A TISS Initiative on enabling

Inclusion & Accessibility

for Students with Disability in Higher Education
Supported by
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Director of the Tata Institute of Social Sciences (TISS)

Initiated by
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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

MISSION STATEMENT

“Facilitating ‘Inclusion & Accessibility’ for persons with disabilities in the field of higher education”

This report has been commissioned to provide an inclusive education framework that aims to take policy initiative towards inclusion of students with disability by means of affirmative action and reasonable accommodation in the field of higher education; bearing in mind the current challenges and barriers they face in a learning environment at the university level.

It’s a pioneer project in India that seeks to facilitate a barrier free learning experience and takes into account the structural, educational, social, economic and technological accessibility for students with disabilities. This is aimed at greater sensitization of higher education stakeholders and inclusion of students with disability in a structured, step by step approach that will help foster their individual growth personally and professionally, both on and off campus.

The Centre for Disability Studies & Action at TISS was launched in 2006 and works on the issues and concerns of people with disabilities through teaching, training, research and demonstration; to work with, through, and for persons with disabilities. The centre also encompasses all stakeholders in this field, so as to enhance capacities in working towards an equitable and just society which will ensure equalization of opportunities, full participation and protection of dignity and rights of persons with disabilities.

The report seeks to create a manual on how to implement various provisions granted under the UNCRPD, The Persons with Disabilities

The report examines the existing challenges students face in the field of higher education and proposes a framework that includes the following recommendations

- **Creating a data base of students with disability** at university level and mapping of issues of relevance.

- **Need based assessment of students with disability** with a comprehensive understanding of their concerns & work to facilitate interventions with stakeholders of higher education. Practicing Disability Studies & Social Work methods at three levels- one by understanding the ecology of student with disability, ecological engagement at micro level, needs assessment. Two by understanding the university system and identification of barriers at mezzo level, designing interventions with higher education stakeholders, three by recommending systemic changes and policy formulation at macro level.

- **Sensitization and training programmes for teachers, students, staff** at various levels for various stakeholders in order to better accommodate the needs of students with disability in classrooms, internship, Research, issues of Library accessibility, Accommodation, Job Placement, Scholarship & funding schemes etc.

- **Strengthening volunteers program** for need based issues pertaining to students with disabilities, tutoring and learning aids.

- Developing creative & accessible academic resource for students with disabilities using ICTs, Structural accessibility checks at the university from the entrance of the university, to the classrooms, dining hall, washroom, stair cases and lifts,
hostels and other university facilities in order to create a barrier free environment through access audits.

- Better understanding of issues students with disabilities face with academic resources and learning material with a view to make university library disabled friendly.

- Conduct regular synergy meets between Teachers and staff in order to better understand the core issues and concerns of students with disabilities.

- Sensitization programs on disability issues for Teachers, Peers and staff on and off campus through Art & Media.
STRUCTURE OF THE REPORT

PART A explains the various definitions of disabilities and the limitations it imposes in realizing the goal of full inclusion of persons with disabilities in society. It suggests redefining the concept of disability to encompass a broader view in light of current jurisprudence on disability laws & various provisions of International conventions and treaties with emphasis on the influence of various models of disability. This is followed by an assessment & comparison of existing provisions in the context of Indian laws for persons with disabilities with the provisions of the CRPD.

PART B looks at the vision of the Education for all (EFA) Campaign with a special emphasis on students with disabilities and the challenges they face in their inclusion in mainstream education highlighting provisions of various international frameworks. It examines infrastructural barriers to Inclusion & Accessibility and the role of stakeholders in formulating national policies as well recognizing the need for increased investment & training of teachers and support staff for students with disabilities. It briefly enumerates on the importance & emerging role of ICTs in making education inclusive & accessible for students with disabilities.

PART C is the framework CDSA has created in compliance with the provisions of the UNCRPD & UGC guidelines with the aim to facilitate an inclusive educational policy that calls for assessment and implementation of accessibility measures for students with disabilities in higher education. It provides details, point by point on what’s been done at TISS to create an inclusive culture and explores the possibilities to further develop programs & measures to facilitate accessibility. These are then followed by the Conclusion & select Bibliography of references used for this report.
Director of TISS, Prof. S. Parasuraman is seen here inaugurating the ‘i-access’ rights mission on the 21st of August, 2013, with Associate Professor & Chairperson, Vaishali Kolhe of the Center for Disability Studies and Action (CDSA)
# TABLE OF CONTENTS

**EXECUTIVE SUMMARY** ............................................................................................................. 3  
**STRUCTURE OF THE REPORT** ................................................................................................. 6  
**TABLE OF CONTENTS** ............................................................................................................... 8  
**ABBREVIATIONS** ....................................................................................................................... 10  
**FOREWORD** ............................................................................................................................... 12  
**INTRODUCTION** .......................................................................................................................... 14  
  Key objectives of the project ........................................................................................................... 19  
**PART A** ....................................................................................................................................... 21  
  **‘PERSONS WITH DISABILITIES’** ............................................................................................ 21  
    1) Re-defining ‘persons with disabilities’ .................................................................................. 22  
    2) Models of Disability ............................................................................................................. 27  
    3) Overview of ‘persons with disability’ provisions in the Indian context ......................... 32  
**PART B** ....................................................................................................................................... 41  
  **EDUCATION FOR ALL (EFA)** ................................................................................................. 41  
    1) Inclusive & accessible education for students with disabilities ........................................ 42  
    2) India & EFA ......................................................................................................................... 50  
    3) ICT’s as a tool of Inclusive & Accessible Education for students with disabilities & UGC Schemes .................................................................................................................. 56  
**Disability is the inability to see ability: OVERCOMING ODDS** ............................................... 64  
**PART C** ....................................................................................................................................... 66  
  **‘I ACCESS’ RIGHTS MISSION (IARM) FRAMEWORK** ....................................................... 66  
    Background ............................................................................................................................... 67  
    1. Reservation Policy for Staff & Students with Disability .................................................... 68  
    2. Courses offered for Pwd’s in TISS .................................................................................... 68  
    3. Job Placements for Students with Disabilities through CGPC/Job Placement cell ........ 68  
    4. Courses offered in Accessible formats .............................................................................. 69  
    5. Center for Disability Studies & Action (CDSA) .............................................................. 70  
      1. IARM’s key areas of focus include the following: ......................................................... 70  
    6. The Social Protection Office (SPO) ................................................................................ 71  
    7. Disability specific initiatives at TISS – HEPSE, TEPSN & EOC .................................... 72  
    8. Flexible Multimodal Academic Environment .................................................................. 72
9. Data Mapping of Students & Staff with Disability at TISS

10. Remedial Coaching

11. Measures to make TISS Disability-friendly

12. Current challenges facing students with disabilities at TISS

13. Creating positive images of persons with disabilities to nurture an inclusive culture

14. Persons with disabilities- Staff at TISS & teaching/working methods employed

15. Simulation Exercises & Awareness programs for disability awareness at TISS

16. Disability specific skills for Students with Disabilities & Non-disabled students with the aim to facilitate Inclusion.

17. Reader, Scribe & Interpretation Services at TISS

18. ‘Ability Expo’ for showcasing abilities of students with disabilities

19. Guidelines/Recommendations being followed at TISS

20. Orientation programs for students with disabilities

Conclusion

Bibliography
# ABBREVIATIONS

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Acronym</th>
<th>Description</th>
</tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>AAPD</td>
<td>The American Association of People with Disabilities</td>
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<td>ASHA</td>
<td>American Speech-Language-Hearing Association</td>
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<td>CBR</td>
<td>Community-based Rehabilitation</td>
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<td>CBM</td>
<td>Christian Blind Mission</td>
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<td>CDSA</td>
<td>Centre for Disability Studies &amp; Action</td>
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<td>CGPC</td>
<td>Career Guidance &amp; Placement Cell</td>
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<td>CWSN</td>
<td>Children with special needs</td>
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<td>DPO</td>
<td>Disabled people's organization</td>
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<td>EFA</td>
<td>Education for All</td>
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<td>EOC</td>
<td>Equal Opportunity Cell</td>
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<tr>
<td>GOI PMS</td>
<td>Government of India-Post Matric Scholarship</td>
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<td>HRD</td>
<td>Human Resource Development</td>
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<tr>
<td>HEPSN</td>
<td>Higher Education for Persons with Special needs</td>
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<td>IARM</td>
<td>I Access Rights Mission</td>
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<td>IAS</td>
<td>Indian Administrative Service</td>
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<td>ICT</td>
<td>Information &amp; Communication Technologies</td>
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<td>IITE</td>
<td>Institute for Information Technologies in Education</td>
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<td>IPC</td>
<td>Indian Penal Code</td>
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<td>MoSJE</td>
<td>Ministry of Social Justice and Empowerment</td>
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<td>MSW</td>
<td>Masters in Social Work</td>
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<td>NAB</td>
<td>National Association for the Blind</td>
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<td>NCPEDP</td>
<td>National Centre for Promotion of Employment for Disabled People</td>
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<td>NCTE</td>
<td>National Council for Teacher Education</td>
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<td>Acronym</td>
<td>Full Form</td>
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<td>NCERT</td>
<td>The National Council of Educational Research &amp; Training</td>
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<td>NET</td>
<td>National Eligibility Test</td>
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<tr>
<td>NGO</td>
<td>Non-governmental Organization</td>
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<tr>
<td>NHFDC</td>
<td>National Handicapped Finance &amp; Development Corporation</td>
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<tr>
<td>NUEPA</td>
<td>The National University of Educational Planning and Administration</td>
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<td>OHCHR</td>
<td>Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights</td>
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<td>PWD</td>
<td>Persons with Disabilities</td>
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<td>RPWD</td>
<td>Rights for Persons with Disabilities Act 2016</td>
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<td>R&amp;D</td>
<td>Research &amp; Development</td>
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<td>RCI</td>
<td>Rehabilitation Council of India</td>
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<td>SDTML</td>
<td>Sir Dorabji Tata Memorial Library</td>
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<td>SIDPA</td>
<td>Scheme for Implementation of Persons with Disabilities Act</td>
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<tr>
<td>SPO</td>
<td>Social Protection Office</td>
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<tr>
<td>TEPSE</td>
<td>Teacher Preparation in Special Education</td>
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<tr>
<td>UGC</td>
<td>University Grants Commission</td>
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<tr>
<td>UNCRPD</td>
<td>The United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities</td>
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<tr>
<td>UNESCO</td>
<td>The United Nations Educational Scientific and Cultural Organization</td>
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<td>UNICEF</td>
<td>The United Nations Children Fund</td>
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<tr>
<td>UNDP</td>
<td>The United Nations Development Program</td>
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<td>UPSC</td>
<td>Union Public Service Commission</td>
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<td>USOF</td>
<td>Universal Service Obligation Fund</td>
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<td>WHO</td>
<td>World Health Organization</td>
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FOREWORD

The Ministry of Social Justice & Empowerment, Government of India, has taken a significant step by publishing the revised curriculum for teaching mathematics and science for students with disabilities. This initiative is in line with the principles of inclusion and accessibility, aiming to provide equal opportunities for students with disabilities. Under the National Policy for Persons with Disabilities, 2016, the government has emphasized the importance of inclusive education and the need to overcome barriers in the education system. The 2016 National Plan for Gender Equality and Women’s Empowerment highlights the importance of education for all, including students with disabilities. The ministry has been proactive in implementing various programs and schemes to address the needs of students with disabilities, ensuring they are provided with appropriate and accessible educational resources.

2. Education has long been a priority in India’s development agenda, and has been receiving strong support from Central and State Governments. Various schemes have been implemented to equip students with education and skill development, adapting to meet their distinct needs. Despite these efforts, the Ministry of Social Justice & Empowerment, Government of India, has noted a significant gap in the number of students with disabilities who are receiving higher education. A study cited by the Ministry based on National Sample Survey, 2003, states that while at least 31,60,000 disabled youth should be studying in Universities and Colleges of India, only 1.2% of the 31.60 lakh disabled youth, who should have been studying, are in Universities and Colleges. Unfortunately, India’s higher educational system is not accessible to 98.8% of its disabled youth.

3. In order to promote inclusion and accessibility, it is essential to put in place guidelines and determine parameters that would help stakeholders in the field of higher education to develop an appropriate educational policy for students with disabilities. Such policies would reap dual benefits - first, youth will be able to get employment, reach higher echelons of Government and corporate management positions and eventually take part in decision-making processes; and secondly, India will gain a productive workforce from a hitherto untapped source.

28th September, 2015

FOREWORD

Of late, the disability regime has witnessed a major paradigm shift from welfare-based to rights-based approach. The focus is no longer on inability of persons with disabilities but on their abilities and inherent potential; as individuals who have the right to be educated, earn a living and become part of the societal mainstream. It is now universally recognized that an individual with disabilities enjoys the same rights as an individual without disabilities, deserves equal opportunity and freedom to pursue his/her dreams. Society has, therefore, the responsibility to appreciate and support the needs of such individuals.
4. I deeply appreciate the efforts of Tata Institute of Social Sciences, Mumbai (TISS) in strengthening implementation of the United Nations Convention on Rights of Persons with Disabilities framework at the University level particularly Article 9 - on Accessibility, Article 8 - on Awareness building and other measures that promote inclusive education; and urge state parties to develop guidelines and policy initiatives on Accessibility.

5. Access-related difficulties faced by students with disabilities have motivated the creation the 'I-Access Rights Mission' & 'I-Access buddies'. This is a unique cooperative initiative led by Dr. Vaishali Kolhe, Chairperson of the Center for Disability Studies & Action at TISS with participation from the TISS student community and supported by Prof S Parasuraman, Director, TISS.

