

*COUNTRY STATEMENT*

**Philippines**

***“Philippine Initiatives and Challenges in  
Enhancing ICT Accessibility  
for Persons with Disabilities”***

for the

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Information and Communication Technology Accessibility  
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Presented by

**Dandy C. Victa**

and

**Leovigilda G. Oasin**

Project Development Officer IV

Administrative Officer V

**National Council on Disability Affairs (NCDA)**

# **Philippine Initiatives and Challenges in Enhancing ICT Accessibility for Persons with Disabilities**

*(By Dandy C. Victa and Leovigilda G. Oasin)*

## **INITIATIVES**

The provision of access to information and communication and technology is anchored on the principle that every individual is valuable in his/her own right and should be offered equal opportunity to develop his/her potential.

In 1962, Republic Act 3562 was enacted to declare permanent government commitment to the training of SPED teachers for the blind, the institutionalization of the residential school program and the establishment of the Philippine Printing House for the Blind (PPHB). This is when access to learning and information such as the Braille system and the sign language were finally made permanent aspects of education. This development may as well be identified as the precursor of the current access technology.

Presidential Decree No. 1509 of 1978 established the National Commission Concerning Disabled Persons (NCCDP). The creation of this government agency under the Office of the President articulated the government's responsibility for the fullest protection and assistance to PWDs which, included access to information. The Presidential Proclamation No. 1780 mandating the annual highlighting of PWD concerns, through the observation of the National Disability Prevention and Rehabilitation (NDPR) week was promulgated in 1979.

Landmark legislation was enacted in 1983 known as Batas Pambansa Bilang 344 or the Accessibility Law, which enumerated measures of making not only public buildings and transportation but also information and communication technology accessible to Persons With Disabilities.

In 1991, the Philippines enacted *Republic Act 7277 (Magna Carta for Disabled Persons)* which enumerated and consolidated comprehensive measures to ensure rehabilitation, self-development, and self-reliance that includes specific provisions on accessibility of telecommunications such as the broadcast media, telephone services and all other types of aids and services that would ensure improvement of the total well being of persons with disabilities and their integration to the mainstream of society.

In May 2002, the United Nations Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific (UNESCAP) adopted a resolution "***Promoting an inclusive, barrier-free and rights-based society for people with disabilities in the Asian and Pacific region in the twenty-first century***", also known as the Biwako Millennium Framework which outlined 7 priority areas of concern, that include ***Access to information and communications including ICT***.

The Philippines as a responsible and active member of the United Nations gave efforts to ensure that its commitments are fulfilled vis-à-vis the time frame set under the UNESCAP resolution.

Thus in March 2003, the Philippine government in partnership with the United Nations Division on Economic and Social Affairs (UN-DESA) hosted an “*Interregional Seminar and Regional Demonstration Workshop on Accessible ICT and Persons with Disabilities*”, which was attended by 12 countries namely Bangladesh, Brunei Darussalam, Cambodia, Canada Indonesia, Lao People's Democratic Republic, Myanmar, Pakistan, the Philippines, Thailand, United States and Vietnam. The workshop led to the adoption of two milestone documents namely: the *Manila Declaration on Accessible ICT* and the *Manila ICT Design Recommendations* which served as the first concrete contribution of the Philippines to the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities. They became the cornerstone of Article 9 (Accessibility, paragraph g and h).

To ensure continuity of the country’s commitment to the Biwako Millennium Framework and carry out the action plan to promote web accessibility and *Web-based Information Networking* learned by the NCWDP-RBI team from the Asia Pacific Center on Disability (APCD), the Philippines mounted 3 regional web accessibility workshops specifically in Luzon, Visayas and Mindanao and 1 national Interface workshop for GO-NGO web designers from government, non-government and academic institutions to advocate and promote web accessibility as an empowering socio-economic tool for persons with disabilities.

In 2004, then NCWDP issued Board Resolution No. 21 which enjoined the National Computer Center to a) monitor and assess compliance of participating agencies; b) include web accessibility in the agency’s training programs and c) create relevant policies to use Accessible ICT as empowering tool for PWDs.

To further boost the advocacy campaign towards an accessible ICT, a group of web designers and advocates who were participants in the above-mentioned workshop series formed a group in 2006 known as the “*Philippine Web Accessibility Group*” (PWAG) <http://www.pwag.org>, the first Filipino accessibility group recognized by the London-based Guild of Web Designers (GAWD). Its mission is to teach and promote web accessibility in the Philippines, as a method of making information accessible to all including persons with disabilities (PWD).

In 2007, PWAG in partnership with the National Computer Center successfully convinced the organizers of the Philippine Webby Awards to include web accessibility as an award category for all nominated participating websites.

