



WOMEN WITH DISABILITIES AS AGENTS OF CHANGE AND HOW TO SUPPORT THEM.

Learning from the women with disabilities movement
in Tanzania.

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INTRODUCTION.

LEARNING FROM THE WOMEN WITH DISABILITIES MOVEMENT IN TANZANIA.

Women and girls with disabilities face ‘double discrimination’ linked to both their gender and impairments. This can result in the exclusion or marginalisation of their representatives and/or their priority issues. This ‘double discrimination’ also makes women and girls with disabilities highly vulnerable to violence and safeguarding abuses.

Women and girls with disabilities have been ignored by programmes, organisations and movements in which they should be a key priority. They are people with disabilities, but they have struggled to be heard equally in disability-focussed actions. They are women, but they have struggled to be heard equally in women and gender-focussed actions dominated by women without disabilities.

Making change in Tanzania.

In 2017 peer research conducted by women with disabilities in Tanzania (with training and support from ADD International) found that all those interviewed had faced multiple forms of violence by multiple perpetrators. This research underscored the complexity of the causes and intersectionality of gender and disability discrimination in Tanzania.

In response, in 2019, leading activist women with disabilities came together with ADD’s country team in Tanzania to explore how they could bring the most change.

All the activists had been working to combat this ‘double discrimination’ for many years, and were frustrated at the lack of progress and divisions in the movement. They began to plan how to strengthen women and girls with disabilities to act as their own agents of change and build a more impactful movement that could help shift the behaviours of families, communities, government, business and funders.

Funding was secured for two years of work for the **DRIGE (Disability Rights, Inclusion, and Gender Equality)** project (2019-21).

Sharing our lessons.

This short paper shares a brief overview of the story, impact and learning from the extraordinary work of the activist women with disabilities at the heart of DRIGE and the support provided to them by ADD International.

You can read the full report at: add.org.uk/research

The full report aims to present the perspectives and learning of the activist women with disabilities themselves who led and implemented both the programme itself, and the learning process undertaken at its end.

The learnings should be of use for a range of audiences: for women and girls with disabilities as they start or continue their own activist journeys; for those seeking to fund and support women and girls with disabilities; and for those who are yet to seriously consider or address the inclusion of this doubly discriminated against group in their own work, be it in women/gender-focussed, disability-focussed, and/or in mainstream services, society and governance.

ABOUT THE PROJECT.

Activist women with disabilities and ADD International were able to secure funds for two years of focussed work in Tanzania for the DRIGE (Disability Rights, Inclusion, and Gender Equity) project. In this period, a core group of 21 activist women with disabilities, supported by ADD International have worked in 4 domains of change in which women with disabilities have been engaging actively as their own agents of change: 1. Programmes, organisations and movements specifically for women and girls with disabilities; 2. Those focussed on disability; 3. Those focussed on women/gender; and 4. Mainstream society, governance and services.

Within the DRIGE (Disability Rights, Inclusion, and Gender Equality) project (2019-21), the core group of activist women with disabilities, supported by ADD International strove:

- To organise together: by strengthening their platforms at national level, and building new ones at district level
- To be seen and heard: by mobilising for mass visibility and engaging in targeted advocacy
- To bring change to the situation of women and girls with disabilities in Tanzania: in awareness and awakening, in their lived experiences, and in policy change.
- To reflect and improve: by regularly reviewing progress and responding to learning and new opportunities.

Figure 1: Women and girls with disabilities as agents of change in 4 domains of change.

