

Transcript: “Enabling systems: AT innovation across Africa”

Pathways to Zero Barriers Episode 5, Season 3

Introduction

Renita Nabisubi (00:00)

Just look at that ecosystem and try to understand if they're innovators that are creating products and services and they need financing and the people in the system who want to invest, why aren't those two meeting? If there are 80 solutions, are young people with disabilities using them? Where are they not? Context is very important. The user is very important, but there might be a need to segment, for example.

Judith Hermetter (00:28)

Welcome to Pathways to Zero Barriers. Today, we're talking with Renita Nabisubi from the Mastercard Foundation about the assistive technology innovation landscape across the African continent. We'll touch upon datasets, cultural context, and delivery models. Join us for insights of what drives, or hinders, enabling systems for persons with disabilities.

Tom Butcher (01:00)

Renita, we're live. Hello, my name is Tom Butcher with the Zero Project, and it's a delight to be able to welcome you to our third season of Pathways to Zero Barriers podcasts. This season, we will be focusing on assistive technology innovation around the world and in this episode on AT solutions in Africa. I'm very happy to be here today with Renita Nabisubi. Renita is a strategic leader in digital solutions based in Kampala, Uganda, from where she is joining us today. Thank goodness after the difficulties she had this morning, which she will tell you about. But first, Renita is lead digital economy with the Mastercard Foundation. Renita, welcome. Great to have you with us. How are you doing?

Renita Nabisubi (01:58)

I am fine. Thank you, Tom. It's really exciting to be here. I just wanted to correct you a little bit. I am lead disability inclusion at the Mastercard Foundation. Digital economy was my post before this one.

Tom Butcher (02:13)

I am terribly sorry. So listeners, you hear, I am corrected and Renita has told you exactly what she does. Anyway, please, before we dive into the conversation, perhaps you could tell us a wee bit more about yourself and... you got to what you're doing and where you are now.

Renita Nabisubi (02:32)

Sure, of course, very happy to share that. I have a background in electrical engineering and telecommunications sector. You know, that's where my career started. But after five years of that, I moved into the development sector where I was working on developing and testing digital financial products and services. Let me tell you as well, I am a person with a disability and I am... above the knee amputee. I never remember what sequence I need to say that in. I'm an above the knee amputee. And I lost my leg from when I was seven years old. But that, you know, I mean, I don't really quite remember what it was like to have two legs. So for as long as I've known myself, you know, I've had one leg.

The reason I talk about that is, so this morning when I was coming to work from my home, I live a little bit outside Kampala. And the road there is, it's a Marim road and it's the rainy season. And I have to live really early in the morning. So I was on the road by 6am, but it'd been raining from 4 a.m. in the morning. And so the road was full of mud and it was slippery. And, you know, so I have a prosthetic limb and crutches as well. But I walk quite fine. I'm independent, but I cannot push a car. So I was very worried about, you know, getting stuck by the roadside because I'd driven off-road. However, you know, I think my driving skills are not too bad. So I was able to make it to work safe and sound.

Tom Butcher (04:13)

Yeah, and here you are. And so it's double, quadruple, triple, however many thanks to you. It's absolutely great to have you with us. Can I just ask one question before we fire away?

Renita Nabisubi (04:27)

Sure.

Tom Butcher (04:28)

Throughout your career, have you actually been in Kampala?

Renita Nabisubi (04:33)

No, no, no. Sorry, it's because it's a very long... time from when I was out of school and just started work. But no, I first worked in Kampala in the telecom sector. But then I moved to Italy to do my master's in a university called Pavia. And so that's in Italy. And then I worked in Milan for four or five years with Vodafone Italy and eventually then moved back to Uganda. I also have worked on programs and projects across East Africa.

Tom Butcher (05:10)

That's quite a geographical spectrum. And now you're with the MasterCard Foundation. So could you please tell us about the MasterCard Foundation, what your focus areas are, and what they are in particular when it comes to disability?

