

From Rhetoric To Reality: Assessing The Inclusion Of Persons With Disabilities In Local Government Of Bangladesh

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ABSTRACT:

The inclusion of persons with disabilities (PWDs) particularly Physically Challenged Persons in the local governance structures of Bangladesh remains a significant challenge despite national and international commitments toward inclusivity. This exclusion is largely due to socio-cultural stigmas, insufficient legal frameworks and the lack of awareness about disability rights among local authorities. In this backdrop this study attempts to explore how far inclusion of Physically Challenged Persons is being implemented in the domain of local government. The prime objective of this study is to assess the present scenario of Physically Challenged Persons' inclusion in local government and to unveil the problems they encounter and the prospects therein for effective inclusion of PWDs. To do this, a mixed method approach was applied combining both qualitative and quantitative methods consisting of sample survey among 100 Physically Challenged Persons, 50 KIIs, 2 FGD. The study brings into surface that hardly PWDs have any space or opportunity for their inclusion or participation in committee meeting, decision making, election participation, leadership roles in the affairs of local government. Their voices are never heard and they are facing negative socio- institutional discrimination while participating in local government activities. Additionally, their awareness level about different government policies and programs still remain disappointing therefore government intervention in the form of policies, plans, projects and programs are being called for full inclusion of PWDs in the local government.

KEYWORDS: *Inclusion, Interventions, Local Government, Persons with Disabilities, Sustainable Development.*

1) INTRODUCTION

The inclusion of Physically Challenged Persons (PCPs) in local government activities is a critical aspect of building an inclusive and equitable society [1], [2]. Because inclusion in local government activities is the doorway to participate in central politics that build healthy democratic culture, social justice and equality and sustainable development [3], [4]. Participation of PCPs in Local governments of Bangladesh has been very low [5]. This phenomenon is not peculiar to countries in the developing and underdeveloped world, even, in highly developed countries and relatively socially inclusive states like the USA, Canada and Europe, PWDs remain politically marginalized [6], [7], [8]. Compared to those without disabilities, stigmatization and discrimination associated with disability may combine with isolation and diminished resources to reduce the interest of PWDs in politics. This is equally true in the case of local government of Bangladesh.

Since Ancient Hebrews, PWDs have been suffering from the prevalence and practice of social and religious stigma that systematically increased their exclusion from mainstream society, thus limiting their ability to integrate in society and make their voices heard. According to the European Court of Human Rights (FRA) considers exclusion based on disability as a breach of the European Convention on Human Rights, to which all EU member states remain signatories [9]. Within the last decade, countries such as Austria, Netherlands, Spain, Finland, Sweden and the UK have shifted towards full participation of PWDs in the electoral process irrespective of the nature of disability. In Canada, Prince has attributed the underrepresentation of PWDs in municipal, i.e., in the local government. Bangladesh is no exception of this.

Despite the declaration and commitment enshrined in the Bangladesh constitution (Articles 10, 11, 15, 17, 19, 20, 21, 27, 28, 29, 31, 32, 36) and declaration in the SDGs, inclusion and PWDs' participation in every sphere of the government is seriously missing. On a parallel, the number of disabled people is increasing at an alarming rate; approximately 1 billion individuals worldwide have a handicap of some kind. As many as 15% of the world's population falls into this category. The majority of PWDs (80%) reside in low- and middle-income countries (LMICs). It has been demonstrated that individuals with disabilities are disproportionately the most marginalized group in society [10]. PWDs are not only disproportionately the most marginalized group in LMICs, but also in most developed and democratic countries; their inclusion is disproportionate. For example, in the United States (US), where PWDs have enjoyed greater autonomy, the participation of PWDs in politics is generally lower than that of persons without disabilities [6]. Bangladesh is no exception to that.

Nevertheless, to attain the 10th goal (Reduced Inequality) of SDG, the present study focuses on inclusion and active participation of PWDs in local government activities and decision-making processes that may reduce inequality as well as discrimination among human beings by utilizing their capabilities and hidden talent to build up a smart and sustainable society. A more nuanced understanding, many disabled people like Albert Einstein, Sir Isaac Newton, Charles Darwin, Thomas Alva Edison, Franklin D. Roosevelt, Thomas Jefferson, Stephen Hawking, Alexander Graham Bell, Leonardo da Vinci, Pablo Picasso, Helen Keller and many more have enlightened and ignited the world by their hidden god gifted power. However, there is a lack of comprehensive research to identify local governance challenges and highlight their inclusion in the process. In this backdrop, the study examines whether they became famous being disabled, so why couldn't the PWDs of Bangladesh? Consequently, there is an immense demand to conduct research, especially relating to the inclusion of PWDs in the local government of Bangladesh.

2) LITERATURE REVIEW

The inclusion of Persons with Disabilities (PWDs) in local governance has been a growing area of focus in both global and national contexts. Historically, PWDs have been subjected to exclusion and discrimination. Romke discusses how earlier societies, such as the Hebrews and Greeks, embedded stigmatizing beliefs in religious and cultural practices, portraying PWDs as dependent and unproductive [11]. During the 19th century, societal views shifted to seeing PWDs as "worthy poor," warranting pity rather than participation. Despite this, individuals like Thomas Alva Edison, Franklin D. Roosevelt, Sir Isaac Newton, and Stephen Hawking demonstrated that disability does not equate to inability—emphasizing the vast potential of PWDs when societal barriers are removed.

Inclusion in Local Government – Global and Bangladesh Contexts

Globally, several countries have made strides in ensuring PWDs are represented in local government bodies. For instance, Uganda has established reserved seats for PWDs at various levels of local councils, ensuring their voices are included in decision-making processes [12]. In South Africa, the legal framework encourages participation of marginalized groups, including PWDs, in municipal governance [13]. In contrast, Bangladesh's progress has been slower. While legal frameworks exist to promote inclusion, such as the Rights and Protection of Persons with Disabilities Act 2013, actual representation of PWDs in Union Parishads or Upazila Parishads remains limited and symbolic. A study by CDD (2019) highlighted some improvements, yet meaningful inclusions such as direct representation and decision-making power is remaining minimal [14].

Challenges in Including PWDs in Local Government

Several barriers hinder the inclusion of PWDs in local governance. Scholars ([15], [16], [17]) note that Bangladesh's local government system suffers from political manipulation, elite dominance, limited resources, and inadequate fiscal autonomy. These issues are compounded by PWDs, who face physical inaccessibility, lack of transportation, communication barriers, and negative social attitudes. A study by NGDO/NCDW/BLAST (2015) found that 76% of PWDs could not participate fully in electoral processes, and 44% cited physical inaccessibility of polling centers—such as lack of ramps and

second/third-floor locations—as key obstacles. Furthermore, the absence of priority queues discouraged many from casting their votes.

To address these challenges, several organizations have made key recommendations. The International Labour Organization (ILO, 2019) [18] and the National Council on Disability (NCD, 2020) have proposed initiatives such as awareness training for local government officials, capacity-building for PWD leaders, and the development of accessible infrastructure [19], [20], [21]. Globally, best practices include implementing legal quotas for PWDs, ensuring accessible election materials, and fostering inclusive political party platforms [22].

This study builds upon existing literature by investigating not only the current status of PWD inclusion in Bangladesh's local government but also how this rhetoric of inclusion translates into reality. While previous studies have examined the physical or institutional barriers to inclusion, there is a research gap in assessing how PWDs perceive their role and participation within local governance structures. By focusing on lived experiences, institutional responses, and policy execution, this study seeks to bridge theoretical understanding with practical implementation, thereby contributing to the ongoing discourse on disability-inclusive governance in Bangladesh.

Objectives of the Study

The study was driven by the following objectives:

1. To unveil the present scenario of PWDs' inclusion in local government of Bangladesh.
2. To identify the reasons why PWDs are not heard at committee meetings or other venues where local government authorities make decisions.
3. To identify strategies for fostering greater participation and representation of PWDs in local government.

