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**DAILY EDITORIAL
ANALYSIS**

TOPIC

**EQUALITY OF TREATMENT FOR PERSONS
WITH DISABILITIES**

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EQUALITY OF TREATMENT FOR PERSONS WITH DISABILITIES

Context

- Disability pensions in India remain fragmented, inadequate and uneven across States even after India's rapid digitalisation and expansion of Direct Benefit Transfer (DBT) systems.

Current Status of Disability Welfare in India

- According to the **2011 Census**, India had **2.68 crore Persons with Disabilities (PwDs)** (2.21% of the population). Recent estimates suggest the number may be **4.5–6 crore** due to population growth and changing health conditions.
- The **Rights of Persons with Disabilities (RPwD) Act, 2016** expanded the recognized **categories of disabilities from 7 to 21** and guarantees rights related to equality, education, employment, accessibility, and social security.
- Key government initiatives include:
 - Unique Disability ID (UDID) Project** for a national disability database.
 - Accessible India Campaign (Sugamya Bharat Abhiyan)** to improve accessibility in public spaces and services.
 - Indira Gandhi National Disability Pension Scheme (IGNDPS)** for income support.
 - Skill development programmes such as **PM-DAKSH**.
- Disability pensions remain **fragmented and inadequate**, with most States providing only **₹300–₹500 per month**, while coverage remains limited despite these measures

Key Challenges in the Existing System

- Fragmented and Unequal Pension Structure:** Disability pensions differ across States because eligibility criteria, benefit amounts, and implementation mechanisms vary considerably.
 - Such disparities undermine the principle of equality.
- Inadequate Financial Support:** Current pension amounts are insufficient to meet basic living expenses, healthcare costs, assistive device requirements, and mobility needs.
- Administrative Complexity:** Multiple agencies are involved in certification, verification, and benefit delivery, often leading to delays, exclusion errors, and accountability gaps.
- Low Public Expenditure:** India spends only about **0.02% of GDP** on disability welfare, significantly lower than many developing and developed countries.
- Rights-Based Deficit:** Disability pensions continue to function largely as welfare assistance rather than as an enforceable social security entitlement, contrary to the spirit of the RPwD Act, 2016.

Why Disability Pensions Are an Economic Necessity?

- Economic Costs of Exclusion:** According to estimates by the **World Bank and UNDP**, low and middle-income countries lose **3–7% of GDP** due to exclusion of PwDs from education, employment and social security systems.
- Positive Economic Multipliers:** Disability income supports to improve household consumption, enhance economic resilience, reduce poverty, and encourage labour market participation.
 - It is estimated fiscal multipliers between **1.4 and 1.6**, implying that every rupee spent generates broader economic activity.
- International Evidence: Pro Bono Economics (2025)** found that the socio-economic benefits of disability income support exceed programme costs by nearly **48%**.
 - Thus, disability pensions function as social protection, poverty alleviation, economic stimulus, and human capital investment.

Case for a Minimum Universal Disability Pension Floor Rate (MUDPFR)

- **MUDPFR** would guarantee a nationally defined minimum pension to all eligible PwDs, irrespective of their State of residence, while allowing States to provide additional top-ups.
- **Constitutional and Legal Basis:** The proposal derives legitimacy from:
 - ♦ **Article 14:** Equality before law.
 - ♦ **Article 21:** Right to life with dignity.
 - ♦ **Article 41:** Public assistance in cases of disability.
 - ♦ **Section 24 of the RPwD Act, 2016:** Social security and pension support.
- **Fiscal Feasibility:** Compared to allocations for food subsidies, infrastructure and other welfare programmes, such expenditure is fiscally sustainable.

Global Best Practices

- Several countries have adopted nationally uniform disability support systems:
 - ♦ **South Africa:** National Disability Grant.
 - ♦ **Brazil:** Benefício de Prestação Continuada (BPC).
 - ♦ **Australia:** Disability Support Pension.
 - ♦ **New Zealand:** National disability income support.
 - ♦ **Kenya, Rwanda, Thailand and Indonesia:** National disability assistance programmes.
- These systems demonstrate that centrally defined standards improve uniformity, portability, transparency, and inclusion.

Need For Institutional Reform

- **Proposed National Disability Pension Authority (NDPA):** India may establish a dedicated authority responsible for:
 - ♦ **Uniform Eligibility Standards:** Creating transparent and nationally applicable eligibility criteria.
 - ♦ **National Disability Registry:** Integrating UDID, Aadhaar and DBT platforms for seamless beneficiary identification.
 - ♦ **Portability:** Ensuring uninterrupted benefits irrespective of migration across States.
 - ♦ **Grievance Redressal:** Providing accessible and time-bound complaint resolution mechanisms.
 - ♦ **Performance Monitoring:** Tracking State-level implementation and outcomes.
- **Linking Pensions with Employment:** International experience shows that disability pensions are most effective when integrated with employment and skill development programmes. These would help shift PwDs from dependence to **productive economic participation**. India can strengthen convergence with:
 - ♦ **PM-DAKSH** skill development initiatives;
 - ♦ National Apprenticeship Promotion Scheme (NAPS);
 - ♦ Employer incentive programmes;
 - ♦ Accessible workplace policies;
 - ♦ Assistive technology support.
- **Relevance to International Commitments:** A universal disability pension framework would strengthen India's commitment to:
 - ♦ **UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (UNCPRD);**
 - ♦ **Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) 1.3** on social protection;
 - ♦ **ILO Recommendation** on Social Protection Floors;
 - ♦ Commitments reflected in the **G20 New Delhi Leaders' Declaration** regarding inclusive growth.

Way Forward

- India has already demonstrated its ability to deliver welfare benefits at scale through **Aadhaar-enabled DBT, UPI, PM-KISAN, food security programmes, and health insurance schemes**.
- The technological infrastructure exists; the challenge is policy prioritisation.
- A **Minimum Universal Disability Pension Floor Rate** would ensure minimum income security; reduce interstate disparities; promote dignity and equality; strengthen inclusive development; and advance constitutional morality.

Daily Mains Practice Question

[Q] Examine the challenges faced by Persons with Disabilities (PwDs) in accessing welfare benefits in India. Discuss the need for a nationally uniform framework to ensure equality of treatment and dignity for persons with disabilities.

Source: TH

