

# The Power and Possibilities of Disability Advocacy



Understanding the  
Need for Advocacy and Sarthak's  
Contribution to Building Inclusive Futures



# CONTENTS

1. List of Abbreviations	4
2. List of Figures	7
3. Executive Summary	9
4. Understanding Advocacy	11
4.1 Definitions of Fundamental Concepts of Disability Advocacy	12
4.2 Disability Advocacy in the Global Arena	13
4.2.1 International NGOs	20
4.2.2 Foreign Governmental Best Practices	21
4.3 Disability in the Indian Context: History, Legislation, Current State of Affairs	24
4.3.1 Advocacy Initiatives by Indian Disability NGOs	28
5. Advocacy efforts by various stakeholders	32
5.1 Advocacy by Government	32
5.2 Advocacy by the Corporate Sector	39
5.3 Advocacy by Academia	42
5.4 Advocacy by Media	47
5.5 Advocacy by International Agencies	48
5.6 Advocacy by Civil Society Organisations (CSOs)	50
6. Best strategies from notable disability advocacy campaigns	54
7. Sarthak & Advocacy	64
7.1 Components of Advocacy at Sarthak	65
7.1.1 Sarthak's Advocacy with Corporates	65
7.1.2 Sarthak's Advocacy with Governments	69
7.1.3 Sarthak's Advocacy with PwDs	73
7.1.4 Sarthak's Advocacy with Parents	75
7.1.5 Sarthak's Advocacy with Medical Fraternity	76
7.1.6 Sarthak's Advocacy with Academia	76
7.1.7 Sarthak's Advocacy with Media	77
7.1.8 Advocacy Events	80
7.1.9 India Disability Empowerment Alliance (IDEA)	82
7.2 Support systems and processes	83
7.2.1 Fundraising	83
7.2.2 Formation of International/National/State Advisory Boards	84



# LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

<b>ADIP</b>	Assistance to Disabled Persons
<b>ALIMCO</b>	Artificial Limbs Manufacturing Corporation of India
<b>ANM</b>	Auxiliary Nursing and Midwifery
<b>ASHA</b>	Accredited Social Health Activist
<b>B.Ed.</b>	Bachelor of Education
<b>CII</b>	Confederation of Indian Industry
<b>CRC</b>	Composite Regional Centre
<b>CSO</b>	Civil Society Organisations
<b>CSR</b>	Corporate Social Responsibility
<b>CwD</b>	Children with Disabilities
<b>DDRC</b>	District Disability Rehabilitation Centre
<b>DEI</b>	Diversity, Equity & Inclusion
<b>DEPwD</b>	Department of Empowerment of People with Disabilities
<b>ESCAP</b>	Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific
<b>GBDN</b>	Global Business and Disability Network
<b>ICT</b>	Information and Communication Technology
<b>IDEA</b>	India Disability Empowerment Alliance
<b>IIM</b>	Indian Institute of Management
<b>ILO</b>	International Labour Organisation
<b>ISL</b>	Indian Sign Language
<b>ISLRTC</b>	Indian Sign Language Research & Training Centre
<b>IYDP</b>	International Year of Disabled Persons (1981)
<b>MDG</b>	Millennium Development Goal
<b>M.Ed.</b>	Master of Education
<b>MGNREGA</b>	Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Act

<b>MoU</b>	Memorandum of Understanding
<b>NAAI</b>	National Abilympic Association of India
<b>NCERT</b>	National Council of Educational Research and Training
<b>NCHW</b>	National Council for Handicapped Welfare
<b>NCPEDP</b>	National Centre for the Promotion of Employment for Disabled People
<b>NEP</b>	National Education Policy 2020
<b>NGO</b>	Non-Governmental Organisation
<b>NHFDC</b>	National Handicapped Finance & Development Corporation
<b>NIEPVD</b>	National Institute for the Empowerment of Persons with Visual Disabilities
<b>NSDC</b>	National Skill Development Corporation
<b>OECD</b>	Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development
<b>OHCHR</b>	Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights
<b>PMAY</b>	Pradhan Mantri Awas Yojana
<b>PMKVY</b>	Pradhan Mantri Kaushal Vikas Yojana
<b>PSU</b>	Public Sector Unit
<b>PwD</b>	Person(s) with Disabilities
<b>PWD Act</b>	Persons with Disability Act, 1995
<b>RBSK</b>	Rashtriya Bal Swasthya Karyakram
<b>RCI</b>	Rehabilitation Council of India
<b>RMSA</b>	Rashtriya Madhyamik Shiksha Abhiyan
<b>RPwD Act</b>	Rights of Persons with Disabilities Act, 2016
<b>RTE Act</b>	Right to Education Act, 2009
<b>SCPwD</b>	Skill Council for Persons with Disabilities
<b>SDG</b>	Sustainable Development Goal

<b>SSA</b>	Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan
<b>UGC</b>	University Grants Commission
<b>UN</b>	United Nations
<b>UNCRPD</b>	United Nations Convention on Rights of Persons with Disabilities
<b>UNDESA</b>	United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs
<b>UNDP</b>	United Nations Development Programme
<b>UNICEF</b>	United Nations Children's Emergency Fund
<b>VRC</b>	Vocational Rehabilitation Centre
<b>WHO</b>	World Health Organisation

## 2. LIST OF FIGURES

Figure 1: Models of Disability	14
Figure 2: International Day of Persons with Disabilities - Previous Themes	16
Figure 3: 10 Goals of Incheon Strategy	17
Figure 4: The Eight MDGs	18
Figure 5: Disability in the SDGs	19
Figure 6: Foreign Governmental Best Practices	23
Figure 7: 2011 Census Data on PwDs	24
Figure 8: Students at NIEPID	26
Figure 9: Government assistance handover at CRC Kozhikode	26
Figure 10: Ministerial Initiatives by Government of India for disability advocacy	34
Figure 11: Accessible India - Campaign Status	38
Figure 12: Principles of the GBDN Charter	39
Figure 13: The Valuable 500 - Focal Areas for Change	41
Figure 14: Differing Approaches to Education of CwDs	45
Figure 15: Disability-specific Recommendations from NEP	46
Figure 16: Posters of movies exploring disability	47
Figure 17: Leading International Agencies & Civil Society Organisations	52
Figure 18: Inclusive Vidya Campaign	53
Figure 19: Screenshot of Accessible India website	54
Figure 20: Screens from the Sugamya Bharat App	55
Figure 21: Excerpt of Priya the Accessibility Warrior	56
Figure 22 : Frame from The Ability Factor video	57
Figure 23: Invalid Opinions Campaign video	58
Figure 24: Screenshot from #BreakTheSilence	59

Figure 25: Screenshot from We All Win	59
Figure 26: Screenshot from Independence	60
Figure 27: Twitter post announcing wheelchair-friendly jumpsuit	61
Figure 28: Accessibility features in Guide's makeup tools	61
Figure 29: Wheelchair accessibility details of locations in Google Maps	62
Figure 30: Person with cerebral palsy using Voiceitt to access Alexa	62
Figure 31: Lego Braille Bricks	63
Figure 32: Sarthak's Reach	64
Figure 33: Sustainable Employment Processes Designed by Sarthak	65
Figure 34: Rehabilitation of Employees with Disabilities	68
Figure 35: Government interventions that Sarthak contributed to	69
Figure 36: RozgarSarathi Landing Page	70
Figure 37: Job Listings on RozgarSarathi	71
Figure 38: Screenshots of CapSarathi app	72
Figure 39: Screenshot of sample Sarthak ke Saarthi story	73
Figure 40: Screenshot of sample Aces of Abilympics story	74
Figure 41: Screenshot from Sarthak ke Anmol Ratan story	74
Figure 42: Sarthak in the spotlight	77
Figure 43: Sarthak on Facebook	78
Figure 44: Sarthak on Twitter	79
Figure 45: Sarthak on Instagram	79
Figure 46: Sarthak on Youtube	79
Figure 47: Sarthak's Website	79
Figure 48: Quarterly & Monthly Events at Sarthak	80
Figure 49: National Conferences by Sarthak	81



### 3. EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The word ‘advocacy’ has its roots in medieval Latin verb *advocare*, meaning “to summon, to call for aid.” Any movement that seeks to effect social change is one that engages in advocacy, as it is one that brings together people and organisations who work towards a common cause. Disability advocacy, be it in India or elsewhere in the world, is a space to challenge prevailing cultural norms, social structures and power relations that hold back persons with disabilities (PwDs) from living their fullest lives.

In the Indian context, disability is framed by numerous structural and cultural factors. Attempts to gain a clearer picture of PwDs in the country is often marred by obsolete or incomplete data. The picture that is available is one of immense marginalisation: the 2011 Census records that 64% of PwDs are unemployed and approximately 45% are illiterate.<sup>1</sup> This precarity only gets amplified by other socio-economic factors of marginalisation. Further, accessibility of public amenities remains a huge challenge for those with disabilities.<sup>2</sup>

As abject as this scenario is, the Indian disability sector is characterised by its relentless advocates for change. This report explores the breadth of disability advocacy carried out in India, anchoring the discussion in the broader national and international context of disability rights. Cornerstones of disability advocacy include the United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disability (UNCRPD) and the Rights of Persons with Disabilities Act of 2016. Together, these provide a framework for individuals and organisations in the disability sector to advocate for PwDs through interventions and policies. Finally, this report seeks to spotlight Sarthak’s role in the arena of advocacy. Through programmatic interventions, digital initiatives and an unwavering focus on partnerships and awareness building, Sarthak has contributed immensely to strengthening advocacy initiatives for PwDs across India.

Chapter 4 elaborates on frameworks and contexts of disability advocacy, whereas Chapter 5 maps out the roles of various stakeholders. These include the government, the corporate sector, academia, media, international agencies, NGOs and Civil Society Organisations.

Chapter 6 takes note of best strategies from notable disability advocacy campaigns in India and the world, highlighting what worked well in these initiatives.

Chapter 7 moves on to the various facets of advocacy undertaken at Sarthak. Following a brief overview of its core activities, this chapter delves into the primary component of Sarthak's advocacy—in-depth engagement with as many stakeholders as possible (governments, parents, medical communities, corporates). Then, it explores Sarthak's presence in the advocacy arena as covered by the print and digital media. The organisation's foray into technical advocacy and research is also documented.

The chapter then catalogues the variety of advocacy events hosted by Sarthak, such as conferences, webinars and observances of disability-specific days. The objectives and activities of IDEA, Sarthak's sector-wide collaborative project, find a special mention in the same chapter. There are sections dedicated to highlighting support systems and processes in place for alumni engagement and fundraising at the organisation.

While significant efforts have taken place in disability advocacy, there is much that needs to be done. The eighth and final chapter offers a set of recommendations for the same, stressing on the need for richer data on PwDs. The report concludes by taking stock of Sarthak's roadmap for broadening the scope of its advocacy.

## 4. UNDERSTANDING ADVOCACY

Advocacy refers to any process that is undertaken with the intent to promote social change by transforming cultural attitudes, social relationships and existing power relations. Advocacy efforts strengthen civil societies and open up democratic spaces for those cast to the margins of our public sphere. It cannot and should not be reduced to mere talking about a certain topic or cause, but rather requires individuals and organisations to act strategically. This includes ramping up outreach, coordinating mobilisation efforts, disseminating information, and communicating effectively. It is only through strategic action that advocacy has made social justice and empowerment possible, be it institutionally, socio-culturally or legally.

Advocacy can be broadly categorised into self-advocacy, individual advocacy and systems advocacy. Self-advocacy refers to PwDs' ability to effectively communicate, convey, negotiate or assert their own interests, desires, needs, and rights.

Individual advocacy is when advocacy efforts are concentrated on one or two individuals. There are two common forms of individual advocacy—informal and formal advocacy. When people like parents, friends, family members or agencies speak out and advocate for vulnerable people this is termed informal advocacy. Formal advocacy more frequently involves organisations that pay their staff to advocate for someone or for a group of individuals.

Systems advocacy is about changing policies, laws or rules that impact how someone lives their life. These efforts can be targeted at a local, state, or national agency. The focus can be changing laws, or simply written or unwritten policy.<sup>3</sup> Any significant change that has occurred in the space of disability rights has largely occurred through advocacy, particularly systems advocacy. Be it the expansion of scope of India's major disability law (Rights of Persons with Disabilities Act 2016), movements such as Equal Pay for Equal Work and Decent Work for All, the gradual growth of Diversity, Equity & Inclusion (DEI) initiatives, or wider awareness of concepts such as 'reasonable accommodation,' positive changes in disability rights have been made possible because of advocacy.

*Advocacy is an important aspect of Sarthak's interventions in the disability sector. The organisation undertakes awareness activities focused on engagement and sensitisation of a wide variety of stakeholders. These stakeholders include the government, the corporate world, media outlets, academia, persons with disabilities (PwDs), parents of PwDs and other aspiring changemakers.*

## 4.1 Definitions of Fundamental Concepts of Disability Advocacy

**Inclusion:** To understand the relationship between the way PwDs function and how they participate in society, and making sure everybody has the same opportunities to participate in every aspect of life to the best of their abilities and desires.<sup>4</sup>

**Equity:** To understand the individual needs of each person—and to offer support accordingly, so that each PwD can reach the same outcomes as people without disabilities.<sup>5</sup>

**Mainstreaming:** Broadly, the process of making something start to be considered normal. Within educational contexts, mainstreaming refers to the practice of placing children with disabilities in the same classroom contexts as children who do not have disabilities.<sup>6</sup>

**Reasonable Accommodation:** An adjustment made in a system to accommodate or make the same system fair for an individual based on a proven need.<sup>7</sup>

**Ableism:** Discrimination and social prejudice against people with disabilities based on the belief that typical abilities are superior.<sup>8</sup>

**Discrimination:** The unjust or prejudicial treatment of different categories of people, especially on the grounds of race, age, sex, or disability. Direct discrimination is when a person is discriminated against for a certain characteristic such as a disability (example: being denied employment/promotions despite being qualified). Indirect discrimination refers to instances where a uniformly-applied rule/policy/practice proves to be disadvantageous to people of a certain group (PwDs, for instance).<sup>9</sup> An example of indirect discrimination would be a teacher disseminating reading material only in the form of hard copies to their students, not accounting for the fact that visually impaired students will need Braille versions or soft copies.

Discrimination is also sometimes differentiated into 'positive' and 'negative' forms. Negative discrimination, as the name suggests, is prejudice against PwDs. Positive discrimination refers to measures which aim to foster equal access to opportunities for PwDs<sup>10</sup>, such as designated parking or seating on public transport for PwDs.

## 4.2 Disability Advocacy in the Global Arena

Global disability advocacy has had a long history dating back to the 1950s. Prior to that, disability was considered a personal issue, with not much political or governmental action to provide support to PwDs. In the United States, disability advocacy gained momentum with the civil rights and women's movements in the 1960s, with advocates promoting equal treatment and challenging stereotypes around disability. The disability rights movement gained a cross-disability focus around the same time, as people with various disabilities started coming together to fight on a common platform.

Historically, disability has been approached through several prisms. The 'Charity Model' of disability views PwDs as victims of circumstance, deserving charity, pity and sympathy.<sup>11</sup> In this model, PwDs are always dependent on the altruism of the non-disabled and denied any agency. Closely related to this worldview is the 'Medical Model', in which a PwD is considered to be a patient afflicted with an impairment that needs to be "fixed" or managed through medical intervention and various forms of therapy.<sup>12</sup> From this perspective, medical professionals are considered as the experts on disability and the people living with the disability are side-lined.

As both these models deprive PwDs of their voice, many strands of disability advocacy draw upon the "social model of disability," a term coined in the UK in the 1980s. This perspective on disability moves the focus away from the disabled body and disability as a medical condition. Instead, the model focuses on the specific ways in which societal structures and cultural values create environments that disable people with physical and mental impairments. According to the social model, it is not a physical or mental attribute of a person that is disabling. It is the refusal of the socio-cultural environment to accommodate individuals that produces the disability.<sup>13</sup>



## MEDICAL MODEL

*The person is disabled by the abnormalities and deficits of their own body and/or brain.*

*PwDs are broken, abnormal, or damaged versions of human beings and should be fixed, cured and/or prevented.*

*Since the PwDs' impairments prevent them from functioning normally, they need caregivers and professionals to make decisions for them. The PwD is an object of charity and receiver of help.*

*The PwD should adjust to society, since they are the one who is not normal. Being part of society means rising above abnormality.*



## SOCIAL MODEL

*The person is disabled by their environment and its physical, attitudinal, communication and social barriers.*

*PwDs are normal, valid varieties of human being and should have equal rights and access to society, just as they are.*

*Since the PwD is inherently equal, they have a right to autonomy, choice and free and informed consent in their own lives.*

*The PwD should be supported by society, because they are equal and have a right to inclusion. Their community should adjust its own barriers and biases.*

**Figure 1: Models of Disability<sup>14</sup>**

The pressure for change has been consistently placed on national governments through the passing of various international mandates such as the United Nations International Year of Disabled Persons (IYDP), 1981, which focused global attention on disability issues for the first time. The period from 1983 to 1992 was commemorated by the United Nations as The Decade of Disabled Persons. The commemoration prompted an increase of activity designed to improve the situation and status of PwDs. Emphasis was placed on raising new financial resources, improving education and employment opportunities for PwDs, and increasing their participation in the life of their communities and country.<sup>15</sup> The commemoration of the Decade was accompanied by the World Programme of Action Concerning Disabled Persons (1983-1992) which began the process of transforming the disability issue from one of social welfare to making it a central part of the development process.<sup>16</sup>

Since 1992, the United Nations has also observed December 3rd as the International Day of Persons with Disabilities. From the 1998 edition's emphasis on individualistic "Independent Living" to later editions' focus on "decent work" and inclusive, accessible societies, the movement away from the medical model to structural frameworks of viewing disability (such as the social model) is evident.

## Previous Themes of International Day of Persons with Disabilities

**2021:** Leadership and participation of persons with disabilities toward an inclusive, accessible and sustainable post-COVID-19 world

**2020:** Building Back Better: toward a disability-inclusive, accessible and sustainable post COVID-19 world

**2019:** Promoting the participation of persons with disabilities and their leadership: taking action on the 2030 Development Agenda

**2018:** Empowering persons with disabilities and ensuring inclusiveness and equality

**2017:** Transformation towards sustainable and resilient society for all

**2016:** Achieving 17 Goals for the Future We Want

**2015:** Inclusion matters: access and empowerment of people of all abilities

**2014:** Sustainable Development: The Promise of Technology

**2013:** Break Barriers, Open Doors: for an inclusive society and development for all

**2012:** Removing barriers to create an inclusive and accessible society for all

**2011:** Together for a better world for all: Including persons with disabilities in development

**2010:** Keeping the promise: Mainstreaming disability in the Millennium Development Goals towards 2015 and beyond

**2009:** Making the MDGs Inclusive: Empowerment of persons with disabilities and their communities around the world

**2008:** Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities: Dignity and justice for all of us

**2007:** Decent work for persons with disabilities

**2006:** E-Accessibility

**2005:** Rights of Persons with Disabilities: Action in Development

**2004:** Nothing about Us without Us

**2003:** A voice of our own

**2002:** Independent Living and Sustainable Livelihoods

**2001:** Full participation and equality: The call for new approaches to assess progress and evaluate outcome

**2000:** Making information technologies work for all

**1999:** Accessibility for all for the new Millennium

Source: International Day of Persons with Disabilities, UNDESAD [Available at: <https://www.un.org/development/desa/disabilities/international-day-of-persons-with-disabilities-3-december/2021-2.html>]

## ***Figure 2: International Day of Persons with Disabilities - Previous Themes***

A watershed moment in disability advocacy on a global scale was the United Nations Convention on Rights of Persons with Disabilities (UNCRPD), adopted on 13 December 2006 and brought into force on 3 May 2008. The UNCRPD borrows elements from the social model of disability, furthering the idea that PwDs are not “objects” of charity and medical treatment but rather “subjects” with inalienable rights, humans who are capable of claiming those rights and living as active and fully-realised members of society.<sup>17</sup>

Parties to the UNCRPD reaffirm that all persons with all types of disabilities must enjoy all human rights and fundamental freedoms. The Convention is intended as a human rights instrument with an explicit, social development dimension. It clarifies and qualifies how all categories of rights apply to persons with disabilities. Furthermore, it identifies areas where adaptations have to be made for persons with disabilities to effectively exercise their rights. The UNCRPD also highlights areas where the rights of PwDs have been violated, and where protection of rights must be reinforced.<sup>18</sup>

## **DID YOU KNOW?**

*The UNCRPD was opened for signatures on the 30 March 2007. There were 82 initial signatories. This is the highest number of signatories in history to a UN Convention on its opening day. It is the first comprehensive human rights treaty of the 21st century and is the first human rights convention to be open for signature by regional integration organisations. As of 2022, the UNCRPD has 164 signatories and 185 ratifications.*

Source: Convention on Rights of Persons with Disabilities, United Nations [Available at: <https://www.un.org/development/desa/disabilities/convention-on-the-rights-of-persons-with-disabilities.html>]



Like all international conventions, countries which have ratified the UNCRPD are required to implement the rights and guarantees provided in it. Countries are also expected to change existing laws in order to bring them in conformity with the principles of the Convention.<sup>19</sup> All of these factors have had a significant impact on advocacy efforts around the world. For instance, the Government of India initially set out to amend laws such as Persons with Disability Act, 1995 (PWD Act 1995) to comply with the UNCRPD, and later replaced the Act with the Rights of Persons with Disabilities Act, 2016 (RPwD Act 2016). The new act was fine-tuned considering the socio-cultural and local needs of the society, and the available resources.<sup>20</sup>

Another key international framework in disability advocacy was the Biwako Millennium Framework for Action Towards an Inclusive, Barrier-Free and Rights-Based Society for Persons with Disability in Asia and the Pacific. It aimed to achieve an inclusive, barrier-free and rights-based society for PwDs in the decade from 2003 to 2012. The Framework identified seven areas for priority action in the new decade. These areas included training and employment (including self-employment), access to built environments and public transport, and access to information and communications (including assistive technologies).<sup>21</sup>

The Incheon Strategy builds on the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities and the Biwako Millennium Framework. It describes ten interrelated goals mapped against 27 targets and 62 indicators to be achieved between 2013 and 2022. The Incheon Strategy aims to enable the Asian and Pacific region to track progress towards improving the quality of life, and the fulfilment of the rights, of the region's 650 million persons with disabilities, most of whom live in poverty.<sup>22</sup>

## 10 goals to 'make the Right Real' for persons with disabilities in Asia and the Pacific

### INCHEON STRATEGY

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

Figure 3: 10 Goals of Incheon Strategy<sup>23</sup>

Advocacy for PwDs is not limited to disability-specific frameworks alone, as disability is a social justice issue that cannot be seen in isolation. The Millennium Development Goals (MDGs), for instance, were specifically designed to address the needs of the world's poorest citizens and the world's most marginalised populations. However, there were no references to PwDs either in the MDGs themselves or in the accompanying body of guidelines and policies, programs and conferences that were part of the MDG efforts. As a result, in 2009, the United Nations Expert Group meeting on Mainstreaming Disability in MDG Policies, Processes and Mechanisms: Development for All worked to develop a "roadmap" for how disability can be included in the planning, monitoring and evaluation of all MDG related plans, programs and policies in international development. The Expert Group came to the conclusion that the MDGs "cannot be achieved without the full and effective inclusion of persons with disabilities and their participation in all stages of the MDGs processes." The Group also noted that all MDGs were relevant to and affect the lives of persons with disabilities, suggesting that the inclusion of disability in the indicators would be more effective in the short-term to promote the inclusion of disability data than proposing entirely new indicators.<sup>24</sup>



**Figure 4: The Eight MDGs<sup>25</sup>**

The MDGs were derived from the United Nations Millennium Declaration, signed in September 2000 and targeted for 2015. As the progress towards these goals were uneven, the MDGs were succeeded by the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) in 2016, with a target of 2030. Disability is referenced in various parts of the SDGs, particularly those related to education, growth and employment, inequality, and accessibility of human settlements.

