



# Report of the Inclusive Africa Conference 2024

**Breaking Barriers: Advancing Digital Accessibility for a Disability-  
Inclusive Future in Africa**

**Radisson Blu Hotel, Nairobi, Kenya  
In-person event + Virtual  
May 14th – 16th, 2024**

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## Abbreviations and Acronyms

|      |                                          |
|------|------------------------------------------|
| ADHD | Attention-Deficit/Hyperactivity disorder |
| AI   | Artificial Intelligence                  |
| AT   | Assistive Technology                     |
| GBV  | Gender-Based Violence                    |
| MOH  | Ministry of Health                       |
| PWD  | Persons with Disability                  |
| UHC  | Universal Health Coverage                |

## Background

As per [The World Bank](#), One billion people, or 15% of the world's population, experience some form of disability. Africa has a population of about [1.4 billion](#). This equates to around 220 million Africans with disabilities. Background

The failure to provide accessible products and services in education, employment, financial services and other sectors is a global issue. During the COVID-19 pandemic, people were asked to stay home and go online to access vital public health information, work-from-home, and [remote education](#). This magnified the inequalities and alienation that prevent [inclusion](#) and protection of PWDs. For many of the estimated 300 million Persons with Disabilities (PWDs) in Africa, digital services and products are just not usable. They were never designed with their diverse needs in mind. Today, more than any other time, digital accessibility urgently needs to be addressed, which is why inABLE organizes the Annual Inclusive Africa Conference in the first place.

The [UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with disabilities](#) addresses accessibility in its resolution adopted by the [General Assembly in 1993](#) by recognizing “the importance of accessibility to the physical, social, economic and cultural environment, to health and education and to information and communication, in enabling persons with disabilities to fully enjoy all human rights and fundamental freedoms.”

Goal 10 of the [Sustainable Development Goals \(SDGs\)](#) aims to ensure equal opportunity and reduced inequalities for all by 2030, to empower and promote the social, economic and political inclusion of all, irrespective of age, sex, disability, race, ethnicity, origin, religion or economic or other status.

## About the 2024 Inclusive Africa Conference

The 2024 was in-person event that brought together over 300 participants with a livestream virtual-event of approximately 2,000 people globally taking place concurrently. inABLE partnered with 20 leading disability organizations in Africa to host live watch parties with about 50 - 100 participants. African countries present at the conference included Burundi, Central African Republic, Ethiopia, Gambia, Ghana, Malawi, Nigeria, Rwanda, South Africa, Tanzania, Togo, Uganda and Zambia. The conference was accessible through live captions, sign language and translation in English and French.

## Conference Participants

- In-person 300 participants / Online 2,000+
- Governments (Ministries of ICT & Innovations, Education, and Labour etc.)
- Policy makers and ICT policy experts
- Technology companies
- Telecommunication companies
- Financial Services companies/ Banks/ Fintechs
- Diversity and inclusion/ corporate social responsibility professional
- Technology users with disabilities

- Content creators, web designers and developers
- Disability advisers and officers in education, government and business
- Employment, Human Resources (HR) experts and practitioners

## Conference Approach

The Inclusive Africa Conference took the following approaches: panel discussions, fireside chats, breakout discussions, lightning talk discussions and high-level keynote addresses.

The focus of the conference was around the following key topics:

- Inclusive policies and Standards
- Mobile Assistive Technology
- Inclusive Financial Services
- Inclusive Mobile solutions
- Inclusive Design
- Access to Entertainment
- Accessibility Awareness/ Etiquette
- Inclusive education
- Inclusive employment
- The Future of Accessible Tourism
- Youth with disabilities

## Conference Objectives

1. **Ensure that African youth with disabilities** are at the centre of digital **accessibility conversations**. **By provide a forum for disability rights and support groups** across Africa to bring PWDs to the centre of inclusive design and digital accessibility.
2. **Share regional and global best practices in implementing accessibility standards and policies** and influence delegates to become accessibility ambassadors and lead the development of: Accessible ICT policies, solutions, and products anchored under the universal/inclusive design guidelines so that PWDs can participate in and benefit from the digital economy.
3. **Focus attention** on the best way forward for implementing **accessibility of digital products and services** in Africa and **increase public awareness** for the needs and rights of PWDs to access digital information.
4. **Highlight assistive technology innovations in Africa** and create a platform to share knowledge and expertise on product design and go to market, mentorship and funding opportunities. Award the annual Inclusive Africa Innovations winner.
5. Demonstrate inclusive events' "**best-practices**", including attendees with lived experience, interpreters, and captioners.

**Conference MC's: Mureithi Anthony (MC on Wheels) & Teddy Otieno**

## Faces of Africa

### Introduction:

In this session, dubbed "Faces of Africa," a few individuals with disabilities spoke about themselves and how they have overcome challenges and succeeded in their various areas of calling. This session showcased their abilities, reinforcing that disability is not inability. Below are notable quotes by some of the individuals<sup>1</sup>.

### Notable Quotes

- *"Whatever steps you take make a difference; continue breaking barriers."*  
Wangui Nje - Person with Vitiligo
- *"We can do what anybody else can do – we just need to be accommodated and seen as normal."* Perpetual Senkoro - Person with Albinism
- *"Put away the cane and get a diagnosis for your child."* Linda Njoki Gakuru – Person with ADHD and Dyslexia (neurodiversity)
- *"When designing products for persons with disability, walk the journey with them through every stage."* Emmanuel Makokha – Person with stammering
- *"People with disabilities are able." A key challenge faced is the mindset of communities that hinders us in inclusion. These challenges need to be removed by continued engagement – nothing for us without us."* Jean-Paul Sekeram – Person Upper limb deficiency.
- *"Lack of interpreters is a huge challenge for the deaf." The deaf and the hearing are all equal; there is a need for the deaf and hearing to have an equal platform."* Abdi Fata – Deaf person.
- DJ Wiwa – Person with Cerebral Palsy
  - *"Beauty in disability"*
  - *"There is more to disability than what people see"; we can be who and what we want to be if you just give us support."*
  - *"I am brave and strong despite my disability, which is Cerebral Palsy; I'm not easily shaken and get what I want."*
  - *"My challenge is that I find it hard to get international gigs."*

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<sup>1</sup> See Appendix 1

## 1.0 Opening Remarks

### 1.1 By Irene Mbari-Kirika, OGW, Executive Director, inABLE

In her remarks, Ms. Mbari-Kirika stated that inABLE has, over the years, grown to influence Policy and high-level decision-making across the continent. She mentioned that the focus of the *Inclusive Africa Conference 2024* was to discuss inclusion for opportunities that can only be made available through technology. inABLE, she said, looks for a future where inclusion would be considered a key marker of great companies and their bottom-line profits.

Reflecting on the conference, she mentioned that the word "seamless" came to mind, illustrating how digital devices are easily connected to the internet. She said there is a need to aspire to a future where disability inclusion would be just as seamless, where digital accessibility would be part of essential service delivery without special considerations.

Ms. Mbari-Kirika highlighted inABLE's journey since 2008 with the mission to bridge the access gap for blind and low-vision students. She noted their achievements in establishing assistive technology in schools for the blind, enrolling over 14,000 visually impaired students, and empowering them with digital skills. She outlined the following as some of inABLE's key achievements over the years:

- Established assistive technology in schools for the blind and enrolled more than 14,000 students who are blind and low-vision, including their teachers.
- Delivered more than 43,000 hours of assistive technology skills training.
- Developed an accessible computer assistive technology curriculum. In 2024, inABLE launched an assistive technology computer training program for 20 law school students with visual impairments from various universities across Kenya, each receiving a laptop to enhance their studies. inABLE is planning to expand this initiative to reach more students in the future, especially in higher education.
- inABLE has been instrumental in advocating for policy change related to inclusive education, employment, and digital accessibility. In 2023, inABLE launched Kenya's digital accessibility standard, the only African country with such a standard.

*"If the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals are to be achieved, socioeconomic development must be rights-based and disability inclusive."*

Irene Mbari-Kirika

Ms. Mbari-Kirika highlighted the significance of investing in young people with disabilities for disability inclusion across Africa. She stressed that socioeconomic development must be rights-based and disability-inclusive if the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals are to be achieved. She said that a critical component of disability inclusion across Africa is investing in young people with disabilities; by doing so, the future of disability inclusion in Africa will be unlocked. Technological advancements like artificial intelligence can be powerful tools for empowerment and equality when used for social good. In this regard, she referred to the Assistive Technology Village, which will be showcasing unique AT innovations from across Africa during the conference. Some of the innovations, she said, are in the final steps of approval for the European Union market. In this regard, she emphasized that Africa can pioneer global quality innovations that will be exported to the rest of the world.

She said the conference could ignite continental-wide conversations about mainstream inclusion. It can help rally together multiple stakeholders, African governments, industry leaders, and innovators to drive greater inclusion. Many physical and digital solutions must be accelerated so that Africa does not lag behind.

She said many special schools across Africa do not even have basic computers, a prerequisite for students with disabilities to excel academically and professionally. In this regard, inABLE is eager to collaborate with like-minded organizations to grow the reach and coverage of its solutions.

She listed the following as the objectives of the *Inclusive Africa Conference 2024*:

- Develop the Africa Digital Accessibility Standard so that governments, private sector companies, education institutions, and others know how to develop inclusive digital products.
- Unlock the Africa AT ecosystem and assist African countries and innovators in developing policies and funding structures that will help innovation thrive in Africa.
- Empower youth with disabilities with the correct information, tools, and opportunities to become digital accessibility champions across the continent.
- Make Inclusive Africa Conference the melting pot for disability and digital inclusion across the continent.

*"For people with disabilities, my passion is driven by the fundamental principle that we cannot be a developed continent when 15% of our 1.4 billion African population is at risk of being left behind."*

Irene Mbari-Kirika

In conclusion, Ms. Mbari-Kirika expressed gratitude to persons with disabilities, organizations, and partners for supporting inABLE over the years. She also thanked inABLE's Board of Directors and staff for their continued dedication.

#### YouTube Video

Ms Irene Mbari-Kirika began by playing a YouTube Video of Mr Odumbe, a stammerer and champion for inclusion. In the Video, Mr Odumbe places a call to the Customer Care of a leading phone company and shares his struggle with using mobile credit due to his stammering, which makes it very expensive. He proposes that the company provide a mobile credit package for stammerers. In closing, Ms Mbari-Kirika expressed the need for policies to develop solutions that enable better digital accessibility for people with disabilities.

## **1.2 By Hon. Justice Dr. K.I. Laibuta, Judge of the Court of Appeal & Chair of the Board of Directors, inABLE**

In his address, Hon. Justice Dr. K.I. Laibuta began by providing a detailed description of himself to ensure that all attendees could envision him, emphasizing his height, complexion, and attire despite being visually impaired. He highlighted his professional background as a judge of appeal, mentioning his past roles in various capacities within the legal field, including teaching law for over three decades and serving in the Commission for the Implementation of the Constitution. He underscored that his disabilities did not hinder his accomplishments but emphasized the importance of opportunities, support, and reasonable accommodation.

Dr. Laibuta acknowledged Dr. Samuel Kabue as a trailblazer for individuals with visual disabilities, emphasizing that disability affects everyone, directly or indirectly, hence the need to have it as an agenda all can buy into. He articulated the purpose of the *Inclusive Africa Conference 2024* as commemorating achievements and advocating for the rights of persons with disabilities. He stressed the need for collective action to address challenges in accessibility and inclusion, extending beyond Kenya to encompass the broader African continent and collaborating with other global regions such as Europe and America.

He emphasized the need to i) invest in early childhood and higher education for individuals with disabilities that will ensure them a seamless transition into employment, ii) prioritize accessibility in all aspects of life, particularly in the digital realm, and iii) commit to mobilize resources for accessibility, highlighting the importance of assistive technology (AT) and reasonable accommodation in the workplace.

Dr. Laibuta debunked the notion that disability is inherently expensive, emphasizing that the actual expense lies in societal attitudes and missed opportunities for inclusion. He challenged employers to prioritize reasonable accommodation and utilize tax rebates to support employees with disabilities. He commended the role played by inABLE over the years in establishing computer labs for learners with visual disability in Kenya, making these institutions almost paperless today. He acknowledged the contributions of corporate partners like Apple, Google, Microsoft, and Uber in supporting initiatives for persons with disabilities. He specifically cited i) the Google Chromebook project has transformed lives in some of Kenya's special schools today, ii) Microsoft for putting up a computer lab at its inclusive school in Meru, and iii) the MasterCard Foundation, Google, Uber, and several other organizations that have been supported *the Inclusive Africa Conferences* over the years. He called for continued collaboration and financial support to sustain and expand these efforts.

In closing, Dr. Laibuta expressed hope for fruitful exchanges during the *Inclusive Africa Conference 2024*, urging attendees to network and collaborate to help advance the inclusive development agenda globally. He reiterated the goal of full inclusion in all aspects of life, including the workplace.

## 2.0 Keynote Speech

**By Philip Thigo, MBS - Special Envoy on Technology, Executive Office of the President, Kenya**

Philip Thigo emphasized the importance of addressing critical issues surrounding digital inclusivity. He highlighted the need for increased representation in developing AI tools to mitigate biases. Additionally, he stresses the importance of tackling systemic problems, such as procurement failures, to ensure inclusivity. Thiago also stressed the need for practical solutions, including addressing affordability, insurance coverage, and industry adaptation.

Furthermore, he underscored the significance of investing in technical support and maintenance skills to support inclusive digital development. He emphasized the importance of prioritizing data and context in research and development, urging inclusive research practices that encompass considerations for personal disability.

Moreover, Mr Thigo advocated for inclusive design principles from the outset and emphasized the importance of breaking down silos and fostering collaboration across different sectors and disciplines. He called for advocacy efforts to promote the involvement of marginalized groups in technology development and infrastructure investment.

Mr. Thigo also highlighted the importance of exploring innovative financing mechanisms to support technological advancements and developing scalable reskilling and upskilling programs to adapt to rapidly changing technological landscapes. He stressed prioritizing accessibility in online platforms and engaging in global negotiations and advocacy efforts to promote inclusive digital futures.

Additionally, he encouraged private sector involvement and investment in inclusive digital initiatives and emphasized the need for strengthening enforcement mechanisms for disability rights in digital contexts. He called for citizen training on the importance of resource allocation for inclusive digital development and advocated for the participation of diverse groups in innovation ecosystems.

Finally, Mr Thigo emphasized enhancing collaboration beyond annual events to promote inclusivity in digital development efforts continuously.

### 3.0 inABLE and Google: Advancing Accessibility for Kenyan Students with Disabilities

**Moderator:** Ms. Sara Basson, Accessibility Evangelist, Google, USA

**Panelists:**

1. **Mr. Anthony Ndirangu**, Program Manager, inABLE, Kenya
2. **Ms. Valarie Olesia**, Instructor, Thika School for the Blind, Kenya
3. **Ms. Christine Kayathi**, Teacher, Thika School for the Blind, Kenya
4. **Ms. Elizabeth Ngare**, Head Teacher, Likoni School for the Blind, Kenya

Discussions focused on the program that inABLE and Google are doing together to advance accessibility for Kenyan students with disabilities. Google was inspired by inABLE in their work with the blind in Kenya and, in 2023, was delighted to be able to provide several hundred Chromebook computers for children in special schools<sup>2</sup>. (A short video summarized the stories of the students using these computers over the previous year.)

The panelists responded to various questions directed to them by the Moderator. They were teachers in the schools of the blind who are leading the initiative in advancing accessibility for Kenyan students with disabilities using Chromebooks provided by Google.

*" I am a graduate of Kenyatta University, and I can tell you for sure it was not easy without inABLE having to help me through assistive technology for me to be able to perform very well in my academics. So it has been very overwhelming to see people like me also going through the same ...."*

Valarie Olesia, Instructor, Thika School for the Blind, Kenya

Below are the key outcomes of the discussions:

1. *On the program's biggest wins and key challenges experienced:*

| Program Wins                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                     | Program Challenges                                                                                                                                                                                                     |
|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Learners have gained independence in computing. They can independently interact with computers.</li> <li>• Learners and their teachers can now use ICT tools in their classwork.</li> <li>• Learners have gained employable skills.</li> <li>• At the onset of the program, most trainers were sighted. Currently, 65.5% of the trainers are persons with visual impairment.</li> </ul> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Lack of sufficient accessible learning e-materials – accessible content in the correct format.</li> <li>• Sustainability of the hardware, software, and workforce.</li> </ul> |

2. *On changes seen across teachers at Thika School for the Blind as a result of the program:*

<sup>2</sup> A short YouTube video was shown that summarizes the stories of the students who have been using the chrome computers over the last one year - <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=2yeNbryW8w8>

- Teachers are now able to independently schedule shifts in the learning classroom using Chromebooks. They can also easily prepare for their lessons electronically rather than using Brail.
- Obtaining opportunities to learn new things, relearn, and unlearn others.
- Using the Chromebooks (Google Classroom) to bring the content to the learners in the classroom.
- With independence in using technology, they can now communicate in various ways, from personal to corporate conversations; they can communicate independently.

3. *On changes in learners' enthusiasm to learn in the digital world as a result of the program:*

Learners are now able to:

- Check on the pronunciation of English words using technology. This has helped change/improve their pronunciation of words.
- Enthusiastically carry out exercises independently using the Chromebooks.

*"We want to ensure that kids with disabilities across Kenya and Africa will have access to technologies that improve their learning outcomes and digital skills."*

Ms. Sara Basson, Accessibility Evangelist, Google, USA

Call to Action

- To get these efforts to scale across multiple disability types and multiple African countries
- Standardize the production of e-materials.

## 4.0 Legislation & Standards: Paving the Way for Inclusive Innovation

**Moderator:** Hon. Justice Dr. K.I. Laibuta, Judge of the Court of Appeal & Chair of the Board of Directors, inABLE

**Panelists:**

1. **Hon. Sen. Crystal Asige**, The National Senate, Kenya
2. **Mr Shuaib Chalklen**, Executive Director, Africa Disability Forum, South Africa
3. **Mr Abdel Monem**, Chairman, NAID, Egypt
4. **Mr Cristopher Patnoe**, Head of Accessibility and Disability Inclusion, EMEA@ Google

The overall focus of the session was on how legislation and standards can develop a framework that paves the way for inclusive innovation around assistive technology (AT). The panelists responded to various questions directed to them by the Moderator. Below are the highlights of the discussions:

1. **On the importance of standards:**

Over one billion people worldwide require AT, hence the need for standards and regulations. Standards are needed to ensure the functionality and safety of the product or device, reliability and robustness, and compatibility and interoperability of the product. Also, to be taken cognizance of are the medical aspects of the AT devices as some of them can have medical implications. In this regard, medical regulations will need to be considered. Since technological advancements are moving quickly, standards will also need to be set in an agile fashion. Standards, therefore, ensure that innovation does not take place just for the sake of it. When building standards, it is paramount to understand the balance of consistency and identify areas where changes must be made to the existing standards because it is essential for the user or the terrain for where it will be used, for example, a wheelchair. It is paramount to understand the users' needs and the advantages of the specifications and make the changes thoughtfully.

