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Tourism Accessibility and Inclusive Policy Practice in Protected Landscapes: An Analytical Case Study of Serengeti National Park, Tanzania

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Abstract

Tourists with accessibility needs (TwANs) continue to face barriers to equitable participation in protected-area tourism, despite growing recognition of inclusive tourism and accessibility in some destinations. This study examined tourism accessibility and inclusive policy practices for TwANs in the Serengeti National Park (SENAPA), Tanzania, with particular attention to staff training and evaluation, safety measures and legal compliance, public awareness, and mechanisms for stakeholder feedback. Grounded in the Social Model of Disability, the study employed a qualitative case-study design. A purposive sample of 66 participants comprising TwANs, tourism officers, tour operators, tour guides, and accommodation managers were involved in the study. Data were generated through 43 semi-structured interviews, six focus-group discussions comprising 23 participants, direct field observations, and documentary analysis. Methodological rigor was strengthened through triangulation across these sources and methods to enhance the credibility, dependability, confirmability, and trustworthiness of the findings. TwANs were recruited based on self-identified accessibility needs to capture diverse access requirements beyond visible impairments. Data were analyzed using framework analysis, informed by the study objectives, the Social Model of Disability, relevant literature, and emergent findings. The findings disclose persistent accessibility barriers associated with tourism infrastructure and facilities, staff preparedness, safety and emergency arrangements, information provision, legal and policy implementation, and limited public awareness of different access requirements. These barriers demonstrate that accessibility constraints are shaped not solely by individual impairments but also by environmental, institutional, and attitudinal conditions within the tourism system, particularly in protected landscapes like SENAPA. The study contributes empirical evidence from an African protected-area context and highlights the need for coordinated inclusive tourism policies, universal design principles, staff capacity development, effective regulatory implementation, and participatory planning to promote equitable tourism participation for TwANs in protected landscapes.

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1. Introduction

Globally, it has been shown by Islambekova (2021) that 7–8% of tourists with accessibility needs have the same access to tourism as those without accessibility needs. The obstacles encountered by tourists with accessibility needs (TwANs) have underscored the importance of ensuring their inclusion in tourist destinations, including the Serengeti National Park (SENAPA). Also, Viktorovich (2021) and Tatic (2015) point out that tourist infrastructure may pose physical access issues at sites, including national parks. In that case, the development of inclusive tourism policies is a significant and pertinent topic. This focus is essential due to the intricate nature of the industry, which comprises many interconnected networks. Recent observations indicate that numerous governments have provided minimal support to stakeholders within the tourism sector (Khalid et al., 2021). For the present study, TwANs are defined as tourists who experience temporary or permanent physical, sensory, cognitive, age-related, or other conditions that may create barriers to accessing, navigating, or fully participating in tourism services, facilities, and experiences. This category encompasses, but is not limited to, older tourists, infants and young children, wheelchair users, people with visual or hearing impairments, and individuals experiencing temporary health conditions or mobility limitations.

The development and execution of effective inclusive tourism policies are essential for rebuilding trust among stakeholders in the sector and TwANs, and for revitalizing the industry (OECD, 2020a, 2020b). Despite the significant social and economic implications of these policies, there is a lack of comprehensive understanding regarding their commitment to the tourism and hospitality field (Shao et al., 2021) and the influence of policy on shaping the sector (Okuyama, 2018). Inclusive tourism encompasses activities designed to be accessible for both TwANs and those without accessibility needs, allowing them to participate together. This concept reflects a social reality that all societies must confront. Each country, based on its level of development, priorities, and resources, establishes social and economic policies aimed at supporting individuals with disabilities (Kropotova et al., 2015).

However, in the related study by Lwoga and Mapunda (2017) at the Village Museum in Tanzania, it was found that enabling the effective participation of tourists with disabilities in the tourism sector could yield economic advantages for the industry. This would contribute to broader goals such as social integration, equity, human rights, and sustainable tourism development in Tanzania and similar regions. The research highlights that the Village Museum lacks adequately designed resting and seating areas for visitors like TwANs. Likewise, in protected areas, particularly the Serengeti National Park (SENAPA), more attention is needed, with a focus on inclusive tourism policies for TwANs.

2. Literature Review

2.1. Inclusive Tourism Policies and Practice

According to the World Tourism Organization (2019), accessibility is a fundamental aspect of any responsible and sustainable tourism policy in inclusive tourism. It is not only a matter of human rights, but it also presents a unique business opportunity. Accessible tourism benefits everyone, not just individuals with disabilities or access needs. This strategic vision has driven Portugal's efforts in this area, with visible results. In 2019, Portugal earned the title of "Accessible Tourist Destination 2019" from the World Tourism

Organization, recognizing the substantial contributions of both public and private sectors to promote accessible and inclusive tourism. This approach highlights that inclusive tourism is not just a social obligation but also a competitive advantage.

Manguele and Roque (2015) observed that Portugal possesses substantial capacity to address issues of inclusion and accessibility through initiatives implemented by both public and private sectors. Despite these collaborative efforts, significant challenges remain. Beyond adapting infrastructure, equipment, and services, destinations must provide comprehensive accessibility information through tourist sites and tour operators. Inclusive destinations recognize diverse market segments and emerging tourist profiles while responding to broader societal transformations. Consequently, prioritizing inclusive tourism is essential for reducing social and economic barriers and fostering equity. Such an approach extends beyond targeting specific markets, ensuring that destinations are adequately prepared to accommodate and welcome all tourists, including those with accessibility needs.

Also, considering the social focus of the state's internal policy, the Russian Federation has recently increased its attention to inclusive tourism for children (Kryukova & Khetagurova, 2020). In September, the Public Chamber of the Russian Federation, through its Commission on Accessible Environments and Inclusive Practices, launched a survey aimed at the parents of children with disabilities. This initiative, undertaken in collaboration with the Center for Socio-Cultural Rehabilitation and led by Diana Gurtskaya and the All-Russian Organization of Parents of Disabled Children, addresses the topic in "Inclusion in Children's Recreation: Barriers and Solutions" (Kryukova & Khetagurova, 2020).

