

# ACCESSIBILITY AND DEVELOPMENT

Mainstreaming disability in the  
post-2015 development agenda



UNITED NATIONS

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## **DEPARTMENT OF ECONOMIC AND SOCIAL AFFAIRS**

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## Introduction

The present publication reviews the concept of *accessibility* and its role in achieving inclusive and sustainable development. Accessibility usually embodies the special needs of a specific group, such as persons with disabilities. Accessibility is a precondition for an inclusive society for all, and may be defined as *the provision of flexibility to accommodate each user's needs and preferences*.<sup>1</sup> This publication proposes that accessibility be not only a means and a goal of inclusive development but also an enabler of an improved, participative economic and social environment for all members of society.

The present report will address three key issues, as follows: (a) accessibility in the context of human rights and development; (b) accessibility in policy and practice; and (c) accessibility and a disability-inclusive post-2015 development agenda.

### **Accessibility in the context of human rights and development**

Chapter I of the book deals with accessibility within the ambit of the international normative framework on disability, in line with the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities and internationally agreed development goals. It reviews, in brief, international instruments relating to disability and development, and responds to several basic questions, such as: "What is accessibility?", "Why is accessibility important?", and "How does the international community support the implementation of accessibility?" The international community currently promotes accessibility as an integral part of universal human rights, yet recognizes the urgency of incorporating accessibility into the goals, targets and policy directives that would shape an inclusive post-2015 development framework.

### **Accessibility in policy and practice**

Chapter 2 focuses on international commitment to accessibility and the ways in which such commitment can be trans-

formed into national policy and programmes: “How can different approaches to accessibility be transformed into effective national level policies and programmes?” How does an effective policy promote accessibility and make it work in practice?” In responding to these questions, the principle of universal approach—in line with the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities—provides a basis for contextualizing accessibility in varying economic, social and cultural environments.

### **Accessibility and an inclusive post-2015 development agenda**

Finally, Chapter 3 reviews lessons learned from a bottom-up approach in response to the following question: “How does accessibility relate to inclusive, sustainable and equitable development?” The core argument in this publication is that accessibility must be re-conceptualized as an enabler: a precondition for any progress toward development for all members of society. It concludes that the full and effective participation of persons with disabilities in decision-making processes would contribute directly to the successful adoption of an inclusive post-2015 development agenda.

# CHAPTER ONE

**Accessibility in the contexts of  
human rights and development**

***What is accessibility?***

***Why is accessibility both a human rights issue and a development issue? Why is accessibility important?***

***How does the international community support its implementation?***

#### **KEY MESSAGES**

- **Accessibility is both a human rights issue and a development concern.**
- **Accessibility bridges the gap between the special needs of persons with disabilities and the realization of social, economic, cultural and political inclusion.**
- **Accessibility has not yet been integrated into the goals, targets and policies that have shaped the international development agenda.**



The international development agenda is built upon a set of mutually supportive, international normative frameworks, including those relating to the rights and well-being of persons with disabilities. These frameworks guide the interpretation of well-being across the globe and are often tied to the acceptance of fundamental human rights.<sup>2</sup> The realization of fundamental human rights requires an inclusive society in which every individual is treated equally, has freedom of expression and may participate fully in social, economic and political life. In this context, equal access to information, quality education, decent work, food, shelter and security—among other things—become particularly important.<sup>3</sup>

The realization of the fundamental rights of persons with disabilities often requires policy intervention and the implementation of measures to remove barriers and provide reasonable accommodation in order to ensure their equal access and full participation. A major part of this process, or state of accommodation, is often referred to as *accessibility*.

Accessibility is best defined as *the provision of flexibility to accommodate each user's needs and preferences*;<sup>4</sup> when used with reference to persons with disabilities, *any place, space, item or service, whether physical or virtual, that is easily approached, reached, entered, exited, interacted with, understood or otherwise used by persons of varying disabilities, is determined to be accessible*.

Accessibility within the context of the United Nations is not only an inherent right of persons with disabilities, but a means of ensuring that persons with disabilities are able to exercise all rights and fundamental freedoms and are empowered to participate fully in society on equal terms with all others. Three major documents have guided the understanding and promotion of accessibility within the United Nations policy framework to date: *The World Programme of Action concerning Disabled Persons*,<sup>5</sup> *The United Nations Standard Rules on the Equaliza-*

*tion of Opportunities for Persons with Disabilities*<sup>6</sup> and *The Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities*.<sup>7</sup> Together, these three documents require that Governments and the international community recognize the importance of accessibility in ensuring the equalization of opportunities for persons with disabilities by empowering them to “live independently and participate fully in all aspects of life”.<sup>8</sup> The documents give particular attention to accessibility in the physical environment, as well as access to information and communication, and affirm the importance of access to public services such as transportation, education and health care, among others.

The Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities, with its entry into force in May 2008, set the global standard for understanding and enforcing the realization of the rights of persons with disabilities.<sup>9</sup> The Convention constituted both the legal and the political commitment of the international community to the inclusion of the disability perspective and persons with disabilities in all aspects of society and development. However, outside of the Convention, attention to disability within global policy has still tended to focus on persons with disabilities as recipients and beneficiaries of development policy rather than as agents and co-determinants whose input and provisions benefit all of society.

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**... Accessibility refers to ease of use, and to the provision of flexibility to accommodate each user’s needs and preferences ...**

Nonetheless, as persons with disabilities gain voice in all spheres of life and development, the approach to addressing disability in global policy has been shifting gradually. Disability, where addressed in the outcome documents of global development conferences, has been considered in various ways. In some cases, persons with disabilities have been treated solely as members of vulnerable groups to which special, tailored attention must be given. In

other cases, persons with disabilities have been recognized as both agents and beneficiaries of development processes.<sup>10</sup> However, despite persons with disabilities accounting for 15 per cent of the world's population—the vast majority of whom live in developing countries—they have yet to see their specific perspectives and concerns considered in the internationally agreed development goals and targets to which countries are held accountable.

Among the goals, targets and other commitments shaping the international development agenda, the Millennium Development Goals stand out as the definitive measure of social progress to date. The Goals have shaped social policy focus at both the national and the international levels since 2000, yet disability was neither included in the Goals nor in their operationalizing targets and indicators. As a result, disability has been largely invisible in implementation of the Goals, rarely included in national policies or programmes related to the Goals, much less in monitoring and evaluation efforts. However, in recent years, there has been increasing recognition that no development path that would exclude the participation of persons with disabilities in economic, social or political life can be inclusive, equitable or sustainable.

At the first five-year review of implementation of the Millennium Declaration in 2005 (A/54/2005), the High-Level Plenary of the General Assembly noted “the need for persons with disabilities to be guaranteed full enjoyment of their rights without discrimination” and affirmed the need to finalize a comprehensive convention on their rights.<sup>11</sup> At the second five-year implementation review of the Millennium Declaration in 2010 (A/64/665), the High-Level Plenary of the General Assembly addressed advancement of persons with disabilities with reference to poverty eradication and acknowledged the importance of providing “equitable access to economic opportunities and social services” and pursuing “sustained, inclusive and equitable economic growth and sustainable development”.<sup>12</sup>

## Box 1: Accessibility in the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities

The Convention has centred the very concept of disability on lack of accessibility. It refers to disability, not as a state of being, but as

... an evolving concept ... that results from the interaction between persons with impairments and attitudinal and environmental barriers that hinder their full and effective participation in society on an equal basis with others.

With accessibility as its hinge, the Convention has sought to open the door for mainstreaming disability issues into strategies for sustainable development.

The Convention has presented accessibility as a process that ensures access for persons with disabilities, 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 rural areas. It presents the concepts of reasonable accommodation and universal design to provide guidance in achieving accessibility, and encourages States "... to undertake or promote research and development of universally-designed goods, services, equipment and facilities ..." and "... to promote universal design in the development of standards and guidelines".

While reasonable accommodation suggests accessibility on an as-needed basis, the concept of universal design is that of the design of products, environments, programmes and services to be usable by all people, to the greatest extent possible, without the need for adaptation or specialized design.

The Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities links the provision of accessibility to empowering persons with disabilities to live independently, be included in the community, and to exercise personal mobility, freedom of expression and opinion, and access to information. It recognizes accessibility as an enabler and facilitator for the valued existence and potential contribution of persons with disabilities to the overall well-being and diversity of their communities, and observes that the promotion of disabled persons full participation in society will result in an enhanced sense of their belonging and in significant advances in the human, social and economic development of society, and enable the eradication of poverty. The Convention also emphasizes the importance of mainstreaming disability issues into strategies for achieving sustainable development.

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Read the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities [online] at <http://www.un.org/di>. Read the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities [online] at <http://www.un.org/disabilities/convention/conventionfull.shtml> [sabilities/convention/conventionfull.shtml](http://www.un.org/disabilities/convention/conventionfull.shtml).

Further recognition and commitment to the mainstreaming of disability into international development goals also came at the High-level Meeting of the General Assembly in September 2013 on the realization of the Millennium Development Goals and other internationally agreed development goals for persons with disabilities beyond 2015. That meeting not only underscored the importance of recognizing persons with disabilities as agents and beneficiaries of development, but also acknowledged the value of their contribution to the general well-being, progress and diversity of society, and called for action to mainstream disability into the development agenda.