2. **On what inclusive innovation means and entails:**

The idea of nothing about us without us is about co-designing, co-developing, partnering with the community so one can create something that meets their needs, collaborating over time to develop solutions that will continue to meet their needs as their expectations adapt and as technology evolves.

3. **On the role that legislation plays in ensuring that innovations are protected**

Legislation is essential, but it's only half the equation. There's also legislation and implementation, which requires the government and the Executive to follow through.

4. On the extent to which the African continent has achieved the ideals of inclusive innovation and challenges

Africa is striving towards this ideal, albeit success is unequal, with advances being made in Rwanda, Kenya, Uganda, and South Africa. A pivotal hindrance to achieving this ideal is a lack of legislation and very little pressure by civil society on governments to ensure inclusivity and raise awareness around the rights of people with disabilities. There is also less pressure on the private sector and society in general to advance the rights of people with disabilities and innovations in technology (Case of South Africa).

5. The Persons with Disability Bills that Hon. Sen. Crystal Asige has pushed through the Kenya Senate:

- Persons with Disabilities Bill<sup>3</sup>
- Kenyan Sign Language Bill
- Learners with Disabilities Bill
- The Startup Bill

6. About the Persons with Disabilities Bill

The KEBS ICT Standards have been embedded into this Bill. It mandates any company, organization, or institution to have their ICT products and services, whether web-based, non-web-based, or hybrid, to include and embed the ICT standards within for inclusivity.

Session Recommendations

- More inclusion champions should be included in the non-disabled space. There should be voices loud enough in different spaces of influence to continue talking about the inclusion journey and the importance of having a universally designed Kenya or Africa.
- More companies must include or be more inclusive on the board level and above. Inclusivity will then trickle down to the rest of the organization, becoming a standard and part of the organization's culture.
- For the media to change the narrative around disability. Their stories should not only be about inspiration but also portraying people with disabilities as having an equal chance in life once the barriers that hinder their progress are removed.
- For inclusivity to be practical, users need to have these tools at an affordable price. In this regard, the whole research and development system (research entities) must be fully supported, including the entrepreneurial system.
- When many companies compete and provide free technologies to support the community with different kinds of disabilities, there must be a balance between openness and innovation. This approach will empower startups to be more viable.

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<sup>3</sup> The KEBS ICT Standards have been embedded in this Bill.

## 5.0 Breakout Sessions

### 5.1 Breakout 1: Early-Stage Funding & Venture Capital Financing for Assistive Technology Innovations

Moderator: **Mr. Bernard Chiira**, Executive Director, Assistive Technologies for Disability (AT4D), Kenya

Panelists:

1. **Mr. Klaus Hockner**, Managing Director, HGBS/Access Austria
2. **Mr. Steve Sewe**, Co-Founder, Jaza Rift Ventures, Kenya
3. **Mr. Mohamed Dhaouafi**, Cure Bionics, Tunisia

Introduction and Overview:

The session explored the potential for Assistive Technology (AT) products to find market success and attract investment. Key questions included the size of the disability market, the challenges in making AT products viable and scalable, and whether people are willing to pay for these products.

Key Insights and Findings:

- *Market Size:* Klaus highlighted the vast potential of the disability market, with an estimated value of \$8 trillion, but questioned the market viability and scalability of AT solutions.
- *Investment Challenges:* Klaus emphasized that investment is not just money but also trust and time, while Steve pointed out the difficulty in assessing market size and attractiveness without regulatory approvals.
- *Customer Demand:* Audience responses indicated a preference for free AT products, creating challenges for developers to market affordable solutions.
- *Market Fragmentation:* The fragmented nature of the market and the mindset of getting things for free were identified as significant barriers.
- *Co-Design and Customization:* Mohammed and Bernard discussed the importance of co-designing products with PWD and offering tailored upgrades to increase willingness to pay.

Actionable Recommendations:

- *Market Research:* Conduct thorough market research to understand customer needs and ensure products are tested and desired by the market (Klaus). Also, willingness to return to the drawing board when the consumer doesn't like the product.
- *Regulatory Approvals:* Obtain local regulatory approvals to assess market potential and attract investors (Steve). This will attract business models such as businesses to firms and donors to the government.

- *Product Categorization:* Develop precise categorizations for AT products to streamline regulation and market entry (Steve).
- *Customer Engagement:* Engage with PWD to co-design products, ensuring they meet user needs and are seen as valuable investments (Mohammed, Bernard).
- *Investment Strategies:* Encourage collaboration among investors, regulatory bodies, and entrepreneurs to create an innovation space for AT (Mohammed, Klaus) and a common ground for investors, entrepreneurs, and innovators to meet.
- *Manufacturing backup:* Ensure that, as an innovator, you have a backup of qualified suppliers who can make quality products. This will ensure that if one supplier is unavailable, the product is still of the same quality.

### Success Stories and Case Studies:

- *Prosthetic Arms Market:* Mohammed's experience selling prosthetic arms demonstrated that tailored, co-designed products have a better chance of being purchased, even if they compete with free alternatives.
- *Sensor Development:* Mohammed shared the approach of developing smaller products like sensors and muscle detectors as a step towards market entry, highlighting the importance of incremental innovation.

*"The ability to access the potential market is what investors look at. Many AT solutions don't know the category of the device or how to find potential investors."*

Steve Sewe

### Areas for Further Exploration:

- *Investment Landscape:* AT's investment landscape needs further exploration, focusing on how to attract more investors and ensure sustainability.
- *Funding Models:* Investigate diverse funding models, including grants, donor-based business models, and traditional investment avenues.
- *Regulatory Collaboration:* Study the impact of regulatory frameworks on AT market success and how different regions can harmonize standards.

### Next Steps:

- *Collaborative Forums:* Attend conferences and engage in global networks to foster collaboration and innovation in the AT space (Klaus).
- *Innovation Hubs:* Establish digital innovation hubs that bring together investors, regulatory bodies, and entrepreneurs (Klaus).
- *Sustainable Funding:* Explore funding sources such as grants and institutional investors to reduce risk and improve success rates for AT startups (Steve).

### Participants' Feedback:

- Participants recognized the complexity of the AT market and the importance of customer-centric design and affordability. They appreciated the insights on funding and the need for collaboration among stakeholders.

## **5.2 Breakout 2: Empowering Women with Disability Through Sexual Reproductive Health**

**Moderator: Ms. Lizzie Kiama**, Managing Trustee, This Ability

**Panelists:**

1. **Dr. Charlotte Pahe**, Reproductive Health, PS Kenya
2. **Ms. Winfred Wawira (DJ. Wiwa)**, Founder, Wiwa Entertainment, Kenya
3. **Ms. Stephanie Ashley**, Health Project Coordinator, The Hunger Project, Ghana
4. **Mr. Mildred Omino**, Disability Liaison Officer, University of Nairobi
5. **Prof. Tammary Esho**, Deputy Vice Chancellor, AMREF University, Kenya

### **Introduction and Overview**

This session aimed to create an understanding of the importance of SRHR for women and girls with disabilities and strategies to improve accessibility.

### **Key Insights and Findings**

Why is sexual reproductive health for women with disability significant?

- Sexual Reproductive Health Rights (SRHR) is essential to every woman, especially to women with disabilities who have been ignored or neglected by society. There is minimal investment in SRHR of women with disabilities. Women with disabilities struggle with access, equity, dignity, and autonomy in the healthcare systems.
- Sexual and Reproductive Health Rights are essential at both the individual and community levels. There is an ongoing issue and struggle in Policy regarding the consideration of sexual reproductive rights as health issues. Women with disabilities have not yet started conversations on their Sexual and Reproductive Health Rights (SRHR).
- The connection between culture and sexual and reproductive health and rights (SRHR) makes it challenging to discuss reproductive health, and children take too long to understand their bodies. Many cultures do not openly address sexual reproductive health, creating a disconnect when advocating for their rights.
- Funding for sexual and reproductive health is often seen as a matter of diversity rather than strictly a health issue.
- There is a disconnect in how healthcare workers perceive the Sexual Reproductive health of women and girls with disabilities. Medical professionals often lack training and resources for addressing the reproductive health needs of women with disabilities. This means that women with disabilities may not receive adequate information about reproductive health and contraceptives and may struggle to understand medical terminology during healthcare visits.

- Statistics show that women with disabilities are more prone to Gender-Based Violence.
- Stakeholders should allocate funds for women with disabilities and train healthcare professionals.
- The healthcare facilities are not easily accessible for women with disabilities, as they lack ramps and beds suitable for persons with disabilities. Additionally, healthcare practitioners cannot often take care of women living with disabilities.
- Integration of disabilities into service delivery and policy levels is needed to enable the Ministry of Health to support the SRHR policy.
- Sexual reproductive health is crucial because existing menstrual products are not suitable for women with disabilities, making it challenging for them to manage their menstrual health since they have to rely on third-party assistance.
- Data is crucial for informing programs, policies, and practices for women with disabilities.
- At the community level, women and girls require education about their sexual and reproductive health rights.

*"Nothing about us without us." Everything must be done in collaboration with women with disabilities.*

*Lizzie Kiama*

### Actionable Recommendations

What must we change for Sexual Reproductive and Health Rights (SRHR) to be inclusive, dignified, and equitable?

- Design innovative menstrual health products to meet the needs of women with disabilities.
- Destigmatize people with disability at community and healthcare levels
- Operationalize good policies that are in place that offer to protect SRHR of women with disabilities.
- Fit-for-purpose medical practitioners should be trained at medical schools to cater to people with disabilities.
- Empower individuals with disabilities to access sexual and reproductive health and rights (SHRH) services at health facilities and advocate for the government to construct health facilities that are accessible to people with disabilities. It also provides training for health practitioners on effectively supporting women with disabilities.
- Mainstream and include women with disabilities in decision-making from the household to the international level. Center women with disabilities in policy-making and interventions.
- There is a need for data and documentation at healthcare facilities for women with disabilities to help the government and policymakers make informed decisions.
- Financing and stakeholder collaboration are needed to address the sexual and reproductive health of women with disabilities.

- Allow women with disabilities to provide consent for issues related to their sexual and reproductive health, such as contraceptives and maternal healthcare.
- Ensure that women with disabilities are treated with dignity when providing sexual and reproductive health services.

Feedback from participants

- How do we communicate and sensitize children on the issue of discrimination of persons with disability?
- Digital Inclusivity in terms of data on femicide and Sexual abuse of women with disabilities. Where can we get this data?

### 5.3 **Breakout 3: Paper Presentations**

#### 5.3.1 **Paper 2: Empowering Adolescent Girls with Disabilities: A Girl-Centered Approach to Menstrual Health and Hygiene Management through Mobile Technology. A Case Study of Oky App, Kenya**

*Presenter: Ms. Kate Ogutu, Kenya*

##### Challenge:

- Menstrual health challenges and barriers, especially for girls with disability

##### Intervention:

- Oky period tracker
- Has a human-centered design
- Avatar representative
- Colorful background
- Translate from Kiswahili to English and vice versa
- User-tested to enhance inclusivity

##### Outcomes:

- Increased utilization of mobile technology
- Enhances inclusivity
- Confidence building

#### 5.3.2 **Paper 3: Optimizing Home-Based Education: A Comprehensive Investigation into the Efficacy of Play-Based Approaches for Enhancing Learning among Autistic Children**

*Presenter: Mr. Hussein Hussein, Tanzania*

##### Challenge:

- Autism spectrum affects people in terms of social interaction, communication, and behavioral tendencies.

##### Intervention:

- The play-based approach is effective, interactive, and inclusive, increasing communication engagement.

##### Methodology:

- Three Target groups with different timing to mitigate time correlation with play intervention
- Structured play groups tailored to individual needs
- Visual support
- Social stories
- Peer-mediated intervention

- Use of natural environment

Outcomes:

- Without a clear structure, there are increased stressful episodes
- Volume of work done increases with the intervention
- Changes and improvements to the autistic children with the intervention

Recommendations:

- Support teachers to implement play-based approaches.
- Teach using low-cost materials
- Disseminate knowledge in workshops

## 5.4 **Breakout 4: Mental Health, Technology, and Inclusive Opportunities** **(including Live watch parties)**

**Moderator:** Mr Kevin Gachee, Psychologist, Mental Health Haven, Kenya

### **Panelists:**

1. **Ms. Mukami Munyoki**, Mental Health Advocate, Mental 360, Kenya
2. **Ms. Sara Theuri**, Psychological counselor, KISE, Kenya
3. **Mr. Africa Kanyi**, Kenya

### **Introduction and Overview:**

Kevin initiated the session by defining mental health and differentiating it from mental illness. Mental health pertains to overall psychological and emotional well-being, while mental illness involves conditions causing significant distress in daily life. The session aimed to explore innovative solutions, policies, and the use of technology to improve mental health services, especially for persons with disabilities (PWD) in Africa.

### **Key Insights and Findings:**

- **Policy Gaps:** Dennis from South Sudan, who was joining virtually, emphasized the absence of a mental health act in his country and the necessity of multisectoral approaches to advancing comprehensive mental health policies.
- **Digital Solutions:** Sylvester from Zambia joined virtually, highlighting the need for a dedicated body to address mental health and incorporate digital solutions.
- **Advocacy and Awareness:** Munyoki of Mental 360 underscored the importance of conversations in saving lives and advocating for mental health.
- **Technology Access:** Mukami discussed the limited access to mental health services and proposed teletherapy and virtual training as efficient and affordable solutions.
- **Challenges for PWD:** Sara identified affordability, accessibility, and usability of digital solutions as significant barriers for PWD accessing mental health services.

*"Involving PWD in the innovation and development process of mental health technologies ensures that they are targeted, inclusive, and dignified."*

*Mukami Munyoki*

### **Actionable Recommendations:**

- **Teletherapy:** Implement virtual therapy sessions to offer timely and comfortable mental health services (Mukami).
- **Webinars:** Conduct mental health training through webinars to discuss pertinent issues globally (Mukami).
- **Affordable and Accessible Devices:** Develop affordable, user-friendly devices tailored for PWD to facilitate independent access to teletherapy and ensure confidentiality (Sara).

- *Inclusive Apps:* Create apps with features for sign language and AI guidance to help PWD navigate mental health technologies without needing a third party (Sara).
- *Collaboration:* Encourage collaboration among mental health professionals, tech experts, and PWD organizations to co-create inclusive solutions (Mukami).

#### Success Stories and Case Studies:

- *Mental 360 Initiative:* Munyoki's advocacy through Mental 360, which uses the tagline "conversations save lives," exemplifies the impact of community-driven mental health initiatives.
- *Teletherapy Implementation:* Mukami's recommendation of teletherapy as a practical solution to increase access to mental health services demonstrates a successful approach to overcoming physical barriers. A tested tool that was used regularly during and after Covid-19.

#### Areas for Further Exploration:

- *Policy Development:* Further explore comprehensive policy frameworks for mental health in African countries.
- *Digital Inclusion:* Investigate more deeply into making digital mental health solutions accessible and inclusive for all disabilities.
- *Community-Based Approaches:* Expand research on community-driven methods to reduce stigma and improve mental health support for PWD.

#### Next Steps:

- *Inclusive Forums:* Organize more forums like the Inclusive Africa Conference to foster stakeholder collaboration (Kevin).
- *Baseline Surveys:* Conduct baseline surveys to inform decision-making processes for mental health initiatives (Africa).
- *Government Engagement:* Advocate for government and policymakers to integrate mental health into broader disability policies and prioritize mental health services for PWD.
- *Funding and Infrastructure:* Secure more funding to build infrastructure that meets the demand for mental health services (Kevin).

#### Participants' Feedback:

- Participants appreciated the emphasis on policy development, digital solutions, and the need for inclusive, community-driven approaches to mental health.

## **5.5 Breakout 5: Creative Economy & Business Models for Persons with Disability**

**Moderator:** Mr. Cobhams Asuquo, CEO, Vintage Grey Media, Nigeria

**Panelists:**

1. **Dr. Ezekiel Mutua**, CEO of the Music Copyright Society of Kenya
2. **Ms. Nadia Wamunyu**, Contemporary Artist, Kenya
3. **Mr. Dennis Karanja**, Musician, Kenya
4. **Mr. Kamanu Cietu**, Musician, Kenya

### **Introduction and Overview**

This session's objectives were to explore innovative approaches and success stories in fostering entrepreneurship and envision a more diverse future for persons with disability, especially those in the creative industry.

### **Key Insights and Findings**

- The panelists noted that most of the innovative technology in the market is focused mainly on education. They emphasized the need for technology that addresses the needs of creatives with disabilities, highlighting the importance of adaptive technology for persons with disabilities.
- It was noted that creatives are pioneers in their own right and do not yet have a place in adaptive technology. Society should embrace creatives, especially those with disabilities.
- Accessible workspaces are essential for creatives with disabilities to access information, as the lack of accessible spaces can limit their ability to work with what they hear, see, or feel in their environment. Access to information also allows for further personal research.
- The collaboration among various stakeholders advocating for persons with disabilities is minimal due to the absence of a supportive ecosystem. When the ecosystem is not functioning, creatives have no room to develop. Greater collaboration among all stakeholders is essential to ensure that persons with disabilities are included and not left behind.
- Leveraging technology to enhance diversity and inclusion for people with disabilities is crucial. Whether an artist has a disability or not, it often takes a long time to be discovered. The journey of a creative person with a disability is ten times harder. Unlike able-bodied individuals, they face many odds, such as not being able to use platforms like YouTube to learn how to play a musical instrument.
- Struggle with accessibility; for example, in production, the software is not accessible to people with disabilities. As a result, they have to use a third party to gain access, and the individuals might not be able to convey their ideas properly.

- Partnerships between stakeholders and policymakers can help create a more inclusive creative space for people with disabilities.

### Actionable Recommendations

- Tech companies should develop adaptable designs for creatives to use in their work, such as flow tools.
- uniqueSpecial studios and production houses should be accessible and inclusive for persons with disabilities due to different needs.
- The government and private sector should establish incubation spaces or talent academies for creatives with disabilities to create a supportive environment for future generations.
- Leverage AI to improve accessibility, especially for persons with disabilities.
- Funding: Government ministries should allocate budgets for persons with disabilities to improve accessibility, inclusivity, and diversity.
- Comprehensive data on individuals with disabilities must be collected. This will assist the government in allocating budgets and creating structured spaces for them.
- Collaboration among stakeholders is critical to fostering inclusivity for persons living with disabilities.

*"The world is missing out on a huge fraction of our economic well-being by ignoring the creatives with disabilities."*

*Kamanu Cietu*

### Success Stories and Case Studies

Ms. Nadia Wamunyu doesn't remember losing her hearing, but she found herself in the hospital. In the early phase of her artistic journey, Nadia primarily focused on charcoal drawings and oil paintings, capturing various subjects, from random individuals and faces to intricate scenes of Lamu town, a captivating destination she had cherished since childhood. Nadia's work has been showcased both locally and internationally, including at venues such as GoDown Art Centre, Village Market, Alliance Francaise, Kuona Artists Collective, US Embassy, British Council, Baitil Aman in Shela, Lamu Fort, Nairobi Museum, Polka Dot Art Gallery, Circle Art Gallery, Absa Gallery in South Africa, and Kerry Packer Civic Gallery in South Australia, among many others. She runs a thriving organization that empowers women to see beyond their disability.

