



The Daily Star



DISABILITY INCLUSIVE NATIONAL BUDGET 2021-22

The Daily Star and Access Bangladesh Foundation in collaboration with five organisations of Persons with Disabilities - DCF, NCDW, Sitakund Federation, TurningPoint, and WDDF, organised an online discussion titled "Disability Inclusive National Budget 2021-22" on May 5, 2021. The event was supported by Disability Rights Fund. Here we publish a summary of the discussion.



ALBERT MOLLAH, Co-Founder & Executive Director, Access Bangladesh Foundation
The progress of the Five Year Plan (FYP) has been disrupted by COVID-19, and the issue of the pandemic needs to be addressed accordingly. The new FYP, as compared to the previous one, has several new points added. 15 national priorities have been set for the 8th FYP but disability has been set as an indicator for only one of them, with the priority being education. No disability indicator has been added for employment which is just as important.

We have laws, policies, and action plans related to disability but they must be reflected in the budgets accordingly.



MOHUA PAUL, Co-Founder, Access Bangladesh Foundation
For the discussion today, we are joined by our chief guest Mr. M A Mannan, Honourable Minister, Ministry of Planning;

special guests Aroma Dutta, Member of the Parliament, Member, Standing Committee on Ministry of Social Welfare; Nasima Begum, NDC, Chairman, National Human Rights Commission; and Shibani Bhattacharji, Additional Secretary, Ministry of Social Welfare.



MAHFUZ ANAM, Editor, The Daily Star

We have always tried to stand behind persons with disabilities and disability rights organisations, and hope to continue doing so in the present and in the future. The topic in question today is about the insufficient funding allocated for the issues plaguing persons with disabilities in general and how it is imperative for us to come forward regarding the issue, especially during this pandemic. We are aware that persons with disabilities today are more organised, skilled, and educated than before. However, in the pandemic, their situation has deteriorated significantly and we must pay greater attention to the matter. Compared to other nations in a time such as this, our government has stood firmly and sincerely by people affected with COVID-19. We have seen how government grants, initiatives, and policies have assisted those in dire conditions during the pandemic.

The budget is an extremely useful tool for determining our national priorities. From that perspective, we believe it is highly necessary for a disability-friendly budget. The Daily Star will keep this issue in the public consciousness, not just through webinars, but also through reports and editorials to direct the government's view towards it.



VASKAR BHATTACHARJEE, Adviser, Sitakund Federation of DPOs

Bangladesh's social safety net includes those most marginalised and deprived. However, out of the safety-net allocation, less than two percent has been allocated for persons with disabilities.

A further matter of importance is accessibility. Those left farthest behind are the people with intellectual disabilities such as those with autism, cerebral palsy, and other such conditions. Initiatives should be taken to make Digital Bangladesh inclusive, and all websites should be made accessible.

Many persons with disabilities have lost their jobs owing to the pandemic and they require unemployment allowance. A pension system must be established for employees with disabilities employed in the private sector. A saving scheme must be established to ensure financial security for those with intellectual disabilities.

Furthermore, we have to simplify the process of identifying who actually needs the allowance being provided along with an increase in the amount of the allowance. I would also specifically mention the need for an allowance for people with neurodevelopmental disabilities and the caregivers of those with multiple disabilities to assist them in their jobs.

People with disabilities have been deprived of education during the pandemic owing to their lack of devices and accessibility. Thus we need a special plan to re-accommodate these children into the education system. Lastly, I would recommend a tech support fund to provide computers, smart phones, hearing devices, electric wheelchairs, and other devices for persons with disabilities free of cost by the state. The Ministry of Social Welfare already provides many of these devices; however, there is yet to be an actual plan for this.



SHAFIQUUL ISLAM, Country Director, ADD International, Bangladesh

Bangladesh has a strategy for ensuring a social safety net which was approved in 2015 and was created under the leadership of the current planning minister. It was a ground-breaking and extremely useful action strategy. It is clearly stated in this strategy how we can reinforce societal safety mechanisms for persons with disabilities. A life-cycle strategy has been mentioned, starting from childhood and going on to school-going age and youth till becoming senior citizens. Thus it is long-term, multidimensional, and takes into

account various factors of a person's life.

If this strategy really is to be disability-inclusive, we need to see to it that it is actually implemented.

