



Annual Report

2025

**Empowering Persons with
Disabilities through Technology,
Skilling, and Opportunities.**



Executive Director's Message

Dear Partners,

As we reflect on 2025 and look ahead to 2026, I am filled with deep gratitude for our journey together. This year is especially meaningful for us as we celebrate our fifth anniversary. Five years of resilience, growth, and an unwavering belief that opportunity has the power to transform lives.

What began as a small, ambitious initiative has matured into an internationally recognized organization. We are proud to equip Persons with Disabilities and youth from underserved communities with the skills, confidence, and access required to thrive in a modern economy. Over the past five years, we have reached more than 10,000 participants across our programs. Behind this number are stories of true transformation: learners securing dignified employment, families achieving financial stability, and employers discovering the immense value of inclusive talent.

In 2025, our impact reached new heights:

- **Over 600+ participants were trained in industry-relevant digital skills, preparing them for the digital economy.**
- **1,000+ Enterprises nationwide underwent Disability Inclusion mainstreaming.**
- **3,500+ Employees across Kenya were engaged, positioning us as a definitive leader in workplace inclusion.**

This year also marked a significant leap in innovation. We launched and refined our AI-enabled inclusion tools, designed to help employers build more accessible workplaces. This reflects our core philosophy: systems change requires not only training individuals but also reshaping how organizations recruit and support diverse talent. Furthermore, we have strengthened our model as a hybrid nonprofit and social enterprise, proving that social impact and financial sustainability are mutually reinforcing.



Our fifth anniversary is both a celebration and a call to action. The need remains urgent, as millions of Persons with Disabilities across Africa still face systemic barriers. However, our journey has proven that when the right skills meet the right partnerships, change is not only possible but scalable.

Looking forward, we are committed to expanding our reach, deepening our employer partnerships, and bridging the gap between talent and opportunity. Our vision for this next chapter is clear: to become the leading driver of inclusive digital workforce development in Africa.

None of this would be possible without the trust of our participants, staff, board, and partners. Your belief in our mission fuels every success shared in this report. Thank you for walking this journey with us into the next five years of unlocking opportunity for all.

Peres Were



Impact at a glance

658

Total participants trained

99%

Participants graduation rate

53%

Representation of
Persons with Disabilities

93%

Job retention rate
of participants placed

83%

Interview success
rate among PWD graduates



About us

Mission

We transform lives by leveraging the power of technology to upskill Persons with Disabilities, women and young people from marginalized and underserved communities to be empowered to participate in the digital economy.

Vision

An inclusive and empowered world.

Core Values

-  Passion
-  Inclusivity
-  Integrity
-  Innovation
-  Empathy

OUR THEORY OF CHANGE (R.A.A.T.T METHOD)



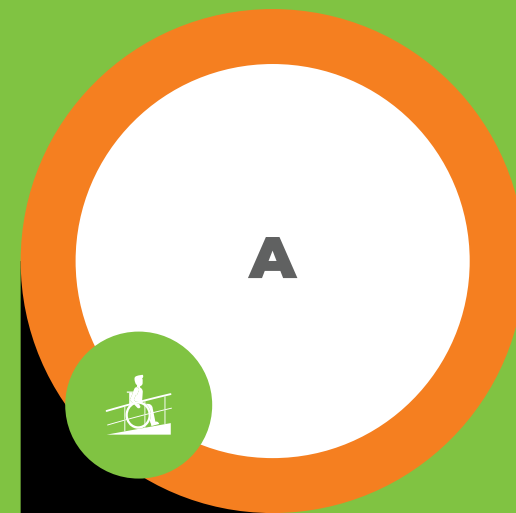
Recruiting

Young Persons with Disabilities in Africa face invisibility due to social stigma, familial shame, and prioritization of resources, leading to segregation in education. We have a network of schools, universities and Disabled People's Organizations who help us identify and recruit young Persons with Disabilities to participate in our training programs.



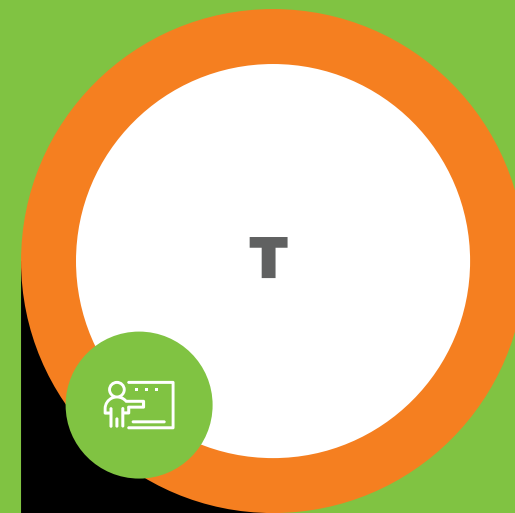
Assessment

Diversity among Persons with Disabilities, ranging from mobility challenges to hidden disabilities compounded by intersecting personal attributes, poses unique and multifaceted barriers to inclusion and support. The assessments are program-specific and are designed to match candidates with the right training. They also identify what tools /resources are needed to address any disabilities.



