

# Summary Report of Vodacom's Inaugural Accessibility Conference

HERE'S TO THE NEXT  
**30**  
YEARS OF  
PURPOSE



2 May 2024

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Theme:

**“Promoting the digital inclusion of persons with disabilities in Africa; leaving no one behind.”**



# Agenda

	Time	Topic/Item	Activities	Speaker/Participant
<b>Session 1</b> Purpose in Action – Enabling an inclusive digital society	08:00 – 09:30	In-person event registration	Registration	Events team
	09:30 – 09:35	Video	Video	Events team
	09:35 – 09:40	Welcome	Welcome	Dr Karen Smit: Accessibility Lead – Vodacom Group
	09:40 – 09:45	Introduction	Vodacom SA CEO address	Sitho Mdlalose: CEO Vodacom South Africa
	09:45 – 10:00	Driving accessible innovations to promote the participation of persons with disabilities in a digital economy.	Keynote talk	Dr Shameel Joosub: CEO Vodacom Group
	10:00 – 10:55	Removing barriers to accessibility/disability inclusion: the role of Policies in influencing an inclusive ICT landscape.	<b>Panel discussion</b> Moderator: <b>Taki Netshitenzhe</b> : Chief Officer – External Affairs Vodacom South Africa	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• (former) <b>Minister Lindiwe Zulu</b>: Minister of Social Development – South Africa</li> <li>• <b>Shuaib Chalklen</b>: Executive Director – African Disability Forum</li> <li>• <b>Mariana Gomes Neto</b>: Human Rights Officer – Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights</li> <li>• <b>Mpho Moyo</b>: Research Associate – Research ICT Africa</li> <li>• <b>Petronella Linders</b>: Chief Director: Gender, Disability, Youth and Children: Department of Communications and Digital Technologies – South Africa</li> </ul>
	10:55 – 11:05	Q&A		
11:05 – 11:30 Tea break and visit exhibitions				
<b>Session 2</b> Best practice examples of implementing accessibility upfront	11:30 – 11:50	Building Inclusively, Building Accessibly: Google's approach to Accessibility.	Talk	Christopher Patnoe: Head of Accessibility and Disability Inclusion: Google EMEA
	11:50 – 12:40	Implementing accessibility upfront to drive positive customer experiences for consumers with disabilities in Africa	<b>Panel discussion</b> Moderator: <b>Doreen Kissoky</b> : HOD Customer OPS – Tanzania and Deputy Chairperson Vodacom Africa Accessibility Forum	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Tabie Kioko</b>: Chapter Lead, Diversity Equity &amp; Inclusion, Safaricom PLC – Kenya</li> <li>• <b>Pamela Ilunga</b>: Deputy CEO – Vodacom DRC</li> <li>• <b>Yasmine Tarek-Desouky</b>: Senior Manager Talent Management, DE&amp;I and Leadership Development – Vodafone Egypt</li> <li>• <b>Davide Tacchino</b>: Managing Executive Terminals – Vodacom South Africa</li> </ul>
	12:40 – 12:50	Q&A		
	12:50 – 13:30 Lunch and visiting exhibitions			
<b>Session 3</b> “Nothing About Us Without Us”: Promoting societal participation of persons with disabilities	13:30 – 13:35	Video	Show video	Events team
	13:35 – 14:30	Promoting accessibility: the gateway to unlocking the participation of persons with disabilities in a digital society.	<b>Panel discussion</b> Moderator: <b>Matimba Mbungela</b> : Chief Human Resources Officer – Vodacom Group	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Jace Nair</b>: CEO Blind SA</li> <li>• <b>Judith Coetzee</b>: CEO Cape Town Society for the Blind</li> <li>• <b>Phuti Mabelebele</b>: Chief Director of Department of Women, Youth and Persons with Disabilities – South Africa (Presidency)</li> <li>• <b>Ilze Fourie</b>: Tobii Specialist and Chairperson: Disability Employee Forum – Vodacom South Africa</li> <li>• <b>Dirkie Ebersohn</b>: Content Developer Manager – National Institute for the Deaf</li> <li>• <b>Lynette Victor</b>: Chief Sign Language Centre Officer – National Institute for the Deaf</li> </ul>
	14:30 – 14:45	Q&A		
	14:45 – 15:05	Recognise Accessibility and Disability Inclusion Champions	Recognition certificates	<b>Stephen Chege</b> : Chief Officer External Affairs Vodacom Group
	15:05 – 15:15	Closing remarks and vote of thanks	Closing remarks	<b>Stephen Chege</b> : Chief Officer External Affairs Vodacom Group
	15:15 – 16:00 Visit exhibitions			

# Conference overview

The Vodacom Inaugural Accessibility Conference was the first of its kind to be hosted by an Mobile Network Operator (MNO) in Africa.

