

Final Report

Purpose of this report

1. Following the decision made by the Rapporteurs Group during the Study Group meetings on Question 20/1 in September 2006 and in April 2007, the Seminar on Sharing Experience on Best Practices and Services for People with Disabilities was held in Geneva, Switzerland on 17 September 2007. The main objective of the seminar was to create a global awareness on the importance of accessibility by all to the Information and Communications Technologies (i) as an appropriate mean to economic, social and integration into the workforce, (ii) to bridge the digital divide by providing equal access to the Information Society, and (iii) as the medium to exercise fundamental rights. Through the development of this seminar, ITU also made a call for partnership and support from ITU Member States and Sector Members to work with the BDT to jointly promote and achieve the integration of the People with Disabilities into the Information Society.

2. Approximately 50 people participated in the event, from countries in the Africa, Asia Pacific, Latin America regions and other parts of the world. Full documentation for the seminar, including the final agenda, list of participants and all presentations made, is available on the website at http://www.itu.int/ITU-D/study_groups/SGP_2006-2010/events/2007/Workshops/documents.html. This seminar report presents common understandings and positions reached at the event and summaries the presentations as well as demonstrations made during this event.

Session 1: Opening Ceremony

3. The Seminar on Sharing Experience on Best Practices and Services for People with Disabilities was opened with a welcoming address by Mr. Sami Al-Basheer, Director of BDT. Mr. Al Basheer noted that Access to Telecommunication Services for People with Disabilities was an important issue which presented both an opportunity and a challenge to the Information Society to create the Digital Opportunities for all. He noted that the seminar presented an excellent opportunity for sharing the rich experiences on this important issue among participants and speakers with a variety of back grounds, coming from different countries and regions. He further pointed out that this seminar was a first step towards implementing the initiative on “Access to telecommunication services for people with disabilities”, which was newly established by Member States during the World Telecommunication Development Conference, held in Doha in 2006. He finally invited participants to engage in fruitful discussion during the event.

4. Mr. Roberto Wirth, President & General Manager of the Hotel Hassler, Rome & President of the Roberto Wirth Fund, highlighted the importance of technology for preventing isolation of people with disabilities from society, and hence, the ICTs must be accessible and affordable. Mr. Wirth noted the convenience of using ICTs in schools with competent teachers, and the need for active involvement of people with disabilities for any ICT policy design. People with disabilities are the ones who know the most about disability: hence “nothing about us, without us”.

5. Mr. Donald Shelton, Vice-President, Swiss Federation for the Deaf, recalled that the telephone was invented by Graham Bell for his wife who was deaf, and that the text telephone was also created initially for communications between deaf persons. He expressed the need to have better facilities for more privacy for example through use of video relay services which allows a person to communicate in sign language. He however noted the importance of telecommunication relay services which have made it possible communication with and between deaf persons, through an operator (call center) and text telephones or the internet.

Session 2: “Agenda” for Persons with Disabilities

6. Dr. Cynthia Waddell, ITU Consultant & Executive Director of International Centre for Disability Resources on the Internet, presented a background paper for the meeting. She highlighted the mandates of the World Summit for the Information Society that requires e-strategies, plans of action, equitable access to education and tools for disaster warning that take care of people with disabilities. Dr. Waddell underscored the need for active participation of all relevant actors, including people with disabilities. Other major policy issues are the implementation of ICT barriers removal action plans, requiring accessible ICTs in public procurement, identification of benchmarking and research needs, as well as outreach, education and training on accessible ICTs (i.e. accreditation at the university level to include Universal Design as a formal component of educational programs).

She further pointed out the importance of having universal service obligations that consider accessibility covering availability, affordability and accessibility. As a case in point, she cited the experience of the European Union where the universal service obligations provide text telephones, but lack of interoperability prevents calls to another system and even across member states. Moreover, such communications sometimes do not provide access emergency services.

