



“The ICT Opportunity for a Disability-Inclusive Development Framework”

New report from UN Broadband Commission for Digital Development, G3ICT, IDA, ITU, Microsoft, the Telecentre.org Foundation and UNESCO

A new report released demonstrates how Information and Communication Technologies (ICT), have become a positive force of transformation and a crucial element of any personal development, empowerment and institutional framework for inclusive development.

While the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) represent a concerted effort to address global poverty, there is a striking gap in the current MDGs and their inclusion of

persons with disabilities. The estimated 1 billion persons with disabilities are still excluded from equitable access to resources (education, healthcare, etc.) and as a result persons with disabilities experience disproportionately high rates of poverty. In spite of the conclusion of the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities in 2006, disability remains largely invisible in most mainstream development processes.

The High-Level Meeting on Disability and Development (HLMDD) of the sixty eighth session of the United Nations General Assembly, taking place in New York, provides a historic opportunity to rectify this omission and will discuss the issues that should be reflected in the post-2015 framework for development.

“*The ICT Opportunity for a Disability-Inclusive Development Framework*” contributes to a better understanding of the extent to which ICTs can enable and accelerate the social and economic inclusion of persons with disabilities. It lists challenges that are still to be addressed while outlining concrete actions to be undertaken by each group of stakeholders and a set of indicators to help measure progress towards the achievement of a disability-inclusive development agenda.

This report is the result of collaborative input from the UN Broadband Commission for Digital Development, the Global Initiative for Inclusive ICTs (G3ICT), the International



Dr Hamadoun Touré, Secretary-General, ITU

- ▶ Disability Alliance (IDA), the International Telecommunication Union (ITU), Microsoft, the Telecentre.org Foundation and the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO).

Launching the report, Secretary General of the ITU, Dr Hamadoun I. Touré, said "The use of information and communication technologies should be at the heart of any strategy to promote the social and economic inclusion of persons with disabilities. We have the tools at our hands; the remaining challenge is to expand access to these technologies to all and to make ICTs accessible and affordable for persons with disabilities."

The content is based on feedback from a global consultation on ICT, Disability and Development, carried out from 20 May to 17 June 2013 in support of the preparatory process of the HLMDD. The consultation gathered over 150 expert inputs from relevant organizations and key individuals from over 55 countries and representing multiple stakeholders, including governments, academic institutions, organizations of persons with disabilities, civil society organizations, private sector and regional and international organizations.

The report highlights that when ICT are available, affordable and accessible, they can significantly improve the inclusion of persons with disabilities in all aspects of society.

- **Web services** constitute the access technology with the greatest impact in promoting the inclusion of persons with disabilities in all areas of development (e.g. social networking, teleworking, online educational classes, telemedicine).
- **Mobile devices and services** constituted the second-most valued ICT. In particular, the use of mobile phones is instrumental to enable independent living of persons with disabilities (e.g. SMS, captioned telephone, mobile banking services, and access to emergency services).
- **Television** is the third-ranked ICT in the assessment,

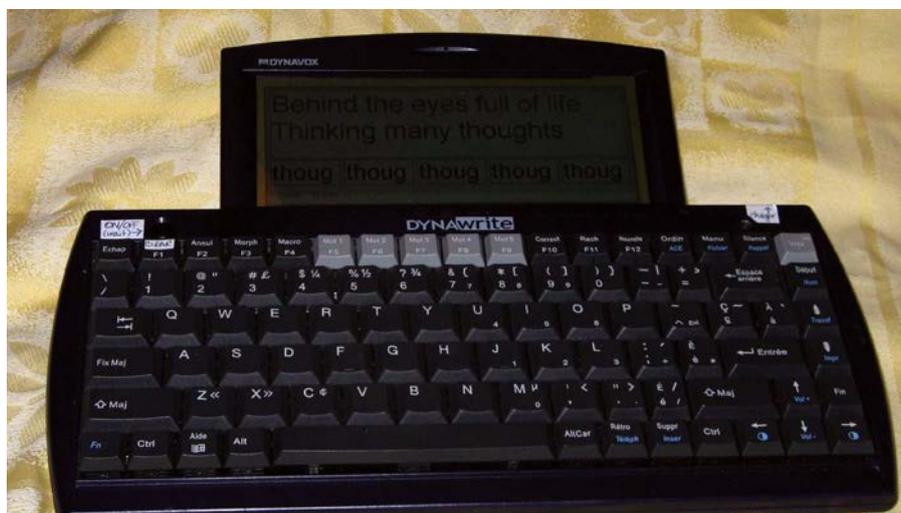
specifically for its use as a tool to access government services and information (e.g. news broadcasts, information and education programmes).

