SUSTAINABLE SOLUTIONS FOR PERSONS WITH DISABILITIES

Action oriented dialogues on the organisational impact of the COVID-19 pandemic

AIWEFA-NINA SIBAL WEBINAR SERIES REPORT

JUNE 2020
Webinar Series on ‘Sustainable Solutions for Persons with Disabilities: Action oriented dialogues on the organisational impact of the Covid-19 pandemic’

ALL INDIA WOMEN’S EDUCATION FUND ASSOCIATION (AIWEFA)

Editorial Team:
Ms. Asha Chandra, Dr. Mayanka Gupta, Dr. Renu Malaviya, Ms. Chitra Sarkar, Ms. Sarla Manchanda and Ms. Garima Sharma.

Disclaimer:
AIWEFA: The opinions expressed in this report are the personal views presented by the resource persons in the webinars, in the context of the broad theme ‘Sustainable Solutions For Persons With Disabilities: Action oriented dialogues on the organisational impact of the Covid-19 pandemic’ articulated by AIWEFA. The contents of the presentations and webinar proceedings are not the expression of opinions of AIWEFA.

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This summary report contains the major findings and deliberations of the webinar Sustainable Solutions for Persons with Disabilities, Action oriented dialogues on the organisational impact of Covid-19 organised by AIWEFA.

Before the COVID, on 30th December 2019, the Sustainable Development Goals India Index was released. It comprehensively documented the progress made by the Indian States and Union Territories towards achieving the 2030 SDG targets. On this occasion the UN Resident Coordinator Renata Dessallien, said “In 2020, the world enters the final decade for achieving the SDGs—the ‘Decade for Action’. India’s composite score has improved from 57 in 2018 to 60 in 2019, thereby showing noticeable progress”.

Since then, the COVID-19 has plundered and ravaged 216 countries, or territories or areas, forcing us all to press the RESET button. This new vision with fresh perspectives and innovative revivals needs to focus on the common good and leave no one behind.

People with disabilities have so far not received the kind of consideration their predicaments warrant. The pandemic lockdowns have brought families together in the confines of their homes bringing awareness of the needs of each member. With no outside help, parents and guardians of children with disabilities have learned to manage on their own, gathering new sensibilities along the way.

In 2003, AIWEFA instituted the Nina Sibal Memorial Award presented to an organization working with disabilities. The Award honours the memory of Ms. Nina Sibal, an IFS officer posted at the United Nations who tragically lost her life to cancer.

The coronavirus pandemic closed physical doors, but it offered an opportunity to harvest the experience of the 17 Awardee Organisations in helping mainstream disability in all the COVID 19 response and recovery, ensuring access of information, facilities, services and programmes; establishing patterns for participation and accountability.

The four webinars held in June 2020 on Research and Education, Educational and Rehabilitation Outreach, Visual Impairment and Mental Health seek to identify best practices that track inclusion and empowerment of people with disabilities, build inclusive
social protection systems, invest in community-based solutions and invite multi-stakeholder dialogues and collaborations.

AIWEFA expresses deep appreciation to the policy makers, academicians, members of civil society and international organisations, as well as colleagues who participated in the webinars and resolved to work towards sustainable solutions for persons with disabilities. AIWEFA is thankful to the resource persons Ms. Rita Menon, Dr. Anupa Siddhu, Ms. Sarla Manchanda, Dr. Renu Malaviya, Ms. Chitra Sarkar, Dr. Mayanka Gupta. Our gratitude to the AIWEFA Nina Sibal Awardees Mr. R.S. Hiremath, Dr. Kshama Metre, Ms. Sheela Sinha, Prof. M.K.C. Nair, Prof. Asha Hans, Ms. Merry Barua, Ms. Shubhra Mukherjee, Mr. Javed Ahmad Tak, Ms. Neelam Jolly, Ms. Ketaki Bardalai and Mr. Sudeep Goyal. We recognise with appreciation the presentation by Ms. Sulagna Roy, Education Specialist formerly with UNICEF.

AIWEFA is grateful to Dr. Anupa Siddhu, Director Lady Irwin College, for her constant support through facilitation of the faculty and student support.

AIWEFA recognises the intense application of Dr. Mayanka Gupta, Assistant professor, Lady Irwin College and the young team of interns who constantly worked against deadlines. Ms. Shaivya Singh for digital engagement, Ms. Baishakhee Mohapatra for content and infographics, Ms. Palak Sharma and Ms. Srishti Goel for e material, Ms. Lakshmi Bhardwaj and Ms. Tanya for ICT development and Ms. Mona Singh towards content development.

AIWEFA appreciates the administrative support of Mr. Mithun Singh, even though he is functioning from his hometown due to the pandemic conditions.

We thankfully acknowledge the important contributions of all the AIWEFA members, mainly Mr. Himangshu R. Vaish, Vice President for his clear fiscal insight, Dr. Renu Malaviya, Secretary for proficiently handling various portfolios, Mr. Umesh C. Goyal, Treasurer for his guiding hand to ensure robust financials, Ms. Chitra Sarkar, Joint Secretary, ably supported by Mr. Sudarshan Sharma, in engaging and surmounting technical complexities. We gratefully appreciate Ms. Sarla Manchanda, Convenor Nina Sibal Committee for her enthusiastic selfless service in AIWEFA’s cause, Ms. Rita Menon, IAS, for her reliable support and incisive counsel on all important matters, Mr. Riaz Umar for his sage advice and guidance, Dr. Adarsh Sharma for her insightful recommendations, Ms. Ishani Chandra for her ready assistance and support always, Dr. Usha Sharma for enthusiastically rallying together volunteers and most
importantly Dr. Mayanka Gupta who has been a constant right hand support with her ebullience, initiative and successful implementation of programmes.

We thank Ms. Garima Sharma for her conscientious and meticulous reporting of the webinar proceedings and Ms. Neha Rupeja for her designing under guidance from Dr. Mayanka Gupta.

This webinar series and this report greatly benefitted from the close collaboration of our Awardee Partners.

Asha Chandra
President
All India Women’s Education Fund Association (AIWEFA)
All India Women’s Education Fund Association (AIWEFA) was founded in 1929 under the leadership of Mahatma Gandhi and vibrant women stalwarts of the freedom movement like Sarojini Naidu, Rajkumari Amrit Kaur, Aruna Asaf Ali, Kamaladevi Chattopadhyay and Annie Besant among others, for empowering women. Education continues to be recognised as the catalytic agent for social change and for the upliftment of women in Indian society.

In 1932, AIWEFA founded the Home Science College, Lady Irwin College, New Delhi to introduce a scientific temper in women’s education. For the last nine decades, AIWEFA’s programmes in rural and urban areas have been implemented to promote holistic and sustainable development for the welfare of the communities.

Activities promote the education and training of women in family and child care, environmental sustainability, health and nutrition, skill development. AIWEFA also promotes the representation of women in politics and programmes to fight violence against women. Development of rural families through the introduction of drudgery reducing equipment for improvement in agricultural management has been undertaken in grassroots rural projects.

Today AIWEFA campaigns and mobilises nationally and internationally through its field projects, seminars, workshops, conferences, publications and networking to encourage a sustainable approach to human development and the upliftment of weaker sections of society. Some of the important partners include NGOs, Central and State Governments, public sector, corporate and bilateral agencies.

In 1999, AIWEFA was granted the “NGO in Special Consultative Status with the Economic and Social Council of the United Nations” (ECOSOC). Following this milestone, the organisation accepted the role of Regional Coordinator of the UN’s Informal Regional Network of NGOs (NGO IRENE) in 2013. Furthermore, AIWEFA has also been conferred the Observer Status with UNFCCC. In recent years, AIWEFA’s programmes include national conferences on “Transition of women from Education to Full Employment”, “Education is recognised as the catalytic agent for social change and the upliftment of women in Indian society. Activities include the promotion of education and training of women in family and child care, environmental sustainability, health and nutrition and skill development.”

Sustainable Solutions for Persons with Disabilities
“Ensuring healthy lives and promotion of wellness in old age” and “North East Expo” which brought together the village industries of the 8 North-East states to showcase their products and build markets. The “Khadi Goes Global” national programme brought leading KHADI fashion designers, actors and crafts persons on the national stage in collaboration with the Ladies Wing of FICCI, FLO.

Workshops for colleges and schools have included initiatives like cyber security, “Prevention of Drug Abuse” and “Promoting Intergenerational Bonding”. Grassroots initiatives comprise “Promotion and Development of Handicrafts from Locally Available Resources” of the Andaman and Nicobar Islands.

Internationally at the United Nations, AIWEFA’s programmes incorporate documentation of robust implementation strategies from Asia, Africa and the Global-South towards achieving Sustainable Development Goals in “A World We Women Want”.

To celebrate Mahatma Gandhi’s 150th birth anniversary, 100 years of khadi and AIWEFA’s 90th foundation year, “Khadi goes Global” was held at the United Nations Headquarters in New York, in partnership with the Ministry of Micro Small and Medium Enterprises (MSME), Khadi and Village Industries Commission (KVIC) and the Permanent Mission of India to the United Nations. The organisation held panel discussions and exhibitions to spread awareness of the climate friendly Khadi cloth at a gathering of 193 nations during the sixty-third session of the Commission on Status of Women (CSW63) in March 2019.
AIWEFA NINA SIBAL MEMORIAL AWARD WINNERS
For those of you, who will be receiving the Nina Sibal Award, it is important to know something about the person after whom the award is instituted. As a young student, Nina was outstanding, brilliant, mercurial, full of enthusiasm and loved life to its fullest. She was also a person in a hurry. Twenty-four hours of the day were not enough for her. She was a born achiever. A voracious writer of fiction, her first love was writing. She adored nature in all its wildness and felt equally at home in the midst of forests and mountains, lost in their beauty, discovering peace and serenity. For all those she touched, she will always be remembered as “loving, emotive and a doer.”

She had the capacity to work with persons at all levels, from Heads of States and persons at the highest echelons of diplomatic life to the poor, the needy and the challenged, with whom she felt most comfortable. There was never a moment that she did not talk about doing something for them. In her stint in the United Nations in the 2nd Committee of the General Assembly, she always fought for the rights of those in the less developed world. The rights of the child, empowerment and emancipation of women and the obligations of society towards those challenged were issues closest to her heart. In any conversation on any of these subjects, we always knew the position she would take and she never hesitated to enthuse persons to fight for their rights. She was always with the weak against the strong, the oppressed against the oppressor, the poor against the rich and the challenged against those who are insensitive to their concerns. That is where she stood and always wanted to stand.

Her journey was filled with the battles she fought for the less privileged. Some said she was obstinate on those issues and...
that she was occasionally irrational about the concerns of the less privileged.

But there was an element of consistency in what she stood for. In that sense, life was a struggle, a battle for a cause that needed support and she had enormous strength to always fight for those causes. In the last years of her life, she fought her biggest battle against an affliction that ultimately took her away from us. But as she had done throughout, she fought her battle bravely and with great dignity. Despite knowing that the might of the affliction was gaining ground, she never gave up. She also realized that she had to fight that battle on her own. She had indomitable courage and in moments of extreme adversity felt that she was being wronged. That is how she went fighting the last battle of her life. She died the way she lived.

1st AIWEFA Nina Sibal Memorial Award - 2003
Ms. Merry Barua, President, Action for Autism, New Delhi was awarded the "1st AIWEFA Nina Sibal Memorial Award" for her organization. Ms. Barua is a disability activist who has tried to have "autism" recognised as the communication disorder disability towards attracting greater attention to its management both by the victim and family and others working with them.

2nd AIWEFA Nina Sibal Memorial Award - 2004
Mr. Sumit Roy, was awarded the “2nd AIWEFA Nina Sibal Memorial Award” for his organisation, Digdarshika Institute of Rehabilitation and Research, Bhopal, Madhya Pradesh. DIRR is a non-profit voluntary organisation with a vision to provide a congenial environment and equal opportunities for the mentally challenged, through its research and documentation.
3rd AIWEFA Nina Sibal Memorial Award - 2005

Dr. Sangeeta Agarwal was awarded the “3rd AIWEFA Nina Sibal Memorial Award” for her organisation Shubham, Muzaffarpur, Bihar. Shubham is a welfare organisation for the development of persons with disabilities. Its activities are targeted at enabling people suffering from both physical and mental impairment and to encourage and bring them towards the mainstream of a healthy life.

4th AIWEFA Nina Sibal Memorial Award - 2006

Dr. Kshama Metre, National Director, “Chinmaya Organisation for Rural Development (CORD)”, Kangra, Himachal Pradesh, was awarded the “4th AIWEFA Nina Sibal Memorial Award”, for her organisation. The main objective of the organization is to empower and provide an opportunity to the differently abled persons to live as important citizens of the country and contribute as any other person.

5th AIWEFA Nina Sibal Memorial Award - 2007

Shri P. C. Kapoor, President, Jammu Red Cross, Udheywala, Jammu & Kashmir, was awarded the “5th AIWEFA Nina Sibal Memorial Award”, for his organization, which is a home for the handicapped and provides the children with education, free uniforms, free coaching and pre occupational training apart from physiotherapy and medicare for victims of poliomyelitis.

6th AIWEFA Nina Sibal Memorial Award - 2008

Shri N. Krishnaswamy, IPS (Retd.), was awarded the “6th AIWEFA Nina Sibal Memorial Award” for his organisation, Vidya Vrikshah, Chennai, Tamil Nadu. The mission of the Vidya Vriksh is to share IT-knowledge with socially and physically disadvantaged persons. The organisation has adopted path-breaking technologies to reach the usually unreachable groups of people.
7th AIWEFA Nina Sibal Memorial Award - 2009

Prof. (Dr.) Asha Hans was awarded the “7th AIWEFA Nina Sibal Memorial Award” for her organization Shanta Memorial Rehabilitation Centre, Bhubaneshwar, Odisha. The centre provides services for the physically disabled children and adults. SMRC has been striving to create and implement a wide range of activities, designed to meet the medical, physical, emotional, social and vocational needs of persons with disabilities.

8th AIWEFA Nina Sibal Memorial Award - 2010

Mr. R.C. Hiremath, was awarded the “8th AIWEFA Nina Sibal Memorial Award” for his organization “Flexitron” of Bengaluru, Karnataka. Flexitron has brought technological innovations, like alternative energy, low cost lighting, disease control etc. to focus on the poor, women, children, and differently-abled persons in the society.

9th AIWEFA Nina Sibal Memorial Award - 2011

Dr. M.K.C. Nair, Founder Director of Child Development Centre, Medical College, Thiruvananthapuram, Kerala, was awarded the “9th AIWEFA Nina Sibal Memorial Award” for his organization on account of the pioneering work done on Reduction of Disability through novel scientific Initiatives.

