

“All children and young people of the world, with their individual strengths and weaknesses, with their hopes and expectations, have the right to education. It is not our education systems that have a right to certain types of children.

Therefore, it is the school system of a country that must be adjusted to meet the needs of all children.”

**Fourth Annual Report
The Status of Inclusive
Education of Children
with Disabilities
under the Right to Education Act 2009**

**by Radhika M Alkazi, Founder and Managing Trustee (AARTH-ASTHA),
Founder, Centre for Research and Policy in Disability (CRPD)
with Shabnam Aggarwal (Founder, Director Anandini)
supported by Reena Mukhija & Purva Semar**

Acknowledgements

This report is dedicated to **Jatinder Arora**, Founder of Prayas, Jaipur who was passionate about the rights of children with disabilities.

This report has been written with the support of organizations and individuals in Delhi and Rajasthan. We are thankful to the organizations for facilitating our meetings with children with disabilities and their families and for giving us a deeper insight into the barrier that face children. We are also grateful to the experts from the different organizations that gave us time and discussed their views with us.

Special thanks are due to Ms Shabnam Aggarwal (Anandini) for collaborating in this independent project and for supporting the printing of this report.

In Delhi

AARTH-ASTHA

ANANDINI

CARENIDHI

JOSH (JOINT OPERATION FOR SOCIAL HELP)

PARDARSHITA

NATIONAL ASSOCIATION FOR THE BLIND

In Jaipur, Rajasthan

BHARAT GYAN VIGYAN SAMITI

PRAYAS FOUNDATION

UMANG

We would also like to thank Mr. Saurabh Sharma (Executive Director, JOSH), Ms. Rekha Koli (Program Manager, JOSH), Mr. Rajiv (Director, Pardarshita), Ms. Ritu (Chief Functionary, Pardarshita), Ms. Deepak Kalra (Founder, Umang), Dr Sunanda Reddy (Founder, Carenidhi, Delhi), Ms. Kalpana Mehta (Supervisor, Prayas Foundation), Ms. Komal Srivastava (Vice Chairperson, Bharat Gyan Vigyan Samiti), Ms. Kiran Kumari (Special Educator, AarthAsthA), Mr. Vishwamber (Member, SCPCR-Rajasthan), Mr. Govind Beniwal (Member, SCPCR-Rajasthan), Mr. Naveen, Consultant SSA Rajasthan

Special thanks are due to Dr Ganesh Nigam, consultant UNICEF for unstintingly sharing data and analysis on children with disabilities.

Special thanks are also due to Kavvya Mukhija for sharing her experiences and thoughts on inclusion.

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Inclusive Education and The Right of Children to Free and Compulsory Education Act 2009

As the RTE ACT the law that gives Indian Children from the ages of 6-14 years the fundamental right to education completes five years of implementation, it is time to take stock again on the status of the right to education of children who are amongst the most excluded from education in nearly all countries of the world: children with special needs or children with disabilities.

The fourth stocktaking report comes on the heels of the three earlier reports that have in some way tried to highlight gains as well as issues that need urgent attention if children with disabilities are to access their right to quality and inclusive education in India.

First Report (2011)

The first report was written at the time of the notification of the Model Rules of the Act. The model rules had been written and different states were finalizing their own rules to the Act. In our first report we studied the model rules and the draft rules of states of Odisha, Karnataka, Kerala, Haryana, and West Bengal. We looked at the implications of the Rules for the education and inclusion of children with disabilities and the strength of the commitments that different states were making to the child with disabilities.

Second Report (2012)

The Second Annual Report on the Status of Children with Disabilities under the Right to Education Act was written in the backdrop of the controversial amendments of the Act. An attempt was made through the report to advocate against the amendment of providing home based education as a choice to children with severe and multiple disabilities.

The report also looked closely at official data on the inclusion of children with disabilities and underlined the need to look closely at the low rates of enrollment and gender parity index of children with disabilities in school. It also drew the reader's attention to changing patterns in the enrollment of children with disabilities and brought forth some of their voices.

The Third Report (2013)

The Third Annual Report on Stocktaking of the Right to Free and Compulsory Education of Children with Disabilities under the Right to Education Act 2009, attempted to put forth the perspective of one hundred and fifty families from Odisha, Delhi and Uttar Pradesh. Children with disabilities and their families are the primary stakeholders in the process of education. In our third stocktaking report, we felt it was imperative that we hear their voices.

In this process we were joined by two other civil society organizations, AAINA from Odisha, SPARC India from Uttar Pradesh.

The Fourth Report (2014-15)

In the Fourth Report, we attempt to look closely at the framework in which to understand the right to education of children. As the disability discourse unfolds after the coming into

force of the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities, there is increasing clarity on how the big conceptual changes the Convention brings in, are changes for children and persons with disabilities that impact all persons and society and states. In short the disability discourse cannot any longer be a discourse in isolation. We try to spell out the framework and ask what data reflects on the health of inclusive education in our country. We make the links between recent trends in education such as school merger and closure in Rajasthan and children with disabilities and then look at how families migrating to Delhi in search of better prospects for their children fare, and how their children are treated in government schools in Delhi. Finally, through a series of interviews we bring the reader the actual experience of children with special needs/disability in education.

INCLUSIVE EDUCATION: THE EMERGING FRAMEWORK

As we complete five years of the implementation of the Right to Education Act 2009: it is time to vet it against the emerging understanding of 'inclusive education'.

This is important because "the right to education is being increasingly being recognized as the right to Inclusive education".¹ 'Inclusive Education' is today "acknowledged as the most appropriate modality for states to guarantee universality and non-discrimination in the right to education".² These values, that are central to enjoyment of the right to education can be realized only as systems become more and more inclusive.

No longer focussed solely on children with disabilities, "an inclusive education implies transforming the school system and ensuring interpersonal interactions based upon core values which allow for the full learning potential of every person to emerge.

It also implies

- Effective participation,
- individualized instruction and
- Inclusive pedagogies

"The creation of inclusive education systems is fundamental to achieving better quality in education and realising the human rights of all children.

Inclusive education can raise the quality bar across education systems, by using strategies that cater for naturally diverse learning styles of all students, whilst accommodating the specific learning needs of some students. They also serve to target and include other marginalised groups of children, helping to ensure inclusion for all."

Some key values of inclusive education are equality, participation, non-discrimination, celebrating diversity and sharing good practices".³

¹The recent report of the Office of the United Nations Commissioner on Human Rights makes it very clear that "Several international instruments, inter alia, the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights and the Convention on the Rights of the Child, affirm the core principles of universality and non-discrimination in the enjoyment of the right to education. Inclusive education has been acknowledged as the most appropriate modality for States to guarantee universality and non-discrimination in the right to education" The Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities recognizes that, for persons with disabilities to exercise this right, inclusive education systems must be in place and, consequently, the right to education is a right to inclusive education."

²Thematic study on the Right of Persons with Disabilities to Education; Report of the Office the High Commissioner for Human Rights of the United Nations, 18 December 2013, pg 3

³Thematic study on the Right of Persons with Disabilities to Education; Report of the Office the High Commissioner for Human Rights of the United Nations, 18 December 2013, pg 5

It is for this reason that the 2013 Thematic Study on the Right of Persons with Disabilities to Education underlines the fact that “Inclusive education is no longer a marginal policy issue but must be seen as central to the achievement of high quality education for all learners and the development of more inclusive societies”.⁴

Inclusive Education and Children with Disabilities

“Rather than segregating children with disabilities in special schools, inclusive education entails providing meaningful learning opportunities to all students within the regular school system. Ideally, it allows children with and without disabilities to attend the same age-appropriate classes at the local school, with additional, individually tailored support as needed.

It requires physical accommodation as well as a new, child centred curriculum that includes representations of the full spectrum of people found in society and reflects the needs of all children.⁵

Finally, it must be said that inclusion is a process not a program. It is a process of constantly eliminating barriers that restrict or ban the participation of children within a system. As we take stock of the process it becomes important for us to develop frameworks that assess how far a system is becoming inclusive not only through the numbers but also through an evaluation of the values that the system carries with it.

THE UNCRPD: The UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities reflects from the paradigm shift.

The UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities for the first time calls for ‘inclusive education systems’ to be available for all. This along with the guidance of the committee on the rights of persons with disabilities gives us a growing understanding of what inclusive systems could look like.

With regard to our understanding of the rights of children and persons with disabilities the Convention reflects a paradigm change.

Ratified by India in 2007, The UN Convention of the Right of Persons with Disabilities moves away from a medical and impairment based understanding to gives us a social understanding of disability. It reminds us that children with disabilities are girls, boys, rich poor, belong to different castes and religions are to be found in all states of the country. The barriers they face and the supports they receive are part and parcel of the social, political and cultural and economic contexts in which they live and with which they interact.

The Principles of the Convention emphasise, “full and effective participation and inclusion in society”, “non-discrimination and equality of opportunity”.

“Respect for inherent dignity, individual autonomy including the freedom to make one’s own choices and independence of persons” is another major principle of the Convention that reminds us of the active agency of children with disabilities in education.

⁴(Equal Right Equal Opportunity: Inclusive Education for Children with Disabilities, Global Campaign on Education 2014)pg4

⁵UNICEF State of the World’s Children, UNICEF Executive Summary, pg 9

“Respect for difference and acceptance of disability as part of human diversity and humanity”⁶ is perhaps the one principle that is at the core of the philosophy of inclusive education and of the Convention.

In terms of education then, the implications are that everything that happens within the system affects the child and person with disability and our analysis of inclusive education must reflect this.

Article 24 of the Convention is on Education. This along with the other articles of the convention gives us clear guidance on making education systems inclusive and the specific requirements of children and persons with disabilities in these inclusive systems.

According to Article 24, the aims of education include:

“The development by persons with disabilities of their personality, talents and creativity, as well as their mental and physical abilities to their fullest potential”

“State parties recognise the rights of persons with disabilities to education. With a view to realize this right without discrimination and on the basis of equal opportunity state parties shall ensure an inclusive education system and life-long learning”(1)

This implies that systems must be such that children and persons with disabilities are able to move from one stage of education to another. There must be ample opportunity within the education system to cater to a diversity of needs.

The earlier thinking applied to some children with disabilities that they cannot go beyond a certain point in education, no longer holds.

According to Article 24, “State parties must ensure that

“Persons with disabilities are not excluded from general education system on the basis of disability, and that children with disabilities are not excluded from free and compulsory primary or secondary education on the basis of disability.”(2 a)

There can be no rejection of children with disabilities within the education system because they are disabled. This rejection often comes in direct and indirect ways in the education system in India. Arguments such as “the system is not ready” or that “we do not know how to teach a child with disability or do not have the resources to provide the supports required” do not hold with such a commitment.

No rejection also means that the school must take full responsibility of the child while in school. During admissions, parents are often told that while their child will get admission, the school will not take any responsibility for the safety and security of the child. Parents are often told that they must accompany their children with disabilities and sit with them in school.

⁶Article 3(Principles) UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities 2006

“Persons with disabilities can access an inclusive, quality and free primary education and secondary education on an equal basis with others in the communities where they live”

“An inclusive education system does not imply a lower quality of education; on the contrary, establishing quality education is at the core of the recommended measures”.⁷

This implies “moving away from homogeneity to the pedagogy of diversity.” It also implies a moving away from only one way of assessing success in education.

The article also underlines the fact that education must be provided to the child in the communities where they live. For children with disabilities this becomes important because very often residential schools where all children with disabilities study and live together are seen as an accepted measure of providing education and residence to children with disabilities.

The Convention on the other hand stresses the importance of children with disabilities living with their families⁸ and services being provided within the communities where they live⁹.

Article 24 also underlines the fact that in order to provide quality inclusive education it is important that:

- **Reasonable accommodation of individual requirement is provided (2c)**
- **Persons with disabilities receive the support required within the general education system, to facilitate their effective education(2d)**
- **Effective individualized support measures are provided in environments that maximize academic and social development, consistent with the goal of full inclusion (2e)**

Inclusive education systems do not brush all children with one stroke. Instead inclusive education systems engage with specific requirements and individualised instruction and support.

In order to achieve full participation and equality children with disabilities may require changes at an individual level. For example, a child may require a reading board or a reading stand to be able to read his textbook properly. Children may require specific learning aids, assistive technologies and even personal assistance without this individual requirement being fulfilled the child would be at a disadvantage. According to the UNCRPD the denial of this kind of reasonable accommodation must be seen as discrimination.¹⁰

Individualized support requires individualized planning for education and inclusion. “The core element of individualized education plans is the involvement of professionals, parents and the student.¹¹ These plans aim at enabling each student to live, study and act autonomously, with adequate support, taking into account individual capacities.”

⁷Thematic study on the Right of Persons with Disabilities to Education; Report of the Office the High Commissioner for Human Rights of the United Nations, 18 December 2013, pg 10

⁸Article 23, (Respect for Home and the Family),UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities 2006

⁹Article 19(Living Independently and being included in the community,UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities 2006

¹⁰Article 5(Equality and Non Discrimination,UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities 2006

¹¹ The Right of Children with Disabilities to Education, p. 70.

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In order to facilitate the full and equal participation in education children and persons with disabilities will need to learn life and social skills.

To do that State parties must take measures such as

- **Facilitating learning of Braille, alternative script, augmentative alternative modes, means and formats of communication, orientation and mobility skills and facilitating peer support mentoring 3(b)**
- **Promoting the learning of Sign Language3(c)**
- **Education of blind, deaf and deaf blind children in appropriate language, modes and means of communication and in environments that maximize academic and social development**

Communication and language and mobility are life skills that are important for all children. Because some children with disabilities communicate differently, the convention at various places emphasizes the importance of these core skills for the child.

This also means that education systems have to be equipped to teach this diversity. The ways in which different children with disabilities may communicate are essential to their being and education systems must be equipped to teach them. The UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities in-fact widens our understanding of the words communication and language.

“Communication for example will include spoken language, display of text and braille and tactile communication, large print, written, audio, accessible multi-media, plain language, human reader, and augmentative and alternative modes of communication, including accessible information and information technology.” (Article 2 Definitions)

Languages include spoken and sign languages and other forms of non-spoken languages. (Article 2, Definitions)

Article 24 on Education further emphasizes the importance of having

- **teachers who are qualified in sign language and/ or Braille**
- **teachers with disabilities**
- **Training of professionals in disability awareness, use of appropriate alternative and augmentative modes, means and formats of education, education techniques and materials to support persons with disabilities 24(4)**

Finally it promises access to tertiary education, vocational training, adult education on an equal basis with others with reasonable accommodation 24(5)

THE RIGHT OF CHILDREN TO FREE AND COMPULSORY EDUCATION ACT, 2009

The Right of Children to Free and Compulsory Education Act is the law that outlines how the fundamental right to free and compulsory education of children in the age group of 6 to 14 is to be implemented. Despite some shortcomings, it is seen as a landmark law envisioning fundamental changes to the education system and the way we have transacted education so far. There are many aspects of the law that support the inclusion of many marginalized groups of children with children with disabilities being one among them. Some of these are:

Mapping of children

Clear responsibilities of the State to map children in their communities and ensure the enrollment, retention and completion of elementary education are an important one. For children with disabilities who face grave barriers not only from systems but also from society and community, a proactive local authority/ state government can go a long way in enabling the child to go to school.

Setting up Schools at a One kilometer Distance and the Provision of Transport

Section 6 of the Rules of the RTE Act, specify that primary school must be established within a walking distance of one kilometer of the neighborhood. For children in classes 6 to 8 schools can be established within a walking distance of three kilometers. Added to this is the commitment in the Rules to provide transport to children with disabilities. Since physical access is a particularly important issue for children with disabilities, having schools within reach and the facility of transport to reach the school is critical for the full participation in education for this child.

