

## **Advocacy Roadmap for Eye Health**

**Inaugural Session: May 13, 2010**

**by Bhushan Punani**

First of all, I congratulate VISION 2020 for selecting “Advocacy Roadmap” as a topic for eye health. When the whole world is shifting from charity to development and recently to “Rights based Approaches” deliberating on “Advocacy” that in ever expanding eye health is a step in the right direction.

At the outset, I admire efforts of VISION 2020 and specially Dr. Tulasiraj, Dr. Rajesh Noah and members of Vision 2020 team who have planned this Workshop in a super professional manner. The schedule of the workshop, Directory of 48 Owners of “Roadmap” and background material is just fantastic. While I have attended and organized numerous such conferences at the national and international level, this Workshop has been planned in the most democratic and professional manner. I am sure the outcome of the Workshop would truly be a very practical and effective Advocacy Roadmap.

While most of sessions are health-oriented and speakers have excellent background in ophthalmology, we do need to consider “right-based” concerns and provision in respect of rehabilitation, low vision and social communication as the same have great relevance to advocacy in eye health. The Section 25 of the Persons with Disabilities Act, 1995 which is a statutory law, casts responsibility upon the Government and Local Authorities to undertake research concerning cause of occurrence of disability including blindness and promote prevention on blindness as a mandatory responsibility. It also desires Governments of ensure screening of all children at least once a year for identifying as risk cases, sponsor awareness campaigns through the use of mass media and organize sensitization of medical staff. In fact, the Government as per the provision of the Act can be compelled to undertake such provision as a responsibility of the State. I am sure you will agree with me these provisions would definitely strengthen “Advocacy Roadmap”

Our country has taken the bold decision of ratifying the U N Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities which devotes a complete chapter on health. The Convention desires provision of all health related services as close to communities as possible as a mandatory provision of the Government. The recent judgment of the Supreme Courts pronounces the UNCRPD as a National Law and directs the Government to adopt and implement all the provision in an expeditious manner. Such self adopted and mandatory provision by which our Government is bound to take newer initiatives of ensuring promotion of health should find a place in our “Advocacy Roadmap”

Even as per the programs of the Ministry of Social Justice & Empowerment, a multi million allocation has been made for providing completely free of cost low vision devices to children with low vision. There is also provision for establishing low vision clinics. Even Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan and Inclusive Education of Children with Disabilities which have multi-million allocations for children at primary school level for provision of low vision devices, large print and other support material.

As all these provision are mandatory and biding upon each citizen of this country including the participants of this Workshop, I am confident the same would a place in envisaged “Advocacy Roadmap”

I am grateful to the organizers of the Workshop for bestowing this honour to a Rehabilitation Professional like me of speaking in the inaugural session.