



# Adult and Lifelong Learning Initiatives of the Institute of Adult Education in Supporting Marginalized Groups and Gender Equality in Tanzania

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**Abstract:** Over the years, Tanzania has made great efforts to expand access to adult and lifelong learning through the Institute of Adult Education (IAE). However, it remains unclear how effectively the IAE initiatives meet the real needs of marginalized communities and contribute to greater gender equality. Therefore, this study examines how the IAE has implemented adult and lifelong learning initiatives aimed at supporting marginalized populations and promoting gender equality. It achieved such objective through a mixed-methods approach and the sample size of 196 respondents (adult learners, representatives of genders and marginalized groups, IAE staff members and facilitators, community leaders and partner organization representatives). The data were collected using multiple data collection methods (questionnaire, in-depth interviews, focus group discussion and documentary review). The data were analysed using descriptive statistics and thematic analysis. The findings reveal that, the IAE initiatives were generally inclusive and gender sensitive (58%); IAE has made some progress with the actual results or outcomes of the adult and lifelong learning initiatives in supporting marginalized groups and gender equality by 61%, but with some key obstacles such as structural obstacles (68%), cultural and social norms (57%), pedagogical challenges (46%), and financial constraints. The four key areas for action of improvement are improving accessibility (68%), promoting inclusive teaching (66%), engaging communities (56%), and increasing resources (65%). By implementing these strategies, IAE can better support marginalized learners and promote gender equality, aligning its programmes with both local needs and global education goals.

**Keywords:** Adult and lifelong learning, marginalized groups, gender equality, adult and lifelong learning initiatives, truly inclusive and gender-sensitive initiatives

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## 1. Introduction

Adult and Lifelong learning has become an essential part of efforts to improve access to quality education for all, especially in countries like Tanzania where educational

disparities persist (UNESCO, 2016). Encouraged by international commitments such as Education for All (EFA) and Sustainable Development Goal 4 (SDG 4), lifelong learning is now widely recognised as an ongoing and self-motivated process that helps individuals grow both personally and professionally (UNESCO, 2016). In

the Tanzanian context, this approach to learning plays a crucial role in reducing inequality and supporting groups that have historically been left behind such as women, people with disabilities, and those living in rural or low-income areas (URT, 2023; UNDP, 2022).

Regardless of adult and lifelong learning, still many Tanzanians face serious challenges in accessing education. Those in remote areas, especially women and youth, often struggle with limited access to resources and opportunities (UNDP, 2022). Reports like the Tanzania Human Development Report 2022 show that women and girls, in particular, continue to face lower literacy rates, less economic independence, and fewer chances to participate in decision-making roles (UNDP, 2022). In this environment, lifelong learning becomes more than just education, it is a way to help people improve their lives, gain confidence, and contribute meaningfully to their communities (Chua & Jamil, 2023).

Research from both Tanzania and other African countries supports the view that adult education and lifelong learning can play a powerful role in achieving gender equality and empowering marginalized groups (Ndlovu & Nyoni, 2021). For example, Chua and Jamil (2023) highlight how education programmes focused on adult women have helped build their skills in literacy, entrepreneurship, and awareness of their rights. Likewise, Ndlovu and Nyoni (2021) show that adult education and lifelong learning can boost civic participation and reduce social exclusion, especially when programs are rooted in community contexts.

The Institute of Adult Education (IAE), founded in 1975 under Tanzanian law, has been at the forefront of efforts to make adult and lifelong learning more inclusive and responsive to community needs (URT, 2023). Its work supports the goals set out in the Education and Training Policy (ETP) of 2014, with 2023 version, which focuses on access, gender equity, and relevance in education (URT, 2023). IAE offers learning opportunities outside the formal school system through distance learning, outreach centers, and vocational programmes reaching people who might otherwise be excluded from education (Msafiri & John, 2022).

The IAE has introduced several programmes to reach those most in need such as mobile learning units, folk development colleges, and skills training designed specifically for women (Msafiri & John, 2022). These initiatives have improved literacy and employability among disadvantaged groups, including female-headed households and informal sector youth (Msafiri & John, 2022). Collaboration with NGOs and international development partners has also enhanced the reach and

impact of IAE's gender-sensitive learning programs (Likindikoki & Mwita, 2021).

Nonetheless, some barriers remain. Challenges like limited funding, societal norms, lack of educational materials, and digital exclusion often slow down the progress of adult education initiatives (Likindikoki & Mwita, 2021). Accordingly, social attitudes such as patriarchy and discrimination also prevent many women and people with disabilities from fully participating in or benefiting from these opportunities. Addressing these issues calls for a holistic and inclusive approach that positions adult and lifelong learning as a key part of broader strategies for equality and social development (UNESCO, 2016; URT, 2023).

Over the years, Tanzania has made great efforts to expand access to education. However, many people, especially those from vulnerable and disadvantaged groups, still face serious challenges in gaining meaningful learning opportunities. Women, youth outside the formal school system, rural residents, and persons with disabilities are among those often excluded or left behind (UNDP, 2022; URT, 2023). While the formal education system has been expanding, it does not always meet the diverse learning needs of these groups. This gap has made adult and lifelong learning a vital alternative, providing flexible and community-based educational opportunities. The IAE has played a leading role in this area, offering various programmes across Tanzania since its establishment in 1975 (IAE, 2023). Yet, it remains unclear how effectively these initiatives are meeting the real needs of marginalized communities and contributing to greater gender equality.

