

Tanzania general election 2025: post-election disability inclusion enquiry

Executive summary

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Background information

People with disabilities in Tanzania continue to face barriers to meaningful participation in electoral processes, including inaccessible voter education, physical and communication barriers at polling stations, and persistent stigma. These challenges have been documented in previous elections and broader regional **research** on disability-inclusive elections in Africa¹.

Tanzania is a State Party to the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (UNCRPD) and is guided by African Union and SADC electoral governance frameworks, alongside national provisions under the Persons with Disability Act 2010, which set out measures to support accessible and inclusive participation in elections.

Against this policy and legal backdrop, the 2025 general election provided an opportunity to strengthen disability-inclusive electoral processes. In this context, Sightsavers implemented the Disability Inclusive Citizenship and Political Participation project in Tanzania, to support the meaningful participation of people with disabilities in the election.

Description of project

As part of Sightsavers' **Inclusive citizenship** area of work, the Disability Inclusive Citizenship and Political Participation project is funded by the UK Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office (FCDO) and implemented by Sightsavers in partnership with the Youth with Disabilities Organisation (YoDOW) Tanzania. The project worked closely with the Independent National Election Committee (INEC) and the Prime Minister's Office, Labour, Youth, Employment and Persons with Disabilities (PMO-LYED).

The project aimed to strengthen the meaningful participation of people with disabilities in electoral processes of the 2025 general election, with a focus on women and youth with disabilities, through capacity strengthening, accessible voter education, and disability-inclusive election observation across 12 districts in Tanga, Singida, and Morogoro regions.

¹ Disability-inclusive elections in Africa: a qualitative systematic review, Sightsavers, August 2017

Purpose of the post-election enquiry

Sightsavers undertook a qualitative post-election enquiry through the project to assess how the voices and experiences of people with disabilities were reflected in the 2025 general election in Tanzania.

The enquiry used a participatory approach, involving people with disabilities in data collection and drawing on multiple data sources across selected regions. It explored barriers and enablers to participation, alignment between institutional commitments and lived experience, and differences in experience by gender, age, and impairment type, to inform learning and future efforts towards inclusive elections.

Given the scope of the project being mainly round actions to support inclusion on election day, the enquiry also focused on participation in voting on election day.

Approach and methodology

The enquiry drew on multiple data sources to enable triangulation across perspectives. Data collection included one key informant interview with a representative from an organisation of persons with disabilities (OPDs), and four focus group discussions with male and female voters with disabilities, OPDs/ civil society actors (CSOs), and Social Welfare officers.

In total, 22 respondents, 10 female and 12 male, from the Tanga, Singida and Morogoro regions participated as these were the regions targeted with project activities.

Data were collected in April 2026 during an Accessibility Sector Review Workshop in Morogoro, using semi-structured guides translated into Kiswahili. Analysis followed a thematic framework approach, combining deductive and inductive coding and comparing findings across respondent groups to identify convergence and divergence.



Voter education was a key enabler of participation, but findings highlight the need for accessible formats and more consistent outreach.

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Main findings

Overall disability inclusion progress: The findings indicate a broadly consistent pattern of advancing but uneven progress in disability inclusion in the 2025 Tanzania general election. Across respondent groups, there was strong convergence that participation by people with disabilities was supported through improved voter education, more visible institutional efforts to promote disability inclusion, and more supportive polling station practices, particularly in relation to staff behaviour, prioritisation measures, and informal assistance. These factors contributed to increased awareness and confidence among voters with disabilities. As one female voter reflected, “I began to feel that I was important and deserving of participating.” Several respondents perceived that turnout among voters with disabilities was higher than in previous elections, although turnout data was not provided to verify this.

Uneven implementation and reliance on support: However, this progress was not experienced uniformly and was frequently dependent on context, location, and informal support systems rather than consistently applied accessible design. While assistance from election officials, family members, or community actors often enabled participation, it also reflected the continued absence of fully accessible systems that would enable independent and dignified voting for all groups. As one OPD respondent noted, “being carried in a wheelchair removes our dignity.”

