



## Research on the realization path of common prosperity of the disabled from the perspective of feasibility theory

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### Abstract

Common prosperity for all people in the process of Chinese modernization is one of the goals pursued in the development of socialism with Chinese characteristics. As a vulnerable group, the development level of people with disabilities reflects, to some extent, the degree of social equity and social civilization. However, due to limitations such as physiological impairments, social environmental barriers, and imperfect institutional safeguards, people with disabilities in China currently face challenges in educational attainment, employment, social activities, and equal opportunities. From the perspective of feasible capabilities, this paper explores the practical obstacles and causes hindering common prosperity for people with disabilities in China. It argues that common prosperity for people with disabilities is not merely a process of income growth but also a process of enhancing capabilities and opportunities. The main challenges in the development of people with disabilities in China include insufficient capability development, unequal social opportunities, and an imperfect institutional support system. Therefore, solutions to common prosperity for people with disabilities can be sought through improving their capability development, perfecting employment and income security mechanisms, enhancing social security and public service systems, promoting social integration, and establishing multi-stakeholder collaborative governance mechanisms. The study concludes that building an inclusive social policy system centered on capability development is a crucial approach to enabling people with disabilities and all members of society to share the fruits of development and achieve common prosperity.

**Keywords:** Capability theory, persons with disabilities, common prosperity, social integration

### Introduction

Common prosperity is the essential requirement of socialism and a defining feature of China's modernization. Since the 18th National Congress of the Communist Party of China, President Xi Jinping has elevated the common prosperity of all people to the level of national development strategy, proposing it as a key value orientation for advancing China's modernization. Unlike the capital-driven modernization in the West, China's approach fundamentally adheres to the principles of development for the people, development relying on the people, and shared benefits of development, promoting comprehensive human development and social harmony through high-quality development. Therefore, common prosperity encompasses not only economic income growth but also equitable opportunities and enhanced capabilities in education, employment, healthcare, and social participation. On this basis, the concept of common prosperity has gradually expanded beyond income distribution to become a holistic notion encompassing economic prosperity, social equity, and comprehensive human development. China's modernization strives to ensure all people share the fruits of development, with its essence being the continuous reduction of disparities between urban and rural residents, regions, and different groups through institutional design and social governance measures, promoting a more balanced and coordinated societal development. In the process of achieving common prosperity, the development status of disadvantaged groups serves as a crucial indicator of social equity. Thus, safeguarding the development opportunities and capabilities of disadvantaged groups during the journey toward common prosperity has become a key focus in current social policy research. People with disabilities, as a special vulnerable group, face challenges that extend beyond personal well-

being, directly impacting the progress of social equity and civilizational advancement. China's disability sector development reveals persistent structural barriers for persons with disabilities in education, employment, and social participation. Their ability to progress alongside society serves as a key indicator of common prosperity. From a developmental perspective, persons with disabilities are not only vital beneficiaries of social security but also active contributors to societal progress. Advancing shared prosperity for persons with disabilities reflects both the strengths of the socialist system and modern social governance.

In the practice of common prosperity in China, people with disabilities have always been at the center of national and social discourse. Important Party meetings and development plans have proposed to continuously improve the living and development conditions of people with disabilities, enhance their self-development capabilities, promote their all-round development, and join the rest of the nation in building a moderately prosperous society in all respects. Some scholars argue that the development level of people with disabilities is an important criterion for measuring whether a society has a high level of social security, and it also reflects the degree of social equity and inclusion. Research indicates that the extent to which common prosperity is achieved among people with disabilities serves as an important measure of China's common prosperity level. Therefore, under the backdrop of common prosperity, incorporating the group of people with disabilities into the research framework of common prosperity holds significant theoretical and practical implications for advancing social equity and integration.

The concept of capacity is a crucial starting point in disability studies, as individuals with disabilities face

greater challenges in transitioning due to physiological limitations and socio-cultural factors. For instance, they often incur higher healthcare costs than able-bodied individuals with equivalent incomes, making it difficult for their earnings to fully translate into capacity. Moreover, institutional barriers and social discrimination in the community may further hinder the development of disability-related capabilities. Research indicates that poverty among people with disabilities is largely a deprivation of capacity, and enhancing their capacity levels serves as an effective means to advance social equity and development.