*Goal 4: on inclusive and equitable quality education and promotion of life-long learning opportunities for all focuses on eliminating gender disparities in education and ensuring equal access to all levels of education and vocational training for the vulnerable, including persons with disabilities. In addition, the proposal calls for building and upgrading education facilities that are child, disability and gender sensitive and also provide safe, non-violent, inclusive and effective learning environments for all.*

*In Goal 8: to promote sustained, inclusive and sustainable economic growth, full and productive employment and decent work for all, the international community aims to achieve full and productive employment and decent work for all women and men, including for persons with disabilities, and equal pay for work of equal value.*

*Closely linked is Goal 10: which strives to reduce inequality within and among countries by empowering and promoting the social, economic and political inclusion of all, including persons with disabilities.*

*Goal 11: would work to make cities and human settlements inclusive, safe and sustainable. To realise this goal, Member States are called upon to provide access to safe, affordable, accessible and sustainable transport systems for all, improving road safety, notably by expanding public transport, with special attention to the needs of those in vulnerable situations, such as persons with disabilities. In addition, the proposal calls for providing universal access to safe, inclusive and accessible, green and public spaces, particularly for persons with disabilities.*

Source: Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) and Disability [Available at: <https://www.un.org/development/desa/disabilities/about-us/sustainable-development-goals-sdgs-and-disability.html>]

### **Figure 5: Disability in the SDGs**

International frameworks of advocacy, be it UNCRPD or SDGs, are crucial because they set benchmarks for concrete action worldwide. Once nations become signatories to these frameworks or agreements, they commit to implementing them in their territory. In India, that could take the form of laws, policies or procedures enacted at Centre and State levels, trickling down to Gram Panchayats, Urban Local Governments and Rural Local Governments. These government bodies often partner with national and local NGOs active in the sector to achieve their ends.

### 4.2.1 International NGOs

Apart from the UN, international leaders in disability advocacy include NGOs and collaborative efforts such as:

#### Rehabilitation International

Founded in 1922, Rehabilitation International (RI) is a worldwide organisation comprised of people with disabilities, service providers, government agencies, academics, researchers and advocates working to improve the quality of life of people with disabilities. With a footprint in 100 member countries, RI works closely with the UN and its various agencies. The organisation also promotes collaboration among stakeholders and advocates in order to build strong policies and legislation on the international, regional and national levels. Among RI's achievements are the overseeing of UNCRPD's adoption and the creation of the International Symbol of Access.<sup>26</sup>

#### World Institute on Disability

The World Institute on Disability (WID) was established in 1983 as one of the first global disability rights organisations founded and continually led by people with disabilities. WID is dedicated to designing, building, and supporting whole community solutions by removing barriers to include people with disabilities.<sup>27</sup> The organisation promotes equity policies and offers consulting services to companies. The consulting services include providing recommendations and resources for Disability-Inclusive Emergency Preparedness and Disaster Resilience, as well as for making conferences/events accessible. WID utilises disability-led surveys, focus groups and user experience testing to help clients arrive at better design and accessible experiences.<sup>28</sup>

#### TASH

Founded in 1975, TASH is an international leader in disability advocacy. The organisation advocates for the rights and inclusion for people with significant disabilities and support needs—those most vulnerable to segregation, abuse, neglect and institutionalisation. TASH works to advance inclusive communities through advocacy, research, professional development and policymaking. TASH is also devoted to providing information and resources for parents, families and self-advocates.<sup>29</sup>

### International Disability Alliance (IDA)

IDA is a platform which brings together over 1100 organisations of PwDs across eight global and six regional networks. IDA promotes the inclusion of PwDs across global efforts to advance human rights and sustainable development. IDA works across the United Nations to make sure its human rights and sustainable development processes uphold the highest standards of the UNCRPD. IDA also supports UN agencies—such as UNICEF, the World Bank and the World Health Organisation—to help ensure that the human rights of all persons with disabilities are an integral part of their work. Another core mission of The Alliance is to empower disability organisations to hold their governments accountable and to advocate for change locally, nationally and internationally.<sup>30</sup>

### International Disability & Development Consortium (IDDC)

IDDC is a conglomeration of civil society organisations that rally around a common objective of promoting inclusive international development with a special focus on the full and effective enjoyment of human rights by all people with disabilities. IDDC promotes the inclusion of appropriate disability-specific approaches in development policy and practice. By collaborating and sharing experiences about policy and practice, IDDC helps member organisations improve their work. The Consortium also supports the exchange of information and knowledge about inclusive development, especially between people and organisations in economically poorer countries.<sup>31</sup>

## 4.2.2 Foreign Governmental Best Practices

There are several foreign governments that support PwDs in different ways, be it through healthcare support or infrastructural access or pensions. In **Germany**, for example, PwDs are entitled to health treatment via the nationwide health insurance scheme at no extra cost but must have been paying into the system prior to the disability. Children with disabilities are automatically insured with their parents in the health insurance scheme without having to pay any additional costs. Students with disabilities are entitled to various rights, including wheelchair access and a sign language interpreter. Companies receive benefits and tax breaks for employing people with disabilities. Grants are available for up to €2,557 per project to adapt the home of a person with disability to their individual needs. They are also entitled to housing benefits of up to €1,500, depending on the severity of the disability; help towards taxi fares to enable mobility and participation in normal life; and free public transport. There is also money to cover care at home, measured on three levels, according to an individual's care needs.<sup>32</sup>

In contrast to many countries where disability benefits are only available for those in the labour market, **Norway** deems it a universal right. Benefits are calculated at two-thirds of a person's gross salary three to five years before the disability occurred. Those who have had very low or no wages receive 40-50% of the average wage. Over 10% of all working-age adults receive permanent or temporary disability allowances, according to the OECD. This figure rises to 14% if one includes people receiving support to get them back into work after illness or injury. There is also means-tested support<sup>33</sup> for each child in families in which a parent is a recipient of disability benefits.<sup>34</sup>

In another example from Scandinavia, **Sweden** prioritises making physical environments accessible. If a person is involved in a car accident or similar, and ends up with a disability, they have the right to financial assistance for home adjustments. For example, a house may need to be remodelled to make it possible for a person with disability to move around in the house with a wheelchair. Sweden also introduced amendments to construction law making it such that, if someone plans to build a new house, they will not get planning permission if the house is not accessible to PwDs. The house plan needs to have the kitchen on the ground floor, plus a bathroom accessible for a wheelchair, and at least the possibility to easily convert one room on the first floor to a bedroom. This is regardless of whether anyone in the family has a disability.<sup>35</sup>

Recognising the power of public acknowledgement, the **European Union** instituted the Access City Award in 2011. This award “recognises and celebrates a city's willingness, ability and efforts to become more accessible”, in order to:

- Guarantee equal access to fundamental rights
- Improve the quality of life of its population and ensure that everybody – regardless of age, mobility or ability – has equal access to all the resources and pleasures cities have to offer<sup>36</sup>

The award recognises efforts by cities to become more accessible and promote equal access to urban life for people with disabilities. Crucially, it gives local authorities a platform to promote and share their best practices. The winner of the Access City Award 2022 was the city of Luxembourg, with Lyon, Salzburg, Berlin and Warsaw being some of the previous winners.<sup>37</sup>



**Australia's** National Disability Insurance Scheme (NDIS) provides direct funding to eligible PwDs based on their individual requirements, regardless of individual incomes or assets. The process involves drawing up customised NDIS plans for those who qualify for it.<sup>38</sup> Support offered by NDIS ranges across home and community care, health and education support, employment assistance, and transport. Where accessibility is concerned, NDIS supports design and construction of housing modification, mobility equipment and vehicular modifications. NDIS also funds therapeutic support as well any help a PwD might need at their workplace.<sup>39</sup>

Along similar lines, **New Zealand** has a dedicated ministry for PwDs. The ministry prioritises support services in four domains: housing and transport, education and employment, health and wellbeing, equipment and aids.<sup>40</sup> The country's labour ministry also has specialised employment agencies for PwDs, apart from an extensive set of resources that cater to their employment needs.<sup>41</sup>

Data collection on PwDs is an area that often goes overlooked, despite its centrality to developing any policies that are beneficial for PwDs. In South Asia, **Bangladesh's** National Disability Identification Survey is often commended for its outreach efforts. Every public hospital (570 in all) has a Social Welfare Officer in charge for registration and identification of persons with disability across the country's 65 districts. A caregiver could register the PwD without them having to visit the office. Upon registration, PwDs are entitled to a range of services including monthly allowance, identity card, access to special school, access to inclusive school, priority-based service in public transport. The survey was also supported by mass media activities to spread awareness on the support that PwDs could avail.<sup>42</sup>

*Disability benefits that do not depend on the employment status of the PwD (Norway)*

*Construction law that mandates accessibility for new houses, regardless of whether occupants are PwDs (Sweden)*

*Customised support plans and direct funding for PwDs through the National Disability Insurance Scheme (Australia)*

*Access City Awards for cities that prioritise accessibility (European Union)*

*Awareness and outreach for reliable data collection through the National Disability Identification Survey (Bangladesh)*

**Figure 6: Foreign Governmental Best Practices**

## 4.3 Disability in the Indian Context: History, Legislation, Current State of Affairs

In India and much of South Asia, disability has to be located within a matrix of cultural impediments (such as beliefs and stereotypes) and structural impediments like poverty, lack of development, illiteracy, and unemployment. PwDs are marginalised in most areas of life, especially education, employment, and mobility. According to the 2011 Census, 26.9 million PwDs live in India, constituting 2.21% of the overall population.<sup>43</sup> However, nearly 64% of them are unemployed, with only 23% of female PwDs finding employment as opposed to 47% of male PwDs.<sup>44</sup> The numbers in education are equally dismal: children with disabilities rarely progress beyond primary school, and only 9% complete secondary education. Around 45% of PwDs are illiterate and only 62.9% of PwDs between the ages of 3 and 35 have ever attended regular schools. Less than 40% of school buildings have ramps and around 17% of schools have accessible toilets.<sup>45</sup> As disheartening as the state of affairs seems, it is important to understand the data in context. Data based on Census 2011 is over a decade old and predates the RPwD Act of 2016. Under the previous Act, the law recognised only seven disability categories. This was expanded to 21 in 2016. Thus, Census data does not capture this expanded understanding of disability.



*Figure 7: 2011 Census Data on PwDs*

In the Indian context of disability advocacy, there have been institutions like the National Council for Handicapped Welfare (NCHW) that was set up in line with independent India's welfare state policies. The NCHW was established to frame policy guidelines for the entire country and to prioritise disability programs. However, by and large, disability remained a marginal issue until the 1980s. Several factors were involved in the rise of disability movements in the late 1980s and 1990s, such as a much more accountable state policy, the strong presence of women's movements as well as the interest of international agencies. The presence of these factors created a more conducive space for the political mobilisation of marginalised groups such as those with disability.<sup>46</sup> As a result, disability advocacy gathered steam in this period, with the emergence of local NGOs in partnership with government working at the community level as well as greater interest and participation of international NGOs.



Another influence on regional disability advocacy was The United Nations Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific (ESCAP). It has been the regional engine to move forward disability rights and disability-inclusive development in Asia and the Pacific, through innovative decade-long disability initiatives. The first Asian and the Pacific Decade of Disabled Persons (1993–2002) aimed at raising awareness about the importance of creating legislation and policies that address the issues faced by PwDs. The highlight of the Decade was ESCAP's technical cooperation projects which improved accessibility of roads and transportation covering capitals such as Beijing, Seoul and New Delhi.<sup>47</sup>

Building on this history, the Government of India—through the Ministry of Social Justice & Empowerment—has established nine National Institutes for PwDs, each focusing on a specific category of disabilities. These institutes focus on Human Resources Development by offering various courses, providing rehabilitation services to PwDs, and promoting research efforts for and by PwDs. The National Institutes are:

- National Institute for the Empowerment of Persons with Visual Disabilities (NIEPVD), Dehradun
- Ali Yavar Jung National Institute of Speech and Hearing Disabilities (AYJNISHD), Mumbai
- National Institute for the Empowerment of Persons with Intellectual Disabilities (NIEPID), Secunderabad
- National Institute for Empowerment of Persons with Multiple Disabilities (NIEPMD), Chennai
- Pt. Deendayal Upadhyaya National Institute for Persons with Physical Disabilities (PDUNIPPD), New Delhi
- Swami Vivekanand National Institute of the Rehabilitation Training and Research (SVNIRTAR), Cuttack
- National Institute for Locomotor Disabilities (NILD), Kolkata
- Indian Sign Language Research & Training Centre (ISLRTC), New Delhi
- National Institute of Mental Health and Rehabilitation (NIMHR), Sehore



*Figure 8: Students at NIEPID<sup>48</sup>*

Furthermore, there are 21 Composite Regional Centres (CRCs) which function as extended arms of the National Institutes. The basic objectives of CRCs include:<sup>49</sup>

- Providing rehabilitation services to all categories of PwDs
- Training rehabilitation professionals, workers and functionaries
- Undertaking programs of education and skill development for PwDs
- Creating awareness among parents and the community regarding needs and rights of PwDs



*Figure 9: Government assistance handover at CRC Kozhikode<sup>50</sup>*

To take rehabilitative and other allied services to the grassroots, the government has also established District Disability Rehabilitation Centres (DDRCs) across the country.<sup>51</sup> Apart from these institutions, India also has 21 Vocational Rehabilitation Centres (VRCs) which assess the functional capacities of PwDs, identify trades suited for them and impart workshop training. VRCs help PwDs develop a personal vocational plan to chart out their skill-building and sustainable employment journey.<sup>52</sup> PwDs can also access job suited for them from the National Career Service portal.<sup>53</sup>

Apart from these public institutions, India has enacted several laws for the welfare of PwDs over the years. The most important of these are:

- Rehabilitation Council of India Act, 1992
- Persons with Disability Act, 1995 (PWD Act 1995) and Rights of Persons with Disability Act, 2016 (RPwD Act 2016)
- The National Trust for the Welfare of Persons with Autism, Cerebral Palsy, Mental Retardation and Multiple Disabilities Act, 1999

The most important disability legislation that is in effect presently is the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (RPwD) Act, 2016. Drafted in the aftermath of the UNCRPD, the RPwD Act came into force on the 19th of April 2017. The Act holds that the government must take effective measures to ensure that persons with disabilities enjoy their right to equality and to a life with dignity.<sup>54</sup> While previous legislation had only accounted for seven disabilities, RPwD expanded its scope to twenty-one disabilities.<sup>55</sup> People suffering from blood disorders (thalassemia, haemophilia, sickle cell disease), Parkinson's disease, and intellectual disabilities (disorders on the autism spectrum and learning disabilities) were brought under the ambit of the law. Notably, acid attack survivors were also recognised as PwDs.<sup>56</sup> This broadening of scope helps more people access the government's schemes and facilities meant for PwDs.

Other salient features of the RPwD Act include:<sup>57</sup>

- Additional benefits for persons with benchmark disabilities<sup>58</sup> and those with high support needs
- Every child with disability between the age of 6 and 18 years shall have the right to free education
- 5% reservation in seats in Government and Government-aided higher educational institutions for persons with benchmark disabilities
- Emphasis on ensuring accessibility in public buildings (both Government and private)



- 4% reservation in Government jobs for persons or class of persons with benchmark disabilities
- Broad-based Central & State Advisory Boards on Disability to be set up as policymaking bodies
- Creation of National and State Funds to provide financial support to PwDs
- Provision for penalties for offences committed against PwDs
- Designated courts to handle cases concerning violation of rights of PwDs

The government has also launched a number of initiatives for the inclusion and empowerment of PwDs, such as the Accessible India campaign and the National Action Plan for PwDs, apart from ensuring the participation of PwDs in broader skill development and training programs such as the Pradhan Mantri Kaushal Vikas Yojana (PMKVY). The inclusion of PwDs is also a priority of broad-based social security initiatives such as the MGNREGA, Pradhan Mantri Awas Yojana, and Ayushman Bharat. These schemes and their impact on the lives of PwDs are discussed in greater detail in the next chapter.

#### *4.3.1 Advocacy Initiatives by Indian Disability NGOs*

Apart from government-run platforms, there are scores of non-governmental and civil society organisations today that advocate for PwDs in India. Some of them are:

##### **National Centre for the Promotion of Employment for Disabled People (NCPEDP)**

Founded in 1996, NCPEDP is a cross-disability non-profit organisation working as an interface between the government, industry, international agencies, and the voluntary sector towards empowerment of persons with disabilities. NCPEDP works to advocate for the rights of persons with disability along with encouraging their employment, increase public awareness about disabilities, and disseminate knowledge, information, and opportunities. The organisation also works towards easy and convenient access to all public places, products, services, and technologies. For the last 25 years, NCPEDP has been advocating for viewing the issues of PwDs with a rights-based approach and equality and gender-based lens; subsequently moving away from traditionally held views of charity and welfare.<sup>59</sup>



### The Association of People with Disability

Active since 1959, this Bangalore-based NGO has been transforming the lives of underprivileged people with disabilities. It runs extensive programs in rural and urban Karnataka to enable, equip and empower children and adults with a range of disabilities, including locomotive difficulty, spinal cord injury, speech and hearing impairments, and cerebral palsy. The APD works with stakeholders like Village Rehabilitation Workers (VRWs), Multiple Rehabilitation Workers (MRWs), Community Based Organisations (CBOs), and government departments.<sup>60</sup>



### Sense International India

Established in 1997, Sense International India (also known as Sense India) is a national-level organisation supporting needs-based services which enable children and adults with deaf-blindness to overcome the challenges caused by the disability. Sense India's key objective is to provide information, guidance, support, and training needed along with being committed to helping persons with deaf-blindness and multiple disabilities and their families by raising awareness and campaigning for rights, opportunities, and services throughout the nation.<sup>61</sup>



### VISHWAS (Vision for Health Welfare and Special Needs)

Rooted in Haryana, VISHWAS promotes the rights and interests of the disadvantaged and people with disabilities. It partners with stakeholders to build knowledge and capacities on inclusive practices and policies, and creates opportunities for meaningful participation. VISHWAS has developed a Disability Resource Manual training material for ASHA and Anganwadi workers, regular teachers and parents for spreading awareness and for the right information related to 21 disabilities and associated challenges.<sup>62</sup>

### Samarthanam Trust for the Disabled

Started in 1997, the organisation works for the empowerment of persons with disabilities and the underserved through various initiatives focused on providing quality education, accommodation, nutritious food, vocational training and placement-based rehabilitation. Samarthanam Trust's cricketing arm, the Cricket Association for the Blind in India (CABI), organises blind cricket tournaments for visually impaired players across India.<sup>63</sup>





### Association for the Mentally Challenged (AMC)

Founded in 1960, AMC aims to educate, train and rehabilitate individuals with intellectual disabilities. AMC also extends support to the families of these individuals and handholds them in their journey of caring for their children with disabilities. The Association runs a school for children with disabilities, multi-vocational training centre, workshop, day care centre, child guidance clinic and a parents' self-help group.<sup>64</sup>

### ADAPT (Able Disable All People Together)

Headquartered in Mumbai, ADAPT was founded in 1972 to help people with neuro-muscular and developmental disabilities. Today, it runs schools for children with disabilities, and offers vocational training and help for finding suitable jobs to the students, through rehabilitation, communication and speech therapy, counselling, parent training and support programs. Certificate and diploma courses are conducted for special educators, basic developmental therapists and community rehabilitators.<sup>65</sup>

Sarthak Educational Trust is proud to be part of this sprawling network of organisations that are committed to advocating for PwDs. Acknowledging the long history of collaboration in the disability sector, Sarthak has founded the India Disability Empowerment Alliance (IDEA) to bring together over 491 Indian disability advocacy organisations on a common platform. (To know more about this initiative, refer to Chapter 7.)

## 5. ADVOCACY EFFORTS BY VARIOUS STAKEHOLDERS

A stakeholder is any person, group, or organisation that affects or can be affected by an organisation's actions. A variety of stakeholders promote advocacy in the disability sector – governments, corporate entities, civil society organisations, media, academia as well as international agencies. Each of these stakeholders has varying powers and capacities to shape conversations and drive action on disability. The government, for example, is responsible for the welfare of all its citizens, which naturally includes PwDs. As the paramount legislative and administrative power, the scope of the government in advocacy is immense.

Civil society organisations and international agencies facilitate community care, on-ground implementation of services, and knowledge-sharing. They are often the stakeholders who work closely with PwDs to understand their problems and identify solutions. The media serves as indicators of cultural attitudes towards disability and can play a huge role in spreading awareness and combating stigma. While academia facilitates research on ways to improve the lives of PwDs, corporate entities can help PwDs build livelihoods as they are one of the most underrepresented people in formal employment.