Session 3: Accessibility in Standards- Implications for ITU-D work for people with disabilities

7. Mr. Daniel Hadorn, a Lawyer for the Swiss Federation for Deaf (Fédération Suisse des Sourds SB-FSS), presented the different laws applicable for access to ICTs by people with disabilities in Switzerland. He pointed out that universal service shall include people with disabilities. Also, there is possibility that a person with disabilities is lent the accessible equipment. Mr. Hadorn indicated that a law governing broadcasting will be in place from 2007. The law requires that a proportion of the transmissions are accessible, in which at least for 1/3 of the time it will have captioning.

Session 4: Sharing experience and user perspectives on ICTs for persons with disabilities

8. Mrs. René Amarasiri, Director of Legal Affairs of the Telecommunications Regulatory Commission of Sri Lanka, presented a video from Sri Lanka's experience in providing, initially, payphone accessible to persons with various forms of disabilities and later with the eNABLE Project whereby the regulator together with service providers participated. Rural schools for children with hearing impairments received computers and televisions for them to access information via television. Computers with Braille facilities and speaking software are used for visually impaired children. Ms. Amarasiri mentioned that the law on disabilities for Sri Lanka dated from 1996, but remained dormant until Sri Lanka's regulator started the project. She also stated that currently the operators' licenses include the accessibility requirement. The projects are funded from operators, payments of frequency use, budget and license conditions.

9. Mr. Gunnar Hellström, Ommitor, Sweden, presented the concept of total conversation as an accessible communication that combines video, text and voice communication in one mainstream telecommunication service useful for all. Mr. Hellström referred to the 3G Mobile IMS multimedia that allows total conversation as an example and that the best sign of accessibility was when one does not need to mention accessibility, because it provides all ways of communicating. Likewise, total conversation needs no translation, because each person will use the sense he/she wants. There is currently a project in Sweden called "Call Direct" which intends to convert relay services in a one step dialing process. This can be done with Next Generation Networks, yet it could be done also with traditional telecommunication networks. Finally, Mr. Hellström stressed that relay services form the base of telecommunication accessibility.

10. Mr. Abdoulaye Dembélé, Chief of Tariff Section of SOTELMA, Mali, presented the vision of people with disabilities in Africa, particularly for Mali where the population with disabilities is significant. Mr. Dembelé noted that the ICTs are professionally essential for people with disabilities, both for those currently in employments as well as for those who may join the work force in future. Therefore, countries should develop and implement projects for education and professional advancement for people with disabilities. Mr. Dembelé pointed out the key role that using ICTs plays to transform lives of people with disabilities.

11. Mr. Jesus Hernan Zambrano Ruiz from Colombia shared Colombia's experience in making ICTs accessible to people with disabilities. Colombia has installed adequate technologies for blind and persons with diminished vision in libraries, telecenters, educational institutes and universities, in different regions. The companies that provide public television are obliged to incorporate closed caption, subtitles or sign language. Mr. Zambrano referred to the three relay telecommunication services in Colombia: (1) one that provides national and long distance service and that can be accessed by all counties through the country, and (2) two that provide local communication and that are accessed by text telephones (TTY) or by chat (Bogotá and Medellín). Mr. Zambrano stated that there are several indicators to assure the service is of quality and maintains confidentiality of the communications.

12. Mr. Mike Starling, VP, CTO & Executive Director of National Public Radio Labs of the USA, explained that digital radio could in one single station pass several different channels that could include blind reading service and captioned radio for deaf. The blind reading service is done through digital radio that includes newspapers and books that are read, and included in one of the channels of the digital radio. Then the blind persons are included in the system, so they can access to the content of such newspapers and books. The captioned radio for deaf passes the same information that is being listened in a radio, in text format. This text format is passed in real time. Mr. Starling mentioned that although the captioned radio for deaf is not yet publicly available, the technology already works, and an in-site demonstration was made during the seminar.

