



# THE HIGHER EDUCATION NETWORK

*Creating inclusive and welcoming university environments and open market employment opportunities for students with disabilities*

## ANNUAL REPORT - 2020

*With the support from*



**Japan**

*Presented by:*



**International Council for Education of  
People with Visual Impairment**

**M.N.G. Mani**

CEO, ICEVI & Project Director

The period of time covered by this report is one the world will always associate with the COVID-19 pandemic. As this reporting period began the pandemic accelerated and our higher education network partners in the Philippines, Vietnam, Indonesia, Cambodia, Laos, Myanmar and Mongolia were faced with challenges few could have ever imagined. Public health directives and government imposed lockdowns became commonplace. This unexpected situation had a significant impact on the plans each country had made. The ICEVI and its project partners in the region began a series of individual and group discussions, online, regarding the best way to manage plans under these circumstances. What could we hope to accomplish and what would not be possible? We were all working under conditions we had never before dealt with.

One of the major concerns of our project partners was that the time lost due to the pandemic should be accounted for through a revised implementation schedule of planned activities that would take into account for the specific levels of Covid severity which varied widely throughout the region.

We are most grateful to The Nippon Foundation for their understanding and flexibility which allowed us to extend the project period by five months to 31 May 2021. That made an enormous difference in allowing project partners to revise the schedule of activities and project timeframes.

The initial discussions with the Project partners revealed that some countries could implement most of the activities before the end of the extension period whereas some found it difficult due to the restrictions imposed by the governments and the protocols prescribed on what could be organised and what would be restricted by public health directives. These strategic adjustments assisted the project in implementing the maximum number of activities that are presented in this report.

## **Partners have become Tech Savvy**



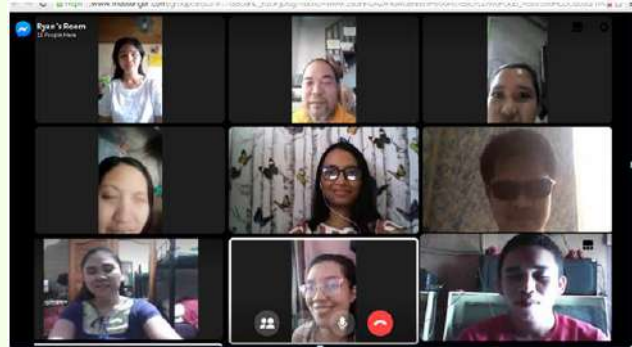
It is gratifying to note that the pandemic resulted in many innovations in project activities that have addressed a very difficult situation and resulted in solutions we might never have felt possible. Shifting to online strategies from the usual face-to-face activities enabled most of our partners to prepare themselves to face situations and to learn important lessons that will be of value if similar situations arise in the

future. As this report documents, the pandemic made our higher education project partners more creative and “tech savvy” and established a “new normal” related to online training and the use of platforms such as Zoom, MS teams,

Google etc. The concept of “so far yet so near” is emerging in many of our activities as we improve communications through online media, participation in remote activities and interactions with participants when we cannot be physically present. Although the Covid pandemic threw down a challenge to our project partners they have largely handled it effectively and **“turned adversity into an opportunity”**.

## Noteworthy Highlights

Before we turn our attention to country specific highlights of the higher education project let us first look at some activities and achievements that cut across multiple countries in the region.



In the Philippines and Vietnam enrolment of students with visual impairment in higher education has increased and the pandemic has had little impact on new enrolments. We believe this is due to the awareness created by the higher education project over the past several years regarding the empowering nature of higher education and how it is creating enhanced awareness at the community level which in turn is expanding open market employment. All of this leads to a new self-interest that has been created in visually impaired individuals who are recognizing the long term benefits to themselves, their families and their communities. All countries are reporting that visually impaired students are well connected even in this challenging time. Technology training surely has been the key to unlocking latent potentials and empowering persons with visual impairment as is increasingly demonstrated by the beneficiaries of the higher education project.



Vietnam and the Philippines have risen to the occasion to optimise the use of technology to connect visually impaired individuals throughout the country. Vietnam has demonstrated how accessible materials are helping visually impaired individuals, especially during this pandemic.

The Philippines has organised a number of online webinars connecting visually impaired learners throughout the country.

Another noteworthy feature of the project is the preparation of guidelines on how to handle learning in a situation like this. Indonesia has prepared a video on how to teach abacus in the online mode that is considered very useful by



parents and visually impaired students. Abacus learning is mostly skill-based and learning such a skill in the online mode is something noteworthy. Indonesia has also prepared a document highlighting general guidelines that should be followed in promoting employment opportunities in the online mode. Vietnam has

prepared hundreds of learning materials that are not only relevant but of great assistance in the time of the pandemic. Cambodia has prepared a video on counselling to visually impaired students for their education and their future career. We are feeling confident that these approaches will soon be applied by other partner countries in the regional network.

With a view to help not only the ICEVI partners, but others, Resources for the Blind has prepared a video on how to organise online activities especially under situations like the Covid pandemic. It is also in the process of making a video by recording the statements of the higher education students on what they have derived from online learning and the challenges encountered by them. This video will be available soon and will be a learning source for other regions of ICEVI. Production of these materials was not part of our original plan. However, the pandemic brought unexpected challenges and these materials are part of our response and will soon be available to all on the ICEVI website.

## Participation in the World Blindness Summit



The World Blindness Summit of the international Council for Education of People with Visual Impairment and the World Blind Union was to be held in Madrid, Spain in June 2020. The ICEVI and The Nippon Foundation had plans to support significant number of higher education beneficiaries to attend the event and take part in the higher education technical sessions at the Summit. The pandemic caused the Summit to be postponed and rescheduled as a virtual event on 28 to 30 June 2021. The Nippon Foundation and ICEVI were in communication with the host organisation ONCE and encouraged as many participants as possible to register for the Summit. The Nippon Foundation agreed to use part of the funds allocated for the summit to support internet access for graduates and visually impaired learners who register from the seven participating countries included in the higher education project. The Nippon Foundation also agreed that funds may be used to support the participants of the World Blind Union who are also

registered from these seven countries. Attending a global event will help visually impaired individuals to learn and to network with leaders at the international level.

The ICEVI partner organisations have contacted current students as well as former higher education students to register for the event. To date, our project partners have registered more than 350 participants to participate in the World Blindness Summit. ICEVI will prepare an impact report regarding the participation of higher education participants in the Summit.

As a part of the World Blindness Summit grant provision, ICEVI will also provide technology devices to Philippines, Vietnam and Indonesia where there are large numbers of students enrolled in higher education. These devices will be used by visually impaired learners on loan basis and also used for similar regional and global events organised by ICEVI and others in the blindness sector.

One of the activities of the World Blindness Summit is conducting thematic webinars. Three themes connected with the higher education have been selected by the International Organising Committee for webinars. One webinar is on higher education and employment and is chaired by Aria Indrawati, our project partner from Indonesia, with speakers Marlo Lucas from the Philippines and Dang Hoai Phuc from Vietnam. These three will highlight how the higher education and technology projects of The Nippon Foundation have contributed to the empowerment of persons with visual impairment in the East Asia region.

