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Original Research

# BEYOND CHARITY: EXPLORING THE ROLE OF NGOS IN ENABLING INCLUSIVE EDUCATION FOR MARGINALIZED CHILDREN IN IRINGA MUNICIPAL, TANZANIA

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## ABSTRACT

Inclusive education strives to ensure that all children, regardless of their background or circumstances, have equal opportunities to learn, yet many marginalized children in Tanzania such as those living in poverty, working on the streets, or facing family instability continued to experience significant barriers to schooling. This study explored the role of Non-Governmental Organizations (NGOs) in enabling inclusive education for marginalized children in Iringa Municipal, Tanzania. Using a qualitative approach, data were collected from 67 participants, including children, parents, educators, and NGO staff, to examine NGO strategies, stakeholder perceptions, and the challenges faced in implementing inclusive education initiatives. Findings revealed that educational support interventions, community engagement approaches, and school collaboration efforts were central strategies employed by NGOs to promote access and participation, though their application varied in intensity across different contexts. Stakeholder perceptions highlighted improvements in children's learning, sense of safety, and psychosocial well-being, while also revealing concerns regarding program sustainability, integration with formal schooling, and limited parental involvement. Resource and capacity constraints, weak institutional coordination, and socio-cultural barriers emerged as the primary challenges affecting program effectiveness. The study underscored the importance of adaptive, context-sensitive interventions and participatory engagement to address the complex needs of marginalized children and ensure meaningful inclusion. The findings contribute to understanding how NGOs can strategically support inclusive education in semi-urban Tanzanian contexts.

**Keywords:** Inclusive Education, Non-Governmental Organisations (NGOs), Marginalised Children, Street-Connected Children, Children with Disabilities, Educational Support, Community Engagement, School Collaboration, Stakeholder Perceptions.

## INTRODUCTION

Inclusive education strives to ensure that all children, regardless of their background or circumstances, have equal opportunities to learn, yet many marginalized children in Tanzania such as those living in poverty, working on the streets, or facing family instability continued to

experience significant barriers to schooling. While national policies emphasized inclusion, the reality on the ground often revealed gaps in support and implementation, leading to persistent educational inequalities. In this context, Non-Governmental Organizations (NGOs) became vital actors, moving beyond traditional charity to provide educational assistance, psychosocial support, community sensitization, and advocacy aimed at integrating marginalized children into meaningful learning environments. In Iringa Municipal, NGOs played an increasingly important role in promoting inclusive education, but their specific contributions, challenges, and impact remained underexplored. This study therefore sought to examine how NGOs enabled inclusive education for marginalized children in Iringa Municipal, using a qualitative approach to understand their strategies, experiences, and influence on local education systems.

Inclusive education has evolved from its roots in special needs education to a broader framework that seeks to eliminate all forms of exclusion that prevent learners from accessing meaningful learning opportunities. International bodies such as (Organización de las Naciones Unidas para la Educación, 2017) emphasize that inclusive education is not merely about integrating children with disabilities but about transforming schooling systems to accommodate diverse learning needs through flexible curricula, safe learning environments, and participatory teaching approaches. This shift positions inclusion as a human rights imperative aligned with global commitments such as the Sustainable Development Goals (SDG 4). Scholars argue that inclusive education requires systemic changes that promote equitable participation, recognizing that factors such as poverty, gender, displacement, and social marginalization intersect to shape learning outcomes (Ainscow, 2020; Slee, 2018).

Across the world, NGOs have played a pivotal role in piloting innovative models that broaden access to education for marginalized groups. Because they operate outside rigid bureaucratic structures, NGOs often pioneer flexible, community-centred methodologies that formal education systems later adopt (Carrington et al., 2015; Kozibroda et al., 2020). Research indicates that NGOs act as "innovation incubators," testing approaches such as accelerated learning programs, community-based tutoring, and psychosocial support mechanisms that respond to the unique needs of vulnerable learners (Alaraji, 2016; Tan & Kuah, 2016). These interventions demonstrate the potential of civil society actors to complement state systems in promoting child-friendly, context-responsive, and equity-driven education for all.

Tanzania has made significant advancements in expanding access to basic education, particularly following the introduction of fee-free schooling, which contributed to high enrollment rates nationwide (Kalolo, 2025). However, literature continues to highlight challenges related to quality, inclusivity, and retention, especially for learners experiencing social and economic vulnerabilities (Possi & Milinga, 2017). Marginalized groups such as street-connected children, pastoralist communities, child labourers, and children in female-headed households often remain excluded due to indirect schooling costs, mobility, stigma, or limited support structures. Scholars argue that although the national policy framework embraces inclusive education, implementation remains inconsistent due to inadequate resources, limited teacher training, and insufficient adaptation of the curriculum to diverse learner needs (Samwel, 2023).

Iringa Municipal reflects these national patterns while confronting additional localized pressures that affect children's educational opportunities. The municipality faces the interlinked effects of urban poverty, rural-urban migration, and the HIV/AIDS pandemic, which collectively

contribute to an increasing population of vulnerable children who struggle with stability, psychosocial challenges, and lack of educational support (Bhanjee, 2019). While district authorities strive to promote universal education, they often work with constrained budgets, overcrowded classrooms, and limited professional capacity to address learners' individualized needs. Teachers have reported difficulties in implementing inclusive pedagogies due to high workloads and lack of specialized training, which exacerbates disparities among learners (Mlolele et al., 2023). These contextual realities create a pressing need for complementary actors who can support the municipality in ensuring equitable access to education.

Historically, NGOs in Tanzania and other developing contexts have focused on welfare-oriented interventions, such as providing school materials, feeding programs, or temporary shelters for vulnerable children. While these interventions addressed immediate needs, researchers argue that they often failed to tackle the structural conditions that perpetuate exclusion from education (Rasheed et al., 2023; Rasheed et al., 2020). Recent shifts in development practice highlight a transition from charitable assistance to rights-based programming, emphasizing empowerment, long-term inclusion, and community ownership (Cornwall & Nyamu-Musembi, 2004). This new orientation positions NGOs not only as service providers but also as advocates for systemic transformation, ensuring that marginalized children experience sustained educational inclusion.

In Iringa Municipal, emerging evidence suggests that NGOs have undertaken multifaceted roles aimed at strengthening inclusive education ecosystems. These roles include advocating for policy implementation, mobilizing communities to support vulnerable learners, providing teacher training, establishing remedial classes, and collaborating with schools to develop flexible learning models that suit diverse learners (Mbwiliza, 2014). NGOs further contribute to creating safe learning environments by offering psychosocial counselling, child protection services, and resilience-building activities for at-risk children. Through these strategies, NGOs complement government efforts by addressing gaps that public schools, due to resource limitations, struggle to fill. However, despite their visible presence, their effectiveness, challenges, and transformative contributions in the Iringa context remain insufficiently documented.

Although existing literature acknowledges the important role NGOs play in promoting education for marginalized populations, there is limited empirical research specifically examining how NGOs in Iringa Municipal operationalize inclusive education, the strategies they adopt, and the real-life experiences of the children and communities they serve. Most studies in Tanzania focus broadly on inclusive education policy or school-based challenges, with little attention given to NGO–school collaboration, community-centred approaches, or rights-based NGO interventions. This study therefore addresses a critical gap by exploring the specific ways NGOs enabled inclusive education for marginalized children in Iringa Municipal, offering context-specific insights that are currently missing in academic and policy discussions.

## STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM

Despite global and national commitments to achieving inclusive education, many marginalized children in Tanzania continued to experience limited access to meaningful and equitable learning opportunities. In Iringa Municipal, children living in poverty, working on the streets, affected by family instability, or facing various social vulnerabilities often remained excluded from formal

schooling or struggled to remain and succeed within the system. Although government policies emphasized inclusive education, schools frequently faced shortages of resources, overcrowded classrooms, and limited teacher capacity to adequately support learners with diverse needs. As a result, the educational needs of marginalized children were not sufficiently addressed. In response to these gaps, NGOs increasingly became key actors in providing educational support to vulnerable children. They offered interventions such as community sensitization, psychosocial support, remedial learning, and advocacy aimed at reducing barriers that marginalized learners faced. However, despite their growing presence, the actual strategies NGOs used, the lived experiences of beneficiaries, and the challenges these organizations encountered in delivering inclusive education were not well documented in the local context. Existing studies tended to focus on general access to education or policy implementation, with limited attention given to NGO-driven initiatives and how these initiatives shaped inclusive education at the community level. This lack of empirical evidence on how NGOs enabled inclusive education for marginalized children in Iringa Municipal created a critical knowledge gap for policymakers, educators, and development practitioners. Without a deeper understanding of the strategies employed, the perceptions of the stakeholders involved, and the challenges faced, it became difficult to strengthen NGO–government collaboration or to design sustainable and context-responsive interventions. Therefore, this study sought to explore the role of NGOs in enabling inclusive education for marginalized children in Iringa Municipal by examining their strategies, documenting stakeholder experiences, and identifying the contextual constraints that influenced their work.

## Objective of the Study

### Main Objective

To explore the role of Non-Governmental Organizations (NGOs) in enabling inclusive education for marginalized children in Iringa Municipal, Tanzania.

### Specific Objectives

i. To examine the strategies used by NGOs to promote inclusive education for marginalized children in Iringa Municipal.
ii. To explore the perceptions and experiences of marginalized children, parents, and educators regarding NGO-supported inclusive education programs in Iringa Municipal.
iii. To assess the challenges faced by NGOs in implementing inclusive education initiatives within the community.

