



Equal Bangladesh



Equal (Somotar) Bangladesh Campaign

Policy analysis report | April 2023

Implementation of the Rights and Protection of Persons with Disabilities Act, 2013 and the National Action Plan on Disability, 2019, in Bangladesh



Sightsavers

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Abbreviations

APDF	Asia Pacific Disability Forum
BIAM	Bangladesh Institution of Administration and Management
BIDS	Bangladesh Institute of Development Studies
COVID	Coronavirus disease
CRPD	Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities
DC	Deputy Commissioner
DGHS	Directorate General of Health Services
DRF	Development Result Framework
DSS	Department of Social Services
GDP	Gross Domestic Product
GED	General Economics Division, Ministry of Planning
ILO	International Labour Organization
JPUF	Jatiyo Protibondhi Unnayan Foundation
KIIs	Key informant interviews
LDC	Least Developed Country
MDG	Millennium Development Goals
MoDMR	Ministry of Disaster Management and Relief
MoHFW	Ministry of Health and Family Welfare
MoP	Ministry of Planning
MoSW	Ministry of Social Welfare
NCC	National Coordination Committee
NCDPCP	Non-Communicable Disease Control Programme
NDDPT	Neuro-Developmental Disability Protection Trust
NEC	National Executive Committee
NFOWD	National Forum of Organisations Working with the Disabled
NHRC	National Human Rights Commission
NGO	Non-government organisation
NSSS	National Social Security Strategy
OPD	Organisation of people with disabilities
PATC	Public Administration Training Centre
RPPD	Rights and Protection of Persons with Disabilities Act, 2013
SDG	Sustainable Development Goals
UN	United Nations
UNDP	United Nations Development Programme
UNICEF	United Nations Children's Fund
UNO	Upazilla Nirbahi Officer
VNR	Voluntary National Review
WFP	World Food Programme
WHO	World Health Organization

1. Introduction

1.1 Background and rationale

Bangladesh gained its independence through a nine-month long liberation war in 1971. In April that year, the government-in-exile took oath on a Proclamation of Independence, where the government committed to ensure for all its citizens only three things – equality, human dignity and social justice. After liberation, therefore, the National Constitution was founded on these three principles. Moreover, in order to ensure equality of the citizens who were marginalised due to various factors, several equitable measures were added to the constitution.

Over the decades, the Government of Bangladesh has signed and ratified almost all human rights treaties adopted by the United Nations, and in most cases, domestic laws have either been newly enacted or modified to be attuned with the treaties. Disability issues are no exception.

People with disabilities have existed in Bangladesh for as long as history goes. But they were either completely absent from development planning or seen only as subjects of charity. Years before the birth of independent Bangladesh, education, training and rehabilitation of people with disabilities were earmarked under the purview of the Department of Social Services (DSS). This was even years before the Ministry of Social Welfare (MoSW) was created. Now there are two different ministries catering for education and a handful of ministries involved in skills development training. While the Ministry of Health is providing medical rehabilitation, and though disability is being seen as a human rights issue according to the allocation of business of different ministries, disability issues are still earmarked only under the purview of the Ministry of Social Welfare. However, their legal identity, at least on paper, has changed to a great extent.

Bangladesh was not only a pioneering country to ratify the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (CRPD), but the Government of Bangladesh also took an active part during the drafting process of the CRPD, attending and participating in the ad hoc Committee meetings. Soon after the CRPD entered into force, a process was initiated to attune domestic laws with the CRPD. The first law to see the light of day was the Rights and Protection of Persons with Disabilities Act, 2013.

The rules of the law were enacted in 2015, and a National Action Plan (NAP) on Disability, spelling out a detailed implementation plan of the law was adopted by the Cabinet in 2019. While both the law and NAP are to be implemented by a multitude of ministries and departments of the government, MoSW has been identified as the pivotal ministry to coordinate and monitor implementation of the instruments. On the one hand, MoSW claims that the law is being implemented, while the scores of organisations of people with disabilities (OPDs) and non-government organisations (NGOs) working with people with disabilities complain that neither the law, nor the NAP, is being implemented.

This study made an attempt to look into this confusion, from a neutral point of view, to assess to what extent the instruments are being implemented, if at all, and identify the bottlenecks, if any, towards actual implementation.

1.2 Equal/Somotar Bangladesh Campaign

The Somotar Bangladesh Campaign is a notable policy campaign that aims to promote disability rights and inclusive policies in Bangladesh. This campaign strives to influence policymakers to adopt measures that protect and enhance the rights of persons with disabilities, ensuring that they have equal opportunities and access to resources, employment and public services through the effective implementation of the National Action Plan on Disability. The Bangladesh Campaign operates with the conviction that disability is not a limitation but a right that should be ensured and respected. This campaign seeks to increase awareness about the rights of people with disabilities and create a more inclusive society where everyone can participate equally. The campaign's primary objective is to influence policy changes that will empower people with disabilities and promote their full participation in all aspects of life in Bangladesh. In this context, the campaign partners have heavily supported the campaign cocreation process, identifying the key areas of policy engagement and policy change. The campaign has also undertaken 'A Policy Analysis and Review of the Implementation of the Rights and Protection of Persons with Disabilities Act, 2013, and the National Action Plan on Disability, 2019', conducted by an external consultant that shaped the key campaign asks for the government stakeholders.

The Somotar Bangladesh Campaign is a coalition of over twenty organisations of people with disabilities from across the country, as well as a number of CSOs. It is led by a steering committee of elected OPD members with Sightsavers Bangladesh forming the campaign secretariat. As the secretariat, Sightsavers is responsible for the administration of the campaign and for the coordination of the campaign activities engaging all the coalition partners.

By adopting these strategies, the Somotar Bangladesh Campaign aims to co-create a movement that would promote the rights of people with disabilities in Bangladesh and bring about positive change in the country.

Sightsavers arranged three cocreation workshops on 16-17 May 2022, on 20-22 July 2022 and on 11-13 October 2022. Representatives from 20 organisations, including the OPDs, Disability Alliance on SDGs Bangladesh, UN Agencies, NGOs, INGOs and youth activists have taken part in all three workshops.

Participants expressed views and opinions as to the opportunity the Somotar Bangladesh Campaign offers to deliver on the rights enshrined in the Rights and Protection of Persons with Disabilities Act, 2013, of Bangladesh. Unanimous agreement among participants is that the biggest hurdle to persons with disabilities in Bangladesh accessing their rights on an equal basis with others is the non-implementation of the Rights and Protection of the Persons with Disabilities Act, 2013.

1.3 Development of the analysis

This analysis was conducted through a desk review of available literature, and the collection of primary data through a series of key informant interviews, workshops and consultations. This included government stakeholders, OPDs and civil society. Members of the Disability Alliance on SDGs Bangladesh played a significant role in providing necessary information, based on their practical experiences. A list of all the participants is added as annexure.

2. National instruments and implementation arrangements

2.1 National instruments

The national instruments under this review were the following:

- a) Rights and Protection of Persons with Disabilities Act, 2013
- b) National Action Plan on Disability

2.1.1 The Rights and Protection of Persons with Disabilities Act, 2013

The Rights and Protection of Persons with Disabilities Act, 2013 (RPPD Act) was developed completely following the spirit and content of the CRPD. It was drafted through a thorough participatory process involving over 14,000 people from all walks of life.

The drafting process was initiated through a three-day workshop at Mujib Nagar, where the journey for the emancipation of Bangladeshi citizens had begun with the Proclamation of Independence being signed way back in 1971. Seven Members of Parliament, government officials, a host of the most prominent lawyers in the country, human rights activists, journalists, teachers and prominent development practitioners joined people with disabilities, their family members and professionals in the field of disability and development for the drafting workshop. A former Minister, Ministry of Law, Justice and Parliamentary Affairs presided over the proceedings, while Barrister Amirul Islam, the lawyer who had drafted the Proclamation of Independence, attended the three days as chief guest and led the discussions.

The drafting process took more than three years and was finally enacted in Parliament in 2013. The law provides definition of disability and people with disabilities in the same spirit of the CRPD. It is also based on the same principles of the CRPD and it identifies 20 different rights for people with disabilities in Bangladesh. Discrimination on the basis of disability has been identified as a punishable offence.

Besides the national, district, upazilla and urban committees, vide Article 29 (1) all government, semi-government, autonomous and private organisations, and educational

institutions, and so on have also been mandated to implement provisions of the law, as per directives provided by the National Coordination Committee. The law does not contain any article that indemnifies an official or member of any of the committees, for any unintentional omission of responsibility, that may result in the infringement of any right of people with disabilities.

2.1.2 The National Action Plan on Disability

In pursuit of Article 29 (2) of the RPPD Act, a National Action Plan (NAP) on Disability was prepared and confirmed by the National Coordination Committee. It was then adopted by the Cabinet in 2019. The NAP identifies 18 different action areas and encompasses specific functions of 35 different ministries and their departments.

The plans were also developed through a long consultative process. The drafting process was initiated from the NGOs and OPDs under the guidance of JPUF. It was then spearheaded by the National Human Rights Commission before submission to the National Coordination Committee.

The plans are categorised as short-term, medium-term and long-term plans. Some activities will be continued. The NAP has been designed in 10 different columns, as follows:

- i. Operational Area
- ii. Objective
- iii. Reference
- iv. Prevailing Situation
- v. Planned Activity
- vi. Performance Indicators
- vii. Timeframe
- viii. Resources Required
- ix. Primary Responsible Authority
- x. Supportive Authority

While developing the NAP, all of the programmes and activities have been identified directly from the provisions of the RPPD Act, either from the different Articles of the law, or from the 16 Schedules. A column had been kept open for Resources Required (financial or non-financial). It was anticipated that the respective ministries and departments will plan and allocate the required resources, within their own respective jurisdictions to carry out the plans. As such, the NAP does not show a total operational budget.

2.2 Implementation arrangements:

2.2.1 The Rights and Protection of Persons with Disabilities Act, 2013

The RPPD Act specifies committees at four different levels to implement the law. At the national level, there is the National Coordination Committee (NCC) and the National Executive Committee (NEC).¹ The NCC is chaired by the Minister, Ministry of Social Welfare, while the NEC is chaired by the Secretary, Ministry of Social Welfare. In both these committees, the Managing Director of the Jatiyo Protibondhi Unnayan Foundation (JPUF) (National Foundation for Development of Disabled Persons) acts as the member secretary of both the committees. These are both inter-ministerial committees.

There are also district and upazilla committees, chaired by the concerned Deputy Commissioners (DCs) and Upazilla Nirbahi Officers (UNOs), respectively. The Deputy Director of the DSS and the Social Welfare Officers act as the member secretaries of the two committees, respectively. Within the City Corporations, there are also urban committees, chaired by the respective Chief Executive Officer. The Urban Social Welfare Officer acts as the member secretary. There will be one urban committee for each of the 80 Urban Community Development (UCD) programmes functioning in 64 districts.

The law specifies membership of the committees, their functions and responsibilities. Representation from disability related NGOs/OPDs/self-help organisations has been ensured in all the committees, including representation of women.

The law also specifies how many times each of the committees should convene each year. Accordingly, the NCC should meet at least twice every year, the NEC at least three times each year, the district committees at least four times, and the upazilla and urban committees at least six times every year.

According to the law, where a person with a disability feels any of her/his rights have been infringed upon, s/he should first report (in writing) to the district committee. The law describes a detailed process and time frame by which the committee must respond to the complaint. Where the person is not satisfied with the outcome of the complaint at the district level, s/he can then reach out to the NEC.

