



DEPARTMENT OF ECONOMIC AND SOCIAL AFFAIRS IN COLLABORATION WITH THE UNITED NATIONS EDUCATIONAL,
SCIENTIFIC AND CULTURAL ORGANISATION

UN DESA-UNESCO FORUM DISABILITY AND DEVELOPMENT*

ICT AND DISABILITY : PURSUING INCLUSIVE DEVELOPMENT THROUGH TECHNOLOGY

INTERNATIONAL CONFERENCE – FROM EXCLUSION TO EMPOWERMENT: THE ROLE OF INFORMATION AND
COMMUNICATION TECHNOLOGIES FOR PERSONS WITH DISABILITIES

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CONCEPT NOTE AND PROGRAMME

INTRODUCTION

In collaboration with UNESCO, the United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs (DESA), as the global focal point on disability issues of the UN system, will organize a DESA Forum on “Information and Communication Technologies and Disability: Pursuing Inclusive Development through Technology” at the international conference on *Exclusion to Empowerment: The Role of Information and Communication Technologies for Persons with Disabilities*, in New Delhi, India, on 24th November 2014. The Forum will bring together a broad range of stakeholders to share experiences and good practices on using ICT and technology to promote inclusive development for persons with disabilities, and will discuss a way forward to strengthen linkages between technology innovations and realising the benefits of technology for inclusive development and societies. The Forum’s objective will be to evaluate the current relationship between technology advancements and disability, and to explore new ideas to strengthen the role of technology in advancing disability-inclusive development and societies. In lead up to the Third UN World Conference on Disaster Risk Reduction, special attention will be directed to accessible technology and ICTs and the inclusion of persons with disabilities in situations of natural disasters and in emergency preparedness and responses. The Forum will contribute to strengthening the interface between disability and technology in the development of the post-2015 framework and to the formulation of a multi-stakeholder outcome document on ICT and disability.

BACKGROUND

Technology lies at the heart of most aspects of inclusive development and the fulfilment of rights for persons with disabilities. Without technology, basic rights such as access to education and employment and participation in social, cultural and political aspects of society cannot be realised for persons with disabilities. The current draft of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) provides special attention to persons with disabilities in a number of areas¹ and includes references to technology and access to the benefits of technologies throughout as a mechanism for the achievement of the post-2015 goals and targets. The 2012 UN Conference on Sustainable Development (Rio+20) outcome document, *The Future We Want*, also highlights the importance of

¹ The current draft recognizes the special needs to persons with disabilities in the areas of health; human rights and discrimination; employment; cities and urban development; and access to public services.

*DESA Forum is an initiative of the Division for Social Policy and Development (DSPD/UNDESA)

technology for sustainable development in eight paragraphs of Section VI on Means of Implementation.²

In the context of global policy discourse on disability and development, accessible technology has been a major policy objective in international normative frameworks concerning the advancement of persons with disabilities and development since the 1990s.

Following the General Assembly's adoption of the Standard Rules on Equalization of Opportunities for Persons with Disabilities in 1993, and the five-year review and appraisal of the *World Programme of Action concerning Disabled Persons (1982)* in 1997, 2002 and 2007, accessibility has been clearly defined as a means and goal to disability-inclusive development by the Assembly resolutions on this issue. The Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities adopted by the United Nations General Assembly in 2006 further strengthened the international normative framework for the advancement of the rights of persons with disabilities and emphasises accessible environments as intrinsic to the achievement of the fundamental rights of persons with disabilities. This has been reaffirmed by through a series of resolutions of the United Nations General Assembly.³

In September 2013, the General Assembly held a high-level meeting on disability and development.⁴ Building on the existing international framework on disability and development, the resolution from this meeting stresses the importance of ensuring accessibility for and inclusion of persons with disabilities in all aspects of development, including in the emerging post-2015 framework and highlights the need for information and communications technologies to be developed and used to their fullest potential throughout the life cycle of persons with disabilities.⁵

Technology, and making the benefits of technology accessible, is an essential component to realising the rights of persons with disabilities and ensuring they are included in development. Often, and particularly in developing countries, developments in technology are too expensive or exclusive and are therefore not used as enablers to promote inclusive development. Policy-makers and the market need to ensure that existing and new technologies are made accessible to those groups who are often excluded from the benefits of mainstream technological developments, particularly persons with disabilities. Approaches to technology innovations need to shift from current attitudes whereby the benefits of technology are only occasionally provided to persons with disabilities as a by-product of mainstream developments, to an approach that more systematically advances and promotes the transformative potential of technology for persons with disabilities. The benefits of technology need to be translated into an inclusive development agenda at the same pace as technology advancements and innovations. Special efforts are required to address this challenge and to strengthen accessibility of appropriate and socially-just technologies.

Accessible technology is also crucial in emergency and disaster situations. Available data reveals that persons with disabilities are one of the most vulnerable groups in the face of disasters. A lack of awareness, a lack of inclusive and responsive policy frameworks, a lack of strategies and

² See paras 269-276.

³ See General Assembly resolutions, 63/150, 64/145 and 65/186.

⁴ A/RES/68/3.

⁵ A/RES/68/3, II, 4(h).

programmes for risk reduction and resilience, together with inaccessible information, communication, and inaccessible facilities and services all contribute to the current status quo. As a contribution to the Third UN World Conference on Disaster Risk Reduction, to be held in Sendai, Japan in 2015, the Forum will also discuss and explore the role of inclusive technology in disaster risk reduction (DRR) and share experiences on how inclusive and accessible technologies and policies have benefited all persons in communities, and ultimately saved lives.

An enabling environment for the development, adaptation and dissemination and transfer of accessible technologies, particularly in developing countries, needs to be created and must involve an assessment of the social and developmental benefits for persons with disabilities.

OBJECTIVES AND ORGANIZATION OF THE FORUM

In recent years, Governments, working hand in hand with the private sector, academia and civil society, have increased their efforts to make technology and the benefits of technology accessible to persons with disabilities. As such, there has been an increase in good practices worldwide - in both developed and developing countries.

The Forum will focus discussions on the following:

- Current situation and trends in relation to technology innovations and promoting the benefits of ICT advancements for persons with disabilities.
- The role of technology as an enabler and transformer in the post-2015 framework and its relationship to the realisation of the rights of persons with disabilities.
- Sharing experiences and lessons learned on inclusive and accessible technology, including in situations of emergencies and disaster risk reduction.
- Exploring new approaches and paradigms for technology developments to ensure the benefits are accessible to persons with disabilities.

The results of this Forum are expected to:

- Strengthen the interface between disability and technology as an enabler in the Post-2015 framework;
- Contribute to the disability agenda in the forthcoming Third UN World Conference on Disaster Risk Reduction in 2015;
- Promote implementation of the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities and the resolution of the high-level meeting on disability and development; and
- Contribute to the development of a multi-stakeholder agreement on ICTs and disability.

The summary of the discussion at this forum will also be included in the compilation of good practices for action toward disability-inclusive development and posted on the UN Enable website.