

Foreword

In most parts of the World people with disabilities are subject to multiple deprivations with limited access to basic services, including education, employment, rehabilitation facilities etc. Widespread social stigma plays a major role in hindering their normal social and economic life. However in the last three decades since the International Year of Disability in 1981, there has been a "paradigm shift" in attitudes and approaches to persons with disabilities. Worldwide the movement takes a new height from viewing persons with disabilities as "objects" of charity, medical treatment and social protection to treating them as "subjects" with rights, capable of claiming those rights and making decisions for their lives based on their free and informed consent as active members of society.

The Asia Pacific Region followed up the UN initiative with two consecutive disability specific regional decade initiatives since 1993 with approximately two-thirds of world's 600 million disabled people living in this region. It led to the formulation of Biwako Millenium Framework for action towards an inclusive, barrier free and rights-based society for persons with disabilities and its supplement, the Biwako Plus Five for further efforts in this regard. In accordance with this convention, Governments are expected to enhance their national capacities in data collection and analysis of disability statistics besides other policy initiatives.

The Washington Group on Disability Statistics was formed by United Nations Statistics Division in 2001 to allow the representatives from national statistical agencies of various countries to come together and address selected problems in statistical methods in compiling Disability Statistics.

However, there has been a major difference between the developed and the developing countries in understanding the disability types and formulation of their measures. In economically developed countries these have been conceived in keeping with the greater scope of using measuring devices during disability surveys/ censuses or in the administrative records of the medical facility centres. On the other hand such advanced procedures are not feasible in developing countries for getting accurate measure of various disability related parameters. For this very reason, India, like most of the developing countries, could not adopt the International Classification of Functioning, Disability and Health framework for identification and measurement of disability types. In these countries disability statistics is essentially based on the informants' response to the simple, easily comprehensible disability questionnaire and thus can capture only the most severe cases. This is reflected in the wide divergence in the estimates of prevalence of disability of the developed and the developing countries. In India the official statistics collected through both Population Censuses and the nationwide sample surveys put an estimate of around 2% prevalence of disability as against nearly 20% in countries like Australia and New Zealand in the Asia Pacific region.

This publication has contextualized the analysis of existing official data on disability with reference to the policy framework and the embedded principles of social justice followed in the country at present.

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