



**Government of the People's Republic of Bangladesh
Ministry of Health & Family Welfare**



Autism

More needs to be done

GLOBAL INITIATIVE ON AUTISM

An international partnership to assist persons with autism spectrum disorders (ASD) to achieve their fullest potential and participate fully in all aspects of community life, on an equal basis with others



"Light It Blue." Blue light illumination of Banga Bhaban (The Presidential House) on World Autism Awareness Day, 2015

Acknowledgement

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The Challenge of Autism and Rationale for Global Action

Autism Spectrum Disorders (ASD) (more commonly known as autism) is a unique neurodevelopmental disorder characterized by varying degrees of difficulties in language development, social communication, motor development, and sensory integration; in addition, persons with autism may manifest repetitive/restricted mannerisms and interests. The World Health Organization has reported a global prevalence of autism as 1 in 160 while recent studies in the United States and other countries point to much higher rates of occurrence. Although several plausible theories point to a combination of genetic predispositions and environmental factors as causes of autism, as of now, there is no known single cause of ASD. In addition, the significant variability in the presentation of symptoms and functionality means that no two persons with autism look alike, nor do they require the same management and services. In the absence of a known cause, early detection and interventions assume greater



Dr. Margaret Chan, the Director General of WHO in a call on meeting with Honorable Prime Minister of Bangladesh Sheikh Hasina after the Side Event on Global Autism Initiative held on 11 September 2014 during the 67th Regional Committee Meeting of the WHO South-East Asia (Dhaka, 10-12 September 2014). Honorable Minister for Health & Family Welfare of Bangladesh Mr. Mohammed Nasim, Honorable State Minister for Health & Family Welfare Mr. Zahid Maleque, WHO-SEARO Regional Director Dr. Poonam Kethrapal Singh and Chairperson of Bangladesh National Advisory Committee on Autism Saima Wazed Hossain were present in the meeting.

importance, as secondary and tertiary levels of prevention within the health system. In addition, access to appropriate education and employment opportunities, as well as independent/supported living options play a vital role in supporting both the individual and their families. Most developing countries lack the infrastructure to provide evidence based early detection and intervention programs, and many developed countries face significant challenges in creating universal access to quality services for this vulnerable group.

ASD and NDDs not only debilitate the life of the affected individual, but also significantly impact the social, economic and emotional well-being of the family. In developing countries, particularly for those living in poverty, the situation is further compounded by poor infrastructure, shortage of trained professionals, lack of reliable data, evidence based intervention programs and research centers. Existing services, often lack standardization (in both management modalities and capacity of professionals), are limited to urban settings and usually beyond the financial reach of most families. A lack of coordinated action from governments, which address issues throughout the individual's life, results in further marginalization and exclusion and increase their vulnerability.

A planned and coordinated approach that incorporates ASD services within existing educational, health, employment, social and developmental programs of countries, would ensure convergent service delivery systems that are cost-effective and sustainable, leading to a more inclusive global community.

UN and WHA Recognition

In 2007, the United Nations adopted the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (CRPD) addressing the human rights of all persons with disabilities, signed by 150 countries and ratified by 100. Bangladesh was one of the first countries to ratify the CRPD and has also signed its Optional Protocol. In recognition of ASD as a global health crisis, the UN designated in 2008 April 2nd as World Autism Awareness Day. Since then, several regional and international resolutions have been adopted urging countries to coordinate efforts, implement public health initiatives, and develop multi-sectorial opportunities for social inclusion and economic emancipation of persons with ASD.

The political will to address the autism challenge is further evidenced by numerous resolutions, three of whom were proposed by Bangladesh. These are:

- SEA/RC65/R8 Comprehensive and Coordinated Efforts for the Management of Autism Spectrum Disorders (ASD) and Developmental Disabilities by the South East Asia Regional Committee Resolution on 7th September 2012;

- A/RES/67/82 Addressing the socioeconomic needs of individuals, families and societies affected by Autism Spectrum Disorders, Developmental Disorders and Other Associated Disabilities by the United Nations on 12th December 2012; and
- WHA resolution 67.8 Comprehensive and Coordinated Efforts for the Management of ASD by the 67th World Health Assembly on 24th May 2014.

Several other regions have also demonstrated their commitment through the European Regional Committee Declaration EUR/51298/17/6 on the Health of Children and Young People with Intellectual Disabilities and their Families (26th November 2010); at the 57th session of the Eastern Mediterranean Regional Committee Resolution EM/RC57/R.3 on Maternal, Child and Adolescent Mental Health (October 2010).

Global Initiative on Autism (GIA)

It is clear that the challenge of autism (ASD and NDD) needs a global systematized response which is coordinated, structured, and planned as well as implemented through public-private partnerships. Through international collaboration and partnerships with governments, organizations, experts and families, the GIA seeks to promote a more inclusive global community.

Goals of GIA

- To promote the rights to inclusive development for persons with autism and other neurodevelopmental disorders;
- To address life-span needs through multi-sectoral planning and action;
- To share, sustainable strategies of service delivery systems through public-private partnerships;
- To raise awareness, end discriminatory practices, enhance greater participation and inclusion within their communities;
- To promote greater access to health, education, employment and social services that are appropriate, accessible and affordable; and
- To enable and empower individuals with autism and families to be involved in decision-making processes.

The scope/actionable areas of the Global Initiative on Autism

I. Advocacy & Access

- Create awareness about autism, by addressing cultural biases, stigma and misconceptions;
- Create demands for quality mental health services with particular focus on ASD and other NDDs especially in rural and remote areas;
- Ensure greater acceptance and opportunities for participation through enhanced knowledge and understanding of ASD and NDDs at the community level; and
- Promote a rights-based perspective on issues related to diversity, equal opportunity and full inclusion of persons with ASD and NDDs in all aspects of community life.

I. Convergence in Action

- Promote collaboration among existing national/international organizations as well as governments interested in supporting persons with ASD and other NDDs;
- Promote inter and intra-ministerial collaboration in health, education, employment and social service sectors in order to maximize reach and minimize costs;
- Assist in the effective and efficient implementation of the Southeast Asian Autism Network (SAAN);
- Assist autism organizations within countries to work collaboratively with research institutions in order to promote research on ASD and other NDDs;
- Promote international cooperation between high and low resource countries; and
- Assist in the incorporation of content on ASD and NDDs within relevant global initiatives and agendas of donor agencies so that existing financial and technical resources may be maximized.

III. Service Delivery Systems and Data Collection

- Promote efforts to collect and disseminate reliable data;
- Share the developments of sustainable strategies for early identification of delays in child development through existing maternal and child health services and programs, in a phased manner;
- Collaborate in the development of low cost non specialized (caregiver based) early intervention service modules that are evidence-based, culturally sensitive and economically sustainable in low resourced settings;

- Strengthen local capacity, including community level service providers and family caregivers to become partners in the service delivery process;
- Ensure provision of care is as close as possible to their homes and schools, in order to promote participation in family and community life and create opportunities for greater social inclusion;
- Improve the capacities of all health professionals so that integrated health care services can be provided from the primary to the tertiary levels;
- Empower and enable education systems to address issues of diversity at primary and secondary stages of education;
- Address issues of financial empowerment and skill development, so that persons with ASD and other NDDs may be adequately prepared for employment, in partnership with prospective employers;
- Ensure that a range of options for living, including independent living in the community, are made available to persons with ASD and NDDs, and that they have a voice in the decision-making processes involving their lives; and
- Establish mechanisms for ensuring high quality of services, with built-in transparency in management, monitoring, evaluation, and research.