Even greater recognition has been shown for the need to close the gap between international commitment to realizing the rights of persons with disabilities, and actual acknowledgment of their agency and inclusion as important for development in general.

The repositioning of accessibility as an integral development goal would provide a path for securing such inclusion and agency.

## Box 2: Accessibility in the outcomes of global development conferences

The Programme of Action adopted by the **International Conference on Population and Development** (Cairo, Egypt, 5-13 September 1994) considered the situation of persons with disabilities in the context of a reproductive health and development framework. It urged Governments: (a) to consider the needs of persons with disabilities in terms of ethical and human rights dimensions; (b) to develop infrastructure to address the needs of persons with disabilities with regard to education, training and rehabilitation; (c) to promote mechanisms to ensure the rights of persons with disabilities; and (d) to promote systems for the social and economic integration of persons with disabilities.

The Copenhagen Declaration and Programme of Action adopted by the **World Summit on Social Development** (Copenhagen, Denmark, 5-12 March 1995) considered the advancement of persons with disabilities under each of its priority themes: eradication of poverty, expansion of productive employment and social integration.

The Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action adopted at the **Fourth World Conference on Women** (Beijing, China, 4-15 September 1995) addressed the situation of women with disabilities in a broad rights context. It discussed the importance of eliminating barriers to the advancement and participation of women with disabilities in development, and identified actions for the advancement of the rights of women with disabilities in education and training, health, economic participation and human rights.

The Istanbul Declaration on Human Settlements and Habitat Agenda adopted at the **United Nations Conference on Human Settlements (Habitat II)** (Istanbul, Turkey, 3-14 June 1996) considered accessible shelter and habitat, directing special attention to shelter needs and the circumstances of persons with disabilities, and the need for accessible shelter and basic services and facilities to be promoted in ways that were consistent with international human rights norms and standards.

## Box 2: Continued

The **Second World Assembly on Ageing** (2002) and its outcome document, the Madrid International Plan of Action on Ageing, focused on the development of a society for all ages. The Plan of Action affirmed that the incidence of impairment and disability increased with age, with older women being particularly vulnerable to disability in old age. Issue 6, under *Priority Direction II: Advancing health and well-being into old age*, highlighted the issue of older persons and disabilities, and stated the actions required both to meet the objective of maintaining maximum functional capacity throughout the life course and for the promotion of full participation of older persons with disabilities. The directive declared the need for creating housing options for older persons with disabilities that reduced barriers, encouraged independence and made public spaces, transportation, commercial and other services more accessible. The Plan of Action addressed housing and the living environment specifically under *Priority Direction III: Ensuring enabling and supportive environments*, and identified actions that would ensure that new urban spaces were free of barriers to mobility and access, and assist older persons in making their homes free of barriers to mobility and access.

The Plan of Implementation adopted by the **World Summit on Sustainable Development** (Johannesburg, 26 August–4 September 2002) identified persons with disabilities as members of a vulnerable group in society, requiring both protection from debilitating diseases and special care from the causes of ill-health, including environmental causes (paragraph 53).

The **World Summit on the Information Society (WSIS)**—held in two phases, in Geneva, from 10-12 December 2003, and in Tunis, from 16-18 November 2005—focused on policy options to establish an "Information Society for All" and on the measures to implement such commitments. The Geneva Declaration of Principles (2003) stated that the special needs of older persons and persons with disabilities should be recognized in building an information society for all. The Declaration identified access to information and knowledge, capacity-building and an enabling environment as key principles in building an information society for all, but did not consider the question of accessible information and communications technologies. The Tunis Summit focused on financial mechanisms to bridge the digital divide, on Internet governance and options for follow-up to plans adopted in Geneva and Tunis. The Tunis Commitment referred to "the special needs of marginalized and vulnerable groups of society, including migrants, internally displaced persons and refugees, unemployed and underprivileged people, minorities and nomadic peoples, older persons and persons with disabilities". However, the Commitment provided no guidelines on ensuring that "inclusive and development-oriented Information Societies" provided accessibility with reasonable accommodation for all.

## Box 2: Continued

The **United Nations Conference on Sustainable Development—“Rio+20”** (Rio de Janeiro, Brazil, 20-22 June 2012) reaffirmed the commitment to respect, protect and promote human rights and fundamental freedom for all, and acknowledged the importance of participation and access to information for engaging stakeholders in promoting sustainable development at all levels. The Outcome Statement noted that green economy policies in the context of sustainable development and poverty eradication should, among other issues, “enhance the welfare ... and improve livelihoods and empowerment of poor and vulnerable groups” including persons with disabilities. The *Framework for action* chapter of the outcome document addressed options for planning and building sustainable cities and urban settlements but omitted discussing ways for integrated planning for shelter, habitat and transportation to provide accessibility with reasonable accommodation. The *Framework for action* stressed the need for ensuring equal access to education for—among others—persons with disabilities. The sustainable development goals of the Outcome Statement addressed, however, neither the role of accessibility in furthering their achievement, nor the need for the progressive removal of barriers so that all persons could participate on a basis of equality in sustainable development and poverty eradication.



