

POLICY BRIEF

RESEARCH, EVALUATION, MONITORING UNIT (REMU)

MOVING FROM THE MARGINS

**MAINSTREAMING PERSONS WITH
DISABILITIES IN PAKISTAN**

MOVING FROM THE MARGINS

Mainstreaming persons with disabilities in Pakistan

Summary

This policy brief is based on the research *Moving From the Margins: Mainstreaming Persons with Disabilities in Pakistan (2014)*, which was commissioned by British Council Pakistan's Research, Evaluation, Monitoring Unit (REMU) and conducted by The Economist Intelligence Unit. The policy brief provides information and recommendations for practitioners, administrators, and policymakers to mainstream persons with disabilities in Pakistan. This brief: (1) offers a working definition for disability, and outlines the status and context related to persons with disabilities in Pakistan; (2) examines the challenges and opportunities affecting persons with disabilities in Pakistan; and (3) proposes recommendations that can improve access for those with disabilities and address the neglect, exclusion and cost caused by marginalisation.

Introduction

According to the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (CRPD), the United Nations' treaty to protect the rights and dignity of persons with disabilities, disability includes those who have long-term physical, mental, intellectual or sensory impairments, which in interaction with various barriers may hinder their full and effective participation in society on an equal basis with others.

Contrary to the dominant medical model of disability, which sees disability as a physical state that needs to be fixed in order to conform to normative values, the CRPD uses a social model of definition, which sees society as the main contributory factor in disabling people. Deliberate or inadvertent systemic barriers, negative attitudes and exclusion by society cause disability. While physical, sensory, intellectual, or psychological variations may cause individual functional limitation or impairments, these do not have to lead to disability unless society fails to take account of and include people regardless of their individual differences.

In simpler terms, the key message from the CRPD definition is that disability is not a biological problem that lies with the individual but a complex one that lies within social failure.

In Pakistan, estimates of the number of persons living with disabilities vary between 3.3 million and 27 million, depending on whether they are based on government statistics (the last census which measured the prevalence rates was taken in 1998) or whether they come from other agencies. In a bid to protect the rights and dignity of its population with disabilities, Pakistan ratified the CRPD in 2011. Despite this, persons with disabilities are marginalised in Pakistan: they face discrimination, exclusion and neglect, and are unable to participate fully and effectively in society. They particularly face barriers in education, economic participation, legal recognition, and availability of clinical resources:

- 1.4 million children with disabilities do not have access to either inclusive or special schools.
- There is only one law focusing on persons with disabilities, The Disabled Persons (Employment and Rehabilitation) Ordinance 1981.
- Only 0.49 psychologists and psychiatrists for every 100,000 people in Pakistan.

Beyond being a social, legal or moral issue, marginalising persons with disabilities has also become a major economic issue for Pakistan. Inaction towards persons with disabilities is costing Pakistan 4.9 to 6.3 per cent of its GDP annually. In 2014, Pakistan's economy lost an estimated US\$ 12 billion because of excluding persons with disabilities from employment. In 2018, Pakistan's economy is expected to lose US\$ 20 billion.

Pakistan did in fact make early attempts at including persons with disabilities in the 1980s with the introduction of education and employment policies, setting up special schools for persons with disabilities, for example, and mandating businesses to employ persons with disabilities through a quota-based system and levies. Although these were celebrated achievements in the early years, they proved to be ineffective in including persons with disabilities. Persons with disabilities still have difficulty exercising their civil and political rights, attending quality schools and finding gainful employment.

Challenges and Opportunities

Culture

The culture around disability in Pakistan is one characterised by pity. Persons with disabilities are seen sympathetically, in need of medical help or charity, instead of worthy of empowerment. This perception is evidently informed by the medical model of disability that identifies disability as a biological problem that lies with the individual. Pakistan's ratification of the CRPD, which uses a social model of disability, therefore offers a promising opportunity. By assuming CRPD's rights-based approach, which recognises disability as a diversity that needs to be accepted, Pakistan can develop inclusive culture that includes persons with disabilities in all aspects of life.

Governance

So far, little has happened by way of policies and strategies in line with the CRPD framework. Part of this is the result of the 18th Amendment to the Constitution of Pakistan of 2010, which devolved powers to the provinces. Several plans and policy papers, as well as pending legislation that was being drafted and discussed at the federal level, became the responsibility of the provinces and have since been largely ignored. That said, government agencies consulted for this study recognise that changes need to be made, and provinces are making strides in different ways. The Punjab government, for example, is focusing on expanding educational services for persons with disabilities, and the Khyber Pakhtunkhwa government is looking to provide more in the way of employment support.

