

Access to All - A Step towards Gwalior as a Smart City

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Abstract: *People with disabilities have frequently been dismissed and barred from the different plans, and schemes launched by the Government. An a valid example is the SMART Cities Mission that has barely any specify of availability for people with inabilities. All the more critically, with innovation being the foundation of the SMART Cities activity, the officially existing computerized separation will just become further in the event that it is not made comprehensive for people with incapacities. India which is home to an estimated 70-100 million people with disabilities and an increasing number of people acquiring disabling conditions due to old age should stop viewing disability as an isolated issue. [3] Following a holistic approach, all aspects of the SMART Cities Mission should be made accessible for persons with disabilities.*

Keywords: Smart city, Smart communities, Urban planning, Open data, Citizens as sensors, Governance

1. Introduction

All the time the idea of SMART city is emphatically identified with the thriving of portable applications, focusing on the innovative perspectives and a top-down approach of cutting edge brought together control frameworks equipped for settling all the urban issues, totally overlooking the pith of a city with its associated issues. [2]

While the Smart Cities Mission had until now been called non-inclusive for largely overlooking providing facilities and provisions for persons with disabilities, the new national building code (NBC) prepared by the Bureau of Indian Standards, which was released by the Ministry of Consumer Affairs on March 15, appears to have now provided a solution to making smart cities disabled-friendly and completely barrier-free. Disability rights activists are now also calling for the Centre to formulate guidelines or a template for making a few model smart cities with disabled-friendly features, so it can be replicated in all other projects. [1] These developments come at a time when round three of the smart cities project in underway, where a list of cities will be shortlisted for inclusion in the project. Sixty cities have been shortlisted so far following two rounds.

Earlier, the NCPEDP had released a report titled "Smart Cities Mission and Disability," which had pointed out that the major challenges before the project were lack of awareness regarding e-accessibility for persons with disabilities by the stakeholders; lack of data or guiding policies/principles on persons with disabilities; poor project execution leading to the failure to incorporate features for persons with disabilities; absence of a specific regulating authority to ensure accessibility features in each and every project under the mission; lack of accessibility features in the proposals; and absence of benchmarks for accessibility features like other services.

The report had stated that the Smart Cities Mission had failed to as there was no component of universal accessibility in every proposal. "The mission finds few mention of disability in the overall process, although there is no certainty to ensure

their incorporation in each city's proposal," it had pointed out. Noting that "The top 20 winning cities have completely neglected the role of digital inclusion for PwDs in their proposal," the report had also stated how while several of the city proposals had talked about disabled friendly pathway design or barrier free walkways, almost all of them had neglected the access to IT enabled solutions like e-governance and citizen services.

2. Gwalior as a Smart City

Gwalior City is the famous city of Madhya Pradesh for its culture and architecture. The Gwalior City has been shortlisted by Ministry of Urban Development as one of the 100 smart cities in India.[4]

The Gwalior City has successfully completed the first phase of smart city challenge and make its position in the list of 98 smart cities. The Municipal Corporation of Gwalior is preparing the smart city proposal for participate in the IInd phase of the smart city challenge and our city has to compete with others to make it to the top 20 to be taken up for the Ist round of funding.[4]

Gwalior Corporation pertaining to city's basic infrastructure such as water supply, sanitation, Solid Waste Management, Storm Water Drainage and Housing. But still there is no scope for disabled free / Barrier free approach in their projects till date.[4]

3. The Disability Act 1995

Indeed, even following ten years of the entry of The Disability Act 1995, and as India praises its 58th Independence, handicapped individuals remain detainees in their homes, just because of absence of access, in structures and transport, and unpleasant condition. Section II on The Central Coordination Committee (Para 8 (2) (f)) in The Disability Act, plainly stipulates that the Committee ought to, Take such different strides to guarantee boundary free condition in broad daylight places, work places, open

utilities, schools and different establishments. The law plainly expresses that open transport, including trains, transports and air ship, ought to enable simple access to the impaired; sound signs ought to be introduced at movement lights; and pathways ought to be made wheelchair available. [5]

Part V on Education (para 39) guides fitting Governments to set up a complete instruction plot accommodating transport offices to children with disabilities, expulsion of design obstructions from schools, universities, or different organizations. However not a lot has been done to date.

4. Need to address the issue - Indian context

When Prof. Stephen Hawking came to India in 2001, there was an enormous mayhem on the issue. Overnight inclines were built; a handicapped benevolent vehicle was made, Reality hit hard. Be that as it may, the lesson appears to have as of now been overlooked by all specialists concerned. Delhi got two impaired cordial Delhi Transport Corporation (D.T.C.) transports on the eve of the 6th International Abilympics in November 2003, finish with hydraulic powered lift and all facilities. In any case, they were later given by the Ministry of Social Justice and Empowerment to two N.G.Os in Delhi.

