

# Disability inclusion is the right thing to do. It also makes good business sense.

## The future of work is changing.<sup>1</sup>

Digitisation, demand for new skills, and a change in culture brought about by the technological revolution<sup>2</sup> present new challenges – and opportunities – for the inclusion of people with disabilities.

Global frameworks such as the Sustainable Development Goals<sup>3</sup> and the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities<sup>4</sup> have established the rights of people with disabilities to access decent, meaningful work on an equal basis with others.

It is also increasingly recognised that disability inclusion brings economic benefits to companies and wider society.<sup>5</sup>

However, building a fully inclusive society requires government and employers to play a central role in supporting people with disabilities at every stage of their working lives.

The UK-Africa Investment Summit presents a key opportunity to promote this inclusive agenda.

## The opportunity of disability inclusion for businesses investing in Africa

- There are an estimated 80 million people living with disabilities in Africa<sup>6</sup>
- In most countries, our Disability Data Portal project reveals higher unemployment rates for people with disabilities compared to those without<sup>7</sup>
- ILO research estimates that the cost of this exclusion from the labour market represents an estimated loss of GDP of between 3-7 per cent<sup>8</sup>



# Youth with disabilities: harnessing potential

**“Persons with disabilities want the opportunity to use their talents and skills.”**

William, Zambia  
2030 and Counting interviewee

African countries now have the most youthful populations in the world, with over 70 per cent aged under 30.<sup>9</sup>

This represents a huge potential pool of talent for business.

However, young people make up 60 per cent of the unemployed in Africa<sup>10</sup> and young people with disabilities are routinely excluded from economic opportunities.<sup>11</sup>

Targeting youth with disabilities represents an opportunity for businesses to harness the benefits of the growing youth demographic while promoting disability inclusion.

Young people with disabilities can thrive in the future labour market if businesses create inclusive job opportunities for their varying skill sets which are secure and sustainable.

Through Leonard Cheshire's 2030 and Counting project, young people with disabilities from Kenya, Zambia and the Philippines undertook research into the significant barriers faced by their peers in relation to employment and produced recommendations for employers.

Their recommendations included running networking events for youth with disabilities, directly involving them in the development of accessible products and services, and upgrading workplaces to be fully accessible.

Find out more in **'2030 - the countdown is on'**.<sup>12</sup>

## Technology for disability inclusion

Technology has the potential to be a game changer in the workplace. Access to the right assistive technology (AT) may mean the difference between a life of poverty and having the opportunity to work and earn a living.

Leonard Cheshire is involved in a number of projects in partnership with private sector and technology companies to support access to AT, including working with Grid3 technology for people with communication impairments and with Google to improve the Google Assistant speech recognition feature.

# Good business sense

When people with disabilities are enabled to pursue their career aspirations, it brings increased productivity and wider economic benefits for employers and society more widely.<sup>13</sup>

Here are five key benefits of disability inclusion for business.

## Cost benefit

Research carried out by Accenture in the US found that disability-inclusive companies achieved 28 per cent higher revenue, double the net income, and 30 per cent higher economic profit margins compared with other companies in their sample.<sup>14</sup>

## Return on investment

Employees with disabilities have better retention and low absenteeism rates. They are loyal, reliable and highly motivated.<sup>15</sup>

## Marketing and innovation

Many companies find that employing people with disabilities increases their understanding and ability to serve their customers with disabilities.<sup>16</sup>

## Improved performance

The Institute for Corporate Productivity found that “twice as many high-performing organisations address diversity and inclusion at the highest levels of overall business strategy.”<sup>17</sup>

## Social responsibility

Companies that demonstrate social responsibility are more competitive, and they attract a larger number of employees and customers.<sup>18</sup>

# How to be disability-inclusive

More and more companies see the benefit of engaging this huge untapped pool of talent, but remain unsure of how to reach candidates with disabilities.

Based on our expertise, here are five key ways in which companies can become more inclusive.

## Create an accessible work environment

Many adaptations are often no-cost changes to work hours and tasks. Where there is a cost it is usually a one-time, low-cost expenditure.<sup>19</sup>

Harnessing technological innovation can also better support people with disabilities in the workplace.

## Run inclusive recruitment processes

Identify candidates with disabilities by creating partnerships between vocational training centres and disabled people's organisations and ensure recruitment processes are fully accessible.

## Offer flexible working

Research shows that offering flexible working is a central element of retaining disabled people in the labour market.<sup>20</sup>

## Provide continuous support

Workplace inclusion efforts do not stop when employees are hired.

Additional support can be provided with mentorship programmes and by hosting disability awareness training to break unconscious bias in the workplace.

## Harness NGO-private sector partnerships

Businesses are increasingly tapping into the expertise of organisations such as Leonard Cheshire to reach people with disabilities and design a fully inclusive pathway to employment.



# Leonard Cheshire and Accenture Foundation

Leonard Cheshire has worked closely with Accenture Foundation to empower people with disabilities to access employment and live independent lives.

Support provided includes career counselling, skills training, matching candidates to employment opportunities, and follow-on support.

We use technology to enhance the reach and sustainability of the programme. For example, we developed a Virtual Livelihoods Resource Centre in India that enables people with disabilities to

access advice and support without going to a physical centre, through a toll-free phone line.

Our online portal, **jobability.org**, matches job seekers with accessible employment opportunities and useful resources.

This approach has been highly successful, supporting 28,029 people with disabilities into livelihoods programmes, 18,374 into either waged or self-employment, and working with over 3,000 employers.



# Take action

Whether taking the first step or already established, here are three key things you can do to advance disability inclusion in your business.

## Get involved

Join the **Valuable 500 initiative**, a network of 500 corporations who will unlock the business, social and economic value of people living with disabilities across the world.

## Get informed

**Invalid Opinions** is a campaign led by the ILO challenging the misconceptions that hold back people with disabilities in the world of work.

## Get in touch

**Contact Elaine Green**  
([elaine.green@leonardcheshire.org](mailto:elaine.green@leonardcheshire.org))  
to find out more about how to strengthen disability inclusion for business.

## Who we are

Leonard Cheshire believes in a fair and inclusive world, where everyone can live as they choose.

In order to reach this goal, we deliver a range of programmes that have an impact on individuals, the public, organisations and at national and global levels.

We exist to improve the life chances of people with disabilities and play our

part in supporting individuals to live, learn and work as independently as they choose, whatever their ability.

With over 70 years' experience of supporting people with disabilities across the globe, we are a leading voice on inclusive development.

Our international operation works out of four regional hubs in Kenya, Zambia, Thailand and India.

# References

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