10th AIWEFA Nina Sibal Memorial Award - 2012

Mr. Asok Chakraborty, Secretary, “Shelter” Bhadreshwar, Hooghly, West Bengal was awarded the “10th AIWEFA Nina Sibal Memorial Award” for his organisation on account of their dedicated work towards education and rehabilitation of persons with mental retardation in association with other disabilities.
11th AIWEFA Nina Sibal Memorial Award - 2013

Ms. Sheela Sinha, Director Education, Helen Keller Institute for Deaf & Deaf blind (HKIDB), Mumbai, Maharashtra was awarded the “11th AIWEFA Nina Sibal Memorial Award” for her organisation on account of their dedicated work towards educating and rehabilitating the deaf & deaf-blind.

12th AIWEFA Nina Sibal Memorial Award - 2014

Dr. Anupa Siddhu, Director, Lady Irwin College, New Delhi, was awarded the “12th AIWEFA Nina Sibal Memorial Award” for her institution for their multidimensional work related to disability across the life span and training the Disability Educators.

13th AIWEFA Nina Sibal Memorial Award - 2015

Mr. Javed Ahmad Tak, Founder Humanity Welfare Organisation Helpline, Anantnag, Jammu & Kashmir, was awarded the “13th AIWEFA Nina Sibal Memorial Award” in recognition of his organisation’s pioneering work in rehabilitating disabled children affected by the disturbed situation in that area.

14th AIWEFA Nina Sibal Memorial Award - 2016

Mr. Arman Ali, Director, Shishu Sarothi Centre for Rehabilitation and Training for Multiple Disability Guwahati, Assam, was awarded the “14th AIWEFA Nina Sibal Memorial Award” for his pioneering work for empowerment of children with disabilities by providing them with avenues for a holistic development.

15th AIWEFA Nina Sibal Memorial Award - 2017

Dr. Arun Mukherjee, Founder Director “Udaan for the Disabled”, New Delhi, was awarded the “15th AIWEFA Nina Sibal Memorial Award” for his pioneering work for training and
early medical intervention of children suffering from Autism Spectrum Disorder, Cerebral Palsy, Down Syndrome etc.

**16th AIWEFA Nina Sibal Memorial Award-2018**

Mr. Sudeep Goyal, Chief Functionary, “Asha Ka Jharna”, Jhunjhunu, Rajasthan was awarded “16th AIWEFA Nina Sibal Memorial Award” for his exemplary work of providing services to not so abled children through three schools.

**17th AIWEFA Nina Sibal Memorial Award-2019**

Ms. Neelam Jolly, Founder & Chairperson, Vishwas, Gurugram, Haryana was awarded the “17th AIWEFA Nina Sibal Memorial Award-2019” for the exemplary work of her organisation in providing services to about 2.5 lakh underprivileged persons.
Ms. Asha Chandra: Moderator

AIWEFA extends special gratitude to Ms. Asha Chandra for facilitating the sessions smoothly during the webinar series episodes 1, 2 and 4. In all the webinars, she discerningly explained the objectives of webinars in the context of the Covid-19 pandemic and also elucidated on the expectations from the panelist speakers. Describing the webinars as the need of the hour during the coronavirus pandemic, she effectively put forth the focused areas of the sessions. Her concise rendition of the rules ensured that the speakers and audience followed the webinar code of conduct like keeping mics on mute etc. She managed the sessions with perfection keeping the speakers as well as audience absorbed. Her timely interventions during the e-platforms enabled the session to follow the timeline and ensured that each speaker received adequate time along with leaving sufficient time to field questions from the international audience. Before inviting the concerned speaker, Ms. Chandra provided a brief introduction of their pioneering work and achievements. At the end of each session, the reiteration of key points and important takeaways added to the value of the webinar and enabled the varied audience of students, faculty, professionals to stay updated and assimilate the information. In many instances during the Questions and Answers session, Ms. Chandra intervened to invite answers to the most relevant questions and avoid repetition. Her commendable role as a moderator not only facilitated the session but also enabled the audience to take advantage of the full wealth of the experience, knowledge and expertise of each of the panelist speakers who are the previous Nina Sibal Award winners.Discussant

Ms. Rita Menon: Discussant

Ms. Menon facilitated the sessions of webinar series 2. AIWEFA was privileged to have her during the webinar as a moderator. Her effective communication skills allowed the speakers and audience to understand the objective of the webinar clearly. The webinar faced some technical issues during the session however, her deft handling of the proceedings did not affect the conduct of the programme. She very patiently handled the situation and controlled the session to end in the stipulated time. Ms. Menon elaborated on the profiles of panelist speakers and duly acknowledged their taking out precious for the webinar. While presenting the objectives and expected outcomes of the webinar to audience and the
panelists as well, Ms. Menon also took the opportunity to explain about the Nina Sibal Memorial Award. At the end of each speaker’s address, she once again refined on the key highlights and lessons to ensure easy assimilation of the information by the audience. Due to some technical issue faced at her end, the questions and answers session was facilitated by Dr. Mayanka Gupta, Executive Member, AIWEFA. Ms. Menon summed up the webinar at the end and was kind enough to acknowledge the support of the team.

Ms. Sarla Manchanda: Convenor, NSA

AIWEFA is honoured to appreciate the work of Ms. Sarla Manchanda and acknowledge her significant contribution as the Convenor, Nina Sibal Award Committee. At the end of each webinar, she traced the history of the award since 2003 and spoke about the vivacious and multi-dimensional personality of the late Ms. Nina Sibal, in whose name the Award has been instituted by her husband, Mr. Kapil Sibal. She gave details on how to apply for the award and elaborated on the selection criteria of the awardee organisation which had successfully enabled people, especially children with disabilities, to lead empowered lives with dignity. Ms. Manchanda informed the participants that it was an opportune gesture to dedicate the webinar series in Ms. Nina Sibal’s name as the Award is presented annually on her birthday on 2nd August.
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<thead>
<tr>
<th>Acronym</th>
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<tr>
<td>CBOs</td>
<td>Community Based Organisations</td>
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<td>CCPD</td>
<td>Chief Commissioner for Persons with Disabilities</td>
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<td>CRPD</td>
<td>Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities</td>
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<td>ILO</td>
<td>International Labour Organisation</td>
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<td>LBW</td>
<td>Low Birth Weight</td>
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<td>MHCA</td>
<td>Mental Health Care Act</td>
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<td>NDMA</td>
<td>National Disaster Management Authority</td>
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<td>NICU</td>
<td>Neonatal Intensive Care Unit</td>
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<td>NREGA</td>
<td>National Rural Employment Guarantee Act</td>
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<td>NSS</td>
<td>National Sample Survey</td>
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<td>OTT</td>
<td>Over the Top</td>
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<td>OPD</td>
<td>Outpatient Department</td>
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<td>PICS</td>
<td>Post Intensive Care Syndrome</td>
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<td>PPE</td>
<td>Personal Protective Equipment</td>
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<td>PwD</td>
<td>Persons with Disabilities</td>
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<td>Rights for Persons with Disabilities Act</td>
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<td>SDGs</td>
<td>Sustainable Development Goals</td>
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<td>State Disaster Management Authority</td>
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<td>SOP</td>
<td>Standard Operating Procedures</td>
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<td>Whf</td>
<td>Work from Home</td>
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<td>WHO</td>
<td>World Health Organisation</td>
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WEBINAR-1

Sustainable Solutions for Persons with Disabilities: Education and Research
INTRODUCTION

The AIWEFA Nina-Sibal Webinar Series Day 1 deliberates on the issue of education and research in the arena of disability. Its focus is on the additional hinderances caused in the lives of persons with disabilities due to the Covid-19 pandemic. Various support systems like medical care, therapies, special education and other essential services either stand disrupted or have become difficult to access. The response measures taken by the government against the Covid-19 pandemic are not inclusive in nature for persons with disabilities and require immediate interventions at the organisational level. Therefore, specialists from various areas of work collaborated for this webinar to discuss the diverse needs and demands of different sections of persons with disabilities and make response measures inclusive and accessible to all. Several sustainable development measures and strategies of early interventions in the field of education as well as research are also discussed in this webinar.

PANELIST 1

Prof. (Dr.) M.K.C. Nair, D.Sc., Director NIMS-SPECTRUM-CDRC
(Formally VC, KUHS & Founder Director, CDC, Kerala)

Prof. Nair began his address stating that the issue of ‘Covid-19’ has brought them together on this platform. He mentioned that the Covid-19 pandemic has affected all of us in several spheres of our lives. However, the session was focused on the sustainable solutions for persons with disabilities. He highlighted that the core issue that has affected the people with disabilities during this pandemic is the need for continued development and follow up. Referring to the rapid research response made by UNICEF, Prof. Nair emphasised the three main ways in which children are affected by the Covid-19. This includes children getting affected by the virus itself. Next is the impact of the closure of the immediate socio-economic environment imposed to stop the transmission of the virus. Lastly, the long-term impact of the delayed development goals. As a result of the complete lockdown due to Covid-19 outbreak, 1.5 billion children have lost months of education and schooling. Furthermore, developmental goals, interventions and therapies have faced a severe

“Awareness of early detection of disability is severely missing among parents in India. 90-95% disability-related problems can be addressed if detected in the pre-natal stage”
Sustainable Solutions for Persons with Disabilities

In the face of the crisis in case of PwD. Looking at the disruption the pandemic has caused and more so in case of persons with disabilities, he briefed the audience on the five major research areas undertaken by UNICEF for this period. These research areas include: “Child protection in the Covid Era”, “Education to Promote Continuous Learning”, “Social Protection”, “Child Well-Being” and lastly “Online Education to Facilitate Internet-Learning”.

Expounding on the fact that the children with special needs require additional services and support systems, he mentioned that maximum results are achieved when the impairment is arrested below six years of age. Unlike the conventional system that believes in rehabilitation to address the issue of disability, the children under the age of six are observed for development delay, motor delay, communication delay and language delay to identify early symptoms of disability. In his address, he further described ‘High Risk Babies’ who can further be classified into three stages: mild risk, moderate risk and severe risk, depending on the criticality of the issue. 85% of high-risk babies are at ‘mild risk’ where there is lack of stimulation and 10% of them are at ‘moderate risk’ due to low birth weight (LBW), hypoxia, hypoglycemia, septic shock and NICU graduates.

He said only a small percentage of 5%, falls under the category of ‘severe risk’ where there are genetic and metabolic issues, he added that by conducting a simple ultrasound, 90-95% of disability related problems can be identified at the prenatal stage. He further exemplified that the premature babies are more prone to visual impairments due to retinopathy. Prof. Nair further explained that some early development stimulations also help to reduce the brain damage in children with LBW. Addressing the issues of development, Prof. Nair mentioned that a simple developmental screen chart has been made accessible to all mothers, Anganwadi workers and health workers across the country to detect developmental delays in children.

He highlighted that early identification of developmental delays allows timely therapies and prevents children from undergoing major permanent damages. In the session, he presented a simple checklist that can be administered by trained health workers for identifying Autism Spectrum Disorder. Stressing on the need to maintain continuous identification of early developmental issues, he emphasised the use of video calls and other online measures during the Covid-19 pandemic. Except group therapies, all other measures were encouraged to be continued for children with autism even during the current pandemic situation with the help of technology and digital platforms. He emphasised on the creation of databases that provide information on community disability in India.
Prof. Nair stated that based on a survey conducted with 5000 children under the age of 10 years, it is revealed that approximately 10% of children under the age of 10 years have some neurological development disability. He also mentioned the introduction of the new concept of ‘Development Nurse Counsellors’ where families are counselled with the help of trained nurses. The experts in the field of psychology and sociology are able to handle the parents and families of children with disabilities efficiently. Prof. Nair ended the session with a brief on the overview of the work initiated at SPECTRUM-CDRC, NIMS Medicity in the field of child development.

**PANELIST 2**

**Dr. Anupa Siddhu**, Director, Lady Irwin College, University of Delhi

Starting with her address, Dr. Siddhu acknowledged that the present situation of the Covid-19 pandemic has altered the ways of bridging the gap between special educators and persons with disabilities. In her address, she highlighted her formal education programmes like B.Ed programme that sensitize teacher-educators to the issue of disability and provide hand-on experience in practical knowledge through field work during internships. Dr. Siddhu shared her pride in shaping well-trained educators in the robust and erstwhile B.Ed programme. Maximum emphasis of the curriculum is on
providing exposure to teacher-educators in their respective fields so that they become the best educators in their respective area of work and are prepared to handle all circumstances.

Another area of work that was highlighted by Dr. Siddhu is ‘Early Detection’ which is the early detection of all remedials at the physical, social and emotional level. The objective of early detection is achieved by an intervention along with research-work assigned to teacher-educators. She further added that such research work is conducted by their master’s students enrolled in the course of Human Development. In the context of disability, she mentioned a nursery school in their premises where more than 50% of children are disabled. Highlighting the key areas of her institution, she mentioned that developing innovative skills among children with disabilities is also their area of focus. This prepares them to acquire work-skills and take part in upcoming opportunities in their lives. Being an executor of courses such as Human Development, Child Development and B.Ed, she believes that all people have some kind of inabilities even if one is not physically disabled. Thus, exploration of every opportunity with an inclusive mind is essential to unfold the potential of a child, specifically a skill-based potential. She emphasised that identification of the right potential is the most relevant aspect of education along with sustainability.

She explained that the conventional notion of skill development involving candle-making, mat-weaving etc. may not hold long-term results due to non-identification of potential skills in the child. The complete endeavour of developing skills which are sustainable in nature, is reassuring for the child as well as the family. Another aspect that was brought to notice while working with children with disabilities, is of inclusive approach. Skilling based on their capabilities and interest does not instill a feeling of discrimination as these skills are formulated for all children. Postulating that disabilities
will not cease to exist in society, there is a need to improve the skills and coping strategies of these children through professional mentoring.

The larger agenda is to make them self-reliant so that they can lead an independent life in their middle and old age. Like Prof. Nair, Dr. Siddhu also emphasised the need to reach out to these children as new modes of communication are adopted during this pandemic. She admitted that things are at a nascent stage even at the child study centres and have received very dismal response from the parents of these children due to the novelty of the situation. She mentioned that her educators are constantly trying to develop new online methods of interactions such as story-telling and fun games. Sharing her experience on the present situation, she stated that the current interventions in the situation might not have brought desired outcomes but with time, they will continue to unfold their potential. Concluding her address on a hopeful note, she said that they will not let time change their path and let people unfold their talents with all kinds of abilities and disabilities.

“The hard fact is that disabilities will not go away from society. We have to improve the skills and coping strategies of these children through professional mentors so that they can live an independent life at the age of 40 or 50 years”

PANELIST 3

Dr. Asha Hans, President, Shanta Memorial Rehabilitation Center, Odisha

The next panelist, Dr. Asha Hans highlighted three core work areas of her organisation involving ‘Rehabilitation’, ‘Disaster & Disability’ and ‘Women & Disability’. On the occasion, Dr. Hans presented her talk on ‘Women and Disability’ mentioning that their organisation has been in this area for the last ten years across India and has conducted several academic studies. In context of the current pandemic situation. Dr. Hans opined that the shift to the digital mode has not thrived with the rural women with minimal literacy levels and lack of technological equipment. Highlighting the technological inadequacies, she mentioned that in Odisha, only two women out of two hundred have access to smartphones. Similarly, in case of Telangana, out of two hundred rural women surveyed, five women were found to have smartphones. Therefore, digitisation of things
during the Covid-19 pandemic has not helped much in providing assistance to rural women with disabilities as rehabilitation work has been hampered.

