



ACCESSIBILITY STANDARDS

A practical guide to create a barrier-free physical environment in Uganda



*Produced by Uganda National Action on Physical Disability (UNAPD)
in collaboration with the Ministry of Gender, Labour
and Social Development*

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WORD FROM UNAPD CHAIRMAN

One of the biggest challenges faced by persons with physical disabilities is the in-accessible physical environment. It is a source of denial of rights and non-accessibility to services enjoyed by others. This contributes a lot towards unemployment, injustice, discrimination, low levels of literacy, exclusion, isolation, inadequate involvement in community activities, etc.

Uganda has a disability-friendly legal framework which guarantees the rights of persons with disabilities. Unfortunately, there is limited implementation of these laws. Among other things the laws provide for accessibility in the physical environment. One of the reasons why it has been difficult to implement the legal provisions on accessibility is the absence of Accessibility Standards. It is as a result of this realisation that UNAPD in collaboration with various stakeholders developed these Accessibility Standards.

The purpose of these standards is to guide architects, property developers, policy makers and implementers on the accessibility requirements in the physical environment during the design and implementation of construction projects.

The process of developing this document involved a number of key players without whose support and commitment UNAPD would not on its own have accomplished this great piece of work. We would like to acknowledge in particular the technical and financial support from Dansk Handicap Forbund (DHF) that made it possible to develop the Accessibility Standards for a barrier-free environment. We also acknowledge with thanks the technical input and financial contribution towards the production of this document by Survivor Corps Uganda.

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We acknowledge the technical input from stakeholders namely the Community Based Rehabilitation Alliance (COMBRA), National Union of the Disabled Persons of Uganda (NUDIPU), Legal Action for Persons with Disabilities (LAPD), Uganda Society of Architects, Spinal Cord Injury Association Uganda (SIA-U), Mulago Orthopedic Workshop and Uganda National Association of the Blind (UNAB).

In order to secure effective implementation, it is our desire that these Accessibility Standards should be appended to the proposed Building Control Bill. The standards would then be taken as a requirement for approval of construction projects and it would be easy for players in the construction industry to make reference to them when using the Building Control Act.

We call upon all stakeholders in the construction industry to play their part in making Uganda a barrier-free society by implementing these standards.

Hon. James Mwandha
Chairman UNAPD

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ACRONYMS

PWDs	:	Persons With Disabilities
WHO	:	World Health Organization
CBR	:	Community Based Rehabilitation
DPO	:	Disabled People's Organization
UNAPD	:	Uganda National Action on Physical Disability
UN	:	United Nations
ATM	:	Automated Teller Machine
NUDIPU	:	National Union of Disabled Persons of Uganda
UNAD	:	Uganda National Association for the Deaf
UNAB	:	Uganda National Association for the Blind
LAPD	:	Legal Action for Persons with Disabilities Uganda
COMBRA	:	Community Based Rehabilitation Alliance
MP	:	Member of Parliament
SIA-U	:	Spinal Cord Injury Association- Uganda

DEFINITIONS OF TERMS

Assessment:

Assessment in this document refers to a pattern of analysing and investigating the extent of compliance between the physical aspects of a structure or a service, and the requirements that must be fulfilled to make them accessible to persons with disabilities.

Accessibility

The possibility to reach a place and maneuver 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.

Barrier Free Environment

An environment that enables accessibility as defined above.

Physical Environment:

Infrastructure and features in various areas in society such as housing, buildings, streets and other outdoor environments/facilities

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1.0 INTRODUCTION

Uganda is among the few countries in Africa that have taken affirmative action in favour of marginalised groups at a higher level with a focus on persons with disabilities. These efforts have resulted in laws and policies promoting equality, inclusion and participation of persons with disabilities in society. However, advocacy, implementation and supervision of disability programmes are severely lacking.

Accessibility is one of the key elements addressed in these policies and laws. Due to limited enforcement of disability laws, absence of National Accessibility Standards and lack of knowledge about the rights of persons with disabilities, laws and policies on accessibility have been largely overlooked.

2.0 BACKGROUND

The environment in Uganda 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 without obstacles, which leads to loss of dignity and independence.

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. The major hurdle to a barrier-free environment is the lack of Standards on accessibility that can serve as a basis for improving accessibility in Uganda.

These Standards are aimed at addressing this hurdle. Their adoption and use will support implementation of laws, policies and regulations regarding accessibility.

2.1 Existing legal framework

The Standards were developed in line with existing Ugandan laws and policies on disability. In 2006, the Parliament of Uganda adopted the Persons with Disability Act. Part IV of the Act requires that constructors of public places and operators of public services ensure that places and services are accessible to persons with disabilities.

The National Council for Disability Act (2003) and Equal Opportunities Commission Act (2008) also include provisions on accessibility.

The National Policy on Disability in Uganda (2006) was developed by the Ministry of Gender, Labour and Social Development. One of the major priorities of this policy is making facilities and infrastructure accessible to persons with disabilities.

