Inclusive Schools for Children with Disabilities

Why in news?

Developing inclusive and accessible schools will aid in challenging the perceptions about children with disabilities and actualise the zero-rejection policy in schools.

What is the picture of Persons with Disabilities (PwD) in India?

> *The Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities defines living with a disability as having long-term physical, mental, intellectual or sensory impairments which in interaction with various barriers may hinders one's participation in society on an equal basis with others.*

- **PwD** – As per Census 2011, Persons with Disabilities (PwD) comprise around **2.21%** of the total population in India.
- The proportion of males with disabilities is higher than the woman with disabilities.
- **CWD** - As per Census 2011, Children with Disabilities (CWD) comprise **1.7%** of the total child population in India.
- They are faced with physical, institutional, socioeconomic and communication barriers from an early age.
- A UNESCO 2019 report mentioned that **more than 70%** of five-year-olds with disabilities in India have never attended any educational institution.

What are the barriers to accessibility?

Barriers to accessibility

- Inaccessible school buses
- Inaccessible facilities in schools (drinking water facilities, canteens and toilets)
- Inappropriate infrastructure in classrooms (uncomfortable seating, slippery flooring and low illumination)
- Misinformed attitudes and perceptions among parents, teachers, staff, and communities
- Lack of inclusive technologies and learning practices
- Inadequate funding for the construction of inclusive infrastructure

Need to remove the barriers

- Developing inclusive and accessible schools will be a big step towards
    - Challenging perceptions and the associated discrimination about CWD
    - Actualising the zero-rejection policy in schools

What efforts were taken by the government to promote inclusiveness?

- **Article 21A** of the Constitution outlines the fundamental right to education.
- **The Right of Children to Free and Compulsory Education Act, 2009** outlines the right to have free and compulsory education for children aged 6-14 years.
- **The Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan**, which adopted a 'zero rejection policy', emphasises that every child with special needs is provided meaningful and quality education.
- India has also ratified the **UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities.**
- The government launched the **Accessible India Campaign (Sugamya Bharat Abhiyan)** in 2015 that aims at achieving universal accessibility for all citizens and creating an enabling and barrier-free environment.
- The government has also been supportive of the principle of **Leave No One Behind (LNOB),** which is the central promise of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development.

To know more about the initiatives of department of empowerment of persons with disabilities, click here

What lies ahead?

- **Creating an enabling environment** - A multi-pronged participatory approach is needed to provide an enabling environment for the empowerment of children with disabilities. This includes
    - Awareness and sensitisation programmes for children, parents, and caregivers
    - Training trainers for upskilling of school faculty and special educators
    - Providing access to updated teaching toolkits and materials
    - Technical training for local government departments
    - Co-learning platform for knowledge-sharing
- **Providing infrastructure services** - The following principles must be embedded for providing infrastructure services in schools. It includes
    - Equitability
    - Usability and durability
    - Affordability
    - Cultural adaptability
    - Aesthetic appeal

References

1. The Hindu | Developing schools without barriers
2. UNICEF | Children with disabilities

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