

# Empowering Special Minds: A Systematic Review of Government Support for Students with Disabilities in Tanzania

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## Abstract:

*The scope of the study includes an analysis of the implementation of inclusive education policies for students with disabilities in Tanzania as well as the identification of barriers that affect their effectiveness. This study aims to explore the conditions of implementation of inclusive education policies and identify challenges in achieving sustainable education inclusion for students with disabilities in Tanzania. The methodical strategy used to find relevant documents published between 2004 and 2022 was powered by the publish or perish domain across many electronic databases, namely Google Scholar, Institutional Repositories, and ERIC. Nine documents out of 41 were selected for data mining and analysis after meeting inclusion and exclusion criteria. The results show that the government has implemented several policies and strategies, like the Education and Training Policy, the Persons with Disabilities Act, the Inclusive Education Strategy, and educational regulations and circulars reinforcing inclusive education and children with disabilities' rights to access education. In addition, the government has established inclusive schools and special needs education departments at the ministerial level to address the several needs of students with disabilities. The review also highlights several impediments to implementing inclusiveness in education by government initiatives. These impediments include insufficient funds, dilapidated and inaccessible infrastructure, the community stigma related to disability, inadequate specialised experts, and a lack of assistive technology in many conventional schools. The implication of this research is to provide a better understanding of the effectiveness of inclusive education policy implementation in Tanzania and highlight the barriers that need to be overcome to achieve sustainable education inclusion for students with disabilities.*

**Key Words:** Government Support; Students with Disabilities; Inclusive Education

## INTRODUCTION

Throughout history, Tanzania has made significant efforts to promote inclusive education and support students with disabilities since independence in 1961 (Braun, 2022). Despite the multifaceted nature of disabilities, the government has constantly committed to protecting everyone and treating all children with equal respect as their constitutional rights (Anastasiou & Bantekas, 2023). Even earlier in colonisation, communal chiefs' traditional beliefs and practices in Africa and Tanzania, particularly, recognised the status of people with disabilities (Mulumba et al., 2021). However, during colonialism, the insight and handling of disabilities underwent different significant changes (Marín-

García et al., 2022). For example, the colonial powers of German and Britain in Tanganyika introduced medical beliefs and practices that viewed disabilities as medical conditions needing separate institutions and specialised care by establishing different institutions that were segregative. Soon after Tanganyika's independence in 1961, the government recognised the need for inclusive policies and initiatives to support disabled children to reduce the system that was predominantly colonial and prone to discrimination against students with disabilities. In the early 1980s, the government of Tanzania established the first school for children with mental disabilities, followed by the enactment of the law to protect the constitutional rights of people with disabilities through the Persons with Disabilities Act of 1982 (Shayo, 2022). The act further reinforced legal protection and documented the rights of disabled persons to education, employment, and access to public services (Etieyibo, 2020). Prior to the Persons with Disabilities Act of 1982, the government enacted the Education Act No. 25 of 1978 and amendment No. 10 of 1995 to reinforce every child's right to get an education at the level of their ability (Muhwava, 2022). In the 1990s, there was a significant shift towards inclusive education in Tanzania following the government's decision to integrate disabled children into regular schools and provide them equal access to education (Sakata et al., 2021).

The integration of disabled children into conventional schools was the response to several international conventions and agreements such as Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (Byrne, 2022), Standard Rules of the Equalization of Opportunities for Persons with Disabilities, the Convention on the Rights of the Child, World Program for Action Concerning Disabled Persons, the African Charter on Human and People's Rights, the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women, which aimed at protecting the rights of disabled persons. Specifically, the United Nations World Program for Action Concerning Disabled Persons states, "All state parties should formulate and implement policies that recognise the rights of disabled persons to have equal educational opportunities with others. The education of disabled persons should, as far as possible, take place in the conventional school system. Responsibility for their education should be placed upon the educational authorities, and laws regarding compulsory education should include children with all ranges of disabilities, including the most severely disabled" (UN, 1982). Furthermore, the Standard Rules of the Equalization of Opportunities for Persons with Disabilities reinforced that "all states should acknowledge the principle of equal primary, secondary and tertiary educational opportunities for children with disabilities in the integrated educational settings. State educational authorities are responsible for educating persons with disabilities in integrated settings and should be an integral part of national educational planning, curriculum development and school organisation" (United Nations, 1993).

