



Between Symbolic Inclusion and Structural Exclusion: A Critical Analysis of Governance, Capability Deprivation, and the Marginalization of Visually Impaired Artists and Sportspersons in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, Pakistan

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Abstract

Despite growing international and national commitments toward disability inclusion, visually impaired persons in Pakistan particularly those engaged in arts and sports continue to experience profound structural exclusion. This study critically examines the challenges faced by visually impaired artists and sportspersons in accessing inclusive opportunities in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa (KP), with a specific focus on governance failures, institutional practices, and capability deprivation. Drawing on qualitative data generated through in-depth interviews with visually impaired individuals, trainers, and institutional stakeholders, the study reveals that disability-inclusive policies in Pakistan largely remain symbolic in nature. Weak implementation mechanisms, fragmented institutional coordination, inaccessible infrastructures, and persistent charity-based approaches undermine the conversion of individual talent into recognized social and professional opportunities. Using the Capability Approach and the Social Model of Disability as theoretical lenses, the paper argues that exclusion is not primarily rooted in impairment but in systemic deprivation of enabling conditions. The findings further highlight intersectional dimensions of exclusion, particularly along gender and regional lines. The study contributes to social work and social policy scholarship by exposing the disjunction between policy commitments and lived realities and by calling for a shift from symbolic inclusion toward rights-based, capability-enhancing governance frameworks for visually impaired persons in Pakistan.

Keywords

Visual impairment; disability inclusion; capability approach; governance; arts and sports; social policy; Khyber Pakhtunkhwa; Pakistan

Introduction

Over the past two decades, disability inclusion has emerged as a central concern within global development, human rights, and social policy discourses. International frameworks such as the United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (UNCRPD, 2006) emphasize the right of persons with disabilities to participate fully in cultural life, recreation, leisure, and sport. These commitments signal a paradigmatic shift from charity-based and medicalized understandings of disability toward rights-based and social models that recognize disability as a product of structural and environmental barriers rather than individual impairment alone. Yet, for millions of persons with visual impairments living in the Global South, such commitments

remain aspirational rather than transformative. Globally, visual impairment constitutes one of the most widespread forms of disability. According to the World Health Organization (2023), over 2.2 billion people live with some form of visual impairment, with a disproportionate concentration in low- and middle-income countries. Beyond functional limitations, visual impairment often intersects with poverty, weak institutional support, social stigma, and exclusion from public life. These intersecting vulnerabilities become particularly pronounced in talent-based domains such as arts and sports, where access to training, platforms, mentorship, and institutional recognition is crucial for success.

In Pakistan, disability inclusion is formally recognized through constitutional guarantees, federal and provincial legislation, and international treaty obligations. However, empirical evidence consistently demonstrates a wide gap between policy rhetoric and lived experience. Persons with visual impairments continue to face systemic barriers in education, employment, cultural participation, and sports (Naz & Sulman, 2012; Iqbal & Ashraf, 2022). These barriers are intensified in provinces such as Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, where geographical constraints, limited infrastructure, conservative social norms, and weak governance structures further restrict opportunities for marginalized populations. The marginalization of visually impaired artists and sportspersons represents a particularly neglected dimension of disability studies in Pakistan. While existing literature has largely focused on education, employment quotas, and rehabilitation, far less attention has been paid to the ways in which visually impaired individuals seek to develop, express, and institutionalize their talents in creative and athletic fields. Arts and sports are not merely recreational activities; they constitute important avenues for identity formation, social recognition, economic participation, and civic engagement. Denial of access to these spaces thus reflects deeper forms of social exclusion and capability deprivation.

