

# Influence and Use of ICT in the Digital Transformation of Centers for People Living with Disabilities: A Case Study

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## Abstract

The development and innovation of information technologies have driven digital transformation and improved accessibility in all aspects of citizens' lives. Life in society includes people with disabilities, who may have reduced mobility, low incomes, and limitations related to their disability. ICTs can influence the lifestyles of these individuals. Our study was conducted in seventeen (17) centers for people with disabilities in Burundi to determine the influence of ICTs and identify the current situation, while also analyzing their impact. Through information and communication technologies (ICTs), including computers, smartphones, tablets, the internet, software, and applications, people with disabilities can create, produce, communicate, and find employment, thus contributing to transforming their daily lives and society. The results of our research indicate that the use of ICTs by people with disabilities, regardless of the nature of their disability, represents a real opportunity to promote their integration in both daily and professional life. Thus, the influence and use of ICTs show that as of December 31, 2024, 87% of the centers consulted claim to have at least one radio, 100% have a television and a computer and 62% have a fixed telephone line. We have demonstrated that a small number of workers and people with disabilities use their mobile devices to connect to the Internet. Thus, 38% of users have mobile devices, 25% use flash modems, 12% are connected to the internet, and 63% have no connection at all. This access is limited by the high cost of smartphones and data plans for this often-low-income group. Responses from managers of centers for people with disabilities indicate

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that 64% of centers face financial difficulties in obtaining internet access, with 49% citing a lack of funds and 15% high costs, while 36% experience network connectivity problems. Other constraints have an impact and influence on the inefficient use of ICT in centers for disabled people in Burundi, including low internet access for disabled people estimated at 38% (with 25% via modem and 13% via network), network connection failures estimated at 36%, difficulties related to lack of equipment at 34%, lack of ICT skills at 27%, lack of financial resources at 21%, lack of desire for digital culture at 12%, inaccessibility to centers related to their location estimated at 6% and finally other endogenous and exogenous constraints such as electricity supply and rising ICT service communication tariffs. In conclusion, the benefits of using ICT for people with disabilities outweigh the difficulties related to their inclusion in Burundian society.

### Keywords

ICT, Disability, Center for People with Disabilities, Digital Transformation

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## 1. Introduction

Information and communication technologies (ICTs) are gradually becoming essential tools in various fields, including industry, the economy, and society. The use of ICTs by people with disabilities, regardless of the nature of their disability, represents a real opportunity to promote their integration, both in daily life and in the workplace.

With the rapid evolution of electronic communications and information and communication technologies (ICTs), as well as the increasing availability of online services, people with disabilities of all kinds can, with support and adaptation, benefit from opportunities to participate fully in all aspects of life (governance, education, health, employment, leisure, commerce, banking, etc.) while eliminating barriers to their integration into society (United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities<sup>1</sup>).

According to Fardeau et al. (2024), Renouf (2022), disability is defined as: “any limitation of activity or restriction of participation in society experienced by a person in their environment due to a substantial, lasting, or permanent impairment of one or more physical, sensory, mental, cognitive, or psychological functions, multiple disabilities, or a disabling health condition,” in accordance with French law (law of February 11, 2005). A 2022 WHO report emphasizes the need to continue research on disability, as 16% of the world’s population is affected by a disability.

According to Stone & Colella (1996) there are different types of disability, grouped into six categories cited by Point et al. (2010): physical disabilities (e.g., paraplegia), psychological or mental disabilities (e.g., intellectual disability), and

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<sup>1</sup>Web/Internet (ITU-D 1)/Study report for the period 2010-2014.

many others. Among these individuals, some, despite their disability, can contribute to the development of their society. Living in communities increasingly influenced by technology, they need to communicate, conduct financial transactions, develop their skills, and engage in income-generating activities in order to contribute to the socio-economic development of their country.

The results of Bacon & Hoque (2022) indicate that in terms of employment, disabled people fare better in large companies than in SMEs.

