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ITU

WSIS FORUM

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ICTS AND ACCESSIBILITY FOR PERSONS WITH DISABILITIES AND SPECIFIC
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MODERATOR: It's already 2:00 Geneva time, so if you are ready to start, please let me know when you are ready and we will go live. If you're ready, we're going to start. Okay, we're going live, 3, 2, 1.

>> MORTEN MEYERHOFF NIELSEN: Good afternoon, good morning if you're in the U.S. and South America and good evening if you're in the Asia Pacific. My name is Morten Nielsen. I'll be moderating this session. We'll just start a video for two minutes while the rest of the registered participants log on, so please go ahead with the video.

>> The world summit on the information society 2021 has begun. It's off to an exciting start. Hosted several workshops and sessions since the Forum was launched in January, as well as receiving a record number of submissions for the WSIS prizes, 1270 projects nominated. As the Forum progresses, we encourage stakeholders to keep an eye out on the interactive agenda for information about the exciting workshops and ICT development related special tracks such as the opening of the ICT and gender mainstreaming track on March 8, the opening of the ICTs for well-being and happiness track on March 15th. The opening of the

ICTs and accessibility for persons with disabilities and specific needs track, also opening on March 15th. The high-level track will open March 22 with high-level policy sessions. The cybersecurity track opening the 12th of April, and many more such as the ICTs and youth track, emerging technologies for sustainable development track, as well as extended reality for SDGs track. All of which you can find more information for on our website.

In addition to these exciting tracks, building on the title of this year's Forum, ICTs for inclusive resilient and sustainable societies and economies, we're hosting a series of related workshops, including our series of biweekly workshops where stakeholders from around the world will be presenting their innovative projects and activities, use ICTs to respond to the coronavirus pandemic which will take place until the end of March. The work of the stakeholders will also be displayed in the virtual exhibition space inaugurated on March 15th, 2021.

Various other networking and social events will be integrated into the Forum, with meet and greet opportunities, frequent social media posts and engagement as well as engagement during internationally recognized UN days and weeks.

Participation in the WSIS photo contest is encouraged for stakeholders. Submit your best photo. In addition, registration for the aging better with ICTs hackathon is now open. With 120 registrants already, we urge you to share your ideas to create a team and build a better future for older persons around the world. We look forward to your participation and thank stakeholders for their contribution in shaping this year's WSIS Forum through our open consultative process. We would also like to extend a warm thank you to our partners, without whom this Forum would not be possible. Thank you. And we look forward to a successful 2021 WSIS Forum.

>> MORTEN MEYERHOFF NIELSEN: Once again, welcome to our session on ICT and Accessibility for Persons with Disability and Special Needs. My name is Morten from the United Nations University EGOV. We have exciting participants on our agenda today so I will not take much time, but we'll start by introducing the Deputy Director-general, Malcolm Johnson from ITU to welcome us.

>> MALCOLM JOHNSON: Thank you very much, Martin. Good morning, good afternoon, good evening wherever you happen to be, and thank you very much for joining us. Let me start by thanking our partners for their continuous support and advice in organizing this track, and especially our panelists for joining us today, and you, Morten for moderating the session.

During the COVID-19 pandemic people around the world have relied more than ever before with ICTs to keep in touch with loved ones, follow advice on health issues, and to continue their work or studies. However, this is providing they have access and the skills

and the ability to make use of the connection.

As we know, almost half the world's population is still unconnected, but also there are particular challenges for people with disabilities, and according to WHO, that's over 1 billion people around the world with some form of a disability, so they're at risk of being excluded from the accelerated digital transformation that's been taking place over the last year due to this pandemic, and ITU is the UN Specialized Agency for ICTs and recognizes that the principles of universal design, affordability, and equal opportunity to access ICTs and assistive technologies are key to building inclusive societies.

ITU pioneered work on standards for persons with disabilities back in the 1990s and adopted the first international text-telephone standard in 1994. My first World Telecom Standards as Director in 2008 was a major step forward in mainstreaming accessibility in ITU. The conference adopted the first-ever ITU resolution on accessibility, Resolution 70, which recognizes the importance of the work on accessibilities and mandated ITU to document best practice, review its services and facilities for accessibility, and to work on programs that progress accessibility in developing countries.

Recognizing the standards have an enormously important role to play in making ICTs more accessible, the Resolution requires ITU to have an accessibility checklist to ensure that all new ITU standards incorporate the needs for persons with disabilities. And the Resolution called on ITU to work collaboratively and cooperatively with other organizations and entities to invite duplication and pool our resources. I'm very pleased that we're joined by some of those representatives today.

