

# Report on Women with Disabilities in Bangladesh



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# 1. Acknowledgments

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***Dr. Akhter Hussain***

## 2. Abbreviations & Acronyms

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CEDAW	Convention for Elimination and Discrimination against Women
DPO	Disable Person's Organization
FGD	Focus group discussion
NGO	Non Government Organization
SARPV	Social Assistance and Rehabilitation for the Physically Vulnerable
VGd	Vulnerable Group Development
VGf	Vulnerable Group Feeding
WWD	Women with disability

### 3. Executive Summary

Disability is to an increasing extent being addressed as an issue to be included into mainstream development rather than as a matter of separate programs and charity. This follows the recognition that people with disabilities are citizens with equal rights, who given the opportunity - are able to contribute economically and socially to their households and communities. However, people with disabilities are often discriminated against, socially marginalized and do not have access to basic social services. As elsewhere, the number of population, both male and female, with disability is growing in the country. The number of people with disabilities in Bangladesh is high enough to merit special attention. Based on an assessment of the available figures and estimates by WHO and World Bank for developing countries, an overall disability prevalence of about 10% of the population remains a valid working estimate. The prevalence of disabilities in children below 18 years can be estimated to 6% and for the age group above 18 years the prevalence to about 14% or corresponding to 3.4 million children with disabilities and 10.2 million adults with disabilities (Danida, 2004. Disability in Bangladesh: A Situational Analysis).

Although women with disability constitute a large proportion of our population, very little information is available about their characteristics, the constraints they face in their daily lives and the quality of life they enjoy. The government has limited program interventions in addressing issues related with disability and for the disabled. In recent years, a number of organizations in the non- government sector have come up with programs and projects for the benefits of the disabled. However, organization run by the disabled dealing exclusively with disability issues is yet to emerge.

In view of the above, a study was conducted to know the real situation especially of women with disability so that appropriate program, project intervention and organizational set up could be designed and launched in the future. The general objective of the study was to assess the situation of women with disabilities and explore the possibility of how they could be developed as a pressure group to change the situation in their favour for ensuring their development. The specific objectives of the study included, review of the situation of women with disabilities (WWD); assess the attitude and perception of the WWD about their lives and livelihood; review policy framework of different stakeholders; and identify opportunities whereby WWD can ensure their rights and access to services. The proposed approach and methodology of the study consisted of two phases, I and II, which were design and implementation in phases. The first phase included two elements, review of literature and development and pre-testing of tools of information collection. Phase II consisted of survey, focus group discussion, key informants interview etc.

In recent years, global concern for disability and disabled people has come to the center stage of the international and national development discourse. Multilateral and bilateral international agencies, national and international non government organizations and above all national governments of countries are now coming forward with enabling policies, programs and projects for ensuring rights and mainstreaming the disabled with national life. The current study revealed that in respect to the above, Bangladesh is no exception in formulating national policies, enacting legislation and establishing organizations and taking up programs and projects for the benefit of the disabled. In addition to government efforts, a number of national and international non governmental organizations are also working in the area of disability. The major focuses of their initiatives are awareness development about rights, skills development and employment creation through training and credit and networking, advocacy for the establishment of rights and formulation of enabling policies and programs.

In the course of the study, it has also been observed that there exists a general level of awareness among officials of government and non government agencies particularly working with disabled and disability issues about relevant national and international laws and policies on disability. It appeared that they also have a genuine concern for mainstreaming of the disabled.

Media in Bangladesh do cover news about the disabled and disability. It was reported by the disabled that in the media, their success stories and achievements are reported in lesser number compared to negative aspects. However, the media persons expressed their concerns for the development of the disabled.

It has been observed that those women with disability who have been covered under the study have especially limited access to education and employment. In the families, they participate in the decision making process and social gatherings. They have movements outside their homes with assistance from family members as and when

### 3. Executive Summary

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needed. However, it was gathered that they have limited awareness about policies and legal provisions on disability. Some of them mentioned that they are associated with NGOs/DPOs and have benefited from their programs and projects. However, they were of the opinion that the WWD should have a national organization focusing specifically on their issues and preferably run and managed by them.

In light of the findings and observations, the followings recommendations are made.

■ A national organization of the WWD should be created to advocate and work for the benefit and interest specifically of the WWD in the national and international arenas. The main focus of such an organization should be empowerment of the WWD and promotion of their rights. For sustainability such national organization should maintain transparency, ensure accountability and develop strategic network, capacity and needs to be a member driven and not donor driven organization.

■ For improving the situation of the WWD, more proactive actions should be taken to ensure their increased access to education, health and employment by close monitoring of compliance of the fulfillment of already existing quota granted for them.

■ For mass awareness development on the issues and rights of the disabled the media should play a much more affirmative role. For this purpose, both government and non government organizations working in the area of disability should network and enter into a social responsibility partnership with print and electronic media to project life, livelihood, constraints and prospects of the WWD for the awareness development of the general mass.

Organizations working for the benefit of the disabled should be networked to develop a common advocacy strategy and program for the establishment of rights and policy change in favour of the disabled. This will be more forceful in exerting pressure and will intensify the movement for policy change.

## 4. Introduction and Background

Disability is to an increasing extent being addressed as an issue to be included into mainstream development rather than as a matter of separate programs and charity. This follows the recognition that people with disabilities are citizens with equal rights, who given the opportunity - are able to contribute economically and socially to their households and communities. However, people with disabilities are often discriminated against, socially marginalized and do not have access to basic social services. As elsewhere, the number of population, both male and female, with disability is growing in the country. The number of people with disabilities in Bangladesh is high enough to merit special attention. Based on an assessment of the available figures and estimates by WHO and World Bank for developing countries, an overall disability prevalence of about 10% of the population remains a valid working estimate. The prevalence of disabilities in children below 18 years can be estimated to 6% and for the age group above 18 years the prevalence to about 14% or corresponding to 3.4 million children with disabilities and 10.2 million adults with disabilities (Danida, 2004. Disability in Bangladesh: A Situational Analysis).

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In Bangladesh, data and information on the situation of women with disabilities are limited due to lack of elaborate studies or researches on the subject. The study 'Feminine Dimension of Disability' done by Nirafat Anam in 2002 tried to reflect on the situation of the adolescent girls with disability in the country. The other noteworthy study 'Feelings: on Disability Issue in Bangladesh' by Shahidul Haque and Shahnaz Begum tried to look into various issues that are related with the lives of the disabled persons in Bangladesh. It appears that not yet any attitudinal study has been conducted highlighting many dimensions of the lives of the women with disabilities. In view of the above, the present study has been conducted by taking into account the attitudes and perceptions of the women with disability and the different stakeholders towards them.



## 5. Objectives of the Study

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### General Objective

To assess the situation of women with disabilities and explore the possibility of how they could be developed as a pressure group to change the situation in their favour for ensuring their development.

### Specific objectives

- Review the situation of women with disabilities (WWD) in Bangladesh
- Assess the attitude and perception of the WWD about their lives and livelihood
- Review policy framework of different stakeholders
- Identify opportunities whereby WWD can ensure their rights and access to services



## 6. Methodology

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The proposed approach and methodology of the study consisted of two phases, I and II, which were design and implementation phases respectively. The details of each are discussed below.

