

Completed Projects

Access to Health and Education for All Children and Youth with Disabilities (AHEAD) in Bangladesh

In partnership with the Centre for the Rehabilitation of Paralyzed (CRP) Bangladesh and the Bangladesh Health Professionals Institute (BHPI).

Dates:	December 19, 2012 to December 31, 2017
Primary sites:	Bangladesh
Budget:	\$5,999,556 CAD
Donor:	Global Affairs Canada with contributions from Queen's University

Overview

In 2012, 1.8 million children aged 6-9 in Bangladesh had a disability, representing roughly 10% of children in this age group. Children and youth with disabilities experience many hardships in Bangladesh, in large part due to inaccessible schools, an inaccessible workforce, limited access to healthcare, and poor training/awareness of disabilities among healthcare providers, teachers, and policy makers. With the goal of improving life for children and youth with disabilities, the AHEAD project had two components. The first was to improve access to health services, education and vocational training for children and youth with disabilities, increasing their ability to participate in society. The second was to support the creation of disability related policies that promoted human rights for people with disabilities in Bangladesh.



The AHEAD project was a significant step towards increasing support for children and youth with disabilities in Bangladesh (particularly girls and young women). The project had many components, including the following:

- Training of 99 personnel that ran 12 workshops about inclusivity and accessibility for teachers and health service providers. AHEAD also ran workshops for people with disabilities about peer support and counselling. Over 3360 participants attended the project's workshops, exceeding targets.
- The project created 54 mobile clinics with teams of doctors, therapists, community rehabilitation technicians and students to provide comprehensive care for over 11,175 people with disabilities.
- AHEAD provided eight workshops for 144 participants about gender equality and disability.
- AHEAD organized eight events to generate awareness of gender equality for over 5200 participants.
- The project distributed over 265 locally manufactured wheelchairs and 275 locally manufactured assistive devices for youth with disabilities.

Background

In 2012 it was estimated that 40% of Bangladeshis lived in poverty. Disability and poverty are closely linked, as the poor living and working conditions that are commonly experienced by those in poverty can create a high-risk environment for injury. These injuries can lead to disability or the progression of existing disabilities. Having a family member with a disability can have a significant impact on the entire family unit, and households with disabled family members are overrepresented among those without basic necessities. At the onset of the Access to Health and Education for All Children and Youth with Disabilities (AHEAD) in Bangladesh project there were 1.8 million children in Bangladesh aged 6-9 with a disability, over 10% of children in that age range. The prevalence of disability increased as children got older or if they lived in rural areas. The prevalence of disability was also much higher for women, who were twice as likely to have a disability than men. The large number of acquired disabilities, inaccessible educational infrastructure (only 1% of schools in Bangladesh were physically accessible), and negative societal attitudes towards people with disabilities had created a social setting that was very challenging for people with disabilities – there were limited opportunities for them to work, obtain an education, or have a social or political voice.

Approximately 65% of childhood disabilities are preventable. Childhood disability can be ameliorated with adequate access to health and rehabilitation services to prevent complications of injury or illness and maximize functional abilities. The AHEAD project sought to improve understanding of disability with the goal of changing attitudes and behaviors towards children and youth with disabilities and subsequently improve their quality of life and their families' quality of life. This was accomplished by training workers such as healthcare providers, educators, policy makers, and people with disabilities themselves to enable more comprehensive inclusion in healthcare, education, and social environments. The project was intended to create opportunities for people with disabilities to participate fully in Bangladeshi society.

Rationale

A baseline study was prepared during the first three months of the project and included input from community partners, stakeholders, government reports, international and local non-governmental organizations, and site visits to observe the state of support for people with disabilities in Bangladesh. The report identified the following barriers to the rights of children and youth with disabilities:

- Insufficient understanding of disability by support workers, educators, policy makers and the general population.
- Limited access to healthcare, education, and vocational services for people with disabilities, particularly women and individuals living in rural settings.
- A lack of trained personnel, coordination, and policy implementation to support people with disabilities.
- Barriers to education for children with disabilities such as insufficient resource use, training, attitudes, and interest of the government to implement its own policies. The study found that only 1% of schools were physically accessible in Bangladesh and only 0.84% of school-aged children with disabilities actually attended school.

There was political instability in Bangladesh during the AHEAD project, further reducing government action to aid people with disabilities. This increased the need for external support.

Actions and Outcomes

The AHEAD project was designed to change attitudes and behaviors towards children and youth with disabilities and create opportunities for their participation in society. It had two primary components: to improve the participation of children and youth with disabilities by **improving access to health services, education, and vocational training**, and to support the **creation of disability related policies** that promote human rights for people with disabilities. The project met these goals through three overarching objectives:

1. The **improvement of access** to quality, gender sensitive health and education services by removing environmental, attitudinal, and knowledge barriers.
2. **Efforts to strengthen the capacity** of education and health service providers to provide inclusive, quality services to children and youth with disabilities.
3. Support for the implementation of **disability policy** frameworks to protect and promote the human rights of children and youth with disabilities, particularly girls.

Locations for the project's work were selected based on the locations that a local partner, the Centre for the Rehabilitation of Paralyzed (CRP) Bangladesh, operated. Given the CRP's work and reach, working with them to deliver services improved availability and accessibility of project initiatives. The project operated in 13 districts of Bangladesh: Sylhet, Maulvibazar, Mymensingh, Tangail, Rajshahi, Gazipur, Dhaka, Manikganj, Narayanganj, Comilla, Barisal, Khulna, and Chittagong.

