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World Blind Union Toolkit on providing, delivering and campaigning for audio description on television and film

World Blind Union

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Foreword

In the past decade audio description has increased in popularity amongst blind and partially sighted people as a way of independently enjoying television and film. It is an additional audio track that fits into the silent gaps of television programmes or films and describes what is happening on the screen.

World Blind Union's aim of an inclusive world means that all television and film products must offer the choice of audio description.

The development of audio description has been fragmented across the world but has been quite rapid in some of the countries. Countries such as the UK, USA, Germany, France, South Korea, Canada and Japan have managed to get description on mainstream television broadcasts, not necessarily adopting the same technical solutions but following what best suited their systems. Films have been made more accessible in a lot of countries by making description available in cinemas or on home entertainment products such as DVD and Blu-ray discs. Sometimes it's the mainstream product as distributed by the studio and sometimes as a special product adapted by a specialist organisation.

Though informally there has been much sharing of experience, we have so far failed to work systematically together as a worldwide community to achieve our aim of an inclusive world of television and film. This document aims to bring together the lessons learned in different countries, and to help build capacity across the World Blind Union membership to campaign for audio description.

The United Nations Convention on the rights of persons with disabilities in Article 30 Participation in cultural life, recreation, leisure and sport states "States Parties recognize the right of persons with disabilities to take part on an equal basis with others in cultural life, and shall take all appropriate measures to ensure that persons with disabilities enjoy access to television programmes, films, theatre and other cultural activities, in accessible formats".

Let's work together to make this convention a reality. Here is a guide to help you make audio description of TV and film an every day reality.

Stephen King
Chair, World Blind Union Technology work group

Executive summary

The WBU Toolkit on audio description has brought together an impressive constellation of international partners, projects, and resources to share their experiences on the development of audio description.

Toolkit goals

- It is designed to share information on the development of audio description across countries.
- It seeks to support information needs of key stakeholders working to improve access to television in different countries e.g. people working within local, national and international blindness organisations who want to campaign for audio description, It also contains information that will be useful to government personnel and NGO partners who are getting involved in a campaign to provide or increase audio description.
- It provides technical information on the delivery of audio description that professionals working in media organisations may find useful.
- It endeavours to generate ideas and provide some stepping stones for key stakeholders to get started in planning, managing and monitoring campaigns to achieve or increase audio description provision in their respective countries.
- It aims to encourage more and more countries to support access to television programmes and films for people living with sight loss. The United Nations Convention on the rights of persons with disabilities in Article 30 Participation in cultural life, recreation, leisure and sport states "enjoy access to television programmes, films, theatre and other cultural activities, in accessible formats".

Background information on audio description

Audio description is like a narrator telling a story. It is an additional commentary that describes body language, expressions and movements, making the story clear through sound.

The delivery of audio description requires support from:-

- Content providers to produce the audio description track and deliver it to the media platform
- Media platforms to broadcast the audio description track and,

- Lastly, for television programmes, the television receiver manufacturers to enable the support for audio description where a technical adaptation is required in their products. For cinemas, access equipment needs to be installed for audio description to be delivered.

Technical details for the delivery of audio description

Television

Some of the methods being used to deliver audio description on television across different countries are:

- Broadcast mix/ receiver mix [for digital television only]
- Open and closed description
- Secondary audio programming on analogue television

Cinemas and DVD

In the cinemas, audio description is delivered through infra red headsets so that only those people with headsets can hear the description track. For most films and television programmes, pre-mixed audio description tracks are now carried over on to their DVD and Blu ray releases as an additional audio track option that the user can select in the language settings of the disc.

Online delivery of AD

In the UK, online delivery of audio description started with the BBC iplayer in 2009. It is also available on small percentage of content on 4oD, the Channel 4 online player.

Campaigning for audio description

Before planning a campaign, it is always advisable to carry out research to investigate if there is a potential market for audio described programming/ films in the country. Once the need has been established, the next step would include identifying likely supporters of the campaign.

Campaign design

Try the following campaigning techniques and see if they help:

- Carry out a basic PEST analysis to provide a framework for your research
- Make sure you have solid evidence about the need for audio description and the size of the blind and partially sighted

population that can benefit from it. Solid evidence should provide irrefutable support for your audio description campaign. It does not contain exaggeration and is often at its best when it contains first-hand evidence and/ or personal stories alongside technical facts and figures.

- Set your goal and plan your audio description campaign as a series of small steps
- Get the work started - gather people with required skills and set up working groups.
- Look for solutions for the delivery of audio description that will work in your country
- Make sure your target audience is made aware of the availability of audio description once it is available.
- Involve blind and partially sighted users in the development of your audio description campaign

A peek into the future

Digital television technology is developing at an exponential rate today. Television content is no longer confined to the actual television set in your living room. Your laptop or your mobile phone could very well be your television. So where does this leave blind and partially sighted people and what happens to the level of audio description that some countries have managed to achieve on television? Unfortunately, experience shows that audio description is vulnerable when new TV and film technologies come along.

To sustain a future for audio description, it is important for companies designing new television platforms and services to grasp the significance audio description. They need to be influenced at an early stage so they develop and build audio description delivery in their new products and services from the inception stage.

1. Introduction

This toolkit is a resource for everyone striving to improve access to television and film for blind and partially sighted people in their respective countries.

It is designed to share information on the development of audio description and motivate all relevant stakeholders e.g., broadcasters, government personnel, blindness organisations to work together in preparing a strategic action plan for the introduction of audio description. It stresses the importance of developing solutions in different areas - technical solutions, awareness raising, and legal requirements for rapid improvement.

1.1 Who is the toolkit for?

It is designed to help and support people working in local, national and international blindness organisations, NGO partners and government personnel to prepare, plan, implement and monitor initiatives that focus on the development of audio description in different environments. However this development cannot be achieved in isolation. Rather, it is a consultative process between all these parties: the community of blind and partially sighted people, and broadcasting, film and audio description providers' industries. Therefore we hope information in this toolkit will be used by all stakeholders involved, thereby contributing to the overall development of audio description.

1.2 How was the toolkit developed?

This toolkit was commissioned by the World Blind Union in 2009. Members of the technical committee of the World Blind Union were asked to review and provide feedback on the draft toolkit. In addition, international experts working to improve access to television/ film in their own countries contributed materials for the toolkit. For a full list of names of those involved in the development of this toolkit, please see the acknowledgements page at the beginning of the toolkit.

1.3 What is in the toolkit?

This toolkit provides clear, user-friendly guidance to local, national and international organisations working in the field of blindness. Aside from this, it also aims to provide information and practical tools to organisations working across countries and government

departments that operate in this sector. Participatory approaches are proven to influence people to make informed decisions, and take action.

It has six parts:

- Part 1: Introduction to the toolkit

- Part 2: What is audio description?

This part provides an introduction to audio description and outlines the benefits of adding description to television programmes and films.

- Part 3: Delivery of audio description - technical solutions

If you require background information on how audio description is provided and subsequently delivered on different television platforms and for films, please refer to this part of the toolkit.

- Part 4: How to lobby for change?

This part will guide you on your journey to planning an effective campaign for the introduction of audio description for television or films. The techniques listed are by no means exhaustive- rather, they offer a foundation to build your own campaign.

- Part 5: Case studies

This part gives an account of the development of audio description for television or films in five countries across four different continents.

- Part 6: A peek into the future

Final part in this toolkit emphasises the need to ensure that the new technology related to television and films takes into account audio description delivery for people with sight loss as we move forward.

1.4 How to use this toolkit?

This toolkit aims to generate ideas and provide some stepping stones for all involved to get started in planning, managing and monitoring campaigns for improving access to television and films as a result of adding audio description tracks.

Lobbying techniques mentioned in this toolkit are a compilation of techniques that have been used successfully in some parts of the world; however they may not be suitable for every country due to socio-economic or cultural differences. In such cases, the idea is to use the techniques as a foundation to build and design your own campaign keeping in the mind the local situation and the resources you have available.

