

## **SARIC Podcasts for Training and Networking Services**

### **Script for Podcast 2**

#### **Ruth**

Hi, and welcome to the Why Gender and Social Inclusion Matters in Infrastructure mini-podcast series.

My name is Ruth Lancaster, and joining me is my business partner and good friend, Dr Anu Mundkur. Anu and I are co-directors of a small business called Equalis, which is a gender equality, disability and social inclusion-focused consultancy. We're based here in Australia and concentrating on the regions of South Asia, the Pacific and Australia.

But just before we shift into this episode, I would like to acknowledge the traditional owners of the land that we are broadcasting from. I'm on beautiful Wurundjeri lands in Melbourne, Victoria, and Anu is on Kurna land in Adelaide, South Australia. We would like to pay our respects to elders past, present and emerging and extend that respect to all Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples today.

#### **Anu**

Hello and welcome again to SARIC's mini-podcast series Gender and Social Inclusion Matters in Infrastructure where we aim to spark conversations and inspire ideas on building infrastructure, transport and energy sectors that are more inclusive – in other words, how can we ensure that our infrastructure investments result in well-designed and managed projects that facilitate gender equality and social inclusion that benefit everyone. This podcast is commissioned under the South Asia Regional Infrastructure Connectivity Program, also known as SARIC supported by the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade.

Ruth, what are we talking about today?

#### **Ruth**

Anu, hi, it's great to be back for our second episode of the SARIC podcast series. Today we're focusing on disability inclusive infrastructure and what does that involve and why is it important? Our guests are Dr. Shivani Gupta and Tammy McGown. Shivani is senior inclusive designer manager at the Global Disability Innovation Hub and our second guest, who is Tammy McGown, is an experienced disability consultant with Maven.

Welcome Shivani and welcome Tammy, we really appreciate your time. Shivani, let's start with you if we can. Could you tell us a little bit more about yourself and also about your work with the Global Disability Innovation Hub?

**Shivani**

Thanks Ruth, it's really great for me to be here.

I am a person who is passionate about inclusive environments and considers them as one of the pre-conditions for the inclusion of persons with disabilities. My interest initially was prompted by my lived experience of disability - I have been a wheelchair user for over 30 years, and my interest has now changed to my profession. I went on to do a Masters in Inclusive Environments and a PhD on the lives of persons living in rural India. Presently I am very happy to be working with the GDI Hub.

The GDI Hub or the Global Disability Innovation Hub is a research and practice centre driving disability innovation for a fairer world. And our vision is of a world without barriers to participation and equitable opportunity for all. I am part of the Inclusive Design team. We have just completed a 4-year research in six cities around the world on inclusive design under the AT2030 programme funded by the Foreign Commonwealth Department Office of the United Kingdom. This piece of research has great significance because by 2050 it is projected that 60% of the world population would be living in cities and this research fills the current gap in knowledge around building inclusive cities, especially in low and middle-income settings. So, look out for a Global Action Report that we hope to publish by the end of the year.

**Ruth**

That research sounds really interesting. Shivani, it would be of great interest I know to all the listeners. Tammy over to you, we'd love to hear a bit more about you and also about your work with Maven.

**Tammy:**

Hi Ruth and thank you all of you for inviting me to join you in this conversation today. I am particularly excited to be in the presence of Dr Shivani today.

I'm a late diagnosed woman with multiple disabilities. I am autistic, ADHD and dyslexic. I have low vision and auditory processing disorder. I also have chronic illness and pain conditions. I have worked in the community services sector for 15 years, specifically in the disability sector for the last eight years. I have been a disability advocate since my first diagnosis 10 years ago and work as a consultant and volunteer for disability advocacy organisations. For example, the Autistic Realm Australia, also known as TARA on the internet. I've been working with Palladium on the Maven team for almost two years. The Maven team is a group of people with disabilities who work together and individually to promote access and inclusion. What we do is offer tailored training, document revision, public speaking, policy and procedure writing, and mentoring. We create work access plans for individuals and we create easy-read translations of formal documents.

I enjoy my work because I am contributing my skills and experience as an advocate to improve people's lives.

**Ruth**

Yeah, I can see Tammy that would be the value you would add to this sector with the understanding you would have, I think would be amazing. So it's wonderful to have you on this podcast. Tammy, if I can bounce back to you, we hear a lot about universal design and very simply can you explain to us what does universal design mean and why do they matter? Why does it matter for infrastructure development?

**Tammy:**

Universal design is basically about creating spaces that everyone can use. A well-known example of universal design is having ramps leading up to buildings instead of stairs. Ramps help everyone, not just people using wheelchairs. Other examples of universal design include speaking elevators and changing fluorescent lighting to dimmable lighting. These changes help everyone.

**Ruth**

I'm a little bit amazed myself to see that it's taken so long and that how many of us had not even considered all these things before, but slowly and hopefully surely we're starting to see these changes appear. Shivani, what do you see as some of the economic and social benefits of inclusive design?

