

# Grassroots Comics

by Disabled People



Report

January-February 2010

## Introduction

SHIVYAWATA Mwanza is an umbrella organization of Disabled People's organizations in Mwanza Region, Tanzania. SHIVYAWATA organized Grassroots Comics workshops for four of its member organizations during 4/1/2010-29/1/2010:

- Workshop for CHAVITA (Tanzania Association of the Deaf) was held 4/1-8/1/2010
- Workshop for TAS (Tanzania Albino Society) was held 11/1-15/1/2010
- Workshop for CHAWATA (Tanzania Association of the Physically Handicapped) was held 18/1-22/1/2010
- Workshop for TAMH (Tanzania Association of Mentally Handicapped) was held 25/1-29/1/2010

The workshops were funded by Abilis Foundation from Finland. Grassroots Comics are made by NGO activists, because they are the experts in their own issues. Grassroots Comics are short comics with a message. The goal is to make a change in the thinking and attitudes of the community. It is an inexpensive way of spreading information. All you need is paper, pens and a possibility to use a photocopier. To our knowledge, this is the first time Grassroots Comics are made by disabled people. Edina Fidelis, the treasurer of CHAVITA worked as a project coordinator of the Grassroots Comics project. The teachers of the workshop were artists Sunday Ngakama and Sanna Hukkanen, and Jonathan Livingstone interpreted sign language.

## Participants and Gender Balance



Organization	Women	Men	Total
CHAVITA	4	7	11
TAS	7	3	10
CHAWATA	10	8	18
TAMH	5	7	12
All Total	26	25	51

The participants in the workshop for TAMH were mainly family members of mentally handicapped people, but there were also three mentally handicapped participants. Two of them managed to finish their comics. In the other workshops all participants were disabled. In the workshops for CHAVITA and TAS there were some illiterate women participants. They all finished their art work, with the help of teachers to write. They were also among the most motivated and successful participants; if one fails to get education, one becomes to value it highly.

## Programme of the Workshops



The duration of each workshop was five days, from Monday to Friday. After introduction the teaching started with basics of drawing (drawing human, facial expressions, perspective and landscapes). Then the participants learned how to construct a story from theme, focus and message, and to consider the target group (readers) of the story. Finally the stories were made into comics. In the last day of the workshop the participants studied how to organize their own workshops.

## The Comic Stories

The stories mainly were real life experiences of the participants, so the comics became personally important to them. Most of the comics made in the workshops dealt with issues related to basic rights:

- **Education:** Parents don't see the importance of taking their disabled children to school. Schools don't have enough special teachers, equipment or accessibility for disabled children.
- **Health Care:** Disabled people face discrimination in hospitals and fail to get treatment. Equipment like wheelchairs etc are too expensive for them.
- **Employment:** Employers, both private and public discriminate disabled people. It is very difficult for them to find a job even with high education.
- **Family and relationships:** Parents often oppose disabled people's marriages. If a wife gives birth to a disabled child she faces danger of being chased away. Also disabled children are often discriminated inside families; they are abandoned or hidden inside.
- **Infrastructure:** Moving around is difficult for disabled people. Buildings, streets and transport are not accessible.
- **Politics:** Disabled people's participation in politics is still a dream.



## Evaluation

An evaluation was conducted in the last day of each workshop. The participants were asked what they had learned during the training, how it helps them, how it can be used in the work of their organizations and how they felt about the workshop. The evaluation also helped us to see that most of the participants had understood the contents of the training.

The participants felt like Grassroots Comics is an easy, fast and inexpensive way to educate the community about disabled people's issues. They hope to train others through their organizations to make comics. Some also noted that comics can be used in lobbying the government about disabled people's rights, as well as to educate disabled people, for example how to vote in elections. One participant mentioned that comics are a good way to make the DPO's known to people. The participants of TAS workshop believed that comics could help to stop the albino killings. Surprisingly many participants believed that the new skill will help them to find employment. Important issue was also to show the community what disabled people can do. The participants hoped that the works could be published in newspapers. Surprisingly many participants of the workshop for TAMH felt like they did not only learn to make comics, but also to respect and to take care of mentally handicapped people.



All participants felt good about the training and were happy to get a new skill. Most of them hoped, though, that the training would have been longer. They asked for new trainings in the future. One participant said the peer criticism during drawing exercises and finishing the comics was good and helpful. The participants got money for transport, no allowance was paid. This seemed to be the main reason why some workshops had few participants, but the people who attended the workshops showed true commitment.

The whole subject of comics seemed quite difficult for many in the beginning. But in the end, when the participants saw their art work ready it was very rewarding. The stories in their comics were very important to them because they were often personal real life experiences. The participants have very strong, even shocking messages in their comics, which makes them very powerful tool for campaigning/ changing the attitudes of readers. There were problems in one group with art materials disappearing and participants coming late every day. Babies were disturbing their mothers in the workshop, but if that's the arrangement that enables the mothers to participate, it's a small problem. In the workshop for TAS the women who never went to school were doing best, since their commitment to education was high.

## **Distribution of the Comics and Community Feedback**

The participants made a distribution plan for their comics. The Comics in wallposter format were distributed in small groups into the places where they can best reach their target groups; schools, government and city offices, hospitals and health centers, courts, bus stops and stations, ferry terminal, and markets. During the distribution the participants collected feedback from the community. Among the interviewees there were doctors, teachers and city officers but also ordinary passers-by. The comics draw people's attention and we saw big crowds gathering to read them.

