



FAITH & HOPE WELFARE ASSOCIATION

(A Non-Profitable voluntary social Welfare Organization)
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Ref. F. b. n. r. 001572..

Date. 27. 07. 08..

To,
Mr. Ibrahim Wani
Chief
Development, Economic and Social Issues Branch
United Nation High Commission For Human Rights.
Geneva, CH 1211, Geneva 10;

OHCHR REGISTRY

28 JUL. 2008

Recipients : ... A. Z.
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Dear Mr. Ibrahim Wani

Greetings from Bangladesh. Thank you very much for giving us chance for writing on the Right of persons with Disabilities and its optional protocol.

The information could be made available on the OHCHR website.

Yours truly,


Ms. Janfun Nahar Runu
Executive Director

Disability Rights and Social Participation:

(By Lutfun Nahar Runu, Executive Director,
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Background of the NGO:

Faith & Hope Welfare Association briefly FHWA is a Bangladeshi mid level NGO. The NGO has some specialty in its program. This NGO mainly works in those aspects of the women, children and elderly persons which are either addressed inadequate or at all not addressed to them. The initiator of the NGO Ms. Lutfun Nahar Runu brings with her long experiences of working with the women, children and elderly persons. She has been able to reveal so many important unrevealed facts of these target people being her attachment and involvement so close and hearty. She intends to bring some changes in the life of the children, women and elderly persons particularly whose life have been so much vulnerable suffering from the disability. She wants to break some traditional outlook to stable the life of children, women and elderly persons chronically suffering from disability.

By now she has developed a good motivated small team of FHWA in terms of her continuous interaction and dialogue with these persons. She has pooled so many rare ideas both at home and abroad, being sometime at the organizational level and sometimes at an individual approach. She has compiled the ideas with her talent of creativity and thought. The diverse field of her involvement mobilized her to new ideas and sense of experimentation at a non-traditional approach. The presentation below about the disability mostly is based on her practical experiences and sharing of ideas and exchanges. Some situational analysis made here is her review on different programs, papers and documents. Suggestions so far reflected here in the presentation are her ideas either she herself opined from her social analysis combined with technical knowledge or success she has witnessed with others.

Introduction:

Disability may be defined as lack of ability to perform an activity in the manner or within the range considered normal for a human being. Bangladesh situation indicates that approximately 10% of the total around 15 million population is disabled which is around 15 million. About 70% of this disabled population is totally illiterate, 14% of them own less than 0.1 acre of land (functionally landless). Another serious situation is annual growth of disabled population is approximately about 2, 50,000 in Bangladesh.

In order to take some measures in hand the national action plan on disability was approved by the Government of Bangladesh on 25 September 2006. The action plan sets out a strategy to improve the lives of disabled people in the country. Fundamentally all matters relating to disability is the responsibility of the Ministry of Social Welfare. The

ministry endorses policies that are implemented by the Department of Social services often with involvement of the NGOs. An estimate shows that about two hundred NGOs and INCOs are working in this disability sector in Bangladesh.

From the documentary evidence it appears that donors working in this sector such as NORAD, USAID, DFID, and EU have their own disability guidelines. Most authentic document in this regard is the convention on the rights of the persons with disabilities by the United Nations. The purpose of the convention was to set a worldwide standard to promote, protect, and ensure the full and equal enjoyment of all human rights and fundamental freedoms by all persons with disabilities and to promote respect for their inherent dignity.

In the light of article-1 of the UN convention we can understand that disabilities include those persons who have long-term physical, mental, intellectual or sensory impairments which in interaction with various barriers may hinder their full and effective participation in society on an equal basis with others. This great UN Convention in fact contains a total of fifty articles. These articles in different ways have expressed to protect the interest of the disabled persons. Disability has a strong linkage with socio-economic condition of the people in a country as well as education, awareness, cultural and relevant other values have also a big influence on this sensitive sector.

