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ICEVI

The International Council for Education of People with Visual Impairment

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The **Institute on Disability and Public Policy** (IDPP) is a networked virtual institute promoting the analysis and understanding of public policy for persons with disabilities. Using our innovative cyberinfrastructure and in collaboration with institutional partners including ICEVI, the IDPP:

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Global Campaign on **Education For All Children with Visual Impairment (EFA-VI)**

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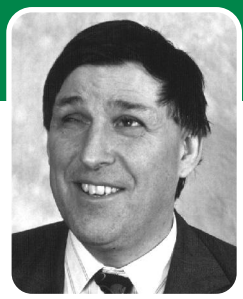


Message from **The President**

I sent my message for the latest edition of ICEVI e-News from Beijing, where I was attending the Beijing Forum organised by the China Disabled Persons' Federation. It was an excellent conference, which resulted in a wide-ranging declaration which was clearly intended to give a strong lead for the post-2015 United Nations development agenda in the way that the Beijing Summit on Disability in 2000 had sounded the first international clarion call for concerted action leading to the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities. Of particular interest to ICEVI, it contained a commitment to the "establishment and implementation of laws, policies and national action plans to achieve quality, inclusive education for all and guarantee the enrollment and retention of all school age children with disabilities, with provision of the necessary resources and support, and clear milestones towards 100 per cent completion of education". It also called for the incorporation of "training on special needs education and inclusive education in the pre-qualification and professional continuing education curricula for training teachers". Of even wider significance, it noted that the UN's Millennium Development Goals made no explicit mention of disability, and called for the explicit incorporation of the disability dimension in the post-2015 United Nations development agenda, with adequate resources explicitly identified in annual budgets. You will be glad to know that I was able to ensure that ICEVI was to the fore in the education discussions, where we also worked in close collaboration with the International Disability Alliance (IDA).

Our East Asia Regional Chair, Dr Suwimon Udompiriyasak, has also been helping to put ICEVI on the map at a UNESCO regional expert meeting in Bangkok from 16-18 July, 2012. The focus of the meeting was "inclusive education through quality teacher education in Asia-Pacific". A particularly happy development was the good contact she made with a UNESCO colleague from Myanmar. Myanmar is where it's all at right now. With the country opening up, the whole of the NGO sector is beating a path to Myanmar to see what programmes they can set up. Our Immediate Past President, Larry Campbell, has been working to put together a task force from the visual impairment sector. He has already got the Nippon Foundation on board, and the Vision Alliance is considering an integrated mission to the country on the basis that it makes most sense to pool our efforts rather than all fire off independently. I would certainly welcome this, as my first girlfriend was half Burmese and the Burmese cuisine is particularly good. I have always wanted to visit the country, even though I know she is not there any more!

The Vision Alliance is a loose association of ICEVI, WBU and IAPB (International Agency for the Prevention of Blindness) which came together about five years ago to maximise the benefit we could get from acting together on projects in which we had a common interest, even though different organisations might be in the lead on different projects. Two representatives from each organisation meet or talk on the phone from time to time as required. Dr Mani and I represent ICEVI and the chair rotates between the organisations on an annual basis. Currently I am in the chair. Areas of collaboration identified so far are the EFA-VI campaign, the needs of people with low vision, the needs of disabled people in disaster emergency situations and the campaign to secure a WIPO treaty that would dismantle barriers to the circulation of copyright material in accessible form. WIPO is the World Intellectual Property Organisation, a UN agency. We are now turning our minds to how we might work together to promote the needs of disabled, and in particular visually impaired, people in the post-2015 agenda when the current set of Millennium Development Goals comes to an end, which brings us full circle and back to the BEIJING Declaration again.

Excellent news to end with is the appointment of Gordon Brown as UN Special Envoy for Education. You remember we had very positive talks with him towards the beginning of the year. Needless to say I lost no time in writing to send our congratulations—and the latest draft of our EFA-VI strategy, which is now very nearly in its final form.

C. M. Low

Colin Low

EFA-VI Update

The Education for All Children with Visual Impairment (EFA-VI) is a global campaign and program of the International Council for Education of People with Visual Impairment (ICEVI) acting in partnership with the World Blind Union (WBU) to ensure that all girls and boys with blindness and low vision enjoy the right to education. The growth of the EFA-VI Campaign is classified into the following 4 stages:

1) **Conceptualization Stage (2003 to 2006)** when the campaign was conceptualized, Global Task Force formed, draft Business Plan developed and the Campaign launched at the 12th World Conference of ICEVI held in Kuala Lumpur in 2006.

2) **Experimentation Phase (2007 to 2011)** when ICEVI introduced the campaign in 12 focus countries which resulted in the development of good practices that could be emulated in other countries.

3) **Consolidation Phase (2012)** which is characterised by ICEVI introspecting the strengths and limitations of the campaign by doing a SWOT analysis (strength, weakness, opportunities, threat) and

4) **Expansion Phase (from 2012 onwards)** when ICEVI is expected to strengthen its regions to collaborate with international agencies, larger initiatives of Education For All, INGDOs, UN Bodies, etc., to strengthen the advocacy front and also actively work with the Governments, local NGOs, organisations of Blind people etc., to facilitate quality education for children with visual impairment.

CURRENT STATUS OF THE CAMPAIGN:

The EFA-VI Global Campaign is currently underway in 12 focus countries including Ecuador, El Salvador, Ethiopia, Fiji, Honduras, Mozambique, Nepal, Nicaragua, Pakistan, Paraguay, The Dominican Republic and Vietnam. The preparations for implementation of the campaign are underway in Bolivia, Burkina Faso, Cambodia, Guatemala and Palestine.

Many key players including Governments, International Non-Governmental Development Organisations (INGDOs), local NGOs, Organisations of blind people etc., in the focus countries are engaged in providing services to children with disabilities in general and children with visual impairment in particular. ICEVI has been serving as a catalyst in creating a demand for education of children with visual impairment in these countries through awareness programmes being organised at various levels. We have also conducted more than 200 capacity building programmes for 17,479 teachers and parents in areas such as Low Vision, Early Detection and Assessment, Adapted Learning Materials, Abacus, Braille, Education of Multiply Disabled Visually Impaired Children, Inclusive

Education, Visual Stimulation, Orientation and Mobility, Child Protection Policies, Role of Parents in Education of Children with Visual Impairment and Activities of Daily Living.

Capacity Building Programmes

It is gratifying that the enrolment of children with visual impairment in these countries is certainly increasing and data from 11 countries (Ecuador, El Salvador, Ethiopia, Honduras, Mozambique, Nepal, Nicaragua, Pakistan, Paraguay, The Dominican Republic and Vietnam) reveals that 49,102 additional children with visual impairment have been enrolled in schools. ICEVI applauds the collective efforts of all stakeholders which are important factors in creating conducive environment for the inclusion of children with visual impairment in the mainstream education.

Enrolment Data

The four performance indicators as per the EFA-VI Campaign are 1) increased enrolment, 2) improved retention, 3) ensuring provision of appropriate support services, and 4) improving performance of children with visual impairment on par with non-disabled children. Now that the data from the focus countries is showing marked increase in enrolment, ICEVI, in partnership with national Governments and INGDOs, will strive to ensure provision of support services including human and material resources in order to facilitate improved performance of children with visual impairment.

The campaign is demonstrating that the education for all initiative will become a reality when children with disabilities in general and children with visual impairment are included in the mainstream education system and there is a long way to go in facilitating opportunities to the majority of 4 million children who are currently not having access to education.

ICEVI Constitution, Memorandum and Articles of Association

As 2012 is the election year for ICEVI the members are asked to refresh themselves with the Constitution, Bye-Laws, Memorandum of Association and Articles of Association of the organization which can be accessed from the website of ICEVI www.icevi.org

Any resolutions members want to put forth at the General Assembly have to be presented to the Resolutions Committee which is headed by Maureen Matheson (E-mail: MMatheson@afb.net), American Foundation for the Blind.

Summary of EAST ASIA REGIONAL STRATEGY DEVELOPMENT MEETING

A meeting of ICEVI with the UN Bodies and International Non-Governmental Development Organisations (INGDOs) present in the East Asia region was held at Suan Dusit Rajabhat University, Bangkok on 11 and 12 April 2012.

The broad objectives of the meeting were:

1. To devise a framework within which we can work together to advocate for the education of children with visual impairment; and
2. To identify ways of sharing human resources and exchange good practice for the effective implementation of the Global Campaign.

SUMMARY OF DELIBERATIONS:

Mapping of INGDO services in the East Asia region:

A mapping exercise was done to find out the involvement of INGDOs in various activities within the East Asia region pertaining to services for persons with visual impairment. The 15 areas listed in the mapping exercise included the following:

1. Advocacy
2. HR Development
3. Low vision services
4. MDVI
5. Inclusive education
6. CBR
7. Assistive devices
8. Prevention
9. Early intervention
10. Technology
11. Braille book production
12. Vocational education
13. Parents' Groups
14. Sports
15. Self-help groups

The following key findings emerged from the mapping exercise.

- ICEVI - INGDO Partner organizations (CBM, Light for the World, NABP, Nippon Foundation, Perkins, Overbrook School for the Blind, and Visio) are present in 13 of the 19 countries in the East Asia region.
- At least 3 INGDO partner organisations are present in Cambodia, China, Indonesia, Philippines, Thailand and Vietnam.
- The areas in which INGDOs are involved most: Human resource development, Braille Book production, Inclusive education, and Parents' networking.
- All areas of expertise are addressed by at least one INGDO partner.

EFA-VI in Vietnam – Factors contributing to its success:

The meeting deliberated on the factors that should be in place for the successful conduct of the EFA-VI Campaign. The EFA-VI in Vietnam was used as a promising experience and the following factors were considered to be vital for its success.

- Vietnam is one of the countries of the Global Partnership for Education programme of the World Bank, formerly known as the Fast Track Initiative.
- Vietnam has a clear National Plan.

Education for children with disabilities is an integral part of the national plan.

A National Technical Task Force (NTTF) for the EFA-VI campaign was formed in 2007 which is supported by the Government.

The National Technical Task Force consists of Government officials, professionals, members from blind people's organizations and voluntary organizations.

The campaign works closely with the Vietnam Association of the Blind

Visually impaired children enrolled in school are assisted with low vision aids, learning materials and Braille books as per needs.

The country is also involved in indigenous production of materials such as Braille slates, embossing papers, etc.

General Recommendations

The participants of the meeting stressed that the following general strategies should become key priorities of the global ICEVI.

