

# Inclusion Works

## Bangladesh Situational Analysis

### Version II - June 2020

The Inclusion Works programme is testing innovative ways to improve economic empowerment and inclusion for people with disabilities, enabling them to find employment and earn a living. The Inclusion Works programme is a part of the Inclusive Futures initiative.

The Institute of Development Studies (IDS) has prepared Situational Analyses (SITANs) which synthesise the most recent existing literature and evidence (drawing on government and non-government sources available online) about the country generally and on factors relating to persons with disabilities involvement in formal employment. For more information about how the situational analyses were conducted see page 32.

**This situational analysis addresses the question: “what is the current situation in relation to formal sector employment for persons with disabilities in Bangladesh?”.**

Inclusion Works operates in four countries: Bangladesh, Kenya, Nigeria and Uganda.

The SITAN can be used throughout the programme, by all those involved in it, to better understand the current context and available evidence. This will help lead to better informed projects which may be focussing on different actors and aspects of the topic (e.g. persons with disabilities, employers, government, organisations for people with disabilities, partnerships, policy) and help with situating the different activities within the wider country context.

Where possible, the SITANs also flag up gaps in evidence which the Inclusion Works programme may be interested in addressing. As living documents they will be updated and adapted to include newly published evidence and to reflect any new areas of interest in the programme as it develops.

The earliest version of the SITAN was dated June 2019 and reflected the context in each country before the programme is implemented, while the annual updated SITANs may begin to reflect what has occurred during the programme implementation phase. It can then support MEL efforts. The six programme outcome areas are flagged in the relevant sections of the SITAN.



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# Contents page

<b>1. SUMMARY OF KEY INFORMATION</b>	<b>3</b>
<b>2. COUNTRY OVERVIEW</b>	<b>10</b>
Disability prevalence	10
Disability and poverty	11
The employment sector	12
Attitudes towards disability and disability stigma	12
<b>3. PERSONS WITH DISABILITIES AND INCLUSIVE EMPLOYMENT</b>	<b>14</b>
Disability and livelihoods/work	14
Barriers to employment	18
Disability and education and training	19
<b>4. EMPLOYERS AND INCLUSIVE EMPLOYMENT</b>	<b>23</b>
Formal employment	24
Programmes to support employment	24
<b>5. GOVERNMENT AND NATIONAL POLICIES RELATING TO INCLUSIVE EMPLOYMENT</b>	<b>26</b>
<b>6. THE DISABILITY MOVEMENT AND INCLUSIVE EMPLOYMENT</b>	<b>31</b>
<b>7. PARTNERSHIPS FOR INCLUSIVE EMPLOYMENT</b>	<b>32</b>
<b>8. HOW THE SITANS WERE CONDUCTED</b>	<b>32</b>
<b>9. REFERENCES</b>	<b>34</b>

# 1. Summary of key information

## The country context

### **Poverty rates**

In 2014 Bangladesh had a poverty rate of 31.5%. By 2016, the poverty rate was 24.3%. Poverty is believed to have been falling as economic growth is rising.

### **Disability prevalence**

The official government figure for number of people in Bangladesh with a disability is 1.8 million. Other disability prevalence estimates vary dramatically. The census from 2011 reported disability prevalence to be 1.4% (1.3% female, 1.5% male). The Global Disability Report found disability prevalence to be 31.9%. A Household Income and Expenditure Survey (2010), which used the Washington Group questions, found the disability prevalence rate to be 9.07%. Disability is more prevalent in rural areas compared to urban areas.

### **Disability and poverty**

Persons with disability are in general poorer below across all sectors. A four percentage point gap in poverty rates exists between persons with disability (28%) and persons without disability (24%).

### **Stigma**

Despite the existence of the laws and policies relevant to disability, discrimination, exclusion and neglect of persons with disabilities continues in Bangladesh. The main barriers to employment for persons with disability in Bangladesh are found to be prejudice and ignorance. Persons with disability are often left out of development planning due to inadequate understanding and awareness among the general people.

Women with disabilities appear to be especially marginalised. Disability is not however, the primary disadvantage for women. Rather, their disability becomes an additional burden in their already marginalized gender position. Other relevant factors include ethnicity, social class and race.

Traditional gender roles and common perceptions about disabilities have a negative impact on women with disabilities in Bangladesh. Some of this discrimination is rooted in the false belief that women with disability were 'cursed' or had committed an offence against God. Such exclusion may have an impact on mental health, resulting in depression.

In May 2019, the Committee on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities requested Bangladesh delivers information on measures undertaken to combat negative stereotypes relating to disabilities.

### **Types of jobs available and main/growing sectors of employment**

Only 13% of Bangladesh's labour market operates in the formal sector, while 87% operates in the informal economy. 10% of women are engaged in formal sector employment and 14% for men. 8.3% of formal employment is in rural areas and 26% in urban zones. Employment in agriculture has dropped from 60% in 1991 to 48% in 2010. The industry sector has increased from 13% to 18% while the service sector from 16% to 35%. 54.4 million workers were employed in 2010, with over 70% of them being male. The gender gap in the agricultural sector is relatively low with women representing 41% of the workers.

### **Main businesses**

The agricultural sector remains the largest sector with 25.7 million workers. Trade, restaurants and hotels sector involves 8.4 million workers and manufacturing involves 6.7 million workers.

### **COVID-19**

The COVID-19 crisis has hit the global textiles, clothing, leather, and footwear industry hard as sales and production have fallen. This has resulted in a lost revenue of around US\$3 billion for Bangladesh, with over 2 million workers affected. Many workers will face unemployment as less than 20% of firms can continue to pay wages. Over a million workers have been dismissed or furloughed with 72.4% being sent home without pay.

## **Persons with disabilities and inclusive employment**

### **Disability and livelihoods/work**

Persons with disabilities are less likely to be involved in any economic activity compared to people without disabilities. If a disability is acquired, the vast majority of people have to leave employment. Adults with disabilities have a higher unemployment rate (1.9%) than adults without disabilities (1.5%). Females present higher unemployment rates than males (4% and 4.8% for women without and with disability respectively, compared to 1.3% and 1.7% for men without and with disability respectively).

64% of youths with disabilities are neither in education nor in employment, compared to 43% of youths without disabilities. Female youth with disabilities aged 15–24 in Bangladesh face high rates of economic and social exclusion compared to other low income contexts. Other data suggests that 65.30% of persons with a disability were non-employed, compared to 46.37% for persons with no disability. A different study reported that 40% of women with disabilities had no paid work. Bangladeshi society in general prefers males to participate in the workforce. Women with disabilities are not regarded as having an earning capacity and are usually expected to stay within the home. Many women with disabilities who are engaged in paid employment are working for organisations for people with disabilities.

One study reported that nearly 80% of persons with disability reported that disability had a negative consequence on their employment. 27.5% of this group reported not earning as much as people who did not have a disability. 26% were forced to change their employment either voluntarily or because they had lost their previous employment. A further 26% had been unemployed (either dismissed or had not been able to continue their work).

Employees with disabilities may not get equal rights and privileges compared to their colleagues without any disability. Physical accessibility to the workplaces and also the indoor facilities are important for effective inclusion of persons with disabilities into employment and ensuring equal rights. 72% of people reported that workers with disabilities tend to get paid less than others. This is particularly true for those employed in manual jobs. Fear of discrimination may result in some people with disabilities not applying for work in the first place.

In 2002, of the persons with disabilities who are employed, only 5% are employed in government agencies, 17% in non-government organisations, and the rest are in self-employed activities. Other data suggests that 69% of people with disabilities were found to beg. This figure was slightly higher for females (38%) compared to males (31%). A further 8% of persons with disabilities were found to work in day labour, 9% were involved in business, 5% were students, and 6% were not involved in any kind of work.

The main barriers to employment of persons with disabilities seem to be prejudice and ignorance. Despite quotas, employment rates in the public sector are low. Orphans are often preferentially chosen to fill quota posts over persons with disabilities. In addition, few private companies employ people with disabilities.

In general, people in Bangladesh have little knowledge about barriers to employment for persons with disabilities. Providing access to training, micro-credit programmes, rehabilitation services, and the establishment of an effective quota system for persons with disabilities to be employed in the public sector are suggestions to improve the situation.

One study considered how disability reduces economic output in Bangladesh by reducing or eliminating the economic contribution of people with disabilities, their family members, relatives and close friends. Costs due to lack of economic productivity, lost education opportunities, and costs associated with carers result in US\$1.18 billion per annum being lost each year – equivalent to 74% of Bangladesh's Gross Domestic Product. Although most of the people with disability have some forms of special skills or knowledge, the available employment opportunities for them are limited. An economic model from 2014 estimated that over 700,000 people with disabilities were employed, and nearly 2 million people who otherwise would have been employed are not employed due to their disability. The impact of this underemployment on the Bangladeshi economy is estimated to be US\$891 million.

A lack of a livelihood pathways is a common problem for persons with disabilities. Urban and rural areas offer very different livelihood opportunities. Industrialised urban areas offer better job prospects than rural areas, and it is harder to make a living begging in rural areas than in towns and cities. The ability to earn a livelihood may bring with it positive regard and greater acceptance from family and community. However, finding a job in such a populous country as Bangladesh is difficult for everyone, but especially so for persons with disabilities and older people. Even for educated persons with disabilities, finding a job is hard. On occasion, they are asked to pay bribes. Self-employment can be an alternative but access to affordable credit to start businesses is difficult for persons with disabilities and older people. Banks and non-government organisations offer loans, but the sums involved can be insufficient. Sometimes, loans bring with them repayment problems or families exploit loan systems for their own benefits.

### ***Disability and education and training***

Many people with disabilities do not get an adequate education. This is due to many reasons including the school environment being inaccessible, a lack of assistive devices, a lack of personal assistance or adequate staff training, absence of accessible transportation, weak or non-existent policies, negative attitudes and an entrenched gender imbalance within education.

The proportion of children without disabilities who have completed primary or secondary education as well as university is more than twice that of children with disabilities. In Bangladesh there are an estimated 1.6 million school aged children who suffer from disability, yet only about 20,000 of these go to school. Dropout rates are disproportionately high among children with disability. Yet the majority of those who complete secondary school also complete tertiary education. Adolescents in Bangladesh with disabilities are 40% less likely to have completed primary school. Persons with disability have lower literacy rates and poorer performance by education level compared to the rest of the population. The participation rate in education or training is 13% for youths with disabilities compared to 27% of youth without disabilities. No gap is observed for adults (0.5% for adults with disabilities compared to 0.3% of adults without disabilities). 53% of Bangladeshis without a disability are literate, compared to 28% for those with disabilities. The majority of children with disabilities who access education are those with mild to

moderate physical impairments. One study suggests that excluding children with disabilities from education results in lower earnings as adults and costs the economy about US\$26 million annually in terms of lost productivity. A stipend programme to support students with disabilities is available through the Department of Social Services, but its effectiveness is unknown.

