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IISRR-IJR ID-2526(9);

DOI No. 10.5281/zenodo.15711919

## Policies and Strategies for Empowerment of Persons with Disabilities in Sikkim: A Reflection

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### Abstract:

*Vasudhaiva Kutumbakam is a Sanskrit phrase meaning the world is one family. This concept somehow can be related in understanding the global to local need-based policies and legal framework advocating for inclusion of Person with Disabilities (PWD) into one inclusive mainstream society. The 2030 Agenda for sustainable development acknowledges the advancement of people with disabilities' rights, perspectives and well-being in accordance with the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (CRPD) in order to create a more sustainable and inclusive world' (Dandona et al, 2019).*

*According to statistical estimates from the World Health Organization (WHO), there are currently more than one billion persons with disabilities worldwide. Additionally, about 27 million Indians with disabilities were counted in the same census (Saikia, 2016). The state of the Himalayas according to the 2011 census, Sikkim, the smallest state in terms of population, has 18,187 PWD, or 2.9% of its total population (Department of Empowerment of Person with Disability, 2023-24). Following the RPWD Act 2016's statewide implementation, Sikkim reviewed its disability-related policies and programs and subsequently envisioned more locally-based, need-based laws and regulations to empower the state's disabled population. Hence, this paper explores the current policies, programs and strategies in empowering the PWD in the state of Sikkim.*

**Keywords:** *Vasudhaiva Kutumbakam, Inclusive, Diversity, Policies, RPWD Act 2016.*

### 1. Introduction:

The WHO defines disability as an all-encompassing term that encompasses limitations in activities, participation restrictions, and impairments. Impairment occurs when there is a problem with the structure or function of the body; an activity limitation occurs when an individual has trouble carrying out a task or action; and a participation restriction occurs when an individual has trouble participating in life situations (Reichert & Berry, 2019). According to office of Registrar General, 2011, India is the world's largest democracy; home to 17% of the world's population (Singal, 2019) has the provision of rights and justice to persons with disabilities since the adoption of her constitution in 1950 and with the beginning of five-year development planning commission since 1951. Different policies, documents and schemes of post-independence era are well aligning with the global policies and laws that all envision for



equitable society. Such policies and documents are vocal for transforming the mindset of mainstream society moving away from segregation to a more equitable inclusive society. The Ministry of Social Justice and Empowerment's (MOSJE) 2023–2024 annual report details the Department of Empowerment of Persons with Disabilities' (DEPWD) actual expenditures and promising budget allocation, which is one example of such an effort in the process of creating an inclusive society.

The budget allocation under DEPWD for the financial year 2018-19 was Rs.1070 crore which was increased to Rs.1225.15 crore during 2023-24 financial year showing an increment of Rs. 155.15 crore in five years. Similarly, the same report also depicts an increment of Rs.126.33 crore in actual expenditure i.e, from Rs.1017.56 crore of financial years 2018-19 to Rs.1143.89 crore during 2023-24 financial years These statistical numbers demonstrate the nation's investment and constructive legislative mindset for advancing an inclusive and equitable society.

## 2. Literature Review:

According to Singal (2019), the terms "children with disabilities" and "children with special needs" (CWSN) are interchangeable and synonymous. While European and American Judeo-Christian concepts of stigma and exclusion are seen as universal principles, the study of historical understanding of the nature of disability in an Indian setting is different and cannot be viewed through the same lens, the historical and contemporary experience of disability in India differs from that in the west (Buckingham, 2011). Although (Sen, 2005; as cited in Buckingham, 2011) stated that the dominant intellectual and textual tradition shapes historical understanding of disability both in Europe and in India.

'Disability has been defined in a multitude of conceptual models or frameworks such as medical model, charity model, social model, ICF model, human development model and so on' (Bhavanamol & Umajyothi, 2023). In 2006, Indian government approved a National Policy on Disability, which envisage 'right-based model' over the old 'charity disability model' of care for the disabled. Such 'right- based model' emphasize the provision of equal opportunities in education, economic independence, rehabilitation and the removal of social and environmental barriers to full participation of disabled people in mainstream society with high self-esteem and pride. For the first time, on 3<sup>rd</sup> December, 2015, honorable Prime Minister of India proposed replacing the name "Viklang" (disabilities) with "Divyang" (divine body) for physically disabled people (Singh, 2018). Another important turning point in the conversation around disability in India was reached with the enactment of the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (RPWD) Act 2016. It is acknowledged as historic legislation that aims to protect and advance the rights of PWD and is consistent with the principles of the UNCRPD. (Shanaz, 2023; as cited in Bhavanamol & Umajyothi, 2023). In a historic legislative move to honor and advance diversity and inclusivity



in Sikkim, the state administration renamed the Women and Child Development Department to Women, Child, Senior Citizen and Divyangjan Welfare Department (WCSC&DWD) with the notification No: 17/Home/2025 dated 26.02.2025. Such decision truly reflects the government vision of an inclusive Sikkimese society.