Accommodation

The diverse needs of Persons with Disabilities necessitate tailored accommodations, ranging from screen-readers and sign language interpreters to specialized equipment and learning environments, posing challenges for inclusivity. We use the results of our assessment process to identify the accommodations each candidate will require to successfully complete the training program and obtain employment



Training

Digital skills training programs often lack comprehensive instruction, failing to equip graduates, particularly Persons with Disabilities, with the necessary technical and soft skills demanded by employers. We offer only skills-based training that imparts practical knowledge that is aligned with existing and future labor market demands.



Transition

Limited focus exists on addressing the 'last mile' challenge of transitioning Persons with Disabilities into employment, as they encounter their first job with associated hurdles. We provide mentors for our graduates that help them transition into employment and help identify ways in which corporations can establish and grow disability inclusion programs.

EXPANDING OPPORTUNITIES IN THE DIGITAL ECONOMY:





Skills for Inclusive Digital Participation phase 4, 2025

Phase 4 of the Skills for Inclusive Digital Participation (SIDP) project was completed in Nairobi County with funding from the UK Government and implementation by the British Council in partnership with the Next Step Foundation.

A total of 347 Persons with Disabilities (164 male, 183 female) completed accredited basic digital skills training.

The program integrated reasonable accommodations from the onset, including sign language interpretation, caregiver support, and transport facilitation, ensuring equitable participation across different disability types.

This phase reinforces that structured, accessible digital skills training can deliver high retention and meaningful participation when inclusion is intentionally built into program design.



Advanced Cloud Certification Pathways

NSF continues to strengthen its advanced digital skilling portfolio through Amazon Web Services (AWS) Cloud Certification programs. To date, over 400 learners have been trained across various AWS tracks, building a growing pipeline of cloud practitioners and instructors.

In partnership with Strathmore University's iLabAfrica Research and Innovation Centre, our first cohort of learners enrolled in the AWS Solutions Architect training and completed it, as part of ongoing delivery and institutional collaboration.

This sustained investment in cloud skilling positions learners for high-demand roles in cloud engineering, infrastructure management, and digital transformation initiatives across sectors.



AI for Industry: Beauty Sector Skilling

We introduced a specialized Prompt Engineering course tailored for professionals in the beauty industry in partnership with Lintons Academy. The program focused on practical applications of artificial intelligence in digital marketing, content creation, and brand positioning within the beauty sector.

A total of 23 participants completed the training, strengthening their ability to integrate AI tools into business growth strategies and digital engagement. This initiative demonstrates our capacity to contextualize emerging technologies for specific industries, ensuring that AI adoption is practical, relevant, and commercially viable.



Cross-Border Digital Work: Advanced Data Annotation Training in Nigeria

In 2025, we expanded our regional footprint by delivering online Advanced Data Annotation training to 120 participants in Nigeria through our **Nikoworkx Learning Management System**, in partnership with **Tech Mindset Africa**. The program equipped learners with skills required for participation in the global digital labor market.

By leveraging online delivery infrastructure, we extended access beyond Kenya, demonstrating a scalable and cross-border training capacity. This initiative strengthens pathways into remote digital work opportunities and reinforces our commitment to preparing African talent for emerging roles within the AI ecosystem.