IV. Planned development of professional service-providers

- Incorporate content on ASD and NDDs in the training of all health and allied health professionals, so that they may work more effectively with persons with ASD and other NDDs;
- Enhance the knowledge and skill levels of teachers at pre-service and in-service programs so that schools can effectively address diversity, and be inclusive and supportive of all students regardless of any learning, behavioral, social and/or emotional challenges; and
- Invest in the development of specialized professional cadres in health, education, and related fields, which will ensure sustainability of services over time.

V. Development of policies and legislation

- Develop and modify policies and legislation, mandating special support as well as inclusive support for persons with ASD and NDDs;
- Mandating special legal support for financial independence and legal guardianship of persons with ASD and NDDs; and
- Formulating mechanisms for individuals with ASD and NDDs to be involved in the policy making process as self-advocates.

'Addressing Autism through Partnerships: A Round-table Discussion for the Development of a Multifaceted Action Plan' on 11 September 2014 at the side event of 67th Session of the WHO Regional Committee for South-East Asia

The above mentioned side event was a collaboration of the Ministry of Health and Family Welfare, Government of Bangladesh and the World Health Organization. Her Excellency Sheikh Hasina, the Honorable Prime Minister of Bangladesh graced the occasion as the Chief Guest. The first session was chaired by Ms. Saima Hossain, Member, WHO Director General's Expert Advisory Panel on Mental Health. The second session was moderated by Dr. Poonam Khetrpal Singh, Regional Director, WHO Regional Office for South-East Asia.



Dr Margaret Chan, WHO Director General, Dr Shirin Sharmin Choudhury, Speaker of National Parliament of Bangladesh, Dr Gowher Rizvi, Adviser to Honorable Prime Minister of Bangladesh, Saima Wazed Hosaain, Chairperson of Bangladesh National Advisory Committee on Autism and Dr N Paranietharan, WHO Representative to Bangladesh took part in a workshop on autism held in Dhaka during 67th WHO-SEAR Regional Committee Meeting (10-12 September 2014)

The objective of the side event was to initiate a dialogue among stakeholders to develop partnerships for a Global Action on Autism. The discussions also aimed at building a momentum towards a global initiative on autism through sharing of ideas for

the development of a multifaceted action plan. The participants of the round-table discussion comprised of Ministers of Health of WHO South-East Asia Region, Heads of Missions, and Ambassadors/Heads of Delegations, representatives of World Bank and UN and International Development Agencies.



Honorable Prime Minister of Bangladesh Sheikh Hasina and Chairperson of Bangladesh National Advisory Committee on Autism Saima Wazed Hossain with the participants of Global Autism event held in Dhaka in September 2014

In the opening technical session, chaired by Saima Hossain, Dr. Michael Klag, Dean, Bloomberg School of

Public Health, Johns Hopkins University, USA presented an insight on the public health perspective of autism. Dr. Klag explained the common triad of symptoms and the spectrum of manifestations observed in persons with autism. Dr. Klag talked of the probable and multi-factorial causes of autism, the diagnosis therein and the influence of environment on autism. He emphasized that the rising prevalence needs to be acknowledged through provision of early diagnosis and interventions.



Honorable Prime Minister of Bangladesh Sheikh Hasina speaking as the Chief Guest in the National Event held on the occasion of World Autism Day (Dhaka, 2 April 2015)

Dr. Samira Al Saad, Founder and Director, Kuwait Centre for Autism and Vice President, World Autism Organization, made a presentation from the perspective of a parent, emphasizing the need to understand autism and provide necessary support-systems to persons with autism and their families. She mentioned that persons affected by autism, are often gifted and have inner strengths that need to be recognized. Dr. Samira reiterated empathy not sympathy is what we need to show to persons with autism. The second session was moderated by Dr. Poonam Khetrpal Singh. The floor was opened for comments from participants.

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A summary of the comments

- Minister of Health, Bhutan welcomed the initiative, referred to the 2011 Dhaka Conference, talked about the Queen of Bhutan being a champion for autism and pledged Bhutan's support for the cause GIA.
- Minister of Health, India, congratulated Saima Wazed Hossain on leading a global campaign on this sensitive issue, mentioned the declaration of South Asian Autism Network (SAAN) on Autism and placed on record India's continued support to the GIA. He felt that no child with autism should suffer the ill effects of late diagnosis, and have his rights violated. He pledged the wholehearted support of the Government of India in the development of detailed action plans for GIA.



British High Commissioner (right) and Canadian High Commissioner (left) to Bangladesh made comments at the side event

- The High Commissioner of UK talked of his governments long-time actions in providing a full cycle of support to persons with autism, with quality and access ensured, across the country.
- The High Commissioner of Canada pledged support on this initiative and talked of the huge investments made in inclusion of marginalized groups, with focus on education, skill development and partnerships with employers.
- The Ambassador of Italy talked of the work with Microsoft and Apple, and the successful inclusion of many persons with autism in these organizations.

- The Ambassador of Turkey congratulated Saima Hossain on the Award she received from WHO, and pledged full support to GIA and to Bangladesh, he was happy to participate in this noble cause.
- The Ambassador of Japan, also representing JICA, was fully committed to taking GIA forward, and supporting Saima Hossain in her global effort to bring autism to center-stage.
- The Ambassador of Korea, on behalf of KOICA, congratulated Saima Hossain on her WHO award, and pledged full support to the GIA.
- The Charge de Affairs of China, thanked the hosts for giving him an opportunity to participate in this important event, acknowledged that autism is a global problem, and appreciated the role of Saima Hossain in leading the effort.
- The Ambassador for Malaysia expressed his solidarity with Saima Hossain's initiative on autism, referring also to the 2014 conference on Autism in Malaysia, signaling her government's commitment.
- The representative of the US Ambassador talked about the importance of growing awareness about autism, mental and neurological disorders including other disabilities, where USA is providing life-cycle services and support.
- Country Heads/Representatives of USAID, UNDP, UNICEF, World Bank and ICRC applauded the initiative of bringing autism to the forefront and mentioned areas, which need focus, like social stigma, family reluctance to seek support and treatment, and the need for universal access to services. There was praise for the comprehensive approach taken by the Government of Bangladesh and the World Health Organization to address autism, and across-the board support to GIA. Each one of them talked about meaningful collaboration in the area of autism.
- In her concluding remarks, Dr. Poonam Khetrpal Singh, Regional Director, WHO Regional Office for South-East Asia, thanked everyone for their supportive statements and in particular the Honorable Prime Minister of Bangladesh for bringing Autism to the forefront not only regionally but globally. Dr. Singh acknowledged the various organizations that are doing incredible work in the Region and appreciated the important areas that had been discussed at the roundtable. She emphasized the need to translate plans into actions through the development of a roadmap. The Regional Director reiterated the importance of research and requested member states to support research and training activities pertaining to autism. Dr. Singh urged the Ministers of Health to take autism as a priority health agenda and commit more funds in this area. She thanked the Honorable Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina for her unwavering support to the cause of autism and other disabilities.



