

**The role of Tanzania Dental Association in improving the quality of oral health care in Tanzania.** Mugonzibwa EA, Honorary Secretary, Tanzania Dental Association

**Introduction**

Tanzania Dental Association in acronym **TDA**, is a professional Association of Oral Health personnel (Men and Women) in Tanzania. It was registered in Tanzania 24 years ago on the 2<sup>nd</sup> of April 1980 and its registration number is **SO. 6167**. To date it has more than 250 active members countrywide.

TDA is affiliated to Commonwealth Dental Association (CDA) and World Dental Federation (FDI).

TDA has its headquarters based in Dar es Salaam currently located in the School of Dentistry building.

**Tanzania Dental Association's** address is Postal Box Number 65008, Dar es Salaam, Tanzania, School of Dentistry, MUCHS, First Floor Room 102  
Tel: 255-22-2150564, Email: [tdadent@muchs.ac.tz](mailto:tdadent@muchs.ac.tz)

The office bearers for 2004-2006 are:

President:	Col. Dr. GE. Idinga
Vice President	Dr. F. Fabian
Hon. Secretary	Dr. EA Mugonzibwa
Hon Treasurer	Dr. HI Nguvumali
TDJ Editor	Dr. FK Kahabuka
Members	Prof. B.S. Lembariti
	Dr.A. Awadia
	Dr.C. Wanga
	Dr. D. Barnabas Kilasara
	Mr. N. Tarimo
	Mr. JJ Minja

**Types of Membership**

TDA's scope of membership is as follows:

**Full membership**

1. Any dental practitioner registered with the Tanganyika Medical Council.
2. Any licensed Dental practitioner holding Assistant's Dental Officer's certificate.
3. Any authorized Dental practitioner holding Dental Therapist's Dental Technician's or Dental Hygienist's certificates.

4. Any authorized Dental Auxiliary having undergone an approved training programme.
5. Any registered medical Practitioner interested in assisting the Dental profession with a view to fostering inter-professional relationship.

**Associate membership**

Any Student undergoing any Dental Training Programme

**Honorary membership**

Any person approved by the Management Committee who does not fall in the afore said categories (a) and (b).

**Life membership**

This shall be accorded to those who in the opinion of the Management committee deserve that honour, namely retired Dentists, eminent Dental professionals and allied health workers.

**Duties and Rights of Members**

Only three rights are recognized by the TDA constitution.

These are:

1. Every member shall be bound to observe and follow the rules and regulations of the Association and will assist the Association in all its programmes and activities.
2. A member of the Association will be entitled to vote at all general meetings. Only those members of the Association who are Dental Surgeons shall have a right to vote when decisions are taken in relation to the Association's matters connected with Federation Dentaire Internationale (FDI).
3. A member of the Management Committee of the Association will have access to the books, correspondences and related documents of the Association for inspection by previous appointment with the Secretary. A member who is not in the Management Committee will have access to the books; correspondences and related documents of the Association provided the member concerned conveys his/her request in writing to the Management Committee. The

decision to allow such an access to the member shall rest with the Management Committee.

### Objectives of Tanzania Dental Association

TDA has 10 objectives as follows:

1. To promote dental Science and profession for the betterment of dental health care delivery in Tanzania by the most economic ways and means available.
2. To unite all Tanzanian Dental personnel in their quest for better Oral Health Care Delivery.
3. To promote ethical conduct and interaction with other associations involved in health care delivery.
4. To promote and encourage professional understanding among dental personnel.
5. To encourage public Institutions and voluntary organizations to assist the Association to promote dental health care in Tanzania.
6. To ensure, maintain and safeguard the Interests, privileges and welfare of its members.
7. To hold conventions and general meetings of the Association at which scientific papers will be presented at least once in two years.
8. To publish a Scientific Dental Journal and circulate it among the members of the Associations.
9. To encourage and where possible assist members to attend scientific meetings, symposia and workshops, which are held inside and outside Tanzania.
10. To seek and raise funds by such means that are desirable and within legal parameters to enable the Association to achieve its objects.

