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work is slow, results don't materialise, money is not spent where it should, and opportunities are not identified," says Dr Bidisha. Her analysis of MOWCA's gender budget notes successful implementation of programmes "is critically dependent on effective coordination of related ministries" and are often prevented by "leakages and corruption in the system".

This analysis did not, however, cover all 43 ministries which submit a gender budget. In addition, Dr Bidisha and other economists have also only undertaken qualitative analysis so far because gathering gender-segregated data from each ministry has proved difficult. "When I started working on this, I realised that the analysis was not done systematically. Or, they [the ministries] don't want to share their data so that we can undertake our own analysis." One of the economists' recommendations was that a cell of gender

experts be created at the finance ministry, which could centrally assess gender sensitivity of all government programmes.

Another problem is how much of the gender budget allocations fall when the revised budget is announced at the end of the year. Dr Bidisha's report notes "it is extremely crucial that the priorities towards women in the development budget is not curtailed when the budget gets revised." The money has technically not been handed out yet and past precedent shows that these percentages will fall. For example, the 10.71 percent women's share in the land ministry's 2018-2019 budget was revised down to around half (5.74 percent) by the end of the fiscal year. The same was true for the Ministry of Youth and Sports whose 2018-2019 budget proposed women's share of the development budget was around 64 percent but which was cut down to more than half, 30.7 percent, in the revised budget.

Dr Sharmind Neelormi, associate professor of economics at Jahangirnagar University, who undertook analysis of these ministries' gender budgets, says that there is no monitoring or evaluation of how these funds are spent at the end of each fiscal year and whether these had measurable impact on women. Dr Neelormi's analysis of the past few years' gender budgets of three ministries shows that the gender budgeting done is largely lip service. "Everything except for the new allocated figures are copy-pasted from previous years. If you read consecutive years' gender budgets, you will feel you are reading the same thing over and over again."

Dr Neelormi recommends thorough monitoring and evaluation of at least several ministries at the end of each fiscal year. "We will then be able to understand the impact of these allocations and the impact of their gender budgets."

