

## A Brighter Future for Children with Disabilities



### **Project objectives and goals**

The main objective of the project is to empower children with disabilities (CWD) in urban areas to increase their access to education in regular schools. There are two intended outcomes. These are:

- to improve local identification standards and mechanisms to detect CWD in regular schools
- to empower families and educational organizations to access appropriate education services, learning resources, and personal development opportunities for CWD.

IRIM is responsible for undertaking work towards achieving the first outcome.

## **Project dates**

The project is being implemented between June 2016–September 2017.

## **Background**

In the 2014–2015 school year, the total number of primary and secondary school students in Mongolia was 505,816. Identified CWD constituted two per cent of these (11,072). CWD make up a significant percentage of school dropouts and many have very limited access to education, especially in rural areas. Nationally, approximately 30 per cent (4,779) of the total number of school-aged CWD (15,851) did not attend school.

However, because of the quality of the data, we do not know for certain how many CWD there are in Mongolia. There are no established methods to detect CWD. In most cases, regular school teachers rely on their personal experience in order to determine whether children have disabilities or not. In 2014, IRIM conducted a nationwide survey as part of a disability and education research project funded by the Japan International Cooperation Agency Research Institute (JICARI). The survey also found that data on CWD are of a poor quality and ambiguous.

Established in 2014, The Sub-Commission of Health, Education and Social Welfare (SCHESW) is the official organization for identifying and screening CWD in Mongolia. But currently, the SCHESW is not working to its full capacity. There is an urgent need to standardise the national screening tool used to detect CWD at an early stage. It is intended that the screening tool developed by the project will be simple and easy-to-use, and will help identify which children should then be formally assessed by the SCHESW.

## **IRIM conducted following activities under the implementing of the outcome 1 during past time:**

### **1. Baseline survey:**

We conducted a baseline survey and interviews in three Ulaanbaatar duuregs. The surveys and interviews included parents, nine schools teachers, khoroo social workers, six non-government organizations (NGO) and specialists from the Social Development and Education Departments of the duureg governor. In total, 312 questionnaires and 60 interviews were conducted.

The baseline survey found that in 2015–16 there was no central body that implemented activity related to assessment of CWD.. It also found that while a few members of the SCHESW and related NGOs were aware of assessment tools, but they had not used them.

**2. Policy Analysis:** The project team undertook a review of the clauses related to CWD in policy documents, laws and regulations that are currently applicable in Mongolia. The team then validated the results of the review with government experts and NGOs.

The review found that from 2016 the Development Department—which previously only operated within the Ministry of Labour and Social Welfare—will become the Prime Minister's Office Council for People with Disabilities. The Council therefore now has additional responsibilities to ensure cooperation between key ministries and provide guidance and regulation for them. However, the review found that it is currently unable to do this sufficiently. It also found that cooperation between stakeholders including NGOs, and government and international organisations is poor.

**3. International best practice comparison:** We reviewed the practices in four countries that have inclusive education policies—Australia, Ireland, Thailand and the United States of America. In completing the comparison we examined the following areas:

- rules and regulations regarding CWD assessment
- tools and methodology used to assess CWD
- who the stakeholders are regarding CWD assessment

We found that school and special education centres in the countries compared often collaborate and respond to the needs of each individual student. Generally, regular schools have their own assessment team and they undertake screening and assessment of students at an early stage. If children then need an in-depth assessment, this is usually completed at special education centres. Formal assessment teams usually consist of specialists including paediatricians, special education teachers, psychologists and therapists. The team usually also gives guidance on how to respond to the special needs of each child, and which measures should be taken.

### **4. Working group:**

The project team created a working group that developed a screening tool for identifying CWD at an early stage. The ten-person working group consisted of specialists working in the education of CWD, specialists from duureg governors' offices and representatives from NGOs.

Based on its research and consultation with relevant stakeholders, the working group selected an international identification tool called the 'Washington Group-Child Functioning Module' developed by the United Nations International Children's Emergency Fund (UNICEF). The working group

determined that the tool will help achieve the project's purpose and is therefore suitable. This is the tool that is due to be piloted.

### **Trial of the screening tool in target schools**

The pilot targeted 500 pupils in total. We stratified the sample into three groups:—identified CWD, children identified as potentially being CWD and children who have not been identified as CWD /normal children/. The project team conducted training on the screening tool and its methodology for participating school teachers and social workers.

Based on the outcomes of the trial, the project team will finalise the screening tool and manual, and distribute it to all the relevant stakeholders including family doctors, teachers, khoroo social workers and parents who have CWD.

### **Future directions**

Following piloting of the tool and the finalisation of all relevant guidance, we anticipate that regular school teachers and khoroo social workers will be able to use the 'Child Functioning Module' to do an initial screening for CWD. The information from this assessment will then be used to select which students should undergo further formal assessment by the Sub-Commission of Health, Education, and Social Welfare.

It is anticipated that there will be a range of positive outcomes from this work. Firstly, we anticipate that the widespread use of the tool will improve the quality of the available statistics related to CWD. Secondly, it will allow for targeted assessments by the Sub-Commission of Health, Education, and Social Welfare, which should improve efficiency. Finally, we anticipate that the tool will allow for the identification of many CWD who would not otherwise have been identified.