Key facts to remember:

- This toolkit is designed to share information on the development of audio description across many countries.
- It aims to support information needs of key stakeholders working to improve access to television and film for blind and partially sighted people in different countries
- The toolkit also provides technical information on the delivery of audio description that professionals working in media organisations may find useful.
- Data and information in this toolkit seeks to generate ideas and provide some stepping stones for key stakeholders to get started in planning, managing and monitoring campaigns for audio description.
- The United Nations Convention on the rights of persons with disabilities in Article 30 Participation in cultural life, recreation, leisure and sport states "States Parties shall take all appropriate measures to ensure that persons with disabilities enjoy access to television programmes, films, theatre and other cultural activities, in accessible formats".

2. What is audio description?

2.1 Introduction to audio description

Audio description is like a narrator telling a story. It is an additional commentary that describes body language, expressions and movements, making the story clear through sound. It describes what might otherwise be missed by a person with sight loss. Audio description is also known as video description in some countries. Another term used for this service in the US is DVS ® [Descriptive Video Service], registered copyright of WGBH Boston.

It is provided as an aid to understanding and enjoyment of television and films particularly, but not exclusively, for blind and partially sighted people.

The delivery of description on television or for films requires support from:

- Content providers to produce the description track and deliver it to the media platform
- Media platforms to broadcast the description track
- Lastly, for television programmes, the television receiver manufacturers to enable the support for audio description where a technical adaptation is required in their products. For cinemas, access equipment needs to be installed for audio description to be delivered.

An approach that has proven to be very successful in countries where audio description is no longer a new concept is working in partnership towards a common target, e.g. stipulating audio description on a certain percentage of television programming, with all the key stakeholders mentioned above. Once the legal or voluntary target has been agreed upon, responsibility must be distributed amongst all the stakeholders guaranteeing their continued involvement. This is to ensure that stakeholders feel accountable for making a genuine contribution towards the achievement of the target.

For detailed information on developing and structuring campaigns driving the growth of audio description in a country, please refer to Chapter 4 - Lobbying for change.

2.2 Benefits of adding audio description

Potentially the largest set of audience to benefit from the addition of audio description is the community of blind and partially sighted people across the world.

In order to illustrate how blind and partially sighted people benefit from audio description, we present the following personas. None of the personas are based on real people, but their characteristics and features are based on observations gained during the development of audio description in different countries.

Persona 1: Caneel, age 13, school student

Caneel lives in Sacramento, California in the US. She loves watching films in cinemas or on the television. She is allowed to watch two hours of television each day and one or two films in a week:

- She asks her parents to take her to the cinema to watch the latest releases over the weekend so that she can talk about it with her friends at school.
- She watches a lot of film based shows on the television and is very comfortable using the television remote control. Her favourite television channel, when she is not watching films or sitcoms on Disney, is MTV.

Caneel is totally blind from birth and her film/television viewing habits differ from other children's:

- She uses DVS® or video description whenever available to understand what is happening on the screen. She selects shows that have DVS through the electronic programme guide and sets reminders on her television. She says DVS makes her feel independent.
- Caneel not only uses description for entertainment but also for education. Her school often uses videos for educational purposes and they ensure that they have the videos with description available for Caneel before using it in the class. The videos with description are made available through a free loan library of accessible media. This library is funded by the Government's Department of Education.

Caneel gains immensely from the provision of audio description and would like it on as much content as possible.

Persona 2: Indira, age 32, housewife

Indira lives in Haryana in North India. She is not a very keen television viewer. However she does enjoy watching documentaries occasionally and never misses the evening news. She admits that she does not always understand what is going on, on the screen while watching television. She has two teenage children who could potentially help her fill in the gaps but she says there is no point asking them what is going on on the screen as she does not want to disturb them. She uses audio clues to understand the programme but often this is not sufficient and she can not follow programmes as a result.

Indira has learnt to use the computer from her son and now surfs the internet to read newspapers and magazines. She finds it easier to use her computer than her television.

Partially sighted since birth, Indira differs in the techniques she uses to understand a film/ television programme from a sighted person:

- She depends a lot on audio clues to understand the content better.
- If she does go to the cinema with her family, Indira does not like asking her family to explain to her what's happening on the screen and, as a result, quite often ends up losing track of the plot.
- Indira is not aware of audio description at all.

If she had access to audio description, Indira would be able to understand the documentaries that she wants to watch on television without any external help.

Persona 3: Mathew, age 87, a retired musician

Mathew lives in Melbourne in Australia. He enjoys his films at home now – on television or DVD. Mathew has subscribed to the film and entertainment package offered by his satellite television service provider. He receives 72 channels, quite a few of which give access to the latest blockbusters on a pay as you go basis.

A regular film viewer, he has a good collection of old classic films on DVD. He listens to (views) the films when someone gets the player going for him. Mathew can manage the remote control but with difficulty.

Totally blind since birth, Mathew differs in the techniques he uses to understand a film from a sighted person:

- He has always depended on external support to help him understand what was going on, on the screen. Audio clues and a companion who can describe well without interrupting the dialogues is an ideal combination, he says.
- Mathew has recently been introduced to audio description. His daughter bought a DVD for him that included a description track. He says for the first time in his life he did not feel the need to ask anyone to understand what was happening on the screen.
- He spoke to his local blindness organisation about audio description to check if they had any additional information. He has been told that it is available on a host of DVDs and even in the cinemas. He does not want to go to the cinema because of his reduced mobility but would like to buy more DVDs with audio description.
- Mathew wishes that audio description would be available on his television.
- He has asked his daughter who lives in London in England to send him some more DVDs with audio description.

Mathew being a keen film viewer has the real potential to benefit from using audio description.

Persona 4: John, age 42, IT Analyst in a call centre

John lives in London in the UK. John enjoys watching the latest film releases. He hardly ever goes to the cinema but buys his films on DVD/ Blu ray from the Amazon or the LOVEFiLM website. John is very comfortable with new technology.

Partially sighted since the age of 23, John differs in the techniques he uses to watch television/ film from a sighted person:

- Audio Description is often the deciding factor for him when he is purchasing a DVD /Blu ray for a film.
- John has bought the new Smart-Talk set top box for his room that has text-to-speech output of all menus and navigation. It does enable independent viewing and the set top box allows him to find audio described programmes easily.
- John regularly goes to the cinema to watch films with audio description.

John benefits enormously from audio description on TV, on DVDs and in the cinema.

Persona 5: Hugo, age 32, Lecturer - Latin American Literature

Hugo lives in Sao Paulo and teaches in the School of Philosophy and Literature, University of Sao Paulo. He watches selected shows on the television and occasionally goes to the cinema if his wife is keen on watching a particular film. Hugo's favourite television series is David Attenborough's Life though he gets annoyed when he loses the plot of the scene.

Partially sighted since birth, Hugo differs in the techniques he uses to watch television/ film/ theatre from a sighted person:

- After a recent trip to Washington where he watched a theatre performance with live audio description and a touch tour, he sent a letter of request to his local theatre that they start touch tours and look into the provision of audio description to make the theatre experience more pleasurable for visitors like him.
- In the cinema, his wife fills in the blanks for him when everything on the screen goes quiet.
- He loves to listen to audio books and also occasionally listens to radio dramas especially murder mysteries. He wishes there was some way to convert the visual clues he misses on television murder series into audible clues.

Hugo could gain substantially if television were broadcast with audio description.

Persona 6: Janine, age 74, retired

Janine lives in Brussels in Belgium. She used to be a clerk in the local library before she retired. Her husband passed away last year so she lives alone now.

Janine is aware that she is slowly losing her sight and thinks that it is part of the aging process. She tries to watch television but that is proving to be difficult: the image on the screen is getting more and more blurred for her. As a result, she finds it hard to fully understand what is happening on the screen.

Janine differs in the techniques she uses to watch television from a sighted person:

- As someone who has followed television series for years, she is now thinking that television is no longer for her.
- She feels quite alienated and isolated because she no longer gets to enjoy the dramas that she has been watching on the television for years.

The provision of audio description on television programmes could completely transform the experience for Janine.

2.3 Sample Clips of Audio Description

If you have not experienced audio description before, we suggest that you take a look at some of the sample clips with description provided below. Please click on the any of the links and wait for a new browser to open.