# CHAPTER TWO

## Accessibility in policy and practice

## ***What types of policies make accessibility work?***

### **KEY MESSAGES**

- **Implementation of accessibility should be promoted further based on the concept of universal design.**
- **Many national policies take a top-down approach, with nationally legislated minimum requirements.**
- **A participatory, bottom-up approach can add to the efficiency and effectiveness of accessibility policies.**
- **A combination of both approaches and strategies, where applicable, can increase opportunities for success.**

In keeping with the international focus, much of the national-level policy, law and administrative guidance on accessibility has taken a special-needs approach, stemming from the promotion and protection of rights and fundamental freedoms, for the provision of specialized services to persons with disabilities. Most existing policies were enacted before the entry into force of the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities, and have focused mainly on technical guidance and performance standards related to accessible transportation, urban infrastructure and public facilities. In general, these policies have been helpful in strengthening, and expanding, coverage of services for persons with disabilities; however, there are some limitations to this approach. In some cases, it could result in separate—and generally inequitable—services, segregated from the principal provisions. Furthermore, retrofitting existing infrastructures and facilities, if they need to be altered to accommodate changed standards, could be a costly exercise. In summary, accessibility requirements, in many cases, have yet to be integrated into all aspects of the planning and design of buildings. This has been a challenge to making progress in accessibility for many countries.

While the Convention does call for such a holistic approach to achieving accessibility and the full integration of persons with disabilities, even the more comprehensive national-level policies still tend toward the provision of minimal technical guidance for accommodation, framed in the context of non-discrimination. These top-down approaches to implementing accessibility view the Convention and other international frameworks as guidance for national legislation. Generally, these forms of legislation are supplemented by regulations and timelines for implementation, and characterized by standard-setting specifications. While this is a promising first step, accessibility requirements still need to be mainstreamed in the planning and creation of any place, space, item or service. This will not only ensure equal access for persons with disabilities, but will also benefit all members of society.

### Box 3: Top-down approaches to State implementation of accessibility in buildings and transportation

#### Australia

*Buildings:* Accessibility legislation in Australia is based on the Disability Discrimination Act 1992 (DDA), which decrees the elimination, as far as possible, of discrimination against persons on the basis of their disabilities in various areas and, in particular, in access to premises, work, accommodation and the provision of facilities, services and land. The Disability (Access to Premises—Buildings) Standards 2010 (Premises Standards Act), which entered into force in May 2011, aimed to ensure that buildings were accessible to people with disability and met the requirements of the discrimination law (DDA). It is envisaged that the Standards will ensure that buildings in Australia become more accessible and useful to an ageing population. The Premises Standards prescribed national requirements for new buildings, and new building work being undertaken in existing buildings, to comply with DDA in those areas and for the buildings covered by the Standards.

*Transportation:* The Disability Standards for Accessible Public Transport 2002 (as amended in 2010) were enacted to provide transport operators and providers with information on their obligations under discrimination law DDA. Providers and operators of public transport were directed to comply with the minimum accessibility requirements set out in the Transport Standards for the full range of public transport vehicles, infrastructure supporting public transport, and premises. New public transport systems were instructed to comply with the Standards, and existing public transport had to become progressively more accessible over a 30-year period. The Transport Standards applied to (a) trams, (b) trains, (c) buses and coaches, (d) taxis, (e) ferries, and (f) airplanes.

### Box 3: Continued

#### Canada

*Buildings:* The National Building Code (2010) is the model building code, issued by the Canadian Institute for Research in Construction. It provided the base document for provincial building codes, since provinces were responsible for regulating construction under the Constitution of Canada. Provinces could adopt supplemental legislation or administrative guidance to help the Code better meet local conditions.

*Transportation:* Under the Canada Transportation Act (1996), the Canadian Transportation Agency was made responsible for removing obstacles to mobility in all federally regulated (air, rail, marine and interprovincial bus) transportation services and facilities. The Agency was mandated to (a) develop regulations, codes of practice and standards, (b) communicate with the transportation industry and community of persons with disabilities, (c) resolve individual accessibility-related complaints and (d) order corrective measures, as required.

In contrast, some Member States provided examples of bottom-up approaches to the implementation of accessibility. These approaches have been characterized by local initiatives identifying functional requirements and minimum accessibility standards appropriate to local conditions and capacities. These local initiatives have provided important lessons on needs and capacity to promote environmental accessibility on a larger scale. The lessons learned can shape frameworks to formulate and implement effective and sustainable regulatory guidance, implementation and monitoring.