This study addresses this gap by critically examining the challenges faced by visually impaired artists and sportspersons in accessing inclusive opportunities in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa. Rather than treating these challenges as isolated or individual problems, the study situates them within broader governance, institutional, and socio-cultural contexts. It asks why, despite evident talent and resilience, visually impaired individuals remain excluded from mainstream artistic and sporting platforms. It further interrogates how policies that ostensibly promote inclusion fail to translate into meaningful change on the ground. Guided by the Capability Approach and the Social Model of Disability, this paper argues that the exclusion of visually impaired artists and sportspersons in KP is fundamentally structural. The deprivation they experience is not merely a consequence of visual impairment but of the absence of enabling conditions such as accessible infrastructure, institutional support, inclusive governance mechanisms, and societal recognition that allow individuals to convert their abilities into valued functioning. By foregrounding the lived experiences of visually impaired individuals, this study seeks to contribute to critical social work scholarship and to inform more just, rights-based, and capability enhancing disability policies in Pakistan.

Disability, Exclusion, and the Limits of Policy-Centered Inclusion

Disability studies have undergone a significant paradigmatic shift over the past five decades, moving away from biomedical and charity-oriented models toward rights-based and structural interpretations of exclusion. Early medical models conceptualized disability primarily as an individual pathology requiring treatment or rehabilitation (Oliver, 1990). While such perspectives facilitated clinical interventions, they also reinforced dependency narratives and legitimized institutional segregation. In response, the Social Model of Disability emerged as a critical counter-framework, arguing that disability is produced not by impairment itself but by socially constructed barriers embedded in physical environments, institutions, and cultural norms

(Shakespeare, 2014). Despite widespread acceptance of the social model within academic and policy discourse, scholars increasingly argue that its translation into practice remains uneven, particularly in the Global South (Meekosha & Soldatic, 2011). Governments frequently adopt inclusive language and legal frameworks without dismantling the structural arrangements that sustain exclusion. This phenomenon has been described as symbolic inclusion, wherein policies exist largely as performative commitments rather than as instruments of substantive social transformation (Goodley, 2017).

In low- and middle-income countries, disability policy implementation is further constrained by weak governance systems, limited fiscal capacity, and fragmented institutional coordination (Grech, 2015). As a result, inclusion often becomes conditional, selective, and unevenly distributed, benefiting small segments of the disabled population while leaving others particularly those in rural or peripheral regions systematically marginalized.

Arts, Sports, and the Politics of Recognition

Arts and sports occupy a unique position within disability discourse. Beyond physical activity or creative expression, these domains function as spaces of social recognition, identity construction, and symbolic citizenship (Bourdieu, 1986; Howe, 2008). For persons with disabilities, participation in arts and sports has been shown to enhance self-esteem, social integration, and public visibility (Darcy & Dowse, 2013). However, access to these spaces is highly dependent on institutional support, adaptive infrastructure, and inclusive governance frameworks.

Critical disability scholars caution against romanticized narratives that portray disabled athletes and artists as inspirational exceptions rather than as citizens entitled to equitable opportunities (Silva & Howe, 2012). Such narratives often depoliticize exclusion by framing success as a product of individual resilience rather than collective responsibility. This framing is particularly problematic in contexts where institutional neglect is normalized and systemic barriers remain unchallenged. Existing research suggests that visually impaired individuals face distinct challenges in arts and sports due to the sensory nature of these fields, which are frequently designed around visual norms (Bolt, 2014). Without accessible training methods, adaptive technologies, skilled mentors, visually impaired artists and athletes are effectively excluded from professional and competitive platforms. These exclusions are rarely accidental; they reflect broader societal assumptions about competence, productivity, and worth.