Different Ambassador/High Commissioners

- Dr. Singh congratulated Saima Hossain for her tireless efforts to bring autism the attention that it deserves, which has given a huge platform to all mental and neurological disorders.
- In her capacity as the Chief Guest, Her Excellency Sheikh Hasina, the Honorable Prime Minister of Bangladesh expressed her solidarity with the decisions of the roundtable discussion. She mentioned that persons affected by autism should not be considered a burden to the society; they should be nurtured, given proper education and raised to a level where the nation can be proud of them. She talked about inclusive education and how Bangladesh stands firm on its commitment to ensuring persons with disabilities are ushered into mainstream education. She mentioned about the work Bangladesh has undertaken to establish the rights of the persons with disabilities. She mentioned it is an honor that Saima Wazed Hossain has brought to the country through her relentless work in the field of autism. She spoke about the importance of working together and on behalf of the Government of Bangladesh expressed her total support for autism. The Prime Minister assured that the Government of Bangladesh is providing and will continue to provide support to persons with autism and other disabilities. She thanked the World Health Organization for prioritizing autism, which ensures that autism will get its due recognition and support.
- Saima Wazed Hossain proposed a vote of thanks, appreciating and gratefully acknowledging the goodwill generated by this event and thanked the Honorable Prime Minister, WHO and the large number of Heads of Missions/Country Representatives, Ministers, Aid Organizations, UN agencies, the media and all invited international and local guests for their commitment to the proposed Global Initiative on Autism.

Autism Initiatives



Commitment to Autism continues: Bangladesh Experience

Bangladesh has addressed the issue of ASD in a planned manner. It hosted the first Regional Conference on Autism in 2011, which was attended by over 1,000 national & international delegates, organized jointly by the Government of Bangladesh, World Health Organization and Autism Speaks. This was followed by a Situation Analysis and the need development for a multi-sectoral plan involving more than one ministry. In August of 2012, officials (Joint secretary and above) were brought together to develop a multi-pronged strategic plan. This led to the formation of a National Steering Committee on Autism and Neurodevelopment Disabilities, comprised of 9 ministries/divisions (Health and Family Welfare, Social Welfare, Education, Primary and Mass Education, Labor and Employment, Women and Children Affairs, Local Government Division and Finance Division).



Late Honorable President of Bangladesh Mohammed Zillur Rahman was always very supportive to autism and neurodevelopmental disability related activities. Saima Wazed Hossain handed over to him the Strategic and Convergent Action Plan on Autism and NDD's (SCAPAND) to him at Bangabhavan (the presidential house).

Now the area of National Steering Committee has been extended to 15 ministries/divisions where Ministry of Information, Economic Relations Division, Ministry of Youth and Sports, Ministry of Cultural Affairs, Planning Commission and NGO Affairs Bureau are included. The National Steering Committee is guided by a National Advisory Committee and a Technical Guidance Committee comprised of both

parents and experts. Through the voluntary efforts of these committees a Strategic and Convergent Action Plan on Autism and Neurodevelopment Disabilities (SCAPAND) has been developed which has been incorporated within current programs and allocated budgets of the Ministries. The SCAPAND has been successfully dovetailed within current programs and allocated budgets of Ministries and is being implemented through the Government's 5-year National Development Plan, with the approval of the Planning Commission. This has had considerable impact on national awareness, policy, legislation and capacity of service providers. The stakeholders like parents, professionals and NGOs have been effectively involved from the planning stage onwards. Through this planned process, Bangladesh has demonstrated that multi-sectoral convergence addressing needs throughout their life span has the maximum impact on the lives of persons with disabilities, their families and the community at large.

The relevant ministries of the Government of Bangladesh are continuing their programs to address autism and neuro-developmental disorders through a cooperative and collaborative multi-ministerial approach and in coordination with experts and stakeholders.

Advisory Committee on Autism and Neuro-developmental Disabilities

An 8-member "Advisory Committee on Autism and Neuro developmental Disabilities" headed by Saima Wazed Hossain helps the National Steering Committee to develop priorities, design programmes, devise implementation strategies, provide guidance on the appropriate use of resources, and identify necessary resources.

National Autism Technical Guidance Committee

There is a national level 17-member Autism Technical Guidance Committee whose responsibility is to provide technical support to the Advisory and Steering Committees. Working in specialized group, members are responsible for translating appropriate materials for use in Bangladesh, collating existing materials available in the country and region, identifying needs in the community and setting priorities.

National Steering Committee on Autism and Neuro-developmental Disabilities

To implement the action plan adopted in solving autism and neuro-development disabilities in Bangladesh and to co-ordinate them, there is a "National Steering Committee on Autism and Neuro-developmental Disabilities" consisting of 23 members of 15 ministries/divisions and an organization, viz. NGO Affairs Bureau. Secretary, MOHFW is the Chairperson and Secretary, Ministry of Education (MOE) and Secretary, Ministry of Social Welfare (MOSW) are the co-chairpersons of the committee.

The National Steering Committee has following terms of reference:

- Effective implementation and co-ordination of autism and neuro-development related action plan;
- Ensuring engagement and participation of the civil society, non-state organizations, guardians' forum, higher educational and research organizations;
- Motivation of the print and electronic media personnel to help building positive social attitude and create awareness about autism;
- Consideration for adoption of appropriate actions for implementation of the action plan and for updating it as and when required;
- Coordination of autism related activities of different ministries/divisions /organization; and
- Holding discussion on issues of activities related to implementation and convergence of autism and developmental disabilities, and to undertake measures if there is problem.



Chair, co-chairs and members after meeting of National Steering Committee on Autism and NDDs

Ministry of Health & Family Welfare

Establishment of CNAC and IPNA

At the initiative of MOHFW of Government of Bangladesh, Center for Neurodisorder and Autism in Children (CNAC) was established in Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujib Medical University (BSMMU) to provide medical treatment and conduct training and research related to autism and neuro developmental disabilities. At present this CNAC has been transformed into the Institute of Pediatric Neuro-disorder and Autism (IPNA).

The objectives of IPNA are:

- To expand our services and bring in-patients and out patients facilities under one roof;
- To expand the CNAC school;
- To increase man-power;
- To involve more professionals and families in our existing training programs;
- To engage in greater local and national level advocacy and awareness raising campaigns;
- To liaise with other countries for knowledge and technology sharing; and
- Greater emphasis on research.