### Phase One: Design

The first phase included two elements:

#### 1 Review of Literature

Relevant published and unpublished literature, documents and reports on disability and disabled people especially women were studied to have a thorough understanding about different aspects of their lives.

#### 2 Development and Pre-testing of Tools of Information Collection

To collect data and information from various sources a number of tools were developed. These were questionnaire to conduct opinion survey of the WWD, guidelines and checklists to conduct focus group discussions and key informants' interviews on different areas concerning the WWD. Before using the tools in real field settings, these were pre-tested to observe their relevance and appropriateness, and later standardized after incorporating feedback received from field-tests.

### Phase Two: Implementation

Field investigation was undertaken in all administrative divisions of the country. A number of activities were undertaken to collect relevant data and information that were thought required for the purpose of the study. The activities included:

#### 1 Survey

To learn about the attitude of the WWD, a survey was conducted. The survey was conducted with the help of pre-designed questionnaire. The questionnaire recorded relevant information on attitude and perception of the WWD on areas concerning their lives and livelihood. The designed questionnaire recorded both qualitative and quantitative information. The respondents were selected through a purposive sampling technique.

#### 2 Focus Group Discussion

Focus group discussion sessions with different stakeholders were conducted to identify various problems faced by the WWD and also opportunities that could be used to ensure their rights and access to different services. A pre-designed guideline was used to conduct FGDs.

#### 3 Key Informants Interview

Knowledgeable persons representing different arenas that included officials of the government, NGOs and DPOs were interviewed to gather information on policy frameworks and possible interventions and their suggestions and recommendations to improve the situation especially of the WWD.

## 7. Bangladesh Government's Policy and Legal framework on Disability

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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 also prohibits any form of discrimination between various social groups including the disabled. 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 organization.

The Government has also established a National Foundation for the Development of the Disabled Persons to provide funding support to programs and projects of different non governmental and social organizations. As part of affirmative action, the government has also introduced 10 per cent quota system for the employment of people with disabilities in the services of the Republic. A national Action Plan on disability concerned issues has also been developed. The Action Plan focuses on areas like, self-help organization, women with disability, early detection and intervention, education, training and employment, access to built environment and transport, access to communication, assistive technology, social security, public awareness etc.

## 8. Situational Analysis of Women with Disability

Before embarking on designing any policy and or program intervention focusing on any particular community it is always advisable to conduct a situational analysis of that particular community. It is even better to conduct the situational analysis on the basis of opinion of the representative samples of the concerned community. In line with the above assumption, to gather opinions of women with disability (WWD), a survey was conducted in different geographical locations of the country to obtain nation wide representative responses on issues related to them. As mentioned earlier, the survey was conducted with the help of a pre-designed questionnaire. It recorded a set of information on the life and livelihood of disabled women of Bangladesh that are discussed in the succeeding sections.

### 8.1 Distribution Pattern

About 300 women with disability (WWD) were purposively selected for administering the questionnaire. However, at the end, about 292 selected WWD could be interviewed. Table 1 presented below projects the distribution pattern of surveyed WWDs by administrative division. It needs to be mentioned here that from each division, 50 WWD were selected. It appears from the table that in Khulna and Rajshahi divisions all selected respondents were interviewed. On the other hand, 46 from Dhaka and 48 from Chittagong divisions could be interviewed. Here it needs to be mentioned that all of the selected WWD in different divisions could not be interviewed due to their non availability at the time of the survey.

Table-1: Respondents by Division

Division	Number	Per cent
Dhaka	46	15.8
Chittagong	48	16.4
Rajshahi	50	17.1
Khulna	50	17.1
Sylhet	49	16.8
Barisal	49	16.8
<b>Total</b>	<b>292</b>	<b>100.0</b>

### 8.2 Personal/Socio-economic Profile

Personal details provide important information about the group that is selected for the purpose of any specific study. In the current effort, a number of information, such as age, education, marital status were collected from the respondents for developing a personal profile of them.

#### 8.2.1 Age

Collected information on age of the respondents presented that about one third (28.8%) of them belong to the age group of up to 24. Another 30% of them fall within the age bracket of 25-34 years. On the other hand, 29.1% of the total number surveyed is from the age of 35-39 years. About 20% are either 40 or above years of age.

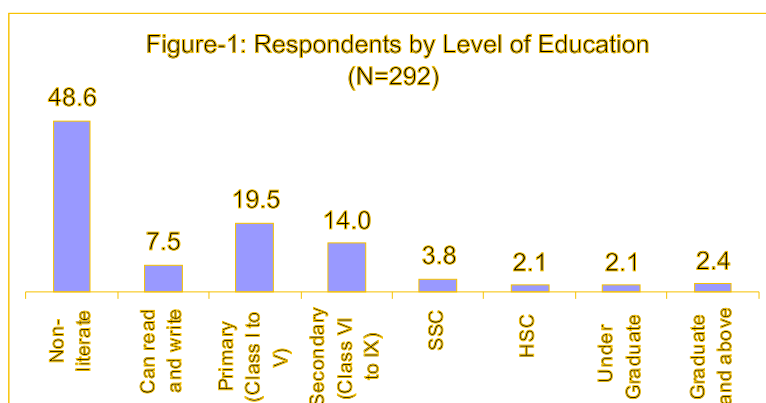
#### 8.2.2 Education

Education is an important indicator to determine socio economic status of an individual. As such, during the survey relevant information were collected to determine the educational status of the respondents. The figure presented below projects that almost half (48.6 per cent) of the surveyed women with disability (WWD) are non-literate, and those who can read and write constitute about 7.5% of them. It can be further gleaned from the table that about 19.5% of them read up to primary level and another 14% have studied up to secondary level (class IX). Again, about 5.9% have read up to Higher Secondary level. On the other hand, undergraduate and graduate constitute about 4.5% of the total number of respondents.

Here it may be noted that the number of specialized educational institutions for the disabled (particular types) in either non existent or limited and they are mostly located in urban areas. As a result, women with

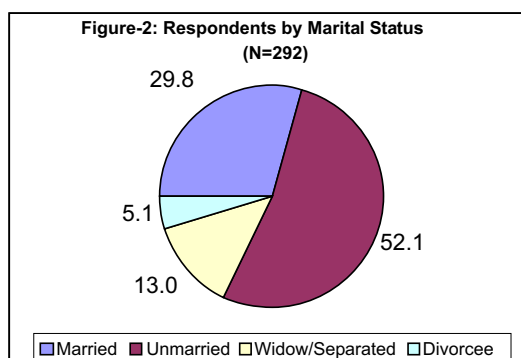
## 8. Situational Analysis of Women with Disability

particular kind of disability in the rural areas absolutely have no opportunity to attend or go to those educational institutions. The other aspect that needs to be mentioned is that because of lack of awareness schools in overwhelming cases do not create enabling infrastructure facilities such as entry exit provision, for the disabled to attend schools.



