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# Barriers to Access and Retain Formal Employment for Persons with Disabilities in Bangladesh and Kenya

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## Key Questions:

- What is the existing literature on the barriers to access and retention of formal employment for Persons with Disabilities in Bangladesh and Kenya?
- What should the Innovation to Inclusion (i2i) programme partners including the GDI Hub do to develop appropriate challenge statements for an innovation challenge fund call in the current context of a global COVID19 pandemic?

A GDI Hub Working Paper [www.disabilityinnovation.com/projects/innovation-to-inclusion-i2i](http://www.disabilityinnovation.com/projects/innovation-to-inclusion-i2i)

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## Abstract

Globally persons with disabilities have lower employment rates compared to the general population due to systemic barriers particularly in the formal sector. In developing countries, 80 percent to 90 percent of people with disabilities of working age are unemployed. There has been limited research in low-income and middle-income countries focused on the barriers to access and retain formal employment for persons with disabilities. The aim of this paper, based on desk research, is to analyse the barriers to access and retain formal employment of persons with disabilities which are framed in three categories according to where the barriers primarily manifest: 1. In the workplace among employers and co-workers without disabilities, 2. Among persons with disabilities seeking or engaged in formal employment and 3. In the wider social, physical and policy environment. Although the study mainly focuses on Kenya and Bangladesh other countries' literature on access to and retention of employment of persons with disabilities were reviewed where relevant. In the current context where the global pandemic is breaking barriers to remote working one part of the solution will be to empower persons with disabilities with appropriate access to Information and Communication Technology, assistive devices and services, digital skills, creating more accessible and inclusive digital platforms for persons with disabilities which also hold the potential to improve working conditions and productivity for the whole workforce as well as enhancing resilience to potential future shocks.

## Introduction

The issue of disability and employment has taken centre stage on the global arena in part because it is recognised across several areas of the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals, in which confrontation of extreme poverty in its many manifestations is the number one goal [2]. The World Health Organization (2011) reports about 15 percent of the world's population has a disability [1]. In developing countries, 80 to 90 percent of people with disabilities of working age are unemployed [43].

Assistive devices and technologies are those whose primary purpose is to maintain or improve an individual's functioning and independence to facilitate participation and to enhance overall well-being. They can also help prevent impairments and secondary health conditions. Examples of assistive devices and technologies include wheelchairs, prostheses, hearing aids, visual aids, and specialized computer software and hardware that increase mobility, hearing, vision, or communication capacities. In many low-income and middle-income countries, only 5-15% of people who require assistive devices and technologies have access to them.

Employment rates are defined as a measure of the extent to which available labour resources (people available to work) are being used. They are calculated as the ratio of the employed to the working age population.

The labour force participation rates is calculated as the labour force divided by the total working-age population.

*Figure 1: Key Definitions*

There is a close link between poor access to work and having had limited or no school education and thus lower socioeconomic status [3]. So, for the many persons with disabilities who did not enrol in or complete school, or who come from poor families, it is much more difficult to find decent, secure work [4]. The current literature on disability and employment shows that globally persons with disabilities have lower employment rates compared to the general population, due to systemic barriers particularly in the formal sector [4]. Formal waged or salaried work is much more difficult to find. It is also accepted that this difficulty is usually exacerbated for women with disabilities compared to their male counterparts, although this varies according to context [1,4, 18, 38]. Furthermore, it is seemingly universally difficult for those with particularly stigmatised impairments (such as cognitive / intellectual and psychosocial / mental health impairments) to find work with stigma compounding the challenges inherent within the disabilities [5]. However, much of the data we have in this area is patchy at best as in low-income and middle-income countries, data on the employment of persons with disabilities are not systematically available.

