PEOPLE-POWERED PARTNERSHIPS
Intersectionalities in Development Practice: Approaches and Anecdotes
About the American India Foundation
The American India Foundation is committed to improving the lives of India’s underprivileged, with a special focus on women, children, and youth. AIF does this through high impact interventions in education, health, and livelihoods, because poverty is multidimensional. AIF’s unique value proposition is its broad engagement between communities, civil society, and expertise, thereby building a lasting bridge between the United States and India. With offices in New York and California, twelve chapters across the U.S., and India operations headquartered in Delhi NCR, AIF has impacted 6.7 million lives across 26 states of India. Learn more at www.AIF.org

About the AIF Clinton Fellowship Program
The AIF William J. Clinton Fellowship for Service in India builds the next generation of service leadership committed to lasting change for underprivileged communities across India, while strengthening the civil sector landscape to be more efficient and effective. Since inception, AIF has placed close to 500 Fellows in service at 215 host organizations across 25 states of India.

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This year’s Fellowship Dossier, ‘People-Powered Partnerships Vol. 3 - Intersectionalities in Development Practice: Approaches and Anecdotes of Identifying Intersectionalities in Practice in India.” The practical and theoretical approaches to identifying and responding to intersectionalities in social work shared in this volume speak to AIF’s commitment to catalyze social change in India and do it in a way that it builds a lasting bridge between the U.S. and India. Since its inception 20 years ago, the AIF Clinton Fellowship has played a crucial role in furthering this commitment and supporting local efforts by creating people-to-people and civil society-to-civil society partnerships towards sustainable development.

This volume was written by five passionate members of the 2019-20 cohort: Anant Tibrewal, Jane Hammaker, Jessica Standifer, Pallavi Deshpande and Sahana Afreen, and an alumnus from the Class of 2015-16, AIF William J. Clinton Fellowship Program: Benson Neethipudi. All authors of this wonderful piece overcame the challenges imposed upon the world by the devastating COVID-19 pandemic to share with us their impressive and impactful research. As a mix of both current and former AIF Clinton Fellows, they bring a deep understanding of the complexities on the ground, and a true appreciation of the power of service for social impact.

This publication features compelling examples of how the AIF Clinton Fellowship has supported innovative and localized solutions, spanning multiple areas of intersectionalities, primarily in the 2019-20 program year. We are proud to present this at a time when considering intersectionalities in designing solutions to current problems is more crucial and pressing than ever before. AIF's response to the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic is a standing testament to the urgency of the situation and the need it creates for any relief and rehabilitation work to be deeply rooted in a multidimensional approach. The essays depicted in this publication represent inspiring models narrated by U.S. and Indian Fellows who have served across India on projects ranging from leading a girls’ education campaign for rural government primary schools to creating livelihood opportunities through technology for those with disabilities. We hope that this publication inspires you to join us in our journey to "Serve, Learn, Lead".

In Service and Gratitude,

Nishant Pandey
Chief Executive Officer
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Mathew Joseph
Country Director
New Delhi

American India Foundation
August 2020
Over the span of my career in International Community Development, there have been a myriad of projects that propose various “solutions” to a large variety of issues which contribute to world-wide poverty and inequalities. The majority, well intentioned and truly thought to be the most innovative of the time. Just like in any other profession, the international aid sector is constantly absorbing “lessons learned” and changing course to put these learnings into practice. One of the lessons that I am happy to see coming to the forefront of generally accepted fact, is that no one problem or issue is unto itself... there is always a linkage or causation to another societal factor. As a sector looking to improve the quality of life for all, we must delve deeper into this theory and get away from the common understanding of a singular “project” and look at our efforts as larger scale INITIATIVES which take into consideration cause and effect. Poverty and inequality are systemic, and we must approach the solutions as such. I am thrilled that this year’s People-Powered Partnerships volume has decided to focus on this intersectionality. I am proud to be able to introduce this compilation of great stories about the experiences of the Fellows who participated in the AIF Clinton Fellowship program.

It is now over three years that the Rural India Supporting Trust (RIST) has sponsored the AIF Clinton Fellowship program and I was at the forefront of ensuring that we teamed up for this effort. I can say without pause that RIST’s impact is directly related to the partnerships we forge. RIST is a family-founded grant giving organization that focuses on supporting grassroots level community development initiatives in India. Our beacon of light is poverty alleviation and we believe that a lack of access to quality social services is linked to a person or community’s economic standing. It’s a cycle we wish to break.

The AIF Clinton Fellowship program is invaluable in contributing to impact on the ground, but also assists in the evolution of the next generation of development practitioners. We cannot begin to help without trying to view any situation from a number of different perspectives, and this is what the fellowship program offers to its participants. While serving as a Fellow, you get to experience the reality of what it is like to work at a grassroots level organization and begin to understand what the communities that these organizations work in face on a daily basis. The host organization will gain a much needed tangible resource, and the Fellow will be introduced to the critical awareness that their submersion into a community dealing with abject poverty and a lack of social services is a temporary one, where they may go back to a life full of opportunities which others do not have. It’s this perspective that will ignite the spark in a life-long humanitarian. I have no doubt that the stories you are about to read will spark a fire within you and inspire thoughtfulness and action!

In closing, it would be remiss of me not to mention the pandemic more specifically. This is something that took us all by surprise. As an organization, RIST has had to make adjustments in our operations and we quickly realized that our partners would need to as well. AIF quickly changed course and allowed for this year’s group to complete their commitment remotely. Despite all of these new challenges, Fellows took the lead in supporting AIF’s COVID-19 response through a virtual crowdfunding campaign, as well as created this publication to share. Enjoy and pass along!

Thank you,

Paul Glick
Executive Director, RIST
Note from the Contributors

We write to you as the AIF Clinton Fellowship 2019-2020 program comes to close. It has been a tumultuous ten months, to say the least, with many Fellows electing to complete their service remotely in response to the COVID-19 crisis. Despite the challenges wrought on by a global pandemic, we are excited to present our publication, ‘People-Powered Partnerships Vol. 3: Intersectionalities in Development Practice: Approaches and Anecdotes,’ which will provide both theoretical and practical approaches to identifying and responding to intersectionalities in social work.

In this publication, we seek to:

• Define intersectionality as the interconnection or overlap of ‘discrimination’ people face on account of their gender, able-bodiedness, socioeconomic status, and many other factors
• Create awareness around intersectionality challenges among social organizations to recognize importance of intersectionalities in program design and impact
• Identify approaches to recognizing intersectionalities in practice
• Provide relevant examples of intersectionalities in the programs we have worked on
• Advocate for inclusive solutions

Haling from various backgrounds, experiences, and academic disciplines, we hope that our collective diversity will provide a variety of insights on intersectionality challenges while maintaining an objective lens. We use elements of several frameworks, such as literature review, theoretical, comparative case study, policy analysis, and field research in our approaches. Our articles discuss intersectionality in education, economic opportunity, disability, gender, and youth development. While much of the evidence we discuss is based in India, we believe our findings are generalizable to social impact organizations worldwide.

We end on this note: this is far from an exhaustive discussion on the existence of intersectionality in social work. None of us worked explicitly on environment, mental health, religion and other common intersectionalities that are absolutely relevant in this work. Rather, we hope to share lessons on how organizations can identify and adapt to their unique intersectionalities in their own spaces of work.

Thank you for reading. Be safe, and be well.

Sincerely,

Anant Tibrewal
Jane Hammaker
Jessica Standifer
Pallavi Deshpande
Sahana Afreen
What Is an Intersectionality?

All too often we are tempted to box development initiatives as either ‘health interventions’, a ‘livelihood initiative’, or an ‘education program’. While categorization has its own advantages, like ease of monitoring, receiving funding grants, accountability to donors, and tackling bigger development issues in bite-sized projects, it also must be taken with a grain of salt. Understanding the mechanisms through which various social categories, such as gender, caste, language, class, etc., might overlap to create, or exacerbate inequality and discrimination among certain communities is vital to ensuring that policies and initiatives are adequately contextualized and truly inclusive.

Kimberlé Crenshaw, a civil rights activist and legal scholar, introduced the term “intersectionality” to demonstrate how traditional ideas of feminism and anti-racial policy excluded Black women since they face overlapping discrimination, unique to them given their two identities, of being Black and a woman. While this term intersectionality was first specifically developed to talk about issues of race and gender, the term has evolved to be used across disciples and identities.

According to the Merriam-Webster’s dictionary, intersectionality refers to “the complex, cumulative way in which the effects of multiple forms of discrimination... combine, overlap, or intersect especially in the experiences of marginalized individuals or groups.” For example, within the Indian context, discrimination on the basis on gender can be exacerbated when the individual also belongs to a specific caste group.

Within social work and global development, it is important to account for the varied ways in which social categories overlap and intersect. This intersection can create “multiple jeopardy” (or “double jeopardy”), as categories intersect to multiply the discrimination faced by a group, this can create unintended consequences, diminish program impact, or only address a facet of a larger problem.

Therefore, holistic and inclusive programming usually involves identifying and acknowledging intersectionalities and addressing them during implementation. However, doing this extensively requires time, knowledge, resources, and reach, which most ground-level community and donor-based organizations might not have access to. Through this publication, we hope to show readers that even without extensive resources and networks, organizations can take a positive step forward to addressing this issue by recognizing and acknowledging the overlaps that exist within the sectors that they operate in. We have been very deliberate in providing the required sociopolitical context to the various intersectionalities that we identify and explore to ensure that we do not fall into the trap of using it as a buzzword.
“Do not use the word Dalit”, a senior AIF donor once said to me at an AIF-sponsored event. It was right after several members in the audience had congratulated me for my work and my personal journey that led me to the AIF Clinton Fellowship. I was startled. I pulled myself together and continued exchanging pleasantries with AIF Fellows, other donors, friends of the foundation, and the United States’ Ambassador to India. While the remarks of one individual do not reflect the values of the entire AIF community, the interaction reiterated to me the need for intersectionality in development work.

What was it that allowed a person to understand and support poverty alleviation projects in India, but not recognize caste as one of the foundational causes of intergenerational poverty and economic deprivation? What drives us to show appreciation for healthcare workers who are saving lives during the ongoing COVID-19 crisis, but not offer livable wages or dignity of labor to the army of house helps, municipal sanitation workers, and building society staff who are on an overdrive to keep our homes and surroundings extra clean? Why is progress for the LGBTQIA+ community perceived as a war on ‘cultural values’?

As individuals, our perspectives are shaped by the lived experience of our multiple identities. As a collective we make progress when the humanity of our multiple identities is recognized and allowed to thrive.

Intersectionality requires us to recognize the distinct and shared identities of each other. It requires us to value the humanity that emerges at the intersections of these identities.

On social media Indians have widely expressed solidarity with the #BlackLivesMatter movement. Indian diaspora in the United States including Indian students at American Universities, recent immigrants, NRIs, and Indian American citizens participated in BLM protests, in person and on social media. Indians vocally taking a stand against systemic racism in the US and the legacy of inequality that racism perpetuates is truly inspiring. So what makes it hard for the same group to recognize systemic casteism in the Indian Subcontinent? What’s holding us back from taking a stand against state violence on minorities, and Islamophobia, with the same enthusiasm? What’s stopping us from actively introspecting our normalization of Islamophobia, reflecting on our apolitical attitudes towards caste, and questioning the misogyny of friends and family?

