Summary of the BERT Landscape Analysis Study Report

1. Introduction

This summary synthesizes the findings of the *Landscape Analysis on Disability Inclusion: Rehabilitation and Technology in Higher Education Institutions in East Africa*, focusing on Rwanda and Tanzania (Zanzibar). The study was conducted within the framework of the Breaking Education Barriers: Inclusion, Rehabilitation and Technology (BERT) Project (2024–2026).

The BERT project aims to enhance the capacity of higher education institutions (HEIs) in East Africa to break down barriers hindering the full inclusion of persons with disabilities (PWDs) in the digital era. The report provides a detailed examination of the current state of inclusive education, rehabilitation services, and assistive technology, as well as the challenges and opportunities in fostering inclusive learning environments.

2. Aim and Objectives of the Study

Aim:

To enhance interdisciplinary knowledge and skills in creating inclusive higher education institutions for students with disabilities in Rwanda and Tanzania.

Specific Objectives:

- To gather information on the current situation and development needs of inclusive education in HEIs in Rwanda and Tanzania.
- To assess the challenges and barriers to inclusive education for students with disabilities in HEIs.
- To identify opportunities and facilitators for inclusive education for students with disabilities in HEIs.

Research Questions:

- What are HEIs' current practices and initiatives regarding disability inclusion, rehabilitation services, and assistive technologies?
- What challenges and barriers do students with disabilities face in accessing higher education, rehabilitation services, and assistive technology?
- What are the best practices and success stories in disability inclusion within HEIs in Rwanda and Tanzania?

3. Methodology

The study applied a **mixed-methods approach**, integrating both quantitative and qualitative methods:

- **Quantitative:** Web-based surveys administered to students with disabilities across selected HEIs.
- **Qualitative:** Focus Group Discussions (FGDs) and key informant interviews with policy makers, academic leaders, staff, NGOs, and Disabled People's Organizations (DPOs).
- **Scoping Review:** Mapping of global best practices in inclusive education, rehabilitation, and assistive technology.

This triangulated approach provided robust insights into institutional practices, student experiences, and systemic barriers.

4. Key Findings

Rwanda

- The country has developed strong legal and policy frameworks for inclusive education, backed by the Constitution and education sector strategies.

- Progress includes training of teachers, integration of special needs education in curricula, and government support for assistive devices through community health insurance.
- Nevertheless, significant gaps remain in **physical accessibility**, provision of **affordable assistive technology**, and **social attitudes** toward disability. Dropout rates (less numbers) for students with disabilities are still disproportionately high in HEIs.

Zanzibar (Tanzania)
- Zanzibar has a national inclusive education strategy (2021/22–2025/26), but implementation is hampered by **resource shortages**, **insufficient teacher training**, and **inadequate infrastructure**.
- Cultural beliefs and societal stigma continue to restrict the participation of students with disabilities.
- Some HEIs have piloted inclusive education programs, but these remain limited in reach and sustainability.

5. Challenges and Barriers
The study identified recurring obstacles across both contexts:
- **Infrastructure:** Limited physical accessibility in some classrooms, libraries, laboratories, and student accommodation.
- **Assistive Technology:** Limited supply, high cost, and uneven distribution of devices and services.
- **Human Resources:** Shortage of trained professionals in inclusive pedagogy, rehabilitation, and assistive technology.
- **Policy Implementation:** While frameworks exist, resource allocation and execution are inconsistent.
- **Social and Cultural Attitudes:** Negative perceptions and stigma against PWDs create additional barriers to inclusion.

6. Opportunities and Facilitators
Despite these barriers, several enabling factors were identified:
- **Political and Legal Frameworks:** Rwanda and Tanzania both have constitutions and laws guaranteeing the rights of PWDs, aligned with UNCRPD and the SDGs.
- **Institutional Initiatives:** Some HEIs have established disability support units and adopted inclusive pedagogical practices.
- **Technology:** Advances in digital rehabilitation, e-learning platforms, and assistive technology present opportunities for wider inclusion.
- **Partnerships:** Collaboration between HEIs, NGOs, donor agencies, and regional bodies (e.g., IUCEA, UNESCO, UNICEF) provides momentum for reform.
- **Best Practices:** Successful examples include teacher training programs, student resource rooms, student scholarships, and NGO-led awareness campaigns.

7. Conclusion and Recommendations
The landscape analysis demonstrates that while significant strides have been made, the inclusion of students with disabilities in higher education in Rwanda and Zanzibar remains incomplete. Strong political will and legal frameworks exist, but challenges in infrastructure, technology, and attitudes continue to limit full participation.

Recommendations include:
I. **Strengthening institutional capacity** through training of teachers and rehabilitation professionals.

II. **Scaling up access to assistive technologies** and integrating them into national insurance and procurement systems.
III. **Improving physical accessibility** in HEIs through compliance with building codes and universal design standards.
IV. **Enhancing policy implementation** with dedicated funding, monitoring, and evaluation mechanisms.
V. **Promoting cultural change** through awareness campaigns and student-led advocacy for disability inclusion.

Ultimately, advancing inclusive higher education in Rwanda and Zanzibar requires a coordinated, multi-stakeholder approach. The findings of this study provide a valuable evidence base to guide governments, HEIs, and development partners in creating barrier-free learning environments that fully integrate students with disabilities.

Annex 1: Summary of Recommendations according to objectives and key findings

Objective	Key Findings	Recommendations
1. Gather information on the current situation and development needs of inclusive education in HEIs in Rwanda and Tanzania	- Policies exist in both countries (Rwanda Constitution, inclusive education strategies in Rwanda and Zanzibar). - Some HEIs have disability support units and initiatives. - Teacher training and assistive device provision underway in Rwanda. - Zanzibar has a national inclusive education strategy (2021/22–2025/26).	- Strengthen monitoring and evaluation of policy implementation. - Ensure all HEIs establish functioning disability support units. - Integrate disability data collection into HEI management systems for better planning.
2. Assess the challenges and barriers to inclusive education for students with disabilities in HEIs	- Limited accessibility of infrastructure in both countries. - Inadequate supply and high cost of assistive technology. - Shortage of trained professionals in inclusive pedagogy, rehabilitation, and AT. - Persistent stigma and negative attitudes towards PWDs.	- Invest in upgrading physical infrastructure to meet universal design standards. - Subsidize and expand access to assistive technologies through insurance and government programs. - Expand training programs for teachers, rehabilitation experts, and AT providers. - Conduct awareness campaigns to reduce stigma and promote inclusion.
3. Identify opportunities and facilitators to inclusive education for students with disabilities in HEIs	- Political will and legal frameworks aligned with UNCRPD and SDGs. - Growing partnerships with NGOs, donor agencies, and regional bodies. - Digital technologies and e-learning platforms expanding access. - Best practices exist in teacher training, scholarships, and awareness campaigns.	- Scale up best practices across HEIs through knowledge-sharing platforms. - Leverage digital tools and e-learning for inclusive pedagogy. - Strengthen regional and international partnerships to mobilize resources and technical expertise. - Institutionalize inclusive practices into HEI strategic plans and budgets.