Research Questions

1. To what extent are PWDs being included now in the local government?
2. What are the potential areas of inclusion of PWDs by the local government? and
3. What role can local government play for the inclusion of PWDs in their programs and activities?

Theoretical Underpinnings

A. Empowerment Theory: This theory views PWDs as agents of change, capable of advocating for their own rights and inclusion and explores how PWDs can be empowered to participate in decision-making processes and hold local officials accountable. In Bangladesh, empowerment of PWDs is crucial in building leadership skills, improving access to education and creating institutional pathways to engage them in governance.

B. Community-Based Approach (CBA): This approach constitutes three views: 1. **Local Participation** encourages grassroots involvement ensuring that PWDs are not passive recipients but active contributors to local governance decisions. 2. **Sustainability** promotes long-term change by embedding inclusive practices within local governance. 3. **Collaborative Governance**-CBA emphasizes collaboration between local governments, civil society organizations and community members to create inclusive policies and actions that address the needs of PWDs.

Community Based Approach (CBA)
CBA puts the PCPs at the center

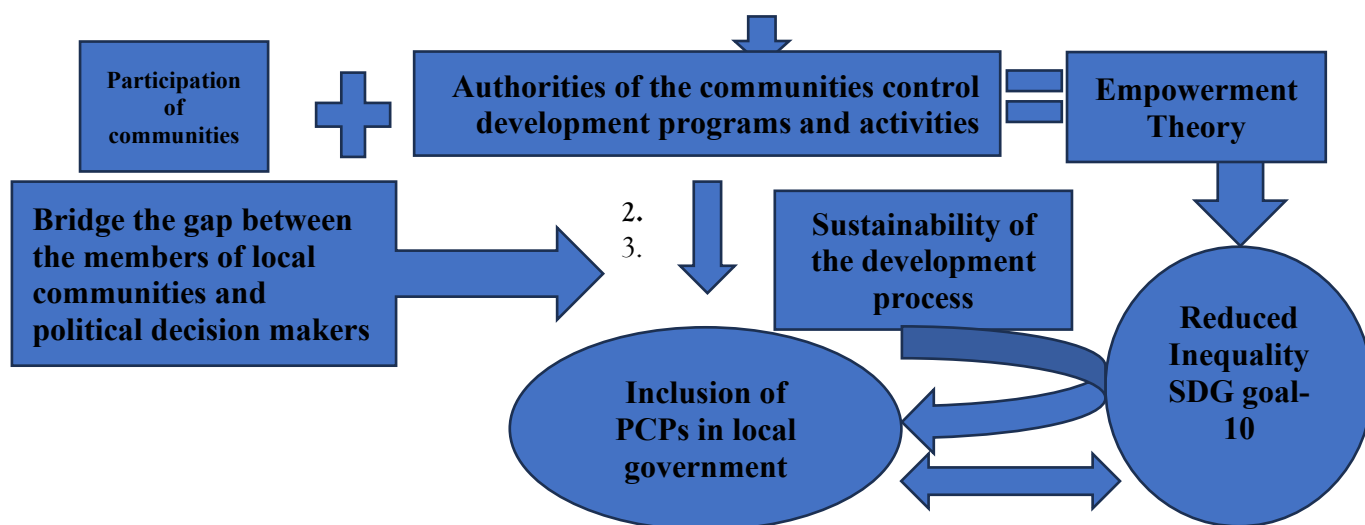


Figure 1: Theoretical Underpinnings of the Study (Researcher's own Perspective)

3) METHODOLOGY

Research Design

A concurrent mixed method has been followed for conducting the study that “legitimate inquiry approach” provides the sound ideas and knowledge about the population, subject matter and research questions of a study. The triangular method also helps researchers to explain how one variable affects another for studying the research problem [23]. According to Jick (1979) argues that a mixed methods approach of research with the combination of semi structured interview and survey provide a rich and comprehensive result of a research [24]. There are several types of mixed methods, Concurrent Mixed Method is one of them. When quantitative and qualitative data are collected simultaneously and then integrated to provide a more comprehensive understanding, it is called Convergent Parallel. In the current study as quantitative method 100 PWDs and as qualitative method 50 KIIs and 2 FGD were conducted simultaneously.

- a. 100 Physically challenged disabled people have been surveyed from 10 Union Councils of Bangladesh where each Union Council was selected as Purposive Sampling Technique (from each Union Council 10 Physically challenged disabled people are surveyed through a questionnaire).
- b. As many as 50 KIIs were interviewed through a semi-structured questionnaire among the 10 Chairman, 20 Members (10 males and 10 female), 10 Social Welfare officers, 10 representatives of NGOs who are working for the overall development of PWD of the union council. From each Union Council 1 Chairman, 1 male member, 1 female member, 1 Social Welfare officer and 1 representative of NGOs-INGOs are selected.
- c. Separate interviews with another questionnaire were conducted through 2 FGD techniques.

Table 1: Study Area and Number of Respondents

District	Upazila	Union Council	Pattern of Union	PWD S	KII	FGD
Dhaka	Savar	Birulia	Urban	10	5	1
Sylhet	South Shurma	Mogla Bazar	Urban	10	5	-
Rangpur	Lalmonirhat	Hatibandha	Rural	10	5	1
Barisal	Barisal Sadar	Chandpura	Urban	10	5	-
Jessore	Sadar Upazila	Monirampur	Urban	10	5	-

Mymensing	Fulbaria	Radhakanai R	Urban	10	5	-
Chuadanga	Alamdanga	Belgachi	Rural	10	5	-
Gaibandha	Gobindogonj	Talukkanupur	Rural	10	5	-
Cumilla	Chaoddagram	Moonshirhat	Rural	10	5	-
Khagrachari	Panchhari	Panchhari	Rural	10	5	-
Total=10				100	50	2

Sampling Technique: Purposive sampling is a non-probability sampling technique where researchers select participants deliberately based on specific characteristics or qualities that help to explore the objectives of the study. The primary goal of purposive sampling is to focus on particular groups or individuals who can provide the most relevant and detailed information for the research question. In the 20th century Prominent figures Paul Lazarsfeld, were influential in developing purposive sampling methods for social researchs. Opoku, Mprah, and Saka (2016) explored the participation of persons with disabilities in political activities in Cameroon where they used purposive sampling technique as qualitative method in conducting FGD [25]. Another study Mahmud and Azad (2017) also applied purposive sampling techniques for quantitative study (110 PWDs were interviewed following sample survey tool) while for qualitative study 5 case studies and 5 Key Informant Interviews were carried out to explore the nature of vulnerabilities and living standard of the PWDs [26].

Urban and Rural Sampling: Five urban municipalities and five rural union parishads were purposefully chosen from a total of ten districts to compare and assess the present inclusion status of PWDs in local government. The questionnaire was prepared in Bengali for easy understanding. The questionnaire was pre-tested for measuring validity and applicability before its final use.

Data Analysis for Quantitative Method: The data entry plan received validation from AIUB before the commencement of data analysis. Likewise, approvals were secured for the database and data tabulation before the composition of the study report. After collecting and calculating data, data was presented using a bar graph, pie chart, table, and percentage using Microsoft Office Excel.

Data Analysis for Qualitative Method: Data from KIIs and FGDs were analyzed thematically. Thematic Analysis Steps by Creswell (2014) as like: 1. Familiarize yourself with Data 2. Generate initial codes, 3. Search for themes 4. Review themes 5. Define and name themes and 6. Produce the report.

