



Protecting the rights of everyone

Citizens' views on disabilities



1. Introduction

One of the founding principles of modern democracies is to protect and promote the rights of all citizens. This is particularly important when it comes to the rights of minority, or historically underprivileged groups such as women and people with disabilities who should enjoy equal access to the same opportunities – in work, housing, education, and access to water and sanitation – as other citizens.

In Tanzania, there is still work to be done to improve accessibility for and ensure non-discrimination of people with disabilities. For example, ensuring wheelchair access in urban planning or making it illegal to discriminate against a potential employee because they have a disability, are important parts of the struggle for equal rights. People with albinism face a particular challenge in Tanzania, due to superstition.

Sauti za Wananchi, Africa's first nationally representative mobile phone survey, collected information on experiences with and perceptions of disability. By design, we cannot collect data on the prevalence of disability in Tanzania, instead we collect data about people's views of and experiences with disability.

This brief presents six facts on perceptions of disability in Tanzania using the most recent data available. The findings are based on the 21st call round of *Sauti za Wananchi* (www.twaweza.org/sauti). In this round, 1,397 respondents were reached between 14 and 24 July 2014.¹

¹ For the sake of readability Sauti za Wananchi briefs report means without confidence intervals. However, these are available on request. Figures in charts may not add up to 100% due to rounding.

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The key findings are:

- Seven out of ten citizens report knowing someone with a physical, sensory or mental disability.
- Perceptions are varied, respondents viewed people with disabilities as their equals (31%) but also with discomfort (10%)
- Almost half of Tanzanians are aware of employment discrimination against someone with a disability
- One out of three citizens know children with disabilities of primary school age who are not in primary school.
- Most citizens support reserved seats in the National Assembly for people with disabilities.

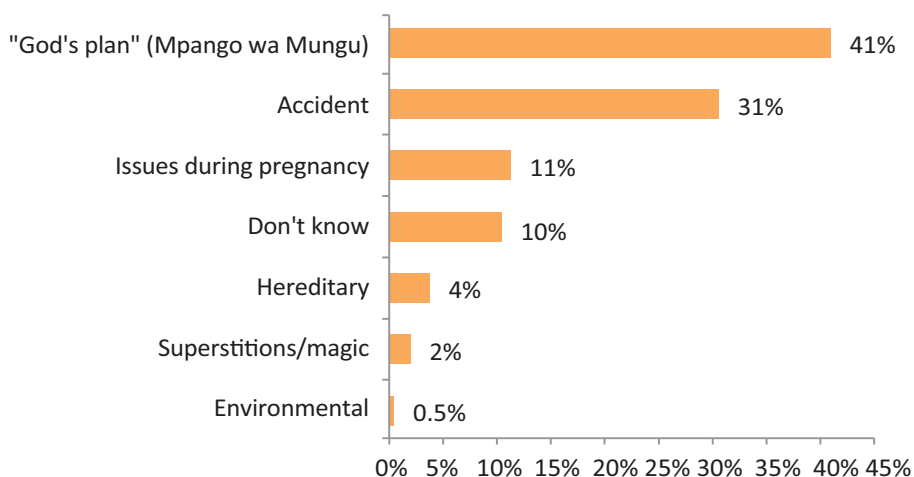
2. Six facts about perceptions of disability

Fact 1: Most citizens know someone with a disability – and the most commonly observed disabilities are physical

We asked citizens from across the country, in both rural and urban settings, from all age groups and genders, whether they know anyone in their community who has a disability.² The majority - 70% - said yes. When asked to describe the type of disabilities they had observed, most people (88%) reported physical (or sensory, e.g. someone who is deaf), rather than mental, disabilities (data not shown).

Furthermore, one out of four citizens (26%) report having someone with a disability in their household (data not shown). When asked about what they believe are the causes of disability, the most popular cause (41%) reported is “God’s plan” (*Mpango wa Mungu*), a generic response to hardship in Swahili (Figure 1).

Figure 1: Beliefs regarding causes of disability



Source of data: *Sauti za Wananchi*, Round 21- July 2014

² In the questionnaire disability was defined as: “Someone is understood to have a disability if he or she has a physical or mental impairment which has a substantial and long term adverse effect on her or his ability to carry out day-to-day activities”.