Therefore, the study of common prosperity of the disabled based on the feasibility theory is helpful to get rid of the traditional income-centered analysis, shift the attention from the redistribution of resources to the ability and opportunity, and also help to grasp the causes behind the development difficulties of the disabled more completely, and on this basis, think about how the disabled can better go to the road of common prosperity.

## **Theoretical Basis**

### **1. The Proposal and Development of Feasibility Theory**

The Capability Approach, a seminal development theory proposed by Nobel laureate Amartya Sen in the 1980s, emerged from critical reflections on traditional welfare economics and utilitarian frameworks. While conventional welfare economics prioritizes income or utility maximization as social welfare metrics, Sen demonstrated that such singular indicators fail to adequately capture individual living conditions or societal equity—particularly in studying disadvantaged groups. He argued that metrics like income or resources alone might obscure disparities in how individuals transform their resources into life opportunities. To address this, Sen introduced the concept of "capability" as a framework for evaluating both personal quality of life and societal development.

The core of the feasibility theory lies in emphasizing what individuals can "do" and "become." According to Sen, societal development should not merely focus on increasing wealth or resources, but rather on expanding personal choices and the freedom to pursue diverse lifestyles. In other words, development is not about economic growth alone, but rather the expansion of human freedom and capabilities. From this perspective, social evaluation should shift its focus to fostering individual capacity development and promoting comprehensive human development.

With the evolution of theoretical frameworks, the capability theory has emerged as a cornerstone for development economics, social policy research, and studies on social equity. Scholars widely acknowledge that this theory transcends traditional income-centric evaluation models by prioritizing human capacity development as the core criterion for assessing social progress. It provides a new theoretical framework for understanding poverty, inequality, and social exclusion. The concept of capability is primarily applied in sociological and policy-oriented research, with applications spanning educational equity, social security, social exclusion, and the development of vulnerable groups. Furthermore, it offers a fresh theoretical perspective for examining structural inequalities in social development processes.

### **2. Feasibility and Functional Implementation**

In the theory of capabilities, "Functionings" and "Capabilities" are two core concepts. Sen defines "Functionings" as the actual living conditions a person achieves, such as education, social participation, and physical health. "Capabilities" refer to the real opportunities and freedom an individual has to achieve different combinations of Functionings, essentially the freedom to choose how one lives. In other words, Functionings represent the actual living conditions a person possesses, while Capabilities denote the potential living opportunities available to an individual.

Theoretically, capacity refers to the potential for possibility. When an individual in society has not yet attained a certain standard of living but possesses the potential to achieve it, this represents the expansion of capacity. For instance, when someone has the opportunity to attend school but has not yet done so, their capacity has expanded. Thus, capacity not only reflects an individual's current living standards but also indicates whether the social system provides sufficient opportunities for personal development.

The true measure of social development lies not in whether resources are fairly distributed, but in whether individuals can pursue diverse lifestyles. When institutional frameworks or structural limitations deny basic developmental opportunities, genuine progress remains elusive. This is why capability theory advocates expanding individual potential through policy reforms, ensuring all members can grow and realize their worth on a level playing field.

### **3. The Relationship Between Resources, Capacity, and Development**

The capability theory has enriched the traditional resource-oriented development perspective. The "resources-capability-development" analytical framework stands as a core tenet of this theory. While conventional social development models typically equate progress with resource accumulation, capability theory emphasizes that resources do not directly generate human capabilities. Instead, the crucial process involves transforming resources into capabilities. Firstly, resources form the foundational basis for capability development. Essential resources in education, healthcare, employment, and social security create necessary conditions for capability growth. When these resources are scarce, individuals' potential for capability development becomes significantly constrained. Secondly, resource-to-capability conversion is influenced by multiple factors. Sen identifies three key elements: individual attributes, societal structures, and institutional frameworks. For instance, personal physical condition, educational attainment, and social networks determine how effectively individuals utilize resources. Meanwhile, social institutions and environments shape resource utilization through institutionalized mechanisms and societal norms.

Third, the development of human capabilities is an outcome of social progress. Social development encompasses not only economic growth but also the comprehensive enhancement of individuals' competencies. A society is considered developmental when people have expanded opportunities to pursue diverse lifestyles and can autonomously choose their preferred ways of living. From the perspective of capability development, the objective of social policies is to broaden individual capacities through institutional frameworks and social services, thereby advancing social equity and justice.