Setting Standards

The move to formalize education and set standards of what is a school and minimum requirements in a school for infrastructure and PTRs and trained teachers can go a long way in ensuring the inclusion of children with disabilities. A classroom for every teacher and a PTR of 30:1 is enabling for all children including children with disabilities. It is easier for the teacher to understand the specific requirements of a disabled child in a classroom of 30 than in a classroom of 80 or even 100 as has been the order of the day in many states.

Further the requirement of schools to have of playgrounds, libraries, toilets and drinking water facilities and to have barrier free access can be extremely enabling for children with disabilities if these basic facilities are accessible to all and based on the principles of universal design.¹²

The commitment to having trained teachers by the end of five years¹³ gave the hope that teachers will know how to teach all children including children with disabilities.

Child Centered Education and Continuous and Comprehensive Evaluation

Major changes in the way education is transacted is another hall mark of the Act. A child centered education; a clear setting of curriculum¹⁴ that enable the full physical and mental development of the child could have been used to enable a system where supports such as physical therapies, mobility training, positioning required by some children with disabilities could have been incorporated in the school curriculum.

A commitment to provide all teaching and learning materials required by children and continuous and comprehensive evaluation are important changes for the child with disabilities in school. It is well known that children with disabilities (and many other children) may flourish in other aspects of education than just the academic. Further the commitment to education that ensures the full development of the child mandates that many of the commitments of the UNCRPD Article 24 on the aims of education are fulfilled in schools..

¹²The Right of Children with Disabilities to Education, p. 70

¹³Section 23(2) Right of Children to free and Compulsory Education Act 2009

¹⁴Section 29 (2) Right of Children to free and Compulsory Education Act 2009

The Involvement of Parents and Communities

The involvement of parents and others from outside the school in the school management committees is another important aspect giving multiple stakeholders a stake in the education of children in the community. The role of monitoring the implementation of the act and the big responsibility of preparing school development plans gives impotent opportunities for families and communities to steer education. The model rules of the Act further specify that SMC must monitor the inclusion of children with disabilities and ensure their right to education.¹⁵

An Acknowledgment of Discrimination

The RTE Act is one of the few Acts that actively acknowledges that discrimination is an important factor in full enjoyment of rights and the full participation of children in education. A sharp focus on non-discrimination and the understanding that some groups of children are vulnerable and need further protection is extremely important for inclusion. The specific mention and protection of children from disadvantaged groups and weaker sections is an important aspect of the Act. Added to this is further protection of children against corporal punishment and mental harassment.¹⁶ Discrimination overt and covert mental harassment are major factors affecting the retention of children with disabilities in education. A law that expressly prohibits both recognizes this.

In 2012 the RTE Act was amended. Among other important amendments was the amendment with regard to children with disabilities.

The amendment specifically named children with disabilities under the disadvantaged groups of children but also added another clause to the Act. It gave children with severe and multiple disabilities the right to opt for home based education. As a result of this amendment:

- a) Children with disabilities now come under the 25% EWS category that private schools must admit
- b) Parents of children with disabilities will now have to be included in all school management committees (SMCs). Given the requisite training and power, these parents can have a positive impact on the way school development plans are made.

If applied in their true spirit, these are real and important gains for the education of the child with disabilities in the general school system.

RTE and Inclusive Education: A Narrow Discourse

Five years down the line we seem to be battling to keep alive the great hope that our system of education will become more inclusive. Children with disabilities continue to be amongst the most excluded and the tide is not changing fast enough. The biggest reason for this is that despite the UNCRPD and despite the fundamental right to education our discourse on the education of children with disabilities has not changed. It has not been enriched by the guidance of the Convention and has therefore remained very narrow in scope.

The RTE that could and should have been the vehicle of inclusive education, has been so narrowly interpreted and implemented that it actually excludes rather than include. 'Inclusive

education' remains a program of the SarvaShikshaAbhiyan, the vehicle through which RTE works. This stand-alone program which focuses only on children with disabilities, with a set of activities has led to the thinking that the rest of the system need not worry about the child with disabilities!

- ☝ The system of education has not changed or become flexible to include diversity.
- ☝ All the clauses of the RTE that could have been interpreted fully for the inclusion of the child with disabilities have remained narrow in execution and thinking.
- ☝ Infrastructure that could have been made barrier free for all children with disabilities has been narrowed down to the ramp and the rail. The commitment to provide transport to children with disabilities has not started in most states.
- ☝ The commitment to make basic facilities like toilets and drinking water facilities or midday meals available has not been interpreted in a way that it must be accessible to children with disabilities and the state is not expected to report on this.
- ☝ Curriculums that have the power to enrich the child for life have become whittled down to "adaptations to be made for specific impairment groups". There is little discussion on the aims of education and the heterogeneity of pedagogies that can be used.
- ☝ Teaching and learning materials have become limited to the supply of braille books or books in large print. Little attempt has been made to cater to the needs of all children who communicate differently.
- ☝ Discussion on teachers has narrowed down to the availability of special educators. No attempt has been made to reorient or rethink the relationships or the 'fit' that these teachers must have to the general system. No attempt has been made to understand or plan for other personnel required for inclusive education to be a success.
- ☝ Home based education continues to function on an ad hoc basis with volunteers filling for the child who needs the most support.
- ☝ Children with disability seem to have benefitted little from being included in the disadvantaged groups. No systems have been made to prevent discrimination that is rampant countrywide and is often the cause of children dropping out or entering school at all. Little attempt has been made to understand that fact that children with disabilities are not a homogenous group and cultural context and multiple identities of gender , caste class etc impact the nature and likelihood of discrimination.
- ☝ School management committees are being trained but training modules do not include the requirements of this child.
- ☝ Reports do not tell us about how a child with disabilities is affected by the increasing privatization in education or what happens to them when states like Rajasthan suddenly close or merge thousands of schools.

Despite these continuing barriers, there is also a silver lining that must be acknowledged. There is clearly a growing interest in government institutions to understand the barriers that affect the right to education of children with disabilities and take steps to break barriers. In 2013 the National Commission for the Protection of Child Rights organized a national level workshop on the Right of Children with disabilities to inclusive education under the RTE Act 2009. In 2014, the UNESCO and the UNICEF also organized national level consultations that addressed the issue of the use of information and communication technologies in education.

Major civil society networks like the RTE forum, the India Alliance for Child Rights and others are addressing disability issues and the voices of children with disabilities are being heard in these forums. These are real and important gains that can be built on.

Data on Participation of Children with Disabilities in Education

There is a growing number of sources for data on children with special needs/disability and their participation or the lack of it in education. Every ten years the CENSUS of India gives us an increasing understanding of the population of persons with disabilities and the trends and changes they are undergoing. Amongst children in the school going age group it is the consolidated category of 5-19 that we can use for analysis. The UDISE is yearly data set specifically for education that is increasingly attempting to inform us about the participation of children in education as per the indicators set out in the Right of Children to Free and Compulsory Education Act 2009. The National Sample Survey of Estimation of Out-of-School Children in the Age 6-13 in India is another regular data set that has been collecting and analysing the numbers and proportion of out of school children belonging to different categories in the country.

Despite these very important data sets being available it is difficult to draw correlations and comparisons to understand the participation of children with special needs / disabilities since each data set is based on a different understanding and definition of impairment groups.

Definition of Visual Disability in Census of India 2011	Definition of Visual Disability in National Sample Survey
<p>A person may be considered as having disability 'in seeing' if she/he:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Cannot see at all; or • Has no perception of light even with the help of spectacles; or • Has perception of light but has blurred vision even after using spectacles, contact lenses etc. A simple test is whether the person can count the fingers of hand from a distance of 10 feet in good daylight. Such persons can however, move independently with the help of remaining sight; or • Can see light but cannot see properly to move about independently; or • Has blurred vision but had no occasion to test if her/his eyesight would improve after taking corrective measures. <p>The enumerator was instructed to note that;</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Persons with no vision in one eye but full vision in the other eye (one eyed persons) should not be considered as disabled in seeing. • Persons having night blindness alone should not be considered as disabled in seeing. • Persons having colour blindness alone should not be considered as disabled in seeing. 	<p>Loss or lack of ability to execute tasks requiring adequate visual acuity. For the survey, visually disabled included</p> <p>(a) those who did not have any light perception - both eyes taken together</p> <p>(b) those who had light perception but could not correctly count fingers of hand (with spectacles/contact lenses if he/she used spectacles/contact lenses) from a distance of 1 meters in good day light with both eyes open.</p> <p>The questions posed are:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1.Does the child have difficulty in counting the fingers of an outstretched hand at a distance of one meter? 2.Does the child move his/her head towards the source of light? 3.Does the child stumble over objects or bump into people? <p>Night blindness was not considered as visual disability</p>

The three data sets do not report on the same impairment groups making it difficult to compare numbers and percentages.

Census of India 2011	National Sample Survey of Out of School Children	U DISE
Multiple disability	Multiple disability	Multiple disability
		Cerebral palsy
		Autism
		Learning disability
Movement	Orthopedic/ Loco motor	Loco motor impairment
Hearing	Hearing	Hearing impairment
Speech	Speech	Speech impairment
Mental retardation	Mental disability	Mental retardation
Seeing	Visual disability	Blindness
Mental illness		
Any other		Low vision

While it is understood by all that children with disabilities continue to be amongst the most vulnerable groups in education in India, the nature and breadth of the questions asked for data collection remains limited. For example, we continue to have little understanding of whether toilets that are made in schools are accessible; how many resource teachers are available in a state to support the classroom teacher, whether materials are available for the child with special needs/disabilities on a regular basis etc.

Finally, it must be said that there are specific challenges in gathering data on disability worldwide. Issues of detection and identification of disability and the training and understanding of enumerators are as challenging as the stigma attached to disability which inhibits families from disclosure.

Imperfect as it is, the data given below gives us a good idea of the health of inclusive education in India and has important implications for policy and practice.

SHUBHA at School

Shubha has cerebral palsy with visual and intellectual disability. Shubha got admission in class 1, in the government school near her home, 2 years ago. She is now in class 3. The school does not provide any transport facility. Her mother holds her hand and walks her to school every day. Shubha's sister and brother are also in the same school. In school, she is learning basic social skills, besides basic reading and writing. Though she is happy about going to school, she faces many difficulties too. She has difficulty in moving around from place to place, within the school and has fallen many times.

She finds it difficult to eat the mid day meal provided in school. She is not yet able to eat independently, but she is learning slowly by observing other children eat.

CHANGE IN ATTITUDE OF OTHER CHILDREN

Earlier the other children used to find her 'strange'. They teased her and made fun of her. But now they are used to her and some of her classmates are friendly and support her whenever she needs it.



IN CLASS LACK OF ACCESSIBLE INFRASTRUCTURE AND APPROPRIATE FURNITURE:

In class, there is no appropriate chair and table for her which makes it difficult for her to sit.

Going to the toilet poses quite a challenge. The washrooms are not clean nor are they accessible. Thus, she is forced to be dependent on her classmates whenever she needs to go. Shubha, who also has low vision, finds it difficult to read from a regular text book. But the school has not made any effort to ensure that textbooks in larger font are made available to her. The teachers in the school do not give any special attention to children with disabilities, so even though they are physically present in class, they are completely ignored.

The last few months has seen a special educator appointed in the school. As a result, Shubha has been asked to come to school for 2-3 hours each day. She is now taught by the special educator. This means she can only be with her classmates and interact with them during the recess.

Shubha's mother hopes that her decision to shift to Delhi despite all odds, will pay off eventually and all her children, especially Shubha will benefit from what Delhi has to offer.¹

The Census of India 2011 and Data on Persons with Disability

The 2001 Census put the figure of disability to be 2.13% of the population. However, this Census did not include many categories of people who are acknowledged as persons with disabilities in our law.

The 2011 Census saw a concerted effort both by government and disability groups to ask the right questions, train enumerators and spread awareness in communities. Instead of the five impairment groups included in the census in 2001 we now had eight groups included in the counting. The recently declared preliminary figures of the 2011 census show some important results.

- Percentage of population of persons with disabilities to the total population has increased from 2.13 in 2001 to 2.21 in the 2011 census.
- The disabilities in movement, seeing and hearing are significantly larger in numbers than the others that have been enumerated.
- While the percentage of population in the rural areas has grown from 2.21 in 2001 to 2.24 in 2011 it has increased significantly in the urban areas from 1.93 to 2.17
- Although the number of men continues to be higher than women with disabilities the decadal increase in numbers of women (1.87 in 2001 to 2.01 in 2011) is higher than men (2.31 in 2001 to 2.41 in 2011)
- 2.45 % of the disabled population belongs to the Scheduled Castes while 2.05% belongs to the Scheduled Tribes.² Another 2.18% belongs to the other social groups regarded as vulnerable in the country.

¹DATA ON DISABILITY, Census of India 2011 New Delhi, 27-12-2013

²Interview with mother of Shubha at Govind Puri facilitated by the organization Aarth Astha that works in Govind puri & Lal Kuan. The name of the child has been changed to protect her identity.

The importance of this data for policy and practice in education should be recognized. Having data on children with disabilities belonging to already vulnerable groups in our country indicates that not only medical but also social and other factors must be taken into account when we strategize for education of children with disabilities. Our strategies have to be multi layered and recognize increased vulnerability.

As per the census of 2011 there are 6.57 million children with disabilities in the school going age group (5-19). Of these, 20% (1,278,764) are children with hearing impairment, by far the largest percentage of all children with disabilities. Children with vision impairment account for 17% (1,133,152,) while children with movement disability are 14% (928,330).³ Although children with speech difficulties are not recognized as a separate category of children with disabilities in our laws, both the Census and the DISE collect data on these children as part of children with special needs/disability. Children with speech difficulties account for 10 % (651,241,) of all children with special needs.

Children with multiple disability and intellectual disability (mental retardation) are 9% (599,790) and 8% (545,728,) respectively. Another large group amongst these is children whose impairment is not known. These children account for 20% (1,307,155) of the children with disabilities. Significantly for the first time, we have figures of children living with mental illness (127,429,) 2% in the age group of 5-19. At present no thought has been given to provisioning for children living with mental illness within the education system of our country.

Children with 'Special Needs' and Children with 'Disabilities'

The terms children with special needs and children with disabilities are often used interchangeably to talk about the same set of children in our country. As per the law⁵ children belonging to ten categories are officially acknowledged as children with disabilities



AMAAN's Story...

Amaan is a ten year old. He falls in the Autism Spectrum and has low vision. He started going to the "Marginal Bundh "government school last year. His parents shared that due to his vision difficulty, he struggles to read small font. His parents asked the teacher if she could write bigger so that he is able to copy from the board, but the teacher felt that, that would not be possible.

The teacher doesn't give any work to Amaan either. When the parents requested the teacher to give him work, they were told that since Amaan did not do anything, there was no point. Amaan finds it difficult to sit still in class. He needs a one to one support for some time which he does not get in school.

Amaan also takes support from Carenidhi an organization that works with children with special needs/disabilities in Seelampur. Here he is learning and getting individual support. Amaan's parents shared that their younger son is also in the same school and the children do not learn much. Whatever both the boys have learnt have been thanks to the tuition that they both go for. Amaan also has Carenidhi to thank.

However the parents felt that this school was much better than the school in the village that they went to as children.⁴

³Shared by Dr. Ganesh Kumar Nigam, Consultant, UNICEF

⁴As told by a mother of Amaan and facilitated by the organization Carenidhi that works in Seelampur and supports children with disabilities

in our country. These are children with low vision, blindness, hearing impairment, locomotor disability, mental retardation, mental illness, leprosy cured, autism, cerebral palsy, multiple disability. Officially also a person or child is seen as disabled if they have 40 % or more disability and have a disability certificate for the same. On the other hand the Census and National Sample Survey are based on self-reporting of disability rather than assessment by independent authorities. This makes it difficult to compare data. Children with learning disability and speech disability are not officially seen as children with disabilities as yet by law in the country. Therefore through this report we use both terms to refer to children with different impairments.

KESHAV'S Story...

Keshav is a ten year old with an infectious smile. He goes to a Kendriya Vidyalaya in Delhi. When we go to meet him and his parents, he is out in the street playing cricket with other children his age.

