



EXPLORING THE ROLE OF GRAM PANCHAYATS IN EMPOWERING DIFFERENTLY ABLED CHILDREN

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Abstract

By promoting comprehensive development at the grassroot level, Gram Panchayats help to empower differently-abled children. Gram Panchayats, the tiniest units of local government in India, execute initiatives to advance education, health, skill training, and social inclusion for handicapped children. Furthermore, they are developing access in schools and public areas and guarantee access to government benefit programs, scholarships, and assistive equipments. Working together with non-governmental organizations, self-help organizations, and local stakeholders, Gram Panchayats raise awareness and remove social stigma related with handicaps. Furthermore, they encourage vocational training and job prospects to guarantee sustained autonomy for these youngsters. Emphasizing the position of Gram Panchayats in disability-inclusive governance could help to create a more just and empowering society, thereby enhancing the general well-being of differently-abled kids in rural India.

The Tenth Plan's strategy centers on enabling and supporting disabled people emphasize on efficient enforcement of the Individuals with Disabilities Act, 1995, for integrating people with disabilities in education and in the economic development process, the Government of India offers several approaches, policies and programmes. Implementing such programs well, though, calls for enough financing, a suitable policy framework, and most of all an efficient administration delivery method. To achieve this, Panchayats should be included in these initiatives. First, provide the Panchayats with pertinent data. The States should, according to Article 40 of the Constitution, arrange village panchayats having enough power and authority to allow them to operate as elements of self-government'. Effective decentralization, both political and economic, have been tried several times during the last fifty years with little success. Passed in 1992, the 73rd Constitutional Amendment Act gave Constitutional position of the Panchayati Raj Institutions (PRIs). Statutes under 29 subjects including 'Empowerment of Disabled,' governments are now developing institutional structures and modalities to help Panchayati Raj Institutions (PRIs) participate in program implementation.

Democratic decentralization depends on the idea that more public engagement will enhance the level of services given from the authorities as well as local self-government, which has a responsibility of acting as the fulcrum of society, is provided by the gram panchayats, village engine of socio-economic growth. Formally including local government, the Seventy-third Constitutional amendment gives a formal



framework administration and management. The organizations which run panchayats can change rural India by means of all-round development. This paper seeks to examine the function of gram panchayats in society as a tool that may cause growth in several fields like economy, health, and technology and will also try to point out areas where this paper will cover the need of evaluating the role of gram panchayat in realizing the right to education for all.

Keywords: Gram Panchayats, Disability, Differently-Abled Children

Introduction

Empowering differently-abled children is vital for creating an all-inclusive and fair society. For local governance and growth in rural India—the Gram Panchayat is the most important institution should resources and knowledge be scarce. Under the 73rd Constitutional Amendment, the Panchayati Raj system allows Gram Panchayats to run social welfare initiatives including those for disabled children. Gram Panchayat, a local governance institution, is required to create local economic development and social justice plans, carry out projects, and execute policies for issues listed in the 11th schedule (Article 243G) of the Constitution. The 73rd Constitutional Amendment Act of 1992 Constitutional status was given to the Panchayati Raj Institutions (PRIs). The Constitution allows for devolution of powers and obligations on Panchayats to right extent. Devolution to the PRIs has been planned for 29 subjects mentioned in the Eleventh Schedule of the Constitution.

Following the 73rd Constitutional Amendment Act, State Governments are now developing mechanisms and institutional structures to support the engagement of Panchayati Raj Institutions (PRIs) in the implementation of many programs under 29 subjects including 'Empowerment of Disabled'. 30 million youngsters (10%) of about 300 million youngsters aged 0-14 now, according current best guesses in the country have some degree of impairment/disability (including sensory, locomotors, or cognitive deficits) ranging from minor to significant. More than half of such disabilities result from poor prevention measure; if appropriate and efficient preventive action is taken measures are especially taken at early stages.

The Eleventh schedule point 25 assigns to the Panchayati Raj organs all responsibilities related to Women and Child development initiatives and policies. Empowerment and promotion of the plan's tenth plan is the approach taken disabled people's well-being. Efficient execution of the Persons is what is stressed with Disabilities Act of 1995. Several approaches, policies, and programs/acts can be found among the Indian Government programmes for including individuals with handicaps in the labor sector and education life cycle motion. Successful execution of those initiatives, though, calls for sufficient money, a good policy structure and first of all energetic execution mechanism. At the district level, the Panchayati Raj Institutions serve as the



nodal point. They are to assist coordinate, schedule, monitor, and manage the execution of many national projects as needed. This paper analyzes how Gram Panchayats may help to close the gap between policy and implementation, therefore guaranteeing that disabled children have proper support and chances.

