



**ITU REGIONAL WORKSHOP ON ICT ACCESSIBILITY FOR
PERSONS WITH DISABILITIES FOR AFRICA REGION**



Lusaka, Zambia, 15-16 July 2008

**Lusaka Declaration on Supporting Access to Information and
Communication Technologies and Services for Persons with Disabilities**

Issued by the

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Region**

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Preamble

The Regional Workshop on ICT Accessibility for Persons with Disabilities for Africa Region took place in Lusaka, Zambia from 15-16 July, 2008. The event was attended by 20 African countries namely Angola, Burundi, Burkina Faso, Comoros, DRC, Ethiopia, The Gambia, Ghana, Kenya, Lesotho, Malawi, Mali, Madagascar, Mozambique, Uganda, Rwanda, South Africa, Tanzania, Togo, Zambia and Zimbabwe. International and non-governmental organizations included the International Centre for Disability Resources on the Internet, DAISY Consortium, Politecnico di Milano, South African Telecommunication Association, the African Communication Decade, Meraka Institute, Deaf Association of Zambia, Disabled Entrepreneurship, Zambia, Action on Disability Development, Zambia Agency for Persons with Disabilities and Zambia National Association for disabled Women. The workshop discussed 21 working papers that focused on:

- Highlighting key policy issues in accessible ICTs including assistive technologies for persons with disabilities;
- Highlight the implications of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities, adopted in 2006, and the responsibilities of the signatory countries, United Nations specialized agencies and other concerned parties following the fast rate of signing the Conventions and its entry into force on May 3, 2008;
- Reviewing current structures and technologies promoting accessible ICTs;
- Identifying priority actions needed to address the subject;

- Sharing experiences and best practices from various countries including resources for more information;
- Roles of governmental entities, non-governmental organizations, research centres, universities, civil society and the private sector in providing such services.

The participants,

Affirming their belief that:

- Most countries of the region have no clear, specific statistics on the number of persons with disabilities, the types of their special needs and causes of such needs;
- Absence of periodic (annual) reviews or surveys to update statistics on persons with disabilities and types of their special needs in the countries of the region;
- The United Nations and other international and regional organizations have no accurate statistics on persons with disabilities or data on the types of their special needs;
- Persons with disabilities in the African region have limited access to information and communication technology, while those with such limited access are mainly located in urban areas. Moreover, the African countries lack telecommunication/ICT policies and industries serving person with disabilities;
- The number of persons with disabilities is increasing in least developed countries as a result of war, environmental pollution, and consanguinity leading to pathogenic hereditary characteristics, diseases, accidents and disasters.

Having noted:

- The percentage of the persons with disabilities in the African region ranges between 10% and 12% of the total population, and the percentage of relatives and acquaintances adversely affected by such disabilities represents 10% of the total population;
- The significant outstanding efforts exerted by nongovernmental organizations and civil society to resolve the problems of persons with disabilities and the various related matters;
- The numerous success stories and the considerable number of persons with disabilities who, despite their conditions, became proficient producers enjoying a sense of dignity and self worth befitting any productive and talented member of society.

Being aware that:

- The high percentage of persons with disabilities represents a serious problem that negatively affects sustainable development in Africa. This enormous loss of human workforce leads to low GDP and national income. As well, the financial resources at the individual, family and country levels are depleted to meet the continuous needs of persons with disabilities, including clothing, food, treatment, compensatory assistive devices and special equipment;

- Providing the necessary information and communication technology devices, infrastructure and software to persons with disabilities would greatly help them to learn about information and communication technology and consequently apply for suitable jobs in the electronic labour marketplace. In addition, persons with disabilities may access basic electronic services such as e-learning and tele-health, get valuable knowledge, practice and follow up sports, enjoy inclusion in social life and live as productive members enriching their society. Moreover, the communication divide and gap can be filled between persons with disabilities and those without disabilities regardless of their special needs;
- The size and complexity of the problem make it impossible for any single entity (governmental, nongovernmental organizations, civil society or specialized organizations) to address or control and manage single handed. Therefore, all concerned parties should cooperate to achieve the targeted national objectives and work together under the umbrella of one coordinated system with clearly defined objectives, roles and responsibilities in accordance with a well-studied plan;
- It is crucially important to maintain continued and intensive exchange of information, experience and success stories among all relevant parties at the national, regional and international levels, whether electronically or through different platforms;
- It is also important to maintain coordination and exchange of information between the concerned United Nations bodies, especially the ITU, UNDESA, UNESCO, WHO and other concerned entities with respect to enforcement of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities.

Express:

- Their gratitude and appreciation to nongovernmental organizations and civil society in African countries for their sustainable efforts despite the limited resources and varying environments.

