

COUNTRY REPORT: BANGLADESH

Md. Zulfiker Haider
Convenor, Care-taker Body
SWID Bangladesh
Additional Director,
Department of Social Services

Abstract

Bangladesh is one of the developing countries of the South Asian region. The population near about 122 million of which 3% people are intellectually disabled. Considering the UN declaration on equal rights and opportunities of the persons with intellectual disability, the Govt. of Bangladesh adopted National Policy for the Disabled People – 1995, Bangladesh Welfare Act for the Disabled – 2001, Bangladesh National Coordination Committee for the Disabled in aiming to implement the Programs for development of life-living condition of the disabled people through special education & training, employment facilities, establishment of legal rights and social security, recreation and equal opportunities for participation in the activities of national economical progress.

SWID Bangladesh is one of the pioneer organization of Bangladesh working for the cause of intellectually disabled people sine 1977. It is promoting special education & training and rehabilitation programs under 46 schools throughout the country wherein the beneficiaries raised in near about 7200 children with intellectual disability. SWID also started B.S.Ed Training course under ‘SWID Special Education Teachers Training College’ for build-up a qualified professional groups in the filed of intellectual disability in Bangladesh. In the CBR programs SWID is trying to bring intellectually disabled children into mainstream of the Society as a self-reliant person. Another NGO, Bangladesh Protibondhi Foundation provides services to more than 3000 physically and intellectually disabled children through schooling, CBR and Distance Training Package Program. Bangladesh Government runs National Center for Special Education(NCSE) where educational facilities for the intellectually disabled and Teachers’ Training Program on Special Education are available. The University of Dhaka also provides Teachers’ Training on Special Education.

Introduction

Bangladesh is one of the developing countries of the South Asian region. The population of Bangladesh is about 140 million. Considering the world declaration and the need for services for the intellectually disabled, programs for the intellectually disabled have been started in Bangladesh from 1977; but the services for them till

today are very limited. Disability is a universal element in the human condition to which no one is immune. This problem is not acknowledged as a national problem and is not taken proper steps as a national agenda for the development of the persons with disabilities. Reasons behind this attitude may be low political interest and cost-effective benefit. The comprehension on disability, throughout the history, has rested on make-belief ideas. The direct result of these stereotyped image and consequential action by the society and policy on the persons with disabilities(PWDs) has neglected. This negligence bars persons with disabilities from normal economic, social and political activities in their families. Communities, essential services and education, etc. Many people in Bangladesh view disability as a curse and a cause of embarrassment to family. In Bangladesh, there have been only a few systemic interventions to raise awareness of persons with disabilities at the community level. Women with disabilities are particularly doubly vulnerable to social discrimination and neglect. The PWDs are usually excluded from existing governmental and non-governmental development programs.

Persons with Intellectual Disability are classified as: One's intellectual development is not as per his chronological age or whose IQ (Intelligent Quotient) is below the normal range, or has lost intellectual balance or is damaged, partly or wholly. In Bangladesh, about 14 million (1Crore and 40 Lacs) people are disabled (according to WHO assumption). The World Health Organization (WHO) has a global estimate of about 10% people having disability of one kind or another. There is no clear and accurate statistics on the prevalence on this major social and economic phenomenon in Bangladesh. From the WHO estimate there are 3 percent of the total population that is 4.2 million (42 lac) people are intellectually disabled. According to UNESCO report only 2% of persons with disabilities receive any kind of services in developing countries where around 10% of total population is disabled. Situation in Bangladesh is no better than those. In fact persons with disability deserve priority basis service as they are one of the weak groups of population but they are given lowest priority in providing services in Bangladesh. Recent awareness among the Government and non-Government organizations working with the disabilities have created a ray of hope for development work in the field of disabilities. In this context parents can change their attitude, accept the rights of the persons with intellectual disability. They can form organization, struggle, lead social movement, mobilize social force. They also can advocate together with the govt. and start working.

