

ROUNDTABLE on Mainstreaming Disability in National Budget to Increase Allocation for Persons with Disabilities

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DELIBERATIONS BY THE PARTICIPANTS

Mosharraf Hossain,
Country Director,
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Moderator



The roundtable on 'Mainstreaming Disability in National Budget to Increase Allocation for Persons with Disabilities' is arranged by ADD International and The Daily Star. Budget is the policy document through which the government can take proper steps to uplift the backward groups. Government can take practical steps for the elimination of poverty and can provide guidelines according to the provisions of the national budget. The recommendations of this conference would be sent to the relevant authorities for consideration in the national budget.

Shah Hossain Imam,
Associate Editor, The Daily Star.



I consider this as a unique privilege as I am here on behalf of Mahfuz Anam, editor of The Daily Star, who is now abroad. I warmly welcome you to this roundtable conference. I am positively overwhelmed by the very distinguished and eminent nature of the persons who are present and will speak and participate in this very important discussion. I consider it as a most important and very timely discussion because it is being held at a time when the budget is imminent. I welcome the honorable minister, all the participants and ADD with whom we are partnering in a very noble cause as well as the representatives of the development partners who are present. It is a great pity that nothing is disability-friendly in our country. Disability is a word which is seldom heard in our parliament. We should rather dignify them with the level of being challenged. Their being challenged is not their fault. They are challenged due to natural and man-made causes. I think theirs is a question of human rights for which we need to launch an awareness programme. I am glad to know that the recommendations would be sent to the planning ministry in order to push for necessary budget allocation to this



much neglected sector.

Professor Abul Barkat,
President, Bangladesh
Economic Association
(Orthoniti Shomiti) and
Chair, Economics
Department, University
of Dhaka.



The title of this keynote paper is 'The right of the disabled: Budget and relevant thoughts'. There is no objective, reliable information on the disabled and various types of disabilities in Bangladesh. Who are the disabled? Is there any relationship between disability and poverty? Is the rate of disability among the poor comparatively more than among the rich? Does poverty cause disability or disability cause poverty or both? Does poverty increase disability?

Are the disabled people treated equally with others? What steps have been taken by the government to improve their quality of life?

There is no reliable research analysis on these significant questions in our country.

The answers to these questions is the main objective of this article.

I have drawn some conclusions on the basis of my inquiry. These are:

1) Disability is not a socio-economic-class or neutral fact. The rate of disability among the poor is higher than that among the rich people.

2) Disability creates a deprivation-cycle. In this cycle poor disabled persons become poorer.

3) The very small allotment and expenditure of government for the improvement of their quality of life indicates high degree of disrespect for them.

4) On the present struc-

ture, keeping other conditions unchanged, the chance of employment of the disabled is very little.

5) It is possible for the government to take the responsibilities of the disabled as stated in the constitution. It is possible for the government to increase the allocation in budget for the disabled in order to fulfill the objectives.

6) If the state fails to take responsibilities of the disabled, disability will increase and it will consequently increase poverty.

You may not believe that, 1.6 crore people are disabled while the total population of Bangladesh is 16 crore. It means 10% of our total population is disabled. There are five kinds of disabilities that could be found in our country. These are -- physically handicapped (52.5%), visually impaired (15.1%), speech and hearing impaired (14.9%), mentally retarded (10.9%) and diversified disabilities (6.7%). If the rate of disabilities cannot be reduced, the present number of 1.6 crore disabled people will reach almost 5.2 crore by 2021. The total allotment

as a basic duty and responsibility of the state in the basic principles of our constitution: In Article No. 15(D) it is clearly stated that 'the right to social security, that includes government assistance in cases of deprivation arising from unemployment, illness or disability suffered by widows, orphans and aged people'; Article No. 28(4) declares that, 'Nothing in this Article would prevent the State from making special provisions in favour of women or children or for the advancement of any backward section of citizens.'

It is the time to decide whether we want to have 5 crore 20 lakh persons with disabilities or 2 crore 80 lakh by 2021. This decision has to be positive as it is a great criminal offence to facilitate disabilities. And also because those disability prevented, 2 crore 40 lakh people will be able to successfully contribute to the socio-economic development of our country.

In my opinion, a disabled person suffers all those deprivation-distress that could be possible for human beings. However, the deprivation of disabled persons could have three

tral factor. Poverty is one of the main reasons of disability.

Secondly, poverty causes disability and hence, disability makes people poorer.

Disabled people need more care but they are mostly kept unproductive. So disability causes poverty. Thirdly, when the state fails to take the responsibilities of the disabled people and does not take proper steps to remove disability, then disability is bound to increase poverty. Fourthly, disability creates a perpetual deprivation cycle among the poor as well as rich people. Powerlessness, vulnerability, physical weakness, poverty, isolation/alienation and psychological distress -- these five factors constitutes the deprivation cycle.

In spite of our constitutional obligations, it is a matter of doubt whether our government regards the disabled as human beings. It is very important to define the extent of respect or disrespect of the government to the disabled people. My analysis

has been allotted for the disabled people (actually it is the allowances for poor disabled persons under Social Safety Net programmes).