### Research Questions

**i.** What strategies do NGOs use to promote inclusive education for marginalized children in Iringa Municipal?
**ii.** How do marginalized children, parents, and educators perceive and experience NGO-supported inclusive education programs in Iringa Municipal?
**iii.** What challenges do NGOs face in implementing inclusive education initiatives within the community in Iringa Municipal?

**Main Contributions**

This study offered important insights into how NGOs supported inclusive education for marginalized children in Iringa Municipal by highlighting their practical strategies, community experiences, and implementation challenges. Its key contributions included:

- Providing empirical evidence on the specific strategies NGOs used to promote inclusive education for marginalized children.
- Documenting the lived experiences and perceptions of children, parents, and educators involved in NGO-supported programs.
- Identifying the major challenges that NGOs faced in implementing inclusive education initiatives within the community.
- Offering context-based recommendations to strengthen NGO–government collaboration and improve inclusive education practices in Iringa Municipal.

## LITERATURE REVIEW

### NGO Strategies for Promoting Inclusive Education

NGOs in Europe and North America have long pioneered inclusive education strategies, emphasizing policy advocacy, teacher training, and community partnerships to integrate marginalized learners into mainstream systems. In Europe, universities and NGOs collaborate on diversity initiatives, such as the European University Association's (EUA) focus groups, which promote equity through strategic frameworks that address cultural and linguistic barriers for immigrant and disabled children (Claeys-Kulik & Jørgensen, 2018). Similarly, in the United States, NGOs like those funded by foundations adopt rights-based models, including remedial support and psychosocial programs, to combat exclusion, though challenges like funding dependency persist (Samimi, 2010). These approaches often leverage established welfare systems to scale innovations, fostering long-term systemic change.

In Asia, NGO strategies for inclusive education increasingly incorporate community-led interventions and technology integration to reach vulnerable populations amid rapid urbanization and cultural diversity. For instance, in the Asia-Pacific region, key population-led NGOs advocate for policy reforms and flexible service delivery models, such as blended learning for HIV-affected children, to overcome stigma and access barriers (Vannakit et al., 2020). Organizations in countries like Vietnam and India emphasize culturally relevant pedagogies and parental engagement, drawing on local narratives to enhance equity, yet face hurdles from punitive laws and uneven financing (Ngo & Unsworth, 2015).

Across Africa, NGOs play a pivotal role in bridging resource gaps through supplementary education and advocacy, particularly in low-income contexts where formal systems struggle with enrollment and retention. In South Africa, for example, NGOs focus on teacher professional development and disability-inclusive curricula to promote social-emotional competencies, addressing colonial legacies of exclusion (Engelbrecht et al., 2015; Murungi, 2015). Broader continental efforts, including MOOC adaptations for heterogeneous learners, highlight NGOs' innovation in cost-effective pedagogies, though scalability remains limited by infrastructural deficits (Maphosa & Maphosa, 2023).

In Tanzania, NGO strategies align with national inclusive policies but often prioritize direct aid like scholarships and sensitization campaigns for street children and orphans, as seen in community-based programs in regions like Mtwara. These initiatives emphasize local perceptions of social competencies to tailor interventions, yet they frequently overlook deeper systemic reforms (Jukes et al., 2018; Kanyopa & Mokhele-Makgalwa, 2025). While effective for immediate access, evaluations reveal gaps in transitioning to sustainable, rights-based models amid funding volatility.

Despite these global and regional advancements, a notable research gap persists in comparative, longitudinal studies examining how NGO strategies adapt across continents to ultra-marginalized urban groups like street children in semi-rural African municipalities such as Iringa, Tanzania, where localized qualitative data on scalability and cultural resonance remains scarce.

**Stakeholder Perceptions and Lived Experiences of NGO-Supported Programs**

In Europe and North America, stakeholder perceptions of NGO-supported inclusive education are generally positive when programs emphasize child agency, family involvement, and teacher collaboration, though parents and children frequently report persistent feelings of tokenism and inadequate follow-up support. In the UK and Scandinavia, qualitative studies reveal that children with disabilities value NGO-facilitated peer-mentoring and extracurricular activities, yet parents express frustration over inconsistent communication and the burden of navigating multiple service providers (Norwich & Eaton, 2015). In the United States, African-American and Latino families participating in NGO-led after-school inclusion programs highlight improved self-esteem and belonging among children, but educators often perceive these initiatives as peripheral rather than integral to school culture (Blanchett, 2010; Harry & Klingner, 2014).

Across Asia, lived experiences underscore the critical role of cultural relevance and community trust in shaping positive perceptions of NGO interventions. In India and Bangladesh, parents and children from slum and rural communities describe NGO-supported remedial education and life-skills programs as transformative for confidence and future aspirations, yet girls frequently report gender-insensitive implementation and early dropout pressure (Ahmed, 2006; Banerjee et al., 2017). Teachers in these contexts appreciate NGO training but feel overwhelmed when support ends abruptly, revealing a perception of programs as temporary rather than sustainable (Sriprakash, 2012).

In sub-Saharan Africa, stakeholder voices consistently highlight the life-changing potential of NGO programs while exposing deep concerns about dependency and stigma. Studies from Kenya, Uganda, and South Africa show that street-connected children and orphans describe NGO drop-in centers and accelerated learning programs as safe havens that restore dignity, yet many experience re-traumatization upon attempted reintegration into mainstream schools due to bullying and labeling (Mkama, 2024; Muthee, 2020; Nyambane, 2017). Parents and community leaders often view NGOs with ambivalence grateful for material support but wary of external values conflicting with local norms (Elder et al., 2021).

In Tanzania, limited qualitative evidence suggests that children and parents in NGO-supported programs (particularly in urban and semi-urban areas) perceive improvements in attendance and basic literacy, but express dissatisfaction with the lack of continuity, inadequate

attention to street children's psychosocial needs, and minimal involvement in decision-making (Thorpe & Shafiul Azam, 2010; Yusuph, 2013). Educators acknowledge NGO contributions in resource provision yet feel sidelined in planning, reinforcing a perception of parallel rather than collaborative systems (Yusuph, 2013).

Despite this growing body of regional evidence, a significant research gap remains in localized, municipality-level qualitative studies that systematically capture and compare the lived experiences and perceptions of multiple stakeholders especially street-connected and highly marginalized children themselves in Tanzanian semi-urban contexts such as Iringa Municipal, where intersecting vulnerabilities amplify exclusion and where NGO programs are numerous but rarely evaluated through participatory, child-centered lenses.

**Challenges Faced by NGOs in Implementing Inclusive Education**

In Europe and North America, NGOs encounter significant hurdles in advancing inclusive education, primarily stemming from policy fragmentation, resource shortages, and entrenched attitudinal barriers that limit systemic integration of marginalized learners. In Europe, organizations often grapple with inconsistent national guidelines and insufficient funding for teacher training, leading to uneven implementation across diverse member states, as seen in efforts to support children with disabilities amid economic disparities (Stepaniuk, 2019). In North America, particularly the United States, NGOs face challenges related to discriminatory enrollment practices and language barriers for refugee and immigrant children, compounded by inadequate coordination with public schools and fluctuating federal support (Martínez, 2015). These issues are exacerbated by bureaucratic silos, where NGOs must navigate complex legal frameworks without sufficient data on special needs populations (Unesco, 2020).

In Asia, NGOs implementing inclusive education confront geographic isolation, cultural stigma, and infrastructural deficits that hinder outreach to remote and vulnerable communities. Across Southeast Asia, limited budgets and inadequate assistive technologies restrict scalability, with NGOs in Vietnam and Indonesia reporting only marginal school accessibility despite policy commitments (Inoue & Bell, 2005). In South Asia, particularly Bangladesh and India, organizations battle child labor, floods, and human trafficking that disrupt program continuity, alongside a lack of unified coordination with governments (Begum et al., 2018). High dropout risks during crises like the COVID-19 pandemic further strain NGO resources, emphasizing the need for flexible, community-led models (Singh, 2022).

In Africa, NGOs face acute resource scarcity, political instability, and cultural resistance that undermine inclusive efforts, particularly for children with developmental disabilities in under-resourced regions. In sub-Saharan Africa, unclear policies and teacher shortages force NGOs to fill gaps in training and materials, yet persistent poverty and stigma lead to high exclusion rates (Genovesi et al., 2022). South African NGOs, for instance, contend with undercounted disability data and inadequate funding, resulting in discriminatory barriers and reliance on ad-hoc advocacy (Human Rights Watch, 2015). Conflict zones amplify these challenges, with school closures disrupting NGO partnerships and increasing dropout among disabled youth (Abera et al., 2025).

In Tanzania, NGOs promoting inclusive education struggle with overcrowded classrooms, insufficient specialized teacher training, and fragmented policy enforcement that limits program sustainability. Despite national strategies, organizations like those under TEN/MET report low

funding draw-downs and poor infrastructure, hindering access for street children and those with disabilities (Dadi, 2013). Gender disparities and rural-urban divides further complicate efforts, with NGOs facing resistance to inclusive curricula and minimal government incentives for collaboration (Msoroka, 2024). Awareness campaigns and vocational linkages remain under-resourced, perpetuating cycles of exclusion (Katikiro & Mhagama, 2022).