2.2.2 National Committee for monitoring the implementation of the CRPD

Soon after the CRPD entered into force, in pursuit of Article 33, the Government of Bangladesh launched a National Committee for monitoring the implementation of the CRPD, chaired by the Secretary, Ministry of Social Welfare. As a first step, 46 disability focal points were set up within as many ministries and departments from among deputy secretary level officials. However, it was soon realised that the focal points should be from a higher

¹ Composition and functions of the National Coordination Committee and National Executive Committee are added as Annexure.

decision-making level within different ministries. Therefore, the focal points were chosen from joint secretary level officials instead.

Besides the focal points, the monitoring committee was comprised of a selection of human rights activists, lawyers, journalists, academicians and representatives of OPDs and NGOs working in the field of disability and development. The committee was assigned to meet on a quarterly basis.

The greatest advantage of this Committee is that it does not have a cap on its total number. As such, the Committee can include any number of relevant participants, either as regular members, or on any short-term basis, as required. Under the purview of this committee, the CRPD initiation report and first periodic report of Bangladesh was compiled and submitted to the United Nations.

While this committee is assigned to monitor the progress of the implementation of the CRPD, the RPPD Act is the legal instrument containing all the legal, policy and programmatic framework of the CRPD in the context of Bangladesh, and the National Action Plan is the direct implementation plan of the RPPD Act. Therefore, monitoring the progress of the NAP is very much within the purview of this committee. Unfortunately, the committee has remained less active since 2017.

3. The status of implementation

3.1 The National Coordination Committee

Activities of the National Coordination Committee (NCC) are lagging far behind. Where the committee is expected to convene twice a year, in the nine years since it was constituted, it has so far convened only twice. The last meeting was held in 2019. If the committee does not convene at all, what amount of inter-ministerial coordination it is playing can be well presumed.

The committee comprises two Members of Parliament (nominated by the Speaker of the Parliament) and 15 Secretaries from as many ministries, besides MoSW. During the two previous meetings, many of the secretaries did not attend in person, but sent representatives instead. Some of the representatives were also not senior level officials. Both the chairperson and the two Members of Parliament present at the meeting stressed the need for more cooperation from the other ministries and their top-level executives.

A veteran leader of the disability rights movement and former president of the national disability platform opined that high level government officials do not think that the Ministry of Social Welfare is a very important ministry compared to Health, Education, Labour, Local Government, ICT, and Planning or Disaster Management. Hence, when meetings are convened by this ministry, other ministries' officials may not be able to give much importance or attention to them. The situation was even worse 20 years ago. Over time, the disability sector has seen some positive change, but he felt that there is still a long way to go.

While MoSW acknowledged such frustrations of the leaders of the disability sector, they believe that some of the Secretaries could not attend due to priorities in their own ministries. MoSW mentioned that they would inform all members of the committee well in advance in future meetings, so that they can mark their respective calendars in time. They also discussed lack of inter-ministerial coordination and mentioned that they would look into the matter about what's functioning and what's not, and will take necessary action.

Key government stakeholders in the Ministry of Social Welfare were very optimistic and emphasised that disability is a priority issue for the government, and the Honourable Prime Minister is most supportive of ensuring the rights of people with disabilities. The Ministry will bring together key issues to the Prime Minister's attention, so that the challenges are addressed properly.

3.2 The National Executive Committee

By provisions of the RPPD Act, 2013, this is the supreme committee to implement the law. However, similar to the NCC, the National Executive Committee has also not been performing as expected. Since its launch in 2013, this committee was expected to convene 27 times according to the law, but it has only done a limited number of times.

Government officials who form MoSW agreed that the COVID-19 pandemic had significantly halted progress – it had been very difficult to work during the COVID-19 lockdown. However, the MoSW, never stopped and continued to put in their best efforts to ensure people with disabilities are not left behind.

Unfortunately, even when the committee meets, its agenda hardly reflects implementation measures of the law. The committee is expected to receive one report annually from the 64 district committees. Also, several people with disabilities have lodged written complaints with this committee, having been deprived of justice from the district committees. None of these issues are usually discussed in the NEC meetings. There is also no follow-up to collect the reports from the districts. And even if the reports arrive from districts, they are hardly read or reviewed by the decisionmakers. Therefore, the people with disabilities that have lodged complaints with the committees upon infringement of their rights and entitlements, have to wait for years on end to see some resolution.

The member secretary of the committee is the Managing Director (MD) of JPUF, which has its office far away from the secretariat. The Foundation also has its own programmes and operations and is short staffed to take up any additional work for the NCC or NEC. But since the law entered into force, there was no update that JPUF sent any proposal to MoSW seeking additional staff to deal with the two committee issues. Moreover, since the MD is a transferable post, there are frequent changes in this position. And when a new person comes in, there is no mechanism to brief her/him of this additional role of being the member secretary of the two national committees constituted under the RPPD Act.

Government stakeholders explained that administration cadre officials, upon joining new positions, are expected to orient themselves on all pertaining issues by going through and reading all documents in files. All documents are stringently maintained in different files, but

with disability issues, documents can only provide information not the sensitivity, or the urgency of the matters concerned. In earlier times, whenever new officials joined the MoSW ministry, NFOWD leaders would come to meet them and discuss ways to orient them. Now they come, but there is little orientation. Officials also only read recent documents and not the older ones, so their knowledge remains shallow.

Officials at the ministry believe that the initiative to activate the committees must come from the member secretary, whereas the member secretary believes the initiative should come from the ministry, depending on the availability of the Minister and Secretary. Unfortunately, neither MoSW nor JPUF have been taking the first step.

Government stakeholders admit that the overall progress for NAP implementation has not been enough, but also emphasised that the government and the Ministry of Social Welfare are committed to implementing the NAP and improving the standard of living of people with disabilities in Bangladesh. Hence, on behalf of the government, the ministry actively participated in the UNCRPD session in August last year (2022) where they presented and reviewed the progress. They also submitted their inputs to IDA on this. While they acknowledged that 100 per cent implementation of the NAP has not been possible, MoSW will hold a series of meetings with the organisations working in the disability sector to understand more about the implementation challenges and execute the NAP more effectively.

Some disability rights activists believe, similar to some other neighbouring countries of Bangladesh (such as Cambodia, Vietnam), a separate, independent and powerful secretariat could make a difference. There are indeed examples in Bangladesh of such practice. For example, as skills development became high on the government agenda, the National Skills Development Authority was launched under the patronisation of the Prime Minister's Office, even though it had a separate secretariat with its own staff. The Authority has functional relationships with the Ministry of Youth, Ministry of Labour, Ministry of Education, Ministry of Women's Affairs, the Technical Education Board, and so on;. similar to that, activists believe a secretariat could be set up, even within the premises of the JPUF. However, some other activists are a bit more cautious and realistically do not think the government would prefer setting up a whole secretariat, but instead a Disability Coordination Cell, with an additional secretary at the helm. The cell could also have dedicated staff to coordinate the work with other ministries and liaise with the district, upazilla and urban committees.

3.3 The district committees

The district level committees have been identified in the RPPD Act as the principal authority to deal with the rights and privileges of people with disabilities. According to the law, in the case of any disability-based discrimination, an aggrieved person with a disability, or her/his nominated agent must first approach the district committee. However, several challenges have not been taken into consideration.

The Deputy Commissioner (DC) in every district, who is the chairperson of the district level committee, heads tens of committees. While most of the committees are not constituted under the purview of any specific law, the district administration tries to treat all committees

with equal importance. As a result, committees such as this one, that are constituted under the instructions of specific laws, often get little importance. Moreover, there are three different committees related to disability concerned issues in each district, which includes the district committee constituted under the RPPD Act, the district committee constituted under the NDD Protection Trust Act, and the district steering committee of the JPUF operated in Sheba o Shahajjyo Kendra (welfare and service centres). There are some members that are common in all of the three different committees. And all the three committees are supposed to convene on similar intervals. Often, the committee members or even the DC gets confused about which meeting they are attending.

A veteran grassroots-level disability rights activist opines that there is still too much confusion among government officials between the terms 'disability' and 'autism', especially at the grassroots level. When a new UNO or DC arrives, in most cases they either think all disabilities are called autism, or if autism is not addressed, then disability is not being addressed. They tend to ignore the main district committee and only want to focus on autism. Unfortunately, by the time the disability stakeholders have a good rapport, and they get acquainted, they get transferred and a new person comes in with all that confusion. The struggle has been continuing in this manner for years. When an administration cadre official gets promoted and joins a district as the Deputy Commissioner, it is not expected that s/he would be fully aware about her/his role as the chairperson of the district disability committee. However, there is no institutional mechanism in place to orient the newly appointed official. Moreover, the hierarchic gap between the DC and the Deputy Director of Department of Social Services (the member secretary of the committee) is so large that it becomes difficult for the member secretary to acquaint and apprise the new official of her/his disability-specific added responsibilities. As a result, this could impact the regularity and effectiveness of the meetings.

Government officials from the MoSW also confirm that there is a greater need for orientation on NAP for the top officials of the different ministries and relevant government offices as they know little about the NAP, and MOSW will need to work together with the NGOs and OPDs for the NAP review and modification in aftermath of the COVID-19 pandemic.

The pioneering disability rights activist of Bangladesh, a former member of the UN Committee on CRPD and former Managing Director of JPUF, mentioned that he was the only non-government person to briefly lead JPUF as its Managing Director. Upon joining, the first thing he did was to conduct an orientation programme for all the disability focal points from JPUF. Unfortunately, within a very short period, most of these people got transferred to other places. This is a reality that must be taken into account. Accordingly, JPUF needs to make it a regular programme to remain informed on who is coming in as a fresh focal point in different ministries and provide them with orientation. However, these are the focal people in different ministries, who have already been out there in upazillas and districts. Very few of them are going back to the field level. Also, what happens with the officials who are becoming UNOs and DCs that are chairing the upazilla and district level committees? As part of their foundation training, all administrative officials have to go through intense training at a Public Administration Training Centre (PATC). They also have advanced trainings and refresher trainings at the PATC and the Bangladesh Institution of Administration and

Management (BIAM) throughout their career. While some of those courses are now disability inclusive to some extent, the course content needs to be looked into in terms of whether it is sufficiently updated and if the trainers and facilitators are well-informed and well-conversant with all the rights-based issues concerning people with disabilities. If inclusion cannot be ensured in those trainings, apathy towards disability issues will continue.

The two non-government members selected into each of the district committees should preferably be chosen from OPDs or NGOs with vast experience of working with people with disabilities. But in most of the committees, these chosen members have little understanding of disability related issues. Therefore, they too cannot contribute effectively and the voices of people with disabilities are not being heard in the decision-making process, which is mandated in the CRPD and the RPPD Act.

3.4 The upazilla and urban committees

Similar to the district level committee, the upazilla and town committees also face stiff challenges. In almost all the upazillas, a monthly coordination meeting is organised by the upazilla administration, with the Upazilla Nirbahi Officer (UNO) in the chair. Almost all development organisations attend this meeting, along with representatives of different ministries and departments. Development issues pertaining to the upazilla are also discussed here.

Several OPDs allege that in many cases, the Social Welfare Officer (who is the member secretary of the committee) tends to show this general coordination meeting as the meeting of the upazilla disability committee. Improper meeting resolutions are documented, and signatures of the committee members are collected. However, there is little evidence of whether this is true across the country, nor is there any investigative report on these allegations.

