

ENABLING ENVIRONMENT FOR DISABLED-A STUDY ON INDIA'S INITIATIVES¹

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ABSTRACT

More than 500 million people in the world are disabled as a consequence of mental, physical or sensory impairment. Too often their lives are handicapped by physical and social barriers in society which hamper their full participation. Because of this, millions of children and adults in all parts of the world often face a life that is segregated and debased. In view of the importance of an accessible and barrier free environment for PwDs, the present paper attempts to look at efforts made in India towards the same especially Accessible India Campaign (AIC) and Barrier Free Environment (BFE). The paper found that the progress towards creating enabling environment for disabled in the country is quite slow and many of the objective/targets are still to be achieved. The study also found a wide variation among states in achievement of targets set out for providing accessibility environment to the disabled.

Key Words: AIC, BFE, DEPwDs RCI, ERNET

1 This paper uses the primary data collected for a project study on 'Evaluation of Central Sector Scheme Accessible India Campaign (AIC)' and 'Evaluation of Central Sector Scheme –Barrier Free Environment (BFE)' sponsored by the Ministry of Social Justice and Empowerment (MoSJ&E), Government of India and carried out by NILERD in 2020. The sole purpose of the paper is to disseminate the welfare measures undertaken by the DEPwD. The authors thank the Department of Empowerment of Persons with Disabilities of MoSJ&E for funding and Dr. Pitam Singh, Mr. Mr. T.D. Dhariyal, and others who contributed to the research study. All errors and omissions are the authors' responsibility. The views are those of the authors and not of the institution to which they belong.

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1. Introduction

The Preamble to the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (CRPD)-2006, adopted by the United Nations, describes disability by stating that: *“Disability results from the interaction between persons with impairments and attitudinal and environmental barriers that hinder their full and effective participation in society on an equal basis with others”*.

The term persons with disabilities is used to apply to all persons with disabilities including those who have long-term physical, mental, intellectual or sensory impairments which, in interaction with various attitudinal and environmental barriers, hinders their full and effective participation in society on an equal basis with others.²

There are currently more than 1 billion or 15 percent of the world’s population who are disabled. According to the World Health Organization (WHO) a disabled person is anyone who has “a problem in body function or structure, an activity limitation, has a difficulty in executing a task or action; with a participation restriction” (Wagner, L, 2021)³ and around 110 million to 190 million people experience significant disabilities. In India, the number of disabled increased from 21.9 million in 2001 to 26.8 million in 2011 which is 2.21 percent of the total population (World Bank, 2021).⁴ Persons with disabilities are more likely to experience adverse socio-economic outcomes such as less education, poorer health outcomes, lower levels of employment, and higher poverty rates due to many factors, one of which is accessibility.

Transportation provides independent access to employment, education, and health care facilities, and to social and recreational activities. Without accessible transportation, people with disabilities are more likely to be excluded from services and social contact (Roberts P, Babinard, 2005). In Europe, transport was a frequently cited obstacle to the participation of people with disabilities.⁵ In a survey in the United States of America, lack of transportation was the second most frequent reason for a person with disability being discouraged from seeking work (Loprest P, Maag E, 2001). Lack of public transportation is itself a major barrier to access, even in some highly developed countries (CDS, 2006).

A lack of accessible communication and information affects the life of many disabled people.⁶ Individuals with communication difficulties, such as hearing impairment or speech impairment, are at a significant social disadvantage, in both developing and developed countries (Olusanya, 2006).

2 <https://www.un.org/esa/socdev/enable/faqs.htm>

3 <https://www.inclusivecitymaker.com/disabled-people-in-the-world-in-2021-facts-and-figures/>

4 <https://www.worldbank.org/en/publication/wdr2021>

5 <http://www.mhadie.it/publications.aspx>

6 <http://www.yorku.ca/dрпи/>

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This disadvantage is particularly experienced in sectors where effective communication is critical – such as those of health care, education, local government and justice.

Available empirical evidence suggests that people with disabilities have significantly lower rates of ICT use than non-disabled people. In some cases they may be unable to access even basic products and services such as telephones, television and the Internet. Surveys on access to and the use of digital media in developed countries have found that disabled people are half as likely as non-disabled people to have a computer at home, and even less likely to have Internet access at home.

Studies show that physical environment plays an important role in either restricting disabled people or encouraging their participation and inclusion in social, economic, political, and cultural life. The physical features of our environment like stairs, thresholds and other public utilities have been designed without considering the needs of Persons with Disabilities (PwDs) and acts as a major barrier to their mobility and participation in daily life.

Improving access to buildings and roads, transportation, and information and communication can create an enabling environment which benefits not only disabled people but many other population groups as well.

The World Report on Disability highlights the importance of ‘enabling environments’ for people with disabilities and defines these environments as physical, social and attitudinal environments (World Report on Disability, 2011).⁷ According to the World Bank, urban inclusion is multi-dimensional and expressed through three domains: spatial inclusion, social inclusion and economic inclusion. These three domains are driven by principles of access (such as access to housing, land and essential services), opportunity (such as access to education and employment or access to increasing prosperity in the place they live) and the right to participation (the ability to participate in society). These principles offer a foundation for planning inclusive infrastructure (World Inclusive Cities Approach Paper, 2015).⁸

Recognizing that a disability is only disabling when it prevents someone from doing what she or he wants or needs to do, the United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (CRPD) stipulates the importance of interventions to improve access to different domains of the environment including buildings and roads, transportation, information, and communication.

