

NATIONAL CONFERENCE ON LIVELIHOOD FOR PERSONS WITH DISABILITIES

The National Conference on Livelihoods for Person's with Disability was organized by FICCI, Accenture, Cheshire Disability Trust, and the Chief Commissioner for person's with disabilities on 25th May 2012 at Le Meridien Hotel, New Delhi with the aim to develop a roadmap for increasing employment of persons with disabilities. This conference has brought together over 150 people from the corporate sector, civil society and the government for an extremely important, yet marginalized cause. The chief guest for the event was Shri KM Acharya, Secretary, Ministry of Social Justice and Empowerment, Government of India.

The first inaugural session of the conference began with a welcome address by Shri PM John, Chairman of Cheshire Disability Trust, who made a strong case to open up employment opportunities for people with disabilities, not only because of their needs, but also their skills.

Dr KK Upadhyay, Head, Corporate Social Responsibility, FICCI highlighted the view of FICCI on Inclusion of people with disabilities. As a chamber of commerce, he gave three ways in which FICCI has been working on the issue for the past five years: awareness programmes, advocating with the Government and providing platforms like the conference for livelihood for people with disabilities to people from different spheres.

Shri PK Pincha, Chief Commissioner for Person's with Disabilities, Ministry of Social Justice and Empowerment, spoke of a few critical dimensions for livelihood for people with disabilities – employability, the need to recognize inherent potential of persons with disabilities (PWD), the need to unearth this potential, the need for massive training programmes and massive research, employment in both public and private sector, as well as self employment of PWD.

Mr. Aqueel Merchant, Senior Vice President, Accenture, spoke of Accenture's view on inclusion of PWD's. He expressed his wish to create a culture where all employees, regardless of their diversity, feel part of one organization. Mr Merchant also used this momentous occasion to launch the JOBABILITY PORTAL – which is an online portal with gives PWD a platform to showcase their talent where corporate can hire from. The portal also provides opportunities to PWDs to enroll into training programmes.

Shri Mukul Wasnik, Minister for Social Justice and Empowerment, also sent a message expressing his happiness on organizing such a conference, which was read out by Shri TD Dhariyal, Dy. Commissioner, CCPD.

The Chief Guest for the event, Shri KM Acharya, expressed strong views on the issue and said that livelihood of PWD's must start with identification, inclusive education, skill training etc. He also mentioned that while disability is a state subject, according to the Indian Constitutional Framework, the central government has also been supporting the cause with initiatives like NHFDC AND National Trust.

Sunanda Mavillapali, Senior Program Manager, Leonard Cheshire Disability UK, spoke of several issues relating to livelihood of PWD – lack of data in developing countries, exclusion of PWD in Millennium Development Goals, etc and also spoke of the practical solutions LCD adopts to bring about livelihood for PWD.

The next session was about statutory obligations of stakeholders in promoting livelihoods of persons with disabilities, with specific references to article 9 and 27 of the United Nations Convention on Rights of Person's with Disabilities.

Shri PK Pincha spoke of article 9 and 27 of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of People with Disabilities (UNCRPD) as well as the PwD Act of 1995, thus addressing both international and national policies on the same. While article 27 of the UN Convention speaks of both work and employment, article 9 is about accessibility. In India, a new law on the issue is in the pipeline, which is to be in harmony with the UN Convention. The current 1995 law also has many provisions with regard to livelihood.

Shri Prashant Verma, associated with the Daisy India Forum addressed the gathering about the role of technology in providing employment opportunities.

Shri Pradeep Bangalore and Smt. Jyoti Ganapati from Accenture presented the "JOBABILITY PORTAL" and showcased its various features in this session.

Shri Mahesh Chandrashekhar, International Policy and Campaigns Manager, LCD UK , spoke of enabling an accessible environment to PWD by making our environment a barrier free one and gave a comprehensive framework for inclusion.

The third session was a panel discussion on Proactive actions of corporate agencies in promoting employment of persons with disabilities. The panel was headed by Dr. KK Upadhyay and panelists included corporates like Mr. Aqueel Merchant from Accenture, Mr. Niranjana Khatri from ITC Hotels, Smt. Gouri Rivekaer from Nasscom, Mr. Ashish Chanana from Pizza Hut

and Mr. Rajendra Thakur from Elin Appliances Pvt. Ltd. All of them spoke of the work of their respective companies in the field, and about their goals for the future.

Session four was another panel discussion on the Role of the Central Government and Public Sector in Skill Development and promotion of livelihoods for person's with disabilities. The chair of the panel was Shri PK Pincha, and panelists included representatives from various ministries like Ministry of Social Justice and Empowerment, Department of Public Enterprises, Department of Financial Services and CCPD.

Session five was a panel discussion on breakthrough initiatives of civil society organizations in enhancing the employability of PWD. The session was chaired by Shri. AK Mittal, President, ALL India Confederation of the Blind (AICB), and the panelists included Aruna Rangachar Pohl from Cheshire Disability Trust, Shri Mahantesh from Samarthanam, Shri Arun C Rao from Deaf Way, Smt Preeti Johar from Family of the Disabled, and Dr Sara Varughese from CBM.

In the last session, four working groups were made to develop a road map for livelihoods for persons with disabilities. The four working groups dealt with different arenas of the topic – skill development, financing of self employment ventures, the role of government and public sector, and the role of the role of the private sector. The Group Work Facilitators were from LCD UK, CDT, FICCI and CCPD.

Each group came up with insightful solutions to the problem and the conference was able to bring up several recommendations and deliberations which will be of use in future. The conference ended with a vote of thanks from FICCI.