The project had complex and multifaceted actions, including the following:

- The project created a **teaching team of 99 individuals**, including staff from the CRP, to train teachers, health service providers, and people with disabilities. This team ran workshops that detailed strategies to remove barriers, increase accessibility and ensure participation of children and youth with disabilities. **A total of 12 workshops were provided to over 3360 participants**. A framework was created to train more educators and run more workshops in the future. These educational efforts had substantial impacts on the ability, comfort and capacity of healthcare providers, educators, and other service providers to give accessible, appropriate care for people with disabilities. The workshops improved public perception of people with disabilities and paved the way for longer-term systemic improvements.
- **54 mobile clinics** with teams of doctors, therapists, interns, community rehabilitation technicians and students **provided care to over 11,175 people with disabilities**. Professional rehabilitation workers assessed, treated, and referred individuals that previously would have had difficulty accessing these services. A large number of the patients were children, youth, and women. This effort directly contributed to the health outcomes of people with disabilities and improved community attitudes towards them.
- **A Peer Support Forum was established at CRP** and held three days per week in both Bangla and English language. Several initiatives developed from the Peer Support Forum, including a **literacy program for mothers of children with disabilities and women with disabilities**. Events to raise awareness of disabilities for parents were run through CRP and attended by hundreds. Grassroots, community engagement is an integral step in widespread support and acceptance of people with disabilities, and the AHEAD project facilitated the creation of sustainable community support networks for people with disabilities.

- Efforts to **raise awareness** about both gender and disability occurred through various workshops and events. Events included a poster contest, a sponsored walk, awareness days, and international women's day celebrations. These **events reached over 6300 participants** and contributed to changing attitudes of the population towards people with disabilities, including women with disabilities.
- **AHEAD supported the future employment** of women and men with disabilities, training over 470 participants, 47% of which were women. The activities included an "Industrial Sewing Machine Training" program of four classes of 12 women at the CRP Vocational Training Institute in Gonokbari.
- **AHEAD modified classrooms to make them accessible for people with disabilities.** The project implemented changes such as making desks adjustable and providing appropriately designed tables, chairs, and space to accommodate for people with physical disabilities.
- In collaboration with CRP, **AHEAD distributed 267 locally manufactured wheelchairs and 278 locally manufactured assistive devices** for children and youth with disabilities to directly improve their quality of life.
- AHEAD organized **five policy forums and five conferences** to discuss policy and long-term initiatives to support people with disabilities in Bangladesh. In total, 445 community partners, stakeholders, government officials, policy makers, healthcare providers and people with disabilities participated. These sessions mandated significant inclusion of women. Through these forums AHEAD paved the way for policy creation and political support for people with disabilities, including women.
- Queen's faculty supported the creation of a social enterprise at CRP-Bangladesh, which offered opportunities for people with disabilities to work with a printing press.

Conclusion

The Access to Health and Education for All Children and Youth with Disabilities (AHEAD) in Bangladesh project was successful and exceeded many of the initial targets and expectations. AHEAD helped educate educators, healthcare professionals, community leaders and policy makers about effective support for people with disabilities. By empowering local organizations and individuals with disabilities there is potential for long-lasting, sustainable change in the way people with disabilities are treated in Bangladesh. The above actions and outcomes are only a sample of the project's work to remove barriers to the rights and health of people with disabilities, particularly children, youth, and women.

Partners

Implementing partners: Centre for the Rehabilitation of Paralyzed (CRP) Bangladesh, Bangladesh Health Professionals Institute (BHPI), Global Affairs Canada (Formerly, Canadian International Development Agency and Department of Foreign Affairs, Trade, and Development).

Local/community collaborators: Bangladesh Protibondhi Unnayan Sanstha (BPUS), Government of Bangladesh, Family Welfare Visitor Training Institute, Ministry of Health and Family Welfare, Ministry of Education, Union Health and Family Welfare Centre, CRP Vocational Training Program, National Forum of Organizations Working with the Disabled (NFOWD), Association for research development and Rights Implementation for Disabled People (ARDRID), Centre for Statistics and Information on Disability (CSID), BRAC Dhaka, Society for the Welfare of Disabled Children (SWAC), National Institute of Population and Training (NIPORT), RHSTEP, University of Dhaka Department of Educational and Counselling Psychology, Community Welfare Centre (Savar Government), Access Bangladesh Foundation, National Disability

Development Foundation, ADRID Barisal, Bangladesh Physiotherapy Association, Bangladesh Occupational Therapy Association, Directorate of Primary Education (Inclusive Education Dahka), Bangladesh Red Crescent Society.

International collaborators: Autism Speaks International, UNICEF Bangladesh, Centre for Disable's Concern (CDC), Muslim Aid UK.

Sources and Project Resources

1. Access to Health and Education for All Children and Youth with Disabilities (AHEAD) in Bangladesh Final Report*
2. Table of Targets and Outputs Achieved by December 31, 2017*
3. Access to Health and Education for All Children and Youth with Disabilities (AHEAD) in Bangladesh Baseline Study*
4. International Centre for the Advancement of Community Based Rehabilitation (ICACBR) Mid Year Report 2014*
5. Final Annual CRP Report for IPODMCH and AHEAD 2014*
6. Module 3: Strategies for inclusion of children with disabilities in mainstream schools
7. Girls & Young Women with Disabilities Leadership Training
8. Framework of results and key success factors
9. Various case studies created/used by the project's educational efforts

*used to generate this report