Further, the guideline of WHO to wash hands frequently is also not feasible in rural areas where water is fetched by women who travel on foot to distant lakes and rivers. The situation is impractical in the case of women with disabilities as they are required to fetch additional water to meet the need of washing hands frequently.

Another critical challenge highlighted by Dr. Hans is in regard to wearing of masks by persons with disabilities during the pandemic. She stressed that it is a challenge for people with hearing impairment as many of them practice ‘lip reading’ which is not possible with masks. Mentioning the challenges of the Covid-19 period, Dr. Hans highlighted the problem faced by people with disabilities while ‘social distancing’. She affirmed that social distancing is impractical in cases where people with severe disability need personal assistance for support and other work. Lastly, suspension of health services and OPD is another major area of concern, as health care services for minimal and serious health issues of people with disability are being neglected.

While sharing several restrictions that lockdown has imposed on people with disabilities, Dr. Hans shared the outcomes of a study conducted by her organisation in three states—Odisha, Gujarat and Telangana. The study was conducted to obtain a deeper insight into challenges faced by women with disabilities in homelessness and increased cases of domestic violence in many cases.
Based on the study conducted, Dr. Hans shared some measures that can be taken to overcome the challenges being faced by women with disabilities during the Covid-19 pandemic. Firstly, it was highlighted that new guidelines for disability must be formulated considering the issues of Covid-19. Secondly, the remedial action plans must be executed considering the type of disability in mind. For instance, tele-medicines or tele-counselling are not useful for persons with hearing impairment. Thirdly, for food security, Dr. Hans mentioned that civil societies must act on the issue as many of them may not be able to go and stand in long queues. Fourthly, she emphasised the need to improve the masks so as to include people with hearing disabilities. Next, she highlighted the long-awaited need for maintaining a record for persons with disabilities similar to one maintained for migrant workers. Further, she also emphasised the need for development of some apps that could provide information on various schemes available to disabled people. Analysing and looking ahead in future scenarios post the pandemic, Dr. Hans stated that the issue of legal aid and employment would also need urgent attention. In addition, persons with psychosocial disabilities need qualitative counselling sessions which provide them with confidence and satisfaction. Dr. Hans ended her session on a positive note stating that despite so many odds, many of these women have secured leadership roles and taken a stand for themselves.

“...new guidelines for disability must be formulated considering the issues of Covid-19. Also, the remedial action plans must be executed considering the type of disability in mind.”

DISCUSSANT

Dr. Mayanka Gupta, Executive Member, AIWEFA
Assistant Professor, Lady Irwin College, University of Delhi

Dr. Gupta, the discussant of the webinar gave a summation of the key highlights of all panelists and their interventions in their respective fields. She shared some recent developments at the national as well as the international level, with respect to persons with disabilities. In this regard, it was highlighted that UN guidelines passed in May 2020
stressed on the need to ensure that people with disabilities have access to essential services, including immediate health and social protection services. In her address, she also made a mention of disability inclusive guidelines that were issued by the Indian government, post lockdown due to the Covid-19 pandemic which notified the state health authorities to provide accessible facilities in quarantine centres and health facilities.

During this period, the government of India also intervened at the local level by the creation of a WhatsApp group headed by government officers for persons with disabilities, to ensure outreach in rural and remote areas. The group shares details of nodal officers, govt orders, e-passes for caregivers and procurement and dissemination of essential items of daily need. She emphasised that the current crisis is all the more reason for formulating disability inclusive guidelines as lack of internet access, lack of accessible software, disconnect with educational setups and disconnect with their therapist has further enlarged the gap for persons with disabilities.

Reinforcing the opinions of panelists on disability and the Covid-19 pandemic, the need to identify an inclusive sustainable response to the pandemic was emphasised as the situation is not likely to be normal soon. In her presentation, she shared some of the solutions that can be introduced to reduce the impact of Covid-19 pandemic among persons with disabilities. The measures included support solutions promoting equality in employment and work from home policies, ensuring communications accessible to all types of disabilities and providing adequate social protection considering the current crisis situation.
With regard to education and research for persons with disabilities, Dr. Gupta pointed the way forward to achieve sustainable solutions:

1. Ensure access to Internet for remote learning, software and assistive devices to persons with all disabilities and reasonable accommodation.

2. Provide guidance, training and support to teachers on inclusive education through remote learning.

3. Establish close coordination with parents and caregivers for early education of children with disabilities.

4. Provide guidance and distance support to parents and caregivers to assist the setting up of equipment and to support the education programme of their wards with disabilities.

5. Develop accessible and adaptive materials

6. Develop accessible educational audio-visual materials for ease of dissemination using effective media (e.g. online on-demand, televised educational programmes, etc.)

7. Strengthening the means of implementation of the SDGs for persons with disabilities.

8. There is a need for a two-way capacity development. Primarily, the service providers must increase the quantity and quality of their services for persons with disabilities. Secondly, capacity development programmes on accountability mechanisms must exercise disability rights, access services with improved quality for self-empowerment of persons with disabilities.

9. More inclusive health care, tele-therapy, telemedicine and robotics may be an important area to explore. Emphasis should be on medical and quarantine policies and disability inclusive processes.

10. With respect to policy and institutional coherence, there is a need to establish a robust institutional mechanism with efficient coordination at the national level and adequate resources, both financial and human, to promote the rights, inclusion, and well-being of persons with disabilities. In addition, there is a need to ensure that national legislation and development plans are coherent and that legal and policy provisions do not contradict each other.

11. There should be an interlinkage between laboratory research and ground reality involving multi-stakeholder partnerships. Data related activities must be executed with systematic coordination among responsible ministries, working together in cohesion and also with civil society communities such as non-governmental organisations, particularly dealing with persons with disabilities, the private sector, and research institutions.
Concluding the session, Dr. Mayanka Gupta stated that we, as stakeholders, have to be at the heart of the above-mentioned interventions in terms of addressing the issues and defining the solutions.

**QUESTIONS AND ANSWERS SESSION**

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| **Dr. Asha Hans**    | 1. **How are the concerns of indigenous women incorporated into solutions for people with disabilities?**  
This is something on which we have been working for the last two years, especially at a global level. I am working with someone in Nepal who does a lot of work in this direction. We bring women with disabilities from indigenous areas to them. I’ll give an example from my work area-Odisha; which has a huge population coming from indigenous areas. We make a point to include this segment of the population, and as we don’t regularly work with them, it is a learning process. We need to understand their requirements to collectively work out the solutions. The practices and models developed for the general cannot be implemented on them as they are. However, they are quite open about their issues, and we have to proactively work towards attending to their needs. Also, we cannot expect them to come on their own for treatment or counselling.  

2. **What possible funding is available for NGOs and how do we bridge the gap of access and ICT in communities?**  
At present, the funding is very-very limited but under Covid-19, there is now some funding available. For example, yesterday ‘MamaCash’ came up. Also, USAID has a lot of funding but in India, there are limited resources because several other expenses have come up for Governmental spending during Covid-19 and persons with disabilities continue to remain a very marginalised community. However, there is a lot of global funding from women’s foundations. I am on the board of women humanitarian fund and we just released some millions across all conflict zones in the world funding for Covid-19 under a special programme.  

3. **I am working in the garment labour industry. I would like to know if there is any international policy for developing them?**  
I worked in the garment industry in Tamil Nadu, Tripura and Bangalore and did a study for ILO. However, there is nothing on disability. Though ILO has come up with some issues regarding disability and these have been taken up. Many women workers in India and Bangladesh employed in the garment industry are very young usually of 17-18 years and they come from indigenous areas. Therefore, their issues of migration and disability need serious attention. There is a global compact on migration that looks at the issue of the garment industry. |
| **Dr. Anupa Siddhu**  | 1. **What has been the impact of Covid-19 on education with reference to parents of children with special needs?**  

Sustainable Solutions for Persons with Disabilities
I do not have the first-hand experience of how children with special needs are coping with the current situation. However, they would definitely need the support of parents to use technology. In urban areas, the students of the B.Ed course have responded very well to Covid-19 pandemic needs concerning children with special needs. In fact, in my area, I have seen very young children using mobiles for their online classes and uploading assignments. These were the children of Sarvodaya Vidyalaya. Technology in general is getting harnessed. The more it is explored, the more it would be beneficial. Moreover, we should not develop any notion that disabled children cannot use technology. There are some limitations but those limitations can be with people without disability too. Therefore, one should not presume this, rather, we should encourage them. Presently, they are successfully able to do their assignments and upload them. If there are some challenges, then I believe with parental support, they can be resolved. During the pandemic, personal attention and personal evaluation have definitely become a limitation though we have various modules which hold e-learning compatibility. We hope that by at least the next session, the situation will normalise and we, as institutions, will be able to carry out evaluations. Further, the younger generation is more digital savvy and most of the disabilities have not come as interferences.

2. What social and educational justice issues have social distancing policies raised for disabled people?
As Dr. Asha Hans informed, some disabilities require escorting as they are faced with a physical challenge. A lot needs to done by the country in the area of physical accessibility which should not be limited to the duration of the COVID-19 pandemic, but established as a norm. The physical accessibility index needs to be addressed, not only of institutions and educational institutions, but even of malls and entertainment spaces. Presently, a huge gap exists. This section needs escorting, some physical assistance, some support equipment which encompasses the larger issues where we have to have behaviour change communication to make it more compassionate and inclusive. Though, I personally believe that the work from home (wfh) strategy during Covid-19 has been successful. Many of these persons with disability who were employed have successfully continued with their employment. In fact, this wfh facility has enabled them to overcome the visual barrier of being seen as a person with a disability. Now with wfh that barrier removed, many of them have actually reached the pinnacle of their ability and deliverance. Moreover, developing the culture of wfh is a very good strategy even after the pandemic is over. Learning to cope up is the key and the supervision of the mentors is also important. They should have a directory for medical help and a reckoner with the necessary database of their medical reports. In fact, the behaviour of self-reliance and independence should be introduced as early as at the age of a three-year-old, and this should be the general norm also.

1. What are the three main stimulating actions which reduce the developmental disorders in the new-born?
The most important thing is that the baby needs to have a conducive prenatal environment, that is, before delivery. At the time of delivery, the baby needs immediate oxygen, should be immediately put on the breast so that there is no way the baby develops a lack of glucose. Above all, the most important aspect is avoiding infection. Now, concerning stimulations, even a normal baby needs several stimulations.
Conventionally, there has been a lot of stimulus by the mother, grandparents and others. These stimulations should continue at least in the first year of the child. These early stimulations have been able to gain 10 IQ levels at a minimum. And, the most stimulating factor is the face of the mother. My study has brought out that, the lesser educated the mother is, the better it is. The last point is that nowadays we have started giving lesser time to our children of even the younger age groups. In fact, in most cases, only the mothers are left to be responsible for handling early stimulations, thus compromising their other aspects of life. So, here in the institute, we aim at bringing the whole family in the early stimulation programme.

2. What is the differing impact on women and men with disabilities during this crisis?
Though I do not have any specific data, I believe that somehow women have more resilience when it comes to their coping capacity. May be throughout their life, since childhood they have been managing difficult situations and admirably coping with them. The men never try to build their inner strength. They always depend on outside things that could include, maybe drinking, outing or some other outlet of that sort. Now due to the pandemic crisis, the whole arena is on hold. Also, if we look at the suicide cases, then the cases of male suicides are much more than women. Thus, women build their inner strength and can manage somehow which is not there in men.
WEBINAR-2

Sustainable Solutions for Persons with Disabilities: Educational and Rehabilitation Outreach
INTRODUCTION

The AIWEFA Coronavirus Covid-19 Webinar Series-2 commenced on a note of ‘tuning in’ to listen to the speakers present on the panel. While ‘tuning in’ has a retro association, the Covid-19 pandemic has set it as a new normal. The spread of Covid-19 has been devastating for the world leaving an indelible mark on everyone’s life. Witnessing the enormous damage, it has caused to humanity, it has pushed all our scientists, doctors, researchers, economists, academicians and other experts to study its effects and come up with theories for this new normal. Recently, WHO Emergency Expert, Mike Ryan said that the Covid-19 virus might just become like any other virus endemic in our communities and it is here to stay with us. The UN Secretary-General, Antonio Guterres stated that even when the pandemic is brought under control, grief, anxiety and depression would continue to affect people and communities. Thus, in this whole paradigm of a new normal, experts in different areas are coming up with their research-based concepts, while we here at AIWEFA, attempt to accelerate actions by learning from each other’s experience. With this perspective, the AIWEFA Covid-19 webinar series taps into the vast experience available with the 17 AIWEFA Nina Sibal awardee organisations who took steps to develop Covid-19 coping mechanisms among people especially children with special needs. Their practical knowledge and proficiency could enlighten many of us and enable us to develop a robust retrieval plan for our own sectors.

PANELIST 1

Ms. Neelam Jolly, Founder and Chairperson, Vishwas, Gurgaon, Haryana

Ms. Jolly commenced the session by citing that the truth of the Covid-19 pandemic is that it has hit us. Now, when the situation has caused such a disaster that it has impacted almost every single person, this calls for a collaborative effort. She mentioned that during this period, technology has to be the biggest boon which benefits a large section of society. She further added that technology should not be used only to create awareness about the pandemic but also to penetrate every section of society with solutions for education, hunger, medical services, and rehabilitation. The emphasis was laid on a holistic approach. Highlighting the approach of her organisation to deal with challenges of the pandemic situation, she said that the organisation works as a resource centre on one hand while guiding, supporting and rehabilitating the disabled and
disadvantaged on the other hand. Another important aspect which she highlighted in her address was the capacity building of their staff at regular intervals. In this context, Ms. Jolly mentioned a 4-week online programme by the University of Cape Town on the training of deaf students to become empowered teachers. She also shared the training sessions conducted for the staff on issues like - behaviour management in children with Autism and other developmental disabilities, Teachers as mentors, Leadership skills, Neuro-linguistic programming, and Emergency Medical Response in the school settings. These trainings were highly beneficial while connecting with the disabled children through digital mode during the pandemic. Ms. Jolly also stressed upon the importance of providing financial security to the staff of an organisation along with serving the beneficiaries in the community. It was underlined that the timely payment of salaries to staff adds to their sense of security, keeps them motivated, encourages them to give maximum efforts and eventually adds certainty to programmes execution.

