

eNABLE” – A Success Story from the Democratic Socialist Republic of Sri Lanka

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Commencement of the eNABLE Project

In the year 2001, a project was commenced to provide basic telecommunication facilities inclusive of payphone access for people with various forms of disabilities. Over the years the project was expanded to reach out to people with disabilities living in many parts of the country. These people live mostly in rural and remote areas.

When we commenced the implementation of the project we were aware of the difficulties we would face. Nevertheless we moved on and we were able to change the established mindsets of the people, specially the service providers.

eNABLE Project was commenced in year 2003 and we have come a long-way. The Regulator, together with the service providers have refurbished much neglected buildings provided air-conditioning facilities for comfort and security.

Expansion

Computers with printers, Internet facilities, facsimile and photocopiers are provided to train the youth for employment.



Training the youth for employment

The above centre is located on the road leading to the international airport and the free trade zone. As such it is easy for young people with disabilities to be trained to work in this ICT Centre.

Many institutions such as Banks (HSBC) are now employing children with disabilities who are computer literate. We intend negotiating with many more institutions to make it possible for our special children to gain employment. They will not be marginalized anymore.

Access to information via television

A rural school for children with hearing impairments was in need of computers as well as a Television set with a DVD player. The Regulator has fulfilled this need, considering their right to access information.



The hearing impaired children thanking us, using sign-language for providing them with a television set.



Handing over the television set and the DVD player

The children were overjoyed at the prospect of having a television set with a large screen.

Children who possess a certain degree of hearing are provided with assistive technologies. Computers with Braille facilities have been provided to children with vision impairments. They are also given the advantage to use speaking software (HAL System). We are in the process of purchasing printers with Braille facilities.

Children with speech impairments are encouraged to speak

A Solaris Group Hearing System was provided to a school for little children with hearing impairments. These children with hearing impairment are rarely correctly diagnosed and given proper treatment. Their hearing ability is constantly monitored with hi-tech equipment in this school. In many developing nations these children are not given a systematic education but Sister Greta is determined to make these children speak.



Based on audio-gram reports, audio logical investigations on speech and language assessment appropriate hearing aids are provided. With the Solaris Group Hearing System which is called (Frequency Modulation System) a school could accommodate twelve children at a time who will hear only the teacher's voice. "We hope that this would proclaim loud and clear and prove with tangible results that the deaf can hear and dumb can talk provided they get the right kind of support".

In the year 2007 we have taken measures to provide fully equipped computer laboratories with Internet access. Training is undertaken by service providers.

In order to provide access to payphones for people with physical disabilities ramps are built.



A payphone within easy reach

With the implementation of the eNABLE project I am certain that we could help to build an inclusive society by including marginalized groups. Today, in many developing nations many divides exists in the society in varied forms dividing the society. In this context naturally, access to ICTs will be extremely difficult for people with disabilities if timely action is not taken. In Sri Lanka, specially with a very high intelligence quotient, the children could be trained easily.



A mentally challenged child

Mentally Challenged

Presently we are considering a group of mentally challenged children to be trained on the use of computers first. Initially it is important for us to train them to use the keyboard.

This school is being provided with a small budget but they have foreign donors.

It is a challenge, but I am certain we could meet it successfully because the aim should be not only to provide shelter but also education, independence and the right to live like any other.

We will make every Endeavour to enable our special child to access information and communication technologies overcoming all barriers. In Sri Lanka, we are very proud to state that there will be no room for any of the great divides, educational divide, language divide, information divide, most importantly gender divide.

No gender divide



The International Telecommunications Union (ITU) has considered providing us with funds to the value of USD 2600/= for project activities for the year 2007. Best efforts are made to provide assistive technologies to the centres where people/children with disabilities live, learn or work.

We appreciate the assistance provided by the ITU which would greatly help to expand this project to a great extent.

It is important for us as, Regulators and as adults to teach the children with disabilities that these technologies should be used for noble values in life. It is only then that young people, irrespective of whether they are with disabilities or not could make this world a better and a brighter place for all.

Biography

Mrs. Pushpa Réne Amarasiri is the Director Legal Affairs of the Telecommunications Regulatory Commission of Sri Lanka. She has contributed immensely for the development of ICTs in Sri Lanka for marginalized groups.

To make an inclusive society she initiated the eNABLE Project and it has expanded greatly bridging the many gaps existing in a developing nation.