ADVANCING DISABILITY INCLUSION IN THE WORKPLACE

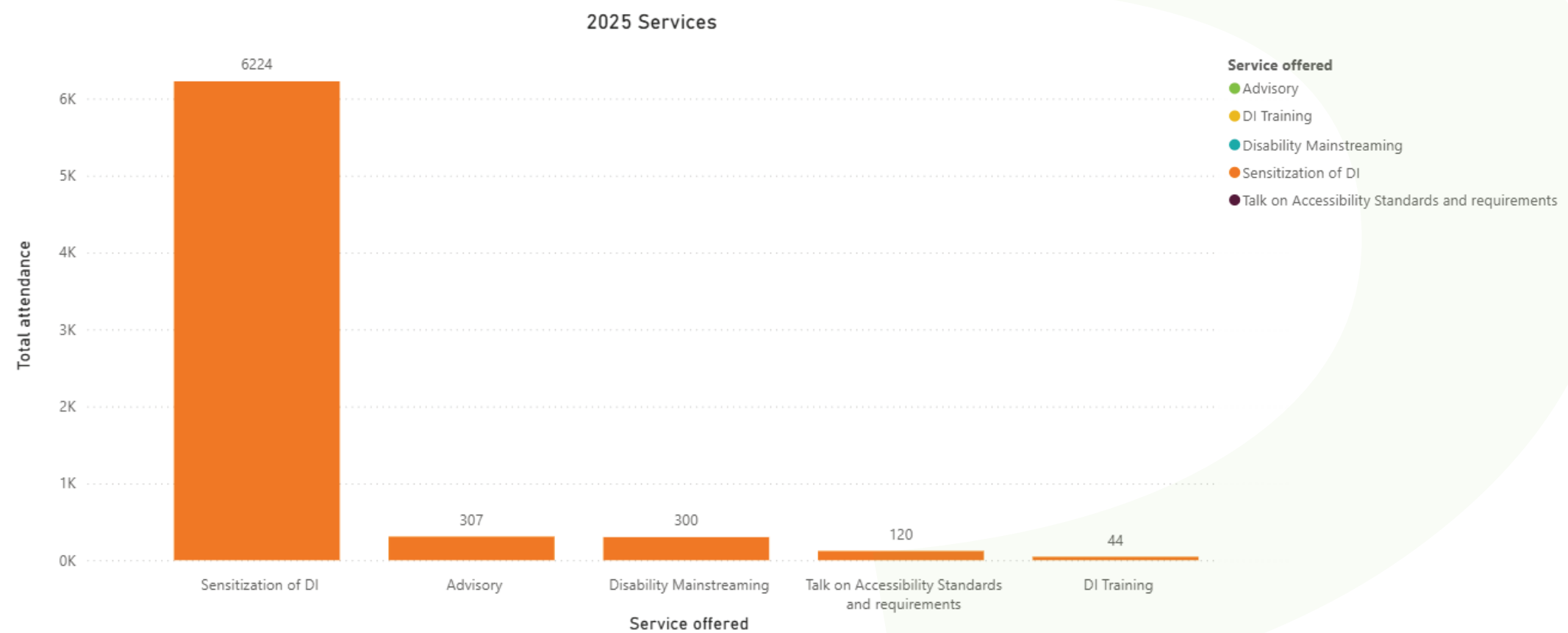


Disability Inclusion Training Program

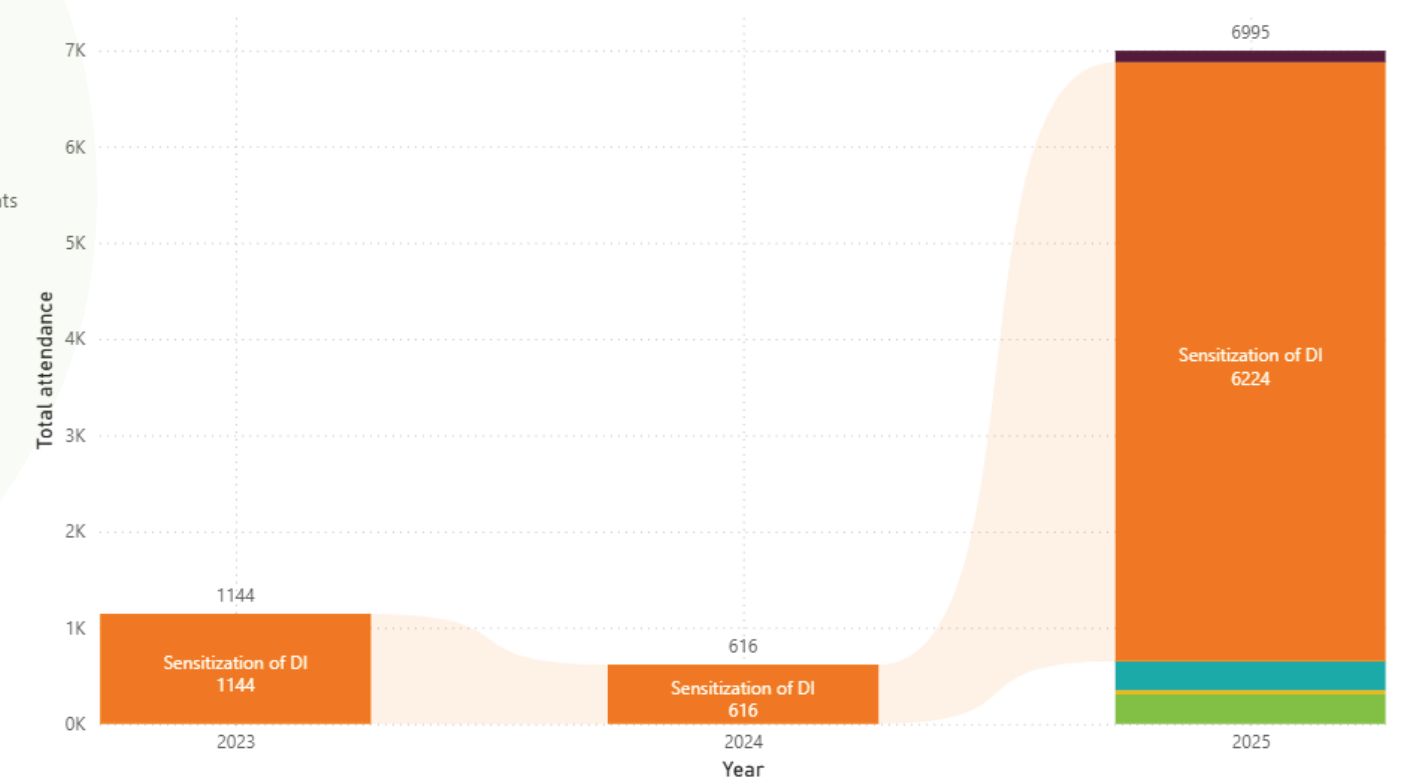
We supported organizations to build inclusive workplaces through structured Disability Inclusion interventions that drive systemic change. Our work strengthened inclusive hiring practices, promoted accessible work environments, and enhanced employee support systems to better reflect diverse workforce needs.

