

## ANNEXE II

### Leadership Development of Persons with Disabilities (JFY 2006)

#### Inception Report

## **1. Country Data**

### **1-1 General Information**

#### **Sri Lanka**

- |                      |   |   |
|----------------------|---|---|
| (1) Total land area  | : | 65,710 km <sup>2</sup>  |
| (2) Capital city     | : | Sri Jayawardenapura, Kotte  |
| (3) Total population | : | 19.3 million  |
| (4) Ethnic groups    | : | Sinhalese<br>Sri Lankan Tamils<br>Indian Tamils<br>Sri Lankan Moors<br>Indian Moors<br>Malays<br>Burghers |
| (5) Languages        | : | National Languages<br>Sinhala<br>Tamil<br>English   |
| (6) Religions -      | : | Buddhism<br>Hinduism<br>Islam<br>Roman Catholic<br>Christianity<br>Other sects                            |

### **1-2 Disability Related Information**

- (1) Definition / Classification of Disability:

**Definition in Section 37 of Act 28, The Protection of Rights of Persons with Disability**

“A person with disability means any person who as a result of any deficiency in his/her physical or mental capabilities, whether congenital or not, is unable by himself/herself to ensure for himself/herself wholly or partly the necessities of life.”

## (2) Population of persons with disability

### Source – Census of Population and Housing – 2001

Total - 274,711

#### By Gender

Male - 158,446

Female - 116,265

#### On the basis of Disability

In Seeing - 69,096

In Hearing & Speaking - 73,343

In Hand - 48,131

In Legs - 90,576

Other physical - 13,275

Mental - 69,026

#### On the basis of Employment

Employed - 39,512 - 14.4%

Supported by family or relations - 201,0264 - 73.3%

Supported by Government Institution/Organisation - 16,969 - 6.2%

Begging - 1,025 - 0.04%

Other - 15,856 - 0.8%

Not specified - 76 - 00%

## (3) Major laws and regulations concerned with persons with disability

### (i) The Constitution of Sri Lanka

Under Chapter III, Fundamental Rights, Clause (1) of Article 12 states that, "All persons are equal before the law and are entitled to the equal protection of the law". In the anti-discrimination Clauses (2) and (3), persons with disabilities are not mentioned as a separate group. Clause (4) states that, "Nothing in this article shall prevent special provision

being made, by law, subordinate legislation or executive action, for the advancement of women, children or disabled persons.

(ii) The Protection of the Rights of Persons with Disabilities Act, No. 28 of 1996

The Act was passed in the Parliament in October 1996. The Act established the National Council for Persons with Disabilities and made provision for the establishment of a National Secretariat for Persons with Disabilities to assist the Council in the discharge of its duties. The only rights mentioned in the Act are related to non-discrimination in employment and education, and access to the built environment. There is no particular mention of other rights such as economic, civil social, cultural and political rights.

(iii) The National Policy on Disability for Sri Lanka - 2004

The National Policy on Disability provides disabled people with the conditions for them to exercise their rights and responsibilities, guarantee for them an equitable share of available resources and inclusion into the socio-economic mainstream.

The policy includes sectoral policies and strategies for inclusion in the following areas.

1. Employment
2. Vocational Training and Skills Development
3. Poverty Alleviation
4. School Education
5. Non-Formal Education
6. Higher Education
7. Health
8. Sports
9. Transport
10. Housing
11. Social Security
12. Access to the Built Environment and Accessible Tourism
13. Access to Communication and Information
14. Assistive Devices and Information Technology
15. Children
16. Youth
17. Women
18. Elderly Persons
19. Persons Affected by Armed Conflict
20. Individuals who have Severe Disability

## 21. Mass Media.

The policy also includes Policies and Strategies to ensure holistic implementation. These are

22. Community based rehabilitation
23. Non Government Organisations and the Private Sector
24. Research
25. Legislation
26. Implementation, Monitoring and Evaluation of Policy

Discussions have begun within the National Council for Persons with Disabilities on how the existing legislation can be amended/enacted to provide social, civil, economic and legal protection to people who have disability as outlined in the National Disability Policy.

