Country statement from the Bangladesh Delegation regarding Agenda #9

UNESCAP’s High-level Intergovernmental Meeting on the Midpoint Review of the Asian and Pacific Decade of Persons with Disabilities 2013-2022

Session title: “Forward-looking policies to accelerate the implementation of the Incheon Strategy”

Expected outcome: Gain an overview of national perspectives and forward-looking policies to promote disability-inclusive development and accelerate the implementation of the Incheon Strategy and identify opportunities for cooperation, noting the value of a multi-stakeholder approach in disability-inclusive development.

Your Excellencies, honorable chair of the session, distinguished delegates and guests. Assalaamu alaikum.

Disability is a complex issue and a challenge for all countries. With almost one billion people with disabilities all over the world it poses an enormous economic challenge that cannot be ignored. A 2008 World Bank report estimated the annual cost of disability in Bangladesh to be approximately 1.74% of our GDP. According to the ILO, low-and-middle income countries lose an estimated 3-7% of their GDP, annually, due to exclusion of persons with disabilities from the workforce and increased cost of healthcare, education and social support services.

Since healthcare, social support, education and employment are the four major pillars upon which disability inclusion must be implemented, our approach needs to be multidisciplinary, involving multiple stakeholders both public and private and be collaborative in nature.

I commend the aims of the Incheon strategy and the Beijing Action Plan. But in order to ensure its effective implementation governments need to ensure disability-sensitive laws and policies are in place and enhance the knowledge base of their policy makers.

Under the leadership of Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina and the Awami League government we have made enormous strides in that area. We have harmonized our legal framework and are now working to adjust sector-specific policies.

As part of our 7th Five Year Plan, we are implementing a National Social Security Strategy to ensure that various lifespan risks faced by poor persons with disabilities are mitigated through several tax-funded safety net programs and social support services.

In healthcare, our national experience has shown that inter-service referral and coordinated health management is indispensable. Therefore, through several pilot studies currently being designed, we hope to soon have an economically feasible and sustainable system in place which utilizes community-based rehabilitation and home-based interventions programs. We plan to ensure that our specialized centers will effectively support them through a continuum of services for complex cases and regular training on evidence-based methods and research that enables us to have comprehensive data and improve our services. Our community based programs also include training for carers and caregivers.
Our 2010 National Education Policy mandates the enrolment of students with disabilities. Despite an increase in enrolment, overcrowded classrooms, limited teacher training and social stigma continues to be a challenge.

Our 2011 National Skill Development Policy sets a 5% admission quota for students with disabilities in all technical and vocational training institutes.

Disability is a multi-faceted challenge and therefore requires a cross sectorial approach. Since in the past autism and neurodevelopmental disabilities (NDD) was a particularly neglected area, we established in 2012 an eight-ministry national steering committee that is comprised of senior government officials and supported by experts in an advisory capacity. As a result of this model for one complex disability, we have been able to not only achieve significant social awareness and acceptance of all disabilities in a more holistic manner, we have also ensured that disability is prominent in our current five-year national economic development plan. It has also enabled us to develop comprehensive services that address the various lifespan needs regardless of the type of disability.

As a result of what we have learned from our forward-looking policies in Bangladesh we recommend the following as critical for achieving the Incheon goals:

1. UNESCAP should guide the various organs of the UN system towards a more universally accepted definition of disability categories based on levels of impaired functionality rather than how the disability is categorized and or manifested. This will ensure that the needs of individuals with multiple disabilities are better met. It will also ensure better use of resources and enable governments to plan for tiered support services with the aim to mainstream as many as possible.
2. We also need to develop free screening tools and rehabilitation protocols appropriate for our region.
3. Skills training for parents, community based service providers, training for healthcare providers and educators.
4. Skill development programs for employment so that persons with disability are employed not as CSR or via quotas, but as valuable human resources that improve a company’s bottom line.

Reviving UNESCAP’s thematic working groups and restructuring them to be in alignment with the ten goals of the Incheon strategy would enable us to collate best practices from Member States and share them with each other in the form of technical assistance.

As we have learned in Bangladesh, despite a visionary leadership, we cannot do it alone. In order to be successful, we need a mechanism through which greater collaboration, active partnerships both within countries and across political borders, can take place effectively.

With that, I conclude the official statement of the Government of Bangladesh, with my sincerest thanks to the distinguished delegates present here for their attention.