In response to the international policies mentioned above, the government-endorsed documents include the Rights of Persons with Disabilities Act of 2009 and the National Policy on Disability of 2004. In reinforcement of the endorsed laws, the government established inclusive schools for all children, with or without disabilities, across all districts to eliminate discrimination against children with disabilities. Inclusive schools have increased from four in 1998 to more than 377 in 2013. Despite the government's efforts to ensure equal access to all, the majority of children with disabilities still do not get equal access to education like the others without disabilities, the cause being a lack of awareness among parents on the educational services provided to children with disabilities, traditional myths, poverty, and harassment (Mason-Williams et al., 2020).

Previous studies have investigated the Tanzanian government's efforts to support students with disabilities through inclusive education policies and initiatives. Historical research by Kambuga and Hussein (2022) reviews the evolution of policies from the colonial period to the post-independence era, highlighting the shift from segregative practices during colonial rule to post-independence efforts to integrate children with disabilities into regular schools. A qualitative study by Brydges & Mkandawire (2020) explores barriers to inclusive education, including societal stigma and lack of awareness among parents. Case research by Francisco (2020) evaluated the impact of education inclusion policies on access to education for students with disabilities, emphasizing the need for specialized support services and training for teachers. This reference provides a comprehensive overview of the history, challenges and impacts of inclusive education policies in Tanzania, providing an important foundation for continued research on government support for students with disabilities.

The research can focus on further exploration of best practices and innovations in the implementation of inclusive education policies in Tanzania. Research can critically examine the success of newly introduced inclusion programs, such as teacher training, community empowerment, or the development of supporting resources for students with disabilities. In addition, research can deepen understanding of the perceptions and direct experiences of stakeholders, including students, parents, and educators, to identify factors that influence the acceptance and participation of students with disabilities in inclusive education environments. By exploring these aspects comprehensively, the research will provide richer insights into the challenges and opportunities in supporting inclusive education in Tanzania, as well as make a valuable contribution in formulating more effective and sustainable policy strategies.

## **RESEARCH METHODS**

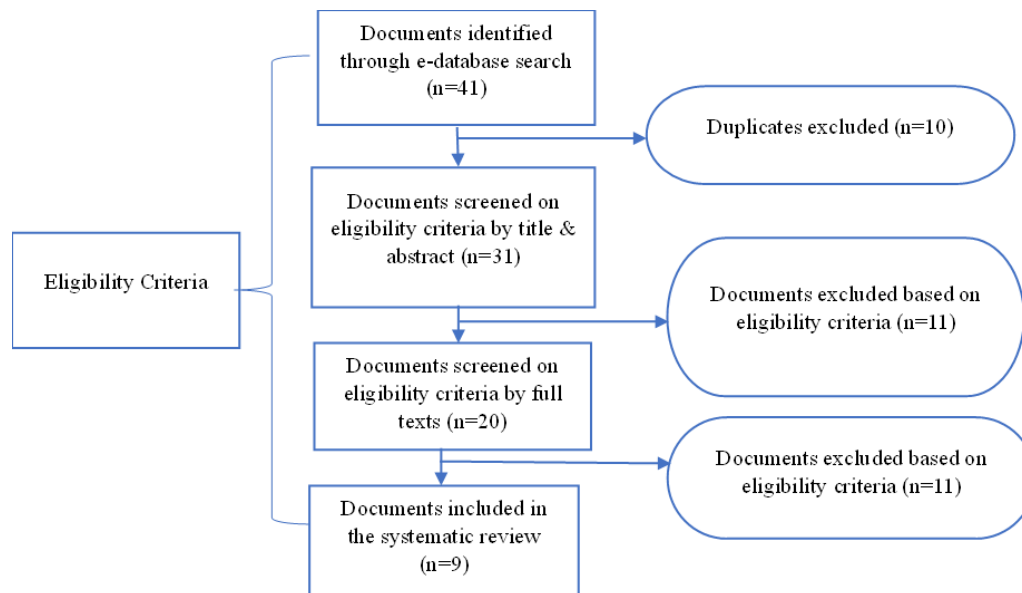
This study uses a systematic approach by reviewing various sources to assess the Tanzanian government's support and initiatives in supporting

inclusive education for children with disabilities (Braun, 2022). The researchers followed the stages outlined in David Gough's work. Where, including determining specific criteria for document selection, searching for related documents using electronic databases, selection and screening of documents based on inclusion criteria, recording and description of relevant document materials, bias assessment, thematic synthesis, and finally, preparation of results, discussion, and conclusions (Newman & Gough, 2020). This research method utilizes qualitative analysis by considering the reliability, quality, creativity, and usefulness of each selected document, and integrates these findings into a coherent narrative (Diana & Zaini, 2023). This approach enabled the researchers to compile a comprehensive report on government support for inclusive education for children with disabilities in Tanzania, as well as provide recommendations for improving future practices in supporting children with disabilities in accessing education.