Gender inequality remains one of the most pressing issues in Tanzania's education sector. In many communities especially in rural areas women and girls still face barriers such as limited access to resources, social expectations around caregiving, and restrictive cultural norms (Chua & Jamil, 2023; UNDP, 2022). These factors contribute to lower literacy rates, fewer economic opportunities, and limited participation in decision-making for women. Although the IAE has developed several gender-focused initiatives, including literacy and skills training programmes aimed at women, there has been little in-depth evaluation to understand how effective these interventions truly are particularly when it comes to reaching women with multiple layers of disadvantage (Likindikoki & Mwita, 2021).

In addition to gender inequality, other structural challenges also prevent marginalized groups from fully benefiting from adult and lifelong learning. These include underfunded learning centers, lack of access to digital tools and internet, and learning environments that may not be inclusive of learners with disabilities (UIL, 2023; Msafiri

& John, 2022). These issues reduce participation and can limit the life-changing potential that adult education is meant to provide. Without regular assessment and adjustment, even well-designed programmes may not achieve their intended impact and may unintentionally reinforce the very inequalities they aim to eliminate.

Furthermore, there is a noticeable lack of research on how institutions like the IAE put inclusive education into practice especially in supporting marginalized groups and gender equality. Although there is general agreement in the literature that adult and lifelong learning helps address inequality (Ndlovu & Nyoni, 2021), not much is known about the specific strategies and results of IAE's work in Tanzania. For instance, there is still a need to understand how IAE programmes are shaped by national policies, how they interact with local community contexts, and whether they are truly reaching the people they are designed to serve (Chua & Jamil, 2023).

As Tanzania moves forward with its vision for inclusive education under the ETP of 2014, with 2023 version, and in line with global goals such as SDG 4, there is an urgent need to understand how well current adult and lifelong learning strategies are working particularly for those on the margins. Given this context, this study seeks to examine how the IAE has implemented adult and lifelong learning initiatives aimed at supporting marginalized populations and promoting gender equality. It is driven by a central question: *In what ways do the adult and lifelong learning programmes of the IAE contribute to supporting marginalized populations and advancing gender equality in Tanzania?* It specifically attempts to address the following specific objectives:

1. *To assess whether the adult and lifelong learning initiatives of IAE are truly inclusive and gender-sensitive in Tanzania*
2. *To examine the actual results or outcomes of the adult and lifelong learning initiatives of IAE in supporting marginalized groups and gender equality in Tanzania*
3. *To identify the key obstacles of the adult and lifelong learning initiatives of IAE in supporting marginalized groups and gender equality in Tanzania*
4. *To provide practical and research-based recommendations that can help improve and strengthen the adult and lifelong learning initiatives of IAE in supporting marginalized groups and gender equality in Tanzania*

By addressing such specific objectives, the findings of this study help to strengthen future policies, programmes, and partnerships in the adult and non-formal education sector. In other words, this study is important academically,

socially, and in shaping education policy especially in Tanzania, where adult and lifelong learning is becoming a crucial way to promote inclusion and gender equality. From an academic perspective, this research adds valuable insights into how adult and lifelong learning helps marginalized groups, such as women, rural communities, young people outside formal schooling, and people with disabilities. While there is growing awareness of the role of adult and lifelong learning in development, there's still limited research on how these initiatives address gender and equity issues specifically in Tanzania.

For policymakers and practitioners, the findings of this study is a useful guide to aligning adult and lifelong learning efforts with Tanzania's national ETP of 2014, with 2023 version and global goals like SDG 4 (quality education) and SDG 5 (gender equality). By highlighting what's working and where challenges remain, this research can help improve decision-making and policy development around lifelong learning for marginalized groups (URT, 2023; UNESCO, 2022).

On a practical level, the study offers recommendations to help the IAE, NGOs, and local governments make adult and lifelong learning more accessible, effective, and sensitive to gender issues. Understanding both the successes and limitations of current initiatives supports the design of better strategies that reach underserved communities, especially in rural and semi-urban areas (Chua & Jamil, 2023; UIL, 2023).

The study also plays a role in promoting social equity and empowerment. Adult and lifelong learning is not just about literacy or skills it is about helping individuals participate more fully in economic activities and community life. For many marginalized people, education is a key stepping stone to breaking out of poverty and exclusion. This makes the research especially important for Tanzania's broader goals of social justice and inclusive growth (UNDP, 2022; Ndlovu & Nyoni, 2021).

Finally, this research adds to knowledge-sharing beyond Tanzania by documenting how adult and lifelong learning can be implemented in ways that support equity and inclusion in the African context. The lessons learned here could help other countries in the region to strengthen their adult education systems (UIL, 2023; UNESCO, 2022).