Bangladesh is a country with a vast majority of poor people below two dollars earning a day. There are so many age old traditions and prejudices detrimental to the interest of healthy growth of a society. Sustained effort especially by the NGOs to empower the impoverished women is still have a limited achievement. Health and nutritional knowledge level is still very low for a huge majority women and men. Access to needed nutritive food, clean water, sanitation and other basic necessities of life are not within the reach of large majority people. These are some of the contributive factors to enhance the number of disabilities in Bangladesh.

Apart from this in a rural oriented life structure many other curative facilities are also beyond the reach of many people even those who have some level of awareness about taking care of life. This also worsens the disability situation in Bangladesh. The situation of the women and children in the disability sector in Bangladesh alike many other sectors are a matter of more suffering than the situation of men community. We from our practical experiences in working with the people have seen that in a religiously conservative society here a woman can neither express her all problems nor can take advantage of any facilities. The condition of children is worse as he/she is totally helpless. Elderly disabled persons are the worst sufferer with their disability. In this regard article six and seven of UN Convention on disability advocated in favor of rights of women and children though many countries could not yet be respectful to those articles in the implementation level. Bangladesh also needs to enforce implementation of those articles.

Disability and Poverty:

While making a situation analysis of disability in Bangladesh, the Danish Bilharziasis Laboratory for the World Bank in Bangladesh in one of their documents revealed that the people with disabilities are often the poorest of the world. In Bangladesh most people with disabilities live in the rural areas. Such people and their families are often remain outside of development programs and further of them most vulnerable are women and children. We can add with them the deplorable condition of elderly persons with disabilities. The paper also indicates that many of the responsible persons in the planning and implementation level bear a negative attitude about the people with disabilities. The paper also agrees that the organizations that have knowledge about the disability situation, many of them lack needed resources to undertake and implement needed programs. Assistive devices are not available in the countryside. Most caregivers to the disabled persons are not equipped with updated needed knowledge.

Scope of Education and Employment:

Disable persons opportunity of education is very limited in Bangladesh. Same is the case for them to get an employment opportunity even somehow if they manage to get some education. This is a negative outlook of the employer apprehending low performance and output from a disable person.

Awareness Level of Disable Person:

Awareness level of disable person about their rights is very low in Bangladesh. The reasons are many but a major cause is that a vast majority live in the rural area. Along with socio-economic and vital other factors, one of the recent major causes of disability is natural disaster in the form of cyclone, tornado, flood, flash flood, landslide and Sidr in Bangladesh. Many people are injured and hit from such natural disasters and can rare overcome the blow. These impair them in various ways and they enhance the list of disabilities. Further the victims of such disasters are the children, elderly persons and the women who relatively lack strength and stamina for self-rescue.

Social Outlook to Disable persons:

From our working experiences we can mention that the disable persons do not get due respect from the society in spite of many of them having education and other competencies. The children with disability in most cases in Bangladesh are considered as family burden and burden of the society. Most family because of their ignorance thinks that investment in disable children is not appropriate and they do not consider spending money behind disable children a profitable one. Similarly a senior citizen with disability is mostly uncared both at the family, society and in the country. This is a tragic situation. An elderly person who once contributes his family and society in most cases the family and the society recognizes his/her contribution. It is so inhuman in Bangladesh. Opportunity of normal elderly home is limited and the effort of accommodating the disabled elderly persons or the senior citizens are almost non-existent. This is a clear cut non-recognition and lack of feeling to the senior people.

Movement of Disable Person:

There are almost no facilities practically for the disable person to move. There is no favor for them. Therefore their movement is so much restricted. Over and above someone being disabling among the seniors is almost confined at home. He/she has almost no scope to travel in a public transport like bus, train and steamer. Where as article 18 of the UN convention on the rights of persons with disabilities has clearly stated that movement is a liberty of a person with disability. This is his/her national right. The state should afford and guarantee this right to a person with disability.

