

# An Inclusive Society with the Differently Abled Youth Educate:: Empower:: Engage

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India is a young developing country with an increasing youth population, often called its secret weapon. According to UNICEF, the term “youth” indicates a person between the ages 15 to 24 years when they finish compulsory education to find their first employment. This age-group constitutes 27.5% of India’s population which is about 33.5 crores. That said, it is important to focus the synergy of this massive resource of manpower that India and channelize it to help the nation building.

Differently abled is a euphemistic term for someone who might formerly have been classed as disabled, handicapped, challenged, or having special needs. A disability is an impairment that may be cognitive, developmental, intellectual, mental, physical, sensory, or some combination of these. Other definitions describe disability as the societal disadvantage arising from such impairments. Disability substantially affects a person's life activities and may be present from birth or occur during a person's lifetime. It can apply to people with predominantly physical or mental challenges. Even if people have mental and/or physical impairments, they still have abilities, contrary to the picture painted with the terms disabled or handicapped. The Constitution of India ensures equality, freedom, justice and dignity of all individuals and implicitly mandates an inclusive society for all including the persons with disabilities. As per the provisions of the Persons with Disabilities Act 1995, seven categories of disabilities have been identified viz., blindness, low vision, leprosy cured, hearing impairment, locomotor disability, mental retardation and mental illness. Persons falling under the above categories with a minimum of 40% disability are eligible for entitlement of all benefits provided by the Government.

## Statistics

Estimates suggest that there are between 180 and 220 million youth with disabilities worldwide and nearly 80% of them live in developing countries like India. Conservative estimates from the World Bank report suggests that 70-100 million persons with disabilities live in India. This substantial portion of our population needs equal services and opportunities for their overall development, which is also an essential attribute for the inclusive growth. People with disabilities (PWD) make up the world’s largest minority group and yet, the majority of whom remain on the sideline of the economy. Census 2001 has revealed that over 21 million people in India are suffering from one or the other kind of disability. This is equivalent to 2.1% of the population. Among the total disabled in the country, 12.6 million are males and 9.3 million are females. It has been observed that Locomotor and Multiple disabilities

are more prevalent in rural areas while speech and hearing impairment are more prevalent in the urban areas of the country. Furthermore, only 36.3% of the disabled people are employed. This further suggests that there is a substantial number of disabled youth in the country and yet, the voices of these disabled youth have still not found sufficient resonance in the policy making and decision making processes nor have they been given a platform for voicing their opinions and highlighting their issues even within the disability rights movement itself. Leaving persons with disability out of economy translates into a loss of 5-7% of GDP.

## Need for Strategic Planning

Youth with Disabilities, who more than often face discrimination, severe social, economic, and civic disparities and experience an even higher risk of living in poverty, deprivation and neglect as compared to non-disabled individuals. This leaves the disabled youth often feeling isolated, under confident, confused and worried about their future – job, life partner, social life, disability identity, and so on. Many of them are not even aware of their rights, entitlements, technologies and support systems that are available in the country. According to the national youth policy (2014), youth organisations in India are “fragmented, and there is little coordination between the various stakeholders working on youth.” Various national platforms and party youth wings exist, yet, “there are no systematic channels for engagement between the government and young citizens and no mechanisms for youth to provide inputs to government,” the national youth policy (2014) highlights. India is a member of the Commonwealth Youth Council. The main challenges of civic development for the disabled youth in India are:

- lack of co-ordination between the Government and NGOs,
- the absence of a coherent community level strategy,
- limited competence and capacity of decentralizing services,
- limited models of good practices
- Lack of informative flow

Despite shared interest in inclusivity, Disabled Persons Organizations (DPOs) don’t often collaborate with one another; the field has not established collective goals for success. DPOs, as well as private companies, struggle to quantify the progress of PWD programming. Transparent impact data demonstrating the economic and social outcomes of PWD employment is lacking. By investing and engaging in collective knowledge sharing and data management platforms, DPOs will be poised to overcome continual challenges faced by PWDs and advocate for change together. In order for these challenges to be dealt with successfully, there needs to be a

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strategic plan for the education of the children with disabilities as well as children with special needs. After their basic education, training and skill development programs can empower them to be engaged in private and public sector industries. The call for youth with disabilities to become self advocates and demand their rights is the need of the hour.

### Educate

The age limit of finishing compulsory education has been increasing, as higher levels of unemployment and the cost of setting up an independent household puts many young people into a prolonged period of dependency. Making the differently abled persons aware of their rights as citizens of India along with the policies and provisions that the Government has made for such people is of utmost importance. There needs to a change in the following aspects to allow inclusive education for the differently abled children, namely:

- Flexible Curriculum and Pedagogy—which caters to unique ways of learning and also gives time for the children of lower IQ levels to reach the mainstream.
- Removal of Attitudinal Barriers—Change in the behaviour and approach of other students to them without labelling, bullying or abuse.
- Reduce Physical Barriers—allowing easy access in transportation as well as learning environment.
- Inclusive Learning for all—Making learning a social integrating exercise and not discriminating.
- Additional support—Support for students who need special needs teachers and coaches and also building a strong support systems for the children with their parents and peers.

