

Faces of *change*



For a quarter century, Aga Khan Foundation U.S.A. (AKF USA) has been investing in people, extending a helping hand to communities and individuals so they may live with dignity and hope.

Hamad Discovers Inclusive Education

At 42 years, Juma Ali Hamad has just “discovered” himself. A primary school teacher for the last 27 years, Mr. Hamad or Mwalimu Juma as he is known among peers, found a new passion: Inclusive Education. For the last three years, Hamad has been attending workshops on inclusive education for special needs students.

The workshops are an initiative of CREATE (Completion, Retention and Access to Education for Tanzanians), a project of the Aga Khan Foundation and supported by the American people through the United States Agency of International Development (USAID).

In working to improve the quality of learning in Southern Tanzania and Zanzibar, CREATE provides in-service training and support for primary school teachers on the inclusion of children with special learning needs. Teachers receive specialized training on improvizing learning materials, using no-cost or low-cost inputs available locally, Braille to benefit visually impaired students and sign language to communicate with deaf students.

CREATE (Completion, Retention and Access to Education for Tanzanians) provides in-service training and support for primary school teachers of special needs students.

Hamad was hardly aware that he possessed even an inkling of interest in learning about special needs teaching. But after the first week of training Hamad became aware of the challenges facing special needs students in the classroom and his own inability to use inclusive teaching methods that could facilitate their learning. He began to wonder if he had unknowingly encouraged such students to drop out of school, which he says “saddened” him. “I was very ignorant about the various special needs that learners face. I was also of the opinion that the children with these needs had to be taken to special schools and not learn in the same classrooms with their ‘normal’ counterparts. If anything, I was not even able to detect these needs except for those that are openly visible!”

An interest began to develop where there was previously none. “I decided to learn more about special needs education” he says. Hamad’s commitment begins with a 2-hour brisk walk at five o’clock every morning, then an hour bicycle ride to the bus stand. He then waits for a bus that will take him on a 45 minute journey to Michakaini Teacher Training Centre. Mr. Juma has never missed a class and shares this experience with 22 other devoted teachers.

Hamad explains it is the feeling of self-empowerment that captures why he has been devoted to attending over the past three years. “The training has increased my capacity as a teacher. I am able to detect various impairments in children and teach them appropriately. The training sessions have greatly changed my perceptions towards learners with disabilities! I can now handle both normal children and those with various learning disabilities.” It is a confidence that is encouraging him to learn more about inclusive education at an advanced level by undergoing graduate work. He is planning to attend a full time one-year certificate course on Special Needs Education. He has also started to apply his new found knowledge outside of the classroom by sensitizing his community to special needs issues. In particular, he is encouraging families with special needs children to send them to school.



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