The audio-recorded responses of each of the discussions were transcribed verbatim and separately by the researcher. The data was analyzed by performing inductive content analysis (researcher developed themes by studying the trends of responses). The researcher reads through the transcripts to ensure that transcriptions were done accurately and also to be familiar with the responses. The researcher developed a theme based on the research questions while reading the transcripts. There were three research questions. After identifying the themes, the researchers met and discussed the emerging themes, similar themes from the two group discussions were grouped together. Relevant quotes from each of the groups were identified and linked to their respective themes.

4) FINDINGS OF THE STUDY

RQ 1: The Present state of PWDs being included in the local government of Bangladesh

In response to Research Question-1 (To what extent PWDs are being included now in the local government), the following tables and figures represent the present state of PWDs in terms of accessibility to government offices and public transport, their hurdles and discrimination while participating, level of awareness are analyzed.

Quantitative Findings of the Study

Table 2: PWDs' Accessibility to Government Offices and Public Transport

Types of Physical Disabilities	Accessibility in Government Offices		Accessibility in Public Transport			Grand Total
	Very Poor	Poor	Average	Good	Excellent	
Hearing Disabilities	6	3	1	0	0	10 (10%)
Vision Disabilities	6	8	8	0	0	22 (22%)
Speech Disabilities	6	0	0	0	0	6 (6%)
Body Limb Disabilities	20	32	10	0	0	62 (62%)
Total N =%	32 (32%)	49 (49%)	19 (19%)	0 (0%)	0 (0%)	100

In response to accessibility out of 100 PWDs, 49% of the PWDs reported that their accessibility to government offices and public transport is "Poor," representing the largest group's absolute dissatisfaction towards the prevailing hostile system. 32% reported "Very Poor," indicating significant barriers and only 19% reported average, indicating that very few PWDs experience any level of reasonable access to these services. The survey finds large portion (62%) PWDs have body limb disabilities and among them 32 PWDs reported "Poor" in accessibility while 20 found "Very Poor," and only 10 reported 'Average' accessibility. 22% of PWDs have vision disabilities and they face mixed levels of access, with 8 PWDs reporting "Poor," and 6 having "Very Poor" accessibility. 10% of the PWDs have hearing disabilities with 6 reporting "Very Poor" accessibility and 3 opined "Poor." 6 PWDs (6%) have speech disabilities and all of them reported their accessibility as "Very Poor," indicating severe challenges in accessing services. This analysis provides an overview of the accessibility challenges faced by PWDs in the given locality. It highlights extreme exclusion for PWDs in course of accessibility in government offices and public transportation.

Table 3: Major Hurdles Encountered by PWDs while Participating in Local Government Activities

Types of physical disabilities	Major hurdles they encounter					Total
	Lack of Publicity (1)	Lack of Disabled-Friendly Environment (2)	Improper Identification (3)	Administrative complexity (4)	Lack of prompt support (5)	
Hearing Disabilities	1	6	2	1	-	10 (10%)
Vision Disabilities	6	11	2	2	1	22 (22%)
Speech Disabilities	-	2	1	1	2	6 (6%)
Body Limb Disabilities	9	42	5	3	3	62 (62%)
Total N=%	16 (16%)	61 (61%)	10 (10%)	7 (7%)	6 (6%)	100 (100%)
(1) Lack of publicity of awareness	(4) Administrative					

(2) Lack of disabled friendly environment, attitude and mindset	e complexity
(3) Improper identification	(5) Lack of prompt support

This table summarizes the opinions of PWDs regarding the major hurdles they face in participating in local government activities, categorized by type of physical disabilities. 61% of PWDs identified "lack of disabled-friendly environment, attitude, and mindset" as the most significant hurdle, indicating pervasive societal and infrastructural barriers and poorly designed public infrastructure for PWDs. 16% highlighted "lack of publicity awareness and transportation problems" as the next major challenge.

By types of disabilities, body limb disabilities include the most individuals 62, while 42 opined facing lack of a friendly environment (2). 9 reported lacks publicity of awareness (1), 5 opined they are identified properly (3) while 3 responses administrative complexity (4) and lack of prompt support (5) emphasizing significant obstacles in their participation. Out of 10 hearing disabilities 6 consider lack of a friendly environment and mindset as a significant hurdle. Only minor issues were reported regarding transportation and awareness. 22 vision disabilities reported a wide range of hurdles, with 11 indicating lack of a friendly environment as the major issue. They also noted a lack of publicity and awareness (6) as a considerable barrier. 6 speech disabilities reported fewer hurdles overall. 2 indicated a lack of a friendly environment and 2 cited problems with faster services, reflecting a relatively lower level of engagement.

Table 4: Discrimination faced by PWDs in course of Participating in LG activities

Educational level	Male					Female					Total
	Type of discrimination					Type of discrimination					
	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)	
No formal education	16	9	1	4	3	7	1	1	4	1	47 (47%)
Primary	4	14	4	1	2	4	1	4	1	1	36 (32%)
Secondary	2	2	-	-	1	1	1	3	-	2	12 (10%)
Higher	3	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	2	-	5 (05%)
Total N=%	25	25	5	5	6	12	3	8	7	4	100 (100%)

- (1) Negative social attitude
(2) Non-Cooperative
(3) PWDs are not valued

- (4) Don't pay attention to PWDs
(5) No RAMP

In terms of gender, representing a diverse range of educational backgrounds, male respondents highlighted (16) facing negative social attitudes and 9 citing non-cooperative behaviour. 7 female respondents cited negative social attitudes but they also mentioned 4 experiencing lack of attention from officials, indicating a slightly different focus on institutional discrimination compared to their male counterparts. In terms of educational level, the largest group (47 individuals), where both males and females reported the most discrimination, particularly concerning negative social attitudes (16 males, 7

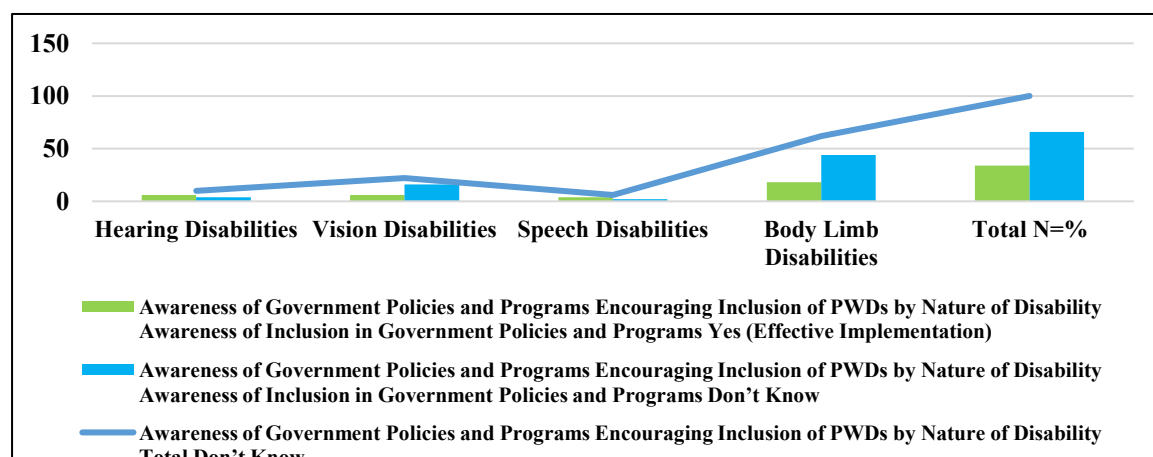
females). Comprising 36 individuals, primary-educated PWDs reported a mix of discrimination, with a notable number of females (14) facing non-cooperative behaviour. A smaller group (12 individuals), with both genders reporting lesser discrimination overall, although 2 males and 2 females noted negative social attitudes. The smallest group (5 individuals) showed minimal discrimination, reflecting a potential correlation between higher education and reduced discrimination.