Furthermore, the European Commission (2014) has released a policy document titled "European Disability Strategy 2010–2020". The primary goal of this strategy was to enable people with disabilities to fully exercise their rights and engage in society and the economy on an equal footing with others. In fact, disability is becoming an important concern in the tourism industry (Minnaert, 2012). The National Disability Strategy covering the period (2010–2020) established in Australia outlines a decade-long framework aimed at enhancing the quality of life for individuals with disabilities, as well as their families and caregivers. This initiative represents a collaborative effort among various government levels, industry stakeholders, and the community to create a cohesive national strategy for disability policy and program development. The strategy identifies six key focus areas, including the promotion of inclusive communities that enhance accessibility in built, natural, and digital environments. These environments encompass public transportation, parks, buildings, housing, digital information, communication technologies, and aspects of civic life such as social, sporting, recreational, and cultural activities. The strategy emphasizes that transforming societal attitudes towards disability, alongside improvements in accessibility, can significantly boost the economic participation of individuals with disabilities as consumers (Tourism Commission, 2017; Pavkovic et al., 2017). Supporting this policy orientation, Tourism Australia, the agency mandated to implement the Tourism 2020 agenda, acknowledges the importance of developing inclusive destinations, products, and services. Such initiatives broaden participation in tourism while creating additional economic opportunities through expanded markets and extended operating seasons. Accessible tourism spans both public and private attractions and targets key market segments, including families with strollers, older adults with mobility limitations, and individuals with permanent or temporary disabilities, by addressing diverse accessibility needs (Pavkovic et al., 2017). Besides, it is widely recognized that various factors—including economic, social, and cultural conditions, as well as government structures and political systems—affect tourism policy (Briedenhann & Butts, 2004). Liu and Liu (2009) note that tourism has become a vital driver of wealth creation and development, prompting governments around the world to implement diverse policies and development plans

with enhanced institutional support aimed at fostering a growing tourism sector. Consequently, tourism organizations need to understand their competitive advantages and the areas requiring improvement or maintenance (Aurel et al., 2016), particularly in catering to older tourists and those with access needs. However, Conejo and Wooliscroft (2015) emphasize the necessity for policies that enhance infrastructure, facilitate the integration of tourist services, sustain visitor numbers, and encourage tourists to extend their stays, explore more locations, and increase their spending.

Pertaining to accessibility for individuals with physical disabilities, it is more appropriate to refer to tourism that is accessible to everyone. This type of tourism involves a collaborative effort among various stakeholders, allowing tourists with different access needs, such as mobility, vision, hearing, and cognitive challenges, to participate independently and with fairness and dignity. This is achieved through the provision of universally designed tourism products, services, and infrastructure (Linderová, 2015). Accessible infrastructure is essential for participation, but information about the accessibility of tourism facilities and destinations is also a key requirement for the access needs market (Chang & Chen, 2011). On the other hand, Mace et al. (1991) emphasize that adaptable design involves creating facilities that cater to the needs of TwANs while also being usable by individuals without disabilities at other times. This concept differs from universal design. In South African National Parks (SANParks) like Kruger, accessible features include access ramps, accessible restrooms, roll-in showers, grab bars, and lever taps. Notably, there are 21 accessible campsite restrooms available for guests with mobility impairments across SANParks.

Korstanje and George (2020) describe individual-related strategies as those that empower people with mobility challenges to advocate for their own rights and inclusivity. In contrast, organizational-related strategies involve companies implementing policies focused on education and awareness. Industry-related strategies include training and development initiatives related to COVID-19. Lastly, government-related strategies pertain to the legal requirements for infrastructure, such as ramps.

Séraphin and Butcher (2018) highlight the importance of infrastructure in their study on Haiti in the Caribbean. They argue that an inclusive tourism policy strategy could attract tourists with mobility disabilities and boost revenue. However, they emphasize that effective implementation requires infrastructure development specifically designed to accommodate individuals with mobility challenges. Alongside universal design as a strategy for promoting inclusive tourism, it has been suggested that social tourism policies and practices can significantly enhance inclusive and sustainable outcomes for individuals with disabilities (Minnaert et al., 2009).

Correspondingly, it is also argued that accessible tourism encompasses more than just access issues; it represents an ideal that fosters the involvement of all stakeholders, including individuals with disabilities, in the policy making, planning, and governance of accessible tourism development (Scheyvens & Biddulph, 2018). Supporting this view, Hong (2009) emphasizes that investments in infrastructure such as accessibility projects, accommodation, and transportation are critical components of a destination's physical resources. Additionally, Winters (2014) points out that infrastructure serves as a key policy response that effectively promotes and spreads the benefits of economic growth. Moreover, the Government of Tanzania (United Republic of Tanzania, 1999) has identified it as one of the top tourist destinations in Africa, whose tourism development is guided by the National Tourism Policy of 1999, but has no specific strategies focusing on the challenges and opportunities of TwANs. However, studies elsewhere (i.e., USA, Hong Kong, Iceland) by Sheldon et al. (2017) show that this market segment has potential to expand accessible tourism opportunities and significantly contribute to the overall Tanzanian tourism market. Despite this, there is limited empirical data in Tanzania focusing on tourists

with accessibility needs in protected areas, including SENAPA. For that reason, the researchers are motivated to address these important questions:

(1) What does inclusive tourism policy encourage regarding tourist facilities and infrastructure for tourists with accessibility needs?
(2) Is there a need for staff training and regular evaluation to comply with inclusive tourism policy?
(3) What are the safety measures and requirements for legal compliance when focusing on inclusive tourism policy guidelines?
(4) Are there feedback mechanisms and public awareness requirements regarding inclusive tourism policy practice?

2.2. Theoretical Background on Inclusive Tourism Policies

The Social Model of Disability is relevant to protected landscapes because accessibility is shaped by physical, informational, institutional, and operational barriers. Inclusive tourism should therefore address structural barriers within tourism policies, destination management, information systems, facilities, and services, rather than focusing solely on individual accommodation. This aligns with inclusive and sustainable tourism principles that promote equitable participation and barrier removal (Scheyvens & Biddulph, 2018; UNWTO, 2021). However, effective governance, policy implementation, stakeholder collaboration, and inclusive organizational practices are essential for reducing exclusion. Thus, the Social Model of Disability provides a suitable framework for examining tourism accessibility and inclusive policy practice for TwANs in protected landscapes such as SENAPA, Tanzania.