6. This report is timely and significant for a number of reasons. It explores the scope of the Marrakesh treaty within higher education; raises key issues related to enabling and inclusive environments and their relevance to the ecology of students with disability; emphasizes user-centric design, highlights inclusive culture; seeks to facilitate the inclusion of students with disabilities and thus promotes accessibility.

7. I am grateful to Dr Kolhe and Prof. Parasuraman, for having taken up this initiative that supports the inclusion and accessibility of students with disabilities in higher education. I believe this report contextualizes the need for an inclusive educational policy, and pioneers the promotion of disabled-friendly campuses in terms of both physical as well as social environments. I sincerely hope that this initiative will be replicated in other educational institutions across the country and in the region.

(K.V.S Rao)
INTRODUCTION

Key Questions: How our universities and higher educational institutions are prepared to provide services and facilities to students with disability by ways of providing barrier free environment, equal opportunities and mandatory accessibility provisions? How are the attitudes of higher educational bodies and professionals towards students with disability? Who are the students with disability? How the reservation policy and provisions are implemented at the university system?

The “I access’ rights mission” (IARM) is a Tata Institute of Social Sciences (TISS) Initiative launched by the Centre for Disability Studies & Action (CDSA) with the aim to work with the ecology of students with disabilities towards facilitating a disabled friendly university/campus with special focus on ‘Inclusion & Accessibility’.

It seeks to create an innovative, need based approach towards students with disabilities by creating an inclusive education framework that aims to take policy initiative towards greater accessibility & inclusion of their inclusion by means of affirmative action and reasonable accommodation in the field of higher education.

This would help construct a barrier free environment that is conducive to their growth as students and professionals; it will also facilitate an inclusive culture and social cohesion with reference to students with disabilities in higher education and promoting their living with dignity. The approach is dual and it focuses both on micro and macro factors that would enable universities to implement educational, social, infrastructural and economic audits and policy.

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1 Chapter 1, 2(m) The Rights of Persons with Disability Act, 2016 “inclusive education” means a system of education wherein students with and without disability learn together and the system of teaching and learning is suitably adapted to meet the learning needs of different types of students with disabilities.

2 Section (v), Preamble of the CRPD recognizes the need & importance of ‘Accessibility’ to socio-economic, cultural, environmental, health & education facilities in order to ensure that persons with disability enjoy fundamental freedoms & human rights essential to living a life with dignity.

3 As implied in Article 2 of CRPD

4 Chapter 1, 2(c) The Rights of Persons with Disability Act, 2016 “barrier” means any factor including communicational, cultural, economic, environmental, institutional, political, social, attitudinal or structural factors which hampers the full and effective participation of persons with disabilities in society.

changes towards establishing a wholesome, inclusive and accessible learning environment for students with disabilities.

The main objective of this project is to work on facilitating inclusion of students with disabilities in higher education and make their learning environment accessible and sensitive to their individualized needs.

“Perceptions of ‘dis’-ability create barriers to true inclusion and are often reinforced through higher education training programs. To promote inclusive values, acceptance of individual and cultural differences must be included in all curricula, not solely within special education. The future of a truly inclusive education relies on a cultural shift that supports and nurtures differences, and views success through a lens not focused on standardization but on diversity.” (Braunsteiner & Mariano-Lapidus, 2014)

Inclusion has academic and social benefits for all students, whether with or without disabilities and therefore IARM seeks to implement an integrated support system and guideline based on various provisions of International & National level protocols like the UNCRPD (United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities), The PWD Act, 1995, The National Trust Act, 1999, The Marrakesh VIP Treaty, The Biwako Millennium Framework (BMF), The Rights of Persons with Disabilities Act, 2016 and the University Grants Commission (UGC) guidelines. It is a framework that lays emphasis on accessibility and includes various stakeholders such as peers, teachers, university administration, ICTs (Information & Communication Technologies), structural changes, and social attitudes which would help create an inclusive and accessible learning experience for students with disabilities.

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6 Article 9, 2(c) UNCRPD states that training must be provided for stakeholders on accessibility issues facing persons with disabilities
The project is the first of its kind in India and utilizes the ‘bottoms up’ methodology by including students with disabilities in formulating a rights based framework that involves Data mapping of students, identifying their individual needs and taking affirmative action to resolve issues related to accessibility in the best possible manner. While also sensitizing stakeholders in the field of higher education towards the needs of students with disabilities and ensure continued commitment towards making the field of higher education inclusive & accessible. The project recognizes the need for thorough research of teaching & learning pedagogies that could help facilitate greater participation and cooperation between higher education stakeholders and students with disabilities, thus fostering a sense of mutual confidence.

[This is in alignment of UNCRC provision under Article 23 for children with disabilities, which provides for the] “Effective access to and receive education, training, health care services, rehabilitation services, preparation for employment and recreation opportunities in a manner conducive to the child’s achieving the fullest possible social integration and individual development, including his or her cultural and spiritual development.” (UNCRC, 1989)

IARM seeks to build upon key issues of relevance regarding ‘accessibility’ as proposed by article 9 of the UNCRPD which unequivocally states that all appropriate measures shall be taken to “identify and eliminate obstacles & barriers to accessibility” (UNCRPD, 2008); thus ensuring that students with disabilities will receive equal treatment and opportunities in all areas of life including the field of education which is vital to their overall development.

It also seeks to create a shift in focus from a medical model to a more socially inclusive & acceptable model of definition of ‘persons with disabilities’ with a view to empowering students with disability to not become mere passive recipients of care, but to be equal participants and action leaders in the field of education and their respective professions; and to help them enjoy their rights as individuals.

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7 Article 24, 2(e) UNCRPD recommends individualized support measures for maximizing academic & social development with the goal of full inclusion.

8 Medical model refers to a view of disability that solely focuses on the aspect of medical intervention & rehabilitation of persons with disability.
ACCESS TO HIGHER EDUCATION: KEY ISSUES OF STUDENTS WITH DISABILITY

First of all, it’s tough for students with disability to reach at the stage of higher education. Access to higher education is a laborious task for students with disability due to three main factors; one is ‘diversity among students with disability’ and second is ‘social construction of disability’ the way meaning of disability is perceived by the university stakeholders in shaping policies and services for them. Third is ‘lack of awareness’ among university stakeholders that leads to unwillingness, resistance to change for inclusion of students with disability. This resistance is observed from entry level to every stage of the higher education. This non-accepting attitude is due to lack of awareness, results in facing painstaking challenges by students with disability at every step in fulfilment of their academic goals. This impacts their overall development as individual in terms of personhood, identity construction and citizenship. (V. Kolhe, 2017) In Indian context, the traditional and stereotypical mindset of society does not accept disability as a ‘natural human phenomenon’ but views it as 'different with stigma' which discredits the potential of students with disability. Such societal outlook may reinforce attitudes of higher education authorities and institutions in providing limited services for them. (V. Kolhe, 2017) The total graduate population of persons with disability is 1246857. The male population is 839702 and the female population is 407155 (Census of India, 2011). The graduates’ male female population ratio is 3:1. One third of total graduate with disability population comprises of female graduates with disability. Also, triple disadvantage faced by females with disability, their vulnerability to abuse and lack of financial support are key reasons for drop out among disabled female graduates. (V. Kolhe, 2017). Factors affecting the academic exclusion and lack of facilities for students with disability at university level are mainly stereotypical attitudes of teachers, staff and administration, lack of disability specific knowledge, skill, expertise, lack of data of student with disability. Thinking disability as unimportant area & working with them with sympathetic attitude instead of empowering them with strength based approach. Overall the lack of awareness perhaps leads to invisible position of disabled in university followed by unpreparedness of higher education stakeholders to deal with issues of disabled students. (V. Kolhe, 2017)

IARM recognizes the importance of identifying academic, social & cultural barriers students with disabilities face in the field of higher education & understands that timely intervention in eliminating these barriers can help students with disabilities realize their full potential.

It believes that students with disabilities must be recipients of an inclusive education system right from primary to higher education level with the view of developing their talents, creativity and skills while affirming their sense of confidence, dignity and self-esteem. 10

The project therefore aims to facilitate measures that reflect the themes of Inclusion & accessibility and best practices, experiences shared by students with disabilities regarding the challenges they face in the field of education, conduct training/orientation programs for teachers and peers, work with experts in the field of universal design with a focus on structural accessibility, utilize assistive technologies & multimodal learning resources.

10 Article 24 of the UNCRPD emphasizes on the rights of persons with disabilities to free, quality and inclusive education & requires that state parties must implement all such measures that are necessary in realizing this goal.
Fig 1. Barriers to Inclusion & Accessibility
Key objectives of the project

1. Taking steps for accessibility issues at university level regarding students with disabilities by developing a framework or guideline based on International & national level protocols with special emphasis on Inclusion & Accessibility.

2. Identifying and mapping individual needs of the students with disabilities right from the application process, for the entire duration of their respective coursework till they obtain their degrees or placement. This would include addressing any accessibility issues during the admission process, entrance exam, orientation, accommodation, commute within campus, field work, research, academic resources (e-books, e-journals, class notes, reading material), library access etc.

3. Understanding emerging issues and challenges of students with disabilities in higher education on regular intervals.

4. To create disability awareness & sensitization programs to promote an inclusive culture among all stakeholders on campus using creative art forms, media and academic activities. Parent’s suggestions may also be taken in order to facilitate inclusion.

5. Developing guidelines for teachers and peers regarding Students with Disabilities (SWD) and work towards designing academic resources (e-books, class-notes, journals) and promoting accessibility in curriculum taking into account barrier free environment, universal design for accessibility and inclusive education in context of higher education.

6. Conduct Inclusion Access Audits (Access Audit by insiders: including students with disability of the campus are involved in mapping physical and social barriers for developing guidelines to create disabled friendly environment at university level) and Access Audits (Audit done by experts to identify barriers)

7. To facilitate and strengthen various facilities for SWD.
Disability is the inability to see ability: OVERCOMING ODDS

I am proud to say that I am the only person, who owns a degree in the family. My education was delayed because of my motor problems. I joined first standard when I was 10 yrs old. My family thought about providing at least primary education to me, but during this time I felt motivated to pursue higher education with the support of teachers and friends. My parents supported me wholeheartedly in my decision to study further. The love, support and affection I received from everyone in my life is immeasurable and I can never thank them enough. All the teachers in my life have been helpful in one way or the other. They eased the burdens & challenges I faced in my journey. Life was not a bed of roses. I have faced rejection & isolation from clubs like NCC and was discouraged from taking up activities like trekking which I love. I overcame these barriers by taking up even more adventurous trips & activities.

There have been two turning points in my life. The first was when I passed my 10th class with a glorious 91%; I wanted to opt for science, but the school authorities forced me to take humanities just because I am “disabled”. At first I felt very bad, but it turned out to be a blessing in disguise. Now I feel it was a better decision to study my fellow humans than study Natural Sciences. The second turning point was my decision to move out of my hometown for my graduation. My parents were apprehensive about my safety and security but they had to finally bow down before my determination. I graduated from Farook College, Calicut with good grades after which I was given full control to make my life's decisions. I chose to move out and this proved life altering as it’s because of this decision that I am here today in the institute of my dreams –TISS. My dreams have got wings at last!

- Mansoor Ali K.
PART A

‘PERSONS WITH DISABILITIES’
Re-defining ‘persons with disabilities’

Persons with disabilities have remained an invisible, silent & marginal part of the populace for long and have been subject to exclusion, discrimination, oppression & inhumane treatment; a person with disability was viewed as an individual who ‘lacked’ something naturally which justified such exclusion and isolation in society. They had no freedom to decide where they wanted to live, study, work or choose their occupation, thus depriving them of their basic human rights.

“Exclusion from meaningful participation in the economic, social, political and cultural life of communities is one of the greatest problems facing individuals in our society today. Such societies are neither efficient nor desirable.” (UNESCO, 2005)

‘Disability’ can no longer be confined within the views expounded by various definitions that attempt to narrow its scope to physical or pathological abnormalities. Though terms such as handicapped, disabled, physically challenged & crippled are used to address persons with disability, it is mainly characterized by a pathological view. Disability can therefore be said to be the state of an individual, who faces limitations in the activities he/she can pursue, or who cannot freely participate in the workings of day to day life and who suffers from some form of impairment. Excluding ‘morbidity’ from the scope of ‘disability’ does not negate the need of such an

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11 Monitoring CRPD Guidance for Human Rights Monitors, Professional training series No.17 states the old model of viewing disability was based on the medical approach (which was characterized by rehabilitation & medicine) or the charity approach (which was characterized by welfare schemes & charity). The old model handed over the task of making fundamental decisions concerning persons with disabilities to professionals who would determine when, where, how such persons should study, live or work.

12 The Ministry of Statistics and Programme Implementation (MPSI) stated in its March 2011 statistical survey on persons with disabilities that existing definitions and terminologies used to address disability focused solely on the pathological aspect.

13 According to the World Health Organization (WHO), impairment is a problem in body function or structure; an activity limitation is a difficulty encountered by an individual in executing a task or action; while a participation restriction is a problem experienced by an individual in involvement in life situations.
individual for disability assistance for the duration until which morbidity persists.  

The concept of ‘Disability’ needs to be redefined in light of the paradigm shift that has taken place in recognizing the rights of persons with disabilities. “Policy has now shifted towards community and educational inclusion, and medically-focused solutions have given way to more interactive approaches recognizing that people are disabled by environmental factors as well as by their bodies.” (WHO, 2011).

