



**INTERNATIONAL COUNCIL FOR EDUCATION OF  
PEOPLE WITH VISUAL IMPAIRMENT**



**ICEVI E-NEWS**

**APRIL 2019**

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## Message from the President

Dear Readers

Welcome to the April 2019 issue of ICEVI E-News, an online bi-annual publication that presents information about global events and initiatives in the field of education for children and young people with visual impairment. The International Council for Education of People with Visual Impairment (ICEVI) is a non-profit association of individuals and organisations promoting equality of access to education for persons with visual impairment. ICEVI operates through regional and national committees in its seven global regions – Africa, East Asia, Europe, Latin America, North America/Caribbean, Pacific, and West Asia, and is governed by a global Executive Committee.

This April 2019 issue includes reports on recent and upcoming global and regional conferences and meetings, including the WBU-ICEVI joint General Assembly that will take place in Madrid, Spain, in June 2020. The joint assembly will include two days of ICEVI paper presentations, and the Call for Papers is currently available on the ICEVI website, [www.icevi.org](http://www.icevi.org). Also included in this issue are updates from ICEVI's seven regions, together with reports on collaborative initiatives with ICEVI's partner members. The ICEVI Latin America report describes the release of an online publication that features 51 stories written by children with visual impairment from across the region. I am looking forward to the translation of this Spanish publication into English.

Regular readers of the ICEVI E-News will notice that we have changed the titles of our Regional Chairs to "Regional Presidents". This change is in line with the nomenclature used by our Vision Alliance partners, the World Blind Union and the International Agency for Prevention of Blindness (IAPB).

I hope you enjoy the contents of this issue. You are welcome to share the issue with others and to contact the ICEVI Secretariat if your colleagues would like to join our distribution list – email [ceo201922@gmail.com](mailto:ceo201922@gmail.com).



**Frances Gentle**

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## WBU-ICEVI General Assembly Update

We are pleased to advise the WBU-ICEVI joint General Assembly will be held at the Marriott Hotel, Madrid, Spain, from 19 to 24 June 2020.

Elaborate arrangements have already been made by the host organisation ONCE, the National Organization of the Blind, Spain. ONCE is a long-time partner of ICEVI and the World Blind Union, with a staff of over 70,000 and extensive experience in organising international events. The theme for the General Assembly is **"World Blind Summit: What it means to be Blind and Visually Impaired"**. The schedule of the full event is as follows:

- **Friday, June 19 to Saturday, June 20** – WBU Assembly proceedings
- **Sunday, June 21** – Joint WBU-ICEVI plenary and concurrent sessions
- **Monday, June 22** – Day 2 of joint WBU-ICEVI plenary and concurrent sessions, Gala Dinner
- **Tuesday, June 23** – ICEVI Paper Presentations – Day 1
- **Wednesday, June 24** – ICEVI Paper Presentation – Day 2, ICEVI General Assembly

Invitations are being extended to speakers and professionals from different organisations around the world to present during the joint ICEVI-WBU Plenary and concurrent sessions on 21-22 June. The themes for the joint sessions include technology, organisational capacity building, and the Sustainable Development Goals from the perspective of the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (UNCRPD). Invitations will be extended to world renowned speakers in the blindness movement.

A special feature of this general assembly is that ICEVI will be hosting two days of paper presentations on 23-24 June. The ICEVI days will enable many individuals to make presentations on research and developmental activities being conducted in various parts of the world. The Call for Papers has been released via the ICEVI website, [www.icevi.org](http://www.icevi.org).

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The WBU-ICEVI General Assembly is expected to include large numbers of exhibitors who will be displaying the state of the art assistive devices in the field of visual impairment. In addition, ONCE is planning for mega awareness activity and further details on this activity will be available soon. The General Assembly offers the opportunity to create positive awareness about the range of essential services for persons with visual impairment, leading to formulation of appropriate legislation by governments for the betterment of individuals with visual impairment and families. The dedicated website for the General Assembly will be launched latest by the end of July 2019, and will provide details on registration, the program and social events.

This is the third joint General Assembly of the WBU and ICEVI, and the evaluations of the two previous assemblies indicated that the event provides a unique opportunity for the blind individuals, professionals and parents/carers to come together to show their solidarity and to bring synergy among various stakeholders. The Madrid General Assembly will be attended by large number of participants from all over the world and updates will be available on the websites of WBU and ICEVI.

## **Africa Forum**

The much awaited Africa Forum will be held in Addis Ababa, Ethiopia from 7<sup>th</sup> to 11<sup>th</sup> October 2019. In addition to the Forum program, ICEVI will be holding its annual Executive Committee meetings and hosting the dedicated Education Day on the 9<sup>th</sup> October. focusing on various topics on education and specific strategies pertaining to the Africa region. The program schedule and speakers for the Education Day are currently being finalised and we are looking forward to an exciting program of quality presentations and workshops. Members of the ICEVI Executive Committee will be available on the Education Day to share their knowledge on various topics with the colleagues of the Africa Forum. The Africa region will also be conducting its regional board meeting during the Forum.