2.3. Conceptual Framework

The framework (Figure 1) assumes that higher levels of inclusive policy practice led to more positive outcomes among TwANs. From a theoretical perspective, when destinations provide accessible products, activities, information, and supportive policies, they are more likely to satisfy tourist accessibility needs. Fulfillment of these needs enhances satisfaction and perceived experience quality, which in turn strengthens tourist intentions to revisit and to engage in positive word-of-mouth recommendations. The conceptual framework proposes that effective inclusive policy practices and accessible services in SENAPA enhance participation, satisfy accessibility needs, and improve tourism experiences among TwANs, demonstrating accessibility's influence on satisfaction and engagement outcomes.

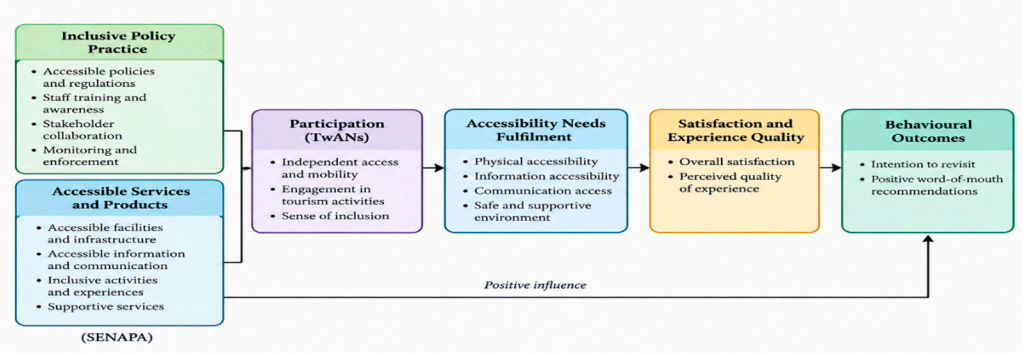


Figure 1. Conceptual framework. Source: Author's work (2026). There is a call for developing clear, practical standards for evaluating tourism governance to inform policymaking and improve governance practices (Eagles, 2009; Islam et al., 2018). Such standards should address the complexities of governance in protected areas, ensuring inclusivity, transparency, and effective conflict-resolution mechanisms to sustainably manage tourism and conservation objectives.

3. Materials and Methods

This study focuses on tourism accessibility and the implementation of inclusive tourism policies for TwANs within protected landscapes, specifically in the Serengeti National Park, Tanzania. The park (Figure 2), recognized as a UNESCO World Heritage Site, spans approximately 14,763 square kilometers of savanna ecosystem. It shares boundaries with several important conservation areas, including the Maasai Mara National Reserve, Ngorongoro Conservation Area, and the Maswa, Ikorongo, and Grumeti Game Reserves, as well as Loliondo. Established in 1951, the Serengeti National Park was created to safeguard biodiversity and remains one of Tanzania's most significant conservation areas. It also plays a crucial role in the country's tourism sector, with protected areas collectively accounting for roughly 80% of international tourist arrivals (Tanzania National Parks, 2024; Hunt & Gorenflo, 2018; Bayliss et al., 2014).

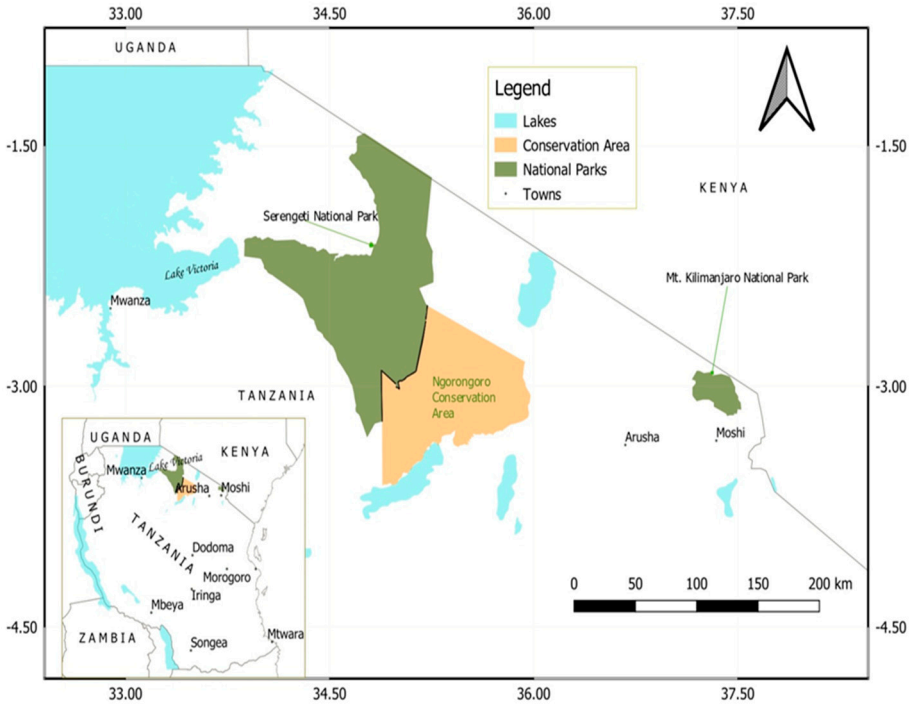


Figure 2. The map of Tanzania showing the position of the study area. Source: Author's work (2026).

Methodological rigor was strengthened through triangulation, whereby evidence from semi-structured interviews, focus-group discussions (FGDs), direct field observations, and documentary analysis was systematically integrated to enhance the credibility, dependability, confirmability, and overall trustworthiness of the findings. Semi-structured interviews were conducted with 43 participants representing key stakeholders in the Serengeti National Park (SENAPA), including tourists with accessibility needs (TwANs), tourism officers, tour operators, tour guides, and accommodation managers. TwANs were recruited based on their self-identified accessibility needs, rather than relying solely on visible impairments, to ensure appropriate representation of diverse accessibility requirements. Each interview lasted approximately 30–40 min and was conducted in English after participants had been informed about the study and provided informed consent.

