



The IT Bridge Academy: Building Resilient IT Skills Supply for Persons with Disabilities in Kenya

BACKGROUND

People with disabilities make up 16 per cent of the global population¹, yet they are far from adequately represented in labour markets and face much higher rates of unemployment compared to people without disabilities. In Kenya, there is an estimated four million people living with disabilities. Only 23.6% are in employment compared to 73.8% of the general population. Confirming persisting gender disparities, women with disabilities face double disadvantages based on gender and disability: men with disabilities are more than twice as likely to work for pay.

Many of the jobseekers with disabilities graduating from schools lack the opportunity to access educational programmes which equip them with demanded technical and soft skills for employment. On the other side, private sector employers do have a clear interest to increase the representation of disability in their workforces but commonly fail due to lack of experience and confidence in dealing with disabilities in their recruitment and working processes. There need to be a catalysing force to bridge the gap between employers and jobseekers.

¹ World Health Organisation (WHO): [Global report on health equity for persons with disabilities](#), 2022.

Picture above: Shanice Muthoni, who has a hearing impairment, explains her future expectations drawing during a world cafe workshop. The event was held during a Cisco Networking training at NITA that is supported by Sightsavers and GIZ.



Divinah Moriango (left) and Kibwana Mkumba (right), students at NITA pose for a photograph during a learning break. They are attending a Cisco Networking course in Nairobi with support of Sightsavers and GIZ.

IT TRAINING FOR JOBSEEKERS WITH DISABILITIES

In 2021, GIZ Global Project Inclusion of Persons with Disabilities together with the pan-African youth employment programme “Employment and Skills for Development in Africa” (E4D) funded by the German Federal Ministry of Economic Cooperation and Development (BMZ) and the Norwegian Agency for Development Cooperation (NORAD), and the NGO Sightsavers joined forces to fund the first pilot for the IT Bridge Academy in Nairobi, Kenya. The Academy is hosted at the National Industrial Training Authority (NITA) and provided in its first year accessible IT training to 37 jobseekers with disabilities and built employable skills to give them an opportunity to find employment in the IT sector. In 2022, a second cohort of 49 students completed the training and are currently doing internships. A third cohort have started training in spring 2023.

Partners:

- Sightsavers
- United Disabled Persons of Kenya (UDPK)
- Three Talents Advisors
- CISCO Systems
- National Industrial Training Authority (NITA)
- Accenture
- Safaricom

THE CONCEPT OF THE IT BRIDGE ACADEMY

The IT Bridge Academy offers a nine-month training course utilising an adopted version of the CISCO IT training curriculum. Together with measures supporting a disability inclusive infrastructure, trainees are prepared for the CISCO Certified Network Associate (CCNA) and CISCO Certified Technician (CCT) exam, both being highly recognised industry certificates. The curriculum is complemented with soft skills training and mentorships to facilitate transition into employment and support trainees to move from learners to earners. After the trainings, the IT Bridge Academy links the graduates to selected private sector employers to gain work experience in form of a three to six months internship. Safaricom, Kenya’s largest telecommunication provider, committed early in the process to offer internships for graduates of the current cohorts.

The target group of the trainings is youth with disabilities in all their diversity with a particular focus on women, recognising the gender gap in IT and in disability inclusion. Thanks to these measures, the initiative achieved 50:50 gender parity in the classroom. To enable every student to participate, the cooperation partner United Disabled Persons of Kenya (UDPK) provides reasonable accommodation based on the individual needs of each student to remove barriers for learning (such as sign language interpretation, screen readers and physical adjustments to the built environment).

ACHIEVEMENTS TO DATE

- › Since 2021, a total of 86 students (= 90 per cent of all participants) have passed the CISCO exams in both cohorts. This is above average for CISCO Networking Academies.
- › 42 out of the 86 successful students were women with disabilities.
- › 33 students from the first cohort have completed six-months internships at Safaricom in October 2022 of which 13 students have already transitioned into full-time formal jobs.
- › Others are supported by a mentorship program by Accenture and Cisco.

- › There is a noticeable shift in attitudes and beliefs among students whose self-confidence grows over the length of the course as well as the growing confidence of Safaricom to employ people with disabilities.
- › In February 2022, the IT Bridge Academy in Nairobi was one of four academies globally who won the latest CISCO Be the Bridge award. This is prestigious among 12,000 academies around the world and recognises the efforts of the programme to pilot the Bridge model successfully.

5. PLANS FOR THE FUTURE

After the successful pilot, a scale up phase is now being implemented in partnership with the two GIZ projects, with 50 per cent match-funding from the global initiative Futuremakers by the Standard Chartered Bank to sustain the Nairobi academy through end-2023 and to further support two more cohorts of students with disabilities.

The IT Bridge Academy is a unique collaboration bringing together public and private sector actors in overcoming functional gaps in the labour market system. Over the next years, GIZ and partners will work to expand the IT Bridge Academy in Kenya but also to other countries. Partners from the public and private sectors are welcomed to be part of this ecosystem and offer opportunities for skilled women and men with disabilities.

As the curriculum and the approach can be replicated and expanded to other market skills in demand, the partner Sightsavers is currently conducting GIZ-financed market research on current IT demands in the Kenyan labour market to match the skills taught at the IT Bridge Academy. The outcome of this market research will influence the scale up and scale out of existing and future IT Bridge Academies.



Group photo of the Cisco Networking class held at NITA in Nairobi with the support of Sightsavers and GIZ.

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