

6. Our City, Accessible City. Let us realize this dream, together

WHAT ARE THE POTENTIAL BARRIERS TO INCLUSION

It is important to understand the potential barriers that prevent or hinder persons with disabilities to Participate in the spheres of socio, economic, political, cultural, religious and other aspects of life with their so called non-disabled fellow citizens as equal members and citizens of that community, society and nation which put them in a disadvantageous position which are as follows:

- Contribute to the development of self, family, community, society, nation and world.
- Secure, realise, and exercise their rights and duties to a life of dignity.
- Realise their personal goals, dreams, aspirations and ambitions to a life of dignity.

The potential barriers can be broadly classified into seven categories:

A. Attitudinal barriers: The negative and crippling attitudes of the larger community towards persons with disabilities make them more vulnerable. It reinforces the impoverishment and their invisibility due to these stereotypes. These attitudes are reinforced by myths and misconceptions. These myths and misconceptions are deep rooted in the minds of larger community. The conditioning of the community always views them as helpless, objects of charity and pity, dependent, beggars, weak, disadvantaged, under privileged, inferior and pitiful. These stereotypes and crippling and negative attitudes never give them a chance to prove their ability and make them more dependent. Negative attitudes can be seen in the forms of sympathy, apathy, antipathy, negligence, over protection, pity, charity, compassion and elimination. These attitudinal barriers can also be due to ignorance. Community or society is ignorant to the issues of persons with disabilities which never give them a chance to understand the feelings of persons with disabilities. Negative and crippling attitudes are manifested in the forms of discrimination, exclusion, charity, feelings of inferiority and superiority, deprivation of opportunities and differential treatment.

B. Institutional barriers: Institutional barriers refer to the policies, procedures, legislations, norms, rules, regulations, schemes, programmes, laws, processes and other written or unwritten constitutional framework of the local, regional, national and international levels which exclude persons with disabilities and create barriers for persons with disabilities to access the services of those institutions, schemes, programmes, policies, legislations and laws as an equal citizen of that society. These institutional barriers not only keep them away but also

do not protect the human rights of this underprivileged section. In the first instance these institutions are inaccessible; secondly the policies and procedures exclude persons with disabilities. One of the biggest disadvantages is that information about these procedures is not accessible to persons with disabilities. Anti expression and absence of expression of disability make these institutional frameworks anti-disabled and a potential barrier to persons with disabilities.

C. Physical or environmental barriers: Physical or environmental barriers refer to those structural and functional barriers of buildings, roads, transport facilities, open places like parks, stadiums, play grounds, religious places, recreational places, legal places, state and union legislatures and other natural or human made structures which prevent persons with disabilities to access services of these structures and enter into them. Access to information is a fundamental issue for persons with disabilities. The existing information is inaccessible since it is not in accessible form. Auditory signals at public places are inaccessible to persons with hearing impairment. Visual signages and signals are inaccessible to persons with visual impairment. The information existing in the form of print is inaccessible to persons with visual impairment. Access refers to reaching buildings, structures, places, information, services and other opportunities in society.

D. Legal barriers: Legal barriers can be broadly classified into four categories. They are:

1. Anti disabled legislations, laws, policies and orders: Almost all legislations, laws, policies and orders are anti-disabled in nature. The expressions used in these legislations are anti disabled and do not protect the interests and human rights of persons with disabilities, rather they exclude persons with disabilities. Some of the anti disabled legislations and policies are the Manifestos of the major political parties of India 2004 and mention/speak about creating livelihood opportunities only to abled citizens of this country. The expression used in the manifesto is that creation of livelihood opportunities to millions of “abled” citizens of this country. The common minimum programme of United Progress Alliance, Government of India 2004 speaks the same thing. It does not include persons with disabilities in the livelihood programme. The draft bill on Employment Guarantee Act does not include persons with disabilities for livelihood opportunities. Medical Termination of pregnancy Act of 1972 permits the couple to terminate the foetus with disability which is again anti disabled.

2. Absence of word “disability” in the general legislations, laws, policies and orders: Almost all policies and laws exclude persons with disabilities. The non-discriminatory provision of most of the national and international human rights instruments and legislations do not have the expression “disability” in it but have expression like gender, race, caste, class, colour, creed and any other ground. The international human rights instruments do not speak about persons with disabilities at all. The instrument includes the universal declaration of human rights; child rights convention, convention on minority rights and other treaties, conventions, international laws, legislations but none of them have an expression called “disability”. The constitution of India in its anti-discrimination legislation excludes persons with disabilities. The legislation enacted for the protection of under privileged sections of India does not speak about disability at all. The judiciary is uninformed about the application of general laws, legislations and policies for the protection of persons with disabilities who are also citizens of the country. Every time the judiciary seeks special legislations and laws to protect and safeguard the interest of persons with disabilities by ignoring the fact that the law of the land is equally applicable to persons with disabilities to protect their rights.