The country champions program involving the higher education students has been organised in the project countries and gained the attention of ICEVI globally. As a result other regions of ICEVI have emulated that activity in the last Quadrennium. In order to highlight the importance of the country champions program and its impact,

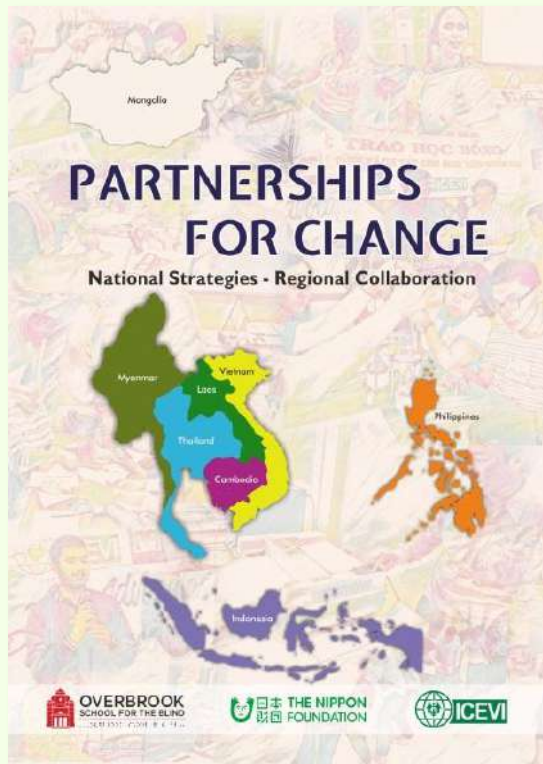


a webinar under the title “Youth Leadership” is being organised and moderated by Marie Joyce from the Resources for the Blind who moderated the first country champions program in the Philippines in 2017. Three young speakers - One each from the Philippines, Nepal and India will be speaking at this session.

The third webinar is on mathematics instruction that will be moderated by

the higher education project director and ICEVI CEO MNG Mani who will provide a demonstration of the ICEVI Instructional videos prepared with support from The Nippon Foundation. In summary the World Blindness Summit will have a significant presence from the higher education project.

## Release of “Partnerships for Change” at the World Blindness Summit



It has been the attempt of the publication team of the ICEVI and the Overbrook International Program to summarise the impact created by The Nippon Foundation in shaping the lives of thousands of visually impaired individuals from the East Asia region. The publishing team headed by Larry Campbell who was instrumental in initiating both the Higher Education Project of ICEVI and the ON-NET technology projects of Overbrook has gathered background information from mid-1990s and has come out with the publication under the title “Partnerships for Change.” This publication outlines the historical evolution of the projects supported by The Nippon Foundation and also the country level impact created by their investment in this work. The publication includes more than 50 embedded videos

that provide insight into the work of The Nippon Foundation in the seven project countries namely Indonesia, Philippines, Vietnam, Cambodia, Laos, Myanmar and Mongolia. Though the original idea was to release this publication at the World Blindness Summit in June 2020 it had to be delayed because of the cancellation of the face-to-face event. The book will now be released at the virtual General Assembly that will take place on 28 to 30 June 2021. The international organising committee has provided a time slot of 30 minutes for the release of the book and the event will commence at 10.30 AM GMT on 28 June 2021. Larry Campbell will provide an introduction to the work of the Overbrook International Program and ICEVI in the region leading to a twenty year partnership including the Higher Education Project. Two beneficiaries of the project Vina Dipoirawan from Indonesia and Sohankumar Motwani from the



Philippines will speak about their experience and the impact it has created on their lives. Following these remarks the first copy of the book will be presented to Mr Yohei Sasakawa, Chairman of The Nippon Foundation who will also deliver a special address. At the end of the session the book will be available for download on the websites of Overbrook [www.osb.org](http://www.osb.org) and ICEVI [www.icevi.org](http://www.icevi.org)

## Use of the Hivebrite Platform for Networking

Hivebrite is a new portal being developed for use by The Nippon Foundation to network the beneficiaries of its scholarship programs. ICEVI and Overbrook are exploring ways to use of the Hivebrite Platform with their project partners. Dr. Mani attended the Hivebrite training session on 3rd March 2021 and found it useful and informative.



The platform has excellent potential for forming various groups of the beneficiaries. At present the portal is not accessible for persons with visual impairment but an accessibility team from Hivebrite is working on this and being assisted by our Vietnam country co-ordinator Mr. Dang Hai Phuc. The platform is currently available in Japanese and English. The team at The Nippon Foundation is exploring other languages to maximise participation of the beneficiaries from the non-English speaking countries. ICEVI and Overbrook have asked the Hivebrite team to organize training sessions for key persons from our regional partner organisations so that they can mobilize and train local beneficiaries. ICEVI and Overbrook hope that our project partners will find this platform helpful to connect with the former beneficiaries and for continued networking between member countries.

## Zero Project Award for the Sao Mai Centre for the Blind

We are pleased to share with our readers a news that on 3<sup>rd</sup> December 2020, the International Day of Persons with Disabilities, Sao Mai Centre for the Blind, our project partner in Vietnam was selected as an awardee by the Zero Project, Austria for the ICT innovation practices for persons with disabilities; specifically two new innovative open-source software products SM Braille and SM Music Reader. This significant award is a fitting recognition of the many contributions the Sao Mai Centre has made to visually impaired people in the field of information technology for the past two decades. Mr. Phuc also delivered a presentation at the Zero Project virtual conference held on 12<sup>th</sup> February 2021 where he received the award.

## Country Highlights

In addition to the overall highlights of the higher education project which were enumerated in the previous sections, country specific activities have been listed in the following section:

### Philippines

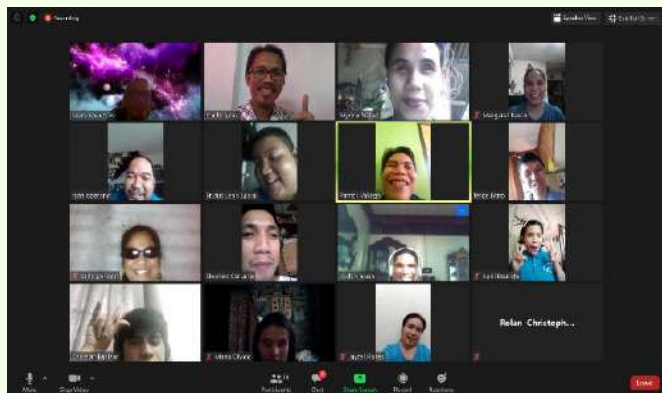
The year 2020 has been a very challenging year for all, especially in the field of education, due to the restrictions imposed on transportation and face-to-face classes which was disallowed in compliance to safety and health protocols. It is surprising to note that the enrolment in higher education notably increased significantly, compared with the previous years despite of the challenges brought about by covid-19.

There were a total of 24 students newly-identified by Resources for the Blind, Inc. (RBI) who enrolled in 2020 and many of them are studying in government universities. There were also 12 visually-impaired persons who have successfully secured employment in the mainstream workplaces during the pandemic

#### Programs Implemented:

##### 1. Virtual Training on Working Online

This training was entitled "Remote Work 101— An Actionable Workshop to Get Gainful Online Jobs in the Middle of a Global Crisis". The objective was to equip the participants with the tools and techniques to strategically identify accessible remote work options most suitable for their core competencies, existing skills, and available resources. Further, the training was designed to motivate the blind to consider remote work options and to provide them avenues to gain strategic knowledge, insights and practical experience as well as assess their individual skills and competencies.



There were two groups divided into the following sessions: the first was on June 1-5, 2020 participated by 30 people, and the second, on June 8-12, 2020 with 5 participants. All participants were visually-impaired from different regions of the country. The training introduced participants the industry standard technical and documentary requirements, the right tactics in going through the application process and the formulation of a remote work-life balanced environment.