### 5.1 Advocacy by Government

As a cross-sectoral issue, the wellbeing of PwDs is not a matter that can be addressed by a single exclusive ministry. Disability inclusion should be a cornerstone of governance across ministries. Various ministries can and do contribute to the welfare of PwDs in different ways. Some of these avenues are described below:

The Ministry of Housing & Urban Poverty Alleviation is responsible for the Pradhan Mantri Awas Yojana (PMAY), the 'Housing for All' scheme being implemented in urban areas. PMAY has a provision which states that preference should be given to PwDs (among other marginalised communities) while sanctioning credit-linked subsidies on home loans taken out by beneficiaries.<sup>66</sup>



The Ministry of Skill Development and Entrepreneurship's flagship program, Pradhan Mantri Kaushal Vikas Yojana (PMKVY)<sup>67</sup> is implemented by the National Skill Development Corporation (NSDC). PMKVY is a skill certification scheme that encourages Indian youth to sign up for industry-specific skill training through short-term training courses, so that they may find better livelihoods. Individuals with prior learning experience or skills can also be assessed under the Recognition of Prior Learning component of PMKVY. PMKVY incentivises participation of PwDs in skill training through post-placement support, monthly conveyance allowance, boarding and lodging, and so on. Furthermore, there is an exclusive Skill Council for PwD (SCPwD) which caters to the needs of the PwD candidates and supervises skilling/training sessions in PwD-friendly training centres. These centres are structurally designed so that PwD candidates can train with ease.<sup>68</sup>

The Ministry of Rural Employment oversees the Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Act (MGNREGA) which is overseen by The Ministry of Rural Employment, lays down specific operational guidelines for employing PwDs. State governments have been charged with identifying suitable avenues of employment for PwDs. Effort has to be undertaken to employ PwDs close to their homes so as to minimise transportation. The guidelines also stipulate that PwDs shall be called by their names alone at their work-site. This is meant to ensure that PwDs are not addressed by their disability or denigrated through abuses or slurs in any shape or form.<sup>69</sup>

The Ministry of Labour offers incentives in the form of Employee State Insurance and Employee Provident Fund relaxation to private sector employers which provide jobs to PwDs. As per the scheme, the employers who provide employment to PwDs are exempted from paying employer's contribution to the Provident Fund for the first 3 years.<sup>70</sup> The Ministry of Road Transport and Highways has issued guidelines on provisions for disability-adapted vehicles<sup>71</sup>, while the Ministry of Finance offers concessions on car excise duty, road tax, toll tax, as well insurance premiums.<sup>72</sup> PwDs can avail customs concessions on assistive devices if imported;<sup>73</sup> domestically manufactured devices are taxed at a concessional 5% GST rate.<sup>74</sup>

The Department of Science and Technology oversees the Science for Equity, Empowerment & Development (SEED) division, which has developed and successfully field-tested 30 prototypes of assistive devices for PwDs. Of these, 5 products have been commercialised and 10 software tools are freely downloadable.<sup>75</sup> SEED also funds research on assistive devices through its Technology Interventions for the Disabled and Elderly (TIDE) Program.<sup>76</sup>

The **Ayushman Bharat scheme** is being rolled out under the aegis of the National Health Authority, an autonomous body attached to the Ministry of Health & Family Welfare. Also known as the National Health Protection Mission, the scheme aims to cover over 10 crore poor and vulnerable families, providing coverage up to Rs. 5 lakhs per family per year for secondary and tertiary care hospitalisation. The scheme also includes expansion of healthcare services through Comprehensive Primary Health Care (CPHC). These services are expected to benefit PwDs in the most underserved areas of the country.<sup>78</sup> The **Ministry of Health & Family Welfare**, via the National Health Mission, is also responsible for the Rashtriya Bal Swasthya Karyakram (RBSK) program. This involves screening of children from birth to 18 years of age using a 4D framework. The four Ds stand for Defects at birth, Diseases, Deficiencies and Developmental delays. RBSK encompasses early detection and free treatment and management, including surgeries at tertiary level, of 32 health conditions common along children. The Ministry also oversees several national institutions working in the field of rehabilitative services, such as National Institute of Mental Health and Neuro Sciences (NIMHANS), Bangalore; All India Institute of Physical Medicine and Rehabilitation (AIIPMR), Mumbai; All India Institute of Speech and Hearing (AIISH), Mysore; and Central Institute of Psychiatry, Ranchi.<sup>79</sup>



**Ministry of Housing & Urban Poverty Alleviation:** Affordable housing for PwDs through PMAY

**Ministry of Skill Development and Entrepreneurship:** Skill building through PMKVY

**Ministry of Rural Employment:** Guidelines on employing PwDs via Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Act (MGNREGA)

**Ministry of Labour:** ESIC & EPF relaxations

**Ministry of Road Transport & Highways:** Guidelines on provisions for disability-adapted vehicles

**Ministry of Finance:** Tax concessions for assistive devices

**Department of Science and Technology:** Research and development of assistive devices

**Ministry of Health and Family Welfare:** Ayushman Bharat, early intervention through the 4D framework, national institutes which provide rehabilitation services

**Figure 10: Ministerial initiatives by Government of India for disability advocacy**

Apart from these efforts from other ministries, the Union government has a dedicated Department of Empowerment of People with Disabilities (DEPwD), operating under the Ministry of Social Justice and Empowerment. The government operates 9 national institutes, each dedicated to a different disability or an intersection of disabilities, along with 23 Composite Regional Centres (CRCs), all of which work towards the rehabilitation and skill development training of PwDs. Apart from the National Institutes (listed in Chapter 4), organisations functioning under the DEPwD include:

■ **The National Trust** is a statutory body set up for the welfare of persons with autism, cerebral palsy and multiple disabilities. The Trust's mission is described as "providing opportunities for capacity development of Persons with Disability and their families, fulfilling their rights, facilitating and promoting the creation of an enabling environment and an inclusive society."<sup>80</sup> It fulfils this mission through a range of schemes, such as:

- **DISHA:** Early intervention and school readiness program for children with disabilities under the age of 10
- **VIKAAS:** Day care scheme for persons with autism, cerebral palsy and other intellectual disabilities, intended to boost their interpersonal and vocational skills
- **SAMARTH:** 'Respite homes' for PwDs from families below the poverty line
- **GHARAUNDA:** Housing and lifelong care for people with autism, cerebral palsy, and other forms of intellectual disabilities and multiple disabilities
- **NIRAMAYA:** Affordable health insurance for PwDs
- **SAHYOGI:** Scheme for training and creating skilled workforce of caregivers for PwDs and their families
- **GYAN PRABHA:** Educational support scheme for PwDs, especially those pursuing higher education and vocational courses
- **PRERNA:** Marketing scheme to create viable & wide spread channels for sale of products and services produced by PwDs
- **SAMBHAV:** Scheme to setup resource centres in each city, to collect technological aids/assistive tools

The Trust's objectives include supporting registered organisations which provide need-based services to PwDs. It also develops procedures for appointing guardians and trustees for persons with disabilities.

**Rehabilitation Council of India's (RCI)**<sup>81</sup> objective is to regulate and monitor services offered to PwDs as well as to maintain a central register of personnel working in Rehabilitation and Special Education sectors. RCI regulates training policies and programs in the field of rehabilitation of PwDs and brings about standardisation of training courses for professionals dealing with PwDs.

**National Handicapped Finance & Development Corporation (NHDFC)**<sup>82</sup> is a wholly-owned company by Government of India, with the primary aim of offering financial support to initiatives which contribute directly or indirectly to PwDs' income generation or help them in their overall empowerment. The support is channelled through agencies nominated by state governments, public sector banks or regional rural banks. Key schemes being implemented by NHDFC include:

- **Divyangjan Swavalamban Yojana:** This scheme offers financial assistance through loans to PwDs in order to start any activity that contributes directly or indirectly to generating income for them.
- **Vishesh Microfinance Yojana:** Under this scheme, loans are disbursed to PwDs so that they can pursue small/micro business and development activities.
- **NHFDC Swavalamban Kendra (NSK):** An NSK is intended to function as a district-level mini-incubation centre that will address the credit needs, skilling needs and business linkage needs of PwD entrepreneurs so that they can build locally relevant and viable businesses.

**Artificial Limbs Manufacturing Corporation of India (ALIMCO)**<sup>83</sup> is a Public Sector Unit that has been engaged in the manufacture and distribution of assistive devices for PwDs since 1976. ALIMCO's product range features about 35 categories of cost-effective assistive devices with approximately 360 variants, which cater to persons with locomotor, intellectual and sensory disabilities.

Apart from these organisations, the government has introduced several schemes and initiatives devoted for the welfare of PwDs. Some of the most impactful ones are discussed here.

**Assistance to Disabled Persons (ADIP)**<sup>84</sup> operational since 1981, its primary objective is to empower those PwDs who need assistive devices of any sort to bolster their physical, social and psychological wellbeing. ADIP helps PwDs procure durable, sophisticated and state-of-the-art aids and appliances through the likes of ALIMCO, the National Institutes and their CRCs, District Disability Rehabilitation Centres (DDRCs). Where necessary, ADIP also facilitates corrective surgeries for PwDs prior to their acquisition of an assistive device.

**Accessible India campaign**<sup>85</sup> launched in 2015 by the DEPwD is a nation-wide campaign for achieving universal accessibility for PwDs. Also known as the Sugamya Bharat Abhiyan, the campaign is centred around three verticals: Built Environment, Transportation Sector, and ICT Ecosystem.

The Built Environment vertical focuses on making a higher proportion of government buildings accessible—that is, ensuring that PwDs face no barriers in entering them and using all the facilities therein. This covers the built environment—services, steps and ramps, corridors, entry gates, emergency exits, parking—as well as indoor and outdoor facilities including lighting, signages, alarm systems and toilets.

Similarly, the Transportation Sector vertical is meant to coordinate efforts in making airports, railway stations and public transport carriers fully accessible.

The ICT Ecosystem vertical is focused on making a greater number of public documentation and government websites/portals accessible, in line with internationally-recognised accessibility standards. Efforts will also be directed towards training and building a larger pool of sign-language interpreters. There is also a concerted attempt to develop and adopt a national standard for captioning and sign-language interpretation for public television programs aired on government channels.

A summary of the current status of the campaign, as reported by the Ministry of Social Justice & Empowerment in November 2021, is presented in Figure 11.

BUILT ENVIRONMENT		TRANSPORTATION		ICT ECOSYSTEM	
Target	Status	Target	Status	Target	Status
Converting 50% of all the government buildings of National Capital and all the State capitals into fully accessible buildings by June 2022.	48.5% of State and UT government buildings made accessible.	Conducting accessibility audit of all the international airports and converting them into fully accessible international airports by June 2022.	All 35 international airports are accessible.	Conducting accessibility audit of 50% of all government (both Central and State Governments) websites and converting them into fully accessible websites by June 2022.	588 State/UT Government websites and 95 Central Government websites have been made accessible. (No percentage-wise data available)
		Ensuring that A1, A & B categories of railway stations in the country are converted into fully accessible railway stations by June 2022.	Completed	Developing and adoption of national standards on captioning and sign-language interpretation in consultation with National media authorities by June 2022.	National standard has been developed; implementation data unavailable.
		Ensuring that 25% of Government owned public transport carriers in the country are converted into fully accessible carriers by June 2022.	8.73% of buses are fully accessible.		

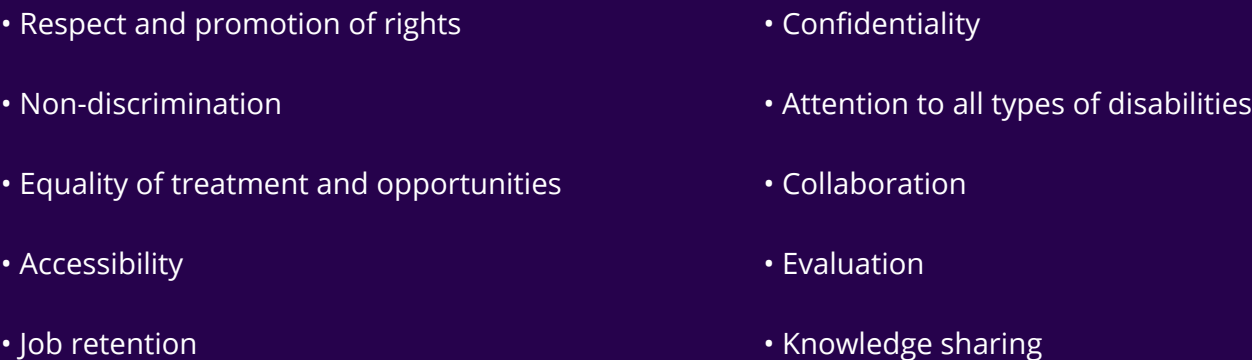
**Figure 11: Accessible India - Campaign Status**

**National Action Plan**,<sup>86</sup> launched by the DEPwD in collaboration with the Ministry of Skill Development and Entrepreneurship, is dedicated to the skill development and training of PwDs. This plan was introduced in recognition of the fact that improving vocational training and employment opportunities for PwDs is critical for enhancing their quality of life as well as their families'. In addition to these individual and family benefits, there is also a strong economic imperative. Increasing PwDs' labour force participation will help in addressing the country's shortage of skilled labour force, while simultaneously reducing fiscal pressures associated with welfare dependency.

## 5.2 Advocacy by the Corporate Sector

Disability advocacy in the corporate sector primarily takes the form of Diversity, Equity & Inclusion (DEI) initiatives. Such initiatives are designed to push companies towards drawing up dedicated plans to hire and retain a PwD workforce, creating equal-opportunity work cultures and accessible workplace environments. Companies may partner with consultancy services to achieve these goals. Furthermore, DEI initiatives produce thought leadership on disability inclusion among executives and employees, generating conversation and spurring other companies into taking action.

Internationally, there have been coordinated efforts to place disability higher on the DEI agenda of corporate firms. The International Labour Organisation (ILO), for instance, has a Global Business and Disability Network (GBDN), consisting of multinational enterprises, employers' organisations, national business and disability networks across the world. Signatories to the GBDN Charter commit to a set of ten principles that serve as a framework while creating workplaces that offer equal opportunities to PwDs. Signatories of GBDN include prestigious firms such as Accenture, IBM, AXA, GSK, BNP Paribas, Nestlé, L'Oréal, Standard Chartered and Unilever.

- 
- Respect and promotion of rights
  - Confidentiality
  - Non-discrimination
  - Attention to all types of disabilities
  - Equality of treatment and opportunities
  - Collaboration
  - Accessibility
  - Evaluation
  - Job retention
  - Knowledge sharing

Source: Disability Inclusion Makes Good Business Sense [Available at: <http://www.businessanddisability.org/>]

**Figure 12: Principles of the GBDN Charter**

A similar global initiative is The Valuable 500, launched in 2019 by the World Economic Forum. Valuable 500 is the largest global network of CEOs committed to disability inclusion. All member companies are working towards advancing disability inclusion within their organisations, such as Unilever's commitment to increase the representation of employees with disabilities to 5% by 2025<sup>87</sup> and Microsoft's commitment to intentionally building accessibility into their products.<sup>88</sup>



Microsoft is taking an integrated approach to disability inclusion, working towards creating a systematic culture of inclusion and disruptive innovations to change what is possible for people with disabilities.

Fifteen "Iconic Leaders" across The Valuable 500 co-fund, co-build and co-test inclusion programs and solutions, using their industry experience to help catalyse progress for the entire community. These leaders are Allianz, BBC, Deloitte, EY, Google, Mahindra, LSEG, Omnicom, P&G, Salesforce, Sony, Sky, Verizon, Microsoft and Apple. These Iconic Leader companies are working together to drive systemic change across six key pillars: C-Suite, Culture, Customer, Reporting, Representation and Research.<sup>89</sup>

**C-Suite:** This aims to harness the power of conversations to end the culture of silence around disabilities in boardrooms. It will also launch a search across all 500 companies to find and mentor the next-generation of potential executives with lived experiences of disability.

**Culture:** With the help of Iconic Leader companies Deloitte and Google, The Valuable 500 will conduct a global exercise to gather employee disability data. With Mahindra and Salesforce, the network will develop a methodology for recruiting people with disabilities.

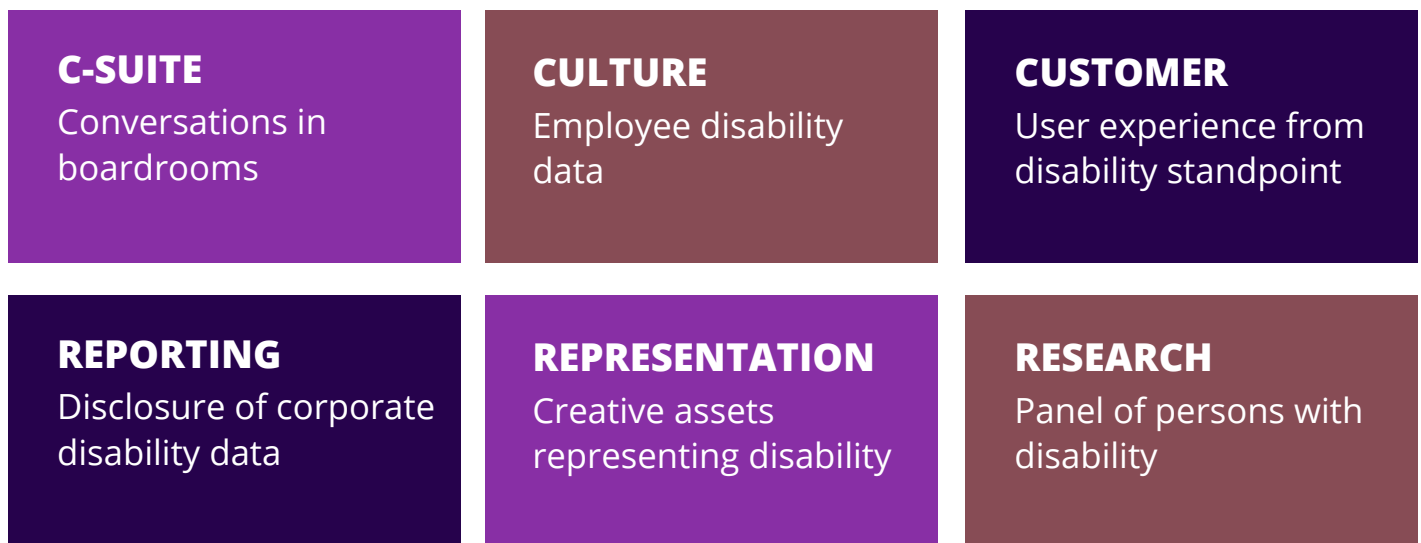
**Customer:** There are ongoing customer experience barriers for people with disabilities and companies often lack knowledge on how to make their offerings more accessible. P&G and Omnicom Group will develop a Customer Experience Audit tool that will help companies better assess their user experience from a disability standpoint.

**Reporting:** Disability data is routinely excluded from annual reports and global indices, so The Valuable 500 wants to encourage more public disclosure of corporate disability data. Working with Iconic Leader companies London Stock Exchange Group (LSEG) and Allianz, the network will create a reporting framework to collectively gather and track disability metrics.



**Representation:** There is a lack of content in the media that authentically represents people with disabilities. The Valuable 500 wants to change that by setting a new visual standard and building a hub of creative assets for the 500 companies to use, in collaboration with Iconic Leader company Sony.

**Research:** The Valuable 500 will be building a truly inclusive, global research panel of people with disabilities, created in partnership with Iconic Leader companies Sky and EY.



*Figure 13: The Valuable 500 - Focal Areas for Change*

In UK, the Business Disability Forum is the leading business membership organisation in disability inclusion. The Forum works with PwDs, businesses and policymakers to tackle barriers to inclusion and improve the lives of employees with disabilities.<sup>90</sup> Workability International also operates along similar lines, connecting organisations that champion equality of employment opportunities for PwDs. The organisation encourages members to measure its DEI outcomes against global best practices.<sup>91</sup>

In India, the Federation of Indian Chambers of Commerce and Industry (FICCI) has set up a dedicated task force for enabling DEI initiatives across the Indian corporate world. In 2021, it conducted a training program on inclusion of PwDs in the workplace.<sup>92</sup> It has also published a toolkit for organisations to promote disability inclusivity, titled "Inclusivity and Accessibility Index."<sup>93</sup>

The Confederation of Indian Industry (CII) has established India Business and Disability Network (IBDN), a one-of-a-kind network of organisations to “engage, enable and empower”. The network promotes and facilitates inclusive, accessible and barrier-free workplaces within the corporate sector.<sup>94</sup> CII-IBDN’s founding members include Accenture, Mahindra, Tata Steel, Tata Chemicals, NatWest Group, Mylan Group and Brookfield Properties.<sup>95</sup> CII-IBDN takes a three-pronged approach to disability inclusion:<sup>96</sup>

- Knowledge creation and dissemination: enhancing capabilities of member companies, sharing of best practices
- Advocacy & dialogue: providing space for member companies to raise their concerns and issues
- Facilitation of partnerships/services: connecting member companies with appropriate service-providers who can facilitate accessibility

Apart from these forums, individual businesses have DEI initiatives of their own. ITC launched Braille-inscribed product packaging for its popular antiseptic liquid, Savlon. The company intends to not only raise awareness about Braille, but also to engender a design language that enables inclusivity.<sup>97</sup> The supermarket chain Big Bazaar observes Quiet Hour every Tuesday between 10 and 11 am, during which PwDs can shop comfortably. Apart from the lack of a jostling crowd, Quiet Hour is marked by dimmer lights and the absence of loud music/announcements. All these features create a shopping environment that is not sensorily overwhelming. To help PwDs locate products easily, stickers with names and pictures are also stuck around the store. Regular customers are requested to use shopping baskets instead of trolleys, leaving more space for wheelchair users.<sup>98</sup> These are a few of the important steps that the corporate world has taken towards building inclusive experiences for PwDs.

## 5.3 Advocacy on Academia

Academia can and does play a range of roles in promoting disability advocacy around the world and in India. Academics conduct valuable research and raise awareness on disability inclusion by organising workshops and conferences. Data collated over the course of academic research, especially case studies, is often the foundation upon which inclusion programs are designed. The field of Disability Studies is witnessing a rapid growth of interest, as it interrogates socio-cultural attitudes on disability. The field critically examines literature and popular culture through the lens of disability in order to shed light on the way ableism structures societies around the world. These perspectives pave the way for sensitising people to the importance of issues such as accessible infrastructure.