According to Renouf (2022), new information and communication technologies are seen as levers for development and digital inclusion. His research indicates that these technologies have helped people with disabilities in two ways: firstly, by replacing prostheses, and secondly, by serving as application software.

According to Moxon et al. (2025), although ICTs are a solution for digital inclusion, the 2019 UN report on disability and the Sustainable Development Goals indicates that disabled persons are not able to benefit effectively from ICTs, hence the extreme need to integrate ICTs into centers for disabled persons.

The goal of ICT is to contribute to existing systems and adapt them according to the type of disability, through software that facilitates reading and writing tasks. Julie Fardeau and al., indicate that many authors have subsequently taken up these questions and raised many questions, particularly with regard to the use of information and communication technologies (ICT) and assistive technologies (AT) by disabled employees.

Since technology is designed for everyone, it is important to popularize the use of ICT tools among this category of people with low mobility and low income by enabling them to access computers, tablets and smartphones, the use of which transforms their lives in society.

Thus, our research question is: *“Can the use of information and communication technologies (ICTs) drive digital transformation and influence the lifestyles of people with disabilities?”*

To answer this question, we formulated two hypotheses:

- ICTs are tools that make life easier for people with disabilities.
- The use of ICT enables the acquisition of digital skills and brings about a real transformation for people living with a disability.

According to the work of Rasquinet (2023), the Internet has had a positive influence on the lives of deaf people, particularly on their use of media and its evolution over time. In general, the advent of the Internet constitutes a transformative event for society.

## 2. Literature Review

Information and Communication Technologies (ICTs) have profoundly transformed the way organizations function and lifestyles. They have left their mark throughout the 20<sup>th</sup> century, as evidenced by the abundant literature devoted to their industrial, economic, political and cultural development.

Globally, more than one billion people live with a disability, and nearly 200

million of them have significant functional limitations. According to the World Report on Disability published by the (Bickenbach, 2011; *World Report on Disability*, n.d.) governments must create enabling environments, develop rehabilitation and support services, ensure adequate social protection, and implement inclusive policies and programs that promote the development of people with disabilities (Bickenbach, 2011).

Statistics from the WHO and World Bank report of June 2011, indicate that people with disabilities represent between 11% and 15% of the world's population, or more than one billion people, and that 77% of them live in developing countries.

However, several studies have been conducted on the use of ICT by people living with disabilities (PLDs) residing in Centers for People Living with Disabilities (CPLDs)<sup>2</sup>, some reflections and results of which are presented below:

According to Méadel (2019), it describes the uses of ICTs, the changes brought about by their manipulation and action in an environment equipped by them. This demonstrates that the use of ICT dates back to the 1980s in France with the beginnings of telematics, followed by other technologies such as microcomputers, VCRs, portable music players, videophones, answering machines, etc. The use of desktop computers, laptops, mobile devices, tablets, applications and software, as well as the use of the Internet via search engines, have been continuously adopted by all segments of the population.

According to Fardeau et al. (2024) the literature highlights that information and communication technologies (ICTs) and assistive technologies (ATs) sometimes present challenges. Research suggests that employees with disabilities have a positive perception of ICTs/ATs, viewing them as tools that promote performance, inclusion, and equality. However, difficulties in use are observed: compatibility issues, difficulty in highlighting the disability, difficulties in learning how to use the technology, and a lack of digital skills.

According to this author, ICTs can help disabled people adapt to their work, as confirmed by Schur et al. (2017), who indicated the advantages and disadvantages of using ICTs in the workplace and that technology plays a more important role in reducing these inequalities.

Research by Ayon (2016) indicates that the concept of disability evolved from the mid-1960s onward. Previously, anyone with an impairment was considered disabled. The struggle for human rights led to a shift in this concept, as people with disabilities found the term discriminatory. It was therefore modified to better reflect their needs. The author's reflection on the concept of inclusion shows that including people with functional or mental differences in society implies eliminating all discrimination against them. Today, information and communication technologies are accessible to everyone, including people with physical or mental disabilities.

