

# Strategic Vision Features on Disability and Special Needs Issues

“The Multi-Dimensional Ten-Step Scale”

Prof. Dr. Abbas Ali Shallal



## The Goals We Aspire To

The goals we aspire to achieve for persons with disabilities and special needs are great and noble. However, they often collide with the obstacles of reality and the multiple, intertwined challenges. In Iraq, these difficulties and challenges multiply, affecting everyone who attempts to pave even a small part of the way in this field. This is due to many reasons, perhaps foremost among them being the nature and level of awareness and culture prevalent among the relevant officials and decision-makers at all levels, as well as within society across its various segments and groups regarding disability, special needs, and their issues, realities, and future.

Perhaps the best examples and situations that reflect society's perspective and awareness are those that express the prevailing culture among both official and popular circles in our Arab world. This perspective is often limited to pity or compassion toward persons with disabilities—an outlook that appears positive on the surface but is, in essence, negative in its implications and impact. In adopting this view, people overlook the fact that these individuals possess both the ability and the potential to participate in life in all its details and to be active contributors in various aspects of daily work.

## We Aspire To?

We view disability and special needs issues as falling within a ten-step scale of stages and dimensions. This scale, in our belief, encompasses the most important and essential aspects of disability that should be focused on when designing policies. Any project or service related to these issues should be formulated based on these aspects. Therefore, a comprehensive approach involving multiple parties, methods, and activities should be adopted within a well-defined strategic vision.

## What Do We Propose?

From the perspective of a strategic vision in this context, it is suggested to develop a comprehensive and well-governed action plan based on general and specific objectives that are achievable and measurable. This plan should be holistic and integrated in terms of work elements, coordination systems, and across all areas of life.

It is not possible to advance the reality of persons with disabilities and special needs through a single scientific dimension or a single practical field. Often, there is an excessive focus on education and learning while neglecting other crucial areas such as healthcare, vocational training, sports, arts, and employment, among others.

Since the overall goal is to activate all aspects of life and improve the quality of reality concerning this issue, the efforts of the state, its institutions, and all sectors of society must come together to shape a comprehensive and well-regulated project in this context. This requires the participation of ministries and official bodies directly concerned with persons with disabilities and special needs, such as the Ministries of Health, Education, Labor and Social Affairs, Higher Education and Scientific Research, Industry, and Transport, as well as the Commission for the Care of Persons with Disabilities and Special Needs, alongside supporting ministries, relevant authorities, and all other ministries.

It is not possible to advance the reality of persons with disabilities and special needs through a single scientific dimension or a single practical field. Often, there is an excessive focus on education and learning while neglecting other crucial areas such as healthcare, vocational training

We propose...

The launch of the Ten-Tier Framework with Five Dimensions, which consists of ten key phases aimed at revitalizing disability-related issues and empowering persons with disabilities. These phases include: detection, diagnosis, acceptance, care, rehabilitation, training, education, empowerment, housing, and participation.

These phases should be interconnected and strategically linked to five essential dimensions: awareness, legislation, equality, facilitation, and planning. We view disability issues as a holistic system that cannot be effectively addressed, challenges removed, or improvements made without a comprehensive and informed approach that considers all elements.

At its core, the project is based on five detailed dimensions that aim to:

1. Enhance societal and institutional awareness and culture in accepting disability and fully recognizing the rights of persons with disabilities and special needs.
2. Develop necessary legislation to further reinforce awareness and ensure these rights.
3. Implement the principle of equality, create resources, and provide facilitation.
4. All of this is guided by a future vision and strategic planning to achieve sustainable progress.

- ✓ Societal and institutional awareness and culture
- ✓ Legal legislation
- ✓ Opportunity availability and accessibility
- ✓ Resource availability and facilitative measures

✓ Strategic planning

What are the five main Dimensions?

First: Societal and institutional awareness and culture...

The success of any humanitarian project relies, in its initial steps, on society and its belief in this project and its goals. It then depends on the awareness of this society, its culture, and its interaction. Society is the primary driving force behind all elements of the project, holding the initiative and leading in guidance, sustainability, and continuity.

Society must be both willing and ready to accept persons with disabilities within its familial and social systems. It should recognize that no human society is without individuals who think differently, those who have different bodies, and some who have different lifestyles.

This belief, readiness, and awareness are often observed in societies with a rich cultural heritage, which they rely on to build their present and future. These societies work to achieve their aspirations based on knowledge and realistic principles, aiming to benefit from every individual and every resource, as well as to invest in their potential.

Our societies must recognize their roles toward persons with disabilities and take proactive steps to actively participate in everything they can and are asked to do in achieving comprehensive development for all their members, in all areas of life. They should not place the responsibility and active participation solely on the families of persons with disabilities or those working with them.