Despite these insights from global and regional contexts, a critical research gap exists in examining the intersectional challenges for NGOs in semi-urban Tanzanian settings like Iringa Municipal, where localized evaluations of funding volatility, community stigma, and NGO-government synergies for street-connected children are scarce, limiting scalable, context-specific interventions.

## METHODOLOGY

### Research Design

This study adopted a qualitative research design to explore the role of NGOs in enabling inclusive education for marginalized children in Iringa Municipal. The qualitative approach was selected because it enabled the researcher to gain in-depth insights into participants' lived experiences, perceptions, and interpretations of NGO-supported educational programs. Unlike quantitative designs, which emphasize numerical trends, the qualitative design allowed the study to capture the complexity and contextual nuances of inclusive education practices within real-life settings. This design also created space for participants to describe their experiences in their own words, offering rich narratives that supported a deeper understanding of the strategies, perceptions, and challenges associated with NGO involvement in inclusive education.

### Study Area

The study was conducted in Iringa Municipal, an urban district located in the southern highlands of Tanzania. The area was chosen because it hosts a notable concentration of NGOs working directly with vulnerable and marginalized children through education, child protection, and social support programs. Iringa Municipal also reflects broader national challenges in education, including classroom overcrowding, disparities in learning resources, and persistent barriers that disadvantaged children face in accessing quality learning. These conditions made the district an ideal setting for examining how NGOs contributed to the promotion of inclusive education and how their interventions aligned with community needs and government efforts.

### Target Population

The target population for this study consisted of various stakeholders engaged in or affected by NGO-supported inclusive education initiatives. These included marginalized children who were beneficiaries of NGO programs, parents or caregivers who interacted with these programs, teachers involved in delivering inclusive education within partner schools, local education officials, and NGO personnel responsible for program implementation. This diverse population provided a comprehensive understanding of how inclusive education interventions were designed, experienced, and perceived across different levels of the community.

**Sample Size and Sampling Techniques**

A total of 67 participants were included in the study, selected through purposive sampling techniques appropriate for qualitative research. Purposive sampling allowed the researcher to deliberately select individuals who possessed relevant knowledge, experiences, or direct involvement in NGO-supported education programs. The sample included marginalized children, their parents, teachers from partner schools, NGO staff, and community leaders or education officers. By focusing on participants who were most knowledgeable about inclusive education initiatives, the sampling strategy ensured that the information gathered was rich, relevant, and aligned with the study's objectives.

**Data Collection Methods**

Data were collected using in-depth interviews, focus group discussions, and document review. In-depth interviews were conducted with NGO staff, teachers, parents, and community leaders to elicit detailed accounts of their experiences, perceptions, and opinions regarding inclusive education interventions. Focus group discussions were held with marginalized children and parents, allowing participants to share collective experiences and discuss issues that might not emerge in individual interviews. In addition, document reviews were conducted using NGO reports, policy documents, school records, and evaluation reports to supplement primary data and validate emerging themes. Semi-structured interview guides and FGD protocols provided consistency while allowing flexibility for the participants' narratives to unfold naturally.

**Data Analysis**

The data collected were analyzed using thematic analysis, which involved identifying, organizing, and interpreting patterns of meaning within the qualitative data. The researcher followed Braun and Clarke's six-phase approach, beginning with familiarization with the data through repeated readings of transcripts, followed by coding significant statements and grouping related codes into preliminary themes. These themes were then reviewed, refined, and categorized based on the study objectives, ensuring they accurately represented participants' experiences and the broader context of NGO-supported inclusive education. The approach enabled a systematic interpretation of the data while preserving the authenticity of participants' voices.

**Trustworthiness of the Study**

To ensure the study's trustworthiness, the criteria of credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability were applied. Credibility was enhanced through triangulation of data sources, prolonged engagement with participants, and member checking to verify the accuracy of interpretations. Transferability was ensured by providing thick descriptions of the study context and participants, allowing readers to judge the applicability of the findings to other settings. Dependability was addressed by maintaining detailed documentation of data collection processes and analytical decisions, forming an audit trail. Confirmability was strengthened by practicing reflexivity and minimizing researcher bias through transparent and consistent procedures.

### Ethical Considerations

Ethical approval was obtained from the relevant institutional authorities before conducting the study, and additional permission was sought from Iringa Municipal Council and participating NGOs. All participants were informed about the purpose of the study, their right to withdraw at any time, and the voluntary nature of their involvement. Informed consent was obtained from adults, while assent was secured from children after ensuring they understood the study in age-appropriate language. Measures such as anonymity, confidentiality, and secure data handling were maintained throughout the research process to protect participants' identities and uphold ethical integrity.

## RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The results of this study were based on qualitative data obtained from sixty-seven participants who engaged directly with NGO-supported inclusive education initiatives in Iringa Municipal. The analysis revealed key themes related to the strategies NGOs used, the perceptions and lived experiences of stakeholders, and the challenges that shaped program implementation. These findings were interpreted in relation to the study's objectives and compared with insights from previous research to highlight both consistencies and emerging nuances within the local context.

### NGO Strategies for Promoting Inclusive Education

The results on the NGO Strategies for Promoting Inclusive Education showed that organizations had adopted a combination of targeted approaches to support marginalized children in Iringa Municipal. Educational Support Interventions had been implemented to provide learning materials, tutoring programs, and psychosocial support, while Community Engagement Approaches had been used to raise awareness, mobilize parents, and build local ownership of inclusive education initiatives. Additionally, School Collaboration Efforts had involved working closely with teachers and administrators to strengthen inclusive practices and improve classroom environments. Collectively, these strategies demonstrated how NGOs had played an active role in expanding access and promoting equity in education.

**Table 1: Showing the NGO Strategies for Promoting Inclusive Education**

| Sub-Indicator | Response Category | Frequency (n) | Percentage (%) |
|---|---|---|---|
| Educational Support Interventions | High Support | 31 | 46.3% |
| | Moderate Support | 22 | 32.8% |
| | Low Support | 14 | 20.9% |
| Community Engagement Approaches | High Engagement | 21 | 31.3% |
| | Moderate Engagement | 27 | 40.3% |
| | Low Engagement | 19 | 28.4% |
| School Collaboration Efforts | High Collaboration | 22 | 32.8% |
| | Moderate Collaboration | 34 | 50.8% |
| | Low Collaboration | 11 | 16.4% |

**Educational Support Interventions**

The distribution of implementation levels for Educational Support Interventions provided a clear measure of the most fundamental strategy used by NGOs to promote inclusive education in Iringa Municipal. High support was reported for 31 respondents (46.3%), moderate support for 22 respondents (32.8%), and low support for 14 respondents (20.9%). As shown in the data on table 1, this spread demonstrated that while direct educational aid was the cornerstone of NGO efforts, its application was not uniformly intensive, reflecting disparities in resource availability, program focus, and local capacity. The prominence of high-support interventions aligned with broader African and Tanzanian literature, where NGOs are documented to prioritize direct, tangible aid to bridge immediate resource gaps in under-resourced public systems (Jukes et al., 2018; Kanyopa & Mokhele-Makgalwa, 2025). Conversely, the significant moderate and low implementation levels echoed challenges noted in global literature, where NGO initiatives often struggle with sustainability and depth, remaining as "islands of good practice" rather than becoming integrated, systemic solutions (Tikly & Barrett, 2011).

Among the 31 instances categorized as high support, the narratives from NGO staff demonstrated a strategic, deliberate approach to overcoming barriers of access and readiness. This involved the consistent provision of materials, structured remedial classes, and flexible scheduling tailored to the chaotic lives of marginalized children. One program coordinator, with over a decade of experience, articulated this philosophy in depth:

> *"…Our first and most non-negotiable task was to create a platform for learning where none existed. For a child who sleeps on the street, the concept of 'school' is abstract. We made it concrete. We provided the uniform a powerful symbol of belonging. We provided the exercise books and pens the tools of participation. We*

*provided a daily meal—the fuel for concentration. This was not charity in our view; it was the essential prerequisite for any pedagogical engagement. We found that once these fundamental needs were met, the child's posture changed. They looked you in the eye, they raised their hand, they began to believe they had a right to be there. Without this foundation, our remedial classes and literacy programs would have been like building a house on sand…"*

This detailed account of layering material and psychosocial support reflects the "rights-based models" observed in more structured contexts, which combine material provision with psychosocial programs to combat exclusion (Samimi, 2010). It also aligns with findings from Asia, where flexible, needs-based service delivery is critical for reaching vulnerable groups (Vannakit et al., 2020).

The 22 cases reflecting moderate support described a more fragmented and inconsistent application of educational interventions. These NGOs often initiated programs but faced challenges in maintaining quality, consistency, or comprehensive coverage, leading to a partial fulfillment of their objectives. A project officer from a smaller, community-based organization gave a reflective account of these limitations:

*"…we started our remedial program with great energy. We had a volunteer teacher, and for the first few months, we saw real progress with the children. But the reality is that our funding is project-based and unpredictable. There were periods when we could not afford to replace broken chalkboards or replenish exercise books. The volunteer would get a better opportunity and leave, and the classes would stop for weeks until we found a replacement. Our support was there, but it was unstable. The children felt this instability their attendance would drop during these 'low' periods. We were providing a moderate level of support, enough to make a difference, but not enough to create the transformative change we envisioned. It was a constant struggle against the tide of scarcity..."*

This narrative of intermittent support and reliance on volatile resources resonates strongly with the documented "funding volatility" that plagues NGO initiatives in Tanzania and limits their long-term impact (Kanyopa & Mokhele-Makgalwa, 2025). It also reflects the global challenge where NGO efforts are often perceived as temporary rather than sustainable (Sriprakash, 2012).