1. Advocacy and development of good practices have to be addressed by ICEVI.
2. ICEVI should work with other organisations and broader initiatives involved in disability services.
3. Presence of active and strong organizations of the blind in countries is important in order to implement the EFA-VI campaign.
4. National governments, World Bank, UN agencies and donor organisations should become the pressure points to make education for all children with disabilities an integral part of the national EFA plans.
5. Presence of ICEVI in the UNCRPD-related events is vital to create awareness amongst countries about the Global Partnership for Education.
6. Data on education of school-age girls with disabilities should receive special mention in all advocacy programmes.
7. The WIPO intervention on access to materials should also be emphasized in the advocacy campaign.
8. "Schools for All", "Education for All", "Books for All", etc., should become taglines in the EFA-VI campaign.
9. The regional committees of ICEVI should address diverse areas including that of sub-regions, gender issues, presence of international organizations, Governments, etc.
10. In the near future, the EFA-VI Campaign should also be popularized in non-focus countries.
11. There is a need to map the activities of the INGDO organisations where ICEVI is also involved to bring synergy into services.

Recommendation specific to East Asia Region

1. It was felt by the group that formation of sub-regional structure may be necessary for effective contact, communication, cooperation and collaboration with the national governments, INGDOs, DPOs etc. The following sub-regions were suggested and the participants were of the view that the sub-regional classification may further be discussed at the Regional Committee meeting during the WBU-ICEVI joint assembly.
   - ***Sub-Region 1:*** Thailand, Laos, Myanmar, Cambodia and Vietnam.
   - ***Sub-Region 2:*** China, North Korea, Mongolia, Singapore and Hong Kong.
   - ***Sub-Region 3:*** Philippines, South Korea, Chinese Taipei and Macao China
   - ***Sub-Region 4:*** Indonesia, Japan, East Timor and Brunei

2. The regional chairs of ICEVI East Asia region and WBU-AP are asked to gather, analyze and share information from all countries in the region in regards to priorities, strategic plans, and problems identified. The priorities may also be revisited in November 2012.
3. The EFA-VI Campaign may be extended to non-focus countries also by forming National focus Groups to highlight Education of Children with Visual Impairment in national agendas at the country level.
4. The ICEVI and WBU-AP may explore ways to involve missing key players in the Regional activities:
    - ***Ministries of Education*** - Coordinate with SEAMEO to include an initiative targeting inclusive education, with a possible Regional meeting with ICEVI and WBU and those in the Ministries responsible for implementing Inclusive Education.
    - ***Teacher Training Universities***
    - ***Parents*** - Find ways to stimulate Parent Organizations in the Region. Consider a Regional Parents Conference or Organization.
    - Producers of Adaptive Equipment
5. In order to strengthen collaboration between ICEVI and WBU-AP it is proposed to include representatives of ICEVI East Asia region on the WBU-AP and vice versa.
6. The idea of organizing joint regional conference may also be discussed by the ICEVI and WBU and decisions taken accordingly. The regional level meetings of ICEVI and WBU can be rotated in different countries in order to expose the members to different good practices.
7. It was also suggested that efforts must be made by the ICEVI East Asia and WBU-AP to reach out to other international organisations who can also support educational activities at the national level.
8. It was recommended that lobby with the national governments should be made to support the WIPO Treaty at the national level. Internationally recognized accessibility standards should also be practiced locally.
9. The WBU tool kit for CRPD may be used to orient various stakeholders.
10. Capacity building with the particular reference to teachers is a priority in the region as inclusion without their assistance will not become a reality. ICEVI and WBU will discuss with the INGDOs and National stakeholders through a needs assessment survey to find out the capacity building requirements in the region.
11. The regional committees of ICEVI and WBU may also provide adequate representation to address the diversity in terms of location, gender issues, INGDO representation etc.
12. It was resolved to make use of regional publications and the websites of ICEVI and WBU effectively to disseminate information on regional activities to the constituencies of ICEVI and WBU.

Keeping the above recommendations in focus a regional implementation plan for the quadrennium (2013-16) will be evolved before the WBU-ICEVI General Assembly in November 2012, so that it is adopted by the regional committee for implementation from the ensuing fiscal year.

WBU-ICEVI 2012
November 8-18, 2012
Bangkok, Thailand

World Blind Union

ICEVI

WBU/ICEVI General Assemblies: Achieving Our Vision through Empowerment and Partnerships

MANUAL REGISTRATION FORM

(Can be downloaded from the Website www.icevi.org)

Please complete this form in block letters and return it by email, fax or regular mail to the address below before **September 30, 2012.** This registration form is for individual and group registration.

ProCOngress (Thailand) Co., Ltd.
4/383 Moo 6, Soi Nakniwas 37, Nakniwas Road, Ladprao, Bangkok, Thailand 10230
Tel: + 662 956 1580 ; Fax: + 662 932 4454 ; E-mail: **registration@wbu-icevi2012.org**

Please indicate the number of registrants ☐ **Persons**

Section 1 : GENERAL INFORMATION

Organization _____

Name or Group Manager _____

Full Address _____

City _____ Country _____ State _____ Postal Code _____

Telephone _____ Fax _____ Email _____

Emergency Contact Information

Name _____

Address _____

Telephone *(including country code)* _____ Fax _____

Email _____

Section 2 : PARTICIPANT INFORMATION

Please copy section 2 for the number of total registrants

Please select event

☐ AFUB General Assembly *(Does not include Gala Dinner)*
☐ WBU Diversity Forum *(Does not include Gala Dinner)*
☐ WBU General Assembly *(Includes Gala Dinner)*
☐ ICEVI Events and Assembly *(Includes Gala Dinner)*
☐ WBU General Assembly & ICEVI Events and Assembly *(Includes Gala Dinner)*
☐ WBU Diversity Forum & WBU General Assembly & ICEVI Events and Assembly *(Includes Gala Dinner)*
☐ Gala Dinner *(Additional Purchase)*

Please Select Registration Type

☐ Delegate ☐ Observer ☐ Guide ☐ Interpreter ☐ Accompanying Person

Salutation

☐ Professor ☐ Associate Professor ☐ Assistant Professor ☐ Dr. ☐ Mr.

☐ Mrs. ☐ Ms. ☐ Other

First Name _____

Middle Name _____

Last Name _____

Position _____

Mobile Phone _____

Corresponding E-mail _____

Please indicate if you are bringing your guide dog ☐ YES ☐ NO

Additional Information

Gender: ☐ Male ☐ Female

Disabilities: ☐ Blind ☐ Deafblind ☐ Sighted ☐ Partially sighted

☐ Other Disabilities _____

Preferred language (select one): ☐ English ☐ French ☐ Spanish

Preferred Format: ☐ Braille

- ○ English contracted
- ○ English uncontracted
- ○ French uncontracted
- ○ Spanish uncontracted

☐ Electronic

☐ Large print

☐ Disk

- ○ Ascii / text file ○ MS Word

☐ DAISY

Dietary Requirement: ☐ Normal (Any) ☐ No Beef ☐ No Pork

☐ Vegetarian ☐ Halal

☐ Allergies, please specify: _____

Flight Information

Arrival Flight : Airline and Flight number : _____ Date _____ Time _____

Departure Flight : Airline and number : _____ Date _____ Time _____

Travel Documentation ***(using for fast track at Thai immigration)***

Full Name *(As appear on passport)* _____

Passport Number _____

Place of Issue _____

Date of Issue _____ Expiry Date _____

Date of Birth _____

Do you require a visa invitation letter? ☐ YES ☐ NO

Associated Event Registration

Welcome Reception (November 11, 2012) – **Not valid for AFUB**	☐ YES	☐ NO
Opening Ceremony (November 12, 2012) – **Not valid for AFUB**	☐ YES	☐ NO
Closing Ceremony (November 16, 2012) – **Not valid for AFUB**	☐ YES	☐ NO
Gala Dinner (November 16, 2012) – **Not Valid for AFUB** and **WBU Diversity Forum**	☐ YES	☐ NO

Information to appear in the receipt

Same as Section 1 (General Information) ☐ YES ☐ NO *If not, please indicate below.*

Name _____

Full Address _____

_____

Section 3 : SUMMARY FOR REGISTRATION AND PAYMENT

Event Registration	Registration Type	Fee (USD)	Number of Persons	Total USD
AFUB General Assembly	Delegate	200		
WBU Diversity Forum	Delegate	150		
	Observer	150		
	Guide	150		
	Interpreter	150		
	Accompanying Person	150		
WBU General Assembly	Delegate	350		
	Observer	300		
	Guide	250		
	Interpreter	250		
	Accompanying Person	250		
ICEVI Events and Assembly	Delegate	300		
	Observer	250		
	Guide	200		
	Interpreter	200		
	Accompanying Person	200		

Event Registration	Registration Type	Fee (USD)	Number of Persons	Total USD
WBU General Assembly & ICEVI Events and Assembly	Delegate	600		
	Observer	500		
	Guide	400		
	Interpreter	400		
	Accompanying Person	400		
WBU Diversity Forum & WBU General Assembly & ICEVI Events and Assembly	Delegate	700		
	Observer	600		
	Guide	500		
	Interpreter	500		
	Accompanying Person	500		
Gala Dinner (Additional Purchase Only)		100		
Total Registration Payment				

Payment of Registration Fees:

Registration fee payments are due in full and can be made either via wire transfer or by credit card. Please complete the relevant information below:

Bank Transfer

Bank Name : **Siam commercial Bank Plc.** Branch : **Victory Monument**

Account Number : **034-431273-7** Swift Code : **SICOTHBK**

Bank Address : **467/1 Ratchawithi Rd. Phayathai Ratchathewee Bangkok Thailand 10400**

Beneficiary : **Thailand Association of The Blind (WBU-ICEVI 2012)**

Your money transfer reference number: _____

Remarks : The bank fee varies according to bank regulations.

Credit Card Payment

☐ Visa ☐ MasterCard

Name as shown on card: _____

Number ☐☐☐☐ ☐☐☐☐ ☐☐☐☐ ☐☐☐☐ Expiry Date (mm/yy) ☐☐ ☐☐

Last 3 Digits on the signature bar ☐☐☐

Signature _____ Date _____

Remarks : Credit card fee of 3% may apply in addition to the registration fee.

TERMS & CONDITIONS

- This registration will be accepted only upon full payment is received.
- Registered delegates who are unable to attend will receive 50% refund, provided that a written request is received by the WBU-ICEVI 2012 registration Office before September 30, 2012 at **registration@wbu-icevi2012.org** .
- Transfer to another name will be accepted only by written request before September 30, 2012.
- All approved refunds will be processed and issued 60 days after the congress.

Signature _____ Date _____

(Electronic signature is acceptable)

Section 4 : HOTEL BOOKING

The information that you provide will be sent to the Imperial Queen's Park Hotel and the hotel will contact you directly to issue your invoice, receive your deposit and confirm your hotel booking. The hotel can accept payment either via wire transfer or credit card. Payment option instructions will be provided by the hotel when they issue your booking invoice to you.

Information about the room types, hotel services and terms and conditions follows the booking information.

