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ANALYSIS**

TOPIC

**INVESTING IN PERSONS
WITH DISABILITIES: A CALL
FOR INCLUSION**

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INVESTING IN PERSONS WITH DISABILITIES: A CALL FOR INCLUSION

Context

- Many parents of children with disabilities face societal pressure to believe that their offspring are not worthy of investment, which eventually perpetuates **social stigma, marginalisation, and discrimination** against persons with disabilities (PwDs).

About the Persons with Disabilities(PWDs)

- As per United Nations Conventions on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities, PWDs include those who have **long-term physical, mental, intellectual or sensory impairments** which in interaction with various barriers may hinder their full and effective participation in society on an equal basis with others.
- As per **National Family Health Survey**, India's population of people with a disability has reduced to 1% between 2019 and 2021, from the 2.2% (26.8 million) estimated by the **Indian census in 2011**.
- As per **2011 population census**, 20% of persons with disabilities in India have a disability in movement, 19% have a disability in seeing, 19% have a disability in hearing and 8% have multiple disabilities.
- The **Rights of Persons with Disabilities Act, 2016 defines 21 types of disabilities**, including speech and language disability, specific learning disabilities, and even includes acid attack victims.

Challenges Associated With PWDs

- **Education, Infrastructure and Employment:** Educational institutions and workplaces often lack the necessary infrastructure and support mechanisms for PwDs.
 - ♦ Disabled persons are the ones who are scapegoats in getting fired at tenure of recessions. They are first to be discharged from their services when cost cutting methods are adopted by the companies.
- **Social Stigma:** The word disability is being seen as a social stigma, according to which parents feel ashamed of their children, and in fear most of them feel uncomfortable in public upfront.
- **Institutional Failures:** Indian education system and Government institutions both are failing in making arrangements for the welfare for disabled persons to an extent. There should be proper seats for disabled persons at classrooms as well as at the exam centres.
 - ♦ Illiteracy is particularly prevalent among disabled people and constitutes a double disadvantage. In addition to being disabled, they are isolated by illiteracy.
- **Poor implementation of Rights of Persons with Disabilities Act:** While the Rights of Persons with Disabilities Act, 2016, provides for reservation in government jobs and incentives in non-government jobs, implementation remains a challenge. There is a need for better enforcement to ensure equal opportunities for PwDs.
- **Lack of awareness and accountability:** The implementation of accessibility standards has been haphazard. There is no consistency, there is a lack of budgetary allocation, and no monitoring and sensitisation.

Why Investing in Persons With Disabilities (PwDs) is Important?

Economic Impact

- **Global GDP Boost:** According to a study by the **International Labour Organization (ILO)**, the inclusion of PwDs in the economy **can boost global GDP by 3% to 7%**. It is substantial and underscores the economic potential that remains untapped when PwDs are excluded from the workforce.
- **Productivity and Innovation:** Diverse workplaces, including those that actively include PwDs, tend to be more innovative and productive. When people with different abilities collaborate, they bring unique perspectives and problem-solving skills to the table.

Social Justice and Dignity

- **Overcoming Stigma:** PwDs face social stigma and marginalisation across various sectors. By investing in their education, employment, and overall well-being, we challenge these stereotypes and create a more inclusive society.
- **Dignity and Self-Worth:** Providing opportunities for education and employment ensures that PwDs can lead fulfilling lives with dignity. It's about recognizing their inherent worth and potential.

Education and Employment

- **Educational Infrastructure:** Unfortunately, less than 1% of India's educational institutions are truly disabled-friendly. Many lack necessary infrastructure like ramps and accessible restrooms.
 - ◆ Investing in inclusive infrastructure is essential for PwDs to access quality education.
- **Employment Opportunities:** A 2023 report revealed that only five out of 50 Nifty 50 companies employ more than 1% of PwDs, with most being public sector firms. Private and public institutions alike need to create more job opportunities for PwDs.

Examples from Abroad and India

- **Harvard and Stanford:** Universities like Harvard and Stanford in the U.S. have robust support systems for students with disabilities. They provide personalised assistance, housing accommodations, and comprehensive resource centres. Indian universities can learn from such models and adapt them locally.
- **Shiv Nadar University in India:** In 2023, Shiv Nadar University introduced a disability support policy. They provide personalised support to students based on their health conditions each semester.

Related Government Initiatives

- **Accessible India Campaign:** Stress has been laid on ensuring accessibility in public buildings within a prescribed time frame. It aims to create a barrier-free environment for Divyangjan. The project envisages creation of ramps, help desks and accessible toilets in public places.
- **Harmonised Guidelines and Standards for Universal Accessibility in India, 2021:** These are an enabling step towards strengthening the national mandate of an Accessible India and a self-reliant India with a vision for a universally accessible and inclusive India.
- **Department of Empowerment of Persons with Disabilities:** Understanding the special needs of PwDs, the government carved out a special department under the Ministry of Social Justice and Empowerment.
- **'Divyang':** With a view to change the societal attitude towards PwDs and to encourage them to participate in the society without any feeling of inferiority, the Prime Minister coined the term 'divyang' to denote PwDs.
- **Sugamya Bharat:** To understand the problems of Divyangjan, the Government has launched the Sugamya Bharat app. The app lets people provide feedback on accessibility issues for PwDs.
- **Unique Disability Identity Project (UDID):** The Project is aimed at easing disability certification, while weeding out fraud in the process.
- **Divya Kala Shakti:** It is a scheme of the Government of India to encourage Divyangjan to participate in cultural activities.
- **Assistance to Disabled Persons for Purchase/Fitting of Aids and Appliances (ADIP) Scheme:** Under this programme, the Government provides aids and assistive devices to PwDs.
- Chief Justice of India emphasised the need for greater accessibility for PwDs in public spaces. Despite existing laws mandating disability-friendly infrastructure, many places remain inaccessible, and called on both government and private entities to comply with these laws and treat PwDs with respect and equality.

Conclusion and Way Forward

- Investing in PwDs is not just a legal obligation; it's a moral imperative. It isn't just about financial resources; it's about investing in dignity, equality, and a more inclusive society.
- Despite progress, accessibility remains a mirage in many Indian cities. Buildings, even in tier 1 and 2 cities, often lack proper facilities for PwDs.
- Both public and private institutions must actively contribute to uplifting PwDs. By doing so, we create a world where everyone has the opportunity to thrive, regardless of their abilities.

Source: TH



Mains Practice Question

[Q] How does India's cultural and societal attitudes towards disability influence the experiences and opportunities of persons with disabilities? Do you think investing in individuals with disabilities can contribute to both financial and social inclusion?