

CPI(M)

Lok Sabha Election 2009

**AAM AADMI SUFFERS
IN 'HIGH GROWTH'
INDIA**

**Differently
Abled**

Right to Live with Dignity

CAMPAIGN FOLDER



Vote CPI(M)

**Strengthen the Left and Democratic Forces
to Ensure an Alternative Secular
Government at the Centre**

The Congress-led government's slogan of "inclusive growth" rings hollow when seen in relation to the rights, needs and requirements of the disabled or differently abled population in India. It is a shame that a disabled child in "high growth" India cannot expect even a tiny benefit of that growth to accrue to her, mainly because she is invisible to policy makers. Worse, in India there is an extremely backward approach to the disabled, who are often subjected to extreme forms of cruelty. No society can consider itself civilised which fails to respect the differently abled. Successive governments and mainstream political parties have utterly failed disabled citizens by ignoring and neglecting their issues.

Today even the numbers of the differently abled are underestimated because the census methodology depends purely on self-reporting. Recent estimates have put the numbers at as much as 6 crore (6% of the population). 75% of persons with disabilities live in rural areas, compounding their misery further. Disabled women and girl children suffer from the added victimisation of gender and are vulnerable to sexual exploitation. Disability is also a contributing factor for poverty, reduced access to education and health, exclusion and discrimination for both persons with disabilities and their families.

The welfare and advancement of the disabled or differently abled is crucially linked to the recognition of their rights as equal citizens, not as recipients of charity. Policies have to recognise the different needs and requirements of disabled persons. India has a law, The Persons with Disability (Equal Opportunities, Protection of Rights and Full Participation) Act, which came about due to the struggle of disabled persons and their organisations, and provides a framework for a right-based approach. However, it is necessary, on the basis of the experience of the working of the Act, to further strengthen it. The present overemphasis and dependence on NGOs and the private sector should be balanced with a greater responsibility for the government.

At present, the Ministry of Social Justice and Empowerment is the nodal agency for the issues of the disabled. Apart from distributing funds to NGOs there is precious little that this ministry does. In any case, the whole approach is incorrect. Since the issues of the disabled include education, employment, etc., they have to be mainstreamed through special cells into the agendas of all ministries concerned with government schemes and projects like HRD, rural employment, other employment or self-employment schemes,

urban development, etc. A central monitoring cell, preferably under the Prime Minister, is also essential, to ensure that it is taken seriously. Budget allocation from each of these ministries for empowering differently abled people has to be made.

FAILURE TO REACH THE UNREACHED

Even the commitment made in the Xth Plan of “Reaching the Un-reached” remains unfulfilled, as per the XIth Plan’s own admission. The document admits that two Plan periods after the enactment of the Persons with Disabilities Act, 1995, the ground reality is still not very different.

That not much has changed despite these legislations is reflected in the fact that 51% of the disabled population is illiterate and 63% unemployed. People with disabilities are among the most excluded in Indian society according to *People with Disabilities in India: From Commitments to Outcomes*, a World Bank Report. The Report says that they are subject to multiple deprivations. Households with disabled members are significantly poorer than average, with lower consumption and fewer assets. Children living with disability are around four to five times less likely to be in school than SC/ST children. Illiteracy is high across all categories of disability, particularly for children with visual, mental and multiple disabilities. Even when enrolled in school, they are not able to go beyond the primary stage. Worse, employment rates have sharply declined in the 2000s compared to the previous decade.

EDUCATION

A comprehensive education policy for the disabled should be framed. The programme of inclusive education, although included in the agenda of the HRD Ministry, has not been properly implemented. Whether it is the ICDS, the Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan, the allocation of funds, training of teachers, inclusion of sensitive teaching methodologies suitable for the specific disability the child may suffer from are absent. As a result, where disabled children are included in schools or centres, they suffer from isolation, humiliation and insensitivity. The government has totally failed in providing the necessary infrastructure, thus making the children suffer. At the same time, work of teachers in special schools is unrecognized and since they are often in NGO-run schools, they are denied proper salaries.

Educational institutions do not always follow the mandated 3% reservation for the disabled. Even where this is followed, it

becomes ineffective with the campuses not being accessible to them.