Some of our more recent examples of ITU's work on standards includes areas such as audio-based indoor and outdoor network navigation system for persons with vision impairment, accessibility in IP TV Systems, and safe listening guidelines and standards which support WHO's Make Listening Safe Initiative.

Since the start of the COVID-19 pandemic, ITU has addressed the needs of those with disabilities, specific needs, by taking a number of measures including updating our online resources and developing guidelines for decisionmakers and communicators on how to make digital information and services accessible to people, regardless of their disabilities. And these Guidelines are available in all of the UN official languages as well as 22 other languages.

And we also have released online training which is available for free through the ITU Academy in English, French, and Spanish. ITU's ultimate objective, of course, is to have universal connectivity, and for this we need to ensure that persons with disabilities and specific needs can fully access ICTs. Not only as users, but also as producers and developers. So this special

track will provide information on how ICTs can better help people live with disabilities and how we can reduce accessibility barriers constraining digital connectivity.

All this week we will be hearing from speakers across a range of different sectors and stakeholders. We will discuss efforts to leverage ICTs to assist people with blindness and vision impairment, consider the importance of educator training, and inclusive universal design, and have an insight into how startups and firms are designing and merging assistive technologies to help persons with disabilities.

From academia and international organizations to Civil Society and the private sector, the participation of all stakeholders will be crucial in the fight for digital inclusivity, and that's the very nice thing about the WSIS Forum is that it's open to all stakeholders. We're very grateful to have with us today expertise and a breadth of personal and professional experience which is unfounded anywhere, and so I encourage participants to suggest concrete outcomes, take advantage of these experts that we have with us to look at ways that we can collaborate and form partnerships to have a positive impact on digital connectivity, inclusion, and access for persons with disabilities.

So, I wish you all a very successful discussion and a significant outcome to this week's discussions. Thank you very much.

>> MORTEN MEYERHOFF NIELSEN: Thank you, Mr. Johnson. Before we start with our panelists, I just want to welcome all the participants and raise a couple of household issues. First of all, the session is recorded and will be available on the Session Description Page in a day or two after this event. You will also find a link in the chat to the human captions functionality, and if you have any questions, please do not hesitate to raise these in the chat function or the Q&A function at the bottom menu, at the bottom of the screen. We will collect them and raise them at the end of the session.

So, before -- so as we're ready to start, I would like to introduce Mr. Dipendra Manocha, the Coordinator and leader framing and support in DAISY Consortium and specifically we'll introduce Dipendra by asking him a question. So in low and middle-income countries, what approaches have you seen are beneficial to deal with challenges of affordability and availability and compatibility of online content with local languages? What are the technical support and repair requirements needed for assistive technologies, particularly when we talk about accessibility and ICT access.

>> DIPENDRA MANOCHA: Thank you so much for this opportunity. So, as part of my work with the DAISY Consortium at the international level and also as part of the section that works within India, the things that have actually worked on these very big issues that you have mentioned about affordability and

availability and awareness about the solutions, what really has worked is first of all, to get all the stakeholders together. So like in India, we created a network called DAISY Forum of India which is a network of about 190 organizations providing services to persons with blindness and low vision. And that really brought all stakeholders together, which primarily did the technology gap identification.

For example, some of the basic building blocks, which are required for accessibility, such as availability of text-to-speech engine, which is in a way, you know, real accessibility of information could be possible for persons who are blind if we do not have this text-to-speech, this usable text-to-speech available. So these kind of key gaps are identified under the stakeholders, and we worked on by creating well-timed strategy on how to actually deal and what kind of achievements can be done in the next three years, next four years, and long-term and short-term goals were designed together.

This also requires some identification of local, you know, champions. So when we worked Sri Lanka or Bangladesh it became accessible because we built organization between local organizations and have local companions identified and capacity to try and address those -- to try to address these problems and issues in the local, you know, local scenarios.

What also has worked is that we have had, you know, the procurement policy, for example, has worked wonderfully in several countries, but when we say that data procurement policy, the accessibility needs to be ensured in procurement policy, then how do we define that accessibility? So then the role, which I do, is actually playing so importantly is to define those standards that, you know, or to adopt those standards that define accessibility. This, localization, there are adaptations in local countries and not so very local, but at the national level, adaptation of these international guidelines to which very well define accessibility which could then, you know, they've made this policy procurement table because this is a big gap that we see in terms of providing access to the assistive technology solutions, et cetera.