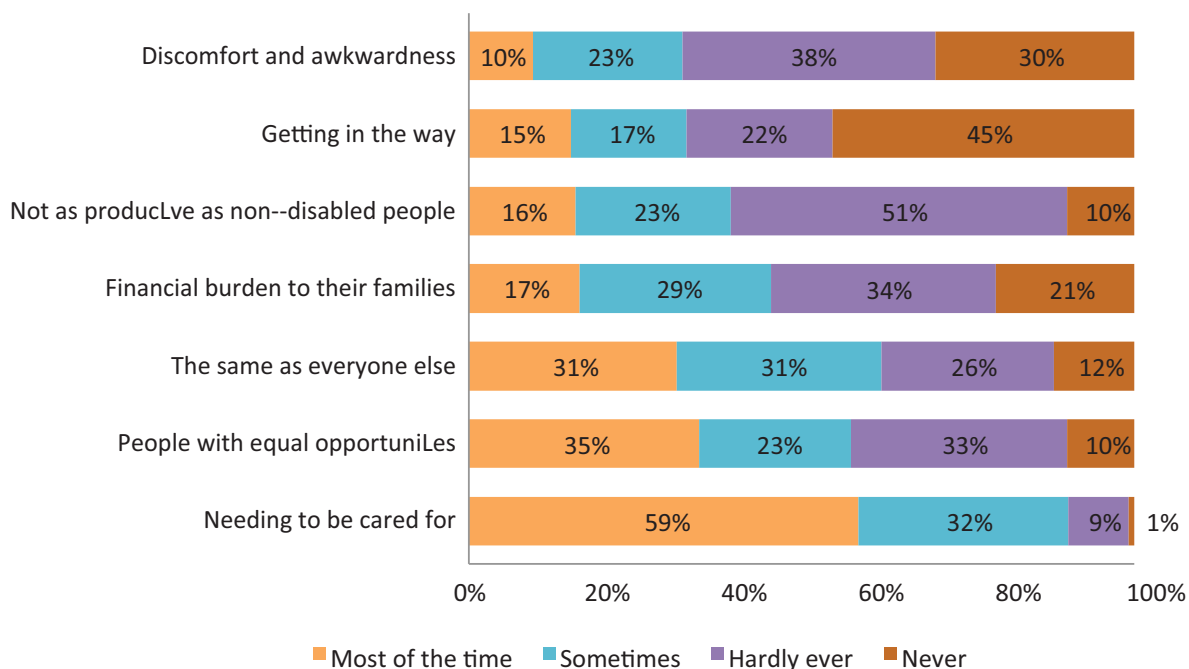
In interpreting these statistics we should keep in mind two things: first, these questions were somewhat open-ended, in that we presented a definition of “disabilities” to respondents, but did not describe specific types. Second, respondents report their social perception of the phenomenon, not a medical diagnosis.

The Tanzanian National Disability Survey 2008 found that 13.3% of households in Mainland Tanzania had a member with a disability³, using questions that ask about the difficulties people have in doing various activities. The 2002 Population and Housing Census reported a prevalence of 2% disability based on a yes/no question. The range of results found probably reflects the different measurement approaches, the age range included, as well as the sensitivity of the issue and the different timings of the surveys.

Fact 2: There are varying perceptions of people with disabilities

Perceptions of people with disabilities vary from support to discrimination. Approximately three out of ten Tanzanians report that they see people with disabilities as the same as everyone else (31%) or as having equal opportunities (35%) most of the time. However a significant number of citizens see people with disabilities with discomfort (10%), as getting in the way (15%) and as a financial burden (17%) most of the time (Figure 2). The largest portion (59%) of citizens by far felt that people with disabilities need to be cared for most of the time. Although this may well be motivated by compassion, this idea paints people with disabilities as passive victims reliant on the goodwill of others rather than as active and equal citizens.

Figure 2: Perceptions of people with disabilities



Source of data: *Sauti za Wananchi*, Round 21 - July 2014

³ National Bureau of Statistics, Tanzania 2008 Disability Survey Report.