Table 5: Awareness Level about Government Policies and Programs of PWDs Purported for them

Nature of Physical Disabilities	Awareness of Inclusion in Government Policies and Programs		Total
	Yes	No	
Hearing Disabilities	6	4	10 (10%)
Vision Disabilities	6	16	22 (22%)
Speech Disabilities	4	2	6 (06%)
Body Limb Disabilities	18	44	62 (62%)
Total N=%	34 (34%)	66 (66%)	100 (100%)

The above table and following figure portray the level of awareness of PWDs regarding government policies and programs categorized by nature of disability. A significant 66% indicated they either do not know about these initiatives or are unaware of their effectiveness, reflecting a gap in awareness and communication regarding these policies while 34% of PWDs reported being aware of government policies and programs encouraging inclusion, with an emphasis on "effective implementation."

Figure 2: Awareness of Government Policies and Programs Encouraging Inclusion of PWDs by Nature of Disability Awareness of Inclusion in Government Policies and Programs Yes (Effective Implementation)



In terms of types of disabilities, 18 body limb disabilities state that they are aware of effective implementation. However, 44 are unaware, representing a significant gap in knowledge. 6 vision disabilities awareness of effective implementation is moderate and there is a larger number (16) who do not know about these policies. 6 hearing disabilities are aware of the policies while 4 do not know, reflecting a relatively better awareness compared to vision disabilities. Speech disabilities have the lowest awareness, with only 4 individuals aware of effective implementation.

Qualitative Findings of the Study

In response to the RQ-1 (The present state of PWDs being included in the local government of Bangladesh), according to Key Informant Interviews (KIIs) based on their organizational affiliation, the study identifies several barriers hindering meaningful participation in local government activities and categorizes them into following main themes:

KIIs Identification of the Hurdles Encountered by PWDs

Social and Economic Barriers: Government officials and local government representatives reported a significant constraint is ignorance, poverty, lack of awareness, negative social values and non-cooperation (KII 3-9, KII 12, 17, 19 and KII 33-39). These factors create a social environment where PWDs are marginalized and excluded from decision-making processes. The study found that those who have a very minor physical issue and can contribute to family earnings have the right to provide a decision. Those who do not have any earnings and were physically unable to move have no right to make decisions on family matters. PWDs face economic hardships that prevent them from engaging in civic and political participation. Limited financial resources further restrict their ability to travel to meetings, access digital platforms, or advocate for their rights effectively (KII-18-22).

Geographic and Infrastructural Challenges: A considerable number of respondents (KII-7, KII-11, KII-14, KII-17, KII-19, KII-23, KII-48) from local government representatives and NGOs highlighted hilly areas, poor internet connectivity and transportation problems as major obstacles for PWDs. In remote areas they struggle to access government facilities due to physical inaccessibility which is further exacerbated by inadequate transport systems. The lack of necessary infrastructure such as ramps, accessible pathways, and assistive technologies limits their ability to engage actively in governance.

One Social Service officer (KII-6) points out that many government buildings including Union Parishad offices lack ramps, elevators, and other accessible infrastructure. As a result, PWDs, particularly with mobility challenges, find it difficult to attend meetings, access government services or even participate in local elections. Although newer buildings are required to follow accessibility guidelines, older structures have not been retrofitted to accommodate PWDs.

Challenges in Rural Areas: In rural and coastal areas, the situation is even more dire. The chairman of a coastal Union Parishad (KII-19) mentioned that in areas prone to flooding and cyclones, public infrastructure is often built on higher ground, making it even more inaccessible for PWDs. While there are disaster-resilient structures, they are not always disability-friendly, despite national-level guidelines advocating for inclusive disaster management strategies.

Psychological and Societal Prejudices: Depression and prejudices (KII 39-44) were identified as significant factors deterring PWDs from participating in local governance. Many PWDs experience stigma and discrimination which negatively affects their self-esteem and willingness to engage in civic activities. This psychological distress, coupled with societal biases, creates a culture of exclusion that discourages active participation. Social stigma surrounding disability emerged as a significant barrier to the inclusion of PWDs in local governance and community activities.

Cultural Attitudes: Few Social Welfare Officers (KII 9, 12, 22, 37) revealed how negative cultural attitudes toward disability persist in many communities, particularly in rural areas. PWDs are often seen as dependent or incapable which perpetuates their marginalization from decision-making processes. One Union Parishad member (KII-46) recounted how voters were hesitant to support PWD candidates during local elections citing concerns over their ability to effectively manage public office due to their disabilities.

Educational Barriers: (KII 41-49) noted that the lack of accessible education and schools for PWDs limit their ability to engage effectively in policy discussions and decision-making.

Insufficient Government Funding and Support: Another crucial challenge identified by KII-9, KII-13, KII-18, KII-22, KII-29, KII-32, KII-44, KII-47, KII-50 are insufficient financial allocations for disability-inclusive programs hinder efforts to promote their participation. This includes the absence of targeted

initiatives, assistive technologies and funding for accessibility improvements in local government offices and public spaces.

Economic and Financial Barriers: The economic barriers faced by PWDs were a consistent point of discussion during the interviews. Many PWDs in Bangladesh, especially in rural areas, live in poverty and depend on family members or limited government allowances. This financial dependency limits their ability to engage in political or leadership roles, as running for public office requires resources for campaigns, travel, and outreach (KII 13-19). A chairman (KII -36) noted that in his Union, PWDs receive financial allowances under the Social Safety Net Programs (SSNPs) but these amounts are often insufficient to meet their basic needs.

Entrepreneurial Opportunities: Social Service officers (KII 38, 46) suggested that providing entrepreneurial training and financial support for PWDs could be a game-changer. Economic empowerment would not only improve their livelihoods but also boost their confidence and enable them to engage more actively in governance and community leadership roles. However, such programs remain limited and underfunded.

Understanding of Legal Framework and Policies

A prominent theme that emerged from the KIIs was the respondents' knowledge and understanding of existing legal frameworks particularly the “Rights and Protection of Persons with Disabilities Act, 2013” and other related policies that aim to safeguard the rights of PWDs.

Implementation Gaps: While there is an existing legal provisions for including PWD representation in local government committees but the officers and representatives (KII 22-30) admitted that enforcement and implementation remain weak.

Lack of Awareness among Stakeholders: The Social Service officers (KII 5-8) expressed concern over the limited awareness among both government officials and PWDs themselves regarding their legal rights. This lack of awareness creates a significant barrier as PWDs may not know how to advocate for their inclusion or access the services meant for them.

RQ 2: Potential areas of inclusion of PWDs in the local government

Quantitative Findings of the Study

In response to Research Question-2 (What are the potential areas of inclusion of PWDs by the local government), the following tables represent the potential areas of inclusion of PWDs in the local government:

Table 6: Participation of PWDs in Local Government Meetings or Events on Ensuring Voting Rights

Educationa l level	Nature of Participation in Meetings						Total
	Yes					No	
	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)		
No formal education	7	-	3	1	-	36	47 (47%)
Primary	7	2	2	5	-	20	36 (36%)
Secondary	2		2	1	3	4	12 (12%)

Higher	1	-	-	-	-	4	05 (05%)
Total N =%	17 (17%)	2 (2%)	7 (7%)	7 (7%)	3 (3%)	64 (64%)	100 (100%)