## **Registration of Africa region as a legal entity**

The ICEVI global body has previously endorsed the idea of ICEVI regions registering as legal entities to strengthen their work at the regional level and to carry out the mission and vision of ICEVI. To date, three regions

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have registered formally as legal entities. These are the Europe region which has been a legal entity for many years, the Latin America region which recently registered as a legal entity, and the Pacific region which has been registered for several years. The Africa Regional Board explored all possibilities to register in various locations across Africa in order to give legal status to the Africa region. The Board has resolved to register the region as a non-governmental organisation in Kenya, which is an important country in the vast Africa region with the presence of major International bodies working in the field of visual impairment. The members of the Board will be drawn from Kenya and other countries in Africa, reflecting the diversity of the Africa region. Registering the ICEVI Africa region in Kenya will provide leverage for ICEVI to promote and implement its activities in the 52 countries which come under the ICEVI Africa region.

The documentation process has been completed and registration is likely to be approved by the Kenyan authorities in the near future. Registration will also open opportunities for the Africa region to work with international organisations and collaboratively write grants with regional, global and UN bodies to promote multifarious activities in the region.

### **ICEVI Middle East sub-region**

The Principal Officers and the West Asia Regional President had a series of discussion about strengthening the ICEVI Middle East sub-region. The recent election of Mr. Refaat Sabbah from Palestine as the Chairperson of the Global Campaign for Education (GCE) for the next 5 years has provided impetus for development of the ICEVI Middle East sub-region. ICEVI's Second Vice-President, Rima Canawati, is also from Palestine and there are increased opportunities for the GCE and ICEVI to collaborate on education initiatives. A preliminary meeting of the key representatives of the Middle East sub-region will be held in Addis Ababa prior to the Africa Forum. Discussions will include strategies that can be put into place for strengthening the activities of ICEVI in countries in the Middle East. This initiative will be jointly planned by the Regional Presidents of the Africa and West Asia regions of ICEVI with overall guidance from the ICEVI Principal Officers.

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## **ICEVI – SEAMEO SEN Memorandum of Understanding**

The ICEVI East Asia region and the Southeast Asia Ministers of Education Organisation - Regional Centre for Special Education (SEAMEO-SEN) in Malacca, established a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) in the recent past to organise capacity building programs at the regional level and in countries in the East Asia region. A meeting of the ICEVI CEO, the East Asia Regional President and officials from SEAMEO-SEN was held on 5<sup>th</sup> March 2019 at the headquarters of the SEAMEO-SEN to review and update the MoU. It was agreed that the formal MoU will be signed at the SEAMEO-SEN International Conference on Special Education (ICSE), to be held in Surabaya, Indonesia in July 2019. The MoU clauses will include ICEVI supporting the 2019 ICSE as one of the key sponsors, planning strategies for organising activities at the regional level with joint collaboration of ICEVI and SEAMEO-SEN, and conducting country level capacity building activities, materials production, etc., where ICEVI counterparts may be encouraged to work with the Education Ministries of countries in the ASEAN region to expand educational opportunities for children with visual impairment. The President of ICEVI will also deliver a Keynote address at the ICSE 2019 conference. More updates on this will be available in ICEVI publications.

## **Committee on Children with MDVI**

At the regional conference of the ICEVI East Asia region held in Manila, Philippines in October 2018, there was a resolution to strengthen the work on promoting education for children with multiple disabilities and visual impairment (MDVI) in the region and also in other parts of the world. During 2018, the World Braille Council also listed education access for children with MDVI as one of the key priority areas. As a result, ICEVI has formed a joint committee of experts in the field of MDVI to create publications pertaining to education and community-based intervention for children with MDVI. The target audience will be parents, health professionals and teachers in rural and remote communities and countries that have limited resources to provide early intervention and education programs that are critical to the development of children with Mdvi. The joint committee consisting of members from the World Blind Union and ICEVI will establish guidelines for supporting communication, emergent braille literacy, and other quality of life measures. It is

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anticipated that the publication will be launched at the 2020 WBU-ICEVI General Assembly.

## **Governance Committee Activities**

We have been reporting on the work of the ICEVI Governance Committee in developing a governance framework that will serve as the foundation for ICEVI's governance and fiduciary requirements to members, and also inform the linkages between ICEVI's global and regional entities. The importance of a governance framework has been highlighted by several of ICEVI's regions becoming legal entities. The Governance Committee consists of the President ICEVI, representatives of international partner member organisations of ICEVI, representatives of ICEVI's Regional Presidents and the CEO. The Governance Committee held a series of discussions by teleconference calls in order to create the draft Governance Framework. The draft Framework was tabled at the 2018 EXCO meeting held in Manila, with further revisions made following input from ICEVI's Regional Presidents. The revised draft will be shared with the Regional Presidents and Executive Committee of ICEVI in Addis Ababa for further discussion and endorsement. Once in-principle is obtained from the Executive Committee, a small group nominated by the ICEVI EXCO will look into the potential constitutional changes that may be necessary for adoption at the General Assembly to be held in Madrid in 2020. The list of proposed constitutional amendments will be published in the January 2020 issue of The Educator, so that the ICEVI General Assembly delegates will be knowledgeable of the proposed amendments to the constitution prior to voting at the ICEVI General Assembly in Madrid in 2020.

The Governance Framework is a significant development in the recent activities of ICEVI and is likely to result in solid guidelines for the ICEVI regions that are seeking to become legal entities. The governance framework will also support the regions in organising regional and country-level activities that are in keeping with the Mission and Vision of ICEVI.

