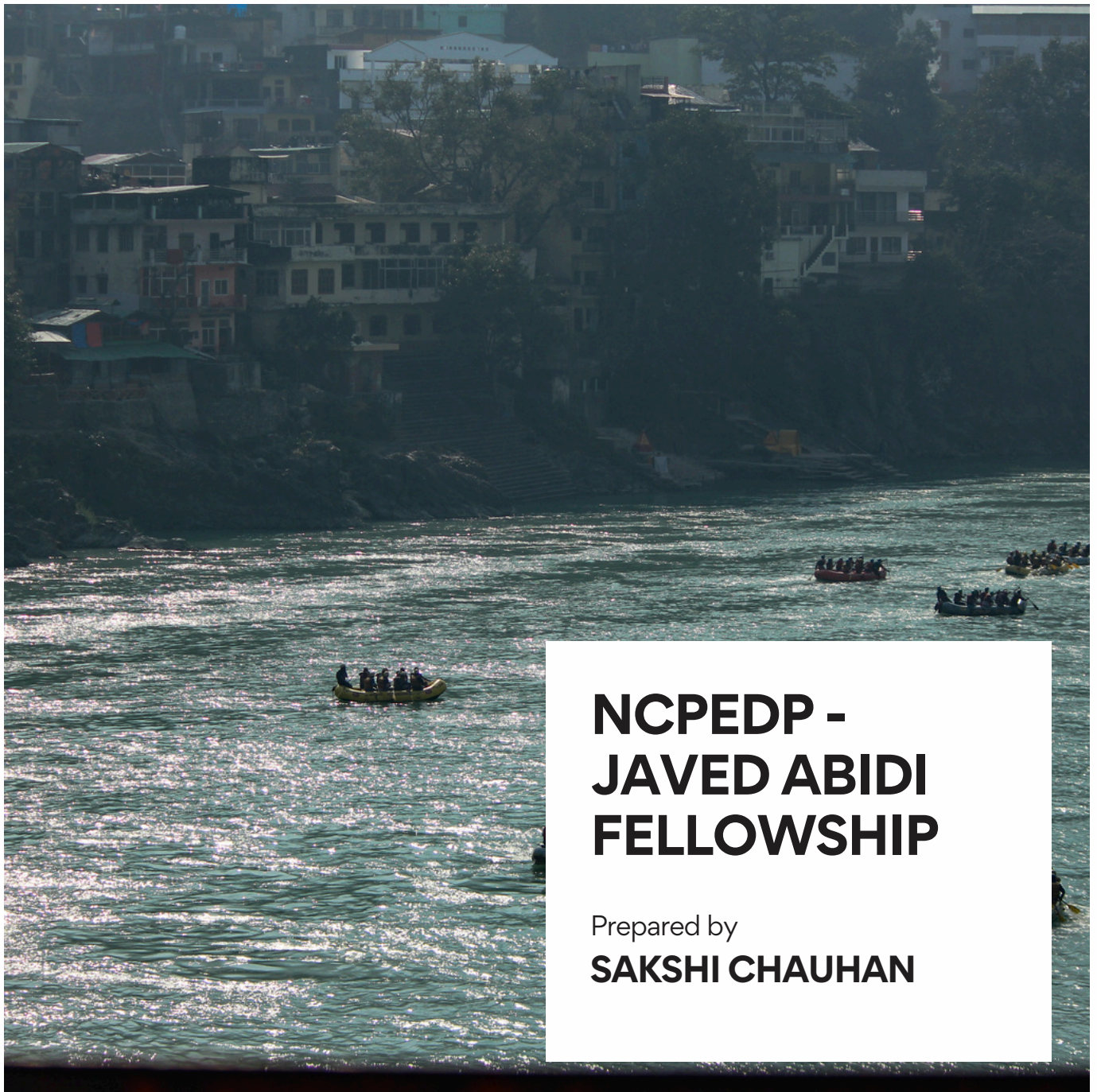


**“WHEN YOU TRAVEL YOU
CANNOT JUST GET CLICKED,
YOU NEED TO LEAVE
FOOTPRINT”**

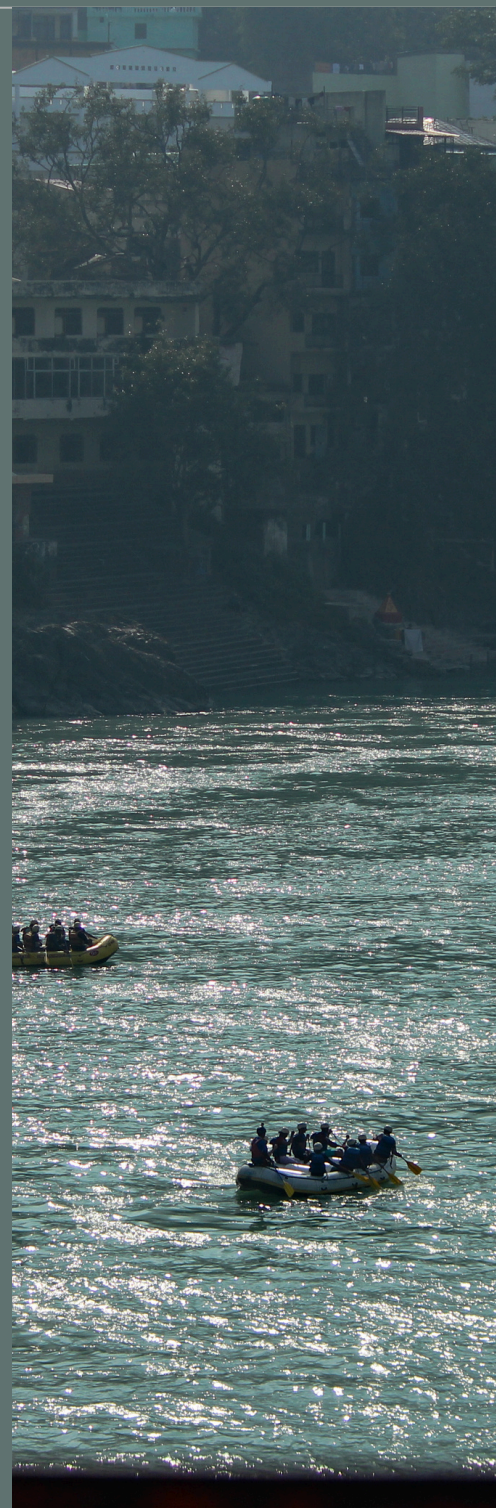


NCPEDP - JAVED ABIDI FELLOWSHIP

Prepared by
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BACKGROUND

When I met with an accident at the age of 9; I started using a wheelchair and had to move out of my village to move to Rishikesh because the village was not accessible. It was late in my teenage years that I realised why my family had to take that risk to move out to ensure my education. Even in my school, my school did not have accessible classrooms and toilets and I was dependent on my mother to access facilities in school. But, the real experience of accessibility began with me joining college which was 21 kilometers away and inaccessible transportation was further an experience like due to us receiving student concession we would be asked by drivers to stand and leave seats for passengers travelling long distances. I used to thereby mostly get late for classes and even my classes used to be on the third floor and the workshops related to Electrical Engineering used to be at different corners of the campus so my effective participation was completely disrupted.”

She joined a group TCO (The challenging one) which was a peer support group for amputees and this helped her delve into sports playing basketball and archery. It meant her travelling across the country using the rail network. “One needs to walk slowly through mostly inaccessible stations carrying the entire equipment amidst rush of the other passengers which in itself used to be a more rigorous exercise than a memorable travel experience. I still remember my 2022 trip to Jind in Haryana with my archery equipment where due to numerous stairs only available to go to the adjoining platform, I had to take the risk of not only giving my equipment to a stranger but also crossing the railway line to reach my designated platform”. The well developed sports infrastructure across major cities was not accessible for her team thereby, reducing equitable opportunities for training and, even enjoyment / recreation with the team post training due to inaccessible public spaces was not an option, even though she was travelling the world.

The exposure took her towards understanding the needs and also learning about the rights of persons with disabilities through peers. She came across the opportunity of the fellowship and then decided to delve into the laws and policies to work on the measures required for grass roots transformation in her own capacity. “I used to tell my teammates and my competitors during tournaments about my hometown with them getting attracted to visit the place and they always used to end up asking me like is Rishikesh accessible? Which places are accessible for us to visit?” She had to answer back after all. She realised that inclusive tourism can make the travel experience memorable for persons with disabilities, elderly and many more with diverse needs .At the least, The land of gods cannot be exclusively open for few.