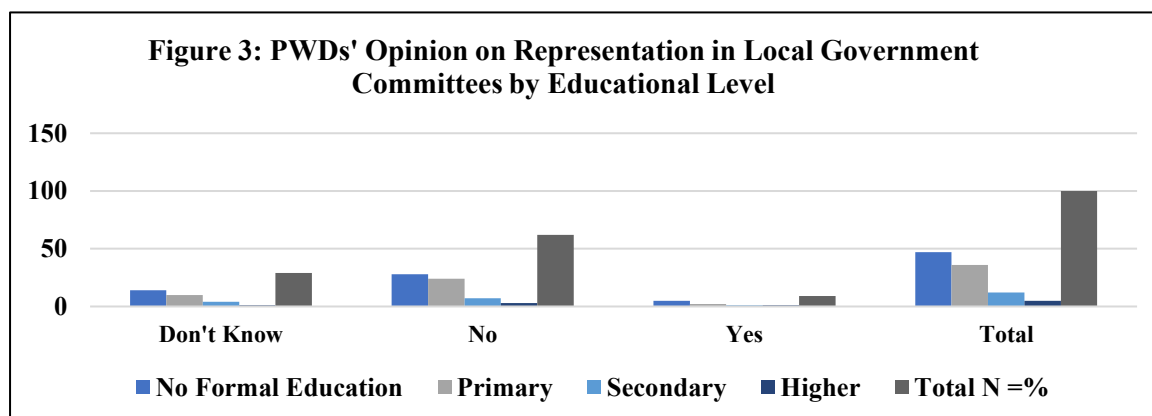
1) Strongly Disagree, 2) Disagree, 3) Neutral, 4) Agree, 5) Strongly Agree

This table analyses the participation PWDs in different meetings about their right to vote, broken down by their **level of education** and the **nature of their participation**. Majority of the participants (64%) regardless of education, expressed 'No', indicating they either did not participate meaningfully or had no strong feelings. On the other hand, only 36% response as 'Yes' and when they ask do you feel that your voice is adequately heard during these meetings? In response to the question, they express mixed opinions.

In the case of educational level and nature of participation, the majority of PWDs (47%) fall under no formal education category. Among them, 7 individuals responded "strongly disagree" when asked if they feel that their voice is adequately heard during these meetings. 36% of PWDs have primary education and 7 individuals felt their opinions were "Strongly Disagree. "The secondary level representing 12%, shows limited engagement, only 3 finding their opinions "well received." The Higher education group, just 5%, shows the least involvement, with 4 PWDs being neutral and only 1 reporting active engagement. 17 PWDs (the highest number) across all education levels felt that their opinions were disregarded, showing a disconnect between PWDs and decision-makers. Very few PWDs (only 7 individuals) reported their opinions were "well received," highlighting limited inclusivity in the process.

Table 7: PWDs Representation in Local Government Committees

Educational Level	Don't Know	No	Yes	Total
No Formal Education	14	28	5	47 (47%)
Primary	10	24	2	36 (36%)
Secondary	4	7	1	12 (12%)
Higher	1	3	1	5 (5%)
Total N =%	29 (29%)	62 (62%)	9 (9%)	100 (10%)



Above table and figure explore the opinions of PWDs regarding their representation in local government committees, categorized by educational level. The majority of PWDs (62%) opined that their representation is not duly considered in local government committees, indicating a widespread perception of exclusion. This sentiment is most prevalent among those with no formal education (28 individuals) and primary education (24 individuals). Only 9% of the PWDs feel that their representation is "duly considered." A small portion (29%) response that they don't know about their representation. This sentiment is common among individuals with no formal education (14 individuals) and primary education (10 individuals). PWDs with non-formal education represent the largest group in the sample (47%) and predominantly feel that their representation is not considered. PWDs with primary education make up 36% of the total, with a similar trend of feeling underrepresented. PWDs with secondary (12%) and higher education (5%) shows more mixed responses with a few individuals feeling that their representation is considered, albeit partially.

Table 8: Inclusion of PWDs within the existing government policies and programs

Educational Level	Opinion expressed					Total
	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)	
No formal education	3	5	17	20	2	47 (47%)
Primary	5	9	15	5	2	36 (36%)
Secondary	2	2	4	2	2	12 (12%)
Higher	1	1	3	-	-	5 (5%)
Total N=%	11 (11%)	17 (17%)	39 (39%)	27 (27%)	6 (6%)	100 (100%)

(1) Provide services selecting PWDs appropriately

(2) Provide easy and faster services and training

(3) Work for PWDs spontaneously/create employment

(4) Publicize Government programs extensively

(5) Local government representatives may arrange meeting in the yard or yard sitting

This table summarizes the opinions of PWDs on the steps that should be undertaken to enhance their inclusion in government policies and programs, categorized by educational level. 39% of respondents expressed the need for the government to "work for PWDs spontaneously or create employment" indicating a strong desire for proactive measures to enhance employment opportunities for PWDs. The second most common opinion (27%) is to "publicize government programs extensively," showing recognition of the importance of awareness and outreach. The other options which focus on service delivery and training received relatively fewer mentions.

By educational level, No Formal Education comprises 47% of the total, shows a varied response with a significant focus on creating employment (17) and publicizing programs (20). They express the least need for "providing services selecting PWDs appropriately" (3), suggesting they prioritize broader employment and awareness efforts over tailored services. Primary education comprising 36% of respondents, this

group also highlights the need for creating employment (15) and publicizing programs (5), though fewer compared to those without formal education. Secondary education making up 12%, expresses more balanced opinions but still emphasizes employment (4) and publicizing programs (2), indicating a continued need for awareness. The smallest group, higher education (5%) shows limited engagement, with fewer overall opinions expressed. They support employment initiatives (3) but indicate a lack of strong opinions on other measures.

Qualitative Findings of the Study

KII's Knowledge, perception and realities about the inclusion of PWDs in the Local Government activities show a mixed perception to analyze the potential areas of inclusion of PWDs in the local government activities, KIIs responses based on RQ-2 are thematically analyzed:

Representation of PWDs in Local Government Activities

The nature of Participation in Local Government Activities: Some Social Welfare Officers and representatives of NGOs (KII 6, 9, 24, 36, 44-49) reveals that PWDs are participating in various forms of active participation such as attending seminars, participating in training programs and voting. Their involvement in these platforms allows them to contribute to decision-making processes that affect their community. However, the scope of their involvement remains narrow (KII 16, 19, 24).

Community Development Initiatives: Several KIIs 18-24, mentioned that PWDs engage in community-driven projects and social welfare programs. This includes participation in disability advocacy groups, social inclusion programs, and public awareness campaigns aimed at promoting disability rights within local governance structures. Among government officials, (KII 6-10) response that PWDs representation and involvement in local government activities is limited and PWDs are not fully represented in the activities of local governments.

Employment and Leadership Roles: According to KII 41-47, some PWDs have secured positions within local government as representatives, committee members, and administrative personnel as limited scale. These roles allow them to champion disability rights and push for inclusive policies.

Barriers to Participation: Several barriers were identified according to KII 3, 7, 11, 22, 23, 44 that restrict the involvement of physically challenged individuals in local governance. These include limited accessibility, societal prejudices, lack of awareness, and inadequate government support. KIIs noted that many local government offices lack disability-friendly infrastructure, further deterring participation.

KIIs identification of specific areas

Following specific areas are identified to improve the implementation of existing policies or programs for the inclusion of people with disabilities in local government:

Direct Outreach and Support for PWDs: Local government representatives should go directly to PWDs' homes to encourage and motivate them. Local Government Representatives (KII 1-20) emphasized the importance of local government engaging directly with PWDs. While Social welfare officers (KII 3-4) acknowledged the need for door-to-door interaction to increase motivation.

Economic Opportunities, Skills Development and Empowerment: Providing training and skill-building opportunities for PWDs to enhance their capabilities. Local Government Representatives (KII 4-7) highlighted the need for skill-building programs to empower PWDs. Social Welfare Officers (KII 37-40) recognized the importance of making PWDs capable through training initiatives.

Policy Reform and Legal Frameworks: Reforming existing policies and laws to better include PWDs in local government activities. Local Government Representatives (KII 6-11) called for reform of the Disabled Act-2013 and the insertion of new provisions for PWDs. Social Welfare Officers (KII 2-4) acknowledged the need for legal reform.