In September 2008, Uganda ratified the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (CRPD). Article 9 of the CRPD requires all States Parties to take measures to ensure that facilities and services are accessible to persons with disabilities.

Though Uganda is a State Party to the CRPD and domestic laws and policies regarding accessibility exist, the foundation for accessibility is weak. It will remain so until uniform Standards to which laws and policies on accessibility can refer and by which accessibility can be measured are in place.

We hereby provide uniform Standards which will guide policy makers and implementers on how to ensure accessibility to persons with disabilities.

2.2. Accessibility benefits all of society

An accessible barrier-free environment enables individuals with or without disability to access every public place and service with dignity and independence. It creates equal opportunities not only for persons with disabilities but for all persons in society.

Every person at some stage in life faces barriers as a result of how society has structured the physical space, services, and exchange of information and communication.

2.3. Accessibility to the physical environment

Various components must be addressed in order to ensure access to the physical environment. Contrary to popular beliefs, much more is required beyond a ramp and an elevator to make a barrier-free environment. Other components that must be addressed include door and passage width, floor surfaces, counter heights, door handles, signage, auditory signals, and tactile guides.

These are aspects that are addressed in these Standards.

2.4. Beyond the physical environment: Accessibility to services, information and communication.

Accessibility entails understanding its relation to areas of life beyond just the physical environment. Areas that are often overlooked are access to services, information and communication which are an integral part of making a barrier-free society and address the accessibility needs of persons with sensory, intellectual and psychosocial disabilities as well. These aspects should be addressed in a set of complementary Standards.

3.0 DEVELOPMENT OF THE STANDARDS

The process involved in creating these Standards has benefited from extensive consultations with a wide range of stakeholders, line ministries and literature in the field of accessibility and disability.

The process also involved an in-depth review and analysis of the existing literature related to accessibility, laws and policies on disability. Using these publications as a framework and following other consultations and field visits, UNAPD developed a classification scheme and then established the core content.

The Accessibility Standards set accessibility requirements that apply to the physical environment.

3.1 Purpose

The goal of the Accessibility Standards is to contribute to improving equal access for persons with disabilities, in order to enable them to live independently and participate fully in all aspects of life.

3.2 Objectives

- To provide a blueprint for creating an accessible physical environment.
- To provide a tool for measurement and auditing of accessibility of the environment.

4.0 TARGET GROUP

The Standards are intended for use by a variety of stakeholders, including those that:

- Develop laws, policies and regulations e.g Parliament and line ministries.
- Build and implement changes in the physical

environment such as architects, contractors, engineers.

- Own or operate public infrastructure or services.
- Monitor the implementation and assess the level of accessibility of the physical environment such as accessibility audit teams, civil society organisations and advocates for the rights of persons with disabilities.

4.1. People affected by accessibility barriers:

- People who use wheelchairs
- People with limited walking/movement abilities
- People with visual impairment or low vision
- People with hearing impairment
- People with intellectual disabilities
- People with psychosocial disabilities
- Elderly persons
- Pregnant women
- People with temporary disabilities
- People carrying heavy or cumbersome luggage
- Etc.

5.0 GUIDING PRINCIPLE: Trip Chain

An important concept in these Standards is the "Trip Chain". A typical Trip Chain is the sum of all parts of movement from one place to another which must be accessible in order to ensure a barrier-free environment. For example, to be able to go from home to a workplace a person must be able to:

- Exit the home to a sidewalk or pathway.
- Enter a vehicle.
- Alight from the vehicle to a sidewalk or a pathway near the workplace.
- Reach the entrance of the building.
- Enter the building.
- Maneuver within the building.
- Enter the office or specific place in the building.
- Reach the work station.

It takes only one inaccessible link in the Trip Chain to make the journey impossible. Therefore, each link must be considered and improved upon to foster a barrier-free environment. These Standards aim to provide clear and concise guidance to guarantee an accessible Trip Chain.

6.0. APPLICATION OF STANDARDS

The Standards are to be applied during the design, construction and alteration of buildings and facilities.

A variety of stakeholders involved in the planning and implementation of accessibility will find these Standards useful.

The following are examples of different ways to apply the Standards:

(i) Establishing and deploying Accessibility Audit Teams

The Standards can be used by auditors on the ground to assess the compatibility of infrastructure with basic accessibility requirements.

The process of auditing involves convening an accessibility audit team, i.e. a team composed of at least two professionals with knowledge on disability and accessibility to the physical environment.

The Standards include an auditing tool in the form of a checklist to be used by the audit team to determine whether the facility conforms to the outlined accessibility requirements.

The tool is used to review the drawings for the different parts of the physical structure, such as entrances, latrine, and ramps as against the set requirements.

A report written by the audit team that conducted the audit and analyses the state of accessibility of the facility in relation to the requirements set in the Standards. The audit team recommends structural adjustments if the building is found not accessibility compliant

The audit team is also responsible for periodic monitoring of the implementation of the proposed adjustments.

