

# Leadership in Inclusive Education From India

## LEADERSHIP IN INCLUSIVE EDUCATION FROM INDIA

I recently attended a conference in Goa, India that brought people from developed and developing nations together in a North South Dialogue to consider issues of disability and inclusion in education and other aspects of society. The conference was convened by ADAPT, India under the leadership of Dr. Mithu Alur. Dr. Alur has taken leadership in introducing inclusive education in India. She and her co-workers have achieved amazing progress within the economic, cultural, and traditional realities of India.

In a variety of ways, what Dr. Alur and her people have achieved has out-paced creative progress in nations such as Canada, the United States, and the United Kingdom. In an earlier blog I wrote of the early childhood program initiated in the huge Dharavi Slum of Mumbai, the setting of the movie, Slumdog Millionaire. This ground-breaking early childhood program has now expanded to other slum areas of Mumbai. The program is a model of what can be done when one has a vision, little in the way of resources, but much in terms of creativity and determination. ADAPT moves ahead despite the enormous difficulties characteristic of education in India.

In this blog I want to describe a completely different part of the work and leadership of ADAPT.

Dr. Alur and ADAPT some years ago began a one-year training program for inclusion at ADAPT's site in Bandra West, Mumbai. This program has attracted mostly younger people, first from India. However, trainees from other nations began to attend the program, as their nations did not have anything similar. They undertake a demanding program of instruction on community development, program planning, inclusive education, and initiation and development of leadership at the local level.

I am proud to say that I have played a small part in the program on my various visits to work with Dr. Alur and ADAPT. I can say from first-hand experience that the course of instruction is varied, practical, of high quality, and focused. Trainees are challenged to think about how they would apply their learning in their home areas once they complete the course. The teaching faculty drawn from ADAPT and outside India are dedicated and excellent models of leadership.

The North South Dialogue gave a number of graduates of the training program the opportunity to describe the wide-ranging, inclusive, educational and social programs they have initiated at the local level. In addition, presentations were made by members of ADAPT and speakers from various developing and developed nations. To me, the most cogent information came from the ADAPT training program graduates. Included in this group were young and vital women (I don't recall any males) from Bangladesh, Nepal, Tajikistan, Mongolia, Vietnam, Tibet, Cambodia, and Indonesia – and, of course, India.

Most of us in developed nations are unaware of the progress and leadership in developing nations, particularly when it comes to issues related to areas such as disability. These nations tend not to have the sophisticated special education systems of nations such as Canada. We look down from our lofty, well-funded systems and think we are ahead of less financially well-off nations. For my own part, I have learned more about educational development, the values of adventurous programming, leadership, and dedication in the face of daunting challenges in developing nations than I have in the rich north, where programs around disability tend more to be administrated than led.