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Project title: Navigating the digital landscape: universities partnering for change

Deliverable D4.1: Disability Needs Assessment

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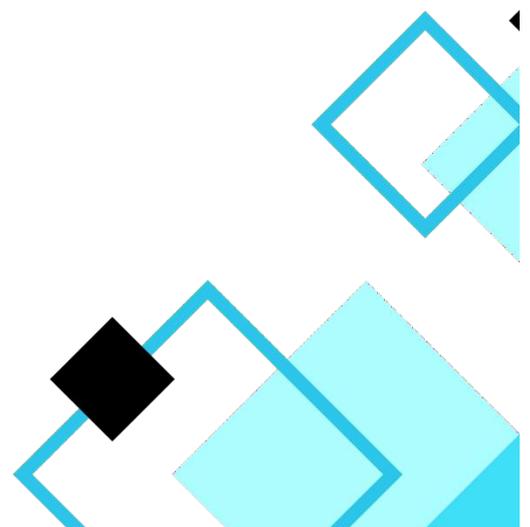
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i. About the project

The objectives of the NIAGARA project directly addresses digital transformation, inclusion, and diversity, and will impact participation in social, economic, democratic life and civic engagement through a focus on digital competence. The connection between digital competence and participation in democratic life and civic engagement is well-established, particularly regarding issues such as misinformation, disinformation, and fake news that affect all areas of life. Indirectly and in the long term, the grant will contribute to addressing issues related to the environment and climate change by supporting education and learning at the tertiary level, as well as research. In particular, the NIAGARA project aims to enhance digital resources within university libraries across Tanzania and Zambia, ensuring equal access to library services for all students and staff. In addition, we will examine the essential digital skills required by both librarians and students to deliver efficient library services. To support their development, we will provide short courses tailored to enhance these digital capabilities. The NIAGARA project aligns with international, EU, national, and institutional priorities, making it a vital initiative for academic progress.

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Project Acronym	NIAGARA
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Start Date	1 January 2023
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Project Manager	Elin Opheim
Project Coordinators	Jamie Johnston (OsloMet), Kelefa Mwantimwa (UDSM), Wylustan P. Mtega (SUA), Christine W. Kanyengo (UNZA), Greg Kwalombota Mubita (UBL), Sabina Cisek (UJ)

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Project Coordinators	Jamie Johnston (OsloMet), Kelefa Mwantimwa (UDSM), Wylustan P. Mtega (SUA), Christine W. Kanyengo (UNZA), Greg Kwalombota Mubita (UBL), Sabina Cisek (UJ)
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iii. Abbreviations and acronyms

EU	European Union
HEI	Higeher Education Institutions
INN	Høgskolen I Innlandet
LIS	Library and Information Sciences
NIAGARA	Navigating the digital landscape: universities partnering for change
OHCHR	Office of the High Commission for Human Rights
OPAC	Online Public Access Catalogue
OSLOMET	Oslomet–Storbyuniversitetet
PD	Policy on Disability
PWDs	Persons with Disability
SUA	Sokoine University of Agriculture
UBL	University of Barotseland
UJ	Uniwersytet Jagielloński
TTY	Teletypewriter
UDSM	University of Dar es Salaam
UNZA	University of Zambia
UNZASU	University of Zambia Students Union
WP	Work Package

1. Executive summary

This needs assessment report is related to task T4.1 (D4.1 – Needs assessment report) as stated in the Grant Agreement. The aim of the activity was to conduct a needs assessment in each of the partner institutions in Tanzania and Zambia. The needs assessment provides information on the number and types of disabilities; programme, support and infrastructural needs in partner institutions. Through this activity, barriers to using university libraries and relevant infrastructure to support students with disabilities have been identified to enhance equity in educational opportunities. T4.1 is part of WP 4 with the following deliverables:

a) D3.4 – Training materials on inclusive services available on project website
b) D3.5 – Inclusive services course evaluation report
c) D3.7– Official approval of the developed /reviewed curricula by university authorities and the Commission of Universities in Zambia and Tanzania
d) D4.2 – Workshop report
e) D4.3 – Policy document

2. Introduction

The need for inclusiveness and equity in service provision in libraries the world over gained prominence decades ago. The purpose of this survey is to set the ground upon which libraries may endeavour to introduce/enhance services and information resources delivery that will cater for current and future users with various forms of disabilities. Further, the activity will profile the library needs of current and future students with disabilities and to establish training needs for library staff in relation to services and resources for students with disabilities.