#### **Box 4: Bottom-up approaches to State implementation of accessibility in buildings and transportation**

##### **Beirut, Republic of Lebanon**

Accessible planning and redevelopment of Beirut, Lebanon, following a period of civil conflict, was carried out by the Ministry of Social Affairs of the Republic of Lebanon National Committee for the Disabled and Solidere, a Lebanese company, for the development and reconstruction of Beirut City, with technical assistance from the United Nations Economic and Social Commission for Western Asia. The monograph, *Accessibility for the Disabled: a design manual for a barrier-free environment* (Beirut: Solidere, 1998), discussed the twin-track approach to promoting non-handicapping environments in the context of urban redevelopment: (a) measures to influence planning, design and reconstruction of a barrier-free Beirut Central District, and (b) technical documentation on accessibility concepts and standards, and suggested instruments to apply and effect wider geographical coverage and social impact throughout Lebanon.<sup>13</sup>

##### **Asia and Pacific Region**

Pilot action in accessible urban planning and pedestrian movement at the national and local levels was undertaken during the first Asian and Pacific Decade of Disabled Persons, 1993-2002.<sup>14</sup> This was conducted in cooperation with interested Governments, civil society organizations and professional societies, with technical assistance from the United Nations Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific in collaboration with the United Nations ESCAP/United Nations Centre for Human Settlements (HABITAT) Joint Section on Human Settlements. The experiences were compiled in a monograph that discussed concepts, planning and design principles, technical guidelines and implementation strategies, *Promotion of Non-Handicapping Physical Environments for Disabled Persons: Guidelines* (Bangkok, 1995).<sup>15</sup>

Accessibility in information and communications technologies (ICTs) is a critical part of advancing inclusive and sustainable development for all. The following box on accessibility in the domain of the Internet illustrates this issue:

## Box 5: Information and communications technology and accessibility

Increasingly, Internet accessibility is becoming a requirement in national legislation in many countries: public Internet resources must provide accessibility with reasonable adaptation; enterprises that engage in commerce with public entities must provide accessible portals, and public facilities must provide accessible portals and offer essential information in accessible formats. There is growing recognition that the provision and maintenance of accessible Internet resources adds value to product and service offerings, both public and private. Data compiled by the United Kingdom-based AbilityNet advocacy group have suggested that the provision of accessible information resources on products and services has contributed to increased market share and long-term, stable consumer relationships.<sup>16</sup>

The Uniform Compliance Framework (UCF <<https://www.unifiedcompliance.com/>>), developed in the United States of America, is a recent approach to reducing the cost of complying with the range of regulatory guidelines in the field of information technology. UCF was based on an analysis of more than 700 information technology source documents, which included audit guidelines, contractual obligations, laws, standards and related instructions and compilation in an online database. UCF is a subscription-based service to assist enterprises and organizations in identifying regulatory controls that need to be instituted to comply with relevant rules, standards and policies.

The World Wide Web Consortium (W3C) also provides guidance on ICT accessibility with specific reference to Internet use. W3C has identified a set of components on web development and end-user interactions that must work together for web accessibility:<sup>17</sup>

- (a) Website content: use of natural information (text, images and sound), and markup code that defines its structure and presentation;
- (b) User agents: web browsers and media players;
- (c) Assistive technologies: screen readers and input devices used in place of conventional keyboard and mouse-pointing devices;
- (d) User knowledge and experience: use of web resources, and adapting strategies;

## Box 5: Continued

- (e) Developers: content producers, including end-user-created content;
- (f) Authoring tools and related software: creating websites and content;
- (g) Evaluation tools for web accessibility: HTML validators, CSS validators;
- (h) Web accessibility: standard, or policy to evaluate accessibility characteristics.

Three sets of regulatory guidelines on the design, provision and maintenance of accessible and usable Internet resources are often cited as examples of good practice:

- (a) The United States of America Rehabilitation Act of 1973, Section 508, as amended by the Workforce Investment Act of 1998;
- (b) Web Content Accessibility Guidelines 2.0, published as a World Wide Web Consortium Recommendation on 11 December 2008; and
- (c) Technical report ISO/IEC TR 29138-2:2009 (parts 1-3), *Information technology: accessibility considerations for people with disabilities* prepared by the Special Working Group on Accessibility (SWG-A) of Joint Technical Committee 1 (JTC 1) of the International Organization for Standardization (ISO) and the International Electrotechnical Commission (IEC).

