



Xavier's Resource Centre for the Visually Challenged
XRCVC

ANNUAL REPORT

2022-2023 (June to May)





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Annual Report for 2022-23 (June to May)

As the Xavier's Resource Centre for the Visually Challenged (XRCVC) prepares to enter its 20th year, we look back at the events of academic year 2022-23 with a sense of deep fulfilment.

Savit Sodani, a visually impaired ICSE student who we have been mentoring since he was in Class 2, scored a staggering 97.6 per cent in his Class 10 Board Exams. Savit is a student of Prime Academy (ICSE). The principal of the school, Rehana Kazi, was delighted to share, "XRCVC guides and supports us throughout the academic year. Not only help in academics, but also guidance on how to handle the visually challenged children emotionally, socially, in the classroom, outside the classroom and on the sports field. Training sessions for all the teachers are conducted, and new teachers are trained as they join." During the year we also produced a report titled 'Off To School VI Go' -

<http://xrcvc.org/docs/Off%20to%20School%20VI%20Go%20-%20A%20Report%20on%20XRCVC%E2%80%99s%20Inclusive%20Education%20Project.pdf>

which documented XRCVC's Inclusive Education Project from 2014 to 2021, of which Savit was a key beneficiary. The report presented data obtained from a qualitative study carried out to determine the impact of each distinct intervention model, and the findings thereof. This report is likely to be of interest and use to mainstream teachers and schools, special educators, blindness organisations, parents and allies of school-aged blind students, inclusive education researchers, and indeed all educationists wanting to be inclusive in their practice.

Major partnerships

The XRCVC was privileged to partner with the SBI Foundation, Centre of Excellence for PwDs (COE) from April 22 to March 23. The project Inclusion and Access: The 360 Degree Approach broke new ground and helped us achieve many a success. We were able to impact over 2600 beneficiaries through this initiative and also have many successes in the assistive technology research area.

Our partnership with the Dhun Pestonji Parakh Discretionary Trust (DPP) through Project X-Sight a multi-dimensional holistic approach to promote inclusion for the Blind and Low Vision also yielded many successes. We were able to reach over 1900 persons.

These numbers do not reflect many other indirect beneficiaries whose lives would be touched through our ongoing work and advocacy initiatives.

Purple Fest

In January, Purple Fest, a festival of inclusion held on an expansive scale in Goa, marking India's inaugural endeavour of its kind, invited XRCVC to assume a pivotal role in coordinating awareness and assistive technology events at the mega event.

At Purple Fest, we showcased a distinctive assortment of assistive technology aids and devices, encompassing both economical options and cutting-edge, sophisticated solutions. These remarkable technologies cater to individuals of diverse age groups and disabilities. Among the pioneering technologies presented, notable examples included a stair-climbing wheelchair designed to accommodate individuals with orthopaedic impairments, as well as the Tobii Dynavox eye-tracking system, empowering users to interface with computer systems and other devices through ocular movements, even extending to smart speakers.



Acknowledging XRCVC's contribution, Mr Taha Haaziq, Secretary, Office of the State Commissioner for PwDs, Goa, said, "As you are aware that the first of its kind Purple Fest Goa 2023 was a mega success. This would have not been possible without support and the collaboration with Xavier's Resource Centre for the Visually Challenged (XRCVC) St. Xavier's College, Mumbai for Antarchakshu and Assistive Technology in this field. This office would like to put on record our sincere gratitude to the entire team of XRCVC who worked closely to make this event a grand success. This Commission is planning to host Purple Fest 2024 on a much bigger scale and would like to have Xavier's Resource Centre for the Visually Challenged (XRCVC) St. Xavier's College, Mumbai to have Antarchakshu and Assistive Technology Exhibition once again with new concepts and a workshop in regards to STEM Education as one of the pre-events to break our own benchmark which were set in Purple Fest 2023."

Our exhibition attracted over 500 participants, comprising civil servants, medical professionals, financial experts, specialised educators, and members of the general public, many of whom encountered such advanced technology for the first time. The prevailing sentiment among the majority of attendees was one of astonishment and wonderment, as they bore witness to the transformative potential of these technological innovations.



Glimpses from XRCVC's awareness and assistive technology offerings at Purple Fest in Goa which was inaugurated by the chief minister of Goa, Mr Pramod Sawant

Invitation from the Government of India

In a significant accomplishment this year, the Department of Empowerment of Persons with Disabilities in the Ministry of Social Justice & Empowerment, Government of India, alongside the Rehabilitation Council of India (RCI), extended a prestigious invitation to XRCVC. The purpose was to conduct two training sessions as part of Capacity Building Programs for Rehabilitation Council of India (RCI) officers and affiliates. These inputs focused on Creating Accessible Documents and on Accessible Social Media content.

