



Empowering Persons with Disabilities

This editorial is based on [“India, disability inclusion and the power of ‘by’”](#) which was published in The Hindu on 04/12/2023. The article highlights the challenges faced by persons with disabilities in India, such as poverty, discrimination, lack of access to education, health, social protection, and employment opportunities. It also cites some positive examples of disability inclusion initiatives.

For Prelims: [Rights of Persons with Disabilities Act, 2016](#), [NFHS-5 survey](#), [UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities \(CRPD\)](#), [International Fund for Agricultural Development \(IFAD\)](#), **Disability Inclusion Facilitators (DIFs)**, [Accessible India Campaign](#)

For Mains: Status of Disability in India, Challenges faced by People with Disabilities, Initiatives for the Empowerment of Disabled and Way Forward

Disability as an identity and entity exists at the intersection of multiple vulnerabilities — social, economic and gender — with each facet requiring careful consideration when conceptualising action for equity.

Globally, **1.3 billion people live with some form of disability**. Of them, 80% live in developing countries; further, 70% of them live in rural areas.

Current systems are designed for persons without disabilities and end up being exclusionary to people with disabilities, resulting in them experiencing higher instances of poverty, lack of access to education and opportunities, informality and other forms of social and economic discrimination.

What is the Definition of Disability in India?

- According to the [Rights of Persons with Disabilities Act, 2016](#), a person with a disability is someone who has a long-term impairment that affects their physical, mental, intellectual, or sensory abilities.
 - This impairment prevents them from participating fully and effectively in society.
- The four main categories of disability are:
 - Behavioural or emotional
 - Sensory impaired disorders
 - Physical
 - Developmental

What is the Status of Disability in India?

According to the [World Bank](#), 5–8% of India's population have disabilities. The NSSO estimates that 2.2% of the population is disabled. The [NFHS-5 survey](#) (2019–21) found that 4.52% of the population has a disability.

What Challenges Do People with Disabilities Face in India?

- **Limited Awareness:** The first hurdle is the lack of awareness about the government schemes and benefits available for people with disabilities.
 - This issue is more pronounced in rural areas where information dissemination is challenging.
- **Lack of Accessibility and Infrastructure:** Many public places, such as schools, hospitals, transport systems, and government offices, are not designed to accommodate the needs of people with disabilities.
 - This limits their mobility, education, health care, and participation in social and civic activities.
 - According to [UNICEF](#), children with disabilities are often excluded from such spaces and therefore miss out on the critical initiatives that aim to improve their health and well-being.
- **Limited Access to Education and Employment:** Persons with disabilities in rural areas often face restricted access to education and employment opportunities.
 - The **lack of inclusive educational institutions and vocational training centers** can hinder their ability to acquire necessary skills and participate in the workforce.
- **Exclusion from Developmental Schemes:** Some developmental schemes may inadvertently exclude persons with disabilities, leading to their exclusion from critical initiatives.
 - One example is vaccination campaigns that **do not take into account the accessibility and communication needs of persons with disabilities**, such as ramps, sign language interpreters, or braille materials.
- **Perception and Stigma:** Persons with disabilities are sometimes viewed as objects of charity rather than as autonomous beings capable of making meaningful contributions to society.
 - This perception can lead to social stigma, discrimination, and exclusion from decision-making processes, further exacerbating their challenges.
- **Agricultural Dependence and Climate Change Risks:** Rural areas in India often have a high dependence on agriculture, and **persons with disabilities in these areas are particularly vulnerable** to the impacts of [climate change](#).
 - Reduced access to clean water and food, hurricanes, heatwaves, and floods pose heightened risks to their livelihoods, health, and overall well-being.
- **Lack of Legal and Policy Support:** India has ratified the [UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities \(CRPD\)](#) in 2007, and enacted the [Rights of Persons with Disabilities Act \(RPWD\)](#) in 2016, which provides a legal framework for the protection and empowerment of people with disabilities.
 - However, there are gaps and challenges in the implementation and enforcement of these laws and policies, and many people with disabilities are still unaware of their entitlements and remedies.

What are the Initiatives for the Empowerment of Disabled People?