Laws related to Special education or children with special needs (CWSN) exemplify the notion of ‘disability’ being a natural phenomenon that sees students with disability not as objects that are broken and need fixing, but as individuals who are essentially unique and function differently from others. A disability cannot and must never be allowed to “define a person’s potential, humanity or character.” (Snow, 2013)

An individual’s environment also plays an important factor in experiencing disability and in determining to what extent it will affect the individual’s enjoyment of human rights. “Inaccessible environments create disability by creating barriers to participation and inclusion” (WHO, 2011).

According to current definitions in the context of Indian laws, “persons with disabilities” would mean a person with long term physical, mental, intellectual or sensory impairment which, in interaction with barriers, hinders his full and effective participation in society equally with others” and to include anyone who suffers and person with benchmark disability is minimum 40% disability

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15 Chapter I, 2 (t) Persons with Disabilities (PWD) Act, 1995; Chapter I, 2 (s) of The Rights of Persons with disability Act, 2016, defines persons with disability as “…..a person with long term physical, mental, intellectual or sensory impairment which, in interaction with barriers, hinders his full and effective participation in society equally with others”; but further classifies persons suffering from 40%
and it must be certified by a medical authority specified by the government. This medical model of disability emphasises on loss of organ and its entire focus lies on restoration & rehabilitation by expert medical sciences to become able body hence it shifts the onus of responsibility to persons with disabilities to continually strive for rehabilitation, treatments & medical interventions without accepting biological limitations. Therefore, not only is this definition of ‘persons with disabilities’ limiting because of its medical assessment based definition, it also excludes other persons who suffer less than 40% disabilities from receiving benefits related to accessibility for persons with disabilities; these are disabilities nevertheless and still act as a barrier to the individual’s effective enjoyment of his/her inherent right to live life with dignity in accordance with the provisions of the Indian constitution. Though newer definitions of disability have expanded the view of what qualifies as a disability, the benchmark of 40% disabilities is both regressive and restrictive. The Lok Sabha passed the Rights of Persons with Disabilities Act 2016. The Act has replaced the existing PWD Act, 1995, which was enacted 21 years back.

The salient features of the Rights of Persons with Disabilities Act 2016 are as follows:
1. Section 2 (s) “persons with disabilities” means a persons with long term physical, mental, intellectual or sensory impairment, which, in interaction with barriers, hinders his full and effective participation in society equally with others.
2. Section 2 (r) “persons with benchmark disabilities” which means a person with not less than forty percentage of a specified disability where specified disability has not defined in measurable terms and includes a person with disability where specified disabilities has been defined in measurable terms, as certified by the certified authority.
3. Section 2 (t), which defines a “person with high support needs” as a person with a benchmark disability that needs high support.
4. The types of disabilities have been increased to 21 types are given below: - Blindness, Low-vision, Leprosy Cured persons, Hearing Impairment (deaf and hard of hearing), Loco motor Disability, Dwarfism, Intellectual Disability, Mental Illness, Autism Spectrum Disorder, Cerebral Palsy, Muscular Dystrophy, Chronic Neurological conditions, Specific Learning Disabilities, Multiple Sclerosis, Speech and Language disability, Thalassemia, Haemophilia, Sickle Cell disease, Multiple Disabilities including deaf-blindness, Acid Attack victim, Parkinson's disease.

Hence University may have to work with 21 categories of students with disability as per RPWD Act 2016.

Disabilities as persons of benchmark disability in Chapter I, 2( r) persons with disability having high support needs in Chapter 1, 2(t).

16. Article 21 of the Indian Constitution assures the right to live with human dignity, free from exploitation
17. Chapter 1, 2(j) The National Trust for the Welfare of Persons with Autism, Cerebral Palsy, Mental Retardation and Multiple Disabilities Act, 1999 (The NT Act)
18. Persons with benchmark disability are those who have not less than 40% disability according to Chapter 1, clause 2 (r) of The Rights of Persons with Disabilities Act, 2016
Call to Action

- The concept of ‘disability’ is defined legally to accommodate every area of life of person with disability to be inclusive and accessible in education, schemes, technology, transport etc as per RPWD Act 2016. This applies to student with disability in higher education under reasonable accommodation in university.

- Applying UNCRPD framework of ‘Nothing about us without us’ in higher education where state and non-state actors alike will be able to reach out to the students with disability(SWD) under affirmative action and reasonable accommodation to provide need based provisions afforded to them under International & National accords.

- Reservation policy for SWD shall be 5% in all Universities with inclusion of 21 disability categories of the RPWD Act, 2016.

- All the university websites and communication & information technology shall be made accessible to SWD. This will help to access the academic information, circular & online information.

- Students with less than 40% disabilities may be included based on the needs of learning. The UGC must make provisions for the inclusion & accessibility of students with less than 40% of SWD for provide equal opportunity to all.

- The barriers faced by students with disability in higher education may be categorised into four types: physical or architectural, institutional, social and academic barriers which may be deconstructed by using barrier free environment, universal design, and awareness building to facilitate inclusion.

- Needs Assessment of students with disability is required on quarterly basis to determine the provisions or concessions to be granted with the goal of ensuring accessible and ‘inclusive education’.
▪ Volunteers, buddies and ‘support groups’ at classroom level and university campus for students with disability to meet individual academic needs based on degree of disability, special needs & special assistance.

▪ For example, 3 support groups can be created where Support group 1 could be for students with blindness for special assistance, Support group 2 would then have students with deafness working with sign language interpreter for special assistance and Support group 3 could be those students who have high need for special assistance or cannot do without assistance. **Note that this system must not be based on the percentage of disability but must be need-based criteria and is for the purposes of teacher/staff efficiency in making education as inclusive and accessible as possible for students with disabilities.**

▪ Curriculum Accessibility & Teaching Pedagogy: To ensure that admission procedures and educational resources(e-books, class-notes, e-journals)required by students with disabilities are made in ‘accessible formats’ and multimodal methods of teaching & learning pedagogy are employed in university educational settings to promote inclusive education. The same process must be followed at the time of examinations, research, field trips and dissertations.

▪ As Human Resources Development all universities shall promote teaching and research in disability studies including establishment of study centres for disability studies as per the RPWD Act, 2016.
II) Models of Disability

The real issues that merit focus, reform and improvisation in the concept of disability are inequality, marginalization, oppression and abuse, poverty and lack of inclusion and accessibility. However the field of disability studies has over the years attempted to classify certain models of disabilities, each one characterized by a specific approach. Some of these approaches have evolved with time while some have become outdated as they have failed to accommodate & address the pressing concerns of approaching disability from a dignified, universally acceptable perspective.

The medical model of disability was one of the first classifications based on which a number of conventions, accords and acts were formulated.

“The ‘medical model’ of disability has frequently been contrasted in recent years with the “human rights” model. The medical model focuses on persons’ medical traits such as their specific impairments. This has the effect of locating the “problem” of disability within the person. The medical model encapsulates a broader and deeper social attitude – a tendency to problematize the person and view him/her as an object for clinical intervention”. (Quinn & Degener, 2002).

Auguste Comte, a French philosopher who founded the discipline of sociology and the doctrine of positivism introduced the concept of ‘normality’ which implied a state of order and balance; so when he viewed disability with this idea of order and balance, he recognized the pathology of disability to be an ‘excess’ or ‘deficiency’. This is
where the medical model originated because it was founded on the principle of normality. It aims “...to restore the disabled person to normality, whatever that may mean. Where that is not possible, the basic aim is not abandoned; the goal is to restore the disabled person to a state that is as near normality as possible.” (Oliver, 1990)

“By contrast, the social model of disability locates the experience of disability in the social environment, rather than impairment, and carries with it the implication of action to dismantle the social and physical barriers to the participation and inclusion of persons with disability.” (Kayess & French, 2008) “The medical model and the social model are often presented as dichotomous, but disability should be viewed neither as purely medical nor as purely social” (WHO, 2011)

The social model of disability is the embodiment of UNCRPD’s slogan “Nothing about us without us” which calls for the dynamic, enthusiastic participation of persons with disabilities in bringing about changes in disability rights and the laws that come into effect as a result of these changes. It has provided persons with disabilities a framework where they become vehicles of change, ushering in greater awareness about their rights. The social model of disability has unified persons with disabilities in their common struggle for disability rights while also acting as a powerful device of liberation that by means of purposeful collective action can transform society.

-inspired a deficit view of disability. Needless to say, such a view is antiquated in light of the current approaches being outlined to understand & address the concerns of disabled persons.

23 The slogan was widely used by organizations advocating for the rights of disabled persons. It was the theme for the observance of the ‘International day of Disabled Persons’.

24 Disability KaR-Enabling disabled people to reduce poverty: Briefing Note: The social model of disability, human rights and development by Bill Albert September 2004.
Models of Disability

**Medical Model**
focuses on medical care, therapy, rehabilitation with the aim of curing or 'fixing' the disability or impairment

**Charity Model**
views disability as a weakness that merits sympathy, the focus is usually on welfare schemes & philanthropy

**Social Model**
views disability as a society's lack of organization to accommodate a person with disability, focus is on removing barriers to access

**Human Rights Model**
views that all persons irrespective of their disabilities have basic human rights, as they are born free & are equal in rights and dignity

**Economic Model**
focuses on economic effects caused by the lack of employment or productivity of a person with disability, loss of earnings, low profit margin for employers etc

**Empowerment Model**
seeks to empower persons with disabilities to take action, make choices & realize his/her full potential

Fig 1.1 Models of Disability
Persons with disabilities are subjects who hold certain inalienable rights irrespective of the disabilities they suffer from, because they were born equal and free.\textsuperscript{25}

“Seeing people with disabilities as subjects rather than objects entails giving them access to the full benefits of basic freedoms that most people take for granted and doing so in a way that is respectful and accommodating of their difference. It means abandoning the tendency to perceive people with disabilities as problems and viewing them instead in terms of their rights.” (Quinn & Degener, 2002)

The human rights model of disability is therefore a view which embodies the principles that govern human rights as enshrined in the Universal declaration of human rights.

“The human rights model positions disability as an important dimension of human culture, and it affirms that all human beings irrespective of their disabilities have certain rights which are inalienable. This model builds upon the spirit of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, 1948, according to which, ‘\textbf{all human beings are born free and equal in rights and dignity}’ (CUTS International, 2011).

A socially cohesive and inclusive model of defining ‘persons with disability’ could combine a medical-social model of disability with other socially significant aspects while affording all persons with disabilities the benefits of inclusion & accessibility; with the goal of securing for them the full spectrum of human rights and fundamental freedoms without discrimination.\textsuperscript{26} “Disability is an evolving concept and that disability results from the interaction between persons with impairments and attitudinal and environmental barriers that hinders their full and effective participation in society on an equal basis with others.” (UNCRPD, 2008).

The convention recognizes that the concept of disability is subject to socio-cultural shifts in attitude and can vary from time to time, from society to society. Article 1 of the UNCRPD gives an inclusive idea

\textsuperscript{25} \textit{Article 1 of UDHR, 1948 states that all are born free and equal in dignity & rights}

\textsuperscript{26} \textit{CRPD Training Guide no.19, Professional Training series, OHCHR}
of persons with disabilities wherein it states that “persons with disabilities include those who have long-term physical, mental, intellectual or sensory impairments which in interaction with various barriers may hinder their full and effective participation in society on an equal basis with others.” (UNCRPD, 2008)

The UNCRPD’s concept of a ‘person with disabilities’ suggests fluidity & accommodation, which is crucial to understanding & developing guidelines in the context of an evolving jurisprudence on disability rights with emphasis on inclusion and accessibility. It has been instrumental in bringing about a paradigm shift in the way the world views issues of disability and in empowering persons with disabilities to grow beyond perceived limitations imposed by the society at large.

Call to Action

- Social model of disability is changing the attitude of society towards disability which may be promoted by Round table, conferences workshops on disability and life experiences of students with disability using social media platforms to sensitize university stakeholders towards their needs.

  Encouraging a shift in attitude from the ‘disabilities’ to their positive traits and strengths; where their successes and accomplishments are highlighted as role models. These campaigns at the university level can be instrumental in fostering an inclusive culture & disabled friendly campus.

- Orientation programme on schemes, provisions & assistance for Students with disabilities as mandatory programme with regular updates) in colleges/universities.

- World Disability day/International day for disabled shall be celebrated annually in all colleges/universities.
III) Overview of ‘Persons with Disability’ Provisions in Indian context

Though India has adopted the UNCRPD concept of ‘persons with disabilities’ as a definition in the ‘Rights of Persons with Disabilities Act, 2016, and it has\(^{27}\); this implies that the focus is back on the removal of ‘impairments’ and not the societal, cultural, economic, educational, or technological barriers that may hinder the person with disability in everyday life as barriers; further, this also acts as an impediment to students with disabilities in the areas of higher education and university level. The barriers faced by students with disability may be categorized into four types: physical/architectural barriers (infrastructure), institutional barriers (rules), social barriers (attitudes), academic barriers. As the barriers is included in the definition of Persons with disability in The Rights of Persons with Disabilities Act, 2016 also further classifies persons with disabilities as a “person with benchmark disability” meaning a person with not less than a 40% disability & a “person with disability having high support needs”.\(^{28}\)

So by implication there are 3 categories of persons with disabilities i.e. persons who suffer from less than 40% disabilities (which are clearly excluded from disability concessions or benefits and their rights must be recognized on par with other persons with disabilities), persons with benchmark disabilities and persons with disabilities having high support needs.