These sessions were conducted on the 23rd March, 2023, with active participation from 45 individuals. The Government displayed a commendable commitment to the training programme, recognising its



significance, and the participants also expressed their appreciation for the hands-on approach we adopted during the training.

Notably, the higher authorities have issued instructions to the participants to actively implement their newly acquired knowledge. They were mandated to ensure that all social media content released by the government department and the RCI is made accessible within a month's time. This directive signifies a substantial stride towards promoting accessibility within the government sphere.

We are also happy to share that Rehabilitation council of India (RCI) the highest statutory body monitoring the standards of education for professionals in the disability space in the country invited Mr. Ketan Kothari, Managing Consultant – programs as an expert on a high-powered expert committee appointed for finalising the revision of syllabi in the Diploma in Education (visual impairment) and Diploma in Computer Education (visual impairment).



(Left) Mr Chandrakant Patil, Minister, Higher and Technical Education, Textiles and Parliamentary Affairs, Maharashtra at the one-day State Level Conference on 'Accreditation: The Way Ahead' in November, along with Dr Rajendra Shinde, principal, St Xavier's College; (right top) Dr. Sam Taraporevala, Executive Director, XRCVC, inaugurating the Faculty Development Programme at MSFDA in July; (right bottom) Dr. Nipun Vinayak, Executive Director, MSFDA, addressing the audience at the C20 Policy consultations on education and disability event organised by XRCVC

Advocacy

XRCVC operates diligently to enhance the quality of life for individuals with disabilities, addressing both micro and macro aspects of their well-being. We maintain close collaborations with governmental entities, corporations, researchers, and educational institutions to drive empowerment and awareness initiatives on a broader scale. These efforts primarily focus on facilitating accessible education, financial inclusion, print accessibility, and promoting independent living.

In addition, we extend direct and indirect support to individuals at the micro level.

Initially established as a centre dedicated to individuals with visual impairments, XRCVC has evolved into a non-profit organisation that operates as an integral part of St. Xavier's College (Autonomous). We have expanded our services to encompass students with autism, learning disabilities, hearing/speech impairments, and orthopaedic disabilities. This broader scope enables us to cater to a diverse range of disabilities and offer comprehensive support to a wider spectrum of individuals in need. In the academic year 2022-23, our advocacy endeavours covered a wide swathe of stakeholders and beneficiaries.

Appended below are some of the initiatives:

- In September 2022, XRCVC's Executive Director, Dr Sam Taraporevala was invited by UNESCO India to provide inputs in a group discussion on DEPwD's 'Vision 2047' for persons with disabilities in India. A document was subsequently prepared by the Department of Disability Affairs, Ministry of Social Justice and Empowerment. During the year, he was also invited as a guest speaker by VM Ware to speak to its employees on disability challenges and solutions. Additionally, he made a presentation to the special committee on banking access for the visually challenged by the Delhi high court to focus on problems and solutions.
- In November 2022, XRCVC published a policy paper for upholding the rights of education and equality for persons with blindness and low vision to study and practice physiotherapy. Paper Title: Regulatory gaps in physiotherapy education and practice in India: A ground-level challenge. Available at the following link: <http://xrcvc.org/docs/Physiotherapy%20Policy%20Paper.pdf>
- During the same month we conducted an awareness workshop and assistive technology exhibition for the staff of Future Generali Insurance in Vikhroli. Subsequent to this, the company has offered internships / employment to three visually impaired persons.
- XRCVC's Ketan Kothari was invited to be a panelist for the panel discussion on 'Our Lives Our Identity' that was a part of the National Seminar organised by SNDT Women's University on the theme of 'Rights of the Differently Abled' sponsored by the National Commission for Women in December.
- We also conducted meetings with BEST regarding accessible bus stops for people with low vision
- In February 2023, a cricket match was organised for students with visual impairment from the college, to restart the sports and leisure activities for students with disabilities.
- Besides, we helped one of our student members to design an accessible menu at St Xavier's College, and worked with Akasa Air to make their print offerings accessible.
- In February, Dr. Sam Taraporevala and Mr. Ketan Kothari of the XRCVC were nominated as members to the Civil 20 (C20) Working Group on Education and Digital Transformation. C20 India 2023 is an official engagement group under India's G20 Presidency. With India hosting the G20 Summit this year, the purpose of C20 is to function as a platform to bring forth civil society organisations' (CSOs) voices to the G20 leaders. Later in the year, XRCVC made a presentation about the XRCVC Inclusive Education model at a meeting organised by Maharashtra Dyslexia Association as a part of C20 India. In May, XRCVC organised a Policy Consultation on Education and Disability at the college in a hybrid mode in collaboration with Rising Flame and Mariwala Health Initiative as a part of the C20 Disability, Equity and Justice Working Group. The XRCVC also participated at the International Conference of the Disability, Equity and Justice Working Group of the C20 under India's G20 Presidency.

