

Bangladesh Business & Disability Network (BBDN): Supporting people with disability

The number of people with disability in Bangladesh is high. While most people in this group are yet to be covered under a general education scheme, those who do attain a degree find it difficult to get suitable jobs. To help people with disabilities find employment in the job market, the Bangladesh Business & Disability Network (BBDN) has been working with its member organisations and other stakeholders in the industry since 2016.

"The network is a non-profit trust established by the Bangladesh Employers' Federation (BEF), which was officially launched by the Honourable Prime Minister, Sheikh Hasina on 11 December 2016 during the inauguration of the Dhaka Summit on Skills & Employment," said Murteza Rafi Khan, CEO, the Bangladesh Business & Disability Network.

Through the activities of BBDN, people with disabilities attain benefits ranging from the opportunity to access skills training to participating in targeted job fairs, on-the-spot interviews, and thus opening up job placement opportunities. In addition, the BBDN represents the collective voice of employers willing to bring about a change in society by advocating for the rights of people with disabilities.

Khan said, "The BBDN comprises a group of representatives from business, civil society, non-governmental organisations, and organisations of persons with disabilities, working collaboratively to build a disability-inclusive labour market in Bangladesh."

"Hiring people with disabilities can contribute to overall diversity, creativity, and workplace morale. It enhances a company's image and engagement amongst its staff, in the community, and among customers," he added.

People with disabilities represent an untapped source of skills and talent, including technical skills if they have access to training.

During the COVID pandemic, many people with disabilities lost their jobs. Freshers who entered the job market were struggling to face interviews as most of the companies had frozen their recruitment process. BBDN and its partners organised two online job fairs, which aimed to connect job seekers with disabilities to employers using a virtual platform.

This was the first time in Bangladesh that online job fairs were arranged for people with disabilities, which was well received and appreciated by all

stakeholders. Both fairs were successful in achieving the desired outcome. As it was a virtual event, candidates from all over the country could easily register on the fair platform, and no travel was required.

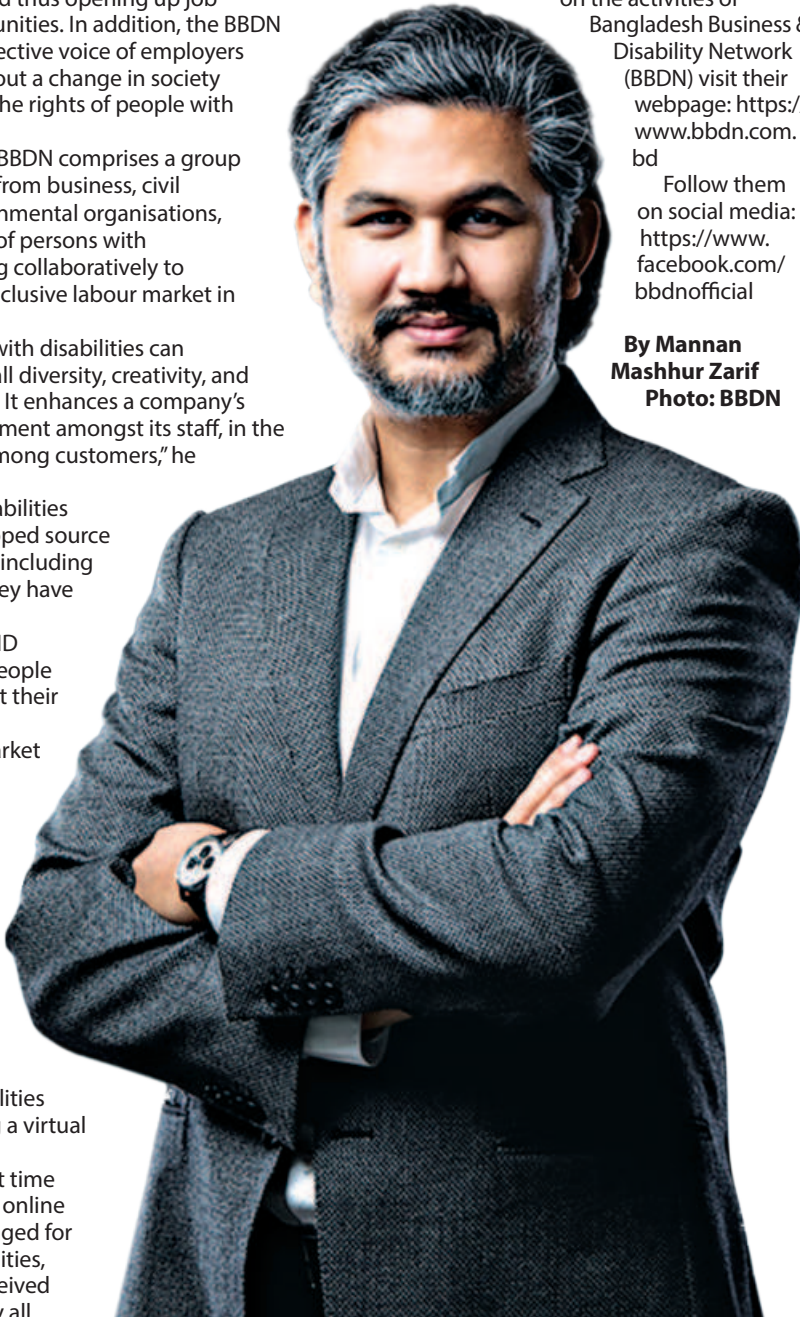
"Employers were initially sceptical about the possible effects of an online fair. However, at the closing of the affair, they were enthusiastic and encouraged. In addition, candidates found the learning session run by corporate experts to be most useful," said Murteza Khan, CEO, the Bangladesh Business & Disability Network.