### Functions of Tanzania Dental Association

TDA may realize the 10 objectives by carrying out any or all of the following six functions:

1. To organize seminars, workshops, study tours, debates, symposia, lectures and the like in the health sector;
2. To seek opportunities to voice its views and advance its aims and objectives in national and international platforms;

3. To print, publish and broadcast through the mass media and to publish its own journal, books, magazines and the like;
4. To promote means and facilitate continuing education for its members
5. To establish committees, subcommittees, workgroups and task-forces for the better carrying out of the aims and objectives of the Association
6. To organize and facilitate voluntary oral health aid to and promote oral health awareness and appreciation amongst members of the public.

### TDA's achievements

It is unfortunate that various TDA management committees have implemented not all objectives and things desired by TDA members since the inception of the Association in 1980.

However, there are some achievements that have been realized.

1. The current TDA Management Committee (MC) continues to give priority to the association's objectives, 2, 4, 5 and 7-10 which are mainly confined, to the three key areas: namely promoting:

#### 1.1 Promoting professionalism

Continuing education sessions have been conducted at the last two TDA annual general meetings. However, taking into consideration that not all TDA members attend the annual general meetings more Continuing Education sessions should be planned not only at AGMs but also in various centres countrywide to reach more members.

At individual level some members of the Association continue attending numerous seminars, workshops and conferences as well as formal training. Members who get such opportunities are urged to share, with the rest of the members, the knowledge and skills acquired.

#### 1.2 Promoting Scientific Research

The current TDA MC has managed to have a new Tanzania Dental Journal Editorial Board in place. It gives me pleasure to see that despite the difficulties the TDJ issues are currently being printed

regularly due to the efforts of committed and active members of the current editorial Board lead by the Editor, Dr. Febronia K Kahabuka.

TDA HIV/AIDS research group managed to develop a proposal, which attracted funding from National AIDS Control Programme. The study has been completed and the investigators are preparing a final report.

Individually or at group level a few members have continued to produce scientific publication in local, regional and international journals as was seen in the abstracts section of TDJ volumes 10 (2), as well as other issues.

### 1.3 Promoting Partnership with oral health stakeholders

On going through many speeches in the association's files, the recognition of the role of TDA as a professional association in the struggle to improve oral health care delivery of our people has been registered by various Ministry of Health leaders. They have further underscored the need for more proactive role of TDA. Pursuant to the remarks, one can confidently underline the Ministry's realization of the potentials of TDA as a professional association in the health reform process and the intention to involve the association in the efforts to improve oral health services in the country.

Our relationship with all our partners remains warm. They have continued supporting the association financially and materially. The TDA MC expresses its appreciation to all our partners and sponsors for their special and keen interest and involvement in the affair of Tanzania Dental Association.

Currently, TDA partners are:

- I. The Ministry of Health
- II. Muhimbili University College of Health Sciences
- III. Colgate-Palmolive Tanzania
- IV. Whitedent toothpaste manufacturers
- V. AHA toothpaste manufacturers

Our relationships with other professional associations like MAT and others have remained warm too.

We continued enjoying good relationship ever with the School of Dentistry.

TDA has a Patroness in place.

TDA has up to date audited accounts reflecting a true and correct account of all assets and liabilities.

### TDA Problems/Failures

1. Various TDA Management Committees including the current one have not given expected attention to the association's objectives 1, 3 and 6.
  - I. To promote dental Science and profession for the betterment of dental health care delivery in Tanzania by the most economic ways and means available.
  - II. To promote ethical conduct and interaction with other associations involved in health care delivery.
  - III. To ensure, maintain and safeguard the Interests, privileges and welfare of its members.
2. TDA has not attracted all eligible Oral Health personnel and prospective associate members to register with the association.
3. Most of the Association activities have remained a Dar es Salaam affair more so of the MC. There is very little concern among the majority of the members on what goes on in TDA after the Scientific Conferences and AGM.
4. TDA has had no smooth, prompt, systematic continuous communication with the members.
5. TDA has not fully engaged the Patroness, as it should.

### Reasons for TDA Problems and Failures

1. There are many reasons but some of them are that all along TDA has lacked SWOT (Strength, Weakness, Opportunities and Threats) analysis of the organization
2. TDA has lacked a strategic implementation plan
3. TDA has lacked a permanent programme/management officer in the association's structure. Such a person would follow up various association's

- issues including resolutions and recommendations from different meetings. The leaders are usually busy persons with their own employment
4. who work part time for their Association as volunteers.