Six mini-FGDs involving 23 participants were conducted to obtain additional perspectives and facilitate interaction among participants with relevant experiences. The groups comprised three or four participants each, consistent with recommendations for

mini focus groups (Krueger, 1994; Morgan, 1997). Tour guides and TwANs who had not participated in the interviews were purposively included to broaden the range of perspectives and minimize duplication of responses. Trained moderators facilitated the discussions, with appropriate communication tools and interpretation support provided where necessary to accommodate participant accessibility requirements. Participation was voluntary, and informed consent was obtained before data collection. Participant anonymity was protected through unique identification codes, which also supported systematic data management and analysis. For both interviews and FGDs, data collection proceeded iteratively, with emerging findings continuously reviewed across five stakeholder categories. Among 43 interviews and six FGDs involving 23 participants, later data predominantly confirmed established themes concerning infrastructure (transport), information and feedback awareness, staff training, safety, and inclusive practices. Sample adequacy was therefore determined through thematic convergence, information richness, and the diminishing emergence of new substantive issues (Table 1).

Table 1. Data saturation stages during data collection in the field. Source: Author's work (2026).

Data Collection Stage	Interviews Stage	New Substantive Issues Emerging?	FGD Stage	New Substantive Issues Emerging?
Early fieldwork	Initial interviews	Several new issues	FGD 1–2	Several new issues
Middle fieldwork	Progressive interviews	Fewer new issues; existing categories consolidated	FGD 3–4	Mostly confirmation and elaboration
Late fieldwork	Final interviews	No major new substantive categories	FGD 5–6	Predominantly confirmatory information
Decision	43 interviews	Information richness	23 participants	Information richness

Documentary analysis complemented the primary data by examining relevant national tourism policies and planning documents from Tanzania, Kenya, Botswana, South Africa, and Namibia, together with European accessibility guidelines and Tanzania's National Tourism Master Plan. These documents provided contextual and policy-level evidence against which participant experiences and perspectives could be examined. The comparison of evidence across these sources enhanced analytical depth and helped reduce the influence of potential single-source bias (Creswell & Creswell, 2018; Denzin, 2012). Collectively, these procedures enhanced the transparency, consistency, and trustworthiness of the research process. Direct field observations were carried out by the researchers during the morning and afternoon sessions in the presence of tourists around visitor attractions and tourism service areas.

4. Results

The current research study, based on tourism accessibility and inclusive policy practice for tourists with access needs in protected landscapes in the Serengeti National Park, Tanzania, was intended to assess inclusive tourism policies on tourist facilities and infrastructure, inclusive tourism policies on staff training and regular evaluation, inclusive tourism policies on safety measures and legal compliance, and inclusive tourism policies on public awareness and feedback mechanisms.

4.1. Characteristics of Respondents

The qualitative study engaged a total of 66 participants representing key stakeholders involved in tourism accessibility and inclusive policy implementation within the protected landscapes of the Serengeti National Park. The participant composition largely reflected individuals directly involved in tourism experiences and service

provision. TwANs formed the largest group, comprising 26 respondents (39.4%), highlighting the study's emphasis on understanding the experiences of the primary beneficiaries of accessible tourism initiatives. Their contributions provided valuable insights into the barriers, challenges, and opportunities related to accessing tourism facilities and services. Tour guides constituted the second-largest category, with 22 participants (33.3%), offering operational perspectives on accessibility implementation and visitor experiences. Tour operators accounted for 8 respondents (12.1%), contributing insights into the integration of accessibility considerations within tourism products and travel arrangements. Accommodation managers represented 7 participants (10.6%), providing information on accessible lodging services. Tourism officers, although numbering only 3 (4.5%), contributed important policy, planning, and regulatory perspectives on inclusive tourism development in the park (Table 2).

Table 2. Categories of study participants. Source: Author's work (2026).

Participants Category	Population (*n*)	Sample Size	Percentage (%)	Selection Basis
Tourists with Access Needs	120	26	39.4	Purposive
Tour Operators	50	8	12.1	Purposive
Tour Guides	70	22	33.3	Purposive
Tourism Officers	5	3	4.5	Purposive
Accommodation Managers	47	7	10.6	Purposive
Total	292	66	100	Purposive

4.2. Inclusive Tourism Policies on Tourist Facilities and Infrastructure

Based on the facility experiences of TwANs, Table 3 indicates that the 26 TwANs represented diverse access requirements, with wheelchair users and tourists experiencing mobility limitations constituting notable groups. All participants (100%) in each category of accessibility needs reported using assistance, highlighting the importance of human support alongside accessible infrastructure and adaptive services. Their experiences encompassed game-drive roads, campsite washroom paths, camping-ground terrain, visitor-center washrooms and pathways, audio–visual information devices, picnic-site platforms, the Mara River crossing, and the airstrip. This diversity demonstrates that accessibility in protected landscapes extends across the entire tourism movement pattern, encompassing arrival, mobility, information access, sanitation, recreation, and attraction visitation. In consistency with the Social Model of Disability, these experiences highlight environmental, infrastructural, informational, and service barriers rather than locating disability solely within individual impairments. Also, first- and repeat-visit experiences provide insights into whether existing inclusive practices facilitate meaningful participation, autonomy, and equitable enjoyment of tourism experiences within SENAPA.

Table 3. Characteristics and facility experiences of Tourists with Accessibility Needs (*n*= 26). Source: Author's work (2026).