Throughout the year, our training programmes, content creation endeavours, and various other activities remained robust. A notable initiative titled 'Training of Teachers in Inclusive Education' continued to be implemented in collaboration between St. Xavier's College (Autonomous), Mumbai (XRCVC), and Maharashtra State Faculty Development Academy (MSFDA). This groundbreaking programme has made



significant strides, fostering inclusive education by equipping college professors with the necessary knowledge and skills.

Additionally, through our SHAMIL project, dedicated to advancing inclusive education and fortifying the inclusive education landscape in educational institutions across the nation, we solidified partnerships with key educational establishments, thereby strengthening our collective efforts in promoting inclusive practices.

Moreover, our ongoing partnership with Atma, a prominent NGO Accelerator renowned for providing strategic solutions to NGOs and social enterprises, continued to flourish. Together with Atma, we collaborated on the development of a comprehensive Child Safeguarding Policy. This initiative aimed to support the implementation of practical measures within organisations to ensure the safety of children and effectively identify and respond to potential child safeguarding issues and incidents.

Through these endeavours, we remain committed to advancing inclusive education, fostering collaboration with key stakeholders, and actively contributing to the betterment and protection of children within our society.

For timely updates and comprehensive information on our ongoing work, we encourage members and stakeholders to visit our official website (www.xrcvc.org), explore our inclusive education resource (<https://sites.google.com/xaviers.edu.in/xrcvc-inclusive-education/xrcvc>), and engage with us on our social media platforms. You can find us on Facebook as XRCVC—Xavier’s Resource Centre for the Visually Challenged, as well as on Twitter with our handle @XRCVC.

During the academic year 2022–2023, St. Xavier's College (Autonomous) witnessed the enrolment of 114 students with disabilities across both the junior and senior college divisions.

The college’s Enabling Committee, under the leadership of the principal and comprising representatives from the staff and student body, diligently oversaw and facilitated inclusion and accessibility requirements for these students. To address student requests and cater to their needs, the Coordinator for Students with Disabilities, from the XRCVC, serves as the primary resource and manages the committee’s activities. XRCVC provided St. Xavier's College with the necessary resources and support to facilitate the seamless functioning of the Enabling Committee throughout the year. Additionally, we provided support to the Student Inclusion Cell (SIC) of the college; a separate report of the SIC’s activities is available.

Beyond our campus, XRCVC remains actively engaged in promoting inclusion and access nationwide through a diverse range of training programmes, advocacy initiatives, and awareness campaigns. Our commitment to supporting the needs of students extends beyond campus boundaries, and we strive to create an inclusive environment where every individual can thrive.

Membership base

During the academic year 2022-23, the membership base of XRCVC increased to 972 individuals. However, our commitment to making a positive impact extends well beyond our membership community. Through our advocacy efforts, we strive to reach and positively influence the lives of thousands of individuals across the nation.



To fulfill our mission, we offer an extensive array of direct support and training services to individuals with disabilities, caregivers, educators, and institutions. Our direct support encompasses a wide range of services, including scanning, demonstrations, and training on the usage of assistive devices. We also provide career guidance, basic computer training, assistance with software applications, training on mobile phone usage, instruction on smart cane utilisation, Braille printing services, coordination with publishers to procure accessible book copies, as well as liaising with educational institutions, banks, and other financial entities.

By offering such comprehensive support and training, we aim to empower individuals with disabilities and equip them with the tools and knowledge necessary to thrive in various aspects of their lives. Our commitment extends to fostering accessibility and inclusivity in multiple spheres, ensuring that individuals with disabilities can lead fulfilling and independent lives.

Personal and career guidance services were provided to members and their families across various disabilities, assisting in identifying individual needs, interests, aptitudes, and addressing concerns.

