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# Accessible Books Consortium

*Bringing books to  
persons with print disabilities*

2014

# Imagine...

living in a world where you could not obtain the books that you wanted to read.

For most of us this is something we take for granted. Imagine wanting to get an education and not being able to get the materials, articles or newspapers that you needed to learn.

These constraints are a daily reality for over 285 million<sup>1</sup> people in the world today. It happens because they are blind or have low vision, and there are simply not enough books and other publications produced in accessible formats.

<sup>1</sup> World Health Organization estimate (2013).

# The global book famine

More than 90% of the world's books are not accessible<sup>2</sup>. This is what is known as the global book famine. Persons who are blind in developing countries have only a one in ten chance of going to school or of getting a job<sup>2</sup>. They are in danger of being caught in an unfortunate and vicious cycle of illiteracy and resulting unemployment. The lack of accessible books is a very real barrier to getting an education and leading an independent, productive life.

Take Dipendra Manocha, for example, who has been visually impaired since the age of 11 due to a retinal disease. Dipendra was one of the lucky few: his Delhi secondary school had textbooks in braille, which he shared with three blind classmates.

Unfortunately, when he went to university there were no accessible publications available. He had to hire readers or ask friends to read books to him. This was a huge struggle. But Dipendra overcame the situation, completed his education and today, as President of the DAISY Forum of India, is campaigning to end the global book famine.

# The challenges

There are many challenges in getting accessible books into the hands of persons with print disabilities<sup>3</sup>, but they are not insurmountable.

The main ones are:

- Many countries do not have a copyright exemption that allows for the production of accessible books without permission first being granted by the copyright holder. Most legislation also does not allow for the cross-border sharing of such books once produced.
- Technical know-how is required to produce accessible books.
- There are very few libraries or databases of accessible books in developing countries and those that do exist often struggle on account of a lack of financial and human resources.
- Devices that allow people with print disabilities to read accessible books can be very expensive when compared to average monthly salaries in developing countries.

2 World Blind Union estimates.

3 Persons with print disabilities cannot read print because of blindness, low vision or a perceptual, reading or physical disability

# What is being done?

Two exciting initiatives will make a difference to the lives of persons with print disabilities, and bring lasting change:

## **Paving the way for sharing accessible books worldwide: the Marrakesh VIP Treaty**

The member states of the World Intellectual Property Organization (WIPO) have been working together since 2008 to do something that will increase the number of accessible books: to create exemptions in copyright law. Negotiations led to the historic adoption in June 2013 of the Marrakesh Treaty to Facilitate Access to Published Works for Persons Who Are Blind, Visually Impaired, or Otherwise Print Disabled. This will allow for the production, and exchange, of accessible books amongst countries with no need for permission from the copyright holder. The Marrakesh VIP Treaty will come into force when 20 countries have ratified it.

## **Practical measures to create more books: the ABC**

A new multi-stakeholder entity is working on practical ways to make more accessible books available. The Accessible Books Consortium (ABC) is an alliance that comprises WIPO,

organizations that serve persons with print disabilities and organizations that represent authors and publishers. The ABC includes the following international umbrella organizations: the World Blind Union, the DAISY Consortium, the International Federation of Library Associations and Institutions, the International Publishers Association, the International Federation of Reproduction Rights Organizations and the International Authors' Forum.

The ABC is having an impact in three areas:

### **Sharing technical skills**

Many countries do not possess up-to-date technical knowledge about how to produce accessible books. The ABC is funding the sharing of this knowledge through projects in developing and least developed countries. For example, through financial support received from the Government of Australia, ABC was able to fund workers from an NGO in Chittagong, Bangladesh to go to Kolkata, India, to receive training in the latest technologies. This included training in producing audio books. Back in Bangladesh, these trainees are now using their new skills to convert into audio those books that are most needed by students at the University of Chittagong.



A woman recording a book into audio.