Please keep in mind that these audio- video files provide only a very small sample of the diverse range of languages and countries where audio description is available today.

1. Bran Nue Dae	Australia
2. Paralympics Games in Vancouver	Canada
3. Tatort	Germany
4. The Storyteller	Greece
5. Black	India
6. Na skraju lasu	Poland
7. El erizo	Spain
8. Charlie and the Chocolate Factory	UK
9. 'Horton Hears a Who'!	USA

Key facts to remember:

- Audio description is like a narrator telling a story. It is an additional commentary that describes body language, expressions and movements, making the story clear through sound
- The delivery of description requires support from:
 - Content providers to produce the audio description track and deliver it to the media platform
 - Media platforms to broadcast the description track and,
 - Lastly, for television programmes, the television receiver manufacturers to enable the support for audio description where a technical adaptation is required in their products. For cinemas, access equipment needs to be installed for audio description to be delivered.
- The largest set of audience to benefit from the addition of audio description is the community of blind and partially sighted people across the world

3. Delivery of audio description - technical solutions

3.1 How is audio description delivered on television?

Amongst all the existing media delivery platforms such as cinemas, DVDs, online catch up services, video on-demand services, television emerges as the largest source for audio described content. A significantly larger percentage of accessible content has been available for free across television services in the United Kingdom and the United States during the past decade than elsewhere. It took years of research and technological innovation, before audio description could be delivered on television irrespective of the platform e.g. digital television, analogue television. However, the way in which audio description is currently delivered on either of the platforms varies across the world.

To start with, it is important to acquaint yourself with the current delivery methods for audio description. This is not to say that these are the only methods that can be used for the delivery of the description track but the only ones that have been explored so far.

- Broadcast mix/ receiver mix for digital television
- Open and closed audio description
- Secondary audio programming on analogue television

3.1.1 Broadcast mix/ receiver mix

Both these methods of delivery are for digital television only.

Broadcast mix: An additional audio track consisting of the original audio and the audio description track is pre-mixed at the broadcaster side and is transmitted alongside the regular soundtrack of the television programme. To put it simply, the broadcaster, who is also referred to as the service provider in many countries, will mix the audio description track with the audio of the program at his end and then broadcast a mixed track. When the user presses the AD/language button on his/her remote control or television menu, he/she will be able to listen to the audio description track interspersed with the original audio track through his/her television set.

Receiver mix: As an alternative to broadcast mix, in receiver mix audio description the mixing of the original soundtrack and the

description track takes place inside the viewers' receiver i.e. television or a set top box. This system offers certain advantages for the user, including the ability to adjust the sound level of the audio description, and to route the description to headphones so that only one person can hear the description while others in the room hear the regular audio track.

3.1.2 Open and closed audio description

Both of the above delivery methods [receiver mix/ broadcast mix] provide what is, in effect, 'closed' audio description. This means that the description is separated from the main programme audio in a way that the individual viewer can choose whether or not to hear it. This contrasts with 'open' description which cannot be switched off so the viewer has no option but to listen to the description track along with the regular soundtrack of the programme.

In the absence of advanced delivery methods, 'open description' provides a window of opportunity for the delivery of audio description. One excellent example of a very successful service that has been running in Canada since 2008 uses this method to deliver description. The Accessible Channel [TAC] broadcasts open description on 100 per cent of its programming. As per the information made available by TAC, about 75-80% of the programmes on the channel have never been aired with audio description before.

3.1.3 Secondary audio programming on analogue television

Secondary audio programming is a supplementary audio channel on analogue television. It was often used to transmit alternate language on certain programmes, or for video description [another name for audio description] in the U.S before the digital switchover. The description track was combined with the original sound track on the secondary audio programming channel of televised programming. Analogue television systems used in most countries have not had the capability to include user-selectable description in this way.

3.2 Audio description on programming available online

Internet television, video on-demand, IPTV, connected television and web television are all names for new services where content is

being made available to audiences online. However going online no longer means just accessing internet on your computer; you could very well go online using the 51 inch flat screen TV standing tall in your living room. In the UK, online delivery of description started with the BBC iplayer, a BBC catch up service available online, in 2009. The development has inspired other broadcasters to think in this direction and recently in the UK another online provider, 4OD, Channel 4's video on demand player, also started delivering description, on very limited content though.

However it is important to recognize the need for the website itself to be accessible to blind and partially sighted people. Unless this happens, there will be barriers for people with sight loss trying to access the online audio described content.

3.3 Audio description in cinemas and DVD

Audio description is delivered at every screening of the film, provided the film is showing on the accessible screen, and it can only be heard by those wearing a set of infra-red headphones. These headphones are provided by the cinemas and allow the viewer to vary sound levels of the description track as and when needed.

For the delivery of audio description and other access features such as subtitles and captions, cinemas need to install special access equipment [on a per screen basis]. Access equipment ensures that the audio description track is synchronised with the time code of the film.

With the advent of digital cinema, audio description is now part of the digital cinema package. The description is still transmitted via an infra red headphone system, therefore similar to 35mm prints, only those cinemas that have the IR transmission system and the headphone system installed are able to deliver audio description to the audience. The challenge for the industry is to have the audio description track finished and available in time for it to be included on the digital print.

A number of Hollywood studios have over the years been persuaded to describe all their releases for both cinemas and DVDs. For the UK, the journey began in 2002 with Harry Potter and the Philosopher's Stone which marked the beginning of audio

described screenings in cinemas for blind and partially sighted people. However, it was not until much later that distributors started adding the same audio description tracks onto their DVD releases. Today there are more 500 mainstream DVDs available with description across the world.

However, there seems to be a gap in the way that this access feature is currently being shared. To a layman it would almost seem logical that if an attribute such as a description track has been produced for a particular piece of content in one part of the world, then it gets shared with the other media channels screening the same film across different platforms e.g. Harry Potter being screened in cinemas across the world, its DVD being sold across the world, and the film being scheduled on the television. Such a move would not only allow many more people with sight loss across the world to enjoy the film with audio description but will also minimise costs being invested in producing the same description track over and over again. That said, this does not currently take place and it would have to be an industry led initiative to share these assets. Blindness organisations can encourage the relevant industries to do so.

Key facts to remember:

- Current methods of delivering audio description on television
 - Broadcast mix/ receiver mix for digital television
 - Open and closed audio description
 - Secondary audio programming on analogue television
- Online delivery of audio description started with BBC iplayer in the UK in 2009.
- If a cinema has access equipment installed in one of its screen, than audio description can be delivered in that screen via infra red headsets.
- Description tracks for many films and television programmes are now also carried over to their DVD and Blu ray releases

4. Lobbying for audio description

If everyone was aware of the concerns prompting your campaign and agreed with your point of view then there would probably be no need to launch a campaign. Acquainting people to your idea and subsequently convincing them of the need for audio description is fundamental to putting together a concerted effort needed for a successful campaign. This section contains information that will help and support you in developing your audio description campaign as well as hints and tips on what to look out for!

4.1 Step 1- Research

We would recommend that you gain a thorough insight into the issue that you are campaigning for and then juxtapose it with opinions from diverse sources. It is important to get perspectives from other people working in related areas as you do not want to use data as a piece of evidence for your campaign only to realise that it is incorrect. Try some of the following strategies in order to identify the value of your campaign:

4.1.1 PEST Analysis:

To provide a framework for your research you may want to use basic PEST analysis. This means looking at the Political, Economical, Social and Technical context of your issue. If, for example, you were worried about development of audio description in your country, you might want answer questions in each of the four categories:

See a sample PEST analysis for audio description:

The political context

- What is the government policy on disability access in your country?
- What is the government policy on audio description or other access services in your country?
- Is there a legal requirement to provide subtitles for deaf and hard of hearing people?
- Can you use this requirement to push for provision of audio description for blind and partially sighted people?
- Within the government, which department is most likely to look at such policies?

- Upon what research will such a policy be based, and who will conduct research that will potentially determine the policy at the end?
- It is also important to ask yourself- how sympathetic is the Government likely to be to your campaign?