Renita Nabisubi (05:35)

Sure, Tom. I'm very excited to share that. So the Mastercard Foundation works with partners to expand access to education, skills, and dignified and fulfilling work for young people in Africa and the indigenous young people of Canada. Through its Young Africa Work Strategy, the Foundation is seeking to enable millions of young women and men to access employment and entrepreneurship and livelihood opportunities. So because at the Foundation we feel strongly that access to these opportunities must be equitable, disability inclusion is at the center of all the work that we do at the foundation.

And the reason for that, Tom, is because... Till to date, young persons with disabilities face significant barriers that prevent them from accessing finance, opportunities for learning, work and education. And so really that contributes a lot to keeping them in poverty. Yeah. You know, they cannot be. economic inclusion without disability inclusion. And I say that because when you think of young people, so young people with disabilities, just like everyone else, you know, they've got dreams, they're capable, they have ambition, but oftentimes they are, because of those difficulties and those barriers, they are unable to actualize those opportunities. But we have seen, of course, that assistive technologies can help to remove some of those barriers or reduce them anyways.

And, you know, for example, a young person with a disability can learn better with the support from these technologies. They can communicate, work, even be more independent and manage to run a business as well. That being said, technology alone is obviously not enough. You know, we still need to have accessible learning environments and workplaces as well as policy. support disability inclusion and accessible public services. So I think all in all, I would summarize and say that, you know, other foundation,

we're really working to expand access to education, skills, dignified and fulfilling work for young men and women, and disability inclusion is a key part of that. because we want young persons with disabilities to access the very same opportunities as well. And that means thinking about accessibility from the beginning rather than as an afterthought.

Tom Butcher (08:36)

Great. Thank you very much. That's wonderful because that really, really puts things into context.

There's one point that I'm going to come back to later, which is we talk about Africa, but Africa is... huge and it's so many different cultures and it's so many different countries so I want to come back to talk about that and just the differences in what you do in different parts of the continent but first I'd like to talk about kind of AT the technologies what the kind of market and landscape is like for AT innovations technologies. And I think we can use the coverall for Africa.

And then if you want to and can provide us with some focus on specific either regions or countries. How does that sound?

Renita Nabisubi (09:41)

Sure, sure. I can do that.

Tom Butcher (09:44)

Yeah, please do. [laughs]

Renita Nabisubi (09:46)

So, you know, Tom, I think...I don't think, I do know that the need, also because I have lived experience. So the need for assistive technology is significantly high.

But we are also seeing on the continent that there are innovations that are happening. The Foundation conducted a study recently for the AT landscape in Africa. And some of the findings were that there is high and increasing demand, but there is low access across very many countries. And the thing is, the challenge is not so much the lack of new ideas. We have quite a number of those. Also, the different... actors in the ecosystem. There are many and they're varied. We've got innovators, we've got entrepreneurs, universities, manufacturers, and organizations of persons with disabilities. So we do see that diversity there.

The greater issue, it's how to get promising products and services to people who need them and how to get these products to them at scale. As I mentioned, there is no shortage of ideas. We see different applications, mobile, digital apps, communication technologies. Also, you know, we see up and coming relevant local services that are being provided. An example here, I can speak about Carol. She's a young entrepreneur. a woman that I have met in the course of my work and she's from Botswana and she owns a company called Revision Africa. With our company, she has designed a product that can help visually impaired people use the camera on their phones and the audio support to identify objects around them and convert audio to speech. And many other similar innovations, you know, abound.

Another point I want to talk about is affordability being key and very important. You know, a product is only as good as, you know, the ability of a user to, well, have it, meaning they can afford it, they can maintain it, they can repair it. Products that are considered low-cost products within the AT industry, we still see very many people being excluded from those.

Then there is the conundrum that, you know, funders to scale these products, you know, you need investment, you need funding, but funders also want to see evidence and very early on in the product development journey of the potential to scale.

So then we're caught in between, you know. you know, how do we get the product to scale, but we don't have the funding? How can we track that funding? The third point that I want to talk about, and I think we'll also talk about the different areas in Africa and the status of AT is, so I talked about affordability, and we do see a lot of variety across the continent in terms of access. In different countries, we have different types of access. Even within the countries and the communities, it varies. And it varies greatly between urban and rural communities. Of course, the underlying factor there being availability, being quite scarce and affordability being difficult to achieve in the rural area.

