

Empowering Differently Abled People (Divyangjan) in an Inclusive India

Inclusive India needs to facilitate mainstreaming of Differently-abled people (Divyangjan) through sustainable economic empowerment for self-reliance, autonomy, inclusivity, and dignity. Today, about 2.21 per cent of the population suffers from some disability, from 21 identified types (earlier, there were 7 types of Disabilities). Furthermore, several interventions and initiatives are being undertaken across the country to unleash their economic empowerment potential, which usually remains dormant. Hurdles that hinder the empowerment process of Divyangjan, viz. social discrimination; exclusion; lack of sensitivity, respect & support needed towards human diversity; and dignity of work, need to be handled to optimise the capabilities of Divyangjan for nation building.

Entrepreneurship is a powerful tool to help underprivileged groups, such as Divyangjan, Transgender, Tribal, and many others, become self-reliant. To help Divyangjan and other underprivileged groups engage in meaningful economic activities, earn a living, and live dignified lives, entrepreneurship as a behaviour could be introduced.

Several institutions and centres are working hard to sensitize and empower Divyangjan across the country. Activities cover the large canvas such as; awareness creation interventions, skill development, capacity building for self-employment, and enterprise establishment or job placement. I am citing some interventions which could be relevant in the current context while empowering Divyangjan:

There is a lack of orientation among Divyangjan about entrepreneurship as a career or source for earning livelihoods. They mainly focus on government support, grants or pension, despite having various skills that can be applied to a vocation or business. Agencies working for the empowerment of Divyangjan need to organise 2 to 3 days of **'Entrepreneurship Orientation Programmes,'** highlighting self-employment and livelihood opportunities suitable for Divyangjan. During the programme, significant time could be devoted to highlighting the availability of government and non-government supports they may utilize. This kind of orientation may help Divyangjan know emerging business opportunities and supports they can avail themselves and build their enterprise.

Divyangjan's lack of knowledge about the business ecosystem, funding, and government programmes is another issue. One or two-day "Entrepreneurship Outreach Programmes" may answer this issue. This type of programme could be conducted at village or Taluka level to disseminate information pertaining to the ecosystem (policy, schemes, incubation, market players etc.), funding (both formal and informal), and government scheme to Divyangjan. Further, after attending this programme, their confidence could be rebuilt, and they may approach government departments to avail benefits, besides making attempts to create their ventures.

'Skill Development' has emerged as a key enabler for disadvantaged communities, including Divyangjan. Government Departments and Private organizations run Skill Courses and support the aspirants in securing a reasonable livelihood. Towards the end of these skill development courses, institutions support the candidate in (i) getting a job placement or (ii) establishing a skill-based enterprise. Furthermore, in both cases, the candidate is being empowered economically.

Some institutions offer 'Entrepreneurship Development Programmes' for two to four weeks for Divyangjan. This kind of capacity-building programme provides information on Business opportunity mapping, ideation, business support system, small venture management, sources and means of funding, business plan preparation, etc., which are very much relevant for an entrepreneurship aspirant. Additionally, these programmes offer participants handholding and mentoring support to foster venture creation and assure participant empowerment.

The above-cited ideas could help yield better results in the field of Divyangjan Empowerment. Also, a meaningful contribution from economically empowered divyangjan is expected to help make our country inclusive.