These social protection programs have been created using examples of good practices from across the globe. But, will these programmes be reflected in our budget? If they are, we need to know how much will be allocated to each scheme, and how we can check whether the funds are being used appropriately.

Allowance for each person with disabilities is currently BDT 750 monthly and about 18 lakh people have been receiving this. In the coming year, both the number of recipients and the amount of the allowance might increase. However, we must also focus on employment, education, support, training, and other factors that enable persons with disabilities to emerge as vital human resources and responsible citizens who can contribute to society.



AMRITA REJINA ROZARIO, Country Director, Sightsavers

We are aware that persons with disabilities have additional costs to living and these expenses can be significantly greater, whether for medicine, food, and particularly mobility as in many cases public transport may be inaccessible. In addition, the people with severe conditions have to avail medical services which often exceed the allowance they receive. Therefore, for persons with disabilities, ancillary costs have to be taken into consideration following the assigned allowance amount.

In the case of children with disabilities, ancillary costs have to be kept in mind for the parents have to bear additional costs with many such children often dropping out of the education system, ultimately being deprived of education which goes on to become a barrier in their lives.



ZAHIR-BIN-SIDDIQUE, Country Representative, Leonard Cheshire

The 8th FYP mentions the creation of one crore 13 lakh new job opportunities. Persons with disabilities should be included in this opportunity. Those of us involved in working with persons with disabilities know that in terms of skills, qualifications, capabilities, and creativity, they are in no way behind people who do not have disabilities. The difference is only that we need to give them the right opportunities, and this is everyone's responsibility.

The first thing that comes to our mind when we think of persons with disabilities is that additional effort will be required to accommodate them. However, there are many who do not even require assistive technologies, and only need some simple support and accommodation to not only do the same job but sometimes better.



MONSUR AHMED CHOWDHURI, Founder Trustee, IMPACT Foundation Bangladesh

The pandemic and its effects will not end anytime soon. The National Budget 2021-22 is also at its final stage of development.

Persons with disabilities must be included in the strategies to adapt to the COVID-19 crisis proposed for the budget.

Bangladesh Bureau of Statistics (BBS) should create a database by the end of the year on the updated number of persons with disabilities living in Bangladesh, including information about their age, type of disability, etc., so that the budget allocation process is more accurate.

Many people are unemployed in the current situation, and numerous persons with disabilities have had to move back to the villages. The allowances should be large enough to support these people instead of solely providing incentive.

Persons with Disabilities Rights and Protection Act 2013 and the National Action Plan for the Disabled that was approved in 2019 should be implemented.



FARIDA YESMIN, Executive Director, DRRRA

The health budget for persons with disabilities has two sections. The first is basic healthcare services, and the second is health rehabilitation services.

The Ministry of Health and Family Welfare should have fixed allocations for this health budget. The ministry must be accountable and monitor the use of the funding.

Research findings have shown that a person with disability in Bangladesh has to spend an additional BDT 27,733 on basic healthcare. If the person with disability has more needs, such as regular medicines, chest X-rays, and other treatments, they have to spend over BDT 56,000. However, the allowance for persons with disabilities is only around BDT 750, which is not sufficient.



KHANDAKER JAHURUL ALAM, Executive Director, Centre for Services and Information on Disability (CSID)

All policy work related to issues of persons with disabilities is considered the responsibility of the Ministry of Social Welfare. However, the ministry's role is only in coordination. All other relevant ministries should work on

implementing the National Action Plan for the Disabled and demand budget allocations.

The COVID-19 pandemic has led to large numbers of persons with disabilities losing their jobs. Out of the 365 we helped find jobs at various points in time, 128 are now unemployed. Therefore, massive challenges currently are skill development and employment of persons with disabilities. The employment of persons with disabilities would lead to a 3.4 percent rise in national income.

There are over one lakh unemployed persons with disabilities who have at least passed SSC, and some even hold Master's degrees. We must think about how to provide them with skills training and find them jobs.



A.H.M. NOMAN KHAN, Executive Director, Centre for Disability in Development (CDD)

It is the responsibility of the National Coordination Committee and National Executive Committee to ensure all ministries working on social development are inclusive of persons with disabilities, in alignment with the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). Although many ministries follow the existing policies for persons with disabilities in their work, there is a considerable lack of coordination. If the two national committees can be made active, they can hold ministries accountable. There are over 1200 committees all over Bangladesh responsible for protecting the rights of persons with disabilities. However, these committees are not active.