They also came up with a yahoo group forum [accessibleweb@yahoogroups.com](mailto:accessibleweb@yahoogroups.com) that facilitated continuous exchanges of information and consultations among other designers including persons with disabilities, that led to coming up with specific web accessibility recommendation checkpoints for Philippine designed websites. The checkpoints were divided into maturity stages 1 and 2.

<http://www.pwag.org/designrecommendations.htm>

## **Maturity Stage 1:**

A web content developer **MUST** satisfy this stage. Passing this checkpoint is the **BASIC** requirement in order for the web documents to become accessible. The **Manila Accessible ICT Design Recommendations** form this stage.

## **Maturity Stage 2:**

A web content developer **SHOULD** satisfy this stage. Passing this checkpoint will remove considerable barriers in accessing web documents. The **PWAG Web Accessibility Design Recommendations** form this stage.

### **Maturity Stage 1 (MS 1) Checkpoints**

**MS 1-1** Provide an Access Instruction page for visitors explaining the accessibility features of the web site. Put an e-mail hyperlink for visitors to communicate web page accessibility problems.

**MS 1-2** Avoid using words such as "This" or "Click Here" in creating links. Use descriptive hyperlinks to support text browsers.

**MS 1-3** Attach ALT (alternative) text to graphic images so that assistive computer technology such as screen readers can reach the content.

**MS 1-4** Provide a "D" hyperlink to a page providing descriptive text of photographs that contribute meaningful content to the page.

**MS 1-5** Provide text transcriptions or descriptions for all audio and video clips.

**MS 1-6** Provide alternative mechanisms for online forms such as e-mail or voice/TTY phone numbers since forms are not supported by all browsers.

**MS 1-7** Avoid access barriers like: PDF files with no equivalent HTML or ASCII files, non-linear page formats, frame formats and content that requires user to download software to access it.

### **Maturity Stage 2 (MS 2) Checkpoints**

**MS 2-1** For ALT texts:

**MS 2-1-1** Decorative images must contain null ALT text or ALT="".

**MS 2-1-2** Anchor elements within the Image Maps must contain ALT texts.

**MS 2-1-3** ALT texts that have more than 80 characters long must instead be changed to "D" hyperlink.

**MS 2-2** Provide a Site Map with a link appearing on every page.

**MS 2-3** All pages must provide a link back to the home page.

**MS 2-4** Use Access keys in creating shortcuts to important links and form controls.

**MS 2-5** Provide a "Skip to Content" link in every page.

**MS 2-6** Make the language that you use in your web site easy to understand.

**MS 2-7** Do not use blinking, rolling or scrolling markup tags on your web pages.

**MS 2-8** Provide a LABEL text and ALT text on the input elements of your forms.

**MS 2-9** Avoid using the FONT SIZE markup in your web pages or change the size to relative units.

**MS 2-10** Provide a Search form within your site.

**MS 2-11** Layout must be navigable even if the page style is turned off.

**MS 2-12** Website content must appear clearly even when colors are turned off.

In 2002, then National Council for the Welfare of Disabled Persons (NCWDP) issued Board Resolution No. 22 creating the Sub-Committee on Information Communication and Technology (ICT) and Board Resolution No. 7 in 2003 specifying its specific functions:

1. Recommend policies and legislative measures on accessible ICT to enhance the promotion of opportunities of PWDs in the following areas:  
Employment and Livelihood  
Training and Education  
Transportation and Communication  
And Other related public goods and services not mentioned above
2. Tap concerned agencies in the conduct of research to develop "PWD-friendly" local technologies.
3. Assist concerned government agencies in the monitoring and evaluation of the implementation of existing policies on accessible ICT.
4. Recommend plans and programs on accessible ICT to concerned agencies for their implementation and institutionalization.
5. Promote and encourage the participation of the business sector and other stakeholders in the accessible ICT programs of the government.

## **Introduction of DAISY in the Philippines**

In 2004, the Bangkok-based Asia-Pacific Development Center on Disability conducted *DAISY For All* sponsored training. The Philippines through then National Council for the Welfare of Disabled Persons (NCWDP) now National Council on Disability Affairs (NCDA) sent a four man delegation to represent the country, the Philippine Printing House for the Blind (PPHB), The Resources for the Blind Inc. (RBI) and the Adaptive Technology for the Rehabilitation, Integration and Empowerment of the Visually Impaired (ATRIEV).

The delegation formulated a Philippine DAISY Action Plan and called itself Philippine DAISY Group (PDG). Each of the four member organizations, two GOs and two NGOs agreed to go beyond the mere information sharing stage. As aimed by the DFA training at APCD, the PDG moved to promote DAISY towards the production of information and learning materials into the full adoption and institutionalization of DAISY as a standard in producing Digital Talking Books (DTB). With these objectives, the membership of PDG expanded thus becoming the Philippine DAISY Network (PDN).