Guest Details

Room Type _____

Guest Name _____

Email _____

Check-in date* _____ November 2012 Check-out date* _____November 2012

Imperial Queen's Park Hotel (Event Venue)

Room Types	Price Per Night (THB)	Number of Rooms	Number of Nights	Total THB
Deluxe Single	3,900			
Deluxe Twin	4,200			
Premier Single	4,200			
Premier Twin	4,500			
Premier Suite	5,700			
Premier Corner Suite	6,700			
Extra bed	1,300			
Total Payment				

Extra Bed Thai Baht 1,300 net per bed per night.

Rates are inclusive of 10% service charge, and 7% government tax. In case if Thai government increase the percentage of tax collected on room or impose additional tax/levies, the hotel reserve the right to increase the percentage of tax accordingly.

Each guest will be given an internet password which can be accessed in your guest room, function room area, lobby, and the swimming pool terrace on the 9th floor.

Special Arrangements:

Guide dogs are allowed to accompany vision impaired guests to their rooms. Maximum allowed are for 20 guide dogs and hotel reserves the right to accommodate subject to health conditions of the guide dogs. *(A proven certificate of the guide dog is required upon request by hotel).*

Benefits:

- Free access of broadband internet in room.
- Daily buffet breakfast at Parkview Restaurant.
- Welcome drink upon arrival.
- Welcome fruit plate in each guest room.
- Personal safe deposit box in room.

- Complimentary daily local English newspaper.
- Complimentary use of Fitness Center, sauna, and swimming pool.
- Tea/coffee station in room

Additional Benefits for Premier:

- Premium amenities in room to include bath robe and slippers.
- Jacuzzi Bathtub

Check in/out Time Policy:

- Check in time is 14:00 hrs. and check out time is 12:00 hrs.
- Early check in guarantee before 14:00 hrs: it is recommended that room reservation covering the night before is made with hotel.
- Late check out is extended to 14:00 hrs. and is subject to availability.
- A half day charge for late check out between 14:00-18:00 hrs.
- One night room charge for check out later than 18:00 hrs.

Room reservation:

Availability will be guaranteed if booking is made before October 1, 2012. After this date, room will be subject to availability.

Room Reservation Guarantee:

Credit card from individual guest is required upon making online room reservation to guarantee hotel reservation.

Cancellation:

Cancellation before 14 days prior to arrival is accepted without penalty. After 14 days prior to arrival, cancellation fee equivalent to one night room charge will be applied automatically to guest's credit card.

No show:

For no show, two nights room charge (and one way airport transfer fee if booked) will be applied to guest's credit card.

ICEVI Regions

Countries within the ICEVI regions are as follows:

Africa region:

Algeria, Angola, Benin, Botswana, Burkina Faso, Burundi, Cameroon, Cape Verde, Central African Republic, Chad, Comoros, Congo, Côte d'Ivoire, Djibouti, Egypt, Equatorial Guinea, Eritrea, Ethiopia, Gabon, Gambia, Ghana, Guinea, Guinea-Bissau, Kenya, Lesotho, Liberia, Libyan Arab Jamahiriya, Madagascar, Malawi, Mali, Mauritania, Mauritius, Morocco, Mozambique, Namibia, Niger, Nigeria, Rwanda, Sao Tome and Principe, Senegal, Seychelles, Sierra Leone, Somalia, South Africa, Sudan, Swaziland, Togo, Tunisia, Uganda, United Republic of Tanzania, Zambia, and Zimbabwe.

East Asia region:

Brunei Darussalam, Cambodia, China, China Taipei, Democratic People's Republic of Korea, East Timor, Hong Kong China, Indonesia, Japan, Lao People's Democratic Republic, Macao China, Malaysia, Mongolia, Myanmar, Philippines, Republic of Korea, Singapore, Thailand, and Viet Nam.

Europe region:

Albania, Andorra, Armenia, Austria, Azerbaijan, Belarus, Belgium, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Bulgaria, Croatia, Cyprus, Czech Republic, Denmark, Estonia, Finland, France, Germany, Georgia, Greece, Hungary, Iceland, Ireland, Israel, Italy, Kazakhstan, Latvia, Liechtenstein, Lithuania, Luxembourg, Malta, Monaco, Netherlands, Norway, Poland, Portugal, Macedonia (former Yugoslav Republic of), Republic of Moldova, Romania, Russian Federation, San Marino, Slovakia, Slovenia, Spain, Sweden, Switzerland, Turkey, Ukraine, United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland, and Yugoslavia.

Latin America region:

Argentina, Bolivia, Brazil, Chile, Colombia, Costa Rica, Cuba, Dominican Republic, Ecuador, El Salvador, Guatemala, Honduras, Mexico, Nicaragua, Panama, Paraguay, Peru, Uruguay, Venezuela.

North America and Caribbean region:

Antigua and Barbuda, Bahamas, Barbados, Belize, Canada, Dominica, Grenada, Guyana, Haiti, Jamaica, Saint Kitts and Nevis, Saint Lucia, Saint Vincent and the Grenadines, Trinidad and Tobago, and United States of America.

Pacific region:

Australia, Cook Islands, Fiji, Federated States of Micronesia, Kiribati, Marshall Islands, Nauru, New Zealand, Palau, Papua and New Guinea, Samoa, Solomon Islands, Tonga, Tuvalu and Vanuatu.

West Asia region:

Afghanistan, Bahrain, Bangladesh, Bhutan, India, Iraq, Islamic Republic of Iran, Jordan, Kuwait, Kyrgyzstan, Lebanon, Maldives, Nepal, Oman, Pakistan, Palestine, Qatar, Saudi Arabia, Sri Lanka, Syrian Arab Republic, Tajikistan, Turkmenistan, United Arab Republic, Uzbekistan, and Yemen.

General Assembly of ICEVI

The General Assembly of ICEVI will be held on 18th November 2012. The participants of the General Assembly are the voting delegates of ICEVI and the classifications are as follows:

Principal Officers (5)
President, Immediate Past President, First Vice President, Second Vice President, and Treasurer

Founding Members of ICEVI (3)
American Foundation for the Blind, Perkins School for the Blind, and the Royal National Institute of Blind People

International Umbrella Organisations (3)
International Agency for the Prevention of Blindness, Deafblind International and World Blind Union

International Partner Members (9)
CBM, ONCE, Perkins School for the Blind, Royal Dutch Visio, Royal National Institute of Blind People, Sightsavers, The Norwegian Association of the Blind and Partially Sighted, Francophone Blind Union, and Vision Australia

Regional Chairs of ICEVI (7)
Africa, East Asia, Europe, Latin America, North America and the Caribbean, Pacific and West Asia

The above members constitute the Executive Committee of ICEVI. In addition to them 12 delegates are selected by the Regional Chairs in consultation with the Regional Committees of each region. The selection of the delegates takes into account the geographical representation within each region, gender, implementation of ICEVI focus activities such as EFA-VI, etc. These delegates (84) and the 27 members of ICEVI Executive Committee constitute the General Assembly with voting powers.

Agenda of the General Assembly:
The General Assembly agenda includes report on finance and approval of audit reports, constitutional amendments if any, discussions on future directions, introduction of the regional chairs, presentation of resolutions and adoption, report of the nominations committee and voting if necessary to elect the principal officers.

Participants other than the voting members of the General Assembly are allowed to take part as observers. ICEVI will issue separate identity cards to the voting delegates during the WBU-ICEVI joint event.

Questions if any may be addressed to MNG Mani, CEO, ICEVI.

News from World Blind Union

Maryanne Diamond, President

The WBU World Braille Council was reconstituted in 2009 with representation from the major language groups within the WBU, from our Regions and from key stakeholder sectors. Diane Wormsley has represented ICEVI on the Council and made a great contribution. Initiatives which have been undertaken over the last three years include:

- Guidelines for the establishment of National Braille Authorities have been drafted, based on a paper delivered at the Braille 21 conference (held in Sept. 2011). These will be further refined shortly and made available on the WBU website.
- A survey of credible Braille libraries from around the world was conducted among WBU member organizations. The result is a list of 150 Braille libraries from 72 countries that has been compiled and made available from the WBU website.
- A comprehensive bibliography of research material concerning Braille has been compiled covering the period from 1912 to close to the present. It is being finalized and once complete will be placed on the WBU website.
- The WBC has also been working on the identification of uniform Braille notations for mathematics, science, computer symbols and so forth and has developed recommendations for further work in this area as it is very complex.
- The World Braille Council has also had interaction with ISO committees dealing with Braille on consumer products and public spaces.
- The publication of the 3rd edition of the World Braille Usage has been undertaken by the Library of Congress in the United States with the support of Perkins School for the Blind. This project is scheduled for completion in mid-2012.
- A major undertaking of the World Braille Council in 2011 was the Braille 21 Conference held in Leipzig Germany in September 2011 and hosted by the German Central Library for the Blind. This was a very successful conference with 420 delegates from 51 countries participating, 68 papers presented on 6 topics. A special award was also presented to an organization demonstrating innovation in Braille.

As the current term of the WBU draws to an end, there is great support to ensure this Council remains in place in recognition of the importance of its work.
Joint event of WBU & ICEVI, November 2012

During November 2012, both ICEVI and WBU will hold their General Assemblies and some days have been set aside to jointly hold sessions covering topics of interest to both memberships. This major event will be held at the Imperial Queens Park Hotel Bangkok Thailand.

15 and 16 November will consist of 18 sessions, many parallel sessions, covering a wide range of topics including braille, employment, technology, research, the CRPD, Early Intervention and Childhood Development, Encouraging Sport and Recreation, Inclusion and Advocacy and others.

17 November will be taken up with a planning day for the expansion of the EFAVI global initiative.

This is a unique opportunity for us to participate and hear the perspectives of members from both the WBU and ICEVI and also spend time together building new and old friendships and networks. Our work is extremely important and together we have the opportunity to improve the educational opportunities and experiences of persons who are blind and partially sighted and to build their capacity and self-assurance.

I look forward to meeting many of you in Bangkok during November.

ON-NET: Regional Technology Network for people with Visual Impairments in Southeast Asia

Hisae Miyauchi, Assistant Professor, Ibaraki Christian University, Japan
Eriko Takahashi, Chief Manager, The Nippon Foundation, Japan
Yoshiko Toriyama, former Professor, University of Tsukuba, Japan

Introduction

The Overbrook-Nippon Network on Educational Technology (ON-NET) program was launched in 1998 by the International Program of Overbrook School for the Blind in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania (USA). Overbrook planned and implemented this initiative with financial support from The Nippon Foundation (TNF). This article outlines the findings of a recent evaluation of the program.

The goal of ON-NET is to expand educational and employment opportunity for persons who are blind or visually impaired in developing countries by training them to use access technology. The member nations of ASEAN (Association of Southeast Asian Nations) were targeted: Cambodia, Indonesia, Laos, Malaysia, Myanmar, the Philippines, Thailand, and Vietnam.

