

FOCUS

Poverty and Disability: The Case in Bangladesh

by Md Nurul Abedin

Nobel laureate Amartya Sen has defined poverty as "capability failure" in a given socio-economic structure. We cannot, hopelessly and helplessly, watch the capability failure of the disabled persons. We must swing into action to arrest their capability failure by arranging required training for them, organising them as coherent group and providing them with necessary capital.

BD is a poor country judged in the context of all indicators viz. per capita income (US\$ 386), GDP growth rate (5.5%), rate of unemployment (24%), incidence of absolute poverty (40%) and number of people living below the poverty line (48% in rural areas). Poverty, in the context of Bangladesh, is usually defined as the inability to attain a minimal standard of living. Failure to attain that standard means the negation of required calorie intake, nutritious food, health care, educational opportunities, safe drinking water, proper sanitation and shelter to the vast multitude of people with consequent adverse effect on their productivity, national growth process and social equilibrium. Based on the realisation that the nation cannot reap the good harvest of development efforts leaving large number of people in the womb of poverty, its alleviation has been accepted as the core of State Policy right from the inception of the country as an independent sovereign state.

Bangladesh is not only a poor but a populous country as well. According to the census of 1991, the country is now inhabited by more than 12 crore people. WHO (World Health Organisation) has estimated that 10 per cent of the country's population (i.e. 1 cr. 20 lac) is disabled. Some local surveys suggest that as high as 14 per cent of those surveyed are disabled. Even within this 10 per cent, the number of children and youths aged upto 16 years is about 60 lakh. Seventy per cent of the disabled population is totally illiterate. Annually an approximate number of 2,50,000 of the disabled join the mainstream of population. Every year about 30 thousand children aged less than six years lose their eye sight and hearing power due to malnutrition and Vitamin 'A' deficiency. In other words, about 100 children per day and four per hour are falling victims to this kind of disability. About 10 lakh children in the same age group (aged less than 6 years) are suffering from the symptoms of blindness due to vitamin deficiency. Every year, in Bangladesh about 1,80,000 to 3,25,000 pregnant women suffer from the disease of night blindness due to vitamin A deficiency. Apart from these factors, people also fall victims to different kinds of

disabilities due to deformity at birth, diseases, flood, cyclone, tornado and rail/road/air accidents.

From the above analysis, we can come to the conclusion that disability is caused by the interplay of either natural or accidental or health factors. Whatever may be the factors, the fact remains that disability is characterised both as a cause and effect of poverty. There is general belief that a disabled person loses his/her working ability and, as such, productivity. Because of this societal belief, he/she is pushed aside the mainstream of productive activities and, as a consequence, remains in the realm of abject poverty. The poverty does not permit him/her to have access to health care, nutritious food, education and training. Had not the poverty prevented his/her access to these services, his/her disability would have been mitigated to a large extent. There is, now-a-days, a growing global realisation of the existence of an intrinsic relationship between disability and poverty.

With this strong hypothesis, the Impact Foundation, Bangladesh (IFB) conducted a survey in four thanas (sub-district) of Chuadanga district in April, 1997 to work out the strategy for the implementation of "The Comprehensive Primary Health Care Project for Prevention and Care of Avoidable Disability". The survey established a strong relationship between poverty and disability and between prevention of disability and alleviation of poverty. The survey has brought out certain interesting findings. Some of the findings which are of interest to us are:

- 61 per cent of the total disabled persons are identified with 0 to 0.49 acres of land-holding, taken as a measure of the level of poverty.
- 20 per cent of the total disabled persons are located in households with 0.50 to 2.99 acres of land. Thus as the amount of land-holding increases, the rate of disability decreases.
- 19 per cent of the total disabled persons are located in households with 3 and above acres of land-holding.

The above findings reveal an

inverse relationship between the source of income (land-holding in this particular case) and disability. As the source of income increases, disability decreases. Decrease in the sources of income means loss of purchasing power. This phenomenon negates a person's access to better health care, education, shelter, nutritious food etc. Faced with the denial of such social security, a person tends to become morbid, morose, melancholy, mentally-depressed and physically uncared for which, in turn, accentuate his/her disability.