Article 9 of the Convention requires countries to identify and eliminate obstacles and barriers and ensure that persons with disabilities can access their environment, transportation, public facilities and services, including information

7 <https://www.who.int>

8 <https://documents1.world bank.org>

and communication technologies and systems, and to other facilities and services open or provided to the public, both in urban and in rural areas (CRPD, 2006).⁹

Research also shows that having interventions in place is not sufficient; this should be followed by a robust implementation process. A United Nations survey in 2005 of 114 countries found that many had policies on accessibility, but they had not made much progress. Of those countries, 54 percent reported no accessibility standards for outdoor environments and streets, 43 percent had none for public buildings, and 44 percent had none for schools, health facilities, and other public service buildings. Moreover, 65 percent had not started any educational programmes, and 58 percent had not allocated any financial resources to accessibility measures. Although 44 percent of the countries had a government body responsible for monitoring accessibility for people with disabilities, the number of countries with ombudsmen, arbitration councils, or committees of independent experts was very low.¹⁰

Reports from countries with laws on accessibility, even those dating from 20 to 40 years ago, confirm a low level of compliance.¹¹ A technical survey of 265 public buildings in 71 cities in Spain found that not a single building surveyed was 100 percent compliant, and another in Serbia found compliance rates ranging between 40 percent and 60 percent.¹² There are reports from countries as diverse as Australia, Brazil, Denmark, India, and the United States of similar examples of non-compliance (Mazumdar, and Geis, 2003).

This is based on the premise that in order to function effectively and safely in jobs, education, and everyday life, people with disabilities need to have physical and social access to spaces, employment, goods, services, entertainment, and community participation as everyone else. Thus, creating an enabling environment for PwDs by improvement in these areas is the only way of achieving inclusive growth and providing equal educational and economic participation to them thus helping them to live a dignified life.

In view of the importance of an accessible and barrier free environment for PwDs, the present paper attempts to look at efforts made in India towards the same. The paper is divided into 5 sections. Section 2 looks at Global Initiatives taken for empowerment of PwDs; Section 3 looks at Initiatives addressing PwDs in India; Section 4 discusses initiatives to provide Enabling Environment for PwDs in India especially with reference to Accessible India Campaign and

9 <https://www.un.org/development/desa/disabilities/convention-on-the-rights-of-persons-with-disabilities/the-convention-in-brief.html>

10 <https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/books/NBK304070/>

11 Regional report of the Americas 2004. Chicago: International Disability Rights Monitor; 2004. [9 February 2010]. <http://www.idrmnet.org/content.cfm?id=5E5A75andm=3>.

12 Regional report of Europe 2007. Chicago: International Disability Rights Monitor; 2007. [9 February 2010]. <http://www.idrmnet.org/content.cfm?id=5E5A75andm=3>

Barrier free Other than AIC; and Section 5 concludes the paper with various suggestions and recommendations.

2. Global initiatives for empowerment of PwDs

The Preamble of the Charter of United Nations affirms the dignity and worth of every human being and gives primary importance to the promotion of social justice. Persons with disabilities are *defacto* entitled to all the fundamental rights upheld by the Charter. According to Article 25 of the Universal Declaration, each person has the right to security in the event of unemployment, sickness, disability, widowhood, old age or lack of livelihood in the circumstances beyond his or her control. The United Nations declared 1981 as the International Year of Disabled Persons, and adopted the World Programme of Action concerning Disabled Persons (1982). The UN also declared the Decade (1983-1992) as the decade of Disabled Persons. Since then attention towards the disabled people and the need to promote their welfare came into the forefront. The Asia Pacific Region was the first to follow up with a regional Decade of Disabled Persons in 1993 since approximately 400 million of the world's 600 million disabled people live in the region. The first changes came in 1982 when the World Programme of Action Concerning Disabled Persons was accepted by the General Assembly of the UN. The United Nations' Standard Rules on the Equalization of Opportunities for Persons with Disabilities (UNSR), formulated by the UN at the end of the Decade of Disabled Persons in 1992, followed the World Programme as the next treaty to address the issue of disability. Both of these treaties defined handicap as "the encounter between the person with a disability and the environment," effectively shifting the focus of disability legislation all over the world from aiding the disabled person to adapting their surroundings to permit equal participation in society.

Washington Group on Disability Statistics: The Washington Group on Disability Statistics was formed as a result of the recognition by United Nations International Seminar on Measurement of Disability in June 2001 that statistical and methodological work was needed at an international level in order to facilitate the comparison of data on disability cross-nationally. This led to the formation of a City Group to address some of the issues identified in the International Seminar. The main purpose of the Washington Group on Disability Statistics is the promotion and coordination of international cooperation in the area of health statistics by focusing on disability measures suitable for censuses and national surveys which will provide basic necessary information on disability throughout the world (World Bank: 2009).

Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (UNCRPD)

The United Nations General Assembly in its 61st Session on 6th December, 2006 detailed the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities

(CRPD). CRPD and its Optional Protocol were adopted on 13 December 2006 at the United Nations Headquarters in New York, and were opened for signature in March 2007. It is the first comprehensive human rights treaty of the 21st century and is the first human rights convention to be open for signature by regional integration organizations. The Convention came into force on 3 May 2008.

The Convention marks a “paradigm shift” in attitudes and approaches to persons with disabilities. In its introduction, the State Parties to the Convention recognized among others that disability is an evolving concept and that disability results from the interaction between persons with impairments and attitudinal and environmental barriers that hinder their full and effective participation in society on an equal basis with others. It emphasizes the importance of mainstreaming disability issues as an integral part of relevant strategies of sustainable development. The purpose of the Convention, as stated by the UN, is to promote, protect and ensure full and equal enjoyment of all human rights and fundamental freedoms of all people with disabilities, and to promote respect for their inherent dignity (Sharma, 2009).

The convention changed the outlook towards disabled as “objects” of charity, medical treatment and social protection to “subjects” with rights, who are capable of claiming those rights and making decisions for their lives based on their free and informed consent as well as being active members of society. The Convention adopts a broad categorization of persons with disabilities and reaffirms that all persons with all types of disabilities must enjoy all human rights and fundamental freedoms.

