

# THE HIGHER EDUCATION NETWORK

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

## ANNUAL REPORT 2023

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

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## *Higher Education Project – A Legacy*

The higher education project of the East Asia region that was commenced in 2006 has become a legacy. Initially, the objective of the project was to expand enrolment of students with visual impairment in tertiary level education, but to do that the project needed to identify and address the major barriers that were both limiting access and leading to high drop-out rates. In the course of the next several years as the program commenced in Indonesia in 2006 and then extended to the Philippines and Vietnam in 2008 (and eventually to Cambodia in 2010, Myanmar in 2014, Laos in 2015 and Mongolia in 2017), it became apparent that while each country faced its own unique challenges there was a consistent pattern of need that continued to emerge in each of the countries.

The areas of greatest needs were remarkably similar and always included 1) the need for access to assistive technology and training in its use, 2) the dearth of accessible learning materials, 3) the need for awareness and public education regarding the capabilities of blind learners and the 4) the need for public policy changes that supported inclusion.

The project partners had addressed these four issues with the strategies available locally and the results are heart-warming. The East Asia region, perhaps has the largest numbers of visually impaired graduates who have been networking on regular basis and proving how effectively they themselves become change agents in influencing positive attitudes and proactive policies assisting persons with visual impairment.

2023 is the final year of the current cycle of the higher education project of ICEVI with the support of The Nippon Foundation. Though the higher education project originated with the primary objective of increasing the enrolment of students with visual impairment in higher education institutions in the partner countries, the focus has been more on employment creation and related activities since 2016. The employment related activities included development of soft skills, organising employment fairs, enhancing job skills of visually impaired individuals, etc. At the same time the partners have been assisting the higher education students who are already in the mainstream education systems.

More than 3000 students with visual impairment were benefited by this program in the implementing countries namely Indonesia, Philippines, Vietnam, Cambodia, Myanmar (until 2020), Laos and Mongolia.

Sustainability has been the main focus of the higher education project since its inception, and it is gratifying that the partner countries have built the sustainability

factor in the implementation of the programme. The review of the activities of the partner countries in the last three years clearly revealed that the higher education of visually impaired individuals has already been absorbed into the mainstream systems through necessary Decrees and legislations. For example, many private universities too have come forward to offer higher education programmes for persons with visual impairment and in the case of some countries, the necessary Decrees have also been enacted to ensure that quality higher education is provided to persons with visual impairment. ICEVI places on record the proactive measures undertaken by the project partners in ensuring that the higher education initiatives would go on even after the current cycle and beyond.

ICEVI is grateful to The Nippon Foundation for being the key supporting organisation in implementing the Higher Education project in the East Asia region which became one of the flagship activities of ICEVI for the past one and half decades. The project won many laurels including the Zero Project Award in 2017.

ICEVI members sincerely thank Larry Campbell, former President of ICEVI who connected ICEVI with The Nippon Foundation and served as the Director of the project for many years which was later taken over by Dr. Mani, CEO ICEVI. The impact created by the project on the lives of persons with visual impairment in the East Asia region will go a long way in their empowerment. The Executive Board of ICEVI extends its heartfelt thanks to Mr. Yohei Sasakawa, Chairman of The Nippon Foundation and all officers involved with the higher education project for their faith in ICEVI in carrying out this landmark activity in the East Asia region.

## **Enrollment of visually impaired students in higher education institutions**

When the pilot project commenced in Indonesia in 2006, it was a big challenge to bring even a few visually impaired students into higher education institutions. That was because of the reason that not many role models for younger students with visual impairment were available.

In 2005, ICEVI Survey in the Asia region revealed that less than 10% of children with visual impairment had access to any type of education; and the percentage of children entering into higher education when compared with the total population of persons with visual impairment was not even 0.5%. There was no doubt that most of these individuals were not able to pursue higher education because of the many challenges they faced, although they had the capability to do so. That called for a dramatic effort to change the situation so that significant numbers of qualified students with visual impairment have the opportunity to access higher education during the next decade. The project had a conservative estimate of 100-125 new

students with visual impairment on an average annually getting into higher education when the project decided to expand it to Philippines, Vietnam, Cambodia and other countries in the region.

The partner countries had put in more efforts not only to meet the targets and in fact exceeded the expectations. With solid awareness created about the project, the initial years witnessed a clear surge in enrolment which steadily increased in the subsequent years and at the end of 2023, the number stood at 3016. The year wise and cumulative enrolment are presented below:

Country	2006 – 2007	2006 – 2011	2006 – 2014	2006 – 2015	2006 – 2016	2006 – 2017	2006 – Dec 2017	2006 – 2018	2006 – 2019	2006 – 2020	2006 – 2021	2006 – 2022	Additions in 2023	2006 – 2023
Indonesia	250	385	480	609	631	637	644	660	678	678	729	754	32	786
Vietnam	28	354	470	563	630	689	736	757	799	841	871	912	50	962
Philippines	32	460	489	671	710	726	732	751	769	793	828	850	27	877
Cambodia	04	14	22	52	83	91	91	105	127	135	157	196	8	204
Myanmar	-	-	29	54	69	88	88	114	114	122	122	122	0	122
Laos	-	-	07	16	19	25	25	33	33	33	36	36	0	36
Mongolia	-	-	-	-	-	-	08	14	16	20	23	26	3	29
<b>Students Enrolled</b>	<b>314</b>	<b>1213</b>	<b>1497</b>	<b>1965</b>	<b>2142</b>	<b>2256</b>	<b>2324</b>	<b>2434</b>	<b>2536</b>	<b>2622</b>	<b>2766</b>	<b>2896</b>	<b>120</b>	<b>3016</b>

## Shift of Focus to Employment

The project partners realized the need to promote employment opportunities for the students with visual impairment who were graduating through the higher education project. The preparation work towards this area commenced in late 2012. From 2012 – 2013 onwards, the focus on employment became an integral part of the project, with the partners focusing on preparation for employment, technological applications, and advocacy towards inclusive universities. The training initiatives of all project partners on “soft skills” and employment preparation were offered to the students with visual impairment while they were undergoing higher education courses. This resulted in the generation of gainful employment for a number of the students. During the academic year 2015 – 2016, over 100 were supported to find employment.

