
Persons with Disabilities in Mainstream: A Collective Effort

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ABSTRACT

Disability has been understood in numerous ways, but today it is generally recognised that disability involves the interaction of medical and social factors. A disability-inclusive approach to development seeks to include people with disability in the development process by “recognising their potential, valuing and respecting their contributions and perspectives, honouring their dignity, and effectively responding to their need”. Rather than implementing isolated policies and actions, an inclusive approach to development promotes an integrated strategy benefitting persons and society as a whole. Marginalizing and impoverishing persons with disabilities, barriers to their employment also impose significant costs on the economy at large. Current best practice in this area is summarised by the World Report on Disability (WHO & World Bank 2011), which emphasises a multi-faceted approach to tackling the social and economic barriers facing people with disabilities. This kind of a participatory approach to economic empowerment engagements contribute significantly to an improvement in their quality of life and heightened self-esteem. In this direction, Department of Empowerment of Persons with Disabilities (DEPwD), Ministry of Social Justice & Empowerment has conceptualized the “**Accessible India Campaign (Suganya Bharat Abhiyan)**” as a nation-wide flagship campaign for achieving universal accessibility that will enable persons with disabilities to gain access for equal opportunity and live independently and participate fully in all aspects of life in an inclusive society. In this paper, the pros and cons of inclusive approach has been explored so that it can be

promoted in order to make disabled persons dignified instead of an object of pity.

Key Words: Disability-inclusive approach, economic empowerment, Accessible India Campaign, inclusive society.

1. Introduction

Disability has been understood in numerous ways, WHO has defined it as “Disabilities are an umbrella term, covering impairments, activity limitations, and participation restrictions. Impairment is a problem in body function or structure; an activity limitation is a difficulty encountered by an individual in executing a task or action; while a participation restriction is a problem experienced by an individual in involvement in life situations”.

Disability inclusive development focuses specifically on ensuring that people with a disability are included in and benefit equally from development efforts. In this way it is a subset of broader, inclusive development programming. Disability inclusive development:

- ❖ Aims for active participation and leadership of people with disabilities at all stages of community, national, regional and international development programming, from design, planning and implementation through to monitoring and evaluation.
- ❖ Requires organizations and services to reorient their practice, policy and administration procedures and infrastructure.
- ❖ Ensures and promotes the rights of people with a disability to access equal opportunities.

1.1 Theoretical background

‘A society which is good for disabled people is a better society for all’. (Beckles, 2004)

The field of disability was significantly influenced by the medical model and social model of disability. Medical model looks at it as a problem within individual and try to correct it; while, contrary to this, social model defines it as a form of social oppression. Hughes (1998) defines it clearly, “...it is not a physical, sensory, cognitive or mental impairment of the individual that disables, but rather disability results from the structural handicapping effects of a society geared towards able-bodiedness as a norm. The earlier emphasis on medical rehabilitation has now been replaced by an emphasis on social rehabilitation with right based approach instead of charity.

1.2 Current Demographic Profile

Census 2011 data revealed that there are 2.68 Crore persons with disabilities (PwDs) in India, which include 1.50 crore male and 1.18 crore female PwDs. The disability prevalence rate in India is 22 %. Moreover, the data also revealed that about 1.34 crores persons with disabilities are in employable age of 15 to 59 years.

Rather than implementing isolated policies and actions, an inclusive approach to development

promotes an integrated strategy benefitting persons and society as a whole (Berman-Bieler 2008).

2. Disables and inclusive society

Policymakers have a responsibility to ensure that persons with disabilities enjoy all human rights and freedoms on an equal basis with others. Despite various policies and schemes the condition of disabled is still miserable. It is important for the governments to adopt and promote disability- inclusive approaches, not only to their employment practices, but to society at large.

2.1 Employment and disability

Work is therapeutic and essential for an individual's physical survival and psychological well-being. It is an important part of a cultural role, which occupies much of an individual's time, supplies a source of income, provides a basis of identity, and contributes to one's physiological and psychological well-being in the society. Enabling people with disability to fulfil their potential and achieve desired levels of independence, including employment, reduces the strain and enhances quality of life. As the World Bank considers that leaving people with disability, outside the economy, translate into a forgone GDP of about 5% to 7%, policies should be geared toward the inclusion of persons with disability into the mainstream economy.

The International Labour Organization (ILO) (2011) has proposed a business case for promoting the employment of people with disabilities, which includes following points:

- ❖ People with disabilities make good, dependable employees.
- ❖ People with disabilities represent an untapped source of skills and talent.
- ❖ Disabled people, their families and friends are often an overlooked market segment.
- ❖ Hiring people with disabilities can contribute to the overall diversity, creativity and morale of the workplace and enhance a company's image.