From a policy perspective, we see that across the continent some countries are in the early stages of creating an enabling policy framework and environment, while others are a little bit more advanced in terms of that framework, but they do struggle with implementation of those policies.

In terms of geographical regions, I can pick a couple of examples for innovation. We see that in East Africa, the innovation environment and community is quite dynamic. So you find a lot of innovations from Kenya, from Uganda, and so on. But there is limited access

to finance to enable those to scale and grow, and also these poor service delivery systems. We do see in Southern Africa, specifically in South Africa, an increased capability to produce and manufacture.

So that's a bit of a landscape, yeah, I would say.

Tom Butcher (14:57)

Great. Thank you so much. Before we move on to looking at kind of current trends and developments and further challenges,

I was really interested, and I noted down, you were talking about the diversity that is available, universities, companies, NGOs, etc. Essentially, all the stakeholders who have to work together in order to make inclusive AT work or just anything work.

Do you see your position as essentially a kind of nexus who brings everything together?

Because you can have a university with a research department. that has really good ideas but if they don't know to whom to take it or you can have a company which can do things which are absolutely amazing but nobody approaches them.

I get the feeling that this is something, not least from your background of what you've done as an engineer, that this is something that you do. You can see the big picture, which is so important, and essentially materialize from the big picture. Would that be a correct way of looking at it, Renita?

Renita Nabisubi (16:25)

Yes, Tom, that's very well put. Like you mentioned, for all of these things to work, you do need them to come together. So what we do at the foundation and what I'm very vested heavily in is to just look at that ecosystem and try to understand if they're innovators that are creating products and services, why? and they need financing and the people in the system who want to invest, why aren't those two meeting? What is the root problem? What do we need to do so that they get to meet and then work together?

If there are 80 solutions, are young people with disabilities using them? Where are they not? You know, we have seen that many of the solutions on the continent, because before a lot of them were being imported. So you would find that, you know, there was that whole charity welfare model that it's still prevalent. It's still there, yeah. Yeah, it's still there. And so, you know, you'd see maybe an organization, you know, just... getting donations of, I'll use mobility devices because I relate to that quite well, getting donations

of, for example, crutches or wheelchairs, and then maybe they're linked to a community, they have found a connection in a community.

And so they'll take those devices there and then you have persons with disabilities who don't have access to anything better and they'll just use those. So if you're using crutches that are not fitted to you, there's a big risk that you end up making the situation worse. So I would say really what we want to look at more and more is... It's good to invest in products, but not only that, but there is a need to create a system that allows these products and services to reach the people who need them at scale.

Tom Butcher (18:33)

Great. Thanks so much. And I'm sorry, I was rather long-winded asking you that question, but no, that's really good to know. And I noticed throughout... What you're talking about, there is this constant return to youth. Youth, youth, youth.

Why do you think that youth are so important in this whole process? I ask simply because I was talking with someone the other day and... their country in particular, they said how difficult it was that sometimes some ideas came from young people. But because they were young, they had a credibility gap. And that that was something that they had to deal with. The fact that it was lived experience seemed to be absolutely irrelevant. But from our point of view, no, it is not irrelevant.

Renita Nabisubi (19:45)

I will look at Africa because I know those statistics a bit better. So the majority of the population in Africa comprises of young people, of youth. I think in Uganda, the median age is 16.

Tom Butcher (20:04)

Good gracious!

Renita Nabisubi (20:05)

Yes. And so back to your point in the example that you gave that, whereas that's the case that, you know, the greater part of the population is comprised of young people, you will find that the young people, there's not an equal representation in the rooms where decisions are made, in the networks that bring... you know, access to resources and opportunities and ideas.

I will speak about Uganda and the cultural nuances here. Older people are, there's a lot of respect for older people and the belief is that they always know and a young person, you know, you listen, but there isn't a lot of room for you to express your opinion or, you know, to... decisions and act upon those, even if, you know, decisions are being made that influence you. Now we're just broadly talking about the society.

