BANGLADESH

Country paper
on
The current situation and issues of education for children with Autism - Promoting Autism education with perspectives toward a cohesive society.

Mr. A.B.M. Arshad Hossain
Director (Deputy Secretary), Department of Social Services
Ministry of Social Welfare

Introduction:
The word ‘Autism’ is newly introduced and it is flourishing in Bangladesh which is differentiated from the other disabilities as spectrum disorder with multiple characteristics of behaviour and neurological mechanism.

In Bangladesh just a few years back, people were merely aware about disability with Autism. Only the parents are mainly concerned about their children with Autism in urban area. But at present, the situation is improving gradually throughout the country. Electronic and print Media plays an important role to buildup the awareness on this issues. Non Government Organizations (NGO) and Foreign Agencies are also working for awareness building in this regard.

2. Special education for the disability with Autism:
Ministry of Social Welfare on behalf of Bangladesh Government is playing a vital role for providing education to the student with disabilities as well as Autism in accordance with their special needs. The constitution of Bangladesh has a strong commitment in its article 15 (D) to improve disability and to help the poor, helpless, deprived children and adolescents with disabilities. Over the year Bangladesh has achieved a remarkable progress in fundamental education. Primary education is free and compulsory under the primary education Act. Bangladesh has taken various measures to access and achievement of gender equality. Children with mild disabilities enrolled in the primary schools totaled 53,303 of which 30,142 are boys and 23,161 are girls in 2008. In the year 2006, a total number of children with mild disabilities ware 45,680 of which 25,833 were boys and 19,847 were girls. The Autistic children are studying in the mainstream of school education system.

The total number of primary schools in Bangladesh is 81,434 and number of students are 16,312,907 where 5,701 students have some disabilities in 2007. At present only about 7% students with disabilities are enrolled in the schools. To encourage the students with disabilities and to enroll themselves in the educational institutions Government has introduced monthly stipend programme from the fiscal year 2007-08. An amounting to Taka 80 million are allocated for this programme and 17,150 Students with disabilities are being benefited in the fiscal year 2009-10. Government has a plan for expansion of this programme to ensure the education for the students with disabilities and to
bring them in the mainstream of the society. Two special education centres has been running by the Department of Social Services for the children with Autism one of which located in the capital city of Dhaka and another is in the port city of Chittagong.

3. Intervention Capacity on Autism:
Centre for Rehabilitation of the paralyzed (CRP) was founded in 1979 at Savar. It was established with a view to provide rehabilitation service for the persons with disabilities. CRP has a multi disciplinary team where doctors, nurses, physiotherapists, occupational therapists, social welfare officers and counselors are working. Children with Autism can get occupational therapy communication therapy and psycho-social therapy over there. CRP has started honors course on occupational and communication therapy in Bangladesh.

4. Laws and Policies Related to Social Protection:
Bangladesh has formulated a good number of policies specially National policy for the persons with disability, 1995 for social protection and ensured the rights of the vulnerable groups. Bangladesh has ratified some important social protection related United Nations Convention. Accordingly concerned Ministry has formulated National Plan of Action to implement the provisions of the said convention. Some important conventions are:

- Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW), 1984
- Governments has taken decision for Ratification of the Optional Protocol on the Rights of the Persons with Disabilities, on 4 May, 2008

The United Nations General Assembly designated 2 April 2008 as the first world Autism awareness day. Coincidentally the National Disability Day of Bangladesh fell on the same day in 2008. For the first time the Autism issue was placed in a large shape and raising awareness about Autism among the mass people.

5. Programmes for the Person with Disabilities (PWDs):
5.1 In Bangladesh, Ministry of Social Welfare is the lead Ministry and acts as the coordinating agency for Government and Non-government interventions towards addressing disability issues. In the recent time dynamic and sustainable steps have been taken for the PWDs. The steps are:

i) To establish separate ticket counters in railway station, bus terminals, river ports, steamer terminal, airport and airways office to facilitate easy availability of tickets for the PWDs.
ii) To maintain reserve seats in the bus, train and water transports for PWDs.
iii) To fill up the 10 percent reserved quota for employment in the government jobs by the orphans and PWDs.
iv) To construct a ramp in all the government offices to facilitate easy movement of the PWDs.
v) To withdraw the existing restrictions regarding appointment of PWDs in the Govt. class I & class II jobs.
Vi) To arrange micro-credit for PWDs by all the Nationalized Commercial Banks (NCBs).