His mother tells us that Keshav has been in that school right from the beginning. What makes Keshav different from the other children in his class is the fact that he has hearing impairment. He has total hearing loss in his left ear and 60% hearing loss in the right ear. His parents have a Disability Certificate for him.

Keshav uses a hearing aid to make it easier to understand and communicate with people around him. Keshav wears a hearing aid in his right ear but doesn't have a hearing aid for his left ear, even though the doctor has advised him to wear it.

IMPACT OF POVERTY/AIDS AND DEVICES Keshav's family is not well off and are not in a position to buy a new hearing aid.

ATTITUDINAL BARRIERS The fact that Keshav is a child with hearing impairment caused a problem at the time of admission to school. Authorities were reluctant to grant admission and advised Keshav's mother to get him enrolled in a special school. Keshav's mother pleaded with the school authorities and after a week's struggle, Keshav was enrolled in the school.

LACK OF SUPPORT AND REASONABLE ACCOMMODATIONS The teachers and school extend no special support to the child in school. The only accommodation that they have yielded to granting is that he sits in front in class and the usual rotation system does not apply to him. While other children get to sit in front for a week at a time, Keshav continues to sit there.

Despite being seated on the first bench, Keshav is still lagging behind in his studies. He jots down all his notes directly from the blackboard, whether or not he understands them or not. Even though he sits directly in front of the teacher, she makes no effort to ensure that he understands what she is teaching. Keshav struggles to comprehend what people are saying through a combination of hearing and lip reading. As a result he loses out on a lot that is happening in the class.

Keshav's text books are full of written material. But when we ask him what he has written he smiles shyly and says he does not know!

As the schools have a no detention policy, Keshav continues to move forth from class to class but is not really learning.⁶



⁵PWD Act 1995 and the National Trust Act for the Welfare of Children with Autism, Cerebral Palsy, Mental Retardation and Multiple Disability 1999.

⁶Interview with mother of Keshav at Trilokpuri facilitated by the organization Josh that works in Trilokpuri. The name of the child has been changed to protect his identity.

ENROLLMENT OF CHILDREN WITH SPECIAL NEEDS/ DISABILITIES IN EDUCATION

The education of children with disabilities continues to be the responsibility of two Ministries. The nodal ministry for disability, the Ministry of Social Justice and Empowerment has the responsibility of supporting special schools, while the Ministry of MHRD is responsible for the education for children with disabilities within the general education system. Despite the RTE Act and India's commitment to the UNCRPD there is still little understanding in the country as to the relationship between the two. What is increasingly clear today is the fact that children with special needs/disability in general schools far out-number children going into special schools. The data on education through DISE does not cover special schools as yet.

National Situation

	No of children with disabilities enrolled in elementary education	Percentage of children with disabilities enrolled in relation to all children in primary classes	Percentage of children with disabilities enrolled upper primary classes
2009-10	1.4 million	0.75	0.74
2010-11	1.9 million	0.74	0.70
2011-12	1.68 million	0.87	0.83
2012-13	2.35 million	1.18	0.90
2013-14	2.50 million	1.30	1.18

Source Elementary Education in India, State report cards, 2009-10, 2010-11, 2011-12, 2012-13, 2013-14

After over a decade of below one percent enrollment of children with disabilities in elementary education, the year 2012-13, has seen a breakthrough and the percentage of enrollment of children with disabilities to all children has gone above one percent! In 2012-13 it is 1.18 % and in 2013-14 it goes up again to 1.30 percent. Today, 2.50 million children with special needs are said to be studying in government schools. Growing international and national attention on the inclusion of children with special needs/disabilities in education and a focused push by the Ministry of Human Resource Development is perhaps one reason for this increase.

Further, experience from the ground all over the country reflects changing trends in admissions. The earlier experience of constant rejection and refusal to admit children with special needs/disabilities is changing. It is increasingly difficult for schools to refuse admission to children with disabilities after the advent of the RTE Act 2009 and perhaps that too is reflecting in increased enrollment.

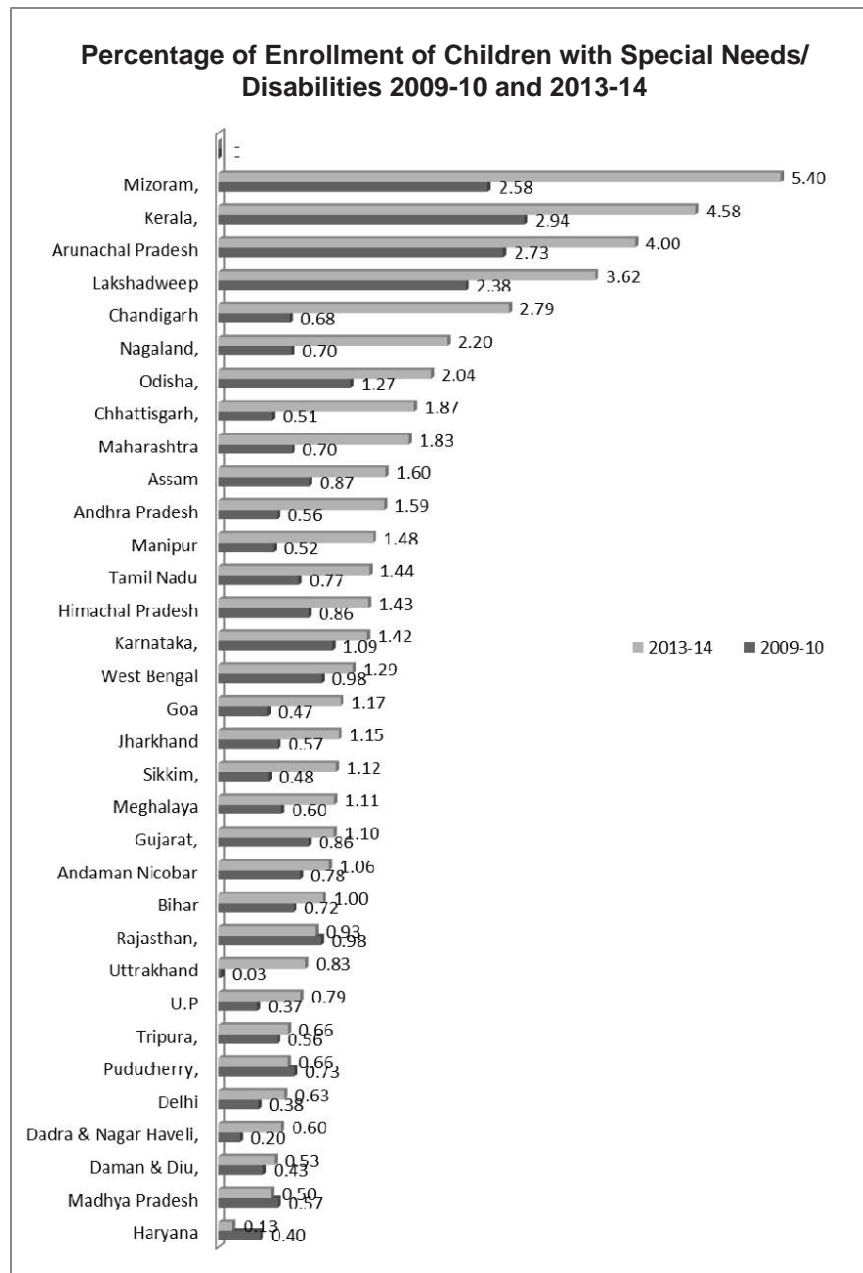
Another reason is that since 2012-13 more categories of children with special needs are being counted by DISE. These include:

- Visual impairment (Blindness)
- Hearing Impairment
- Loco motor Impairment
- Learning Disability*
- Autism*
- Visual Impairment (Low Vision)*
- Speech Impairment
- Mental Retardation
- Cerebral Palsy*
- Multiple Disabilities*

The categories of Low Vision, Learning Disability, Cerebral Palsy, Autism and Multiple Disabilities were earlier not counted through DISE data. This too has led to a swelling of numbers as more impairment groups are being counted.

Enrollment of Children with Special Needs/Disabilities within States

The responsibility of education in India lies largely with the states and we see the diversity of India reflected in the data on education amongst all the states. The state wise variation in percentage of enrollment of children with disabilities enrolled shows clearly where there has been focused work on the enrollment and retention of children with disabilities and where still work needs to be done.



Source: DISE Analytical Tables No. 3.10, 2009-10 and DISE Analytical Tables No. 3.12, 2013-14

A comparison of the percentage of enrollment of children with disabilities to all children in the years 2009-10 (the year when the RTE was enacted) with the percentage enrollment in 2013-14, shows that nearly all states have seen a jump in the percentage of enrollment of children with special needs/ disability to all children. **Except for a few states, the jump in enrollment of children with special needs/disabilities does not reflect a prioritization of this child within education.**

States such as Chhattisgarh (0.51-1.87) Andhra Pradesh (0.56-1.59) and Kerala (2.94-4.58), Odisha (1.27-2.04) show big jumps in the percentage of enrollment of children with special needs/disabilities from 2009-10 to 2013-14. The smaller states of Lakshadweep, Manipur, Mizoram and Nagaland have also made significant progress.

However, the percentage of enrollment has actually gone down in the five states of Haryana (0.40-0.13), Madhya Pradesh (0.57-0.50), Rajasthan (0.98-0.93) and Puducherry (0.73-0.66).

In 2013-14 there are some states where the percentage of enrollment of children with disabilities to all children in elementary education is as high as 4% in Andhra Pradesh, 4.58% in Kerala, 3.52% in Lakshwadeep and 2.61% in Punjab.

On the other hand there are nine states where the percentage enrollment continues to be below one percent even in 2013-14. Large states such as Uttar Pradesh have only 0.79% enrollment of children with disabilities with Uttarakhand being 0.83%. Smaller states such as Tripura (0.66%) and Puducherry (0.66%) have even a lower percentage of enrollments with the state of Haryana being the lowest at 13%.⁷ Notable also is the fact that the percentage of enrollment of children with special needs/disabilities remains extremely low in the capital of our country, Delhi (0.38-0.63).

GIRLS WITH DISABILITIES

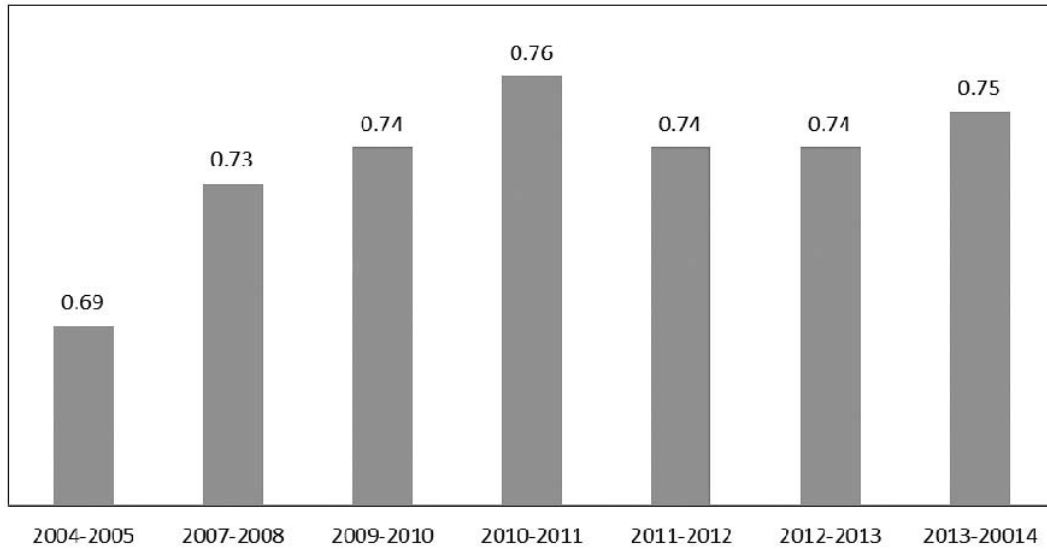
	Ratio of Girls to Boys in primary classes	Ratio of Girls to Boys in upper primary classes	Ratio of Girls to Boys in elementary education	Ratio of Girls with disabilities to Boys with disabilities in primary classes	Ratio of Girls with disabilities to Boys with disabilities in upper primary classes	Ratio of Girls with disabilities to Boys with disabilities in elementary education
2009-10	0.94	0.93	0.94	0.73	0.77	0.74
2010-11	0.94	0.94	0.94	0.75	0.78	0.76
2011-12	0.94	0.95	0.94	0.72	0.79	0.74
2012-13	0.94	0.95	0.94	0.72		0.74
2013-14	0.93	0.95	0.94	0.72	0.81	0.75

Source: Elementary Education in India, DISE, State report cards, Analytical report - 2009-10, 2010-11, 2011-12, 2012-13, 2013-14

Although girls in continue to be extremely vulnerable in India's patriarchal society, they are managing to stride into education and stay there far better than they did earlier. The ratio of girls to boys in education hovers around 0.94. In sharp contrast for every 100 boys with disabilities only 75 girls with disabilities are enrolled within the school system in 2013-14.

⁷Adapted from DISE Analytical Tables No. 3.10, 2009 and DISE Analytical Tables No.3.12, 2013-14

Ratio of Girls to Boys with Disabilities



Source: UDISE 2013-14

There is little change over the years in the ratio of enrollment of girls with disabilities to boys with disabilities in elementary education over the period of a decade. After an initial jump from 0.69 in 2004-5 to 0.73 in 2007-8, it has hovered between 0.73 to 0.76 over a period of six years. In 2013-14 the ratio of girls to boys for children with disabilities is 0.75. What is equally significant is that there is virtually no bridging of the gap between the enrollment of girls to the enrollment of girls with disabilities within the education system for many years. The ratio of girls to boys remains at 0.94 for many years.

The figures also seem to tell another important story. As girls and girls with disabilities manage to stay on through primary classes they have a better chance in the upper primary classes. The ratio of girls to boys and girls with disabilities and boys with disabilities seems to be growing with every consecutive year.

The Inclusion of Girls and Girls with Disabilities in all states

Given the great diversity of India, planning has to be context specific. A detailed look at the inclusion of girls and girls with disabilities within education in the states shows that:

1. **States where the status of the girls and women is known to be low are also the states where the ratio of enrollments is likely to be low.** Although there would be many factors like successful strategies used and the focus given to girls education in the state that would affect the enrollment of girls and girls with disabilities, this correlation cannot be ignored.

The National Sample Survey study on out of school children points out that *“the gender dichotomy prevalent within the northern parts of the country is brought out in the estimations from the Northern zone where compared to 4.54% females, only 2.49% males in the age group are estimated to be out of school.”*⁸ The northern zone in the study consists of the states of Chandigarh, Haryana, Himachal Pradesh, Jammu and Kashmir, Punjab and Rajasthan.

The Ratio of Enrollment of Girls to Boys

The ratio of enrollment of girls to boys in 2013-14 for states such as Delhi (0.86), Rajasthan (0.85) Gujarat (0.85), Haryana (0.83), Punjab (0.81) and Daman and Diu are much lower than the average of 0.94. On the other hand, states such as Meghalaya, West Bengal Assam, Manipur, Chhattisgarh, Arunachal Pradesh and Jharkhand seem to be far more supportive of girl's education in general.⁹

Ratio of Girls to Boys amongst Children with Disabilities

A closer look at the ratio of girls to boys amongst children with disabilities shows a similar pattern with few exceptions. Unlike Delhi (0.84) which is higher than the average of 0.75, states of Punjab (0.72), Haryana (0.76), Rajasthan (0.65) and Gujarat (0.68) remain lower than the already low gender parity index for girls with disabilities in 2013-14.¹⁰

Even lower than these are the Union territory of Chandigarh at (0.59), Goa at (0.59) and Mizoram being the lowest at (0.34).