Services for the People with intellectual disability

Before 1977 people of Bangladesh were unaware of intellectual disability. Persons with Intellectual Disability were treated as “mad”. They had no access in any kind of school if any unidentified mild intellectually disabled persons were admitted, they

were neglected or given inappropriate educational services. They also lacked appropriate vocational support. In 1977 Society for the Welfare of the Intellectually Disabled, Bangladesh (SWID Bangladesh) was established by the parents and professionals who started educational program for the children with intellectual disability of Bangladesh. It is the milestone in the history of services for the person with intellectual disability of Bangladesh. This organization was established to provide services to the children with intellectual disability as a model, to develop human resources, to develop social awareness, and to do advocacy to establish rights of the people with intellectual disability. In 1982 NFU, a Norwegian organization for the intellectually disabled came forward to support the initiative of SWID Bangladesh. SWID Bangladesh by its well-planned activities broke the ice and developed awareness among the people and the Government. At present at least a section of the people are aware of the persons with intellectual disability and their needs. Govt. of Bangladesh and various NGOs came forward to take necessary action in favor of the person with intellectual disability.

SWID Bangladesh has the following strength to continue social movement:

- a. 46 Branches of SWID Bangladesh throughout the country.
- b. 46 bodies of committee to lead the social movement with a good number of volunteer parents and non-parents members. Among non-parents there are Psychologists, Psychiatrists, Social workers, Politicians etc.
- c. Schools in 46 places to demonstrate the abilities and education system of the children with Intellectual Disability with 7200 students through its 450 classes and highly skilled professionals and teachers.
- d. SWID Bangladesh runs a National Institute for the Intellectually Disabled (NIID) where assessment of disability, counseling, physiotherapy, speech therapy and medical services are provided. Training programs on intellectual disability are also arranged for the teachers, parents, students of university and colleges in related subject and social workers. It promotes scouting, sports and cultural activities for the persons with intellectual disability.
- e. As a part of the rehabilitation program, SWID Bangladesh established a subsidiary organization with the title of TWID Bangladesh (Trust for the Welfare of the Intellectually Disabled) in 1994 which is playing a significant role for the rehabilitation of the intellectually disabled.

Other activities of SWID Bangladesh

1. SWID hosted 13th ACMR in 1997 in Dhaka where important decisions were taken in favor of the people with intellectual disability of Asian region.
2. SWID encouraged the development of South Asian Regional CBR Network on disability.

3. SWID encouraged the development of National Forum of the Organizations Working with the Disabled (NFOWD) and became its member.
4. SWID organized training programs for teachers of Government Primary Schools and BRAC and other non-government and voluntary organizations for inclusive education of children with intellectual disability and non-disabled children.
5. SWID Bangladesh is the initiator and founder of Special Olympics for the intellectually disabled, and a good number of persons with intellectual disability won gold, silver and bronze medals in the Special Olympics held in America, China, Ireland and Brunei.

6. Advocacy program of SWID:

- a) SWID advocates for establishing the full participation and equal opportunities of the persons with intellectual disabilities, ensure inclusion of people with intellectual disabilities and their interest in all levels of activities throughout the society, and provide the services that are necessary to be enabled to participate in all sphere of the society.
 - b) To empower parents by organizing them.
 - c) Creation of a mechanism in the society to oversee the quality of services provided to the people with disabilities along with the persons with intellectual disability.
 - d) SWID has good working relation with the Government officials and maintains good communication with the other NGOs in getting encouragement from them.
7. **Rehabilitation Programs:** TWID Bangladesh was launched in 1994 by a deed of trustee registered at the office of the Sub-Registrar, Dhaka by the SWID Bangladesh for the welfare of the PIDs-

To provide rehabilitation resource support to SWID Bangladesh for its continuing programs for the welfare of PID.

To give financial assistance to the disadvantaged PID for their education, training and medical treatment.

To take care of PID and their assets in the absence of their parents and guardians as per agreement with their guardians.

To advocate for organizing programs for health-care, education and training and for setting up residential homes for PID.

To provide assistance for rehabilitation of PID.

To help parents of PID for the life-long care of their PID wards.

To collect donations in cash or kind for programs of TWID from the Government, public bodies, individuals and private organizations (national and international).

Rehabilitation by:

- (a) Finding employment opportunities for PID.
- (b) Providing capital for self employment of PID.