The main expected outcomes of the IPNA are:

- Multi disciplinary, comprehensive and tertiary clinical management services become available in BSMMU for children with autism and NDDs;
- Specialized education and recreation facilities are made available for children with autism and NDDs;
- Professionals, families and caregivers become better skilled and capacitated for management of children with autism and NDDs;
- Society get enhanced awareness about autism and NDDs in children;
- Speialized facilties (Khelaghor) created for recreation of children with autism and NDDs;
- Clinical research facilities created; and
- Telemedicine facilities established to give country wide support.

Shishu Bikash Kendra

The "Shishu Bikash Kendra" is the synonym of "Child Development Center". The MOHFW has already established 15 such centers, one in each of 15 key government-owned medical college hospitals of the country. Besides these centers, in the Institute of Pediatric Neuro-disorder and Autism (IPNA) and Dhaka Shishu Hospital, the function of Shishu Bikash Kendra is running. There is a plan to establish five centers of Shishu Bikash Kendra in medical colleges and hospitals/district hospital every year. This year in the districts of Gazipur, Manikganj, Narayanganj, Sirajgonj and Munshiganj the function of Shishu Biskash is going to be started. In each Shishu Bikash Kendra, there are one child psychologist, one child therapist, and two supporting staff. During 2014 in these centers, necessary services including child medi-care have been provided to 125,952 children. The vision of this project is to prevent disability, optimize development and improve quality of survival of all children in Bangladesh. These are the model child and family-friendly centers. There are a number of objectives, viz. (a) to engage and train multi-disciplinary professionals including physicians, psychologists, development therapists, etc. all for children's domain; (b) to make application of standard tools, methodologies and strategies for early screening, assessment, intervention, treatment and management of entire range of developmental delays, disorders, impairments and disabilities; (c) to conduct epidemiological surveys and clinical research with an aim at providing an evidence based on health service delivery system, and identify causal risk factors to help towards prevention of major childhood disabilities; (d) to provide mental health services to children with pervasive developmental disorders through home based and family supported programs; (e) to provide outreach services by conducting child development camps by linking the Shishu Bikash Kendras with primary health care at sub-district hospitals; (f) to establish a digital database of information related to child development and disability across Bangladesh; and (g) to provide continuing training and supervision of services through various strategies including internet-based technologies. The clinical services provided from Shishu Bikash Kendras include walk in clinic; general development assessment; seating and feeding clinic; epilepsy clinic; low vision clinic; speech; language and communication clinic; psychological assessment clinic; psychological counseling; more than word clinic for improved socialization and communication; well-baby clinic for high risk infants, etc.

Establishment of Autism Cell in MOHFW

In order to co-ordinate, integrate, speedy and effective accomplishment of the activities related to autism and neuro-developmental disabilities, an autism cell has been established in the MOHFW consisting of Director General, one Director and two Deputy Directors and other supporting staffs.

Pilot study on autism and neuro-developmental disabilities

The MOHFW through its three subordinate or allied organizations, viz. Community Clinic Project, Non-communicable Disease Control Program and Bangladesh Medical Research Council supported the conduction of a survey on autism and neuro-developmental disabilities in Bangladesh. The survey included 7,280 children aged 0 to 9 years in selected rural communities of 7 sub-districts (one sub-district in each of 7 divisions of Bangladesh) and 5 urban localities of Dhaka city. The results show prevalence of ASD of 0.15% which varies from 3% in Dhaka city to 0.07% in the rural areas of Bangladesh. This survey was disseminated on 16th February 2015.

Selection of National Celebrities as Autism Ambassador

In order to make the people of the country more aware of autism and neuro-development disabilities, campaign sub-committee and programme sub-committee have been formed by National Steering Committee. Some National Celebrities have been selected as Autism Ambassadors with whom the campaign sub-committee and programme sub-committee are working to make a programme calendar for the whole year.

Adoption of ASD resolution in 67th World Health Assembly

In the 67th World Health Assembly on the proposal of Bangladesh, a new autism development disabilities resolution titled "Comprehensive and Coordinated Efforts for the Management of Autism Spectrum Disorders" was adopted. This historic resolution firmly establishes autism as a global public health priority and provides stakeholders every-where a powerful new advocacy tool. Here the continuous effort of Saima Wazed Hossain, Chairperson of National Advisory Committee on Autism and NDDs to adopt the resolution by the WHO Executive Board meeting and in the 67th World Health Assembly is mentionable.

Catalytic role to promote the cause of ASD in global perspective

The MOHFW of Bangladesh played an instrumental role in the formation of the South Asian Autism Network (SAAN) and in preparation of SAAN's Charter.

Observance of World Autism Awareness Day 2nd April 2015



Honorable Prime Minister of Bangladesh Sheikh Hasina with children with autism after their cultural program held on the occasion on World Autism Awareness Day 2015

On the occasion of 8th World Autism Awareness Day, a discussion program followed by cultural activities jointly organized by Ministries of Health and Family Welfare; Social Welfare; and Education was organized on 2nd April 2015 at 9.30 am at the Bangabandhu International Conference Center, Dhaka. The program was chaired by Hon'ble Minister of Social Welfare Syed Mohsin Ali. Hon'ble Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina participated at Chief Guest. Three prominent persons of the Government of Bangladesh spoke in the event. They included Hon'ble Minister for Health and Family Welfare Mohammed Nasim; Hon'ble Chairperson of Parliamentary Standing Committee for Social Welfare Ministry Md. Mojammel Hossain; and Hon'ble State Minister of Social Welfare Mr. Promod Mankin. The children with autism presented an excellent cultural show. The event was followed by a highly participatory rally. In the evening, blue light decorations were done at office of the Directorate General Health Services (DGHS); specialized hospitals; medical college hospitals; and hospitals at district and sub-district levels; and also at the district health managers' offices. These organizations also held

discussion meetings on autism on the same day. The Non Communicable Disease Control Program of the DGHS under MOHFW broadcasted autism awareness messages across all the mobile phone subscribers of the country with assistance of the telecom



World Autism Day 2015 (2 April). Dhaka. Honorable Prime Minister of Bangladesh is speaking as the Chief Guest at the national event held in Bangabandhu International Conference Center

regulatory authority. The text message read as: "April 2, World Autism Awareness Day. Know about autism. If you suspect someone around you as victim of autism, please extend your help to identify the case immediately with help of nearby government health center - NCDC, DGHS, MOHFW". In all medical colleges of Bangladesh, the first class of the day for all students was devoted to lecture, and questions and answers on Autism Spectrum Disorders.

Side event on Autism in WHO SEAR Regional Committee Meeting

During the 67th Session of the WHO Regional Committee for South-East Asia held in September 2014 in Dhaka, a side event on autism titled Global Initiative on Autism was successfully conducted where Her Excellency Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina, Dr. Poonam Khetrupal Singh, RD, WHO Regional Office South-East Asia, Ministers of Health of WHO South-East Asia Region, Ambassadors/Heads of Delegations, Representatives of World Bank and UN and International Development Agencies. The objective of the side event was to initiate a dialogue among stake-holders to develop partnership for Global Action on Autism through sharing the ideas for the development of a multifaceted action plan.

