

‘ASSISTIVE AIDS REMAIN INACCESSIBLE’

Relevant for: Developmental Issues | Topic: Rights & Welfare of Persons with Disability including Mentally Ill People - Schemes & their Performance, Mechanisms, Laws Institutions and Bodies

Hearing aids, wheelchairs and assistive apps can empower the disabled.

More than 2.5 billion people need one or more assistive products, such as wheelchairs, hearing aids, or apps that support communication and cognition and yet a billion of them are denied access, particularly in low- and middle-income countries, where access can be as low as 3% of the need for these life-changing products, said a report released on Monday by the World Health Organisation and UNICEF.

The “Global Report on Assistive Technology” presents evidence on the need for and access to assistive products and provides a series of recommendations to expand availability and access.

Rajib Dasgupta, chairperson at the Centre of Social Medicine and Community Health, Jawaharlal Nehru University, is one of the contributors to the report. Speaking about the condition in India, Dr. Dasgupta said that the 2011 Census puts the national estimate of the number of people with disabilities at 2.21% of the total population (26.8 million persons), including persons with visual, hearing, speech, locomotor and mental disabilities with the majority in the 19-59 age group.

Of the people with disabilities, 49% are literate, 34% employed and 75% live in rural areas.

Indian government agencies are dedicated towards the cause of improving access to assistive technology. The planning efforts will be supplemented by the recommendations from the global report, said Dr. Dasgupta.

Balram Bhargava, Director-General, Indian Council of Medical Research and Shweta Sharma, public health consultant, also contributed to the report.

The report notes that the number of people in need of one or more assistive products is likely to rise to 3.5 billion by 2050, due to populations aging and the prevalence of non-communicable diseases rising across the world. Also, affordability is a major barrier to access, the report notes.

A survey of 70 countries featured in the report found large gaps in service provision and trained workforce for assistive technology, especially in the domains of cognition, communication and self-care.

“Assistive technology is a life changer — it opens the door to education for children with impairments, employment and social interaction for adults living with disabilities, and an independent life of dignity for older persons,” said WHO Director-General Tedros Adhanom Ghebreyesus.

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