- In February 2008 Bangladesh organized and hosted the Third General Assembly & Conference of the Asia Pacific Disability Forum. In the Conference Disability & Development Practical strategies are highlighted.

5.2 Child protection and children development programme including Autism:

The Department of Social Services (DSS) is running different types of state subsidized welfare institution and programmes for the vulnerable and uncared, abandoned children and orphans. The basic objectives of these programmes are to provide shelter, food, clothing and other livelihood necessities and as well as education, training, health care, recreation, awareness building on human and child rights and finally to reintegrate into the society. The Department of Social Services runs significant number of social protection related programme addressing disability. The major ongoing programmes are 85 Sarkari Shishu Paribar (State Orphanages), 6 Baby Homes, 3 Training and Rehabilitation Centres for the Destitute Children, 5 Pre-Vocational Training Programmes, 3 Juvenile Development Centres, 5 Integrated Education Programmes for the Visually Impaired, 7 Schools for the Hearing Impaired, 64 Schools for the Visually Impaired and Capitation Grant for 3,022 non-Government Orphanages.

The Department of Social Services is also implementing an interest free micro-credit programme only for the Acid Burnt Women and Physically Handicapped for self employment. This programme has a significant impact to improve the standard of living of the PWDs including autistic persons. Government has already disbursed about Tk. 800 million under this programme.

5.3 Autistic schools in private sector:

Society for the welfare of Autistic Children (SWAC) is the first special school for the children with Autism established in 2004 and later on it has taken steps to make another separate school with other services named ‘Autism Welfare Foundation’ (AWF).

The other schools only for Autistic children are Applied Behavior Analysis (ABA) in Dhaka, BAKA at Bogora. Moreover, there are some institutions providing education for children with Autism along with intellectual impaired namely Caring Glory, Orchid School, School for Gifted Children, Bangladesh protibondhi Foundation and Society for the Welfare of the Intellectually Disabled (SWID) Bangladesh.

About two thousand children are getting both care and education from these schools.

6. Present scenario in Bangladesh:

Autism is a fairly recent discovery in Bangladesh. Beginning of this decade Autistic children are
screened and identified by the few trained parents of Autistic child who learn the Autism to deal with their child in western countries. After introducing of medical based diagnosis system in the country still many parents feel free to screen out their children. The trained parents are now operating the special schools.

Medical based diagnosis system in Bangladesh has started to identify Autistic children by the child development centre of Government child hospitals since 2001-2002. It was the only diagnosis centre for the first five years. Meanwhile 'National Economic Council' (ECNEC) the highest Government body has approved to introducing Autism diagnosis system into the eight Government medical college hospitals. Moreover private child hospital and child involve centre of Bangladesh protibondhi foundation has the service to identify the children with Autism. Government has taken initiatives to build up awareness about Autism throughout the country.

Conclusion:
The Government of Bangladesh is facing these emerging social issues with firm determination and courage. In line with the Government policy the Department of Social Services under the Ministry of Social Welfare has an enthusiastic vision & mission to address the social issues relating to Person’s With Disabilities (PWDs) as well as Autism. Autism has received serious policy attention in Bangladesh. Over the years the county has made important gains in autism development through different measures. Indeed, Bangladesh has a robust portfolio of social protection programme which addresses various forms of risks and vulnerability of autistic children.

<Questions and Answers after Country Report>

Q1. On the last slide, you mentioned about ABA. I think ABA is effective to early intervention. Would you introduce some program of ABA?
A1. Now we are just studying about the method to address problems of autistic children. I think that we should address those problems with various ways.

Q2. You mentioned that autistic children are medically diagnosed from parents of autistic children. Would you please confirm that if it is true?
A2. No, just doctors can diagnose children with autism.

Q3. You mentioned that trained parents are now operating the special schools, and that parents are supported to feel free to screen out their children. Are there any other supports which are given to parents by the government?
A3. No, the government is just studying about the method to educate autistic children.