Based on lessons learned and experience, accessibility is best promoted by applying the principle of universal design and by combining both top-down and bottom-up approaches. The concept of universal design is not a style but rather an orientation to design. It is based on the premise that design processes must be inclusive, produce equitable benefits and be appropriate to human functioning, gender, demographic group and social, economic and cultural setting and historical development experience.<sup>18</sup> With this in mind, performance standards and technical requirements for accessibility should produce results for persons with disabilities and non-disabled



persons alike. In this regard, the European Union experience in developing its European-wide standards on accessible built environments has provided an illustrative example of the implementation of a mix of strategies aimed at promoting accessibility.

### **Promoting accessibility in the European Union: a case study**

The European Committee for Standardization (CEN) is the organization responsible for planning, drafting and adopting European Standards in all areas of economic activity, except electro-technology and telecommunications. The 32 National Members of CEN develop, jointly, voluntary European Standards (ENs), which have a unique status since they also are national standards in each of its 32 Member countries.

In September 1999, the European Commission issued a mandate to European standardization organizations to prepare a guidance document for standards developers on the safety and utility of products to people with special needs (older persons and persons with disabilities), including accessibility in the built environment. This was issued as CEN/CENELEC Guide 6: *Guidelines for standards developers to address the needs of older persons and persons with disabilities*.<sup>19</sup>

Guide 6 had three aims: (a) to inform, increase understanding and raise awareness about how human abilities—sensory, physical, cognitive and allergic—impact on the functionality of products, services and environments; (b) to outline the relationship between requirements in standards and accessibility and the functionality of products and services; and (c) to raise awareness about the benefits of adopting accessible design principles in terms of wider markets.

In November 1999, the European Commission adopted a series of measures to combat discrimination, based on Article 13 of the Amsterdam Treaty. Among these measures was a

focus on non-discrimination on the grounds of disability, the reasonable accommodation of persons with disabilities in access to employment and training, and the promotion of the adequate integration of persons with disabilities into working environments.<sup>20</sup>

In 2003, the European Union observed the European Year of Persons with Disabilities. Within the framework of the Year, the European Union sought to raise public awareness of the benefits of accessibility to all persons, and to assess the legal and political climate for implementing minimum standards toward achieving a Design for All approach to the implementation of accessibility.

In 2010, in a move towards providing guidance in the concept of universal design, the European Union carried out an inventory assessment of accessibility standards in member countries. The assessment found that—despite the benefits of environmental accessibility being well known—there were examples in current built environments where buildings and spaces—both public and private—did not provide appropriate levels of accessibility. The review found that there was a substantial body of regulations, standards and guidance available to guide design and provision of accessible built environments, but that there were some gaps and weaknesses in national documents concerning functional accessibility requirements, as well as differences in minimum requirements and in the way conformity was assessed.

In order to address identified weaknesses in accessibility legislation, guidance and conformity systems in Europe, the review recommended the introduction of a common, European Union-level approach to requirements specification, accessibility standards and conformity assessment, which would involve: (a) preparation and adoption of a European Union technical reference document (EN standard) on the basic functional requirements for accessibility of the built environment;

(b) preparation and adoption of a European Union technical reference document (EN standard) on the minimum technical specifications related to the functional requirements; and (c) preparation and adoption of a European Union model for tendering and conformity assessment to address accessibility throughout public procurement processes.

On 15 November 2010, the European Commission adopted the European Disability Strategy 2010–2020, with the aim of breaking down barriers that prevented persons with disabilities from participating in society on an equal basis.<sup>21</sup> The Strategy stated that disability was regarded as an issue of rights rather than one of discretion. It outlined ways in which the European Union and national Governments could empower people with disabilities so they could enjoy their rights fully. Improving accessibility to goods and services, health care, employment and education was a specific measure in the Strategy. Proposed actions included the use of standardization, public procurement, or grant aid and assistance rules to make goods and services accessible to people with disabilities and foster a European Union market for assistive devices in line with the proposed European Accessibility Act.<sup>22</sup>

There are important lessons to be taken from the European experience for integrating accessibility into the core goals and targets of international development:

- (a) **Perception matters:** As with the European Union, the policy guidance for integrating accessibility already exists in the form of the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities; however, attention must be given to public awareness of the mutual benefits of accessibility.
- (b) **Stock-taking is important:** As in the European case, it is important to take stock of existing standards and programmes and conduct an adequate assessment of whether, and in what context, they serve their purpose.

This will provide the foundation for setting minimum international standards for achieving accessibility in the built environment, while providing enough flexibility to accommodate national and domestic needs.

- (c) **Institutional frameworks matter:** Standard-setting should include systems for oversight and evaluation.
- (d) **Capacity-building is integral:** Once standards are set, models and toolkits should be made available to simplify implementation.