But then when you talk about young persons with disability, you know, you will lay around another complication because of the stigma. You know, it's even harder for young people. with disabilities to express themselves and have their own agency and voice.

And some of it also comes from the fact that, you know, someone will think, oh, you know, you're a person with disabilities, so I need to speak for you. You don't know what you're talking about and so on and so forth. So, yeah, I would say that's why it is important to really support youth to get their own agency and voice.

Tom Butcher (21:48)

Great. Thank you. That's what I thought. This whole aspect of youth getting youth listened to is quite obviously a challenge and a challenge for AT, I think I could go so far as to say, AT development in Africa. What do you see as other current challenges, trends, developments? Is there anything which... You know, you can put your finger on and say, this is what I've seen happen or what is happening. And for the last X number of years, because it's so difficult being so far away and not being in the milieu to see what those might be. So I'm sure I certainly would be interested. I'm sure our listeners would be really interested to hear as well.

Renita Nabisubi (22:44)

Yes, Tom. So I think I spoke to you briefly. We were looking at AT from a welfare and health lens, but now increasingly we see the recognition that AT is an enabler to economic empowerment, that AT can help people be more productive, it can help them in their employment and their independence.

I want to give an example of Samson, who is a young entrepreneur from Ghana. He has created the BOAFO accessibility widget, which just helps visually blind people to navigate e-commerce platforms. You know, we're talking about digital intel. It provides access to opportunities and all.

So that's one example. We are also seeing a lot more of local innovation, production, repair and maintenance, gaining attention on the continent. Right. From what we

discussed earlier, the reason this is important is because then it helps to bring down the cost of AT. It improves product fit for users and their realities, as well as it does contribute to increasing availability.

Another example that I want to... speak to is of Olu Shola who is a young man from Nigeria and when he was 18 he became paraplegic and it was very difficult for him to have access to a wheelchair and then eventually when he did get one so he was at university so when he eventually got a wheelchair because of the distances and you know needing to move on the university campus it was frequently um you know not working like it would break down he couldn't get a repair part for it and also just having access to a cushioning that comes with mobility devices and all um however the good thing um that happened as well later was that he was able to drive a car because uh a local um entrepreneur was able to adjust and fit the car to put manual operations and commands.

Maybe the last trend that I want to point out is digital assistive technology. So I've given some examples of that previously. I spoke about Carol and Revision Africa. That innovation is using the mobile phone. The fact that mobile phones now are more accessible and they are cheaper, you know, has also contributed to more people having access to digital AT. Yeah, I think in terms of, or maybe one challenge that I could mention as well.

We still don't have enough data and information about the needs. the use as well, obviously the repair of assistive technologies. And so that means that it's very difficult to plan and predict, even for governments that, you know, are working towards dedicating budget line items towards assistive technologies in communities without the right information, you know, that they don't do, they're unable to do that well and efficiently. Yeah, I think, yeah, that's what I want to talk about.

Tom Butcher (26:28)

Thank you. have a couple of questions which come from that. First one is a personal question. Over the last year or two, has there been any one innovation where you've just thought, wow, that really blows my mind...

Renita Nabisubi (26:50)

Yes...

Tom Butcher (26:51)

Or maybe not? [laughs]

Renita Nabisubi (26:52)

No, there is one, but I'm just trying to think. It speaks to me and my situation...

Tom Butcher (26:57)

Oh yeah, that's great, please!

Renita Nabisubi (26:59)

I can find something more general. Okay. I will talk about that one.

So I remember I mentioned that I am an above the knee amputee. So that means that, so I do have a prosthetic limb and it has to have a knee that... that articulates well uh underfoot um and now you're going to know how old i am i lost my leg in 1984 yes in 1984 and um from then up to now the types of knees that have been available in the market are mechanical knees so they're a lot harder to use um to bend uh so it's really up to you to figure it out how are you going to bend it and how are you going to walk and so on and so forth.

However, with the advent of AI now, I can't afford them yet, but there are such things as AI-powered electronic needs that take into consideration the context and where you are. For example, if you are walking uphill. It will then automatically adjust the limb so that you can, it's easy for you to go uphill and you can go downhill or you can, if you want to increase your speed, you know, I can, I can only walk at one speed. I cannot, I cannot go slow. Well, so people understand that I can't run. They don't understand that I can't walk slower.