3. Non existence of legal protection measures: There should be special legislations and laws or provisions within the general laws to safeguard the interests of persons with disabilities but the fact of the matter is that there are no special legislations and laws covering all aspects. There are a few special laws and legislations but they are not comprehensive enough to protect the interest of persons with disabilities in all aspects of socio, economic, political, cultural and religious life. The aspects include right to inheritance, marriage, divorce, recreation, companionship, access and other spheres.

4. Poor lack/no implementation of legislations, laws, policies and orders: There are a couple of legislations, laws, policies and orders exclusively enacted for the development of persons with disabilities but they are not implemented in letter and spirit. If even 10% of the provisions enshrined in the legislations are implemented, millions of persons with disabilities will be benefited and their life will be changed. The lack of political will to promote and protect the interests and human rights of persons with disabilities on the part of political parties and Government has led to this pathetic situation.

E. Cultural barriers: It has been discussed in the previous section that religious values and beliefs are the root cause of negative attitudes and discrimination against persons with disabilities. These negative attitudes, discrimination, exclusion, stereotypes and prejudices are

reinforced by strong myths, misconceptions, blind beliefs, superstition and ignorance. Since these negative attitudes, prejudices and stereotypes have their roots in ancient religious values; it is very difficult to change them. Manu's expression that disability is due to the sin of wrong doing in a previous birth; losing righteousness due to the presence of a person with disability in religious rituals, the theory of glorification of race, exclusion of persons affected by leprosy and restrictions on them from entering the main village as depicted in the old testament in the Bible are some of the explanations of the cultural barriers which prevent or hinder the development of persons with disabilities as an equal member of that society.

F. Economic barriers: The so called mainstream livelihood opportunities exclude persons with disabilities. When the question of livelihood options arise suddenly people think about stereotype livelihood options like chair recanning, telephone booths, candle-making, agarbathi making, greeting card making, file making, music and other occupations which are enlisted for persons with disabilities. Society never thinks beyond these stereotyped occupations. But actually persons with disabilities could be engaged in all types of meaningful and gainful occupations depending upon the type of disability, degree of disability, and the interest and aptitude of the person. But society is absolutely unaware about this fact. Persons with disabilities have established this fact by efficiently managing various occupations. The fact of the matter is that the one which is not possible for some one is possible for others. Thus enlisting or branding some stereo type occupations is a potential barrier to engage in a meaningful and gainful occupation which gives him/her a sense of job satisfaction. The work force of this country consists of less than 1% of persons with disabilities in comparison to 6% in Germany, 3% in UK, 1.9% in Japan and 1% in Bangladesh. The further break up of this less than 1% is 0.5% in public sector, 0.4% in private sector and 0.002% in multi national companies. The reasons for this discrimination are inaccessible work places, negative attitudes of the employer, excluded by HR policies, lack of opportunities for vocational training, lack of opportunities for higher education, lack of opportunities to get elementary or basic education and prejudices against persons with disabilities. This blatant discrimination and exclusion has forced them to be engaged in undignified occupations like begging. Economic empowerment of persons with disabilities equips them with a sense of self confidence, respect, worth, dignity, esteem and makes them contributing members of the society. Almost all NGOs, projects, Government departments and national and international agencies working with people with disabilities just ignore this part of crucial and critical component of rehabilitation and end up providing medical rehabilitation services like certificates, surgery, medication, assistive devices and therapeutic services.

G. Political barriers: The political barriers include decision making in family, village, community, society and other decision making bodies, voting, contesting elections, representation in decision making bodies in community and society, political parties, manifestos of political parties, common minimum programmes of political parties and democratic institutions of this country. The constitution of this country provides reservation to other backward sections to represent in decision making bodies in order to address their issues. The constituencies have been reserved for other backward sections in the legislature of both union and states. Reservation is also provided in Panchayat Raj institutions, town and city municipal corporations. But there is no such provision of privileges for Persons with disabilities. The main reason for this blatant discrimination and exclusion is that they do not constitute a sizable chunk of the vote bank to attract political parties since they are scattered across the country. The polling stations are often not accessible to persons with disabilities and the people sitting there are not sensitive enough to the needs of persons with disabilities and are rather indifferent and insulting

H. Religious barriers: It has been discussed that negative attitudes, discrimination, exclusion and prejudices against persons with disabilities have their roots in values and belief system. The values and belief systems are influenced by the religious values. The crippling attitudes and stereotypes are derived from the religious texts and scriptures. The religious texts and scriptures view people with disabilities as objects of charity and pity. Disability has been seen as Karma [bad deeds of previous birth] and curse of God for retribution; thus there is no prominent place for persons with disabilities in religious ceremonies. The places of worship such as Church, Mosque, Temple, Gurudwara, Basadi and Vihara are not accessible to persons with disabilities. People with assistive devices like callipers are not allowed into places of worship on the pretext of sanctity or sacredness. Religious rituals exclude persons with disabilities. They are not allowed to take part in these rituals for the simple reason that the righteousness will be lost due to presence of persons with disabilities. They have no opportunity to perform these rituals. Many religious and cultural taboos are imposed on them. The religious texts or scriptures are not accessible to persons with disabilities since they are in ink print.

This should be our collective action and efforts to deal with these barriers and create an accessible city which can be realized by together along with persons with disabilities.

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