Academia can (and often does) also take concrete action to tackle structural issues in higher education. Institute administrations can have dedicated offices to cater to PwDs, such as the Office of Accessible Education (OAE) in IIT Delhi. OAE works to provide students in need with assistive technology resources (hardware and software), study material in accessible formats, scribes and compensatory time during examinations, and e-rickshaws for students to move across the campus.<sup>99</sup>

Placement support is another way higher education institutes can make a positive difference in the lives of students with disabilities. In the 2021-22 placement season, IIT Madras rolled out a targeted approach help PwDs get deserving job opportunities. The Placement team compiled a comprehensive database of students with disabilities, mapped job profiles with interests and skillsets, and made exclusive pitches to companies which had openings relevant to these students' interests.<sup>100</sup> Academia also pioneers innovations in technological support and assistive devices for PwDs. IIT Madras' Centre for Rehabilitation Engineering and Assistive Technology (CREATE) has developed distinctive devices in the wearable tech segment to facilitate independent communication for people with hearing and locomotor disabilities. Their product for people with hearing impairments, called 'Vibe', generates vibration and LED light inputs to alert the wearer to pre-identified sounds like doorbell. 'Gest' recognises gestures and provides audio output through a smartphone, thus helping people with cerebral palsy to communicate.<sup>101</sup> IIT Madras also hosts another research group dedicated to assistive devices. The TTK Centre for Rehabilitative Research and Device Development (called R2D2@IITM) focuses on people with locomotor disabilities. The group engineers affordable products PwDs in India and beyond, works with clinical specialists, NGOs, hospitals and other organisations to field-test the designs, and fosters a research environment to evaluate assistive device designs from biomechanical and functional standpoints.<sup>102</sup> Their innovations include a standing wheelchair (Arise), prosthetic knee for above-knee amputees (Kadam), hand-neuro-rehabilitation device (PLUTO) to provide gamified therapy to persons with neurological and musculoskeletal conditions, and a compact, personalised wheelchair (Neomotion) that covers greater distances and can be supplemented with a motorised add-on.<sup>103</sup>

## DID YOU KNOW?

*IIT-Madras has two centres dedicated to the research and development of assistive devices.*

**CREATE** develops wearable tech for PwDs:

- **VIBE** alerts people with hearing impairments to pre-identified sounds (such as doorbells)
- **GEST** captures gestures and translates them to audio output, aiding communication for people with cerebral palsy

*R2D2@IITM works on devices for people with locomotor disabilities:*

- **ARISE:** standing wheelchair
- **KADAM:** prosthetic knee
- **PLUTO:** hand-neuro-rehabilitation device
- **NEOMOTION:** compact, personalised wheelchair

Academic institutes solely devoted to PwDs also play a crucial role in advocating for their wellbeing and full participation in society. India has nine government-run institutes for PwDs, each dedicated to the empowerment and capacity-building of people with specific disability types. These institutes, listed in Chapter 4, offer courses in a variety of subjects, apart from vocational training, rehabilitation services, early intervention and assessment services, and medical assistance. Depending on which area of disability an institute focuses on, courses offered include undergraduate, postgraduate and diploma programs in Audiology, Speech Language Pathology, Physiotherapy, Clinical Psychology, Rehabilitation Psychology, Occupational Therapy, Prosthetics and Orthotics, and Sign Language Interpretation. NIEPVD, Dehradun, also manages the Central Braille Press, which is the largest Braille press in the country that produces literature for school and college education. ISLRTC, New Delhi, has signed an MoU with NCERT to convert course books and materials for classes I to XII into sign language.

While higher educational and research institutes have their part to play in advocacy, school education merits just as much attention. The right approach to educating children with disabilities (CwDs) in school has always been a matter of contention. Should CwDs be educated separately? Should they be placed in a “mainstream” educational setting alongside children without disabilities? The most common perspectives are Special Education, Integrated Education and Inclusive Education.

SPECIAL EDUCATION	INTEGRATED EDUCATION	INCLUSIVE EDUCATION
Responds to the needs of CwDs outside mainstream education	CwDs learn alongside peers without disabilities	Welcomes diversity of learning styles in students; children with and without disabilities benefit
Individual-centric; content & mode of delivery depends on the needs of individual CwDs	CwDs are expected to adapt to “mainstream” curricula and learning processes	Follows an ‘education for all’ approach, adapting to the needs of all students
Less challenging for CwDs	More challenging for CwDs	Less challenging for CwDs
Can take place in a general or a specialised classroom	Takes place within the general classroom	Takes place within the general classroom

**Figure 14: Differing Approaches to Education of CwDs<sup>104</sup>**

Where elementary schooling is concerned, the Right to Free and Compulsory Education (RTE) Act of 2009 proclaims that all children have the inalienable right to free and compulsory education between the ages of 6 and 14. Section 3(2) of the Act specifically stresses on the right of CwDs to elementary education. A 2012 amendment further clarifies that a child with multiple and/or severe disabilities has the right to opt for home-schooling.

However, it is important to remember that the RTE Act was framed prior to the 2016 RPwD Act. Therefore, it is not in line with current disability paradigms and continues to refer to PWD Act (1995) in defining concepts related to disability. The RTE Act also bears several inconsistencies with the RPwD Act that need to be resolved. For instance, while RPwD Act pushes for inclusive education for CwDs, the RTE Act has not yet defined inclusive education. As such, the norms and standards that it sets for schools are not sufficient to meaningfully implement inclusive education. Furthermore, special schools do not fall under the ambit of a ‘school’ as defined in the RTE Act. As a result, they are not regulated the way other schools are under the Act. In a nutshell, these different legal frameworks around the welfare of CwDs need to be harmonised in order to enable high quality education for CwDs.<sup>105</sup>

While laws such as the RTE Act provide the scaffolding for the educational landscape in the country, landmark programs such as the Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan (SSA) facilitate on-ground policy implementation. Launched in 2001, SSA was the Union government’s flagship program for universalising elementary education for children in the 6-14 age group. Its overall goals included universal access and student retention, bridging of gender and social category gaps in education, and improving learning levels of children. Through SSA, children with and without disabilities participated and learned together in the same class. SSA’s major interventions for the education of CwDs include identification, functional and formal assessment, appropriate educational placement, preparation of individualised education plans, provision of free aids and appliances, teacher training, and appointment of resource teachers.<sup>106</sup>

The SSA and Rashtriya Madhyamik Shiksha Abhiyan (RMSA) schemes were subsumed by the Union government's Samagra Shiksha program in 2018-19. Samagra Shiksha carries forward its predecessors' commitment to making elementary and secondary education inclusive for children with disabilities. The program's objectives include:

- Identification of children with disabilities at the school level and assessment of their educational needs
- Provision of aids/assistive devices to CwDs as needed
- Removal of architectural barriers in schools so that CwDs have access to classrooms, laboratories, libraries, play/recreational areas, and toilets in the school
- Supplying appropriate teaching learning materials, medical facilities, vocational training support, guidance and counselling services to CwDs as per their requirements
- Provision for transport, escort and scribe allowances
- Allocation of stipends for girls with disabilities (from Class I to XII)
- Sensitisation and training for general schoolteachers
- Organising capacity-building programs for existing special educators

India's most recent policy initiative for educational reform was the National Education Policy (NEP 2020), which recognises the provisions for inclusive education made by the 2016 Rights of Persons with Disabilities Act (RPwD). Accordingly, NEP asserts that all children with disabilities will have access to barrier-free education. The final version of NEP incorporated several recommendations made in response to the 2019 draft by disability organisations.

- |                                 |   |
|---------------------------------|---|
| ■ Non-discrimination in schools | ■ Use of Braille and Indian Sign Language in teaching             |
| ■ Accessible infrastructure     | ■ Disability awareness within teacher education                   |
| ■ Reasonable accommodations     | ■ Recruitment of special educators with cross-disability training |
| ■ Individualised support        |   |

Source: Examining Disability Inclusion in India's New National Education Policy [Available at: <https://www.ukfiet.org/2020/examining-disability-inclusion-in-indias-new-national-education-policy/>]

**Figure 15: Disability-specific Recommendations from NEP**



## 5.4 Advocacy by Media

Print, visual and digital media have a pivotal role in advocating for PwDs, especially when it comes to the manner in which stories about PwDs are covered. A higher amount of sensitive reportage can go a long way in presenting PwDs as complex human beings in their own right, not mere sympathetic figures or perennial sources of inspiration. TV programs like *Nazar ya Nazariya*, a 2013 Doordarshan series featuring real-life stories of people with visual impairment from across the country, helped in challenging prejudices and misconceptions around disabilities. *Nazar ya Nazariya* explored themes such as education, employment, marriage and relationships, parenting, business, and art in the lives of the people whose stories it shared.

Even existing TV shows that typically do not deal with advocacy can conceptualise special episodes or features that can be utilised for the same. The hit quizzing show *Kaun Banega Crorepati*, popularly called KBC, introduced a special series called *Karamveer*, which invited various activists and changemakers to the show. These episodes draw the audience's attention to the vital work that these people/organisations are carrying out. Sarthak's founder, Dr. Jitender Aggarwal, appeared on *Karamveer* along with Dr. Suman Aggarwal.<sup>107</sup> The duo played KBC and won INR 25 lakhs, utilising the prize money for the upliftment of PwDs at Sarthak.

When talking about the media's part in advocacy, it is equally important to recognise the role of movies in shifting perspectives and encouraging conversations on disabilities. Over the last two decades, Indian cinema has produced several movies that explore disability with sensitivity and nuance. Sanjay Leela Bhansali's *Black* (2005) portrays the relationship between Michelle, a deaf-blind woman played by Rani Mukerji, and her tutor Debraj (Amitabh Bachchan). The 2007 movie *Taare Zameen Par*, directed by Aamir Khan and starring Darsheel Safary as an 8-year-old dyslexic child, was one of the first Bollywood movies to feature a protagonist with learning disabilities. Shonali Bose's *Margarita with a Straw* (2014) and Ram's *Peranbu* (2018) both feature central characters (essayed by Kalki Koechlin and Sadhana respectively) with cerebral palsy who struggle with personal relationships and self-acceptance.



Figure 16: Posters of movies exploring disability<sup>108</sup>

While strides forward have been made in representations of disability, there is still a long way to go. Plenty of media establishments continue to cover stories of PwDs with outdated language and in dehumanising ways, often reducing their personhood to disability alone. This is where communication guidelines<sup>109</sup> and toolkits can play a crucial role in helping the media frame stories on PwDs in a respectful manner. The UN's Disability-Inclusive Communication Guidelines and ILO's Media Guidelines for the Portrayal of Disability<sup>110</sup> are comprehensive documents which offer tips, tools and checklists for sensitive communication regarding PwDs and disabilities. The guidelines contain pointers on appropriate terminology as well as information on international conventions and standards on disability. These documents could be used as a blueprint and adapted to local contexts to drive nuanced and thoughtful reporting.

## 5.5 Advocacy by International Agencies

International agencies (such as the UN and its various bodies) working in the disability sector promote advocacy through several means. They help to advance better understanding of disability issues and promote standardisation of processes, thus ensuring quality services.

Most importantly, these agencies facilitate networking between stakeholders. They engage local stakeholders to gather data and arrive at actionable recommendations on promoting inclusion and equity for PwDs. Using their extensive resources and widespread networks, international agencies support on-ground efforts and accessibility services offered by local players across nations. This is critical to promoting cross-learning and sharing information on best practices in advocacy.

ILO, for instance, is committed to promoting the right of PwDs to decent work. To this end, they produce working papers and guidelines on inclusive employment practices and social protection. The ILO-GBDN (discussed earlier in this chapter) brings together corporate employers who are committed to disability inclusion in practice.

The UN Programme on Disability/Secretariat for the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (SCRPD) falls within the Division for Inclusive Social Development (DISD) of the United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs (UNDESA). Through the programme, UNDESA promotes the rights and advancement of persons with disabilities within a broad mandate provided by the World Programme of Action (1982), Standard Rules (1994) and the UNCRPD (2006). This includes work such as mainstreaming disability in the global development agenda.<sup>111</sup>



The United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) recognises disability inclusion as a multidimensional human rights issue. UNDP is committed to an inclusive approach to sustainable human development which benefits all and ensures that no one is left behind. As the development branch of the UN system, UNDP supports member states as they seek to achieve the SDGs by 2030 and fulfil their human rights obligations under the UNCRPD. The SDGs and the UNCRPD are the twin frameworks within which the UNDP operates.<sup>112</sup>

The World Health Organisation (WHO) acknowledges that its commitment to building a healthier world can only be achieved if health systems are inclusive of people with disability. In December 2020, it launched the WHO Policy on Disability, which requires the organisation to:<sup>113</sup>

- Integrate disability into the design, implementation, monitoring, and evaluation of all programs, while continuing disability-specific or targeted initiatives for people with disability
- Consult with people with disability in decisions relating to its programs and operations, including organisations of persons with disabilities
- Recognise and address the multiple and intersecting forms of discrimination that people with disability face when accessing health systems and services
- Progressively and incrementally improve the accessibility of building, facilities, workspaces, information, procurement processes, and events to people with a range of impairments, including those with physical, sensory, psychosocial, and intellectual impairments
- Attract, recruit, retain and promote people with disability as staff; and strengthen understanding on disability inclusion within the Organisation

The Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR), the UN's apex body on human rights, has a mandate to ensure the inclusion of the rights of persons with disabilities in the United Nations system. OHCHR's work includes spreading awareness of disability as a human rights issue as enshrined in the UNCRPD. The Office also facilitates and aligns policy dialogue on the rights of PwDs among intergovernmental bodies and across development agendas (such as SDGs)<sup>114</sup>

On similar lines, the United Nations Children's Emergency Fund (UNICEF) works to ensure that children with disabilities and their families have access to all the services and support they need in their communities. UNICEF advocates for disability-inclusive policies and legislation, along with adequate investments to put them into practice. UNICEF aims for CwDs to be included in mainstream programs across sectors.

The organisation also works to build evidence and knowledge on disability, strengthen the capacities of frontline workers, support parents and caregivers of CwDs, and engage communities to address stigma and discrimination. UNICEF further promotes the accessibility of content, communication channels and platforms, and builds strong partnerships with disability organisations. In UNICEF's words, "Children and adolescents with disabilities are the experts on their own experiences: We amplify their voices and enhance their ability to claim their rights."<sup>115</sup>

Another project targeting CwDs is the Inclusive Education Initiative (IEI), overseen by the World Bank. The IEI's purpose is to accelerate action by countries and support their efforts in making education more inclusive. The IEI does this by working both at the global and country levels to help stakeholders and governments mobilise financing and develop programs that ensure inclusive education.<sup>116</sup>

## **5.6 Advocacy by Civil Society Organisations (CSOs)**

Much of advocacy work would remain unaccomplished if it were not for CSOs. Such organisations perform several functions in the disability sector, including conducting sensitisation workshops, offering vocational training and legal aid to PwDs, drawing up policy recommendations for the government, and raising awareness through media campaigns.

A pioneering organisation in the Indian disability sector is the National Centre for Promotion of Employment of Disabled People (NCPEDP). Its advocacy campaign, "Missing Millions," drew the spotlight to the millions of missing persons with disabilities in education, employment, and legislation. In line with its mission of promoting PwDs' employability, NCPEDP partnered with the Confederation of Indian Industry (CII) to constitute a core group to evolve a policy on disability inclusion for the private sector.

The organisation has worked with a number of government ministries and apex bodies to push for better accessibility. Most notably, it worked with the Ministry of Social Justice and Empowerment to produce the National Disaster Management Guidelines on Disability Inclusive Disaster Risk Reduction, in order to ensure that not a single PwD gets left behind in dire situations. NCPEDP's advocacy work with the University Grants Commission (UGC) resulted in the launch of two schemes – one to aid universities/colleges in starting special teacher preparation courses at the B.Ed./M.Ed. levels, and another to provide for appropriate facilities for persons with disabilities at educational institutions.

The NCPEDP also offers the Javed Abidi Fellowship (named after the organisation's founder) to youth with disabilities who are interested in working in the development sector, particularly in the field of disability rights and inclusion. Supported by the Azim Premji Foundation, the Fellowship is a three-year immersive leadership program that encourages youth with disability to examine and amplify the issues PwDs deal with at the grassroots level, thus becoming the community's voice.

Another CSO that focuses on the livelihoods of PwDs is Atypical Advantage. It is India's largest integrated platform that hosts performing artists and visual artists, as well as job-seekers and entrepreneurs (under its Inclusive Hiring vertical). The platform has scaled up to 500+ performing artists, 1000+ artworks, and 10000+ job-seekers with disabilities who have collectively worked with over 120 brands to generate economic opportunities with dignity.<sup>117</sup>

The Disability NGOs Alliance (DNA) brings together NGOs active in the disability sector across the state of Karnataka. DNA works to improve the intervention capacity of NGOs, strengthen their overall impact at the policy-making level, and to support their advocacy efforts. Apart from a host of capacity-building solutions, DNA's initiatives include projects for early intervention, self-employment opportunities for PwDs, and COVID vaccination drives. As a collective representative of disability organisations, DNA acts as an interface between PwDs and administrative forces, providing inputs to lawmakers, government bodies, corporate donors, universities, and other relevant institutions.<sup>118</sup>

The Diversity and Equal Opportunity Centre (DEOC) is a leading consulting, research and training team that prioritises disability inclusion. DEOC comprises of highly qualified and experienced professionals, comprising of disability policy specialists, technology experts, universal design architects, communication and research scholars. They offer services across sectors to corporates, industry bodies, development organisation, educational institutes and the government.<sup>119</sup>

Another prominent organisation in the disability sector is Christian Blind Mission (CBM), which is committed to improving the quality of life of PwDs in the poorest communities of the world. Founded in 1908, it is considered to be one of the oldest and largest organisations in the sector. With over a hundred years of experience working alongside PwDs, CBM strives to remove the barriers that marginalise PwDs in the most disadvantaged societies in the world by teaming up with partner organisations, influencing policy at all levels and responding to emergencies and natural disasters.<sup>120</sup> In India, CBM operates under four broad verticals:

- Inclusive Education:** Interventions towards inclusive teaching methodology, accessible curriculums & infrastructure, and breaking attitudinal barriers among parents, peer groups, school management committees, and communities. In addition to this, CBM also has programs on early identification and intervention for children.<sup>121</sup>
- Inclusive Health:** Work towards minimising the conditions that lead to disability and reducing the prevalence of diseases that cause impairments. CBM also works on prevention and health promotion besides curative treatment, therapy, and support with assistive devices. While primarily known for its work in eye care, CBM also supports cross-disability health interventions such as ear and hearing care, mental health care, and physical impairments such as clubfoot.<sup>122</sup>
- Inclusive Livelihoods:** Development and execution of locally relevant on-farm, off-farm, and non-farm livelihood systems. These programs are noteworthy not just because they facilitate value addition, positive environmental impacts, and sustainable livelihoods, but also because PwDs enter into leadership and decision-making roles.<sup>123</sup>
- Humanitarian Response:** CBM is also active in promoting disability-inclusive disaster prevention, preparedness and management. Their work ensures full inclusion and meaningful participation of PwDs in needs assessment, design, implementation, coordination, monitoring, and evaluation of humanitarian crisis and disaster preparedness. CBM has also developed an app-based Humanitarian Hands-On Tool (HHOT), which provides a step-by-step guide to implementing an inclusive emergency response.<sup>124</sup>

This is only a minuscule fraction of what CSOs contribute to and achieve in the disability sector. Needless to say, there is much work yet to be done. Sarthak is proud to work shoulder-to-shoulder with these organisations, collaborating to impact the lives of PwDs all over the country.

LEADING INTERNATIONAL AGENCIES IN DISABILITY ADVOCACY	KEY CIVIL SOCIETY ORGANISATIONS IN THE DISABILITY SECTOR
International Labour Organisation	National Centre for Promotion of Employment of Disabled People (NCPEDP)
United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs (UNDESA)	Atypical Advantage
United Nations Development Program (UNDP)	Disability NGOs Alliance
World Health Organisation (WHO)	Diversity and Equal Opportunity Centre (DEOC)
Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR)	Christian Blind Mission (CBM)
United Nations Children’s Emergency Fund (UNICEF)	
World Bank (via Inclusive Education Initiative)	

**Figure 17: Leading International Agencies & Civil Society Organisations**

## 6. BEST STRATEGIES FROM NOTABLE DISABILITY ADVOCACY CAMPAIGNS

Over the years, there have been several disability advocacy and awareness campaigns that have struck a chord with the public. Whether it is visual content designed for children or advertising campaigns by multinational companies, different organisations have taken varied approaches to their disability advocacy. This chapter will explore some popular advocacy campaigns and how they accomplish their goals through lucid, carefully-wrought messaging.

### *Include Vidya campaign, CBM India*

In their own words, Bangalore-based CBM India is committed to building an inclusive India for PwDs, with interventions in education, healthcare, livelihood and disaster response.<sup>125</sup> CBM's inclusive education program is dedicated to providing equitable learning opportunities for children with disabilities from different socioeconomic backgrounds. Their "Include Vidya" campaign features an animated video<sup>126</sup> which explains infrastructural and other systemic barriers that CwDs face in their pursuit of education. These barriers are depicted from the perspective of the video's protagonist, Vidya—a child with low vision who also uses a wheelchair as a mobility aid. While the video draws on statistics and legal frameworks surrounding disability and education, its core narrative is clear and consistent. It focuses on Vidya's story, emphasises how she is one of millions who face accessibility issues in education, and shares how CBM is tackling the problem through concrete actions.



*Figure 18: Inclusive Vidya Campaign*



## ACCESSIBLE INDIA CAMPAIGN, DEPwD<sup>127</sup>

The Accessible India campaign (also known as Sugamya Bharat Abhiyan) was launched in 2015 by the Department of Empowerment of Persons with Disabilities, Government of India. It is a nation-wide campaign for achieving universal accessibility for PwDs in three critical verticals: Built Environment, Transportation Sector, and ICT Ecosystem. DEPwD's Accessible India webpage extensively chronicles what the campaign hopes to achieve over its course. There are measurable and time-bound targets for accessibility listed under each vertical, which are helpful in maintaining accountability. (For more information, refer Figure 11) The page also provides a list of resources that demystify the concept of accessibility through photo-digests, demonstrating what it means for public amenities to be truly accessible. There are also documents which lay down standards and guidelines for accessibility as well as a section on FAQs which addresses various aspects of the campaign (such as its context and necessity, stakeholders, terms such as 'reasonable accommodations' etc.)