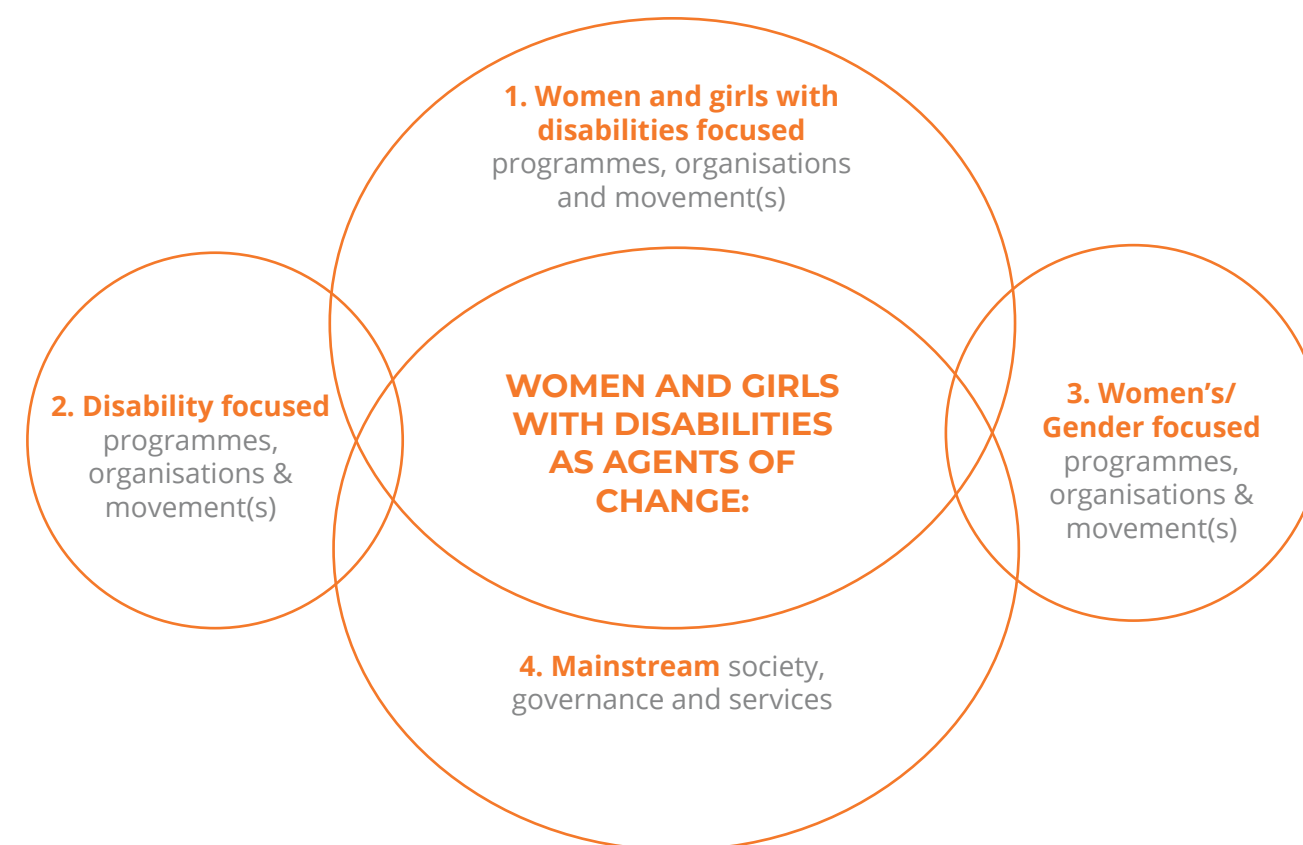