As a politically conscious Dalit studying at an Ivy League University, with prior experience in white collar professions, I am deeply aware of the social bubbles I traverse between home and the outside world. Microaggressions from colleagues, indifference of my friends, and silent suffering of my loved ones are weaved into my everyday interactions. Over the course of many years, I have learned how to cope in these social situations, in ways that don’t drain me, leaving me perpetually tired. Today when I examine these coping mechanisms, it is evident that I have at times been blindsided by my own internalized patriarchal and heteronormative view of the world. I have a lot of unlearning to do; we all may have different levels of unlearning to do.

Intersectionality requires us to introspect, learn, unlearn & relearn. It requires us to acknowledge our privilege, put in the honest work to address our internalized biases, and participate in bridging inequalities.

As of 2018, there is a 18% gender wage gap in the US¹. Female full-time workers made only 82 cents for every dollar earned by men.[¹,²] According to the NAACP, African Americans are incarcerated at more than 5 times the rate of whites.³ A UN
pursuit of freedom from injustices should bond us together.

Intersectionality requires us to center justice in our lives. It requires us to prioritize and pursue social, economical, and political justice.

Intersectionality is not an alternative lens. It should be the anchor that grounds progressive ideologies, which are built to uplift historically discriminated communities. ‘Development’ as an academic endeavor or a professional pursuit that is decoupled from intersectional realities of our society will remain hollow. It is our moral responsibility to reassess our actions and refine our plans for the realization of a progressive intersectional future.

A just society is that society in which ascending sense of reverence and descending sense of contempt is dissolved into the creation of a compassionate society.9

— Dr. B.R. Ambedkar, *Annihilation of Caste*

Are our projects and policies incorporating intersectional approaches, to ensure that progress in one dimension does not come at the expense of other dimensions?

Society in general, and our institutions in particular, have often upheld systemic injustices, and are not doing enough to change the status quo. Authoritarian leaders and beneficiaries of oppressive systems across the globe share similar supremacist agendas. It is time for marginalised community movements and their allies, across regions, to talk to each other and learn from our shared experiences.

Women’s report states that the average Dalit woman dies 14.6 years younger than women from higher castes.[4,5] In 2018, the Department of Empowerment of Persons with Disabilities (DEPwD) reported that only 3% of the public buildings across India, identified under Accessible India Campaign, are accessible to disabled individuals.[6,7]

Martin Luther King Jr. writes this in his letter from the Birmingham jail: “Injustice anywhere is a threat to justice everywhere. We are caught in an inescapable network of mutuality, tied in a single garment of destiny. Whatever affects one directly, affects all indirectly.”

Congratulations AIF Clinton Fellowship, class of 2019-20.
Benson Neethipudi
AIF Clinton Fellow, class of 2015-16
ABSTRACT
The COVID-19 pandemic has closed schools around the world, impacting the education of over 1.5 billion students globally. Solving for distance education during the pandemic presents numerous challenges given access and inequality. This paper will address select intersectionalities exposed and created by the COVID-19 pandemic in the education sector, including: infrastructure, gender, and health. Given such barriers, how will global practitioners create equitable and inclusive solutions available for all students?

KEY INTERSECTIONALITIES: COVID-19, GENDER, INFRASTRUCTURE, DIGITAL INFRASTRUCTURE, HEALTH, HUNGER

INTRODUCTION
COVID-19 has exposed a profound number of challenges which vulnerable communities face on a day-to-day basis, especially in the education sector. Even before the COVID-19 pandemic swept across the globe, many students faced severe and innumerable obstacles to education. Gender, geography, ethnicity, and income, all play a distinct role in a child's ability to attend school and learn. Consequently, the COVID-19 pandemic, which has closed schools around the world, adds to an already difficult situation for many. According to UNESCO, up to 90% of enrolled students around the world, or 1.57 billion students, have been affected by this crisis.¹ This paper will address select intersectionalities exposed and created by the COVID-19 pandemic in the education sector, challenging global practitioners to create inclusive and holistic solutions.

Intersectionality is an essential framework to understand the obstacles which overlap and stack, creating unequal and discriminatory barriers to educational access for many students around the world. By naming and addressing barriers that stop students from attending school and succeeding, decision makers can better design equitable solutions in education.

While many barriers to education exist, this paper will highlight the following selected intersectionalities: infrastructure, gender, and hunger in light of the current COVID-19 crisis. This article does not highlight an exhaustive list of intersectionalities that create barriers to education nor a comprehensive deep dive. Examples discussed below are included to showcase a small piece into the varied, complex, and contextual challenges that prevent educational success for many low-resource students.

Importantly, the COVID-19 pandemic has not only created new challenges to overcome, but has also exacerbated existing obstacles in the education space. Over 780 million Indians live
on household incomes of under $3.10/day, many of whom live in rural, disconnected regions.\(^2\) Adding to widespread poverty, chronic teacher absenteeism, poor teacher training, and continual low learning outcomes create uneven and disproportionately foundations to build solutions upon in the current, ongoing crisis.

For my fellowship year, I worked with TYCIA Foundation, a host organization based in New Delhi, which was established in 2010 by an AIF Clinton Fellowship Alumna. Before COVID-19 school closures, working with the Korku Tribe of Madhya Pradesh, I saw firsthand deep and systemic challenges facing the education sector. Government classrooms were often made up of primarily boys and frequently lacked any government teachers. Poverty was prevalent; the average household income of Korku families is approximately $550/annually, which provides barely enough to survive. Many of the girls that TYCIA has worked with in this region, often don’t make it to 8th standard, but some, like Jamuna in Figure 1, do. Jamuna is an 11-year-old girl completing 7th standard in Chabutara, a Korku village in Khandwa District. She feels passionately about her education. She plans to complete 12th standard and learn to use a computer. However, current school closures make accessing education more difficult for girls like Jamuna. In wake of the crisis, TYCIA Foundation was forced to pause all education programming in Madhya Pradesh, instead, opting to assist with emergency ration support, ensuring that families have necessary food and supplies. Unfortunately, without cellular network or digital devices, beginning distance learning initiatives has proved challenging.

KEY INTERSECTIONALITIES: INFRASTRUCTURE, GENDER, AND HUNGER

The COVID-19 pandemic suspended the 2019-2020 school year abruptly, sending students around the world home fearing for their health and education. High-income countries have not been spared; the need for distance learning has exposed challenges for families globally.\(^3\) Notably, students around the world depend on school food programs, have limited access to technologies such as tablets and computers, and have limited teaching support at home.\(^4\,5\,6\) In many parts of India, these distance learning challenges are magnified,
with imminent threats to families’ economic livelihoods and health superseding the long-term, detrimental side effects to education due to the pandemic. Three intersectionalities, particularly facing communities in rural India, that further complicate distance learning, include: access to digital and physical infrastructure support, long held beliefs regarding gender, as well as new arising concerns regarding childrens’ health and hunger.

**Can Edtech Really Work in Rural India?**

Edtech solutions have been praised for their ability to improve access to educational materials despite school closures, however in low-resource communities challenges persist. A question facing many development professionals is how to roll out technology driven solutions in geographies with limited digital infrastructure, and often, with limited financial resources. However, fast thinking in a quickly evolving environment has yielded results. Many organizations have leaned into existing wide-spread platforms as a solution for distance learning, holding classes on popular communication platforms like Whatsapp, Facebook, and Zoom. Yet, limitations for digital solutions persist.

Basic foundational infrastructure needed to support reliable distance learning is unavailable for millions of rural Indians. Many villages which are claimed to be electrified, only are required to have 10% of households in the region connected to the power grid. Power supply in many rural regions is unreliable, limited, and not equally available to all residents. For edtech solutions, reliable, available, and equitable power solutions are required. Success stories of organizations connecting their students over platforms like WhatsApp or Zoom, require students’ ability to regularly charge their devices. For over 30 million Indians, likely far more, power supply is not guaranteed.

Intricately connected to issues of uneven infrastructure access are questions over the quality of various distance learning initiatives. Inevitably, edtech solutions built into complete curricula available over tablet or computer will bear better results than temporary solutions over WhatsApp or Zoom.

Although distance learning challenges all families, families with proper digital and physical infrastructure are better equipped to ride the storm brought by COVID-19. Given this, how can organizations and governments act swiftly to provide solutions available to millions of low-income students?

*Despite the central government’s push for edtech solutions and increased app-based support, the Punjab state government has taken a different approach to shrink the access gap. A household survey conducted in 2019, showed that only 17% of Indian households had access to a smartphone device, while over 60% owned a television. The Punjab Education Department has made lessons for primary and secondary classes available on free-to-air TV channels, as well as, a separate second channel sharing teaching materials. In combination with TV programming, the state government has made mobile application, Youtube, and radio lessons available for Punjab students.*

**Girls Face Additional Obstacles to Success**

It has been well documented that uneven and unequal educational opportunities exist based on gender. In India, nearly 40% of girls between 15 and 18 years of age are out of school, according to a 2018 report by the National Commission for Protection of Child Rights. While this is an ongoing obstacle to equitable education, COVID-19 presents new challenges. According to a report released by Malala Fund, “drawing on data from the Ebola epidemic in Sierra Leone, [Malala Fund] estimates that approximately 10 million more secondary school-aged girls could be out of school [globally] after the crisis has passed.” Solving for ongoing gender obstacles given the new barriers to education in light of COVID-19 is essential.
Women and girls face additional obstacles to access and utilize mobile phones and other digital devices. In 2016, several districts in Gujarat banned women under 18 years of age, or unmarried, from owning mobile phones; in some regions, cell phone usage by women is entirely banned.\textsuperscript{15} Similar bans have been made elsewhere which create fundamental obstacles for girls and women to access digital learning materials. While such bans are not prevalent throughout India, fear that girls are misusing phones, eloping, and avoiding their studies are much broader, especially in rural regions. Nearly 90\% of families have access to a mobile phone, significantly fewer have access to a smartphone, but ensuring that children, especially girls, have adequate and sufficient access to devices is not guaranteed.\textsuperscript{16}

Distance has shaped girls' access to education for many years. While current school closures and health risks reshape the education landscape, for secondary age school girls, distance is a familiar challenge. The dropout rate significantly increases after grade 8, especially for girls. According to an article from Livemint, “in 2015-16, for every 100 elementary schools (classes I to VIII) in rural India, there were 14 offering secondary (classes IX-X) and only six offering higher secondary grades (classes XI-XII).”\textsuperscript{17} Although primary schools are commonly found in each village, secondary schools are much less common. Lack of transportation and fear for girls' safety are often cited as reasons for dropping out after 8th standard. In this case, school closures due to COVID-19 may present new opportunities for secondary aged girls. By solving for distance education and digital access challenges, ongoing systemic barriers to access may also be addressed.

**Food Insecurity Directly Inhibits Learning**

Nearly 90\% of India's labour force works in the informal economy, with little financial safety net. Under India's multiple rounds of lockdown, many have entirely lost their livelihoods, some spending their life savings to survive.\textsuperscript{18} Given the insurmountable challenges driving many deep into poverty, education, more than ever, is a luxury. According to the Food Research & Action Center, “school lunch is critical to student health and well-being, especially for low-income students—and ensures that students have nutrition they need throughout the day to learn.”\textsuperscript{19} India's midday meal scheme provides meals for 11 crore students (111 million) around the country regularly. Despite the Ministry of Human Resource Development's request for all students to be provided their midday meal or food allowance, reports reveal that not all students received midday meal rations since lockdown began. In Uttarakhand, 1 in 5 students did not receive their guaranteed ration during the first two months of India's lockdown.\textsuperscript{20} Hunger and food insecurity add to an already challenging situation for many students. This crisis has pushed millions of families near starvation, where students do not have the luxury to do more than survive.