The ON-NET program evaluation took place between October 2011 and March 2012. It was implemented by The Nippon Foundation and conducted by the authors of this article. The purpose of the evaluation was to:

- Assure the donor (TNF) of the program's financial accountability;
- Document best practices and share information useful for future programs;
- Target areas for improvement and set the future directions and goals of the ON-NET program itself.

The evaluation team consisted of Yoshiko Toriyama, former Professor, University of Tsukuba; Hisae Miyauchi, Assistant Professor, Ibaraki Christian University; and Eriko Takahashi, Chief Manager, The Nippon Foundation.

The evaluation focused on the ON-NET programs in three countries, selected because they represent the variety of education and technology infrastructure in the participating nations. Thailand is at an advanced level, Vietnam is at a mid-level, and Cambodia is at a lower level of development in these categories.

The evaluators used the following methology:

- Review of documents such as annual reports, briefing documents, minutes of meetings;
- Evaluation of questionnaires that were sent to individuals and organisations;
- Site visits to Thailand, Cambodia and Vietnam;
- Evaluation of interviews with personnel involved in the ON-NET program.

Background of the ON-NET program

Overbrook School for the Blind provides educational services for children with visual impairments from east and central Pennsylvania. In 1985, the school established an International Program under the directorship of Mr. Larry Campbell. Overbrook hosted carefully selected groups of students who were blind or low vision from throughout the world for a one-year program. The intensive instruction focused on computer technology, English as a second language, orientation and mobility, and leadership development skills. Between 1985 and 1999, 281 students and 38 teachers from 43 countries completed this program.

However, program director Campbell noticed that students who excelled in the program were struggling when they returned home. Although they were enlightened by the new technology, participants did not have a place to use and extend their skills once they returned to their countries. To tackle this problem, Mr. Campbell realised that the program needed to be more regionally based, and approached The Nippon Foundation for financial assistance. Established in 1962 in Tokyo, Japan, TNF has devoted considerable attention to the needs of persons with disabilities. It had been funding scholarships since 1987 for students from developing countries studying at Overbook, and agreed to support the creation of a regional program in southeast Asia in 1996. The Overbrook-Nippon Network on Education Technology program officially started in 1998 and will continue as long as interest is earned on the endowment that funds the work.

Between 1997 and 2005 TNF contributed a total of $5,023,500 to the ON-NET program, of which $4,000,000 was in the form of a special endowment fund. During the same period, Overbrook contributed $841,667. A total of $3,720,745 was expended for the program in the period 1998-2011, resulting in an annual average program expenditure of $286,211. Of the three countries included in this evaluation, direct expenditures were as follows: Thailand $479,578; Vietnam $355,948; Cambodia $513,185.

Structure and Administration

The ON-NET program was coordinated by Overbrook through a group of local partner organisations, drawn from both the government and non-government sectors. To achieve the goal of building partnership among these sectors, national committees were formed that included all stakeholder groups. Funded by small grants, these national committees collected baseline data to identify specific needs and to establish priorities. Alumni of the Overbrook International Program played key roles throughout this foundational work, helping to develop networks to deliver programs and services at the national level.

Once a foundation was established, national committees nominated one or two individuals to represent them on a wider Regional Advisory Committee (RAC) that had two specific mandates:

- Develop a network for the effective exchange of information between countries;
- Identify common challenges that might more effectively be addressed at the regional or sub-regional level.

Examples of regional challenges that were identified and tackled include weak mathematics instruction, barriers in production of effective tactile graphics, and the need for standardisation of web-accessibility. These regional efforts resulted in publications such as "Mathematics Made Easy" and the braille mathematics software.

Most national activities were conducted by personnel representing NGOs, schools, organisations of persons with blindness and Ministries of Education with grants provided by the ON-NET. In the three countries included in this evaluation, there were 20 activities in Thailand, 6 activities in Cambodia, and 23 activities in Vietnam.

Overview of the Three Focus Countries

Thailand

Within Southeast Asia, Thailand has the best developed infrastructure and strongest cadre of trained personnel in the field of access technology for users who are blind. Accordingly, Thailand was chosen as ON-NET's starting point and the regional hub for activities during the first few years of the project. There are six major organisations of and for the blind on the ON-NET National Steering Committee for Thailand, and many effective activities took place.

With the support of ON-NET, the Christian Foundation for the Blind in Thailand (CFBT) in Khon Kaen, received new hardware and software for their computer center and offered various kinds of computer training. Ms. Criselda Moonwicha, who is partially sighted and an Overbrook alumna, commented, "It can be said that ON-NET initiated the use of technology for visually impaired people in Thailand through providing several kinds of technology training. We have trained several hundred people since the ON-NET started".

At Ratchasuda College, Mahidol University, translation software was developed for Thai, Khmer, and Laos braille. Braille material production was dramatically improved by this development in each country. The Foundation for the Employment Promotion of the Blind successfully integrated young adults who are blind into existing vocational technical colleges for the sighted, as a way of building a foundation for employment promotion.
ON-NET also supported a program to develop support services for students with visual impairments who were entering or already enrolled in higher education. Project BBUS (Braille for Blind University Students) provided educational materials in a suitable format.

Mr. Wiraman Niyomphol is the regional coordinator of the ON-NET project and also a graduate of Overbrook School for the Blind. He said, "The goal of ON-NET was clearly narrowed down to the promotion of ICT (Information and Communication Technology) and therefore was easy to be understood by counterparts," adding that "the grant was there when we needed it the most". He pointed out that not all the proposals that they submitted were accepted; in fact, there was a very strict review before approval. Yet, Mr. Campbell, who gave final approval for projects, was always available to discuss and talk it through until mutual understanding was achieved. As a result of the great progress in education and access to information technology for people who are blind, Thailand is now in a position to support neighboring countries, rather than receiving support.

Cambodia

Since the establishment of a coalition government after the 1998 elections, Cambodia is more politically stable, and with the help of other countries has started to rebuild. However, conditions for people with disabilities remain especially fraught with challenges. The population of persons with visual impairment is estimated to be 144,000, including 7,000 to 9,000 who are school age children. Due to the limited number of schools, many children with visual impairments have no educational opportunities.

ON-NET set the following two objectives for its work in Cambodia:

- Develop a national organisation of people who are blind, to serve as the voice of the people with blindness in the country and develop programs to address the difficult conditions they deal with;
- Introduce and expand appropriate use of access technology to improve education.

The Association of the Blind in Cambodia (ABC) was founded in October 2000, and it plays an active role with ICEVI and WBU. The energetic leader of the association, Mr. Bun Mao, who became blind due to an attack by a motorcycle robber, was one of the participants of ON-NET's first major regional computer training program in 1998. ON-NET has been the primary supporter of ABC since its founding, and the association reaches out to Cambodians who are blind throughout the country. ABC holds 3-month intensive trainings that focus on braille, English, and computer studies. The evaluators met two graduates of this program who are now successfully working at the international NGO World Vision.

Krousar Thmey (KT), a local NGO that developed the first educational programs for students with blindness in Cambodia, is another of ON-NET's partners. With their support, KT has worked to refine the Khmer braille translator by sending staff to work with the programmers in Thailand, and trained technicians in equipment repair and in the use of braille software. ON-NET has also provided computers, scanners, braille embossers, and other equipment. The evaluation team observed KT's braille production room, which was operating at full capacity. The organisation recently held a braille production workshop with the support of Resource for the Blind, an ON-NET partner in the Philippines--a good example of cooperation among the ON-NET network.

In Cambodia today, computer literacy and English language skills are the key elements that will open doors for education and employment opportunities for people who are blind. ON-NET worked with KT to integrate computer literacy and training into their school curriculum and supported English education training for teachers. Three of four KT-owned schools now have well trained computer instructors, up-to-date hardware, software, and learning materials. In 2011, a total of 172 children were taught to use MS Word and other basic Microsoft applications, and received instruction in internet access.

Vietnam

In 2005, only 8% of children who are blind or visually impaired in Vietnam had access to education. Therefore, while technology training was still an important priority, there were more

urgent and basic educational needs to be met. Due to this, ON-NET balanced its activities between providing computer literacy training and producing educational materials to increase the number of children in school. This highlights the flexible character of ON-NET's approach: the projects developed for each country are specifically aimed at the needs of that country.

The team visited NDC School for the Blind (Ho Chi Minh City and Hanoi City), Sao Mai Center for the Blind and Nhat Hong Center for the Blind and Visually Impaired, where ON-NET provided computers, braille embossers, and software such as Zoom text, JAWS and Duxbury Braille translator. The team also visited the computer center in Nam Dinh, one of 9 regional computer centers built by the Vietnam Blind Association with the support of ON-NET. At this facility, seven children of secondary school age were learning to use a computer for the first time, fulfilling its role as a resource center in the province.

The evaluators' team spoke to a staff member with visual impairment at Nam Dinh, who received computer training from ON-NET. He said this training helped the People's Committee change its view towards people who are blind. "In the past they thought blind men cannot do anything. Now they know we can work. They now support computer training for blind people." Also present was the VBA vice president who commented, "After I became blind, there have been two of my most happy moments. The first was when I learned braille, and the second was when I learned to use a computer." This comment underscores the importance of technology training for people with visual impairments, and thus the importance of the ON-NET program's work.

At Sao Mai Computer Center for the Blind, the team met the deputy director, Mr. Dang Haoi Phuc. Mr. Phuc, totally blind himself, has been eagerly working to provide computer training and to develop technology such as free screen readers and web accessibility. Mr. Campbell cooperated with Mr. Phuc to make Sao Mai one of the key training centers for the region. In Mr. Phuc's opinion, the key element of ON-NET's success was investing in the knowledge and skills of talented people with blindness within the country, and incorporating them into the program's activities. He added, "In this way, human resources have and will continue to spread to more blind people".

ON-NET supports the computer center at the Nhat Hong Center for the Blind and Visually Impaired. With seed money from ON-NET, this organisation also opened a copy center which employs low vision women; this is another example of the flexibility of ON-NET's approach to specific local needs.

In Vietnam, it was standard practice for each school for the blind to use their limited time and resources to create braille materials only for their own students, resulting in duplication of effort and several small collections. To tackle this problem, ON-NET collaborated with the Ministry of Education to improve cooperation among the schools, unify the Vietnamese braille code, develop a national plan for education for children who are visually impaired, and produce a braille frame and stylus. Education for visually impaired children has made great progress, and today approximately 40% of children with blindness or visual impairment attend school.

