PERSONS WITH DISABILITIES, THEIR ORGANISATIONS AND REHABILITATION SERVICES IN SIKKIM
Persons With Disabilities, Their Organisations And Rehabilitation Services In Sikkim

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This report about the situation of persons with disabilities, their organisations and the rehabilitation services in the state of Sikkim is based upon a visit carried out in Gangtok in May 2015. This report should be seen as a work in progress. Disability activists, members of disabled persons organisations and organisations active in the disability & rehabilitation sector in Sikkim are invited to share information to improve this report. Comments about the report will also be welcome.
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GENERAL INFORMATION ABOUT SIKKIM

The tiny state of Sikkim is part of the North-East region of India. With a surface area of around 7,000 sq km and a population of about 0.6 million, Sikkim is a tiny state. In terms of population it can be considered as equal to a district in many other states of India.

Sikkim is divided into 4 districts – East Sikkim (Gangtok), North Sikkim (Mangan), South Sikkim (Namchi) and West Sikkim (Geyzing). About 50% of the state population lives in East Sikkim, in and around the district and state capital, Gangtok.

On the other hand, North Sikkim district has the largest surface area and the smallest population (around 45,000), with very low population density.

PERSONS WITH DISABILITIES IN SIKKIM

According to the 2011 census, about 2.5% of the population (around 18,000 persons) in Sikkim had a disability. Around 44% of the persons with disabilities in Sikkim had a disability certificate at the time of this census.

Sikkim has only one District Disability Rehabilitation centre (DDRC) and is based in Gangtok.

Low population density and the lack of infrastructures outside the few urban centres make it difficult for persons with disabilities in Sikkim to access services. The state is full of hills and mountains, which creates additional barriers for persons with locomotor disabilities.

OBJECTIVES OF THE VISIT

Mobility India’s “Inclusive Development Centre”, based in Guwahati (Assam) focuses on the 8 states of the north-east region including Sikkim. The one week long visit was carried out in May 2015 as a first step in learning about the situation of persons with disabilities, their organisations and the rehabilitation services in the state of Sikkim.

INFORMATION ABOUT PERSONS WITH DISABILITIES, THEIR ORGANISATIONS AND REHABILITATION SERVICES COLLECTED DURING THE VISIT

During discussions with different persons about the organisations involved in disability related activities in different parts of Sikkim, only 2 non-governmental organisations were mentioned – Sikkim Vikalang Sahayata Samiti (SVSS) and the Spastic Society of Sikkim (SSS). SSS is the only RCI recognised training centre in Sikkim for its course on care giving.

Apart from these 2 NGOs, some persons also mentioned about some special schools, though most of these were small structures and with limited number of students. For
example, the Special School for Hearing Impaired near Tamang Gumpa in Gangtok has 16 students.

Repeated questions to a number of stakeholders, failed to provide any information about any existing community-based disability-rehabilitation programmes in Sikkim. Similarly no information was available on any Disabled People Organisation (DPO) in the state.

Sikkim faces huge issues of physical accessibility because of its hilly terrain. In Gangtok, the presence of countless stairs in all public spaces including in almost all houses and sidewalks, make the use of wheel chairs very difficult.

Sikkim’s only DDRC is based in the STNM Hospital complex in Gangtok. It was created in 2000. It also has a Mobile Rehabilitation Unit Van.

Identification of children and adults with disabilities in the state is carried out during the Assessment Camps organized annually at block (sub-district) level. Social Welfare Division of the Social Justice, Empowerment and Welfare department along with NGOs, health professionals and Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan(SSA) take part in these camps. Such camps are important for identification and screening of children/persons with disability and providing disability certificates and technical appliances.

State Project Office (Inclusive Education) of Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan (SSA) under Human Resource Development Department, carries out training of school teachers for elementary education for the 6 to 14 years age group. It has prepared a book for this training that is given to all the Government schools (Inclusive education in Sikkim – A handbook on disabilities and its causes, symptoms and management). In 2008, officially there were 708 children with disabilities in the 6 to 14 years age group registered in the state out of which about 87% were enrolled in schools.

As per the recent SSA data of 2014-15, the total identified “children with special needs” (6 to 14 Years) were 1547, out of whom 1350 were enrolled in school system and 197 were out of Schools. Thus, this data showed that 87.3% of children with disabilities were in the mainstream education in Sikkim. This is a very good coverage of Inclusive Education programme in Sikkim. The efforts are being done to increase the percentage of coverage. Those children who cannot be enrolled in mainstream schools will be covered through “Home Based Education”.

Persons with disabilities in Sikkim can benefit through 2 different pension schemes:

- Indira Gandhi Disability Pension (IGDP) scheme provides 700 Rs per month to persons in the age group of 18 to 79 years, and 1000 Rs per month to persons above 80 years. To get this pension, persons must belong to Below Poverty Line with at least 80% disability.
- A state grant of subsistence allowance provides 600 Rs per month to persons with at least 40% disability, not covered under the IGDP.