PROGRESS OVERVIEW

NOVEMBER 2021 TO APRIL 2022

- Being a person who acquired disability during schooling and an International basketball player she had faced issues of accessibility at very regular intervals which made her inclined to work on this very thematic area.
- She started browsing through accessibility measures taken in Rishikesh and found updates or challenges related to tourist spots, banking institutions, schools and found very little information on the same. She then enlisted an array of public spaces like police stations, schools, courts and banks to visit the same and found concerns of accessibility and thereby started to request the concerned authorities to look into the same like Mayor Anita Mamgai in Jan-2022 And Parshad Bijendra Mogha on 26-10-2021
- As she apprised them on the same, they agreed to look into the matter and later submitted a policy brief.
- She started to create a network on her own using data available on Uttarakhand's social welfare department. The data only had a census of districts and this was not useful for establishing connections with persons with disabilities in the region.

MAY 2022 TO OCTOBER 2022

- She started to use information from Naukri.com to reach out to persons with disabilities in the region. She updated them on her work and then conducted a meeting with 15 people on 18 March 2022. She sensitised them on the RPwD act and created a WhatsApp group wherein they started discussing the accessibility issues which also influenced one of the members Mr Rakesh to create a ramp in the market area he used to go to regularly.

- She continued her visit to understand the situation of accessibility in higher education and visited the colleges PG College Rishikesh, She also continued visiting regional offices of the SBI(State Bank of India) and PNB (Panjab National Bank) considering they have the highest number of branches in Rishikesh.
- She also started to meet executives of the Municipality i.e. Mayor Anita Mamgai to understand the process of approvals for new buildings and they suggested looking at building bye-laws.
- She analysed building bye-laws and found that the existing Uttarakhand building bye laws does not elaborate design like in Harmonised guidelines but certainly refers to the same.
- So, she decided to target those buildings which have been retrofitted post implementation of RPwD Act 2016 and new buildings created recently to look at the status of accessibility there.
- She realised that public places' accessibility are of prime importance in Rishikesh, which has an inflow of tourism for spirituality, well being and adventure. So, she started to focus her work on the important stakeholders in the tourism chain.
- She did a case study of Triveni Ghat where ramps have been installed and railings were also introduced which did not follow the ratio of 10:1 making it steep; there is absence of dedicated parking for persons with disabilities; ramps leading to toilets are also too steep with no accessible toilets; the road leading to entry and exit directly leads to parking which due to inflow of traffic makes it insecure environment for people from vulnerable groups like PwDs, children, pregnant mothers and old age people. Recently, there have been retrofittings made, however, even those are not up to the measurements highlighted in the guidelines provided by the govt.
- The recently created Yog Nagri Railway station has added very well developed accessibility features like ramps, it is also laid with tactile pathways. It also has one of the safest underground broadways to navigate through platforms. But, the executives managing the railway station need to be sensitised to ensure right usage of features instead of using railing or ramps for drying up clothes.

- She had also enlisted 3 star to 5 star hotels in Rishikesh to check their accessibility features. Out of 10 hotels contacted and found that only a few hotels under the chain of Hotel Aloha and Lemon Tree had an accessible setup based on the conversation she had with the executives. Ganga Kinare had partially accessible infrastructure restricted to rooms only. It is important to note that such luxury premises will start at prices of INR 5000 per night (excluding GST) which will restrict the majority of tourists with disability to avail the same given the status of employment.
- She also collaborated with other fellows Kavya Poornima B. and Kavya Mukhija, to go live on instagram for making their networks aware of accessibility status of prominent places of tourist interest. (attach photo)
- To understand the preferences, behaviour and challenges of tourists with disabilities she had used mix methodologies to create a survey and used qualitative tools like interviews to document their individual experiences as well.
- She collected 114 responses from across India where 78% participants fall in the age group of 15 to 35 years, and 21 business owners from the hospitality chain. The findings of the survey were as follows:
- Only 53% of disabled people step out of their home every day, and 13% once a week, with the rest rarely leaving their home.
- The preferred mode of transport of 83 out of 115 people is personal vehicle and the reason behind this is first accessibility, second comfort and third affordability.
- The most important requirements in terms of accessibility are first ramp, second accessible toilet, third lift.