## **The Philippine DAISY Network PDN; A Strategy**

With the expansion of its membership which includes the National Library of the Philippines (NLP), the National Computer Center (NCC) and the Commission on Information Communication and Technology (CICT), the National Anti Poverty Commission (NAPC) PWD Sectoral Council, the Philippine National School for the Blind (PNSB) and the Autism Society Philippines (ASP), it became a strong force in promoting and advocating the importance of accessible information especially to persons with disabilities.

As a strategy, PDN alongside PWAG, became the focal group that made breakthroughs for people with print and learning disabilities on matters related to information sharing, training, production and its full institutionalization in the government and private sectors and on April 15, 2008, the same day when the Philippines officially ratified the UN CRPD, the Philippine Network of DAISY Consortium Inc. (PNDCI), a non-stock non-profit organization was registered under the Security and Exchange Commission (SEC) to provide administrative and technical support to PDN.

To bolster effective development, coordination and monitoring of programs and services for PWDs, President Macapagal Arroyo issued Executive Order 709 renaming and redefining the functions of the National Council for the Welfare of Disabled Persons (NCWDP) to National Council on Disability Affairs (NCDA) and put the agency directly under the supervision of the Office of the President. Hence, to further improve ICT accessibility in the country, NCDA issued the following Board Resolutions:

**Board Resolutions No. 11, “*Adopting Digital Accessible Information System (DAISY) and its equivalent as a standard in producing accessible materials for persons with disabilities*”**

(This resolution responds to the commitment of the government to ensure standardization in the creation of accessible learning materials for persons with disabilities.)

**Board Resolution No. 12 *“Enjoining All Members of NCDA to Employ Qualified PWD Encoders Using Available Recruitment Schemes”***

(This recognizes the skills and potential of PWDs comparable with their non-disabled counterparts in the encoding industry. It also tries to boost their employment opportunities through member organizations of the Council.)

**Board Resolution No. 13 *“Requesting the Commission on ICT/National Computer Center to Deputize the Philippine Web Accessibility Group (PWAG) to Undertake Web Accessibility Assessment of Websites of Participating Agencies and to Enjoin Member Agencies of NCDA to Comply with Web Accessibility Minimum Requirements.”***

(This board resolution responds to the initial observation findings of PWAG that still only few government organizations have efforts to make their websites accessible to PWDs. Through this, more government agencies would be socially aware of their obligations to make their information accessible to PWDs and that they would be able to avail of the services that PWAG offers to help them make their website accessible to all.

## **CHALLENGES**

For the last decade, there has been tremendous development in the field of Information and Communications Technology that opened various opportunities for non-disabled and persons with disabilities alike especially in education and employment. However, its remarkable progress also widened the digital divide between persons with disabilities and the non-disabled primarily in accessing ICT infrastructures, Internet accessibility, ICT skills acquisition and their economic situation. On the other hand, if these problems would be addressed accordingly, ICT would definitely narrow the gap of capabilities between PWDs and physically normal mainstream persons.

The introduction of various ICT related work such as call centering, data encoding, medical and legal transcription, web designing, animation, Image editing and the likes expanded and boosted new employment openings for persons with disabilities that made them on equal footing with their non-disabled counterparts in terms of salary and benefits.

Today, 19 deaf encoders are prominent in the Department of Foreign Affairs’ (DFA) passport processing section and were recognized for exemplary records and they are continuously increasing in number. However, the challenge now is for other government agencies and organizations to follow the leadership shown by DFA to make it sustainable. The government should come up with policies that would ensure continuity of these new ICT opportunities and to assure that they are protected against all types of discrimination vis-à-vis their disabilities.

Moreover, the benefits of ICT in education should be given emphasis and focus particularly cyber education and the use of adaptive technologies in learning such as Braille, Digital Talking Books (DTBs), voice synthesizer, and assistive devices. These technologies have made learning far-reaching and accessible to persons with disabilities to prepare them in more challenging roles in our society.

Another aspect that should be given focus is the involvement of NGOs and the private sector in crafting relevant policies and programs on ICT accessibility to ensure effective implementation and cooperation of all concerned stakeholders. The government on the other hand should create long lasting measures and strategies to guarantee strong compliance among concerned accountable organizations such as sustainable consultation and legislative mechanisms that are simple and easy to follow and an institutional incentive and reward programs that would encourage voluntary compliance.

Furthermore, ICT is not the end in itself but only the means that should lead to improvement and betterment of the lives of all including persons with disabilities. ICT should adapt to the culture and core values of the nation and the country as it opens various new opportunities in employment, tourism, sports and leisure and information sharing. Therefore accessible ICT should not result to additional burden on the part of information or technology provider instead it should facilitate mainstreaming and integration of all types of people including persons with disabilities.