We propose involving the entire society, with all its segments, classes, and responsibilities, in any project, activity, or program aimed at serving persons with disabilities and special needs. This should start from the very first step toward detection and diagnosis, through acceptance, care, and training, all the way to full participation in all areas of life. We believe that any success in this regard can only be achieved through the involvement of society in general, and families in particular.

We also believe that involving society in addressing disability and special needs issues is the best and most effective way to raise awareness and support their culture toward persons with disabilities, both among community segments and even within institutions and their leaders. Participation and playing an active role pave the way and ease the efforts of spreading culture and awareness in this regard.

### Second: Legal Legislation...

In our Arab countries, including Iraq, there are many laws that support disability issues and protect their rights, which pave the way for their care, education, as well as empowering them and ensuring equality and active participation in various areas of life.

With a simple review and survey of the general legislation or that specific to ministries and institutions, we find a clear deficiency or confusion and delays in the laws and regulations necessary to serve persons with disabilities in all matters concerning them. This includes aspects such as care, training, education, as well as creating measures to ensure accessibility, equality, and ultimately full participation.

The legislative body should reconsider all existing laws related to the issues of persons with disabilities and special needs, and take the initiative to update outdated and obsolete laws. It should then begin enacting missing laws in every area of their lives, based on priorities, importance, and comprehensiveness. Furthermore, it should instruct all ministries and official institutions to review the regulations and instructions issued, and carry out the necessary amendments and updates.

We propose that all processes, steps, and procedures related to legislation, regulations, and laws be coordinated with academics, relevant experts, and those with direct experience, as well as with persons with disabilities and special needs.

### Third: Providing Opportunities and Accessibility...

Achieving the principles of equality, non-discrimination, and dignity among people of different classes, segments, abilities, and qualifications involves several steps. These start with creating opportunities in all areas of life so that each of us can try and do our best to fulfill our duties toward ourselves, others, society, institutions, and the state, and everything around us. Equality should begin by ensuring all rights for persons with disabilities, starting as an initial step through the perspective of "how the law, decision-makers, society, and institutions view persons with disabilities." Additionally, the concepts of "what linguistic, scientific, and official terms are used to define, describe, classify, and deal with persons with disabilities" are crucial.

The principle of accessibility and achieving this right involves overcoming all societal challenges and barriers for persons with disabilities. This means granting individuals with special needs the ability to access everything they aim to reach in their ambitions, aspirations, mobility, and objectives. This includes access to kindergartens, schools, universities, hospitals, airports, streets, public squares, buildings or spaces typically used by the public, hotels, conference centers, medical offices, as well as theaters, sports

stadiums, historical sites, tourist attractions, and more. In other words, it is about granting persons with disabilities the ability to access everything they desire with ease, without cost or suffering.

Fourth: Availability of Resources and Facilitative Measures...

Persons with disabilities and special needs, as well as those working with them in various sectors of life, need resources that are suitable for their abilities, capacities, and the differences they possess. If these resources are not provided or made available, these individuals will not be able to achieve their goals or meet their needs. Therefore, governments and relevant institutions must commit to providing the necessary support to facilitate the required and effective activities to improve the effectiveness of persons with disabilities and empower them. This includes providing appropriate accommodations and tools for their needs, as well as individual support measures.

For example, in the field of education, we need to provide and employ qualified, trained teachers to educate persons with disabilities in schools across various disciplines without the need to create separate schools or classes. Teachers also need the necessary resources to work in a creative learning environment that meets the actual needs of all students, including students with disabilities and special educational needs.

The state should also facilitate the movement of citizens with disabilities in the streets, schools, sports fields, and other areas of life by providing the necessary resources for this purpose, after consulting with them and the professionals and experts in this field.

Fifth: Strategic Planning.

A future vision and strategic planning are very important for all sectors of life, for countries, society, institutions, and even individuals. Their importance increases when dealing with circumstances, changes, and activities that involve significant challenges, such as when drawing up a public policy for the future of generations of persons with disabilities. Strategic planning is a general concept that refers to an organized, regulated process, with steps and procedures planned scientifically,

based on specific timelines and periods, after determining its direction, dimensions, and boundaries. It also involves making decisions regarding the allocation of resources to follow through on its implementation and then objectively evaluating the outcomes.

The purpose of this planning is to answer key questions, including: What are our goals? What should we do? How do we execute? Where are we heading with these actions? What is the time required for implementation? Who will join us in our activities? What are the material and financial resources

needed? ... and other important primary and secondary questions, taking into account the future vision of our activity, mission, and the interrelated and integrated relationships between all aspects and elements of this mission.

The purpose of this planning is to answer key questions, including: What are our goals? What should we do? How do we execute? Where are we heading with these actions? What is the time required for implementation? Who will join us in our activities? What are the material and financial resources needed? ... and other important primary and secondary questions, taking into account the future vision of our activity, mission, and the interrelated and integrated relationships between all aspects and elements of this mission.