Economy

Beyond the cultural and policy setbacks, Pakistan also faces grave economic setbacks. There is only one law especially targeted at persons with disabilities, The Disabled Persons (Employment and Rehabilitation) Ordinance 1981. It specifies that employers with 100 workers or more must ensure that at least 2% of their total workforce consists of persons with disabilities, or pay a levy. Unfortunately, the monitoring and implementation of this law has been weak. Several investigations found that many large, private companies and public agencies are not meeting this requirement.

Crucially, The Disabled Persons (Employment and Rehabilitation) Ordinance 1981 defines disability as impairment while failing to consider psychosocial disabilities and intellectual disorders such as autism. Persons with intellectual disabilities are therefore often entirely omitted from policies and strategies. Identification mechanisms are weak and often focused on physical impairments. There is a corresponding shortage of mental health professionals trained to identify and rehabilitate persons with varying degrees of intellectual disorders: according to a 2008 World Health Organisation (WHO) report, there are only 0.49 trained psychologists and psychiatrists for every 100,000 in Pakistan.

Education

Limited employment opportunities for persons with disabilities have also stemmed from limited access to quality education, which later leads to limited skills for the labour market. Education for persons with disabilities is largely limited to low quality special education schools, which have perpetuated discrimination and enforced sympathy. There are approximately only 330 special education schools in Islamabad, Punjab, Sindh and Khyber Pakhtunkhwa. Most of these schools are in urban areas, which makes education for persons with disabilities in rural areas a challenge. At least 50 per cent of children with disabilities do not access to such schools, but even where there is access, the quality of education is poor.

Recommendations

Based on the rights-based approach offered by the CRPD, there are several steps that Pakistan can take to respond to the challenges and opportunities identified above:

1. Develop a comprehensive set of laws to protect the rights and dignity of persons with disabilities in all aspects of living. This includes laws that protect the rights of persons with disabilities with regard to discrimination, education, employment, communication, infrastructure and transport, and civil rights.
2. Establish a lead government department to develop and monitor the implementation of policies that protect the rights of persons with disabilities. This should be available at both the federal and the provincial level.
3. Where resources are limited in a country such as Pakistan, it is imperative that there is an effective use of government and other stakeholder resources and funds for rehabilitation, health, education, and employment services. This can be done with proper strategy development and regular monitoring.

Disability is not inability – it is a diversity that needs to be accepted.

4. Innovative community-based mechanisms can alleviate the burden on the government. There are successful examples in Pakistan, such as the Lady Health Worker Programme and similar community-based mechanisms, which can help in building awareness, changing attitudes and driving change.
5. Special education promotes segregation, but inclusive education, where persons with disabilities are in the same classroom as mainstream students, makes educational services more accessible. Studies also show that this has a positive impact on costs and on changing attitudes. This requires changes in school infrastructure and investment in better teacher training.
6. On employment, there is a need to build an effective ecosystem to support the employment of persons with disabilities. This includes anti-discrimination laws, incentives for employers, vocational training services and job-matching support.
7. Disabled people's organisations (DPOs) need to work together to ensure a united front that communicates change from a rights-based approach. DPOs in Pakistan are sometimes still focused on a charity or medical approach, which are both important services, especially where the government falls short. But there needs to be better awareness of the need for broader change.

Persons with disabilities must be represented in the parliament. There are seats currently reserved for various minority groups, but not a single one for persons with disabilities. This will have an impact on policy development and changing society's image of persons with disabilities.

Conclusion

Pakistan cannot afford to ignore millions of its citizens who are currently out of sight because of disability but who, if given a chance, could contribute significantly to the country as a whole. And the steps outlined above are not for the government alone; they require collaboration and commitment from the government, civil society, businesses and persons with disabilities themselves. From the government to the man on the street, there needs to be a shift from a culture of pity to one focused on dignity, empowerment and rights. To make this shift, persons with disabilities need to be empowered through quality education; they must have equal access to employment and be able to live and work in a broader physical environment conducive to their mobility, learning and working needs. Disability is not inability – it is a diversity that needs to be accepted.