State wise Difference between Ratio of Girls to Boys and Girls with Disabilities to Boys with Disabilities 2013-14

A state-wise comparative look at the ratio of girls to boys and girls with disabilities to boys with disabilities in 2013-14 shows that in most states the difference lies between 0.10% to 0.22%.

In the states of Goa, Bihar, Meghalaya, Chandigarh, Assam, Andaman and Nicobar Islands, Dadra and Nagar Haveli the difference is particularly pronounced. In the state of Mizoram almost an equal number of girls to boys get into school (94 girls to every hundred boys) but only 34 girls with disabilities are enrolled for every hundred boys.

In comparison in the states of Punjab, Delhi, Chhattisgarh, Arunachal Pradesh, Nagaland seem to have less of a difference between the two groups of children.

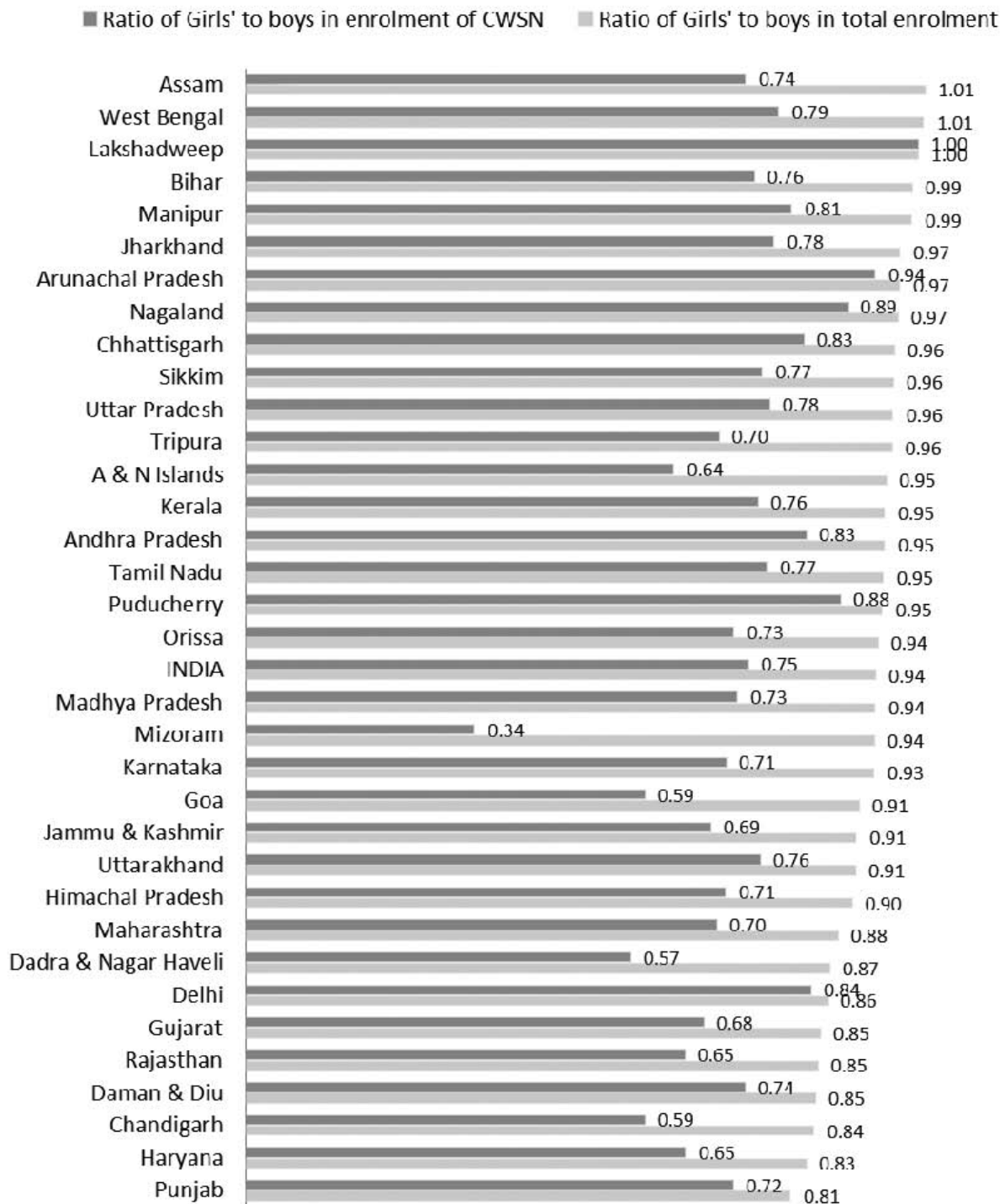
2. The data is also willing us to look at the fact that children with disabilities do not exist in isolation. Apart from stand-alone strategies it is important to look at intersections and also plan for girls with disabilities amongst all girls. Such statistics reflect a lack of strategic intervention to address the barriers in the participation of girls with disabilities in elementary education.

Girls with disabilities face all the biases that other girls do in society. Apart from that they face specific biases on the basis of their disability. The traditional biases within our society against the education of girls often get heightened in the case of girls with disabilities. Families too, may give up earlier in the face of negative attitudes and huge barriers that children with disabilities face within the education system. Lack of physical accessibility, personal assistance and non-functional toilets make it impossible for many families to even think of sending their girls with disabilities to schools. Issues of safety and security that face all girls face some girls with disabilities with great intensity. Girls with disabilities may find it more difficult to protect themselves. Girls communicate differently or those who may have an intellectual impairment become particularly vulnerable.

⁹shared by Dr Ganesh Nigam, Consultant UNICEF

¹⁰shared by Dr Ganesh Nigam, Consultant UNICEF

State wise Difference between Ratio of Girls to Boys and Girls with Disabilities to Boys with Disabilities 2013-14



Source: shared by Dr Ganesh Nigam, Consultant UNICEF

Nisha's Story

Nisha is a 13 year old who lives in Delhi with her parents and five siblings. Her father works as a halwai and mother sits at their shop during the day. They have their own dwelling unit in an urban slum. They have six children: five girls and one son who is married.

Living in an area that her parents feel is not very safe, Nisha is never left alone for a moment. She is never allowed to go alone anywhere.

Nisha is able to understand things. Her parents make it a point to explain the reasons she must not wander out on her own. Once she is told, she is able to understand what is good for her. She does not repeat the act after that.

SCHOOL: Nisha is a student of class 6. Her mother walks her to school in the morning. She likes walking back with her friends, joining in, their chatter. Her mother has told her as well as her friends to ensure that Nisha comes back with them. She is not allowed to walk back alone. The reason for this is the busy road she needs to cross to get home. She does not look left or right and just crosses the road without looking. Being an extremely busy road, this can be very dangerous.

TOILETS: The toilets in the school are not clean. As a result Nisha does not go to school during her menstruation period as she is unable to manage in school.

ATTITUDE OF TEACHERS: Earlier, in primary school, when the school teachers were not aware of Nisha's condition. They would call her 'mad'. They used to tell the other children not to talk to her as she was a bad influence. The teachers used to constantly complain about Nisha to her mother.

When Nisha joined middle school, her parents decided to share the information about her disability and her difficulty to comprehend, with the teachers. This has brought about a change, even though it is a limited change. They no longer call her 'mad'. But despite the fact that Nisha is not able to do everything the other children manage to do in the class, they offer no support. They do not extend even simple things like extra time to complete an assignment. No special attention is given to her by the teachers.

No special educator has been appointed in the school yet. The parents feel that if there was a special educator, she would be able to support Nisha. The special educator would also be able to guide the teachers on how to teach Nisha in class. The teachers have no expectations from Nisha. They feel she is unable to follow what is being taught in class. This creates a vicious circle: 'Having no expectations of her' means that 'there is no motivation for her to do anything'. No demands are made of her. It is almost like ignoring her.

The no detention policy ensures that Nisha moves from class to class without really getting an education. This will go on till she is on class 8. After which it remains to be seen what is in store for her...¹¹



¹¹Interview with mother of Nisha at Govind Puri facilitated by the organization Aarth Astha that works in Govind puri & Lal Kuan. The name of the child has been changed to protect her identity.

ENROLLMENT OF CHILDREN WITH SPECIAL NEEDS /DISABILITIES BY NATURE OF IMPAIRMENT

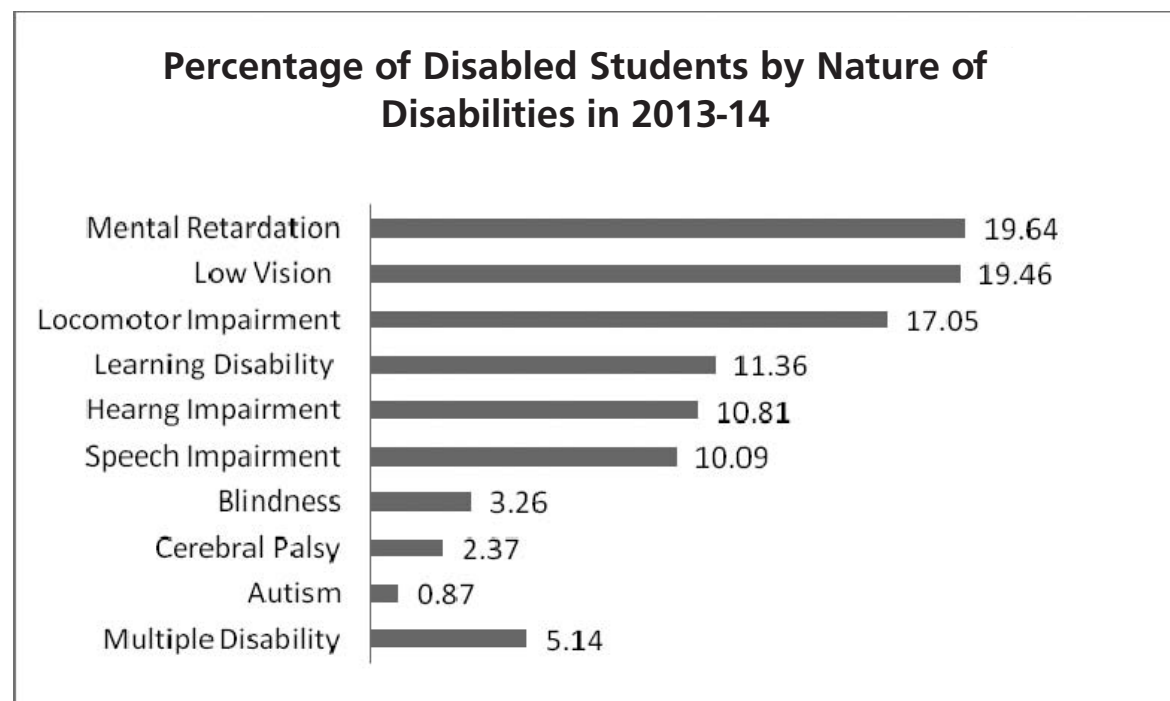
It is important to understand that within the category of children with special needs/disability there is great diversity. While there is cultural, social religious, political, caste, class and other diversities among children with disabilities there are also diversities of impairment.

The statistics show that children with mental retardation, low vision and loco motor disability form some of the largest percentages of children with special needs/disabilities in school in 2013-14. Children with hearing impairment and speech impairment come next. Children with developmental disabilities like cerebral palsy, multiple disability and autism are the smaller groups of children within the school system in 2013-14.

Both children with multiple disability and mental retardation are the largest groups of out of school children amongst children with disabilities with the percentages going up to 44% and 34% respectively.

Field experience shows that the children from any group attending school today are children with less support requirements or those who have been traditionally labeled as 'mild to moderate catalogaries'.

Yet behind all these labels are children with very diverse levels of ability and with different requirements. While labeling maybe important for resourcing in education, the label itself must be given after detailed assessment. At present within the education system it is extremely unclear on what basis we label children and at what point the label starts. These are important questions since the possibility of misinterpretation is large.



Source: UDISE 2013-14, ANALYTICAL TABLES 3.9

Learning disability and low vision are extremely large categories. These are also categories that lend themselves to a lot of misinterpretation if not assessed properly. Discussions with teachers and SSA officials show that even children who require spectacles are often put under the category of low vision. It is also easy to label a child who is not reading well as learning disabled!

Specialists from the National Association for the Blind, Delhi stress the fact that Low vision is not easy to diagnose. It requires proper detailed assessment involving both clinical and functional assessment by trained professionals. In India there is paucity of trained professionals to conduct a detailed assessment.

Children labeled as having 'Low Vision' are an extremely heterogeneous group in their needs and the nature of support required. While for some children having a text in large print may work, it may not suffice for other children. Some children with Low vision may learn Braille very easily and function well with it, while others may find it difficult to do so. Some children start using DAISY book readers early in life and are comfortable using them. Some children are introduced to computers early and are able to function independently by increasing the font size.

Learning disabilities are conditions that affect how a person learns to read, write, speak and /or do math. They are caused by differences in brain structure and affect the way a person's brain processes information. A learning disability is not a result of intellectual disability. Neither is it caused by vision or hearing impairment. Learning disabilities is an umbrella term which included Dyslexia, Dysgraphia and Dyscalculia.

NEERA TALKING ABOUT HER DAUGHTER...

Neera's daughter is ten years old. She has cerebral palsy, mild intellectual disability and epilepsy.

She shared that at the time of admission parents had to sign a letter saying that if their child falls and hurts herself, the responsibility lies entirely with the parents and the school will not be held liable. The parents requested the principal to arrange a special chair for their daughter to sit in class, but nothing was done about it.

When Neera's daughter was granted admission, Neera was told to come and sit with her in class. She did that for some time. But despite her presence in the class, there was no work that was done with her child. No attention was given to her. It seemed as if it was enough to just allow her to sit in class.

Going to school and being there every day was something Neera could not manage for very long. Her other duties at home suffered. She spoke with the teacher and principal and suggested that since her older daughter was in the same school, she could come any time there was a need. This however was not acceptable to them and they insisted that Neera sit in class with her daughter.

Due to this and the fact that her daughter was not learning anything, schooling was discontinued.¹²



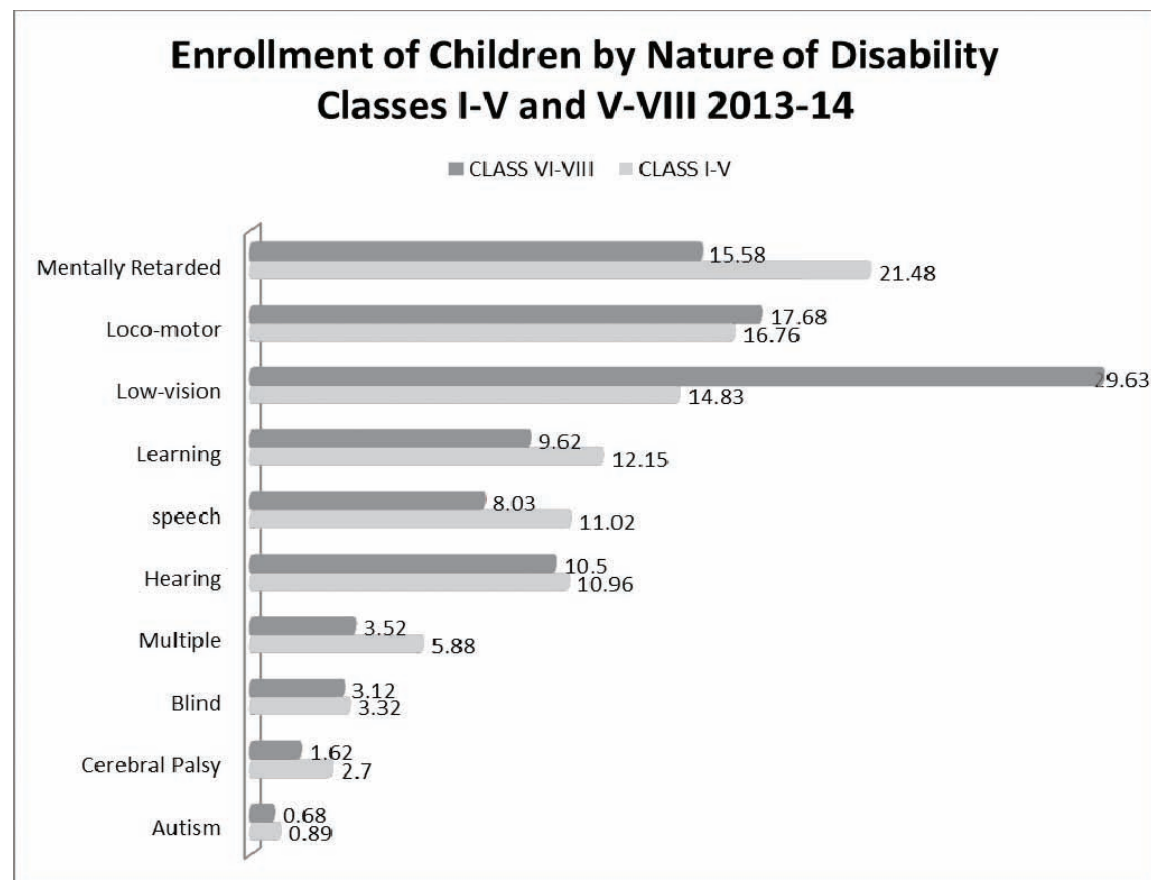
¹²As told by a mother of Neera and facilitated by the organization Carenidhi that works in Seelampur and supports children with disabilities

The word 'Dyslexia' means 'Difficulty with words or languages.'

