

CHAPTER III

ACCESSIBILITY

Chapter-III: Accessibility

The State Government has taken the initiatives for providing accessibility to PwDs but is yet to provide barrier free facilities in all the public buildings, initiate action to improve disabled friendly facilities in Transportation and Tourism sectors and ensure accessibility to regular and special schools conforming to the standards prescribed.

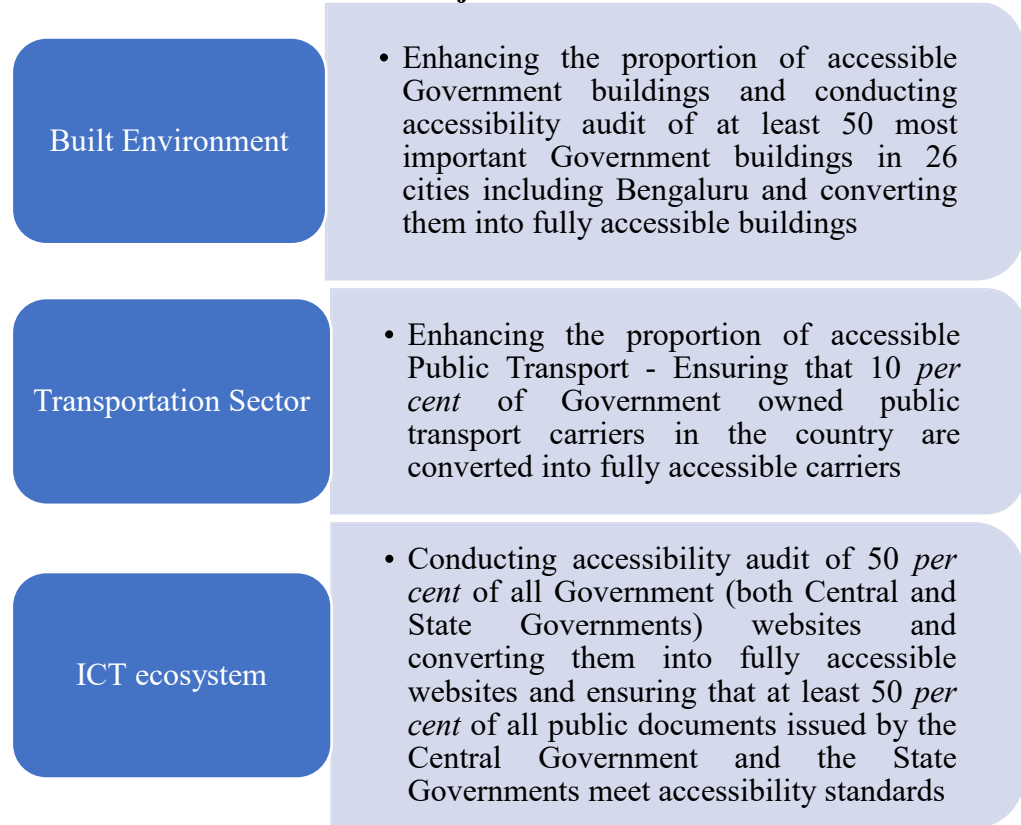
“Accessible” means a person with a disability is afforded the opportunity to acquire the same information, engage in the same interactions, and enjoy the same services as a person without a disability in an equally effective and equally integrated manner, with substantially equivalent ease of use. The RPWD Act through Sections 40-46 mandates accessibility to be ensured in all public centric buildings, transportation systems, Information and Communication Technology (ICT) services, consumer products and all other services being provided by Government or other service providers in a time bound manner. The Act also provides for formulation of Accessibility Standards / Guidelines for incorporation across various sectors.

GoI released ₹27.09 crore for providing accessibility facilities in public buildings during 2018-19 and 2019-20. However, the State Government had not made any separate provision for allotment of funds for providing accessible features in special schools, rehabilitation homes/centres under the jurisdiction of the Department. Audit noticed that funds provided for Accessible India Campaign by GoI were not utilised optimally, accessible features were not provided by special and regular schools in its premises as discussed in subsequent paragraphs.

3.1 Accessible India Campaign

Department of Empowerment of Persons with Disabilities (DEPwD), Ministry of Social Justice and Empowerment launched (December 2015) Accessible India Campaign (Sugamya Bharat Abhiyan) as a nation-wide campaign for achieving universal accessibility for PwDs. The campaign focusses on three important verticals, viz., the Build Environment, the Transportation Sector and the Information and Communication Technology (ICT) ecosystem as depicted in **Chart 3.1**.

