1. CONCLUDING REMARKS

Analyzing the challenges stated by those countries that have responded the questionnaire we can clearly identify common challenges that are for sure also being faced by those that have not responded. Based on the statements received we can even dare to select those that are most likely to be found in all developing countries of our region.

Here are a few examples of these challenges:

- ✓ Difficulties to adjust existing regulation and establish a national policy framework to promote ICT accessibility;
- ✓ Limited funds to implement accessibility and social/digital inclusion related projects and initiatives;
- ✓ Lack of knowledge on current accessibility status of telecom services and ICTs;
- ✓ Lack of specialized professionals on the many accessibility issues and absence of adequate training programs to address the problem;
- ✓ Raise awareness of service operators/providers on the importance of investing in accessible ICTs and of the general public on the importance of ICT accessibility policies and on the rights of PwD;
- ✓ Build a shared vision on the use of Universal Service Funds to reduce the digital divide in vulnerable populations;

There is not one that we can pick as the most crucial or important, we need to address all of them together in order to progress in regard to ICT accessibility. It is important to raise awareness and review public policies currently in place, but if we don't establish the necessary financial mechanisms and improve the technical capacity, they are bound to fail and we will not achieve the results we wish for.

Therefore it is important to share the good practices and see how some countries have dealt with these challenges and how much they have progressed taking the necessary measures to overcome them.

As the most appointed successful approaches, respondents have highlighted the replication of successful experiences from other countries as very useful for implementing pro accessibility solutions and actions. The review of policies in force, capacity building programs, sharing information among the stakeholders and general public, as well as working in partnership have been the most cited among respondents. Just one mentioned the use of Universal Service Funds to identify existing gaps and implement projects and initiatives to promote social/digital inclusion to vulnerable groups, which is fully coherent with the number of respondents that stated the non-use of the USF for social/digital inclusion projects and initiatives.

When asked to recommend actions that stakeholders should prioritize for achieving an inclusive society in the Americas region, respondents once again highlighted the work in partnership, empowerment of PwD by sharing information on their rights, raise awareness of the general public on the barriers faced by PwD, increase availability of financial resources for social investments, the creation of national and regional statistics to account access and use of telecommunication and ICT services by PwD and also the creation of a regional data base where countries can update information related to their achievements and progress in regard to ICT accessibility.

When requested to provide concrete actions implemented to improve the quality and availability of accessible ICTs products and services for PwD, respondents mostly informed on policies review, information sharing, trainings provided and the increase on the use of USF for social/digital inclusion projects and initiatives. Although this last issue was not reflected in the specific questions on the use of the USF for this kind of projects.

When informing on the actions carried out by national institutions to strengthen the awareness of national stakeholders to promote ICT accessibility policies and programs, most of the respondents provided inputs that are directly related to the development and sharing of information, just a few mentioned training provided.

Respondents were asked to suggest actions that different stakeholders should take to promote the goal of ICT accessibility in countries and in our region. Some interesting suggestions were provided and are highlighted below:

For the Academia

- ✓ Courses on content and digital services for target populations;
- ✓ Include in the curricula topics or disciplines related to universal accessibility
- ✓ Promote more accessibility related research projects.

For International Organizations

- ✓ ITU to develop an information system on the access of PwD to telecommunication services and ICTs as to allow Members to contribute with indicators. This will allow the development and implementation of public policies, since one of the elements to generate public policies is the analysis of the international context.
- ✓ To facilitate the ease of implementation of PwD initiatives, international organizations can share the experiences of others and possibly establish best practices to guide those who are yet to implement their initiatives.

NGOs and other representatives of the Civil Society

- ✓ It is important that organizations responsible for persons with disabilities to partner with government agencies to push the ICT accessibility agenda. In addition, outreach programs should be considered by these organizations to

enlighten their members on the possibilities that ICT accessibility have created making it now possible for them to engage more fully in society.

Telecom Service Provider

✓ Persons with disabilities usually fall within the low income bracket making it almost impossible for them to afford ICT devices with accessibility features. Telecommunications agencies can therefore ensure that these devices and special packages are affordable for persons with disabilities.

Government:

✓ ICTs and disability national ranking;

✓ Inclusive education programs since elementary school;

✓ Promote inter-institutional interaction between PwD associations and Operators, in order to promote greater access to telecommunication services for this group;

Not specified:

✓ Promote low-cost and easy-to-use solutions to the PwD community;

✓ Integration in primary, secondary and university educational spaces for the understanding of the needs of PwD and the importance of citizen inclusion is essential for universal accessibility;

✓ Promote technologies that cover the full user envelope inclusive of PwD;

Of all respondents, just Colombia, Costa Rica and Grenada stated the use of USF to finance social/digital inclusion projects.

As for the suggested issues to be addressed by the Accessible Americas event, some are highlighted below, not all, since many of the other suggested issues have been already addressed by the mentioned Forum and can be found in the body of this Report:

- ✓ IoT and its application to accessibility issues for PwD;
- ✓ Web accessibility, universal design in the curricula of the universities, as well as the use of technology in support of accessible content development;
- ✓ Development of assistive technologies and tools in Latin America;
- ✓ Development of support technology for families and caretakers of PwD;
- ✓ The study, development, adoption and dissemination of standards to comply with accessibility standards and generation of resources (software, documentation, guides, good practices, etc.). In both cases there should be a repository or referral center to allow the management and sharing of ICT accessibility knowledge;
- ✓ Technical standard (ISO or similar) concerning digital and accessible (all digital accessible!);
- ✓ Creation of international parameters to measure accessibility actions of Operators and countries;

Summarizing all information, it is clear that some important progress has been achieved in many areas but there is still a long path to go and many issues to solve. There is no magic recipe and some pillars are important for a continued progress and development of the ICT accessibility issue in the Americas:

- ✓ Partnership among national and regional stakeholders;
- ✓ Information sharing at all levels (to empower Pwd; to replicate good practices; to raise awareness of the general public and public agents);
- ✓ Taylor-made training programs to build technical competencies on the many ICT accessibility issues;
- ✓ Identification of financial resources at national and regional level to invest on social/digital inclusion projects and initiatives.

ITU's mandate embraces many of these issues and every year, through the Accessible Americas event, which has become a role model to other regions of the world, it will be possible

to witness more and more progress and achievements. Undoubtedly, within the work of ITU, the Americas region has a leading role as far as ICT accessibility is concerned and citizens of the Americas can proudly say that their region has overwhelmed most of the challenges and continue to work hard towards a much more inclusive society.