Even in the presence of special concessions and provisions\(^{29}\), such a categorization cannot be substantiated when the focus of the CRPD is

\(^{27}\) Chapter I, 2(s) of the Rights of the persons with disabilities Act, 2016 states that “person with disability” means a person with long term physical, mental, intellectual or sensory impairment which, in interaction with barriers, hinders his full and effective participation in society equally with others;”

\(^{28}\) Chapter I, 2(t) Rights of the Persons with disabilities Act, 2016

\(^{29}\) As enshrined in chapter VI & VII of the Rights of the Persons with disabilities Act, 2016
“on the prohibition of discrimination and the promotion of equality rather than on the categorization of various disabilities.” (OHCHR, 2010) When compared to the provisions of the UNCRPD which India has ratified without reservations, the segregated approach of this Act seems to lack a core understanding of the principles with which the UNCRPD was drafted.

The Act, 2016 also implies as benchmark disability, as a further proof of its nonchalant understanding of CRPD principles, that persons with disabilities cannot be discriminated on the ground of percentage of disabilities if it can be proven that the “impugned act or omission is appropriate to achieve a legitimate aim.” (Chapter II, 3(3) Rights of Persons with Disabilities Act, 2016)

The term ‘legitimate aim’ is a subjective clause which can be employed as a means of enabling discrimination against persons with disabilities thus defeating its purpose. In the absence of a conceptually clear legal definition of what might constitute a ‘legitimate aim’ or a precedent which it can be based upon, such a clause may be misconstrued and misused to the detriment of persons with disabilities. The CRPD perceives ‘disability’ beyond the confines of a ‘medical model “which is rooted in an undue emphasis on clinical diagnosis, the very nature of which is destined to lead to a partial and inhibiting view of the disabled individual”; (Brisenden, 1986). Disability is a human rights issue that needs legislative, socio-economic & comprehensive policy measures to eliminate all barriers to inclusion and accessibility for persons with disabilities.

“Women, men and children with disabilities are too often amongst the most marginalized in all societies and face unique challenges in the enjoyment of their human rights. For a long time it was assumed that such challenges were the natural and unavoidable consequence of their physical, mental, intellectual

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30 Sec 15 of the Equality Act 2010 enacted by the UK Parliament recognizes the principles of ‘objective justification’ & ‘proportionality’ with regards to pursuing a legitimate aim, with the intention of preventing discrimination arising from disabilities. In the absence of a similar clause in the Rights of the Persons with Disabilities Bill, 2014, the term ‘legitimate aim’ is open to wide interpretation & may unwittingly become a tool to perpetuate discrimination against persons with disabilities.
or sensory impairment. The adoption and the entry into force of the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities and its Optional Protocol challenge such attitudes and mark a profound shift in existing approaches towards disability. **In the Convention, the focus is no longer on a perceived “wrongness” of the person, with the impairment seen as a matter of deficiency or disease. On the contrary, the Convention views disability as ‘pathology of society’, that is, as the result of the failure of societies to be inclusive and to accommodate individual differences. Societies need to change, not the individual, and the Convention provides a road map for such change.** *(OHCHR, 2010)*

The purpose behind revising the Persons with Disabilities Bill, 2012 was to align the provisions of the bill with that of CRPD in an attempt to set forth greater transparency, accountability, enforcement and implementation of disability friendly laws. The ‘Rights of Persons with Disabilities’ Bill 2014 is supposed to have taken into account all such revisions as were deemed necessary to make it a comprehensive and inclusive legislative tool with clear definitions of concepts and steps for mobilizing & implementing measures that would facilitate accessibility for persons with disabilities in all walks of life. Instead, it has laid out vague framework that focuses on standardizing provisions based on percentage of disability without concise protocols or clear definitions on how to execute these standards; parts of which constitute blatant violations of the guiding principles with which the CRPD was drafted. This was revised further in Rights for person with disabilities Act, 2016.

For example, the RPWD Act, 2016 makes provision for free education for all **children with ‘benchmark’ disabilities between the age of six to Eighteen years, shall have right to free education in a neighbourhood school or a special school, of his choice.** It would by omission then imply that, if a child with benchmark disabilities chooses to go to a school that is outside the neighbourhood due to socio-cultural barriers or lack of accessibility, the ‘free education’ clause would cease to apply. It acts as an impediment to the child’s,

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31 The Draft of Persons with Disabilities Bill 2012 was meant to an improvisation of the PWD Act of 1995. The Rights of Persons with Disabilities Bill, 2014 was a further revision of the 2012 Draft bill.

32 Article 3, The Right of Children to Free & Compulsory Education (RTE) Act, 2009, the right to education has been granted the same legal status as the right to life under Article 21 of the Indian Constitution.

33 Chapter VI, Article 31 (1) The Rights of Persons with Disabilities Act, 2016
parent or guardian’s basic human right of the freedom of choice regarding where the child should receive schooling.

The RPWD Act, 2016 states that every child with benchmark disability will have access to free education in an ‘appropriate environment’ but fails to define what might constitute an appropriate environment or state basic parameters by which guidelines or measures can be drawn (by willing state or non-state actors) to develop an ‘appropriate environment’ suited to the needs of students with disabilities.

“Social acceptance has a significant impact upon the self-esteem of students with learning disabilities. Social acceptance of these students requires the sensitivity of the entire school community” (ASHA, 1991) in fostering an environment that is beneficial to their overall development and confidence. The aspect of social inclusion in the field of education is crucial in determining the various factors that would help define the concept of an ‘appropriate environment’.

Under clause 102 & 103 of the Rights of Persons with disabilities Bill 2014, the violation of any provisions contained, will amount to a criminal offence; however it has failed to address the issue of what might constitute a criminal offence; whether it would fall under the purview of the Indian Penal Code (IPC) or under the Indian constitution. “For example the Bill states that a person with disabilities will have the right to live in the community. This implies that violating this provision could attract imprisonment for up to six months and /or a fine of up to Rs 10,000. However the Bill does not specify what actions would constitute violating the right of disabled persons to live in a community.” (Kala & Shankar, 2015)

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34 Article 26 (3) as enumerated in Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR), 1948
35 Chapter VI, Article 31 (2) The Rights of Persons with Disabilities Act, 2016
36 The Canadian Urban Libraries Council (CULC) defines social inclusion as the participatory, authentic, and accountable manner in which institutions uphold and reinforce the principles of access, equity and, as a result, social inclusion for all.
37 Relief for the disabled & unemployable are on State List II of the 7th Schedule of the Constitution of India
It is also important to note that persons with less than 40% disabilities might sometimes need special assistance as it is with a person with benchmark disabilities. This criterion of allowing special provisions only for persons with benchmark disabilities and persons with need for higher support is exclusive, not inclusive. This must be reviewed and revised to include all persons with disabilities in line with the provisions of CRPD.

This must also reflect in protocols pertaining to obtaining a disability certificate which would allow persons with disabilities to access benefits & schemes specially accorded to them under various International & national provisions. According to the Union Government’s Ministry of Social Justice and Empowerment Department of Disability Affairs, only 39.28 per cent of persons with disabilities hold a disability certificate. There is a dire need of overhauling the procedures related to issuing a disability certificate and also ensuring the authority & validity of such a document.

To illustrate, a student X with benchmark disabilities (40%) applied for admissions in a premier institute ABC. ABC conducted an assessment of X’s disabilities through its own medical authority and determined that X suffered only with 25% disabilities and therefore was not eligible for admission concessions accorded to persons with disabilities. But if the disability certificate qualifies as 40% and above then the person with disability is entitled to get all facilities.

If every institute or organization conducts an independent medical examination of person with disabilities and then denies admission because the reassessed disability report doesn’t qualify for benchmark disabilities concessions, the validity & authority of the disability certificate issued by a certified medical authority by the government not only comes into question, but is also considered to be void. The disability certificate issued by the government approved

\[38\] Statistics mentioned are for the year 2013-2014

\[39\] The American Medical Association (AMA) in its Sixth Edition of “Guides to the Evaluation of Permanent Impairment” defines ‘Independent Medical Examination’ as a usually one-time evaluation performed by an independent medical examiner that is not treating the patient or claimant, to answer questions posed by the party requesting the IME.
medical authority is also regularly evaluated for changes in the disability status of persons with disabilities. So, a person with disabilities has to prove his/her ‘disabilities’ time and again, to both government & non-government parties in order to avail concessions. The process is not only cumbersome but also lowly in its manner of treating persons with disabilities and violates their right to live life with dignity.\textsuperscript{40}

Rights for Persons with Disability Act, 2016 has facilitated a new scheme of UDID card which is Unique Disability Identification Card to get one stop facilities to Persons with disability in the country. If this applies to the higher education context, the certification procedures and disability specific provisions & facilities can be provided with a greater ease. I-Access Rights Mission suggests providing the UDID card to all university students with disability with the help of Social Welfare Department of every district under Ministry of Social Justice and Empowerment. This will help to provide various scholarships for PWD students through the MoSJ.

Persons with disabilities living in rural areas often face accessibility issues with regards to transport to reach a government authorized college or university so transportation facilities can create boon to the life of SWD.

There is a great need for sensitization which \textit{involves} learning the skills to negotiate effective communication, a heightened awareness of one’s own attitudes, and sensitivity to issues of stereotyping, prejudice and exclusion” \textendash{} (Triliva, Anagnostopoulou, Hatzinikolao, Chimienti, & Mastorakou, 2009); this calls for breaking stereotypes about disability identity and building strong awareness programme.

\textit{“Central to contemporary concepts of disability is the notion of systemic disadvantage, according to which persons with disability are discriminated against by social structures that segregate or exclude them from participating fully in society. ‘Disability’ is understood and experienced as oppression by social structures and practices.”} (Kayess & French, 2008). Eliminating these archaic social structures is critical in order to pave way for a ‘barrier’ free, inclusive & disability friendly society. An inclusive definition of disability would help shape the future of disability laws in India and strengthen the cause of ‘Inclusive & Accessible’ education for all persons with disabilities irrespective of the percentage of disabilities they suffer from.

\textsuperscript{40} Article 3, CRPD & Article 21 under the Constitution of India grant & recognize the inherent dignity & individual autonomy of all persons with disabilities.
Call to Action

- Admission policy for SWD should be accessible to them in context of examination facilities and scribe/ writers provisions. Volunteers scribe list shall be generated in every college/ universities.
- Monitoring & feedback system regarding the needs of SWD shall be developed to monitor all facilities and benefits. Their voices shall be taken into consideration to develop academic resources, facilities under Section 44 of RPWD Acts, 2016.
- Disability Awareness and Accessibility Committee (DAAC) can be formed in every universities to monitor the services on every 3 months with a report prepared annually.
- Disability certificates issued by Government authorized medical Officers/ hospitals must be given final status. UDID cards are the unique disability identity card issued by the Ministry of Social Justice as the one stop solution to provide all the schemes and facilities for PWD. The students with disability who has disability certificate may also apply for UDID card. This will save legal hassles for students with disabilities as well as help them utilize the benefits afforded to them through various legislative Acts for their assistance.

- The procedure for securing a disability certificate must be simplified using existing legal frameworks. Students with disabilities in rural communities sometimes have to take 2-3 day trips to their nearest authorized government medical hospital/officer for the issuance of a disability certificate. This is cumbersome and perhaps one of the reasons why half the persons with disabilities in India do not have disability certificates.  

41According to census data in 2011, India has a population of over 2.1 crore or 21 million people with disabilities, however only 40% of this population has access to a disability certificate. Refer to the article in ‘The Hindu’ titled “Only 40 per cent of India’s disabled have access to disability certificates” which can be accessed at http://www.thehindu.com/news/cities/kolkata/only-40-per-cent-of-indias-disabled-have-access-to-disability-certificates/article6657745.ece
Disability is the inability to see ability: OVERCOMING ODDS

Since the age of five, I had a severe ear pain & asthma. In 1996 I suffered from Diplopia for which I was admitted in Jaslok Hospital, Mumbai where a tumor was detected in the anterior cranial fosse of my brain. Five unsuccessful biopsies were done to diagnose the tumor. On a trial and error basis, they tried two different chemotherapies & later advised to go further for radiotherapy. We refused and opted for Ayurvedic treatments instead.

In 2001 calamity struck again & darkness loomed into my life, literally. I was studying for my 12th board exams then & realized I could not read my textbooks properly. I lost sight in both eyes in about ten day’s time. Both eyes were shut tight and I couldn’t move my eyes. This was accompanied by a loss of speech, the inability to eat or drink & unbearable headaches. I was admitted to Jaslok Hospital again and had to undergo two unsuccessful biopsies to diagnose the tumor. My family and I felt utterly helpless and lost.

“When all the doors in life are closed, God opens a new one”. In 2002, the door of hope opened for me when a specialist doctor suggested that I practice some Yoga techniques along with Panchagavya Ayurvedic treatments. He also taught me some breathing techniques. Miraculously, within 2-3 months I started speaking a few short words though my neurosurgeon had said that my loss of speech could not be revived.

Not only did I regain my speech but also the ability to eat a little at a time without the leakage of food through my nasal cavity, headaches subsided, my eyes started opening slowly and regained eye movement. Within two years all the symptoms of the disease disappeared. I am now as healthy as any other normal individual though I have not regained complete eyesight. But I am thankful &
relieved though for the relief I’ve got from other complications. In 2005 I got in touch with the National Association for the Blind (NAB) and pursued a 4 month basic rehabilitation course in which I regained my confidence and was able to move freely all over the Mumbai. In January 2006 I took up a 6 month Acupressure and Massage course run by NAB. Within 3 months I started earning and decided to take admission for 3 yr diploma course in physiotherapy. I completed my studies with the money I earned personally. I was no longer a financial burden on my family; in fact I started to contribute to family income along with my studies. After completing my diploma I started practicing physiotherapy. I got married in 2009 and shortly afterwards, I completed my graduation from Mumbai University. I was determined to serve the organization NAB, who has done so much for me; I worked at NAB for 4 yrs teaching acupressure and massage to blind students.

