Accessibility

A policy for CBM
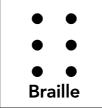
Content

Introduction

As an international Christian disability and development organisation with its primary purpose to improve the quality of life of persons with disabilities, their families and those at risk of disability in the most marginalised societies, it is CBM's integral responsibility to promote and ensure accessibility in all spheres of its work.

Accessibility is a fundamental prerequisite for building an **inclusive society** where everyone, also persons with disabilities, has the opportunity to participate fully in all aspects of society. Besides meeting the necessity of physical access to the built environment, it implies furthermore, that every individual is entitled to equal access to all social, health, educational, economic and cultural facilities, services, and institutions.

Consequently, the realisation of accessibility principles are not to be seen as a special reclamation of and for persons with disabilities, but as solutions[1] and applications which are beneficial to everyone. Accessibility improves the utility and quality of solutions for all users. Hence the implementation of accessibility criteria improves return on investment and profitability, providing better usability and opportunities for both users and investors.

The **UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities**, as approved by the General Assembly in December 2006, opened for signature on 30th of March 2007 and entered into force on 3rd of May 2008. This Convention establishes the legal framework for policy change and implementation towards achieving accessibility and inclusion for all. **Article 9** of the Convention stipulates that persons with disabilities are to be enabled to live independently and participate fully in all aspects of life. This requires States Parties to "[…] take appropriate measures to ensure to persons with disabilities access, on an equal basis with others, to the physical environment, to transportation, to information and communications including information and communications technologies and systems, and to other facilities and services open or provided to the public, both in urban and in rural areas […]".[2,3]

Becoming a more inclusive organisation requires an ongoing process of learning and improvement. CBM therefore embraces principles of positive change in relation to its own performance on accessibility, planning and reviewing of supported projects as well as capacity development on accessibility both internally and externally.

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[1] Be it an office building, a hospital or a software solution which fulfils minimum accessibility criteria.
[2] http://untreaty.un.org/English/notpubl/IV_15_english.pdf

[3] In addition to Article 9, Article 2 (Definitions), 3 (General Principles), 8 (Awareness Raising), 11 (Situations of Risk and Humanitarian Emergencies) and 32 (International Cooperation) are to be taken into account as cross-cutting in terms of advocacy for accessibility as well as in regard to the actual implementation of accessible solutions.

1. Definitions

1.1 Disability

In its "Disability and Development Policy Paper" CBM understands **disability** in a multidimensional way:

> "Though arising from physical (including sensorial) or intellectual impairment, disability has social implications as well as health ones. A full understanding of disability recognises that it has a powerful human rights dimension and is often associated with social exclusion, increased exposure and vulnerability to poverty. Disability is the outcome of complex interactions between the functional limitations arising from a person's physical, intellectual, or mental condition and the social and physical environment. It has multiple dimensions and is far more than an individual health or medical problem."

In its programmatic and advocacy fields of work CBM supports a **"twin track approach"** to disability and development. This approach comprises the mainstreaming of disability into development practices as well as supporting disability specific measures with the aim of empowering persons with disabilities.

1.2 Inclusion

CBM sees **inclusion** in the context of disability and development in a bifocal and complementary way:

> Every **individual** is entitled to have full access to all social, health, rehabilitative, educational, economic and cultural facilities, services and institutions.
> At the same time **society** is required to be responsive and promotive to diverse needs and potentials of all its members.

1.3 Accessibility

While being a substantial component of inclusion CBM understands **accessibility** in the following way:

> Accessibility refers to **physical** and **social access** to the built environment, transportation and services as well as to accessibility of information and communication technologies and systems.
>
> In principle and consistent with CBM's approach to disability and development, accessibility is a human rights issue in the sense that every individual has the right to access, full participation and inclusion in society.