### (iv) The Ranaviru Seva Act No. 54 of 1999

The Ranaviru Seva Act was enacted by parliament by which the Ranaviru Seva Authority was set up to provide for the after care and rehabilitation of members of the armed forces and police who have been disabled in action and to look after the welfare of the families of those killed or missing in action.

### (v) The Visually Handicapped Trust Fund Act No. 9 of 1992

The Act established the Trust Fund for the Visually Handicapped. The functions of the Trust Fund are to provide educational and vocational training opportunities for the visually handicapped, to create employment opportunities for poverty reduction and provide financial assistance for self-employment, The other functions are to give assistance for housing, to implement schemes for the welfare of the visually handicapped, assist projects undertaken by registered NGOs working for visually handicapped, and to take action to eliminate conditions that prevent visually handicapped persons gaining equal rights and opportunities.

### (vi) Social Security Board Act No. 17 of 1996

The Act provided for the establishment of a Social Security Board for the management of a Social Security Benefit Scheme for people who are self-employed. Persons with Disabilities who are self-employed can contribute to this scheme. Benefits include compensation for accidents at work and pension on retirement from work.

## (4) Financial assistance for persons with disability if any

- Housing Assistance upto a maximum of Rs. 100,000 for an individual who gains an income of less than Rs.5,000 per mensem
- Self-employment Assistance upto a maximum of Rs.10,000
- Medical Assistance for people with disabilities for settlement of medical bills upto a maximum of Rs.25,000
- Relief for disabled bread winners bereft of any income – Rs.3,000 per mensem under the Mahinda Chinthana Programme
- Season cards for 60% of the cost for disabled persons using public transport.

(5) Disability related organisations

Attached

## **2. Description of My Organisation**

### **2-1 General Information**

- (1) Name of the organisation  
Sri Lanka Council for the Blind (**SLCB**)

**Address -**

74 A, Church Street  
Colombo 02  
Sri Lanka

Tel/ Fax :- +94 11 2329564/ 2399834  
Email :- [slcb@mail.ewisl.net](mailto:slcb@mail.ewisl.net)

- (2) Type of organisation :  
Non-Governmental Government approved service provider

- (3) About SLCB

**Background -**

The beginning of this service provider organisation goes back to 1956 when it was called the National Council for the Welfare of the Deaf and the Blind. The bifurcation of this organisation took place in 1971 with the Sri Lanka Council for the Blind and the National Council for the Deaf functioning as two separate service provider organisations. Today, the Sri Lanka Council for the Blind is

recognised as the premier and principal organisation for the welfare of the vision impaired community.

