

# ROUNDTABLE on

## Mainstreaming Disability in National Budget to Increase Allocation for Persons with Disabilities

Jointly organised by  ADD International and  The Daily Star at the Daily Star conference room on 21 May 2011 with support from  Manusher Jonno Foundation

### DELIBERATIONS BY THE PARTICIPANTS

**Mosharraf Hossain,**  
Country Director,  
Bangladesh, ADD  
International,  
Moderator



The roundtable on 'Mainstreaming Disability in National Budget to Increase Allocation for Persons with Disabilities' is arranged by ADD International and The Daily Star. Budget is the policy document through which the government can take proper steps to uplift the backward groups. Government can take practical steps for the elimination of poverty and can provide guidelines according to the provisions of the national budget. The recommendations of this conference would be sent to the relevant authorities for consideration in the national budget.

**Shah Hossain Imam,**  
Associate Editor, The Daily Star.



I consider this as a unique privilege as I am here on behalf of Mahfuz Anam, editor of The Daily Star, who is now abroad. I warmly welcome you to this roundtable conference. I am positively overwhelmed by the very distinguished and eminent nature of the persons who are present and will speak and participate in this very important discussion. I consider it as a most important and very timely discussion because it is being held at a time when the budget is imminent. I welcome the honorable minister, all the participants and ADD with whom we are partnering in a very noble cause as well as the representatives of the development partners who are present. It is a great pity that nothing is disability-friendly in our country. Disability is a word which is seldom heard in our parliament.

We should rather dignify them with the level of being challenged. Their being challenged is not their fault. They are challenged due to natural and man-made causes. I think there is a question of human rights for which we need to launch an awareness programme. I am glad to know that the recommendations would be sent to the planning ministry in order to push for necessary budget allocation to this



much neglected sector.

**Professor Abul Barkat,**  
President, Bangladesh Economic Association (Orthoniti Shomiti) and Chair, Economics Department, University of Dhaka.



The title of this keynote paper is 'The right of the disabled: Budget and relevant thoughts'. There is no objective, reliable information on the disabled and various types of disabilities in Bangladesh. Who are the disabled? Is there any relationship between disability and poverty? Is the rate of disability among the poor comparatively more than among the rich? Does poverty cause disability or disability cause poverty or both? Does poverty increase disability?

Are the disabled people treated equally with others? What steps have been taken by the government to improve their quality of life?

There is no reliable research analysis on these significant questions in our country.

The answers to these questions is the main objective of this article.

I have drawn some conclusions on the basis of my inquiry. These are:

1) Disability is not a socio-economic-class or neutral fact. The rate of disability among the poor is higher than that among the rich people.

2) Disability creates a deprivation-cycle. In this cycle poor disabled persons become poorer.

3) The very small allotment and expenditure of government for the improvement of their quality of life indicates high degree of disrespect for them.

4) On the present struc-

ture, keeping other conditions unchanged, the chance of employment of the disabled is very little.

5) It is possible for the government to take the responsibilities of the disabled as stated in the constitution. It is possible for the government to increase the allocation in budget for the disabled in order to fulfill the objectives.

6) If the state fails to take responsibilities of the disabled, disability will increase and it will consequently increase poverty.

You may not believe that, 1.6 crore people are disabled while the total population of Bangladesh is 16 crore. It means 10% of our total population is disabled. There are five kinds of disabilities that could be found in our country. These are -- physically handicapped (52.5%), visually impaired (15.1%), speech and hearing impaired (14.9%), mentally retarded (10.9%) and diversified disabilities (6.7%). If the rate of disabilities cannot be reduced, the present number of 1.6 crore disabled people will reach almost 5.2 crore by 2021. The total allotment

as a basic duty and responsibility of the state in the basic principles of our constitution: In Article No. 15(D) it is clearly stated that 'the right to social security, that includes government assistance in cases of deprivation arising from unemployment, illness or disability suffered by widows, orphans and aged people'; Article No. 28(4) declares that, 'Nothing in this Article would prevent the State from making special provisions in favour of women or children or for the advancement of any backward section of citizens.'

It is the time to decide whether we want to have 5 crore 20 lakh persons with disabilities or 2 crore 80 lakh by 2021. This decision has to be positive as it is a great criminal offence to facilitate disabilities. And also because those disability prevented, 2 crore 40 lakh people will be able to successfully contribute to the socio-economic development of our country.