2. Framework for Accessibility

2.1 Design for All

CBM internally subscribes to the approach of "Design for All".
Design for All aims to **enable all people to have equal opportunities** to participate in every aspect of society.
To achieve this, the built environment, everyday objects, services, culture and information – in short, everything that is designed and made by people to be used by people – must be accessible[4] and convenient for everyone to use and responsive to human diversity.[5]
Design for All can be defined as a philosophy and a process for achieving universal access to environments, products and services that are designed in a respectful, safe, healthy, functional, comprehensible and aesthetic way (cf. ECAA 2008). Design for All recognises that "inclusion" equals "accessibility" and applies to social, cultural, intellectual and environmental conditions (cf. Build for All Reference Manual 2006).

CBM encourages its partner organisations and other cooperating stakeholders to adopt and adhere to the Design For All approach in their respective efforts.

2.2 Access

In its "Disability and Development Policy" CBM refers to access in its fullest sense i.e. to **physical access** (built environment, transport systems, etc.), **communication access**, and **social access** to facilities, services, training, and jobs.

2.3 Physical Access

Physical access relates to the condition of the built environment being designed in such a way that all persons can, autonomously and safely, approach, enter, pass to and from, and make use of an area and its facilities without undue difficulties.

2.4 Communication Accessibility and eAccessibility

Barriers to equal opportunities and participation can be due to physical inaccessibility or related to poor capacity to receive information. The principle of accessible communication aims at overcoming these barriers by adhering to

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[4] The "10 – 30 –100" concept claims that for 10 % of a society accessibility is absolutely indispensable, for 30 % necessary, for 100 % of people comfortable, and a quality criterion. (see: Leidner, R., Neumann, P., Rebstock, M. (2006): Leben ohne Barrieren. Design für Alle und Barrierefreiheit als Herausforderung für Kommunen. In: Europa kommunal 06/2006 (S.203-206)
[5] The EIDD Stockholm Declaration© (http://www.design-for-all.org/images/stockholm_declaration.doc); Build for All Reference Manual 2006 (http://www.build-for-all.net)

minimum standards[6] to ensure equal participation in electronic, printed and verbal communication processes.

"eAccessibility" comprises the ability to fully access and make use of information as well as to communicate in an accessible manner via electronic devices. Ultimately, everybody benefits from accessible communication that is clear and easy to understand and provided in a compatible way.

2.5 Access to Services

CBM promotes **access to comprehensive services** aiming at the active establishment of service delivery networks in order to provide all necessary components according to the multiple needs of an individual. The respective contextual situation, including socio-economic and cultural elements such as support seeking and service delivery, is to be taken into account.

Access to services also refer to measures to promote inclusive education and job trainings as well as to remove social barriers which hinder access to all kind of services, facilities and institutions.

Furthermore potential barriers to access to comprehensive services due to poor knowledge, inappropriate communication about referral systems or inaccessible transport systems, are to be removed and the fundamental right to access to services has to be respected.

3. Advocacy on Accessibility

CBM subscribes to a rights-based approach to disability and development and, in conjunction with its partnering organisations, advocates for inclusive development practices whereof accessibility is a substantial part.

3.1 Internal Advocacy

It is imperative that accessibility becomes a priority for CBM**. Accessibility** is to be understood as an intrinsic part of our commitment to acknowledge accessibility as a matter of human rights. With a concerted effort to adhere to accessibility requirements, CBM will gain more credibility and expertise in this field.

In order to have a common understanding of accessibility and to assess the implications of the realisation of minimum accessibility standards at all levels within CBM, effective advocacy strategies for awareness raising and capacity development are to be elaborated, implemented and monitored.

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[6] This applies to different kinds of technical provisions directed to composition of documents, i.e. use of correct language (e.g. plain language – see communication guidelines) and layout of text bodies in electronic correspondence and for publications (e.g. font size, avoidance of dense texts, alternative text for non-text elements like images and graphs, full text version as default (.doc, .rtf, .html), accessible PDF).