The initial experiences in the employment arena revealed that the employment potential of persons with visual impairment could be enhanced by improving their technical as well as soft skills and to meet this objective, the project partners have been organising a number of programmes to expand the employability skills of graduates with visual impairment.

Until 2023, the higher education project could facilitate employment for over 550 graduates with visual impairment and the details are as follows:

Country	2015 – 2016	2015 – 2017	2015 – Apr-Dec 2017	2015 – 2018	2015 – 2019	2015 – 2020	2015 – 2021	Additio ns in 2022	2015 – 2022	2015 – 2023
Indonesia	39	39	39	48	49	48	59	14	73	92
Vietnam	27	54	78	91	101	109	128	15	143	166
Philippines	13	25	36	54	71	83	94	15	109	117
Cambodia	38	74	76	90	94	95	110	-	110	149
Myanmar	-	-	10	11	11	11	11	-	11	11
Laos	-	-	-	-	-	-	3	-	3	5
Mongolia	-	-	-	2	-	-	7	5	12	16
<b>Persons Employed</b>	<b>117</b>	<b>192</b>	<b>239</b>	<b>296</b>	<b>326</b>	<b>346</b>	<b>412</b>	<b>49</b>	<b>461</b>	<b>556</b>

## Activities of 2023

The implementation of the higher education project includes a few key inter-regional activities that benefit all partner countries and specific activities pertaining to countries.

In 2023, the two major regional activities included the conduct of a Regional Summit of Youth and the second activity was to prepare instructional videos on teaching mathematics by using the expertise available within the partner countries. The reports of these two regional activities are presented below:

### Regional Youth Summit

In a remarkable achievement for the second consecutive year, Resources for the Blind Inc. (RBI) Philippines took pride in hosting the Regional Youth Summit 2023 from December 3 to 5 at the Sequoia Hotel Manila Bay, Parañaque City, Metro Manila, Philippines. The summit brought together a total of 85 participants and speakers with 53 young individuals with visual disabilities hailing from six countries in the East Asian region. As an integral component of the Higher Education Project, this initiative is a collaborative effort between ICEVI and the Nippon Foundation, underscoring the commitment to advancing education and fostering collaboration among visually impaired youth on a regional scale.

On Day 1 of the summit, Mr. Gary Jamora, Chairperson of Resources for the Blind Inc. Philippines, set the tone by highlighting the transformative potential of the blind community as agents of change. He emphasized the importance of empowerment



and collective strength among individuals with visual disabilities. Dr. M.N.G. Mani, CEO of ICEVI, provided an overview of the program, focusing on the history and progress of the global campaign "Education for All People with Visual Impairment" that was a catalyst for the commencement of higher education for creating role models among visually impaired youth. Ms. Carla Pendon shared her inspiring journey, emphasizing preparedness, perseverance, and prayer. Delegates from various countries discussed challenges faced by visually impaired youth and highlighted the role of family support, advocacy, education, technology, and employment opportunities. The Achievements Report showcased the positive impact of ICEVI and the Nippon Foundation, with countries celebrating advancements in education, increased tertiary education accessibility, and enhanced employment opportunities for young people with visual disabilities. The day concluded with a recognition that empowerment is a commitment requiring persistence and purpose.

On Day 2 of the summit, Ms. Carmen Zubiaga, Consultant for Policy Development at the House of Representatives, delivered a powerful talk, acknowledging positive changes in breaking down barriers but emphasizing the ongoing work needed. She urged young participants to unite and build local communities, connecting them with larger organizations representing diverse disabilities. Ms. Zubiaga introduced a rights-based approach, emphasizing understanding problems and actively participating in solutions through meaningful conversations. The second session highlighted the success of the Higher Education Project, with Mr. Dang Hoai Phuc sharing the partner's perspective while Ms. Kwai Nan and Ms. Marie Joyce Lopez detailed the beneficiaries' perspectives. The panel discussion on employers' dialogue chaired by Ms. Aria Indrawati showcased insights from employers who emphasized the importance of skills development and highlighted inclusive hiring practices. The final session, "Sharing of Local and International Employment Experiences," moderated by Mr. Mike Daryl Ocol and Ms. Carla Pendon, focused on delegates' employment journeys, addressing challenges and emphasizing the need for self-advocacy and a supportive environment for personal and professional growth despite obstacles.



The third and final day of the summit focused on imparting crucial skills to attendees for effective advocacy and networking. In the "Networking/Advocacy: Making Your Voice Heard" panel discussion, moderated by Ms. Marie Joyce Lopez, Mr. Silatul Rahim Dahman passionately shared communication strategies, emphasizing the impact of environmental and attitudinal barriers on society's perception of people with disabilities. He stressed the necessity of a collective approach to advocacy and shared his journey of overcoming disbelief, highlighting the positive outcomes of belief and support. Mr. Earl Sumauag of Foundever discussed inclusive hiring practices and introduced the "Language Academy Plus" initiative, empowering individuals with visual impairments through comprehensive training. Mrs. Jonalyn Lucas of the National Council on Disability Affairs shared her CLEAR PINK approach to networking and advocacy. The drafting of a resolution, chaired by Mr. Mike Daryl Ocol, outlined key points for attendees to implement in their respective countries, fostering a palpable sense of collective commitment to advancing goals and creating a positive impact in their communities.

