



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



ICEVI E-NEWS

Published in July 2020

Contents

1. Message from the President and CEO	3
2. Postponement of Joint ICEVI-WBU General Assembly	4
3. Virtual Meeting of ICEVI Executive Committee	4
4. Include Me Booklet.....	5
5. Sightsavers Webinar	6
6. New Members on the EXCO	7
7. COVID-19 Africa webinar	8
8. COVID-19 Responses of ICEVI Regions.....	9
9. ICEVI Book and Videos of Good Practices	10
10. ICEVI Higher Education strategies are turning out to be good practices during the COVID Pandemic	11
11. The Educator issues of the future.....	13
12. Next Meeting of the ICEVI Executive Committee	13
13. Sad demise of Jaiganesh.....	14

Message from the President and CEO

Dear Readers

Welcome to this July 2020 issue of E-News, the bi-annual digital newsletter of ICEVI. Since release of the last E-News in late 2019, the world has been turned upside down with the COVID-19 pandemic. UNICEF estimates that nearly 1.3 billion children are out of school due to pandemic-induced closures. As a result, educational authorities are turning their attention to alternative teaching methods and modalities, such as the internet, radio and television. However, Mr. Antonio Guterres, the UN Secretary General, has highlighted that the most vulnerable populations and individuals are being hit the hardest as the pandemic deepens existing inequalities. In communities in low and middle income countries, for example, access to learning may be limited due to a unreliable electricity or internet facilities, or limited access to information and learning materials in a child's required format, such as braille, large print or sign language. In this context, we acknowledge the positive efforts of ICEVI members and partners in rethinking their existing program delivery models and responding to the urgent needs of children with disabilities and their families and communities.

In this issue of the E-News, we present an overview of recent ICEVI initiatives and draw your attention to the COVID-19 responses of our Regional Presidents and committees. The pandemic has brought us together as one global community, in which partnerships and solidarity are essential to overcome the health, socio-economic, and educational impacts of COVID-19.

We invite you to also read the ICEVI October 2019- June 2020 Interim Report for additional information about ICEVI activities – the report is available on the ICEVI website at <http://icevi.org/reports/>



Frances Gentle
President



M.N.G. Mani
CEO

Postponement of Joint ICEVI-WBU General Assembly

The WBU-ICEVI Joint General Assembly (GA), originally scheduled for June 2020 in Madrid, has been postponed to May 2021 due to the global COVID-19 pandemic. As the host organization, ONCE, had made elaborate arrangements including the conduct of a Technology exhibition in conjunction with the GA, the extensive planning of ONCE and the International Organising Committee (IOC) was halted and the three organisations WBU, ICEVI and ONCE, carefully studied the situation before making the formal decision to postpone the General Assembly to May 2021 in Madrid.

The International Organising Committee held a conference call on 10th July 2020 to discuss the follow-up measures with regard to the conduct of the WBU-ICEVI Joint General Assembly. It was mentioned by ONCE, the host organization, that the pandemic has been controlled to a large extent in Spain, with the opening of its borders to tourists from a large number of countries. The IOC will continue to monitor the COVID-19 pandemic and ICEVI will keep its constituency informed about the developments.

Virtual Meeting of ICEVI Executive Committee

The International Council for Education of People with Visual Impairment (ICEVI) has undergone many phases since its inception in 1952. The year 2020 will enter into the history of ICEVI for organising the first virtual meeting of the full Executive Committee (EXCO). Since inception, it has been mandatory for the ICEVI to organise at least one face-to-face meeting of the full Executive Committee to discuss the administrative and programmatic aspects of the organisation. The COVID-19 pandemic of 2020 has prevented the opportunity to conduct face-to-face meetings due to social distancing restrictions, closure of international borders and restrictions to air travel. Though the COVID pandemic has dampened the plans for physical meetings, it could not reduce the spirit of ICEVI members and partners to meet online for the exchange of information and ideas. The ICEVI Principal Officers made the decision to organise the first virtual EXCO meeting on 29th June 2020. It was the first of its kind for ICEVI and therefore there was detailed planning prior to the meeting.

At the outset it was decided to prioritise the agenda items as the duration of the virtual meeting was for a maximum of two hours. The Principal Officers wanted to include as many of the items as possible that we would normally discuss in a face-to-face meeting. In order to make the meeting more effective, clear agenda notes for every discussion item were prepared in advance and shared with the members, with a request to forward any questions or discussion points prior to the virtual meeting.

ICEVI is pleased that the first virtual meeting went very well. Out of the 27 members of the Executive Committee, 21 could attend. The EXCO members addressed all agenda items and several future priorities were identified. As expected, members had focused discussions on the status of the joint General Assembly of ICEVI and the World Blind Union (WBU) scheduled for May 2021. It was mentioned that appropriate decisions about the General Assembly would be taken in consultation with the International Organising Committee, consisting of leaders of ICEVI, WBU and the host organization, ONCE.

