Using technology to support blind learners on all levels of education

Tanzania –Tanzania League of the Blind: Modelling ICT in primary and secondary schools for blind learners through assistive technology

SUMMARY OF PROJECT

The lack of access to ICT among the blind community (as well as among local authority officials) has been a major obstacle, and the need for training in ICT matters has been the highest priority in the organization's annual work plans. The objective of the project is to integrate assistive technology in the national education system, and thus ensure that assistive technology for people with visual impairment is available at the workplace and at all levels of education. Representatives from the identified proposed project areas were thoroughly involved in the planning process.

QUOTE

"I would like to congratulate all those who have facilitated ICT training for the visually impaired, for it has increased their opportunity for employment and maximised their access to information."

—Hon. January Makamba, Deputy Minister for Science and Technology, Tanzania

FACTS & FIGURES

- Each year some 170 students graduate from Sebastian Kolowa Memorial University with the necessary assistive technology skills for training visually impaired learners

- Each year 168 students graduating from Patandi Teachers College are equipped with assistive technology training skills for visually impaired learners.

- 95 pupils studying primary education in standard 5, 6 and 7 at Mugeza, Makalala and Ikungi integrated schools with elementary knowledge on computer application.

PROBLEMS TARGETED

Due to computer illiteracy and a lack of assistive technology, persons with visual impairment face serious challenges in accessing information, communication, and services. Further, these individual receive little consideration when new technology is introduced. For instance, the introduction of ICT in learning institutions in Tanzania has not considered the special needs of the visually impaired.

SOLUTION & METHODOLOGY

Tanzania Education Authority, Sightsavers, and the Tanzania League of the Blind attempted to address this problem of ICT inaccessibility by ensuring that the visually impaired are equipped with computer skills and are enjoying ICT through assistive technology. Initial beneficiaries were education practitioners, out of which group two primary school teachers attempted to teach ICT at their respective schools. This gave clues as to the possibility of teaching ICT to visually impaired learners as it is done to students without disabilities.

This process involved: (1) piloting the idea in eight institutions, consisting of one university, one teacher-training college, three secondary schools, and three primary schools; (2) establishing one computer laboratory at each of the eight benefiting institutions (such laboratories will be fully furnished, including the accessories necessary to make computers accessible to the visually impaired; (3) developing an ICT training curriculum for all school levels and a teacher-training course on assistive technology; (4) conducting trainings in the application of a screen reader; and (5) translating the screen reader into a Swahili speech synthesizer.

OUTLOOK & TRANSFERABILITY

The pilot project will be co-implemented by the three assistive technology stakeholders, with the Ministry of Education as the primary policy developer. A sample of students in secondary schools and all visually impaired students receiving special needs education will be trained in assistive technology as a way of teaching and learning ICT as a curriculum subject. After two years of the project implementation, during which the results and best practice will be recorded, the project will be adapted by the Ministry of Education.

Photo: yes

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