Persistent accessibility barriers: Accessibility barriers remain widespread and multidimensional, spanning physical infrastructure, communication, and information access. Polling stations were often not fully accessible for people with mobility impairments, while deaf and hard-of-hearing voters faced significant barriers due to limited sign language interpretation and inaccessible communication channels. Blind and visually impaired voters also encountered inconsistent provision of Braille ballot papers and challenges with written materials. One OPD respondent summarised these gaps, stating, “They were not present... no sign language interpreters at the stations... Braille and friendly physical environments did not materialise.” These barriers often occurred simultaneously, reinforcing exclusion and limiting independent participation.

Policy–practice gap and capacity constraints: Institutional commitment to inclusion is increasingly visible through the training of election staff, prioritisation measures, the establishment of local disability committees, and engagement with OPDs to support voter education and accessibility initiatives. In some cases, prioritisation was experienced positively, with one male voter noting that “people with disabilities were given priority so they could participate with certainty.” However, these measures were uneven in practice and often depended on individual capacity, local implementation practices, and resource availability. Across the findings, there is a consistent gap between policy intent and implementation, driven by weak planning systems, limited availability and use of disability-disaggregated data for planning and resource allocation, and constrained institutional capacity. This reduced the ability of electoral actors to anticipate accessibility needs and contributed to uneven provision of accessibility measures across polling stations.

Need for tailored approaches: Inclusion approaches remain largely universal rather than differentiated, with limited tailoring to specific impairment types, gendered experiences, or age-related differences. While OPDs played an important role in voter education,

mobilisation, and monitoring, their involvement in planning and decision-making remained limited, reducing opportunities for more systematically responsive design to diverse, and in particular the most excluded, groups.

These patterns point to uneven implementation across locations and impairment groups, with continued reliance on assistance and inconsistent accessibility conditions.



Organisations of persons with disabilities played a key role in voter education, observation, and supporting participation in the electoral process. © Sightsavers

Conclusions

The 2025 Tanzania general election showed improvements in voter education, institutional engagement, and polling station practices, but these gains were uneven across groups and locations. Participation continued to rely on informal assistance rather than fully accessible systems, limiting independent and dignified participation and reinforcing dependence on others.

Inclusion measures remain largely universal rather with insufficient adaptation to the diverse needs of different impairment groups and intersecting factors such as gender, age, and geography. While institutional commitment to disability inclusion is increasingly evident, implementation remains inconsistent due to capacity constraints, limited integration into planning processes, and weak use of inclusive data.

Overall, strengthening inclusion will require more systematic, data-informed, and impairment-responsive approaches to ensure consistent, independent participation.

Recommendations

Through the consultations, 20 recommendations were developed and organised across six strategic domains. The summary below presents these strategic domains of recommendations, providing a high-level overview of the priority areas for strengthening disability-inclusive electoral participation:

- **Inclusive electoral planning and governance:** Strengthen the use of disability-disaggregated data to inform election planning and accessibility support. Promote impairment-specific inclusion approaches and formalise the participation of organisations of persons with disabilities (OPDs) in electoral planning, monitoring, and review processes.
- **Polling station accessibility and infrastructure:** Establish and enforce minimum accessibility standards for polling stations, including physical access, layout, signage, and safe waiting areas. Introduce pre-election accessibility audits to identify and address barriers before election day.
- **Accessible communication and voting materials:** Improve access to election information and voting materials through systematic sign language provision, improved Braille and tactile ballot availability, and voter education in multiple accessible formats. Begin voter education earlier and sustain it throughout the electoral cycle.
- **Training and frontline implementation:** Strengthen disability inclusion training for election officials, including communication, dignity, privacy, autonomy, and inclusive assistance practices. Improve sign language communication capacity, support independent voting where possible, and strengthen privacy arrangements during voting.
- **Participation, representation, and accountability:** Strengthen coordination and accountability through joint accessibility planning forums, improved disability-inclusive election monitoring systems, and greater support for political participation and leadership opportunities for people with disabilities more broadly and longer-term.
- **Targeted inclusion for underrepresented groups:** Develop targeted approaches for rural communities, women with disabilities, youth with disabilities, and marginalised groups, including people with psychosocial, intellectual, and invisible disabilities, to address barriers that may not be captured through existing inclusion approaches.