

The XRCVC Annual Report of 2011-2012



A Journey of Breaking New Barriers and Creating Access

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This report reviews the year gone by, highlighting our work in the areas of accessibility and inclusion for the visually challenged. The multimodal nature of our work, the diverse areas in which we operate, and the various dimensions to our resources and services are presented here. The report also pinpoints areas for further development.

Advocacy – voicing concerns, overcoming roadblocks

The XRCVC has for long played a leading role in championing the issues that concern the visually challenged community. Some of these key concerns are highlighted in the realms of academia, finance, travel and daily life as part of “Project Access: An XRCVC – Sightsavers Initiative. Through our advocacy efforts we have tried to draw attention to the lack of inclusion in the policies and practices of different institutions. While doing so, we have shared our insights in these areas and have spelt out the ways to surmount the roadblocks the visually challenged regularly encounter.

PRINT ACCESS

The two major fronts of the Print Access project were the proposed amendments to the Copyright Act of India to enable special concessions to the print disabled, and the production of books in the DAISY format.

At the national level, as a result of the concerted efforts of various groups, just as we compile this report, a huge breakthrough has been made! The Copyright Amendment Bill has been successfully passed both by the Rajya Sabha and the Lok Sabha now only awaiting the signature by the President. This historic legislation has realised the right of the print disabled to access of printed works. This has been a huge achievement and a result of 6 years of persistent, joint efforts at the national level amongst various organisations of which the XRCVC has played a critical part in initiating and sustaining.

The XRCVC has also submitted a representation to the Ministry of Human Resource Development on behalf of the National Access Alliance to put forward our stand at the Geneva discussions of the World Blind Union (WBU) Treaty. Our position is that India should support a global treaty allowing for the sharing of accessible printed material for the blind across countries.

The DAISY production unit laboured consistently to bring the printed word within the reach of the visually challenged community. The number of books produced was 58, and the types of books varied in subjects from medicine, law and banking to a computer manual in Hindi. The list of DAISY books was then emailed to the members. Furthermore, we uploaded all the DAISY produced books on the DFI Combined Catalogue on the website www.oblindia.org. In addition, DAISY training services were also offered to organisations so that the production of books could be diversified to other units.

Our publisher contact programme has succeeded in convincing a few more publishers to give us a soft copy of the titles published by them to be converted into DAISY format.

FINANCIAL ACCESS

Making banking and other financial operations more accessible for the visually challenged remains a key focus. With this objective in mind we tested the accessibility features of ATMs of banks such as ICICI, Standard Chartered at different locations in Mumbai and Delhi, and conveyed our recommendations to the banks and the ATM manufacturers. We also discussed with the CII the drafting of a circular to be given to the RBI regarding accessible ATMs for banks in India. Further parleys continued with senior members in the Indian Banks Association so as to sustain the lobbying and pressure to introduce accessible ATMs.

Our discussions with the Reserve Bank of India centred on accessible currency notes and our meetings with the Union Bank of India, State Bank of India, Axis Bank and the ICICI Bank drew their attention to the steps needed to make banking systems and facilities easy to operate for people with visual impairment



Visually Impaired user testing an accessible ATM

In addition the XRCVC initiated a fresh partnership with Indian Banks Association (IBA) and was made part of its special task force looking at deployment of accessible ATMs across India. As part of the same the XRCVC will be actively involved in providing inputs, accessibility testing as also providing deployment location to the banking industry to help achieve the goal of accessible ATMs on the ground across India.

INCLUSIVE EDUCATION

Overcoming the hurdles on the path to education is crucial to creating accessible pathways in other domains. Our work in this area was geared to bringing about legal, institutional, societal and individual level changes to make inclusion the operating principle in the field of education.

Our interactions with members of the Azim Premji University, to make the University a truly inclusive one, and with the principal and teachers of two schools in Mumbai - St. Thomas and Gopal Garden - which are keen to retain their visually challenged students and to provide appropriate support, demonstrate that some institutions have imbibed an inclusive ethos. XRCVC also partnered with Arya Vidya Mandir School across its four branches in Mumbai to sensitize their teachers in being able to teach students with vision impairment.