For example, when capturing the context of persons with disability and employment in Bangladesh we need to acknowledge that disability is not included in any routine data collection or surveillance system in the health sector in Bangladesh [4,7]. It is though captured in the labour sector and from this we know that of the overall 165 million population, there is currently a 96% employment rate [4,8]. The

labour participation rate is 56.5 percent, which has been fairly consistent since 1990 (with the average between 1990 and 2018 being 56.99 percent) [4]. However, only 1% of persons with disabilities are employed in Bangladesh [10]. This is despite a public sector employment quota decreeing that 10 percent of positions should be made available for persons with disabilities [4]. Employment rates remain low due to the lack of awareness of employers and support for them to increase access to employment for persons with disabilities, contradictory employment policies, loopholes in the system, and a lack of proper monitoring system [16]. In Kenya, estimates of employment rates of persons with disabilities range from 3.5 percent in the 2009 census to 10.3 percent in the World Health Survey 2002–2004, [4,36]. The overall employment rate in Kenya is lower than in Bangladesh at 73.8 percent, however the employment rate for persons with disabilities remains at 1 percent. This demonstrates a relative better position, however it falls short of the 5 percent employment quota set by Government. In Kenya, for persons with disabilities who are engaged in livelihood activities only one in five are employed while four in five are self-employed in the informal sector [45]. Lack of access to employment contributes to higher poverty rates among persons with disabilities in Kenya [4, 58]. In Kenya, factors responsible for the high unemployment include inaccessible information on employment, negative attitudes, inaccessible physical environment, low educational attainment of persons with disabilities, and ineffective legislation on employment [58].

When in employment there still remain barriers, and on the flip side, enablers to ensuring persons with disability can conduct their work as equals in the workplace. Known barriers are: a lack of reasonable accommodation at work, inaccessible public transportation to/from work, discrimination and lack of awareness about people's potential at work, communication and information barriers, lack of training opportunities, lack of financial resources and negative attitudes of employers [6,17,58]. Often these barriers make it extremely difficult for persons with disabilities to access and retain in employment. These barriers are significantly influenced by types of disability, gender, age, culture and social protection [40,49]. Misconceptions harboured by employers, co-workers and the public create attitudes that regard persons with disabilities as less competent or even a burden [19,44,58]. A recent study [61] illustrated that, despite the relative availability of accommodations, workers with disabilities still encounter numerous accessibility challenges in the office setting. Participants showed resourcefulness as they developed their own accommodations and sought support from colleagues. This additional work needed to create an accessible space is unfortunately rarely seen by co-workers and supervisors, potentially leading to negative and misguided interpretations of the productivity of blind workers [61].

## Background

The focus of this working paper is to analyse the barriers to access and retain formal employment of persons with disabilities which are framed in three categories where barriers primarily manifest: 1. In the workplace among employers and co-workers without disabilities, 2. Among persons with disabilities seeking or engaged in formal employment and 3. In the wider social, physical and policy environment. Although the study mainly focuses on Kenya and Bangladesh other countries' literature on access and retention of employment of persons with disabilities were reviewed where relevant.

This working paper comes at the start of a new project – Innovation to Inclusion (i2i). We are applying the disability interactions framework to understand how technology can be used to help persons with disability to access and retain employment. As a first step of the framework, it is necessary to build on what is already known. This paper does this by reviewing the literature to establish what is known about the barriers and enablers to formal employment in Bangladesh and Kenya. Building on the disability interactions framework we seek to understand these things within the context of the countries and the industries which are currently employing persons with disability.

## Method

The evidence in this working paper was identified through a rapid desk-based search using an internet search using a key term such of “disability” and “ICT” and “inclusive employment”. These were filtered for “remote working”, “barrier”, “COVID-19”, “Assistive technology”, “Kenya” and “Bangladesh”. This included a review of more than 66 sources including 22 articles from journals, 24 reports and working papers, 15 media articles and blogs and 3 references from NGOs. From the journal and online research conducted 15 sources focussed on Kenya, 13 on Bangladesh, 9 on low- and middle-income countries (LMICs) and 31 on a wider global context. In terms of technical focus 37 sources focussed on disability and employment, 20 on disability and development for broadly and only 10 on COVID-19 and associated Assistive Technology.

## Results

Overall, there was a relative lack of information on Kenya, Bangladesh and other LMIC settings as well as the opportunity and challenges emerging from the COVID-19 pandemic in relation to persons with disabilities and employment. A particular gap was identified relating to opportunities and challenges

related to remote working in Bangladesh and Kenya including associated Information and Communication Technology (ICT) and Assistive Technology and services.