A study indicated that there was a correlation between household income and the enrolment of children with disabilities, leading the researchers to conclude that when resources are tight, parents prioritise the schooling of children without disabilities.

The UN Convention on the Rights of People with Disabilities (CRPD) Monitoring Report lists 62 schools for children with intellectual impairments, 11 schools (all urban) for children with autism, 5 schools for children with visual impairments and 5 schools for children with hearing and/or speech impairments. In 2018 the government set up twelve educational facilities for people with disabilities and an integrated education programme for children with disabilities was established. Many non-government organisations have created schools or school places for children with disabilities, some of which the government funds.

The Primary Education Development Program (PEDP) is a government programme which includes children with disabilities (since its second phase) through an inclusive education approach. The third phase will include a 2% enrolment quota for children with disabilities. Efforts are also being made to recruit teachers with disabilities. The government is planning to train over 50,000 teachers to cater to the needs of children with disability, as well as renovating or constructing 10,000 accessible schools. Some challenges remain regarding access to washrooms.

In terms of higher education, some initiatives exist to accommodate students into Dhaka University. A broader understanding of the higher education sector is needed.

In May 2019, the Committee on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities requested information relating to measures inclusive education, the availability of accessible materials, the accessibility of learning environments, the provision of support, and the training of education personnel on quality inclusive education.

The alternative report on the CRPD questions the lack of data on disability inclusive education. It criticises infrastructure, staff skills, materials, learning environment and education policy. The Primary Education (Compulsory) Act 1990 is found to have loopholes which may result in children with disabilities being excluded.

## **Employers and inclusive employment**

### ***Programmes to support employment***

There are limited programmes to support employment in Bangladesh for persons with disabilities. The TVET Reform Project involved the government and the ILO and focused on removing policy-related barriers as well as physical barriers to skills training. It was funded by the EU and ran from 2007 to 2015. One of its objectives was to make TVET accessible to all, including persons with disabilities.

The public sector quota, which requires 10% of the workforce to have a disability, is not well implemented. In 2002 there were nearly 100 credit and employment schemes for persons with disability in Bangladesh. A number of centres exist to assist persons with disability access non-formal income generation, but their effectiveness is not clear.

Bangladesh's Seventh Five Year Plan (2016 – 2020) included delivering an inclusive skills training programme that will upskill 250,000 people in the first phase (with over 70% coming from disadvantaged groups including people with disabilities). It will engage public training institutions, ministries, industry associations, and foundations to provide the training. Eventually 1.5 million people will be trained, 30 Centres of Excellence will be developed, and 15 Industry Skill Councils strengthened through public-private partnerships. The National Skill Development Authority will coordinate efforts and the National Human Resources Development Fund will manage the finances.

The Sheikh Fazilatunnessa Training Center on the outskirts of Dhaka City, which offers training for the made garment industry, is gradually becoming more disability inclusive. There are other examples of business groups who now employ thousands of people with disabilities, inspiring other businesses to follow suit. Jatio Protibondhi Unnayan Foundation (JPUF) organises disability development fairs and disability job fairs. The ICT Division of the Bangladesh Computer Council and a non-government organisation are working together to offer ICT training opportunities to youths with disabilities. The Association of Cyber Cafe Owners have also agreed to install screen reading software on their computers, and they are also providing jobs. The Bangladesh Road Transport Corporation has recently launched a scheme to employ persons with disability in its central workshop. A 5% quota has been created by the Technical Education Board under the Ministry of Education to encourage enrolment in technical schools and colleges. The Keya Group employs thousands of people with disabilities.

## **Government and national policies relating to inclusive employment**

### ***Relevant disability legislation***

Bangladesh signed and ratified the CRPD in 2007. The implementation of the CRPD has to date lagged far behind policy commitments. Since 2007, Bangladesh has introduced legislation and policies to nationalise the CRPD commitments. These include the Children Policy, adopted in 2011; a new Children Act, passed in June 2013; and the Rights and Protection of Persons with Disabilities Act 2013. In addition, The Constitution of the People's Republic of Bangladesh guarantees basic rights of every citizen and prohibits any form of discrimination including due to disability. A national committee has been established as per the Act to oversee and coordinate activities regarding persons/people with disabilities (PWD)'s rights and protection.

In 2018 the initial State Party's Report was submitted by Bangladesh under article 35 of the UNCRPD. It had been due in 2010 but was received in April 2017. It detailed how Bangladesh first ratified the CRPD, and then ensued the process for attuning its laws and policies. It states that the disability legislation has been enacted in Bangladesh following the principles, spirit and content of the CRPD, but that national policies and action plans are yet to be attuned. Only policies dated after 2008 start to address the needs of people with disabilities. The Report details how both the Rights of Persons with Disabilities Act (2013) and the Bangladeshi Constitution are relevant to disability inclusion and employment in line with the CRPD.

However, in May 2019, the Committee on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities published a list of issues in relation to the initial CRPD report of Bangladesh. The Committee requested further information on the measures to incorporate the CRPD into domestic law or make it automatically part of the Constitution. They also questioned how the national action plan for persons with disabilities adopted in January 2019 will be amended to include time-bound targets and a functioning monitoring and evaluation framework.

In February 2019, an alternative report on the status of implementation of the CRPD in Bangladesh was published by a group of stakeholders working for the rights of People with Disabilities. It details concerns about the Rights and Protection of Persons with Disabilities Act (2013) as it is unclear whether the Act prevails over other laws that affect persons with disabilities. It also suggests that the Act does not address all the articles of the CRPD in separate sections, as well as pointing out the lack of an efficient monitoring mechanism in place to oversee the Act's implementation. The shadow report also questions the consultative process in developing plans, programmes, policies and legal frameworks. It concludes that harmonisation between laws and policies and the CRPD is taking place but is not acceptable yet. In addition, the policies the government has aligned with CRPD remain weak in implementation.

In December 2019 in response to the Committee on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities, the government offered reassurance that the Disability Act details the right to employment of people with disabilities and prohibits discrimination on the basis of disability. However, a collaborative response by organisations for people with disabilities, non-government organisations and international non-government organisations has stated that the government has not incorporated the CRPD into domestic law. They argue that activities are still mostly being driven by a charity-based approach. In general, there has been a lack of harmonisation of mainstream laws and policies with the UNCRPD. The Disability Act is criticised for failing to acknowledge that women with disabilities are particularly marginalised.

### ***Employment legislation***

National policies regarding disability issues contain policies to promote employment of persons with disabilities. As noted above, the government of Bangladesh reserves 10% quota for orphans and persons with disabilities for all public sector jobs, which in practice is not fully followed though. The National Skill Development Policy 2011 includes improving access to skills development for people with disabilities.

The government response to the UN Committee on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities detailed how a long-term Plan of Action (2018–2025) is under implementation. In addition, the government confirmed that the Disability Act sets positive steps to ensure people with disabilities have employment opportunities, are not discriminated against, and have priority access to banking and commercial services relating to work. However, a response from organisations for people with disabilities, non-government organisations and international non-government organisations has challenged progress in this area, arguing that no database has been developed to track the proportion of the persons with disabilities who are employed in the public and private sectors. They also argue that the Disabilities Act lacks enforcement measures to remedy discrimination in employment. Legislation fails to recognise that persons with psychosocial or intellectual disabilities may be particularly disadvantaged with regards to employment.

## **The disability movement and inclusive employment**

The National Forum of Organisations Working with the Disabled (NFOWD), National Grassroots and Disabilities Organisation (NGDO) and The National Council of Disabled Women (NCDW) are some of main organisations in the disability movement. NFOWD partners with Access Bangladesh Foundation on a programme that promotes employment and decent work for persons with disabilities. The information on the disability movement's involvement with developing inclusive employment in Bangladesh was found to be limited.



## **Partnerships for inclusive employment**

As noted already, there are limited partnerships to support employment in Bangladesh for persons with disabilities. Employment policies to support persons with disabilities are rare. A public sector quota states that 10% of the workforce must be made up of persons with disabilities, but this is not well implemented. There is some government support for vocational rehabilitation centres but it is not clear how effective vocational training is with regards to getting people into work. There are nearly 100 credit and employment schemes for persons with disability in Bangladesh, with some micro-credit and non-formal income generating schemes existing. The TVET Reform Project aimed to reduce poverty by improving the quality of vocational educational and training and to make TVET more accessible to various groups, including persons with disabilities. The project concentrated on removing policy-related barriers as well as physical barriers. Bangladesh's Seventh Five Year Plan details skills training for disadvantaged groups including people with disabilities.

# Main report

## 2. Country overview

In 2018 Bangladesh had a population of 161 million people, of which half were male and half were female (World Bank 2020). In 2019, its income per capita was US\$1,905.7 and the poverty rate was 24.3% in 2016 (UNDP 2020). According to the Asian Development Bank, the population living below the national poverty line in Bangladesh is falling, with figures dropping from 24.3% in 2016 to 21.8% in 2018 (ADB 2020). Bangladesh was ranked 135 on the Human Development Index 2019, which showed an improvement of one ranking place since 2017 (UNDP 2020)<sup>1</sup>.

Economic growth (the rate of change of real GDP) in 2018 was 7.86%. Between 1961 and 2018 the average economic growth was 4.27%. Bangladesh's labour force in 2019 was 70 million people. The labour force participation rate was 36.26% for women and 81.37% for men in 2019. The unemployment rate in 2019 was 6.2% for females and 3.31% for males. Between 1991 and 2019 the average unemployment rate for Bangladesh was 3.61 % (Global Economy 2020).

### Disability prevalence

In May 2019, the UN Committee on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities requested Bangladesh indicate measures envisaged to collect better data on persons with disabilities (UN 2019). In response, the Government of Bangladesh explained how the number of people with disabilities are now detailed on the Government's Disability Information System website<sup>2</sup> (UN 2020). According to DIS (2020), 1,810,821 Bangladeshi's have a disability (1,108,859 men, 699,473 women, and 2,489 who are described as third gender).

However, other estimates of disability prevalence in Bangladesh indicates that there is much room for confusion. The reliability and comparability of data is questionable (Disability Alliance on SDGs 2017). The census from 2011 in Bangladesh reported disability prevalence to be 1.4% (1.3% female, 1.5% male) (Disability Alliance on SDGs 2017). A Household Income and Expenditure Survey was undertaken in 2010 by the Bangladesh Bureau of Statistics (BBS), which included the Washington Group questions. It found that the disability prevalence rate was 9.07%. However this figure may rise in years to come as the number of children with cerebral palsy and intellectual disabilities is thought to be rising (Disability Alliance on SDGs 2019). A study by Tareque, Begum and Saito (2014) reported that in 2010, the disability prevalence was 8.83% for males and 10.76% for females. Based on World Health Survey Data (2002–2004), the Global Disability Report found disability prevalence in Bangladesh to be 31.9% (WHO 2011).

