

**Document WTDC14/21-E**  
**28 January 2014**  
**Original: French**

**SOURCE:** Ministry of Posts, Telecommunications and New Information and  
Communication Technologies (Democratic Republic of the Congo)

**TITLE:** Access to telecommunication, information and communication services (ICT)  
for persons living with disabilities

**COD/21/1** Objective 5

**Abstract:**

According to the World Health Organization (WHO), it is estimated that 650 million people in the world live with some type of disability; 80% of these people live in developing countries. The number continues to grow, creating survival challenges due to their high degree of dependence.

As the world continues to witness the dynamism in the growth of the ICT sector, it should be noted that greater social inclusion needs to be considered at all levels for sustainable ICT growth, economic development and reduction of the dependence that results from excluding people/consumers with special needs and hence negating efforts put in development.

This contribution puts forward some policy and regulatory remedies in order to improve conditions of access to ICT services by people with disabilities and gives also current status of projects which gives access to ICT services for persons with disabilities and with special needs in the Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC).

Accessibility is a major concern for people with mobility impairments, total or partial visual impairments, hearing impairments, as well as other forms of situational disabilities caused by barriers like the environment, language and geographical factors.

There are several issues to consider in order to achieve the objective of including persons with disabilities in the information society. This should start with raising awareness on the need for policies and strategies that will help in meeting the ICT needs of persons with disabilities by ensuring that both equipment and services are accessible to them.

This will not only ensure an inclusive information society but will also enable ITU Member States to meet their obligations under Article 9 of the UN Convention on the rights of persons with disabilities adopted by the United Nations assembly in Geneva in 2006.

**Why should the world take action?**

- To help people with disabilities to achieve their goals and improve their quality of life
- To make everyday tasks easier
- To help them to save time
- To ensure that nothing is impossible for them because of their disabilities
- To ensure that people with disabilities have access to development and ICT data.

## **ICT policy, legal and regulatory framework for disabled people in DRC**

In the case of DRC, the Head of State has just passed a law on broadcasting containing practical provisions for persons with disabilities. The Government and the operators in the ICT sector envisage that the special circumstances of persons with disabilities will be taken into account.

Also, the ICT bill, which is in the process of adoption by the Government, considers more specifically people with disabilities, establishing a permanent committee for elderly and disabled persons. The committee will be responsible for providing advice on the interests in relation to ICT matters of elderly persons and of persons with disabilities.

It is obvious that this new provision about disabled people is very important and very critical. In order to improve access to communal services as part of the goal of universal service, the telecommunication and broadcasting operators and other State, local administration and private stakeholders are mobilized to work together in order to create comprehensive projects with the compliance of their mutual interests.

The major issues confronted by people with disabilities with respect to ICTs are "accessibility" and "ease of use". People with different disabilities may not be capable of accessing and utilizing ICTs. For example, a blind person may not be able to use a mobile phone with no text-to-speech capability; a deaf person may be unable to communicate with the emergency services requiring spoken conversation; a physically disabled person may be unable to respond to a website using mouse-clicks; online videos may not be easily accessible to blind and deaf people; and people with cognitive disabilities may be unable to view the different pages of a website properly.

In order to facilitate ICT accessibility for people with disabilities, various economic and international institutions have introduced special e-accessibility projects along with special guidelines.

### **Universal service for disabled people**

Use of ICTs by people with disabilities is an initiative of the Ministry of Social Affairs of DRC. It provides for a census with a view to drawing up a plan for collaborative services aimed at increasing ICT use by people with disabilities and ensuring that ICT equipment adapted to their needs is made available to them.

### **Conclusion**

People with disabilities make up a large proportion of the world's population. According to the World Health Organization (WHO), more than one third of the world's people live with some form of disability.

Challenges facing people with disabilities are due mainly to poverty and inadequate education. ICTs can provide appropriate solutions in education and in other areas. The governments of developing countries should face up to these challenges and launch extensive projects for people with disabilities. Projects can be prepared through cooperation with ICT operators, academia, development NGOs and regional and international bodies.

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