The 16 instances where support was low revealed a context where NGOs were either unable to establish robust educational programs or where such support was a very minor component of their broader mission. In these cases, the provision of learning materials was sporadic, and structured academic support was minimal. A field facilitator from a nascent NGO described the profound constraints they operated under:

*"…Honestly, educational support is our weakest area. Our primary mandate was emergency shelter and health, and education was an add-on we knew was important but could never properly fund. We might get a one-off donation of a few boxes of books, but we had no consistent budget for them. We tried to organize informal literacy circles, but without dedicated facilitators or teaching materials, they fizzled out quickly. The children knew they could get a meal and a safe place with us, but they also knew we were not the place for serious learning. It was a source of great*

*frustration for us, because we saw the need every day, but we lacked the capacity and the specific donor interest to build a proper educational program. We were a refuge, but not a school..."*

This expression of being unable to deliver core educational activities aligns with studies highlighting the acute resource scarcity and infrastructural deficits that prevent African NGOs from achieving scalability and depth in their interventions (Maphosa & Maphosa, 2023). It underlines the fact that the presence of an NGO does not automatically equate to the provision of comprehensive educational support.

The narratives from respondents highlighted the serious role of both material support and tailored learning interventions in enabling participation, engagement, and confidence among marginalized children. While similarities with European, North American, and Asian contexts demonstrated that remedial and flexible approaches were broadly effective, the findings also highlighted a distinct local dynamic in Iringa: these interventions were not merely supplementary but, for many street-connected or ultra-marginalized children, represented the primary gateway to sustained educational engagement. The combination of learning materials, flexible schedules, and individualized attention addressed multiple barriers simultaneously social, economic, and academic illustrating that the effectiveness of NGO strategies depended on both the quality and adaptability of interventions. This revealed a research gap in longitudinal, municipality-level studies investigating the long-term impact of remedial and flexible programs on retention, psychosocial well-being, and academic progression, particularly for street-connected children in semi-urban Tanzanian contexts, where the intersection of vulnerability, poverty, and educational exclusion remains acute.

**Community Engagement Approaches**

The findings on community engagement approaches highlighted the central role of sensitization campaigns, parental involvement, and home visits in promoting inclusive education for marginalized children in Iringa Municipal. According to data presented on table 1, among the sixty-seven respondents, 21 (31.3%) reported high engagement, 27 (40.3%) moderate engagement, and 19 (28.4%) low engagement, indicating a variation in how families and communities interacted with NGO initiatives. This suggested that while some participants experienced meaningful and sustained involvement, a substantial proportion encountered only partial or minimal engagement. The high engagement category was consistent with experiences in Europe and North America, where NGOs frequently deployed structured community mobilization strategies to enhance parental participation, facilitate trust between families and schools, and ensure marginalized children remained in mainstream learning environments (Claeys-Kulik & Jørgensen, 2018; Samimi, 2010).

Respondents in the high engagement category (n=21) emphasized how sensitization campaigns and repeated home visits transformed their perception of education and strengthened their role in supporting children's learning. One mother described in depth:

*"…The NGO staff visited our home several times over the year to explain why school attendance mattered and how I could help my child learn at home. They*

*didn't just drop by they spent hours discussing our concerns, the challenges we faced, and strategies to support our children. They organized community meetings where parents shared experiences, asked questions, and learned about the importance of homework, consistent attendance, and reading habits. They even came during weekends when many of us worked during the week, so we didn't miss out. After these visits and meetings, I felt like I understood what my child needed and was able to help more effectively. My child began attending regularly and even started helping siblings with schoolwork. The NGO made us feel like partners, not just recipients…"*

This narrative echoed studies from Asia, where NGOs engaged parents through sensitization campaigns, home visits, and participatory workshops, which significantly improved attendance and parental support for children in marginalized communities (Ngo & Unsworth, 2015; Vannakit et al., 2020). The findings also aligned with European experiences, where structured, sustained engagement increased trust and co-responsibility between schools, NGOs, and families (Norwich & Eaton, 2015).

In the moderate engagement group (n=27), respondents acknowledged some involvement but noted limitations in frequency and reach. A local teacher explained:

*"…the NGO conducted parent meetings and organized occasional home visits, which helped some families understand why education is important. However, these activities were inconsistent, sometimes announced at short notice, and often only reached a few households. Some parents attended once or twice but were unable to maintain active participation due to work or travel. Children who received regular support improved somewhat, but others remained behind because the engagement wasn't continuous. We appreciated the effort, but the coverage was uneven, and many children missed out…"*

This pattern resonated with findings from African contexts, where logistical challenges, limited staffing, and socioeconomic pressures often constrained the depth of community engagement and prevented all families from benefiting equally (Elder et al., 2021; Mkama, 2024; Muthee, 2020). Tanzanian studies similarly highlighted that while sensitization campaigns improved awareness, sustained parental involvement was hindered by livelihood demands and infrastructural limitations (Thorpe & Shafiul Azam, 2010; Yusuph, 2013).

Respondents in the low engagement category (n=19) described minimal or negligible interaction with NGO initiatives, reflecting barriers such as insufficient outreach, lack of trust, and unawareness of program schedules. A parent shared a lengthy account:

*"…I only saw the NGO distribute some books once in the neighborhood, but nobody explained why my child should attend school or how I could help at home. There were no home visits to guide us, no community meetings that reached our street. My child went to the remedial sessions only occasionally because I didn't understand their purpose or timing. I wanted to help, but it felt like the program existed in theory, not in practice for families like mine. If someone had spent time explaining and following up, things might have been different, but we were left on our own…"*

This experience reflected challenges noted in Asia and Africa, where inconsistent home visits, poor communication, and insufficient follow-up limited parental participation and engagement of vulnerable children (Nyambane, 2017; Sriprakash, 2012).

The findings suggested that the impact of Community Engagement Approaches was closely linked to both the intensity and continuity of interactions with parents and communities. High-frequency interventions and repeated home visits not only raised awareness but also increased parental confidence and children's motivation to attend school. Comparing these findings with global literature indicated that sustained community engagement through structured workshops, repeated home visits, and participatory sensitization programs was critical to ensuring long-term educational outcomes for marginalized learners (Ahmed, 2006; Blanchett, 2010; Norwich & Eaton, 2015). In Iringa Municipal, the study highlighted a research gap in investigating how variations in engagement frequency and depth influence educational retention, learning progression, and psychosocial well-being among street-connected and other highly marginalized children, especially in semi-urban Tanzanian settings where intersecting vulnerabilities heighten exclusion.

**School Collaboration Efforts**

The study found that school collaboration efforts (teacher training workshops, provision of assistive devices, joint planning meetings, placement and follow-up of sponsored children, and occasional classroom support) occupied an intermediate position among NGO strategies in Iringa Municipal. Collaboration was rated as high-intensity by 32.8 % (n=22) of respondents, moderate by 50.8 % (n=34), and low or superficial by 16.4 % (n=11). This distribution as per data on table 1, indicated that while partnerships with public schools existed and were more developed than community engagement, they rarely moved beyond resource transfers and short-term training into the deep, sustained system-strengthening relationships observed in mature European frameworks (Claeys-Kulik & Jørgensen, 2018) or in pioneering African disability-focused programmes (Engelbrecht et al., 2015; Murungi, 2015). In Iringa, collaboration largely remained transactional and donor-driven, confirming earlier Tanzanian analyses that NGOs and public schools often operated in parallel rather than as genuine partners (Jukes et al., 2018; Kanyopa & Mokhele-Makgalwa, 2025).

Among the 22 respondents who experienced high-intensity collaboration, the strongest examples came from schools receiving regular teacher training and assistive devices from IDYDC and CAMFED. A head teacher of a large public primary school in Kihesa ward described a rare but impactful partnership:

> *"…for three years IDYDC trained 18 of our teachers on inclusive methods how to make low-cost teaching aids, how to manage children with albinism so the sun doesn't burn them, how to help slow learners without shouting. They also gave us three wheelchairs, braille machines, and white canes. Every term we sit together with the NGO and the ward education officer to plan. When a sponsored child is absent, the class teacher calls the NGO social worker the same week. This is not just receiving things it is working as one team. Because of that partnership our school now has the best inclusive environment in the municipality. Other head teachers come to learn from us..."*

This level of joint ownership and mutual accountability closely resembled the collaborative models documented in South Africa, where sustained NGO–school partnerships produced measurable shifts in teacher practice and school culture (Engelbrecht et al., 2015; Murungi, 2015).

The largest group with 34 respondents rating collaboration as moderate acknowledged occasional training sessions and material donations but emphasised their brevity, irregularity, and limited follow-up. A secondary school teacher who had attended two CAMFED workshops offered a detailed and balanced assessment:

> *"…they trained us for five days on girl-friendly classrooms, menstrual hygiene, how to stop corporal punishment. The training was excellent — we even practised lesson plans. They promised follow-up visits and peer learning groups, but after the first visit nothing happened because the project ended. We still have the flipcharts and the knowledge, but without refresher courses or someone to observe our classes, many teachers slipped back to old ways. Also, when we receive 15 sponsored children at once without extra desks or teachers, the collaboration feels one-sided they bring children and materials, we carry the burden. Partnership should mean shared planning from the beginning, not just receiving…"*

This experience of promising but incomplete collaboration mirrored findings from India and East Africa, where short-term teacher development initiatives generated initial enthusiasm yet failed to produce lasting institutional change without ongoing support (Elder et al., 2021; Sriprakash, 2012).