Employment and Quota System: Increasing employment opportunities and quotas for PWDs within local government systems. Local Government Representatives (KII 44-49) suggested increasing quotas and improving employment opportunities for PWDs. While Government officers (KII 24-26) recognized the need for more inclusive hiring practices.

Accessibility and Infrastructure: According to KIIs (7-13), physical accessibility of government buildings, transportation, and public spaces needed to be identified to improve the implementation of existing policies or programs for the inclusion of people with disabilities in local government.

Education, Awareness and Community Engagement: Involving PWDs in decision-making processes and community development (KII 20, 33, 41).

Inclusion of PWDs in Local Governance Structures

One of the primary objectives of the interviews was to understand how effectively PWDs are being integrated into the local government system.

Committee Representation: According to the (KII 7-18) respondents, the law requires that each Union Parishad (UP) forms a committee that includes at least one PWD representative. However, in practice, compliance with this directive is inconsistent. Many UPs have not yet formed these committees, or when they do, PWDs are either underrepresented or given tokenistic roles that do not influence decision-making.

Election Participation: There has been some positive movement regarding PWD participation in local elections, as demonstrated by examples in Savar and other regions where PWDs have run for office. However, (KII 26, 28, 35, 38) noted that the number of PWDs competing in elections remains low due to a combination of factors, including lack of confidence, economic barriers, and institutional bias. For instance, one chairman (KII 30) highlighted that PWDs face significant challenges in mobilizing the financial resources needed to run an effective campaign, which limits their ability to participate actively.

RQ 3: Roles of local government for inclusion of PWDs in their programs and activities

Quantitative Findings of the Study

In response to RQ-3 (What roles local government can play for inclusion of PWDs in their programs and activities), following tables exhibit the roles local government for inclusion of PWDs in their programs and activities:

Table 9: Opportunity remake for PWDs Participation and Representation in LG

Age	Opportunities					Total
	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)	
18-30	10	15	13	11	13	62 (62%)
31-50	6	9	2	4	4	25 (25%)
51-65	4	2	4	1	2	13 (13%)
Total N=%	20 (29%)	26 (26%)	19 (19%)	16 (16%)	19 (19%)	100 (100%)

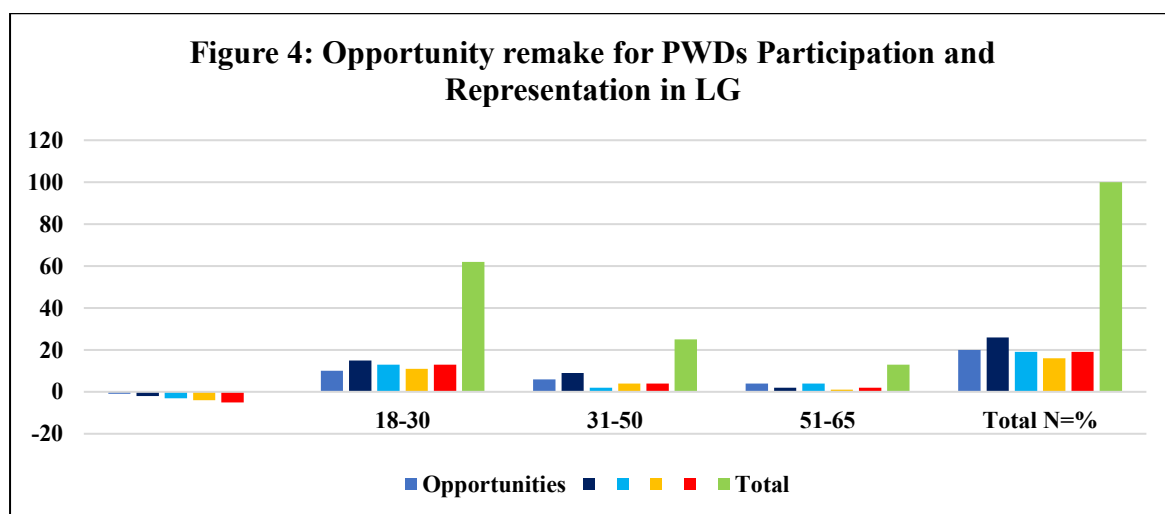
(1) Ensure PWDs participation

(2) Should hear PWDs

(3) Increase educational, medical, economical facilities

(4) Make PWDs member in all committees,

(5) Provide adequate opportunities/social recognition



Above table and figure reveal the opinions of PWDs regarding the opportunities available to enhance their participation and representation in local government activities, categorized by age. In response to opportunities, 26% of PWDs believe that the most important opportunity is to "Hear the voice of PWDs" (option-2) highlighting the need for active listening and engagement from local government authorities. 20% expressed that ensuring PWDs' participation through awareness (option-1) is crucial, indicating a recognition of the importance of education and outreach in fostering engagement. Other opportunities, such as increasing educational, medical, and economic facilities (option-3) and social recognition (option-5) received less emphasis but are still noted by a significant percentage.

Age group (18-30) comprising the largest segment (62 individuals), has a diverse range of views, with 15 prioritizing the need to hear PWDs and 10 emphasizing awareness. They show a strong inclination towards active participation and representation. Age group (31-50) also values the importance of being heard (9) and awareness (6), but with slightly lower enthusiasm for engagement compared to the younger group. Ages 51-65, the oldest group (13 individuals) has fewer opinions overall, reflecting a lesser emphasis on the opportunities presented. Here, 4 mention the need for educational and medical facilities, but there is minimal interest in being included as committee members.

Qualitative Findings of the Study

In response to RQ-3 (What roles local government can play for inclusion of PWDs in their programs and activities), following themes analyses the roles local government for inclusion of PWDs in their programs and activities:

Policy Implementations Suggested by the KIIs

The thematic analysis of KIIs' opinion about the initiatives taken/policy interventions made for inclusion of PWDs in the local government activities are as follows:

Providing training: One of the key areas identified is the opportunities for training in handmade products as a way to enhance economic independence for PWDs. Many respondents (KII 30-40) urge vocational training provided by local government could work as a critical tool for self-reliance, reducing financial dependence on government allowances. Training in handmade crafts, tailoring, and other small-scale industries not only provides income opportunities but also promotes social recognition of PWDs as productive members of society.

Implementing Disabled Allowance system: Financial support plays a crucial role in ensuring basic needs, healthcare and overall well-being for individuals who may have limited employment opportunities. An efficient disabled allowance system can reduce economic vulnerability and promote greater independence for PWDs (KII 31, 49).

KIIs Suggested ways for Enchantment of PWDs Participation in LG

Reduce negative attitudes toward PWDs through different campaigns: Awareness campaigns using media serve as a powerful tool to reduce stigma, promote inclusivity and shift public perceptions toward PWDs. Additionally, PWD-led advocacy efforts and representation in leadership roles can strengthen the impact of such initiatives (KII 37-42).

Provide PWDs ‘Suborno Card’, BRTB Card, Rice Card, Shelter allowance: Providing Suborno Cards (for disability benefits), BRTB Cards (for transportation assistance), Rice Cards (for food security), and Shelter Allowances (for housing support) ensures that PWDs can lead dignified and independent lives. (KII 22, 37, 39, 47) also suggested the following ways for enhancement of PWDs participation in Local government:

1. Local government should work at grass root level and include original PWDs in this process.
2. Required Inclusive socialization and prioritize disabled women in local government activities as reserved members.
3. Local government may establish more vigilant trained and equipped disabled schools.
4. Ensuring quota and reserved seats for disabled male and women will enhance PWDs participation in LG.

NGO-Led Programs: Many respondents (KII 13-24) praised the work of organizations such as CRP Savar and CDD (Centre for Disability in Development), which have been instrumental in providing PWDs with vocational training, healthcare, and advocacy support. These NGOs have also collaborated with local governments to introduce disability-friendly infrastructure and promote the rights of PWDs in local governance.