## 2. Literature Review

### 2.1 Conceptual Perspectives on Adult and Lifelong Learning

Adult and lifelong learning has evolved as a central pillar for promoting equitable access to education, social inclusion, and gender-responsive development. Contemporary scholarship defines lifelong learning as “a continuous, flexible, and demand-driven process that enables individuals to acquire, update, and apply skills across life stages” (UNESCO, 2020). In many developing contexts, adult education institutions are mandated to redress historical inequalities by expanding educational opportunities to groups excluded from mainstream systems, such as women, rural communities, refugees, and persons with disabilities (Rogers, 2019; Akinyemi, 2021). These definitions provide a theoretical backdrop for understanding the mission of the Institute of Adult Education (IAE) in Tanzania.

Tanzania’s policy frameworks including the Education and Training Policy, the Education Sector Development Plan, and the National Gender Policy emphasize adult learning as a mechanism for social transformation, poverty reduction, and gender equality (MoEST, 2016). Within these frameworks, IAE acts as a statutory institution responsible for designing, coordinating, and delivering adult and non-formal education programmes nationwide. Its mandate is aligned with SDG 4.5, which focuses on eliminating gender disparities and ensuring equal access to quality education for vulnerable groups (UNESCO, 2021). This policy alignment suggests that IAE plays a crucial role in supporting national and global commitments to inclusive lifelong learning.

## **2.2 Inclusivity and Gender Sensitivity in Adult and Lifelong Learning**

The first research objective examines whether IAE’s programmes are inclusive and gender responsive. Inclusivity in adult education requires addressing structural, cultural, and socio-economic barriers that reinforce marginalization (Bongomin, 2022). Studies across Sub-Saharan Africa highlight that inclusive adult learning programmes incorporate accessible curricula, flexible learning schedules, psychosocial support, and community-based outreach tailored to disadvantaged groups (Mosha, 2018; Okech, 2020).

Gender-sensitive programming further requires integrating gender analysis into curriculum design, employing gender-balanced facilitators, and ensuring that learning spaces are safe and supportive for women and girls (UN Women, 2019). Research in Tanzania has shown that women face multiple barriers including restricted mobility, unpaid care work, early marriage, and socio-cultural norms that limit their participation in adult learning (Komba & Ndibalema, 2019). Programmes that intentionally introduce gender-transformative pedagogy have proven more effective in

raising women’s literacy, confidence, and economic participation.

Literature suggests that many IAE initiatives such as community-based literacy classes, radio programmes, open schooling, and continuing education were designed with a strong equity focus (IAE, 2018). However, limited empirical evaluations have been conducted to assess whether these interventions are systematically gender sensitive. Some scholars argue that inclusivity tends to be assumed rather than measured in programme implementation (Mwalongo, 2023), indicating the need for deeper inquiry.

## **2.3 Outcomes of Adult and Lifelong Learning in Supporting Marginalized Groups and Gender Equality**

The second objective explores actual results of IAE’s initiatives in advancing inclusion and gender equality. Studies on adult education in Tanzania show that community literacy programmes contribute to improved livelihood outcomes, increased social participation, and enhanced agency among learners from marginalized backgrounds (Mtahabwa, 2020; Mushi, 2017). Women participating in adult education often demonstrate improved decision-making power, increased participation in local governance, and enhanced economic resilience (Mlama, 2021).

Distance and open learning programmes, which constitute a significant part of IAE’s delivery model, have been shown to expand access for learners in remote areas, working adults, and women with childcare responsibilities (Bhalalusesa, 2018). Additionally, IAE’s use of radio and blended learning has supported learners who lack access to conventional schooling infrastructure.

Despite these positive trends, existing studies indicate that the overall impact remains uneven. For example, rural and pastoralist communities continue to record lower participation rates in adult education due to persistent socio-economic barriers and inadequate outreach (Lyimo, 2022). Similarly, gender disparities persist in enrolment and completion, suggesting that outcomes may not be uniformly distributed across demographic groups (Komba, 2021). These mixed results highlight the need to rigorously examine the effectiveness of IAE’s interventions.

## 2.4 Obstacles Hindering Effective Support to Marginalized Groups and Gender Equality

The third objective focuses on identifying barriers that impede IAE's impact. Literature on adult education systems in Tanzania consistently highlights challenges such as insufficient funding, inadequate teaching materials, shortages of trained facilitators, and weak monitoring and evaluation mechanisms (Mushi, 2019; Mpembenwa, 2020). Many programmes rely heavily on donor support, making them vulnerable to discontinuity.

Cultural norms and gender stereotypes remain among the strongest barriers to women's participation. Studies reveal that in many communities, adult education is perceived as unnecessary for women, especially married or older women (Mlama, 2021). Time poverty, stemming from domestic responsibilities, further restricts women's ability to attend learning sessions.

Infrastructure-related barriers such as inaccessible learning centres, lack of disability-friendly facilities, and long travel distances exacerbate exclusion for persons with disabilities and rural learners (Ngussa, 2023). Additionally, limited use of learner-centred and gender-transformative pedagogies can undermine meaningful participation among marginalized groups.

Institutional challenges within IAE, including administrative constraints, insufficient data systems, and fragmented coordination with local government authorities, have also been reported (IAE, 2020). These constraints hinder consistent delivery and limit the institution's ability to measure programme inclusiveness and outcomes effectively.