This study used a variety of data collection techniques to obtain relevant information about the Tanzanian government's support and initiatives in supporting inclusive education for children with disabilities. The main technique used is document search using electronic databases, namely ERIC, Google Scholar, and national and international Institutional Repositories (Zibani et al., 2022). The search was conducted using variations and combinations of related keywords, such as "Tanzania, government support, students with disabilities, inclusive education, policies, regulations, and laws." In addition, the reference list of included documents is also checked to find additional relevant sources. During the process of searching, selecting, and screening documents, researchers also collaborate with a research assistant who is pursuing a master's program in inclusive education to ensure accuracy and fairness in the review process. By combining these techniques, research can present comprehensive information on government support for inclusive education in Tanzania.

In this study, the data analysis technique used includes several stages. First, after the relevant documents are collected, researchers conduct selection and screening based on predetermined inclusion criteria (Maulidah et al., 2023). Documents that meet these criteria are then recorded and described based on relevant materials, such as government support, recommendations, and implementation of education policies and strategies. Then, researchers conduct a bias assessment to consider potential bias, such as selectively selected reports or publication bias. Furthermore, researchers used the rubric method adapted from Charmaz and Thornberg (2021) to assess the quality of each selected document, involving aspects such as reliability, quality, creativity, and usability. After that, researchers perform a thematic synthesis to identify common patterns, trends, and important findings in the documents, which are then analyzed and presented in a narrative format. Finally, researchers compile a summary of results, discussions, and conclusions based on four key issues, namely

government support, students with disabilities, inclusive education, and policies governing the rights of children with disabilities in education, while providing recommendations for improving future practices. By combining these techniques, the study can present a comprehensive and informative analysis of data on government support for inclusive education for children with disabilities in Tanzania. The process is further detailed below.



**Figure 1. Flow Chart for Identifying Eligible Studies**

## RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Accessing basic services such as healthcare, education, and employment for people with disabilities is a critical challenge due to societal perception of persons with disabilities. In supporting the educational rights of people with disabilities, the government of Tanzania has enacted and implemented several legislative, policy, and programme initiatives. These administrative initiatives address the challenges mentioned above facing people with disabilities. The government's commitment to supporting people with disabilities to access educational rights is manifest in the nine documents presented. These documents are sourced from national and international agency repositories, Google Scholar, and ERIC. Below is a summary of the nine documents that mark the government's support and initiatives for persons with disabilities.

### **United Republic of Tanzania (2010). The Persons with Disability Act of 2010**

The government of Tanzania is devoted to providing support for persons with disabilities through various issued directives concerning education for persons with disabilities. The policy directives positively state that people with disabilities have the same right to education as other normal children, e.g., equal opportunities for enrollment in public or private schools and universities, except for special schools when necessary. Further, the policy mandates that persons

with disabilities have equal rights to access healthcare, social support, education, vocational training, communication, and employment opportunities. Furthermore, the policy directs that students with various impairments have the right, directly or indirectly, to access information and be provided with assistive devices and support such as sign language, audio tapes, large print, low vision facilities, braille, and computerised information, programming, and interpretation support. Lastly, educational institutions are directed not to discriminate against persons with disabilities by restricting them from receiving benefits or admission based on disability or expelling them based on their disability.

#### **United Republic of Tanzania (2004). Nation Policy on Disability of 2004**

The policy advocates that all children have the right to an education, regardless of their disabilities. The policy aims to create an inclusive, supportive learning environment, equity, and academic achievement for all. The policy calls on the following: firstly, students with disabilities must attend regular schools alongside their non-disabled colleagues. Secondly, children with disabilities must be protected, obtain a quality education and be free from any form of discrimination and harassment in accessing public services. Thirdly, educational resources, namely infrastructure, teaching strategies, and learning materials, must be friendly to meet the diverse needs of students with disabilities. Lastly, disability-related themes must be included in the curricular and teaching methods to be integrated into teacher training programmes to support children with disabilities in both conventional and special schools.

