

Solution Exchange – Bhutan Consolidated Reply



Query: Overcoming Accessibility for Physically Challenged Children and Adults- Advice; Experiences

Compiled by **Mamta Katwal**, Resource Person
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From **Chencho Tshering**, Kuensel Corporation, Thimphu
Posted 8 December 2009

This year's theme for the "International Day of Persons with Disabilities" held annually on 3 December, centered on "An Exhibition of Abilities" whereby physically challenged children of Bhutan displayed a wide range of carvings, knitting, embroidery and art work. This day no doubt ended as a source of encouragement and inspiration for those with special needs. (For more information click here <http://kuenselonline.com/modules.php?name=News&file=article&sid=14130>).

However, despite such efforts, the physically challenged in Bhutan face a range of issues and problems. One, they lack access to disability friendly infrastructure. Only one hotel in Thimphu has the provision for the disabled. Public buildings such as banks, post offices and places where utility bills are paid, are inaccessible for people with special needs. In a recent media report, a visiting Japanese tourist in a wheelchair expressed problems with accessibility in Thimphu. (Click here for more information <http://kuenselonline.com/modules.php?name=News&file=article&sid=13579>). Accessibility is also a problem for the elderly and mothers with children in prams.

It has also been observed that teachers in a school, which cater to children with special needs, reported that the inclusive education strategy to promote equal educational opportunity is posing a challenge for the disabled children. The teachers lack the training necessary to deal with such children and the children learned to be fearful and anxious in the classroom. (<http://kuenselonline.com/modules.php?name=News&file=article&sid=14130>).

In addition, the physically disabled adults lack access to vocational training opportunities. During the Third Session of Parliament in June this year, the members discussed the establishment of Care Centers to provide vocational training to disabled people aged thirty and above. The members highlighted that such projects were not included in the Tenth Plan. To this end, the members informed that 4% of Bhutan's population was physically challenged and the Constitution (Article 9, Section 21, 22), maintained that vocational skills should be imparted through information and technology. The discussions also included establishing Care Centers for elderly people and the poor.

Given this at the backdrop, we would thus like to explore the issue of accessibility (to infrastructure and training) and inclusive education strategy. Specifically, we are seeking inputs from members on the following:

- What are some best practices/experiences with overcoming infrastructure accessibility issues for people with special needs?
- Suggestions on how to better integrate an inclusive education strategy into our schools, in a way that caters to children with special needs and ensures teachers are properly trained to care/teach children with special needs?

Your inputs and experiences from Bhutan as well as other countries will help us in our efforts to improve Bhutan's infrastructure, training opportunities and education to make them more accessible to people with special needs.

Responses were received, with thanks, from

1. [Shiriin Barakzai](#), Independent, United Kingdom
2. [Tandi Dorji](#), Centre for Research Initiative, Thimphu
3. [Jakar Dorji](#), National Council, Thimphu
4. [Sonam Tshering](#), Royal Institute of Management, Thimphu
5. [Michael Rutland](#), Independent, Thimphu
6. [Mamta Katwal](#), United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), Thimphu

Further contributions are welcome!

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Summary of Responses

The query pointed out that public buildings such as banks, post offices as well as other frequently visited buildings do not have the necessary provisions to make them accessible to the disabled. It also highlighted the lack of teachers' training on how to deal with children with special needs in regular schools as a problem. Responding to the request for suggestions and feedback on how to create a barrier-free environment for the physically challenged and an effective inclusive education strategy to mainstream children with special needs into regular schools, members agreed these are important issues and outlined ways of addressing them.

Respondents expressed the view that physical disability is not just about barriers to accessibility, pointing out it is also about a much broader issue – the [attitudes of people towards the disabled](#). In this regard, they urged changing the mindset of public and medical staff to remove any prejudice against people with special needs.

To address this problem, discussants recommended designing easily accessible public service facilities for the blind and people with mobility issues (i.e. people in wheel chairs, children in prams and the elderly). These measures need to extend to staircases and elevators as well as roads, which require proper pedestrian crossings. Another suggestion was to designate certain residential areas, such as staff quarters and residential houses, for physically challenged people and building housing especially for them.

