
National Centre for Promotion of Employment for Disabled People: Dignifying the Disabled

Abstract

National Centre for Promotion of Employment for Disabled People (NCPEDP) is a not-for-profit organisation operating across India, championing the rights of people with disabilities. Its primary intervention area is policy advocacy through research, campaigns, mentoring, and leadership development to promote inclusion and rights of people with disabilities. The case journeys through how the founder's deep-felt connection with disability rights led the organisation to initiate and support a social movement, which culminated in passing of a milestone legislation in 2016 that sought to ensure rights of people with disabilities. This was soon followed by the passing away of the founder. The case examines how, despite this simultaneous success and setback, the organisation continued to retain its rights-based advocacy character and its commitment to the disability cause. The case seeks to engage the reader with how a small set-up is able to make remarkable strides within a span of two decades and what the organisational variables are that inform this: such as perspective, cultural cohesion, strategic design thinking, and strong governance. The case leaves the reader with an appreciation of how initial efforts of solitary individuals can end-up building a valuable legacy around which institutional spaces can spring.

Keywords: Disability Rights; Advocacy; Networked Organisations; Rights-based Organisations; Organisational Form and Design

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There is work to do and I don't have enough time to build consensus and please everyone. I will not be alive to see the change but I don't want the future generations of people with disabilities to experience an India that does not include them. (Javed Abidi, founder, NCPEDP)

“Nothing about us without us”

Recounting Javed Abidi's approach and tremendous contribution in advocating the rights of people with disabilities, Meenu Bhambhani, speaking in 2018 as the Vice President and Head of CSR at Mphasis, a prominent technology solutions provider, said:

When I look back, he (Javed Abidi) groomed many of us to believe in the basic premise of disability rights: “Nothing about us without us”. His every living moment was a testimony to this philosophy. He spoke for people with disabilities at a time when the issue was steeped in charity and pity. He taught us the language of rights and dignity. (Bhambhani, 2018)

Born to a middle-class family in Aligarh, Uttar Pradesh, Javed Abidi was diagnosed with spina bifida—a congenital impairment affecting the spine—early in his childhood. At the age of 15, an age when a youngster takes his first hesitant step towards the independence of adulthood, Abidi became a wheelchair user. He may have been wheelchair-bound, but refused to be wheelchair-confined. He continued the pursuit of education, receiving a scholarship and travelling to the USA to study mass communication. In 1989, he moved back to India with the aspiration of starting a career in journalism—much against the advice of his friends and parents, who felt there would be little scope in India for a wheelchair-bound young man to find a job. Javed, certain that they would be wrong, returned to India. Unfortunately, as he reflected later, the reality was quite different:

I thought that newspapers would readily employ me. But I was shattered when all the newspapers refused to employ me. They all appreciated my courage to take up journalism. They appreciated me, but refused to give me a chance. They were all unanimous in one stand: you cannot be a good journalist. I asked them to give me a story and a deadline but then too, they refused. They simply did not want me...Employers refused to look at my degree credentials. Instead, they would only stare at my wheelchair! (Rahman, 2001; Chari, 2009)

Refusing to give up, Abidi started working as a freelance journalist and happened to be at the offices of a small magazine—City Scan—when an opportunity arose. He recounts:

It was election time (in 1991) and they (City Scan) were covering all the seven parliamentary constituencies. They had interviewed four MPs from the city but were unable to get the other three as these were senior ministers in the central government. I was there when they were discussing these things. I told them that I will do it. And I got an appointment with Jagdish Tytler (then the Union Minister of State, Labour and Food Processing Industries) the next morning. I interviewed the three and I was an instant star. Soon, I started getting published in all the leading newspapers and magazines in Delhi and Mumbai. Times of India and the Illustrated Weekly are a few examples. (Rahman, 2001)

After the initial struggle to break through, Javed was finally “tasting success” in his dream field of journalism. But a conventional and normal run of career was not for Javed, much in keeping with his life so far. In 1991, he was offered the opportunity to set up and head the disability unit of the Rajiv Gandhi Foundation, which was just being established at the time. Reflecting on the offer, Javed said:

It was a big offer. But for it I was supposed to lose my favourite profession for which I had strived so long, and where after great struggle I was now establishing myself. I was being asked to sacrifice my passion. But I was clear that it is a very big opportunity that has come my way. (Rahman, 2001)

Javed accepted the offer and joined the Rajiv Gandhi Foundation in May 1992: his decision crystallised by a simple but powerful realisation:

Quitting journalism would not harm that sector, but refusing [the offer] would mean turning my back on so many things that I was angry about—and I don’t mean my disability, but the attitude of people to my disability. (Chari, 2009)

Thus, an innocuous question posed to him put a full stop to his progress in journalism and would find him, a “disabled” person, writing a new national charter for people with disabilities. His personal motto throughout his time working with disability rights, and by definition, the remainder of his life, was: “nothing about us without us” (Jayakumar, 2018).

Over the next few years, Javed channelled his energy and passion into bringing together many of the scattered and unorganised voices that had been demanding rights for people with disabilities in India since the 1970s and 80s, pushing for representation and access across all walks of life for people with disabilities and giving form to India’s disability rights movement. To understand the significance of this period, and of Javed’s landmark achievements in this space from 1992, it is important to understand the context of disability in India during that time.

The birth of the “cross-disability” movement

In India in the 1990s, people with disabilities were estimated to account for about 5-6% of the population, numbering around 60 million people, a non-trivial cohort by any stretch of any imagination. Together, they constituted more than the population of many Indian states, and indeed, several small countries.

Yet, they remained invisible and unheard, suffering a dismal status in the country. There were segregated “special schools” and similar arrangements in institutions of higher education, but these numbered very few. When it came to employment, the picture was even bleaker: over 30 years since the establishment of the first Special Employment Exchange by the Government of India in 1959, only about one lakh people with disabilities had obtained employment. There were job reservations in government departments and public sector undertakings, something that had been initiated in 1977, but these only applied to very low-ranking posts (Chari, 2009). Arman Ali, the current (2022) Executive Director of NCPEDP, reflects on the 1990s:

Back in 1999, we did a national study on the status of employment and also education. First, employment: we figured that only less than 1% of people with disabilities were getting any kind of employment. And then we figured that only 1% of people with disabilities were getting an education. And that less than 1% of those with 15 years of education were getting some kind of meaningful employment.

One of the main reasons for all this happening was because there was no access. No access to schools, and if you don't have access to schools, you don't get the education, and if you don't have primary education, then you don't get to higher education. And further, access is not limited to school infrastructure or a ramp there. It's also information, the curriculum, the data, value pedagogy, and so on. And it also has to take everybody along, it's not just one person who's in a wheelchair, you know; there are all kinds of disabilities.