The objective of the conference was raising awareness of advancing the inclusion of consumers and employees with disabilities to enhance their participation in society.

Key stakeholders included Vodacom staff across African markets and external stakeholders from various organisations.

The theme of the conference was ‘Promoting the digital inclusion of persons with disabilities in Africa; leaving no one behind.’

The Vodacom Accessibility Conference was the latest milestone in a series of discussions. It aimed to elevate the narrative of intentionally advancing the participation of persons with disabilities as employees and consumers. The series commenced with Vodacom delivering a keynote talk on promoting the digital inclusion of persons with disabilities in Africa at the 2023 GSMA Mobile World Conference (MWC) in Kigali.

The conference was organised by Vodacom staff with various (visible and invisible) disabilities as we live the principle of ‘Nothing About Us Without Us – thanks to senior leadership’s support to lead the disability agenda within Vodacom.’

<p>Venue: <b>Vodacom World, South Africa</b></p>	 <p>Delegates <b>In person:</b> <b>140</b></p>	 <p>Media houses <b>8</b></p>	<p>Exhibitions Industry <b>Samsung</b>   <b>Honor</b> <b>Apple</b>   <b>Oppo</b></p> <p>Vodacom internal <b>Vodacom Africa Accessibility Forum</b> <b>Vodacom Disability Employee Forum</b></p>	<p>Speakers <b>Internal</b> <b>13</b> <b>External</b> <b>10</b></p>	<p>Participating organisations <b>Academics</b> <b>ICT industry</b> <b>Civil society</b> <b>Organisations for Persons with Disabilities</b> <b>Government departments</b></p>
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# Outcomes

Enhanced the accessibility narrative by discussing **Vodacom's accessible products and services for consumers with disabilities** which demonstrated the role that Vodacom play as a mobile network operator to promote digital inclusion in Africa.

Vodacom **senior leadership's participation** and commitment to the inaugural conference demonstrated commitment to promoting the inclusion of employees and consumers with disabilities in Africa.



Created a **platform for disability advocates** from Organisations for Persons with Disabilities to make their voices heard by sharing information about disability initiatives.

Increased **thought leadership amongst private and public organisations** in Africa to intentionally embed accessibility and disability inclusion in their strategies.



Facilitated **networking opportunities for attendees** from Organisations for Persons with Disabilities, tech companies, industry organisations and government.

Recognised:

Vodacom employees and leaders for **championing accessibility and disability initiatives** within their respective business units.

Organisations for Persons with Disabilities for **driving accessibility initiatives**.



# Outcomes

We succeeded in hosting a conference that was accessible and inclusive for delegates with disabilities and others which resulted in positive experiences and great enjoyment.

The needs of delegates with disabilities were taken into account to ensure that every aspect of the event is accessible – some of the accessibility efforts included the following:



- Allocated dedicated parking bays
- Trained Security to assist delegates with disabilities to enter the venue comfortably
- Venue staff guided delegates to the lift area and accompanied them to the venue
- Registration staff assisted delegates with completing registration
- Catering staff were briefed beforehand and offered assistance to delegates by assisting to dish up and carry their food to the dedicated lunch area
- The stage had a ramp at the correct incline for safe access
- Ramp Assistants' ensured that speakers with disabilities navigated the ramp safely
- Speakers read any information displayed on the screen to not exclude persons with visual impairments
- Visually impaired persons with guide dogs were welcomed; bowls of water was provided as well as a demarcated area for the guide dogs to relieve themselves.
- Setting up the TV screen for Sign language speakers and their interpreters to be able to view the complete panel
- Spaced tables to ensure that delegates using mobility aids and guide dogs could navigate the venue easily

**Committed** to including persons with disabilities, with a special focus on girls and women with disabilities in various programmes to promote digital inclusion.

**Confirmed** the ongoing development of policies which encourages accessible and psychological safe workplace environments across African markets for employees with disabilities to thrive, develop and advance.

**Invited** persons with disabilities to provide feedback on improving digital solutions for Vodacom to continue making meaningful differences in the lives of Africans with disabilities.