# CHAPTER THREE

**Accessibility and the post-2015  
development: shaping "The  
Future We Want"**

***How does accessibility relate to sustainable development? What more should be done to promote accessibility as a core aspect of development?***

#### **KEY MESSAGES**

- **Accessibility adds value to the lived environment and benefits all members of society.**
- **Mainstreaming accessibility into the international development agenda is necessary for a truly inclusive and sustainable future.**
- **Participatory processes that give voice to persons with disabilities are the most effective means of ensuring that accessibility is mainstreamed in the post-2015 development agenda.**

Accessibility can play a considerable role in development: a significant spectrum and percentage of the world's population of all ages can benefit from accessibility measures and the progressive removal of barriers to their full and effective participation in social life and development.

A recent study by the World Health Organization, in collaboration with the World Bank Group, estimated that, in 2010, there were more than one billion persons (approximately 15 per cent of the global population) living with disabilities,<sup>23</sup> and that more than 80 per cent of persons with disabilities lived in developing countries. The Madrid Plan of Action on Ageing (2002) stated that accessibility was an important factor in furthering the goal of a society for all ages. The United Nations Population Division estimated that, in 2009, there were 737 million persons (slightly more than 10 per cent of the global population) aged

60 and older, and that, in most regions, the population of older persons (aged 60 and above) was growing faster than the total population.<sup>24</sup> As the incidence of impairment and disability increases with age, this trend supports further the need for including disability on the international development agenda.

Building accessibility and the principle of universal design into the international development agenda would ensure that every environment, space, product or service, whether physical or virtual, could be easily approached, reached, entered, exited, interacted with, understood or otherwise used by persons of varying capabilities. At the same time, it would ensure that persons with disabilities were fully integrated into all aspects of social, economic, politi-

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**... Building accessibility and the principle of universal design into the international development agenda would ensure that every environment, space, product or service, whether physical or virtual, could be easily approached, reached, entered, exited, interacted with, understood or otherwise used by persons of varying capabilities. ...**

cal and cultural life on equal terms with other citizens through the provision of flexibility in the way all people were able to interact with their physical and virtual environments.

Member States of the United Nations have recognized increasingly that ensuring accessibility for, and inclusion of, persons with disabilities was important for achieving internationally agreed development goals. In June 2012, the interlinkages between disability and sustainable development were addressed in the outcome document of the United Nations Conference on Sustainable Development (Rio+20). Promising steps have also been taken in the process towards the post-2015 development agenda itself. For example, in May 2013, the report of the Secretary-General's High-Level Panel of Eminent Persons on the Post-2015 Agenda addressed disability in a number of critical ways, especially as a crosscutting development issue, and in relation to human rights, participation and monitoring.<sup>25</sup> At the high-level meeting of the General Assembly on the realization of the Millennium Development Goals and other internationally agreed development goals, Member States reiterated these calls and resolved to promote accessibility, including through following the universal design approach.

The Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities has been the impetus for adjusting the approach to disability and accessibility in international development. Under its provisions, States parties are obliged to promote accessibility in development.

When perceived as a compliance issue, accessibility has often been viewed as an expense in providing and maintaining—or outsourcing operation to a private enterprise—facilities and services, rather than as a necessary investment in infrastructure that would eventually enhance and expand opportunities for all persons. While this shift in perception is slowly taking shape at the international level, more needs to be done to cement accessibility as a core development objective. Viewing



accessibility as a global public good<sup>26</sup> would help to propel this change.

Experts at the United Nations Expert Meeting on the nexus between inclusive societies and development and the promotion of accessible information and communications technologies (Tokyo, 2012) concluded that accessibility to "the general systems of society" should be specifically referenced in the vision statement on the post-2015 development framework. Enhancing accessibility for all individuals, including for persons with varying capabilities, will benefit all members of society and contribute to the realization of "The Future We Want".

### **Accessibility: a global public good**

The benefit that one person can experience from accessible physical environments and information and communications technologies does not diminish the opportunities for others to enjoy the ease and flexibility of using an accessible good or service at the national, regional or global levels. Accessibility can thus be identified as a member of the set of global public goods and not a defined benefit for a particular group. The concept of global public good is important to advancing environmental accessibility in the context of mainstream development, since it redefines resource allocation questions from being a matter of compliance to becoming investments that contribute to improved societal well-being.

Public goods are commodities and services with two principal characteristics: (a) non-competitiveness, which means that offering the good or service to others involves zero marginal cost: consumption of a public good by any one consumer does not reduce the quantity available to others; and (b) non-excludable, which means no one can be excluded from a public good.<sup>27</sup> In addition to these characteristics, global public goods are not defined by geographical location.

Since global public goods are not defined with reference to a particular location, the question becomes: at what level should

the good or service be produced, disseminated and maintained?