The economic context

- What kind of subsidies does the media industry e.g. broadcasting, films, DVD receive for providing access services?
- Are there subsidies for providing subtitles?
- Are there subsidies available for taking other social causes into consideration?
- Which agencies or individuals within the industry make donations towards access i.e. any media conglomerates that run any charities?
- What the kind of issues does the industry tend to focus on?
- Who [individual/company] takes special interest in lobbying for social causes or is there currently a brand ambassador for a charity working in a prominent position the industry?
- Who will lose and who might gain financially if you win your campaign for audio description?
- Are there any agencies such as a Film Council or a Media Producers' Guild that you can target?
- Are there sector conferences and gatherings where you could meet the right people?
- And lastly but most importantly, what is the cost of the production of access services versus the potential uptake?

Once you have the answers to these questions, you will not only have a lot of material for strategising your campaign but also solutions on how to begin.

The social context

- What is the public opinion about audio description or access services such as subtitles?
- Are there any campaigns for other access services running elsewhere in the country and what is their strategy? What is the kind of support that they have received?
- Which pressure groups are active on the issue of audio description?

- How many people in your country will be affected if audio description was to become a regular feature for television broadcasts/ films in cinemas or DVDs?
- Who will support and oppose your campaign?

The technical context

- Where will the production of audio description fit in the current system of operations?
- How will audio description be delivered?
- How will audio description be received by end users watching TV in their homes? Will they need new equipment?
- If your campaign for audio description is successful and broadcasters or film companies agree to provide the service, how will you market it to potential end users?
- If your proposed solutions are not acceptable for any number of reasons, then are you able to offer alternate solutions?

4.1.2 Some research sources

- **World Blind Union Research Bank and Statistics**

WBU is a worldwide movement of blind and partially sighted people with a strong focus on capacity building. Their work includes development and sharing of tools and resources, advocacy on key issues for people with sight loss. This could be a vital source to tap if you are looking for background/ related information. You will not only find relevant information on the website but also some relevant names with their contact details of people who could potentially help you and guide you in your campaign.

- **Support from other countries**

Sourcing relevant information can sometimes be as easy as contacting relevant people who have been working on similar campaigns in other countries. So keep a check on the progress that audio description campaigns are making in other countries and do not hesitate to contact people for information or guidance.

- **Local campaign groups**

All countries have a massive number of exciting active campaign groups who could be of help, in a number of ways, with your campaign. A collective voice and a joint effort are likely to be taken more seriously than a fragmented approach.

4.1.3 Internet

Don't forget the importance of internet search before you pick any issue up- find out the history, background and the global presence of the audio description!

Some useful websites for finding out what is happening on audio description around the world are:

Media Access Australia

<http://www.mediaaccess.org.au/>

Review: Very international in nature and a fantastic resource

Royal National Institute of Blind People

www.rnib.org.uk

Review: Good overall assessment of the current situation of audio description in the UK. With the assistance of a professional marketing agency, RNIB has developed an audio description logo that is freely available to anyone and that can be used by any industry, regulator or user organisation.

Audio Description International

<http://www.acb.org/adp/>

Review: Good overall assessment of the current situation of audio description in the US and some international updates as well

World Blind Union

<http://www.worldblindunion.org>

Review: Has a bank of relevant statistics and background research can prove to be valuable for your campaign.

Most good ideas [we said most!] start in classrooms so approach relevant departments in some of top tier universities in your country if anybody is doing any research around audio description? In quite a few countries, audio description is studied in the Linguists or Translation Departments. It is worth contacting them to find out if they have any research projects or research findings that your campaign would benefit from.

4.1.4 Mainstream corporate media companies

It is almost fashionable for corporate companies to have a Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) policy these days so as to

show company's support for ethical standards and international norms. A lot of work done for social benefit is carried out in accordance with these policies so have a look if access services for audio-visual media fit into any of the current media and film company CSR policies, or if you can convince them include these.

4.2 Step 2- Setting your goal

The most successful campaigns have clear and achievable goals which can be communicated with a clear-cut message through publicity. It is often a good idea to plan a campaign as a series of small steps, where one leads to the next.

Stick at each step until it is achieved and then go onto the next. These small successes will help keep you feeling positive about your campaign and encourage others that it's worth getting involved.

Some sample aims in the case of audio description could be:

- Ensuring that technical audio description trails take place by a specific date
- Ensuring that there is description on 10% of the content across analogue and digital television service by a specific date.
- Ensuring that 50% of the cinemas across the country will have appropriate equipment to be able to deliver audio description to blind and partially sighted people by a specific date.
- Ensuring that audio description is provided on at least 25% of the releases coming from each film producer/ distributor who is part of the Producer's Guild or another formal film industry committee by a specific date
- To ensure that awareness of audio description increases amongst blind and partially sighted people in the country by at least 50%.

4.3 Step 3- Getting work started

Next step, after setting your goals is to actually put the wheels in motion and start the campaign but before you do that:

- **Get people with required skills together**

For a campaign on audio description, you need people with some background in campaigning but more importantly, people who have knowledge of the media industry. This does not mean that

the person needs solid contacts within the industry to begin with as these can be developed whilst on the job but some understanding of the production process will be an asset. This is needed as you will not only need to lobby for description but you will also have to work with the film industry/ broadcasting industry to find technical solutions at times for the delivery and receipt of audio description.

- **Working groups and staying updated**

One way for effective delivery of a campaign is to set-up working groups.

In small groups most decisions are made through informal and spontaneous discussions. However, if your group starts to grow in size, you may want to consider setting up working groups.

Under this model people can just attend meetings specific to their working group and then nominate one person from the working group to attend a broader council where they can feedback progress to the wider group.

The other benefit of setting up working groups is that it tends to distribute work more evenly amongst everyone rather than a few people doing a lot.

Example of working groups in a campaign for audio description:

1. Working group 1 to target film and DVD industry inclusive of distributors, producers, guilds, film councils, cinema exhibitors and film festival authorities possibly.

HINT: It is helpful to start with bigger producers as they are more likely to have enough funding for the production of access services like audio description.

2. Working group 2 to target broadcasting and broader television industry, including television channels, broadcast platforms, any regulatory group that monitor the activities of broadcasters.

HINT: It can be beneficial to start with broadcasters who receive some form of direct or indirect government subsidy.

3. Working group 3 to exclusively target relevant departments within the Government. So for audio description, you could target either the department looking at rights of people with disabilities or the department looking at media regulation. These departments have different names in different countries so you may need to go through a list of departments to identify the suitable one.

HINT: 100 countries across the world have ratified the United Nations Convention on Rights of People with Disabilities. Find out if your country is one of them because if it is, then you already have legislation on your side.

And don't forget to make a plan for each goal

Having researched your issue and setting your aims and goals, try mapping out the forces for and against for what you want to change.

Draw a campaign map of the challenge showing the people involved, the organisations, the institutions etc. This will help you work out exactly what the mechanisms are for what you want to change including the approach to achieve each goal.

4.4 Step 4 - Conclusion

Public Awareness

- Do not forget to spread the word that audio description is now available on television/ cinemas/ DVD through mass media, word of mouth, community events etc
- Give blind and partially sighted people full support as they will need guidance on how to access and use audio description. Since it will be a new service, people may not even realise in the beginning that it is targeted at blind people. Make sure your audio description marketing message is clear and succinct and use an audio description logo to help the general public to recognise the service if you can.
- Send weekly or daily newsletter updates to blind and partially sighted people on new content being made available with audio description.
- Ask blind and partially sighted users to write back reviewing the audio description that they used last and then pass their comments to the description provider as well as the Media organisation that commissioned the audio description. Ask users to be as critical or appreciative of the service as possible. This will help monitor the quality of description being produced.

Key facts to remember

- Carry out a basic PEST analysis to provide a framework for your research
- Make sure you have solid evidence about the need for audio description and the size of the blind and partially sighted population that can benefit from it. Solid evidence should

provide irrefutable support for your audio description campaign. It does not contain exaggeration and is often at its best when it contains first-hand evidence and/ or personal stories alongside technical facts and figures.