Disability Governance and Institutional Fragmentation in Pakistan

In Pakistan, disability governance is characterized by a complex mix of constitutional guarantees, federal and provincial legislation, and international commitments. Pakistan ratified the UNCRPD in 2011 and has since introduced various legal instruments aimed at promoting inclusion, including employment quotas and accessibility provisions. However, scholars widely agree that implementation remains weak and inconsistent (Miles, 2002; Singal, 2016). One major limitation of disability governance in Pakistan is the persistence of welfare- and charity-based approaches, often driven by non-state actors and philanthropic organizations (Haider, 2019). While such initiatives provide short-term relief, they frequently operate outside rights-based frameworks and do not challenge structural inequalities. As a result, persons with disabilities are positioned as beneficiaries rather than as rights-holders. Empirical studies highlight significant gaps in institutional coordination among social welfare departments, education authorities, sports boards, and cultural institutions (Iqbal & Ashraf, 2022). This fragmentation leads to policy silos, duplication of efforts, and the absence of clear accountability mechanisms. For visually impaired individuals seeking to pursue careers in arts or sports, navigating these fragmented systems becomes an additional barrier to participation.

Provincial Context: Khyber Pakhtunkhwa and Peripheral Exclusion

The challenges of disability inclusion are particularly acute in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, a province marked by rugged geography, limited infrastructure, and a history of conflict and underdevelopment. Research indicates that marginalized groups in KP face compounded disadvantages due to restricted mobility, conservative social norms, and weak service delivery mechanisms (Khan & Bari, 2020). For visually impaired persons, these constraints translate into limited access to specialized training centers, inclusive sports facilities, and cultural platforms. Gender further intensifies exclusion, as visually impaired women encounter layered barriers rooted in patriarchy, protectionism, and social invisibility (Naz & Sulman, 2012). These intersectional dynamics are rarely addressed in mainstream disability policies, which tend to adopt homogenizing assumptions about disability experiences. Existing studies in Pakistan have largely focused on education and employment outcomes for persons with disabilities, leaving arts and sports significantly under-researched. Where such domains are discussed, they are often treated as recreational rather than as legitimate fields of professional and social engagement. This gap reflects a narrow understanding of inclusion that prioritizes economic productivity while neglecting cultural citizenship and human flourishing.

From Access to Capabilities: Emerging Critical Perspectives

Recent scholarship increasingly critiques access-based approaches to disability inclusion for their failure to address deeper questions of agency, choice, and dignity (Sen, 1999; Nussbaum, 2011). The Capability Approach offers a powerful lens for examining how social arrangements enable or constrain individuals' real freedoms to pursue valued ways of being and doing. From this perspective, providing nominal access to facilities or programs is insufficient if individuals lack the resources, support, and recognition required to convert opportunities into meaningful outcomes. Applied to the context of visually impaired artists and sportspersons, the capability lens shifts attention from impairment to institutional arrangements, governance quality, and social attitudes. It highlights how talent remains underutilized not because of individual limitations but because of systemic failure to nurture and recognize it. This perspective is particularly relevant in contexts like KP, where formal policies coexist with entrenched exclusionary practices.

While global and Pakistani scholarship has extensively documented barriers faced by persons with disabilities in education and employment, there remains a significant gap in understanding the lived experiences of visually impaired individuals in arts and sports, particularly within peripheral regions such as Khyber Pakhtunkhwa. Existing studies rarely integrate governance analysis with capability-based and rights-oriented frameworks, resulting in fragmented explanations of exclusion.

This study addresses this gap by offering a critical, empirically grounded analysis of how governance failures, institutional fragmentation, and capability deprivation intersect to marginalize visually impaired artists and sportspersons in KP. By doing so, it extends disability scholarships beyond access and participation toward questions of recognition, agency, and social justice.

Theoretical Framework: The Social Model of Disability and Capability Theory

Understanding the marginalization of visually impaired artists and sportspersons in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa requires a theoretical approach that moves beyond impairment-centered explanations and engages with structural, institutional, and governance-related dynamics. This study is guided by an integrated theoretical framework drawing on the Social Model of Disability, Sen's Capability Approach, and a rights-based governance perspective. Together, these

frameworks enable a multi-layered analysis of how exclusion is produced, sustained, and normalized within policy and practice.

