Draft

# Social Protection Framework

for

# Persons with Disabilities in Bangladesh

Social Security Policy Support (SSPS) Programme

Cabinet Division and

General Economics Division (GED) of Bangladesh Planning Commission

Government of the People's Republic of Bangladesh

Australian Aid

UNDP

**Social Protection Framework for Persons with Disabilities in Bangladesh (Draft)**

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# Abbreviations & Acronyms

| | |
|---|---|
| 4IR | 4th Industrial Revolution |
| a2i | Aspire to Innovation |
| APSC | Annual Primary School Census |
| BANBEIS | Bangladesh Bureau of Educational Information and Statistics |
| BBDN | Bangladesh Business Disability Network |
| BBS | Bangladesh Bureau of Statistics |
| BCC | Behavior Change Communication |
| BDF | Bangladesh Disability Forum |
| BDHS | Directorate General of Health Services |
| BDT | Bangladesh Taka |
| BIAM | Bangladesh Institution of Administration and Management |
| BLAST | Bangladesh Legal Aid and Services Trust |
| BMF | Biwako Millennium Framework |
| BNBC | Bangladesh National Building Code |
| CA | Capability Approach |
| CBR | Community Based Rehabilitation |
| CSID | Centre for Services and Information on Disability |
| CST | Care-giving Skill Training |
| DA | Disability Alliance |
| DC | Deputy Commissioner |
| DDS | Disability Detection Survey |
| DGHS | Directorate General of Health Services |
| DIDRM | Disability Inclusive Disaster Risk Management |
| DIS | Disability Information System |
| DMBoB | Disaster Management Bureau of Bangladesh |
| DPE | Directorate of Primary Education |
| DPOs | Disabled Peoples' Organization |
| DSOs | Disability Service Organizations |
| DSS | Department of Social Services |
| DSSO | District Social Service Office |
| DWA | Disability Welfare Act |
| ECD | Early Childhood Development |
| EGDI | e-Government Development Index |
| ESCAP | Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific |
| FY | Fiscal Year |
| G2P | Government-to-Person |
| GBV | Gender-based Violence |
| GDIH | Global Disability Innovation Hub |

| | |
|---|---|
| GDP | Gross Domestic Product |
| GDS | Global Disability Summit |
| GED | General Economics Division |
| GER | Gross Enrollment Ratio |
| GoB | Government of Bangladesh |
| GPS | Government Primary School |
| HLP | Horizontal Learning Program |
| ICT | Information and Communication Technology |
| IDA | International Disability Alliance |
| IDDC | International Disability and Development Consortium |
| IDPD | International Day of Persons with Disabilities |
| ILO | International Labour Organization |
| JPUF | Jatiyo Protibondhi Unnayan Foundation |
| KII | Key Informant Interviews |
| LCA | Life Cycle Approach |
| LGI | Local Government Initiatives |
| LNOB | Leave No One Behind |
| MDGs | Millennium Development Goals |
| MFS | Mobile Financial Service |
| MoDMR | Ministry of Disaster Management and Relief |
| MoE | Ministry of Education |
| MoF | Ministry of Finance |
| MoP | Ministry of Planning |
| MoSW | Ministry of Social Welfare |
| MPs | Member of Parliament |
| MPTF | Multi-Partner Trust Fund |
| NBC | National Building Code |
| NCC | National Coordination Committee |
| NCDCP | Non-Communicable Disease Control Programme |
| NCDW | National Council of Disabled Women |
| NCP | National Coalition Project |
| NDDF | National Disability Development Foundation |
| NDDPT | Neuro-Developmental Disability Protection Trust |
| NDDs | Neuro Developmental Disorder |
| NEC | National Executive Committee |
| NFOWD | the National Forum of Organizations Working with the Disabled |
| NGDO | National Grassroots Disability Organization |
| NGOs | Non-Governmental Organizations |
| NHRC | National Human Rights Commission |
| NHRIs | National Human Rights Institutions |
| NPIs | National Priority Indicators |
| NRI | Networked Readiness Index |
| NSPD | National Survey on Persons with Disabilities |
| NSPF | National Social Protection Framework |

| | |
|---|---|
| NSSS | National Social Security Strategy |
| OSSC | One Stop Service Centers |
| PDPT | Physical Disability Protection Trust |
| PEC | Post Enumeration Check |
| PHC | Population and Housing Census |
| RBA | Rights Based Approach |
| RRPD | Rights and Protection of Persons with Disabilities Act |
| SDGs | Sustainable Development Goals |
| SDTG | Social Development Thematic Group |
| SEIP | Skills for Employment Investment Programme |
| SFDRR | Sendai Framework for Disaster Risk Reduction |
| SOF | Strategic and Operational Framework |
| SSK | Sheba o Shahajjyo Kendra |
| SSNP | Social Safety Net Programme |
| SSPS | Social Security Policy Support Programme |
| SVRS | Sample Vital Registration System |
| ToC | Theory of Change |
| TVET | Technical and Vocational Education and Training |
| UCD | Urban Community Development |
| UDG | Universal Design Guideline |
| UN DIS | UN Disability Inclusion Strategy |
| UNCRPD | United Nations Convention on the Rights on the Persons with Disabilities |
| UNCT | United Nations Country Team |
| UNDP | United Nations Development Programme |
| UNDRR | United Nations Office for Disaster Risk Reduction |
| UNO | Upazila Nirbahi Officer |
| UNRCO | United Nations Resident Coordinator's Office |
| UNSDCF | United Nations Sustainable Development Cooperation Framework |
| USSO | Upazila Social Service Office |
| USWO | Urban Social Welfare Officer |
| VNR | Voluntary National Review |
| WEF | World Economic Forum |

# Background, Objectives and Methodology

**Chapter Overview**

This chapter introduces the National Social Protection Framework for persons with disabilities in Bangladesh, outlining the study's objectives and rationale. The objectives include analyzing national policies, reviewing international conventions, assessing budget allocations, identifying gaps in the current system, and proposing an inclusive framework. Additionally, the study aims to recommend the detailed analysis of disability inclusion into the National Social Security Strategy 2026+. The rationale highlights the critical need for a dedicated National Social Protection Framework to address the barriers faced by persons with disabilities, such as economic disadvantage and social exclusion. It further underscores the importance of a comprehensive framework to ensure inclusion, dignity, and equal access to opportunities. Drawing from theoretical perspectives, the chapter also discusses the life-cycle approach, which ensures tailored interventions for persons with disabilities at different life stages, promoting long-term inclusion and support across their lifespan. Therefore, the chapter sets the stage for the development of the National Social Protection Framework for persons with disabilities in Bangladesh.

## Background

Disability is an integral part of the human condition, with nearly everyone likely to experience a temporary or permanent disability at some point in their lives. As of 2023, approximately 1.3 billion people—around 16% of the global population—are living with significant disabilities. This number is expected to increase due to factors such as an aging population and the rising incidence of non-communicable diseases (WHO, 2023). Furthermore, it is estimated that one in five women will experience a disability during her lifetime, and one in ten children currently live with a disability. These statistics highlight the widespread prevalence of disabilities globally and underscore the urgent need for inclusive policies and robust support systems to ensure that individuals with disabilities are fully integrated into society.

In Bangladesh, despite significant progress in social protection, the absence of a coherent policy in the past has limited the effectiveness of government-led interventions in reducing risks, alleviating vulnerability, and empowering marginalized communities like persons with disabilities. The National Social Security Strategy (NSSS), approved in June 2015, recognizes the social safety net programs as a narrative of resilience and transformation. According to the NSSS, these safety net programs represent the Government’s commitment to supporting poor and vulnerable populations in managing risks.

While the coverage of these programs has expanded in recent years, reaching more poor and vulnerable households, a significant proportion of impoverished families still remain excluded from

social protection initiatives. The NSSS is embedded within a broader Social Development Framework (SDF) that integrates the Government's strategies for poverty reduction across various sectors, including human development, financial inclusion, gender empowerment, social inclusion, environmental protection, climate change management, disaster management, and infrastructure development. It also addresses the security of persons with disabilities, the elderly, and widows.

The primary aim of the NSSS is to "Build an inclusive Social Security System for all deserving Bangladeshis that effectively tackles and prevents poverty and inequality, contributing to broader human development, employment, and economic growth." Over the last years, the NSSS has focused on reforming the national Social Security System to ensure the more efficient and effective use of resources, strengthen delivery systems, and advance towards a more inclusive form of Social Security. This reformed system aims to effectively address lifecycle risks, prioritizing the poorest and most vulnerable members of society.

Building on these efforts, the Social Security Policy Support (SSPS) Programme undertook a comprehensive perception study in 2020. The study aimed to identify the factors and challenges that hinder the participation of persons with disabilities in Bangladesh. Additionally, it sought to provide actionable recommendations for overcoming access barriers and to evaluate the role of social protection in supporting persons with disabilities. To ensure a robust and inclusive approach, the research was conducted by the Centre for Disability in Development (CDD), utilizing a standardized questionnaire distributed to 80 persons with disabilities. Importantly, the study ensured equal representation of men and women from various income levels, all aged 18 and above.

The findings of this study revealed a significant lack of awareness among the general population in Bangladesh regarding the concept of disability. Notably, societal attitudes, including those within families, often stigmatize disability, viewing it as a punishment for parental misdeeds or as a curse. Consequently, children with disabilities are frequently perceived as burdens, leading to the deprivation of their basic human rights (SSPS, 2020). These findings align with other recent studies that highlight the pervasive negative attitudes towards disability in South Asia. For instance, Alam (2023) emphasized that cultural beliefs and stigma significantly hinder the social inclusion of persons with disabilities in Bangladesh.

Moreover, Hasan et al. (2022) similarly noted that, despite policy advancements such as the NSSS, implementation remains inconsistent due to deeply rooted societal biases. Complementing these perspectives, Mitra et al. (2021) underscored the critical role of social protection programs in mitigating these barriers and promoting the inclusion of persons with disabilities in economic and social life. Additionally, Banks et al. (2019) emphasized that societal perceptions have a profound influence on the quality of life and the opportunities available to persons with disabilities, further reinforcing the need for comprehensive strategies to address these challenges.

To address these ongoing challenges, the SSPS Programme has continued its efforts to strengthen policy frameworks related to the social protection of persons with disabilities. This ongoing work includes providing crucial policy support to ensure that the social protection budget adequately addresses the needs of persons with disabilities. By advocating for a more inclusive budget, the SSPS Programme aims to secure the necessary financial resources to implement effective social protection measures. Moreover, the programme has been actively involved in scrutinizing the beneficiary

selection process for social protection programs. This scrutiny is essential to ensure that the most vulnerable and marginalized individuals, including persons with disabilities, are accurately identified and prioritized for support.

Significantly, the budget allocation for disability-related programs has increased from 0.5% to approximately 2%, indicating a substantial shift in financial commitment. According to the NSSS, the state will undertake actions while considering its fiscal space, necessitating a shift in the budgetary focus from viewing disability as a liability to recognizing it as an opportunity. However, it is important to note that discussions regarding the NSSS often lack cohesion, as there is no dedicated chapter specifically addressing the well-being of persons with disabilities. This gap underscores the need for continued advocacy and policy development to ensure that the needs of persons with disabilities are adequately represented in national strategies.

In response to this need, a joint event titled “United in Action to Rescue and Achieve the SDGs for, with, and by Persons with Disabilities” was organized last year by focal points such as Sightsavers Bangladesh, UNDP, Australian Aid, UNFPA, ILO, UN Women, UNPRPD, UNICEF, and UNRC. This event brought together all relevant stakeholders—disabled persons, organizations working on disabilities, government authorities, private sector representatives, civil society, and the media—to discuss collective efforts for the advancement of persons with disabilities. During the day-long discussions, stakeholders launched the Reporters Forum for advisory aspects promoting awareness. A consensus was developed for thoroughly reviewing the social protection benefits for persons with disabilities, further emphasizing the need for a comprehensive and inclusive approach.

Furthermore, the Joint UN platform has been pivotal in preparing the Social Protection Framework for persons with disabilities under the purview of the "Leave No One Behind" (LNOB) initiative. This framework will contribute to the development of the NSSS 2026 and beyond, as well as inform the background for the 9th National Five-Year Plan (FYP). Additionally, a National Action Plan (NAP) for persons with disabilities, developed in 2018, was highlighted during the Global Summit last year, where Bangladesh secured 11 commitments. One of these commitments emphasizes the joint effort to implement the National Action Plan, making it essential to revisit and monitor its progress to ensure effective outcomes.

In this context, the SSPS Programme is working towards developing a comprehensive Social Protection Framework for persons with disabilities. This initiative will engage the Joint UN platform and other relevant stakeholders in preparing a robust framework that addresses the current challenges faced by persons with disabilities in Bangladesh. Through a series of policy dialogues and collaborative efforts, this framework aims to ensure that persons with disabilities are fully integrated into society, with access to the social protection and support they need to lead dignified and empowered lives.

## Objective of the Study

1. To conduct a comprehensive analysis of the existing national public and social policies, programs, and initiatives in Bangladesh, focusing on their relevance and effectiveness for persons with disabilities;
2. To review international treaties, conventions, and best practices that Bangladesh is committed to or can learn from, in order to align the national framework with global standards for disability inclusion;
3. To analyze national and ministry-specific budget documents to assess the adequacy of financial resources allocated for the social protection of persons with disabilities and identify areas where increased investment is necessary;
4. To identify the key evidence-based results, gaps and challenges in the current social protection system that hinder the inclusion and support of persons with disabilities;
5. To propose an inclusive Social Protection Framework for persons with disabilities,
6. To suggest the integration of the needs of persons with disabilities into the NSSS 2026.

## Rationale of the Study

The concept of a framework varies across disciplines, serving as a structural guide for theoretical or empirical inquiry (Cox et al., 2016). Frameworks are commonly understood as supporting structures, aiding in decision-making and organizing ideas. The Cambridge Dictionary defines frameworks as "a supporting structure around which something can be built; a system of rules, ideas, or beliefs that is used to plan or decide something." Whereas Schlager (2007) explains that frameworks serve as foundational tools for inquiry, and Cumming (2014) adds that these frameworks may not necessarily rely on deductive logic to connect ideas. Binder et al. (2013) highlights that framework encapsulate assumptions, values, and practices, reinforcing their normative underpinnings. Furthermore, McGinnis and Ostrom (2014) describe frameworks as organizational tools for diagnostic and prescriptive inquiry, essential for theory-building. A comparative review by Binder et al. (2013) reveals that frameworks in social-ecological systems research help create a shared language, guiding research toward sustainability. Similarly, Pulver et al. (2018) argue that frameworks allow scholars to navigate the complex interdependencies between biophysical and social systems. These definitions collectively underscore the multifunctional role frameworks play in organizing research, theory-building, and guiding empirical observations across fields.

A social protection framework specifically designed for persons with disabilities is essential for ensuring their inclusion, dignity, and equitable access to resources and opportunities. Persons with disabilities often face multiple, intersecting forms of disadvantage arising from physical, social, and economic barriers, which significantly limit their ability to fully participate in society. In countries such as Bangladesh, where a considerable proportion of the population lives with disabilities, the need for a comprehensive social protection system is particularly pressing to mitigate the impacts of poverty, discrimination, and exclusion.

Without a targeted framework, persons with disabilities often fall through the gaps of mainstream social protection systems. Many lack access to essential services such as healthcare, education, and employment opportunities, which perpetuates cycles of poverty and social exclusion. A dedicated

social protection framework would not only ensure adequate financial and social support but also promote empowerment by enabling persons with disabilities to fully participate in society and contribute to the economy. Furthermore, such a framework would address the intersectionality of disability with other social factors, such as gender, age, and economic status, offering a more inclusive and equitable approach to social protection.

By incorporating the life-cycle approach into a social protection framework for persons with disabilities, it becomes possible to more effectively meet the specific needs of individuals at various stages of life. Early interventions in childhood, such as access to inclusive education and healthcare, can significantly reduce long-term inequalities. For adults, employment support and anti-discrimination policies are essential in promoting independence and economic participation. In old age, access to social pensions and healthcare becomes critical in ensuring a dignified and secure life. The life-cycle focus of the NSSS provides a model that can be adapted to prioritize disability-inclusive social protection and address the unique vulnerabilities faced by persons with disabilities.

## Methodology

To develop a comprehensive social protection framework for persons with disabilities, thorough background research is crucial. This report functions as a foundational document for the framework's formulation, employing a qualitative research methodology. The approach primarily relies on desk research, a secondary research method involving the systematic collection and analysis of existing data from various sources. In addition, ten Key Informant Interviews (KIIs) were conducted with relevant stakeholders, utilizing open-ended questions to gather in-depth insights.

According to Johnston (2017), desk research is valuable for leveraging existing knowledge to inform new research inquiries and policy developments. This methodology will enable the document to build upon the extensive work already conducted in the field, thereby ensuring that the framework is grounded in well-established evidence.

## Research Components

1. **National Policies Analysis**: The research will examine existing national policies relevant to the persons with disabilities. This includes identifying policy gaps, assessing their relevance, and evaluating how well they address the needs of persons with disabilities. The analysis will focus on both current and historical policy documents to understand the evolution and impact of policy measures.

2. **International Treaties and Commitments**: The study will review international treaties and conventions to which the GoB is a signatory. This includes agreements such as the UNCRPD. The aim is to evaluate the extent to which national policies align with these international commitments and identify areas for improvement.

3. **Budget Analysis**: Analyzing budget documents at both the national and ministry-specific levels will provide insights into the financial aspects of social protection for persons with disabilities. This component of the research will focus on identifying budget allocations, expenditures, and financial gaps related to disability services and support.

4. **Review of Global Literature**: The research will also incorporate a review of globally published books, reports, and other scholarly materials. This literature review will provide a comparative perspective on social protection frameworks for persons with disabilities and highlight best practices and lessons learned from other contexts.

5. **Stakeholder Reports and Evaluations**: The research will include an analysis of reports and evaluations from key stakeholders, such as non-governmental organizations (NGOs), advocacy groups, and international agencies. These documents will offer insights into the effectiveness of current social protection measures and highlight challenges and successes in implementation.

6. **Case Studies**: A selection of case studies from other countries will be reviewed to identify successful social protection frameworks and practices that could be adapted for the Bangladeshi context. These case studies will provide practical examples of how different approaches have been implemented and their impact on persons with disabilities.

7. **Legal and Regulatory Framework Analysis:** The study will also review the legal and regulatory framework governing disability rights and social protection in Bangladesh. This analysis will focus on understanding the legal provisions related to persons with disabilities and their enforcement, as well as any gaps or inconsistencies in the legal framework.

By integrating these research components, the methodology aims to provide a comprehensive understanding of the current landscape of social protection for persons with disabilities and inform the development of an effective and inclusive framework.

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## Understanding Disability: Definitions, and Theoretical Perspectives

**Chapter Overview**

This chapter explored the definitions of disability from various national and international documents, highlighting the lack of a universally agreed understanding of disability. By presenting examples and a matrix of different national statistical reports, it illustrated how this lack of consensus creates challenges in policy development and implementation. The chapter also examined various disability models, including the medical, social, and rights-based approaches, and explored Bangladesh's journey in defining and addressing disability. It further delved into disability theories, including the functional approach, and their implications for inclusive development. Additionally, the chapter discussed the theoretical foundations underlying disability frameworks, emphasizing the importance of clear, context-sensitive definitions and models to ensure that persons with disabilities have access to rights, resources, and opportunities.

Disability, as a concept, has undergone significant evolution over time, reflecting shifts in societal values, cultural norms, and scientific understanding. Historically, disability was often viewed as a personal tragedy or a medical condition requiring cure or rehabilitation. However, contemporary perspectives emphasize the role of societal barriers in perpetuating inequality for persons with disabilities (Shakespeare, 2018; WHO, 2022). This shift marks a transition from a deficit-focused view to one that recognizes disability as a dimension of human diversity and a rights-based issue.

The need to define disability precisely is critical for policy development, advocacy, and service delivery. Definitions determine access to rights, resources, and opportunities, making them a cornerstone of inclusion efforts (WHO, 2022). International frameworks, such as the UNCRPD, have provided a more holistic understanding, framing disability as an evolving concept influenced by the interaction between impairments and societal barriers (UN, 2023). Yet, definitions remain contested, reflecting cultural, regional, and disciplinary differences. According to the **Disability Welfare Act of 2001**, initiated by the Ministry of Social Welfare (MoSW) in collaboration with the National Forum of Organizations Working with the Disabled (NFOWD), a person with a disability is defined as someone who is physically disabled either from birth, as a result of a disease, accident, improper treatment, or any other cause. This condition leads to physical incapacity or mental imbalance, which may be partial or total, rendering the individual unable to lead a normal life (MoSW, 2001).

In Bangladesh, where over 10% of the population is estimated to live with some form of disability (BBS, 2022), definitions play a vital role in shaping the effectiveness of policies and programs. The country has made significant strides, particularly with the enactment of the Persons with Disabilities Rights and Protection Act, 2013, which aligns with the principles of the UNCRPD. Despite progress, challenges remain in harmonizing legal definitions with the diverse lived experiences of persons with

disabilities, particularly in rural and marginalized communities. These complexities underline the importance of context-sensitive approaches to understanding disability and implementing inclusive development strategies.

This chapter explores the multifaceted nature of disability by examining its definitions, theoretical frameworks, and paradigms. It delves into historical and contemporary models, including the medical, social, and rights-based approaches, while highlighting emerging perspectives like intersectionality, the capability approach, and inclusive policy development. By doing so, this chapter aims to provide a comprehensive foundation for understanding disability globally and within the Bangladeshi context.

## Definitions of Disability

The definition of disability varies widely across international conventions, national legislation, and global frameworks. Each definition reflects the priorities, cultural contexts, and theoretical paradigms underpinning these documents. This section examines key frameworks, highlighting how they define disability and the implications for policy, advocacy, and inclusion.

### United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (UNCRPD)

The UNCRPD, adopted in 2006, refrains from providing a fixed definition of disability, instead recognizing it as an "evolving concept" (UN, 2006). It upholds the Right-based Approach (RBA) defines persons with disabilities as individuals with "long-term physical, mental, intellectual or sensory impairments which, in interaction with various barriers, may hinder their full and effective participation in society on an equal basis with others" (UN, 2006). This definition reflects the shift from a purely medical perspective to a rights-based approach, emphasizing the societal barriers that exacerbate disability.

The UNCRPD's framework has been instrumental in influencing national policies, including Bangladesh's Persons with Disabilities Rights and Protection Act, 2013. By acknowledging the role of attitudinal and environmental factors, the Convention calls for removing barriers and promoting inclusivity in all aspects of life**.**

### International Classification of Functioning, Disability and Health (ICF)

The World Health Organization's ICF framework (2001) adopts a biopsychosocial model, defining disability as an umbrella term for impairments, activity limitations, and participation restrictions. This framework focuses on the interaction between health conditions and contextual factors, including environmental and personal circumstances. The ICF categorizes disability into three domains:

- Body function and structure impairments
- Activity limitations
- Participation restrictions

By integrating medical and social models, the ICF provides a comprehensive understanding that informs public health strategies and policy-making worldwide.

### Washington Group on Disability Statistics

The Washington Group's approach is rooted in practical considerations for measuring disability in surveys and censuses. Its short set of questions identifies functional difficulties across six domains: seeing, hearing, walking, remembering, self-care, and communication (Washington Group, 2006). This approach emphasizes functionality rather than specific medical diagnoses, making it a versatile tool for generating comparable data across countries.

Bangladesh has adopted the Washington Group's questions in its Household Income and Expenditure Survey (HIES) to gather disability data, enabling evidence-based policy-making and targeted interventions (BBS, 2022).

### Persons with Disabilities Rights and Protection Act, 2013

The Persons with Disabilities Rights and Protection Act of 2013 recognizes twelve distinct types of disabilities, which are as follows: Autism or Autism Spectrum Disorders, Physical Disability, Mental Illness Leading to Disability, Visual Disability, Speech Disability, Intellectual Disability, Hearing Disability, Deaf blindness, Cerebral Palsy, Down Syndrome, Multiple Disabilities, and Other Disabilities. In line with this definition, the SVRS 2023 (Socio-Economic and Demographic Survey) has been designed to collect data that reflects the various types of disabilities as specified in the Act. The survey categorizes disabilities within households in Bangladesh into the following types: Autism or Autism Spectrum Disorders, Physical Disability, Mental Illness Leading to Disability, Visual Disability, Speech Disability, Intellectual Disability, Hearing Disability, Deaf blindness, Cerebral Palsy, Down Syndrome, Multiple Disabilities, and Other Disabilities (BBS, 2023).

The Act underscores the need for rights-based approaches, focusing on education, employment, healthcare, and accessibility. However, challenges persist in harmonizing this definition with rural and marginalized communities' diverse lived experiences (Hasan et al., 2023).

### Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA), 1990

The ADA adopts a civil rights perspective, defining disability as 'a physical or mental impairment that substantially limits one or more major life activities' (ADA, 1990). It also includes individuals with a history or perception of such impairments. This definition emphasizes societal and environmental aspects, advocating for non-discrimination and equal opportunities in employment, education, and public life.

### Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs)

Although the SDGs do not explicitly define disability, they emphasize inclusion through targets under Goals 4 (education), 8 (decent work), and 10 (reduced inequalities). The implicit recognition of disability aligns with the UNCRPD, focusing on removing barriers to achieve equality and inclusivity (UN, 2023).