In my opinion, a disabled person suffers all those deprivation-distress that could be possible for human beings. However, the deprivation of disabled persons could have three

dimensions -- as a disabled person, as a poor-poverty stricken-ultra poor disabled person, and as a poor disabled woman. On the basis of my survey, it can be said that

1) We must put more emphasis on the improvement of disabled rural people.

2) We must put more emphasis on the poor-ultra poor-lower middle class disabled people.

There are some factors which we should consider in defining the relationship between disability and poverty. Firstly, disability is not a socio-economic and class neu-

tral factor. Poverty is one of the main reasons of disability.

Secondly, poverty causes disability and hence, disability makes people poorer.

Disabled people need more care but they are mostly kept unproductive. So disability causes poverty. Thirdly, when the state fails to take the responsibilities of the disabled people and does not take proper steps to remove disability, then disability is bound to increase poverty. Fourthly, disability creates a perpetual deprivation cycle among the poor as well as rich people.

Powerlessness, vulnerability, physical weakness, poverty, isolation/alienation and psychological distress -- these five factors constitutes the deprivation cycle.

In spite of our constitutional obligations, it is a matter of doubt whether our government regards the disabled as human beings. It is very important to define the extent of respect or disrespect of the government to the disabled people. My analysis

has been allotted for the disabled people (actually it is the allowances for poor disabled persons under Social Safety Net programmes). That means only 0.3% of the total development budget has been allocated for the disabled people.

\* If it is considered that 10% of our total population is disabled, then the proportionate percentage of the budget should be of 3,859 crore taka while the budget is only 110 crore taka.

So, I can say that, on the basis of the development budget, the degree of disrespect of the government to the disabled people is 94.3%.

As we hope to build an exploitation-free, discrimination-free, secular Bangladesh which we have achieved through our liberation war, and as we hope that Bangladesh will be a secular, progressive, liberal, and democratic welfare state by 2021, and as our constitution is disability-friendly, so we must allocate 10% of our budget, nearly 1,500 crore taka in a year for the disabled people.

Moreover, the state should take some disabled-friendly steps. Such as--

1) To give priority to the persons with disability in distributing the 2 crore bigha fallow lands in our country.

2) To introduce and implement specific employment quota (may be 5%) for the disabled.

3) To provide them with bank loans on easy conditions in order to create disabled-friendly entrepreneurship.

4) To facilitate and reward those private institutions that ensure the

employment of the disabled.

5) To create disabled-friendly environment in every educational institution.

6) To increase the number of recipients and the amount of allowances to at least 900 taka (the present amount is only 300 taka per month).

7) To spend 10% of the education budget for the development of education of the disabled.

8) To give at least 1000 taka health allowances to pregnant disabled women.

9) To allocate budget in the IT sector in order to increase the skills of the disabled people.

10) To take proper steps to ensure disabled-friendly public and private transportation system.

11) To allocate 20 crore taka for the legal and medical aid of the disabled women who are victims of violence and torture.

12) To introduce rationing of essentials for the poor and needy persons with disabilities.

13) To allocate a handsome amount in the budget for the implementation of the 'Disability Welfare Act 2001'

This would be possible only if the leadership is disability-friendly.

**Dr. Akbar Ali Khan,**  
Former Adviser,  
Caretaker Government,  
People's Republic of  
Bangladesh:



I am here basically to give support to the rights and demands of the disabled persons. And I am very much pleased to come here for that purpose. I fully agree with the main points of the keynote paper of Professor Abul Barkat. His recommendations are really very practical.

But it is a matter of great

We have to identify specific forms of disabilities and design programmes

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sorrow that there is little chance of the fulfillment of the goals for which the conference has been arranged. As most of the budget papers are ready, you would get some allotment in the case of special recommendation by the highest official. You could also get some allotment by special political consideration. Unless we realize this, the discussion will be meaningless. It is very unfortunate for our country that there is no chance of reflecting the discussions upon the national budget. We do not have any forum by which our thoughts can be reflected or presented in the budget. The major weakness of the budget process of Bangladesh is that here each ministry has a standing committee but they cannot give their opinion in budget making as they have not been given the right by the rule of business of parliament.

If a standing committee makes any corrections in the budget then it would be like a cut motion. So it would be harassing for the government. So the standing committee cannot make any corrections. On the other hand it makes no sense to suggest any change at the time of budget.

A disabled person does not seek sympathy. We should create scope to bring them in the mainstream. So we need investment and recurring expenditure. We have to set priorities. First priority is to provide them with technical facilities. Second, we have to give them access to education. Computer technology has unlocked new horizons of potentialities. We have to invest in the field so that they can have easy access to this technology. The most important point is to create employment for disabled persons.

