

# INCLUSIVE EYE HEALTH STRATEGY IN PUNJAB

**Dr. Imran Ahmad, Sara Ikram**

The concept of social inclusion is best understood in context with its converse i.e. social exclusion, which is a natural and logical accompaniment of poverty and deprivation. In addition to monetary poverty and physical need, the hallmarks of exclusion are disrespect, discrimination, and degradation. Social exclusion is multidimensional or socioeconomic (encompassing collective as well as individual resources) dynamic, relational (leading to social distance or isolation, rejection, humiliation, lack of social support networks, and denial of participation) active (having a clear causative agent) and relative to context.<sup>1</sup>

The very first of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs)<sup>2</sup> pertains to “No Poverty,” while almost half of the goals address the problem of inclusiveness, indirectly. Inclusiveness in the society is based on four key areas of opportunity i.e. the opportunity to participate in society through education, to employment and access to services, to connect with family, friends and the local community, to deal with personal crises (e.g., ill health), and last but not the least, the opportunity to be heard. Social exclusion, on the other hand, is the restriction of access and limitation of the capabilities required to capitalize on these opportunities. Alleviation of social exclusion and promotion of Social inclusion, and accessibility by people with disabilities and marginalized communities can be achieved by employing a Universal design of assistive devices and technology. It requires a dedicated promotive, preventive, curative and rehabilitative approach. The all important and decisive role in various aspects of this strategy is based on the guiding principles of United Nations' Convention on Persons with Disabilities (UNCPRD).

Inclusive Eye Health (IEH) as an initiative was first launched in October 2016 in the 10<sup>th</sup> General Assembly of International Agency for Prevention of Blindness (IAPB) of which Pakistan a signatory too. The international NGO Christoffelblinden Mission (CBM) has played a leading role in this initiative globally as well as in Pakistan.

College of Ophthalmology and Allied Vision Sciences (COAVS) and CBM took the leading steps to develop an IEH strategy which included development of an IEH module that could be incorporated and taught in all its graduate programs related to eye health in COAVS. This module on Inclusive Eye health (IEH) was developed to build capacity of eyecare team nationwide and produce master trainers in the subject. It was prepared under consultation of international subject matter experts, with special expertise required to train the faculty and integrate the module within partner organizations in Pakistan. Purpose of module was to produce trained Human Resources who could play a vital role in developing inclusive/accessible environment at primary, secondary and tertiary health tiers in future. COAVS played a pivotal role in advocacy of the topic at the Syndicate meetings of King Edward Medical University for inclusion of the module in its Bachelor of Vision Sciences (Honours) programme, and also at other affiliating bodies dealing with other programmes like Ophthalmic Nursing and Ophthalmic Technician courses etc.

Seeing the successful implementation at COAVS, National Committee for Eye Health took up the challenge to develop a uniform syllabus on the template provided by COAVS for teaching in all the institutions imparting training in Vision Sciences in Pakistan. A National Faculty Development Program 2017-21 was set up, four National- and one provincial-level workshops were held in collaboration with CBM to train faculty with international practices on inclusive health, and to develop a uniform curriculum framework of inclusive eye health, in consultation with all the stakeholders to make it comprehensive and sustainable.

In addition to developing a teaching module, other targets were also achieved at national level that included Provincial and National Situation Analyses with inclusion component, Development of Programme Policies (Inclusive Eye Health and Safeguarding– Policy Principles and Actions), Policy Analysis of Health, Disability and Social protection in Pakistan, 2019, and Access audits of provincial eyecare hospitals and provision of reasonable accommodation for persons with disabilities.

### References

1. Silver H, Miller SM. Social Exclusion: *The European Approach to Social Disadvantage*. Indicators 2003;2(2):7-9
2. United Nations. United Nations Sustainable Development – 17 Goals to Transform Our World. Available from URL: [www.un.org/sustainabledevelopment/](http://www.un.org/sustainabledevelopment/)