**ICT Leadership in Inclusive Employment of Persons with Disabilities:
An Economic and Social Imperative**

WITSA/SourceAmerica

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October 2018

Synopsis

As Information and Communications Technology (ICT) touches nearly all aspects of human life, the technology sector can play a vital role in addressing the persistent unemployment of persons with disabilities. Worldwide, persons with disabilities face barriers to economic and social participation, including employment.[1,2,3] Advancements in accessible and assistive technologies are critical and must expand to cover the broad diversity of disability. But, such advancements must also support outcomes such as increased employment of persons with disabilities. Such outcomes can only be realized if industry leaders recognize the talents of persons with disabilities and provide equal consideration for employment. As ICT shapes the global labor market, it is incumbent on policymakers and industry to address longstanding disparities between persons with and without disabilities.

This paper and accompanying policy recommendations address the social and economic imperatives of employment of persons with disabilities and lay out a roadmap for the ICT sector to grow as leaders in supporting the employment of persons with disabilities. Outcomes include the employment of persons with disabilities within all

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[1] World Health Organization (2011). World report on disability (2011): Retrieved from: http://www.who.int/disabilities/world_report/2011/en/

[2] United Nations Division for Social Policy and Development (n.d.). Factsheet on persons with disabilities. Retrieved from: https://www.un.org/development/desa/disabilities/resources/factsheet-on-persons-with-disabilities.html

[3] World Health Organization (2017). 10 facts on disability. Retrieved from: http://www.who.int/features/factfiles/disability/en/

levels of the ICT sector as well as the use of technology to increase their employment in all other industries. The content builds on the work of the International Telecommunication Union (ITU), the World Bank Group, and multiple organizations supporting implementation of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (UN CRPD) to promote greater access by persons with disabilities to ICT and employment. While there have been measurable increases in ICT access experienced by persons with disabilities, the state of employment has remained relatively unchanged or, in many cases, worse when measured since 2006 when the United Nations Convention of the Rights of Persons with Disabilities was established.[1,4]

From a societal standpoint, persons with disabilities are subject to significantly higher rates of poverty due to barriers to education and employment opportunities. This is largely due to long held stigmas and the existence of highly variable cultural norms that cause persons with disabilities to exist on the fringes of society.[1,2,3,5] Beyond greater awareness, and the recognition of untapped talent represented by the disability community; the public and private sectors must explore strategies for increased inclusion. Such approaches include education, training and employment initiatives that enable persons with disabilities to achieve economic wellbeing. Technology is playing an increased role in each of these areas for the general population and must also do so for persons with disabilities.

Economically, it is estimated that countries forego up to 7 percent of Gross Domestic Product (GDP) due to the exclusion of persons with disabilities.[6,7] Employing persons with disabilities represents a significant return on investment for industry. Research indicates that people with disabilities are loyal employees, staying with an employer longer than people without disabilities, reducing turnover costs.[8] Additionally, research shows that people with disabilities have less absence due to sickness and include less quantifiable benefits including better interactions with customers and co-workers, increase in company morale, increase in productivity and more favorable views by customers of companies that hire people with disabilities.[8,9] For these reasons, public

[4] Fembek, M., Heindorf, I., Kainz, W. & Saupe, A. (2017). Zero Project report 2017: employment, work and vocational education & training. Zero Project. Retrieved from: https://s3.amazonaws.com/zeroproject-uploads/zeroproject/wp-content/uploads/2017/02/Zero+Project+Report+2017+on+Employment_Vocational+Education+and+Training_English_6MB.pdf

[5] Watermeyer, B. (2016). Disablism, identity and self: discrimination as a traumatic assault on subjectivity. Journal of Community & Applied Social Psychology. 26 (3), p. 268 - 276.

[6] United Nations Division of Economic and Social Affairs. (2015). Global status report on disability and development prototype. Retrieved from: http://www.un.org/esa/socdev/documents/disability/2016/GlobalStatusReportonDisabilityandDevelopment.pdf

[7] World Bank Group (2018). Disability inclusion and accountability framework. Retrieved from: http://documents.worldbank.org/curated/en/437451528442789278/pdf/126977-WP-PUBLIC-DisabilityInclusionAccountabilitydigital.pdf

[8] Beyer, S. & Beyer, A. (2017). A systematic review of the literature on the benefits for employers of employing people with learning disabilities. MENCAP.