Type of Accessibility Needs	Participants *n* (%)	Participants Reported Assistance *n* (%)	Directly Experienced Tourist Facilities
Wheelchair users	7 (27)	7 (100)	Roads; campsite washroom paths; camping-ground terrain; visitor-center washrooms; picnic-site platforms; airstrip
Visual impairments	5 (19.2)	5 (100)	Roads; campsite washroom paths; visitor-center paths; audio–visual devices; picnic-site platforms; Mara River crossing
Hard of hearing and speech impairment	1 (3.8)	1 (100)	Roads; visitor-center washrooms; audio–visual devices; visitor-center paths; picnic-site platforms; airstrip

Mental health problem	1 (3.8)	1 (100)	Roads; visitor-center washrooms; audio–visual devices; visitor-center paths; picnic-site platforms; airstrip, picnic-site platforms
Hearing impairments	2 (7.6)	2 (100)	Roads; visitor-center washrooms; audio–visual devices; visitor-center paths; picnic-site platforms; airstrip
Older tourists with mobility limitations	6 (23.1)	6 (100)	Roads; campsite washroom paths; camping-ground terrain; visitor-center washrooms; picnic-site platforms; airstrip
Temporary mobility/health-related access needs	4 (15.5)	4 (100)	Roads; campsite washroom paths; camping-ground terrain; visitor-center paths; visitor-center washrooms; airstrip
Total	26 (100)	26 (100)	Multiple facilities were experienced by participants

Furthermore, in the findings from FGD04, TwANs reported that game-drive roads in the Serengeti National Park (SENAPA), particularly the Seronera–Kogatende route, require substantial improvement to facilitate equitable access to visitor attractions. The long and challenging journey disproportionately affects older tourists and other TwANs who may experience fatigue during extended transit. From a social-model perspective, such difficulties are not solely attributable to age or impairment but are produced or intensified by inaccessible transport infrastructure and inadequate spatial planning. Similarly, the tour guide emphasized the importance of strategically located visitor facilities, particularly washrooms, that consider travel distances and the needs of elderly tourists and infants. These findings indicate that exclusion can emerge from park-planning decisions when infrastructure is designed around the presumed needs of tourists without access requirements. Therefore, inclusive tourism policy should address environmental and infrastructural barriers by incorporating accessibility considerations into road development, facility location, service planning, and recreational design. This approach shifts responsibility from individual TwANs to tourism institutions and destination planners.

In addition to that, inclusive tourism policies with a focus on TwANs have made an urgent call for the present research study. Through direct field observation, the research findings exposed the presence of limited basic needs at the Seronera airstrip. During the study, it was observed by the researchers that there were no accessible pathways with ramp structures at the entry and exit points of the arrivals and departures building for TwANs, such as elderly, wheelchair users, children, and others with mobility challenges. From the field observation, the findings of the present research study give direction and inform the relevant authority to consider the requirements of all visitors, including TwANs, when it comes to the proper planning and development of the national park infrastructure. The findings align with the Social Model of Disability as TwANs reported that public campsite structures in SENAPA were not designed to accommodate diverse access needs, thereby restricting the equitable use of accommodation services. From this perspective, exclusion results from inaccessible facility design and the inadequate implementation of inclusive tourism policies.

4.3. Inclusive Tourism Policies for Staff Training and Regular Evaluation

As the present research study focused on TwANs, in the study findings, the researchers found inadequate training among the tourism staff. The gap in professional training was reported during the focus-group discussion among the tour guides in the research study. It was strongly emphasized in the discussion that Tanzanian tour guides are good in many aspects, but they lack additional skills in dealing with TwANs with different impairments. In support of inclusive tourism policy, particularly on staff training, in the current study, FGD members insisted on sign language in favor of tourists who are hard of hearing for easy communication and to improve the accessibility of tourism services. Also, from another study output through the FGD among the tour guides, it was suggested that capacity building for tourism staff regarding proper

handling techniques for TwANs such as elderly, wheelchair users, tourists with mental health problems, and others with physical challenges could be ideal for tourism industry requirements.

Other findings in the present research study, with regard to the inclusive tourism policy for staff training, expressed that, during the interview with one accommodation manager (ACM02), in the tourism operations that involve TwANs with different health challenges, taking a trip escort or concierge who is a medical professional could be helpful for the provision of first aid. The interviewee said that, as TwANs face health emergencies on trips, recruiting a professional first aider could be of valuable assistance for closer care to TwANs with health problems. These findings of the current research study reveal that concierge staff require additional training in medical aspects for the provision of first aid to handle minor health cases likely to be encountered by TwANs when on a trip for vacation.

Additionally, in the findings of the research study, the provision of tourism training for TwANs among tour operators was a matter raised. During the interview between the researcher and one of the tour operators (TOP07), it was expressed that most tour operators do not participate in field areas where TwANs are provided with tourism services. The interviewee elaborated that, as they do not see what is happening during service delivery, when field challenges happen to TwANs, the problem-solver is a tour guide. One of the interviewees coded as TGD06 said, "In my field experience of guiding elderly people and infants, they prefer a slow game drive; they eat slowly and need extra time in most of what they do. However, they need varieties of food and beverages."

4.4. Inclusive Tourism Policies for Safety Measures and Legal Compliance

On legal compliance in the aspect of inclusive tourism policy, the present research study findings reveal that tour vans' facilities were mentioned to have deficiencies in terms of automotive systems to support TwANs with mobility challenges. From the interview with one of the tour guides, it was reported that tourists with mobility challenges struggle with the use of the tour vans, especially when boarding, turning in the seat, and disembarking. The interviewee continued to tell the researcher that almost all tour operators own tour vans that accommodate tourists without disabilities and do not consider such basic requirements for TwANs who engage in tourism recreational activities. With regard to this challenge in tourism operations, the interviewee gave an opinion that now is the right time to adhere to the legal requirements for tour operators to own at least one special tour van in each tour company that accommodates TwANs on the trip with critical mobility challenges. Based on lodge company policy, the accommodation manager informed the researcher that:

> "*At our lodge, the dining tables, chairs, and beds in the restaurant and a few rooms are made at reasonable heights to accommodate our guests with access needs. […] We hosted a couple of families of people with dwarfism from the United States, and they found us with all the necessary needs in place*". (ACM02)

Likewise, through direct field observation with consideration for safety among TwANs when on vacation, the findings of the present study revealed that currently most tour vans were observed to use locally made metal and wooden steps for supporting TwANs when boarding and landing. This was noted to be unsafe and risky for them, as the steps were not properly fixed to the tour vans. However, in an initiative to strengthen inclusive tourism policies, this matter is to be taken into consideration as a result of the present research study.