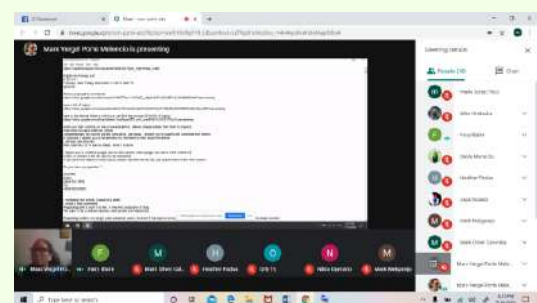
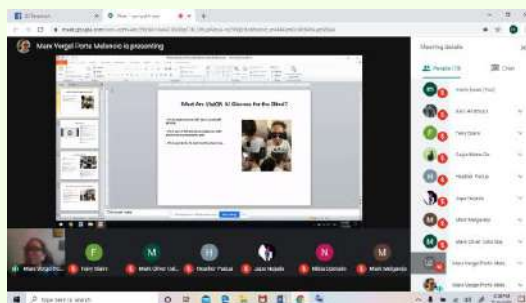


## 2. Public Speaking Virtual Training

This training entitled “Improving Your English Language Skills” was in partnership with two BPO companies - Accenture and JP Morgan. Seventeen (17) students participated and sixteen (16) graduates, all of whom are visually impaired. The training gave the participants the opportunity to learn how to apply effective communication in their studies and employment and how to use the same in challenging conversations.



## 3. Orientation on the Use of Job Access with Speech (JAWS) to Partner Stakeholders



This program was conducted by RBI in collaboration with JP Morgan Chase & Co., Philippines on July 10, 2020. It aimed to provide key personnel of JP Morgan Chase & Co., particularly the department heads, technical personnel and hiring managers, with information on how to use a screen reader such as JAWS. It sought to make them aware that there are computer programs that enable blind people to navigate computers independently. The ultimate goal is to gradually pave the way for BPO's in the country to employ persons with visual impairment.

## 4. Employment Summit for Persons with Visual Impairment

This “3rd Employment Summit for Persons with Visual Impairment: Building a Culture of Diversity and Inclusion in Time of Crisis” was conducted on July 23-24, 2020 in consonance with the celebration of the 42<sup>nd</sup> National Disability Prevention and Rehabilitation (NDPR) Week 2020 in the entire country. The event was designed to promote awareness to persons with visual



impairment on the initiatives of the government and the private sectors in addressing employment issues faced by blind individuals amidst the pandemic. Organizations present during this event were the National Council on Disability Affairs, the Department of Labor and Employment, Accenture and Sutherland Philippines. They introduced their respective efforts to uplift the conditions of persons with visual impairment despite the challenges and hindrances brought about by covid-19. The event was also an eye opener to everyone about the realities faced by blind people during the pandemic as three blind persons shared about their difficulties and struggles brought about by the crisis.

## 5. Online Transcription Training to Students and Graduates with Visual Impairment

This 5-day skills training, participated by twenty (20) visually-impaired graduates and undergraduates mainly from Visayas and Mindanao, was conducted on July 2020 which aimed to equip the participants with basic principles and skills of transcription and translation which could help them acquire a good source of income, as well as explore other online opportunities to augment their finances during the crisis. This hands-on training has equipped participants with new skills which could result to gainful employment for them.

## 6. Training on Basic Computer Skills

In partnership with ON-NET and IBM, RBI carried out the 19<sup>th</sup> National Computer-Eyes Camp (CEC) for the blind and visually-impaired on August 17-22, 2020.

The 6-day training was participated in by twenty-eight (28) secondary students and sixteen (16) college graduates from the different regions of the country. All had no prior formal computer training.



The training aimed to equip participants with basic computer skills to help them cope up with academic and work tasks. Needless to say, computer skills are essential in this time of pandemic when almost everything happens online. The training included the use of screen reader in navigating Microsoft application programs such as Word, Excel and PowerPoint, and internet browsing.

## 7. Orientation on Hiring Blind and Visually-Impaired to the partner BPO - Hinduja Global Solutions

This event was conducted on August 26, 2020 which aimed to revive the partnership of RBI and Hinduja Global Solutions (HGS), a BPO (Business Process Outsourcing) company which was formerly known as HTMT in the Philippines. Through this orientation activity, HGS has started accepting applications from persons with visual impairment and has actually employed some visually-impaired individuals during the height of the lockdown. This initiative has helped unemployed and displaced blind and visually-impaired to acquire work especially during the crisis.



## 8. STEM Access for Students with Visual Impairment

This 3-day STEM Access online training for receiving Math teachers, conducted on September 16-18, 2020 was a project in partnership with the Department of Education Region XI and various higher education institutions. The training was attended by 79 participants which included receiving teachers, Special Education (SPED) teachers and school heads in the Mindanao region. This training primarily aimed to equip receiving teachers on the use of different strategies, accommodation approaches, instructional materials and other available resources relative to teaching Mathematics. The elements are all necessary to provide accessibility to students with visual impairment in higher education. The training covered topics about understanding visual impairment, courtesy rules in dealing with the visually impaired, roles of teachers in the journey of the blind students to success, strategies in teaching Math to blind students using different resources for easy understanding, and different testimonies from blind students about their experiences and challenges in learning and understanding Mathematics.



## 9. Soft Skills Training “Skills build Training Program

There were 20 graduates and 7 undergraduates with visual impairment from different regions of the Philippines that participated in this training. It was conducted in partnership with the higher education project and IBM Philippines on October 26-30, 2020. Utilizing the Skills Build program of IBM via Skillsbuild.org.ph, the trainees were given avenues to be



equipped and prepared with both technical and soft skills as they choose courses/topics available in the website. The program was accessible to persons with visual impairment; thus, it was not difficult for them to develop or enhance their skills through the program.

## 10. Public Speaking Virtual Training “English as a Second Language – ESL”

Maintaining its relevance and stability amidst the pandemic, ESL teaching is one of the things that RBI upheld. An ESL coaching was conducted by RBI on November 9-20, 2020 with 30 graduates and 7 undergraduates with visual impairment of which majority were education graduates but without experience in teaching ESL. This training was designed to equip participants with skills in ESL teaching which they could consider venturing into as an alternative source of income.



This training was designed to equip participants with skills in ESL teaching which they could consider venturing into as an alternative source of income.

The training had resulted to the development of, not just ESL teaching skills, but also of a support group among the participants as they shared resources and insights with one another relative to ensuring a successful ESL career. Everyone learned from the demonstrations of one another guided by their facilitator who is herself blind and has been in the ESL industry for several years now.

## 11. Youth as Advocates, Philippines (YAP) - Surpassing Disability Barriers amidst COVID-19”

This year’s YAP was held during the evenings of November 10, 13, 17 and 18. Some sessions had to be cancelled and rescheduled due to the onslaught of Typhoon Ulysses in the country. The event was participated in by both students and working blind and visually-impaired individuals across the country. They convened together to share their different testimonies about how they were able to surpass physical, economic and psychological

effects brought about by the pandemic, so as to motivate other fellows to pursue advocacy for themselves and for others during tough times. The event also underscored the different programs and services being offered by selected governmental agencies and private companies presented by their respective representatives, who included those from the National Council on Disability Affairs, Commission on Higher Education, Department of Science and Technology and Hinduja Global Solutions. All of whom had strong conviction and gave the assurance that persons with visual impairment could still rise up amidst the crisis.