If I walk slower, I fall. For me, what I am super amazed and excited about is these sorts of needs that can adjust to whatever's happening in my life. And I really can't wait. Oh, I mean, I hope that the price points will drop significantly enough for us to be able to afford them.

Tom Butcher (28:45)

Great. Thank you so much for sharing that with us.

And I'm going to come back to that because I'd love to chat with you about the whole issue of AI. A very large issue and we'll probably have six podcasts afterwards. No, just

this one. I'd like to just quickly ask you whether one of the challenges is this incredible divide between urban and rural. And just how does one go about choosing? which AT solutions to look at when you know that in one context or one country, it would be incredibly helpful in a rural context, but not in an urban context, or vice versa. How do you address this issue?

Renita Nabisubi (29:42)

I would say that you cannot design a product without thinking about the context, because just as you pointed out, If we take the example of the, I was talking about that knee, the electronic knee. So where I live right now, when it rains, we can go without power for, the electricity will go off. Electricity will go off for six days.

Yep. And so much as I desire to have that knee. I cannot charge it. If we don't have electricity for more than six days, I will not be able to charge it. So context is very important. The user is very important, but there might be a need to segment, for example.

So if you are producing technology, you could segment and decide to focus on... you know, urban communities that have access to reliable electricity. And then, you know, that's where you can supply that kind of technology. So those would tend to be maybe more high-tech sorts of solutions. But then you could look at more low-tech solutions for areas that don't have, you know, access to internet, access to electricity and things like that. So really context is quite important. Even the delivery models. The delivery models would need to be different.

I'll take the example of Uganda. In a rural context and setting, you would have to rely heavily on a community sort of delivery model. if you were going to supply a technology, because even there, the community is stronger, there is less access to public services. Whereas if you're looking at the urban areas, there is reach of some... types of services that are offered by the health centers. So delivery models as well need to be adapted, yes, adapted to the setting.

Tom Butcher (31:53)

Great, thank you. It's really interesting, and I'll just bring up another example what you mentioned about community. We were looking at the Zero Project the other day about crisis response.

We had some really interesting examples that some of the best and the most effective crisis responses were community-based. And because they were community-based and

it was a lived community experience, they were incredibly effective. Aside, back to AI. I think you and I have both agreed AI is a great tool. How is the development of AI affecting your world, particularly for product development, etc.?

Renita Nabisubi (32:51)

I think with the onset of AI, we now have our fingertips. the ability to process vast amounts of data at very high speeds. Sorry, I get excited by those sorts of things. At very high speeds. We have systems that can take in different types of information and data. They can take in audio, visual, and other kinds of data. And they can recognize trends and patterns and learn and self-correct. So when you put all of that together, you will see that that feeds into some of the products I already talked about for those functionalities.

So for example, innovators have used these capabilities to produce products that can adapt to the context of someone because they would take in all of that data, make a decision and adjust and fit the technology to the contacts and to the needs of the user.

Tom Butcher (34:02)

Great. Thank you. I have another question. I hope it's just not too abstruse. I know that the Foundation has recently published an AT landscape in Africa report. I have to admit that I have not read all of it, but there's one aspect that I'd be really interested in your thoughts on, which is how do you deal with collaboration across, as you've described it, the ecosystem amongst the different stakeholders, and it refers back to the kind of rural, urban, high-tech, low-tech. How do you address collaboration?

Renita Nabisubi (34:49)

Well, I think one key thing, that we have seen in that study is that it's important to have national collaboration and platforms.

It's very important to have cross-sector collaboration. For example, if you are looking at ecosystem actors that you're talking about the private sector, there's a lot of the private sector can do to grow the provision and the supply of AT, but it can't do a lot of that without the government services and the government support and the right government infrastructure.

So it's important to have those meeting points where at a national level, for example, we can talk through end-to-end with the service or the young persons with disabilities at the centre to see what does it take end to end to deliver the right service and the right product and who has got to play what role.