## **Main Problems in the Common Prosperity of the Disabled**

The disability sector has made remarkable strides toward common prosperity in the new era. Yet overall, people with disabilities still face structural challenges in areas like developmental capacity, social opportunities, and institutional barriers. From the perspective of capability theory, common prosperity for people with disabilities involves not only income disparities but also limitations in capacity development and unequal social opportunities. Due to individual conditions, social environments, and institutional arrangements, significant obstacles persist in transforming resources into capabilities and capabilities into developmental outcomes. Therefore, a thorough analysis of the key challenges to common prosperity for people with disabilities is crucial for exploring viable pathways to achieve it.

### **1. Insufficient capacity development**

Disability constitutes one of the primary manifestations of developmental limitations for individuals with disabilities. From a capability perspective, human development relies not only on resources but also on individuals' ability to utilize these resources to achieve authentic life possibilities. However, due to physiological impairments and social environmental factors, some disabled individuals still require improvement in educational attainment, work capacity, and social interaction skills. Firstly, in education, disparities in educational levels persist among disabled individuals. Although China's special education system has made continuous progress, some disabled individuals—particularly those in rural areas—still face challenges such as relatively backward educational conditions and insufficient educational support, hindering their access to adequate educational resources and thus constraining human capital development. Low educational attainment among disabled individuals limits their employability and impedes their social integration. Secondly, in terms of employability, some disabled individuals exhibit low vocational skills and poor job adaptability. Factors such as low educational levels and limited vocational training give them an unfair advantage in the job market. Additionally, prolonged reliance on family or social assistance has led some disabled individuals to lack self-development capabilities and career planning skills, resulting in sustained weakening of their developmental potential. Thirdly, insufficient social participation and limited opportunities for social activities are prevalent. Firstly, incomplete barrier-free infrastructure development makes it difficult for some disabled individuals to engage in normal social interactions due to transportation barriers. Secondly, entrenched societal stereotypes about disability persist, creating obstacles for the disabled community to integrate smoothly into society. The low level of self-ability development of persons with disabilities is not only unfavorable to the development of persons with disabilities, but also unfavorable to their participation in social creation and sharing of social development achievements.

### **2. Social inequality of opportunity**

The second category involves social opportunity inequality, a key structural factor affecting the common prosperity of people with disabilities. The capability theory posits that individual development depends not only on personal capacity but also on whether social institutions provide

equitable opportunities. In reality, disparities persist in education, employment, and social participation for people with disabilities, primarily stemming from institutional environments and societal perceptions. Firstly, limited employment opportunities. Although China has implemented a quota-based employment system for people with disabilities, some employers still hold discriminatory views in practice, creating employment barriers. Secondly, the scarcity of accessible job positions further restricts employment choices for people with disabilities.

Secondly, the issue of unequal social resource allocation between people with disabilities and the general public persists. Due to limited access to information and social capital, some individuals with disabilities struggle to obtain relevant information on education, employment, policy support, and social welfare benefits, resulting in disparities in their developmental rights. Thirdly, in terms of social participation, people with disabilities still have limited opportunities to engage in public affairs and organizational activities. The lack of barrier-free infrastructure in public spaces and the persistence of implicit social discrimination have significantly reduced their participation in public life. The uneven distribution of social opportunities not only hinders their individual development but also widens the gap between them and the broader societal average.

### **3. Incomplete institutional support system**

Thirdly, the institutional support system for people with disabilities to achieve common prosperity remains underdeveloped. While China's social security framework for persons with disabilities has been continuously improved in recent years, there are still shortcomings in public service provision, policy implementation, and social security support. Firstly, regarding the social security system, although basic living standards for persons with disabilities have been steadily enhanced, the current level still falls short of their actual needs. Many individuals face substantial financial burdens from high medical costs, rehabilitation expenses, and long-term care requirements, which place significant pressure on their families. Moreover, disparities in policy implementation across regions have led to uneven welfare distribution. Secondly, in terms of public services, rehabilitation, educational support, and assistive technology systems for persons with disabilities require further development. Rural areas, in particular, lack sufficient rehabilitation resources and professional services, negatively impacting their functional recovery and development. Additionally, social support mechanisms lack multi-stakeholder collaboration. Disability affairs require not only government involvement but also participation from social organizations, businesses, and community groups. However, social organizations are still in their early stages of service delivery, and social resources are underutilized. In summary, insufficient capacity, unfair social opportunity distribution, and inadequate institutional support systems have become major obstacles in the shared prosperity process for persons with disabilities. These factors collectively create multiple disadvantages for some individuals during their transition from resource acquisition to functional development and eventual advancement. Therefore, in the process of shared prosperity for persons with disabilities, assistance should be provided in terms of capacity development and equal opportunities, while institutional mechanisms should be improved to enable persons with disabilities to better integrate into society and gain greater development space.