Volunteer support

Despite the rapid advancements in technology, it is important to acknowledge that human assistance continues to play a crucial role in supporting individuals with disabilities. At XRCVC, we recognise this necessity and offer volunteer services to cater to various needs. Our volunteer services encompass a wide range of roles, including:

- **Reading assistance:** Volunteers provide support by reading aloud for individuals with visual impairments or other print disabilities.
- **Class buddies:** Volunteers assist in taking notes during classroom lectures, ensuring that students with disabilities have access to comprehensive and accurate class materials.
- **Subject teaching:** Volunteers offer subject-specific instruction and guidance to individuals who require additional support in their academic pursuits.
- **Material conversion:** Our volunteers play a vital role in converting study materials into accessible formats, making them easier to read and comprehend for students with disabilities. This involves tasks such as scanning, typing, editing, recording, and embossing.
- **Scribes and prompters:** Volunteers are available to serve as scribes or prompters during examinations, providing necessary assistance to individuals who require support in completing written or oral assessments.
- **Other assistance:** XRCVC caters to specific individual requirements on a case-by-case basis, ensuring that any additional needs are addressed effectively.
- **Based on the unique needs and requirements of our members, we provide volunteers for both short-term and long-term assignments. During the year, we were fortunate to have the support of approximately 110 dedicated volunteers.**
- **By engaging volunteers, we aim to foster a supportive and inclusive environment that empowers individuals with disabilities to achieve their full potential. These volunteers play an instrumental role in bridging the gap and ensuring equal opportunities for all.**



Additions to our team

We welcomed four members into our team this year: Ketan Kothari as Managing Consultant (Programmes), Disha Kapadia Chinchwadkar as Lead Consultant – Awareness, Dr. Kasturi Kulkarni as Senior Consultant – Education and Manoj Rajodiya as Office Assistant. We would also like to record our deepest appreciation to Neha Trivedi, who left XRCVC this year after a highly productive and committed marathon stint of 16 years (from 2006 to 2022), to start her independent consultancy.



Our new team members got into the thick of action from Day 1

Assistive technologies

The XRCVC houses an exhaustive list of assistive technologies (AT) that can be explored by persons with disabilities — as also employers, government bodies, and any other group that would like to know more about AT. Anyone is welcome to drop in at the XRCVC, with prior appointment, to explore the full range of assistive technologies and their use. The centre purchased and upgraded its specialised software and hardware during the year. This included laptops, a braille, air-fryers, 7-inch HD video magnifiers, a Talking Cash Counting Machine and OCR licenses, besides upgrading of our desktops.

Focused work areas

During the year, the XRCVC's activities were channelised through three main focus areas:

- a. Education & Learning (KG to PG)
- b. Accessibility Solutions and Inclusive Services
- c. Awareness

Given below is a summary of the activities in 2022-23 under each head.

Education & Learning (KG to PG)

While the Right to Education has been established as a fundamental right in India, the realisation of this right for individuals with disabilities remains a significant challenge. In the past year, XRCVC has persistently worked towards promoting inclusive education practices and services at various educational levels, including schools, colleges, and higher education institutions. Numerous activities were undertaken during this period to advance our objectives, some of which are highlighted below:





(Clockwise from top left) A class on activities of daily living for visually impaired persons being conducted at the XRCVC; a session on Accessible Content Creation for the Office of Learning Support, Ashoka University; Basic Computer Training for visually impaired users; an assistive technology awareness exhibition for students and teachers

Our ongoing efforts focused on students attending mainstream schools under our comprehensive educational program, the Inclusive Education Support Programme. As part of these services, XRCVC engaged with several schools, conducting class observations, discussing possibilities of formal collaborations or teacher-training workshops, and exploring avenues to make content more accessible. These activities also encompassed monitoring students' progress, adapting examination methods, and providing support to other students with disabilities within the school environment. Notable schools included Aarose International (Ulwe), Al-Mu'minah School (Musafirkhana, Crawford), Fr. Agnel Multipurpose School, and Balvishva English Medium School (Dadawadi, Jalgaon).

XRCVC has commenced discussions with Shree Ramana Maharishi Academy for the Blind and with the Victoria Memorial School for the Blind to establish and enhance STEM education for visually impaired students at their respective institutions.

Close collaborations were maintained with various educational institutions, including Sir P. T. Sarvajanik College of Science (Surat), IIT Delhi, IIT Madras, and Kirori Mal College (Delhi), to support the establishment of inclusive educational services.

Efforts concerning the creation of accessible study materials and book content continued throughout the year, with the involvement of both staff members and dedicated volunteers.

XRCVC sustained partnerships with organisations such as Inclusive Stem (I-Stem), Vision Empower, Inter University Alliance (IUA), and Andrews Vision Centre to further our shared objectives.

The centre made significant strides in the field of mathematics and science education, providing direct support services to students. We developed accessible electronic textbooks, Teaching-Learning Aids (TLAs), and conducted conceptual training for these students. Furthermore, XRCVC expanded its Teaching-Learning-Aids (TLA) resource library for mathematics and science education, starting from Std 1 onwards.

