ITU and UNESCO Regional ICT Accessibility Week

Symposium: *Overcoming Divides and Achieving the SDGs*
Supporting the inclusion of people with disabilities and vulnerable groups

Organized in collaboration with our strategic partner

On the occasion of the commemoration of

UNESCO's International Day for Universal Access to Information
and the
Closing of the Regional ICT Accessibility Week

to be held at

Al Waleed Hall, American University of Cairo, New Cairo
9:00 a.m. – 1:00 p.m., 28 September 2017

Concept Note

Overview

At the 38th session of UNESCO's General Conference, held at its Paris Headquarters in October and November 2015, UNESCO's Member States and Associate Member States unanimously designated 28 September as the "International Day for Universal Access to Information (IDUAI)". This Day was conceived to bring heightened attention to the critical role of Information in the realization of fundamental freedoms and advancing humanities' development.

In today's emerging knowledge society, the ability to effectively access and use information as well as information-based resources is increasingly a critical determinant of social as well as economic participation and advancement. Effective decision-making depends to a large extent on our ability to collect, analyze, store, share, retrieve, cross-reference and synthesize

information in a timely manner. Without such information capabilities, we have little chance of meaningful progress on the key societal problems we must collectively address.

For 2017, UNESCO has adopted the theme, "*Overcoming Divides and Achieving the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs)*". The celebration of the International Day as an integral part of the Regional ICT Accessibility Week being jointly organized by ITU and UNESCO, is a testimony to the critical role played by information in supporting holistic and sustainable national development and the urgent need to overcome the exclusionary effects of information, technological and other societal barriers.

Through various initiatives and programmes including amongst others the Action Plan, Declarations and other processes of the World Summit on the Information Society, ITU and UNESCO in concert with a variety of stakeholders have been championing the use of ICT to promote access to information and knowledge and the inclusion of all persons in society.

Five of the 2030 SDG Targets – Goals 4, 8, 10, 11 and 17 – make explicit reference to the needs of persons with disabilities. Without addressing the needs of this major population segment, we cannot hope to eradicate poverty or meet the SDG targets. This is particularly relevant as persons with disabilities, are a cross-cutting group that includes youth, women, the aged amongst others. Preventing as well as mitigating disabilities is therefore critical as disability further intensifies other forms of vulnerability and exclusion.

According to the World Health Organization (WHO), persons with disabilities represent about 15% of the population, with an estimated 1 billion persons around the world living with at least one disability. There is limited current statistical information on the number of persons with disabilities in Egypt. Figures quoted for Egypt in published sources range from just under half a million persons with a disability in 2006[12], to as many as 12 Million persons with a disability in 2015[3].

The impact of a given disability on the autonomy of an individual may vary significantly. Some persons with a disability may require little if any assistance while on the other hand others may require 24-hour assistance and supervision. By implementing accessibility measures and

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[1] WHO, World Bank. (2011). *WHO World Report on Disability*. Retrieved from WHO Website: http://www.who.int/disabilities/world_report/2011/report.pdf

[2] ESCWA, LAS (2014). Disability in the Arab world: An Overview. Retrieved from ESCWA website: https://www.unescwa.org/sites/www.unescwa.org/files/page_attachments/disability_in_the_arab_region-_an_overview_-_en_1.pdf

[3] G3ict. (2015). *Egypt's Model Policy for Accessible Education.* Retrieved from Arab Republic of Egypt Ministry of Information and Communications Technology Website: http://www.mcit.gov.eg/Publication/Publication_Summary/892

other accommodations, a majority of persons with disabilities are able to fully participate in society - attend school, obtain employment and participate in a range of social settings and activities that many citizens take for granted. We can address the medical aspects of disability, there is also extensive body of knowledge regarding design requirements that can ensure that our physical and digital environments are more welcoming to all persons.

However, the most difficult and persistent barriers appear to emerge from attitudes, a lack of awareness or foresight, stigma and discrimination disability often becomes a social barrier and divide for persons with disabilities and their families. This can limit the exercise of basics rights, the right to education and other social services to dignity. Not only does this prevent these persons from reaching their full potential, it also deprives society from benefitting from their human capital - insights, talents and other contributions.

If we ignore the up to 12 million people in Egypt who have a disability, we have no hope of eradicating poverty or meeting the sustainable development goals.

Session Format and Objectives

The session will take the form of an interactive panel discussion by diverse stakeholders groups involved in supporting the implementation of the SDGs in Egypt. The exchanges will serve to raise awareness of ongoing initiatives and through the sharing of experiences highlight opportunities for collaboration. 2018 has been designated by the Government of Egypt as an year of accessibility in Egypt. The panel discussion will therefore serve to initiate a shared reflection on how by combining the lenses of accessibility, access to information and knowledge facilitated by ICT and social innovation, inclusion barriers – particularly those around disability - can be overcome and the SDGs advanced.

For further information, please contact:

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SESSION	TIME	Tentative Agenda
		Tentative Agenda
Registration	9:00 - 9:55	***Coffee and Registration***
Opening Ceremony	10:00 – 10:50	***Welcome and Introduction*** ***Chair:*** Dr. Ted Purinton, Dean of the Graduate School of Education, The American University in Cairo (AUC) • Welcome Remarks: Mr. Francis J. Ricciardone, President of the American University in Cairo (TBC) • Welcome remarks: Welcome and IDUAI Address from Ms. Irina Bokova, Director General of UNESCO: Dr. Ghaith Fariz, Director & Representative, UNESCO Cairo Office and Regional Bureau for Sciences in the Arab States • Welcome Remarks: Mr. Ebrahim Al Haddad, Regional Director, ITU Arab Regional Office • Remarks: National Disability Organizations in Egypt • Remarks: Mr. Richard Dictus, Resident Coordinator, United Nations in Egypt (TBC) • Keynote Address: H.E. Dr. Tarek Shawki, Minister of Education • Keynote Address: H.E. Dr. Khaled Abdel Ghafar, Minister of Higher Education and Scientific Research • Keynote Address: H.E. Mr. Yasser El Kady, Minister of Communication and Information Technology
Photo Op	10:50 – 11:00	**Group photo or screening of film**
Panel Discussion	11:00 – 12:40	***Panel discussion: Overcoming Divides and Achieving the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs)*** Introductory statements by Chair and Panelists, followed by open discussions to highlight progress made in overcoming divides, identify emerging challenges and propose actions for reducing barriers ***Moderator:*** *Dr. Paul Hector, Advisor for Communication and Information, UNESCO* ***Panelists:*** • *Dr. Abeer Shakweer, Special Advisor to the Minister of Communication and Information Technology (MCIT) TBC* • *Mr. Karim Abdelghani, Regional Programme Coordinator for Arab States, ITU* • *Accessibility and the Urban environment, TBC* • *Dr. Gihan Osman, Graduate School of Education, AUC* • *Representative of International development partners* • *Representative from the Private Sector TBC* Interactive Q & A with audience and panel Final words by panelists and Session wrap-up by Moderator
Closing	12:40 – 13:00	Announcement by ITU/UNESCO
		Vote of thanks and Closing of Regional ICT Accessibility Week 2017