- Set your goal and plan your audio description campaign as a series of small steps
- Get the work started - gather people with required skills and set up working groups.
- Make sure your target audience is made aware of the availability of audio description through an audio description marketing campaign.
- Involve blind and partially sighted users in the development of your audio description campaign

5. Case Studies

5.1 Development in the UK

Authors: Joan Greening, Independent Consultant and Leen Petré, Principal Manager, Royal National Institute of Blind People

5.1.1 Audio description [AD] on television

Genesis of an idea

In 1991, the Independent Television Corporation founded the Audetel consortium, a European-wide consortium of regulators, consumer associations and broadcasters, that explored issues related to beginning regular broadcasts of audio described content in Europe. The Audetel Project was undertaken between April 1992 and December 1995 with a singular aim of enhancing television viewing for people with sight loss. The project began by carrying out a survey of the practical requirements of people with sight loss with regards to their television viewing. It conducted research on the best methods of manufacturing and supplying low-cost decoding equipment to transmit the signals required for the broadcast of AD on television. This technical research entailed the development and production of a prototype receiver. A field trial was conducted by the BBC in 1994 using the technology developed by Audetel in which 50 of these receivers were placed in the homes of blind and partially sighted television viewers. The trial demonstrated that AD could be transmitted over the air along with the conventional television signal for analogue television. As well as attempting to overcome the various technical difficulties of setting up an AD service, the project looked at the marketing of the service in addition to determining any legislative measures, which could foster and accelerate the dissemination of AD on television. The project was, however, superseded by the introduction of the 1996 Broadcasting Act, which mandated audio description via terrestrial digital transmission.

Legislative steps

The 1996 Broadcasting Act legislated that ten per cent of programmes on digital terrestrial television (digital TV through an aerial) should be broadcast with AD by the tenth year of every channel's digital TV license being issued. The subsequent 2003 Communications Act extended the 1996 legislative requirements to include digital cable and digital satellite providers. In 2004, the

Office of Communications (Ofcom, the independent regulator and competition authority for the UK communications industries) published its Code on Television Access Services, which advised that ten per cent of programmes had to be audio described by the fifth anniversary of a digital license being issued. This was to have a great impact on the further evolution of AD.

The beginning

In 2000, Nebula Electronics, a British multimedia company, marketed the first commercially available equipment able to support the receiver-mix digital terrestrial AD service provided by the major television channel operators. Its DigiTV PC card - a fully featured digital television receiver for use with personal computers - would deliver AD. It also provided the means to record second playback digital TV programmes using the PC's hard disk. The receiver's interface was designed to be both simple to use and comprehensive in functionality. Following consultation with the RNIB, Netgem, a French company, launched the IPlayer, the first digital terrestrial set-top box with AD functionality.

2002 saw the launch of a broadcast-mix audio description service by satellite TV organisation British Sky Broadcasting (BSkyB) on a very limited number of its own channels, making it the first platform to deliver AD to general public. A year later Channel Five added its AD to the digital satellite service and in 2004 the BBC, together with Channel 4 and ITV, announced that they would be making AD available via digital satellite television. Finally, in 2005, Ofcom decided that the standard abbreviation for audio description in television should be AD and that this now had to be used in the programme synopsis on digital electronic programme guides, thus providing viewers with information about which programmes carry AD.

Since then...

Even though the legislation mandates only 10 per cent of the programming to be described for broadcast, the average for each quarter since Jan 2009 has never slipped below 17 per cent. [Updated Nov 2010]

Three television platforms are currently being used in the UK and all of them have the ability to deliver AD.

1. Freeview [non subscription digital TV service via terrestrial rooftop aerial]

2. BSkyB and Freesat [digital Satellite TV services, with BSkyB operating a subscription model and Freesat being non-subscription]
3. Virgin Media [subscription digital TV Cable service]

1. Freeview

This digital terrestrial TV platform uses receiver-mix AD. Most of the integrated digital televisions launched in the UK from 2009 onwards have a built in feature that enables them to deliver AD. The inclusion of this technology in TV receivers took much longer than RNIB initially estimated and RNIB relentlessly kept on lobbying over the years for its inclusion. A key achievement that gave the receiver manufacturers a big push was the inclusion of audio description as a requirement in the UK government digital switchover help scheme equipment. This meant that any digital TV receiver manufacturers that wanted to be considered for the help scheme had to have audio description - RNIB had successfully used public procurement as a carrot. In addition to this achievement, in 2010 the first commercially available Freeview Digital Television Terrestrial set top box with spoken output of menus and EPG information made by a Harvard (a commercial company) and RNIB went on sale in the UK. The set top box features a fully talking Electronic Programme Guide (EPG), spoken output of all menu settings and one-click access to AD through a dedicated button on the remote control.

2. Satellite

For satellite distribution the AD track and programme sound are pre-mixed and then broadcast as an additional high bit rate 'narrative' bit stream. The set-top box receiver then makes the mix available for use, turning it into a broadcast mix AD. Every BSkyB and every Freesat set-top box receiver in the UK has the ability to receive AD, and Freesat receivers have one-click access to AD through a dedicated button on the remote control.

3. Cable

Cable distribution for AD is the same as via Satellite with every Virgin Media set-top box receiver delivering AD as standard.

5.1.2 AD in Cinemas

Harry Potter and the Philosopher's Stone was the first film to be screened with AD in the UK in January 2002. Today the majority of

the films being released by UK distributors of Hollywood films release with AD.

Getting the system up and running

In cinema blind and partially sighted user are provided with headphones so that only they hear the audio description track via the headphones. The headphones let through the sound of the film soundtrack that everyone else is hearing. This system ensures that the AD and does not disturb other cinema-goers.

The initial trials for this system encountered synchronisation problems. In 2000, Napier University, in collaboration with the RNIB, the International Audio Description Agency and the Glasgow Film Theatre, was given the brief to develop a product that would open the cinema experience for blind people. This led to the development of the Cinetracker, a separate player that delivered the AD track from a CD in the projection box via infrared headphones to the users. However, there were problems of synchronization with the film. As the reels went through the projector the AD started to lose synchronization with the film, resulting in the film sometimes becoming totally incomprehensible.

In September 2001, a system was developed by US based company DTS (Digital Theatre Systems). The AD track was now linked to the DTS time code on each reel of film. Consequently, at the start of each new reel, a new section of audio description was triggered, thus ensuring that the film and AD were always synchronized.

Dolby subsequently developed the Dolby Screentalk system, which works by tying the AD to the Dolby time code. A major breakthrough was realized in 2003, when the UK Film Council agreed to partially fund cinema audio description equipment in 78 cinemas around England. These installations kick-started the project and there are now over 300 cinemas in the UK with an accessible screen equipped with either a DTS or Dolby delivery unit.

Digital Cinema

With the advent of digital cinema, audio description is now part of the digital cinema package. The description is still transmitted via an infra red headphone system, therefore similar to 35mm prints, only

those cinemas that have the IR transmission system and the headphone system installed are able to deliver audio description to the audience. The challenge for the industry is to have the audio description track finished and available in time for it to be included on the digital print.

5.1.3 AD on DVD

The majority of UK Hollywood distributors ensure that the AD is now carried over to the DVD and Blu-ray release of the film and as a result there are over 500 films in the UK available with AD on DVD/Blu-ray. These disks are available for purchase in mainstream retail outlets and online shopping websites.

5.1.4 AD on Online Streaming

The BBC iPlayer paved the way for streaming content with AD in 2009. This development has inspired other broadcasters to explore the option of delivering audio described content. Channel 4 has in its own way, made a start - 100 per cent of the Paralympics coverage in 2012 will be available with AD on the 4oD [Channel 4's video on demand service].

5.1.5 Lessons learnt

Some of the factors that helped AD grow in the UK are as follows:

- **Involvement of blindness organisations and blind and blind and partially sighted people**

Everyone in the UK will recognise that the involvement of blind and partially sighted people and of RNIB was crucial in the lobbying for AD solutions in the UK. A consistent lobbying effort went on for several years before results were achieved, and RNIB set up a specific department to deal with AD lobbying, technical issues and marketing of the service.