I support quota facilities for the disabled though I am generally against quota system. People think that they are unable to work. But if you give them a chance they would prove what they can do. Private organizations have to come forward along with the government. 5% quota should be initiated by the organizations that enjoy tax holiday. If we introduce the tax holiday system, private companies would put up their hand. Disabled people would work harder as they have to prove their competence.

**Dr. Ananya Raihan,**  
Executive Director, D.  
Net:

We have to identify specific forms of disabilities and design programmes

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according to the different categories. Training and incentives are needed for the disabled. It is little bit costly for private organizations, so government should take the lead. Disabled people can gain from out-sourcing activities like translation, graphic designing and so on. There are some infrastructural issues. Building code should be maintained as disability-friendly.

D.net is doing some projects for the development of the accessibility for the disabled like developing Braille readers and USB with Sri Lanka. We are appealing to all of you to suggest to us on the non-technical aspects of these projects.

**Colin Risner, CEO, SHIREE:**



One cannot reduce poverty without addressing disability because we have approximately 80 thousand households now who are the beneficiaries of our projects and the proportion of disabled people in the households is very high. We have to allocate enough resources proportionate to the number of the disabled people.

There are multiple deprivations because expenditure rises in the case of mental and physical challenges. We have to address them in a coordinated way.

**Mohua Paul, Resource Mobilizer, Access Bangladesh:**



Article 6 of the Bangladesh Disability Welfare Act 2001 ensures accessibility facilities for the disabled. But ten years have already lapsed and it is yet to be implemented. There are provisions in City Corporation's Building Code-2008 and Housing Authorities Ordinance-2009 to maintain ramps, wheel chairs and toilet facilities for the disabled in the building, transports and public places. We have not found any implementation of these provisions.

Government should allocate more budgets for the easy accessibility of the disabled. Tax holiday provisions could be good options.

**Ummeh Kulsum Ranjana, President, Protibondhi Narider Jatio Parishad:**



Government's allocation of 300 taka per month is very poor for a disabled person. Government should allocate more funds for them. Government should create a platform where all the organizations who work on disability issues would be united to

make coordinated and centralized programmes for the disabled.

**Prof Dr. Jebun Nasreen Ahmed, Head, Department of Architecture, BUET:**



Ensuring universal accessibility is a very important topic. New buildings should maintain disability friendly building code. We have to also think about old buildings because they are large in numbers. Budgetary provisions should be allocated for the conversion of the old buildings to ensure accessibility for the disabled. Existing building code has limitations to ensure universal accessibility. We are preparing indexes for universal accessibility.

I have seen in many educational institutions that there are no ramps or toilet facilities for the disabled students. If there is a ramp it is usually very steep. We should combine the disability-friendly facilities in the building design.

**Col Shawkat Ali (Retd) MP, Deputy Speaker, People's Republic Bangladesh:**



The honourable members of the parliament need to be mobilized more. Then they will talk more about this issue. I am requesting you to take the chance. Personally, I will try to impress the members of the parliament about this issue. Before the submission of budget any standing committee can make recommendations about it. Those recommendation can be placed in the house and can be communicated to the ministry of finance. Dr. Akbar Ali Khan talked about the Loksabha. I do not know what happens there. But there is no chance to discuss after the announcement of budget in our country. There are many standing committees, there is ministry of social welfare and they can recommend before the budget is placed. As government is committed to the welfare of the disabled, it must stand by their side. Honourable Prime Minister and Honourable Minister of Social Welfare expressed their solidarity with the disabled. There is a committee who can recommend about the promises of the government. Though it is late for this year but I think we can make good efforts in the coming days. We can make it possible for the government to come forward to fulfill their commitments.

**Shanawaz Qureshi, Country Director, CBM:**



CBM is an international

development and disabilities organization. Bangladesh has ratified the CRPD. Now the challenge ahead is the implementation of the provisions. To implement that effectively, we need to have a comprehensive approach. Actions are needed to be taken by different stakeholders. We need to have some new laws following CRPD action plans, policies as well as resources, so that the provisions could be implemented in the field. A lot of interventions by different organizations, government and different stakeholders are going on. But still as you know there is a sizeable number of disabled people in Bangladesh. So, we are far from sufficient and we need to increase the support and interventions to ensure their rights whether it's in the form of rehabilitation services, inclusive education or their livelihood opportunities. The need is everywhere.

are in top places proving their competence. Let us think about our progress. The issue of disability has been switched over from medical model to social model. This is positive progress. The National Disability Development Foundation was founded in 1999 and has become an effective platform for the persons with disabilities. The disability welfare act was issued in 2001. It is an important progress.

