. Personnel

- 1.1 Establish a cadre of teaching assistants and develop training for them on how to support children with deafblindness/MSI in an inclusive classroom.
- 1.2 Teachers already in school will need in-service orientation courses and on-going support to teach the new curriculum, and to develop Individual Education Plans (IEP) to support the education of children with deafblindness/MSI.
- 1.3 Awareness raising and sensitisation activities around deafblindness/MSI to be carried out within the whole school community to support teachers, parents, students and the wider community to be inclusive.



Figure 1: Home-based education, preparing the child for school.



Figure 2: A student with deafblindness using a video magnifier to read.

### 2. Curriculum

2.1 Develop a competency-based curriculum which is flexible to meet a range of learning styles of children with deafblindness/MSI in inclusive classrooms.

2.2 Train teachers on the flexible curriculum including how to teach children with a range of educational levels, learning styles and any other support needs.

2.3 Enable lessons and the timetable to be adapted for learners with disabilities.

2.4 Develop different tools to measure progress and learning where examinations are not appropriate.

### 3. Early identification and support

- 3.1 Early identification and support gives a child with deafblindness/ MSI the best chance of realising their potential.
- 3.2 Children with deafblindness/MSI need to be identified and start learning from home, with support from teachers from nearby schools, as early as possible.
- 3.3 Staff from the Ministries of Education, Health and Social welfare will need to coordinate around identification of children with deafblindness/MSI and how best to support their education.
- 3.4 All children of school age should be recorded and have a documented follow-up mechanism for home-based learning, followed by transition to a school-based system.



*Figure 4: A student being supported by her teaching assistant and fellow students.*

### Evidence base

- “Consultancy Report on Educating Children with Deafblindness and Multisensory Impairment (MSI) in the Ordinary Classroom Setting”  
Sense International Tanzania Study by Dr. Dinah r. Mmbaga and Rebecca M. Kisenha, December, 2018
- “The Role of Classroom Assistants on Teaching practices and on retention of children with Disabilities”  
Leonard Cheshire Disability Study by Marcella Deluca and Maria Kett,
- “Time to stop polishing the brass on the Titanic: moving beyond ‘quick-and-dirty’ teacher education for inclusion, towards sustainable theories of change”  
Ingrid Lewis, Su Lyn Corcoran, Said Juma, Ian Kaplan, Duncan Little & Helen Pinnock, May 2019.
- “Costing Equity: The case for disability-responsive education financing”  
IDDC Report, October 2017.

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*Figure 5: Two students in wheelchairs with their teaching assistants standing behind along with their mothers and class teachers in Tanzania.*

