

Blog 2 – PDF Version:

"The Need to Work Collaboratively on Assistive Devices"

May 2020

Writing a blog post can be scary, especially writing about research when I am not yet seeing myself as a full researcher. But I love learning, and I have an inquisitive mind, and I appreciate how research can impact our communities. So, here it goes...

One of my roles with the PIRL Project is to enable learning by helping people to have access to communication – whether that is online, by phone, or in person.

I have been involved in projects with the disability and rehabilitation community for many years, and I am still learning a lot. One of the things I love most about this work is that I can share my passion for technology, and how different kinds of technologies can really open new opportunities for people.

Living in Bamenda, Cameroon, I see the limitations we have but I also see so many opportunities. I love open-source approaches. I would love to see access in our African communities grow through the use of both complex technologies, like learning platforms, and what are now often seen as more simple technologies, like text messaging.

I think the World Health Organization's work on GATE is really important and is an initiative that all researchers, no matter what field, can benefit from knowing about. "GATE" stands for Global Cooperation on Assistive Technology. Whether you are living in the Global North or the Global South, you have a contribution to make in this area. We need to have more cooperation and collaboration on assistive technologies around the world so that everyone can get the support they need.

Assistive technology is important, but it is just a tool. It is often a part that is forgotten or not prioritized in our contexts. Without good assistive technologies, people with disabilities and people living with other circumstances that put them in marginalized situations -like poverty or being

part of an Indigenous community – cannot be equal beneficiaries of the development occurring in their communities. More importantly, they cannot fully contribute to the development process, even though they have much to offer.

I am proudly a geek. I think that smartphones and computer access need to be seen as just as important as other assistive devices like eyeglasses, wheelchairs, prostheses, and hearing aids. The Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities has recognized access to assistive technology as a human right and has called for international cooperation to improve its access ([read Article 32](#)).

The PIRL Project is just one step of many that are needed to make the world more inclusive and accessible. I am very happy to be able to be part of PIRL, and I look forward to discussing new innovations and strategies with you.

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Mr. Marc Stephan Nkouly is an ICT Technical Support Specialist and CEO of STARC Enterprise, a company that provides related IT services to people and organizations of very different backgrounds. He has over 10 years of experience providing services to individual clients, and community-based and international organizations. His work includes designing websites, piloting online questionnaires, installing, configuring, and updating hardware and software, and troubleshooting for any related challenges. He understands local African realities and provides support to clients who have little or no knowledge about using ICT. Through his project CLICSpace, he has introduced IT to many beginners and is a very good coach in this domain. He places emphasis on teaching about the use of laptops, printers, telephone systems, routers, and modems as well as software like MS Office and the internet.