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DIFFERENTLY ABLED

Special Article

Differently-Abled: Scaling Up Educational Rights and Opportunities

Indumathi Rao

Skilling the Differently-Abled

Shanti Raghavan

Financial Inclusion of the Differently-Abled

P C Das

Social Inclusion for the Differently-Abled :Issues and Strategies

Sandhya Limaye

Focus

Accessibility Beyond Disability and Welfare

Shivani Gupta



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Let noble thoughts come to us from all sides

Rig Veda

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Accessibility in Transport: Inclusive Designs

Devarshi Chaurasia



... ‘people are disabled by environment provided for them’. If we want to make our cities ‘Smart’ in true sense, we should make cities ‘Accessible’, ‘Safe’ and ‘Inclusive’ for all people irrespective of age, gender, physical condition, economic status

Accessibility is about giving equal access to everyone and without being able to access the facilities and services, Persons with Disabilities (PwDs) will never be fully included. (United Nations, 2007)’. United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (UNCRPD), to which India is a signatory, under Article 9 casts obligations on the government for ensuring to PwDs accessibility to (a) Information, (b) Transport, (c) Physical Environment, (d) Communication Technology and (e) Accessibility to services as well as emergency services.

For the differently-abled, Universal Accessibility is critical for enabling them to gain access for equal opportunity, living independently and participating fully in all aspects of life in an inclusive society. ‘Persons with Disability (equal opportunities, protection of rights and full participation) Act, 1995. Under section 44, 45 & 46 categorically provides for Non-discrimination in transport, Non-discrimination on the road and Non-discrimination in built environment respectively.

Indian Scenario:

A large share of population in Indian cities are dependent on public transport to reach their destinations every day. The trips are varied in nature like

for work, study, recreation etc. With less number of personalised vehicles, long distance trips, expensive fuel and over and above, high vulnerability on roads makes buses and rail network play a key role in Indian society and primary carrier of local economy. Huge amount of money is spent on public transport infrastructure projects across the country to match the pace of demand of the city. Yet most of the infrastructure and services are not benefiting differently abled and creating unfriendly environment for potentially vulnerable group of people like old age, children, pregnant woman and persons with temporary disabilities. People unable to walk on streets, transit stop, climb steps, read/ interpret sinages, adjust themselves into inadequately designed vehicles.

Indian cities have a large number of commuters, but most of the infrastructure and services are designed for certain users only. What about the smaller section of Differently Abled? If we consider old age, children, pregnant woman and persons with temporary disabilities, the smaller number of differently abled persons may increase many folds. Through raised awareness and social discourse, one should consider every user in the design and development of infrastructure and transport service design. In the fast changing world, with the application of enhanced technology, awareness and valued notion of social equity, our

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transit system needs to demonstrate adaptability to meet the needs and demands of all users.

Challenges with the Issue:

Public transportation access in Indian cities is a challenge for all users. Public spaces, transport facilities including vehicles have not been designed for people with disability. Nationally, JnNURM (Jawaharlal Nehru National Urban Renewal Mission) has been the key trigger for cities to start preparing the BRTS (Bus Rapid Transit System) proposal to provide efficient public transport system. BRTS proposals have taken care of issues with PwDs but because of lack awareness and sensitivity towards the issue, we are unable to implement standards and provide facilities to the users with disability. Other issues are poor maintenance of the existing infrastructure.

While some public facilities which exist for disabled lie unused because they are not integrated with other facilities or exist in isolation, surrounded by encroachments which makes them inaccessible, external environment paths and sidewalks should be comprehensive and provide for the journey that people want to make including routes through residential areas (Malhotra, 2010). Due to poor public signage system, no one knows that these facilities exist. Essential access information should be communicated to 'Potential Users' and also to other citizens. In a country like India with huge population pressure on unfriendly public infrastructure facilities is almost like discouraging PwDs from using public facilities. Presently, we have improved our facilities. Still differently abled are not confident to use it freely because of bad past experiences. The differently-abled are unique and have a limitation in accessibility in use of built environment that needs further attention in a society. (Kennedy & Hesla, 2008)

Government of India launched a nation wide awareness campaign



Are pavements not meant to be accessible for the visually disabled?

'Sugamya Bharat Abhiyan' towards achieving universal accessibility for all citizens including differently abled in creating an enabling and barrier-free environment.

Design Guidelines and Standard:

Design guidelines and standards exist in many countries. In the absence of National Standards, the available standards from other countries are recommended. Guidelines provided by CPWD for barrier free built environment for differently-abled and elderly persons needs to be revised and elaborate so that one can use it more comprehensively. Many institutions

(govt., semi-govt. and NGOs) are working in this regard. Institutions are spreading awareness through conducting workshops, seminars to create awareness amongst common man, officials of govt. departments responsible for the city development. Academic and research institutes may contribute a lot in creating sensitivity among students at the initial stage. They may conduct hand on exercise, documentation of existing situation as academic or research project to collect valuable information and data to analyse the cause of problems and recommend the solution for changes for the benefit of society.