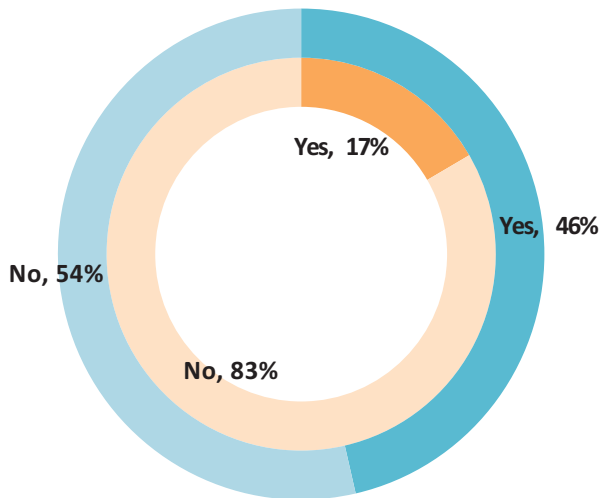
On the other hand, citizens also say that they could imagine a person with disabilities as a religious leader (88%), a successful business owner (87%), and a leader of change in the local community (85%) (data not shown). This may be attributed to respondents' own desire not to admit to any discriminatory tendencies themselves.



Fact 3: Almost half of Tanzanians are aware of discrimination against people with disabilities

Almost half of the respondents (46%) are aware of discrimination against people with disabilities in accessing apprenticeships, vocational training, government jobs, community- or family-based co-operatives or micro-enterprises.

Additionally, only 17% know of institutions that give preferential employment opportunities to people with disabilities (Figure 3). Of the institutions that were reported to give preferential treatment, 38% are governmental, 28% are religious, and 26% are private companies (data not shown).

Figure 3: Employment prospects for people with disabilities



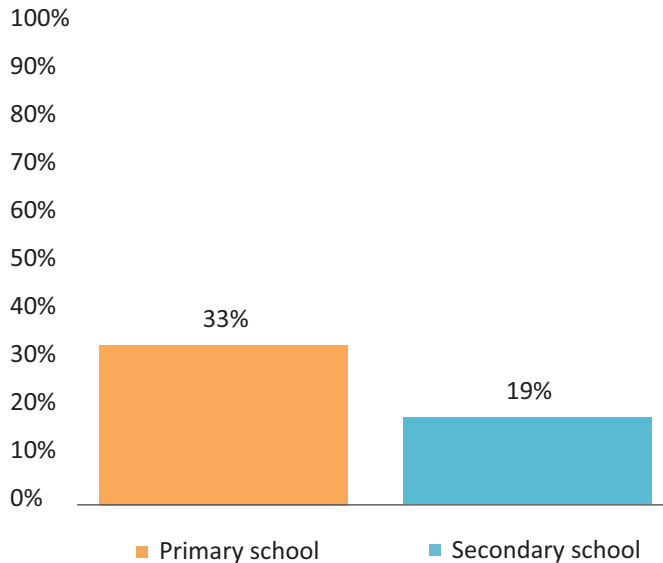
-  Are you aware of any discrimination in employment towards people with disabilities?
-  Do you know of any organizations that give preferential treatment for employment to people with disabilities?

Source of data: *Sauti za Wananchi*, Round 21- July 2014

Fact 4: One out of three citizens are aware of children with disabilities not attending school

One out of three citizens are aware of children with disabilities of primary school-going age who are not going to primary school (Figure 4). This data is based on the observation of respondents (that is, we did not directly ask the parents of children with disabilities).

Figure 4: Percentage of citizens who know of children with disabilities who are not in school



Source of data: *Sauti za Wananchi*, Round 21- July 2014

Fact 5: One out of eight citizens has heard of attacks on albinos in their community

Albinism is a genetic condition where the body is unable to produce melanin, a natural pigment found in the skin, hair and eyes. It affects an average of 1 in 17,000 people around the world⁴ and can cause problems with vision and increased risk of skin cancer. In Tanzania, there have been incidents of death and dismemberment of albinos that have been reported in the national and international press and attributed to superstitions around the condition

Sauti za Wananchi asked citizens whether they had heard of incidents of death or dismemberment of albinos within their community. One out of eight citizens have heard of someone with albinism being dismembered or killed (Figure 5).

