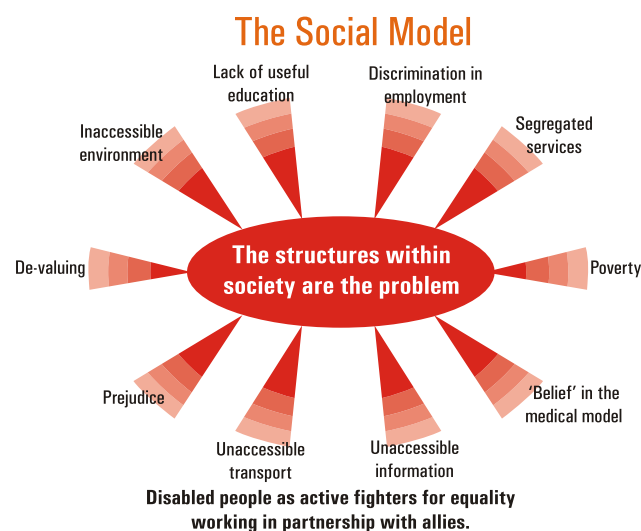


The second and more modern approach is the notion that challenges that such individuals face are a social construct; much in the same way that gender, race and ethnicity are socially constructed. In the social model the focus is on society, which imposes restrictions on the behavior of persons with impairment. It takes the view that persons with disabilities are rights holders and are entitled to strive to for institutional, physical, informational and attitudinal entitlements from society. Lack of useful education, discrimination in employment, poor access to information and a discriminatory environment are seen to be major social blockades that hinder the life of the intellectually challenged individual.



This transition from an individual, medical perspective to a structural, social perspective has been described as the shift from a 'medical model' to a 'social model' in which people are viewed as being disabled by society rather than by their bodies. But disability in itself should be viewed neither as purely

medical nor as purely social as the persons with disabilities can often problems arising from their health condition while facing discrimination from society.

The shift from the medical to the social model is a shift that is premised on a rights-based approach. Inclusion of children with disabilities and their families is rooted in the concept of equity. Central components of inclusion are access to standard healthcare services, and active participation in the community by removing social barriers.

Situation in India

Actions of the Government: India is mindful of its responsibilities towards its citizens who experience intellectual challenges in spirit - this commitment is enshrined in the Constitution of India and reflected in the National Policy on Persons with Disabilities (2006). The Policy recognizes that Persons with Disability are a valuable human resource and seeks to create an environment that provides them equal opportunities, protection of their rights and full participation in the society. India is also a signatory to the United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities which states "all persons with any kind of disability enjoy all the human rights and fundamental freedom". The Persons with Disabilities (Equal Opportunities, Protection of Rights and Full Participation) Act, 1995 aims to offer equal opportunities in public employment by reserving vacancies for persons with challenges. Intellectual challenges have been emphasized in the documents of the 12th Five Year Plan. In September 2012, the Ministry of Social Justice and Empowerment placed a new Bill (Rights of People with Disability) before Parliament which provides a special emphasis on intellectual challenges.

The Ministry of Social Justice and Empowerment is the nodal ministry for all matters relating to the implementation of policies for affected individuals. The Ministry has recently set up a separate department - the Department of Disability Affairs to coordinate and undertake initiatives to address disabilities. Medical and rehabilitation services are of utmost importance for the effective participation of the intellectually challenged individual. The government has established the National Institute for the Mentally Handicapped which serves as an apex body in the area of mental retardation. Another crucial component in moving towards inclusion is educational services. Government initiatives such as Education for All, the National Policy on Education, Sarva Sikhsha Abhiyan and the Right to Education are some of the platforms that provide the rights of equal education to all children, including those facing intellectual challenges. The Rehabilitation Council of India was set up as a registered society in 1986. Through the Rehabilitation Council of India Act (1992), it became a statutory body

of the Government of India. The mandate of the Rehabilitation Council of India is to regulate and monitor services provided to persons with disability, to standardize syllabi, and to maintain a register of all qualified professionals and personnel working in the field of rehabilitation and special education.

