Code2Unlock Hackathon in Rwanda
Summary Lumen group coaching intervention

Intervention brief: accelerating IT Talent readiness for Global Outsourcing from Rwanda

Intervention of Lumen EA as part of the Code2Unlock Hackathon 2025 in Rwanda, funded by the Embassy of the Netherlands in Kigali, implemented by the TRAIDE Foundation supported by the German Federal Ministry for Economic Cooperation and Development (BMZ) Special Initiative "Decent Work for a Just Transition", implemented by GIZ.

Context

In the competitive IT Outsourcing industry, technical proficiency and soft skills are the baseline, but interpersonal agility is the differentiator for service quality as per international standards. As part of the Code2Unlock Hackathon 2025 in Kigali, Lumen EA addressed the critical interpersonal and soft-skills gap, that often hinders the integration of junior Rwandan developers into international remote teams.

Intervention: Turning talent into human capital

The soft skills training week began with a full-day of team coaching session led by Lumen EA, using the globally recognised Insights Discovery® (Colour Energies) methodology. The intervention was thoughtfully adapted to the Rwandan context and the needs of IT students entering the workforce. Led by Lumen's certified and experienced coaches, a psychologically safe environment was created where participants developed deeper insight into their own communication styles, gained a stronger understanding of others, and enhanced their ability to collaborate effectively by leveraging individual strengths. The students completed the Insights Discovery personality assessment in advance, which informed peer feedback and encouraged honest reflection. This process sparked a shift in how participants saw themselves and others, laying the foundation for sustainable behavioural change. The session also connected the Colour Energies to each student's soft skills development plan (informed by Komensky's survey), ensuring the training was aligned with their individual growth goals. For more details, see page 5 of the attached report.

Reflection post-hackathon

Lumen EA's facilitation played a key role in the success of this hackathon. Their strength lies in translating global leadership and team effectiveness methodologies into contextually relevant, impactful experiences. By combining international expertise with deep local insight, Lumen has built a strong track record across East Africa — working effectively with students, entrepreneurs, and corporate teams alike. This versatility and regional experience position them as a valuable partner for future capacity-building programmes.

In Rwanda, it was the first time such an intervention was embedded into talent development measures. Feedback from both funding partners, ecosystem enablers (skilling partners), and students was highly positive. Lumen's intervention took the activity to another level, going beyond traditional training by providing a structured pathway from self-awareness to professional collaboration via psychological safety, data-driven development and contextualized implementation.

Strategic value for future partnerships

For the Global Outsourcing sector in Rwanda and the broader East African region, talent is the engine of job creation. By equipping youth with the "language of professional effectiveness" through Lumen EA's intervention, the onboarding risk for employers is significantly reduced. This leads to higher long-term retention of junior developers in remote teams and positions the workforce as a premium destination for international investment.

Lumen EA's strength lies in translating global leadership and team effectiveness methodologies into contextually relevant, impactful experiences. Their proven track record working effectively with students, entrepreneurs, and corporate teams alike makes them a valuable partner for future capacity-building programmes.

The above feedback is based on input from the Hackathon organisers from GIZ and Traide Rwanda.

Code2Unlock Hackathon 2025

The Code2Unlock Hackathon was organized by the TRAIDE Foundation in collaboration with The Gym – Rwanda's most intensive software development training program and sponsored by the Embassy of the Kingdom of the Netherlands in Rwanda. The hackathon ran from August 25 to September 19, 2025, beginning with 134 participants and culminating in a grand finale that crowned one winning team.

More than just a competition, the hackathon served as a platform for collaboration between young IT talent, international experts, and both public and private sector stakeholders. It enabled participants to not only tackle real-world challenges but also to learn from experts and companies in the Rwandan and Dutch tech ecosystems.

The event showcased Rwanda's growing software development landscape and supported the country's ambition to position itself as a competitive IT outsourcing destination through skills development, global partnerships, and a vibrant, innovative tech community.

Four Dutch tech mentors supported and guided the participants in Rwanda and two Dutch learning and development companies, Komensky and Lumen EA, contributed to the hackathon with their expertise in professional and skills development. The hackathon also received additional support from the German Federal Ministry for Economic Cooperation and Development (BMZ) Special Initiative "Decent Work for a Just Transition", implemented by GIZ Rwanda, and the Rwandan Ministry of ICT and Innovation.

Kingdom of the Netherlands

TRAIDE

The GYM

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Challenges

RTB | RWANDA TVET BOARD

Challenge 1

Driving Private Sector Participation and TVET Enrollment

How can we increase private sector engagement and strengthen connections to TVET, while also raising awareness among young people about the opportunities that TVET can offer them?

