

### **Information accessibilities: Disability Inclusive ICT policies required.**

In Bangladesh, person with disabilities constitute a total of the One hundred Fifty Million people. This is approximately 10% of the total population. This number is not static and is on the rise each year.

Around forty percent people of the country are illiterate or print disabled who are unable to read printed materials. Accessible information are also not available to them and it was not recognised their information rights. .

National ICT policy will ensure equal access of information Communication Technology (ICT) for persons with disabilities. Any kind of exclusion of persons with disabilities from their rights not acceptable as a signatory country of UNCRPD. Bangladesh has to adopt legislation and undertake administrative measures accordingly coherent with the CRPD promise.. I just explain what's International obligation Bangladesh Government have to make Disability ICT policy.

### **World Program of Actions on ICT and prospect of Bangladesh:**

To materialize the activities of disability related "World Program of Actions" in Asia-Pacific region, Asia-Pacific Regional Disability Decade (from 2003 to 2013) was announced. On December 20, 1993, a 'Standard Rule' on equal opportunity for the PWDs was approved in the UN General Council. In that council, emphasize was given to make the PWDs educated in electronic and ICT education to enrich them easily and appropriately. Regarding that very issue, 'e-accessibility' was made the theme of "International Disability Day" in 2006. The World Summit on Information Society:

xThe first phase of the World summit on Information Society, which was held in Geneva Switzerland from December 10-12, 2003, has come up with two documents:

Declaration of Principles and Plan of Action. The WSIS documents are the first mainstream (outside disability-specific) global documents which include disability-related text. In these two documents, there are many references to PWDs, such as universal design and the use of assistive technologies (Declaration of Principles, Para. 25), special requirements of PWDs in ICT capacity building (Declaration Principles, Para. 30), web accessibility standard (Plan of Action, Para. 28 E), etc. (See more detail from WSIS web site at <http://www.itu.int/wsis>)

# The recent development is UN CONVENTION on the RIGHTS of PERSONS with DISABILITIES

this convention, already signed and ratified by Bangladesh, will serve as a global mandate upon member states of the United Nations to undertake measures to ensure that PWDs will enjoy the human rights and fundamental freedoms on an equal basis with others. So far, the matter of ICT accessibility has been included in the preamble, general state obligations and has a separate article [article 9] on its own in the convention. the convention at the UN web site:

<http://www.un.org/esa/socdev/enable>.)

## Article 9 - Accessibility

1. To enable persons with disabilities to live independently and participate fully in all aspects of life, States Parties shall take appropriate measures to ensure to persons with disabilities access, on an equal basis with others, to the physical environment, to transportation, to information and communications, including information and communications technologies and systems, and to other facilities and services open or provided to the public, both in urban and in rural areas. These measures, which shall include the identification and elimination of obstacles and barriers to accessibility, shall apply to, inter alia:

- a. Buildings, roads, transportation and other indoor and outdoor facilities, including schools, housing, medical facilities and workplaces;
- b. Information, communications and other services, including electronic services and emergency services.

2. States Parties shall also take appropriate measures to:

- a. Develop, promulgate and monitor the implementation of minimum standards and guidelines for the accessibility of facilities and services open or provided to the public;
- b. Ensure that private entities that offer facilities and services which are open or provided to the public take into account all aspects of accessibility for persons with disabilities;

- c. Provide training for stakeholders on accessibility issues facing persons with disabilities;
- d. Provide in buildings and other facilities open to the public signage in Braille and in easy to read and understand forms;
- e. Provide forms of live assistance and intermediaries, including guides, readers and professional sign language interpreters, to facilitate accessibility to buildings and other facilities open to the public;
- f. Promote other appropriate forms of assistance and support to persons with disabilities to ensure their access to information;
- g. Promote access for persons with disabilities to new information and communications technologies and systems, including the Internet;
- h. Promote the design, development, production and distribution of accessible information and communications technologies and systems at an early stage, so that these technologies and systems become accessible at minimum cost.

## **Universal/inclusive design: A Great Contribution from the Disability Communities for the Brighter and Better Information Society**

What is still lacking within the mainstream circle of the World Summit on Information Society (WSIS) up till this moment is the matter of design and development of ICTs. Many times, such concept has been brought to the attention of the meeting. Although there has been no clear opposition among government delegations, the whole meeting, with some few exceptions, is still silent on such matter. Some even suggest that "design for all", or otherwise known as "universal/inclusive design", concept is just to meet specific needs of specific groups, such as persons with disabilities, and should not be included in the "access for all" part of the declaration of principles of WSIS. Others suggest that the use of "assistive technology" should be enough to take care of such matter.

### **What is "Universal/Inclusive *Design*"?**

The term "universal design", as widely known in north America, and "inclusive design" or "design for all", as widely known in Europe, refers to the way the environment, products services including ICTs are designed so that all people, regardless of their differences including disabilities, can access without any difficulty. Such concept is not just intended to meet specific needs of persons with disabilities, but rather it is intended to accommodate all diverse needs. The fact that such accessibility solution has been brought into life and has been contributed by disability-related individuals/organizations may cause many people, who might be new to the ICT design and development field, to be quite

confused which often leads to wrong assumption that it is a disability-specific concept.

### ***What is assistive technology?***

Assistive technology refers to specific ways and means to achieve accessibility by persons with disabilities or otherwise with special needs, both in terms of access to built environments and in terms of access to information and communications including ICTs. The need for assistive technology is normally caused by inaccessible/poorly designed products and/or services. For example, blind people need to use a computer screen reader with voice or Braille output in order to have access to the computer which has been originally designed to interact mainly through visual channel, and deaf people require the use of TDD or TTY in order to communicate through telephone because such communication tool was originally designed to be used mainly through voice interaction, etc. Therefore, assistive technology is a disability-specific issue, intended for making specific products/services accessible. It is a specific mechanism to help achieve the accessible information society.

### ***Why both universal/inclusive design and assistive technology?***

The role of assistive technology is to help make the task of universal/inclusive design more complete. For example, a wheelchair user can possibly move independently in the building with properly installed elevators and ramps (best done from the designing stage). The use of assistive technology is a specific solution at micro level while universal/inclusive design stands at the macro level to achieve accessibility. They are equally important and should both be included in the WSIS declaration of principles.

Vashkar Vattacharya  
Program Officer of YPSA  
Convener ICT Thematic Group of NFOWD  
[www.ypsa.org](http://www.ypsa.org)