**WHAT SHOULD YOU TAKE AWAY FROM THIS?**

Many students in low-resource communities face numerous challenges to succeed in the new education environment brought by the COVID-19 pandemic. Importantly, many students struggled immensely before this crisis closed schools and ended their families' livelihoods. Unsurprisingly, this crisis has exacerbated previous obstacles. Given the intersectionalities raised above, how should decision makers act to make education during this crisis accessible and equitable? Solutions that only work in well resourced, highly connected, urban spaces by definition will discount a majority of India's students. However, by solving challenges faced by the most disadvantaged, solutions will be widely accessible. Solving for contextual challenges in policy design and program development will continue to play an important role in the education space post-COVID-19. Challenges related to gender, infrastructure, and health only showcase select barriers for underprivileged communities. Inclusive solutions are those which cast a wide net. The lessons learned during this crisis will remain relevant, useful, and will likely shape the future of education for years to come.
ABSTRACT

This article explores a new approach to conceptualize disability. By exploring disability through the lens of space, this article argues that disability is a product of the spaces that people with disabilities occupy and therefore, constructing inclusive and accessible spaces is crucial for sustainable development. This article provides an example of how to apply this theory to a micro-level; in this case, to the visually impaired community in the Visakhapatnam district.

KEY INTERSECTIONALITIES: DISABILITY, SPACE, PERSONHOOD

INTRODUCTION

Disability and disability studies as a discipline has been gaining increasing popularity and notice, both in academia and development discourse, shining a welcome light on crucial and long-marginalized issues. The United Nations Sustainable Development Goals explicitly include disability and persons with disabilities eleven times in the context of “education, growth and employment, inequality, accessibility of human settlements”. Given this, it is important to stop and consider what we mean when we use the word ‘disability’. Over the years, scholars have designed multiple models that have attempted to define disability in a way that encompasses its diverse and complex nature. The models have ranged from defining disability as a health condition, the inability to do a specific, or set of, tasks, and a social creation that is a product of the social environment instead of individual attributes. However, to truly encompass the complex, varied, and dynamic nature of disability, a model will have to reach beyond traditional boundaries of disciplines to encourage productive cross-discipline engagement. In this article, the author uses a case-study approach to present a new way of conceptualizing disability through the lens of spaces and how access to these spaces is fundamental to improving the freedoms of those who are disabled.

Most of the exciting and radical scholarship on space and policy has traditionally been inaccessible to those who work in development or the disability sector largely due to the scholarship’s heavy theoretical focus, use of jargon, and almost entirely being Western-centric. An important objective of this article, therefore, is to adapt theories on space, disability, and policy into an easy-to-understand, dynamic, and flexible model through which anyone, not just academics, can critically engage with the concept of ‘disability’. Additionally, this article provides a concrete example of how this model can be applied to specific situations, geographies, and communities to then
meaningfully inform reform and interventions related to empowering those communities.

The disability type explored in this article is visual impairment and the community in question refers to visually impaired from rural, semi-urban, and marginalized backgrounds in Andhra Pradesh. The theoretical framework that underpins our discussions about empowerment is Amartya Sen's Capability Approach; therefore, empowerment (or freedoms) refers to how capabilities, or opportunities, are translated into achievements by communities with the help of resources. More specifically, the article analyzes space as a critical resource, the access to which can empower the visually impaired to increase their freedoms to make choices that eventually lead to fulfilling lives as imagined and constructed by them.

The author served as an AIF Clinton Fellow at Vision Aid, Visakhapatnam, Andhra Pradesh, where she engaged with several members from the visually impaired community and spent time understanding how space can disable rather than enable people with visual impairments. Based on her field experience, the author notes that in the case of visual impairment specifically, the relationship between space, mobility, and accessibility is fundamental to shaping the lived experiences for those with disability.7

To summarize, these are following objectives of this article:

1. To overlay theories of space, disability, and development and present a new way of critically engaging with disability

2. To present a model that is dynamic, flexible, and based on cross-discipline dialogue that explores disability and lived experiences as a part and product of a complex, dynamic, and interconnected system of ideas and actions that is context-specific

3. To apply this model when understanding how spaces, material and non-material, are key to meaningfully and sustainably empowering the visually impaired

4. To add to the scant literature dealing with visual impairment and lived experiences of the visually impaired community within the South Indian context

**DISABILITY AS A SPATIAL PHENOMENON**

Space matters because it informs how we engage, understand, and approach the world. It is important to explore how space informs and exacerbates disability and how constructing inclusive spaces while actively disabling oppressive spaces is vital to development policy in the disability sector. However, to understand and engage more critically with the idea of space, we have to first define what we mean by it. This article borrows from geographers like Massey, De Certeau, and Mudimbe, when it engages with space. Space has multiple dimensions, but this article engages with two important dimensions -- the material and abstract dimension. The material or physical dimension is typically what we associate with geography space. Some examples include public infrastructure, shared public spaces, private spaces, professional spaces, and geographic spaces. On the other hand, the abstract dimension of space views space as a lived phenomenon. Simply put, this dimension of space includes your perceptions, beliefs, identity, and narratives. For example, your local and cultural context, identity, and beliefs intersect to create the space you inhabit in Visakhapatnam, which in turn is ever-changing based on context and circumstance. Abstract spaces are products of your relationships with various entities within the city and similar to you, other entities have their own abstract spaces thereby creating a multiplicity of interconnected spaces which are dynamic.

Instead of trying to single out disability based on condition or type of impairment, it would help to think critically about the spaces that disabled people inhabit, how identity and disability are constructed within space, and how spaces can instruct specific understanding of what it means to be disabled and not disabled. In rural villages in east Andhra Pradesh, full personhood is constructed on the idea of being able to be a part of a family and earn a living, most typically by working in agriculture. In such spaces, persons with a hearing impairment will be considered ‘less’ disabled than persons with visual impairment since the former is able to satisfy the constructed ideas of personhood in that specific space.
SPACE AND DEVELOPMENT

Amartya Sen defines development through the capability approach as a process that expands the capabilities of citizens i.e., their access to opportunities and things that they value. In this article, development specifically refers to the expansion of opportunities in the form of increased freedoms to choose and avail opportunities that are important to the entity in question. As development is described as increasing freedoms, poverty is described as lack of freedoms and agency to convert opportunities into achievements. This article overlays the spatial understanding of disability on Sophie Mitra’s Human Development Model (HDM). By doing this, disability can more appropriately be viewed as a deprivation of capabilities because of the material and abstract spaces that a person with disability inhabits.

Given that this article situates disability in space, development within the disability sector involves critically thinking about constructing inclusive spaces that do not marginalize persons with disabilities and actively deconstruct pejorative depictions of bodies of persons with disabilities and by extension, the people themselves, as inefficient and unproductive.

Using the specific case of vision impaired groups, disability can be described as the lived experience as a product of inhabiting specific places that value sight as a part of full personhood and where shared spaces are dominated by visuality. In Visakhapatnam, most shared spaces such as sidewalks, buildings, transport, etc. that are related to concepts like movement are usually designed under the assumption that the person can see or visualize these shared spaces. Within the context of our definition of disability, groups of people with a visual impairment living in Visakhapatnam are deprived from accessing various opportunities for living a fulfilling life. Exploring disability and deprivation through the lens of space also informs us of a power dynamic between the non-disabled and disabled with respect to how public space is constructed and enjoyed. The mere construction of these spaces initiates a cycle in which the non-disabled hold the power to alter space in ways that exacerbate the existing conception and experience of disability.

Therefore, empowering the disabled includes recognizing the power dynamics that hamper inclusivity, and emphasizing policy and interventions that reconceptualize spaces as truly inclusive. This reconceptualization can be empirically applied to a place as small as a neighborhood or as large as a state. Designing specific space is essential to increasing real opportunities for persons with disabilities.

OVERVIEW OF THE INTERSECTION OF VISUAL IMPAIRMENT, SPACE, AND DEVELOPMENT

The intertwining of these two ideas -- space and capabilities -- is a first step in thinking about a general model which embodies the lived experiences of the visually impaired. However, even the conception of a general model requires policymakers to consider two important challenges: notions of individuality and flexibility.

It is widely known and documented that in India, identity, meaning, and representation are constructed and lived through community. India’s community-based value system may clash with the Western-centric disability rights discourse, which focuses on individual interventions based on Western ideals of independence and autonomy. It’s important to ensure each community has a say in how inclusivity spaces are created to allow for non-homogenous understandings of personhood, well-being, good life, values, etc.

Another consideration to note is that open-ended, dynamic models are required because capturing the disability experience and defining it is almost impossible. Context and circumstances are constantly impacted by factors such as changing physical and political geographies, access to infrastructure, conflict, and migration among others. Therefore, it becomes imperative to view development and space as dynamic concepts, requiring analysis of it to be flexible to change across time and communities.

Given that this article looks at vision impairment specifically, it is important to understand what vision impairment means and diversity within the spectrum of visual impairment. According to the National Health Portal
For example, someone with low vision might be eligible to work as a store coordinator; however, the same job role might not be a good fit for someone who is blind. A benefit of applying this model to our case study is that the model defines disability as deprivation of opportunities because of the spaces that a vision impaired person inhabits. That a low vision person might have access to more spaces and hence, more opportunities, is accounted for in this model.

of India, visual impairment is “when a person has sight loss that cannot be fully corrected using contact lenses or glasses.” It is important to note that vision impairment is a spectrum ranging from low vision to complete blindness. Therefore, understanding vision impairment and the lived experiences of the visually impaired involves factoring in where they fall on the spectrum of vision impairment. People with low vision are those who are partially blind or have partial sight. Depending on where they fall on the spectrum between total blindness and low vision, they might be able to perceive light, shapes, or letters with the help of assistive devices. Whereas, people who lean heavily towards total blindness end of the spectrum will be unable to improve ability to sense light, shapes, or text even with use of assistive devices.

Even within the state of Andhra Pradesh, the visually impaired are not a homogenous group; these communities have different experiences of disability based on their own ideas of what personhood signifies which vary across physical geographical territories like villages, towns, mandals, etc. This article specifically refers to visually impaired persons who have temporarily migrated from rural and semi-urban areas within the state to Visakhapatnam in the pursuit of skill-development and access to a wider job market.

METHODOLOGY

The author breaks down space into specific design elements which can convert corresponding opportunities into achievements.

One of the major points of debate regarding the application of the capability approach is the choosing of appropriate opportunities for analysis. How do you decide what opportunities are more valuable than others for development? The author bases her choice of capability on the various conversations and observations she made during the course of her field experience engaging with the visually impaired community in Visakhapatnam. The opportunity analyzed below, public transport, reflects the choice of the visually impaired community themselves.

Figure 1: A basic overview of the approach presented in this article
ACCESS TO PUBLIC TRANSPORT

It would not be wrong to say that a hallmark of most Indian cities is blaring traffic, chaotic roads, streets, and intersections, and oftentimes, a lack of accessible tools to navigate them. To better understand how constructed public spaces i.e., roads, pavements, and public transport can disable visually impaired, it is important to understand how the visually impaired themselves perceive spaces and orient themselves in it. Only upon understanding these spaces as seen by the visually impaired can we transform and/or construct spaces that are designed for all senses.

Devanna, a 54-year old migrant from Sabbavaram, moved to Visakhapatnam to attend a scholarship program at Vision Aid, a non-profit that works towards empowering the visually impaired through skill development and mentorship. Devanna was born sighted, but lost sight after an accident less than a decade ago. When asked about what the hardest adjustment he has had to make, Devanna points to the severe restriction in his movement. According to him, when he was able to see, he had the freedom to travel wherever he wanted and access any place within or outside his village without any supervision. However, post-his vision loss, he was only able to confidently and comfortably leave his house less than 5 times over 3-4 years. His outings were limited to those that were either extremely necessary or when his wife or a friend were available to accompany him outside. “The world is not for us” was his conception of his own position in the spaces shared by society. For him, the spaces he was now able to access shrank exponentially and with it, his conception of self, identity, and his position within his village.