However, in some situations we have encountered resistance, and we have had to seek legal redress. Our legal battles with academic councils and examining bodies have resulted in some victories. In the case regarding the scribe eligibility for the MBA-CET exam, the Court directed the Directorate of Technical Education to issue a student his results which were being withheld and has ordered that he should be allowed to pursue admission for an MBA course.

When we sought the Bombay High court's intervention to allow a visually challenged student to pursue Physiotherapy, the Physiotherapy Council submitted a report in court stating that as the practice of physiotherapy involves the practitioner seeing the patient to glean information from their gait, appearance, etc, a person with visual impairment will lose out on much information, and hence cannot practise as a physiotherapist but as an assistant. Although the State government has accepted the Council's contention, the Bombay High Court has stayed the OT/PT council's decision

to bar students with visual impairment from studying mainstream courses in Physiotherapy and then to practise on par with sighted physiotherapists.

Our multi-pronged approach to this battle has led us to team up with a practising physiotherapist to discuss modifications on the visual content of the Physiotherapy course. We also contacted Physiotherapy councils around the world to understand how students with visual impairment could learn the course in a mainstream set-up and practise in the same way as a sighted physiotherapist. This information was presented in the court hearing.

On another front, meetings with the members of the Physiotherapy Academic Council and the Maharashtra University of Health Sciences (MUHS) bore fruit when the latter issued a circular stating the rules to conduct university examinations for the first year Physiotherapy course. A related outcome is that the MUHS has notified the XRCVC as the centre to be contacted in case any clarifications are needed during the theory examinations. Further in this academic year with the revised rules two new low vision students took admission to physiotherapy courses and the XRCVC worked with MUHS to issue appropriate new circulars for them as well.

Our concern with realising educational inclusion causes us to be always vigilant. When we noticed that the MH-CET circular 2012 by the Directorate of Medical Education and Research (DMER) allowing students with visual impairment to appear for the medical entrance tests was not posted on the DMER website, we worked with members of the DMER to get this rectified.

Another achievement of note is that subsequent to our discussions guiding the principal and teachers of Delhi Public School to work out a system with the CBSE for the practical examinations for a student studying in 11th standard science in their school, the CBSE board has passed a circular stating the guidelines to be followed when evaluating the 11th and 12th class Science practical exams.

Apart from addressing on-the-spot issues that the visually challenged frequently encounter, we also have a long range focus. In order to give the visually challenged community and its well-wishers a platform to air the difficulties they encounter while appearing for different exams, we organised a national process of consultation including a Round Table with Score Foundation, at the YMCA Delhi. The agenda was to frame standardized rules for theory and practical examinations, which could be followed across the length and breadth of the country to facilitate the effective participation of blind and low vision persons. We have submitted a representation on inclusive writer guidelines to the Ministry of Social Justice and Empowerment, Government of India.



***Roundtable for National level Guidelines for use of scribe, New Delhi,
in partnership with Score Foundation***

We believe it is our responsibility not only to overcome the hurdles in accessing education, but also to support the visually challenged once they have gained access to a course of study. With this focus in view, we worked on making accessible educational materials such as biological diagrams and more than 30 tactile physiotherapy diagrams for students. Our latest venture is to work towards an inclusive Mathematics and Science teaching and learning experience for the visually impaired. Furthermore, in an effort to make accessibility an important feature in the curriculum for architecture students, we have been working with the concerned authorities to prepare a module which will help the new batches of architecture students to build universal and accessible infrastructure and facilities.

Thus our work in the area of education transcends academic disciplines, institutions and fields of practice to open the doors of knowledge to the visually challenged community.

INDEPENDENT LIVING

Following the work started last year on making travelling by public transport in Mumbai accessible, the XRCVC team has begun work on the Bus Identification and Navigation system developed by the IIT, Delhi, in collaboration with Saksham Trust and NAB, Delhi. A proposal for a pilot trial of this system on selected buses has been handed over to the BEST Corporation. We have also signed an MOU with IIT, Delhi, so that work towards producing the system and addressing other technical and maintenance issues of the system could be worked on before it can be installed on the BEST buses.

We submitted a representation to the Railway Ministry to include the visually challenged within the ambit of concessions that are allotted for Shatabdi and Rajdhani trains for people with disabilities. We are pleased to note that the railways have responded positively.