## **Text-to-Speech Software in Burmese Language**

ICEVI and the Overbrook-Nippon Network on Education Technology (ON-NET) have collaborated on developing Text-to-Speech (TTS)

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software in the Burmese language with the support of The Nippon Foundation. The work has taken about two years in collaboration with the Sao Mai Vocational & Assistive Technology Center for the Blind, Vietnam and the colleagues in Myanmar. The software was launched on 17<sup>th</sup> January 2019 in Yangon. The software is considered as a boon for visually impaired people in Myanmar as it enables them to access information through digital technology. Government representatives, volunteers, non-governmental organisations, visually impaired individuals and organisations of the blind were present at the launch, which generated substantial media attention to this important work.

The software is currently being used by people with visually impairments in Myanmar, and ICEVI and ONNET have appealed through the Myanmar National Association of the Blind for feedback on the software. Based on the feedback received, further refinements may be carried out. Similar initiatives may also be emulated in other regions of ICEVI.

## **Release of Instructional Mathematics Videos**

We have been reporting that ICEVI is working on the production of Mathematics Instructional Videos for the benefit of teachers. Sample videos were prepared and tested with teachers in South Africa and also in the higher education projects of the East Asia region. Based on the suggestions given by the participating teachers, the first set of videos has been prepared and final editing work is going on. 40 videos on different topics in Mathematics, starting from primary level to secondary level, will be released on 18<sup>th</sup> July 2019 in Manila, Philippines in the presence of representatives from The Nippon Foundation, ICEVI and the Department of Science and Technology (DOST), and the Government of Philippines. These videos are based on practical experience and will be available on YouTube after the formal release. The duration of each video is approximately 5 to 10 minutes, depending on the topic.

ICEVI is grateful to our CEO, Dr M.N.G. Mani, whose professional expertise and hard work has made the production of the instructional videos possible. ICEVI is planning to release further videos later in 2019 and also prior to the 2020 General Assembly. Additional mathematics instructional videos are likely to be prepared in the 2020-2024 quadrennium.

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## **Mathematics Workshop**

ICEVI and the East Asia region supported a Mathematics Workshop in the Philippines in collaboration with the Government of Philippines and the Resources for the Blind. This workshop was held in Manila from 28th to 30th May 2019, and was attended by Ms. Lisdah and Ms. Indah, Mathematics experts from Indonesia, the CEO of ICEVI, Dr. M.N.G. Mani, and teachers from general schools in the Philippines where visually impaired children have been enrolled. The Workshop helped the participants to adapt mathematics materials and also learn techniques for teaching Mathematics in inclusive settings. Some of the videos prepared for release in July 2019 were also showed to the participants at this workshop to gain their feedback.

## **Debbie Gleason replaces Mike Delaney on the ICEVI Executive Committee**

Mike Delaney, the former International Executive Director of Perkins International who also served as a member of the ICEVI Executive Committee has accepted a position with the Gates Foundation. Mike was an active member of the ICEVI Executive Committee and also a member of the Governance Committee appointed by ICEVI. We will definitely miss Mike in the future meetings of ICEVI and wish him a great future in his new career.

The good news is that Debbie Gleason of Perkins International, who is a world renowned expert in the area of multiple disabilities, has been nominated to join Dave Power of Perkins School for the Blind on the ICEVI EXCO. With the formation of the ICEVI-WBU committee on MDVI, Debbie's nomination to the EXCO will auger well for this work. We welcome Debbie to the ICEVI family.

## **Nepal Conference in 2020**

The ICEVI West Asia regional conference, in collaboration with Sense International, will be held in Lalitpur, Nepal in February 2020. This is an important event for the region as Nepal was the first country in the West Asia region which served as a focus country for the promotion of the global WBU-ICEVI EFA-VI (Education for All Children with Visual Impairment) Campaign.

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The Vision Alliance concept of networking between the Education and medical professionals is being promoted in Nepal and therefore there are many good practices that can be shared with the other ICEVI regions. The conference announcement has already been issued and can be accessed from the ICEVI website and also the ICEVI West Asia regional website.

Although this is a regional conference, the participation is not limited to the West Asia region. We are expecting more than 400 persons to attend the event.

### **Dr. Bhushan Punani at the GCE Meeting**

Dr Bhushan Punani, the Regional President of West Asia region, represented ICEVI at the General Assembly of the Global Campaign for Education held in Kathmandu, Nepal in November 2018. Dr. Punani had extensive discussions with officials of the GCE and explored the possibilities of working with the national coalitions of GCE in the region of West Asia to promote ICEVI activities. ICEVI has been active in the work of the GCE.

With the attendance of Bhushan Punani at the GCE General Assembly, a foundation has been established for strengthening the ICEVI Middle-East Network.

### **Regional News**

**ICEVI** regions have been very active as usual and following is the summary of region wise activities conducted in the recent past.

#### **Africa**

The Africa Region has intensified its effort towards registration. After two years of grappling with a stringent registration process, in early May, the Region finally deposited its application for registration with the Kenyan NGO Coordination Board, the government authority that registers non-profit organisations. One of the registration requirements was for the Region to appoint a Treasurer who would be a Kenyan citizen. As such, the Africa Executive Committee appointed Fred Haga, the Director of Special Needs Education at the Kenya Ministry of Education, as the Region's Treasurer. The outcomes of the application will take up to four months.

