



Inclusive Futures

Promoting disability inclusion

Organisations of People with Disabilities and COVID-19 in Bangladesh

Disability Inclusion Helpdesk, October 2021



UKaid

from the British people



A Brac member of staff talks to community members
about hygiene during COVID-19. © Brac.

Rapid Assessment by the Disability Inclusion Helpdesk

- Rapid literature review
- Interviews with 16 OPDs (5 in Bangladesh)
- Focus Group Discussions with 27 representatives of 23 OPDs



People with disabilities and OPDs were largely excluded from governments' planning and delivery of COVID-19 responses

- Article 11 of the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (CRPD) states that governments must ensure the protection and safety of persons with disabilities in humanitarian emergencies.
- OPDs in Bangladesh developed and delivered training and workshops about including people with disabilities in humanitarian responses.

“When a government ministry plans for us, they don't engage us to make those plans, we only know when those plans are circulated that this is the plan of the government. When we go to give an opinion, government generally denies us, and doesn't take our opinion seriously.”

FGD participant from an OPD in Bangladesh



A family in Bangladesh pictured during COVID-19. © Brac

Gaps in registration excluded some people with disabilities from services

- There were already registers of people with disabilities in Bangladesh, but many people with disabilities have not been registered due to a range of barriers.
- There was a need to collect additional disability data during the pandemic. The Inclusive Futures programme collected data at the beginning of the response to help identify people with disabilities.

The exclusion of people with disabilities and OPDs from planning and delivery of responses resulted in increased pressure on OPDs.

- OPDs played a critical role in the pandemic response, sometimes interceding to provide direct support with severely limited resources.
- OPDs also drove advocacy with the Bangladesh Government to increase, target or change their support to people with disabilities.

Increased pressures on OPDs to deliver services or advocate for more inclusive services:

- Accessible information
- Social Protection
- Health
- Gender-based violence
- Education



A Brac member of staff demonstrates handwashing during

COVID-19. © Brac.



Limited access to technology

- OPDs adapted to using digital technology for outreach and information sharing.
- But it was difficult to reach people with disabilities online due to their limited and unequal access.
- OPDs in Bangladesh have advocated for online platforms to be more accessible.

Dramatic reductions to funding and operational capacity

- Donors and INGOs redirected, paused, or reduced funding.
- CSR funding also reduced.
- International funding for an OPD supporting Indigenous people with disabilities was impossible because they were not registered by government.

“We are mentally broken. We don’t know when the situation will improve. It is an unprecedented challenge. How can we recover? Two projects have kept us running but we have limited scope, it’s frustrating.” OPD representative in Bangladesh.

Psychological impacts

- OPD staff were traumatised by distressing phone calls from people with disabilities who were left behind.
- OPD staff worked overtime and without pay.
- OPD staff with disabilities were experiencing the same challenges as the people they were supporting.

“I’m counselling people with disabilities but I am getting depression because the same things are happening to me. I am feeling sad all the time ... people with disabilities are not getting any support. I cannot explain to you, it was a really hard situation trying to help people with disabilities, but we tried our best.” OPD representative in Bangladesh.



A young man with a disability receives a support package during COVID-19. © ADD International.

The pandemic highlighted the importance of long-term, co-operative relationships between OPDs, governments and civil society.

“DPOs are coming together, which is a good thing. DPOs are becoming more coordinated and cooperative.” FGD participant in Bangladesh



Inclusive Futures

Promoting disability inclusion

Implications:

- Disability inclusion in disaster planning
- Data disaggregation, registration and needs assessments
- Long-term engagement with diverse OPDs
- Accessible information and digital inclusion
- Disability-inclusive social protection
- Mental health responses to emergencies
- Coordination for inclusive GBV services
- Inclusive education during emergencies
- Sustainable funding for OPDs
- Use diplomatic influence for disability inclusion during COVID recovery.
- Need for further research

“We have to be more equipped and united and active. Otherwise, we cannot be sustained. And allocate sufficient support and mindset toward strengthening capacity, and abilities to cope in the situation.” FGD participant in Bangladesh