In Sabbavaram, the main modes of transportation are private vehicles, public buses, and auto rickshaws. Given the arbitrary parking locations of auto rickshaws and high cost of riding, almost all the visually impaired exclusively rely on buses for travelling short-distances or within Andhra Pradesh. In Sabbavaram specifically, none of the buses are inclusive, either in design or experience. The following issues were brought to light when exploring the physical spaces of public transport across specific villages in Andhra Pradesh:

1. The bus stations were not always at the precise location where the buses stopped. Buses usually arbitrarily lined up around the general 200 meter radius of the bus station.
2. Some stations did not have the infrastructure, electricity or structural support, that could serve as markings indicating the space as a bus stop and specifying bus routes.
3. The buses themselves were inaccessible for the visually impaired and caused safety hazards.
4. The buses are usually numbered to the top, at the front and back, of the bus. However, a lack of audio cues, coupled with a lack of GPS connectivity for bus routes in villages, semi-urban towns, and a lot of cities forces the visually impaired to rely on sighted people to access this shared space.

The following issues demonstrate how physically restrictive public spaces, namely the transit system, translate into restrictive abstract spaces:

1. Having to rely on sighted people for route information and bus schedules forced the visually impaired to position themselves as outsiders in society, not belonging to a system that was constructed as the domain of the sighted. Therefore, an oppressive physical space impacted the construction of their own identity and perspectives about their place in the society they inhabit.
2. Lack of audio or physical signs indicating bus stops and related logistical information forced the visually impaired to double and triple check whether or not they’d boarded the right bus, thereby influencing negatively how the visually impaired person constructed their identity, as not belonging to, in relation to themselves and society at large. Therefore, an oppressive physical space can materially alter how people view the visually impaired and position them in relation to the social space they occupied. Spaces that were built by the sighted for the sighted actively disabled people and rendered them unproductive, reinforcing discriminatory and dangerous stereotypes about visually impaired people.
3. Lastly, inability to navigate shared spaces negatively impacts the visually impaired’s confidence and intent to access spaces outside their homes. Narratives from disabling spaces serve as justifications of why limited spaces and spatial interactions were the norm among visually impaired.

The points discussed above are a few design specifications that render public transport into a hegemonic domain of the sighted, for the sighted. Space is a lived phenomenon and when the visually impaired live in actively oppressive spaces, by extension, they also inhabit oppressive lived experiences. In Devanna’s case, inaccessible roads and transport systems also rendered social networks and recreational spaces inaccessible, restricting his ability to occupy both physical and abstract spaces. Therefore, taking a critical look at designing inclusive spaces is key to moving towards empowering the visually impaired in ways that they themselves define as valuable. The design specifications mentioned above can be extrapolated to nearby villages within Andhra Pradesh as well, showing the state-wide prevalence of restrictive shared spaces.

Furthermore, Devanna said during his time in Sabbavaram, he was the only blind person under the age of 60 in his village, and that his inability to travel was a cause for the lack of social, personal, and professional networks in his life. Given the visually impaired almost exclusively dependent on public transport or a fellow person to travel, most of them rarely venture out into public spaces and hence, are rarely seen outside the domains of the home, reinforcing notions of belonging and personhood for both, the visually impaired person and society. Isolation and lack of social skills have ripple effects, affecting several factors, from mental health, ability to interact with people meaningfully, lack of personality development to the learning of social skills required to be employed. Therefore, design adjustments to make public transport systems inclusive can have a multifold positive and sustainable impact on a visually impaired person’s access to spaces, which in turn opens up a diverse range of opportunities for them.

The case of Devanna demonstrates that inclusive public transportation can be an enabling space, one that enables persons with vision impairment to lead independent lives, as envisioned by them. Access is crucial to independence and therefore creating and enabling spaces can help the visually impaired lead autonomous and fulfilling life. However, embedded within the idea of access is mobility and movement, both of which point to transportation as a crucial resource. Given their disability type, most visually impaired persons are almost exclusively dependent on public transport for movement and access to spaces beyond home such as social spaces, professional spaces, and recreational spaces. Therefore, inclusive public transportation becomes a crucial space that connects the visually impaired with various empowering opportunities.

MIGRATION AS A WAY TO ACCESS OPPORTUNITIES AND RESOURCES

Urbanization patterns in India, specifically the uncontrolled expansion of cities, has required an influx of investment and resources to be set aside specifically for these cities, thereby creating larger and relatively more developed labor markets and socio-spatial formations. Even though 3 out of 4 visually impaired persons reside in rural Andhra Pradesh, most resources, whether it be medical or educational, are concentrated in urban cities. For example, access to ophthalmologists in urban India is four times greater than that in rural India. According to estimates, roughly 75% of vision impairment in India is preventable; however, lack of infrastructure and resources in rural areas exacerbate preventable conditions, thereby worsening the outcomes of the visually impaired in rural areas.

Lack of recognition and conception of full personhood might also contribute to the disparity in resources. Migration patterns in cities force people from all walks of life to move into cities, thereby creating a demand to build resources and infrastructure that address their diverse needs. However, in rural settings, conceptions of full personhood and recognition are built on assumptions of sight, which invariably cause those who do not adhere to this idea to be marginalized. In
such cases, neoliberal interventions only serve to reinforce this power dynamic.

Given the lack of inclusive medical, educational, and professional resources in villages, most visually impaired seek out opportunities in urban spaces. “Programs are there... but how do I get to these programs?” were his exact words when describing various development initiatives in Visakhapatnam. In essence, migration to Visakhapatnam was an opportunity for Devanna and other such students from rural settings to access educational programs that would in turn help economically empower them.

Given the difficulties and complications surrounding migration, it is unsurprising that over 90% of blind people and 80% of persons with low vision are out of the labor force in India. Strong positive links between job markets, job security, and public transport have been well-documented by various researchers. To address the challenges of access, public transport and education cannot be assessed in isolation within the disability sector -- perceiving visual impairment as a deprivation of opportunities due to restrictive spaces can help flesh out the complex, dynamic and interconnected nature of the lived experiences and consequences of visual impairment.

CONSTRUCTION OF PERSONHOOD

As mentioned earlier, collapsing disability, even within visual impairment, into a single concept overlooks the unique social consequences of disability that are a product of a given society's definition of personhood. Attempting to understand the status of all persons with ‘disabilities’ overlooks how blindness has very unique social consequences as compared to say deafness, based on social expectations of the specific community.

Understanding how the visually impaired are positioned within the socio-cultural spatial framework of Andhra Pradesh is vital to establishing programs and initiatives that truly empower the said community. To help her readers understand this concept in practice, the author has broken down important elements of personhood as defined by interviewees from Vision Aid, and noted how specific social expectations informed ideas of full personhood and consequently ideas relating to visual impairment as a disability.

1. **Engaging in Economic Activity.** Securing a job means economic independence, ability to start and nourish a family, and in Sabbavaram, truly become an adult. Most of the people in villages within the Visakhapatnam district were engaged in agriculture. As a result, conceptions of personhood revolve around the being able to similarly participate in similar kinds of economic activity. Therefore, disabilities such as visual impairment were more negatively perceived than other disabilities that still allow workers to participate in agricultural and related economic activities in the village.

2. **Providing for and Protecting the Family.** This factor is inextricably linked to engaging in economic activity and is a gendered factor that relates to the construction of male and female personhood differently. Social expectations for males in these villages suggest that being able to have a stable steam of income and provide economic and physical safety for their families is a crucial factor for full personhood. Therefore, disabilities like visual impairment are more negatively perceived in these villages.

3. **Participating in Community-Oriented and Recreational Activities.** One of the community-oriented activities includes being able to participate in local festivals. However, in the case of inaccessible support structures and infrastructure, visually impaired persons usually have to rely on sighted individuals to guide them during the event. Therefore, visual impairment in such districts is looked at more negatively than disabilities that might still allow persons to participate and build community networks and bonds.

These points represent factors that inform the construction of full personhood and consequently, social expectations from the men in the village, positioning of visually impaired based on conceptions of personhood, and how conceptions of personhood can create restrictive spaces that actively
exclude those disabilities that do not meet it. Why these specific factors are considered important for full personhood can in turn be understood by further exploring the how gender, class, caste, religious beliefs, popular culture intersect in the Visakhapatnam district.

INCLUSIVE PUBLIC TRANSPORT: ENABLING SPACES IN VISAKHAPATNAM DISTRICT

Based on the case study presented above, the following suggestions might offer promising policy and program interventions for the visually impaired living in villages and cities in the Visakhapatnam district:

1. **Technology-based developments.** Focusing on affordable accessibility based technological design that helps create virtual spaces that are not only inclusive and accessible, but also might potentially serve as tools to increase access to physical infrastructure that is currently inaccessible to the visually impaired. For example, smartphones with talkback features and a Rapido App can help the visually impaired access modes of transportation that were otherwise inaccessible to them.

2. **Safe and Accessible Housing.** Programs, initiatives, and policies that fast-track and emphasize the mandate set forward by Rights of Persons with Disability Act, 2014, that all buildings be made accessible for persons with disabilities can help build accessible and safe housing for the visually impaired. Focusing on building affordable, safe, and accessible hostels, dormitories, and shared housing can provide housing opportunities for visually impaired migrants seeking opportunities and can even help build community spaces for networking.

3. **Inclusive Socio-Spatial Formations.** Initiatives that only build accessible public infrastructure fall woefully short in engendering sustainable change. Focusing on building community spaces, such as parks, community centers, theatres, etc. are crucial for increasing the visibility of and discourse around visually impaired persons as equal and full members of society.

Although the above are only a few suggestions based on the case study presented in this article, with limitations of their own, they serve as a starting point to reconceptualize spaces as accessible, which in turn empowers the visually impaired to live their lives on their own terms and feel empowered.

CONCLUSION

No person lives as an island. All individuals are a part of a network of family, friends, and society that form interconnected and dynamic systems and spaces which are governed by variables such as gender, caste, class, and so forth. Therefore, when trying to conceptualize a way of understanding disability, it is important to contextualize it within the spaces constructed by both, the specific society and the visually impaired themselves. This helps practitioners, policy makers, and those involved in the disability sector policies, infrastructure, and technologies that truly and sustainably empower and enable the visually impaired. Further, this model, with its focus on narratives of the community in question, allows us to move away from hegemonic Western-centric notions of what it means to live a 'fulfilled' life and move towards allowing the communities themselves to define what fulfillment looks like to them.

Analyzing spaces, in this case public transport, can help us frame a concrete set of development goals that will tangibly improve the achievements among the visually impaired community in Andhra Pradesh. Namely, focusing on developing technologies that create inclusive spaces and resources and designing physical transport systems that are accessible are two examples of development goals that increase opportunities and achievements of the visually impaired.