## 12. Teachers Training in Making Mathematics Accessible for Student with Visual Impairment – “Disability- Inclusive Trainings in Science and Mathematics Education”

This training for receiving Math teachers was conducted on November 23-December 1, 2020 in partnership with the Department of Science and Technology – Science Education Institute (DOST-SEI) and was attended by 37 Math teachers from the three regions of the Visayas. This training targeted receiving Math teachers in Grades 2, 3 and 4 and aimed to promote and improve the STEM education of blind and visually-impaired learners in the regions by developing the capacities of Math teachers to better accommodate said learners. The training discussed some concepts related to inclusive education, the common predicament of learners with visual impairment, and some practical solutions that are proven to help such learners in the inclusive setting. The training also introduced to the participants the Braille code for Mathematics, Abacus and sample teaching materials that can enhance the learning of Math concepts to both sighted and visually-impaired learners. It likewise allowed participants to create their own instructional materials for teaching Math to blind learners and introduced existing materials and currently available references.



Two videos are being prepared – how to cope with the situation like the COVID pandemic and the other providing testimonies of the students who are the beneficiaries of the higher education and technology initiatives.

With the foregoing efforts to help persons with visual impairment fulfill their potentials and realize their goals despite the current global pandemic, RBI believes that it can still do more to help the sector surpass the barriers caused by the pandemic.

## Vietnam

Vietnam is one of the least affected countries in the East Asia region by the Covid pandemic in 2020 but the Covid protocols were applied and periodic lock downs applied to restrict the impact of its spread. Our partner Sao Mai centre for the Blind carried out all the activities planned for the year 2020 and also implemented additional activities during the extension period. The following is a summary of activities implemented.

### Activities organized during the period

1. Produced and updated 4,270 accessible book titles to Sao Mai online library at: [www.saomaicenter.org/en/library](http://www.saomaicenter.org/en/library)
2. Published one new separate online music library to serve blind students, musicians, teachers and parents of interest to access more than 150,000 music scores. All are under public domain copyright. The site is at: [www.saomaicenter.org/en/music-library](http://www.saomaicenter.org/en/music-library)
3. Conducted nine online short computer trainings via Zoom and Google Meet for 97 students. Course content included: computer skills for taking notes, preparing presentations, search skills and online learning/collaboration tools.
4. Conducted four one-week online training courses via Google Meet for 43 graduate students about internet-based job orientation and online sales.
5. Conducted five 6-day online trainings (one day per week) for total of 41 fourth-year students about preparation for employment. These are based on training modules written by Dr. Karen Wolffe from USA.

6. Organized a two-day workshop and conference at RMIT University in HCM about university support services for students with visual impairment in Vietnam in January 2020. This conference was primarily targeted at education administrators, teachers, policy makers and inclusive education advocates.



7. Signed an MOU with RMIT university for the RMIT-Sao Mai Opportunity Scholarship program, which Sao Mai will support the RMIT to select the

best visually impaired candidates, provide any essential skills such as technology, O&M in order to help them effectively participate into RMIT's college education program. RMIT will provide full scholarship for the selected students which are estimated about 100,000USD for each.

8. Thw Sao Mai tech team has worked with universities, mainly in Ho Chi Minh City, to provide technical support for their visually impaired students when attending online classes. In Hanoi, we had our partner, the Vietnam Vocational and Rehab Training Center work with universities there. Many students were not familiar with mainstream online learning system like Microsoft Team, Zoom etc. So many of them had difficulties during their online sessions due to the Corona virus outbreak.
9. After lifting the stay-at-home order in early May, we have been restarting normal activities and just finished one-day training for 9 volunteers about basic skills to assist blind people in orientation and mobility. This is one of our activities in the independent living support program for the blind. However, the second wave of Corona virus outbreak was back to Vietnam in late June so Vietnam was in lockdown again until mid of August.
10. Conducted 10 one-day online training workshops on how to use Mobil devices for learning for total of 87 participants; introducing accessible education related apps on both Android and iOS platforms.
11. Conducted two two-day trainings for 11 technicians from Danang, Hanoi, HCM and Hue one in June and one in October about assistive technology in order to better support the visually impaired students based in their areas.
12. Conducted 4 one-day online job orientation workshops for total of 51 high-school visually impaired students in grade 11 and 12. This was to provide essential information about the job market, the general university enrollment process in Vietnam, sharing work experiences by current employed visually impaired people and different selected subjects' challenges and solutions when following certain majors at the university.
13. Preparation for employment training for 15 music graduate students to learn how to write a CV, prepare for an interview, perform on stage and use media technology to promote themselves. The activity is in collaboration with Adam Music Academy. The activity started from June to September, 2020.
14. Developed and released the SM Braille Viewer app for Android to help students convert text into Braille so they can read it with their connected Braille devices. This app will help students easily convert and export documents into Braille so they can freely emboss or read on stand-alone Braille devices.
15. Frequently released updates of SM Music Reader app for Android to help blind music students and blind musicians to enhance their access to music



materials. Moreover, we just released the first public beta version of SM Music Reader for iOS platform. This music reading technology solution is helping blind music students and musicians have a barrier-free way to read and exchange scores with the sighted with same content at the same time.

16. Frequently released the Sao Mai Braille software targeted at both blind individuals and accessible material transcribers, to help them create and produce accessible books with different document types in accessible formats.
17. Conducted two one-week trainings for 14 colleagues from 9 organizations/schools of and for the blind in Vietnam to produce accessible academic materials with Sao Mai Braille software and DAISY's book production tools.
18. Released the SM Myanmar text-to-speech engine for both Android and Windows with update of new Burmese words, support to read Parli language and many more performance improvements.
19. Provided technical accessibility and accessible materials production trainings/consultation support for 32 faculties from 8 different universities including Hue College of Pedagogy, Danang University, Van Lang University, HCM Tech University, Hanoi Open University, HCM Open University, the Fulbright and RMIT University.
20. Conducted 5 one-day online training workshops on preparation for university for total of 63 visually impaired around the country, covered with subjects: enrollment procedures, scholarship opportunities, self-help related groups/organizations for students support, recommended skills to prepare and available academic materials resources. This online workshop was live-streamed and open for public to attend.
21. Conducted a half-day online forum on employment opportunities for graduated blind students, having presentations from OneFix and Vina Cacao representatives (as employers), sharing working challenges as a blind employee from Tuan Tu (a blind graduate student and currently working as a software engineer at Saratech company) and introducing channels where job seekers can apply. The online forum was live-streamed publicly.
22. Signed the Authorized Entity agreement with WIPO to have Sao Mai continue to join the Global Books Service of Accessible Books Consortium (ABC). This will help Sao Mai to share thousands of accessible book titles with the ABC and access hundreds of other books from their network around the world. In addition, we are also working with the Bookshare library, one of the largest libraries of accessible books in the world, to collaborate on exchanging and distributing accessible books.
23. Successfully referred two visually impaired graduated students to work at OneFix Company as the customer service and online marketing, three graduated students working at Vina Cacao Company.



24. Collaboration with UNDP and Vietnam Blind Association to host a Marrakesh Treaty workshop in Hanoi to hear inputs from lawyers and report the progress to submit draft legal documents to the prime minister to ratify the Marrakesh Treaty. We expect to have it passed by the end of 2021.



