Quality of Life and Employability Potential of Persons with Visual Impairment and Blindness in Sri Lanka

This study focuses on the life of people with visual impairment and blindness in Sri Lanka. Producing evidence-based research aiming at empowering people with visual disabilities, socially, economically, and otherwise, is the overall aim of the project. The study deals with three main areas, namely, (a) prevalence of and service provision, (b) education and employment leading to improved quality of life and (c) employment potential and job market opportunities of this vulnerable community. Thus, this study encompasses a broad research portfolio of interrelated sub-projects in the disability research discipline.

Publications of over 30 research articles, both qualitative and quantitative, in reputed international and local journals and conferences have been resulted. In addition to the principal investigators (three Professors of SLIIT Business School of SLIIT-UNI), many have contributed for the success of this endeavor, time-to-time. They include two senior research fellows, three research assistants of which two are in the master’s level, 46 undergraduates research students. The passionate support and direct involvement a number of academics and scholars who themselves are visually impaired and blind not only made this a unique study but added much color to the whole process. A research project of this magnitude exploring the socioeconomics aspects of people with disabilities, in this island nation in Indian Ocean- a developing country- has not been conducted before, and thus would mark a distinct milestone in the recent history. The three-year project is to mark its successful completion in December 2022, amidst certain critical challenges including Covid-19 pandemic and recent social disturbances.

In addition to publishing a scholarly publication, this research has made and continue to make a significant social impact towards empowering people with visual impermanent and blindness. Poor social awareness and lack of right understanding about the competencies of people with visual impairment and blindness, inadequacies of assistive devices and disability aids, and the socio-cultural landscape in Sri Lanka have been identified as major impediments for improving their quality of life.

It is evident that we have a long way to go towards social inclusion and engaging people with visual disabilities in day-to-day social and economic activities. In this respect, a number of
initiatives have been taken to educate the community including school children, professionals including opticians, and the general public. A policy initiative that would have a major impact towards enhancing employment opportunities for people with visual impairment and blindness has been initiated with National Apprentice and Industrial Training Authority (NAITA). Accordingly, arrangements have been made to provide a training on NVDA (Nonvisual Desktop Access) software to 53 ICT trainers attached to regional training centers of NAITA, at SLIIT School of Business. Thereby, persons with visual impairment and blindness will be able to follow NVQ Level 4 ICT courses at NAITA. All in all, the project would play a major role in promoting social inclusion of the visually disabled community, a highlight in the 2030 -Agenda for Sustainable Development Goals of United Nations.