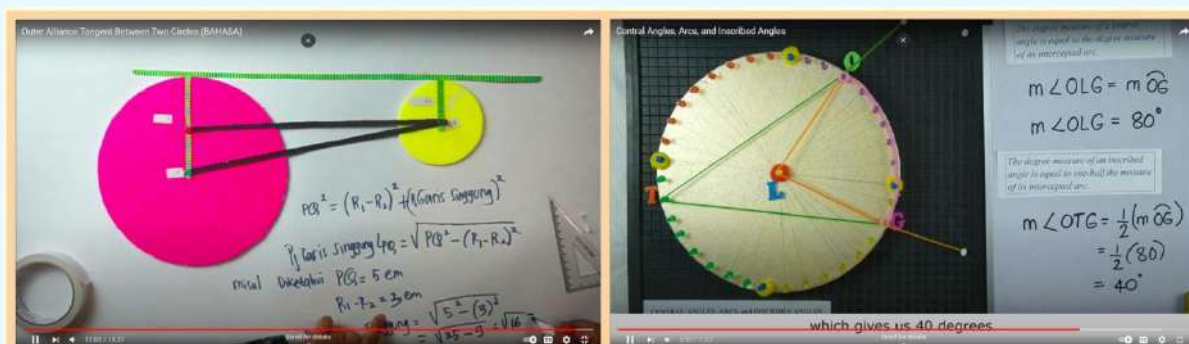
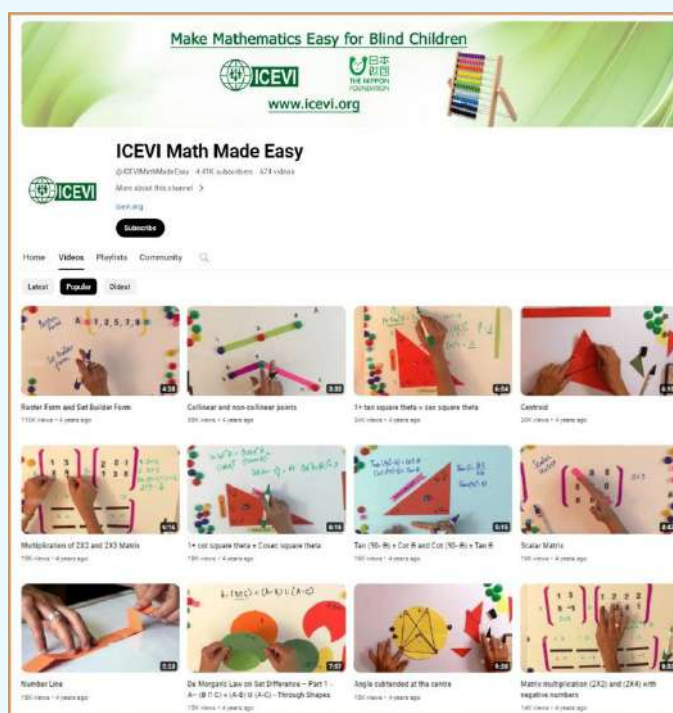
During the closing program of the summit, Mr. Sohan Kumar Motwani, in a powerful valedictory speech, expressed gratitude for the enriching experiences and emphasized the importance of conferences for networking and advocating for the rights of Persons with disabilities. Mr. Ichiro Kabasawa, Executive Director of the Nippon Foundation reiterated their commitment to supporting the young advocates in claiming their spaces in society. Dr. M.N.G. Mani bid farewell to his position as CEO of ICEVI, yet assuring he can always be their "Friend Mani." Lastly, Ms. Amelia Torrente, Executive Director of RBI, expressed sincere gratitude for the successful event, testifying to the life-changing impact of the Higher Education Project for young people with visual disabilities.

## **Regional Activity - Instructional Videos on Teaching Mathematics**

As a part of the higher education project of ICEVI and implemented in the East Asia region with the support of The Nippon Foundation, 674 instructional videos on mathematics have been prepared and uploaded on the dedicated ICEVI YouTube channel, **"ICEVI Math Made Easy"** - [https://www.youtube.com/channel/UCrmcpSzNg\\_9EXLbqExtVIAQ](https://www.youtube.com/channel/UCrmcpSzNg_9EXLbqExtVIAQ). To date, the YouTube channel has attracted more than 4400 subscribers. The videos cover a variety of topics ranging from primary level to senior secondary level mathematics education. Besides these videos, there are self-Instructional lessons on teaching the abacus to children with visual impairment. Of the total 674 videos, 463 videos were prepared by Dr MNG Mani, CEO of ICEVI, who has expertise in mathematics. The other videos were prepared by teachers from the Philippines and Indonesia.

A master training workshop was organised in Jakarta for teacher educators from Philippines, Vietnam, Indonesia, Cambodia and Laos in November 2022. These participants have subsequently organised workshops for teachers in their own countries. The project participants in Philippines and Indonesia were encouraged to train more teachers who in turn could prepare instructional videos from the perspectives of the teachers. The project aim was to have a variety of approaches in learning mathematics concepts

and therefore teachers are encouraged to prepare videos on specific themes focusing on primary to senior secondary level education in their home countries.



It is gratifying that the Philippines has produced 87 videos and Indonesia has produced 68 videos (In English and Bahasa) exclusively made by the local teachers. These videos were edited by the Project team and close captioning was added to each video. The videos serve as an excellent resource for parents, teachers and children with visual impairment for strengthening their learning of mathematics.

## Country-specific activities

*In addition to the above key regional activities, the partner countries carried out a number of activities pertaining to higher education and employment. The summaries of activities of these partner countries organised in 2023 are presented in the following sections.*



## CAMBODIA

### Krousar Thmey is the higher education partner in Cambodia

Created in the refugee camps at the border with Thailand in 1991, **Krousar Thmey** (“New Family” in Khmer) is the first Cambodian foundation supporting underprivileged children. It is a non-political and non-religious organisation. Since its creation, Krousar Thmey aims to enable the integration of underprivileged and disabled children through education and appropriate support in accordance with their traditions and beliefs.