Respondents also suggested installing reliable mobile communication services to facilitate paying bills, purchasing bus tickets, etc. This they felt would reduce the difficulties faced by physically challenged people when engaging in everyday activities.

Another issue highlighted was the difficulty and costliness of building a disability friendly environment. In the light of these constraints, discussants advised assessing the prevalence, the severity and category of disabled people in Bhutan. Additionally, they urged making frequently visited places, such as public

buildings, hospitals and government offices, more accessible and for the time being, not to worry about places, like hotels. Having some accessibility friendly hotels would suffice for catering to tourists and other visitors to Bhutan. They also suggested starting with government buildings, which are shorter, noting it would be difficult to modify four to six story buildings. Furthermore, they urged a change in the [Bhutan building rules](#) to include provisions related to accessibility. This will make buildings and residences more accessible to physically challenged people.

Implementing these suggestions, members felt would ensure maximum utilization of accessibility facilities and address the possibility of overlooking other important needs such as medical care, prosthetics (reconstructive surgery), rehabilitation and general care. It would also help ensure that creating a barrier-free environment for the disabled is not relegated to a low priority development issue.

Discussing **inclusive education**, respondents referenced the "[Education For All-The Mid-Decade Assessment for Bhutan](#)" and pointed out that there are more than 3,000 primary school aged disabled children who are not in school. Furthermore, the "[Education Sector Strategy-Realizing Vision 2020](#)" highlights the various constraints involved in mainstreaming children with special needs into regular schools, including:

- fulfilling the training requirements of teachers
- establishing a broader base of human resources with skills related to teaching disabled and special need children
- diverting substantial resources to special needs education
- addressing the general public's perceptions towards people with disabilities

Given the findings of these reports, members recommended assessing and evaluating existing centers for the disabled, providing teachers' training on inclusive education, and adapting schools to the needs of children. They also advised integrating other services into these centers for the disabled. For instance, Bhutan could follow an example from **Africa** where a [support school](#) for the disabled is providing vocational and life-skill trainings to children and mobilizing resources by running self-sustaining activities like poultry, piggery, milking and jam making. Bhutan could set up similar schools run by teachers and assisted by community members, monks and nuns, etc.

Mainstreaming children with special needs into regular schools will provide them with the education necessary to complement the special cognitive abilities that many such children possess. Discussants stressed that educating physically challenged children can yield [produce competent and productive citizens](#).

Members also explored the issue of integrating people with special needs into the **work force**. This they felt would ease the strain on human resources in the country, noting that not all sectors of physical strength some demand innovative and creative employees.

Finally, respondents shared various [publications](#), information about up [upcoming events](#) on addressing accessibility issues and the names of organizations working in [South Asia](#), which have been able to overcome accessibility challenges for physically challenged children and adults.

Members concluded by noting that while improving accessibility is often difficult and expensive, it is the only way to ensure that every one lives an independent and productive life. They also hoped the inputs shared during the discussion would be shared at the policy level to facilitate the development of accessible infrastructure for children and adults with special needs and better implementation of an inclusive education strategy.

Comparative Experiences

India

Leonard Cheshire Disability (LCD) Providing Services to the Disabled (from *Shiriin Barakzai, Independent, United Kingdom*)

LCD services are available across India, in Coorg, Mumbai, Chennai, and Bhopal where they are currently implementing an inclusive education program supporting 724 children with disabilities during 2007-08. They also provide services like teachers' training, capacity building, sensitization of local government and NGOs and livelihood activities. The IT centre in Bangalore offers job training to people with locomotor disabilities and in Jamshedpur, LCD have provided vocational training to 140 disabled people. Read [more](#)

Related Resources

Recommended Documentation

From *Chencho Tshering, Kuensel Corporation, Thimphu*

An Exhibition of Abilities

Article; by Phuntsho Wangdi; Kuensel Corporation; Thimphu; 4 December 2009

Available at <http://kuenselonline.com/modules.php?name=News&file=article&sid=14130>

Describes the event held to mark International Disability Day and discusses various efforts and challenges involved with having an inclusive approach in regular school

Thimphu: A Disabled Unfriendly City

Article; by Phuntsho Choden; Kuensel Corporation; Thimphu; 1 October 2009

Available at <http://kuenselonline.com/modules.php?name=News&file=article&sid=13579>

