

QUALITY

By:

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Background Information:

The issue, "*Rights of People with Disabilities*" has been given much attention by the United Nations and other international organizations during last two decades. The United Nations Declared 1981 as International Year of Disabled Persons and adopted World Program of Action concerning PWDs by the UN-General Assembly by its resolution 37/52 on 3 December 1982. The Year and the World Program of Action provided a strong impetus for progress in the field of disability. The both emphasized the rights of people with disabilities to the same opportunities as other citizens and to an equal share in the improvements in living conditions resulting from economic and social development. The global experts meeting reviewed the implementation of World Program of Action concerning disabled persons at the mid point of United Nations Decade of disabled persons (1983-1992) and recommended that UN-General Assembly should convene a special conference to draft an International Convention on the elimination of all forms of discrimination against the PWDs, to be ratified by the states at the end of the decade. Subsequently a draft outline of the convention was prepared and presented to the General Assembly at its 42 session and Sweden made further presentations concerning a draft convention at the 44 session of the General Assembly. Both these occasions, no consensus could be reached on the suitability of such a convention. Subsequently under the guidance of General Assembly, the Economic and Social Council by its resolution 1990/26 of 24 May 1990 authorized the Commission for Social Development to consider the establishment of an ad hoc open-ended working group of government experts to elaborate Standard rules on the equalization of opportunities for disabled children, youth and adults, in close collaboration with

the specialized agencies, other intergovernmental bodies and non-governmental organizations, especially organizations of PWDs.

The Standard Rules on the Equalization of Opportunities for PWDs have been developed on the basis of the experiences gained during the United Nations Decade of Disabled Persons (1983-1992). Subsequently the United Nations General Assembly 48th session on 20 December 1993 adopted the Standard Rules on the Equalization of Opportunities for Persons With Disabilities (PWDs) and suggested all the states to follow the rules and execute the step-by-step activities of the rules in respect of ensuring equality and opportunities for PWDs to exercising their rights.

After reviewing the attainments and progress of United Nations Decade, the Government experts group and the expert individuals of Disabled Peoples' Organizations thought that this decade could not bring about any changes of disability situation significantly in Asia-Pacific region. It indicated that people with disabilities throughout the region were still far behind from achieving full participation and equality. Considering this, Economic and Social Commission for Asian and the Pacific (ESCAP) proclaimed and therefore declared the Asia-Pacific Decade of Disabled Persons (1993-2002) in its 48th session in Beijing in April 1992 (Resolution 48/3) co-sponsored by 33 countries. In adopting the resolution, the Governments of the AP region expressed their collective commitment to the goal of the decade “ *Full Participation and Equality*” of people with disabilities.

In the year 1993, in resolution 49/6 the ESCAP adopted Agenda for Action consisting 12 broad areas of concern to achieve the objectives of the AP-Decade. This Decade provided an opportunity for the 56 countries of the ESCAP region to consolidate the efforts initiated UN Decade through regional cooperation in support of progress at the national level. The agenda

for action, planned to be implemented by the signatory countries in the AP-region which includes: National Coordination, Legislation, Information, Public Awareness, Accessibility and Communication, Education, Training and Employment, Prevention of causes of disability, Rehabilitation Services, Assistive Devices, Self-help Organization and Regional Cooperation.

General Situation of PWDs:

Throughout history, the lives of most People With Disabilities (PWDs) have been dominated by the "ignorance, fear and superstition," held by others. Evidence suggests the direct result of these negative attitudes has been an almost total neglect of PWDs, the relative invisibility of the PWDs and their exclusion from normal economic, social and political activities in their families and communities. There exists no systematic intervention for raising awareness on the unacceptable and prevailing situation for most disabled people at the community level. Although notable progress has been made on building awareness on other development issues, the issue of disability has not been integrated into the process of mainstream development.

Every day many PWDs die from neglect, often persons who, with some assistance, could live and lead productive lives. Many people in this society, as in many other developing nations, view people with disabilities as a curse in the family and are unsympathetic, causing embarrassment to the family as well as often to the PWDs themselves. Women with disabilities are especially vulnerable to social discrimination and neglect in the country. It is not uncommon that this discrimination begins in the home. Parents of PWDs often are ashamed of them and want to hide them from family activities and society. They treat them as an economic burden and do not explore their tremendous potentialities. This neglect is due to lack of knowledge which creates a negative attitude towards PWDs. Positive response on disability is essential in all social, developmental and political areas in order to establish the involvement and

contribution of PWDs in the mainstream of all development processes as well as to guarantee their equal rights and the availability of proper opportunities.