#### **United Republic of Tanzania (2017). The National Strategy on Inclusive Education in Tanzania of 2018 and 2021**

The national strategy for inclusive education mandates that every child deserves the right to get a quality education regardless of their disability. The strategy highlights the following measures to achieve this end: First, inclusive education is mandatory to be implemented in the schooling system to prevent the exclusion of vulnerable children, late enrollment, and dropouts. Second, children with disabilities must be taught in the same classrooms as their non-disabled colleagues, and the consideration of the book-student ratio for those with disabilities must be 1:1. Third, the strategy calls for awareness creation and supporting children's rights to attain education through various formal interventions such as Parent-Teacher Associations and school-community meetings on inclusive education to increase community awareness and control mechanisms. Lastly, technical support such as seminars and training programmes are to be provided to teachers and school management teams to help them create inclusive classrooms that meet the learning demands of a diverse group of learners and reduce student dropouts for children with disabilities and learning difficulties.

### **United Republic of Tanzania (2013). Technical and Vocational Education and Training Development Programme (TVETDP) for 2013/2014 – 2017/2018**

These two programs are meant to promote gender and inclusiveness in technical vocational education and training, specifically in providing admission to education for persons with disabilities. The Ministry of Education, Science and Technology directed TVET institutions to be flexible in admitting students from disadvantaged groups, especially those with disabilities. For example, in 2017-2018, the government issued a directive to all TVET-accredited institutions to increase the enrollment rate of students with impairments in vocational education training by at least 50% and 35% in technical education training to beat the previous enrollment rate of 20% in 2011-2012 and 3% in both institutions. Further, the Ministry of Education, Science and Technology has developed a support system for TVET graduates with disabilities to register to access work tools, soft loans, grants, and seed money to start or improve income-generating projects. The developed system has also helped the government and TVET institutions to track supported graduates with disabilities periodically, evaluate their performance, determine the effect of the support, and provide feedback to donors.

### **United Republic of Tanzania (2014). The Tanzania Education and Training Policy of 2014**

The education policy is dedicated to providing education to all children, regardless of their abilities or inabilities, from pre-primary to tertiary level. The policy documents have several strengths, namely, government commitment to ensure the accessibility of educational infrastructure to meet the educational needs of all groups, including special care for children with disabilities; promotion of access to education for disadvantaged groups, including those with intellectual and hearing impairments and multiple impairments; promoting the rights of children with disabilities to access education without discrimination; promoting and providing support services to students with disabilities to access and own educational and assistive technology support; and implement teacher preparation programmes in teachers training colleges that teach inclusive education approaches to meet the learning needs of students with disabilities.

### **United Republic of Tanzania (2015). The National Examination Council Regulations of 2015**

The Ministry of Education, Science and Technology, through the examination regulations, directs school administrators to request special facilities and accommodations for students with special needs before the examination sitting. The regulation calls for visually impaired candidates to be provided with specific testing facilities, braille devices, and test materials during the examinations. The Ministries concerned with education are directed to specify

how candidates with diverse impairments can take examinations in science and mathematics subjects. The regulation mandates that candidates with disabilities must be given an additional 20 minutes for every hour in mathematics and science subjects and 10 minutes for every hour in social science subjects.

**Ministry of Education, Science, and Technology (2011). Government Circular No. 11 of 2011 on Examination Administration for Special Needs Education**

The government has become conscious of parents of students with disabilities' grumbles regarding the inadequate consideration of their children's needs during inter-school and national examinations. In rejoicing the parents' and caregivers' concerns, the Government issued a Circular directive to NECTA to undertake the following measures. First, NECTA must ensure students with disabilities have their separate stream by the established guidelines to enable them to be comfortable during the examination, and the timetable should be flexible. Second, NECTA must ensure that only qualified teachers in special needs education are responsible for the examination preparation, setup, supervision, marking and grading. These government measures address parents' and caregivers' worries and ensure fairness and an inclusive examination process for all students.