Rights of Persons with Disabilities in the Asia Pacific Context: The international change in attitudes towards the rights of persons with disabilities is especially important for the Asia Pacific Region because, as mentioned above, approximately 400 million of the world’s 600 million disabled people live in the region. Nearly one-third of disabled persons live below the poverty line, and less than ten percent of youth with disabilities attend school. Governments of developing nations have been reluctant to champion the rights of disabled persons because of the enormous cost involved in implementing suitable policies. Inter-country meetings to discuss possible methods of inter-sectoral collaboration and to assess the success of the Asian Pacific Decade of Disabled Persons were held in India, Malaysia, Singapore and South Korea. Partly in response to the increased international and regional attention, a significant amount of legislation has been passed in the region regarding disabled persons.

3. Initiatives Undertaken for Persons with Disabilities in India

According to Census 2011, of the total 26.8 million differently abled population in India, 14.9 million are men and 11.9 million are women. There is

a wide variation among the number of disabled in rural (18 million) and urban (8.1 million) areas and among states. Six states (Uttar Pradesh–15.5 percent, Maharashtra–11.09 percent, Bihar–8.69 percent, Andhra Pradesh–8.45 percent, West Bengal–7.52 percent and Rajasthan–5.83 percent) are home for nearly 50 percent of the disabled population of the country.

Recognizing that no country or society can ever progress or develop by ignoring the needs and aspirations of millions of its disadvantaged people, Indian constitution grants equality, freedom, justice and dignity to its entire population including persons with disabilities. In line with this, the Parliament of the country has enacted progressive and forward looking disability specific laws in the country. The Indian Government's initiatives cover a wide range of policy formulations, programmes, plans, execution of schemes and legal enactments related to persons with disabilities in the country. The country has a national policy and four legislations in place for persons with disabilities namely, the Mental Health Act, 1987; Rehabilitation Council of India Act, 1992; the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (RPwD) Act, 2016 (which replaced Persons with Disabilities (Equal Opportunities, Protection of Rights and Full Participation Act, 1995); and the National Trust for the Welfare of Persons with Autism, Cerebral Palsy, Mental Retardation and Multiple Disabilities Act, 1999.

The National Policy for Persons with Disabilities, 2006 recognizes that Persons with Disabilities are valuable human resources for the country and can lead a better quality of life if they have equal opportunities and effective access to rehabilitative measures. The policy thus seeks to create an environment that provides the persons with disabilities with equal opportunities for protection of their rights and full participation in society. The major intervention areas under the policy are: prevention, early detection, rehabilitation: Physical, educational and economic; social protection especially of disabled women and children; barrier free environment; sports, recreation and cultural activities.

At international level, India is a party to (i) The UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (UNCRPD) and (ii) Proclamation on the Full Participation and Equality of People with Disabilities in the Asian and Pacific Region.

India was one of the first countries to have ratified UNCRPD, 2006. The convention was adopted by UN General Assembly on December 13, 2006 and opened for signing by the State Parties on March 30, 2007. Adoption of the Convention has really imparted empowerment to Persons with Disabilities across the globe to demand their rights and make state, private and civil society agencies accountable for enjoying their rights. India ratified the Convention on 01.10.2007 which came into force from May 3, 2008.

India also became a party to the Incheon strategy¹³ which among other things adopted the strategy to “Make the Right Real” for the PwDs in Asia and Pacific during the meeting from 29th October to 2nd November, 2012. This includes access to the physical environment, public transportation, knowledge, information and communication.

In order to give focused attention to policy issues and meaningful thrust to the activities aimed at welfare and empowerment of the persons with disabilities, a separate Department of Disability Affairs was established on May 12, 2012. On December 8, 2014 the Department was renamed as Department of Empowerment of Persons with Disabilities (DEPwD). The Department acts as a nodal agency for matters pertaining to disability and persons with disabilities. The vision of the department is to build an inclusive society in which equal opportunities are provided for the growth and development of persons with disabilities so that they can lead productive, safe and dignified lives.

Persons with Disabilities (Equal Opportunities, Protection of Rights and Full Participation) Act, 1995 envisaged that universal accessibility is critical for enabling PwDs to gain access to equal opportunity and live independently and participate fully in all aspects of life in an inclusive society. Sections 44, 45 and 46 of the Act categorically provide for non-discrimination in transport, non-discrimination on the road and non-discrimination in built environment respectively. The Act provided that subject to the limits of the economic capacity and development, the government and local authorities shall take special measures to make the built infrastructure such as hospitals, educational institution, workplaces, roads, footpaths and transport facilities accessible by providing ramps, Braille symbols, and signage for differently abled persons. The 1995 Act was replaced by Rights of Persons with Disabilities Act, 2016,

As per the Rights of Persons with Disabilities Act, 2016, interaction with ‘barriers’ hinder full and effective participation of persons with long term physical, mental, intellectual or sensory impairment in a society. The ‘barriers’ in the environment prevent persons with disabilities from enjoying basic human rights and a barrier-free environment enables PwDs to move about safely and independently, access information, communicate, have a feeling of equality and enjoy their human rights. Rights of Persons with Disabilities Act 2016 reflects a paradigm shift in thinking about disability from a social welfare concern to a human rights issue.

In order to provide an enabling environment for the disabled, DEPwD launched Accessible India Campaign and strengthened its efforts to provide barrier free environment for the persons with disabilities which include access

13 Incheon Strategy to ‘Make the Right Real’ for persons with Disabilities in Asia & the Pacific, <https://www.unescap.org/resources/incheon-strategy-make-right-real-persons-disabilities-asia-and-pacific-and-beijing#>

to built environment in schools, colleges, academic and training institutions, offices and public buildings, recreational areas, health centres / hospitals etc. The progressive Rights of Persons with Disabilities Act (RPwD) of 2016 says all public transport and buildings and facilities and facilities must be made accessible to persons with disabilities.