Following a survey of the XRCVC members on the consumer goods that need to be made accessible, we contacted the Royal National Institute of Blind People (RNIB), UK, to know more about how accessible TVs work. We also established contact with the ex and the current CEO / MD of Tata Sky, a digital TV product that is available in India to explore how this accessible system could be implemented in India. We also met with officials from Lumium and Onio to strategize on how design companies can help build in accessible universal design principles at the time of product conceptualization.

XRCVC also began dialogue with Viva City Mall for the various steps that can be taken to make the facility more accessible. In addition the XRCVC also began the process of Brainstorming with Samarthyam – the National Centre for Accessible Environments - to put together a curriculum for the development of a Universal Design course.

We realise that for the visually challenged to lead healthy lives, leisure and play are as important as education and work. We have expanded the range of services we offer by starting fitness sessions for students of the XRCVC to develop their stamina, strength and forte in sports and hence be eligible for competing in various events



Futsal Training Camp at St. Xavier's College

like cricket, football (futsal) among the other outdoor sports.

The XRCVC worked with the Blind Relief Association, New Delhi and resource centre members from Ruia, SIES and Wilson's College along with St. Xavier's College students to conduct a training program in Blind Football for the students of these colleges so that it could become a well played sport in Mumbai too. This has been one of the outcomes of Antarchakshu 2011. Seven students represented the XRCVC at the 7th IBSA National Football Tournament for the Blind 2012, Delhi.

Thus our advocacy work has entered new terrains with initial explorations in some areas and the intensification of efforts in existing areas.

Technology – Exploring, Innovating and Training

As a nodal access technology centre, the XRCVC has kept abreast with the latest in access technologies through a systematic program of software and hardware up gradation.

ACCESS TECHNOLOGY & R & D

The XRCVC has become a nodal centre for testing various software applications and hardware devices to check for their suitability and further use in assistive systems. Through our R & D collaborations across the country the XRCVC has been involved in a range of initiatives through the year.

Some of the key initiatives the XRCVC has been involved in include:

- Work on Dolphin Publisher and Plectalk DAISY recorder
- Testing of I-Ball Click Scan camera scanner for its OCR functionality and accessibility for blind
- Testing of Enable India's spelling tool, Testing of C-DAC's Marathi TTS.
- Analysis of new Text to Speech software - aSpeech -from Akshara Speech Technologies, Chennai.
- Conducted tests on the Bala bolka – a Text to Speech program and on the OBL 2.0 version.
- Work with SAP labs on accessibility of varied SAP products
- Testing of accessibility of Inclusive Planet, IPA solution for www.monster.com for
- Tested the software Tally for its compatibility with JAWS.
- Accessibility testing of the soft phone program at the IBM-IIFL thane call centre as requested by Enable India, Bangalore. This will benefit employees with visual impairment to be employed at this organization.
- Tested the accessibility of CRM package with jaws at Childline, Vikhroli, also on behalf of Enable India.
- Checked the accessibility of the E-book reader program QReader.
- Meeting with Abacus India to know more about the various systems that this organization works with to create accessible systems in mobile phone technology, talking pens, other security measures, etc.
- The XRCVC also scanned SBI passbooks with Zoomex scanner for Enable India's SBI project. This report was then forwarded to the team at Enable India in Bangalore.

SUPPORT & TRAINING

The XRCVC extended support and training to various stakeholders such as government departments and educational institutions. At the behest of the Mantralaya we compiled a list of assistive devices along with a list of vendors so that the government could learn more about the products. A member of the XRCVC team was made part of the expert committee of the Sarva Shiksha Abhiyaan to provide inputs on selection of devices, computer and software equipment, various audio visual equipment and teaching learning material for low vision and blind students in order to help set up a Multi-purpose Resource Training Centre. The Ministry of Social Justice and Empowerment, Government of Maharashtra also sought the help of the XRCVC to prepare a final list of assistive technology products with proprietary items and their pricing.