These findings support the Social Model of Disability, which emphasizes removing environmental and organizational barriers that restrict participation. At SENAPA

campsites, trained staff, safety precautions, and communication systems within tented rooms contribute to reducing barriers affecting TwANs during recreational activities. Emergency communication is particularly important for tourists requiring additional assistance, enabling timely responses when difficulties arise. Thus, inclusive safety practices demonstrate that accessibility depends not only on individual capabilities but also on institutional preparedness, supportive services, and responsive tourism environments.

With regard to safety measures and legal compliance for TwANs, after a one-to-one interview with one of the tour operators, the research study findings reveal that some tour companies are very strict about their rules and regulations regarding participation in recreational activities for TwANs with critical health conditions. Based on company policy, sometimes TwANs with health problems are prohibited from participating in the activity even if they are willing and unlikely to be at risk after a thorough physical assessment. The interviewee TOP06 continued by stating that;

> "*In our Balloon Safari Company, many times, some visitors, particularly the elderly with physical challenges in their legs, have been interested in flying over the Serengeti in a hot air balloon for a once-in-a-lifetime experience but […] after being assessed by the pilot, they are rejected for safety purposes*."

Moreover, taking into account safety measures under the inclusive tourism policy in the contemporary research study, through the interview with one of the tour guides, the findings of the study exposed that the Serengeti National Park management had considered safety issues for the visitors. The interviewee described that, in visitor attractions like picnic sites where game can be viewed, there is visible signage installed for dangerous animals, for example, hippos and crocodiles, which are likely to come closer to the tourists. The study findings show that signage is used as an alert among tourists, including TwANs, to take precautions at the sites visited.

Furthermore, based on the theme of inclusive tourism policy, specifically for the safety issues under consideration, interviewee ACM02 told researchers that, in order to ensure health services for visitors at the Serengeti National Park, the park management is required to establish a standard health facility for attending TwANs, in particular for emergency medical cases that normally happen during the tourism operations. The interviewee reported that sometimes TwANs come to visit Tanzania's national parks even if they have serious health challenges facing them. With reference to the inclusive tourism policy, the research findings revealed that, with tourism development in the national parks, standard medical facilities are needed, with medical practitioners with different specializations present to assist the visitors, specifically TwANs who are vulnerable to health challenges when they are on vacation.

From another interview with one of the tour guides (TGD02), the aspect of safety for TwANs was raised during the conversation. It was again reported by the interviewee that one of the important matters when dealing with TwANs, like the elderly, wheelchair users, and others with physical challenges or injuries, is the need for a safe and careful drive in the wilderness, where rough roads are a challenge. The interviewee stated that most of these TwANs prefer slow speeds on tour vehicles, and in that case, the tour guide is required to satisfy them all the time and make sure they finish their trip safely.

4.5. Inclusive Tourism Policies for Public Awareness and Feedback Mechanisms

In the findings of the present research study, during the field observation conducted by the researchers, it was noted that there was an existing challenge in the public awareness of TwANs. It was observed that, with the exception of visitor attractions like the wildebeest migration, the tour vans used by TwANs found themselves in the middle

of traffic congestion, which blocked them from enjoying the notable attractions in SENAPA across the Mara River. This indicated that accessibility at wildebeest migration crossing areas was constrained by suitable vehicle parking and viewing arrangements for TwANs. The findings further revealed the need for designated vehicle-accessible viewing areas to facilitate TwANs participation in game-viewing activities and enhance their recreational experience in SENAPA. In addition, from the study interview, one of the tour operators declared: "I am proud that my company owns a special vehicle for tourists with disabilities, including wheelchair users and older people. Most tour operators lack such vehicles, so other companies hire ours when they receive requests from tourists with access needs" (TOP04).

So far, these findings can be interpreted through the Social Model of Disability**,** which emphasizes how environmental and institutional arrangements can create barriers to tourism participation among TwANs. The 15- and 30-m distance restrictions at migration viewpoints are primarily established for ecological and visitor-safety purposes and therefore constitute legitimate conservation measures applicable to all tourists. However, limited public awareness and inadequate accessibility planning may disproportionately affect TwANs, particularly tourists with visual, mobility, or physical limitations, and children. Thus, the restriction itself is not inherently discriminatory; rather, inclusive implementation requires accessible information, suitable viewing arrangements, staff assistance, and reasonable adaptations that maintain safety and conservation objectives.

However, relating to the public awareness of TwANs, the establishment of signposts in the accessibility of visitor facilities has been implemented to some extent in service areas of the Serengeti National Park. From direct field observation in various accommodation properties and public areas such as the Serengeti media center and park main gates, washrooms are labeled with a signpost, pathways have a handrail, and there are ramps for visitors in need. In addition to that, from the interview between the researcher and one TwANs, it was stated to the researcher that the visitors had experienced maximum kindness from the service attendants.

5. Discussion

In the present study findings, the researchers discussed inclusive tourism policies as an accessible tourism opportunity for tourists with access needs in the Serengeti National Park, Tanzania. In the study by Scheyvens and Biddulph (2018), inclusive tourism is defined as an analytical rather than a marketing concept that aims to "focus attention on an innovation frontier where new people and new places are incorporated into tourism consumption and production, and use tourism to counter socio-economic exclusions and divisions". However, these two scholars have emphasized that "something can only be considered inclusive tourism if (…) marginalized groups among TwANs share the benefits".

The findings highlight the imperative for policy interventions and collaborative planning that prioritize accessible infrastructure as a cornerstone of inclusive tourism. Applying the Social Model of Disability addresses structural barriers and promotes equitable tourism environments. Likewise, Olafsdottir and Runnstrom (2013) emphasize that improving existing facilities and designing sustainable infrastructure responsive to visitor needs have significant managerial implications. Consequently, integrating disability perspectives into tourism planning reconceptualizes accessible infrastructure as an essential element of socially just development rather than a specialized provision for minority groups.

