



Disability: Situation in Pakistan

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World Health Organization defines disability as *any restriction or lack (resulting from any impairment) of ability to perform an activity in the manner or within the range considered normal for a human being.*

Of the total world population approximately 15% or about one billion fit the above definition with a mild, moderate or severe nature. 93 million of these are children. In Pakistan, in the absence of regular Census, approximate or projected numbers estimate that, total population of people with disability (PWDs) is 5.035 million, more than the population of Norway, New Zealand, Lebanon or Kuwait. Current annual growth rate of disabilities is at 2.65 % per annum more than the annual growth rate (2.03%) of total population of Pakistan. Only 14 percent of persons with disabilities are in work, rest are reliant on family members for financial support.

The number of children with disability is 43.4% of total PWDs population, 58.4% male and 41.6% female (Reference: Population Census 1998), The number of males with disability is greater than females, possibly because of the high incidence of female infanticide caused by

social discrimination, preference for the male child, and deep rooted gender insensitivity within households. It is estimated that around 1.4 million (28.9% of total number of PWDs) are the children of school going age who do not have access to education.

Government of Pakistan addresses the needs of PWD through a Directorate General of Special Education & Social Welfare (under the Capital Administration & Development Division) and a number of institutes and centers established in the Islamabad Capital Territory (ICT). The Government of Pakistan has ratified the United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (UNCPRPD) on 5th July, 2011 in UN General Assembly and implementation of UNCPRPD is mandatory for the Government of Pakistan. DGSE&SW established a cell called UNCPRPD secretariat for the implementation of UN Convention in January, 2012. It is clear that the Governments (Federal and Provincial) need to implement various Policies and Action Plans particularly the UNCPRPD, integrating the needs of PWDs also into national Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) agendas.

Like all children, children with disability require that they be provided with all basic rights and facilities for living a peaceful productive life. These basic rights include the right to quality education. Pakistan has signed and ratified the UN conventions on human rights and rights of people with disabilities UNCRPD which call for equal rights and opportunities for all people including those with disabilities. After 18th Constitutional Amendment, it becomes the responsibility of both the Federal and Provincial governments to undertake immense and aggressive planning in order to fulfill the commitments of this convention.

Sindh Right of Children to Free and Compulsory Education Act, 2013

Article 25 A on Right to Education for ALL children 5-16 years of age has been enacted in 2 provinces and ICT however to date rules have not been made for implementation. The Sindh Right of Children to Free and Compulsory Education Act 2013 was assented by the Governor of Sindh on March 6th, 2013 and published thereafter as an Act of legislation. In reference to this Act, the following articles refer to disabilities:

Chapter 1: Preliminary

Article 2, sub-section (o): *“special education means educational programs and practices designed for students, as handicapped or gifted students, whose mental ability, physical ability, emotional functioning, require special teaching approaches, equipment, or care within or outside a regular class room;”*

Chapter 3: Duties of Government, Local Authority and Parents

Article 4, sub-section (c): *“ensure that the disadvantaged child is not discriminated against and prevented from, on any grounds whatsoever for pursuing and completing education;”*

Chapter 4: Responsibilities of Private Schools for Free and Compulsory Education

Article 10, sub-section (b): *“shall admit in class-I and subsequent classes not less than ten Percent of the strength of that class to disadvantaged children;”*

People and children with disabilities face many hardships, not all of them as a result of their disability. Social ostracization as a result of stigmatization is one of them. They are excluded from social, economic and political decision-making. Focusing attention on the life chances of persons with disabilities translating the notion of inclusive development into ground reality is a dire need in face of various challenges. Raising awareness amongst the people, media, government and nongovernment organizations, as well as academic and other sectors of the society is a way forward.

Inclusion in education process or Inclusive education is “the process of increasing the participation of students in, and reducing their exclusion from, the **cultures, curricula** and **communities** of local schools”. This clearly focuses on all children who are excluded for whatever reason, disability being one of these reasons.

Experience from the countries who have adopted IE has shown that it benefits all children, **Academically as well as Socially**, because children learn to be more tolerant and accept each others’ differences and develop a cooperative spirit. IE reduces segregation and isolation of children and families, giving a chance to implement the **right to all to education**. Rehabilitation with equipment, improved access and attitudinal change in the society will pave the way for an Inclusive society with opportunities to reach their potential for ALL.

The Government of Punjab must immediately abolish and replace the title of **Deaf /Hearing and Defective** from all its institutions catering for those challenged by hearing impairments. It is against constitutional, human rights, right to education /25 A enactments and international conventions.

References:

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