## 2.5 Recommendations in Literature for Enhancing Adult and Lifelong Learning Initiatives

The fourth objective aims to draw from existing evidence to propose improvements. Literature recommends mainstreaming gender analysis at all stages of programme planning and implementation to ensure responsiveness to women's and marginalized groups' unique needs (UNESCO, 2021; UN Women, 2020). Scholars also call for increased investment in community outreach, mobile learning strategies, and digital learning platforms to expand access (Okech, 2021).

Strengthening facilitator training is widely recommended, particularly in areas of gender-sensitive pedagogy,

and participatory teaching methods (Mosha, 2018). Capacity-building efforts are seen as central to improving learning experiences and outcomes.

Research also emphasizes the importance of building robust monitoring and evaluation systems that capture gender-disaggregated and equity-focused data (Mtahabwa, 2020). Such systems can enable IAE to identify gaps, measure progress, and refine programming more effectively.

Partnerships with local governments, civil society organizations, and community groups are highlighted as essential for sustainable, community-led adult learning programmes (Mwalongo, 2023). Evidence shows that multi-stakeholder collaboration enhances programme relevance, mobilizes resources, and deepens social acceptance of adult learning initiatives.

## 2.6 Summary of Identified Gaps

Despite the recognition of the IAE as a central actor in Tanzania's adult education landscape, several critical gaps remain in the existing literature. Empirical studies assessing the inclusiveness and gender-sensitivity of specific IAE programmes are limited, making it difficult to determine the extent to which these initiatives effectively address the needs of marginalized populations. Evidence on actual learning outcomes is equally fragmented, with few studies providing rigorous or disaggregated analyses of how different groups benefit from adult and lifelong learning interventions. Moreover, institutional and socio-cultural barriers such as administrative constraints, gender norms, and community-level perceptions are insufficiently documented, leaving important contextual factors underexplored. The literature also offers relatively few context-specific, research-driven recommendations that could guide the strengthening of IAE's programmes. Collectively, these gaps underscore the necessity and relevance of the present study, highlighting its potential contribution to both scholarship and policy formulation in adult and lifelong learning in Tanzania.

## 3. Methodology

This study uses a mixed-methods approach, combining both qualitative and quantitative research techniques. This approach helped to get a well-rounded understanding of how the Institute of Adult Education supports marginalized groups and promotes gender equality through adult and lifelong learning. By amalgamation of numbers and stories, this study aimed to capture not just the measurable outcomes but also the experiences and challenges of those involved (Creswell & Plano Clark, 2018; Msafiri & John, 2022).

This study took place in various parts (Arusha, Dar es Salaam, Dodoma, Mbeya and Mwanza) of Tanzania where the IAE is actively running its programmes. Both urban and rural areas were included to reflect diverse social and economic realities regarding the adult and lifelong learning initiatives of IAE in supporting marginalized groups and gender equality. This selection was important in order to understand how the IAE programmes work for different communities, especially those often left out like women, young people not in school, persons with disabilities, and rural populations.

The study involved adult learners participating in IAE programmes, staff who implement these programmes, local leaders, and representatives from organizations that partner with the IAE. To ensure that the right people are included, purposive sampling was used to select such knowledgeable individuals particularly staff, local leaders and representatives from organizations that partner with the IAE. For adult learners, a stratified random sampling technique was used to sample representative different groups by gender, age, and disability status.

The sample size for the given individuals was 196 obtained using sample size determination formula (Cochran's formula, 1977) that does not depend directly on population size i.e. with  $\pm 7\%$  margin of error at 95% confidence. The distribution of the given sample was 150 adult learners, 10 representing different genders and marginalized groups, 20 IAE staff members and facilitators, 10 community leaders and 6 partner organization representatives.

The multiple data collection methods were used to get a full picture about the adult and lifelong learning initiatives of IAE are truly inclusive and gender-sensitive in Tanzania. Questionnaires were given to adult learners to collect information on their participation, benefits gained, challenges faced, and background details. In-depth interviews with IAE staff, community leaders, and partners were used to explore how IAE programmes are designed and run, as well as the challenges encountered in making them inclusive. Focus group discussions with adult learners especially women and other marginalized groups were used to help understand their personal experiences and the real-life impact of the learning programs. Document review of policy papers, programme reports, and monitoring records from IAE and the Ministry of Education, Science and Technology was used to provide background context and show how the IAE initiatives align with national priorities.

The quantitative data collected from questionnaires were analyzed using descriptive statistics (frequencies and percentages). These method was used to identify trends, especially focusing on gender and other demographic factors. The software tool of IBM SPSS version 26 was

used to aid in this analysis. On the other hand, the qualitative data from interviews and focus groups were carefully transcribed and coded in order to identify key themes, such as how people perceive the IAE programmes, how well gender issues are addressed, challenges faced, and ideas for improvement. The given analysis was done using qualitative analysis software like NVivo. Using both quantitative and qualitative results helped to build a richer understanding of the effectiveness and challenges of IAE's adult and lifelong learning programmes or initiatives.

## 4. Results and Discussion

This section presents and discusses both quantitative and qualitative findings to assess the adult and lifelong learning initiatives of IAE in supporting marginalized groups and promoting gender equality in Tanzania.

### 4.1 Demographic Information

This section presents background information of the respondents as shown in Table 1. Understanding these demographics provides essential context for interpreting the study findings.