A grassroots-level OPD leader confirmed that soon after the law was enacted, he started insisting that a committee must be formed in his upazilla. The committee was formed, and he was included as a member, but there were no regular meetings. Sometime later, the Social Welfare Officer sent a peon to his office to sign an attendance sheet. Being a visually impaired person, he had to ask a colleague of his to verify what document he was signing on. He was surprised to find that it was a meeting of the upazilla committee, which he was neither notified about, nor attended. When he asked the social welfare officer on the phone what this was about, he was told that they needed to show a meeting was held, but as other members were not interested in giving their time, they had to come up with this process. He told the officer that he would complain about this to his higher authorities in Dhaka. Since then, two meetings before the two international disability days have been held in April and December properly. But throughout the year, they usually try to merge it with the upazilla coordination meetings held at the UNO's office.

The situation with the urban committees is similar. While the government sets out that the meetings are being held regularly, there is no compilation of meeting proceedings either at the MoSW or JPUF.

3.5 Budgetary structure and allocation

While the overall economy of Bangladesh is thriving, exclusion of persons with disabilities from the mainstream development agenda is causing a strain that the country could do without. A study by the Bangladesh Institute of Development Studies suggests that the loss in income due to disability in Bangladesh is about \$1.18 billion (US dollars) per year, which is approximately 1.74 per cent of GDP (Ali, 2014).² Disability tends to reduce economic output by reducing the economic contribution. The amount by which economic output is reduced constitutes the net economic cost of disability. The study further states that this loss is cumulative of four cost categories. First, because some people with disabilities are not employed, it costs Bangladesh US\$891 million per year. This impact on the GDP alone accounts for 76 per cent of the total cost of disability on the Bangladesh economy. Second, some children with disabilities forego schooling because of their disabilities. This costs the economy about US\$26 million per year because of the lower stream of lifetime earnings due to lower national educational attainment. Third, some people with disabilities need help from others to function. This help can come from adults and from children in the family. The cost of adult helpers is then US\$234 million per year from foregone income among adult helpers (often women). Finally, since some children forego schooling because they are helpers of persons with disabilities, it costs Bangladesh US\$28 million per year because of the lower stream of lifetime earnings due to their lower educational attainment.

Therefore, the cost of disability in Bangladesh is US\$148 per year per person with a disability. If these people with disabilities live in households with five family members, this loss in income corresponds to almost a third of the poverty line, noting that the poverty line for households with people with disabilities is different from the poverty line of households without any person with disability.

Based on the above, it can be argued that even on a strict cost-benefit basis, disability services can well be provided, as long as the total cost (both administrative and assistive devices) is below US\$148 per year per person with a disability. Of course, the allocation of any budget targeted at disability issues across the types and severity of disability has implications on the total number of potential beneficiaries of the services. For example, to provide eye glasses to visually impaired people will cost less than US\$25, including administrative, optical diagnosis, and the eye glasses themselves. On the other hand, providing a basic hearing aid to a moderately hearing-impaired person will cost around US\$75. Providing disability services to the people with disabilities is, therefore, very much an economic issue (Ali, 2014).

Every year, as part of the Annual National Budget, a stand-alone document is published by the Ministry of Finance on the Social SafetyNet Budget of the year.³ In a table form, the document shows the 100+ different projects, programmes or schemes taken under the

² Ali, Z., *Economic Costs of Disability in Bangladesh*, Bangladesh Development Studies, Vol. XXXVII, December 2014, No. 4

³ The Social Security Budget for Fiscal Year 2022-23 is available here: <https://mof.gov.bd/site/page/5f9be3bc-923f-4c27-8a65-c5e7fe417945/Social-Security-Programs>

purview of different ministries and their departments, the number of beneficiaries per item, and the allocation. From all the budget documents, this is the only document where allocation for people with disabilities can be discerned.⁴

In the Fiscal Year 2022-23, the Safety Net Budget for people with disabilities has been allocated against the following programmes:

1. Direct services:

- Allowances for the Financially Insolvent Disabled
- Stipend for Disabled Students
- Fund for the Welfare of Burnt and Disabled
- Special Education, Health and Training for poor disabled and autistic
- Cochlear Implant Programme

2. Semi-direct services:

- Service and Assistance Centre for Disabled (under JPUF)
- Grants for the Schools for the Disabled
- NDD Protection Trust
- Welfare Trust for Physical Disabilities
- National Academy for Autism and NDD

3. Indirect services:

- Sports Complex for People with Disabilities

Safety net allocations are determined as per the National Social Security Strategy (2015). Besides people with disabilities, monthly allowances are provided to several other vulnerable groups of people. Every year, both the amount of allowance and the number of beneficiaries per programme is gradually increased to bring more vulnerable people under the net. This fiscal year, the government had initially planned against increasing any allowances for any vulnerable group, however, only the monthly allowance for people with disabilities was finally increased by 100 taka, and their coverage was also increased by 357,000 people and the expansion of coverage is taking place on a regular basis.

Except from the Safety net budgets, where specific amount of budget is allocated for children with disabilities in the inclusive education programme under the Ministry of Primary and Mass Education, budget is allocated for supplying braille books to children with visual impairments in schools from the National Curriculum and Textbook Board under the purview of the Ministry of Education, where under the Non-Communicable Disease Control Programme of the Ministry of Health, children with autism and neuro developmental

⁴ SafetyNets Allocation for People with Disabilities over 5 Years (2017-2023) is added as Annexure

disabilities are being supported, or where Ministry of Information, Communication and Technology has been supporting a considerably large programme for skills development of youths with disabilities, the Ministry of Disaster Management and Relief operates a specific programme targeting people with disabilities during disasters and humanitarian conditions, none of these budgetary allocations can be discerned from any of the documents published by the Ministry of Finance regarding national budgets.

Along with the main budget document, the Ministry of Finance regularly publishes three other budget documents titled Gender Budget, Child Budget and Climate Budget. In each of these documents, the allocation under these three heads within the budgets of the different ministries are compiled as three stand-alone documents. A reader can get a ready reference of how much money is being budgeted in which programme/scheme under which ministry for the development of women or children or to combat climate change.

There has been a demand from the disability movement for a similar Disability Budgeting, so that it could be discerned how much money the government is spending each year in total for the development of people with disabilities. Without such a document, the only available evidence is the amount allocated to the social Safety Net programme and so spending in other sectors cannot be analysed.

A senior government official said that Bangladesh was reviewed by the UNCRPD committee in 2022. It has been a significant development as that was the first review of Bangladesh by the committee itself which took place this year in July. The committee gave a few recommendations to Bangladesh. The first recommendation was about the modification in the 2013 RPPD Act. The committee draws the attention of the Government of Bangladesh regarding the specific vulnerable groups, and also appreciates the efforts made by Bangladesh in terms of policies and legal frameworks. However, lack of implementation or slow implementation of the commitments makes it difficult to translate commitments into reality without a budgetary allocation. As far as the policy framework is concerned, it still merely exists on paper.

3.6 Participation of persons with disabilities

Over the last decade or so, participation of people with disabilities in different sectors, including in decision-making processes is increasing. But how effective or meaningful this participation is, remains a major concern. The RPPD Act has specifically prescribed inclusion of people with disabilities and their organisations within the committees from national to district, upazilla and town levels. But where the meetings do not take place, or where the OPDs are not even informed of meetings beforehand, their participation is not effectively ensured. If they are present, in some cases their opinion is heard, but will often be ignored or not given due importance while decisions are being made.

Even within the OPDs or their networks, people with physical and/or visual impairments generally dominate over others. People with NDDs or hearing and speech impairments are yet to be equally heard. Within the NDDs again, the perception that 'they cannot speak for their own' has meant that decisions are generally taken by parents, even without consultation with the people with NDDs themselves. For people with psychosocial

disabilities, sheer acceptance or presence in discussions concerning them is still not practised at all. Whatever the type of disability, presence of women or their participation in the discussion and decision-making process remains a far bigger challenge.

One major cause for the lack of meaningful and effective participation of people with disabilities in the decision-making process is attributed to the absence of a strong capacity building initiative of the OPDs. The grassroots level OPDs that were formed or nurtured by large national or international NGOs or OPDs were fortunate enough to get some guidance on organisational development matters, access to information, skills on advocacy and influencing, and communication skills. These OPDs had some basic orientation on the CRPD, the RPPD Act, MDGs and SDGs, and how these could be linked with the challenges they faced in their day-to-day lives. When they got an opportunity to speak at local public forums, they could articulate the challenges they faced, link those challenges with the CRPD and/or development frameworks, and propose local level solutions. It was easier for them to gain access to the local decision-making level. But for the majority of the OPDs that have been formed indigenously, such capacity building measures are yet to take shape.

When JPUF was formed, it was expected to contribute to developing capacities of small NGOs and OPDs. Indeed, JPUF provides a nominal grant to a small number of organisations on a periodical basis, but these are tied to conditional spending on observation of disability days, or for providing assistive devices. They cannot be used for organisational development purposes. 'JPUF invests inadequate time or resources on strengthening capacities of OPDs or small NGOs' (cited in an FGD with OPD representatives).

JPUF acknowledges this alleged complaint against them. But with a limited staff size to monitor proper use of provided funding, they do not take the risk of opening the scope of their funds provided to NGOs and OPDs. JPUF was provided a considerable amount of grant by the government almost two decades ago as 'seed money'. The grants provided to NGOs and OPDs are covered from the interest generated out of these funds. At the initial stage, the grants were given annually. But as the number of applicants increased, JPUF began providing the funds biennially. Funding varied from 25,000 taka to 250,000 taka, depending on the size of the NGO/OPD and its coverage. At one stage, over 600 NGO/OPDs received the grants. Unfortunately, several of these recipients either mismanaged the funding, or failed to report back. The JPUF management board has restricted the scope of its funding since then. In the middle of 2020, however, in response to the COVID-19 pandemic, JPUF softened its stand and permitted using the funds for humanitarian assistance.. A fresh round of applications has been received in recent months, and after the screening process, funding is expected to be released by June 2023.

Over the past decade or so, overseas funding especially in the disability development sector has changed considerably. Large NGOs or OPDs have to bid for the projects, which are mandating inclusion of a certain number (or percentage) of grassroots level OPDs as the partners. In the process, OPDs are taken on board to deliver the outputs of the projects, but very little stress is given on the development of the OPDs itself. During the project cycle, the OPDs also get confused about their role – should they be implementing projects like any other NGOs, or should they be an advocacy platform for raising their voice; should they be trying to generate funds for retaining staff or the large office that was paid for during the 3-5

years project? Such use or abuse of OPDs, without investing in their capacities, both in terms of organisational development and in terms of information, communication and advocacy skills will not help much in the establishment of an OPDs-led disability rights movement.

4. Discussion

4.1 Discussion based on findings and observations

4.1.1 Instrumental aspect

The laws and policies are generally enacted and updated in Bangladesh by the government, based on specific demands of the time, the principles and provisions of international instruments, and legal provisions of the national constitution. The instruments concerning people with disabilities were no exception. However, even though there are several laws that concern rights and privileges of people with disabilities, such as the Compulsory Primary Education Act, 1990, the Disability Welfare Act, 2001 (repealed), the Right to Information Act, 2009, the Children Act, 2013, the Neuro Developmental Disability Protection Trust Act, 2013, the Mental Health Act, 2018, the Rehabilitation Council Act, 2018, the Children Day Care Centre Act, 2021, and so on, the one law that supersedes all for people with disabilities is the Rights and Protection of Persons with Disabilities Act, 2013 (RPPD Act).

Almost all laws and policies are drafted through consultative processes, where relevant government authorities extensively consult with concerned government and non-government stakeholders. The RPPD Act, however, was initially drafted by the non-government stakeholders, and then submitted to the government for enactment. Over 14,000 people, including people with disabilities from all walks of life, caregivers, professionals, lawyers, parliamentarians, journalists, and academia were involved directly in the drafting process. The principles and content of the UN CRPD were taken as a baseline requirement, and the provisions were contextualised in the overall socio-economic fabric and context of Bangladesh.