As part of staff capacity-building efforts, Krousar Thmey, in collaboration with its partner Finn Church Aid (FCA), visited several places in 2023 to gain practical experience on inclusive work place adaptation and facilitation process for persons with disability. A total of nine participants, including six women, engaged in this learning visit. During the visit, participants had the opportunity to go to several places, including the Enabling Village, functioning as a support center under the management of the Ministry of Family and Planning, Ministry of Manpower, and Disabled People Association.

The Krousar Thmey team noted that raising awareness on disabilities to the public, upskilling / improving skills for PwD, improving job-matching programs, increasing collaboration among relevant stakeholders were the keys takeaways for an effective replication in the Cambodian context.

### Meeting and facilitation with employers and students

During the reporting period, the project team conducted several sessions of meetings with students and employers to get updates on their studies, and to know about their current situation at



their work place. Follow-up meetings were held with students in Siem reap, Battambang, Kampong cham, and Phnom Penh to gather updated information of their learning at university.

Through these meetings and visits, the project team engaged in discussions with employers on a potential collaboration and explored employment opportunities for youth with disabilities. They also conducted discussions with students to identify potential topics to include in orientation sessions.

## **Provincial meeting for promoting inclusive employment**

To promote employment opportunities for PwD including the ones with visual impairment, an inclusive employment event at the provincial level was organized in Siem reap province. Various stakeholders participated, including the provincial Governor, the provincial department of social affairs, provincial department of labor and vocational training, provincial department of Education, Siem reap job center (National employment agency based at provincial level), representatives from some potential employers, Disabled people association (DPA) in Siem reap, relevant NGOs: People's Action for Inclusive Development-Pafid, Finn Church Aid-FCA, Rabbit School organization-RSO, National Institute for Special Education (NISE), and youth & students with disabilities from Siem reap province.

Krousar Thmey, in cooperation with the National Institute for Special Education (NISE) also facilitated the participation of 3 people from the NISE, 3 teachers and 7 blind students from the special school Siem reap, and 3 representatives from employers to join this event.

From this workshop, participants gained awareness on disabilities, learned about the potential of PwD who could perform similar tasks as non-disabled, and employers also expressed their interest to get PwD into work service if PwD could demonstrate enough potential skills.

## **National forum on inclusive employment for persons with disabilities**

Aiming to strengthen cooperation and ensuring employment opportunities for persons with disabilities in public service, a national forum on inclusive employment for persons with disabilities was organized in November 2023. It was mainly led and facilitated by People's Action for Inclusive Development (Pafid), with involvement from various development partners – Finn Church Aid, Rabbit school, GIZ, and Krousar Thmey. Government bodies also participated– Ministry of social affairs, National employment agency (called NEA, under Ministry of Labor and vocational training), as well as the private sector (banks, factories). Youth with disabilities were also invited to join this important event; totalling 200 participants (80 female). Krousar Thmey facilitated the participation of 11 students (4 female) with disabilities, 5 representatives (3 female) from private companies, and 6 (3 female) from the NISE.

## Orientation workshop for students with visual impairment

In July, the project team organized one orientation session for students with visual impairment from Kampong cham, Siem reap, and Battambang special schools. The workshop lasted a full day: it was conducted in Battambang special school with the participation of 32 students (13 girls).



## Networking activities with relevant stakeholders



During the reporting period, the ACC officer was also involved in several formal and informal meetings with the National Employment Agency (NEA) of Ministry of Labor and Vocational Training, and Disability Action Council (DAC) of Ministry of Social Affairs. The discussions helped gathering information regarding

employment opportunities for youths with disabilities. The ACC officer also had the opportunity to raise awareness on pathway for employment for PwD especially person with visual impairment.

## Regional Youth summit in Manila

In December 2023, 4 youths with visual impairment who came from higher education and 2 youths with visual impairment currently at work, accompanied by one facilitator from Krousar Thmey, and two



members of the NISE participated in the “Regional Youth summit” conducted in Manila, Philippines. The summit allowed the participants, especially youths with visual impairment, to learn new things on different cultures, to share experience of



self-development approach. After the summit, when the participants came back to Cambodia, there was small reflection workshop gathering 13 youths (5 youths involving summit as guest speakers to share experience, and 8 youths from higher education and special high school as participants to learn).



## Challenges

Even when the Covid-19 pandemic seemed to be lessened, some long-term effects are still affecting some employers: some closed down during that drastic time and haven't yet returned back to a normal activity. They are still operating with a limited number of services which also affect the employment opportunities for youth with visual impairment.

Job market proved to be more competitive for applicants and some employers still require a high level of skills from their personnel, which tends to make it harder for youths with visual impairment who have limited skills to challenge the new industrialized-working environment.

In cooperation with the National Institute for Special Education, Krousar Thmey is committed to keep a good relation with relevant stakeholders and various universities and employers to ensure the benefit for youth with disabilities in terms of promoting higher education and employment opportunity.



## INDONESIA

**Pertuni (Indonesian Blind Association)**, is the partner organisation in Indonesia. Pertuni is a national blind member based organization in Indonesia and it has its chapters in 33 provinces and branches in 210 cities/districts throughout Indonesia. The Pertuni plays an important role in lobbying for the rights of persons with visual impairment. The country level activities organised in 2023 are enumerated as follows:

### Computer training

The project organised a basic skills training visually impaired students need to have for their higher education as well as for preparing inclusive employment system by equipping their “computer skill”. During the Project period of 2023, 24 high school students and high school graduates participated in the Training; 12 students for each semester. Topic they learnt included Microsoft office, Social media, and Basic Google application which were commonly used by computer users, especially for higher education purposes.

### Pertuni Edu Ready To Campus – in-person

This program works more as “group counselling”, for which the target groups included high-school-blind-students as well as high-school-blind-graduates.