Disability syndrome is further aggravated by social taboo. Our society still does not accept a naturally born disabled baby with the same amount of fanfare as it does in case of the birth of a normal baby. Concern appears to be writ large on the faces of parents and other near relations. From the very moment of such baby's arrival in this world, he or she is considered to be a liability rather than an asset. Seldom we realise that such a baby has no control over his/her birth. Rather the callousness of the parents is to be blamed. Had the proper health care and nutritional needs of would-be mother been taken during the period of her pregnancy, the fate of new-born disabled baby would have been different and he or she would have appeared in this planet like other normal human babies. This observation also holds good in case of accidents. Accidents are not the own-making of the disabled persons. Normal and able persons fall victims to accidents much against their will and as such, become disabled — persons and agencies alike. Why should such a person suffer in perpetuity for a person suffer which is not his or her own creation? Has not the society, the state and the humanity at large anything to do to wipe out their suffering and rehabilitate them as normal

human beings in God's universe?

The answer to this question is an emphatic 'Yes'. The panacea lies in their rehabilitation in society as productive force. Realisation should be all-around that they are not only the consumers but the producers as well. Consumers simply take away from the productive process but the producers add to it and thereby contribute to the growth of societal wealth. Part of the society as they are, they also grow as the society grows — thereby alleviating their poverty. But the big question is how to transform the disabled persons into productive forces of the society? The simple answer is "by way of human resources development" (HRD). Not less than 50 NGOs and different government agencies are working for rendering services to the disabled including training for the development of their latent faculties. Notable among them are Special Education Centre at Mirpur, Centre for the Rehabilitation of Physically Handicapped (CRPH) at Savar and Employment and Rehabilitation Centre for Physically Handicapped (ERCPH) at Tongi with the attachment of "Mothers' Industry. Different disability-related societies and also their federation NFOWD (National Forum of Organisations Working with the Disabled) are also conducting training programmes for the disabled from time to time. Three programmes — Rural Social Services (RSS), Rural Mothers' Club (RMC) and Urban Community Development (UCD) — are now under implementation by the Directorate of Social Services (DSS). These have poverty alleviation connotations (income generation and employment creation) for their beneficiaries.

New strategy such as CBR — Community-based Rehabilitation — is also picking up momentum for induction of PWDS (people with disabilities) in the mainstream programmes of health, education, rural and

tribal development, urban poverty alleviation and so on to enable them to lead a life with dignity without getting disintegrated from the families and communities. The Dhaka Declaration made at the conclusion of the Second South Asian Conference of the CBR network held in Dhaka from 3 to 6 December, 1997 urged the government and non-government authorities of South Asian countries to develop access of all people with disabilities to basic rehabilitation services by the year 2010. GOB has also made increased allocation for social welfare sector over the plan periods — starting from the first five-year plan (1973-78) up to 5th five-year plan (1997-2002).

What is the impact of all these arrangements on the disabled? Has there been any impact study by any authority? At least, I am not aware of. But I am very much concerned at the magnitude of the problem as is evident from the statistical pocket book for 1998 published by Bangladesh Bureau of Statistics (BBS). It has shown that 11.98 persons say 12 persons per thousand people in Bangladesh suffer from one kind of disability or the other and are subject to abject poverty. We cannot expect peace, social justice and development in the country leaving this vast multitude of people under the shades of poverty. Work plans for the alleviation of their poverty are to be chalked out for implementation by the public and private sectors alike. The plan should encompass the following actions:

- PWDS should be brought within the fold of micro-credit provided by the banking system and NGOs. NFOWD should prepare projects and present the same to the Employment Bank for financing the proposed economic activities of PWDS. NGOs should also be propelled to provide micro-credit to the PWDS. During the tenure of my office as MD, PKSF, I have noticed the inertia among the NGOs to ad-
- Draft laws now under consideration in the Ministry of Law, Justice and Parliamentary Affairs, should be given fair shape without further delay to protect the rights of the disabled as enshrined in our constitution for all citizens.
- Quotas, should be reserved for the disabled in the service of the Republic in line with quotas reserved for other groups.
- It should be made mandatory for the industries/factories, if necessary by legal means, to provide suitable jobs to the disabled in such establishments. Ministry of Social Welfare should take the initiative in holding talks in this respect with Ministry of Labour and Employment, FBCCI and Employers' Association of Bangladesh.
- Social security for the disabled should be there for their movement by whatever mode of transport they prefer as well as in all public places including the places of their work.