Dysgraphia: Children with dysgraphia have difficulties with their handwriting. They may have difficulties in developing an appropriate grip, forming letters, writing within a defined space and writing down their thoughts or expressing themselves on paper.

Dyscalculia: Children with this math learning disability may have difficulty understanding arithmetic concepts and doing such tasks as addition, multiplication and measuring.

Learning disability is a category that is at present not recognized by the law. Therefore at present no affirmative action or strategies or supports are available to this child within the education system. The question to be asked urgently is what is to be done for this child once she is labeled?



Source: UDISE 2013-14, Analytical Tables 3.9

TRANSITION FROM ONE LEVEL OF EDUCATION TO ANOTHER

For some children the move from one level of education to another happens without a thought. For many others it is clearly a challenge. The transition from one level of education to another is an indicator of the quality of education, its relevance for children and its inclusiveness. For children belonging to communities which face many barriers this challenge gets tougher and large numbers fall through the cracks after every stage of education. In

India, we see this fall for all children receiving education in government schools. For example, amongst all the social categories it is the child belonging to the scheduled tribes who fall through the crack the most despite many years of specific planning and investment. As they go from one stage to another they fall out of the system in big groups.

Students from the Scheduled Tribes

Primary	11.09%
Upper primary	9.73%
Secondary	8.58%
Higher Secondary	6.25%

Source: UDISE Table 3.7 percentage of ST to total enrollment 2013-14

Students with Special Needs/Disabilities

Primary	1.30%
Upper Primary	1.18%
Secondary	0.61%
Higher Secondary	0.27%

Source: UDISE: Table 3.9 Percentage of children with special needs to total enrollment; 2013-14

Dramatic and even sharper is the fall for children with special needs/disabilities. Amongst all the data for the marginalized it is children with disabilities who seem to be falling in large numbers through the net as they reach higher classes. In 2013-14 the fall in the percentage of enrollment of children with disabilities between the elementary and the secondary stage is sharp and more than half (50 percent). From secondary to higher secondary it seems very few children with disabilities survive within the system. The percentage enrollment of children with disabilities falls from 0.61% to 0.27% in the secondary to higher secondary years. Nearly three fourths of children with special needs/disabilities fall through the cracks here.

The state that stands out sharply in this regard is Haryana, with the lowest enrollment levels to begin with. The percentage of enrollment of children with disabilities in Haryana is as low as 0.14 at primary level, 0.12 upper primary levels, 0.07 at secondary and 0.04 at higher secondary levels.¹³

The silver lining in this data is that the fall from primary to upper primary for both sets of children is not as dramatic as the fall from upper primary to secondary and secondary to higher secondary. Perhaps the no rejection and no detention policy of the RTE are part of the answer.

The implications for inclusive education are very clear here. At present clearly the education system is pushing out the child with disabilities rather than changing to accommodate the child. The very basis of inclusive education lies in the fact that the education system must change to accommodate diversity. Within this it must focus on the individual child and see

¹³UDISE 2013-14 table 3.9

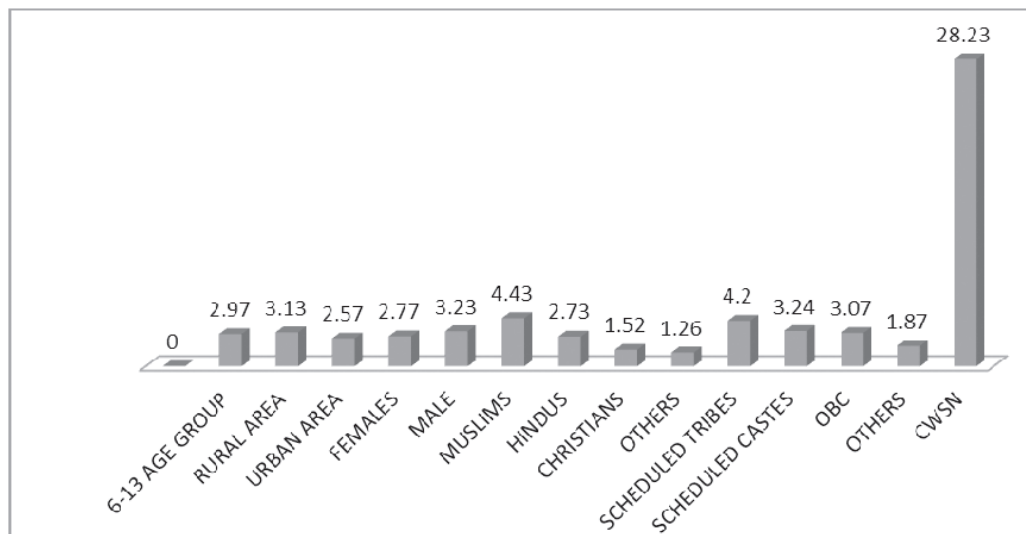


IKRA's Story...

Ikra joined the local MCD School in class 1 and is now in class 3. Before granting admission, her parents were 'advised' by the school to send her to a special school. Now they do not say that. Her parents are happy that she is in school but they are sad that she still does not know how to read or write. They are also angry that Ikra continues to get teased in school and is called names. This makes her very angry too.¹⁴

what kind of accommodation and support is required and aim to fulfill that. While in India, today more and more children are coming into the system the overwhelming response from the ground is that no changes are being made for this child either at the level of the classroom teaching or at providing a reasonable accommodation and a relevant education for all children who are marginalized including the child with special needs/disabilities.

OUT OF SCHOOL CHILDREN WITH SPECIAL NEEDS/DISABILITY



Source: National Sample Survey of Estimation of Out-of-School Children in the Age 6-13 in India¹⁵

Among all the different groups of children where large numbers are out of school, children with disabilities stand out. While among the social categories the largest percentages of out of school children are Muslims (4.43%) followed by Scheduled tribes (4.02%) the percentage of out of school children with special needs/disability stands at 28.23%.

At a national level "out of an estimated 20.41 crore children in the age group of 6-13 years, an estimated 60.64 lakh children are out of school." "An estimated 21.39 lakh children (1.05%) in the age group of 6-13 years have been identified as Children with Special Needs (CWSN). Among the CWSN aged 6-13 years, 5.94 lakh children are out of school."¹⁵

¹⁴As told by a mother of Ikra and facilitated by the organization Carenidhi that works in Seelampur and supports children with disabilities

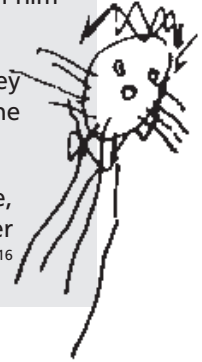
¹⁵National Sample Survey of Estimation of Out of School Children in the Age 6-13 in India, 2014, pg 10 (draft report)

PIYUSH's Story...

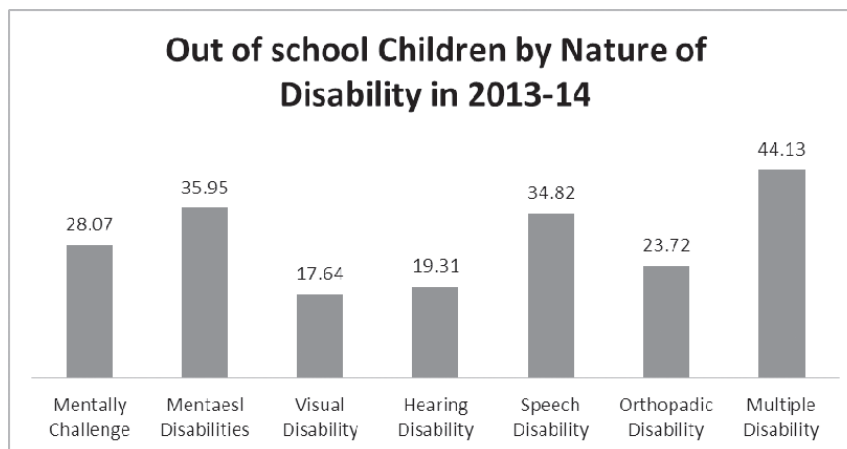
Piyush joined a government school in class 1 and is now in class 3. He has cerebral palsy and mild intellectual disability. Piyush's parents were asked to bring him twice a week and stay with him in class.

The teachers tell the parents that he is unable to sit and is not learning either. They say they should withdraw him from this school and admit him in a special school. They say that the school does not have special educator.

The parents have not done so. They feel that even though he is not learning anything there, Piyush should continue going to school. This gives a routine and ensures that he is with other children his age. The learning part will be handled by the private tutor who teaches Piyush.¹⁶



Compared to 60 lakh out of school children, 5 lakh children with disabilities should seem an easy target to enroll. And yet successive sample surveys have declared children with disabilities as the largest group of out of school children.



Source: National Survey of Estimation of Out of School Children in the Age 6-13 in India, 2014

Among the five lakh children with disabilities, 44.13% are children with multiple disability, 35.97 are children with mental disability and 34.82 are children with speech disability.

The implication for inclusive education is once again clear. Although there is growing enrollment of children with special needs/disabilities in elementary education, there is little groundswell in demand for education for children with disabilities from communities or families. Children with developmental and multiple disabilities are the least served by the education system. Many families, particularly in rural areas, still believe that their child does not have the same right to education as other children have. Communities do not believe that children with disabilities can study in the same school as other children and this is reflected in attitudes of school functionaries and teachers.

¹⁶As told by a mother of Piyush and facilitated by the organization Carenidhi that works in Seelampur and supports children with disabilities

Children with disabilities also remain out of school because of the lack of services such as transportation to and from school. Although the Rules of the RTE Act promise transport for children with special needs and most states make this commitment (some strongly and some not so strongly) in their state rules, very few states have actually put these rules into operation.

Both children with mental disability as well as children with multiple disabilities challenge the system in their own ways. Although not a rule, children with multiple disabilities are likely to require some degree of care taking and some individual support which the system at present does not cater for. The traditional curriculum and ways of teaching will not work for the child with mental disability. And although today we are seeing this as a truth for all children it is children with mental disability who exemplify the need for change more obviously than others.

Percentage of Out Of School Children and Children with Special Needs/Disability by Zones

Among zones, the East zone Reports the highest percentage of out of school children (4.02%), closely followed by the central zone (3.90%). North zone, North East zone, and West zone have 3.30%, 2.52%, and 1.17% out of school children, respectively. With 0.97%, South zone reports the lowest percentage of out of school children.

Children with Special Needs/Disability

Amongst children with special needs/disabilities the East zone tops the list in terms of numbers of out of school children followed by the Central zone (180396), Northern Zone (96,582) South (84,510), West (28,660) Northeast (18,586).

However, if we look at percentages of out of school children with disabilities it is the Central zone (37.99%) North east Zone (36.27%), followed by the North (35.35%) East (25.06%) South (23.51%), West (13.30%).

A deeper look shows that in the Central zone, all the states have a high percentage of out of school children with disabilities. Chhattisgarh (46%), Madhya Pradesh (23.61%), Uttar Pradesh (30.49%) and Uttarakhand with (40.95%)

In the North East, Mizoram alone has 80% percent of its children with disabilities out of school with Tripura and Assam at a high of 39.39% and 31.18% respectively.

Percentage of Out of School Children and Children with Disabilities by State

State wise, Odisha reports the highest percentage of out of school children in India at 6.10%, followed by Uttarakhand at 5.07%, and Rajasthan at 5.02%. Six more States, Bihar (4.95%), UP (3.90%), MP (3.78%), Chhattisgarh (3.75%), Lakshadweep (3.67%), and NCT of Delhi (3.15%) have a higher proportion of children out of school, than the national average (2.97%)



Ravisha's story...

Ravisha lives in an urban-slum in Delhi with her mother and older brother. Her father passed away recently. They live in rented premises. Ravisha's mother and brother work to earn a living. With both of them working, Ravisha is left alone at home. She locks herself in the room. The mother has established good connect with her neighbours and they are supportive of the family. They look after Ravisha whenever needed.

IN SCHOOL: Ravisha goes to school and is now in Class 3. She started school late because they did not have the documents that were needed for admission. But her parents ran around and got the documents and ensured that their daughter went to school.

Ravisha is a good student. She is always eager to learn and is doing very well in her studies.

DIFFICULTIES IN GETTING TO SCHOOL The mother is motivated and wants her daughter to study. The school is a short distance away but there are no transport facilities extended by the school. Ravisha's mother has been helped by the NGO To get a wheelchair for Ravisha. Though it is difficult to navigate through the traffic and cross the road, Ravisha's mother takes her to school in the wheelchair every morning.

DIFFICULTIES IN ACCESSING TOILETTING FACILITIES

ISSUES OF SAFETY AND SECURITY:

In school, the main challenge arises when Ravisha needs to go to the toilet. The mother worries about this as the path from the classroom to the toilet is uneven. Though Ravisha's friends and at times her teacher take her to the toilet, it is not easy to negotiate that path. There have been times when the wheelchair has toppled over and Ravisha has fallen down and hurt herself. It is also difficult for her classmates to help her back onto the wheelchair when this happens, adding to her woes.

That is the reason Ravisha's mother worries about her safety and security in school.

Recently, Ravisha got bitten by a monkey in school. While the other children simply ran away, Ravisha was left stranded and strapped in her wheelchair...