We identified barriers which affected the employer, the person with a disability and some which existed in the wider context. We also identified possible solutions which we group into pre-conditions for improved opportunities and digital platform for employment of persons with disability (see Figure 2)



Figure 2: Framework of issues related to access and retention of employment for persons with disabilities



## A. Employers and Workplace

There is often a level of scepticism and doubt that comes with the decision to hire a person or persons with disabilities, as they are considered as a liability by many employers. These scepticisms and doubts often come from speculation, assumptions and fear of the unknown. The following are common barriers seen amongst employers and in the workplace when considering hiring or promoting persons with disabilities in formal employment:

### I. Negative attitudes, stigma, abuse and discrimination

One of the primary determinants of employment are the attitudes of employers. Persons with disabilities have consistently raised the concern that the attitudes of employers and peers at the workplace have a strong influence on their interest to work. The experiences of persons with disabilities who are successfully employed help to identify critical barriers and factors, which facilitate employment [24]. Several studies that investigate the attitudes of the general population towards persons with disabilities report that persons often feel a high degree of social distance towards persons with disabilities [11].

Persons with disabilities experience a high percentage of unemployment because they face judgment with regard to their productivity and discrimination at the employment stage. Misinterpretations regarding disability generate a stigma that persons with disabilities are not capable of doing their jobs adequately [20]. This is one of the many reasons why unemployment is one of the biggest social issues of persons with disabilities. The stigma associated with disabilities of any kind especially visible disabilities still exists. Stigma, comprises stereotyping, prejudice, and discrimination, whereas discrimination is the behaviour that results from negative stereotypes [11]. The most difficult barrier to overcome is attitudes other persons carry regarding persons with disabilities. These attitudes could generate from ignorance, misunderstanding and stereotyping and fear. Most persons who have disabilities also face discrimination because of their co-workers' and supervisors' attitudes [11]. In fact, just getting hired is often insurmountable for many who want to work but who can't find a job, even during times of low unemployment [23]. Persons with disabilities are often passed over for being thought of as needing too much support and not as capable as non-disabled peers, even though they may be quite capable of performing the work the job calls for [23]. This is often due in part to a lack of

knowledge about disability and disabled-persons employment, especially how to best accommodate people with disabilities into the workforce and leverage their talents.

In the work environment, perception of a social distance can translate into a biased view about the capacities of employees with disabilities in a way that persons with disabilities are perceived as helpless, having no capacities to develop, and being unable to effect a similar level of performance as their colleagues [11]. A study on the employed persons with disabilities in either public or private sector in Bangladesh shows that 27 percent of persons with disabilities had to change their employment because of comparatively low salary, negative attitude of the employers, unfriendly working environment, rigid organizational rules and inaccessible buildings [10].

Apart from problems of accessibility and adaptability, persons with disabilities also experience non-cooperation and negative attitudes by the fellow workers and employers at the workplace. In some cases, employers do not realize their special needs. As a result, persons with disabilities do not feel encouraged to take part in the formal sector employment in Bangladesh [10]. A similar situation is also reflected in Kenya. People with disability tend to be underpaid and have fewer opportunities. A study shows that a high rate of discrimination of persons with disabilities in job applications since majority were refused job during job interview. The majority of persons with disabilities believe their chances of getting promotion on merit is very slim as when this kind of interview is carried out, the disabled workers can be labelled. With a high level of harassment at workplace for persons with disabilities and low level of awareness among persons with disabilities of their rights, most of this goes unreported and perpetrators of such acts go unpunished. This reduces the work performance of persons with disabilities thus enhancing beliefs that persons with disabilities are less productive [44].

Some of the barriers at work are a result of direct discrimination; for example, there is evidence of disabled persons being dismissed or refused promotion on the grounds of their disability [18]. However, a large part of workplace discrimination arises from the fact that work premises and jobs are designed in such a way that disabled persons are effectively excluded. In addition, persons with disabilities may find that, because of discriminatory processes, they are more likely to face job insecurity and repeated periods of unemployment. This may also have a negative effect on opportunities for career development and progression. Their chances of promotion were affected by their disability [18]. Another study gives further examples of how discrimination operates, in terms of employers' unwillingness to make adaptations to workplaces and working arrangements, with employer attitudes again being identified as a key cause of bad experiences at work. This evidence

from the experience of persons with disabilities points towards the significant role of these sort of barriers in the workplace [18].

Research indicates that persons with disabilities face high levels of abuse such as negative jokes towards them, assigned more difficult duties, they are made to do unpleasant or hazardous jobs while there are also cases of threats and verbal abuse toward them by their employers, supervisors and fellow employees [4]. Many employees with disabilities are negatively affected to a great extent because of their status at work.

