# Capacity Building and Advocacy to Promote the Digital Accessibility Rights of Persons with Disabilities

Mohammed Ali Loutfy

*The Global Initiative for Inclusive Information and Communication Technology (G3ICT) Digital Accessibility Rights Education - DARE Academy*

## Abstract –

Despite the progress that has taken place in the sector of technology, efforts of ensuring the inclusion of persons with disabilities remain limited. This is due to the limited opportunities of capacity building, weak awareness among engineers and industrialists, and the hindering of persons with disabilities' voices in Information and Communication Technology (ICT) policy development and decision-making.

Inspired by the disposition of the Convention on the Rights of Persons with disabilities regarding accessibility, the Global Initiative for Information and Communication Technologies have been playing a pivotal role in promoting the persons with disabilities' right to inclusive ICTs. Benefiting from the results of its Digital Accessibility Right Evaluation Index, G3ICT has realized the increasing commitment of CRPD States Parties to issues of ICT Accessibility. Nevertheless, The DARE index data show the remaining challenges encountered by governments' procurement capacity for offering actual support to inclusive ICT programs, products, and services. ICT accessibility continues to be absent from higher education and vocational training programs. Furthermore, advocacy efforts of persons with disabilities and their organizations remain limited within the realm of digital accessibility.

This paper discusses G3ICT's Digital Accessibility Right Education (DARE) Academy, and its role in tackling issues of digital divide through offering a platform of educational development and advocacy capacity enhancement for persons with disabilities around issues of ICT accessibility.

**Keywords:** *Convention on the rights of persons with disabilities, persons with disabilities, organizations of persons with disabilities, digital accessibility, accessibility, inclusion, Information and Communication Technologies, DARE Index, DARE Academy, G3ICT, Advocacy, Scholarship, capacity building, advocacy, education, online learning, partnership.*

## Introduction

This essay presents the background and motivation behind the creation of the G3ICT DARE Academy. The following Paragraphs will offer an overview about the Academy's main programs that are aimed to help the enhancement of inclusion of persons with disabilities in the field of digital accessibility and its related policies and programs.

# Background

The [1] recognizes the right of persons with disabilities to accessible physical, digital or technological environments. Many convention articles address this right in relationship with different sectors and life aspects.

While Article 9 of the convention sets forth the primary components of accessibility as a core principle, other articles of the convention highlight the position of ICT accessibility in relevance to other rights, inter alia: access to justice (article 13), independent living (article 19), freedom of expression and access to information (article 21), education (article 24), employment (article 27), political participation (article 29), and access to cultural material, programs, and facilities (article 30). The convention also realizes that ensuring the right of persons with disabilities to accessibility should be recognized through rather operational mechanisms pertaining to CRPD implementation monitoring and evaluation. Such mechanisms should also take into account the principle of accessibility, particularly through data collection and desegregation by disability, as well as the enhancement of international efforts of multilateral partnerships.

The establishment of this disposition has taken place in a timely manner, given the critical progress done in the field of technology, particularly digital accessibility. Such progress has been reflected through the development of technology dependent practices, such smart cities, e-governance, e-learning, remote employment etc.

As the world is shifting towards increasing reliance on technology, persons with disabilities remain left behind on many levels in terms of ensuring their accessible technology rights. States Parties compliance with the CRPD disposition on accessible technology remains limited to the commitment level i.e., the deployment of relevant legislations, regulations, and policies, as G3ICT DARE index shows. According to this Index, level of implementation capacity of States Parties in the arena of digital accessibility continues to be lagging behind. This matter significantly appears in areas, such as engaging persons with disabilities in decision-making around issues of digital accessibility. Another rather important area, where implementation capacity seems to be lagging behind, is the integration of special curriculum on digital accessibility in both academic and vocational training courses of computer sciences and programming and so on and so forth.

These two examples of areas of implementation capacity by States Parties reflect the perpetual exclusion of voices of persons with disabilities on the level of decision-making in national policy development regarding accessible technology. Furthermore, it rather questions the availability of capacity building opportunities  for technology professionals, and primarily for persons with disabilities who are interested in technology.  While these two factors would surely result in hindering persons with disabilities' chances of inclusion in technology dependent platforms and programs, it shall also have negative implications on persons with disabilities knowledge and advocacy capacity pertaining to issues of ICT accessibility on the national, regional, and global levels.