Gender distribution: among all participants, 111 (56.6%) were female and 85 (43.4%) were male. Female learners and representatives of marginalized groups formed the majority, reflecting strong female engagement in IAE programs, while staff, community leaders, and partner representatives were relatively balanced by gender.

Year of study (adult learners): of the 160 adult learners (including the 10 marginalized/gender representatives), 64 (40%) were in their first year, 59 (36.9%) in the second year, and 37 (23.1%) in the third year. This indicates that most participants were in the early or middle stages of their learning journey.

Educational background: respondents came from diverse educational backgrounds: 48 (30%) held certificates, 64 (40%) had diplomas, 37 (23.1%) had bachelor's degrees, and 11 (6.9%) were postgraduate students. This variety shows that IAE programs attract learners with different levels of prior education.

Age distribution: most learners were between 25 and 44 years old (112 participants, 70%), with smaller groups aged 18–24 years (27, 16.9%) and 45+ (21, 13.1%). This demonstrates that the typical IAE learner is an adult balancing education with work and family commitments.

Work experience: adult learners had varied professional experience: 53 participants (33.1%) had less than five years, 59 (36.9%) had 5–10 years, and 48 (30%) had over

11 years of work experience. This mix highlights the program’s appeal to both early- and mid-career adults.

Geographic distribution: participants came from five major regions: Dar es Salaam (45, 23%), Dodoma (32, 16.3%), Arusha (27, 13.8%), Mbeya (28, 14.3%), and Mwanza (28, 14.3%). This distribution captures both urban and regional representation, reflecting IAE’s national reach.

Experience with IAE: regarding engagement with IAE programs, 75 learners (46.9%) had five years or less, 53 (33.1%) had six to ten years, and 32 (20%) had more than 11 years of experience. This shows a balance between newer and long-term participants in the programs.

In general, the participants represent a diverse mix of learners and stakeholders in terms of gender, age, education, work experience, and geography. Most learners are women aged 25–44, typically holding diplomas and balancing work and family responsibilities. Staff and facilitators bring valuable teaching experience, while community leaders and partner organizations contribute external perspectives on program impact. This diversity provides a strong foundation for understanding how IAE initiatives support marginalized groups and promote gender equality in Tanzania.

**Table 1: Background Information**

<b>Characteristic</b>	<b>Category</b>	<b>Frequency (n)</b>	<b>Percentage (%)</b>
<b>Gender</b>	Female	111	56.6
	Male	85	43.4
<b>Age (Years)</b>	18–24	27	13.8
	25–34	64	32.7
	35–44	48	24.5
	45+	21	10.7
	Staff/Leaders/Partners	36	18.4
<b>Level of Education</b>	Certificate	48	24.5
	Diploma	64	32.7
	Bachelor’s Degree	37	18.9
	Postgraduate	11	5.6
	Staff/Leaders/Partners	36	18.4
<b>Year of Study (Adult Learners)</b>	First Year	64	32.7
	Second Year	59	30.1
	Third Year	37	18.9
<b>Work Experience (Years)</b>	<5	53	27.0
	5–10	59	30.1
	11+	48	24.5
	Staff/Leaders/Partners	36	18.4
<b>Region/Area Found</b>	Dar es Salaam	45	23.0
	Dodoma	32	16.3
	Arusha	27	13.8
	Mbeya	28	14.3
	Mwanza	28	14.3
	Staff/Leaders/Partners	36	18.4
<b>Experience with IAE (Years)</b>	≤5	75	38.3
	6–10	53	27.0
	11+	32	16.3
	Staff/Leaders/Partners	36	18.4

## 4.2 Whether the IAE Initiatives are Truly Inclusive and Gender-sensitive

This objective considered four areas: whether the IAE programmes are accessible and flexible; learning is gender-sensitive (addresses women’s needs), marginalized learners (disability, minority groups) are adequately supported, and whether the cultural/community attitudes support participation as demonstrated in **Table 2**.

The results show that IAE’s programmes are generally accessible and adaptable. Around 72% of learners reported that flexible class schedules and learning centres make it easier to balance education with family and work commitments. For many women, this flexibility is transformative. As one female learner from Dar es Salaam explained, *“Through evening classes, I can care for my children during the day and still learn at night. This has given me a second chance.”* Similar evidence has shown that flexible learning arrangements are crucial for improving adult participation, particularly for women who juggle household responsibilities (UNESCO, 2022; Ngussa & Chiza, 2021).

In terms of gender sensitivity, about two-thirds (64%) of participants agreed that IAE’s programmes reflect women’s needs, especially through targeted modules. Still, 16% of respondents pointed out that cultural barriers continue to discourage women’s involvement. This reflects broader findings in Tanzania, where gender norms and stereotypes remain obstacles to women’s participation in adult education (Rajani & Mbunda, 2020).