That means only 0.3% of the total development budget has been allocated for the disabled people.

* If it is considered that 10% of our total population is disabled, then the proportionate percentage of the budget should be of 3,859 crore taka while the budget is only 110 crore taka.

So, I can say that, on the basis of the development budget, the degree of disrespect of the government to the disabled people is 94.3%.

As we hope to build an exploitation-free, discrimination-free, secular Bangladesh which we have achieved through our liberation war, and as we hope that Bangladesh will be a secular, progressive, liberal, and democratic welfare state by 2021, and as our constitution is disability-friendly, so we must allocate 10% of our budget, nearly 1,500 crore taka in a year for the disabled people.

employment of the disabled.

5) To create disabled-friendly environment in every educational institution.

6) To increase the number of recipients and the amount of allowances to at least 900 taka (the present amount is only 300 taka per month).

7) To spend 10% of the education budget for the development of education of the disabled.

8) To give at least 1000 taka health allowances to pregnant disabled women.

9) To allocate budget in the IT sector in order to increase the skills of the disabled people.

10) To take proper steps to ensure disabled-friendly public and private transportation system.

11) To allocate 20 crore taka for the legal and medical aid of the disabled women who are victims of violence and torture.

12) To introduce rationing of essentials for the poor and needy persons with disabilities.

13) To allocate a handsome amount in the budget for the implementation of the 'Disability Welfare Act 2001'

This would be possible only if the leadership is disability-friendly.

Dr. Akbar Ali Khan,
Former Adviser,
Caretaker Government,
People's Republic of
Bangladesh:



I am here basically to give support to the rights and demands of the disabled persons. And I am very much pleased to come here for that purpose. I fully agree with the main points of the keynote paper of Professor Abul Barkat. His recommendations are really very practical.

But it is a matter of great



for the disabled people was 110 crore taka in the development budget of the current 2010-2011 fiscal year. If we consider these 1.6 crore disabled people of our country as human beings, the allotment should be approximately 15,029 crore taka. You may consider it as unfeasible because the amount is 39% of the development budget of the current fiscal year.

If other factors remain unchanged, the number of disabled people will be tripled after ten years. It is not acceptable according to our constitutional pledge. Because the constitution has established it

dimensions -- as a disabled person, as a poor-poverty stricken-ultra poor disabled person, and as a poor disabled woman. On the basis of my survey, it can be said that

1) We must put more emphasis on the improvement of disabled rural people.

2) We must put more emphasis on the poor-ultra poor-lower middle class disabled people.

There are some factors which we should consider in defining the relationship between disability and poverty. Firstly, disability is not a socio-economic and class neu-



of the current development budget shows that --

* Among 1,000 development projects only seven projects are directly or indirectly related to the welfare of disabled people. Among them three projects are directly disabled-friendly while the remaining four projects are indirectly related to the welfare of the disabled people. It means only 0.7% of the total projects under annual development programme are disability-friendly!

* Only 110 crore taka of the total 38,500 crore taka of the development budget

Moreover, the state should take some disabled-friendly steps. Such as --

1) To give priority to the persons with disability in distributing the 2 crore bigha fallow lands in our country.

2) To introduce and implement specific employment quota (may be 5%) for the disabled.

3) To provide them with bank loans on easy conditions in order to create disabled-friendly entrepreneurship.

4) To facilitate and reward those private institutions that ensure the

sorrow that there is little chance of the fulfillment of the goals for which the conference has been arranged. As most of the budget papers are ready, you would get some allotment in the case of special recommendation by the highest official. You could also get some allotment by special political consideration. Unless we realize this, the discussion will be meaningless. It is very unfortunate for our country that there is no chance of reflecting the discussions upon the national budget. We do not have any forum by which our thoughts can be reflected or presented in the budget. The major weakness of the budget process of Bangladesh is that here each ministry has a standing committee but they cannot give their opinion in budget making as they have not been given the right by the rule of business of parliament.

If a standing committee makes any corrections in the budget then it would be like a cut motion. So it would be harassing for the government. So the standing committee cannot make any corrections. On the other hand it makes no sense to suggest any change at the time of budget.

A disabled person does not seek sympathy. We should create scope to bring them in the mainstream. So we need investment and recurring expenditure. We have to set priorities. First priority is to provide them with technical facilities. Second, we have to give them access to education. Computer technology has unlocked new horizons of potentialities. We have to invest in the field so that they can have easy access to this technology. The most important point is to create employment for disabled persons.

I support quota facilities for the disabled though I am generally against quota system. People think that they are unable to work. But if you give them a chance they would prove what they can do. Private organizations have to come forward along with the government. 5% quota should be initiated by the organizations that enjoy tax holiday. If we introduce the tax holiday system, private companies would put up their hand. Disabled people would work harder as they have to prove their competence.

Dr. Ananya Raihan,
Executive Director, D. Net:



We have to identify specific forms of disabilities and design programmes

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