Train the Trainer Programme for students of Special Ed course of SNDT University

Our training programmes to inform and instruct the visually challenged and other interested persons cover Assistive technology workshops as also computer and assistive technology training to visually impaired persons as also special educators. **Through this year the XRCVC trained 51 persons through its various training programmes and in addition reached out to 579 participants through its Assistive Technology training workshops conducted through the year.**

Awareness – Enlightening Minds

The XRCVC has always stressed the need to raise awareness on issues of inclusion and accessibility. Various meetings, collaborations and workshops were held to expand the reach and relevance of our work on these issues. Discussions were held with the corporate world and awareness and sensitization workshops were conducted for students and teachers of various schools and colleges as part of the Mumbai Eye Care Campaign of Sightsavers so that the participants of these workshops could learn more about the lives of people with disabilities and see for themselves that people with visual impairment could also be a part of the mainstream education system. The Annual Awareness event of the XRCVC, Antarchakshu once again received a huge favourable response. **Through this year the XRCVC reached out to 2264 participants.**

Awareness Workshop Participants getting a peek in the lives of the visually impaired



Service – Identifying Needs and Assisting

Since many of the members of the XRCVC have studied in schools for the blind, where the medium of instruction is Marathi, English language teaching is thus an important aspect of the direct services provided by the XRCVC to its members. During the year 2011-12, twelve students of the College underwent this programme. Other plus-curricular skills were offered on a need-basis: Braille training was provided to one person who had only been using a sighted guide or audio books for all study and work purposes; in order to help with independence, Orientation & Mobility training was made available to two individuals; and a student of the 6th standard was helped with subjects like Mathematics, Geography and Science.

Since our service orientation also includes ensuring our members have the required assistive technology, candidates who applied for the Netbook scheme were informed about their selection. In addition to this, cell phones from Saksham Trust were continued to be distributed to the members.

The XRCVC also provided workplace solutions to a member who is an employee at the SBI CAG, Ballard Pier branch where he was taught the various techniques that would help him do his job more effectively.

With regards the Institution of Banking Personnel Selection – Common Written Examination (IBPS CWE) examination, the XRCVC spread information through various media about the letter from the Commissioner of Persons with Disabilities on the much-needed relaxation of the rule that a scribe for a candidate should have a percentage score of less than 60. Helpline numbers were also provided in case students faced any problems at the last minute. This was done along with help from Eyeway Foundation and NAB India.

XRCVC this year also arranged for talks with professionals from the corporate world to help our students strengthen their concepts in economics and to understand financial markets.

In addition the XRCVC continued with providing financial support to deserving students through its two scholarships programme. The XRCVC- Tech Mahindra Scholarships for the year awarded 8 students pursuing a range of higher education programmes.

The Lions Club of East Bombay scholarship was awarded to Ms Natasha Shah for her overall achievement and performance as she graduated from the college.

The XRCVC Membership for the current academic year closed to a total of 200.



***Ms Natasha Shah receives the
Lions Club of East Bombay Scholarship award***

Network & Presentations – Expanding Our Reach

Establishing links with individuals and organisations which share our concerns is one way to further our common interests. We have shared our experience and expertise with the government and the corporate sectors. Our network includes:

Work with various Governments and Government Bodies:

- Ministry of Social Justice and Empowerment, Government of Maharashtra and the Bombay High Court to make government jobs more accessible and up-to-date with technology for people with visual impairment.
- Bringing about a change in the wording of a post for professors at University of Mumbai, which did not allow people with vision impairment to apply for the said post.
- Being recognised by the Bombay High Court, which has directed the Government of Maharashtra to update their GRs regularly and to work along with organizations like the XRCVC to widen the spread of their information.
- Joining the task force set up by the Ministry of Social Justice & Empowerment to work out the details of the proposed National Centre for Universal Design and Barrier-free Environment (NCUDBE) in Delhi. Dr. Sam Taraporevala was made a member of the core team set up by the Ministry of Social Justice & Empowerment to plan and organize a major disability awareness program at New Delhi. Dr. Sam Taraporevala was also part of the core team set up by the Ministry of Social Justice & Empowerment for selecting the awardees for the National awards for the Empowerment of Persons with Disabilities.
- Dr. Sam Taraporevala was also invited for discussions for the 12th five year plan so that necessary steps towards creating accessible infrastructure could be carried out in the next few years by the Government of India.
- Dr. Sam Taraporevala continues to be part of the Braille Council of India and the General Council of the National Institute of Visually Handicapped, Dehradun.
- Dr. Sam Taraporevala was appointed as a member of the Expert Committee for the Resource Centre for Persons with Different Disabilities at the National Library, Kolkata.