A certificate is issued by the auditing team to the management of the building or facility, certifying that their building meets the accessibility requirements.

(ii) Engaging policy makers

It is important to engage policy makers and implementers in the field of accessibility like line ministries that directly influence accessibility. For example, the Ministry of Lands, Housing

and Urban Development will be approached and familiarised with the Standards to be able to use them. They can then refer to the Standards when drafting policies, regulations, guidelines and programmes.

(iii) Engaging architects and engineers

Civil engineers, architects and contractors will be oriented and familiarized with the accessibility needs of persons with disabilities and how to utilise the Standards in their plans in order to ensure that all structures are built in an accessible manner.

(iv) Use by advocacy organisations

Advocacy organisations will be encouraged to use the Standards when campaigning for the incorporation of accessibility needs in laws, policies, programmes and services.

(v) Use by service providers

Various service providers will apply the Standards in accordance with their areas of operation and responsibility. For example, hotel managers will refer to relevant chapters addressing different parts of the hotel such as toilets, ramps, and entrances, for making the necessary improvements.

7.0. ACCESSIBILITY FOR PERSONS WITH DIFFERENT DISABILITIES

The principal targets for these Standards are people with different disabilities. In order to harmonise between the accessibility needs of different groups, there is need to have a proper understanding of these needs which differ from one disability to another.

7.1. People who use wheelchairs and people with limited movements

Many accessibility requirements relate to dimensions and other aspects of wheelchairs. In order to achieve a complete turn with the wheelchair, it is necessary to provide an unobstructed circle with a minimum diameter of 1.50m.

Considerable energy is required to propel a wheelchair manually up ramps, over changes in level and over soft or uneven surfaces. Therefore the Standards address those aspects in particular.

Resistance between the floor and the wheelchair wheels depends on the floor surface of the

pathway - whether it is even or uneven, firm or loose. Changes in level should be avoided and the floor surface should be hard, even and slip-resistant.

People with movement difficulties may use crutches or sticks. Special attention must be paid to avoid broken, rough or sloping floor surface and surfaces that become particularly slippery after rainfall, such as wood covering, granite, hard burnt bricks, gravel and murram.

The following aspects are important to enable independent movement for people using wheelchairs and other assistive devices:

- Changes in level should be avoided.
- Floor surfaces should be hard, even and slip-resistant.
- Rails should be provided on stairs and ramps.
- Ramps should have resting places and be of low slope along travel routes.
- Pathways should be of limited slope and include sufficient turning radius.
- Doors should be light and easy to turn, and entrances should be sufficiently wide.
- Parking space should be close to the main entrance.
- Furniture, counters, equipment, power sockets, and plugs should be placed at suitable heights reachable by persons who use wheelchairs.
- Handrails should be easy to grasp.

7.2. Blind persons and persons with visual impairments

For blind persons and persons with visual impairments, orientation can be eased by the use of contrasting colours and changes in the texture of the floor material. This helps a blind person in identifying doors, stairs, steps, ramps and pedestrian crossings.

The path of travel should be easy to detect by a blind person using a long white cane. A guide strip with a contrasting floor texture running parallel to main pathway should be used for this purpose.

The use of protruding elements and low overhanging signs should be avoided in pathways.

Visual capability is different from one person to another and changes with age and disability. Lighting systems should be made to suit different needs and include the possibility of adjustments from low to strong light.

Winding staircases, vertical turning doors and side-hung doors should equally be avoided.

In order to provide a barrier-free environment for blind persons and persons with visual impairment, the physical surroundings should be arranged in a simple and logical way. Visual information should be accompanied by audible information, handrails should be available to grip when using stairs, and ramps, entrances, stairs, and information boards should be well lighted.

Blind persons are aided by tactile and auditory information. Therefore, written information should be made available in braille and visual information should be accompanied by audible information.

7.3. Deaf persons and persons with hearing impairments

People with hearing impairments may experience difficulty in distinguishing words and sounds in noisy environments. Therefore, rooms should be acoustically insulated.

Supplementary visual information should be provided for deaf persons and persons with hearing impairments, such as visual information at airports and bus stations, and alarms and bells in lifts.

7.4. People with learning or intellectual disabilities

Some people with learning or intellectual disabilities experience difficulties in understanding or interpreting information like signs, and in distinguishing between different colours or between left or right.

The following design elements will enable people experiencing these difficulties to physically access the built environment: simple design with clear and unambiguous sign postings; use of signs and notice boards with pictures and symbols; and separation of a mass of information into a number of signs that can be more easily read and understood than in one sign.

7.5. Other Groups

In addition to enabling access to persons with disabilities, the Standards also ensure access to other groups, such as elderly persons, pregnant women, people and children with temporary disabilities, and people carrying heavy or cumbersome luggage. In short, accessibility benefits all persons and the Standards ensure a barrier-free environment for all people.