Consequently, after over four decades of independence, there was still no legal protection of the rights of people with disabilities in India. Physical accessibility of transport services and buildings was very poor for people with disabilities. Indeed, the term “accessibility” as it applied to infrastructure was largely unheard of in India. The civil society landscape working on disability was divided into various segments, such as those for the blind, the deaf, associations of parents with developmentally or intellectually disabled children, and so on. Many organisations and specific initiatives were “islands of excellence,” but together there was little to speak of in terms of cohesive action (Chari, 2009). Rama Chari, Senior Program Officer at NCPEDP between 1998 and 2005 further adds that:

Moreover, the sector was dominated by non-disabled people—with their focus mainly on providing services for children. Fulfilling an important need, these services however could not address the rights of people with disabilities or ensure accessible facilities. Furthermore, most of these services were based in cities and had a limited reach. The government's role was restricted to providing welfare, which included providing grants to civil society initiatives and organisations and distributing disability aids and devices. The ministries focusing on development, like those dealing with education, employment, transportation, urban development, women and children, and so on did not address disability. Lack of awareness and indifference attached itself to disability. (Chari, 2009)

This was the context in which Javed Abidi envisioned a broad-based disability rights movement targeted at bringing about a change in the way disability was perceived in India. It was characterised by an emphasis on

inclusion and accessibility for all types of disability, including, but not limited to congenital, sensory, mobility, acquired, intellectual, and mental health. Thus, it was also known as the “cross-disability movement.”

The five pillars

In March 1994, Abidi was invited to lead the Indian panel of a discussion between Washington D.C, USA and New Delhi. In an impassioned speech to the Indian audience of the panel discussion, Javed asked, “Could we not give birth to an Indian disability rights movement here and now? Is this not the call of the hour?” The idea was endorsed by influential leaders of the disability sector. In April 1994, the Disabled Rights Group (DRG) was convened as the first broad-based “cross-disability” advocacy group in India (Chari, 2009).

With the group’s support, Javed was instrumental in drafting the Rights of Persons with Disabilities Act (1995). Its passage was not without obstacles. DRG, along with Javed, conducted “intense lobbying, organised press conferences, meetings, sit-ins, and street demonstrations” (Chari, 2009) to increase pressure on the houses of parliament to pass the bill. In December 1995, the newly-formed group, headed by Javed, staged a large protest in New Delhi, eventually leading to the major political formations setting aside differences and passing the bill into law. It was a landmark legislation in the history of disability rights in India, for the first time ringfencing the rights of people with disabilities into law and including the language of cross-disability (taking into account several types and categories of “disability”) (The National Trust, 2005). Javed summarised the journey of the disability rights movement in India in the 1990s, saying, “First, the nation was forced to recognise that we existed. Then, it was made to realise that we did not merely exist, but that we were citizens too!” (Chari, 2009).

Javed was looking to bring about a paradigm shift in the way society engaged with people with disabilities: from seeing them as subjects of sympathy and as dependents of State and public welfare, to understanding their realities and according to them their rights as citizens of the country. While Javed was keen on providing them access and representation across many spheres, he laid heavy emphasis on their economic independence through education and employment.

The passage of the 1995 Act provided a lot of visibility to the space of disability in India. Amongst several provisions of the Act, perhaps one of the most notable was the inclusion of a 3% reservation for employment in government institutions (The National Trust, 2005). For Javed, employment was the lever that could encourage the implementation of the provisions of the Act around the country, and be used to initiate a shift in the narrative of disability from welfare to one of the economic rights enshrined in law.

Convinced of this perspective and armed with the experience of the past few years, Javed, in 1996, with support from the Rajiv Gandhi Foundation, branched out from his role in the Foundation to set up the National Centre for the Promotion of Employment for Disabled People (NCPEDP). He joined NCPEDP as its first Executive Director in 1997. Reflecting on the founding philosophy of NCPEDP, Javed later said:

Access is the absolute and basic foundation needed for the empowerment of people with disabilities in India. Without access, neither education nor employment is possible. And none of the three are possible without adequate legislation and policy. Thus, for all the above four to materialise, awareness is essential. (Chari, 2009)

Awareness, access, education, employment, and legislation became the newly-founded organisation's five "pillars," which still stand today (2022), albeit with one addition since then: youth. This totality-of-advocacy would stand to materially benefit the disabled in India and would set NCPEDP apart from other like-minded civil society organisations. For the young organisation and its founder, there would follow a period of steadily reeling off of a list of outcomes, noteworthy for changing the ground rules for the disabled and igniting an otherwise dormant concern.

Lining up a legislative cavalcade

One of the earliest, a result of six months of hard efforts by NCPEDP, was the last-minute inclusion of a question on disability in the 2001 Census. It was the first step towards a long overdue formal count and credible data on the size of the disabled population of India. Javed put it succinctly when he said, "It is unfortunate how it never occurred to independent India to count the disabled until 2001. It won't be an exaggeration, therefore, to say that prior to that, we were merely shooting in the dark" (Kannan, 2010).

According to Javed, the government had been insisting up until that point that the figure amounted to less than one percent of the population, a figure he considered a gross underestimate, as research studies in India as well as figures from comparable countries such as Pakistan, had indicated a figure closer to five or six per cent (Srivathsan et al., 2011). He categorically emphasised the significance of inclusion in the census, saying:

When the Planning Commission sits down to allocate funds, they strictly go by the book; the statistics already available in the country. If you do not have the figures to show them, the funds are not going to come through...The Census data is the foundation on which the rights of the people with disability will be determined. Statistics have a huge impact on policy-making and resource allocation. It directly affects decisions on a host of issues ranging from reservations in schools to availability of good quality aids and appliances for the disabled. (Kannan, 2010; Srivathsan et al, 2011)

The results of the 2001 Census indicated that 2.1% of the population were living with disabilities—a figure which, although more than double the officially recognised figure, Javed and other activists in the space criticised as being far too low. The major issues identified were that census-takers were not trained in collecting data on the nuanced question due to its late inclusion, and that only five types of disabilities were included as valid responses. However, the fact remained that the disability category was officially a part of the census and a baseline figure was in place: the urgency and intensity of NCPEDPs efforts had caught the once-in-10-year opportunity at the last minute. The required changes would be made for the 2011 Census, including a large-scale awareness campaign to encourage those living with disability to overcome stigma and reveal their condition to census takers, so that the true number would come out (Kannan, 2010).

The visibility of this data was not without impact: in 2006, NCPEDP and other civil society organisations were able to use it to push through the National Policy on Persons with Disabilities (2006) (World Bank, 2007), and in 2007, India ratified the United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (UNCRPD), a rights-based convention. Its various clauses called for a shift away from the view of people with disabilities as the subject of welfare, charity, and social protection, towards their recognition as citizens with rights, the agency to claim these rights, and the ability to live as active members of society (Unnati, 2011).

Making the most of the publicity and attention following the ratification of the UN Convention, sustained efforts by NCPEDP along with the old advocacy group founded by Javed in 1993—the DRG—led to a governmental commitment in the 11th Five-Year Plan (2007-2012) to set up a new department under the Ministry of Social Justice and Empowerment that would focus in much greater detail on the “specialised nature of the subject of “disability,” the wide-ranging work to be done in the light of the UNCRPD, and the inadequacy of existing implementation structures.” The Department of Disability Affairs was thus formed in 2012 (Department of Empowerment of Persons with Disabilities, n.d.).