In 2025, we engaged over 6,995 individuals across multiple sectors through targeted capacity-building initiatives designed to align employment policies and practices with recognized Disability Inclusion and standards. Our interventions ranged from reviewing recruitment processes and advising on reasonable accommodation frameworks to conducting workplace accessibility assessments and supporting talent with disabilities within organizational systems.


Beyond expanding participation, the Next Step Foundation is also investing in technology that helps organizations build more inclusive workplaces. Through **Nafasi.ai**, our AI-powered HR assistant, employers can identify barriers in hiring, design accessible roles, and implement reasonable accommodations that support employees with disabilities.



Service categories offered as of 2025



DI participation YoY

A photograph of a computer lab or training center. Several people are seated at long wooden tables, each with a laptop. They are focused on their devices. In the foreground, a man in a black jacket is looking at his phone. To his right, a woman in a bright pink jacket is working on her laptop. Other people are visible in the background, some looking at their phones and others at their laptops. The room has large windows and wooden paneling.

IMPACT BY THE NUMBERS:

2025 Skilling

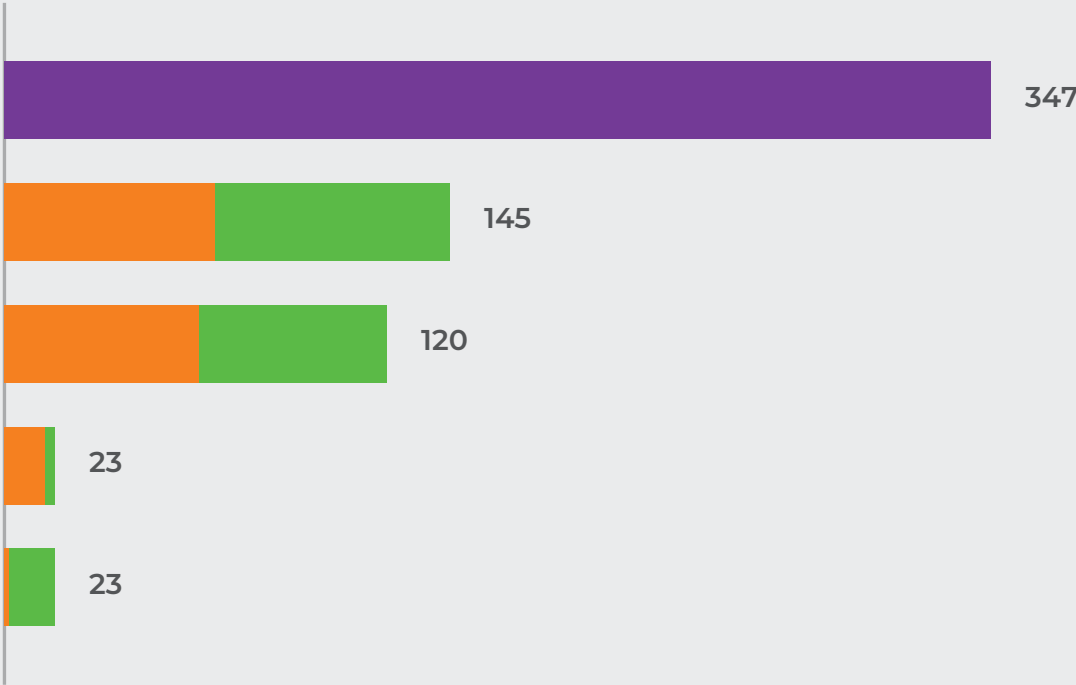
SIDP Phase 4

AWS Cloud Practitioner Essentials

Advanced Data Annotation - Online

AWS Solutions Architect

Prompt Engineering with AI

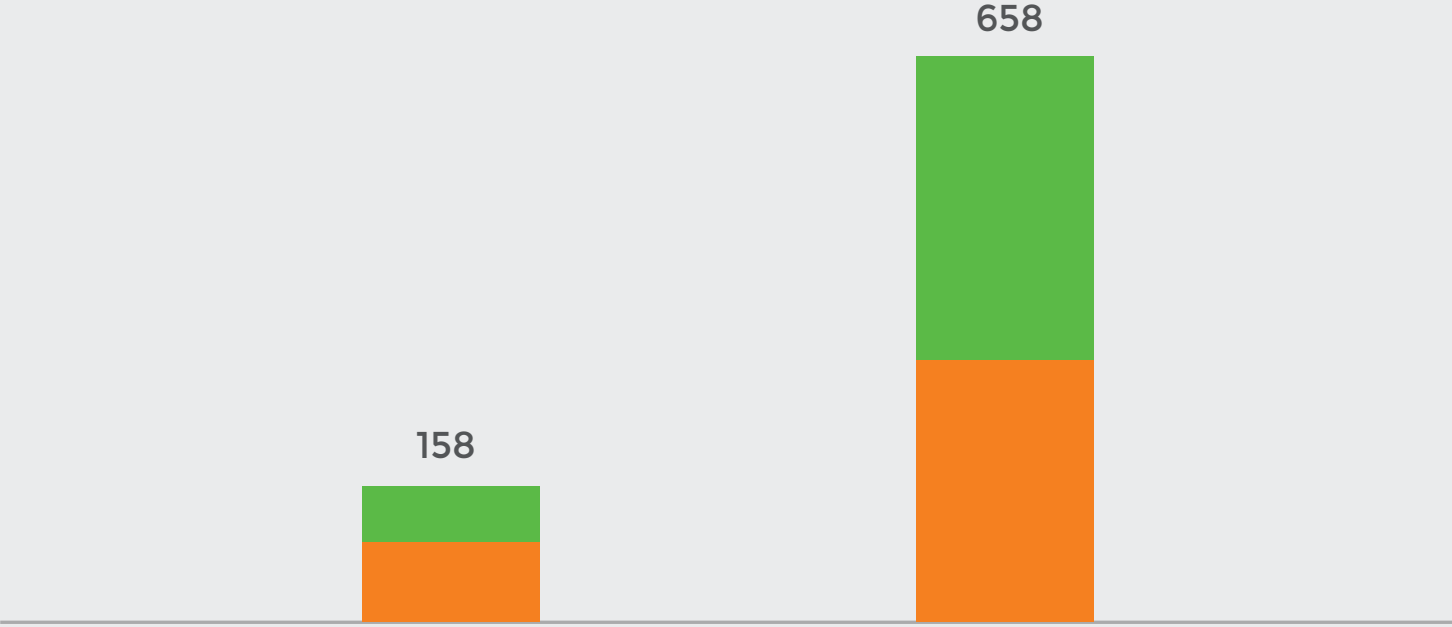


	Male	Female	PWDs
SIDP Phase 4	164	183	347
AWS Solutions Architect	18	5	0
AI Prompt Engineering	1	22	0
Advanced Data Annotation	56	64	0
AWS Cloud Essentials	68	77	0

2025 Programs Numbers

Upili Mental Health Program

Training

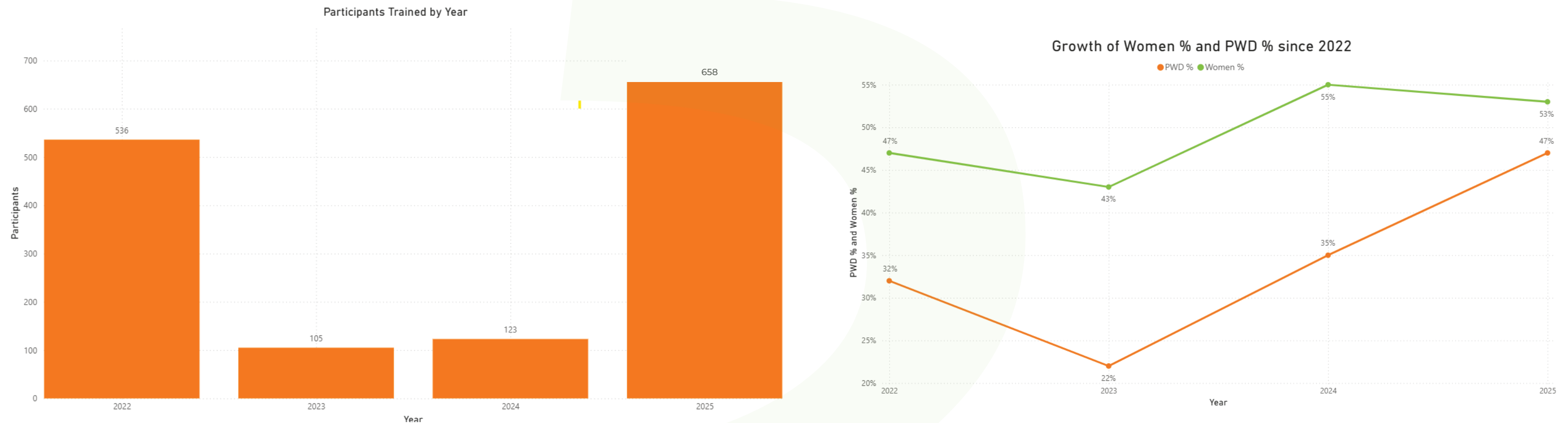


	Male	Female	PWDs	Total
Skilling	307	351	347	658
Upili Mental Health Program	85	73	158	158