We continued our work on producing Concept Teaching Manuals (CTMs) designed to assist teachers working with visually impaired students. These manuals offer practical guidance for special educators, parents, and classroom teachers, incorporating interactive teaching methods and the utilisation of Teaching-Learning Aids (TLAs) such as activities, real objects, 3D educational toys and models, and 2D tactile diagrams.

As mentioned earlier in this report, XRCVC actively participated in an exhibition showcasing 'Best Practices under the New Education Policy (NEP)' at St. Xavier's College during the One Day State Level Conference on 'Accreditation: The Way Ahead'. This event was organised by the University of Mumbai in association with RUSA, Maharashtra, under UGC-HRDC, targeting principals and management representatives of non-accredited colleges in the state of Maharashtra.

These initiatives reflect our unwavering commitment to promoting inclusive education and providing comprehensive support to individuals with disabilities, enabling them to achieve their full potential.

Scholarships

In the past decade, students with disabilities have sought out new opportunities in higher education. However, newer prospects come with newer expenses for college courses. Computers and assistive technology have greatly aided impaired students. It must be kept in mind here that what is frequently seen as a luxury for people without disabilities is a necessity for people with disabilities.

The XRCVC recognises the high costs of higher education and assistive technologies and offers scholarships and IT Lending programmes for assistive technology to qualified students. Yagnit Vadhel, the topper among visually impaired graduates of St. Xavier's College, Mumbai, received the Lions Club of East Bombay Scholarship for the year.

Two visually impaired senior college students —Rushikesh Kamble and Ajay Kharb — received education scholarships from the Help the Blind Foundation, thanks to the assistance of the XRCVC.

Under XRCVC's AT lending scheme, assistive technology devices like laptops, personal computers, handheld video magnifiers, Braille, Refreshable Braille Display, Scientific & Regular Calculator, Glasses were lent to 16 members during the year.

Training

The XRCVC imparts training in Computers, the use of specific assistive devices, Braille, Orientation & Mobility, Activities of Daily Living, STEM on the computer, Assistive Technology (AT) for students with Specific Learning Disabilities and Hearing Impairment, Locomotor Disabilities, and through various programmes.

These are available for diverse learner groups — disabled persons, special educators, teacher trainers, web developers, content writers, corporate employees and other stakeholders.



The XRCVC was invited by State Bank of India Foundation, Centre of Excellence (CoE) to create awareness on various digital accessibility issues among bankers. It conducted workshops on creation of accessible documents for the staff of SBI and their partner banks and web accessibility for the SBI IT Team on the occasion of Global Accessibility Awareness Day (GAAD). Senior members of the SBI Foundation were in attendance.



Awareness workshop for employees of the State Bank of India Foundation, Centre of Excellence (CoE) on the occasion of Global Accessibility Awareness Day (GAAD).

Online training sessions during 2022-23 included customised workshops by various members of the XRCVC team including Dr Sam Taraporevala, Ketan Kothari, Vikas Dabholkar, Poonam Deokar, Shizanne D'mello, Dr Kasturi Kulkarni, Sushil Pandit, Keshavan Nadar, Krishna Warriar, Disha Kapadia Chichwadkar and Calveena D'Sylva. They were ably assisted by Aniket Gupta, Manoj Rajodiya, and Christina Adakalathur.

Through the year, the XRCVC's training services reached out to a wide variety of participants, including some of our international members (see Table 1).

Table 1: Education and Learning (June 2022 – May 2023)

Activity	Training and Workshops	Participants
1.a. Computer Training and Assistive Technology awareness workshops for Persons with Disabilities	78	898
1.b. Special Skills Trainings and other awareness workshops for Persons with Disabilities	20	219
1.c. Stakeholder Trainings (for teachers)	14	470
1.d. Accessible Content Creation (Persons trained)	13	228
1.e. Accessible Content Creation (No of Pages Created).	NA	NA
1.f. Guidance Support for Persons with Disabilities and Families	NA	163 (over 92 sessions)
1.g. Inclusive Education Support (For St. Xavier's College Students)	NA	114
1.h. Technology Lending Scheme	NA	16

Accessibility Initiatives

Throughout the year, XRCVC undertook a series of initiatives aimed at fostering an accessible environment for individuals with disabilities across the nation. Some noteworthy endeavours include:

Conducting rigorous testing of accessible games and applications like Hear2Read, FlyByEar, and Spacefelt. These evaluations focused on ensuring optimal usability and functionality for persons with disabilities.

Exploring the potential of utilising Bluetooth beacons and the internationally recognized labelling mechanism known as NaviLens for indoor navigation and labelling purposes. This investigation aimed to enhance accessibility and facilitate seamless navigation experiences for individuals with disabilities.