Conclusions

A strong network of organisations for the blind has been successfully created in ASEAN countries, and these countries are now supporting each other. After intensive observation and investigation in Thailand, Cambodia, and Vietnam, the ON-NET program evaluators concluded that the program has had a positive impact in all three countries. They have identified the strategies and policies that have created this success:

- The goal of ON-NET was clearly defined as the promotion of Information and Communication Technology (ICT) and therefore was easily understood by participants.
- Methods for approaching the goal were flexible, to accommodate a country's situation and needs.
- The decision making for the grants was prompt; therefore many effective projects started when they were needed the most. This approach allowed important changes to happen without involving big grants and time-consuming applications processes.
- People with blindness or visual impairment were actively involved in all aspects of the project. Overbrook alumni were the key persons at the core of many of these successful projects.
- There was guidance from an experienced project coordinator who visited each country and connected with skilled people.
- Instead of importing information and expertise unilaterally from Western countries, the network grew from local skilled people who were supported by the program. This focus on the ASIAN region is a strategy that made ON-NET program highly cost effective and culturally friendly.

This last point is underscored by the insight of Mr. Campbell, former director of the ON-NET program. He states, "It is important to find the right people in target countries, and listen. They know what is necessary. … The reason why ON-NET was successful is there were core people who had IT knowledge and were highly motivated. … The most important thing is to create the network, either formally or informally."

Having observed the success of the ON-NET program, the evaluation team agrees with his philosophy.

Further needs

The evaluation team observed the following needs during site visits:

- Well trained technicians for braille embosser repair;
- Materials and information about teaching methods for students who are partially sighted;
- Jobs for qualified people who are visually impaired.

Much is beyond the scope of ON-NET project's goals, but there is certainly a need for more cooperative international work.

The team would like to thank all who cooperated with our evaluation. Special thanks go to Ms. Wenru Niu, current ON-NET coordinator, Mr. Gerald Kitzhoffer, Director of the Overbrook School for the Blind, and most of all to Mr. Larry Campbell, former director of the ON-NET program.

The Braille Cup - Ghana: Braille Essays by Students

Ellen Hall, Braille Literacy Manager, Perkins School for the Blind, USA

In January 2012, Ghana hosted its first national braille literacy competition, The Braille Cup – Ghana. The contest was held at Okuapemman Senior High School, in Akropong, just outside of Accra. The contestants were 46 students aged 9-19, from 11 different schools. They were cheered on by teachers, dignitaries, volunteers and hundreds of supporters. With this contest, Ghana joins a growing number of countries using braille competitions to inspire and reward students. These contests foster braille literacy and raise public awareness about the importance of braille for children who are blind.

Every braille competition is unique to the people and culture where it is held. The theme for The Braille Cup – Ghana was, "Unleashing the Potential of the Visually Impaired". All students were examined for skills in the same categories: reading comprehension, reading fluency, spelling, proofreading and, the highlight of the event, an essay and oral presentation on the topic, "What Learning Braille Means To Me".

For those interested in seeing the world through the eyes of blind students in Ghana, the essays can be accessed through the following link: www.perkinsinternational.org/braille-cup-essays They provide a valuable window into these students' experiences: the formidable challenges they face, and the impact and importance of becoming literate in braille. As a sample, consider the following excerpt written by Ebenezer Agetiba, 13-year-old First Prize winner of the Junior High School Division, from Wa Methodist School for the Blind.

> *"Reading and writing with Braille will help me to get certificate at the end of my schooling which will help me to get employment in future. This will prevent me from going to the street begging as my friends visually impaired people do... My knowledge in braille will help me go high on the academic ladder to enable me get employment in future. It will also remove the barrier that prevent the visually impaired from doing certain things that are done by the sighted. Braille has helped me to become literate and I can now write application letters to any sector for employment."*

The Braille Cup—Ghana was principally a Ghanaian affair, organised by the Special Education Division and the Ghana Blind Union, but international partners were involved. The event was initiated through a braille literacy grant from Perkins School for the Blind and supported by the Kilimanjaro Blind Trust, with the donation of six Perkins braillewriters for prizes. To keep the competition to a high standard, the Braille Institute, experienced in these competitions and sponsor of The Braille Challenge®, generously offered to review the competition materials.

In Ghana, as in most developing countries, only a fraction of students who are blind and visually impaired ever have the opportunity to attend school. However, over the last decade the number of inclusive education schools has expanded. As a result, growing numbers of children who are blind or have other disabilities can get an education. For children who are blind, continued access to braille and braille materials remains the primary conduit to literacy and independence. These Ghanian children, in the words of First Prize winner Ebenezer Agetiba, now have the opportunity to "go higher on the academic ladder."

PATHS TO LITERACY

A new international and interactive website

Charlotte Cushman, Project Manager, Perkins School for the Blind, USA

Paths to Literacy for Students Who Are Blind or Visually Impaired

http://www.pathstoliteracy.org/ is a new website aimed at teachers and families working with students who are blind or visually impaired, including those with additional disabilities. Educators at Perkins School for the Blind and Texas School for the Blind and Visually impaired have combined their knowledge, experience, and expertise in this collaborative project. The website is dedicated to the belief that literacy is a right that all children share, regardless of their abilities or unique learning needs. Paths to Literacy offers practical ideas for teaching, news and links to recent research and resources, and a forum for sharing with other teachers.

Literacy has traditionally been defined as the ability simply to read and write, in print or braille. However, research and practice support the view that literacy encompasses much more, including the ability to communicate, and to listen and comprehend. Similarly, this wider view expands the list of literacy formats: auditory strategies, speech, objects, tactile symbols, and pictures are included with the traditional print and braille formats. Driven by this broad definition of literacy, the Paths to Literacy website is designed to support more students who are blind or visually impaired in developing the essential skills needed to be active participants in the world around them.

The information on the site spans a wide range, from strategies for teaching emergent literacy to new technology available to braille readers. It is divided into 12 content areas:

- General Literacy;
- Learning Media Assessment;
- Emergent Literacy;
- Braille;
- Print;
- Multiple Disabilities;
- Struggling Readers;
- Writing;
- Dual Media;
- English Language Learners;
- Auditory Strategies;
- Math Literacy.

Each content area includes some common features, as well as some unique elements, depending upon the topic. Each presents an overview, strategies, resources, research, and technology, with basic guidelines, as well as links to articles and related materials. There are videos, podcasts, and other multi-media, in addition to text and photographs.

Perhaps the most useful component of the site is its interactivity. Each of the 12 content areas has an interactive forum, offering readers the opportunity to share their ideas, comments, advice, and questions. Seasoned teachers are welcome to share ideas with those who are just starting out; and those who are new to the challenges of this field are encouraged to reach out for advice. Examples of entries appropriate for the forums might be:

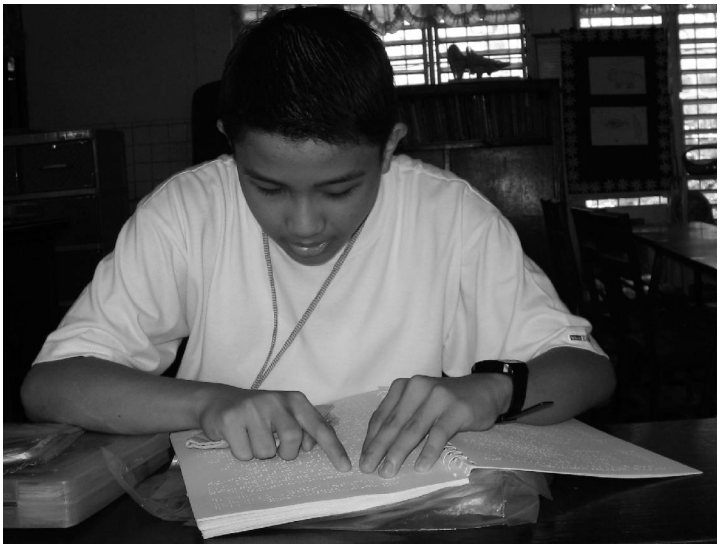
- Adapting classroom activities for a particular student's needs;
- Asking for others' opinions on a development in the field;
- Discussing when to introduce braille contractions;
- Exchanging opinions on whether braille is becoming obsolete.

Users are particularly invited to post their strategies, resources, research, and ideas for using technology in support of literacy.

The Paths to Literacy team hopes to provide support to educators and families, spark lively discussions, and create a supportive forum where all can share their expertise and experience.

Using Braille in Amerindian Languages

John Hinojosa Yampi, Accion por la Inclusion Tiflologica Peru, Peru



Introduction

The Latin American linguistic scene is highly varied and rife with prejudices and misconceptions. Spanish and Portuguese are pervasive, but cohabit with numerous native languages of Amerindian origin, as well as other European languages and language variations are not yet determined. However, the dominance of European languages has created a stratification of linguistic prestige and ethno-cultural aspirations. In fact, almost all groups of non-Spanish speakers and non-Portuguese speakers are in a critical situation. These linguistic communities are marginalised because they do not speak the official languages which are essential for communicating outside their homes.

It is almost impossible for minority languages to gain prestige as a means of social self-definition. For most groups, it is rather a question of survival of languages as well as cultural definitions. One way to preserve the languages is to provide them with a writing system. Having a basic alphabet allows a language to be graphically represented, transcending the orality and keeping its identity through the years.

This linguistic research work has dual goals. First, it is intended to give significant relevance to the Amerindian languages, by using braille, the tactile writing and reading system used by people who are blind. Second, it is also intended to highlight the essential role of braille as a tool for research.

Ultimately, this ambitious project will contribute to providing an alphabet for the majority of non-European languages in the American continent. The researchers have taken as a starting point Peru and its native languages such as Quechua, Aimara and Ashaninka.

Amerindian languages

■ ***Ashaninka.*** Ashaninka belongs to the linguistic family of Arawak, and includes at least seven major dialects. Numbering approximately 25,000, the Ashaninka live scattered in a vast territory in the central eastern part of Peru. Political violence or the exploitation of forest resources caused the Ashaninka to migrate to nearby territories, which they share with other peoples, including the Machiguenga.

Since March of 2008, Ashaninka is recognised as an official language in the Ayacucho province, where Quechua and Spanish are also official languages. It is used officially at school from the fifth grade through secondary school, and is compulsory in the Ayacuchan regions with predominant Ashaninka population.

■ ***Quechua.*** Quechua, or Quichua, belongs to the language family of the central Andes. Its speakers occupy the western part of South America in six countries: Argentina, Bolivia, Colombia, Chile, Ecuador, and Peru. With between 8 and 10 million speakers, it is one of the most wide-spread language families in those countries.

Quechua may have originated from an earlier language in central or western Peru. It attained its greatest influence in the 15th century, when it was the official language of the Incan state. Quechua suffered a decline at the beginning of the 20th century, due to Spanish gaining ground through schooling in rural areas.

There are many websites available in Quechua. There is also an initiative for the promotion of education in Quechua, mainly in Bolivia, Peru and Ecuador. The Wikipedia project in Quechua has also stimulated the digital progress of Quechua.