Need for Stronger GO-NGO Partnerships: Despite these positive examples, KII 8, 23, 34 stressed the need for more robust partnerships between local governments and NGOs. One Social Service officer emphasized that while NGOs are doing commendable work, their initiatives are often limited in scale and need to be integrated more effectively with government programs. A **coordinated effort** between local government bodies and NGOs would ensure that PWDs have sustained support and opportunities for inclusion.

The KIIs with Social Service officers, Union Parishad members and chairmen underscore the significant strides made toward the inclusion of PWDs in local government in Bangladesh. However, substantial challenges remain, particularly in areas of infrastructure, awareness, economic empowerment, and effective policy implementation. The insights from these interviews offer a roadmap for addressing these issues and creating a more inclusive and equitable governance system for PWDs in Bangladesh.

Insights from FGDs: FGD Discussion

To understand and explore the challenges and opportunities of PWDs and the role of local government in improving the lives PWDs and how to enhance their participation in local government, 2 FGDs were conducted one FGD is at the Savar Social Service Office, organized by CRP Savar and another one is at Upazila Social Welfare Office, Hatibandha, Lalmonirhat.

The focus group began with a short introduction and welcome, followed by confirmation of understanding of what participation and consent meant for the participants. Signed consent was obtained from each participant. Anonymity and confidentiality were also emphasized to all participants. After the introduction, the ice breaker and group agreement had been completed, the facilitators encouraged a discussion around three main aspects of their local community.

Table 10 below outlines a framework applied to the inclusive focus groups, including introductory activities and semi-structured questions.

	Order of Focus Group Activities	Description
1	Introduction and Welcome	Re-confirm the purpose of the focus group and the research.
2	Ice Breaker	Go around the group and ask, "how you feel about today's topic in one word."
3	Group Agreement	A set of guidelines of how the group will handle discussions and sensitive issues raised in the focus group. This was collaboratively generated with and by participants at the start of the focus group.
4	Room preparation/props and visual aids	Photographs of local community, Placement of FGD Banner and arranged of other required stuffs.
5	Semi-structured questions for discussion	<p>*Can you share your experiences with participating in local government activities or meetings as a person with a disability in Bangladesh?</p> <p>*How do you feel about the level of representation of PWDs in local government decision-making processes?</p> <p>*Have you encountered any barriers or challenges in accessing and participating in local government activities? If so, please describe.</p> <p>* What do you think are the main reasons why PWDs are not heard at committee meetings or other venues where local government authorities make decisions?</p> <p>* In your opinion, what are the key challenges faced by PWDs in Bangladesh in terms of inclusion in local government?</p> <p>* Can you identify any opportunities or potential strategies for overcoming these challenges and enhancing the participation of PWDs in local government?</p> <p>* Based on your experiences and discussions, what recommendations would you provide to policymakers and stakeholders to improve the inclusion of PWDs in local government activities in Bangladesh?</p> <p>* Are there any specific actions or initiatives that you believe would be particularly effective in promoting the participation and representation of PWDs in local government decision-making processes?</p>
6	Refreshments served	Refreshment served to ensure that participants were not fatigued and enjoy the discussion.

7	End of session	This includes: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Thank you message from the research team; • Questions; • Goodbye.
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Table 10: Outline of FGD including order of FGD activities and semi-structured questions

Discussion Themes

The focus groups covered broad topics about challenges, opportunities and community attitudes. The participants expressed wide-ranging views about what is important to them in the community and what they want to change. There were distinct themes that emerged about what aspects of inclusion in the community were valued by people with disabilities.

The Present State of PWDs being included in the local government

In response to Research Question-1 (The present state of PWDs being included in the local government of Bangladesh), according to 2 FGDs, the study identifies several barriers hindering meaningful participation in local government activities and categorizes them into following main themes:

Limited Inclusion: Despite legal mandates like the "Rights of PWDs and Surikha Act," actual inclusion remains limited. Challenges faced by PWDs in elections, such as lack of confidence, economic constraints, and inadequate institutional support, hinder their political participation. While some positive examples exist (e.g., elected PWDs as councilors), they are isolated cases.

Varying Levels of Awareness: CDD's initiatives have raised awareness among PWDs and their families, but significant gaps remain. The level of awareness and understanding of disability rights among local government officials and the general public varies significantly.

Emerging Practices: Some positive practices are emerging, such as the "Respite and Short Break for Mothers". Union councils are mandated to have open budgets for PWDs, but the extent of their implementation varies.

Challenges Faced by PWDs in Elections: During national and local government elections PWDs are facing numerous challenges like- lack of confidence among PWDs, their Poor economic situations, lack of institutional support, digital hacking and Improper distribution of resources among PWDs.

Potential Areas of Inclusion of PWDs by the local government

In response to Research Question-2, (The present state of PWDs being included in the local government of Bangladesh) following thematic analysis has come out from 2 FGDs:

1. Infrastructure Development: Designing and implementing disability-friendly infrastructure in all public spaces (buildings, roads, transportation). Ensuring disaster-resilient infrastructure that is accessible to PWDs, particularly in coastal areas.

Old vs. New Infrastructure: Old models of buildings, roads, and hospitals are not accessible to PWDs. However, CDD, in collaboration with local government and various disabled organizations, has introduced a new, disability-friendly infrastructure design, incorporating ramps in buildings and roads.

Disaster-Resilient Infrastructure in Coastal Areas: Ground and first floors remain empty to manage disaster risks, and these structures also include ramps, reflecting a positive outcome from CDD's initiatives.

Inclusive Infrastructure: CDD has successfully partnered with local government and social welfare offices to create inclusive infrastructure models that are disability friendly.

2. Social Inclusion: Raising awareness among the general public and local government officials about the rights and needs of PWDs. Providing social safety nets and allowances to PWDs. Supporting the development of skills and employment opportunities for PWDs. By working with social welfare officials, CDD has made significant strides in raising awareness among PWDs and ensuring their inclusion in society. **Example:** Patharia Union Council established a three-room center named "Respite and Short Break for Mothers," providing support for mothers of PWDs. This initiative marks a milestone in including PWDs alongside their families.

3. Political Inclusion: Ensuring the effective participation of PWDs in the electoral process. Promoting leadership roles for PWDs in local government. Creating accessible and inclusive political spaces for PWDs.

Community-Based Rehabilitation (CBR): CBR includes empowering parents of PWDs as "first road doctors" to support their children's inclusion and establishing community-based rehabilitation centers to provide support services to PWDs and their families.

Roles of local government for inclusion of PWDs in their programs and activities

In response to RQ-3 (What roles local government can play for inclusion of PWDs in their programs and activities), following policy implementation is analysed thematically:

Policy Implementation: As policy level implementation local government should implement the "Rights of PWDs and Surikha Act" and other relevant legislation effectively and allocate adequate resources for PWD.

Capacity Building: As capacity building programs and activities local government officials should provide training on disability rights and inclusive development.

Collaboration and Partnerships: Local government should foster strong partnerships among GO-NGOs and PWD organizations. Collaborating with PWDs will create inclusive and accessible environments

Monitoring and Evaluation: LG should regularly monitor the progress of PWD inclusion initiatives and evaluate the effectiveness of programs and make necessary adjustments.

Local government representatives discussed their efforts and challenges in supporting PWDs, including implementing the "Rights of PWDs and Surikha Act." Some key takeaways include:

Inclusive Budgeting: Union councils are mandated to have an open budget for PWDs and include them in the committee system. Savar is a hub for PWDs, with various disabled organizations, training centers, and projects working collaboratively, including Tetuljhora Union's training programs for PWDs.

Social Safety Nets and Allowances: Under 30,000-allowance beneficiaries' program, around 6,000 beneficiaries are PWDs, with 75% of allowances disbursed through SSNP-Nagad. Savar Social Welfare Office provides over 1,000 disability allowances.