# Participating and attending organisations

<p>Organisations for persons with disabilities</p>	
<p>Civil society organisations</p>	
<p>Industry organisations</p>	
<p>Government departments</p>	



# Participating Vodacom African markets



# Stands/exhibitions

Samsung



Oppo



Vodacom Forums:  
Africa Accessibility Forum  
Disability Employee Forum



Honor



Apple





# Speakers

## Keynote speaker



**Dr Shameel Joosub**

CEO Vodacom Group

## Main speakers



**Sitho Mdlalose**

CEO Vodacom South Africa



**(former) Minister Lindiwe Zulu**

(former) Minister of Social  
Development – South Africa

# Featured speakers

## External stakeholders



**Christopher Patnoe**

Head of Accessibility & Disability Inclusion – Google EMEA



**Mariana Gomes Neto**

Human Rights Officer – UN High Commissioner for Human Rights



**Mpho Moyo**

Research Associate – Research ICT Africa



**Petronella Linders**

Chief Director Gender, Disability, Youth and Children – Department of Communications and Digital Technologies South Africa



**Phuti Mabelebele**

Chief Director of Department of Women, Youth and Persons with Disabilities – South Africa (Presidency)



**Jace Nair**

CEO – Blind SA



**Dirkie Ebersohn**

Content Development Manager – National Institute for the Deaf



**Lynette Victor**

Chief Sign Language Centre Officer – National Institute for the Deaf



**Judith Coetzee**

CEO – Cape Town Society for the Blind



**Shuaib Chalklen**

Executive Director – African Disability Forum



# Featured speakers

## Vodacom internal



**Pamela Ilunga**

Deputy CEO – Vodacom DRC



**Stephen Chege**

Chief Officer – External Affairs  
Vodacom Group



**Matimba Mbungela**

Chief Officer – Human  
Resources Vodacom Group



**Taki Netshitenzhe**

Chief Officer – External Affairs  
South Africa and Sponsor for  
Disability Employee Forum  
South Africa



**Davide Tacchino**

Managing Executive  
– Terminals South Africa



**Dr Karen Smit**

Accessibility Lead – Vodacom  
Group and Chairperson  
Vodacom Africa Accessibility  
Forum



**Yasmine Tarek-Desouky**

Senior Manager – Talent  
Management, DE&I and  
Leadership Development  
Vodafone Egypt



**Doreen Kissoky**

EHOD – Customer Operations  
Tanzania and Deputy  
Chairperson Vodacom Africa  
Accessibility Forum



**Tabie Kioko**

Chapter Lead – Diversity  
Equity & Inclusion,  
Safaricom PLC Kenya



**Ilze Fourie**

Specialist – Tobi and  
Chairperson Disability  
Employee Forum  
Vodacom South Africa

# Panel discussion sessions



**Topic**  
Implementing accessibility upfront to drive positive customer experiences for consumers with disabilities in Africa.



**Topic**  
Removing barriers to accessibility/ disability inclusion: the role of Policies in influencing an inclusive ICT landscape.



**Topic**  
Promoting accessibility: the gateway to unlocking the participation of persons with disabilities in a digital society



# Stakeholder feedback

"I want to congratulate Vodacom for hosting this event and for being inclusive as far products and services for customers with various impairments are concerned."

"From arrival to end the arrangements were suburb - full stars for making participants feel welcome and important; it felt glamorous and that the "issue" of accessibility at hand is of great importance to Vodacom."



"These days in-persons conferences are rare. A big advantage of such events is the ability to connect and network with industry peers. I didn't know any person but through interacting with people on my table and during lunch I left with several new connections. This was a value add to the experience."

"The atmosphere in the venue was one of sheer joy and happiness; people wanted to be there to participate and obtain information about accessible technology."



"I appreciated the principle of 'Nothing About Us Without Us', since most speakers spoke from first-hand experience."



"The production, lighting, sound & camera team adapted quickly to include my needs as Deaf Speaker using Sign Language. I could see the panellists on a TV screen in front of our panel which enabled me to see everywhere in real-time. The picture-in-picture were equally big enough to see the speakers and the sign language interpreter at the same time - very impressive!"

"Topics were relevant as it highlighted the importance of collaboration and partnerships to promote accessibility and inclusion in ensuring that persons with disabilities can access technology and use it optimally. "

"The day was full of excellent content, and our delegation benefited from the networking opportunities too."

