

Implementation Tips for USAID Partners

Sharing Resources and Knowledge Among the Global CSO Community

Inclusive Development 5 | 2020

Definitions

Accessibility and access to services:

The ability for all individuals to access programs, facilities, and amenities that are necessary to fully participate in society. These services may include education, health, livelihoods, and more. Access to services is optimized when users, authorities, and service providers collaborate. To ensure optimization, services should be accessible, particularly in terms of geography (road systems, transport and its inter-modality, proximity to centers of population and immediate surroundings), to all individuals.

Assistive technologies: All tools (non-human) designed to help a person perform everyday activities: mobility aids (for example, wheelchair, walking stick, tricycle); positioning aids (specific chairs, standers); daily living aids (responsive covers, shower seats, handles); visual aids (large print books, white canes, braille, computer screens); hearing devices (amplified telephones, visual systems, hearing aids); communication aids (communication board); and cognitive aids (lists, diaries).

Social services for persons with disabilities: Services (both specialized and mainstream) that contribute to the enforcement of basic social rights and equal opportunities for persons with disabilities.

Unbroken chain of movement: A chain of movement that allows people to access all places and services through the basic RECU steps (Reach, Enter, Circulate, Use) without encountering obstacles or barriers. This chain of movement must be unbroken. If one of the links is missing, efforts to provide access through the remaining links may nevertheless fail.

Providing Accessible Services

Q How can my organization provide accessible services for persons with disabilities?

A Access to basic services (both public and private) by citizens in general, and the most at-risk in particular, is a major area of concern for development partners—be they funding bodies, national decision-makers, local authorities, devolved state entities, civil society organizations, or service providers. Being able to access and use one's environment freely, without assistance, is necessary for maintaining the personal autonomy that is crucial for self-empowerment and self-determination. Individuals are considered to be in “disabling situations” when the interplay between personal and environmental barriers prevents them from accomplishing their life goals. For this reason, to ensure accessibility, organizations and their programs must focus not only on the individuals they employ and serve, but also on their own environments. (See also the *Implementation Tip* on [Improving Inclusion in the Workplace and Human Resource Practices](#).)

Actions to improve accessibility may modify not only the physical environment but also the means of communicating and providing information. Barriers may include inaccessible buildings; lack of accessible transportation; inadequate health, education, and employment standards; and/or lower levels of services and funding for those services. The environment must be adapted to the person.

What is Accessibility?

Accessibility is a precondition for persons with disabilities to live independently and participate fully and equally in society.¹ Without access to *the physical environment, transportation, information and communication (including information and communication technologies and systems), and other facilities and services open or provided to the public*, persons with disabilities do not have equal opportunities for participation in their respective societies.

To accommodate the needs of specific individuals, accessibility of existing premises and services may be improved through *reasonable*

¹ Committee on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities' general comment on Article 9 of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (see Resources).

Mainstream and Specialized Services

Mainstream services: Services intended for general use rather than for use entirely or primarily by persons with disabilities.

Specialized services: Services that aim to respond to the needs of persons with disabilities.

Reasonable Accommodations and Universal Design

Reasonable accommodations, as outlined in the United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities, refer to necessary and appropriate modifications and adjustments that do not impose a disproportionate or undue burden on providers—*where needed in a particular case*—that are made to ensure that persons with disabilities enjoy or exercise all human rights and fundamental freedoms on an equal basis with others.

Universal design means the design of products, environments, programs, and services to be usable by all people, to the greatest extent possible, without the need for adaptation or specialized design. Products are usually created to fit what producers perceive to be the abilities of the majority of the population, but universal design aims at accessibility from the start in order to avoid the need for adaptation.