(c) Associating PID in Community Based Rehabilitation Programs

Home/Residential Services (for short term or life-long) by:

- (a) Starting group homes/residential hostels for PID in cities, separately for boys and girls, on the model as SOS Homes with necessary support from the guardians of the concerned PID.
- (b) Acquiring or purchasing a plot of land on the outskirts of cities to establish small residential group-homes with suitable vocational training facilities, sheltered workshops, small agro-industrial projects etc.

Guardianship and Life-long care of PID by:

- a) Act as guardian of PID and their assets in the absence of their parents/guardians as per special agreement with their parents/guardians.
- b) Beside SWID, many Government and Non-government organizations have also been formed in Bangladesh for the welfare of persons with intellectual disability.
- c) Steps taken by the Government of Bangladesh in accordance with the “World Program of the Action Concerning to Disabled Persons” adopted by the UN.

Latest Disability Situation in Bangladesh

Government of Bangladesh is conscious about the need for appropriate policies laws and plans for the education, training and rehabilitation of the PWD's. Over the decades the Government has taken a number of steps. Of late, the Non-Government Organizations (NGOs) have demonstrated their keen interest in the cause of education, training and rehabilitation needs of the PWDs.

1. National coordination:

In 1993 Government has set-up a national coordination committee for the disabled under the chairmanship of the Minister in Charge of the Ministry of Social Welfare. The members are drawn from concerned organizations both at the Government and non-Government level. NFOWD (National Forum of the Organizations Working with the Disabled) coordinates among the organizations in Bangladesh and advocates for legislation and other facilities for the development of the disabled. 204 organizations are involved in this Forum as member of its General Council. The Forum has already achieved some success and advocated strongly in favor of disabled persons. The Forum has taken initiative to collect, assimilate and disseminate information on disability issues to and from various sectors. As per their plan of action they organize workshop/seminars to promote the activities for the welfare of the persons with disabilities.

2. National Disability Policy:

Bangladesh Govt. has passed a National Policy in 1995 which acknowledges the constitutional and international obligation of the PWD's. The policy gives the guideline for prevention, identification, education, rehabilitation, research, and other facilities and management of national programs for the welfare of the persons with disabilities. Implementation of policy guideline is far from the reality. An action plan has already been launched in the light of the policy.

3. Legislation for people with disabilities:

Legislation with the title of "Protibandhi Kallayan Ayn-2001 (Disability Welfare Act-2001)" has been enacted in 2001 for the disabled in the parliament to implement the Disability Policy guidelines. The legislation had been prepared in consultation with the people with disabilities and National Forum of Organizations Working with the Disabled (NFOWD). To fulfill the need and creation of opportunities for the people with disabilities Govt. of Bangladesh is currently considering the amendment of the law for the Persons with Disabilities drafted and suggested by NFOWD.

4. Information:

Information concerning various issues with regard to disabilities is available in limited scales. The Government encourages NGOs for working in the sector of disabilities to initiate and implement various projects for dissemination of information, collection of data, compilation of document etc. The state controlled electronic media also plays a significant role in this sector and supports information dissemination on disabilities.

5. Public awareness:

The disability issue is highlighted both by the Government and by NGOs working in the sector of disability through different means of communications for creating positive awareness towards the disability issues. A number of studies, reports, posters, flip charts, books, manuals, and films have been developed for effective awareness development program.

6. Accessibility and Communication:

Government has taken steps to change physical and psycho social environment for ensuring the accessibility of the disabled persons.

7. Education:

Government of Bangladesh has included issue of special education of the people with disabilities in the National Education Policy. Bangladesh Government is supporting financially the educational programs of SWID and other NGOs. However, NGOs working for education program for people with disabilities have successfully demonstrated integrated education program and the Ministry of Social Welfare has also expanded its program in the same direction. The Ministry runs National Center for Special Education (NCSE) for human resource development. Recently

Government of Bangladesh as introduced inclusive Primary Education to create space for the children with disabilities. Other on going programs of the Ministry of the Social Welfare are as follows:

S. No.	Name of Activities	Number of Unit	Number of Beneficiaries
1.	Integrated blind education program	64	640
2.	Self contained school for the blind	5	240
3.	Self contained school for the hearing impaired	7	270
4.	Self contained school for the intellectually disabled	2	100
5.	Employment and Rehabilitation Center for the Physically Handicapped (ERCPH)	1	85
6.	Industry for Production of Plastic Goods	1	
7.	Mineral Water (Maitry Shilpo)	1	
8.	Artificial Limb Production Center	1	
9.	Computerized Brail Press	1	
10.	Placement Service	1	
11.	National Center for Vocational Training and Rehabilitation of the Visually Impaired	1	100
12.	Village Training Sub center for Physically Disabled	1	30
13.	Special Allowance for the Poor Disabled		
14.	Special Allowance for the Students with Disabilities		
15.	Teachers Training College on Special Education	1	45
16.	Rehabilitation Center for Acid Victim and Physical Disabled		
17.	Micro Credit Program for Disabled		

205 independent NGOs and around 72 Govt. units are working for the welfare of the disabled in Bangladesh. As mentioned earlier very little portion of them are getting any kind of services from those organizations.

Society for the Welfare of the intellectually disabled, Bangladesh (SWID Bangladesh) run 450 classes in 46 Branches throughout the country and about 7200 children with intellectual disabilities are getting educational services through its schools and Community Based Rehabilitation Programs. A good number of other children with intellectual disability received assessment and necessary guidance in various areas.

More than 5000 persons with intellectual disabilities are rehabilitated in different income generation projects through SWID Bangladesh. Bangladesh Protibandhi Foundation (BPF) and many other NGOs run the programs for the intellectually disabled and physically disabled. Students receive education from the schools and Distance Training package. There is only two government school for the Intellectually Disabled under NCSE and one school at Roufabad, Chittagong run by the Government, SIVUS Institute and some other NGOs are also providing services to persons with intellectual disability.

Committee for Inclusive Education has been formed by the Government under Education Ministry with representation of the Ministry of Social Welfare, Ministry of Education and UNESCO to promote education of the children with disabilities in the regular schools.

8. Medical Care

Government of Bangladesh has incorporated appropriate provisions for prevention of avoidable disablement in the National Health Policy.

9. Training and Employment

Government has made adequate provision in the National Policies for people with disabilities to create employment opportunities. Further Government has made quota of jobs for the people with disabilities in category 3 & 4 of the Government services. NGOs has taken community Based Rehabilitation (CBR) program for gainful employment for the people with disabilities in rural Bangladesh.

10. Family life and personal integration

The constitution of Bangladesh ensures family life and integration of people with intellectual disabilities without any discrimination.

11. Rehabilitation Services

Government encourages rehabilitation of people with disabilities through rural social services program of Ministry of Social Welfare and NGOs have most successfully implemented pilot projects for rehabilitation of people with disabilities.

12. Assistive devices

Government has established an Assistive Device Production Center and NGOs have also set-up similar programs to meet the growing demand.

13. Self-help Organization

The self-help organizations with a view to establish the self-advocacy movement of people with disabilities have been established and have ensured participation and representation at different levels on issues concerning disabilities.

14. Regional Cooperation

The Government of Bangladesh recognizes need and importance of regional cooperation on disability issues. With this end in view, the then Head of the

Government of Bangladesh proposed at the 10th SAARC SUMMIT for establishing SAARC Disability Fund for improving the quality of the life of people with disabilities of South Asia Region. The proposal has been accepted and it is expected that effective mechanism will be evolved for better co-operation among the seven countries of South Asia to develop programs of people with disabilities. Regional CBR network of South East Asia has been established and Bangladesh has become an active member of the same.

15. International Cooperation

Bangladesh government attaches great significance to international cooperation and exchange of views. Government participates at every level of international conferences, seminars, workshops; and NGOs working in the sector of disabilities and have played key role in the self-help movement of people with disabilities through Disabled People International (DPI). Bangladesh Govt. has ratified the Child Rights Convention and UN Disability Declaration and signed disability declaration of Asia-Pacific Region of ESCAP and Universal Human Rights Convention. Bangladesh maintains liaison with the following international organizations:

- DPI (Disabled People International)
- Inclusion International
- Rehabilitation International
- AFMR (Asian Federation for the Mentally Retarded)
- Hearing International (II)
- World Blind Union (WBU)
- Global Impact Program
- ESCAP

16. Monitoring and Evaluation

The government maintains continuous effective monitoring and evaluation of program for the people with disabilities taken both by the Govt. and NGOs.