Narrates the experiences of a physically challenged Japanese couple who found buildings, facilities, sidewalks and the traffic scene in Thimphu lacking in accessibility for the disabled

From *Shiriin Barakzai, Independent, United Kingdom*

Breaking Barriers- Inclusive Education in South Asia

Publication; South Asia Region Office (SARO) of Leonard Cheshire Disability

Available at http://lcsouthasia.org/sites/default/files/breaking_barriers.pdf (PDF, Size: 1.14 MB)

Outlines the approach to inclusive education used to encourage the enrolment of children with disability in regular schools by minimizing the barriers they faced in accessing education

Our Attitude is the Biggest Disability

Article; by Kinley Dorji; Kuensel Corporation; Thimphu; 14 September 2009

Available at <http://kuenselonline.com/modules.php?name=News&file=article&sid=13422>

Indicates the difficulty faced by teachers in changing attitudes towards people with disabilities and the hurdles to inclusive education, such as inadequate resources and trained teachers

Blind but with a Vision (from *Tandi Dorji, Centre for Research Initiative, Thimphu*)

Article; by Karma Choden; Kuensel Corporation; Thimphu; 27 May 2005

Available at <http://kuenselonline.com/modules.php?name=News&file=article&sid=5521>

Describes achievements of a visually impaired person indicating the cognitive abilities which can be useful for human resource development in Bhutan

Bhutan Building Rules-2002 (from *Michael Rutland, Independent, Thimphu*)

Document; Department of Urban Development and Engineering Services, Ministry of Works and Human Settlement, Royal Government of Bhutan; Thimphu; 2002

Available at http://www.mowhs.gov.bt/Building_Rules2002/Bhutan%20Building%20Rules%20-%202002.pdf (PDF, Size: 196 KB)

Came into effect on 1 January 2003, and were designed to ensure minimum quality standards for construction work, and contains a provision dealing with access for the disabled (Section 8)

From [Mamta Katwal](#), UNDP, Thimphu

Education for All: Mid-Decade Assessment for Bhutan

Assessment Report; Ministry of Education, Royal Government of Bhutan; 2007

Available at http://planipolis.iiep.unesco.org/upload/Bhutan/Bhutan_EFA_MDA.pdf (PDF, Size: 867 KB)

Assesses centers for special education in Bhutan in terms of number and attendance and presents the number of primary school-going-aged disabled children not attending schools

Education Sector Strategy-Realizing Vision 2020

Document; Ministry of Health and Education, Royal Government of Bhutan

Available at (<http://www.education.gov.bt/Publications/Edn%20Sector%20Strategy.pdf>) (PDF, Size: 341 KB)

Listing of the goals and processes laid out for achieving Bhutan's educational visions, one goal is to provide equal educational opportunities to all Bhutanese children, including disabled ones

United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities and Optional Protocol

Convention; United Nations Secretariat; New York, USA; May 2008

Available at <http://www.un.org/disabilities/documents/convention/convoptprot-e.pdf> (PDF, Size: 449 KB)

Convention to promote, protect and ensure full and equal enjoyment of all human rights and fundamental freedoms of disabled persons and respect for their inherent dignity

From Exclusion to Equality-Realizing the rights of Persons with disabilities

Handbook; United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs (UN-DESA), United Nations Office of the High Commissioner of Human Rights (OHCHR) and the Inter-Parliamentary Union (IPU); Geneva; 2007

Available at <http://www.un.org/disabilities/documents/toolaction/ipuhb.pdf> (PDF, Size: 3.21 MB)

Provides examples and insights to aid parliamentarians in their efforts to realize the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities

Population and Housing Census of Bhutan-2005

Book; Office of the Census Commissioner; Thimphu; 2005

The results of population and housing census for the period 2005-2015, revealed that 21,894 people (3.4% of Bhutan's total population) have one or more disabilities

Accessibility for the Disabled- A Design Manual for a Barrier-Free Environment (from, [Mamta Katwal](#), Resource Person)

Manual; United Nations Economic and Social Commission for Western Asia (ESCWA) and the Urban Management Department of the Lebanese Company of the Development and Reconstruction of Beirut Central District (SOLIDERE); New York, USA; 2004