In relation to the above findings of the present study, Darcy et al. (2020) revealed in their recent study that some destinations, namely Europe, the United States, and Australia, are conforming to legislative requirements and proactively "developing infrastructure, goods, services, marketing, and promotion in alignment with the collaborative

processes outlined in the conceptualization of accessible tourism". However, other scholars like Eichhorn and Buhalis (2011) have argued that "ensuring access to travel and tourism opportunities for people living with disability as well as for the entire population requires knowledge and design structures that are inclusive for all citizens".

On the other hand, it is thought that when planning for national park tourist facilities and other infrastructure, plans should take into account TwANs once they choose to spend their leisure time at the destination. However, Lohmann and Netto (2017) and Bowtell (2015) think that different aspects of infrastructure and recreational facilities can be considered to be elements of tourism infrastructure. In a broader sense, this includes all those facilities that tourists use when they leave their homes, reach their destination, and return home.

In concurrence with the present study, other scholars like Michopoulou and Buhalis (2011) offer a comprehensive analysis of accessible tourism stakeholders. Given that people with disabilities themselves have a lived experience of disability and the requirement of various access needs and support, it is especially pertinent that their voices are heard (Michopoulou et al., 2015; O'Neill & Knight, 2000; Gillovic & McIntosh, 2015). However, in the experience of the tourism industry, this stakeholder group of TwANs is thought to have limited opportunities to contribute to tourism policy, planning, and development in a meaningful way. Therefore, "collaborative efforts can be enhanced in the development of accessible tourism to innovatively move the agenda towards inclusive tourism" (Shane & Venkataraman, 2000; Nyanjom et al., 2018).

As per the study findings, it was revealed that there were no accessible pathways with ramps at the airstrip entry and exit points of the arrivals and departures building for TwANs, particularly those with mobility challenges. Consistent with the findings of the current research, Lestari and dan Ni Putu Noni (2020) emphasized in their earlier study that government policies aimed at advancing the tourism sector should be developed comprehensively to ensure efficiency and maximize benefits for the community in economic, social, and cultural aspects. These plans should establish a framework for government policy to promote and effectively manage tourism development.

The study revealed that pathways, the design of washrooms and bathrooms, and the amenities provided within public campsites were inadequately suited to the needs of TwANs. Consequently, accommodation services were perceived as inaccessible and inconvenient, particularly for individuals with physical impairments. To promote equal accessibility, UNWTO (2013) recommended that built environments should, whenever possible, remain at a single level or incorporate ramps where floor-level changes occur. Furthermore, accessible toilet stalls, washbasins, emergency lighting, signs, and switches should be provided to facilitate the independent use of hygiene facilities. Darcy (2010) similarly notes that disabled tourists prioritize the accessibility of bedrooms and bathrooms, followed by common areas, when selecting accommodation. Consistent with these findings, Molina Hoyo and Cánoves Valiente (2010) argue that environmental and attitudinal barriers continue to impede the full and equitable participation of people with disabilities in travel, accommodation, and other tourism services.

The literature further supports this perspective. Cloquet et al. (2017) emphasize that the quality-of-service delivery in tourism establishments is critically dependent on staff attitude and skill. They argue that empathetic, knowledgeable, and disability-aware staff members play a central role in ensuring that guests with disabilities receive a dignified and non-discriminatory service. Thus, staff training is not simply a human resource enhancement; it is a structural strategy for removing socially created barriers and fostering equitable participation in tourism experiences. Furthermore, other researchers have shown in their studies that each guest is unique, which is why tourism companies should

enable individuals with disabilities to communicate their needs and preferences for service (Dickson et al., 2017; Domínguez Vila et al., 2015).

Regarding inclusive tourism policies on staff training, it was emphasized with confidence that some staff should be trained with the capacity to assist tourists at the destination. This includes tour guides, concierge staff, and first aiders. These significant findings reflect the perspectives of various scholars who argue that accessibility in tourist destinations, training on how to care for PwD in the service sector, and providing good-quality information on accessibility are crucial for avoiding discrimination against the group (Buhalis & Michopoulou, 2011; Darcy, 2010; Michopoulou & Buhalis, 2013; UNWTO, 2016a, 2016b). In another way, it is important that tourism operators take into consideration the complete tourism environment, enabling the interaction and participation of people with disabilities while also providing the support required to fully participate in tourism (Agovino et al., 2017; Michopoulou et al., 2015).

Yet, as per previous research findings by different scholars (Bizjak et al., 2010; Darcy & Pegg, 2011; Daruwalla & Darcy, 2005; Schitko & Simpson, 2011), most tourism operators were reluctant because of workplace health and safety regulations and legal requirements. Research studies show that specific staff training decreased the risks of inappropriate staff behavior toward customers with disabilities; however, none of the providers gave their employees specific training to interact with PwDs.

In connection to the tour-van situation raised in the present research findings with regard to TwANs, Makuyana and Dube (2023), in their recent study, based on responses from all respondents, indicate that tourism-supporting public transport systems still regard disabled people (the elderly included) as a niche market and lack the motivation to make public transport inclusive. In addition, disabled-people organizations in the disability space advocate for improvements in access, empowerment, and agency of disabled people through inclusive transport policies that are currently difficult to enforce due to the lack of a disability act and regulatory mechanisms for sectors like transport and tourism, among others (Makuyana & Dube, 2023).

Regarding the safety of TwANs during participation in recreational activities within the Serengeti National Park, the findings indicate the existence of established communication systems for emergency situations, alongside the provision of precautionary information to all visitors. Within accommodation facilities such as lodges and camps, staff members also play an important role in ensuring tourist safety and security. Nevertheless, previous studies by Cloquet et al. (2017), Rumetshofer and Wöß (2004), Domínguez Vila et al. (2018), and Broach et al. (2016) report that families travelling with children with disabilities undertake extensive pre-trip planning to minimize potential difficulties. Key considerations include the availability of accessible facilities, parking arrangements, and the type, size, equipment, and location of rooms. Parents particularly prefer ground-floor rooms to facilitate safe and convenient access for their children and actively seek information regarding the safety and accessibility of tourism attractions.