Besides school, Ravisha also goes to the NGO that works with children with disabilities. She goes there once a week for therapy. She also brushes up on her social and basic life skills there. The NGO feels that she has come a long way...she is learning and is becoming more and more confident each day...¹⁷

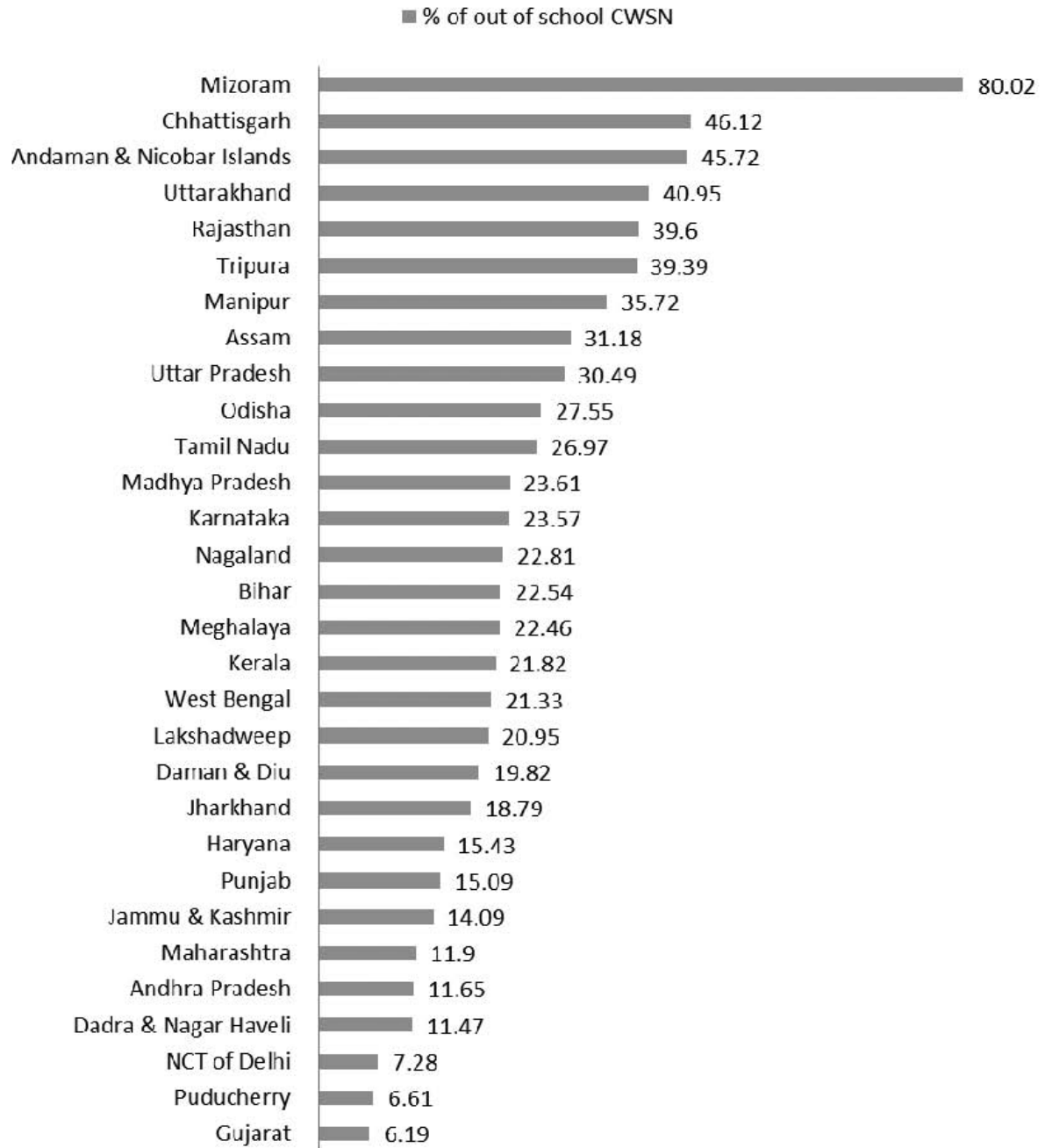
Children with Special Needs/Disability

In the area of children with special needs/disabilities some of the states with the highest percentages of out of school children are Mizoram (80%), Chattisgarh (46.12), Andaman Nicobar (45.72%), Uttarakhand (40.95), Rajasthan (39.60), Tripura (39.39%), Uttar Pradesh (30.49%), Assam (31.18%)

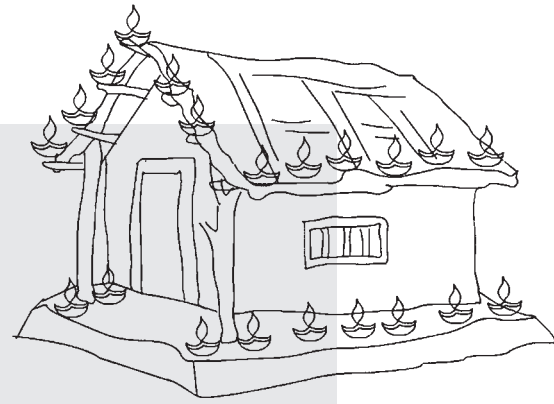
Although the study has given a gender perspective to all the different categories that it has presented for children with disabilities we get no idea of gender balance in the out of school children with disabilities. What we do have is an idea of the different impairment groups that the study has looked at namely mental disability, visual disability, hearing disability, speech disability, orthopedic disability, multiple disabilities.

¹⁷Interview with mother of Ravisha at Lal Kuan facilitated by the organization Aarth Astha that works in Govind puri & Lal Kuan. The name of the child has been changed to protect her identity

Percentage of Out of School Children with Special Needs among children aged 6-13 years



Source - National Sample Survey of Estimation of Out-of-School Children in the Age 6-13 in India"
Table C10: Percentage of Out of School Children with Special Needs among children aged 6-13 years – 2014 (All: Rural + Urban)



Pari's Story.....

Pari is a bright, 9 year old child with Cerebral Palsy along with speech difficulties. She lives in Delhi with her parents. She moves within the house by crawling on the floor.

ABOUT PARI'S FAMILY

The family moved from their village in Bihar to Delhi in search of better employment opportunities as well as better services for Pari. Pari's father works as a gardener and her mother works as a household help in nearby houses. They are barely able to manage meeting their expenses. To add to it, Pari's father also has a disability. He is gradually losing strength in his limbs. While he has no strength in his left hand, even his right hand is gradually losing strength. He cannot pick up weights with his hand and now even requires support for daily, routine chores. This is a cause of huge concern. It also adds to the pressure on Pari's mother who besides earning a living has to support both her husband as well as her daughter. She is exhausted by the end of each day, but has to start all over again the next morning...

PRE-CONDITION TO ADMISSION: With the support of an NGO, Pari's parents approached the government school for admission. The school authorities while not denying admission told the parents that the mother would need to accompany Pari and sit in class for the entire duration. She tried to explain to them that their financial situation did not afford her the luxury of not working, but they were not moved.

LOCKED UP AND LEFT ALONE:

The parents left with no choice, had to take the painful decision of leaving Pari at home. Every morning before leaving for work, her parents lock her in the house. They worry all day about her and are concerned about her safety and security. They feel that a young girl with disability will always be more vulnerable.

ANGER AND FRUSTRATION: Pari hates being left alone in the house. All locked up, in their one room dwelling, with nothing to do makes her feel rejected and unhappy. To express her anger and frustration, she sometimes threatens to kill herself.¹⁸

¹⁸Interview with mother of Pari at Govind Puri facilitated by the organization Aarth Astha that works in Govind puri & Lal Kuan. The name of the child has been changed to protect her identity

Beyond Data: Experiences of Children with Disabilities in Education

Children with disabilities do not live in isolation. Inclusion in education is not just about dealing with impairments but with children who are part of a cultural milieu. Therefore everything that happens in the society the education system affects children with disabilities. Just like the recent merger and closure of school in Rajasthan.

RAJASTHAN GOVERNMENT'S POLICY ON SCHOOL MERGER AND CLOSURE:

The Rajasthan government issued an order in 2014 to merge and close schools. Many schools across the state were merged into nearby schools. This order was to impact schools that did not have very many students. Some schools that were running nearby were merged- so a school that was running from a space that did not have appropriate infrastructure and facilities was shifted to one with better infrastructure. Some primary schools were merged along with senior schools. The aim was to consolidate resources - financial, human as well as land.

The move came into effect almost overnight. "We went to school and we were told that now our school had merged into the big school near the main road", the children shared.

Mid-session, without any information to stakeholders, or consultations with those directly impacted, this decision led to a large number of children dropping-out from schools. Wide-spread protests and drop-outs meant that the some schools were de-merged. It remains to be seen whether after the de-merger of these schools, all the children come back to school.

A Report on Merger of Schools done by Bharat Gyan Vigyan Samiti¹, Rajasthan, studied the impact of the merger on children. In a questionnaire based study, spread over 102 schools in 5 Districts of Rajasthan, they identified factors that have led to the children dropping out of school. Some of these factors are:

- Some children dropped out because the change meant that the school moved further away, for some, as far as 4 kms. Very young children could no longer walk that distance to school.
- For others it was the social dynamics that came into play. Differences and conflict between different communities, caste or class meant they were not treated well and could not bear the discriminatory attitude of both the children and the teachers.
- For younger children whose primary schools were merged into senior schools, the move resulted in increased incidence of bullying and teasing.
- Girls schools merged with co-educational schools leading to girls dropping-out. Rajasthan ranks low as far as education of girls is concerned. With this one stroke all the effort over

¹Report : "Scheme of Merger of Schools : A Conscious Denial of Education to Children of Poor and Vulnerable Communities"
Bharat Gyan Vigyan Samiti, Rajasthan

the years that had gone in convincing the families, including some who had maintained conservative views on the education of their girls, has been undone.

With an increase in school hours in some schools, many older children, who used to help their families, before or after school and contribute to the family income, were unable to do so. They have been left with no option but to leave school.

Besides the obvious consequence of being deprived of education, merger of schools has also deprived children of other things, like the mid day meal. Many children, who used to go to schools that have been merged, came from some of the most marginalized sections of society. The mid-day meal they were getting in school was the first meal of the day and a means of ensuring adequate nutrition.

Besides factors like caste, gender, community, distance, timing, and the medium of instruction, there are also many instances where multiple factors came into play, leading to children discontinuing their education.

Children with Disabilities: The Impact of School Merger

The merger affected all children and it also greatly impacted children with disabilities. Children with disabilities who form an almost invisible minority of the total number of children in schools, also dropped out. No or analysis was conducted by official agencies on the impact of this move on children with disabilities.



NEEMA'S Story²

Neema, a ten year old is up early. She gets after her mother to help her get ready. She wants to go to school.

Her mother does not know what to tell Neema.

"DO NOT COME EVERYDAY" Neema has intellectual disability. The school has told her mother not to send her every day because they do not have any facility for children 'like her'.

"I WANT TO GO TO SCHOOL" When we visit Neema, she is sitting near the door, ready and raring to go. Her mother tells us that she has been sitting there since morning and asking that she be taken to school. "How do I tell her the school has asked me not to bring her every day?" she asks

Neema used to go to her old school every day. She used to walk to school with her friends and learn and play with them. That was her window of opportunity to be with other children and connect with her environment and world at large. It was a small school, run in the neighbourhood. Now, due to the merger and closure of schools in Rajasthan, her school has been merged into a secondary school, which is more formal with the necessary infrastructure and facilities.

NO SUPPORT SYSTEMS BESIDES THE SPECIAL EDUCATOR: However a more formal school has also meant that the small things that facilitated Neema's inclusion have been lost in transit.

She can only go to school once or twice a week- the days when the resource teacher comes there. She is allowed to sit in the class with other children but she is taught by the special educator. There is an educational Plan drawn up for her. Whatever he decides, is what she learns.

²Meeting with Neema and her Family: Facilitated by Prayas, Jaipur

In the next street, we meet Aaina and her mother who has a similar story to narrate



AAINA's Story³

It is 11 am and Aaina is playing on her own at home, while her mother cooks lunch. All the other children around are in school.

Aaina is an 11 year old girl who has Cerebral Palsy. She also has Intellectual disability and vision impairment. She has stopped going to school.

Her mother used to take her to a government school every morning. She went there for many years.

DISTANCE Now her school has been merged and moved some distance away. It is not possible for her mother to take her and bring her back. Being a more formal set up, her parents are hesitant to send her there.

Earlier Aaina's mother used to walk her to school. Even though the school did not have a toilet, being in the neighbourhood, Aaina could easily come home whenever she needed to go to the toilet. This was important for Aaina since she finds it difficult to use the toilet on her own.

LINK WITH COMMUNITY AND FEELING SAFE There were fewer children in the school and since they all belonged to the same neighbourhood, all of them knew each other. Aaina was comfortable with them and her parents also felt comfortable enough to ask the children to accompany Aaina back from school whenever they were busy. This was an added support.

SUPPORT OF SPECIAL EDUCATOR AND TEACHER Twice or thrice a week, a special educator from an NGO used to come to school. The special educator was able to work both with the children as well as the teachers. He used to share teaching strategies and plans with the teacher to support them to work with the children in class, the days he was not there. That arrangement worked well.

Aaina and the other children used to go to school every day and they were happy with the routine that they followed.

Now with the school having moved and merged with a school nearby things have changed for Aaina and many other children from her neighbourhood.

"COME ONLY WHEN THE SPECIAL EDUCATOR COMES" She is not happy going to school even on the two days that the gates of the school are open for her. The new school only allows her to come on the two days that the resource teacher comes. Aaina is taught only by the resource teacher. The class teacher says she cannot teach her as she does not know how to teach her.

TEASED The older children tease and bully Aaina in school. Aaina is caught in a bind. She wants to go to school and be with other children and learn with them; but does not feel very welcome there...

The world has been limited further for Neema and Aaina. Their five days a week of being with others and interacting with children their age has been cut down to two days a week.

³Meeting with Aaina and her Family : Facilitated by Prayas, Jaipur

The experiences of Aaina and Neema and their families may help us to begin to understand this impact. They are two students from a school that has been merged with another bigger school some distance away. Along with their parents, they tell us about themselves, how happy they were going to their old school and how the new school has changed their lives.

PERSPECTIVE OF THE PARENTS

The families shared that the closure and merger took place overnight. The people were not even informed, leave alone consulted about this. They took their children to school in the morning as usual and that is when they learnt that the school had moved to the 'bigger' school nearby. There was no information and thus no time to prepare the children for the change. For some children with disabilities, a change is not something that they take to very quickly or easily.

When the parents took their children there, they saw:

- It was a bigger school, with a proper building, toilets and drinking water facilities. And there were rules that governed it too! There was even a guard at the gate who did not allow entry beyond the gates. Parents had to leave their child there and could not accompany them to the classroom. This was unnerving for most of them, who were comfortable with the informal system at the earlier school. They did not even know the teachers there and were worried about their children's safety.
- The teachers were new and did not know the children. With more than 40 children in a class, children like Aaina felt lost there. The personal connect and interaction with the teacher was lost.
- The school was from nursery to class 12 and thus there were many older children there now. Children with disabilities were teased, bullied and even hit by the older children, raising concerns over safety and security within the school premises.
- The school said that they were not adequately equipped to deal with the special needs of the children. The children with disabilities were restricted to attending school only two days a week, the days that the resource teacher from the local NGO came there. Thus, while physically present in class, their learning environment and opportunities were limited to the special educator.

Now, the other five days that Aaina and other children like her, are at home, they spend their day playing inside. They miss their old school. Both Aaina and Neema say that if the school was shifted back to the original space, they would be very happy. Even though it functioned without even basic facilities and was extremely run-down, the teachers made their children feel wanted and made an effort to teach them. They are hoping that it will start once again.

IMPACT ON INCLUSION:

Inclusive education is a process and there are a range of factors that affect inclusion. Despite years of policy making and commitments, children with disabilities are at a very nascent stage of inclusion in education. Experience shows that they continue to struggle with rejection and discrimination both within and outside the system. In this process, moves for

change that do not consider the process can have drastic fallouts. Some of its first victims will be children with disabilities.

In the Rajasthan experience, children with disabilities and their families have to start the struggle again. Those who had been going to schools where teachers had worked out systems and strategies to include them in class are now lost. The few who are going to the new school are once again faced with a situation where the teachers in the new school do not know what to do. They leave the education of children with disabilities to the special educators.

For families of these children too, the journey starts again. They are faced with an unfamiliar school, teachers and school system. They are also faced with an attitudinal barrier, as many schools that have never worked with children with disabilities, are hesitant to take them in. They once again need re-assurance that their child is safe and secure in the new school, which for most of them is the primary concern.

In our discussions with Former Chairperson SCPCR, Rajasthan and the Founder Director, Umang, Jaipur, Dr Deepak Kalra's shared that during her inspection of around 200 schools, she did not see many children with disabilities. They are not visible. She said that, "there is still a hesitation to handle children with disabilities by people in the mainstream education system."

Mr Vishwamber, Member of the SCPCR, Rajasthan also echoed the same. He too has not seen too many children in schools. He also pointed out that there was not even a single complaint received by the SCPCR Rajasthan, by or on behalf of a child with disability.