## 5.6 **Breakout 6: Paper Presentations**

### 5.6.1 **Paper 1: Social Media for Self-Advocacy: Experiences from Selected Organizations for People with Disability in Sub-Sahara Africa**

*Presenter:* **Dr. John Ndavula and Ms. Jackie Lidubwi**

#### **Challenge:**

- Mainstream media lacks features of persons with disability, and the tendency is pitiful reporting or heroism
- Stickers and memes that devalue and stigmatize
- Harmful content online

#### **Strategy:**

- Social media is a game changer that transforms the narrative and changes stereotypes.
- Document positive and success stories
- Use of progressive language
- Train persons with disability to use and increase engagement in social media use.
- Inclusive education and media projects
- Positive advocacy - capacity building for women with disability to use social media

### 5.6.2 **Paper 2: Mobile Money User Experience for Persons with Disabilities in Africa, Kenya and Nigeria**

*Presenter:* **Mr. James Angoye, Kenya**

#### **Challenges:**

- Accessibility and useability of mobile money apps for persons with disability
- Some tasks go blank when using readers or talking back
- Difficult to sign up without assistance

#### **Findings:**

- Labeling is not friendly
- Clear instructions and prompts are required
- Inclusivity in updates is overlooked

#### **Recommendations:**

- Involve persons with disabilities in design and updates.

## 5.7 Breakout 7: Android and Chromebook Accessibility

### Panelists

1. **Ms. Mariah Moon**, Chrome Product Manager, Google, USA
2. **Ms. Nimer Jaber**, Android Accessibility Analyst, Google, USA

### Introduction and Overview

This session was to help participants learn how to make their Android devices and Chromebooks easier to use. The speakers discussed the assistive technology built into these devices.

They started by saying Google's mission is to organize the world's information and make it universally accessible and helpful. 16 percent of the world's population has some form of disability. Google has built products for people with vision, hearing, motor, and cognitive disabilities. The speakers talked about Chrome accessibility features and Android accessibility features.

### Key Insights and Findings.

- Equality vs equity.
- Equality refers to being equal, especially in status, rights, and opportunities. It implies that everyone is treated the same regardless of their differences. In other words, equality means giving everyone the same resources or opportunities without considering their needs or circumstances.
- Equity, on the other hand, refers to fairness and justice in providing resources or opportunities. It acknowledges that people have different needs and circumstances; therefore, treating everyone equally may not result in fairness. Equity aims to ensure everyone has access to the same opportunities and resources needed to reach their full potential. This might involve distributing resources unequally to achieve fairness, such as providing more support to those who are disadvantaged or marginalized.
- We should aim to build equitable solutions to improve accessibility for people with disabilities.
- Android accessibility features are highlighted below
  - Accessibility scanners can help developers identify opportunities to improve app users.
  - Talkback is the Google screen reader included on Android devices. It allows access and control without looking at the screen.
  - Braille. Display support has been integrated into Talkback, simplifying connecting to the braille display. This has improved editing and reading experiences with a customized braille display.
  - Lookout uses the phone's camera to help blind people complete tasks more efficiently and provide more information about the physical world around them.

- Look out for Q&A Mode. An AI-based feature that integrates a Google Deep Mind visual
- Sound amplifier. Boosts sound and amplifies sounds you want to hear using wired or Bluetooth.
- Live transcribe and sound notifications. Improves access to everyday conversations
- Custom sound notifications
- Audi message transcription
- Voice Access
- Switch access
- Action blocks.
- Look to speak. controlling device using the eyes
- Reading Mode. Customize display options

### Chrome Book

It is a Google-made laptop. Accessibility is inbuilt and includes users with disabilities. Its features include

- Vision
  - fullscreen magnifies
  - magnifier following selection to speak
  - invert colors on the screen
  - Chrome Vox basics
  - PDF Accessibility
- Hearing
  - Live caption
  - Mono audio
- Motor
  - Easy dictation into any text field
  - Onscreen keyboard
  - Physical keyboard and touchpad settings
  - Chrome OS Switch access
  - Reading mode
  - Read aloud
  - Google Workspace
  - Google Meet: multi pinning
- Resources: Google accessibility site or accessibility center.

### Participants' Feedback

- Gmail's accessibility is more difficult to achieve than HTML, so how can users be assisted? A help center on Google Workspace can assist with any issues that arise.
- Google Lookout sometimes gives false information on some items, e.g., currencies or identifying a microwave as a TV. What is being done to make it reliable? The research team at Google is making continuous improvements to ensure Google Lookout correctly identifies items as they are.
- How much does a Chrome book cost? Participants were requested to visit the Google booth for more information.
- Is there any app to amplify the voice of cerebral palsy children? Research is ongoing at Google.

## 5.8 Breakout 8: Access to Assistive Technology in Africa

*Moderator:* **Mr. Zelalem Demeke**, Program Manager, CHAI, Ethiopia

### Speakers:

1. **Mr. Muhidin Abdulla**, Innovation Specialist, UNICEF, Kenya
2. **Ms. Nang'andu Chizyuka**, Program Manager, CHAI, Rwanda
3. **Ms. Becky Mwangangi**, Kenya Clinician, Motivation

### Introduction and Overview

The session explored innovative solutions for improving access to assistive technology in diverse African contexts. It brought together various stakeholders to discuss the current state of assistive technology, identify challenges, and propose potential solutions.

### Key Insights and Findings

- *Data Availability and Management:* Rwanda is developing a disability management information system to register and categorize persons with disabilities, enhancing data availability for policy development.
- *Cost and Availability of Products:* The New Self Supply Division has negotiated lower prices for assistive products, significantly reducing costs through having long-term contracts with suppliers (e.g., a hearing aid price reduction from \$1,500 to \$750).
- *Quality and Appropriateness:* It is crucial to ensure that assistive products meet global standards and are appropriate for users. There are efforts to advocate for quality products and proper provisions to avoid harm.
- *Policy Development:* The lack of proper governmental policies and coordination hinders access to assistive technology. Collaboration between governments and NGOs is essential.
- *Infrastructure Barriers:* Physical barriers, product availability, and a lack of local assembly and maintenance centers are significant challenges.
- *Community Engagement:* Empowering and training community members, including artisans, medical practitioners, and social workers, is vital for sustainable assistive technology provision.

### Actionable Recommendations

- *Develop Inclusive Policies:* Governments should formulate inclusive policies based on comprehensive data and evidence.
- *Establish Local Assembly Centers:* Establish local centers for assembling and maintaining assistive products to reduce costs and improve accessibility.
- *Capacity Building:* Train healthcare professionals and community members on appropriate assistive technology provision and maintenance.
- *Promote Community-Driven Approaches:* Engage community members in raising awareness, reducing stigma, and advocating for assistive technology.

## Success Stories and Case Studies

- *Rwanda's Disability Management Information System*: A collaborative effort with the National Council of Persons with Disabilities and the Ministry of Health to create a registry and case management system. These data will inform you that service provision includes PWDs in all sectors.
- *Global Catalog of Products*: An initiative by the New Self Supply Division that significantly reduced the cost of hearing aids and is expanding to include more products by the end of 2024.
- *Motivation's Grassroots Training*: Training peer trainers and community social workers in Kenya to ensure appropriate wheelchair provision and maintenance.

## Areas for Further Exploration

- *Policy Implementation*: Further exploration is needed to implement and enforce assistive technology policies across African countries effectively.
- *Research and Data Collection*: Continuous research and data collection to understand the evolving needs of persons with disabilities.
- *Local Manufacturing*: Exploring opportunities for local manufacturing of assistive products to ensure quality and reduce dependency on imports.

*"The issue of accessing AT is complex but stems from a lack of community engagement and infrastructure barriers. Solutions about ATs should be contextualized to Africa."*

*Zelalem Demeke*

## Next Steps

- *Policy Advocacy*: Advocate for developing and implementing inclusive assistive technology policies at national and regional levels.
- *Strengthen Partnerships*: Foster collaborations between governments, NGOs, and private sector stakeholders.
- *Expand Training Programs*: Increase the scope and reach of training programs for healthcare providers and community members.
- *Increase Funding*: Seek funding opportunities to support local assembly and maintenance centers for assistive products.

## Participants' Feedback

Participants emphasized the need for inclusive and well-implemented policies, better infrastructure, and community involvement. They also highlighted the importance of affordability and appropriateness of assistive products.

## 5.9 Breakout 9: Empowering Men with Disabilities through Mental Health

### Presenters:

1. **Mr. Kelvin Gachee**, Psychologist, Kenya
2. **Mr. Simalumba Nawa**, Founder, The Blind Spot, Namibia

### Introduction and Overview

The session, led by a Nairobi-based psychologist, focused on empowering men with disabilities and addressing the stigma around mental health. The discussion began with definitions of mental health and mental illness, emphasizing the need to understand these concepts to address the associated challenges effectively. The speaker shared essential statistics, including the high prevalence of mental health conditions and the significant issue of suicide among youth, advocating for decriminalization to improve care access. By addressing these areas, the session aimed to create a more inclusive society where men with disabilities can access the support they need and thrive in their personal and professional lives.

### Key Insights and Findings

**Mental health definition:** A simplified definition of mental health is psychological, emotional, and physical well-being. It shares the World Health Organization (WHO) definition, which emphasizes coping with life stresses, working productively, and contributing to the community.

### Challenges experienced by men with disabilities in accessing mental health care

- *Stigma and Discrimination:* Negative narratives prevent people from seeking help.
- *Accessibility Issues:* Services are not always accessible or usable for men with disabilities.
- *Traditional Masculinity Norms:* Societal definitions of masculinity contribute to high suicide rates among men.
- *Underreporting of Suicide:* Suicide is the fourth leading cause of death amongst the youth, more specifically, 15 to 29-year-olds, yet it is underreported, thus underscoring a need for policy change.

### Potential Solutions Proposed:

- *Decriminalization of Suicide:* To encourage individuals to seek mental health services.
- *Involvement in Policy-Making:* Men with disabilities must be included in decision-making.
- *Redefining Masculinity:* Promoting an inclusive understanding that accommodates individual differences.

- *Involving Caregivers:* Essential in normalizing the act of seeking help.

#### Actionable Recommendations

- *Co-Creation in Policy Making:* Continuous collaboration between government, civil society, and persons with disabilities to develop inclusive policies from inception.
- *Awareness and Education:* Increasing awareness among policymakers and the public about the challenges faced by men with disabilities.
- *Leadership Inclusion:* Promoting the inclusion of persons with disabilities in leadership positions to normalize their presence and break stigma.
- *Support Systems:* Creating spaces where men can speak freely, be vulnerable, and receive support without judgment.

#### Success Stories and Case Studies

- The session highlighted the work of disability inclusion consultants who prepare persons with disabilities and employers for workplace integration. These initiatives show that addressing cost and integration concerns can lead to successful inclusion in the workforce. Personal stories shared by audience members also underscored the importance of open family conversations and mainstream male engagement.

#### Areas for Further Exploration

- *Family Dynamics:* Understanding how disability affects family roles and responsibilities.
- *Long-Term Support Mechanisms:* Exploring sustainable support systems for men with disabilities.
- *Policy Impact Studies:* Assessing the effectiveness of existing policies and frameworks in supporting men with disabilities.
- *Emotional Intelligence Education:* Developing programs to teach emotional intelligence and healthy coping mechanisms.

#### Next Steps

- *Policy Advocacy:* Advocate for the decriminalization of suicide and the inclusion of men with disabilities in policy-making processes.
- *Research Opportunities:* Conduct research to identify gaps in current support systems and develop new strategies.
- *Collaboration Initiatives:* Foster partnerships between government, civil society, and disability advocacy groups to co-create inclusive policies.
- *Community Engagement:* Organize forums and workshops to raise awareness and educate the public on the challenges and needs of men with disabilities.

## DAY 2

*"Outstanding for me on Day 1 was the Face of Africa session that showcased amazing talent and diversity amongst us." Mercy Mugure, Participant*

*"I enjoyed yesterday because of the breakout session – we got a chance to speak, we were never judged. Instead, we were listened to. We were able to unite and fix the challenges." Mr Tepogo Poopedi (Mr TAP), South Africa*

### 6.0 Assistive Technology Village Innovation Showcase

There are between 180 and 220 million youth with disabilities worldwide who are among the poorest and most marginalized, with nearly 80 percent of them living in developing countries. Investing in the African youth is investing in the global future leaders, given that by 2050, almost half of the world's working-age population will be African.

To bring youth with disabilities to the center of the discussions at the 2024 Inclusive Africa Conference, 30 inclusive innovation and assistive technology (AT) start-up groups from Africa. The most inclusive innovation would win a \$10,000 prize fund to help scale their innovation to the next level. The innovators will also get access to a pool of disability, technology, and accessibility experts who will mentor them at the in-person event. An extended 1-year inclusive and assistive tech start-up mentorship program was also launched at the conference.

#### Approach to the Activity

Innovators showcased their innovations and provided practical demonstrations, explaining how their assistive technology (AT) was designed to help specific areas of disability. A panel of judges listened to each presentation and evaluated them based on predetermined criteria.

*See breakdown of the AT showcase in attached report.*

## 7.0 Opening Plenary: AT Scale Partnership with African Governments

*Moderator: Mr. Pascal Bijleveld, CEO, AT Scale, Switzerland*

Panelists:

1. **Dr. Iradukunda Fabrice**, Disability Officer, Non-Communicable Diseases Division, Rwanda
2. **Dr. Misa Funjika**, Ophthalmologist, Ministry of Health, Zambia
3. **Mr. Willy Masuga**, Director, National Community Based Rehabilitation Center, DRC
4. **Dr. Msafiri Nicodemus Kubulwa**, Ministry of Health, Tanzania.
5. **Mr. Djibril Beye**, Director, National Centre for Orthopedic Equipment, Senegal
6. **Dr Zeinab Gura**, Deputy Director General, MOH, Kenya

Session Objective: To provide participants with insights from government officials about their efforts and experiences in increasing access to assistive technology.

The panelists responded to various questions directed to them by the moderator. Below are the key outcomes of the discussions:

*1. Case of Kenya: What it has done in introducing AT<sup>4</sup> In the country:*

Kenya has historically faced significant challenges in providing rehabilitative services and ensuring the availability of AT. These areas had not received sufficient attention until recent years. Kenya is now taking a comprehensive and holistic approach to improving access to assistive technology and rehabilitative services, ensuring that all citizens can access the necessary healthcare services without experiencing catastrophic expenditure. Some of the efforts undertaken by the country to improve the introduction of AT in the country include:

- *Development of a strategy:* Kenya has created a comprehensive strategy to achieve the necessary rehabilitative services and AT. This strategy outlines the steps to ensure no one is left behind accessing these essential services.
- *Categorization guidelines:* The country has established guidelines to categorize disabilities, which is crucial for prescribing the appropriate AT. This includes, among others, sensitizing healthcare providers and developing group committees for this purpose.
- Activities related to AT and disability categorization have been decentralized from the Ministry of Health headquarters to the county level. This ensures that services are closer to the people who need them, with each county having its own committee and health facility equipped to prescribe the right AT to the people who need it.

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<sup>4</sup> Kenya was one of the founding members of AT-Scale, the Global Partnership for Assistive Technology. It is among the countries leading the charge globally for access to assistive technology.

- *Nationwide Coordination:* Recognizing that the Ministry of Health cannot achieve these goals alone, Kenya has adopted a nationwide, cross-cutting approach involving various stakeholders, including government-wide coordination and partnerships.
- *Inclusion in Census:* Disability questions have been included in the national census to gather accurate data.
- *Survey Tools:* Rapid assessment survey tools have been created to understand the country's AT needs. This data is crucial for developing appropriate programs and making informed decisions.
- *Disability mainstreaming:* This has been established as a performance indicator for all government ministries. Cabinet secretaries are evaluated based on these indicators to ensure active and conscious efforts toward improving AT and related services.

2. *Case of Senegal: How the country intends to use the national steering committee to drive the strategy on accessibility to AT:*

Through comprehensive and collaborative efforts, Senegal aims to enhance accessibility to AT and ensure no one is left behind. Towards this end, some of the approaches it has put in place include the following:

- The country does not have a coordination structure at the national level. Instead, it has implemented a project where multisectoral approaches are being undertaken across different sectors to ensure the effective implementation of the strategy on accessibility to AT at the national level towards social adaptation and inclusivity on AT.
- A committee has been established made up of regional directors so that each region's specificity is taken into consideration.
- A team has also been established to implement the project and assess it to determine its effectiveness.:
- A technical team was established that includes all directors in areas such as social protection, general management, equipment, and finance to ensure the provision of quality to all citizens.
- Partnered with AidScale has been crucial in helping define the needed policies and enhance the necessary support to improve accessibility to AT in Senegal
- Systems were put in place to identify existing gaps in AT accessibility in the country, and strategies were developed to bridge these gaps by implementing targeted policies and initiatives.

3. *Case of DRC: The country has recently made progress in defining an essential list of key ATs that it should have. How this has been achieved:*

DRC has not placed an AT supplies system list, so the country's AT needs cannot be quantified. Every year, DRC comes up with a list of tax-exempt essential medicines. The government uses

this list provided by the World Health Organization (WHO) to prioritize the AT needs of the country. To get the priority list right, the following approach is used:

- All the categories of disabled people in the country were invited to discuss the WHO list, which contains 50 products. Officials from the MOH were also invited to this activity to enable them to develop a similar list but in a scientific way.
- All the categories of disabled people were then asked to identify their priorities.
- The activity managed to retain 32 out of the 50 WHO product lists.

DRC now has this list that integrates all essential medicines, all of which are tax-exempt and made available throughout the country.

*4. Case of Tanzania: AT is now being integrated into Universal Health Coverage (UHC). How this happened and the extent to which it is being carried out:*

The country strives to achieve UHC, with some services successfully carried out while others are still struggling, such as rehabilitation. As a result, the government conducted a situational assessment on rehabilitation (2019-2020), which was later followed by formulating a rehabilitation strategic plan launched in 2021 that contains within the AT and human resources aspects, which lags behind compared to other services. Case example: Most of the HR present in rehabilitation are physiotherapists and occupational therapists; the sign language personnel are only three, serving a population of 61 million.

In this regard, the MOH, in collaboration with other partners, including the scale and the WHO, embarked on training non-rehab staff who serve most of the population using primary healthcare facilities (council hospitals, district hospitals, and dispensaries). Clinicians, nurses, and community health workers were also trained. Because of their proximity to the client, 150 community health workers in one region of the country were trained on a model of AT technology (an introduction to AT) developed in collaboration with WHO and ATscale. Following the training, the community health workers then went house to house in the areas tift of sound they serve and identified persons with disability or older persons who require an AT product. If identified, they would link the person to the health facility they serve.

*5. Case of Rwanda: The country launched a program to scale up access to Ear and Hearing Services and hearing aids in particular. The impact of this program is as follows:*

The country began a program called Scale-UP Ear and Hearing Care Services, which in the local language means "don't leave me; I can hear," focusing on children with hearing impairment. It is currently working in nine districts. It started as a pilot program in special schools for the deaf because of the staff infrastructure and the fact that they can communicate effectively with the children. With the success of this program in getting deaf children to experience the gift of sound, the program was expanded to the rest of the country and integrated into the

health care system, right from the community level to the health centers where comprehensive services are provided.