Indian law, as it pertained to disability, needed to be significantly reoriented to meet the country’s obligations under the UN Convention. The old Act passed in 1995 was found to need a huge number of amendments (over 300 by some measures) in order to meet these obligations (Shenoy, 2011). Advocacy efforts by NCPEDP led to consultations with the government in the wake of the ratification. Eventually, the decision was made to draft an entirely new law for the rights of disabled people, passed as the Rights of Persons with Disabilities Act (2016), with the very first line of its wording making clear its mandate: “to give effect to the United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities and for matters connected therewith or incidental thereto” (Ministry of Law and Justice, 2016). The Act expanded the list of recognised disabilities from seven to 21 (refer to Exhibit 1) and for the first time provided “teeth” to the legal framework for disability: penalties were in place for non-compliance, and the provision for fast-track special courts to deal with cases of non-compliance. Speaking in 2017, Javed reflected on the passage of the 2016 Act:

We are very happy with this law. At the outset I can concede that no law is perfect. I think that if you heard contradictory voices, it is because they were searching for perfection. This process (of drafting a new law) started six or seven years ago. In our search for perfection, we lost that many years. Honestly, I would give the new law 7 on 10. It gives us so much that we did not have.

Learning disability was not considered a disability in India. Haemophilia, Thalassaemia, dwarfism, muscular dystrophy, cerebral palsy, autism were not considered disabilities either. So people with those disabilities who weren’t even considered disabled will now get that protection. That in itself is huge.

Second, the 1995 law did not cover the private sector at all. This law devolves responsibility to the private sector as far as accessibility is concerned. When it comes to jobs, the quota is restricted to the government. We are okay with that. I personally don’t believe in the philosophy of quotas to begin with, but the new law very categorically says that anything that the private sector constructs, whether it is universities or offices or shopping places, has to be accessible. In the education sector the previous law restricted accessibility to establishments of the government. The new one extends it to establishments funded by the government or recognised by it. This extends the responsibility of providing accessibility to the private sector.

Third, for the first time the law is saying that people with mental disabilities, including those with intellectual disabilities and psychosocial disabilities, can work. This is being said in a country where until very recently people with mental

disability were sort of equated with being vegetables. So to say now that even if you have a mental disability you can work, and you should be provided that opportunity, is to my mind a huge paradigm shift. It will impact employment not just in the government but in the private sector in a big way. (Civil Society News, 2017)

A moment of pause.

These reflections were poignant for perhaps they were amongst the last few public remarks that captured Javed's sense of attainment of the past and renewed the compact with the future. Not too long after the passage of the 2016 Act—a major milestone in a lifelong struggle to bring attention to the rights of those with disabilities—Javed Abidi passed away on the 4th of March, 2018, aged 53, of a chest infection. Tributes poured in from around the country, and indeed, the world¹.

NCPEDP, and in particular its Board, were faced with a heavy challenge of filling a vacuum like no other. It is after all rare that intellect, intensity, charisma, fortitude, fortune and misfortune, all attend to a person and weave a fine legacy, and that too in a remarkably short span of time. Som Mittal, Chairman of NCPEDP's Board of Trustees, speaking shortly after Javed's passing, said:

I think there are very few people who are crusaders like him. And that's why, I think, the shock of his passing away at this untimely time (was so great) because it's not easy to replace and get champions like him. That's why we are all feeling so sad and hurt. (Newz Hook, 2018)

The challenge was further encumbered by the fact that continuance of NCPEDP mattered: what it had started it could not afford to halt. There were many expectations that had affixed to it. The Board faced the ultimate question of how to preserve and build upon a living legacy.

After much careful deliberation and thought, they approached Arman Ali, who was at the time working as the Executive Director of Shishu Sarothi in Assam: a nonprofit working for the rehabilitation and protection of the rights of children with disabilities throughout northeast India. Arman was a long-term friend and mentee of Javed, and was himself a member of the core team that had drafted the 2016 Act along with Javed. Confirming Arman's appointment as the new Executive Director of NCPEDP, Som Mittal said:

Given the niche position NCPEDP occupies in the disability rights movement of India, we, the trustees, were acutely aware of the responsibility vested in us to find an appropriate successor to our late Executive Director Javed Abidi. We are confident that we have found in Arman someone who is well aware of the issues and the needs of the sector, and brings capabilities, passion and energy to carry the NCPEDP charter forward, working with all partners and stakeholders. (Mohan, 2018)

¹ He was also the Global Chair of Disabled People International (DPI), the first global international organisation of persons with disabilities, which also held a formal consultative status with the United Nations.

In 1998, when Arman was just 18, he travelled from Guwahati, Assam, where he was based, to New Delhi. The occasion: he had won the Ministry of Social Justice and Empowerment's national award for "Outstanding Performance as the Most Efficient Disabled Employee," presented by then Prime Minister Atal Bihari Vajpayee (Arman was born with cerebral palsy—a condition affecting muscle balance—and has been a wheelchair-user since 2010). Following the awards ceremony, Arman had some time to himself in the city. He had heard of Javed Abidi but had no exposure to disability rights then. He decided to attend one of NCPEDP's national conventions which happened to be going on at the time (Sethu, 2021). It was where he met "Javed bhai."

Arman's association with Shishu Sarothi in fact started upon Javed's recommendation to the young Arman that he should work in the NGO's Disability Law Unit set up in partnership with NCPEDP. Disability Law Units were an NCPEDP initiative which started in 2012: regional offices were set up around the country to provide legal aid to people with disabilities, and increase awareness of legal provisions under the 1995 Act. Shishu Sarothi was designated the Disability Law Unit for northeast India (Newz Hook, 2020). Arman Ali was therefore no stranger to what constituted the heart of NCPEDP. On his appointment as the Executive Director of NCPEDP, Arman said:

I took over as the Executive Director after the untimely demise of Mr. Javed Abidi—a man I looked up to as my mentor, my teacher, and my anchor...I am deeply aware of the huge responsibilities I have ahead of me: to maintain the same momentum, the same energy, the same impact as Mr. Abidi had on the disability rights movement of this country and the enormous work that needs to be done to achieve that... It was a long struggle led by Mr. Abidi that resulted in the enactment of the Rights of Persons with Disabilities Act (2016) and saw millions of disabled citizens of India come together to rally for a law that was based on rights, equality, and nondiscrimination. (NCPEDP, 2019)

A living legacy: rights, not services

Locating an organisation like NCPEDP within the landscape of civil society is not a straightforward task. Garimella Subramanian, Deputy Editor of The Hindu and former board member of NCPEDP, underscores why this is so:

[NCPEDP] is an unusual entity both within the NGO community and among institutions working in the area of disability. The organisation's unique identity derives from its single-minded focus on advocacy for the rights of people with all types of impairments. Ever since its inception, the organisation steered clear of assuming any role in the delivery of rehabilitative, educational and other services. What it did was to fill the vacuum in terms of policy and legal advocacy for disabled people.

What marked Javed's highly visible, intense leadership was to reject the NGO straitjacket. The NCPEDP is as much a lobby group, pressing the government, public institutions and the private sector on policies. Indeed, his fundamental premise was that no area of socio-economic, cultural and political life fell outside the purview of disability. (Subramaniam, 2018)

Arman elaborates on NCPEDP's role as an advocate and convener of the cross-disability movement, a role whose relevance he has continued to maintain:

Our role is assessment and advocacy. We collaborate where we can and we confront where we must: that is how we work. It's more of a watchdog-ism, where we look at policies of the government, find out if there is a gap, and then give our solutions. And if you look at the last 25 years of NCPEDP, it is us who have led a cross-disability movement. There are federations for the blind and federations for the deaf and other organisations for particular kinds of disability, but it is NCPEDP who brought everybody together as a cross-disability movement. And we talked about rights and not services. That's how we started.