### 8.2.3 Marital Status

Information was gathered on the marital status of the disabled women covered under the study. Collected data reveal that 29.8% are married. Widow/separated and divorcee constitutes about 13% and 5.1% respectively of the total number of the respondents. It was found that a little over 50% of them are unmarried.



Data on number of children reveals that about a quarter of the married/ widow/divorcee WWDs reported that they do not have any child and about 32 per cent mentioned that they have only one child. On the other hand about 15 per cent of them stated that they have about 4-5 children.

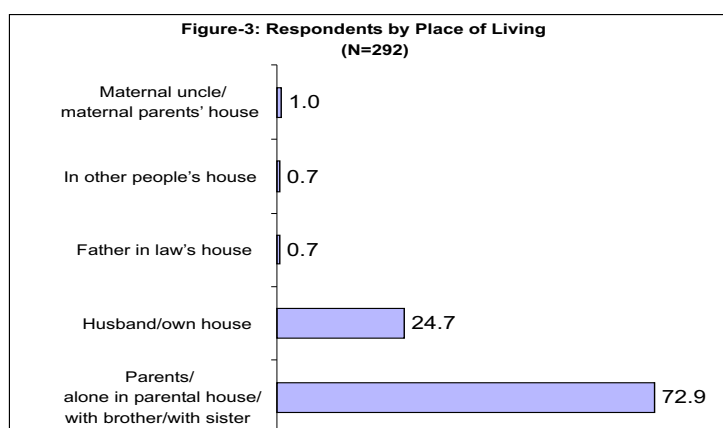
**Table-3: Respondents by Number of Children**

Number of children	Number	Percent
No Children	34	24.3
1 Child	45	32.1
2 Childrens	22	15.7
3 Childrens	19	13.6
4 Childrens	11	7.9
5 and more Childrens	9	6.4
<b>Total</b>	<b>140</b>	<b>100.0</b>

## 8. Situational Analysis of Women with Disability

### 8.2.4 Place of Living

It was thought worthwhile to gather information on place of living of the disabled women covered under the study. It is believed that this kind of information helps in assessing the real life situation of the disabled. Collected data and information suggest that the overwhelming majority of them (72.9%) either live with their parents or with their brother or sister. Some of them mentioned that they live in their parental home all alone by themselves. About 24.7 per cent mentioned that they live with their husbands in their own houses. The rest stated a number of places where they live that include father in law's house, other people's house and maternal uncle or maternal parents' house.



### 8.2.5 Religion

Data and information were also collected to observe the distribution pattern based on religion of the selected respondents of the present study. Collected data on the above is presented in the Table provided below. It can be observed that the overwhelming majority of the disabled women surveyed are Muslims. They constitute about 84.2 per cent of the total number of respondent. They rest 15.8 per cent are Hindus. Here it may be noted that about 86 per cent of the total population of Bangladesh are Muslim.

### 8.2.6 Occupation

Occupation is an important indicator that determines the socio-economic status of a person or a particular group. To have an understanding about different occupations that are being pursued by the present study respondents i.e. WWD relevant data and information were collected during the field survey. Table 8 below presents the computed data on occupations of the WWD. It is projected that about half of the respondents (49 per cent) are involved in household activities or could be termed as home makers. Students constitute the next larger group i.e. 14.4 per cent. The other occupations in which the WWD are engaged include service, business, day labourer and handicraft making etc. During field inquiry it was mentioned by the WWDs that their occupation to a great extent depend on the nature of disability.

**Table-4: Respondents by Occupation**

	Number	Per cent
Student	42	14.4
Household work	143	49.0
Service	7	2.4
Private Service	7	2.4
Business	5	1.7
Day labour	5	1.7
Handicraft	11	3.8
Others	72	24.7
<b>Total</b>	<b>292</b>	<b>100.0</b>

## 8. Situational Analysis of Women with Disability

### 8.2.7 Income

Efforts were made to collect information on average monthly income of the WWDs covered under the current study. It is believed that this information will give us an understanding about the family background of them in terms of economic standing. Collected data on family monthly income projects variations among WWD households. Table on monthly family income shows that about 35.6 per cent of the WWD households have a monthly income of about 1-2 thousand Taka, another 26 per cent have income ranging between 2-3 thousand Taka. It could be further seen from the table that about 14 per cent of the WWD households have a monthly income of more than 5 thousand Taka. It appears from the collected data and information that majority of the WWD households covered under the present study belong to the lower income groups of the society.

**Table-5: Respondents by Monthly Family Income**

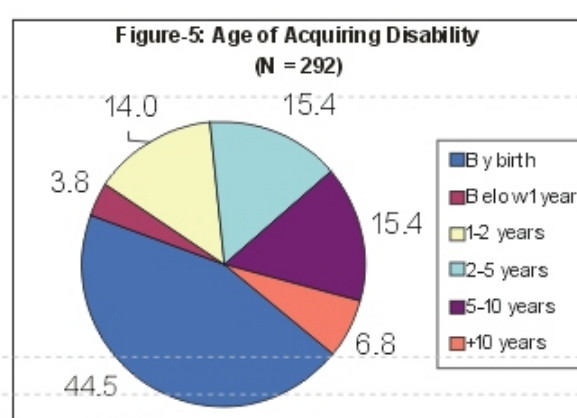
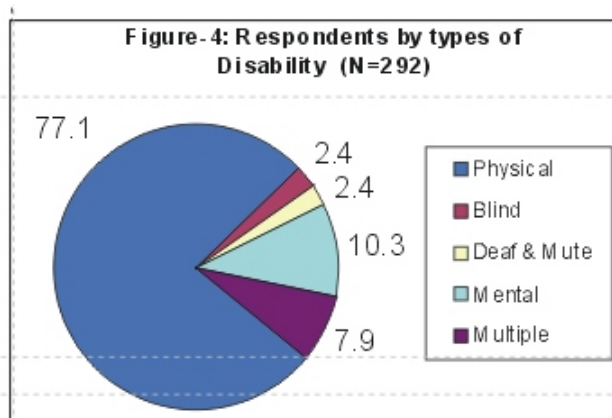
Monthly Income (In Tk.)	Number	Per cent
Up to 1000	19	6.5
1001-2000	104	35.6
2001-3000	76	26.0
3001-4000	26	8.9
4001-5000	25	8.6
5001-10000	32	11.0
10000+	10	3.4
Avg. income in Taka	4,186	
<b>Total</b>	<b>292</b>	<b>100.0</b>

### 8.3 Disability

In the present study a conscious effort was made to record opinions of women with various types of disability to get a comprehensive picture of their current status. Collected data and information on this issue is presented in figure 4 provided below. It projects that women with physical disability constitute about 77 per cent of the selected WWDs. The next higher percentages are mental (10.3 per cent) and women with multiple disabilities (7.9 per cent).

During field survey it was revealed that about two thirds of the WWD respondents were partially disabled and the rest were completely or had serious disability. As we all know some are born with disability while others acquire it at different points of their lives. On inquiry on the above it revealed that 44.5 per cent of the respondents were born with some kind of disabilities. On the other hand, the rest became disabled at a later stage of their lives. Figure 5 shows that about 45 per cent of them got disabled within first 10 years of their lives. Only 6.8 per cent of them reported that they became disabled after attaining 10 years of age.