So these key areas are extremely key according to me that there is -- there is a network that is of stakeholders, which are working together and identifying gaps, working out a strategy, a well-defined strategy to work on solutions on, and also working on, you know, envisioning the holistic solution of accessibility and not just thinking of addressing just one or two parts because parts, that has been a huge gap that I have, for example, seen in many developing countries, that some parts -- work has happened on some parts, but that has not resulted in any impact at all because unless we have a full solution in place, a simple or single part of a solution, just does not -- I mean, it actually malufies completely

if the whole solution is not made, and something like we design confidence, which means that the device to access information must be there in the hands of users, and the content in accessible format needs to be available. The distribution mechanism of that content and also capacity to be able to use the training, all of these components would actually create a solution, and if you take even one single part out of it, the whole solution falls on its face. So even if you have three out of the four components in place, the solution doesn't work. The end user doesn't feel any impact at all.

These are a few areas which are part of this, I feel the key areas that need to be addressed for accessibility of information.

>> MORTEN MEYERHOFF NIELSEN: Thank you very much. So, you almost got ahead of me with my next question, which is what are the most important steps to take in order to have a large-scale impact when it comes to ICT accessibility. Did I understand it correct that you're saying it's a holistic approach from start to end that is really the essential part?

>> DIPENDRA MANOCHA: Yes, that is one part, but I would also like to share another part -- most part of the story. It's that generally, and again specifically in low and middle-income group countries, the assistive technology, you know, is generally developed for high-income group countries and those solutions are completely unaffordable because of the difference in the income levels between the high and the low-income group countries.

So, in a country like India when we were operating through a section we adopted four different approaches to, you know, first of all, identify the most relevant technologies, try to do bulk procurement and, you know, get those solution it's available in the country with adequate support.

The second approach was that the solution really had to be customized. It can't really be, you know, copy and pasted from other regions because of the local language solutions, affordability, support, so for all of those needs, for example, the smartphone with the screen-reading software was something which was available in international market at about \$400, and we were able to reconfigure it, make local-language support, and make available same solution in India through negotiation with the key companies at just about \$120 U.S. dollars, so that was a big change without any subsidy we could do that by special configurations.

The third approach that we have is sometimes we have to build solutions that are specifically usable within the local, you know, circumstances. Development of smart gain in India are an example of such examples where similar solutions for identification and mobility for persons with blindness were available at more than \$1,000 and we redesigned and redeveloped that solution for, you know, suitable circumstances in developing countries like India, and we were able to bring down the costs to just about \$60 U.S.

dollars, and yes, it was more usable within the circumstances that existed here because the general environments, mobility environments are very different in these areas.

>> MORTEN MEYERHOFF NIELSEN: Excellent to hear how you've addressed this. That leads into actually our next panelist, Ms. Sarah Boulter, a Senior Consultant for Service management at Microsoft. So Sarah, a question to you, how do you see the way we've been leveraging technology over the past couple of years, both in terms of an opportunity to drive inclusion and promote remote working environments and so forth, particularly for people with disabilities, so not just the general public but people with disabilities. What's your take on this?

>> SARAH BOULTER: Thank you very much, Morten. Thank you, everyone, today for joining and I'm very honored to speak with just a group of panelists. Over the past year, as you all know we've been living through a global pandemic. We have experienced a dramatic shift in the adoption of technology, and features which enable accessibility.

I work at Microsoft, so I'd like to just give a few examples from my personal experience in what we've seen with customers and organizations over this past year and how we're going to leverage that going forward.

For example, Microsoft Teams which many of you may be familiar with has a built-in immersive reader into the chat functionality, there is also closed captioning available, and automatic prescription, and we've seen immense growth and usage of this especially over the past year.

With many of our customers and organizations, they have shifted to remote or at least a hybrid way of working and we don't see that changing any time soon. This has also driven the pace of innovation, so we're kind of pushed to innovate and develop the features and make them even more accessible to everyone.

For example, we have seen a 560% increase of usage and immersive readers throughout the modern work that includes Office, Windows, et cetera. And we've also seen a 30 times increase in the use of closed captioning in Microsoft Teams.

Finally, up to 200% increase in calls for a disability answer desk. This is a dedicated support team which we have available for all of our customers whenever they have questions around Microsoft Office, X Box, Windows, and accessibility features of those products.

To kind of change the topic a little bit and to go really into the technology which I'm quite passionate about as well. Is thinking about AI, it's the buzz word today, everyone is talking about AI and how to make advances and make that accessible to everyone.

We see that AI is making amazing advances in speech, vision,

and language. When this is coupled with inclusive design it can empower 1 billion people with disabilities to fully participate in our societies and economies. AI accelerates innovation and opens the door to a new wave of possibilities.

We, at Microsoft, believe that AI can amplify human capability and that it will improve the way people with disabilities interact and leverage technology in their daily lives. However, in order to have an optimal impact, it's really important that we have datasets which also include input from people who have disabilities or perhaps special needs.

And we've already started partnering with different grantees to leverage this community and to improve the experience for everyone.