<http://www.un.org/esa/socdev/enable/designm/>

Contains technical considerations & design provisions for creating a barrier-free environment, including information on constructing pathways, signs, parking & street furniture for the disabled

Recommended Organizations and Programmes

From [Michael Rutland](#), Independent, Thimphu

Ministry of Works and Human Settlement, Royal Government of Bhutan, Thimphu

P. B. 791, Thimphu; Tel: +975-2-327998; Fax: +975-2-323121; <http://www.mowhs.gov.bt/index.html>
Ministry involved in formulating policies and developing plans related to physical infrastructures in Bhutan

Department of Urban Development and Engineering Services, Ministry of Works and Human Settlement, Thimphu

kesangt@druknet.bt; <http://www.dudh.gov.bt/>

Is one main technical department under Ministry of Works and Human Settlement engaged in provisions for basic infrastructure and safe and affordable housing for all

From [Shiriin Barakzai](#), United Kingdom

Leonard Cheshire Disability (LCD), South Asia Regional Office (SARO), India

542, 9th Cross, J P Nagar, III Phase, Bangalore 560078 India; Tel: 0091-80-2658-1902/6113; Fax: 0091-80-2658-7434; info@lcdsouthasia.org; <http://www.lcdsouthasia.org/what-we-do>

Servicing South Asia since 1955, they support disabled individuals through LCD's focus areas of education, livelihood, health and rehabilitation, including in Bhutan

St. Angela's Cheshire Home for the Disabled, Lesotho

P.O. Box 4164 Sebaboleng 104 Lesotho; http://www.letsema.org/html/st_angela_cheshire.php; Contact: Sister Augustina Thokoa, Administrator and Rehabilitation Technician; Tel: 266-2231-4580; stangelahome@leo.co.ls

Have experience working with disabled people, providing temporary shelter to children with disabilities and run income generation projects (with livestock and fruit and vegetable gardens)

The Foundation of Asia-Pacific Development Centre on Disability, Thailand (from [Mamta Katwal](#), Resource Person)

APCD Building; 255 Rajvithi Road; Rajvithi, Bangkok 10400; Tel: 66-02354-7505; Fax: 66-02354-7507; info@apcdfoundation.org; <http://www.apcdfoundation.org/countryprofile/bhutan/index.html>

A regional center on disability that promotes the empowerment of people with disabilities and a barrier-free society in developing countries in Asia and Pacific Region, including Bhutan

[Recommended Portals and Information Bases](#)

From [Mamta Katwal](#), Resource Person

United Nations Rights and Dignity of Persons with Disabilities

<http://www.un.org/disabilities/default.asp?id=161>

Portal shares information on the United Nations' initiatives for persons with disabilities, including several documents on topics such as disability and development, disability and education/youth

The World Bank: Disability and Development

<http://go.worldbank.org/19SCI890L0>

Site contains news and broadcasts on "Disability and Development," and contains information on how the World Bank integrates disability concerns into its development activities

Development for All: Towards a Disability-Inclusive Australian Aid Program 2009-2014

<http://www.ausaid.gov.au/keyaid/disability.cfm>

Portal provides information on the Australian government's first strategy to make people with disability a priority in the Aus AID program to improve their quality of life

[Recommended Upcoming Events](#)

From [Mamta Katwal](#), UNDP, Thimphu

Workshop on Innovation on Accessible Transport for All, United States, 14 January 2010

World Bank, 1818 H Street, NW, Washington D.C., 20006, USA; Tel: 202-473-1000;
<http://go.worldbank.org/Z26Z4ZNXA0>

Focus on innovation in policy and governance, design and technology to improve accessibility to transport for disabled and older people in developed/developing countries

2010 International Transport Forum on "Transport and Innovation: Unleashing the Potential," Germany, 26-28 May 2010

Organized by International Transport Forum (ITF) in partnership with International Association of Public Transport (UITP); Leipzig, Germany. Available at:
http://www.uitp.org/advocacy/pdf/UITP_Call_Applicants.pdf (PDF, Size: 87.3 KB); Contact: Mary Crass, Head of Policy and Forum Preparation, International Transport Forum or Minna Melleri, Head of Corporate Development; International Association of Public Transport; Tel: 33-0-1-45-24-13-24 or 32-0-2-661-31 96; Fax: 33-0-1-45-24-13-22 or 32-0-2-660-10-72; mary.crass@oecd.org or minna.melleri@uitp.org