On the question of the use of assistive devices by the selected WWD, it revealed that only 23 (7.9 per cent) out of a total of 292 respondents use various assistive devices. These devices include earphone, plastic leg/shoe, wheel chair and stick etc.



## 8. Situational Analysis of Women with Disability

### 8.4 Home Environment

Under home environment a number of aspects of life have been included under the present study. These aspects include the physical, psychological and social environment that particularly affects the lives of the WWD. Under physical environment, accessibility to different places within the house they live were looked into.

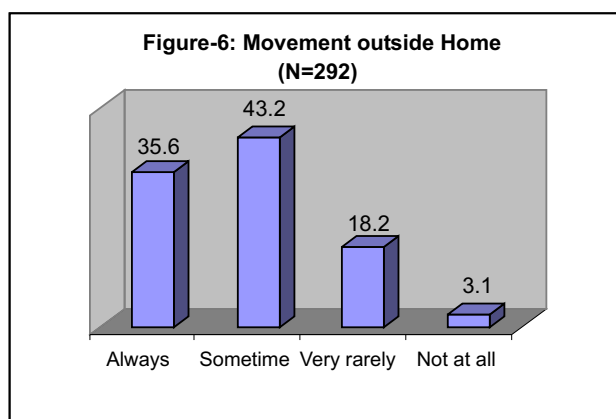
In the first place, regarding easy movement and accessibility to different rooms in the houses the WWD live in, it was reported by the overwhelming majority that they can move around the house without any difficulty. Their number constitutes about 76.7 per cent of the respondents. The rest mentioned that they face difficulty in their movement within the house. With respect to use of toilet facilities within the house it revealed that about 72 per cent of them could use the toilet with ease. On the other hand, the remaining 28 per cent stated that they face some difficulty in using toilet facilities at home. On the question of the use of kitchen, about 230 out of a total of 292 respondents mentioned that they face no difficulty in using the kitchen but the rest 21 per cent mentioned otherwise. Similar responses were recorded regarding easy entry and exit from home.

It is a well-known fact that sometimes some changes are needed in the physical infrastructure for facilitating easy movement and use of various facilities within the house for the disabled. On inquiry, it was observed that in the case of 33 WWD covered under the study, changes were brought within the house for their benefit. The changes brought in were, lowering down of staircase, constructing toilets beside or close to bedroom, setting up of tube well in close proximity of toilet, and modification of furniture to make them disable use friendly etc.

The current study also tried to collect information on social environment that exists within the households of the WWD. This also to a great extent reflects attitude of the household members towards the disabled members. On the question of participation in social gathering or function in the house, about 80 per cent of the WWD mentioned that they participate in those functions and gatherings. The role they usually play in those situations includes, participation in all activities that take place, if possible, help others to organize things, sit at one corner of the room and observe or listen to on going happenings and provide company to the invitees etc.

The present study tried to gather opinion of the WWD regarding their marriage. The collected data projects that about 90 per cent of them are of the opinion that all eligible WWD should get married. In this regard, we also tried to know from them whether their families discuss with them about their marriages. It was reported by about 44 out of a total of 152 that their families discuss with them about their marriage possibilities. But the rest informed that they never had such kind of discussion ever with their family members. The reasons for such, as mentioned by them are, the families do not get any marriage proposition because of disability, not interested because it may bring more harm than good and do not have enough money to pay as dowry.

There is a popular belief that sometime the disabled are subjected to maltreatment even in their families. In view of the above, we tried to know from them they type of behaviour they generally receive from their families. More that 40 per cent stated that sometimes their families maltreat them. But more that 50 per cent of them mentioned that they not subjected to any sort of misbehaviour from their family members.





## 8. Situational Analysis of Women with Disability

On the question of movement outside the homes, 35.6 per cent reported that they always go outside their homes. Around 43.2 per cent stated that they occasionally go outside their homes. The remaining mentioned that they either very rarely or never go outside. Responses recorded in this regard are presented in Figure-6.

It was further learned that more than half (57.5 per cent) of the respondents alone go outside of their homes. On the other hand, the rest 42.5 per cent mentioned that either family members or servants accompany them when they go outside of their homes.

### 8.5 Access to Education

Education is important for every human being. It facilitates both material and spiritual development. On the other hand, it is also a tool through which well-being could be ensured. On the issue of access to education, it was mentioned by 97.9 per cent that WWD should receive some kind of education or the other. Collected data and information revealed that about 150 out of a total of 292 WWD have received some form of education. But the rest 142 of them did not receive any education. The respondents who received education mentioned that a number of enabling factors facilitated their education. Most of them mentioned that they could get education because of their parents' encouragement. Some mentioned that their family members were also a source of encouragement. Teachers motivation and encouragement was another factor that helped them in seeking education.

On the question, what prevented them from access to education, the respondents mentioned a number of reasons. These were, lack of financial resources, negligence of parents and family members, disability (deaf and dumb, blindness, psychological impairment etc), and non-availability of school close to home etc.

In many cases, it has been observed that persons with disability make efforts for education but at a later stage they discontinue or drop out. The WWD mentioned a number of factors or reasons that were responsible for drop out or discontinuing education. The reasons mentioned were, financial constraints, communication to educational institution was expensive, failed in evaluation and carelessness of parents and family members. But those who continued with their education mentioned that their family members constantly encouraged them in seeking education. They further reported that the family tried their best to help them in this regard by providing necessary money, facilitating their travel to school and constant motivation and encouragement.

### 8.6 Participation in Family level Decision Making Process

Participation in the household decision making process indicates one's position in the family. It also projects how a family provides importance to its members. In the present study, we tried to gather information on participation of WWD in their family level decision making process. To determine the level of importance that is attached to their participation in the process a number of questions on their participation in different types of decisions were asked. On the question of their participation on any decision that is related with family economy, 50.3 per cent of the selected WWD mentioned that they participate in such decision making process. The rest are not consulted in such matters [Table-6]. Here economic decision meant buying and purchase of movable and immovable properties, some kind of investment decision, and major expenditure to be incurred by the family etc.

The respondents were also asked to state whether they are consulted or participate in the decision making process that concerns their lives and problems. Collected data revealed that little more than 50 per cent of the WWD expressed that their families seek their participation in the decision making process that concerns their lives. On the other hand, about 44.9 per cent of them mentioned that they are not taken into confidence in making decisions that concern their lives by the families [Table-7].