You know, talk about (accessible) elections, talk about (inclusion in) the census, employment in the private sector, about (physical) accessibility, the digital accessibility of websites, (accessibility of) UPSC exams, about bringing two new laws in two decades, which is an achievement in itself. Look at the RPwD Act harmonised with the UNCRPD, which is one of the strongest legislations on disability in the world. So, that's where NCPEDP is and we largely have been focused on the ongoing discourse².

Niharika Das (Program Officer-Advocacy at NCPEDP) confirms that this right-based, singular conviction is what marks out the organisation:

[NCPEDP keeps advocacy central to its work], because it is very important to make policies (in the right level of detail). If you don't have the rights, then what are you going to ask for? That is very important because there are a lot of NGOs which deal in service delivery, but there are very few organisations or very few individuals who are specifically working on just the policy bits. And only if you have a strong policy can you then go and implement change at the grassroots level. Also, it's not like NCPEDP strictly only does advocacy. That's the broadest thing that we do. But we are also involved in providing legal aid, we are also involved in providing awareness around the Rights of Persons with Disabilities Act (2016). These are the other things that we keep on doing in bits and pieces.

Worth many times its weight

Notably, NCPEDP's work and its long legacy are being carried on the shoulders of all but nine full-time employees including the Executive Director. This small set has, over the two decades now since NCPEDP's inception, punched way over its weight. It was over this same two-decade period that the term "scale" acquired a near-mythical aura in Indian civil society, while NCPEDP was preoccupied with bringing in sweeping changes in

² Further cementing its place in the discourse are the Universal Design awards and the Hellen-Keller awards: prestigious yearly awards instituted by NCPEDP to recognise contributions to the domain of accessibility and equal opportunities for people with disabilities (refer to Exhibit 2).

a highly economical and non-wasteful manner. For this rights-based organisation, small was both beautiful and impactful.

What is true of NCPEDP, speaks for some other committed activists and advocacy set-ups as well. Together such organisations are able to “lever up” their resources several times over through an intense concentration of their efforts. NCPEDP stretched it further than many in the field of disability. Arman stresses the intensity and commitment required from a small team to keep shifting the needle:

There's a lot of effort that we put in. I think [it will be] another 50 years for the disability sector to be ready, for the army to be ready, and then the fight begins. That is the timeline. And imagine, there are just five and a half people working in NCPEDP carrying forward this work.

Continuing with a hint of amusement, he says,

That (five and a half people) is what I say all the time—meaning it's a very small team. Somebody is always moving out: moving to another role, another job. That's the “half.” So, you know, in some ways we are like a lone ranger. People are always looking up to us, asking: what do you think? How do we proceed?

But what enables small advocacy set-ups to aim to capture the summit? Their ability to shift the needle lies in the strength, simplicity, uniqueness, and power of their perspectives and how deeply and consistently people inside the organisation are wedded to them. In NCPEDP's context, its right-based “complete” (cross-disability) perspective on disability has animated its advocacy and organisational culture.

The long presence of a charismatic founder did leave NCPEDP with a cohesive culture convinced of the meaning of its own work. In part, this allowed Arman and his committed band of eight to draw their sphere of influence wide outside of their New Delhi office. The organisation, right from its early days, has been instrumental in the creation of nationwide networks of organisations dedicated to disability rights. It has served as a powerful way to stitch synergies amongst existing participants and draw in new volunteer strength.

Institutionalising a legacy

The very earliest form of such a network was the Disabled Rights Group established in 1993, preceding the formation of NCPEDP—and was the crucible through which Javed Abidi was able to spearhead the disability rights movement. In 1999, NCPEDP took this further, convening the National Disability Network (NDN). The network included a civil society representative in every state and union territory of India, to promote advocacy for the rights of disabled people, develop leadership of those with disability around the country, and to connect local community-based disability groups to a wider movement (Our Networks, 2022).

Following India's ratification of the 2007 UN Convention, NCPEDP also convened the National Committee on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (NCRPD), which formalised its “watchdog” role. The Committee, consisting of around 25 leaders from India's disability movement, monitored the progress of implementation of the UN Convention in India's government ministries and nodal agencies, and functioned as a think-tank for the development of advocacy campaigns to bring disability issues into mainstream discourse. In particular, the

committee has had a lot of input into drafting policy related to physical and digital accessibility for disabled people (for instance, contributing significantly to the drafting the National Policy on Universal Electronics Accessibility or working with the Ministry of Railways for accessibility across the national rail network) (Our Networks, 2022).

These two networks—NDN and NCRPD—are active networks, with NCPEDP playing a central convenor role in both. According to Sumeet, these networks are considered by NCPEDP to be its “internal stakeholders,” and as Niharika shares, the strength of these networks enable NCPEDP to give feet to the cross-disability movement:

Even if we are a small organisation—we're just six or seven (in 2021) people in the entire office—anything that we work on requires a collective effort. And we have strong networks; two very strong networks. One is the National Disability Network. So, that is basically our state-level partners from across the states in the country. Whenever we take up any issue, we always engage them. And then there's the other network (NCRPD), which is sector leaders who have specialisations in particular sectors: be it accessibility, education, health, whatever. These are the two strong networks we have. So, anything we do, even though we have a very small organisation—the structure in Delhi—we work by involving the entire sector.

Over many years of doing this, NCPEDP has connected up a vast, nationwide resource of different skills and competencies. Through engaging with these networks on a day-to-day basis, a very small group of people at NCPEDP are able to amplify and align efforts.

NDN and NCRPD—being a network of advocacy groups around the country—also possess characteristics that set them apart from other civil society networks which seek to address disability through direct support and delivery of services. NCPEDP's work along with these networks in shifting the discourse on disability can result in situations of friction that organisations delivering a service may not have to deal with. Being part of a nationwide network provides the sense of solidarity critical to stand against the norm.

The cohesion and fortitude that NCPEDP built inside of itself, it has also managed to establish through this network. The design and functioning of this network represent many years of NCPEDP's toil given that it has played an anchoring role. Architecting this has imparted upon NCPEDP an institution-strengthening character within the disability rights ecosystem, and this is not lost upon it. It has explicitly recognised that its work must live long beyond the individuals who make it, and one of the best ways to honour this thought is to govern itself sincerely. The organisation, which itself consists of just nine full-time staff, has a board consisting of seven individuals (refer to Exhibit 3), each of whom are prominent and proven in their respective fields (NCPEDP, 2021).

The eminence of the board's members, their networks and linkages to the wider ecosystem beyond civil society: such as with the government, industry bodies, media, and private corporations, further increases the overall reach of this small yet impactful organisation. The message is clear: the organisation generates such a high level of value—both tangible and intangible—that despite its physical size, this level of strong governance is required to ensure it continues to carry itself as befits an institutional ethos, one that aims to uphold the mandate it has given to itself a long time back. And the Board's role does not stop at the precincts of NCPEDP. The organisation's institutional mandate is housed within the broader network as well: if NCPEDP is governed

sharply and impeccably, it has a bearing on how the network may also govern itself. As such, the Board of NCPEDP ensures that the organisation does not lose focus amidst the degree of responsibility it shoulders. According to Avdhesh Kumar Yadav, Accountant at NCPEDP:

We have six pillars. We work following those six pillars (employment, education, accessibility, legislation/policy, awareness, and youth) and we have to update the Board on our progress. If we lose sight of these pillars, the board indicates that we're off track. We get a lot of cooperation from the Board.