**Shivani**

The need for universal and inclusive design spaces, technologies, products or policies is really important. And many people are recognizing its phenomenal impact on the community and economic benefits that it has. And I say economic because if environments are universally designed, they benefit all and therefore no extra investments are required. For example, if an entrance is accessible to all versus the main entrance and a separate accessible entrance that has been retrofitted to allow persons with disabilities. Retro-fitting is known to cost up to 20 times more than building inclusive design from the beginning of the project planning where costs are negligible and maybe up to only 1% of the total project costs.

Then there is a cost of exclusion of persons with disabilities. According to the International Labour Organization, economic losses related to the exclusion of persons with disabilities from labour workforce are large and measurable, ranging from 3 to 7% of the gross domestic product or the GDP. Some of which can be discovered if inclusive environments are provided.

**Ruth**

Tammy, do you have anything to add to that point around the economic and social benefits of inclusive design?

**Tammy**

In Australia, only 42% of autistics like myself are financially participating in the economy as far as having paid working opportunities and having inclusive environments is definitely a barrier to people like myself participating in paid employment.

**Ruth**

That would be wonderful to see that 42% get to 80% or higher in the next few years. There is a goal for people in infrastructure design. Anu, can I hand over to you? You may have a question for Tammy or Shivani or both.

**Anu**

Actually, I have a question for both of you. How does inclusive infrastructure contribute to greater social inclusion and participation for people with disability? Shivani, do you want to go first?

**Shivani:**

Sure, Anu. Inclusive environments are a pre-condition for the inclusion of persons with disabilities. Inaccessible infrastructure results in physical barriers for persons with disabilities. Building inclusive infrastructure is the only way to overcome these physical barriers and as we reduce these barriers it enables better opportunities and increased

participation of persons with disabilities in society, which can ultimately also help reduce stigma and attitudinal barriers.

Inclusive infrastructure is linked to development and this link needs to become more prevalent in the global south. From the AT2030 research we undertook in 6 cities across three global south continents, Persons with disabilities shared that inclusive infrastructure, especially housing, can make them more independent in their daily life and thus be less dependent on their family and friends. Inclusive infrastructure enables them to access essential services and public transport, essential to support education and employment opportunities.

They also expressed that community services and facilities should be more inclusive including schools, hospitals, financial services like banks, shopping areas and other recreational places. Not having access, being excluded, leaves persons with disabilities behind and so it is not surprising that there is a high rate of illiteracy among children with disabilities in low and middle-income countries.

People with disabilities we interviewed also highlighted how their communities did not address their accessibility requirements putting them at greater disadvantage during disasters. Inclusive infrastructure makes environments more resilient for persons with disabilities during disasters, often an outcome of climate change.

**Anu:** Tammy do you have anything to add to what Shivani said?

**Tammy)**

People with disabilities experience barriers to social inclusion every day. The world wasn't designed to accommodate us. We have to consider every part of our day when we plan to leave our homes. We have to think about whether transport will accommodate us, whether we can get into and out of buildings safely, whether we can access a bathroom and if we will be overstimulated by the environment we are in.

For autistic people like me, we can often find spaces that are too loud, too bright and too smelly.

Most community environments play loud music and have very bright lighting so I need to wear ear plugs or noise-cancelling headphones and sunglasses to even have a coffee with a friend at a coffee shop. If I don't wear my hearing aid I cannot hear my friends speaking to me in public places because there are too many noises happening at the same time and my brain can't choose what to focus on. Instead of being a relaxing catch up with my friends I often feel confused, over stimulated and isolated.

When I ask small shops to turn down their music so that I can hear, it often changes the whole experience, not just for me, but for everybody else in that space. Because the

things that I experience as barriers often affect other people who don't have disabilities too, or who have disabilities, but they haven't acknowledged that openly, haven't shared it with people. And it's also a natural part of ageing to develop some of the disabilities that I live with at my age.

Poor public signage is a huge barrier for me as I often feel lost or waste physical energy trying to find places. Having more signs that are easier to read would really help me, and it would also help older people and people who don't use English as their first language in Australia..

Since the Covid-19 pandemic public seating has been removed in many places I used to go to with friends or support workers. And this means I now have to bring my own mobility equipment like a walker with a built-in seat or my walking stick if I'm going anywhere that I would be required to stand for more than a few minutes at a time.

Being able to access buildings that have universal designs means that I would be able to participate just like everybody else can in my country, the people that don't have these disabilities.

It is the difference between choosing to leave my home or staying at home because it is easier for me.

Anu

Thanks for that insight, Tammy. Shivani, what about barriers that you have encountered in low-income and middle-income countries?

Shivani

Some barriers that we see repeated in all the cities where we conducted our research include poor implementation of the policy framework that countries have for inclusive environments; and this may simply mean not using the accessibility standards when building.