SHAHEEN ANAM, Executive Director, Manusher Jonno Foundation

If we want an inclusive budget, we must pinpoint where the need lies and allocate the budget accordingly. The critical discourse among civil society organisations, non-governmental organisations (NGOs), and persons with disabilities on these issues should be reflected in the budget. Strict monitoring after the budget has been allocated is crucial because the people that are meant to be reached through the budget allocations often gain no benefit from them in the end.



M A MANNAN, MP, Minister, Ministry of Planning

I commend civil society organisations and NGOs for amplifying voices that are typically not heard. Last year, for some particular reasons, the employment quota for persons with disabilities had to be stopped. However, I strongly recommend this quota be reintroduced.

Many of us are usually unsatisfied with the finalised national budget for not including many of the essential points highlighted during discussions on these issues. The national budget has to be created after many compromises, which can be why the final document is not acceptable to many. However, our Honourable Prime Minister is hugely supportive in this matter, and so we can hope to have an adequately inclusive national budget this time. We should also remember that the budget

RECOMMENDATIONS

- Design a disability-friendly national budget
- Establish a pension system for persons with disabilities employed in the private sector and a saving scheme to ensure financial security for those with intellectual disabilities
- Simplify the process of identifying persons with disabilities in need of disability allowances
- Re-accommodate children with disabilities into the education system
- Introduce a tech support fund to provide computers, smart phones, hearing devices, electric wheelchairs, and other devices for persons with disabilities free of cost by the state
- Ensure budget for infrastructural and informational accessibility for persons with disabilities
- Shift focus on ensuring employment, education, support, training, and other factors for persons with disabilities
- Initiate specific programs for self and wage employment generation for the unemployed persons with disabilities
- Increase the amount of the disability allowance
- Allocate a monthly allowance for the caregivers of persons with severe types of disabilities
- Take into consideration, the various ancillary costs of persons with disabilities when allocating allowances
- Ensure inclusion of persons with disabilities in the strategies to adapt to the COVID-19 crisis proposed for the budget
- Initiate ministry-wise budgetary allocation for the development of persons with disabilities
- Allocate budget for implementing the Persons with Disabilities Rights and Protection Act 2013 and the National Action Plan for the Disabled

A secretariat could be developed through the Ministry of Social Welfare. The secretariat could monitor whether all the policies are correctly implemented and which areas need improvement. Due to the government not having adequate monitoring instruments, we only have scattered information on which ministries are doing substantial work for persons with disabilities.

The government allocates a budget based on the number of persons with disabilities living in the country. However, we must also consider their families. If we can support the primary caregivers of the persons with disabilities, the caregivers can contribute to the economy.



AROMA DUTTA, Member of the Parliament & Member, Standing Committee on Ministry of Social Welfare

None of our neighbouring countries can compete with us in terms of the rights and services available to our country's persons with disabilities. All the work for this cause has been assigned to the Ministry of Social Welfare. However, this is meant to be an inter-sectoral job. All relevant ministries are working on this issue separately, but there needs to be synergy between these ministries, especially when it comes to using the allocated budget.



NASIMA BEGUM, NDC, Chairman, National Human Rights Commission

The inclusive budget should contain information on the role of each ministry. This would help clarify which ministry is not working adequately on this matter.

The Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (CRPD) talks about forming a coordinating committee. The committee can be established for all relevant ministries. A focal desk should be created with all required documents and paperwork. There should also be a designated person to handle the work of the focal desk.

If we can ensure accessibility for persons with disabilities, they can easily excel. Although we are behind on work due to the COVID-19 pandemic, we should continue making Dhaka and the rest of Bangladesh and its roads more accessible for persons with disabilities.

is still a draft, so there is time and scope for improvement.



MAZDUL HAQUE, Country Operational Coordinator, Humanity & Inclusion

Handicap International particularly supports persons with disabilities who are small business owners and entrepreneurs.

We have supported around 9,000 families since we began our work in 2011 and these families have been successful in escaping poverty due to our support. This clearly translates that even persons with disabilities coming from extremely poor families are capable of achieving independence with the proper support. But, what we need is for the government to replicate these good practices and provide a similar kind of support in a much larger scale.

