

Toward “Sri Lankan model” of inclusive schools where all students learn together with school-wide support

While primary school enrolment rate has reached at a high level in Sri Lanka, there is large room for improvement in providing a proper environment and reasonable accommodation that support the learning of students with disabilities, and hence children with disabilities tend to find it difficult to access public education. Therefore, both promoting the schooling of children with disabilities and ensuring the quality of their education are issues to be addressed.

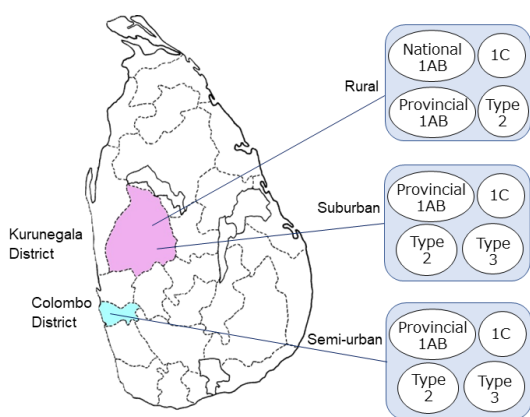
About 10% of public schools have Special Education Units (SEUs) accepting students with disabilities. By selecting pilot schools with SEUs in targeted areas, this project attempts to establish a Sri Lankan model of inclusive education, through the activities such as building a supportive school enrolment system, strengthening the teaching capacity of teachers, and collecting and accumulating best practices.

The project has recently completed a baseline survey report. The implementation of the baseline survey was delayed for months due to the Easter bombings in April 2019. This newsletter will provide an update on the progress of the project from its inception in March 2019 to March 2020.



Pilot school selected

Sri Lanka's public schools are divided into four types by grades and subjects. The project team, in consultation with the Ministry of Education, selected 12 pilot schools with SEUs from the three target sites with different characteristics in the two districts, covering various types of schools in each site.



Baseline survey completed

This survey was conducted to grasp and analyze the baseline data through classroom observations, interviews, and questionnaires with local education officers, principals, teachers, students, social service officers, public health midwives, etc. Here are some of the findings of the survey.

- The number of students with disabilities in mainstream classrooms increases each year
- Students in mainstream classes generally have a high level of self-esteem
- Accessibility to school facilities for students with disabilities is not taken into consideration at school as a whole
- Many of SEU students have attention deficit
- Children with disabilities who are out of school tend to have severe and multiple disabilities in urban area, while children with disabilities in suburban and rural areas tend to be out of school for the reasons other than disability, such as long distances to school.
- There are few training opportunities for In-service advisors (ISAs) to develop their capacities
- ISAs, social service officers and public health midwives recognize the importance of raising awareness in the school community. However, there is room for improvement in coordination of stakeholders inside and outside the school

The project's nickname and logo decided



As a result of discussion with the Ministry of Education, the project was named “REACH-SS (Reasonable Accommodation for all Children in Sri Lankan Schools). In response to this, we created a logo for the project, with the "R" of REACH as an

elephant, which is an animal essential for Sri Lankan festivals, and its nose reaching out to EACH (each child). The various shapes above the EACH express the project's goal of creating inclusive schools that welcome a diverse range of children.

Training in Japan conducted

In October 2019, ten officials from the Ministry of Education visited Japan to learn about the initiatives to promote inclusive education system in Japan. The two-week program included Disability Equality Training (DET) and the lectures on creation of individualized education plan,

as well as school visits in Toyonaka City in Osaka Prefecture and Yokohama City in Kanagawa Prefecture to learn how to support students with disabilities in mainstream classes.



Awareness Raising Workshop conducted



In February 2020, awareness raising workshops were conducted at two pilot schools in Kurunegala District to deepen their understanding of inclusive education and encourage them to think about the challenges and solutions

to promote it. There were lively discussions in the group work where the participants found out barriers in the school environment and consider the solutions. They came up with various ideas such as making a plan to renovate the steps and rough roads inside school with the help of local residents, obtaining advices from SEU teachers on providing reasonable accommodations, and raising awareness among students and parents. The project will implement similar activities at all pilot schools in the future.

Project Team

The project is managed in collaboration with researchers. A Sri Lankan expert who has long worked in the field of education for children with disabilities also joined the team. The entire team will work together with its counterpart, the Ministry of Education, to find a Sri Lankan model of inclusive education.



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