According to Le Chêne & Plantard (2014) digital technologies are now ubiqui-

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<sup>2</sup>CPLDs: Centers of Persons Living with Disabilities.

tous in our daily and professional lives. Their uses enable new modes of communication, organization, production and exchange, and a complete transformation of all segments of the population.

In Africa, the Togolese Federation of Associations of Persons with Disabilities (FETAPH) and the Malian Federation of Associations of Persons with Disabilities (FEMAPH)<sup>3</sup> are implementing the project “West African Regional Portal for the Rights and Inclusion of Persons with Disabilities in West Africa” with the aim of strengthening the capacities of organizations and persons with disabilities in collecting, producing and disseminating information and data on disability in West Africa and promoting access to information for persons with disabilities in order to promote their integration into society.

In Burundi, ICTs are increasingly used in various sectors of national life.

As of December 31, 2024, more than half of the Burundian population owned a mobile phone, representing a penetration rate of 64.69%, and internet penetration is gradually increasing to 26%. Until the date of our study, there was no precise data on ICT use by population group (men, women), let alone for people with disabilities. Research on the influence and use of ICTs provides some data and insights into ICT adoption among this often financially disadvantaged group.

Finally, our case study indicates that the use of ICT tools in centers for people living with disabilities is an important factor in assessing their current situation and proposing actions to be taken in this sector. Email is currently the most widespread use among the general public. In the service sector, the use of the internet and computer applications within government, the public and private sectors, education, healthcare, banking, postal services, e-commerce, and other sectors is even more significant and essential. ICTs represent opportunities for residential centers for people with disabilities and for people with disabilities themselves, as well as for other groups, including women, students, and older adults.

### 3. Materials and Methods

The methodology used to carry out this study consists of identifying the existing regulatory framework in Burundi guaranteeing the inclusion of disabled persons in order to ensure their integration in the use of information and communication technologies.

Burundi has two regulatory instruments to promote the use of ICTs by people with disabilities, namely:

- Burundi’s National Policy for the Development of Information and Communication Technologies (2010-2025): In this sectoral policy document, Burundi has set itself an objective of train a large number of young people, women and disabled people in the use of ICT;
- The law relating to the rights of disabled persons in Burundi, promulgated on January 10, 2018: Article 29 of the law stipulates that “*For equal opportunities with any other Burundian citizen in all areas of social life, every disabled per-*

<sup>3</sup>Togolese Federation of Associations of Persons with Disabilities (FETAPH).

*son has the right to access the physical environment, information and communication.”*

### 3.1. Sampling

Our study identified seventeen (17) centers for people with disabilities offering various types of services as of December 31, 2024. The sample selection was based on a non-probability sampling technique, a reasoned choice made based on the centers' knowledge. As part of our research, we visited the following centers:

- CNAR GITEGA. This establishment, which has hospital status, accommodates a large number of people with physical disabilities.
- The Saint KIZITO Institute is a center comprising a school and a rehabilitation service.
- The Saint Bernard Prosthetics and Rehabilitation Centre in Makamba;
- The “Saint Jean Bosco” center for people with physical disabilities in Muyinga;
- The KIGANDA Centre for people with disabilities,
- The MUTWENZI Medical-Educational Institute,
- The AKAMURI Centre in Jabe;
- The GAKWENDE Centre in Rutana;
- The Morning Star Center in Gitega;
- The KANYINYA Centre for the Disabled in Kirundo,
- The JEHO KUKI Centre in Ngozi,
- The KAMENGE Neuropsychiatric Centre.

We also visited centers offering vocational training and facilitating registration, school activities, in particular:

- RUMURI for the blind is a primary school where children not enrolled in nearby schools can continue their secondary education while receiving vocational training.
- Notre-Dame de la Persévérance, which has a primary school, takes care of people with hearing impairments.
- The KANURA center in GIHANGA has a primary school for blind children. It is an inclusive school.
- The EPHATA center for the deaf and mute in GASENYI-GIHOSHA has a primary school. Two (2) state centers:
- National Centre for Socio-Professional Reintegration (CNRSP) of BUJUMBURA and NGOZI.

