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TOPICS

Outline of the Seminar to Promote Social Participation of People with Disabilities by Using ICT

With the development of ICT (Information Communications Technology) life has become more convenient and the benefits to life have been considerable, but efficient usage of ICT by people with disabilities has not necessarily kept up pace, making the elimination of the digital divide into an important issue.

In order to promote the efficient use of ICT by the elderly and people with disabilities, MIC implemented an investigative study on the evaluation and penetration of efficient use of ICT by the elderly and people with disabilities over a two-year period in fiscal years 2006 and 2007. Examples were collected of the elderly and people with disabilities participating in society through the efficient use of ICT and a pamphlet was published collecting these examples, and distributed. At the same time, conditions were taken into consideration at organizations and companies that provide support through efficient use of ICT for the elderly and people with disabilities, and a framework was investigated to provide effective support in promoting efficient use of ICT by the elderly and people with disabilities, and a report published. The compilation of examples and the investigative study report can be consulted (in Japanese) at http://www.soumu.go.jp/joho_tsusin/b_free/b_free03.html#bf2-6

The seminar to promote social participation of people with disabilities by using ICT was held on March 12, 2008 at the Todofuken Kaikan in Tokyo, with the aim of building a roadmap to promote social participation of people with disabilities. It took into consideration the results of the fiscal year 2006 investigation, a study that was targeted at people with disabilities. Through the introduction of MIC policies as well as the investigative study on the evaluation and penetration of actual examples of efficient use of ICT by the elderly and people with disabilities, and the introduction of examples of actual participation in society through the efficient use of ICT by people with disabilities, the seminar aimed at widely reporting the advantages for people with disabilities from the efficient use of ICT. In order to make it possible for the hearing-impaired to grasp the contents of the seminar, a sign-language expert signed everything that was being said and an abstract of the text also appeared on a screen so as to safeguard the information. There were more than 100 participants from private-sector companies, regional public bodies and public organizations, as well as organizations for people with disabilities. Lecturers came from a variety of sectors including government ministries, experts, people with disabilities, support

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organizations for people with disabilities, and companies, and spoke from their own perspective.

The day started with greetings from Mutsumi Nakata, Director-General, the Information and Communications Policy Bureau at MIC, the seminar's organizer. He explained that the "u" in "u-Japan" was not just the "u" of "ubiquitous" but also the "u" of "universal, and that the government as a whole was pursuing policies based on the 5-year plan of priority implementation that had been decided in December 2007 by the Headquarters for Promoting Measures for People with Disabilities. He also said that MIC would continue to work towards promoting a barrier-free environment in information with its dual support of making the ICT user environment universal and offering support for individual needs.

The first of the keynote speeches, titled "Looking to the Realization of a Digital-Divide Free ICT Society," was a lecture in which Noriyuki Matsukawa, Director of ICT Utilization and Human Resources Development Division of MIC's Information and Communications Policy Bureau talked about MIC's policies. In the second keynote speech, Masayuki Ikuta, professor at the College of Social Sciences of Ritsumeikan University, who headed the investigative study on the evaluation and penetration of efficient use of ICT by the elderly and people with disabilities, spoke about "Promoting Social Participation of People with Disabilities by Using ICT." He expounded on the way that conditions differ in terms of ICT use from person to person and by region, and, in order to give support to the use of ICT by people with disabilities, it's not just a question of linking the people concerned with services and support. It is necessary to have integrated support across the

region, and in order to achieve this, people are needed who will bring together the organizations and groups within a region and offer more effective support. Sadly, there are not many such people available.

There followed announcements of six actual examples. The examples, presented by people with disabilities themselves, were as follows.

(1) Toshiharu Miwa, the head of NPO Project UI, lost his sight in a traffic accident 20 years ago. He talked about taking concrete actions such as compiling direction support maps and educational materials, as an activity of a PC volunteer group conducted with the cooperation of local residents, as well as the development of inexpensive information transmission equipment and the creation of contents.

(2) Despite heavy hearing and motor disabilities, Kazuhiro Seino set up an online shop, Comini-Shop Let's, on the Internet. He talked about how a heavily disabled person came to use PCs to set up a company and how, by starting to work using a PC, he found less time to exercise and consequently caused deterioration in his physical state. The question now is to find the right balance between work hours and profitability while taking his own productivity into consideration.

(3) Hearing-impaired Masaji Hosokawa who runs the NPO Communication Support Center first wanted to get across the fact that hearing-impaired people cannot communicate freely by voice. He talked about several examples such as setting up Communication Support Center following his experience of communicating in the United States using TTY, developed by a hearing-impaired scientist, and which

enables communications with a regular telephone using text input via a keyboard. Their activities include providing a telephone relay service using telephones that are enabled for text and graphics, as well as supporting class using PCs for schools for the hearing impaired and creating a video phone relay service using mobile phones to increase convenience, securing privacy and cost as issues that are to be tackled.

In addition, from the perspective of those who offer support to people with disabilities, (4) Mariko Horigome, Functional Development Manager of social welfare corporation Tokyo Colony dealt with the activities of Tokyo Colony which include software and hardware selection that matches the individual needs, IT workshops, the education and dispatch of support staff.

(5) Yoshinobu Nakamura of NTT DoCoMo, Director of the Product Department of the Products & Services Division, spoke about approaches to universal design. This includes barrier-free installations in shops and sign language support using videophones as well as conditions from the perspective of a telecommunications business operator, such as reductions in charges for mobile phones, input support using equipment such as "Raku-Raku Phones" and the development of functions that will assist operation, while also undertaking product planning for business development.