According to a health system review by WHO (2015) disability was not previously included in any routine data collection or surveillance system in the health sector, but it was included in national censuses in 1982, 1986 and 1991. Reported prevalence rates are far below international and national estimates. Despite progress in the health sector made in recent years, a decline in the incidence of disability is unlikely. Disabilities due to natural circumstances and road accidents imply that the prevalence of people with disability will continue to rise, even though their nature

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<sup>1</sup> <http://hdr.undp.org/en/content/2019-human-development-index-ranking>

<sup>2</sup> <https://www.dis.gov.bd/>

and distribution may change. It is estimated that 6% of people living in rural areas have a disability in comparison to 4% of those living in urban areas (Ali 2014).

According to the alternative CRPD report from 2019, around 24 million people, out of 160 million, have disabilities in Bangladesh. Reported data on disability rights is based on sample surveys or micro-level initiatives generally undertaken by non-government organisations in their individual working areas. The Bangladesh Bureau of Statistics (BBS) and the Bangladesh Institute of Development Studies have yet to conduct any comprehensive mapping of persons with disabilities in Bangladesh (CRPD Alternative Report Platform 2019).

The Ministry of Social Welfare has been conducting the Disability Detection Survey (DDS) since 2013. In 2016, 0.94% of Bangladeshis were identified by doctors as having disabilities. The Education Household Survey from 2014 suggests 1.33%. The DDS is criticised for covering a very small area and having errors regarding identification. It failed to reach people in slums, geographically remote areas, the Chittagong Hill Tracts, and even people in middle and high income groups in Dhaka. Primary schools are entrusted with the responsibility of identifying children with disabilities within respective catchments areas, but there is no effective system in place for such identification, nor are identification questionnaire templates followed up regularly. Schools have no significant initiatives for identifying children with disabilities. The doctors and staff in disability intervention centres are not well trained on appropriate identification of disabilities. It is believed that a large number of persons with disabilities are assigned to the wrong category of disability (CRPD Alternative Report Platform 2019).

To address the above shortcomings, through the CRPD Alternative Report, it is recommended that the DDS is enhanced, and incorporates a process of identification that is aligned with internationally accepted norms. In addition the capacity of 103 disability intervention centres, community clinics, and Upazila and district hospitals must be enhanced to identify persons with disabilities. Organisations for people with disabilities must be engaged with on a technical level to inform government disability rights initiatives. Relevant information must be disseminated in an accessible way (CRPD Alternative Report Platform 2019).

## **Disability and poverty**

Disability and poverty are inter-linked and reinforce each other (Sultana 2010). According to a report focusing on inclusivity in Bangladesh by CPD (2017), persons with disability perform below average across sectors. The wealth of households with a household head who is disabled is lower in all benchmarks except in rural average. Leonard Cheshire (2018) reported a 4% gap in poverty rates, with a 28% and 24% poverty rate is observed for people with and without disabilities respectively. A study based on a large and nationally representative dataset of Bangladesh found a strong link between parents' education and income level increase and children with disabilities' participation in school. Programmes that reduce poverty in a disability inclusive way are likely to have a positive impact on access to education and other sectors (Lamichhane & Kawakatsu 2015).

Despite efforts of the Department of Social Services (DSS) to gather information on persons with disabilities in Bangladesh, evidence that shows the relationship between poverty and disabilities in Bangladesh remains limited. Data that does exist suggests that for people without disabilities aged 14 years and older, 44% had a means of income generation, compared to 36.07% for people with mild disabilities, and only 24.84% for people with moderate to severe disabilities. This suggests that people with disabilities in Bangladesh are less likely to have an income. The Bangladesh government has a large safety-net programme, with 143 schemes and a budget of

BDT 542 billion in the 2017-18 fiscal year. However, only 1.75% of the entire safety-net budget is ringfenced for persons with disabilities, meaning many will remain in poverty (Disability Alliance on SDGs 2019).

## **The employment sector**

In 2010, agriculture had the majority share of the employment sector in Bangladesh with 48%. This was followed by manufacturing (12%), transport, storage and communication (7.4%), public administration, education and health (5.3%) and construction (4.8%) among others. Employment in the agriculture sector has demonstrated changes - a drop from 60% in 1991 to 48% in 2010. In contrast, the industry sector increased from 13% to 18% and the service sector from 16% to 35%, respectively, (LO/FTF Council 2016).

According to LO/FTF Council (2016) the majority (over 50%) of those in employment in Bangladesh are own-account workers<sup>3</sup>. Only 13% of workers operate in the formal employment sector while 87% are in the informal economy. 10% of women were engaged in formal sector employment compared to 14% for men. 8.3% of formal employment was in rural areas and 26% in urban zones. Wages and other labour regulations are more effectively applied in the formal sector, yet in Bangladesh it remains a narrow aspect of the labour force (LO/FTF Council 2016).

As many as 54.4 million workers were employed in 2010 - a figure which is dominated by men in all sectors at a total of 70%. Employment in the agricultural sector remains the largest sector which covers 25.7 million workers. The next dominating sectors are the trade, restaurants and hotels sector of 8.4 million workers (15% of the total employment) followed by the manufacturing sector by 6.7 million workers (12%). The sector with the lowest employment gender gap is in the 'other sector' and the agricultural sector where women present 46% and 41% of the workers, respectively (LO/FTF Council 2016).

## **COVID-19**

The short-term impact of the COVID-19 crisis has been reflected in a sharp drop in sales for the global textiles, clothing, leather and footwear industry, as government restrictions have closed shops and customers stay at home. Falling sales have had an impact on production. The Bangladesh Garment Manufacturers and Exporters Association (BGMEA) has reported a series of order cancellations, even for garments already in production or completed, which has caused the majority of affected factories to shut down operations. BGMEA estimates that this amounts to lost revenue of around US\$3 billion and affects some 2.17 million workers. Many workers will face unemployment as production declines steeply. It is estimated that less than 20% of firms are able to continue paying staff wages. Over a million workers have already been dismissed or furloughed. According to a survey of employers in Bangladesh 72.4% of furloughed workers have been sent home without pay, and 80.4% of dismissed workers have not received severance pay (ILO 2020).

## **Attitudes towards disability and disability stigma**

Persons with disability are often subjected to discrimination and negative attitudes in Bangladesh, where they live in an unfriendly and hostile environment. They encounter non-

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<sup>3</sup> Own-account workers are defined by the ILO as those who hold self-employment jobs and do not engage 'employees' on a continuous basis

cooperation, ill treatment, neglect and hostility at the family, community, society and government levels (Sultana 2010). A study that examined the impact of disability on the quality of life of people with disability in rural Bangladesh reported that more than half of people with disabilities were looked at negatively by society. Women and girl children with disabilities experienced more negative attitudes than their male counterparts (Hosain, Atkinson & Underwood 2002). Discrimination, exclusion and neglect of persons with disability and their household are still prevalent, as the laws (including the Disabled Persons Protection and Rights Act 2013) are not being sufficiently enforced (GED 2015).

Research by Quinn et al (2016) to document the experiences of 15 women with disabilities in Bangladesh found that they had been subject to oppression due to beliefs regarding traditional gender roles and the common perception that women with disabilities do not need to be educated. Discrimination from their local community was reported by the majority of the women. All of them attributed this to a poor understanding of disability, leading to misconceptions that women with disability were 'cursed' or had committed an offence against God. This form of exclusion was found to impact on their mental health significantly, resulting in reports of depression. Drawing on research by Hosain, Atkinson and Underwood (2002), Kandasamy, Soldatic and Samararatne (2017) explain that in Bangladesh, disability is not the primary disadvantage for women in rural areas, rather, their disability becomes an additional burden in their already marginalised gender position. Ethnicity, social class and race become highly contingent factors that shape women's experience of living with a disability in contexts like Bangladesh.

Examining the views of 2,400 participants, Titumir and Hossain (2005) reported that 55% of respondents accept persons with disability well and 20% give extra privilege to them. Most of the participants would be comfortable having friendships with people with disabilities but would not choose to marry someone with a disability. 63% of respondents did not believe that persons with disabilities are a burden to the family. Most of the people argued that persons with disabilities should get extra assistance in society including in the transport, health, and education sectors.

Titumir and Hossain (2005) state that many people in the Bangladesh view disability as a curse and a cause of embarrassment to the family. In Bangladesh, there have been only a few systemic interventions to raise awareness of persons with disabilities at the community level. As already noted, women with disabilities are particularly vulnerable to social discrimination and neglect. Prejudice and ignorance are ranked as among the main barriers to employment for persons with disability in Bangladesh (Danish Bilharziasis Laboratory 2004).

Persons with disability are usually left out of development due to inadequate understanding and awareness among the general people and also the people who design and manage developmental programmes. People are often not aware of the extreme difficulties faced by persons with disabilities and most do not have access to gain the skills and knowledge that would enable them to include persons with disability and their families in development programmes. The neglect that results from this lack of knowledge reinforces and multiplies the effects of the negative attitudes that already exist within families and communities. Often it is not the impairment rather the attitudinal and environmental factors that a person with disability encounters in everyday life that cause his or her exclusion from society (CAMPE 2011).

With regards to children with disabilities in Bangladesh, discrimination in the family, the community and the workplace is at the core of most rights violations. The belief that disability is a curse and a punishment for sinful behaviour permeates all levels of society and affects access to adequate care, health services, education and participation. While progress is slow, changes

have been noted due to policy modifications and social mobilisation. For children with disabilities this includes increased access to school and to opportunities for skills development and employment. Now that they are seen as contributors rather than burdens, their status in the family and the community is improving (UNICEF 2014).

In May 2019, the Committee on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities requested Bangladesh delivers information on measures undertaken to combat stereotypes, prejudices and harmful practices relating to persons with disabilities in all areas of life, including discrimination against persons with disabilities belonging to minority communities and indigenous peoples and persons affected by leprosy (UN 2019).

### 3. Persons with disabilities and inclusive employment

**Outcome 2: Women and men with disabilities have enhanced skills to access formal employment (as a result of programme interventions)**

**Outcome 6: Change in knowledge, attitude and behaviours from stakeholders involved in programme interventions that promotes and enables inclusion of women and men with disabilities in formal employment - from the perspective of persons with disabilities.**

#### Disability and livelihoods/work

In Bangladesh persons with disabilities are less likely to be involved in any economic activity than people without a disability. The vast majority of people who acquire a disability have to leave employment (GED 2015). With regards to the unemployment rate, adults with disabilities have a higher rate (1.9%) than adults without disabilities (1.5%). Females (4% and 4.8% for women without and with disability respectively) present higher rates than males (1.3% and 1.7% for men without and with disability respectively), regardless of disability status. 64% of youths with disabilities are neither in education nor in employment, compared to 43% of youths without disabilities (Leonard Cheshire 2018).

A study on the impact of disability on quality of life of people with disabilities in rural Bangladesh found that nearly 80% of participants reported that disability had some negative consequence on their employment. Nearly 30% of people with disabilities who were employed did not feel that they could earn as much as people without disabilities did. 26% of participants were forced to change their employment either voluntarily or because they had lost their previous employment. Another 26% had been unemployed (either dismissed or had not been able to work) (Hosain, Atkinson & Underwood 2002).