#### **The Role of Tanzania Dental Association in Improving the Quality of Oral Health Care**

1. The World Dental Federation (FDI) to which TDA is affiliated requires country dental associations to recommend to regulatory agencies and dental training institutions in the respective countries to comply with basic dental training. Tanzanians are entitled to dental graduates who are competent to perform nationally and internationally agreed basic clinical competence covering patient examination assessment and diagnosis, communication and patient education, ethics and jurisprudence, treatment, medical emergencies and dental practice management.
2. The ongoing health sector reforms are geared at bringing efficient, productive, cost effective and improved quality of health care delivery with an overall goal of improved health status of Tanzanians. The reforms are part and parcel of the ongoing Civil Service and Local Government Reforms with similar objectives. Similarly, a big proportion of the available resources that will result from debt relief will be allocated to the social services, health being one of them. It is to be expected that quality of the care shall improve with improved resources.
3. On a very important and serious note, TDA members have the responsibility to vote into office leaders who are committed rather than just simple involvement.
4. The overall situation is that TDA still stands with a promising future only that members should wake up, seize and exploit the numerous opportunities that are lying out there in the community and the market.
5. In the wake of globalization, TDA has to recognize and regulate oral health products and human resource of suitable quality that are marketed to the general public in the Tanzanian market.
6. TDA should look into issues of regulation for prices of oral health services delivery in private and public facilities and other related aspects.
7. TDA should look into issues of protection of the patients against improper oral, dental and economic treatment and violation of patients' rights. This implies that the patient is interested in integrated regulation on persons, institutions and product/services.
8. TDA should strengthen and improve inter-relationship and sectoral health responsibilities with other Institutions, Sister Organization Partners, Donor Agencies, and other International Organizations.
9. TDA should attract more eligible Oral Health Personnel and prospective Associate members to register with the association.
10. TDA should facilitate continuing education opportunities for TDA members.
11. TDA should facilitate TDA members to attend various national, regional and international scientific conferences to disseminate their research findings.
12. TDA should assist TDA members to secure funds and conduct research so as to further develop their professional capabilities.
13. TDA should publicize the Association through: 52 TDA weekly TV/media messages to the Public, TDA Radio/TV talks, TDA School competition and TDA feature articles in Newspapers.
14. TDA should conduct a school oral health programme.
15. TDA should carry out various fund raising activities for the Association.
16. TDA should facilitate furnishing TDA/TDJ office with Computer, printer and related accessories, Photocopier and Telephone/Fax line.
17. TDA should promote oral health research through motivating and empowering TDA

- members to table good and attractive research proposals.
18. TDA should promote professional ethics among TDA members.
  19. TDA should explore TDA capacity building opportunities in various oral health professional fields.
  20. To contribute to the Government priority sector on the Oral Health for All in Tanzania.
- ii. The members' willingness to contribute to the association in terms of time, money and their degree of activity.
  - iii. The association's ability to regulate ethical and jurisprudential issues among the members.
2. TDA has to improve communication with the members. TDA website is almost ready. This will improve the communication aspect a lot. The website will include association affairs, relevant oral/dental/medical news and specific designed tele continuing education learning modules.

**The Way Forward**

1. In order to fulfill the obligations as expected, TDA must be strong and independent. Strength in this sense means that TDA must be able to create trust among oral health stakeholders and influence regulations and resulting "by-laws". This depends on:
  - i. The number of members the association is representing or the percentage by which the whole profession is represented by the association (degree of organization).
3. TDA must arrange to organize and perform positive supervision to the members. This supervision process should ensure the compatibility of the members' work with standards and procedures of best practice as well as the coherence to the professional ethics. This supervision must be proactive and targeting on the patients' welfare.

*The biology master at a girl's school asked a student.  
"Stella, tell me which human organ, given the right stimulus, expands to six times its normal size and what stimulus produces this effect?"  
"I feel shy to answer such." She said,  
He turned to another girl and said, "You tell me."  
"The pupil of the eye in low levels of light," she answered quietly."  
Turning back to Stella he said, "I have just two things to say to you:  
Firstly that you have got a dirty mind, and secondly that one-day you are in for a dreadful disappointment."*