***Vision –***

To make the vision impaired see what others think they do not see

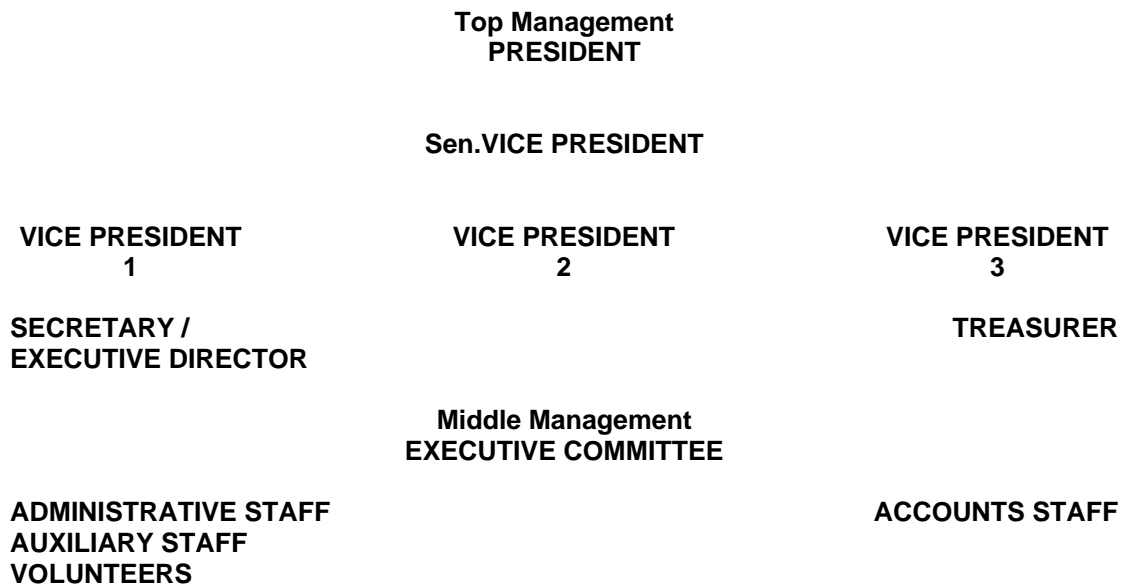
***Mission –***

Prevention of vision impairment, Rehabilitation of the vision impaired and Equalisation of Opportunities in Sri Lanka

***Motto –***

Dignity, Opportunity and Security

***Organisational Chart –***



***Activities –***

- The braille press and library and Talking book library service -the only such service in the whole of Sri Lanka.
- Eye care service
- Assisting the vision impaired students pursuing higher studies.
- Rehabilitation of the war blinded and the adult vision impaired.
- Providing assistance for self employment.

- Death donation scheme.
- Free issue of white canes.
- Securing job opportunities for skilled vision impaired rattan workers and other capable vision impaired persons.
- Training the vision impaired in telephone switch board operating and computer operating.
- Counseling and legal advice.
- Promotion of sport for the vision impaired

are some of the principal activities and services.

#### (4) Staff and volunteers

	With Disability	Without Disability	Total
Paid	07	08	15
Non Paid	19	20	39
	<u>26</u>	<u>28</u>	<u>54</u>

#### (5) Registered members (Individuals, organisations, number, membership fee)

All vision impaired persons in the island can gain free membership and become a beneficiary of the SLCB. Life membership is awarded to vision impaired and non-vision impaired individuals who are not beneficiaries for a one time payment of Rs.1,000 . Currently, there are 101 life members.

#### ***International Organisations that the SLCB has membership***

- World Blind Union
- Asian Blind Union
- Asia Pacific Development Centre on Disability

The Hony. Secretary / Executive Director, Mr.S.L.Hettiarachchi is a member of the

- National Council for People with Disabilities (Ministry of Social Welfare)

- Board of the Visually Handicapped Rehabilitation Trust Fund (Department of Social Services)
- Special Education Advisory Committee (Ministry of Education)
- Selection Committee of the National Federation of Sports for the Disabled
- Committee on Intermediate Technology Development Group (ITDG)

and the

- Patron of the National Association of Cricket for the Blind.

(6) Financial resources of the organisation

Public donations and sponsored projects,  
Charity boxes,  
Government maintainance grant of Rs.50,000 per annum.

(7) Weakness and strength of your organisation

Weakness:

The SLCB is located in the Administrative Capital City – Colombo and has no regional centres. Although any vision impaired person is welcome to receive its services, especially library facilities and rehabilitation programmes are available only at the premises in Colombo. Furthermore, it does not have residential facilities for bebeneficiaries from distant areas.

Strength:

The greatest strength that the SLCB has is the recognition and trust it has earned from the nation as the premier and principal organisation which offers a large range of services to the vision impaired all over the island.

The SLCB also considers its dedicated, committed and selfless staff and volunteers one of its strengths.

(8) Brochure

Attached

## 2-2 My Activities in the Organisation

(1) Job title : Member of the Executive Committee

(2) Details of the activities I am responsible for

As a member of the middle management, I am required to propose and plan action to empower the beneficiaries of the Council, take decisions on issues related to the function of the Council and improvement of its services, monitor and supervise projects and be responsible for the Language Teaching Division.