Click [here](#) to know more about the findings

NOVEMBER 2022 TO APRIL 2023

- The insights gained helped her develop policy briefs to suggest actionable measures towards existing loopholes in public spaces created post 2016 and elaborate building bye laws.

- MDDA responded back with a generic reply that they are implementing the laws and guidelines of RPwD Act and harmonised guidelines.(attach response evidence)
- She reviewed her submission and found the policy brief too large and re-engaged with the authorities later with precise actionable points.
- She also started to use her findings by sharing them on her social media account to proliferate information and help her network. She also apprised the same through her case studies. Click here to be updated on her work.
- She had filed RTi with DEPwD to find about the building which has been made 100% accessible lately and the department was not aware of the same given, the response stated that they are not the right department to receive such information. It highlights the status of flow of the information for SIPDA from states to the Union which will impact the governance of the measures.
- She also made a press release of the accessibility concerns in Triveni Ghat and it was covered by newspapers on 16 Nov 2022. While it wasn't met with a deluge of responses, the press release did serve as a medium to raise awareness amongst people regarding the primary issues.
- During this period, Sakshi carried out 4 case studies: 1. Sandeep Mata 2. Preeti Badoni 3. Rakesh Kothiyal 4. Rahul that delved deep into the lives of People with Disabilities. The primary motive was to develop and showcase insight into the challenges faced by them in terms of infrastructural unavailabilities, particularly in public spaces.
- She did a press conference accompanied by Arman Ali, the executive director of NCPEDP, in Dehradun. The emphasis was laid on the policy brief submitted by Sakshi to the Disability Commissioner and the lack of response for the same.

MAY 2023 TO OCTOBER 2023

- She developed the policy brief again along with receiving digital endorsements for her recommendations and submitted it to Secretary MDDA, DM, as well as MLA Disability Commissioner, Municipality and Tourism Minister Satpal Maharaj.ji in August.
- She continued her study of tourists with disabilities (109 responses) to understand their taste, preferences and choices while travelling to gain consumer insights in collaboration with co-fellow Kavya Mukhija.
- She had later filed an RTI with DEPwD to know the buildings for which the audit was completed, buildings were turned accessible and frameworks or guidelines that were followed for building Janki Setu.
- A list was provided back on the buildings which have been made accessible while directing her to gain information on Janki Setu from the state government.
- She had a meeting with District Nodal officer Mr Anand Mehra in July to understand their inclination on inclusive tourism. However, it was discussed that their primary focus is on disability certification and employment and she can look at accessible transportation as well in her project.
- She also met a member of State Disability committee Mr Amit Dobhal in July to discuss the same and there as well she realised that the focus of the committee as well is on social security like pension rather than on accessible tourism.
- She continued her case studies to document the lived experience of persons with disabilities:
 - Ram Jhula
 - Rishikesh- Javed Choudhari
 - Rishikesh- Jayant
- She had an online meeting with persons with disabilities which facilitated a general discussion of the status quo and the steps to be taken moving forward.

NOVEMBER 2023 TO April 2024

- It was advised by one of the Municipality officials to address the concerns to CM helpline for faster resolution and she followed it up through offline visit as well as online submission of the appeal.

ACHIEVEMENTS

- I got the opportunity to be a guest speaker at IIT Roorkee in March 2022, the topic was Accessibility
- I got the opportunity to present my work at UNESCO Delhi.



EXPERIENCE IN THE FELLOWSHIP

Starting the fellowship was an incredible experience. My initial goal was to broaden my knowledge and understanding of accessibility, especially regarding cross-disability needs. Initially, I had limited knowledge about accessibility laws like the RPWD Act and other policies. However, being part of the fellowship has been enlightening. I've gained a deep understanding of laws, policies, and the diverse needs within the cross-disability community.

Moreover, I've honed my skills in documentation, research, and presentation through participation in panel discussions and showcasing my work multiple times. This exposure has significantly boosted my confidence.

Furthermore, I've gained valuable knowledge about collaborating with government officials, connecting with different departments, and, most importantly, as a person with a disability, understanding and asserting my rights. I now feel empowered to represent the voice of persons with disabilities effectively.

Now, I feel empowered to contribute effectively to accessibility projects. Currently, I'm actively involved in promoting accessibility within my college's Equal Opportunity Cell. I'm confident that these learnings will catalyze positive changes in my career and continue to benefit me in the future.

RESOURCES

Follow Sakshi's work on their social media

