

Thursday, December 4, 2014

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Islamabad

Physically and intellectually challenged children, along with their families, enjoyed every bit of the fun gala organised for them on International Day of Persons with Disability (PWD) by the Directorate General of Special Education (DGSE) in the F-9 Disability Park on Wednesday.

From colourful puppet show and savoury food stalls to impressive stage performances – it was all fun for disabled children. State Minister for Capital Administration and Development Division (CADD) Barrister Usman Ibrahim was the chief guest on the occasion who inaugurated the fun gala and a policy dialogue 'Road Map for Justice and Equality for Persons with Disability (PWD)' organised by Aurat Foundation, in collaboration with DGSE, AUSDFAT, Trocaire and Women Learning Partnership (WLP).

Despite some hazard the children faced in the movement within the Disability Park due to uneven ground, the disabled children had no complaints and were all for more such events in future. "I would suggest the government and NGOs to organise at least two such events per month," said Munazza Tanvir, a visually impaired girl.

When asked to recommend some improvement for future events Sania Ali, mother of Ali Shahbaz, a hearing impaired child, said that "it will be better if the whole ground is levelled and sections are made for different age groups." Her son Shahbaz, 6, was insisting to take a ride. "I cannot take him to slides as older children are playing there.

Shanza, a hearing impaired girl from Rawalpindi, suggested Prime Minister Nawaz Sharif to attend this festival so that he can see the confidence and capability of disabled persons. "I really like this festival. There must be many more such gatherings for us. I have many friends around and we will enjoy the whole day," she said.

Officials of DGSE shared with 'The News' that around 2,000 PWDs would be participating in the event. "According to estimates, there are around

12,000 disabled persons only in Islamabad. Only a small percentage would be able to participate today but the number is increasing every year." He said that the basic objective to arrange fun gala is to create awareness among general public about the special needs of the PWDs and also to provide an entertainment opportunity to the persons with disability.

Speakers at the policy dialogue catered to the serious side of the issue. They spoke about the challenges faced by persons with disabilities and their social inclusion. They also talked about the need for improved awareness among stakeholders, services available for persons with disabilities and current status of legislation on disability. They said that there is no clear legislation at national level for the rights of persons with disabilities, and hence a strong and effective lobbying is required with relevant stakeholders.

Programme specialist, Pakistan Foundation Fighting Blindness Ammara Anwar, in her presentation focused on the challenges faced by disable community of Pakistan. She said that major challenges faced by disable community include communication gap among NGOs working for PWDs, and the organisations working for human rights, insufficient quota allocation for persons with disabilities, and 18th amendment and its consequences.

She pointed out that violent attitudes faced by PWDS in general and women with disabilities in particular, and lack of interest from both government and private sectors for the development of persons with disabilities is another issue. On the education front, lack of trained teachers and study mechanism specially for persons with mental disorders are the key challenges. Lack of implementation of quota available for PWDS in employment and other basic services and non-cooperative attitude of the colleagues is also discouraging.

Saba I Mohsin, Early Intervention Consultant, discussed in detail the inclusion process and challenges of establishing inclusion set ups. The major challenges, she pointed out, was lack of coordination between ordinary schools and special

INTERNATIONAL DAY OF PERSONS WITH DISABILITY

Physically, intellectually challenged kids enjoy fun gala



ISLAMABAD: Children having a good time at the 'Fun Gala' in Fatima Jinnah Park.

schools, lack of awareness and education within the community, inadequate attention to disability-friendly infrastructure, lack of teachers' training, resource materials and funds to develop the inclusive programmes, and of course the attitudinal barriers of society including parents, educators and policy makers.

Deputy Director, Directorate General of Special Education Jawwad Afzal shared that out

total population of 180 million, there are 4 to 8 million persons with disabilities in Pakistan, and 45% of these are children under age 18. At least 3 million adults (both genders included) need rehabilitation through some kind of employment.

Barrister Usman Ibrahim, State Minister for Capital Administration and Development Division said that the government is committed to address the chal-

lenges faced by the persons with disability. He said that the implementation of recommendations came forward in the policy dialogue would be a priority for the ministry.

Barrister Abid Waheed, MD Bait-ul-Mal, said Bait-ul-Mal is updating services for the PWDs by introducing electronic wheelchairs and other assistive aids. He also announced they are planning to launch a pilot project

to carry out a census of PWDs throughout Pakistan by targeting districts levels so that policies could be developed according to updated census.

Director Advocacy and Elimination of Violence against Women (EVAW) for Aurat Foundation Rabeca Hadi stressed the need to create special opportunities for women with disabilities. She demanded employment quota equal to the percentage of

disability existing in the society. She suggested the government to prepare a comprehensive database to identify exact number of persons with disabilities and consider disability aspect while drafting new electoral reforms. Aurat Foundation Chief Coordinating Officer Naeem Mirza demanded legislations according to United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disability (UNCRPD).