### 3.2. Methods

Our study covers all centers for people living with disabilities in Burundi (CPLD), estimated at 17 centers as of December 31, 2024.

Data collection was carried out using a questionnaire sent to the managers of the Centers, followed by a visit to the centers for data collection by interview in order to gather qualitative and quantitative data, the processing of which will be ensured by the SPSS and EXCEL software.

One method involved conducting field visits to all centers to assess the current state of ICT use in centers for people with disabilities, highlighting the influence of ICTs and their applications, and emphasizing their important role in the rehabilitation of people with disabilities and their integration into Burundian society. We conducted interviews with the managers of these centers in Burundi, using questionnaires, and then analyzed and processed the collected data to draw results and conclusions.

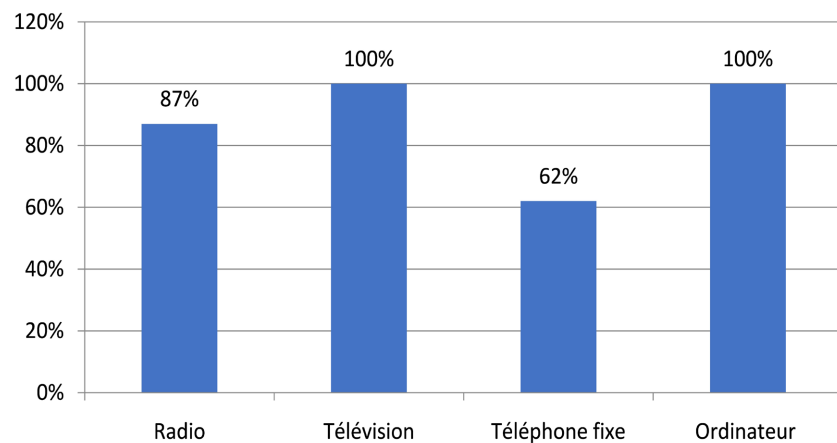
## 4. Analysis of results

### 4.1. Use of ICT in Centers

The results of interviews conducted in centers for disabled people indicate the following:

#### 4.1.1. Availability of ICT Tools

The study focused on the centers' possession of the following ICT and multimedia tools: radio, Television, telephone and computer. The availability of these tools is illustrated in the following graph (Figure 1):



**Figure 1.** Status of ICT tool availability according to the centers consulted. Source: Compilation from data provided by the centers.

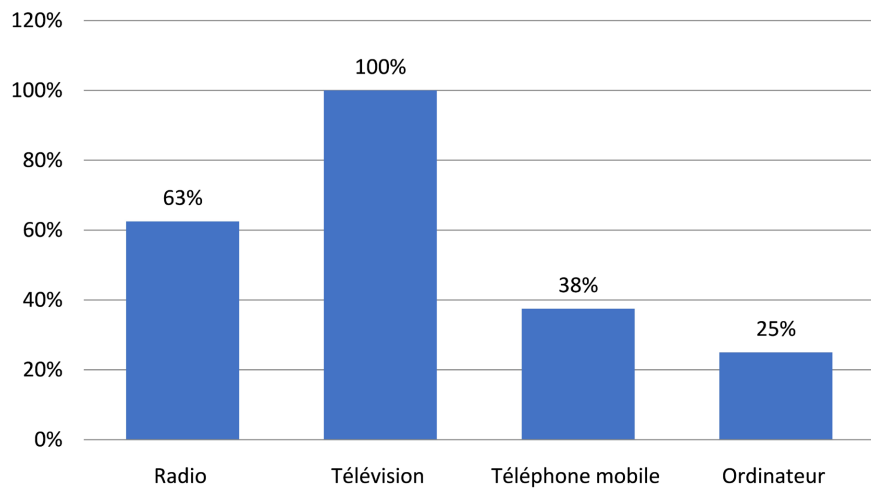
Eighty-seven percent (87%) of the centers consulted reported having a radio, one hundred percent (100%) had a television and a computer, and sixty-two percent (62%) had a landline telephone.

