Accessibility of Higher Education for Students with Disabilities Administration User Manual

Accessibility of Higher Education for Disabilities

HEIs Manual

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Acronyms

AAU: Addis Ababa University

GTP: Growth and Transformation Plan

HEI: Higher Education institution

RESPOND-HER: Responding to Disability& Poverty through Higher Education

MOLSA; Ministry of Labor and Social Affairs

NGO: Nongovernmental Organization

UN: United Nations

UNESCO: United Nations Education Science and Culture Organization

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1. Introduction

Ethiopian students who passed secondary school leaving examinations have the opportunity to join higher education institutions based on their study preferences. This general principle is inclusive to all; regardless of disabilities. However, it is not easy for those with disabilities to exercise their rights as claimed during practice. On the ground, many students with disabilities face diverse challenges besides academic fulfillment criteria, particularly during enrollment and placement, getting the necessary services, materials etc in Higher Education Institutes (HEIs).

Ethiopia's Education and training Policy (1994) and the Growth and Transformation Plan (GTP, 2010-2015) brought dramatic expansion in higher education in the country. These institutions are governmental and private firms. Annual intake reaches 100,000/annum. Accesses options of higher education and students' services are getting better than before, however for those students with disabilities /with special needs/, the situations seem to remain unchanged.

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Ethiopian students who complete secondary education and pass university entrance examinations join higher education institutions generally based on their preferences of study areas. Results of a study conducted by Tirussew et al (2014), however, show that significant proportion of the students are not placed on the basis of their first choice. Another research conducted on "Accessibility of higher education to students with disabilities by "Department of Special needs Education in collaboration with University of Vienna revealed that, in 10 Universities located in four regions of the country have few numbers of students with disabilities. Some of the universities have none. Consequently, many students with disabilities face academic and other challenges as a result of placement decisions and due to lack of appropriate special support services, materials, etc., in the higher education institutions.

These facts/findings triggered the need for preparing this manual. The manual is prepared for HEIs leadership at different levels, instructors, and service giving units to acquaint them with basic information about rights of students with disabilities, as well as to suggest, what shall be done to promote accessibility for those with disabilities.

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With this in mind a research entitled "Accessibility of higher education to students with disabilities was conducted by the Department of Special needs Education, Addis Ababa University in collaboration with the University of Vienna funded by Austrian Development Agency. The findings of this study revealed that, in sampled 10 Universities (Higher Education Institutions) located in five corners of the country have few numbers of students with disabilities even some have none. Thus, this informative manual is prepared for HEIs administration units to acquaint basic information about rights of students with disabilities, provide insights on quality service delivery as well as suggest what shall be done to promote accessibility for students with disabilities.

The manual contains important information about students with disabilities, major categories of disabilities, concept of inclusion and inclusive education, an overview of HEIs legislation on disabilities, potential challenges and remedial suggestions as well as steps of actions to promote accessibility. We hope that the manual would be good reference for higher education staff working with students with disabilities.

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The Purpose

The purpose of this manual is to serve as handbook for HE leadership, instructors, service providing units and students particularly in the area of disabilities. Moreover, it suggests actions to be taken to respond to the needs of students with disabilities. The manual would also make valuable contribution to resolve inaccessibility problems.

2. Who are students with disabilities?

Students with disabilities are those with sensory, motor, physical, cognitive, behavioral, communication impairments varying from mild to severe levels. However, unlike the traditional beliefs, students with disabilities are not with low intelligence or dependent on others, rather variety of studies revealed that these students are similar with other counterparts; their problems are exclusions or are vulnerable to marginalization due to strong negative social attitude. Those who get acceptance have shown their potentials, that they are not different from others. Currently there are renowned scientists, artists, journalists, political figures with disabilities.

Their disabilities do not limit them to actualize their potentials. Provided that there is onducive environment, they can contribute a great deal in academic, social, economic, political and cultural life of the country.

3. What is inclusion and inclusive education?

The term inclusion is human right issue against exclusion. United Nations Declaration of human rights (1948) states all man kinds are equal under the law to enjoy life without being segregated. The declaration is workable among UN member countries. And the term inclusion is derived from this declaration. It has multifaceted social, economic, political, and cultural features and components. One among them is education. Inclusive education is a process of addressing and responding to the diversity of needs of all learners (Booth, 1996). It is a process of increasing participation and benefits of learners.

