



Working with deafblind and multi-sensory impaired people throughout India

## **Concept Note on Second National Conference on Deafblindness 20 – 22 January, 2011 New Delhi**

### **Deafblindness – ‘Building an Inclusive Environment’**

#### **Background & Rationale**

Deafblindness is a combination of varying degrees of visual and hearing impairment in an individual. This combination leads to severe difficulties in communication, mobility and accessing information, which leads to isolation and social exclusion. People with deafblindness have unique educational, vocational and other needs. They learn best when information is presented in a consistent manner. Persons with deafblindness are excluded or segregated from the society due to lack of awareness and resources to support their development.

In India there are an estimated 450,000 deafblind people, most of whom do not receive appropriate services and opportunities to access and exercise their rights. Sense International (India) is the first and only national level NGO that works with deafblind people throughout India since 1997. We work in partnership with NGOs to develop services for deafblind people and support the government in including deafblindness in its schemes, policies and legislations.

In the last 13 years Sense International (India) has developed a network of 40 partners across 19 states of India to reach out to more than 32,000 deafblind persons and their families. This has been possible due to the untiring efforts of our partners, regional learning centres and support from various state and central government. During this phase, greater awareness on deafblindness has been brought in through inclusion of deafblindness in almost all courses of Rehabilitation Council of India, in the teachers’ manual of Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan (SSA) in many states and through our partner networks.

In the past, Sense International (India) organised a series of National Experts Meets (NEM) with the aim to bring together practitioners and experts on a common platform and develop a pool of expertise to provide comprehensive solutions. And in 2009, Sense International (India) along with the National Institute of Empowerment of Persons with Multiple Disabilities (NIEPMD), Ministry of Social Justice and Empowerment, Govt of India, successfully conducted the first National Conference on “Deafblindness: From Isolation to Inclusion”, addressing various issues including identification, assessment, management, service delivery models and various schemes and policies for deafblind people in India with the active participation of 266 professionals from all over India.

With the government drafting a new legislation on disability in place of PWD Act, it is the most opportune time to partner with the government to look into the status of deafblind persons and

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their families in our country. We have a valuable role to play in helping to bring about an inclusive society in which every deafblind person can participate. As the theme of the conference 'Building an Inclusive Environment' suggests inclusive environments should not only address educational system alone but all aspects of life of a deafblind person in all areas of development like health, safety, education, work, communication needs, adaptive devices, social and community life etc, through appropriate and considerate methods. Sense International (India) aims through this National Conference to address these issues and create a positive environment for deafblind persons by bringing together all stakeholders.

## **Participants**

We are expecting 200 participants from different parts of the country representing NGOs working for persons with disability and other allied areas, Govt. departments, state Sarva Shiksha missions, UN agencies, bilateral agencies, International Non-Government Organisations, development organisations, deafblind persons, their families and teachers.

## **Objectives**

- To involve practitioners, researchers, govt. officials, development workers, educators, deafblind people, families as well as experts from related fields and create an opportunity for discussion and sharing information on learning, researches, best practices etc. to build an inclusive environment for people with deafblindness.
- To sensitise, among others, medical and teaching professionals as well as the Central and State Governments.

## **Expected Results**

- Increased recognition of the needs of deafblind people, positive influence on government policies, schemes and legislations
- Including deafblindness in the existing policies and programmes of civil society organisations
- Ensuring an inclusive environment for deafblind people
- Joint resolution to guide the future direction of Sense International (India)'s work in collaboration with key stakeholders.

**Date:** 20 – 22 January, 2011

**Venue:** New Delhi