#### 4.1.2. The Most Commonly Used Tools by People with Disabilities to Access Information

The ICT tools used by disabled people and mentioned by the managers of the centers consulted are radio, television, mobile phone and computer.

The frequency of use of these ICT tools is as follows (Figure 2).

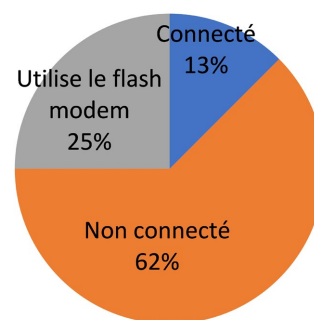
The frequency of use of ICT tools by disabled people in the centers consulted to access information is 63% for radio, 100% for television, 38% for mobile phone and 25% for computer.



**Figure 2.** Use of ICT tools by people with disabilities to access information. Source: Compilation from data provided by the centers.

#### 4.1.3. Internet Connection

Among the centers consulted, some reported having internet access, while others used flash modems to compensate for connectivity issues. Since most of the centers were located inland, we found that fiber optic internet connections were not available. A small number of workers and people with disabilities used their mobile devices to connect to the internet. This access is limited by the high cost of smartphones and data plans for this often-low-income group. Frequent power outages significantly impact the operation of these devices, and therefore communications. The connectivity status of the centers consulted is presented below (**Figure 3**).



**Figure 3.** Connectivity status of accessed centers. Source: Compilation from data provided by the centers.

Twelve percent of centers (12%) are connected to the Internet, sixty-three percent (63%) are not, while twenty-five percent (25%) connect using flash modems.

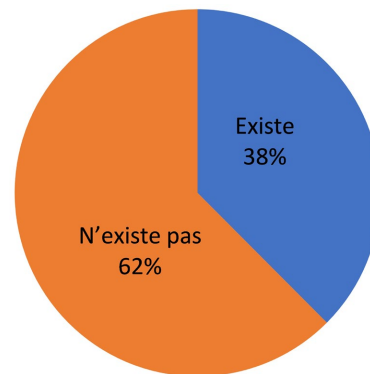
#### 4.1.4. Existence of and Access to ICT Training Programs for People with Disabilities

**Figure 4** indicates that thirty-seven percent (37%) of the centers consulted have the private courses provided to disabled people to enable them to use ICT, while

sixty-three percent (63%) of them do not have access to it.

Existing programs aim to train children with disabilities in independent computer skills. This training has a real impact on their knowledge, contributing to their autonomy and professional integration.

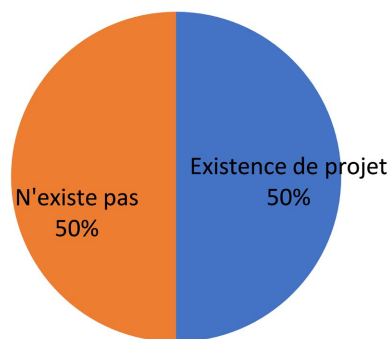
Training in ICT tools enables people with disabilities to use them, according to the type of disability they have. ICT contributes both as technical aids and as a means of stimulation and facilitation.



**Figure 4.** Existence of ICT courses for people with disabilities in the centers. Source: Compilation from data provided by the centers.

#### 4.1.5. ICT Accessibility Planning

Some centers have already planned projects related to ICT accessibility, but others have not yet done so (**Figure 5**).



**Figure 5.** ICT accessibility planning. Source: Compilation from data provided by the centers.

Half of the officials consulted say they have projects related to ICT accessibility, while the other half have not yet planned any.

Even those who claim to have made no plans yet want disabled people to acquire skills.