4. Initiatives to provide Enabling Environment for PwDs in India

As discussed in the earlier section on the RPwD Act, National Policy for PwD emphasizes providing easy, safe and dignified access to built-in environment, transport, information and communication and to various other cultural, societal aspects for persons with disabilities. For these, two schemes namely Accessible India Campaign and Barrier Free Environment have been launched as components of umbrella Scheme for Implementation of Rights of Persons with Disabilities (SIPDA).

4.1 Overview of Accessible India Campaign and Barrier Free Environment

Accessible India Campaign (Sugamya Bharat Abhiyan), a nation-wide initiative, was launched by the Department of Empowerment of Persons with Disabilities (DEPWD) of the Ministry of Social Justice & Empowerment to provide equal opportunities to persons with disabilities to participate in all the aspects of life and live independently. The Abhiyan focuses on developing accessible physical environment, transportation system and information & communication ecosystem for achieving universal accessibility for persons with disabilities in the country. The goal of the campaign pertains to the accessibility in three verticals; Built Environment, Transport, and Information & Communication Technology.

Built Environment Accessibility

AIC aims to provide an accessible physical environment to everyone. To achieve this, measures need to be undertaken to eliminate obstacles and barriers to indoor and outdoor facilities including schools, medical facilities, and workplaces. The built environment not only covers buildings, but also steps and ramps, corridors, footpaths, curb cuts, parking, entry gate, emergency exits, toilets and obstacles that block the flow of pedestrian traffic.

Transportation System Accessibility

Transportation is a vital component for independent living. The term transportation covers a number of areas including air travel, buses, taxis, and trains. Inaccessible transportation system restricts mobility, denies freedom of movement and active participation, for much of the population who may need accessible transportation. AIC focuses on providing persons with disabilities an equal right to travel and use public and private transportation infrastructure with dignity and independence.

Information and Communication Eco-System Accessibility

Access to information creates opportunities for everyone in society. Access to

information refers to all information. This can range from actions such as being able to read price tags, to physically enter a hall, to participate in an event, to read a pamphlet with healthcare information, to understand a train timetable, or to view web pages. AIC aims to take measures to curb all societal barriers of infrastructure, and inaccessible formats that stand in the way of obtaining and utilizing information in daily life.

Source: <https://www.india.gov.in/spotlight/accessible-india-campaign#tab=tab-1>

The objectives with respect to the three verticals are (i) enhancing the proportion of Accessible Government buildings, (ii) enhancing accessibility of Transportation System, (iii) Accessibility of Railway Stations, Airports, (iv) enhancing proportion of accessible and usable public documents and websites that meet internationally recognized standards, (v) enhancing the proportion of accessible public transport, (vi) enhancing the pool of sign language Interpretations, and (vii) enhancing the proportion of daily capturing and sign language interpretation of public news Programme.¹⁴

The Campaign is implemented in three phases.

In phase I, State Governments/ UT Administrations were requested to identify government buildings in their states/UTs as per defined targets of DEPwD. These buildings were then audited by DEPwD empanelled accessibility auditors; after scrutiny by experts, the access audit reports were sent to the State Governments/ UT Administrations for preparation of estimates for making these buildings accessible; the estimates received from the State governments/ UTs were scrutinized and the funds for retrofitting as recommended in the access audit reports and as considered appropriate were provided to them by the DEPwD; payments to the access auditors is made directly by DEPwD.

The Targets for Phase II & III are also fixed by DEPwD, but the rest of the process has to be planned and undertaken by the concerned State Government/ UT Administration out of the State budget. The Central Government buildings, railway stations and the airports are to be made accessible by the concerned Ministries/ Authorities.

Barrier-Free Environment, other than AIC, is a demand-driven scheme where the demand for creating accessible facilities comes from the State/UT Administration. Under this component of the scheme, financial assistance is being provided by way of grants-in-aid to the agencies like Departments of

¹⁴ <http://disabilityaffairs.gov.in/content/page/accessible-India-campaign.php>.

the State Governments/Union Territories; Autonomous bodies/statutory bodies/public sector undertakings set up by the central/state governments/UT administrations including central/state universities; National Institutes/CRCs/DDRCs/RCs/outreach centres under MSJ&E; Organizations registered under Societies Registration Act, 1860, or Indian Trusts Act, 1882 or Companies Act, 1956 who are recognized for skill training by central/state government departments or subordinate bodies there under; Central/State recognized sports bodies and Federations.

The objective of creating a Barrier-Free Environment (BFE) is to provide an environment that supports independent functioning of all individuals equally for empowering them to participate in the community.

Financial assistance is provided under the scheme to make barrier free the built environment in schools, colleges, academic and training institutions, offices, recreational areas, health centres/ hospitals and other public buildings. This includes providing ramps, rails, lifts, accessible toilets for wheelchair users, Braille signage, auditory signals, and traffic flooring, making curb cuts and slopes in pavements for the easy access of wheelchair users; engraving on the surface of zebra crossing for the blind or for persons with low vision; engraving on the edges of railway platforms for the blind or those with low vision; devising appropriate symbols of disability. Financial assistance under the scheme is also provided to make government websites at the centre/state and district levels accessible to PwDs as per guidelines for Government of India websites issued by NIC and Department of Administrative Reforms and Public Grievances, Government of India.

An accessible environment, while particularly relevant for people with disabilities, has benefits for a broader range of people. To succeed, accessibility initiatives need to take into account external constraints including affordability of technologies and knowledge. The AIC seeks to create a barrier-free environment for the persons with disabilities and gradually achieve the aim of creating public spaces and facilities with universal designs. On the other hand, a barrier-free environment is a space that allows free and safe movement, function and access for all, regardless of age, sex or condition. It is a space or a set of services that can be accessed by all without obstacles, with dignity, and with as much independence as possible. The environment means buildings, roads, parks, gardens and other places, services, modes of transportation, products of daily use etc. There is a popular belief that a ramp and an elevator /lift are all that is needed to make a built space barrier-free, but a Barrier-free Environment goes well beyond the construction of ramps and includes the creation of a holistic environment that helps PwDs access public spaces independently and with ease and dignity.