It is this eccentric constellation and collective operations of one Executive Director, eight full-time employees and seven members of the Board which must retain NCPEDP's focus. In the case of NCDEDP, the networks it is a part of, the architecture of these, and its own team culture, are a testament to its art—matured over years of practice—of transmitting a rights-based perspective throughout a network in a language that a broad spectrum of persons can relate to. Beyond these factors, the ability to develop and maintain relationships is where the heart of an institutional spirit manifests. An organisation nurturing this spirit is distinguished by this skill. This, however, demanded cultivating a certain temperament, perhaps best expressed by that resonant Arabic term *sabr* (restrained and graceful perseverance).

Perseverance to match the passion

The late Mr. Abidi was widely known for his fiery, passionate, and relentless pursuit of the rights of the disabled, qualities also closely reflected in his successor Arman. However, both men valued equally highly a non-confrontational approach to nurturing networks and relationships; choosing to form allies wherever possible, and, in a world that continued to discriminate against them, making it a point to not look at other people as adversaries. Meenu Bhambhani remembers Javed's approach of "making friends with the media," while Rama Chari, in the book "Innovations in the World of Disability" (2009), writes that:

NCPEDP has treated the media as an equal partner in all their campaigns. Special care has always been taken to sensitise the media to issues that affect people with disabilities. As a consequence, newspapers and media channels around the country have covered all the issues raised by NCPEDP. This not only provides visibility, but also builds pressure on policy makers.

Arman continues to emphasise the importance of finding allies and engaging without unnecessary confrontation, whilst still "making it impossible for people to ignore you":

I think the challenge is to be able to engage with everybody and not look at people as adversaries all the time. Try to find allies, try to understand that nobody is...how do I say it? Discriminating by design. It's not that they will not hire disabled people. It's often just because they don't know. It's just because there's a lack of knowledge or a lack of understanding. And I (a prospective employer) have not been told in a manner which can be a part of a process, which is what our people (at NCPEDP) are doing. So, I think we did have to bring on board people who come from this (disability-related) kind of background and

who were able to articulate their thoughts, look for solutions all the time and not engage in a confrontational manner.

In the past, as part of its advocacy efforts, NCPEDP has sought recourse to its constitutional right to Freedom of Assembly. However, this approach has only ever been one tool in its kit: used with restraint and when it was most appropriate to do so. Primarily, its core, rights-based perspective is backed with due attention to research and to the design of structured programs, through which it strives to build a new narrative of disability. Its approach to advocacy strives to remain “complete” and balanced, like the six pillars that inform its thought. While network-building may seem an energetic and high-decibel activity, it prefers equally to pursue quieter modes of engagement. The NCPEDP-Javed Abidi Fellowship on Disability—a three-year fellowship program run by NCPEDP—is an example of this.

The fellowship program aims to develop a second line of leadership for the Indian disability movement, placing its fellows in urban and rural contexts to experience disability rights advocacy at the grassroots (NCPEDP-Javed Abidi Fellowship, 2022). People with disabilities in the age group 18-28 are eligible. The fellowship also includes a monthly stipend of Rs. 25,000. Sumeet Parikshit, Program Manager at NCPEDP, elaborates further:

We introduced this [fellowship] program to bring out narratives from different parts of the country, wherein the fellows would be engaged and working on a theme of their preference at different parts of the country—maybe in the hinterlands of India, maybe in urban areas—picking up themes like accessibility, access to education and services and issues concerning disability rights from different parts of India. And they would bring such evidence into the mainstream, so that we can use that data, use such collated narratives to pursue advocacy.

Otherwise, what is usually found in case of disability rights issues, and advocacy pertaining to it, is that in the majority of cases it turns out to be more of activism, given the lack of evidence that we have in this particular sector. And thus, we launched this fellowship, so that through fellows we would be able to bring out such narratives and collate it in one place, and then based on that we can pursue advocacy in a very meaningful manner.

Finding the fit

Perhaps it is no mystery why set-ups like NCPEDP are small and prefer to remain that way. As Arman highlights, it is rare to find people, regardless of their experience or prestigious alma maters, who combine conviction in its right-based perspective with the temperament required to execute upon it indefatigably:

You won't find a person who comes to NCPEDP with the set of qualifications which is needed. Even if somebody has done disability studies from a prominent institution, they only come with a welfare mindset, not a rights-based one, and they come in a mode that: “we are here to help people.” I mean, who are you to help? Is my question. So, this whole idea of doing rights-based work, or an inclusive development approach is still lacking in disability. One advantage is

that if you find people from a law background who have an inclination towards the human rights approach, they tend to understand (rights-based) disability also, because the fundamentals are the same. If you're working for women's rights or child rights or Dalit rights or so on, you understand the politics of discrimination, you understand how it happens. And so, when you understand our mandate, and the barriers which create these multiple levels of discrimination faced by people with disabilities, it is easier to work with us. People who are doing MSW (Master of Social Work) also often have an inclination to the human rights approach. We look out for this, and try to further build their understanding as they work.

Clearly, it matters immensely to NCPEDP that those who work with it, and those who intend to, resonate well with this perspective. Unsurprisingly then, the recruitment process is carefully crafted to bring to the fore candidates who either understand it already or who would be able to pick it up rapidly. In the first stage, candidates are required to submit a cover letter which highlights their views on disability. According to Sumeet, the majority of the cover letters received either speak of the disabled in terms of welfare, or equally undesirably, as *Divyang* ("divine body"; the closest relative of the term in English, in the context of disability, would be "specially-abled"). During the interview stage which follows the cover letter stage, candidates are provided with a series of scenarios to gauge their reactions and to probe the depth of their understanding of the rights-based perspective. Sumeet elaborates:

When we interview candidates, we give them certain scenarios or situations. For example, how would they deal with a person who had recently been cured of leprosy? Interestingly, most of them don't understand such scenarios; don't understand such cases. One reason is, the majority of people opt out of taking biology when they move to higher secondary education. So, a basic understanding of the condition itself is not very clear. And then, disability in itself is often restricted in their perspective to orthopaedic disability, i.e., locomotor, physical impairment—deaf and dumb—which is quite common considering the way we grow up, considering the movies we associate ourselves with when growing up and things like that. So, they would bring out such perspectives. However, when we talk about the entire array of disabilities, it is a lot more than that.

So, considering that the majority (of candidates) have these perspectives and are aware of physical conditions like persons being dumb, persons being blind, we would give further instances to them: "Suppose you're dealing with a person who is visually impaired, which does not necessarily mean that the person is blind, in what manner would you ask them for reports, or interact with them during the project, so that you are effectively monitoring their work, as well as enabling them in doing such things, like reporting, communicating, documenting?" Now, we spend our entire day with our smartphones, our laptops, our personal computers, but again, surprisingly, they are often not aware of assistive technologies. We also ask them questions like, "Have you ever looked at the menu option of accessibility on your smartphone? Are you aware of high contrast settings on your computer?" The majority of the people are

unaware of it. So, these are the kinds of mechanisms we use to understand whether a person even has a grasp of things which they use with such high frequency.

The small group of people that make it through the interview process are thus well-aligned with the organisation's mandate and its essence. The close-knit group have lunch together every day and often find themselves all together at tea time: an informal space of connection. Sumeet describes the culture at NCPEDP as "cohesive," saying:

The team is very small, as we are primarily engaged with advocacy and not with the intervention part of things. So, we do not require a large team. But we do need to be very cohesive, and the interdepartmental communication is quite high, to support each other in various activities, and facilitate each other with things that we can help with.