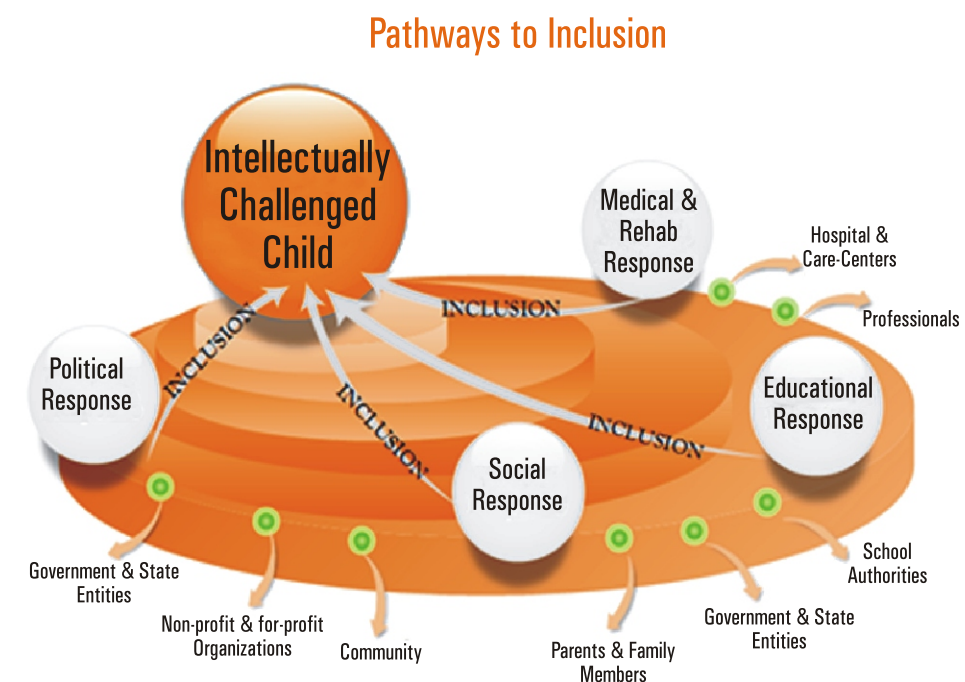
Yet, the situation is far from rosy. Accurate data on the actual number of people with disabilities, the extent of their disability, and their requirements is not accurately available and poses a huge constraint to formulate appropriate action. Reservations for persons with disabilities provided for by law, is not effectively enforced. The Rehabilitation Council of India has approved 436 institutes that train rehabilitation professionals in the country. However, experts agree that there is a crisis of trained rehabilitation professionals who can address the issues of children with intellectual challenges. In 2009, it was estimated that 300,000 rehabilitation professionals (of which 250,000 special educators) are needed to address the country's needs. In sharp contrast, only 38,000 professionals are registered in India.

Inclusion is much more than the child with special needs fitting in to his school environment. It is about the classroom becoming responsive to the needs of the child with intellectual challenges; of the child adapting to the world around them through basic life skills; and being supported to interact with and

accept their peers from varying backgrounds. A quick scan of the status of educational institutions for the intellectually challenged suggests two things. One, there is a need for more number of schools to cater to the population. Two, more schools need to be established in rural settings as 75% of those with challenges live in rural areas.

Actions by the non-governmental sector: Initiatives by non-governmental sector assume a greater importance given the inadequacies of government institutions in addressing the issue of intellectual challenges of childhood. The role of non-governmental organizations (NGO) in building a climate of inclusion is of particular significance.

The National Policy on Persons with Disabilities (2006) makes provisions for participation of the sector in service delivery and encourages their greater involvement in policy making. There are an estimated 1.2 million NGO in India employing about 19.4 million persons. Current Planning Commission NGO partnership data suggests that there are some 10,000 NGO who work with differently-abled persons. Yet data on the Ministry of Social Justice and Empowerment website indicates that the Ministry provided just over Rs. 24 Crores to 57 organizations in the public and NGO sector for all disabilities in 2010-11, not a very large sum given the needs of this sector.



A large number of NGO and private professionals work in the field of intellectual challenges of childhood. Some provide services organized by professional domain such as speech therapy or loco-motor aids, while others work across conditions such as mental retardation, autism and learning disabilities. A common area of partnership is training and technical assistance, apart from direct provision of services. In the last decade, cross-cutting disability organizations and networks have begun to emerge.

Yet the sector is not without its problems. There is a strong urban bias in presence and activities of NGO. A shift in the focus of these organizations from educational and rehabilitation services to advocacy and related functions such as access to justice and participation of the intellectually challenged individual in voting has been noted. Despite the strongly positive reports, there remain concerns about weak monitoring of NGO performance and accountability for use of public funds.