

THE ICT OPPORTUNITY FOR A DISABILITY-INCLUSIVE DEVELOPMENT FRAMEWORK



Executive Summary



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Across the globe, persons with disabilities still face significant barriers that limit their access to key public services such as health, education and information, reduce their opportunities to access the labour market and diminish their opportunities for independent living. Information and Communication Technologies (ICTs), increasingly integrated into every aspect of our lives, have become a positive force of transformation and a crucial element of any personal development, empowerment and institutional framework for inclusive development.

This report, produced as a result of an extensive expert consultation organized from 20 May to 17 June 2013 in the context of the High Level Meeting on Disability and Development (HLMDD), aims to complement previous work on the use of ICT as an enabler of the social and economic inclusion of persons with disabilities by further exploring specific contributions that ICT can make in achieving a disability-inclusive development agenda.

When ICT are available, affordable and accessible, they significantly improve the inclusion of persons with disabilities in all aspects of society. Web services (and the devices used to access them) constitute the accessibility technology with the greatest impact in promoting the inclusion of persons with disabilities, according to the expert's view. This contribution is closely followed by mobile devices and services, which, despite being one of the newest technologies from the ICT assessed, constituted the second-most valued ICT during the consultation. In particular, the use of mobile phones is instrumental in allowing the independent living of persons with disabilities. Television is the third-ranked ICT in the assessment, specifically for its use as a tool to access government services and information.

However, even with this positive force of transformation, key challenges remain to be addressed if persons with disabilities are to fully benefit from the use of ICT. Some barriers

are pervasive- they affect all areas of social and economic development. The experts consulted for this report stated that the cost of assistive technologies, which is comprised of the cost of the technology as well as the cost of assessment, training and support services, is still one of the main barriers that prevents persons with disabilities from fully accessing healthcare services, benefitting from educational opportunities at all levels, being competitive on the labour market and living independently. Another key barrier identified is the lack of ICT accessibility. . A lack of access to ICT accessibility technologies remains a significant barrier which is observable in all areas of development. Also, accessible ICT are only available in a fraction of the thousands of languages that are spoken and signed all over the world, another barrier to be taken into consideration if this challenge is to be addressed effectively. Empirical evidence shows that this barrier is further maintained by the lack of policies which foster widespread availability of accessible ICT and the lack of

effective implementation of the aforementioned policies. Furthermore, among State Parties to the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (UNCRPD), few national governments have translated the provisions of article 9 of the Convention into their legislative frameworks. In many cases, policies promoting accessibility may be in place, but they lack the accompanying laws, legislations and regulations that ensure those policies are effectively implemented. Lastly, 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 collaboration of main stakeholders involved in each sector, as well as the definition of cross-sectorial policies and strategies that maximize the positive impact that investments made to improve access to and accessibility of ICT can have in other sectors.

There are also potential risks that should be taken into consideration to avoid the

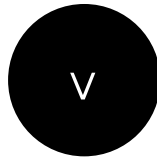
introduction of new barriers associated with the generalized use of ICT in development efforts. These include: i) creating the expectation that accessible ICT alone can remove the barriers faced by persons with disabilities, ii) worsening the digital divide by not addressing the challenge of global access to ICT, and iii) not taking into consideration the fact that the rapid pace of technological change requires frequent revisions of accessibility-related guidelines and standards to support all users, a process which requires focused and regular collaboration of international organizations and entities.

Experts contributing to this report were also requested to propose a set of concrete actions to be undertaken by each group of stakeholders and possible indicators to monitor progress. The recommendations gathered suggest that 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 ICT through the incorporation of accessibility requirements in public procurement policies as well as the revision of disability legislation to include ICT in the legal definition of accessibility.

Private sector organizations can contribute by

increasing research and development efforts, incorporate universal design principles at the earliest stage possible and recruit persons with disabilities in product development departments so as to successfully develop accessible ICT. Another priority action identified for the private sector is to contribute to addressing the shortage of information technology professionals with ICT accessibility skills (professional societies, in-house training, industry gatherings and publications). Lastly, the sector can further remove attitudinal barriers towards hiring persons with disabilities and promote accessible 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 can play a key role by raising policy-makers' awareness of the remaining accessibility barriers, and by becoming more active in the work conducted by international standards organizations. Civil society organizations 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 personal circles (including family and friends) regarding



what ICT can do to facilitate their 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.

Regarding the contribution of the UN system and other international organizations, the consultation highlighted that the most urgent action to be undertaken by the UN system is the implementation of operational activities to meet the disability-inclusive development goals. Furthermore, that these activities should be complemented by the monitoring and evaluation of development efforts at the global, regional and national scales along with the performance review 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 continue to implement 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 harmonize international standards and provide recommendations related to accessible ICT. To achieve this, standards development bodies have the responsibility to facilitate the participation of relevant experts and delegates with disabilities in their activities. Furthermore, these organizations can contribute to the promotion of research and development focused on developing specific ICT-enabled solutions for persons with disabilities. Lastly, international standards organizations bear the responsibility to raise policy makers' awareness of accessibility barriers to be addressed.

These are the experiences, challenges and recommendations gathered as a contribution to the HLMDD. By further presenting the ICT opportunity for persons with disabilities, identifying the remaining challenges and barriers to be overcome and proposing a roadmap of actions, this report invites all stakeholders to acknowledge the role of ICT as critical enablers of a disability-inclusive international development agenda.

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