Inclusive education as a system is responding to broad spectrum of learning needs. It is system transformation to respond to the needs of diverse groups of learners. According to UNESCO, it is a process of strengthening the capacity of

the education system to reach out to all learners….as an overall principle, it should guide all education policies and a practice, starting from the fact that education is a basic human right and the foundation for a more just and equal society.

Thus inclusive education refers to an education system that is open to all learners, regardless of poverty, gender, ethnic background, language, disabilities and impairments. The term is dynamic by its nature, thus the current trend and concept of inclusion is right based education rather than charity.

The manual focuses on enlightening the higher education leadership and staff on institutional responsibilities with regard to inclusion. Hence, the concept presented from system and institutional responsibilities perspective. It is important that higher education institutions strive to provide special support and create conducive environment for students with disabilities.

4. Summary of study findings

The Department of Special Needs Education of the Addis Ababa University conducted to studies , one on "accessibility" and another on "support services " involving   10-11 Universities in Ethiopia and identified   the following   major problems

1) Problems related to placement decisions;

2) Lack of sufficient orientations upon entry to universities;

3) Physical barriers;

4) Absences of assistive technologies;

5) Rigid curriculum;

6) Absence of diversity of management strategies,

7) Lack of preparedness on the part of the leadership;

8) Limitations in service provisions;

9) Unequal opportunities to all and limitations of participation rates are crucial major challenges of accessibility and retention; and

10) Attitudinal problems

Results of these studies also showed encouraging trends in providing special support services to students with disabilities in most universities in the country. Differences were observed among the universities in terms of quality and scope of the services.

5. Basic facts about students with disabilities in Ethiopia

❖ The number of students with disabilities enrolled in higher education of Ethiopia is increasing every year.

❖ The future trends indicate that students with disabilities will be placed in all HEIs in the country. Hence, all HEIs have to make the necessary preparations specially in providing special support to students with disabilities

❖ The existing data indicate, students with disabilities joining HEIs include the visually impaired, hearing impaired, those with physical/motor disabilities and others. Hence, basic preparations might depend on major categories without forgetting others. HEIs should consider the abilities and interests of students with disabilities in planning and providing special support to the students.

❖ Ethiopia has ratified international conventions, to create conducive conditions that enhance access of all students to education according to their needs and demands. All HEIs have obligation to accept and practice this convention.

❖ HEIs are expected to promote excellence in managing diversity.

6. TIPs / Lessons to be learnt from experiences of higher education for students with disabilities of other countries

- Some universities in their admission formats ask students if he/she has disabilities and what their special needs. This helps to arrange better learning conditions (e.g. UNISA, European and American Universities)

- Some universities have road maps marked on the road and pathways in the campus to facilitate students' mobility (e.g. University of Vienna)

- Some universities provide computers to students with disabilities uploaded with special software to assist learning (e.g. University of Eastern Finland (UEF).

- Some universities have well-furnished disability centers where students get internet access and other services (e.g. Vienna University, Addis Ababa University)

- Some universities provide open access to students with disabilities to choose area of study as per their needs.

- Some universities have accessible references in hard copies or in electronic formats in libraries and reference rooms.

- Some universities use multiple Medias to notify information to reach students with disabilities.

- Some universities reserve ground floor dormitories, and service rooms for students with disabilities.

- Some Universities provide wheelchairs and other mobility devices to students with disabilities.

- Some universities sufficient material preparation ahead of enrolling students with disabilities and good amount of budget every year.

- In some universities, academic staffs have enough knowledge about managing diversities among students.

7. What does the higher education legislation of Ethiopia say about students with   disabilities?

The Higher Education Proclamation No.650/2009 article 40 of the Federal Democratic Republic of Ethiopia, declares the following about access of education particularly for those with disabilities.

- Institutions shall make, to the extent possible, their facilities and programs amendable to use with relative ease by physically challenged students.

- Institutions shall, to the extent that situations and resources permits ,relocate classes develop alternative testing procedures ,and provide different educational

auxiliary aids in the interest of students with physical challenges

- Building designs, campus physical landscapes computers and other infrastructures of institutions shall take into account the interests of physically challenged students

- Institutions shall ensure that students with physical challenges get to the extent necessary and feasible academic assistance, including tutorial sessions, exam time extensions, and deadline extensions.