[9] Graffam, J., Kaye, S., Shinkfield, A. & Polzin, U. (2002). Employer benefits and cost of employing a person with a disability. Journal of Vocational Rehabilitation (17)4, p. 251-263.

and private partnerships to increase the inclusion of persons with disabilities should be considered an economic imperative. As the ICT sector represents an estimated 6.5% of the global economy, accounting for an estimated 100 million jobs[10] and garners the attention of policymakers who seek to further unlock its potential for social benefit; ICT should take a lead role in furthering the inclusion of persons with disabilities through employment.

Representing both policymakers and industry leaders, WITSA's membership carries a responsibility to ensure all populations benefit from ICT. In accordance with the objective to fulfill the dream of the digital age, traditionally underrepresented populations such as persons with disabilities must be afforded equal consideration in the access to ICT as well as employment. Achieving equitable outcomes can only occur if persons with disabilities are also provided an opportunity to shape the formation and implementation of policy and tactical approaches. WITSA is committed to furthering goals that promote the inclusion of persons with disabilities, which can only become a reality through the active participation of the global ICT sector.

Context

Of the 7.8 billion people worldwide, nearly 1 in 6 are persons with disabilities, a group disproportionately underrepresented in the economy.[11]

Persons with disabilities are largely underrepresented in many aspects of society.[1,2,3] An estimated 1 billion people worldwide live with a disability. It is important to note there is no single recognized definition of disability. The laws and cultural norms related to disability are highly variable by country. This paper uses the definition established by the UN CRPD:

"Persons with disabilities include those who have long-term physical, mental, intellectual or sensory impairments which in interaction with various barriers may hinder their full and effective participation in society on an equal basis with others."[1]

Equally important is the recognition that the disability community is quite diverse. Census data collection used throughout the world lacks comparability in the definition of disability and generally does not achieve the level of specificity necessary to truly understand the unique demographics represented within the disability community.[1] Such statistics fail to capture the diversity within generalized categories such as persons with intellectual and developmental disabilities, those who experience

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[10] United Nations Conference on Trade and Development (2017). Information economy report 2017: digitalization, trade and development. Retrieved from:
http://unctad.org/en/PublicationsLibrary/ier2017_en.pdf

[11] United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs (2015). Global Status Report on Disability and Development *Prototype* 2015. Retrieved from:
http://www.un.org/esa/socdev/documents/disability/2016/GlobalStatusReportonDisabilityandDevelopment.pdf

intersectionality in disability (i.e. deaf-blind) and those largely unrecognized due to pervasive social stigmas (i.e. persons with leprosy). Data disaggregation is critically important for understanding the level of marginalization experienced uniquely by various groups and for developing responsive public policy interventions. Despite the need for data disaggregation, it is apparent that persons with disability comprise a diverse community that is largely underrepresented throughout society. Furthermore, predictions indicate that the prevalence of disability amongst the world's population will continue to grow, largely because of acquired disability among aging populations.[1]

Barriers to Employment

While technology has facilitated greater inclusion of people with disabilities in the workplace it holds the potential to create additional barriers. This is due to the changing nature of employment worldwide and the potential for the benefits of technology to be unequally distributed across groups.[12,13,14,15,16] If unaddressed these barriers may exacerbate employment situation of people with disabilities as technology becomes ever more integrated into the workplace.

Arguably, the starting point for addressing the employment of persons with disabilities through technology is accessibility. Accessibility to ICT by persons with disabilities was established as a basic human right under Article 9 on the UN CRPD.[17] Since the adoption of the CRPD, the topic of accessibility has become an area of focus by governments, private sector actors and NGOs. This has led to new levels of public and private partnerships to address longstanding barriers to the inclusion of persons with disabilities and the intersection with technological advancements. Additionally, the recognition of accessibility to ICT as a right of persons with disabilities has led to

[12] Frey, C.B., & Osborne, M. (2017). The future of employment: How susceptible are jobs to computerisation? Technological forecasting & social change, 114, 254-280.