During the last three-year Covid 19 pandemic period, this activity was implemented virtually, that



was named as “Pertuni Edu Smart Talk”. The activity organised in 2023 was the first in-person mode of this program, which adapted some modifications in its implementation. Project area was Banda Aceh – capital city of Aceh Province and its surroundings. The reason why The Project chose this area was that inclusive education system is not yet in place and as a result most of students with visual impairment in this province pursue primary and secondary education in special schools. 13 students participated in this group counselling. Topics discussed in this programme included Job and career identification, University study programs identification, University life, How to cope challenges before and during university life, Necessary soft skill for university life, and Learning from success stories of Higher Ed Project alumnus.

## Pertuni Edu Ready To Campus – Virtual

In addition to the in-person mode, the virtual mode counselling session for high school students with visual impairment was also organised as a part of university preparation session. These sessions were conducted in the second semester of the Project. There had been 15 participants of these sessions who were divided into two groups, as follows:

1. The first one was alumnus of Pertuni Edu Ready Go To Campus – in-person, who were still need additional more profound session; - 6 persons
2. High school students with visual impairment who were not participate in the in-person session; - 9 persons, who were participants of Pertuni virtual computer training.

## Individual Virtual Career Counselling Session



Individual virtual career counselling sessions were provided by The Project to university students before and after they participated in “pre-employment soft skill training”. 24 clients participated in this virtual counselling session; they were pre-employment soft skill training participants.

## Pre-Employment Soft Skill Training



Pertuni conducted pre-employment soft skill training in Yogyakarta. The Objectives of the training were to build awareness and understanding toward participants upon the importance of having and developing quality soft skill for entering inclusive job market and to provide with necessary soft skill for entering inclusive job market. The program also supported participants to be more ready in entering inclusive job market and develop understanding and awareness upon job diversification

opportunity they might have in the future. 24 participants consisting of University student, fresh graduates and graduates who had short experience in working with non-profit oriented institution attended.

## Developing Communication with Business Association as part of Orientation for Employers

During the Covid 19 pandemic period, the Pertuni Higher Education Project had been developing communication and cooperation with The Indonesian Business Association. In 2023, the project also started developing communication with The Young Business People Association. These bodies helped the project in the recruitment process of visually impaired graduates in business houses. As part of orientation for employers, The Project also reprinted the Guideline Book on Job Recruitment and Job Placement for People with Visual Impairment.

## Developed network and cooperation with Government

For the last year of Higher Education Project in Indonesia, networking with government body working in employment sector was done with The Provincial Government. When we released the publication book “Transition To Employment” in early August 2022, there was important information the project had obtained from the representative of The Ministry of Employment that The Ministry had started implementing mandate of The Disability Law, to encourage local government, both in provincial as well as city/municipal/regency level to establish “Disability Service Unit” in employment sector. The Disability service Units were located under the Local Government Offices working in employment sector.

Learning from the function mandated by Article 55 of Disability Law above, The Employment Disability Service Unit has such strategic position and function. However, up till now, Pertuni had not yet heard steps as well as achievement they made, after more than one year of establishment in many provinces and cities throughout Indonesia. Even the project assumed that very few of them had link and network with organization working for or with people with disabilities.





## Other Relevant activities

Within The year of 2023, Higher Education project of Pertuni also conducted as well as participated in regional activities, as follows:

1. Activities related with mathematic, which were implemented by Mitra Netra Foundation, Pertuni Higher Education Project Partner in Indonesia, as follows:
  - Provided factory-made adaptive math learning aid to be distributed to regular schools as well as students with visual impairment who are studying in regular schools;
  - Produced 68 mathematic tutorial video from elementary up till secondary level that were uploaded on ICEVI website. The Indonesian version of the videos have also been uploaded on Mitra Netra’s website.
2. The project sent presenters and participants to ICEVI East Asia Regional Conference, conducted in September 2023 in Yogyakarta, Indonesia. Within this event, Indonesia Higher Education Project sponsored 16 participants to the Regional Conference, among them, 4 people presented papers in the concurrent session which the topic were about mathematic, technology related with mathematic, as well as inclusive education implemented in university in Indonesia.
3. Participated in Regional Blind Youth Summit, conducted in Manila on December 3<sup>rd</sup> - 5<sup>th</sup>, hosted by RBI. Within this regional event, Pertuni sent 7 young blind people with visual impairment who were university students - 2 persons, as well as 5 employed young blind people, and one employer – The Founder of Bhumi Varta Technology, who had employed a young person with visual impairment within the company.

## Career Opportunity in Sport

Indonesia is keen develop career in “sport” for persons with disabilities. The momentum was started when Indonesia was the host of Asian Para Games in 2018. The new Government policy had influence on the work of National Paralympic Committee (NPC) in Indonesia to improve their athlete regeneration. One of the groups they targeted was university students with disabilities, including visual disability. Pertuni



Pre Employment Soft Skill Training alumnus are currently developing their career in sport. They started participating in “sport training center”, in local, provincial as well as national level, to prepare themselves in multy-event Para-games.



## Lao PDR

**National University of Laos (NUOL)** is the higher education partner in Lao PDR. Founded in 1996, the National University of Laos is located in Vientiane. The University has many Faculties specialising in humanities, science, management, etc. The program also collaborates with other organisations of/for the blind, which focus on advocacy, education, networking, etc., to empower persons with visual impairment.

*In 2023, the following activities were carried out.*

### Learning Material Production

Learning Materials is still in need for students with visual impairment from two faculties – the Faculty of Letters and Faculty of Education where students with visual impairment are now studying. For this activity, Inclusive Education Division (IED) prepared braille materials 13 titles and facilitated the effective learning of visually impaired students.