Shouldn't the Government have been supposing as far as handling the two impaired inviting transports on Delhi streets in the first place? Shouldn't handicap get to have turned into an imperative piece of any arranging at this point? [6]

As P.R. Mehta, Former President, Council of Architecture, New Delhi, briefly puts it, Cities are being arranged by individuals between the ages 20-60 and they are making arrangements for themselves. This is the problem. There is no affectability to the way that there are youthful and old, non impaired and disabled. The key concern, he states, is that, The city and structures that exist, including open ranges, are not available. But there is no programme to convert them to make them accessible. How are they going to be tended to? He says, over a timeframe, we can make all things accessible including signage, and sound signs at spots. Yet, however individuals have been discussing changes, and two years prior we had arranged a Plan to make Delhi accessible, nothing has happened, Mehta stresses.

What exactly is access? Salil Chaturvedi, a wheelchair user since 1984, in the wake of being deadened underneath the abdomen in a mischance, and an energetic sportsman who has represented India in wheelchair lawn tennis Open in Japan and Australia, says, Doing straightforward things, even as essential as purchasing a tooth brush is a test here. He remembering last trip to Melbourne, he says, It was shocked, to what freedom really could be. It was fully accessible, with cuts in the footpath along the pathway. And there was freedom of selection as one could go and get what he needs. As for Delhi, he says, It is far behind from Melbourne, and dependence level increases. The simple idea of even going to a library is challenging, as most of them are not barrier free.

If there is accessibility, disable people could get more out of their lives.

Ashwini Kumar Agarwal, Joint Secretary, National Association of the Blind, New Delhi, projects a different angle of the problem. Everything should be accessible and a lot of inputs are required for the visually impaired. Even footpaths are difficult to navigate, with rods, wires, etc. lying around. As for crossings, having automatic signals are fine. But orientation should be given to blind people on the use of push button signals. People should also be sensitised.

Delhi is the most glaring example of difficulty in crossing roads. We have been asking for push button signals for a long time. They are very useful for slow learners and people with learning disabilities. When are they going to come? laments Asha Mehra, Swavalamban.[6]

A universal barrier-free environment is a dream of all Indians. And a few have been lobbying for it for some time now. They would like to create and maintain environments in which all people can participate in ways that are equitable, dignified, maximise independence, and are safe for all. Obstacles of any kind affect the lives of people to a great extent, and it is not difficult to imagine the plight of millions of disabled people who face hurdles at every single step.

The fact is that the problems of access are not limited to disabled people, and a variety of people encounter the same problems, such as those recuperating from an ailment or have suffered fractures, pregnant women, people handling heavy baggage, small kids, those suffering from arthritis or cardiovascular problems, or elderly people with failing eyesight or health.

So when we talk about visible signage, easy parking, ramps and so on, it is not just the disabled people who benefit. Everyone does. This is the universal barrier-free environment the disability sector is striving for.

In an effort to create awareness and bring changes at the policy level by getting disability addressed in all the new efforts of the Government to improve the public buildings and spaces, and the transport system, National Centre for Promotion of Employment for Disabled People (N.C.P.E.D.P.) is launching a year-long National Campaign for a Barrier Free India on 15th August 2005, India's Independence Day. One hopes that this Campaign will go a long way in fulfilling the dreams of the disabled people of this country in leading a full and free life.

5. Initiatives by National Capital of India - Delhi

Delhi, being the Capital, is perceived by people as a role model, and often innovations find their way to other parts of India. But Delhi continues to remain inaccessible. None of its transport systems be it bus stops, railway stations, buses, trains, or buildings including schools, universities, offices, banks, restaurants, cinema halls, or even public parks are accessible to disabled people. In fact, Delhi's public transport

is non-existent for all practical purposes, as disabled people cannot even think of boarding buses or trains as the height difference is insurmountable, not to mention the space inside and the seating arrangements. [6]

Delhi, the capital city of India, is undergoing a facelift. The Municipal Corporation of Delhi (M.C.D.) had recently promised that the Capital will have new Building Bye-laws in place by January 2006 that would be simple and user-friendly. Adding weight to this is the fact that there will be a panel of architects and designers to approve the building plans. The M.C.D. Commissioner Rakesh Mehta unveiled the draft copy of the new Byelaws at a workshop in Delhi and announced that once the final draft is ready, public objections will be invited. Unfortunately, disability finds no mention whatsoever in such an important law where even redevelopment of areas is being considered. Again, the Delhi Government has come up with a draft Master Plan with the grand vision of transforming the Capital into a world-class city by 2021. But the Plan that is far from perfect has come in for heavy criticism from all quarters, including the disability sector, for its lack of vision.

6. Conclusion

Critical analysis of disability and world cities offers us new perspective on fundamental questions of communication policy, technology and justice, in the imagining and making of future societies.

'Why would the future utopia of mobilities and social justice and people with disabilities not start here and now, not just in our cities, with their growing hybrid mix of virtual and built environments, but also in areas outside the metropolys where infrastructures and resources to support differential mobilities are typically constrained.

'After all, if we do not comprehend the "becoming" of disability and mobilities in situ now, and the embodied sensory, social, cultural, collective and personal practices in place and space presently - how can we imagine, design and enact expansive, enabling, and just societies in near or far future.

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