## 4.2. Influence of ICT Use in Centers for People with Disabilities

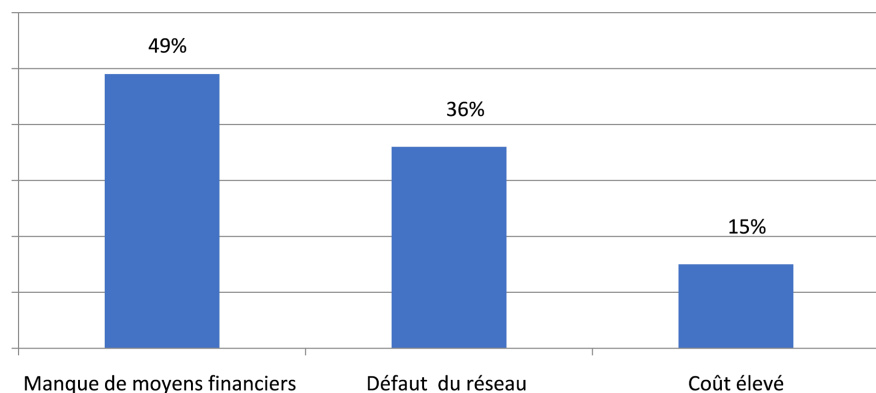
The managers of the resource centers for people with disabilities that we met highlighted several difficulties related to connectivity and accessibility to information

and communication technologies (ICTs), both for the centers themselves and for the people with disabilities who reside there. Among the main obstacles identified were financial constraints due to limited purchasing power for devices, a lack of equipment and training, and insufficient network connectivity. The primary challenge regarding access to and use of ICTs in resource centers for people with disabilities is financial.

The managers of these centers report several difficulties, including a lack of equipment and internet access to communicate with their partners and the rest of the world. This lack of connectivity poses a problem, for example, when sending medical reports abroad for interpretation. Other centers, although equipped with computers, lack the financial resources to maintain them and pay for a monthly internet subscription, and therefore have to use flash modems. These obstacles hinder the integration of people with disabilities into daily life.

### 4.3. Obstacles to the Adoption and Use of ICTs

The obstacles to internet connectivity mentioned by the managers of the centers consulted fall into two categories: lack of financial resources and network connection failures. The graph below illustrates the frequency of these constraints (**Figure 6**).



**Figure 6.** Constraints on center connectivity. Source: Data compiled from the centers.

Sixty-four percent (64%) of the centers consulted have a financial problem obtaining an Internet connection (49% of them report lacking financial means and 15% that the cost is high), while thirty-six percent (36%) have a network problem.

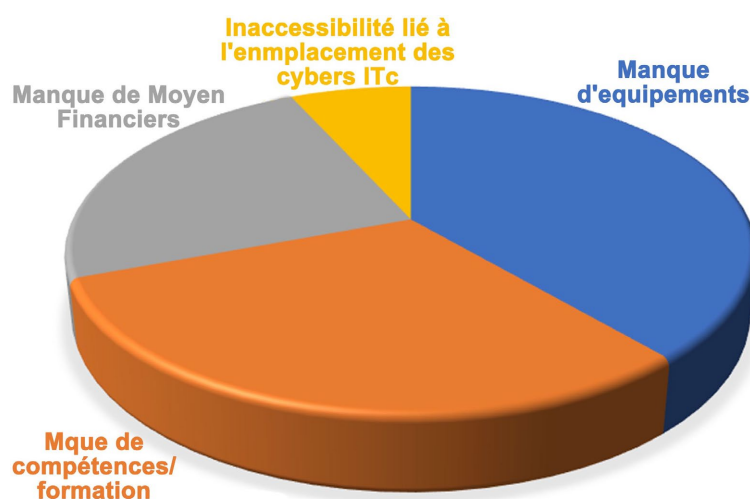
#### 4.3.1. Impact and constraints of Internet Access

Internet access has an impact on the lives of people living with disabilities; however, we have observed the existence of constraints that affect ICT access for users, including lack of equipment, lack of skills, lack of financial resources impacting the acquisition of megabytes and attendance at ICT cybercafés, inaccessibility related to the installation and location of ICT cybercafés, and many other factors.