### National Action Plan on Disability (NAPD)

The National Action Plan on Disability, developed under the purview of the Ministry of Social Welfare, operationalizes the Persons with Disabilities Rights and Protection Act, 2013. It outlines specific strategies to remove barriers in education, employment, healthcare, and accessibility. While the NAPD does not redefine disability, it emphasizes addressing disability as an evolving and intersectional issue, highlighting rural-urban disparities and the needs of women and children with disabilities (MoSW, 2021).

### National Social Security Strategy (NSSS), 2015

The NSSS integrates disability inclusion into Bangladesh's broader social protection agenda. It defines persons with disabilities as those who face impairments restricting their participation in daily activities and socio-economic life. The strategy acknowledges disability as a cross-cutting issue, emphasizing cash transfers, vocational training, and access to health services (GED, 2015).

The NSSS further introduces life-cycle approaches to social protection, identifying children with disabilities, working-age individuals, and older persons with disabilities as priority groups. However, implementation challenges persist due to limited data and resource constraints.

### Comparative Analysis of Disability Definitions in National Reports

The definitions of disability used in national statistical reports in Bangladesh vary depending on the purpose, scope, and methodology of the respective surveys and censuses. This variability reflects both the evolving understanding of disability and the specific data needs of policymakers and stakeholders. Below is a comparative overview of how major national data collection efforts defining and operationalize disability.

In Bangladesh, the issue lies in the dual challenges posed by disability-related surveys and censuses (Table-1). On one hand, surveys like the Population Census 2022 and SVRS 2023 provide valuable data on disability, offering insights into various domains such as functional limitations, economic participation, and education. These surveys enable the government and organizations to gather crucial information for policy development and resource allocation. However, on the other hand, discrepancies arise due to differing definitions and methodologies used across these surveys. For instance, the Population Census relies on self-reported functional limitations, while the SVRS is based on a legal framework with specific categories of disabilities. This creates challenges in data consistency and comparability, limiting the ability to form a cohesive and accurate understanding of the overall disability landscape in Bangladesh. Additionally, challenges such as underreporting, stigma, and difficulties in capturing nuanced disabilities further complicate the interpretation of the data.

Table 1 Comparative Analysis of Disability Definitions in National Reports

| Survey/Census | Definition of Disability | Focus Areas | Scope | Methodology |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| **Population Census 2022** | Functional limitations (aligned with Washington Group Questions) | Basic demographics | Broad, general population | Self-reported functional difficulty assessment |
| **HIES 2022** | Impairments affecting daily life | Poverty, social inclusion | Individuals within households | Integrated questions in a broader poverty survey |
| **SVRS 2023** | Based on 12 types of disabilities outlined in the 2013 Act | Legal definitions, detailed categorization | Comprehensive, legal alignment | Focused questions on the types and causes of disability |
| **LFS 2022** | Functional limitations impacting labor force participation | Employment and economic activity | Working-age population | Questions on work-related barriers and participation |
| **DHS 2021** | Impairments in children affecting health and education | Child health and service access | Children and maternal health | Targeted questions for children in surveyed households |
| **Education Household Survey** | Disabilities affecting learning ability and school participation | Access to education | Students and school-aged children | Assessment of attendance, enrollment, and barriers |
| **Labour Force Child Module** | Disabilities impacting child labor participation | Economic activity and child labor | Children aged 5–17 years | Disability assessed alongside economic participation |
| **Disability Detection Survey** | Physical, mental, and sensory impairments | Screening and identification | All age groups in sample populations | Direct assessments by trained personnel |

## Models of Disability

Disability is understood through various models, each of which offers a different perspective on how to interpret and address the needs and experiences of persons with disabilities. These models shape not only how disability is perceived but also influence policies, societal attitudes, and the overall approach to inclusion. Below, we explore some key disability models and their theoretical underpinnings.

### 1. The Medical Model of Disability

The Medical Model views disability primarily as a problem of the individual, which is attributed to physical, mental, or sensory impairments. In this framework, disability is seen as a pathological condition that needs to be treated, cured, or managed. The focus is on diagnosing and alleviating impairments through medical interventions, rehabilitation, or therapy. The model suggests that it is the disability that limits individuals from functioning in society, rather than societal barriers.

However, the Medical Model has been criticized for treating individuals as passive recipients of care, disregarding the role of societal factors like accessibility and attitudes. It often leads to the marginalization of disables, as they are seen primarily through the lens of their impairments rather than as active participants in society (Oliver, 1996).

### 2. The Social Model of Disability

The Social Model of disability emerged as a counterpoint to the Medical Model, focusing on the idea that disability is not an inherent trait of the individual, but rather the result of societal barriers—physical, social, and attitudinal—that prevent persons with disabilities from participating fully in society. According to this model, it is society that disables individuals by creating and maintaining these barriers, such as inaccessible buildings, discriminatory attitudes, and lack of opportunities for participation.

Critics of the Social Model argue that it sometimes downplays the importance of the individual's impairment and the need for medical or therapeutic intervention. It is also suggested that it can be overly optimistic in assuming that society will easily change its structures (Shakespeare, 2006).

### 3. The Biopsychosocial Model of Disability

The Biopsychosocial Model combines aspects of both the Medical and Social Models. It proposes that disability is the result of an interaction between biological factors (the impairment itself), psychological factors (how the individual responds to the impairment), and social factors (societal barriers). This model suggests that while medical intervention may address the biological aspect, psychological support and societal changes are necessary to fully support persons with disabilities in leading fulfilling lives.

While more comprehensive, this model is sometimes viewed as being more complex and less focused on social change compared to the Social Model (Bickenbach et al., 1999).

### 4. The Human Rights Model of Disability

The Human Rights Model positions disability as a matter of human rights. It emphasizes that all individuals, regardless of impairment, are entitled to equal rights and opportunities as any other citizen. This model advocates for the recognition of persons with disabilities as equal members of society, entitled to access to education, employment, healthcare, and social participation. The Human Rights Model is closely aligned with international human rights frameworks, such as the UNCRPD, which calls for the full inclusion of persons with disabilities in all aspects of life. While this model advocates for equal rights, its implementation can be challenging due to societal and systemic barriers that continue to exist globally (Meekosha & Soldatic, 2011).

### 5. The Capability Approach to Disability

The Capability Approach, developed by economist Amartya Sen, focuses on the abilities of individuals to achieve well-being and participate in society. Rather than focusing solely on medical or social limitations, this approach emphasizes that disability is a result of the lack of opportunities to achieve desired functioning and well-being. The model argues for expanding individuals' capabilities so that they can lead lives they have reason to value. It advocates for a broad understanding of disability, encompassing both the removal of barriers and the enhancement of individuals' abilities to function. The main argument is, disability is not only about the presence of impairments but about the opportunities and freedoms that individuals have to pursue lives they value. This includes access to education, employment, and social inclusion, while also considering personal desires and societal norms. Though, the Capability Approach is praised for its flexibility, but some critics argue that it lacks specificity in its application to disability, particularly in addressing systemic discrimination (Nussbaum, 2006).

Each of these models provides valuable insights into the understanding of disability, yet none can fully encapsulate its multifaceted nature. The Medical Model tends to focus on individual impairments and their treatment, while the Social Model shifts attention to societal barriers that prevent full participation of persons with disabilities. The Biopsychosocial Model blends these perspectives, acknowledging both the medical and social dimensions of disability. The Human Rights Model situates disability within the broader context of human dignity, equality, and social justice. Lastly, the Capability Approach emphasizes the importance of enabling individuals to function in society by focusing on empowerment, opportunity, and the removal of barriers to participation.

**In developing the National Social Protection Framework for Persons with Disabilities in Bangladesh, the framework adopts a predominantly Capability Approach to disability**. This approach is central to explaining and addressing the various dimensions of disability in the Bangladeshi context. It emphasizes the need to expand the capabilities of individuals with disabilities, ensuring they have the opportunities and freedoms to fully engage in social, economic, and political life. By prioritizing empowerment and equal access to opportunities, this framework recognizes the importance of enhancing the well-being and autonomy of persons with disabilities, making it a fitting and comprehensive model for social protection in Bangladesh.

## Theoretical Perspectives on Disability in Bangladesh

Different theoretical stances have impacted how disability is perceived and dealt with in Bangladesh, where it is becoming more widely acknowledged as a social and human rights concern. These theoretical frameworks provide insights into the lived experiences of disabled people and the larger social, economic, and policy environments as the government and civil society endeavor to enhance the inclusion of people with disabilities. Below, we examine how Bangladesh's position and actions on disability are consistent with or informed by important theoretical viewpoints on disability.

### 1. Functionalist Theory

The functionalist theory places a strong emphasis on the notion that persons with disabilities are expected to conform to predetermined roles in society and that their condition challenges social

norms. This method has affected traditional viewpoints in Bangladesh, where people with disabilities are frequently viewed as deviating from normalcy. In Bangladesh, persons with disabilities have historically been stigmatized, and efforts to integrate them into society at large have primarily focused on special education and rehabilitation (Parsons, 1951).

Through the promotion of inclusive education, vocational training, and rehabilitation services, government initiatives and non-governmental organizations have been striving to conform to this viewpoint (SSPS & Sightsavers, 2024). The functionalist approach, however, has frequently come under fire for emphasizing "fixing" people rather than tackling the obstacles posed by society. The emphasis has started to move from merely tolerating disabilities within the current system to social integration as the nation strives for more inclusive policies.

### 2. Conflict Theory

Having its roots in the work of Karl Marx, conflict theory was later refined by sociologists like C. Wright Mills and focuses on how inequality and power impact relationships and societal systems. Conflict theory highlights how structural oppression and inequality contribute to disability, making it more than just an individual issue. Because of society systems that are geared toward able-bodied people, persons with disabilities frequently experience marginalization, exclusion, and exploitation.

According to this viewpoint, disability results from social, economic, and political injustices, where persons with disabilities are frequently disadvantaged by institutions like the job, healthcare system, and educational system. Disability is seen as a social construct that is made worse by the unequal allocation of power, resources, and opportunities rather than as an innate personal characteristic (Oliver, 1996). The conflict model promotes structural change to increase equity for individuals with disabilities and challenges society's perpetuation of these disparities.

### 3. Social Constructionism

The notion that a disability is solely a natural physical or medical condition is contested by social constructionism. It contends that, rather, disability is a socially constructed identity that is influenced by historical, cultural, and societal norms. According to this perspective, social attitudes and environmental factors define what is deemed "disabling" rather than a fixed characteristic. Social constructionism holds that the reason for disability is because society constructs barriers that limit people's ability to fully participate in society and labels some differences as "abnormal" or "impaired."

According to social constructionist theory, a person's handicap is a status that is determined by cultural standards of normalcy. By emphasizing the ways in which cultural norms, values, and institutions influence the experience of disability, this viewpoint contradicts the medical model. It emphasizes how crucial it is to alter social norms and laws in order to build a society that is more inclusive (Barnes, 1991). The focus is on how disability could be redefined and how stigmatizing labels and exclusionary practices could be abandoned.

### 4. Intersectionality

The term "intersectionality," which was first used by Kimberlé Crenshaw, highlights how social categories including gender, racism, class, and disability are interrelated. Individuals encounter

many types of identity-based oppression, according to this viewpoint, which intricately interconnect to produce distinct experiences of exclusion and discrimination. Gender, race, and socioeconomic class are some of the other identification markers that have an impact on disability; it is not experienced in isolation.

For instance, disabled women may encounter sexism in addition to ableism, which exacerbates their marginalization. In a similar vein, disabled people from underrepresented racial or ethnic groups could encounter extra forms of prejudice. In order to comprehend the lived experiences of individuals with disabilities and the kinds of support they need, intersectionality highlights the importance of taking these overlapping identities into account (Crenshaw, 1991). This viewpoint contributes to the development of policies and procedures that more fully and nuancedly address the needs of individuals with disabilities by looking at the ways in which different types of oppression interact.

In Bangladesh, the understanding of disability has evolved over time, influenced by multiple theoretical frameworks that challenge traditional views and advocate for a more inclusive society. The **Functionalist Theory** has influenced early rehabilitation efforts, but **Conflict Theory** highlights the systemic inequalities that persist. **Social Constructionism** encourages a shift from a medical model to a social model of disability, while the **Capability Approach** advocates for empowering people with disabilities to reach their full potential. Finally, **Intersectionality** underscores the need for policies that consider the multiple, overlapping forms of discrimination faced by individuals with disabilities, particularly women and rural populations.

## Bangladesh's Journey Toward Disability Inclusion

Bangladesh as a country commits to ensure equality, human dignity, and social justice for all citizens. These values were enshrined in the Constitution of Bangladesh, which emphasizes equality while also including provisions for equity to support marginalized groups. Article 15 outlines the state's commitment to securing the basic necessities of life, such as food, clothing, shelter, education, and medical care for its citizens, thereby reinforcing social justice. Additionally, Article 28(2) guarantees equal rights for women in all areas of state and public life, while the 2011 Amendment introduced Article 19(3), affirming the state's role in promoting equal opportunity and participation for women across national affairs (The Constitution of Bangladesh, 1972).

In line with international and regional frameworks, Bangladesh has made significant progress on disability inclusion. The country responded to the first ESCAP Decade on Disability (1993-2002) by introducing the National Policy on Disability (1995) and the Disability Welfare Act (2001). The Biwako Millennium Framework (2003-2012), which marked the second ESCAP Decade, prompted Bangladesh to develop its first National Action Plan on Disability (2006), assigning specific roles to 18 ministries. The country also influenced the drafting of the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (CRPD), advocating for the right of individuals with disabilities to live within family settings, a value incorporated in the CRPD. Bangladesh was among the first to ratify both the CRPD and its Optional Protocol.

During the third ESCAP Decade (2013-2022), Bangladesh adopted the Incheon Strategy, further advancing disability rights. The government enacted the Rights and Protection of Persons with Disabilities Act (2013), the Persons with Neurodevelopmental Disabilities Protection Trust Act (2013), and the Rehabilitation Council Act (2018). Moreover, the National Strategy on Neurodevelopmental Disorders (2016-2021) and the National Action Plan on Disability (2019) were established, expanding the roles of 35 ministries to ensure a more inclusive society for persons with disabilities.

**Box 1 The Incheon Strategy at A Glance**

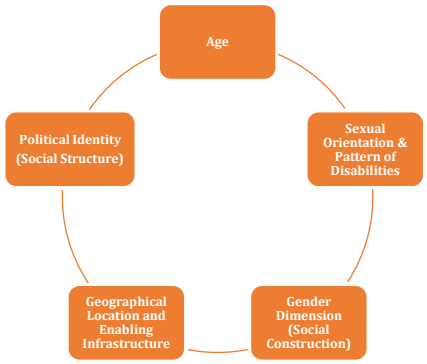
The Incheon Strategy to "Make the Right Real" for Persons with Disabilities in Asia and the Pacific (2013-2022) established 10 goals, 27 targets, and 62 indicators to promote the rights and inclusion of persons with disabilities. It aligns with the UNCRPD and SDGs, focusing on poverty reduction, accessibility, gender equality, and data-driven policy. Bangladesh, as a committed member, integrated these goals into national efforts, emphasizing disability-inclusive governance and service delivery. The strategy's emphasis on measurable outcomes and accountability provides a roadmap for building a more inclusive society across Asia and the Pacific.

Bangladesh has made significant strides in advancing disability rights, evidenced by the signing of international treaties and the implementation of national policies. However, a recent perception study conducted by the Social Security Policy Support (SSPS) Programme revealed that disability is still widely viewed as a curse or punishment for parents. The study found that individuals with disabilities continue to face stigma, discrimination, frustration, and bullying, reflecting deeply ingrained societal attitudes and misconceptions about disability (SSPS, 2023). These findings highlight the ongoing challenges in changing public perceptions and ensuring full social inclusion for people with disabilities in Bangladesh.

## Factors of Disability and Discrimination

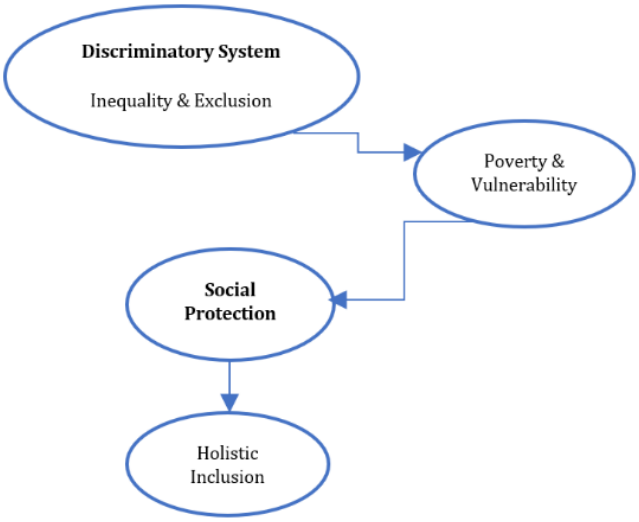
Disability is influenced by a range of factors that intersect and contribute to varying patterns of discrimination and exclusion. These include **age**, where older individuals with disabilities face compounded marginalization due to both ageism and ableism (Ayalon & Tesch-Römer, 2018); **sexual orientation**, when individual questions the mainstream norms and disabilities experience dual discrimination (Hernandez et al., 2021); **political opinion**, as some political regimes actively silence or exclude disabled individuals from political participation (UN, 2020); **gender**, where women with disabilities face additional layers of discrimination, including heightened risks of gender-based violence (SSPS & Sightsavers, 2024); and **geographical location**, where individuals in rural areas, with fewer resources and services, experience intensified social exclusion (WHO, 2020). **Socio-economic factors** also play a significant role, with disabled individuals often disproportionately affected by poverty, limiting their access to education, employment, and social mobility (Burchardt, 2017). Additionally, **the pattern of disability** — whether physical, sensory, intellectual, or mental — can further affect the nature and

Figure 1: Factors of Discrimination



severity of discrimination which has been raised by the participants of a preparatory workshop[1] also (SSPS & Sightsavers, 2024). An **enabling environment**, which includes accessible infrastructure, inclusive education, and supportive policies, is essential to mitigate these challenges and promote greater participation of individuals with disabilities in all aspects of life. Ultimately, the experience of disability is not solely defined by an individual's impairment but is deeply shaped by the broader societal context, with systemic barriers and social attitudes exacerbating exclusion.

Figure 2: Discriminatory System and & Social Protection




Similarly, Humanity International (HI) identifies nine key factors contributing to inequality, which are shaped by societal perceptions and beliefs prevalent in specific environments. These factors include disability, age, gender, sexual orientation, socio-economic status, geographical location, ethnic origin, religion, and political opinion. In different contexts, certain characteristics may be valued differently. For example, advanced age may be seen as a source of authority in some African cultures, while older people may experience isolation and neglect in Europe. These inequality factors are not isolated; they overlap and interact, often resulting in multiple forms of discrimination and exclusion, particularly for persons with disabilities (Humanity & Inclusion, 2022).

## Theoretical Base of the national Social Protection Framework

This diagram illustrates how discriminatory systems result in inequality and poverty for persons with disabilities, and how social protection mechanisms, such as human rights safeguards, financial support, and technology, can foster a more inclusive and cohesive society for them. The framework is grounded in the **Capability Approach**, which emphasizes the importance of enhancing the ability of persons with disabilities to function and participate fully in society, not merely by providing resources, but by expanding their opportunities to achieve well-being.

This approach integrates the concept of inclusive development, where social protection is designed not just to meet basic needs, but to address the systemic barriers limiting persons with disabilities freedoms and capabilities. Therefore, this framework is the theoretical foundation for designing National Social Protection Framework aimed at advancing the inclusion of persons with disabilities in all aspects of societal life, ensuring their rights and empowering them to lead independent, fulfilling lives.

[1] SSPS & Sightsavers. (2024, October 23). Preparatory Workshop on the Social Protection Framework for Persons with Disabilities and Observance of International Day of Persons with Disabilities. Organized by SSPS and Sightsavers.

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# Disability Statistics: Gaps and Progress

**Chapter Overview**

This chapter examines disability prevalence and associated challenges, highlighting both progress and gaps in Bangladesh's efforts toward inclusion. Globally, an estimated 1.3 billion individuals, or 16% of the population, live with significant disabilities, facing shorter life expectancies and systemic barriers (WHO, 2023). In Bangladesh, 3.40 million people (3,398,457) are recorded as persons with disabilities, with the national prevalence rate estimated at 9.7%. However, the absence of a unified prevalence standard across national surveys, such as the HIES, Census, and LFS, complicates comprehensive planning.

Persons with disabilities in Bangladesh face significant disparities in health, education, and employment, compounded by vertical (gender-based) and horizontal (category-specific) discrimination. Despite these challenges, advancements are evident. Social safety net programs and disability allowances have increased in number and coverage over time, reflecting a positive trend. However, these benefits remain limited compared to the scale of need, emphasizing the importance of sustained and inclusive development efforts.

To ensure meaningful and real-time improvements in the lives of persons with disabilities, a thorough understanding of their current status is essential. Nationally representative data serves as a critical foundation in this process, offering a detailed and accurate reflection of the lived experiences of persons with disabilities (NSPD, 2021). To build a Social Protection Framework that is both data-driven and responsive to their needs, it is vital to analyze both national and global statistics, providing a comprehensive understanding of the prevalence and challenges persons with disabilities face (WHO, 2023; UNDRR, 2023).

Furthermore, accurate and reliable data is also the cornerstone of any effective framework for persons with disabilities. It illuminates the scope and scale of disability within the population, allowing policymakers to craft targeted interventions and inclusive policies (NSPD, 2021). Without precise estimations of the number of persons with disabilities, along with their demographic details and specific challenges, real-time interventions risk being inadequate or ineffective.

Moreover, disability data plays a pivotal role in monitoring progress towards social inclusion and evaluating the impact of existing policies. Detailed insights into key areas such as education, vocational training, employment, income disparities, and access to government support programs empower policymakers to design more tailored and impactful interventions (APSC, 2021; APSC, 2022). Disaggregating this data by age, gender, and type of disability further enhances the ability to address the diverse and complex needs of persons with disabilities.

In Bangladesh, the demographic landscape of persons with disabilities reveals significant challenges and disparities across various sectors. The National Survey on Disability 2021 reports that around 3.4 million people live with disabilities, making up a significant portion of the population (NSPD,

2021). The distribution of disabilities varies by gender, age, severity, and type, with males representing a larger proportion of the affected population.

Children with disabilities face particularly acute challenges in education. Data from the Annual Primary School Census (APSC) 2021 and 2022 indicates persistent gaps in enrollment at both pre-primary and primary levels (APSC, 2021; APSC, 2022). Functional difficulties in communication, learning, mobility, and self-care are common, especially in younger age groups, highlighting the need for early intervention and support services (NSPD, 2021).

This section presents a detailed analysis of the demographic patterns, severity, and types of disabilities in Bangladesh, along with education enrollment statistics. Understanding these data points is crucial for designing a robust social protection framework for persons with disabilities, ensuring their inclusion and addressing the barriers they face in accessing essential services.

## Global Context of Disability

Globally, an estimated 1.3 billion individuals experience significant disability, accounting for approximately 16% of the global population, or 1 in every 6 people. Research indicates that Person with disabilities may face a life expectancy up to 20 years shorter than those without disabilities (WHO, 2023). Furthermore, individuals with disabilities are at twice the risk of developing chronic conditions, including depression, asthma, diabetes, stroke, obesity, and poor oral health.

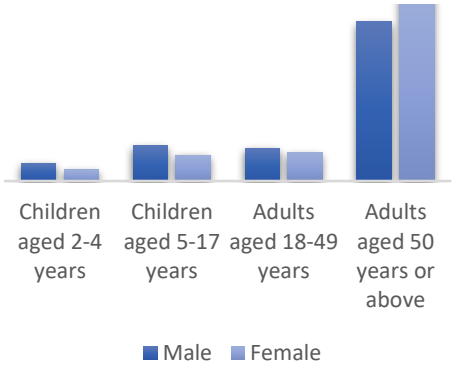
The disparities faced by persons with disabilities extend beyond health conditions; they are also disproportionately affected by inequities in accessing essential services. For instance, they are 15 times more likely to encounter inaccessible and unaffordable transportation compared to those without disabilities. These inequities are driven by systemic factors, including social stigma, discrimination, poverty, exclusion from education and employment opportunities, and structural barriers within the healthcare system itself. Such challenges perpetuate a cycle of disadvantage, further marginalizing persons with disabilities in both health outcomes and broader societal participation (UNDRR, 2023).

## Prevalence and Demographics

According to the DIS, Bangladesh has a total of 3.40 million[2] (3,398,457) person with disabilities. Among them, 2.06 million (approximately 60.7%) are male, while 1.33 million (around 39.2%) are female. Additionally, the data identified 2,879 individuals (about 0.08%) from the Hijra community, highlighting the diverse representation of disabilities across different gender identities in the country.

The 2023 Sample Vital Registration System (SVRS) report includes a dedicated chapter titled "Disability and Functional Difficulties." This chapter provides in-depth statistics on the prevalence, distribution, and nature of disabilities across Bangladesh. Utilizing data from 2,012 Primary Sampling Units (PSUs) and covering 308,032 households, the chapter offers

Graph 1: Persons who have at least one functional difficulty, SVRS 2023

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detailed insights into various types of disabilities and functional difficulties, categorized by rural areas, city corporations, and other urban zones like Paurashavas. This data serves as a vital resource for understanding the challenges faced by persons with disabilities and informs policy interventions aimed at fostering inclusivity and improving support systems.