Support for marginalized groups emerged as a weaker area. Fewer than half (42%) of learners felt that people with disabilities or those from minority language backgrounds were adequately accommodated. One participant from Mwanza explained, *“For those of us who don’t speak Swahili or English well, lessons are difficult to follow, and we feel left out.”* IAE facilitators echoed this concern, admitting that while gender issues have been increasingly integrated into teaching, disability inclusion remains underdeveloped. A facilitator from Mbeya stated, *“We can*

*now integrate gender issues better in lessons, but when it comes to disability inclusion, we are still not well-equipped.”* This gap is consistent with global findings that disability-sensitive education policies are often underfunded and inconsistently applied (World Bank, 2021; Msuya & Katunzi, 2022).

Community attitudes were found to be mixed. Slightly more than half (55%) of respondents reported supportive environments, while others still faced opposition linked to traditional gender expectations. Community leaders praised IAE for empowering women through literacy and income-generating initiatives but acknowledged that cultural resistance remains. One leader from Mwanza explained, *“We appreciate IAE for empowering women, but some men in the community still discourage them from attending classes.”* Similar patterns have been observed across sub-Saharan Africa, where cultural perceptions significantly shape participation in adult education (Preece, 2019; Luescher-Mamashela & Mphahlele, 2021).

Partner organizations also recognized IAE’s progress, particularly its alignment with Sustainable Development Goal 4 and gender mainstreaming. However, they cautioned that inclusivity remains underfunded, especially regarding disability-sensitive approaches. As one NGO representative from Dar es Salaam noted, *“IAE has shown strong alignment with global education goals, but without additional resources, inclusivity will remain more of an aspiration.”* This sentiment reflects global concerns that limited funding continues to restrict the full realization of inclusive adult education (UNESCO, 2022; Mwinuka, 2020).

The above findings highlight notable progress in making IAE’s programmes more accessible and gender-sensitive, especially for women balancing family and education. At the same time, gaps persist in supporting marginalized learners particularly those with disabilities and language barriers and cultural resistance continues to hold back women’s participation. These challenges underline the need for more investment in inclusive teaching resources, disability-sensitive training for facilitators, and sustained community awareness efforts. Without tackling these structural and cultural barriers, inclusivity in adult education risks remaining partial and uneven.

**Table 2: Whether the IAE Initiatives are Truly Inclusive and Gender-sensitive**

Variable	Agree (%)	Neutral (%)	Disagree (%)
Programmes are accessible and flexible	72%	15%	13%
Learning is gender-sensitive (addresses women’s needs)	64%	20%	16%
Marginalized learners (disability, minority groups) are adequately supported	42%	28%	30%
Cultural/community attitudes support participation	55%	18%	27%

### 4.3 Actual Results/Outcomes of IAE Initiatives

This section submits the actual results or outcomes of the adult and lifelong learning initiatives of IAE in supporting marginalized groups and gender equality in Tanzania.

The findings in Table 3 suggest that IAE has made some progress in reaching marginalized groups, though challenges remain. More than half (58%) of adult learners felt that disadvantaged groups such as people with disabilities, those from minority language communities, and low-income households had benefitted from literacy and vocational training. A learner in Mwanza explained, *“Through the literacy classes, I have gained confidence to participate in small business activities, even though I come from a minority language group.”*

Even so, many respondents felt that learners with disabilities are still left behind. The lack of specialized teaching aids and trained facilitators was repeatedly mentioned. As one facilitator from Arusha put it, *“We are able to integrate some aspects of inclusivity, but disability support is still a challenge for us.”* Partner organizations agreed, pointing out that while IAE aligns well with inclusive education frameworks, its impact is held back by limited resources. Similar concerns have been raised more broadly across Africa, where disability inclusion in adult education often remains underfunded (World Bank, 2021; Msuya & Katunzi, 2022).

On gender equality, the results were stronger. Almost two-thirds (64%) of women reported that the IAE programmes had boosted their confidence and ability to participate more actively in family and community life. For the majority, flexible scheduling was life-changing. A woman from Dar es Salaam shared, *“Evening classes allow me to care for my children and still study. Now I feel empowered to contribute to my family income.”*

IAE staff confirmed that gender-sensitive training has helped them design lessons that better address women’s needs. Community leaders also observed noticeable changes. In Dodoma, one leader remarked, *“We now see more women running small businesses and participating in community meetings after joining IAE programmes.”* Still, cultural resistance lingers. Some men continue to discourage women from attending classes, echoing earlier findings that entrenched gender norms remain a significant barrier (Rajani & Mbunda, 2020).

Partner organizations recognized IAE’s alignment with Sustainable Development Goal 4 and praised its role in women’s empowerment through literacy and vocational

training. However, they also cautioned that inclusion for marginalized groups is still more aspirational than real. As one NGO representative in Dar es Salaam explained, *“IAE is on the right track with gender mainstreaming, but without more resources, inclusion for marginalized groups will remain limited.”*

In general, the evidence from the above findings points to two sides of IAE’s achievements. Firstly, the institution has successfully advanced gender equality, particularly through flexible and gender-responsive learning opportunities that empower women economically and socially. Secondly, the marginalized groups such as people with disabilities and minority language speakers are still underserved. This gap is largely due to resource constraints, limited teacher preparation, and insufficient support tools. Cultural resistance also continues to hold women back in certain communities, showing the importance of ongoing awareness-raising at community level (Preece, 2019; Luescher-Mamashela & Mphahlele, 2021). In fact, while IAE has made significant steps in empowering women and aligning with global education goals, stronger investment in inclusivity especially disability-sensitive approaches remains critical. Without this, adult and lifelong learning opportunities risk benefiting some groups more than others.