As one of the pioneering countries to ratify the CRPD, Bangladesh is pledge-bound to attune all its laws and policies with the principles and content of the CRPD. The RPPD Act is one such example where Bangladesh has adhered to its commitment. Some other laws specifically concerning people with disabilities have also been aligned with the CRPD. Examples are the Neuro Developmental Disability Protection Trust Act, 2013 and the Rehabilitation Council Act, 2018. Meanwhile, some other laws, such as the Right to Information Act, 2009, Children's Act, 2013, Children's Day Care Centre Act, 2021, even though not specific to people with disabilities, have also been attuned with the principles and provisions of the CRPD.

Besides laws, several national level policies have also been attuned with international instruments. The National Disability Policy was adopted in 1995. This was never updated. Instead, a National Action Plan on Disability (based on the Disability Welfare Act, 2001) was

adopted in 2005, and a more comprehensive National Action Plan on Disability (based on the RPPD Act 2013) was adopted in 2019. A National Strategy on NDD was also adopted in 2018. These are completely attuned to the CRPD. Some other policies, as discussed earlier, are also developed adhering to CRPD principles.

Therefore, it can safely be said that the laws and policies in Bangladesh are well within recognised international standards and frameworks. However, gross limitations are found in the implementation of these instruments. Performance indicators are found in policies and plans, and so their progress in implementation can be measured. But there are no such indicators in the laws. So, it becomes difficult to measure progress of its implementation.

For proper implementation of the RPPD Act, committees have been proposed at different levels, from national to the upazilla or town level. The roles and responsibilities of each of the committees have also been specified in the law. In doing so, decision-making level has been decentralised. But there is no mention of what happens, or where the committees are not functioning. The RPPD Act has declared punitive measures for people violating the rights of persons with disabilities, but there is no mechanism to hold committee members accountable for any inaction. The same goes with most laws, and so they remain un-implemented.

In terms of sectoral policies though, such as policies on health, primary education, education, and skills development, these are also developed under specific international commitments and instruments and operated by respective ministries and departments. They address disability from an inclusion point of view. However, as neither the two national committees under the RPPD Act nor the national monitoring committee on the CRPD convene regularly, even being the nodal ministry on disability, MoSW does not have adequate information on what other ministries are doing, especially for people with disabilities. When the monitoring committee used to convene regularly on a quarterly basis, MoSW used to have updated information on the activities performed by other ministries. Unfortunately, this committee has not convened in meetings since mid-2017.

4.1.2 Institutional aspect

If the RPPD law is implemented effectively, most of the issues concerning people with disabilities will be adequately addressed. The law has set out its implementation arrangements, from national to upazilla/town level in logical progression. But due to several challenges, as mentioned above, its implementation is not taking place.

At the national level, neither the National Coordination Committee nor the National Executive Committee convene in meetings judiciously. In both committees, the Managing Director (MD) of the Jatiyo Protibondhi Unnayan Foundation (JPUF) acts as the member secretary. However, the MD has to depend on the grace of the MoSW to convene these meetings. Moreover, JPUF does not have any additional human resources or allocated budget to deal with the workload of these two committees. All district committees are instructed, by the law, to submit annual reports to the National Executive Committee. There is no follow-up

mechanism in place to seek these reports, or any designated person to read them, if they are submitted. Yet, JPUF has not yet put in a request for increasing its staff capacity.

If any JPUF official places a call to a district to inquire about the committee proceedings, as these officials are hierarchically junior to the DCs, they are generally snubbed, and their requests are not entertained.

4.1.3 Behavioural aspect

The political commitment of the Government of Bangladesh towards people with disabilities is highly positive. The personal fondness of the Honourable Prime Minister towards people with disabilities is widely known and regularly demonstrated. The professional involvement of her daughter, Saima Wazed Putul, both in the national and international arena is also widely documented. These have indeed played a significant role in influencing the formulation of supportive laws and policies. However, general apathy, lack of in-depth knowledge and lack of initiative of duty bearers have often prevented these supportive laws and policies being duly implemented.

The National Action Plan on Disability was adopted in 2019. This 65-page document outlines specific responsibilities of 35 different ministries and departments under 18 action areas. Apart from Safety Net allocations, which are considered under the National Social Security Strategy anyway, not a single action area of the NAP has been adequately addressed so far, and money has not been allocated in the national budgets over the years.

There are 46 Disability Focal Points in as many ministries and departments. While most of them are at the joint secretary level, some are at the additional secretary level, meaning that they are all in decision-making levels in respective ministries and departments. Unfortunately, in most cases, they are not even aware of their expected role and functions.

In early 2016, at a national level consultation organised by NFOWD, where the national SDG focal person was the chief guest, he asked the focal persons of different ministries why they are not planning programmes for persons with disabilities. Their response was that they did not know what programmes would be appropriate, and that they did not have any additional funding to address any new programmes. In response, the chief guest, who was also the senior secretary of the Ministry of Planning advised that the ministries should hold consultations with the NGOs/OPDs and come up with plans. If logical plans were submitted to the Planning Ministry, funding would not be a problem. The NAP had not been finalised by then. Now there is the NAP at hand, but the disability focal points are not functioning. If the focal points are revitalised, there is a very good chance that the NAP could be addressed adequately.

About a year after the CRPD entered into force, a Parliamentarians' Caucus on Disability was launched in Bangladesh. This 20-member body, comprised of parliamentarians from all parties, used to act as a strong pressure group in the national parliament. Advocate Abdul Matin Khasru MP, a prominent lawyer and a former Minister, Ministry of Law, Justice and Parliamentary Affairs chaired the caucus. At that time, he was also the chairperson of the Parliamentary Standing Committee of the law ministry. The caucus played a significant role

in the drafting of the RPPD Act and its enactment in the national Parliament. From the outset of the caucus, NFOWD used to act as its secretariat. Also, all programmes of the caucus were funded by NFOWD. Unfortunately, NFOWD gradually became rather inactive since 2017 and Advocate Khasru also passed away. Thereafter, the caucus also became void.

As MoSW is the lead ministry concerning people with disabilities, by now there should have been a mechanism in place to orient any new official joining the ministry on its role, positioning and function concerning people with disabilities.

The government operates a training academy for public administration officials. All officials upon joining the government mandatorily need to go through an orientation training here, and there are also further training programmes as the officials go through the hierarchy. In recent years, the training curriculum at the academy has barely included a section on disability issues, but the information shared is too shallow. As a result, officials going through the training sessions do not get the actual picture, nor do they get to recognise their roles and responsibilities concerning people with disabilities.

4.1.4 Output

Positive changes taking place in the lives and livelihoods of people with disabilities at the grassroots level cannot be denied. More children with disabilities are getting access into mainstream schools; more youths with disabilities are getting access to skills training; employment and self-employment opportunities are increasing; there is better access to healthcare facilities; accessibility challenges are being addressed; the list goes on. However, the question remains: is the rate of progress justified enough? Years after enactment of the RPPD Act, 2013, which identifies discrimination on the basis of disability as a punishable offence, should the nation be satisfied with the rate of progress made?

Safety and security issues remain a major concern, especially for women and girls with disabilities. The legal justice system is still inaccessible to a great extent. Mental health issues continue to remain a major taboo.

Years of working with the local government, both at the national policy level and the local grassroots level have begun to show some positive changes in the union parishad level. In a large number of unions' parishads, the voices of people with disabilities are being heard, local challenges are being solved, budgets are being allocated. The stigma, however, though reduced, still persists to a great extent, from family level to national decision-making level. The media, both government and private, is trying to do its share, but their stake in advancing rights for people with disabilities is still far from expectations.

Some good examples of disability inclusion:

Ministry of Disaster Management and Relief:

- Standing Orders on Disasters have been made disability inclusive.
- All committees (from national to grassroots level) will co-opt two people with disabilities.
- People with disabilities will be prioritised in all evacuation, rescue, relief and rehabilitation programmes.

Ministry of Local Government and Rural Development:

- The Local Government Division has issued circulars for all Municipalities and union parishads to address seven issues: (a) Prioritising people with disabilities in all programmes, (b) Considering special needs of people with disabilities in all programmes, (c) Providing special needs assistance, (d) Adequate budget allocation, (e) Identification of people with disabilities, (f) Raising awareness in community on disability, and (g) Ensuring participation in all meetings.
- At the union level, in addition to the 13 standing committees, a separate standing Committee can also be opened in consultation with the UNO.

One of the most important unmet issues still is the availability of authentic, credible and comparable statistics. The lack of disability disaggregated data keeps hampering proper and effective planning, as well as monitoring of progress. This will also impact the effective monitoring of the implementation of the NAP as it is aligned with and feeds into the Bangladesh 8th Five-Year plan.

As per Section 31(6) of the RPPD Act, a person with disability will not be able to enjoy any of the rights and entitlements provided under this law or any other law, without an identification card issued under this Section. This continues to remain a major barrier for people with disabilities, as identification, registration and availability of the disability card is a complex process. It requires involvement of people from the Ministry of Social Welfare, Ministry of Health and Bangladesh Bureau of Statistics (BBS). While the registration form is available online and a major portion can be filled in online by people with disabilities themselves, medical examination for confirmation of the disability type and grade must be filled by a government medical officer, designated by the civil surgeon of the relevant district.

On the one hand, finding the relevant medical officer is a challenge; and on the other hand, most of the government medical officers are not adequately informed about the classification specified in the RPPD Act. There has been a long-standing demand from the disability rights movement for the two ministries, or more specifically, the DSS and the Directorate General of Health Services (DGHS) to work out a smooth *modus operandi* to resolve the issue. The initiative must be taken from DSS. Meanwhile, DGHS has initiated a process for preparing a handbook for the grassroots level medical officers to orient and protect them.

4.2 Relevance with SDG implementation

The current Government of Bangladesh came into power almost halfway through the period of the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs), but still managed to excel in its implementation. Some of the nation's achievements drew international acclaim and recognition. Similarly, from the onset of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), the Government of Bangladesh has shown keen interest to continue its commitment towards the global framework.

The SDGs is the first global mainstream development framework that has systematically addressed and included disability concerned issues. The “leaving no one behind” slogan is not merely words. In five different goals, either in the targets or in the indicators, disability issues have been very specifically included. Also, people with disabilities have been specifically included in the marginalised group of people that the slogan is intended for. The Government of Bangladesh officially recognises that concerns of people with disabilities need to be particularly addressed in its SDG implementation plans.

Bangladesh regularly participates in the Voluntary National Review (VNR) processes. In the first attempt, the government missed including disability issues in its report. However, on behalf of people with disabilities, the Disability Alliance on SDGs Bangladesh (a platform of NGOs and OPDs) submitted a report to the UN. Ever since then, the government has been including issues concerning disability in the report. But due to the lack of adequate data against specific indicators, the reporting is not yet up to the mark from a disability perspective.

In order to implement the SDGs and monitor the progress in Bangladesh, keeping in mind the SDG indicators, the government has developed several National Priority Indicators (NPIs). By monitoring and evaluating the progress against these indicators, it is expected that information about persons with disabilities will be able to be observed directly or indirectly.⁵

SDG 4: Ensure inclusive and equitable quality education and promote lifelong learning opportunities for all:

- NPI 9 Ensure 100% completion rate of primary education.
- NPI 10 Ensure 100% completion rate of junior secondary education.
- NPI 11 Ensure the proportion of students in technical level above 20% to the total students passed every year in the secondary education (SSC, Dakhil, and Vocational).
- NPI 12 Ensure the proportion of schools by 100% with access to the following: A. Electricity, B. Internet, C. Basic drinking water, D. Single-sex basic sanitation facilities (SDG Indicator 4.a.1).

