

Skilling the Differently-Abled

Shanti Raghavan



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Manjunath is a supervisor in a small company and has a team of 15 who work on textile machinery parts. Quality is critical and any rejects by the client can mean loss of business. The **Make in India** programme is based on people like Manjunath delivering quality output. Manjunath is a person with low vision and his team is diverse including persons with disability.

Stanley is self employed and runs a phenyl business. He is a person with cerebral palsy. Tabassum works at an offshore support centre and watches the screen intently to monitor customers across the ocean in far off England! She is a person with physical disability. Pradeep works at a Mall and is a Bay ka Malik. He is a person with intellectual disability and is low vision and hard of hearing as well. Rajiv is an analyst at a multinational bank and is hearing impaired. Prashant got the job as a Panchayat Development Officer due to affirmative action. He is blind. Initially he was not given work due to his blindness but after specialized training was provided to type in Kannada and after configuring his talking software, he could overcome the challenges due to his disability. He has gained the respect of his colleagues and the villagers.

Gausia has to be bathed and fed by her mother due to the severity of her disability. She has no motor function whatsoever. Gausia, however, looks after her mother with the salary she earns as project coordinator at a multinational company. In fact, the washing machine which she bought online has been of great help to her mother. Gausia does her work online by using workplace solutions such as speech recognition software which allows her to dial the phone, use internet and other software tools by just using her speech.

Manjunath, Stanley, Tabassum, Pradeep, Gausia, Rajiv, Prashant are part of the "**Change In India**". By getting skills and becoming employable, they work just like everybody else, pay tax, take care of their families and are part of general society. They remind us that what has made India great is the ability of its people to overcome challenges such as disability, poverty and discrimination.

Current Employment and Skilling Scenario

Employment opportunities for persons with disabilities in the private sector has improved dramatically in the last ten years especially in the major metros with companies seeing the business value in hiring persons

The author is an Ashoka Fellow and is the Founder and Managing trustee of Enable India. Enable India has pioneered inclusion of severe physical, sensory and intellectual disabilities in the workforce via innovative solutions.

with disability. Company's worries on productivity and quality were addressed by skilling candidates to become employable. The trust built by providing good employable products to companies paid off. In 2008 and 2014, at the height of recession, companies hired persons with disability which reiterates that if you build a good product, there will always be a market for it. In the last 5 years, companies growing at a meteoric pace have found a huge supply gap and hence some have started looking at persons with disability as a steady source of supply. NGOs specialized in disability, mainstream training institutions and social enterprises are now skilling and enabling employment for more persons with disability in 2 tier cities and districts as well.

Wage employment has been possible by skilling leaders and supervisors to successfully include and integrate persons with disability in the company. Collaborations with companies for specific domain and job training has helped deliver better quality candidates and hence better placements. Companies have found this a win-win situation to build a pipeline of suitable candidates for their forecasted demand.

The models in skilling which have shown success have a large component of experiential learning. Retention of candidates in companies has been higher when skills training included attitude and life skills development. Skilling initiatives which have focussed on parent development have proved more sustainable in the long run. Parents do not believe their child can face the harsh realities of life and employment. Hence, despite their economic needs, they protect their children with disability from anything remotely stressful such as traveling far, working in shifts or working with targets.

Peer to peer training has proved successful for persons with severe

intellectual disability with an IQ of below 65 under supervision. This method of skilling has to be taken as a better alternative to the traditional models of skilling. Skilling and placement of persons with psychosocial disability involves having a support system of counsellor and psychiatrist being available.

Skilling has happened primarily in growing sectors such as retail, hospitality, IT, ITES, garments, textiles and banking. Self employment skill training has been successful in growing areas such as beauty and wellness, mobile repairing and other geographic specific growth areas.

Future Scenario


The National Skill Policy launched by the Prime Minister has a target for skilling 38 lakh persons with disability in the next seven years. The Department of Empowerment Of Persons with Disability (DePWD) created inside Ministry of Social Justice and Empowerment has helped create focus on the ecosystem for PwD by launching the National Action Plan for PwD and the Accessible India Campaign. The Skill Council for Persons With Disability (ScPWD) has been formed to take the skill policy forward. Hence, the situation in India is ripe for persons with disability to be part of the economic workforce. We need to capitalize on the successful models for persons with diverse disabilities with special focus on severe physical and mental disabilities and by giving equal importance to all forms of employment across geographies.

We also need to capitalize on existing quality infrastructure such as the more than 600 Rural Self Employment Institutes (RSETIs) which can be used for self employment training. Specialized curriculum for different self employment opportunities needs to be created. There is an urgent need to have

qualified trainers with disability who will act as role models and train persons with disability.

In the last ten years, more than 273 job roles across 26 sectors have been opened up for persons with different disabilities by identifying solutions and the environment which will enable them to work effectively. More jobs need to be opened up by finding solutions for persons with different severe disabilities. There has to be a systematic effort to develop leaders to absorb more persons with disability.

Holistic support systems have to be scaled to provide services such as job analysis services, workplace solutions, inclusion services, awareness and sensitization, leadership development and more. This is critical for skilling initiatives to be successful. NGOs like the Enable Academy provide a platform for fostering collaborations among communities working to mainstream livelihoods for persons with disability. It is a platform where all stakeholders can use and share resources and launch campaigns which unleashes the power of collaborative efforts and provides the much needed holistic support required. Namma Vaani, an interactive voice response system which is available via a missed call provides virtual networking for many disabled across rural Karnataka. Persons with disability share their stories, issues and solve each other's problems to gain awareness, hope, face their daily challenges and become economically independent. These technology based platforms will be the game changers and will ensure a bright future for the skilling of persons with disability.

"Make In India" will be successful when there is "Change In India" which is inclusive to all sections of society. Persons with disability working successfully are harbingers of this change. 

(E-mail: shanti@enable-india.org)