Many direct problems develop with the onset of physical, mental, visual, speech and hearing impairments. It has been demonstrated that early detection and appropriate intervention will reduce the level of disability to an extent in many cases. These interventions are mostly absent in the rural areas. Rural people do not have the access to such services to overcome their impairments.

Disability often limits mobility and a person's functional ability either partly or fully to live a full life as a non-disabled person. Appropriate assistive devices, prostheses, adaptations for daily living, and training for efficient and appropriate use of such devices will reduce the degree of disability to a great extent. In some cases a PWD totally overcomes his/her disability. Unfortunately the majority of disabled people, particularly in rural area and poor urban areas, do not have access to such opportunities.

The right of a basic education is fundamental for every citizen. PWDs of school age in most cases have not been included in efforts to provide education. Access to economic opportunities for persons with disabilities is very limited. Some of those PWDs after completion of education, encounter barriers in finding income generating opportunities. Many employers refuse to provide them with jobs. Lack of practical experience and appropriate vocational training are also barriers for their accessing income generation opportunities. It is very difficult for them to obtain loans from banks and other financial institutions or to enter into trade markets. Exploitation and discrimination are also experienced in these sectors.

PWDs are often not allowed to participate in economic activities run by different NGOs and by the government. They are denied access because of inadequate skills and a perceived inability to carry out income generation activities.

Women are generally the victims of a male-dominated society underpinned by religious traditions. Social norms and cultural restrictions confine them in their family. In addition to these restrictions, Women with disabilities (WWDs) face a life compounded by also being disabled.

In many cases, family members and relatives mentally, physically and sexually abuse WWDs. They do not know where and how to get justice. Such abuses, if noticed, are usually ignored or suppressed by the family. Many WWDs come to accept this neglect and abuse as “normal” and endure it in silence.

Considering all the circumstances, few country now initiatives taken by PWDs to change the situation as such Bangladesh Protibandhi Kallyan Somity (BPKS) has devised an innovative and needs-based program, Persons with Disabilities' Self-Initiative to Development (PSID) to address the total situation faced by Persons With Disabilities (PWDs) at the local level and as a part of national development. When this project is implemented in the proposed areas, a significant change and positive impact in the community is realized within successive three years.

This project helps overcome the poverty and dis-empowerment of the PWDs. On the other hand, this project develops strong leadership and self-esteem among the PWDs, empowering them to lead a social movement at the grass-roots level. They are able to bring a dynamic change in their overall situation, being as they are the organizers and decision-makers,

as well as the service providers. Much is accomplished by mobilizing their existing potentials as well as other local resources.

Socio-economic Conditions:

Every aspect of life for PWDs is dominated by ignorance, fear and superstition that often result in their direct neglect. Due to this neglect, they are excluded from the normal economic, social, cultural and political activities of their families and communities. Concurrently, they have not had access to the essential services they need. The situation is even worse for PWDs in rural area because of a serious lack of basic essential services and access to these services.

Traditionally, the disability issue has been considered a charity issue. Most of the development policy makers, managers and implementers of government and non-government agencies have not considered disability as a development issue. Very few of them realize the link between disability and poverty. Almost nothing has been done to address the root causes of disabled people's deprivation, which is linked to negative social attitudes that aggravate PWDs' impairments. Most all programs, either at the institution or community level, maintain a top-down approach that totally excludes PWDs' participation in planning, policy and decision-making and implementation.

PWDs are not only the poorest of the poor, but also the most vulnerable of the vulnerable groups. They suffer poverty, disempowerment, gender discrimination, illiteracy, malnutrition, poor health and a lack of sanitation facilities and potable water, lack of health care, environmental barriers (physical, socio-religious and cultural attitudes and practices), and inaccessibility to resources and mainstream development activities.

The following assumption development in field study illustrates some information:

Recently Bangladesh Protibandhi Kallyan Somity (BPKS) conducted a sample study in ten upazilas (sub-districts) of ten districts of the country to have an assumption on the root causes of poverty and disempowerment as well as the means of improvement of socio-economic status of persons with disabilities. This study conducted through direct interview method among 100 respondent of the community where 50% were women and 20% were PWD respondents. In each area 10 selected persons were interviewed and were requested to respond only one answer for each question.

The questions were as follows:

Q.1: What are the root causes of poverty and disempowerment of Persons with Disabilities?