Findings from the "Innovation on Accessible Transport to All" forum will serve as input to the forum in better understanding and overcoming barriers to innovative accessibility initiative

Related Consolidated Replies

Implementing Inclusive Education in Government Schools, from Radhika Alkazi, Astha, New Delhi and Niraj Seth, ActionAid International, India (Experiences). Education Community, Solution Exchange, India. Issued 18 October 2007

Available at <http://www.solutionexchange-un.net.in/education/cr/cr-se-ed-18100701.pdf> (PDF, Size: 88 KB)

Discussed experiences of making education transactions in an effective way for the differently abled and disadvantaged children in the context of inadequate teachers

Draft Karnataka State Government Policy on Inclusive Education, from Ruma Banerjee, Seva-In-Action, Bangalore (For Comments). Education Community, Solution Exchange, India. Issued 14 December 2006

Available at <http://www.solutionexchange-un.net.in/education/cr/cr-se-ed-14120601.pdf> (PDF, Size: 169 KB)

Provides comments, suggestions and inputs on the Karnataka Draft Policy on Inclusive Education for smoother achievements of its objectives

Inclusive Education and Child Friendly Schools, from Huma Masood, UNESCO, New Delhi (Advice). Education Community, Solution Exchange, India. Issued 31 October 2006

Available at <http://www.solutionexchange-un.net.in/education/cr/cr-se-ed-31100601.pdf> (PDF, Size: 158 KB)

Discusses the issue of inclusive education as a policy and practice, the pros and cons of inclusion in schools and the conditions for successful mainstreaming

Understanding Inclusive Practices in Schools for Compilation of Case Studies Across India, from Ruma Banerjee, and Manjula, N., Seva-In-Action, Bangalore and Archana Mehendale, Independent Researcher, Bangalore. Education Community, Solution Exchange, India. Issued 4 May 2009

Available at <http://www.solutionexchange-un.net.in/education/cr/cr-se-ed-26020901.pdf> (PDF, Size: 221 KB)

Discussed the meaning of the term inclusive along with the advantages and disadvantages of using inclusive education as a strategy to ensure the mainstreaming of persons with disabilities

Responses in Full

Shiriin Barakzai, Independent, United Kingdom

It is good to hear about the issues that [Chencho](#) has raised. Being disabled, physically or otherwise does not by default mean that your brain does not work and you should be confined to a life of making baskets or weaving.

Bhutan has few resources, but human resource is one we should not overlook. In many sectors the need for Bhutan to find a niche in activities, which do not require able bodied people, but rather, innovative and entrepreneurial people i.e. people who have ideas to overcome problems and find practical solutions. Disabled people have to do this every day of their lives, using their brains to make up for any deficiency they may suffer. Chencho is a perfect example of how able 'disabled' people are.

Whilst working in Lesotho I did some volunteer work with a Leonard Cheshire support school. Leonard Cheshire is a United Kingdom (UK) charity organization, which provides accommodation for both physically and mentally challenged adults in the UK (<http://www.lcdisability.org/>). The school I spent time at was in fact a primary school with hostel and a secondary hostel with a small school. They encouraged the older students to attend the mainstream village school if their disability allowed them to access the classrooms, toilets, etc.

My understanding is that St. Angela's school is an indigenous Civil Society Organization (CSO), which receives support from Leonard Cheshire in terms of funding and advice/training (http://www.letsema.org/html/st_angela_cheshire.php). (Letsema is a women's group that supports a number of other CSO's through personal links, but also carries out their own activities such as drying fruits and making jam).

There was by default some elements of vocational and 'life skills' training, but the encouragement to enter mainstream school was strong. This had two benefits, it reduced the number of specialist staff required (as Lesotho is a small developing country) but also enabled children to learn to function in mainstream society with a security net next door. The work I helped them with was to set up an IT classroom with computers donated by various organizations and businesses.

