

# “A Comparison of Provision and Access to Quality Education in the Light of SDG-2030 for Students with Disabilities in Sikkim and Dehradun”

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## Abstract

Goal number 4 of Sustainable Development Goal (SDGs-2015) ensures inclusive and equitable quality education and promotes lifelong learning opportunities for all. Target is to achieve the goal by 2030. The 2023 special edition report of SDG-2030 based on latest data and estimates, presents an assessment and update of progress made towards the development of the goals. It was submitted in response to General Assembly resolution entitled: “Transforming our world: the 2030 agenda for sustainable development”. The report indicates the areas that need urgent action and puts forward major recommendations. This article reports a small scale study on the provisions and access to quality education for students with disabilities in the light of SDG-2030, in Sikkim, a State in the North-eastern part of India and Dehradun, a city in the Northern part of India. Data from both the locations was obtained through purposive sampling of families of students with disabilities and professionals who support them. Interview questions were administered on the subjects in local language of the respective states as well as Hindi and English. The responses were then sorted, discussed and presented enabling a qualitative comparison of the experiences of access to quality education for students with disabilities in these 2 locations. Quality and equity in education are directly proportional to the quality of support services provided to the students with disabilities by appropriate governments of state and country. It is a question of awareness, availability, affordability and accessibility. Awareness in disability legislations, training for continuous professional development of both general and special educators are perceived to be two major concerns in the way toward achieving the objectives of goal 4.

**Key words:** Collaborative teaching, remedial teaching, inclusive education, sustainable development goals, accessibility, students with disabilities, disability legislation, 3 language formula, equity

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## I. Introduction: Purpose of Study

There are many instances in history on the inclusivity of education in The Indian Knowledge System (IKS). Our education system was by nature inclusive. The individual was given more priority and not the disability. Ancient heritage of our country speaks volumes on the efforts made by authorities and persons with disabilities themselves in order to be participatory as well as contributing members of society (Kumari, 2019). In The Mahabharata, Dhritrashtra (a good king), was the king of Hastinapur at the time of Kurukshetra war, the epic’s climactic event. He along-side his younger half brother Pandu was trained in military arts by the mighty Bhishma and the great teacher of the times, Kripacharya.

Another legend, Ashtavakra, who was deformed in 8 places in his body, completed his education along with all others at the age of 12 after which he challenged and defeated renowned scholars on vedic knowledge at the court of Raja Janaka. Hence, inclusive education is a concept very generic to Indian Knowledge System which is being carried forward through legislations passed in parliament, exercised after signing of international conventions. A few states in India have implemented national disability legislations but there is still a long way to go and miles to achieve in this direction. The fact that we are in the midst of achieving the SDG-2030 target it becomes imperative that the beneficiaries of quality education services be compared and assessed as to where we stand at this juncture and what other steps could be taken to move forward toward in achieving the goals.

### Philosophy behind Sustainable Development Goals

United Nations in the year 2015 adopted The Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) aiming to transform our world. They are a call to action to end poverty and inequality, protect the planet, and ensure that all people enjoy health, justice and prosperity. It is critical that no one is left behind. The SDG special edition

UN official report that monitors global progress on the 2030 agenda for sustainable development observes that 2 major incidents in history have affected the progress of achieving the targets of SDG-2030. They being COVID-2019 and the Ukraine war. To meet the goals in this post covid era it has suggested stronger willingness from nations and stakeholders on an equal footing (SDG Special Edition Report, 2023).

India is one among the 193 members who is a signatory to the goals. NITI Aayog is the nodal institution for implementing SDGs in the country, leading the 2030 Agenda (disability rehabilitation through quality education included). Authorities have realized localization of the SDGs as the key to reach farthest behind first. These realizations and efforts have strengthened the statistical systems and developed a monitoring framework covering all the 17 Goals and more than 100 indicators across the country. A presentation from its website published in the 2018 says that Sikkim and Uttarakhand have mapped their concerned departments for implementation of SDG goals. Samagra Shiksha Abhiyan, National Skill Development Corporation (NSDC), Mid-Day Meal Scheme and Digital India are centrally sponsored schemes aligned with SDG for implementation of its 4<sup>th</sup> goal. Pandey (2018) says that India has made significant progress towards implementing the scheme of Education for All (quality inclusive education for the persons with disabilities included). Several key programmes and policies have been initiated to provide free and compulsory education to all children in the age group of 6 to 14 years of age as a fundamental right. Initiatives such as Samagra Shiksha Abhiyan and Right to Education (RTE) have given the desired impetus to education system (including education of the disabled) in India. The Indian National Education Policy (NEP), as enacted in 2020, emphasizes the inclusion of IKS into curriculums at all levels of education and encompasses the much needed provision of equity (need based) and quality in the education of students with disabilities.