She further used the platform to mention the contribution of her organisation in developing a document named- ‘Covid-19: Issues, Challenges and Suggestions for the Inclusion of Persons with Disabilities’. It was apprised that the document could be used as a ready reckoner by organisations involved in the area of disability. She also informed about a Disability Resource Helpline started by the organisation in Haryana for promoting disability inclusive education in the entire state. During the lockdown period, the Helpline facilitated in assessing the education level of disabled persons in the state and also to understand the required support which can be extended through the local level NGOs and civil societies. She elaborated on the activities that her organisation has taken up to overcome the challenges of the Covid-19 pandemic; one such achievement was the successful completion of the last academic session of their children. Informing about the constraints their students have about availability of smartphones, computers, and laptops, Ms. Jolly mentioned that their organisation tapped every possible intermediary which could help establish a connect between children and their teachers. Visual communication, video calls and home-based assignments were the strength of their online virtual classes.

“Taking care of the mental health and financial health of the staff is also a big responsibility for the organisation. This requires equal attention as developing alternative solutions for beneficiaries of the organisation.”

Besides the online classes, regular consultations for emotional, financial or academic support were part of a regular course of action. With regard to financial support, the organisation is associated with the ‘Give India’ programme which enabled them to extend
financial support to both the disabled and normal children from the underprivileged group. Next, Ms. Jolly informed about a tele-rehabilitation programme started by their organisation to provide timely consultation to people with disabilities and thus avoid any secondary complications. It was mentioned that the services of the tele-rehabilitation programme were open to everyone needing intensive care in addition to the registered beneficiaries. Ms. Jolly ended her session with two case studies where the beneficiaries were able to successfully cope up with their situation with the help of frequent consultations and constant intervention.

PANELIST 2

Ms. Ketaki Bardalai, Executive Director, Shishu Sarothi, Assam

Ms. Ketaki Bardalai proceeded to the next session of the webinar. Since the webinar honoured Nina Sibal Memorial Awardees as panelist speakers, Ms. Bardalai was kind enough to acknowledge the pioneering work of Mr. Arman Ali, Ex-Director of Shishu Sarothi who had received the Nina Sibal Memorial Award in 2016. Confronting the difficult situation which the lockdown has imposed on each one of us, Ms. Bardalai shared that she is held up in Kolkata for more than two months. Of course, technology has been a saviour throughout this pandemic period, enabling them to continue with whatever little they could do to deal with the situation.

Highlighting immediate issues of the post lockdown period, Ms. Bardalai stated that many families lacked access to even basic rations. It was stressed that even before an organisation could start any rehabilitation programme or continue with its core services, it was essential to fulfill the basic needs along with the rations to these families. To attend the immediate needs of the beneficiaries, initial efforts of the organisation involved-

“All organisations striving for the common objective must come in partnerships to overcome the challenges of each other during the Pandemic situation of Covid-19. In this whole face of a disquieting situation, cooperation and collaboration of the organisations would be a key strategy.”

14th AIWEFA
Nina Sibal Memorial Awardee in 2016
contacting their beneficiaries, obtaining information on their well-being and arranging for relief wherever required. However, she informed things did not move smoothly.

Considering the pandemic outbreak, getting people willing to work at the frontline, came across as a big challenge. To overcome the issue of shortage of manpower willing to work at the frontline, the organisation moved through government authorities such as the District Administration and State Commissioner for persons with disabilities. Ms. Bardalai mentioned that the organisation has provided relief to more than 600 families, utilising funds from their corpus as well as the funding support extended by various donors. While mentioning about relief work, Ms. Bardalai highlighted that in the initial phase when the state (Assam) did not witness many Covid-19 positive cases, the relief work was continual. However, a sudden shoot up in Covid-19 positive cases has brought the relief work at a halt for the moment. Another work area highlighted by Ms. Bardalai which, actually has taken a front seat now-a-days is ‘tele-therapies’. She informed that the staff at the organisation is into a continuous telecommunication mode and other virtual modes, as it is also the need of the hour. While describing the potential of virtual platforms during the social distancing period, she shared a recent experience of a popular festival- ‘Bihu’ in the Assam state.

She mentioned that various videos and celebration clips were posted on social media, zoom calls were conducted to celebrate the day online. Though, she accepted the fact that online celebrations could not match the level of physical celebration, at least a virtual get together could take place. Moreover, there is also a need for capacity building programmes of staff members to be able to use online platforms more effectively. In this
regard, Ms. Bardalai stressed that while working with funding agencies and donors under the programme named- ‘Covid Recovery’; two components- 1.) capacity building of staff members and 2.) small funds for poor families to resume their economic activities, should be the focus areas.

In her address, she further highlighted that the organisation is seriously concerned about secondary complications that may arise in disabled children with high support needs in the absence of connect with education setups and therapy centres. In this regard, Ms. Bardalai shared their strategy of creating two teams among their staff members where one team would be specifically trained on virtual classes and online modules while the other team would focus on physically visiting the beneficiaries and doing follow-ups on home-based management. Lastly, it was expressed that the organisations are trying hard to develop coping mechanisms and alternative solutions. However, over the longer horizon, the organisations are facing the challenges of depleting financial resources, reducing the scope of several skill programmes due to the collapse of many industrial sectors and the ensuing repercussions due to the complete breakdown of the economy. Therefore, all organisations striving towards the common cause must come in partnerships to overcome the weaknesses of each other. Ms. Bardalai wrapped her session with a remark that cooperation and collaboration of the organisations would be a key strategy to continue with the developmental work in the current face of the disquieting situation.

PANELIST 3

Mr. Sudeep Goyal, Chief Functionary,
Asha Ka Jharna, Rajasthan

Mr. Sudeep Goyal started his presentation by first describing the challenges faced by persons with disabilities due to the execution of new guidelines during Covid-19 pandemic. He presented the data provided by UNESCO stating that around 1.5 billion children are out of school all over the world due to Covid-19 outbreak and lockdown situation. In his address, he mentioned that as the current situation being entirely unprecedented in the history of pandemics, there is a vacuum of information. On the other hand, due to its unknown behaviour, there are new research findings and forecasts every
other day leading to an overflow of information. Though there is an abundance of information available, the absence of any concrete evidence, leads to an information vacuum. The weak information network has added to our anxiety, fear and stress levels.

Regarding children with disabilities, he stressed that rigid restrictions due to the pandemic have posed several challenges for persons with disabilities. Furthermore, these challenges vary with the type of disability i.e. all children with disabilities may not face the same type of challenge. Firstly, the lockdown has not only curtailed the education but has restrained many other scenarios such as a conducive environment for growth and learning, peer learning, sense of protection, emotional support, psycho-social support, inclusive development, mid-day meal facility and much more. Moreover, their confinement at home has induced some behavioural and emotion problems in them. Besides, the situation has led to increased work pressures on family members especially mothers. Secondly, the lack of access to health services is another big challenge for persons with disabilities. He emphasised that children with epilepsy or children on medication need continuous health care and medical services. Thirdly, children with intellectual disabilities have limitations in understanding issues like threat perception or the importance of personal hygiene. Fourthly, children with visual impairment who most times act based on their tactile stimulus face a huge challenge during this period of social distancing. Similarly, children with hearing impairment face great difficulties in lip reading due to masks worn by other people.

Another issue highlighted by Mr. Goyal was concerning social distancing. In this context, he underlined that this segment of persons with disabilities was already cut off from the mainstream. Therefore, further imposing of the social distancing clause during the Covid-19 pandemic has pushed this segment of the population to the periphery. Bringing out this hard fact, he mentioned that on one side where we talk of inclusive growth, this pandemic has forced them to live in isolation and to deal with their limitations on their own. During his address, he also put forth the adverse climatic conditions of Rajasthan, like scarce water, obstructing the norms of a new normal, advising frequent washing of hands.

Mr. Goyal stressed that both washing hands and sanitisation are difficult in rural areas specifically in certain parts of rural Rajasthan. Another aspect highlighted in his presentation pertained to the maintenance of a database comprising of PwD details. In this context, he elaborated that RPD Act, 2016 (Rights for Persons with Disabilities Act) mandates the maintenance of record of PwD details with NDMA (National Disaster
Management Authority) and SDMA (State Disaster Management Authority). The database is foreseen as a ready reckoner to reach out to persons with disabilities during such pandemics or any other exigency and for doing resource mapping for other development activities. However, the database is missing in our government systems. Elucidating on the current situation of the pandemic, he mentioned that the government has details of only those children with disabilities who are associated with formal institutions. However, those children with disabilities who are not connected with any institute or education centres; the government does not have any record. In this context, Mr. Goyal highlighted the effective role played by his organisation in reaching out to children with disabilities who were otherwise not associated with any institute.

In the next section of the presentation, Mr. Goyal described a three-fold approach adopted by the organisation as a coping mechanism against the stressful situation of Covid-19. The approach included: i.) Relief and Reach ii.) Recovery and Resilience and iii.) Reforms. Under relief and reach activity, the organisation reached out to the parents of all of their students and conducted counselling sessions on an individual basis. Besides creating awareness on the Covid-19 pandemic, the organisation also provided relief support in the form of dry ration kit, face masks, sanitisers and immunity-boosting ayurvedic ‘Kadha’. Also, these families were facilitated to obtain government benefits to which they were entitled such as advance pension payments of two months, one-month extra ration to families. Above all, the organisation also pursued for the appointment of a nodal officer.
in each district of Rajasthan for persons with disabilities under CCPD (Chief Commissioner for Persons with Disabilities) guidelines. Under the provision, the District Social Welfare Officer would be the nodal officer for persons with disabilities who could be contacted for any government benefits related issues, medical issues or any other issues. This also provides a toll-free helpline number in every district.

Under recovery and resilience, the organisation focused on the education of its students. Similar to other organisations, they developed online modules and e-learning platforms. This also included the development and execution of assignment worksheets along with the support of their parents. Basic therapeutic sessions including occupational therapy were also conducted with the support of parents. Besides this, the children are also being trained in simple household work, art & craft and yoga to increase their beneficial role at home. Mr. Goyal stressed that e-learning has its limitations like many students have connectivity issues or sometimes their mobiles are not recharged. Moreover, children with disabilities require physical interface including physical prompting or emotional prompting which is lacking in e-learning platforms. He emphasised that the organisation, therefore, might have to look into solutions that are more robust and long-lasting. In his address, he also mentioned about a 24- hrs Childline service that was active throughout the lockdown period.

From a perspective of reforms, he underlined various advocacy level issues that were taken up by the organisation in collaboration with other organisations and national bodies. Regarding employment, he stressed the need to work harder to create employment opportunities. As the economy of the country was already experiencing weaker growth, the shock of Covid-19 has further sullied the situation, in cases of persons with disabilities. In this respect, Mr. Goyal stated about collaborative efforts that include 5% reservation for persons with disabilities under the NREGA programme. Similarly, the organisation attained the permission of allowing a caregiver to the intellectually disabled person at the hospital who is Covid positive.

Looking forward to the post lockdown period when the restrictions would be lifted and schools would reopen, Mr. Goyal underlined the need to make some more inclusions such as new seating arrangements in classrooms and transportation, temporary suspension of some activities like morning prayers, annual day or parent-teacher meet. While describing long term reforms in the education system, he stated that the introduction of life skill training, emotional intelligence training, experiential training,

“Learning Process is not place-dependent. Parents of children with disabilities are required to stand with this thought so as not to feel a burden about the current situation.”
capacity building of educators and development of some software are the next course of action. He ended the session by stating that Covid-19 pandemic certainly has given deep schisms in our economy and human capital but in some of the areas it can be seen as an opportunity especially from the government’s perspective as it has created a platform to reinforce good health practices in the community and need for investing in public health systems.

PANELIST 4

Ms. Sulagna Roy, Educational Specialist, Formerly with UNICEF

Ms. Sulagna Roy began by appreciating the efforts of the AIWEFA awardee organisations working in the area of persons with disabilities. In her address, she shared some of the UNICEF policy briefs about schools and education. She underlined that Covid-19 pandemic has enhanced the disparity between people with resources and without resources. Online platforms, digitisation, e-learning has created a digital divide between people with smartphones, computers and laptops, and people with no such digital access. It was highlighted that even before the Covid-19 pandemic, school teachers, principals and school administrators were struggling to make school classrooms inclusive. There is a huge gap when it comes to children of government schools and children of private schools on account of access to e-learning. On one side, the children of private schools might have not taken a hit of even a single day when it relates to their classes. While on the other side, children of government schools might have to put the entire academic session at stake in the absence of any digital access. Moreover, the software which many government school children have might not be conducive to contemporary e-learning. Furthermore, the level of problems escalates multiple times when it pertains to children with disabilities from a poor socio-economic background.

In her address, she presented a study that revealed that 43% of learners globally do not have access to the internet. In the context of government school children of Rajasthan,
she mentioned that many children were found to be in a confused state of mind due to lack of access to the right information about this pandemic. Whereas, the children who had access to television, informed members in their surrounding environment and access to other sources of information were more prepared about the current situation. It was further found that children better informed about the current pandemic situation responded better to e-learning in comparison to children who did not have correct information about the situation and their increased anxiety levels inhibited their learning process. Describing the importance of access to the right information in the overall performance of children, she emphasised the need to create awareness among all school children about the present pandemic crisis using communication means to which they have access. Next, Ms. Roy shared the perspective of UNICEF on the education of government school children during Covid-19 pandemic. The UNICEF has two focused areas- 1.) At home and 2.) Preparing for school when they would reopen.

Figure 2.3   Ways to Overcome Digital Gap

During the lockdown period when these children are confined to their homes, the school teachers and Asha workers are visiting them regularly for the mid-day meal and other activities. Moreover, there are various e-learning platforms of government such as e-
pathshaala, Swayam, Diksha, National Repository of Open Education Resource through which their teachers are reaching out to these children. Like in other schools, institutes and child study centres, the children are provided with a structured routine including morning activities, afternoon activities, evening activities and night activities. The children are also involved in extracurricular activities like yoga, dance, music, art and craft etc. However, concerning disabled children, Ms. Roy shared a few doubts about the availability of e-learning materials. She emphasised the need to continuously reach out to these with some information, some learning material, some activities throughout this period. It was informed that the whole repository of equipment is present at every Block office under Sarva Siksha Abhiyaan. The equipment was successfully used by some of the school teachers in training parents on how to use them with children. Since, the types of equipment are available at every Block office, these must be utilised to their maximum to provide full benefits to children. Ms. Roy also shared about a new development wherein UNICEF has networked with NCERT to develop learning materials using T.V., radio and films for children with disabilities.

About school reopening, it was mentioned that UNICEF has prepared extensive guidelines. When schools, district education body and state bodies are into preparing guidelines for schools to function in new normal, it is a good opportunity to ensure that guidelines are inclusive. Moreover, there should be a plan of each child as the Right to Education mandates the follow up of every child on his/her pedagogy and continuous comprehensive evaluation. Further, she stressed that accelerated learning projects including remedial learning, catch-up learning would need to be executed due to a weak education system during the lockdown period. Next, it was suggested that parents of children with disabilities should be made a part of the parent-teacher committee along with parents of normal children.

