Consultative meeting organized by UNESCO and Microsoft Corporation

Accessible ICTs and Personalized Learning for Students with Disabilities:
A Dialogue among Educators, Industry, Government and Civil Society

Talking points
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Good morning.
The theme of the expert meeting today and tomorrow is the inclusion of one of the most marginalized groups of society – Persons with Disabilities (PWD). This is particularly relevant and close to UNESCO’s mission and goals as it aims to create the conditions for dialogue among people, based upon respect for commonly shared human values.

We are pleased to welcome more than 30 experts from over the world, who will contribute with their experience to the empowerment of persons with disabilities and advise UNESCO on how best we could serve to their needs and planning new activities.

**We are pleased to acknowledge that Microsoft Corporation is the major partner of this meeting (they provided versatile support for the organization of the meeting).**

**Critical challenges**

Today 15% of the world’s population are people with disabilities, the majority living in developing countries.
In addition to being acutely vulnerable to exclusion, disabled people are disproportionately poor, and poor people are disproportionately disabled.

- Over 80% of people with disabilities live in isolated rural areas in developing countries
- 62 million children of primary school age cope with some form of disability
- 186 million children with disabilities have not completed primary school
- Fewer than 2% of children with disabilities in developing countries are in school

This divide is the result of lack of access to appropriate learning environments, employment opportunities, proper health care, relevant information, as well as other services and facilities to improve people’s daily lives. Some of the services for persons with disabilities are more expensive and not of the best quality.

**International commitments:**

The United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (adopted in December 2006) lays the foundation for the
equalization of opportunities and full participation in society of persons with disabilities.

- 106 countries have already ratified the UN Convention
- 63 countries have already ratified optional protocol

For the first time in history, a legally binding instrument has been created to promote, protect and ensure the full and equal enjoyment of all human rights by persons with disabilities, and States should introduce measures that make services and goods accessible to persons with disabilities without discrimination.

Several of the general principles indicated in the UN Convention are directly linked to UNESCO’s mandate:

5. Equality and non-discrimination
6. Women with disabilities
8. Awareness-raising
9. Accessibility
21. Freedom of expression and opinion and access to information
24. Education
27. Work and employment
29. Participation in political and public life
30. Participation in cultural life, recreation, leisure and sport
31. Statistics and data collection
32. International cooperation

**UNESCO’s contribution**

UNESCO advocates for the building of inclusive knowledge societies, a vision of people-centered and development-oriented societies, where access to information and communication helps all people to develop themselves and achieve their full potential.

Information and Communication Technology, including the Internet, has tremendous potential to improve the capacity of people with disabilities to access information and knowledge, and increase their independence to develop themselves, improve their daily lives and broaden their horizons (for example through access to e-learning programmes, networking opportunities, e-employment, online shopping, e-health, etc.).

UNESCO also recognizes the need to:
➢ Prepare national policies and strongly encourages local governments to introduce specific legislation to safeguard the rights of persons with disabilities;

➢ Train key professionals

➢ Adapt digital media to the nature of disabilities;

➢ Collect statistical data;

➢ Carry out research and assign ministerial responsibility for disability issues;

UNESCO also encourages governments to provide services for persons with disabilities such as equal access to the Internet and educational opportunities and, at the local level, encourages the development of accessible applications (web and technologies), and builds capacity-building of disabled persons to use those new technologies.

4. Some of you attended an expert meeting “Mainstreaming ICTs for Persons with Disabilities to access information and knowledge” which was organized by UNESCO Communication and Information Sector’s together with G3ICT on 22-23 February 2010 in Paris.
I would like to take this opportunity and thank Axel Leblois for his support, dedication and excellent partnership with UNESCO. Truly, the G3ICT is one of the major partners for UNESCO in this area.

Today’s meeting is directly linked to and contributes to the implementation of the recommendations provided by the expert group on mainstreaming ICT in inclusive education in 2010 (just mentioned), particularly the second recommendation for UNESCO’s action:

1. Making UNESCO ICT accessible
2. **Mainstreaming ICT in inclusive education**
3. Mobilizing resources and international cooperation
4. Creating an information and knowledge access ecosystem

During the past two years, UNESCO has implemented a number of activities in this area:

In October 2010, UNESCO has introduced a new Policy on the Employment of Persons with Disabilities. UNESCO aims to provide reasonable accommodation necessary to enable a person with a
disability to enter into and remain in employment within the Organization by implementing measures in various areas.

UNESCO and the Ontario Ministry of Social Services and Community (Canada) provided support to Inclusive Design Institute (OCAD) for the development of guidelines for inclusive access to digital office documents.

Early next year, we expect to share with you a global report on use of ICTs in education. It will be based on five regional reports (Asia-Pacific, Eastern Europe and Central Asia, Africa, LAC and Arab States). We wish to thank Mr Mohamed Jemni who is here with us today for his work, as he is the author of the MENA region report.

A number of CI publications are available as electronic books in EPUB, free and open e-book format.

Events organized at WSIS and IGF on accessibility aspects, contributed to other international events.

I also would like to acknowledge that UNESCO’s Member States introduced accessibility aspects in their country reports which were submitted for the 2nd consolidated report on measures taken to
implement the **Recommendation concerning the Promotion and Use of Multilingualism and Universal Access to Cyberspace, adopted by the General Conference in 2003.** It was presented to the Executive Board (in May 2011) and General Conference (in November 2011). The Member States indicated that specific measures have been taken to enhance access to information and knowledge for persons with disabilities, namely

- increase **broadband connectivity** targeting also distinct social groups, such as youth, women, the elderly and persons with disabilities;
- introduced **web accessibility standards** (WCAG) for public websites;
- put efforts to build **capacities** of the Internet users, including persons with disabilities, for creating digital local content using ICTs;
- introduced specific provisions for facilitating access to knowledge of people with visual impairments, including **libraries** and transmission of audio works through the Internet;
- implemented projects to make **interactive content and applications accessible for all**, regardless of geographic location, technology, or disability.
Today’s meeting has the following main objectives:

- facilitate a deep, multi-stakeholder dialogue on the challenges of and practical solutions for promoting personalization through technology in the classroom for students, particularly with learning difficulties and physical disabilities;

- collect and consolidate strategies and tactics to accommodate the needs of students with learning difficulties and physical disabilities

- use the outcomes of the meeting to enhance ICT Teacher Competency Framework by adding a chapter on disabilities.

Now, I give the floor to the representative of Microsoft, Mr James Thurston, Senior Strategist for Global Policy and Standards, Microsoft Corporation, who will give his welcoming remarks