The Indian National Context for meeting SDG 4 for Persons with Disabilities:

4 Legislations have been passed aiming comprehensive rehabilitation of Persons with Disabilities.

They are:

- Rehabilitation Council of India(RCI) Act- 1992(for standardised training)
- National Trust Act, 1999 for the Persons with Autism, Cerebral Palsy, Intellectual Disability and Mental Illness
- Rights of Persons with Disabilities, RPWD Act-2016 and
- Mental Healthcare Act-2017

## **II. Dehradun-The Research Location-1**

Dehradun, is one of the oldest cities of India. It attained the provisional capital of Uttaranchal (now Uttarakhand) in the year 2000. It is also known as ‘Drone Nagri’ or ‘The Abode of Drone’, named after the great guru (teacher) Dronacharya. Situated in the foot hills of the Himalayas, its altitude is 640 mts. (2100 ft) above sea level. Total area of the district is 3088 sq kms. Its geomorphological and meteorological characteristics make it prone to a number of natural calamities. The region is frequently devastated by earthquakes, landslides, cloudbursts, flash-floods, cold waves and hailstorms.

It is the most populous districts in the state of Uttarakhand with a population of 16,96,694 (Govt. of UK).

Hindi, the official state language, is the primary language in Dehradun.

Dehradun is known as "a town of schools" (Chopra, 2019). Notable private educational institutions in Dehradun include The Doon School, Welham Boys School and Welham Girls School etc. Several Indian and international luminaries have attended these schools. In addition to these schools there are many other state board schools located in the city. Since Dehradun has many central Government offices, there are many Kendriya Vidyalayas also in the city.

Many National Institutes like National Skill Training Institute (NSTI), Indian Military Academy (IMA), Lal Bahadur Shastri National Academy of Administration (LBSNAA)etc. are home to the city of Dehradun. National Institute for the Empowerment of Visual Disabilities (Divyangjan) NIEPVD, one of the country’s prestigious institutions completing its glorious 78 years of providing rehabilitation services to the visually impaired persons. It is equipped with Training Centre for the Adult Blind (TCAB) to ensure reintegration of blind soldiers including other persons in the field of work. In 1951, the Government established the Central Braille Press (CBP); in 1952, the Workshop for the Manufacture of Braille Appliances (MBA); in 1954, the Sheltered Workshop; in 1957 the Training Centre for the Adult Blind Women (TCAB); in 1959, the Model School for the Visually Handicapped (MSVH) and in 1963, the National Library for the Print Handicapped (NLPH) now known as National Accessible Library (NAL) were established. It also undertakes RCI standardized courses on disabilities. MSVH provides quality education to the students with visual impairment. Apart from indoor games like chess, snakes and ladders, blind football and blind cricket are played by the students. Stem courses have been introduced in higher classes as a part of latest development

initiative. Students have represented the school and the state in many sports events and earned laurels for the Institution. The school has produced luminaries who have joined the Indian Administrative Service (IAS), serving in various other professions and are contributing in nation building.

### **III. Sikkim- The Research Location-2**

With a surface area of 96 sqkm, equivalent to the size of a small district in the more populated states of India, Sikkim is the least populous and second-smallest among the Indian states after Goa. Its Situated in the Eastern Himalaya almost the entire state is hilly and a difficult terrain, with an elevation ranging from 280 metres (920 ft) in the south at the border with West Bengal to 8,586 meters (28,169 ft) in the northern peaks. It is due to this reason it has been found that many professionals from outside are also reluctant to opt this location as a work destination.

English is taught in schools and used in government documents. Nepali, Lepcha and Bhutia are languages spoken widely. Sikkim became the 22nd state of the Indian Union, on 16 May 1975. Tourism makes a lot of the money in this small organized state of India. Composite Regional Rehabilitation Centre (CRCs), District Disability Rehabilitation Centre (DDRCs), Women & Child Development Department (WCDD) along with a few NGOs are the main agencies that look after the rehabilitation works of Persons with disabilities in the state. CRCs have been set up by the Ministry of Social Justice and Empowerment (MSJ&E), Department for the Empowerment of Persons with Disabilities (DEPWD), GOI., with an objective of reaching the unreached. There are 21 CRCs all over the country as of now functioning under the administrative control of National Institutes. CRC-Sikkim is one such centre under National Institute for Locomotor Disabilities (NILD), Kolkata. Provision of assistive devices, therapy based services and special education are a few of their core objectives. As reported by (Deepak, 2016), it is not easy to find reports by civil society and organisations for persons with disabilities, presenting their side of the story about how the different schemes and plans for the disabled are implemented in Sikkim. Although many other sources say that most places are barrier free, however, on a visit to the state one finds that there are many hurdles that come in between the beneficiaries and service providers. Distance and difficult terrain is one among them.

### **IV. Research Instruments**

The report of this paper is a result of a small-scale investigation, aimed to compare the current status of provision and access to quality education in the Light of SDG-2030 for Students with Disabilities in two distinct locations of the country. It aims at understanding the disparities in delivery of quality education to the persons with disabilities. 3 schools i.e. 1 Kendriya Vidyalay(CBSE), 1 State-run govt. school and 1 private school(ICSE) from each location were chosen for the purpose. Electronic documents were retrieved and analysed that helped in formalizing research questions (Goldstein & Reiboldt, 2004). They were prepared keeping in mind the objectives of SSA aligned to implement SDG goal 4 and NEP-2020 which were then administered in both locations. These research questions were the focal points of investigation in the study:

1. What kind of support is provided to the students with disabilities in school?
2. What kind of pre-service or in-service training was provided to teachers engaged in teaching students with disabilities?