25. Collaborating with the Vietnam Blind Association to organize the ICT national contest for 82 selected students from around the country in Hanoi.
26. Collaborating with DRD Vietnam, an NGO for people with disabilities in an image exhibition to raise public awareness about the ability of PWDs.
27. Working with Lifebuoy Company to raise funds for 1,000 white canes and hand sanitizer gels to be provided to visually impaired students to help lower the spread of Covid-19. We have already made distributions to more than 300 students and expect to distribute the remainder freely through our partner organizations. Working with Daisy Consortium and Musescore Company to develop accessible music notation and Braille music translation solutions for visually impaired users.
28. Producing one documentary video clip about HE project activities in Vietnam since it's started from 2007 till end of 2020.
29. Produced one video tutorial package with 4 clips to guide how to work with online learning platforms with assistive software. This package is very helpful and handy for both visually impaired students and university faculties to effectively attend and conduct virtual courses during the pandemic period.
30. **Training programs and number of beneficiaries**

No.	Training topic	Targeted beneficiaries	Number of trainees
1	Computer Trainings	Students	56
2	Internet-based job orientation	Graduate students	21
3	Preparation for employment	Fourth-year students and graduates	26

4	University support services workshop	Students, university faculties, policy makers	60
5	Orientation and mobility training for volunteers	Volunteers	29
6	Technician training and consultation	University staff	9
7	Preparation for music-related employment opportunity	Students	15
8	Mobile apps for education	Visually impaired students	53
9	Job orientation workshop for high school students	Visually impaired grade 11 and 12 students	24
10	Producing accessible academic materials with Sao Mai software	Materials organization staff	14
11	Transition and preparation for higher education	High school and first-year students	41
12	Soft Skills	High school and University students	41
13	Music composition on computer	Visually impaired graduates in music major and musicians	16
14	Vietnam law for people with disabilities	Students and university faculties	23
15	Mobility and orientation	First-year students	14

### **Materials produced for training and awareness activities**

The project is producing a series of episodes named “Seeing by Eyes” on Sao Mai YouTube channel. This awareness raising program is to create clips telling stories about daily activities of visually impaired people, which are done on their own. The channel can be viewed at: <https://www.youtube.com/saomaifortheblind>

### **Media coverage of the activities during the reporting period**

The Eyes on Success podcast program from the US interviewing about Sao Mai’s activities: <https://www.reachoutradio.org/post/eos-2005-free-music-reader-app-sao-mai-012920>

News about Sao Mai’s software from DAISY consortium at: <https://daisy.org/activities/projects/music-braille/latest-developments/>

Presentation about Sao Mai software at Connecting To Dots conference: <https://youtu.be/1pZ0IC9keZI>

## Indonesia

During the first and second months of the first quarter of the project period, (January to February 2020), the Project Team conducted preparation steps for higher education project activities. Then in second week of March, the Indonesian Government declared a COVID 19 outbreak in Indonesia and the Government asked people to work and study from home and practice health protocols with strict discipline.

### **Formulating Online Teaching Methods**

Considering the situation, the project partners modified the Pertuni Higher Education project activities to online mode. Offline training was modified into online training, with the usage of the ZOOM platform. Training activities that were designed for two full days each were modified to four hours training per day for a maximum of four days and the teaching method was divided into three parts.

The first part was done through a WhatsApp chat groups. Within this preparation stage, the trainer teaches the participants who are not yet used to using ZOOM and how to use the application. This is followed by training and then internship. After finishing the intern stage, Webinars were conducted on the particular concept.

### **Training on Content Writing**

Though the higher education project had demonstrated in the past that visually impaired individuals can perform a wide variety of jobs, the pandemic period posed lot of challenges. In fact visually impaired individuals, who were depending on the spot jobs such as jobs in restaurant, marketing, massage centres etc., faced the most difficulties in performing their tasks due to the lock downs imposed by the Covid pandemic. The project reviewed the job opportunities that would be available for visually impaired individuals which do not warrant physical presence. Among many such opportunities, content writing emerged as a potential opportunity for visually impaired individuals during the lockdown period.

There were organisations willing to offer such jobs to visually impaired individuals and therefore the project organised training on this topic in August 2020 to prepare visually impaired individuals to acquire skills as content writers as a part of our employment drive.

### **Developing Guidelines on Job Recruitment and placement through online mode**

Though jobs were available in the online mode for visually impaired individuals, most employers were not fully aware of how the recruitment could be done and

the work extracted from them in the online mode. We viewed this concern of the employers as an opportunity to guide them. The project has prepared a booklet on job recruitment and job placement for people with visual impairment. This is available at present in the Bahasa language and being shared with potential employers. Feedback from employers indicates that this guidebook was useful in understanding the job potential of visually impaired individuals and how they can be encouraged to perform tasks in the online mode. The higher education project is proposing to translate this booklet into English so that it can be shared with our partners of other countries too and also posted on the ICEVI website for wider use.

### **Networking to share online materials**

During the period of pandemic, the project contacted the higher education students on regular basis and provided them with assistance in using online resources particularly that of accessible learning materials. Students were encouraged to create WhatsApp groups among themselves to share ideas and resources. Though good internet connections remained a challenge in reaching out to visually impaired students, the project staff did their best to interact with them in addressing their learning needs.

### **Online usage of adapted learning materials by Teachers**

One of the key activities planned for 2020 was to train a series of teachers from the government schools to use the adapted techniques developed by the project in collaboration with ICEVI and the Overbrook Nippon Network on Educational Technology (ON-NET) for mathematics text books of all classes. The project originally thought of face-to-face training in order to make it more effective but this had to be modified because of the national lock down. However the project shared the materials online with potential teachers and organised online training with the use of resource persons on how to use these materials in teaching mathematics effectively to visually impaired students. The project will be organising face-to-face training to prepare as many teachers as possible from the government schools to apply the adaptation techniques for the total inclusion of visually impaired children in the curricular areas.

### **Instructional videos on Teaching Abacus**

The project also prepared instructional videos on how to teach abacus to visually impaired students. In teaching the skills online, the resource persons have involved parents of visually impaired children to follow the instruction and teach their children on how the abacus techniques should be used to learn mathematics. The parents who underwent these training sessions were highly appreciative of the instructional videos and said that such materials helped them to engage their visually impaired children in the learning process especially in a situation like the COVID-19 pandemic when children stay at home with the parents. Some parents stated that the lockdown period has enabled them to understand the intricacies involved in the learning of visually impaired students which has made them more knowledgeable about how their children learn.

The pandemic has caused disruptions in the overall project activities but it gave opportunities to create a strong network among students with visual impairment and also a bonding with the parents and community members as the visually impaired students were mostly staying at home. The project believes that parents have to be treated as key stakeholders in educating children with visual impairment in the future.

## Cambodia

Cambodia was also affected badly like many countries in the East Asia region by the Covid pandemic and therefore for majority part of 2020 the educational institutions were closed and therefore had to use technology to stay connected. In remote areas internet too became a challenge. The project team used all available resources to keep up the momentum in higher education project and following is the summary of activities conducted during the project period.