- **The Spark Project:** The [ILO](#) and the [International Fund for Agricultural Development \(IFAD\)](#), in collaboration with the Women's Development Corporation in Maharashtra, are implementing the **Sparking Disability Inclusive Rural Transformation (SPARK)** project.
 - Through this project, persons with disabilities were put in the lead, being identified from the villages, and trained as **Disability Inclusion Facilitators (DIFs)**.
 - The DIFs **engage with the community, persons with disabilities, caregivers of persons with disabilities, women from [self-help groups](#) and other stakeholders to raise awareness** about disability inclusion and barriers to inclusion.
 - The DIFs identify women with disabilities and mainstream them in existing self-help groups for social and economic development, where these women have been able to access funds to start an enterprise.
 - The SPARK project has been able to bring an attitudinal shift towards persons with disabilities, right from the societal to administrative levels.
- [Unique Disability Identification Portal](#)
- [Accessible India Campaign](#)
- [DeenDayal Disabled Rehabilitation Scheme](#)
- [Assistance to Disabled Persons for Purchase/fitting of Aids and Appliances](#)

- [National Fellowship for Students with Disabilities](#)
- [Unique ID for persons with disabilities \(UDID\) card](#)

What Measures Should be Taken to Improve Conditions of Persons with Disabilities?

- **Enhancing Employment Opportunities:** There is a need to create more job opportunities for persons with disabilities, and to provide them with adequate training, skill development, and support.
 - The government and the private sector should implement the provisions of the **RPWD Act 2016, which mandate 4% reservation for persons with disabilities in government jobs**, and incentives for employers who employ persons with disabilities.
 - [CSR initiatives](#) can also play a role in promoting inclusive and accessible workplaces for persons with disabilities.
- **Improving Accessibility and Infrastructure:** There is a need to make public places, such as schools, hospitals, transport systems, and government offices, more accessible and user-friendly for persons with disabilities.
 - This can be done by **adopting universal design principles, providing ramps, lifts, signages, tactile paths, assistive devices**, and other facilities that cater to the diverse needs of persons with disabilities.
 - The government should also ensure the implementation and monitoring of the [Accessible India Campaign](#), which aims to make public buildings and transport systems accessible for persons with disabilities.
- **Raising Awareness and Sensitivity:** There is a need to raise awareness and sensitise people about the rights and abilities of persons with disabilities, and to combat the myths and misconceptions that surround them.
 - This can be done by **conducting campaigns, workshops, seminars, and cultural events** that showcase the talents and achievements of persons with disabilities, and by involving them in decision-making and leadership roles.
 - The media and the education system can also play a role in creating a positive and respectful image of persons with disabilities, and in promoting a culture of inclusion and diversity.
- **Strengthening Legal and Policy Support:** There is a need to strengthen the legal and policy framework for the protection and empowerment of persons with disabilities, and to ensure its effective implementation and enforcement.
 - The government should **allocate adequate resources and funds for the welfare schemes and programs for persons with disabilities**, and monitor their outcomes and impact.
 - The government should also **ensure the participation and consultation of persons with disabilities and their organisations in the formulation and review of laws and policies** that affect them.
 - The government should also **raise awareness and the capacity of the judiciary, the police, and the administration to deal with the issues and grievances** of persons with disabilities.
- **Capacity-Building at Grassroots Level:** To bridge the gap between government policies and the people they are meant for, there is a need for capacity-building at the grassroots level.
 - **Community leaders** play a crucial role in advocating for the rights and benefits of persons with disabilities, and their training is essential to ensure the effective implementation of these initiatives.

Drishti Mains Question:

Discuss the social and economic vulnerabilities faced by persons with disabilities in India. How do these vulnerabilities intersect with factors such as gender and rural living?

UPSC Civil Services Examination, Previous Year Question (PYQ)

Prelims:

Q. India is home to lakhs of persons with disabilities. What are the benefits available to them under the law? (2011)

1. Free schooling till the age of 18 years in government run schools.
2. Preferential allotment of land for setting up business.
3. Ramps in public buildings.

Which of the statements given above is/are correct?

- (a) 1 only
- (b) 2 and 3 only
- (c) 1 and 3 only
- (d) 1, 2 and 3

Ans: (d)

Mains

Q. Does the Rights of Persons with Disabilities Act, 2016 ensure effective mechanism for empowerment and inclusion of the intended beneficiaries in the society? Discuss. (2017)

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