3. Methodology

The data was collected through a survey of students, faculty and university libraries between April-June 2023. Additional information was obtained from University officials. Further documentary research was done through official university and government documents.

4. Findings

A. National legislative framework

At the national level, both Tanzania and Zambia have enacted laws and formulated policies that provide guaidance on issiues of disability in the respective countries.

The United Republic of Tanzania 1997 national consitution protects the rights of persons with disabilities[1]. The Tanzania Persons with Disabilities Act of 2010 was enacted to make provisions, for the health care, social support, accessibility, rehabilitation, education and vocational training, communication, employment or work protection and promotion of basic rights for persons with disabilities and to provide for related matters"[2]. Further, the Tanzania National Policy on Disability aim at the "improved life situation of people with disabilities by undertaking the following actions:

a) Encourage the development of people with disabilities;
b) Empower families of people with disabilities;
c) Review/amend legislations that are not disability friendly;
d) Improve service delivery;

e) Allow the participation of people with disabilities in decision making and implementation of important activities in the society; and

f) Enable families of people with disabilities and the society at large to participate in decisions and implementation of important disability friendly activities[3].

In Zambia, the issue of disability is guided by the Constitution of the Republic of Zambia [Constitution of Zambia (Amendment) [No. 2 of 2016][4] and the Persons with Disabilities Act, 2012 [No. 6 of 2012] that contain provisions that speak to the need to respond appropiately to persons with diabilities. Such provisions include:

a) Education and facilities that integrate the person into society;

b) Access to the physical environment, information, communications, public facilities and services, places and transportation;

c) Access to materials, facilities and assistive devices for persons with disability;

d) Use of sign language, Braille or other appropriate means of communication;

e) Be addressed or referred to in an enactment or officially, publicly or privately, in a manner that is not demeaning, derogatory or discriminatory;

f) Equal opportunities in the public service and cultural, political, economic and social activities;

g) Tax free materials and assistive devices; and

h) Personal development and independent living[5].

Further, the Zambia Persons with Disabilities Act, 2012 [No. 6 of 2012] has a provision on library services where it states that a public library shall, as far as is practicable, be fitted wtih facilities to enable persons with disabilities use the library[5]. Additionally, the National Policy on Disability aim to "make sure that persons with disabilities can live decent and productive lives without any barriers"[3]. This regulation provides a guidelines from which libraries can learn from and introduce library and information services targeting persons with disabilities.

B. University wide policies on disability

University policies play a cardinal role in the life of any university. They provide a framework within which all sectors of the university respond to any issue that affects the university. Among the four universities, only one university; the University of Dar es Salaam had formulated and implemented a policy on disability. See Table 1.

Table 1: University policies on disability

University	Policy	Name of Policy	Aim of Policy	Comments on LIS Provision
UBL	No	No	No	Elements of PWDs in some policies
SUA	No	No	No	Elements of PWDs in some policies
UDSM	Yes	There is a policy on disability and special educational needs	Provide practical guidance on the management of disability at UDSM	However, the policy does not indicate any provision for LIS
UNZA	No	No	No	Elements of PWDs in

				some policies

C. Disability profiles

Persons with learning difficulties, vision impairment, physical disability, hearing impairment, speech impairment and intellectual disability can be found across all the four universities.

i) UNIVERSITY OF BAROTSELAND

The University of Barotseland, which is based in a rural area has 2 (two) students with disabilities; one with a physical disability and the other one hard of hearing. One student was pursuing full time studies, whilst the other student was pursuing their studies through the distance learning mode. The University of Barotseland is located near a high school for persons with disabilities. Sefula combined high school (combined with regular students) for the visually impaired is one of the oldest schools in the country. If the institution had policies on inclusivity and facilities for PWDS, perhaps more learners with disabilities, especially from Sefula combined school for the visually impaired would have more opportunities of accessing higher education. It would also lessen their need to travel long distances to attend college/university.

ii) SOKOINE UNIVERSITY OF AGRICULTURE

iii) UNIVERSITY OF DAR ES SALAAM

At the University of Dar es Salaam in the 2018/2019 academic year, there were a total of 73 students with different types of disabilities; visually impairment, low vision, hearing impairment and physical impairment. These students were pursuing different learning programmes; bachelor, master and PhD[6]. See Table 2.