A look at the data on enrollment and out of school children shed some light on the situation of children with disabilities in Rajasthan. It is a state where the enrollment levels have shown a downward trend. The percentage of enrollment of children with disabilities in Rajasthan has declined from 0.98 in 2009-10 to 0.93 in 2013-14.⁴

According to 2013-14 figures, the percentage of out-of-school children with special needs among the 6-13 year age group, in Rajasthan stands at 39.6%.⁵

The difference in the ratio between girls and boys in enrollment points out that there are lesser number of girls in the schools in Rajasthan. The situation of girls with disabilities remains worse. While the ratio of girls to boys in total enrollment is 0.85%; the ratio of girls to boys in enrollment among children with special needs/disabilities is 0.65%.⁶

This along with the experiences of children and families reflect the fact that not many children are being fully assimilated and accepted in the system. It will now be important to look closely at situation of children with disabilities who have been affected by the move to merge over 17,000 schools in the state and take corrective action, so that more children do not drop out.

⁴Source: DISE Analytical Tables No. 3.10, 2009-10 and DISE Analytical Tables No. 3.12, 2013-14

⁵Source: Data shared by Dr Ganesh Nigam, Consultant UNICEF

⁶Source: Data shared by Dr Ganesh Nigam, Consultant UNICEF

DELHI: THE CITY OF MIGRANTS

Migration and its impact:

Delhi is a city that, besides sharing its borders with many states, also attracts people in search of a better life and employment opportunities.

A study on 'Migration in Delhi & NCR'⁷ states, 'Delhi, which is the third largest metropolis of the country, has been experiencing high growth rate during the last few decades. The population growth rate of Delhi during the last decade (1991-2001) was 47.02 percent. The unprecedented growth rate and population influx to Delhi is mainly due to high migration into the city from other states of the country.

The report identified Uttar Pradesh, Uttrakhand and Bihar as the states from where the largest number of people migrate to Delhi. People also migrate to Delhi from states like Rajasthan, Punjab and Haryana, though recent trends indicate a marginal decline in these numbers.

Amongst the lakhs of families that migrate to cities like Delhi are families of children with disabilities. Disability of a child or family member is often a reason for families to migrate, hoping to find rehabilitation and better opportunity for this child in the city.

For the purpose of this report, meetings were held with various stakeholders in Delhi. Interviews were conducted with children and their parents, many of whom have also migrated to Delhi, to gain an insight into their experiences and the challenges that confront them. Meetings were also held with professionals working in the field to get a sense of the situation on the ground and to understand where the need for support and systems lie.

The meetings with children and their families were held in different parts of Delhi, including Govindpuri, Lalkuan, Seemapuri, Seelampur, Trilokpuri. These were facilitated by organizations like AARTH-ASTHA, JOSH, Pardashita, Carenidhi and National Association for the Blind, in Delhi.

Disability cuts across all socio-economic groups, but its link with poverty is undeniable. The urban villages and slums, where most of these organizations work, see large number of people who have migrated from U.P, Bihar, Bengal, Rajasthan, Orissa, Madhya Pradesh and even refugees from Bangladesh. In these areas, conditions of living are extremely poor, with high levels of pollution and a lack of facilities like water and sanitation. Educational levels too are low.

The experiences of children with disabilities and families we met there brought up many issues and the challenges they face. Some of the factors that ran through many of their stories are highlighted in connection with the impact it has on education of children with disabilities. One such factor is that many families that have children with disability have migrated to Delhi.

In our discussions with professionals from the National Association or the Blind, New Delhi, they pointed out that a lack of adequate and appropriate services and trained professionals

⁷"Study of Counter Magnet Areas to Delhi and NCR" Conducted by The National Capital Region Planning Board, Ministry of Urban Development, Government of India Source: www.ncrpb.nic.in

across the country, prompt a lot of children to come to them from other states. They have had innumerable families that have shifted to Delhi from Bihar, UP and other states to be able to access better facilities for their children with vision impairment. Many families, who are unable to shift, seek admission to the NAB Hostel, which unfortunately can only cater to the needs of a limited number.

Many families we met, like those of Bina and Ravisha, have moved to Delhi from their villages, in hope of a better future. They search for better employment opportunities for themselves; and better educational and health care services for their children, especially those with disabilities. With no documents to establish their identity and proof of residence, they face enormous challenges in accessing the very things that brought them to Delhi. Lack of documents and Aadhar Cards lead to further difficulties in getting Disability Certificates, in getting admission into school and accessing the various schemes and facilities extended by the government.

Added to this is children who migrate along with their families sometimes also face language difficulties both within schools and outside. The language, dialect or medium of instruction in school, being different can pose some challenges, as in the case of Rajasthan where a change in medium of instruction led to children dropping-out.



BINA'S Story⁸

ABOUT BINA AND HER FAMILY: Bina is a young girl of eight who lives in Delhi. She goes to school and is accompanied by her mother. She has multiple disabilities. She has Cerebral Palsy [quadriplegia] along with Intellectual disability, speech disability and vision impairment. Bina's father works in a factory while her mother looks after the home and her family.

MOVING TO DELHI: Bina's family moved to Delhi from a village in Uttar Pradesh. The two main reasons behind moving to Delhi were to seek a better future for Bina and for her father to seek better employment opportunities.

ATTITUDE OF THE FAMILY The reason that Bina's parents shifted to Delhi in a hurry was also the negative attitude of Bina's paternal grandmother and other relatives in their village in UP, who thought of her as a 'burden' and did not want her to live. Bina's parents wanted to hear none of this. They decided to move to Delhi where they felt that they would be able to access better services and facilities for Bina. They continue to live on rent at Bina's maternal grandmother's house.

STRUGGLE TO FIND THEIR FEET AND GET THE NECESSARY DOCUMENTS: After a struggle, Bina's father found a job. It took five years and a fair bit of harassment in getting a ration card and other documents like an Aadhar card. Getting an Aadhar card for Bina posed an even bigger challenge. They said it is not possible to make it for her because of her disability. Bina finally got it due to her mother's relentless effort and the support of an NGO.

SCHOOL: When Bina was 6 years old, she was denied admission in school on the basis of disability. After a lot of struggle and protest by Bina's mother, the school authorities finally agreed. This was however on the condition 'only if her mother or some member of the family stayed with Bina during the school hours'. Bina's mother had no choice but to agree.

It was only after a special educator joined the school, that Bina's mother was told that she could stop coming. Bina was then asked to come when the special educator was there.

⁸Meeting with Bina and her Family : Facilitated By AARTH-ASTHA, New Delhi

ISSUES OF SAFETY AND SECURITY: One of the major concerns of all parents of children with disabilities is safety and security of their children. This is more heightened when they have girls with disabilities.

Like the experiences of Ravisha and Pari's reflect, families like theirs who have moved and live far from their own relatives and friends, lack family support and the support systems they would have had in their villages. Ravisha and Pari have to be locked in their homes by their mothers to ensure their safety. With their parents out at work, they are all alone at home. Even parents, whose children are in school, constantly worry about their child's safety.

Safety of children, especially of those with multiple disabilities, becomes a huge cause for concern and worry. Recently, Ravisha got bitten by a monkey in school. While the other children simply ran away, Ravisha was left stranded alone in her wheelchair... There was no one there to move her away and ensure her safety.

RAVISHA's Story⁹

Ravisha is a 9 year old with Cerebral Palsy. Ravisha's parents moved to Delhi from Uttar Pradesh, five years ago, when they heard about the existence of organizations for children with disabilities.

In Delhi the parents learnt more about her condition and have been associated with an NGO. Ravisha has been through corrective surgery and with regular therapy, is able to walk using a rollator. 'All this would not have been possible in her village', says her mother.

Ravisha lives in rented premises, in an urban-village in Delhi with her mother and older brother. Her father passed away recently. With Ravisha's mother and brother at work, she is left alone at home, after she comes back from school or on days there is no school. She locks herself in the room.

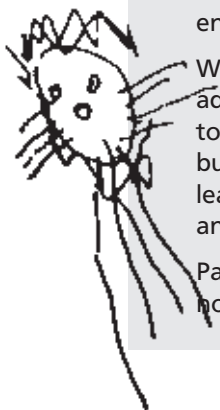


PARI's Story¹⁰

Pari is a bright, 9 year old girl with Cerebral Palsy and speech difficulties. Pari's father also has a disability. Besides supporting them, Pari's mother has to work too. She is exhausted by the end of each day, but has to start all over again the next morning...

When Pari's parents approached the government school for admission, they did not deny admission but told the mother that she would need to accompany Pari and sit in class. She tried to explain to them that their financial situation did not afford her the luxury of not working, but they were not moved. The parents left with no choice, had to take the painful decision of leaving Pari at home. They lock her in the house but still they worry all day about her safety and security. They feel that a young girl with disability will always be more vulnerable.

Pari hates being left alone in the house. All locked up, in their one room dwelling, with nothing to do makes her feel rejected and unhappy.



⁹Meeting with Ravisha and her Family : Facilitated By AARTH-ASTHA, New Delhi

¹⁰Meeting with Pari and her Family : Facilitated By AARTH-ASTHA, New Delhi

GETTING INTO SCHOOL

SCHOOLS ARE STILL HESITANT TO TAKE IN CHILDREN WITH DISABILITIES:

With the coming of the RTE Act, schools nowadays do not refuse admission. However from what the parents narrated, schools do try and dissuade them from sending their children there.

- They tell them that they should send their child to a special school. The special schools have the facilities and that would benefit their child.
- They tell them that they do not have special educators or any other support systems available in school and hence are not equipped to work with children with disabilities.
- Impose pre-conditions, if parents still insist on getting admission



PAVAN's Story¹¹

Pavan joined a government school in class 1 and is now in class 3. He has Cerebral Palsy and mild Intellectual Disability. Pavan's parents were asked to bring him twice a week and stay with him in class.

The teachers tell the parents that he is unable to sit and is not learning either. They tell the parents that they should withdraw him from this school and admit him in a special school. They say that the school does not have any special educator.

The parents have not done so. They feel that even though he is not learning anything there, Pavan should continue going to school. It gives a routine and ensures that he is with other children his age. They feel his education can be handled by the private tutor who teaches Pavan.

IMPOSING PRE-CONDITIONS TO ADMISSION And if the parents still insist on sending their child there, they tell them that the mother should accompany the child and sit in the class. This is usually done for children with Multiple disability and those with some degree of Intellectual disability.

Left with little choice some mothers sit with their child in class all day, but not all can. While Bina's mother was able to be with her child in class, Pari's mother wasn't. Hence, Pari could not continue in school nor could Neera's daughter, who also had to discontinue because her mother had to work. She says, "Both my daughter and I had no choice but to stop going to school."

There are instances where parents have also been made to sign letters drafted by the school authorities themselves absolving the school of all responsibility in the eventuality that any harm comes to the child.

Neera, mother of a ten years old girl with cerebral palsy, mild intellectual disability and epilepsy says, "At the time of admission, my husband and I were told to sign a letter saying that if our daughter falls and hurts herself, the responsibility lies entirely with us and the school will not be held liable."

¹¹Meeting with Pavan and Family : Facilitated By Carenidhi, New Delhi

“Come On The Days The Special Educator Comes”

Among the families who shared their experiences, some also shared the fact that they are told to send their child only twice a week - the days that the Special educator came to the school. This was viewed as another way of dissuading families from sending their child to school.

Bina, like many other children are seen as the responsibility exclusively of the special educator.

For children, especially those with multiple disabilities and those with intellectual disability the focus does not seem to be on education. The children, if they are 'allowed' to be in class every day are not taught by the teacher. The class teachers in many schools do not take any initiative to ensure that the child with disability in their class is learning. Schools say that they are not able to deal with the special needs of children with disabilities and are not able to teach them.

CHALLENGES FACED BY CHILDREN TO GET TO SCHOOL AND WITHIN SCHOOL:

Lack of Transport Facility and Accessibility:

The lack of transport facilities is what most families would like remedied. They say that if there was a school bus that picked up children and dropped them back after school, it would really help. Parents who are working, are forced to leave their work to go and pick up their child from school. Transport facilities would make it easier for the children as well as for their families.

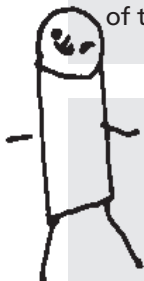
RAVISHA's Story

Ravisha is in class 3. She is eager to learn and is doing very well. This motivates her mother who takes her to school in the wheelchair every morning. It is difficult to navigate through the traffic and cross the busy road, Ravisha is uncomfortable because of the uneven surface of the road to school, but she does not complain.



NISHA's Story¹²

Nisha, a 13 year old girl is a student of class 6. She has intellectual disability. Her mother walks her to school in the morning. She likes walking back with her friends, joining in their chatter. Her mother has told her as well as her friends to ensure that Nisha comes back with them. The reason for this is the busy road she needs to cross to get home. She does not look left or right and just crosses the road without looking. Being an extremely busy road, this can be very dangerous.



Ravisha's journey every morning to school is not an easy one for her mother or her. Many children like Ravisha who use wheelchairs or other aids and appliances for enabling better mobility, lack of accessible roads and footpaths pose a challenge. Ravisha's mother wishes there was some transport facility that took Ravisha to school and back. So do the parents of Nisha and countless others.

¹²Meeting with Nisha and her Family : Facilitated by AARTH-ASTHA, New Delhi

CHALLENGES OF ACCESSIBILITY AND MOVEMENT WITHIN SCHOOL:

Lack of Accessible Classrooms and Suitable Furniture

Children with mobility difficulties and those with cerebral palsy would require certain accommodations to be made. Movement within the school becomes a challenge for children who are wheelchair-users or use a rollator or other mobility aids. They would not be able to negotiate stairs. Conducting access audits and acting upon the recommendations is a one way of looking at making the school accessible.

Schools have to plan and accommodate the needs of each child.

Tushara 16 years old with cerebral palsy, is in a supportive school. They have shifted his classroom to the ground floor. Now he is free to move in and out of class in his wheelchair,

On the other hand, Shubha who is unable to walk independently and needs support. Where there are steps or no railings, she finds it difficult to move on her own. She has fallen and hurt herself many times.

In class too, there are no special or appropriate chair and table which makes it difficult for her to sit. That is the reason she finds it difficult to eat the mid day meal provided in school.

Going from her class to the toilet poses a challenge for Ravisha. Although Ravisha's friends take her to the toilet, the uneven path is not easy to negotiate. There have been times when the wheelchair has toppled over and Ravisha has fallen and hurt herself. It is also difficult for her classmates to help her back onto the wheelchair, when this happens, adding to the woes of Ravisha's mother.

Accessible environments will help all children and reduce the chances of anyone falling or getting hurt. Having appropriate furniture in class would support the child better.

Schools need to have support systems in place. They would require to be supported by professionals and organizations working in the field of disability to seek inputs on making schools more accessible and child-friendly. Trained professionals can assess what special furniture or modifications are required and suggest from where these can be made. Some of it has to be customised to suit individual requirements.



REHWAN's Story¹³

Rehwan is a seven year old boy with Cerebral Palsy. He got admission in school this year, that too after a lot of struggle and the intervention of a disability NGO. Once again, his mother was told that she had to be with him throughout the day. When she took him to the toilet, she realized how dirty it was. She found it extremely difficult to take him there. So she started making him wear a diaper before taking him to school!

¹³Meeting with Rehwan and his Family : Facilitated By AARTH-ASTHA, New Delhi

Understanding the needs of the child and planning for a child are required. Sometimes simple measures can work in facilitating the environment. Many schools, like Tushar's, have moved classes to rooms on the ground floor to facilitate access for children with mobility difficulties.

ISSUE OF TOILETS: INACCESSIBLE AND NON FUNCTIONAL

The non availability of toilets is an issue highlighted time and again as a reason why children, especially girls miss school or even drop out.

"The toilets are not clean. Sometimes they are locked. So there is no access to toilets most days."