Bangladesh is one of the countries to sign UN CRPD and attain glorious achievements. We are claiming charity allocations, welfare donation in the national budget. On 2nd April, our honourable prime minister talked about motivation programme. In 3rd and 4th class jobs there are 10% quota allocated for the disabled. Moreover, the government is considering for 1% quota in 1st class jobs. Government is planning to provide five years

a matter of rights not allocations only. What is mainstreaming? Why are we talking about this? What is its objective? Here mainstreaming is nothing but inclusion. According to Dr. Abul Barkat 10% of our 160 million people are disabled. We have to ensure that they are included in the existing agenda, policy making, and social agenda. This is mainstreaming. We should not consider this meeting only for some recommendations. Rather, we have to consider all these as a continuous activity.

Disabled people are not a homogenous group. We have to consider the diversity. The state has to come forward to solve the specific problems. Besides, wider social issues like persisting discrimination and exclusion must be addressed. The needs of the disabled are not much different from all other people. They also need medical facilities, education, jobs, and social well

being like any normal person. So, we have to make a disability-friendly policy and development model. Finally, we have to change our mentality towards disability.

**Ms. Yasmin Ahmed, Executive Director, NOVA Consultancy:**



Handicap International has been working in Bangladesh since 1997. Our focus is on rights based approach for the disabled according to the framework of the UN Convention on the rights of the persons with disabilities. I am particularly interested about the issue of assistive devices, which is very important in Bangladesh. Any inclusion of the disabled starts with his or her possibility of mobility. An inclusion starts with being able to go out of the house, being able to move in the community, being able to participate in every stage of social life. So we work on the issue of production of assistive devices and availability of quality assistive devices in Bangladesh. We have some projects with our colleagues in Center for Disability and Development. We produce all kinds of mobility devices including wheelchairs, crutches etc. At the elementary level of the project, we made a small survey and found out that in Bangladesh for a population of 160 million people there were no more than 15 places where assistive devices were produced and the quality was very low. So this is really an important issue. I was happy that it came out in the recommendation papers.

**Nazrana Yeasmin Hira, Programme Manager, Manusher Jonno Foundation:**

Sometimes we see the government talking about

lack of money. In this case experts can come forward to help the government and to find out the sources. This discussion can be helpful to find out our working sectors. Many donors are present here. They can think about these sectors and plan for support. They can support the government by funding. Our honourable prime minister talked about the community clinic services and said the disabled can take health services from there. But we need to ensure that there are enough doctors and physiotherapists for the disabled people. The government is talking about the mainstreaming of persons with disabilities in education sector and gave direction to admit the disabled into schools. But the teachers find it tough to deal with the disabled students. They don't know how to teach the speech or hearing impaired children, how to teach in Braille system. In remote areas it is very tough to send disabled children to school. If the teachers fail to understand them then they lose interest to go to school. So the teachers must be trained how to teach them.

We, the Manusher Jonno Foundation, are working with 120 partners. Many of our partners promote the corporate social responsibilities. After getting trained, now many women are working in the garments sector. The garments owners are satisfied with their work. Muktapani could be promoted in the market. It will create job opportunities for the disabled. Other organizations should come forward to support the disabled. Finally, I would like to say that it is not only a concern of the Social Welfare ministry, but we should engage other ministries in the development process of the disabled.

**Ranjit Kumar Biswas, Secretary, Ministry of Social Welfare:**

Ministry of Social Welfare has already taken some measures. We have introduced a development programme for the disabled. We started the project with allocation of 5 crore taka and in the ongoing budget we have spent 9 crore and 45 lakh taka. In the upcoming budget we have proposed 102 crore

taka for development programmes of the National Disability Foundation and Social Service Department. We have been providing some grant and loans to the disabled people. In the 2010-2011 fiscal year we have spent 47 lakh 5 thousand taka in giving loans and 89 lakh 45 thousand taka in grant. In the 2011-12 fiscal year we will spend 2 crore 50 lakh taka. In this fiscal year, we have spent 5 crore 82 lakh taka for the combined education projects of the disabled. We will spend 6 crore 64 lakh 77 thousand 820 taka in this project in the upcoming fiscal year. We provide 300 taka to each of the needy disabled. The number of beneficiaries is 2 lakh 86 thousand and expenditure in this project is 102 crore taka. In the 2011-12 we have proposed to allocate 10 crore taka more.