4.2 Achievement of AIC and BFE

This section presents an analysis of secondary data to measure the objectives and targets under AIC and BFE.

A. Achievement under AIC

It may be noted that for AIC the initial target date of July, 2016 fixed for various works under the Scheme was extended to December, 2017, then August 2019 and now 15 June, 2022. Vertical wise analysis of data on AIC is presented below:

Vertical 1: Built Environment Accessibility

Objective 1: Enhancing the proportion of accessible government buildings

An accessible government building is one, where persons with disabilities have no barrier in entering it and using all the facilities therein. This covers the built environment – services, steps and ramps, corridors, entry gates, emergency exits, parking – as well as indoor and outdoor facilities including lighting, signages, alarm systems and toilets. Identifying accessible buildings requires annual accessibility audits that determine if a building meets agreed upon standards. Once a building is deemed fully accessible, an annual audit is not necessary, but should be required for any proposed changes to the structure or systems contained therein. Thus this vertical has two main components: Accessibility Audit and Retrofitting of buildings.

There are three main targets for achieving the objective:

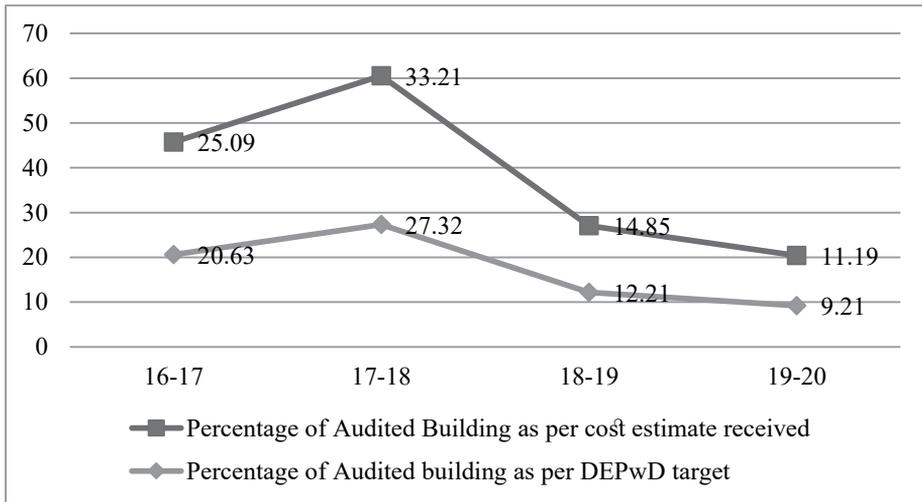
Target 1: Completing accessibility audit of at least 25-50 most important government buildings in 50 cities and making them fully accessible by June, 2022;

Target 2: Making 50percent of all the government buildings of the National Capital and all the State Capitals fully accessible by June, 2022;

Target 3: Completing accessibility audit of 50percent of government buildings and making them fully accessible in 10 most important cities/towns of states not covered in targets 1 and 2 by June, 2022.

The paper looks at available data with respect to accessibility audit and completed buildings. It is seen that since inception of AIC till 31.03.2020, 1153 buildings have been audited so far against the target of 1662 buildings set by DEPwD; thus, 69.34 percent of target has been met. Year-wise targets achieved till 2019-20 is shown in **Figure 1**.

Figure 1: Percentage of Audited Buildings against Target and Received Cost Estimates



State-wise achievement of buildings audited, funded and completed under Built Environment Accessibility is given in Table 1.

Table 1: State-wise Buildings Audited and Completed till 09.06.2021

	State/UT	No. of buildings audited	No. of Buildings Funded	No. of buildings completed (as reported by states/ UTs)	percentage of completed buildings to buildings funded
1	Andaman And Nicobar Islands	25	25	20	80.00
2	Andhra Pradesh	41	38		0.00
3	Arunachal Pradesh	24	6		0.00
4	Assam	25	24		0.00
5	Bihar	28	21	15	71.43
6	Chhattisgarh	58	47	20	42.55
7	Chandigarh	44	43	39	90.70
8	Delhi	23	18	3	16.67
9	Goa	31	30		0.00
10	Gujarat	52	26		0.00
11	Haryana	89	64	3	4.69
12	Himachal Pradesh	22	11		0.00

13	Jammu And Kashmir	25	32		0.00
14	Jharkhand	50	14		0.00
15	Karnataka	50	47		0.00
16	Kerala	51	28		0.00
17	Lakshadweep	57	0		
18	Madhya Pradesh	100	31		0.00
19	Maharashtra	180	142	130	91.55
20	Manipur	50	0		
21	Meghalaya	24	23	17	73.91
22	Mizoram	33	33	20	60.61
23	Nagaland	29	29		0.00
24	Odisha	50	40	26	65.00
25	Puducherry	30	28		0.00
26	Punjab	21	20		0.00
27	Rajasthan	87	88	78	88.64
28	Sikkim	36	35		0.00
29	Tamil Nadu	49	30	15	50.00
30	Telangana	19	16		0.00
31	Tripura	14	14		0.00
32	Uttarakhand	26	16	4	25.00
33	Uttar Pradesh	141	137	87	63.50
34	West Bengal	37	26	17	65.38
	Total	1621	1182	494	41.79

Source: Standing committee on Social Justice & Empowerment (2020-21), 23rd Report, Lok Sabha Secretariat, August 2021.