Do we need to have systems that... cut across health, education, and social protection as well. In terms of, I think we talked a little bit about low-tech and high-tech solutions, what we're saying is that it's easier for, so within the ecosystem for innovation and all, there are accelerators and incubators for entrepreneurs.

There are few that are specific to assistive technology. And so we do find that, you know, the normal model that is, used by accelerators to get funders to invest is very difficult to apply within the AT space.

But that being said, it is easier, or at least there's less friction to access funding for higher tech innovations because a lot of our funding comes from outside Africa. Then for the lot tech products in the rural areas, you often find as well that because they're not at the moment being manufactured at scale, the investments are, you know, they're not... very big ticket sizes. So you find that most times innovators source that funding from their relatives, from their friends. And so, you know, a lot of work is being done to try and see how... we make it easier to have collaboration across sectors, across markets? And of course, be able to pull in that funding where that is longer term and more patience.

Tom Butcher (37:35)

Great. Thank you. I want to come back to one point.

I'm going to call you an advocate with a little A. You might be an advocate with a big A as well. But I think one of the... vital points that you in your work have to fully embrace is that you have to start with accessibility right from the start.

It's rather like building a building. If you make it accessible right from the start, then it makes life so much easier. But if you build in a accessibility for children and early education all the way through then it has the potential to make things easier how do you get this story or this narrative across that you know economically for politicians you're going to save so much money if you spend this money at the start And it'll make life easier.

How do you go about addressing that issue that it's what you're talking is a lifespan story?

Renita Nabisubi (38:55)

Well.

Tom Butcher (38:56)

[laughs] I know it's a big subject.

Renita Nabisubi (38:58)

And it's not very easy. [laughs]

Tom Butcher (39:00)

No, but there must be ways that you address it.

Renita Nabisubi (39:04)

Yes. So for private sector players specifically, because many of them... the greatest concern or what they attach to disability inclusion is cost. Even when we see that they are willing and they would want to be more disability inclusion, the first thing is, but how is that? It's going to eat into my bottom line.

So we're working hard to put forward the business case for disability inclusion, which you've spoken to some of that. It talks about... In some jurisdictions, there have been laws that have been passed or being passed to compel any person who makes products and services to make them accessible, right? So if you are hit by that regulation after you have made your product... service or your building, like you mentioned, you then have to incur those greater costs than you would have incurred to, you know, to be able to follow that regulation. That's one.

But secondly, we focus on the persons with disabilities, the young persons themselves and say they do bring... lot of value because they bring diversity to the workplace. They have ideas, they are creative. And so all of these things do play into your bottom line. directly, but within that environment that you have, because you're going to have different ideas, different ways of looking at things. Sometimes a person with a disability, because of their reality, might be able to come up with a solution that will not only support persons with disabilities, they'll address a greater market need.

And then if you're looking at it from a sales perspective and profit and revenue, you've seen that you've met that... very important as well as um one of my colleagues says frequently is that uh so we might be young in Africa but we are all you know we will end up um growing older so we'll have an older population and what we think now is an option not to consider um in you know in 20 years or so you will have an aging population so these solutions that need to be accessible will not only serve persons with disabilities but they will also serve the rest of the society and when you look at If you look at, let's

say, a family that has, let's say, a child who has a disability from a government perspective.

So when you're in a forum where you're talking to economists or government officials that are planning for the country, we often find that it's useful to quote the lost earnings and revenue. Because if you've got a mom who can't go to work because she's got to stay home to support and to help a young person with disability, that's revenue that's lost. If schools are not accessible, you look at me, if I hadn't been able to go to school, I wouldn't be able to work and I pay taxes.

I contribute to the economy as well. So we try to bring out... you know, the value of inclusion and also point to the fact that some things, by the way, are not about costs, some of them. I'll pick my example. So when I just started working, I was working in the radio planning department. So those are the people who decide where the antennas go on the mast. So obviously I couldn't climb. You can't plan where to put the antenna, how to point it, if you can't go up and see. So I couldn't do that. boss reconfigured the team. I was very good at analysis and desk work. So he reconfigured the team and we were all paired. So I would do all of the analysis and the desk work and then I would go out to the field together with someone else who was able to climb up. So you do see just by, you know, just changing the way the team was configured, you know, I was able to provide value. So we'll try to bring out points like that.