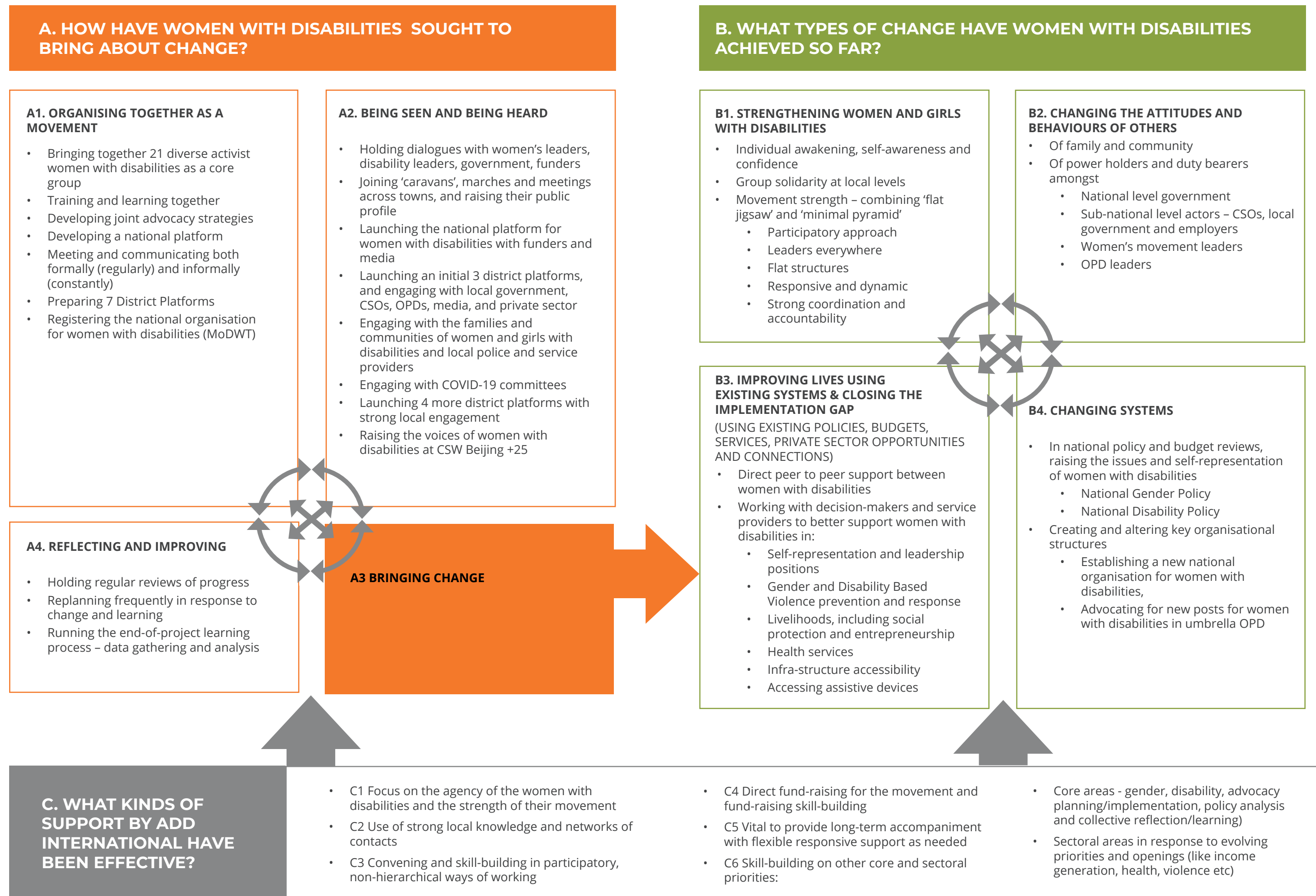