(6) Hiroshige Ohtsuki, President of WorksNet introduced his business as aiming at giving people with disabilities the opportunity of working at home using ICT and contributing to society. He talked about the concrete contents of the business of giving support to people with disabilities working from home, what sort of compensation people with

disabilities working from home are actually getting, and ways of increasing the number of people with disabilities working so as to increase opportunities for people with disabilities in the future.

Documentation related to this seminar is available online (in Japanese) at http://www.soumu.go.jp/joho_tsusin/b_free/b_free03_2.html

In addition, there was an exhibition of telecommunications equipment useful for social participation of people with disabilities at the back of the hall and in the lobby. Many of the participants tried out the equipment and were eager to hear

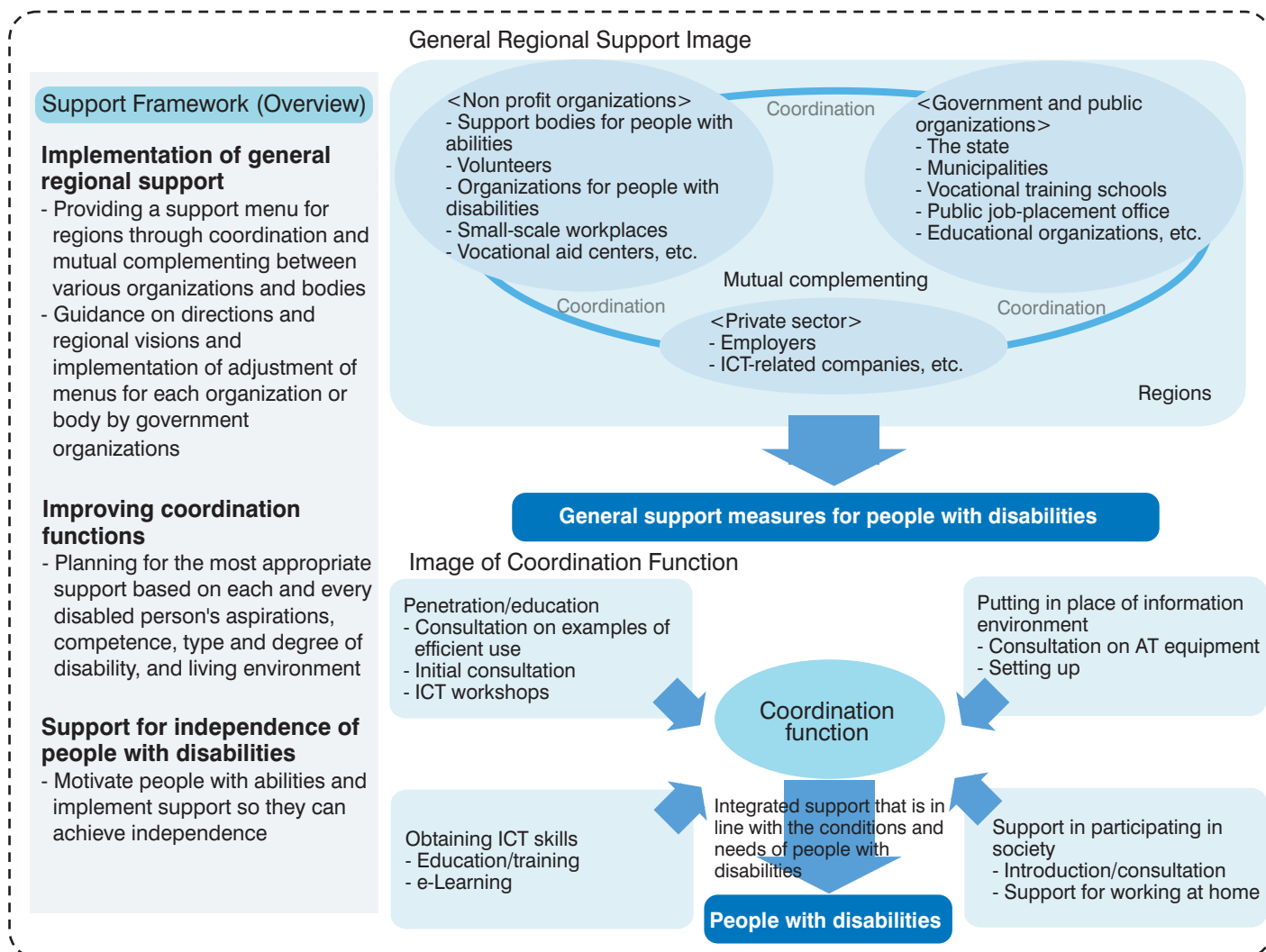
explanations concerning their workings.

In the survey that was conducted on the day, many of the responses stated that "I was able to deepen my understanding of the efficient usage of ICT by people with disabilities by hearing a lot of actual examples," "I got a concrete understanding of how people with disabilities can participate in society through the use of ICT," "I understood the approach of companies and support organizations relating to the social participation of people with disabilities through the use of ICT." Also, other opinions included "Wasn't there to little PR preceding

the seminar" and "it's important to let the outside world know about the seminar for finding approaches for social participation of people with disabilities," and "I would like to become involved personally, so as to become one of the people mentioned in Professor Ikuta's points, who are needed to link ICT and people with disabilities and the elderly."

MIC will continue to promote measures to close the digital divide experienced by the elderly and people with disabilities, as well as working towards keeping people informed concerning its approaches through numerous events such as seminars.

Figure 1: A support framework for social participation of people with disabilities through efficient use of ICT
 (From the "Report from the investigative study on the evaluation and penetration of efficient use of ICT by the elderly and people with disabilities" and "Compilation of actual examples of social participation of people with disabilities through the use of ICT")





Compilation of actual examples of social participation of people with disabilities through the use of ICT



A view of the seminar to promote social participation of people with disabilities by using ICT