From the above Table one finds that of 1621 audited buildings around 73 percent received funding for retrofitting. Of the funded buildings only 41.79 percent have completed the work till 31.03.2021. Only few states/UTs have completed 80 percent or more work. (Maharashtra 91.55 percent, Chandigarh 90.70 percent, Rajasthan 88.64 percent and Andaman & Nicobar Islands 80 percent), while majority of states have not even started the process. The data shows that achieving the targets related to built environment accessibility till June 2022 is a huge task.

However, Annual Report 1920-21 of DEPwD states that access audit of 1662 buildings in 48 cities have been completed and audit reports have been submitted to the State/UT Nodal Officers. Of the 1432 financial proposals received funds were sanctioned for retrofitting of 1152 buildings as on 04.01.2021.

A wide discrepancy in reported data available at different sources is observed. This makes it difficult to arrive at definite performance of the campaign.

Vertical 2: Transportation System Accessibility

Transportation is a vital component for independent living, and like others in society, PwDs rely on transportation facilities to move from one place to another. The term transportation covers a number of areas including air travel, buses, taxis, and trains. Persons with disabilities have an equal right to travel and use public and private transportation infrastructure with dignity and independence. Accessible transportation plays a critical role in the growth of its economy. Inaccessible transportation system restricts mobility, denies freedom of movement and active participation, for much of the population who may need accessible transportation.

Objective 2: Enhancing proportion of accessible airports

An airport is accessible, if a person with a disability has no barrier in entering it, using all the facilities, and boarding and disembarking from airplanes. This covers the built environment – surfaces, steps and ramps, corridors, entry ways, emergency exits, parking – as well as indoor and outdoor facilities including lighting, signage, alarm systems and toilets.

Target 2.1: Conducting accessibility audit of all the international airports and converting them into fully accessible international airports by June 2022.

Target 2.2: Conducting accessibility audit of all the domestic airports and converting them into fully accessible airports by June 2022.

Airports

There are total 137 airports in India; of these 23 are international airports, 81 domestic airports, 23 Civil Enclaves at Defence Airfields and 10 are Customs Airports. However, only 64 airports have been licensed in public use category till April 2020 (AAI AR 2019-20) of which 17 are international airports, 6 custom airports and 41 domestic airports.

Facilities Available for Persons with Disabilities at various AAI Airports:

- (a) Ramps: Smooth ramps with anti-skid flooring of comfortable gradient are provided at the terminal building entry points and city side area.
- (b) Doors: Sensor fitted doors / manned doors at entrance are provided for easy accessibility. Door openings are wide enough for easy access for wheel chair passengers.
- (c) Toilets: Specially designed separate toilets for Persons with Disabilities are provided with appropriate signage.
- (d) Elevators: Elevators with Braille symbols and Auditory Signals have been provided to access all levels of terminal building with care taken of the door opening to allow the biggest size of wheel chair.

- (e) Aerobridges: To facilitate smooth emplaning and deplaning of physically challenged passengers with wheel chairs, the aerobridges wherever provided have smooth gradient slope and anti-skid flooring.
- (f) Wheelchairs: Wheelchairs are available with Airport Manager and airlines on demand.
- (g) Car Parking: Reserved parking spaces with signage have been provided on city side of Departure and Arrival Terminals at various airports. Slots of 3.6 m x 5.0m car park space are specially designated in the car parking area for Persons with Disabilities. (AR 2019-20, AAI)
- (h) Accessible route: 5m to 10m wide kerb is provided in front of terminal building which is directly connected to road with smooth ramp. From the kerb side passenger can board the Taxi/Car. For the easy access of wheel chair special cuts and slopes are provided in the pavement. At some of the airports, engraving on surface of Zebra crossing is provided for visually disabled persons.
- (i) Tactile Path: Tactile pathways are provided at airports for visually impaired passengers from alighting points to entry vestibule at metro airports.

According to data available on MIS portal of AIC (accessed on October 12, 2021), 54 airports have been made accessible so far. Of these 33 are domestic airports and 21 international airports.¹⁵

Table 2: Number and Percent of Total and Licensed in Public use Category Airports made Accessible

	Total	Licensed in public use category	Number of Accessible airports	Percent accessible to total airports	Percent accessible to licensed airports
International	23	23*	21	91.30	91.30
Domestic	81	41	33	50.62	80.49
Total	104	58	54	51.92	93.10

*includes 17 international and 6 Customs airport

Source: AR 2019-20, AAI and MIS portal of AIC

Nearly 93 percent of airports licensed in public use category have been made accessible; however, a look at total airports to accessible airports is not very encouraging as only around 52 percent of airports have been made accessible with only half of domestic airports. Thus, work related to accessibility of domestic airports need to be expedited.

¹⁵ <http://imaic.nic.in/dashboard/airportview>

As per Annual Report 2020-21 of DEPwD, all 35 international airports and 55 out of 69 domestic airports provided with accessibility features (ramps, accessible toilets, helpdesks and lifts with Braille and auditory information systems), Further, all international/customs airports are reported to have been provided with aerobridges. Tactile paths have been provided at majority of the airports whereas 41 airports have been equipped with aerobridges; ambulifts are available at 12 airports and the same are being procured in 35 other airports.

Objective 3: Enhancing the proportion of accessible railway stations

Railway has the widest presence across the nation and is frequently used by Divyangjan and thus is one of the major components of Sugamya Bharat Abhiyan (SBA). As per the target fixed, A1, A and B categories of railway stations and 50percent of all railways are to be made fully accessible by June, 2022. (PIB, GoI: 2018)

Target 3.1: Ensuring that A1, A and B categories of railway stations in the country are converted into fully accessible by June, 2022.

Target 3.2: Ensuring that 50 percent of railway stations in the country are converted into fully accessible by June, 2022.

Total 1391 stations have been provided with short term accessible facilities namely, Standard ramp for barrier free entry, Earmarking at least two parking lots, Non-slippery walk-way from parking lot to station building, Signage of appropriate visibility, at least one drinking water tap suitable for use by Persons with Disabilities (Divyangjan), at least one toilet (on the ground floor), and one 'May I help you' booth¹⁶.

