

# **A study report on inclusive secondary education environment for the children with special Needs**

## **Introduction**

The 1990 World Conference on *Education for All* (Jomtien, Thailand)- creates the promise among the signatories to ensure that every citizen of the society, despite their all diverse background and limitations, receive education by 2010, followed by the Dakar Framework for Action based on the most extensive evaluation of EFA status of each country. In this conference a further commitment was made to achieve EFA by 2015. Through these international declarations including 1948 Universal Declaration of Human Rights education for all becomes a right-based issue.

Why is education for all as a right-based issue important? Education brings individual's personal benefits, led people to live with self-respect and independently; the ultimate result is the contribution to the national development. Education should be a right as everyone in this world has the right to live in a good way which is possible through education. Realizing such benefits the governments of different countries including Bangladesh have joined to such a worldwide commitments.

By and large, much of the discussions about EFA include the assessment of enrolment, dropouts, and completion rates along with quality of education especially at primary level education. Talks about different disadvantaged and vulnerable groups, poor and girls took place with significant emphasis though, the discussion about children with special educational needs remain comparatively a less pronounced area over the years. In an education notes, the World Bank (2003) claimed disability as the 'single-most important factor' causing exclusion of children from schooling. It was reported that among 115 million out of school children, 40 million have some kinds of disabilities and a great majority of these children with disability are with moderate impairments which are not often outwardly visible or identifiable.

The UN report on Human Rights and Disabilities points out that at least 10% people in the majority of the world's countries has physical, cognitive, visual, or hearing impairments and '25% of the world population is directly affected by the presence of disability' (ibid.).

## **Current Status of Disability in Bangladesh**

There is ambiguity about the information of disabled people in Bangladesh. It is argued that finding out the correct statistics of the children with disability in Bangladesh is 'an exercise in frustration'. Existing statistics available are only the approximated values obtained for different types of disabilities (quoted in Nasreen and Tate, 2007, p.32). Many factors are responsible for the lack of information. Firstly, no nationwide survey was conducted yet to locate the children with special needs. It is acknowledged that disability, in Bangladesh, is yet to be included 'in any routine data collection' system (PEDP II Action Plan, 2005, quoted in *ibid.*). In addition, elicitation of information from the family or locality has been proved as difficult tasks mainly due to existing social stigma. Seel (2007: 37) points out that, 'because of fears, prejudices or simple lack of knowledge and resources,' many children with disability are simply not recognised.

In consequence, the studies carried out sporadically by different government and non-government organisations give a great variety of statistics on the number of children with special needs in this country. According to Nasreen and Tate (2007), census documentation and survey conducted in 1980s and early 1990s provide wide-ranging statistics on the prevalence of disability in Bangladesh, which are for example 7%, 4.7% and even as low as 1.62% (BBS, 1994). These figures are far below than the international estimates. However, two baseline surveys carried out by Action Aid Bangladesh between 1995 and 1997 identified a rate of 14.4% and 13.3% disability prevalence among 46,874 and 94,269 people respectively.

Making reference to World Health Organisation (WHO) and World Bank's estimates for developing countries, Ministry of Social Welfare (2005) indicates that 10% of the people belonged to various age groups (e.g., children, adults etc.) in Bangladesh has different kinds of disabilities. World Bank (2004) identifies that the disability among the children below 18 years is estimated to 6% and 14% is estimated for the age group 18 years plus which corresponds to 3.4 million children and 10.2 millions adult with disabilities.

The statistics (though approximated) indicates that a large section of the population including children is in a state of disability. Likewise others, their non-educational or poor quality education status would cause adverse effect on their personal and social life as the disability puts a barrier to carry out day-to-day activities (if perceived as it is and no intervention is made). In the long run, this would affect the national development process of the country as well. Thus, ensuring education opportunities for the children with disabilities is imperative on the part of the government and other relevant agencies of the country.

Over the last few years, the issue of education for the children with disability has started to take its place in the agenda of educational reforms in Bangladesh. Until the recent past, the issue was perceived merely as an issue of social services, not as a necessity or obligatory. The government and the donor funded different educational projects (e.g., SESIP and SESDP, PEDP II, TQI-SEP) have been designed and currently some of them are at their implementation stage. The projects PEDP II and TQI-SEP have sub-components which are distinctively working for planning, designing and implementing educational programmes for both primary and secondary level children with special education needs. Moreover, many NGOs of the country (e.g., BRAC) are also working for promoting the education of the children with special needs.

Promoting education for the children with disability is quite a new issue in the education reform area of Bangladesh. Thus, the intervention already started and the plans made are just the inception. At this starting stage, it is essential to maximise the positive effects and minimise the negative effects of these interventions or plans. In order to create an effective education environment for the children with special educational needs, both concentrated and collaborative efforts are required from all concerned sectors (Khan et. al., 2002) be it government or non-government, collective or individual.