The CPI(M) reiterates that:

- ~ Free education should be provided to all disabled at all levels and provision for special equipment, aids and appliances should be made.
- ~ All educational institutions should be barrier free and disabled friendly.
- ~ Monitoring of education at all levels by organisations of disabled and their parents has to be ensured.
- ~ Course curriculum and evaluation system for the disabled has to be in keeping with their capabilities.
- ~ The examination system should also be modified. Special courses and schools designed to provide specific skills taking into account the disability have to be set up.
- ~ Special scholarships like those given to SCs/STs should be extended to the disabled. Disability units should be set up in bodies like the NCERT, UGC, etc.
- ~ Funds should be allotted for the development and promotion of sign language and training of teachers for this purpose.

EMPLOYMENT

The PWD Act provisions 3% reservation in jobs in all government and public sector units for the disabled. This is calculated against identified jobs and not against the total strength of the cadre. Thus even this inadequate 3% is not implemented under the pretext of there not being suitable vacancies. The share of the disabled against the total strength in actual terms is barely 0.44% as against their estimated population of 5-6%. The situation in the largest government undertaking, the Railways, is indicative. In the last 15 years not a single person with disability has been employed in the Northern Railways. In response to a RTI query, Doordarshan said not a single post has been identified by the organisation to be filled by the disabled people. Disabled rights groups point out that identification of jobs is “very restrictive”, owing to which disabled people have been denied job opportunities despite possessing the requisite qualifications and skills.

In the private sector, the scenario is even worse. In a survey conducted by National Centre for Promotion of Employment for the Disabled People (NCPEDP) in “top 100 companies” in 1999, the rate of employment of the disabled was 0.28%. The figure for multinational companies was a dismal 0.05%.

Reservations for disabled must be extended to the private sector.

CONGRESS-LED GOVERNMENT'S RECORD

The Congress-led government's record on this score has been dismal. With much fanfare, the Union Finance Minister, P. Chidambaram, announced a scheme of providing one lakh jobs per annum to persons with disabilities, with a proposed outlay of Rs. 1800 crore, during the Eleventh Plan, in the Union Budget 2006-07. Under the Scheme, the government was to make payment of the employer's contribution of EPF and ESI for the first three years as an incentive for employing disabled persons. However, Chidambaram himself admitted some time later that "not a single recruitment has been made six months after the Scheme was announced".

Jobs for persons with different disabilities should be identified, reviewed and updated. These have to be notified and filled by central and state government departments and PSUs within a stipulated time frame. There is a huge backlog in vacancies, which should be filled immediately. A special employment guarantee scheme should be designed for differently abled people in all parts of the country that provides them suitable employment ensuring at least minimum wages throughout the year.

Accessibility. Accessibility and a barrier free environment is a major issue for the disabled. Public transport, buildings, schools, colleges, courts, shopping complexes and bus stops in most cases are not barrier free. These barriers deny them the right to education, employment, entertainment etc. *CPI(M) supports:* A barrier free place which would enable disabled persons to utilise facilities without assistance. Building bye-laws should be amended for this purpose.

Universal Identity Cards. Possession of an Identify Card is a prerequisite to obtain any benefit under any state or central government scheme, financial institutions, etc. Different departments demand different types of certificates. This forces the disabled to visit multiple offices and authorities. *CPI(M) supports:* one comprehensive universally valid identity card. These cards should be issued by the village/taluka offices within seven days of the receipt of an application.

Housing, Ration cards. Houses owned by disabled persons prevents them being thrown out of houses on whom they are depending. *CPI(M) supports:* Earmarking of houses for the disabled under the Indira Awaas Yojana. Antyodaya card

should be given to all disabled.

Health. *CPI(M) supports:* Free medical facilities based on identity cards to all disabled including hospitalisation.

Aids and appliances. *CPI(M) supports:* Free provision of aids and equipment by the government, as per requirements.

Social Security. *CPI(M) supports:* Comprehensive social security policy for disabled children as a social responsibility of the State so as to take the burden from parents

Within all the above schemes there have to be special provisions for disabled girls and women who suffer the added discrimination of gender in a patriarchal society.

Disability is no longer a charity or welfare issue. It is an issue for rights, to live with dignity and share the fruits of development with equality. It took 48 years for the government to enact a legislation recognising them as a separate entity who need affirmative action. It took another 13 years to come out with a policy document. Despite lofty claims, the situation on the ground has not improved.

CPI(M)'S COMMITMENT

The CPI(M) views the issues and demands of the differently abled as an intrinsic part of the general democratic movement. We believe that these issues of justice for the disabled must be taken up in the campaign for these Lok Sabha elections.

The CPI(M) pledges to work and struggle along with organisations of the disabled to put in place Government policies that address these genuine concerns and demands.

Vote CPI(M)

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