

Promoting Disability to Dignity



Access to safe water and sanitation facilities is a basic right of all people, including people with disabilities, the denial of which can have serious implications on their well-being. But the physically challenged people in Bangladesh are mostly deprived of any sort of social services and certainly face difficulties to get access to safe WaSH facilities. Social and physical isolation combined with economic hardship make the situation worse turning the persons with disabilities as hard-to-reach, while especially women and girls of respective families are mainly the sufferers to cope with this situation.

Article 28 in the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (CRPD) focuses on the right of persons with disabilities “to an adequate standard of living for themselves and their families; this includes State Parties duty to ensure equal access to clean water services”.

Bringing Equity for the Physically Challenged

- NGO Forum ensures the access of persons living with disabilities especially in hardcore poor families considering the high level of vulnerabilities faced by them due to environmental obstacles rather than their own impairments.
- Consequences on health, dignity, social and familial exclusion are considered while designing intervention centering the physically challenged.
- The intervention includes gender aspect centering the notion that improved WaSH facilities for the physically challenged also benefit those who provide that support in the family, usually women and girls by reducing their work-load.
- Inclusion of the physically challenged is ensured by involving them as members in village level institutions and various development works.
- Inclusion in programmes has allowed identifying their special needs, obstacles, required actions to ensure their easy access to water, sanitation and health facilities.
- Physically challenged people's inclusion in the CBOs also brings up the community's responsibilities in responding to their special needs.
- The whole intervention is centered around giving the isolated persons with disability a life with dignity.

The innovation & modification of WatSan technologies has overall increased people with disabilities' participation and active role playing for the community bringing them out of prejudices and isolation.



The Person with Disabilities Earned His Right

"In 1979, an accident left me crippled and dependent on others. However, I didn't give up fight to come back to a normal life. I tried to involve myself in any development of my own community", says Abu Bakar Siddiq, a person with disability and Secretary of Mothurapara VDC in Mothurapara village in Karnibari union, Sariakandi, Bogra. Living in a high arsenic-prone Mothurapara village, he is always trying to aware people about healthy living. But being a person with disability he was dependant on his wife who has hearing impairment for regular work like bathing, going to toilet and so on which restricted his free mobility. Being demanded by the arsenic victim community, NGO Forum installed an AIRP at Abu Bakar Siddiq's household premises based on the approval by the respective Union Parishad (UP). The ownership of this technology through legal document has been handed over to altogether seven families in the community. "Life was miserable to me and not dignified as I was dependant on my wife. But now I can do my routine work myself as the operation system of the AIRP has made me confident to do so. Now I am a self-reliant person as others," said Abu Bakar Siddiq.



Disability is a Poverty Issue

Poverty both causes and is caused by disability

Identifying the Poor & Vulnerable

In NGO Forum's programme intervention, the persons with disabilities of the hardcore poor & vulnerable families are identified and listed by the CBOs. The lists are put forward to the respective UPs also through which alternative technologies are provided with a higher priority. Regarding the alternative technologies, the intervention designed and brought necessary modifications for disability-friendly WatSan technologies taking the different types of impairment into account. Most convenient part of the household is considered as the technology's installation point. Socio-psychological counseling is also provided to the family members regarding their necessary support in ensuring the physically challenged person's easy access to the facility provided.

Sumon Wins His Greatest Fear

Sumon, a twinkling-eyed 8-year old boy was born with deformed legs and partially paralyzed hands in Sabianagar village of Deoghar union under Ashtogram upazila, Kishoreganj. As he grew up he learnt moving by pulling his body across the floor. Despite having an active brain, Sumon could not continue his education in formal school with his two brothers. He is studying in third grade in Ananda School. Nevertheless, this did not blemish his spirit and he appears as one of the liveliest children of the village. Despite his strong spirit, one of his greatest fears was that of defecation. His mother had to take him down to the river by the slope and hold him by his arms for him to defecate. At times he fell down and got injured on his way to the river. Considering the child's desolation and his family's economic hardship, a Disable-friendly Latrine was installed by NGO Forum addressing the specific disabilities of Sumon. He is now able to go and use the Latrine by himself which turned out to be a wonder for him. The ecstasy is put in his words, "I called all neighbours to come and see my Latrine. I called my uncle over cell phone and said to him that I can now attend to my needs myself. I feel like, a danger that was over me has moved away. I will no more fall down and get cuts."