### **3. Emergence of the Problem:**

#### **3.1 Research Gaps:**

According to the 2011 census, 2.67 crore people in India have specific disabilities, making up 2.21 percent of the nation's total population. Of these, 1.50 crore are men and 1.18 crore are women (Singh, 2018). According to the DEPWD, 2023-24 annual report, 18,187 PWDs live in Sikkim, the smallest state in the Himalayas in terms of population, making up 2.9% of the state's total population (6, 10,577). Manipur has an equal state proportion of 1.2% of de jure households with a householder aged 15 and over who has a disability with Sikkim, which is more than the national average of 1.1%. The two most common types of disability in the state of Sikkim are speech and hearing (0.5% each). According to the Ministry of Health and Family Welfare (2019–21) report, men numbers is marginally more than women numbers to have any kind of handicap (1.2% men against 1.0% women). Following the RPWD Act 2016's nationwide implementation, Sikkim reviewed its disability-related policies and programs and planned to implement more locally-based, need-based laws and policies to empower the state's disabled population. This paper has tried to explore the policies, programs and strategies in empowering the PWD in the state of Sikkim through the lens of RPWD Act, 2016.

#### **3.2 Objectives of the study:**

- (i) To study about the current policies and program for empowerment of PWD in Sikkim.
- (ii) To examine need-based skill training organized for the PWD in Sikkim.
- (iii) To recommend a few strategies for empowering Sikkim's disabled citizens.

#### **3.3 Research Questions:**

- (i) What programs and policies are in place in Sikkim to empower PWD
- (ii) What types of need based skill training are organized for the PWD in Sikkim?
- (iii) In what ways might Sikkim empower its disabled citizens

#### **3.4 Significance of the study:**

Globally the lens of viewing the definition and concept of disabilities is dynamic and has been changing over the period of time. The construction of meaning and interpretation of disabilities which deeply rooted on individual's belief system and the societal perspectives have unfolded in multifaceted and different form. The contestation and interpretation on meaning and facets of



disabilities in moral model of Common Era is different from those in disability justice model of 21<sup>st</sup> century. The rights-based approach mandated by the RPWD Act 2016 which went into effect nationwide in the wake of the UNCRPD 2006 is currently used in India to understand the subtleties of disabilities.

An official logo of fifty years of statehood 'Sunaulo Samriddha Ani Samarth Sikkim' meaning 'Golden, Prosperous and Self-reliant Sikkim' reflects the state's commitment for the welfare of every individual citizen envisaging a progressive and self-sufficient state through imbibing an inclusive model of development. With the fifty years of statehood celebration the state also celebrates and promote the diversity and the rights of PWD revamping the policies, programs and strategies by adopting an essence of RPWD Act 2016. Findings and suggestions of the study may have different implications including governance, legislative decision, administration, health, education, NGOs, civil societies and other stakeholders of the society.

#### 4. Methodology:

##### 4.1 Research Design:

The present study explores the policies and strategies undertaken for PWD by tiny Himalayan state of Sikkim. A cross-sectional survey design was followed in the study. Such design was used because the investigators collected data for the present study at one point in time through semi-structured interview and observation of governmental official documents and notifications. Above particular research design has help the investigators to understand and analyzed the different program and activities avail for the PWD in the state.

**4.2 Population:** The populations for the present study were all the government employees working in Women, Child, Senior Citizen and Divyangjan Welfare Department (WCSC&DWD) of Namchi district.

**4.3 Sample:** Two government officials from Women, Child, Senior Citizen and Divyangjan Welfare Department (WCSC&DWD) of Namchi district were selected as a sample.

**4.4 Sampling technique:** Convenience non-probability sampling technique was applied to the present study. It was used for its cost-effectiveness nature and limitation of time and resources.

**4.5 Tools:** Semi-structured interview and observation were used in the study.

##### 4.6 Procedure:



Conveniently two participants identified as officers from WCSC&DWD of Namchi district were interviewed in depth to know the state government policies and strategies for empowering PWD in the process of making an inclusive Sikkimese society. Semi-structured interview was prepared and conducted to find out the contemporary policies and facilities avail by the government for catering the rights and needs of PWD in the state. In addition, a careful observation of government policies and documents was carried out. Content analysis method is adopted to analyze the collected data for the present study.