They were very good at mobilizing such resources, running a chicken project as well as piggery and milking. This gave the children with more severe learning difficulties vocational skills as well as providing income to the school.

They run five centres in Thailand, but also work in India, Bangladesh, Pakistan and Sri Lanka and so maybe they could be invited to visit, or vice versa to get ideas from them of the areas they work in – education, livelihoods, rehabilitation and support for everyday living (<http://www.lcint.org/?lid=2028>). Using their approach as a blueprint may not work in Bhutan but we can assess the possibility of having such a centre, which can use lay people as staff and also receive help for monks and nuns.

With regard to physical accessibility, this of course is important until such time as alternative, innovative and reliable communications mean that people do not physically have to attend a particular place. For example, in India it is now possible to buy train tickets online or pay your utility bills by mobile phone. Obviously these require people to have access to phones and for such services to be put in place by the operating companies. An unintended benefit found was reduction in bribery and corruption and fairer processing of bills and payments – as the personal interface had been reduced and the chance for such behaviour also reduced.

Chencho notes the difficulties of disabled people getting around town – but I think that even able bodied people struggle with Thimphu's sidewalks. However, many footpaths have been improved by the

authorities and they will continue to do so. Building footpaths for people with special needs may be seen as a poor priority for resources in light of the other development needs of the country. Thus, it will need a clear decision on for whom we want better access and where; for example in hotels for tourists with special needs or in hospitals for patients.

Physical disability is not the only barrier to access, physical and otherwise, and there is a much broader discussion to be had about attitudes to the disabled. Therefore, it is equally important to educate medical staff and the public to do away with any prejudice that can be associated with disability.

Tandi Dorji, Centre for Research Initiative Thimphu

I think this is very important so that we cater to the needs of those with disabilities. However, there are certain things that need to be addressed first. My suggestions are as follows:

1. Together with the prevalence of disability, we also need to clearly establish the category and severity of disabilities.
2. We need to assess the needs of the disabled population in terms of infrastructure, education, health, employment etc. so that the facilities, which are created, are properly utilized. I agree that in certain areas such as hotels and utility services, there must be provision for the disabled but when it comes to building facilities, it must be based on needs.
3. What percentage of the disabled population is facing difficulty because of the absence of these services? Are there barriers in the existing set-up that prevent disabled people from being integrated into the society? Perhaps there are other more important needs such as medical care, physical therapy, prosthetics, rehabilitation and general care.
4. There are already a number of educational centers for physically and mentally challenged children such as the Khaling Blind School, Drugyel Deaf School and Changangkha special School.

There are also plans to make other schools that cater to these special children in Mongar, Zhemgang etc. There is a need to assess and evaluate the existing centers and provide integrated services, not just education. Teachers need to be trained and these schools need to be adapted to the needs of these children according to their disability. It may take years but as shown by Khaling Blind School, blind children can go on to be productive citizens.

Lastly, there needs to be better infrastructure and other services that are easily accessible to disabled people, but let us first identify those specific needs then we can build and adapt those services that are needed for them.

Jakar Dorji, National Council, Thimphu

Chencho's inquiry is very inspiring. Public service facilities need to be designed for people with special needs- wheel chaired, visually impaired, older people and even for mothers with children in pram. Places like markets, bus stops, toilets, need to be made accessible to children and adults with special needs. In order to make them independent, they should be able to avail utility services without assistance. We need to also assure that staircases/elevators are safe for all users.

We have not yet fully prepared ourselves to face the growing traffic congestion. Pavements and zebra crossing also require to be designed for people with special needs. Everyone should be able to use public facilities without much obstruction.

Therefore, it is time we add these to our existing facilities and also improve those that already exist but are less user-friendly. In this regard, I hope that SE's final consolidated reply to this query will be shared at the policy-making level to facilitate and integrate accessible infrastructure for children and adults with special needs.

Sonam Tshering, Royal Institute of Management, Thimphu

When it comes to accessibility issues for children and adults much needs to be done in integrating them into our society. The mainstream physically challenged person is not visible in the society. Moreover, few organizations working for them have yet to pick up well.

As mentioned by Chencho, both private and public places lack accessible infrastructure be it schools, utility buildings and residences. This extends further into road safety and traffic due to lack of zebra crossings.