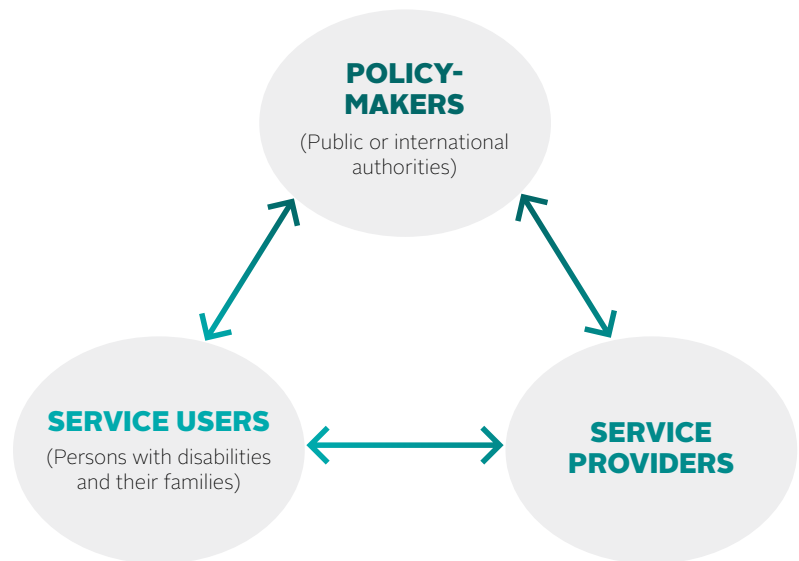
Both reasonable accommodation and universal design cover infrastructure, transportation, communication, and information.

accommodations, while the accessibility of infrastructures, services, products, or systems being planned may be ensured by following the principles of *universal design*. The two concepts are defined further in the column on the left.

Accessible Services

Persons with disabilities often need to access a wide spectrum of services in the community—from early detection of any disability and early intervention, to education, vocational training, health and rehabilitation services, leisure, and transportation. Continuity of services and maintenance of their accessibility are both necessary. An *inclusive system* ensures that both mainstream and specialized services are accessible to persons with disabilities. Accessibility depends heavily on effective interaction among three categories of actors, as illustrated in Figure 1, below.

Figure 1. Three types of actors interact to ensure accessibility



Approaches for achieving accessibility

A number of concepts are integral to ensuring that persons with disabilities have access to the services they need and can engage in the activities important to their lives on an equal basis with others.

A twin-track approach means efforts to improve access take place on somewhat parallel pathways. One is developing initiatives to enhance the empowerment of persons with disabilities. The other is developing or adapting services to meet the needs of persons with disabilities. This “twin track” is necessary to ensure the full and meaningful participation of persons with disabilities in public life (see Figure 2).

Resources

[Accessibility: how to design and promote an environment accessible to all?](#)

[Conduct an Accessibility Audit in Low and Middle Income Countries](#)

[Job Accommodation Network](#)

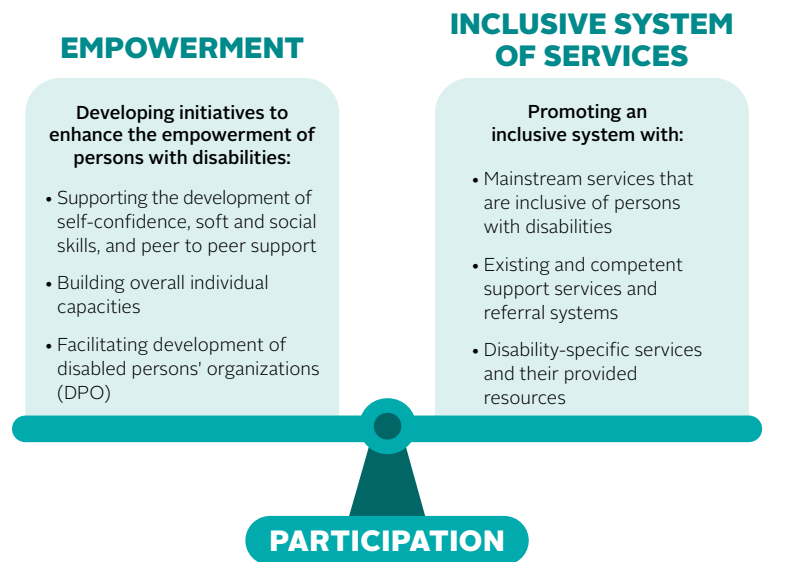
[World Development Report: Making Basic Services Work for Poor People](#)

[United Nations Human Rights, Office of the High Commissioner](#)

[United States Access Board](#)

[International Organization for Standardization's Guide for Addressing Accessibility in Standards](#)

Figure 2: Twin-track approach to achieve accessibility



Source: Humanity & Inclusion.