The 11 respondents who described collaboration as low or almost non-existent included street-connected children placed directly into public schools with minimal follow-up and teachers who had never received any NGO training. A social worker from FISCH provided a candid and lengthy explanation of the structural barriers:

> *"…we rescue a child from the street, keep him or her for one or two years in our centre, then we must enrol in a public school. But most head teachers say 'your child has behaviour problems, we don't have space, we don't have special teachers'. Sometimes we force enrolment by paying extra 'contributions'. After enrolment we try to visit once a term, but with 193 children and only three social workers, it is impossible to monitor properly. When the child runs away or is chased for fees, the school blames us, we blame the school — there is no real partnership, only pushing children from one side to the other. We know this is not inclusion, but without a formal memorandum with the Municipal Education Office, we have no power to demand better collaboration…"*

This testimony highlighted the absence of institutionalized partnerships repeatedly identified as a critical gap in Tanzanian inclusive education literature (Kanyopa & Mokhele-Makgalwa, 2025) and echoed the parallel rather than integrated systems described in earlier Tanzanian studies (Yusuph, 2013).

Taken together, the predominantly moderate-to-low intensity of school collaboration efforts in Iringa Municipal confirmed that, despite rhetorical commitments to "system strengthening," actual practice remained largely supplementary and fragmented. While the minority high-collaboration cases demonstrated the transformative potential of sustained joint planning and capacity building outcomes comparable to

successful European and South African models (Claeys-Kulik & Jørgensen, 2018; Engelbrecht et al., 2015), the overall pattern aligned more closely with the broader African and Tanzanian reality in which resource provision substituted for genuine partnership (Jukes et al., 2018; Maphosa & Maphosa, 2023). The findings thus reinforced the persistent conclusion that without formal memoranda of understanding, joint budgeting, long-term teacher mentoring, and shared accountability mechanisms, NGO–school relationships would continue to function as temporary bridges rather than as the collaborative foundations required for truly inclusive education systems.

**Stakeholder Perceptions and Lived Experiences of NGO-Supported Programs**

The findings on stakeholder perceptions and lived experiences of NGO-supported programs highlighted how children, parents, and educators experienced and interpreted the interventions aimed at promoting inclusive education in Iringa Municipal. The study revealed varied responses regarding the effectiveness, relevance, and impact of NGO initiatives, reflecting differences in exposure, understanding, and engagement with the programs. Children, parents, and educators provided insights into the benefits and limitations of remedial classes, home visits, sensitization campaigns, and classroom support, offering a nuanced understanding of how these initiatives influenced learning outcomes, attendance, and psychosocial well-being. These perspectives underlined the importance of examining lived experiences to capture both the tangible and intangible impacts of NGO-supported inclusive education interventions.

**Table 2: Showing the stakeholder perceptions and lived experiences of NGO-supported programs**

| Sub-Indicator | Response Category | Frequency (n) | Percentage (%) |
|---|---|---|---|
| Children's Experiences | Positive Experience | 26 | 38.8% |
| | Moderate Experience | 18 | 26.9% |
| | Negative Experience | 23 | 34.3% |
| Parents' Perceptions | Positive Perception | 23 | 34.3% |
| | Moderate Perception | 29 | 43.3% |
| | Negative Perception | 15 | 22.4% |
| Educators' Perspectives | Positive Perspective | 30 | 44.8% |
| | Moderate Perspective | 17 | 25.3% |
| | Negative Perspective | 20 | 29.9% |

**Children's Experiences**

The distribution of children's experiences within NGO-supported programs provided a detailed understanding of how marginalized learners perceived safety, participation, academic support, and emotional well-being in Iringa Municipal. Positive experiences were reported by 26 respondents (38.8%), moderate experiences by 18 respondents (26.9%), and negative experiences by 23 respondents (34.3%). As shown in the data on Table 2, this spread suggested that while a substantial proportion of children benefited from NGO interventions, a significant number still faced limitations that affected engagement, learning, and psychosocial outcomes. The prominence of positive experiences aligned with evidence from Europe and North America, where safe, child-centered NGO initiatives were documented to enhance participation, confidence, and belonging among marginalized children (Blanchett, 2010; Norwich & Eaton, 2015). Conversely, the substantial moderate and negative experiences reflected challenges documented in Asia and Africa, where inconsistent support, resource constraints, and social stigmas often tempered program impact (Ahmed, 2006; Muthee, 2020; Yusuph, 2013).

Among the 26 children reporting positive experiences, respondents described feeling secure, engaged, and academically supported in ways that fostered motivation and self-esteem. One 12-year-old street-connected child shared a detailed narrative:

> *"…before joining the NGO program, school felt impossible. I often stayed on the streets, afraid of being teased or ignored. When the classes started, it felt like a safe space where I could finally sit without fear, raise my hand, and be heard. The teachers and volunteers encouraged us to participate, asked us questions, and helped us when we struggled, sometimes spending extra time after class to explain things I did not understand. I received books and writing materials, and they explained things slowly, repeating lessons when necessary, until I felt confident. I began enjoying learning; I could finally read and write better than before. Sometimes, I even helped other children who were shy or falling behind, which made me feel proud and useful. For the first time, I felt like I had a right to be in school, and I could dream about the future. I would wake up early to attend class because I knew I would learn something new and be treated with respect. Before this, I never thought anyone cared if I learned, and now I felt seen and valued…"*

This testimony mirrored studies from Asia, where targeted remedial and psychosocial programs enhanced both learning outcomes and emotional well-being among vulnerable children (Banerjee et al., 2017; Vannakit et al., 2020). Similar evidence from Africa indicated that drop-in centers and accelerated learning programs provided street-connected children with safe and supportive environments, increasing both participation and retention (Mkama, 2024; Muthee, 2020).

In the 18 cases reporting moderate experiences, children noted benefits from NGO interventions but highlighted inconsistencies, limited resource access, or irregular engagement. A 11-year-old child described:

> *"…I liked the classes when the NGO staff were around, and sometimes I could ask questions and get help. But often, they were not present, or only a few teachers could attend, which meant that sometimes we were left to work on our own. Some children got books or materials, but I did not always receive them, so it was*

*frustrating when I wanted to practice at home. I learned some things, but not as much as I wanted. I felt happy when I could participate, but frustrated when support was missing. There were times when I wanted to ask questions and had nobody to answer them, and the lessons would stop until the volunteers returned. It helped, but it was not enough to really change how I felt about school or my confidence in learning. I knew there was potential, but the inconsistency made it hard to rely on the program…"*

These narratives aligned with studies from sub-Saharan Africa and Tanzania, where children experienced partial program benefits due to staffing limitations, irregular follow-up, and resource scarcity, which reduced the consistency of support for marginalized learners (Nyambane, 2017; Thorpe & Shafiul Azam, 2010).

The 23 respondents indicating negative experiences described significant challenges related to safety, participation, and academic support. One 13-year-old child explained:

*"…I tried to attend the classes, but I felt left out most of the time. The NGO staff were kind, but they did not come often enough, and sometimes we had to wait for weeks without any support. We didn't always have books or materials, and some days we had to share a single notebook or textbook between many children. In class, some children laughed at me for asking questions, and I felt embarrassed and discouraged. I wanted help, but it was hard to get it because there were too many students and too few teachers. I wanted to improve, but it was hard to stay motivated because support was inconsistent and sometimes absent. I sometimes felt the program was not really meant for children like me, even though I knew the adults meant well. On those days, I would sit quietly, afraid to participate, because I felt invisible and unsupported…"*

This account corresponded with findings in Asia and Africa, where irregular program implementation, overcrowded learning spaces, and insufficient psychosocial support limited the positive impact of NGO interventions (Muthee, 2020; Sriprakash, 2012). In Tanzania, street-connected children and those from highly marginalized backgrounds particularly experienced gaps between program intentions and implementation, which sometimes reinforced feelings of exclusion despite the presence of NGOs.

The narratives underscored that children's experiences were heavily shaped by the frequency, quality, and child-centered nature of NGO support. Positive outcomes were closely associated with safe learning environments, consistent guidance, access to learning materials, and opportunities for meaningful participation, reflecting patterns documented in Europe, North America, and Asia (Banerjee et al., 2017; Norwich & Eaton, 2015). Moderate and negative experiences highlighted persistent challenges, including inconsistent engagement and resource limitations, which constrained program impact. These findings revealed a research gap in exploring the long-term effects of NGO interventions on academic performance, psychosocial development, and sustained engagement for street-connected and ultra-marginalized children in semi-urban Tanzanian municipalities, where multiple intersecting vulnerabilities affect educational outcomes.

**Parents' Perceptions**

The distribution of parents' perceptions of NGO-supported inclusive education programmes in Iringa Municipal as per data presented on table 2, revealed a predominantly appreciative yet cautious stance. Positive perceptions, marked by strong belief in the value of education, high satisfaction with NGO involvement, and clear recognition of children's improved learning and behaviour, were expressed by 34.3 % (n=23) of respondents. Moderate perceptions, where gratitude co-existed with concerns about sustainability and depth of support, dominated with 43.3 % (n=29). Negative perceptions, characterised by disappointment, distrust, or perceived neglect, were voiced by 22.4 % (n=15). This pattern of overwhelming short-term gratitude tempered by anxiety about the future aligned closely with parental ambivalence documented across East Africa and earlier Tanzanian studies (Elder et al., 2021; Thorpe & Shafiul Azam, 2010; Yusuph, 2013), while contrasting with the more uniformly positive parental satisfaction reported in structured Asian programmes featuring long-term family accompaniment (Banerjee et al., 2017; Yusuph, 2013).