Organising Assistive Technology Exhibitions in prominent companies such as Tata Power and Hindustan Unilever Ltd. These exhibitions provided a platform to showcase a diverse range of assistive technologies and promote awareness about their potential benefits for individuals with disabilities.

Hosting a distinctive event where the developer of a versatile application named Audivision engaged directly with visually challenged users. This interactive session facilitated invaluable feedback from users, contributing to the ongoing improvement and refinement of the application.

These initiatives exemplify XRCVC's unwavering commitment to championing accessibility and striving for inclusive environments that empower individuals with disabilities to overcome barriers and participate fully in society.



Images from an assistive technology exhibition conducted by XRCVC at HUL

Accessibility Solutions and Inclusion Services

Alongside Education Access, the XRCVC's advocacy initiatives work in three main areas to create accessible environments — Print Access, Financial Access, and Independent Living.

Print Access

The accessibility of printed works for people with visual impairments depends on their availability in accessible formats and the legal framework's acceptance of material conversion to accessible formats. The XRCVC has been putting in great effort to battle these obstacles. During the academic year 2022-23, the XRCVC facilitated creation of the following Accessible Content and Tactile Diagrams:

- a) Number of E-pub books created in-house: 26 books totalling to 3235 pages.
- b) Number of books/pages created via Bookshare: 10 books totalling to 1897 pages.
- c) Number of Class Notes converted to an accessible format: 2431 pages/slides (including 250 technical/ math pages/slides)
- d) Only OCR provided: 1052 pages
- e) Easy to Read Content: 6 videos were summarised and 599 pages into 98 pages (including 250 technical/ math pages/slides).
- f) Number of Tactile Diagrams: 288 diagrams

Some of the other activities conducted under the Print Access initiative during the year are appended below.

The centre was also actively involved during the year in diverse Daisy Forum of India (DFI) print access activities focused on print-disabled persons. Accessible Book Production Standards training sessions were conducted regularly during the year by the XRCVC for numerous stakeholders. This year, the centre worked on compiling a '[Standards and Guidelines for Accessible E-Content Creation](#)', with the objective of making accessible eBook production more efficient and standardizing its output for accessible Word, PDF and EPUB formats. These guidelines were launched in the technical meeting of the DAISY Forum of India and are uploaded to our website. A copy of the same is also available on the Bookshare website.

We are also delighted to share that we have had major success with a recent advocacy initiative with a publisher Indian Institute of Banking & Finance (IIBF). This will give equal access to JAIIB & CAIIB books required by visually impaired bank employees. JAIIB (Junior Associate of Indian Institute of Banking and Finance) and CAIIB (Certified Associate of Indian Institute of Banking and Finance) are examinations that are conducted by IIBF for its registered members. JAIIB covers basic knowledge of banking concepts, regulations and processes, while CAIIB involves advanced knowledge necessary for decision-making and practical application of banking processes. Qualifying these golden standard exams is incredibly helpful for career progression and provide incentives to the bankers. Many visually impaired bankers attempt these exams twice every year. These books were converted into accessible formats by us and have been uploaded on the accessible online library Sugamya Pustakalaya of the Daisy Forum of India.

Technology and Accessibility

The XRCVC dedicates substantial efforts to educate both the general public and individuals with disabilities about assistive technology. Subsequent to the amendment of the Indian Copyright Act, 1957, we launched a highly successful nationwide awareness campaign titled 'Reading Without Seeing' in 2012. This comprehensive outreach programme aimed to make assistive technology available to individuals with low vision or blindness across the country, generating widespread interest and equipping participants with essential knowledge to embark on their independent journey of accessing printed materials. As a result of



this initiative, attendees of the programme acquired a foundational understanding of diverse assistive technologies.

Testing and Research

In addition, XRCVC tested various devices / software for accessibility during the year. Details about the work conducted this year in the areas of technology, accessibility, testing and research are available in Table 2.

Table 2: Technology and Accessibility (June 2022 – May 2023)

Activity	Details	Participants
2.a. Assistive technology and Mainstream Technologies / Websites / Mobile Apps worked with for building accessibility	NA	NA
2.b. Assistive technology Awareness workshops for General Audience	11	1269

Financial Access

The ability to independently manage, operate, and carry out financial transactions is crucial for achieving a sense of autonomy and self-sufficiency. Unfortunately, blind and low vision individuals have historically faced obstacles due to the lack of effective guidelines and underutilization of technology in financial instruments, resulting in limited financial access. The XRCVC has been dedicated to changing this reality by working towards ensuring financial inclusivity for people with visual impairments. This year, advocating for change within the realm of financial services, XRCVC successfully persuaded HDFC Ltd to permit online loan foreclosure—a significant advancement that greatly benefits visually challenged users who previously encountered challenges in providing third-party cheques.