I wanted to give back to the society in some way. Merely having the desire to help though is not enough; one should have proper knowledge about how to channel one’s gifts and abilities so that it can be applied properly for the welfare of society. This is when I came across programs offered by TISS and decided to do undertake the MSW Program. After a strenuous admission process and much hard work, I obtained a seat for the program. Today I enjoy my studies at TISS and appreciate the fact that the environment at the institute is disability friendly. I practice Physiotherapy (which is my main source of income) on weekends and evenings when I’m free.

I am glad I joined TISS as the knowledge that I gain here will help me in my future endeavours to help the society. I am very proud to be a TISSian. I hope my story will inspire you face challenges in life and move ahead towards your goals with positivity.

-Ravikant Jagtap
Education for ALL

Education’s purpose is to replace an empty mind with an open one

~Malcom S. Forbes
I) Inclusive & Accessible education for students with disabilities

With the introduction of the UNCRPD which recognizes disability as a human rights issue, the area of disability rights law has undergone a metamorphosis of sorts and has given students with disabilities a new voice & renewed zeal to make a difference in society, to be counted as equals. This shift in attitude is a major breakthrough for them and it needs to be substantiated with direct, affirmative action on the part of the government, state & non-state actors and society to enable a barrier free environment in the field of higher education. Inclusion is one of the key factors that will help in the realization of the goals stipulated by the EFA campaign

[One must] “...Conceive inclusion to be the fundamental right of all children and adults to fully participate, and contribute in all aspects of life and culture, without restriction or threat of marginalization. As an extension of this definition, inclusive education must be understood then not as a decision about the placement of students, but rather as a school-wide philosophy dedicated to the spirit and resources needed to truly provide education for all.” (Maria-Luise Braunsteiner, 2014)

The right to education is a basic human right enshrined under Article 26 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, 1948. The Convention on the Rights of the Child (1989) states “.....That the disabled child has effective access to and receives education, training, health care services, rehabilitation services, preparation for employment and recreation opportunities in a manner conducive to the child’s achieving the fullest possible social integration and individual development, including his or her cultural and spiritual development”.

The Standard Rules on the Equalization of Opportunities for Persons with Disability equips States to “recognize the principle of equal primary, secondary and tertiary educational opportunities for children,
youth and adults with disabilities, in integrated settings. They should ensure that the education of persons with disabilities is an integral part of the educational system”

The Salamanca Statement lays out a framework for action for children with special education needs including children with disabilities. It believes that students with special needs or disabilities will attain the best possible educational progress and integration in an inclusive school setting and that inclusion and participation enables students with disability to enjoy & exercise their human rights.

“Experience in many countries demonstrates that the integration of children & youth with special education needs is best achieved within inclusive schools that serve all children within a community. It is within this context that those with special educational needs can achieve the fullest educational progress and social integration.” (UNESCO, The Salamanca Statement & Framework for Action on Special needs education, 1994)

“Society’s misperception of different forms and types of disability and the limited capacity of social actors to accommodate special needs often place people on the margin. Persons with disabilities experience inequalities in their daily lives, and have fewer opportunities to access a quality education that takes place in an inclusive environment.” (UNESCO Education, 2015).

The approach to education must include access to free and compulsory education; Equality, inclusion and non-discrimination & the right to quality education content and processes. Various international conventions and charters have recognized the importance and need for inclusive education for students with disabilities and are encouraging a universally comprehensive view to education; where education prepares oneself with all the attributes, knowledge and skills necessary to actively participate and contribute

43 Rule 6 of ‘The Standard Rules on the Equalization of Opportunities for persons with disability’,1993 further enumerates on ensuring access by means of integrated education & community based programs by coordinating with parent groups & disabled peoples organizations (DPO’s).

44 UNESCO’s guideline for Inclusion lists out three principles as part of a rights based approach to education.
to all aspects of human life. This approach is based on a humanistic vision of education and development, based on respect for life and human dignity, equal rights, social justice, cultural diversity, international solidarity, and shared responsibility for a sustainable future. (Tang, 2015).

It is imperative therefore to appreciate and value the diversity of students with disabilities and special needs in higher education; while also ensuring that they receive equal opportunities to develop their knowledge base & equip them with all such skills that are essential in understanding and dealing with their environment, society, cultural & social influences & barriers they may encounter outside the field of education.

The ‘Education for All’ movement kick started by UNESCO, UNICEF, UNDP & The World Bank envisioned a global commitment to reducing illiteracy and ensuring educational access for all with a view to reform national educational policies and implement measures that would allow for inclusion of all children, especially those that are often discriminated and marginalized on the basis of disability, special needs, gender and poverty.

In a constantly evolving, globalized and dynamic world, where technology is fuelling innovative educational practices and fast disappearing boundaries, it becomes essential to address the widening gap of children and adults with disabilities who are unable to receive education due to the lack of inclusive & accessible educational frameworks.

*In the report ‘Rethinking Education, towards a global common good’, UNESCO’s Qian Tang promotes a ‘humanistic’ approach to education which goes beyond the confines of utilitarian ideas & economic growth.*

*The initial goal period of the EFA campaign was from the time of the Dakar Framework in 2000 to 2015. The goal for education for all hasn’t been met in this timeframe and a redesigning of goals is underway for the post 2015 period.*
[This is a key area of concern] as “…the changing requirements in the type and level of knowledge, skills and competencies for today’s knowledge based economies and the insufficient opportunities to access higher levels of learning, including for the acquisition of knowledge and skills on ICT (e-literacy), especially in developing/low income countries, are resulting in a knowledge divide with major economic and employment consequences in today’s mainly technology-driven world.” (UNESCO, Position Paper on Education Post -2015)

This is especially true in the case of Sub-Saharan Africa, South & South East Asian countries. However this is not to say that the education systems in technologically advanced regions like the U.S is devoid of problems stemming from the lack of inclusion & access. Au contraire, “a significant proportion of students with disabilities in the US, especially students with intellectual disabilities, were considered uneducable. These students were completely excluded from public schooling. Even those students with disabilities who were considered to be “educable” were typically segregated within schools since it was presumed that these students had unique educational needs requiring the services of specially trained professionals.” (Dudley-Marling & Burns, 2014).

Stakeholders in the field of higher education must bear this in mind and usher in positive changes that could help negate the consequences of outmoded ways of approaching students with disabilities. They must work on developing BEST practices for Inclusion & Accessibility. “…..to move inclusive educational practices forward, children must be permitted equality and access in education at all levels of schooling. It is clear that the promotion of an inclusive school culture requires that all school personnel value diversity and view differences as assets.” (Braunsteiner & Mariano-Lapidus, 2014)

Some of the major barriers that students with disability face in obtaining an inclusive education are institutional, architectural, socio-cultural & technological. It is essential that these barriers are eliminated as they interfere with the smooth day to day functioning of students with disabilities. Providing them with accessible learning material, ICT’s, and an inclusive socio-cultural acceptance of their uniqueness will help them effectively navigate the intricacies of
higher education. Structural barriers alone are sometimes responsible for multiple barriers which include issues like the process of admissions for students with disabilities (because there’s a lack of ICT’s that can make their admission procedure hassle free), their mobility on campus (like going from one building to another while changing classes), interactions within the classroom (specially in the case of students with speech impairments & who are visually challenged), networking or collaborating with other students on projects (where other students might not be as sensitive to the needs of the student with disability), writing exams (sometimes there’s a serious lack of scribes to volunteer) and the process of internships & placements (where companies might show reluctance in hiring despite the 5% reservation).

A lack of inclusive measures in the higher education level and at the professional level means that [even] well qualified students with disabilities are unable to find suitable employment and be limited in their professional & [personal] growth.“The current generation of young adults with disabilities is better educated, more experienced, and ready to contribute to society in ways that were unavailable to previous generations. Yet, the common experience of these young people is that they are less likely to find work for which they are qualified, less likely to get a promotion, and less likely to be considered for senior positions.” (AAPD, 2013)

The whole aspect of restructuring the education system to make it more inclusive & accessible is to secure students with disabilities, the opportunities to grow professionally, socially and personally. Stakeholders in the field of higher education must coordinate these efforts with employment agencies, leading HR experts, multinationals in private & public sector and the HRD Ministry to ensure that equal opportunities at employment are given to students with disabilities; not just by means of the 5% reservation quota47, but also on the basis

47 Article 33(1) of the Rights of Persons with Disability Bill, 2014 earmarks a 5% reservation quota for persons of benchmark disabilities i.e. disabilities not amounting to less than 40%. The PWD Act 1995 in Article 33 made provisions for only a 3% reservation quota in employment but did not make any distinction between persons with benchmark disabilities or persons with high support needs.
of merit. If a person with 62% disability can top the UPSC exams and gain an IAS post solely on the basis of merit\textsuperscript{48}, the society & economic sector both have to wake up to the reservoir of potential these students with disabilities present.

“Underestimation of the abilities of people with disabilities is a major obstacle to their inclusion. It exists not only in society at large but also in the minds of professionals, politicians and other decision-makers. It can also occur in families, among peers and in individuals with a disability, especially in the absence of evidence that they are valued and supported in their development.” (UNICEF, 2013).

The theme of Inclusion & Accessibility in higher education is one that requires continued commitment and adaptation with a view to helping students with disabilities capitalize on opportunities to further their individual development.

\textsuperscript{48} Ira Singhal, who is a role model student with orthoedtic disability of 62% due to scoliosis, topped the UPSC exams for 2015. Such the role model students exist in university
Call to Action

Who are the students with disability? How are they identified and categorised? There are 21 types of diverse students with disability. It is important to recognize that students with disabilities have the best chance at ‘inclusion’ only when they are part of mainstream with non-disabled students.

Fig.1.3 A 1981 stamp issued by the Indian Postal Service to mark observance of the International year for disabled persons.

The 21 types disability are classified as per RPWD Act 2016, are follows :- Blindness, Low-vision, Leprosy Cured persons, Hearing Impairment (deaf and hard of hearing), Loco motor Disability, Dwarfism, Intellectual Disability, Mental Illness, Autism Spectrum Disorder, Cerebral Palsy, Muscular Dystrophy, Chronic Neurological conditions, Specific Learning Disabilities, Multiple Sclerosis, Speech and Language disability, Thalassemia, Haemophilia, Sickle Cell disease, Multiple Disabilities including deaf-blindness, Acid Attack victim, Parkinson's disease. Hence University may have to work with 21 categories of students with disability as per RPWD Act 2016.
Mandatory & enforceable guidelines regarding the same must be issued by state government to ensure that any ‘segregation’ based on disabilities is rooted out.

Coordinate with disabled people’s organizations (DPO’s) and other schools/colleges/universities to organize seminars, TEDx events and participation centric programs at the college/university level students.

Encourage volunteering & internship programs with DPO’s in line with curriculum subjects so as to increase awareness and support of students with disabilities.

Develop a ‘Best Practices of SWD for ‘Inclusion & Accessibility’ Every engineering college shall start Disability Design Challenge Project and develop innovative technology and apps for students with disability to learn better. example-navigation in college campus, tactile map of university, Note taking device for classroom, website accessibility, automatic low cost wheelchairs, accessible lifts, accessible transports, Diagram accessibility, accessible classrooms, Library devices to search books, accessibility in canteen, accessible toilets, ICT devices and apps, speaking pictures, accessible colours for blind person. Sign language learning tool for deaf community.

Review all measures taken to ensure Accessibility for students with disability in various areas i.e., learning materials, ICT’s, teaching pedagogy, and curriculum.

Dedicate one week of the annual mandatory observance of ‘Disability week’ on the 3rd of December every year. The U.N instituted this observance with the aim to create greater awareness & understanding of disability issues Each year has a different theme of focus. Educational institutions must observe the week and plan events in generating awareness as well as the inclusion of students with disabilities.

Inclusive employment & Job placement with networking with NGO /corporate CSR promotion with equality in wages
II) India & EFA

“Education must be viewed as a facilitator in everyone’s human development and functionality, regardless of barriers of any kind, physical or otherwise. Therefore, disability of any kind (physical, social and/or emotional) cannot be a disqualifier. Inclusion, thus, involves adopting a broad vision of Education for All by addressing the spectrum of needs of all learners, including those who are vulnerable to marginalization and exclusion”. (UNESCO, Guidelines for Inclusion: Ensuring Access to Education for All, 2005)

India has made steady progress on EFA goals which includes providing for early childhood education for vulnerable & disadvantaged children, ensuring compulsory, free and accessible quality education to eliminating gender disparities & achieving gender equality in education and ensuring excellence in literacy, numeracy and essential life skills. In its commitment to ensure quality education that is both inclusive and accessible, India implemented the ‘Right to Education’ Act in 2009.

However, India’s recent review of the EFA goals notes that the level of participation in education by children or students with special needs or disabilities is dismally low; hinting at the scope of work that needs to be undertaken in ensuring quality, inclusive education that is accessible to students with disabilities. It has therefore prioritized the goal of ensuring universal access with equity & inclusion. In the foreword of the EFA Review Report of India, Rajarshi Bhattacharya, the secretary of the Department of School Education & Literacy (HRD Ministry) has spelled out the country’s educational goals for the next decade.
“The dynamics of education and its role in national development and social transformation make it essential that educational programs keep continuously renewing in order to maintain its relevance to the changing societal needs, personal needs of learner and to the emerging national development priorities. For India the current review exercise has been very valuable both in the term of reflecting the achievements towards the EFA goals as well as for determining the priorities for the next phase of the international agenda for Education. India stands committed to providing quality education and providing relevant skills to its children to its children in a concerted manner in the decade ahead” (NUEPA, 2014)

One of the biggest challenges the report observed was the lack of training/support provided for teachers in mainstream schooling for students with disabilities & special needs; this is a challenge faced both in elementary, secondary and higher education levels.