Our Skilling Journey

Our journey reflects our intentional focus on expanding access and reducing barriers to participation. Year by year, our programs are becoming more representative of the communities we serve. The data confirms that inclusion is not only a stated value, but a measurable outcome of our work.

The graphs below shows the percentage growth in participation of women and Persons with Disabilities (PWDs) across our programs from 2022 to 2025. Both groups demonstrate a steady upward trend over the four-year period.



Beyond expanding participation, the Next Step Foundation is investing in technology to provide psychosocial support. A key example is **Tumaini**, our AI-powered mental health chatbot specifically designed for East African youth.

Upili: Supporting Mental Health & Resilience for Students with Disabilities



UPILI'S MENTAL HEALTH PROGRESS

The Next Step Foundation's Upili program strengthened its model in 2025, expanding mental health support for High School learners with Disabilities through improved counseling frameworks, partnerships, and innovation. The team developed a structured 12-week counseling curriculum grounded in evidence-based practices and adopted internationally recognized tools, including the PHQ-9 and Rosenberg Self-Esteem Scale, to strengthen outcome measurement and accountability for partners and funders.

These improvements are reflected in outcomes reported by partner schools. Leadership at **SA Joytown Special School** has noted positive behavioral changes among participants, while administrators at **Kambui School for the Hearing Impaired** attribute the program's success to improved academic performance and increased student confidence.

Upili also expanded its support network by partnering with **4C Mental Health** to train Persons with Disabilities as Upili Aides. This initiative increases counseling capacity while creating a scalable pathway for peer support within the disability community.

Innovation remained central to the program's growth. The Next Step Foundation developed and is advancing **Tumaini**, an AI-powered mental health chatbot designed for East African young people, featuring a Swahili-tuned model and built-in safeguards such as crisis detection and age-appropriate onboarding. A research partnership with **Kenyatta University** will support validation and a pilot study at **Joytown**, positioning Tumaini for potential integration into national school counseling programs. Upili also began building a sustainable counselor pipeline through a partnership with **United States International University (USIU)**.

Upili continues expanding its impact through research partnerships, digital innovation, and collaboration, working toward a future where every young person with a disability can access meaningful mental health support.





Students with Disabilities in our Upili Program

Upili's Vision for Students with Disabilities in Kenya

The Next Step Foundation believes meaningful employment is the most cost-effective way to reduce poverty among Persons with Disabilities, their families, and their communities.

Upili, an initiative by Next Step Foundation, empowers Kenyan youth with disabilities through group therapy sessions led by counselors with disabilities. The program addresses mental health challenges, boosts self-confidence, enhances academic performance, fostering participants with self-advocacy skills. Through workplace success and economic independence, Upili promotes a more inclusive society and unlocks the potential of youth with disabilities.

Our Pillars of Action

Youth with Disabilities in East Africa face severe barriers: limited psychosocial support, inadequate sexual health education, and low self-esteem due to deep-rooted stigma. These challenges restrict their ability to succeed academically and economically, leaving them unable to achieve financial independence. Upili addresses these critical gaps by providing targeted mental health support, empowering them to unlock their full potential and build brighter futures.



Student Support

Providing emotional support for Students with Disabilities through group counseling and our mental health chatbot.



Peer Support

Training select group of students to provide peer support, active listening and mentoring.