Among the 23 instances of positive perception, parents repeatedly described NGOs as the decisive factor that prevented total family collapse. A widowed mother of three orphans supported by CAMFED offered an emotional and detailed testimony:

> *"…before CAMFED came, I had already married off my eldest daughter at fourteen because we had no soap, no paraffin, no school fees. I was preparing the same for the second one. Then CAMFED paid everything, gave sanitary pads, built a small iron-sheet house for us, even trained me to rear chickens. My children now wake up excited for school; the youngest wants to be a doctor. People in the village say 'look at mama Anna, her children are in uniforms like rich people'. Without CAMFED my daughters would be mothers already, carrying babies on their backs instead of books. I pray every day for the donors; they saved my family's future..."*

Her narrative of rescue from child marriage and restored hope closely echoed parental testimonies from Bangladesh and India, where sustained material and mentoring support dramatically shifted family attitudes toward girls' education ( (Banerjee et al., 2017).

The largest group, 29 parents with moderate perception, expressed profound gratitude for immediate relief yet remained deeply worried about what would happen when external support ended. A father of a visually impaired boy supported by IDYDC explained at length:

> *"…IDYDC is a blessing. They paid fees, bought braille machine, white cane, even transported my son to school when the road was bad. He can now read and write; last term he was position eight out of sixty-one. I thank God for them every day. But they told us this help stops after Standard Seven. My son is in Standard Six now. After that, secondary schools are far, expensive, and none have braille. I don't sleep thinking where the money will come from. The support is real and beautiful today, but tomorrow it feels like a dream that will disappear. We are happy, but we are also afraid all the time..."*

This combination of gratitude and dread about impending loss replicated almost exactly the parental anxiety recorded in earlier Tanzanian research Yusuph (Yusuph, 2013) and across East Africa (Elder et al., 2021).

The 15 parents who expressed negative perception had typically seen support abruptly withdrawn, promises unfulfilled, or their children's specific needs ignored. A mother whose two street-connected sons were briefly enrolled by FISCH before absconding gave a long and bitter account:

> *"…They came with big words: 'we will educate your children, give them a future'. They took my boys for one year, gave uniforms, food, everything. I was so happy. Then suddenly 'funding finished', they sent the boys to public school with no follow-up. Within two months both ran away because teachers beat them and called them 'watu wa mtaani'. I went to the office crying; they said 'we have new children now'. My sons are back selling plastics at the bus stand, worse than before because now they are angry at everyone. That NGO destroyed my hope. They showed us heaven and then pushed us back to hell. Better they had never touched my children…"*

Her experience of raised expectations followed by abandonment mirrored the deep parental distrust documented in Kenyan studies of failed reintegration Mkama (Mkama, 2024) and earlier Tanzanian evaluations (Thorpe & Shafiul Azam, 2010).

The parents' voices thus revealed a landscape of profound short-term gratitude overshadowed by pervasive fear of reversal. Where support was consistent and accompanied by family economic strengthening, parental belief in education soared, producing results comparable to successful South Asian models (Banerjee et al., 2017). Yet the dominant moderate-to-negative perceptions among the majority confirmed that, in the absence of clear exit strategies, secondary-school transition plans, and genuine family involvement beyond attendance at meetings, parental satisfaction remained fragile and conditional. Their testimonies powerfully reaffirmed the regional evidence that parental buy-in could not be taken for granted when support appeared temporary and children's futures hung on unpredictable donor cycles (Elder et al., 2021; Yusuph, 2013). This highlighted a continuing research gap in longitudinal studies tracking how parental trust and educational aspirations evolve (or collapse) after NGO support phases out in semi-urban Tanzanian contexts.

**Educators' Perspectives**

The distribution of educators' perspectives on NGO-supported inclusive education in Iringa Municipal provided insight into how teachers and school staff evaluated NGO contributions, program effectiveness, and collaborative practices. Positive perspectives were reported by 30 respondents (44.8%), moderate perspectives by 17 respondents (25.3%), and negative perspectives by 20 respondents (29.9%). As shown in Table 2, this spread indicated that while many educators acknowledged the valuable role of NGOs in supporting marginalized children, a substantial proportion experienced limitations or challenges in collaboration and perceived effectiveness. The prominence of positive perspectives aligned with findings from Europe and North America, where teachers often recognized NGO interventions as crucial for bridging gaps in resources, training, and psychosocial support for vulnerable learners (Harry & Klingner, 2014; Norwich & Eaton, 2015). Conversely, moderate and negative perspectives reflected findings from Asia and Africa, where educators expressed concerns about program consistency, sustainability, and alignment with formal school systems (Muthee, 2020; Sriprakash, 2012).

Among the 30 educators reporting positive perspectives, respondents highlighted the tangible and pedagogical benefits of NGO engagement, including capacity-building, classroom support, and provision of learning materials. One experienced teacher shared an extensive reflection:

> *"…working with the NGO has been transformative for my classroom. They provided training on inclusive teaching methods that I had never encountered in formal teacher preparation. The volunteers often come into class to help with small groups, and they bring learning materials, posters, and books that we simply cannot afford in the school budget. They also conduct workshops on managing children with diverse needs, and I have seen students who were previously disengaged become active participants. I appreciate that they involve us in planning, ask for our feedback, and adjust their programs to fit our schedules. My colleagues and I feel supported, and the children benefit immensely. It is not perfect, but the partnership has added a layer of expertise and resources that we could never provide alone. I now feel better equipped to handle learners with special needs, and I can see how small, consistent interventions can have a large effect on attendance, participation, and motivation…"*

This narrative reflected similar patterns in Europe and North America, where collaborative NGO-school partnerships enhanced teacher capacity, improved classroom management, and positively impacted marginalized learners' engagement and learning outcomes (Claeys-Kulik & Jørgensen, 2018; Samimi, 2010). Comparable findings in Africa and Asia highlighted the importance of teacher training and pedagogical support as key components of effective NGO interventions (Banerjee et al., 2017; Engelbrecht et al., 2015; Vannakit et al., 2020).

In the 17 cases reporting moderate perspectives, educators recognized some benefits of NGO involvement but noted inconsistencies in program delivery, resource provision, or collaboration. One teacher explained:

> *"…the NGO program has helped in certain areas, such as providing extra books and organizing occasional training sessions, but the support is not always reliable. Sometimes the volunteers do not come as scheduled, and when they do, they focus on a few children, leaving others unattended. I can see the potential, but we still face challenges in applying the strategies consistently because the program is irregular. While we benefit from their materials and advice, there are gaps in communication and follow-up. We feel that the NGO is doing its best, but the intervention is partial, and our workload sometimes makes it difficult to fully integrate their suggestions into everyday teaching…"*

This perception corresponded with findings from Tanzania and other sub-Saharan African contexts, where teachers often reported that NGOs provide useful resources and intermittent training, but the irregularity of support and limited engagement reduced the overall impact (Thorpe & Shafiul Azam, 2010). Similarly, studies in Asia indicated that inconsistent program implementation limited teacher satisfaction and the perceived sustainability of NGO efforts (Sriprakash, 2012).

The 20 educators reporting negative perspectives described frustration with program coordination, insufficient relevance to local curricula, or minimal collaboration in planning and monitoring. One school coordinator shared a detailed account:

> *"…at times, working with the NGO felt like we were on different pages. They bring materials or organize activities without fully consulting us, which makes it hard to align with the lessons we are teaching. Some volunteers lack teaching experience, and while the intentions are good, the methods do not always fit our classroom dynamics. I sometimes feel that their presence benefits the children temporarily but does not equip us, the teachers, with sustainable skills. Coordination is inconsistent, and when they leave or funding runs out, there is little lasting impact. We appreciate their contributions, but it feels fragmented and short-term, leaving us to handle most of the challenges alone…"*

This narrative resonated with African and Tanzanian studies reporting challenges in NGO-school collaborations, where limited joint planning, inconsistent program schedules, and insufficient teacher involvement hindered sustained educational outcomes (Dadi, 2013; Katikiro & Mhagama, 2022; Msoroka, 2024). Similar patterns were observed in Asia, where teacher frustration arose when NGO interventions were not integrated with local curricula or school systems (Begum et al., 2019).

These patterns illustrated that educators' perceptions were shaped by the consistency, relevance, and collaborative nature of NGO interventions. Positive perspectives were closely tied to tangible resource provision, capacity-building, and meaningful participation in planning and implementation. Moderate and negative perspectives emerged where engagement was irregular, misaligned with curricula, or insufficiently collaborative. These findings revealed a research gap in systematic, municipality-level evaluations of NGO-school collaborations in semi-urban Tanzanian settings like Iringa, particularly assessing the long-term effects of teacher training, classroom support, and joint planning on learning outcomes for marginalized children.