One in seven people in the world have some form of disability, thereby making people with disabilities the largest minority group in the world. They face many barriers that prevent meaningful participation in education, skills development, and employment, amongst other facets of society. The BBDN serves as a bridge to create an inclusive environment for people with disabilities and help them find jobs.

For more information on the activities of Bangladesh Business & Disability Network (BBDN) visit their webpage: <https://www.bbdn.com.bd>

Follow them on social media: <https://www.facebook.com/bbdnofficial>

By Mannan Mashhur Zarif
Photo: BBDN



Importance of adaptive clothing in the world of fashion

The world is a diverse place and there is space in it for everyone. Historically, it was seen that the space for people with disability in the world of fashion was somewhat restricted, with adaptive clothing either not available or made in shabby, shapeless cuts. As the world got more sensitive, the fashion world came through with the help of assistive technology. Inclusive wear is now a global reality and a fashionable one.

Adaptive clothing makes getting dressed and staying in the garments easy for people with a diverse range of needs. The community for people with disability is very wide and therefore designers must prioritise comfort and convenience over almost anything else for this genre of clothing. Thanks to technology and assistance from members of their target market, inclusive designers are now able to not only make functional clothes for the wearer; but also help their personality shine through their clothes.

Fashion in Dhaka is slowly but surely waking up to this reality as well. An architect by profession, and an up-and-coming designer, Tania Afroz started a Facebook page named Tontu and posted pictures of a toilet-friendly, gender-neutral flight suit she had designed. A customer saw potential in the attire for her special need and requested some changes. Nips and tucks later, an inclusive garment was born.

"If we can have an open mindset to offer more adaptability in clothing, with regards to the specially-abled, the aged, the gender-fluid, etc., we can arm people more to show up as they are, wear their character and express themselves more fearlessly," says Tania.

Tontu is still in its experimental phase. The brand is already showing promise, especially for a section of people who have only worn functional clothing until now, without getting a taste of real fashion. Simply by getting the ball rolling, Tontu has brought to the limelight an entirely untapped market segment that will hopefully gain the traction it deserves in Bangladesh.

As Tania says, "It's not about adaptive clothing; it's about an adaptive mindset. If we can ensure it, everything will fall in place, eventually!"

By Munira Fidai
Photo: Tontu

