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Access to the Internet for Persons with Disabilities and specific needs

First let's identify the accessibility itself scientifically in general.

Accessibility is a measure of the extent to which a product or service can be used by a person with a disability as effectively as it can be used by a person without that disability.

For example, an elevator can be fitted with audio outputs and buttons that also have Braille notations, thus making it possible for persons with visual impairment to use it on their own. Similarly, buildings and public places can be built with ramps along with stairs, making it possible for persons using wheel chairs to access them. When a product or service is created such that it is completely usable by persons with disabilities without external support, the product or service is called accessible. In circumstances when only some of the features are usable for persons with disabilities, or when the product or service is usable by persons with certain types of disabilities, while it is not usable for persons with other types of disabilities, they are termed as partially inaccessible.

Now we can start our talk about our topic: (Access to the Internet for Persons with Disabilities and specific needs)

Paper on accessibility to the Internet for PWD - Prepared by: Mohammed Gaafar Osman - Sudan

Access to the Internet for Persons with Disabilities and specific needs

What are the different challenges facing persons with disabilities and specific needs in accessing and using the Internet (e.g., lack of ICT skill sets etc.)?

In the current day scenario, it would be impossible for anyone to conceive of a world without the internet. From being the easiest and most important source of news and information to becoming the medium for communications ranging from personal to commercial, to becoming a place for social connectivity and virtual hangouts, the internet has been woven into the fabric of general society, it's a part of the lives for everyone, and it keeps all connected everywhere anytime.

There are many challenges facing persons with disabilities for using the internet, specially the lack of skills with ICT, there's no enough knowledge with ICT, now all people need the internet for getting the fast information and help in their daily life activities.

While the internet seems to be a one-stop shop for all solutions, persons with disabilities find themselves excluded from it due to their inability to either see the screen, use the mouse or keyboard, inability to access content or unfriendly user interface as many of the websites can still be navigated only by using a mouse, most of the audio visuals are not captioned for the use of persons with hearing impairment and web developers use graphics instead of using text, making them unreadable for screen reader users. The internet, however, is a most convenient medium for persons with disabilities as it has made it possible for them to independently access information, transactions and entertainment without having to wait for someone to provide them with the same. While discussing the reach and power of the internet, accessibility is one of the topics that need to be addressed. Even though there are many measures for accessibility currently available, they are not being addressed and worked on aggressively to bridge the gap. In the digital age where the internet is ubiquitous and a platform where more and more economic activity is happening, the lack of initiative and accessibility policy is leading to exclusion.

What possible approaches and examples of good practices are available to address these challenges?

Here we can mention many points to specify what we need to address the challenges and solving the problems.

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Training for persons with disabilities in ICT skills and how to use the assistive technologies, these training can be held by governments and organizations, that to make it easier for them, also make the devices and assistive technologies available for them, that in some counties maybe difficult to get the assistive devices even if the person has good skills in the ICT, and sometimes the cost is high so they can't get.

The organizations can support on making the assistive technologies and accessibility software or devices available.

An example of this would be an organization employing persons with visual impairment providing them with screen reader software to enable them to work productively. Likewise, employees with disabilities could be granted extra leave in addition to their regular days of leave for attending sessions or training related to ICT and assistive technologies regarding their disabilities beside some training and sessions on managing their disabilities and how to make use and benefit of the technologies.

For persons with hearing disabilities the organizations and development should to train them to use the Caption Subtitle and most of video content on the web must be with caption as many websites now try to make captions and and subtitles available in their videos. Youtube is an good example. Also there are many other examples for this.

What are the gaps in addressing these challenges and how can these gaps be filled?

The gaps in addressing the challenges to be full accessible for persons with disabilities can be as following:

- Concerning the Internet contents: the problem of some media that are difficult to put in accessible format or in a way that can be accessed by persons with disabilities. Accessible content is the most vital aspect of e-accessibility. Content that is present directly on the web and that is shared electronically need to be accessible to persons with various disabilities and thus with varying accessibility requirements.
- Screen reader users, for example, would not be able to access content in graphical or image format. This is also true for documents in pdf formats as not all content in pdf is accessible through screen readers. While pdf documents that are tagged are accessible through screen readers, those documents that are structured, unstructured or secured are still inaccessible.
- Content in audio format is inaccessible to persons with hearing impaired. This applies to not only audio files, but also to videos as they usually are

accompanied by audio outputs. Additionally, videos are also inaccessible to persons with visual impairment. In order to make audio files and videos universally accessible, videos should be accompanied with narration while both audio files and videos should have captions and sub titles.

- • What is the role of governments in addressing these challenges and gaps?
- - A critical step that needs to be taken to make content accessible is to formulate a binding policy that would require all web content developers to ensure accessibility of their content. A good solution for this would be the enactment of the Copyright Act, as the various provisions under it which will make it possible for printed books to be converted into accessible format for persons with print impairment. This in turn will make it possible for millions of people to be able to access information that had remained inaccessible before. The World Intellectual Property Organization (WIPO) agreed on a Treaty for the Visually Impaired that aims at making millions of printed books and other material available to persons with print impairment by converting them to alternate accessible formats.
- - It is better to make it compulsory for web developers in all the world to design websites that comply with the requirements for e-accessibility, there is a need to put in place a policy that would mandate strict adherence to norms. The Governments can set up a process to formulate a national policy to ensure accessibility of websites and ICT products and services in each country. This policy requires that all government websites to be standard and comply with other international accessibility standards for all electronic information and products and services delivery. However, a study conducted by CIS in August 2012 in which 7800 websites were tested, it was found that close to 25% of the websites did not open. Almost all the remaining websites had accessibility issues. The study also highlighted shortcomings of many websites to meet the set accessibility requirements.