## **Pathways to Achieving Common Prosperity for Persons with Disabilities from the Perspective of Feasibility**

According to the theory of capability, the most crucial goal in social development is the diversity of lifestyles available to individuals and the freedom they derive from. In the context of disability, promoting shared prosperity for people with disabilities goes beyond mere income growth. It involves expanding their capacity through institutional frameworks and social support, enabling them to access education, secure employment, and integrate into society on par with others. Therefore, achieving shared prosperity for people with disabilities requires a systematic approach grounded in capability and opportunity perspectives, culminating in comprehensive policy frameworks rooted in capability-based principles.

### **1. Enhancing the Level of Disability Capacity Development**

From a capacity perspective, an individual's development depends not only on the resources they can access, but also on their ability to utilize these resources to create the life they desire. Therefore, in promoting shared prosperity for people with disabilities, efforts should focus on enhancing their self-development capabilities through education, vocational training, and capacity building.

1.1 Strengthening educational support for people with disabilities. Education serves as a vital pathway for personal growth and a key mechanism for social mobility. For individuals with disabilities, education not only improves their knowledge and skills but also enhances their social participation. Thus, it is essential to further refine the educational support system for people with disabilities. On one hand, we should continue advancing inclusive education to provide more equitable access to schooling for students with disabilities, ensuring their right to regular education. Simultaneously, we must strengthen the development of specialized educational resources, improve the integration mechanism between special education schools and regular schools, and offer more diverse educational opportunities for children and adolescents with different types of disabilities. Additionally, we should increase educational support for college students with disabilities through scholarships, grants, and barrier-free learning environments, creating more possibilities for their further education.

1.2 Enhancing vocational skills training. Vocational skills form the foundation for employment and income growth for people with disabilities. In the current context of evolving employment structures, it is crucial to strengthen the vocational skills training system tailored for people with disabilities. Training programs should be designed based on their physical conditions and employment needs, ensuring relevance and practicality in content delivery. Third, leverage new employment opportunities created by the digital economy to conduct digital skills training, enhancing the capabilities of people with disabilities in using information technology, engaging in e-commerce, and remote work. Simultaneously, strengthen the connection between vocational training and the job market, improving employment conversion rates through school-enterprise cooperation and other methods.

1.3 Enhance self-development capabilities. Beyond education and training, it is essential to boost the self-development abilities of people with disabilities by implementing social support and capacity-building projects to strengthen their confidence and social participation awareness. Examples include disability capacity development programs, social participation activities for people with disabilities, and psychological support services, all aimed at improving their social adaptability and self-development awareness. Finally, encourage people with disabilities to participate in social organizations and community activities, enabling them to continuously improve their social interaction and participation skills through practical social engagement.