### **Pre-Employment skills development training**

A pre-employment skills development training was organized between the 21<sup>st</sup> and 24<sup>th</sup> of September 2020 in Siem Reap for university students. The participants learned about a wide range of topics such as:

- Building self-esteem and self-respect
- Exploring the meaning, types and theory of communication
- Learning how to communicate effectively
- Developing a CV and Cover Letters
- Identifying future career paths and preparing for job interviews and
- Writing summary learning reports and developing problem solving skills

### **Individual / collective counseling activities and follow-up**

Counselling sessions were organised with the assistance of the National Institute for Special Education (NISE) for university as well as high school students on a regular basis during the period of the pandemic. The purposes of the sessions were mainly:



*Activities realized during the training*

- To explain the functioning of the NISE and present the services the institute can provide to the students
- To determine on which soft skills should be prioritized
- To organize the training on soft skills (content & logistic aspects)
- To discuss future plans, specifically about the possibilities to study at university level
- To discuss their study and highlight any difficulties encountered, and work on how to make their year at university successful
- To discuss the difficulties & adaptations needed for studying during the Covid-19 crisis (to check if they were attending the online classes or were facing any difficulties)
- To check the possibilities to conduct soft skills training & agree on topics to focus on.
- To help them to lead their lives more fully and independently and
- To help them to face the difficulties linked with the Covid-19 crisis



*Counseling sessions with university students (on the left) and with high school students (on the right)*

The individual sessions were an opportunity to go further into the motivation, struggles and future plans of the youth, to discuss specific cases or to inform them of opportunities.

### **Follow-up with partners**

The visits to universities and higher education institutions have been the key for the Academic and Career Counselling (ACC) officer to understand how the students felt in their studies and to highlight potential difficulties, especially with the Covid-19 crisis. During these visits, the ACC officer discussed different solutions implemented for the students to keep studying online and checked whether the students were actually managing to follow those solutions. The teachers shared documents and videos of the classes through social media like Telegram or Facebook groups. In most cases, the VI students managed to follow the classes with some adjustments.



*Follow-up visit at the University of Management and Economics in Phnom Penh*

Visits to companies and vocational training centres allowed the team to assess the employment opportunities for the students under this program.

### **Follow-up mission to the Resources Centers at Kamchay Mea University and at the University of Battambang**

During the year 2020, 2 follow-up missions have been conducted to the resources centres at Kamchay Mea University in Kampong Cham province and 1 at the University of Battambang in Battambang province (3 follow-up missions in total).

The goal of the 2 missions at Kamchay Mea University were mainly

- To check the working of the Center since its opening in 2018.
- To attend to potential maintenance with materials previously purchased
- To provide training to the students volunteering as recorders.

Because of the Covid-19 crisis, the university had to close and set up online classes for the students. The follow-up mission to the resources centre of the University of Battambang in November revealed that it should be put into optimal use.

### **Documentation of case studies**

During this period, 2 videos were produced. One of the videos was focusing on the counselling sessions provided by the Academic and Career Counselling (ACC) officer to visually-impaired students. This video <https://youtu.be/wRhIxrwt6NA> shows how impactful the role of the counsellor is for students, and how she guides them in their studies and/or professional career. The second video [https://youtu.be/t0uau1WXJ\\_M](https://youtu.be/t0uau1WXJ_M) is about the development of resource centres for visually-impaired students.

## Exceptional support to students and young adults during the Covid-19 crisis

18 students and 4 young adults who were already working but still enrolled under the ACC program received exceptional support of 150\$ each in July 2020 to help them face the Covid-19 crisis. The students mostly used the exceptional support to pay for the internet, study materials, travel expenses and school fees. The young adults mostly used it to pay for their food, travel expenses, rent, and private classes (private music classes, massage classes, etc.) to keep training themselves.

## Myanmar



ICEVI was elated that it could involve the Dagon University, Myanmar as its key partner for higher education project since 2020. Dagon University being a prime university in the country the objective was to expand higher education for visually impaired individuals in other leading universities in the country to make higher education a mass movement thus enabling hundreds of visually impaired students to access higher education opportunities. The release of the Text To Speech engine software developed by ICEVI and ON-NET with the support of The Nippon Foundation in January 2019 has certainly created confidence in the visually impaired individuals to access learning materials and this has had an indirect impact on the urge for visually impaired individuals to enter into higher education institutes. After going through a series of government protocols, a Memorandum of Understanding was signed between the Dagon University and ICEVI in early 2020 to implement higher education activities. The University nominated the pro-rector Dr.Nay Thwe Kyi, herself to coordinate the ICEVI project. Ms. Kwai Nan, the former executive director of the Myanmar National Association of the Blind who is currently heading an organisation called Dignity for the Blind became a technical consultant for the higher education project in Myanmar and the formal activities started in mid-2020 on a grand note. The following activities were organised in the last of 3 to 4 months of 2020.



## **Braille training**

The project trained 6 trainees, 2 resource room staff, 23 students who closely support visually impaired students and 1 graduate for the position of Brailist. They did follow the training very well and mastered English braille grade II. They fully prepared themselves to work for braille production and the project planned to teach them Burmese braille going forward.

## **Developing braille translator software**

The project initiated work to develop translation software for Myanmar braille Grade 1 and the suggested name is Swel Taw Myanmar Braille translator; the Swel Taw being the symbol of Dagon University.

## **Renovated and upgraded the resource room**

The audio room of the Resource Centre at the Dagon University was made sound proof, and the Resource room was partitioned into different work places for braille production.

## **Preparation of braille materials**

The trained Brailist, with the help of student volunteers started producing braille textbooks meant for the higher education studies of the students at the University.

## **Workshop on music as a Career**

A workshop on music related jobs was organised by inviting a visually impaired musician from Thailand. 15 students and 20 other visually impaired individuals attended the training and stated that they hoped to explore the opportunity of music creation as a career. The participants were also introduced to the Sao Mai Centre music codes.

## **Pursuing further studies**

Eight (8) students of the higher education projects have ambition to further their studies and the project has assisted two to apply to the Duskin Leadership Training Program in Japan.

## **Disruption of Higher Education activities**

Due to political issues in Myanmar, the university was "closed on 1 February 2021, and since then the project shifted the planned activities into online mode. The project conducted a two day workshop for visually impaired students drawn from different parts of the country. Students showed a lot of interest to learn while waiting for the university to open. Sixteen (16) students asked to become computer literate to help them more effectively to cope with their higher education studies.

The project started a Facebook management training and also planned to conduct training on how to use and operate digital money system, audio editing, software training, other job related training, etc., However, the activities could not be organised as planned as internet facilities had serious disruptions throughout the country. The project hopes that the situation will improve soon.

As the project started late in 2020, they were striving to complete the planned activities of 2020 by May 2021. The recent political events have certainly affected everyone including visually impaired students. As the universities are closed at the moment, formal activities are not happening. The current scenario brings a challenge to implement the activities planned for 2021. The project is hoping that a more peaceful political climate will be reached soon so that planned activities can be resumed. No grant of 2021 has been sent to Myanmar yet and we shall review the situation in consultation with our partners.

## Lao PDR

While the Covid pandemic did disrupt the work of the higher education programme in Laos, the project managed to carry out activities that allowed visually impaired students to continue their studies in a mix of face-to-face and online modes.

During this project period the National University of Laos (NUOL) created an Inclusive Education Department (IED) to coordinate higher education activities being organised in the six faculties of the university.

On 12<sup>th</sup> October 2020, the Inclusive Education Department was launched and was attached to the Office of Academic Affairs of the NUOL for administrative purposes. The IED was officially assigned to work as the core coordination centre with the Faculties of Letters (FLE), Education (FoE), Economics and Business Management (FEM), Law and Political Sciences (FLP), Sports and Physical Education (FSPE), and Social Sciences (FSS).

The Inclusive Education Resource Centre (IERC) is responsible for producing learning materials for visually impaired students, organizing trainings for teachers and students, and also for arranging internships for students.

At present (2020–2021) there are 20 students with visual impairment studying in six faculties. Three (3) graduates have completed their studies and secured employment.