Figure 2. Summary of the DRIGE project supporting women with disabilities as agents of change



KEY LESSONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS.

1. Recognise and support the reality that women with disabilities have their OWN identity, needs and power to bring change.

Women and girls with disabilities are clear that they are often systematically denigrated or at least ignored and/or underestimated. If their issues are raised at all, it is usually by others speaking on their behalf. Most women and girls with disabilities want support to come together, to speak and act for themselves, and to have their voices and priorities heard and responded to.

When this happens then they have huge power to bring change for themselves that only they possess.

2. Face the truth that women and girls with disabilities often feel marginalised even in disability and women/gender-focussed programmes, organisations and movements

Women and girls with disabilities do not feel that their voice or issues have been well-included to date even in disability and women/gender-focussed programmes, organisations and movements, let alone in mainstream society, governance and services.

To right this imbalance, those supporting and working in these three domains should recognise this historic gap in their actions and work with women and girls with disabilities to ensure they are truly included and their rights fulfilled.

3. Bring organisations of women with disabilities together, to think and act as a movement and invest strongly in facilitating their mutual understanding and trust.

Organisations of women with disabilities and women's wings of OPDs pre-existed the DRIGE project, but historically there have been separations that have undermined collective strength.

The DRIGE project has shown that it is possible to leave these divisions in the past. Such a transformation did not happen spontaneously. It took the investment of a lot of time, honest and open-hearted reflection and bridge-building by key activist women with disabilities, supported by extensive and careful facilitation and accompaniment by ADD International.

Going forward, it will be vital to keep this focus on shared goals and collaborative methods, to continue to invest in strengthening the 'social glue' of relationships and understanding that unite its members, and to ensure sensitive support is available as needed.

4. Grow the movement at the local as well as national level, and foster non-hierarchical structures with leaders everywhere

Historically, much engagement activity and support has been focussed on policy change at the national level. But there are many needs and openings at more local levels where women with disabilities live their daily lives.

By supporting the development of local structures and leaders everywhere with the confidence and networks to get rapidly and responsively into action, relevant and effective engagement and impact has increased significantly.

Growing lots of new groups with different kinds of leaders everywhere should remain a priority going forward. This will also reduce the likelihood of patterns of exclusion or division growing within the movement of women and girls with disabilities, driven by differences like age, levels of education, rural/urban divides etc.

5. Combine and balance two ways of organising the movement simultaneously – 'flat jigsaw' and 'minimal pyramid' – and support both to keep dynamically evolving

As summarised in 4 above, the women with disabilities are organising themselves as a kind of 'flat jigsaw', with lots of different leaders and groups focussing on different priority issues and targets in different levels and locations. The jigsaw is flat in that they do not need approval from any 'higher up' actors in any hierarchy to take action and so there are many leaders and many actions.

But at the same time, there are certain openings and priorities that require a united and coherent view to be presented for the movement as a whole, and representatives who are known to be able to speak for it. To support this, the women with disabilities are organising as a kind of 'minimal pyramid' in which the views from across the broad base of district level platforms can be fed up to, and distilled by, those working at an 'apex', and then presented to key targets. The pyramid is currently 'minimal' in that processes for communication and selection of representatives are largely informal, consensus-based and able to move fast.

Going forward, action and support will need to keep the benefits of both ways of organising, avoiding over-formalising the pyramid or jigsaw in ways that undermine their flexibility and responsiveness, even as pressures for coordination, accountability and due process grow as they usually do in most movements.

6. Continue to balance the focus on bringing different kinds of change: direct peer support; use of existing systems to improve lives; changing policies and systems; and movement building as an end in itself

Some planning frameworks might like to suggest simple linear flows from some kinds of objectives (like building groups and the movement) to others (like getting policies implemented) and/or from shorter term changes (like direct peer support to vulnerable women) to longer term changes (like bringing policy change). But in reality, the flows of cause and effect are more complex, e.g. wins in using existing systems to improve services for women with disabilities help build the women's disability movement by attracting and retaining more members, which in turn, can both strengthen direct peer support and increase the strength of calls for policy change etc.

Going forward, this suggests the need to avoid over-simplifying, embrace the complexity and work on these different kinds of change simultaneously. And at the root is the need to focus on strengthening the women's disability movement itself, in part because it is needed to achieve all the other changes, and in part as an end in itself, because its strength and visibility is a vital symbol and lodestone for women and girls with disabilities in maintaining their spirit and motivation to speak and act for change.

7. Address the gaps in who is being reached by the current movement for women and girls with disabilities – especially those who live in rural areas, are less educated, have intellectual / multiple communication / mental health disabilities.

The activist women are focussed on developing a movement for all women and girls with disabilities. In particular, they have striven to include those with all kinds of impairments amongst their members and the district platforms are being created expressly to reach into sub-national areas across the country. The first 8 platforms are a strong start, but there are many more regions to go and the women want to see a minimum of a platform in each zone.

However, they recognise there are gaps remaining in who is being both reached and taking leadership roles. Going forward they particularly want to deepen their reach, skills and resources in working with women and girls with intellectual, multiple communication and mental health disabilities, those who live outside urban centres and those with low or no education. There is also a need to reflect on any current age-related discrimination in the movement, which is failing yet to benefit fully from the potential activism and leadership of young women (below the age of 30) and girls.

8. Involve the right kind of supporters – those who support the agency of the women and girls with disabilities as paramount and provide long term responsive movement-building accompaniment.