### **2. Improving the Employment and Income Security Mechanism for Persons with Disabilities**

Employment serves as a vital pathway to shared prosperity and a crucial channel for people with disabilities to integrate into society. Stable employment and income growth not only improve their living conditions but also enhance their social participation. Therefore, it is essential to further improve the employment and income security system for people with disabilities. 1. Broaden employment channels for people with disabilities. Regarding employment opportunities, continuous efforts should be made to expand access for this group. On one hand, implement the quota-based employment system for people with disabilities and strengthen supervision of employers' social responsibilities. On the other hand, encourage the development of new employment models such as flexible employment, home-based work, and digital platform employment. Simultaneously, increase support for employment and improve the employment service system by providing career guidance, job information consultation, and employment assistance to help people with disabilities achieve employment and entrepreneurship. 2. Promote the development of supported employment. Supported employment is a key approach to enabling some severely disabled individuals to participate in social labor. For those with limited working capacity, establish supported employment institutions to provide suitable job positions and opportunities for social participation. The government can encourage social forces and enterprises to build such institutions through policy guidance and financial subsidies. Additionally, strengthen the connection between supported employment and social services to ensure people with disabilities receive both employment opportunities and corresponding rehabilitation and care services. 3. Improve income levels for people with disabilities. Increasing income is also an effective means to enhance their living standards. While improving the employment mechanism, multiple channels should be utilized to raise the income levels of people with disabilities. For instance, entrepreneurship support policies can be implemented to encourage individuals with disabilities to establish their own businesses, while tax reductions and financial assistance can be provided to facilitate their individual entrepreneurship. Concurrently, efforts should continue to improve the social security system for persons with disabilities. (3) Enhance subsidies and social security benefits for persons with disabilities to further stabilize their basic living standards.

### 3. Improving the Social Security and Public Service System for Persons with Disabilities

The social security and public service system serves as a crucial institutional framework for ensuring the survival and development of people with disabilities. In the process of achieving common prosperity for people with disabilities, it is essential to continuously improve and refine the social security and public service systems for this population.

- 3.1 Enhancing the social security system. Strengthening the social security system for people with disabilities to increase coverage and improve protection levels. For instance, by refining the living allowance and nursing subsidy systems to alleviate the financial burden on families with disabled members, and by improving medical insurance systems to provide better healthcare coverage.
- 3.2 Providing multi-level public services. Enhancing public service supply to promote the capacity building of people with disabilities. Gradually establish a comprehensive public service supply mechanism for people with disabilities in areas such as education, employment, healthcare, and social participation. In rural regions, efforts should be intensified to allocate public services, narrowing the service gap between urban and rural areas.
- 3.3 Strengthening the rehabilitation service system. Rehabilitation is the primary approach to helping people with disabilities restore functions and enhance self-care abilities. It is necessary to further improve the rehabilitation service system for people with disabilities, leveraging various resources such as hospitals, community rehabilitation stations, and rehabilitation centers to provide more convenient rehabilitation services. Additionally, efforts should be increased in research on rehabilitation techniques and the development of assistive devices to continuously elevate the quality of rehabilitation services.

### 4. Promoting Social Integration of Persons with Disabilities

Social integration is a crucial prerequisite for the holistic development of persons with disabilities. Only in an inclusive and equitable social environment can persons with disabilities truly achieve co-development with other members of society.

- 4.1 Promote barrier-free environment construction. A barrier-free environment is the fundamental condition for the integration of persons with disabilities into society. Greater efforts should be made to build barrier-free facilities in urban development and public space design, such as accessible transportation systems, information systems, and public service facilities.
- 4.2 Eliminate social discrimination. The development of persons with disabilities is significantly influenced by societal perceptions. Through education, awareness campaigns, and social advocacy, it is essential to eliminate prejudice and discrimination against persons with disabilities, fostering a social atmosphere that respects and assists them.

4.3 Enhancing social inclusion. Social inclusion serves as a significant indicator of societal civility. Through policy guidance and social advocacy, it is essential to encourage persons with disabilities (PWDs) to participate in public affairs and social activities organized by social organizations, thereby providing them with greater opportunities for societal engagement.

### 4.4 Establishing a Multi-Party Collaborative Governance Mechanism

The common prosperity of people with disabilities requires not only government policy support but also collaboration from diverse social stakeholders. Establishing a multi-stakeholder collaborative governance mechanism is essential for better integrating social resources and providing comprehensive support for disability development. 1. Government Leadership. The government plays a pivotal role in advancing disability-related initiatives. It should strengthen policy frameworks and public service systems to provide institutional safeguards for disability empowerment. 2. Social Organization Engagement. Non-governmental organizations (NGOs) are vital in disability services. Encouraging NGO participation enhances the diversity and flexibility of social service delivery. 3. Market Entity Support. Businesses play a crucial role in promoting employment and social integration for people with disabilities. Policy incentives and corporate social responsibility mechanisms should be implemented to encourage businesses to create more job opportunities for this group. 4. Family-Community Collaboration. Families and communities serve as vital support networks for people with disabilities. Strengthening community service systems can provide more accessible living services and social support for this population.

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