The EXCO members reiterated that a definite decision on the timing and structure of the joint General Assembly should be taken no later than the first week of November 2020. This date will provide adequate time for ICEVI members and partners and the ICEVI Regional Committees to arrange sponsorship and finalise delegate attendance. The EXCO members reiterated that the health and security of the GA delegates should be the top priority. ICEVI will update its constituency about the General Assembly preparations on a regular basis via ICEVI publications and the ICEVI website.

Include Me Booklet

ICEVI members have collaborated in the creation of "Include Me", a publication focusing on the right to inclusion of children with multiple disabilities and visual impairment (MDVI) or deaf blindness. Considering the importance of this often marginalised group of children with visual impairments, the Executive Committee of ICEVI in its meeting in Addis Ababa, Ethiopia in October 2019, prioritized the preparation of resources or guidelines for parents, teachers and health workers on how to support

and promote the well-being and social inclusion of children with MDVI or deafblindness. The ICEVI EXCO appointed a committee headed by Katie Holland, Executive Director of the Perkins International, with Frances Gentle, President ICEVI; Debbie Gleason, Perkins School for the Blind; Mirko Baur, Vice President Deafblind International; Nandini Rawal, Blind Peoples' Association, India and also Treasurer, ICEVI; and Sian Tesni, Global Advisor of CBM. The committee met by teleconference on a regular basis and developed narratives and pictures depicting how families can include children with MDVI or deafblindness in everyday life.

The first version prepared was in English and the committee took extraordinary care to make the text simple and unambiguous so that families and community members with low levels of literacy could understand the content. Hats off to the committee, which not only brought out the useful publication but rallied support from their international network to produce the booklet in 20 world languages.

The publication was officially released by Frances Gentle, President ICEVI at the virtual Executive Committee meeting on 29 June 2020. The members of the Executive Committee highly appreciated the commitment of this committee in fulfilling the task for the benefit of the blindness sector, especially at difficult times such as the COVID-19 pandemic. There are voices from the Executive Committee to build on this first publication to create companion booklets addressing braille, soft skill development, etc. The committee will seek opinions from all stakeholders and then take up additional tasks on the basis of priority.

Please visit the ICEVI website to download the publication - <http://icevi.org/include-me-mdvi-deafblindness-publication/>

Sightsavers Webinar

ICEVI provided technical guidance to Sightsavers, one of its international partner members, in developing a background paper for the 2020 UNESCO Global Education Monitoring (GEM) Report. The UNESCO-Sightsavers paper is titled "Education of children with visual impairments in Sub-Saharan Africa: Challenges and opportunities" and the principal

author was Guy LeFanu of Sightsavers. The publication is available for download from <https://unesdoc.unesco.org/ark:/48223/pf0000373773>

Andrew Griffiths, Head of Advocacy at Sightsavers, hosted an online webinar to discuss the background paper on 3rd July 2020, with over 100 staff and partners of Sightsavers worldwide in attendance. Gertrude Oforiwa Fefoame, Sightsavers Global Advocacy Advisor for Social Inclusion authored the paper's Foreword and also opened the webinar. Frances Gentle, President ICEVI and Mani, CEO provided technical inputs for the report and delivered a presentation on ICEVI and Sightsavers collaboration. They recalled the initiative of Sightsavers along with CBM in organising the first strategy development meeting of ICEVI in 2002 and also assisting in the preparation of 5000 hardcopies of the strategy goals for 2002-2005 that was released at the ICEVI Golden Jubilee Conference held in the Netherlands in 2002. The webinar participants were also informed of the key roles of Andrew Griffiths as Sightsavers representative on the ICEVI Executive Committee, Member of the ICEVI Governance Committee and Chairperson of the Nominations Committee which is tasked with preparing the slate of ICEVI Principal Officer candidates for elections at the next General Assembly. Gertrude Fefoame of Sightsavers is President of the ICEVI Africa Region.

Besides providing feedback on the reports, the participants asked questions about the COVID-19 responses of the ICEVI regions, the online instructional materials prepared by ICEVI, and collaboration and networking opportunities.

ICEVI welcomes opportunities to collaborate with other international partners in organising similar webinars so that the ideas and key messages regarding education of persons with visual impairment are shared globally for wider dissemination.

