Digital Assistive Technology Challenges and Opportunities: The Potential of Mobile Devices

Side event CRPD Conference of State Parties 2023

Wednesday 14 June 2023, Conference Room 4
1:15-2:30PM New York (EDT), 7:15-8:30PM Geneva (CET),
8:15-9:30PM Nairobi (EAT), 1:15-2:30AM Beijing (CST)

BACKGROUND

There is a widespread lack of understanding surrounding the ability of persons with disabilities to function effectively and participate fully in society when they have access to appropriate assistive technology (AT). Most nations maintain sets of laws and policies designed to include persons with disabilities, however, too often when persons with disabilities in such nations attempt to access their basic rights, even though guaranteed by law, these are either denied or otherwise inaccessible. With this context, it is key to explore the power and versatility of digital technologies to function as AT and reach underserved populations at scale.

Digital technologies are seldom understood and treated as a form of AT, despite their tremendous power and versatility in addressing many of the challenges faced by persons with a variety of disability types. For example, among digital AT products, public policies often fail to fully utilize the potential of the smartphone in improving access to information, social interactions, and overall independence. Smartphones are often not included in national assistive product lists; the lack of digital accessibility standards often results in digital services being frustrating or impossible to use for persons with disabilities; and finally, even amongst individuals who already have smartphones, there is a lack of awareness of and training on smartphone AT capabilities. Important information on government services, education, and employment opportunities are increasingly being relayed through digital means, with many accessing such information on their mobile devices. Thus, action is needed to improve uptake and use of digital AT, such as by providing smart phones to people with disabilities so that they can be part of the ongoing digital transformation.
OBJECTIVE

The objectives of the side-event are to reach key stakeholders like policymakers, duty-bearers, rights-holders, and civil society organizations; catalyze actions which improve access to digital assistive technology; and ensure disability policies and strategies adhere to the best practices which states and international organizations have identified.

The session will focus on examining issues relating to digital assistive technology. Panelists will largely represent those with a lived experience of using digital assistive products or with experience in harmonizing digital disability policy. Each panel member will discuss key issues surrounding these areas of focus and then be asked questions about their recommendations and solutions.

AGENDA

Moderator: Gopal Mitra

Event Time: 1 hour and 15 minutes

Introduction and Opening Statement: Five minutes for introduction and opening statement by Gry Haugsbakken, State Secretary, Ministry of Culture and Equality, Norway. One minute to transition.

Panel discussion:

Theme - Digital Accessibility for Persons with Disabilities

The moderator will take one minute to introduce the five panelists; Rodrigo Machado, National Coordinator for Accessibility and Assistive Technology, representing the Ministry of Human Rights and Citizenship of Brazil; Pascal Bijleveld, Chief Executive Officer at Atscale; Pablo Lecuona, Founder and Executive Director of Tiflonexos; Kylie Shae OAM, Team Lead with the WHO; and Asraa Elghali, a digital assistive technology user from Syria. Panel discussion will last approximately 35 minutes. One-minute transition to questions from the audience.

Questions from the Audience: The panelists will take questions from the audience for 30 minutes. If time allows each panelist will have one minute for a closing statement.

Closing remarks: Victoria Austin, Co-founder and CEO of the Global Disability Innovation Hub will speak for about 5 minutes.

The event will be held in English and interpretation will be available for International Sign Language. Captioning will also be available. Questions and RSVP should be directed to Fernando Botelho at: fbotelho@unicef.org