Ms. Roy assured about SOP being prepared for school administration for post lockdown period; UNICEF is addressing the issues of disability. She explained certain issues like concept of a single desk, peer support, allergic condition due to sanitiser, sanitisation of shoes and other objects, masks for hearing impairment and many more, which are being considered while developing SOP. In her address, she also underlined that teacher training programme must involve principals to make them understand that inclusive education must be based on child’s rights. Moreover, the school principals must ensure to create enabling environment and facilitate inclusive development. Mentioning the importance of all levels in the education system including teachers, principals, administrators at the
school level, district level and state level, Ms. Roy described the Self Assessing Index. Self-Assessing Index is checklist of work expected from the concerned person. The assessment sheet helps the persons to understand what is expected out of them and where exactly they stand at a particular point in time. She informed that Self Assessing Index which was implemented in Rajasthan under the Girl’s Education programme was very useful.

Ms. Roy also stated about ‘Covid-19 disability monitoring’ is being developed by UN and ‘Comprehensive Disability Inclusive Guideline’ already issued by government of India which can be referred to. Acknowledging the fact that work in the disability sector is difficult and requires continuous efforts, the Disability Inclusive Covid-19 Response would serve everyone better. She reiterated that this Covid-19 has provided with an opportunity to relook and rework on inclusive policies and strengthen inclusive growth. In her closing remarks, Ms. Roy once again appreciated the efforts of other organisations working for children with disabilities.

**DISCUSSANT**

![Dr. Renu Malaviya](image_url)

Dr. Renu Malaviya, Secretary General, AIWEFA

Dr. Malaviya concluded webinar 2 on ‘Sustainable Solutions for Persons with disabilities—Educational and Rehabilitation Outreach’. She started with her presentation by first summarising on the key points put forth by the empanelled speakers. On behalf of AIWEFA, she thanked all eminent speakers of Webinar Series 2 for sharing their initiatives and challenges faced during Covid-19 pandemic concerning persons with disabilities and also facilitating learning from each other’s experiences. She acknowledged various innovative actions and approaches of grassroot level organisations which can be scaled up as we move towards the stabilisation of the ‘New Normal’ which are the result of the emergence of the COVID19 pandemic. She then, defined several activities which will form the part of ‘New Normal’ under Covid-19 pandemic for education and rehabilitation of children with disabilities. These activities included- significant use of technology, curriculum based online resources, developing skills for providing virtual online therapy and e-counselling, conducting teacher training programme for new normal,
online documentation and data tracking and capacity building of support groups involving parents and care givers.

In her address, she mentioned that several schools, institutes, NGOs and other grassroots level organisations have already started performing on virtual modes. In this regard, she shared that Rehabilitation Council of India in collaboration with WHO has already started online training of special educator and their skill development. It was stated that various institutions such as Lady Irwin College (University of Delhi), Punjab University, SNDT, Mumbai have networked with NGOs in the areas of rehabilitation and special education. Emphasising that numerous things that need to be looked upon and which are in pipeline, she underlined that access to internet, mobiles and laptops would form a baseline to create an enabling environment. There are galore of possibilities once we can reach out to every last person in the community through mobile. She emphasised the need for strong coordination between community, grassroot level organisation and special education institutions. Next, an urgent need for development of ‘community technology centre’ was stressed to overcome the challenge of incompetent technology or absence of technology at individual or home level in the far-flung areas of the country. Acknowledging the overburden of families in present difficult circumstances, Dr. Malaviya mentioned the pertinent role of group of families or cluster support which can be tapped and explored. She also emphasised the need to incorporate traditional knowledge and practices while developing standards for the new normal.

She stated that the Teacher-Education Programmes are already gearing up to move towards hybrid learning – teaching processes for children and young adults. Work has
already begun with the teacher education institutions and NGOs working with grassroots families towards new skill development for themselves and the teacher-interns. Dr. Malaviya also highlighted that Rehabilitation Council of India (RCI) in collaboration with WHO has already started on-line courses for developing skills of special educators, general teachers and rehabilitation professionals to empower them for present COVID 19 situations and thereafter.

Highlighting that one need to revisit the Indian way of living and gain insight into the process of eliciting the best between the traditional and the present, often we tend to through the baby with the dirty bath water. This is what has happened in certain cases, wherein the learning from the traditional has been completely ignored and the movement has been towards westernization. Giving the example of the regular ‘jachcha-baccha’ (newborn baby and the new mother) massages and bath sequence was considered a very must and that is so much now indicated as a part of early intervention centres. She emphasised upon the need for CENSUS like data collection of the persons with disabilities across the country, so that there is clarity of what is needed and where the experts and resources are, so they can be used to the optimum level for capacity building and needs of the person with disability.

Dr. Malaviya, with reference to education and research for persons with disability shared following way forward to achieve sustainable solutions:

1. Development of databases and data tracking in terms of their needs, issues, facilities required and cluster sharing.
2. Networking of professionals and multidisciplinary teams.
3. Formation of cluster points of excellence and resources development.
5. Awareness and sensitization creation of all different stakeholders.
7. Continuous Skill Development of teacher educators, special educators and general teachers, rehabilitation professionals, grassroots workers, parents and families.
8. Technology innovations for the support and holistic capacity building of the person with disabilities.
9. Utilizing universal design of learning (UDL) and accessibility (UDA) for creating seamless equitable society.
10. Empowering of family and community as resources in the rehabilitation processes of
the person with disabilities.

### QUESTIONS AND ANSWERS SESSION

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| Ms. Neelam Jolly     | 1. Counselling through zoom calls and phone calls works effectively. Do we need a reform in a virtual counselling structure?  
2. How does the lack of technical support hinder the counselling processes?  
I always wanted to run a tele-helpline and have managed to get one also. However, over some time, I have realised that even with tele-helpline, we were not able to reach the other side i.e. beneficiaries. People change their numbers frequently in many cases due to several reasons. In this sense, zoom has come as a blessing. Even if we talk about remote areas, we have Anganwadi workers, Asha workers who can connect with us through online platforms. In that way, it has come as a big boon to us where families can connect with doctors, counsellors through Anganwadi workers and Asha workers. We all had been aspiring for it. Though, now it (virtual counselling) has come as a compulsion but it does provide a way out to situations where counselling is very pertinent in case of children with disabilities. Further, if we see there is abundance of technology including high end technologies at one end while there are people who lack access to even basic technology. Therefore, as organisations we need to bridge this gap and establish a connect. After experiencing the current situation of crisis, we must admit that technology is a key to reach out to our beneficiaries. |
| Ms. Ketaki Bardalai  | 1. What are the precautions that parents have to take care of with reference to the development in their new norms? How this lockdown can be beneficial for their children?  
Some families were proactive in engaging with their children and taking additional care during this pandemic. But there are families whose priorities changed on account of lockdown. During this time, we must convince the families to set aside some time to work with their children and provide the required inputs. Though, we also need to keep in mind that we do not pressurise the parents to an extent that they feel it overburdened. At the organisation, we are into virtual sessions but we may also go for physically visiting the society depending on the need. Picking up from what Mr. Goyal mentioned that learning is not place dependent, we need to reiterate the same thing to parents also and motivate the parents so they can see opportunity in every situation. |
| Mr. Sudeep Goyal     | 1. How will the teachers be able to handle problems which are happening in this new normal due to lockdown?  
Here, self-care is very important. As a teacher or special educator, we have to give our best and not what is left. Therefore, it is very important for teacher, caregivers and special educators to build their own emotional intelligence and mental balance. In this context, we must continue paying their salaries which is required for their emotional balance. In addition, capacity building of persons working with children with special needs is a mandate while striving for coping mechanisms in this unprecedented situation. |
1. The gap between public and private mode of education will further increase in absence of digital facilities. What are the possible ways to reduce this gap?

Firstly, we have to make the government schools the best. In fact, the Kendriya Vidhalyas are exceptionally doing good. Moreover, we should get more towards decentralisation of things instead of centralised planning. The moment things are decentralised, principals plan for the things, teachers take initiatives, resources are properly utilized. But of course, this will take a lot of time.
WEBINAR-3

Sustainable Solutions for Persons with Disabilities: Visual Impairment
INTRODUCTION

The third webinar of AIWEFA Covid-19 webinar series on ‘Sustainable Solutions for Person with Disability’ focused on visual impairment. The devastating effects of the pandemic outbreak are evident and have been showcased in many different forms. Despite great efforts to recover from the crisis, many of us faced daunting vulnerabilities. People with visual impairment have faced great difficulties in the absence of tactile inputs and physical assistance during the social distancing period. The current webinar series on- ‘Sustainable Solutions for Persons with Disability- Visual impairment’ focused on the challenges faced by persons with visual impairment and experiences of invited speakers enabled the audience to gain better insight into the subject.

PANELIST 1

Mr. R. C. Hiremath, Flexitron
Bangalore, Karnataka

Mr. R. C. Hiremath focused on the issues faced by the visually impaired population. He stressed that to understand their challenges during the Covid-19 pandemic, it is necessary to recognize the points of contact where they interact with society. In the current pandemic, the problems of visually impaired persons are primarily linked with health issues, daily living requirements and transportation. For health issues, considering the conditions of asymptomatic or symptomatic, visually impaired persons have major challenges in ways- they reach labs for testing, they are handled at the hospital, and they are assured they will not come in contact with Covid positive people.

Regarding Covid testing, Mr. Hiremath advised for separate test centres exclusively for visually impaired persons or there could be specific days and time slots to dedicatedly attend to visually impaired persons. He further proposed for a medical facility organised via hospitals through mobile vans to approach the schools and institutes of visually impaired persons for confirming Covid positive test. Also, the medical staff must be sensitised to give visually impaired persons a priority at medical centres. Confronting the hard fact, Mr. Hiremath highlighted the sensitisation of service providers as a weak area...
that was not addressed even during the present crisis period. It was stressed that disaster and special circumstances demand the utmost consideration for persons with disabilities.

With regard to the shopping for groceries or other items of daily needs, Mr. Hiremath mentioned a need to sensitize certain chains of supermarkets for handling persons with visual impairment. He stressed a need for continuous support extended to such persons with disabilities in supermarkets by means of a staff-assisted guided system instead of independent shopping. However, looking at the current pandemic crisis, assisted shopping from distance through cane stick or by some other means was emphasised. With this perspective, national-level outlets such as Supermarkets, Big Bazaars, Reliance Malls and many others must have a centralised structure for the training of their staff in this area.

Next, Mr. Hiremath described that the deaf and blind people faced the toughest situation during the pandemic. Since deaf and blind people can only communicate through touch and feel, communication with them became impractical in the highly restricted situation to the current pandemic. In his address, he emphasised an

“We must sensitize our medical staff and other service-providers towards the special needs of disabled persons. The service industry must have a centralised structure to train its staff on the needs of disabled persons.”
urgent need to develop SOPs for communicating with persons with deaf-blindness. He concluded his session by stating the need to evolve some systems to empower disabled persons to handle such situations better.

PANELIST 2

Dr. Kshama Metre, National Director, Chinmaya Organisation for Rural Development (CORD)

Dr. Kshama Metre began with a brief introduction to her organisation- CORD. She informed that CORD works for Comprehensive Integrated Rural Development in 900 villages in 5 states in a country and disability is one of the programmes. She highlighted that since the organisation’s work is entirely based in rural areas, it had to execute a response strategy that was different from usual coping mechanisms across the country. Further, it was underlined that as part of the organisation’s approach to a rural community, a basic operating model was already in place that helped vulnerable groups including persons with disabilities to cope up from the crisis of the Covid-19 pandemic. Dr. Metre, further stated that their organisation has a programme in association with the Panchayat under which, each ward of a Panchayat has panchayat-based community organisations. The community organisations operate at levels of ‘Gram-Sabha’ and ‘Upgram-Sabha’. One such community organisation is of women called ‘Mahila Mandal’. Thus, there is one Mahila Mandal in each ward. These Mahila Mandal besides serving as a voice forum for women; are resilient platforms to address the issues of adolescent girls, widows, mothers of children with special needs, wives of PwDs and take them to the next advocacy forum which is Panchayat level.

Dr. Metre mentioned that these panchayat-based community organisations are an effective intervention to address village level issues. She emphasised that this approach was one big reason that during the Covid-19 pandemic, the organisation did not face any major challenges inspite of having about 2500 PwDs associated with the organisation. The issues of lack of access to food, lack of medicines and lack of access to health care services did not emerge.
during the crisis. Moreover, during the crisis, a lot of inclusiveness was received from the community. Also, there is a village resource person extending support and services at the time of need. Elucidating the exemplary work of community-based organisations during the pandemic, Dr. Metre shared that these community-based organisations provided dry rations and monetary support to the needy families of persons with disabilities. Furthermore, the community organisations were able to provide diabetic kits and even enabled a family member to undergo dialysis during the phase of restricted movement. There was quick response by these community organisations post lockdown period. She emphasised that a rural India unlike urban India has scattered disability. In a Panchayat, there might be 10-20% persons with disabilities, all with different types of disabilities. However, the local groups active at the community level attended to their diverse requirements and provided the necessary support.

Next, she presented her views on disaster management. Regarding disaster management, Dr. Metre stated that pre-emptive preparedness is required to cope with the devastating situations. The current pandemic is one such disaster and the anticipatory preparedness of the local groups enabled them to respond to the crisis. Also, owing to the close integration of families in a village, the local groups were mindful of the vulnerable families and approached them timely. She said, as an organisation they focused on restoring their livelihoods and economic activity for the post lockdown phase. The village resource person at the village level conducted virtual meetings to provide counselling to the families of disabled persons.
Regarding education, Dr. Metre highlighted government programmes like ‘Har Ghar Mein Pathshala’ and ‘Hum Kisi se Kam Nahi’. Though, these are good programmes however, required a separate approach for children with disabilities, which was lacking in the present execution. She informed that their organisation is pursuing it, to devise some executing model which would cater to the requirements of children with special needs. She further shared that their organisation admitted 360 children with disabilities to local government schools under inclusive growth. It was stressed that every state had different response mechanisms to the crisis due to the Covid-19 pandemic. In Himachal Pradesh, the government was vigilant to the needs of vulnerable groups and made provisions for three months advance pension payments to beneficiaries, all entitlements to disabled persons, Kisan Samman money and other new facilities introduced by the government under immediate relief. Lastly, she concluded by opining that when there are systems at the grassroots level and NGOs work as facilitators, integrating all government programmes, the big crisis can also, be handled with proper management. She recapped with a closing remark that the model based on community organisations can be replicated and successfully scaled up through 25 lacs panchayats existing in rural India for more resilient response mechanisms.

“When looking for sustainable solutions for any issue, it is advisable to go for locally available solutions. Standard and ready-made solutions are not effective in the long run. We must entrust and empower communities to take decisions and ownership for themselves.”

**PANELIST 3**

Ms. Sheela Sinha, Director, Education, Helen Keller Institute of Deaf and Blind

Ms. Sheela Sinha in her presentation, reiterated the problems faced by persons with visual impairment during the lockdown period. The problems of transportation and of fulfilling their daily functional needs were of serious concern. In the absence of any formal information and advisory, persons with visual impairment perceived a bleak future subject
to great uncertainty. She highlighted that these persons did not have information regarding grocery shops and other supermarkets functional in their area. Moreover, restricted transport further abated their mobility. It was underlined that during the lockdown period, only those visually impaired persons who were with their families or were employed, were taken care of by their family members or colleagues. While, those who otherwise were self-reliant and confident were left clueless with cooking and other household activities.