This is, by no means, an exhaustive list. The list can be enriched by induction of more points. I will say only this

The writer is a former Secretary to the Government of Bangladesh.

Is the Government Really Serious about Disability Legislation?

Remembering the Work of Madhab Banik (1961-1999), Disability Activist

TWO weeks ago on 8 May, which is, incidentally, World Red Cross and Red Crescent Day, I received the news that at a meeting of the cabinet of the Bangladesh Government, the 'Draft' legislation concerned with people with disabilities in Bangladesh had been approved and it will now go to the Law Ministry for scrutiny and then to the Bangladesh Parliament to be passed into the statutes of the nation.

Madhab was one of my many friends with disabilities who assisted me in putting together the first draft of this proposed legislation, before I handed it over to the Ministry of Social Welfare at the beginning of 1992. It is very sad that the rights of people with disabilities in Bangladesh have not yet been given serious consideration. It is unforgivable that eight years have elapsed since Madhab assisted me and others in drafting this legislation as well as the National Disability Policy, and still it is not law. As a tribute to the life and work of Madhab, I sincerely hope that the law will be passed by Parliament before the first anniversary of Madhab's death at the end of December 2000.

There are many reasons to remember Madhab and the contribution he has made to CRP and to people with disabilities as a whole in Bangladesh. He

has inspired many people with and without disabilities who came into his life. Madhab was a part of Centre for the Rehabilitation of the Paralyzed (CRP) from its beginning, and it was in Dhanmondi where I first met him nearly twenty years ago. Valerie Taylor, the founder, had encouraged Madhab to try out painting and when I met him, he had already produced a number of greetings cards. Madhab will be remembered by many for the beautiful paintings which captured his childhood memories of life near the rivers in Munshiganj, where his father was an artisan of brass, bronze and copper utensils and artifacts.

Madhab was a good athlete before his accident — a fall from a mango tree — at the age of 15, but looking back he often told me that his life had been enriched because of his accident and that is why he used to celebrate the anniversary of his accident, 17 March, and not that of his birthday. He used to say that he had met so many wonderful people who had become his friends, found a job where he could help and inspire others and, for which we all remember him, found the gift of painting. And as I write these words in my apartment in Banani in Dhaka, I look around my living room and see the different types of scenes which Madhab painted. He covered a wide

'canvas' of life, from the traditional colourful country sailing boats and palm trees to more abstract thoughtful black and white creations. On my wall is also the poster advertising the British Council exhibition of his paintings which was held in May 1990, an exhibition which gave him both satisfaction and confidence.

There is a story behind the exhibition. In late 1989, I lost my temper with Madhab, and just before I left Bangladesh for a three-week holiday, I said to him, "I do not believe you can really paint. You are lazy, Madhab; people say you can paint, but I am beginning to have my doubts. I have arranged an exhibition for you next year and you have nothing ready to exhibit. I will have to cancel it on my return." Unknown to me, while I was away, he took leave from his work at CRP and painted every day and some of the nights. He was stung into action. The work of those three weeks was the basis for the exhibition in 1990.

Madhab had no sensation or muscle power below his shoulders. I suggested in 1990 that he could try the computer 'MacPaint' programme on my office computer near Zigatola. Painting he would do lying face down on his bed and using neck and shoulder muscles to move a brush fixed in a hand splint. How could he use a computer

and productive as anyone, and in his case, he was passionately committed to assisting those people struggling to rebuild their lives after an accident or illness.

And there is another aspect of Madhab's life to consider. Because of his accident, he had not been able to continue his formal education. From the last century, I believe, blind persons have been able to use 'writers' of their own to help them complete exams. Madhab could not write easily himself so he applied for a writer. After CRP approached the Chairman of the Dhaka Board of Education in 1987, Madhab was granted permission to sit for his SSC examinations with the help of a 'writer'. Another hurdle overcome, another battle won.

Madhab's paintings in my flat and the many photos that exist of him in action, and his many wise words which still echo in my head and the heads of others, will inspire much more work in the future. Already, others at CRP are taking on the work which Madhab used to do and in doing so become inspired, but they miss those searching eyes which used to check, in minute detail, their work.