Responses	Number	Percent
Yes	147	50.3
No	145	49.7
<b>Total</b>	<b>292</b>	<b>100.0</b>

Responses	Number	Percent
Yes	161	55.1
No	131	44.9
<b>Total</b>	<b>292</b>	<b>100.0</b>

## 8. Situational Analysis of Women with Disability

### 8.7 Profession/Work

Here profession or work meant involvement in gainful activities by the WWD. The data projects that about 30.8 per cent of the WWD surveyed are involved in different activities that generate income for them. On the other hand, more than two thirds of them are not involved in any gainful activities. Further investigation revealed that they are engaged in a number of vocations that included tailoring, batik printing, handicraft, teaching (house tutoring, music and school), business (poultry, rearing of cattle heads), labourer (maid, day labourer), begging and service (in different institutions). Among all these the first one topped the list. About one quarter of the WWD mentioned that they are involved in that vocation. It was followed by business and service. On the question whether they received any training, some of the WWD mentioned that they received training on tailoring, batik printing, music and handicraft.

As mentioned earlier that two thirds of the surveyed WWD are not engaged in any gainful activities. As such, it was probed why they did not engage them in any such activities. The surveyed WWD mentioned a number of reasons for their non involvement in economic activities. Some of these reasons are, family members do not approve, lack of job opportunity, can not work due to disability, no such works are available particularly in rural areas etc. But it is interesting to note that on the question whether disabled women should engage themselves in income generating activities the overwhelming majority answered in the affirmative. They constitute about 98.3 per cent of the total number of WWD surveyed under the study. Their preferred vocations as suggested by them were tailoring, stitching, handicraft, poultry, rearing of cow and goat, vegetable growing, small business, teaching etc. They also felt that training would be needed if they wanted to take up those gainful activities and they expressed their interest in receiving training in those areas to enhance their skills.

Encouragement helps in motivating people to engage in gainful or income generating activities. It is more relevant and to some extent essential in the case of WWD as they suffer from various kinds of physical limitations. The surveyed WWD mentioned that their family members always encourage and motivate them in taking up different activities so that they can stand on their own feet. However, when WWD employed and engaged in gainful activities were asked how they have secured the job, they stated that some one helped them, secured it on their own and the family members helped them. In the work environment on the question whether they are discriminated against others, only a few of the WWD reported the existence of discriminatory practices at the work place. The nature or type of discrimination as mentioned are less importance and less salary compared to other fellow workers. But the respondents mentioned that in the overwhelming cases they are treated well by other co workers and employers.

Employment helps the WWD in earning an income. We therefore wanted to know whether that income was enough to cover their expenditures. But it revealed that in most of the cases the generated income was reported to be insufficient to cover costs. But those who mentioned otherwise, save a certain portion of their income. With respect to expenditure about 90 per cent of the WWD mentioned that they generally spend the money for the family. It was further learned that in more than 85 per cent cases they have a say on expenditure incurred by the money they earn.

### 8.8 Communication and Transport

Like every other human being WWD also need to communicate and use transports for various purposes. It was gathered from little over 75 per cent of the selected respondents that they can travel in transports that are available in their localities. The rest mentioned otherwise. However, 55.1 per cent mentioned that they face difficulty in boarding on and off the transports. It was further reported by about 60 per cent of WWD that buses generally do not wait for a longer period of time to allow them to board on them. Again, only in 50 per cent cases they get help and cooperation of the bus helpers to board on and off the buses. However, 54.2 per cent mentioned that they receive cordial behaviour from the staff of the public transports.

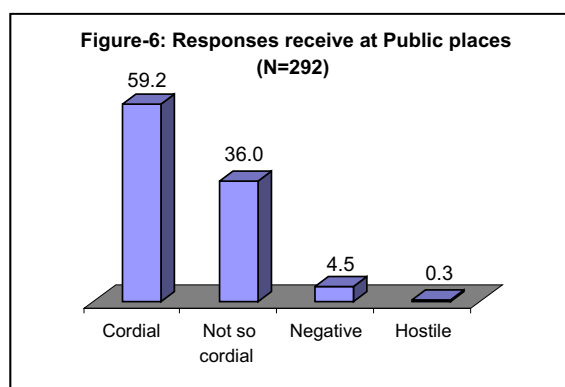
With respect to behaviour pattern of the co passengers towards WWD, it was gathered that in most of the cases they are quite sympathetic and cordial. It was further mentioned by the WWD that the co passengers in most cases help and cooperate with them if needed. But some of them mentioned that in some cases they are subjected to adverse and negative comments of the co passengers of public transports that are related or associated with their disability.

## 8. Situational Analysis of Women with Disability

### 8.9 Public Places

Public places mean the places that are frequented by a large number of people that may include market, bazaar, school, college, amusement centers etc. In the present study, efforts were made to know the nature of accessibility of the WWD to different public places and the kind of behaviour they receive at those places. It was reported by about 63.4 per cent of the WWD that they frequently go to different public places for different purposes. These places include, school, college, shops, markets, hospitals etc. The responses they receive at various public places are recorded in the Table provided below.

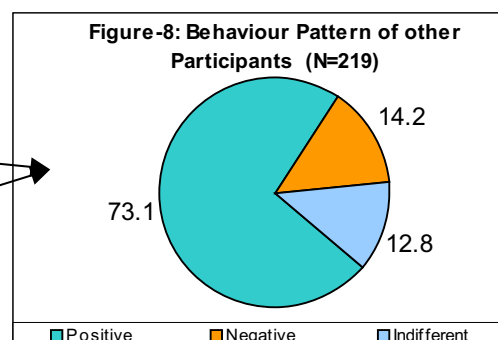
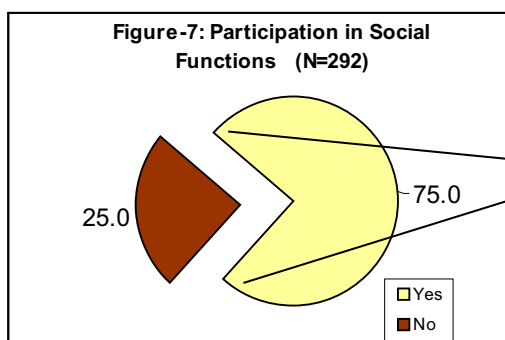
The figure projects that 59.2 per cent of the WWD are of the opinion that they receive cordial responses from people at public places and 36 per cent mentioned that the behaviour pattern of people at different public places towards them is not so cordial. On the other hand, 4.5 per cent are of the opinion that they experience negative behaviour and attitude at public places and only 1 respondent mentioned it to be hostile. However, more than 50 per cent of the WWD stated that they get help and cooperation from people at public places if needed.



### 8.10 Social Function/Gathering

Socialization is an important aspect of human life. As human being one has to socialize to meet his or her socio-cultural and psychological needs. Socialization is achieved through participation in various social functions and gatherings. In the present study, data and information were gathered on the participation of WWD in social functions and gatherings. The Table 16 projects the tabulated data and information on the subject. It can be seen that 219 out of a total of 292 respondents regularly attend or participate in social functions with their family members.

The types of social and religious functions attended by them as mentioned are marriage ceremony, birthday, Eid gathering, Milad and Puja etc. With respect to the behaviour patterns they experience in these social and religious functions and gathering, the responses are provided in Table 17. It can be gleaned from there that 73 per cent of them feel that they receive positive behaviour from other participants of various gatherings. However, 14.2 per cent mentioned that they are subjected to negative behaviours. The rest 12.8 per cent were of the opinion that they experience indifferent attitude from other participants.