The Social Model of Disability emerged as a critical intervention against medicalized and individualistic understandings of disability that locate disadvantage within the body of the impaired person (Oliver, 1990). Instead, the social model conceptualizes disability as a product of socially constructed barriers physical, institutional, and attitudinal that restrict participation and deny equal opportunities. This shift is particularly significant in contexts where exclusion is routinely justified through assumptions about incapacity or dependence. Applied to the experiences of visually impaired artists and sportspersons in KP, the social model directs attention to inaccessible infrastructures, exclusionary institutional practices, and normative assumptions embedded in arts and sports systems. Training facilities designed around visual norms, absence of adaptive equipment, and lack of skilled trainers reflect not natural limitations but socially produced exclusions. These barriers transform visual impairment into disability by systematically restricting access to professional and competitive platforms. However, critics of the social model argue that while it successfully politicizes disability, it often under-theorizes individual agency and the diversity of lived experiences (Shakespeare, 2014). In the context of arts and sports, where personal aspiration, creativity, and bodily engagement are central, a framework that accounts for both structure and agency is essential. This limitation necessitates the integration of complementary theoretical perspectives.

The Capability Approach: Disability as Deprivation of Substantive Freedoms

The Capability Approach, articulated by Amartya Sen (1999) and further developed by Martha Nussbaum (2011), provides a normative framework for assessing human well-being in terms of individuals' real freedoms to achieve valued ways of being and doing. Rather than focusing solely on resources or formal rights, the capability lens examines whether individuals can convert available opportunities into meaningful outcomes. From this perspective, disability exclusion is not merely a matter of access but of capability deprivation. Visually impaired individuals may formally possess the right to participate in cultural and sporting activities, yet lack the conversion factors such as adaptive training, institutional recognition, financial support, and social acceptance necessary to actualize these rights. In such contexts, rights remain abstract and capabilities unrealized.

For visually impaired artists and sportspersons in KP, capability deprivation manifests in multiple ways: absence of accessible pathways for skill development, limited exposure to professional networks, and lack of institutional platforms for recognition. The capability approach thus reframes exclusion as a systemic failure to expand human potential rather than as an individual shortcoming.

Importantly, the capability framework also foregrounds issues of dignity and choice.

Participation in arts and sports is not merely instrumental for income generation but intrinsically valuable for self-expression, identity formation, and social recognition. Denying these capabilities constitutes a profound form of injustice that extends beyond economic marginalization.

Governance and Rights-Based Perspectives: The Implementation Gap

While the social model and capability approach illuminate structural and normative dimensions of exclusion, a governance lens is necessary to explain why inclusive policies fail to translate into practice. Rights-based governance emphasizes the role of institutions, accountability mechanisms, and political will in realizing legal commitments (Cornwall & Nyamu-Musembi, 2004). In Pakistan, disability inclusion is formally embedded in constitutional provisions and legislative frameworks. However, weak institutional capacity, fragmented governance

structures, and reliance on ad hoc welfare interventions undermine effective implementation. This disconnect between policy commitments and lived realities reflects what scholars describe as an implementation gap, wherein rights exist on paper but remain inaccessible in practice (Singal, 2016).

For visually impaired artists and sportspersons, governance failures manifest in the absence of coordinated policy frameworks linking social welfare departments, cultural institutions, sports authorities, and local governments. The lack of clear mandates and accountability mechanisms results in symbolic inclusion where disability is acknowledged rhetorically but neglected materially. A rights-based governance perspective thus situates individual experiences of exclusion within broader institutional and political contexts. It underscores that meaningful inclusion requires not only progressive legislation but also responsive institutions capable of enabling participation and recognizing disabled citizens as rights-holders rather than passive recipients of charity.