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The Africa Regional President continues to work towards the improvement of education for children with disabilities, including ratification and implementation of the WIPO Marrakesh Treaty through presentations and during the Constructive Dialogue with States as part of her role on the UN Committee on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities.

During the recent unfortunate natural disaster in Mozambique, the management of ICEVI Africa expressed the Region's solidarity with the people of Mozambique through the ICEVI Representative in Mozambique.

Discussion on the Visionary Learning Project for Africa has been intensified. The first level of priority countries includes Ethiopia and Kenya, where consultations are currently underway. It is hoped that Visionary Learning initiatives will commence in Ethiopia before the Africa Forum in October 2019.

Preparations for the 7th Africa Forum have gained momentum. ICEVI Africa is using the Africa Forum as a platform for its Regional conference. As such, the Region has taken up planning and preparation for the Education Day of the Forum. Most of the Program discussion areas have been determined and speakers identified. The ICEVI Africa Regional Committee will also hold its face-to-face meeting during the Forum.

In Kenya, ICEVI Africa continues to follow closely developments in the roll-out of the new Competency-based Curriculum which was launched this year. The curriculum launch is part of a total overhaul of the Kenyan educational system and the first year targets pre-primary and the first three years of primary education. For learners with visual impairment, together with Braille books that are being prepared, learners in the first three years of primary school will receive Orbit Reader 20 devices loaded with adapted books, based on the new curriculum.

In South Africa, Blind SA in conjunction with SA Braille Authority and Nali'Bali hosted a successful World Read Aloud Day on 21 February 2019. A total of 646 blind and partially sighted learners from fourteen Schools for the Blind participated in reading the story 'Where Are You' by Ann Walton. The learners read the story in seven South African languages. They also participated in a spelling and comprehension quiz and a Braille treasure hunt. The objective of the event was to commemorate International Braille Day and International Mother-Tongue Language Day,

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and to promote the culture of reading and writing for blind and partially sighted learners. The reports received from the schools certainly attest to the event being a resounding success and the next event will be held on 21 February 2020.

## **East Asia**

### **Accessible Mathematics Learning Process for Students with Visual Impairment**

It has been quite often discussed in ICEVI conferences, that accessible mathematics learning process for students with visual impairment around the world is still such a “challenging challenge”. This situation has been negatively affecting the empowerment of young people with visual impairment. The ICEVI East Asia country members have making efforts to change this situation.

In the **Philippines**, Resources For The Blind Inc. (RBI) regularly conducts mathematics camps for students with visual impairment, as well as “mathematics workshops” for mathematics teachers. The Philippines Ministry of Education has recognized these activities; moreover, the government also plays a role in supporting the activities. The activities have also had a significant impact on young people with visual impairment in the Philippines. We can now find mathematics teachers with visual impairment in schools. We can also find university students with visual impairment who are studying computer science, which requires high levels of skill in mathematics. These positive changes should improve job opportunities for young people with visual impairment in the country.

RBI delivered the most recent mathematics workshop in late May 2019 in Manila. Dr Mani, CEO of ICEVI, was invited to be a resource person during the workshop. Dr Mani also invited two mathematics teachers from Indonesia to share their experiences.

In **Indonesia**, an intensive effort to improve access to quality mathematics education has been taking place since late 2017, with the support of ICEVI global, The Nippon Foundation, and ONNET (Overbrook Nippon Network on Education Technology). ONNET is an ICEVI partner in empowering people with visual impairment in the South East Asia Region. Current activities in Indonesia are as follows:

1. Creation of guideline books on how to develop a learning strategy that ensures the mathematics learning process is accessible for students with visual impairment. Regular mathematics teachers as well as mathematics university lecturers have written the books, and the target audience are regular mathematics teachers from Grade 1 to Grade 12. The books are based on general guidelines and principles, as well as the paradigm of developing a mathematics learning strategy for students with visual impairment. A practitioner in education of students with visual impairment has written the general guideline.
2. Development of mathematics software, with the capacity to produce mathematics documents in Braille using the conversion process for mathematics regular equations. This software is expected to be used by both mathematics regular teachers and students with visual impairment who are learning mathematics, and will serve as such bridge or communication media when working with mathematics in regular classrooms.

It is anticipated that the Indonesian projects will be completed by the end of 2019, with the launch of both the guideline books and the mathematics software.

### **Burmese Text-to-Speech Software**

Having screen reader software with the capacity to read sentences in languages that do not use the English alphabet is needed by people with visual impairment. Myanmar is one country within the ICEVI East Asia region that needs such software. The issue was raised by the Myanmar National Association of The Blind (MNAB), which has been a partner of ICEVI and ONNET since 2012. ICEVI and ONNET collaborated with MNAB to develop "Burmese TTS", text to speech software in the Burmese language.

At the beginning, ICEVI and ONNET faced several challenges. The first challenge was cost and the second challenge was identifying resource persons who had the capability to do the job. With the spirit of collaboration among ICEVI Higher Education Project partners, the Burmese TTS Project accepted support from ICEVI's Higher Education Project Country Coordinator from Vietnam, Dang Hoai Phuc, a blind person who was The Executive Director of Saomai Computer Center for the Blind in Vietnam. Phuc became one of key persons in developing the

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Burmese TTS. After working for several years, finally, in mid-January 2019, the software was launched during a memorable ceremony. The launch was led by Larry Campbell, ICEVI President Emeritus, and witnessed by a representative of the Myanmar Government, the ONNET Project Director, the Director of Overbrook School For The Blind, the Regional Chair of ICEVI East Asia, the CEO of ICEVI, the Board and members of MNAB, and other related stakeholders.