## II. Mis/perceptions and lack of awareness

Misperceptions about the ability of persons with disabilities to perform jobs are an important reason both for continued unemployment and if employed for the exclusion from opportunities for promotion in respective careers. Such attitudes may stem from prejudice or from the belief that persons with disabilities are less productive than their non-disabled counterparts [1]. A Kenyan blogger noted that “there is a general notion that if you’re disabled you don’t need to work, because your family look after you or you’re on government benefits. Not in their wildest dreams would an employer think you want to work and that you may be qualified” [48]. There are range of misconceptions of employers related to the skills and abilities of persons with disabilities, with implications for their view of the individual’s capacity to work. These misconceptions can lead employers to associate employment-related risks, such as safety risks with persons with disabilities [66]. It is also common that many employers have a limited understanding of disabilities and how to support them in terms of challenges that they may face in the workplace. This can lead to poor hiring and management practices that present, among others, limited flexibility in recruiting processes and adapting tasks and other work-related activities [13]. This may signify that they are not taken as part of the productive community despite having gone through tertiary education and acquired the appropriate qualifications and the necessary skills for the job. Several studies have explored employer attitudes toward individuals with disabilities in the workforce according to the type or severity of the disability [25]. The results indicate that employers expressed greater concerns over employing persons with mental or emotional disabilities than employing persons with physical disabilities [25].

In Bangladesh misunderstanding about the capacity of disabled persons among employers also hampers their participation in the formal employment [10]. Most of the time it’s fear of unknown. Statistics show that employers' concerns are off base. Persons with disabilities who are already in the

workforce have proven themselves to be very reliable, to take fewer sick days than the general population, and have high job retention [29]. It has been argued that this suggests the level of adaptation needed to employ disabled persons is lower than many employers might think [18]. However, it may also reflect lack of awareness of adaptation needs, or premises that are already accessible; or it may show that employers take on those disabled persons whose adaptation requirements are minimal [18].

Besides a common lack of knowledge concerning disabilities in general, employers are often not aware of the workers' needs and are not informed about how to accommodate them at work. Concerns of employers regularly report regarding the accommodation process are costs and training time to be devoted to employees with disabilities [11]. Negative attitudes towards persons with disabilities are often accompanied by a misunderstanding of disability, such as distrust and fear of co-workers or managers concerning disability. In some cases, because their disability is invisible and their skills and access needs not immediately ascertainable this can result in several (negative) consequences in the workplace, such as the denial of necessary workplace accommodations [27]. Persons with mental disorders are attributed as being dangerous, deviant, and aggressive, which evokes fear and irritation in others. The higher the level of stigmatization of the disease, the more likely it is that the affected person will experience discrimination [28].

Persons with disabilities applying for jobs may have not had the same opportunities in terms of education, work experience or opportunities for training as other candidates. Prejudice by employers and co-workers may mean that candidates with disabilities have not been offered positions as high as they were capable of as their CV may not reflect their true capability. This may originate from a misperception that disabled applicants will not be as good as non-disabled applicants or a belief that persons with disabilities may be less productive, more likely to have time off sick, be a health and safety hazard or won't stay in the job for long. There are often fears that employing a person with a disability will be very expensive in terms of providing reasonable adjustments despite the reality is that most disabled employees require few if any adjustments. A lack of understanding of what assistive technology is available, lack of confidence (and self-stigma) around employing and managing disabled persons, and a fear of "getting it wrong" also play a role in undermining opportunities for employment or promotion [32]. Employers also expressed concerns about negative reactions from co-workers, customers and clients. Employers had also reported complaints from other staff and supervisors about persons with disabilities relating to poor performance, skill and job requirement mismatch, and poor social skills [4]. A focus group discussion in relation to this found that 'employers were reluctant to

employ people with disabilities because they saw them as a burden and as people who would need constant attention' and they felt that they would 'not be able to provide the necessary adjustments that would enable employees with disabilities to work comfortably' [17].

### III. Employers' demand, capacity, and cost

Most employers prefer employees that are flexible and able to do more than one task. The important influence of employer perceptions that they fear employees with disabilities cannot perform to full capacity. Employers may dismiss the idea to employ a worker with disability, or they believe that their type of work are unsuitable or that access to their premises would cause difficulties [28]. Employers' perceptions of whether a job is suitable or not often strongly influenced by stereotypical images of persons with disabilities [18]. In addition, concerns about the cost of accommodations, have been found to be a major barrier to formal employment [4].