According to Titumir and Hossain (2005), the number of employed persons in Bangladesh with disabilities is assumed to be less than 1%. Mitra, Posarac and Vick (2013) found that 65.30% of persons with a disability were non-employed, compared to 46.37% for persons without a disability. NGDO et al (2015) reported that in Bangladesh 72% of respondents in a survey reported that workers with disabilities tend to get paid less than others, especially in manual jobs. Some people with disabilities reported not applying for work as they felt they would be rejected because of their disability (Huq et al 2013).

Many women engaged in paid work are employed by the not for profit sector, such as the Centre for the Rehabilitation of the Paralysed (CRP). Gender specific, local disability support is shown to facilitate employment and protect women from discrimination in the work force. Women also reported that the environmental accessibility and inclusive community attitudes contributed to their success at work and social life, as well as to improved mental and physical health (Quinn et al 2016).

A study into the livelihood patterns of persons with disabilities by Hossain (2014) included 65 participants (35 male, 30 female) from Dhaka. 69% of participants had a physical disability, 25% had a visual disability and 6% had a speech disability. 69% of participants were found to be involved in begging (38% female, 31% male). 8% of respondents worked as a day labourer, 9% were involved in business, 5% were students, and 6% were not involved in any kind of work. Most of the respondents (47.69%) in the study work 4 to 7 hours in a day and among them 26.15% were female and 21.54% were male. In addition, 30.77% respondents work 8 to 11 hours and 13.85% work 12-15 hours in a day.

A study by Ali (2014) that analysed the economic costs of disability in Bangladesh found that disability reduces economic output by reducing or eliminating the economic contribution of the members with disabilities, their family members, relatives and close friends. The cost components of 1) costs due to lack of access to employment; 2) costs due to children with disabilities losing out on school; 3) costs due to adults helping people with disabilities; and 4) costs due to children helping a family member with disabilities, were taken into consideration in the research. The cumulative cost of the four components is approximately US\$1.18 billion per annum which is about 1.74% of Bangladesh's GDP.

Although most of the people with disability have some forms of special skills or knowledge, the available employment opportunities for them are limited. In 2002, of the persons with disabilities who are employed, only 5% are employed in government agencies, 17% in non-government organisations, and the rest are in self-employed activities. In addition, in most cases, employees with disabilities do not get equal rights and privileges as their colleagues without any disability. Physical accessibility to the workplaces and also the indoor facilities are important for effective inclusion of persons with disabilities into employment and ensuring equal rights (Ali 2014).

According to Ali (2014), the lack of access to employment for people with disabilities costs US\$891 million per annum in Bangladesh. The model estimates that 736,000 people with disabilities are employed. Conversely, 1.9 million people who otherwise would have been employed are not employed due to their disability. If 1.9 million people lose out on an estimated 252 days of work a year each, then the impact on Bangladesh is US\$891 million.

Research undertaken by Voices of the Marginalised (VOTM) (2015) aimed to understand better the experiences of social, political and economic exclusion of persons with disabilities and older people in Bangladesh from their own perspectives. Community peer researchers collected 70 stories, of which 37 were systematically analysed. The remainder were drawn upon by the researchers to validate their analysis. It found that the lack of a livelihood was an issue that appeared in nearly all the stories collected. Finding a job in such a populous country as Bangladesh is difficult for everyone, but especially so for persons with disabilities and older people. There is a 10% public sector jobs quota for orphans and persons with disabilities, but orphans are often preferentially chosen to fill these posts over persons with disabilities. Even for educated persons with disabilities, finding a job is hard. On occasion, they are asked to pay bribes. Self-employment can be an alternative but access to affordable credit to start businesses is difficult for persons with disabilities and older people. Banks and non-government

organisations offer loans, but the sums involved can be insufficient. Sometimes, loans bring with them repayment problems or families exploit loan systems for their own benefits. Many persons with disabilities are unaware of disability allowances. These are, in any case, limited in number. Corruption also surrounds their distribution. For example, people have to pay to obtain the application forms for them. On occasion, people bribe officials to receive these allowances when they are working. This is also the case for older people, who cannot get jobs and often do not have a pension. The list of older people to whom pensions are distributed is out of date. For those who do receive a pension, the amount is insufficient to live on. In addition, older people are often not eligible for loans to start their own businesses.

Begging is often the only way to obtain food to survive for persons with disability and the elderly. This is especially so if they have no education or no family to support them. Urban and rural areas offer very different livelihood opportunities. Industrialised urban areas offer better job prospects than rural areas, and it is harder to make a living begging in rural areas than in towns and cities. People who live alone in rural areas often ask their neighbours for money because begging alone does not bring in enough. The lack of support for older people in rural areas who can no longer farm as a result of ageing is also an issue. No support is available for them. The ability to earn a livelihood, however, brings with it positive regard and greater acceptance from family and community. Almost all the positive stories of persons with disabilities and older people who were able to stop begging involved some sort of small shop (VOTM 2015).

A study focusing on 162 persons with disability in Bangladesh reported that 69 males from the group were employed. 55 of them (79.7%) reported that disability had a negative consequence on their employment. 19 of them (27.5%) reported not earning as much as people who did not have a disability. 18 people (26%) were forced to change their employment either voluntarily or because they had lost their previous employment. A further 18 of them (26%) had been unemployed (either dismissed or had not been able to continue their work) (Hosain, Atkinson & Underwood 2002).

The economic costs of excluding people with disabilities from the labour force are an estimated US\$891 million a year in Bangladesh (World Bank, 2008).

UN Women (2018) reported that in Bangladesh female youth with disabilities aged 15–24, face high rates of economic and social exclusion compared to other low income contexts.

Access Bangladesh Foundation (2019) has a number of programmes focusing on livelihoods and work for persons with disabilities. These include: 1) PRO-poor Growth of Rural Enterprises through Sustainable Skills-development (PROGRESS) which is funded by BRAC and the EC and supports inclusive growth in the Light Engineering Sector (LES); 2) The Hawkers with Disabilities Development Project, which encourages street hawkers with disabilities to increase their existing earning capacity and living standard by shifting their profession from begging to small business development.

In May 2019, the Committee on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities requested Bangladesh to indicate the proportion of persons with disabilities who are employed in the public and private sectors, and state the measures taken to: (a) Promote the employment of persons with disabilities, especially young persons and women with disabilities, in the open labour market in the private sector, and to ensure equal pay for work of equal value for persons with disabilities; (b) Prevent and address harassment and discrimination against persons with disabilities in the area of employment, especially against those belonging to minorities and persons affected by leprosy; (c) Promote appropriate measures, including affirmative action programmes, for the



employment of persons with disabilities in the open labour market, including for persons with psychosocial or intellectual disabilities, and provide training to employers on the rights of persons with disabilities and reasonable accommodation (UN 2019).

The alternative report on the status of implementation of the CRPD reported that the situation with regards to persons with disabilities and inclusive employment is not acceptable. Employees with disabilities commonly face bullying, harassment and misbehaviour at work and tend to get paid less than others, particularly in manual or field based jobs. Job quotas for persons with disabilities are not working. Most work places continue to be inaccessible to persons with disabilities. Workers who become disabled due to workplace injuries are rarely rehabilitated or provided training adapted to their needs. The compensation package offered under the Labour Act 2006 for workplace injuries is inadequate to cover the actual medical or maintenance costs of dependents. Entrepreneurship by persons with disabilities is stifled due to discriminatory finance policies and low uptake of loans where they are available. Grants for persons with disabilities are insufficient and irregular (CRPD Alternative Report Platform 2019).

In order to be CRPD compliant, the alternative report recommends that the Labour Act (2006) is amended to ensure consistency with the Disabled Persons Protection and Rights Act (2013). In addition, provisions are needed to set out the requirement for an effective quota system. Legal consequences for discrimination must be clarified and the currently inadequate compensation package increased. Current rules that allow for discrimination related to employment of persons with disabilities in the public sector and judiciary must be changed. It is recommended that workplace environments are tailored to the needs of individual persons with disabilities. Staff orientation and training on disability issues in the workplace should be provided to ensure empathy and sensitivity towards colleagues with disabilities (CRPD Alternative Report Platform 2019).

To increase employment opportunities for people with disabilities in general, the alternative report on the status of implementation of the CRPD recommends establishing a monitoring mechanism engaging civil society to identify if the 5% quota for 1st and 2nd class government jobs is being fulfilled, and to ensure reasonable accommodation at recruitment. In addition it recommends that quotas should be established for people with disabilities applying for 3rd and 4th class government jobs. Employment opportunities could be further bolstered by arranging reasonable adjustments for persons with disabilities during exams, recruitment and all stages of employment, including questionnaires that are inclusive and that cater to the needs of individuals with disabilities. In addition, free/subsidised training including technical and vocational training to persons with disabilities should be offered and involve private sector organisations. Trainees, who are persons with disabilities, should be allowed to access loans at affordable interest rates. Access to loans for people with disabilities from a variety of sources would facilitate the setting up of small businesses and entrepreneurship (CRPD Alternative Report Platform 2019).

In Bangladesh, persons with leprosy related disabilities in particular are often discriminated against and refused employment largely on account of stigma associated with leprosy. In accordance with article 29 of the national constitution, persons with leprosy related disabilities should be given protection against any kind of violation of their constitutional right (TLMB 2019).

Overall the number of persons with disabilities finding such employment is still very low with barriers still existing. Availability of accessible transportation to and from the factories remains a huge challenge for people with physical disabilities. Scope for people with visual impairments also remain very limited. A major change is being expected though, as the Bangladesh Business Disability Network (BBDN) is now almost ready for launching. This alone will create more

sensitivity towards people with different types of disabilities within the business community and pave the way for far more employment opportunities. The Bangladesh Employers' Federation and the ILO are playing significant supportive roles to make this a reality in Bangladesh. Two of the main recommendations from a report on progress towards the SDGs in Bangladesh are that the number of unemployed persons with disabilities must be identified, and that waged (as well as self) employment initiatives for persons with disabilities are created. In addition, it is recommended that disability inclusive industries are promoted and that special incentives are provided to entrepreneurs with disabilities to run small scale industries. At a national level, industrial policy should be made to be disability and gender inclusive (Disability Alliance on SDG 2017).

## **Barriers to employment**

The main barriers to employment are reported as prejudice and ignorance. However, other barriers exist, such as the salary and conditions of employment for people with disabilities not matching those of employees without disabilities. In addition, people with disabilities are not given the opportunity to qualify for employment through formal education at higher levels. There is a public sector employment quota of 10% for persons with disabilities, but actual employment rates are low. By 2002 the government ran two vocational rehabilitation centres. There are plans for further centres of this nature. It is not clear how effective vocational training is to get people into work. In 2002 there were 93 recorded credit and employment schemes for persons with disability in Bangladesh. Few private companies were found to employ people with disabilities. For the instances where people with disabilities were employed in the private sector, there were rarely explicit employment policies behind the initiative. Many work related accidents in the private sector result in disabilities which could have been prevented. There are extensive guidelines on occupational health and safety, but control and enforcement are limited. There is potential for the private sector to do more to improve the employment of persons with disabilities. With regards to the not for profit sector, several non-government organisations include people with disabilities in micro-credit and non-formal income generating schemes. Several centres exist to assist persons with disability access non-formal income generation (Danish Bilharziasis Laboratory 2004).