### Math Training Activity

Inclusive Education Division (IED) organized two math training activities in 2023. The first math training activity was organized at the National University of Laos and the second one was organized at the Department of Labor and Social Welfares Building in Savannakhet Province and both math training activities were led by Dr. Bounmy Kham-insou who underwent the masters training program in Jakarta, Indonesia in 2022.



On 28–29 March 2023, the programme took place at the Inclusive Education Division at NUoL that was participated by 11 participants - 8 math teachers from secondary schools and other 3 participants from PIAWATH Primary school, Chansawang Primary school and SIKAY lower secondary school in Vientiane Capital.

On 21 – 24 May 2023, the Second Math Training Activity was held at the Department of Labor and Social Welfares building in Savannakhet Province. There were 15 teachers from Primary and Secondary Schools where students with visual impairment are learning. The Math training activities really interesting for Lao math teachers.

### **Soft skill training for students with visual impairment**

On 24 – 25 August 2023, Inclusive Education Division (IED) organized a soft skill training which was related to employment skill development for 4 students with visual impairment who have just graduated from studying at NUoL. The soft skill training invited Ajarn Alounsavath Senduangdeth, Deputy Director of Office of Academic Affairs (OAA) to organise the same.

### **Networking with MoES (Ministry of Education and Sports)**

On 11-15 May 2023, the project was represented at the workshop organized by IEPC (Inclusive Education Promotion Center of MoES.) The workshop's theme was about drafting inclusive education strategy till 2030. This workshop was co-chaired by Mrs Khanthaly siriphongphanh, Deputy Minister of the Ministry of Education and Sports and Dr. Shamlanh Phankhavong, the Head of Education Quality Assurance or (EQA). 80 participants were invited from various parts of the country. The workshop's theme was "Drafting Strategy to Promote Inclusive Education" and the contents is to provide opportunities for persons with disabilities to access mainstream schools from primary to higher education levels over the country to support the slogan: "No one left behind" which Lao government had ratification CRPD since 2009. The project is pleased that it could provide inputs for this national strategy on inclusive education.

### **Computer Training in Savannakhet Province**

The Association of the Persons with Visual Impairment in Savannakhet province was established in 2009, with the approval of the Department of State Development which attaches to the Ministry of Interior in Savannakhet province. The Association has been promoting inclusive education activities for persons with visual impairment to study in regular schools. There are 07 children with visual impairment who will join regular schools in Savannakhet province. The project is working with them to improve their skills in using computers which is essential for their academic advancement.

## MONGOLIA

**Mongolian National Federation of the Blind (MNFB)** is the project partner in Mongolia. It is a non-profit, non-governmental organization established in 1978, with the mission to defend the rights of blind people living in Mongolia. The MNFB pays attention on education, employment, social protection and many other issues related to blind people's interests through whole Mongolia. The federation is functioning for approximately 10,000 people who are blind, have low vision or other kinds of visual impairment through 23 provincial branches and districts and it has councils on elderly, women, sports, culture and youth.

During the year 2023, 8 visually impaired youth graduated from special school for blind and 6 of them took the state entrance exam and 2 of them passed successfully and enrolled in universities. 2 of them enrolled at the vocational training center of the MNFB. Another blind student is studying in English training course aiming at taking IELTS exam and one more is studying to obtain master degree on information technology.

### General training for staff and students

10 visually impaired job seekers did internship at the Ard financing company. Three of them did internship in the call center of the company, another three did internship in the division of social insurance and the remaining four in online shopping unit of the company. MNFB has a MoU with Ard company with the aim of improving the job skills of visually impaired job seekers. The MNFB assigned two teachers to work as facilitators for these 10 persons to guide them and also to make programmatic arrangements for the internship related activities. Internship continued for 2 months in October and November 2023. While doing internship, the 10 visually impaired persons also received computer training at the training venue of the National institute of information and technology

### Orientation program for employers

Before organizing this program, the project got a list of companies with 25 or more workers from the Ministry of Labor and Social Welfare. In the Labor law there is an article 144, which states that an entity with employees of 25 and more than 25 is obligated to employ person with disability equal to 4 percent of total employees. Based on the list the selected companies as targets for the employment drive. the team visited such companies and met with HR officer and in a few cases organized workshops for small group of employers from the targeted companies.

## Employment skills development for persons with visual impairment

Training on possibility to work in mainstream job places and how to prepare to work was conducted for visually impaired youth who have graduated from the vocational training center of the MNFB and who are studying in universities on 11 May 2023. During the workshop, topics on how to be prepared for job market, needed skills for visually impaired job seekers to be productive work forces and importance of having knowledge on use of information technology software and computer and other devices, importance of communication, team work and time management were discussed. During the workshop, those blind persons who passed service entrance examination successfully and who are working in mainstream companies and public institutions shared their experience and encouraged the participants to be creative and hard working in order to have an opportunity to use an existing possibilities to get work.

## Networking with government bodies

Meetings and round-table discussions were conducted between MNFB leaders and representatives from the Ministry of Education and science, Ministry of Labor and social welfare, Ulaanbaatar government, Ministry of culture/national library and Local government of Tuv province.

As a result of networking activities with above mentioned government bodies, the following issues were solved.

Total of USD 40,000 was allocated by the Ministry of education to expand size of building of the vocational training center of the MNFB. Additional 240 square meter building was renovated at the building of the factory for the blind. 5 class rooms and library for students were launched at the new area as the result of that work.

The Federation organized study tour event together with vocational training center for visually impaired persons who live in rural areas in 2-3 June 2023. The selection was made through the branches of MNFB and those blind who have a dream and plan to improve education level and study and get employed were selected.

