

**POPULARISING ACCESSIBILITY STANDARDS TO PROMOTE EDUCATION OF CWDs; A PREREQUISITE TO ACHIEVE THE
MILLENNIUM DEVELOPMENT GOAL ON EDUCATION**

By

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Primary readers:

Government of Uganda - Department of education and Construction unit ministry of education and sports (engineers, surveyors, contractors, developers, planners), Development partners

Message:

Using accessibility standards as a guide to create a barrier free environment in schools

Intention: To inform and advocate for accessibility provisions in schools to enable CWDs acquire education as one of the means to a better future and the realisation of the MDG on education for all.

Definitions

Accessibility:

This is the ability to reach a place and manoeuvre within it; use a service, receive information; participate in activities provided in a public place; all these on an equal basis with others, with dignity, independence and safety.

Accessibility standards:

This is a practical guide developed by disability stakeholders in collaboration with Ministry of Gender Labour and Social Development to guide property developers, contractors, planners and service providers to create a barrier free environment. The goal of the standards is to contribute to improving equal access for PWDs, in order to enable them to live independently and participate fully in all aspects of life.

Accessibility situation:

Many stakeholders including the Government of Uganda are constructing facilities and providing services to schools which are not user friendly to CWDs. Water and sanitation facilities are not accessible, Braille, tactile materials and equipments, sign language interpretation services are missing in schools to enhance learning of children with physical, visual and hearing among other impairments.

The general environment in most of Uganda's schools is not barrier-free. It does not allow easy and safe movement, function or access for all, regardless of age, sex or condition. Access by all to physical space and to services is not possible because of obstacles that lead to CWDs loss of dignity and independence while in schools a situation that contributes to their high dropout and low levels.

Facts on education, rights and accessibility:

Education is a right embedded in legal frame works such as the Persons with Disabilities s Act, 2006 section II (Right to Education and Health), the UN Convention on the Rights of PWDs, 2006 Article 24 (on inclusive education), Article 9 (on Accessibility), Millennium Development Goal 2 and several others, it is evident that there is a challenge of inaccessibility and discrimination especially in schools on basis of disability and environment which must be adequately addressed if CWDs are to enjoy their right to education and develop their full potentials.

The Ministry of Works, Transport and Communication (Building and Construction Inspection Report, August 2007) revealed that 95% of the buildings in Kampala, Mpigi and Wakiso Districts are not accessible. A barrier-free environment enables an individual with or without a disability to access every service with dignity and independence.

In September 2008, Uganda ratified the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities and Article 9 of the CRPD requires all States Parties to take measures to ensure that facilities and services are accessible to PWDs. Although Uganda is a State Party to the CRPD and has domestic laws and policies regarding accessibility, the foundation for accessibility is weak.

Inaccessible schools facilities and services are a strong barrier to CWDs accessing and benefiting from education services. School administrators and teachers lack knowledge of sign language, Braille and other specific needs of CWDs which contribute to their admission and retention in schools.

Accessibility Standards were developed as a practical guide to creating a barrier free physical environment. The standards help the constructors/investors/planners/service providers in putting in place facilities and services for example public and private buildings, schools, toilets, latrines, ramps/steps, lifts, wells, boreholes, bathrooms, windows, doors which are user friendly to CWDs in particular and PWDs in general. (*A copy of the accessibility standards can be found on UNAPD website www.unapd.org*)

The new international targets outlined in the MDGs include access to and completion of universal Primary Education by 2015. However, if marginalised groups of learners, such as those with disabilities, continue to be excluded from education due to the inaccessible environment to all including the Blind, Deaf, Deaf-Blind, Psychological disabilities- mental Health, Epilepsy, children, the sick, it will not be possible for Uganda to achieve the MDG on education.

Recommendations:

Government of Uganda should make accessibility standards part of the building control Act so that it can ensure compliance by all stakeholders in the creation of a barrier free environment for all in schools.

Government and her stakeholders in the provision of education services should make use of accessibility standards as a guide in the provision of services, materials and equipments which are accessible for all

Government should re-print and circulate copies of accessibility standards to all its departments to ensure compliance.

Local governments should ensure that all Bills of Quantities (BoQs) incorporate accessibility provisions.

The national plans to achieve Universal Primary and Secondary Education should be implemented in line with accessible and inclusive education initiatives.

The school monitoring system should be improved by reviewing the schools inspectors' checklist to include indicators for monitoring for accessibility in order to promote education of CWDs.