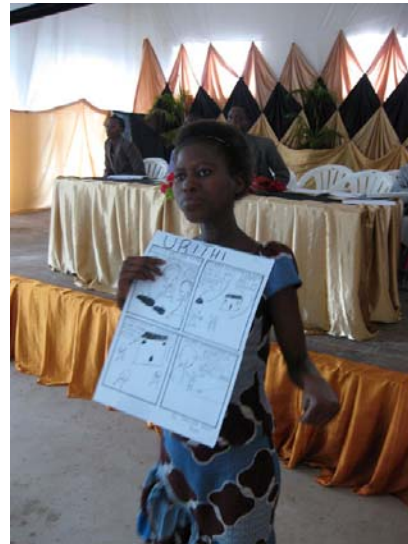


The reactions were mainly positive; the messages went through and the works showed that disabled people are as able as anyone! Many readers stressed that it's very important to distribute the comics also to villages, where people are not educated in disabled people's issues. They suggested distributing them in ward and village meetings and different events. Others said schools are good places for comics, the children like to read, and will pass the information to their parents. It would also decrease the discrimination of disabled children in schools. Some said comics should be used by other NGO's and institutions too. Many thanked the comics for being friendly media for illiterate people. Readers also commented that seeing good artwork from disabled people will lift their credibility; people can start employing them and buying their products.

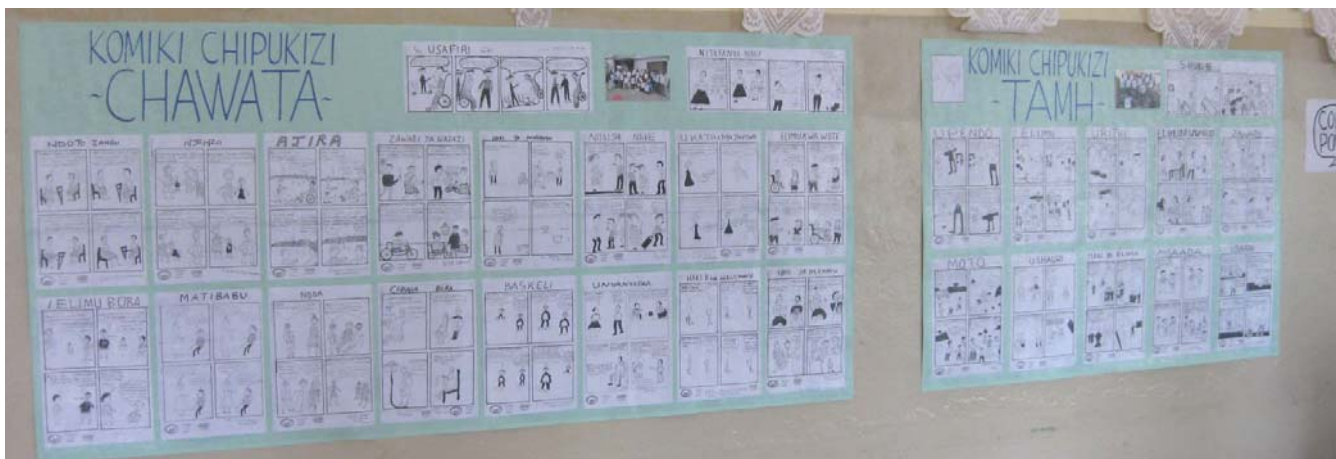
Distributing their comics was good experience for the disabled participants. The human contact between them and the readers was a powerful way to change attitudes. The participants were given contacts of Fishers Union Organization and Tanzania Teachers Union, who were interested in future cooperation. The only negative experience was from one school, where the teachers didn't take any interest in the participants because they were disabled. The comics were also photocopied into booklets and made into an Exhibition.

## Closing Event of the Workshops

Closing Event of the Grassroots Comics project was held on 8<sup>th</sup> February in Mahatma Gandhi Memorial Hall. Government and City officers, Headmasters and special teachers from schools, representatives from other NGO's and religious institutions were invited as guests to the event. The participants received certificates of attendance for the workshops. The guests were given exhibitions to take to their own working places. Also an exhibition with all the comics made during the workshops was displayed in the event.



A representative from each workshop introduced his/her comic to the audience. Especially the comic from CHAWATA workshop created discussion. It was about disabled people's discrimination in local transport. The representative of Sumatra (transport authority) was present, and he encouraged disabled people to report all cases to Sumatra office or police. He even gave his personal phone number for the participants! The guest of honour, a representative of Mwanza City Council promised to donate paper and pens for the project, and to display an exhibition at the City Council.



This report together with comics made during the project will be sent to: Abilis Foundation in Finland, World Comics Finland, ADD in Dar Es Salaam, National SHIVYAWATA in Dar Es Salaam, National CHAVITA, TAS, CHAWATA and TAMH in Dar Es Salaam, SHIVYAWATA branches in all 8 Districts of Mwanza Region and Regional branches in Shinyanga, Tabora and Mara. We hope that all the recipients of this report will help us to photocopy and distribute the comics in their Regions/Districts.