(3) Why and when I started working in this organisation

I first joined the Rehabilitation Programme of the SLCB in 2001 and underwent training in mobility and use of Braille as I felt that my vision was deteriorating further. During this period, while mingling with others who visited the Council, I came to know how much vision impaired persons benefited from its services. Later the same year, I joined the Voluntary Force of the Council as I felt that it was my responsibility and social obligation to help empower the blind and the vision impaired. In recognition of my service, I was elected as a member of the Executive Committee in 2003, 2004, 2005 and 2006.

(4) Problems / difficulties that I face in my activities and how I solve them

In finding employment opportunities for the vision impaired, the greatest challenge I face is changing conventional thinking and attitudes towards disabled persons. It takes hours and hours of convincing by providing examples of successful employed impaired persons and quoting government policy, laws and regulations pertaining to persons with disability to change the attitudes of prospective employers. However, there are some hard nuts that cannot be cracked at all. Thus, I have attempted to raise awareness among the general public through mass media.

A large number of vision impaired persons in Sri Lanka come from low income families. Unlike those who come from middle class or affluent families, parents of this sector neither have the education nor the finances to support and develop their child to his/her fullest potential. It is a challenge to convince parents who are ashamed of their child's disability to bring him/her for rehabilitation and then send to an institution of education. With the help of other members of the Council, I have managed to identify such unfortunate vision-impaired children and direct them for the award of scholarships. I provide the parents and children counselling and guidance and to enhance my knowledge on the subject, I followed a Diploma Course in Special Education at the National Institute of Education.

## (5) My opinion on how to improve my activities and organisation

The SLCB constantly endeavours to make the society at large recognise the inherent dignity of persons with disability. Very often, the disabled are reduced to objects of compassion and condescending treatment. This approach to these persons is fundamentally flawed. It is not only our compassion that is required by this community. On the contrary they should be regarded as persons with a cluster of inalienable rights - Rights to Education and Employment, Right to a minimum of material comforts and conveniences and Right to equal treatment. In other words, basically, the disabled are crucially in need of empowerment.

In order to attain the goal of empowering the vision impaired, the SLCB places special emphasis on its rehabilitation programmes which enable them to reach an optimum physical, mental and/or social functional level, thus providing them with the tools to change their own lives.

According to the census conducted in 2001, only 14% of the disabled population is employed. 73.3% are a liability to their families and relations. Therefore, it is obvious that the rehabilitation programmes that SLCB offers could be further developed in order to produce an educated and skilled worker who can adjust well to a work place. Presently, it offers training in telephone switch board operating and computer operating. It also supports self-employment.

It is important that vision impaired persons are able to secure a regular income as they have to incur expenses more than an average person due to their impediment. Therefore, my main concern is employment of the vision impaired giving special consideration to females. Sri Lanka, being a South Asian country, has a male dominant society and mainly in rural areas, women are not given equal opportunities. I would very much be interested in finding out strategies that other countries employ to develop skills needed to obtain employment and retain it. At present, although there is the occasional administrator and lawyer, the majority of vision impaired persons are employed as teachers, receptionists, telephone operators, rattan workers, handloom weavers etc. I would like to develop the existing training programmes to suit the needs of the job market.

Knowledge of English is vital for securing a place in the world of work. Thus, I would also like to improve the existing English

Language Teaching Programme to conform with international standards. I strongly believe that with a thorough knowledge of English and the necessary skills, the vision impaired can prove to be indispensable in the work place, for their level of commitment is high and possibility of distraction is low.

- (6) Describe what kind of role you would like to take in this process and how

I would like to function as a trainer of trainers and give proper leadership and guidance to the Skill Development Programme for Employment and the English Language Teaching Programme.

### **3. Other working experience with persons with disability that I have other than in the above mentioned organisation**

I have no working experience outside the above mentioned organisation. However, I have hands-on experience with children with various special needs which I gained during the practical component of the Diploma in Special Education which I followed at the National Institute of Education.