“The teacher training course curriculum of general pre-service training programs neither fully equips the teachers and teacher educators to deal with the CWSN nor it equip them to manage the mild and moderately disabled children in general classrooms. Towards this end, an MOU has been signed between the National Council for Teacher Educations (NCTE) and the Rehabilitation Council of India (RCI) leading towards a convergence so as to sensitize all teachers and resource persons. The National Council of Educational Research & Training (NCERT) has set up a group under the National Curriculum Framework Review to examine the pedagogic inputs and classroom reorganization required for CWSN.” (Sanjeev & Kumar, 2007)

Introducing new multimodal learning methods, providing accessible learning material & technology along with other disabled friendly measures like adopting principles of universal design for physical accessibility etc are important considerations in implementing an inclusive and accessible educational framework; however, Teachers & staffs are key stakeholders who need to be sensitized and trained with a view to familiarizing them with inclusive values.

“Teacher training programs must also strive towards recruiting teacher candidates with disabilities and with diverse cultural, migrant and other backgrounds. It is imperative that teachers themselves represent the diversity that the philosophy of inclusion calls for. Teachers often form their attitudes towards students and schooling, based largely on their own experiences as a student. An effort must be made to counter these largely homogeneous
educational experiences by including teachers and administrators from marginalized groups.” (Maria-Luise B, 2014)

The University Grants Commission (UGC) has recognized the importance of addressing this core issue while formulating the framework for ‘Teacher Preparation in special education’ (TEPSE) & ‘Higher education for persons with special needs’ (HEPSN). These two programs were based on the findings by the Rehabilitation Council of India which suggested that India would need over 1 lakh trained teachers in the coming decade to accommodate the educational needs of students with disabilities.

The UGC believes that “Bachelor’s and master’s level teacher programs are needed for preparing teachers to help disabled children realize the objective of education for all.” (UGC, 2012) This would help bridge the alarming pupil-teacher ratio deficit. It is imperative to address this issue keeping in mind the future of the Indian education system. It’d be a futile attempt to get students with disabilities into mainstream schooling if there’s a lack of trained staff & teachers who could cater to their needs.

[As part of EFA, the broader vision of education must include] “…recruiting teachers who are socially closer to children and who are professionally prepared to meet the learning needs of diverse groups of learners; reforming the curriculum for and process of initial preparation of teachers with the aim of preparing teachers for diverse environments (rural and remote areas) and addressing diversity in the classroom with special focus on addressing the learning needs of children from socially and economically disadvantaged groups;” (NUEPA, 2014)

There’s also a strong need to undertake initiatives that will make parents of students with disabilities, aware of the various provisions

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51 UGC’s XII Plan TEPSE & HEPSN was initially introduced in the 9th five year plan with a view to provide teacher’s training for children with special needs & disabilities.

52 It was one of the findings of the NCERT Status Report titled ‘Status of Implementation of RTE Act 2009, in context of disadvantaged children at Elementary stage, 2013 authored by R.B.L Soni.
and benefits they can claim for their children in the field of higher education. A lack of this knowledge prompts many students with disabilities to give up on higher education thus limiting their opportunities for growth, both personally & professionally. Data mapping & identifying the number of students with disabilities with the help of Disabled People's Organizations (DPO's), census data, household surveys, Community-Based Rehabilitation (CBR) and disability services along with other facilities in higher education will help immensely in building up a database of such students. This will allow for greater individualized attention to their learning needs and keep track of their progress. Stakeholders in the field of higher education must “highlight capacity of people with a disability in education, showcasing diverse tertiary, vocational and employment pathways including access to scholarships as viable opportunities” (CBM, 2012)

“Is there a child who does not dream of being counted and having her or his gifts and talents recognized? No. All children have hopes and dreams – including children with disabilities. And all children deserve a fair chance to make their dreams real” (Lake, 2013)

34.2% of out of school children & young adults were those with disabilities and special needs. This reflects poorly on the country’s educational infrastructure to provide quality, accessibly & inclusive education. Changes ushered in to facilitate greater inclusion & access in the field of higher education will be beneficial only when primary education steps up to meeting the challenge of accommodating students with diverse physical, social & economic needs.

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53 Parents were unaware of the provisions of the Right to Education Act according to the NCERT Status Report, 2013.

54 As of 2009, 34.2% out of school children were those with special needs, 48% of them suffered from mental disabilities and 37% of them suffered from speech disabilities. This is according to India’s EFA Review Report titled “Education for all; towards quality with equity” published by NCERT, 2014
Call to Action

- Training of teachers, lab assistance, administrative staffs, librarians, security guards, peers, students and other stakeholders of the university/college on disability, inclusive education, universal design, teaching pedagogies and curriculum accessibility using multisensory modalities.

- As implementation of India’s EFA policy relies on qualified, trained teachers including recruitment of disabled teachers to bridge the existing deficit of qualified staff to address the needs of students with disabilities. There is a need to provide existing teachers with additional training on accessibility software’s to know needs of students with disabilities.

- ICTs play a crucial role in the effective implementation of ‘inclusive & accessible’ education. In India, this becomes an even more important issue because access to technology in rural areas is limited which further proves restrictive for students with disabilities coming from low-income families and live in remote areas. Stakeholders in the field of higher education need to collaborate and converge with major players in the ICT sector & the State to make multimodal methods of learning, reading material in accessible formats, assistive technologies and other access related devices/gadgets/applications affordable and cost effective.

Inclusion of students with disability must be a priority in the long-term development goals for the EFA campaign in India, starting with ensuring primary education for such students in inclusive & accessible schooling environments which will minimize drop-out rates & boost the number of students with disabilities in higher education as well.
Fig 1.4 illustrates an info graphic on ‘Inclusive Education’ presented & published by UNESCO at the World Education Forum, 2015
III ICT’s as a tool of Inclusive & Accessible Education for students with disabilities & UGC Schemes

Accessibility is the human right as per UNCRPD which specifically recognises accessibility under Articles 9 and article 21 as access to information, communications and services, including the internet, is a human right. This is applicable to the rights of student with disability in higher education. The reforms in the (ICT) Information and Computer Technology has plays a significant role in providing access to students with disability across their life span and especially in higher education. The Jaws software, NVDA software, Voice synthesizer, ICT, mobile technologies, Communication APPs like Jellow, Social networking technologies has played a key role in enhancing the learning’s of students with disabilities in higher education.

A multimodal/multisensory human interactive design and information communication technology (ICT) is required to bridge the gaps in teaching and learning for the students with disability for promoting equal access in inclusive education. The starting point is developing and enabling 'equal accessibility policy at university level from the admission to getting the degree'. This begins from responding to their diverse needs from the choosing a subject of choice, responding to admission needs and access to classrooms, class notes, books and academic resources, library, campus navigations, practical, hostels, food, playing games, examinations, class assignments, research and orientation to academic environment etc.(V. Kolhe 2017) Understanding individual needs of the students with disability in planning and designing curriculum at classroom level, is the very prerequisite for facilitating Inclusive/ the better facilitation of education at higher education. The philosophy of inclusion is towards' Occupiability of all learners in Classroom curriculum domain of teaching and providing learning with equal access (V Kolhe, 2017)

UGC guidelines of Persons with Disability: XII Plan constitutes three major facilities for students with disability

A. Teacher Preparation in Special Education (TEPSE) The Teacher Preparation in Special Education (TEPSE) scheme is meant for assisting Departments of Education to launch special education teacher preparation programmes to prepare special teachers to teach in both special and inclusive settings. The scheme provides financial assistance to offer B.Ed. and M.Ed.

B. Higher Education for Persons with Special Needs (HEPSN) Creating awareness about the capabilities of differently-abled persons, constructing facilities aimed at improving accessibility, purchase of equipment to enrich learning, etc. Establishment of Enabling Units: In order to develop awareness, providing necessary guidance and counselling.

C. Equal Opportunity/Enabling Unit:
1. Facilitate admission of differently-abled persons in various courses;
2. Provide guidance and counselling
3. Create awareness
4. Assist differently-abled graduates to gain employment in the public & private sectors. Budgetary provision of Rs. 40,000/- per unit per year will be made by the UGC

D. Barrier free and Accessible Environment: The institutions create special facilities such as ramps, rails and special toilets. One-time grant of up to Rs.10 lakhs per university is provided. Access audits by experts develops architectural/ construction plans as per guidelines on accessibility prescribed by Chief Commissioner of Disabilities, Government of India (website: www.ccdisabilities.nic.in). SIPDA schemes is for building accessibility of 50 lacks per building and 20 lacks for website accessibility.

E Providing Special Equipment to augment educational services for differently-abled persons: Availability of accessible learning devices such as computers with screen reading software, low vision aids, scanners, mobility devices.

F. The UGC will provide an ad hoc one-time grant of up to Rs.8.0 lakhs per university during the Twelfth Plan period.

G. Visually-Challenged Teachers: The Scheme providing Reader’s Allowance and funds for purchase of Braille books, recorded materials, etc. These current schemes budget is very low and it focuses on special education approach instead of inclusive education. Hence, guidelines and ‘calls for action’ document shall be prepared for higher education level by using UNCRPD, Education for all, EFA and UGC and RUSA to transform policy for empowerment of students with disability through creating space for Inclusion of PWD.

H. Inclusive Infrastructure and Academic Resources in accessible format: Under SIPDA schemes from ministry and social justice and empowerment provides 50 lacks per building to make it accessible to universities and 20 lakhs for website accessibility.

Page | 56
The World Wide Web or the Internet signaled the dawn of a new information age that was characterized by hassle free remote participation. This digital revolution has paved way for the growth of Information & Communication Technologies (ICTs) over the last two decades which has been exponential. It has opened up a plethora of possibilities and information which can be used for the greater good of humanity.\(^5\) Today the world is a much smaller place because it’s pretty much at your fingertips; with the click of a mouse, your access to information and its potential to positively transform your life is limitless.

The application of ICTs cuts across all areas of human activity- the field of medicine, education, governance, economics or philanthropy to name a few. ICTs are vital in developing & ensuring an inclusive & accessible education for students with disabilities. “Technology lies at the heart of most aspects of inclusive development and the fulfilment of rights for persons with disabilities.” (UNESCO, 2014) “The educational needs of people with disabilities are extremely diverse. As with all other members of society, people with disabilities must acquire the knowledge and skills required for the community in which they live” (Watkins, Tokareva, & Turner, 2011)

The CRPD clearly spells out this mandate under article 9 on Accessibility. “To enable persons with disabilities to live independently and participate fully in all aspects of life, States Parties shall take appropriate measures to ensure to persons with disabilities access, on an equal basis with others, to the physical environment, to transportation, to information and communications, including information and communications technologies and systems…” (UNCRPD, 2008)

Article 21 of the Convention also gives State parties the directive to undertake all such appropriate measures which will enable persons with disabilities “…exercise the right to freedom of expression and opinion, including the freedom to seek, receive and impart

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55 The concept of ‘social good’ came about as a result of innovative & creative approaches to problem solving through technology which aims to do good to society. Online Crowd-funding (a form of fundraising) to help people cover expenses of education, medical treatments etc & social advocacy are examples of social good.
information and ideas on an equal basis with others and through all forms of communication of their choice...” (UNCRPD, 2008) It states that information made available to the general public must be made available in accessible formats for persons with disabilities without additional costs and in a timely manner as well as making official communications disability friendly by use of sign languages, Braille, augmentative and alternative communication modes.

ICT’s can pave the way for greater integration of students with disabilities into society and all spheres of human activity. Information is essentially knowledge and knowledge is power. “The use of technology in education plays a particularly vital role by enabling flexible curriculum development and assisting students with disabilities to participate as equals in the learning experience.” (UNESCO, 2011)

“ICTs can [also] play an important role in facilitating the socio-economic and Political inclusion and mainstreaming of Persons with Disabilities (...) as ICTs can enable them to access various services (health, education, government services etc), information, employment opportunities etc and most importantly, to communicate effectively in spite of their particular disability.” (USOF, 2011).

Every student with disability has the right to access such information & knowledge both for his/her personal and professional growth & also to contribute and fulfill their roles as active participants in society. Students with disabilities will find it easier to improve their accessibility if such ICT’s are made available to them and are cost effective. Not every person with disability has access to assistive

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56 Article 21(a) of the UNCRPD makes provisions for accessible formats of communications for persons with disabilities.

57 Article 21(b) authorizes states to use disability friendly modes of communication in various formats in official interactions or communication.

58 USOF- Universal Service Obligation Fund was instituted under the Department of Telecommunications by the ministry of Communications & Information Technology, India with the intention of providing access to telecommunication & information services in rural areas and connecting them to the mainstream ICT infrastructure in the country.
devices, especially in countries like India where a majority of disabled persons reside in rural areas and come from low-income families.