Blind people in Myanmar are now using the text to speech software, however, it still needs further development. ICEVI and ONNET are very proud that such a necessary software program has been developed and produced by local people within the region. Through the collaborative spirit, this region had been able to solve a problem which was faced by our country member effectively and efficiently.

### **Contribution to The Nippon Foundation Publication**

The Nippon Foundation has been an important ICEVI donor through the ICEVI Higher Education Project in South East Asia since 2006. Since 2017, the higher education project also operates in Mongolia. The Nippon Foundation also has been working collaboratively with the Overbrook School for The Blind in Philadelphia, USA, to conduct international programs to support people with visual impairment gaining access to computer technology, and to use technology to increase their quality of life, both in education and employment.

In order to compile the history of the Nippon Foundation's investment in empowering people with visual impairment, especially in Eastern Europe and South East Asia, The Nippon Foundation is currently producing a book, which is authored by Larry Campbell and a selected team. In order to enrich the book with colourful information, both in narrative version as well as in video format, our country members who are involved in projects, which are supported by ONNET and the ICEVI Higher Education Project, are asked to contribute. To date, two coordination meetings have taken place, the first in Manila in October 2018, after ICEVI East Asia Regional Conference; and the second in Bangkok in January 2019. Country members who are contributing to the book are from the Philippines, Vietnam, Myanmar, Cambodia, Laos, and Indonesia.

The publication is expected to provide information and inspiration about what has been done by The Nippon Foundation to empower people with

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visual impairment in several parts of the globe. The book is scheduled to be launched in ICEVI and WBU joint General Assembly in Madrid, in 2020.

### **Continued Collaboration with SEAMEO SEN**

One of the ICEVI East Asia strategic partners in South East Asia is SEAMEO SEN (South East Asia Ministry of Education Organization On Special Education Need). This collaboration commenced in 2015, when this region was chaired by Dr. Suwimon. As an organization with expertise in education of people with visual impairment, ICEVI has provided expertise and training in the area of education for students with visual impairment whenever needed by SEAMEO SEN.

In early March of 2019, a meeting was held in the SEAMEO Office in Malaysia, to discuss continuing the joint collaboration. Among the meeting participants were CEO of ICEVI, ICEVI East Asia Regional Chair, and The Deputy Chair of ICEVI East Asia Region. The meeting results were:

1. ICEVI committed to support the SEAMEO SEN 2019 International Conference on Special Education (ICSE) in Surabaya, Indonesia; and
2. A MOU between ICEVI East Asia and SEAMEO SEN will be signed and exchanged during the ICSE opening ceremony in Surabaya, Indonesia.

### **Continued Implementation of the Higher Education Project**

The Higher Education Project in South East Asia and Mongolia is continuing, and 2019 is the second year of the 2018-2020 project cycle. A variety of activities are being undertaken by the country partners in Cambodia, Indonesia, Laos, Myanmar, The Philippines, Vietnam, and Mongolia. Among the activities are as following:

1. Promoting inclusive higher education system;
2. Country champion program;
3. Accessible learning process in STEM;
4. Provision of accessible books for university students;
5. Conducting pre-employment soft skills training for university students;
6. Conducting employer sensitizing sessions; and

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7. Influencing policy and legislation in the area of education to make higher education more accessible for students with disabilities.

### **ICEVI East Asia Regional Conference**

One of the traditions that has been implemented in ICEVI East Asia is to conduct a regional conference within each quadrennium. Although it is not a must, if it is possible to be done, the ICEVI East Asia region in collaboration with our country partners makes an effort to conduct the regional event.

After succeeding in conducting a regional conference in Bali, Indonesia in 2015, ICEVI East Asia, in collaboration with Resources For The Blind Inc ., conducted a regional conference in October 2018, in the Philippines. Prior to the conference, a Philippines Education Forum was also organized by the host organization, RBI, with the support of the Philippines Ministry of Education. In addition to local participants and speakers, the 350 conference attendees included participants and speakers from Australia, United States of America, Africa, Europe, West Asia, and of course, the East Asia Region. The President of the World Blind Union Asia Pacific region was one of the plenary speakers. She shared her expertise and experience in education and advocacy. During the event, the ICEVI EXCO members were invited to share their expertise to inspire all participants. Workshops were conducted by university students and also parents, through their organization, PAVIC (Parent Association of Visual Impaired Children), are one of the main stakeholders in education of children with visual impairment in the Philippines.

New methods and technologies that related to education for people with visual impairment were introduced. Through both the plenary and breakout sessions, we believe many people were inspired by the resource persons who presented during the conference.

## **Europe**

### **Professional Interest Groups - Teaching and teacher-training**

On April 16-17, the professional interest group held a conference in Suresnes, France, with the theme "What is good, can always be better. Wondering how to improve the mathematical performances of Blind student?" The keynote speech titled "Reading Mathematical Expressions

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by Braille readers” was delivered by Annemiek van Leendert from the Netherlands.