Persons with disabilities only receive a minimal safety net which is not enough for their survival. We need to shift our focus from just providing social safety nets and think about how we can involve them in economic activities.

We should provide financial packages of around BDT 50,000 to families of persons with disabilities and ensure that at least 60 percent of that sum can be invested in some sort of business or money generating activity. Such steps can pull the persons with disabilities and their families out of poverty. But, appropriate skill training and guidance will be just as necessary along with the financial package. The government can also further help by ensuring flexible access to micro financing.



MD. SAIDUL HUQ, President, National Forum of Organisations Working with the Disabled (NFOWD)

The issue of the employment quota needs to be looked into. A lot of schools for persons with disabilities are unable to operate due to a lack of teachers. We must direct our resources and invest in new teachers so that children with disabilities can continue learning.



ASIM DIO, Advocacy & Communication Manager, CBM

For the implementation of any action plans, correct data is essential. But, unfortunately, there is a

lack of integrated data about persons with disabilities and the ones present also cannot promise authenticity.

A census is supposed to be conducted this year. We have to ensure that we provide proper accessibility for the participation of persons with disabilities in this census. This data can help in budget allocation and SDG monitoring in the future as well. In order to ensure and facilitate their participation, a separate budget should be allocated.



ASHRAFUN NAHAR MISTI, Executive Director, Women with Disabilities Development Foundation (WDDF)

We need to create a disability-sensitive budget.

During the road development projects, the road dividers are built to be high which makes it difficult for certain persons with disabilities to cross the roads. Not only that, we are slowly getting rid of zebra crossings and instead building more and more over bridges and underpasses. People with certain disabilities will face accessibility issues with these so called developments. None of these developments are made keeping the needs of persons with disabilities in mind.

We are in dire need of disability-friendly transportation. Without this, persons with disabilities are left out from accessing proper education or contributing for the economy.



NASRIN JAHAN, Executive Director, Disabled Child Foundation

The education system for autistic children is subdivided into different types; parts of which are under the Ministry of Social Welfare while others are governed by the Ministry of Education. But, education should not be segregated like this and it should be the same for all governed under the Ministry of Education.



NASIMA AKHTER, President, National Council of Disabled Women (NCDW)

The government needs to take initiatives for creating district or Upazila level committees and sub-committees for the implementation of the Rights and Protection of Persons with Disabilities Act 2013. These committees must ensure the participation of persons with disabilities themselves in decision-making as well. As for the rest of the members of the committee, they must be provided sensitivity trainings.



SALMA MAHBUB, General Secretary, Protibondhi Nagorik Shangathaner Parishad (PNSP)

During the on-going pandemic, we had expected the amount of the disability allowance

to increase but when the budget came out, we were disappointed. Even then, one positive side of the budget is that far more persons with disabilities have been brought under the umbrella of this disability allowance. Moreover, the allowance is being transferred through mobile banking which is commendable.

Unfortunately, the persons with disabilities receiving the disability allowances are being deprived of other allowances.



ABU HANIF MUHAMMAD FORHAD, Acting Executive Director, Turning Point Foundation

The caregivers of persons with neuro-developmental disabilities are excluded from allowance programmes, even though "disability" has affected their economic growth too. A disability-sensitive national budget will set a paradigm-shifting example.

It is also high time to allow independent living of persons with neuro-developmental disabilities. We need to ensure opportunities for them to allow them to grow, including full access to family formation and Sexual and Reproductive Health and Rights policies and practices. They should be promoted to be productive employees, skilled entrepreneurs, and capable of running their own organisations.



SHIBANI BHATTACHARJI, Additional Secretary, Ministry of Social Welfare

We had made huge strides till 2020 but COVID-19 has pushed our progress back. We understand that caregivers of persons with

disabilities also require training but it is not persons with disabilities alone who require caregivers. All of us will require caregivers at one point in our life. We have increased the budget allocation for data collection regarding persons with disabilities and have also created a database. We have also ensured accessibility of this database for persons with disabilities.

We have increased the amount of the budget for the neurodevelopmental trust and we plan on increasing it again for the next year. For individuals with visual impairment, we have again increased the budget for their schooling system. Compared to the year 2020-21, the year 2021-22 has seen around six percent increase in budget allocation. The future years will see further increases.