## 8. Situational Analysis of Women with Disability

### 8.11 Health Care

Access to health care is a fundamental right of every individual. As such, relevant health care related information of the WWD was gathered. It was observed that all the respondents depend on different sources depending on their ability for health care services. Some of these as mentioned are, government and private hospitals, qualified physicians' chamber, Kobiraj, quacks, pharmacy and clinic and religious persons etc. However, only 7.2 per cent of them regularly seek medical advice for their disability. But in general, they visit the above mentioned places for treatment of other ailments. Collected data and information revealed that more than 75 per cent of the WWD seek others help for availing health care services that include immediate family members, neighbours and household servants.

On the question of attention and cooperation that they receive from staff of various health facilities the WWD reported that they generally receive proper attention and cooperation from them. They constitute about 66.8 per cent of the total number of WWD. Even 28.8 per cent of them mentioned that sometimes they are provided with preferential treatment by the staff of the health care facilities and institutions.

### 8.12 Awareness about Policy, Legal Provision and Institutions

Awareness especially on policy, legal provisions and institutions helps to seek and establish rights. To secure rights and for the welfare and benefit of the disabled the Bangladesh government has formulated certain policies and enacted laws at various points of time. It is perceived that awareness about these is important especially for the disabled.

On the question of awareness about government's policy on disability collected data and information reveal that only 20.9 per cent answered in the affirmative. They rest 79.1 per cent mentioned that they do not have any idea about it [Table-8].

Table 9 presented below projects the data and information on awareness of the WWD about the enactment of laws for the disabled. It can be observed from the table that a little over one third of the selected WWD are aware of the enacted laws on disability. However, the majority lacked awareness on them. Regarding awareness about the specific provisions of the laws only 6.2 per cent of the WWD expressed that they are aware of them. But the overwhelming majority lacked awareness about them.

**Table-8: Awareness about Policy on Disability**

	Number	Percent
Yes	61	20.9
No	231	79.1
<b>Total</b>	<b>292</b>	<b>100.0</b>

**Table-9: Awareness about Laws on Disability**

	Number	Percent
Yes	105	36.0
No	187	64.0
<b>Total</b>	<b>292</b>	<b>100.0</b>

Some special provisions are made in the policy and laws for the benefit of disabled in certain areas. The present study tried to assess the level of awareness of the WWD on those provisions. Survey data reveal that there is some level of awareness about provisions in the areas of health and rehabilitation, education, training, employment, safety and social security, accessibility etc., among the WWD. However, more than 50 per cent of the mentioned that they are not at all aware of any special provision that are made for the benefit of the disabled.

In Bangladesh, both the government and non-government organizations have programs and projects that are being implemented especially for the benefit of disabled women. But it appears that less than 1 per cent of the WWD are aware of those programs and projects of the government's Department of Social Services and the NGOs. But, some of them mentioned about some activities that are being run for the disabled, which have relevance with programs and projects of the above-mentioned organizations. However, 17.8 per cent of WWD mentioned that they received some benefits from various programs of the government. The benefits were pension, Vulnerable Group Development (VGD) and Vulnerable Group Feeding (VGF) cards, training and credit.

International charter on women right CEDAW is an important initiative for the advancement of women. This has also addressed the problems of the disabled women and made certain provisions for their rights and

## 8. Situational Analysis of Women with Disability

advancement. The selected respondents of the current study were asked whether they are aware of the CEDAW and its various provisions. Collected data as presented in Table 10 projects that only 10.3 per cent of the respondents are aware of the CEDAW and the rest almost 90 per cent of them have no idea about it. However, those who are aware mentioned that they believe that CEDAW is an important document for reducing gender gap by ensuring access of women to different spheres of life.

**Table-10: Awareness about CEDAW**

Response	Number	Percent
Yes	30	10.3
No	262	89.7
<b>Total</b>	<b>292</b>	<b>100.0</b>

### 8.13 Membership of NGO/DPO

Many Non Governmental Organizations (NGOs) and Disabled Persons' Organizations (DPOs) in Bangladesh are working in the disability sector. They run various programs for the benefits of the disabled, both male and female. During field survey, data and information were collected on their membership of the selected WWD of any NGO or DPO. The compiled data can be seen in the table given below. It projects that about 63.4 per cent of the respondents are associated with NGOs/DPOs [Table-11].

On the query, what services these organizations generally provide, the WWD who are the members of these organizations reported that services which are provided include skills development training in various areas for taking up income generating activities, credit, assistive devices, health care, motivational work and awareness development in different areas etc. The majority of them added that they have been benefited by the projects and programs of these NGOs and DPOs (126 out of 185). The benefits included skills development through training, awareness development, credit and income generating activities, assistive devices and advises on various areas. In the present study, 165 out of a total of 292 of the selected WWD mentioned that these NGOs/DPOs try to address the needs particularly of the disabled women. However, on the question whether as members do they have any role in the decision making process of these organizations, almost 75 per cent answered in the negative. With respect to current activities of NGOs/DPOs, more than half of the WWD felt these need to changed or reorganized. Some of the suggested changes were, creation of more employment opportunity, more efforts for eliminating discrimination, ensure increased involvement of the disabled members in the decision making process etc.

The present study also tried to know from the WWD whether there is any need for a national organization to provide leadership to the disabled in Bangladesh. Collected data revealed that the overwhelming majority of the WWD are in favour of it. They constitute about 96.6 per cent of the total number of respondents [Table-12].

	Number	Percent
Yes	185	63.4
No	107	36.6
<b>Total</b>	<b>292</b>	<b>100.0</b>

	Number	Percent
Yes	282	96.6
No	10	3.4
<b>Total</b>	<b>292</b>	<b>100.0</b>

The selected WWD also made suggestions on the functions of such a national organization of the disabled. These were, work for the development and advancement of the WWD, create employment opportunity for them, provide health services, education and economic assistance and skill development training etc. On the question, whether the WWD will become a member of such an organization, 94 per cent of them answered in the affirmative.

	Number	Per cent
Yes	265	94.0
No	17	6.0
<b>Total</b>	<b>282</b>	<b>100.0</b>

## 8. Situational Analysis of Women with Disability

### 8.14 Media

Media projection plays an important role in developing public perception on any matter or subject. In the present study data and information were collected on access to media and media projection of the WWD. It revealed that little over half of the selected WWD have access to both electronic and print media such as, television, radio and newspaper. It means they watch, listen or read them [Table-14].

It has been observed that different forms of media project various social groups in different ways and helps in creating public perception about them. About media projection of the WWD, 20.2 per cent of the selected respondents were of the opinion that they are projected in a negative manner. Thus helps in creating a negative image of them in the society [Table-15].

**Table-14: Access to Medias (TV, radio, newspaper)**

	Number	Percent
Yes	161	55.1
No	131	44.9
<b>Total</b>	<b>292</b>	<b>100.0</b>

Response	Number	Percent
Positive	127	43.5
Negative	59	20.2
Do not know	106	36.3
<b>Total</b>	<b>292</b>	<b>100.0</b>

The reasons for negative projection as mentioned by them were, no one evaluates them properly and ignores them. They suggested that the media should project on the problems and constraints of the disabled, their achievement against odds and the means and ways on how they could be self-reliant and the rights of the disabled.