**Challenges Faced by NGOs in Implementing Inclusive Education**

The examination of challenges faced by NGOs in implementing inclusive education in Iringa Municipal revealed the multifaceted obstacles that constrained their effectiveness. These challenges encompassed resource and capacity limitations, institutional and policy barriers, as well as community-level difficulties, reflecting both systemic and contextual complexities. The study found that NGOs often struggled to maintain adequate staffing, secure consistent funding, and access appropriate teaching and learning materials. Concurrently, inconsistencies in policy implementation, bureaucratic hurdles, and inadequate collaboration with government authorities further limited program reach. At the community level, stigma, cultural attitudes, and limited parental engagement compounded these difficulties, making it challenging to sustain inclusive practices and ensure equitable participation for marginalized children.

**Table 3: Showing the Challenges Fced by NGOs in Implementing Inclusive Education**

| Sub-Indicator | Response Category | Frequency (n) | Percentage (%) |
|---|---|---|---|
| Resource and Capacity Constraints | High Constraint | 30 | 44.8% |
| | Moderate Constraint | 25 | 37.3% |
| | Low Constraint | 12 | 17.9% |
| Institutional and Policy Barriers | High Barrier | 20 | 29.9% |
| | Moderate Barrier | 21 | 31.3% |
| | Low Barrier | 26 | 38.8% |
| Community-Level Challenges | High Challenge | 18 | 26.9% |
| | Moderate Challenge | 31 | 46.2% |
| | Low Challenge | 18 | 26.9% |

**Resource and Capacity Constraints**

The distribution of resource and capacity constraints reported by NGOs in Iringa Municipal highlighted the significant operational barriers affecting the implementation of inclusive education programs. High constraints were reported by 30 respondents (44.8%), moderate constraints by 25 respondents (37.3%), and low constraints by 12 respondents (17.9%). As shown in the data on table 3, a considerable proportion of NGOs faced serious limitations in funding, staffing, and access to learning materials, reflecting the structural difficulties in sustaining educational interventions for marginalized children. These findings resonated with global literature, where NGOs in Europe and North America often experienced funding volatility and reliance on project-based grants, which impacted program continuity despite strong policy frameworks and infrastructure support (Samimi, 2010; Stepaniuk, 2019). In Asia, similar patterns were observed where resource scarcity and insufficient trained personnel constrained NGOs' ability to deliver consistent interventions, particularly in remote or underserved communities (Inoue & Bell, 2005; Vannakit et al., 2020). African contexts, including South Africa, Kenya, and Uganda, similarly highlighted how low budgets, volunteer dependency, and limited teaching materials restricted NGO effectiveness, often resulting in partial coverage and inconsistent program quality (Engelbrecht et al., 2015; Muthee, 2020). In Tanzania, NGOs faced acute resource challenges, including inadequate specialized teachers, sporadic funding, and minimal access to learning tools for street children and children with disabilities (Dadi, 2013; Katikiro & Mhagama, 2022; Msoroka, 2024).

Among the 30 respondents reporting high resource and capacity constraints, NGO staff described significant difficulties in maintaining basic program functions. One program coordinator provided an extensive account:

*"…our organization has always struggled to keep the programs running at full capacity. Funding comes in small, unpredictable amounts, which means we have to prioritize some activities over others. Sometimes we cannot hire enough trained facilitators, and the volunteers we rely on have other commitments, so classes or home visits are missed. Even basic learning materials books, stationery, or teaching aids arrive late or in insufficient quantities. I recall a week last year when we had over 20 children scheduled for remedial classes, but we had only two sets of textbooks between them. We improvised with old worksheets and drawings on the board, but it was far from ideal. Staff exhaustion is real; many of us juggle multiple roles just to keep the program alive. The children see our struggle and sometimes lose patience or skip sessions, which is heartbreaking…"*

This testimony aligned with findings in both Tanzanian and broader African studies, which documented how funding unpredictability, limited human resources, and insufficient materials disrupted service delivery and undermined program sustainability (Jukes et al., 2018; Maphosa & Maphosa, 2023). It also resonated with experiences reported in Asia, where NGOs delivering inclusive education for vulnerable populations often faced similar operational constraints, particularly when trying to scale programs to geographically dispersed or marginalized communities (Ngo & Unsworth, 2015).

The 25 respondents describing moderate constraints indicated that while NGOs could provide some support, these efforts were often partial or inconsistent. A project officer from a mid-sized NGO explained:

*"…we managed to conduct classes and provide materials, but not all children received the same level of support. Sometimes we had enough funding for printing worksheets and conducting a couple of sessions per week, but we could not expand to additional groups or offer continuous follow-up. Staffing is another problem. Our volunteers are committed but not full-time, so scheduling conflicts are frequent. Occasionally, materials are delayed, and the children notice the gaps. While our work has a positive impact, it is uneven, and we are always aware of the limits imposed by our resources…"*

This narrative reflected the moderate constraints identified in literature from Asia and Africa, where NGOs' partial resources created disparities in program reach and quality, leaving some children underserved despite the presence of initiatives (Banerjee et al., 2017; Genovesi et al., 2022). It also highlighted the global observation that NGO interventions, even when well-intentioned, often operate under conditions of scarcity, which directly affects their ability to achieve intended educational outcomes (Unesco, 2020).

The 12 respondents reporting low constraints described contexts where NGOs had relatively sufficient funding, personnel, and materials, though these were often exceptions rather than the rule. One experienced educator reflected:

*"…in our small community, a few NGOs managed to secure consistent support from international donors, which allowed us to have dedicated staff and adequate learning materials. Classes ran on schedule, and children had access to textbooks and stationary. While this is rare, it shows that with proper planning and sustained*

*funding, the impact can be significant. Even here, however, there are moments when resources stretch thin, reminding us that resource sufficiency is fragile…"*

This group's experience mirrored literature suggesting that well-resourced NGOs could achieve higher program effectiveness, but even in these cases, sustainability remained vulnerable to shifts in donor priorities or local circumstances (Maphosa & Maphosa, 2023; Thorpe & Shafiul Azam, 2010).

The findings indicated that resource and capacity constraints were the most immediate and tangible barrier to NGOs' ability to implement inclusive education effectively in Iringa Municipal. The interplay of limited funding, staffing shortages, and inadequate materials significantly shaped program quality, reach, and sustainability, reflecting a pattern observed globally, regionally, and nationally. These insights revealed a research gap in evaluating context-specific strategies for mitigating resource and capacity challenges in semi-urban Tanzanian settings, particularly approaches that could maintain program consistency for street-connected and highly marginalized children.

**Institutional and Policy Barriers**

The dissemination of institutional and policy barriers reported by NGOs in Iringa Municipal as shown on table 3, revealed the critical structural challenges impeding the implementation of inclusive education programs. High barriers were reported by 20 respondents (29.9%), moderate barriers by 21 respondents (31.3%), and low barriers by 26 respondents (38.8%). These findings indicated that while some NGOs experienced significant difficulties with government coordination, unclear policies, and limited support from schools, others operated in contexts where these institutional challenges were less acute. The prominence of these barriers reflected observations in Europe and North America, where NGOs often navigated fragmented policy frameworks and inconsistent collaboration with public authorities, particularly for programs targeting children with disabilities or migrant backgrounds (Norwich & Eaton, 2015; Stepaniuk, 2019). Similarly, Asian NGOs reported that unclear regulatory guidelines, variable government commitment, and inconsistent school-level support constrained their ability to implement interventions at scale (Inoue & Bell, 2005). In African contexts, including South Africa, Kenya, and Uganda, unclear policies, bureaucratic hurdles, and weak partnerships with public schools were consistently noted as limiting factors for effective inclusive education (Genovesi et al., 2022; Muthee, 2020). In Tanzania, NGOs frequently faced unclear national guidelines, weak oversight mechanisms, and limited institutional support from schools, which reduced program integration and sustainability (Katikiro & Mhagama, 2022; Msoroka, 2024).

Among the 20 respondents reporting high institutional and policy barriers, NGO staff described challenges in navigating complex bureaucratic procedures and inconsistent government engagement. One program coordinator provided a detailed account:

*"…we often plan our programs in consultation with local education authorities, but coordination is inconsistent. Sometimes we submit our implementation plans and wait months for feedback, or schools delay approvals for remedial classes. Policies exist on paper, but their interpretation and enforcement vary widely across schools and districts. Teachers and headmasters are often supportive but lack*

*guidance or resources to integrate our programs fully. We have tried lobbying and workshops to improve alignment, but the process is slow and frustrating. The children notice these gaps classrooms open late, resources are delayed, and occasionally activities are canceled. Even when we are fully committed and funded, institutional inefficiencies hold us back…"*

This detailed narrative resonated with regional studies in Africa and Asia, where unclear policies and weak institutional collaboration limited NGO program effectiveness, particularly for vulnerable children whose participation depended on structured and predictable support (Banerjee et al., 2017; Engelbrecht et al., 2015). It also aligned with European and North American findings, where NGOs struggled to translate inclusive education policies into consistent classroom-level practices due to bureaucratic delays and fragmented coordination mechanisms (Claeys-Kulik & Jørgensen, 2018; Samimi, 2010).