17. Other bodies

- a) National Foundation for the Development of the Disabled (NFDD): In order to develop the life living situation of the persons with disabilities and provide necessary suggestion and guidance to the Government and NGOs regarding disability related issues a central organization called 'National Foundation for the Development of the Disabled (NFDD)' with representatives from Government and NGOs has been established by the govt. of Bangladesh.
- b) Teachers Training; There is a Department of Special Education in the Institute of Education and Research, University of Dhaka which offers Graduation and Master's Degree on Special Education in visual impairment, intellectual disability

and hearing impairment at graduation and post graduation level; Teachers Training College for Special Education under National Center for Special Education and Bangladesh Protibandhi Foundation (BPF) also offers graduation in Special Education.

- c) Child Development Center; Child Development Center under Shishu Hospital is an unique agency for providing medical and relevant support to disabled children.

Achievement

1. Preventive health services like immunization, mother-child health care etc. are going on in Bangladesh under Health and Family Planning Ministry.
2. Steps have been taken very recently to increase awareness by different organizations.
3. Bangladesh Government supports in limited scale to some of the NGOs working with the disabled.
4. Government of Bangladesh has declared National Disability Policy and enacted Disabled Welfare Act-2001.
5. Services like education, training, counseling, physiotherapy, speech therapy and rehabilitation for intellectually disabled are available in a limited scale in Bangladesh. Government of Bangladesh is financially supporting these activities.
6. Some people with intellectual disability are being rehabilitated in different sections.
7. Awareness regarding intellectual disability has been increased and a number of programs had been taken during the last decade as in the previous years.

Limitations

1. There is no screening/diagnosis program for children with intellectual disability in Bangladesh at school or community level other than the few organizations/hospitals.
2. No adequate inclusive education program for intellectually disabled students except some integrated class program run by the Society for the Welfare of the Intellectually Disabled, Bangladesh (SWID Bangladesh) and some other few organizations.
3. Inadequate educational material/equipment
4. Poor public awareness regarding the need of the disabled
5. Less involvement of Government in the field of intellectual disability.
6. Limited scope of rehabilitation for the persons with intellectual disability especially in the public service sections.
7. Agencies of United Nations in Bangladesh are less involved in disability development program.
8. Provisions Created for the people with Disabilities as mentioned earlier, are not

being utilized by the persons with intellectual disability due to their generalized disability.

Recommendations

1. Education: Special Education services need to be provided through the regular educational institutions, like primary schools, high schools and other educational institutions.
2. Rehabilitation: Employment or earning opportunities have to be created through Government, Non-Government or private enterprises.
3. Teachers of the general educational institutions need to be trained through the special education teachers training institutes. At the same time teachers training programs of B. Ed., M. Ed., And C. in. Ed could incorporate special education subjects related to the disability in their existing courses.
4. Additional special education and related expert like Psychologist, Speech Therapist, Physiotherapist and highly qualified Special Educationist could be posted on regional basis to support general educational services for the disabled.
5. Special Vocational Rehabilitation experts also to be posted in regional basis to support vocational training and rehabilitation programs.
6. Medical persons could be trained on disability issues and posted to regional hospitals.
7. The education policy, curriculum and teaching strategies need to be modified to accommodate the disabled in the general educational system.
8. Health policies need to be adopted to accommodate services for the persons with intellectual disability.
9. Employment policies need to be adopted to make room for the persons with intellectual disability.
10. Above all necessary awareness programs need to be taken to make the “Society for All” and ensure equal participation of the persons with intellectual disability in all sectors of the society.
11. Necessary supports need to be given by the Govt. to the organizations working with the persons with intellectual disability.
12. UN agencies working in Bangladesh are not involved significantly in disabled sector. The Govt. should encourage the UN agencies like UNESCO UNICEF, UNDP, ILO, WHO to support disabled sector according to working area.
13. Plan of action need to be developed to implement disabled welfare programs
14. United Nations and other International Organizations should come forward to support the programs for the persons with intellectual disability of Bangladesh.

Conclusion

The persons with intellectual disability are the integral part of our society who deserve social support and opportunities like other human beings. But, in Bangladesh, very little has so far been done for them. However, improvement in the life of the persons with intellectual disability may be achieved if appropriate programs are chalked out and implemented sincerely.

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