

## Concept Note

### Side Event at CSoCD 59 on “Social Development of Persons with Deafblindness in South Asia”

Hosted by:

**Sense International India**

*In special consultative status with UN ECOSOC*

**Online event**

**February 15th, 2021 – 19:00-20:15 Hrs IST**

#### **Background**

Sense International India is the first and only national NGO supporting development of comprehensive services for persons with Deafblindness (PwDb) throughout India, bringing hope in the lives of more than 80,000 PwDb and their families. We work with local, regional and national organisations to develop sustainable services for children and adults with deafblindness. We are partnering with leading organisations in Bangladesh, Nepal, Sri Lanka, Maldives and Malaysia to train educators and setup needs based services for PwDb in the region through a growing network of partner organisations with support of local governments. It is due to the active advocacy of Sense International India and its partners, deafblindness has been recognised in Persons with Disabilities Rights and Protection Act, 2013 (Bangladesh), the Rights of Persons with Disabilities Act, 2016 (India) and Rights of Persons with Disability Act-2017 (Nepal).

About 95% of everything we learn, comes from what we see and hear, hence it's frightening to imagine the challenges caused due to lack or impairment of these two major avenues of learning. This unique condition- a combination of visual and hearing impairment is known as 'deafblindness'. Though the degree of deafness or blindness varies, the combination of dual sensory loss leads to unique problems in an individual's communication, mobility and their ability to access information. The condition of deafblindness, impacts overall development of the child. Children with combination of visual and hearing impairment have limited opportunity to learn and acquire concepts seeing and moving around in the environment. Their learning also gets affected due to lack of or limited interaction with family members and they face major difficulties in communication, social skills and independent living to mention some.

There is no data available regarding the size of the deafblind population in the region due to lack of a comprehensive study or research to determine the true incidence. Estimates, based on information gathered from community based projects, indicate that about 0.04% of the population would be living with deafblindness/ multi-sensory impairment in the region.

Technology has the potential to transform the lives of PwDb. Yet there is a risk that they will be left behind in this rapidly developing field, unable to access the technologies developed for those with a single sensory impairment or for the mainstream population. PwDb experience problems with mobility, access to information and communication. Without the right support in these areas people who are deafblind can become increasingly withdrawn, depressed and isolated. When combined with human support, technology has the potential to help in all three areas.

Upcoming 2021 session of the Commission for Social Development (CSocD59) with its theme "**Socially just transition towards sustainable development: the role of digital technologies on social development and well-being of all**" is an important opportunity to take stock of social development of persons with deafblindness in South East Asia. With an ageing population, the number of deafblind people is set to grow and it is vital that their needs are not forgotten.

It is time to learn about the problems that PwDb experience in accessing technology and what they want for technology in the future. **This side event will provide an opportunity to present their thoughts through a panel discussion, sharing their concerns and experiences.** It will further encourage efforts to make accessible technology and influence the local authorities who are often responsible for funding the provision of technology for PwDb, to try to ensure that they are not excluded from future developments.

### Objective

- To share experience of using technology by PwDb
- To create awareness about the need and rights of PwDb
- To ensure their inclusion through representation at CSocD59

### Outcomes

- Awareness about status of PwDb in South Asia
- Inclusion of PwDb in SDGs and CRPD mandate

### Methodology

Participatory approach would be followed along with online discussions, utilising available online platforms

The event will last 75 minutes and will be held in English. Interpretation in Indian sign will be also available.

**Tentative panel layout: 7 pm to 8:15 pm, IST**

**7:00 pm** Welcome and introduction - Sense International India representative

**7:10 pm** Speaker session 1 – PwDb from India

**7:25 pm** Speaker session 2 – PwDb from Nepal

**7:40 pm** Speaker session 3 – PwDb from Bangladesh

**8:00 pm** Q&A

**8:12 pm** Closing remarks and vote of thanks – Sense International India representative

REGISTRATION LINK: To be shared soon.

For more information please write to [paraq@senseintindia.org](mailto:paraq@senseintindia.org) / [info@senseintindia.org](mailto:info@senseintindia.org)