## PHILIPPINES

**Resources for the Blind, Inc.**, is the partner of the higher education project in the Philippines. The RBI was started in the Philippines in 1988 with a goal to develop and implement programs that will remove the hindrances, and to provide services, training, materials, and equipment needed in order for those who have visual impairment to reach their fullest potential in life. The main office is in Cubao, Quezon City, with two regional offices in Cebu City and Davao City, which serve the



central and southern Philippines, respectively. In 2023, the project carried out a number of activities and the brief descriptions are as follows:

### University Orientation to Adventist University of the Philippines

The RBI conducted an orientation at the Adventist University of the Philippines on March 3, 2023, aimed at preparing teachers, administrators, and key officers to support students with visual impairment. Attended by 92 participants, the orientation covered topics such as understanding visual impairment led by optometrists Dr. Sherwin Dean and Dr. Jasmine Dean, who volunteer at RBI. Dr. Mirla Olores, a Consultant in Special Education at RBI, discussed guidelines for admitting students with disabilities in higher education.



### Facilitating Project ADAM



Audio Description (AD) is the narrated description of visual elements in a video, catering to individuals with vision loss. The AD voice track is strategically inserted between dialogues and essential audio elements. A 3-day Strategic Planning session on May 1-3, 2023, brought

together various stakeholders to develop a roadmap for AD implementation in the Philippines from 2023 to 2028.

### English Camp for Students and Graduates with Visual Impairment

The English Camp was conceived to address the global significance of the English language as the universal medium, especially in professional and business settings. Tailored for individuals with visual impairment, the 120-hour training program focuses on enhancing the English writing and speaking skills of current and aspiring college students and



recent graduates. The English Camp, commenced on February 18, 2023, with sessions held every Saturday. The program concluded with a 3-day face-to-face workshop organised on July 21-23, 2023, allowing participants to showcase their acquired skills from the online sessions.

### **Employment Mentoring – (Mentors-Mentees) - Licensure Examination for Teachers (LET) Review**

Facilitated by Mr. Abdulaziz Dapilin, a teacher and national lecturer, the 2-week online LET review took place from March 13 to 24, 2023, benefiting 9 visually impaired participants. Impressively, out of the 9 examinees, 5 successfully passed the examination, showcasing the program's effectiveness in addressing the accessibility gap for visually impaired individuals pursuing a teaching career.

### **Digital Marketing 101: Enhancing Global Competitiveness through Strategic Multimedia Publishing & Social Media Promotions**



The training conducted on April 26-27 and May 22-26, 2023, with a hybrid session on May 27, aimed to enhance the competitiveness of blind and visually impaired individuals in the Philippines. Facilitated by Mr. Marx Vergel Melencio, a University of the Philippines graduate and experienced entrepreneur, the 20-

hour workshop focused on imparting knowledge of advanced tools, strategies, and tactics for multimedia publishing and social media marketing. The training, held from 7 pm to 9 pm, attracted 34 participants, including students and adults with visual impairment, providing them with valuable insights into real-world experiences in digital marketing.

### **College Preparation**

After a decade, RBI successfully resumed its college preparation program for students with visual impairment entering college. The 2023 College Prep brought together twenty students with visual impairment at The Selah Garden Hotel, Pasay City, from July 17-19. Facilitated by accomplished graduates with visual impairment and select RBI staff members,



including Ms. Mari Joyce Lopez, Mr. Mike Daryl Ocol, Mr. Sohan Motwani, Mr. Apolo Pinos, Ms. Ma. Bless Adriano, and Ms. Lench Ann Perilla, the sessions provided valuable insights from college experiences.

## Multi-Media Production and Social Media Management



In response to the digital age's demands, RBI recognized the importance of providing multimedia production and social media management skills to students and graduates with visual impairments. The "Multi and Social Media Training Using NVDA" program, spanning five days, specifically targeted senior high school students, college students, and graduates with visual impairment. The training focuses on

debunking the notion that visual impairment poses a barrier to creating audio and video presentations, enabling participants to develop content and share it on platforms like Facebook and YouTube. Beyond this, the program imparted essential audio and video editing skills, empowering visually impaired individuals to effectively create and share content on social media.

These initiatives contributed to fostering self-reliance and integration, aligning with broader goals of inclusivity and diversity. Participants emerged better prepared for the professional world, enhancing their employability and life prospects.

## Soft Skills Training for Students and Graduates with Visual Impairment

The Soft Skills Training, titled "Nurturing Self-Confidence and Creativity in the Blind and Visually Impaired Community," took place at Ciudad Christhia 9 Waves Resort in San Mateo, Rizal, Philippines, from October 13 to 15,



2023. Dr. Eva Marie Wang, a Ph.D. holder in Global Education Cooperation from Seoul National University, South Korea, and Ms. Beverly Bravo, an I.T. Instructor at Pamantasan ng Lungsod ng Muntinlupa, both visually impaired, facilitated the workshop for twenty students and graduates with visual impairments.



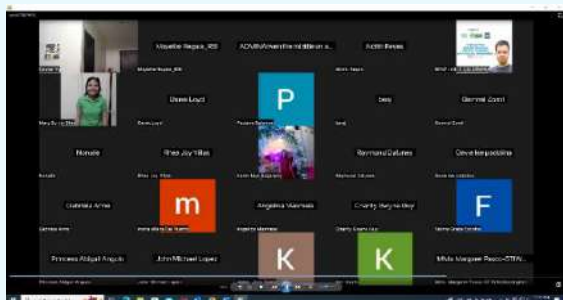
## Employment Skills Development for Persons with Visual Impairment - Employment Mentoring – (Mentors-Mentees)

Starting in June 2023, RBI undertook the impactful task of serving 42 blind and low-vision students nationwide through the ICEVI Employment Mentoring Program. This initiative aimed to enhance the overall college experience for these students by providing guidance and insights crucial for their transition from higher education to professional careers. The program enlisted six mentors who, drawing on their workplace and educational experiences, offered practical advice on coping techniques, blind-specific skills, and navigating challenges in both academic and professional settings.



The mentoring sessions prioritized coping techniques essential for blind and low-vision individuals, addressing challenges such as navigating digital platforms and leveraging assistive technologies.

