Understanding the existing budget space and priorities for community support for persons with disabilities in India

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Community support is a key component towards fulfilling the right of persons with disabilities to live independently and be included in the community. Community support systems entail a network of people, services and products that assist persons with disabilities to carry out daily life activities and participate in their communities, including:

- availability and accessibility of quality assistive devices at affordable costs,
- availability and accessibility of support services, such as personal assistant services and child care services,
- availability of accessible and inclusive living arrangements,
- basic income support compensating the extra costs of disability, and
- availability of transport support and other community services.

The absence of community support services can lead many persons with disabilities, particularly those experiencing high restrictions in participation, to be institutionalised, have lower education outcomes and lower opportunities for work and employment, resulting in poverty and further marginalisation. Moreover, people lose their opportunity to participate in the community decision-making processes.

Many low- and middle-income countries that have ratified the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (CRPD) are in different phases of implementing its obligations. This requires policy development and financial allocations.

India, home to 26.8 million persons with disabilities (as per census 2011), ratified the CRPD as early as 2007. Following the ratification, India passed the Rights of Persons with Disabilities Act 2016 and the Mental Health Care Act in 2017, intending to implement the CRPD. A budget analysis carried out to understand the level of implementation revealed that:

- The overall disaggregated specific allocations for persons with disabilities amounted to 0.068%, 0.075% and 0.068% of the Gross Domestic Product (GDP) of the country during the years 2021-22, 2020-21 and 2019-20, respectively.
- 0.044% of GDP goes for community support services and cash transfers for persons with disabilities during the financial year 2021-22.
- 0.041% of the allocation to community support services for the year 2021-22 goes to cash transfer.

For this analysis, we have considered budget allocation to assistive devices, cash transfers, personal assistant services, family support, community living arrangements, and community-based services. Family support includes items such as caregiver’s allowance and marriage incentives. Community living arrangement includes items of allocations such as hostels for working women with disabilities, and community-based services include programs that aim at the inclusion of persons with disabilities and transport allowance. Allocations to residential institutions are also mapped to highlight the quantum that goes for exclusion and the need for reframing such allocations to ensure the transition to community living.
The graph 1 below gives a detailed insight into the allocations for community support services in relation to GDP for the years 2017-18, 2018-19, 2019-20, 2020-21 and 2021-22. It could be observed that:

- Allocations to assistive devices remain at 0.0002% since 2018-19.
- Allocations to cash transfer have been the highest considering the other support service components. However, the overall allocation has been 0.041% of GDP.
- Allocations to other services are so small that could not be captured as a percentage of GDP.

Further, graph 2 below details the value of allocations across different community support services.
In India, budget allocations are made both at the Union and at the State levels. Union’s contribution has been approximately around 20% of the overall specific allocation for persons with disabilities. Allocations to programs like transport allowance, personal assistant services, and family support are primarily from the states. However, it has to be noted that not all state governments prioritise issues of persons with disabilities uniformly. The graph below gives an overview of allocations to programs leading to community support compared to Gross State Domestic Product (GSDP). It could be observed that:

- All States have state-specific pensions that top up the Union Government’s pension. However, the quantum of per capita allocation towards pension varies across the states of India. For example, states like Andhra Pradesh and Telangana have the highest per capita allocation of Rs. 3000 (USD 1.42 / day per person) and Rs 3016 (USD 1.43 / day per person), respectively.

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Whereas in Meghalaya it is only Rs.200 (USD 0.09 / day per person). Even the highest benefit works out to only 75% of the international basic poverty line of USD 1.90 / day per person.

- Only 14 out of 36 States and Union Territories have allocations for assistive devices. Union Government has the largest share of allocation. However, the allocation remains constant at Rs. 2.3 billion compared to 2019\(^2\).
- Only Kerala has a specific allocation for community-based services aimed at the inclusion of persons with disabilities.
- Only Karnataka and Odisha have community living arrangements, for example, working women’s hostels for women with disabilities; and only Delhi and Tamil Nadu have initiated personal assistant services.
- 14 States have a family support program, which primarily constitutes allocation for marriage incentives. This program, if designed properly, could help cover the extra costs of setting up homes for persons with disabilities. Only Tamil Nadu and Kerala have caregiver’s allowance.
- Almost all states fund some form of institutions. The entire fund should be reviewed and reallocated to promote community inclusion, ensuring choice and control.
- The limited allocations across components across states, except cash transfer, are declining overall as a percentage of GSDP. Cash transfer remains the same in most of the States compared to GSDP.
- Graph 4 below gives an overview of the ratio of total allocations for social support allocations to the total disbursements across states.

Apart from the low budgetary allocation, there are also design issues that undermine the effectiveness of the existing programs for community support, for example:

- Mandating income ceiling for accessing various programs such as assistive devices and cash transfers.
- Accessing one benefit, particularly cash transfer, makes it ineligible for accessing other forms of support such as unemployment allowance.
- Lack of programs such as personal assistant and care services across the country except in 2 states.
- Mostly transport concessions are conditioned by limited access. Lack of plan for ensuring last mile connectivity to access public transport services.

**Conclusion**

Community support services are critical to the full and effective inclusion and participation of persons with disabilities. There is a need for the Government to:

a) Initiate new programs that ensure support services like personal assistant services,

b) Review and reframe existing policies and programs to address the design issues and lead to inclusion and full and effective participation of persons with disabilities.

c) Expand budget for support services for all persons with disabilities.

\(^2\) Union Budget, Government of India
Graph 4: Ratio of allocations to programs related to community support to the Total Disbursements of the States as a %

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Source: Authors compilation and the data on total disbursements from the compilation of CBGA³

³ Source: Open Budgets India (2022): ‘Sector Dashboard- Aggregate Budget Indicators’, available at https://sectors.openbudgetsindia.org/scheme/aggregate_budget