

HANDICAP INTERNATIONAL

PEOPLE with disabilities are a diverse and heterogeneous group. Defining disability by referring to impairment reflects a medical model within which disability is seen as an individualised concept, a medical condition that a person has and that can be addressed through medical management. This model fails to demonstrate respect for difference and acceptance of persons with disabilities as part of human diversity and humanity (UNCRPD Article 1).[1]

However, understanding the diverse functional challenges people experience can help in our understanding of how to address barriers to create an environment that enables participation. It is important to ensure that specific needs of a person are met in order to facilitate participation in society. This may be through assistive devices: wheelchair, hearing aid, communication board etc, rehabilitation services, and advocacy and empowerment initiatives challenging contextual barriers to participation: environmental, social, cultural and institutional. This can lead to communities within which people with disabilities are included in society on equal basis with others.

Disability defined

The United Nations Convention on the Rights of People with Disabilities (UNCRPD), ratified by the Government of Bangladesh (GoB) in 2007, provides a reference for persons with disabilities to include: *Those who have long-term physical, mental, intellectual or sensory impairments which in interaction with various barriers may hinder their full and effective participation in society on an equal basis with others.*

Key points of the reference:

- Long-term nature of impairment.
- Physical impairment includes reduced muscle strength, deformities, loss of limbs, which often lead to difficulty moving from one position to another and/or one place to another.
- Mental impairment, affecting reasoning and mood, often affects development of relationships with others.
- Intellectual impairment may affect ability to understand and act on information.
- Sensory impairment affecting vision or hearing which may impact on communication: reading, listening to conversations, joining in communications.

Key element of the reference is:

- Interaction of impairment with barriers affects opportunity for equal participation

1. Environmental barriers: the built and physical environment within which we live.

RECU concept: the physical environment may be inaccessible if people are not able to R: reach; E: enter; C: circulate; U: use services in their communities.

- R = reach the services from home. This may be the school, the workplace, the market, the training centre, the flood shelter. Barriers include steep, muddy, narrow pathways and slopes, potholes; overcrowded buses accessed by high steps, lack of seats or resting places; rickshaws that do not want to carry a wheelchair as well as person who uses a wheelchair or who are not able to give extra time for a person with a disability to get on or off the rickshaw; signs giving information, direction, advice, awareness that people are not able to understand.

Reaching services: Steps with 150mm height and 300mm depth and handrails at 850-900mm and 700mm (for children) make moving around the community safe and dignified.