Restating the fact that disabled persons are able to take care of themselves in the presence of a conducive environment, she described some of the measures that could be adopted during a restricted period. Acknowledging the fact that their main sources of information are touch and hearing; the market areas could be labelled in a tactile manner or the tangible numbers could be positioned at various places. There was a need for an assisted guidance system to facilitate them to secure their livelihood necessities. Also, unfamiliarity with the new-normal rules to some extent added to their vulnerability. She closed her session by reinforcing the fact that perceptible inputs are key contributors in making visually impaired persons self-reliant.

“Transportation and lack of information were the main issues faced by visually impaired during lockdown.”

DISCUSSANT

Ms. Rita Menon, Executive Member, AIWEFA

Ms. Rita Menon concluded the webinar by appreciating the efforts of organisations participating in the webinar. She highlighted that the sessions were quite informative and were source of exorbitant learning. In her address, she recapitulated on the key remarks of the speakers and emphasised upon the main take-aways. Regarding people with disabilities, Ms. Menon mentioned that there is an urgent need for the development of SOPs in the context of a natural calamity such as the Covid-19. Referring to the address by Mr. Hiremath, Ms. Menon stated that we already have some economical and practical
solutions to attend to the needs of persons with visual impairment such as specific time slots at medical centers dedicated specifically to attend to persons with blindness. Ms. Menon reiterated that the community-based organisations which are working for disaster management relief work need to be sensitized towards the special needs of persons with disabilities. Again, the special needs and special way in which a person with a particular disability may respond may be very different from the way another person with another type of disability will respond. It is the typical person who should follow the norms of social distancing rather than expecting people with blindness to follow it. Ms. Menon also stressed that AIWEFA would ensure that the ‘takeaways’ and lessons learnt are included in the report and that they would serve as a way forward for changes to happen and also for all stakeholders to combine their efforts for constructive changes to happen. Lastly, Ms. Menon ended by thanking all the AIWEFA team members for their hard work.

## QUESTIONS AND ANSWERS SESSION

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| Mr. R. C. Hiremath    | 1. How resilience can be built among people with disabilities and make them feel that they are also contributors to the society and not just recipients of favours?  
A community-based rehabilitation system is an excellent approach to build resilience among people with disability. However, in view of its larger context, it is necessary to bring the same structure in urban scenarios. We will also need to understand their requirements and the actual challenges faced by them. Further, there has to be a continued assisted programme for persons with disabilities. They cannot be left in isolation to handle their challenges on their own. Community participation is very essential.  

2. How social distancing can be followed by persons with visual impairment?  
For a person with blindness, touch and hearing are the sources of information. Also, as stated during the session, person with blindness need assisted guided system. However, when it comes to maintaining social distancing in public places, then media can play a very essential role in creating awareness among normal people to maintain a required distance from a blind person and fulfil the norm of social distancing.  

3. How do persons with visual impairment get employment during Covid 19 pandemic?  
Generally, the scope for employment is good in the current pandemic situation. As there are lots of opportunities for work from home. Also, there will be an entirely new task force that will emerge in 2-3 years from now. Thus, there can be lot of jobs where a person with visual impairment can be employed and while performing work from home.  

4. You have developed lot many gadgets of persons with disabilities. Can those gadgets be used to overcome the challenges of current pandemic?  
We are still in exploring phase. One gadget called ultrasonic sensor was experimented during the current pandemic. However, it created a lot of
confusion. Moreover, in the current situation, I would want the society to be more participatory rather than depending on gadgets. It is definitely a challenging area.

Ms. Sheela Sinha

1. How to teach persons with visual impairment the concept of light and other visual concepts?
In the case of students with total blindness it would not serve much purpose. However, if there is a cognitively high student with blindness then with the help of some tactile input such as experiencing heat when in sun or with braille material, he/she can be made to understand. Further, if we want them to understand light in a manner a normal person understands then it has to be handled in an experienced manner. Also, they need not understand light in so much detail, which is not of use in their life unless it comes in the Physics chapter. We have to learn the ways to communicate with them on the issues that are required in their life. We have to change our attitude of making them understand the things the way we understand.

2. Suggestions to teach persons with visual impairment online.
Technology has a great role to play here. There are a lot of Applications and software that convert everything on the screen into braille or make it auditory. Till sometime back, the technology was very expensive but nowadays these equipments are affordable. Though in rural areas they may still find them expensive but can be afforded at the group level or village level. Further, the online teaching is only possible when technology is made cheaper.

Dr. Kshama Metre

1. How to teach persons with visual impairment in rural areas where there is no infrastructures?
In such cases, we may divide the group into two, namely student with low vision and students who are complete blindness. The low vision students go in normal schools and the government has provided them literature with big size fonts. Whereas, for students who are complete blindness, there is not any such special arrangement in schools. Regarding this, the Himachal Pradesh government has provided residential schools for boys and girls separately. Also, we are following up with the government to start braille education even in mainstream schools. However, in the current scenario, there are not sufficient special educators. Therefore, to bridge this gap, we are training our community volunteers in braille language.

2. What is the condition of reservation in India after Covid 19 for the people with disabilities especially visual impairment in context of privatisation?
I am able to provide information in context of reservation in disability disaster which is 5% more opportunities are provided to people with disabilities. And, this should reach out to them. There is a helpline for disabled people which can be accessed by them.

3. Is accessibility a major barrier to people with visual impairment? What are the ways to overcome those barriers?
Physical accessibility is a big- big challenge for visually impaired people. This aspect is not at all into cognition when we create infrastructures. For instance- when road are built, when we construct building without ramps, without any tactile or braille labelling. Though, we have laws in place but from an execution point of view there is still a long way to go. Besides physical accessibility, we can enhance social accessibility and emotional accessibility as these are very much in our control.
Sustainable Solutions for Persons with Disabilities: Mental Health
INTRODUCTION

The final programme of AIWEFA Coronavirus Covid-19 webinar series featured the pressing topic of mental health among persons with disabilities on day 4. The pandemic situation caused due to Covid-19 has posed new threats and challenges to existing mental issues. It is recognised that Covid-19 virus does not only affect the physical health of people but is also a major cause of their psychological sufferings. The surge in mental health problems is due to uncertainty and fear of the future caused by job loss, isolation, restrictions and difficult family dynamics. The fourth and final webinar series on ‘Sustainable Solutions for Persons with Disabilities- Mental Health’ is addressed by the AIWEFA Nina Sibal memorial awardees, working in the area of disability. The series is enriched by the contribution of these awardees based on their experiences towards the development of Covid-19 coping mechanisms and promotion of sustainable solutions among people especially children with disabilities.

PANELIST 1

Mr. Javed Ahmed Tak, Founder of Humanity Welfare Organisation Helpline, J&K.

Mr. Javed Ahmed Tak began the webinar by emphasising that mental health is as important as physical health for everyone. Even trivial experiences such as a bad odour may affect one’s mental health, therefore, maintaining mental health is a big challenge especially during a pandemic situation like Covid-19. Further, these difficult situations are still much more stressful for people with disabilities due to their additional needs of support for survival. Their inability to procure basic life supporting things puts them in a helpless situation way sooner than a normal person. He underscored that a good mental setup is highly essential for a disable person to deal with such situations. Proper planning must be in place to maintain continuity of services of counsellors, psychiatrists, therapists and other professionals. He brought out the facts that new approaches including online classes, telecoms and virtual platforms being widely promoted as an outcome of pandemic outbreak are not PwD friendly. Children
Sustainable Solutions for Persons with Disabilities

with severe hearing and speech impairment cannot be outreached successfully using above platforms.

Currently, the number of teachers knowing sign language is insignificant. The system has no concrete structure for training and developing professionals catering to the requirements of children with special needs. Mr. Tak, elucidated that the pandemic could be utilised in creating databases at the organisational level as well as at the governmental level providing information on the special needs required by people and a helpline exclusively for catering to that special need.

During his presentation, he explained that unlike the cases of normal individuals, the people with disability might not always consider food or medicine as a priority, they might just be in a need of a counsellor or helper who could explain them the situation and talk positively with them. It was emphasised that communication barriers must be addressed by creating more branches and more professionals (teachers) capable of addressing the needs of PwD and enabling them to cope with the situation in a better way. In a current situation, the existing communication barriers have kept these people at periphery. They are left unattended, uninformed, clueless and helpless about the present situation. While concluding his session, he proposed that the training of at least one of the parents would enable them to handle their child with special needs specifically during crises situations like that of present pandemic, It can be foreseen as a sustainable solution which would allow their children to maintain mental health and mental hygiene even during crises situations.

“Training of at least one of the parents enabling them to handle their child with special need specifically during crises situations like of present pandemic can be foreseen as a sustainable solution and allowing their children to maintain mental health and hygiene."

PANELIST 2

Ms. Shubhra Mukherjee, W/o Late. Dr. Arun Mukherjee, Founder Director ‘Udaan for the Disabled’, New Delhi

Ms. Shubhra Mukherjee, wife of Late Dr. Arun Mukherjee represented the organisation ‘Udaan’ on the occasion. On behalf of Ms. Shubhra Mukherjee, Ms. Anju Saxena, Consultant Director, Udaan made a presentation on “Covid 19- Pandemic Effect on Children with disabilities & A Way Ahead”. She initiated her presentation with a brief
talk on the organisation, its aim and specialisations. Like Mr. Tak, she also mentioned that in the current pandemic situation, failure of children with disabilities to connect with their therapists and counsellors has brought serious implications on them. Their disconnect from their educational set-ups and therapeutic set-ups have somewhere blocked their physical progress. In absence of regular skill-based development routine and school education routine, their sensory needs are not being addressed.

Ms. Saxena highlighted that irregular interventions of institutions with these children and their high sensory needs have put additional pressures on their parents. Due to full-time confinement of these children in their homes, the pandemic situation has created high demands on their parents in terms of physical and mental pressures in addition to usual domestic and professional commitments. During the presentation, she shared her concern over the lack of any structured programme in home set-ups during this pandemic situation leading to increased anxiety levels of both children with special needs as well as their parents.

In the latter part of her presentation, she shared various coping mechanisms that could be practiced during the current social-distancing period. She emphasized that not only children with special needs but even other members of the family should follow a structured routine. To cope up from the situation, the parents and other family members must be counselled and guided at regular intervals. In addition to regular online therapy programmes and special education programmes, Ms. Saxena emphasised the need to connect offline and pay attention to their needs. She mentioned that since every child and their family may not be equipped with the newest digital technologies, it is essential for institutions to reach out to these children using technologies existing in families of those children. Reaching out and just listening to them might allow them to release their anxiety and deal better with the situation.

Figure 4. 1. Holistic Approach for Persons with Disabilities during Covid 19 Pandemic
Moreover, Ms. Saxena laid great emphasis on a holistic approach mentioning that mental health could be achieved through mindfulness, yoga, meditation and music therapy. It was emphasised that as an institution, they need to help these children and their parents by organising online or virtual structured training programmes especially for parents. Constant touch of institutions with their children and parents irrespective of the platform used, is mandated during Covid-19 pandemic situation. The online guidance programmes should not only aim to train children with special needs but should also focus on components like empathy building, sensitisation of siblings considering their acceptance level, relationships among parents and other family members. Focus of these programmes should be to develop home-based therapies including activities of involving these children in household chores such as non-fire cooking, household cleaning, developing positive attitude, enabling them to develop and follow a structured routine, indulging in meditation and music, being patient with each other’s limitations and thus, achieving the goals of special education programme at home levels. Holistic, structured and consistent approach were the key strategies to cope with the present situation of pandemic.

“Developing home-based therapies following structured programme and, constant intervention of therapeutic institutions are the ways ahead to cope with the situation of Covid 19- Pandemic and provide sustainable solutions to persons with disabilities.”

PANELIST 3

Ms. Merry Barua, President, Action for Autism, New Delhi

The next speaker, Ms. Merry Barua commenced her address by acknowledging AIWEFA for awarding her the Nina Sibal award. Being the first awardee of the Nina Sibal award in 2003, she expressed her deep gratitude to the Association and mentioned that it was the first ever award received by her which established a special connection with AIWEFA. She proceeded by briefly explaining the work of her organisation- ‘Action for Autism’ (AFA). The prime activities undertaken and various services provided by AFA include onsite education, setting up of special need education institutes, other education interventions, conducting training programmes for professionals and parents, carrying out
research projects and advocacy besides the core work of providing clinical services to children with special needs.

Ms. Barua also outlined the relief work which her organisation has been doing, for people with disabilities, for families of people with disabilities and for indigenous labourers out of job due to Covid-19 pandemic. In her presentation, while responding to the pandemic situation due to Covid-19 with respect to children with special needs and people with disability, Ms. Baura mentioned that sudden lockdown has caused huge unsettling behaviour in children with Autism. Acknowledging the fact that we all need some kind of predictability and structure in our life, the lockdown has put all of us into an unpredictable and uncertain situation and more so to the children with Autism. Since, these children need more structured routine and certainty in their lives than normal people; this period demands some coping mechanisms to keep them mentally stable while they are at their homes.

Thus, during this period, the parents of these children are given special training to handle the needs of these children. The parents were trained to develop daily schedules and calendars so as to provide these children with predictability and structure in their routine. Further, the need to inform these children about the current crisis situation and even the corona virus itself was emphasized.

As a result, the training of parents conducted by AFA also involved sessions enabling them to talk to their children about the current issue. While explaining about the coping mechanisms that could be adopted as solutions by the parents of these children during this pandemic, Ms. Barua focused on the use of visuals and posters as frequent means of
communications. Day-to-day activities or special tasks to be performed during lockdown period may simply be explained using pictorials without getting into deep reasons for it and overloading them with information. Online platforms have been lifelines during the pandemic and have been helpful in keeping connected with the families of children with special needs. These sessions are very helpful in reducing the anxiety of these children and their parents and getting them to a comfort zone. Ms. Barua highlighted that the online sessions for parents were conducted in a manner that they are to be conducted with their children and the sessions achieved excellent results. She emphasised that the training was planned as partnerships where parents played an active role in achieving institutional goals. In fact, many of the online sessions aim to prepare for conditions when the institutions would reopen.

Further, the very fact that many children require physical assistance for their work, calls for a need to develop special SOPs for handling the situation after reopening. While talking about coping mechanisms, she mentioned that the situation is being better handled during lockdown whereas the real challenge would be when their education set-ups would reopen. For those situations, their organisation is liaising with other organisations working in the similar fields and are in the process of developing SOPs. Ms Barua ended her session by reiterating the need to stay connected during the pandemic period.