>> MORTEN MEYERHOFF NIELSEN: Thank you, Sarah. So, how do you actually take this and what do you see as important steps that we need to do to ensure that no one is being left behind as innovation picks up pace and the digital transformation of the way we work and society at large changes so rapidly, not least if light of the pandemic that has accelerated this process even further?

>> SARAH BOULTER: Absolutely. So what we're seeing is that more companies should and can embrace a disability inclusivity to build a culture of inclusion in their organizations. So it's really important to provide mandatory training, to learn more about functionality, to upskill employees that may need a bit more support along the way or perhaps their job has completely changed because they're now working in a remote environment, and as well as to provide Employee Resource Groups to get a platform to everyone.

Companies should aim to cultivate a workplace where employees with disabilities can be confident to bring in their ideas and their perspectives, as it will truly benefit everyone. We've seen that with technologies, an example with the closed captioning, transcription, recording, it doesn't advantage just the people that need special assistance, but it's an advantage for everybody. We'd love to see that continue as well in all of the organizations.

And just to emphasize, you know, disability as we all know, is not always visible. Up to 70% of disabilities are completely invisible, so you may not know what a colleague or customer is challenged with, so it's best to assume that it's necessary to make our experiences and our interactions as inclusive as possible.

And on that topic, furthermore, everyone can experience a disability or require special assistance as any point in their life. It can be situational, temporary, permanent, and I think this became more relevant in the past year with the remote working. A lot of people that perhaps didn't have access to technology in the past or are still struggling to get access to technology, may be excluded from certain situations so it's super important to keep that in mind as well as organizations evolve to be more inclusive.

>> MORTEN MEYERHOFF NIELSEN: Thank you, Sarah. Very insightful and very interesting that you bring up this last point that it's not just about people who are born with disabilities, but it's actually about all of us who may experience some form of impairment at some stage in our lives.

That brings me on to a third panelist, Martin, and I apologize for the pronunciation of your sir name, Martin Bedouret the founder and developer of Cboard and I specifically would like to ask you what you see as the main differences in terms of implementing ICT solutions for people with disabilities in different countries and different cultural contexts and different levels of development. Are there some main factors that play in your experience, and how do we address them?

>> MARTIN BEDOURET: First of all, I would like to thank the World Summit on the Information Society Team for the invitation and for all of the support that you do to promote our projects. So, thank you very much. We had the possibility of piloting Cboard in different countries with different cultures and economic development, and I would say that the paradox of choice is a good example of what we have learned. The paradox of choice argues that people will appreciate something depending on the number of choices they have. As more options, as less appreciation. When the options are few, the appreciation is high. We realize that Cboard was loved in those countries that have never had an alternative solution due to language constraints, so that's why we focused on supporting as many languages as we could in building an Open Source platform that is available to support collaboration for translations.

We have translations for a wide range of countries from big countries like China to small islands like Timore. The story of Cboard is a story of helping people with disabilities. That include also me as I am a person that needs a lot of help from others since my ALS diagnosis five years ago.

At that time I was suddenly introduced to a new world of disabilities, and as a good engineer, I found a world of technology challenges. Many questions came to me, but the most important was related to communication. How can you communicate with others if you have no voice? And even worse, how can you learn to communicate if you are a child with learning difficulties or impairments?

Communication is the ultimate goal for our project called Cboard. Cboard is an alternative way to communicate by using technology. It is a web app for children and adults with speech and language impairments, aiding communication with symbols and text-to-speech. It can be used with children in order to develop language for those with pathological conditions, such as Autism, cerebral palsy or Down syndrome. It can also be used by adults who have speech impairments in order to ask for help, express their

feelings, or even to give a presentation on the WSIS Forum 2021, as I am myself doing right now.

Let me quickly show you the board that I'm using for my speech now. I am Cboard. Thanks for watching. All of the work we do follows four very clear strategies, and we believe that they are our main differential with respect to other alternative communications solutions. These are the four strategies, web application. Cboard is designed and built for the web. This allows any device capable of running a modern web browser to be able to use Cboard. At the same time, the application is available as a stand-alone app format in the download stores. More than 40 languages. We have learned that the most interested are not the technologically advanced countries, but on the contrary. The project has been having a very good impact in places with few resources and with less popular languages. That is why the support of multiple languages was a design pattern from the beginning. Open Source, that was the way it all came about.

All those who come to collaborate do so with the same concern that we had at the time, an application to help people with disabilities has to be Open Sourced if it is to be inclusive. Together with the UNICEF Regional Office in Europe we have carried out a pilot in Croatia, Montenegro and Serbia in 150 schools and educational centers. This pilot was running from November 2019 up until the end of 2020.

Over 200 professionals, including preschool teachers, speech and language therapists, psychologists, occupational therapists, and special educators were trained to identify and support young children with speech, language, and communication-related difficulties who could benefit from assistive technology.

