

## **Visionary Design Development Pty Ltd**

Visionary Design Development Pty Ltd, a unique transdisciplinary consultancy, operates at the intersection of human need and the built environment. Incorporating universal design principles, sustainability goals and social research outcomes, our collaborative, holistic approach delivers people-centred, accessible environments that nurture enterprise and nourish healthy communities, locally, regionally and internationally.

### **Universal Mobility Index (UMI): a new participatory tool for assessing accessibility.**

Globally the 2011 World Health Organisation's World Report on Disability estimates there are around one billion people with disabilities worldwide. The majority of people with disabilities are in developing world countries, such as those in Latin America. The World Bank reported in 2009 that there are at least 50 million people with disabilities in Latin America & the Caribbean (LAC) – approximately 10% of the region's population, with the prevalence of disability in Brasil estimated at 14.5%. People with disabilities are over-represented in post-conflict countries, areas of natural disasters and poverty statistics with approximately 82% of people with disabilities, and their families, in the LAC region living in poverty. Inaccessible environments result in: loss of human capital, lessened economic production and reduction in human rights. These shortcomings disproportionately affect people with disabilities excluding them from participating in their local neighbourhood activities. One dilemma is assessing the physical barriers to mobility that people with physical and sensory impairments face. The UMI, highly participatory and inclusive, is the first method of quantifying the overall accessibility of neighbourhoods/villages. Local people with disabilities are placed at the centre of decision making. Development practitioners will be familiar with the structure of the UMI which is modelled on a human development index.

Groups of people with differing impairments, physical and sensory, are asked to assess buildings and infrastructure elements and come to a consensus on a five point scale from 'very inaccessible' to 'very accessible'. Results are converted to scores between 0 (inaccessible) and 1 (accessible) with individual scores of built environment components showing which parts of the travel chain are producing barriers. A second part of the UMI assesses human rights agreements and any disability discrimination act operating in the country. The policy cycle affecting the built environment is also scrutinised for inclusion of the opinions of people with disabilities. These scores are summated with the built environment element scores to give an overall UMI score for the neighbourhood/village. Quantifying barriers – as opposed to a pass/fail audit criteria – allows prioritisation. Hence often scarce resources can be directed to where they will be most effective in improving accessibility.

### **Resources**

A pilot of the UMI has been successfully completed in a developed world urban environment (download pilot report [here](#)). Further pilots are planned in both developed and developing countries, in a variety of contexts. The pilots will assist Visionary Design Development ([vdd.com.au](http://vdd.com.au)) to refine the UMI accessibility assessment tool into a package that can be rolled out to development practitioners, government, NGOs, Disabled Persons' Organisations and other accessibility stakeholders worldwide.

Inquiries about pilots are invited [majarch@vdd.com.au](mailto:majarch@vdd.com.au).