7.1 What does the Addis Ababa University legislation says regarding accessibility and services?

General regulatory issues

o The university legislation defines student as any person who is admitted and registered at the University in regular/evening/summer/distance or any other program with

the view to pursuing his undergraduate or graduate degrees or improving his language skills or advancing his specialized studies.

o There shall be no discrimination and harassment on grounds such as membership of a social and political group, political opinion, race, ethnicity, religion, gender, disability, HIV/AIDS or other unreasonable status;

o Protection of constitutional human rights and freedoms, personal safety, and security of personal property of students with disabilities on campus;

o Students with disabilities are entitled to fair treatment in all respects of the teacher-student relationship and to an environment conducive to stimulate learning;

Legislation articles focusing on service accessibility for students with disabilities

o Special provisions shall be made for female students, students with disability and other socially disadvantaged groups that require affirmative action.

o Ensure the physical and psychological well-being of students; to this end, work in cooperation with work units concerned on welfare of students;

o Ensure the preparation, distribution and regular updating of student handbooks in ink-print, and in-Braille as well as making them available on-line in a manner readily accessible to all students including students with disabilities;

o Give particular attention to the welfare and the affairs of female students and students with disabilities which shall be carried out in consultation with relevant University offices such as the Special Needs Students Office and OGEE.

o Criteria for special admissions to individual programs such as special needs education, music, fine arts and design, theatrical arts, educational planning and management shall be developed and recommended by the academic commission of the relevant academic unit .

Rights of students with disabilities

o Notwithstanding the provisions of Article 175.1 students with disabilities have the right of equal treatment by the University with that of students without disabilities and have the right, in as much as practicable, to lead an active and independent life. To this effect, the University shall comply with the standard of reasonable accommodation in particular, to the

extent possible and in accordance with the University`s Policy on Disability Services, by:

o making its facilities and programs amenable to use with relative ease by students with disabilities;

o relocating classes, developing alternative testing procedures, and providing different educational auxiliary aids in the interest of students with disabilities;

o taking into account the interests of students with disabilities in its building designs, campus physical landscape, computers and other infrastructures; and

o ensuring that students with disabilities get academic assistance, including tutorial sessions, exam time extensions and deadline extensions.

o Students of the University are expected to work with their fellow students and staff in a cordial manner, and demonstrate tolerance for diversities of all dimensions, and make proper use of university facilities. They shall, in particular, respect the laws of the land, university rules and regulations and such other standards of behavior as may be set up by appropriate organs of the University. When students fail to live up to these expectations, it may be

necessary to take appropriate actions commensurate with the breach committed.

o Special Rules Relating to Defamation: Students enjoy the same right as academic staff to criticize the University and any of its programs. They shall observe the same limitations of that right; including the principle that one individual should not use his right to criticize in order to defame the reputation of the University and its programs. As used in this context, "defame" means to say or write things, which are untrue about another, or if true, are said or written with the sole intent of injuring its standing and reputation.

> *What do these proclamations and legislation codes spark to your tasks for students with disabilities?*

We believe you are on the process of change and committed to do something good for students with disabilities. GOOD, let us share you how to begin:

8. How to promote accessibility in higher education institutions

Now we see how you begin to promote, accessibility in your institution. *(This information is also helpful for those Institutions that have begun accessibility work).*As the ongoing trend indicates more and more students with disabilities will be enrolled in the coming years, hence all HEIs have to make necessary preparations,

8.1) **Begin with compilation of database: Developing data base including:** number of students aggregated with age, gender, and categories of disabilities are priority action. Precise data updated every year is primary tool for planning for accessibility. Clear data helps to budget appropriately as well as to effectively utilize the resources available. In this regard it is advisable to prepare formats that contain all themes that will help you to obtain necessary information. Well formulated data base will make your decision easy and have clear idea on what to respond to which demand.

8.2.) Assign students classrooms, service centers, and dormitories at ground level: Most students with disabilities have mobility and orientation problems. If you walk in the campus, you will witness this truth. Particularly students that are visually impaired those with motor disabilities, multiple disabilities are seriously challenged. Hence, as general principle, it is advisable to open/establish service centers at ground level as well as reserve ground floor dormitories for students with disabilities.

To ensure easy mobility in your university/college campuses ramps should be constructed at the entrances of buildings, libraries, cafeterias, classrooms, etc. Moreover, whenever new buildings are erected one of technical criteria should be ramps.