So far, over 2000 children have been screened, and 500 more fitted with hearing aids. Children with conditions such as ear syringing and other conditions related to the ear and hearing have also been treated. The program now works with community health workers to improve awareness and reduce the stigmatization of children with hearing impairment within communities.

6. *Case of Zambia: The country's experience scaling up vision services and providing eye care and eyeglasses nationwide.*

Traditionally, eye health services in Zambia were concentrated in urban areas and towns. Since 2011, the country has embarked on procedures/strategies to enhance eye health services across the country. Some of the strategies included the following:

- *Infrastructure development:* This involved setting up eye health services across the country. As of 2023, sixty-six fully functional eye units in 66 districts out of the 116 districts were set up. These eye units in the districts have helped reduce long-distance travel for those needing eye treatment services.
- *Human resources training:* Previously, most of Zambia's eye health staff were trained in Eastern African countries, including Gambia. From 2011, the country began offering training locally from the level of ophthalmologists, ophthalmic nurses, ophthalmic clinical officers, and optometry technologists. This has helped improve the human resources that can oversee these eye units nationwide. Zambia is now embarking on training primary health care workers, specifically general nurses and general clinical officers, to recognize eye diseases and offer primary care so those in hard-to-reach areas can receive the service.
- *Employment:* The government, through the Ministry of Health, has embarked on a massive recruitment drive for optometry technologists who can offer refractive services in the rural parts of Zambia. The provision of drugs, medicines, and consumables is being handled through the government medical and medical supplies agency.
- *Outreach services:* Surgical teams can now move to rural areas and provide surgeries in communities, such as cataracts. This approach is helping reduce the number of people getting blind in rural areas.

## **Plenary Discussions**

The following were the key outcomes of the plenary discussions:

1. *Kenya's education curriculum on accessibility of learners is different:* The Ministry of Education has elaborate plans for an inclusive education system in the country, including physical accessibility to the classroom, the learning area, and the overall curriculum. There are plans to introduce sign language as one of the subjects at Kenya Medical Training College (KMTC). This is towards removing the barrier that exists between health workers and deaf individuals.
2. *On how to better decentralize medical facilities in rural settlements as most are not disability friendly and have limited information about how to support patients with disabilities in terms of medical, delivering medical services, and communicating with deaf patients using sign language.* Scaling up healthcare services in rural areas is not easy. Strategies that can be used include:
  - Integrating iCare services into the existing services in primary healthcare facilities.
  - Orient already existing nurses, clinical officers, and doctors on what they're supposed to look for
  - We are training teachers to identify children who have a visual disability or who may have some type of visual impairment so that they can identify patients who need care early.
3. *The benefits of the assistive priority list:* This list can help one advocate to insurance companies to have them cover most of the assistive technologies available.
4. *The case of Senegal and the equal chances card:* The country is trying to implement this card, which is meant to give all disabled people access to free healthcare services and enable them to have a family bursary every term.
5. A critical question that could not be answered was how to make affordable and accessible products available everywhere for everyone who needs them.

## 8.0 Skills Gap: Bridging the Gap between Employers, Donors and Educational Institutions

Moderator: **Mr. Steve Njenga**, (inABLE), Kenya

Panelists:

1. **Mr. Paul Kasimu**, HR Transformation and Change Advisor, Safaricom PLC
2. **Mr. Kojo Tete**, President, Center for Employment for PWDs, Ghana
3. **Mr. Evans Munyori**, Head of HR, Standard Chartered Bank, Kenya
4. **Ms. Jane Kamau**, Director, Industrial Training and Skills Development, National Industrial Training Authority (NITA), Kenya

Session Objective: How to tackle the skills gaps.

The panelists responded to various questions directed to them by the moderator. Below are the key outcomes of the discussions:

### 1. *The motivation behind Safaricom's approach is narrowing the skills gap.*

Safaricom has taken a partnership approach to narrowing the skills gap. It is doing this by bringing other organizations together to work together and champion this cause around mentorship, onboarding, and internships. Safaricom is driven by its purpose; it has, therefore, invested heavily in transforming lives and, in purpose, people before profit.

The organization has set a target of 5 percent of its staff should be persons with disability. Currently, 2 percent of its 6000 employees are persons with disability. Safaricom has undertaken the following to decrease the skills gap:

- On the IT Bridge Academy: It has partnered with Sightsavers, which is the lead in this initiative.
- Partnered with industries, approximately 50 corporations, and academia to determine how to start driving skills for the future. It will develop curricula, partner with certification bodies, and offer internships to those who complete them.
- Career portal: Safaricom has zero-rated for persons with disability, the ability to go to the career portal for the National Council for Persons with Disability. And that means you don't need a bundle.

### 2. *On the reason behind why young people who are trained and exposed to employers still struggle to transition. Experience of NITA:*

- The deterrence of qualifications. Some of the individuals may not have completed high school and hence locked out of the training.
- Having received their training, individuals do not know the skills required by employers. NITA has partnered with Safaricom to identify skills gaps so that curriculums can be adjusted to meet the required skills.

- Trainers should not be acquainted with or adaptable to the various forms of disability.
- There is a lack of adequate preparedness or expectations of both the employer and the individual. A case example is when a disabled person has a helper and how this should be handled when he/she transitions to the training institution and later to the workplace.

NITA has partnered with various institutions and organizations like Swiss Contact to provide apprenticeship opportunities.

3. *On transitioning to employment, the cost involved from the employers' perspectives and the opportunities that young people with disabilities are unaware of or do not take advantage of. Case of Standard Bank*

The lack of sufficient jobs in the country has led to intense competition among job seekers. Consequently, young people must distinguish themselves and compete fairly for available positions. Employers face the challenge of aligning available jobs with the right skills, which is not always straightforward. The cost of this mismatch affects both job seekers and employers. To address these issues, forums like The Inclusive Africa Conference and roundtable discussions are essential. These platforms allow stakeholders to discuss the specific skills employers seek, such as data and digital skills, which are currently in high demand.

One example of an initiative addressing this skills gap is Standard Chartered Bank's Future Makers program. This program aims to reskill individuals and fill the gaps identified in the next generation of employees.

4. *There are existing gaps for youth with disabilities in the creative economy and for them to be able to either find decent work opportunities or establish themselves in that field. Case of Ghana*

The Centre for Employment for People with Disabilities enhances job placement and skills training for persons with disabilities by:

- **Raising Awareness:** Ensure disabled individuals, disability organizations, and training institutions are aware of the Centre's services and how they can benefit from them.
- **Skills Training:** Offering comprehensive training programs that help disabled individuals understand their unique identities and develop crucial skills. These include confidence building, leadership, job ethics, and life skills. Additionally, the Centre provides work readiness training, covering aspects such as interview preparation and crafting effective CVs.
- **Employer Engagement:** Lobbying employers to recognize and consider the available pool of job-ready disabled candidates.

- **Employer Support:** The center addresses the challenge of employers who are willing to hire but fear infringing on the rights of disabled employees and potential legal issues. It provides training and advice to employers, helping them gain the confidence to employ disabled individuals without concerns about legal repercussions.

*5: Young people with disabilities face significant challenges in the mainstream education system due to a lack of assistive devices, technologies, knowledge, and teaching aids. Below are the recommendations on short-term actions that can be taken to bring about meaningful impact:*

- ***Highlight Soft Skills Investment:*** Emphasize the importance of investing in soft skills development for people with disabilities through external organizations and in-house training.
- ***Enhance Assistive Resources in Education:*** Address the lack of assistive devices, technologies, and teaching aids in the mainstream education system to ensure young people with disabilities do not miss opportunities.
- ***Adapt Training Facilities:*** Ensure training facilities and classroom environments are suitable for various forms of disability. This includes comprehensive training for educators to adapt to different needs.
- ***Expand Skill Offerings:*** Provide a broader range of skills training beyond traditional hands-on skills (e.g., plumbing, electrical work) to include digital skills and other modern competencies, as shown by initiatives like the Cisco Academy.
- ***Improve Workplace Adaptability:*** Develop policies that facilitate the ease of adaptation for people with disabilities in the workplace and their transition out of work environments.
- ***Enhance Labor Market Information:*** Improve the Kenya Labor Market Information System to better document and publicize the skills of persons with disabilities, ensuring their abilities are recognized and matched with suitable employment opportunities.
- ***Develop Specialized Programs:*** Create designated programs that cater to the needs of people with disabilities, preventing them from being overlooked in broader, more generalized initiatives.
- ***Inculcate the behavior of long-life learning among young people so that as organizations change, individuals are not left behind; they are able to acquire new skills and quickly adapt.***
- ***Data drives decision-making:*** Data is needed to help make better decisions. For example, how many persons with disabilities have never gone to school? How many have gone to formal school and completed it? Data on such information will help make informed decisions.

- Tell stories that highlight current events, advancements, and accomplishments, such as successes in utilizing assistive technology, employment opportunities for individuals with disabilities, and overall achievements.
- Project the business case of persons with disabilities to employers.

## 9.0 Breakout Sessions

### 9.1 Breakout 1: Unlocking the potential of assistive technologies for learning disabilities

Moderator: **Ms. Liz Khaemba**, Lead Clinical Psychologist, Transformative Learning, Kenya

Panelists:

1. **Ms. Kaimuri Njeru**, CEO, Learning Differently, Kenya
2. **Ms. Martine Harris**, Founder & President, Travel and Give, USA
3. **Ms. Sandy Dorsey**, CEO, Smiles for Speech, USA
4. **Ms. Fatma Wangari Haji**, CEO, KAIH, Kenya

Introduction and Overview

This session aimed to help participants understand learning difficulties and how they manifest in learning. It also aimed to discuss the various intervention tools available and how technology can assist students with learning disabilities.

Key Insights and Findings

- Learning difficulties is a general term for neurodevelopment challenges. It refers to challenges or obstacles individuals may face when acquiring new skills, knowledge, or understanding certain concepts. These difficulties can manifest in various ways and can affect individuals across different age groups and educational levels. They affect the ability to learn and change your behavior after an experience. They affect things like speech, math, reading, or adaptation.
- Learning difficulties refer to challenges or obstacles individuals may face when acquiring new skills or knowledge or understanding certain concepts. These difficulties can manifest in various ways and affect individuals across different age groups and educational levels.
- Some common types of learning difficulties include Dyslexia, Dyscalculia, Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD), and dysgraphia.
- ADHD is mainly diagnosed when a child goes to school. For many African children, the diagnosis is not given early, and it is related to witchcraft. Most people are diagnosed through the use of psychological assessment, family history, and medical tests since it's a neurological issue.

Tools of intervention - Universal design for learning

- There are many solutions for translating information. India has developed products that are affordable to improve accessibility to learning disabilities. This will improve

education and better the lives of children with learning disabilities. They use simple OCR software to include persons with disabilities.

- They have partnered with Benetech to have products that can be integrated into the classroom to improve learning for children with disabilities.
- Using the universal design in teachers' training helps them to upskill and have more inclusive learning.
- Every teacher needs to be trained to handle learners with different disabilities and understand the psychological aspects of learning disabilities.
- Some of the challenges experienced in using assistive technology include:
  - Low uptake of tech by teachers.
  - The assistive technology gadgets are expensive and not affordable for most of the population.
  - Lack of security for the assistive technology gadgets.
  - Lack of an inclusive curriculum.
  - Assessment tools are not culturally friendly. Education is only useful to the extent that it can be used in a specific culture.

#### Actionable Recommendations

- Create awareness of specific learning difficulties and where people can seek help.
- Access to proper assessment at an early stage.
- Raise awareness, acceptance, education, and empathy for caregivers. Most parents are usually in denial when their children are diagnosed with learning difficulties.
- Increase resources and funding in raising awareness.
- The government should support the provision of tools to assist children with learning disabilities.
- Advocate for a policy for assessment at the right age because most children are diagnosed when it is too late.
- Make tools that are easily affordable to learners with disability.
- The importance of supporting learners with disability with tailor-made solutions for Africa.

## 9.2 **Breakout 2: Web Accessibility-bridging the Digital Divide**

**Moderator:** **Mr. Kevin White**, Accessibility Technical Lead, W3C, USA

**Panelists:**

1. **Mr. Senzo Mbonambi**, Co-director, Lead Change Development, South Africa
2. **Mr. Jean Paul**, National Union of Disability Organization, Rwanda
3. **Ms. Esther Maina**, Technoprise Global, Kenya

### **Introduction and Overview**

The session, hosted by experts from diverse regions, focused on bridging the digital divide through web accessibility. The discussion highlighted the importance of ensuring that digital content is accessible to people with disabilities, with an emphasis on the role of the W3C (World Wide Web Consortium) in setting international standards for web accessibility.

### **Key Insights and Findings**

Key insights from the discussion included the challenges faced by people with disabilities when accessing digital content. These challenges include inadequate alt text for images, inaccessible controls, poor color contrast, and the need for multiple simultaneous key presses. The panelists stressed that these barriers prevent the effective use of assistive technologies, limiting the inclusivity of digital platforms. Potential solutions proposed involved better education for developers and designers on accessibility standards and the importance of including people with disabilities in the development process.

### **Actionable Recommendations**

- Educating developers and designers on accessibility standards and their implementation.
- Ensuring alt text for images and proper color contrast.
- Avoiding complex key combinations for controls.
- Including people with disabilities in usability testing and development processes to ensure that their needs are met.
- Utilizing available resources, such as the W3C's guidelines and courses, to improve understanding and implementation of accessibility standards.
- Company policies and app-based interventions should enhance accessibility, such as using tools like Be My Eyes or Google Lookout for assistance.
- There's a need to balance independence with security concerns, ensuring accessibility measures do not inadvertently increase risks for persons with disabilities.

### **Success Stories and Case Studies**

Panelists shared examples of successful accessibility initiatives. For instance, integrating assistive technologies like screen readers and developing guidelines by the W3C have

significantly improved digital accessibility. These initiatives have allowed people with disabilities to engage more fully with digital content, enhancing their ability to work from home and participate in e-learning opportunities during the COVID-19 pandemic.

### Areas for Further Exploration

The discussion identified several areas needing further exploration:

- Enhancing accessibility in mobile applications and addressing the challenges specific to these platforms.
- Developing better solutions for individuals with multiple disabilities, such as those who are both visually impaired and dyslexic.
- Investigating the impact of accessibility on different age groups, especially the elderly.
- Exploring the compatibility of live transcription services with web platforms to benefit people who are deaf or hard of hearing.

### Next Steps

- Encouraging organizations to adopt and adhere to accessibility standards to broaden their market reach.
- Promoting collaboration between developers, policymakers, and advocacy groups to drive accessibility initiatives.
- Continuing research on improving assistive technologies and their integration with digital platforms.
- Advocating for policy changes that mandate accessibility in all digital services to ensure inclusivity.
- Organizing workshops and training sessions to increase awareness and knowledge about web accessibility among developers and designers.

### 9.3 **Breakout 3: Shaping Inclusive Transport and Travel Systems**

*Moderator:* **Mr. Ofentse Hkulani Madisha**, Head of Public Policy for South Africa, Uber.

Panelists:

1. **Mr. John Nalinya**, Head of Operations Control Center at Kenya Airways, Kenya
2. **Mr. Victo Nalule**, Executive Director, Tunaweza Foundation, Uganda
3. **Mr. Daniel Kamau**, Founder, Ace Mobility
4. **Hon. Sen. Crystal Asige**, Senator of the Republic of Kenya

Introduction and Overview

The session was embarking on a journey towards an inclusive transport system. Transport is always associated with mobility; all that persons with disabilities need is accommodation and access to opportunities.

Key Insights and Findings

- Organizations and the society at large must cater to a person with a disability and take care of their last-mile needs, offering independence and dignity.
- Persons in wheelchairs experience transportation challenges every day. They have to plan ahead of time for their travel arrangements. It is essential to sensitize organizations on how to improve the accessibility of people with disability.
- Attitude is essential in ensuring accessibility.
- Aviation sector specifics to Kenya Airways include persons with a disability included in aviation using technology. They have also recruited persons with disability as part of the crew. The structures in the airport are being tailor-made to care for persons with disability. Entertainment is also being developed to take care of the visually impaired. Kenya Airways has worked with the Kenya Institute of Special Education (KISE) to train staff handling persons with disability.
- Mobility helps a person move from one point to another, but accessibility is more crucial when traveling the world. What can the government and private sector learn from each other to improve accessibility?  
The government can provide national buses that are accessible for people with disabilities, such as buses with ramps or access cards. Websites should also be accessible to all.
- Airlines should ask passengers what they need and not assume their needs. Airline policies should be flexible to the needs of persons with disabilities, such as using braille on the aircraft to mark seats.
- Persons with disability should be treated with dignity because they are more vulnerable in terms of inclusive transport and mobility.

### Actionable Recommendations

- **Accessibility Infrastructure:** Develop infrastructure that is accessible to people with diverse disabilities. This includes ramps, elevators, tactile paving, audible signals, and designated spaces for wheelchairs or mobility aids in public vehicles.
- **Universal Design Principles:** Implement universal design principles in the planning and constructing transportation facilities and vehicles. Universal design ensures that people of all ages and abilities can use infrastructure and services without needing adaptation or specialized design.
- **Assistive Technologies:** Integrate assistive technologies into transportation systems to facilitate independent travel for people with disabilities. This may include audio announcements, real-time information systems, and mobile apps for trip planning and navigation.
- **Training and Awareness:** Provide transportation staff with training on disability awareness and etiquette, as well as techniques for assisting passengers with disabilities. Increasing awareness among drivers, conductors, and station staff can help create a more inclusive and welcoming environment for all travelers.
- **Policy and Legislation:** Enact and enforce policies and legislation that protect the rights of people with disabilities and promote accessibility in transportation. This may include anti-discrimination laws, accessibility standards, and incentives for companies to invest in inclusive design.
- **Collaboration and Engagement:** Involve people with disabilities and disability advocacy organizations in the planning, designing, and evaluating transportation systems. Their insights and perspectives are essential for identifying barriers to accessibility and developing effective solutions.
- **Affordability:** Ensure accessible transportation options are affordable and financially accessible to people with disabilities. Subsidies, discounts, and fare assistance programs can help mitigate the additional costs of accessible travel.
- **Information and Communication:** Provide clear and comprehensive information about accessible transportation options, routes, schedules, and amenities. Accessible websites, signage, and customer service channels can help people with disabilities plan their journeys effectively.
- By prioritizing these principles and practices, transportation authorities and stakeholders can collaborate to create inclusive transport and travel systems that empower people with disabilities to participate fully in society and lead independent lives.