In regard to this I would like to suggest the following:

- Have zebra crossings for people with special needs to ensure that drivers are careful
- Build staff quarters and houses for physically challenged people
- Integrate accessibility in terms of infrastructure in building, public places etc
- Plan and designate certain places reserved only for people with special needs to reside

When considering such plans, it is also important to consider different types of special needs and severity so that we are able to cater to all categories of people with special needs.

Michael Rutland, Independent, Thimphu

I would think there is a difference depending on whether you are thinking of tourists or Bhutanese, when we talk about accessibility issues for people with special needs. For example, hotel accessibility would affect very few Bhutanese. I would feel content if *some* of the hotels were accessibility-friendly, and could advertise them as such.

Accessibility provision is, in my view, most important in public buildings, government offices, etc, where ordinary people need to go for everyday purposes.

However, accessibility is also expensive! Perhaps the buildings regulations for Thimphu could include requirements for accessibility, though when we look at all the four to six floored buildings in Thimphu, to modify them for accessibility would be very difficult and costly. Perhaps policy should begin with policy for government offices.

Mamta Katwal, United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), Thimphu

Having proper pedestrian crossings, parking, ramps, elevators, street benches, disability signs and symbols will cater to accessibility issues for people with special needs. I agree that accessibility issue is both difficult and expensive. However, it is the only way to ensure that everyone in the society lives a productive and an independent life.

I would like to share the "United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities and Optional Protocol" which is intended to promote and ensure full enjoyment of rights and freedoms and respect by people with special needs (<http://www.un.org/disabilities/documents/convention/convoptprot-e.pdf>) (PDF, Size: 449 KB).

The handbook "From Exclusion to Equality-Realizing the Rights of Persons with Disabilities" provides examples and insights to assist parliamentarians in their efforts to realize the UN Convention and to

construct a barrier free environment. (<http://www.un.org/disabilities/documents/toolaction/ipuhb.pdf> (PDF, Size: 3.21 MB)

There are also two upcoming events related to making transportation accessible to people with special needs. A workshop on "Innovation on Accessible Transport for All" is going to be held at World Bank Headquarters in Washington D.C. January 14, 2010 (<http://go.worldbank.org/Z26Z4ZNXA0>). Findings from "Innovation on Accessible Transport to All" will serve as input to the forum in better understanding and overcoming barriers to innovative accessibility initiatives at the 2010 "International Transport Forum" on "Transport and Innovation: Unleashing the Potential" which will be held from 26-28 May 2010 in Leipzig, Germany.

Inclusive education should ensure that all children have equal access to education. According to the figure stated in the "Education for All- Mid-Decade Assessment for Bhutan," the number of disabled children in the age group 6-12 years (primary school going age) would be about 3,488. Since there were 34 students at the National Institute for the Disabled and 13 at the unit for the deaf in Paro, this leaves about 99% (3,441 children) of the primary school going age disabled children not accounted for. (http://planipolis.iiep.unesco.org/upload/Bhutan/Bhutan_EFA_MDA.pdf PDF, Size: 867 KB)

In this regard, the "Education Sector Strategy-Realizing Vision 2020" has stated a vision of making education accessible for children with disabilities and special needs. This document makes it easier to discern the existing challenges in mainstreaming children with disabilities into regular schools. Besides, fulfilling the training requirements of teachers to handle children with special needs, establishing a broader base of human resources related to teaching disability special skills is lacking. Diverting substantial resources to special needs education and addressing public attitudes toward people with disabilities have been highlighted as other challenges. (<http://www.education.gov.bt/Publications/Edn%20Sector%20Strategy.pdf> (PDF, Size: 341 KB)

Lastly, while we set up strategies to overcome accessibility issues for physically challenged children and adults it is equally important to work toward changing the mindset of the people towards people with special needs and toward integrating educated disabled people into the labour market.

Many thanks to all who contributed to this query!

If you have further information to share on this topic, please send it to Solution Exchange Bhutan at se-bhutan@solutionexchange-un.net.bt with the subject heading "Re: Query: Overcoming Accessibility for Physically Challenged Children and Adults- Advice; Experiences. Additional Reply."

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