“...the application of ICT is very important as it plays an essential role in supporting high quality education for learners with disabilities. The advantages of ICT usage in the teaching and learning process are based on the possibilities it offers for alternative means of communication, providing access to educational resources in a more convenient way and to enhancing learning motivation. By overcoming obstacles of time and space, supplementing vital human functioning and supporting the development of crucial skills, these technologies contribute to the increased effectiveness of educational processes by enabling people with disabilities to actively participate in meaningful learning experiences.” (Watkins, Tokareva, & Turner, 2011)

“Persons with disabilities often suffer from discrimination and social exclusion; [They] have fewer economic opportunities and higher rates of poverty. Their daily lives are specifically impeded through inadequate legal frameworks to protect their rights, a lack of financial and skilled human resources to carry out their activities, a lack of opportunities to access education and information, the high cost of assistive technologies (ATs), a lack of services available to them, the absence of large networks of disability groups to share resources with each other, and many other factors…” (UNESCO, Concept Note: From Exclusion to Empowerment-Role of ICTs for persons with disabilities, 2014)

The Marrakesh VIP Treaty (MT), 2013 was a significant step in pushing forward the agenda of ‘Inclusion & Accessibility’. The treaty not only facilitated the making of published works & information accessible to persons with print disabilities & visually impaired persons but also ensured that the countries which have signed the will have to make concessions in national copyright laws to

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59 Population of disabled persons showed a 22.4% increase between 2001-2011, a majority of who were from rural areas according to the 2011 Population Census available at [http://www.censusindia.gov.in/](http://www.censusindia.gov.in/)

60 A person who cannot effectively read print because of a visual, physical, perceptual, developmental, cognitive, or learning disability

61 Implies a person who suffers from partial or complete blindness

62 India is a signatory to the treaty & submitted the instrument of ratification on June, 24th 2014.

63 Copyright laws are in place to protect the authenticity & validity of print material, as well as to stop information piracy. An exception or concession in copyright laws in the context of
allow persons with disabilities & Disabled Person’s Organizations (DPOs) to freely distribute and print such material without prior permission.

This further opens up a channel of information exchange and resources where countries with a vast collection of print material can share it with countries that have limited resources to source such material through traditional methods. This can greatly benefit students with disabilities and special needs as well as other students because it fuels the information pathways to evolve, thrive and develop in a synthesis of knowledge that will be accessible to all. ICTs provide new opportunities for socialization, employment and networking and helps in the inclusion of students with disabilities in all spheres of their lives.

“ICTs offer a great potential to support lifelong learning for all groups of students, including those who have special educational needs. The application of ICTs must enhance independence, integration, and equal opportunities for such people and in this way will facilitate their inclusion in society as valued, respected, and contributing members.” (UNESCO-IITE, 2006)

Therefore it plays a crucial role in the Inclusion & Accessibility of Students with disabilities by equipping them with tools that will ease

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64 Article 5 & 6 of the treaty make provisions for cross-border exchange of accessible format copies as well as the importation of such copies.
their integration process with the society at large and also in specific areas of their life. State parties & stakeholders in the field of higher education must coordinate with other tech think-tanks to ensure that students with disabilities are given information in accessible formats and also taught how to use new technological innovations for greater inclusion and mobility.

This is further emphasized in the current shift of the ICT sector “…in the design of mainstream ICTs to incorporate accessibility (a shift away from design for those without disabilities to cover those with disabilities – Assistive Technologies) and user functionalities for the widest number of users while at the same time focusing also on personalization of the technologies to address the particular disability characteristics of individuals” (Blakemore, 2013)

A majority of students with disabilities in India reside in poor communities or rural areas where accessibility even to basic facilities is found to be challenging. While ICTs are yet to become priorities in designing national level educational policies regarding their implementation & that of assistive technologies for students with disabilities, the need to establish cost effective infrastructural support for allowing greater access to such ICTs in the field of primary and higher education cannot be emphasized enough. Therefore eliminating infrastructural barriers to ICTs should be prioritized as a national development goal, not only to allow greater accessibility and expand the periphery of its application in the development & welfare sector, but also to promote sustainable development.

65 Article 9.2(h) of the UNCRPD states that ICTs must be designed, developed, produced & distributed at an early stage so as to make them accessible at minimum costs.

Call to Action

 “Accessible ICTs is a key consideration for national and regional policies. The potential of accessible ICTs should be fully explored by national educational authorities and ministries with a view to updating national and regional policies to promote their use as a tool for achieving Inclusive Education.” (UNESCO, 2011)

 Create an inventory of existing ICTs (hardware, software, database management systems etc) being used for students with disabilities including assistive devices. Review inventory in the context of available ICT infrastructure to develop an ICT integrated educational module for both students with and without disabilities so as to generate an inclusive ICT centric approach towards education.

 Teachers must be trained in using ICTs & assistive devices used by students with disabilities so as to familiarize themselves with the challenges students face in learning. The UNESCO ICT Competency framework for teachers can be used as a foundation for developing relevant training material & ensuring teachers are ICT competent. Teachers can then accordingly redesign teaching methodologies and employ appropriate multimodal methods and ICTs to create innovative and accessible learning material. Parents, teachers and key stakeholders in the field of education must positively respond to the use of technology in learning and be made aware of its benefits.

 Students with disabilities must be trained in basic computer literacy skills, usage of assistive technologies and given time to accustom themselves with modern ICTs. This would help them learn and apply technology to become self-reliant and confident with technology.

 Disability Inclusion Budget shall be 3% budget of overall university college grants for inclusive & accessible infrastructure, facilities, innovation, workshop, training, honerarium, research, disability resource centre, Technology, enabling unit and salary of the relevant staff.
Every Engineering College shall start Student projects on Disability & Accessible Technology Devices & App creation in Collaboration with Nationally and International key stakeholders in the ICT sector & keep track of current R&D in adaptive & assistive technologies for students with disabilities with a view to making these affordable to create an inclusive and accessible educational system.
Disability is the inability to see ability: OVERCOMING ODDS

I was born into a humble family from the Koli fishing community in Mumbai. My family comprised of my parents and grandmother along with five children of which I am the second. My father is a fisherman and my mother is a housewife. I was 9 years old when my eye sight started deteriorating due to a congenital condition known as Retinitis pigmentosa, an inherited, degenerative eye disease that caused me to lose my eyesight over the course of a few months. I was studying in class 3 at the time. I had to shift schools and hence my parents moved me from the local school that I was attending, to a special school for the blind. It took me considerable time to adjust to my new situation, surroundings and learn Braille. My younger brother who had lost his eye sight a few years earlier was also in the same school and used to do very well academically. I was often compared to him and teased throughout most of my school life for not being like my brother. I completed my SSC at the age of 16 years and obtained 71.46 %. I thought of continuing my education in vernacular medium (Marathi).

However a friend suggested I move to an English medium college as it would help me in my future. I initially did not have the confidence to continue my education in English, but with his encouragement, I finally took a chance & moved from KC College to St Xavier’s college. I faced initially struggled to adjust with the new environment, language and culture. However my confidence increased as I found that I was able to learn and speak the language.

I pursued my post-graduation in social work at the Tata Institute of Social Sciences. I took up research on the fishing community during my post graduation. My research helped me to understand the situation of my community and I realized that they were educationally backward. My own journey and life experience has taught me the importance of education, and I now feel very strongly that I
should facilitate my community through a similar experience. I now conduct personality development sessions for the youth and other interested members of my community residing in my locality. I am associated with a group called the Possibilities Network group, and through them I also conduct Possibilities workshops in schools, colleges, and slum communities in rural and urban areas. I am simultaneously pursuing a law degree from the Government Law College, Mumbai, and have also cleared my NET exam. I hope to use all my education to work towards the betterment of my community. I am currently an advisor in the Machimarnagar, Colaba. I am committed to the cause of the fishing community and plan to establish my own NGO to work on the range of issues confronting fishing communities at large. As Dr. Br. Ambedkar has rightly put it “Those who forget history cannot make history”. With this motivation I am inclined towards making re-writing the history of my own fishing community. I strongly believe that, if education is imparted to the new generation of children belonging to the fishing community, they will be capable of reinventing & transforming the community itself and also contribute positively to the society.

I am presently employed as a project coordinator at the M.K. Tata Learning Centre for the visually challenged at the Tata Institute of Social Sciences. My job profile consists of training students to use assistive technology, and also coordinating responses to the needs of visually challenged students. My family, teachers and friends have taught me the values of being honest, helpful and committed towards the work one is engaged in. Though I am visually challenged I love to take up challenges, and use myself in a productive manner where I can make a difference in myself as well as contribute to society.

My philosophy in life is “get active, take initiative and keep a positive attitude towards life”.

-Kailash Tandel
PART C

‘I ACCESS’ RIGHTS MISSION (IARM) FRAMEWORK
Background

The Centre for Disability Studies & Action (CDSA) at TISS seeks to work with stakeholders in the field of higher education and university level to create, teach, research, develop & demonstrate innovative solutions to deal with the day to day challenges faced by students with disabilities while pursuing higher education. It aims to facilitate their inclusion and make their learning environment accessible, thus enabling an inclusive & accessible educational experience. This will help students with disabilities become self-sufficient, confident and on par with their non-disabled peers in realizing their educational and professional goals & ambitions. It will ensure equalization of opportunities, full participation and protection of the rights & dignity of persons with disabilities.

The IARM framework is part of CDSA’s initiative towards facilitating ‘Inclusion & Accessibility’ for students with disabilities in higher education and at the university level. It has been designed in adherence to the provisions of the UNCRPD and the UGC Guidelines prescribed in the report of the expert committee constituted by the Ministry of Human Resource Development, Government of India. Some of the issues addressed in this framework include accessibility issues related to simplifying admission procedures, on-campus mobility (for e.g. From classroom to dining hall, library, hostel etc), creating learning material in accessible formats, providing assistance during field work and research as well as sensitization of teachers and peers towards students with disabilities in an effort to generate and promote social cohesion & an inclusive culture on campus.

The 9th Five Year Plan introduced the UGC Scheme of assistance for Universities and colleges through TEPSE & HEPSN for the inclusion of students with disabilities. Though the scheme was a step in the right direction, implementation of the scheme has been limited by a focus on special education and not inclusive education, a lack of

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67 The Expert committee report can be found on the UGC website at http://www.ugc.ac.in
funding and the need to amend & update current disability policies in higher education to empower students with disability. Therefore, the idea of this framework here is to suggest small steps and apply these changes to cover a broad spectrum of issues to being inclusion & equal access to the higher education.

1. Reservation Policy for Staff & Students with Disability

The current reservation policy according to legal provisions is 5% for persons with disabilities in employment and educational institutions. The 5% reservation granted under the RPWD Act, 2016. The Rights of Persons with Disabilities Bill, 2014 sought to revise that to 5% reservation to include persons with mental disabilities as well as those with multiple disabilities. TISS follows the 5% reservation policy for students with disabilities and will update its reservation policy as and when new legal provisions are made.

2. Courses offered for Pwd’s in TISS

TISS offers a Masters course in Disability Studies & Action in accordance with the mandate of the Rehabilitation Council of India (RCI), an autonomous central organization under the Ministry of Social Justice and Empowerment, which requires all social workers who are working in the field of disability rehabilitation undergo certification in Rehabilitation Social Work or acquire a credited degree in Disability Rehabilitation Social Work. The course has been designed to create a cadre of professional social workers, with competency in empowering people with disability and all stakeholders.

3. Job Placements for Students with Disabilities through CGPC/Job Placement cell

The Career Guidance and Placement Cell (CGPC) is an independent and autonomous body of the school of Social Work at TISS consisting of student representatives, who are elected to facilitate the placement process and provide career guidance to students of Social Work. Currently, TISS has a centralized job placement cell and has made
changes in its policy for students with disability by including the following

a) **Equal opportunities** for student with disabilities for job placement. No corporate/agencies can refuse to take the interview of SWD if he/she has applied for the same.

b) **Inclusive policy for salary**: A equal employment criteria for providing similar & equivalent salary to candidates with disabilities under the affirmative action of the Government of India.

c) **Pre and post selection criteria**: Job description and placement has to be clearly defined to the student with disability in accessible form as per affirmative action and If he or she is selected in the job then providing further information in accessible form will be helpful. The student should be given equal opportunity to perform on the job with appropriate training.

d) **Post Selection**: Student with Disability can add his basic accessibility requirements related to Job performance in his/her CV in advance.

4. **Courses offered in Accessible formats**

Foundation Course is a key subject of all courses being offered at TISS which prepares and equips students with specialized skills and knowledge exclusive to their field and helps them navigate through the coursework, fieldwork and subsequent research successfully. TISS is in the process of converting all the Foundation courses in accessible formats for students with disability. It has already established the M.K Tata Library for students with visual impairment & has specialist software and hardware to enable visually challenged students to access learning resources. The Library is equipped 20 computers installed with Jaws Software & Kurzweil software for scanning and Braille printers. The Sir Dorabji Tata Memorial Library (SDTML) continues to be proactive in supporting new academic developments.
at the institute and aims at providing the highest level of research and teaching support to all the programs of the Institute including students with disabilities. It assesses and upgrades its ICT infrastructure as and when new technologies are available to make educational resources available in accessible formats.

5. Centre for Disability Studies & Action (CDSA)
The Centre focuses on issues and concerns of people with disabilities through teaching, training, research and demonstration; to work with, through, and for persons with disabilities. Since its inauguration in 2006, the CDSA has conducted various workshops on key topics of relevance in disability studies like “Accessibility, Information & Communication Technology (ICT) for Persons with Disability” which was in collaboration with ENABLE India, a pioneer organization that creates programs for inclusion of persons with disabilities in PSU & Government organizations. IARM is CDSA’s initiative to take measures that ensure reasonable accommodation for inclusion & affirmative action on education & accessibility issues of students with disabilities in TISS.