Differently Abled Children

The World Health Organization (WHO) defines 'disability' as a general term including restrictions in participation, limitations in activity, and impairments. Some youngsters are born with a cognitive, sensory, or physical handicap. Others could suffer from a handicap, as they age, that really restricts their daily life activities. Strictly academically speaking, they are named kids with 'disability'. Sometimes in the public domain they are regarded as 'challenged' or 'differently cognized'. Most of the disabilities fall under different categories such as Impairment of intelligence (functional limitation and Adaptive behaviours), Visual deficiency (comprising poor vision and complete blindness), Hearing Deficiency (total hearing loss, partial hearing loss, and deafness), Cerebral palsy (challenges of posture, speech, hand use, and movement among other things), Autism (A condition impairing play behavior, social interaction, and communication), Reading, writing, and arithmetic problems (learning disabilities).

The need of special educators and other staff inside schooling particularly after the passage of the Persons with Disabilities (PWD) Act 1995, programmes in both special and inclusive learning settings have been growing over time. The Rights of Persons with Disabilities Act (RPD Act) replaced this Act in 2016, which deals with 21 disabilities. Including handicapped children, Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan (SSA) offers eight years of schooling for every kid.

Acts and Policies for Differently-Abled Children

Integrated Education of Disabled Children (IEDC) in 1974: Integrated Education for Disabled Pupils offers opportunities for education for disabled child in regular school.

World Declaration on 'Education for ALL' in 1990: It provided momentum to Integrated Education in India. Passed in 1992, the Rehabilitation Council of India Act started a professional training program meant to meet the requirements of handicapped children.

The Salamanca Statement in 1994: The statement confirms that those with remarkable access to regular school ought to be provided to meet requirements which would be ideally suited them within child-centered education.

Though **the 1995 People with Disabilities** (Equal Opportunities, Protection of Rights and Full Participation) Act provides for the education of children with disabilities in an appropriate setting up to the age of 18 years, it seeks to encourage integration of disabled students in the regular schools. Nevertheless, the act is found to be imperfect in several



regards: the definition of person is based essentially on the 'degree of disability', definition of mental illness is limited, and features under education were less.

The Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities of 2006 imposed on member countries a responsibility to guarantee a free education system. It seeks for complete involvement of disabled people in the society, the workplace, universities, and schools.

Under the **Right to Education Act of 2010, the 2015 amendment** allowed for underprivileged groups to be considered in the definition of "persons". Section 3 gives a child in Section 2 (ee) (A) who has disability, without bias to the definitions of the Persons with Disabilities Act, 1995, and a child mentioned in Section 2 (ee) (B) and (C), equal rights to seek free and compulsory elementary schooling which children with disabilities have. Special Education Bill covers teacher training requirements, surveys, and campaigns to be passed in 2016.

The Rights of Persons with Disabilities Act, 2016: This law superseded the Persons with Disabilities (Equal Opportunities, Protection of Rights and Full Participation) Act, of 1995 and offers a detailed framework for safeguarding the rights and entitlements of individuals with disabilities, which encompasses access to education.

Covering children from pre-primary to senior secondary, the Centrally sponsored **Samagra Shiksha** is a comprehensive plan for School Education of the Department of School Education and Literacy, Ministry of Education. Samagra Shiksha has a special component for Inclusive Education for Children with Special Needs (CwSN) whereby several provisions are made available for their learning requirements including identification and assessment camps, provision of aids, appliances, assistive devices, teaching learning materials (TLMs) etc.

The key of education is complete equity and inclusion, according **the National Education Policy (NEP),2020**, so as to guarantee that all pupils can flourish in the education system. It also emphasizes, inside its context, the need of educating CwSN so as to guarantee fair quality of education. Furthermore in line with the suggestions of NEP 2020 to guarantee that every child is provided with quality education is the Samagra Shiksha initiative, which has been coordinated with an inclusive and fair classroom environment.

Role of Gram Panchayats in Empowering Differently Abled Children

The Panchayati Raj Institutions are the nodal point at level of districts. They serve to coordinate, plan, monitor, and wherever needed control the execution of different national initiatives.

Particular function of the PRIS in 'Empowering Children with pertaining to disabilities:



- Help to prepare several plans pertaining to the instruction and rehab of children with disabilities.
- Block level panchayats should assist them to find the distribution network(s) for the education and rehabilitation of children with disabilities under various circumstances.
- Develop plans to activate the local community for different tasks including surveys, assisting the field level officials, money raising, monitoring of the programs at the level of field, etc.
- Make sure proper percentages of money are distributed into several main programs encompasses those targeting the prevention of educational needs of the disabilities.
- Gram Sabha should play an active role in early detection of disabilities at village and district level with the help of panchayats.
- Arrange specialized centers for disabled children to give training with the help of NGO and public functionaries in cooperation with social workers.

Challenges among Gram Panchayats in empowering Differently Abled Children

Among the most marginalised group of society are those with disabilities. According to the word disability, parents feel guilty of their children and in dread most of them are uneasy in public upfront. It is seen as a social stigma. This not only wrecks the lives of those with disabilities but also causes them to be unhappy all their lives.