Again as per Annual Report 2020-21 of DEPwD, all 709 A1, A and B category railway stations have been provided with the seven (07) Short-Term Facilities identified by Ministry of Railways and 603 railway stations have been provided with additional two (02) Long-Term Facilities namely, Provision of facility of inter platform transfer & Engraving on edges (tactile indicators) of platform.

Objective 4: Enhancing the proportion of accessible Public Transport

Target 4.1: Ensuring that 25 percent of Government owned public transport carriers in the country are converted into fully accessible carriers by June, 2022.

16 http://164.100.47.193/lssccommittee/Socialpercent20Justicepercent20&percent20Empowerment/17_Social_Justice_And_Empowerment_23.pdf.

Table 3: Number of Total Buses, Buses Fully Accessible and Accessible under Intercity and Urban Operational Fleet

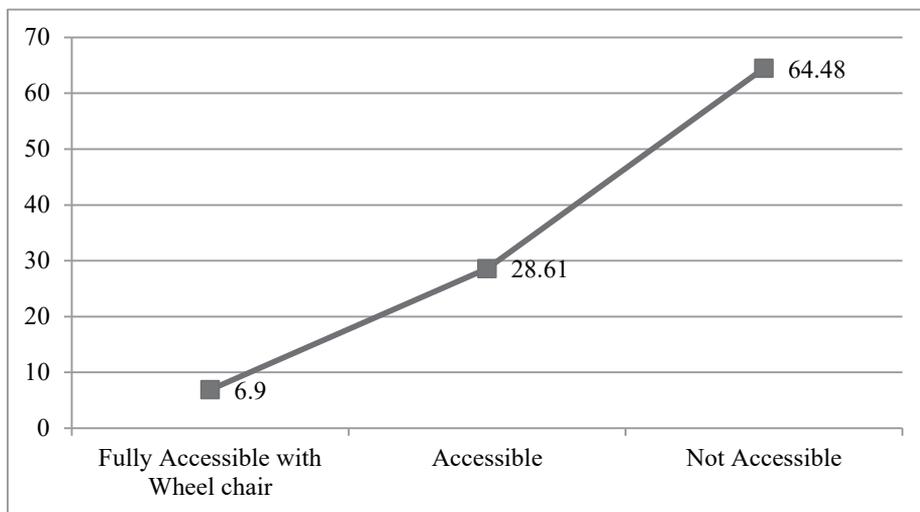
	Fleet Held (Vehicles in Operation)	Intercity operational Fleet	Fully Accessible with Wheel chair	Accessible	Urban operational Fleet	Fully Accessible with Wheel chair	Accessible
Nov-19	145287	115433	77	15592	29854	5167	14884
Jan-21	147368	102600	210	27133	44768	9965	15036

Source: Lok Sabha Unstarred Question No. 3674, dated on 10.12.2019.

Table 3 shows a very dismal achievement in making buses fully accessible under AIC.

Figure 2 further shows that only around 7 percent of buses are fully accessible as compared to a target of 25 percent. Achieving the target by June, 2022, requires great efforts by Ministry of Road Transport and Highways (MoRTH) and better coordination between DEPwD and MoRTH (Nath, Damini, 2021).

Figure 2: Percentage of Buses Fully Accessible, Accessible and not Accessible as of January 2021



Vertical 3: Information and Communication Eco-System Accessibility

Recognizing that access to information creates opportunities for everyone in society and societal barriers of infrastructure, and inaccessible formats stand in the way of obtaining and utilizing information in daily life, emphasis is placed on Information & Eco-system accessibility. To achieve this, following objectives/target is set by DEPwD:

Objective 5: Enhancing proportion of accessible and usable public documents and websites that meet internationally recognized accessibility standards

Target 5.1: Conducting accessibility audit of 50 percent of all government (both Central and State Governments) websites and converting them into fully accessible websites.

Target 5.2: Ensuring that at least 50 percent of all public documents issued by the Central Government and the State Governments meet accessibility standards.

Under Information and Communication Technology Ecosystem, Education and Research NETWORK (ERNET), India has been entrusted with the task of making identified websites of States/UTs accessible. 588 identified websites of States/UTs have been made accessible by 23 participating States/UTs; of these, 443 websites have been made live. In addition, 95 Central Government websites have been made accessible. State-wise details of Accessibility of Websites target of AIC are given in Table 4.

Table 4: State-wise Accessibility of Websites Target of AIC

States/UTs	Made Accessible	Made live	Percentage of websites made live
Andaman And Nicobar Islands	0	0	
Andhra Pradesh	15	5	33.33
Chhattisgarh	85	59	69.41
Chandigarh	28	24	85.71
Dadra & Nagar Haveli	11	6	54.55
Daman & Diu	9	4	44.44
Delhi	49	26	53.06
Goa	14	14	100.00
Gujarat	18	17	94.44
Haryana	60	54	90.00
Himachal Pradesh	23	18	78.26
Jammu And Kashmir	18	12	66.67
Jharkhand	37	36	97.30
Karnataka	4	0	0.00
Madhya Pradesh	39	36	92.31
Maharashtra	23	21	91.30
Meghalaya	34	33	97.06
Odisha	2	0	0.00
Puducherry	55	30	54.55
Punjab	42	32	76.19

Rajasthan	2	0	0.00
Tamil Nadu	3	2	66.67
Uttar Pradesh	17	14	82.35
Total	588	443	75.34

Source: http://164.100.47.193/lssccommittee/Socialpercent20Justicepercent20&percent20Empowerment/17_Social_Justice_And_Empowerment_23.pdf

From above Table it is seen that overall 75 percent of the target has been achieved; however, there is a wide variation in achievement across states ranging from 100 percent target achievement in Goa to nil in Karnataka, Odisha and Rajasthan.