S.no.	Title Of The Content	Details Of Document
<b>Standards/Guidelines notified under the Rights for Persons with Disabilities Rules 2017</b>		
1.	Harmonised Guidelines and Space standards for Barrier Free Environment for Persons with Disabilities.	<a href="#">View</a> (7.6 MB)
2.	Accessibility-standards-for-persons-with-disabilities-in Bus Body Code.	<a href="#">View</a> (1.6 MB)
3.	Guidelines for Indian Government Websites.	<a href="#">View</a>
<b>Standards/Guidelines under notification</b>		
4.	Accessibility-standards-for-persons-with-disabilities-in Railway.	<a href="#">View</a> (962 KB)
5.	Accessibility-standards-for-persons-with-disabilities-in-television-programmes.	<a href="#">View</a> (1.3 MB)
<b>Initiatives by DEPwD</b>		
6.	List of 10 Basic Features of Accessibility for Buildings.	<a href="#">View</a> (167 KB)
7.	Accessibility in Public Centric Buildings (PPT).	<a href="#">View</a> (1.4 MB)
8.	Example of Accessibility in Public Centric Building (Vedio).	<a href="#">View</a>
9.	Access The PHOTO-DIGEST - Volume 1: Demystifying Accessibility in built infrastructure.	<a href="#">View</a> (19.7 MB)
10.	Access The PHOTO-DIGEST - Volume 2: Demystifying Accessibility in civil aviation.	<a href="#">View</a> (18.2 MB)

*Figure 19: Screenshot of Accessible India website*



## SUGAMYA BHARAT APP, DEPwD<sup>128</sup>

The Sugamya Bharat app was designed and launched in conjunction with the Accessible India campaign. The key objective of the app is to enable PwDs and the elderly to flag accessibility-related issues in public buildings and modes of transport. The app provides five main features, four of which are directly related to enhancing accessibility:

- Registration of complaints of inaccessibility across the three broad pillars of the Accessible India campaign
- Sharing of positive feedback on examples/best practices worth emulating with respect to accessibility
- Departmental updates
- Guidelines and circulars on accessibility

The fifth feature is exclusively dedicated to PwDs who are grappling with COVID-related problems in their everyday lives.

To fulfil its primary function, the Sugamya Bharat app has a provision for easy photo uploads with a geo-tagging option for premises where accessibility is an issue. Importantly, the mobile app is designed to maximise accessibility for PwDs. It contains features such as font size adjustment, colour contrasting option, text to speech, videos with sign language interpretation, and an integrated screen reader in Hindi and English. The app is available in ten languages, namely Hindi, English, Marathi, Tamil, Odia, Kannada, Telugu, Gujarati, Punjabi, and Malayalam.

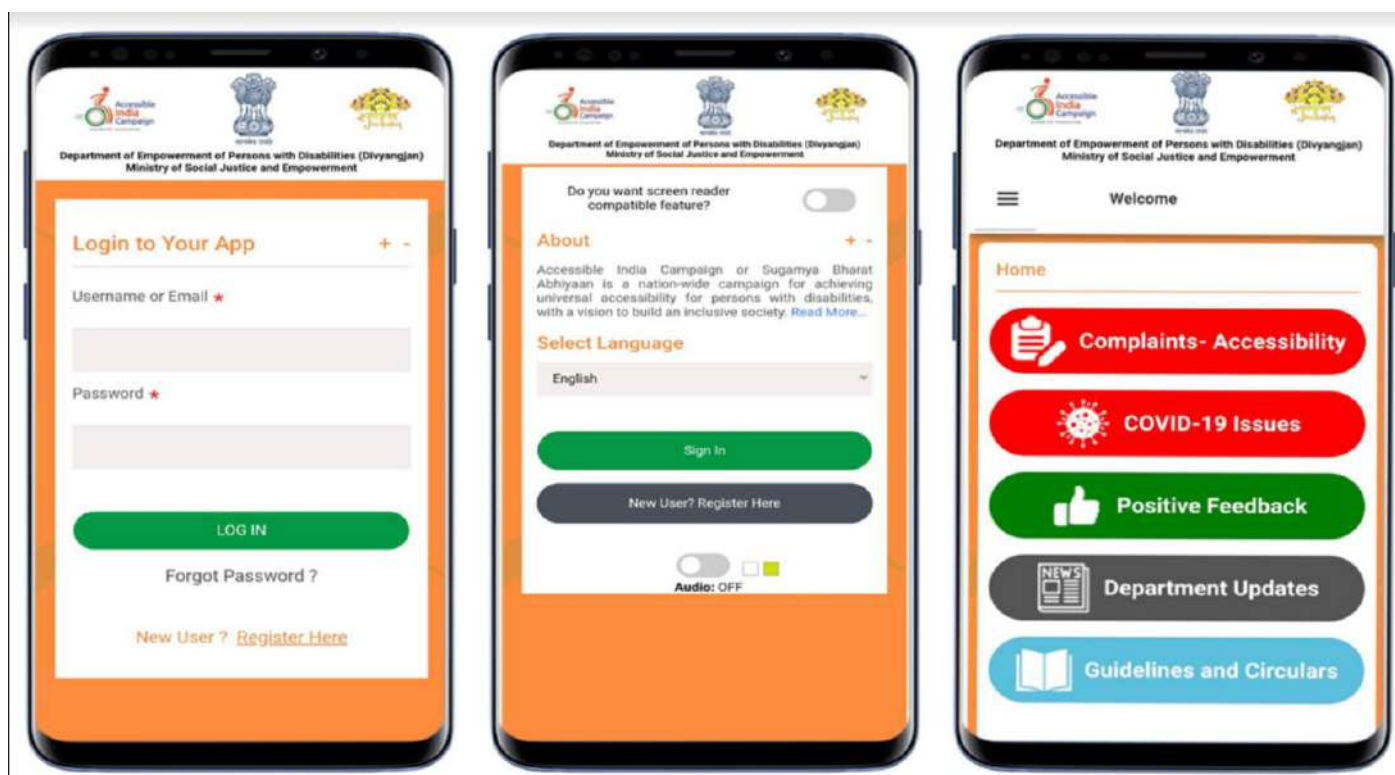


Figure 20: Screens from the Sugamya Bharat App<sup>129</sup>

## PRIYA THE ACCESSIBILITY WARRIOR, NCERT<sup>130</sup>

Released by NCERT as part of the Accessible India campaign, Priya the Accessibility Warrior is a comic book that follows Priya as she navigates all the newly-installed accessibility features in her school. A plethora of accessibility features are woven into the narrative, such as tactile paths, reserved seating, closed captioning, ramps, Braille signage, assistive devices, and screen readers. Throughout the story, Priya's mother, friends and teachers impress upon her the necessity of accessible spaces and how they make everyday life easier for PwDs.

The language and the picture-book format of Priya the Accessibility Warrior are appealing and easy to grasp, making it an ideal resource to introduce disability-specific issues to children. The story is followed by nine interactive activities which encourage kids to further explore the concept of accessibility. Each page of the comic book is equipped with audio narration and Indian Sign Language (ISL) videos, further illustrating NCERT's commitment to accessibility.



Figure 21: Excerpt of Priya the Accessibility Warrior

## THE ABILITY FACTOR, ILO<sup>131</sup>

ILO notes that people with disabilities are the world's largest minority group. With a total population of 1 billion people, they form 15% of the world's population, of which 785 million are of working age. ILO's short video, titled "The Ability Factor", aims to raise awareness about the benefits of employing PwDs.

The video depicts the many barriers to employment that PwDs face. These are broadly categorised as physical, information and attitudinal barriers. Initially, the video showcases these physical barriers (for example, lack of ramps) and information inaccessibility (lack of Braille signage). Later, it captures how stereotypes and misconceptions prevent PwDs from accessing jobs: recruiters often focus on the disability instead of their ability, when in fact PwDs can and do work.

The video utilises minimalistic typography, icons and animation to effectively set this context, following which it makes numerous convincing arguments for employing PwDs.



*Figure 22 : Frame from The Ability Factor video<sup>132</sup>*

#### INVALID OPINIONS, GLOBAL BUSINESS AND DISABILITY NETWORK (GBDN)

PwDs are often dismissed, judged or belittled. Often, such opinions and comments are not intended to be malicious but regularly miss the mark because the person making them assumes that PwDs are weaker, more vulnerable, or less likely to succeed because of their disability. GBDN's #InvalidOpinions campaign<sup>133</sup> spotlights a number of individuals defying these invalid opinions every day. The campaign features a wide range of thoughtfully curated videos which challenge common assumptions and beliefs about disability. Viewers are asked to confront their own beliefs and misconceptions that might be inadvertently contributing to millions of individuals worldwide being held back in the world of work.<sup>134</sup>





What 'special needs' for people with disabilities really are



Star Wars 3D inclusive experience tells a story made for everyone in the galaxy



Learning about disability through Shakespeare



Catalina Devandas wants to celebrate disability as a normal part of human experience



Q: What is wrong with people with disabilities? – A: The design of the environment



How do you want to be introduced?

Figure 23: Invalid Opinions Campaign video

### #BREAKTHESILENCE, L'ORÉAL

Global cosmetics behemoth L'Oréal might be popularly known for their iconic "Because You're Worth It" advertising campaign. However, many are unaware that they have been championing DEI initiatives centred on disability for over two decades. The company's global policy for integrating PwDs in companies is structured around pillars such as:

- Retention of employees with newly acquired disabilities
- Actively recruiting people with disabilities
- Spatial and informational accessibility

Since 2008, L'Oréal has organised DisAbility Awards, an internal competition focused on sharing and promoting best practices in disability inclusion. The #BreaktheSilence campaign was originally the UK team's project (called #BreaktheStigma), honoured at the 2018 L'Oréal DisAbility Awards. The campaign's aim was to raise awareness among employees and build inclusive, caring environments so that employees felt empowered to disclose their disabilities (including mental health issues). From the UK and then the US, the campaign was deployed in seven countries, with Turkey, Italy, India and Chile planning to launch shortly.<sup>135</sup>

# #BreakTheSilence: Our Employees Talk About Disability And The Group Renews Its Commitments

Commit to inclusion of people with disabilities

*Figure 24: Screenshot from #BreakTheSilence*

## WE ALL WIN, MICROSOFT<sup>136</sup>

When Microsoft realised that children with certain physical disabilities found it hard to play video games with traditional controllers, they designed the Xbox Adaptive Controller, with inputs from charity organisations like the AbleGamers Charity and the Cerebral Palsy Foundation. The product launch culminated in the well-received 2019 Super Bowl commercial “We All Win.”

The advertisement features six passionate young gamers talking about how the adaptive controller helped them. The kids emphasise how gaming is an avenue to connect with their non-disabled friends, with the new controller enabling all of them to play on an even footing. The video celebrates the pure, unadulterated joy that a hobby brings with it, the kind of joy that transcends all notions of ability. It ends on a simple, stark note which foregrounds the beauty of accessibility: “When everybody plays, we all win.”



Requires external devices (sold separately).

*Figure 25: Screenshot from We All Win*



### ADAPTIVE, TOMMY HILFIGER

Seemingly simple tasks such as dressing can be challenging for PwDs, particularly those with locomotor disabilities, who are often hindered by actions such as buttoning up. Fashion brand Tommy Hilfiger unveiled their 'Adaptive' clothing line in 2017, which featured many pieces with elements like bungee cords and Velcro closures, magnetic buttons, and one-handed zippers. 'Adaptive' is explicitly marketed as an inclusive collection for men, women and children, designed to make dressing easier.

The 2018 edition launch of 'Adaptive' was accompanied by an ad campaign titled "Independence."<sup>137</sup> The video stars PwDs who are going about their everyday lives—dancing, skateboarding, surfing, and of course, dressing—with a running monologue that normalises disability as a fact of life, like skin or eye colour. People living with disabilities "have the same dreams that everyone else has," says the speaker, exhorting viewers to "Honour that. Embrace that. Love that."



*Figure 26: Screenshot from Independence*

A behind-the-scenes video<sup>138</sup> for the Independence campaign highlighted the fact that its core elements all involved the disability community. The campaign was helmed by a legally-blind director and the senior crew were predominantly parents of CwDs. The campaign featured athletes, dancers, and lifestyle influencers with disabilities. For the product line itself, Hilfiger worked closely with the PwD community to ensure that significant improvements were made on their earlier lines.



## ACCESSIBLE FASHION, ASOS

Clothing retailer ASOS launched its wheelchair-friendly jumpsuit in 2018. The company partnered with the BBC sports reporter and British Paralympian Chloe Ball-Hopkins to create a fashionable and practical jumpsuit. The jumpsuit can be worn by anyone irrespective of whether they are in a wheelchair or not. It is a colourful, two-piece article of clothing that is also designed to be waterproof. This feature is particularly helpful for wheelchair users who cannot tuck under an umbrella as easily as other users, in case they get caught in a downpour.<sup>139</sup>



*Figure 27: Twitter post announcing wheelchair-friendly jumpsuit*

## GUIDE BEAUTY

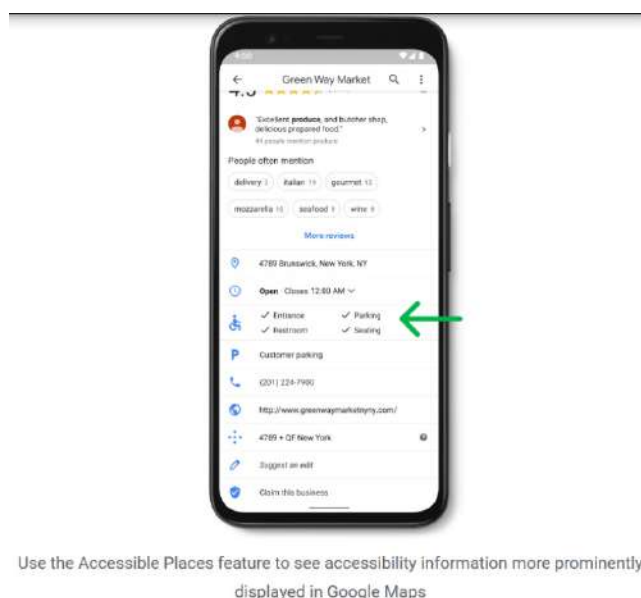
Guide Beauty is a line of accessible makeup products especially for people with shaky hands. The founder is Terri Bryant, a makeup artist who decided to launch the line after she was diagnosed with Parkinson's Disease. This led her to start working on prototypes of makeup tools that would be easier to hold steady. The collection was launched with four products, each of them with a built-in, pop-out Guide ring that steadies the hand and allows for easy grip.<sup>140</sup>



*Figure 28: Accessibility features in Guide's makeup tools<sup>141</sup>*

## ACCESSIBLE BUSINESSES, GOOGLE MAPS

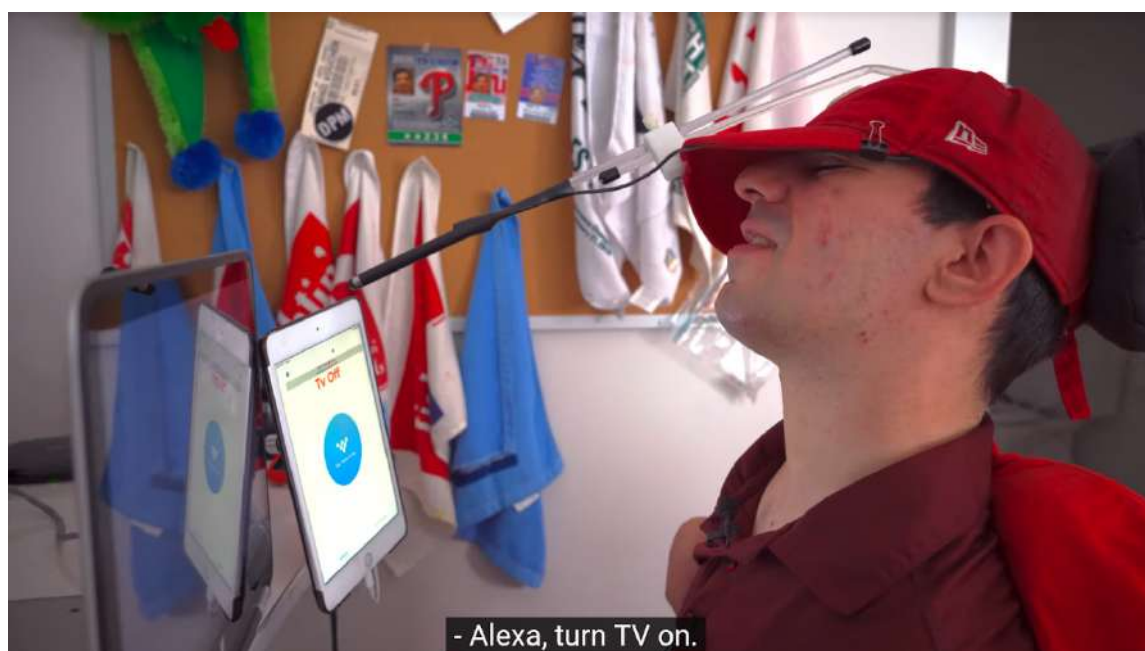
Google Maps launched a new feature that helps businesses indicate whether their establishments are accessible to wheelchair users. Google users can set it up through their account so that wheelchair accessible locations come up in search results. This will help users notice immediately if the entrance of the building they want to go to is accessible. They can also check for accessible parking spots and toilets.<sup>142</sup>



*Figure 29: Wheelchair accessibility details of locations in Google Maps<sup>143</sup>*

## SUPERSPEECH, AMAZON

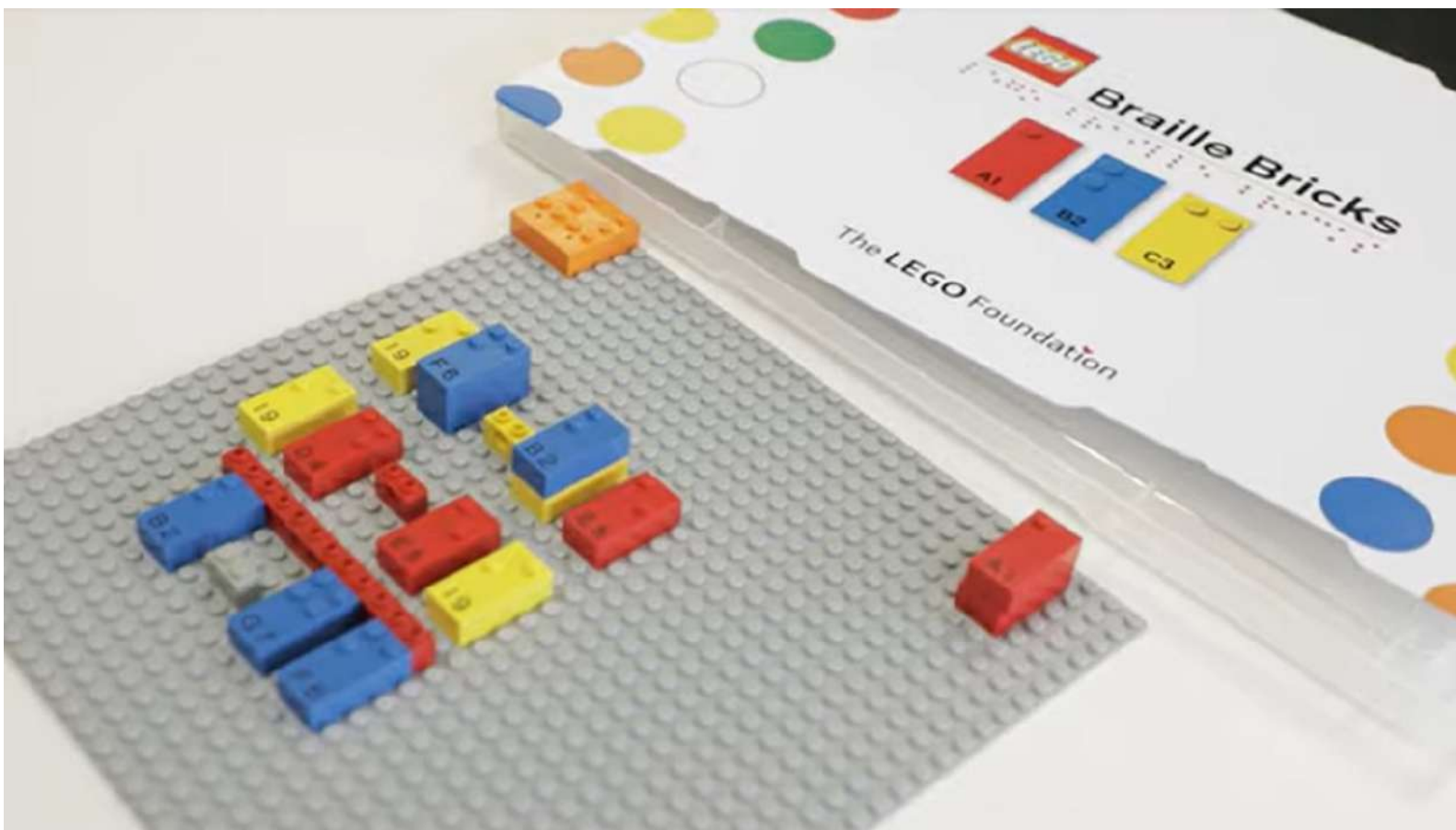
Amazon and speech start-up Voiceitt announced a collaboration to make Alexa (Amazon's voice-activated virtual assistant technology) more accessible to people with atypical speech. Voiceitt is an app that uses machine learning and speech recognition technologies to help people with speech impairments communicate and be more easily understood.<sup>144</sup>



*Figure 30: Person with cerebral palsy using Voiceitt to access Alexa<sup>145</sup>*

## BRAILLE BRICKS, LEGO

The Danish toy company Lego launched new building blocks called Braille Bricks that are fun and playful for children who are visually impaired. The bricks are designed to help them learn the Braille system of reading and writing. The Braille Bricks were launched in seven countries including the United States, France, Germany, Brazil, the United Kingdom, Denmark, and Norway.<sup>146</sup>



*Figure 31: Lego Braille Bricks<sup>147</sup>*

## 7. SARTHAK & ADVOCACY

Founded in the year 2008 by Dr. Jitender Aggarwal, Sarthak Educational Trust traces its origins to Dr. Aggarwal's personal struggles with disability. An accomplished dentist by profession, his vision began deteriorating because of macular degeneration of the retina. He retrained as a medical transcriptionist, which led him to confront the reality that employment opportunities for PwDs were severely limited. This realisation paved way for the foundation of Sarthak as an organisation committed to improving employment opportunities and conditions for PwDs.