Both the Indian education system and Government agencies are failing in making preparations for the welfare for disabled people to some level. Classrooms should have suitable seating for disabled people as well as at the exam centres. Vehicles for applicants with disabilities should be offered at every such location for their mobility.

For most of the government buildings or private offices as well as other infrastructure, access is limited. People with disabilities movements, restrictions, or loss of locomotor skills confront uncertainty that a person can conduct hundreds of different things works from morning awakening until nighttime sleep.

To create a society better fit for disabled people, the educational system should undergo changes that can confront life's obstacles boldly and conscientiously. Though UN declared 1992 as among disabled people, illiteracy is especially high



and accounts for International Year of Literacy them twice as disadvantaged. Along with their handicap, they are alienated by illiteracy.

"Education helps disabled people bring society changes and achieves equilibrium between medical and vocational rehabilitation." More important factor than the muscular strength or swiftness of the joints in a body is that of the movement of the joints. By means of education, a transformation might happen whereby the circumstances of life and social elevation would both be altered. The education of the handicapped child must follow the law of compensation i.e., the development of intellectual skills to make up for physical deficiency. Where a child born blind or physically challenged has to spend years of infancy in demanding training in overcoming such obstacles instead of studying at proper age. The child whose growth is delayed and who begins walking at age seven with outside help, the child who says their first word at age eight or the child who starts spelling at age nine cannot be normal in receiving an education as opposed to his or her classmate who begins walking, talking, and writing at a significantly earlier age. Children in India will have compulsory education at schools concerning treatment with disabled people; special teachers will be employed at schools for sign language training as well as giving specific courses for disabled people for their overall development.

First time under that National Education Policy, education for all was among the treasured objectives of national development. Reaching this objective depends mostly on revolutionizing primary education. According to the policy, one of the main obstacles in the fulfillment of this objective is non-engagement of such groupings of special children. Disabled children are one such distinctive group that so far have not been given enough consideration.

One of the main reasons is unemployment since at such times handicapped people are the ones who are scapegoated in getting dismissed from their job. When businesses implement cost-cutting measures, they are first to be laid off from their jobs; it is thought that their performance relative to that of other employees is poor.

Job-oriented training is needed right now; it is discovered that the character of the work has no relationship to his training. The training given to the applicants offers only some experience managing the tasks. Well trained experts should train people to fit the needs of the service sector and stimulate their minds.

Recommendations

Gram Panchayats, however, have great capacity to drive transformational activity. Equipped with suitable training, data, institutional support, and resources, general practitioners can promote disability inclusion by means of



creative local solutions. Advocacy, community organizing, and the establishment of a respectful diversity-promoting and equality-fostering environment are among their activities beyond simple service delivery.

In essence, enabling differently abled children in rural India calls for a group effort where Gram Panchayats should take a prominent part. GPs, as stewards of local democracy, can and must become active enablers of disability-inclusive growth from passive implementers. By means of a rights-based, inclusive, and participatory approach, GPs can help much to create rural communities where all children— independent of their capacities— might learn, grow, and flourish with dignity

- Capacity building among Gram Panchayat members
It is imperative to develop the capabilities of Gram Panchayat (GP) members on disability inclusion so as to allow efficient governance. This covers:
 - Dissemination of basic toolkits to enable GP members to recognize, support, and track the progress of DACs. Guidelines and Toolkits:
 - Arranging exposure visits to model panchayats with successful inclusion initiatives encourages replication.
 - Establishment and management of disability information at the Village Level
Targeted interventions depend on precise data. GPs should.
 - Keep a dynamic register with information on kind of disability, age, educational status, and demands.
 - Employ government-supported MIS (Management Information Systems) to track the services provided by DACs.
 - Inclusive planning in rural development plans (VDPs). Integrating disability concerns into the planning process guarantees inclusion:
 - Gram Sabha meetings should include DACs and their families so that needs and ideas can be shared.
 - Assign a portion of the GP development budget to ensure inclusive educational activities, offer assistive devices, and enable infrastructure to be accessible.

Conclusion

Rural India's empowering of differently abled children (DACs) is more than just a developmental objective; it is a moral and constitutional necessity. Being the basic building blocks of dispersed governance, Gram Panchayats (GPs) are uniquely positioned to foster inclusive development at the grassroots level. Their constitutionally imposed responsibilities, understanding of local facts, and proximity to communities all make them essential actors in guaranteeing the rights and well-being of DACs are observed. Although many doctors in India have started successful projects spanning from inclusive education programs to



physical access, this study has shown that the general engagement with DAC concerns remains erratic and usually limited by structural, financial, and social obstacles. The ability of GPs to successfully assist DACs is hampered by obstacles including lack of awareness, insufficient training, restricted financial means, and deeply entrenched societal stigma. Moreover, the inclusion of handicap issues into village development plans and local governance structures guarantees that the demands of DACs are not treated as peripheral but are embedded within the center agenda of rural development. Better data management, strong line department convergence, community participation, and ongoing capacity-building initiatives are vital to realize this vision.

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