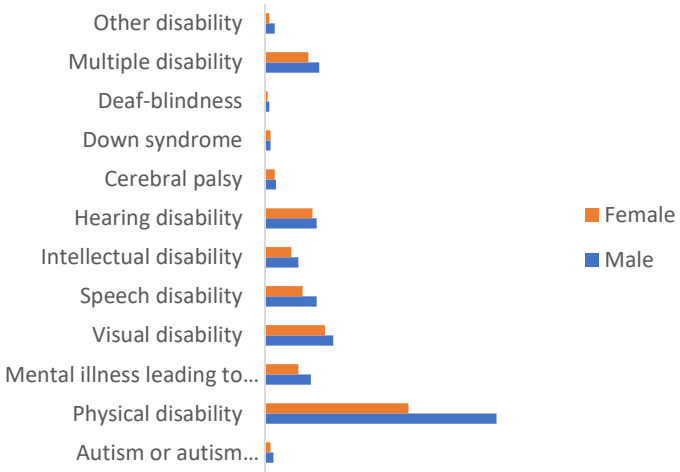
The graph shows that disability prevalence increases significantly with age. Among children aged 2-4 years, 2.3% of males and 1.46 percent of females experience at least one functional disability. For children aged 5-17 years, the prevalence rises to 4.64 percent for males and 3.35 percent for females. Among adults aged 18-49 years, 4.27 percent of males and 3.66 percent of females have a disability. The highest prevalence is found in adults aged 50 years or above, with 20.74 percent of males and 24.67 percent of females reporting at least one functional disability, indicating a significant increase with age, especially for females.

The SVRS data on disability by category highlights significant gender disparities in the prevalence of various disabilities. Physical disabilities are the most common, particularly among males (1.66%) compared to females (1.03%). Mental illness leading to disability also shows a slightly higher prevalence in males (0.33%) than females (0.24%). Visual and speech disabilities are more frequent in males as well, while hearing disabilities are almost equally distributed between the sexes. Autism spectrum disorder, Down syndrome, and cerebral palsy are rare, with minimal differences between genders. Notably, males exhibit higher rates of multiple disabilities (0.39% vs. 0.31% in females). These findings underline the importance of addressing gender-specific needs in disability interventions, particularly for physical and multiple disabilities.

## Multiple Disability

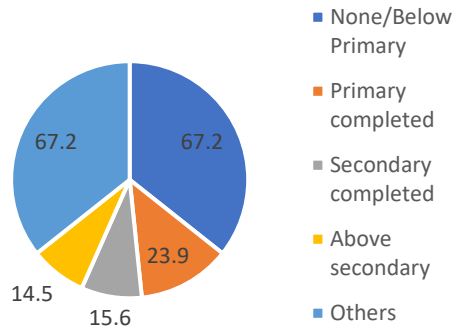
The analysis of disability types reveals that physical disabilities are the most prevalent, with 0.65 percent for single disabilities and 0.69 percent for multiple disabilities. Autism spectrum disorders show a notable difference, with 0.07 percent for single disabilities compared to 0.23 percent for multiple disabilities, indicating that many individuals with autism face additional challenges. Mental illness leading to disability follows a similar pattern, with single disabilities at 0.14 percent and multiple at 0.23 percent. The data underscore that a considerable proportion of individuals with disabilities experience multiple disabilities, highlighting the need for a comprehensive Social Protection Framework that addresses their diverse needs effectively (SVRS, 2023).

Graph 2: Persons with at least one functional difficulty, SVRS 2023



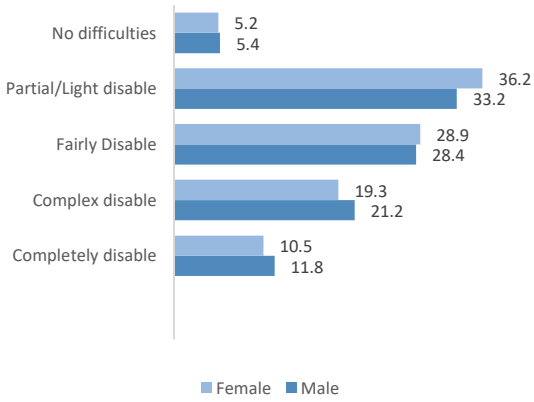
The intensity of disabilities among individuals reveals significant insights into the challenges faced by both males and females. Notably, 11.8 percent of males and 10.5 percent of females are reported to be completely disabled, indicating a critical need for targeted support services. The proportion of those with complex disabilities is higher among males at 21.2 percent, compared to 19.3 percent for females, underscoring the diverse needs that must be addressed in policy frameworks. Furthermore, a substantial percentage of individuals experience fairly disabling conditions, with 28.4 percent of males and 28.9 percent of females reporting such challenges. Partial or light disabilities affect 33.2 percent of males and 36.2 percent of females, highlighting the necessity for inclusive interventions that cater to varying levels of support required (SVRS, 2023).

Graph 3: Education of Household Head, SVRS 2023



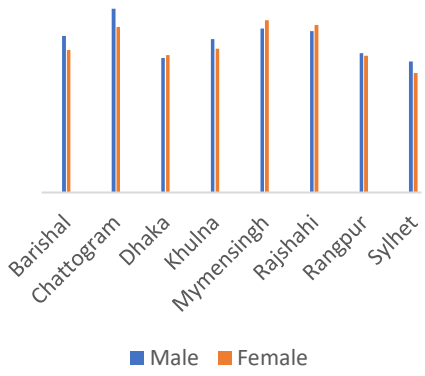

The small percentage of individuals reporting no difficulties (5.4% for males and 5.2% for females) indicates that a significant majority face some form of disability, emphasizing the urgency of developing a robust Social Protection Framework. This framework must prioritize comprehensive support mechanisms that not only address the needs of those with severe disabilities but also enhance the overall quality of life for individuals with varying degrees of disability. Addressing these disparities is essential for fostering inclusivity and ensuring equal access to essential services for all persons with disabilities in Bangladesh.

Graph 4: Intensity of Disabilities, SVRS 2023




The SVRS 2023 report indicates varying disability rates across divisions in Bangladesh, measured per 1,000 population. Chattogram exhibits the highest rates, with 34.3 for males and 30.9 for females, resulting in an average of 32.5. In contrast, Sylhet has the lowest rates, with 24.4 for males and 22.3 for females, averaging 23.3. Dhaka shows a relatively balanced distribution between genders, with 25.1 for males and 25.6 for females, averaging 25.4. Other divisions, such as Barishal (29.2 males, 26.6 females) and Mymensingh (30.6 males, 32.1 females), also reflect notable gender disparities, highlighting the need for targeted interventions based on regional characteristics and demographic factors.

Graph 5: Disability by Division, SVRS 2023




The data shows that 67.2 percent of household heads have either no education or did not complete primary school, presenting a significant challenge for inclusive development,

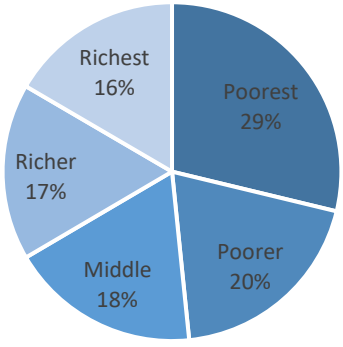
especially in designing social protection frameworks for Persons with Disabilities (Person with disabilities). Low educational attainment among household heads can impact their ability to access services and support, including disability-related benefits. While 23.9 percent have completed primary education, and 15.6 percent secondary education, the proportion with education beyond secondary (14.5%) remains limited. This highlights the need for tailored social protection policies that address education gaps and improve awareness, especially among families with Person with disabilities, to ensure they can effectively utilize available services and opportunities.

The data highlights disability distribution across different wealth quintiles. The highest proportion of disability is found in the poorest quintile, where 39.9 percent of individuals experience some form of disability. This percentage decreases progressively across the other wealth categories, with the richest quintile reporting 23 percent disability prevalence. This suggests a correlation between poverty and the likelihood of having a disability, with those in poorer wealth categories experiencing higher disability rates compared to their richer counterparts. Gender differences are relatively minimal across the quintiles.

## Causes of Disability

The analysis of the causes of disabilities reveals critical areas for developing a Social Protection Framework for Persons with Disabilities. A significant portion, 30.8 percent, stems from genetic, congenital, or natal factors, highlighting the need for early intervention strategies. Illness accounts for 34.5 percent of disabilities, emphasizing the importance of accessible healthcare and disease prevention. Aging contributes to 16.7 percent, indicating a growing need for support programs for the elderly. Additionally, while road traffic accidents (2.9%) and other accidents (7.3%) are less prevalent, they underline the necessity for public safety initiatives. Addressing these causes is essential for implementing effective policies and support systems that foster inclusivity and enhance the well-being of persons with disabilities.

Graph 6: Wealth Quintile, SVRS 2023

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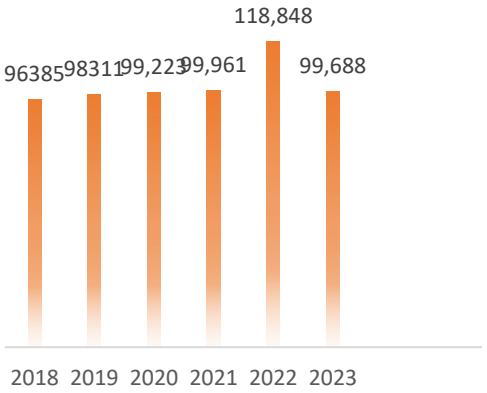
## Educational Enrollment and Access to Services

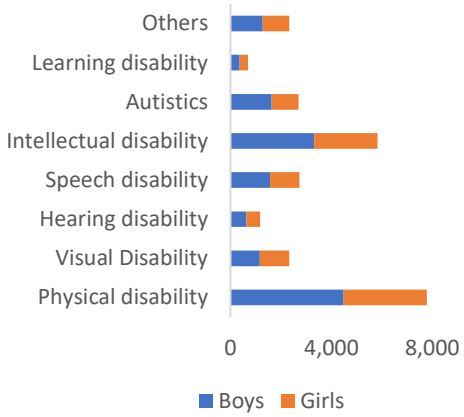
Graph 7: Year Wise Enrollment Data, APSC 2023




According to the APSC 2023, 1801 primary school has been covered to collect data on schooling. The enrolment figures for special needs children in pre-primary education provide essential insights into the current landscape of disability inclusion, revealing both challenges and opportunities. Among the 25,564 children enrolled, 14,459 are boys, representing 56.6 percent, while 11,105 are girls, making up 43.4 percent. This notable gender disparity highlights potential barriers that girls with disabilities may face in accessing early education. Societal norms, stigma, and lack of resources could contribute to the lower enrolment of girls, signaling a need for targeted interventions to promote gender equity in education for children with disabilities (APSC, 2023).

A closer look at the types of disabilities reveals those physical disabilities account for the highest enrolment, with 7,778 children, indicating a significant prevalence in this category. Intellectual disabilities follow closely, with 5,825 enrolled. This suggests that many children are experiencing challenges that may impact their learning and development. Additionally, speech disabilities enroll 2,732 children, while hearing disabilities comprise 1,181 enrolments. The data for autism reflects 2,701 children, highlighting the necessity for tailored educational approaches that address the unique needs of autistic learners. Learning disabilities have 694 enrolments, and 2,328 children fall into the category of "others," which may include a diverse range of disabilities.

Graph 8: Enrolment of Special Need Children in Pre-Primary Education, APSC 2023




The figures suggest a pressing need for the implementation of inclusive educational practices within pre-primary settings. This includes training educators to effectively support children with different disabilities, integrating assistive technologies, and promoting awareness among families and communities about the importance of early education for all children, regardless of their abilities. The enrolment of special needs children in primary education presents a clearer picture of disability inclusion, showing an increase compared to pre-primary figures. In total, **43,939** children are enrolled, with **17,365** boys and **13,574** girls registered under physical disabilities, reflecting a significant prevalence in this category. This is notably higher than the **7,778** children with physical disabilities enrolled in pre-primary education, emphasizing the importance of continued support as children transition into primary schooling.

Moreover, the high enrolment numbers in categories like physical and intellectual disabilities indicate a critical area for developing specialized support services. Early intervention programs that

focus on skill development, social integration, and personal growth are essential in laying a solid foundation for these children's future educational journeys.

### Concerns Regarding 2023 Decline

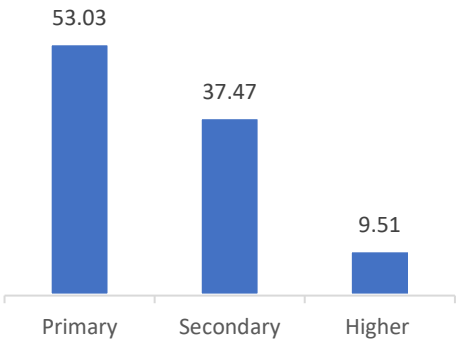
The year-wise data on the enrolment of special needs children in Grades 1 to 5 demonstrates significant fluctuations and trends that are critical to understanding the educational landscape for children with disabilities. Notably, from 2018 to 2022, there was a steady increase in enrolment, rising from 96,385 in 2018 to 118,848 in 2022. This growth, amounting to approximately 23.3 percent over four years, reflects positive strides in access to primary education for children with disabilities. Such increases could be attributed to various factors, including enhanced policy frameworks, increased societal awareness, and the implementation of inclusive education initiatives aimed at supporting children with special needs.

In stark contrast to the preceding years, the data indicates a concerning decline in 2023, with enrolment falling to 99,688. This decrease of approximately 16.1 percent from the previous year raises critical questions regarding the sustainability of the progress made in prior years. Various factors could be contributing to this decline, such as potential budget constraints, changes in educational policies, or a lack of adequate support systems for special needs education. It may also signal challenges in the implementation of inclusive practices, necessitating a deeper examination of the systemic issues at play.

The increase in enrolment figures from 2018 to 2022 suggests that government policies aimed at enhancing education access for special needs children may have yielded positive results. Initiatives focused on inclusive education, teacher training programs, and community awareness efforts are likely to have had a meaningful impact on these enrolments. However, the drop in 2023 underscores the necessity for sustained commitment to these initiatives. It calls for an urgent review of existing policies and practices to ensure they continue to meet the needs of children with disabilities effectively.

To address the decline in enrolment and reinforce the progress made in previous years, it is essential for stakeholders— including the government, educational institutions, and civil society—to collaborate in identifying and mitigating the barriers faced by special needs children. Continued investment in training educators, developing inclusive curricula, and raising awareness about the rights and capabilities of children with disabilities is crucial. By fostering a supportive and inclusive educational environment, the aim should be to not only maintain enrolment levels but also improve the overall educational outcomes for special needs children in Bangladesh.

Graph 9: Primary, Secondary, and Higher Education (%), NSPD 2021




In 2021, the enrolment rates for persons with disabilities across different educational levels in Bangladesh revealed significant disparities. The participation rate was 43.03 percent in primary education, dropping to 37.47 percent in secondary education, and further declining to only 9.71 percent

in higher/tertiary education. This trend underscores the critical challenges person with disabilities face in accessing educational opportunities as they progress through the education system.

The enrolment of 43.03 percent in primary education reflects a relatively strong foundation; however, the decline to 37.47 percent in secondary education indicates that approximately 5.56 percent of person with disabilities do not continue their education beyond the primary level. Factors contributing to this decline include a lack of support services, social stigma and discrimination, and inadequate infrastructure in secondary schools, which may not meet the diverse needs of students with disabilities.

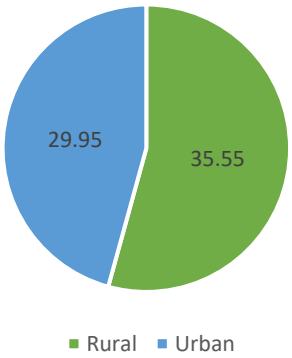
The participation rate in higher education for person with disabilities is particularly concerning at just 9.71 percent. This marks a significant drop of 27.76 percent from secondary to higher education, highlighting systemic barriers that prevent person with disabilities from pursuing further education. Inadequate access to information about higher education opportunities, financial constraints, and limited pathways tailored for person with disabilities contribute to this alarming trend.

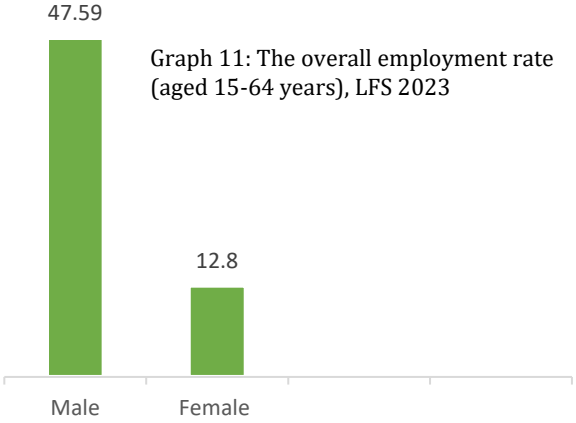
These participation trends emphasize the need for a robust social protection framework for person with disabilities. To improve access to education, it is essential to enhance accessibility in educational institutions, implement targeted support services, and conduct awareness campaigns to challenge societal stigma. Additionally, advocating for inclusive education policies that specifically address the barriers faced by person with disabilities in higher education is vital for promoting their rights and opportunities.

## Employment Scenario

Data from the NSPD 2021 illustrates the employment rates of person with disabilities aged 15-64 years in Bangladesh, revealing an overall employment rate of 33.78 percent. This data also highlights significant gender disparities, with 47.59 percent of males and 12.80 percent of females in this demographic reported as employed. These figures above underscore the challenges and inequalities faced person with disabilities in accessing the labor market, emphasizing the need for targeted policies and initiatives to enhance employment opportunities and promote gender inclusivity.

Graph 10: Rural Urban Employment Rate, NSPD 2021




Graph 11: The overall employment rate (aged 15-64 years), LFS 2023

Additionally, the pie-chart compares the employment rates of person with disabilities between rural and urban areas in Bangladesh, revealing a higher percentage in rural areas (35.55%) compared to urban areas (25.95%). This disparity underscores the importance of

context-specific, need-based programs for the inclusion of person with disabilities in Bangladesh. It suggests that a uniform approach may not effectively address the diverse challenges faced in different settings, necessitating tailored interventions to ensure equitable economic participation across all regions.

### Skill Development and Training

Capacity building through skill development programs is crucial for empowering person with disabilities to overcome employment barriers and actively participate in the workforce. Out of the 35,462 individuals surveyed, only 2.66 percent reported receiving training aimed at enhancing their skills and employability. These training programs are primarily concentrated in specific fields: 35.61 percent of recipients focus on computer skills, 15.24 percent on the readymade garments sector, and 12.36 percent on craftsman, handicrafts, or cottage work. These findings underscore the urgent need to expand and diversify training opportunities tailored to the diverse needs of person with disabilities, thereby fostering inclusive economic development and improving livelihoods across Bangladesh.

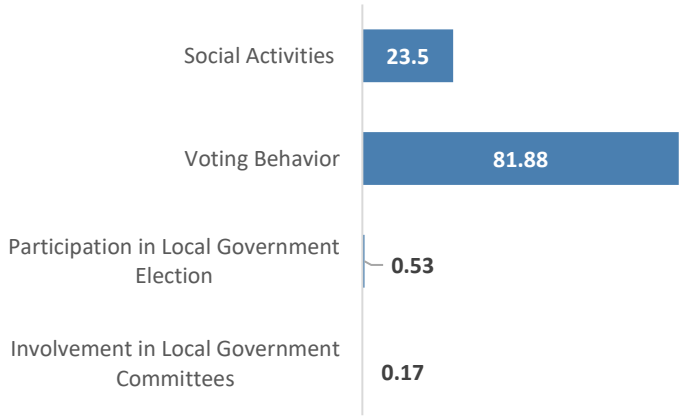
### Healthcare Disparities

In Bangladesh, the harsh reality reveals that only 9.75 percent of persons with disabilities have access to sanitation facilities, leaving a staggering 90.25 percent without these essential amenities. Furthermore, just 61.98 percent of persons with disabilities received necessary healthcare services in the three months preceding the survey. These stark statistics highlight profound disparities in infrastructure and healthcare access for persons with disabilities, underscoring the critical need for targeted interventions to improve their living conditions and overall well-being.

### Participation and Representation

In Bangladesh, the participation of persons with disabilities varies significantly across social, religious, and governmental spheres. The graph shows that 23.50 percent of persons with disabilities engage in social activities, while 28.22 percent participate in religious activities within a six-month period. However, there is a stark contrast in political participation, with only 0.17 percent actively involved in local government committees and a nominal 0.53 percent participating as candidates in local government elections.

Graph 12: Socio-Political Participation (%), NSPD 2021




This graph reflects a concerning lack of representation in decision-making processes, perpetuating barriers to inclusive governance and policy development. Despite these challenges, an encouraging majority of 81.88

percent of persons with disabilities participate in electoral processes, demonstrating their keen interest and resilience in civic engagement. Enhancing their participation and representation across all spheres is crucial for fostering inclusive development and upholding their rights as equal members of society.

### Government Assistance

Globally, 38.9 percent of individuals with severe disabilities receive disability benefits, marking a 6.1 percentage point increase. Despite this progress, 146 million people with severe disabilities remain without coverage. The specialized services needed by persons with disabilities often fall short in meeting their diverse requirements. Moreover, climate change intensifies their vulnerability, adding to the challenges they face worldwide (ILO, 2024).

According to the NSPD, 47.42 percent of persons with disabilities in Bangladesh have received some form of allowance or assistance at any time previously, with 43.35 percent receiving such support within the six months preceding the survey under the government's SSNP. The primary type of assistance reported is disability allowance, received by 33.87 percent at any time and 31.54 percent within six months. Other allowances, such as old-age allowance (8.06% any time, 7.51% in six months), food assistance (4.78% any time, 3.31% in six months), widow allowance (2.02% any time, 1.81% in six months), and stipend (1.09% any time, 0.65% in six months), were less frequently received. However, significant barriers to accessing these allowances persist, with 43.91 percent citing lack of accessible information, 16.82 percent reporting negative attitudes from service providers, 14.07 percent facing service unavailability in their area, and 12.37 percent indicating high service costs.

### Double Victimization: Discrimination and Harassment

Recent surveys in Bangladesh reveal that 43.70 percent of persons with disabilities reported experiencing discrimination or harassment in the twelve months preceding the survey. Shockingly, 90.58 percent of these incidents were attributed to neighbors, indicating pervasive societal challenges. Among women with disabilities, this form of discrimination often represents a double victimization, where gender-based discrimination intersects with disability discrimination, compounding their vulnerability (UN Women, 2021). Despite these high rates, only 5.15 percent of individuals reported incidents, underscoring widespread underreporting and the urgent need for protective measures and inclusive societal attitudes.

In conclusion, this chapter has illuminated the critical disparities in opportunities faced by persons with disabilities in Bangladesh, as evidenced by the data analyzed from various published government reports. These disparities manifest in essential areas such as health, education, and access to government benefits, highlighting significant barriers to the realization of their rights. Understanding these gaps is not just an academic exercise; it is a fundamental step toward crafting a Social Protection Framework that is both effective and rights-based.

To build a framework that genuinely addresses the needs of persons with disabilities, it is imperative to recognize and analyze the specific areas requiring intervention. The data presented in this chapter

has enabled a clearer identification of these gaps and pressing issues that need immediate attention. By focusing on these critical sectors, we can ensure that the interventions are tailored to foster inclusivity and enhance the quality of life for persons with disabilities. Ultimately, this framework will serve as a pivotal tool in advancing human rights and promoting equality, ensuring that no individual is left behind in the journey towards social inclusion and justice.

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# Key Stakeholders for UNCRPD Implementation

**Chapter Summary**

This chapter examines the stakeholders involved in the implementation of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (UNCRPD) in Bangladesh, focusing on the challenges of coordination among government bodies, UN agencies, and Organizations of Persons with Disabilities (OPDs). It highlights the limited integration of OPDs into SDG frameworks, the lack of representation on key committees, and the insufficient knowledge and training among government officials regarding the CRPD. Moreover, the chapter identifies key barriers such as inadequate skills and resources for accessible services, as well as gaps in the UN system's coordination and the provision of accessible materials. The role of the UNPRPD and its strategic framework is discussed, with an emphasis on the five foundational preconditions needed for effective disability inclusion across all sectors.

## Government

### The Ministry of Social Welfare (MoSW)

The Ministry of Social Welfare (MoSW) serves as the focal ministry for issues related to persons with disabilities in Bangladesh. The Department of Social Services (DSS) is tasked with the practical implementation of disability programs. MoSW is the primary government agency responsible for coordinating and enforcing the RPPDA and the National Disability Policy and Action Plan. These frameworks guide the government's actions to ensure the rights and welfare of persons with disabilities in the country. The 2013 Act establishes a comprehensive governance structure aimed at ensuring the rights and protection of persons with disabilities in Bangladesh.

### The National Forum of Organizations Working with the Disabled (NFOWD)

Established in 1991, the National Forum of Organizations Working with the Disabled (NFOWD) is a pioneering coalition in Bangladesh that acts as a platform for disability-focused advocacy and policy development. With a membership base exceeding 400 organizations, NFOWD works tirelessly to safeguard the rights of persons with disabilities by influencing national policy, enhancing accessibility, and creating socio-economic opportunities. It collaborates with international agencies and the government to promote a disability-inclusive development agenda (Equal Bangladesh, 2023; Prothom Alo, 2024).