Staff Support

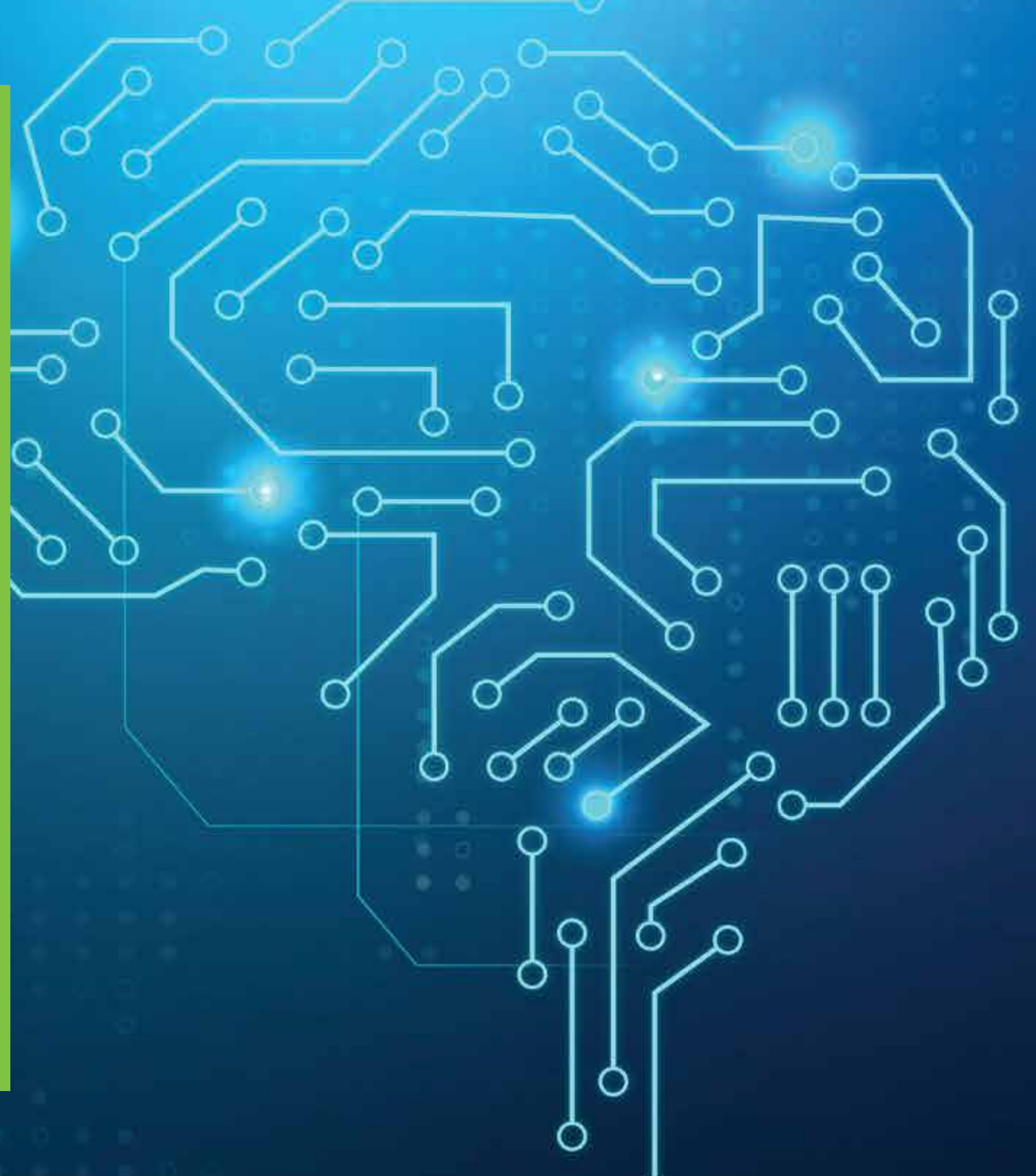
Educating teachers/staff to serve as Psychological First Responders in support of group therapy sessions.



Caregiver Support

Coaching and educating caregivers around disability acceptance and support at home.

**BUILDING
SUSTAINABLE
IMPACT
THROUGH
INNOVATION:**



Advancing Toward Sustainable Impact

The international development sector experienced significant disruption in 2025. These changes highlighted a growing reality: traditional grant funding alone cannot sustain long-term development initiatives.

For the Next Step Foundation, this moment reinforced the importance of building diversified funding models that combine philanthropy, strategic partnerships, and mission-aligned commercial initiatives. Rather than slowing our progress, these changes challenged us to rethink how impact can be sustained and scaled in a rapidly evolving development landscape.



FutureFlow Innovations

To strengthen long-term sustainability, Next Step Foundation launched FutureFlow Innovations, a wholly owned social enterprise designed to commercialize the organization's training expertise and AI-enabled tools.

FutureFlow Innovations allows us to generate mission-aligned revenue while maintaining our core non-profit purpose. By offering industry-relevant training and digital tools through commercial channels, revenue generated can directly support the foundation's programs—expanding opportunities in digital skills, disability inclusion, and mental health support for Persons with Disabilities across East Africa.



In 2025, Next Step Foundation deepened its partnership with Amazon Web Services (AWS), strengthening its position as one of the few AWS-certified training partners in East Africa. This partnership enables the foundation to deliver industry-recognized cloud infrastructure training that prepares learners for high-demand roles in the global digital economy.

Through this partnership, learners gain access to internationally recognized certifications, hands-on technical training, and pathways into emerging roles across cloud, technical support, managed services, and enterprise technology sales. Beyond training, the partnership also creates strategic opportunities for earned revenue through AWS-related education, managed service delivery, and enterprise-facing solutions that support organizations on their digital transformation journeys.