Provided by: Rwanda TVET Board (RTB)

THE PROBLEM:

Private sector and industry stakeholders are not sufficiently engaged or investing in skills development. At the same time, many young people remain unaware of the benefits of Technical and Vocational Education and Training (TVET), leading to low enrollment. This combination contributes to a skills gap that hinders both workforce readiness and business growth.

SOLVIT AFRICA

Challenge 2

Unlocking Diaspora potential for youth empowerment

How might we design a sustainable, inclusive, tech-enabled bridge between diaspora professionals and Rwandan youth to foster job readiness and meaningful employment?

Provided by: SolvIT Africa

THE PROBLEM:

Many educated Rwandan youth lack mentorship, global perspectives, and career readiness tools. Meanwhile, the Rwandan diaspora holds valuable expertise and networks and a strong desire to contribute to national development but this potential remains largely untapped and unstructured.

tabiya

Challenge 3

Mapping the World of Work - Exploring Jobs & Skills with Tabiya

How might we use Tabiya's open taxonomy of jobs and skills to make the world of work more visible and navigable? Consider how people could explore how occupations and skills connect, uncover hidden career pathways, or better understand opportunities in the labor market.

Provided by: Tabiya

Tabiya has developed an open-data reference map of occupations and skills recognizing capabilities from both formal and informal work and adaptable to local contexts worldwide.

The taxonomy includes:

- 3,000 occupations & 650 occupation groups
- 14,000 skills & 650 skill groups
- 130,000 associations between skills and occupations

THE PROBLEM:

The Tabiya taxonomy is rich but complex, containing thousands of data points that are difficult to explore. There is currently no intuitive or engaging way for people to visualize and interact with this data especially when combined with real-world labor market trends (e.g., job postings or individual skill profiles).

Challenge 4

From Skills to Careers: Finding Your Dream Job

Using Tabiya's skill–occupation links, how might we help individuals map their current skills to desired roles, identify missing skills, and suggest the most efficient pathways toward achieving their career goals?

Provided by: Tabiya

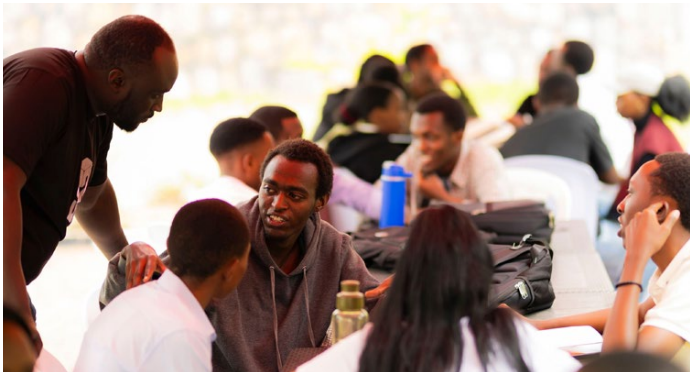
THE PROBLEM:

Many people struggle to transition into new jobs because it's unclear which skills they already possess, which ones they lack, and how best to bridge that gap. While Tabiya's taxonomy connects thousands of occupations and skills, this information remains difficult to navigate and apply in practice.

Participants & Mentors

The Gym partners with over nine universities across the country to train software engineers who can compete at an international level. For the Code2Unlock Hackathon, trainees from six of these partner institutions stepped forward: ALU, AUCA, Kepler College, IPRC Kigali, IPRC Gishari, and IPRC Tumba. Excitement grew quickly as 134 students registered, eventually forming 32 teams ready to take on real challenges.

Alongside student preparation, the organizing team launched a call for Dutch IT professionals – engineers, designers, and product managers – to support the hackathon as mentors. The announcement went live on Code2Unlock.org, inviting candidates to apply. From the dozen applications, four inspiring mentors were selected, representing a rich mix of backgrounds from product design to software development to startup coaching.



1 25/08
Kick Off
Hackathon Deep Dive
Challenges

2 26/08–11/09
Ask, listen, build!
Coaching and online Q&As

3 11/09
Selection Day
First pitch and prototype

4 14/09
Crunch Week
Refine code and prototype
Perfect your pitch

5 19/09
Graduation Day!
Final pitch to a panel of judges
Prize ceremony
Networking

Code2 Unlock

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Hackathon Highlights

Kick Off



On August 25th, 2025, all 134 students and challenge owners gathered for the official launch of the Code2Unlock Hackathon. The session opened with remarks from George Kategaya, Program Manager at The Gym, followed by Opening Remarks from François Uwumukiza of the Embassy of the Kingdom of the Netherlands. Challenge owners then presented their challenges in brief five-minute pitches, followed by a Q&A.

