



Discussion Report

Skills and Employment of Persons with Disabilities in Bangladesh

Bridging the Gap Between Skills Development and Sustainable Employment

Organized by:
Bangladesh Business and
Disability Network

Date:
11 March
2026

Location:
Gulshan Police
Plaza, Dhaka

Section One

01 Introduction & Participating Organizations

Setting the Stage

The discussion on Skills and Employment of Persons with Disabilities convened a diverse group of stakeholders - BBDN resource members, disability-focused organizations, BBDN team members - to examine why employment outcomes have not kept pace with the growth in skills development initiatives. The discussion was grounded in a shared observation: while skills development initiatives and private sector engagement have expanded in recent years, placement and retention outcomes continue to reflect implementation challenges experienced over time. The discussion therefore focused on identifying the underlying causes of this gap and proposing practical strategies to strengthen the transition from training to sustainable employment.

PARTICIPATING ORGANIZATIONS

ADD International Bangladesh	Bangladesh Disabled Development Trust (BDDT)
Bangladesh Society for the Change and Advocacy Nexus (B-SCAN)	Bangladesh Youth Leadership Center (BYLC)
BRAC (DI Unit)	BRAC Skills Development Programme (SDP)
CBM Global Disability Inclusion	Centre for Disability in Development (CDD)
Center for the Rehabilitation of the Paralyzed (CRP)	Disabled Child Foundation (DCF)
Humanity & Inclusion (HI)	Prattasha Samazik Unnayan Sangstha (PSUS)
SheRAA - Women's Climate Resilience & Adaptation Alliance	Sightsavers
Society of the Deaf & Sign Language Users (SDSL)	Visually Impaired People's Society (VIPS)

Section Two

02 Keynote & Organizational Perspectives

Three speakers shaped the framing of the day's discussions, each contributing distinct perspectives on progress, gaps, and operational realities.

Aziza Ahmed, Director Operations Opening Remarks	Underscored the progress made in preparing persons with disabilities for employment, noting improved access to skills training and growing private sector interest in inclusive hiring. She emphasized, however, that outcomes in terms of sustained employment have not progressed at the same pace which raises critical questions about job readiness, candidate expectations, and workplace integration.
Arup Ratan Chowdhury, Program Manager BBDN — Network Presentation	Presented BBDN's ongoing work and impact trajectory, outlining the network's role in bridging employers and skilled candidates while highlighting current programmatic interventions.
Rubaiya Sultana, Senior Program Officer 2025 Programming Update	Provided an operational perspective on 2025 programming, identifying retention and candidate commitment as recurring concerns. She stressed that technical training alone is insufficient without addressing the psychosocial and contextual factors that influence employment continuity.

Section Three

03 Key Challenges Identified

Seven interconnected barriers were identified across stakeholder contributions, spanning the full employment lifecycle from initial training to long-term retention.

3.1 **Transition from Training to Employment**

While training completion rates have improved, the transition into sustained employment remains uneven. Some candidates do not join offered positions, while others exit shortly after placement. This reflects a combination of limited exposure to workplace environments, gaps in expectation management, and insufficient post-placement support.

3.2 **Job Quality and Market Alignment**

Most available opportunities remain concentrated in entry-level roles, often with limited salary growth and career progression. This creates a structural mismatch between candidate aspirations and available positions, contributing to lower motivation and retention over time.

3.3 **Workplace Environment and Inclusion**

While recruitment has improved, organizational readiness to support employees with disabilities varies significantly. Reports of inadequate sensitization among line managers, limited reasonable accommodation, and occasional tokenistic hiring practices were raised. For persons with hearing and speech disabilities in particular, workplace integration challenges are more pronounced due to communication barriers and social isolation, especially when placed individually rather than in groups.

3.4 **Psychosocial and Behavioral Dimensions**

Workplace adjustment, confidence, and resilience emerged as critical determinants of retention. Limited familiarity with professional environments can lead to difficulties in adapting to workload demands, communication norms, and organizational culture.

3.5 **Role of Families and Social Context**

Family dynamics emerged as a significant influence on employment outcomes. In many cases, family perceptions and expectations shape decisions around job acceptance and continuity, highlighting the need for broader engagement beyond the individual candidate.

3.6 **Systemic and Coordination Gaps**

Participants identified several ecosystem-level challenges: limited outreach beyond urban centers, particularly at the district level; absence of a centralized, accessible database of skilled candidates; and fragmented coordination and information-sharing mechanisms across organizations. These gaps collectively reduce the efficiency of candidate-opportunity matching.