He was a very good cook too, which few would realise, and in the old, old days he would organise dinners in my Dhanmondi flat. Madhab used to love going shopping for daily groceries and necessities and became a favourite figure in a number of local markets. His cooking process could perhaps be written about on some other occasion. We could collect a recipe book of 'Madhab's Favourites'. Madhab is remembered in a full length feature film, 'Bihong', directed by Abdullah Al-Mamun, which will be released in Bangladesh and U.K. later this year. The film, which, it is hoped, will do much to change the general public's attitudes towards people with disabilities, is dedicated to the memory of Madhab. I suggest that the Members of Parliament be given a private showing of the film at which time they can make the commitment to quickly enact the very important legislation recently agreed by the Cabinet.

Doing this will be another way to remember Madhab Chandra Kangsa Bank and his life's work.

The writer works for the International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies, and is currently based in Dhaka.

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সিটিং অফিস: ডিএসসি
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০১. কাজের নাম :	আলগা-বিভিন্ন এবং অন্তর্ভুক্ত সি-টিএই অফিসের কোয়ার্টার (১০০০ বর্গফুট প্রতি ইউনিট) ৪র্থ তলায় নির্মাণ কাজ ও ৬-৭ তলায় পানির টাঙ্ক স্থাপন।
০২. দরপত্র দাখিলের মূল্য :	৳ ১০০০.০০ (এক হাজার টাকা মাত্র অক্ষরহীনভাবে)
০৩. স্বাক্ষরিত মূল্য :	৳ ১৭,৯৬,৬৪৫.৯৬ (একাত্তর লাখ হাজার ছয়শত পঁচাত্তর টাকা হাজারেই পয়সা মাত্র)
০৪. আবেদনকারী :	নন্দলাভকে উক্ত মূল্যের ২.৫% হারে জামানত গ্যাস ট্রান্সমিশন কোম্পানী লিমিটেড এর অনুমোদিত ব্যাংক/ফাইন্যান্স কোম্পানীর মাধ্যমে প্রদানের পরে কোন তফসিলিৎ ব্যাংক হইতে ব্যাংক ড্রাফট/চেক/অর্ডার এর মাধ্যমে দরপত্রের সঠিক অর্থেরই জমা প্রদান করিতে হইবে।
০৫. টেন্ডারদানের বোল্যাজ :	সরকারী/স্বাধীনকারী/স্বাধীনকারী প্রতিষ্ঠানের তালিকাভুক্ত ১ম শ্রেণীর টেন্ডারদানকারীর নামে ২০.০০ লাখ টাকার একক নন্দলাভে বিগত ৩ বছরে পূর্ণ কাজের পূর্ণ অভিজ্ঞতা থাকাইবে।
০৬. দরপত্রের সাথে যে সকল কাগজপত্র জমা দিতে হইবে :	ক) ১ম শ্রেণীর টেন্ডারদানকারীর নামে (১৯৯৯-২০০০) তালিকাভুক্তির সন্দর্ভ/সন্দর্ভসমূহের অনুলিপি। খ) ইতিপূর্বে সম্পাদিত কাজের কার্যসম্পন্ন পত্র ও কার্য সম্পাদন পত্রের অনুলিপি। গ) যে কোন তফসিলিৎ ব্যাংক হইতে আর্থিক সঙ্গতির সন্দর্ভ। ঘ) ১৯৯৯-১৯৯৯ অর্থ বছরের আকের পরিচয়ের সন্দর্ভ। ঙ) হালনাগাদ (১৯৯৯-২০০০) কনসার ট্রেড লাইসেন্সের অনুলিপি। চ) মূল সম্পাদনকারীর সন্দর্ভ।
০৭. কার্য সম্পাদনের সমসীয়া :	কার্যসম্পন্ন হইবার দিন হইতে ৩০ (ত্রিশ) দিন।
০৮. দরপত্র দাখিল বিকরের স্থান ও সময় :	বোল্যাজসম্পন্ন টেন্ডারদানকারী ০১/০৫/২০০০ই তারিখ হইতে ১০/০৫/২০০০ই পর্যন্ত সকল কার্যবিবরণে সফল লসাকর্ষীনে সময়ে নির্দিষ্টকৃত অফিস হইতে দরপত্র দাখিল করা করিতে পারিবে। * হিসাব বিভাগ, জিটিসিএল, বাড়ি-১২, বোত-১২, পেট্রোল-১, উত্তরা মডেল টাউন, ঢাকা। * হিসাব বিভাগ, পেট্রোলিয়াম, পেট্রোলিয়াম, ০-কাজান বাসার, ঢাকা। * হিসাব বিভাগ, স্বাধীনকারী গ্যাস ট্রান্সমিশন লিমিটেড, ০-কাজান বাসার, ঢাকা। * হিসাব বিভাগ, বাসের, ইন্ডাস্ট্রিয়াল এলাকা (৪ম তলা), পুরান পল্লী, ঢাকা।
০৯. দরপত্র গ্রহণ এবং বোলার তারিখ ও সময় :	উক্তবিধে কার্যসম্পন্ন হইতে ১৪/০৫/২০০০ই কোর্ট ১২:০০ ঘটিকায় অর্থাৎ নন্দলাভ/এডিনিটসমূহ উপস্থিত হইতে (যদি কেহ থাকেন) গ্যাস সম্পাদনকারীর কার্যসম্পন্ন হইবে।
১০. জিটিসিএল কর্তৃক কোন কার্য দাখিলে বাতিবেকই সকল দরপত্র গ্রহণ হবে। কোন দরপত্র বাতিল করিবার অধিকার সংরক্ষণ করে।	