Election Participation: In 2023, 11 PWDs were elected as members and councilors of city corporations across Bangladesh. A father of a PWD was elected as the chairman of a union parishad (UP) in Savar, and one PWD in Berulia UP competed in the UP election.

This thematic analysis provides a framework for understanding the current state of PWD inclusion in local government in Bangladesh, identifying key areas for improvement, and defining the roles and responsibilities of local governments in promoting the rights and well-being of PWDs. The FGD highlighted significant strides made by CDD and local government in making Bangladesh more inclusive for PWDs. However, challenges remain in terms of confidence, economic barriers, and proper resource distribution. The recommendations provided, including mandatory inclusion of PWDs in electoral processes and strengthened GO-NGO partnerships, are key to ensuring sustained progress for PWDs in the country.

Triangulation of Findings

RQ-1: To what extent PWDs are being included now in the local government?

In response to RQ-1, the opinion and experience of 100 PWDs, 50 KIIs and 2 FGDs are quite similar. Majority of the respondents echoed the same in case of PWDs accessibility to government offices and public transport, major hurdles encountered by PWDs while participate in the local government activities.

Conversely, regarding the discrimination experienced by PWDs during participation in local government activities, their awareness of relevant government policies and programs and the opinions and experiences of 100 PWDs, 50 Key Informant Interviews (KIIs) and two Focus Group Discussions (FGDs) diverged. A majority of PWD respondents reported significant dissatisfaction, negative social attitudes and non-cooperative behavior from mainstream society. In contrast, the KIIs and FGDs revealed a more positive perspective on these issues.

RQ-2: What are the potential areas of inclusion of PWDs by the local government?

Participation in Local Government Meetings: As from quantitative data out of 100 PWDs, 64% of PWDs feel their voices are not heard. This suggests a disconnect between PWDs and local government. On the other hand, qualitative data (KIIs and FGD) highlights limited representation and involvement of PWDs in local government activities. Barriers like inaccessibility, prejudice, and lack of support are identified. Both quantitative and qualitative data converge on the finding that PWD participation in local government meetings and events is limited and often ineffective.

Representation in Local Government Committees: From quantitative data, majority of PWDs feel they are not duly represented in local government committees. As Qualitative (KIIs and FGD) stating that with the help of government policies and programs NGOs, Government officials and local government representatives are working and ensuring PWDs representation in local government committees.

Inclusion in Local Governance Structures: As quantitative data, the majority of PWDs shared hostile and unfriendly attitude and environment from the offices. While the KIIs identify the problem (limited inclusion in governance structures) and the FGDs offer potential solutions and examples of good practice. The FGDs provide concrete suggestions for how to improve inclusion, building on the challenges identified by the KIIs.

Different data sources complement each other, providing a more comprehensive understanding of the challenges and opportunities for PWD inclusion in local government. The FGDs offer practical, ground-level perspectives and potential solutions.

RQ-3: What roles local government can play for inclusion of PWDs in their programs and activities?

Regarding RQ-3, the opinions and suggestions offered by the 100 PWD respondents, 50 KII participants, and two FGDs exhibited considerable convergence. A majority advocated for reserved seats for PWDs in local government bodies, similar to the existing system for women members. Furthermore, they emphasized the need for proper and effective implementation of the disability allowance system, reduction of negative attitudes toward PWDs through targeted campaigns, collaboration between NGOs and governmental initiatives, increased awareness campaigns, and the provision of financial and economic support.

Recommendations from PWDs, KIIs and FGD for National level Policy Making and Implementation

The research has presented several important recommendations and implications for policy, practice and future research related to PWD inclusion in local government:

1. Policy Reforms and Implementation:

Revise Existing Policies: Amend the Disabled Act of 2013 to incorporate provisions that ensure PWDs' representation in local government, including quotas for PWDs in elected bodies and committees.

Establish Reserved Seats: Implement reserved seats for PWD representatives at various levels of local government, similar to existing provisions for women.

Promoting Inclusive Governance: The research underscores the need for a shift towards more inclusive governance practices. This involves not only including PWDs in formal structures but also creating an environment where their voices are heard and valued.

Resource Allocation: The findings can inform resource allocation decisions. Governments should invest in programs that address the identified needs, such as skills development, accessible infrastructure, and awareness campaigns.

2. Practical Implications:

Formation of Vigilant Committees: A committee comprising only PWDs should be formed in each Zilla with one PWD member compulsory in each committee.

Inclusion in Electoral Process: In the electoral process at least one PWD's participation should be mandatory in the nomination process and at least one reserved seat for PWD in local government like women members.

Implementation of the Surokha Act, 2013: The act should be enforced properly to protect and ensure the rights of PWDs.

Standing Committee Inclusion: Every standing committee should include at least one PWD in their committee.

Awareness Raising: Awareness campaigns should be conducted through local governments, especially by Union Council members during their visits to social welfare offices for allowance collection.

Courses for Engineering Education: Engineering curricula should include courses on constructing disabled-friendly infrastructure to ensure future construction projects are accessible.

3. Research Implications:

Longitudinal Studies: Longitudinal studies are needed to track the progress of PWD inclusion over time and to assess the long-term impact of various interventions.

Comparative Studies: Comparative studies across different regions or countries can help to identify factors that facilitate or hinder PWD inclusion in local government.

4. Social Implications:

Reducing Social Exclusion: By promoting PWD inclusion in local government, the research can contribute to reducing social exclusion and promoting greater social justice.

Enhancing Democratic Participation: Including PWDs in decision-making processes strengthens democratic participation and ensures that the needs and perspectives of all members of society are taken into account.

5) CONCLUSION

The inclusion PWDs in the local government of Bangladesh is not just a matter of policy compliance but a critical step toward fostering an equitable and sustainable society. The findings from the various analyses highlight significant gaps in awareness, accessibility, and representation of PWDs in local governance. These gaps impede active participation of PWDs by limiting their contributions to community development and decision-making processes.

To overcome these challenges, it is essential to implement a multi-faceted approach that includes raising awareness, enhancing accessibility, reforming policies, and promoting capacity-building initiatives. Empowering PWDs through targeted training and support, alongside ensuring their representation in local government by preserving reserved seat/members can help dismantle the barriers they face. Moreover, strengthening community involvement and collaboration with NGOs and civil society can provide the necessary support systems for PWDs ensuring their voices are heard and valued. Continuous

monitoring and evaluation of these initiatives will be crucial in adapting strategies to better serve the needs of PWDs and to measure the effectiveness of inclusion efforts.

Ultimately, fostering a culture of inclusiveness in local governance not only benefits PWDs but enriches the entire community, creating a diverse and vibrant society where all individuals can thrive and contribute meaningfully. By taking concrete steps towards inclusion, Bangladesh can move closer to achieving the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) and ensuring that no one is left behind.

6) ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

This article was adapted from a primary study conducted between January 2024 and January 2025, commissioned by American International University-Bangladesh. Special thanks to AIUB for their funding and assistance [Grant Number- AIUB-FASS-24-02-02]. The official of the various Union Parishads and municipals (Chairman, members, Social Welfare Officers, NGOs-dealing/working with PWDs) who gave consent to provide data for interview of the study also deserved acknowledgement. Sincere thanks to CRP at Savar, Social welfare officer of Savar Upazila, representative of CDD, representative of Access Bangladesh and local government representatives who assisted long time for successful completion of FGD at Savar. Appreciation also goes to all individual respondents who participated in the study. I am equally grateful to Dr. Abdur Rahim Khan (BIGM) and Shah Md. Ashiqur Rahman (Project Coordinator at Ministry of Planning) for their unconditional and valuable support and comments on the earlier draft report from which this work article has been adapted.

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