I. **IARM’s key areas of focus include the** following:

a) **Conducting a ‘Needs’ based assessment of students with disability** towards understanding their issues of concern & work to facilitate intervention for assistance with all relevant **stakeholders in higher education by practicing ‘Disability studies & Social Work’ methods of process engagement and problem solving.**

b) Conducting Workshops and seminars on issues of relevance.

c) Making short films on disability and other media/print resources for creating awareness on Disability

d) Sensitization of
   i. Public Transport system on issues of disability
ii. Banks regarding student loan provisions and dealing with various stakeholders to ensure financial accessibility of students with disabilities.

iii. Teachers & peers so as to better understand issues and concerns of students with disabilities and to generate an inclusive culture of education on campus.

iv. Other key stakeholders in administration, legal and placement services on campus.

e) Collaborating & Networking with organizations for accessibility & ICT technology

f) Coordinating with CSR & HR departments of MNCs and other corporate entities for job placements of students with disabilities and following up on any employment issues they face.

g) Developing innovative solutions by means of transdisciplinary & multidisciplinary approaches to develop academia to facilitate inclusion of students with disabilities.

h) Celebrating ‘International Day of Persons with Disabilities’ & observing ‘Disability week’ annually where fun, interactive events allow non-disabled peers and students with disabilities come together to create awareness and facilitate inclusion.

6. The Equal Opportunity Cell (EOC)
The EOC has been set up at TISS with the aim of ensuring effective implementation of affirmative actions and operation of supportive mechanisms to persons with disabilities, SC/ST/OBC, Minorities, Kashmiri Migrants and Kin of Armed Forces on the basis of the directives from the Government of India and the University Grants Commission from time to time.

EOC manages scholarships for students at TISS and has facilitated the process of securing Government of India- Post Matric Scholarships (GoI-PMS) for 4 students with disabilities. The EOC also facilitated
the process of securing other scholarships for students who are not eligible for GoI PMS such as the Scholarship for Persons with Disability sponsored by NHFDC & the Rajiv Gandhi National Scholarship. EOC oversees the admission process and extends support to the Admission Steering Committee at the Institute level to ensure the smooth implementation of reservation policies as well as represent it in the selection panels for administrative as well as academic positions.

7. Disability specific initiatives at TISS –HEPSE, TEPSN & EOC
The Centre for Disability studies & Action (CDSA), EOC and the IARM currently perform with the Equal Opportunity Cell (EOC) by providing timely assistance and counselling in academic, social, financial and other areas as per the needs of students with disabilities. TISS has also sent proposal to MoSJE for the implementation of the SIPDA scheme.

8. Flexible Multimodal Academic Environment
TISS believes in maximizing the teaching-learning process by means of implementing easy and flexible pedagogies for teaching and learning at Higher Education for inclusion. This may range from using digital technology to suit the learning needs of all students by understanding everyday issues of students with disabilities at the university level and can incorporate the following methods:

- Employ Multimodal /Pictorial Lectures with sign language
- Experiential learning with simulations
- Assess seating arrangements in classroom for easier access
- Assessment patterns with multimodal flexibility, AV for students with learning disabilities
- Allowing different presentations styles in assignments
- Pre-Scribe orientation and Scribe guidelines for exams & developing independent exam patterns using software
- Learning styles with IPods and apps to facilitate learning at maximum level
- Barrier reduction strategies of time and distance in learning
- Promoting Zero time learning using Data Base of lectures & use of ICTs in redesigning coursework & evaluation processes to make it accessible for students with disabilities.
- Availability of easy transport for academic and social mobility within campus in 2015-16
- Website accessibility
- Revise admission policies bearing in mind accessibility to facilitate communication for students with disabilities regarding admission procedures, entrance exam, personal Interview etc
- Classroom room adaption for social cohesion to enable peer learning
- Make Field work changes based on need and travel issues
- Make arrangements for Research Scribes as Data Analysis is difficult for students with disability, especially those with visual challenges
- Use open source educational resources and check for compatibility of Library ICTs with assistive devices and other disability specific technologies for learning.
- Access Audit of hostel accommodations restructuring furniture’s, accessible table chair, attached washrooms, ensuring dining hall accessibility (food serving systems, washroom facilities etc)

- Guide students with disabilities regarding financial accessibility through low-interest student loans and scholarships

- All students with disabilities must be treated with a strengths based perspective inspired by Amartya Sen’s capability approach as role models for University.

- Engage Teachers and peers in breaking barriers on daily basis with sensitization measures and buddy system for everyday support of students with disabilities.

- Conduct Inclusion Audit using feedback from students with disability for drafting key measures for accessibility and making suitable changes. Prepare yearly reports that review accessibility features on-off campus.

- **Formulate Teacher’s sensitization programs and develop lectures and assessments pedagogies for students with disabilities as per their needs and developing individualised education plan (IEP).**

- Create teaching and learning processes in classroom with the aim of reducing stigma with buddy support for classroom inclusion.

- Create Campus selection and career development cells with inclusive policy for students with disability ensuring equal opportunity & salary.

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68 Amartya Sen introduced the ‘capability approach’ in the early 1980’s as an approach to welfare economics which focused on an individual’s ability to generate valuable outcomes taking into the person’s individual characteristics & external factors. ‘Freedom to achieve’ is a key part of the capability approach.
9. Data Mapping of Students & Staff with Disability at TISS

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Types of Disability</th>
<th>Visual Impairment</th>
<th>Low Vision</th>
<th>Hearing Impairment</th>
<th>Orthopaedic Impairment</th>
<th>Wheelchair Users</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Faculty</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Staff</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Students</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>9</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Fig 1.5 Data of persons with disabilities, total strength 51 as of 2015

In order to create a ‘needs’ based assessment of issues that students with disabilities face on campus, TISS updates its data base of students with disabilities and maps issues of relevance. The purpose is to gain a comprehensive understanding of their concerns & work with teachers, staff and other stakeholders to facilitate timely intervention and assistance. This may include making changes in curriculum, learning modalities, extra tutorial time, scheduling and making available mandatory readings in advance, pictorial notes, Peer assistance etc along with ensuring accessibility to campus facilities.

10. Remedial Coaching

Remedial coaching is being provided for students with disabilities informally. Extra classes or tutoring time is scheduled as per discussions with respective teachers and I-Access buddies, a peer support group of IARM that volunteers to help students with disabilities prepare for examinations, including SET & NET.

11. Measures to make TISS Disability-friendly

TISS’s current initiatives to make the campus inclusive & disability friendly are operated through CDSA, IARM EOC. TISS strives to provide an inclusive & accessible educational experience to students with disabilities. With this in mind, it has conducted a ‘disability audit’ taking into consideration structural modifications and other infrastructural changes. It has made a detailed proposal in compliance with provisions of the Scheme for Implementation of
Persons with Disabilities Act (SIDPA) and has sent it to the MoSJE for consideration.

12. **Current challenges facing students with disabilities at TISS**

The National centre for promotion of employment for disabled people (NCPEDP) conducted an annual survey to assess the current status of students with disabilities in higher education (colleges & universities). It found that only 0.56% of students with disabilities pursued higher education in the period from 1995 when the PWD Act was enacted, to 2015, the data spanning across two decades. At TISS, the challenges most students with disabilities face is the lack of access or availability of academic resources in accessible formats. It includes issues pertaining to website accessibility, academic circulars, research & fieldwork related material, curriculum etc. TISS has conducted an Access audit through IARM with valuable input from students with disabilities, under the SIDPA Scheme to study their issues and come up with suitable solutions. Efforts are being made to implement recommendations in accordance with the audit.

13. **Creating positive images of persons with disabilities to nurture an inclusive culture**

All students with disabilities enrolling at TISS are part of the IARM Group. Every event, campaign, program or activity is designed to include their feedback and suggestions to make it accessible for them. Non-disabled students and students with disabilities work hand in hand, together, to make these events memorable and successful thus fostering an inclusive, upbeat vibe in the campus.

14. **Persons with disabilities- Staff at TISS & teaching/working methods employed.**

TISS has staff and faculty with disability. The VI person uses the MK Tata Library to prepare & access academic material in accessible formats (i.e. Braille, JAWS (Job Access with speech) software, audio etc).
15. Simulation Exercises & Awareness programs for disability awareness at TISS  
   a) I Access ‘Mehfil’ is an open expression platform for students with and without disabilities to engage in various creative art forms like theatre, streetplay, mushaira, essay writing, puppet shows, orchestra by blind persons, wheelchair dance, blindfold dance, poem on disability, open mic, debate, play, monoact, blind photography, music, poetry, storytelling and other activities. This acts as a platform for students with disabilities to showcase their talents and encourage them to pursue their hobbies & interests.
   
b) ‘Challenging Challenges’ is a simulation activity to generate awareness on issues of disability is done by faculty of CDSA.
   
c) ‘World Disability Day’ is celebrated with a weeklong observation dedicated to create awareness on disability issues; each year, activities are designed around a different theme and all students at TISS participate in this with great gusto and energy.

16. Disability specific skills for Students with Disabilities & Non-disabled students with the aim to facilitate Inclusion.

TISS conducts a workshop on Braille & Sign language through CDSA, which is open to both students with and without disabilities. TISS believes that doing so will help immensely in sensitizing peers of disabled students to better cater and understand their needs.

17. Reader, Scribe & Interpretation Services at TISS

Reader, Scribe & Interpretation services are provided through the SPO to all students with disabilities. Its also working on converting all foundation courses in accessible formats as it is mentioned in Section 4.

18. ‘Ability Expo’ for showcasing abilities of students with disabilities. Though TISS does not have an ‘Ability Expo’ per se, the functions of such an expo i.e. a platform for students with disabilities to showcase their talents and abilities, is being done through TISS’s annual observance of ‘Disability week’ mentioned in section 3.5. It also seeks to provide skills training in ICTs through various workshops and collaborations with other DPO’s and experts.
19. Guidelines/Recommendations being followed at TISS
CDSA is working on creating a guideline/policy framework based on the provisions of the UNCRPD and taking into account national level policies currently in place for persons with disabilities.

20. Orientation programs for students with disabilities
Students with disabilities are given a comprehensive ‘disability specific’ orientation program with the main orientation program conducted for non-disabled students; this ensures a general awareness among non-disabled students about disability issues their disabled peers might face and also sensitize them to their needs. IARM also provides individualized support services throughout the academic year, closely working with students with disability to help them overcome any challenges they may face in pursuing their coursework. This includes providing assistance for Laboratory specific courses according to the individualized needs of the student in consultation with their Teacher.
Conclusion

India has ratified the UNCRPD & is a signatory to the Marrakesh VIP Treaty as of July, 2014. Inclusion & Access are the two main themes of these protocols; the education system in India needs to overhaul its approach towards students with disabilities and make Inclusive education a priority. Inclusive Class rooms are needed today where teachers are using multisensory /multi-communication approach to include all vulnerabilities of students of all types and accepting student centric approach to meet the unique needs of students with disabilities. Also, they are trained and equipped to provide the lectures, reading compendiums, class notes in accessible format as per needs of student’s disability. Also, provide facilities in exam and assessment styles in order to suit the sensory capability of students with disability. Library shall have the all the academic resources books in accessible format and facility of readers and writers for exams and study purpose. Also, it should have software and ICT for better accessibility with enabling unit consist of hub of software’s to suit diverse student community. Website Accessibility and academic circulars as per WCAG, 2.0 guidelines are mandatory today as per law of this country, all university websites shall be accessible for PWD However. There is a clear lack of a policy initiative for realizing this goal of ensuring access to education for students with disability and this is reflected in the recent survey by the NCPEDC which reported a 0.56% enrolment rate of students with disabilities who are pursuing higher education. The 5% reservation policy for PWDs hardly suffices for the broad spectrum of disability issues prevalent today because it doesn’t factor in the possibility of employment or skills training. Previous studies have shown that the reservation policy for students with disabilities are mostly occupied by loco-motor disabilities or visual impairment but now there are 21 categories with few of them are hidden disability such as blood related disorders like thalassemia, haemophilia, sickle cell disease, mental illness which may require confidentiality issues in order to deal with the stigma including Learning disability, These are the complex issues which a higher education institute has to deal with to foster inclusive education and develop stigma reduction strategies to develop inclusive community in higher leanings.
The emergence of ICTs & new approaches to disability studies has opened up a wide array of possibilities that could potentially create a lasting, sustainable change for students with disabilities in India. Universities have to think about providing facilities to 21 categories of students with disability in higher education to facilitate inclusion. One of possibility to provide government schemes to 21 categories of students with disability is by providing unique identity cards UDID to them. This will help to create maintain a data base of SWD and allow to get all schemes eligible for them.

This pioneer Field action project has tried to establish a groundwork which can be built upon as it synthesizes key features in the area of Accessibility & Inclusion for implementation in higher education and be replicated to all universities of the India and as a national goodwill ambassador working for the cause of disability in higher education. Students with disabilities has unique talents & skills that need to be encouraged through their inclusion in mainstream education; therefore ensuring their accessibility to education is vital in the context of current statistics and for the country’s future human resource.

**Inclusive dialogue:**

There is a need for dialogue in all academic disciplines on the issue of disability & enabling an inclusive education among all university community for promoting equal access for student with disability in higher education. The essential dialogue among key stakeholder i.e., teacher, student and peers should be held to experience the interface with disability. This is a journey towards creating a space for understanding and accepting disability with its unique similarity and initiating process of coming together towards social cohesion and inclusion. This dialogue aims towards developing an academically flexibly and multisensory learning environment for equal participation of students with disability at classroom level for creating inclusive environment.


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