Ground location of classrooms, equipping of classes with modified materials like adjustable table and chair, reserving appropriate sitting places or positions, allowing students to record lessons, tolerance of slate and stylus sounds seems simple or minor but are basic for students with disabilities.

8.3) Awareness creation among HEIs community: Awareness creation could be done in variety of ways; pictorial billboards are easy ways to convey messages about cautions and rights of students with disabilities. Such billboards are daily reminders to all HEIs community while looking at them. Hence, appropriate places for erecting billboards; attractions and use of high visibility colors are essential.

Celebration of disability day in HEIs is also another alternative in which all university /college community take part in the celebration. The modality might be through conferences, discussions, guest lectures, and other creative ways as conditions permits.

Awareness could be done in all academic and administrative discussions and decision as to make the issue inclusive in all matters.

Awareness of faculties, department heads and staffs about students with disabilities is crucial. Particularly, instructors should be alerted that there would be
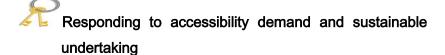
students with disabilities in their classes. Such awareness will enable teachers make mental readiness and make lesson preparations to respond as per the needs of their students.

Awareness of staff working in units of students' admission and registrar office is also crucial. Students should not be limited to choose their preferences. In some countries admission and registrar offices have spaces in their application formats to indicate type of disabilities and for writing down their preferences.

8.4) **Avoidances of physical barriers and campus road map**: Unfortunately, roads and pathways are not safe to walk freely without assistance. Open ditches are serious sources of danger for students with disabilities. Hence, a campaign of removing physical barriers is priority work in creating conducive atmosphere.

Most modern way of avoidance of barrier is alerting students with disabilities particularly blind students should be sensitized with campus road map. Such orientation will keep them while walking alone.

9. Challenges and remedial suggestions

Responding to accessibility demand and sustainable undertaking

The task of responding to accessibility might not be easy particularly in view of challenges that come from deep rooted negative attitudes which often are impregnable hurdles resulting in hindrance to new and positive initiatives. Major negative attitude driven challenges might attack from two angles: one is unpreparedness of academic units and the second is marginalization, negligence or carelessness to accomplish tasks related to disabilities. Thus, the following remedial suggestions can be considered as alternative solutions.

o Continuous awareness creations using all available options.

o Experiences sharing among institutions (in the country or abroad) that have experiences in dealing with students with disabilities.

o Creation of collaborative work with disability focused NGOs.

o Now days there are numerous teaching and administrative evidence based experiences in the internet. Hence, browsing, adapting to local conditions and using them.

o Avoiding negligence and promoting accessibility needs to be taken as major cross cutting issue in both academic and administrative matters.

Failure to provide necessary materials, equipment and assistive devices is another possible challenge. The problem could be related to lack of budget or lack of information where to access or where to buy the materials and equipment. Hence, you may consider making/preparing

o List of materials/equipment enhance learning among students with disabilities. This can be done by discussing the matter with students with disabilities.

o List of organizations and their addresses where you can buy those items or get donations.

o Price for each item needed, and update the price with current cost.

Availability support center for students with disabilities helps to organize special support to students with disabilities. The

center serves to bring onboard both students and service providers to the same table. It creates better conditions to coordinate supports. Hence, thus the following remedial suggestions can be considered as troubleshooting alternatives.

- o Prepare workable proposal and begin contact with Ministry of Education and NGOs working in the areas of disabilities.
- o Share experiences from Universities /colleges having/establishing disability centers.
- o Prepare lists of materials or assistive devices needed
- o Work with HEIs materials purchase units In every fiscal year make the budget plan based on needs of students with disabilities.
- o Search for organizations or business firms that import materials needed for education of students with disabilities
- o Prepare and provide updated and adapted reference books and handouts that are essential for students with disabilities.
- o Nature appropriateness of examinations, test notifications, preparation and delivery modality as well as exam appropriateness and physical location are crucial

- o Make course adaptations, in line with needs and potentials of students with disabilities.
- o Make the technology accessible for lectures and examination

Inflexibility of instructional approach is one of serious challenges. It negatively affects the academic performances and may result in dismissal. The problems here include exam preparations, administration, use of single approach, rigidity on traditional principles; the problem might arise from attitude or from lack of appropriate modification of skills. Hence,

- o Raising the awareness of the academic staffs about differentiations among students with special reference of students with disabilities
- o Training on lesson adaptation or modifications shall be prepared and delivered to academic staffs.
- o Preparing sample lessons or course materials and distribute to departments to use it as references
- o Acknowledging and encouraging staffs that made trials on lesson modifications or use them as role models.