New Members on the EXCO

Since the last meeting of the Executive Committee of ICEVI held in Addis Ababa, Ethiopia in October 2019, three new members have become part of the Executive Committee. David Clarke is the official representative of the Royal National Institute of Blind People (RNIB) in the UK in the place

of Kevin Carey. David comes with a lot of expertise in technology and preparation of accessible materials. His ICT expertise will be valuable in promoting the Visionary Learning Project in Africa. Monika Brenes is the new member of the Executive Committee representing CBM in the place of Lars Bosselmann (and Sian Tesni). Monika has previously served as a member on the ICEVI EXCO prior to the nomination of Lars Bosselmann. She was closely involved in the ICEVI committees that revised the 2002-2005 Strategy document and prepared the broad guidelines for the various categories of ICEVI membership. CBM and Sightsavers were the first International Partner Members of ICEVI in 2002 and also partly support the position of CEO. The third new member of the ICEVI EXCO is Penny Rosenblum representing the American Foundation for the Blind (AFB). AFB is one of the founding members of ICEVI, together with RNIB and Perkins School for the Blind.

The ICEVI Executive Committee extends a warm welcome to David, Monika and Penny, and expresses thanks to our outgoing Committee members.

COVID-19 Africa webinar

The ICEVI Africa Region conducted its first webinar on “COVID-19 and The Education of Learners with Visual Impairment in Africa” on Friday 10th July 2020. The Session Panelists were:

Gertrude Oforiwa Fefoame, President, ICEVI Africa, Ghana; Praveena Sakhraj-Ely, First Vice President, ICEVI Global and Director, National Department of Justice and Constitutional Development, South Africa; and Fred Haga, Director, Directorate of Special Needs Education, Ministry of Education, Kenya.

The webinar addressed a wide range of strategies to be adopted by community members, teachers and parents to ensure that children with visual impairment receive adequate attention during the COVID-19 pandemic and are not left out of the education system.

The ICEVI Africa Region has also developed its COVID-19 response statement that was shared with government officials in the region and

international bodies for consideration and it is heartening that many governments are referring to the document in formulating strategies towards COVID-19 responses.

COVID-19 Responses of ICEVI Regions

Soon after the surfacing of the COVID-19 pandemic world over, the ICEVI Regions were requested to devise strategies to promote alternative learning activities for students with visual impairments wherever possible and to raise awareness among government leaders and education practitioners about education of children with disabilities. The areas of focus of the ICEVI regional committees have included technical know-how for education of persons with disabilities, including persons with visual impairment, to facilitate their learning opportunities while staying with their parents and without the direct assistance of teachers.

We are grateful to the ICEVI Regional Presidents and Committees for their work in developing COVID-19 responses and strategies. The ICEVI Secretariat has created a dedicated section of the website for the COVID-19 responses – go to <http://icevi.org/icevi-covid-19-response/>

The specific responses of each region are listed below for ready reference:

- Pacific SPEVI Learning @ home resources-VI (as at April 2020)
- ICEVI Africa – Appel à l’action COVID19 FR
- ICEVI Africa – Call to Action for an inclusive Covid-19 response to Education
- ICEVI Latin America – Documento-técnico-sobre-educación-inclusiva
- ICEVI Latin America – OM-in-times-of-pandemic-Technical-Recommendations
- ICEVI Latin America – OM-en tiempos de pandemia – Recomendaciones técnicas
- ICEVI Latin America – Technical-document-on-inclusive-education
- ICEVI West Asia – COVID19 and Mobility for persons who are blind

ICEVI Book and Videos of Good Practices

Higher Education for students with visual impairment is one of the flagship programmes of ICEVI with the support of The Nippon Foundation. During the last decade, the program has facilitated higher education opportunities for more than 2500 students with visual impairment in Indonesia, Philippines, Vietnam, Cambodia, Myanmar, Laos and Mongolia. The program has empowered individuals with visual impairments through education and employment and has served as a strong motivator for parents of children with visual impairment to send their children to school. It is evident from the reports of our program partners that the higher education graduates in these countries often serve as role models for young students with visual impairments.

ICEVI and the Overbrook Nippon Network on Education Technology (ON-NET), which is also collaborating with ICEVI in implementing a number of technology projects in the partner countries, are jointly preparing a publication highlighting the impact created by The Nippon Foundation on the lives of young visually impaired persons in the East Asia region. The publication is currently being prepared and will be released at the next General Assembly of ICEVI.

ICEVI and the ON-NET, in collaboration with our program partners, have prepared more than 75 videos highlighting various thematic dimensions of higher education and technology interventions, including the University Preparation Program, Accessible Learning Materials, Technology, Soft Skills, and Employment Orientation. The videos also present specific country experiences and case studies of the higher education learners and employees. Most of these videos will form part of the publication. The videos will be of use for individuals and training institutions in preparing their training activities. The videos will be uploaded to the ICEVI website and a separate YouTube channel will be created for wider dissemination. More details on the publication as well as videos will be provided on a regular basis.

ICEVI Higher Education strategies are turning out to be good practices during the COVID Pandemic

The COVID-19 pandemic has resulted in lockdowns in most countries and forced Higher Education students to stay at home. However, despite this challenge, we are pleased to report that most higher education partners were able to maintain a reasonable degree of project momentum.