Table 2: Number of students with special needs registered for 2018/2019

Category	Bachelor			Master			PhD			Total		
	Male	Female	Total	Male	Female	Total	Male	Female	Total	Male	Female	Total
Visual Impairment	2	9	11	1	4	5	2	3	5	5	16	**21**
Low Vision	10	15	25							10	15	**25**
Hearing Impairment	7	6	13	1	1	2				8	7	**15**
Physical	4	6	10	1	1	2				5	7	**12**
Total	**23**	**36**	**59**	**3**	**6**	**9**	**2**	**3**	**5**	**28**	**45**	**73**

iv) UNIVERSITY OF ZAMBIA

At the University of Zambia, both the Office of the Dean of Students (responsible for overall student welfare) and the Academic Office (office responsible for admissions) had no statistics on total population of students with disabilities at the institution. Yet during admissions, the Academic Office asks applicants to state if they have a disability and the nature of their disability; therefore, it is expected that the Academic Office would have this information. In the course of the research, it was indicated that the Academic Office will start tracking these statistics beginning with 2023 applicants. The Office of the Dean of Students only kept statistics on students who had been offered campus housing; and not overall number of students with disabilities enrolled to study at the University of Zambia.

D. Programmes, services and support from the Libraries for PWDs

The libraries were found to offer no services for PWDs. Such critical services catering to the need of PWDs when using libraries were not available in the libraries. For example:

a) TTY (teletypewriter) that helps people who are deaf, speech-impaired, or hard-of-hearing use a phone to communicate, 4 track tape recorders, audio, large print, braille textbooks or braille translation;

b) Staff assistance with information literacy or how to use the libraries' Online Public Access Catalogue (OPAC) to search for available information resources;

c) Services such as long term borrowing privileges (borrowing a book for more than two weeks) or varying some of the library rules to accommodate PWDs;

d) Library orientation/instruction programmes that allow library users to get acquainted with library facilities and services;

e) Study space/reading space that cater to the specific needs of PWDs;

f) Services such as Internet, Photocopying, retrieval of books from the stacks/shelves, using the circulations desk etc, that other students were using were not readily available for PWDs, especially those that are blind, deaf or needed wheelchair assistance;

g) Programmes, such as campus book delivery services, assistance with assignments, research, information search and use of the library, E-Resources (Exam past papers, Journals, e-books, Thesis/Dissertation or remote assistance that could help students with disabilities in their studies and research; and

h) In summary there were no services or support coming from the libraries for PWDs in the four institutions (summarised in Table 3)

Table 3: Services available for students with disabilities

SERVICE	UBL	SUA	UDSM	UNZA
Targeted programme and services	No	No	No	No
Funding	No	No	No	No
Library policies	No	No	No	No
Focal point office	No	No	No	No
Library facilities (e.g. toilets and reading space	No	No	No	No
Books & Journals	No	No	No	No
Communication and information (Signs, posters)	No	No	No	No
Assistive/Adaptive/adoptive technologies	No	No	No	No
Awareness of disability issues	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes

5. Key findings from the needs assessments

The are several barriers hindering persons with disabilities from using the libaries. As stated, only one university had a university institutional policy on disability (UDSM). The were no policies on disability at university library level for all the partners. Barriers identified are:

a) **Policy barriers**: lack of policies (except for UDSM) means that even though universities state in most of their policies that they are inclusive, there are no specific policies on PWDs in the institutions mentioned. The implications are that there is no guidance on the response that departments and units within the universities should make regarding PWDs programes and services.

a) **Accessibility barriers**: all the university libraries have barriers that prevent persons with disabilities from utilising their facilities and services due to a lack of ramps, rails, slides for those who use wheel chairs, and sanitary facilities that could accommodate PWDs. Facilities such as entrances and exits, toilets, circulation desks etc were not meant for PWDS . The Majority of the facilities, programmes and service were not meant to serve people with disabilities.

b) **Funding**: lack of funding in the libraries prevents them from implementing services and programmes to library users with disabilities.