Okay. That would be all I have for my presentation, and I will be sharing the links of the project in the chatting channel. Please feel free to contact us if you have any questions or comments about Cboard, and of course, we're always welcoming collaboration on our Open Source repositories. You don't have to be a programmer. The Cboard community is made up of translators, caregivers, speech therapists, parents, and people who are facing speech difficulties. Let me highlight the fact that we are looking for investors and to apply for programs that can help us to strengthen the solution, most especially in developing countries.

Thank you very much.

>> MORTEN MEYERHOFF NIELSEN: Thank you, Martin. That was super interesting to see how you apply your own experience also to your work. That leads me to a question. From your point of view, it's a personal point of view. What do you see as the most important ability enabling everyday living, independent or otherwise?

>> MARTIN BEDOURET: Due to my disease, I have to face multiple disabilities. Anyway, I think that communication is the

most important capability for humans. Language shapes your mind. When I started to lose my ability to speak, I started to think differently. I found myself being less social. That was something that I could handle as I was conscious of my socialability loss, but what about children with Autism or cerebral palsy that are prevented to talk from the very beginning of life?

I think that technology and ICTs play a major role on helping them and collaborating on language development. That is the final goal for all of our projects.

>> MORTEN MEYERHOFF NIELSEN: Thank you very much, Martin. That leads us actually quite nicely into Axel Leblois and you've been monitoring progress made in countries in the last decade or so, particularly in the relation to the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities. Can you tell us a bit about your latest findings? You need to put on your microphone, please.

>> AXEL LEBLOIS: Thank you for the reminder, Morten, it's better this way. Good afternoon and good morning to everyone. Yes. Thank you for the question. In fact, we have for the past 10 years systematically tried to see whether or not the state's party to the CRPD were making progress in implementing the policy that meets their commitment with the CRPD, so I will try to share some quick facts this morning to give you a kind of framework to see what's going on.

So if you allow me, I will share my presentation, and use those few slides to comment on those results.

So, the tool I will be using is the DARE Index, the Digital Accessibility Index, started with the cooperation of initial persons with disabilities around the world and this year about 137 countries. I disability for the international, European Disability Forum and many others for helping with the data collection. It's very important that we have such collaboration in countries.

91% of the world population is covered by the numbers that I show now, so it gives you a sense of that. Typically as we normally do for human rights monitoring we check three things, country commitments, so we look at laws and creation programs they have put in place or not put in place. We look at the country's capacity to influence, and then we look at the country's actual implementation and outcomes from top ten ICT accessibility application sectors.

So, to make a quick assessment of where we stand, we can see that country commitment scores an average have made great progress for the past years since the convention is adopted and since it's been ratified by many countries. The country capacity to implement is lower, much lower, in fact, which results in the level of outcome and actual implementation of programs, and in fact if we look at a scale of 1 to 5, we look at partial potential level of

implementation to persons only across countries which have reached that level.

So let me go through some details. First, in our sample in 93% of the countries that we monitor have ratified the CRPD, and amazingly enough, 88% have now general law protecting the rights of persons with disabilities. Now, you need to look at back before 2006 before the Convention was launched that that number was very small and it was small around the world.

The definition of reasonable accommodation, which is essential for countries to request accommodation, request solutions, that is the case now in 68% of countries. Back in 2006 there were 4 countries around the world that had such. So the CRPD had definitely a tremendous impact on the legal framework that's being rolled out around the world. And it's also true for the definition of accessibility and regulation that includes ICTs, and as you may recall Article 9 of the Convention says that accessibility means accessibility to the environment, translation, and ICTs on bath, you know, and so now 61% of countries have such a definition. It's very important if you want to actually start to promote the accessibility of it, mobile phones, television, so on and so forth, if you do not have a definition in legislation, it's more difficult to achieve.

Now, very close to ITU and the work we're doing with ITU for many years now and modern policies for accessibility, the universal service obligation that is such an important tool for most countries in equalizing access to communications, does not include persons with disabilities historically. It includes mostly everyone else. But since the Convention was passed and ratified by many countries, many countries have taken the step of including persons with disabilities as target for universal service fund and it's extremely important, this position, because it opens the door to a lot of funding for many programs for persons with disabilities. Funding the Marrakesh Treaty which is very important for the CRPD for not being in the way of accessibility, has only been ratified so far by 37% of countries and so this is the status of commitment by countries, and you can look at it with it. I see it as tremendous progress since a few years ago and that's extremely encouraging.

This graph was very quick and I don't want to spend more time on it, but the more years between now the higher score. So it shows the CRPD had a tremendous influence on countries not only ratifying the Convention but implementing in ICT accessibility.