The present study has analysed the current situation with respect to the education status of children with disability in terms of accessibility. In doing this an effort is made to critically review the available literature on disability issue with regard to education provisions.

### **Aim and Objectives**

The aim of this study is to provide guidelines for developing policy options and practical mechanism for bringing all children including the children with special educational needs with grade V certificates under the secondary education system.

The specific objective of this study is to -

- Identify the present status of secondary school education with respect to accessibility of children with special educational needs.
- Unfold the existing policy options with regard to secondary education provision for the children with special educational needs.
- provide further guidelines to formulate and implement policies in connection to secondary education for children with disability

## **Methodology**

This study was conducted primarily based on desk research approach. The documents, papers/articles, research reports etc. related to disability and the education for the children with special needs were reviewed and analysed. The study was descriptive in nature and both quantitative and qualitative data was employed. Mainly secondary data and expert opinions was the basis of conclusion.

### **Source of information**

The evidence for the study was gathered basically from documents of various kinds. The documents considered were different annual reports, booklet, research reports, concept papers, project reports, reports of programmes, activities, interventions etc.

They were collected from both government and non-government sources. Ministries of social welfare and education were the main government sources. Documents on International Declarations were also reviewed.

In addition, internet based sources were reviewed and opinions of specialist personnel on disability issues were used for analysing the data.

### **Limitations of the Study**

The study was completed following the methodology which was confined to uni-technique approach rather than a multi-method one. Thus, the study may lack the comprehensiveness in presenting its findings. The following aspects limit the magnitude of the study with regard to scope and totality.

- The study did not include empirical data except few personal experienced evidences;
- Most of the existing documents reviewed and analysed are developed based on a 'listing approach' rather than a research approach.
- Only documents within reach were used.
- The research reports reviewed did not use representative samples of institutions. Therefore, the findings based on the review may not be generalisable. Moreover, number of research reports reviewed was very little in numbers.

Reliance on the findings of the reviewed reports may not be wise due to gaps in the research methodology followed by the researchers.

### **Implication of the findings for the secondary education status of children with disability**

- There is no policy guidelines for the education for the children with disability at secondary level institutions;

- Very few of the class V graduated children with disability are getting enrolled in secondary education;
- Those who are getting enrolled, most are enrolled in special schools rather than general stream schools
- Individual efforts, no national level intervention was made to enrol children with special educational needs at secondary level schools;
- Most of the secondary schools are not physically accessible to the children with special needs;
- Teaching-learning-assessment system followed in secondary schools are not congenial to the needs of the children with special needs
- Teachers, students, administrators, families in general possess negative attitudes towards the potential of the children with disability
- Ministry of education is yet to consider the policy issue for the education of the children with disability.

## **Recommendations**

1. The mainstream secondary education sector needs to be ready for including children with disabilities who are eligible (grade V graduates);
2. A policy has to be developed which needs to incorporate guidelines for identifying (by local level survey) children with special educational needs eligible to be enrolled in secondary schools;
3. Study findings show that the information and statistics about disability and education status is not sufficient to take any policy decision. As there was no systematic survey mechanism to collect information about the children with disabilities and their education status. No meaningful progress can be made without proper information. Therefore, a suitable organisation, capable of to work countrywide, needs to be given responsibilities to conduct survey and research in this arena. Institutions like Bangladesh Bureau of Educational Information and Statistics could well use their resources for this kind of work.
4. The policy will also include -
  - the issue and strategies for renovating the exiting school buildings, classrooms, furniture, toilets, drinking water provisions so that the physical accessibility of the children with disability are ensured.

- The issue of standard building construction codes for new school building;
5. The secondary education policy for the children with special educational needs should be developed based on flexible approach. The flexibility may be applied to -
    - entry age level criteria,
    - curriculum content or textbook,
    - variety of appropriate teaching methods and
    - assessment mechanism.
  6. The policy may include the guideline for teacher training for handling children with special needs with necessary knowledge, skills and positive attitudes considering students' contextual, emotional and psychological status;
  7. For a successful and inclusive secondary education programme for the children with special needs, there is no alternative to awareness creation among members of the society including teachers, students, parents, employers etc. Any programme could be failed if it is not understood and accepted by the clientele group as well as the stakeholders. It was evident that people in general possess unfriendly attitude towards children with disabilities and resist the necessity of educational provision for them. Thus, the policy should include a strategic guideline for creating and promoting awareness about various aspects of human rights, international declaration for EFA, and perception of education as a right -based issue.