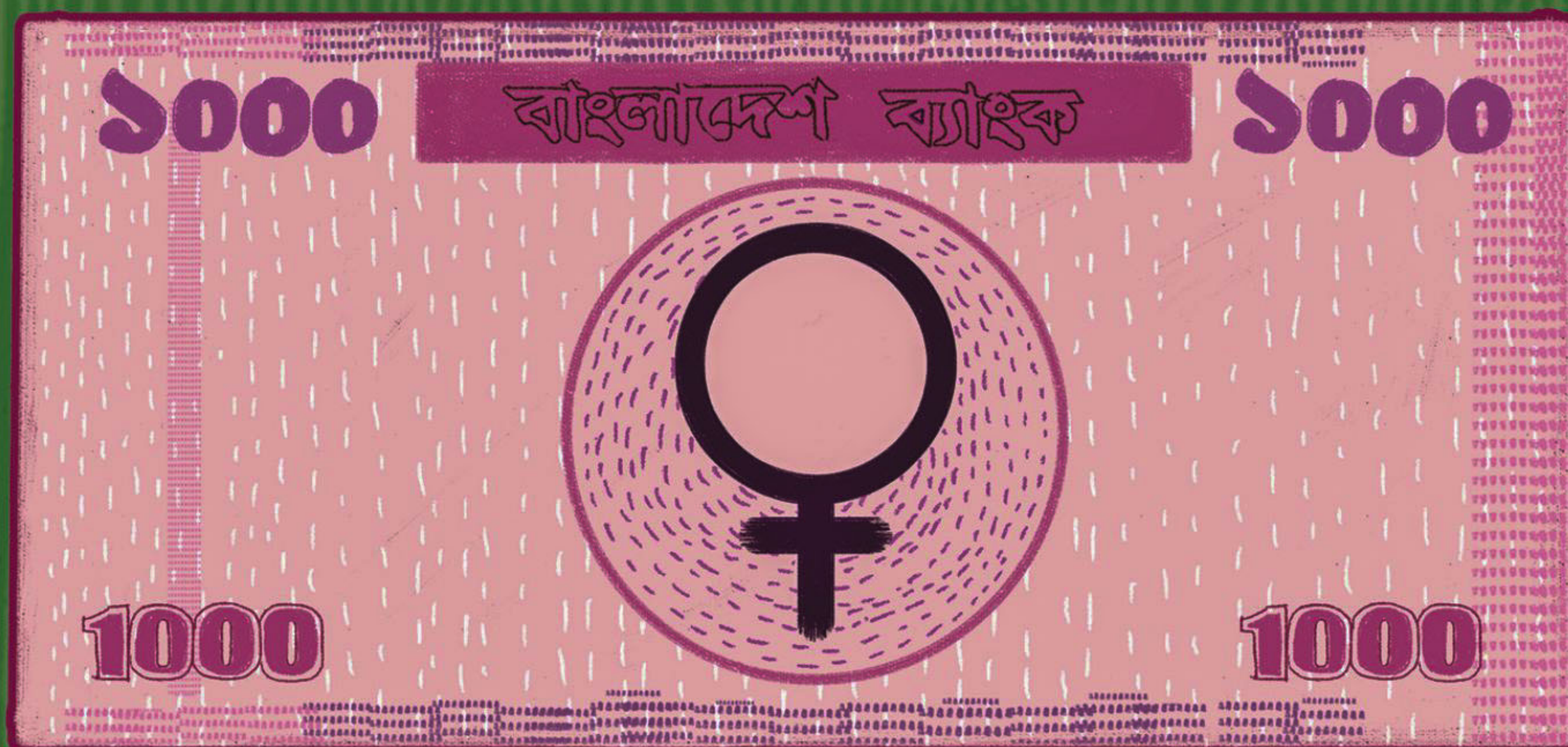


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Rights activists also highlight there are many differently-abled persons who could not receive proper education and they stay idly at home. If they could be given special training on income generating activities and employed in accordance with their skills, they would not have to live as a burden to others. "The Ministry of Social Welfare and the National Disabilities Development Foundation provides nominal therapeutic services, assistive devices, special education, and trainings. But beyond therapy and medication, there must be more trainings targeted towards livelihood and income generation," says Salma Mahub, general secretary of Protibondhi Nagorik Sangathaner Parishad (PNSP) Network and Bangladesh Society for the Change and Advocacy Nexus (B-SCAN).

Salma thinks that there are many things that the government still needs to do to make life better for the disabled. There are many severely disabled people who cannot go out of their homes, and are solely dependent on their parents. They need basic medical care, but our domestic

helpers are usually not skilled enough to handle them, she says.

"The government can arrange training on care-giving for disabled persons so that not only the uneducated people from rural areas but also the educated people come forward for taking care of the disabled persons," she adds.

Meanwhile, although the disability rights organisations have long been demanding accessible infrastructure in accordance with the Protection of the Rights of the Person with Disabilities Act 2013—which clearly mentions that public establishments must be accessible to people with disabilities—we have not seen any significant changes over the years. It goes without saying, if we want to train and employ differently-abled persons, we must build accessible infrastructures for them.

The Building Construction Act 1952 and National Building Code 2008 also states that every establishment should be designed and made accessible to disabled persons so that they can enter and exit the building without difficulty. They should also be able to use the toilets at these

establishments. But in reality, only a few organisations have introduced ramps and pavements, including the national museum, the parliament building, Mirpur national stadium, University of Dhaka, and the Daily Star Centre. In fact, ministries have no ramps or pavements for disabled persons at all.

Our transport and communication sector got allocated the third highest share of the total budget, but sadly, there is no specific allocation to make roads, highways, footpaths, footbridges, and public transport disabled-friendly.

"The bus drivers, as well as helpers are as always unwilling to help us get onto the bus. Currently, no bus service has a portable ramp for wheelchair-ridden persons. But most differently-abled persons use public transport as very few are able to avail private vehicles and other modes of transport, such as rickshaws, are difficult for us to get on," says Salma Mahub.

Using the train is next to impossible for physically challenged people, considering that even fully-abled people face difficulties getting onto a train. The railway department imported 270 couches in the

last term, and is importing 250 this term, of which 50 couches have already arrived. Sadly, only 10 percent of them, have some seats reserved for physically challenged people along with washroom facilities, says Md Shamsuzzaman, additional director general (Rolling Stock) of Bangladesh Railway.

"We couldn't install ramps in all the stations. We have a few ramps in some stations, and hopefully will work on it in the future," he admits. "I think it is just a matter of time because we started the initiative just three to four years ago. But we will surely bring the issue to our rolling stock and infrastructure development," he adds.

People with disability want to prove that though they may be differently-abled, they are not a burden; that they, too, can lead meaningful and productive lives and contribute to society. But it is the responsibility of the state to create an accessible and inclusive environment in which their abilities can flourish. Reinforcing their dependent status, limiting their assistance to only allowances, essentially risks making them more powerless.