

# Dubai Universal Accessibility Strategy and Action Plan (DUASAP)

Region	Sub-Saharan Africa
Award Scheme	Dubai International Award
Sustainable Development Goals	Goal 11 - Make cities and human settlements inclusive, safe, resilient and sustainable

## Summary

The DUASAP project was initiated by the Dubai Government to ensure that the Emirate of Dubai becomes fully and universally accessible by 2020. Before the project, the Emirate was partially accessible with some features of accessibility, however, the standards used to guide the accessibility features of the Emirate were not uniform.

## Background and Objective

**Situation Before the Initiative Began:** Prior to the project, Dubai was partially accessible. There was no uniform accessibility code or set of guidelines, resulting in uneven implementation of accessibility without reference to principles of Universal Design. There was no central authority in the Emirate of Dubai responsible for monitoring of the implementation of Universal Accessibility. **Establishment of Priorities:** The Government of Dubai will be hosting the World Expo 2020. This provided the impetus for the universal accessibility strategy. The government of Dubai issued a request for proposals and GAATES was the successful bidder. The government listed its priorities in order of making the built environment and transport sector universally accessible. It required a Gap analysis report, a regulation, strategy document, and a new Universal Accessibility Code for the Dubai government. The initiative was overseen by the Executive council represented by the Director of Policies and Programmes and the Roads and Transportation Authority. **Formulation of Objectives And Strategies:** The Government of Dubai developed the main objectives and strategies. The overall objective according to the Dubai government is for Dubai to be Universally Accessible by 2020. The strategies include using the new Dubai Code as the main source of standard for the entire Emirate and to ensure compliance through the new regulation and through the encouragement of the Executive Council of the Emirate. One of the beneficiaries of the Universal Accessibility Strategy is women. Universal Accessibility aims to make the environment accessible for pregnant women, people pushing baby strollers, and use bathroom facilities as a baby changing room. **Mobilisation of Resources:** The Government of Dubai through the Community Development Authority provided the financial resources for the DUASAP Project. The technical input was provided by the GAATES team. Focus group sessions were held with community groups, such as the Dubai Sports club for Disabled, users of the transportation network, women with disabilities, deaf and blind individuals, and members of the different government agencies such as the Dubai Municipality and the Roads and Transportation authority. The private sector was also consulted, especially the large construction companies and some of the foreign consulting firms operating in Dubai. The Director of Policies and Programmes managed the DUASAP Project at the Executive Council level with senior managers at the Roads and Transportation Authority. GAATES provided an international team of expert consultants that focused on Universal Design and its implementation.

## Actions and Implementation

The DUASAP project as with any large projects had its own challenges. One of the problems was the scattered authority with regard to implementing its accessibility initiatives. This means that influential agencies each had its own standards on accessibility and was implementing according to its own rulebook. This can be seen with differently designed bathrooms in public buildings according to the company who developed and who owns the building. The second problem was that there are no known groups or organisations of people with disabilities that perform any advocacy or any organisations that is owned and managed by a group of people with disabilities that we could consult on their needs and to solicit their inputs on the future accessibility of the emirate of Dubai. The first problem was solved through the combined authority of the Executive Council and the Roads and Transportation Authority (RTA). Weekly meetings were held with senior management of the Executive Council, the RTA and the Community Development Authority. GAATES met with the different agencies to present its work program and to solicit their support. The second problem was overcome through the intervention of the Dubai Sports Club for Disabled. They are familiar with the different nascent organisations and prominent individuals with different disabilities who could provide input on the work of GAATES. GAATES held workshops to present its different milestones such as the Gap Analysis Report and managed to get the individuals and organisations with disabilities to attend and participate fully in the proceedings. GAATES also sought meetings with the Sports club for disabled persons to have more detailed discussions on its work. The support from the users of services was invaluable tools for correcting some of the

errors in our approach and also highlighted some of the priorities according to the users of services. GAATES reported weekly to the management and at workshops to the broader community. The Dubai Code was developed as the final output of the project. We benchmarked our work on the Code with the latest global developments within International Standards Organisation (ISO) and on 3 countries that have achieved the most with regard to the implementation of Universal Design.

## **Outcomes and Impacts**

Financially accessibility pays for itself as many previous studies in Europe have shown. The Spanish metro transport system was made accessible and that resulted in an increase of users and revenue. The EU tourism authority reports an increase of tourist and revenue when accessibility was increased. The accessibility of Dubai will allow older citizens to travel to the emirate without the anxiety of having to be concerned about accessible hotel rooms, taxis, malls, restaurants and so on. This increases the number of tourist and overall revenue. Accessibility means inclusion of people with disabilities and others with functional limitations, and the older community. Without access all including our target groups cannot achieve social inclusion as it creates barriers to participation. Culturally Universal Access encourages health and well being and the overall harmony of society. It moves people from objects of pity to citizens with rights who participate in all of the community services and amenities. The development of regulations to implement the Dubai Universal Design Code and to ensure compliance with its prescripts is a necessary part of the overall strategy to make the emirate accessible. The regulations will also ensure that the government monitors the implementation of the Code and to track progress. The Gap Analysis report pointed to the need for a national access office – a structure able to act as a secretariat for the Code to ensure coordination among different government agencies. Thus far the Executive Council has full power over the process of implementing the Code.

## **Gender and Social Inclusivity**

GAATES developed a training program that focused on the transfer of skills to professionals such as architects and engineers working for the Dubai Municipality and other related government agencies. The subject of Universal Design is a neutral subject that doesn't require any cultural adaptations except that it can be easily adjusted in cases where it may become sensitive such as in the use of animals for support in the case of blind persons and guide dogs. This may not be appropriate as other members of the local community may find the proximity of animals offensive and it may be difficult to transport them using public transport. Once the Code is implemented it will have a lasting impact on the whole of Dubai society. It will be beneficial for everybody. The redesign and retrofitting of Dubai may cause some small disruptions initially but it will mean freedom to wheelchair users, freedom of movement for baby strollers, older citizens in scooters or walkers, or crutches, blind persons, deaf people, and any person pushing something heavy, and anyone not having a functional limitation but knowing that this society is inclusive and accepting of diversity. It is a city of the future.

## **Innovative Initiative**

The key lessons learnt are that the Dubai process was a successful exercise as it followed a logical approach to arriving at a Universal Design Code by going through the process of examining the gaps and current scenario, including the management and legal gaps, the financial and human resource gaps and the technical capacity to implement future UD Codes. Also, it is difficult to promote accessibility without full participation by user groups or significant leaders in the disability community and broader social leadership. It was possible to meet with leaders in this project but it is not the same in the region. This is something that can be corrected. Management gaps must be analysed. Management are often the client and hard to confront on its shortcomings. To be successful in an universal accessibility related project requires that the failures of management in the past be confronted. We confronted some of the challenges related to management or the lack of resources to implement in the past. This is a necessary exercise as a project cannot be successfully implemented without management support and the technical and financial resources. Cultural sensitivity is an issue in the middle east. European consultants often slip up by making insensitive suggestions that offend the cultural norms of the client. Studying the local culture and respecting norms are necessary preconditions for success.

## **Resources devoted to delivery**

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## **Conclusion**

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