Regarding the challenges to overcome, some barriers are universal while others affect specific areas of development.

- **The cost of assistive technologies**, which is comprised of the cost of the technology as well as the cost of assistive technology assessment, training and support services, is still one of the main barriers that prevents many persons with disabilities to fully access healthcare services, benefit all educational levels, be competitive in the labour market and to live independently.
- **A lack of access to ICT accessibility technologies** is a pervasive barrier that is further reinforced by the lack of policies which foster widespread availability of accessible ICTs and the lack of effective policy implementation.
- **Limited availability and use of ICT in general** greatly constrains the use of ICT as a solution to tackling development challenges.

Addressing these barriers requires the collaboration of the main stakeholders involved in each sector, as well as concrete actions to be undertaken by each group of stakeholders and relevant indicators to monitor progress.

- **Governments** can play a key role in stimulating the introduction of ICT-enabled solutions adapted to the needs of persons with disabilities, increasing the availability of accessible ICTs and promoting the affordability of assistive technologies in social, educational, economic and other domains. One priority action is the inclusion of accessibility requirements in procurement policies. In addition, governments can foster a greater awareness of the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities as a comprehensive



Keyboard text-to-speech generating device for literate users with adequate fine motor control © en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Assistive_technology

- ▶ and integral instrument which highlights the importance of ICTs and accessibility for the enjoyment of one's human rights and fundamental freedoms. This entails updating disability legislation to include ICTs in the legal definition of accessibility. Through regular consultation with organizations of persons with disabilities, they can improve the provision and quality of accessible ICT.
- **Private sector entities** can contribute by increasing research and development efforts, incorporating universal design principles at the earliest stage possible and recruit persons with disabilities in product development departments to develop accessible ICTs. Another priority action is to address the shortage of IT professionals with ICT accessibility skills (in-house training, industry gatherings and publications). The private sector can further remove attitudinal barriers towards hiring persons with disabilities and promote accessible and inclusive workplaces. Through these contributions, employers can greatly contribute to a society where persons with disabilities can participate in work life, and have increased independence.
- **Civil society organizations** have a key role in raising policymakers' awareness of the remaining accessibility barriers, becoming more active in the work conducted by



An AAC user uses number coding on an eye gaze communication board.
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- international standards organizations. Furthermore, they also have the ability to bring about social progress and economic growth by raising the awareness and building the capacity of persons with disabilities and their relatives in using ICT to facilitate their own economic and social inclusion. Finally, advocating for the mainstreaming of the use of the universal design principle in all development efforts is crucial for ensuring that the international development framework is disability-inclusive.
- **The UN system** and other international organizations must implement operational activities to meet disability-inclusive development goals, complemented by the monitoring and evaluation of development efforts at the global, regional and national levels. Also necessary are performance reviews to assess whether development policies, programmes and projects are effective and results-driven. It is imperative to ensure that this analysis is quantitative and supported by consistent data, and that such analysis is designed with the participation of persons with disabilities, in order to make sure that the correct factors are measured. Lastly, the UN must ensure that it keeps implementing awareness-raising activities and mobilization campaigns in order to create a demand for national governmental action.
- **International standards organizations** can also play a special role in enabling a disability-inclusive development agenda by providing a neutral platform from which to develop and/or harmonize international standards and provide recommendations related to accessible ICTs. To achieve this, standards development bodies must facilitate the participation of relevant experts and delegates with disabilities. Furthermore, these organizations can contribute to the promotion of R&D focused on developing specific ICT-enabled solutions for persons with disabilities. International standards organizations must also raise policy makers' awareness of accessibility barriers to be addressed.

The report was released on 23rd September during the High-Level side-event to the HLMDD "The UN delivering as one in enabling a disability-inclusive development agenda towards 2015 and beyond", at the United Nations Headquarters in New York.

Download the full version of the new report:

http://www.itu.int/en/action/accessibility/Documents/The%20ICT%20Opportunity%20for%20a%20Disability_Inclusive%20Development%20Framework.pdf

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