Nepal Telecommunications Authority

MEDIA BRIEFING ON

Making ICT and mobile phones accessible for persons with disabilities

Kathmandu Nepal

08 November 2012

Out of the 7 billion world's population, over a billion persons around the world are living with – some form of disability.[1] Out of these, more than 85% live in developing countries and subsist below the poverty line. The majority of the disabled are unable to participate meaningfully in mainstream society and lead independent lives on account of lack of access to assistive devices and other means of empowerment. They are thus unable to avail basic human rights such as to education, employment, cultural materials and information. This is particularly true of those living in rural areas.

In today's increasingly connected world, access to Information and Communication Technology (ICT) holds the key to digital inclusion and empowerment which are essential for achieving Millennium Development Goals, job creation and moving to information society. In particular, for the differently abled persons, this implies that ICTs must be available, affordable and accessible so that they can use the ICT services in no less effective manner compared to others. When ICT is made accessible with the help of an appropriate policy and regulatory framework which facilitates usage of suitable assistive technologies, it also benefits the aged and the illiterates thereby effectively contributing towards Digital Inclusion.

 Nepal has a deep commitment towards inclusion of persons with disabilities, which is expressed in its constitution and other laws. It has signed and ratified several international instruments in this regard, most importantly, the United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (UNCRPD) and its optional protocol. UNCRPD assures basic human rights for persons with disabilities such as right to education, employment, political rights, cultural materials, independent living and the right to opinion and expression and recognizes ICT as a critical tool to realize these rights.

Today, advancements in ICT, especially the mobile phone, have made it possible for persons with disabilities to communicate effectively and access information and services on the internet. For instance, blind persons are able to access text using voice based technology and deaf persons can use text messages to communicate over phone. This is especially important when we consider that Nepal has a predominantly young population who would benefit greatly from participation in information society. Not only persons with disabilities, but other groups such as elderly persons and illiterate persons can also benefit tremendously from these accessible technologies and features.

---

[1] World Disability Report 2011

Recognising the significance and potential of ICT for the empowerment of persons with disabilities and other underprivileged groups, the Ministry of Information and Communication and Nepal Telecommunications Authority under the technical collaboration of the International Telecommunication Union (ITU) (United Nations Specialised Agency for Telecommunications and ICT) have undertaken a project wherein ITU shall prepare a report to identify gaps and make recommendations for policy, regulatory and project intervention/initiatives in Nepal to implement ICT accessibility for persons with disabilities.

Senior Advisor of ITU Mr. Sameer Sharma said "ITU is committed for ICT development in Nepal with special focus on Digital Inclusion to promote access to, as well as use and knowledge of, telecommunications and ICTs for persons with disabilities and people living in rural, isolated and poorly served communities in Nepal. Commitment by the State and concerted coordinated efforts amongst the relevant Ministries and involvement of representatives of disabled communities in this work will ensure mainstreaming of differently enabled persons."

Director and Acting Chief of the Office of Nepal Telecommunications Authority (NTA), Mr. Ananda Raj Khanal told that the very project was conceived when two persons with visual impairments came to him for some financial assistance to visit India to explore how ICTs have been used by persons with disabilities in India. He said ,"This incident inspired me to do something for persons with disability. Now we have this project". He further expressed his commitment on behalf of NTA to make telecommunications and ICT services not only available, affordable and reliable but also accessible for people who are otherwise left behind. He also stressed the need for revisiting the existing business model to ensure digital inclusion.

The Secretary of Ministry of Information and Communications Mr. Surya Prasad Silwal expressed his commitment to facilitate the implementations of the recommendations of the report from the government side.

Such Special Initiatives are designed to ensure that people with special needs are targeted by efforts to bridge the digital divide. The report examines the international framework relating to accessibility and disability and its relevance for Nepal. It explains basic principles of ICT accessibility, showcases available technologies, features and services for persons with disabilities and gives an overview of the level of ICT usage and existing barriers in Nepal. Based on an assessment of the present legal, policy and regulatory environment for promoting ICTs for persons with disabilities in Nepal, it identifies gap areas and makes specific recommendations for appropriate action by key ministries and agencies. It also proposes enabling policy and legislative amendments, as well as examples of projects which the Government could fund through the Rural Telecom Development Fund (RTDF). The report stresses the suitability of the RTDF as a source of funding for rolling out accessibility related projects in rural areas. It incorporates international examples of similar use of universal service funds and policies for the promoting accessible ICTs. It is hoped that this report will form the basis for development of a new ICT accessibility policy and other initiatives in coordination with industry and other stakeholders.

The first draft of the report is to be presented in a National Workshop on Making ICTs and mobile phones accessible for persons with disabilities which is being organized by MoIC and NTA on 9th November, 2012 to solicit comments and feedback and is available at ITU website at http://www.itu.int/ITU-D/asp/CMS/Events/2012/Nepal-PwDs/index.asp

The National Workshop will be inaugurated by the Secretary MoIC. There will be representation from other relevant ministries and organizations. Presentations will be given by ITU experts, NTA, Disability organizations and industry.

The workshop will take place on 9th November at Hotel Yak and Yati , Kathmandu, Nepal from 09:00-13:00.

Contact person:

Mr. Udaya Raj Regmi, Deputy Director, Engineering Section, QoS and Interconnection/ International Relations Nepal Telecommunications Authority

Phone: +977-1-2046014

E Mail: urregmi@nta.gov.np