⁵ GoB, *Sustainable Development Goals Bangladesh Progress Report, 2020*, Dhaka, Bangladesh Planning Commission, June 2020, in the weblink https://info.undp.org/docs/pdc/Documents/BGD/SDGs-Bangladesh_Progress_Report%202020.pdf

- NPI 13 Ensure the proportion of schools by 100% with access to adapted infrastructure and materials for the child/student with disability (SDG Indicator 4.a.1).

SDG 8: Promote sustained, inclusive and sustainable economic growth, full and productive employment and decent work for all:

- NPI 21 Increase annual growth rate of GDP to 10% (SDG Indicator 8.1.1).
- NPI 22 Reduce unemployment rate below 3% (SDG Indicator 8.5.2).
- NPI 23 Reduce the proportion of youth population (15-29 years) not in education, employment or training to 10% (SDG Indicator 8.6.1).

SDG 10: Reduce inequality within and among countries:

- NPI 28 Reduce the ratio of income of top 10% population and bottom 10% population to 20.
- NPI 29 Reduce the recruitment cost borne by employee as a proportion of yearly income earned in a country of destination to 10% (SDG Indicator 10.7.1).

SDG 11: Make cities and human settlements inclusive, safe, resilient, and sustainable:

- NPI 30 Ensure women, children, elderly and persons with disabilities have convenient access to public transport (minimum 20% seats) (SDG Indicator 11.2.1).

SDG 17: Strengthen the means of implementation and revitalize the Global Partnership for Sustainable Development:

- NPI 38 Increase total government revenue as a proportion of GDP to 20% (SDG Indicator 17.1.1).
- NPI 39 Increase the proportion of individuals using the Internet to 100% (SDG Indicator 17.8.1).

4.3 Relevance with the 8th Five-Year Plan

The Government of Bangladesh addressed disability related issues in its five-year development plans for the first time in the 6th Plan. A comprehensive chapter was added, and a few policy decisions were mentioned. However, there was no measurable indicator concerning people with disabilities in the plan. In the 7th five-year Plan, only one indicator was added, measuring the percentage of children with disabilities enrolled in primary education.

During preparation of the 8th plan, the government conducted a review to look into the gaps of the 7th plan, using a disability lens. Based on the findings, the chapter and approach on disability was revised.

In the 8th Five-Year Plan, disability has been addressed as a cross-cutting issue rather than addressing it as a separate issue.⁶ Disability has been integrated in different policy frameworks. The social protection scheme will be expanded based on the life cycle approach for person with disabilities. The RPPD Act, 2013 will be implemented to ensure international standards on disability rights as set out in the Act. The National Coordination Committee will be strengthened to monitor and coordinate activities of different ministries/divisions in implementation of the Act. Requirements of the poor and vulnerable, including women and children, will be prioritised in all activities and implemented.

The government will ensure full implementation of the disability benefit schemes proposed in NSSS in the 8th Five-year Plan. The government will ensure that every child certified as having a severe disability will be provided with a regular transfer, known as the Child Disability Benefit. This will extend the current Child Disability Grant that is managed by the Ministry of Social Welfare. The government will develop a mechanism to identify severe disability among children (it is estimated that there will be around 350,000 children eligible for the scheme). Mechanisms will also be established to remove children with disabilities from the street, making the Child Disability Benefit conditional on children not involved in begging. A system of penalties will be introduced for those who employ children as beggars (KII with GED).

The current disability grant managed by the Ministry of Social Welfare will be reformed into a scheme that provides a regular transfer to all poor and vulnerable citizens of Bangladesh with a severe disability. During the period, there is a plan to undertake a scheme for all poor and vulnerable people aged 19-59 years with a severe disability and, at 60 years, they will transition to the Citizens' Pension. The government will design robust measures for identifying severe disability and will establish an appeals mechanism for those who feel that they have been unfairly excluded.

The introduction of a reformed Disability Benefit will mark a significant change in the lives of the citizens with disabilities who are poor. They will be better able to enter the labour market and access credit so that they can invest in small businesses. The Ministry of Social Welfare will complement the Disability Benefit by providing additional support to recipients by ensuring access to vocational education and small business schemes and eliminating discrimination in the labour market.

Along with an expansion of an integrated education programme for children with visual impairments, existing institutions for children with hearing and intellectual disabilities will be expanded. New institutions will be established to provide access to more children with disabilities at primary, secondary and tertiary levels. A collaborative effort involving the government, NGOs and the private sector will be encouraged to expedite an expansion of existing institutions, establish new institutions and undertake teachers' training on disability.

Action will be taken in the health sector to: (i) strengthen early detection of symptoms of disability and provide primary medical rehabilitation; (ii) undertake a nutrition programme for

⁶ Based on key informant interview with GED

pregnant women; (iii) appoint trainee doctors, nurses and other caregivers to deal with disability issues; and (iv) introduce support services of assistive devices and equipment at health centres.

Measures will be taken so that people with disabilities can have access to all physical facilities and information and communication. Inclusion of persons with disabilities in various national and community level decision-making processes that affect their lives will be ensured. Services like early detection and timely medical intervention, fitment of artificial aids and appliances, educational services in special and integrated schools, vocational rehabilitation – including micro-credit – will be provided to people with disabilities through community-based rehabilitation programmes.

Some people with disabilities require specialised support services, assistive devices and job modifications but, more importantly, the right to decent work needs to be recognised. It is assumed that such an approach will ensure meaningful participation of persons with disabilities in the development process. A Development Result Framework (DRF) has been drafted by the government for monitoring and evaluating the performance of the 8th FYP. The proposed DRF includes the following disability related performance indicators:

- Number of enrolled children with disabilities (by gender).
- Proportion of schools with access to adapted infrastructure and materials for students with disabilities.
- Unemployment rate, by sex, age and persons with disabilities.
- Proportion of population that has convenient access to public transport, by sex, age, and persons with disabilities.

4.4 Relevance with the National Social Security Strategy (NSSS) with the 8th Five-Year Plan

In order to streamline the social SafetyNet programmes of the government, a National Social Security Strategy was developed. For people with disabilities, there are three core schemes:

- A Child Disability Benefit for all children with a disability, up to the age of 18 years. The amount of support may vary based on the severity of the impairment and associated cost care. Mechanisms will be established which will remove children with disabilities from the street to prevent exploitation, and the MoSW will be responsible for monitoring.
- A Disability Benefit for all adults with severe disabilities, aged 19-59 years. This particular scheme will mark a significant change in the lives of disabled citizens; it will give them a morale boost since they will be better able to enter the labour market and access credit which they can invest in small business.
- At 60 years, people with severe disabilities will transition to the Old Age Allowance. The Ministry of Social Welfare will define the disability and income criterion for inclusion in the

programme. The level of transfer will be reviewed to assess whether a higher transfer is viable considering the medical requirements (KII with GED).

4.5 Relevance with the Vision 2041

When the current government came into power in 2009, it adopted a charter of change and introduced a 'Vision 2021'. The document envisioned transforming Bangladesh into a middle-income country by 2021 that aimed to attain high growth, reducing poverty and inequality, improving human resources and environmental response action plan. For translating the political manifesto of the political party into an Action Plan, it prepared the first ever 'Bangladesh Perspective Plan 2010-2021' identifying the long-term development priorities. Through the 6th and 7th Five-Year Plans, Bangladesh achieved an average GDP growth rate of 7%, attained most of the MDGs and graduated from a low-income country to a lower-middle income status by 2015. The government also fulfilled all the UN threshold criteria for graduating from the Least Developed Country (LDC) in 2018 and also in 2022.

The 'Vision 2041' was adopted in line of 'Vision 2021' to provide impetus to the development dream of the nation. Its aim is to end absolute poverty and to be graduated into a higher middle-income status by 2031 and eradicate poverty on the way to becoming a developed nation by 2041. Learning from the experience of higher middle and high-income countries, Bangladesh aims to deliver all facilities of a modern city at the village level, transforming the villages at the centre point of development.

The Perspective Plan 2021-2041 has been prepared to translate the policies and programmes enshrined in the Vision 2041 into development strategies. This is the development vision of the government of a prosperous Bangladesh, a strategic description of the goals and objectives and a roadmap for its implementation. The institutional basis of the plan covers: (a) good governance, (b) democratisation, (c) decentralisation and (d) capacity building. The main beneficiary will be the people of Bangladesh and they will be the key driving force of growth and transformation.

Besides the economic indicators, some of the human development indicators highly relevant to people with disabilities include:

- Taking services to the doorsteps of people.
- Increasing life expectancy to 80 years.
- Extending universal health care to 75% of the population.
- Increasing adult literacy rate to 100% by 2031.
- Increasing youth skill training rate to 100% by 2031.
- Free education for up to 12 years.

However, in any developed nation of the world, one of the most visible infrastructural indicators is universal accessibility. While the Vision 2041 has planned mega projects to improve transportation and communication, this is one vital area that has been missed.

Where a considerable percentage of the population are people with disabilities, bringing them under all the development schemes without ensuring universal accessibility, will not be possible. Therefore, attuning with the Vision 2041 plans, there could be a nationwide campaign to ensure an “Accessible Bangladesh by 2041”.

4.6 The impact of the COVID-19 pandemic

The outbreak of the coronavirus disease (COVID-19) in Wuhan, China in late December 2019 reached pandemic proportions across the world and wreaked havoc throughout the year 2020 and a large part of 2021. While people in almost all countries fell victim to the risk of contracting the virus, people with disabilities suffered disproportionately more than others. As educational institutions were shut down initially, and then introduced online teaching, children with disabilities suffered immensely. Especially for children with visual or communication disabilities, coping with classes conducted online became a massive challenge, even if they had access to smart phones, which in itself is a rarity in the case of children with disabilities.

The prolonged absence of physiotherapy, occupational therapy, speech and language therapy services created major contractures or setbacks in the rehabilitation plans for children with physical and/or neuro-developmental disabilities. In a large number of cases, gradual progresses made over the past few years went in vain. The special schools are not merely centres of education for many children, but also places for therapy services and learning life skills, vocational skills and social and communication skills. Children with NDDs also learn to adopt certain routines, which are generally tailor-made for each individual, depending on the extent of their impairment levels. Prolonged physical absence from schools disrupted these progressive development initiatives, and in some cases, resulted in irreparable loss in their development plans.

For teenaged children with NDDs, especially girls, the special schools also act as a safe day-care shelter for a few hours. Leaving the children here, parents can go about their employment or even to attend household chores, knowing that the child is in safe hands. These centres have drastically reduced the risks of violence and abuse faced by these children. But as the centres were physically shut down due to COVID-19, either the parents could not leave home considering the safety of the daughters, or they had to be exposed to higher risk of violence and abuse.

Prolonged exposure to screens (such as television, computers, tabs and cell phones) generally have been proved to leave significant detrimental effects on the cognitive development of children. The effects on children with cognitive disabilities are significantly and disproportionately higher. Many children are now suffering from depression. Many children have also become very violent.