Under international law, States must agree to accede to international obligations.<sup>28</sup> In the case

of accessibility, the international community has adopted and re-affirmed commitments in binding

and non-binding international instruments, which are reflected in

actions by Governments to promote accessibility. Recognizing

accessibility as a global public good rather than a compliance

issue would afford it a central place in international development

policy analyses, budgeting decisions and implementation

management.

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**... The benefit that one person can experience from accessibility in the physical environment and in information and communications technologies does not diminish the opportunities for others to enjoy the ease and flexibility of using an accessible good or service at the national, regional or global levels. ...**

### **Conclusion: shaping the future we all want**

While there has been a growing body of knowledge and expertise concerning accessibility and its promotion, the focus has been especially on infrastructural design of physical and virtual environments. There is less evidence of public recognition of the ways in which accessible and usable design contributes to the sustainable and inclusive development of all individuals and societies. Discussion of the creative and effective use of the first principles of accessibility generally occur in publications addressed to building and design professionals, academics and organizations concerned with the advancement of persons with disabilities, as well as governmental bodies, which are often sponsors of accessibility and functionality efforts. This tends to reinforce perceptions that accessible and usable design is a compliance issue, a topic concerned mainly with

targeted populations and not a mainstream resource that contributes to improved standards of living and well-being for all.

A successful post-2015 United Nations development agenda requires progress in building a rights-based, secure and equitable world for all persons. In that context, accessibility is an issue that cuts across the four domains of concern from the disability perspective, namely: social inclusion, environmental stewardship, economic inclusion, and civil and political participation.<sup>29</sup>

The post-2015 development framework should include a commitment to accessibility to the general systems of society on an equal basis for all. This is an essential precondition for the full and effective participation of persons with disabilities in development. Furthermore, seeing accessibility as an investment, rather than a cost or compliance issue, can support its integration into the post-2015 development agenda. This requires a mindset shift from policies that address mainly the objective of equalization of opportunities for persons with disabilities as a targeted group, to a focus on measures that contribute to accessibility to the general systems for all. To accommodate this shift, policymakers, at international and national levels, must reconsider their vision of development, and the role of people and processes in it. In addition, decision makers must consider the types of skills, knowledge and techniques necessary for achieving accessibility through applying the principle of universal design.

Implementing this new vision will require new tools of analysis, planning and programming of resources, monitoring and evaluation with a view to shifting the debate from the costs of accessibility to its role as an investment in sustainable development. In this regard, the integration and coordination of persons with varying functional needs and disabilities will be critical. Participatory processes that give voice to persons with disabilities are the most effective means of ensuring that accessibility is mainstreamed in the post-2015 development agenda.

# NOTES

- 1 Leo Valdes, "Accessibility on the Internet", report to the United Nations (16 June 1998, updated 31 March 2004) available [online] at: <http://www.un.org/esa/socdev/enable/disacc00.htm>, cited in report of the Secretary General, "Implementation of the world programme of action concerning disabled persons", (United Nations document A/54/388/Add.1).
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- 3 See the Universal Declaration of Human Rights; the Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights; and the International Covenant on Civic and Political Rights.
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- 5 A/37/351/Add.1 and Add.1/Corr.1, annex.
- 6 A/RES/48/96, annex.
- 7 A/RES/61/106, annex.
- 8 See Article 9 of the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities.
- 9 See Box 1.
- 10 See Box 2.
- 11 General Assembly resolution 60/1, paragraph 139.
- 12 General Assembly resolution 65/1, paragraphs 28 and 70.
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- 17 Essential components of Web accessibility available [online] at: <http://www.w3.org/WAI/intro/components.php>.
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- 23 World Health Organization and the World Bank Group, *World Report on Disability 2011* (Geneva: World Health Organization, 2011), p. 29. WHO produced the estimate using data from its *World Health Survey* and *Global Burden of Disease, 2004 update*. Using 2004 data, the latest year for which data were available from surveys and burden of disease estimates, the *World Health Survey* and *Global Burden of Disease* provides global prevalence of disability estimates among the adult population (age 15 and older) of 15.6 per cent and 19.4 per cent respectively. Based on 2010 population estimates—6.9 billion, with 5.04 billion persons aged 15 years and over and 1.86 billion under 15 years of age—and the 2004 disability prevalence estimates (*World Health Survey* and *Global Burden of Disease*) there were estimated to be about 785 (15.6 per cent) to 975 (19.4 per cent) million persons 15 years and older living with disability.

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- 28 Professor Nordhaus, op. cit., discusses the Westphalian dilemma in producing global public goods: sovereign States have the right to govern within national territory; international obligations can be imposed on sovereign States only with its consent. Production of global public goods, Professor Nordhaus noted, often was characterized by inaction in the absence of appropriate international intergovernmental mechanisms that could take action with the agreement of participating States.
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