There is often a lack of accountability and responsibility to ensure that infrastructure is inclusive.

Then there are often budgetary constraints, and there isn't an earmarked budget to incorporate accessibility.

Practitioners such as planners/architects are not always aware of what is required to make the environment inclusive, as most schools of planning and architecture do not have inclusive environments as a core subject.

The planning processes typically do not engage persons with disabilities and therefore their concerns get left out.

Some recommendations from my perspective would be to strengthen the implementation mechanism with vigilant monitoring of new construction. Country governments to develop implementation plans in consultation with persons with disabilities and other stakeholders for retrofitting accessibility of existing infrastructure. These plans must be at the local level and be linked to other development plans for the area. There must be timeframes, monitoring milestones and budgetary allocations. A lot of this implementation can be achieved by ensuring the procurement or contracting process of any infrastructure requires that the outcome complies with accessibility standards for infrastructure that the country has.

There needs to be awareness raising of all stakeholders and of the community at large about the benefits, importance and ways of creating inclusive environments. Making a compulsory basic course on building inclusive infrastructure for students of architecture and planning will also be a key recommendation.

Anu

Thanks, Shivani, for some of those really practical recommendations. Ruth, I think we have time for one more question.

Ruth

Shivani and Tammy, a question for you both. Given your expertise in this area and also your lived experience, can I ask what advice would you give to those involved in planning and building infrastructure on how they can be more disability inclusive? Tammy, can I start perhaps with you first?

Tammy:

Certainly. Firstly, I'd just like to agree completely with what Shivani mentioned. My advice is very similar which is to include people with disabilities in your planning. Speak to disability-led organisations and businesses like Palladium who promote co-design with the people who will use your spaces.

Hidden disabilities, or disability that you cannot see when you meet a person, are becoming more well known now. So, everyone is aware that we need to think beyond only providing wheelchair access, although there is still a lot of work that needs to be done to improve access for people living with physical disabilities in Australia too.

In response to the growing number of people being diagnosed with hidden disabilities, the Government has recognized that building design and access to public buildings and transport needs to change. People are starting to think about addressing sensory barriers - what we see, hear and smell when they plan new spaces.

One of the things the Maven team do is offer to go into places like public buildings and One of the things that the Maven team do is offer to go into public places, for example, public buildings and review the customer experience that we had. We are able to point

out the dangerous uneven paths, the lack of bathroom access, or signage, design that's too busy, for example, really patterned carpets in rooms and even chemical smells that people without disability may not have noticed.

In Australia we have National Disability Standards and Building Standards, but we still don't see enough consultation with people who will use the spaces. When we have an opportunity to talk about plans, we will be able to point out barriers and offer design solutions that work for everyone.

Really, there should not be any design started without actually talking to the people who need to use all of the spaces and not just the non-disabled community.

**Ruth**

Before I hand over to you, Shivani, I think what Maven is offering in this, it makes absolute sense, why would you not engage Maven or maybe it's, you know, another organisation to have a look at the design? It makes absolute sense. Shivani, can I hand over to you on perhaps just that final question?

**Shivani:**

I fully agree with Tammy about the importance of engaging with persons with disabilities. I'd just like to add that Inclusive infrastructure is not about designing and planning only for persons with disability it is more about addressing everyone needs. However, persons with disabilities are a heterogeneous group with diverse requirements and addressing this diversity would already ensure that most needs of other groups such as older persons are also met.

**Ruth**

That was a really interesting conversation and I know Anu probably feels the same, that we could talk for hours about this. It's just been really interesting and quite a fascinating conversation. So thank you very much, Dr. Shivani Gupta and also Tammy McGown for your time and your expertise.

There were so many things to take away from the conversation we've had today, Anu. What were some of the highlights that you found?

**Anu**

Ruth, for me, one of the things that really struck me was the point that whether we were building big infrastructure projects or whether we are just renovating, we really need to consider people with disabilities and their organisations.

The other thing that really struck me was the comment that Shivani made around stigma. If we had inclusive design, we would be seeing more people with disabilities in



the public. They'd be out and about. They'd be participating in our workforces. They would be part of going to the movies, recreation, community work. Just seeing more people with disabilities out and about can really help deal with the stigma and attitudinal barriers that they face.

**Ruth**

Yeah, I agree with you. The other thing that stood out for me, Anu, was the economic losses related to the exclusions of person with disabilities from the labour force. I found that really interesting, not only to GDP, but also as well to the cost of business if they have to retrofit as opposed to having that as part of their early design.

So I think that was a really interesting conversation. That's a wrap. Please use the comment section below to share your thoughts on this podcast and the issues you would like us to cover. Our next podcast drops in August and we will be discussing how we can diversify the infrastructure workforce so we can ensure equal opportunity for all in this growing sector. We hope you'll join us.

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**Cue Music**