With reference to previous research studies, there are varying levels of physical mobility restrictions affecting legs, feet, back, neck, arms, or hands (Buhalis & Darcy, 2010); among the structural barriers, interpersonal ones remain no less important in relation to trail accessibility and difficulty level. However, insufficient accessibility, including trail difficulty measures within natural areas, is an additional barrier that has led to the inaccessibility of trails for mobility-impaired people and reduced their participation in nature-based activities (Crosbie, 2015). In other studies, Tasmania's Liberal Party set out its agenda in the 2014 policy document on Unlocking the Potential in their Parks, which proposed that encouraging development can be done through calling for expressions of interest from private investors and tourism operators to propose their ideas for developing

sensible, low-impact eco-tourism experiences and associated infrastructure (Tasmanian Liberal Party, 2014).

Furthermore, as healthcare issues are ignored phenomena in tourism research, the study conducted by Pandey (1994) demonstrates that tourists are not satisfied with the availability of information centers and signposts. There are some trekkers who have disappeared in the park and who have never been found. Health issues among tourists in the Sagarmatha National Park are one of the main concerns currently being addressed by several non-governmental organizations such as the Kathmandu Environmental and Educational Project, Himalayan Rescue Association, and the Himalayan Trust. Pandey (1994) states that almost half of all tourists (46.7%) report that they had some health problems such as diarrhea, headache, altitude sickness, and respiratory infections.

The findings from related research reinforce this interpretation, as Corazon et al. (2019) identify various environmental and infrastructural factors such as travel distance, slope, pavement type, and weather conditions as potential barriers for people with access needs when visiting national parks. They also highlight that safety-related aspects of walkability and "wheelability", combined with access to information, education, accommodations, and suitable parking, are perceived as essential requirements for enjoying outdoor spaces. When these elements are not adequately addressed, they produce exclusionary environments that limit the mobility and autonomy of visitors with disabilities.

In relation to these findings, Crawford et al. (2008) reveal that, in protected natural areas, all actions designed to improve accessibility should ensure people with disabilities (PwD) are able to fully participate in outdoor activities as defined by the International Classification of Functioning, Disability, and Health. In other studies, different scholars like (Zhang et al., 2017) and (Groulx et al., 2022) on nature-based recreation have indirectly or directly based their studies on the benefits that humans obtain from ecosystem functions, such as improvements in physical, mental, and social health, especially when they can actively participate in activities that involve enjoying green spaces.

However, distance restrictions away from the attractions, especially along rivers in the park, have been challenging for TwANs. Based on these study findings, inclusive tourism policy at the park level could address this challenge for improved tourism services with a focus on TwANs. Therefore, due to the growing importance and the complexity of tourism in those areas, national policies must ensure nature-based tourism that is equitable for all people, taking into consideration its conservation for future generations through good governance (Chikuta et al., 2021; Aguilar-Carrasco et al., 2022).

From other studies, the findings suggest that although certain tourist facilities within the park demonstrate consideration for tourists with access needs, inclusive tourism policies could serve as effective instruments for enhancing public awareness and promoting accessibility across tourism operations. Consistent with these findings, UNWTO (2020) reports that destinations such as Portugal have increasingly prioritized accessible tourism. During the International Tourism Fair 2020 in Madrid, the World Tourism Organization and the ONCE Foundation recognized Portugal as one of the best Accessible Tourism Destinations for its commitment to developing and implementing tourism products and services that are accessible to all (UNWTO, 2020).

Lastly, the findings unveil that greater effort is needed to implement inclusive tourism policies in Tanzania. Although Germany, Slovakia, Hungary, and the Czech Republic have advanced inclusive tourism, challenges persist in policy implementation, funding, attitudinal barriers, and political commitment (Islambekova, 2021). However, challenges may be greater in developing destinations, where inclusive tourism receives limited policy attention and operational support (Kotlyarova et al., 2020). From the Social Model of Disability, such challenges reflect structural barriers within policies, infrastructure, information systems, and services rather than individual limitations. The applied model

emphasizes removing physical, informational, and attitudinal barriers (Darcy & Buhalis, 2011; Duignan et al., 2023), thereby strengthening equitable participation meaningfully in SENAPA. Therefore, moving forward, there is a call for developing clear, practical standards for evaluating tourism governance to inform inclusive policy making for sustainable tourism operations (Eagles, 2009; Islam et al., 2018).

6. Conclusions and Recommendations

During the study, it was noted that tourism infrastructure, staff training, legal compliance, and public awareness of TwANs are important aspects to be spelt out in inclusive tourism policies. This is because the present study exposed deficiencies in the practice of inclusive tourism policies. However, it is concluded that the formulation of inclusive tourism policies is important at all levels of tourism destinations, particularly in the provision of tourist facilities in protected landscapes towards sustainable tourism for all people, regardless of any form of disability.

Therefore, the study recommends that park authorities integrate universal accessibility into infrastructure, visitor facilities, safety systems, and park planning. Tour operators should provide accessible itineraries, transportation, accurate accessibility information, and trained guides. Accommodation providers should improve accessible facilities, emergency systems, and staff competence. Regulatory agencies should strengthen accessibility standards, monitoring, licensing, and compliance mechanisms. Disability organizations should participate in policy formulation, accessibility audits, awareness, and monitoring. Collectively, these stakeholders should establish participatory mechanisms involving TwANs to ensure inclusive tourism policies are effectively implemented, monitored, and continuously improved. So far, standards should address the complexities of present tourism policies in protected-area landscapes, ensuring inclusivity, transparency, and effective mechanisms to sustainably manage tourism for the well-being of TwANs.

Consistent with the recommendations, UNWTO (2016a, 2016b) highlights that accessible tourism can enhance destination quality and competitiveness, making accessibility essential to sustainable tourism. As directed by the Social Model of Disability, the present study views exclusion as arising from barriers within tourism policies, facilities, services, and environments rather than from individual impairments (Oliver, 2018; Darcy & Buhalis, 2011). Findings of limited accessible products, recreational activities, and facilities for TwANs in SENAPA therefore reflect structural barriers associated with inadequate inclusive policies. Addressing these barriers through inclusive tourism policy implementation is essential for the promotion of sustainable tourism and enabling the equitable participation of TwANs.

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