### The National Grassroots Disability Organization (NGDO)

The National Grassroots Disability Organization (NGDO) serves as an umbrella group that unites OPDs and self-help organizations, fostering their capacity to advocate for disability rights. Operating in 27 districts, NGDO represents over 25,000 members and has a dual governance structure comprising a General Committee and an Executive Committee. It plays a critical role in bridging the gap between grassroots movements and national policymaking, ensuring that the voices of persons with disabilities are heard at all levels of governance. Recent advocacy efforts include calls for equitable access to education and healthcare for persons with disabilities (The Daily Star, 2024; Dhaka Tribune, 2023).

### The National Council of Disabled Women (NCDW)

Focusing on the intersection of disability and gender, the National Council of Disabled Women (NCDW) is dedicated to protecting the rights of women and children with disabilities. The NCDW collaborates with community-based organizations to amplify the voices of disabled women, advocating for their inclusion in education, employment, and healthcare. By addressing issues such as violence, discrimination, and lack of representation, NCDW continues to challenge systemic barriers to equality and dignity (Rahman, 2022; UNDRR, 2023).

### Additional References to OPDs' Contributions

The collective impact of these OPDs is evident in the national policy discourse, where their advocacy has led to tangible advancements such as the inclusion of disability-specific measures in the Standing Orders on Disasters and the National Action Plan on Disability. Additionally, media reports highlight their ongoing efforts to raise awareness and influence public attitudes toward disability rights (Prothom Alo, 2024; The Daily Star, 2024).

**National Coalition Project,** Led by NGDO, NCDW, and the Bangladesh Legal Aid and Services Trust (BLAST), the NCP has been instrumental in advocating for the rights of persons with disabilities in Bangladesh. Since 2013, the NCP has collaborated with the Disability Rights Fund to produce a shadow report on the UN CRPD (Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities), providing a critical review of Bangladesh's progress in implementing the Convention.

These organizations are pivotal in promoting the inclusion, rights, and dignity of persons with disabilities in Bangladesh, driving advocacy, policy changes, and building strong, sustainable movements for disability rights across the country.

### UN System

Historically, coordination among UN agencies on disability-related efforts has been fragmented, leading to inefficiencies and the duplication of services. Prior to the establishment of the UNPRPD frameworks, agencies operated largely in isolation, which

hindered the effectiveness of disability inclusion initiatives. Despite ongoing independent efforts by organizations such as ILO, UNICEF, UN Women, UNDP, and UNFPA, there is a concerted push to streamline and unify these approaches. The UN Resident Coordinator's Office (RCO) has played a pivotal role in advancing a coordinated strategy to foster greater disability inclusion within the UN system. This includes strengthening collaboration with government entities, civil society groups, and Organizations of Persons with Disabilities (OPDs). In Bangladesh, the creation of a UN Task Team, which oversees the implementation, monitoring, and reporting of disability inclusion efforts, is a key example of the RCO's commitment to promoting a more collaborative approach to disability inclusion under the UN Disability Inclusion Strategy (UNICEF, 2024; ILO, 2023)

### Challenges in Coordination

The situational analysis highlights significant challenges in coordination and capacity within both the government and UN systems regarding disability inclusion in Bangladesh. While structures for implementing the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) exist, there are limited efforts to integrate OPDs into these frameworks. Currently, OPDs do not have official representation on the SDG Implementation Committee, and both ministry officials and grassroots-level staff often lack the knowledge and training necessary to fully support disability inclusion, particularly in relation to the CRPD.

Government ministries and agencies face considerable barriers when engaging with individuals with disabilities. These include insufficient skills, such as a lack of proficiency in sign language, and limited financial resources for accessible services and information. Public information, including laws and policies, is frequently inaccessible to people with sensory impairments, and there are minimal resources dedicated to converting documents into accessible formats for diverse disability types.

Among OPDs, cross-disability organizations tend to be more effectively coordinated at the national level, playing a stronger role in advocacy. However, there is an internal imbalance, where individuals with physical or visual disabilities often dominate, leaving those with intellectual or psychosocial disabilities less represented.

Additionally, there is a lack of systematic coordination or accountability mechanisms within the UN system in Bangladesh to ensure disability inclusion. Key UN resources are often not provided in accessible formats, such as large print or sign language, and some UN agency facilities remain physically inaccessible, underscoring the ongoing gaps in both coordination and inclusion efforts.

## Conclusion

The chapter concludes that the success of disability inclusion in Bangladesh depends on overcoming significant coordination and capacity challenges. Ensuring greater integration of OPDs, improving government and UN agency collaboration, and providing accessible resources are essential steps. Adopting the UNCRPD's strategic framework, with a focus on equality, accessibility, and accountability, will be crucial for addressing these gaps and advancing the rights of persons with disabilities in Bangladesh.

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# Government's Legislative and Institutional Frameworks


**Chapter Summary**

This chapter has provided a comprehensive analysis of the government's response to disability inclusion in Bangladesh, highlighting key legislative and policy frameworks designed to address the needs and rights of persons with disabilities. It began by detailing the Rights and Protection of Persons with Disabilities (RPPD) Act**.** The chapter also examined the process for obtaining the Suborno Card (Disability Identification Card), a crucial step in ensuring access to government services and benefits for individuals with disabilities. In addition, the National Action Plan and the National Priority Indicators were discussed, showcasing how these documents aim to integrate disability concerns into broader national development goals.

Despite the formal policies in place, the chapter highlighted several challenges related to the implementation of the National Action Plan. Drawing primarily from the insights of Key Informant Interviews (KIIs), it revealed a number of systemic issues that hinder effective execution, such as institutional factors, lack of awareness among new government officials about their responsibilities regarding disability committees, insufficient institutional support, and gaps in coordination between various stakeholders.


## 1. The Rights and Protection of Persons with Disabilities Act, 2013

The Rights and Protection of Persons with Disabilities Act, 2013 (RPPD Act) stands as a significant milestone in Bangladesh's commitment to upholding the rights of persons with disabilities, reflecting a strong adherence to the principles enshrined in the CRPD. This law is the result of an inclusive and collaborative process that involved over 14,000 people from all walks of life. The drafting process began with a highly participatory three-day workshop, where stakeholders from diverse sectors came together to discuss and shape the law. The attendees included Members of Parliament, government officials, renowned lawyers, human rights advocates, journalists, educators, and development professionals, in addition to people with disabilities, their families, and experts in the field of disability. The workshop was overseen by a former Minister from the Ministry of Law, Justice and Parliamentary Affairs, with Barrister Amirul Islam—who had drafted the Proclamation of Independence for Bangladesh—serving as the chief guest. In its Strategic Framework, the UNPRPD has identified five preconditions essential for ensuring the rights of persons with disabilities across various sectors. These foundational elements, which are vital to improving disability inclusion in Bangladesh, include:

1. Equality and non-discrimination
2. Accessibility
3. Inclusive service delivery

4. CRPD-compliant budgeting and financial management

5. Accountability and governance

However, the drafting of the RPPD Act took more than three years of careful deliberation, and it was finally passed by the Bangladesh Parliament in 2013, symbolizing a crucial step toward full inclusivity. The law defines disability and people with disabilities in alignment with the CRPD, reinforcing the country's commitment to international human rights standards. It enshrines 20 specific rights for persons with disabilities. These are:

1. Right to Equality and Non-Discrimination
2. Right to Accessibility
3. Right to Education
4. Right to Employment
5. Right to Health
6. Right to Social Protection
7. Right to Access to Justice
8. Right to Participate in Political and Public Life
9. Right to Family Life
10. Right to Independent Living
11. Right to a Standard of Living
12. Right to Participation in Cultural and Recreational Activities
13. Right to Protection from Abuse and Exploitation
14. Right to Rehabilitative Services
15. Right to Personal Security
16. Right to Informed Consent
17. Right to Access to Information
18. Right to Protection from Discrimination in Transport
19. Right to Awareness and Education about Disability
20. Right to Legal Protection

Furthermore, the law mandates a comprehensive implementation framework, extending to national, district, upazila, and urban committees. According to Article 29(1), all government, semi-government, autonomous, and private organizations, as well as educational institutions, are required to adhere to the law's provisions, guided by directives from the National Coordination Committee (NCC). A noteworthy feature of the law is its commitment to accountability; it does not include any indemnification for officials or committee members in case of unintentional omissions that result in violations of the rights of persons with disabilities. This ensures that the law's provisions are followed diligently, creating a legal framework where persons with disabilities are fully protected and their rights respected. This progressive legislation is a testament to Bangladesh's proactive efforts to enhance the lives of persons with disabilities and build an inclusive society where no one is left behind (Equal Bangladesh Campaign, 2023).

### National-Level Committees for RPPD Implementation

The RPPD Act establishes committees at four distinct levels to oversee the implementation of the law. At the national level, two key committees are responsible for guiding and overseeing these efforts:

1. National Coordination Committee (NCC)
2. National Executive Committee (NEC)

The NCC is led by the Minister of the Ministry of Social Welfare, while the NEC is headed by the Secretary of the same ministry. In both committees, the Managing Director of the Jatiyo Protibondhi Unnayan Foundation (JPUF), which is the National Foundation for the Development of Disabled Persons, serves as the member secretary. Both of these committees are inter-ministerial in nature, ensuring broad representation from various government departments.

### Regional-Level Committees for RPPD Implementation

At the regional level, there are district and upazila committees. These committees are chaired by the respective Deputy Commissioners (DCs) and Upazila Nirbahi Officers (UNOs), with the Deputy Director of the Department of Social Services (DSS) and the Social Welfare Officers serving as the member secretaries of these committees. Furthermore, within urban areas, specifically within City Corporations, urban committees have been formed. These committees are chaired by the Chief Executive Officer of the respective city, and the Urban Social Welfare Officer acts as the member secretary. Notably, there will be one urban committee for each of the 80 Urban Community Development (UCD) programs that operate across 64 districts in the country. These structured committees ensure that the implementation of the RPPD Act is effectively carried out across different administrative levels, creating a comprehensive and coordinated approach to disability inclusion.

The RPPD Act outlines specific provisions regarding the membership, functions, and responsibilities of the committees established to implement the law. These committees include a broad range of stakeholders, with particular attention to ensuring representation from disability-related NGOs, OPDs, self-help organizations, and women's groups. This diverse representation ensures that the voices of persons with disabilities, including women, are incorporated into decision-making processes at all levels of implementation.

### Monitoring and Coordination

The law also clearly specifies the frequency of meetings for each committee to ensure effective monitoring and evaluation of its activities. The National Coordination Committee (NCC), which oversees national-level coordination, is required to meet **at least twice per year**. The National Executive Committee (NEC), responsible for executing the policy at the operational level, must meet **at least three times annually**. The district committees are mandated to convene **at least four times a year**, while the upazila and urban committees, which operate at the local level, must meet **at least six times annually**. These regular meetings are essential for maintaining ongoing dialogue, addressing issues, and ensuring that the committees fulfill their responsibilities in a timely manner.

The RPPD Act also provides a clear mechanism for addressing grievances. If a person with a disability feels that their rights have been violated, they are encouraged to report the issue in writing to the district committee. The law stipulates a detailed process and specific time frame within which the district committee must respond to the complaint. This ensures accountability and a structured approach to addressing violations (Smith & Johnson, 2020). If the person with a disability is dissatisfied with the outcome at the district level, the complaint can be escalated to the NEC for further review and resolution. This tiered grievance redressal system is designed to provide multiple avenues for resolving issues, promoting transparency, and ensuring that the rights of persons with disabilities are protected at all levels of governance.

## 2. National Committee for Monitoring the Implementation of the CRPD

After the CRPD came into effect, Bangladesh established a National Committee to oversee its implementation, as mandated by Article 33 of the CRPD. Initially chaired by the Secretary of the Ministry of Social Welfare, the committee aimed to monitor the country's progress in fulfilling CRPD obligations. The committee appointed **46 disability focal points from various ministries**, initially at the deputy secretary level, but these were later upgraded to joint secretary-level officials to enhance oversight and decision-making effectiveness. These focal points are instrumental in ensuring that various governmental bodies effectively integrate disability rights and inclusion into their policies and programs, in alignment with international standards set by the CRPD. The committee plays a key role in tracking progress, identifying challenges, and ensuring accountability across all sectors involved in disability inclusion (Ahmed & Alam, 2021).

## 3. National Action Plan

The government of Bangladesh developed a comprehensive National Action Plan (NAP) on Disability in 2018, aligning with the commitments outlined in Article 29(2) of the Rights and Protection of Persons with Disabilities (RPPD) Act. The plan was finalized and approved by the National Coordination Committee before being formally adopted by the Cabinet as a critical step toward ensuring the rights of persons with disabilities. The NAP identifies 18 distinct action areas and outlines the roles and responsibilities of 35 different ministries and their respective departments in driving its implementation.

The drafting process of the NAP was highly consultative, emphasizing the importance of collaboration and inclusivity. It began with inputs from NGOs and OPDs, with guidance from the Joint Platform of Disability Organizations, Jatiyo Protibondhi Unnayan Foundation (JPUF). The process was then spearheaded by the National Human Rights Commission (NHRC), ensuring that the perspectives and needs of persons with disabilities were central to the plan's development. Once the draft was completed, it was submitted to the National Coordination Committee for final approval, ensuring that the plan had broad support and alignment with national priorities (EBC, 2023).

The NAP is divided into **short-term, medium-term, and long-term** plans, reflecting a phased approach to implementation. The NAP is closely aligned with the provisions of the RPPD Act, directly referencing its articles and the 16 Schedules included in the legislation. It translates the law's mandates into actionable steps, ensuring that each focus area is supported by a well-defined strategy. A notable aspect of the NAP is its emphasis on resource allocation, featuring a dedicated column for

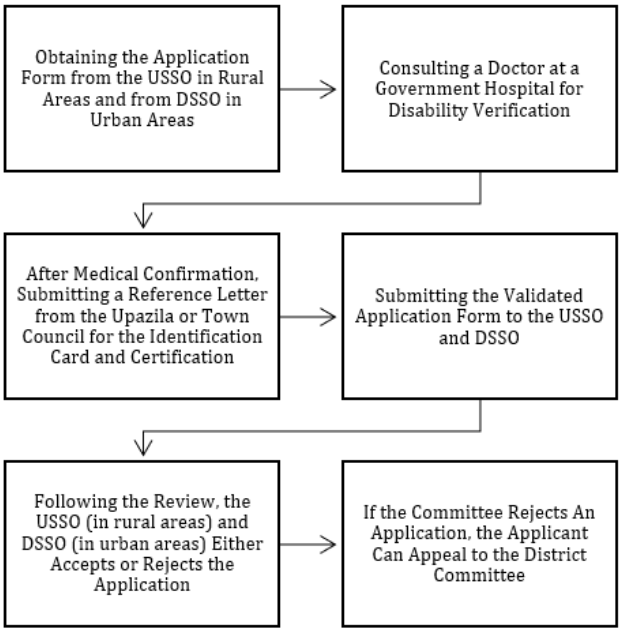
'Resources Required' to guide ministries and departments in planning and allocating the necessary resources within their respective scopes. Instead of a centralized operational budget, the NAP relies on individual ministries and departments to manage resource allocation as appropriate for their areas of responsibility.

This holistic approach reflects the government's strong commitment to making meaningful progress in the inclusion of persons with disabilities. The NAP provides a clear roadmap for action, with a strong focus on accountability and a structured plan for implementation across various levels of government (Equal Bangladesh Campaign, 2023).

## 4. Disability Identification Card (Suborno Card)

Section 31(6) of the RPPD Act stipulates that individual with disabilities must acquire an official identification card to access the rights and entitlements specified under this Act and other related laws. However, this provision presents a considerable challenge, as the process for obtaining the disability identification card is complex and involves multiple steps[3].

Figure 3: Process Flow for Obtaining the Suborno Disability Identification Card




Once accepted, the applicant will receive their card along with bank account details for Sonali Bank and Nagad (Mobile Financial Service) within 15 working days, enabling them to receive the government-provided allowance.

The analysis revealed significant gaps in institutional support for individuals with disabilities after receiving their disability certificates and identification cards. Notably, there are **no formal referral**

[3] Data Gathered through Key Informant Interviews (KII)

**mechanisms** in place to guide individuals toward necessary services. To access assistive devices and other support, individuals must independently contact the Jatiyo Protibondhi Unnayan Foundation, a process that is perceived as burdensome and inefficient. The identification card, which theoretically provides access to certain rights and benefits, lacks tangible support, discouraging many individuals with disabilities from pursuing it.

Moreover, **accessibility issues** in the application process for disability identification cards were highlighted. While forms are available online, they are not universally accessible. Individuals with visual impairments or physical disabilities often need assistance to complete them, which complicates the process and undermines autonomy. KIIs further uncovered systemic challenges, including the widespread practice of **unofficial payments (bribes) to expedite the card issuance**, which reflects the inefficiency and complexity of the entire process.

The **procedural barriers** in obtaining the disability identification card are particularly exhausting. Although the registration form can be partially filled out online, final approval requires a medical examination conducted by a government-appointed officer[4]. This step, which verifies the disability type and grade, necessitates in-person visits, a major logistical challenge for individuals in remote areas. The **time-consuming** nature of this process and its inaccessibility for many individuals significantly limits the number of people who can successfully navigate the system and access their legal entitlements (Sultana, 2023; Rahman, 2022).

## 5. National Priority Indicators

To support SDG implementation and track progress in Bangladesh, the government has established a set of National Priority Indicators (NPIs) aligned with SDG targets. By evaluating these indicators, it is anticipated that data relevant to persons with disabilities will be monitored, either directly or indirectly.

**SDG 4: Ensure inclusive and equitable quality education and promote lifelong learning opportunities for all:**

- NPI 9 Ensure 100% completion rate of primary education.
- NPI 10 Ensure 100% completion rate of junior secondary education.
- NPI 11 Ensure the proportion of students in technical level above 20% to the total students passed every year in the secondary education (SSC, Dakhil, and Vocational).
- NPI 12 Ensure the proportion of schools by 100% with access to the following: A. Electricity, B. Internet, C. Basic drinking water, D. Single-sex basic sanitation facilities (SDG Indicator 4.a.1).
- NPI 13 Ensure the proportion of schools by 100% with access to adapted infrastructure and materials for the child/student with disability (SDG Indicator 4.a.1).

**SDG 8: Promote sustained, inclusive and sustainable economic growth, full and productive employment and decent work for all**:

[4] Data Gathered through Key Informant Interviews (KII)

- NPI 21 Increase annual growth rate of GDP to 10% (SDG Indicator 8.1.1).
- NPI 22 Reduce unemployment rate below 3% (SDG Indicator 8.5.2).
- NPI 23 Reduce the proportion of youth population (15-29 years) not in education, employment or training to 10% (SDG Indicator 8.6.1).

**SDG 10: Reduce inequality within and among countries**:

- NPI 28 Reduce the ratio of income of top 10% population and bottom 10% population to 20.
- NPI 29 Reduce the recruitment cost borne by employee as a proportion of yearly income earned in a country of destination to 10% (SDG Indicator 10.7.1).

**SDG 11: Make cities and human settlements inclusive, safe, resilient, and sustainable**

- NPI 30 Ensure women, children, elderly and persons with disabilities have convenient access to public transport (minimum 20% seats) (SDG Indicator 11.2.1).

**SDG 17: Strengthen the means of implementation and revitalize the Global Partnership for Sustainable Development**

- NPI 38 Increase total government revenue as a proportion of GDP to 20% (SDG Indicator 17.1.1).
- NPI 39 Increase the proportion of individuals using the Internet to 100% (SDG Indicator 17.8.1).

## Implementation Challenges

### A. Challenges in Medical Assessment and Disability Classification

A major challenge in the disability identification process is the difficulty in locating the designated medical officer for the required assessment. In addition, many governments medical officers lack adequate training on the classifications outlined in the RPPD Act, complicating the accurate application of the disability criteria. Disability rights advocates, including the Bangladesh Disability Forum (BDF), have long urged the Ministry of Social Welfare, specifically the Department of Social Services (DSS), to establish a more efficient and streamlined approach for disability classification and assessment. The Directorate General of Health Services (DGHS) has taken a step forward by developing a handbook to guide medical officers at the grassroots level. This resource aims to improve their understanding of the RPPD Act classifications and enhance consistency in the application of disability assessments, a necessary step toward improving the accessibility of services for persons with disabilities (Sultana, 2023; Rahman, 2022).

### B. Irregular Committee Meetings

A critical challenge in implementing the NAP for persons with disabilities is the irregular convening of key committees, particularly the NCC. As stipulated by the RPPD Act, the NCC is required to meet at least twice annually to ensure effective policy coordination and implementation across ministries.

However, in the nine years since its establishment, the NCC has convened only twice, with its most recent meeting held in 2019. This lack of regular meetings severely undermines its capacity to oversee and drive the implementation of the disability rights framework. Given that the NCC serves as the apex body responsible for inter-ministerial coordination, its inactivity raises serious concerns about the government's commitment to ensuring the rights and welfare of persons with disabilities (Prothom Alo, 2023).

Similarly, the NEC, tasked with operationalizing and monitoring the NAP, has failed to meet its mandated frequency. Since its inception in 2013, the NEC should have convened 27 times as per the RPPD Act. However, it has held only a handful of meetings, significantly constraining its ability to execute and evaluate the NAP effectively (Prothom Alo, 2020). These gaps in meeting regularity at the national level reflect systemic challenges in prioritizing disability-related issues, impeding progress and accountability in implementing the NAP.

### C. Lack of Accountability

The district, upazila, and urban committees, which are integral to implementing the NAP for persons with disabilities at the local level, face significant challenges in their operations. Although the law mandates regular meetings to address local disability-related issues, improper meeting practices and insufficient follow-up on decisions undermine their effectiveness.

At the upazila level, coordination meetings are held monthly under the leadership of the Upazila Nirbahi Officer (UNO). These meetings, attended by various ministries, departments, development organizations, and representatives from OPDs, are intended to foster inclusive development. However, OPDs have frequently reported that the Social Welfare Officer, designated as the member secretary of the upazila disability committee, often misrepresents these general coordination meetings as disability-specific gatherings[5]. This misrepresentation leads to improper documentation of resolutions and the collection of signatures without genuine accountability or actionable outcomes.

### D. Lack of Transparency and Formal Oversight

The absence of clarity and transparency in local committee operations raises concerns about their ability to fulfill their mandate. Allegations of misrepresentation and procedural lapses by committee members have not been formally investigated, making it difficult to assess the prevalence of these issues across the country[6]. This lack of oversight perpetuates inefficiencies and prevents the committees from effectively addressing the needs and rights of persons with disabilities at the community level (Prothom Alo, 2020). Such systemic shortcomings call for strengthened monitoring mechanisms and enhanced accountability to ensure that these committees can deliver on their responsibilities.

[5] Data Gathered through Key Informant Interviews (KII)
[6] Ibid

### E. Inadequate Focus on Implementation Measures

Even when meetings are held, they often lack a clear focus on the practical implementation of the law. The agendas of these meetings rarely align with the objectives of the NAP or address the specific challenges laid out in the RPPD Act. This disconnects between the meetings' discussions and the implementation of the law further exacerbates the gap between policy and practice (Equal Bangladesh Campaign, 2023). Without a dedicated focus on concrete measures for the inclusion of persons with disabilities, the committees fail to make meaningful progress in advancing the rights of this marginalized group.

### F. Overburdened Deputy Commissioners

One of the major challenges in implementing the NAP for persons with disabilities at the district level is the lack of prioritization of disability-related committees. The Deputy Commissioner (DC), who chairs the district-level committees, is responsible for overseeing numerous committees in the district, many of which are not mandated by law. This heavy workload results in the disability-specific committees often receiving less attention[7]. The DC's efforts to treat all committees equally, regardless of their legal standing, further detracts from the focus and resources needed to prioritize disability-related matters.

### G. Confusion with Multiple Committees

In each district, there are typically three different committees dealing with disability-related issues. These include the district committee constituted under the Rights and Protection of Persons with Disabilities (RPPD) Act, the district committee formed under the National Disability Development (NDD) Protection Trust Act, and the district steering committee of the JPUF (Jatiyo Protibondhi Unnayan Foundation) that operates welfare and service centers (Sheba o Shahajjyo Kendra). The overlap in membership across these committees, coupled with their similar meeting schedules, often leads to confusion among committee members, including the DC, regarding which meeting they are attending. This confusion further undermines the effectiveness and coherence of these committees.

### H. Lack of Transparency and Communication Failures

Even when the disability committees are formally constituted, their effectiveness is compromised by irregular meetings and poor communication. An illustrative case is that of a visually impaired committee member, who was never notified about a meeting but was later asked to sign an attendance sheet by a peon from the Social Welfare Officer's office. Upon investigation, it was discovered that the meeting he was asked to sign for was an upazila committee meeting, not one focused on disability issues (Equal Bangladesh Campaign, 2023). This lack of transparency and accountability in the meeting process led to confusion and frustration, especially since the committee member had not been informed or involved in the meeting.

While there have been attempts to hold meetings around key dates, such as two meetings before International Disability Days (in April and December), these meetings are typically merged with

[7] Ibid

general coordination meetings at the Upazila Nirbahi Officer's (UNO) office. This not only undermines the specific focus needed for disability issues but also further dilutes the potential impact of the district-level committees. The merging of meetings with other development issues reduces the visibility and importance of disability-specific concerns, which should be given greater priority in these forums (Equal Bangladesh Campaign, 2023).