Presentations and workshops attended for the year:

- Attending a workshop by C-DAC FOSS (Free Open source Softwares) to know more about accessible systems and aids that are available for people with print impairment.
- Presenting a report of the DAISY books produced by the XRCVC and a report of the Copyright issue in the Parliament at the DFI General Body Meeting at Trivandrum, Kerala.
- Attending the Access India (AI) convention at Kerala where Dr. Sam Taraporevala presented on the topic of “Accessible ATM the Social Need, Prerequisites and the Current Reality.” Dr. Sam Taraporevala and Mr. Prashant Naik jointly presented on “Building Accessibility into Existing Electronic Devices - A Case Study of the IFT Electronic Physiotherapy Machine”.
- Attending the Techshare 2012 conducted at India Habitat Center. Dr. Sam Taraporevala presented a session on "Technology - Showing the way for inclusive education of the disabled" The XRCVC team also met with Dr. Viney Gupta, Associate Professor of

Ophthalmology from AIIMS and discussed the setting up a vision resource facility for practitioners and patients in the field of visual impairment.

- Attending a seminar on Employability and Dignified Livelihood at Bengaluru organized by the Sightsavers South India Meet 2011, where Dr. Sam Taraporevala co-chaired the session on New Avenues – Opportunities and Challenges.
- Participating in a seminar “Access for Persons with Disabilities to Higher Education and workplaces” at IIM, Bangalore, jointly hosted by IIMB and Fourth Wave Foundation as a part of “never-the-less” together it gets better! At this seminar, Dr. Sam Taraporevla presented a case study of the XRCVC as a resource unit working for people with visual impairment.
- Attending the 19th Senior Scholars’ Seminar Series on the theme: Building Asynchronous Learning Environments: Opportunities and Challenges. Dr. Sam Taraporevala was the Chairperson for the session on: ‘Catering to Diverse Needs through Asynchronous Learning Strategies.
- Presenting the work of the XRCVC & Inclusion in Education at a two-day National Conference on Inclusion: A Step Away, conducted by the Centre of Special Education, SNDT Women’s University.
- Presentation at the annual workshop on Corporate Social Initiatives (CSI) for the CSI practitioners of Larsen and Toubro.
- Conducting a sensitization and awareness session with stress on how to be courageous and cautious for 15 leaders from diverse sectors ranging from private, government, and non-profit as part of the 2011-2012 MERIDIAN senior leaders development course.

Other Collaborations:

- Worked with Mahaonline – a joint venture between the Maharashtra government and the Tata Consultancy Services to set up a camp to register people with visual impairment for the Unique Identification number and card that will help the government in providing services to people.
- Providing inputs for a newspaper / magazine in Braille for people with visual impairment with Reliance Industries.
- Discussing with the Centre for Persons with Disability Livelihoods (CPDL), Hyderabad; Patkar College, and the Rotary Club of Borivili the possibility of opening similar resource centres.
- Providing our facility for one batch of Marathi typing classes to be conducted by National Federation for the Blind, Maharashtra (NFBM).

A Final Word

Mr. Prashant Naik, our Project Manager who has steered our technology R & D and training programmes and was part of the XRCVC for the past 5 years, has left our organisation. Although we are sorry to lose his expertise, we wish him well in his new job.

As another year draws to a close and we take stock of what we have achieved, we acknowledge the consistent support of our sponsors and well-wishers. Among the many individuals and organisations that have contributed in various ways we would like to thank in particular Sightsavers International,

Tech Mahindra Foundation, Dhun Pestonji Parakh Trust, Sir Ratan Tata Trust, Johnson and Johnson Ltd, Lions Club of East Bombay, Godrej Industries Ltd, Sunshine Builders and Developers, Pooja Kapur, Cleartrip, Tata Sons Ltd, Keyurbhai Patel, Diptiben Keyurbhai Patel, Hansaben Patel, Krinashraya Automobiles, Dipak Madhubhai Patel, Suryavanshi Ads and Promotion Pvt Ltd (Rashna Doongaji), and the Principal, staff and student volunteers of St. Xavier's College, Mumbai.