Five practices which we have been following in the Higher Education project for quite some time have immensely helped to assist learners with visual impairments during the period of lockdown and these are worth mentioning.

1. **Skills in using Technology:** From the outset, the Higher Education program has placed a great deal of attention on equipping students with high level skills in the use of the computer as a learning tool. We can recall statements made by some general educators about five years ago that the students with visual impairments in the Higher Education project had better computer skills than their sighted peers. However, we all understood that for students with a visual impairment computer skills are not a luxury but a necessity. These skills are helping students with visual impairments, now more than ever, as the current pandemic has placed heightened attention on remote on-line learning. From the reports we are receiving, project beneficiaries appear to be doing quite well as they transition to remote on-line learning environments.
2. **Computer lending services:** The computer lending service originated with our project partner Resources for the Blind, Philippines and later expanded to other countries. The Higher Education project assisted our partners to secure laptops and netbooks to lend to students with visual impairments for specific time periods to complete their assignments before they are passed along to other students in need. This system is working very well and is an integral part of the Higher Education project. The senior students in some countries have bought their own laptops after making use of the loan services and therefore it can be said that most of the Higher Education students have laptops or desktops at home; either

purchased or loaned. This is a big help especially at the time of COVID lockdown.

3. **Network among students:** The third important development in the Higher Education program has been the development of networks among students with visual impairments and their sighted friends studying in Higher Education. We have always encouraged beneficiaries to make effective use of social media to exchange information and to share learning materials. The project leaders have viewed these as simply good habits and practices for all students with visual impairments. No one ever imagined how welcome these practices would be in this time of lockdowns.
4. **Preparation of accessible online materials:** The country-level higher education projects over the years have prepared hundreds of e-books and other online materials as preparation of braille books was not feasible due to cost and production times. The online materials are of great help in the learning of students with visual impairments at the time of the COVID lockdowns.
5. **ICEVI Mathematics Made Easy YouTube Channel:** The “ICEVI Math Made Easy” YouTube channel with instructional videos on Mathematics has emerged as an excellent learning opportunity for teachers and parents. The videos have become a particularly welcome resource to teachers and parents to address Mathematics, especially at a time when schools are closed. These instructional materials are available on and off line and it is gratifying that these self-instructional materials are of help especially when teachers and parents are coping with closed schools and dealing with new on-line learning platforms that are just being developed. ICEVI has prepared 175 Mathematics videos ahead of its scheduled time of December 2020 and we are pleased that these learning materials are of help during this time of lockdown. Additional videos will also be produced in the near future and uploaded on a regular basis. In the meantime, scripts of the Mathematics instructional videos are being prepared and uploaded onto the website of ICEVI, allowing countries to translate these video materials into their own local languages. To

explore the YouTube instructional videos, please visit the homepage of the ICEVI website, or go directly to

https://www.youtube.com/channel/UCrmcpSzNg_9EXLbqExtVIAQ

The Educator issues of the future

Braille is the theme of the next issue of ICEVI's official magazine The Educator. Within this broad title, articles are being invited underlining the effective teaching of Braille, learning devices, research in the usage of Braille, etc., are most welcome. Those interested in contributing articles may contact Dr. Kay Ferrell, the Editor of The Educator or the ICEVI Secretariat for further guidelines – Email kay.ferrell@comcast.net or ceo201922@gmail.com

ICEVI members may also suggest preferred topics for the future issues of The Educator.

Next Meeting of the ICEVI Executive Committee

Considering the fact that online strategies have to be depended on to a large extent during times of crisis such as the COVID-19 pandemic, the ICEVI Principal Officers have suggested frequent meetings of the various officers of ICEVI to maintain networking and collaboration among members. The ICEVI Principal Officers, Regional ICEVI Presidents and committees are holding regular conference calls to review global and regional strategies and propose innovative activities during this period of uncertainty and disruption to education.

The first Executive Committee meeting in the virtual format that was held on 29th June 2020 and will be followed by a second virtual meeting in November 2020. ICEVI anticipates significant progress in addressing the effects of the COVID pandemic by the November meeting. The outcomes of the November meeting will also be shared with the ICEVI constituency through the communication channels that include The Educator, E-News and the ICEVI website.

Sad demise of Jaiganesh

We are sad to inform the sudden demise of M.B.Jaiganesh, a colleague at the ICEVI Secretariat who passed away on 22nd June 2020. The last ICEVI event attended by Jaiganesh was the West Asia Regional Conference held in Kathmandu, Nepal in February 2020 where he assisted in the conduct of workshops and also presented a paper on Inclusive Education. ICEVI recognises the contribution of Jaiganesh to ICEVI and we pray that his soul should rest in peace. ICEVI also expresses its deepest condolences to his bereaved family.

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

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