### I. Lack of Proper Documentation

The situation at the urban committee level is similarly problematic. While the government claims that meetings are being held regularly, there is no clear record of meeting proceedings maintained by the Ministry of Social Welfare (MoSW) or the JPUF. Without proper documentation, it becomes difficult to track the progress of the committees, assess their effectiveness, or hold participants accountable. This lack of transparency leads to uncertainty about the actual progress made in implementing the National Action Plan and fulfilling the commitments made under the RPPD Act.

### J. Lack of High-Level Participation

A significant challenge in the effective operation of disability committees in Bangladesh is the lack of high-level participation, which undermines their ability to achieve meaningful outcomes. These committees are intended to include key decision-makers, such as two Members of Parliament (MPs) nominated by the Speaker of Parliament, along with 15 Secretaries from various ministries, as well as officials from the Ministry of Social Welfare (MoSW). However, recent reports have highlighted a concerning trend in which many of these Secretaries have been absent from meetings and sent lower-level representatives instead (Equal Bangladesh Campaign, 2023). More troubling is the fact that some of these representatives lacked the necessary seniority to influence discussions or drive action (The Daily Star, 2024).

This absence of high-level officials has been noted by both the chairperson of the committee and the MPs present at the meetings. They have emphasized the critical need for greater cooperation and participation from senior officials to ensure that disability issues are adequately prioritized within governmental frameworks (Dhaka Tribune, 2023). The involvement of top-level decision-makers is essential for shaping policies that can address the complex needs of persons with disabilities in Bangladesh. Without their active engagement, the effectiveness of the committee is severely compromised, as lower-level representatives often lack the authority and resources to bring about the necessary policy changes (Prothom Alo, 2020). This issue reflects broader challenges within the governance structure, where disability inclusion is not consistently treated as a priority at the highest levels of decision-making.

### K. Hierarchical Gaps Between Key Officials

Another structural issue undermining the effectiveness of the disability committees is the significant hierarchical gap between key figures within the committee. Specifically, the gap between the Deputy Commissioner (DC) and the Deputy Director of the Department of Social Services, who serves as the committee's member secretary, creates difficulties in coordination and communication (Prothom Alo, 2020). The member secretary, who is responsible for overseeing the committee's day-to-day

functioning, often faces challenges in acquainting new officials with the specific responsibilities tied to disability-related issues.

This hierarchical gap makes it harder for the member secretary to effectively engage with and inform other officials, particularly at the district level. The lack of coordination at this level can impact the regularity and effectiveness of meetings, as it may lead to confusion or delays in preparing agendas, ensuring proper attendance, and following up on decisions made during meetings (Prothom Alo, 2020). Without clear communication and the support of both high-level and district-level officials, the disability committees may struggle to implement the National Action Plan effectively.

### L. Lack of Action on District Reports and Complaints

The committee, which is supposed to receive annual reports from the 64 district committees, faces a significant gap in addressing issues related to people with disabilities. Despite numerous complaints lodged by individuals who have been deprived of their rights at the district level, these issues are seldom discussed in the NEC meetings. Furthermore, there is no consistent follow-up on collecting the reports from the districts, and even when they are received, they are not reviewed or acted upon by decision-makers. As a result, people with disabilities must wait for years without seeing any resolution to their complaints.

### M. Structural and Staffing Challenges

The member secretary of the committee, who is the Managing Director of the Joint Parliamentary Unit Foundation (JPUF), faces additional challenges due to the geographical distance of the Foundation's office from the secretariat and the lack of sufficient staffing. JPUF is already tasked with its own programs and operations, leaving little capacity to handle additional work related to the NCC or NEC. Since the law mandating these committees came into force, JPUF has not proposed additional staff to support the committees, further exacerbating the problem (Equal Bangladesh Campaign, 2023). Moreover, as the MD position is transferable, frequent changes in leadership prevent continuity and hinder the smooth functioning of the committees. There is no established system to brief new MDs on their responsibilities as member secretaries of these national committees (UNPRPD, 2022).

### N. Lack of Clear Ownership and Initiative

There is a lack of clarity regarding who should take the initiative in activating the committees. Ministry officials believe that the member secretary should take the lead, while the member secretary feels that the initiative should come from the MoSW, depending on the availability of the Minister and Secretary. This standoff has led to inaction, with neither the MoSW nor JPUF taking the first step toward resolving the committee's issues, thus delaying important decisions and actions (Equal Bangladesh Campaign, 2023).

### O. Insufficient Orientation for New Officials

Government officials, particularly those in administrative roles such as District Commissioners (DCs) or Upazila Nirbahi Officers (UNOs), are expected to familiarize themselves with relevant documents upon assuming new positions. However, in practice, many new officials fail to thoroughly engage with all the necessary materials, particularly older documents or those perceived as less urgent. This leads to a limited and superficial understanding of disability-related issues. Historically, leaders of the National Forum of Organizations Working with Disabilities (NFOWD) would visit new Ministry of Social Welfare (MoSW) officials to ensure proper orientation; however, this practice has significantly diminished, resulting in reduced attention to critical disability matters (Prothom Alo, 2023).

A key gap in the system is the lack of an institutionalized mechanism to formally orient new officials regarding their roles on disability committees. When new administrative officials are assigned to a district, there is no formal expectation that they will be fully acquainted with their duties as chairpersons of the district disability committees. The absence of a structured process to ensure these officials receive adequate training and support undermines their ability to effectively fulfill their responsibilities[8]. This lack of orientation contributes to ongoing confusion and inefficiencies in addressing disability issues at the district level.

## Conclusion

In conclusion, while Bangladesh has made significant success in developing legislative and policy frameworks to support disability inclusion, such as the RPPD Act, and the National Action Plan, the implementation of these measures remains fraught with challenges. Key Informant Interviews revealed systemic barriers, including institutional inefficiencies, lack of awareness among newly appointed government officials, inadequate institutional support, and insufficient coordination among stakeholders. To truly achieve the goal of disability inclusion, there is a need for enhanced capacity-building initiatives, stronger inter-agency collaboration, and continuous monitoring of policy implementation. Addressing these challenges is essential to ensuring that the rights and needs of persons with disabilities are fully recognized and integrated into Bangladesh's broader development agenda.

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## Policy Implementation: A Human Rights Approach

**Chapter Overview**

This chapter assesses Bangladesh's efforts to support persons with disabilities through various educational, social, and economic inclusion initiatives. The country has made significant progress in promoting education for persons with disabilities, with 65% enrollment in primary schools and 35% in secondary schools. A stipend program benefiting 100,000 students with disabilities, with allocations totaling 95.64 crore BDT, has provided financial support for their education.

Additionally, efforts to enhance employment opportunities include skill development programs, tax exemptions for incomes up to 4 lakh BDT, and a 5% quota for persons with disabilities in TVETs further highlight the government's commitment to inclusivity. However, despite the existence of supportive policies, the slow implementation of the National Action Plan has left many disability-related demands unfulfilled. The chapter highlights sector-specific challenges that persist, particularly in areas like education, employment, and access to healthcare.

Bangladesh has made remarkable strides in social and economic development, emerging as a model for progress among developing nations. However, ensuring that this progress benefits all segments of society remains a critical challenge, particularly for persons with disabilities. Addressing the socio-economic barriers faced by this marginalized group is not only a matter of equity but also essential for achieving inclusive growth, as emphasized in the global commitment to Leave No One Behind (LNOB), a core principle of the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals (UNSDGs).

The government of Bangladesh has demonstrated a strong commitment to advancing the rights and welfare of persons with disabilities. This is evident in the enactment of the persons with Disabilities Rights and Protection Act 2013, which provides a robust legal framework for upholding their rights. Complementing this legislation are various strategies and action plans designed to promote accessibility, participation, and equality for persons with disabilities. Institutional efforts include the establishment of the National Foundation for the Development of Persons with Disabilities and their integration into existing social protection programs.

Despite these advancements, significant challenges remain in fully realizing the rights and potentials of persons with disabilities. This chapter takes a human rights-based approach to evaluate the incorporation and effectiveness of policies targeting persons with disabilities. It assesses achievements to date and explores persisting challenges identified through the preparatory workshop on National Social Protection Framework for persons with disabilities, key informant interviews (KIIs), and an analysis of relevant literature and policy documents.

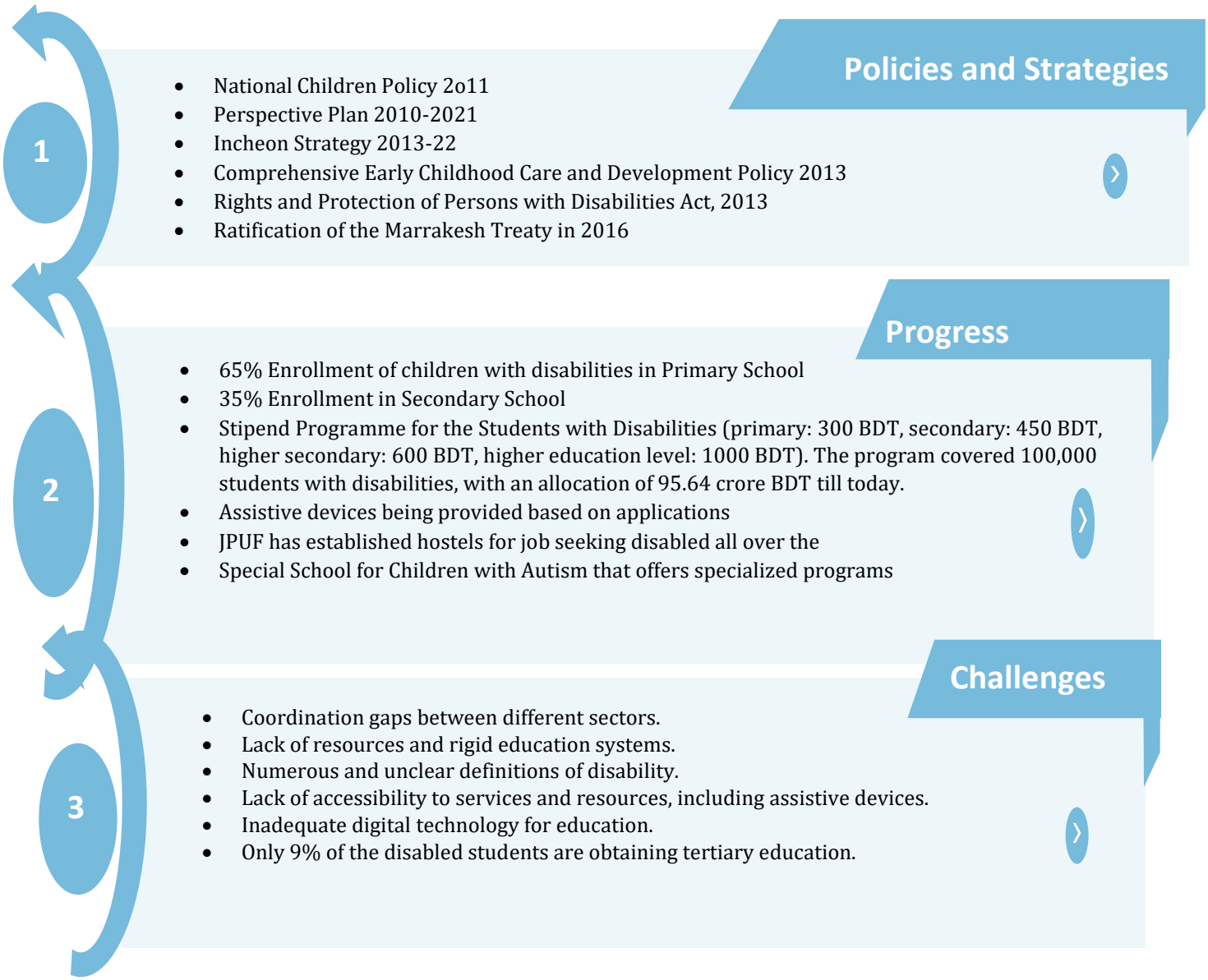
**Box 2: The Marrakesh Treaty**

The Marrakesh Treaty to Facilitate Access to Published Works for Persons Who Are Blind, Visually Impaired, or Otherwise Print Disabled was adopted in 2013 under the World Intellectual Property Organization (WIPO). It addresses barriers to accessing printed materials by permitting the production and sharing of accessible formats such as braille and audiobooks across borders. Bangladesh ratified the treaty in 2016, committing to improve access for its visually impaired population. This treaty emphasizes inclusivity by bridging the "book famine," ensuring that persons with disabilities can equally participate in education, employment, and cultural life.

A substantial portion of the challenges discussed stems from insights shared during the preparatory workshop, underscoring the importance of inclusive consultation processes. By addressing these challenges, this chapter aims to provide actionable recommendations for bridging gaps and ensuring that the rights and dignity of persons with disabilities are upheld as Bangladesh progresses toward achieving the UNSDGs.

## Right to Education

In Bangladesh, children with disabilities encounter unique barriers to accessing quality education, making inclusive and equitable education a pressing priority within the country's social policies. Recognizing the fundamental right of every child to receive education regardless of ability, the government has undertaken a series of initiatives to address these challenges. This section focuses on analyzing the current policies, strategies, and legislative acts related to the education of children with disabilities. The aim is to evaluate the effectiveness of these measures in facilitating access to education, promoting inclusivity in learning environments, and ensuring that the educational needs of children with disabilities are adequately met. Additionally, we aim to identify the persistent challenges hindering the full realization of inclusive education for children with disabilities in Bangladesh.



## Right to Health

In Bangladesh, ensuring the right to health for all citizens, including the persons with disabilities, is fundamental to promoting their overall well-being and quality of life. Recognizing the unique healthcare needs and vulnerabilities of this population, the government has implemented a range of policies, programs, and initiatives aimed at providing equitable access to essential healthcare services. This section examines the current landscape of policies, strategies, and legislative measures pertaining to the right to health, their effectiveness, and the identification of persistent challenges and barriers that hinder the full realization of the right to health for persons with disabilities in Bangladesh.

1

### Policies and Strategies

- National Health Policy, 2011
- Women Development Advancement Policy of 2011
- Rights and Protection of Persons with Disability Act of 2013
- Health, Nutrition and Population Strategic Investment Plan (HNPSIP) 2016-2021

2

### Progress

- Establishment of disability service and support centers in all the 64 districts
- Distribution of 60,342 assistive devices, including artificial limbs, wheelchairs, tricycles, crutches, standing frames, walking sticks, and other mobility aids, to persons with disabilities and those at risk of disability.
- Established 103 disability service and assistance centers under its initiative for Early Detection, Assessment, and Early Intervention.
- JPUF has deployed 32 Mobile One-Stop Service Units that provide therapeutic services to persons with disabilities, including autism, in remote areas.
- Autism Resource Center has provided services to 31,988 individuals with autism
- JPUF offers specialized training programs for the parents of children with autism, helping them develop caregiving skills

3

### Challenges

- Lack of One-Stop-Service Centers and absence of a disability focal practitioner in hospitals
- Cost of health services
- Mostly hospitals are not accessible
- The allowance is inadequate
- Lack of awareness among private practitioners about disability
- Public spaces, such as parks, transport stations, markets, and footpaths, are inaccessible for persons with disabilities.
- Limited accessibility in emergency response plans, leaving persons with disabilities vulnerable during crises.

## Economic Rights

In Bangladesh, empowering persons with disabilities to exercise their economic rights is essential for fostering their independence and inclusion in society. Recognizing the economic challenges and barriers faced by persons with disabilities, the government has implemented various policies and initiatives aimed at promoting their economic participation and financial well-being. The aim of this section is to assess the effectiveness of existing policies and measures in enhancing the economic empowerment of persons with disabilities. Additionally, it aims to identify persistent challenges and barriers that hinder their full participation in the economic sphere creating a more inclusive and accessible economic environment for persons with disabilities in Bangladesh.

1

### Policies and Strategies

- National Policy for Persons with Disabilities 1995
- Convention on The Rights of Persons with Disabilities 2008-09
- Rights and Protection of Persons with Disabilities Act, 2013

2

### Progress

- They do not need to pay taxes up to Tk 4 lakh taxable income
- There is a five percent quota for persons with disabilities in TVETs
- National Foundation for the Development of Disabled Persons
- Service and Assistance Centers in 64 Districts
- Introduction of Disability Allowance
- Skill development programmes and capacity building trainings

3

### Challenges

- 64 percent of young people with disabilities are estimated to be out of work
- Lack of skills among persons with disabilities
- Inadequacy of service providers
- The Amount of Allowance is inadequate
- Implementation of the National Action Plan is slow
- Reluctance among employers to recruit persons with disabilities
- There is no reward and punishment mechanism for employing persons with disabilities

## Training and Employment

Providing training and employment opportunities for persons with disabilities is imperative for enhancing their economic independence and societal integration. Recognizing the significance of empowering persons with disabilities through gainful employment, the government has introduced various policies and initiatives to augment their skills and facilitate their integration into the workforce. This section aims to evaluate the efficacy of existing training and employment programs for persons with disabilities, encompassing vocational training, job placement services, and workplace accommodations. Additionally, it endeavors to identify persistent obstacles and challenges hindering the full participation of persons with disabilities in the workforce.

### Policies and Declaration

- National Skill Development Policy 2012
- Seventh Five Year Plan (2016-20)
- Incheon Strategy, 2013-22

### Progress

- 33.78% of the persons with disabilities are employed.
- 7th FYP aims to initiate Market Responsive Inclusive Skills Training Programme.
- 100 Credit and Employment Schemes
- JPUF arranges an annual disability job fair in March-April to facilitate the recruitment of persons with disabilities in the private sector based on their skills.
- A total of 1,103 individuals from 74 disability centers have received 100% vocational training under JPUF, equipping them with essential skills for workforce inclusion.
- 100 women with disabilities received job with the assistance of Center for the Rehabilitation of the Paralyzed.
- Chittagong Chamber of Commerce has undertaken an initiative to make the port city inclusive

### Challenges

- Not all persons with disabilities are included in the DSS identification process.
- Lack of motivation and incentives among employers.
- TVET quota for persons with disabilities is not being enforced. Also, the institutions are not disability-friendly
- Lack of digital literacy and limited wage employment opportunities.
- Absence of OPD representation in decision-makings regarding skill development
- Mostly training programmes are organized in urban areas, i.e., Dhaka centric
- A dedicated budget to make TVET and workplaces disability-inclusive is absent

## Accessibility Rights

In Bangladesh, guaranteeing accessibility rights is pivotal to foster inclusivity and ensure the full participation of all individuals in society. This section delves into the current status of accessibility rights in Bangladesh, with a particular focus on the government's initiatives and policies aimed at enhancing accessibility for persons with disabilities.

### 1 Policies and Declaration

- Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities 2008-09
- Information and Technology Policy of 2010
- National Building Code of 2008
- Incheon Strategy, 2013-22
- Proclamation on the Full Participation and Equality of People with Disabilities in the Asia Pacific Region
- Biwako Millennium Framework for Action Towards an Inclusive, Barrier Free and Rights Based Society for Persons with Disability
- Ratification of the Marrakesh Treaty in 2016

### 2 Progress

- The construction of all new schools includes ramps and toilet facilities that are accessible to children with physical disabilities.
- National Forum of Organizations Working with the Disabled (NFOWD) was formed.
- The CRPD has been translated into Bangla. The official version is also available in accessible formats.
- JPUF has launched the "Smart Wheelchair for Persons with Disabilities in Alignment with the Fourth Industrial Revolution (4IR)" project, which is currently being implemented to improve mobility and accessibility for persons with disabilities using innovative technology.

### 3 Challenges

- Public transportation rarely includes wheelchair access
- Copyright Act 2000 is not supportive of access to print materials for persons with disabilities
- The official websites of most ministries still remain inaccessible and lack simplified content to aid persons with disabilities.
- Voter Enrolment Act, 2009 and the Contract Act, 1872 exclude persons with intellectual disabilities from their right to vote
- The NBC is rarely being obliged

While Bangladesh has made commendable strides in the inclusion and empowerment of persons with disabilities, the full realization of these objectives remains impeded by slow implementation and gaps in service delivery. Although policies and programs exist, the absence of timely execution, particularly of the National Action Plan for Persons with Disabilities, continues to hinder progress. More focused efforts, stronger implementation mechanisms, and continued advocacy are essential to fulfill the commitments made to persons with disabilities. Bridging these gaps will ensure that persons with disabilities are not left behind in the country's broader development goals, aligning with the global commitment to the SDGs and the principle of "Leave No One Behind." Further collaboration between government, NGOs, and international partners is crucial to accelerate progress and fully realize the rights and potential of persons with disabilities in Bangladesh.

**Box 3: Biwako Millennium Framework for Action**

The Biwako Millennium Framework for Action was adopted in 2002 in Biwako, Japan, and focuses on promoting the rights and inclusion of persons with disabilities in Asia and the Pacific. It outlines key action points aimed at enhancing accessibility, participation, and equality for people with disabilities. The framework emphasizes the importance of ensuring that policies and practices are disability-inclusive, particularly in areas like education, employment, and social protection. The Biwako Framework also provided the basis for the development of the Incheon Strategy and other regional commitments, strengthening the regional approach to disability rights and inclusion.

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# Disability Financing

**Chapter Summary**

This chapter examines the current state of government allocations for disability programs in Bangladesh, focusing on trends. While the national budget indicates some progress in disability inclusion, the allocated resources are far from adequate to meet the needs of persons with disabilities. Government spending is primarily channeled through safety net programs, which, though important, is not adequate to comprehensively address the diverse challenges faced by persons with disabilities. A significant limitation is the lack of a ministry-specific disaggregated disability budget, which hampers the tracking and evaluation of specific resource allocations and outcomes. The chapter underscores the necessity of introducing a dedicated Disability Budget, akin to the existing gender and child budgets, to ensure targeted interventions. This approach would enable more effective policy integration, better alignment with global commitments, and a more inclusive approach to addressing the needs of persons with disabilities.

In Bangladesh, the commitment to enhancing the rights and opportunities of persons with disabilities has been underscored by a notable increase in budgetary allocations in recent years. Contrary to previous trends, the government has demonstrated a proactive stance by augmenting resources directed towards supporting this marginalized group. In fiscal year 2022-23, the allocation for persons with disabilities constituted 0.37 percent of the national budget, reflecting a significant uptick from previous years. This positive trajectory continued into fiscal year 2023-24, with the budgetary allocation rising to 0.42 percent of the total budget (MoF, 2024). Such an increase not only highlights the government's recognition of the diverse needs of persons with disabilities but also signifies its commitment to fostering inclusivity and empowerment.

A study conducted by the Bangladesh Institute of Development Studies (BIDS) estimates that the economic loss due to disability in Bangladesh amounts to approximately US$1.18 billion annually, equivalent to about 1.74% of the country's Gross Domestic Product (GDP) (Ali, 2014). This economic burden is attributed to four key cost categories. First, the lack of employment opportunities for individuals with disabilities results in an income loss of US$891 million per year, accounting for 76% of the total economic impact of disability on the nation's GDP. Second, the exclusion of children with disabilities from education contributes an annual economic loss of US$26 million, stemming from the reduced lifetime earnings due to lower educational attainment. Third, individuals with disabilities often require assistance to carry out daily activities, leading to a further economic cost of US$234 million per year, representing lost income among adult caregivers, predominantly women. Finally, children who forgo education to assist family members with disabilities incur a cost of US$28 million

annually, again due to the long-term impact of lower educational attainment. Consequently, the overall cost of disability in Bangladesh is estimated at US$148 per person with a disability each year. For households with five family members, this represents nearly one-third of the poverty line, noting that the poverty threshold for households with members who have disabilities is distinct from that of households without disabilities (Ali, 2014).

An analysis of the budget trends for social safety net programs in Bangladesh reveals significant fluctuations in the allocations for various initiatives aimed at supporting vulnerable populations, including persons with disabilities. Over the years, the government has increasingly recognized the importance of social protection, particularly in the context of economic hardship and societal inequality. However, while there has been a general upward trend in the allocation for safety net programs, the specific allocation for disability-related initiatives remains disproportionately low.