3.7 **Limitations of Current Job Matching Approaches**

The prevailing job fair model was identified as requiring fundamental rethinking. Participants noted that vacancies and participating companies should be openly accessible to persons with disabilities and made public through social media channels before any job fair event takes place. More critically, a database of skilled candidates must be developed first - job offers and matching should follow from that foundation, not precede it. The shift required is from event-driven placement toward a structured, demand-driven model where candidate profiles are already known and employer requirements are aligned in advance.

Section Four

O4 Synthesis of Stakeholder Recommendations

The recommendations emerging from the seminar are organized into eleven strategic areas, each corresponding to a distinct dimension of the employment ecosystem.

STRATEGIC AREA	KEY ACTIONS PROPOSED
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Retention and Transition Support	Introduce structured follow-up mechanisms including post-placement tracking, focus group discussions with candidates who drop out, and continuous psychosocial counseling throughout the employment period.
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Needs Assessment	Conduct a year-long training Needs Assessment before the training cycle begins. Following candidate selection, carry out a Job Needs Assessment to identify suitable employment pathways. Upon training completion, conduct a second and more rigorous Job Needs Assessment to ensure placement decisions reflect updated candidate capabilities and current labour market demand.
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Psychosocial and Career Counselling	Embed structured psychosocial and career counselling at each stage of the employment journey to build candidates' self-efficacy, clarify career goals, and equip them to navigate workplace challenges before they escalate.
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Training System Strengthening	Integrate pre-training preparation phases, enhance soft skills modules, and adopt tailored approaches for different disability groups to address diverse learning and adjustment needs.
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Workplace Inclusion	Conduct employer sensitization programs, strengthen inclusive HR policies, and ensure practical implementation of reasonable accommodations. Extend sensitization to co-workers, who shape the day-to-day inclusion experience and can significantly reduce social isolation and communication barriers at the peer level.
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Employment Pathways	Expand access to mid-level roles, promote entrepreneurship pathways as an alternative to wage employment, and improve employer mapping to broaden the range of available opportunities.
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Job Matching Models	Rethink the job fair model fundamentally: vacancies and participating companies should be made openly accessible to persons with disabilities and publicized through social media in advance. Before organizing any job fair or placement event, develop a database of skilled candidates first: job offers and matching should follow from that foundation. Transition from event-driven placement toward pipeline-based recruitment where candidate profiles are pre-identified and employer requirements are aligned throughout the process.
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Information Dissemination	Establish a WhatsApp group to share employment opportunities quickly with partner organizations.
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Data and Coordination

Develop a centralized, accessible database of skilled candidates with disabilities, and strengthen digital platforms to improve information sharing across organizations and employers.

OPD Network & Grassroots Expansion

Actively involve organizations of persons with disabilities beyond BBDN's existing resource pool to widen candidate reach, diversify pipelines, and strengthen grassroots representation. Extend program reach beyond urban centers through partnerships with local OPDs and district-level actors to address geographic gaps in service delivery.

Family and Community Engagement

Introduce structured family sensitization initiatives to build household-level understanding and support for employment decisions and continuity.

Section Five

05 Toward a More Integrated Approach

The discussion's central finding was a call to move from fragmented, stage-specific interventions toward a holistic livelihood model - one that coordinates across the full arc from training to sustained employment.

This integrated approach would bring together skills development, job placement, workplace adaptation, and long-term retention support within a single coordinated framework, rather than treating each stage as a discrete project with separate accountability. Participants emphasized that the sequencing of interventions matters as much as their content - from needs assessment and candidate selection through to training, placement, and structured follow-up.

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A holistic livelihood model integrates four elements that are too often siloed: skills development, which must go beyond technical competencies to include behavioral preparation; job placement, designed around employer demand rather than candidate supply alone; workplace adaptation, ensuring that environments are genuinely ready to receive and support employees with disabilities; and long-term retention support, sustained well beyond the point of initial placement.

Participants called for more effective sequencing ensuring that each stage is deliberately connected to the next, and that no candidate moves from training into placement without adequate preparation for the workplace environment they will enter.

CONCLUSION

Meaningful Progress, Unfinished Work

The discussion reaffirmed that Bangladesh has made meaningful progress in expanding opportunities for persons with disabilities, particularly through skills development initiatives and increasing private sector engagement facilitated by BBDN.

At the same time, experiences from past years indicate that sustaining employment outcomes requires far greater attention to quality, alignment, and support systems than has historically been invested. The gap between training completion and stable employment reflects structural weaknesses that require deliberate, coordinated responses.

Addressing these challenges will require a multi-stakeholder approach that goes beyond placement targets to focus on long-term sustainability. Strengthening systems for retention, improving the quality of workplace inclusion, and enhancing coordination across the ecosystem will be critical to ensuring that skills development translates into employment that is both meaningful and lasting.