

PEOPLE with disabilities are citizens who should be given an opportunity to achieve development and fulfilment of their abilities. HakiElimu executive director Rajesh Rajan explored the question in a talk with PROSPER MAKENE. His report :

A COMPETITION organised by HakiElimu and several organisations for the disabled was launched by the Commissioner for Welfare in December 2004. The aim was to encourage people to explain common problems facing people with disabilities in the education system and suggest practical solutions to address them. People from virtually every part of the country responded to the competition.

Eleven won the disability and education competition and a further eight emerged runners up, their

essays and drawings taken as the best from a competitive field of almost 2,800 entries. The choice of winners was based on quality of submissions and took into account geographic and gender diversity.

Rajesh says that the top winners will each receive 100,000/- for themselves and a further 100,000/- for a school of their choice, the runners-up receive 50,000/- for themselves and a further 50,000/- for a school their choice.

Participants said that key challenges include discrimination and prejudice

HakiElimu fosters societal approaches in education for the disabled question

against children with disabilities, the lack of appropriate school buildings, learning materials and teachers. The flat rate capitation fund for schools was considered to be woefully inadequate and unfair in relation to the actual needs of children with disabilities. As a result many children drop out of school or refuse to attend schools with poor, inadequate facilities.

Essay participants proposed a number of innovative

solutions including widening community education, reforming teacher training, providing incentives for teachers to work with disability, among others. They also called for provision of special equipment at the school level, while others even called for a separate ministry to deal with the rights and needs of people with disabilities.

"Mkukuta identifies the inclusion and rights of people with disabilities as central to development and

this competition shows how reforms in education need to be strengthened. They need to be more inclusive, and this exercise demonstrates how ordinary citizens have valuable information for policy making and implementation," the HakiElimu director underlined.

Winners of HakiElimu education competition were Said Nambinyika, Grace Masilingi, Emanuel Nyambuka, Mercy Charles, Upendo Busanya,

Abraham Moses, Edna Josephat, Grace Emmanuel, Octavian Barnabas, Idelfonce Chunchu and Magnus Mahenge.

Others were Bahati Kideghesho, Constatine Mukama, Mwangosi Gerephace, Abdul Ally, Rogath Timanywa, Hamis Mtingwa, Samuel Kamdaya and Haji Nassor Muhamed.

George Kameka, the Commissioner for Social Welfare said that education is a basic right

to everyone even though a few may not have access to it. The government was looking for alternatives to address this problem, he said.

"I thank HakiElimu for raising this problem which faces disabled people, and suggested solutions in addressing the disabled. They need to recover equality, dignity and be assured of equal opportunity that have often been trampled upon due to discrimination," he said.

HakiElimu's vision is that every child in Tanzania enjoys her or his right to basic education, in schools that respect dignity, foster creativity and critical learning, advance human rights and democracy. HakiElimu seeks to achieve this vision by facilitating meaningful public participation in education governance.

"We at HakiElimu believe education in Tanzania will only improve when all of us get involved. This is

why we are not trying to solve the many problems ourselves, but instead creating the space and opportunities for people to do so themselves," the director noted.

This view is an expression of 3.5 million Tanzanians with various disabilities, where the question is to give a new push to efforts of having a policy that focuses on protecting the interests of the disabled, people with a view to participating in development activities, he says.

The need for such a policy is to strengthen education among the disabled so as to enable them to become self-reliant, he adds.

Records show that about 600 million people with disabilities are found worldwide, with 180 million of them children. About 400 million live in developing countries and about 8m in Africa. In the latter case the majority are located in rural areas where there are few basic services for the disabled, he pointed out.