Next year Annemiek van Leendert hopes to complete her PhD on the subject of mathematics for visually impaired students. The conference went very well and there were 40 mathematicians from 14 countries. The conference report will be published shortly in the Newsletter of ICEVI-Europe (see website of ICEVI Europe). It was decided to continue the consultations at the European Conference of ICEVI-Europe in 2021 in Jerusalem. Israel Annemiek hopes to promote the subject of mathematics for visually impaired students next year.

### **Rehabilitation**

The professional interest group on Rehabilitation organised a conference in Budapest , Hungary. On the website of ICEVI-Europe you can find all the information.

## **Latin America**

### **National Conferences**

During April and March 2019, two National Conferences were conducted in Guatemala and Venezuela, to elect the national representatives for ICEVI Latinoamerica. Only three countries (Bolivia, Cuba and Nicaragua) remain for elections for next period.

### **On-line training for the Inclusive Education Monitoring**

Ten webinars, two for each sub-region, were carried out between March and June 2019, for training the national representatives on the monitoring process that will take place during the Sub-regional Conferences.

### **Sub-regional Conference**

From 7th to 9th May 2019, the Southern Cone Sub-regional Conference was conducted. The sub-regional representatives for ICEVI Latinoamerica were elected and the Sub-regional Inclusive Education Monitoring took place.

### **EFA-VI Campaign**

Between February and March 2019, the coordination visits to the five countries of the EFA-VI Campaign (Paraguay, Honduras, Guatemala, El

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Salvador and Dominican Republic) took place. The Regional President met with the governmental authorities to invite the governmental representatives to the Sub-regional Conferences and to request them to provide the information for the monitoring process. The Regional President also met with each National Task Group of the EFA-VI Campaign and with each National Delegation.

### **Workshop for Revising the Regional Report Draft on the Implementation of the SDGs**

On 11th and 12th May 2019, in Cochabamba, Bolivia, the Regional President attended the Workshop for Revising the Regional Report Draft on the Implementation of the SDGs, organized by RIADIS, IDA, and ADD Bolivia. The Regional Report was completed and on 31st March was submitted to IDA.

### **Meetings with ULAC to organize the Sub-regional Conference 2020**

During February and April 2019, in Argentina and Dominican Republic, two meetings were held to organize the 2020 ICEVI LA-ULAC Joint Conferences and Assemblies. The first meeting was held with the Scientific Committee, and the second meeting with the Host Committee. During the second meeting, the Regional President and the Coordinator of the Central America and Caribbean Sub-region visited the possible venues for the Conference.

### **Workshop on Strengthening Organisations of People with Disabilities**

On 25th April 2019, the Regional president, Cristina Sanz, and the Coordinator of the Sub-region, Julio Canizalez, delivered presentations in the Workshop on Strengthening Organisations of People with Disabilities organized by FOAL in Dominican Republic. Julio's presentation addressed the topic of the Importance of the Political Advocacy of the Civil Society, and Cristina's presentation addressed the topic of Rehabilitation and Education for the Effective Enjoyment of Rights.

### **Awards Ceremonies for the Winners of "The Children Tell Us"**

The Awards Ceremonies for the winners of each category of the contest took place in Mexico, El Salvador and the Dominican Republic. The prizes were a Braille Watch and a Digital Recorder. An on-line book was published on 3rd December 2018, gathering 51 stories written by children

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with visual impairment in the region, and is currently being translated into English.

### **Bridging the Gap II – International Forum of Educative Inclusion of People with Disabilities**

Miriam Gallegos, First Delegate of ICEVI Latinoamerica in Ecuador, represented our organization in the International Forum of Educative Inclusion of People with Disabilities which took place in Quito, Ecuador on 7th May. Miryam presented on the activities of ICEVI Latinoamerica in the Panel of Civil Society and International Cooperation for Educative Inclusion. The International Forum was attended by representatives of UNESCO, UNICEF and OAS.

### **Perkins Session of Action Planning in Argentina**

On May 23rd in Cordoba, Argentina, 25 representatives of different organizations of Argentina, including the Regional President of ICEVI Latinoamerica, will meet to elaborate a Work Plan for joint action. These Sessions are organized by Perkins International's Office for the Southern Cone Sub-region.

### **International Disability Forum and Summit**

On 6th and 7th June 2019, the International Disability Forum and Summit will take place in Buenos Aires, Argentina, organized by the National Government, IDA and RIADIS. The Regional President was invited to present in the Education Panel. The Forum and Summit will be attended by national and international stakeholders.

## **North America / Caribbean**

- The North America/Caribbean Region has been invited by the Ministry of Education of St. Vincent and the Grenadines (SVG) to train a cohort of 25 classroom teachers from preschool to secondary levels in the basics of educating children and youth with visual impairment. While has included some students with visual impairment in its schools, this new initiative will make it possible to educate more children by preparing teachers to welcome children into their classrooms. The training occurs July 15-19, 2019 in Kingstown. Presiding officer for the training is Celene Gyles, Deputy Chair for the Caribbean. Adam Wilton, Deputy Chair for Canada, is

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the lead workshop coordinator. Susan LaVenture, Deputy Chair for the United States, will speak to the teachers about working with families before conducting a two-day workshop for parents in collaboration with Voice of the Disabled. We are honored that Charles Mossop, President of the North America/Caribbean Region of the World Blind Union, will be present for the Opening Ceremony and will speak to both the teacher and parent groups. This training, originally scheduled for two weeks, was reduced to one week, given the financial constraints of the regional budget. Further trainings are anticipated.

