International year of disabled person, in India

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The International Year of Disabled Persons is more than half way through and one's thoughts naturally turn to taking a good and hard look at what has already been achieved and what is planned to fulfill the promise of a better life for the disabled. The objective of all programmes in this field is to bring about social and economic integration of the disabled; to focus attention on the abilities rather than the disabilities, to fully develop their inherent capabilities, to enable them to be self-reliant and play their proper role in society; to induce attitudinal change towards disability amongst parents of the disabled and the community at large; and to achieve equal and full participation by them.

Data on the disabled in India

A big problem for workers in this field has been the virtual absence of dependable data concerning the disabled persons in our country. According to broad estimates of the United Nations roughly 10 per cent of a country’s population is disabled in body or mind. On this basis India may well have 60 million or more persons with some physical or mental disability.

The government has launched this year a sample survey for gathering information in urban and rural areas about the size, needs and characteristics of the disabled population—the blind, deaf, dumb or orthopedically handicapped. Information would be collected about the number and their visual, communication and locomotor disabilities. Information on social adaptation, developmental milestones and behaviour of children in the age group of 5 to 14 will also be gathered. Expert groups have evolved simple and practical definitions of these disabilities to enable workers without any medical background to conduct the survey, which will cover 6,000 villages and 4,000 urban blocks. In all about 1.2 million households will be canvassed. This survey has started from 1st July 1981 and is likely to be completed by 31st December 1981. Simultaneously the state governments will also participate in this survey through the state statistical bureaus and will cover another sample of the same size.
Indian plans for IYDP

Since independence the central government has taken many steps to promote welfare of the disabled persons. These initiatives have been intensified in 1981. The basis for the planned thrust is provided by the National Committee on the International Year of Disabled Persons. The important areas being covered are education, employment, rehabilitation, prevention, early detection and intervention. The question of providing legislative support to the programmes for the disabled is also under consideration.

Prevention of disability

(a) One of the major causes of disability is nutritional deficiency. Deficiency of vitamin A, for example causes blindness. Its incidence is particularly high in pre-school children. It has been estimated that 20 per cent of all cases of blindness in India are due to this. Similarly, lack of vitamin A in the diet of pregnant and lactating mothers also has serious consequences. There is a programme for giving vitamin A to pre-school and school children in primary health centres.

In addition the government has many other nutrition intervention programmes such as the Special Nutrition Programme, Balwadi Nutrition Programme and the Integrated Child Development Scheme (ICDS).

(b) National Programme on Prevention of Blindness aims at providing equipment and man-power to the primary health centres all over the country. In addition, mobile units for camp approach are envisaged; facilities at district level and national level including training facilities are to be upgraded.

(c) Polio accounts for nearly 60 per cent of total orthopedic disability. Immunisation against polio is, therefore, very important. At present the coverage aimed at is about 23 per cent. Ways and means are being sought to increase this coverage. One of the constraints in this programme is that polio vaccine is not manufactured in this country. Preservation of polio vaccine also presents difficulties.

(d) Leprosy affects nearly 3.2 million people in the country of which 1.15 million are children. The Plan objective is to reduce the incidence of active cases by 50 per cent by the Sixth Plan period. Total number of units and centres established under the National Leprosy Control Programme till March 1981 are 382 leprosy control units, 6695 survey education-cum-promotion centre, 442 urban leprosy training centres, 71 reconstruction surgery units, 225 temporary hospitalisation wards and one leprosy rehabilitation promotion unit. In the current plan period 15 more leprosy rehabilitation promotion units, 6 new regional training-cum-referral institutes and 12 sample survey-cum-assessment units and 15 epidemiological surveillance units will be set up.

Education for the disabled

Practically every major physical or mental impairment makes it necessary for the child to be educated in a special way. At present this is often interpreted to mean that disabled children should be