A study by Quinn et al (2016) based on a relatively small sample of 15 women with disabilities reported that 6 of the women (40%) had no paid work and 9 of the women (60%) had paid work. The participants report that their access to employment was impacted by perceived inefficiencies of women with disabilities as compared to women without disability and particularly men (with or without disability). Bangladeshi society in general prefers males to participate in the workforce, and adopted cultural norms result in a failure to recognise that women with disability have earning capacity. The majority of participants reported that women with disability are usually expected to stay within the home and complete domestic duties, or sit idly and not participate at all. The lack of inclusive transport and physical accessibility issues were also reported to be barriers to the inclusion of women with disabilities in the workforce. The majority of women who participated reported difficulty in accessing public places due to inaccessibility of transport and public buildings (Quinn et al 2016).

Titumir and Hossain's (2005) study into knowledge, attitudes and practices regarding disability found that people have little knowledge about the obstacles to employment opportunities for persons with disabilities. Access to training, micro-credit, specialised programmes for women with disability, rehabilitation services, and establishment of quota for persons with disability in government employment were suggested as recommendations to improve the situation.

To understand how to overcome barriers to employment for persons with disabilities Mollah (2014) undertook a study to identify prospective employers for advancing employment opportunities for young people with disabilities. Based on the findings, it was recommended that to address the barriers relevant policy was developed and strengthened, the quota system was properly monitored, employers are sensitised, all training facilities are made accessible, non-government organisations take on people with disabilities and collaboration with employers association, non-government organisations, media and government are strengthened prior to employment of people with disabilities (Mollah 2014).

## **Disability and education and training**

There is no uniformity regarding statistics relating to disability in Bangladesh. Despite some legislative progress, the participation of people with disabilities in education in Bangladesh remains critical. In a study that used a large and nationally representative dataset, parents' education and income level were found to increase children with disabilities' school participation. Disability has been shown to have a negative effect on the probability of children's school participation for both primary and beyond primary levels. Children with disabilities face difficulties in their family level in relation to their access to education (Lamichhane & Kawakatsu 2015). The Education Policy 2010 addresses children with disabilities, as does the Comprehensive Early Childhood Care and Development Policy, approved in November 2013. Children with disabilities are adequately addressed in these policies, with emphasis on inclusion beginning with early learning centres/preschools and other early childhood development centres. Fewer initiatives are visible for secondary students with disabilities. The National Skills Development Policy 2012, developed with technical support from the International Labour Organisation (ILO), includes mainstreaming of disability in all governmental training programmes. The aim is to ensure reasonable accommodation and to develop disability-inclusive training modules and curricula. Additionally, a National Strategy for Inclusion of Persons with Disabilities in Skills Development was drafted in 2013 and will assist in strengthening disability inclusion in the sector. While the Ministry of Education and the Ministry of Primary and Mass Education in Bangladesh are both working to meet the goal of providing free primary and secondary education to all children by 2030, children with disabilities fall under the purview of the Ministry of Social Welfare, meaning that the educational needs of students with disabilities are effectively siloed away from those in charge of education (WHO 2011, UNICEF 2014).

Despite the education policies, large percentages of persons with disabilities are still out of education. The rate of enrolment among persons with disabilities is very low. Common causes of non-enrolment among children with disabilities are: lack of adaptive ability with the school environment, no or low scopes of personal assistance, absence of accessible transportation, inaccessible infrastructure and environment, absence of implication of policy, negative attitude of the family, teachers and community (CAMPE 2011).

Male and Wodon (2017) report that in Bangladesh, of adolescents aged 15–18, those with disabilities are 40% less likely to have completed primary school.

The Department of Social Services under the Ministry of Social Welfare has started a stipend Programme for students with disabilities, which is encouraging students with disabilities to enrol in the general 584 educational institutions (GED 2015). In addition to making the mainstream national skills development policy disability inclusive, a standalone national policy for skills development of persons with disabilities has been developed. Certain quotas in seats are also

being reserved for people with disabilities in vocational and technical education centres (Disability Alliance on SDG 2017).

People with disabilities have suffered from a lack of access to adequate education services (Ali 2014). Persons with disability have lower literacy rates and poorer performance by education level compared to the rest of the population of Bangladesh (CPD 2017). Leonard Cheshire (2018) report that the proportion of children without disabilities who have completed primary or secondary education as well as university is more than twice that of children with disabilities. The school completion rate for boys is higher than that of girls except for primary education, 81% for girls without disabilities and 38% of girls with disabilities, compared to 71% and 32% of boys without and with disabilities. With regards to participation in organised learning one year before primary school age, in general fewer than one quarter of the children participate in organised learning. The gap between people with and without disabilities in the female sample - 10 percentage points (22% for girls without disabilities and 12% of girls with disabilities) is slightly higher than that of the male sample, which is 8 percentage points, (21% of boys without disabilities, 13% of boys with disabilities). The analysis of the participation rate in education or training reveals a 14 percentage point gap between people with and without disabilities for youths (13% for youths with disabilities compared to 27% of youth without disabilities), while no gap is observed for adults (0.5% for adults with disabilities compared to 0.3% of adults without disabilities). Fewer than half of Bangladeshis with a disability who are at least 15 years of age are literate (53% and 28% for those without and with disabilities respectively) (Leonard Cheshire 2018).

Quinn et al (2016) undertook a study to better understand barriers and facilitators to socioeconomic inclusion for women with disability in Bangladesh. 15 women took part in semi-structured in-depth interviews. The results suggest that barriers to formal education include poor societal attitudes regarding female disability, poverty, teacher and student discrimination and poor physical accessibility within educational institutions. The women reported feelings of frustration, prejudice and oppression due to beliefs regarding traditional gender roles and the common perception that educating a woman with disability is futile. Women in the study described barriers mostly related to high school, college and university level institutions. In addition, the majority of women who had progressed beyond primary education reported teacher and student discrimination, poor disability awareness and the absence of disability inclusion policies. Other students often excluded the women from study and social circles, thereby increasing their dependence on family.

According to Ali (2014) access to education of children with disabilities is very limited in Bangladesh due to improper physical infrastructure, lack of proper training amongst the teachers, lack of appropriate teaching-learning materials and lack of assistive devices for both mobility and communications. There are few specialised schools and most are located in urban regions of the country. The National Forum of Organisations Working with the Disabled (NFOWD 2002) reported that there are about 1.6 million school aged children who suffer from disability, and only about 20,000 of these children have access to school education. The report also reflects a high proportion of dropouts among children with disability. The majority of those who complete secondary level are also able to proceed and complete their tertiary level of education.

In Bangladesh children with disabilities have clearly been among the most marginalised when it comes to education. The majority of children with disabilities who access education are those with mild to moderate physical impairments. Vocational training, in addition to education, is important for many children with disabilities. When barriers to skill development training and employment are removed, they can become contributing members of communities versus being

seen as a burden to families and society. While most of the immediate benefits affect older adolescents and adults with disabilities, progress made towards inclusive skills development and employment also promotes future opportunities for children with disabilities and societal changes in attitude that will also benefit them. A number of organisations working with and for children and adults with disabilities, including organisations for people with disabilities and special education schools, support vocational training. The concern is that even after being trained, students have difficulty finding jobs (UNICEF 2014).

With regards to education, the support given to students with disabilities and special needs is inadequate. Financial incentives for students with disabilities to participate in the education system are low with limited coverage. Additional efforts will be needed on these aspects during the Seventh Plan (GED 2015).

Excluding children with disabilities from education results in lower earnings as adults. A project appraisal published by the World Bank in 2008 found that in Bangladesh the cost of disability due to forgone income from a lack of schooling and employment, both of people with disabilities and their caregivers, is estimated at US\$1.2 billion annually, or 1.7% of gross domestic product. Of this total, an estimated US\$26 million is lost annually from the Bangladeshi economy due to the exclusion of children with disabilities from education (World Bank 2008, WHO 2011).

Bangladesh has a population of nearly 165 million yet is particularly poorly equipped with special schools. The CRPD Monitoring Report lists only 62 schools for children with intellectual impairments, 11 schools (all urban) for children with autism, 5 schools for children with visual impairments and 5 schools for children with hearing and/or speech impairments (Jones, Presler-Marshall & Stavropoulou 2018). Lamichhane and Kawakatsu (2015) found a correlation between household income and the enrolment of children with disabilities, leading them to conclude that when resources are tight, parents prioritise the schooling of children without disabilities.

In 2018 it was reported that the government had set up five special schools for children with visual disabilities, five for those with hearing and speech disabilities, two special schools and vocational training centres for those with physical disabilities. The government also has an integrated education programme for children with visual disabilities in 64 schools across the country. The Ministry of Social Welfare has already introduced Disability related Coordinated Special Education Regulation (2009). Under this initiative, 62 special schools for children with intellectual disabilities are being operated. There are also 11 special schools for children with autism established in eight divisional cities in the country. At present total of 9,854 students are receiving education in these institutes. In addition to these, many non-government organisations and private institutions have created special, integrated and inclusive schools for thousands of more children with disabilities, some of which the government funds (especially those providing education to children with intellectual disabilities and autism) (Committee on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities 2018).

The government, with support from donors, initiated a series of programmes including the Primary Education Development Program (PEDP). Realising the need for addressing the issue of children with disability, in the second phase (PEDP II) a major component was included to address all 'left out children', including children with disabilities through an inclusive education approach. The project had very limited success. A third phase (PEDP III) is expected to make some positive changes, including a minimum 2% enrolment quota for children with disabilities. Of the 650 teachers with disabilities recently recruited for Government operated primary schools, about 70% of them are women with disabilities. Approximately 150,000 children with disabilities are enrolled in these schools, 45% of them being girls. In order to promote enrolment and

retention in primary education, which is free of cost for all students in any case, the government had introduced Education Stipends for the regular attendees. In addition, education had been made free for girl children up to Class VIII, which has gradually been extended now to the higher secondary level. A programme to provide special stipends has been initiated by the government to all students with disabilities enrolled in formal education. Under this scheme, children in primary education receive a monthly additional stipend amounting BDT300. The government provides textbooks to all children in primary schools free of cost. From 2015 Braille books were also provided. The government is working to extend the coverage so that no child with disability is left out from this scheme. The government is now planning a scheme to train over 50,000 teachers as part of their in-service training to cater to the special needs of children with disability. The government has recently either renovated or newly constructed 10,000 accessible schools across the country. Challenges remain, particularly with access to washrooms. In the public education system, all students need to complete the answer scripts in the public exams in their own handwriting. Students with visual impairments and physical impairments, if informed in advance, are allowed scribes. Considering the extra time required, and as a measure of reasonable accommodation, the government has decided to allow an additional 20 minutes to such students in all public examinations. In a recent move, the Ministry of Education, in collaboration with the Ministry of Social Welfare and the Ministry of Health and Family Welfare, has launched a project to set up an Academy on Autism and Neuro-Developmental Disabilities. Under the first phase of this project, besides setting up the academy, 3,000 teachers from secondary education level will be trained to cater to the specific needs of children with Neuro-Developmental Disabilities. The Rights and Protection of Persons with Disabilities Act 2013 has given huge importance to the area of education for persons with disabilities. Firstly, in Article 16 it has been declared as a basic right. Article 33 entirely is about 'Elimination of Discrimination against Admission of Persons with Disabilities in Education Institutions'. Finally a dedicated section, Section 9 (with 12 sub-sections) of the Schedule of the Law, has been kept to deal with Education and Training (Committee on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities 2018).

