

(b) What is the number of visually disabled scholars in Universities of the country?

THE MINISTER OF STATE IN THE MINISTRY OF SOCIAL JUSTICE AND EMPOWERMENT (SHRI KRISHAN PAL): (a) In the year 2014-15, the Government of India launched the Central Sector Scheme of support "for establishment, modernization, capacity augmentation of Braille Presses" to be implemented by National Institute for Empowerment of Persons with Visual Disabilities (NIEPVD), Dehradun, for timely availability of Braille text books to the students with visual impairment. Under the scheme, 22 Braille presses have been established.

The Central Braille Press of the NIEPVD, Dehradun, the Regional Braille Press of the NIEPVD at Chennai and four small scale Braille printing units at Shillong, Guwahati, Aizwal and Agartala, altogether print Braille literature in 14 languages *i.e.* Hindi, English, Sanskrit, Urdu, Punjabi, Bengali, Assamese, Garo, Khasi, Lusai, Nagamese, Tamil, Kannada and Telugu. The Central Braille Press and Regional Braille Press of the Institute are producing NCERT books which are prescribed in all Kendriya Vidyalaya. The institute has supplied these books on demand to Government of Delhi, Government of Himachal Pradesh, Chandigarh and some schools in Jharkhand.

There are three Universities having their own Braille presses to cater to the needs of the students with visual impairment.

Teachers who are visually impaired are provided Readers Allowance annually to meet all kinds of their academic expenses including purchase of Braille books and recorded materials.

(b) As per the inputs received, there are 62 scholars with visual impairment in the Central Universities of the country.

Status of cluster development programmes for backward communities

561. SHRI SAMBHAJI CHHATRAPATI: Will the Minister of SOCIAL JUSTICE AND EMPOWERMENT be pleased to state:

(a) whether the National Backward Classes Finance and Development Corporation (NBCFDC) has initiated any exercise to plan Cluster Development Programmes for the backward communities in different parts of the country;

(b) if so, the details thereof; and

(c) what physical progress has been made with respect to each of the proposed clusters during the last three years and the benefits accrued to the community in general?

THE MINISTER OF STATE IN THE MINISTRY OF SOCIAL JUSTICE AND EMPOWERMENT (SHRI KRISHAN PAL): (a) Yes, National Backward Classes Finance and Development Corporation (NBCFDC) has introduced Technology Upgradation Schemes from February, 2018 for development of clusters for the backward classes community in different parts of the country.

(b) The scheme details are given below:—

- (i) Financial Assistance upto ₹ 30,000/- per Backward Classes beneficiary for procurement of machinery/equipment with accessories for technology upgradation and/or capacity augmentation subject to availability of funds, evidence for sustainability of project etc. is provided with 90% financial assistance by NBCFDC and 10% by beneficiary.
- (ii) Upto ₹ 30,000/- per beneficiary for entrepreneurship development and other specialized training is earmarked with 100% financial assistance by NBCFDC.
- (iii) Upto ₹ 6 lakh per SHG (with minimum 10 members) for development of common infrastructure/establishing of marketing linkages etc. is provided with 80% financial assistance by NBCFDC and 20% by SHG.

(c) Since the scheme was introduced in February, 2018 the Corporation invited proposals from its State Channelizing Agencies and other reputed Government Institutions under this Scheme in May, 2018 and August, 2018.

During the current financial year, the Corporation has sanctioned Entrepreneurship Development Programme (EDP) for 36 members of the clusters of wood inlay to be executed by National Institute for Micro, Small and Medium Enterprises (ni-msme) at Mysuru, Karnataka.

Corporation has also sanctioned EDP and specialized programme for technology upgradation for 52 members of the clusters of Garment Construction Technician in Budgam and Hazaratbal (Jammu and kashmir) to be executed by Jammu and kashmir State Women's Development Corporation.

The above scheme will improve the knowledge in technological upgradation and income of the weaker section with improvement in quality and productivity of the products/services being rendered by members of backward classes.

The scheme would enable backward classes members to face the competition in domestic and international markets.