Q.2: What means/reason do you consider responsible for today's improvement of persons with disabilities?

The respondents identified twenty-Nine areas of which 18 were on the reasons for poverty and dis-empowerment and 11 were on the ways and means of socio-economic improvement of the disabled persons. The findings of this study revealed the following facts and figures:

Q.1: What are the root causes of poverty and disempowerment of Persons with Disabilities?

1. Lack of positive attitude 28%
2. Lack of general education on disability 12%

3. Lack of PWDs' organizations 7%
4. Lack of PWDs' participation 5%
5. Lack of Employment of PWDs 5%
6. Lack of training 5%
7. Lack practical action of the government 04%
8. Lack of PWDs' confidence 05%
9. Lack of responsibilities of PWDs-families and communities 04%
10. Lack of initiatives of PWDs 04%
11. Lack of Information 04%
12. Lack of appropriate health services 3%
13. Lack of PWDs' understanding about their needs 03%
14. Lack of representation of PWDs in parliament 03%
15. Lack of implementation of disability Act 03%
16. Lack of Technology 02%
17. Lack of acceptance 02%
18. Lack of access to resources 01%

Q.2: What means/reason do you consider responsible for today's improvement of persons with disabilities?

1. The people are now more aware 35%
2. BPKS is helping persons with disabilities 12%
3. The PWDs are aware 10%
4. The government is giving attention 8%
5. Children with disabilities are going to schools, 8%
6. Disabled persons are doing business 6%

7. Persons with disabilities' confidence is increasing 6%
8. Now the Disability issues have come into limelight 5%
9. Family and community support are increasing 4%
10. PWDs' employment opportunities are increasing 4%
11. Social superstitions are decreasing 02%

Self-help Organization of Disabled Peoples':

Before discuss the topics need to mention here that, what is DPOs or Self-help organization of PWDs mean, DPO is the own organization of persons with disabilities, which is formed and managed by disabled persons and working for the development of all. The persons with disabilities themselves run the management activities and take decisions of such organization and a member or a representative of the organization will be a person with disability.

The UN standard Rule 18 stated that, States should recognize the right of the organizations of persons with disabilities to represent persons with disabilities at national, regional and local levels. States should also recognize the advisory role of organizations of persons with disabilities in decision-making on disability matters.

Most of the disability related documents of UN have given high importance of Disabled Peoples' organization considering focal point as strength and base for achieving the ultimate objectives of world program of action. In the time of initiatives taken by UN for PWDs in Asia, a few non-government organizations are formed and managed by a very limited number of PWDs acting only in their individual capacities. Most of these organizations are urban based and there are very few PWDs at the management level. Other PWDs, certainly the beneficiaries of these

organizations, do not participate in policy development and decision-making and in design, implementation and management of their programs.

The United Nations Consider Disabled Peoples' organizations play important roles to ensure equality for them. But in the Asia there are very few DPOs existing. Due to lack of existence of DPOs, PWDs in Asia have been still isolated and segregated from community life. They are not organized well and haven't institutional or organizational entity for their own at community level, through which their common interests of equal rights, opportunities and full participation in development could be addressed and at the same time lobbying and advocacy on disability could be carried out.

The few outreach services provided are in areas where modern infrastructure and communication facilities are available. None of the present services concentrate on the empowerment, leadership capacity building and organization of PWDs, which are among the basic building blocks for a holistic development of PWDs.

Most of the states in Asia have not yet achieved the expected results according to world program of action on disability meters as well as UN-ESCAP declared agenda for action. Due to this reason most of the countries do not have DPOs especially in the rural area, though DPOs are considered as vital agents and partner to accelerate and activate the movement of PWDs in the respective states.

Support needed for Disabled Peoples' Organization:

As disabled persons haven't been organized in most of the countries and Disabled Peoples Organizations (DPOs) couldn't be emerged. To make the disabled persons productive

component and useful human resources they should be organized. Optimum competence, capacity and skills should be developed among them. And DPOs could play important role in this regard. Through the DPOs PWDs could become self-confident on their own capabilities and equally contributive to the mainstream development of the community.