Figure 5: One in eight Tanzanians has heard of someone with albinism being attacked



Source of data: *Sauti za Wananchi*, Round 21- July 2014

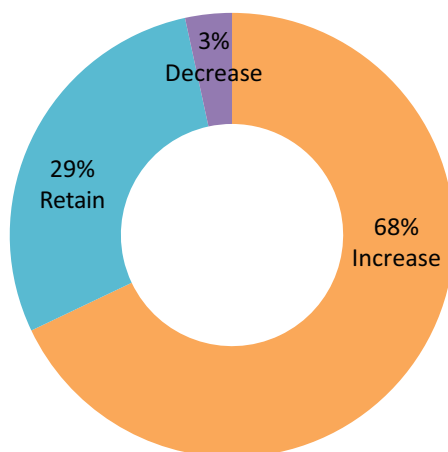
⁴ Grønskov et al. 2007. "Oculocutaneous albinism." Orphanet Journal of Rare Diseases.

Fact 6: Most citizens support a quota of National Assembly seats for people with disabilities

The Tanzanian Parliament currently has reserved seats for only one under-represented group: women. There are no reserved seats for Members of Parliament with disabilities. At present, there is one elected Member of Parliament with albinism and one appointed one.

The second constitutional draft proposed allocating 5 out of 75 National Assembly seats (7%) to people with disabilities. Seven out of ten citizens believe this allocation should be *increased*, while a further 29% believed it should remain the same (Figure 6). This demonstrates that there is near-unanimous support for having reserved seats for people with disabilities since a total of 97% believe the proposed number of seats is appropriate or too low.

Figure 6: Do you think the Constitution Assembly should increase, maintain or decrease the proposed special seat allocation for the people with disabilities in the National Assembly of the United Republic of Tanzania?



Source of data: *Sauti za Wananchi*, Mobile Phone Survey- Round 21 (July 2014)

3. Conclusion

Tanzania continues to lag behind in ensuring equal rights and opportunities for people with disabilities. An important consideration in driving this agenda is citizens' perceptions of people with disabilities since local demand and interest can push forward the equity agenda and help ensure that people with disabilities have access to the same opportunities as everyone else, and special services when they require them. On the other hand, community complacency, discrimination and paternalism prevents people with disabilities from accessing their rights and lets government off the hook in creating an enabling environment and providing services that are accessible to everyone.

Citizens appear to have mixed and sometimes contradictory views on the issue with many viewing people with disabilities as a burden and others seeing people with disabilities as equal and entitled to the same opportunities. Furthermore, a significant portion of citizens report having witnessed instances of discrimination in employment and children with

disabilities being kept out of school. This implies that structural discrimination is prevalent and observable. On the other hand a substantial number of citizens report acceptance of people with disabilities and claim to be optimistic about their capacity to be leaders in various fields. However structural discrimination, lack of access to education, and other opportunities, and citizens' biases are likely to exclude people with disabilities from holding these types of positions.

An important first step in achieving progress comes through the legislative environment and ensuring a legal framework that supports people with disabilities in accessing their rights. As a starting point, there is need for better data on people with disabilities: how many people have disabilities, what does this mean for their access to schools and jobs, and how do the people without disabilities see and treat them?

Political representation can be ensured via reserved seats – something which 9 out of 10 citizens support. And, importantly, rights – to personal safety and security, to accessibility, and to opportunity – can and should be enshrined in the legal framework of the country and enforced by the authorities. Tanzania has taken some measures in this regard: for example, the People with Disabilities Act of 2010, which addresses “health care, social support, accessibility, rehabilitation, education and vocational training, communication, employment or work, [and the] promotion of basic rights for the persons with disabilities”.⁵

Community attitudes, beliefs and values will also need to shift. Legislation can help by creating norms but also by affording space for people with disabilities to thrive and thus breakdown stereotypes and misconceptions. Media campaigns can also educate the public and popular culture can influence norms and attitudes, and, in particular, to shift public perception of people with disabilities as victims to be pitied and needing help to a view that considers them differently abled and deserving of respect. The key is to bring the realities to light and to create awareness, understanding and equal opportunities.

⁵ The Persons with Disabilities Act, 2010. Government of Tanzania. <http://www.parliament.go.tz/index.php/documents/bills/all/all/85>