Electronic records of documents available on websites were collected and analysed to draw conclusions on the study (Grant, 2019). Document analysis is a systematic procedure for reviewing or evaluating documents—both printed and electronic (Computer-based and Internet- transmitted) material (Bowen, 2009). Atkinson and Coffey (1997) refer to documents as ‘social facts’, which are produced, shared, and used in socially organised ways (p. 47).

### **V. Findings**

Realisation of urgency and the need to uplift the disabled population came into light only after Covid-19. Also, quality and equity in education is directly proportional to the quality of support services provided to the students with disabilities. SSA, National Council for Education Research and Training (NCERT), District Institute for Education and Training (DIET) and State Council for Educational Research and Training (SCERT) along with National Institutes, CRCs, WCDD are the nodal agencies along with private Non govt. organizations (NGOs) are working for the purpose in both the locations. Uttarakhand is the first state to implement NEP at pre- primary level. 'Bal Vatikas' at anganwadi kendras across the state to strengthen the pre-primary education system. The 'Bal Vatikas' function at 4,457 anganwadi kendras in the state and are equivalent to the nursery classes at a private school. This has covered Early Childhood Care and Education (ECCE). Setting up of Early Intervention Centres in both locations has been initiated in both locations.

Beti Bachao Beti Padhao (BBBP) scheme is operated in all other districts of Uttarakhand including Dehradun is a positive initiative to bridge the gender gaps in school education, prevent and increase the decline in child sex ratio and seeks to empower women, honor them and increase opportunities.

In Sikkim, training program of teachers on National initiative for Proficiency in Reading with Understanding and Numeracy(NIPUN) was undertaken in the lines of learn and read for nursery to class 2 and learn system from class 3 onwards. This laid emphasis on Foundational Literacy and Numeracy (FLN). Resource teachers in various blocks have been appointed lately, who collaborate with the general teachers and strive to provide equity in education. General teachers of Pakyong district have attended various disability orientation program on a regular basis organized by CRC Sikkim covering around 300 teachers as published in a local news paper report.

System of Bal vatika course for 3 months for nursery LKG UKG and class 1 and Vidya Pravesh have been initiated to refine them under Right of Children to Free and Compulsory Education (RTE) Act, 2009 and hence increase percentage of enrollment.

Training in National Initiative for School Heads and Teachers Holistic Advancement (NISHTHA) by nodal agencies like the NCERT in the centre and SCRET and DIET in the states which has strengthened these agencies and helped to train both general and special teachers. This is in progress in both states. It is a thrust on Holistic, Integrated, Inclusive and activity based Curriculum and Pedagogy to impart 21st century skills among the students. It has also been initiated for provision of quality education and enhancing learning outcomes of students.

## **VI. Comparison**

Although both the locations are separated by distance they both have one thing in common

i.e. they are surrounded by high mountains and they both lie in the foothills of the Himalayas. Uniqueness of Dehradun lies in its vastness whereas that of Sikkim lies in its hilly terrain. Hence, the similarity in rate of progress in meeting the target of SDG-4. Government of India has been promoting equity and inclusion in schools despite the hurdles and challenges unique to both the locations. Nodal and implementing agencies that provide support services to the students with disabilities are common which ensures uniformity in the system that is slowly catching up and surely, falling on tract. Students with disabilities have been able to access the services provided by various agencies after 2015 and relatively more after the passage of RPWD Act, 2016.

According to the head master of a renowned school in Dehradun, enrolment rate of students with disabilities in mainstream schools although was low in the year 2023-24 but trends in the admission season and number of applications showed that the percentage was slowly picking up and was expected to rise in the year 2024-25. The same was true for Sikkim.

Knowledge of rights based services is minimum and almost the same in both locations. Enrolment rate of students in the age group of 3-6 yrs has increased after the boost in the Anganwadi, balwadi and Asha workers' ecosystem of services provided in both locations. Focus on Early Childhood Care and Education (ECCE) has proven to be a milestone in the future of Inclusive education in both the states.

Provision of assistive devices and special education facilities through practices like remedial teaching has boosted the confidence of the parents of students with disabilities that has in turn helped increase in enrolment to various special as well as general schools. However, more needs to be done in the field. Both the locations need to stress on need-based vocational education and training under trained teachers after class 6 which would further increase the rate of enrolment.

## **VII. Conclusion & recommendations**

With the present pace of development as well as implementation process of various schemes of Govt. of India and State govt. both Sikkim and Dehradun are on right track towards achievement of SDG goal 4. That spark of a bright future is certainly visible on the faces of families of students with disabilities.

Being in the midst of SDG-2030, this study finds that parents of the disabled students are concerned on the livelihoods of their wards. What would happen to their children after they had gone was a major concern followed by education.

Therefore, further research focused on vocational training of youth with disabilities and the innovative practices to generate employment to secure their future would be recommended.

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