Chart 3.1: Verticals and their objectives



3.1.1 Built Environment

For providing accessibility facilities, the GoI released ₹27.09 crore to 47 buildings (₹11.04 crore during 2018-19 for 20 buildings and ₹16.05 crore during 2019-20 for 27 buildings) based on the estimates submitted by the State Government. Out of the above funds received, the State Government released ₹11.04 crore to the Department during January 2020 and the remaining funds were released to the Department (2022-2023). Audit observed that the Department provided Accessibility facilities to 18 buildings by incurring an expenditure of ₹8.44 crore. The facilities are yet to be provided to the remaining two buildings. As the funds for the period 2019-20 are yet to be received by the Department, works were not taken up for the 27 buildings. ₹2.60 crore received for the works identified in 2018-19 are yet to be utilised by the Department (May 2023).

Audit also observed that the process of identification of public buildings to be provided barrier free environment was yet to be taken up in other parts of the State.

The State Government stated (May 2023) that though the Finance department had released this budget to DEDSC during the year 2022-23, department could not utilise the funds as the sub-agencies had not accepted the released budget due to change in scheduled rates and requested for additional budget. Hence, the released amount of ₹16.05 crore has been deposited to Central Nodal Agency (C.N.A) account as per the instructions of Government of India.

The delay in releasing funds by the State Government and Department's failure to monitor the progress of utilisation of grants affected the implementation of the work for making the building accessible and barrier free for PwDs thereby resulted in depriving divanganjan of accessible infrastructure.

Illustration

Accessibility to voting for PwDs

Following concerted efforts of the State Election Commission of Karnataka to identify and enrol PwDs through door-to-door survey, introduction of Chunavana App for booking wheel chairs, providing sturdy ramps with handrails, preparation of voter slips in braille script, engaging renowned PwDs as State icons etc., the State witnessed an increase in PwD voters turnout from 67 per cent in 2013 Assembly Elections to 76 per cent in 2018 Assembly Elections and 80 per cent in 2019 Lok Sabha elections.

The Election Commission of India acknowledged the good practices and new initiatives in Karnataka such as continuous identification and solutions, voter registration and polling, inclusive voter education, leveraging technology for accessible elections etc., and incorporated these in its Strategic Framework.

There were 5.71 lakh PwD voters in Karnataka (Assembly Elections conducted in May 2023) and for the first time, home voting facility was provided for 19,279 PwD voters with benchmark disability in Karnataka and of these, 95 per cent of PwDs cast their vote from home.

3.1.2 Transportation Sector

Section 41 of the RPWD Act mandates the appropriate Government to take suitable measures to provide-

- facilities for persons with disabilities at bus stops, railway stations and airports conforming to the accessibility standards relating to parking spaces, toilets, ticketing counters and ticketing machines and
- access to all modes of transport that conform to the design standards, including retrofitting old modes of transport, wherever technically feasible and safe for persons with disabilities, economically viable and without entailing major structural changes in design.

The State of Karnataka has 8,673 buses (inter district/state) run by Karnataka State Road Transport Corporation (KSRTC) and 6,603 buses run by Bengaluru Metropolitan Transport Corporation (BMTTC). In response to audit query regarding the status of accessibility features, the Managing Directors of KSRTC and BMTTC stated (October 2020) that the Committee of disabled persons was not formed to consider disabled-friendly suggestions while planning and executing transport-related infrastructure projects. It was also stated the provisions of accessibility features for PwDs as enumerated in the Bus Body Code were taken into consideration while framing bus body specifications besides providing facilities such as foldable and potable ramps with customised wheelchairs in all major and minor bus stands to facilitate easy entry and exit of all passengers with reduced mobility into all types of buses.

In respect of the existing buses, it was stated that retro fitment of lift mechanism facility was not technically feasible in all high floor buses and technical assistance was sought to make these buses accessible to PwDs and assured that facilities like audio alert, buzzers and ring holders would be provided for retro fitment in the coming days. A statement showing the compliance to the provisions by KSRTC and BMTC is detailed in **Appendix 3.1**.

The State Government (May 2023) has not offered any comments.

3.1.3 Absence of Accessibility features in AMRUT projects

Atal Mission for Rejuvenation and Urban Transformation (AMRUT), a GoI Scheme aims to provide basic services like water supply, sewerage, urban transport to households and build amenities in cities which will improve the quality of life for all, especially the poor and the disadvantaged. The components of AMRUT consists among other things, capacity building, urban transport and development of green spaces and parks.

The minimum accessibility features for differently abled persons comprise the following:

Urban Transport	Level boarding/alighting at the stations and space for wheelchair movement, providing easy accessibility at entrance to the bus stations, ramp access with tactile blocks, ramps and low flooring aligned with bus stops displaying a disabled friendly image.
Green space and parks- General Accessibility Features	Wheelchair-accessible entrance gates and pathways, non-slippery and levelled pathways bordered by a handrail, ramps with railings at entrance gates and play areas, display of Signage in Braille (English and Kannada).