## **9.4 Breakout 4: Navigating Employment: Challenges and Solutions for Neuro-Diverse Community**

**Moderator:** Ms. Jessica Rafuse - Director of Strategic Partnerships & Policy, Microsoft, USA

**Panelists:**

1. Dr. Sylvia Moraa, Executive Director, Andy Speaks, Kenya
2. Ms. Briana Gilmore, Head of Public Policy, Accessibility and Marginalized Communities, Uber, United States.
3. Dr. Jane Muiruri, iZola, Kenya
4. Dr. Neema Lema, Founder, Autism Voice for Children Ltd, Kenya

**Introduction and Overview**

The session begins by emphasizing the significant positive impact neurodivergent individuals can have on company performance, culture, and products. It raises questions about the experiences of neurodivergent individuals in Africa and introduces the panelists who discuss workplace challenges, support mechanisms, and the role of government in supporting neurodivergent individuals.

**Key Insights and Findings**

- Neurodivergent individuals, including those with Attention-deficit/hyperactivity disorder (ADHD), dyslexia, and autism, navigate the world differently than expected.
- Inclusivity involves understanding and accommodating these differences.
- Neurodevelopmental disabilities encompass a wide range of conditions affecting brain development, such as cerebral palsy.

**Challenges in Employment:** Neurodivergent individuals face significant challenges in employment due to systemic issues in education and healthcare, societal stigma, and lack of inclusivity. Employers often fail to provide necessary accommodations, leading to exclusion from opportunities.

**Personal Experiences:** Personal stories highlighted severe misunderstandings, mistreatment, and systemic inadequacies faced by neurodivergent individuals, underscoring the need for accurate understanding and support.

**Need for Accommodations:** Neurodivergent individuals often feel unworthy of accommodations due to societal conditioning. Even when accommodations are provided, they can lead to further isolation and missed opportunities.

Advocacy for Change: True inclusion requires a cultural shift and a deep understanding of the needs and challenges faced by neurodivergent individuals. Inclusion efforts should aim to adapt to their lived experiences rather than conform them to neurotypical standards.

#### Actionable Recommendations

- *Education on Neurodiversity:* Organizations need to educate all levels of staff on neurodiversity to foster inclusivity.
- *Inclusive Recruitment Processes:* Recruitment processes should be reevaluated to be more inclusive, using practical assessments and avoiding overemphasizing skills like "excellent communication" unless essential.
- *Simplified Onboarding:* Onboarding processes should be simplified to avoid overwhelming neurodivergent new hires.
- *Continuous Support:* Creating an inclusive culture requires constant support and understanding, considering sensory sensitivities and unique needs.
- *Technical and Human Accommodations:* Employers should ensure that their environments are accommodating, providing necessary technical and human accommodations.

Success Stories and Case Studies: Neurodivergent employees at Microsoft contributed to workplace innovation by developing the hand-raise feature in virtual meeting platforms, which is now widely used.

#### Areas for Further Exploration

- *Systemic Problems in Employment:* Further exploration is needed to address systemic issues in employment for neurodivergent individuals and ensure policies are actively practiced and enforced.
- *Inclusive Vocational Training:* The current state of inclusive vocational training and education requires deeper exploration to provide better support systems and transition pathways from education to employment.

#### Next Steps

- *Leveraging Technology:* Utilize technology and available resources, such as iZola and Neurohub, to support neurodivergent individuals from an early age.
- *Focus on Inclusive Vocational Institutions:* Increase the focus on creating inclusive vocational institutions and developing curricula relevant to modern technological advancements.
- *Promote Unique Skills:* Employers should recognize and harness the unique strengths of neurodivergent individuals, such as those with OCD excelling in hospitality due to their attention to detail.

- *Ongoing Advocacy and Education:* Continue advocating for a cultural shift towards true inclusion, ensuring continuous education on neurodiversity, and providing necessary accommodations.

## **9.5 Breakout 5: Inclusive Education for Students with Disabilities**

**Moderator:** **Ms. Georgine Auma**, Director, eKitabu, Kenya

**Speakers:**

1. **Mr. David Satterthwaite**, Director of International Operations, Perkins School for the Blind, USA
2. **Dr. Homiyar Mobedji**, Bookshare Program Manager, Benetech, India
3. **Ms. Sheilah Lutta**, Senior Education Officer, Ministry of Education: Directorate of Special Needs Education, Kenya
4. **Ms. Valerie Olesia**, Program Instructor, inABLE

**Introduction and Overview**

This session aimed to raise awareness of the importance of creating inclusive education environments for students with disabilities to ensure equal access to quality education. The session also delved into strategies that foster a culture of inclusion; schools can create learning environments where students with disabilities can thrive academically, socially, and emotionally alongside their peers.

**Key Insights and Findings**

- The constitution captures accessible and relevant education, including for students with disabilities. Policies exist, but they need to be agreed upon in practice. The government is working hard to ensure the curriculum is accessible through age-based and stage-based curricula. Government structures at home, nationally, regionally, and internationally are implemented to increase accessibility at all levels.
- Teacher training for inclusive education. Through capacity building, teachers must be empowered to have the appropriate skills and use assistive technology to teach learners with disabilities. Teachers should also encourage peer support and collaboration among students to foster a sense of belonging and community.
- Transitioning from inclusive education to employment. Many students with disabilities lack employable skills. The education system is specialized in developed countries. We need to understand that people with disabilities experience the same world as mainstream society. Therefore, there is a need for assistive technology that is accessible, affordable, and readily available, e.g., the humble Chromebook or the Android phone at \$200 or Book Share, where content can be uploaded and read offline.

- Assistive technology helps in adaptive and rehabilitative measures for students to ensure they can use technology independently. This improves accessibility and prevents them from being left behind in pursuing education and later in the job market.
- There is also a need to create an ecosystem through the collaboration of various stakeholders to support persons with disability through assistive technology. Involve parents, families, and community stakeholders in the education process and decision-making regarding inclusive practices. Create opportunities for collaboration, feedback, and partnership to ensure that the needs of students with disabilities are met effectively.
- Policies and regulations: It is important that the government formulates policies guided by the intended users to improve accessibility. We should move from the charity model to the empowerment model. Persons with disabilities just need policies and regulations that improve accessibility to improve their productivity in mainstream society.

## 9.6 Breakout 6: Understanding Albinism in Africa

Moderator: **Mr. Alan Herbert**, Black Albinism

Panelists:

1. **Hon. Senator Isaac Mwaura**, Government Spokesman of the Republic of Kenya
2. **Ms. Perpertia Senkoro**, Disability Rights Advocate, Tanzania
3. **Mr. Peter Ogik**, Executive Director, Source of the Nile Union of Persons with Albinism (SNUPA), Uganda

### Introduction and Overview

The panel discussion on albinism advocacy featured experts sharing their experiences and insights into the progress and challenges faced over the past decade. The session echoed the 10th anniversary of International Albinism Awareness Day, reflecting on changes in Tanzania, Uganda, and across Africa.

### Key Insights and Findings

- *Tanzania's Progress:* Significant developments include increased university enrollment and employment for people with albinism and a dramatic decrease in attacks against them.
- *Improvements in Uganda and Africa:* People with albinism are now more visible and involved in public spaces and forums. Despite growing awareness, regional plan implementation remains limited.
- *Challenges and Misconceptions:* Albinism's genetic basis, health challenges like sunburn and vision impairment, and societal discrimination were discussed. Misconceptions and superstitions continue to cause stigmatization and attacks.
- *Advocacy Evolution:* While there has been progress in mainstreaming albinism issues, tragic incidents have raised awareness. The need for new advocacy strategies was emphasized to ensure genuine inclusion and prevent regression.

### Actionable Recommendations

- *National Action Plans:* Governments are urged to adopt comprehensive plans covering health, education, economic livelihood, and security for persons with albinism.
- *Government Representation:* Ensuring persons with albinism hold government positions to raise awareness and showcase their potential.
- *Continuous Public Education:* Maintaining ongoing education about albinism to change societal attitudes and prevent a return to past prejudices.

### Success Stories and Case Studies

- *Examples of Successful Initiatives:*

- *Kenya's National Celebrations:* In 2015, the first national celebration of International Albinism Awareness Day was organized, leading to global recognition and progress in advocacy. People with albinism serve in prominent public roles, such as the current government spokesperson.
- *Tanzania's Decrease in Attacks:* Successful public awareness campaigns and safety measures resulted in significantly fewer attacks on people with albinism.

*"We can change the narrative to maintain the tempo. In Kenya today, the government spokesman is a person with albinism who is out of competence, not tokenism. When we embody a struggle, we carry the hopes of millions toward a better Kenya, a better Africa, and a better world."*

*Isaac Mwaura, Government*

### Areas for Further Exploration

- *Sustainable Advocacy Strategies:* Developing new advocacy strategies beyond the current human rights-based approach to maintain and advance progress.
- *Substantive Inclusion:* Ensuring that the inclusion of persons with albinism is meaningful and not merely tokenistic.
- *Long-Term Impact of Education:* Further research on the effectiveness and sustainability of public education initiatives in changing societal attitudes towards albinism.

### Next Steps

- *Enhanced Collaborations:* Strengthening international collaborations between governments, NGOs, and advocacy groups for more effective advocacy.
- *Research Opportunities:* Researching to develop effective advocacy strategies and measure the impact of public education initiatives.
- *Policy Advocacy:* Continue advocating for policy changes and resource allocation to support the well-being and inclusion of persons with albinism.
- *Call to action:* Ongoing advocacy to achieve meaningful inclusion for persons with albinism. The potential for persons with albinism to hold significant roles in society was highlighted, envisioning a future where they could achieve ultimate inclusion and equality, symbolized by the possibility of a person with albinism becoming the president of an African nation.

## 9.7 **Breakout 7: Media and Digital Accessibility for Africans with Disabilities**

**Moderator:** Dr. Jackline Lidubwi, Project Lead - Integrating Disability Rights into Journalist Training in Sub-Saharan Africa, Internews, Kenya

**Panelists:**

1. **Mr. David Omwoyo**, CEO Media Council of Kenya
2. **Mr. Luke Muleka**, Founder/ Managing Director, Signs Media Kenya
3. **Mr. Hussein Hussein**, Disability and Inclusion Specialist, Ubongo TV
4. **Mr. Tebogo Aubrey Poopedi**, Radio Host, West Side FM Live, South Africa

### **Introduction and Overview**

Media and digital accessibility for Africans with disabilities is crucial to ensuring inclusivity and equal opportunities for all by prioritizing media and digital accessibility for Africans with disabilities. This session focused on fostering a more inclusive society where everyone has equal access to information, communication, and entertainment.

### **Key Insights and Findings**

- There are very few persons with disabilities in the media space. The few who are there are treated as charity cases. This is because persons with disabilities are not telling their own stories from their own experiences.
- Persons with disabilities must tell their own stories through positive modeling. This has helped shape the conversation around inclusion in the workspace.
- Assistive Technologies: Support using assistive technologies such as screen readers, screen magnifiers, and voice recognition software to enable users with disabilities to access and interact with digital content effectively. Ensure compatibility with a range of assistive devices and software applications. Innovation is the way to demystify myths and have a mind shift on how people view persons with disability.
- Content must be designed using human-centered design, making it more accessible to people with disabilities. Feedback from users also helps to improve content. Content creators should involve users with disabilities in the testing and feedback processes for digital products, websites, and media content. Solicit input from diverse user groups to identify barriers and usability issues and make iterative improvements based on their feedback.
- Policy and Regulation: There should be advocacy for developing and enforcing policies, regulations, and standards that mandate accessibility requirements for digital content and ICTs. Collaborate with government agencies, regulatory bodies, and industry stakeholders to ensure compliance and accountability. South Africa has implemented the rights of persons with disabilities in its constitution. It has also implemented policies to improve accessibility.

- Capacity building on journalists with disabilities. The media council has identified Signs TV as a sector-specific training for journalists with disabilities. It is also essential to provide training and awareness programs for content creators, web developers, and digital media professionals on accessibility best practices and techniques. Empower them to design and produce content that is inclusive and accessible to users with disabilities.

### Plenary Discussions

The following are the key outcomes of the discussions:

1. On how to change the narrative on social media regarding the perception of persons with disabilities, it was stated that perceptions from mainstream media are quickly sipping into social media, but it is also a platform for self-advocacy for persons with disabilities. Social media remains an equal platform for persons with disabilities to tell their own stories.

## 9.8 **Breakout 8: Access to Justice: Advocacy and Policy Change**

**Moderator:** Hon. Dr. K.I. Laibuta, Judge – Court of Appeal, Judiciary of Kenya

**Speakers:**

1. **Ms. Sally Nduta**, Chief Executive Officer, UPDK, Kenya
2. **Mr. Samuel Kabue**, Disability Rights Advocate and UN Committee of Experts on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities
3. **Mr. Lawrence Mute**, Lecturer, University of Nairobi, School of Law, Kenya

**Introduction and Overview**

The discussion focused on the international standards and frameworks available to ensure access to justice for persons with disabilities, particularly highlighting the UN guidelines and the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (CRPD). The session explored challenges in implementation and proposed strategies to make justice more accessible and inclusive.

**Key Insights and Findings**

- *UN Guidelines and CRPD Implementation:* The UN has guidelines on access to justice for persons with disabilities, which face implementation issues.
- *10 Principles for States:* Key principles include recognizing legal capacity, accessibility of justice facilities, procedural accommodations, transparent and accessible information, safety, legal assistance, involvement in the judicial system, monitoring, and raising awareness about rights.
- *Challenges Identified:*
  - Legal capacity issues, particularly for those with intellectual and psychosocial disabilities.
  - Lack of accessible justice facilities and information.
  - Inadequate procedural accommodations and legal assistance.
  - Discriminatory attitudes and lack of awareness among the judiciary and general public.

**Actionable Recommendations**

- *Awareness and Training:* Increase awareness about the need for reasonable accommodations in judicial processes and educate the judiciary and the public on disability rights.
- *Utilize Legal Frameworks:* Leverage existing national and international legal frameworks to enhance accessibility.
- *Meaningful Accessibility:* Address discriminatory mental attitudes and promote human dignity to ensure that access to justice is meaningful and not merely tokenistic.
- *Advocacy:* Heighten advocacy efforts to protect and promote the rights and freedoms of persons with disabilities, emphasizing their non-alienable nature.

### Success Stories and Case Studies

- *Legal Aid and Framework Utilization:* Successfully making judicial processes accessible through legal aid and constitutional frameworks, though specific examples were not detailed, highlighted the need for more documented case studies.

### Areas for Further Exploration

- *Contradictory Laws:* Address contradictions in current laws, such as the Elections Act versus county government laws, which lead to discrimination.
- *Community Mobilization:* Further explore community mobilization to change cultural beliefs that compound access to justice and fundamental rights issues.
- *Judicial Education:* Investigate the impact of educating the judiciary on the CRPD and how to make the inclusion committee more representative.
- *Litigation Awareness:* Increase awareness about litigation to enforce rights among persons with disabilities.

### Next Steps

- *Policy Advocacy:* Continue advocating for laws that ensure non-discrimination and resolve existing legal contradictions.
- *Collaboration with Monitoring Institutions:* Strengthen connections between organizations of persons with disabilities and institutions like the Kenya National Commission on Human Rights (KNCHR) for better monitoring and advice.
- *Judiciary Education Programs:* Develop comprehensive education programs for the judiciary on the rights of persons with disabilities.
- *Inclusion in Monitoring:* Include persons with disabilities in the monitoring and evaluation processes of justice accessibility.
- *Leveraging social media:* Use social media and civil society organizations to highlight issues and promote access to justice for persons with disabilities.
- *Litigation and Advocacy:* Encourage those who are more aware of their rights to engage in litigation when their rights are violated.

## 9.9 Breakout 9: Higher Education - Barriers to Education and Innovative Solutions

Moderator: **Ms. Yetnebersh Molla**, Children with disabilities Program specialist UNICEF, Kenya

### Panelists:

1. **Ms. Brenda Betty Kiema**, Disability Inclusion Officer and a lecturer at Tangaza University
2. **Ms. Kate Sonka**, Executive Director, Teach Access, USA
3. **Dr. Victor Boiyo**, DVC Student Life, USIU-Africa, Kenya

### Introduction and Overview

The session addressed barriers to higher education for persons with disabilities, emphasizing the low completion rates and the challenges faced in transitioning from enrollment to graduation. The discussion focused on the prohibitive costs of assistive devices and the lack of inclusive strategic plans in universities. Various strategies and collaborations aimed at overcoming these barriers were explored. By addressing funding challenges, expanding support systems, and advocating for policy changes, significant progress can be made toward achieving meaningful inclusion for persons with disabilities.

### Key Insights and Findings

- *Low Completion Rates:* Only 1.6% of persons with disabilities complete higher education.
- *Transition Challenges:* Enrollment exists, but transitioning to completion is problematic.
- *Cost of Assistive Devices:* Prohibitively high costs hinder accessibility.
- *Lack of Inclusive Strategies:* Universities' strategic plans often do not address inclusivity issues.
- *Inclusive Education Models:* Examples like USIU showcase efforts in physical facilities, universal design of learning, assistive technology, and inclusive policies.
- *Tech Collaboration:* Partnerships with tech developers like Teach Access are crucial for creating accessible educational programs aligned with industry needs and legislation.

### Actionable Recommendations

- *Develop Inclusive Strategic Plans:* Universities should integrate inclusivity into their strategic plans. This will ensure budgetary allocations.
- *Increase Funding for Assistive Devices:* Allocate higher budgets for assistive technologies to support students with disabilities.
- *Expand Tech Collaborations:* Work with tech developers and industries to create accessible educational tools and resources.
- *Continuous Awareness Training:* Regularly train faculty and staff on inclusivity issues and best practices.
- *Enhance Public Policies:* Advocate for policies that support reasonable accommodations and accessibility in higher education.

### Success Stories and Case Studies

- *Examples of Successful Initiatives:*
  - *USIU's Inclusive Approach:* USIU's commitment to accessibility through facilities, processes, people, and policies has led to higher enrollment and increased budgets for disability inclusion.
  - *Teach Access Impact:* Collaboration with Teach Access has increased awareness and inclusivity in universities, although there is a need for continued efforts to raise awareness among faculty.

### Areas for Further Exploration

- *Diverse Disabilities:* Explore accommodations for a broader range of disabilities beyond visual and physical impairments, including ADHD and neurodiversity.
- *Sustainable Funding Models:* Investigate sustainable funding strategies to support long-term accessibility initiatives.
- *Comprehensive Support Systems:* Develop mentorship and peer support systems to enhance psychosocial development and self-advocacy among students with disabilities.

### Next Steps

- *Collaborations and Research:* Strengthen partnerships between universities, tech developers, and NGOs to innovate for inclusivity.
- *Policy Advocacy:* Engage in advocacy efforts to influence government policies on accessibility in higher education.
- *UNICEF Initiatives:* Increase efforts to hire persons with disabilities, aiming for 7% of all UN employees by 2030, and collaborate with universities to absorb skilled graduates.
- *Workshops and Training:* Conduct workshops and training sessions to enhance representation and inclusivity awareness in the higher education sector.
- *Resource Allocation:* Secure resources through collaborations and research to support assistive technologies and inclusive education programs.