From 2004 to 2007, the organisation largely conducted research on the operations of disability organisations situated in various parts of India. Between 2008 and 2013, Sarthak hosted job fairs and corporate sensitisation workshops across the country, flagging off its skill development mission with a batch of 8 students with visual impairment. The four years between 2014 and 2018 saw a time of great scaling of operations, with Sarthak expanding to 16 Skill Building Centres, 2 Early Intervention Centres, and an Inclusive Education Centre. Sarthak was also given the responsibility of overseeing National Abilympics Association of India (NAAI).

Since 2019, Sarthak has reached out to and transformed the lives of over a million PwDs. The organisation now has 23 Skill Building Centres across India and is in the process of setting up the GyanSarathi Knowledge Bank for the community of PwDs. The organisation, through NAAI, also hosts regional and national Abilympics events (vocational skills competitions for PwDs). Recognising the demand for digital transformation, the organisation recently also launched a Digital Literacy Program as well as a mobile application. A joint initiative with Capgemini, the CapSarathi app is a multi-lingual platform which provides PwDs with greater access to information and support services, and aims to be a one-stop solution for all information for PwDs across age groups and disability categories.

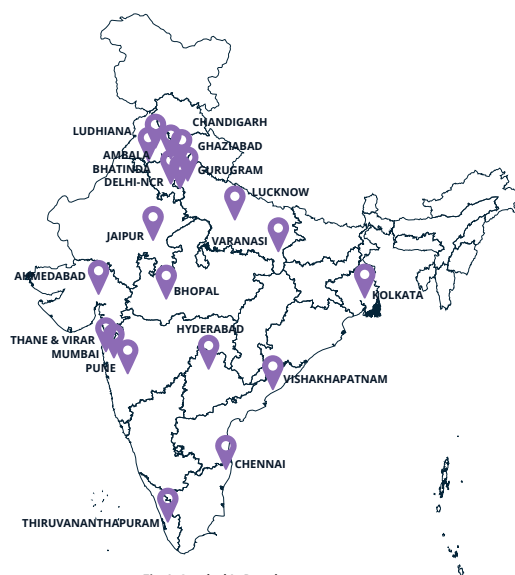


Fig 4: Sarthak's Reach

**Figure 32: Sarthak's Reach**

The year 2019 also witnessed the launch of the landmark India Disability Empowerment Alliance (IDEA) platform, intended as a common platform for disability organisations across India to leverage their collective strengths and empower PwDs. The network currently has nearly 500 NGO members from across India.

At its core, Sarthak enshrines the principles of inclusion, empowerment and mainstreaming of PwDs. Apart from the organisation's interventions in Skill Building, Placements, Early Intervention and Inclusive Education, Sarthak is deeply committed to disability advocacy in a multitude of forms. This is reflected in the organisation's focus on stakeholder engagement, technical advocacy, media campaigns, storytelling and alumni engagement.

## 7.1 Components of Advocacy at Sarthak

The first step of advocacy is the acknowledgement of multiple stakeholders who play significant roles in shaping the life-worlds of PwDs. This includes the corporate sector, the government, public sector units (PSUs), and the media. Sarthak deploys a multi-pronged approach to engage with all these stakeholders, via sensitisation workshops, job fairs, and consultancy services.

### 7.1.1 Sarthak's Advocacy with Corporates

Sarthak's advocacy with the corporate sector operates on a number of different levels. These services can primarily be understood through the lens of DEI assistance. Sarthak helps corporate organisation be equal opportunity employers by encouraging the implementation of DEI initiatives for PwDs and inclusive policies across the board. The organisation equips corporates with the resources they need to be a diverse workplace where PwDs feel included, are treated with dignity, and can progress through the ranks.



*Figure 33: Sustainable Employment Processes Designed by Sarthak*



## Disability Sensitisation Workshops

Sarthak organises interactive workshops that aim to create awareness and instil sensitivity at different levels of the workforce in an organisation. These workshops exhort and empower participants to work towards creating an inclusive work environment which recognises ability among PwDs.

The post-workshop action plan includes drawing up a blueprint for creating employment opportunities for PwDs in their respective functions/roles, and exploring workplace accessibility at infrastructural and attitudinal level.

Since 2019, Sarthak has conducted over a 100 sensitisation workshops with a wide variety of corporate partners, including (but not limited to) the likes of Le Meridien, Crowne Plaza, Westin, Tech Mahindra and Future Group.

## Job Analysis and Mapping

This is the process used to explore suitable job roles for PwDs across sectors to ensure they effectively meet the job requirements and expected levels of performance.

Job Mapping explores content of a specific job with three perspectives: the suitability of a PwD for a job, the suitability of a job for a PwD, and the adaptations required to enable a PwD to do the job (Reasonable Accommodations).

## Inclusive Recruitment, Induction & Training

Following the process of job mapping, Sarthak also goes on to provide corporate partners with recruitment support for the process of actually employing Persons with Disabilities in the identified suitable role.

This Support Service can be divided into two main components: matching job seeker to job role, followed by offering induction & training support for the selected PwD candidate.

## Accessibility Audits

The Accessibility Audit involves a physical audit of work-sites from an accessibility viewpoint, i.e., assessing whether built environments are designed in a disabled-friendly manner. This includes evaluating horizontal circulations (doors, corridors) and vertical circulations (stairs, ramps, escalators), common building facilities such as water and sanitation, signage, parking, access routes, and proximity to public transport—to name a few parameters.



The audit features a comprehensive report of required alterations to achieve basic or advanced levels of accessibility, as per the organisation's discretion. The post-audit action plan provides guidance to ensure physical access at 4 levels, namely

- Getting to the premises
- Getting into the premises
- Getting around the premises, and
- Availing basic services by PwDs

The plan also offers guidance on setting up emergency evacuation systems considering PwD requirements. Furthermore, it provides valuable insights into drafting and implementing HR policies sensitised with the requirement of PwD workforce.

### Career Support & Continuance: Rehabilitation of Employees with Disabilities

Every employee has a probability of acquiring a disability or contracting an illness that hinders their ability to work. Rehabilitation programs for employees with disability is direly needed in cases where individuals find that, owing to their disability, continuing in paid employment is difficult or nearly impossible. Barriers to return to work are not only physical but also attitudinal.

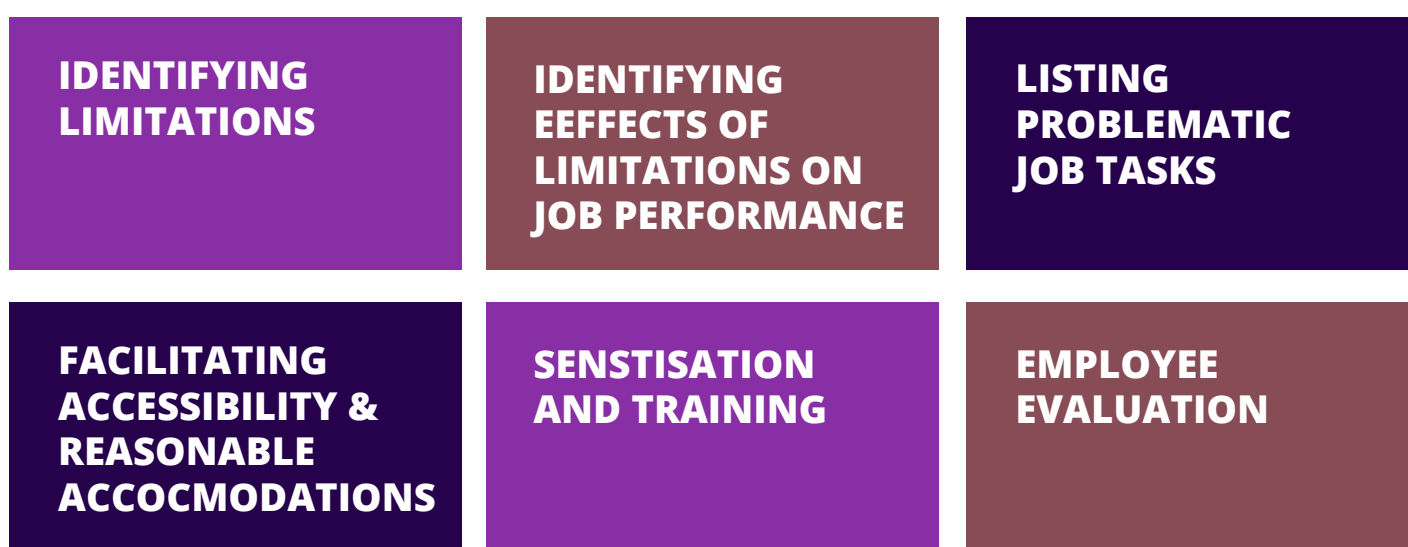
On the other hand, return-to-work strategies for employees with disability can save organisations time and money, while protecting against loss of talent. Needless to say, it also creates a positive and inclusive working environment.

Sarthak deploys a mix of techniques to reintegrate people with newly acquired disabilities into the workforce, including in-depth analysis of employer-employee requirements on a case-to-case basis and identification of feasible solutions. To understand what kind of intervention is necessary, Sarthak explores the following questions with the employer and employee:

- What kind of limitations are the employee experiencing?
- How do these limitations affect the employee and the employee's job performance?
- Which specific job tasks pose challenges as a result of these limitations?
- What accommodations are available to reduce or eliminate these problems? Are all possible resources being used to determine possible accommodations?
- Once accommodations are in place, would it be useful to meet with the employee to evaluate the effectiveness of the accommodation and to determine whether additional accommodations are needed?
- Do supervisory personnel and employee need training?

Depending on the responses to these questions and the organisational context, various strategies recommended to employers/employees are:

- Opportunities to work part time
- Telecommuting
- Modifying work duties and schedules
- Implementing reasonable accommodations
- Sensitisation of colleagues/superiors



*Figure 34: Rehabilitation of Employees with Disabilities*

#### **Career Support & Continuance: Secondary Training of PwDs**

This is the module where Sarthak offers continuous workplace training and lifelong learning to employees with disability, enabling them and their enterprises to anticipate and build competencies for future needs. Secondary training equips PwD workforces with the required skill sets for career development and growth.

Sarthak's secondary training for employees with disability involves a three-layer approach:

- **Job Mapping, Candidate Mapping & Placement of PwDs**  
This involves identifying suitable job roles in organisations for PwDs. Thereafter, suitable candidates are provided placement opportunities for identified jobs based on their interest, skill set, qualification and suitability for the job role.

- **Post-Placement Follow-up**

It involves maintaining regular contact with PwD candidates after extending placement support. The objective is to keep track of work experience and provide necessary interventions and support in case of any challenges. Possible prospects of growth are also identified through this approach.

- **Career Development Plan for Existing PwD Workforce**

In association with employers, possible prospects of growth are identified for employees with disability. Required training and support for the same is also listed. Based on a candidate's aspiration to growth and organisation's willingness to provide opportunity for the same, a Career Development Plan is developed and required training is extended.

In addition to audits, Sarthak also provides accessible event management support. The first such service extended to Microsoft to organise its first ever Accessibility Summit in Hyderabad in 2017.

Sarthak's corporate advocacy also entails promoting affirmative action for PwDs, CSR initiatives, participation in Disability Day and Joy of Giving Week celebrations. Along with corporate partners, Sarthak also hosts roundtable conferences and publishes reports on disability inclusion in employment. The most recent such was on Sustainable Employment, which is at the core of Sarthak's disability advocacy.<sup>148</sup>

### **7.1.2 Sarthak's Advocacy with Governments**

As a result of intense, sustained advocacy events with the Union government and various state governments, Sarthak has produced thought leadership on several avenues of action for PwDs, providing valuable input on multiple seminal national-level initiatives.

- The National Action Plan
- Accessibility India campaign
- Sector Skill Council for Persons with Disabilities
- The passing of the monumental Rights of Persons with Disability Act 2016

**Figure 35: Government interventions that Sarthak contributed to**

Government partners associated with Sarthak since 2008 include the state governments of Punjab, Delhi, Haryana, Uttar Pradesh, Maharashtra, Rajasthan and Telangana. Sarthak has also extensively associated with the following ministries of the Union Government: Ministry of Social Justice & Empowerment, Ministry of Rural Development, Ministry of Skill Development & Entrepreneurship, Ministry of Heavy Industry & Public Enterprises, and Ministry of Labour & Employment.

Sarthak's work with governments has produced collaborative efforts at all levels, from leadership to on-ground implementation. Through its work with the government, Sarthak has been able to help PwDs access online and offline services across their lifecycle. These include digital solutions that can be used by PwDs and different changemakers in the disability sector: RozgarSarathi, CapSarathi, UdhyamiSarathi and GyanSarathi. RozgarSarathi and CapSarathi are employment and information-sharing portals respectively, while UdhyamiSarathi seeks to promote entrepreneurship among PwDs. GyanSarathi is an e-learning platform dedicated to PwDs that is being created.

### RozgarSarathi

Sarthak conducts job fairs and hosts an exclusive online job portal for PwDs, known as RozgarSarathi. Developed from a prototype hosted on the Sarthak website, this independent portal seeks to address all the aspects of inclusive employment. The accessible portal connects skilled PwDs with relevant job opportunities across India. Candidates with disability can set up a profile, apply for and track jobs, and avail the services of a Virtual Interview Room.

Likewise, potential employers with a commitment to inclusive hiring can create and post job openings, while managing and tracking job applications. Public sector jobs for PwDs are also promoted through RozgarSarathi.

Going forward, the portal will have the potential to host virtual job fairs with auto-screening of suitable candidates.

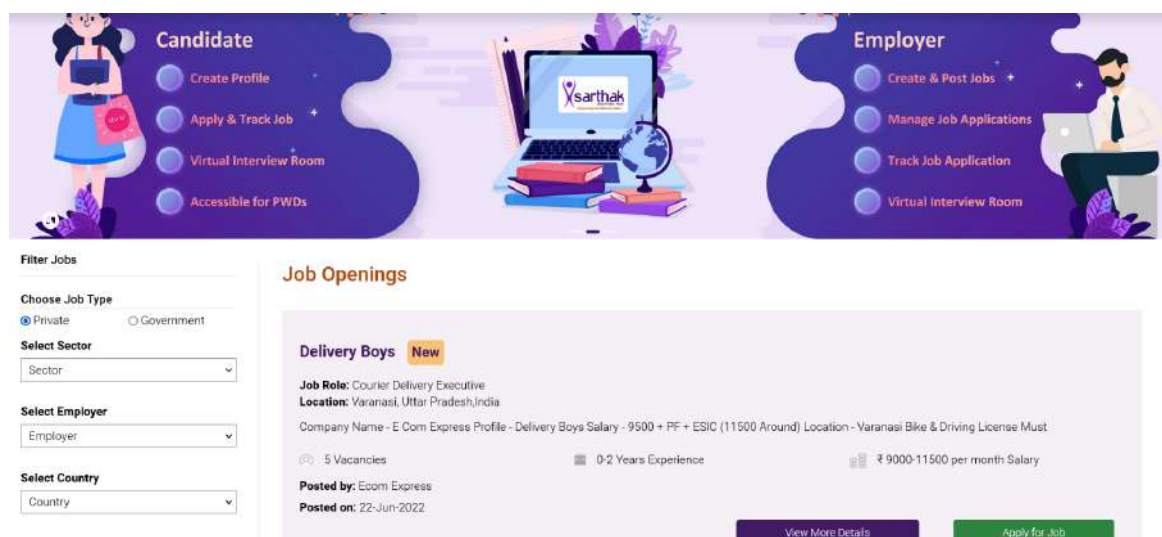


Figure 36: RozgarSarathi Landing Page

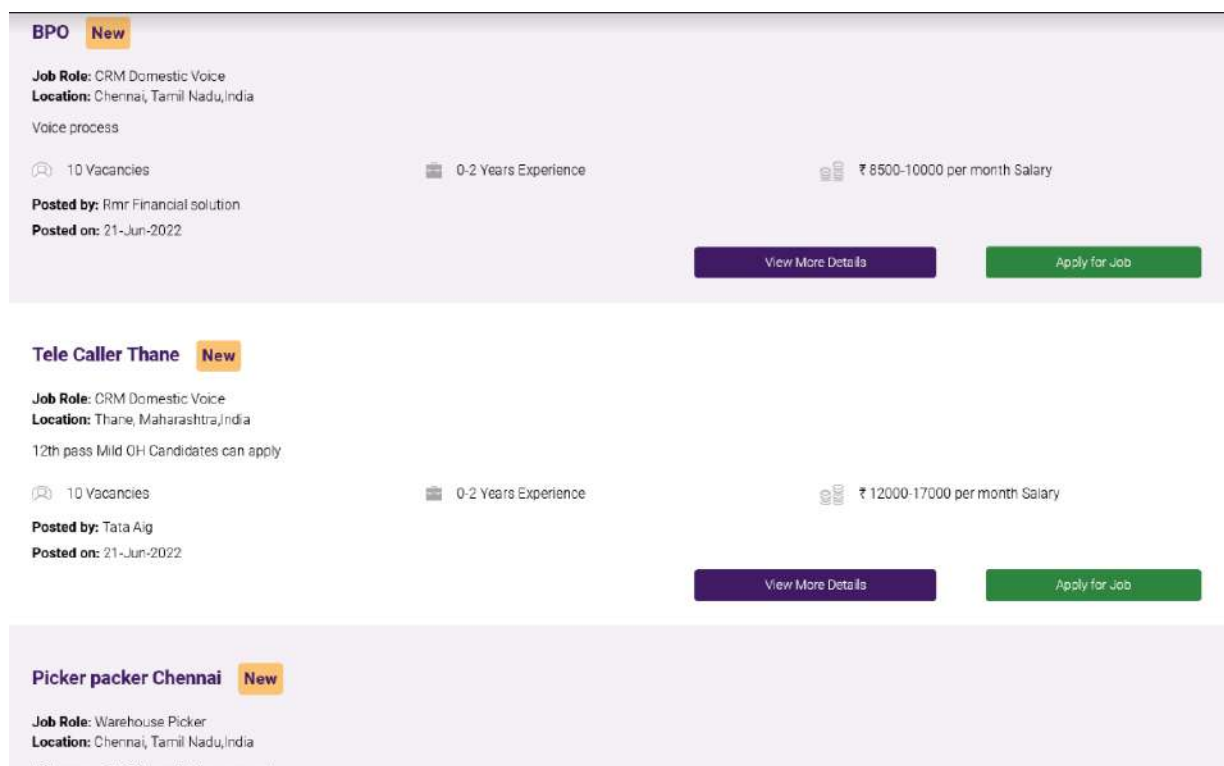


Figure 37: Job Listings on RozgarSarathi

## CapSarathi

A joint initiative by Capgemini and Sarthak, CapSarathi is an app directed towards providing support and services to PwDs. Its main objective is to provide PwDs with information and connect them to support services that they may require over the course of their life. In order to accurately capture their needs and provide tailored support, users are categorised into 6 age groups: 0-5 years, 6-11 years, 12-17 years, 18-35 years, 36-50 years, and 51 years and above.

In order to avail the services of CapSarathi, users must sign up either as a PwD or as a parent/guardian acting on behalf of a PwD. Once the process of signing up is completed, the user arrives at a central dashboard from where they can access the information and services they require.

Capsarathi keeps its users up to date with the details of:

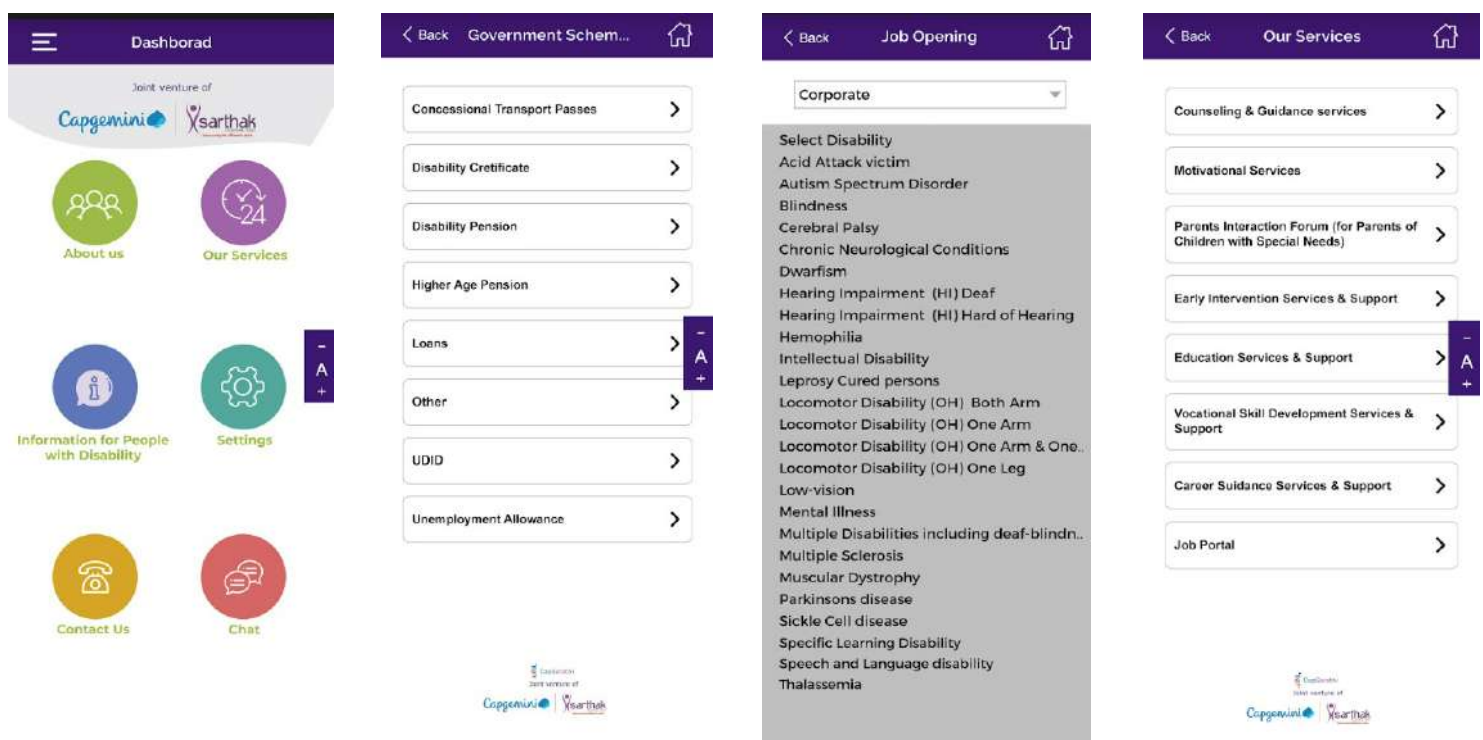
- Government schemes, policies & provisions such as disability certificate, pension, transport concessions, reservations and others
- Government, private and non-profit service providers in the areas of health, education, skill, employment and rehabilitation
- National/international scholarship programs for PwDs
- Free/concessional assistive device providers
- Resources such as Braille/online/audio books, details of assistive devices and matrimonial services
- Upcoming events such as assistive device camps, job fairs and others

CapSarathi also allows users to access:

- Services such as counselling, guidance, early intervention, education, skill development, employment, career growth and career continuance support
- Counselling, guidance and support to parents of children with disabilities
- Engagement, sensitisation and knowledge-sharing with changemakers in the disability sector
- Updates of the latest developments in disability sector such as assistive devices, judicial orders, government provisions, research and development

The app is supported in 11 languages: Hindi, English, Tamil, Telugu, Kannada, Bengali, Oriya, Malayalam, Marathi, Punjabi, and Gujarati. It also offers Help Desk Support to counsel and guide users over chat and calls, apart from a feedback mechanism to resolve concerns and queries in a timely manner. These features position the app as a prime resource to reach out to PwDs across 718 districts and 664,369 villages in India, bridging the urban/rural information divide.