The following **Table 1** indicates the level of impact:

**Table 1.** Level of constraints regarding access to the Internet in the centers of people living with the disability.

| Constraints   | Levels/Percentage |
|---|-------------------|
| Lack of equipment                                     | 34%               |
| Skills/Training Lack                                  | 27%               |
| Lack of Financial Resources                           | 21%               |
| Inaccessibility due to the location of ITC cybercafés | 6%                |



**Figure 7.** Barriers to Internet access for people with disabilities. Source: Compilation from data provided by the centers.

The obstacles to Internet access for disabled people in the centers consulted are related to lack of equipment in 34%, lack of knowledge and training in 27%, lack of financial resources in 21% and inaccessibility of ICT centers by people living with disabilities due to their location or installation (case of a house on an upper floor).

#### 4.3.2. The Main Obstacles Encountered by People with Disabilities in the Use of TIC

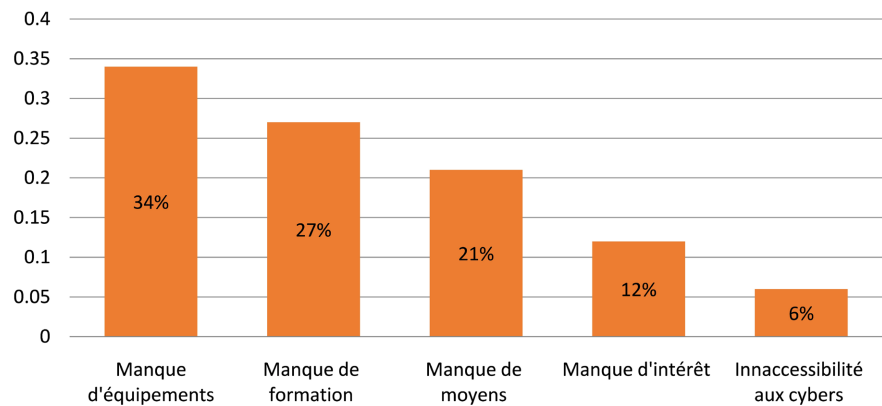
In addition to the obstacles previously mentioned in **Figure 7** regarding internet use, we identified a difficulty related to a lack of digital literacy and interest in using ICTs. Therefore, the main obstacles to the full use of ICTs by people with disabilities are grouped in the following **Figure 8**.

The responses obtained showed that 34% of disabled people attending the centers consulted do not have access to ICT due to a lack of equipment, 27% due to a lack of training in the use of the tools, 21% due to a lack of financial resources, 12% due to a lack of interest, and 6% due to accessibility problems in internet cafes. The main obstacles to access are therefore as follows:

- Due to a lack of equipment, the few computers available in the centers are being made available staff training.
- The inaccessibility of cybercafés for disabled people is linked to the fact that

some cybercafés are located on upper floors, with many stairs, or located at long distances where disabled people have difficulty reaching them.

- This lack of interest is explained by a lack of awareness among disabled people regarding the use of ICT, which means that some of them do not perceive its importance.



**Figure 8.** Main obstacles to the full use of ICTs in CPVH. **Source:** Compilation from data provided by the centers.

Following the various constraints related to the use of ICT encountered in centers for disabled people in Burundi, the directors of the centers consulted gave their opinion focusing on financial and technical assistance in the field of ICT and specified that the lack of access to the Internet for communication also constitutes a major obstacle to development. The results of the analyses indicate the state of ICT in centers for disabled people in Burundi, confirming the existence of a regulatory framework for the effective integration of this category of people.

Burundi has therefore ratified the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities and its Optional Protocol of 26 March 2014 establishing the National Policy for the Development of Information and Communication Technologies (PNDTIC), one of whose objectives is to train a large number of young people, women and disabled people in the use of ICTs.