In the afternoon, teams met with challenge owners to discuss the problems in depth and choose their preferred areas of focus. By the end of the day, 32 teams picked their challenge.

Mentor Online Sessions

Over the next three weeks, teams worked on their solutions while having the opportunity to meet remotely with the four selected Dutch mentors for guidance, feedback, and technical support.

Matt SZASKO

With over 15 years of Product and Design experience across India and the Netherlands, Matt specializes in B2B SaaS and is a Y Combinator alumnus. His session covered product design and user validation, helping teams understand how to speak to users, decide what to build, and stand out from competitors.

Roelof VUURBOOM

Roelof is an IT startup mentor with deep expertise in data science, machine learning, Agile, and Scrum, backed by senior roles in multinational companies. He led a session on pitching and presentation, teaching teams how to structure a compelling story and deliver it with clarity and impact.

Jesus LORCA LUQUE

Jesús, a Senior Technical Architect at Salesforce with roots in Java development, brings strong experience in software architecture for telecom and automotive sectors. His session guided teams through designing scalable, efficient technical solutions within the constraints of a hackathon.

Mireille LOCK

Mireille is a software developer with 18 years of experience building backend systems across sectors, with expertise in AI, Java, Python, and modern databases. Her session focused on practical AI use in product development, highlighting how teams could apply it effectively and responsibly.

Selection Day

After three weeks of development, all teams were invited on September 11th, 2025, to present their solutions during Selection Day for a chance to reach the final Crunch Week.

Throughout the full day, judges reviewed and questioned both the technical and conceptual aspects of each project. Out of all participating teams, 30 made it to the selection day and by the end of the day, 7 finalist teams were selected to move forward.

Professional Skills Development

Turning talent into human capital

Komensky played a key role in embedding soft-skills awareness and reflection into the Code2Unlock Hackathon through the development and deployment of a structured Personal Skill Check. At the start of the hackathon, all 134 participating students completed this self-assessment, which covered a broad range of soft skills such as analytical skills, collaboration, planning and organisation, active listening, adaptability to change, and self-reflection. The primary purpose of this survey was not only to establish a baseline, but also to actively engage students with the language, relevance, and importance of soft skills in a practical, project-based context. Students who progressed to the Crunch Week completed the same skills check again, allowing for direct comparison and reflection on their personal growth during the programme.

The self-assessment had a clearly noticeable impact on student engagement, as participants became more aware of their own development and involvement throughout the hackathon.

Lumen's intervention took the awareness and skills development to the next level, going beyond traditional training by providing a structured pathway from self-awareness to professional collaboration via psychological safety, data-driven development and contextualized implementation. Lumen certified coaches applied the globally recognized Insights Discovery® (Colour Energies) methodology. The approach was adapted to the Rwandan context and addressed the critical soft-skills gap that often hinders the integration of junior Rwandan developers into international remote teams. The coaches created a psychologically safe space where the students gained insight into their communication styles, understood others better, and learned to collaborate by leveraging on personal strengths.

The students took the Insights Discovery personality assessment in advance, enabling meaningful peer feedback and reflection. This process sparked a 'mindset shift' in how participants saw themselves and others, laying the foundation for sustainable behavioral change. The session also linked the Colour Energies to each student's soft skills development plan (informed by Komensky's survey), supporting their personal growth goals.

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A Day in the Crunch Week

September 15th–19th was the heart of the hackathon! Each morning, students arrived at The Gym ready to refine their projects, using the feedback they'd received the day before to sharpen their ideas, presentations, and prototypes. The space buzzed with teamwork as groups coded, rehearsed, and problem-solved together.

By lunchtime, the pace slowed as everyone gathered to eat and socialize, connecting with teams from other schools and exchanging ideas across campuses. In the afternoon, students met with their mentors, asking questions, validating decisions, and getting guidance that shaped both their pitches and their confidence.

Evenings were reserved for the masterclass of the day, where mentors taught a focused topic drawn from their expertise. Each day ended with a shared dinner, a moment to reflect and recharge for the next round of building.