As our model suggests, development policy and programs should be informed by our understanding how full personhood is conceptualized within the visual impaired community in Sabbavaram and ways in which space can disable these communities from achieving this conception. In this case, development policy would address building inclusive public transport systems that increase access to the job market and
opportunities for participation in communal and recreational activities. For example, a government mandate to incorporate timely, loud, and clear audio announcements of bus arrivals, stops, and routes at major bus stops in Visakhapatnam by 2021 is one such actionable goal. Chennai is another city that has set similar goals to redesign public transit and the experience of using this shared space as accessible for all.30

Although Visakhapatnam has made attempts to “modernize” its public transport system, these attempts have taken the form of replacing existing old busses with newer models that are bigger, equipped with A/C, and painted with scenes from tourist destinations in the state.31 This is an example of how subconsciously or consciously, policies that view disability and other development issues as separate topics can reinforce oppressive assumptions about belonging and shared spaces. In this case, focusing on painting buses with scenes again is unpinned by the assumption of sight and access. Redesigning public infrastructure as inclusive spaces will involve forcing those in power, typically the non-disabled, to question implicit assumptions about personhood that marginalize entire visually impaired communities and actively work towards deconstructing existing oppressive spaces. Therefore, this article presents a new approach to engaging with the development and disability discourse through the lens space, which by design forces people to rethink implicit and explicit assumptions and spatial claims and confront deeper systemic and narrative issues rather than simply provide short-term band-aid solutions.

The opportunity, access to public transportation, as a way to achieve economic and personal fulfillment is only one example of the ways in which spaces marginalize the visually impaired in Andhra Pradesh. Further research into this could involve looking at how access to affordable and accessible housing, social networks, and recreational spaces can empower the visually impaired to translate opportunities into achievements that they value. As mentioned earlier, the case study is one example of how the macro approach presented in this article can be applied to a micro setting.

The author would like to address and acknowledge her positionality when writing this article and presenting the narratives of the visually impaired community in Vizag. The article has maintained the narratives shared by the visually impaired community as are when weaving them into the larger model. This is to ensure that any analysis, suggestion, and conclusion is a direct result of exploring their narratives through the lens of this model.

Lastly, given length and scope constraints, this is a condensed case-study, focusing only on one spatial element, public transport. To access the full case-study, please reach out to the author.

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GLOSSARY

Space:
- Disability
- Development
- Capabilities
- Functioning
- Capability Approach
- Human Development Model
- Visual Impairment
- Socio-spatial formations
- Full Personhood
Intersectionality Within Gender

SAHANA AFREEN

ABSTRACT

Intersectionality within gender explains the multiple identities and oppression within gender as it is not a homogenous group. Based on my Ethnographic study during my fellowship time in Odisha, this article explores how women, as a result of their gender, are oppressed and how this oppression is compounded for women with layered identities such as women who are Dalit, Adivasi, or Muslim.

KEY INTERSECTIONALITIES: GENDER, DALIT, ADIVASI, HEALTH, EDUCATION, AND ECONOMY

INTRODUCTION

When we talk about women, we tend to assume that every woman fits in one category, or that they are part of a homogenous group, who are all suffering from the same level of oppression and patriarchy. However, even though we all belong to the same gender, we forget that our lives are very different from each other and also our oppressions, which is why Kimberlé Crenshaw came up with the term “Intersectionality” in 1989. She defines intersectionality as “a lens, a prism, for seeing the way in which various forms of inequality often operate together and exacerbate each other... What's often missing is how some people are subject to all of these, and the experience is not just the sum of its parts.”

After her discovery of this concept, there have been many feminist theorists who have explained intersectionality in reference to women from different classes, castes, races, and sexualities. After reading relevant documents, I came to understand that intersectionality refers to multiple discrimination on the basis of different identities we all have. For example, as a Muslim woman, I have a double identity, a woman, and a Muslim, that’s how my experience also comes in a pack of two which is very different from my other Hindu women friends. Like this, there are a number of identities like socioeconomic status, caste, disability, age, marital status, body size, education level, political and religious beliefs, racial and ethical. They all differentiate our level of discrimination and oppression we experience.

To give an example within the Indian context, think back to the famous case of poet and Dalit activist Mruduladevi Sasidharan in her #MeToo post. In reference to her being verbally and sexually harassed, she says “Being a Dalit and woman, I face double jeopardy. All my life, I have fought against the Hindutva forces. I am taking all criticism in the spirit of democracy.”

In this paper, I will talk about the intersectionalities within gender, specifically in these three subjects - Education, Economics, and Health - on the basis of my field experiences from working in Ganjam, Odisha. Further, this article explores how women, based on their other identities, such as that of caste or tribe, can face further discrimination and lack of access to basic needs.
A BACKGROUND OF MY FELLOWSHIP FIELD

Ganjam district is one of the oldest administrative units of Odisha. The district is divided into two belts in the district, the coastal belt and plain areas. Major populations who stay around coastal areas are engaged in fishing while those living in the plain areas are engaged in farming. The district is also known for having the maximum number of out migrants (both overall and to Gujarat) triggered by both pull and push factors. The single-cropping pattern in most rural economies in Orissa, small land-holdings, poor irrigation facilities, restricted industrial infrastructure and a history of migration outside the state for generations.

The major religions in the district are Hindu (98.78 %), Muslim (0.38 %) and Christian (0.68 %), Sikh (0.02 %) and the other 0.13% is not identified in records indicating Hindu predominance. My major engagement was with the Kondh tribe which consists of 2.88% of the population. Numerically, the Kondhs form the largest tribal group amongst 62 other tribes in Odisha. There are various sections among the Kondhs or Kandhas. Each section is endogamous though originally they hail from the same Kandha community. In this article, we will look at how disadvantage accrues with each of a person's subordinate-group identities and leads to a situation of double jeopardy.

1. Education

Education is the most potent mechanism for the advancement of human beings. Education emancipates human beings and leads to liberation from ignorance. Education is now being visioned as a human right and an instrument of social change. The Universal Declaration of Human Rights 1948 by way of Article 26(1), which lays down that everyone has the right to education. Education shall be free, at least in the elementary and fundamental stages. Thus, UN recommendation has been re-enforced in the provisions of the Right of Children to Free and Compulsory Education (RTE) Act 2009, which came into effect on 1st April 2010. But there is a huge gap in regards with gender. Girls always get a push back with lack of basic facilities like toilets, travel, as well as eve teasing, household chores, responsibility of other young siblings etc. While an additional barrier comes in the life of the Kondh tribe is language.

THE STORY OF KAJLA FROM MY FIELD

Kajla (name changed) belongs to the Kondh tribe and speaks the Kui and Odia language. Kui is her mother tongue and Adivasi language while Odia is the local language of Odisha. She dropped out when she was in middle school because she was not able to understand the classes. The major reason for her understanding difficulty is Hindi language as the medium of instruction. Now she helps in work with her single mother in the agriculture field and does maintenance for all households because she doesn't have enough options nearby, as all other schools are 15 to 20 km away from her village. The other reasons for girls not having the opportunity or access to move beyond primary classes include bullying, as well as discrimination in public places and while using public transport.

My own research in a Muslim migrant community in Delhi directly indicates that male children get first priority in almost every aspect. I found that 40% of young girls dropped out from schools because their families had migrated from one
place to another and their parents did not work on their readmission. While 20% percent said that they belong to lower income families and the preference to get admitted in school with limited income is given to the male child of the family as they will help the family after getting a job. Based on this evidence, we can easily identify how gender affects education outcomes among these groups of people and can cause them to be left out.

2. Economics

Economic empowerment is one of the essentials of women's empowerment. We all know how unequal the labor market looks like even today with all the reservations and schemes. Employers take advantage of menstruation, pregnancy, marriage with added government initiatives like maternity benefits and leaves to get away from hiring a potential female candidate. If any chance she gets employment with her exceptional talent and degree, her work will not be valued as equal as it deserves. This is commonly observed in the nuances we all have experienced in our lives while talking to our friends, family members, and relatives who work.

The majority of the women's labour force in India participate in low-paying menial work and earn low income. Among urban women who do work, domestic cleaning work is the second most common profession after textile-related jobs, according to the periodic labour force survey (PLFS) data published by the NSSO show. As a country we have taken initiative to improve women's employability by enactment of Maternity Benefit (Amendment) Act, 2017, which provides for enhanced paid maternity leave from 12 weeks to 26 weeks, making crèches mandatory in establishments with more than 50 employees and issuing an advisory to states under the Factories Act, 1948, to ensure there are adequate safety measures for women workers in night shifts. Many training and skilling programmes have also been launched to enhance women workers' employability. But none of them caters to the unorganised sectors work in which the women's work in majority numbers.
Despite these government programs, LiveMint reports that “According to latest survey India’s female Labour Force Participation Rate (LFPR)—the share of working-age women who report either being employed, or being available for work—has fallen to a historic low of 23.3% in 2017-18, meaning that over three out of four women over the age of 15 in India are neither working nor seeking work”.13 Simply put, in India, 1 in 2 men are likely to be employed whereas that statistic is less than 1 in 4 for women, indicating a significant gap in labor force participation rates based on this gender identity.14

This is the condition of women in general, but when we talk about intersectionalities within gender, we see how women from the minority community face more oppression in comparison to other women. In the case of Dalit, Adivasi, and bleeding women from my host communities are EVEN denied work in fields that are accessible to a majority of female laborers in India. Throughout my fellowship experience, I have observed that almost all the agriculture labourers are females and they all belong to either the scheduled caste or tribal community. These particular groups of women cannot find work as domestic help as well because untouchability is still very much prevalent and hence they are left to work in agriculture lands, construction sites, scavenging etc.

**AN EXPERIENCE OF UNTOUCHABILITY AT WORKPLACE IN MY HOST SITE**

I visited the home of an upper caste family from Odisha for my fellowship related work. In the very first conversation with the women of the house, she looked very interested to know about my religion and caste. So, the conversation between us mostly revolved around caste. She was also very excited to tell me her caste identity and that was how I found out that she belongs to an upper caste family of Odisha. By the time we were talking, her house helper also came and started doing work after greeting us. On that point, she told me a few important facts to be checked before hiring a househelp. The women should be upper caste to enter her house and completed the stage of menopause to enter and work in her kitchen. This is an example of how women from lower castes are further discriminated against based on their layered identity.

Women don’t have access to and control over productive resources, access to decent work, control over their own time, lives and bodies. The UN Women Economic Empowerment plan states that we need increased voice, agency and meaningful participation in economic decision-making at all levels from the household to international institutions and all these aspects affect the overall development of the women.15

### 3. Health

Communities with poor socioeconomic conditions are pushed out of the mainstream health system and are not able to

[Photo Credit: Medcare]
avail basic health services. As a lack of maternal health care services, poor awareness about menstrual hygiene solutions and high level of malnourishment are some of the common issues these women face in their lives. Adivasis and Dalits are the social categories who are most deprived of basic health facilities among others, reveals the latest NFHS – 4 survey. Vaccinations are one of the most effective ways to prevent the harmful short- and long-term effects of serious, but preventable diseases. Their importance cannot be stressed enough. However, according to UNICEF, India has 7.4 million children who are not immunised, and gender plays a role in whether children are immunised or not, with girls reportedly receiving fewer vaccines than boys.

The structural vulnerability throughout the life of the majority of women makes them dependent on having to visit hospitals or use public transport to get the treatment. India is one of the top five countries with the highest number of maternal mortality.

The practice of eating in the end after the whole family which results in less food for her, discrimination in food served for a girl child and a boy child, first priority to give milk, meat and other enriched food items to a male child are some of the common practises seen in Indian culture.

This is how India has one of the highest rates of malnourished women among developing countries. A 2012 study by Tarozzi found the nutritional intake of early adolescents to be approximately equal. However, it is seen that the rate of malnutrition increases for women as they enter adulthood. Besides malnutrition there are other gender specific health issues also there which can be found in higher numbers in women like domestic violence, mental health, lack of maternity health services.

Healthcare related discrimination against Dalit women is a common occurrence in India. The latest National Family Health Survey (NFHS) data states that 70.4% of the Dalit women surveyed said they had problems accessing health care.