Integrating the Frameworks: Toward a Critical Analytical Lens

Taken together, the Social Model of Disability, the Capability Approach, and rights-based governance provide a comprehensive framework for analyzing the marginalization of visually impaired artists and sportspersons in KP. The social model identifies the structural barriers that produce exclusion; the capability approach assesses how these barriers translate into deprivation of substantive freedoms; and the governance lens explains why policy commitments fail to dismantle exclusionary structures. This integrated framework enables the study to move beyond descriptive accounts of challenges and toward a critical examination of power, institutions, and social values. It positions visually impaired individuals not as deficient subjects but as capable agents whose potential remains systematically constrained by structural and institutional failures. By anchoring the analysis in this framework, the study contributes to a more nuanced and justice-oriented understanding of disability inclusion in Pakistan.

Analysis and Discussion

1. From Talent to Trapped Potential: Structural Barriers to Artistic and Sporting Participation

The empirical findings of this study reveal a striking paradox: despite demonstrable talent, motivation, and commitment, visually impaired artists and sportspersons in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa remain largely invisible within formal artistic and sporting institutions. Participants consistently reported that exclusion did not stem from their impairment *per se* but from the absence of enabling environments. Training facilities, performance venues, and sports grounds were overwhelmingly designed around visual norms, rendering participation either unsafe or practically impossible. This finding strongly aligns with the Social Model of Disability, which locates disability not in the body but in socially constructed barriers (Oliver, 1990). The data suggests that visual impairment becomes disabling only when institutional arrangements fail to accommodate difference. For example, respondents described how the absence of tactile markers, adaptive coaching techniques, and assistive technologies systematically restricted their ability to train and compete. Such barriers transform talent into trapped potential abilities that exist but cannot be converted into recognized achievement.

From a capability perspective, these conditions represent a clear case of conversion failure (Sen, 1999). Even where individuals possessed skills and motivation, the lack of institutional support prevented them from transforming these resources into valued functions, such as professional recognition, income generation, or social visibility. This underscores that inclusion cannot be reduced to formal access; it must be evaluated in terms of whether individuals are genuinely enabled to pursue and sustain their aspirations.

2. Institutional Neglect and the Governance of Invisibility

A recurring theme in the findings is the pervasive absence of institutional ownership over disability inclusion in arts and sports. Participants reported being passed between departments social welfare offices, sports boards, cultural directorates, none of which assumed responsibility for supporting visually impaired talent. This institutional fragmentation reflects deeper governance failures rather than isolated administrative lapses.

The data illustrate how disability governance in KP operates through policy silos, where inclusion is rhetorically endorsed but practically disowned. Cultural institutions view disability as a welfare issue; sports authorities prioritize performance metrics aligned with able-bodied norms; and social welfare departments remain confined to rehabilitation and charity-oriented interventions. As a result, visually impaired artists and sportspersons fall between institutional mandates. This pattern exemplifies what rights-based scholars describe as symbolic inclusion a condition in which policies exist primarily to signal compliance with international norms while substantive implementation remains absent (Goodley, 2017). The lack of accountability mechanisms allows institutions to evade responsibility, thereby normalizing exclusion as an unfortunate but unavoidable reality.

From a governance perspective, this invisibility is politically significant. By failing to recognize visually impaired individuals as right-bearing citizens within cultural and sporting domains, institutions effectively exclude them from spaces of public recognition and civic belonging. Inclusion, in this sense, is not merely about participation but about who is seen, valued, and legitimized within the public sphere.

3. Charity over Rights: The Persistence of Paternalistic Frameworks

Another critical finding is the continued dominance of charity-based approaches to disability support. Many participants reported receiving sporadic assistance from philanthropic organizations or individual benefactors, often framed as acts of goodwill rather than entitlements. While such support provided short-term relief, it lacked sustainability and failed to address structural barriers.

This reliance on charity reinforces paternalistic relationships in which visually impaired individuals are positioned as passive recipients rather than active agents. From a social work perspective, such frameworks undermine empowerment and perpetuate dependency. They also depoliticize exclusion by framing it as a matter of compassion rather than justice.