The Dhaka University has been accommodating students with visual impairments since 1969. With the assistance of donors, it has installed a Braille and computer section in its central library (Committee on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities 2018).

In May 2019, the Committee on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities requested Bangladesh delivers information relating to measures to ensure the right of persons with disabilities to inclusive education and to ensure the enrolment and retention in education of all children with disabilities in mainstream settings and the provision of individualised support. In addition, they requested information on the availability of educational materials in accessible formats, particularly Braille, sign language and Easy Read, as well as on the accessibility of learning environments, the provision of individualised support, and the training of teaching and non-teaching personnel on quality inclusive education (UN 2019).

The alternative report on the status of implementation of the CRPD states that no statistics are available on the number of children with disabilities attending primary schools. Accessibility and distance of schools remain an obstacle for students with disabilities in Bangladesh. Many students with disabilities face discrimination and are often denied admission on the basis of their disability. There is a lack of learning material available in an accessible format. There is no approved policy on the use of scribes. Special schools have poor infrastructure and lack teachers with sufficient training and capacity. The education of children with neuro-developmental disabilities is particularly lacking. The shadow report recommended that educational materials are provided in accessible formats and that infrastructure is made accessible and that reasonable adjustments are made to curricula, examinations and procedures. In addition, training

should be provided to staff, as well as including disability issues in the curricula of government and non-government Teachers' Training Institutes. It is recommended that special and integrated schools are established to deliver secondary education to children with disabilities, particularly girls (CRPD Alternative Report Platform 2019). To address the discrimination that persons with leprosy related disabilities face in Bangladesh, the National Technical and Vocational Education and Training should specifically target persons with leprosy related disabilities as beneficiaries by reserving certain seats within the existing quota for persons with disabilities (TLMB 2019).

A voluntary national report on the Sustainable Development Goals and persons with disabilities by the Disability Alliance on SDG (2017) found that Bangladesh has done well in terms of achieving nearly 100% enrolment rates in primary education. However, for most children with disabilities this is yet to become a reality. The Primary Education (Compulsory) Act 1990 had left room for respective schools to deny admission to children if they have a disability. This however has been addressed in the Rights & Protection of Persons with Disabilities Act, 2013, which prohibits discrimination in school enrolment on the grounds of disability. But because of the former law, thousands of children with disabilities have been deprived of their right to education and by now have passed the school-going age. A national study conducted in 2001-2002 found a primary school enrolment rate of only 4% for children with disabilities. Over the last 15 years, significant measures have been taken, but the enrolment rate cannot be estimated over 20% as yet.

The Ministry of Housing and Public Works has issued a circular compelling all new public buildings to accommodate principles of universal design. As such, 10,000 newly constructed schools have built a ramp and made provisions for accessible toilets. But due to a lack of proper monitoring, most of the ramps have failed to meet the accepted standards in their slopes and lengths. Also, in most cases, the toilets have been relocated behind the school building, without ensuring continuity of the corridors, and thus they have lost their accessibility features. In a move regarded as positive, the Ministry of Primary and Mass Education has introduced a standalone subject on disability in the curriculum of primary school teachers' training. As such, 11,000 teachers will be trained on disability inclusion in primary schools every year from here onwards in the country. This will positively influence the enrolment and quality of education for children with disabilities in Bangladesh, and thus pave the way for a better life and livelihood of persons with disabilities in the near future (Disability Alliance on SDG 2017).

## 4. Employers and inclusive employment

**Outcome 3: Employers test and adopt innovative CRPD compliant practices that enable the inclusion of women and men with disabilities in formal employment.**

**Outcome 6: Change in knowledge, attitude and behaviours from stakeholders involved in programme interventions that promotes and enables inclusion of women and men with disabilities in formal employment - from the perspective of persons with disabilities.**

## Formal employment

The study by Quinn et al (2016) reported that the majority of women who participated that were engaged in paid work were employed by an organisation working on disability issues, such as the Centre for the Rehabilitation of the Paralysed or the National Council of Disabled Women, Bangladesh. According to Ali (2014), 5% of persons with disabilities in Bangladesh who are employed work for government agencies. This is despite a 10% public sector jobs quota for orphans and persons with disabilities, with many employers choosing to offer jobs to orphans instead of persons with disabilities (VOTM 2015). Ali (2014) goes on to say that a further 17% of persons with disabilities working in Bangladesh are employed by non-government organisations, and the rest are self-employed. It is reported that employees with disabilities do not get the same rights as other workers without a disability. In a study that involved 162 persons with disability in Bangladesh, Hosain, Atkinson and Underwood (2002) reported that over 40% were formally employed.

Industries are yet to be fully disability inclusive. There are a few sporadic cases though, such as in the case of Keya Group, which employs thousands of people with disabilities. Non-government organisations and organisations for people with disabilities working closely with businesses have ensured that a few hundred factories have been systematically employing persons with disabilities over the last few years. Factory buildings are being made accessible, changes are also brought about in their respective human resource policies, and other reasonable accommodation measures are being taken (Disability Alliance on SDG 2017).

## Programmes to support employment

There are limited programmes to support employment in Bangladesh for persons with disabilities (Danish Bilharziasis Laboratory 2004). The TVET Reform Project was an initiative of the government of Bangladesh, assisted by the International Labour Organisation and funded by the European Union. It ran from 2007 to 2015. The goal was to ensure Bangladesh's competitiveness in the global market and reduce poverty by improving the quality of vocational educational and training. One of the key reform objectives was to make TVET accessible to all, including youth with low literacy and numeracy, child workers, women and rural communities and persons with disabilities. The project concentrated on removing policy-related barriers as well as physical barriers (ILO 2018).

A public sector quota states that 10% of the workforce must be made up of persons with disabilities, but this is not implemented well. By 2002 the government ran two vocational rehabilitation centres. There are plans for further centres of this nature. It is not clear how effective vocational training is to get people into work. In 2002 there were 93 recorded credit and employment schemes for persons with disability in Bangladesh and employment policies to support persons with disabilities were rare. Several non-government organisations have micro-credit and non-formal income generating schemes available to persons with disabilities. Several centres exist to assist persons with disability access non-formal income generation (Danish Bilharziasis Laboratory 2004).

Bangladesh's Seventh Five Year Plan (2016 – 2020) included a market responsive inclusive skills training programme that will engage public training institutions, various ministries, industry associations, and foundations to train over 250,000 people in the first phase with 70% of the people involved being from disadvantaged groups including people with disabilities. Eventually about 1.5 million people in 15 priority sectors will be trained. In addition 30 Centres of Excellence and 15 Industry Skill Councils will be strengthened through public-private partnerships. Skill



development activities will be coordinated by a National Skill Development Authority (NSDA) with finances to be disbursed through a National Human Resources Development Fund (NHRDF) (GED 2015).

The Made Garment industry is the topmost export earning sector of the country, employing millions of workers. The Sheikh Fazilatunnessa Training Center has been built in the vicinity of the Export Promotion Zone in the outskirts of Dhaka City, to develop skilled machine operators and floor supervisors. The centre has gradually been made disability-friendly by orienting the trainers on disability rights issues and building accessibility features in the infrastructure. Following a recent health and safety audit, all services and facilities have been modified to make them inclusive of persons with disabilities. In the private sector, formal employment opportunities for persons with disabilities are gradually on the rise. One business group alone, which began employing persons with disabilities about a decade back with only 10 people with hearing and speech impairment, today employs over 2,500 persons with disabilities. This has inspired others to follow suit. Besides cosmetic and readymade garment industries, persons with disabilities have also found employment in pharmaceutical industries, and in more technical jobs in banks and cell-phone companies. They are also working in call centres and outsourcing sectors. In order to facilitate accommodation of working people with disability, and especially women, JPUF has built two hostels (one for women and one for men) within their premises, where such potential persons can find at least a temporary living arrangement free of cost and with subsidised food, until they can settle down in their jobs and find more suitable living arrangements (Committee on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities 2018).

JPUF have also organised a disability development fair in 2014 and disability job fairs in 2016 and 2018 (Committee on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities 2018, UN 2020). From the job fair 2018, 65 persons with disabilities got jobs in the formal sector of different private organisations (UN 2020).

There is also a job placement cell for persons with disabilities based on a referral mechanism at JPUF. In addition, the Ministry of Telecommunication and Information Technology has created various training opportunities for educated youths with disabilities. The ICT Division of the Bangladesh Computer Council and a non-government organisations are working together to offer ICT training opportunities to youths with disabilities. The Association of Cyber Cafe Owners have also agreed to install screen reading software on their computers, and they are also providing jobs. The Bangladesh Road Transport Corporation has recently provided employment to 40 people with hearing and speech impairments in its central workshop. To promote the technical education skills of persons with disabilities, a 5% quota has been created for them, by the Technical Education Board under the Ministry of Education, in enrolment into all public and private polytechnic institutions, and technical schools and colleges (Committee on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities 2018).

## 5. Government and national policies relating to inclusive employment

**Outcome 5 - Increased commitment from government and national employer organisations to enable inclusive employment for women and men with disabilities (Government demonstrates commitment to enabling inclusion of women and men with disabilities in formal employment through creation and/or implementation of inclusive legislation/policy; as a result of programme interventions).**

### CRPD and national disability policies and legislation

In Bangladesh, the Department of Social Services within the Ministry of Social Welfare is the government focal point for disability (ESCAP 2018). Bangladesh has progressed in terms of promoting and protecting the rights of persons with disabilities. Both the CRPD and the Beijing Proclamation on the Full Participation and Equality with Disability in Asia and the Pacific Region have been ratified. A five year National Disability Action Plan in 2006 was also implemented, making all relevant ministries responsible for undertaking various initiatives to include and protect people with disabilities. The Sixth Plan built on these foundations to further consolidate the gains (GED 2015).