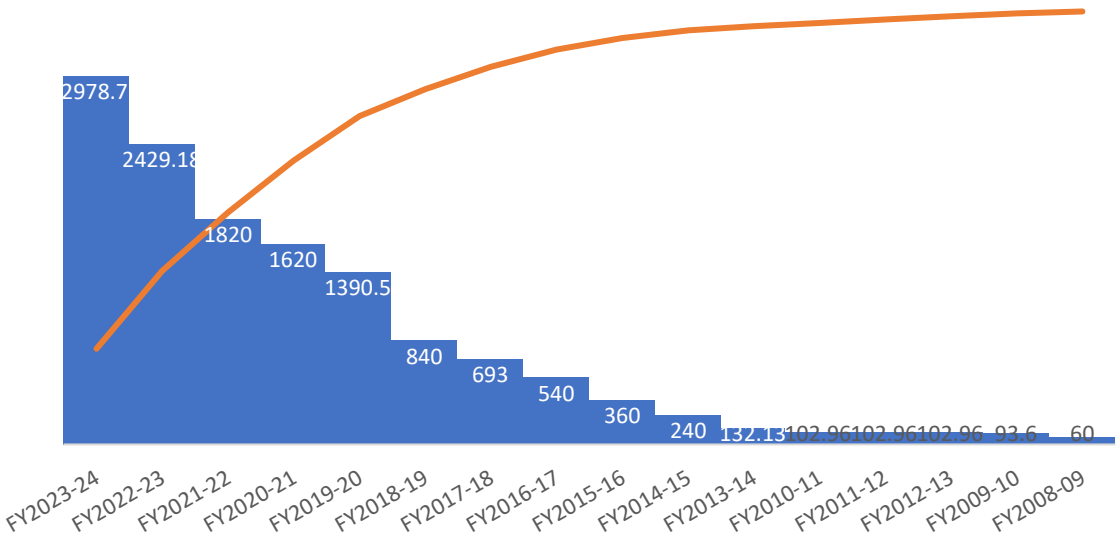
Despite these obstacles, the government has shown some commitment to expanding the scope of safety net programs, as evidenced by incremental increases in the total safety net budget. However, the funds allocated for disability-related expenditures are still far from meeting the comprehensive needs of persons with disabilities, especially considering the economic burden they face. For instance, although the government's efforts to integrate disability inclusion into mainstream safety net policies have been acknowledged, the absence of a distinct Disability Budget hampers the effective tracking and utilization of resources dedicated to this demographic (Ali, 2014).

## Programme Specific Budgets

### 1. Allowance for Financially Insolvent Disables

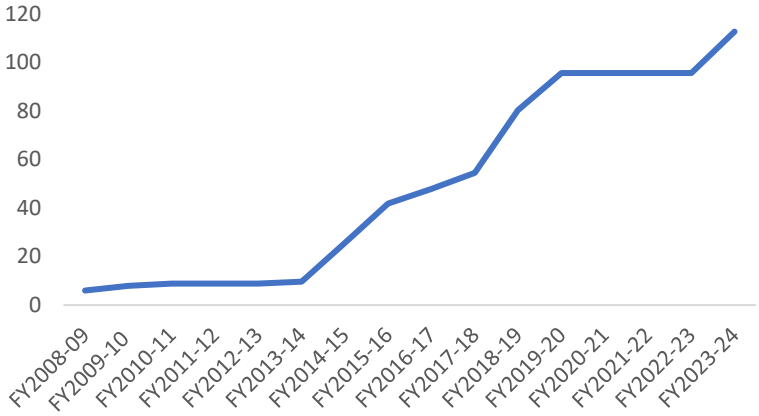
Over the fiscal years from FY2008-09 to FY2023-24, the GoB has demonstrated a steadfast commitment to supporting financially insolvent individuals with disabilities through its "Allowances for the Financially Insolvent Disabled" program. Beginning with an initial allocation of 60 crore BDT

Graph 13: Allowance for Financially Insolvent Disabled People (2008-2024)



in FY2008-09, the budgetary allocation has steadily increased, reaching a substantial 2978.71 crore BDT in FY2023-24.

Graph 14: Stipend for Disable Students (2008-2024)




### 2. Stipend for Disabled Students

Beginning with a modest allocation of 6 crore BDT in FY2008-09, the budget has steadily increased, reflecting the government's commitment to supporting disabled students financially. Notable increases occurred in FY2014-15, where the allocation rose to 25.56 crore BDT, and in subsequent years, reaching 112.74 crore BDT in FY2023-24. This upward trajectory underscores the government's recognition of the importance of ensuring equal access to education for students with disabilities and facilitating their academic pursuits through financial assistance.

### 3. Grants for Schools and Welfare Fund

The GoB has allocated funds for two key initiatives aimed at supporting marginalized groups: "Grants for the Schools for the Disabled" and the "Fund for the Welfare of Acid Burnt Women and Disabled." Funding for disabled schools has steadily increased, reaching 42 crore BDT in FY2023-24, reflecting a commitment to enhancing educational opportunities for disabled students. Simultaneously, allocations for the welfare fund, ranging from 2 crore BDT to 7.12 crore BDT, highlight efforts to address the specific needs of acid-burnt women and disabled individuals.

### 4. Service and Assistance Centers for the Disabled

In addition to funding for schools and welfare programs, significant attention has been given to the establishment of Service and Assistance Centers for the Disabled. Starting at 5.41 crore BDT in FY2008-09, the allocation steadily increased to 76.14 crore BDT in FY2023-24. This sustained investment reflects the government's dedication to providing accessible service centers tailored to the needs of individuals with disabilities. By increasing funding over the years, the government aims to ensure comprehensive support and assistance, ultimately enhancing the quality of life and social inclusion of disabled individuals throughout the country.

### 5. Neuro-Developmental Disability Protection Trust

Government has prioritized the establishment of specialized institutions to address the needs of individuals with neurodevelopmental disabilities. Notably, funding allocations for the Neuro-Developmental Disability Protection Trust and the National Academy for Autism and Neuro Development underscore the government's commitment to this cause. The Neuro-Developmental Disability Protection Trust received 36.08 crore BDT, while the National Academy for Autism and Neuro Development was allocated 97.58 crore BDT in the fiscal year.

## Conclusion

These initiatives signify the government's recognition of the importance of providing specialized support and resources for individuals with neurodevelopmental disabilities. By investing in these institutions, the government aims to enhance awareness, research, and services tailored to the unique needs of this vulnerable population, ultimately fostering their inclusion and well-being within society.

Furthermore, external pressures from international organizations and civil society have contributed to some level of policy change, with recent budget allocations showing a shift towards more inclusive policies. However, significant gaps remain in terms of both financial and programmatic support for persons with disabilities, which calls for a more targeted and transparent allocation strategy within the social safety net budget (Khan & Rozario, 2023). It is essential for the government to leverage the increased budgetary allocations for persons with disabilities to drive tangible improvements in their lives (World Bank, 2022).

Moving forward, there is a notable absence of **disaggregated data** to clearly identify budget allocations for programs targeting persons with disabilities or the integration of disability considerations into the budgets of government institutions (Yasmin, 2023). While preparing the annual national budgets, many ministries are required to prepare separate **Gender Budgets** and **Child Budgets**, which provide a clear breakdown of resources allocated for the advancement of women and children within each ministry's scope. It is crucial that a similar approach be adopted for disability, with the creation of a **Disability Budget** that would enable the collection of disaggregated data on disability-related expenditures (Ali, 2014).

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# National Social Protection Framework for Persons with Disabilities


**Chapter Summary**

This chapter presents the National Social Protection Framework (NSPF) for persons with disabilities in Bangladesh, emphasizing the need for an inclusive approach to promote, prevent, and transform the lives of persons with disabilities. It addresses the complex challenges they face, including social stigma, economic marginalization, and limited access to essential services. Grounded in the principles of the National Social Security Strategy (NSSS), the Capability Approach, and key legal frameworks such as the Disability Welfare Act of 2013 and the Rights and Protection of Persons with Disabilities Act, the chapter outlines a cohesive strategy with both immediate and long-term interventions.

The framework adopts a Theory of Change, identifying three key pillars: Economic Capital, Social Capital, and Human Capital. These pillars address the diverse needs of persons with disabilities across different life stages. The chapter emphasizes the importance of guiding principles, such as dignity, non-discrimination, participation, and accessibility, integrating both international standards and local realities.


## Principles of the Framework

This framework serves as a guide for policymakers, service providers, and development partners in ensuring that social protection programs are inclusive and responsive to the diverse needs of Persons with Disabilities Informed by international standards and local realities, the framework articulates a set of guiding principles, including respect for dignity, non-discrimination, full participation, and accessibility. These principles will be operationalized through a range of interventions, including cash transfers, vocational training, healthcare access, and legal protections, to ensure the full and effective participation of Persons with disabilities in society.

### 1. Respect for Inherent Dignity, Individual Autonomy, and Independence

This principle emphasizes the right of Persons with disabilities to be treated with dignity and respect, with the freedom to make their own decisions and live independently. In Bangladesh, many Persons with disabilities are often seen as dependent on others, which undermines their autonomy and agency. The Social Protection Framework must ensure that Persons with disabilities are empowered to make their own choices in all aspects of life, including education, employment, and healthcare. For instance, programs should facilitate decision-making support and promote the development of skills that enable Persons with disabilities to live independently. The government should strengthen the legal frameworks that protect the rights of Persons with disabilities, preventing any forced interventions or institutionalization. Additionally, services such as personal assistance, counseling, and home-based support should be expanded to enhance the independence and dignity of Persons with disabilities.

### 2. Non-Discrimination

Non-discrimination is a cornerstone of the UNCRPD, ensuring that Persons with disabilities are treated equally and are not subjected to exclusion or unequal treatment on the basis of their

disability. In Bangladesh, social and economic discrimination against Persons with disabilities is widespread. The Social Protection Framework must address this by ensuring that Persons with disabilities have equal access to all social protection programs, including healthcare, education, and employment. These principal mandates that policies should prohibit discrimination in all forms and ensure that Persons with disabilities, regardless of their gender, age, ethnicity, or socio-economic status, receive equitable treatment. Moreover, the framework should focus on removing barriers that prevent Persons with disabilities from accessing services, particularly in rural and hard-to-reach areas. Specific mechanisms, such as quotas for Persons with disabilities in educational institutions and employment opportunities, could be introduced to promote inclusion.

### 3. Full and Effective Participation and Inclusion in Society

This principle highlights the importance of ensuring that Persons with disabilities are fully included in all areas of social life and that their voices are heard in policy-making processes. Persons with disabilities in Bangladesh are often excluded from meaningful participation in society, both in decision-making and in everyday life. The Social Protection Framework must ensure that Persons with disabilities are active participants in the design, implementation, and monitoring of social protection programs. The government should institutionalize consultative mechanisms with DPOs and ensure that persons with disabilities are represented in local governance and policy dialogues. Additionally, efforts should be made to create inclusive environments in schools, workplaces, and public spaces to foster the social integration of persons with disabilities. This also includes the promotion of persons with disabilities as role models and leaders in their communities.

### 4. Respect for Difference and Acceptance of persons with disabilities as Part of Human Diversity

This principle calls for the acceptance of persons with disabilities as part of the diversity of the human race and challenges societies to embrace disability as a normal aspect of human diversity. In Bangladesh, cultural attitudes towards disability are often negative, with Persons with disabilities being seen as ‘abnormal’ or ‘dependent’ To change this perception, the Social Protection Framework must include public awareness campaigns to foster acceptance and respect for Persons with disabilities. These campaigns can challenge stereotypes and emphasize the contributions of Persons with disabilities to society. Educational curricula should also include lessons on diversity and disability rights to promote a culture of respect from an early age. The government can work with media outlets and community leaders to disseminate positive stories about Persons with disabilities and their achievements.

### 5. Equality of Opportunity

Persons with disabilities should have the same opportunities as others to participate in society, including access to education, employment, and social services. In Bangladesh, persons with disabilities face significant barriers to equal opportunity, particularly in employment and education. The Social Protection Framework must prioritize the creation of equal opportunities for persons with disabilities by removing physical, social, and economic barriers. This can be done through policies

that promote inclusive education, vocational training programs tailored to persons with disabilities, and incentives for employers to hire persons with disabilities. Affirmative action measures, such as employment quotas and scholarships for students with disabilities, should be part of the framework to ensure that persons with disabilities have the same opportunities as their non-disabled peers.

### 6. Accessibility

Accessibility ensures that persons with disabilities have access to the physical environment, transportation, information, and communication technologies, and other facilities and services available to the public. Accessibility remains one of the biggest challenges for persons with disabilities in Bangladesh. The Social Protection Framework must guarantee that public buildings, transport systems, and digital services are accessible to all. This includes enforcing the implementation of the Bangladesh Disability Rights and Protection Act, 2013, which mandates accessible infrastructure. Additionally, the Digital Bangladesh initiative can be leveraged to provide persons with disabilities with access to technology, education, and telehealth services, reducing geographic barriers to essential services. Accessible communication formats, such as Braille, sign language, and assistive technologies, should be widely available to ensure persons with disabilities can access information and services.

### 7. Equality Between Men and Women

Gender equality is fundamental, and women and girls with disabilities should be afforded the same rights as men and boys. Women with disabilities in Bangladesh often experience compounded discrimination due to both their gender and disability. The Social Protection Framework must incorporate gender-sensitive policies that address the specific vulnerabilities of women with disabilities. Programs should focus on empowering women with disabilities through education, vocational training, and entrepreneurship opportunities. Legal protections against gender-based violence should be strengthened, and healthcare services should be inclusive of women's needs, including reproductive health services tailored to women with disabilities.

### 8. Respect for the Evolving Capacities of Children with Disabilities and the Right to Preserve Their Identity

Children with disabilities have the right to develop their capacities and should be provided with opportunities for growth and development. Children with disabilities in Bangladesh are often denied access to education and healthcare, which stunts their growth and development. The Social Protection Framework should prioritize early childhood interventions, including inclusive education programs and specialized healthcare services. Schools should be equipped with the resources and trained staff necessary to support the unique learning needs of children with disabilities. Furthermore, social protection programs must ensure that these children can grow up in an environment that respects their identity, free from discrimination and stigmatization.

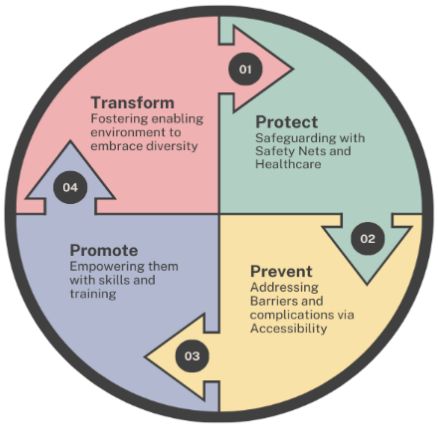
## 9. Twin-Track Approach

In the context of developing a social protection framework for persons with disabilities, the social protection framework will follow the twin-track approach. It provides a valuable strategy for promoting inclusion and ensuring equal access to resources. This approach emphasizes both the mainstreaming of disability within general social protection programs and the provision of targeted, disability-specific interventions to address unique needs. [9]

Mainstreaming disability within social protection involves making sure that all individuals, including persons with disabilities, can participate equally in the benefits of social protection systems. This requires raising awareness among policymakers, service providers, and institutions about the capacities and rights of persons with disabilities, ensuring they are not excluded from general provisions like healthcare, education, and employment support. The understanding that persons with disabilities have the same basic needs as others, along with removing barriers to participation, is essential for inclusive social protection.

At the same time, a twin-track approach acknowledges that some persons with disabilities may require specific adaptations or individualized support to fully access services. These targeted interventions could include assistive devices, rehabilitation services, inclusive education programs, and additional support for families or caregivers. By addressing the particular challenges faced by individuals with different impairments—whether physical, sensory, cognitive, or intellectual—the framework can ensure that the social protection system is responsive to diverse needs.

Figure 4: Inclusive Empowerment Cycle




To prepare a comprehensive social protection framework for persons with disabilities, the framework will be built around four core approaches: Protect, Prevent, Promote, and Transform. These approaches ensure a holistic and sustainable pathway to enhancing the well-being and inclusion of persons with disabilities in society.

In this interconnected diagram, each phase strengthens the next, showing that 'Protect" and "Prevent" lay the groundwork, while "Promote" and "Transform" ensure persons with disabilities can thrive and contribute to a more inclusive and equitable society. The circular or iterative nature of the diagram suggests that these approaches are continuous and mutually reinforcing, always evolving to meet new challenges and opportunities.

[9] Digital divide? Any relevant statistics?

## Rationale for a Social Protection Framework

The concept of a framework varies across disciplines, serving as a structural guide for theoretical or empirical inquiry (Cox et al., 2016). Frameworks are commonly understood as supporting structures, aiding in decision-making and organizing ideas. The Cambridge Dictionary defines frameworks as "a supporting structure around which something can be built; a system of rules, ideas, or beliefs that is used to plan or decide something." Whereas Schlager (2007) explains that frameworks serve as foundational tools for inquiry, and Cumming (2014) adds that these frameworks may not necessarily rely on deductive logic to connect ideas. Binder et al. (2013) highlights that framework encapsulate assumptions, values, and practices, reinforcing their normative underpinnings. Furthermore, McGinnis and Ostrom (2014) describe frameworks as organizational tools for diagnostic and prescriptive inquiry, essential for theory-building. A comparative review by Binder et al. (2013) reveals that frameworks in social-ecological systems research help create a shared language, guiding research toward sustainability. Similarly, Pulver et al. (2018) argue that frameworks allow scholars to navigate the complex interdependencies between biophysical and social systems. These definitions collectively underscore the multifunctional role frameworks play in organizing research, theory-building, and guiding empirical observations across fields.

A social protection framework specifically designed for persons with disabilities is essential for ensuring their inclusion, dignity, and equitable access to resources and opportunities. Persons with disabilities often face multiple, intersecting forms of disadvantage arising from physical, social, and economic barriers, which significantly limit their ability to fully participate in society. In countries such as Bangladesh, where a considerable proportion of the population lives with disabilities, the need for a comprehensive social protection system is particularly pressing to mitigate the impacts of poverty, discrimination, and exclusion.

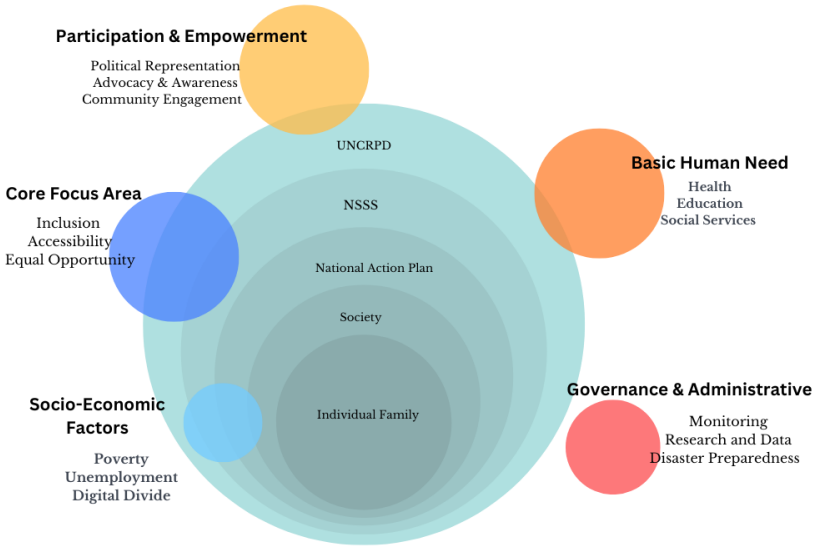
Without a targeted framework, persons with disabilities often fall through the gaps of mainstream social protection systems. Many lack access to essential services such as healthcare, education, and employment opportunities, which perpetuates cycles of poverty and social exclusion. A dedicated social protection framework would not only ensure adequate financial and social support but also promote empowerment by enabling persons with disabilities to fully participate in society and contribute to the economy. Furthermore, such a framework would address the intersectionality of disability with other social factors, such as gender, age, and economic status, offering a more inclusive and equitable approach to social protection.

By incorporating the life-cycle approach into a social protection framework for persons with disabilities, it becomes possible to more effectively meet the specific needs of individuals at various stages of life. Early interventions in childhood, such as access to inclusive education and healthcare, can significantly reduce long-term inequalities. For adults, employment support and anti-discrimination policies are essential in promoting independence and economic participation. In old age, access to social pensions and healthcare becomes critical in ensuring a dignified and secure life. The life-cycle focus of the NSSS provides a model that can be adapted to prioritize disability-inclusive social protection and address the unique vulnerabilities faced by persons with disabilities.

## Thematic Roadmap to the Framework

A social protection framework for persons with disabilities aims to address the multiple, intersecting challenges that individuals face throughout their lives. By integrating the life-cycle approach from Bangladesh's NSSS and leveraging the National Action Plan, this framework seeks to ensure that persons with disabilities have equal access to resources, opportunities, and participation in society. It acknowledges the roles of the government, families, society, and the economy in reducing poverty and fostering inclusion. The framework will focus on critical areas such as accessibility, employment, administrative reforms, and bridging the digital divide, while also emphasizing basic human needs and equal opportunity.

Figure 5: Thematic Roadmap to the Framework



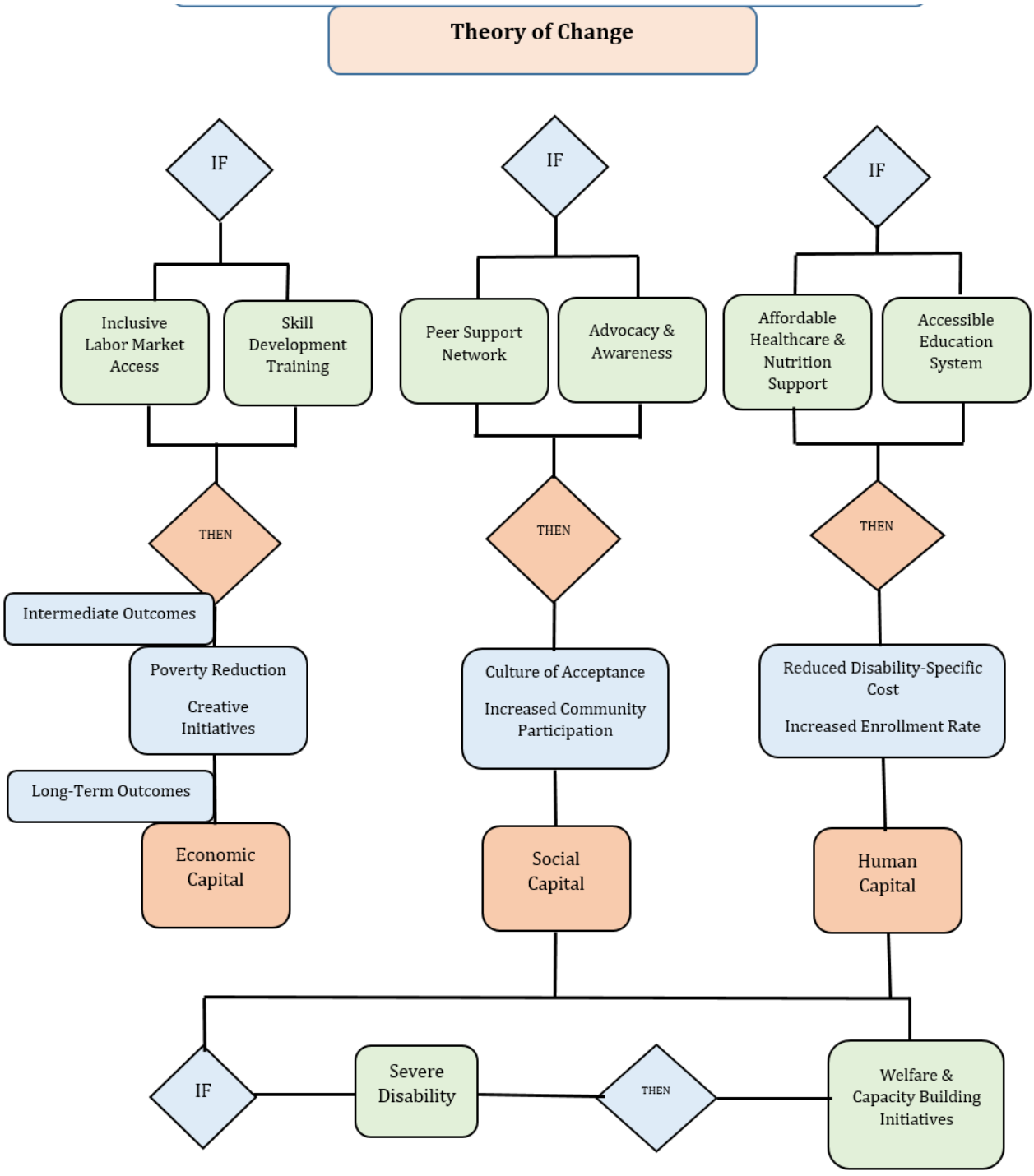

## Theory of Change

A Theory of Change (ToC) is a comprehensive methodology used in development programming to map out the steps that lead from specific interventions to desired long-term outcomes. It provides a framework for understanding how and why change happens in a particular context, drawing on causal logic and empirical evidence. According to Stein and Valters (2012), ToC is an ongoing process of reflection to explore change and how it happens – and what that means for the part we play in a particular context, sector, and/or group of people. This approach allows the formulation of a clear vision and actionable strategy by identifying short-term, medium-term, and long-term outcomes that connect to broader development goals.

For persons with disabilities in Bangladesh, the ToC serves as a roadmap to outline the necessary interventions aimed at their social inclusion, economic empowerment, and human capital development. It provides a structured approach to understanding how specific efforts can address the existing barriers faced by persons with disabilities and lead to their full participation in society.

To address the multidimensional challenges faced by persons with disabilities, interventions must be categorized into three critical areas: Social Capital, Economic Capital, and Human Capital. Each of these categories plays a unique role in promoting inclusion, empowerment, and the overall well-being of person with disabilities. The ToC outlines these interventions as coordinated, targeted actions that work together to bring about transformative change in the lives of person with disabilities in Bangladesh.

**Figure 6: Social Protection Framework for Persons with Disabilities**



## 1. Social Capital

Social capital is considered as having an impact on its conditions to intervene in the economic dynamics of society, so that, through cooperation and collaboration projects, methods capable of operating an effective autonomy are developed. for people with disabilities to make use of their potential for this respective active participation in the social structures in which they are inserted (Coleman, 2022).