- Regional President Kay Ferrell met with Kevin Carey, RNIB's representative to ICEVI's Executive Committee, in April 2019 to revise the Start-up Mobile Phone Teacher Training Curriculum and create the country assessment tool. These documents will be available soon on the ICEVI website.
- The Regional President will not seek re-election for the 2020-2024 quadrennium. The Region is actively seeking nominations for regional officers prior to the 2020 General Assembly in Madrid.

## **Pacific**

2019 began with the hosting of the 6th biennial Regional Conference on Disability, held from 25 February to 1 March in Nadi, Fiji. Hosted by the Pacific Disability Forum, an umbrella organisation for Pacific islands based disabled people's organisations (DPO's,) the event brought together over 200 persons with disability from 20 regional countries, experts in the areas of education, rehabilitation, advocacy, United Nations bodies, indigenous groups, government and nongovernmental organisations working in the disability sector to exchange ideas and share the latest innovation and policies related to persons with disability. With the theme "From Recognition to Realisation of Rights: Furthering Effective Partnership for an Inclusive Pacific 2030 for Persons with Disabilities", the conference explored how the Sustainable Development Goals have impacted people living with disability in the region thus far and what is likely to happen as the SDG's progress.

ICEVI was represented at the 6<sup>th</sup> Regional Conference by Mr Ben Clare, the Pacific Regional President who shared the latest news from the ICEVI

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community as well as liaising with DPO's and potential partners for future regional initiatives ICEVI could be involved in. DPO's based in Fiji and Samoa were very interested in running the Champions training workshop. In the case of Fiji, this would be a follow-up from the Champions program conducted in 2017. Planning is underway for a possible Champions workshop to be held in Samoa during the second half of 2019, subject to available funding and timetabling. ICEVI is an associate member of the Pacific Disability Forum and the organisation is very appreciative of our input, especially in the area of education for all with vision impairment, a major concern within the Pacific region and globally. The Pacific Disability Forum maintains a mailing list, website and social media profiles. All can be found at: <http://www.pacificdisability.org>.

In early March 2019, the Pacific Regional President for ICEVI visited the Fiji Society for the Blind in Suva to discuss the possibility of hosting a joint ICEVI/SPEVI regional conference, currently scheduled for July 2021. SPEVI (South Pacific Educators in Vision Impairment), is a regional non-profit association made up of teachers of the blind and vision impaired, parents, medical and allied health professionals, assistive technology providers and others working in the vision education sector, not dissimilar to ICEVI. SPEVI generally holds a biennial conference and has hosted joint events with ICEVI and its regional members in the past. These have been held in various cities around Australia and New Zealand and if held in Fiji, it will be the first time a conference of this type is held in a Pacific regional country. Fiji is in a good position to host such an event with appropriate infrastructure and conference hosting facilities. Fiji can also be reached from within the region and from other parts of the world relatively easily. The planned conference will involve various ICEVI worldwide personnel and will have a strong focus on regional involvement.

Initial discussions with the Fiji Society for the Blind, the host organisation of the joint ICEVI/SPEVI conference, have been fruitful and in-principle approval for Fiji to host a 2021 event was given during SPEVI's Annual General Meeting on 27 May. More information about SPEVI can be found at: <https://www.spevi.net>.

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**Upcoming activities for the Pacific region include the following:**

- Braille embosser maintenance workshop to be conducted by Index personnel based in Malaysia and to be held in Fiji and Samoa, hosted by United Blind Persons of Fiji and the Samoa Blind Persons Association. These workshops will equip participants with the skills needed to perform basic and advanced repairs on equipment manufactured by Index Braille embossers, several of which are operated by the blindness organisations of Fiji and Samoa. ICEVI will be represented at these events by the Pacific President. Workshops will be held during June 2019;
- Capacity building of Tonga Blind Persons Association as part of a wider initiative of the Australian Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade. ICEVI, through the Pacific Regional president will conduct various workshops in the areas of disability advocacy, funding proposal construction, inclusive education and joining the World Blind Union. Workshops are scheduled for August 2019 in the Kingdom of Tonga.
- Monitoring and Evaluation of Kiribati Education Facility to be conducted during second half of 2019. The Kiribati Education Facility has seen the successful integration of students who are blind and low vision in tertiary and regular school settings. Recently, the first class of students with vision impairment graduated in ICT as part of a regular class at the Kiribati Institute of Technology while three others have obtained fulltime employment in the private sector. The Pacific Regional president will conduct monitoring and evaluation on behalf of the Australian Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade in the hope the program can be expanded.

## **West Asia**

### **Champions Program for Nepal**

The Country Members of ICEVI from Nepal, Mr Madhav Aryal and Mr Birendra Pokharel organized this program during 17<sup>th</sup> and 18<sup>th</sup> August in Lalitpur in Nepal. 25 participants from all over Nepal were selected. The program was inaugurated by Deputy Director General of Education, Government of Nepal. The faculty of this program included Dr Mani, Nandini Rawal, Bhushan Punani, and Mr Birendra Pokharel.