In my personal experience during my fellowship, I noticed that the community health center was 30 kms away from a Notified Area Council (NAC) with only one doctor. People from all around this radius need to get to this center for each and every problem, but not for maternal health. For maternal health care, Asha workers are appointed in these villages but they only take care of maternal issues because it has commission benefits on every patient. An Accredited Social Health Activists (ASHA) worker was paid Rs 600 a month to ensure four ante-natal check-ups and facilitating institutional delivery in rural areas and Rs 400 in urban areas.

Odisha has a special provision of the ASHA Matrutwa Yojana, where an ASHA worker would get monthly assistance of Rs 1,000 for six months for self-care during pregnancy from third trimester (seventh to ninth month) and new-born care up to three months.

**POSSIBILITIES TO WORK FORWARD**

Through my experiences and realisation I came up with few practically possible reflections and also some approaches from IGLYO. The International Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, Queer & Intersex (LGBTQI) Youth and Student Organization who adopted intersectionality as a key focus...
area to work and believes that intersectionality is not simply a theme to be studied for a limited time, but should be seen as a fundamental approach, embedded throughout the work of organization.

1. Recognise differences

Recognise that we all have different identities and overlapping identities that build a different experience and different level of oppression or unique discrimination for an individual. And by recognising the differences we can take our first step towards an aware, and equitable impact on work.

2. Reach out to different groups of people

Ask them about their struggles, daily life, how an incident affects their life and walk through their experiences by putting yourself in their shoes. This will help us to empathise with them through their own narratives and assist us to frame any policies or project with all the consideration.

3. Representation and inclusion in decision making process

We all know the importance of representation and its effect. Representation will help them to come up in the forefront for their own issues rather than someone speak on behalf of them. It will become a process of empowerment for the whole group of people. And by including them in part of the decision making process we can have an inclusive, effective and sustainable policy and its impact.

4. Outreach to organizations that are working with different identities

Reach out to the organizations that are working on human

CONCLUSION

In this chapter, I have explained my lived experiences throughout my fellowship through the lens of intersectionality. Women face additional challenges in accessing education, economic opportunities, and health care relative to men. In addition, women with multiple identities face problems differently and harshly. Access to basic things becomes the hardest task for women who may belong to lower castes, Adivasi, and minority communities. The chapter tries to explain how gender may affect access to broader needs, and identifies a few degrees of oppression within gender. We face different challenges and oppressions when compared to women as a whole community. I argue that an intersectional approach needs to be taken into consideration before making any decision related to us which can take the form of policy by government, programs by NGOs and other organizations.
Dimensions of Gender Inclusivity in Sports-Based Youth Programs

JANE HAMMAKER

THEMATIC AREA: YOUTH DEVELOPMENT

ABSTRACT

I review approaches to creating gender-inclusive sport-based programming in India and Kenya. I find that girl-focused programming is essential to achieve girl participation, but may require engagement with men and boy children to make even greater strides towards gender equality.

KEY INTERSECTIONALITIES: GENDER, YOUTH DEVELOPMENT, RURAL

UNDERSTANDING GENDER GAPS IN YOUTH AND SPORTS

It has been widely researched and documented that girl and boy children around the world do not have access to equal opportunities for learning, development, and growth. In the 2020 Global Gender Gap publication, which measures the extent of gender-based gaps in economic opportunity, educational attainment, health, and political empowerment, the World Economic Forum reports that the Gender Gap stands at 68.6%.¹ Around the world, this means that boys are generally healthier than their sisters, and are more likely to work, receive an education, and participate in civic society.² Youth organizations worldwide recognize gender as a barrier to these same essential areas- that girl children will face challenges that boy children may not- and consider gender an important ‘intersectionality’ when implementing programming.

This publication will focus on a specific subset of youth development organizations: the Sport-for-Development (S4D) or sport-based, youth-focused programs. UNICEF defines S4D as:

The use of sport, or any form of physical activity, to provide both children and adults with the opportunity to achieve their full potential through initiatives that promote personal and social development.

However, S4D organizations face very unique challenges in creating gender-inclusive and equitable content. Worldwide cultural norms have hyper-masculinized sports, which has contributed to the widely held beliefs that it is unacceptable for girls to play and participate. In addition, sport programming can be exclusive (‘last-pick’ mentality) and ableist.

In this publication, I review approaches to creating gender-inclusive sport-based programming at Yuwa, an S4D NGO that focuses on empowering girls through football and
This publication will focus on two dimensions of gender-inclusive youth development programming:

1. **HOW TO INCLUDE GIRLS** in sports-based youth development programs?

2. **HOW TO INCLUDE BOYS** in girl-empowerment sport-based youth development programs?

### S4D AND THE CHALLENGE OF INCLUSIVITY

Sport-for-development (S4D) organizations around the world have demonstrated that playing football (soccer) is an effective tool in improving health, academic performance, and confidence in children from vulnerable or marginalized communities. A recent study on S4D found that children who participated in football programs gained leadership, self-esteem, and life skills, and were less likely to drop out of school than peers who did not participate.³ Evidence even suggested that S4D organizations were associated with reducing gender based violence (GBV).

However, the benefits of participating in an S4D program are not experienced equally by boys and girls. S4D has

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Seema, age 13, leading football practice in Hesathu, Jharkhand.
[Photo Credit: Yuwa]

education in rural Jharkhand, and Moving the Goalpost (MTG), an S4D NGO and girl's empowerment organization in rural Kenya. I will use the cases of Yuwa and MTG to demonstrate that girl-focused programming is essential to achieve girl participation, but may require engagement with men and boy children to make even greater strides towards gender equality.

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MTG players participate in the Mombasa International Show Tournament, 2018.
[Photo Credit: MTG]
the potential to reinforce harmful socio-cultural attitudes towards girls by promoting exclusion on the basis of gender. Sport culture is already highly masculinized, and girls from patriarchal societies may be discouraged by their parents or communities from participating. These barriers prevent many S4D organizations from recruiting and sustaining female participation in programming.

**YUWA INDIA AND MTG EMPOWER GIRLS THROUGH FOOTBALL**

One strategy for strengthening female participation in S4D programming is to focus exclusively on girl empowerment. To better understand these ‘girl-power’ sport programs, I spoke extensively with two organizations doing similar work on opposite sides of the world: Yuwa India and Moving the Goalpost (MTG). By focusing their resources and advocacy efforts towards girl children, both organizations were successful in overcoming their context-specific barriers to female participation through holistic programming that included opportunities for young women to lead, gender-sensitive education, and extensive family outreach.

Yuwa is an S4D NGO based in Jharkhand that focuses on empowering girls through football and education. Girls are recruited from an early age, usually by a Yuwa coach (an older girl in the community), to play on Yuwa Football teams. Teams range in age, size, location, and skill level. Teams practice 5 days per week, usually before school, and meet once more for Life Skills Workshop, led by their female coach or senior facilitator. Workshops cover topics from sexual health and puberty to domestic violence and financial literacy. As girls progress through the program, they are invited to join the coaching staff and trained to create their own teams, coach, and lead life skills workshops. Understanding Yuwa’s Programs (Fig. 1) outlines how Yuwa’s programs create an environment for learning, growth, and empowerment.

**UNDERSTANDING YUWA’S PROGRAMS**

Yuwa School: An all girls, college-preparatory school that has been designed by and exclusively for Yuwa players. Enables each girl to reach her full potential—academically and personally—and prepare for the next step in her life.

**Coaches’ Development**: Young local coaches become role models and advocates for their players. Weekly coaches development sessions help girls to gain practical employability skills: time and group management, session planning, financial literacy, and problem solving.

**Sports teams**: Teams of girls, led by young female coaches. Daily football and Ultimate Frisbee sessions bring vulnerable girls out of isolation, build strong, positive social networks, and create accountability to go to school and stay healthy.

**Family Outreach**: Regular home-visits by Yuwa staff build trust and deepen our understanding of the girls’ family situations. Family outreach directly prevents child marriage, human trafficking, and domestic abuse.

**Life-skills Workshops**: Weekly life-skills workshops help girls develop their voices, strengthen teams, share critical health and rights information, reinforce the importance of education, and assist in framing their dreams and goals for the future.

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*Figure 1: Yuwa programs create an environment for learning and growth.*

[Graphic by Rose Gastler]
In addition to football training, Yuwa also provides opportunities for motivated girls to continue their education at Yuwa School for Girls, and provides additional nutrition support for their players through the football program.

To overcome the challenges of including girls in a sport program, Yuwa exclusively invests in girl children. Football participation is dominated by girls, and boys are only allowed to play if they bring four girls with them. To keep girls involved in the program Yuwa focuses on family outreach in order to build meaningful relationships with partner communities. By focusing on these relationships, Yuwa advocates alongside their players to overcome barriers to participation such as child marriage, gender discrimination, harassment, and sexism.

Moving the Goalpost (MTG) operates programming similar to Yuwa in rural counties in Kenya. Like Yuwa, MTG supports young women to become young leaders through opportunities to coach and facilitate workshops, and forms deep community relationships to help their players overcome barriers to participating. In their 2020 Strategic Ambitions (Fig. 2) MTG outlines their goals to continue to expand their programming, and establish best-practices in the S4D space.

In summary, both programs have created an environment on and off the football field conducive to learning and growth. Participants develop close relationships with teammates and access to mentors and resources, which helps them to build confidence and self-esteem. Participants can continue their education and develop awareness of taboo social issues through school, access to scholarships, and weekly workshops. Finally, participants develop leadership skills by becoming coaches and facilitators, and have a sustainable source of income. Both organizations have seen enormous success in their participants and have been awarded and

MTG players at the Global Goals World Cup in 2017.
[Photo credit: GGWCup]
honored for their contributions to the S4D space.

Three components of both programs that are key to these achievements are:

- **Opportunities to lead.** Female coaches act as role models and challenge gender norms simply by taking on visible leadership roles. They also help to ensure greater safeguarding of vulnerable girl participants.

- **Holistic programming.** The football program is a gateway for building community and a platform to engage with and educate young women on a myriad of topics, including gender-sensitive topics such as puberty, menstruation, sexual health, and gender based violence.

- **Extensive family outreach.** Both organizations eventually overcame resistance to girls in sports by establishing meaningful relationships in their partner communities, building trust and eventually support.

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**THE UNEXPECTED CHALLENGE: HOW TO INCLUDE BOYS IN GIRL-FOCUSED PROGRAMMING?**

However, there are challenges in implementing girl-focused sport programming. While Yuwa has made incredible progress in empowering young female leaders, they still lack the support of some men and boys in the community, both directly and indirectly related to the program. For example, young boys from the neighborhood often break glass on the football pitch, so that the girls playing would hurt their feet the next day. Similarly, in Kenya, MTG female participants were attacked and targeted by young men in their communities to deter them from playing. Both organizations have dealt with fathers or brothers preventing their daughters and sisters from for a variety of reasons; commonly, men believe that football is a sport for boys and that girls should not be permitted to play, or that sports are inappropriate for girl
children. In order to truly ‘empower’ the girls they work with, both organizations realized that they needed to find ways to include and educate boys in their program ecosystem.

MTG has made substantial progress in addressing these challenges through their Young Men as Equal Partners program. In 2016, MTG launched the Young Men as Equal Partners Program (YMEP) in an effort to equip boys, male parents, guardians, and village leaders with various forms of gender sensitivity training. The program targets men at three tiers of society - local leaders, parents, and boys - with unique content for each level. Each year, MTG invites local leaders to attend a training on equality, GBV, and girl empowerment, equipping leaders to lead additional training in their communities. Male parents and guardians of MTG female players also attend trainings on responsible parenting, gender sensitivity, and GBV. By building support from parents, MTG ensures girls are allowed to attend all of their training and practices.