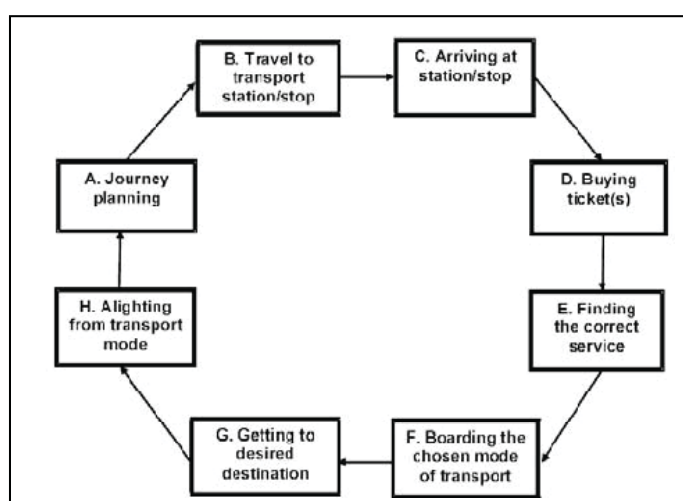


Fig. 1: The Journey Cycle. (Source: Assessment of Accessibility Standards for Disabled People in Land Based Public Transport Vehicles, Lafratta, 2008).



How do I use that zebra crossing?

Present/New Development Need:

We need multimodal transit system to cater to all sections of society, Government initiatives funds the transport projects by JnNURM. We have started construction of bus stops, metro station, BRTS as standalone systems. These may be accessible and having all features of accessible design and standard but the actual success will be through providing a fully accessible 'trip chain' for a journey. For example, a visual impaired or wheelchair user should get an integrated infrastructure to move freely with all necessary information and infrastructure starting from pedestrian walk, para-transit

mode stand to BRTS stop to metro station. As a fact, we know all users of public transport are pedestrians at start and end of their travel. It is important to develop accessible pedestrian infrastructure such as streets, curb ramps with railing for kids and adults, tactile pavements on footpaths etc. Inaccessibility to the built physical environment is one of the significant barriers to the full participation of persons with disabilities in the society (Henry, 2009). Further, the simplest way of increasing the use of public transport facilities to establish an environment where pedestrian access is safe, convenient and comfortable (Griffin, 2000).



I too would like to use the Public Transport

Maintenance of infrastructure of public information system, toilet facilities, pedestrian crosswalk signals, access ramp, railing, tactile paving etc., supported with a repair and maintenance policy should be framed to keep it in a good condition to support the ongoing accessibility.

The Way Forward

A nationwide accessible India campaign should be considered as an opportunity and the need of the hour is to spread awareness to all sections of society, schools, colleges, amongst professionals, development authorities, urban local bodies, politicians, bureaucrats etc. to make it as common as our daily needs and associated with our life style. Increasing awareness should be at the core of the training on accessibility. Accessibility is increasingly recognised as a key element of a high quality and sustainable transport system. Indeed all of us users of the transport system benefit from easier access to buses, trams, transit, planes & ships (Cullen, 2006).

Through training, there is need to develop skilled drivers, conductors, transit operators, facilities staffs, security staffs to serve all users and special care to differently abled. In the absence of training, they cannot realise the investment and effort made to obtain accessible vehicle, facilities and can easily deny access to differently abled.


Use of Information & Communication Technology (ICT), and concept of Green Technologies in vehicle design and fuel, may be the answer to make public transport infrastructure more accessible, safe and more prompt in communicating information to all users specially differently abled. Elizabeth Barton and Lynne Mitchell, in the book 'Inclusive Urban Design-Street of Life' published in 2006, very rightly pointed out that 'people are disabled by environment provided for them'. If we want to make our cities 'Smart' in the true sense, we should make cities 'Accessible',



Obstacle race for the physically challenged

‘Safe’ and ‘Inclusive’ for all people irrespective of age, gender, physical condition, economic status.

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DO YOU KNOW?

INCHEON STRATEGY

The Incheon Strategy is the action plan for the Asian and Pacific region, and the world, to make societies barrier-free for persons with disabilities and to ensure their rights over a decade. The Strategy consists of a set of disability-inclusive development goals regionally agreed for the first time. The strategy was adopted at the meeting of the Ministers and representatives of members countries of the United Nations Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific (ESCAP) held at Incheon, Republic of Korea, from 29 October to 2 November 2012.

The name “Incheon Strategy” links the Decade action plan with the place where it was adopted. These goals will enable the Asian and Pacific region to track progress towards improving the quality of life, and the fulfilment of the rights, of the region’s 650 million persons with disabilities, most of whom live in poverty. The strategy being implemented during the decade from 2013 to 2022, has 10 goals. These goals have 27 targets for action and 62 indicators to measure progress. The Incheon Strategy requires the governments to collect data about persons with all disabilities so that we can know what more we have to do.

Main ideas of the Incheon Strategy Persons is that the persons with disabilities should: Be respected; Be able to make their own choices; Not be discriminated against; and Be able to participate in society the same way as everyone else.

The 10 goals under the strategy include Goal 1: Reduce poverty and enhance work and employment prospects; Goal 2: Promote participation in political processes and in decision-making; Goal 3: Enhance access to the physical environment, public transportation, knowledge, information and communication; Goal 4: Strengthen social protection; Goal 5: Expand early intervention and education of children with disabilities; Goal 6: Ensure gender equality and women’s empowerment; Goal 7: Ensure disability-inclusive disaster risk reduction and management; Goal 8: Improve the reliability and comparability of disability data; Goal 9: Accelerate the ratification and implementation of the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities and the harmonization of national legislation with the Convention; Goal 10: Advance subregional, regional and interregional cooperation. 

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