Audit observed that the Detailed Project Reports prepared under the scheme did not include accessibility features for PwDs.

The State Government (May 2023) stated that the Department of Urban Development would be requested to issue directions to the Urban Local Bodies to incorporate accessibility features for PwDs in Detailed Project Reports for future projects and tender documents in consultation with special educators and occupation therapists before incorporating the accessibility features.

3.2 Accessible Tourism

Accessible tourism (also known as ‘inclusive tourism’ and ‘barrier-free tourism’) is tourism and travel that is accessible to all people, with disabilities or not, including those with mobility, hearing, sight, cognitive, or intellectual and psychosocial disabilities, older persons and those with temporary disabilities. (Takayama Declaration, UNESCAP 2009).

Audit observed that the State Tourist Policy for 2015-20 and 2020-25 did not focus on the above issues, and it lacked the perspective on major attributes of tourists with disabilities like lack of proper information and inadequate signages at major points, non-availability of personal aids/equipment, locating affordable and accessible accommodation, non-availability of toilets for people with reduced mobility *etc.*, as mentioned in ‘Report on Problems and Prospects of Accessible Tourism in India³’ (October 2010).

The State Government (May 2023) stated that the Department of Tourism would be requested to amend the State Tourism Policy to include accessibility guidelines for Tourists with disabilities.

3.3 Accessibility to Libraries

The provisions of the RPWD Act mandate the appropriate Governments to ensure that all existing public buildings shall be made accessible for PwDs in accordance with the rules formulated by the Central Government within a period not exceeding five years from the date of notification of such rules.

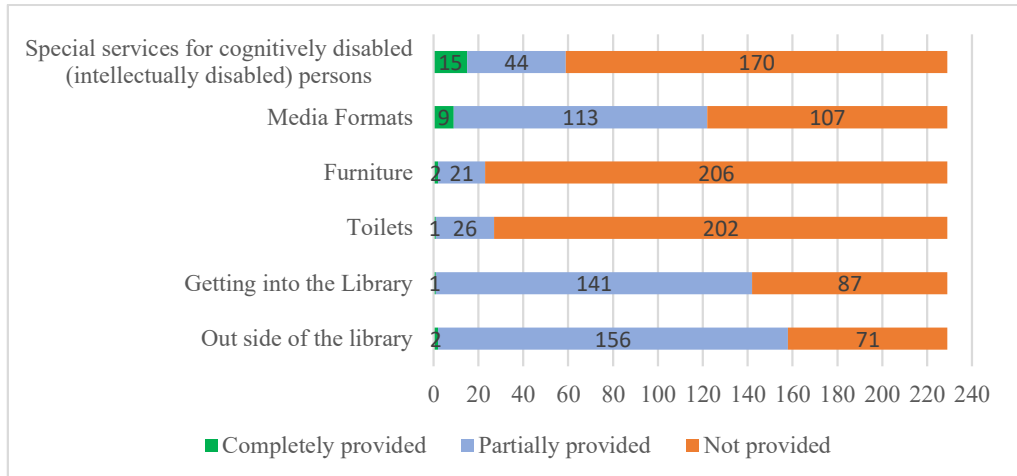
The Central Government brought out (February 2016) the ‘Harmonised Guidelines and Space standards for Barrier Free Environment for Persons with Disabilities’ to facilitate/guide design of spaces to ensure equitable, easy access to persons with disabilities. As per Para 4.2 (vi) of the said guidelines, all open book stacks and all library facilities and equipment should be accessible. A special room should also be provided for people with hearing and vision impairment who need assistance while reading.

There are 6,861 public libraries in the State including 5,766 Gram Panchayat libraries. Audit observed that the Karnataka Library Act, 1965 was not amended to include provisions such as retrofitting the libraries with reasonable structural modifications *etc.*, to make libraries accessible to PwDs. The Department of Libraries did not prepare a plan of action to assess the existing levels of accessibility of library buildings for further enhancements.

Information furnished by 229 libraries (48 – District Central library; 23 – City Central library and 158– Other libraries) on the status of infrastructure facilities available indicated that more than 88 *per cent* of the libraries did not have accessible toilets and furniture for PwDs; 38 *per cent* of the libraries did not provide for ease of access into the library; 47 *per cent* did not have media formats exclusive for PwDs such as audio and visual assisting materials/software and 74 *per cent* did not have services for intellectually disabled persons as shown in **Chart 3.2**.

³ Study carried out by the Indian Institute of Tourism and Travel Management.

Chart 3.2: Status of infrastructure facilities



The State Government stated that the Director, Department of Library is requested by the State Commissioner to create a plan of action for assessing accessibility levels and establishing a separate library wing for the visually challenged persons.

Recommendation 4: The State Government should accord top priority and step up its efforts to ensure that all public buildings, public transport and public places are provided with barrier free access to PwDs.