According to Putnam (1993) social capital is understood as aspects of social organization, such as networks, norms and trust that facilitate coordination and cooperation for mutual benefits. This way, social capital would increase the benefits of investing in physical capital and human capital. Based on these statements, it is possible to understand social capital as a tool to bring together people who work in partnership so that, together, they achieve the same ends. Jane Jacobs (1961) also works with the idea of social capital; so that the concept is explained as a way of self-management of trust as a generator of value, which the author applies in urban social relations, but which can also be applied with regard to the fact of perceiving, or not, this factor with regard to people with disabilities, in the social relationships to which they belong.

For Bourdieu (1986), social capital is a set of real values, resulting from the fact of belonging, for a long time and in a more or less institutionalized way, to the network of relations of knowledge and mutual recognition.

**Key Interventions in Social Capital:**

- **Awareness Building Campaigns**: Promoting widespread awareness through national and community-level campaigns to reduce stigma and discriminatory attitudes towards persons with disabilities. Examples include government-led campaigns on disability rights or social media campaigns by NGOs that showcase the abilities and potential of persons with disabilities.
- **Advocacy for Acceptance and Inclusion**: Supporting advocacy efforts aimed at fostering a culture of acceptance and inclusion for persons with disabilities, such as lobbying for more inclusive policies, accessible public services, and equitable treatment in schools, workplaces, and public spaces.

**Immediate Outcomes**

- **Increased Public Awareness of the Rights and Contributions**: Through targeted awareness campaigns, media engagement, and community outreach programs, there will be a rapid rise in public knowledge regarding the rights, potential, and contributions of persons with disabilities. This will foster a more empathetic and supportive societal view, reducing ignorance and misconceptions about disabilities.

- **Reduction in Negative Stereotypes and Discriminatory Behaviors**: Initiatives such as inclusive education programs, workplace sensitization training, and government-led anti-discrimination policies will begin to mitigate prejudice and reduce discriminatory practices

in schools, workplaces, and communities. This will immediately create more welcoming and respectful environments for persons with disabilities in both public and private sectors.

In Bangladesh, where cultural stigmas around disability remain deeply ingrained, these immediate outcomes will play a crucial role in catalyzing a shift towards inclusion, starting at the grassroots level. The recent increase in public discourse around disability rights, as encouraged by the NSSS, further sets the stage for immediate impacts.

**Long-Term Outcomes:**

- **A Society That Values Diversity and Promotes Equal Rights and Opportunities**: Over the long term, Bangladesh will progress towards becoming a more inclusive society where diversity is celebrated. As negative stereotypes diminish and inclusivity becomes the norm, persons with disabilities will have equal access to opportunities, resources, and social services. Disability inclusion will be embedded within legal, educational, and economic systems, fostering a sustainable shift in how persons with disabilities are perceived and treated.

- **Social Capital Embedded Within Community Systems**: Social capital, in this context, refers to the networks and relationships that facilitate collective action and support for persons with disabilities. Over time, communities will integrate persons with disabilities into everyday life, ensuring that they have equal access to rights, opportunities, and respect. With strengthened community ties and inclusive policies, persons with disabilities will not only access services but also contribute meaningfully to the development of their communities.

In Bangladesh, these long-term outcomes will signify a deep-rooted societal transformation. By embedding social capital into community systems, persons with disabilities will experience sustained inclusion, enabling them to live dignified, independent lives. This outcome is critical for achieving the objectives of the 2030 SDGs, particularly in relation to poverty reduction and inequality.

### 2. Economic Capital

Economic capital refers to the financial resources and assets that individuals, organizations, or nations hold, which can be invested to generate further wealth. Pierre Bourdieu (1986) defines economic capital as material assets that are directly convertible into money, playing a critical role in social and economic structures. In contrast, Becker (1964) views economic capital in the context of investments in productive activities, such as education and training, that yield economic returns over time. In terms of social protection, economic capital is essential for promoting income security, poverty alleviation, and sustainable development, particularly for marginalized groups like persons with disabilities. By enhancing access to financial resources, employment opportunities, and market participation, economic capital drives long-term economic growth and reduces inequalities.

- **Employment and Labor Market Access**

Providing persons with disabilities with vocational training and facilitating access to employment opportunities is another key intervention. Vocational training programs equip persons with

disabilities with market-relevant skills, enabling them to secure jobs in various sectors. Additionally, job placement services and workplace accommodations ensure that persons with disabilities can not only enter the workforce but thrive within it. To further incentivize employers, public-private partnerships can offer tax breaks or subsidies to businesses that actively recruit persons with disabilities. For example, Bangladesh's government, in collaboration with NGOs and private enterprises, could implement employment quotas or introduce training programs aimed at creating inclusive workplaces. This intervention would contribute to improving the overall employability of persons with disabilities and address the existing labor market exclusion they face.

- **Skill Development for Entrepreneurship**

Entrepreneurship provides a viable alternative to formal employment for many persons with disabilities. By offering grants, low-interest loans, or microfinance programs specifically tailored for persons with disabilities, governments and financial institutions can support persons with disabilities in starting and growing their businesses. Business incubators can further provide training, mentoring, and networking opportunities, helping persons with disabilities build sustainable enterprises. These entrepreneurial initiatives not only foster self-reliance but also contribute to broader economic growth. Programs like microfinance institutions in Bangladesh, such as Grameen Bank and BRAC, can extend their services to focus on persons with disabilities, providing accessible financial resources to launch small-scale ventures. With adequate financial backing and business support, persons with disabilities can become successful entrepreneurs and economic contributors.

**Immediate Outcomes**

- **Skills Development for Employment or Entrepreneurship**: Through targeted training programs, persons with disabilities will begin acquiring skills suited for both traditional employment and entrepreneurial ventures. This initial phase focuses on improving employability by equipping persons with disabilities with technical skills, knowledge of business management, and essential competencies relevant to various industries. For example, vocational training initiatives by organizations like BRAC are already beginning to impact the employability of persons with disabilities across Bangladesh.

- **Initial Entry of Persons with Disabilities into the Labor Market**: As more persons with disabilities complete training and skill development programs, they will start entering the labor market. Early successes in employment or entrepreneurship will serve as inspiration and proof that persons with disabilities can contribute meaningfully to the economy, opening doors for future generations of persons with disabilities to participate in economic activities. Persons with disabilities employed through public and private sector collaborations will demonstrate the benefits of inclusivity in the workforce.

**Long-Term Outcomes**

- **Sustainable Economic Empowerment:** Over time, persons with disabilities will gain a more equitable presence in the workforce, leading to sustainable economic empowerment. Through continued access to education, training, and financial support, persons with

disabilities will move from being viewed as dependent individuals to becoming active and productive members of the workforce. The reduction in income disparities between and the general population will serve as a key indicator of economic equity.

- **Economic Contributions**: As persons with disabilities become more integrated into the workforce and entrepreneurial sectors, their contributions to the economy will grow. This will result in broader societal benefits, as the economy gains from the talents, creativity, and productivity of persons with disabilities. Long-term, the narrowing of the disability-related income gap will reflect a more inclusive and equitable economic environment. By 2030, as Bangladesh strives to achieve the SDGs, persons with disabilities increased economic participation will play a crucial role in the country's economic and social progress.

### 3. Human Capital

Human capital refers to the skills, knowledge, health, and well-being of persons with disabilities that enable them to live fulfilling and productive lives. Investing in human capital through education, health, and an improved standard of living is fundamental to empowering persons with disabilities to reach their full potential. Human capital refers to the skills, knowledge, and health that individuals accumulate, contributing to their productivity and economic potential. Gary Becker (1964) defines human capital as the education, training, and experiences that improve an individual's economic productivity, treating it similarly to physical capital. He argued that investments in education and skills yield future economic returns, such as higher wages and improved job prospects. Similarly, Theodore Schultz (1961) broadened the concept to include health and nutrition, recognizing their role in enhancing productivity. The World Bank (2019) further expands this definition, emphasizing the importance of health alongside education in enabling individuals to realize their full potential.

In the context of social protection, investing in human capital, particularly for marginalized groups like persons with disabilities, is critical for ensuring inclusive economic participation and long-term development.

- **Inclusive Education**: Ensuring that persons with disabilities have access to quality education is essential for building human capital. This involves making educational institutions physically accessible, equipping schools with assistive technologies, and training teachers to effectively support persons with disabilities through inclusive education strategies. Initiatives like Education for All focus on integrating persons with disabilities into mainstream educational systems, from early childhood development to higher education. This requires the removal of physical and attitudinal barriers and the provision of resources like braille, sign language interpretation, and specialized curricula.

- **Healthcare and Rehabilitation:** Accessible healthcare services tailored to the specific needs of persons with disabilities are crucial for improving human capital. This includes physical rehabilitation, mental health support, and access to assistive devices like wheelchairs, hearing aids, and prosthetics. Healthcare systems need to be disability-sensitive, ensuring that persons with disabilities receive timely and appropriate medical care that improves their

quality of life and ability to contribute to society. Moreover, health interventions should focus not only on immediate medical needs but also on long-term health maintenance and prevention of further disability complications.

**Immediate Outcomes**

- **Access to Education and Healthcare**: With increased accessibility to educational institutions and healthcare services, persons with disabilities will experience improved learning outcomes and enhanced physical well-being. Accessible school environments and targeted healthcare interventions allow persons with disabilities to participate more fully in academic and everyday activities.

- **Participation in Community Life:** Persons with disabilities with access to assistive devices and rehabilitation services, are empowered to engage more actively in their communities, contributing to social and cultural life.

**Long-Term Outcomes:**

- **Full Potential Realization**: A fully educated and healthy population of persons with disabilities can contribute significantly to the country's social and economic fabric. Persons with disabilities achieve parity with the non-disabled population in terms of educational attainment, health, and overall well-being, fostering a society that values all citizens equally.

- **Equity in Society**: Through long-term investment in human capital, persons with disabilities are able to reach their full potential, leading to a more inclusive society where disability is not a barrier to personal or professional growth.

This comprehensive approach to human capital development ensures that persons with disabilities are not left behind but are fully integrated into all aspects of life, contributing meaningfully to the development and progress of Bangladesh.

The Theory of Change demonstrates that the interventions within these three areas—Social Capital, Economic Capital, and Human Capital—are interlinked and mutually reinforcing. For example, improving persons with disabilities social capital through awareness campaigns can help break down barriers to education (human capital) and employment (economic capital). Likewise, investments in human capital (e.g., education and healthcare) can empower persons with disabilities to become financially independent and contribute to their communities, enhancing both their social and economic capital.

By addressing these three dimensions in a coordinated manner, the ToC shows that the immediate outcomes of increased awareness, initial employment, and access to education can lead to sustained improvements in the lives of persons with disabilities. In the medium term, these interventions will result in more inclusive societies, where persons with disabilities are economically independent, socially integrated, and empowered. Ultimately, in the long term, this ToC envisions a future where persons with disabilities enjoy equal rights, opportunities, and outcomes as their non-disabled peers, with social protection systems that fully support their needs.

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## Conclusion

This document represents a comprehensive endeavor to lay the groundwork for a Social Protection Framework for persons with Disabilities in Bangladesh. Utilizing a qualitative research methodology, it systematically analyzed various national and international policies, engaged with key stakeholders, reviewed global commitments, and examined budgetary documents to identify gaps, progress, and opportunities for disability inclusion.

A detailed analysis of national policies highlighted both achievements and shortcomings in current approaches to disability inclusion. The National Social Security Strategy (NSSS) 2015 provided a foundation, but there remains a need for enhanced disaggregation of disability-focused data, improved inter-ministerial coordination, and greater budgetary prioritization. Stakeholder consultations further underscored the lack of cohesive implementation mechanisms and the pressing need for capacity-building at institutional and community levels.

On the global stage, Bangladesh has demonstrated commendable commitment by ratifying the UNCRPD and participating in disability-related summits, such as the Global Disability Summits of 2018 and 2022. However, translating these commitments into measurable outcomes remains a challenge due to fragmented implementation and limited resource allocation. A thorough review of budget documents revealed that existing allocations for persons with Disabilities are largely confined to safety net programs, which, while beneficial, are insufficient to address the multi-faceted needs of the disability community.

This framework document not only synthesizes these findings but also provides a clear pathway for integrating disability inclusion into the upcoming NSSS 2026+. By adopting a rights-based and life-cycle approach, the framework seeks to promote inclusivity, resilience, and equitable access to social protection services for all persons with disabilities in Bangladesh. In conclusion, this document serves as a critical stepping stone for policymakers, practitioners, and development partners in advancing the disability agenda in Bangladesh.

# Annexure

## Annex 1. The National Coordination Committee

**According to Article 17 of the RPPD Act, the National Coordination Committee on Protection and Rights of Persons with Disabilities shall be composed of the following members:**

1. Minister, Ministry of Social Welfare – who will also serve as the chairperson of the Committee.
2. Two Members of Parliament – nominated by the Speaker, with one member from the ruling party and the other from the opposition.
3. Secretary, Ministry of Social Welfare.
4. Secretary, Ministry of Public Administration.
5. Secretary, Ministry of Health and Family Welfare.
6. Secretary, Ministry of Home Affairs.
7. Secretary, Ministry of Primary and Mass Education.
8. Secretary, Ministry of Housing and Public Works.
9. Secretary, Ministry of Women and Children Affairs.
10. Secretary, Ministry of Youth and Sports.
11. Secretary, Ministry of Labour and Employment.
12. Secretary, Ministry of Education.
13. Secretary, Ministry of Information.
14. Secretary, Ministry of Information and Communication Technology.
15. Secretary, Ministry of Disaster Management and Relief.
16. Secretary, Department of Finance.
17. Secretary, Department of Legislative and Parliament Affairs.
18. Secretary, Department of Local Government.
19. Director General, Department of Social Services.
20. Four female and three male representatives – nominated by the government from non-governmental organizations, Disabled People's Organizations (DPOs), or Self-Help Organizations working for the rights of persons with disabilities.
21. Managing Director, Jatiyo Protibondhi Unnayan Foundation (JPUF) – who will also serve as the member-secretary of the Committee.
22. These members will form the National Coordination Committee, which is responsible for ensuring the protection and rights of persons with disabilities in Bangladesh.

**Responsibilities and Functions of National Coordination Committee (Article 18)**

The National Coordination Committee shall have the following responsibilities and functions:

(a) Coordinate Activities: To coordinate the actions of ministries, state establishments, constitutional bodies, or private establishments at the national level to ensure the protection and rights of persons with disabilities.

(b) Policy Development: To develop national policies that secure the rights and protection of persons with disabilities, and to make recommendations to the government for the enactment and

implementation of laws, rules, and regulations that align with international standards for the rights of persons with disabilities.

(c) Educational Recommendations: To recommend the creation of enabling environments for persons with disabilities in existing educational institutions and advocate for the establishment of specialized educational institutions in each division, district, and upazila.

(d) Directives and Recommendations: To provide recommendations or directives to ministries, divisions, authorities, state or constitutional organizations, private organizations, self-help organizations, or organizations of persons with disabilities (OPDs) to ensure the protection of persons with disabilities.

(e) Rights, Dignity, and Welfare: To make recommendations to the government regarding the rights, dignity, and overall welfare of persons with disabilities.

(f) Other Functions: To carry out other responsibilities and functions of a similar nature, aimed at promoting the rights and welfare of persons with disabilities.

## Annex 2. The National Executive Committee

According to Article 19 of the RPPD Act, the National Executive Committee on Protection and Rights of Persons with Disabilities shall consist of the following members:

1. Secretary, Ministry of Welfare – who shall serve as the president of the committee.
2. Director General, Social Services Officer.
3. An officer with at least the rank of Joint Secretary from the Ministry of Housing and Public Works, nominated by the Ministry.
4. An officer with at least the rank of Joint Secretary from the Ministry of Health and Family Welfare, nominated by the Ministry.
5. An officer with at least the rank of Joint Secretary from the Ministry of Education, nominated by the Ministry.
6. An officer with at least the rank of Joint Secretary from the Ministry of Primary and Mass Education, nominated by the Ministry.
7. An officer with at least the rank of Joint Secretary from the Ministry of Information, nominated by the Ministry.
8. An officer with at least the rank of Joint Secretary from the Ministry of Youth and Sports, nominated by the Ministry.
9. An officer with at least the rank of Joint Secretary from the Ministry of Labour and Employment, nominated by the Ministry.
10. An officer with at least the rank of Joint Secretary from the Ministry of Disaster Management and Relief, nominated by the Ministry.
11. An officer with at least the rank of Joint Secretary from the Ministry of Women and Children Affairs, nominated by the Ministry.
12. An officer with at least the rank of Joint Secretary from the Department of Finance, nominated by the Department.
13. An officer with at least the rank of Joint Secretary from the Department of Legislative and Parliament Affairs, nominated by the Department.
14. Two women and two men representatives nominated by the government from non-governmental organizations, self-help organizations, or organizations of persons with disabilities (OPDs).
15. Managing Director, National Foundation for Persons with Disabilities – who shall serve as the committee's member secretary.
16. These members, as per the Act, will form the National Executive Committee tasked with overseeing and ensuring the protection and rights of persons with disabilities in Bangladesh.

**Responsibilities and Functions of the National Executive Committee (Article 20)**

The National Executive Committee shall have the following responsibilities and functions:

(a) To take necessary actions for the effective enforcement of policies, directives, and recommendations issued by the government or the National Coordination Committee.

(b) To offer advice or issue directives to any organization, statutory body, non-governmental organization, self-help organization, or organizations owned by persons with disabilities, coordinating their activities to ensure the protection and rights of persons with disabilities.

(c) To provide guidance, monitor, and oversee the activities of the committee.

(d) To submit an annual report to the National Coordination Committee detailing the programs implemented to safeguard the rights of persons with disabilities.

(e) To fulfill any additional responsibilities and functions as assigned by the National Coordination Committee.

## Annex 3. Progress Matrix (UNCRPD and SDGs in Disability Inclusion)

| Inclusivity Theme | UNCRPD | SDGs | Progress |
|---|---|---|---|
| Eradicating Poverty | Poverty is cross-cutting. | Goal o1 - No Poverty | • The "National Disability Welfare Foundation (NDWF) Act 2023" bill, aimed at furthering the rights and protection of Persons with Disabilities, is currently awaiting passage. This legislation builds upon the foundation laid by the Disabilities Act of 2013. |
| Health | Health is cross-cutting. All CRPD article applies to it. | Goal 03- Health and Well Being | • The Neurodevelopment Disabled Persons Protection and Trust Act of 2013 has spearheaded the implementation of Bangabandhu Surokkha Bima for individuals with Neurodevelopmental Disorders (NDDs).<br>• One-Stop Service Centers have been established in government hospitals to enhance accessibility.<br>• 103 disability service centers have been established across 64 districts to distribute essential accessories for persons with disabilities (64 in district areas and 36 at various upazila levels).<br>• Autism and NDD corners have been set up in service centers for early screening, assessment, and detection of disabilities.<br>• Mobile applications such as 'Bolte Chai' and 'Smart Autism Barta' have been introduced.<br>• 45 therapeutic vans have been deployed in various parts of Bangladesh to provide free therapeutic services.<br>• A budget has been allocated for the development of disability-friendly sports complexes.<br>• Full-free accommodation has been provided for children with cerebral palsy under the NDWF, with 41 children currently residing there.<br>• In 2022, a project titled 'Development and Implementation of e-Services for Treatment, Education & Management System of Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD) People' was initiated.<br>• Similar centers for NDDs have been established in Bogura and Brahmanbaria.<br>• An Autism Resource Centre has been set up to provide counseling, therapy, and training manuals.<br>• The Bangladesh National Rehabilitation Council Act 2018 has been enacted to bolster rehabilitation efforts. |
| Quality and Inclusive Education | Article 24- Right to Inclusive Education | Goal 04- Quality and Inclusive Education | • The Right to Information Act 2009 and the National ICT Policy 2009 address inclusivity issues, particularly by making IT policies disability-inclusive.<br>• Under the Special Education Guideline 2019, 74 special schools currently accommodate 11,500 students.<br>• Twelve 'Special Schools for Children with Autism' have been established across various parts of Bangladesh.<br>• Efforts are underway to develop a Special Curriculum for NDDs.<br>• Caregiving Skill Training (CST) programs have been initiated for parents and teachers of children with NDDs. |
| Gender Equality | Gender is cross cutting | Goal 05- Gender Equality | • Development and dissemination of Behavior Change Communication (BCC) Materials |

| | | | |
|---|---|---|---|
| Employment | Article 27- Work and Employment | Decent work environment | • Disability service centers are providing capacity-building training, with a total of 360 persons with disabilities receiving training between July 2022 and June 2023.<br>• Two hostels, one for men and one for women, are available for capable persons with disabilities.<br>• The Sharirik Protibandhi Surokkha Trust, known as 'Maitri Shilpa,' employs a significant number of persons with disabilities.<br>• The trust produces a water bottle named 'Mukta' and offers capacity-building training.<br>• Under this trust, eight sales centers have been opened across all eight divisions. |
| Sustainable Cities | Article 9- Accessibility | Goal 11- Sustainable cities and communities | • National Building Code (NBC), Dhaka City Construction Rule 2008, Road Transport Act 2018 |
| Global Partnership | Article 32 (International cooperation) aligns with this, calling for inclusive capacity-building initiatives. | Goal 17 Strengthening global partnerships | • United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (UNCRPD)<br>• International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights (ICESCR) (Inclusive of disability rights provisions)<br>• Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC) (Ratified, with specific references to children with disabilities)<br>• ILO Convention No. 159 on Vocational Rehabilitation and Employment (Disabled Persons).<br>• Global Summit Commitments:<br>• Global Disability Summit (GDS) 2018:<br>• Global Disability Summit (GDS) 2022 |

## Annex 4. Preliminary Report

2024

PREPARED BY

ARJU AFRIN KATHY

## Introduction

Last year, a joint event was organized titling "United in Action to Rescue and Achieve the SDGs for, with and by the Persons with Disabilities" with the same goal by the focal points such as Sightsavers Bangladesh, UNDP, Australian Aid, UNFPA, ILO, UN Women, UNPRPD, UNICEF, and UNRC commuting all the relevant stakeholders, i.e., disabled persons, different benevolent organizations working on disabilities, respective government authorities, private sector, civil society representatives, and media to the same table to discuss so that we all can jointly work for the persons with disabilities. During the day-long discussions, stakeholders launched the Reporters Forum for advisory aspects promoting awareness. Moreover, a consensus was developed for thoroughly reviewing the social protection benefits for the persons with disabilities. Also, the Joint UN committed preparing the Social Protection Framework for persons with disabilities under the purview of Leave No One Behind (LNOB)[10]. It will help developing the NSSS 2026 and beyond. To be mentioned, a National Action Plan (NAP) for persons with disabilities was developed in 2018 and at the Global Summit last year, Bangladesh secured 11 commitments, one of which emphasizes the joint effort to implement the National Action Plan. Thus, it is essential to revisit the NAP and monitor its progress to ensure effective outcomes.

## Objective

1. Present the draft Social Protection Framework for Persons with Disabilities;
2. Build consensus among stakeholders on findings and analyses;
3. Ensure the framework is inclusive, human rights-centered, and evidence-based;
4. Plan for the observance of the International Day of Persons with Disabilities (IDPD) on December 3, 2024.

The event had two sections. On the first section, presenting the Social Protection Framework for Persons with Disabilities and one the second half, participants were divided into eight groups for working on eight thematic areas.

## Welcome Remarks

### Ms. Amrita Rejina Rozario

### Country Director, Sightsavers & Convener, Disability Alliance on SDGs Bangladesh

In her opening remarks, Ms. Amrita Rejina Rozario articulated the objectives of the event, emphasizing the critical importance of developing a robust Social Protection Framework for Persons

[10] SSPS. (2024). Report on International Day of Persons with Disabilities – Seminar 2023. Retrieved from https://socialprotection.gov.bd/2024/02/report-on-international-day-of-persons-with-disabilities-seminar-2023/. Published on 25th February, 2024.

with Disabilities in Bangladesh. She provided valuable context for the framework's preparation, highlighting the need for inclusive policies that align with the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) to ensure that no one is left behind.

Ms. Rozario offered insights into Sightsavers' work in Bangladesh, detailing the organization's efforts to empower individuals with disabilities and promote their rights. She highlighted their flagship campaign, Samatar Bangladesh, which focuses on raising awareness, fostering social inclusion, and advocating for the legal rights of persons with disabilities. Through this campaign, Sightsavers aims to create a more equitable society where individuals with disabilities can thrive and contribute to their communities.

Additionally, Ms. Rozario stressed the numerous challenges faced by persons with disabilities in Bangladesh, including social stigma, lack of accessibility, inadequate healthcare services, and limited employment opportunities. She pointed out that these barriers not only hinder their participation in society but also perpetuate a cycle of poverty and exclusion. Ms. Rozario concluded by underscoring the urgent need for collaborative efforts among stakeholders to address these challenges and implement effective solutions that will enhance the quality of life for persons with disabilities in Bangladesh.

**Objective of the Preparatory Workshop Discussed by Mr. Ayon Debnath, Sightsavers**

Mr. Ayon Debnath commenced his address by outlining the core objectives of the preparatory workshop, focusing on two key areas:

1. Developing the Social Protection Framework for Persons with Disabilities
2. Building Stakeholders' Consensus on the Social Protection Framework

He provided a comprehensive context for the framework's preparation, emphasizing the need for a well-structured approach to address the multifaceted challenges faced by persons with disabilities in Bangladesh. Mr. Debnath outlined the objectives of the workshop, underscoring the importance of collaboration among stakeholders to create an effective and inclusive social protection system.