■ ***Aymara.*** The Aimara were centred in Tiwanaku, although there is linguistic evidence suggesting that the Aimara came from the north. Between 300 and 500 B.C.E., the Tiwanaku territory developed into an urban area of 40,000, enjoying important regional power in the Southern Andes. In the year 1200 the city was suddenly abandoned and its arts disappeared with it.

Current speakers of Aymara occupy Argentina, Bolivia, Chile, and Peru.

Political Context

In a country like Peru, where growth and human development play an important part, education is important in overcoming poverty, social inequality, and the lack of social inclusion. Peru has made a great deal of progress in primary education, the modernisation of the education infrastructure, the reduction of illiteracy, training of public school teachers, and investments in staff. However, these achievements have not been extended to the indigenous population. This is an impediment to building an intercultural citizenry.

It is estimated that there are 1,046,639 indigenous children in Peru between 3 and 17 years of age. (INEI: 2007). Although those children and adolescents with a native mother tongue have the right to an intercultural bilingual education (IBE), they are not receiving enough attention from the state. The lack of an adequate intercultural bilingual education prevents them from systematically and permanently developing skills in their own native language and Spanish.

Intercultural bilingual education fosters respect for cultural diversity and strengthens personal and cultural self-esteem. It is therefore of utmost importance that the teachers not only know the language of their students, but that they know it well enough to teach it. All

citizens have the right to learn in their primary language. This right applies to indigenous children whose mother tongue is not Spanish, and includes children with visual impairments who are braille readers.

Braille Alphabets for Amerindian Languages

This braille project is the work of the Iberoamerican Braille Council's technical group, with the support of the School of Linguistics of the Universidad Mayor of San Marcos and the Research Centre of Applied Linguistics. We are driven by the dual desire to preserve the autochthonous languages, and to foster the use of braille by speakers of Amerindian languages who are visually impaired. The partnership will use this study to encourage the production of braille materials by the authorities and agencies who serve these populations. For too long have the speakers of native languages been marginalised and discriminated against—this is doubly true of individuals who have visual impairments as well.

Peru, with its multicultural society and its rich array of languages, was the starting point for this research. We would like to continue with the research throughout the rest of Latin America, joining forces with other university research institutes, associations, research centres, institutes, etc.

Braille alphabets for the Ashaninka, Quechua, and Aymara have been devised, and texts have been selected to be printed out in braille. It will be the first time that braille materials will be produced in the Centre of Applied Linguistics. With the cooperation of the Peruvian Ministry of Education's Special Education section, we can now provide accessible material and support the survival of the indigenous languages of Latin America.

INEI : Instituto Nacional de Estadística e Informática (2007). Lima, Peru.

LIGHT FOR THE WORLD
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Braille in Ethiopia: Changes and Challenges

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Federation of Ethiopian National Associations of Persons with Disabilities, Ethiopia

Introduction

Independence, according to the UN Convention on the Right of Persons with Disabilities (2006), includes the "freedom to make one's own choices...." Braille is one of the most important tools for independence for people who are blind. This alternative reading and writing system, having empowered so many to free themselves from excessive dependence on others, can be said to have significantly changed the history of blindness.

Unfortunately, in Ethiopia and in countless other countries, many do not enjoy the great benefits of braille. Ironically, the reasons for this failure are caused by poverty for most potential users, and by technological affluence for others. Low-income countries have very little braille-producing equipment and consequently a tiny supply of braille materials and personal braille-writing tools. Too often, those who are affluent or who live in technologically developed countries tend to avoid using braille in the mistaken belief that audio technology is a better choice. In this paper we will very briefly describe the development and use of braille in Ethiopia, and make suggestions for improving access.

Disability in Ethiopia

Located in the horn of Africa, Ethiopia is one of the most ancient nations of the world. It is the second-most populous nation in Africa, with over 85.2 million people, and the tenth-largest by area. During colonialism, the country maintained its independence despite a short occupation by the Italians. Ethiopia was one of four African countries in the League of Nations, and was a founding member of the United Nations.

The Central Statistical Agency (2007) estimates that 805,492 Ethiopians have a disability. However, the organisations that serve people with disabilities believe the World Health Organization's global estimate of 10% is more accurate, which brings the figure to between 7 and 8 million people. The total number of people who are blind or visually impaired is 248,649 (Ministry of Education, 2009).

In the year 2009, the total school age population of the country was 16,906,898, out of which 1.69 million are children with disabilities. Only 47,463 (2.8%) of this population were enrolled in primary education.

History of Braille and Education for People with Blindness

Ethiopia was home to one of the earliest institutions that offered education to people who were blind. The Orthodox Church established schools in the 5th century, about 100 years after the introduction of Christianity. The first level of study was called "Nebab bet," where students were taught to read the Bible in Geez, the ancient language of Ethiopia.

(Hailegebriel Dagne, 2003). Eventually students who were blind were admitted to these schools, and many became highly respected church scholars, “meri getas” (leading and most senior scholars). Although many such scholars lead in Ethiopian church education today, the tradition does not include the use of braille.

Braille’s introduction to Ethiopia is shrouded in mystery. The single fact upon which researchers agree is that braille came to Ethiopia in 1924. One version credits missionaries called from Sudan to give medical service to soldiers deployed in western Ethiopia. They began teaching braille and the Bible to a group of people who were blind (ENAB, 2011). Others versions associate the introduction of braille with Pastor Gidada Solon, the father of the former president of Ethiopia, Doctor Negasso Solon. Having lost his sight to smallpox at the age of five in 1906, Gidada became the first person to learn braille in 1924. In his autobiography, Gidada claims that he learned braille by himself in only five days with the support of his brother (Gidada Solon, 1972). However, a recently published book on the social and political life of his son, Dr. Negasso, states that Gidada learned braille through an American braille teacher.

In any case, it was around 1950 when emperor Haile Selassie asked Professor Robinson, head of the Swedish Mission, to accept some youths who were blind at the mission school in Addis Ababa. This group of students became the first to attend regular school using braille as a reading and writing method. In 1952, the first residential school for the blind was opened at the heart of the capital. In 1957, a group of ten students with blindness presented a petition to the prime minister for official recognition of braille as a writing and reading system (ENAB, 2011). Thereafter, more residential schools were founded, establishing modern education techniques and the use of braille as a literacy medium for Ethiopian students. However, this educational foundation is undermined by the problems outlined in the next section.

Braille in Ethiopia Today

Despite its nearly 90 years of history in Ethiopia, it is frustrating to see that braille is not yet widely used in the daily life of most people who are blind. The potential users of braille today include students from elementary school through university, people in all trades and professions, and special needs education teachers. In order to assess the frequency of braille use, the author of this paper conducted a focus group study, interviewing 50 who are blind: students, teachers, sociologists and lawyers. Out of 50 interviewees, only 22 teachers and office workers reported making some use of braille in their daily life. The remaining 28 respondents reported that they prefer to use sighted people to read and write for them.

There are multiple reasons for this low usage of braille: perceived irrelevance, lack of writing resources, social discomfort, inconvenience, and illiteracy/poor braille skills. These reasons are surveyed below.

Irrelevance of Braille

Asked if they felt the need for braille in this century, 60 percent of the interviewees answered in the negative. In their opinion, new technology is replacing braille and making it

unnecessary. A special education teacher at a school in north Ethiopia observes that students are losing interest in braille because they are curious and enthusiastic about new technology and are dissatisfied with the general braille service.

Lack of Writing Resources

70% of the respondents had no slate and stylus although they are all braille literate. None of them possessed a braille typewriter. Their inability to put braille to use is self-explanatory.

Social Discomfort

When asked if they take notes and minutes in meetings, conferences, workshop and related events, 65% of the interviewees answered in the negative. They report that they are embarrassed by the noise produced by the braille writing devices, which may disturb others and make the user seem a nuisance. A lawyer said that he would never try to take notes in a court room, and a young girl recounted bursting into tears while attending a workshop because the conference chairwoman reprimanded her for brailling.

Inconvenience

As an example, an attorney complains of the bulkiness of braille; preparing legal memos and arguments in braille would create a voluminous quantity of pages.

Illiteracy or poor braille skills

A high school teacher reported that ten out of his eleven students who are blind were unable either to read or write braille. Tsehay Mekete, teacher of the visually impaired for many years, identifies several factors that account for this situation:

- Many students skip kindergarten, where they would be introduced to and could practice braille. From grade three onwards, braille is not taught as a subject. There is simply not enough instruction, leading to low practice rates and deteriorating braille skills.
- There is no adequate braille library to encourage reading and development of skills.
- Students have also no slate and stylus of their own. Tsehay noted that only 14 students in her class of 33 were provided with slate and stylus during the school hours. Because they belong to the school, the students cannot take them home to practice. Hence, it is not strange if we find high school or university students with little or no braille skills.

Recommendations

In order to ensure that people who are blind benefit from braille and enjoy independence in life, we need to take urgent and practical measures, including the following:

- The World Blind Union, the World Braille Council and other immediate stakeholders should design an effective strategy to promote braille use and practice in Ethiopia and other African countries.
- There should be some means of supplying braille resources to low income countries like Ethiopia at low cost.

- Local initiatives and research for domestic production of braille appliances should be technically and financially supported.
- Country-specific braille projects should be designed and implemented.
- Community-based rehabilitation (CBR) programs and other disability projects should give special attention to braille education and use.
- The World Bank and other development partners working with the ministry of education should make braille one component of their development assistance.
- The Ethiopian Ministry of Education should espouse the cause of braille as part of its commitment to maintaining quality of education.

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I long to accomplish a great and noble task,
but it is my chief duty to accomplish
small tasks as if they were great
and noble.

- Helen Keller

Conservation conversation: An argument for a 21st century approach to Braille music

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Introduction

In this article, we compare learning music notation to learning a foreign language. In fact, stave music notation has much in common with a constructed language like Esperanto, regular in its rules and designed to be universally intelligible. For musicians who are blind, braille music is the closest rendition of stave notation—the key to communicating with other musicians in the universal notation language. Because music notation crops everywhere--in music technology courses, band rehearsals, the church music group--a musician who is blind and unfamiliar with braille music notation is at a great disadvantage. It is much like being unable to speak a language familiar to one's sighted colleagues.

Current State of Braille Music

There are thousands of braille music scores sitting on shelves in libraries around the world. These volumes have often cost much to produce. Older volumes are labours of love, embossed from manually set plates and bound by hand. Almost all of these volumes purport to be transcriptions of the “universal language”: musical stave notation. However, the actual contents have many regional dialects, even after the latest "international" revision of the braille music code, agreed to by 16 countries (Krolick, 1997). Most are transcriptions of classical music long since out of print, from the days when there were many small publishers around the world.

With the advent of online publishing, we once again have many small music publishers promoting their own compositions, arrangements, and educational materials. The major publishing companies remain active as well. Priding themselves on their scholarship, they produce definitive, often highly annotated, editions of the standard repertoire.