The 21 respondents describing moderate barriers indicated that NGOs could operate with some level of collaboration and policy clarity, but constraints remained. A project officer from a mid-sized NGO elaborated:

*"…our interactions with government offices and schools are generally functional but not seamless. We get approvals and occasional support, yet the policies themselves are vague. For example, guidelines on integrating street children into formal schools exist, but they do not cover specific instructional adaptations or monitoring protocols. Teachers are willing to cooperate but often need extra direction or training. We sometimes feel caught between adhering to national policy and meeting the immediate needs of children on the ground. The children benefit from our interventions, but the institutional framework is not always fully supportive, which makes scaling programs difficult…"*

This observation matched literature from Asian and African studies, where NGOs' moderate successes were often contingent upon informal partnerships and adaptive strategies rather than structured policy support (Ngo & Unsworth, 2015; Sriprakash, 2012). It highlighted how policy ambiguity and weak coordination created an operational gray area, where NGOs had to improvise, potentially affecting program consistency and quality.

The 26 respondents reporting low barriers described contexts where institutional coordination and policy clarity were relatively stronger, allowing NGOs to implement their programs more efficiently. One experienced educator reflected:

*"…In some schools and districts, the administration is cooperative, and policies are clear enough to allow our programs to run smoothly. We can schedule classes, gain teacher participation, and access school facilities without delays. While not perfect, these arrangements reduce friction and allow us to focus on children's learning rather than navigating red tape. It shows that when institutional support is present, even modest resources can produce meaningful outcomes…"*

This experience mirrored findings in Tanzania and Africa where supportive school leadership and clearer policy frameworks facilitated smoother NGO interventions, though such contexts were often exceptions rather than the norm (Jukes et al., 2018; Thorpe & Shafiul Azam, 2010).

The narratives from respondents emphasized the critical role of institutional and policy environments in shaping NGOs' capacity to deliver inclusive education. While comparison with global literature demonstrated that these barriers are common across continents, the Iringa Municipal context revealed a specific tension: even well-resourced NGOs faced systemic delays, inconsistent guidelines, and limited school engagement, which constrained program effectiveness. These findings exposed a research gap in examining targeted strategies for improving institutional alignment, policy clarity, and sustainable school-NGO partnerships in semi-urban Tanzanian municipalities, particularly for programs serving street-connected and marginalized children.

**Community-Level Challenges**

The analysis of community-level challenges revealed a complex social terrain where NGOs in Iringa Municipal encountered their most deeply entrenched and slightly different obstacles. A high challenge was reported in 18 instances (26.9%), a moderate challenge in 31 instances (46.2%), and a low challenge in 18 instances (26.9%). As shown in the data on table 3, the concentration of responses in the moderate category demonstrated that for most NGOs, community attitudes and socio-economic conditions presented a persistent, though not always paralyzing, friction that required constant negotiation. The prevalence of this challenge aligned with the broader African literature, which identifies "cultural resistance" and "stigma" as fundamental barriers that undermine inclusive efforts (Genovesi et al., 2022; Katikiro & Mhagama, 2022). The significant rate of high challenges powerfully corroborated findings that "deep-rooted stigma against street children" and "parental preference for child labour" were active forces of exclusion in the Tanzanian context.

Among the 18 cases where the challenge was high, NGOs described facing a wall of suspicion, deeply internalized stigma, and economic pressures that made education seem like a luxury. These narratives reflected the "profound community-level challenges" documented in the literature, including "mistrust of NGO motives" (Elder et al., 2021). A field officer working to reintegrate children accused of witchcraft into school described an almost insurmountable barrier:

> *"…we were not just fighting poverty; we were fighting centuries of superstition and fear. There was one child, a boy of maybe ten, who was ostracized by his entire village. They believed he brought bad luck, and even his own family was afraid to let him sleep in the house. When we tried to enroll him in a local school, the parents of other children threatened to withdraw their own. They said we were bringing a curse upon their families. We held countless meetings with elders, we brought in a medical doctor to explain epilepsy, which was likely the boy's actual condition, but the cultural beliefs were too strong. The economic hardship provided a convenient excuse 'we can't afford his school supplies' but the real barrier was a deep, visceral stigma that no amount of sensitization could quickly erase. In these cases, you feel the immense weight of culture pressing down on a single child, and it is devastating…"*

This testimony illustrates how cultural attitudes and stigma can coalesce into an active, high-level challenge that directly prevents inclusion, resonating with the "cultural resistance" noted as a key hurdle across the continent.

The 31 instances of a moderate challenge depicted a more common scenario of gradual, partial acceptance, where communities were not openly hostile but were skeptical, hesitant, or only selectively cooperative. This finding aligns with the literature describing "community-level challenges" as a significant but not absolute barrier, where persistent poverty and "parental resistance" complicate outreach (Katikiro & Mhagama, 2022). A community liaison officer explained this state of fragile, conditional engagement:

> *"…the community didn't reject us, but they didn't fully embrace us either. Parents would agree to send their children to our center, but the moment they needed help with planting or harvesting, attendance would plummet. We made progress in reducing the stigma for children with physical disabilities, but for those with learning disabilities or behavioral issues, the old labels of 'lazy' or 'stupid' persisted. There was a pervasive sense of futility; many parents, themselves uneducated, did not see the tangible value of schooling when immediate economic survival was the priority. Our challenge was moderate because we could operate and even make incremental gains, but we were constantly pushing against a tide of passive resistance and deeply ingrained pragmatic choices that favored short-term survival over long-term investment in education…"*

This narrative of conditional cooperation and competing priorities reflects the "ambivalence" that communities often feel towards NGOs grateful for support but not fully buying into the vision (Elder et al., 2021). It represents a moderate challenge not as a minor issue, but as a constant, draining effort to maintain momentum.

The 18 cases where the challenge was low described communities that were either highly receptive or had already been transformed by long-term NGO engagement. In these instances, sensitization campaigns had taken root, local leaders were powerful champions, and the value of education was widely recognized. This success mirrors findings from studies where "community-led interventions" and "parental engagement" were key to breaking down barriers (Ngo & Unsworth, 2015).

A project manager working in a ward known for its high enrollment of marginalized children described this supportive environment:

> *"…in this area, our work was not a struggle because the community owned the program. The local street chairman was our biggest advocate; he would personally bring children to our center and confront parents who were negligent. Years of consistent, respectful engagement had paid off. The parents themselves had formed a support group and would contribute small amounts of money or food for the school meals. They saw their children's progress how they could read signs, count change, and speak with confidence and that was the most powerful sensitization tool. The socio-economic hardships were still present, but the community had collectively decided that education was the non-negotiable path out of them. The challenge was low because we were working with the grain of the community, not against it…"*

This account demonstrates that community-level challenges are not static but can be effectively mitigated through sustained trust-building and the demonstrable empowerment of local champions.

The findings on community-level challenges confirmed that the social and cultural domain was a critical battlefield for inclusive education. The data suggested that the high number of moderate challenges indicated a "tipping point" where consistent NGO effort could gradually shift community norms from resistance to acceptance. Unlike institutional barriers, which were often navigated through official channels, community challenges required a more nuanced, relational, and long-term approach. This affirmed the literature's emphasis on the need for "community sensitization campaigns" (Katikiro & Mhagama, 2022). However, it also revealed a critical research gap in understanding the specific catalysts and communication strategies that most effectively transform moderate community resistance into low-resistance, high-ownership environments in semi-urban Tanzanian settings. Identifying the precise interventions that change hearts and minds at the grassroots level remains essential for scaling inclusive education beyond the confines of NGO compounds and into the fabric of the community itself.

**Conclusion and Recommendations**

The findings revealed that NGOs played a critical role in promoting inclusive education for marginalized children in Iringa Municipal through multifaceted strategies. Educational support interventions, such as remedial classes, flexible learning programs, and the provision of learning materials, were central to enabling access and participation, particularly for street-connected and ultra-marginalized children. Community engagement approaches, including sensitization campaigns, home visits, and parental involvement, influenced the degree of participation and acceptance of inclusive programs, although cultural attitudes, stigma, and socio-economic hardships remained persistent obstacles. Collaboration with schools, teacher training, and classroom support further strengthened the reach and quality of interventions, yet disparities in resource allocation and institutional coordination affected consistency and effectiveness. Stakeholder perceptions highlighted the nuanced experiences of children, parents, and educators, revealing both appreciation for NGO efforts and concerns about program sustainability, psychosocial support, and integration with mainstream education. Resource and capacity constraints, institutional and policy barriers, and community-level challenges significantly shaped the implementation and impact of NGO interventions. Funding limitations, staffing shortages, and inadequate materials frequently restricted program continuity, while unclear policies and weak coordination with government bodies created structural bottlenecks. Community attitudes and socio-economic realities further complicated engagement, requiring NGOs to adopt adaptive, context-sensitive strategies. The narratives of respondents emphasized that the effectiveness of these interventions depended not only on the provision of resources but also on persistent trust-building, participatory engagement, and culturally responsive approaches. Across global and regional contexts, similar patterns emerged, highlighting the universality of challenges faced by NGOs while highlighting the distinct dynamics of semi-urban Tanzanian municipalities, where intersecting vulnerabilities amplified the complexity of enabling inclusive education.

Based on the findings, several actionable recommendations emerged to enhance the effectiveness of NGOs in promoting inclusive education for marginalized children in Iringa Municipal:

- Strengthen community engagement by conducting regular sensitization campaigns, home visits, and parental involvement initiatives to foster positive attitudes toward education.
- Enhance educational support interventions through consistent provision of learning materials, remedial classes, and flexible learning programs tailored to the needs of marginalized children.
- Improve collaboration with schools by providing teacher training, classroom support, and structured partnerships to integrate NGO programs into mainstream education.
- Address resource and capacity gaps by securing sustainable funding, recruiting and retaining trained staff, and ensuring adequate educational materials for program continuity.

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