## SkillsBuild Training in partnership with IBM Philippines



RBI, in collaboration with The NIPPON Foundation and ICEVI, facilitated another impactful 5-day online training through the IBM SkillsBuild portal program from October 23-27, 2023. This initiative engaged 28 college students and graduates with visual impairment, providing them with a valuable opportunity to develop skills and enhance their employability.

## I.T. Conference and Job Fair for the visually impaired job seekers

On December 1, 2023, a ground breaking IT Conference designed for individuals with visual impairment unfolded at the Red Hotel EDSA Cubao, Quezon City. The event aimed to empower and educate the visually impaired community, including employers in the Information Technology industry. The program sessions commenced with a thought-





provoking keynote speech by Sohan Motwani, emphasizing three pivotal points for success in the IT profession, from the importance of passion-driven hard work to the significance of building a network of professionals. Following Motwani's keynote, Engr. Elizier Obamos delved into strategies to overcome challenges in IT studies, providing a comprehensive guide to navigating the academic landscape successfully. The "Breaking Barriers" segment featured personal stories of triumph over adversity, highlighting the importance of creativity, resourcefulness, and positive self-affirmation.

On December 9-10, RBI participated in the National Disability Expo at Megatrade Hall A at the SM Megamall in Ortigas, Mandaluyong City, where diverse disability organizations showcased products, services, and programs tailored for individuals with disabilities. Employers committed to hiring persons with disabilities were also in attendance, setting up booths to engage with and interview walk-in applicants. RBI had the opportunity to network with other organizations and employers exploring potential employment for blind job seekers.



## Awareness video for blind and visually impaired and employment success stories documentation



In July, RBI initiated the production of Sighted Guide Technique videos in both English and Tagalog versions. This video-based approach aims to assist all sighted guides in extending help and support to visually impaired individuals encountered in public places. Through this initiative, RBI seeks to

have a meaningful impact by fostering widespread understanding and proper techniques for guiding the blind and visually impaired in the community. Additionally, aside from creating an awareness video, RBI has also begun the production of an Employment Video Awareness to encourage public and private organizations to hire persons with visual impairment.

## Film viewing with Audio description

On December 2, 2023, RBI, in collaboration with the Project ADAM (Audio Description Advocacy Movement) working group, organized a film viewing in

partnership with SM Cinema at SM Megamall in Ortigas, Mandaluyong City. This event aimed to provide individuals with visual impairment with a cinematic experience tailored to their needs and to raise public awareness about the accessibility of entertainment and arts through audio description. The film showing of "Beauty and the Beast" drew participation from approximately 375 viewers, contributing to the ongoing efforts to promote inclusivity in the realm of audio-visual entertainment.



## VIETNAM

**Sao Mai Vocational & Assistive Technology Center for the Blind** is the higher education partner in Vietnam. Sao Mai Vocational & Assistive Technology Centre for the Blind was established in 2001 with the main goal of promoting the usage of assistive technology in education and employment of persons with visual impairment. The Centre has also offered consultancy to other organisations in assistive technology.

Below are activities of higher education project in Vietnam that were carried out in the year 2023.

- Converted 1,095 books into accessible formats. All are available via our online library and distributed to local libraries with support program for visually impaired readers nationwide.
- Completed the integration of our existing online library platform to be ready to connect with any third-party app systems, mainly to promote the accessible books exchange programs between libraries both in country and across

borders. SMCB has continued to work with the ABC's global books service to expand the access to more accessible books for individuals with print disabilities in Vietnam to member libraries.

- Conducted 5 technology training courses for 57 high school and college students to equip them with the know-how of latest tools to enhance their studying.
- Conducted 2 trainings of trainers on assistive technology tools to support both blind and low vision people for 59 participants from 27 different organizations serving the blind throughout the country.
- Organized one workshop about web accessibility in Hanoi to raise awareness among policymakers and administrators working at government agencies which are running and managing public government services.
- Conducted two-day training workshop on Marrakesh Treaty and accessible books production in Hanoi for a total of 29 participants from government-related agencies and public libraries.
- The project has collaborated with some publishers to support them in their national program of producing accessible textbooks. This is a long-term strategy program of Vietnam in terms of ensuring the provision of accessible textbooks for all visually impaired pupils from grade 1 to 12.
- Collaborated with VBA and the VN Rehab Training Center to organize 6 orientation & mobility trainings for 63 high-school and first-year college students in Hanoi and HCM.
- Organized a national technology contest for young visually impaired people in collaboration with the Vietnam Blind Association for the final round in Hanoi with 10 different prizes. The first award was given to a young blind software programmer who has developed an educational game system for visually impaired users.
- Conducted the total of 26 webinars discussing topics related to soft skills, covering various skills to support their activities at both school and workplace.
- Conducted a total of 26 webinars on job orientation and preparation for the visually impaired, focusing on various job sectors such as online marketing, telesales, running business, software development, consultation services etc.
- Collaborated with Nhat Hong center for the blind to have meetings with total of 11 potential employers based in Hanoi and Danang.
- Conducted 2 employment workshops for both recruiters and visually impaired job seekers, one in Bac Lieu and one in HCM for total of 112 participants.
- Successfully referred 23 visually impaired people to work in 4 companies, including Prudential Vietnam, Limart, Digitalk Viet and 1Fix.

## Parting Observations

The long standing partnership of ICEVI with The Nippon Foundation has come to an end but it is just the beginning of the long term impact in the East Asia region. The project has contributed to various components of education and employment. Besides assisting over 3000 persons with visual impairment to get higher education and more than 550 graduates to get employment, the project has created a Legacy of Empowerment that will go a long way in the blindness sector in the East Asia region. The Nippon Foundation has not only helped in implementing a Project but silently nurtured a Movement leading to an inclusive society where visually impaired persons and their parents have a significant place.



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