Gender Perspective and Disability:

Gender has a great implication on the disability. Someone being a girl with disability is far and far inferior to a boy with disability. A girl especially of the adolescent age group when in the countryside the parents think starting marriage age of a girl. Disability is a big minus point in her life to cope up with the society. A society where values a little in the case of a normal girl. The society where recognizes rarely the role of an educated women. In such a case the place of a disabled uneducated girl in the countryside is mostly treated as a curse. In such a situation, a girl not only suffers from her physical disability, her humiliation constrains her life of mental stress followed by a short life-span and a severe unpleasant life. Even such a girl with disability is not preferred for work as a maid in any family. The chance of normally surviving of such a girl is very meager.

Information and Statistics:

Information and statistics are very confusing about the situation of disabilities in Bangladesh. Even it is not clear whether there is any severe vulnerable geographical area where prevalence of disability is at a higher rate. Information provides only idea that the rural areas are more vulnerable to disability. There might be some correlation between the success of immunization program and the disability. A specific long-term research in relation with EPI program may reveal the impact of the immunization on the disability. From medical point of view, before the introduction of EPI program, the children were more vulnerable to so many incurable diseases leading to various types of physical impairment and diseases. Immunization has protected, of course, principally against six fatal diseases, which either takes the toll of life or grossly can cripple the life of a child. It is of course, a great success against fighting the disability in human being, particularly in the children (both boys and girls), and at a matured stage of course, the life of an adult and subsequently life of a surviving elderly woman and a man. Now let us turn our attention about the media.

Role of Media:

Media has a strong role in improving our country situation concerning the disability. The role of television, radio and news paper, any electronic media or any type of printing and publicity can make a great awareness to mitigate this suffering. Who can rightly do this in case of the media? A very clear concept of the media professionals are of utmost

importance. From our experiences we saw that most events are designed mirroring the urban way of life because who plan the events they have usually an influence of urban life. Most people even being involved with the media mostly live in the urban area or at best in the sub urban. Most of these people are either not oriented with the rural life or detached from the rural for a long time. Long time living for the media people in a rural setting has never been a condition in their career. Most of the information dissemination is urban and political event based. Most drama and feature are also urban oriented but

in a country along with their community and civil society participation. The effort of the NGO and NGO joint collaboration need to be further strengthened.

Secondly, within the broad disability issue, there are many small but critical issues those have to be researched and restrengthened for a proper sustainable solution of the disability problem. Since rural areas have been neglected and lacking facilities concerning the disability issue, therefore relevant organizations should be encouraged to more operate their programs at the countryside. The future research on disability issue should bring out more scientific facts and reasons as to the cause of disability. Future programs should be designed more rationally and realistically to address the disability issue.

Media coverage should increase particularly apprising the disabled persons about their rights and existing facilities. This may be done through using Radio, TV and Bangla newspapers. Locally the opinion leaders may be trained and oriented about the disability issue. Their responsibility will be to share their knowledgeable information about disability with the common people. The lawyers in a country can also play a laudable role to highlight the rights of the disabled persons whatever way they can. They should extend possible cooperation so that the rights of the disabled persons are protected and not undermined.

The job opportunities and educational facilities should not be discriminated for the disabled persons. Respective authority should be kind to provide special type of facilities to the disabled persons in their transport and communication sector. If possible seats may be reserved or earmarked for the disabled persons in the buses, trains and steamers. Many children with disabilities remain in uncared condition in the country. Their condition should be categorized. Those who can learn education should be given the opportunity of education and as well as vocational education according to the need and suitability of both the boys and girls with disability. In case of the elderly persons with disability and in extreme helpless condition should be given livelihood facilities and care in such a way so that their sufferings are mitigated. Some shelter house with innovation of piloting may be opened with joint effort of community, implementer and the donor and Govt. cooperation. The success may be replicated elsewhere. The model should be a sustainable one.

As a model steps may be taken to form cooperatives of disabled persons. From these cooperatives list may be prepared about the need of probable surgical need to restore disabled persons to normal life. Earning from the khas land, pond and other sources at the local level may be spent for the welfare of the disabled persons. Different impairment aids may be supplied to the needy disabled persons.