3.2 External Advocacy

While CBM's accessibility standards are being implemented and adequate expertise is gained, experiences and good practices are to be shared with other advocacy networks and platforms (consortia/coalitions for accessibility, disability and development forums, etc.). This expertise should also be made available and, where appropriate, supplement the existing expertise of CBM's partner organisations on capacity development and experience sharing. CBM is a learning organisation which can act as a facilitator for building multi-sectoral alliances on advocacy for accessibility together with diverse stakeholders.[7]

4. Framework for Inclusive Employment

4.1 Inclusive recruitment strategies and policies

A **comprehensive and inclusive recruitment policy** is needed for CBM to be employ more persons with disabilities by equal qualification.
CBM's Human Resources departments are respectively required to develop appropriate inclusive recruitment policies and strategies. Minimum standards include the dissemination of inclusive job announcements and postings on respective platforms, mailing lists, etc. which can be consulted by everyone. In addition to this the encouragement of persons with disabilities to apply for jobs, the provision to post job announcements in alternative formats and adequate support with regard to job interviews need to be ensured. Such strategies are to be established in a cohesive and coherent way so that inclusive recruitment processes can function efficiently.
More comprehensive recruitment strategies specify a clear, written commitment of the respective leadership to previously agreed targets to be more inclusive. These can include the commitment to collaborate with different actors, internally and externally, and to specific affirmative action and prevention measures (e.g. job retention).

4.2 Inclusive work environments

CBM is committed to create workplace environments and conditions with necessary requirements so that employees are able achieve their full potential.

4.2.1 Accessibility of Workplaces

Provisions to create accessible offices and workplaces comprise various aspects. It already starts with entering the building and approaching the reception area without facing major barriers. Other parts of an office building, such as corridors and meeting rooms, should be free from obstructions.

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[7] Like it already happens for example in the Philippines with a campaign to create an alliance for developing accessible public transport. See project documentation available on the intranet or on request from Regional Office/**cbm**'s inclusion officer.

Furthermore, safe and easy transitions between levels should be provided, accessible toilets need to be provided within the building, etc. In terms of the actual workspace, furniture and assistive technologies should be installed and adjusted according to specific requirements.

The workplace can often be made accessible with minimum effort and expense. Optimum solutions can be identified with respective advice from (local) experts and in many settings financial support from external authorities can be tapped into.

4.2.2 Assistive Technologies

Adaptive and assistive technologies include assistive, adaptive, and rehabilitative devices and the process used in selecting, locating, and using them. This includes for example ergonomic accessories like height-adjustable furniture, footrests, wrist rests, and arm supports to ensure correct posture or assist in using the computer, e.g. Screen Reader software, voice activation, headphones and/or speakers and screen magnification.[8]

4.2.3 Inclusive work practices

In each CBM office it must be ensured that all staff members are aware of how to overcome potential barriers and how to facilitate daily work procedures for everyone.

Each office should have a guidance note about how to get to the office and have clear guidelines what kind of support is available at the office. Relevant information which is of internal relevance has to be provided in alternative formats.

5. CBM's Statement on Accessibility

CBM considers accessibility as a high priority with regard to its mandate and strives towards the realisation of minimum standards and practices. Accessibility should be achieved through a Design for All process and, where appropriate and necessary, disability-specific measures.

CBM is aware that standards need to be set and fulfilled according to different socio-economic, legislative and cultural contexts. While implementing accessibility measures, we make sure that local professional and expertise - ranging from persons with disabilities, their representing organisations to specialised organisations - is involved at each stage of the process.

CBM has an anticipatory approach towards accessibility issues. This means that we assume that everybody will use our buildings, information material, and services, and make this possible in advance.

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[8] See guidelines for Accessible Communication and eAccessibility; http://www.assistivetech.com/;

References

Build for All – Promoting accessibility for all to the built environment and public infrastructures, at www.build-for-all.net

CBM Disability and Development Policy (2007).

ECA for Administrations. European Concept for Accessibility. Luxembourg 2008, at www.eca.lu

Footnote: This policy has been developed by CBM's working group on accessibility and with advice from NeumannConsult. Please do not hesitate to contact CBM's inclusion unit for questions and comments (christiane.noe@cbm.org). (29.07.2008)