## Activities organised:

### Computer Training



Every year the computer training activity is organized for new students and in the academic year 2019 – 2020, it was organized from 21<sup>st</sup> September to 6th October 2020 and four blind students who were newly enrolled and underwent training. The training activity was followed three modules in 100 hours. The students were trained to use Microsoft Word 2010, PowerPoint, and web browsers with other functions.

In addition, the visually impaired students were also trained to install NVDA Screen Reader on their computers and also trained on other essential functions.

### Production of Learning Materials

The Inclusive Education Resource Centre (IERC) makes decisions on what materials are to be produced in braille and which ones will be prepared in the audio format. Information is collected from all faculties and the Committee of the IERC suggests a time frame for completing the task of producing both Braille and audio materials. The staff of the IERC and student volunteers from the university assists in the production of these learning materials. Most of the English titles were produced in the form of soft copies whereas other materials in Lao language are generally prepared in Braille.

During the year 2020, the Inclusive Education Resource Centre produced 3728 pages of braille materials and the details are as follows.

#### List of textbooks production

No.	Items	No. of pgs.	Soft files	Braille pgs.
1	4 Titles of law	600	600	1800
2	English	67	67	201
3	Thesis Writing (New Edition)	30	30	90
4	Lao grammar text books	130	130	390
5	Other files	420	420	
			<b>1,247</b>	<b>2,481</b>
<b>Total</b>			<b>3728</b>	

The IERC is fully aware of the cumbersome process involved in braille book production that includes the maintenance of the printing equipment, need for skilled Brailleists and available storage space. As the students are given more training in the use of technology the shift will gradually going to be to audio

format for most learning materials that can be managed in that format. Only essential books will be printed in Braille in the future.

### **Internship Activity for visually impaired students**



Internships for visually impaired graduates are one of the responsibilities of IERC. Internships are normally organized for a 3-month period. During 2020, it was arranged from 1<sup>st</sup> September to 30<sup>th</sup> November when students qualify for Bachelor Degree at NUoL. In the academic year 2019 – 2020, there were 4 visually

impaired students who were asked to take part in the internship program and they were placed at the following organisations:

1. The Secretariat of the National Committee for Disabled People and Elderly (NCDE),
2. Humanity and Inclusion (HI) - Non-Government Organization in Vientiane Capital,
3. The Aid Children with Disability Association (ACDA).

### **Raising Awareness on Inclusion in Higher Education**

The annual awareness raising programme on inclusive education has a profound impact on creating an inclusive learning environment for students with visual impairment. This is an opportunity for the teachers and non-disabled students to know the capabilities of visually impaired students. This event also provides an opportunity for visually impaired students to interact with their non-disabled counterparts. A programme was organised on 10 March 2021 involving university faculty members, visually impaired students and non-disabled students. A wide range of topics including the UNCRPD, legislative measures for inclusive education in Laos, rights of persons with visual impairment, orientation and mobility, nature of adaptations necessary in the learning of visually impaired students, soft skills, etc., were the topics covered in this awareness activity. This event was also used for exposing teachers and non-disabled students to the assistive devices used by visually impaired students. In fact the annual awareness programme motivates many sighted volunteers to come to the IERC and help in the production of audio materials. The awareness programmes also helps to consider visually impaired students first and foremost as students who simply happen to have a visual impairment. Visitors observing visually impaired students on the campus of the university state that the students seem at ease and that interaction between disabled and non-disabled students is cordial. This is largely due to the awareness programmes organised by the IERC are creating a more open and inclusive environment at NUoL.

In summary, despite the Covid pandemic the momentum established by the IERC and the university is proving that a first class learning environment for visually impaired students is achievable. While there have been recent lockdowns for specific periods the ability of visually impaired students to effectively use technology has enabled them to stay connected. With the creation of the Inclusive Education Department as a part of the Office of the Academic Affairs, NUoL is providing additional impetus for the growth of the education of visually impaired children not only at the tertiary level but all other levels of the education system in the Lao PDR.



## Mongolia

Mongolia was not affected seriously by the Covid pandemic but the government took all precautions and brought strict protocols to prevent the impact of the pandemic and as a result there were lock downs. Consequently, the higher education project was not able to organise face-to-face activities during the first half of 2020. However, the planned activities went on during the second half of 2020 and following is the summary of the activities conducted by the project which includes extension time granted by The Nippon Foundation and ICEVI.

### **Establishment of the resource center**

The objective of the higher education project implemented by the Mongolian National Federation of the Blind is to establish a full-fledged resource and information Centre in every leading university which is not only a centre for learning for students with visual impairment but a place which spreads awareness on inclusive education initiative and also the capabilities of students with visual impairment. The MNFB has finalized an agreement to establish this information resource center at the library of the University. The University will provide a room with furniture and the MNFB is responsible for providing some special or assistive devices for visually impaired students such as a braille display, computer with screen reader software and DAISY players.

## **Teaching learning materials**

The project proposed to develop an accessible online digital dictionary for English to Mongolian and from Mongolian to English. A team consisting of English teachers, information technology experts and representatives of the MNFB was established and they started their work to develop this online dictionary. This will be a useful source of material for the higher education students to study and also in the successful completion of their assignments. There was a delay in its completion due to the Covid pandemic but hopes to finalize the work soon.

## **Production of learning materials for students**

With the purpose of assisting visually impaired students to successfully complete their coursework MNFB prepares necessary learning materials in braille or audio format. During the year 2020, the MNFB received a request to produce 21 titles of university books in accessible formats. The MNFB is working on producing these books in the Braille, DAISY and large print formats for the benefit of the students. 14 titles have already been converted into accessible formats and the project is currently working on the remaining books. Due to the lock down the people producing these materials are working from home. Higher education students find these accessible materials enormously useful and the project aims to prepare more learning materials in accessible formats in the near future.

## **Workshops for university staff and students**

In 2019 officers from The Nippon Foundation and ICEVI visited the project in Mongolia and interacted with the staff and students of the special education Department of the Mongolian University of education (MNUE). During that visit a workshop on mathematics was organised to introduce the ICEVI maths initiative that evinced interest in the teachers as well as students to know more about the learning of students with disabilities. Subsequently the MNFB entered into a collaboration with the university not only for the development of maths videos but for the general orientation of teachers and students to disability issues too in order to facilitate comprehensive inclusion for students with visual impairment. During 2020 the higher education project collaborated with the Mongolian National University of education to organise two workshops for the students and staff about disability issues where lot of interactions took place about how the non-disabled students could work with visually impaired students in enhancing their learning opportunities. The first workshop was organised on 29 September 2020 which was attended by 99 students and 13 teachers including the staff of the math and computer science faculties of the university. The second workshop was carried out on 8 October 2020 which was attended by 78 students and nine teachers and staff of the faculty of social science of the university. The higher education project believes that by exposing more teachers and staff to disability issues positive climate can be created in the higher education institutes to facilitate effective learning for visually impaired students. The project will be conducting more such workshops in the future.

## Training for students who have enrolled in universities



In 2000, six (6) visually impaired youth took the state entrance exam and 4 of them passed successfully and enrolled in universities. The remaining two (2) enrolled in the vocational training center of the MNFB. Those newly enrolled students received computer training. One student who enrolled in the National University of Physical Education is 38 years old and is a testimonial to the fact that age is

no barrier to pursuing higher education. The project believes that the awareness workshops organised over the past few years have motivated persons like Bathisheg to come back to pursue higher education. A computer training programme was organized from 24 August to 15 September 2020 at the vocational training center of the MNFB and students were expected to undergo training for a specific number of days depending on their learning needs.