Examination is one of major common challenges in HEIs is examination. The exam notifications, delivery approach, its appropriateness, and physical setting/location are generally not suitable to students with disabilities. For example, visually impaired students take their exam through reader assistance. The readers might not write answers exactly in the way the as the student thinks and says. Usually they might add or ignore some of the ideas. Readers also might not understand the importance of basic terms in the subject area. Hence, such ignorance might influence the examinees grades.

Exam problems are multifaceted as indicated above. Hence the following suggestions will help as remedial ways:

o   Test notification shall be done in variety of ways.

o   Multiple modality of taking exam should be in place.

o   The time allowed has to be usually extended (they need more time)

o   Appropriateness of examination has to be examined ahead of delivery

o   Technology can help a lot; hence exam could be delivered using computers.

o   Testing visually impaired students on veranda or at the corridors seems segregating; examinees are often

distracted by the noise of people passing or chatting close to the examinees. Relocation of special exam rooms should be considered.

Lack of basic references is in appropriate formats like in audio, video, Braille or others bring serious challenge for students with disabilities. This situation limits students' scope of learning and performance. Students find it difficult to actualize their potentials. Hence, to overcome the problem:

o contact with universities that have experiences on such services

o list down the type, contents and amount of resources/services needed to allocate budget

o organize group of staffs having better awareness and readiness to prepare references that support learning among students with disabilities.

o search the market if the necessary materials are available.

o create contacts with other universities abroad to exchange experiences (on preparation skills, getting models, or international references). Mobility limitations and inaccessibility of pathways, buildings, classrooms, toilets, labs, libraries ect. impose academic, psychological and

social problems for students with disabilities in general and students with motor impairments in particular. These situation limit full participation and endangers academic survival as well as the psychosocial well being of students with disabilities. Hence,

o creating barrier free and accessible environment

o Relocating destinations where students with disabilities usually visit.

o placing milestone marks after specified intervals to assist visually impaired students

o marking road side with disability marks to keep them safe from other traffic

o place caution bill boards to other pedestrians and drivers

> **Dear reader:** *we suggest the following basic references and addresses of organizations that you may need to contact and consult when you buy materials for your students or look for*

10. Basic References

While working on accessibility please refer the following
materials:

No.	Basic conventions, laws, legislative and directives	Where you find them
1	Addis Ababa University legislation 2010	AAU web site , Brehanina Selam(Hard copy)
2	Higher education proclamation,No.650/2009	Brehanina selam printing (hard copy)
3	UN Convention ratified by Ethiopia	UNESCO Web site
4	SNE /Inclusive Education strategy (2012)	Ministry of Education
5	Education and Training Policy (1994)	Ministry of education
6	SNE /inclusive education strategy implementation guideline (2012)	Ministry of Education
7	SNE/Inclusive Education Communication Works Guideline (2005)	Ministry of Education

10 A) Addresses of organizations working on accessibility

	Name of organizations	Physical Addresses
1	Disability Center	Addis Ababa University ,(Mandela Bld)
2	Ethiopian Center for Disability and Development (ECDD)	Behind Dream liner Hotel, Meskel flower road
3	Ethiopian special Needs Education professional Association (ESNEPA)	In front of Teferi Mekonen school, Meskaye Hizunan Medehanialem School bld, 5th floor.

10 B) Basic materials

No.	Materials	Where you can buy
1	Braille paper	Wonji paper mill factory, Ethiopian National association for Blind(ENAB)
2	Slate	Ethiopian National Association for Blind(ENAB)
3	Styles	Ethiopian National Association for Blind(ENAB)
4	Brailler	Ethiopian National Association for Blind(ENAB)
5	Jigsaw software	Adaptable technology
6	Desktop computers	Any computer sales shops
7	Tape recorders	Any electronic shops
8	Talking calculator	Any stationery shops
9	Sign language dictionary	Ethiopian National Association for Deaf(ENAD)
10	Embosser	Ethiopian National Association for Blind(ENAB)
11	Other software	Blues Software Center or Software Shops