What are the ten main axes?

We propose that the project include and focus on the issues and topics of persons with disabilities through the following stages and requirements, represented by the ten main axes:

Axis 1: Early Detection... Early detection is the first and fundamental step in identifying the presence of disability. It does not necessarily have to be medical or even comprehensive. It can be a spontaneous and unintentional step taken by parents or teachers. However, the most important aspect is the necessary training for every responsible person or related party, such as family heads, parents in general, teachers, and staff at health centers related to school affairs and primary care.

Axis 2: Diagnosis... This refers to assigning a categorical classification to an individual, meaning describing the disability and determining the category the person belongs to, along with outlining other necessary procedures. The task here requires a comprehensive and multi-dimensional diagnosis, meaning relying on holistic diagnostic tools and a diverse team of specialists with various expertise and tasks.

Axis 3: Acceptance... Acceptance refers to the individual and society being fully content with the disability and the person's current condition as it is, and to the acceptance of all their traits and characteristics equally, without the desire to change them for any reason. It also involves positive recognition and coexistence from the person with the disability, as well as familial, societal, and institutional acceptance of the disability, working to mitigate its negative effects and benefiting from the inherent strengths available.

Axis 4: Care... Refers to comprehensive support, including psychological, social, health, and financial assistance. It represents a system of multi-dimensional services designed to provide help to individuals and groups so they can achieve a satisfactory standard of living. It also helps them form healthy relationships and strengthens or develops their abilities, fostering harmony between individuals, families, groups, and communities.

Axis 5: Rehabilitation... The process of restoring individuals with disabilities to the fullest extent of their abilities in physical, mental, social, professional, and economic aspects. It involves developing adaptation, adjustment, and self-perception of life. In its comprehensive meaning, it refers to enhancing and developing the capabilities of individuals with disabilities to become independent, productive, and adaptable. It also includes helping the person overcome the negative effects of disability and impairment. Rehabilitation efforts are directed towards achieving a specific goal within a limited time, enabling the individual and their family to overcome the consequences of impairment and regain or acquire their role in life, relying on themselves and reaching the best functional level, whether mentally, physically, or socially.

Axis 6: Training... This process primarily aims to provide and acquire the experiences and knowledge that the individual needs, along with the information and data they lack, as well as the necessary skills and behavioral patterns for life, adaptation, and work. It also involves the development of the necessary habits and practices to increase the level of adjustment and efficiency. It is a complex concept made up of several elements, meaning improvement or development in the individual's knowledge, ideas, skills, and overall behaviors. The goal is to adequately prepare the individual to meet the demands of current jobs and to develop all their skills, such as language, movement, artistic, and intellectual abilities, to address future needs and achieve success. It is particularly crucial for individuals with disabilities who are unable to learn or receive education.

Axis 7: Education... This generally refers to an organized process aimed at providing and acquiring the fundamental knowledge bases. It is carried out in an organized and intentional manner with specific and known goals. It primarily involves the systematic transfer of information to the learner. It includes the information, knowledge, experiences, and skills acquired by the learner through certain methods. Education is designed to help the learner make the desired changes through their learning. There is an urgent need for all categories of individuals with disabilities who are capable of learning and education



whether within formal educational institutions or other non-formal ones.

Axis 8: Empowerment... This refers to the ability of individuals and groups to control their circumstances, exercise authority, and achieve their personal goals. It is the process through which individuals and groups are able, both individually and collectively, to help themselves and others achieve the greatest possible value in their lives. Empowerment represents an increase in the capacity of individuals or groups to make choices and transform those choices into actions and outcomes that contribute to the development of both individual and collective assets, improving the efficiency and integrity of the organizational and institutional context that governs the use of these assets. It also refers to measures aimed at increasing the degree of self-determination and autonomy for people and local communities, enabling them to represent their interests in a responsible and self-defined way, in order to build their own authority. It involves the process of self-empowerment and professional support, especially for people with disabilities, enabling them to overcome feelings of helplessness, lack of influence, and managing their personal resources effectively.

Axis 9: Placement... In its general meaning, it refers to the process of placing an employee in a position that matches their qualifications, skills, abilities, personal traits, and experience. This means placing a person in a job or role that aligns with their unique characteristics, qualifications, and level of experience. Therefore, the individual differences among people with disabilities, as well as between them and others, necessitate the regulation of selection, work, and employment standards. This is essential for achievement, work performance, and improving overall productivity.

Axis 10: Participation... Refers to the active and shared use of life and the fair distribution of resources and roles based on characteristics and qualifications, without discrimination or exclusion for any reason. It also represents the act of actively engaging in any type of political or administrative activities, decision-making, as well as all kinds of social activities, whether they are within the community or outside, and whether carried out individually or collectively.