Highlights of some other progress by MOHFW

- Developed short and long term action plans for mitigation of autism and related problems;
- Nearly completed development of a national strategic plan on the above issue;
- Mainstreamed autism and neuro-developmental related disorders in the Health, Population and Nutrition Sector Development Program (HPNSDP 2011-2016) through inclusion of mitigation activities in the related operational plans, viz., non-communicable disease control; in-service training; improved hospital service management, etc.;
- Inclusion of autism in the curriculum of medical education;
- Conducting national level training programs for doctors and nurses on autism by the "Center for Neuro-development and Autism in Children" and by the "National Institute of Mental Health" and also at the sub-district levels for paramedics and parents with use of effective IEC materials.

Ministry of Social Welfare

Ministry of Social Welfare (MOSW) is one of the important development ministries of the Government of Bangladesh working for the human resource development. It has several multidimensional programs like socio-economic development and protection of rights for the destitute, poor, orphans, senior citizens, widows, vulnerable children, persons with disabilities and marginalized people of the country.

The National Parliament of the Government of Bangladesh has promulgated two important acts to protect the rights and ensure safety of the disabled persons. They are:

- (i) Neuro-developmental Disabled Persons' Protection & Trust Act 2013;
- (ii) Disabled Persons' Rights & Protection Act 2013.



Honorable Prime Minister of Bangladesh Sheikh Hasina never missed the opportunity to encourage the children with autism and other disabled individuals. She is seen joining his hands to express her joys at the culture show offered by the children with autism held in Dhaka on 2 April 2015 on the occasion of World Autism Awareness Day

Neuro-developmental Disabled Persons' Protection & Trust Act 2013

Neuro-developmental Disabled Persons Protection & Trust Act 2013 was legislated for enforcement from 10 November 2013 to create a Trust with a view to supporting creation of a fund and a sustainable organizational system for ensuring rights and safety of the neuro-developmental disabled persons through providing them physical, mental and financial help. The Trust keeps provision for the Honorable Prime Minister of Bangladesh to serve as ex-officio chair and 13 Honorable Cabinet Ministers from the line ministries to serve as the ex-officio members and the Secretary to the Ministry of Social Welfare to serve as the ex-officio member secretary. The Trust will soon be realized to create an institutional system for providing appropriate training, comprehensive

development, social empowerment and other ways to enabling the disabled from neuro-developmental causes to live independently in society. Moreover, the Trust will identify the persons with neuro-developmental disabilities, help him/her to live in her/his family, live long and receive care at his/her parents' death; provide special education, employment opportunities, and ensure his/her inheritance. Under this act, volunteer organizations working for above purpose will be financially subsidized. Currently work is underway to make rules under this Act. According to the section 13 of the Trust Act, Neuro-Developmental Disabled Protection Trustee Board has been formed.

Disabled Persons' Rights & Protection Act 2013

This Act was also endorsed by the Jatiyo Sangshad (National Parliament) of Bangladesh in 2013, which went to enforcement from 9 October 2013. The purpose of the Act is to make legal bindings on state and citizens to safeguard the rights and safety of the disabled persons irrespective of the kind of disability. The Act creates legal binding on the state and society not to create any discrimination between a normal person and a disabled person and ensure similar and equal rights in all matters, such as, enjoyment of all civil rights, such as, inheritance; expression of opinion; right to information; living with family and society, marital relationship; entering places where all others can go; appropriate education; employment; protection from torture or oppression; safe, healthy and appropriate environment and infrastructure; highest quality healthcare within the available limit, accommodation; rehabilitation and dependency allowance if applicable; participating in cultural and sporting events; travel; privilege to use indicative communication language; voting; national identity card; creating and joining any organization, etc. Headed by the Minister for Social Welfare, this Act keeps provision of a national coordination committee with members from national parliament, several secretaries from different line ministries and representatives from NGO a working for the disabled persons.

The Department of Social Service and Jatiyo Protibondhi Unnayan Foundation under Ministry of Social Welfare have a significant role in implementing different programs to foster the cause of autism and other neuro-developmental disabilities inclusive of all other disabilities.



Rally on 8th World Autism Day, Dhaka 2 April 2015

Jatiyo Protibondhi Unnayan Foundation (JPUF)

Jatiyo Protibondhi Unnayan Foundation (JPUF) is an autonomous entity under Ministry of Social Welfare. It was established in November 1999 with a view to serving person with disabilities of the country in better way. Since then this organization has been making all possible efforts for development of persons with disabilities including autism. By the assistance and technical cooperation of World Bank, JPUF is implementing different programs and projects. In English, JPUF is called National Foundation for Development of the Disabled Persons (NFDDP).

Activities of JPUF for Autism & NDDs

Disability Service Centre (Protibondhi Sheba O Sahajya Kendra)

JPUF has been implementing a program titled 'Protibondhi Sheba O Sahajya Kendra' which is also known as Integrated Disability Service Center (IDSC) since 2009. This program was formally inaugurated by the Hon'ble Prime Minister of Bangladesh on April 2010. Under the program, there are 103 centers in different areas covering all the 64 districts. Physiotherapy, speech and language therapy, occupational therapy, hearing test, visual test, counseling, referral service, etc. are being provided to the person with disabilities free of cost from these centers. Assistive devices like wheel chair, standing

frame, crutch, elbow crutch, tricycle, artificial limb, hearing aid, etc. are also being distributed at free of cost among the person with disabilities. Gradually this program will be extended up to all sub district levels. There is an autism and NDDs corner and also a toy library for children with autism and other NDDs with every service center. Till February 2015, total number of registered children with autism and other disabilities at the IDSCs are 111,094 and by whom 1,115,606 service-encounters happened.

Autism Resource Center

JPUF has introduced an Autism Resource Center in its own campus in 2010. From this center counseling, training and referral services are being provided to the children with autism and their parents. A group of experts consisting of psychologist, physiotherapist, occupational therapist and speech and language therapist are working in this center. Hon'ble Prime Minister has inaugurated the center on 2 April 2010 on the occasion of 3rd World Autism Day.

Special School for Children with Autism

Jatiyo Protibondhi Unnayan Foundation has been running four special schools for the children with autism at Mirpur, Uttara, Jatrabari and Lalbagh. Number of students of the schools is 130. In addition, 6 new schools for children with autism will be established at Rajshahi, Khulna, Chittagong, Barisal, Rangpur, Sylhet Divisional Head Quarters. There will be schools for children with autism all over the country phase by phase.

Training Program

JPUF has been implementing different training programs for sensitization and rehabilitation of the PWDs. The programs are: Training for the Mothers of Mentally Challenged Children, Training Program on Bangla Sign Language, Training for Parents of Children with ASD and other NDDs, Training on Autism, Behavior Modification, Picture Exchange Communication System (PECS), Implementation of IEP of children with ASD and NDDs its exercise at school and also at home, Training on Parents' Role in Managing Children with Autism Spectrum Disorder, etc. It is a continuous process.