Crucially, CapSarathi is also integrated with RozgarSarathi. In the event that a user of CapSarathi expresses interest in employment opportunities, they are promptly redirected to RozgarSarathi, where they can apply for different jobs of their choice.



Figuree 38: Screenshots of CapSarathi app



### UdhyamiSarathi

UdhyamiSarathi is another digital solution in the pipeline intended to foster entrepreneurship among PwDs. A collaboration between Sarthak and NAAI, this platform will promote products and services offered by PwDs, catalysing increased income as entrepreneurs. UdhyamiSarathi will help PwDs access a wider network, thereby ensuring increased financial stability through self-employment.

### GyanSarathi

GyanSarathi is a proposed digital learning solution that will provide online training opportunities for PwDs across India through a dedicated LMS. It will host trainer-led learning opportunities, self-learning modules, and interactive learning material in the form of documents, PowerPoint slides, videos, animated content, and quizzes. All content will be accessible across the disability categories listed in Rights of Persons with Disability (RPwD) Act 2016.

## 7.1.3 Sarthak's Advocacy with PwDs

### Sarthak ke Saarthi

This series brings together all the recent alumni who have successfully completed their skill development training and are in prestigious institutions. As part of the series, one such alumnus' story is shared in a video format. So far, 25 episodes have been shared on the Sarthak website.<sup>149</sup>



Figure 39: Screenshot of sample Sarthak ke Saarthi story

### Aces of Abilympics

This series is an effort to bring out stories of success of PwDs who took the opportunity given by NAAI to showcase their talent and skills. Aces of Abilympics shares the stories of Sarthak heroes who have showcased their talents on regional, national or international level. Twelve episodes have been published so far.<sup>150</sup>



Figure 40: Screenshot of sample Aces of Abilympics story

### Sarthak ke Anmol Ratan

The series of stories focuses on decade-old alumni who have had several life-changing experiences with Sarthak, highlighting their tenacity and perseverance in the face of adversity.<sup>151</sup>

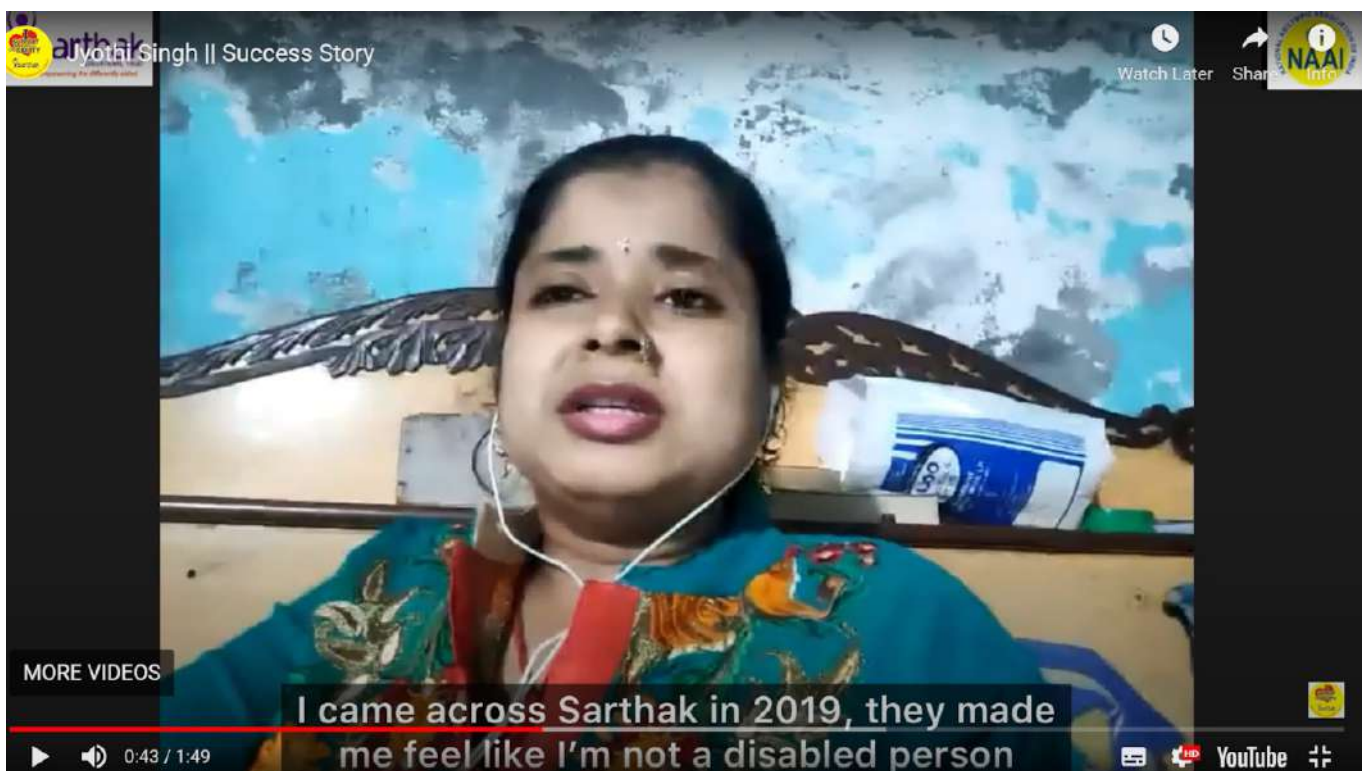


Figure 41: Screenshot from Sarthak ke Anmol Ratan story

### Entrepreneur Alumni

As the name indicates, this storytelling and networking vertical revolves around alumni who have embarked on entrepreneurial journeys through Sarthak. Sarthak's Entrepreneur Alumni not only form a stronger PwD community with innovative ideas but also inspire thousands more to kick off their own entrepreneurial ventures.<sup>152</sup>

### Extraordinary Alumni

Several Sarthak alumni have secured remarkable milestones as they served pivotal roles in the sciences and the arts. This initiative shares their stories.<sup>153</sup>

### DPOs of Sarthak Alumni

There are quite a few Sarthak alumni who have decided to pay it forward, going on to establish their own organisations for PwDs. DPOs of Sarthak Alumni shares the journeys of these former Sarthak members and how their platforms empower PwDs.<sup>154</sup>

### Stories of Change

This 14-episode series showcases the lives of Sarthak alumni who stood out of the crowd with their never-say-die attitude.<sup>155</sup>

### Human Stories

This series emphasises that our champions at Sarthak are, first and foremost, human—complex in their own ways yet willing to meet every challenge in their path.<sup>156</sup>

Through the National Abilympic Association of India, Abilympics participants have brought laurels to the nation. Sarthak's 'Human Library' tells the story of PwD achievers in their own voices. The success stories of Sarthak's PwD members have also been compiled as a coffee table book.<sup>157</sup> This focus on storytelling and spotlighting case studies is integral to Sarthak's focus on mainstreaming and awareness building. Hearing stories of PwDs who are achievers and changemakers in their own right helps overcome the stigma and ignorance surrounding disability in mainstream society. Thus, Sarthak's storytelling initiatives are integral to their efforts towards inclusion and advocacy.

## 7.1.4 Sarthak's Advocacy with Parents

Sarthak works with parents of children with disabilities, emboldening them through sensitisation workshops as well as counselling and guidance sessions. These events generate awareness about the importance of skilling their children and making them independent. They encourage parents to see their children's immense potential and to engage more deeply with the rights of PwDs. Sarthak also organises frequent alumni meets where parents and children can learn first-hand about the success stories at Sarthak. Parents can also access support resources through CapSarathi as well as Sarthak's YouTube channel.

### *7.1.5 Sarthak's Advocacy with Medical Fraternity*

Sarthak organises sensitisation workshops with the medical fraternity in order to work towards the goal of ensuring that PwDs have equitable access to healthcare facilities that understand and prioritise their needs. Towards the same goal, the organisation facilitates Continuous Medical Education (CME) events for medical practitioners and workshops for ASHA and ANM workers. With the help of medical professionals, the organisation also ideates on the creation of employment opportunities for PwDs in the healthcare sector.

### *7.1.6 Sarthak's Advocacy with Academia*

Sarthak frequently works with academic institutes to spread awareness and provide guidance towards building a more inclusive education system. The organisation has a dedicated Campus Connect Program to provide employment assistance. Sarthak also offers volunteering and internship opportunities so that students can gain first-hand understanding of the disability sector.

Research and technical advocacy form important components of Sarthak's disability advocacy. The organisation undertakes research projects that takes stock of disability inclusion in various sectors, primarily related to employment. One such project was the "Report on Employment Landscape for People with Disabilities in India."<sup>158</sup> This was the result of collaborative research conducted by scholars from the Indian School of Business (ISB) and IIM Udaipur in tandem with Sarthak. The research explored inclusion of PwDs from a strategic perspective, studying the impact of employing PwDs on the firm's productivity and engagement, engagement of the other employees, customer engagement, and the firm's overall performance.

Another notable report produced by Sarthak was "Accessibility & Inclusion in Higher Education in India." Sarthak undertook this study to gain a better understanding of the experiences of students with disabilities in higher educational institutes across the country. Rooted in the social model of disability, the study sought to identify the hurdles faced by students with disability in the classroom, campus and hostel settings. A total of 156 students with disability across close to 30 institutes in India participated in the study. It explored inaccessibility along three axes: organisational, environmental and attitudinal. Students reported challenges such as inaccessible coursework and lack of support during assessments, limited mobility due to inaccessible amenities as well as discrimination and bullying due to the stigma and ignorance surrounding disabilities. Following these observations, Sarthak's recommendations focused on the pressing need for attitudinal changes (sensitising multiple stakeholders, enabling a culture shift towards inclusion) and removal of physical barriers (distribution of assistive devices and improved accessibility of infrastructure).



Such research-based technical advocacy is necessary for gathering accurate, grounded data. This information then enables all stakeholders in the disability sector to collaborate and work towards addressing the challenges of PwDs. Such capacity building can only be achieved through transparency and knowledge-sharing. To this end, Sarthak publishes detailed project reports on all of its studies, highlighting methodologies, processes and strategies that can be readily adopted by existing and aspiring change-makers, strengthening the sector as a whole.

### 7.1.7 Sarthak's Advocacy with Media

As the fifth pillar of democracy, the media plays a pivotal role in shaping narratives around an issue. Disability rights is no different. Be it print or digital, the media is an important instrument to raise awareness and counter stigma. Hence, Sarthak conducts workshops for media organisations to catalyse inclusion and mainstream PwDs, so that their stories and concerns are covered with dignity and respect.

Sarthak also ensures that its advocacy events are covered as widely as possible to take disability awareness to the masses, encouraging people to break taboos and dispel the stigma around disabilities. Sarthak's disability advocacy has been featured in digital media platforms as well as leading national and regional media outlets including The New Indian Express, The Morning Standard, and Times of India, to name a few.



Figure 42: Sarthak in the spotlight

In April 2021, Sarthak's founder, Dr. Jitender Aggarwal delivered an insightful TEDx talk titled "Independence in the Face of Adversity"<sup>159</sup> on escalating social change and inclusion with respect to PwDs. This was a TEDx event independently organised by Kalinga Institute of Industrial Technology, a private deemed-to-be university in Bhubaneswar, Odisha.

Sarthak is also active on all major social media platforms – Facebook<sup>160</sup>, Instagram<sup>161</sup>, Twitter<sup>162</sup>, YouTube<sup>163</sup> – which it uses for the purposes of outreach, awareness and community building. Highlighting Sarthak's mission, activities and digital solutions on these platforms helps reach out to more potential beneficiaries, particularly PwDs. This will enable more PwDs to avail of Sarthak's suite of services.

The Sarthak website is a repository of textual and visual content pertaining to the organisation's activities. On the website, well-wishers, prospective partners and disability allies can find annual reports and monthly video bulletins that extensively document Sarthak's advocacy and the impact it has had on PwDs.<sup>164</sup> The organisation ensures that all its communication material is conveyed in accessible formats.

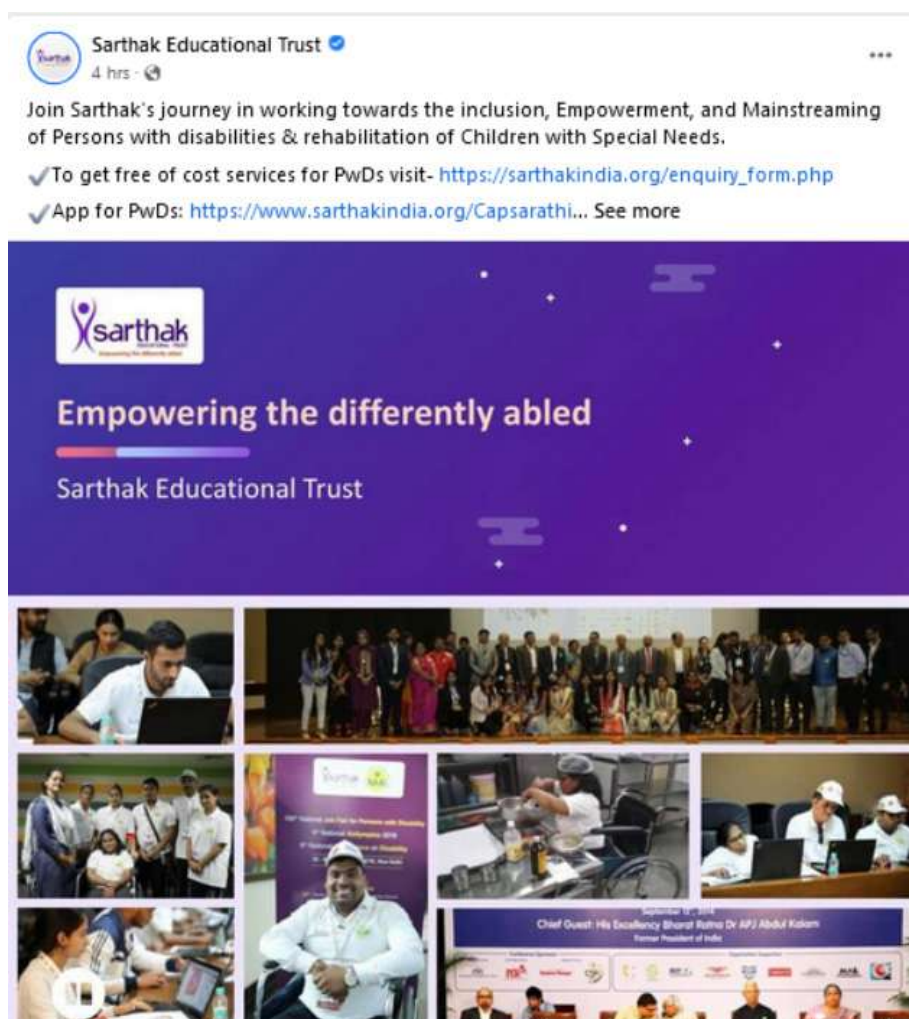


Figure 43: Sarthak on Facebook



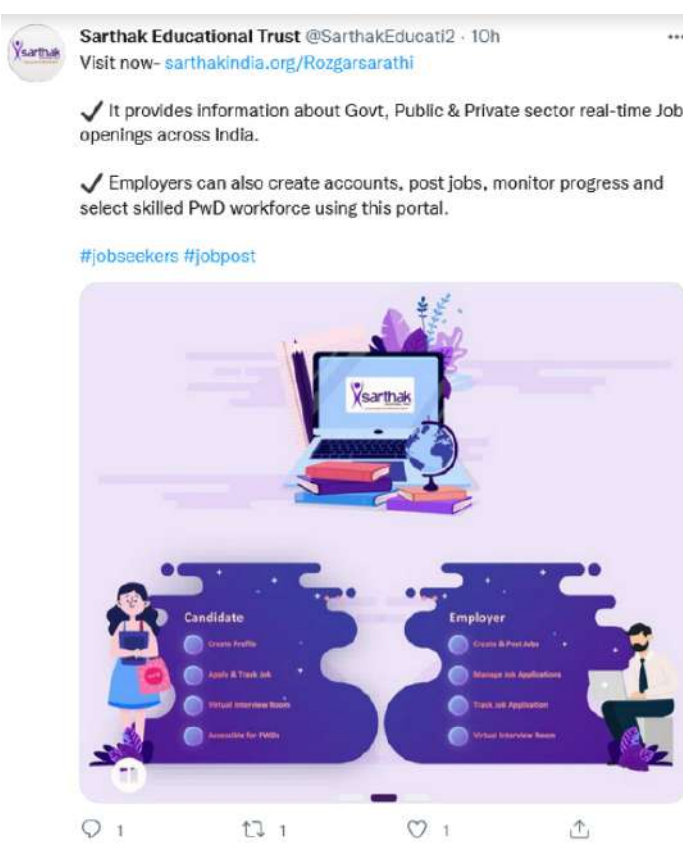


Figure 44: Sarthak on Twitter



Figure 45: Sarthak on Instagram

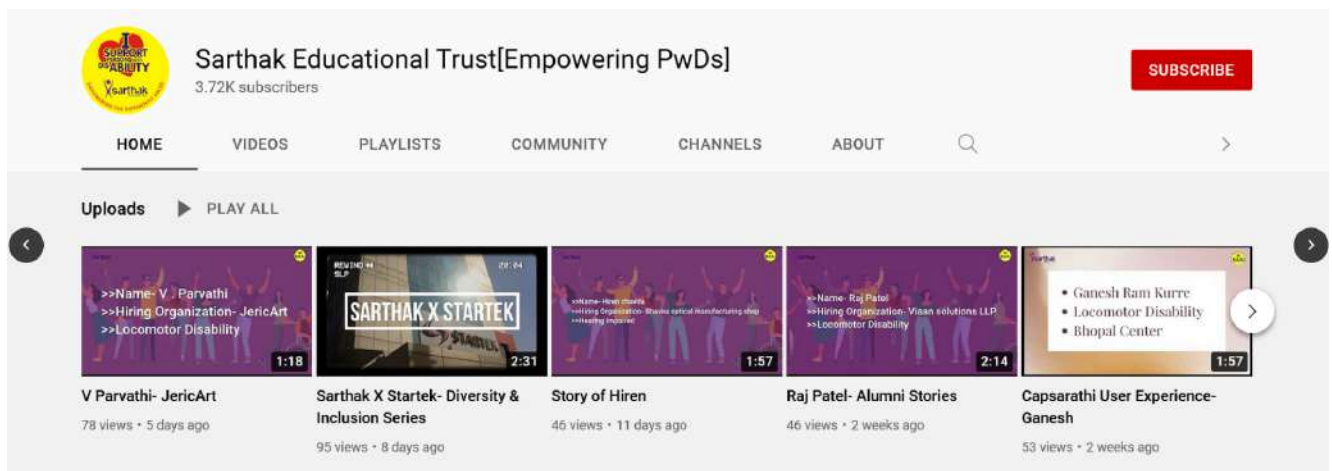


Figure 46: Sarthak on Youtube

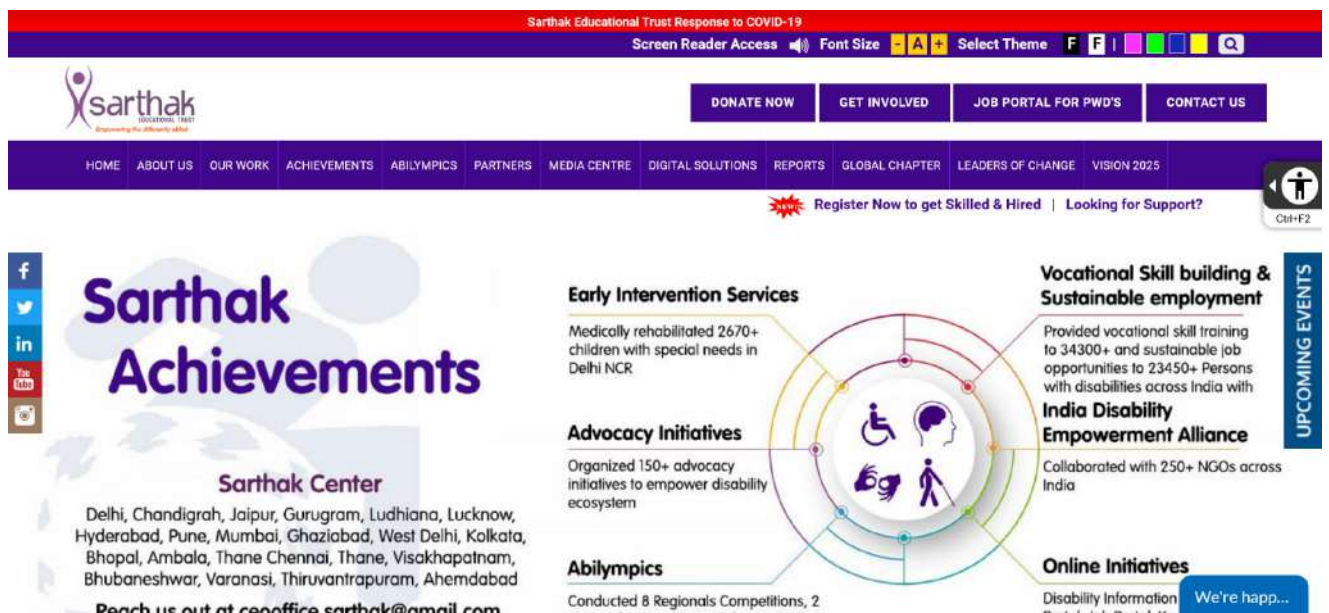


Figure 47: Sarthak's Website

### 7.1.8 Advocacy Events

Sarthak conducts a host of monthly sensitisation workshops for public and private sector institutions operating across a variety of sectors such as hospitality and education. A monthly webinar series has recently been inaugurated to take Sarthak's disability inclusion initiatives to a more global audience.