The ministry is working with enthusiasm and we are getting support from the apex of the government which is unmatched in Bangladesh up to now. We are trying to produce some dedicated people who will work wholeheartedly to provide support to the disabled persons.

Another point I want to touch is that why the disabled do not get 10% of the budget. They get services from overlapping sectors which we do not count. I think we should count the whole allocation.

**Enamul Haque Mostofa Shahid, MP, Honorable Minister, Ministry of Social Welfare, People's Republic of Bangladesh:**

**Md Abdul Halim Sardar, Secretary, National Grassroots Disability Organization**



I have budgets but I have no addresses of the concerned institutions who work on disability. I expect from you that you would give me realistic plans. We have to bring the organizations on a centralized platform. We are doing many things for the development of the disabled like creating disabled foundations, providing loans and grants, employment and so on. But still we have to go a long way. Prime Minister has given commitment of 17,000 crore taka for the disabled. So we have enough money. If we need more, the Prime Minister can allocate more funds beyond the budget. We have to plan effectively so that change in government will not affect mainstreaming programmes of the disabled. We need good direction.

We have allocated fund for the autistic children but there is no monitoring how the fund has been spent. So we have to monitor the programmes thoroughly.

**Mosharraf Hossain, Moderator:**

It is not a one-stop activity. We want to continue such programmes to make a comprehensive disability development programme. Thank you.



I would like to say that wherever I go for the field work in the remote area I always make it a point to discuss with the different representatives of the government. There is thinking about their interventions as well as what is going in their area. It is always a kind of sensitization. It is very encouraging to see that they are aware of, they are interested in and they feel that definitely there should be more interventions to ensure the rights and services for the persons with disabilities. But there is always limitation in the field of resources that they face. At the national level there is a need to ensure and to allocate more resources, so that more and more actions could be taken in the fields. I feel today's discussion is very important. Definitely it would be helpful to increase the resources in this sector.

**Gazi Mohammad Nurul Kabir, MD, Jatiyo Protibondhi Unnayan Foundation:**



It is tough to penetrate into the running budget but it would be an example for the future. The history of disability is as contemporary as the history of mankind. But disabled people are obstructed to progress smoothly as much as human civilization. For many centuries disabled peoples have been left behind. In the passage of time the disabled developed their potential talents. Now many disabled persons around the world

extra job facilities and to lessen the educational qualification for the disabled. We hope it will be implemented. The disabled are enjoying 10% to 100% extra allocations in many one-stop services.

Actually there is a progress in this sector since 1999. I hope we will talk about the 2012-13 budget from a better position. We are expecting for a complete survey and for effective laws for the disabled within the next economic year. Dr. Abul Barakat talked about the assistive device. But I think it could be comprehended after the complete assessment. We import one-time clinical wheel chair as assistive device but many promising companies in our country are producing disabled-friendly wheel chairs, far better than China, Indonesia and Vietnam. I think they should be promoted in the PPP. Then we can produce to meet our domestic needs. Many disabled persons work in these companies. The progress in this sector will create employment for them.

**Dr. Mustafa K. Mujeri, Director General, BIDS:**



Today our discussions are in the context of the budget. I think we have to consider the mainstreaming process from a wider context. According to the Conventions on The Rights of the Disabled, every state has to protect, ensure and promote the full and equal enjoyment of all human rights and fundamental freedom of all persons including the disabled. It is

being like any normal person. So, we have to make a disability-friendly policy and development model. Finally, we have to change our mentality towards disability.

**Ms. Yasmin Ahmed, Executive Director, NOVA Consultancy:**



I think we have to address the reasons behind disability. The rate of road accident is very high in Bangladesh. Every year twenty thousand people become disabled because of road accidents. I think we need to pay more attention in the employment and education of the disabled. It requires more economic allocations. They should be provided more SME facilities. Another important thing is their skill development which is very important for their access to job market. Government can assist them by providing IT training, mobile repairing training and so on. Jobs at call centres could be a good solution to the employment of disabled people because it does not require mobility. For these kinds of jobs they need to develop fluency both in English and Bengali.

In our country the disabled do not get the supporting allowance which is provided properly by the government because of corruption especially in the rural areas. In Bangladesh there is no disability insurance which is very popular in the developed world.

I think we can provide more job facilities to the