### **Promoting inclusive publishing**

If all new books were published in such a way as to be usable from the start by both sighted people and persons with print disabilities, many lives would be radically transformed. ABC supports the goal of “born accessible” publishing and encourages the adoption of an industry-wide accessibility standard. The Accessible Books Consortium is also a sponsor of the Charter on Accessible Publishing which publishers of all kinds will be invited to sign and commit to making the idea of “born accessible” works a reality.

### **Building an international database**

Knowing which publications have been converted into accessible formats will also have a critical impact. The ABC is building an international database and book exchange of accessible books called the TIGAR Service. It includes over 238,000 titles in approximately 55 languages from the catalogues of libraries from around the world. The goal is to make this international book exchange service the premier repository of accessible titles in the world. Currently, rights must be granted by copyright holders for books to be shared across borders. Once the Marrakesh VIP Treaty is effective, this will no longer be needed in those countries that ratify the treaty.

# The way forward **Can you help?**

The people involved in the Accessible Books Consortium are optimistic about making real progress in this crucial work over the next few years. This initiative, however, is very resource intensive. To have real impact, more funds are needed. It costs approximately:

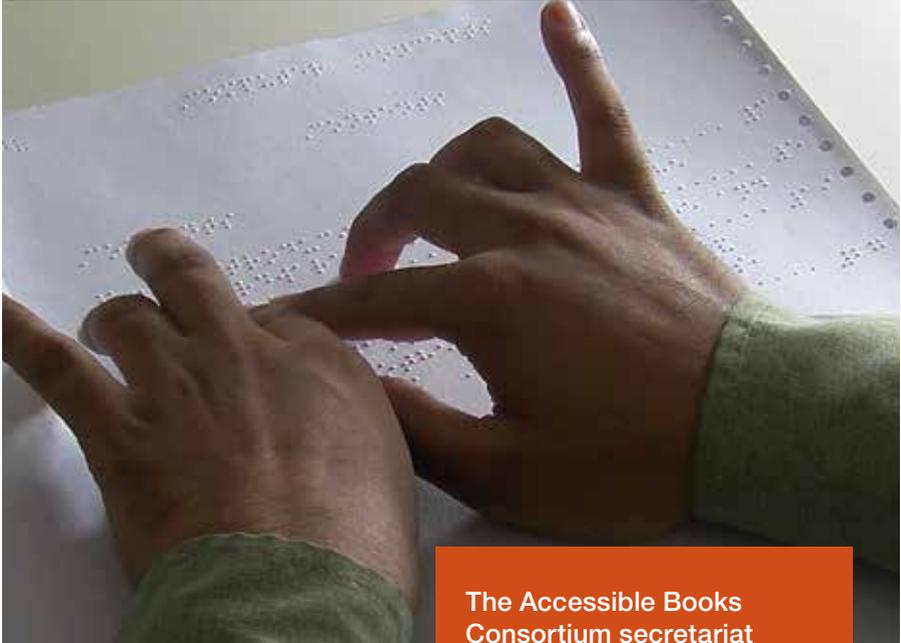
- US\$2,500 to train 10 people in Bangladesh in the latest publishing technologies
- US\$20,000 to produce 1,000 accessible books in Sri Lanka
- US\$125 for a reading device in India used by a person with print disabilities
- US\$7,000 to add an entire library catalogue to the TIGAR Service database.

The Accessible Books Consortium urgently needs financial support from both the public and private sectors to help transform the lives of persons with print disabilities.

Can your company or government make a contribution? Donations of any size are most welcome and can be earmarked to fund specific projects. In-kind contributions are also welcome.



Two women using a DAISY reading device.



A man reading a text in braille.

The Accessible Books Consortium secretariat is located at WIPO's headquarters in Geneva, Switzerland and is audited by the WIPO External Auditor. Its Board includes representatives from WIPO, organizations serving persons with print disabilities, including the World Blind Union, organizations representing publishers and authors, and major donors.



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