In addition to working with leaders and parents, MTG provides more in-depth workshops and training for boys in their partner villages. They reach boys through their boy’s football league, and hold workshops for boys as well. Their gender-equity, sport-based curriculum focuses on positive masculinity, power relations, and equality, as well as other life skills. To train their gender workshop facilitators (who, similar to Yuwa, also coach football teams) they hold a yearly residential training camp to help facilitators develop communication skills and review the curriculum.

To monitor the impact of their men’s programming, MTG follows their typical procedures of field visits, assessments, and “Commitment to Change” self-reporting from male participants. However, they rely most heavily on feedback from the GIRLS of families with men who participate in their program and survey them regularly. Both girls and participants have reported positive change in attitudes, beliefs, and action towards women in their communities.
While the impact of the MTG program has been positive, there were several challenges identified in the initial pilot phase. Men were hesitant to attend trainings, and contextually-appropriate incentives were created to encourage participation and engagement. MTG also created a gender policy with guidelines to inform how resources would be allocated between girl and boy teams.

Yuwa has not yet launched their men’s engagement program, but has also taken steps towards including men in a female-focused context. Although the program is still in the planning phase, Yuwa is working to launch a program similar to their girls program for boys by forming teams, holding workshops, and providing opportunities for leadership and mentorship. They have made progress towards including men by hiring locally for roles such as bus drivers, handy people, and coaches.

PROGRESS TOWARDS GENDER EQUALITY

It is clearly essential to provide additional resources to girl children to overcome gender gaps in education, health, and economic opportunities. S4D organizations, as well as other youth development organizations, can learn from the Yuwa and MTG empowerment models by focusing on holistic programming and family outreach. However, it's also important to realize that addressing intersectionalities in gender may have unanticipated tradeoffs, as Yuwa and MTG experienced. Women's empowerment organizations must prioritize girls while recognizing the role of men and boys in shifting cultural norms to achieve sustainable gender equity.

Note: The author acknowledges that gender identity is not binary and encompasses fluidity and other identities. However, given the scope of this publication, the author refers to gender as male and female.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

Special thanks to Rose Gastler, Neha Baxla, Franz Gastler, Sunita Melinga, and Supriya Kumari from Yuwa India for their willingness to discuss these issues and participate in this publication. Thank you to Dorcas Amakobe and Robert Mwangi for being amazing teammates in S4D work and for sharing their challenges and successes. And finally, thank you to my Intersects team for being amazing editors, teammates, and friends!
THE MISSING ‘DISABLED VILLAGES’ AND THE IMPORTANCE OF COMMUNITY

People with disabilities have on average only 15 people in their social circle, while the typical person without a disability has 150 people in their social circle.1 Due to a variety of societal factors, people with disabilities tend to be isolated from others. They face discrimination due to social stigma and misunderstanding of disabilities, resulting in marginalization from mainstream society.2 Furthermore, people with disabilities are also isolated from each other, preventing them from forming solidarity. Some marginalized groups have communities that are organically formed due to the close proximity of its members. The disabled population, however, is denied this asset due to the fact that people with disabilities are typically spread out across a large area instead of being clustered together. A person with a disability is often the only one in the immediate area, particularly in rural locations. This is because disabilities are mostly acquired due to random chance, possibly as a result of genetic error, complications at birth, or an accident later on in life. These factors can affect anyone, regardless of one’s background, which means that disability is orthogonal to the ethnic, caste, and religious lines that often demarcate neighborhoods and villages in India. There is no “disabled village”, so to speak. As a result, there is no one that one can relate to, no one to share common experiences with, and no one to learn from on how to overcome the challenges that people with disabilities face. Essentially, there is no community of people with disabilities. The intersectionality between disability and community thus becomes a powerful factor to consider when examining the causes of marginalization for people with disabilities. By looking at people with disabilities within the context of community, or the lack thereof, we uncover many insights on why a state of static isolation has persisted among this group.

What is the effect of this lack of community on people with disabilities? Communities are critical in forming an individual’s sense of belonging, as spaces where you are surrounded by
individuals who understand and accept you. Many people with disabilities express feelings of isolation and loneliness, as there is no one that they can talk to who understands their situation.\(^3\) It is not uncommon for people with disabilities to stay at home all day, rarely interacting with anyone outside immediate family. Communities are also key facilitators of knowledge and resource transfer, as people share new ideas, information, and opportunities for advancement. They become mediums for crowdsourcing solutions to common problems, and the collective knowledge of the group is leveraged for the benefit of all. Without a community, if a person who is visually impaired comes up with a new way to cross the street safely, for example, this solution is less likely to be shared and spread to others with the same problem. This is particularly true in rural areas, where a lack of internet access and a smaller, more isolated population serve as further barriers to information.

**DEVELOPING AN ACCESS STRATEGY**

As an AIF Clinton Fellow, I worked on issues relating to the empowerment of people with disabilities to achieve economic independence. Based at Enable India, an organization in Bangalore, much of my work focused on serving people with disabilities in an urban setting. However, just serving people living in cities is not enough if one wants to impact the larger population, as 69% of people with disabilities live in rural areas according to the 2011 Census of India.\(^4\) To do this effectively though, requires a different strategy than what is used for those in urban areas. In rural areas, people with disabilities are spread far apart from each other, so it’s not as effective to hold workshops and classes in a central location, as many would not be able to attend. Furthermore, it is difficult to contact people in rural areas. The internet penetration in rural India is only around 32%,\(^5\) so common methods for sourcing and mobilizing people in urban areas, like social media campaigns, do not work. Travelling to each individual village would be time consuming and is not practical at scale. Thus, there was a critical need to have a way of reaching the population remotely, using the means and technology that are commonly available.

While the internet penetration in rural India is low, the percentage of people who have phones is much higher, at 58%.\(^6\) Mobile phones have reached nearly every village in India, and people are comfortable with using them. Thus, the widespread availability of this technology can be leveraged to solve the problem of reaching people with disabilities.

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ENABLE VAANI: AN INNOVATIVE SOCIAL NETWORK

In 2016, Enable India launched a social networking platform called Enable Vaani (EV). In contrast to other social networking platforms, EV is entirely offline, operating through basic mobile phone technology via an Interactive Voice Response (IVR) system. IVR technology has been used in the past to reach people in rural areas, but EV is the first that is specifically created for people with disabilities. Users access the system by giving a missed call to a designated number. After a few moments they get a call back and enter the platform. Users can listen to audio recordings uploaded by other users, and record their own audios. Furthermore, users can bookmark and forward recordings they like to other people. This is all possible through an easy to use menu that is navigated by pressing numbers on the phone. EV is currently deployed in two languages, Kannada and Hindi, which are known as Namma Vaani and Hamari Vaani respectively. Namma Vaani operates in the state of Karnataka while Hamari Vaani spans 17 states, primarily in North India where Hindi is common.

The goal of EV is “facilitating the sharing of stories, opportunities and ideas for differently-abled persons in rural India.” On the platform, users can access information relating to employment, education, government programs, daily life, and many other types of content. The key aspect of this platform is that the content is overwhelmingly generated by the users themselves, instead of by Enable India. An estimated 98% of the content comes directly from user recordings. As a result, people with disabilities are on both the producer and consumer ends of the system. To date, EV has received more than 1 million (10 lakh) calls and reached more than 30,000 users, across 18 states.

CREATING A DIVERSE COMMUNITY

When EV was first launched, there was little activity from users on the platform. The platform was bootstrapped by creating interesting posts about people with disabilities who have been successful. Over time, users started creating their own posts, which ranged from a variety of topics. Users would share their own stories, ask questions, and spread useful information. A community gradually emerged, as users began using the platform for social support, advice, and opportunities. As one user puts it, “Enable Vaani is my family.”

The reason why EV was able to successfully create a community and have an impact at a large scale is that it serves users at every stage of their developmental journeys. There is a wide range in the level of independence among people with disabilities. Some people have a low level of confidence and self-reliance, and need lots of help and guidance. Others already have high amounts of these qualities, and are ready to start helping other people as leaders in the community. EV serves both types of users, and everyone in between, by connecting them with each other. Next, we dive deeper into how both user types use and benefit from the platform.

By joining EV, people with disabilities who were previously isolated from each other suddenly gain access to thousands of other people like themselves, enabling them to build connections and expanding their social circles. Users can use the platform as a source of support, as they face the daily issues that come up for people with disabilities. One such user remarked that the stories on EV have “motivated me to become bold and independent. Through stories like this I have gained self-confidence and that I could do something of my own.” Users can also learn about exciting entrepreneurial activities that others are undertaking.
inspiring them to start businesses of their own, as one user from Tumkur, Karnataka did.

The strong relationship between social relationships and mental health has been widely studied, and people with disabilities are no exception.8 The quantity and quality of one’s relationships affects one’s worldview, whether one sees the world as dangerous and scary or as full of possibilities. Studies show that “social interactions play an important role in determining how people form expectations.”9 Many users of the platform “have a low sense of self-esteem and sometimes do not consider themselves worthy of attention. They have internalized their irrelevance in an increasingly networked society that does not always acknowledge them.”7 The social circles built through EV break this state of isolation and negative mentality. Social circles also provide a network that people can rely on for economic support. People often reach out to friends, family, classmates, and former colleagues when looking for a job to increase their odds of successfully gaining employment. Not having this network results in fewer career opportunities for people with disabilities. On EV, however, users are able to tap into the community to look for employment. In one such example, a person with vision impairment from Raichur, Karnataka posted on the platform requesting information about job opportunities near his hometown. He received a reply from another user in the area who owns a shop, and eventually was offered a job by the shop owner. EV made it possible for these two users to communicate and help each other. The level to which users rely and depend on EV is strikingly expressed by one particular user, who declared, “For me

Enable Vaani is like God Vaani. It is an integral part of my life. I do not sleep till the time I have heard Enable Vaani three times a day.”

One of the most interesting trends to have come about from EV is the creation of social capital among leaders on the platform. People with disabilities are traditionally seen as a burden to be taken care of, incapable of doing work and contributing to society. Particularly in rural India, people with disabilities face an uphill battle when trying to prove themselves and become active members of society. This is due to people with disabilities having very low social capital. Because they are viewed as less capable, others are less likely to give them the opportunities that they would otherwise get. People with disabilities often lose motivation to improve their lives, as others don’t take their thoughts and opinions seriously, and they feel that they aren’t able to help others. However, on EV this dynamic is completely different. Here, people with disabilities are valued, and their voices do matter. People can share their stories and experiences, and receive widespread support as others can relate to the challenges and aspirations that they have. Users can help others by sharing advice and solutions to problems. Over time, certain users began to gain reputations as leaders, and other users would specifically request them by name to answer questions or provide advice. Users that frequently post useful and interesting content are publicly recognized as “star users,” motivating them to continue posting. One such leader posts 8-10 times a day about stories from his community that he finds interesting and motivating. He has a reputation for using information on the platform to help people in his community, and other users share information with him that they think he would find useful. Another leader managed to get a job through the platform, then started to help others obtain jobs in his company, providing information about job openings on the platform. Furthermore, he has now started to encourage local politicians to utilize the platform to learn how to better support people with disabilities. The motivations behind leaders on EV is perhaps best articulated by a woman from Punjab, who states, “In my journey of overcoming my disability I have gone through several experiences in life. I always used to wonder how do I share this knowledge to benefit others.
In my journey of overcoming my disability I have gone through several experiences in life. I always used to wonder how do I share this knowledge to benefit others. EV is giving me that opportunity to help my community. I take personal interest in providing credible information on EV for the benefit of my community."