- **Introduction of legislation and Media regulation**

Under the Communications Act 2003, every digital television channel in the UK is required to broadcast 10 percent of their programmes with AD. Most campaigners would agree that this legislation gave an unprecedented impetus to the level of AD on programmes being broadcast on television.

Ofcom, independent regulator for the UK communications industries, has been tasked by the government to keep a watchful eye on the level of AD being provided by each broadcaster and whether or not

the levels are in agreement with the levels defined in 2003 Communications Act. This close watchful eye kept broadcasters from deviating from their commitments.

- **Industry involvement and support**

Support of the some of the major UK broadcasters and the film industry to see access features being included on their films meant it was no longer the sole responsibility of the blindness organisations to see that films were being described for mainstream, cinema, and DVD release. The responsibility was shared.

- **AD Provider's Industry**

The presence of trained and qualified audio describers resulted in good quality description being provided on media. Regular feedback from AD users also helped make the quality of AD even better.

5.2 Development in Australia

Author: Alex Varley, CEO, Media Access Australia

5.2.1 How access service developed in Australia

The development of audio description [AD] in Australia has been rather slow when compared to other similar countries, especially some of its European counterparts. Whilst Australia is a world leader in some areas, such as the AD on home entertainment products such DVD and Blu-ray discs, it is yet to run an AD trial on television.

The first AD service in Australia was a volunteer service used to describe theatre (via Vision Australia) and some non-commercial VHS video work. The theatre service continues today. The often-titled “father of AD” in Australia, John Simpson, had also written a landmark position paper on AD in Australia in 1999 – “When a word is worth a 1000 pictures’. This was the main realm of AD discussion, at an abstract policy level with little hope for practical development.

Commercial mainstream AD was kick-started with a Federal Government Grant to provide AD on 10 entertainment DVDs in 2005. This included the creation of the first commercial AD service by the Australian Caption Centre (now Red Bee Media Australia).

After the release of these DVDs with AD, blind or partially sighted consumers commented that they hoped that this initial batch of DVDs would be followed by an ongoing service, otherwise they would rather not have any as it would be cruel to be given hope which was subsequently dashed. The service continued and DVD AD started to grow from a low base of about 2% of entertainment DVDs to around 25-30% now.

In tandem, the other target area that started to gain interest was cinema. Although it took about 4 years [2009] until a proper established commercial service was set-up, even though there were early flurries via film festivals and one-off screenings. A significant part of this was the use of the DTS access system for cinema for captioning and its inclusion of AD as part of that system (although the big chain cinemas refused to include AD). An Australian Human Rights Commission complaint campaign helped to focus attention on the lack of AD and this has led to an agreement for all cinemas in the four big chains (Hoyts, Reading, Greater Union and Village BCC) to provide AD on 1-3 screens for all sessions at all of their locations. This will rollout progressively from 2011-2014.

The independent cinemas commenced an AD service in 2009; via a Federal Government grant to Media Access Australia (this also included captioning).

Television is still waiting for a trial which is expected to occur in the latter half of 2011. This would be a precursor to a full AD service being introduced, possibly coinciding with the end of analogue television in 2014.

On the policy front, the Federal Government has an ongoing review of media access and this has included audio description. This report was released in December 2010 and includes a substantial AD trial on ABC (public) television in the second half of 2011, likely leading to an ongoing service. Although some areas will be picked up in a convergence review next year, the presence of the media access review has pushed some media (especially DVD and cinema) to review AD in fear of possible (out of their control) regulation.

5.2.2 Lessons learnt

There were a number of major factors that helped AD develop on various media in Australia:

- The **role of Media Access Australia** as a unique, not-for-profit agency that emerged from the sale of the commercial operations of the Australian Caption Centre, has provided an independent organisation with real-world experience that has informed all sides of the negotiation for an increase in AD. This has been particularly important in supporting blindness organisations with data, information about production processes, setting realistic expectations and directly assisted consumers to push for what they wanted.
- **Working with Deaf and hearing impaired organisations** and taking a “common” approach that media needs to be accessible to everybody has sped up the process of adoption, particularly in DVD and cinema. The service is delivered by the same equipment, the same suppliers and at the same time, so this made sense.
- **Having accurate information** is paramount. A regular reporting of access progress (especially on DVD) and comparisons with the same titles in other markets showed that the major problem was not availability of content, but a system that failed to secure that content. This led to a rapid increase of DVD AD that is now among the highest in the world.
- **Promoting champions encourages good behaviour.** One distributor, Roadshow, took AD up as a service and persuaded its clients to include AD, particularly on Australian products, including TV shows that don’t have AD for broadcast.
- **Talking to industry and being fair** and honest about the progress. MAA provides regular reports to the DVD industry on which titles are described and which of those titles were provided with AD overseas. This “school report” as it has been described, identifies specific titles and specific distributors and how they are performing. This helped the industry overall as it separated the providers from the non-providers and generated pressure on the non-providers from the supporters of AD.

- **Being realistic is very important.** AD on television is a key service, but the Australian television system could not support old AD receiver technology. That has changed with new generation receivers. Similarly the switch off of analogue TV is a huge issue for government and industry, so they were not prepared to add AD into the mix. A campaign focussed on getting an AD trial instead. At the time of writing this was looking like it would happen in 2011 (with no announcement made).
- **Understanding all aspects of the service** can bring dividends. By looking at how the DVDs were authored, we were able to identify where DVD distributors sourced the different components and educate them about requesting AD files. Similarly, by discovering that the DVD covers were created locally due to the need to include local censorship information, we were able to include information about AD on the cover. A growing trend in television receiver manufacturing industry is to make televisions for a worldwide audience (excepting PAL and NTSC differences) and more manufacturers were including AD receiver mix decoding as standard. This has meant that the Government's household assistance scheme for digital set-top boxes is likely to include AD decoding ability as standard, helping to future-proof the process.
- **Not getting caught up with issues that could be barriers** to early adoption such as focussing on AD standards when only a handful of offerings are available means that energy is not wasted on relatively minor issues.
- **Finally, consumer education is vital.** Without an audience these services are useless. One of the benefits of pushing AD on DVDs first was that DVDs are widely available and accessible to a consumer at home, using standard DVD players. Cinema has suffered from poor marketing, a lack of product and the need to overcome a culture of cinema not being a service that blind people use.

5.2.3 So where is Australia now?

There is no doubt that it is definitely in a much better place. AD is an established service today and the expectation is that it will increase. DVD is the most accessible medium, followed by

cinema. AD for TV is still in the early trial phase and it should be seriously resolved by the time analogue TV is switched off in 2014. AD on streaming video is still a dream, even captioning has limited access. Initiatives such as the Federal Government adopting the WCAG 2.0 standard will lead to a greater awareness of the need for AD (and the media access needs of the blind more generally). Other parts of the world are still ahead, but in an environment where content is international and the Internet allows instant access to information, wherever you are, there is a gradual narrowing of the gap and Australia will equalise with North America and Europe.

5.3 Development of AD in USA

Author: Larry Goldberg, Director, WGBH National Center for Accessible Media

5.3.1 History

Dr. Margaret Pfanstiehl, founder of The Metropolitan Washington Ear, the radio reading service of Washington, D.C., is credited with the invention of the first ongoing audio description service in 1981. Designed primarily for adults with visual impairment attending theatre productions, audio description has today expanded into other cultural venues as well.

In the late 1980s, WGBH, Boston's public broadcasting station, received training from Dr. Pfanstiehl and, along with the Narrative Television Network, brought the description service to television audiences. In 1997 WGBH introduced description in movie theatres for regularly scheduled screenings. Today Descriptive Video Service (DVS) is a national service that makes television programs, feature films, home videos, and other visual media accessible to people who are blind or visually impaired. DVS was launched nationally in 1990 by the WGBH Educational Foundation and is part of the Media Access Group at WGBH.

Description services are now routinely offered by several providers at movies, museums, and dance productions, as well as on television, to viewers with visual impairments. Known by several terms—"audio description," "video description," "descriptive video information," "Descriptive Video Service™" and "DVS™," "narrative description," and/or "descriptive video"—description is typically provided through a secondary audio channel or the

Secondary Audio Programming (SAP) channel for analogue television and ancillary audio services for DTV.