## **9.10 Breakout 10: Smartphones – Assistive Technology Shows its Truly Transformative Potential**

**Moderator: Mr. Christopher Patnoe**, Head of Accessibility and Disability Inclusion for EMEA, Google, USA

**Panelists:**

1. **Ms. Maryam Bandukda**, Research Fellow at Global Disability Innovation Hub, UK
2. **Mr. Pascal Bijleveld**, Chief Executive Officer, AT Scale, USA
3. **Ms. Suparna Biswas**, Chief Executive Officer, Kilimanjaro Blind Trust Africa

### **Introduction and Overview**

The session aimed to help participants understand the potential of assistive technology to transform the lives of people with disabilities. Indeed, smartphones have emerged as powerful assistive devices, revolutionizing accessibility and inclusivity for people with disabilities.

### **Key Insights and Findings**

- A presentation on research being carried out in India, Brazil, and Kenya on using assistive technology to improve the quality of life of persons with disability. The final findings will be released after six months, but interim results show that assistive technology drastically improves the lives of people with disability.
- Research provides evidence of what smartphones can do, but what is next? The findings need to be shared with telecom companies, and the minimum accessibility requirements for smartphones need to be met. Digital training on smartphone features also needs to be provided.
- There is a need to build partnerships in place and include other partners like the government for sustainable solutions to make sure smartphones are accessible to people with disability.
- A significant digital skills gap was noted when it came to language support.
- Accessible smartphones have made participants' lives easier by allowing them to move around and increasing their privacy and independence.
- There is a need for more advocacy for recommended features to increase accessibility for persons with disability.
- Create relationships with governments to increase the affordability of smartphones to persons with disability.
- The price of a typical smartphone is still expensive; platform companies should include accessibility at an affordable rate.

### Recommendations

- Research needs to study the long-term impact of smartphones on the participants.
- Create better infrastructure for accessibility in smartphones.
- Change in the narrative making smartphones become assistive technology.

### Participants Feedback

- Accessibility for persons with disability is a moral imperative and a right.
- Tech companies should explore marketing accessibility features like the way the cameras are advertised. This will raise the visibility of smartphones' accessibility features.
- Smartphones with improved accessibility will help persons with disability in accessing government services.
- Tech companies should consider making applications to assist children in education and entertainment.
- Market phones specifically for persons with disabilities.
- The standard of development should include accessibility.
- Make smartphones affordable through monthly payments.

## DAY 3

### 10.0 Keynote Address

By **Ms. Jessica Rafuse**, Director, Microsoft

Ms. Rafuse began by highlighting Microsoft's Neurodiversity Hiring Program, which actively seeks individuals who are autistic, have learning disabilities, or identify as neurodivergent, offering them opportunities to work at Microsoft. She emphasized that these individuals are highly qualified and excel in technical positions, including coding. Microsoft ensures these individuals receive the necessary tools and resources to succeed. She underscored the importance of supporting all employees to ensure their success, not just those with disabilities. She highlighted the Centralized Accommodation Fund, which provides essential resources for employees to excel.

Ms. Rafuse shared inspiring stories of disabled individuals making significant contributions at Microsoft, such as Swetha, a deaf engineer credited with developing the widely used Background Blur feature in video conferencing applications. She stressed that accessibility is a fundamental right and advocated for inclusive policies and wage equity for people with disabilities. Microsoft is also collaborating with the organization *You Disabled Self*, which helps people with disabilities understand relevant legislation using A.I. to create plain language translations of complex texts. She suggested similar initiatives in Africa to help disabled persons understand policies and practices that directly impact them.

*"We don't want technology for the sake of technology. We want technology that makes us better, more efficient, creative, more marketable."*

Jessica Rafuse, Microsoft

She elaborated on Microsoft's efforts to incorporate accessibility features into its products and its partnerships to accelerate A.I. development in Africa. Microsoft has partnered with G42, where it will contribute 1.5 billion dollars to help accelerate A.I. across Africa. She stressed the importance of responsible and accessible A.I. technology built on inclusive data. She urged people with disabilities to be part of the data for creating A.I. technology.

She concluded her remarks by stating, *"We don't want technology for the sake of technology. We want technology that makes us better, more efficient, creative, and marketable."*

## 11.0 Opening Plenary: Communication Strategies for Deaf and Hard of Hearing People in Africa

Moderator: **Ms. Sara Basson**, Accessibility Evangelist, Google, USA

Panelists:

1. **Mr. Nickson Kakiri**, Chairperson, Kenya National Association of the Deaf, Kenya
2. **Mr. Johannes Teklay**, Ethiopian National Association of the Deaf,
3. **Mr. Ambrose Murangira**, Thematic Director Disability Inclusion, Light for the World, Uganda

### 1. About Sign Language in Africa

Sign language in Africa has a diverse and culturally rich background. Each country on the continent has its national sign language, developed from its people's unique cultural contexts, beliefs, and daily practices. This diversity means that sign languages are deeply influenced by the local culture and societal norms, resulting in variations from one country to another. Despite this diversity, deaf individuals in Africa often possess a unique talent for communication. They can bridge gaps between different national sign languages through gestural language and a combination of facial expressions and emotions. This ability allows them to interact effectively with deaf individuals from other regions, even if they do not share the same sign language.

Facial expressions and emotions are crucial in sign language communication and aid in psychological and cognitive development. They provide additional context and understanding, allowing deaf individuals to convey and interpret moods and intentions accurately. Although sign languages are not universal, there are international signs that can facilitate essential communication across different languages. This is especially useful in contexts where deaf individuals from other countries must interact, such as in international meetings or travel scenarios.

There are more than 23 different sign languages in Africa alone, reflecting the continent's linguistic and cultural diversity. Hearing individuals are recommended to learn sign language to improve communication and inclusivity, which can significantly ease interactions with the deaf community. Sign language is a powerful tool for connection and understanding, promoting inclusivity and universal communication.

### 2. The Do's and Don'ts when engaging with the deaf community:

- Call the individual as he is. He is not abled differently.
- Maintain eye contact with the deaf individual, not the sign language translator.
- Gently signal the individual to get their attention.

- Seek to understand the individual, and if there is no sign language interpreter present, make it known to them that you do not know how to sign.

### 3. Critical challenges faced by people who are hard of hearing in Africa

- *Social Stigma and Perceptions:* Deaf children are often seen as a curse or sin, a misconception rooted in cultural beliefs, leading to marginalization within families and communities.
- *Educational Barriers:*
  - Many deaf children start school late, around the age of 14, due to societal exclusion and lack of early educational inclusion.
  - Schools are often inaccessible and lack proper facilities and resources to support deaf students.
  - The national education policies do not include the needs of deaf individuals.
- *Communication Barriers:* There is a significant communication barrier as most educational and public institutions are not equipped to cater to the needs of people who are deaf or hard of hearing.
- *Lack of Inclusion in Decision-Making:* Deaf individuals are rarely included in decision-making processes that affect their education and overall welfare.
- *Technological Limitations:*
  - A.I. and speech-to-sign technology often fail to capture the full complexity of sign language, including facial expressions and hand movements.
  - Text-to-speech and speech-to-text tools struggle with regional accents and mixed languages, making translation and communication challenging.

### 4. Recommendations

- *Inclusive Education:*
  - Integrate deaf children into the educational system from an early age.
  - Ensure schools have the necessary resources and trained personnel to support deaf students.
- *Policy Reforms:*
  - Develop and implement national policies that are inclusive of the needs of deaf individuals and other persons with disabilities.
  - Include deaf individuals in decision-making processes, especially those related to education and public policy.
- *Awareness and Mindset Change:*
  - Educate families and communities to change negative perceptions about deafness.
  - Promote awareness that deafness is not a curse but a condition that can be managed with the right support.
- *Technological Advancement:*

- Enhance A.I. research to better understand and incorporate the nuances of sign language, including facial expressions and hand movements.
  - Develop more sophisticated text-to-speech and speech-to-text technologies that handle regional accents and mixed languages.
- *Self-Advocacy and Autonomy:*
  - Encourage and support deaf individuals to advocate for themselves and be involved in decisions affecting their lives.
  - Allow deaf individuals to decide their needs and preferences rather than having others decide for them.

## 12.0 Fireside Chat: A Regional Perspective on Access to Assistive Technology

Speaker: **Ms. Chipso Chimhundu**, Program Manager, Global Assistive Technologies, Clinton Health Access Initiative (CHAI)

The session brought out CHAI's perspective on access to AT in Africa. Below are the key highlights of the Fireside Chat:

### Mission and Background

CHAI's mission is to save lives and improve health outcomes in low and middle-income countries, with 26 of these countries located in Africa. Initially focused on HIV and AIDS, CHAI's programs have expanded to over 20 areas, including access to assistive technologies (AT).

### Key challenges in accessing AT:

Millions of people in Africa struggle to access life-saving AT because i) AT projects are often limited in scope and scale, and ii) the AT market and service delivery are highly fragmented, making it difficult for individuals to find and afford necessary technologies.

### CHAI's Approach to Improving AT Access:

- *Building and Strengthening Government Capacity:* Integrate AT into government systems for sustainable accessibility.
- *Shaping Assistive Technology Markets:*
  - √ Increase knowledge and awareness of AT availability, providers, and pricing.
  - √ Negotiate price reductions to make AT more affordable.
- *Long-Term Sustainable Financing:* Collaborate with various sectors to ensure the sustainability of AT access improvements.
- *Regional Achievements:*
  - √ *Strategy Development:* 10 countries have launched their first-ever AT scaling strategies.
  - √ *Digital Systems:* Strengthening digital systems for AT in five countries.
  - √ *Assistive Product Lists:* Six countries have created lists communicating government priorities for AT procurement.

### Examples of successful initiatives:

- *Digital Data Systems:* Rwanda's Disability Management Information System identifies and links people with disabilities to critical services.
- *Eyeglass Service Provision:* In South Africa, digitizing eyeglass dispensing processes reduces wait times and improves service provision.

- *Digital Solutions for AT:* Using smartphone-based combined hearing and vision screening solutions in South Africa to enhance AT provision.
- *Market Report on Digital AT:* It details information on various digital assistive technologies, including their availability and pricing, all aimed at negotiating price reductions.

Recommendations:

- Supportive structures and policies are needed to develop and implement policies that support AT accessibility.
- Ensure products are affordable, appropriate for the context, and supported by effective service delivery networks.
- Raise awareness about the importance and availability of AT to enhance digital inclusion.
- Collaboration with partners and governments is vital to enhancing AT access and digital inclusion in Africa.

## 11.0 Breakout Sessions

### 11.1 Breakout 1: Gender-Based Violence

Moderator: **Ms. Zaha Indimuli**, Youth In Power Africa Rise, Kenya

Panelists:

1. **Mr. Dan Shieshie**, Founder, Dan Shieshie Foundation, Kenya
2. **Ms. Faustina Urassa**, Chief Executive Officer, Songambele, Songambela Initiative Organisation, Tanzania
3. **Mr. Emmanuel Ngulube**, Gender Social Inclusion (GESI) Advisor, World Vision, Zambia
4. **Ms. Zaha Indimuli**, Youth In Power Africa Rise, Kenya

#### Introduction and Overview

Gender-based violence (GBV) is a pervasive issue that disproportionately affects persons with disabilities, compounding their vulnerability and marginalization. The session's objective was to find ways to break the silence on GBV and raise awareness to foster inclusivity.

#### Key Insights and Findings

1. *How can the Inclusive Africa Conference contribute to breaking the silence on gender-based violence for persons with disabilities, and what role does awareness play in fostering inclusivity?*
  - InABLE should advocate for implementation at all levels. Addressing GBV against persons with disabilities requires intersectional approaches that recognize the interconnectedness of disability, gender, and other identities. Advocacy efforts should prioritize the voices and experiences of persons with disabilities and advocate for inclusive policies, services, and interventions.
  - Women with disabilities should be included in all decision-making processes to prevent assumptions about the design of solutions. The programs should be championed by someone who has undergone a risk and needs assessment.
  - Survivors of gender-based violence are often not believed, so there needs to be a shift in mindset.
2. *What innovative strategies and collaborative efforts can be employed to empower marginalized communities and ensure their voices are heard in the fight against gender-based violence across Africa?*
  - Family should be the first point of support for persons with disabilities. The community follows the example of the family.
  - Community-led initiatives must start at the grassroots levels, where GBV information is minimal and persons with disabilities, especially women, are not

included. Support grassroots organizations and community-based initiatives led by and for marginalized communities, including persons with disabilities. These organizations often have a deep-rooted understanding of local contexts and can implement culturally relevant solutions.

- Peer-to-peer education on Gender-Based Violence by persons with disabilities who have experienced it. Create inclusive spaces for dialogue, consultation, and collaboration that prioritize the voices and perspectives of those directly affected by GBV. This will help increase awareness and increase advocacy.
- Design programs that are inclusive of persons with disabilities. Adopt intersectional frameworks that recognize the interconnectedness of identities and experiences of discrimination. Develop programs and interventions that address the intersecting forms of oppression faced by persons with disability.

3. *Building a safer and more compassionate society requires collective action. How can partnerships be facilitated and collaboration among diverse stakeholders, including government bodies, NGOs, and local communities, be harnessed to tackle gender-based violence and create lasting change effectively? What role do you envision for educational institutions, governmental bodies, and civil society organizations in collectively breaking the chains of gender-based violence for persons with disabilities across the African continent?*

- GBV thrives in silence. GBV against persons with disabilities is often underreported and invisible within mainstream discourse on violence prevention and response. Stereotypes, stigma, and societal attitudes that perceive persons with disabilities as less credible or less deserving of support can further contribute to underreporting.
- Foster partnerships and networks between civil society organizations, government agencies, academia, and international stakeholders to collectively address GBV and promote social justice. Collaboration allows for pooling resources, expertise, and influence to achieve common goals.
- The government should have in place laws and strict penalties for GBV perpetrators. There should be enhanced access to legal empowerment services, including legal aid, legal literacy, and support for navigating the justice system. Advocate for legal reforms that can help strengthen the protection of people with disabilities and ensure their rights are upheld.
- Sensitize different stakeholders on how to handle GBV victims. Provide comprehensive support services for survivors of GBV that address their physical, emotional, and psychosocial needs. Ensure that services are accessible, non-discriminatory, and tailored to the specific needs of individuals, including access to healthcare, counseling, shelter, and economic empowerment programs.

- Fight corruption because perpetrators buy their freedom, leaving no room for justice. Institutional practices, lack of oversight, and power imbalances can perpetuate abuse and neglect against residents or patients with disabilities.
- Formulate policies and involve survivors to enable us to end GBV. Ensure that people with disabilities have meaningful opportunities to participate in decision-making processes related to GBV prevention, response, and policy development. Create inclusive spaces for dialogue, consultation, and collaboration that prioritize the voices and perspectives of those directly affected by GBV.

### Plenary Discussions

1. About men with disabilities who have experienced GBV and are not able to openly talk about it. There will be a need for the following:
  - Create awareness from the grassroots because most GBV cases are perpetrated by people known to them.
  - Work with the local administration to report and investigate the cases.
  - Create safe spaces for GBV survivors for dialogue, consultation, and collaboration that prioritize the voices and perspectives of those directly affected by GBV.
  - Empower persons with disabilities with information. Provide training and capacity-building opportunities for individuals and community leaders to strengthen their advocacy skills, leadership abilities, and organizational capacity. This includes training on GBV prevention, survivor support, community mobilization, and human rights.
  - Speak about GBV to survivors. Develop culturally sensitive GBV prevention and response programs that are responsive to different communities' diverse needs and realities. Respect cultural norms and values while challenging harmful practices and beliefs that perpetuate GBV. The African culture has played a significant role in silencing men.
  - Address GBV holistically. Provide comprehensive support services for survivors of GBV that address their physical, emotional, and psychosocial needs.
2. On whether there are policies that protect persons with neurodivergent disabilities?
  - There are policies in place, but they have not been implemented to protect persons with disabilities.
  - There is a need to raise awareness of neurodivergent disabilities because most of them are ignored or are unknown.
3. How can technology be leveraged to amplify the voice and accelerate advocacy against GBV, such as vuvuzela centers in South Africa?

- Harness the power of technology and innovation to reach GBV victims and survivors to amplify their voices. Utilize mobile phones, social media platforms, and digital storytelling tools to raise awareness, share information, and facilitate community organizing and advocacy efforts.
- Tech companies and innovators to develop technology for reporting GBV for people with disabilities.

#### Call to action

- Gender-based violence affects everyone, and we should look for prevention measures for GBV by changing mindsets. Promoting prevention efforts and raising awareness about GBV against persons with disabilities is crucial in challenging societal norms, dispelling myths, and fostering a culture of respect and inclusion.
- Strategies aimed at helping people with disabilities, such as providing accessible information, developing self-advocacy skills, and fostering supportive networks, can empower individuals to seek help and challenge violence.
- Implement the policies for persons with disabilities.
- There is a toll-free number to report cases of GBV to the Kenya Police. The police are also developing an app to report.

The government must be held accountable and act on the cases of femicide in Kenya.

## **11.2 BREAKOUT 2: Social Media and Disability Inclusion**

**Moderator:** Mr. Julius Mbura, Advocacy Officer, inABLE, Kenya

**Panelists:**

1. **Ms. Faith Musyoka**, USIA, Student, Kenya
2. **Ms. Jackie Waihero**, Mandella Washington Fellow, Kenya
3. **Mr. Kesah Princely**, TWIF News, Cameroon
4. **Mr. Alan Herbert**, Founder, Black Albinism, Kenya

### **Introduction and Overview**

This session examined the role of social media in fostering inclusion for persons with disabilities, highlighting the accessibility challenges they face and the potential benefits and drawbacks of social media engagement. It explored how digital platforms can amplify voices, shift societal perceptions, and provide opportunities while also addressing issues such as cyberbullying and addiction.

### **Key Insights and Findings**

- *Underrepresentation:* Persons with disabilities are significantly underrepresented on social media, with only 15% of Africa's 80 million persons with disabilities using these platforms.
- *Accessibility Tools:* Many rely on tools like screen readers, talk back, NVDA, and JAWS to access social media.
- *Citizen Journalism:* The rise of new media has enabled persons with disabilities to engage in citizen journalism, with examples like layered journalism in Zimbabwe enhancing their contributions.
- *Impact of Social Media:* Social media can positively impact advocacy, visibility, and societal perceptions but also poses risks like cyberbullying and addiction.

### **Actionable Recommendations**

- *Digital Accessibility Tools:* Implement tools like ALTEX, captioning, and A.I. features to enhance accessibility.
- *Highlight Successes:* Showcase achievements of persons with disabilities on social media to big tech companies.
- *Training and Support:* Train persons with disabilities as journalists and storytellers, leveraging solution journalism and providing necessary tools and funding.
- *Awareness Campaigns:* Increase visibility and awareness through influencers, socialites, and corporate collaborations to drive positive societal change.

## Success Stories and Case Studies

- Examples Shared:
  - Ghana: After 200 workers with disabilities were laid off due to an electronic tax system, social media advocacy led to their reemployment.
  - Cameroon: Social media highlighted the exclusion of visually impaired university students from sports, resulting in legislative changes for their inclusion.
  - Access to Water: Social media campaigns highlighted water accessibility issues for persons with disabilities, leading to collaborative solutions.