EV is giving me that opportunity to help my community. I take personal interest in providing credible information on EV for the benefit of my community.”

CHALLENGES IN BUILDING COMMUNITY

While the growth and impact of EV has been impressive, the platform currently faces some challenges that it will need to solve in order to fulfill its mission of building a community for people with disabilities.

A key challenge that EV faces is ensuring that information on the platform is relevant to users’ unique situations. As India is a diverse country, information that is relevant to one part of the country may not be useful in other locations. For example, a post relating to a government program being conducted in Bihar would not be relevant to users living in Madhya Pradesh. Thus, content has to have local context in order for users to benefit from it. Communities are often based around a specific locality, and EV is no different. Users will only begin to feel like a community if they feel that they have similar backgrounds and experiences, which is often correlated with being from the same location. As mentioned earlier, EV is split into two platforms: Namma Vaani (for Karnataka) and Hamari Vaani (for North India). North India is a much larger area than Karnataka, both in terms of population and size. As a result of this, users behave on these platforms quite differently.

Studying the behaviors of users on both platforms showed that users on Namma Vaani tend to be active on the platform for a much longer period of time than users on Hamari Vaani. The majority of users of Hamari Vaani are “new” users, who have recently joined the platform, while there are very few “old” users. In contrast, there are many “old” users on Namma Vaani. These users feel a sense of loyalty to the platform, and feel it is their responsibility to help others on the platform. Users on Hamari Vaani are much less engaged, and are less likely to use the platform on a regular basis. Essentially, the community of Hamari Vaani is not as strong as that of Namma Vaani. The main reason behind this is the lack of local context in Hamari Vaani. Having users from such a vast area on the platform, from Rajasthan to Assam, dilutes the relevance that each post will have for the majority of users. Namma Vaani, being restricted to a single state, has managed to create a much stronger community among its users because the content is much more localized. For EV to build strong communities among people with disabilities, it will have to create more state-specific platforms where users can interact and share relevant information with others from the same area. Studying this case reveals the strong correlation between the success of a community and the proximity of its members. When one is building a community, it is imperative to define the scope of the community such that it is large enough to generate consistent discourse, but also small enough that users still find it relevant to their own lives and feel a desire to contribute to it.

Another challenge that EV faces is in securing the financial
sustainability of the platform. The current financial model of EV is entirely dependent on having a funder to bear the cost of the platform. As the users of the platform are in economically disadvantaged situations, Enable India does not want to force them to pay for access. Furthermore, it was decided not to allow paid advertisements on the platform due to the risk of shifting the focus of the platform away from the community. While EV has been able to secure funding for its operating costs, the current model prevents it from significantly scaling up the platform’s reach. Each call is paid for by the funder, which means that the more users that call, the more expensive the platform gets. As a result, they have not been able to market the platform to acquire more users, due to the risk of exceeding the budget that the funder is willing to pay. A potential solution to this challenge is to involve the national government in being responsible for the platform. If the government can integrate EV into its programs, it would not only secure the financial backing of the platform, but would also provide the administrative resources to expand its reach to more states. The organization is currently in collaboration with the government to explore the possibility of partnering to achieve this outcome.

The audio-centric nature of EV poses a key challenge to the inclusion of the Deaf. Currently, the majority of users of the platform have either vision impairment or a physical disability, but people with hearing impairments are excluded because they can’t access content on the platform. A proposed solution that is currently under development is the creation of a smartphone app that will display content in text form, as well as in sign language. While this solution is not ideal for all Deaf people in rural areas due to inconsistent access to smartphones, it would still be valuable to those that do have the technology. Furthermore, a Deaf-centric platform would also be useful to people in semi-urban and urban areas, because they often face challenges with communication on traditional social networks.

THE POWER OF COMMUNITIES
Over the past four years, EV has impacted thousands of people with disabilities throughout India by offering an innovative model of community building. Instead of remaining dependent on an NGO to provide them with assistance, users are empowered to seek out their own solutions to their problems by harnessing the collective knowledge of the community. Users realize their own capabilities by looking to role models on the platform who have taken control of their lives and achieved remarkable goals. Communities are gateways for self-reliance and empowerment among marginalized groups, and EV has shown that creating communities for people with disabilities unlocks the power of the collective, the critical instrument of change that has been denied to them all these years. At its core, communities that are owned by people with disabilities shift the power dynamic between the rest of society by creating spaces where their needs are prioritized, instead of neglected.

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WHAT IS AN INTERSECTIONALITY?

INTERSECTIONS OF IDENTITIES, INEQUALITIES & INJUSTICES

NAMING INTERSECTIONALITIES IN EDUCATION: A COVID-19 WORLD
7 “Promising Uses of Technology in Education in Poor, Rural and Isolated Communities around the World.” World Bank Blogs, blogs.worldbank.org/edutech/education-technology-poor-rural.
EXPLORING DISABILITY THROUGH THE LENS OF SPACE

5 This article uses the word ‘opportunities’ instead of ‘capabilities’ so that people, who might not have had previous encounters with Sen's Capability Approach, can understand the concepts and ideas referred to.
10 This model is based on Sen's capability approach; Mitra defines disability as a deprivation of capabilities (or opportunities) and/or functionings (or achievements) among persons with a health condition and/or impairment. The model highlights the role of resources, socioeconomic factors, and uses functionings (or opportunities) and/or capabilities (or achievements) as a metric for wellbeing. Mitra, Sophie. “Disability, health and human development.” Palgrave Pivot, Palgrave Macmillan, New York, 2018.
12 This highlights how spaces can act as conversion factors in converting opportunities into achievements within this community.
14 The author would like to emphasize that there were other opportunities that were outlined as immensely valuable by the community as well. This is not an exhaustive application of the model. Rather, this practical application is meant to help extrapolate the concepts laid out in this article to specific
contexts, settings, communities, and disability types.
15 Name changed for publication purposes.
17 The villages looked at in this case-study include Sabbavaram, Bobbili, Amalapuram, Gopalpatnam, Anakapalle, Ananthagiri, Bheemunipatnam, and Hukumpeta. The analysis is based on surveys and in-person visits.
18 These issues mentioned here are in no way exhaustive. Rather, these are issues that overlapped across villages and survey responses.
20 Interviews with several staff members at Vision Aid’s Visakhapatnam office revealed that several other students faced similar problems. Although the center provides free educational and skill-development programs 5-days a week, they had less than 7 regular students.
24 Based on conversations the author had with Devanna during his time at Vision Aid.
27 A state-level analysis should be done for state-level interventions whereas more specific town-, city-, and village-level analysis should be conducted for local-level interventions.

INTERSECTIONALITY WITHIN GENDER

1 Steinmetz, Katy. “She Coined the Term ‘Intersectionality’ Over 30 Years Ago. Here’s What It Means to Her Today.” TIME [USA], 20 Feb. 2020, time.com/5786710/kimberle-crenshaw-intersectionality.
9 As a Youth Accountability Advocate I worked with the Muslim migrant community of Delhi to understand the SRHR needs of young women and need of health infrastructure in the community and started campaign about the health issues of the community on the basis of data derived out of qualitative and quantitative research methods on national and international level.


DIMENSIONS OF GENDER INCLUSIVITY IN SPORTS-BASED YOUTH PROGRAMS

1. On a scale from 0, meaning perfectly unequal, to 1, meaning perfectly equal

BUILDING THE MISSING COMMUNITIES AMONG PEOPLE WITH DISABILITIES

Contributors

ANANT TIBREWAL

Anant Tibrewal served as an AIF Clinton Fellow with Enable India in Bangalore, Karnataka. His fellowship project involved developing capacity building and advocacy tools to create livelihood opportunities for people with disabilities, enabling them to achieve economic independence. During the fellowship he also conducted market research and analysis on the employment trends for people with disabilities and the experiences of those currently in the workforce.

PALLAVI DESHPANDE

Pallavi Deshpande served as an AIF Clinton Fellow with Vision Aid in Visakhapatnam, Andhra Pradesh. Her fellowship project has involved creating content for Vision Aid’s Online Academy, which trains teachers, partners, and organizations to deliver accessible and quality educational interventions to the visually impaired and developing a 6-month scholarship program aimed at holistic skill development and tangible empowerment for the visually impaired from rural, semi-urban, and marginalized backgrounds in Andhra Pradesh.

JANE HAMMAKER

Jane Hammaker served as an AIF Clinton Fellow with Yuwa in Ormanjhi, Jharkhand. For her fellowship project, she developed a life skills curriculum for adolescent girls from vulnerable backgrounds around sports-based training to enhance education, build confidence, and improve health. She thanks the Yuwa community for welcoming her with open arms, and for their willingness and vulnerability in sharing their stories with us. After the fellowship, Jane will continue working with Yuwa as a distance-learning educator.
SAHANA AFREEN

Sahana Afreen served as an AIF Clinton Fellow with VIEWS (Voluntary Integration for Education and Welfare of society) in Ganjam, Odisha. For her fellowship project she worked with the tribal community of the district to work on the livelihood opportunity with them and conducted several village and cluster level meetings to motivate the SHG members to adopt a more organic way of farming with the existing resources in the community with the assistance of her host organization.

JESSICA STANDIFER

Jessica Standifer served as an AIF Clinton Fellow with TYCIA Foundation in Khandwa, Madhya Pradesh, and Delhi, NCR. For her fellowship project, she designed and led a girls’ education campaign for rural government primary schools to increase enrollment and retention of girls from the Korku tribe in Central India. As a fellow, Jessica also developed M&E frameworks for various educational programs, designed impact surveys, and managed various stakeholder engagement. Jessica is thankful for the relationships she built both within the AIF cohort as well as within her host organization.

BENSON NEETHIPUDI

Benson Neethipudi is a Master of Public Administration candidate at Columbia University. He had worked in corporate America, consulted for government agencies in India, and led projects at philanthropic foundations. He is an AIF William J. Clinton Fellow, class of 2015-16. His interests are at the intersection of identity, equity, and technology. He is Dalit and his perspectives stem from his lived experience with caste, its privileges (or the lack of), and their interplay in everyday affairs.
Acknowledgment

RURAL INDIA SUPPORTING TRUST

The Rural India Supporting Trust (RIST) was established in 2007 as a family based grant making organization. RIST’s ultimate goal is to make strides towards alleviating poverty and improving the quality of life of communities in India. RIST partners with value aligned, publicly supported organizations to achieve scale and larger impact of projects. RIST’s work is rooted in the right-based framework with an aim to create an equitable India. Since 2017, RIST and the AIF Clinton Fellowship program have partnered to enhance capacity and impact of India’s social sector through channeling specialized skills, knowledge, and best practices to areas of greatest need. From 2017-2019, RIST supported the AIF Clinton Fellowship to dispatch ten Fellows to Uttarakhand and other under-served regions of India, including states of Jharkhand, Bihar, Madhya Pradesh, Chhattisgarh, and Odisha. Equally important, due to the U.S.-India cross-cultural exchange of the binational cohort of Fellows, RIST and AIF invested in an ecosystem of understanding and cooperation to forge strong ties between the global leaders of tomorrow. The partnership created and enabled a higher level of program impact by adding an “eleventh month of service” to the existing program model. This is an opportunity for recently returned Fellows to use this extended program time to strengthen the Alumni network, enhance the impact of the Fellowship program, create innovative program practices, help train the incoming cohort, and engage the broader public. In the second phase of the RIST-AIF Clinton Fellowship partnership, RIST will be funding eight Fellows each year from 2019-2022 and host Alumni Impact Talks to share inspiring stories of young change makers and the impact they have made.