Whilst the databases of libraries for the blind tell exactly how many braille music volumes they hold, there is no database with information about how many users there are, or their requirements. Nor is there any means of finding out how many people produce their own braille music. We do not know whether or not there is a large number of braille music users worldwide. We know merely that there is a large number of pieces available in the braille notation, though often in old fashioned layouts.

These are important questions: How many fluent readers of braille music are there to make use of these library volumes? How sustainable is an argument that any piece of print music should be available as braille music? Why should an aspiring classical musician who is blind learn braille music in the first place?--a less frequently addressed and more basic issue. This article will review the history and importance of braille music notation, attempt to address these questions, and make recommendations for revitalising the use of this universal music notation.

History of Braille Music

When students in developed countries were educated in schools for the blind in the 20th century, braille music was often taught as a compulsory subject. Even in schools where it was not required, it was a subject that students wanted to study if they wanted to be in the "in crowd". Being "in the know" with braille music conferred some status. In this era, braille music scores were regularly published. One college for the blind specialised in training practical musicians, equipping them to work in the sighted world.

Whilst there is still a network of braillists who lend music scores to one another, it is largely populated by former students of the specialist schools. Now that most braille-reading students are educated in mainstream schools, fewer of them are familiar with braille music, and the community of music braillists is shrinking. Indeed, there are Qualified Teachers of the Visually Impaired, let alone pupils who are blind, who know nothing of braille music. In the UK, a student in an inclusive school who uses braille music is likely to be the only one.

Advantages and disadvantages of braille music

While braille music is the closest approximation of printed stave notation, there are some major differences.

- Practice and learning. Practice is not the same for sighted musicians and those who are blind. A sighted learner's repetition is gradually refining accuracy to the score, comparing the sound to the viewed notation. A user of braille music notation needs to memorise a passage completely before beginning to practice; any misreadings must be carefully unlearnt.
- Lack of sight-reading potential. Another difference lies in immediacy and then speed of learning. A sighted pupil plays or sings a piece of stave notation immediately. (UK orchestras are still renowned for "sight reading" accuracy). Almost all braille scores need to be read carefully and then memorised before performance (exceptions being singers without lyrics and some brass players). However, the braillist's slower learning process becomes an advantage in the thoroughness of preparation and the ability to recall the score long after the sighted reader has forgotten it.
- More coding. Louis Braille, himself a musician, produced much of the current braille music code. It is more precise than stave notation in some areas but contains more "grammar" owing to the need to express all features of a graphic system within the 63 permutations of six dots and a blank cell.
- Not yet universal. Braille music notation was always designed to be "internationally accepted". However, despite several international conferences, there is no internationally agreed complete code.
- Advantages over sound-based method of learning music. An audio recording is not an accessible version of stave notation. Recordings simply do not "freeze" the sounds in the same way as symbols on the page. When working in an orchestra, sheet music often appears just as it's time to begin working on it. It may be impossible to produce a recording early enough to allow the musican who is blind to listen to it before playing it with the rest of the musicians. Without fluency in braille music, a musician who is blind is unable to study independently by reading the score.

Recommendations for Encouraging the Use of Braille Music

- Improve internet presence. Although there may be a large number of online courses where one may learn braille music, there is no central website to find them. There is an online grammar book for the current version of the language: however this is not easy to navigate, nor totally accurate. There are various small, lively, online groups for braille music, but again no international centralised site for this international system.
- Develop the role of braille libraries. Could the braille libraries become hubs for a more unified and concentrated approach to braille music? In addition to lending scores to those who are proficient users, could they provide online courses and support for learning braille music? Holding copies of the print version with the braille version would enable sighted teachers to foster musical literacy, encouraging their students, blind and sighted, to play together. Sighted musicians locate no-longer-copyrighted musical works in stave notation (a very considerable quantity of the standard repertoire) online, download, and print them. Why cannot braille-using musicians do the same?
- Develop a truly international code. Braille music experts throughout the world could meet virtually, perhaps convened through the EBU or WBU. These experts could revise the New International Manual, aiming at more unified practice. Priority should be given to the online version, with speedy production of versions in languages other than English. Availability of basic tutor books for various common instruments, in different literary languages, along with a good online dictionary, could encourage use by Braillists. Once international agreement upon the code is settled, there will be incentive for various commercial and philanthropic braille producers to create downloadable music transcriptions speedily, accurately, and at a cheap price.
- Research the learning and teaching processes. There is a perception that braille music is difficult, although it's probably not more difficult than learning stave notation. Research into the process of acquiring and using music braille at all levels of expertise would expand our understanding of learning and teaching techniques. Such studies should include case studies from musicians who are blind, and may lend new insight into allied issues such as memorisation.
- Make the standard repertoire available. Having key musical scores downloadable as braille music, would save duplication of hardcopy. The commentaries on how to use the scores should be included. Quicker learning could be fostered by transcribing some parts of the score in a simplified version. Online accessibility would also address the waiting-period problem—a braille music user currently sometimes waits many months for a score.

Conclusion

Stave notation is an internationally agreed-upon symbol system for music. Although constantly evolving, a competent user can share music with another competent person in any part of the world. The technology exists to allow users of braille music to enjoy the same universal language communication. Surely the need for an international approach to the conservation of braille music is the best way ahead. What better place to start than with beginners?

The views expressed here are those of the author and do not represent RNIB policy.

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Setting Up a Computerised Database in Nigeria: Creating Access to Braille and Alternative Format Materials for People with Visual Impairments

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Introduction

Funded by a grant from International Federation of Library Associations (IFLA), the author created a computerised catalog and distribution database of alternative materials for people who are visually impaired in Nigeria. The primary purpose of this project was to identify the location and availability of these scarce and scattered resources and set up a database, creating the opportunity for access and retrieval that never existed before. Another purpose was to create a template for database entry which could be replicated by other developing countries. The information was assembled by questionnaires and site visits, which also provided data for a portrait of the needs and circumstances of Nigerians who use alternate reading formats and the institutions that serve them.

Background

The total population of Nigerians is estimated at 120 million people (Federal Office of Statistics, 1991). At least one million persons are blind or visually impaired, and more than 25,000 of these are of school age, although less than 10 percent actually attend school. The remaining 90 percent are confined to houses or roaming the streets as beggars (Agbaje, 2000). For the small number of students who are blind or visually impaired, there is no adequate provision of reading and information materials in alternate formats. This need continues to grow as a consequence of the federal government policy (Federal Ministry of Education, 1981) of equitable educational provision for all children. Although most children with disabilities still receive no education, the federal policy encouraged an overwhelming increase in school enrollment for such students, including those who are blind or visually impaired.

Although there is no national library service, there are myriad organisations involved in education and production of alternate format materials in Nigeria, including the federal government, state library services, special schools for the blind, secondary schools and higher education, non-governmental organisations (NGOs).

NOTE:
This is a condensed version of an article published in Library Trends, v.55, n.4, Spring 2007. Used by permission of the author, the editors of Library Trends, and Johns Hopkins University Press.

The Challenge

The result of this situation is that production and distribution of alternate format materials is inadequate, disorganised, and fragmented, spread over a number of organisations and locations. An additional problem is that production is limited almost exclusively to educational materials; there is almost a complete lack of recreational reading materials.

In this study, the author identified the locations of alternative materials in Nigeria, analysed their subject content, and created a computerised catalog and distribution database that will hopefully become a nationwide access point.* Ideally, it is also expected to provide a gateway to the unlimited resources on the Internet for Nigerian students who are blind or visually impaired.

The Database

A template was designed for the electronic database, containing the following fields:

- Author: the individual or corporate body responsible for the intellectual content of the material;
- Title: copied from the braille or large print material; for talking books, titles were taken from the labels of the cassette or the catalog of the hosting institution;
- Subject: determined from the call number and/or title of the material;
- User level: Primary, secondary, or tertiary (post-secondary), as indicated by the host institution or investigator's judgment;
- Publisher: as given on the material or provided by the hosting institution;
- Publication Year: as found on the publication;
- Edition: as given on the publication;
- Number of volumes: braille books usually run to several volumes;
- Language: language in which text is written;
- Format: braille, large print, tapes; DAISY, etc.;
- Status: grade of the braille material, e.g., 1,1.5, or 2 (contracted or uncontracted);
- Duration: length of time for tapes as shown on the cassette.
- Terms of availability: whether available for borrowing, sale, or strictly for on-site use;
- Price: if available for purchase;
- Organisation's Name: name of host institution and contact information, postal address, website address, and e-mail address.

The Survey

Data was collected by use of two questionnaires:

- **Questionnaire #1** was for institutions serving students who are blind or visually impaired in Nigeria. Two sets of data were collected: first on the institutions' holdings in braille and other formats; and second on their services, clientele, and equipment.

- **Questionnaire #2** was for students who were blind and visually impaired in the secondary and tertiary institutions visited. Data was collected on their educational background; braille reading and writing proficiency; braille grade preferred; library and braille production center use; possession of brailling or recording equipment; possession of books and tapes; computer literacy and Internet accessibility; and their reading and information needs.

The author used Microsoft Excel to analyse the students' questionnaire, and Microsoft Access to analyse the institutions' questionnaire and create the database template.

Research Findings

The findings are presented in three parts: information about the holdings, the institutions, and the students.

The Holdings

There were a total of 1,860 entries for alternate format materials, either produced within the country or received from domestic or foreign donors. The largest numbers were held in Lagos, the most densely populated state. Eight of the thirty-six states held less than twenty braille titles each. There are collections of tapes in three institutions, and only one has titles in large print. Fourteen states have no materials at all, and five of them also lack a school that accommodates students who are visually impaired.

The subject matter of the holdings are mostly non-fiction, although fiction accounts for more than 500 of the titles. The most popular non-fiction topics are religion, with 246 titles, and literature, with 173. All other topics had less than 100 titles each.

Institutions and Services

Seventy-one institutions were visited by research assistants, nearly half of which are secondary schools. The integration of secondary students with visual impairments in general classrooms throughout the country accounts for the high percentage of secondary schools on the list. In fact, any given school may include fewer than ten students with visual impairments. The remainder of the institutions are special schools, state library boards, tertiary institutions (higher education and polytechnics), ministries of education, vocational training centers, and NGOs.

Equipment

Among the 71 institutions, 43 held Perkins Braillers. The institutions did not report on the functionality of the machines, but many respondents to the individual questionnaire complained that the Perkins Braillers were broken. Other equipment included typewriters (27), slates and stylus (17), and tape recorders (11). In smaller numbers, there were also abacuses, Thermoform equipment, computer systems, braille embossers, writing frames, radios and CCTVs. Three institutions boasted recording studios. It was surprising that only 17 institutions owned a slate and stylus, the most inexpensive mode of braille production.