Educational and Vocational Rehabilitation which is ability based skill training has to be the way to go about educating the disabled youth with different abilities. It helps restore a person be a useful contribution to the society. The Integrated Education for Disabled Children (IEDC), Siksith Yuva Sewa Samithi (SYSS) and Sir Shapurji Billmorja Foundation are some of the major contributors of educating the disabled in India, hand in hand with the government. The Ministry of Youth and Sports is the governmental authority responsible for youth at federal level in India. It is supported in its responsibilities by the respective departments in the Indian states. The central Ministry oversees programs geared towards young people in the field of education, volunteering, housing and development. The Ministry funds the Rajiv Gandhi National Institute of Youth Development, a think-tank and training institution for youth related policies and implementation strategies. A Dynamic and evolving organization with a National Vision and focus of skilling Persons with Disability, The Skill Council for Persons with Disability (SCPwD) was incepted in October 2015 to offer Persons with Disabilities meaningful, industry relevant, skill based training. The educational sector should be more inclusive by adapting newer techniques with respect to content of the curriculum, methods of teaching and ensuring that classrooms, facilities, and educational materials more accessible. Children with multiple or severe disabilities who

might require extensive additional support may access education through the use of innovative methods best suited to their context.

### Empower

While recognizing the differently-abled people as valuable human resource to our country, the government has to take and has been taking various initiatives to bring them at par with the mainstream. The policies of the government towards the welfare of persons with disabilities have been reflected in the enactments, schemes and through institutions established for development of manpower for rehabilitation of persons with disabilities. Rehabilitation which can help the disabled lead a dignified life without social stigma has to be done and access to Assistive devices is very crucial to empowering them to take on their path to a sustainably bright future.

### Rehabilitation

The United Nations, *Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities* (CRPD) calls for: "... appropriate measures, including through peer support, to enable persons with disabilities to attain and maintain their maximum independence, full physical, mental, social and vocational ability, and full inclusion and participation in all aspects of life". The article calls on countries to organize, strengthen, and extend comprehensive rehabilitation services and programs, which should begin as early as possible, based on multidisciplinary assessment of individual needs and strengths, and including the provision of assistive devices and technologies. Rehabilitation involves identification of a person's problems and needs, relating the problems to relevant factors of the person and the environment, defining rehabilitation goals, planning and implementing the measures, and assessing the effects. Educating people with disabilities is essential for developing knowledge and skills for self-help, care, management, and decision-making. People with disabilities and their families experience better health and functioning when they are partners in rehabilitation. One of the biggest challenges is providing rehabilitation services to the unreached persons with disabilities living in rural areas and small towns.

### Assistive devices

Empowering the disabled through aids and devices of assistance with the usage of technology can help them achieve higher levels of employability. Technology may not be able to change someone's body, but through inclusive design, it can – and should – focus on its basic purpose: making the surrounding environment easier to navigate. Assistive devices or aids can be categorized as:

#### 1) Personal—

- Functional Living Aids: Which include modified eating utensils, adapted books, pencil holders, page turners, dressing aids, adapted personal hygiene aids.
- Mobility Aids: Devices that help mobility like electric or manual wheelchairs, modifications of vehicles for travel, scooters, crutches, canes and walkers.
- Prosthetics and Orthotics: Replacement or augmentation of body parts with artificial limbs or other orthotic aids such

as splints or braces. There are also prosthetics to assist with cognitive limitations or deficits, including audio tapes or pagers (that function as s or reminders).

- Vehicle Modifications: Adaptive driving aids, hand controls, wheelchair and other lifts, modified vans, or other motor vehicles used for personal transportation.
- Sensory aids for vision/hearing impaired: such as magnifiers, large print screens, hearing aids, visual ing systems, Braille and speech/telecommunication output devices.

## 2) Community/Organizational—

- Alternative and augmentative communication devices (AAC): These devices help people with speech impairments or person having low vocal volume to communicate such as speech generating devices, voice amplification aids and communication software. For visually impaired person, devices as magnifier, Braille or speech output devices, large print screens, closed circuit television for magnifying documents, etc.
- Home/workplace modifications: structural adaptations that remove or reduce physical barriers such as ramps, lifts, modification in the bathroom to make it accessible, automatic door openers and expanded doorways etc.
- Computer Access Aids: Modified or alternate keyboards, switches activated by pressure, sound or voice, touch screens, special software, voice to text software that enable persons with disabilities to use a computer. This category includes speech recognition software.

## Engage

Once the educated and trained in the right rehabilitation facility and given proper aids and assistive devices to lead a less challenging life, the differently abled persons needs to be engaged in a civic development at a community level. PWDs make up a mere 0.28 percent of the workforce in private companies given the country's current PWD Act, which reserves 3 percent of the public sector jobs for PWDs, 15 million people with disabilities should be skilled under this legislation. National Centre For Promotion Of Employment For Disabled People (NCPEDP) is lending a helping hand in providing accessibility of employment resources to the disabled people. There is a lack of awareness and sensitivity among both employers and the youth about purposeful and appropriate engagement in the workplaces. Employers can remove barriers in the workplace while Differently-Abled Youth have to find solutions to break down those barriers in the workplace. Capitalizing on the job market is the responsibility of both groups. Collaboration with the employment and labor sectors is essential to ensure that both youth and adults with disabilities have access to training and work opportunities at community level. Productive and decent work in a conducive environment is essential for the social and economic integration of individual persons with disability (PWDs).

Employment services— job training, counselling, job search assistance, and placement – can develop or restore the

capabilities of people with disabilities to compete in the labour market and facilitate their inclusion in the labour market. People with disabilities may need flexibility in the scheduling and other aspects of their work – to give them proper time to prepare for work, to travel to and from work, and to deal with health concerns. Contingent and part-time work arrangements, which often provide flexibility, may therefore be attractive to them. But such jobs may provide lower pay and fewer benefits.

When the millions of youth in India along with the hundreds of thousands of differently abled youth can stand equipped to face their challenges due to their disabilities and find employment, enabling them to lead a dignified social life, India can be proud of its rich resource of enabled manpower. There are major gaps after the rehabilitation of the differently abled for them to find suitable sustainable employment.

“Disability need not be an obstacle to success”.

Stephen Fleming

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