In 2013, Sikkim launched another programme to support marriages of persons with disabilities, where couples get 2 lakh one time grant, if one of them has a disability. The state also provides scholarships to students with disabilities studying inside or outside the state.

The Spastic Society of Sikkim (SSS) runs a Special Education and Rehabilitation day-care centre in Gangtok, conducts awareness raising programmes, vocational training courses, art and cultural activities and works together with Government departments during disability screening camps. It is the state nodal agency for National Trust of India. Some of its activities such as appointment of legal guardians, development of sports facilities and rural awareness programme, cover all the 4 districts of Sikkim.

The second NGO, SVSS has a vocational training (beautician, computer use) centre and a small orthopaedic workshop in Gangtok. It organises disability screening and distribution of aids and appliances camps in different parts of the state and surgical camps for children with cleft lips and palate. It has some activities in Singhtam and Namchi, but has only one office (in Gangtok).

Sikkim Helping Hands is an umbrella organisation of NGOs, first created to provide support to victims of earthquake in Sikkim in 2011. It can be a medium to reach different Sikkim NGOs, through its Facebook page.

**BENEFICIARIES OF TECHNICAL APPLIANCES IN SIKKIM – EVALUATION REPORT 2013**

Regarding the technical appliances, a national level evaluation survey carried out in 2013 had contacted 143 out of 274 beneficiaries of appliances in Sikkim during 2007-10. Some details of this report are given below (full report can be consulted online at the link below).

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79% of those had received an appliance for a locomotor disability, while 18% had a hearing impairment and 3% had a vision impairment.

Among those 143 persons, 12% were below 15 years, 31% were 16 to 30 years, 23% were in 31 to 50 years, 20% were in the 51 to 75 years and 14% were in above 76 years old age groups. 67% of them were illiterate and only 2% had studied up to higher secondary.

6% of 143 persons had a job, 17% were self-employed while 77% were not working. Majority of persons who were working had limited incomes (between 1500 to 2000 Rs per month).

To receive the appliances, most persons had applied to ALIMCO, DDRC or to the State Handicapped Corporation (a channelizing agency under Social Welfare). The most common appliances were wheel chairs and crutches.

As a result of the appliances, about 65% of the respondents said that they feel less dependent, about 16% had improved mobility and about 14% was able to resume study/work. There were no complaints regarding the quality of mobility-appliances like wheel chairs, tricycles and crutches etc. while there were some complaints about the quality of hearing aids and artificial limbs. It was reported that utility of tricycles and wheelchairs was limited due to the geographical conditions.

In Sikkim, Artificial Limb Manufacturing Corporation and Narayan Seva Sansthan are the implementing agencies associated with ADIP scheme. Both organisation are based outside Sikkim and has no institutional facilities in the State. Therefore, coordination amongst implementing agencies and State and local authorities is missing and there is lack of follow-up of the beneficiaries. DDRC seems to be the preferred institution for replacing old devices or getting repairs on existing devices.

Some challenges identified during the evaluation included the following:

- Difficulty in reaching rural and isolated areas away from the cities, so they remain uncovered.
- Lack of local implementing agencies.
- Inadequate support provided to beneficiaries in adapting to the use of the appliance.
- Appliances such as callipers given to children become unsuitable as the children grow.
- Geographical barriers due to hilly areas limit the use of tricycles and wheelchairs.
- Sometimes the quality of appliances is poor, especially for hearing aids and artificial limbs.

The report on appliances in Sikkim concludes that “ADIP scheme is concerned with the curative and rehabilitative aspects of the disability. Scheme’s services ranging from the provision of Artificial Limbs, Wheel Chairs, callipers, Crutches, Walkers to corrective surgeries. Through these services, scheme has had a great Impact on the mobility of the beneficiaries. Therefore, overall scheme has a positive and constructive output on the Differently Abled beneficiaries. However, a large number of Differently Abled persons
are still deprived of the benefits because of the less frequent distribution of the appliances and low investment in the scheme.”

CONCLUSIONS

The above report is a result of brief first visit limited to the state capital Sikkim. It’s information regarding the situation of persons with disabilities in Sikkim is likely to be incomplete.

The overall impression is of a state that has to face enormous geographical challenges that create barriers to the accessibility of persons with disabilities to different services. The civil society organisations working for/with persons with disabilities seem to be very limited, without any DPOs and community-based interventions.

It may be worthwhile to create some dialogue with civil society organisations involved in community development activities (for example, with women groups or marginalised groups) to see if community-based rehabilitation (CBR) or community-based inclusive development (CBID) can be initiated.

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