Learning

The priority of the induction period for fresh hires at NCPEDP is to gain an in-depth understanding of the organisation's right-based perspective. Rosy Martin, the Executive Assistant to Executive Director, notes that this usually takes around a month or two for new hires. They are given a set of materials prepared by NCPEDP, which brings new staff up to speed on the key legislations (the 1995 and 2016) acts, and they are expected to go through all of NCPEDP's research published on their website. However, Rosy notes that: "The rights-based understanding won't be developed by just reading, but they will get to know the basics. Once you start working, then you gain complete knowledge about what disability is, and what disability rights are."

Peer learning and guidance are crucial in the first year to strengthen this foundation of knowledge and perspective. NCPEDP's main phone number receives over 100 calls a day from around the country from individuals with disabilities looking for help on various matters. For a new staff member at NCPEDP (a program officer), listening to and responding to caller concerns with the help of experienced staff is an important learning experience; they are able to very quickly build up a bank of knowledge and real-world experience by putting the rights-based perspective into practice. Avdhesh notes that within two to three months, new program officers are able to handle most of these issues by themselves.

Supplementing

Aside from its core staff, NCPEDP makes use of interns and volunteers throughout the year in its programs. Volunteers are taken on board specifically for events that it is organising, such as meetings and seminars, in order to assist the core team. Volunteers are always paid at least a nominal daily sum for their contributions, with the exact amount depending on the funds available for the relevant project. If someone is particularly interested in volunteering with NCPEDP outside of an organised event, they are able to get in touch with the team, who will engage them in a more learning-oriented program as Rosy shares:

If someone wants to volunteer, we invite them and point out the things they can learn. They come and then we pay them. For example, we used to have a

volunteer Saurav coming here. He was a disabled person, having difficulty in speaking. He would come here to assist us in typing and other tasks. In this way, through volunteering, we try to make the team bigger.

Similarly, internships (six months to a year in length) are another NCPEDP initiative to provide experience of an advocacy environment to college students, as well as to increase its available team strength at times when it has a lot of work. Interns are guided by program officers and considered for possible future contractual or full-time staff roles. One of NCPEDP's present team members started out as an intern and today manages the organisation's legal aid work.

Improving

The Executive Director at NCPEDP has ultimate oversight on staff performance. The organisation, given its size, has chosen not to implement a formalised system of performance assessment. The system is founded on honest and straight-forward self-assessment. Each year, all employees are expected to prepare a two-page narrative detailing their objectives and deliverables from the past year, along with the year's outcomes, achievements, and challenges. They are also encouraged to express whether any objectives were missed and the type of support they would need in order to meet it in future. Alongside this, an annual record of work (such as execution against targets laid out in individual plans and relevant communications or evidence from periodic meetings between employees and supervisors) is submitted to the Executive Director. Notably, the results of the assessment do not determine salary levels. These are a fixed yearly increase for everyone in the organisation which depends only on total available funds, although Arman does have discretion to provide individual increments for exceptional performance.

Being on, all the time

Evidently, leading an intense, rights-based set-up is not about ideation and advocacy alone. Wide-ranging responsibilities in administration and governance attend equally to the daily duties of the leader. Just as with Javed, there is a great degree of expectation on Arman to be the ever-present centre of NCPEDP's efforts, energy, and thinking in all these areas: the living embodiment of its often conceptual, abstract perspectives. Day in and day out, this is no small pressure on a single individual. The financial uncertainty associated with any small rights-based set-up adds to the pressures (refer to Exhibit 4). Arman shares that:

(Leadership) is a constant struggle because the context keeps changing. We never knew we'd have a lockdown, that it would come to a time where there would be a pandemic like the novel Coronavirus and then, in such a situation, how do you, as the leader, take disability along? So, you have to constantly learn, you have to constantly update yourself, constantly engage with the stakeholders.

Sensitising and joining fellow citizens to a rights-based view on disability is not the same then, as engaging people in charity and philanthropy for the same cause: the former activity emanates from a theoretical and abstract space. As a result, right-based perspectives do not embed themselves with ease in the collective social psyche. Momentary disturbances are enough to efface past efforts and efforts must be made to reestablish

them. Legal safeguards are one way to ensure these perspectives remain within sight. However, the language of the law is not what the layman relates to, even though these laws hold very real implications for everyday life. Demographics change, political economies shift, habits and preferences evolve over time: the right-based view and the societal safeguards, including legal, have to be constantly reiterated in different ways for different audiences. Arman reflects on what it takes to bring about the change he's seeking to bring along with NCPEDP:

It's only by displaying what you talk about, by walking the talk. You have to lead. It's a very tiring role, you know. I think it is the case for any human rights or any rights-based organisation. The leader has to be displaying a lot of what is being theoretically spoken or taught. If you can't display it or walk the talk, it doesn't work. So, I think, at least for people with disabilities, if I say that people with disabilities should be able to use Metro services or be able to go to the marketplace and so on: am I doing that myself or not? Am I promoting that activity when I am organising an event or training?

For that matter, we've mentioned the (Javed Abidi) fellowship. I'm getting all the fellows to Delhi for the induction. Because it is important. If people from all over the country with different kinds of disabilities come together in one place, they meet, they talk, and then we also take them out to different places, that's 30 people with different needs moving around together. It's a message you send, and that's how they (the fellows) also understand that: "we can also do everything, we just have to overcome all these inhibitions." So, you put that confidence into the fellows that there is nothing wrong with them and it is the environment which we need to fix.

As of 2022, Arman has been the Executive Director at NCPEDP for just under four years. While there are strong and credible individuals forming NCPEDP's second line, Arman admits that there is no one that could replace him "tomorrow." He shares:

So, that discussion is constantly ongoing in my organisation with the trustees and with myself: looking for a number two. That kind of thing is my aspiration, to find somebody who questions me all the time, where there's a debate of "why this and why not that." But again, the challenge is that disability, largely, is seen as welfare and a charity issue. It is difficult to find somebody and when I talk, people generally drop their jaws and they are in awe, "Oh wow, I think this is very inspiring"...and that kills it. People ask me sometimes, "Why don't you depute one of your colleagues?" I say that's a problem. It will derail. I'm like the lighthouse: I have to be on all the time.

Exhibits

Exhibit 1: Key features of the Rights of Persons with Disabilities Act, 2016

Rights of Persons with Disabilities Bill - 2016 Passed by Parliament (PIB Delhi, 2016)

The Lok Sabha today passed "**The Rights of Persons with Disabilities Bill - 2016**". The Bill will replace the existing PwD (Persons with Disabilities) Act, 1995, which was enacted 21 years back. The Rajya Sabha has already passed the Bill on 14.12.2016.