AusAID (2008) argues that adopting a disability- inclusive approach may prove beneficial for society as a whole: 'actively including people with disability and creating more accessible and inclusive communities will not only benefit them, it results in more successful and sustainable development for all.

2.2 Current Best Practice

1. Cobley inspects three Bangalore- based schemes, which are designed to promote formal sector employment for disabled people, through vocational training and job placement support. The first scheme was run by the Association of People with Disability (APD), a local disability NGO. The second is run by the National Association for the Blind (NAB), a national NGO. The third is run by Leonard Cheshire, a UK based charity.

2. MphasiS is an IT company from Bangalore, which decided in 2007 to focus on hiring people with disabilities as a part of its corporate social responsibility programme. Later it partnered with a local disability NGO to roll out a pilot project named 'Project Communicate'. The project was aimed at enabling persons with disabilities in skills required for jobs at the MphasiS, through proper training.
3. Vazhndhu Kaatuvom Project that has been implemented in 16 of the 32 districts in Tamil Nadu and is run by the State Government of Tamil Nadu, in collaboration with NGOs and with World Bank support.
4. The idea of people with a disability being able to participate in sport and physical activity is not so uncommon. However, organizations and establishments like the Wheelchair Sports Federation of India, the Indian Blind Sports Association, and the Special Olympics Bharat do provide opportunities for physically and mentally differently-abled athletes to participate in sporting activities. The 2016 Paralympics Games held in Rio de Janeiro, Brazil, help to drive social inclusion for persons with disabilities and enables marginalized people to demonstrate, front and centre, their abilities that surpass most people without a disability. The Paralympics help to build inclusive cities and make visible what persons with disabilities can achieve on a global scale.

These cases suggested that there is a growing demand for suitably skilled disabled people. These denote that impressive outcomes can be achieved when an appropriate training is provided to support the transition from training to employment. It also highlights a degree of coordination and cooperation exists between local NGOs, international agencies and local and national government bodies that is one of the factor that lead to the success of these schemes.

3. Accessible India Campaign

Department of Empowerment of Persons with Disabilities (DEPwD) has launched Accessible India Campaign (Sugamya Bharat Abhiyan) as a nation-wide Campaign for achieving universal accessibility for Persons with Disabilities (PwDs). It has the following three important components:

- ❖ Built Environment Accessibility
- ❖ Transportation System Accessibility
- ❖ Information and Communication Eco-System Accessibility

The first component, Built Environment Accessibility is aimed at eliminating obstacles and barriers to indoor and outdoor facilities including schools, medical facilities, and workplaces. These would include not only buildings, but also footpaths, curb cuts, and obstacles that block the flow of pedestrian traffic. The second component, Transportation System Accessibility is

necessary because transportation is a vital component for independent living, and like others in society, Persons with Disabilities rely on transportation facilities to move from one place to another. The term transportation covers a number of areas including air travel, buses, taxis, and trains. The third component of this campaign is Information and Communication Eco-System Accessibility can range from actions such as being able to read price tags, to physically enter a hall, to participate in an event, to read a pamphlet with healthcare information, to understand a train timetable, or to view WebPages. No longer should societal barriers of infrastructure, and inaccessible formats stand in the way of obtaining and utilizing information in daily life. In this way, “**Accessible India Campaign (Sugamya Bharat Abhiyan)**” is a nation-wide flagship campaign for achieving universal accessibility that will enable persons with disabilities to gain access for equal opportunity and live independently and participate fully in all aspects of life in an inclusive society.

4. Recommendations & Conclusion

Any effective strategy must take a twin-track approach. Firstly, disability inclusion should be mainstreamed into regular employment policies and practices. Secondly, certain supplementary programmes may also be required to meet more specialized needs.

1. The concept of ‘Identification of jobs’ has been questioned by many people including the World Bank, which has recommended that it should be dropped. There is a need for developing a system/ process which is discriminatory and inclusive.
2. Assistive Devices, including technologies are great enablers for people with disabilities particularly in the work environment. Government should provide subsidies to bring down the cost of assistive devices. Incentives should be given to companies to produce assistive devices.
3. Synergistic participation of the Private sector and NGOs in the training and placement process should be promoted by the local government.
4. Emphasis should be laid on making physical and digital infrastructure accessible.

Apart from these, there should be stronger focus on eradicating stigma against different disabilities by spreading awareness about the causes of disabilities so that disability is not only considered as a preventable condition but as a kind of diversity that must be accorded respect and dignity. Participatory approach should be adopted in order to fight against the stigmatized attitude of societal elements toward the persons with disabilities so that they can lead a life with pride and dignity.

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