[13] Arntz, M., Gregory, T., & Zierhan, U. (2016). The risk of automation for jobs in OECD countries: A comparative analysis. OECD Social, Employment and Migration Working Papers,189. Retrieved from: http://www.ifuturo.org/sites/default/files/docs/automation.pdf

[14] Berriman, R., & Hawksworth, J. (2017). Will robots steal our jobs? The potential impact of automation on the UK and other major economies. UK Economic Outlook, PricewaterhouseCoopers UK. Retrieved from: https://www.pwc.co.uk/economic-services/ukeo/pwcukeo-section-4-automation-march-2017-v2.pdf

[15] Manyika, J., Lund. S., Chui, M., Bughin, J., Woetzel, J., Batra, P., & Ko, R. (2017). Jobs lost, jobs gained: Workforce transitions in a time of automation. McKinsey Global Institute. Retrieved from: https://www.mckinsey.com/~/media/McKinsey/Global%20Themes/Future%20of%20Organizations/What%20the%20future%20of%20work%20will%20mean%20for%20jobs%20skills%20and%20wages/MGI-Jobs-Lost-Jobs-Gained-Report-December-6-2017.ashx

[16] White House, Executive Office of the President. (2016). Artificial intelligence, automation, and the economy. Retrieved from: https://permanent.access.gpo.gov/gpo75989/Artificial-Intelligence-Automation-Economy.PDF

[17] United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs Division for Inclusive Social Development (n.d.). Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities – articles. Retrieved from: https://www.un.org/development/desa/disabilities/convention-on-the-rights-of-persons-with-disabilities/convention-on-the-rights-of-persons-with-disabilities-2.html

increased study to include the collection and dissemination of best practices around the world.[18]

Studies suggest that 41 percent of persons with disabilities have accessible telecom and media services and 49 percent have accessible features for their computers. When comparing the figures for high and low-income economies there is a stark difference. In high income economies 65 percent of people with a disability have accessible telecom and media services and 79 percent have accessible features for computers, but in low income economies, the figures are 17 percent and 19 percent respectively.[19] This is significant because an estimated 80 percent of the world's population with disabilities lives in developing countries.[2]

It is important to acknowledge that access requires more than availability to ICT. To be fully accessible technology must be affordable for those of all levels of economic status. Research indicates that there is a significant gap in the availability of public funding for assistive devices and technologies. Developed economies, possess systems and funding to provide assistive technology. But less developed regions score low on this indicator, with research showing that while systems may be in place to provide these technologies, they are not as widely available and are of a poorer quality.[20] Availability and affordability alone are not sufficient to making a difference. Technology must also be responsive to the needs of human beings who wish to engage with it to overcome barriers and achieve goals. The recognition of this fact has led to increased attention to the principles of universal design, and usability testing conducted by persons with disabilities.[21,22]

There are also non-technology related barriers to employment that have persisted for years. Research examining why employers do not hire more people with disabilities finds that the societal marginalization is more often the cause than any lack of capability by people with disabilities. This marginalization results primarily from misperceptions about levels of productivity and a belief that accommodating people with disabilities will be cost prohibitive. The same research also indicates that employers hold different views depending on the disability; employers have more positive views individuals with mobility or sensory disabilities and less positive views towards individuals with intellectual and developmental disabilities.[8]

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[18] Examples include the Smart Cities for All initiative led by G3ict and World Enabled and collection of indicators by the Zero Project.

[19] Gould, M., Leblois, A., Cesa-Bianchi, F. & Montenegro, V. (2014). Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities: 2013 ICT accessibility progress report. Retrieved from: http://g3ict.org/resource_center/CRPD_2013_ICT_Accessibility_Progress

[20] Charles, P., Fembek, M., Kainz, W., Mundackal, S., Saupe, A., Vaughn-Spitzy, M., Kahane, A. & Wagner, C. (2018). Zero Project report 2018: accessibility. Retrieved from: https://20cxh614hon119kmcx49v25h-wpengine.netdna-ssl.com/wp-content/uploads/2018/02/Zero-Project-Report-2018-on-Accessibility.pdf

[21] Andersson, E. (2018) Technology that is accessible to everyone: three ways we're building for people with disabilities. The Keyword. Retrieved from: https://blog.google/perspectives/eve-andersson/technology-accessible-everyone-three-ways-were-building-people-disabilities/

[22] Examples of organizations that specialize in usability testing by persons with disabilities include Knowbility and My Blind Spot