Aaina used to go home from school whenever she needed to go to the toilet.

Nisha does not go to the school during the time she has her periods because the toilet is dirty and does not have running water. Leading to gaps in learning when she misses school and her studies a few days every month.

Children like Tushar, would not have been able to go to the toilet if it wasn't for his friends.

Ravisha, too has a great set of friends who help take her to the toilet. But she has hurt herself when a couple of times her wheelchair has toppled over, due to the uneven path leading to the toilet. Once inside the toilet, it is a struggle, as the toilets are not designed properly.

Being a very basic need, toilets continue to remain an issue. In some schools there are no toilets and in the ones that have them, there are dirty, have no water, are in a dilapidated condition. There are very few schools that have well maintained and clean toilets.

At present under the RTE Act, the state is not required to report on how accessible the toilets are to children with disabilities. The discourse on functional toilets continues to be narrow and not include a universal design perspective.

STEP THREE: CHALLENGES WITH REGARD TO EDUCATION

EDUCATION OF CHILDREN WITH DISABILITIES: SYSTEMS, QUALITY OF EDUCATION AND SUPPORT SYSTEMS

ANKITA'S Story¹⁴

Ankita is a 12 year old girl who lives with her parents, her 14 year old sister and 16 year old brother. Ankita is a happy and well-settled young girl who loves going to school. Ankita has Cerebral Palsy along with intellectual disability.

Moving to Delhi...

Ankita's family shifted to Delhi from their village in Punjab. They left their house and land, so that they could seek better education, services and facilities for Ankita. While their other two children were getting an education in Punjab, there was just no school or facilities for Ankita.

As parents they want the best for all their children and that prompted them to shift to Delhi, a city totally alien to them. It was tough but today they have bought a house in Delhi because they believe that is they will stay on here because Ankita is able to get access to an education.

Her Education...

Ankita shared that she used to go to the neighbourhood government school till class five. The teachers there were not keen to have Ankita continue and constantly told her mother that she would benefit from going to a special school.

After class five, the school felt that she was not able to cope with the studies and asked her parents to withdraw her.

She says, "I did not like going there. The children used to tease me and make fun of me. I had no friends. It hurt me." She was the only child with disability among the 70 children in her class.

In the classroom, Ankita was not given any special attention by the teachers. In fact the teachers were not at all supportive, nor did they make any effort to help Ankita to learn or be included in class activities. There were no attempts at providing any reasonable accommodation in class or facilitating peer support.

LACK OF SYSTEMS AND INACCESSIBLE PHYSICAL INFRASTRUCTURE:

Even during the mid-day meals, Ankita would be left sitting alone in class, while her classmates went to the canteen to have their meals. There was no system to ensure that she also got her meal. Rarely would Ankita get to have her meal that too when some classmate would get it for her in class.

At times when Ankita tried to go to the canteen to have her mid day meal, she faced difficulties. While standing in the queue, she was either pushed by other children or would fall down as there was no structural support available, not even a railing. Bruised, Ankita gave up. Her mother started giving Ankita a lunch box so that she could eat by herself in class.

Even for accessing the toilet during school hours, Ankita did require someone to escort her. Usually, her classmates helped her to go to the toilet. Her classroom was on the third floor. Her mother tells us that once, when the toilets on the third floor were under maintenance, Ankita had to come all the way down to the ground floor toilet, falling down the stairs many times.

Lack Of Strategies And Systems To Facilitate Learning: **Ankita's mother attended the parent-teacher meetings regularly, but the teachers rarely discussed what they planned to do to support and encourage Ankita to study and learn better. There were no expectations and no motivation to learn.**



¹⁴Meeting with Ankita and her Family : Facilitated By JOSH, New Delhi

Need For Empowering Parents: Ankita's mother never spoke up or asked questions when she met the teachers at PTMs. She was the only parent who had a child with disability and thus had no support from other parents, making her feel alone, vulnerable and discouraged.

Attitudinal Barriers: Having gone upto class 5 and not having learnt much, Ankita's confidence and self-esteem had also touched rock-bottom with the negative attitude of teachers and children in school.

Inclusion To Segregation: JOURNEY FROM MAINSTREAM TO SPECIAL SCHOOL: Seeing the negative effect of the school on Ankita, her parents finally enrolled her in a special school for children with disabilities, where Ankita doesn't feel one out of seventy.

As far as education is concerned, Ankita's initial years seem a waste as she did not learn anything. Now at the age of 12, in class two in a special school, she is learning and also going for private tuition every evening, seven days a week. She has been in the special school for two years now. She now takes the school bus to school every morning. She loves going to school. She says that this school is very nice and is without a doubt better than her previous school. What makes it better is that it has 'everything'- classrooms, canteen, playground, computers and even elevators to take her up to her class. She is able to go wherever she wants to go without being dependent upon anyone. Ankita is now in class two there and is learning Hindi, English, EVS and Math. She enjoys going for the computer class. She also plays games with her friends. Yes, she has friends now. She is happy that she can even talk to her friends on the phone in the evening. She is among other children like her and is not teased by anyone.

About Ankita's Family and Friends..Social Isolation/ Lack Of Peer Group: Though there is a smile on her face when she says all this, there is also a sadness behind the smile when she says, " At home I talk to my sister and play with her." Once home, she only has her sister for company. Her sister, Sumita, is fully supportive and plays indoor games with her every evening. Sumita makes sure that Ankita is included and gets to participate in the group when her friends come over. Ankita has no friends of her own in the neighbourhood.

Ankita has also started helping her mother with household chores- washing the utensils, washing clothes etc. She adds with a mischievous smile, "I help only when I feel like it! "

The greatest strength through all this has been her family, especially Sumita, who is extremely supportive. Her brother is older and has a life of his own, but is there when she needs help.

Concerns About Safety And Security : They live in a congested area, but are lucky to have supportive people as neighbours. They offer to look out for Ankita whenever her parents need to go out during the day. Despite this, her parents fear for her safety and security. To add to this, there have been instances of children, especially girls having gone missing from the area they live in. They never leave her alone and ensure that Sumita is with Ankita incase they have to go out. "Being a girl with disability makes her more vulnerable", says her mother.

The experiences of Ankita and other students with disabilities like her reflect the harsh reality that inclusive education is not gathering pace as it should in India. Although many more children are coming into education, the system is not changing to include them. Most of the issues faced by children with disabilities are the same as those faced by other children who struggle within the system. Some are specific to this child and need attended to as such.

WHAT CAN BE DONE TO CHANGE THE SITUATION

The school system needs to gear up and support children with disabilities. This support needs to be holistic and look at all aspects that determine whether the child continues in school. Children essentially need the support of peers, teachers to continue in school.

All the children we spoke with said that they had been teased. They said they were seen as being 'strange'. They were bullied and some were even hit. The child with disability needs to be an integral part of the class and be fully accepted by the teachers and peers. Teachers need to sensitize the other children towards the needs children with disability and facilitate inclusion by involving them in the process for instance through the peer tutoring technique.

Reasonable Accommodations and Resource Material: Reasonable accommodations need to be made for children to stay in inclusive set-ups and learn better. Special furniture, aids, appliances and devices need to be made available to the child. Children also need to be provided language support. For children with hearing impairment, not having sign language or alternative modes of communication can cut them off from a lot of learning experiences in a class. Children with vision impairment associated with The NAB, Delhi are taught Braille and introduced to computers so that they can access the curriculum. For children with multiple disabilities, unable to communicate verbally, access to augmentative and alternate modes of communication is integral to their gaining an education.

Reasonable accommodation must be made during teaching. Teaching learning material must be modified and different aids provided during transaction of curriculum. Children must be provided need based material in accessible formats. Children must be allowed the facility of scribes, of technology and other digital material in classrooms. Accommodations during tests and evaluation must be extended at all levels. Resource material suited to the needs and requirements of children across all disabilities need to be made easily available to children and teachers, so that they can be included more meaningfully in class activities.

Role of a Special Educator: Every child has a right to full and comprehensive education. It must be meaningful. Children like Aaina and Neema and many others whom we meet, have been asked by schools to come only on the days when the special educator is there. Leaving their education entirely to the special educator, totally defeats the purpose of inclusion.

The role of the special educator needs to evolve. It needs to be supportive and that of a facilitator, rather than become the teacher for all children with disabilities. A special educator cannot teach all subjects. With one or two special educators in each school, the special educator's role should be to support the teacher in enabling inclusion as well as providing specific, need-based support to the child. Support in terms of facilitating and linking to resources and resource persons should also be part of the mandate.

Need for Empowering Parents: There is a need to inform parents of the rights of their children and also of what facilities are available. It is important to empower parents to be able to voice their child's needs and also so that they are able to empower their child too.

Dr Deepak Kalra¹⁵, stresses on the need for 'Regular Trainings to be conducted around the RTE Act'. She says, "Parents need to be empowered by helping them understand their role

¹⁵Dr Deepak Kalra : Founder Director, Umang and Former Chairperson of The State Commission for Protection of Child Rights, Jaipur, Rajasthan,

and the concept of SMCs. A year and a half ago, not a single parent of a child with disability was found on any of the SMCs in visits to 250 schools spread across Rajasthan. Though it seems very unlikely, it remains to be seen whether the situation has changed.”

Support For Teachers : Ankita’s class teacher did not focus any attention on her nor did she support her learning. Teachers say they do not know what to do and how to teach the child. Teachers teach a classroom full of children with diverse learning needs, learning styles and abilities, yet children like Ankita are not considered part of the spectrum of diversity.

The gaps in teacher training courses need to be addressed. Teachers need to have access to support services that provide technical support as well as resources. Specific requirements of teachers and their concerns with individual children need to be addressed directly and promptly.

Where can this support come from?

Resource Centres:

Resource centres or knowledge hubs can play a pivotal and a multi-dimensional role in meeting the needs and demands of the various stakeholders. A resource centre, providing services, information and resource material across all disabilities and staffed by trained professionals would need to :

- ☞ Collate and constantly update information across all disabilities
- ☞ Address and meet information and training needs of parents, teachers and children
- ☞ Provide resource material that can facilitate learning children and teachers in class.
- ☞ Support families with information and referral to organizations and professionals.
- ☞ Support and facilitate schools in establishing linkages with organizations and professionals who can support them.

Dr Deepak Kalra, shared the two models of resource centres that are working in some parts of Rajasthan.

Resource Centre : Model One

A team of special educators from an NGO supports government schools in facilitating inclusion. They provide disability specific inputs within the government school itself. So, a child with vision impairment is taught Braille, a child with hearing impairment is taught sign language in class after school. The special educators even visit the children at home and involve family members and train them along with the child. For instance a sibling of a child with hearing impairment was taught sign language while another child’s mother learnt Braille. This creates support systems within the home for the child and they do not remain solely dependent upon the special educator.

Resource Centre: Model Two

A team of Special Educators, Physiotherapists, Speech therapists and other professionals are there at a resource centre. With different days allocated to different disabilities, children and their families come to the resource centre for information, services and facilities. This way they are able to reach-out to many more children who have access to a team of professionals, under the same roof.

Resource Centre: Model Three

The National Association for the Blind [NAB] Delhi has been facilitating inclusion of children with vision impairment for many years now. They have developed a team of 22 Special Educators and Teachers with expertise in different subjects[as a single Teacher or a Special Educator cannot teach all subjects to a child, especially in senior school.] They support 220 children who are in 28 mainstream schools at present. They visit each school by rotation and support the child and teacher within school wherever necessary. Additional support is provided whenever the child needs it, after school hours. Besides, the NAB library provides resource material like Talking Books and material in Braille and multimedia. Together, access to resource material and to trained resource persons goes a long way in encouraging and facilitating inclusion.

Mr Dipendra Manocha¹⁶ and Ms Nandita Saran¹⁷ of the NAB spoke of the benefits of being in an inclusive system. Children with disabilities who are in inclusive schools are better equipped to deal with life and its challenges. They start thinking like other children their age. They have the same aspirations. Being in an inclusive set-up also ensures that the other children in the class also grow up with them and are sensitized to their needs. It creates a more balanced society.

They emphasized the fact that the support of an organization or professionals, who can extend support to the teachers and the child, is absolutely necessary in order to ensure inclusion of the child in all activities. Sustained and intensive support in skill building and problem solving is required particularly in the first few years of schooling.

In conclusion, what emerges from meetings and discussions with children, their families and professionals working with them is that despite five years of the RTE, there are still barriers that they encounter in getting into schools and staying in the system. Data on inclusive education continues to show that children with disabilities are the largest categories of children who are out of school.

Children with multiple disabilities, intellectual disabilities and those living in institutional residential facilities are some of the children who are rarely included.

Real change will happen as we broaden our discourse and start to make the whole of our education system inclusive. This will require a commitment to re-think about the systems as they are today.

¹⁶MrDipendraManocha: President National Association for the blind (Delhi State Branch), Managing Trustee, Saksham, Delhi and President of DAISY Forum of India

¹⁷MsNandita Saran , Project Coordinator, National Association for the Blind

For children with disabilities a lot can change if we can move from an impairment based model of provisioning in education to a model that also understands the contexts of the child.

Change can happen if systems are put into place within schools to enable full participation in all aspects of school life.

Change can happen if we begin to understand the nature of discrimination both direct and indirect and address it systemically.

Real change will happen as we invest in individualised support and invest in reasonable accommodation, build repositories of knowledge and understanding that will support the child in education.

As different systems converge to support the child holistically, the right to education is more likely to be fulfilled.



AARTH-ASTHA

AARTH-ASTHA is a registered non-profit organization founded in 1993. It works in urban resettlement colonies, conducts research, provides information and links action with policy concerns. Aarth-Astha believes that each and every person in society however severely disabled, has the right to equal opportunity in every institution of society and has the right to develop their full potential.

In this, it prioritises children and people with disabilities belonging to the poorest and most vulnerable sections of society.

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ANANDINI

Anandini, a disability based organisation works with children, families and professionals, conducting research, training and advocacy in disability. Anandini has been conducting training sessions on disability, disability rights and on Dyslexia.

Anandini's recent research has been on rights of persons, especially children with disabilities, living in institutional homes across the country. Anandini has also written training modules on independent living and on setting up of help lines.

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CRPD

Centre for Research and Policy in Disability (CRPD) is a new initiative. Its aims are:

- To bring forth the voice of children with disabilities and their families so they are heard in policy forums.
- To build and support issue based national networks for the inclusion and full participation of children with disabilities.
- To research and monitor the progress of inclusion and realisation of right of children and persons with disabilities, with particular focus on children living in difficult circumstances.

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Inclusion..! It is an element which is considered to be essential for a child with special needs to lead a life of dignity and self respect. Inclusion is not only applicable in educational institutions but it is also important in the social environment of the child.

In the context of educational institutions, inclusion is often misunderstood as 'just admission'. It is often seen that schools think that their job is done and that they have become fully inclusive once they admit the child. They fail to understand that inclusion is much more than just admitting the child. All the students have to be included in the activities. There has to be proper accessible infrastructure so that the child is able to participate in each and every sphere of the school life. The curriculum should be planned keeping in mind the presence of all the students. For instance, I cannot participate in the annual function in my school because the stage is not accessible for me. I am not able to go for class trips and excursions because, one, the buses are not wheelchair friendly and, two, the place we are taken to is also not accessible.

This year in January, the school hosted the farewell party for the outgoing batch. I was really excited about it. I went there and for the first few minutes my friends were there but later they all left me alone. I did not like this. Before the event, I had asked the school to provide me with a helper to help me move around. The school refused and said that only my mother can accompany me and that there will not be any help from their side. I did not want my mum to accompany me as it was a formal event.

It was a once-in-a-lifetime event and I could not enjoy it.

It has been very rightly said by Buky Ojelabi that-
"There is no "them" and "us".

We are all sons and daughters of God."

Thus, it is imperative not only for schools but also for the society to be inclusive.

Kavya Mukhija, student of class XII
studies in a Public school in New Delhi