## 9. Perception, Policy and Programs of Different Organizations

### 9.1 Government Organizations

Information on government policy, program and projects concerning disability and disabled was collected from officials of different government organizations and agencies. It revealed that the officials of government agencies especially those of the Department of Social Services, Ministry of Social Welfare, Ministry of Women and Children Affairs and Department of Youth Development, Ministry of Youth and Sports are well aware of constitutional provisions, national policies, legislation and programs and projects that are formulated, enacted and implemented respectively for the benefit of the disabled. The officials of other government agencies are not aware of the details of these measures. However, all of them were found to have concern for the development and mainstreaming of the disabled especially women in the national life.

Government agencies have programs and projects for the benefit of the disadvantaged including women in general, but specific program and projects specifically for the WWD are not existent. The projects and programs that are implemented by the Ministry of Social Welfare for the disabled are open for both disabled men and women. It is implementing projects on empowerment, credit without interest and pension for the disabled. However, the ongoing projects and programs do not have special provisions for the treatment, and rehabilitation of WWD.

The government officials appreciate the concept of having a national organization of the disabled women. They were of the opinion that such kind of organization is needed as it will be able to effectively represent the WWD. They felt that the organization should be run and managed by them. Such organization will receive support of the government under existing policy. For sustainability, they suggested that besides external support it should primarily depend on its focused clientele, the WWD.

### 9.2 Non-Governmental Organizations (NGOs) and Disabled Persons Organizations (DPOs)

The present study tried to gather information on a number of issues concerning disability and the disabled from the selected NGOs and DPOs including their programs, projects and policies regarding women with disability. Here it may be mentioned that some of these organizations have nation wide programs/projects while the others have programs/project with limited area focus. The gathered data and information are presented under the following headlines.

#### 9.2.1 Programs and Projects

It has been observed that the NGOs selected for the purpose of the study have projects in different program areas. Some of these are health and sanitation, education, rights, legal rights and assistance, gender, and human trafficking etc. These programs and project have project specific beneficiaries, such as, poor, children and women in general. It was mentioned by the officials of these organizations that disabled including women with disability can also be a beneficiary of the projects and programs run by them if they fulfill the qualification or eligibility criterion. However, they mentioned that they do not have any particularly focused program and projects specifically for women with disability.

However, in the case of the Disabled Persons Organizations (DPOs) investigation revealed that these organizations do have specific programs for the disabled that include awareness development about rights, skills development and income generating activities. It was reported that the projects and programs are in general for the disabled including both men and women. But women in many cases are given preference.

The NGOs and the DPOs in general depend on financial support of the international donors and other national NGOs and funding sources. However, sometimes the national NGOs receive fund from international donors and channel those to other smaller NGOs and DPOs. These organizations are either registered with the Department of Social Services or the NGO Affairs Bureau of the Government of Bangladesh.



## 9. Perception, Policy and Programs of Different Organizations

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### 9.2.2 Awareness about Policies and Legal Provisions on Disability

On the question of awareness about policies and legal provisions on disability, it appears that in general there is awareness about the existence of those. But in most of the cases, the functionaries of these organizations could not specify the specific policies and legal provisions on disability. However, the organizations especially the DPOs that have programs and projects specifically for the disabled their officials are aware of the national and international policies, Act and organizations that particularly address and act for the benefits of the disabled.

### 9.2.3 National level Organization of WWD

The NGO and DPO officials mentioned the names of a number of organizations that they consider to be national level organizations working for the benefit of the disabled. Some of these as mentioned by them are, Jatiyo Pratibandhi Forum, NADPO, National Grassroots Disability Federation, Jatiyo Bodhir Sangtha, Jatiyo Andha Kalyan Sangtha and Manashik Protibondi Foundation etc. These organizations work for the disabled, both men and women. However, they could not mention any national level organization that functions specifically for the benefit of the WWD. The respondents from both NGOs and DPOs expressed the need for a national level organization specifically for the WWD. They were of the opinion that such an organization should also be managed by the WWD. Then only the needs and aspiration of the WWD will be truly represented at the national as well as international level.

## 9.3 International Non-Governmental Organizations (INGOs)

A number of international non-governmental organizations are operating in Bangladesh. These organizations, in general, implement programs and projects in partnership with other national and local NGOs and DPOs. However, some of these organizations work for the benefits of persons with specific disability. International NGOs' program and project activities include awareness development, capacity building of disabled organizations, advocacy for policy change for the benefit of the disabled, health services for the treatment and rehabilitation of specific disability etc.

It appeared that the officials of these organizations are aware of the national and international policies and legal provisions that exist for the benefit of the disabled. However, they are of the opinion that some of these need change especially human rights issue has not been addressed in its proper perspective in the case of the disabled. A similar observation was made in the case of CEDAW as well.

The international NGOs think that national organization of the WWD if created would be able speak and work for the benefit specifically of the WWD in the national and international arenas. The main focus of such organization should be empowerment of the WWD and promotion of their rights. With respect to support, they expressed that the organization if established will receive support from various quarters both national and international. For sustainability such an organization should maintain transparency and ensure accountability, develop strategic network, develop capacity and should be member driven and not donor driven.

## 9.4 Media

Media, in general, plays an important role in awareness and perception development of the larger society on specific issue or phenomenon. This is usually done by projecting the various facets of the issue in concern, in its right perspective. It again depends on the perception and understanding of the issue by the media and persons involved with it. In the following paragraphs the perception and concern of the media persons (electronic and print) on disability and disabled are presented based on the collected data and information.

### 9.4.1 Perception about the Constraints of Women with Disability

It has been observed that the media, in general, are aware of the challenges and constraints of women with disability in Bangladesh. Most of the media personalities who were interviewed stated that women in Bangladesh are in many ways deprived and ignored by the government and the society. The disabled women's situation is worse for obvious reasons. Appropriate actions on the part of the government and the society are not taken to help them to become self-reliant. The disabled women also cannot establish

## 9. Perception, Policy and Programs of Different Organizations

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their rights as other citizens of the country as they are not organized and aware of their various rights that are guaranteed by the Constitution and various legal provisions. As such, they become a burden to the families and the society.

### 9.4.2 Media Projection and Image Creation/Building

Features and sensational news on disability and disabled are generally published in print media that includes newspapers and magazines. In the electronics media, such as, radio and television sometimes special programs such as talk show and documentaries are broadcasted on various aspects of the lives of the disabled that includes their constraints and challenges. But in most of the cases these programs depict the negative side of the lives of the disabled. As a result, a negative image is created in public mind regarding disability and the disabled.

### 9.4.3 What needs to be done?

The media personalities mentioned that first of all societal awareness should be developed so that the disabled are considered as equal to other human beings. For this purpose the media needs to play a proactive role in building positive image of the disabled by publishing and broadcasting positive news meaning success stories and opportunities that exist for the disabled. In the second place, they should be brought to the mainstream of national life. For this purpose, enabling environment and provisions are to be made for their education, skills development, employment and health care.