Now for capacity to implement, most countries haven't an agency that takes care of persons with disabilities, 88%. But then in essential elements of capacity building of accessibility, you are really looking at a huge drop in percentages, for instance, again close to ITU, only 44% of countries refer to international ICT accessibility standards. How can you have a policy or any kind of

valid program if you don't understand that, so that's a big gap that we still need to push for to fill.

Similarly to that, there is in 61% of countries, there is no one in the government or anywhere in the organization that is actually focusing on accessible ICTs, and there is no center of opportunities, no resource, so it's very difficult for government to do follow-ups, that's very key essential point.

And then in terms of capacity building, in terms of training and education, 38% of countries have some level of courses in universities regarding accessibility, and that means that 62% have nothing. That's not very good news because the universities train hundreds of thousands of young people to compete and focus in elected domains and know nothing of accessibility when they come out with their degrees.

Last but not least, I want to refer to the panelist presentation, only 26% of government involve persons with disabilities in policymaking and monitoring, and that to me is the worst possible, you know, gap that you can think of because how can you possibly create the right programs of design solutions for persons with disabilities without their participation? It is such an obvious thing, and yet why does it cost anything for government to put that in place. Three-quarters of the Convention have no process for including persons with disabilities in creating the policies.

That gives you a view of the capacity. Now, there are mostly in the top 10 performers around the world when you take all of the index, a lot of countries are coming from the high-income country, but South Africa and Brazil for instance have scores now approaching those of high-income countries and actually similar and better than many of the, for instance, CRPD countries.

So it is possible, and if I may do quick concluding thoughts, technology solutions are here today to make most digital interfaces accessible, and we just had many examples. Anyone in the world of PowerPoint and access checker, you can have captions in Microsoft Teams or Zoom, it's unbelievable, everything can be made accessible.

And yet they're not chosen as much as they should. One of my close friends leader of the Deaf Community told me, you know, the issue with all of those platforms is not their Internet accessible but the fact when they have those features, organizations don't use them. So it's a lack of awareness, it's a lack of focus, it's a lack of knowledge about the solutions, and a lack of practical know-how to implement. So that's where I think the most progress can be made, just capacity building and training and awareness raising.

>> MORTEN MEYERHOFF NIELSEN: Thank you, Axel. You actually in your conclusions got ahead of me in terms of the questions that I had, so you highlighted both the type of gaps that there are in terms of accessibility skills within the public sector

in particular, but also some of the most efficient steps that particularly, again, governments should consider taking once they've ratified, but really looking at involving people, their target audience, persons with disabilities, into the service design, into the decision-making process, and then also building the right capacities to do so within the public sector.

Now, we had a fourth or a fifth panelist to join us, Daniela Bas, the Director from UNDESA Division on Inclusive Social Development, but unfortunately she cannot join us, but she's been very good at actually sending us a little bit of a response to a couple of questions we asked her in writing.

So, I'll just quickly read out the questions on her behalf and the answers, and I've also promised Daniela to apologize for the inconvenience of a last-minute change in her agenda in the U.S. So with that said, Daniela would have been asked by me the following. As the Director in charge of social development policy in the UN, how do you see the existing digital divide, for instance in terms of Internet access amongst people with disabilities and other social groups who are marginalized? How do you see these developments progressing? And Daniela as I said, kindly provided us a written answer, which is that leaving no one behind means leaving no one offline.

However, at present nearly half the world's population or roughly 3.7 billion people do not use the Internet. This surely becomes a big issue for those of us concerned about inclusivity, equitability, and sustainability development for all. Some disadvantaged and marginalized social groups are overrepresented and lacking in the offline population which is disproportionate female, rural, poor, comprised of older persons, and/or limited education or literacy levels.

Factors such as geographical location, income level, age, gender, ethnicity, and disability are significant pre-detectors of access to ICT and the Internet. More specifically, persons with disabilities face inequalities and additional barriers in accessing the Internet and ICT in general, but particularly assistive technologies, and this includes affordability; not least in relative terms, but also due to being in the low-income bracket of their general communities, and all the expenses associated with overcoming their disabilities.

This leads to limited accessibility both of devices, but also programs and websites. Older persons are more likely to be left behind; for example in the U.S. 27% of individuals age 65 or older do not use the Internet. Ensuring that every person has safe and affordable access to the Internet will be crucial to realize the full potential of digital technologies and in the implementation of the 27 -- of the 2030 Sustainable Development Agenda.