2. The salient features of the Bill are:

- I. Disability has been defined based on an evolving and dynamic concept.
- II. The types of disabilities have been increased from the existing 7 to 21 and the Central Government will have the power to add more types of disabilities. The 21 disabilities are given below:

1. Blindness

2. Low-vision

3. Leprosy Cured Persons

4. Hearing Impairment (deaf and hard of hearing)

5. Locomotor Disability

6. Dwarfism

7. Intellectual Disability

8. Mental Illness

9. Autism Spectrum Disorder

10. Cerebral Palsy

11. Muscular Dystrophy

12. Chronic Neurological Conditions

13. Specific Learning Disabilities

14. Multiple Sclerosis

15. Speech and Language Disability

16. Thalassemia**17. Haemophilia****18. Sickle Cell Disease****19. Multiple Disabilities including deafblindness****20. Acid Attack Victim****21. Parkinson's Disease**

- III. Speech and Language Disability and Specific Learning Disability have been added for the first time. Acid Attack Victims have been included. Dwarfism and muscular dystrophy have been indicated as a separate class of specified disabilities. The New categories of disabilities also included three blood disorders, Thalassemia, Haemophilia and Sickle Cell disease.
- IV. In addition, the Government has been authorised to notify any other category of specified disability.
- V. Responsibility has been cast upon the appropriate governments to take effective measures to ensure that persons with disabilities enjoy their rights equally with others.
- VI. Additional benefits such as reservation in higher education, government jobs, reservation in allocation of land, poverty alleviation schemes etc. have been provided for persons with benchmark disabilities and those with high support needs.
- VII. Every child with benchmark disability between the age group of 6 and 18 years shall have the right to free education.
- VIII. Government funded educational institutions as well as the government recognized institutions will have to provide inclusive education to the children with disabilities.
- IX. For strengthening the Prime Minister's Accessible India Campaign, stress has been given to ensure accessibility in public buildings (both Government and private) in a prescribed time-frame.
- X. Reservation in vacancies in government establishments has been increased from 3% to 4% for certain persons or class of persons with benchmark disability.
- XI. The Bill provides for grant of guardianship by District Court under which there will be joint decision – making between the guardian and the persons with disabilities.
- XII. Broad based Central & State Advisory Boards on Disability are to be set up to serve as apex policy making bodies at the Central and State level.
- XIII. Office of Chief Commissioner of Persons with Disabilities has been strengthened who will now be assisted by 2 Commissioners and an Advisory Committee comprising of not more than 11 members drawn from experts in various disabilities.
- XIV. Similarly, the office of State Commissioners of Disabilities has been strengthened who will be assisted by an Advisory Committee comprising of not more than 5 members drawn from experts in various disabilities.
- XV. The Chief Commissioner for Persons with Disabilities and the State Commissioners will act as regulatory bodies and Grievance Redressal agencies and also monitor implementation of the Act.

- XVI. District level committees will be constituted by the State Governments to address local concerns of PwDs. Details of their constitution and the functions of such committees would be prescribed by the State Governments in the rules.
- XVII. Creation of National and State Fund will be created to provide financial support to persons with disabilities. The existing National Fund for Persons with Disabilities and the Trust Fund for Empowerment of Persons with Disabilities will be subsumed with the National Fund.
- XVIII. The Bill provides for penalties for offences committed against persons with disabilities and also violations of the provisions of the new law.
- XIX. Special Courts will be designated in each district to handle cases concerning violation of rights of PwDs.

3. The New Act will bring our law in line with the United National Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (UNCRPD), to which India is a signatory. This will fulfil the obligations on the part of India in terms of UNCRD. Further, the new law will not only enhance the Rights and Entitlements of *Divyangjan* but also provide an effective mechanism for ensuring their empowerment and true inclusion into Society in a satisfactory manner.

Exhibit 2: Overview of NCPEDP initiatives

NCPEDP Mphasis Foundation Project on Awareness, Accessibility, and Implementation of the Rights of Persons with Disabilities Act, 2016: This is a three-year program aimed at creating awareness around accessibility vis-a-vis the Rights of Persons with Disabilities Act, 2016 and ensuring the implementation of the Rights of Persons with Disabilities Act, 2016 in full body and spirit. The program involves organising sensitisation seminars/workshops and lobbying with policymakers and also increasing awareness of the masses around disability through the DNIS portal. It also aims to recognise good practices in accessibility and create awareness around the concept of Universal Design through the *NCPEDP-Mphasis Universal Design Awards*.

An Introduction to Disability Research: A Legal & Social Studies Perspective (An Online Certificate Course): NCPEDP in collaboration with the Centre for Disability Research and Training (CDRT) and Kirori Mal College offers this nine-week program. The objectives of the certificate course are to: develop an understanding of disability laws and their relevant concepts; provide an understanding of working on the rights-based needs of people with disabilities in an inclusive society; learn about the intervention framework; research and writing and advocacy mechanisms. Students/research scholars pursuing their undergraduate or postgraduate courses from any university or college in India can participate in the course.

Missing Millions Campaign: A national advocacy and awareness-raising campaign to bring the spotlight to the millions of missing people with disabilities in education, employment, legislation and access.

The NCPEDP-AIF Walk to Freedom: NCPEDP and American India Foundation (AIF) jointly organise the “Walk of Freedom.” It is organised each year on 3rd December at India Gate, New Delhi, proclaimed by the United Nations as the International Day of Persons with Disabilities. The occasion is a means to come together, to debate and discuss the achievements of the disability sector and the way ahead. It provides a platform to engage key stakeholders, to share issues affecting people with disabilities and to work together to find and implement

solutions to calibrate the way forward in a manner that ensures the inclusion of people with disabilities in all future developments and policies adopted across Governments and the private sector.

Legal Aid program: NCPEDP runs a legal aid program wherein legal counsel is extended to people with disabilities in matters relating to but not limited to, employment, education, health, protection against abuse and violence etc. The underlying premise is that access to justice is a challenge for persons with disabilities. With inaccessible infrastructure at courts and police stations, it is difficult for people to use the law as a tool in availing their fundamental rights. NCPEDP aims to create a platform and pave a way for everyone to access their rights. The grievances are received from across the country through NCPEDP's helpline number. The helpline is active on all days of the year. The grievances are routed to a panel of advocates who provide consultation and representation in the court of law wherever required. Currently, NCPEDP is working on more than 50 such grievances of people with disabilities whose rights have been violated. Several petitions are lined up in High Courts and Supreme Court. This program is supported by Mphasis F1 Foundation.

NCPEDP's networks

Disabled People's International (India): NCPEDP is a Member of the National Assembly (MNA) from India of the Disabled People's International (DPI). DPI is the world's first successful cross-disability Disabled People's Organisation (DPO). DPO has a presence in more than 130 countries across seven regions. Through DPI, NCPEDP helps include participation from India in events like the Conference of State Parties organised in the United Nations every year and in projects like the Zero Project, mainstreaming of leprosy in the disability movement.

Indian Forum for Rehabilitation and Assistive Technology: This is an informal network made up of people with disabilities, organisations of people with disabilities (OPDs), and family members of disabled persons. The objective is to improve the quality of rehabilitation services for all at different levels and increase the coverage. It advocates with the Ministries of Health and Family Welfare and Social Justice and Empowerment of Government of India to ensure that Community-based Rehabilitation has a central emphasis as a strategy for delivery in the World Health Assembly resolution on attaining the highest standard of health for persons with disabilities.

National Convention for Youth with Disabilities (NCYD): NCYD is initiated to reach out to the youth with disabilities in the country. The convention aims to expose the youth with disabilities to the social sector movement in India, including disability and other allied fields. This would help in identifying and inspiring the next generation leadership, not just in the Indian disability sector but across other sectors as well.