As regards, support and encouragement from all levels are essential to organizing PWDs, establishment and functioning of DPOs for greater interest of the community and actualizing national development posses. Through the DPOs issues concerning the disabled persons of the community could be properly represented in different bodies and at different levels. At present in majority states of the UN do not have Disabled Peoples' Organizations (DPOs) and the persons with disabilities in those countries have no direct scopes for participating in any national or international events on behalf of the disabled persons of the respective communities. As a result, many of the development programs have been taking over for this community without their actual involvement or representation from the need assessment and planning level to the implementation level. And most of those programs can't address the statement of actual need of the disabled persons at grassroots levels. Needless to say that, many resources are spent in the name of the grassroots level PWDs but very few of their need could be met.

On this situation, every support from both govt. and non-govt. levels of the UN Member States is important to organize, establish and run DPOs improve the living condition of sdisabled persons in real sense in all countries. Well-managed self-help groups of PWDs or DPOs could achieve a lot to improve the situation of PWDs very cost effectively by their active involvement. Such groups or organizations can explore new avenues to share experiences and knowledge and develop respect and support among themselves.

Therefore, Development and empowerment of self-help organizations have been identified as one the prime agenda for action. But if we go through our activities and soul searching, what have we achieved in this regard? The answer would be very simple, nothing.

Dear audience, I would like to take the opportunity of drawing your attention once again, to ponder a little and be supportive in this regard.

The following supports needed to be considered for establishing and strengthening DPOs:

- Support to implement holistic approach is needed in rural area, which recognize Disabled Peoples' in establishing their own Organizations.
- Financial cooperation is needed for developing organizational management infrastructure, assistive device production for PWDs of DPOs in the rural areas.
- Financial support for basic services and intellectual capacity building of the members of the DPOs and PWDs in the rural areas is essential.
- Support needed for extensive training on skills development, IGAs on traditional trades and approaches, introducing modern technology and competence development program for PWDs, which could be implemented by the DPOs to ensure employment of PWDs.

Consultative engagement with DPOs:

The Asian Development Bank (ADB) National Office can play important role to ensure the consultative engagement of the representatives of DPOs from this region in planing, implementation, decision-making, monitoring and evaluation of all development activities. DPOs could play the roles of field and policy level consultants for the government, United Nations development bodies and other agencies in assessment of need of PWDs, identifying the scopes and avenues and field experimentation of innovative approaches for PWDs. Worthwhile consultative engagement of DPOs for other organizations, those intend to implement development program for disabled persons, could be done through providing staff training, assessment, planning and implementation.

The following areas are need to be considered for improving the ultimate living condition and socio-economic status of PWDs by actualizing the development plan for all:

- ADB can organize planning workshop with representatives of DPOs from each country in every three year to formulate ADB plan for disability.
- ADB can form a consultative committee to actualize ADB initiatives. The committee meeting should be organized once a year.
- ADB can create a position of DPO Consultant who is an expert and have got sufficient experiences with DPOs to work on regular basis with ADB.
- Expert opinion from the DPOs should be considered by the member states of Asia regarding national surveys on disability and participation of DPO Representatives in such survey should be made mandatory by the member states.

- Training and orientation courses on disability for all professionals, decision-makers, and field level executives should be made compulsory by the government of the countries where resource persons should be the DPO representatives.
- ADB can develop a comprehensive policy including Disability and Development Issues to prepare their long-term planning and financial budget in consultation with DPOs.
- ADB should ensure the participation Of DPOs representatives as guest speaker in the development-related workshop/seminar/training, which will be organize or sponsor by ADB.

Conclusion:

Disability issues and the PWDs have been a major concern of development issue including provision of health and socio-economic services all over the world. International year of the PWDs (1981) and the UN-decade of PWDs (1983-92) had past almost silently in the Asia. Asia-Pacific decade was proclaimed by UN-ESCAP in 1992, which is going to be ended in coming December 2002. In this Decade most of the country in Asia passed Act, Policy and Action Plan. But implementation of these Act, Policy and Action Plan far away from expectation.

In question of promotion and protection of human rights of Persons With Disabilities (PWDs), DPOs are generally avoided to provide them participatory opportunities in all respect.

Besides, development and empowerment of self-help organizations have been identified as one of the basic policy categories of agenda for action to achieve the objectives of Asian and the pacific decade of disabled persons (1993-2002). But the self-help organizations have not yet

been given importance by any government to involving the DPOs members in the process of development and in policy making.

Actually self-help organizations are often denied, avoided and ignored by the authorities concerned in providing support and cooperation for their capacity building, empowerment and fundraising in respect of integrity and solidarity of people with disabilities. But a well-managed self-help organization of PWDs can do a lot of things for overcoming the barriers of PWDs and states.

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