13. Ms. Monique Mai from France Telecom referred to the design for all principle, which implies that there are dedicated solutions to be extended to all customers in terms of ergonomics, simplicity and technology. Therefore, the people with disabilities have the possibility to use specific software in order to use France Telecom's products. The main driver is the accessibility grid that enables integration, a way to introduce differentiation among competitors, avoid specific cost adaptations and legal adaptations by integrating total accessibility up-stream, as well as developing average revenue per user (ARPU), reducing churn, and increasing volume of communications from people with disabilities or elder customers.

14. France raised a question on the possibility of ITU would using the ICT-eye, the newly implemented ICTs statistics tool, to collect the data on accessibilities for people with disabilities. Mrs. Asenath Mpatwa, Head of Special Initiatives Unit responded by saying that the yearly ITU-D questionnaire to collect statistics for the year 2006 was already circulated to Member States. The ITU-D questionnaire included a section requesting countries to provide information on people with disabilities as well as information on legal and regulatory framework and activities aimed to implement the initiative on "Access to Telecommunication Service for people with disabilities".

15. Tanzania emphasized the need and importance of taking into consideration various e-applications such as e-health, e-learning, e-education, e-commerce, e-government and e-employment etc. when designing policies and equipment to meet needs of people with disabilities. Furthermore, it was important for countries to take note of ongoing study questions that have relevance for "Access to Telecommunication Service for people with disabilities" in both ITU-D and ITU-T Study Groups. To ensure that developing countries also benefit from these developments, ITU should support and provide assistance to LDCs since most of them are not aware about the development on both policies and technologies for meeting ICTs needs of people with disabilities.

17. Mr. Michel-René Lemaitre, from Polytechnic School Bucharest Association of Romania, reiterated the need to provide assistance to LDCs, noting that their needs were many and called for timely intervention to address them.

Session 5: The evolving role of ICT policy and regulatory frameworks in promoting access and services for persons with disabilities

18. Mr. Miguel González Sancho, Deputy Head of Unit ICT for Inclusion, Information Society and Media Directorate General of European Commission, stated that e-Accessibility was contained in several pieces of legislation, but most remained dormant. The legislative themes involve public websites, commercial websites, telecommunications services and equipment, analogue and digital television, assistive technology, public procurement, equality and anti-discrimination, disability specific laws, and others such as consumer protection and taxation. Mr. González-Sancho listed the challenges for legislation: effectiveness, regulatory competence, fragmentation of legislation and technology neutrality. He noted that liberalization was not against accessibility measures.

19. Mr. Hiroshi Kawamura, Chair of the DAISY Consortium, Japan, explained that DAISY (Digital Accessible Information System) was an open non-proprietary, interoperable standards that met the requirements of persons with print disabilities (persons having difficulties reading printed text because of blindness, visual impairment, color blindness, certain learning disabilities or certain mobility problems). The objective is that all published information, at the time of release to the general population, should be available in an accessible, highly functional feature rich format and at no greater cost to persons with print disabilities. Therefore, users are persons who have difficulties with vision oriented information contents such as ink print text on papers and pictures, as well as those with mobility, cognitive and psychiatric disabilities. Mr. Kawamura noted that the key elements for ICT accessibility were developing accessible multimedia technology with multimodality, and promoting participation of users with disabilities. DAISY was originally developed to benefit people unable to read print due to a disability, it has now broad applications as a best practice in its use for Digital Talking Books; education and training materials; HIV/Disaster prevention tools; and publication tools for indigenous languages.

20. Mr. Axel Leblois, Executive Director of G3ict, an Advocacy Initiative of GAID, the United Nations Global Alliance for ICT and Development for Global Alliance for ICT and Development, highlighted the salient facts about the United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities that was adopted by the General Assembly in 2006 and is the first human rights convention of this millennium. He went on to say that this convention addresses the rights of 650 million persons with disabilities, impacting 2 billion persons, including family members of people with disabilities. The obligations of the Convention are generally defined in relation to a desired outcome, rather than to a technology. There are specific mandates for the States to promote accessibility of ICT based services and applications for government, employment, media, internet, consumer services, emergency response and cultural life. Furthermore, the Convention encourages universal design. The Convention requires States to take appropriate measures to ensure that people with disabilities can exercise freedom of expression through all forms of communication. The stakeholders are NGOs, ICT industry, large users of ICT, governments, legislators and standards organizations, and each has their own concerns and challenges.