For persons with physical disabilities the environment is a major factor as to whether or not an employment site is accessible. This ranges from wheelchair, ramps to elevators and everything in between. If a business is not located on the ground floor and the building doesn't have a working elevator, a person who relies on crutches or a wheelchair cannot work there. Employees with visual impairments or hearing loss need assistive technologies in order to succeed in the workplace. This also includes closed captioning on training videos and increased font size for those with visual limitations. If a job requires a person to use a phone and computer, it needs to be designed to accommodate employees with these needs [34]. Many employers argue in their defence that they do not receive applications from persons with disabilities for vacancies. Employers might also create barriers to applications when the wording of a job advert or the description of the job is highly discouraging. Job descriptions sometimes include requirements such as the ability to drive which may not be an essential aspect of the work but have the effect of excluding some persons with disabilities [18].

However, misperceptions exist that persons with disabilities are unable to work and that accommodating persons with disabilities in the workplace is expensive [34]. Expected additional costs are one of the major reasons why the rate of unemployment among the persons with disabilities is high. The costs of the hiring process both affect the jobseeker and the organization. The concern about the perceived cost of accommodations for persons with disabilities was identified as a limiting and negative attitude among employers. Employers' perceived loss of profit and productivity is another

barrier. According to a study, employers reportedly perceive that hiring a person with disabilities decreases overall productivity and increases the cost of supervision [13].

Study indicates that a program of government subsidies for worker accommodations could be very helpful. Another solution addressing cost concerns involved public policy strategies, namely tax breaks or salary subsidies for employing workers with disabilities, and practical strategies such as a central budget within the business or government entity for accommodations, so that the organizational units are not, in effect, financially penalized for hiring a worker with a disability [28].

## **B. Employees and Job seekers (Persons with Disabilities)**

The barriers faced by persons with disabilities seeking employment opportunities, job retention or promotion will vary from individual to individual, depending on a range of factors. In many cases, the disability itself may prevent persons from working in certain jobs, whilst in other cases, there are a range of preventable physical, historical and attitudinal barriers that can make it more difficult to work for persons with disabilities [35]. The following are common barriers faced by persons with disabilities seeking or already engaged in formal employment:

### **I. Lack of skills and education**

In Bangladesh access to economic opportunities for persons with disabilities is limited and this is compounded by lack of vocational skills and practical experience. This can be partly attributed to the policy barriers and negative attitudes of the employers [40,47]. The challenges of accessing education mean persons with disabilities often lack the formal qualifications and skills needed to access employment [4]. Fewer persons with disabilities graduate from high school than those who do not have disabilities [29]. However, even those with university education or other qualifications struggle to find employment due to employer's attitudes. On many occasions acquired training for persons with disabilities does not fit the available job opportunities. It is not just the perceptions of disability that limit job opportunities but also the conspicuous lack of competitive employable skills that lead to persons with disabilities being discriminated against in the job market by employers. Education and training are central to good and productive work for a reasonable income. But young persons with disabilities often lack access to formal education or to opportunities to develop their skills particularly

in the increasingly important field of information technology [1]. The gap in educational attainment between persons with disabilities and those without is thus an ever-increasing obstacle. Many persons with disabilities lack the skills and experience needed to compete with others in the labour market [58].

Parents are reluctant to send children with disabilities to school which increases barriers to employment. Persons with disabilities cannot compete with persons without disabilities for getting a position in the public sector because of lack of inclusive education in Bangladesh and a subsequent lower level of education and skills [10]. Individual barriers include relationship and social skills difficulties, verbal and non-verbal communication disabilities and difficulty with changes in routine [10]. There are also key differences between persons who have acquired disabilities in later life and persons whose disability dates from birth or prior to looking for work. This is due to their different opportunities to acquire skills, qualifications and work experience, which may also impact on levels of confidence and expectations. Socio-economic class is also likely to have an important influence on educational and work opportunities [18].