Protibondhi Complex

The government has approved a comprehensive project to setup a separate Protibondhi Complex in JPUF's campus at an estimated cost of \$ 11 million. The complex has been inaugurated by the Hon'ble Prime Minister on 2nd April 2014 on the occasion of 7th World Autism Awareness Day. It will be an international center of excellence for the persons with disabilities, autism and other NDDs. Advanced dormitory, auditorium, OPD, physiotherapy center, shelter home and day care center will also be available in the complex.

One stop mobile therapy service

One stop mobile therapy service was also inaugurated by the Hon'ble Prime Minister on 2nd April 2010 to deliver therapy services at the door step of the peripheral PWDs. Now JPUF is going to procure 32 fully equipped mobile vans to strengthen outreach disability services all over the country.

Special Education Policy

Ministry of Social Welfare has introduced Disability Related Coordinated Special Education Regulation 2009. JPUF has been paying 100% salary of some 538 teachers and staff of 49 special schools including proyas (effort) and 7 inclusive schools since February 2010. Number of students of these schools is some 9,000. This coverage is expanding.

Tele-therapy services

Using modern IT communication facilities rural people of Bangladesh will be brought under therapeutic intervention through tele-therapy services. A group of expert in this filed like physiotherapist, occupational therapist, speech and language therapist, psychologist will be engaged for this purpose. Through this service people in community will be imparted training in these disciplines so that peripheral people can get disability related services within their reach.

Protibondhi Sports Complex

The government has approved a project to establish a Protibondhi Sports Complex as a center of excellence and allocated a total of 12.01 acres government land under Savar sub district, Dhaka. The project is under way. It will add a new dimension in the arena of mainstreaming process of disability.

Disability Development Fair

On the occasion of International Disability Day 2014 an eight day long Disability Development Fair was arranged at JPUF campus consisting of 38 stalls allotted among GOs and NGOs working with persons with disability and autism. Every day, there was seminar and cultural program in the fair participated and performed by persons and children with autism and other disabilities. Products of persons with autism and disabilities were exhibited and marketed in the stalls.

The Department of Social Services

The Department of Social Services (DSS), the executive agency of the Ministry of Social Welfare, is implementing multidimensional programs for protection of rights and development of the autistic children especially for those who are with ASD. The programs / projects are described below:

Sheikh Fazilatunnessa Mujib Memorial Specialized Hospital & Nursing College

The project is located near the capital city of Dhaka in Kashimpur, Gazipur. Started in January 2010 and completed successfully in June 2013, this 250-bed specialized hospital provides treatment and care, among others, to persons with neurodevelopmental disabilities. The institute's activity also includes social and clinical research on children with autism.

Expansion and development of PROYASH in Dhaka Cantonment

"Proyash" means "Effort". The project located in Dhaka Cantonment was started in October 2011 and was to be completed by June 2014. This specially designed center provides care to 400 children with autism and disability. The main objective of the project is to provide education and training to the children and youths with autism and disability to ensure their optimum development.

Disability detection survey

The Department of Social Service, with technical assistance from UNICEF, is conducting a survey to understand the prevalence of disability in the country and also to electronically register and track the registered disabled persons. Meanwhile, data collection has been finished in all districts of the country. More than 16 million people are targeted for inclusion in the survey. A major part of data collection has been completed and so far 1,803,456 disabled persons have been surveyed and 14,55,205 disabled persons have been issued clinical certificates by doctors. This survey will make it possible to estimate the number of disabled persons in the country and then to make need based planning and support programs for each of the disabled persons.

Autism related displays were made in 64 districts and 564 upazilas and UCDs in the country during dissemination and orientation meetings for the purpose. Measures were also undertaken to create awareness by a national level workshop and dissemination and orientation meetings in 8 venues of all 7 divisions of Bangladesh.

Schools by NGOs

Society for Welfare of Autistic Children (SWAC)

There was no school for children with autism in Bangladesh. In 2000, the SWAC was established by some parents of autistic children. This is the first only "Autism" related organization in Bangladesh.



Children with autism are doing their daily activities at Society for Welfare of Autistic Children

Autism Welfare Foundation (AWF)

In 2004, Dr. Rownak Hafiz, a renowned paediatrician, established Autism Welfare Foundation (AWF) to offer school-based education and training, home program for children with autism, and training of parents and teachers.



Newly elected Mayor of Dhaka City (North) Corporation visiting the children with autism at Autism Welfare Foundation



Students at Autism Welfare Foundation are doing their Art Work during the class

Parents Forum for Differently Able

In 2011, Honorable Prime Minister's daughter Saima Wazed Hossain created an opportunity to organize the parents of autistic children through arranging the "South



Sports activities of the children with autism organized by Parents' Forum for Differently Able



Cultural activities of the children with autism organized by Parents, Forum for Differently Able

Asian Conference on Autism". As a result Parents' Forum for Differently Able emerged as a voluntary social welfare organization of the parents with special needs children. It is a platform that gives parents mutual opportunity to share their stress, receive formal and informal counseling, information sharing, awareness raising and networking. It also allows to build a supportive relationships among families and parents.

Motto of the Parents, Forum is to bring persons with autism and with other developmental disabilities into national development process through awareness raising; include them in all aspects of society; advocate on behalf of them for ensuring rights and justice; undertake development projects to bring change in their lives; arrange appropriate education, provide treatment and therapies to prepare them to be part of the mainstream population; and also to create opportunities for them to adjust and live in their own setting.



The curious children with autism at a science fair

Ministry of Primary & Mass Education

Under the Ministry of Primary and Mass Education the Directorate of Primary Education (DPE) is responsible for ensuring enrollment of every child of schooling age into basic education facilities. In doing so, the department gives equal importance to the enrollment of children with special needs and continuation of their primary education in the main stream. Under the leadership of Saima Wazed Hossain, Chair of GAPH (Global Autism Public Health Initiative), Bangladesh, a special plan of actions has been formulated. The achievements out of the program are as follows:

Curriculum

Autism has been incorporated in the primary education curriculum. The focus theme is "autism is a psychological problem - not a disease and affected children can get rid of the problem if managed properly". Autism has been incorporated in the inclusive education curriculum. A teachers' training manual was developed and concerned education officers' and teachers' training is going on.

Popular tele-cartoon film "Meena" to enhance social awareness and responsibility to the autistic children and persons

In Bangladesh, a popular tele-cartoon film titled "Meena" after the name of an imaginary village girl created enormous social awareness for child education and health. The popularity of the cartoon film made "Meena" a popular character whom every viewer loves. The young children in Bangladesh are fans of "Meena". The MOPME has developed a short episode of "Meena" to raise awareness of autism among children and mass people. The script was developed through a series of workshops held in May 2012. On successful completion, the "Meena" cartoon film was broadcasted in different electronic media.

Interactive popular theater (IPT)

The MOPME also staged an interactive popular theater on autism which tells Apu's story to speak about autism. "Apu" is a friend of "Meena". The interactive popular theater was staged in the sub-district level and so far 158 shows have been staged.