21. Ms. Andrea Saks, Independent Accessibility Advisor from the USA, presented achievements in accessibility and standardization within the framework of Question 26 of Study Group 16 of ITU-T, which go from the text telephone to accessible mainstream multimedia. Recommendation F.790 provides guidelines for accessibility for the elderly and people with disabilities. There are several documents that address accessibility, total conversation and text telephony interoperability. Ms. Saks referred to Next Generation Networks and H.325, also known as Advanced Multimedia System (AMS), which are new initiatives where accessibility can be and is being included from the beginning. Ms. Saks pointed out that accessibility is now integrated in NGN scope and requirements with the following goals: inclusion of real time text and video with voice in conversational services, use only of full motion video, and global interoperability of accessible calls. The main topics of the accessibility checklist are control of devices, control of services, media transport, media entry by the user, media presentation to the user, invocation of media translating services, user profile management, and user profile usage. Ms. Saks stressed the need to encourage implementation of international standards that include accessibility features and need to create awareness among regulators to achieve such goal.

Summary of Conclusions & Closing Remarks

22. Ms. Clara-Luz Alvarez, rapporteur for Question 20 of Study Group 1 of ITU-D and Chair person of this seminar, confirmed that the seminar had attained its objective: share the experiences between countries, presenting successful projects such as those from Sri Lanka and Colombia, as well as others being developed in other countries. The seminar introduced a new language in the ITU: the sign language. The presentations reflected that the telecommunications market liberalization has not provided accessibility to the population. Therefore, there was a strong and urgent need for public policy design whereby both public and private sector participates to ensure availability of equal access to telecommunications for everyone, regardless of any disability.

Ms. Alvarez highlighted the essential principles of making ICT accessible to people with disabilities as equal access, functional equivalency, accessibility, affordability, and universal design. The UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities sets forth several mandates for States, including adopting measures to assure that private entities are providing accessible facilities and services. The seminar noted that it was easier to consider accessibility when designing equipment, rather than trying to make them accessible afterwards. She further noted that standardization and interoperability were essential for accessible solutions; otherwise an accessible equipment may not be able to work with certain networks or services.

23. Participants endorsed a four phased Action Plan to address these challenges to meet ICT needs of people with disabilities:

Phase I: Continue creation of public awareness through regional workshops & Global Symposia on ICT accessibility, availability and affordability to equip countries in the areas of a) Interoperability and Standards; b) Regulatory and Policy Frameworks; and c) Social and Economic Issues. Identify best practices, tools and resources for use in the next phases.

Phases II and III: Hold regional workshops with Member States to enable them to facilitate workshops in their own countries. It is proposed that “train the trainer” events be held in various regions to provide training workshops to equip countries with best practices, tools, resources and collaborative partnership opportunities for stakeholders, including consumers, business and government, on meeting country obligations under the UN Convention and in line with the aspirations of ITU-D Question 20/1 from the WTDC-06.

Phase IV: Organize a Global meeting to review and report on the effort and to share best practices for barrier removal as a basis for a report to the next World Telecommunication Development Conference. It was agreed that that this be a way forward to address the challenges before us enshrined in the WSIS Plan of Action and relevant Resolution and Convention so that everyone in particular people with disabilities can benefit from ICT innovation and the realization of equal opportunities can be achieved.

24. Ms. Alvarez invited the audience to actively participate in the Study of Question 20/1. She also noted that the ITU Council had approved that the theme for the World Telecommunication and Information Society Day, May 17, 2008 be to raise awareness on the possibilities that use of the Internet and other ICTs can bring to societies and economies, under the theme “Connecting People with Disabilities: ICT Opportunities for All”.