For individuals who acquire disabilities while in paid employment, training may be equally important in terms of re-training for new skills or new working methods or in some cases for a new occupation. Someone who has a disability prior to entering the labour market may have experienced additional barriers in schooling, careers' advice, lack of qualifications and work experience. Access to training may be denied in the same ways as access to work. Training centres or work placements may not be physically accessible, information may not be accessible to those with sensory disabilities, and training courses may not recognise the need for flexibility in hours or other arrangements. All of these factors will also influence expectations and confidence levels of persons with disabilities [18].

## II. Lack of confidence

Barriers that originate from the biased and subjective perception of barriers on the part of the employees with disabilities themselves. These include the anticipation of stigmatization. Concerning access to work, persons with disabilities more frequently anticipate stigmatization than they actually experience it [11]. Some persons with disabilities have low self-esteem about their ability to be employed and may not even try to find employment [27]. In Kenya, persons with disabilities face problems related to self-esteem in a number of ways, this results from issues like lack of employment opportunities which is associated with poverty. Social isolation is also a factor leading to a lack of

employment opportunities. A combination of environmental barriers, negative societal feedback and messages as well as diminished social activities are causes of disconnectedness facing persons with disabilities [41]. The social isolation of persons with disabilities restricts their access to social networks, especially of friends and family members, that could help in finding employment. A lack of confidence in applying, having been rejected many times before on declaration of a disability, a lack of confidence in their own abilities, having been brought up in a society that equates “disabled” with “not as good as others”, a fear of not being offered the appropriate support, and being discriminated against, insufficient skills in “selling” themselves on paper or at interview [32].

By far, the most significant issue for candidates with disabilities is finding employers that they feel confident to apply to. Research suggests that the one of the most pressing problems is finding truly disability-friendly employers. Whilst many employers describe themselves as ‘equal opportunities employers’, this is rarely borne out in practice, particularly in relation to disability. Employers often perform poorly when it comes to empathy and understanding around disability. Another significant barrier is a lack of confidence in the recruitment process, including a fear of the process being biased or discriminatory throughout. Many candidates with disabilities are left with the feelings that their opportunities to demonstrate their qualities and skills are limited. This included a lack of offering adjustments (which were rarely mentioned in job adverts), relying on CVs and work experience when their opportunities may have been limited, and the nature of interviews [32].

At the same time, many employees with disabilities face reluctance from employers to make any adjustments to their workplace, however necessary. This resistance can undermine those working with disabilities and discourage them from applying to work in certain institutions. There is a fear that organisations, teams and individuals may not be equipped with skills or knowledge to support them [46]. Some employers don’t know how to make workplace adjustments from IT adaptations to working with someone who has a personal assistant or interpreter and don’t have access to ready advice on how best to accommodate individuals. This reduces the opportunities available to workers with disabilities and there is still a culture prevailing in some workplaces in which persons don’t feel comfortable being open about their health condition or disability. This results in persons with disabilities being afraid they will be wrongly viewed as less capable, passed over for promotion or even lose their job [31].

Research suggest that self-stigma and poor perceptions about abilities, self-worth, and ability to compete in the job market with non-disabled workers are holding persons with disabilities back from



applying for jobs. Stigma, low expectations, and lack of support from family and communities impacts on employment opportunities as it contributes to self-stigma, often meaning that persons with disabilities were unable to acquire the skills that would make them employable. The exclusion of persons with disabilities also contributes to their lack of networks, contacts or social and interpersonal skills, which constrains their ability to find employment [4].

In Bangladesh most employed persons with disabilities who responded to a survey did not feel comfortable in responding to the queries regarding their working environment and attitudes of the management. There was a reluctance to report or comment on workplace discrimination and abuse as many felt they may lose their jobs if they raised a concern [40].

## C. Wider context

Persons with disabilities experience environmental obstacles that make access to employment difficult or impossible. The following are the common external barriers:

### I. Accessibly and physical barriers

In Kenya, 65 percent of persons with disabilities regard the environment as a major problem in their daily lives more than their impairments and it is seen that less than a quarter of persons with disabilities are employed in public and private sectors, only a quarter of persons with disabilities work in family businesses, but a third do not work at all (Kenya National Survey for Persons with Disabilities, 2008) [41]. In Bangladesh, accessibility, in a way, was the determining point as to the kind of employment that the persons with disabilities usually attained. It was also one of the major factors that was limiting their employment [40]. The job markets do not meet the requirements of infrastructure appropriate to the needs of persons with disabilities. Physical barriers are structural obstacles in natural or manmade environments that prevent or block mobility or access. Examples of physical barriers include steps and curbs that block a person with mobility impairment from entering a building or using a sidewalk; mammography equipment that requires a woman with mobility impairment to stand; and absence of a weight scale that accommodates wheelchairs or others who have difficulty stepping up [33], damaged or non-existent foot paths, lack of accessible toilets, disabled transport, and free access to facilitate the movement of persons with disabilities [30]. Simply being unable to access the interview venue can also hold a person with a disability back from getting the job that they want [35]. Some may not be able to afford the daily travel costs to and from work either.