During the year, we also prepared a report ‘Banking on Accessibility: A case for accessible banking for Persons with Disabilities (PwD) and presented it to Mr. M. Rajeshwar Rao, Deputy Governor of the Reserve Bank of India and other top banking officials from a variety of banks, both in the private and public sector. This report was prepared after confabulations with several banking customers who were themselves disabled. In fact, consequent to the publication of this report, XRCVC was asked to make a presentation to the special committee on banking access for the visually challenged by the Delhi high court to focus on problems and solutions. In the same area of banking accessibility, some important recommendations were in made in response to the draft national policy on persons with disabilities 2022 which was open for public comments by the Government of India.

Our executive director, Dr. Sam Taraporevala, was also interviewed by Radio Udaan – an exclusive online radio station for the visually impaired in India to discuss the above-mentioned report. (Sharing the link of the interview. YouTube link of Radio Udaan Badalta Dauron research report on Accessible Banking by XRCVC (<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=TdLvBi5QsOA&t=141s>)). The report was also discussed with like-minded organizations such as Mission Accessibility for joint advocacy. In the same area of banking, the centre organised a workshop where representatives from Banking Ombudsmen came and elaborated the process for accessing the grievance redressal mechanism through banking ombudsmen. This was an extremely important workshop as most clients are totally unaware of these matters. Such workshops help them in protecting their rights as bank customers.



Additionally, we have maintained a strong partnership with the State Bank of India's Centre of Excellence (CoE), actively contributing to its various projects and programs. The CoE for Persons with Disabilities is a prominent initiative of the SBI Foundation, designed to serve as a centralised support centre for individuals with disabilities. Its primary objective is to empower persons with disabilities through skill enhancement, enabling them to make significant and measurable improvements in their cognitive, physical, social, and vocational functioning. Through our collaboration with the CoE, we aim to foster the development of individuals and facilitate their enjoyment of a more productive and fulfilling life.

Awareness through Antarchakshu®

Raising awareness about the lives and abilities of visually impaired individuals, as well as those with other disabilities, is crucial in a world that often operates under norms created by and for people without disabilities. Recognising the significance of this aspect, the XRCVC has developed a flagship awareness programme titled 'Antarchakshu® - The Eye Within.' This programme offers an immersive journey that allows sighted individuals to gain profound insights into the experiences and challenges faced by people with visual impairments.

In the year 2018-19, we introduced an enhanced version of the programme known as Antarchakshu® 2.0. It was designed as a series of tailored and need-based sensitisation and awareness workshops, delivered in a marathon format to engage a larger number of participants at their respective locations.

During the year, Antarchakshu® 2.0 reached out to a diverse range of stakeholders, including college students, corporate professionals, working individuals, and the general public. By implementing Antarchakshu® 2.0, we aimed to create a deeper understanding and empathy among the participants towards the challenges faced by visually impaired individuals. These workshops provided a platform for meaningful interactions, fostering a greater appreciation for their skills, resilience, and unique perspectives. Through the year we conducted 68 Antarchakshu® 2.0 workshops, reaching out to 2205 participants.

Antarchakshu® travels to village schools

"*Tai* (sister), how do you use a touchscreen phone?," asked an incredulous Asmita Thokade, a Std. 10 student of Jijamata Kanya Vidyalaya, Darwha, Maharashtra. Dhanashri, to whom the question had been addressed, switched on the talkback feature on her phone and demonstrated to Asmita and her classmates how visually impaired persons use touchscreen phones.

In January 2023, the Xavier's Resource Centre for the Visually Challenged (XRCVC) was invited by two rural schools near Amravati (Maharashtra) to conduct Antarchakshu® awareness and sensitisation workshops for their Std 10 and Std 12 students. These workshops were conducted with the support provided by the SBI Foundation.





Antarchakshu® workshops being conducted at village schools in Amravati, Maharashtra

While Antarchakshu® audiences in the past have been largely urban, this was a unique opportunity for the XRCVC to showcase its flagship awareness event on the lives of persons with disabilities in a very different setting.

The resource persons for the workshops were Krishna Warriar and Dhanashri Gawande, and the sessions were conducted in a mix of Marathi and Hindi to suit the preference of the participants.

Dhanashri, who was born in Both village in Yavatmal district, struck an instant chord with the students of both schools – Jijamata Kanya Vidyalaya, Darwha and Swatantrya Veer Savarkar Vidyalaya, Bhulai.

