Strategies for the Inclusion of accessibility and universal design in a Post-2015 development agenda

Mukhtar AlShibani[a,]

[a] *Global Alliance on Accessible Technologies and Environments - GAATES*

Abstract. Mainstreaming universal design is a cross-sector and cross-disciplines exercise. GAATES has identified barriers and strategies as well as stakeholders for including universal design and accessibility in a Post-2015 development agenda.

Keywords. Universal design, development, agenda, accessibility, barriers, strategies.

Introduction

GAATES is the leading international organization dedicated to the promotion of accessibility of electronic and communication technologies and accessibility of the built environment.

Our mission is to promote the understanding and implementation of accessibility of the sustainable built, social and virtual environments, including architectural, infrastructural design, transportation systems, habitat, and electronic information and communication technologies so that everyone.

GAATES' objective is to improve access for the estimated one billion people with disabilities around the world, the majority of who live in developing countries. People with disabilities are described as the poorest of the poor. Their community often marginalizes them, by the lack of accessibility to the built environment, transportation and related facilities, as well as information and communications technologies.

We have an international presence and membership from 26 countries, and cooperative agreements with governmental institutions and civil society organizations worldwide.

Next our organization has compiled obstacles encountered and challenges faced in relation to implementing policies and programs for accessibility in ICTs, the built environment, transportation and tourism in a comprehensive development agenda for persons with disability with accessibility and universal design as a core element. We've also listed strategies or actions that have proven successful promoting the inclusion of accessibility and universal design.

1. Barriers

What are the major obstacles encountered and challenges faced in relation to implementing policies and programs for accessibility in ICTs, the built environment, transportation and tourism?

1.1. ICTs

- In the field of ICT, the major challenge faced is the lack of mandatory requirements by States Parties to fully adopt leading international standards such as the W3C WCAG 2.0

1.2. Built Environment

- Language detailing the inclusion and protection of the rights of persons with disabilities is often not included in National or States' Human Rights and/or other Legislation. Where it is included, it is frequently not taken as seriously or protected as vigorously as other rights, such as religious rights, gender rights, etc.
- When policies are developed, they are either not implemented, or implemented without an enforcement plan and a plan for levying consequences for non-compliance. When there is implementation, there appears to be a lack of monitoring
- There are many countries, including many who have ratified the CRPD and have pledged support to reach the MDG's, who do not have building codes, standards or regulations.
- The Universal Design and accessibility provisions for the built environment need to have the force of law, and be included in the mandatory building code.

1.3. Transportation

- IThe UN-CRPD, although effective in changing various policies and programmes, appear to be having little effect on accessible transportation.
- Air travel for persons with mobility impairments is increasingly becoming more and more difficult, rather than improving;
- Both city and inter-city bus service providers continue to purchase vehicles that are not accessible, and are not being adapted to be accessible;
- Boats and ferry services continue to operate fleets that restrict mobility while on board, and do not have inclusive emergency evacuation plans, etc.

1.4. Tourism

- Building codes and standards do not address accessibility of the built environment requirements for many tourism related aspects, including

hotels/motels, amusement parks, historical sites, beaches, parks and open spaces, etc.
- There are currently very poor statistics, if any, in most countries regarding the participation rates of people with disabilities, these visitors will remain unrecognized and consequently their needs will not be adequately served

2. Strategies

Approaches or actions that have proven successful promotion the inclusion of universal design and accessibility in public polices and private sector actions.

2.1. ICTs

- The direct involvement of persons with disabilities, as well as disability organizations. Similar to engaging champions in industry, is involving champions with disabilities who use, test and design ICTs. Especially those who are able to come up with low cost solutions that can have a global application and implementation at a low cost (or low cost to benefit ratio)
- The private sector can use their procurement power as large consumers of ICT goods and services to encourage a more Universal Design of mainstream ICT goods and services.

2.2. Built Environment

- Monitoring and enforcement: Enforcement must be impartial and applied equally to all developers, regardless of size of the company or of the size of the development.
- Education is also a key element of this, there must be education of architects, engineers, urban planners, landscape architects, etc.

2.3. Transportation

- A clear strategy and programme of action, and implementing mechanisms, some with funding attached to ensure progress.
- Implementation of Universal Design principles as non-negotiable conditions of all new build vehicles and infrastructure, and of obtaining operating licensing.
- Proportionate access improvements should also be required whenever infrastructure and vehicle refurbishment or upgrading is taking place.
- Ensure that it is no longer acceptable to regard the provision of accessibility and accessible services as an optional extra, rather than an integral part of the transportation chain; from the development of the built facilities to transportation vehicles.

2.4. Tourism

- What is good for visitors with access needs is also good for the local population…. Tourism development can be a valuable tool for change and improvement in the living conditions and opportunities for participation of citizens with disabilities. Not only from the perspective of better access to the built environment, but also in terms of opportunities to participate in the labor pool and service industries related to tourism.
- Establish monitoring procedures at global level to ensure that targets for accessible tourism development are clearly defined and met.

3. Effective mechanism to provoke change and the implementation of those strategies include:

- Raising awareness
- Mandatory requirements for accessibility
- International certification process of accessibility consultants
- Development of on line tools that provide concrete information, search tools, and clear explanations
- Workshops and seminars worldwide, on the benefit of the development and implementation of not only the CRPD, but of universal design
- Identify and promote knowledge experts and centers of expertise amongst stakeholders.

4. Specific measures that should be taken to promote accessible environment:

- A comprehensive approach to providing guiding technical information is required to ensure that people with disabilities have the same access to the built, ICT and transportation environments, regardless of where they live, or how rich or poor their government, or country is.
- The capacity building of persons with disabilities is a starting point for upgrading the knowledge and level of expertise of all stakeholders, from States Parties, to educators, to private sector organizations.
- Well-educated persons with disabilities results in a group of persons willing and able to advocate for changes to the built environment, and greater access to accessible information and communication technologies. They are in a position to advocate and implement changes to building codes and standards and procurement policies.

A cross-sector approach is needed, as accessibility is a multidisciplinary task. The Sectors to involve in order to promote and strengthen the development and application of accessibility strategies:
- Government
- Service Providers and Operators

- DPO's and NGO's
- People with disabilities (mobility, vision, speech & hearing, cognitive)
- Experts in Accessible Environments, ICTs, Transportation.
- Colleges, including design school, engineering and others.Item
- Item

5. How GAATES can help with those strategies and specific actions:

There are several projects the we have proposed to global organizations that address the challenges noted in this document and that will contribute to implement the strategies:
- Handbook on the application of the CRPD accessibility requirements
- Development of harmonized international and national code and standards
- Training of public officers, faculty members and NGO officers on accessibility and universal design
- Assessment and certification of accessibility consultants
- Assessment and development of public policies on disability-accessibility