Bangladesh signed the CRPD on 9 May 2007 and ratified it on 30 November 2007 (UN 2018). The implementation of the CRPD in Bangladesh has lagged far behind policy commitments (Jones, Presler-Marshall & Stavropoulou 2018). In 2018, the Committee on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities released the initial State Party's Report submitted by Bangladesh under article 35 of the Convention. The report had been due in 2010 but was received in April 2017. The report was delayed due to a period of political transition in Bangladesh. With regards to the legal basis for the UNCRPD, the report states that in 2009, the government constituted an independent National Human Rights Commission, which is entrusted with the responsibility to act as a watchdog for monitoring the rights and fundamental freedoms of all citizens, especially those who are most vulnerable. Up until a separate Disability Rights Commission is up and running, it is this Commission that will ensure the rights and privileges of persons with disabilities in the country, on an equal basis with others. Unlike most countries which attune their concerned laws prior to acceding to a human rights treaty, Bangladesh first ratified the CRPD, and then ensued the process for attuning its laws and policies. The disability legislation has been enacted in Bangladesh following the principles, spirit and content of the CRPD. National policies and action plans are yet to be attuned. Therefore, progress of implementation of the CRPD is not reflected much in the initial report (Committee on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities 2018).

The CRPD has been translated into Bangla, the official language of Bangladesh. Popular versions, in far simpler language with examples and explanations have also been published. A child-friendly version with stories, poems and plays has also been published to sensitise children on the issues of disabilities as well as to create awareness about their responsibilities. These are widely disseminated to ensure that the general public, especially people with disabilities living in remote grassroots areas, are aware of the rights and entitlements enshrined in the CRPD. Sections from these publications are also being published in national and local daily newspapers for wider circulation (Committee on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities 2018).

With regards to national policies in Bangladesh, policy documents from pre-2001 through the early 2000s focus mostly on women, children and the poor. It was not until 2008-09 that policies started to address the needs of other vulnerable groups, such as people with disabilities (CPD 2017). The government has established several programmes to address the needs of the poor and vulnerable, persons/people with disabilities (PWD) require further attention (Ali 2014). Following the ratification of the CRPD in 2007, Bangladesh has taken a number of legislative and policy actions towards nationalising these global commitments, including the Children Policy, adopted in 2011; a new Children Act, passed in June 2013; and the Rights and Protection of Persons with Disabilities Act 2013, which was passed in October 2013 (UNICEF 2014). The ratification of the 2013 Disabled Persons Protection and Rights Act aims to protect PWD's rights. Amongst other things, the Act bans educational institutions, enterprises and other organisations from discriminating against PWD. Organisations and individuals will face fines and imprisonment if they discriminate against PWD, for instance by 'creating obstacles to them in getting due share of inherited assets, giving negative impression of them in books, publications and media both directly and indirectly and forgery of identity cards'. A national committee has been established as per the Act to oversee and coordinate activities regarding PWD's rights and protection (GED 2015).

The 2013 legislation is specifically attuned to the CRPD. The law ensures and guarantees for persons with disabilities an equal and effective legal protection against all types of discrimination, including the provision of reasonable accommodation. It also creates obligation to develop policies and programmes, including affirmative actions and measures in the spirit of CRPD. The law has taken into account the diversity of persons with disabilities based on gender, age, ethnicity, religion, caste, profession, and location issues in addition to the type and grade of disability (Committee on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities 2018). Article 37 of the Rights and Protection of Persons with Disabilities Act 2013 affirms '(1) Notwithstanding anything contained in any other law in force, a qualified person with disability shall not be deprived of or discriminated against in giving employment on account of his/her disability, depending on the nature of disability, provided he has the requisite qualifications.' and '(2) If a question arises as to whether a person with a particular disability is qualified for a particular work, the National Coordination Committee shall provide instructions on the subject and such instruction shall be considered as final.' Article 10 of the Schedules of the Act is also solely dedicated to employment of persons with disabilities. The Act (2013) gives equal status to men and women with disabilities in all its provisions. However, to ensure that the voices of women are heard, specific seats have been reserved for them in all the committees (from national coordination to grassroots level) enshrined with the responsibilities to oversee the implementation of the law (Committee on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities 2018).

There are several relevant sections of the Bangladeshi Constitution to disability and employment. Article 29 affirms, '(1) there shall be equality of opportunity for all citizens in respect of employment or office in the service of the Republic. (2) No citizen shall, on the grounds only of religion, race, caste, sex or place of birth, be ineligible for, or discriminated against in respect of, any employment or office in the service of the Republic.' Earlier in the Constitution, Article 15 affirms (b) 'the right to work that is the right to guaranteed employment at a reasonable wage having regard to the quantity and quality of work.' Article 19 (Equality of opportunity) affirms, '(1) The State shall endeavour to ensure equality of opportunity to all citizens. 2) The State shall adopt effective measures to remove social and economic inequality between man and man and to ensure the equitable distribution of wealth among citizens, and of opportunities in order to attain a uniform level of economic development throughout the Republic. (3) The State Shall endeavour to ensure equality of opportunity and participation of women in all spheres of national

life.’ Article 20 affirms, ‘(1) Work is a right, a duty and a matter of honour for every citizen who is capable of working, and everyone shall be paid for his work on the basis of the principle “from each according to his abilities to each according to his work”. (2) The State shall endeavour to create conditions in which, as a general principle, persons shall not be able to enjoy unearned incomes, and in which human labour in every form, intellectual and physical, shall become a fuller expression of creative endeavour and of the human personality.’ Article 40 of the Constitution affirms, ‘Subject to any restrictions imposed by law, every citizen possessing such qualifications, if any, as may be prescribed by law in relation to his profession, occupation, trade or business shall have the right to enter upon any lawful profession or occupation, and to conduct any lawful trade or business.’ (Committee on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities 2018).

Based on these Constitutional provisions, and in the spirit of the CRPD, the Rights and Protection of Persons with Disabilities Act 2013 has established work and employment of persons with disabilities as their inalienable right. Article 16 (1) has three separate sub-articles towards this end, (i) ‘To gain employment in public and private institutions’ (j) ‘In case of a person acquiring disability in the course of employment, to remain employed or receive appropriate rehabilitation and adequate compensation’ and (m) ‘Receiving reasonable accommodation in education, work and all other applicable fields.’ Sub-article (k) ‘Protection from oppression and access to a secure and healthy environment’ is applicable in this aspect (Committee on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities 2018).

As the Constitution of the People's Republic of Bangladesh guarantees basic human rights of every citizen of the country irrespective of colour, sex, religion, races etc it prohibits any form of discrimination between various social groups including due to disability. In the light of the constitutional provisions and commitments made by the government at the international arena by adopting the United Nations Standard Rule on the Equalization of Opportunities for Persons with Disabilities, the National Policy for Persons with Disabilities, 1995 was formulated. To protect and promote the rights of the persons with disabilities the Bangladesh Parliament in 2001 enacted the Disability Welfare Act, 2001. The law made provision for the constitution of National Coordination Committee and District Coordination Committees to ensure coordination on disability related issues both at the national and local level. The Act made provisions to ensure protection of rights and equal opportunity of persons with disability. It includes 10 specific areas for intervention, such as, disability prevention, identification, curative treatment, education, health care, rehabilitation and employment, transport and communication, culture, social security and self-help organisation. The government has also established a National Foundation for the Development of the Disabled Persons to provide funding support to programmes and projects of different non-governmental and social organisations. As part of affirmative action, the government has also introduced a 10% quota system for the employment of people with disabilities in the services of the Republic (Hussain 2008). The quota has led to employment for people with disabilities in various ministries (Committee on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities 2018).

At the Global Disability Summit held in 2018, the Government of Bangladesh made a number of commitments. These included the launch of a new National Plan of Action to implement the Disability Rights and Protection Act 2013, which they state is in line with the UNCRPD. They also committed to implementing a 5 year National Strategic Plan for Neuro-Developmental Disorder 2016-2021. They also stated that at the national level they would work to eliminate stigma and discrimination of people with disabilities. In terms of data, as well as improving the way the census and various surveys collect data on disabilities, a real time Disability Survey System that was established by the Ministry of Social Welfare, will be used to improve disability data. At the Summit, the Government of Bangladesh also reaffirmed their commitment to empower

organisations for people with disabilities in policy creation. The government committed to empowering the persons with disabilities by providing special quota in the government services. No further detail is provided on how this quota would be implemented or evaluated. Finally, the Government committed to strengthening support for the Neuro Developmental Disabilities Trust (GDS 2018).

In February 2019, the alternative report on the status of implementation of the CRPD in Bangladesh was published by organisations for people with disabilities, community based organisations and Non-Government Organisations in Bangladesh working for the rights of People with Disabilities. It details concerns about the Rights and Protection of Persons with Disabilities Act (2013). Firstly, it articulates a concern that it is unclear whether the Act prevails over other laws that affect persons with disabilities. Secondly, it suggests that the Act is not all encompassing and it does not address all the articles of the CRPD in separate sections. Thirdly, it reports that there is no appropriate and efficient monitoring mechanism in place to oversee proper implementation of the Act. It is argued that the Act is not properly implemented due to a general lack of awareness among persons with disabilities, stakeholders and duty bearers about the rights and duties established under each of the Sections and Schedule of the Act (CRPD Alternative Report Platform 2019).

The alternative report also states that consultation with the persons with disabilities in developing plans, programmes, policies and legal frameworks concerning persons with disabilities in Bangladesh has been inadequate. There is no process through which the government regularly consults with persons with disabilities through their representative organisations. In addition, documentation on the use and impact of the Act (2013) is unavailable. The shadow report that while the harmonisation of laws, policies, strategies and action plans with the CRPD is taking place, there is a long way to go. In addition, the policies the government has aligned with CRPD remain weak in implementation (CRPD Alternative Report Platform 2019).

In May 2019, the Committee on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities published a list of issues in relation to the initial CRPD report of Bangladesh. In terms of general obligations, the committee requested to be provided with information on the measures to incorporate the CRPD into domestic law or make it automatically part of the Constitution to ensure that any public action for its implementation follows a human rights-based approach. In addition they requested information on the harmonisation of laws and policies with the CRPD and on measures to ensure that the concept of disability used in the State party fully adheres to the human rights model of disability. Further, it was questioned whether and how the national action plan for persons with disabilities adopted in January 2019 will be amended to include time-bound targets and a functioning monitoring and evaluation framework, to ensure synergies with other national policies such as the National Women Development Policy, ensuring they are in line with the human rights model of disability (UN 2019).

In December 2019 the government of Bangladesh responded to the list of issues in relation to its initial report detailed above. The response reiterates that the Rights and Protection of Persons with Disabilities Act (2013) was enacted after Bangladesh's ratification of the CRPD and that care has been taken to ensure that the legislation adheres to the human rights model of the disability. The response confirms that the Disability Act details the right to employment of people with disabilities and prohibits discrimination on the basis of disability (UN 2020).

The CRPD Platform-Bangladesh (2020) detailed a collaborative response by organisations for people with disabilities, non-government organisations, and international non-government organisations to the list of issues raised in relation to the initial CRPD Report of Bangladesh.