The labour market, unsurprisingly, also suffered a massive shock in the first COVID-19 wave, with significant numbers of job losses by the middle of 2020. The World Bank estimated an increase in unemployment from 4.2% in 2019 to 5.3% at the end of 2020, which at a first glance looks a relatively small change. However, with a 60 million people labour force participation, that small percentage change suggests that 750,000 people had

lost their employment and not been successful in finding a replacement livelihood. The cottage, micro, small and medium-sized entities which have been a greater historic relevance to people with disabilities in terms of formal employment, including self-employment, suffered more shocks than the large industries. The survey of marginalised and vulnerable populations, including people with disabilities, found that 70.3% of households reported at least one member had experienced loss of employment in 2020 (Brown, 2021).⁷ It is estimated that 74% of people with disabilities lost their income (Innovision, 2020).⁸

In most cases, the strain of coronavirus causing COVID-19 severely affected three of the five senses in the infected individuals – the sense of smell, the sense of taste and the sense of touch. For people with visual impairments, who have to depend on these senses to a great extent even just to move around or to go about their day-to-day lives, the effects of the virus have been devastating. Especially for people with deaf blindness, who communicate with only tactile sign language, the advice for physical distancing and avoiding touching others left them without any means for communication. Also, for people with hearing and speech disabilities, communication had become harder as people were wearing masks and other protective gear (BRAC).

A large proportion of people with disabilities also have comorbidities, making them more susceptible to contract the disease, or suffer more severely than most other people. Unfortunately, the infrastructure or the medical support personnel in most of the mainstream hospitals are not quite efficient in handling the special needs of persons with disabilities. The shutdown introduced during the COVID-19 crisis created massive disruptions to Bangladesh's health care services delivery. People with disabilities generally have more health care needs than other people (both in terms of general health needs and needs linked to impairments). Many people with disabilities in Bangladesh require emergency medical and rehabilitation services but could not access them during the crisis. This was particularly the case for those living in rural areas with limited access to health services. The lack of access to health care facilities increased the risk of health complications and even death for persons with disabilities in Bangladesh (Kibria et al 2020).⁹

Where COVID infected people with disabilities needed to be isolated in hospitals, especially those with communication disorders, medical personnel in many cases were not able to communicate with them. Moreover, were they needed to be isolated at homes, they were deprived of day-to-day special assistance measures that many require due to their impairments. Similar deprivation also resulted in caregivers becoming infected.

⁷ Brown S., 2021. Labor Market Assessment – Bangladesh, Inclusion Works
<https://asksource.info/resources/labour-market-assessment-bangladesh-2021-refresh>

⁸ Innovision (2020). COVID-19 Impact on Vulnerable Groups People with Disabilities. Dhaka. Available at:
http://innovision-bd.com/covid-19/COVID-19_Digest-5_PWD.pdf

⁹ Kibria G, Islam T, Miah S, Ahmed S, Hossain A. 2020. Barriers to healthcare services for persons with disabilities in Bangladesh amid the COVID-19 pandemic. Public Health in Practice; (1)
https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC7332919/#__ffn_sectitle

Due to all these specific reasons, people with disabilities need to be prioritised in all the COVID response measures. From the outset of the pandemic, both the government and non-government entities commissioned several packages for relief and rehabilitation of poor people affected by the pandemic. In many cases, priority was given to people with disabilities and their families. However, while chiefly food security had been addressed in these packages, specific services required for them due to their impairments had rarely been addressed. Confusion was also created around whether people with disabilities already receiving one service (monthly disability allowances) from the government should be permitted to receive a second service (the emergency food assistance or cash grants). However, upon learning about this confusion, MoDMR issued a circular clarifying that people with disabilities, irrespective of their registration status and/or allowance receipt must be prioritised while selecting recipients of the benefit packages.

The COVID-19 pandemic began after adoption of the NAP on Disability. While the pandemic is now over, residual effects remain deep rooted in communities. The NAP may need to be revisited to ensure it duly addresses the effects left behind on people with disabilities.

5. Immediate way forward for implementation of the NAP on Disability, 2019

The following areas need to be addressed urgently in order to effectively implement the NAP, 2019, as articulated by disability sector stakeholders and broadly supported by many relevant government stakeholders as evidenced by some of their perceptions and thoughts which have been reflected in the preceding sections.

5.1 Governance and institutional mechanisms

5.1.1 Ensure that the disability committees are functional

- Immediate activation of the NEC and the NCC to ensure regular meetings as per the law.
- Capacitate OPDs to ensure district level committee meetings and disability inclusion annual reports submitted to the NCC.
- Disability Annual reports from district level should be made available in the public domain under the Right to Information Act.
- Rationalisation of the district committees constituted under the RPPD Act, the district committee constituted under the NDD Protection Trust Act, and the district steering committee of the JPUF operated Sheba o Shahajjyo Kendra (welfare and service centres).

- The two non-government members selected into each of the district committees should preferably be chosen from OPDs or NGOs with vast experience of working with people with disabilities.
- Meaningful participation of OPDs should be ensured in the committee meetings. The committees will plan and create opportunities for the empowerment of OPDs and promote leadership of people with disabilities.

5.1.2 Inter-ministerial coordination

- Disability focal persons/points in as many ministries and departments need to be appointed at the joint secretary level or even at the additional secretary level (if the government thinks appropriate), meaning that they should be in decision-making levels in respective ministries and departments.
- The disability focal points need to be properly oriented on the NAP, 2019 and incentivised to actively participate in the National Coordination Committee, and embed disability inclusion in their respective ministries.
- Disability focal points appointed by each relevant ministry and the names/contact details clearly published on the relevant websites.
- Inter-ministerial coordination on implementation on the NAP strengthened through the NEC and active participation of the disability focal points in each ministry.
- Annual reports on disability inclusion made available from the disability focal points in each ministry.

5.2 Human resource and capacity

Build knowledge and actively promote the application of the RPPD Act, 2013 and the implementation of the NAP on Disability:

- Institutional mechanism needs to be put in place, where the newly appointed officials will receive the required orientation on disability inclusion.
- Disability inclusion component needs to be integrated into advanced trainings and refresher trainings at PATC and BIAM. Disability related courses need to be incorporated in the curriculum of the PATC and BIAM, focusing on disability inclusion, relevant domestic and international legislations along with disability sensitivity.
- Ministry of Public Administration should ensure that disability focal points appointed by each ministry to be transferred only after a period of three years to ensure continuity and consistency.
- Special training should be arranged for government offices and NGOs about UN CRPD and Bangladesh's disability related legislations.

5.3 Clarify and allocate an appropriate budget for implementation of the NAP on Disability, 2019

Similar to the Gender Budget and the Child Budget, the Ministry of Finance should introduce a Disability Budget, which will act as evidence towards implementation of the National Action Plan on Disability, and also the disability inclusive SDGs. Disability Budget document would act as a resource to discern the extent of government expenditure each year on the development of people with disabilities in accordance with the NAP, 2019.

- Annual Disability Budget should be developed by each ministry based on the NAP, 2019, using a similar process to the Gender Budget, Child Budget and Climate Budget.
- Ministry wise disability budgets to be available on each ministry website, as well as collated on the Ministry of Social Welfare's website.
- Adequate financial and human resources allocated for the effective implementation of the NAP, including the functioning of the disability committees at various levels.
- The OPDs should be involved and consulted in the national budget development process meaningfully.
- Alongside the disability budget proposed, a specific budget should be allocated in all relevant ministries to tune their programmes with disability inclusion.

5.4 Develop a robust monitoring framework and CSO engagement mechanism

There is an urgent need to develop a monitoring framework and inclusive monitoring mechanism. Performance indicators are found in most policies and plans to measure their progress in implementation. NAP on Disability, 2019 should similarly have a set of performance indicators.

- Collaborative development of a robust monitoring framework for the implementation of the NAP to measure progress and ensure accountability.
- SDG National Tracker with the NPIs to be disability disaggregated.
- MoSW to work together with the NGOs and OPDs for the implementation of NAP, including review and modification in the aftermath the COVID-19 pandemic.
- Activation of the CRPD monitoring committee.
- All the ministries should consult with the OPDs to make their development projects disability inclusive.
- National Progress Report on the implementation of UN CRPD and the Rights and Protection of Persons with Disabilities Act, 2013 need to be published in English, Bengali and accessible format.

6. Longer term recommendations on disability inclusion to achieve Vision 2041

Area of recommendation	Recommendation	Priority level	Time frame	Stakeholder
Increased political commitment of the government	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> To ensure that disability is effectively included in all mainstream national planning processes, what is most needed is a strong political commitment across the government, from the topmost decision-making levels. Disability must become an integral part of the Vision 2041 plan (Smart Bangladesh). 	High	Short term to mid term	Ministry of Planning GED
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> This requires a strong advocacy and awareness movement with OPDs in key roles. 	High	Short term to mid term	OPD networks
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> To facilitate this process, a Parliamentarian's Caucus on Disability might be formed like before, with a dedicated parliamentarian in the leading and coordination role. 	High	Short term	Parliament Secretariat
Stronger commitment to address equality and non-discrimination	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Attuning laws: Under the Law Commission of Bangladesh, an independent cell should be created in order to assess all existing laws and policies and suggest how these should be amended to be attuned with the CRPD. This cell could also look into the implementation status of the laws and policies, identify challenges and bottlenecks, and suggest remedial measures. The cell should comprise lawyers with different types of disabilities practising in the courts of Bangladesh. 	High	Mid term	Law Commission of Bangladesh
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> A more responsive media: A major investment is necessary to address the stigma and prejudices that exist surrounding disability across 	High	Mid term	Ministry of Information

Area of recommendation	Recommendation	Priority level	Time frame	Stakeholder
	<p>the country. Engaging with the mainstream media will play a vital role towards this end. The print media is generally targeted towards the educated and conscious citizens, including the decision makers. But to bring about lasting changes in the community at large, including the families of people with disabilities, electronic media must be engaged. Audio-visual material must address the intersectionality, especially women with disabilities and invisible disabilities. Engagement with Ministry of Information could facilitate the process of utilising the state-operated Bangladesh Television and Radio, which have the highest coverage across the country.</p>			
Universal accessibility must be ensured	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> An “Accessible Bangladesh by 2041” campaign should be launched. <p>A major commitment is required towards ensuring accessibility of infrastructure, transportation, communication, ICT, and so on, both in terms of policy and practices. While some of these could be achieved immediately, some could be achieved by 2030, and others by 2041.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Bangladesh plans to become a developed country by the year 2041. One of the biggest indicators of a developed country is universal accessibility. The Ministry of Planning could be convinced to declare an “Accessible Bangladesh by 2041” campaign, in association with other related ministries. 	High	Mid term to long term	Ministry of Planning
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> A roadmap towards reaching this commitment may be developed as an immediate step. 	High	Short term	

Area of recommendation	Recommendation	Priority level	Time frame	Stakeholder
Stress must be given on inclusive development	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Statistics: Disability disaggregated data needs to be generated for planning, implementation, monitoring and evaluations of all national strategies, programmes and budgets. Intersectionality within disability, especially women with disabilities must be addressed while collecting and/or analysing data. The Bangladesh Bureau of Statistics, the Department of Social Services and the General Economics Division of the Ministry of Planning must work in unison towards this end. Therefore, a tripartite coordination mechanism must be created between these three entities. 	High	Mid term	Bangladesh Bureau of Statistics GED of the Ministry of Planning
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Adopting a twin-track approach: A commitment by all ministries to redesign sectoral programmes under a twin-track approach will be a major milestone towards implementation of the CRPD. The National Action Plan will be a useful instrument to ensure disability-specific services for the different ministries. Focus should include additional plight of women with disabilities, and other types of intersectionality. A two-three years period will not be enough to change all sectoral policies, but agreement and commitment to make that change will be a move in the right direction. • Besides the NAP, the UN can provide the necessary guidelines and technical assistance as required. Good inclusion practices, such as the case of Ministry of Disaster Management and Relief, could be reviewed, shared and replicated. 	High	Mid term to long term	Ministry of Planning GED Monitoring Committee All relevant ministries UNDP