**United Republic of Tanzania (2019). Performance Audit Report on Management of Education for Pupils with Special Needs of 2019**

The Ministry of Education, Science and Technology commissioned the National Audit Office to conduct a special performance audit on education management for pupils with special needs. These tasks for the National Audit Office are an effort of the government to provide a clear picture of the coordination and provision of basic learning and teaching requirements for special needs education and quality assurance activities in delivering special needs education. The report indicated that despite the government effort to provide services to children with disabilities, primary schools lack a long-term funding mechanism for special needs education activities, resulting in a shortage of critical teaching and learning equipment such as braille embossers, braille machines and audiology test facilities for 68 percent in both conventional and special need schools. The report indicated that schools have inadequate spaces for storing and using little available educational materials and assistive technology for 75 percent. Also, the report further indicated that many conventional schools lack specialised personnel for special needs education; even those assigned by NECTA to supervise special needs education examinations lacked the necessary experts, contrary to Government Circular No. 11 of 2011. Besides, the report highlighted a shortage of Special Needs Education (SNE) teachers in primary schools, with only 2,460 teachers out of the required 4,428, representing a 44% teacher shortage. Despite the shortage of experts in this field, 61% of SNE teachers did not take job-designed courses specifically for them



between 2014 and 2018. In addition, the report indicates that ministries concerned with education, e.g., the Ministry of Education, Science and Technology and President Office, Regional and Local Authorities did not allocate budgets for maintenance and repair of teaching and learning equipment for SNE because they do not have records of malfunctioning facilities and assistive devices that needed repair.

### **EAC Secretariat (2012). East African Community Policy on Persons with Disabilities of 2012**

The East African Community policy concerning Persons with Disabilities (PWDs) aimed at creating an environment that empowers Persons with disabilities (PWDs) to be integrated into the community and access equality rights. The policy calls for the Partner States to work together to provide social welfare services to children with disabilities to have equal rights to quality education. For example, Article 120 (c) calls for cooperation among member states to develop and execute a shared strategy that supports rehabilitation services and meets the needs of PWDs, including healthcare, employment, and education. Further, the East African Community policy on disabilities requires partner states to provide cost-sharing guidelines to create a friendly environment for PWDs to access fundamental basic needs. Additionally, the policy encourages member states to work closely to change societal perceptions and raise awareness about PWDs, especially the killing of persons with albinism, by launching campaigns with the help of Social Welfare Officers at the district and regional levels.

The government of Tanzania has taken a series of initiatives to improve access to education for disabled and non-disabled children since the country gained independence in 1961. These initiatives are documented in various legal frameworks, including the Education Act of 1978, the Persons with Disabilities Act of 2010, the Education and Training Policy of 2014, and the National Inclusive Education Strategy of 2018-2021. These legal frameworks aimed to establish equal educational opportunities for persons with disabilities and are in line with the Dakar Framework for Action of 2000 and the Salamanca declaration, which calls member states to provide access to education for all regardless of their ethnic background in efforts to achieve universal primary education (United Republic of Tanzania, 2010. UNESCO, 1994; Habib & Mawa, 2022).

Notwithstanding economic and budget deficit, the government of Tanzania has been allocating funds to improve existing schools and construct new ones with accessible features, such as ramps, larger doors, and toilets designed to support children with disabilities (Kombe & Mwakasangula, 2023). Also, children and students with various impairments are given assistive technology devices, such as Braille machines, books, and hearing aids, to support them to participate fully in the learning process (Kisanga & Kisanga, 2022). In order to effectively implement these initiatives, the government has allocated

TZS 3 billion in 2019-2020 to purchase special needs education equipment and teaching materials and build dormitories for all 307 special needs primary classes as part of the National Inclusive Education Action Plan Strategy to expand school infrastructure for children with impairments (United, Republic of Tanzania, 2017, 2019). In order to ensure that every child has equal access to education regardless of ethnic background, the government has collaborated with non-governmental organisations and international agencies to establish special and inclusive schools across regions. These government initiatives have increased the number of students with diverse disabilities in schools compared to the previous years, as indicated by Kisanga & Kisanga, (2022). However, the number of students with disabilities requiring support remains uncertain, and enrollment of children with disabilities is lower compared to general enrollment with a low enrollment of female students (Kombe & Mwakasangula, 2023).