### **The ICEVI-Nepal**

ICEVI-Nepal had an opportunity to collaborate with several partners led by ADRAD-Nepal to join hands with Bookshare and Enable India to organize several activities, in particular the **“Reading Without Seeing”** Workshop. In this event, 110 visual impaired students were given orientation about Digital literacy and accessing E-books from the Bookshare on-line library.

### **Sub National Conference**

The ICEVI West Asia organized a sub national conference at Bhubneshwar during 11-12 August, 2018. About 230 participants from states of Odisha, Chhatisgarh and Bihar participated in the conference.

### **Development of TTS (Text to Speech) system for Nepali language**

ICEVI is seeking assistance of Mr Bajaj of Canada who has experience of developing TTS for number of Indian languages to develop TTS for Nepali language as well.

### **Hans Welling Supports ICEVI West Asia**

Hans Welling, Regional President of ICEVI Europe, has mobilized support of Euro 22,000 for supporting activities of ICEVI WA during 2018 and 2019. We are grateful to Hans for this support.

### **Session on Inclusive Education in International Conference**

ICEVI WA conducted a parallel session on inclusive education in the International Conference on Inclusive Education held in New Delhi during 28-30 November, 2018. The session was chaired by Mr. Akhil Paul and presentations were made by Nandini Rawal, S R Mittal and Bhushan Punani. Dr MNG Mani also delivered a keynote address in the valedictory function held on 30<sup>th</sup> November. Bhushan Punani was also member of the Organizing Committee, the Program Committee, as well as the Drafting Committee of this conference.

### **Participation in World Assembly of Global Campaign for Education**

Dr Bhushan Punani represented ICEVI as a voting member in the GCE World Assembly held in Kathmandu during 16-18 November, 2018. A

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major breakthrough was motivating all the participants to ensure promotion of inclusive education for children with visual impairment. It was well organized and well conducted event. Mr. Refat Sabbah of Palestine was elected as President of the GCE, defeating Nafisa Baboo during a well contested election. Rima Canawati, Second Vice President of ICEVI, already knows Mr Refat and we anticipate that ICEVI shall be able to work more closely with the Board of GCE.

### **Presentations in Conferences**

ICEVI is being regularly invited to make presentations in various conferences. These included delivering a keynote address during the National Conference on Inclusive Education held at Vadodara on 15<sup>th</sup> November; the International Conference on the theme of "Harmonizing Inclusive Education" organized by BA Open University at Ahmedabad on 3<sup>rd</sup> December, 2018; the National Conference organized by SNDT University in Mumbai during 18-19 January, 2019; and a keynote address at Amity University, Delhi during 8<sup>th</sup> to 9<sup>th</sup> March, 2019.

### **Parent Counselling**

ICEVI organized a one day parent counselling session for the parents of students with visual impairment who are studying in special schools, on 28<sup>th</sup> January, 2019 at Ahmedabad. The parents appreciated the use of new technology in the field of education of their children.

### **Leadership Training for Women with Visual Impairment**

ICEVI has organised a two week leadership training program for 20 women during 6<sup>th</sup> to 18<sup>th</sup> May, 2019, at Ahmedabad. 20 such women shall receive training in communication, personality development, confidence building, legislation and knowledge building.

### **Accessible Voting**

ICEVI has played a significant role in ensuring promotion of accessible voting in India. This is the first time that all polling booths in the country will have ballot papers, voting slips guide book on voting process and voter identity cards in Braille. The ballot papers have also been produced in audio format.

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## Appointments:

- Our Member from Iran, Ms Fatane Amiri, has been appointed as **Goodwill Ambassador** by the Government of Iran. Heartiest congratulations to her.
- **President Elect of Rotary Club:** Our member of Nepal, Mr. Birendra Pokharel, has been elected as President of Rotary Club of Lalitpur. He is first blind person to be elected as President of a Rotary Club anywhere.
- Bhushan Punani has been appointed as **Member of the Advisory Committee** on Accessible Elections by the Election Commission of India.
- Vibhu Sharma, a well-wisher and ardent supporter of ICEVI West Asia, was conferred the **Legendry Honorary Award 2018** by Partners for Youth with Disabilities, USA, on 10th May, 2018.

## Dr. Susan Spungin has passed away

**Dr. Susan Spungin** who served as a significant member of ICEVI in various capacities passed away in February 2019. Dr. Susan Spungin served as the Vice President of ICEVI and also as the Regional Chairperson of the North America and Caribbean region of ICEVI. She made a significant contribution to the development of the EFA-VI business plan before it was launched in Kuala Lumpur in 2006. Susan also served as a member of various committees such as the ICEVI Nominations Committee, Awards Committee and various professional committees of ICEVI particularly addressing the teacher curriculum and teacher preparation. Susan also served as the Treasurer of the World Blind Union and was highly respected all over the world for her professionalism, publications and academic career. Susan was the member of ICEVI for many years representing the American Foundation for the Blind. ICEVI will definitely miss her contribution in the future and the present generation will emulate the great professional qualities of Dr. Susan Spungin. ICEVI places on record her significant contribution to the initiatives and growth of the organisation.

**We will miss you Susan. Rest in peace!**

**ICEVI E-News comes to your mailbox in May and November every year. Please provide us with the e-mail addresses of individuals and organizations that may be interested in receiving the ICEVI E-News and The Educator.**

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