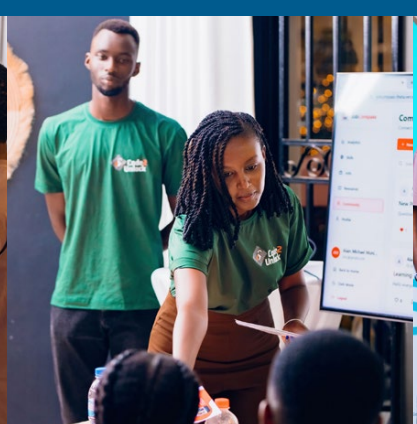
Finale

On September 19th, 2025, the month-long hackathon concluded with a Graduation and Award Ceremony filled with anticipation and pride.

Her Excellency JOAN WIEGMAN, Ambassador of the Kingdom of the Netherlands, opened the event, highlighting the students' journey and Rwanda's growing role in global IT.

CHANTAL KAYONGA, CEO of the GBS Growth Initiative, encouraged the finalists to continue pushing their boundaries as Rwanda's outsourcing sector grows.

The seven finalist teams then presented their five-minute pitches, impressing judges with their innovation, usability, and impact. After deliberation, the top teams were announced and awarded, marking a celebratory close to the hackathon.



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Reflections and impact

The Code2Unlock Hackathon made a lasting impact on students and mentors, creating a dynamic space for learning, collaboration, and inspiration within Rwanda's tech ecosystem. Over 134 students tackled real-world challenges, strengthening not only their technical capabilities but also their teamwork, creativity, communication, and problem-solving skills. By focusing on practical soft skills alongside technical development, the hackathon helped reduce the gap between emerging talent and workplace expectations. This approach supports smoother onboarding for employers, contributes to stronger long-term retention of junior developers in local and remote teams, and positions the talent pool as an attractive destination for international collaboration and investment.

Mireille Lock | Mentor

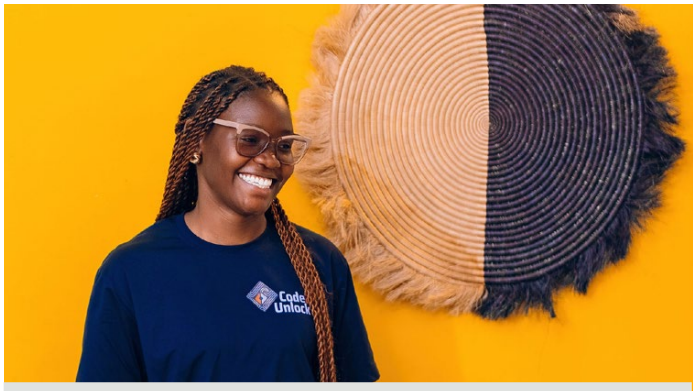
"It was a remarkable experience to support the students of The Gym for the Code2Unlock Hackathon. Seven teams, 28 students, tackling real-world challenges in Skills & Jobs across Rwanda. Their energy, discipline, and motivation to become top software developers truly impressed me."

RP student

"We started at The Gym a few months ago and joined the hackathon because it seemed exciting, but we didn't expect this. We didn't expect to be in the top 7, let alone the top 3. We learned so much about our own strengths to push through, but also from everyone around us – including our competitors and mentors. Thank you very much!"

Building on this momentum, the organizing team will actively follow up with the challenge owners to explore how the most promising solutions can be further developed and translated into real-world impact. There is a clear ambition to extend the hackathon into future editions, continuing to offer a high-quality learning environment where young Rwandan IT talent can grow through hands-on challenges, exposure to professional methodologies, and collaboration with industry partners. By translating proven global approaches to leadership, teamwork, and professional effectiveness into contextually relevant experiences, the hackathon demonstrated a scalable model for future capacity-building initiatives.

We would like to sincerely thank all organizations involved: first and foremost the EKN for making this initiative possible; RTB, Tabiya, and SolvIT for providing relevant challenges; Lumen and Komensky for their methodologies and effective professional skills training; and GIZ for the operational support that ensured the success of the hackathon.



ALU Student

"The hackathon was such a fulfilling experience because I finally got to build something from the ground up and learn more about myself along the way. Jesús's words about programming languages being 'just tools' really changed how I see tech. I now remind myself that I don't need to know everything, just stay flexible and willing to learn."

"Participating in this hackathon was a valuable experience which is really worth it. We learned a lot about how to manage working together, knowing each one's strengths and weaknesses. Having the seniors beside us made it even more interesting."

AUCA Student

List of contributing organisations

Sponsored by:

Kingdom of the Netherlands

Organising partners:

TRAIDE

The GYM

Supporting partners:

CDA Code and Design Alliance

Komensky

LUMEN

Supported by:

german cooperation DEUTSCHE ZUSAMMENARBEIT

Invest for Jobs Opportunities for Growth in Africa

Implemented by:

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