## Areas for Further Exploration

- Next Steps in Digital Accessibility: Investigate and implement the next big innovations in digital accessibility on social media.
- Economic Opportunities: Explore ways to monetize social media usage for persons with disabilities across Africa, similar to upcoming initiatives in Kenya by Meta.
- Creative Funding: Advocate for funds to support creators with disabilities, paralleling initiatives for other marginalized groups.

## Next Steps

- *Tech Collaborations*: Partner with big tech companies to enhance digital accessibility and support content creation by persons with disabilities.
- *Inclusive Journalism Training*: Develop programs to train persons with disabilities in journalism and storytelling, promoting impactful social media use.
- *Awareness and Advocacy*: Launch campaigns to raise awareness and create visibility for disability inclusion, leveraging the influence of social media personalities.
- *Positive Reinforcement*: Encourage a societal mindset that recognizes the potential and beauty of persons with disabilities, using social media as a platform for empowerment.

### **11.3 Breakout 3: Digital Inclusion: Government and Public Services**

**Moderator:** **Ms. Jane Theuri**, Assistant County Commissioner, Ministry of Interior and National Administration, Kenya

**Panelists:**

1. **Mr. Harun Hassan**, Executive Director, National Council for Persons with Disabilities, Kenya
2. **Dr. Abdel-Monem El-Sharkawy**, Chairman, National Academy of Information Technology for Persons with Disabilities, Egypt
3. **Mr. Abayneh Guyo**, Executive Director at the Federation of Ethiopian National Associations of Persons with Disability (FENAPD), Ethiopia
4. **Mr. Jonas Lubago**, Secretary-General, Shirikisho la watu wenye ulemavu Tanzania (SHIVYWATA), Tanzania.
5. **Mr. Balkisse Hassan Ali**, The National Agency for Persons with Disabilities, Djibouti

#### **Introduction and Overview**

Digital inclusion is a critical agenda because of globalization. Governments must include people with disabilities. The objective of this session was to find out what strategies the government must implement to include people with disabilities in government spaces, especially government services.

#### **Key Insights**

1. *What are the current and future strategies to ensure universal access to digital services for persons with disabilities in Africa, and what role can government policies play in fostering inclusivity in the digital realm?*
  - **Accessible Public Services:** Ensure that digital public services, including government websites, online portals for accessing benefits and services, and digital communication channels, are accessible to persons with disabilities. Governments should prioritize accessibility in the design and development of e-government platforms and applications.
  - **Collaboration with Stakeholders:** Foster collaboration with disability rights organizations, advocacy groups, industry stakeholders, and international partners to promote digital inclusion. Governments can convene multi-stakeholder forums, task forces, and working groups to address accessibility challenges and develop inclusive solutions collaboratively.
  - **Research and Innovation:** Support research and innovation in assistive technologies, accessibility tools, and inclusive design solutions. Governments can fund research projects, innovation grants, and technology incubators focused on developing accessible digital solutions that address the specific needs of persons with disabilities in Africa.

- Research and Innovation: Support research and innovation in assistive technologies, accessibility tools, and inclusive design solutions. Governments can fund research projects, innovation grants, and technology incubators focused on developing accessible digital solutions that address the specific needs of persons with disabilities in Africa.
  - The government can also develop tools to connect employers and job seekers with disabilities.
2. *Emerging technologies and innovative solutions that have the potential to enhance digital inclusion for the disabled community in Africa:*
- Call center with videos where sign language interpreters are available for emergency services.
  - Tool with a translator that can be used in the supermarkets.
  - Mobile Accessibility Apps: Mobile accessibility apps can empower individuals with disabilities by providing features such as screen readers, magnifiers, voice control, and gesture navigation. These apps make smartphones and tablets more accessible and usable for people with visual, hearing, or motor impairments.
3. *What challenges are faced by persons with disabilities in accessing government and public services digitally in Africa, and what collaborative efforts can be suggested to overcome these barriers and create a more inclusive digital landscape?*
- Barriers start from the design stage of the education system, where it does not ensure access for children with disabilities.
  - Many government websites, online portals, and digital services lack accessibility features that cater to the diverse needs of persons with disabilities. Barriers include inaccessible website design, a lack of alternative text for images, poor color contrast, and non-intuitive navigation.
  - Internet connectivity remains limited or unreliable in many parts of Africa, particularly in rural and remote areas. Persons with disabilities in these areas may struggle to access online government services due to slow internet speeds, connectivity disruptions, or lack of access to digital devices.
  - Access to digital devices such as smartphones, tablets, or computers, as well as the cost of internet data, can be prohibitive for persons with disabilities, particularly those from low-income households. High device costs and data tariffs may limit their access to online government services.
4. Interventions
- Avail content to include children with disabilities in education.
  - Governments should collaborate with disability organizations and advocacy groups to understand the specific needs and challenges faced by persons with disabilities in accessing digital services. These partnerships can inform the development of inclusive policies, strategies, and solutions.

- Government agencies responsible for digital services should prioritize accessible design and development practices to ensure that online platforms are usable by persons with disabilities.
- Invest in technology innovation and research to develop tailored solutions that address the specific accessibility needs of persons with disabilities in Africa. This includes funding research projects, supporting start-ups, and collaborating with tech companies to develop assistive technologies and accessibility tools.
- Governments should demonstrate leadership and commitment to digital inclusion by prioritizing accessibility in designing and delivering online government services. This includes allocating resources, developing accessibility guidelines, and enforcing compliance with accessibility standards.

#### 5. Comments by participants

- Sign language is different, and the government needs to include persons with disability in developing sign language.
- People with disabilities are generalized and not addressed with their specific needs. For example, some have access to technology, and others are not as advanced.
- People with Disabilities need to be advocates for themselves.
- Strategies need to be redrawn to increase accessibility. When designing programs or tools, the government should include People with Disabilities to cater to their specific needs.
- Work together to push and have a standard system to ensure inclusion by bridging the gaps. Include professionals in different areas of partnership.

## **11.4 Breakout 4: Entrepreneurship, Technology and Economic Empowerment**

**Moderator:** Ms. Hital Miraj, Disability Consultant

### **Speakers:**

1. **Ms. Marlise Montcho**, Presidente, FemTICDEV, Benin
2. **Ms. Mumsie Odirile**, Actress, motivational speaker, and content creator, Botswana
3. **Ms. Iram Bahawal**, Inclusive Employment Advisor, Light for the World, Kenya
4. **Mr. Moses Chege**, Country Director, Sight Savers, Kenya

### **Introduction and Overview**

The discussion focused on the challenges and opportunities for integrating persons with disabilities into the entrepreneurship workspace, emphasizing funding, mentorship, and accessible infrastructure. High unemployment rates, particularly among youth with disabilities, necessitate targeted interventions to equip them with relevant skills and improve their job prospects.

### **Key Insights and Findings**

- *High unemployment rates:* In Kenya, 70% of youth (15-34 years) are unemployed, with an even higher rate of 80% among those with disabilities.
- *Collaboration with NITA:* Partnerships with the National Industrial Training Authority (NITA) have been crucial in creating courses for youth with disabilities, focusing on technology skills and identifying relevant employers.
- *Inclusive Infrastructure:* Efforts with NITA have included making their facilities accessible and sensitizing management to the needs of learners with disabilities.
- *Awareness Challenges:* There are ongoing challenges in raising trainers' and management's awareness of the importance of inclusion and adaptation in training courses.
- *Funding Barriers:* Traditional funding options often exclude persons with disabilities due to perceptions about their capabilities and lack of collateral or credit history.
- *Access to Technology:* Ensuring technology platforms are fully inclusive remains a challenge that requires ongoing attention and policy influence

### **Actions and Strategies:**

- *Skills Training:* The first cohort trained under the Cisco I.T. academy surpassed the global pass rate.
- *Business Partnerships:* Collaborations with companies like Safaricom offered internships, boosting learners' confidence and demonstrating their capability.
- *Extended Training Programs:* Light for the World has provided business and technical skills training to 1,700 persons with disabilities, with peer-to-peer learning and mentoring.
- *Vocational Training:* Providing vocational training for entrepreneurs in MSMEs helps them advance through technical skills, professionalism, certification, and understanding of regulatory and legislative frameworks.

- *Soft Skills Training:* Emphasizing self-advocacy and communication skills helps build confidence. Coaching and mentorship can also strengthen these skills.
- *Digital Skills and E-commerce:* Partnerships with e-commerce platforms help train disabled entrepreneurs to leverage e-commerce to access markets and ensure these platforms are accessible.
- *Funding Initiatives:* Developing prototypes for lending to persons with disabilities and partnering with institutions like the National Council for Persons with Disability to offer financial support.
- *Market Access:* Assisting entrepreneurs with disabilities in accessing markets and promoting inclusion within the business ecosystem.

### Success Stories and Case Studies

- Examples Shared:
  - *Sightsavers:* A graduate of the I.T. Bridge Academy became a Cisco Certified Network Administrator and now works in the office of the government spokesman.
  - *Value chain success:* Youth with disabilities are part of the value chain, supplying sorghum to Kenya Breweries Limited.
  - *Light of the World:* Successful placements include a project manager role and a landscaping graduate who transformed the family garden into an events venue, providing business opportunities for the whole family.
  - Benin: A young woman turned her cooking passion into a successful home-based business; the business has grown, and now she employs others.

### Areas for Further Exploration

- *Assistive Technology:* Exploring the potential of assistive technology to enable remote work and reduce accommodation costs.
- *Digital and Soft Skills:* Partnering with e-commerce platforms to train entrepreneurs and ensure these platforms are accessible.
- *Agriculture Value Chain:* Leveraging the agriculture sector, where 75% of Kenyans rely on it, to provide decent wages for youth with disabilities.
- *Gender and Inclusion:* To understand and address specific barriers, further investigate the intersection of disability, gender, geography, and age.

## 12.0 Fireside Chat: Global Business Disability Network

**Moderator:** Mr. Luke Muleka, Founder/ Managing Director, Signs Media Kenya; Vice Chair of Kenya Business Disability Network

**Panelists:**

1. **Mr. Simon Brown**, Deputy Director, Technical: Economic Empowerment, Sightsavers, USA – to join virtually
2. **Mr. Henry Saaba**, Coordinator, UBDN, Uganda
3. **Mr. Shuaib Chokran**, Executive Director African Disability Forum
4. **Ms. Srilakshmi Subramanyam**, EBDN, Ethiopia

**Introduction and Overview**

The discussion focused on the importance of creating inclusive workspaces and workforces for persons with disabilities. Emphasis was placed on the need for accessible spaces, products, and services and the significant role of business collaboration in achieving these goals.

**Key Insights and Findings**

- *Importance of Inclusion:* Inclusive workspaces and services are crucial for persons with disabilities.
- *Innovations Driven by Accessibility:* Innovations like smartphones and lifts were developed to solve accessibility challenges.
- *Business Collaboration:* Effective inclusion requires active cooperation between businesses and disability organizations.

**Challenges Identified:**

- *Youth Disability in Ethiopia:* Most persons with disabilities are under 25 and lack skills and job search knowledge due to non-inclusive job portals.
- *Job Application Rejections:* Stigma and marginalization lead to frequent rejections for job applicants with disabilities.
- *Skill Disparity:* Highly skilled individuals with disabilities find employment more easily, while those with fewer skills face significant challenges.

**Strategies/Actionable Recommendations**

- *Business Collaboration:* Organizations like EBDN work with the private sector to prepare for hiring people with disabilities. This has helped reduce the rejection rate.
- *Sharing Best Practices:* Learning from organizations like Sightsavers International and the Inclusion Works Program.
- *Skill Preparation:* Equipping persons with disabilities with soft skills, interview techniques, and CV writing.
- *Corporate Readiness:* Educating companies on reasonable accommodations.
- *Media Engagement:* Utilizing mainstream media to disseminate information on disability inclusion.
- *Societal Adaptation:* Shifting the burden of unemployment away from persons with disabilities and adapting societal structures.

- *Policy Implementation:* Enforcing U.N. guidelines and creating measurable policy frameworks like Kenya's 5% workforce provision for persons with disabilities.
- *Capacity Building:* Strengthening systems for corporates and MSMEs to understand and meet the needs of persons with disabilities.
- *Knowledge Exchange:* Utilizing disability networks like EBDN for corporate learning and scaling best practices.
- *Policy Incentives:* Strengthening frameworks to incentivize inclusion and support reasonable accommodation costs.
- *Timely Interventions:* Establishing effective communication channels to address productivity declines.
- *Accessibility Audits:* Supporting SMEs in conducting accessibility audits and providing accommodations.

#### Success Stories:

- *Examples Shared:*
  - *EBDN's Role:* In Ethiopia, EBDN collaborates with the private sector for mental preparation and expectation management, reducing rejection rates.
  - *Support from ILO:* Funding from the ILO aids in conducting accessibility audits and providing reasonable accommodations such as transportation, stipends, and safety audits, thus enhancing workplace inclusion.

#### Next Steps/Proposed Actions:

- *Positive Future Outlook:* Growing memberships and business disability networks indicate a private sector keen on inclusion.
- *Disaggregating Disability:* Addressing the needs of marginalized groups such as those with intellectual and psychosocial impairments and the deaf and blind to create specific accommodations.
- *Best Practices:* Implementing inclusive work projects and regulatory frameworks to build capacity and incentivize inclusion.
- *Market System Development:* Focusing on inclusive work projects, labor systems, trade unions, and regulatory frameworks to build and incentivize capacity.
- *Inclusion in Workforce:* Ensuring persons with disabilities find dignity and opportunities in the workforce, with companies actively seeking to include them.

## 13.0 Fireside Chat: Big Tech: A discussion about the future of accessibility by 2030

Moderator: **Ms. Mercy Ndegwa, META**

Speakers:

1. **Ms. Jessica Rafuse**, Microsoft, USA
2. **Ms. Briana Gilmore**, Uber, USA
3. **Ms. Laura Allen**, Google

Key Insights: How technology is enabling access and inclusion with a specific focus on the future standards and practices, especially for persons with disability:

- **Accessibility Features:** Technology platforms, devices, and software increasingly incorporate accessibility features to cater to diverse user needs. These features include screen readers, magnification tools, voice recognition, captioning, alternative input methods, and customizable settings that enhance usability for persons with disabilities.
- **Inclusive Design Principles:** Inclusive design principles prioritize the needs of diverse users, including persons with disabilities, from the outset of product development. By considering accessibility and usability requirements throughout the design process, technology products and services become more inclusive and user-friendly.
- **Global collaboration and advocacy efforts** promote the adoption of inclusive technology standards, policies, and practices at national, regional, and international levels. Future initiatives involve partnerships between governments, industry stakeholders, disability organizations, and standards bodies to advance digital inclusion for persons with disabilities worldwide.
- **Data Collection and Research:** Invest in data collection, research, and evidence-based advocacy to understand the number of people with disabilities. Use data to inform policy and programming decisions, monitor progress, and hold decision-makers accountable for effectively addressing accessibility and improving government conversations.
- **Investment.** Working with governments in terms of financing research and innovation to create tools to improve accessibility.
- **Customize technology** being built to improve accessibility. Ninety-six percent of websites are still not accessible; therefore, standards and regulations need to be developed to ensure accessibility for all.
- **Universal design standards** promote creating products, environments, and systems that people of all abilities, ages, and backgrounds can use. Future standards emphasize the importance of designing digital interfaces, websites, and applications that are accessible, intuitive, and barrier-free for persons with disabilities.

- Reducing the cost entry in terms of the disability tax (being disabled is extra work) can be done by lowering the cost through the power of A.I. to help us be more productive and efficient. Big Tech can make it easier for people.

#### Challenges for providing accessibility solutions platforms for people with disability

- People with disabilities have diverse needs, including visual, auditory, physical, cognitive, and neurological impairments. Designing solutions that cater to this wide range of needs can be complex.
- Lack of understanding of the needs of the user. Comprehensive testing with users with disabilities is essential to ensure that accessibility solutions are effective. However, recruiting diverse participants for testing can be difficult, and obtaining meaningful feedback requires careful consideration of each user's unique needs and experiences.
- Some accessibility features may require advanced technology or may not be feasible to implement in specific platforms or environments. Overcoming these technological limitations while maintaining affordability and scalability can be challenging.
- Lack of awareness. Many designers and developers may not be fully aware of the needs and challenges faced by people with disabilities. Increased education and awareness are needed to promote inclusive design practices.
- Safety remains a big challenge.

#### Interventions

- Learn more about the impact of Tech on mental health using a tool kit
- Independence of the users. Develop products that can understand the needs of the user.
- Use self-identification through A.I. to identify needs.
- Ensure user privacy is maintained and not being surveilled by big tech companies.
- Teaching access is trying to infuse accessibility into the curriculum.
- Collaborative among big Tech to increase education and awareness.

#### Role of A.I.

- The possibility of A.I. is exciting and moving fast; therefore, we must make sure issues of accessibility are addressed. By leveraging A.I. technologies, developers, designers, and policymakers can create more inclusive digital environments that prioritize accessibility and empower individuals with disabilities to participate fully in the digital world.
- A.I. to personalize small human interactions. AI-driven recommendation systems can analyze user preferences, behavior, and accessibility settings to personalize content and user interfaces. By adapting to individual needs and preferences, these systems can enhance the accessibility of digital platforms and improve the user experience for people with disabilities.

- Crowdsource data from as many sources as possible to advise design accessibility.

Next step

- Big Tech companies need to empower policymakers at a scale to inform policy.

## 14.0 PLENARY SESSION: A.I. and Disability: Navigating Challenges, Unlocking Opportunities

Moderator: **Ms. Irene Mbari-Kirika**, Executive Director, inABLE, Kenya

Speakers:

1. **Mr. Irungu Houghton**, Executive Director Amnesty International Kenya, Kenya
2. **Mr. Christopher Patnoe**, Head of Accessibility and Disability Inclusion for EMEA, Google, USA
3. **Ms. Jessica Rafuse**, Director of Strategic Partnerships & Policy, Microsoft, USA
4. **Mr. Bernard Chiira**, Executive Director, Assistive Technologies for Disability (AT4D), Kenya

About A.I.:

A.I. refers to the capability of a computer, machine, or any system to learn and perform tasks that typically require human intelligence. It involves mimicking cognitive functions such as learning and problem-solving. The different types of A.I. are as follows:

- *Machine learning*: This is the process of using data to develop A.I.
- *Generative A.I.*: Refers to using A.I. to create new content or objects such as text.
- *Large language models* are specific applications of A.I. that process and interact with languages.

On the challenges of A.I. on Security, Privacy, Ethics, and Data and strategies on enhancing the transformative power of A.I. and how it can be used to transform the lives of persons with disability:

- *Challenge of A.I. on Security*: A.I. poses significant security risks, particularly around the potential for online violence and cyberbullying. Amnesty International has focused on these issues, noting the increasing impact on vulnerable groups like young people and women. Additionally, A.I. systems can be exploited for malicious purposes, such as hacking, which is a concern in regions like Bomet in Kenya.
- *Challenge of A.I. on Privacy*: Mass surveillance facilitated by A.I. is a significant privacy concern. A.I. models can identify and profile large categories of people, leading to intrusive surveillance practices. This is particularly worrying in contexts like the U.S., where people of color are disproportionately targeted. The profiling capabilities of AI can result in significant privacy breaches, as large datasets of personal information are analyzed and potentially misused.
- *Challenge of A.I. on Ethics*: Ethical concerns with A.I. are vast and multifaceted. One major issue is the potential for A.I. to perpetuate biases. For example, profiling based on physical characteristics, such as assuming individuals with dreadlocks are guilty of

crimes, can reinforce harmful stereotypes. Another ethical challenge is the influence of A.I. on democratic processes. The concern is that elections could be swayed by powerful A.I. algorithms, potentially undermining the democratic process and thereby diminishing the importance of individual votes.