Now, the second question I asked Daniela to respond to was how

we better address digital divisions and how we promote digital inclusion in general. To this she kindly provided us with a written answer that goes along the following lines. Rapid technology change without an inclusive and sustainable development, strategic orientation risks entrenching existing inequalities while introducing new ones. To close the digital divide and better promote inclusion, we shall start with a mindset change and raise awareness about the importance of inclusion for all. We shall then develop regulatory frameworks and policies which leverage digital technologies for sustainable development and smart incidental tal inclusion. This should include promoting inclusive design, align, science, technology, and innovation policy with social development and SDGs in mind.

There is an increase in the need to ensure that every person has affordable access to the Internet by 2030, and equally so the supporting devices. This requires that our governments promote universal access to ICT infrastructure, address affordability, enhance digital skills and literacy, and improve the relevance and awareness of the benefits of being online.

The digital inclusion of disadvantaged and marginalized groups, including women, older persons, people with disabilities, people on the move and indigenous peoples, also requires targeted and multi-faceted measures. These include identification and amending exclusionary policies and systems, raising awareness of digital divides, and combating stereotypes through more empowering images of women, older persons, and other marginalized groups in the digital realm.

Measures designed specifically to close gender gaps may include establishing gender responsive national broadband plans, closing the digital skills gap through education, establishing gender-friendly public Internet access and training venues, and not least, a whole of government and a whole of society approach to bridge the digital divide and ensure that ICT benefits everyone and address the needs of those most vulnerable in society, in particular.

Now, I apologize for Daniela, once again. I hope you've got the gist of what she was going to present by this short presentation on her behalf. With that in mind, I'm happy to open the floor for questions, so anyone that I'll just check the chat function.

But I have a couple of questions already that I'd like you to consider. As Axel was pointing out, lots of countries have ratified the UN Convention on Accessibility, particularly the accessibility of persons with disabilities. But following one's own preaching and ensuring compliance was highlighted as being somewhat lacking. My question is therefore this, are governments underestimating the need and resources required to ensure equitable access for all, and in particular for marginalized individuals and communities such as

persons with disabilities? Sarah, do you have any thoughts on this? And also Martin and Dipendra?

>> SARAH BOULTER: Sure. Absolutely. We're seeing this not only with governments but with organizations. So I work primarily with various organizations in various industries, and we see that they're becoming more open to having the discussion, especially with the transition that's happened over the last year. It's been such a huge way of transitions. They're approaching and asking for guidance of how to leverage the investment they've made in technologies, what's already built in, to become more conformed, and I say conformed rather than compliant because we're not a government organization.

So from that perspective, absolutely. Are and I can only imagine how my colleagues on the panel today can give more insight on the government perspective, but we're seeing that they're starting to realize that it can't just be added on. It has to be really built in from the ground up.

>> MORTEN MEYERHOFF NIELSEN: Thank you. Martin, any thoughts?

>> MORTEN MEYERHOFF NIELSEN: I'm sorry. You've come through, Martin. Please go ahead.

>> MARTIN BEDOURET: From my perspective -- I think there is.

>> MORTEN MEYERHOFF NIELSEN: Thank you very much, Martin. That was insightful. Dipendra, from the no-income and middle-income perspective and some of your experiences, very shortly are governments estimating the resources need to ensure accessibility in your opinion?

>> DIPENDRA MANOCHA: The answer, of course, is yes. But let us also see the reasons for that underestimation that besides the governments which take and draw upon the international conventions and guidelines, et cetera, they do respond to what the grassroots are asking for, and often in low and middle-income group countries, we have found that the users themselves, that their level of awareness, especially when it comes to standards and their roles in all of these issues, you know, the persons with disabilities themselves are not asking the right questions and right kind of steps to be taken for the larger impact, and that is where we -- where I lay down so much emphasis on strategy building and bringing stakeholders together because that's where things will start and that is where governments will be encouraged to, you know, put in the right amount of resources into the system. Thank you.

>> MORTEN MEYERHOFF NIELSEN: It actually leads to a question that one of our attendees has raised. So Grace raised the issue of initiatives which develop toolkits for ICT for disability strategies and policies, particularly toolkits that will allow policymakers and practitioners to work with these. I'll

target -- I'll tag a question to this, Grace, and address it to Malcolm Johnson and also to you, Axel, if you don't mind, which relates to what Daniela was raising. Do we have enough insights into the actual degree to which people are marginalized in our communities? Do we have the statistics? Does ITU collect data that is disaggregated enough? Does the ITU members collect segregated or disaggregated data that gives us decision-making insights to develop toolkits and get most bang for our dollars, so to speak, in addressing geographical communities, specific gender or age group or educational attainment level target groups.

So, again, toolkits, statistics to be aware of where we need to target our initiatives to address the most people the quickest?

Malcolm, Axel, any takes on this?