**PANELIST 4**

*Ms. Chitra Sarkar, Joint Secretary, AIWEFA  
Executive Director (Retrd.), Air India*

Taking the webinar forward, Ms. Sarkar began her session by mentioning that three segments of population would be the prime focus of her address. While the pandemic and lockdown due to Covid-19 has a world-wide impact, affecting all sections of the society; the presentation made by her was restricted to three sections of the society including daily
wage migrants, patients recovered from Covid-19 and air travellers. These groups are referred to as high-risk groups. In fact, during this period, the daily wage migrants had sought nation-wide attention while journeying hundreds of miles along with their families including children and elderly members. In her presentation, Ms. Sarkar highlighted the status of migrant workers at national level providing some data from National Sample Survey (NSS) 2008 and Census 2011. Though overall 28% of the workforce consist of migrant workers in India according to NSS 2008, however there are some states such as Delhi and Mumbai witnessing influx of migrants as high as 43% (NSS, 64th round).

She highlighted a positive correlation between mental disorder and adverse conditions of migrant workers arising due to poverty, lack of education, gender inequality, irregular income, financial debts and risky living conditions. In the attempt to establish positive correlation between mental disorder and adverse conditions of migrant workers, she presented the data from The National Crime Records Bureau Report, 2018 highlighting that 22.4% of total suicides were of daily wage earners. Undoubtedly, the outbreak of Covid-19 and nation-wide lockdown had put these migrant workers in extreme distress and financial devastation.

Ms. Sarkar expressed her fear of increasing cases of suicides among migrant workers who are daily wage earners due to shortage of food, lack of shelter, fear of infection, loss of job, anxiety and mental disturbance. She opined that the helpless situations of migrant workers call for our attention and require that some strong social protection measures are taken. Providing social protection measures, health services including mental health services to these migrant workers is definitely a huge challenge before the government and the organisations involved as they have to overcome these problems to deal with the current situation. Ms. Sarkar then addressed the second high-risk group of ‘patients recovered from Covid-19’. Discussing the status of patients recovered from Covid-19, she mentioned that these patients in many cases have shown Post Intensive Care Syndrome (PICS) comprising of physical, cognitive and mental infirmities. In fact, she quoted a study conducted by Johns Hopkins University stating that PICS can impact quality of life in the long term as well as in the short term not only of the patient but of the whole family. While describing PICS,
Ms. Sarkar mentioned that even the treatment procedure of Covid-19 involving wearing of PPE kit by doctors and complete isolation of patients intensify the PIC syndrome. 

In her address, she once again reinforced that proper medical counselling can reduce the risk of PIC syndrome to a large extent among such patients. Additionally, some measures such as exposure to sunlight, circadian rhythms, telephonic contact with family members and human approach have found to be significantly contributing in reducing the risk of PIC syndrome. She emphasised that mental health needs must be taken care of even after the patient is discharged and must be given counselling sessions for weeks or months if required, post the treatment of Covid-19.

It was proposed that counselling sessions are all the more important when the recovered patient moves to a family environment battling for day to day needs, job loss and other crises situations due to Covid-19. These adverse outcomes due to Covid-19 outbreak may lead to increased anxiety and mental depression in the patient recovered from the pandemic disease. To overcome the increasing instances of PICS, Ms. Sarkar expressed the need for adequate counselling sessions and proper mental rehabilitation. With this note, she moved to her third and last high-risk group of air travelers.

Recently, after the outbreak of pandemic Covid-19, air flights have come up with a lot of restrictions and instructions to be followed at the airports and during on-board. While
exemplifying some of the restrictions, she highlighted that long hour flights or overseas journeys can be as stressful or traumatic specially for the elderly, people with special needs and people with young children. These restricted conditions in air flight may trigger the instances of possible psychotic episodes more precisely in people having previous history of medical illnesses. In the current situation, people with high mental vulnerability may come up with possible psychotic episode when exposed to constrained situations of flight journey accompanied with the issues of jet lag, changes in time zones, loss of sleep, recent emotional trauma and early stages of dementia in elderly passengers.

Highlighting the risk of an air traveller, Ms. Sarkar stated that all air passengers travelling in constrained situations especially passengers at high mental risk should be closely supervised and administered serious medical intervention if required. Ending her address, Ms. Sarkar concluded by stating that since lots of new groups in the population have entered into the hazardous zone of mental health vulnerability due to the Covid-19 pandemic, we must expand our mental counselling and mental treatment services.

**DISCUSSANT**

Dr. Mayanka Gupta, Executive Member, AIWEFA
Assistant Professor, Lady Irwin College, University of Delhi

Taking the webinar towards the end, Dr. Gupta enriched the session by presenting some best practices in the area of mental health along with case studies from all over the world and along with the way forward. During her presentation, she laid emphasis on systems framework of management and mentioned that for a holistic approach, the issue of mental health needs to be analysed in the context of its existing macro and micro environment.

Establishing a connect with systems approach and sustainable solutions for mental health, Dr. Gupta exemplified several factors existing in macro-environment, micro-environment including near and household environment and within an individual itself which have a direct impact on a person’s mental health. Looking into the macro-environment, she highlighted the policy level issues, new acts passed in the area of mental health and the various cultural predominance influencing an individual’s mental setup.
With respect to acts, Dr. Gupta informed about a recent petition filed in India by an advocate, which argue that the exclusion of mental illness from insurance coverage that violates the fundamental rights to equality and non-discrimination. Besides India, she also informed about new acts and policies enacted in the countries of USA, U.K., Kenya, Afghanistan to cope up from the pandemic crisis of Covid-19.

With respect to micro-environment including near environment and household environment which consists of community services, social-welfare services mass media, family members, peers, etc. Dr. Gupta shared the case studies from the countries of Peru, Afghanistan, Japan, Egypt highlighting their intervention model at community level. In the context of the household environment, she mentioned a recent report published in 2020 by Human Rights Watch named ‘Better to make yourself Invisible’ which revealed family violence against people with Disabilities in Mexico. Lastly, referring to the individual environment, Dr. Gupta discussed the way forward which could help to improve the independency, sense of empowerment and outlook of persons with disabilities. She concluded her session on a positive note stating that all the reflections whether positive or negative on mental health of persons with disabilities culminates in one factor and that is hope. She mentioned that everyone should spare some time to sit with them and facilitate them to discover hope.
Analysing the issue of mental health in perspective of system’s approach, examining case studies, policies and several intervention models, Dr. Gupta presented the following way forward in the area of mental health for persons with disabilities:

1. Given the expectation of second wave of coronavirus pandemic following two measures can be adopted:

   First, India can appoint a minister with a Cabinet rank as head of mental health and well-being, and create an emergency task force of public health experts in creating and executing evidence-based interventions. Second, work on a war footing to push the implementation the Mental Healthcare Act, 2017, (MHCA) that promises mental health care to all and introduce a suicide prevention policy. Many countries, including China, have been able to significantly reduce suicides after they implemented a suicide prevention policy.

2. Urgent need of sensitising professionals, policy makers, legislators and members of the public on disability rights of persons living with mental illnesses in order to have institutional policy and legal frameworks.

3. Conditions of persons living with mental illnesses need positive interventions with their full consent. Forced intervention is a violation of their rights.

4. The public should be empowered with information on the difference between intellectual and psychosocial disability.

5. To encourage quality interventions for different types of disabilities.

6. There is urgent need to empower persons living with mental illnesses with knowledge of their identity as persons living with psychosocial disability.

7. Persistent and vibrant initiatives aiming at addressing the deep rooted cultural, social and religious stigma; currently associated with psychosocial and intellectual disabilities are required.

8. Campaign on awareness of mental health of people with disabilities should be promoted on television, radio, social media, digital news portals, OTT, and so on.

9. The term ‘Divyang’ has been enacted in the PWD Act 2016 and such programmes like ‘Divyang Kumbh Mela’ held at Allahabad should be promoted to raise awareness.

10. Door-step delivery of essentials should be ensured for free or at affordable rates which could save them time and promote mental well-being.

11. Direct cash assistance can be provided along with special provisions under the public distribution system (PDS) for PWDs which indirectly promote mental well-being.

12. There should be separate rehabilitation and quarantine centres for PWDs. Special
training may be required for health professionals to deal with PWDs when quarantined.

13. Reasonable accommodation could reduce the risk of contamination. For example, Australia has reserved a separate time slot in supermarkets only for PWDs and senior citizens.

**QUESTIONS AND ANSWERS SESSION**

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<tr>
<th>Name of the Panelist</th>
<th>Responses to Questions posed to respective Panelists</th>
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| Mr. Javed Ahmed Tak  | **1. What are the policy level decisions that can be taken regarding mental health of PwDs?**  
If there is budget, then a lot of policy level decisions can be taken in a country. However, in the current scenario, educational policy, accessibility of reasonable accommodation and employment are three important areas. We should have clear policy for the empowerment of children or persons with disabilities.  

**2. What can be done during this covid-19 times when PwDs have no job or work which is affecting their mental health?**  
During pandemic or any emergency situation, we should have a proper working system from home which we lack presently. Further, the government should have a social security policy for the persons with disabilities to provide livelihood support and to promote job security so that they are not terminated. Moreover, PwDs have exemptions from working duties as in many cases it exists due to low immunity and several other reasons. |
| Ms. Anju Saxena      | **1. What are the various ways to reduce mental health issues for PwDs?**  
We need to foster connect with parents and children to understand their stress and problems in the current crisis. We can even discuss the programme and further actions in collaboration with parents. Discussions pertaining to mindfulness and yoga, regular counselling sessions, and enabling them to express themselves would help them to be happy. An organisation might keep all this in mind while developing a programme and an action plan.  

**2. How to deal with intellectually disabled students online in this Pandemic?**  
Strategies being applied with children with autism will also work with children with intellectual disabilities. There is a need to give them a lot of credibility, structure, prepare them for future along with making the pedagogy clear and effective. The content of e-learning modules must be further bifurcated into small parts for better acceptance by children. Additionally, the counselling and capacity building of parents are required to enable them to support their children. Lastly, the most important, learning should be made fun to keep a child’s interests alive.  

**2. How to handle children with mental health issues during this pandemic?**  
In situations where the child is mentally distressed, then emphasis should be to create a positive, structured and calm environment. For people with severe |
mental health disabilities further simplification of programme structure brings more clarity. Structure for the day needs to be designed keeping the ability levels of a child in mind.
The Covid-19 pandemic is the largest outbreak the world has experienced since the Spanish Flu of 1918. The pandemic has affected millions of people across the globe while bringing the economy of almost all the countries to a standstill. The crisis due to the total lockdown with stringent restrictions on movement has impacted all sectors, industries and segments of the population - physically, socially, economically and psychologically. Till July 2020, more than 15 million cases of Covid-19 has been reported worldwide with a threat of continuous acceleration in the spread of the virus. In the face of this bleak outlook, many vulnerable groups of poor people, women, disabled persons, elderly are the hardest hit in these challenging times.

The alarming situation is exacerbated for persons with disabilities as they require additional necessities which are linked to their impairments. Social distancing, lockdown and severe restrictions during the current pandemic have impacted their basic needs to survive their physical challenges. It has been noted that though people with disabilities are not more susceptible to the coronavirus, their unattended critical needs including health care essentials, psycho-social requirements and high support system could make them more vulnerable.

While it may take nations decades to recover from the damage caused by the pandemic globally, several institutions, agencies, organisations and governments have initiated novel interventions to pull through this health crisis and make progress towards a new normalcy. To withstand this onslaught and emerge robustly, the United Nations has prepared a policy brief to guide persons with disabilities, organisations and governments during this struggle with Covid-19. The policy brief emphasised on the following action points to achieve the highest attainable standards of health for persons with disabilities.

- Strengthen national legislation and policies on health care in line with the CRPD.
- Identify and eliminate obstacles and barriers to accessibility in health-care facilities.
- Improve health-care coverage and affordability for persons with disabilities as part of universal approaches to health care.
- Train health-care personnel on disability inclusion and improve service delivery for persons with disabilities.
- Empower persons with disabilities to take control over their own health-care decisions, on the basis of informed consent.
- Prohibit discriminatory practices in health insurance and promote health insurance coverage for assistive products and rehabilitation services.
- Improve research and data to monitor, evaluate and strengthen health systems to include and deliver for persons with disabilities.
The current impact and long-term anticipated risks associated with persons with disabilities demand sustainable solutions for their improved living conditions and disaster risk reduction. Towards this goal, the AIWEFA organised a series of 4 webinars on ‘Sustainable Solutions for Persons with Disabilities’. The webinar invited the AIWEFA Nina Sibal memorial awardee organisations from across India doing exemplary work for the welfare of children with special needs. The webinar series aimed at sharing the experiences of these organisations about their area of specialisation so as to disseminate information about the initiatives at the community level and the best practices. The series drew upon the experiences of these awardees to deliberate on the Covid-19 coping mechanisms for people, especially children with special needs to arrive at the sustainable solutions for people with disabilities.

In the face of great uncertainty and accelerated downside risks, these organisations created successful case studies and models of best practices that helped their beneficiaries to effectively cope with the current crisis of Covid-19. Furthermore, many organisations perceived the present pandemic as an opportunity to develop resilient response mechanisms, inculcate healthy practices, create a database at organisational and government levels, develop technology and online platforms to create the new culture of work from home.

Besides providing relief work, the organisations focused on a continuous reach out to disabled persons especially children with special needs, providing a structured routine, creating e-learning platforms, conducting e-counselling sessions, facilitating home-based therapies, counselling and training of parents, capacity building of special educators and therapists, and sensitisation of service providers including medical staff. Though the benefits of greater connectivity through e-platforms was acknowledged during the lockdown period, its inability to reach a large section of society without access to the internet and smartphones was also discussed. Experts sounded a note of caution as they advocated the continuation of other conventional communication modes for the greater well-being of people with disabilities. Acknowledging the access to limited resources, organisations came up with the model of computer centres at the community level executed by Anganwadi workers and Asha workers. Also, the remedial action plans suitable for different types of disabilities included special masks required for persons with hearing impairment to facilitate them in lip reading, more tactile inputs and assisted shopping for visually impaired persons, and more visual and pictorial depictions for children with autism were suggested. Further, the need for greater cooperation and collaboration of grassroots organisations to build on each other’s strengths and overcome their weaknesses was emphasised. Community organisations such as Mahila Mandals and Yuva Mandals were seen as excellent operating models in rural India to take care of immediate relief work, extending physical, social, emotional and financial support to the families of the persons with disabilities.
The pandemic has caused organisations to manage in situations which are new and have no parallel in relatable memory. In these tough times of financial insecurity, it was agreed that the organisations should continue to take care of the physical and financial needs of the staff and should make timely payments to keep their morale high and to ensure the execution of programmes.