- *Challenge of A.I. on Data:* A.I. relies heavily on large datasets, raising concerns about data management and fairness. If the underlying data and algorithms are biased, using A.I. to determine access to essential services, such as social protection grants, education bursaries, and health insurance, can lead to discriminatory practices. This is especially problematic in regions like Africa, where access to services is already uneven.

### Strategies to Harness AI Responsibly

- *Inclusive Design:* To ensure that AI technologies are inclusive, people with disabilities should be involved in their design and development processes. This can be achieved through continuous feedback loops in which users provide insights on AI performance.
- *Legislative Frameworks:* It is crucial to create clear legislative frameworks that prioritize disability rights. Laws governing AI must explicitly address the needs of people with disabilities to ensure these technologies enhance rather than hinder their lives. Countries like Kenya must develop and enforce regulations that mandate universal design principles in all AI applications.
- *Transparency and Accountability:* Promoting transparency in AI development and deployment is vital to building trust and mitigating fears. This includes clear communication about how AI systems work and the data they use.
- *Education and Awareness:* Raising awareness and providing education about AI, especially its potential and risks, can help demystify the technology and dispel myths. This is particularly important in areas where misconceptions about AI are prevalent, such as Kenya. Education initiatives should target the general public and specific groups, such as policymakers, to foster a more informed and inclusive approach to AI.

### Overall Recommendations

- Ensure transparency in A.I. development by clearly communicating the process and benefits to build trust with the community.
- Use inclusive algorithms and diverse data sets to represent people with disabilities accurately, avoiding stereotypes.
- Incorporate local cultural contexts to make A.I. relevant in different regions and engage communities to meet their needs.
- Apply inclusive design principles by learning from users' experiences, such as modifying the Pixel phone's camera functionality.
- Adopt an iterative approach, continuously refining A.I. through feedback and corrections to achieve meaningful impact.

### Call to Action on A.I.

- *Join and Engage:* Participate actively in platforms and conferences like the *Inclusive Africa Conference* to hear diverse voices and collaborate on A.I. solutions tailored for Africa. Continuous engagement beyond annual meetings is essential.
- *Leverage Government and External Expertise:* Collaborate with experts and governmental bodies already working on A.I. initiatives to help bring out diverse perspectives. This approach will ensure inclusive progress.
- *Experiment and learn with AI tools:* Don't be afraid of AI—explore and play with available tools to understand their potential and limitations. Practical experimentation can uncover unique applications and necessary improvements.
- *Promote Inclusivity in A.I. Development:* Advocate for the involvement of people with disabilities in coding, designing, and overseeing A.I. projects to ensure technologies meet diverse needs.
- *Champion Privacy and Transparency:* Advocate privacy-by-design principles and demand transparency from AI developers regarding how their systems work and any biases they may contain.
- *Support Local Cultures and Languages:* Ensure A.I. technologies respect and represent local cultures and languages to avoid creating a disadvantage for non-English speakers.
- *Cultivate Leadership:* Encourage leadership in communities, such as those with disabilities, to drive the A.I. agenda and prioritize their needs.
- *Learn A.I.:* Use resources like Google and ChatGPT to educate yourself on its basics and implications. Knowledge is power, and being informed allows more effective participation and advocacy.

## 15.0 Unraveling Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD) in Sub-Saharan Africa

**Prof. Susan Wamithi**, Developmental Pediatric Specialist, Aga Khan University Hospital, Nairobi

### Introduction:

In this session, Prof. Wamithi discussed the challenges and strategies related to diagnosing and managing ADHD in children and adults in Sub-Saharan Africa. The following is a summary of her presentation.

### About Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD)

ADHD is a neurodevelopmental disorder that affects both children and adults. It is characterized by inattention, hyperactivity, and impulsivity patterns that can lead to functional impairments in various aspects of life, including academic performance, work, and social interactions. ADHD is recognized as a medical condition with a genetic component influenced by environmental factors. It manifests in two primary symptom clusters:

- *Inattention*: Difficulty sustaining attention, not listening when spoken to directly, and a tendency to lose items necessary for tasks and activities.
- *Hyperactivity and Impulsivity*: Inability to stay seated, excessive running or climbing, talking excessively, and interrupting others.

### ADHD impact on daily life

ADHD can lead to significant challenges in school for children. The child may struggle to follow instructions, complete homework, and maintain organization. These difficulties often result in poor academic performance and repeated visits to the principal's office for disciplinary action. In adults, ADHD can affect occupational performance. Tasks requiring sustained focus may go unfinished, leading to job instability and unemployment. Adults with ADHD might find it challenging to manage multiple projects simultaneously or prioritize tasks effectively.

### Identifying ADHD

In many cases, ADHD is misunderstood, especially in regions like Sub-Saharan Africa, where it was previously considered a non-issue. Children with ADHD are often mislabeled as naughty or troublesome, leading to missed diagnoses. Recognizing ADHD involves identifying patterns of inattention and hyperactivity.

### Importance of Early Intervention

Early diagnosis and intervention are crucial. Without appropriate support, children with ADHD may experience low self-esteem, social difficulties, and academic setbacks. Adolescents and

adults may engage in risk-taking behaviors, such as substance abuse and reckless driving, due to untreated ADHD.

### Managing ADHD

Management of ADHD typically involves a combination of medication, behavioral therapy, and environmental adjustments. Cognitive Behavioral Therapy (CBT) helps individuals develop coping strategies. Additionally, A.T.s can be beneficial such as:

- Audio Books helps children who are always on the move to learn while being active.
- Text-to-speech technology assists in maintaining attention by combining auditory and visual inputs.
- Timers and visual reminders help manage time and tasks, reducing forgetfulness and helping maintain routines.

### Technology and ADHD

Advances in technology have provided valuable tools for managing ADHD. Devices and apps can support children and adults in organizing their activities, setting reminders, and creating structured environments conducive to focus and productivity.

### Community and Support

Raising awareness about ADHD is essential. Educators, parents, and healthcare providers need to collaborate to identify and support individuals with ADHD. Creating an inclusive environment that understands and accommodates the needs of those with ADHD can significantly improve their quality of life.

### Plenary Discussions

The following were the key outcomes of the discussions:

- *ADHD Testing and how to raise awareness about the condition:* For young children, parents should see a pediatrician who can screen and refer them to subspecialists if needed. For adults, a psychiatrist or neurologist should be consulted. The East African Academy of Childhood Disabilities supports people with ADHD and creates awareness through online platforms like Google Meet and Zoom for educational sessions.
- *Access to ADHD Medication:* There is a significant shortage of ADHD medication in Kenya, particularly for adults, and there are challenges in locating pharmacies that stock the medication. This can be attributed to some of the drug companies having exited the market due to economic reasons. A technology-based solution should be developed to track medication stocks and their locations.
- *ADHD Services in Rural Areas:* To improve the availability and accessibility of ADHD services in rural and hard-to-reach areas, the Ministry of Health, Kenya, set up a rehab

and assistive technology strategy for primary care facilities in rural areas. Doctors are also now using teleconsultations to support pediatricians in remote locations.

Key Recommendations:

- Parents should consult pediatricians or relevant specialists for ADHD testing and diagnosis.
- Doctors should utilize social media and online platforms to disseminate information and support for ADHD awareness and education.
- For innovators to develop a technological solution or app to track the availability of ADHD medications across pharmacies and hospitals.
- Leverage government strategies and policies to ensure ADHD services are integrated into primary care facilities in rural areas.
- Doctors should utilize telemedicine and teleconsultation services to support remote regions, ensuring access to necessary care and information.

## 16.0 Plenary Session: Youth with Disabilities in Leadership: Public & Private Sector

**Moderator:** **Mr. Washington Sati**, Commissioner and the Vice Chairperson of the Commission on Administrative Justice (Office of the Ombudsman), Kenya

**Speakers:**

1. **Mr. Cobahms Asuquo**, Musician, Producer, and Songwriter, Nigeria
2. **Mr. Victo Nalule**, Executive Director, Tunaweza Foundation, Uganda
3. **Ms. Perpetua Senkoro**, Coordinator, Tanzania Human Rights Defenders Coalition
4. **Hon Wangui Njee**, Village Society of East Africa

*On how education and vocational training programs can better support youth with disabilities, helping them to build the necessary skills and confidence to contribute positively to their communities.*

- ***Building Confidence and Self-Esteem:*** Education plays a vital role in building the confidence and self-esteem of individuals with disabilities. Many who lack educational opportunities suffer from low self-esteem and are more susceptible to suppression and discrimination. Education transforms their outlook, making them more resilient and confident.
- ***Inclusive and Well-Equipped Institutions:*** For education to be effective, institutions must be equipped to accommodate various disabilities. This includes recognizing and addressing the diverse needs and challenges faced by individuals with disabilities. Schools should not limit their support to only common disabilities but should be prepared to accommodate all types, including less-known ones like ADHD.
- ***Knowledgeable Educators:*** Teachers and educators must understand the differences in disabilities and how to support students with varying needs. Proper training for educators is essential to create an inclusive learning environment.
- ***Collaboration with private sector partners:*** Government-run schools should be open to collaborations with private partners to improve facilities and resources. An example cited was a vocational training school with poor accessibility for wheelchair users, where the government declined a private donor's offer to enhance the infrastructure, resulting in no improvements being made.
- ***Universal Accessibility in Mainstream Schools:*** Schools should aim for universal accessibility, integrating students with disabilities into mainstream educational settings. This approach helps normalize the presence of disabilities and ensures all students are treated equally and inclusively. There should not be schools labeled "special schools."
- ***Economic Support for Parents:*** Special attention should be given to parents of children with severe disabilities, who often face significant economic challenges. These parents

might need to stay with their children throughout the school day, impacting their ability to work and earn a living. Measures should be implemented to support these parents economically, enabling them to ensure their children can attend school and participate equally with their peers.

*On how mentorship and peer support, which are vital for young persons with disabilities to pursue their aspirations around employment education and civic participation, can be used to support youth with disability:*

- Mentorship is crucial for personal and professional development and is a continuous process. Organizations such as the Tunaweza Foundation have been impactful in mentoring young people with disabilities. Projects like inclusive education funded by the U.S. Mission have also shown positive results. Youth should be encouraged to leave their comfort zones and explore new opportunities. Successful mentorship leads to empowerment and self-reliance; it also encourages youth to pursue aspirations in diverse fields, such as aviation, where they might feel underrepresented and be able to compete globally.
- Additional support for the youth can be through the use of technology, for example:
  - Use of speech-to-text and text-to-speech software.
  - Development of apps and devices catering to the specific needs of youth with disabilities.
  - Use of online learning platforms.

*On policy and innovation towards the promotion or inclusion of youth with disability in entrepreneurship, leadership, and development and the type of initiatives that should be put in place:*

- Some key initiatives include establishing accessible ICT centers, leveraging government and private sector collaboration, promoting awareness of grant programs, and involving youth with disabilities in decision-making processes.

#### Overall Recommendations:

- *Accessible ICT Centers:* Government and private sector collaboration to build accessible ICT centers for youth with disabilities to overcome barriers to accessing the internet and technology.
- *Grant Programs:* Promote and ensure awareness of government projects like KEOP and NYOTA that provide grants to youth entrepreneurs, including those with disabilities, without requiring repayment.
- *Capacity Building:* Joint government and private sector efforts to develop and implement capacity-building programs tailored for youth with disabilities.
- *Involvement in Policy Formulation:* Ensure youth with disabilities are actively involved in the decision-making process when new regulations and policies are being

developed. This includes participation in public consultations and having their views considered.

- *Memoranda of Understanding (MOUs):* Develop MOUs with legislative bodies like Bunge and county assemblies to guarantee accountability and structured participation of youth with disabilities in policy discussions.
- *Public Participation and Accountability:* Advocate for systematically including youth with disabilities in public participation processes for different bills, ensuring they have a say in legislative matters affecting their lives.
- *Amplifying Conversations on AT:* Continue discussions around AT.
- *Mentorship as a transformative tool:* Emphasize the importance of having mentors; this can help significantly improve the lives of persons with disabilities and enable them achieve their full potential.

## 17.0 Keynote Address

**By Ms Laura Allen, Head of Strategy & Programs for Accessibility & Disability Inclusion, Google**

Laura Allen described an incredible partnership at Google, emphasizing the importance of hiring people with disabilities to build a diverse and representative workforce. She stated that hiring is just the beginning; the focus must also be on helping these employees thrive in any job they choose, not just disability-related roles. Google, she said, does this in the following ways:

- *Having a dedicated group of people that are focused on accommodations for people with disability, right from the hiring process through to the point they have settled in their jobs:* She mentioned that accommodations, which are provided by a team of specialists, include assistive technology, CART captioning, and flexible working hours, facilitated by a specialized team. She acknowledged that not all managers are familiar with disability inclusion. As such, Google provides resources and training for them and an external training course titled "Disability Fundamentals for Managers."
- *The importance of accessible technology, internal products like Gmail and Google Docs, and third-party tools:* She stressed the need for procurement teams to prioritize accessibility in contracts and sales discussions. Over the years, many Googlers with disabilities have provided feedback to product teams, often seen as an extra burden. To alleviate this, Google created a specialized tech support team for accessibility to handle issues and prioritize fixes. This approach has helped reduce the burden on the employee and instead placed it on the person whose job it is to fix.
- *Navigating physical spaces in offices:* She highlighted the importance of accessible physical spaces, mentioning features like automatic door openers for people using wheelchairs and lighting adjustments for people with low vision. Google has also built focus areas for employees who are neurodiverse and do not want to work in open office spaces all day. She noted that the Disability Alliance ERG at Google has grown to thousands of members, providing community and support through numerous subgroups.
- *Employee Resource Group (Disability Alliance ERG):* This is a group of Googlers with disabilities, family members and parents of people with disabilities, and allies who just want to learn more. There are different subgroups and chapters, for example, a group of Googlers with ADHD, a group of Googlers with visual impairment, a group for parents of children with autism, etc. These groups help create support, belonging, and community among each other.
- *Self ID campaign for disclosing disability:* Google carries out a survey of its employees, the answers of which are not passed on to management. The survey was carried out purely to understand how many employees identify as disabled or neurodiverse within the company so that trends can be tracked over time. Over time, this data will, for example, provide information on how the experience is for employees who do not identify as disabled versus the people who do and what sort

of programming can be created to improve that. The data is, therefore, critical to tracking momentum and progress.

Based on the above, Ms. Allen shared the following as the key learnings from her experience at Google:

- *Technology has transformative power:* It provides new capabilities and innovations and is bridging the gap. If done right, it has transformative power; if done wrong and accessibility is not prioritized, it has the opposite impact. Therefore, technology has to be prioritized, and accessibility has to be continuously championed.
- *Putting people at the center:* The voices of people with disabilities must be valued and represented and should be at the center of everything being carried out.
- *Leadership buy-in is critical:* Buy-in from all levels of the company to the agenda is key.
- *Progress over perfection:* Progress is key; every journey to the summit begins with one singular step.
- *Collaboration across all sectors is key.* Talking honestly about the challenges and opportunities and tackling them together is imperative. Talking about everything in terms of perfection will not help anyone. *"We will always go further together."*

Ms. Allen addressed the pervasive issue of fear as a significant barrier. She noted that fear manifests in various forms: people with disabilities fearing they might not succeed in school or the workplace, parents feeling anxious about their children with disabilities leaving the house, and employers worrying about the risks and unknowns of hiring individuals with disabilities. She stressed the importance of reducing this fear by fostering understanding about disabilities, capabilities, and the potential people with disabilities have. She emphasized that through collective effort, this fear can be transformed into understanding, commitment, and action, ultimately leading to an inclusive and empowering future for people with disabilities.

In closing, she reflected on the Inclusive Africa Conference's theme of breaking barriers and the progress made through the discussions and connections formed. She urged participants to think about one specific action they can commit to that has been inspired by the conversations at the conference. Emphasizing the momentum generated at the conference, she expressed confidence in the group's ability to drive transformative change across Africa and globally. She thanked everyone for their dedication to the mission of creating a more inclusive and beautiful world, highlighting the potential for significant and positive impact through their continued efforts in Africa and across the world.



## 18.0 Closing Remarks

### **By Mr Joe Kiarie, Board Member, inABLE**

Mr Joe Kiarie, concluding the *5th Inclusive African Conference*, reflected on the significance of the collective efforts and expressed heartfelt gratitude to all contributors, celebrating the success of the 2024 event. He emphasized the importance of advancing digital accessibility for a disability-inclusive Africa, focusing on innovative solutions, policy frameworks, and collaborative strategies to break down barriers and create opportunities for people with disabilities.

The conference sessions, he said, addressed themes such as web accessibility, employment, challenges faced by people with disabilities, access to assistive technology, gender-based violence, sexual and mental health, and innovative solutions in the education sector. He highlighted the identified challenges, including technology design barriers and insufficient policy reforms, and discussed solutions specifically around bridging the skills gap, advocacy, and policy changes to foster inclusion.

He stated that a key takeaway from the discussions was the emphasis on collaboration among persons with disabilities, policymakers, educators, technology developers, the private sector, and civil society to drive meaningful change and foster a more inclusive society in Africa. He noted the critical need for promoting inclusion and accessibility in education and digital technology, underscoring the core mission of the *Inclusive African Conference*.

On behalf of his colleagues at inABLE, Mr. Kiarie expressed sincere gratitude to persons with disabilities, acknowledging them as the heartbeat of their efforts and the inspiration behind their work. He thanked government representatives for their commitment to policy reforms and collaboration, which are essential to advancing digital accessibility and inclusion in Africa.

He further expressed gratitude to partners such as the MasterCard Foundation, Google, Uber, and Meta for their support in bridging the digital divide and creating pathways to inclusion. He acknowledged the contributions of all partners, collaborators, and influencers, appreciating their commitment to accessibility and inclusion.

He thanked the speakers for their time, commitment, and wisdom, which enriched the conference discourse; he also recognized the vendors for ensuring the event's success. He commended the assistive technology innovators for developing cutting-edge solutions that empower individuals with disabilities and encouraged them for the upcoming awards.

Mr Kiarie concluded by acknowledging the outstanding efforts of his colleagues at inABLE and praising their dedication and hard work. He hinted at next year's conference, promising an even more significant impact. He urged all participants to carry forward the spirit of collaboration, innovation, and empathy, remaining committed to inclusion and working towards a future where barriers are dismantled, opportunities are abundant, and no one is left behind. He wished everyone safe travels.

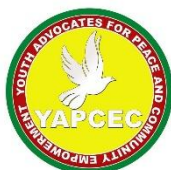


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