Area of recommendation	Recommendation	Priority level	Time frame	Stakeholder
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Human resources: This needs to be seen at two different levels. • On the one hand, more supportive officials within the government are required, who are fully conversant on disability rights issues. For this purpose, disability related courses need to be incorporated in the curriculum of the Public Administration Training Centre (PATC) and Bangladesh Institution of Administration and Management (BIAM) focusing on disability inclusion, relevant domestic and international legislation, along with disability sensitivity. • On the other hand, disability inclusive development courses must be introduced in the curriculum of public universities. The existing institutions and available courses are designed to confer academic training and degrees in special education or rehabilitation (either physiotherapy or occupational, speech and/or language therapy, counselling, and so on). There are only a few universities or institutions that offer courses on disability and development studies, where people can learn to understand inclusive development and disability, holistically, or the policy issues. Such academic courses need to be commenced in the higher educational institutes, where, combining knowledge and personal experience, people with disabilities will get the opportunity to grow up as policy specialists. 	High	Mid term to long term	Ministry of Public Administration Ministry of Education University Grants Commission
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • CRPD compliant budget: • Similar to the Gender Budget and the Child Budget, the Ministry of Finance should introduce a Disability Budget, which will act as evidence towards implementation of the National Action 	High	Short term to Mid Term	Ministry of Finance

Area of recommendation	Recommendation	Priority level	Time frame	Stakeholder
	Plan on Disability, and also the disability inclusive SDGs.			
Coordination for accountability and governance must be increased	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Setting up a Disability Coordination Cell: The RPPD Act has mandated a national coordination and execution mechanism for adequate implementation of the law. But for the two committees to function smoothly and effectively, there is no office or secretariat in place. While it is assumed that JPUF will act in this regard, JPUF has its own functions and staff to deal with, and it may be a huge task to ensure the proper coordination. • An independent Disability Coordination Cell needs to be created to manage the coordination. The cell may also act as the secretariat of the national CRPD monitoring committee and the Parliamentarians' Caucus on Disability. The cell must ensure effective and meaningful inclusion and participation of OPDs in its day-to-day functioning. 	High	Short term to mid term	Prime Minister's Office Ministry of Public Administration
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Strengthening the disability focal points: • As the different ministries are re-nominating disability focal points, they need to be oriented on disability issues from a rights-based understanding and will need to be constantly kept up-to-date on the developments happening in Bangladesh and beyond. As these government positions are transferable, it is not unlikely that over the next two to three years there will be changes in the actual personnel acting as focal points. Therefore, orientation and capacity strengthening will need to be a constant process. 	High	Short term to mid term	All ministries Ministry of Social Welfare
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Stronger role by JPUF: 	High	Short term to	Ministry of Social Welfare

Area of recommendation	Recommendation	Priority level	Time frame	Stakeholder
	<p>The JPUF was established to promote disability rights and strengthen the capacities of grassroots level NGOs and OPDs, so that they do not have to be dependent on external donors. Now, besides an annual nominal grant, the support provided by JPUF to OPDs is little compared to the expectations. That grant too goes principally to the already established large NGOs and OPDs, and is earmarked for certain limited activities. JPUF needs to support the grassroots level OPDs, in terms of knowledge from a rights-based perspective, and also in strengthening their communication and advocacy skills, so that the OPDs can act locally as change-making agents.</p> <p>JPUF needs to consult with the national level OPDs in developing the curriculum for the courses, and to conduct the sessions. JPUF also needs to sign a memorandum of understanding with the Directorate of Health, through which a referral system can be created between the 103 JPUF centres and the community clinics and upazilla health complexes.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> JPUF needs to open a wing to specifically address specific needs and concerns of people with different types of disabilities. 		mid term	JPUF
Increased participation of persons with disabilities	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Strengthening OPDs: Efforts must be taken to strengthen capacities of OPDs, especially those at the grassroots level. Special emphasis must also be given to women with disabilities and women-led OPDs. JPUF may play a crucial role in this regard. 	High	Short term to mid term	Ministry of Social Welfare JPUF
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> OPDs and networks: 	High	Short term to	OPD Networks

Area of recommendation	Recommendation	Priority level	Time frame	Stakeholder
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • There are several prominent OPDs and networks in Bangladesh, some of which are cross-disability organisations, while some are focused on a single type of disability. While each have their individual strengths and agenda, a collective movement has proved in the past to work better and influence national legislation and policies. All the OPDs and networks may work closely as a unified force for advocacy initiatives. While each will play their individual roles, there needs to be some collective action, where everyone contributes together. Moreover, these OPDs and networks need to be more sensitive to the issues concerning people with disabilities. • There must be wider scope for OPDs for consultation with the ministries for disability inclusive planning and programming. Ministries should also come forward to consult with the OPDs in this regard. 		mid term	
Revisiting the NAP	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Updating the NAP in consideration of the Vision 2041 and COVID-19 response. • There is a need to produce an official English version of the NAP especially for the international development partners. 	High	Short term to mid term	Ministry of Social Welfare NGO/OPD Networks

7. Validation of the Policy Analysis Report

On 1 March 2023, a validation workshop was held to gather input from OPDs who are Somotar Bangladesh campaign partners regarding the Policy Analysis Report. The workshop was organised by Sightsavers with the purpose of ensuring that the Policy Analysis Report accurately reflected the needs, concerns and perspectives of OPDs, and to identify any policy gaps or areas that required further attention.

The validation workshop was attended by representatives of various OPDs (list of OPDs provided below), and disability experts and the researcher. The workshop began with a presentation of the Policy Analysis Report by Dr Nafeesur Rahman, who outlined the key findings and recommendations. This was followed by a discussion session, during which OPD representatives were invited to provide feedback on the report.

The feedback provided by the OPDs was diverse and covered a wide range of issues. However, some common themes emerged from the discussions. These included:

Effective Implementation of the Rights and Protection of Persons with Disabilities Act: Many OPDs urged for an effective implementation of the Rights and Protection of Persons with Disabilities Act, despite little progress being made since its enactment 10 years ago.

The OPDs pointed out that despite the act being in place for a decade, the implementation of the law has been slow, and there has been little progress made in addressing the challenges faced by persons with disabilities. They demanded that the government take concrete steps to ensure the effective implementation of the act and to address the challenges faced by people with disabilities.

Accessibility: Many OPDs emphasised the need for policies that ensure greater accessibility for persons with disabilities in public spaces, transportation and buildings. They suggested that the Policy Analysis Report should highlight the barriers faced by persons with disabilities in accessing various services and facilities, and provide recommendations for improving accessibility.

Employment: Several OPDs highlighted the challenges faced by persons with disabilities in finding and retaining employment. They suggested that the Policy Analysis Report should include recommendations for promoting employment opportunities and creating a more inclusive workforce.

Education: Many OPDs emphasised the need for policies that promote inclusive education and address the barriers faced by students with disabilities in accessing education. They suggested that the Policy Analysis Report should provide recommendations for improving access to education and promoting inclusive learning environments.

Health: Several OPDs highlighted the challenges faced by persons with disabilities in accessing health care services. They suggested that the Policy Analysis Report should include recommendations for promoting greater accessibility to health care services and improving the quality of care provided to persons with disabilities.

The feedback provided by the OPDs was incorporated into this Policy Analysis Report. The policy analysis validation workshop provided an opportunity for OPDs to provide their input into the Policy Analysis Report. The feedback provided by the OPDs was incorporated into the report, and the final report included recommendations for the effective implementation of the Rights and Protection of Persons with Disabilities Act, for promoting greater accessibility, employment opportunities, inclusive education, and access to health care services for persons with disabilities. It is hoped that the recommendations provided in the report will inform the development of policies and programmes that address the needs and concerns of persons with disabilities and promote greater inclusion in society.

SI no	Name of the participating organisation in the campaign validation workshop held on 1 March 2023
1	National OPD Advisory Committee (NOAC)
2	Upazilla Protibondi Unnayan Parisad (KUDPDC)
3	Manikganj Disabled People's Organization to Development (MDPOD)
4	Narayanganj Sadar Upazila Protibondi Unnayan Parishad (NSUPUP)
5	Tangail Disabled Peoples Organization to Development (Tangail-DPOD)
6	National Council of Disabled Women (NCDW)
7	Down Syndrome Society of Bangladesh (DSSB)
8	Centre for Disability in Development (CDD)
9	Centre for Services and Information on Disability (CSID)
10	Disabled Welfare Society
11	Disabled Child Foundation
12	Women with Disabilities Development Foundation
13	Society of the Deaf and Sign Language Users (SDSL)
14	Visually Impaired People's Society (VIPS)
15	Turning Point Foundation
16	Bangladesh Society for the Change and Advocacy Nexus (B-SCAN)
17	BRAC
18	ADD International Bangladesh

19	United Nations Development Programme
20	National Grassroots Disabilities Organisation (NGDO)
21	Ganna Unnayan Kendra (GUK)

8. Conclusion

Disability has, and always will remain in any society, as a part of human diversity. The social stigma attached to disability has been overcome to a great extent, but it still pervades the society, from family level to national decision-making level. As the nation moves forward, bridges are built and crossed, but newer challenges emerge every now and then.

In the backdrop of all these challenges, the Government of Bangladesh is showing an ever-increasing interest in the disability sector and has become state party to all relevant international frameworks, including the UN CRPD. At the same time, the government has shown a keen interest to work hand in hand with the non-government sector. The government has all the best intentions in heart, but to a great extent lacks the required technical knowledge and skills. NGOs on the other hand have acquired technical knowledge and skills, but have neither the power, nor the required financial resources. To make some real progress in this field in a country like Bangladesh aiming to become a developed nation, an all-out effort from all quarters is mandatory.

People with disabilities themselves, their organisations, other organisations working in this field, all the advocacy platforms and the UN organisations now need to increase their awareness and advocacy campaigns for establishing their rights and privileges, as equal citizens of the country.

Measures should be taken to ensure that every child with a disability gets access to basic, quality education; every person has an opportunity for a respectable employment and/or income; every built infrastructure and transportation system is equally accessible to people with disabilities; every person with a disability has equal access to health services, the legal system and basic public utilities; every life is saved, including that of a person with a disability in times of disasters and humanitarian conditions; and that every person, including a person with a disability, can live a life with dignity and freedom.

Disability must be recognised and practised as a crosscutting mainstream development agenda by all. And it also needs to be reflected in statistics, plans, budgets and reports.

Only then this country will ever practically come a step closer to achieving all the SDGs, or implementing the CRPD and other international commitments, or the Rights and Protection of Persons with Disabilities Act and the National Action Plan on Disability. Only then shall we all collectively bring about some positive changes in the lives and livelihoods of people with disabilities in this country – and any other country in this world.