RECU steps and unbroken chain of movement refer to the process of maintaining accessibility of all points in any potential journey—so that all places and services can be accessed without encountering obstacles or barriers. An unbroken chain of movement is a prerequisite for access to services. If one of the links is missing, the chain is broken, and the overall journey may be impossible. There are four basic types of links, abbreviated as “RECU.”

- **Reach:** Being able to move around the community from home to any needed service—affected by pathways, linking pathways, slopes, transport systems, signage, and tactile floor surface
- **Enter:** Being able to get inside a building—affected by steps, ramps, handrails, door widths, and door handles
- **Circulate:** Being able to move about inside a building—affected by corridors, thresholds, door widths, resting places, signage, and dimensions
- **Use:** Being able to use services and facilities—affected by dimensions and design of internal furniture and communication (such as height and type of furniture, signage, and emergency evacuation procedures)

Accessibility in terms of *chain of movement* can be approached in a comprehensive manner through a pilot project (in a well-defined area) that ensures all the places and services to be made accessible are connected seamlessly. For example, around a central district square, this might mean linking the local mayor's office, primary school, public library, health center, private clinic, religious center, and communication facilities, such as internet cafes. This would allow all users to take part in the activities offered by the district in that central location.

Accessibility and communication by disability type

Focus on six general categories of disability when conducting an accessibility analysis and/or planning improvements to an existing environment or a new design.

Physical: Are the infrastructure and equipment accessible and to what extent? These include external areas, entrances, common spaces, toilets, circulation spaces, working spaces, evacuation system, and so forth. Is the location easy to reach for people with mobility disabilities? Is the furniture usable by everyone? Adaptations to improve accessibility might include:

- ramps and elevators instead of stairs
- desks that can be lower to the ground
- automatic doors (for all spaces, including bathrooms)
- assistive devices such as keyboards and writing materials
- curb cuts

Hearing: Are information/communication techniques accessible to all? Are services, meetings, and workshops accessible to people who are deaf? Would a deaf person be able to learn when an emergency occurs that requires evacuating the building? Are staff able to communicate with people who are deaf or hard-of-hearing? Would a deaf person be able to discuss work with his or her supervisor? Adaptations to improve accessibility might include:

- qualified sign language interpreters
- printed material (posters, flyers, or billboards), dependent upon literacy
- amplification systems such as loud speakers or microphones at workshops
- instructional videos
- pictures and visuals
- provision of paper and pen, so people can write down or draw their questions or requests
- captions on TV programming

Visual: Are information/communication techniques accessible to all? Is information provided for people who are blind or have low vision? Would a person be able to use a screen reader to access files? Are the printed materials used accessible to a person with low vision or who is color blind? Adaptations might include:

- alternative formats such as braille, large print, or electronic formats that can be read by assistive technology such as Job Access With Speech (JAWS)
- assistive devices such as white canes, guide dogs, glasses, or assistive technology
- high contrast materials
- sighted guides, visual and audio descriptions, or audio messages
- radio announcements

For More Information

For this or other issues of *Implementation Tips*, please visit [NGOConnect.net](https://ngoconnect.net). The Web site is a dynamic and interactive portal dedicated to connecting and strengthening CSOs, networks, and CSO support organizations worldwide.

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Intellectual: Are information/communication techniques accessible to all?

Would a person with an intellectual disability be able to find an office or meeting space without asking for help? Would he or she be able to use essential equipment without support? Adaptations might include:

- “easy read” written materials (clear and simple messages supported by pictures)
- radio announcements
- personalized support

Psychosocial: Are services and policies accessible to all? Do your programs take into consideration people who have mental disabilities? Is attention paid to non-apparent or invisible disabilities? It is important for an organization to consider:

- flexible schedules
- access to quiet and dark spaces
- support people or animals
- counseling or therapy options, if requested

Chronic pain, disease, or illness: Are services and policies accessible to all? Do your programs and services consider individuals who are in constant pain or are experiencing a debilitating disease? It is important for an organization to consider:

- access to medication and treatment
- flexible and forgiving schedules
- access to information and referrals

Partnerships can be an important aspect of ensuring that services are accessible. Organizations might also decide if they will be involved in advocacy actions to improve access to services or to support actors involved in advocacy actions (see also *Implementation Tip on Advocating for the Rights of Persons with Disabilities*). When planning partnerships, consider giving priority to DPOs (see also *Implementation Tip on Partnering with Organizations of Persons with Disabilities for Inclusive Local Development*).