They argued that Bangladesh has neither taken any measure to incorporate the Convention into domestic law nor made it part of the Constitution to ensure a human rights based approach of public action for its implementation so far. Public activities are still mostly driven by a charity-based approach. Harmonisation of mainstream laws and policies with the CRPD is yet to be achieved. In addition, the national plan of action for the persons with disabilities has been adopted, but without a functioning, monitoring, and evaluation framework. In addition, there has been limited efforts to ensure synergies with other national policies to ensure they are in line with the human rights model of disability. They also argue that legislation in Bangladesh does not acknowledge that women with disabilities are particularly marginalised.

## **Employment policies**

National policies regarding disability issues contain policies to promote employment of the persons with disabilities. The government of Bangladesh reserves 10% quota for orphans and persons with disabilities for all government jobs, which in practice is not fully followed though (Ali 2014).

The National Skill Development Policy 2011 includes improving access to skills development for various groups of citizens including women and people with disabilities, as well as encouraging participation in skills development by industry organisations, employers and workers and improve skills acquisition in communities (GED 2015).

The response to the UN Committee on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities by Bangladesh detailed how a long-term Plan of Action (2018–2025) is under implementation. Reassurance is offered that any issues identified with regards to disability rights will be addressed in future action plans. It goes on to detail how the Disability Act sets out the duty of public and private organisations to identify positions suitable for an employee with disabilities. In addition, the Disability Act details how banking and commercial services should be provided to people with disabilities on a priority basis to provide easy access to small and start up loans (UN 2020).

With regards to employment, the CRPD Platform-Bangladesh (2020) argue that no database has been developed to track the proportion of the persons with disabilities who are employed in the public and private sectors. Also, there are no enforcement measures detailed in the Disabilities Act to remedy discrimination in employment. A lack of awareness initiatives and non-functionalities of the district committees has resulted in no employee or employment seeker filing complaints against discrimination. There is no legal provision for protecting employees with disabilities from harassment at their workplace. There is no recognition that persons with psychosocial or intellectual disabilities may be particularly neglected in terms of their right to employment opportunities. As an affirmative action, 1% quota for the persons with disabilities was reserved in the cadre services of the republic, but the quota provision has been abolished by the government in October 2018. Also, the government has taken no initiative to train the employers on the rights of persons with disabilities and reasonable accommodation.

The CRPD Platform-Bangladesh (2020) make the following recommendations:

- A. Amend the Labour Act 2006, to ensure consistency with the Disabilities Act, 2013, and include provisions setting out the requirement for an effective quota system and make it applicable to all government and non-governmental organisations to ensure that employees with disabilities are not ill-paid due to their disability; clarify the legal consequences that an employer may face for breach; and increase the currently inadequate compensation package.

- B. Amend Schedule III of the Bangladesh Civil Service Commission and Bangladesh Judicial Service Commission Rules to remove discrimination related to employment of persons with disabilities in the public sector and judiciary.
- C. Increase employment opportunities for people with disabilities by:
  - I. Establishing a monitoring mechanism engaging civil society to identify if the 10% quota for persons with disabilities is being fulfilled.
  - II. Arranging reasonable adjustments for persons with disabilities during exams, recruitment and all stages of employment.
  - III. Offering free/subsidised training to persons with disabilities and involving private sector organisations. Trainees, who are persons with disabilities, should be allowed to access loans at affordable interest rates and to secure 0% down payment from banks and financial institutions.

## 6. The disability movement and inclusive employment

**Outcome 4: The disability movement and supporting stakeholders demonstrate strengthened capacity to support women and men with disabilities to realise their rights to work (Article 27).**

The National Forum of Organisations Working with the Disabled (NFOWD) is a national disability think tank and the only registered national disability network in Bangladesh. It is the well-recognised national apex federating body of non-government organisations working in the field of disability in Bangladesh. Based on a consensus arrived through a National Seminar on persons with disabilities held in 1989, NFOWD was formally established on 3<sup>rd</sup> February 1991 with a view to, safeguarding and promoting the rights and interests of people with disabilities in society; lobbying with concerned government authorities/agencies to pass a national policy and subsequent legislation on disability. It has 388 active member organisations and liaises with relevant government and non-government organisations to formulate coordinated action plans towards establishing equal rights and participation of persons with disabilities in all spheres of national life and providing backstop services to the organisations working with people with disabilities. NFOWD works at the interface between the government and the non-government organisations in this field. NFOWD has two administrative tiers – the General Body and the 15 member National Executive Committee, elected to office every two years, and operates all its functions through an independent Secretariat. It has major programmes, such as coordination, networking, capacity building of the member organisations, liaison with both local and international organisations and the government, raising awareness and sensitisation, analysis and dissemination of information on disability, education, training and awareness raising, hosting national and international events and working closely with the media and policy advocacy and influencing. NFOWD assists with preparing national legislation, policies, strategies and action plans concerning disability and disability-friendly national budgets and supporting the government in the implementation and monitoring of national and international instruments concerning disability issues (NFOWD 2018). NFOWD has a programme with Access Bangladesh Foundation called ‘Promoting Employment and Decent work for Persons with Disabilities in Accordance with CRPD and SDGs’ (Access Bangladesh Foundation 2019).

The National Grassroots and Disabilities Organisation (NGDO) is a national level network of over a hundred grassroots organisations for people with disabilities working to promote the rights and

inclusion of people with disabilities through strengthening the disability movement. It works in 23 out of 64 districts in Bangladesh. From the inception of NGDO, ADD has been facilitating the networking wing to build a broader network for boosting disability rights. NGDO coordinates the organisations for people with disabilities, which contain over 25,000 active members, and escalates activities regarding the disability movement over the country. As a leading network of organisations for people with disabilities in the country, NGDO attributed many successes to having built good linkages with government, civil society organisations, non-government organisations and the media, which in turn contributed to the acceptance of disabled people within wider society (NGDO 2018).

The National Council of Disabled Women (NCDW) strives to strengthen grassroots organisations for women with disabilities in Bangladesh to ensure the rights and dignity of women with disabilities and children. Their work focuses on obtaining justice for women with disabilities. NCDW worked in collaboration with NGDO, with persons with disabilities, lawyers and other members from the community level in seven districts of Bangladesh. NCDW have also in the past collected primary data through their members which included women with disabilities (NGDO et al 2015).

The information on the disability movement's involvement with developing inclusive employment in Bangladesh was found to be limited.

## 7. Partnerships for inclusive employment

**Outcome 1: Partnerships between private, public and civil society are developed to influence the inclusion of women and men with disabilities in formal employment.**

A market responsive inclusive skills training programme, laid out in Bangladesh's Seventh Five Year Plan, will engage public training institutions from 3 ministries, 9 industry associations, Palli Karma-Sahayak Foundation, and Bangladesh Bank Small and Medium Enterprise Department to train about 260,000 people in the first phase. The programme works in six priority sectors with an average job placement of 70% targeting, among others, people from disadvantaged groups including people with disabilities. In three phases the ten year programme will train about 1.5 million people in 15 priority sectors strengthening along the way the training institutions and the quality assurance system. To expand the capacity, the programme will support 30 Centres of Excellence and 15 Industry Skill Councils with public-private partnership. All skill development activities will be coordinated under a National Skill Development Authority (NSDA) with additional and uninterrupted finance to be mobilised and disbursed through a National Human Resources Development Fund (NHRDF) (GED 2015).

## 8. How the SITANS were conducted

A non-systematic but extensive literature review has been conducted for each country within the time and resources available, covering both academic and grey literature, focusing on the situation in the country and persons with disabilities involvement in formal employment. Searches of publicly available English language literature for the intervention areas have been conducted online through academic databases, search engines and websites which host grey literature. No new data has been generated by IDS for this review. As disability and development is an under researched area, much of the available literature and evidence is grey literature published by



governments and organisations working in the countries, rather than academic literature. Also, the most recent and up to date evidence often comes in the form of journalism or press releases. Some of the evidence presents contradictory findings, especially in relation to disability prevalence.

The most recent well-evidenced literature was selected for synthesis in the SITANs to provide those working on the Inclusion Works programme with an overview of the current situation in the country to help with the design of the interventions and to provide a form of baseline of existing secondary knowledge about the areas being targeted by the programme. As a time lag sometimes exists between evidence being gathered and then published, the SITANs are living documents, which will be updated annually to reflect newly available evidence. Having the SITANs as living documents also means they can be adapted to reflect new areas of interest to the programme, or areas to be developed further, throughout its implementation. As people in the different countries use and engage with the SITANs in the project planning processes in the countries, they will have the opportunity to feedback on the SITANs based on their current experiences (helping deal with the time lag issue) and provide useful internal evidence which is not available publicly. Feedback on the content of the SITANs is thus incorporated in two different ways:

- 1) Highlighting published material that can be incorporated into the main text.
- 2) Unpublished commentary that is added under 'Annex 1 - Feedback and commentary on the SITAN from consortium partners'.

The SITANs have been reviewed by a gender expert from IDS to ensure that gender/intersectionality are well reflected, where possible.

#### **Inclusion Works SITANs:**

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<sup>4</sup> As of 30.06.2020 the NGDO website is not working.

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## Annex 1 - Feedback and commentary on the SITAN from consortium partners

### Feedback from Kimber Bialik, Project Manager, Inclusion International (June 2020)

*“Within the disability community in Bangladesh, people with intellectual (also called neuro-developmental) disabilities are among the most marginalized, with lower rates of employment than people with disabilities from other impairment groups. Jobseekers with intellectual disabilities face additional barriers to employment – educational, attitudinal, and accessibility barriers. School enrolment rates are lower among people with intellectual disabilities, and when people with intellectual disabilities do have access to education, it is most often in segregated settings that rarely provide a path to a certificate, which further disadvantages them in the job market. Vocational skills training opportunities are rarely delivered in a way that is accessible to people with intellectual disabilities.*

*Due to strong stigma, employers lack understanding of intellectual disabilities and hold assumptions about people with intellectual disabilities being incapable of working, unproductive, or likely to disrupt their workplaces. Employment initiatives enshrined in legislation like quota systems tend not to benefit the most marginalized groups, who are last in line for employment among other people with disabilities, and people with intellectual disabilities who are employed are typically paid a fraction of the wage of their non-disabled colleagues. Self-advocates in Bangladesh who do have experience in formal sector employment report severe mistreatment on the job, including physical, emotional, and financial abuse by supervisors and colleagues in the workplace.*

*As an alternative to inclusive formal sector employment, people with intellectual disabilities in Bangladesh are often pushed towards self-employment, but self-advocates in Bangladesh indicate that this is not a viable option for most people due to a lack of start-up capital and supports to maintain a business, and the reality of stigma making it challenging to get customers to patronize their businesses.*

*Self-advocates emphasize the need to work towards inclusive formal sector employment as their best option for inclusive livelihoods, and indicate the need for a greater understanding of workplace support strategies among employers and broader training for colleagues to ensure workplaces are free of discrimination.”*