5.3.2 Legislative Steps

In 2000, the Federal Communications Commission (FCC) issued a rule requiring major television and cable networks in large markets to provide a minimum number of hours weekly of described television, noting that: in the U.S., there are up to 12 million persons with a vision difficulty that cannot be corrected with ordinary glasses or contact lenses. Video description could also benefit secondary audiences of up to one and a half million children between the ages of 6 and 14 with learning disabilities by capturing their attention and enhancing their information processing skills. (July 21, 2000).

However, in 2002, shortly after the proposed rule took effect, it was struck down by the United States Court of Appeals, which found that the Telecommunications Act of 1996 did not authorize the FCC to adopt regulations requiring description of television content. Many television networks, most notably PBS, CBS, TCM, and FOX continued to offer some televised description, but several others stopped providing description services in the absence of any federal requirement to do so.

On December 21, 2007 the U.S. House of Representatives released a draft bill, the Twenty-First Century Communications and Video Accessibility Act, which authorized the previous proposed regulations and expanded them to digital television technologies.

In October 2010, the 21st Century Communications and Video Accessibility Act was turned into a law in the US. The legislation gives individuals with vision or hearing loss improved access to television programming, smart phones, mobile Internet browsers, menus and program guides on cable and satellite TV set-top boxes, and more. The law also requires digital television to be more accessible with provisions such as mandating video description quotas for broadcasters and cable and satellite program providers.

5.3.3 Description on Television Broadcasts

Described television broadcasts are regularly available on CBS, Fox, PBS, and Turner Classic Movies.

However, a viewer must subscribe to cable or satellite TV or live within range of a station that carries video description. The national transition from analogue to digital television in June 2009 changed the way most viewers access description tracks via broadcast, cable and satellite TV. In some areas of the US, there are now other options: cable-TV-like services delivered by national telecommunications companies, e.g. Verizon (FiOS-TV) and AT&T (U-Verse). For video description purposes, these phone company services act just like cable TV.

Information on how to access video description in digital television using specific equipment and service combination is available at the dtvaccess.org resource site and will soon be available on the FCC web site as that government bureau institutes its reinstatement of the video description rules (perhaps as early as January 1, 2012).

5.3.4 Description on Films

- In movie theatres, description tracks can be played in auditoria which have either film (analogue) projectors or the emerging digital cinema projection technology. The description tracks are delivered to moviegoers via infra-red or FM audio systems and headsets, with the ancillary audio tracks synchronized either, in analogue, via a CD distributed by DTS Access (marketed via Datasat Digital Entertainment) or via a version of the film with the supplemental audio embedded in the "digital cinema package." In virtually all distributed movies, both of these methods employ description written and recorded by WGBH's Media Access Group.

Both analogue and digital systems support description and captioning, with WGBH's combined MoPix system presently the most widely deployed access technology for movie theatres (the captioning component is known as "Rear Window® Captioning"). Other devices and projected caption systems are also deployed or in development, including the DTS Access system which offers open captioning on-screen via a special projector.

Today, description is increasingly available for first-run movies, and more and more movie theatres are being built with the necessary equipment to offer the description track to patrons.

A list of latest films playing in theatres with description is available on <http://ncam.wgbh.org/mopix/>

5.3.5 Description on DVD

DVS Home Video® was an effort of the WGBH Media Access Group that spanned more than a decade and made over 200 films accessible on VHS tapes sold by DVS via mail order.

The Media Access Group is now working to ensure that the DVS tracks produced for theatrical releases also get transferred to the DVD and/or Blu-ray releases and download services such as iTunes and Netflix online. The year 2010 saw the release of 48 mainstream DVDs and Blu-ray disks with DVS, the highest total so far for North America. The following websites provide an exhaustive list of DVDs available with DVS in retail outlets or online:

<http://www.describedmovies.org>

<http://www.acb.org/adp/dvds.html>

5.3.6 Description on Educational Media

The application of description to education has been limited, with the exceptions of children's programming on PBS and Nickelodeon and materials funded by the U.S. Department of Education's "Emerging Technologies" grants. As the use of digital media has increased exponentially in classrooms across America, their accessibility to students with visual impairment has remained limited. Classrooms still rely on simultaneous human descriptions of real-time visual materials, even though the technology exists to make these educational materials accessible to students with visual impairment. The Office of Special Education Programs in the U.S. Department of Education took a giant step forward by awarding a cooperative agreement to the National Association of the Deaf's "Described and Captioned Media Program) for:

- the selection, acquisition, closed captioning, video description, and distribution of free educational media through such mechanisms as a loan service. The educational media are to be used in classroom settings by students with hearing or vision impairments and teachers and paraprofessionals who are directly involved in elementary or secondary classroom activities for these students.

see: www.dcmp.org/

This priority ensures that students who have hearing or vision impairments benefit from the same educational media used to enrich the educational experiences of students who do not have hearing or vision impairments. (71 Federal Register 26353 (2006); emphasis added).

In addition, standards, tools, and production processes for description of images in electronic books is being developed by the DIAGRAM Center project (Digital Image and Graphic Resources for Accessible Materials Center), a partnership of Benetech (known for Bookshare.org), the WGBH National Center for Accessible Media and the U.S. Fund for DAISY (USFDAISY). Funding is being provided by the U.S. Department of Education. see: <http://diagramcenter.org/>

5.4 Development in Germany

Author: Bernd Benecke, Head, Audio-Description, Bayerischer Rundfunk

The first film to be described for cinema release in the German language was "Hear no evil see no evil" by Arthur Hiller in 1989. This was followed by two similar projects in 1990 and 1992. In 1993, ZDF the public broadcaster aired its first audio described film, followed by one or two described films per year until 1996.

In 1997 Bayerischer Rundfunk BR, the public broadcaster for Southern Germany started a self-financed regular audio description [AD] service. It was the first of its kind in the German broadcasting industry and in those days, the frequency was maintained at one described film per month. Till today, BR is the only television broadcaster in Germany with a full-time AD editor.

Until 2010 Bayerischer Rundfunk had described around 300 films, television-films and television series and some documentaries and making them into "Hörfilme" (the name for audio described programmes in Germany).

About 30 per cent of the description on German television and DVDs is produced by BR. Aside from BR, Deutsche Hörfilm, a subsidiary of the German Blind Union, is another AD provider in the country and describes films for other public broadcasters.

There is no AD on private owned channels or Pay TV in the country.

In 2010, the total number of programmes with AD on German television stood at 1150, each one about 90 minutes long. Around 100 DVDs are available with AD in the country.

A database in German with more details can be found under <http://www.hoerfilmev.de/index.php?id=117&PHPSESSID=261252d4cd67be8b6420bd0c18266bdd>

The provision of AD in the cinemas still requires further work in Germany. A project involving DTS, BR and the subtitling company Titelbild died out because cinemas and film distributors did not show too much interest. They complained that there weren't enough blind people coming to the theatres. Only seven films were described between 2006 and 2008. Now we only find films with live AD at the Berlin Film Festival each February.

5.4.1 Technical Aspects

Germany uses secondary audio channel to transmit AD on television.

For analogue television, the stereo signal was separated into the two mono-parts. On the left you had the normal soundtrack, and on the right, you had a premix of the soundtrack with the AD track. However the transition to digital television has caused a lot of problems because digital receivers could not separate the two signals and sighted people complained heavily about the descriptions they were forced to hear. Some television channels had to discontinue the delivery of AD for quite a while.

Now AD is only available on digital television, offered on a second stereo channel, so description is possible in Dolby Surround and Dolby 5.1.

5.4.2 AD in Austria and Switzerland

Austria and Swiss Television have produced AD since 2004 and 2008 respectively. The description work for both the countries is done by BR.

5.5 Development in India

Author: Dipendra Manocha, Managing Trustee, Saksham Trust

Genesis

The genesis of audio description in India can be traced to an AD track created by Saksham Trust for the national award winning film, *Black*, in 2005. The AD track received an enthusiastic response from people living with sight loss in the country and Saksham received an extraordinary number of requests for a copy of the film.