>> MALCOLM JOHNSON: Yes. Thank you very much for that very clear question, and we've been working, in fact, very closely with Axel and G3ict on toolkits for quite some years and that's very important and you can find these, of course, online. But we also need, of course, persons with disabilities to be participating in our work, you know, because they're the ones that can best guide us in the right direction to address these issues, so this is why in ITU we've been facilitating the participation of persons with disabilities in our work for quite some years now. You know, we have captioning, we provide for persons with vision impairment, as I mentioned, you know, we have a guide to finding a way around our building, find the meeting rooms, et cetera. So it's very important that we have persons with disabilities participating in this work.

As for the statistics, we always refer to the WHO statistics. You know, they have come up with around a figure of 1 billion people around the world with some form of disability, and of course that is growing due to the aging population. Yeah, so those are very important considerations, and I'm sure Axel could add to this.

>> AXEL LEBLOIS: Thank you, Malcolm. First of all, let me say that as long-time member of the ITU, we really appreciate the effort that ITU puts in including persons with disabilities in all of its work. It's very remarkable the way it's done, so sending gratitude for that. In regard to the estimation, I think ultimately what I would like to say is even though there are so many countries and so many governments looking at policies for accessibility, one of the fundamental issues or lack of adoption of the UN's statistics questionnaire for disabilities, as you probably know they were like all types of questionnaires and censuses, more medical in nature, and people would ask if you have a disability, and you know most of the time people will say, no. But then if you ask questionings, can you do this, can you do that, can you do that, then for instance in Brazil, they went from I think it was like 15 years ago went from 1.4% of the population with disabilities when they applied the questionnaire on function, they jumped to 14.5, 10 times, so the

first thing is to understand what's going on they need to apply the UN Statistics Format and use the questionnaire and that gives a real picture of the persons with disabilities in the country, and if they don't, they don't know.

I've seen telecom regulators in developing nations starting their own surveys because they were guessing that the national statistics were not correct. It's unbelievable. So that is like the fundamental thing. Once you have the correct census methodology, you can find how much of your population of persons with disabilities on average 15 to 18% depending on the country and so on, so it's going to show that you have a certain percentage, maybe two-third of those persons with severe disabilities and those are likely the ones that will experience digital accessibility barrier, and that's just 10% of the population so that's a really problem step.

Now, in terms of the estimation of conversation in action, as I said earlier there are 88% of countries that have a organization for persons with disabilities, approximate you many times the ICT of digital accessibility is not on their own working schedule, and it's just not there. So, that is really the key lagging point that we need to focus on is to raise awareness of the need of greater focus on digital.

>> MORTEN MEYERHOFF NIELSEN: It actually links into a couple of things that were raised in the chat and Q&A, and so Dr. Salma talks about the lack of holding policymakers and decision-makers in the public sector accountable when inclusion is missing. And also sort of Angelo and Gary are relating to there is maybe a need for terminology definitions, et cetera, for common language. I no he that from my own experience as a Danish Civil Servant that if I was talking accessibility with my colleagues, it meant very different things depending on who they were.

So, if we were talking with the IT staff, they're often talking about web accessibility as defined by the W3C, WCAG standard but talking to the bosses they talk about whether it's accessible on tablets and mobile phones which is somewhat more limited than the WKEG standard is all about, and so I think it was Martin highlighting the importance of communication as really being the essential part of not only accessibility but also general comprehension.

Unfortunately, we're already five minutes over time. I hope you all had an interesting session. I hope you all enjoyed the presentations of the panelists, the questions, and I'd like to thank both ITU for setting up the session, the WSIS Staff has been very great, and so thank you to them. Also, thank you to the five panelists, so Sarah, Daniela, Martin, Dipendra, Axel, but also thank you to you, Malcolm, for organizing and contributing. I don't know if you have a final word for us, Malcolm, before we close the session?

>> MALCOLM JOHNSON: Well, thank you very much, Morten. I

can't let you finish without thanking you. I mean, coming in and moderating this so well, that's a short notice and thank you very much. And thanks to all the panelists for a tremendously interesting and insightful session here. Thanks to them all, but in particular Dipendra and Martin, I mean, it's fantastic examples of how persons with disabilities can help other persons with disabilities, so congratulations to them.

We look forward to you continuing to work with us to address this very important issue. We have sessions every day this week, so I hope you'll be able to join us again tomorrow. Thank you very much, Morten.

>> MORTEN MEYERHOFF NIELSEN: Thank you, Malcolm. And, yes, you highlighted the fact that this is just the first day of the full week where we are dealing with and addressing accessibility in different ways in the WSIS Forum. Please have a doublecheck of the agenda. Please register. This session is recorded and will be available shortly on the same page as the description.

I'd like to ask you just to hang on for a couple of seconds and minutes just for a thank you video to all of our sponsors and supporters. Thank you very much.

(music).

(session completed at 9:07 a.m. CST).

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