# Press releases



<b>Vodacom Group:</b> Vodacom to hold its inaugural disability and accessibility conference	<a href="https://www.vodacom.com/news-article.php?articleID=14024">https://www.vodacom.com/news-article.php?articleID=14024</a>
<b>Eyewitness News:</b> 'How do we go back to basics?' asks Minister Zulu on helping people with disabilities:	<a href="https://www.ewn.co.za/2024/05/03/how-do-we-go-back-to-basics-asks-minister-zulu-on-helping-people-with-disabilities">https://www.ewn.co.za/2024/05/03/how-do-we-go-back-to-basics-asks-minister-zulu-on-helping-people-with-disabilities</a>
<b>Eyewitness News:</b> 30 years into SA's democracy, the vibrancy of the disability sector has waned, says official:	<a href="https://www.ewn.co.za/2024/05/03/30-years-into-sas-democracy-the-vibrancy-of-the-disability-sector-has-waned-says-official">https://www.ewn.co.za/2024/05/03/30-years-into-sas-democracy-the-vibrancy-of-the-disability-sector-has-waned-says-official</a>
<b>Digital Street:</b> Vodacom to hold its inaugural disability and accessibility conference:	<a href="https://www.digitalstreetsa.com/vodacom-to-hold-its-inaugural-disability-and-accessibility-conference/">https://www.digitalstreetsa.com/vodacom-to-hold-its-inaugural-disability-and-accessibility-conference/</a>
<b>Lifestyle and Tech:</b> Vodacom to hold its inaugural disability and accessibility conference:	<a href="https://lifestyleandtech.co.za/company-news/article/2024-05-01/vodacom-to-hold-its-inaugural-disability-and-accessibility-conference">https://lifestyleandtech.co.za/company-news/article/2024-05-01/vodacom-to-hold-its-inaugural-disability-and-accessibility-conference</a>
<b>Midrand Reporter:</b> Vodacom holds its first disability and accessibility conference:	<a href="https://www.citizen.co.za/midrand-reporter/news-headlines/2024/05/23/vodacoms-first-disability-and-accessibility-conference-pioneers-digital-inclusion/">https://www.citizen.co.za/midrand-reporter/news-headlines/2024/05/23/vodacoms-first-disability-and-accessibility-conference-pioneers-digital-inclusion/</a>
<b>Full View:</b> Vodacom to hold its inaugural disability and accessibility conference:	<a href="https://fullview.co.za/business/item/36883-vodacom-to-hold-its-inaugural-disability-and-accessibility-conference">https://fullview.co.za/business/item/36883-vodacom-to-hold-its-inaugural-disability-and-accessibility-conference</a>
<b>IT News Africa:</b> Can AI Transform Accessibility for Those with Disabilities?:	<a href="https://www.itnewsafrika.com/2024/06/q-a/">https://www.itnewsafrika.com/2024/06/q-a/</a>
<b>Telecompaper:</b> Vodacom Group hosts inaugural disability and accessibility conference:	<a href="https://www.telecompaper.com/news/vodacom-group-hosts-inaugural-disability-and-accessibility-conference--1499159">https://www.telecompaper.com/news/vodacom-group-hosts-inaugural-disability-and-accessibility-conference--1499159</a>



## Acknowledgements

Vodacom proudly hosted the Inaugural Accessibility Conference which was the first of its kind to be hosted by an MNO in Africa.

Thank you, Vodacom senior leadership, for supporting the conference:

- **Dr Shameel Joosub** – CEO Vodacom Group
- **Pamela Ilunga** – Deputy CEO Vodacom DRC
- **Sitho Mdlalose** – CEO Vodacom South Africa
- **Philip Besiimire** – CEO Vodacom Tanzania
- **Mohale Ralebitso** – CEO Vodacom Lesotho
- **Stephen Chege** – Chief Officer External Affairs Vodacom Group
- **Matimba Mbungela** – Chief Officer Human Resources Vodacom Group
- **Taki Netshitenzhe** – Chief Officer External Affairs Vodacom South Africa
- **Davide Tacchino** – Managing Executive Terminals Vodacom South Africa

“We want to extend a special thank you to the many speakers and delegates from organisations for persons with disabilities, industry, civil society and government departments who came to Vodacom World to share expertise and insights on accessibility and disability inclusion topics.”





# Connecting for a better future