Employment of Persons with Disabilities

Despite recognition of access to technology as a basic human right of persons with disabilities, there has not been a positive correlation in employment statistics. A 2007 report issued by the United Nations indicated that unemployment percentages for persons with disabilities averaged 80-90 percent in developing countries and 50-70 percent in industrialized countries. A 2011 World Disability Report produced by the World Health Organization and World Bank found that the average employment rate of persons with disabilities in 51 countries was 52.8 percent for men and 19.6 percent for women. The same report cited data from the Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) from a survey of 27 countries. The OECD found the employment rate of persons with disabilities average 44 percent, while the rate for those without disabilities averaged 75 percent. Additionally, the barriers to employment cited by the WHO included lack of access, misconceptions about disability, discrimination, and overprotection in labor laws.[1] Most recently, a 2017 study indicates that despite the existence of national hiring quotas for persons with disabilities, employment percentages of persons with disabilities are deteriorating worldwide.[4]

Exact figures on the economic impact of unemployment of persons with disabilities are difficult to find. Studies suggest a lack of available statistics on education and employment of persons with disabilities worldwide.[4] However, according to the 2015 UN Global Status Report on Disability and Development, in developing countries "higher rates of unemployment and labor market inactivity among persons with disabilities as well as the reduced productivity of employed disabled persons due to barriers to education, skills training and transport lead to a loss for countries worth up to 7% of GDP." These figures represent a tremendous loss of both human capital and economic contribution. Numerous studies cite benefits to employers including acquiring highly motivated employees, creating an inclusive work culture, improved customer satisfaction and enhanced employer brand, of which the latter two can have a direct impact on a company's bottom line.[23,24] Such benefits experienced by individual employers should inform the widespread adoption of inclusive employment practices, leading to the strengthening of entire industries.

Companies that actively hire individuals with disabilities position themselves to engage a diverse talent pool and reach a larger market by developing products and services for a growing segment of the population. It has been found that individuals with disabilities regularly think creatively and adapt to situations and challenges, tapping into their unique insights brings creative thinking to the workplace that can aid in innovative product development.

[23] Solovieva, T.I., Dowler, D.L. & Walls, R.T. (2011). Employer benefits from making workplace accommodations. Disability and Health Journal 4(1), p. 39-45. Retrieved from: https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pubmed/21168806

[24] Martin, K., Jamrog, J., Jamrog, J. & Dixon, A. (2014). Employing people with intellectual and developmental disabilities. Institute for Corporate Productivity (i4cp). Retrieved from: https://ohioemploymentfirst.org/up_doc/Employing_People_With_Intellectual_and_Developmental_Disabilities.pdf

Companies should not simply follow anti-discrimination laws when it comes to hiring practices but should view persons with disabilities as a source of unique talent and insight into the technology needs of a growing population. The ICT industry has an opportunity to take a leadership role in increasing the employment of people with disabilities in the ICT industry, setting an example that could catalyze other sectors to include persons with disabilities, encouraging large-scale economic and societal benefit across the world.

Given the global state of access to ICT and employment, it is an economic and social imperative to increase inclusion of persons with disabilities. The importance of doing so will only increase due to the changing nature of work brought on by globalization, urbanization and technological innovation. Some research indicates that technology transformations could increase work opportunities for people with disabilities, but this is limited to individuals with vision, hearing, and mobility disabilities and neglects to mention the impact on individuals with intellectual and developmental disabilities.[25] Comparatively, persons with disabilities may face a greater likelihood of technological unemployment due to long-standing economic gaps, lower rates of educational attainment, and lower average earnings compared to those without disabilities.[26] Limited access to ICT has a compounding impact on employment, economic well-being and societal inclusion.

Access to ICT is a starting point to addressing this concern. Significant progress can only be achieved if persons with disabilities are included in the design of products and services and afforded equal opportunities to employment. As a driving force of economic mobility, ICT offers a way to address the growing rate of poverty and marginalization experienced by persons with disabilities worldwide. The ICT industry must lead the way by ensuring full participation of persons with disabilities as consumers and contributors.

