CASE STUDY

Government Websites in Maharashtra – Moving towards Accessibility

Accessibility and Localisation

As per Indian census 2001, about 2.1% of the population in India is disabled and a majority of the cases are related to sight and hearing related disabilities. Current number of disabled citizens as a percentage of population would be higher due to ageing population, spread of chronic diseases and improvement in methods to measure disability.

As per a World Bank report of 2007, titled 'People with Disabilities in India: From Commitments to Outcomes", *"While estimates vary, there is growing evidence that people with disabilities comprise between 4 and 8 per cent of the India population (around 40-90 million individuals)"*

Further, India is a multilingual nation with 22 officially scheduled languages and English speaking community is only a minority. In this era of increased penetration of technology through various media such as internet, mobile and social networking – even in the government sector, this poses a unique challenge to e-governance initiatives in a large democratic country like India. Accessibility and Localisation are significant drivers to ensure that these technology-based initiatives reach every citizen and intended user.

Localisation is the method of ensuring that a product or service is culturally and linguistically appropriate and may be customised to the specific needs of a specific country / state / region. Making locale specific changes is generally not limited to translating of text but also includes adjusting to cultural aspects and sometimes even need engineering level changes.

Localised and Accessible Websites

Government of Maharashtra is the first state in India to include the needs of persons with disabilities in its Maharashtra's State E-governance Policy of 2011. With the government using the internet to reach its citizens, it is imperative to ensure that we

are not creating barriers but enabling people with disabilities to also access the same information.

The Directorate of Information Technology (DIT, GOM) recognized that the State websites need to adhere to international standards and guidelines. The Maharashtra's State E-governance Policy of 2011 highlights that all websites and web applications will comply with Web Content Accessibility Guideline (WCAG) 2.0 – Level A. Based on the e-governance policy, DIT, started working with different ways and strategies to implement the WCAG Guidelines and Localisation in various government websites.

Problem

Every department in the State of Maharashtra, manages their own website either through NIC (National Informations Centre – www.nic.in) or external vendors. This meant that numerous stakeholders were a part of the process. Often NIC, vendors or the department themselves did not understand the implications of ensuring that the website meet the Web Content Accessibility Guideline 2.0 (WCAG) – Level A. Some of them did know how to develop "Localised Websites"

DIT realised that it was important to impart the knowledge, as well as ensure quality measures and checks to meet the compliance on Accessibility and Localisation. Hence DIT decided to hold training sessions offering specialised module on Accessibility and Localisation, for such developer communities.

Solution - Training

DIT is organising a series of training all the software professionals of the IT vendor firms developing software / websites for the government. A new course curriculum was developed by DIT in conjunction with CDAC CoE (coe.maharashtra.gov.in & www.cdac.in), BarrierBreak Technologies (www.barrierbreak.com) and WebDunia (www.webdunia.net)

The courseware has been productised and the schedule of such training is also standardised. A typical 5-day course will have following sessions

Day	Topic	Test at end of module	Grading
1	Accessibility – Sensitisation and Tools	-	Overall weighted grades are given
2	Accessibility – Programming guidelines	Test is conducted for accessibility module	-Pass -Distinction
3	Guidelines for Indian Government Websites (GIGW)	Test is conducted for GIGW module	
4	Localisation of Websites – programming for websites	Test is conducted for localisation module	
5	Programming test – Dummy website - Which is localised and accessible	This dummy website is evaluated	Fail (<60%)

#Failed developers are trained again…

Till now 12 batches of this training has been completed covering close to 200 professionals from vendor firms such as MahaOnline, Nelito, Mastek, ABM Knowledgeware, ESDS Technologies etc. This is a continuous process and regular batches are organised by DIT.

Also, DIT has introduced a mandatory certification "eGov 0.0", for all consultants, business analyst, team leaders and managers. Compliance to global standards such as WCAG and Guidelines for Indian Government Websites (GIGW) is mandatory for any new application / website development in Maharashtra.

Periodic status review and performance evaluation of the standardisation of various department-wise / district-wise websites is performed to ensure Sensitizing and increasing awareness of such initiatives among the consultants and developer community for various departments and projects is an ongoing initiative of DIT. Concept of accessibility and localisation in all software deliverables has been institutionalised and has been closely tagged with vendor procurement and periodic vendor management.

Solution – Accessibility compliance and testing

DIT has worked with the Departments and the Vendors to ensure that they adhered to WCAG 2.0 – Level A. DIT has also provided support to the websites by providing access to Accessibility Testing that has been conducted by a team of people with disabilities at BarrierBreak Technologies (www.barrierbreak.com). The websites are being tested on Desktop and mobile to ensure they meet accessibility standards.

This accessibility feedback is provided to the vendors and they are asked to implement the recommendations and address the issues keeping in mind people with varied disabilities.

Some of the websites that have implemented considerable accessibility features are as follows:

Sr No	Department Website
1	Government Of Maharashtra – Main Website
2	DIT website
3	Egovernance Training and Certification
4	Prison department, GoM
5	Sugar Commissionarate, GoM

There are 15-20 more websites which are being tested on testing environment for accessibility.

Using this strategy more and more websites in the state of Maharashtra will start to focus on accessibility and meet the compliance as per the Web Content Accessibility Guideline 2.0 – Level A.

The focus of DIT is to ensure that all e-governance projects of Government of Maharashtra are compliant to any accessibility and localization standards in shortest possible time. The future of this initiative would be to be a model state for accessibility and localisation of e-governance projects in India and there on extend the scope to include any touch point with the citizens.