In the current environment of uncertainty, when the pandemic is still continuing to throw new challenges, the organisations may look to developing SOPs and Self-Assessing Index for better performance and to act as catalyst to the start of new normal.
ANNEXURES
THE EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE (2019-2022)

Patrons: Dr. Karan Singh and Dr. Sarala Gopalan

Office Bearers

Ms. Asha Chandra
(President)

Mr. Himangshu Rai Vaish
(Vice President)

Dr. Renu Malaviya
(Secretary)

Ms. Chitra Sarkar
(Joint Secretary)

Mr. Umesh Chand Goyal
(Treasurer)

Mr. Sudarshan Sharma
(Joint Treasurer)
## Elected Executive Members

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Mr. Riaz Umar</th>
<th>Ms. Sarla Manchanda</th>
<th>Dr. Adarsh Sharma</th>
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<tr>
<td>Ms. Rita Menon</td>
<td>Ms. Ishani Chandra</td>
<td>Dr. Mayanka Gupta</td>
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<tr>
<td>Dr. Anupa Siddhu (Director, Lady Irwin College)</td>
<td>Dr. Usha Sharma (Co-opted Executive Member)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Ms. Sheela Kakde (AIWC Representative)</td>
<td>Ms. Kuljit Kaur (AIWC Representative)</td>
<td>Ms. Rehana Begam (AIWC Representative)</td>
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Ms. Asha Chandra is the President of All India Women’s Education Fund Association (AIWEFA). An advertising professional, Asha Chandra’s expertise spans multi-media platforms. For the last two decades, her work in the social sector, too, bears an imprint of this target oriented, all-encompassing approach. As President of the 91 year old All India Women’s Education Fund Association (AIWEFA), Asha has been the Governing Body Chairperson of the Lady Irwin College, founded in 1932 by AIWEFA. Firmly believing that the Sustainable Development Goals (SDG) are possible only through women’s education and economic empowerment, Asha builds linkages from the grassroots to the United Nations for cost effective and enriched project implementation. With foresight and planning, underprivileged women were trained to become safe car drivers, financial consultants and self-defence proponents; 5000 college students undertook workshop training in cyber security; drug abuse prevention; and intergenerational bonding to promote community and elder welfare. “A World We Women Want” showcased best practices from Asia and Africa in SDG implementation at a time when the United Nations was engaged in making the Goals better known. Women’s economic empowerment emerged as the global south’s vocal response to ensure diminished violence at home and open pathways to leadership roles as effective citizens. “Promotion and Development of Handicrafts” and “Khadi Goes Global” promoted national livelihoods in ethical, zero carbon products and fabrics that rural women could undertake from the environs of their own homes. Webinars with disability organisations awarded by AIWEFA in the last 17 years, disseminate best practices to build the resilience of people with disabilities during COVID 19.

Ms. Rita Menon is a distinguished IAS officer now retired, who has worked extensively in the fields of revenue administration, rural development, urban planning, industrial infrastructure, defence planning and production, health and family welfare, finance and expenditure; textiles and allied fabrics and export and development of handicrafts. She has a number of firsts to her credit in the course of her long and remarkable career. Post retirement she was the Chair and Managing Director of the India Trade Promotion Organisation where she contributed to the conference and exposition industry by raising revenues to all time high and planning a state-of-the-art Convention and Exhibition centre which is currently under execution. She currently sits on a number of Boards as Independent Director and volunteers for various organisations.

Ms. Sarla Manchanda, is the Convenor of the Nina Sibal Memorial Award Committee. In her long association with AIWEFA she has held various positions, and has rendered selfless service to the organization and to the cause of the underprivileged. She has led from the front in all the projects and programmes, though her areas of interest are sustainable energy, especially green and solar energy and working with the youth for workshops on

Sustainable Solutions for Persons with Disabilities
intergenerational bonding, prevention of drug abuse, cyber security. She is a former Associate Professor of Applied and Textile Chemistry at Lady Irwin College.

**Dr. M.K.C. Nair**, Founder Director of Child Development Centre, Medical College, Thiruvananthapuram, Kerala, was awarded the “9th AIWEFA Nina Sibal Memorial Award” for his organization on account of the pioneering work done on Reduction of Disability through novel scientific Initiatives.

**Dr. Anupa Siddhu**, Director, Lady Irwin College, New Delhi, was awarded the “12th AIWEFA Nina Sibal Memorial Award” for her Institution for their multidimensional work related to disability across the life span and training the Disability Educators.

**Prof. (Dr.) Asha Hans** was awarded the “7th AIWEFA Nina Sibal Memorial Award” for her organization Shanta Memorial Rehabilitation Centre, Bhubaneshwar, Orissa. The centre provides services for the physically disabled children and adults. SMRC has been striving to create and implement a wide range of activities, designed to meet the medical, physical, emotional, social and vocational needs of persons with disabilities.

**Dr. Mayanka Gupta** is an Assistant Professor at the Department of Resource Management and Design Application, Lady Irwin College, University of Delhi. Her Doctoral degree focused on Gerontology. She is an international speaker on Ageing in America and has conducted several papers in international& national conferences seminars. She has been the trainer for intergenerational bonding, resume writing, theatre for change, women’s reproductive health, HIV/AIDS, sexual abuse for varied target groups. She has been on the Jury for Abilympics for India Skills 2018 and has trained National Abilympics Vocational Skills participants. Presently, she is the Advisor to the Student Association of Lady Irwin College and Executive Committee Member of AIWEFA and Lady Irwin College Alumnae Association. She is an avid theatre enthusiast and has been a participant of two exchange programs related to community living and HIV/AIDS in America and Canada respectively.

**Ms. Neelam Jolly** was awarded the “17th AIWEFA Nina Sibal Memorial Award. She holds an M. Sc degree in biophysics from Punjab University and subsequently completed a diploma in Basic Developmental Therapy from the Spastic Society of India (now AADI). She founded VISHWAS in 2005 and spearheads all the programmes. She has been its full-time Chairperson since then. Under her able guidance VISHWAS has grown steadily and is a name to reckon with, in the field of Disability and Inclusion.
Mr. Sudeep Goyal, Chief Functionary, "Asha Ka Jharna", Jhunjhunu, Rajasthan, was awarded the "16th AIWEFA Nina Sibal Memorial Award" for his exemplary work of providing services to not so abled children in three schools.

Ms. Ketaki Bardalai, Executive Director, Shishu Sarothi Centre for Rehabilitation and Training for Multiple Disability Guwahati, Assam. The organisation works for empowerment of children with disabilities by providing them avenues for a holistic development.

Ms. Sulagna Roy, Education Specialist formerly with UNICEF. She studied in the Tata Institute of Social Sciences in 1980. She started her career as a teacher and a counsellor of special needs children in REACH Kolkata. She founded her own preschool in Bhutan and was also the principal of a school in Bhutan. In Kolkata, she was associated with CINI (Child -in Need-Institute) for seven years ensuring developmental opportunities for street and working children. She joined UNICEF and had the opportunity to work in three states-Assam, West Bengal and Rajasthan where she started innovative projects for enhancing the learning of children in Government schools. Her main area of work is focussed around deprived groups and girls. Inclusion in schools is a special area of interest which she has been striving for in each of the three states, she worked in. She took an early retirement to devote her time with her family.

Mr. R.C. Hiremath was awarded the “8th AIWEFA Nina Sibal Memorial Award” for his organization “Flexitron” of Bengaluru, Karnataka. Flexitron has brought technological innovations, like alternative energy, low cost lighting, disease control etc. to focus on the poor, women, children, and differently-abled persons in society.

Dr. Kshama Metre, National Director, “Chinmaya Organisation for Rural Development (CORD)”, Kangra, Himachal Pradesh, was awarded the “4th AIWEFA Nina Sibal Memorial Award”, for her organisation. The main objective of the organisation is to empower and provide an opportunity to the differently abled persons to live as important citizens of the country and contribute as any other person.

Ms. Sheela Sinha, Director Education, Helen Keller Institute for Deaf & Deaf blind (HKIDB), Mumbai, Maharashtra was awarded the “11th AIWEFA Nina Sibal Memorial Award” for her organisation on account of their dedicated work towards educating and rehabilitating the deaf & blind.
Mr. Javed Ahmad Tak, Founder Humanity Welfare Organisation Helpline, Anantnag, Jammu and Kashmir, was awarded the “13th AIWEFA Nina Sibal Memorial Award” in recognition of his organisation’s pioneering work in rehabilitating disabled children affected by the disturbed situation in that area.

(Late) Dr. Arun Mukherjee, Founder Director “Udaan for the Disabled”, New Delhi, was awarded the “15th AIWEFA Nina Sibal Memorial Award” for his pioneering work for training and early medical intervention of children suffering from Autism Spectrum Disorder, Cerebral Palsy, Down Syndrome etc. The webinar was represented by his wife Ms. Shubra Mukherjee.

Ms. Merry Barua, President, Action for Autism, New Delhi was awarded the "1st AIWEFA Nina Sibal Memorial Award" for her organization. Ms. Barua is a disability activist who has tried to have "autism" recognised as the communication disorder disability towards attracting greater attention to its management both by the victim and family and others working with them.

Ms. Chitra Sarkar retired as Executive Director, Air India after thirty-six years of service in the corporate world. She now devotes her time to cultural and community issues, women's rights and journalism. She is the Joint Secretary of All India Women's Education Fund Association.
The COVID-19 Sustainable Solutions for Persons with Disabilities webinar series was organised to draw upon the experiences of 17 Nina Sibal Memorial Awardees and build resilient coping mechanisms among people with special needs. An electronic feedback form was administered to each participant towards the end of each webinar. The feedback form focused on following aspects:

- Satisfaction level with the event
- Satisfaction level with the session content
- Key take away from the webinar series
- Suggestions regarding the session
- Suggestions for webinar topics for the future

The below review represents the collective results of all four webinars.

**Satisfaction level with the event**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Satisfaction Level</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Completely Satisfied</td>
<td>65%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Satisfied to great extent</td>
<td>31%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Satisfied to moderate extent</td>
<td>4%</td>
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<tr>
<td>Satisfied to low extent</td>
<td>0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Not at all Satisfied</td>
<td>0%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Satisfaction level with the session content

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Satisfaction Level</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Completely Satisfied</td>
<td>62%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Satisfied to great extent</td>
<td>33%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Satisfied to moderate extent</td>
<td>6%</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Not at all Satisfied</td>
<td>0%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Some Key Take Away for the participants from the webinar series

There are abilities in disabilities. PwDs have so much potential, talent and just need the right mentor to guide him/ her for better skill and personal enhancement. Also, I learned about the importance of stimulation and role of family (especially the mother) in overall development of the child with disabilities in early years.

**Shweta Tyagi**

Early intervention is necessary. Educational platform should be made available in an inclusive manner. We can have intervention even in covid19 with various strategies.

**Akansha Kaushik**

Learning is not dependent on a place. I also learned about the idea of developing a self-assessment checklist on back to school.

**Divya Gupta**

Holistic approach for the rehabilitation of PwDs and use of right technology for reaching out to unreached.

**Rohit**

Communities can be a very major support for every kind of disabled person. It was heartening to know that it is actually being practised and needs to be encouraged.

**Dr. Malini Kapoor**

Opportunities to adapt can be found out from crisis.

**Dr. Sadhna Jain**

Mental health needs are more sunlight, more condor, and more unashamed conversation.” “Anything that's human is mentionable, and anything that is mentionable can be more manageable.
Inclusion and accessibility are key sources for giving equality to PWDs.

Key Suggestions Regarding the Session

Personal experiences of people with disabilities could also be shared.  

Sessions can be of longer duration to have an interactive question-answer session.

The webinar session would have been more interesting if more case studies were involved.

Holistic approach for the rehabilitation of PwDs and use of right technology to reaching out to unreached.

A PowerPoint presentation for a session is more effective.

If this forum can also create some internship programme for final year students based on special need children, it will be useful for the students and also needy children who are suffering because of this pandemic.

It would be more helpful if there could be some more practical sessions.

Suggestions for webinar topics for the future

Problem with Girls Disabilities

Children with Autism Spectrum Disorder

Communication Skills, Digital Marketing, Entrepreneurship

Handling Adolescent Problems of Students with Special Needs

Status of Government & International Efforts Made Towards Finding Sustainable Solutions for PwDs

ICT in Corona Pandemic

Happiness and Wellness of Teachers During the Pandemic Scenario

Coping Mechanisms for Covid Positive Elderly People

Role of Media and Technology as An Educational/ Awareness Creating Tool For Creating New Learning Opportunities For PwDs
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Topic</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Inclusive Livelihoods mainly for Pwds</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Teaching Aids of Disabled Persons</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Covid-19 And Women</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Issues Pertaining to Intersectionality</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Enhancing Economic Independence of the Disabled People</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Posters of Webinars

**Sustainable Solutions for Persons with Disabilities**

*Action oriented dialogues on the organisational impact of COVID-19 pandemic*

**Theme:**
Education and Research

11th June 2020, Thursday 4:00-5:30pm (IST)

**Online Platform:** Google Meet

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**All India Women’s Education Fund Association (AIWEFA)**

**Webinar Series:**
Sustainable Solutions for Persons with Disabilities

**Panelists:**
- Ms. Asha Chandra, President, AIWEFA
- Dr. Anupa Siddhu, Director, Lady Irwin College, University of Delhi
- Prof. (Dr.) M.K.C. Nair, Director, NIMH, Thiruvananthapuram
- Prof. (Dr.) Asha Hans, Shri Ram Memorial Rehabilitation Centre, Odisha

**Convenor NSC Committee:**
- Ms. Sarla Manchanda, Convenor NSC, AIWEFA

**Respondent:**
- Dr. Mayanka Gupta, Executive Member, AIWEFA

**Discussant:**
- Dr. Renu Mahaniya, Secretary General, AIWEFA

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**Sustainable Solutions for Persons with Disabilities**

*Action oriented dialogues on the organisational impact of COVID-19 pandemic*

**Theme:**
Visual Impairment

16th June 2020, Tuesday 5:00-6:30pm (IST)

**Online Platform:** Google Meet

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**Sustainable Solutions for Persons with Disabilities**

*Action oriented dialogues on the organisational impact of COVID-19 pandemic*

**Theme:**
Mental Health

18th June 2020, Thursday 5:00-6:30pm (IST)

**Online Platform:** Google Meet

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**Sustainable Solutions for Persons with Disabilities**
The AIWEFA Nina Sibal Memorial Award was instituted 17 years ago in 2003 to honour an organisation working with disabilities. The Award pays tribute to the memory of Ms. Nina Sibal, an IFS officer, posted at the United Nations, who tragically lost her battle to cancer.

The All India Women’s Education Fund Association (AIWEFA), established in 1929 under the inspiration of Mahatma Gandhi, administers the award of Rs. 8 lakhs, a trophy and a citation. For the first time this, prestigious event is being held virtually due to the COVID-19 pandemic.

This global health crisis is straining health infrastructures and national budgets, while exacerbating, even more, the well-being of people with disabilities. At this crucial time, AIWEFA taps into the experience of the 17 Nina Sibal Awardee Organisations who have taken steps to develop the COVID-19 coping mechanisms among people with special needs and build their resilience to face the challenge. The COVID-19 Sustainable Solutions for Persons With Disabilities webinar series has been held in this context to discuss, explore and dissect current scenarios within the framework of their organisational reaction as well as the current national, global, financial and health situation.