The findings resonate with critiques of welfare-oriented disability regimes in the Global South, where non-state actors frequently fill gaps left by weak public institutions (Grech, 2015). While civil society plays an important role, the absence of state accountability allows structural inequalities to persist unchecked. In the context of arts and sports, charity-based interventions rarely invest in long-term capability development, such as professional training, institutional integration, or career pathways. Through the capability lens, charity fails to expand substantive freedoms because it does not alter the conditions that constrain choice. Instead, it often reproduces asymmetrical power relations that limit autonomy and reinforce social marginalization.

4. Gendered and Regional Dimensions of Exclusion

The analysis further reveals that exclusion is not uniform but deeply intersectional. Visually impaired women participants faced compounded barriers arising from gender norms, familial protectionism, and social stigma. Participation in arts and sports was frequently viewed as inappropriate or unsafe for women with disabilities, leading to heightened restrictions on mobility and public engagement. These findings echo feminist disability scholarship, which emphasizes that disability interacts with gender to produce layered forms of marginalization

(Shakespeare, 2014). In KP's conservative socio-cultural context, visually impaired women are often rendered doubly invisible excluded both as women and as persons with disabilities.

Regional disparities further intensify exclusion. Participants from rural and peripheral areas reported significantly fewer opportunities than those in urban centers. The absence of local training facilities, combined with transportation challenges and financial constraints, effectively confines talent to private or informal spaces. This spatial dimension of exclusion highlights how geography operates as a structural determinant of capability deprivation.

5. Between Law and Lived Reality: The Implementation Gap

Perhaps the most critical insight emerging from the analysis is the stark disconnect between legal commitments and lived realities. Pakistan's ratification of the UNCRPD and the existence of provincial disability laws create an appearance of progress. However, participants' experiences reveal that these frameworks rarely translate into actionable support. This implementation gap is not accidental; it reflects weak institutional capacity, limited political prioritization of disability issues, and the absence of monitoring mechanisms. Arts and sports remain peripheral to disability policy agendas, which prioritize education and employment quotas while neglecting cultural and civic dimensions of inclusion.

From a governance standpoint, this gap undermines the legitimacy of rights-based frameworks. Rights that cannot be exercised lose their transformative potential and risk becoming symbolic artifacts. The findings suggest that without institutional reform, policy coherence, and participatory governance, disability inclusion will remain performative rather than substantive.

6. Reframing Inclusion: From Participation to Recognition

Collectively, the findings challenge narrow interpretations of inclusion that focus solely on access or participation. For visually impaired artists and sportspersons, meaningful inclusion entails recognition being acknowledged as legitimate contributors to cultural and sporting life. Recognition is not merely symbolic; it has material implications for funding, career development, and social status. Drawing on the integrated theoretical framework, this study argues that exclusion persists because governance systems fail to recognize visually impaired individuals as capable agents. The denial of recognition constrains both capabilities and citizenship, relegating visually impaired artists and sportspersons to the margins of public life.

The analysis demonstrates that the marginalization of visually impaired artists and sportspersons in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa is not the result of individual limitation but of systemic governance failure, institutional neglect, and capability deprivation. The following section synthesizes these insights and outlines concrete conclusions and recommendations aimed at advancing rights-based, capability-enhancing disability inclusion.

Conclusion

This study set out to critically examine the marginalization of visually impaired artists and sportspersons in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, moving beyond descriptive accounts of challenges to interrogate the structural, institutional, and governance-related dynamics that sustain exclusion. Drawing empirical evidence from Rahman Said's MPhil research and guided by the Social Model of Disability, the Capability Approach, and a rights-based governance perspective, the study demonstrates that exclusion is neither accidental nor inevitable. Rather, it is produced through systemic failures that deny visually impaired individuals the conditions necessary to convert talent into recognized social and professional achievements.