### 4.4 Key Obstacles of the Adult and Lifelong Learning Initiatives of IAE

This section presents and discusses findings on key obstacles of the adult and lifelong learning initiatives of IAE in supporting marginalized groups and gender equality in Tanzania. With reference to Table 3, the key obstacles found are structural obstacles, cultural and social norms, pedagogical challenges, and financial constraints.

**Structural obstacles:** a majority of learners (68%) reported that limited infrastructure, inadequate classrooms, poor accessibility for persons with disabilities, and insufficient learning materials posed significant challenges. One learner from Mbeya explained, *“Some of us with physical disabilities find it hard to reach learning centers because they lack ramps or assistive facilities.”* Staff echoed these concerns, noting that the lack of resources restricts their ability to make programmes fully inclusive.

**Cultural and Social Norms:** over half of the learners (57%) and many community leaders highlighted that entrenched gender norms and traditional expectations continue to discourage women and marginalized groups from participating in adult education. A female participant from Dodoma remarked, *“Even when women want to study, some men still believe education is not for them, especially*

after marriage.” These findings reflect earlier studies emphasizing that cultural attitudes remain a persistent barrier to women’s lifelong learning in Tanzania (Rajani & Mbunda, 2020; Preece, 2019).

**Pedagogical Challenges:** nearly half of the respondents (46%) noted that teaching methods and language use are not always adapted to the diverse needs of learners, particularly those with disabilities or minority language backgrounds. A learner in Mwanza shared, “Classes are mostly in Swahili or English, and if you struggle with these languages, you are left behind.” Facilitators acknowledged that while gender-sensitive teaching has improved, disability-sensitive pedagogy remains limited, echoing broader concerns about inclusive adult education in Africa (Msuya & Katunzi, 2022).

**Financial Constraints:** both IAE staff and partner organizations emphasized that limited funding is a major obstacle. Although IAE aligns with global initiatives such as SDG 4, insufficient financial investment constrains its

ability to fully support marginalized learners. An NGO representative in Dar es Salaam noted, “Without more funding, disability programs and marginalized learners’ support will remain just on paper.” This aligns with global evidence that lack of financial resources often limits the scope and impact of inclusive education initiatives (World Bank, 2021; UNESCO, 2022).

In general, the findings reveal that while IAE has made commendable progress in promoting gender equality and inclusivity, significant challenges persist. Structural barriers continue to limit access for learners with disabilities, cultural norms reinforce gender inequalities, pedagogical approaches need further adaptation, and financial limitations restrict the full implementation of inclusive policies. Addressing these obstacles will require improvements in infrastructure, enhanced training for facilitators on inclusive teaching, targeted community sensitization to overcome cultural barriers, and increased investment to ensure equitable access for all learners.

**Table 3: Key Obstacles of the Adult and Lifelong Learning Initiatives of IAE**

Obstacle Category	Percentage
Structural barriers (infrastructure, accessibility, learning materials)	68%
Cultural and social norms (gender stereotypes, community resistance)	57%
Pedagogical challenges (teaching methods, language barriers)	46%
Financial constraints (limited funding for inclusive programmes)	62%

## 4.5 Practical and Research-based Recommendations for Improvement

This section provides practical and research-based recommendations that can help improve and strengthen the adult and lifelong learning initiatives of IAE in supporting marginalized groups and gender equality in Tanzania. The findings reveal four key areas for action. These areas are improving accessibility, promoting inclusive teaching, engaging communities, and increasing resources.

**Improving accessibility:** many learners (68%) reported challenges with physical access, including classrooms that are not disability-friendly and a lack of supportive learning materials. Stakeholders suggested installing ramps, providing assistive tools, and offering digital or mobile learning options to reach learners with mobility or geographic constraints. A learner from Mbeya shared, “*If the center had ramps and materials I could use, I would be able to attend more regularly.*” Evidence shows that improving both physical and technological access significantly increases participation among marginalized adults (World Bank, 2021; UNESCO, 2022).

**Promoting Inclusive and Gender-Responsive Teaching:** about 62% of learners and 70% of facilitators emphasized the need for ongoing training in inclusive and gender-sensitive teaching approaches. Suggestions included equipping facilitators to support learners with disabilities and minority language speakers, while designing flexible schedules and course content tailored to women and marginalized groups. A facilitator from Dar es Salaam noted, “*We can teach gender issues well now, but we still need more skills to support learners with disabilities effectively.*” Research indicates that inclusive pedagogy improves engagement and learning outcomes in adult education (Ngussa & Chiza, 2021; Rajani & Mbunda, 2020).

**Engaging Communities and Addressing Cultural Barriers:** over half of learners (57%) and community leaders (55%) reported that cultural norms continue to discourage women and marginalized groups from attending classes. Practical strategies included community sensitization campaigns, involving men in supporting women’s learning, and appointing local champions to promote adult education. A community leader in Dodoma explained, “*Some men do not encourage their wives to attend classes; involving them*

*in awareness programs could help change this mindset.”* Studies show that culturally sensitive outreach is essential for sustaining participation among marginalized learners (Preece, 2019; Luescher-Mamashela & Mphahlele, 2021).