This year due to COVID 19 situation, universities started on 21<sup>st</sup> September and before that classes were taken online. Two students out of four from the rural countryside and attended computer training classes between 5 and 16 September. Depending on the school schedules, some students were not able to attend classes together and received trainings at different times and on different dates. The computer course was taught by T. Ochirdagva, the computer and assistive technology teacher of the vocational training center.

## Country champions program



Under the country champions program, MNFB conducted 2-days workshop for visually impaired youth from 27 October 2020. A team to organize the event consists of 7 persons including MNFB leaders, representatives from students and those working at mainstream job places and other youth. The workshop program was

developed by the team and all preparation work was made by the office of the general secretary of MNFB.

Two (2) parliament members and representatives from the Ministry of Education and Ministry of Labor and Social Protection (MLSP) attended the workshop.

Although, initially it was planned for 30 visually impaired youth, in reality 50 youth participated.

On the first day, Representatives from the Ministries made presentations on the policies and activities for persons with disabilities including visually impaired persons particularly youth, Also, Mr. Erdenebat who works at the call center of Social Insurance Agency of the MLSP made a presentation on experience, advantages and challenges of working in a mainstream environment as well as issues that the government should pay attention to as they work to increase employment of visually impaired youth. Sharing of experiences and panel discussions involving parents, visually impaired students and government officials were held.

On the second day, 2 successful social and business celebrities made presentations on their success stories and existing opportunities for human development. Also, other visually impaired youth who are working in mainstream employment and studying at universities made presentations to share their experiences and encouraged others. Group discussions were arranged to formulate recommendations for the Government.

At the end of the workshop, feedback was received from the participants that they were very satisfied and requested similar sessions annually. Also they stated that they learned much from each other, along with inspiration regarding future work and study for themselves that increased their confidence.



### **Orientation program for employers**

Under the orientation program for employers, a workshop on how to create reasonable accommodation for visually impaired employees was organised on 8 November 2020 at the Bishreilt Hotel and a total of 35 persons attended. Participants were public officials from the Agency for Development of Persons with Disabilities, Department of Labor, Department for Development of Persons with Disabilities of the Ministry of Labor and Social Protection, Department of Health Insurance from the Ministry of Health, Department of Education from Ulaanbaatar City Government, human resource manager of public hospitals, insurance company, taxi service center and companies which engage in telemarketing services. In order to identify participants, the project did some research on public and private companies to identify work places where visually impaired persons might be employed.



During the workshop, representative from the Education Department of the local government indicated that they would ensure that visually impaired teachers get jobs in public schools. After the workshop the education department asked the project to provide data of visually impaired teachers who are looking for a job and the project has just submitted data of two visually impaired teachers to the department. The project believes that the orientation of employers from time to time and showcasing the abilities of persons with visual impairment will expand opportunities for visually impaired individuals in the employment sector and this will be one of the key additional focus areas of the project in the years to come.

### **Jobs skills development for persons with visual impairment**

Under this activity, a total of 6 visually impaired job seekers between 21 and 41 years of age were selected and the MNFB assessed their qualifications and made career development plans with each of them that provided specific skills to be developed in them to help in securing employment. Based on the assessment they received different trainings including computer skills, orientation and mobility, etc. One of them now has a job at the call center of the Ministry of Labor and Social Protection. It is expected that at least 3 more visually impaired job seekers will be employed soon.

### **Translating ICEVI math videos**

The MNFB has started to translate 10 math videos as a demonstration and introduce them to school teachers from both special and mainstream schools. The project is cooperating with the professor who teaches math and computer science at the Mongolian National University of Education. Currently first 2 introductory videos have been translated into Mongolia and those are ready for use. The project has planned to translate 10 videos and use them for further advocacy activities. The project is also encouraging the university teachers to cooperate with MNFB and translate remaining videos.

As is evident from the report, the Mongolia National Federation of the Blind could implement most of the activities of the higher education project in a satisfactory manner though there were time constraints caused by the Covid pandemic. The project wants to build upon the goodwill created in 2020 with government departments, and universities and hopes to augment opportunities for visually impaired individuals in both the education and employment sectors.

## **Moving Forward with Optimism:**

As the reader has seen, the year 2020 brought with it many challenges. However, our project partners worked very hard to implement activities and achieve many of the desired outcomes. Partner organizations that have been involved with the network for the longest time seemed able to make the shift from in-person to online activities most easily. Thankfully, those same partners were very willing to assist others who were having more difficulty making the transition.

While we were pleased and surprised with many of the creative ways our partners used online approaches we recognize that with activities involving persons with visual impairment, face-to-face training, overall, has more impact than the online virtual training; particularly with several of the area the project is focusing on. For example, the soft skills training involves lot of group interaction and demonstration of activities in the live situation and emulating the same in the online mode presents many challenges.

Similarly there are so many visual oriented activities such as mathematics, orientation and mobility, job skill training, etc., which involve demonstration and such activities were also not as effective when transacted through the online mode.

The lock downs have also brought major disruptions on the employment front. Those working in the technology area managed the lock downs quite well. However, for others working sectors that required a physical presence at the job site or in businesses forced to close down completely as physical offices faced a very different and more difficult situation. While we appreciate our project partners for swiftly adapting to the online learning and engaging visually impaired individuals in the planned training activities, our partners admit that they are looking forward to the end of the current situation so that they can resume more in-person training going forward.

One specific area where the project is experiencing difficulty relates to the documentation enrolment and employment data. As many educational institutions were closed due to the pandemic and often worked remotely with a skeleton workforce, documentation of enrolment of students with visual impairment in the higher education institutions has been difficult to secure. Our partners report that the pandemic has certainly not dampened enrolment as has been reported by Philippines and Vietnam but the exact number is probably an undercount. Many higher education institutes will be sending data once operations are again normalized. Therefore the additional enrolment data of the higher education project for the years 2020 and 2021 will be reported in the annual report of 2021 that will be submitted in January 2022. The situation is very much the same in the employment area. Though some visually impaired graduates have secured employment in the technology sector, there are instances when some of them have lost jobs and ICEVI is proposing to document data on additional employment as well as the sectors where individuals lost jobs. Research on this will be carried out once the situation is back to normal.

Despite all these challenges the silver lining is that our project partners have persisted and remain optimistic and determined to keep moving forward to achieve needed change.

Should the current situation continue, ICEVI will conduct a thorough needs assessment in each country based on their technical and administrative expertise and propose activities for the year 2022 that are achievable.

## Partner Organisations



**Krousar Thmey**  
Cambodia  
[www.krousar-thmey.org](http://www.krousar-thmey.org)



**Resources for the Blind,  
Inc., (RBI)**  
Philippines  
[www.blind.org.ph](http://www.blind.org.ph)



**Pertuni  
(Indonesian Blind Union)**  
Indonesia  
<http://pertuni.idp-europe.org>



**Sao Mai Vocational & Assistive  
Technology Center for the Blind**  
Vietnam  
[www.saomaicenter.org](http://www.saomaicenter.org)



**National University of Laos (NUOL)**  
Lao PDR  
[www.nuol.edu.la](http://www.nuol.edu.la)



**Dagon University**  
Myanmar  
<https://www.dagonuniversity.edu.mm>



**Mongolian National Federation of the Blind (MNFb)**  
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[www.mnfb.mn](http://www.mnfb.mn)

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