## 5. Survey Conducted and Data Collection:

The survey was conducted to assess the policies and strategies avail for empowerment of PWD in Sikkim. Data was gathered from the participants via semi-structured interviews conducted on March 6<sup>th</sup> and 7<sup>th</sup>, 2025, with prior departmental approval. The present study has also extensively referred the secondary sources such as governmental documents, official notifications and official Facebook page, government of Sikkim.

## 6. Analysis of the Collected Information:

Table No. 1: Synopsis of the Collected Information

Sl. No	Category	Code	Source	Frequency	Key Themes
1	Outreach program	O1	WCSC & DWD, Namchi District, Official Facebook page, Govt. of Sikkim and interview from participants.	4	Identification, screening & assessment program, distribution of aids and appliances and issue of disability certificate.
2	Pension Scheme/Allowance & Reservation	P1	WCSC & DWD, Namchi District and interview from participants.	3	IGNDPS, CMSDPS, conveyance allowance, Sikkim grant award for marriage and reservation in government employment.
3	Educational Scheme	E1	WCSC & DWD, Namchi District and interview from participants.	3	Pre-metric, post-metric, top class education scholarship, state level school toppers scheme and seat reservation in higher education.
4	Vocational skills and training	V1	WCSC&DWD, Namchi District and interview from participants.	3	Shelter workshop and Braille press at JNMI, Namchi and skill development training at Gangtok.
5	Public facilities	P2	WCSC&DWD, Namchi District and interview from participants.	3	Parking space in public places, free use of public toilet and free of cost in travelling under state transport department.
6	Legal rights	L1	WCSC&DWD, Namchi District	1	Every district courts function as special court for speedy trial.



7	Empowering PWD	E2	Official facebook page, Govt. of Sikkim and interview from participants.	3	Divya kala mela, job fair mela, vocational skill education, sports centre, state award for PWD and institutions, community-based awareness campaign and tracking need, challenges, potential and progress of PWD.
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## 7. Findings of the study:

- (i) A program for identification, screening and assessment ~~program for~~ of persons with disabilities is organized in a regular basis at each district level under Women, Child, Senior Citizen and Divyangjan Welfare Department in collaboration with Health Department, NGOs, Gram Panchyat Members and Urban Local Bodies.
- (ii) Distribution of aids and appliances as per requirement of the individual with disability.
- (iii) Issuance of disability certificate to PWDs in order to avail the various benefits provided to them by the state government as well as the central government.
- (iv) Indira Gandhi National Disability Pension Scheme (IGNDPS) of Rs. 2000 per month for 18 years and above with 80% and above disability persons.
- (v) Chief Minister State Disability Pension Scheme (CMSDPS) of Rs. 1500 per month for 1 years and above with 40%- 79% disability persons.
- (vi) Online registration for Pre-Metric, Post-Metric and Top-Class Education scholarships through the department of Empowerment of PWD, MSJ&E, Government of India.
- (vii) Cash awards for students with disabilities in class X and XII (Arts, Science and Commerce streams) under State Level School Toppers Scheme. Rs. 50,000 for first position and Rs. 35,000 for second position.
- (viii) One time grant of Rs. 2 lakhs under Sikkim Grant Award for Marriage with Person with Disabilities.
- (ix) 4% of horizontal reservation for Person with Disabilities in government employment.
- (x) 5% seat reservation for higher studies to the Persons with Disabilities (PWD).
- (xi) State government provide conveyance allowance of Rs.1000 per month to all the disabled government employees with bench mark disabilities working under the state government including semi government organization, government undertakings, Boards and Commissions, etc.
- (xii) Allocation of designated parking space in all the public places such as market, government offices, shopping malls, etc to park the vehicles of Persons with Disabilities (PWDs).
- (xiii) All the Persons with Disability shall be allowed to use public toilets in the state of Sikkim free of cost.



- (xiv) The State Transport Department (SNT Division) provides 100 % free of cost to the Persons with Disabilities to travel in the state own transport within and outside the state.
- (xv) The government of Sikkim with the notification no 40/Home/2020 dated 04.08.2020 and notification no 49/Home/2022 notified following each district session's court as special court for speedy trial under section 84 of RPwd Act 2016. The following courts are Court of Session at Gangtok, Court of Session at Mangan, Court of Session at Gyalshing, Court of Session at Namchi, Court of Session at Pakyong and Court of Session at Soreng.
- (xvi) Shelter workshop was established at Jawaharlal Nehru Memorial Institute (JNMI), Namchi for production and hands-on training centre for vocational skill development to visually impaired persons. Vocational skill development training was organised for Special School for Children with Disabilities, Syari, Gangtok. Twenty five PWDs age 18 years and above have participated in the training. An establishment of Braille Press at Jawaharlal Nehru Memorial Institute (JNMI), Namchi district was another significant milestone for the development of vocational skill of visually impaired persons in the state.

