

# Listening to the Stories of Persons with Disabilities

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The *Workshop on Social Protection: Person with Disabilities- Lives and Programming* held on 21<sup>st</sup> March 2022 had a session where a diverse group of people with different impairments shared their lives stories, about disabling attitudes and stereotypes they have encountered in their lives, expectations from society, and how they could be the game-changer of the social structure. Along with that, eleven different organizations of person with disabilities [OPD]s presented an overview of the work and programs and their experiences for the mapping of social protection programs.

The session started with a school-going girl named Mim with a physical disability who told her story of struggle. At the mere age of three, she faced a tragic accident and lost her ability to walk. She found it very fascinating to travel around in a wheelchair when she was a small child. Unfortunately, when she started growing up, she faced many barriers. Bullying from her relatives, neighbors, and even close friends is one of the major ones. When our honorable Prime Minister announced that in every school a ramp must be built for aiding disabled people, she still faced problems in movement due to insufficient infrastructure. She often found herself ultimately climbing the stairs. Mim belongs to a poor family. Her father is a vegetable seller. The small amount of disability grant she received did not help her much. She also shared the story of her classmates who is visually impaired who could not attend her examination because there were no scribes in the school which is often the common problem in most schools.



Elora Abanti Banik worked in CDD as an MIS Officer. She has severe hearing and speech ailments. She shared her struggling story about how she had to regularly travel from Savar to Dhaka to attend sign language training. Also, since there was no school in her vicinity, her parents opened a school for her so that she and other children like her who were deprived of education for their disability, could also receive a proper education. Seventy-three years old Mohammad Abdul Hay is an auto-rickshaw driver. When he

was injured

and faced a potentially lifelong disability, no one stayed beside him or took care of him. His wife and his own family left him alone. He faced numerous financial crises during this period. He worked in small shops and sold vegetables to only be able to afford one meal a day. Finally, he met BERDO as a well-wisher and received the much-needed help. He learned to drive an auto-rickshaw and became capable of earning more. Nowadays, he teaches driving to other disabled people



like him for free so that they don't have to face the difficulties to earn a minimum wage like he initially experienced.



On the other hand, a mother who played the role of caregiver of a disabled child asked for respect and recognition of their struggle. Women like Marzan Munia and Kulsum Begum badly need mental support, not discrimination or indignation. They also asked for financial support as a caregiver.

These inspiring and struggling stories of disabled people remind us how lucky we are. All people with disabilities deserve the same respect a normal person gets, even more so in some cases. They need our love, not hate, they need support, not discrimination.

By the end of the workshop, everyone in attendance had learned about the struggles of the journey of person with disabilities and what they need from the government to support them in leading a decent life. They demanded to increase the amount of the disability grant, and that every child with disability receives both education and disability allowance. They asked for sufficient and necessary infrastructural development and planning to ensure accessible ramps in every place like school, road, or market area. Simultaneously scribes need to be assigned for visually or physically impaired students in exam halls. The Government and all concerned should not shy away from paying due recognition, respect, and financial support to those caregivers who sacrificed their lives and took care of disabled children.

