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Commonwealth Educational Media Centre for Asia

WELCOME NOTE

THE NEED FOR INCLUSIVE CLASSROOMS IN THE MALDIVES

By

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WEBINAR FOR BUILDING CAPACITIES OF POLICYMAKERS & TEACHERS OF MALDIVES

Organised by

COL-CEMCA
in collaboration with the
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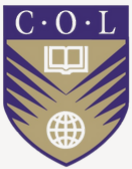
Dear colleagues at the Ministry of Education, Dr Fathmath Nishan, Deputy Minister, Ministry of Education; Dr Aminath Nazima, Deputy Minister, Department of Inclusive Education; Mr Ahmed Mausoom, Focal Point for Commonwealth of Learning; Ms Adhila Rushdee, Head of Inclusive Education Department; and Ms Haleemath Hussain and various other colleagues who have joined us online from Male and the various Atols and provinces of the Maldives. My gratitude to you for the partnership. May I, on behalf of COL-CEMCA welcome each one of you and hundreds of teachers who have joined us today to participate in this training workshop.

On the outset, shall I also congratulate the Government of the Republic of Maldives for recognising the need for an exclusive policy and implementation mechanism through the Department of Inclusive Education in the Island Nation. This shows the seriousness with which the government is handling the issue and the attention paid to persons with disability and other forms of disadvantage. By becoming inclusive in education, we are building an equitable and inclusive nation with citizens and the future workforce. This resonates with the idea of 'Leaving No One Behind!' Well done the Maldives!

My hearty welcome to Ms Noopur Jhunjunwala, the Founder of Changelnkk Foundation, Ms Poornitha Nambiar, the Programme Manager and various other colleagues at Changelnkk who have joined us today.

May I also welcome my own colleagues at COL-CEMCA, and also place on record their contribution to the Webinar today. And, my sincere gratitude to Dr Geet Oberoi who serves today as the main resource person who brings in the perspective of an inclusive classroom that facilitate quality access to education, enabling children with specific-learning difficulties to experience the same learning experience as the rest of the children do in classrooms.

The issue of Specific-Learning Disabilities is dealt with at various levels. At the global level, through various conventions and guidelines, we see the larger agenda of inclusion ensured for not only children with specific learning-



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disabilities (SLD), but for all those who are identified as persons with disabilities (PwD). Globally, we recognise the fact that each of the persons with disabilities is served with dignity, included in all 'spheres' of life and provided with all opportunities to excel in life. With regard to SLD, various efforts are undertaken at the global level. For example, the month of October each year is celebrated to acknowledge and highlight the issue of Dyslexia. The Go Red for Dyslexia global campaign celebrates the achievements of people with Dyslexia, something that helps to create awareness on the issue, but also helps to see the issue in a newer light.

In the United States, recognising that over 40 million Americans are living with Dyslexia, the International Dyslexia Association, for instance, is focussing on the 2 million children who are struggling with reading. On the 17th of this month, they hosted a 24-hour live programme to raise funds for the cause. They went Red for Dyslexia and organised activities such as:

- Red Carpet Walk
- Lip Service: The ultimate Lip Sync Challenge to go beyond the Lip Service to the cause
- Spotlight Baltimore to showcase the efforts of local business houses
- 'Til Dawn': the VIP After Party

Again, starting tomorrow, the 24th, there will be three-day annual reading, literacy and learning conference at Hyatt Regency Dallas to discuss the issue in detail.

In India, the ChangeInkk Foundation, in partnership with the Ministry of Education, has been at the forefront of addressing the issue at the primary, elementary, secondary and tertiary levels of education and skill development. Various important buildings and monuments are lit in red to spread awareness, Walk4Dyslexia events are organised all over the nation. Even in a state such as Nagaland, the Department of School Education along with the Nagaland Board of School Education (NBSE), Department of Employment, Skills Development and Entrepreneurship, the State Council for Education Research and Training,



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Samagra Shiksha, and the Office of the State Disability Commissioner organised 'Walk4Dyslexia' at the Heritage in Kohima on Saturday, the 19th of October 2024.

Last week, the Commonwealth of Learning and ChangeInkk Foundation, in partnership with the Ministry of Education launched a set of video tutorials for assisting all staff in the higher education institutions to learn more on the issue of SLD. Again, COL-CEMCA and ChangeInkk Foundation are launching a full-fledged course aimed at Schoolteachers to identify, accommodate, strategise and support children with SLD in Classrooms. This 15-hour long courseware will be recognised as a part of the teacher development activity.

Welcoming the Maldives into the network of nations that deal with SLD, the Commonwealth of Learning shall be happy to provide all these material, such as the courses and tutorials for adaptation to the island nation. We shall also strive towards building the capacity of teachers and the entire education community in the Maldives, should there be an interest.

In our pursuit to mainstream SLD in our education system, it is important for us to consider a systemic change rather than a symptomatic change as in the case of many nations. I believe that in the Maldives, we may consider creating the necessary systems at the macro, meso and micro levels.

At the micro level, within the schools, we may create systems for screening and identifying children with special needs. This may also be followed by creating partnerships between the health and education authorities so that the identified children can be certified for the disability; thus, provided with all necessary support required. Also, at the micro level, we must ensure that both hard and soft systems are geared up towards accommodating and supporting children with special needs. This may include staff training to infrastructure enhancement to ensuring that data on disability is captured and reported.

At the meso level, we need to create systemic transformation through institutions that provide staff training, curricular reforms and creating curated



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repository of open resources for wider usage. Intermediary organisations can also lend support in terms of knowledge sharing among micro-level delivery institutions.

At the macro level, we need to ensure that the global commitments are honoured through enabling policies and funding mechanisms. It is important for nations to create data capturing mechanisms that inform policy-making and monitor progress made at the national level. Many a times, the subject of disability is dealt with by various ministries within the government. There should be an attempt to create a unified government approach to ensuring that the issue is addressed in a holistic manner.

Having mentioned our interest to continue collaborating with our colleagues in the Maldives, I, once again, extend my warm welcome to each one of you present in this two-hour long online training session.

Ladies and gentlemen, thank you for your attention!