“Just the act of getting on to public transport takes a long time, first you have to wait for a bus that has enough room for you and your chair, then finally you show up at the office for the interview, and you are turned away at the door because they think you are there to beg,” says Ouko, who is from Nairobi [48].

There may also be physical barriers to the actual work setting, and to attending social events with fellow employees. Access to information can be a further barrier for persons with visual impairment [1]. Therefore, keeping a job once found may become more challenging due to flexibility to create reasonable accommodation. The level of access to transport, housing, and personal assistance that a person with a disability has will greatly affect their choice of employment opportunities and control over working arrangements. Access to employment is hindered by physically inaccessible workplaces, as well as lack of accessible communication within the workplace while parts of a building may be accessible, other important spaces such as toilets may not be. Reasonable accommodation is often lacking, which means persons with disabilities do not get the basics to enable them to communicate with colleagues. This can result in them feeling isolated and opting to leave work. Some of these barriers that face by persons with disabilities in work are the same as the obstacles to obtaining work, particularly restrictive access [4]. Keeping a job once found may become more problematic due to flexibility to create reasonable accommodation.

For persons who develop a disability at work or who have a deteriorating condition, their need for employers to respond appropriately to their changing situation will be similar to that of a potential employee. The advantage for the existing employee over the job applicant is that, particularly they are in a relatively senior or highly skilled post, the employer will probably wish to retain them in employment if at all possible. Retaining existing employees saves on training costs for their replacements [18]. However, it is likely that the less skilled and more short-term an employee is, the easier they will be to replace.

Participation of persons with disabilities in the public sector employment in Bangladesh is lower partly because a large portion are living in rural areas while almost all formal employment is concentrated in urban areas. According to JICA (2002), the prevalence of disability in the rural areas of Bangladesh is six times higher than that of urban areas. Moreover, rural areas lack education institutions, quality teachers and other facilities. Therefore, persons living in the rural areas irrespective of disabilities do not have equal level of education and skills compared to those are living in the urban areas. In addition, non-disabled rural persons can move to cities for education and training which is almost impossible

for persons with disabilities in rural areas because of negative attitude of their families and communities. Consequently, persons with disabilities of rural areas are more likely to be less educated which eventually restrict them to fight for public sector employment [10].

In Bangladesh, buildings are not designed considering the needs of persons with disabilities although incorporating accessibility for persons with disabilities is mandatory according to the building construction code of 1993. However, most of the developers and individuals do not apply laws in incorporating accessibility while designing the buildings in Bangladesh. Disability Rights Watch Group (2009) observed that, inaccessibility of infrastructure is a major obstacle for persons with disabilities to enjoy their rights and entitlements in Bangladesh [9]. In the employment setting, accessibility includes physical access to all the work premises, including other work or training sites and access to equipment and to organisational information. However, there is evidence that employers are often unwilling to make necessary adaptations [4]. Employment is also hindered by inaccessible public transport. The difficulties and costs of getting to work can often result in persons with disabilities giving up formal work [36].

## II. Lack of ICT and Assistive Technology / services

Members of marginalised groups, including those with disabilities, are reported to have unequal access to computers and internet technologies. People with disabilities often experience economic and linguistic restrictions in addition to accessibility barriers. This inequality of access is sometimes called the ‘digital divide’ – a term used in the 1990s to describe inequalities among countries, but more recently applied to inequalities within countries. People with more disabilities have far more to gain from the use of ICTs than those who have fewer disabilities. The most marginalised groups are the least likely to gain access to ICTs but that when they do it can make the biggest difference to their lives (in terms of enhanced capabilities and functioning). This is true in many different settings and sectors [56].