জিটিসিএল-১০/২০০০

জিটি-৪৮১

Government of the People's Republic of Bangladesh
Ministry of Jute
Bangladesh Secretariat, Dhaka

Re-Tender Notice
No 16/97 (5th time)

No MJS-8/BJC S-114/Tender-16/97/106 Dated: 11-5-2000

Tenders are hereby invited by the undersigned for sale of abolished BJC's property of the undermentioned group on as it is where it is basis. Tender schedule and terms & conditions should be purchased from BJC Head Office (Adamjee Court Annex Building-2, 119-120 Motijheel C/A, Dhaka) against BD/Pay Order/ Bank Draft for Tk 100 (one hundred) only (non-refundable) from any scheduled bank in favour of Secretary, Ministry of Jute by 4-6-2000. The amount of property given in the tender may be more/less. Earnest money at the rate 2.5% through Pay Order/Bank Draft should be submitted with the tender as per terms & conditions of schedule. If any tenderer want to submit tender as a company then list of their names with amount of property mentioned against each should be submitted with the tender, otherwise tender will not be acceptable. Purchaser of property shall have to pay income tax at the rate 3% of the sale price as per Income Tax Act at the time of paying the price of property.

Tenders will be received in tender box kept at the Ministry of Jute, Bangladesh Secretariat (Building No 6, Room Nos 708 & 710) up to 2-30 PM of 5-6-2000. The tenders received will be opened on the same day at 3-00 PM in presence (if any) of the tenderers. The authority reserves the right to reject/accept tenders in part or whole without assigning any reason.

Gr No	Name & address/description of premises	Mouza	Khatian No	Dag No	Amount of land
5	Land including 2 godowns, kutcha press & office building of abolished BJC's Messrs Universal Jute Traders at Narayanganj, as it is where it is valuation rate — Tk 25,89,266.25	Shitalakkhya	108	427, 428, 441	0.57 acres

Md Ali Akbar
Senior Assistant Secretary
Ministry of Jute &
Member Secretary
Abolished BJC's Property
Sale Committee
Phone: 8610379

DFP-12073-16/5
G-966

TOM & JERRY

By Hanna-Barbera

James Bond
BY IAN FLEMING
DRAWING BY MORRIS

IF JAMES IS RIGHT, YOU'R RICHTER WILL BE CROSSING THE ISLAND TO THE WESTERN END. THERE A ROAD HE WOULD TAKE, NIHO?

NOT THAT FAR, FROM HIS COTTAGE... HE WOULD GO BY WATER, I THINK

AND HOW DO YOU EXPECT TO KEEP HIM FROM SEEING US? THE ALTAR IS NOT VISIBLE, MY DEAR!

WAIT! THAT MAN FROM THE CRUISER... I JUST REMEMBERED SOMETHING!

THEN LET'S WATCH FROM OUR SHIP—AND FOLLOW HIS BOAT!