Prior to COVID-19, Sarthak used to organise regional conferences in different parts of India to generate awareness about disabilities and tackle various issues that PwDs face, especially in the workplace environment. With the onset of the pandemic, Sarthak hosted multiple webinars, helping the organisation reach much wider audiences through the digital medium.



*Figure 48: Quarterly & Monthly Events at Sarthak*

Since the year 2014, Sarthak has also hosted an annual National Conference on Disability. Prior editions have been inaugurated and made successful by innovators and industry leaders, apart from luminaries from the fields of governance, administration and planning.

The latest edition of the conference was held on the 17 and 18 December 2021, and was organised around the timely theme of "Digital Divyang – Enabled and Empowered." The event brought together national and global experts together to brainstorm and lead panel discussions on how to bridge the barriers that stand in the way of PwDs on digital mediums. Only by bridging these barriers can the empowerment of PwDs be strengthened and scaled. Experts included senior politicians, bureaucrats, CSR leaders, champions with disability, and senior media-persons who brought their wealth of experience and insight on the matter of disability inclusion.

# 2014

## 1<sup>st</sup> National Conference, New Delhi

Inaugurated by former President of India, Dr. APJ Abdul Kalam

Panel discussion with participation of doctors, NGO professionals, government representatives & private sector employees

Vote of thanks by Dr. Sudhir Gupta, Director of Cygnus Medicare & Member of Advisory Board at Sarthak

# 2016

## 3<sup>rd</sup> National Conference, New Delhi

**THEME: INCLUSION TO EMPOWERMENT**

Discussion incorporated perspectives of PwDs, government actors, corporates, CSOs and media

Multimedia content including presentations, stories of progression and achievement and videos

# 2018

## 5<sup>th</sup> National Conference, New Delhi

**THEME: ACT TO EMPOWER**

Nine panel discussions discussing interaction with government, corporates, media and PwDs

Sarthak Lifetime Achievement Award to Dr. Bharat Vatwani (Founder Trustee, Shraddha Rehabilitation Foundation for Mentally ill and recipient of Ramon Magsaysay Award 2018)

# 2020

## 7<sup>th</sup> National Conference, Online

**THEME: DIGITAL INCLUSION - PATHWAY TO EMPOWERMENT OF PwDs**

First online national conference due to COVID-19

Participation of senior politicians, bureaucrats, CSR leaders, corporate actors, PwD representatives and senior media persons in 8 panels

Deliberation on bridging physical, attitudinal and financial barriers to inclusion through social means

# 2015

## 2<sup>nd</sup> National Conference, New Delhi

Discussion on key provisions for PwDs including usage for 'divyang'. Accessible India Plan, revision of existing PwD Act, increase in government reservation for employment of PwDs and unique IDs for PwDs

# 2017

## 4<sup>th</sup> National Conference, New Delhi

Panel discussions on interactions with government, corporate actors, academia, media, PwDs and parents

Sarthak lifetime achievement award to Dr. Bhushan Punani (Executive Secretary, Blind People's Association)

Sarthak Innovation Award to Ms. Surbhi Srivastava for Braille Reader

# 2019

## 6<sup>th</sup> National Conference, New Delhi

**THEME: VOICE, CHOICE & CONTROL - PATHWAYS TO DISABILITY INCLUSIVE DEVELOPMENT**

Panel discussions over three days on accessibility, Abilymics and skill building for PwDs, early intervention, inclusive education, media portrayal of PwDs and government support for PwDs

# 2021

## 8<sup>th</sup> National Conference, New Delhi

**THEME: DIGITAL DIVYANG**

Enabled and empowered panels led by senior politicians, bureaucrats, CSR leaders, Champions with Disability, and senior media-persons

Discussions on how to bridge the barriers that stand in the way of PwDs on digital mediums

Figure 49: National Conferences by Sarthak

Advocacy events at Sarthak centres include allied activities such as guest lectures, alumni sessions, workshop for parents, and exposure visits to corporates. Sarthak's UK Chapter has been hosting webinars to create more awareness about the organisation's interventions & objectives, in order to reach beneficiaries in the United Kingdom.<sup>165</sup> Through these webinars, Sarthak wishes to engage with volunteers as well as leaders of various corporate and non-profits organisations working in the disability sector.

Other annual advocacy events that the Sarthak team looks forward to include International Disability Day (December 3), International Day of Sign Languages (September 23), World Autism Awareness Day (April 2), Foundation Day (July 4), NAAI events and the Joy of Giving Week, organised in association with the organisation's corporate partners in the month of October.

### ***7.1.9 India Disability Empowerment Alliance (IDEA)***

Launched by Sarthak in 2019, IDEA is a currently an informal body that is composed of 491 organisations working for the inclusion of PwDs. The alliance's functioning is in line with the 17th SDG ("Partnerships for the Goals") which encourages multistakeholder engagement. IDEA's mission is to help empower Indian PwDs by leveraging the collective strengths of the many organisations working in the field. The IDEA platform aims to be the apex body for all NGOs serving PwDs, functioning as a common platform for advocacy of PwD issues with government, political parties, media, academia, and the larger public. IDEA will also commission and conduct relevant research, applying their findings to the benefit of PwDs.

Most importantly, the platform will facilitate mutual learning and transfer of best practices between member NGOs. A common platform would mean that the reach of all member organisations would increase significantly. In other words, IDEA can function as an accelerator model which can be replicated and scaled in any geography to catalyse disability mainstreaming.

### **Activities undertaken under the aegis of IDEA:**

- Hosting online capacity building sessions with member NGOs, covering various topics like importance of documentation, obtaining mandatory certifications (12A, 80G; FCRA, etc.), fundraising, making proposals, websites, and entrepreneurship options
- Conducting bi-weekly sessions, 'Aap Ki Aawaz', to understand member NGOs and challenges, and provide solutions
- Linking product making NGOs with online marketing portals (such as GeM and Atypical Advantage) to increase sales



- Financially strengthening rural NGOs during the COVID-19 pandemic
- Providing ration kits and medical kits (masks, sanitisers, etc.) during lockdowns
- Conducting free-of-cost online training sessions and creating employment opportunities for PwDs associated with member NGOs through Sarthak Trainers and Employment team (for those who were unable to hold physical trainings in their respective centres)
- Enrolling beneficiaries associated with Member NGOs and those who had not completed 10th standard/were above 35 years of age in a free, 15-day Sarthak Digital Literacy program to provide basic knowledge on self-employment opportunities

## 7.2 Support Systems & Processes

While Sarthak's key aim may be to enable employment of PwDs, the team's work does not end with training and placement of PwDs and sensitisation workshops. The organisation's commitment to the PwDs extends well beyond these first steps.

### 7.2.1 Fundraising

Fundraising is vital for sustaining Sarthak operations. As a non-profit organisation, fundraising through CSR is the only tool available for expanding Sarthak's advocacy and its operations in Early Intervention, Inclusive Education, Skill Building, Sustainable Employment and NAAI. Funding is also necessary for the development and operational costs of digital products such as CapSarathi and RozgarSarathi. Sarthak raises these funds through multiple channels, namely:

- Corporate: funds raised from National & International companies under the umbrella of CSR
- Government & PSUs: funds raised through government schemes and grants or through CSR wing of PSUs
- Individual funding: funds raised through cold-calling or mailing individuals of high net-worth
- Retail funding: funds raised directly from the public, via malls, e-commerce websites or retail stores

Fundraising is initiated after due diligence on Sarthak's part, mainly pertaining to the CSR policies of prospective partners. Every corporate firm invests as per their pre-defined CSR Policy, available on their website. Before approaching any funder, Sarthak studies their policy to understand their preferred CSR areas and whether they can be mapped with the organisation's programs.



Prominent partners of flagship Sarthak programs (such as JEET and Early Intervention for Children) include National Skill Development Corporation (NSDC), Capgemini, Kotak Mahindra Bank, HDFC, Lemontree Hotels, Credit Suisse, and Crocs, among many others.

Fundraising for Sarthak's advocacy initiatives in particular is done through a sponsorship model. The organisation leverages existing corporate relationships and forges new ones to secure venues, refreshments, PR/media, and to establish communication channels. Depending on the requirements of the sponsor, Sarthak offers them a variety of receivables such as branding, kiosks, social media publicity, product displays, canopies, and speaking slots. Corporate partners can also support the activities of NAAI by sponsoring participants.

### **7.2.2 Formation of International/National/State Advisory Boards**

Every advocacy organisation needs its own guiding lights; people who will have the platform's best interests at heart and take it to greater heights. Sarthak has stellar Advisory Boards at three levels— state, national and international — comprised of leaders and visionaries from fields as varied as technology, entrepreneurship, healthcare and the development sector. The advisory boards operate alongside our mentor Padma Bhushan Dr. M.B. Athreya and the Board of Trustees, enriching Sarthak by bringing their diverse experiences and perspectives to the table.

The International Advisory Board of Sarthak consists of the following members:

- Abhishek Sandhir, *General Manager, Sterlite Technologies Limited*
- Ashruti Singh, *Global Director, SAP*
- Debasis Majumdar, *Managing Director, Seed Maritime UK Ltd*
- S.J. Menon, *CEO, Five Wisdoms Consulting*
- Savita Sharma, *MD, Kranacx Canadian Inc and The Transformation Gurus*
- Shumsa Tahseen, *Development Sector Consultant*
- Obaidullah Fakhruddin Ajmal, *Group Director and the Chief Operating Officer, Ajmal Group of Companies*
- Jody Tull, *Founder and Director, Be in Awe*
- Rupert De Salis, *Be in Awe*

Sarthak's National Advisory Board is comprised of:

- Krishan Kalra, *President, NAAI and Former President, AIMA*
- Ranjan Chopra, *MD, Team Computers*
- Lov Verma, *Former Secretary, DEPwD, Government of India*
- Sandeep Bhargava, *CEO & Founder, Leap Edtech*
- Rewa Nayyar, *Chairman, Bal Sahyog*
- Ajay Kanchan, *Chief Editor & CEO, Media Today*
- Dr. Sudhir Gupta, *Former Director, Cygnus Medicare*
- Supriyo Gupta, *CEO, Torque Communications*
- Anuradha Bhawnani, *Former Regional Director, Shell Foundation*
- Raj Kapur, *Advisor, JCT Electronics Ltd*
- S.K. Gupta, *Former DDG, Department of Telecommunication, Government. of India*
- Siddhartha Rastogi, *MD, Ambit Investment Advisors Pvt Ltd*
- Atul Bhatnagar, *Former COO, NSDC*
- Dr. (Brig) RK Gupta, *Paediatrician, Indian Army*
- Bhushan Punani, *Executive Secretary, BPA*
- Prof. M.P. Poonia, *VC, AICTE*
- Dr. S.M. Gupta, *GCPO, Startek*
- Deepak Chhabra, *MD, Tupperware India*

## 7.3 Awards & Recognition

In its illustrious history spanning over a decade, Sarthak's landmark initiatives have garnered the organisation a plethora of accolades. Sarthak has been felicitated as follows:

- By megastar Amitabh Bachchan, during Kaun Banega Crorepati Season 12 (Karamveer Special)
- Cognizant Foundation Appreciation Award, in recognition of strategic partnership in making a difference in lives of many
- Capgemini, for promoting innovation in skilling of youth with disabilities
- NSDC and Skill India, with a Special Mention Award under the category for empowering specially-abled people

- GT Sabera Award, under the category of Changemakers
- Skills India 2018
- Accor Hotels, for providing sustainable employment opportunities to person with disabilities
- Association of Special Educators and Allied Professionals, at the International Excellence Award for Service towards People with Disabilities
- Sambodhi Research Organisation, New Delhi, at their Awards and Conclave Event
- Social Change Awards, in the category Sustainable Solutions Changing India
- Shikhar Organisation for Social Development, at the 4th National CSR Summit 2016 on Sustainable Development Goal No. 4

Sarthak's founder, Dr. Jitender Aggarwal, has been felicitated by:

- The PHD Chamber, for being a distinguished speaker on a panel titled "Mainstreaming the marginalised through Digital Inclusion"
- GMRVK and National CSR Network with a Certificate of Appreciation for sharing his valuable knowledge as guest speaker at the Seminar on CSR for Persons with Disabilities

Sarthak has been awarded by:

- Certificate of Appreciation and Participation at World Skills Asia (Abu Dhabi, 2018)
- Certificate of Commendation by Gilard Electronics Pvt.Ltd. for contributing towards creating an Inclusive society for PwDs
- SKOCH Group's Top-50 Qualification (Smart Education Projects in India) for Sarthak Inclusive Education Centre
- Top-30 Qualification in Skill Development Projects in India for Sarthak Skill Building Training Programme, by SKOCH Group
- CSR Excellence Award at India International CSR Conclave
- Outstanding Contributor in the field of Specially-Abled by Sonalika Tractors

Social Change Award for contribution in enabling the differently-abled to live their life with dignity and respect

The Impact Awards 2017

The Best NGO at the eNGO Award organised by Digital Empowerment Foundation (DEF)

Certificate of Partnership with National Skill Development Corporation

Rashtriya Swayam Siddha Samman by JSPL Foundation in 2016

Exceptional Achievers Award by Government of Delhi

Best NGO Award by Punjab State Government

Speaker award in 37th Annual Conference of AOICON (Association of Otolaryngologists of India, Delhi State Branch & North Zone).

Certificate of Recognition for meaningful contribution in the field of differently-abled by Tech Mahindra Foundation on the occasion of World Disability Day

Sarthak has also been awarded for bringing “Olympic and Paralympics Moment” in India at the Sports India Awards by IISGS (Indian International Sporting Good Show). Additionally, the organisation has been awarded by Sri Aurobindo College, University of Delhi for ‘Synchronising Education and Employment Opportunities for Visually Challenged’ again in 2014.

Sarthak’s accreditations include:

Registration under Section 12A of Income tax Act, 1961

Registration Under Section 80G of the Income Tax Act, 1961, which enables it to extend 50% tax exemption to its donors

Registration under Foreign Contribution (Regulation) Act, 1976

Accredited by CAF (Charities Aid Foundation) for operation & processes

Certification of Accreditation by Credibility Alliance

Registration Certificate under section 52 of PWD Act, 1955

## 8. RECOMMENDATIONS & FUTURE PLANS

As is evident, advocacy is a strategic exercise that is an integral part of any movement that wants to usher in social change. Attitudinal and systemic barriers that hold back PwDs are often best challenged through extensive stakeholder engagement, in-depth research and interactive events. Storytelling is a powerful vehicle to disseminate ideas and perspectives generated from such avenues.

However, advocacy does not happen in a vacuum. There are several lacunae that need to be addressed for disability advocacy to be more effective, engaging and watertight. Several areas of current engagement can also be strengthened to increase impact.

For stakeholders such as the government and disability organisations, the first possible area of intervention is the need for accurate data. Existing data on PwDs is often outdated and/or superficial. It is imperative to gather disability data that presents a truer picture of PwDs throughout the country. This data has to be disaggregated by gender, class, caste, geographical location and specific disability types. Governments and advocacy organisations should possess such nuanced data to help frame holistic policy recommendations which can translate to better lives for all PwDs. As such, collection and compilation of refined data is the need of the hour. To this end, one course of action should be to vastly improve the reach of the government's UDID (Unique Disability ID) program. This will generate insightful, actionable data on the PwD community, enabling concerned parties to tailor their interventions to the needs of the community.

As a critical stakeholder, the corporate sector needs to scale up its efforts at inclusion, moving from basic affirmative action to more comprehensive DEI initiatives. This would entail hiring PwDs with varying disabilities and across degrees of disability, at all levels of the organisations. Inclusion should also extend beyond recruitment, encompassing continuous employee support, retention and growth.

The media is yet another significant stakeholder that should progress towards better coverage of PwDs and disability issues. Stories on PwDs should strive for balanced treatment, refusing to cast PwDs either as heroic figures or objects of pity. Media outlets should also acknowledge that specific occasions (such as the International Day of Disability) are not the only time to feature disability-centric stories. Disability is a cross-cutting issue that has relevance across sectors—be it Make in India or eco-tourism, every topic has the potential to be approached through the lens of disability.



Another area that needs to be addressed by disability advocacy organisations is the scope for greater levels of collaboration. Often, advocacy groups exist in silos, chipping away at massive structural inequities with inadequate resources. Greater communication between these groups can help all of them function sustainably and achieve their goals faster. Collective sharing of knowledge, organisational strategies and best practices among advocacy groups will go a long way in strengthening the sector as a whole. The expansion of Sarthak's IDEA initiative is a step in this direction.

Sarthak will soon launch its pioneering e-learning management system for PwDs, GyanSarathi, as well as an entrepreneurship platform for PwDs, UdhyamiSarathi. It will also further scale its existing digital solutions and services, CapSarathi and RozgarSarathi. Each of these online resources hold tremendous potential to transform the lives of PwDs.

As noted earlier, storytelling is a key component of advocacy efforts. Stories help people engage with the world and facilitate change in thought processes. They are powerful tools to break prejudices and stigma. Above all, stories offer hope for a more equitable, inclusive world. The disability sector as a whole can leverage the power of storytelling to conceive focused awareness and sensitisation activities. Sarthak's storytelling campaigns detailed in Chapter 7 are examples of effective storytelling for advocacy.

Perhaps the most ambitious of Sarthak's future plans is the Global Resource Centre for Persons with Disabilities. Its construction is underway in Haryana. The Centre is intended to function as a hub for sector-wide interventions that are much more integrated and higher in quality. Large-scale schemes for capacity building, inclusive education, vocational skill building and placement services will be conceptualised and initiated at the Centre. It will also serve as a site for research and development, technological exchange and cross-border advocacy.

As an organisation that has never shied away from dreaming big, Sarthak is currently in the process of charting out its global expansion. The UK Chapter has been inaugurated, with many more in the works. Sarthak's global expansion will enable it to reach out to PwDs of varying socio-cultural backgrounds, thus fostering solidarities that transcend borders and cultural barriers. The expansion also presents Sarthak with invaluable opportunities to learn from advocacy practices across the world. These lessons could be transposed to the Indian context, opening up newer paths and possibilities for all advocates of disability rights in the country.

## Recommendations

Interventions for accurate, disaggregated data on people with disabilities



More comprehensive DEI initiatives in the corporate sector



Media sensitivity towards disability issues



Acknowledgment of disability as a cross-cutting issue



Greater levels of collaboration between disability NGOs

## Sarthak's Future Plans

Launch of GyanSarathi and UdhyamiSarathi



Scaling up of CapSarathi and RozgarSarathi



Sarthak Global Resource Centre for Persons with Disabilities



International expansion of the organisation

## 9. ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

The environment for working in the disability sector in India has never been more conducive. For this, we would like to thank both government and international bodies for their policies that promote inclusion and accessibility. In particular, our thanks to the Ministry of Health, the Department of Disability Affairs, the Ministry of Rural Development, and the National Institute for Transforming India (NITI Aayog). We are also grateful for legal provisions such as the RPwD Act that have enabled organisations like ours to work more effectively and sustainably towards the empowerment of PwDs. The various advocacy initiatives by the Central and State Governments have also been instrumental in enhancing the work done at Sarthak.

Sarthak's interventions are driven by the encouragement of our CSR partners and other stakeholders who have always been supportive of Sarthak's services. Our thanks to Team Computers, Capgemini, Altran (previously known as Aricent), Hans Foundation, Cognizant Foundation, Credit Suisse Security, HT Parekh Foundation, HCL Foundation, Lemon Tree Hotels, and HDFC Bank.

Much of our work is fuelled by our NGO partners and collaborators who work tirelessly to provide better opportunities and support systems for PwDs. We would like to thank Blind People's Association (Ahmedabad), Kamayani School (Pune), Ability Foundation (Chennai), v-shesh (Chennai), Enable India (Bengaluru), National Association for the Blind (New Delhi), and Shanta Memorial Rehabilitation Centre (Bhubaneswar) for all their efforts.

Our international partners have also been an integral part of our work. We would like to extend our gratitude to Aflatoun International, Careeredu (Nigeria), European Social Network (ESN), International Agency for Prevention of Blindness, International Disability Alliance (IDA), Valuable 500, International Labour Organisation (ILO), Global Rehabilitation Alliance, Russian Society for Disabled People, Nippon Foundation (Japan), World Blind Union, and American Foundation for the Blind.

From within Sarthak, gratitude to our national and advisory board members, and mentor and guru Padma Bhushan Dr. M.B. Athreya. We are also thankful for the support of Shri Krishan Kalra, Sri Ranjan Chopra, Sri Lov Verma, Sri Sandeep Bhargava, Sri Atul Bhatnagar, Sri SK Gupta, Sri Sudhir Gupta, Smt. Anuradha Bhavnani, Sri Sidhartha Rastogi and Sri Ravi Garg. Special thanks to Dr. Jitender Aggarwal (CEO), Dr. Suman Aggarwal (Strategic Leader), and Nistha Tripathi (Program Leader, India).

Finally, our gratitude to AuxoHub for helping us collate and compile this report.

## 10. ENDNOTES

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