This model not only equips learners with market-relevant skills, but also helps build a more sustainable social enterprise engine that advances the foundation's broader mission of expanding digital employment pathways for Persons with Disabilities.



AI4SDG: Advancing Responsible Artificial Intelligence for Sustainable Development

Building on the launch of the **AI for Sustainable Development Goals (AI4SDG)** initiative in 2024, Next Step Foundation continued developing locally grounded artificial intelligence solutions designed to scale impact across Africa.

Through **Nikkoworkx**, the foundation introduced Kenya's first culturally grounded Generative AI training program, equipping learners with practical skills to apply AI tools to real economic challenges. Delivered in both English and Swahili, the program ensures accessibility and relevance for African learners.

Looking ahead, the Nikkoworkx learning platform will integrate with WhatsApp in 2026, allowing learners to access GenAI and prompt-engineering training directly from low-cost mobile phones without requiring separate apps or data charges.



OUR PARTICIPANT STORIES:



COMPUTER SCIENCE GRADUATE | DATA SCIENCE & AI TRAINEE

JEFFERSON MOI

“Having something to do, paying my rent, serving customers passionately, it makes me happy.”

Before the Next Step Foundation

Born prematurely in Bomet County with a limb disability, Jefferson’s path to education was uncertain. Early surgeries attempted to change his condition, but doctors warned they could leave him paralyzed. His family chose instead to support him as he was. Determined to learn, Jefferson taught himself to write using his leg and began school, even as his mother carried him nearly 5 kilometers each day.

The Turning Point

While studying at Joytown Secondary School, Jefferson was among the first participants to join our programs. This early exposure helped build his confidence and shaped his transition beyond secondary education. He went on to pursue further studies, eventually earning a Diploma in Computer Science from the Cooperative University of Kenya. Along the way, he became a strong self-advocate - working with lecturers to move inaccessible classes and serving as a PWD representative in the Student Governing Council to push for ramps and improved accessibility on campus.

Today

Through a referral from Next Step Foundation, Jefferson secured an internship with ABSA Bank Kenya in the Complaints Handling Unit, later advancing to a one-year contract.



Absa’s Head of HR Mumbi Kahindo holds the microphone for Jefferson during a panel discussion, as Absa’s Managing Director Abdi Mohamed looks on.

“I wish people could see the ability in me before they see the disability.”

Jefferson now works independently, supporting customers and contributing to the team. Next Step Foundation also supported Jefferson with Assistive Devices and an electric wheelchair, greatly increasing his independence and mobility.

Looking Ahead

Jefferson is currently advancing his skills in Data Science and AI at Kenyatta University through a sponsored program. He hopes to combine a career in tech with leadership that advances accessibility in public services and transport systems across Kenya.

CUSTOMER EXPERIENCE EXECUTIVE | SAFARICOM

THADIUS ODHIAMBO

“I’m a happy man now. I can depend on myself, support my parents, and even help my sister with her education.”

Before Next Step Foundation

Thadius was pursuing a Bachelor of Commerce in Finance when an accident on his very first day at university in 2019 changed his life. After months in hospital, he returned to complete his studies at Multimedia University, determined not to abandon the path he had worked so hard to pursue.

Adjusting to life with a disability required time and acceptance. With support from family and friends, Thadius gradually rebuilt his confidence and began exploring how he could transition from university into meaningful employment.

The Turning Point

While still in university, Thadius learned about Next Step Foundation through social media and friends who had previously interacted with the organization. As he prepared to graduate, he actively sought guidance and opportunities, working with the Next Step team to refine his CV and connect with potential employers.

Through this support, Thadius applied for opportunities that eventually led him to Safaricom.

Today

After a highly competitive recruitment process involving hundreds of applicants and multiple interview rounds, Thadius secured a position with Safaricom.



“Give Persons with Disabilities the opportunity. When you do, they excel.”

He now works as a Customer Experience Executive, where he helps resolve customer issues and contributes to delivering high-quality service.

The role has given him independence and the ability to support himself and his family.

Looking Ahead

Thadius hopes to continue growing professionally within Safaricom while eventually transitioning into the finance field he studied. He is also passionate about mentoring other young people with disabilities and encouraging employers to focus on capability rather than assumptions.



[Click Here to Watch Our Origin Story](#)

[Click Here to Watch the Skills for Inclusive Digital Participation Phase 4](#)



Our Team



Peres Were
Executive Director



Mercy Jeremy
Head of Programs



Carol Okara
Head of Partnerships



Jim Cohick
Head of Healthcare
Technology Solutions



Allan Maonga
Head of People,
Diversity & Culture



Daniel Ngugi
Head of Inclusion
& Development



Calvince Ademba
Head of Impact
& Sustainability



James Ngane
Finance Manager

Board of Directors



**Christopher Harrison,
J.D, Ph.D**



Lillian Wambui Chege



Asiya Mohamed



Jane Theuri



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