Only 5 institutions are brailling by computer, which means that other agencies are brailling manually (or not at all).

Services Provided

The institutions offer a range of services:

- Braille services. Production of educational material, including handouts, examination papers, and some text books. Some produce manually using Perkins Braillers, while others have embossing machines.
- Computer services. Including training and assistive technology.
- Counselling services. Educational advancement, vocational training, and daily living skills.
- Library services. Access to a collection of alternate format book.
- Rehabilitation services. Adjustment, vocational or orientation and mobility training for adults who lose their vision.
- Supportive services. Assistance in locating appropriate reading materials.

Profile and Needs of People who are Blind or Visually Impaired

452 people responded to the questionnaire on reading and information needs, but only 433 (95.1 percent) of the questionnaires were usable for analysis. 277 were male (64.4%) and 153 were female (35.6%). The respondents were from every level of the educational spectrum, from primary school to postgraduate level. This indicates that Nigerians who are blind and visually impaired are achievers, in spite of the paucity of the educational material in braille and other format. They are quite articulate about their needs for adequate reading materials, and several of them have brailled materials themselves or appealed to foreign donors for books.

41.8% of the respondents have earned the primary school leaving certificate (PSLC), and another 37.5% are at the secondary level. However, there is a sharp decline at the tertiary level: only 16.3%. The reason for this may be directly connected with the dearth of information materials for students at this level.

Over 86% of the respondents can read and write braille proficiently, with nearly the same percentage preferring contracted braille. 85% prefer reading braille to reading large print or audio books. However, 75 percent have no personal brailling or recording equipment, and only 12 percent own a slate and stylus. Consequently, it would be expected that respondents would use libraries or braille production centers; however, only 50 percent have done so. The libraries and braille producers that receive the highest use (38.8% and 17.1% respectively) are in the densely-populated southwestern part of Nigeria, suggesting that the low usage among some respondents is due to lack of proximity to such institutions.

Students go to great lengths to get access to books. Many write to foreign donors for needed titles. Some tertiary-level students buy print books and then arrange to record them on tape. However, only 20% percent of respondents have personal collections. As long as individuals with visual impairments lack assistance from government agencies, the information deficit and paucity of alternate materials will continue.

Outcomes and Conclusions

This project successfully fulfilled its primary goals:

- Creating a computerised catalog and distribution database* of alternative materials for people who are visually impaired in Nigeria, funded by a grant from International Federation of Library Associations (IFLA);
- Creating a template for database entry, which can be replicated by other developing countries;
- Using data from questionnaires to assemble a portrait of the needs and circumstances of Nigerians who use alternate reading formats and the institutions that serve them.

Ideally, the database can become the foundation of a network of braille-producing organisations and institutions in Nigeria. Sharing catalog information will help braille producers avoid duplication of effort and waste of money. Several agencies have created networking and resource sharing agreements. For example, seven of the agencies have identical braille translation equipment (Obi, 2003), permitting them to share master copies.

Issues for Braille Readers in Nigeria

The database contains only 1,860 titles in total, of which 1,449 were books in braille, 231 audiotapes, and 80 in large print. These materials were held in only 23 of the 36 states in Nigeria, which suggests that braille readers in the states without materials are not receiving reading materials.

The tiny size of the total collection shows that there is a book famine as far as alternative materials are concerned. This scarcity may be explained in part by the scarcity of braille production and audio-recording facilities. There are only six braille producers in Nigeria, all located in urban centers. Although they use computerised systems to transcribe, they still are not meeting the demand for books and reading materials. Additionally, the personnel needed to produce braille are scarce: teachers, librarians, and other professional staff. These workers rarely receive necessary training and are often poorly paid.

It is a matter of necessity rather than a luxury for one to acquire the ability to read and write (Basharu, 2002). It is the means of communication and independence. Unfortunately, braille literacy in Nigeria is plagued with several problems:

- There is a shortage of personnel to teach or produce braille.
- Existing personnel lack expertise. Abilu (2004) asserts that many braille teachers are not familiar with mathematical code and science notation.
- There is also a lack of facilities and equipment to teach braille. Slates and stylus, the writing frames, and Perkins Braillers are all in heavy demand but in short supply in the country.

Encouraging Developments

Nigerwives, an NGO in Lagos, has begun organising braille workshops for teachers of primary school children, as well as braille reading competitions to encourage the children learn to read and write braille.

Nigeria has given the Unified English Braille Code (UEBC) formal recognition and adoption. Obi (2003) predicts two great gains from this development:

- New code books will be produced and will be locally available to braille students, teachers, and users.
- Materials will be provided for teachers, producers, and users to update themselves, resulting in improved level of competence all around.

With this adoption of UEBC in Nigeria, it becomes necessary to test and adopt a grade II code for each of the major Nigerian languages (Akinyemi, 2004)--Hausa, Igbo, and Yoruba. The proposed grade II Yoruba code has been undergoing testing in homes and institutions for the blind in the southwest and north central zones. The onus is on braille transcribers to work out braille codes for each of the 250 languages and dialects spoken in Nigeria.

Preparing for the Future of Braille in Nigeria

If we are to achieve substantial progress, however, all concerned need to address the following issues:

- There is need for a national strategy aimed at improving, publicising, and promoting the reading and information needs of persons who are blind or visually impaired. Such a strategy should involve all the organisations working in this field, avoiding duplication of effort by determining areas of collaboration and cooperation.
- Instead of responding piecemeal to individual requests, the agencies should cooperate to insure that standard textbooks are transcribed and are widely available. Recreational reading materials should also be produced in this way.
- The government needs to be persuaded to infuse large sums of money into special education, for equipment, facilities, and for reading and information materials.
- Individual organisations should be selected as nodal points for production and distribution of certain kinds of materials. For example, certain NGOs would be assigned to produce and distribute tertiary-level books, while others would produce books for primary- and secondary-level students.
- The National Library of Nigeria should act as the coordinating center for all activities related to the production and distribution of reading and information materials to persons who are blind and visually impaired persons. It should also be the depository for all materials produced and act as a link with international libraries and organisations (Adimorah, 2000 and Obinyan & Ijatuyu, 2003).
- Nigeria needs several networks of materials-producing agencies, operating at different levels, from the grassroots to the states, regions, and zones (Iweha, 2003).
- The National Library should ensure that every state library has a collection of materials for persons who are blind or visually impaired. Each state library should also maintain a register of its residents who need these materials.
- People who are blind or visually impaired need to be computer- and internet-literate.

* *Unfortunately, the website at which the computerised catalog database was housed (www.alvi-laris.org) has been pirated. The ISP and other stakeholders are working to restore the resource. In the meantime, Professor Atinmo is willing to share the database entry template or address any questions about her landmark project: morayoatinmo2004@yahoo.com .*

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ICEVI has been focusing on thematic issues such as inclusion, teacher preparation, technology, early intervention, low vision, Braille literacy, etc., for The Educator and the past issues can be accessed through the website of ICEVI **www.icevi.org**. Those who have suggestions with the new topics for The Educator may contact Aubrey Webson (**Aubrey.Webson@perkins.org**), Editor or MNG Mani (**sgicevi@vsnl.net**), Associate Editor.

Useful Internet Resources

Jan Seymour-Ford, Research Librarian, Perkins School for the Blind, U.S.A.

This is the first in a series of articles presenting information useful to educators who work with students who are blind or visually impaired. In this issue, we review some valuable full-text documents and books that are available on the internet. The information provides a basic foundation of knowledge about education for students with blindness or visual impairment.

Education of Visually Impaired Pupils in Ordinary School
J. Kirk Horton (1988), UNESCO.

This 134-page handbook advises the general classroom teacher on teaching both the basic curriculum and the additional skills needed by students with visual impairment. Particularly appropriate for schools in rural areas or with few resources, it includes advice on materials, adaptations, and teaching braille literacy.

http://www.uam.es/personal_pdi/psicologia/agonzale/2005/Discap/Libros/GuideVisualUnesco.pdf

First Steps: A Handbook for Teaching Young Children Who Are Visually Impaired
Blind Childrens Center (1993).

An overview of the development and educational needs of young children with visual impairments. Includes information about developmental differences, causes of visual impairment, impact upon family life of a child's blindness, and advice for stimulating development in areas affected by visual impairment.

http://www.eric.ed.gov/PDFS/ED404838.pdf

Helping Children Who Are Blind: Family and Community Support for Children with Vision Problems
Sandy Niemann, Namita Jacob (2000). The Hesperian Foundation.

Aimed at parents in poor or rural areas, describes how to help a child who is blind develop strength, self-esteem, and many other skills, including communication and mobility. Profusely illustrated, it includes many activities that foster development and independence.

http://hesperian.org/books-and-resources/
Also available in Spanish and Arabic:
http://hesperian.org/books-and-resources/resources-in-spanish/
http://hesperian.org/books-and-resources/resources-in-arabic/

The Impact of Vision Loss on the Development of Children from Birth to 12 Years Canadian National Institute for the Blind (2007).

A succinct outline of the effect that visual impairment has on a child's development in physical, cognitive, language, social, and emotional areas; as well as on family interactions, play, daily living skills, orientation, mobility, and self-esteem.

http://www.wcbvi.k12.wi.us/assets/documents/Outreach/handouts/pre-school/HANDOUT-The%20Impact%20of%20Vision%20Loss%20on%20the%20Development%20of%20Children%20from%20Birth%20to%2012.pdf

Infants and Toddlers with Visual Impairments

Virginia E. Bishop (1998). Texas School for the Blind and Visually Impaired.

This 40-page booklet emphasises the importance of identifying vision impairments early. There is an overview of the effects of visual impairment on infant development, and recommended activities to help the child develop in those areas that are impacted by the impairment.

http://www.tsbvi.edu/curriculum-a-publications/1051-infants-and-toddlers-with-visual-impairments-by-virginia-bishop

Preschool Children with Visual Impairments

Virginia E. Bishop (1996). Texas School for the Blind and Visually Impaired.

This booklet is an "introductory guidebook to help early childhood teachers understand what a visual impairment is, how a visual impairment affects early development, and why early intervention is so critical to these children." Includes advice for teachers on understanding the needs of preschoolers with visual impairments, and classroom activities that are well-adapted to their abilities.

http://www.tsbvi.edu/curriculum-a-publications/3/1069-preschool-children-with-visual-impairments-by-virginia-bishop

Teaching children with sensory impairment: Strategies for mainstream teachers : Vision impairment

Karen Waldron, Michael Steer, Dolly Bhargava (2006). Trinity University/Royal Institute for Deaf and Blind Children.

A collaborative project by teachers in the U.S., Australia, and New Zealand. Drawing upon their training and experience, they share advice for including students with visual impairments in general classrooms. There is a great deal of information about classroom accommodations and teaching strategies.

http://www.trinity.edu/org/sensoryimpairments/