#### 8. Suggestions to empower Divyangjan in Sikkim:

- (i) Organized Divya Kala Mela at each district level to showcase the potential talent of Person with Disabilities in a regular basis.
- (ii) Organized job fair mela for Person with Disabilities to avail equal opportunity to participate in workforce in a regular basis.
- (iii) Provide need based skill education and vocational training to every category of Person with Disabilities.
- (iv) Awareness campaign on umbrella scholarship scheme of government of India to avail benefits for every individual PWD.
- (v) Establish sports training centre facilities for disability sports personality to harness their talent in the field of sports.
- (vi) Early identification and intervention with need based appropriate support mechanism for every Divyangjan people.
- (vii) Felicitate with State Awards for Empowerment of PWD in different categories considering their contribution for the development of society.
- (viii) Felicitate with State Awards for different institutions engaged in empowering PWD in the state.
- (ix) Awareness campaign at every Gram Panchyat Unit (GPU) level in collaboration with NGOs and stakeholders regarding the law, policies, schemes and direct benefits avail to every individual PWD in the state of Sikkim.
- (x) Set a mechanism to follow up/ track every individual with PWD about their need, challenges and their progress.





## 9. Limitation of the Study:

The present study is limited to Namchi district only for procuring the data on policies and programs for the welfare of PWD in the state. Two participants from the WCSC&DWD of same district were considered for the interview and the state government notifications and official facebook page of government of Sikkim were used as the source of data collection for the study. Such type of study may be conducted in depth and systematic way with more sample size and area in near future.

## 10. Conclusion:

According to the RPwD Act of 2016, a person is considered disabled if they have a chronic physical, mental, intellectual, or sensory impairment that, when paired with additional barriers, keeps them from completely and equally engaging in society. In accordance with subsection (i) of section 2 of the CMSDPS Rules, 2020 following subsection (zc) of section 2 of the RPWD Act 2016, the Sikkim government has designated a specified disability. In recent days different program and activities addressing the rights of PWD have been organized in the state.

Purple Fair 2025 was celebrated at community hall, Pakyong, Sikkim on 19.03.2025 in a remarkable way. An event was organized to celebrate diversity and harness 'Divya kala' of Divyangjan in the form of dance, music, arts, cooking and sports. A long day event was decorated with the facilities of health camp and display of eye-catching handloom and mouth-watering food stalls. On March 19, 2025, a medical camp, assessment, and identification session for senior persons, children from daycare centers, and children with impairments were held at the Jawaharlal Nehru Memorial Institute (JNMI) in Boomtar, Namchi. The medical camp had 122 participants in all. In order to acknowledge diversity and advance inclusivity in the state, the Women, Child, Senior Citizen, and Divyangjan Welfare Department (WCSC&DWD) commemorated the International Day of Persons with Disabilities (IDPD) 2024 in each of the six districts. Sikkim stands at forefront in implementation of RPWD Act 2016 in a decentralized approach. The Gram Panchyat Members, Urban Local Bodies, Non-Governmental Organization (NGOs) and different stakeholders actively involved in different program and awareness campaign for promoting diversity and in fact such organizations have become a beacon for an inclusive Sikkimese society.

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### Abbreviations used:

CMSDPS	= Chief Minister State Disability Pension Scheme
CWSN	= Children with Special Needs
DEPWD	= Department of Empowerment of Persons with Disabilities
GOI	= Government of India
GPU	= Gram Panchyat Unit
IDPD	= International Day of Persons with Disabilities
IGNDPS	= Indira Gandhi National Disability Pension Scheme
JNMI	= Jawaharlal Nehru Memorial Institute
MOSJE	= Ministry of Social Justice and Empowerment
NGO	= Non- Governmental Organization
PWD	= Persons with Disabilities
RPWD ACT 2016	= Rights of Persons with Disabilities Act, 2016
SNT	= Sikkim Nationalized Transport
UNCRPD	= United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities
WHO	= World Health Organization
WCSC&DWD	= Women, Child, Senior Citizen and Divyangjan Welfare Department