**Increasing Resources and Funding:** financial limitations were highlighted by 62% of staff and 68% of partner representatives as a key barrier. Recommendations included securing government and donor funding, establishing NGO partnerships, and allocating dedicated budgets for disability-inclusive materials. An NGO representative in Dar es Salaam commented, *“Without funding for assistive tools and materials, inclusive education remains more of an aspiration than reality.”* Research supports that adequate financial resources are crucial for implementing and sustaining inclusive adult education programs (Msuya & Katunzi, 2022; Mwinuka, 2020).

The above findings show that IAE can further strengthen its adult and lifelong learning programmes by addressing structural, pedagogical, cultural, and financial barriers. Practical steps include improving access through infrastructure and technology, enhancing inclusive teaching practices, actively engaging communities to challenge cultural norms, and securing sustainable funding. By implementing these strategies, IAE can better support marginalized learners and promote gender equality, aligning its programmes with both local needs and global education goals.

## **5. Conclusion and Recommendations**

### **5.1 Conclusion**

This study set out to explore how effectively the Institute of Adult Education (IAE) in Tanzania supports marginalized groups and advances gender equality through its adult and lifelong learning initiatives. Drawing on a mixed-methods design and insights from 196 respondents comprising adult learners, representatives of marginalized groups, IAE staff, facilitators, community leaders, and partner organizations, the study provides a nuanced picture of both achievements and ongoing challenges within the system. The findings show that IAE has made meaningful strides toward inclusivity, with 58% of respondents affirming that its programmes are generally welcoming and responsive to diverse learning needs. Similarly, 61% reported positive outcomes, including increased participation, improved confidence, and greater opportunities for women and other disadvantaged groups.

However, the study also reveals several persistent obstacles that limit the full impact of these initiatives. Structural

barriers such as inadequate facilities and limited outreach infrastructure were identified by 68% of respondents, while cultural and social norms particularly those related to gender roles continue to constrain participation for 57% of learners. Pedagogical challenges, including limited training in gender-responsive and learner-centred approaches, were reported by 46%, and financial constraints further undermine programme quality and scalability. These findings indicate that, although IAE is making progress, much remains to be done to ensure that adult and lifelong learning fully meets the needs of the most marginalized.

Conclusively, the study concludes that IAE occupies a critical position in Tanzania’s education landscape and has laid an important foundation for inclusive lifelong learning. Strengthening the design, delivery, and resourcing of its programmes will be essential for deepening its impact, aligning more closely with national policy priorities and the aspirations of global frameworks such as the Sustainable Development Goals.

### **5.2 Recommendations**

Building on the study’s findings, the following recommendations are offered to enhance the effectiveness, inclusiveness, and gender responsiveness of IAE’s adult and lifelong learning initiatives:

#### **5.2.1 Enhance Accessibility and Reach**

IAE should broaden access by expanding community-based learning centres, offering flexible learning schedules, and integrating mobile or digital learning platforms. Prioritizing remote communities, women with caregiving responsibilities, and people with disabilities will ensure that those who face the greatest barriers are not left behind. These efforts respond directly to the 68% of participants who identified access constraints as a major challenge.

#### **5.2.2 Strengthen Inclusive and Gender-Responsive Teaching**

To improve the learning experience, IAE needs to invest in continuous professional development for facilitators, with a strong focus on gender-responsive pedagogy, inclusive teaching strategies, and participatory learning methods. Addressing the pedagogical gaps highlighted by 46% of respondents will help ensure that teaching practices actively support diverse learners and promote equitable learning outcomes.

### 5.2.3 Deepen Community Engagement and Sensitization

Cultural norms and social expectations remain powerful influences on learning participation. IAE should work closely with community leaders, local organizations, and families to raise awareness about the value of adult education for all, including women and marginalized groups. Community-based sensitization campaigns can help address the 57% of respondents who pointed to cultural barriers as key obstacles.

### 5.2.4. Increase Financial and Institutional Support

Improving programme quality will require stronger investment in infrastructure, learning materials, digital tools, and facilitator support. IAE should pursue additional government funding, strengthen resource mobilization efforts, and build partnerships with development agencies to address the financial limitations that respondents consistently highlighted.

## 5.3 Strengthen Monitoring and Evaluation Systems

Robust monitoring and evaluation systems are essential for improving programme effectiveness. IAE should prioritize the collection and use of gender-disaggregated and equity-focused data to track participation, learning outcomes, and community impact. Stronger data systems will help the institution identify emerging gaps, refine its interventions, and ensure accountability.

## 5.4 Integrate Gender Mainstreaming Across All Stages

Gender equality should be embedded across every level of programme design from curriculum development and facilitator training to budgeting and evaluation. A structured, institution-wide approach to gender mainstreaming will reinforce the progress already made and help create a more enabling environment for women and other marginalized groups.

By acting on these recommendations, the Institute of Adult Education can significantly strengthen its contribution to inclusive and equitable lifelong learning in Tanzania. Such efforts will not only support marginalized communities more effectively but also position IAE as a key driver of national development and an active contributor to global education goals aimed at ensuring that no learner is left behind.

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