Conclusion

Advancements in technology are insufficient by themselves to bridge socioeconomic marginalization experienced by persons with disabilities worldwide. In fact, technological innovations alone have the potential to widen the digital, economic and social divide between persons with and without disabilities. This is due to the likelihood that those predisposed to using technology will continue to excel at a pace that marginalized populations with limited access cannot, creating an ever-widening skills gap. This is clearly demonstrated in employment. Furthermore, predictions for the future of the labor market suggest the accelerating pace of technology may leave traditionally underrepresented populations even further behind.[12,13,14,15,16]

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[25] Lotito, M. J., Mathiason, G. G., Black, C., Merin, C., Scherer, M. U., Crews, A. & Pierce, N. (2018). The future is now: workforce opportunities and the coming TIDE. Littler Workplace Policy Institute. Retrieved from: https://www.littler.com/files/the_future_is_now_-_workforce_opportunities_and_the_coming_tide_0.pdf

[26] Kanady, S. (2018). The Future of Work and the Disability Community. SourceAmerica.

ICT can be the catalyst for opportunity for a diverse, untapped labor market with unique perspectives that can shape the future of the global economy. By understanding the barriers commonly faced by persons with disabilities and adopting policies based on evidenced-based practices, the ICT sector can serve as a model of inclusive employment to drive societal and economic benefit. True understanding originates from the inclusion of persons with disabilities in defining the challenges, designing the solutions, and implementing the interventions. The slogan of "nothing about us without us" is central to meaningful engagement of persons with disabilities. This is an essential element for the adoption of a policy framework for public and private ICT sector actors to assert their role and responsibility in enabling inclusive employment.

About WITSA
The World Information Technology and Services Alliance (WITSA) is the leading recognized international voice of the global ICT industry, whose members from over 80 nations represent more than 90 percent of the world ICT market. WITSA thus represents a critical stakeholder in discussions on Internet policy, regulation and governance.

WITSA's members and stakeholders comprise national associations, multinational corporations, institutions and organizations, researchers, developers, manufacturers, software developers, telecommunication companies, suppliers, trainers and integrators of ICT goods and services. As such, they represent a large and obviously critical constituent group for whom international trade in ICT products and services underpins business development and economic activity.
See more at: https://witsa.org/

About SourceAmerica®
Established in 1974, SourceAmerica® creates job opportunities for a skilled and dedicated workforce: people with significant disabilities. SourceAmerica is the vital link between the federal government and private sector organizations that procure the products and services provided by this exceptional workforce via a network of nearly 800 community-based nonprofits. Headquartered in Vienna, VA, SourceAmerica provides its nonprofit agency network with business development, contract management, legislative and regulatory assistance, communications and public relations materials, information technology support, engineering and technical assistance, and extensive professional training needed for successful nonprofit management. See more at: https://www.sourceamerica.org/

Policy Recommendations for an Inclusive Future

As discussions take place on how to increase access to ICT worldwide, WITSA supports a strategic focus on actionable outcomes that narrow the gap in employment for persons with disabilities. The policy interventions outlined below are intended to achieve the desired outcomes by supporting greater access to employment opportunities, technology, education, and workforce development.

As a fundamental principle, WITSA believes that by encouraging persons with disabilities to enter the technology industry at all levels, the ICT sector will become more robust, more competitive, and more innovative. By serving as a model for success and continuing the development of technologies accessible to all people, the ICT sector can be a global catalyst for the employment of persons with disabilities. WITSA and its members around the world are committed to this cause and have endorsed the following set of policy recommendations:

Policy Recommendation #1 Employment: All industry sectors, including the ICT sector, need to promote policies and practices that improve efforts on including persons with disabilities within their workforce. The ICT industry, working in conjunction with governments, needs to develop hiring policies and processes that are fully inclusive and offer equal consideration to qualified candidates with disabilities. This should result in a shrinking disparity in the employment rates between people with and without disabilities in the ICT as well as most other sectors.

Policy Recommendation #2 Training: Governments and industry must adopt policies and programs that raise awareness about creating a barrier-free digital environment. The knowledge, competence and attitudes towards technology and disability among industry leaders and government is critical to bridging the gap in the workforce. National laws addressing public adquisition or purchase of ICT solutions must include standard requisites that ensure barrier-free public services for all citizens.