Since then, Saksham, a voluntary organisation based in New Delhi has regularly released Hindi and other regional language films with description. These films are produced as special products for blind people with a single mixed audio track which includes the audio description and the soundtrack of the film. Video CDs of these films are provided free or at a nominal cost to persons with blindness or members of associations working for blind and partially sighted people in India. Saksham is now using these to create awareness amongst film producers and distributors to add description tracks to their mainstream cinema and DVD releases. Release of *Peepli Live* with audio description was the first successful step in this direction. The DVD of *Peepli Live* is available across mainstream stores with a description track in Hindi.

The Bollywood Project

The Royal National Institute of Blind People, a UK charity supporting the needs of blind and partially sighted people, after witnessing the enthusiastic response that audio described Hindi films were receiving in India, decided to launch its own Bollywood audio description Project. The project initially aimed to gather evidence that there was a market for audio described Hindi films in the UK and subsequently sought to engage with the Indian film industry to make them aware of this demand.

Industry takes the first step...

As a result of the RNIB Bollywood campaign, 20th Century Fox decided to describe its first Bollywood release, 'My name is Khan' for the theatrical release. It opened in cinemas across the UK in February 2010 with description in Hindi and English. Not only, did

this film, become the first Hindi film to be screened with description in the cinemas but also the first one in the world to give its viewers the option of choosing to listen to the description track in Hindi or English. Shortly after this, another Bollywood distributor Eros International decided to add audio description to one of its latest film releases, though not for cinema but for the DVD release. The DVD of 'Veer' became the first Bollywood mainstream DVD to be made available in retail outlets across the world with description.

Even though the practise of adding audio description to films is not a standard practise in the Indian film industry, the concept is gathering a lot of interest. One of the leading film production houses in the industry, Aamir Khan Productions in the last quarter of 2010, announced that it was committed to bridging this gap in accessibility for its blind and partially sighted viewers. It released its third film in succession with description in Hindi.

Broadcasting Industry and Government Intervention

There is no audio description on television channels in India currently and the broadcasting industry has shown very little interest in bridging this gap in accessibility.

However, now there seems to be hope in the form of the new Rights of Persons with Disabilities Act, 2010 which, once finalised and implemented, will replace the current Disability Law of India. The current working draft of the law in section 4F, access to information and communication technology, demands for audio description on films and documentaries on public and private television broadcasts.

A strong push is needed in a developing country such as India in order to affect a paradigm shift. Making audio description a norm in films and television programmes would engender a shift in priorities in societal obligations towards blind and partially sighted and thereby transforming the current levels of accessibility.

5.6 Experiences of blind and partially sighted people

Over the years, audio description has not only matured in its delivery across different platforms but in its quality as well. Below are some of the comments from television viewers across the world giving their positive reaction to audio description:

On the film "The Godfather", Television

The audio description for The Godfather on Channel 4 last night was stunning, absolutely amazing - I could actually smell the olive trees! The description was perfect and didn't interfere with the film at all. I followed the whole 3 1/2 hour film totally - I was gobsmacked. I remember seeing the film over 10 years ago before I lost my sight and last night the description brought all my memories of the movie flooding back.

It was the dog's bollocks and I can't wait for next Wednesday to see Godfather 2!

"On the popular series LOST", Television

The last series had some of the best audio description I have ever heard, and I did write to congratulate Channel 4 for getting this so right!

On the film, Murder in the First, Television

"I watched Murder in the First, a film on Channel 5, over the weekend; it was absolutely first-class. I have visited Alcatraz and the audio description on this film brought back the atmosphere, smells and everything – superb!"

On the film 'Night at the Museum', DVD

"We rented a DVD the other weekend [...] the DVD was Night at the Museum. It was really good and so so funny, I can't imagine watching it without the audio description as it would have been quite dull and frustrating but the audio description brought the whole thing to life and I could picture everything so clearly - if you haven't seen it then go rent it as you will laugh your head off!"

On the film ' The day after tomorrow', Cinema

"This afternoon my wife and I went to see The Day After Tomorrow with audio description at the cinema. We both enjoyed the film, and I found the audio description excellent."

On the film 'Spiderman', Cinema

The only time I lost concentration was half way through the film, when I suddenly realised how great it was to be in a cinema, watching a film without having to rely on someone else describing the visual scenes to me, it gave me a wonderful sense of independence. I was also enthusiastic about the fact that for the first time I would be able to talk to sighted friends about the film in

its entirety, not just the plot and dialogue but also the visual aspects that I saw through the audio description.

On the film 'Matrix', Cinema

I went to see the Matrix re-loaded last night at the cinema and thought the audio description worked brilliantly with it! I thought the detail of the description was really amazing and gave such a graphic sense of the action taking place, of which there was loads!!

Key facts to remember

- Audio description in the UK is available on television, cinemas, DVD, and online catch up services. Most campaigners for description in the UK would agree it was only because of the lobbying of RNIB and after the launch of Broadcasting Act 1996 and subsequently the Communications Act 2003 that audio description really took off on UK television channels as both legislations mandated description on television.
- Media Access Australia's unique positioning as a non profit organisation with prior technical expertise and good collaborative working with other disability groups in Australia helped bolster the level of audio description in Australia. Government is now looking at trailing AD on TV in 2012.
- Audio Description is known as Video Description or DVS® in the US. The recently launched 21st Century Communications and Video Accessibility Act would make digital television more accessible with provisions such as mandating DVS® quotas on broadcasters and cable and satellite program providers.
- Audio Description is known as Hörfilm in Germany, literally meaning, an audio described film. It is currently available across television channels and DVDs in the country.
- Audio Description is still a new concept for the Indian film industry. It opened up to description for the first time in 2010 and the year saw five subsequent mainstream releases with description in Hindi/ English.

6. A peek into the future

The second half of the twentieth century witnessed a radical transformation of the television technology. Until very recently the changes were limited to quantity (the number of channels available) and quality (the transition to colour and then to High Definition television) of the television service.

Since 2000, a subtle shift began to occur towards greater user control of the viewing experience. More recently, it has included the incorporation of user-generated and Internet content and possibilities for users to schedule and play programmes at a time that suits them rather than watching "linear TV". Some of these recent developments are available across the globe e.g. TiVO, Google TV, Apple TV. This trend is accelerating and expanding to widgets, social networking, and other interactive content.

The availability of on-demand content, user-generated content, interactive applications and other cross-platform content on television is likely to transform watching television into a highly interactive experience. With these developments come new challenges for delivery of TV access services.

6.1 So the value of linear TV is declining, is audio description under threat?

To mitigate risks and preserve value - content providers and television platform providers/ broadcasters must both embrace new types of content and redesign the user experience. However blindness organisations report that their national legislative requirements on broadcasters to provide audio description for linear TV are often not extending to these new platforms such as on-demand TV or TV delivered over the internet.

In this constant flux of activity the role of blindness organisations and campaigners for audio description will be to ensure that the new emerging platforms are at least as accessible as the existing ones, if not better, for blind and partially sighted people. First and foremost they should not take the delivery of audio description for granted but they will have to campaign for it to be delivered on these new platforms. In addition, the new platforms also need to take into consideration factors such as accessible user interfaces, user friendly packaging, and audio feedback amongst other features.

6.2 Lets build in accessibility from the start

It is important for companies designing new television platforms and new ways of delivering content to grasp the significance of audio description so they build it in right from the inception stage. It is true that sometimes designing mainstream products so that they are compatible with an assistive technology—as is done by designing computer screen readers—is the only practical solution for attaining a certain level of accessibility. Often, however, the most cost-effective and efficient approach is to have the mainstream device designed so that no additional adaptive equipment is needed.

The need to comply with regulations—to include any particular accessibility service like audio description has proven to be an effective driving factor. Regulatory approaches do not, however, work well if implementation is weak or opportunity costs of complying are higher than the costs (e.g., fines) of not complying so careful planning and scrutiny is needed at the implementation of the regulatory framework.

Key facts to remember

- Developing technology needs to be made accessible by the addition of audio description from the start.
- Regulatory frameworks with effective sanctions could be the driving factor for broadcasters and manufacturers to provide access services like audio description on new platforms.

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