Autism as a theme of Meena Day (24 September each year)

The MOPME has declared 24 September as the "Meena Day" to raise awareness among children and families about child education and prevent school dropouts. The 2012 "Meena Day" had the theme of "autism is not the barrier for education of school children if they become friend".

Training

- 05 (five) day long TOT (Training of Trainers) training has been given to the field level officers with the help of Global Autism Public Health Bangladesh (GAPH) to develop master trainers on integrated education including autism.
- 05 (five) day long training has been given to 02 (two) Assistant District Primary Officers' (ADPO) /PTI instructors from each Primary Teachers' Training Institute (PTI) for the implementation of integrated education program; and



Part of "Meena Carton" a locally developed carton character for increasing awareness

- There is plan to train up one teacher from every government primary school on integrated education including autism.

With aim to development of master trainers to train the teachers of inclusive education on autism.

Autism actions under Primary Education Development Program (PEDP-2)

There is a development program named "Primary Education Development Program, Phase-2 under the Directorate of Primary Education for improvement of primary education in the country. Supported by World Bank, this program although does not include autism as direct program, several autism related activities have been carried out as in-built component, which are as follows:

- Development of strategic action plan for children with special needs under umbrella of inclusive education;
- Development of tool-kit for identifying mental and intellectual problems;
- Development of information brochure on inclusive education along with four action plans;
- Identification of teachers and Assistant District Primary Officers (ADPO) of primary education as focal persons for coordination of local autism activities; and
- Development of training manuals (three in number) for trainers, field officials and teachers.

Training held

- One day orientation program for all primary education personnel all over the country (PTI field officials);
- 5-day TOT to 270 officials for implementation of inclusive education;
- 3-day training of one teacher from each government primary school on inclusive education;
- 3-day training to all field officials (2,694 participants) of the Department of Primary Education on inclusive education;
- 5-day training to Assistant District Primary Officers (ADPO) of primary education of all 64 districts of Bangladesh on inclusive education; they have been designated as district focal persons for autism as well; and

- Training of two Assistant District Primary Officers (ADPO) /PTI instructors from each primary teachers' training institutions on inclusive education.

Other programs

Different programs have been planned and implemented in partnership with UNICEF to create social awareness on autism. The social motivation and awareness programs cover different creative productions and events on autism like drama serial, TV spot, Meena cartoon, TV scroll, communication strategy document, message, mother/parent meeting, SMC meeting, etc. Furthermore, series of orientations, seminars, workshops and different motivational programs on autism have been conducted with participation of senior policy makers, officials, civil society members, parents, public representatives and community people to raise awareness about the issue.

Ministry of Education

Education is one of the basic rights of human beings. Nothing but a well educated nation can lead a country to the ultimate success. An educated nation means producing educated people irrespective of ethnicity, religion or cast. A significant number of children in our country are born with neurodevelopmental disorders or develop them after their births. It is not possible to develop the nation in a balanced way, if the neurodevelopmentally disabled people are kept out of the reach of education. Consequently, national education policy 2010 has been taken into action and opportunities of special education have been created for the neurodevelopmentally disabled and autistic children.

Programs undertaken

- Training about autism awareness and integrated education programs has been given to the senior level officials of the ministry, through internal planning of the ministry;
- A sensitizing workshop has been conducted at the National Academy of Education Management (NAEM) on 25 September 2012 aiming at the development of the autism related module;
- A training program has been conducted during 20-29 November, 2012 at National Academy of Education Management (NAEM) organized by National Academy of Education Management (NAEM) in collaboration with Global Autism and Public Health Bangladesh (GAPB), to make 27 faculty members of NAEM prepared to become master trainers;

- Autism awareness programs have been developed through posters, leaflets, workshops and mass communications;
- National Curriculum & Textbook Board Bangladesh (NCTB) has included autism as learning topic in the physical training, health science and sports related curriculum for class IX and class X;
- Examination time has been extended for an additional 20 minutes for the autistic children compared to normal ones; and
- 2% quota has been reserved for the admission of disabled students according to their merits to integrate them with mainstream education for the vacant seats in serial 15 of the admission policy for secondary, junior and conjoint primary levels of private schools/ schools and colleges.

Besides, the name of the ongoing project of establishing autistic academy by the Department of Secondary and Higher Secondary Education, under Ministry of Education, has been proposed to be changed into National Academy for Autism and Neuro-developmental Disabilities (NAAND), according to the advice of the Chairperson, National Advisory Committee, Autism and Neuro-developmental Disabilities Bangladesh, Saima Wazed Hossain. Project expenditure has been estimated to be \$ 9.5 million to build this academy with modern facilities. Extensive training for teachers and parents to bring the autistic and neurodevelopmental disabled children within the scope of education, conducting different programs under training wing, academy wing and counseling wing, specialized IT systems, early intervention center, outdoor service, vocational training center, water therapy system, hotel management, auditorium, playground, swimming pool and many other facilities have been included in this academy facilitating contribution to autism and neuro-developmental disabilities.

Ministry of Women & Children Affairs

Ministry of Women and Children Affairs formulated two policies namely "National Women Development Policy 2011" and "National Child Policy 2011". In these policies, special attention has been given for disabled including autism women and children.

A National Action Plan has been formulated for implementing the National Women Development Policy 2011. A matrix of action plan aimed at achieving goals relating to special program for disable including autism has been developed. The comprehensive plan describes related policies, laws, rules, regulations, present activities, future program, timeframe, responsible ministries, division and other associate agencies.

The ministry has also undertaken some important activities to prevent disability of congenital origin and to create positive environment, as follows, for the disabled:

- Careful watch to prevent disability and early detection of autism;
- Provide maternity allowance for the poor mothers and fund for supporting the lactating working mothers in urban areas;
- Provide suggestions and advices;
- Vocational training and rehabilitation;
- Proper logistic support for disable women and children, training, rehabilitation and also provide logistic support for admission to special school;
- Extension of maternity leave for the working women to facilitate birth of healthy babies;
- Constitution of a high level committee with the Secretary of the Ministry of Women and Children Affairs as the chair to carry forward the welfare and development of street children and underprivileged children inclusive of the disabled and autistic children; the committee also coordinates the activities between different ministries for the targeted children; and
- The department, academy and association under the ministry conducted many mitigation activities related to autism and other conditions.

Department of Women Affairs (DWA)

- Instruction given to all residential and non-residential training centers to include class/ module on autism in all training courses; in results, special chapter has been incorporated in life skill training module for the members of adolescent club; TOT for

this provided to the peer leaders of adolescent club; and peer leaders then trained other members of the club, who then conducted awareness raising programs for the community people;

- World Autism Awareness Day has been observed on 2nd April 2015;
- National Training Academy of DWA organized an orientation class for the DWA officers by the clinical psychologist of OCC (One Stop Crisis Center) to identify and counsel the autistic children.