25. Mrs. Asenath Mpatwa, Head of Special Initiatives Unit, gave the closing remarks, on behalf of the ITU-D Director Mr. Sami Al-Basheer. She noted that best practices on ICT policies, access and services for people with disabilities were shared and highlighted very interesting experiences from all around the world. This would greatly enrich the understanding and inspire people to take concrete actions. She personally and on behalf of the ITU-D Director Mr. Sami Al-Basheer thanked the participants for their active participation in this event and congratulated them for the excellent work they are undertaking in each of their countries and institution in promoting accessibility for people with disabilities.

She further went on to point out that, while the seminar had fruitful discussions; there is still much work to be done. ITU-D remains committed to work with the partners represented, and many others, to achieve the common objective creating awareness on the need to provide ICT accessibility for people with disabilities. This will involve continuing to work with governments and regulators on promoting policy and regulatory frameworks which encourage actions from the private sector, including investments in technologies that will assist people with disabilities. Finally, she thanked again the chair person, speakers, exhibitors and all participants for their contributions to the success of this seminar.

**Seminar on
Sharing Experience on Best Practices and Services for People with Disabilities
Geneva, 17 September 2007**

Agenda

Time	Description
08.00 – 09.00	Registration
09.30 – 10.00	Session 1 - Opening Ceremony Welcome Remarks Mr. Sami Al Basheer , Director, BDT Dr. Roberto Wirth , President & General Manager of the Hotel Hassler, Rome & President of the Roberto Wirth Fund Mr. Donald Shelton , Vice-President, Swiss Federation for the Deaf
10.00 – 10.15	Session 2 - “Agenda” for Persons with Disabilities Major issues for development and implementation of successful policies & strategies, Dr. Cynthia Waddell , ITU Consultant & Executive Director International Centre for Disability Resources on the Internet Discussions
10.15 – 10.30	Session 3 - Accessibility in Standards- Implications for ITU-D work for people with disabilities. Mr. Daniel Hadorn , Lawyer, Fédération Suisse des Sourds SB-FSS
10.30 – 11.00	Session 4 - Sharing experience and user perspectives on ICTs for persons with disabilities - Asia & Pacific region-Sri Lanka, Mrs. P.R. Amarasiri , T.R.C, Sri Lanka - Europe-Sweden, Mr. Gunnar Hellström , Sweden
11.00 – 11.15	<i>Coffee break</i>
11.15 - 12.30	- Africa, Mr. A. Dembélé , Chief, Commercial Director, SOTELMA, Mali - Colombia, Mr. Jesus Hernan Zambrano Ruiz , Coordinador Grupo de Seguimiento y Control de Proyectos - USA, Mr. Mike Starling , National Public Radio - France, René Germain, Group Accessibility Department, Orange Business Group Discussions
12.30 – 14.30	<i>Lunch break & View Demos (Mike Starling-National Public Radio; James Edge - Roberto Wirth Fund & Sachim Uttam-Enabling Dimensions)</i>
14.30 – 16.00	Session 5 - The evolving role of ICT policy and regulatory frameworks in promoting access and services for persons with disabilities, Mr. Gonzalez Sancho , Deputy Head of Unit, ICT for Inclusion, EU Mr. Hiroshi Kawamura , Chair of the DAISY Consortium, Japan The UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities & Legal aspects of Swiss experience: Implications for ICT policies and Strategies Mr. Axel Leblois , UN GAID ITU-16 Achievements in accessibility and standardization, Ms Andrea Saks , Independent accessibility Consultant, United States Discussions
16.00 – 16.45	<i>Coffee break & View of Demos (Mike Starling-National Public Radio; James Edge -Roberto Wirth Fund & Sachim Uttam-Enabling Dimensions)</i>
16.45 – 17.30	Summary of Conclusions & Closing Remarks Mrs. Clara Luz Alvares , Rapporteur, Study Group1, Question 20/1 Mr. Sami Al Basheer , Director, BDT