Tom Butcher (43:33)

And that makes absolute and perfect sense. Thank you so much. I'm looking at time. We've got a few more minutes. So what I'd love to do is I'd love to try and sum up, well, it's incredibly difficult to sum up, but bring out three points that cover a lot of what we've talked about.

And I think...and all of these i'm in total agreement with and i'm sure that most um people are in in agreement with first is that assistive technology is about participation. It can determine whether a young person well in particular it can determine whether a young person can remain in school go to an interview with confidence work independently in any sort of organization travel for their holidays or for their business or indeed to build a business.

So that's the first one, which is participation.

The second is that access is, as you've mentioned, more than just receiving a device. What on earth happens if it goes wrong? And the technology must be... What's

appropriate for me might not be appropriate for you or for Cynthia or Jack. It's got to be affordable. Accessible, yes, that's a kind of sine qua non. But I think the point that you made is that there has to be the ability to maintain that device and repair that advice is something that is so often lost on people.

And then thirdly, and it comes back to youth and young people, is that young people with disabilities must help shape the decisions that affect them. And it's quite obvious from talking with you, that's what you make sure happens simply because their experience should guide product design, investment, procurement, service delivery, and this is where kind of the age factor comes in, policy. They need to be able to influence policymaking and the politicians, even though we're talking about youth.

Have I missed anything out there, Renita? Or have I whittled on too long? Should I have shortened something?

Renita Nabisubi (46:26)

No, Tom, you've done it beautifully. Thank you.

Tom Butcher (46:29)

Oh, that's great. I'm not going to let you off the hook, though. Sorry about that. You thought, wow, you know, I got up at six o'clock in the morning. I really want to get on with my work.

I always like to ask each of my guests as I conclude an interview or a podcast, can you provide our listeners and me with what you... consider to be a single call to action for them to take away. It can be a single call to action with a number of subsections.

Renita Nabisubi (47:08)

[laughs] Thank you for allowing me that. Because we had a discussion around an ecosystem. So my call to action is going to speak to different players within the ecosystem.

Tom Butcher (47:20)

Please.

Renita Nabisubi (47:21)

But if I was to summarize it first, I would use four words. I would say build, invest, co-design, and enable.

So build, because governments must build systems. We can't get away from that.

Invest. Finders need to invest in the entire product development journey that we spoke about.

Then co-design... is really speaking to innovators who must design, as you mentioned, with persons with disabilities and work with them.

And lastly, very important is: enable. So educators and employers need to create environments that enable young persons with disabilities to succeed.

Yes, that's how I would like to conduct that.

Tom Butcher (48:07)

Thank you so much.

Renita, it has been an absolute delight to chat with you today. Thank you for battling through the rains this morning. And thank goodness your car did not get... stuck in the mud and you weren't stuck there for two hours waiting for someone to get you out and um when does the rain stop during the day is it just in the mornings or is it going to be hell getting back?

Renita Nabisubi (48:38)

No, no. The good thing about the Ugandan weather, because when a tropical climate, it rains heavily for, you know, one or two hours and then you've got sun the rest of the day. So I am hoping that by now it's all dry and I will have a smooth sailing back home.

Tom Butcher (48:57)

Great. And I cross my fingers. All it behooves me to do now, Renita, is to thank you once again for joining us and sharing with us not only your experiences, but so much of your wisdom and telling us the great things that you're doing with the MasterCard Foundation, especially the acting as a catalyst. And I think that's so important. Catalyst, Nexus, however you like to describe yourself.

And listeners, please look out for our next episode. Goodbye. And thank you for tuning in to this, the third season of Zero Project's Pathways to Zero Barriers podcasts.

Judith Hermetter (49:46)

Pathways to Zero Barriers is a monthly podcast from The Zero Project. Subscribe now on your favorite podcast app to hear more stories from assistive tech innovators worldwide.