9. Annexures

- The National Coordination Committee
- The National Executive Committee
- SafetyNets Allocation for People with Disabilities over 5 Years
- List of Participants Interviewed through KII
- List of Participants in Workshops

Annex – 01 The National Coordination Committee

Quoted from Article 17 and 18 of the RPPD Act:

Composition of National Coordination Committee: (Article 17)

For the purposes of this Act, the following members shall form a committee by the name of “National Coordination Committee on Protection and Rights of Persons with Disabilities”:

1. Minister, Ministry of Social Welfare, who will also be the chairperson of the Committee;
2. Two Members of the Parliament nominated by the Speaker, among whom one will be from the ruling party and the other from the opposition;
3. Secretary, Ministry of Social Welfare;
4. Secretary, Ministry of Public Administration;
5. Secretary, Ministry of Health and Family Welfare;
6. Secretary, Ministry of Home;
7. Secretary, Ministry of Primary and Mass Education;
8. Secretary, Ministry of Housing and Public Works;
9. Secretary, Ministry of Women and Children;
10. Secretary, Ministry of Youth and Sports;
11. Secretary, Ministry of Labour and Employment;
12. Secretary, Ministry of Education;
13. Secretary, Ministry of Information;
14. Secretary, Ministry of Information and Communication Technology;
15. Secretary, Ministry of Disaster Management and Relief;
16. Secretary, Department of Finance;
17. Secretary, Department of Legislative and Parliament;

18. Secretary, Department of Local Government;
19. Director General, Department of Social Services;
20. Four female and three male representatives nominated by the government from among non-government organisations, Disabled People’s Organisations or Self-Help Organisations working for the protection of rights of persons with disabilities;
21. Managing Director of the Jatiyo Protibondhi Unnayan Foundation (JPUF), who shall also be the member-secretary.

Responsibilities and Functions of National Coordination Committee (Article 18)

The responsibilities and functions of the National Coordination Committee shall be as follows:

- (a) Coordinate the activities of the ministries, state establishments, constitutional establishments or private establishments at the national level to ensure the rights and protection of persons with disabilities;
- (b) Develop national policies for ensuring the rights and protection of persons with disabilities and make recommendations to the government for enacting and implementing necessary laws, rules and regulations compatible with international measures commissioned for persons with disabilities;
- (c) Make recommendations to the government with respect to creating enabling environments for persons with disabilities in existing educational institutions and establishing specialised educational institutions in every division, district and upazilla;
- (d) Make recommendations to or give directives to any ministry, division, authority, state/constitutional/statutory organisation, private organisation, self-help organisation or organisations of people with disabilities (OPDs) for ensuring the protection of persons with disabilities;
- (e) Make any kind of recommendation to the government for the rights, dignity and welfare of persons with disabilities;
- (f) Carry out other responsibilities and functions similar in nature.

Annex – 02 The National Executive Committee

Quoted from Article 19 and 20 of the RPPD Act:

Composition of the National Executive Committee: (Article 19)

For the purposes of this Act, the following members shall form a committee by the name of “National Executive Committee on Protection and Rights of Persons with Disabilities”:

22. Secretary, Ministry of Welfare, who shall be the president of the committee;
23. Director General, Social Services Officer;

24. An officer holding the post of at least Joint Secretary in the Ministry of Housing and Public Works nominated by the Ministry;
25. An officer holding the post of at least Joint Secretary in the Ministry of Health and Family Welfare nominated by the Ministry;
26. An officer holding the post of at least Joint Secretary in the Ministry of Education nominated by the Ministry;
27. An officer holding the post of at least Joint Secretary in the Ministry of Primary and Mass Education nominated by the Ministry;
28. An officer holding the post of at least Joint Secretary in the Ministry of Information nominated by the Ministry;
29. An officer holding the post of at least Joint Secretary in the Ministry of Youth and Sports nominated by the Ministry;
30. An officer holding the post of at least Joint Secretary in the Ministry of Labour and Employment nominated by the Ministry;
31. An officer holding the post of at least Joint Secretary in the Ministry of Disaster Management and Relief nominated by the Ministry;
32. An officer holding the post of at least Joint Secretary in the Ministry of Women and Children nominated by the Ministry;
33. An officer holding the post of at least Joint Secretary in the Department of Finance nominated by the Department;
34. An officer holding the post of at least Joint Secretary in the Department of Legislative and Parliament nominated by the Department;
35. Two women and two men representatives nominated by the government from non-governmental organisations or self-assisting organisations or organisations of people with disabilities (OPDs);
36. Managing Director, National Foundation for Persons with Disabilities, who shall be the member secretary of the committee.

Responsibilities and Functions of National Executive Committee (Article 20)

The responsibilities and functions of National Executive Committee shall be as follows:

- (a) To take steps for proper enforcement of policy, directions and advice adopted or given by the government or National Coordination Committee;
- (b) To advise or give directions to any organisation, statutory body, non-government organisation, self-assisting organisation or organisation owned by persons with disabilities or coordinate their activities for ensuring the rights and protection of persons with disabilities;
- (c) To provide necessary direction and check and supervise the committee's activities;

- (d) Submit a report to the National Coordination Committee at least once a year on the programmes arranged for the purpose of securing the rights of persons with disabilities; and
- (e) Carry out responsibilities and functions prescribed by the National Coordination Committee.

Annex – 03 SafetyNet Allocation for People with Disabilities over 5 Years

Allocation area	Number of beneficiaries					Budget allocation in fiscal year				
	2017-18	2018-19	2019-20	2021-22	2022-23	2017-18	2018-19	2019-20	2021-22	2022-23
Direct services										
Allowances for the Financially Insolvent Disabled	825,000	1,000,000	1,545,000	2,008,000	2,365,000	6,930,000,000	8,400,000,000	13,905,000,000	18,200,000,000	24,291,800,000
Stipend for Disabled Students	80,000	90,000	100,000	100,000	100,000	545,000,000	803,700,000	956,400,000	956,400,000	956,400,000
Fund for the Welfare of Burnt and Disabled	15,000	30,000	33,000	6,000	6,000	15,000,000	15,000,000	16,500,000	69,300,000	69,300,000
Sp Ed, Health and Training for poor disabled and autistic								23,700,000		
Cochlear Implant Programme				1,000	1,000				371,000,000	400,000,000
Training for autistic women through pilot centres			4,000					28,500,000		
Sub-total	920,000	1,120,000	1,682,000	2,115,000	2,472,000	7,490,000,000	9,218,700,000	14,930,100,000	19,596,700,000	25,717,500,000
Semi-direct services										
Service and Assistance Centre for Disabled	376,000	376,000	376,000	1,200,000	1,200,000	650,000,000	650,000,000	650,000,000	692,000,000	721,800,000
Grants for the Schools for the Disabled	35,000	35,000	35,000	11,000	12,000	229,600,000	230,000,000	280,000,000	378,200,000	400,000,000

Allocation area	Number of beneficiaries					Budget allocation in fiscal year				
NDD Protection Trust				300,000	315,000	105,000,000	275,000,000	275,000,000	309,300,000	340,200,000
Welfare Trust for Physical Disabilities				9,000	9,000	100,000,000	100,000,000	150,000,000	200,000,000	185,000,000
IPNA in BSMMU	4,000					144,500,000				
National Academy for Autism and NDD				21,000	18,000	600,000,000	300,000,000	600,000,000	120,300,000	84,000,000
Sub-Total	415,000	411,000	411,000	1,541,000	1,554,000	1,829,100,000	1,555,000,000	1,955,000,000	1,699,800,000	1,731,000,000
Indirect services										
Establishment of Hostel for the VI Children (37 Unit)	3,000	3,000				181,200,000	181,200,000	-		
Construction of VTRC at CRP, Savar						50,000,000	30,600,000	10,000,000		
Sports Complex for People with disabilities									150,000,000	1,200,000,000
Sub-total	3,000	3,000				231,200,000	211,800,000	10,000,000	150,000,000	1,200,000,000
Total SafetyNets for persons with disabilities	1,338,000	1,534,000	2,093,000	3,656,000	4,026,000	9,550,300,000	10,985,500,000	16,895,100,000	21,446,500,000	28,648,500,000
Percentage of total for persons with disabilities						1.76	1.71	2.27	1.92	2.52
Per day allocation per persons with disabilities						19.83	19.89	22.42	16.29	19.50

Annex – 04 List of Participants Interviewed through KIIs

The Prime Minister's Office

Ms Zuena Aziz, Principal Coordinator-SDGs Affairs

Ministry of Planning

Mr M A Mannan MP, Minister

Mr M Kawser Ahmed, Member (Secretary), GED, Planning Commission

Mr Mahbubul Alam Siddiquee, Deputy Chief, GED, Planning Commission

Ministry of Social Welfare

Mr Nuruzzaman Ahmed MP, Minister

Mr M Jahangir Alam, Secretary

Ms Shibahi Bhattacharya, Additional Secretary (Disability and Institution)

Ministry of Health and Family Welfare

Dr Parvez Rahim, Joint Secretary, Health Services Vision

Dr S M Mustafizur Rahman, Deputy Programme Manager, NCDPC, DGHS

Ministry of Disaster Management and Relief

Ms Momena Khatun, Joint Secretary

UN Agencies

Ms Huma Khan, Senior Human Rights Adviser to the UN Resident Coordinator, and UN Country Team

Ms Shrabana Datta, Knowledge Management and Monitoring Specialist, UN Women

Ms Farjana Reza, National Programme Officer, Social Protection, ILO

Ms Nazgul Cholponbaeva, Child Protection Officer, UNICEF

Persons with Disabilities

Mr Monsur Ahmed Choudhuri, Former Member, UN Committee on CRPD, and Former MD, JPUF

Mr Khandaker Jahurul Alam, Former President, NFOWD and Former President, APDF

Mr Badiul Alam, National and grassroots level OPD leader

Mr Habibur Rahman, Grassroots level OPD leader

Ms Afia Kabir Anila, A student, a volunteer at WFP, and a rising disability rights activist

Annex – 05 List of participants in workshops

Name	Organisation	Designation	Sex	Type of disability
Bashir Al-Hossain	National Grassroots NGO Disabilities Organisation (NGDO)	Programme Manager	M	Physical
Sanjiban Chandra Mallik	Kapasia Upazilla Protibondi Unnayan Parisad (KUDPDC)	President	M	Physical
Md. Antaj Ali	Manikganj Disabled People's Organisation to Development (MDPOD)	Director	M	Physical
Md. Litan	Narayanganj Sadar Upazila Protibondi Unnayan Parishad (NSUPUP)	President	M	Physical
Md. Shahidul Islam	Tangail Disabled Peoples Organization to Development (Tangail-DPOD)	Director	M	Physical
Nasima Akter	National Council of Disabled Women (NCDW)	President	F	Physical
Mizanur Rahman Jewel	Down Syndrome Society of Bangladesh (DSSB)	Head of Programme	M	N/A
Md. Ataud Rahman Sarker	Ganna Unnayan Kendra	Project Manager	M	N/A
Mohammad Billal Hossain	Spondon Protibondi Unnoyan Sangstha	President	M	Physical
Morjina Ahmed	Disabled Welfare Society	Executive Director	F	Visual
Khandaker Jahurul Alam	Centre for Services and Information on Disability (CSID)	Executive Director	M	N/A
Nasrin Jahan	Disabled Child Foundation (DCF)	Executive Director	F	Visual
Hasiba Hasan Joya	Society of the Deaf and Sign Language Users (SDSL)	Treasurer	F	N/A
Jahangir Alam	Centre for Disability in Development	Thematic Expert	M	Visual
Rohida Islam	Visually Impaired People's Society (VIPS)	Project Officer	F	Visual

Abu Hanif Muhammad Forhad	Turning Point Foundation	Acting Executive Director	M	N/A
Ashrafun Nahar Misti	Women with Disabilities Development Foundation (WDDF)	Executive Director	F	Physical
Salma Mahbub	Bangladesh Society for the Change and Advocacy Nexus (B-SCAN)	General Secretary	F	Physical
Shihab Uddin Bhuyan	Youth activist	Chittagong University	M	Visual
Daisy Akter	BRAC	Lead, Disability Inclusion	F	N/A
Mehrin Karim	United Nations Development Programme	Research Officer, SPSS Programme	F	N/A
Konoc Fatema	ADD International Bangladesh	Project Officer	F	N/A
Asim Dio	Humanity and Inclusion	Advocacy and Communications Manager	M	N/A



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