Celebrating champions of disability rights

Each year, NCPEDP confers awards to individuals and organisations who have done exemplary work to promote rights of people with disabilities.

NCPEDP-Mindtree Helen Keller Awards: The aim of this award is to appreciate the individuals and organisations working towards promoting employment opportunities for people with disabilities. Every year, 13 awards are given. Four awards are given in the category “Role Model Companies/NGOs/Institutions,” three awards each in three individual categories: “Role Model Persons with Disabilities,” “Role Model Supporter of Increased Employment Opportunities for Persons with Disabilities,” and “Role Model Entrepreneurs with Disabilities.” This award is regarded as one of the most prestigious Indian benchmarks for honouring the individual and organisations committed to encourage employment for people with disabilities.

NCPEDP-Mphasis Universal Design Awards: This award is conferred each year on those who have done commendable work towards accessibility and Universal Design, ensuring a life of equality and dignity for people with disabilities across the country. Universal Design is the design of buildings, products or environments to make them accessible to all people regardless of age, disability or other factors. Advocacy with the identified Ministries for urgent intervention vis-a-vis effective implementation of the accessibility clauses under the Rights of Persons with Disabilities Act, 2016. This has pan-India coverage.

Javed Abidi Public Policy Award: This award is given to organisations and individuals for their pioneering work in ensuring that people with disabilities have equal access to the same opportunities and rights as all other Indian citizens.

Exhibit 3: Profiles of NCPEDP’s Board of Trustees

Mr. Som Mittal

Mr. Mittal is the former Chairman and President of NASSCOM, the premier trade body for the IT-BPM Industry in India. He has held corporate leadership roles in the IT industry at companies such as Wipro, Digital, Compaq, and Hewlett Packard. Mr. Mittal has served as a member of the Prime Minister’s Committee on National e-Governance and on the Global Advisory Council of the World Information Technology and Services Alliance. He is currently an independent director on several boards and is associated with several NGOs. He is also Chair of the Advisory Council set up for developing the IT Vision for the Indian Railways.

Mr. A.S. Narayanan

Mr. Narayanan has been working with the hearing impaired community for the past 25 years. He is the Secretary of the National Association of the Deaf, India. He is actively involved in the setting up and functioning of the Indian Sign Language Research and Training Centre. Currently, he is leading the campaign for the recognition of Indian Sign Language as one of the official languages of India, issuance of driving licences for deaf people, and captioning on TV, among other issues.

Mr. Arun Seth

Mr. Seth is an independent Director on the board of Jubilant Foodworks (Dominos), Centum Learning, Usha Breco Ltd., Samtel Avionics, Narayana Hrudalaya and Servion Global Solutions Ltd. He is also the Chairman/Director of Informage Enterprises Pvt. Ltd., a consultancy that invests and drives disruptive technologies, Comza Informage Pvt Ltd., Partner Trinetra Business Advisors India LLP and Informage Advisory

LLP. An alumnus of IIT Kanpur and IIM Calcutta, Mr. Seth has held several senior positions in HCL, Usha Martin, UB Group and retired as the non-Executive Chairman of British Telecom in India in July 2012. He is also on the Board of Governors of IIM Lucknow and IIT Delhi and is the Advisory board member of TERI and a Governing member of the TERI University board. He is also a Trustee of the Nasscom Foundation, which drives CSR initiatives for the IT Industry.

Major General Ian Cardozo

A decorated war veteran, Major General Cardozo became the first officer with a disability in the Indian Army to be approved for command of an infantry battalion and brigade, after losing a leg during the battle of Sylhet in Bangladesh. He was also the first officer of the Indian Army to be awarded the Sena Medal for gallantry on a patrol in the erstwhile North-East Frontier Agency (NEFA) in 1960. Major General Cardozo has been part of the Sino-Indian war of 1962, and the Indo-Pakistani wars of 1965 and 1971. After retirement as Chief of Staff of a Corps in the North East of India, he worked as Vice President of the War Wounded Foundation and was later appointed as the Chairman of the Rehabilitation Council of India. His books “Param Vir,” and “The Sinking of INS Khukri” have been widely acclaimed.

Ms. Kanchan Pamnani

Ms. Pamnani is a Solicitor practising mainly in the Bombay High Court in the field of Corporate, Testamentary, Property and Disability law. A graduate in Commerce from Sydenham College and a postgraduate in law from the University of Bombay, Ms. Pamnani has completed two courses from the World Intellectual Property Organisation, Geneva and a course in Arbitration from the Indian Merchant’s Chamber and a diploma in Intellectual Property Law from the University of Bombay. She has passed the examination of the Bombay Incorporated Law Society and additionally the Qualified Lawyers Transfer Test from the Law Society, England.

Mr. Pradeep Gupta

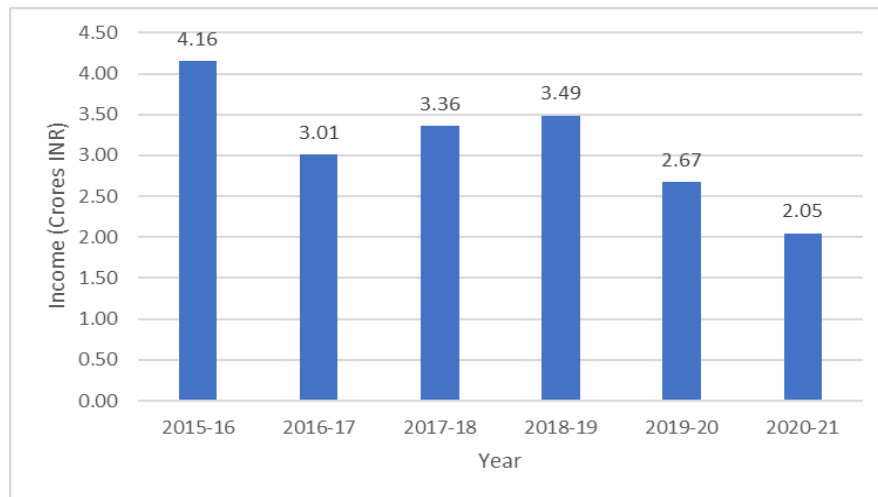
Mr. Gupta is the Chairman of the CyberMedia Group, South Asia's first and largest specialty media house with publications, websites, events, and TV programs in the areas of information-technology, telecommunication, consumer electronics, and entrepreneurship. An angel investor and mentor to a number of entrepreneurs, Mr. Gupta is the co-founder of Indian Angel Network and is and has been on the board of UTI AMC, IIT Mandi, TiE Global, PanIIT Global, Indian Newspaper Society, IvyCap Ventures, and others. An engineering graduate from IIT Delhi and an MBA from IIM Kolkata, he is the recipient of the NCPEDP-Shell Helen Keller Award.

Mr. Badri Agarwal

Mr Agarwal has been passionate about improving the quality of education, especially in rural India. He quit his job as the President at Airtel (Infotel business) in 2006 and joined Bharti Foundation as its honorary President & CEO. It was with his unique approach that Bharti Foundation set up 250+ schools during 2006-09. He has also volunteered at Pardada Pardadi Education Society, TAP India, and the Gyan Prakash Foundation, all focused on education for the underprivileged and skill-building at the grassroots level.

Exhibit 4: NCPEDP financials

Fig. 1. NCPEDP Annual Income 2016-2021



Source: NCPEDP Annual Reports 2016-2021

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