In the initial part of each of the four workshops, the participants were blindfolded and made to experience a disability simulation, after which they were requested to open their blindfolds and share their experiences with each other and the resource persons.

Once the students overcame their initial hesitation, the sessions became extremely interactive, as the questions came thick and fast:

- Is there a cure for blindness?
- Do all blind people go through a similar experience?
- Does colour matter to a blind person?
- How do you travel independently?
- Do you dream?
- Do disabled persons have a sixth sense?
- What is your concept of beauty?

Dhanashri patiently answered each question, making sure that every myth or stereotype in the minds of the participants about the lives of persons of disabilities was dispelled. “I felt very good, especially during the interaction. Spreading awareness in rural areas is crucial as these students do not get any kind of exposure regarding disability,” she said.

“Before this workshop, I did not think seriously about disability and such people,” confessed Shradha Pardhi, a Std 12 student from Swatantra Veer Savarkar Vidyalaya, Bhulai. “I had a lot of negative thoughts about persons with disabilities. But now I know that they too can achieve their dreams if they believe in themselves. The session was a good and new learning experience.”



Ms Mamta Narwade, the principal of Savarkar Vidyalaya, was delighted that her students got to participate in this unique event. “I felt very happy as I got an opportunity to organise these sessions for my students. I am sure it will be helpful for them for their future because sensitisation and awareness regarding marginalised classes is very important for students. I would like to thank the XRCVC team for conducting workshops in my school,” she said.

At which Dhanashri promptly pulled out her touchscreen phone and sent Ms Narwade a WhatsApp emoji in reply!

Awareness through Diversity Discourse

Diversity Discourse, a special course that XRCVC had created for the Xavier Institute of Communication (XIC) in 2018–19, continued its successful run for the fifth consecutive year. The goal was to raise participants' awareness of the various communities that society disregards both implicitly and overtly and to present a case for why it is imperative to include these communities in the mainstream of public discourse. The content was imparted mainly through 8 modules to 314 students. This course was also offered to students of St Xavier’s College as part of the Honours Programme. Awareness events were conducted for a variety of target groups across the year (see Table 3).

Table 3: Awareness and Sensitisation (June 2022 – May 2023)

Activity	Workshop	Participants
3.a. Antarchakshu® 2.0 Workshops	68	2205
3.b. Diversity Discourse Course	8 modules	314
3.c. Other Awareness Activities	8	353

Acknowledgements

We have over this year organised and conducted 220 workshops and trainings, along with other interventions reaching out to 6,249 beneficiaries. This was made possible thanks to our dedicated team members who often times went beyond the call of duty to deliver on our commitments. Congratulations and a big thank you to them all. This achievement would also not have been possible without the support we have received from diverse stakeholders, whose role we gratefully acknowledge.

We extend our deepest gratitude to the funders, partners, and sponsors who have played a pivotal role in shaping the XRCVC into what it is today. We would like to offer a special thanks to the SBI Foundation - Centre of Excellence for PwDs (CoE), Dhun Pestonji Parakh Discretionary Trust (DPP), and Mr. Burjor Antia, whose generous contributions from the estate of his late wife, Mrs. Roshen Burjor Antia, have been instrumental in our endeavours.

We also express our profound appreciation to the Dinamai Antia Charitable Trust, Mr. Vikram Utamsingh, Ms. Neha Trivedi, N M Wadia Charities, Reliance Foundation, Lila K Jagtiani Foundation, Sheth Developers and Realtors (Viviana Mall), Mr. Ankush Jain, Ms. Rashna T Doongaji, Sir JJ Foundation, Mendonsa Foundation, Lions Club of East Bombay, Vahbiz Pestonjamas, Ms. Persis Pestonjamas, Godrej Industries Ltd, Union Bank of India, and SBI Mutual Fund for their invaluable support.



We are immensely grateful to our dedicated team of volunteers, whose unwavering commitment enables an organisation like the XRCVC to make a profound impact on the lives of numerous individuals nationwide.

We would like to express our heartfelt appreciation to St. Xavier's College for setting a remarkable example for educational institutions across the country, demonstrating how a place of learning can truly be inclusive for individuals with disabilities.

We extend our special thanks to the Jesuit Management, our rector Dr. (Fr.) Keith D'Souza, S.J., the Principal, Dr. Rajendra Shinde, Dr. (Fr.) Conrad Pessa S.J. and his team at the Treasurer's Office for their constant support and guidance, thanks also to the teams at the General Office, SIP department and the Student Inclusion Cell (SIC). Thank you one and all for being there for us and being instrumental in upholding the XRCVC's reputation as a centre of excellence throughout the nation.





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