The women with disabilities within DRIGE feel that those outside the project who aim and claim to fund and act as allies to women with disabilities need to be more careful with the roles they play and the ways that they operate to avoid doing harm to the interests of women and girls with disabilities.

In the first place, they must be clear that it is the right of women with disabilities to act as their own agents of change and to have their lived experiences inform and drive activity. This puts the onus on building their capacity to identify their own priorities, speak out, and take action for themselves. This does not detract from the importance of others also using their positions to speak and act in their support, and the activist women with disabilities would like them to do much more of this in appropriate ways – e.g. raising funds, making introductions of the women with disabilities to power holders. But others should not claim to speak or act for them, and such actions should not be a substitute for, or get in the way of, the women with disabilities' own agency.

Secondly, where funders insist on outcomes sought being pre-determined before implementation starts, all stages of design, implementation, monitoring and accountability should pay focussed attention to the specific inclusion of women and girls with disabilities, and respond to, rather than distort, their priorities and ways of working.

However, strong pre-determinations of outcomes and rigid approaches to implementation in short-term and narrow 'projects' are not the optimal way to support and make the most of the agency of the women and disabilities themselves. The activists in DRIGE feel its unusual effectiveness has come from its focus on movement-building and its ability to respond to and support the diverse and evolving priorities of its members. Movement development and impacts are not achieved quickly, nor are processes linear and predictable, especially using the dynamically evolving 'flat jigsaw' model of multiple leaders and groups outlined above in 4.

So thirdly, the most valuable funding and support going forward will be long-term and highly flexible movement building, able to respond as needs and opportunities evolve and to deal with the inherent messiness and creativity of bringing change through social movements. The primary focus needs to be increasing direct support to the movement of women with disabilities. They also encourage increased support for allies like ADD that can provide responsive long-term accompaniment, build their skills in technical areas, rights and in participatory approaches to running groups, help navigate through any conflicts and link them to learning and contacts within and across countries.

PROJECT VOICES.



ADELINA MLUGE - THE CARAVAN TRIP TO SIMIYU.

"It was an exciting Morning of 3rd March 2020, when we started the caravan trip to Simiyu Region for commemoration of Women's Day that was marked on 8th March 2020 in Simiyu region.

Previously women with disabilities were not part of the caravan trip. We took the initiative and visited the Ministry of Health, Community Development, Gender, Elderly, and Children, asking why women with disabilities were left out. The Director for Gender was so cooperative and sorry for not including women with disabilities in such an essential event for all women, and she assured women with disabilities will be involved in all national events arranged for women.

We chose to go by the route of central corridor via Morogoro, Singida and Shinyanga to sensitize communities on their attitudes towards persons with disabilities. We also targeted the lack of accessible public services (such as health and wash facilities) and protective devices (sanitizers, mask, soap, sunburn lotion, hats). We also influenced regional authorities on the needs to address the abject poverty experienced by many households of persons with disabilities in their access to food, shelter, and clothes. Shinyanga was particularly sensitized to end violence and discriminatory acts against persons with albinism.

As a member of Tanzania Association of Albinism, I was able to follow up on implementation of pre-established plans and commitment especially: -

1. Strategic Plan to end violence against persons with albinism
2. 'Cross-Border Cooperation Plan on Preventing and Combating Trafficking and the Protection of



Persons with Albinism in Malawi, Tanzania and Mozambique'

3. 'Joint Programme for the Protection and Wellbeing of People with Albinism in Tanzania '
4. 'ACTION STRATEGY: Minorities and Other Vulnerable Groups'
5. 'Regional Plan of Action on Albinism adopted on May 22, 2017, by the African Commission on Human and Peoples' Rights'

We also visited some few families with girls with disabilities and we showed them how to include persons with disabilities (especially girls) in all life spheres without violating their rights.