**Table 1: Trend in The Enrolment of Students with Disabilities in Primary to Secondary Schools from 2016 to 2020**

Year	Enrolled pupils with disabilities in Primary schools			Enrolled Students with disabilities "Ordinary Level"			Enrolled students with disabilities in "Advanced Level."		
	M	F	T	M	F	T	M	F	T
2016	21,151	15,883	37,034	3676	3361	7,037	244	201	445
2017	24,629	18,154	42,783	4150	4168	8,318	229	231	460
2018	28,672	20,953	49,625	5294	4983	10,277	263	216	479
2019	31,175	23,119	54,294	5786	5911	11,697	263	252	515
2020	31,996	23,763	55,758	4839	4935	9,774	303	248	551

**Source: Basic Education Statistics of Tanzania 2016-2020**

Additionally, the government has made valuable stapes to educate and support education stakeholders, including teachers, quality assurance officers, school management teams, school boards, and civil societies, in enhancing inclusiveness in education institutions (Kavua, 2018; Onditi, 2016; Possi, 2018). Despite the government's efforts to ensure that children and students with disabilities have equal opportunities in education, there are still several unresolved challenges in both primary and secondary schools, which include low enrolment, drop-out and poor performance in examinations among children with disabilities, recruiting and retaining special needs teachers, and insufficient funding for procuring assistive devices for teaching sign language (Kisanga & Kisanga, 2022).

From the data provided, it can be concluded that the Tanzanian government has taken important steps to improve access to education for children with and without disabilities since the country gained independence in 1961. These measures are documented in various legal frameworks, including the Education Act 1978, the Persons with Disabilities Act 2010, the Education and Training Policy 2014, and the National Inclusive Education Strategy 2018-2021.

These measures aim to establish equal educational opportunities for persons with disabilities and are in line with the Dakar Framework for Action 2000 and the Salamanca Declaration, which calls on member states to provide access to education for all regardless of their ethnic background in an effort to achieve universal primary education (United Republic of Tanzania, 2010. UNESCO, 1994; Graham et al., 2023).

Nonetheless, there are still unresolved challenges in both primary and secondary schools, including low enrollment rates, dropout rates, and poor exam performance among children with disabilities, recruiting and retaining special needs teachers, and lack of funding to purchase assistive devices to teach sign language (Habib & Mawa, 2022). Nonetheless, the steps taken by the Tanzanian government demonstrate their commitment to improving access and quality of education for all children, including those with disabilities. This government effort must continue to be supported and improved so that inclusive and equitable education can be fully realized in Tanzania.

The contribution of this research lies in a deep understanding of concrete steps taken by the Tanzanian government to support inclusive education for people with disabilities. By identifying existing policies, programs, and initiatives, the study provides a clear view of the government's efforts to overcome barriers to education accessibility. These findings not only provide insights for more effective policy development, but also provide the foundation for more targeted implementation measures to ensure equal education rights for persons with disabilities in Tanzania.

## CONCLUSION

The government of Tanzania has made outstanding progress in its policies and regulations to support children and students with disabilities. Despite this outstanding progress, there are still several challenges that need to be seriously addressed by the government to help children and students with disabilities have equal access to fundamental rights, including education. These challenges include insufficient funding allocated to schools, inaccessible and dilapidated infrastructure, a shortage of qualified teachers for special needs education, and the absence of monitoring and evaluation systems to assess the progress of inclusivity at all educational levels. To address the challenges above, the government needs to increase funding for education, improve teacher preparation programmes, enhance and rehabilitate infrastructure accessibility, foster stakeholder collaboration, raise awareness about inclusion in society and create inclusive education control mechanisms in education institutions. By implementing the suggested solutions, the government would be in a good position to create an effective and inclusive educational system for children with disabilities at all levels of education in the country.

The government to overcome the challenges above and empower special minds in schools as other developed countries need to increase the financial budget in the sector, strengthen inclusive education initiatives and improve school infrastructure; prepare comprehensive in-service training programmes for teachers, caregivers, and school management team to impart them necessary skills in addressing the needs of students with disabilities; regularly conduct awareness campaigns with local leaders and communities to lessen myths and stigma on people with disabilities. The ministries concerned with education should partner with civil societies to create monitoring and evaluation systems that will provide feedback, track progress, and help in making decisions on how best to support students with disabilities; the Ministries concerned with education in partnership with the of Ministry of Labour, Employment, Youth and the Disabled should come up with proper strategies that graduates with special needs are given priority on government employments when vacancies are available.

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