Mr. Debnath briefly discussed the current scenario of disability in Bangladesh, highlighting the pervasive challenges that hinder the inclusion of persons with disabilities in various aspects of society. He pointed out the slow implementation of the National Action Plan for Disability, which has led to a gap between policy intentions and practical outcomes. This delay in execution underscores the need for immediate action and collaboration among stakeholders.

Drawing from international best practices, Mr. Debnath emphasized the potential of assistive technology to transform the lives of persons with disabilities. He advocated for tax rebates on the importation of assistive technologies, which would make these crucial tools more accessible. Mr.

Debnath argued that providing persons with disabilities access to assistive devices is a vital step toward ensuring their inclusion in the labor market. He also stressed the necessity of equipping persons with disabilities with essential skills and ensuring their inclusion in the workforce. Mr. Debnath highlighted the importance of fostering an inclusive labor market that provides opportunities for individuals with disabilities to thrive and contribute meaningfully to society. He reiterated that this focus on skills development aligns with the overarching goal of improving the quality of life for persons with disabilities.

Addressing the thematic areas of the workshop, Mr. Debnath emphasized the significance of Article 3 of the framework, which pertains to health care affordability and access. He noted that ensuring access to affordable health care is a critical component of a comprehensive social protection strategy for persons with disabilities.

Mr. Debnath concluded his remarks by stressing the importance of group work during the workshop. He encouraged active participation from all stakeholders, asserting that collaborative discussions would be instrumental in shaping a robust Social Protection Framework. He expressed optimism that through collective efforts, the workshop would yield actionable insights that can lead to effective policies and initiatives for persons with disabilities in Bangladesh.

**Keynote PowerPoint Presentation Mr. Aminul Arifeen, SSPS Programme, UNDP**

Mr. Aminul Arifeen started his keynote presentation by outlining the objectives of the preparatory workshop and the overarching framework aimed at enhancing the lives of persons with disabilities in Bangladesh. His articulation of the goals set a proactive tone for the discussions to follow, emphasizing a collaborative approach to developing a more inclusive society.

The goals highlighted by Mr. Arifeen include:

- **Analyzing Existing Policies**: A thorough examination of national public and social policies, programs, and initiatives—both national and international—to identify gaps and opportunities.
- **Reviewing International Standards**: An assessment of international treaties, conventions, and best practices that serve as benchmarks for inclusivity and rights protection.
- Budget Analysis: A critical analysis of the national budget and ministry-specific budget documents to evaluate the adequacy of financial resources allocated for the support of persons with disabilities.
- Inclusive Social Protection Framework: The development of a social protection framework that is inclusive and responsive to the needs of persons with disabilities.

- Integration into National Strategies: Ensuring that persons with disabilities are integrated into the upcoming National Social Security Strategy (NSSS) for 2026.

**Understanding Inequality Through the Capability Approach**

In his introduction, Mr. Arifeen discussed the development of inequality and exclusion through the lens of the Capability Approach. He emphasized how these factors create a discriminatory system that perpetuates a vicious cycle of poverty and vulnerability for persons with disabilities. This perspective underscored the need for a framework that not only acknowledges these disparities but also actively seeks to address them.

**Research Methodology: A Qualitative Approach**

Mr. Arifeen detailed the qualitative research methodology employed in developing the framework, which involved a comprehensive analysis of existing policies and frameworks. This approach ensures that the needs and rights of persons with disabilities are central to the discourse, guiding the development of a more effective and inclusive framework.

**Legal Instruments: Protecting Rights and Promoting Inclusion**

A significant part of Mr. Arifeen's presentation was dedicated to the legal framework safeguarding the rights of persons with disabilities. He highlighted key documents that form the backbone of these protections, including:

- The Constitution of Bangladesh (1972)
- Disability Welfare Act (2001)
- Washington Group Short Set on Functioning (2006)
- United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (UN CRPD) (2007)
- NSSS (2015) and its Action Plans (2016-2022)
- Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) — Leave No One Behind (2015)
- Rights and Protection of Persons with Disabilities Act (2013)
- National Action Plan on Disability (2018)
- Commitments to the Global Disability Summit (2022)

He underscored how the NSSS emphasizes the social inclusion of persons with disabilities, recommending essential reforms, such as a Child Disability Benefit for children under 18 and a Disability Benefit for adults with severe disabilities.

**Statistical Insights**

Mr. Arifeen presented alarming statistics regarding the prevalence of disabilities in Bangladesh, shedding light on the urgent need for action:

- The Disability Information System (DIS) indicates that 3,413,507 persons with disabilities are receiving government benefits.
- The Population and Housing Census (2022) reports a disability prevalence rate of 1.37%.
- The National Survey on Persons with Disabilities (NSPD, 2021) finds a rate of 2.80%, while the Household Income and Expenditure Survey (HIES, 2022) reports 5.71%.

- The widely cited prevalence rate is 9.70%.

He noted that disability rates tend to increase with age, particularly among women, and that over 67% of households with disabilities lack formal education. Despite a national literacy rate of 78%, only 9.51% of disabled students have access to higher education.

**Economic Disparities**

Utilizing lower poverty lines from the HIES (2022), Mr. Arifeen stated that the headcount rate of poverty at the national level is 5.6%, with 29% of disabled households classified among the poorest. The overall employment rate for individuals aged 15-64 years stands at 33.78%, revealing significant disparities across gender and other demographics.

**Political Representation**

Highlighting the critical underrepresentation of persons with disabilities in the political process, Mr. Arifeen noted that only 0.17% are involved in local government, and 0.53% in elections. This statistic underscores the pressing need for inclusive policies that amplify the voices of persons with disabilities in decision-making processes.

**Financial Assistance Trends**

Mr. Arifeen reviewed the growth of financial assistance for persons with disabilities from FY 2005-06 to FY 2024-25, noting a significant increase in the number of disability allowance beneficiaries from 104,166 to 3,234,000, with the allowance amount rising from BDT 200 to 850. This trend reflects a growing recognition of the needs of persons with disabilities.

**Discrimination Factors: Analyzing Vulnerability**

In a comprehensive analysis, Mr. Arifeen examined data-driven evidence highlighting factors contributing to vulnerability and discrimination. He discussed variables such as age, sexual orientation, patterns of disabilities, gender dimensions, geographical location, political identity, and enabling infrastructure, which collectively exacerbate the challenges faced by persons with disabilities.

**A Comprehensive Social Protection Framework: Rethinking Approaches**

Mr. Arifeen emphasized the importance of shifting perspectives towards a comprehensive social protection framework that respects dignity, autonomy, and inclusion for persons with disabilities. He advocated for a twin-track approach that promotes both mainstreaming and specialized support, ensuring that all individuals receive the attention and resources they need to thrive.

**Thematic Roadmap: Collaborating for Change**

In his concluding remarks, Mr. Arifeen discussed the thematic roadmap for the framework, urging stakeholders to collaborate and build consensus on the draft Social Protection Framework for persons with disabilities. This collaborative effort is essential to understand the diverse needs and aspirations of the disability community, paving the way for a more inclusive and equitable future in Bangladesh.

**Reflection on the PowerPoint Presentation**

**Mr. Monsur Ahmed Chowdhuri, Founder, Impact Foundation**

Mr. Monsur Ahmed Chowdhuri began his address by expressing appreciation for the keynote speaker and paying tribute to those injured or lost during the tragic events of July-August. Chowdhuri passionately argued for a nation that actively includes and integrates persons with disabilities into every aspect of life. He emphasized that a truly progressive society must prioritize the needs and rights of all its citizens, especially those with disabilities.

**National Action Plan: Funding Gaps**

Focusing on the National Action Plan, which involves 35 ministries since its launch in 2019, he called for allocation of funding. Chowdhuri pointed out that only a few ministries, such as the Ministry of Information and Communication Technology (ICT), have received necessary financial backing, while the Ministry of Social Welfare, which is pivotal to this cause, remains underfunded.

**Governance Challenges**

Mr. Chowdhuri stressed the urgent need for a unified national consensus to advocate for the rights of persons with disabilities. He raised concerns about the frequent turnover of government officials, which leads to instability and lack of commitment to these crucial initiatives. He urged for improved cooperation between ministries and called for a strengthened governance framework to enhance the social protection system.

He addressed the negative perception surrounding the Ministry of Social Welfare, which is often viewed as a less desirable posting. This has led to a lack of engagement from talented and motivated officers who could drive positive change. He called for a shift in this narrative to create a more supportive environment.

**Reviving Focal Points for Disability Advocacy**

Reflecting on past initiatives, Chowdhuri noted the establishment of focal points in 2007-2008 aimed at disability advocacy, which have since disappeared. He urged the re-establishment of these points to ensure that the needs of persons with disabilities are adequately represented in government discussions and policy-making. Furthermore, highlighting the role of the SDG Network, he urged stakeholders to direct their efforts toward concrete actions that address the needs of persons with disabilities. Chowdhuri emphasized the necessity for ongoing reforms by the Interim Government to be inclusive, encouraging all parties to formally present their demands for change. Chowdhuri did not hesitate to criticize the previous government for conflating the needs of transgender individuals with those of persons with disabilities, asserting that this approach undermined the distinct rights and requirements of each group.

In closing, he expressed his deep disappointment regarding the government's progress on initiatives for persons with disabilities. He highlighted a particularly striking example: the National Bangla Braille Committee, which was established in 1976. Despite the significant time that has passed, it took 48 years for the government to officially approve the National Bangla Braille in 2024. This prolonged process vividly underscores the sluggish pace at which the government is addressing the

critical needs of persons with disabilities, revealing a troubling gap between policy intentions and actual implementation.

**Ms. Ashafunnahar Misti, Executive Director, Women with Disabilities Development Foundation**

**Insights from Ms. Ashafunnahar Misti: Targeted Support for Persons with Disabilities**

**Political Declarations vs. Practical Needs**

Ms. Ashafunnahar Misti, Executive Director of the Women with Disabilities Development Foundation, emphasized that the concept of a disability allowance with 100% coverage was initially a political declaration. She argued that such support should be targeted and need-based, meaning it must directly address the specific needs of individuals with disabilities. Drawing from her extensive experience, she stressed that the allowance should fully cover all necessary expenses to truly be effective.

**Encouraging Employment Through Incentives**

She highlighted a progressive initiative wherein companies employing a minimum of two individuals with disabilities would either maintain those positions or pay the equivalent salaries to the government. This approach encourages businesses to actively participate in the inclusion of persons with disabilities in the workforce.

**Learning from Global Best Practices**

Reflecting on her experiences during a fellowship in Japan, Ms. Misti noted the importance of adapting successful global practices to the local context in Bangladesh. She underscored the necessity for data to be segregated based on various factors such as socio-economic status and education levels. This detailed analysis is crucial for designing inclusive programs that cater to the diverse needs of persons with disabilities.

**The Call for Inclusive Programming**

In her closing remarks, Ms. Misti reiterated the urgent need for inclusive programming that not only addresses financial support but also encompasses comprehensive strategies for education, employment, and social inclusion. By tailoring programs to meet the specific needs of individuals with disabilities, we can create a more equitable society where everyone has the opportunity to thrive. She has also stressed on accessible tourism and the prevailing stigma and continued harassment against the persons with disabilities.

**Mr. Khandaker Jahurul Alam, Executive Director, Centre for Services and Information on Disability (CSID)**

Mr. Khandaker Jahurul Alam, Executive Director of the Centre for Services and Information on Disability (CSID), delivered a powerful address highlighting the systemic challenges faced by persons with disabilities in Bangladesh. He emphasized that national policies and actions have contributed to a cycle of poverty that traps disabled individuals, stating, "Our national efforts have shaped a reality where disabled people will remain poor for the rest of their lives."

**Inadequate Support and Employment Opportunities**

Alam pointed out the inadequacy of the current disability allowance of 850 Taka, arguing that it fails to meet the basic needs of individuals. He urged the government to acknowledge that at least 500,000 disabled individuals secure jobs earning around 8,500 Taka annually, underscoring the urgent need for sustainable employment solutions. "We need employment," he asserted, stressing the importance of accessible job opportunities.

**Healthcare and Social Services: A Deceptive Approach**

Alam voiced concerns about the healthcare services available to persons with disabilities, lamenting their isolation from essential support systems. He criticized the Ministry of Social Welfare's initiative to create "One Stop Service Centers," branding it as a mere deception. "Why do we need alternative services instead of inclusive ones?" he questioned, calling for genuine inclusivity rather than superficial solutions.

**The Voice of Persons with Disabilities**

Highlighting the lack of representation and advocacy, he noted that persons with disabilities struggle to act as a pressure group to influence government policies. The internal divisions among OPDs further complicate their collective efforts. "We do not have a unified voice," he remarked, emphasizing the need for solidarity among advocacy groups.

**Commitment to Action**

In conclusion, Mr. Alam reaffirmed his commitment to supporting the Social Protection Framework for persons with disabilities. He mentioned a recent initiative where 12 disabled individuals joined forces under the platform of 'Disability Rights Watch' to contribute to the Interim Government's reform efforts. He called for collaboration and assistance in these endeavors, reminding officials from the Ministry of Social Welfare that the responsibility for the well-being of persons with disabilities extends beyond their ministry to at least 34 others. "We seek appointments in various ministries, but

we often do not receive responses," he lamented, urging a more positive and inclusive approach from the government.

S M Monjur Rashid, Senior Advisor for Communication at the SSPS Programme, UNDP, provided an insightful backdrop to the thematic group work during his speech. He began by underscoring the constitutional rights of persons with disabilities in Bangladesh, emphasizing the nation's legal obligation to ensure inclusion and equal opportunities for all citizens, including those with disabilities.

**Focused Thematic Groups**

Mr. Rashid outlined the key thematic areas that would guide the group discussions, which aim to address the multifaceted challenges faced by persons with disabilities. These thematic groups included: Livelihood and Social Allowance, Inclusive Education, Accessibility, Human Development and TVET, Digital Divide, Disability Inclusive Disaster Risk Management, AI, Data Interoperability, Identification and GRS, Advocacy and Communication, Budget and Financing.

**Thematic Group Exercise**

| Theme | Current Situation | Key Challenge | Prioritized Expectation |
|---|---|---|---|
| Livelihood and Social Allowance | Lack of employment opportunities for persons with disabilities<br><br>Social safety nets are insufficient, both in coverage and in amount.<br><br>Lowest social protection benefits in South Asia.<br><br>Limited access to TVET and skills development programs, with a missing link to income-generating activities.<br><br>Absence of disability-disaggregated data. | Not all Persons with disabilities are included in the DSS (Department of Social Services) identification process.<br><br>Enrollment processes for Persons with disabilities are not easily accessible.<br>Safety nets are not viewed as a rights-based approach.<br><br>Mis-targeting in safety net benefits.<br><br>No scope for multiple benefits.<br><br>TVET quota for Persons with disabilities is not being enforced.<br><br>Lack of digital literacy.<br><br>The NSSS commitment to unemployment insurance is still missing.<br><br>Limited wage employment opportunities. | Allowances should be based on the degree of disability.<br><br>Standardized and increased amounts of allowances for Persons with disabilities. |
| Inclusive Education | 80% of children with disabilities are still outside mainstream services due to a coordination gap.<br><br>Priority is being given to inclusion, but major gaps remain. | Coordination gaps between different sectors.<br><br>Policy gaps, including the outdated education policy (2010).<br><br>Conflicting policies, especially related to the Ministry of Social Welfare (MoSW). | Universal stipends for Persons with disabilities.<br><br>Assistive devices and technology tailored to needs.<br><br>Credible and comprehensive disability surveys. |

| | | | |
|---|---|---|---|
| | | Lack of resources and rigid education systems.<br><br>Numerous and unclear definitions of disability.<br><br>Lack of accessibility to services and resources, including assistive devices.<br><br>Inadequate digital technology for education.<br><br>Lack of credibility in disability surveys. | Mainstreaming of services for Persons with disabilities.<br><br>Improved digital accessibility and technology.<br><br>Enhanced awareness and advocacy for inclusive education.<br><br>Strengthening research, DIS (Disability Information System), and OPD (Organizations of Persons with Disabilities) engagement. |
| Accessibility, Human Development, TVET | Accessibility challenges go beyond physical barriers, including digital accessibility.<br><br>Public spaces, such as parks, transport stations, markets, and footpaths, remain inaccessible for persons with disabilities.<br><br>Transport systems are not inclusive. | Lack of accessible digital systems, including websites, online banking, and educational materials.<br><br>Inaccessible software and a lack of assistive technology.<br><br>Audio-visual communication systems are not disability-friendly. | Enforce compliance with the Bangladesh National Building Code for accessibility.<br><br>Make transport systems (road and water) accessible to all.<br><br>Develop specific legislation for digital accessibility.<br><br>Create accessibility guidelines for public offices.<br><br>Implement tax rebates for importing assistive devices.<br><br>Improve accessibility in educational materials. |
| Digital Divide, | Lack of accessibility in digital services and assistive technology for Persons with disabilities.<br><br>No proper assessments on digital technology needs for persons with disabilities. | Digital technologies are unaffordable, unavailable, and not user-friendly.<br><br>Connectivity gaps and lack of data on digital inclusion for persons with disabilities. | Ensure affordability and subsidize technological devices for persons with disabilities.<br><br>Create more accessible user interfaces, including visual and audio signals.<br><br>Conduct proper assessments for digital devices needed by persons with disabilities. |

| | | | |
|---|---|---|---|
| AI and Data Interoperability, Identification and GRS | AI and data interoperability are not fully utilized in disability services.<br><br>Lack of AI-based guidance and intervention for Persons with disabilities. | AI initiatives are concentrated in Dhaka, with limited understanding and application elsewhere.<br><br>Poor data management and a lack of specific guidelines within both government and non-government sectors. | Training on AI use and its potential for persons with disabilities.<br><br>Collect proper and disaggregated data.<br><br>Develop an inclusive legal framework for AI in disability inclusion. |
| Disability inclusive Disaster Risk Reduction (DRR) | Limited accessibility in emergency response plans, leaving persons with disabilities vulnerable during crises.<br><br>Inadequate data on disability needs and distribution in disaster-prone areas.<br><br>Insufficient awareness and training on inclusive practices among DRR agencies. | Lack of inclusive infrastructure in evacuation centers, shelters, and communication systems.<br><br>Social stigma and isolation reduce access to timely information and assistance.<br><br>Limited financial and human resources for integrating disability-inclusive measures within DRR frameworks. | Enhanced inclusive DRR policies mandating accessible shelters, transportation, and communication.<br><br>Capacity building for DRR practitioners, responders, and communities on inclusive practices.<br><br>Improved data collection systems to guide targeted disaster risk reduction efforts for persons with disabilities. |
| Advocacy, Communication | The collective voice of persons with disabilities is not being raised effectively.<br><br>Grassroots-level OPDs lack clarity about their roles and responsibilities.<br><br>Limited capacity building of OPDs. | Lack of support from policymakers and limited media engagement. | Implement capacity-building programs for OPDs.<br><br>Provide training and guidance for the media to advocate for disability rights. |
| Budget and Financing | Except for the disability allowance, there is no disaggregated budget for persons with disabilities.<br><br>The budget is not being allocated according to the action plan or CRPD compliance | Lack of specific budget allocations for disability-related programs and activities. | Develop a disability-disaggregated budget.<br><br>Ensure compliance with CRPD in the budget allocation process. |

## Reflections by Dignitaries

Following the group exercises and participants' presentations, distinguished guests shared their reflections on the Social Protection Framework for persons with disabilities, providing valuable insights on critical aspects of disability inclusion, policy implementation, and rights-based approaches.

**Ms. Nasima Akhter, Chair of the Equal Bangladesh Campaign,** shared that while many people with disabilities face economic challenges, not all are economically disadvantaged. Consequently, she argued that a universal allowance may not be the most effective approach. Instead, she emphasized a need-based allowance that targets those most in need, maximizing impact and efficient resource distribution.

**Mr. Saidul Haque, Executive Director of BERDO and an Ekushey Padak Awardee,** expressed his support for the framework and its underlying principles, particularly the alignment with international standards and inclusivity. He highlighted the need for disability issues to receive higher prioritization within government agendas. He shared his concerns regarding the lack of proactive attention to disability inclusion at the governmental level, which he believes hinders meaningful progress toward national inclusivity goals.

**Mr. Azmul Haque, Director (Development, Planning, and ICT) and Joint Secretary at the Jatiya Protibondhi Unnayan Foundation, Ministry of Social Welfare,** reaffirmed his commitment to working on the implementation plan for the Social Protection Framework. From his perspective within government, he acknowledged significant barriers, notably the lack of a unified voice among Organizations of Persons with Disabilities (OPDs) on setting policy priorities. He stressed that consensus within OPDs is crucial to ensuring government alignment and advocacy efforts that effectively address priority areas.

**Mr. A.H.M Noman Khan, Executive Director of the Center for Disability in Development (CDD),** reflected on his decades-long experience in disability advocacy, noting the progress made in inclusive education. While discussions on disability inclusion are now common, two decades ago, the idea of children with disabilities receiving a mainstream education faced considerable resistance. He expressed optimism that the framework could serve as a cornerstone for advancing the rights and representation of persons with disabilities in Bangladesh, providing a structured approach to implementing and safeguarding their rights.

**Mr. Shafiqul Islam, Asia Regional Director of ADD International,** provided closing reflections, stressing the urgency of implementing the UNCRPD effectively. He remarked that this framework has the potential to support persons with disabilities by facilitating a rights-based approach, empowering them to advocate for their entitlements. He reiterated the participants' insights that the basic needs of persons with disabilities remain unmet and called for greater attention and action from all stakeholders.

These reflections underscored both the promise and challenges of advancing disability inclusion in Bangladesh, with an emphasis on strategic, rights-based approaches and effective collaboration among government, organizations, and advocates.

## Conclusion

The preparatory workshop on the Social Protection Framework for Persons with Disabilities marked a pivotal step toward enhancing disability inclusion in Bangladesh. By comprehensively examining national policies, budget allocations, and international best practices, the workshop laid a strong foundation for developing a framework aligned with both national priorities and global commitments like the UNCRPD. Insights shared by government representatives, OPDs, advocates, and academics highlighted the value of a need-based, rights-centered approach in addressing the unique challenges faced by persons with disabilities.

Reflections from dignitaries underscored the importance of a coherent strategy for inclusive policy implementation, while acknowledging existing barriers, such as limited consensus among stakeholders and inadequate prioritization of disability issues on national agendas. The discussions reaffirmed that although progress is being made, significant gaps remain in access to education, economic support, and political representation for persons with disabilities. Bridging these gaps will require an integrated approach, incorporating data-driven policy, inclusive budgeting, and cross-sector collaboration.

The workshop successfully achieved consensus among stakeholders on the framework, setting the stage for further action plans, consultative dialogues, research, and cooperation. This consensus paves the way to implement the Social Protection Framework that can protect the rights of persons with disabilities and foster their active participation in society, contributing to an inclusive and equitable Bangladesh.

## Annex 5. List of Organization

**Participating Organizations in the Consensus Building Workshop on the National Social Protection Framework for Persons with Disabilities**

| | |
|---|---|
| 1 | Narsingdi Disabled Peoples Organization to Development (NDPOD) |
| 2 | Team Inclusion Bangladesh (TIB) |
| 3 | Spondon, Narsingdi |
| 4 | Seba Foundation |
| 5 | Strengthening DRM Structures & Capacities (SDSC) |
| 6 | United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) |
| 7 | Society of the Deaf and Sign Language (SDSL) |
| 8 | BRAC |
| 9 | Disabled Welfare Society (DWS) |
| 10 | Action on Disability and Development Bangladesh (ADD) |
| 11 | Disabled Rehabilitation & Research Association (DRRA) |
| 12 | Young Power in Social Action (YPSA) |
| 13 | Aspire to Innovate (a2i) |
| 14 | World Health Organization (WHO) |
| 15 | The International Labour Organization (ILO) |
| 16 | Sightsavers |
| 17 | Centre for Disability in Development (CDD) Bangladesh |
| 18 | Centre for the Rehabilitation of the Paralyzed (CRP) |
| 19 | Palli Karma-Sahayak Foundation (PKSF) |
| 20 | Manikganj Disabled People’s Organization to Development (MDPOD) |
| 21 | Congenital sucrase-isomaltose deficiency (CSID) |
| 22 | জাতীয় প্রতিবন্ধী উন্নয়ন ফাউন্ডেশন (JPUF) |
| 23 | Christian Blind Mission (CBM) |
| 24 | National Grassroots Disability Organization (NGDO) |
| 25 | Visually Impaired People's Society (VIPS) |
| 26 | Bangladesh Protibandhi Unnayan Sangstha (BPUS) |
| 27 | Down Syndrome Society of Bangladesh |
| 28 | Organization for Disabled Improvement and Rights (ODIR BD) |
| 29 | Impact Foundation |
| 30 | Daily Bonik Barta |
| 31 | Society for the Welfare of the Intellectually Disabled (SWID) |
| 32 | Disabled Child Foundation (DCF) |
| 33 | NSUPUP |

Social Security Policy Support (SSPS) Programme

Cabinet Division and

General Economics Division (GED) of Bangladesh Planning Commission

Government of the People's Republic of Bangladesh

Australian Aid

UNDP