

Dr. Hajime Yamada

I would like to discuss how to facilitate the use of ICT accessibility standards.

Japan already has a set of ICT accessibility standards. The series name is “Guidelines for Older Persons and Persons with Disabilities Information Communication Equipment, Software and Services,” of which we have five parts.

Part 1 – Common Guidelines; developed in 2004

Part 2 – Information Processing Equipment; developed in 2004

Part 3 – Content; developed in 2004

Part 4 – Telecommunication Equipment; developed in 2005

Part 5 – Office Equipment; developed in 2006

During the development of these standards, one of the most important things we considered is the market stakeholder involvement. We invited user communities, industry, academia, as well as government agencies to develop these standards. In some cases, during the development, there were conflicts among stakeholders, but that was the only way to reach to these accessibility standards.

Next I will cover how to facilitate the use of these standards, and the reason why I emphasize how to facilitate the use is that very simple. The message is that standards are effective only if they are used in the market. Even if we develop a standard, if no one uses it then the standard is useless. Therefore, we must develop something that would be used widely in the society and especially in the market. That is what we were considering during the development of the standards.

We introduced a couple of strategies, and the first one is to include older persons. In Japan, 20% of the population is over the age of 65. That is attractive enough and big enough for manufacturers to consider as a market, and that is very important. If we only develop standards that are only used by people with disabilities, then maybe the firm’s consideration is that the market size is too small; therefore, let’s consider the other 90% of the population. If we include our 20 percent of the population in it, firms must consider the market seriously. That is our strategy. Of course, older persons can be regarded as persons with age-related impairment because various human abilities will

deteriorate over time. I also strongly believe that it is necessary to include older persons in the information society.

Our next strategy was to be global. I think that global applicability wakes up the industry, and so from the beginning, we considered that it is necessary to make our work global. We submitted Japanese industry standards to various international standardization organizations in order to pass the global harmonization and to brush up our national standards. First, our common guidelines went to the ISO, and now they've started the final voting process. We will have the international standard around September. Then, the information processing equipment standard will go to JTC1, and a standard group there will start work soon. It is in this way that we will go to the international arena. I worked as a project editor for IS on the convergent of our national standard to the international one, and I feel that during the development of drafting international standard that I received a lot of views and comments and everything and I believe that such different views based on different cultures and different environments really improve the quality of the standards.

The third strategy to being global is to participate in international, regional or national activities. Japan is participating in JTC1, a working group on accessibility that contributes to the development of user summaries and inventory of standards. In US, I am told that they developed a standard for procurement, and now they have a work named TEITAC. My European colleagues and I are sitting in and submitting information to the TEITAC committee and other various committees on information so that we can really achieve global harmonization.

Another strategy is to use government bargaining power and public procurement. Accessibility standard can be used as a requirement for public procurement.

More encouragement is necessary in this field. One positive solution and strategy is to develop a UN ICT Accessibility Product Award. Awards and encouragement like that can help the industry to consider this issue more seriously.

Question and Answer Session

Question 1:

Professor Yamada, what do you think is necessary in order to implement your suggestion for having a UN Accessibility Prize? What would be required from the colleagues around on the panel and even on the floor because many of them are very active people? Do we need to make having a UN Prize for Accessibility a reality?

Professor Yamada:

Thank you very much for the question.

I think it would be fantastic to have such a prize, if possible. One possibility that Ken already mentioned during his speech is that industry could voluntarily give good practices and good products that could be very accessible and then evaluate the total and decide which one is best.

In that way, we could proceed, but we need a panel to do that. Of course, a panel should be constructed with the participation of all the stakeholders, including user community, and also some budgeting. It could be possible, but it is very optimistic to think that we could do it now.

Question 2:

I would like to ask someone from the panel if there's a possibility of countries under development to reach the technologies much better than today because all these technologies are all very good. How can we reach of all the countries, especially the less developed countries, because in the majority of these countries, people don't have access to these very good technologies?

Dr. Hajime Yamada:

I'd like to discuss hardware. In the case of hardware, especially in areas such as semiconductors, the mass production of semiconductors reduces the costs dramatically. For example, every PC has a wireless connection now, at the cost of a chip inside this PC or in your PC is less than a dollar. Now, we have a lot of equipment or products that speak. You have mobile phone that speaks "email received," and you have elevators that speak when they stop on each floor. In that case, a speech synthesizer is installed and the cost itself is very low. Perhaps such global use of the same technology could reduce the cost dramatically.