

Community Engagement for Inclusion of Children with Disabilities

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Introduction: In Bangladesh approximately 1.6 million children with disabilities are in primary school age, only 4% have access to education. In a developing country like Bangladesh student with disabilities have less opportunities to get enrolled in mainstream schools. CDD is trying to promote mainstreaming disability in Bangladesh where Inclusive Education is one of the major strategic priorities in its all interventions. Since 2015, CDD is piloting inclusive education at ten government primary schools in a rural area of Bangladesh in collaboration with community partnership under a project (PHRPBD) supported by CBM. Through this project, CDD is working to develop an inclusive education model with the combined effort of government and non-government agencies including the active participation of all related stakeholders of the community where Self-help group members are actively engaged.

Strategies used:

Early identification and intervention: In the project, there are disability resource person who are working in the community to identify different type of children with disability including severe disability from the community by a proper assessment process. The age range of identified children were 2 to 7. After early identification, the disability resource person can set interventions plan on the basis of age, type and level of disability. Disability resource person has a skilled on provide therapy, ADL support and communication. On the basis of assessment Disability resource person provide services and prepare children for mainstreaming schooling.

Partnership for sustainability: From the beginning of the planning project involved all related stakeholders like Upazila education office, teachers, SMCs, local government representative and the community people including persons with disabilities of that community. All the stakeholders were involved in planning to implementation and monitoring. So, a stronger commitment to the partnership and cooperation were established which makes the development process sustainable.

Active participation of persons with disability: Persons with disabilities of self help groups played a proactive role in the whole process. They acted as a bridge among the stakeholders to address disability related issues (disability specific needs and challenges). Project ensures active participation and representation of persons with disabilities in all decision-making process.

Results/Changes: Ten schools became accessible and practicing inclusive education; Motivated parents and teachers enrolled 47 children with disabilities; Community contributed more than 40% of the required resources to create inclusive environment; Government shows interest to replicate this change model to another 193 primary schools.

Major challenges:High schools are not ready to receive children with disabilities who have completed primary education;Schools are not prepared to address the needs of children with severe disability, intellectual disability, autism and psycho-social disability.

Learning:Active engagement of persons with disability is indispensable for creating inclusive environment; Community participation and ownership is very essential for sustainable development;Support from the government authority is very important for community mobilization.

Recommendations: Community driven home based education for children with severe disability.

Conclusion: This project established that, children with disabilities can be mainstreamed with the provision of reasonable accommodation in the school environment, changing the attitude of parents, teachers and other concerned people, ensuring training on inclusive education among the teachers, ensuring availability of education materials.This project established that, children with disabilities can be mainstreamed through the community collaboration, which can be owned by the community including the active engagement of persons with disabilities.