## Why is the DARE Academy?

Based on its mission towards promoting the CRPD disposition on digital accessibility rights for persons with disabilities, and supported by its [2] data, [2] has been aware of the problem of lacking opportunities of capacity building and enhanced advocacy efforts by persons with disabilities around issues of digital accessibility. On June 14th, 2021, at its virtual side event during the [3] held by the United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs (UNDESA), G3ICT launched its [4]. In preparation of this launch, G3ICT reached out to major international organizations of persons with disabilities, including: International Disability Alliance (IDA), Disabled People's International (DPI), World Blind Union (WBU), World Federation of the Deaf (WDF), European Union of Persons with Hard of Hearing, in addition to disability and development organizations, including CBM Global Disability Inclusion, Leonard Cheshire, and Daisy Consortium. These organizations today form G3ICT DARE Academy Advisory Council.

To help filling the gap in programs of ability building and advocacy in the field of digital accessibility, G3ICT DARE Academy aimed at offering persons with disabilities a number of opportunities. Given its educational mission, DARE academy has been formed to provide means of capacity building for persons with disabilities around issues of digital accessibility. These means are primarily reflected through the Academy Scholarship program and online courses. To ensure that the knowledge gained through the scholarship program is going to be useful for potential candidates, the Academy strives to bring digital accessibility leaders and champions of persons with disabilities together through a global advocacy and peer-to-peer sharing of expertise network.

## DARE Academy Scholarship

Sponsored by G3ICT, this scholarship is dedicated for all persons with disabilities interested and active in the field of digital accessibility. With the priority given to persons with disabilities of countries of emerging economies, and affiliated to representative organizations of persons with disabilities, this scholarship allows candidates to have free access to G3ICT International Association for Accessibility Professional's (IAAP) Certification for Professional Accessibility Core Competency (CPACC). This certification program is offered in partnership with Princeton University in the United States. The free Access to CPACC covered by the DARE Academy Scholarship entails that have access to the certification Course's body of knowledge and examination process.

The scholarship, so far, has been granted to forty candidates, who have been selected according to a rigorous application process, and the approval of the members of the Academy's Advisory Council. These scholarship recipients compromise two application cycles, with one year timeframe each. The first cycle was started in September 2021, while the second cycle was started in December of the same year. During this one year, each recipient is anticipated to access and study the CPACC body of knowledge and take and pass the CPACC exam. Upon their acceptance into the scholarship program, each student is granted a one-year IAAP

membership. This membership will enable each student to have access to a broad network of accessibility professionals around the world and take advantage of IAAP online seminar series on different digital accessibility topics and issues.

## DARE Academy Online Course on Digital Accessibility Best Practices

In addition to its scholarship program, DARE Academy is preparing the launch of an online course featuring digital accessibility best practices. These featured best practices will be selected based on the series of responses and data collected through G3ICT DARE Index. This online course will host experts, professionals, and leaders in the field of digital accessibility who will form each course session panelists or lecturers. The identification of course subjects will take into consideration the DARE Index set of variables and will take advantage of the extensive knowledge resources owned by G3ICT. Course sessions will be recorded and archived for future by demand access. While this course will require paid registration, DARE Academy Students will be granted free access to course sessions and archived materials.

## Global Network for Digital Accessibility Champions

The Academy alumni and program participants constitute a global network that brings together persons with disabilities who have leadership roles at organizations of person with disabilities, particularly those that are active in the field of digital accessibility. This network aims at creating a space for these leaders to share their expertise and enjoy peer-to-peer support around issues of digital accessibility rights. This network is an open platform for leveraging advocacy efforts of these leaders, and to enhance their voices towards their governments and other digital accessibility stakeholders on the local, national, regional, and global levels. DARE Academy scholarship recipients are granted automatic membership in this network upon their graduation with their CPACC certificate.

## Conclusion

As a pioneer initiative by G3ICT, the DARE Academy will hopefully be an aid to those who believe in the role of digital accessibility in transforming the lives of persons with disabilities through inclusion on all levels. Therefore, G3iCT hopes that this Academy will become a hub of knowledge and capacity building to help voices for persons with disabilities will be further heard at digital accessibility platforms of decision-making, and skills of persons with disabilities to be recognized for ensuring their participation and inclusion in society at all levels.

## Acknowledgment

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# References

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