Bangladesh Shishu (Child) Academy (BSA)

- About 30 special needs children are taking training on art course at the central office every year;
- Various awareness program along with many competitions (art, recitation, dance, song, etc.) have been arranged at the academy's district and sub-district level offices, where many special needs children participated;
- 28 officers of head office, district offices, project offices and partner organizations completed training on autism / special needs for such children;
- Provision made to give admission to autistic children in the academy, and 9 autistic children have already been enrolled.



Honorable Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina with the children with autism

Jatiyo Mohila Sangstha (JMS) - National Women Association

- Discussion on autism in monthly co-ordination meeting presided by association's chairperson;
- Inclusion of autism and NDDs related topics in training manual of JMS and session in every training program of JMS and its projects;
- Regular courtyard meetings (Uthan baithak) through 64 district and 50 branch offices for creation of awareness of the mass people on autism and NDDs; and
- Special discussion meeting with local stakeholders of JMS held in Veramara sub-district of Kustia district, Monirampur sub-district of Jessore district and Tala sub-district of Satkhira district from 16 to 17 November 2014, where JMS chairperson was present as the chair.

Information & Communication Technology Division

The Information & Communication Technology Division is playing the pioneer role in materializing the government's dream of implementing Digital Bangladesh Vision 2021. Two programs of the division, such as, "Text to Speech" and "Talking Book" are for helping the blind people. Bangladesh Computer Council (BCC), an organization of this division. It held 21 training courses on development of computer skills beginning from 2009 and it continued till June 2014. The number of participants was 291 which included 69 physically disabled persons, 136 blind persons and 86 persons having other kind of disabilities including children with autism; males were 188 (35%) and females were 103 (65%). The current year's (2015) computer training will include 100 disabled persons through 5 batches with 20 participants in each batch; the training will range from basic computer course to advanced training on hardware and graphic design to ICAP and DICP.

Ministry of Labor & Employment

Ministry of Labor & Employment amended the existing labor and employment law to focus on the rights and opportunities of the persons with disabilities. Following changes have been incorporated in the law:

- Bar has been imposed against engagement of disabled persons in use of machines and works that can cause physical risks to them; and
- Preference has been given to disabled persons when nominated for providing internship training.

Initiatives and activities of the ministry

- Action plan developed;
- Appropriate actions taken for raising awareness among the officers and staffs of the ministry in collaboration and coordination with other ministries;
- Workshops organized;
- Posters and leaflets developed, printed and distributed
- The owners of the industries motivated to create an appropriate environment in the work place for recruitment and work of the autistic persons; and
- Autism awareness committee formed at various levels.

Ministry of Local Government, Rural Development & Cooperative Local Government Division

Local Government Division of Ministry of Local Government, Rural Development & Cooperatives (MOLGRDC) has undertaken a program called "Planning and development of a strategic and convergent action plan for autism and neuro-developmental disabilities in Bangladesh". Under this program, following office orders have been issued:

- To include autism and NDDs as a regular discussion agenda in the meetings of Union Parishad standing committee on "Education, Health & Family Planning";
- To include autism and NDDs as a regular discussion agenda in the meetings of "health related committee" of Upazila Parishad;
- To constitute health related committee in each municipality under clause 55(2) of Local Government (Pourasabha) Act 2009 and include autism and NDDs as a regular discussion agenda in the committee meetings;
- To constitute health related committee in each city corporation under clause 41 and 1(1.1) of 3rd Tafshil of Local Government (City Corporation) Act 2009 and include autism and NDDs as a regular discussion agenda in the committee meetings;

- To organize training programs on autism and NDDs for the doctors working under the Urban Primary Healthcare project; and
- To include autism and NDDs as a topic in the training organized by the National Institute of Local Government for the personnel of Local Government Division through engagement of resource persons from the Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujib Medical University.

Ministry of Finance

Ministry of Finance responded to generously allocate funds to implement various projects and/or programs on autism and disability. Whereas all ministries received financial allocations for this purpose, notable allocations that require mention are those for special projects/programs under Ministry of Health & Family Welfare (MOHFW) and Ministry of Social Welfare (MOSW). The cumulative utilization of fund by MOHFW from Fiscals 2009-10 to 2013-14 was 5.6 million US\$, 2014-15 (Budget) 3.2 million US\$ and that by MOSW from fiscals 2009-10 to 2013-14 was 103.6 million US\$, 2014-15 (Budget) 47.1 million US\$.

Economic Relations Division (ERD)

Economic Relations Division (ERD) is one of the important divisions of the Ministry of Finance, Government of Bangladesh. The main mandate of ERD is to coordinate, plan, process, assess, negotiate and mobilize multilateral and bilateral foreign assistance for the socio-economic development of Bangladesh. ERD nominates officials of different Ministries/Divisions every year to impart training on autism and neurodevelopment disabilities in Korea financed by KOICA.

Ministry of Youth & Sports

Department of Youth Development (DYD) under the Ministry of Youth & Sports has been working across the country for development of backward, unemployed and poverty stricken youths out of one-third of total population in the country. Though DYD, since its inception, mainly works for partially-educated, educated, physically and mentally able and poor youths, it gives special importance to the physically handicap and autistic youths. Recently DYD has included contents on behavioral patterns of the common youths and autistic youths in its formal and informal training curricula. "Autistic youths are inclusive of the society and active force of development activities" is the theme of DYD's program for autistic youths. DYD so far trained 73,320 normal youths, who have been taught about their duties and responsibilities towards autistic youths. In addition, 1,300 youths have been particularly trained on disability and autism. The action plan of the DYD for the next 3 years includes (a) bringing the autistic youths in the mainstream of the society and enhancing their skill through residential training; (b) training workshop for mainstreaming the autistic youths; and (c) arranging youth fair high-lighting the success stories of the autistic youths.



"War of Independence of Bangladesh 1971", a painting by a child with autism

WHO Excellence Award & Distinguished Alumni Award to Chairperson, National Advisory Committee on Autism and Neurodevelopmental Disabilities, Bangladesh

During the 67th Session of the WHO Regional Committee for South-East Asia held in September 2014 in Dhaka, Saima Wazed Hossain, Chairperson, National Advisory Committee on Autism and NDDs was awarded the WHO Excellence Award in recognition of her contribution to public health in the national, regional and global level.

Besides, the University of Barry of the USA awarded her the Distinguished Alumni Award in recognition of her notable contribution in public health in the international level.



Saima Wazed Hossain, Chairperson of the National Advisory Committee on Autism and Neurodevelopmental Disabilities is receiving WHO Excellence Award from Dr. Poonam Khetrpal Singh, Regional Director, WHO for the South East Asia.



"Pied Piper of Hamelin", a painting by a child with autism



"Spirit of Independence", a painting by a child with autism



"Village Life", a painting by a child with autism



"Village Life", a painting by child with autism



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Autism

More needs to be done

May 2015

GLOBAL INITIATIVE ON AUTISM

An international partnership to assist persons with autism spectrum disorders (ASD) to achieve their fullest potential and participate fully in all aspects of community life, on an equal basis with others



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