Addressing the Special Needs

- The nature of disability is identified and addressed for each individual person;
- The social environment in which the person lives is considered;
- Affordability of the household is considered;
- Hygienic conditions and easy operation & maintenance are ensured to reduce the family's care taking women's burden;
- Social accountability towards the physically challenged persons is promoted through CBOs;
- Physically challenged persons' representation in CBOs is ensured;
- Efforts are made to promote Disable-friendly Latrines through LGIs;
- Local masons are trained and engaged to minimize the cost of production.

The population slipping from the development action of both GOs & NGOs falls into the hard-to-reach category. In Bangladesh, the physically challenged persons are of the hard-to-reach groups who face both economic hardship and social exclusion.

Sheuli is Released from Her Daily Distress

“My daughter used to tumble down each time she went to the toilet. She could not go on her own. Her father and I used to live in a constant fear and pain to see her getting hurt everyday. Now she is capable of using the chair-latrine all by herself,” says Sheuli’s mother. Sheuli, 22, was born with impaired feet and hands. She lives with her parents in the Groenbandh village, a char land of Jamuna river encircled by a dam in Karnibari union, Sariakandi, Bogra. Her education in BRAC School stopped at an early age as she could not write with her fingers. Gradually as she grew, Sheuli has been engulfed with isolation when her only sister got married to the nearby Para within the village. She says with tears, *“I am totally alone. I have no friends. Even the crutch cannot help visit my sister as I have to cross the dam to reach her house”*. The Disable-friendly Latrine provided to Sheuli has brought some relief in her distressed life. Sheuli mentions about it, *“I do not have to call mother for help. I can go all by myself without fearing to fall down. The Latrine is within our premises. The VDC members and NGO staff have taken care of the path even; so now I can move easily”*.



No More Waiting

“All of a sudden my life stopped. I couldn’t move; lost all hopes to live”. Mohammad Fazel, 40, a father of four, paralyzed from beneath the waist from a horrid accident while he was at work as a construction laborer 8 years back expressed his grief. He lives with his family in Jhenaipukur village of Nezampur union under Nachole, Chapai Nawabganj. Being handicapped in a hardcore poor family has brought forth hardships for him in all possible ways. *“There is hardly anyone to share my pain and emotion. This is increasing my isolation and fears”*, Mohammad Fazel states his life status. NGO Forum took initiative to make life easy and dignified for him through providing a Disable-friendly Latrine. The Latrine has brought some relief in his everyday struggle to healthy living and deal with the pain of isolation. *“This is very good, I no more have to call and wait for my wife to help me. The Latrine has given me free will and a huge relief for my family”*, Mohammad Fazel expresses his feeling.



Scope of Scaling-up

One of the challenges in promoting Disable-friendly Latrines is the unavailability of trained masons at local level. Also, each individual case of disability requires modification and innovation to address the physical requirements as well as the social environment that vary from case to case. Field experiences also revealed that there is massive demand within the remote rural and low-income urban areas for Disable-friendly Latrines. There have been several incidences of replicating the NGO Forum-promoted Disable-friendly Latrines by Union Parishads. If local masons are developed by their technical skills and mentality, the opportunity to optimize these hygienic, low-cost disable-friendly sanitation options corresponding to local demand could be created. It is an urgent call by the persons with disabilities in favour of their rights.

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Editorial Advisor: S.M.A. Rashid

Script: Joseph Halder, Jubaida Akhter

Technical Annotation: Engr. Md. Toriqlul Islam, Engr. Salahuddin Ahmmed

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