

Is Education, a Welfare activity?

Investment in education of children with disabilities must be treated as an investment on human capital. This outlook requires a solid human rights approach to disability issues. This approach calls for the treatment of disabled persons as individuals rather than those with unusual qualities. Human rights approach always lays importance on the child and not on his/her disability. It does not give scope for stereotypes.

Education is the fundamental right of every human being. In the system of administration of educational systems in any country, various machineries of the Government are involved and

it is customary that education in general is managed by the Ministries / Departments exclusively created for Education. In many countries, education of children with disabilities is managed by the Ministries of Education too, which is ideal, as the school age population of children with disabilities is not more than 5% of the total strength in any country.

India has ratified the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (UNCRPD) implying that the country is committed to the empowerment of persons with disabilities in every sense. Article 24 of the UNCRPD dealing



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with "Education" mentions that with a view to realizing this right without discrimination and on the basis of equal opportunity, State Parties shall ensure an inclusive education system at all levels and lifelong learning. It also states that the Governments should ensure that persons with disabilities are not excluded from the general education system on the basis of disability, and that children with disabilities are not excluded from free and compulsory primary education, or from secondary education, on the basis of disability. It further adds that persons with disabilities receive the support required, within the general education system, to facilitate their effective education and underlines the importance of effective individualized support measures to be provided in environments that maximize academic and social development, consistent with the goal of full inclusion.

When the thrust of the UNCRPD is to maximize inclusion of persons with disabilities in the mainstream, it is ideal to include the system of special education in the mainstream. In India, it is a fact that education of children with disabilities, when they study in inclusive or integrated settings, is governed by the general education system whereas the same education provided through special schools comes under the welfare departments. It tends to create an impression that education is still considered a welfare activity for some students. Treating education of children with disabilities as "welfare" does not raise the image of the system in the global arena and therefore, it is advisable to bring the education under the Ministries / Departments of Education irrespective of the mode of service delivery. In a vast country like India, one model does not fit all and therefore, systems such as special residential schools for persons with disabilities, integrated education, and inclusive education will co-exist. Among persons with disabilities, those experiencing visual impairment, hearing impairment and locomotor disability are not

cognitively impaired and therefore, the inclusion of special schools meant for them under the general system is not going to result in any problem. The children with mental retardation cannot compete with non-disabled children in the general system and therefore, education for severe and profound categories of children may have special sections but it is ideal to have these special sections as units of the general education systems. The Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan has created Block Resource Centres with the purpose of helping children with disabilities in the particular locality and such centres may be equipped well to take care of the needs of children with cognitive challenges too. At present, the special schools for persons with disabilities, because of their exclusive nature, create an impression among the community that these children are special and they need to be kept in exclusive settings. Therefore, it is high time to bring the education of children with disabilities under the education sector to demonstrate that we treat the education of children with disabilities as their right and not a welfare activity.

There is another reason why the education of these children should come under education department. Ever since services for persons with disabilities emerged in India, the general system was not adequately sensitised to the needs of these children and as a result special schools were initiated. Trends gradually changed with the introduction of the centrally sponsored scheme of Integrated Education of Disabled Children (IEDC) in the seventies and later with the implementation of inclusive education. As per the present statistics, majority of children with disabilities study in integrated and inclusive settings while special schools accommodate only a limited number. The shift in enrolment pattern too is influencing the concept that education of children with disabilities should be brought under the general education system.

There are many other areas where the Welfare departments can provide significant services to persons with disabilities. In the education of children with disabilities, the most vulnerable section is that of children with multiple disabilities. These children require individual attention and special survival skills and therefore, their academic inclusion becomes difficult in the general system. In fact, the general system at present is not equipped to meet the needs of children with multiple disabilities and therefore, special homes or residential facilities may be provided to these children under the jurisdiction of social welfare departments. There are only a few schools available at present for educating children with multiple disabilities and therefore, Social Welfare departments may focus attention on increasing this number to help such vulnerable children. They may also undertake measures to create awareness among parents and persons

with disabilities about the value of education, which will facilitate education of these children in the mainstream. The entire gamut of rehabilitation including employment requires special attention and this may be looked after effectively by the social welfare departments. Similarly these departments may initiate research activities in the areas of assistive devices, community involvement, etc.

In summary, the social welfare departments can involve in a variety of activities to bring the child to the doorstep of education but it is vital to provide education under the umbrella of the mainstream education. If not, education of children with disabilities will continue to get the label of welfare, which is not healthy. Can education become a fundamental human right instead of being a welfare activity?

- Editor

It can solve the existing problems of special teachers too

Bringing education under the department of education may also solve many problems related to teachers of these children. At present many teacher preparation courses are recognised by the Rehabilitation Council of India (RCI) and offered through Government and Non-Governmental Organisations. It is an irony that special teachers in some States in the country are appointed on the basis of where they study instead of looking at what they studied. RCI offers diploma course in special education and many institutions are implementing this. When it comes to employment in special schools, it is true that some States employ students from specific institutions only which were training teachers for children with disabilities prior to the establishment of RCI. Similarly B.Ed. Special

Education approved by the RCI is not considered for employment in special schools in some States whereas the same is listed as a qualification under the Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan. Though the curriculum prescribed by the RCI is same across the country, appointment in special schools seems to be made on the basis of different yardsticks. This anomaly can be overcome when education in special schools is included under the department of education. Therefore, mainstreaming the education of children with disabilities in the general system will solve many teething problems. When global campaigns highlight that education for all includes children with disabilities too, mainstreaming the service delivery models under the general system of education would be most ideal.

UDIS Report Card for April 2008



- ☞ The Forum enabled placement for 16 persons with disabilities during April 2008.
- ☞ A Memorandum of Understanding with the Coimbatore Association for the Deaf (CAD) was signed on 16th April 2008. As per the MOU, the Forum and the CAD will jointly organise leadership training activities, pre-employment training, sports, cultural activities, etc., involving hearing impaired persons.



- ☞ Embroidery training in collaboration with Caliber, an organisation working for the welfare of persons with locomotor disabilities was launched on 13th April 2008.
- ☞ Sri Subramania Shiva, Vice President (Administration) and Sri S. Sekaran, Executive Director, UDIS Forum offered a training programme in Tirunelveli on

11th April to orient representatives of self-help groups to assist persons with disabilities through creation of self-employment opportunities. They also addressed persons with disabilities and their families at a function organised by the Rotary Club of Ambasamudram to orient them on various welfare schemes.



- ☞ The UDIS Forum and Saraswathy Thiagarajar College, Pollachi worked with industries in Pollachi region to identify jobs for persons with disabilities.
- ☞ The PRIST University and the UDIS Forum prepared curriculum for skill oriented courses to be offered to persons with disabilities, members of youth wing, parents and public.

For more details on the activities of the UDIS Forum, log onto www.davo.in
We value your suggestions.

Do you want to write in the Enabling Voice?
Send your brief write-ups on issues relating to disability to udis@vsnl.net

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