Objective 6: Enhancing the pool of sign language interpreters

A sign language interpreter is one who meets professional standards in the official sign language.

Target 6.1: Training and developing 200 additional sign language interpreters.

Indian Sign Language Research and Training Centre (ISLRTC) has trained more than 1000 persons in Indian sign language through Diploma and Short Term Courses. Total 93 students have completed Diploma in Indian Sign Language Interpretation (DISLI) course in three academic sessions during 2016-17 to 2018-19 (AR 2020-21, DEPwD).¹⁷

Objective 7: Enhancing the proportion of daily captioning and sign-language interpretation of public television news programmes.

The proportion of public television news programmes that meet agreed upon standards of daily captioning and sign-language interpretation should be increased. Public television refers to programmes that are produced, funded or subsidized by the government.

Target 7.1 Developing and adoption of national standards on captioning and sign-language interpretation in consultation with National media authorities.

Target 7.2 Ensuring that 25 percent of all public television programmes aired by government channels meet these standards.

With reference to above targets, 15 private news channels are telecasting partially accessible news bulletin, 190 news bulletins have been telecast with subtitling/sign-language interoperation and more than 2486 scheduled programmes/movies using subtitling have been telecast by general entertainment channels AR 2019-20, DEPwD).¹⁸ Furthermore,

17 <https://disabilityaffairs.gov.in/content/page/annual-report.php>

18 <https://www.meity.gov.in>

- 95 Central Government websites have already been made accessible.
- 588 State/UT Government websites made accessible with features for screen reader, color contrast, translation, and font size control, among others.
- All Ministries/Departments and States/UTs to migrate to development of public documents in accessible format.
- More than 1250 Sign Language Interpreters have been trained by Indian Sign Language Research and Training Centre through long term, short term and professional courses.
- Accessible content on TV is being enhanced in a phased manner: - 19 news channels telecast 2447 accessible news bulletins;3686 scheduled programmes/movies using subtitling telecast by 17 general entertainment channels.

B. Achievements under BFE

Creation of barrier-free environment for the persons with disabilities includes access to built environment in schools, colleges, academic and training institutions, offices and public buildings, recreational areas, health centres/hospitals etc. Providing barrier free environment for the persons with disabilities includes provision for ramps, rails, lifts, and accessible toilets for wheelchair users, Braille signage and auditory signals, tactile flooring, slopes in pavements for the easy access of wheelchair users, engraving on the surface of zebra crossing for the blind or for persons with low vision, engraving on the edges of railway platforms for the blind or for low vision and devising appropriate symbols of disability etc.

The number of buildings made barrier free for PwDs from 2014-15 to 2018-19 is presented in Table 5. From the Table it can be seen that BFE has gained momentum only in 2017-18.

Table 5: Number of Buildings made Barrier free from 2014 to 2019

Year	Number of buildings
2014-15	69
2015-16	76
2016-17	34
2017-18	413
2018-19	516
Total	1108

Source: RFP document for Impact study provided by DEPwD

5. Conclusions and Recommendations

The Government of India ratified the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities in 2006 and it came into force in May 2008. India had adopted the Rights of Persons with Disabilities Act in 1995 and modified it in 2016 aiming to improve the policy and legal environment for ensuring the rights, participation, and protection of persons with disabilities and public service accessibility in line with its international obligations. In 2015, the Government launched Accessible India Campaign to provide environmental, transport and information and communication accessibility to help persons with disabilities to live independently and to create an accessible environment for them in terms of infrastructure and public services. The paper shows that the overall progress in the creation of enabling environment for PwDs in India is rather slow. Only 494 buildings (29.7percent) out of a total of 1662 identified buildings have been made accessible by 9 States/UTs and 558 websites (64.61percent) out of 917 websites have been made accessible. Despite extending the deadlines for meeting the targets from time to time, the majority of states are far from meeting their targets. The same is the case with Barrier free other than AIC. DEPwD is responsible for AIC and creating BFE but for meeting the targets related to transport accessibility, it is directly dependent on MoRTH, MoR and AAI. There is no mechanism to ensure compliance from them. The need is to have better coordination in planning and decision making between different government agencies to achieve the goal of creating accessible and enabling environment for PwDs. There is also a need for better coordination between central and state governments to ensure compliance.

People with disabilities, once they are able to access the web, value the health information and other services provided on it. For example, one survey of Internet users with mental health conditions found that 95percent used the Internet for diagnostic-specific information, as opposed to 21percent of the general population. Online communities can be particularly empowering for those with hearing or visual impairments or autistic spectrum conditions because they overcome barriers experienced in face-to-face contact. There is a need to speed up ICT accessibility for the disabled. When designing websites, developers should ensure that they are able to provide the same benefits to people with disabilities as the wider population.

There is a need to bring about attitudinal change as mostly accessible environments and inclusive design are understood as the domain of persons with disabilities and are often just seen as a ramp or accessible toilets, but it should be broadened to include individual, social and economic development of PwDs. They should be able to provide opportunities and choices to them in order to choose what they want to do and not restrict them because the public buildings, roads, transport, education and health system have not been designed keeping them in mind. Another aspect which needs to be looked into is the

top-down approach which is being followed without including the PwDs in designing and decision making. Awareness raising and education is vital to create a culture of inclusion.

It is now well understood that it is not the person who is disabled; rather, it is their environment which is disabling. Lack of accessible environment keeps disabled persons homebound, losing out on opportunities and therefore vulnerable to being trapped in poverty. So much potential is lost by the government's short sightedness, and we talk of developing human resources by providing them a common platform to prove their capacities. The fact remains that everyone, when old, when pregnant, when injured, when ill and weak, will benefit from an accessible environment. The sooner officials and politicians wrap their minds around this, a slightly more equal and inclusive India will be.

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