Article 29 of the law relating to the rights of disabled persons in Burundi promulgated on January 10, 2018 stipulates “*equal opportunities with any other Burundian citizen in all areas of social life, every disabled person has the right to access the physical environment, information and communication*”.

Finally, the results obtained indicate a positive influence of the use of ICT on beneficiaries in order to enable their socio-professional integration, but the efforts of all stakeholders must be combined to meet the challenges identified.

## 5. Prospects and Benefits of ICT for People with Disabilities

Information and communication technologies (ICTs) represent a real opportunity for people with disabilities, regardless of the nature of their disability, to fully integrate into their daily and professional lives, provided that accessibility is

taken into account<sup>4</sup>. The managers of the centers visited encourage both people with disabilities and the centers themselves to promote the acquisition of equipment and the use of ICTs, which offer numerous advantages today. With the future focused on innovation and ICTs, the prospects for people with disabilities are as follows:

- Encourage people with disabilities to study in the field of ICT;
- Promote internet access for people with disabilities;
- To provide centers with computer equipment in general and low-cost internet access;
- Equip the centers with information and research rooms using ICT;
- Raising awareness among decision-makers about the needs of people with disabilities;
- Consider offering training to people with disabilities on software and applications in order to facilitate their effective use.
- Integrating people with disabilities into professional environments and equipping them with skills through ICT training.

## 6. Conclusion

Our research aimed to understand the influence and use of ICT in the lives of people with disabilities. Our research question was: “*Can the use of information and communication technologies (ICT) promote digital transformation and influence the lifestyles of people with disabilities?*”

At the end of our study, we observe that information technologies offer opportunities to improve the social participation of people with disabilities by facilitating their integration into school, training, the labor market, leisure activities, transportation, consumption, information seeking, and communication. This aligns with the findings of the study by (Chantry & Dunford, 2010), which confirms the value of information technologies for participation, to varying degrees, in all areas of professional activity, with positive impacts on education, communication, and recreational activities for children with disabilities. Furthermore, the World Bank report indicates that access to general information online enables people with disabilities to overcome the physical barriers to communication and transportation they may encounter in society.

ICTs are among the tools for inclusion and facilitation of people living with disabilities; our finding at the end of our research coincides with the results of the research of (Achiq & Belhaj, 2024) who finds that the adaptation and personalization of distance learning using information and communication technologies (ICTs) offer enormous potential to bring about significant improvements in the lives of these people living with disabilities and give the possibility of compensating for their physical restrictions.

Although some believe that people with disabilities are incapable of acting and being useful, they nonetheless possess diverse intellectual potential that can enrich

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<sup>4</sup>Philippe Balin (2014).

the lives of their communities. The use of ICT by people with disabilities is a powerful tool to facilitate and influence their development. Center managers are developing support projects to secure ICT funding. Some centers face connectivity challenges due to a lack of computers or internet access. Our research encourages center managers to provide as much training as possible, seek financial support from donors, and appeal to the generosity of individuals to acquire internet access, computers, and other equipment necessary for the centers' operation and the digital inclusion of these vulnerable and disadvantaged people.

Despite the wishes of those in charge of centers for people with disabilities, the use of ICT in these centers in Burundi remains limited due to the main challenges identified in our study, including low internet access for disabled people estimated at 38% (with 25% via modem and 13% via network), network connection failures estimated at 36%, difficulties related to lack of equipment at 34%, lack of ICT skills at 27%, lack of financial resources at 21%, lack of interest in digital culture at 12%, inaccessibility to centers related to their location estimated at 6%, but also due to other difficulties such as the lack of electricity supply, lack of funding and multi-faceted support.

Our study calls on all actors and stakeholders to support the installation of Digital Centers in order to increase the level of ICT penetration of ICT services in these centers, the majority of which are located in rural areas, in remote areas where connectivity and Internet access are necessary.

## Conflicts of Interest

The authors declare no conflicts of interest regarding the publication of this paper.

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