Policy Recommendation #3 Education: Government and industry must adopt policies and programs that can advance the acquisition of ICT related skills for persons with disabilities of all ages through, Science, Technology, Engineering and Mathematics (STEM) learning in educational programs for youth, continuing education for adults, and apprenticeship models. Government and industries requiring ICT related knowledge should engage with the disability community to promote the use of Universal Design principles in development of ICT and provide skills and resources to promote employment opportunities. As the world prepares for the future of work, industry leaders must not overlook persons with disabilities. Furthermore, industry must be aware that much like the general population, people with disabilities

are quite diverse in their levels of experience, education, skills and abilities. When provided access to education, matched with the right employment opportunity and afforded reasonable accommodations, people with disabilities can perform at the same level as others. They also provide a unique perspective based on their lived-experienced that can drive business innovation through Universal Design.

Policy Recommendation #4 Improved Data Collection: Worldwide there must be a greater emphasis on the collection of reliable data to fully understand the prevalence and employment of persons with disabilities. This includes data representative of the diverse community of persons with disabilities as well as employment by sector. WITSA recommends that policymakers and industry adopt practices to collect data, with respect to legal frameworks and individual privacy, to enhance the global understanding of the employment situation for persons with disabilities. This will further inform responsive policy interventions toward the goals of greater inclusion and reduced poverty.

Call to Action – Advancing Inclusion through Collaborative Action on Policy Principles

WITSA recognizes the importance of both the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (CRPD) and Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), both seek to address the deeper poverty experienced by underserved populations, creating more inclusive societies, including for persons with disabilities. The CRPD calls for promoting equality and eliminating discrimination in all facets of society. Specifically, the CRPD calls for enabling independence and participation through access to ICT (Article 9); the right to access to general education systems without discrimination and with the provision of reasonable accommodation (Article 24); and the right to work on an equal basis with others (Article 27). Like the CRPD, the UN SDGs set forth aspirational outcomes of inclusion through education (Goal 4), economic growth and employment (Goal 8) and general social, economic, and political representation (Goal 10).

Systems change on a global scale is needed to achieve meaningful inclusion of persons with disabilities. Awareness building and resulting action across sectors is necessary to make progress toward addressing the longstanding economic disparity between persons with disabilities and the general population. This includes recognition of the contributions that persons with disabilities can make when afforded opportunities many

take for granted. The inclusion of persons with disabilities in the workforce can drive innovation and produce positive economic benefits for society.[27]

As the leading global ICT industry alliance, WITSA strongly believes that having a diverse and inclusive workforce across the ICT sector strengthens its market position as the cornerstone of industry across global markets. By widening the talent pool to be more inclusive, the ICT sector will continue to thrive and grow in both size and influence.

As the global voice of the ICT industry, WITSA and its members around the world are committed to this cause and have endorsed the following set of principles:

1. WITSA members will actively promote the use of Universal Design principles in the development of ICT.
2. WITSA members will actively support equal opportunity for persons with disabilities in employment and remuneration.
3. WITSA members will contribute to changes in our industry and economies in support of an inclusive culture and parity in treatment.
4. WITSA members will support and encourage educational programs that provide Science, Technology, Engineering, and Mathematics (STEM) learning opportunities for youth and adults with disabilities to promote employment.

The ICT industry is not the future, it is the present. Information technology is transforming and revolutionizing every industry sector with each passing day. By not capitalizing on the vast untapped resource that is persons with disabilities, the sector risks losing many of the economic, political, and social gains made over decades. There is a growing need to consider marginalized populations such as persons with disabilities to stem the growing digital divide especially as the nature of work changes and human reliance on technology continues to grow.

Acknowledgments
WITSA and SourceAmerica would like to acknowledge those who contributed to the development of this document:

H.E. Ambassador Luis Gallegos Chiriboga
Michael Fembek, Director of the Zero Project
Isabel Hodge, Executive Director, United States International Council on Disabilities
Albert Rizzi, Founder, My Blind Spot
James Thurston, Vice President for Global Strategy & Development, G3ict
Frances West, Founder, FrancesWestCo
Christa White, Senior Vice President of Global Development, Special Olympics

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[27] Donovan, R. (2016). Translate different into value: 2016 annual report the global economics of disability. Return on Disability. Retrieved from: http://www.rod-group.com/sites/default/files/2016%20Annual%20Report%20-%20The%20Global%20Economics%20of%20Disability.pdf