The findings reveal that despite the existence of disability-inclusive laws and policy commitments, visually impaired artists and sportspersons continue to experience profound capability deprivation. Inaccessible infrastructures, lack of adaptive training mechanisms, fragmented institutional responsibilities, and the persistence of charity-based approaches

collectively undermine meaningful inclusion. These conditions transform disability into a symbolic exercise one that satisfies formal obligations without addressing lived realities. A key contribution of this study lies in highlighting arts and sports as critical yet neglected domains of disability inclusion. Unlike education and employment, which dominate policy discourse in Pakistan, arts and sports are often treated as optional or recreational. This narrow framing obscures their significance as spaces of recognition, identity formation, and civic participation. Denying access to these domains constitutes not only cultural exclusion but also a denial of dignity and citizenship. The study further underscores the intersectional nature of exclusion. Gender and geography emerge as powerful determinants shaping the experiences of visually impaired individuals, particularly women and those residing in rural or peripheral areas. These layered exclusions expose the limitations of homogenizing disability policies that fail to account for social context, power relations, and structural inequality.

This research argues that disability inclusion in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa remains trapped between progressive rhetoric and regressive practice. Without institutional reform, policy coherence, and a shift from charity to rights-based governance, visually impaired artists and sportspersons will continue to occupy the margins of public life. Inclusion, as this study demonstrates, is not a technical issue of accommodation but a political and moral question of whose lives, talents, and contributions are valued.

Recommendations

Grounded in the empirical findings and theoretical insights of this study, the following recommendations are proposed to advance rights-based, capability-enhancing inclusion for visually impaired artists and sportspersons in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa.

1. Institutional Integration of Disability in Arts and Sports Governance

Provincial cultural and sports institutions must formally integrate disability inclusion into their mandates. This requires:

1. Clear policy directives assigning responsibility to sports boards and cultural directorates
2. Dedicated budget lines for adaptive training, assistive technologies, and inclusive infrastructure
3. Inter-departmental coordination mechanisms linking social welfare, sports, culture, and local government

Disability inclusion should not remain confined to social welfare departments but must be mainstreamed across all public institutions.

2. Shift from Charity-Based to Rights-Based Frameworks

Government and non-government actors must move away from paternalistic, charity-oriented interventions toward rights-based approaches that recognize visually impaired individuals as capable agents. This entails:

1. Reframing support mechanisms as entitlements rather than benevolence
2. Ensuring transparency and accountability in disability-related programs
3. Strengthening legal literacy among persons with visual impairments regarding their rights under national and international law

Social work professionals have a critical role to play in facilitating this transition through advocacy and rights education.

3. Capability-Oriented Program Design

Disability inclusion initiatives should be evaluated not merely on access or participation but on their capacity to expand substantive freedoms. Programs must:

1. Provide sustained skill development pathways in arts and sports

2. Facilitate access to professional networks, competitions, exhibitions, and performance platforms
3. Recognize and reward excellence among visually impaired artists and sportspersons through scholarships, fellowships, and awards

Such initiatives would enable talent to translate into long-term social and economic outcomes.

4. Gender-Responsive and Context-Sensitive Interventions

Policy and practice must explicitly address the intersectional barriers faced by visually impaired women and individuals in rural areas. This requires:

- i. Gender-sensitive program design that accounts for mobility, safety, and social norms
- ii. Community-based training centers to reduce geographical barriers
- iii. Engagement with families and communities to challenge stigmatizing attitudes

Without such measures, inclusion efforts risk reinforcing existing inequalities.

5. Strengthening the Role of Social Work Education and Practice

Schools of social work, particularly in public universities, should play an active role in advancing disability inclusion by:

- i. Integrating disability studies, capability theory, and rights-based practice into curricula
- ii. Promoting field-based research and advocacy focused on arts and sports inclusion
- iii. Collaborating with government and civil society to design evidence-based interventions

Social work must position itself not only as a service-delivery profession but as a critical agent of social transformation.

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