

Webinar on National Education Policy 2020 on Disabilities: Expectations, Assurances and Realities

Gandhinagar, December 08, 2020: Gujarat National Law University (GNLU) organized a webinar on ‘National Education Policy 2020 on Disabilities: Expectations, Assurances and Realities’ to celebrate the International Day of People with Disabilities 2020.

In his inaugural address, GNLU Director Dr S. Shanthakumar discussed various provisions of the New Education Policy (NEP) concerning the persons with disabilities. He said that NEP asserts that children with disabilities will have opportunities for equal participation across the educational system. It recognizes the need for inclusive education, defined as a system of education where students with and without disabilities learn together. It envisages non-discrimination in schools, accessible infrastructure, reasonable accommodations, individualized supports, use of Braille and Indian Sign language in teaching, and monitoring among others. The policy has provisions for the recruitment of special educators with cross-disability training and incorporates disability awareness within teacher education. NEP has thus adequate provisions to ensure that children with disabilities get opportunities for equal participation across the educational system. However, NEP is a policy document. Whether and to what extent the intended benefits of the policy will reach children with disabilities will depend on its implementation. Now, it is the responsibility of various stakeholders including the governments, private philanthropic investors, universities, colleges and schools to effectively implement these provisions for ensuring inclusive education for the benefit of students with disabilities.

Ms Radhika Alkazi, Managing Trustee, Aartha-Aastha said that the Right to Education Act should be amended to make early education a legal right. She said that children with disabilities should not be relegated to home-based education; rather the school system must be adjusted to the needs of such children at least for early education.

Shampa Sengupta, Director of Sruti Disability Rights Centre, also expressed her concerns about the provision for educating the parents of children with disabilities for enabling them to teach such children. She felt that parents of children with disabilities already have a lot of responsibilities and they should not be saddled with more.

Another panellist, Dr Pubali Agarwal, Assistant Professor at Durgabai Deshmukh College of Special Education, University of Delhi expressed happiness over the inclusion of Early Childhood Care and Education (ECCE) and said it would benefit children with special needs. However, to make ECCE successful, Anganwadi workers must be trained in Braille and sign languages so that they could educate children with disabilities at the foundation stage.

Ms Shabnam Agarwal, Founder Director, Aanandini emphasized on the need for the cooperation of regular teachers for the growth of children with disabilities. She expressed her concerns about the lack of awareness among the parents of children with disabilities about the various teaching

techniques and other related information. She advocated for providing the scribe and extra time in examinations at the early stage of learning.

Dr Boopathi, Assistant Professor at Central University, Tamil Nadu highlighted that disability diversity needs to be acknowledged in the society, and stated the lack of knowledge about Braille and other assistive aids is a matter of concern. He said that in the case of congenital disability, some parents are aware of how to educate such a child. However, in the case of blind children, most parents do not know how the child should be educated. Disabled students must be reasonably accommodated in higher education, and vocational learning must also be talked about from the perspective of children with disabilities.

Saudamini Pethe, Trustee Access Mantra Foundation and a law student, mentioned about the attitudinal barriers in using sign language. She called for the empowerment of the deaf community. For this purpose, the sign language should be standardized, all content and curriculum should be made available in sign language and parents should be made aware of different types of hearing impairment. She also felt that there should be a role of the deaf community for deaf children.

The webinar concluded with a vote of thanks by Dr Marisport, Head, GNLU Centre for Disability Studies.

The webinar was organized under the aegis of the GNLU Centre for Disability Studies in collaboration with Sruti Disability Rights Centre.

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