## 10. Conclusion and Recommendations

In recent years, global concern for disability and disabled people has come to the center stage of the international and national development discourse. Multilateral and bilateral international agencies, national and international non government organizations and above all national governments of countries are now coming forward with enabling policies, programs and projects for ensuring rights and mainstreaming the disabled with national life. The current study revealed that in respect to the above, Bangladesh is no exception in formulating national policies, enacting legislation and establishing organizations and taking up programs and projects for the benefit of the disabled. In addition to government efforts, a number of national and international non-governmental organizations are also working in the area of disability. The major focus of their initiatives are awareness development about rights, skills development and employment creation through training and credit and networking, advocacy for the establishment of rights and formulation of enabling policies and programs. In the course of the study, it has also been observed that there exists a general level of awareness among officials of government and non-governmental agencies particularly working with disabled and disability issue about relevant national and international laws and policies on disability. It appeared that they also have a genuine concern for mainstreaming of the disabled. Media in Bangladesh do cover news about the disabled and disability. It was reported by the disabled that in the media, their success stories and achievements are reported in lesser number compared to negative aspects. However, the media persons expressed their concerns for the development of the disabled.

It has been observed that the women with disability who have been covered under the study have especially limited access to education and employment. In the families, they participate in the decision making process and social gatherings. They have movements outside their homes with assistance from family members as and when needed. However, it was gathered that they have limited awareness about policies and legal provisions on disability. Some of them mentioned that they are associated with NGOs/DPOs and have benefited from their programs and projects. However, they were of the opinion that the WWD should have a national organization of them focusing specifically on their issues and preferably run and managed by them.

In the light of the findings and observation, the followings recommendations are made.

■ A national organization of the WWD should be created to advocate and work for the benefit and interest specifically of the WWD in the national and international arenas. The main focus of such organization should be empowerment of the WWD and promotion of their rights. For sustainability such national organization should maintain transparency, ensure accountability and develop strategic network, capacity and needs to be a member driven and not donor driven organization.

■ For improving the situation of the WWD, more proactive actions should be taken to ensure their increased access to education, health and employment by close monitoring of compliance of the fulfillment of already existing quota granted for them.

■ For mass awareness development on the issues and rights of the disabled, the media should play a much more affirmative role. For this purpose, the organizations, both government and non government, working in the area of disability should network and enter into a social responsibility partnership with print and electronic media to project life, livelihood, constraints and prospects of the WWD for the awareness development of the general mass.

■ Organizations working for the benefit of the disabled should be networked to develop a common advocacy strategy and program for the establishment of rights and policy change in favour of the disabled. This will be more forceful in exerting pressure and intensify the movement for policy change.

## 11. Case Studies

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### Johura's life

Johura Khatun is the daughter of Abul Hasem who is a small businessman. Her mother is Hamida Begum - a house wife. She has six brothers and three sisters. Among them her position is fourth. They live on a piece of khash land. She is physically challenged by birth. As she is a girl with disabilities, her parents had no will to send her to school. In spite of this, because of her own eagerness, she began to go to school. Her dream was to become successful and dignified in her life through education. She was able to complete her education up to class seven. Because of financial incapability she could not continue her study further. Yet, poverty could not stop Johura, she kept on thinking how she could improve her position. At one stage, CDA - an NGO, came forward and stood by her. At first Johura joined the disability group of CDA as a member. Her group 'Shapla' comprised eight members and all the members were disabled. CDA provided training to all the members of the group on small business. Through this training all the members could understand how to start and run a business. Johura received training on making candle. Johura gradually realized that a group plays a vital role to improve one's position and confidence to do something on one's own. At that time, she was getting TK. 200 as a monthly allowance from Social Welfare office of Dinajpur which she saved for future action. Again she had a training on tailoring from Social Welfare office for which she paid money from her savings. After training, she started working at her paternal cousin's tailoring shop as a worker where she got very small amount of money. Later she changed her job and now is engaged in a boutique house. Here she has to give labour without payment for four months. After four months they will give her salary. Johura is happy now because day by day she can change her position.

### Monzuara's expectation

Monzuara, is the daughter of Eunus Sardar- a van puller and her mother is Diloara. Hers is a hardcore poor family and they do not have any asset except a hut. She lives in Khajura village at Latachapli union in Kalapara upazila under Potuakhali district. It is a coastal area. She is eighteen years old. She has one sister and one brother. Among them her position is second. She was born without any disability. When she was two years old she got high fever. Her parents were not aware of the disease. They were a bit careless. Fifteen days later, the parents got her treated by a village doctor. After taking medicine she became cured but she felt problem in her right leg and hand and eventually she lost the strength in her leg and hand and became a physically challenged girl. In spite of poverty, her father got her admitted in the school but she could not attend the school regularly. The school was far away from her residence. In rainy season it was very difficult for her to go to school as she did not have any mobility or transport support. Despite various obstacles she completed her education up to class nine. Her father could not bear her educational expenses including transport cost and suddenly she had to stop her school. She always tried to engage herself in different types of social work. As a result one NGO came forward and started to help her. By the help of SSDP, she attended a three month-long computer training course of Bangladesh Protibondhi Kalyan Samity (BPKS). Now she practices her computer skills regularly at SSDP office. She wants to have education at least upto graduate level to make herself ready for job opportunities and to ensure her financial stability. SSDP is planning to give her capital with which she can start a business related to computer. She is struggling to change her position.

### Mukta's dream

Mukta's father is Delowar Talukder and mother is Jesmin Begum. They are a poor family from Tiakhali village in Kalapara Upazila under Potuakhali district. She has one sister and one brother. She is second daughter in the family. Her age is twenty years. She is physically challenged. When she was born, she was quite ok. One night, at the age of five, suddenly she was attacked by high fever. First, her parents thought that it would be cured without any treatment. After seven days of high fever she was taken to a doctor. In spite of taking medicine she did not get well. The doctor again gave her medicine. This time her fever was stopped but her father discovered that her left leg was not normal. She was taken to another doctor but there was no change. Eventually, she had become disabled. Because of her parents' interest later she got admitted in a school. She had to face different bad comments on her way to school but she did not bother. She continued her study. At last, with the help from SSDP- an NGO, she successfully completed her S.S.C examination. Now she is a student of first year of H.S.C. At the same time she works as reflect support project in SSDP. Mukta wants to be an educated person and engage herself in a good job.



# SARPV Album on Women with Disabilities



Shaheed Minar becomes accessible

Roksana Akter, a student of PRODIPALLOY, Chakaria, Cox's Bazar, a winner of Toitomboor Vision 2020 Children Contest 2005 is seen receiving prizes from noted artist Hashem Khan at Drishti Mela 2005 held at Dhaka on 30th September 2005



Courtesy: Toitomboor



Courtesy: PhotoVoice

The Photographer

Source: Disability Information Service Center (DISC), SARPV- Bangladesh

Report on Women with Disabilities in Bangladesh

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