The Workshop calls upon:

1. The African Governments to:

- Draw up policies, develop comprehensive national plans and identify the responsibilities and roles of all the relevant national stakeholders;
- Exert their utmost effort to carry out a comprehensive survey and produce periodical statistics on the number, cases and causes of special needs;
- Give due attention to studying the United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities and devise appropriate work programmes and mechanisms for implementation;

- Invite the African countries who have not yet signed the United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities to accede to the Convention with a view to benefit from the opportunities afforded to signatories;
- Exempt from all taxes and customs duties all information and communication technology devices and assistive equipment for persons with disabilities, including talking computer images for persons with visual impairment and disability aids for persons with hearing impairment.

2. The Secretariat of the African Union (AU) and the specialized agencies of the Union to:

- Request the Secretary General of the AU to develop comprehensive Africa working mechanisms to provide care for the persons with disabilities in all areas including social, health, educational, cultural and sports;
- Call on the AU Secretary General to direct competent bodies to encourage the specialized ministerial councils and the relevant African entities and organizations to give much attention to persons with disabilities by including ICT issues related to persons with disabilities as a permanent agenda item for their meetings;
- Invite the Council of African Ministers of Telecommunications and Information Technology to give due attention to facilitating the access and participation of persons with disabilities to Information and Communication Technology committees and encourage all committees to consider such aspects and
- Call upon the Council of African Ministers of Housing to take the necessary action to establish disability-friendly specifications as a condition for granting building licenses to new facilities in the African countries and require adherence to such specifications as a condition for getting building permits especially with respect to public and government buildings, malls, schools, universities, clubs as well as ICT centres including multi-purpose community telecentres and internet cafés.

3. Ministries of Telecommunications and Information Technology in the African countries to:

- Provide the necessary technical and financial support to nongovernmental organizations and schools for persons with disabilities; help them obtain state-of-the-art ICT equipment and software including assistive devices and train the cadres needed to use and maintain such devices within the framework of ICT development projects.

4. Ministries of education in African -countries to:

- Prepare special educational curriculum for students with disabilities using information and communication technologies. The students' capabilities and actual needs should be taken into consideration upon preparing the said curriculum. To this end, Ministries of

Education may benefit from the relevant experience of the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO).

5. Telecommunication/Postal Regulatory Authorities in African countries to:

- Implement special policies on communications for persons with disabilities and enact the laws and regulations necessary to facilitate their use of information and communication technology services at affordable rates compatible with their level of affordability. In this regard, national telecommunication regulatory authorities may follow the examples of existing models in Malaysia, or other countries;
- Include conditions in the private sector company licenses stipulating the employment of a certain percentage of the persons with disabilities in information and communication technology services.

6. Telecommunication companies, service providers and internet companies in African countries to:

- Offer to persons with disabilities special privileges in rates, service, contracting and bills settlement;
- Recruit a certain percentage of persons with disabilities in such companies.

7. Software companies in African countries and throughout the world to:

- Give due attention to designing user-friendly African software to facilitate its use by persons with disabilities in African countries taking due cognizance of multiple languages in the region.

8. The African private sector to:

- Communicate with government bodies as well as African and international organizations, civil society and individuals interested in social affairs, with a view to support developmental projects directed to persons with disabilities and help them to obtain the assistive devices needed and access high-cost information and communication technology services at affordable costs.

9. The ITU to:

- Call on the ITU in collaboration with member states, sector members and other stakeholders to convene similar events on an annual basis;
- Launch accessible and interactive websites and e-forums to address the needs of persons with disabilities and disseminate experience and success stories in all countries;

- Prepare regional African projects to develop the assistive software and equipment and the information and communication technology devices for persons with disabilities, by cooperating with the United Nations specialized agencies and other partners;

10. General recommendations:

- All concerned parties in African countries, including academic institutions, research centres, universities and companies, should support research and development projects, with a view to developing and producing assistive technologies, devices and facilities for the persons with disabilities to promote a better life for them, their families and society.
- Relevant parties in African countries should set up criteria, standards and specifications to control the quality of services, software and commodities geared to persons with disabilities.
- Relevant training and rehabilitation bodies in African countries should establish academic and professional training courses to train trainers needed to deal with ICT accessibility issues for persons with disabilities. Selected trainers should possess excellent scientific, professional and behavioral competencies.
- Relevant parties in the African countries should adopt, in coordination with UNESCO a regional initiative to devise a unified sign language for people with hearing impairment in the African countries to facilitate their study and travel throughout the continent.

11. Coordination and follow-up mechanisms:

- National entities (i.e. councils, authorities, associations) concerned with the ICT issues for persons with disabilities in Africa should circulate the report of the meeting to all relevant national parties.
- National entities should form ad hoc committees to follow up implementation in cooperation with all national authorities and organizations mentioned in the report. Such committees should include persons with disabilities and reports should be presented to the annual events on this subject.
- All the participating bodies and individuals should do their best to operationalize the “Lusaka Declaration” and follow up its implementation with the competent national authorities in their respective countries.