### **4. Personal experience related to my disability.**

I was born with Retinitis Pigmentosa, which causes night blindness, colour blindness and short sightedness. The dawn of each day brings with it whole lot of challenges that I have to overcome somehow to survive. Even the basic functions such as determining what to wear, getting from one place to another, meeting new people etc. tormented me. What is pathetic is that I am neither completely blind nor completely sighted and people really do not understand the plight of such persons. In Sri Lanka, if it is possible, people would rather hide their disability than to be a disgrace to their relatives and friends. Therefore, on most occasions I was pressured to act as if I had no disability.

I attended a school for sighted children and underwent many difficulties during my school years. Teachers had never encountered a child with my kind of disability and did not know how to handle the problem. Many just ignored and had to totally rely on peers and my intelligence. The Physical Education period was my worst nightmare for two reasons. On one hand, I had difficulty in participating in the sports activities and joining in the

fun. On the other hand I had a teacher / Physical Training Instructress who called me derogatory names. I remained an average student because of my impediment and sat the G.C.E. (Ordinary Level) Examination with sighted children under equal conditions. At the time neither my parents nor school knew that I could have got additional time. The only facility that I made avail of was the use of a powerful lamp.

When I reached the Advanced Level class, the classroom was too dark for me to do anything but be seated in one place. Therefore, my parents requested a change of classrooms but the principal – a Catholic nun, refused to do so. My parents who were indignant, took me out of school and I was compelled to sit the G.C.E. (Advanced Level) Examination as a private candidate. I went for private tuition, two hours per week per subject whereas had I attended school, I would have had five hours and twenty minutes per subject. Yet, I managed to pass the examination and gained admission to university by obtaining an aggregate of marks well over the required mark.

At the university, the lecturers were more understanding. I passed the BA degree in English, French and Linguistics with First Class Honours. I pursued higher studies and passed the MA degree in Linguistics with Merit and the Postgraduate Diploma in Education with Distinction. My academic achievements are commendable not only because I competed with sighted students under the same conditions but because I faced many challenges. I can study only if there is ample light and ample light means strong daylight. After sunset or on gloomy days, I have to use a powerful lamp. The strong light of the lamp strains my eyes and therefore, I used it very sparingly. It was difficult for me to find reference books in the library as local libraries are not equipped to cater to the needs of the disabled.

My parents had to incur many additional expenses in order to help me with my studies. They bought me a micro cassette player to tape lectures and a computer for my use, paid for enlarging of learning material, etc. Even transport fees added to the expenses as they felt that public transport is unsafe for me when I was young. .

I am now attached to the Ministry of Education as a Graduate Teacher with a service of over 16 years. I first joined the public service after passing a competitive examination. I managed to obtain a high mark that I was able to get an appointment to a

school in Colombo – the administrative capital city. Those who were unable to get a similar mark got schools in difficult areas. At school, every day is a challenge. Vision impaired teachers employ the lecture method in teaching. It was accepted till 1997 when new reforms were introduced and. The new reforms promoted student centred learning and the role of the teacher changed from instructor to facilitator and guide. This posed problems to all vision impaired teachers including me. Throughout the years, I have produced good results at public examinations and many students sought admission to our school from other schools as the word went round that I was a good teacher. However, I too have to use student centred teaching methods which involve continuous assessments, use of multi-media projectors, overhead projectors, field trips etc. I cannot get the help of other teachers to mark written work as I am the only French teacher.

Lately, I have felt that my sight is deteriorating further. I believe that I can be more productive in an administrative post than as a teacher. Thus, I applied to sit the Sri Lanka Education Service competitive examination and my application was rejected by the Commissioner of Examinations as I am a vision impaired person. When I went to meet him, he asked me why I even bother to apply for an administrative post when I cannot see well. I did not have the audacity to tell him that it is because I had the mental capacity and that I could function as well as any person if not better if I have the necessary assistive devices. This incident itself shows how long we have to wait for government policy to be a reality. All the acts and legislation are ineffective if the mindsets of public servants and other personnel do not undergo transformation.