We also managed to meet some of the Gender police desks during our stops and got their insights on the treatment of Gender-Based Violence (GBV) cases regarding people with disability especially girls and women. The police desks visited appreciated the work being done by

NURU AWADH AND THE 'MOVEMENT OF WOMEN WITH DISABILITIES IN TANZANIA

"The Organizations of Persons with Disabilities OPDs) are yet to attain gender equity in the sense of fairness and justice in the distribution of benefits, power, resources, and responsibilities between women and men with disabilities. Women with disabilities have less involvement in the affairs of our organizations compared to men. This denies women with disabilities access to opportunities including economic empowerment, leadership, networking, training and participation in events and advocacy.

This is why we have registered the organization called the Movement of Women with Disabilities in Tanzania' (MoWDT). The aim of the organization is to unite women and girls with disabilities to form a stronger voice and series of actions that will enable the movement of women with disabilities' agenda in development and equal opportunities within organizations of persons with disabilities. Members of MoWDT held a special meeting with the leaders SHIVYAWATA, the umbrella Organization of Persons with Disabilities (OPD). We advocated for four changes:

1. The National Advisory Council for Persons with Disabilities should have more women with disabilities as representatives compared to the current situation. The Council includes five members to be appointed by the Minister from

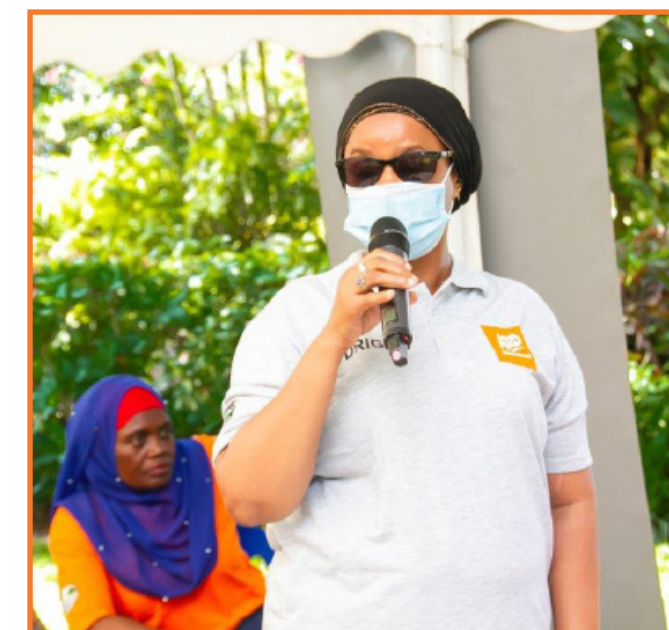
women with disability. They asked the activists to visit them periodically and exchange views, knowledge and experiences to improve the services for women and girls with disability, taking into account the diversity of the groups they are serving.

We were also able to attend different side events organized by others, where we were able to introduce the DRIGE project and give education to the meetings on issues of women and girls with disability and how to protect them against GBV and respect their rights.

It was a good learning journey for me as Adelina, as I used my knowledge and skills to influence people to stop discriminating against persons, especially women, with disabilities. I was able to speak before the media for the purpose of educating the public, continuing to strengthen my advocacy and public speaking skills without fear.

organizations of persons with disabilities and these should include women with disabilities.

2. With regard to the SHIVYAWATA, the umbrella OPD:(a) The Board should have more seats designated for women - of its current 20 members, only four are women. (b) The Executive Committee needs more women as it is comprised of four women among 13 members. (c) Since the secretary post of the women department is vacant, autonomy and independence should be provided to women members to make their own choice as to who should be appointed. Otherwise this opportunity is taken away by male leaders.



CONCLUSION.

The women with disabilities involved in the DRIGE project have achieved remarkable change in the two years of the project. Bypassed for too long, they are eager and positioned to achieve much more as they continue to work together in solidarity and with those who will support them to do so.

“There is peace when we work as women with disabilities groups. We are free to share opportunities. We treat each other with love. There is the freedom to speak without limit or worry as our concerns are shared. We share and learn together about everything and our common concerns - even family problems, good working practices, we find workable approaches to solving the problems we face.”



ADD International is a disability rights organisation. We partner with organisations of disability activists in Africa and Asia and help them access the tools, resources and support they need to build powerful movements for change.

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