c) **Lack of targeted services**: all the university libraries were not providing services that are targeted at students/faculty with disabilities.

d) **Lack of awareness of disability issues**: all the university libraries were aware of the need to extend their services and facilities to students/faculty (lecturers) with disabilities; however the libraries stated that they lacked funding to implement such a service.

e) **Lack of adaptive/adoptive technology centre/department/focal point office:** these were not available in all the partner libraries.

f) **Communication and information barriers:** all the university libraries had no information menat for PWDs. There was no signage or posters for communicating library services.

g) **Assitive/Adaptive/adoptive technology:** the were no assisitive/adaptive/adoptive technologies in all the libraries. These are technologies that are used by persons with disabilities to utilise technology and other service that are useful to their needs.

6. Key areas of intervention and action

This project does not go beyond needs assessment of the PWDs. It is hoped that the project can apply for a further grant to be able to facilitate some of the key interventions that are needed to address the needs of the PWDs in the partner universities. Furthermore, if these interventions are implemented, they will respond to what has been articulated in various instruments both at national and international level. In addition to the national laws and policies mentioned earlier, these interventions; such as the Convention on the Rights of Persons with isabilities, where state parties agreed to "promote, protect and ensure the full and equal enjoyment of all human rights and fundamental freedoms by all persons with disabilities, and to promote respect for their inherent dignity"[7].

Table 4: Key areas of interventions and action

Area	Description	Action
Policies	Policies on disability at the university level are important in giving a	Universities without policies on disability to formulate and adopt them. This is the best

	framework in which the universities would respond to the needs of both faculty and students with disabilities.	practice worldwide, where policies on disability are distinct and stand alone. This allows for easy monitoring and evaluation of progress made. This project will formulate policies for persons with disabilities use of library services and facilities. However, it is important there are policies at the institutional level that deal with PWDs.
Accessibility	Accessibility to services is a prerequisite to PWDs accessing university education.	Reasonable adjustments to library facilities to accommodate PWDs could be done to infrastructure facilities such as toilets, circulation counters, toilets, elevators etc.
Funding	Budgeting for Libraries entails recognition of the need to support PWDs use of university libraries.	Library budgets should start with line items that specifically target library services and programmes for PWDs use of libraries.
Targeted programme and services	Recognition of PWDs needs in order for the libraries to better deliver targeted library services.	Small incremental services targeting PWDs could be implemented immediately.
Disability awareness	Although there is awareness of PWDs issues among library staff; its implications for library service provision is not well articulated.	Training of staff on issues of PWDs as they relate to library services.
Communication and information	Information on how to access are important in effective utilisation of library services.	These are easily done and the libraries could immediately implement them.
Assistive/adaptive/adoptive technology	Assistive/Adaptive/adoptive technology are important to have in the libraries if PWDs are to enjoy the services that other library users are getting from the libraries.	Implementation of a programme that would enable the university libraries acquire Assistive/Adaptive/adoptive technologies.

7. Conclusion

The situation of PWDs in the Universities requires urgent and drastic attention. Apart from UDSM, there were no institutional policies for PWDs. Additionally, all the libraries had no policies on PWDs use of the libraries. Statistics on students with disabilities are not tracked at all the institutions. So, it was impossible to gauge whether student numbers are increasing or decreasing. Already not tracking statistics for such a critical issue both nationally and internationally sets a tone on the general lack of awareness of the importance of responding to the needs of PWD in the universities; so, they are able to participate in education in a fair and just manner. It is generally agreed that affording PWDS accessing higher education will enable them to lead productive life and be in gainful employment, therefore lessening the burden on their families and society in general.

The project had put in the original grant proposal remedial measures to the disability barriers that students and faculty face when using libraries in the partner universities. However, due to a technical difficulty, the remedial measures that the grant had sought and intended to make a difference to the situation of PWDs use of university libraries were removed from the project grant budget. In Zambia, in 2020, there were a total of 17,598 (8985 – Males, 8613 – Females) pupils with disabilities who were in high schools countrywide[8]. These large numbers of girls and boys require access to higher education if supportive facilities at higher education institutions (HEIs) were available. In Tanzania, a similar situation ensues, where not enough PWDs are accessing tertiary education.

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