Despite the great potential ICT and mobile technology has to improve the inclusion of persons with disabilities, advances in technology alone are insufficient to address all forms of inclusion of persons with disabilities. The success of the internet and ICT for the inclusion of persons with disabilities is heavily impacted by stakeholders’ knowledge and awareness of the technology available, as well as knowledge of laws and policies. In several countries’ laws exist that cover ICTs, although the relevance of the laws to accessibility, and levels of compliance, are not well documented. The ICT landscape is

developing rapidly, leaving existing regulation outdated. Compared to accessibility standards for other sectors (such as transport/accommodation) standards for the development of ICT are lagging behind [56].

The World Health Organisation (WHO) estimates that over one billion people, the majority of whom are people with disabilities and older people, need one or more assistive devices. The number in need of assistive devices is projected to increase to beyond two billion by 2050 as a result of rises in non-communicable diseases and the aging global population. However, evidence indicates that an estimated 90% of people who would benefit from assistive technologies do not have access to them and there is a huge unmet need for such devices [57].

Inequalities in access to assistive devices and services have been found between people living in different countries or regions of a country, under different economic conditions, among people with different impairments, genders, ages, languages and cultures. Men are often more likely than women to have assistive technologies, adults are generally more likely to have them than children, and in some countries people with a specific type of impairment more frequently have assistive technologies than people with other impairments do [57].

Lack of access to assistive devices is due to a number of factors including high costs, limited availability, and lack of governance and inadequate financing in many settings, as well as a widespread lack of awareness and suitably trained personnel. Few countries have national assistive technology policies or programmes which means access to assistive devices is not universal [57].

Frequently employees with disabilities and their employers (or potential employers) lack information of available assistive technology options, applicability of process approaches such as teleworking, or even awareness that a range of accommodations exist. Further, there is a concern that due to lack of awareness, manufacturers of workplace related devices or technologies (i.e. information and communication devices, software, telephones, etc.) may not be designed for all users, or do not optimally design technology to be adaptable for a wider array of user characteristics. The high cost of many technologies limits access for persons with disabilities, particularly in low-income and middle-income countries. In particular, intermediate and assistive technology are often unaffordable or unavailable [17,37].

In Bangladesh lack of assistive devices in the country is a major barrier in the inclusion of people with disabilities in mainstream development process. Due to a lack of assistive devices many people with disabilities are not getting access to employment opportunities and the job market [40].

Communication barriers are experienced by persons with disabilities that affect hearing, speaking, reading, writing, and or understanding, and who use different ways to communicate than persons who do not have these disabilities. Examples of communication barriers include written health promotion messages with barriers that prevent persons with vision impairments from receiving the message. These include, use of small print or no large-print versions of material, and no braille or versions for persons who use screen readers. Auditory health messages may be inaccessible to persons with hearing impairments, including videos that do not include captioning, and oral communications without accompanying manual interpretation such as sign language. The use of technical language, long sentences, and words with many syllables may be significant barriers to understanding for persons with cognitive impairments [33].

Assistive services are initiatives or support offered to persons with disabilities within the society so as to enable them access to facilities and ease of usage of services. These services may range from relatively minor and inexpensive support initiatives to major and costly ones. Those services aim at allowing persons with disabilities to live life on an equal basis with other persons who do not have a disability. For many persons with disabilities, these assistive services, be they for the blind, deaf or physically incapacitated, are prerequisites for the full participation in society and more importantly in the work environment. Examples of how assistive services aid persons with disabilities are for example a sign language interpreter assisting a deaf person to work in any ordinary work environment or a personal assistant aiding a person using a wheelchair to travel to meetings or work. These individuals are therefore given an opportunity to live in the community as fully participatory persons, rather than be marginalized. These assistive services should be made mandatory for employers in private sectors that offer services to the public and government bodies in the public sector to implement [55].

### III. Employment process

Persons with certain disabilities may not know that the job opening exists for example if the job is only advertised on inaccessible online job boards, many persons will not be able to see it due to it only being advertised on platforms that they are unable to access [31]. The application process being

inaccessible lack of suitable formats for the application form, or online application being the only option. The interview venue being inaccessible may prevent suitable candidates for being considered or employed. A study in Kenya, indicates that access to information on job vacancies was a major barrier because, according to the participants, information on job vacancies was not in accessible formats and so participants were unable to access advertisements on jobs [58].

The recruitment process itself can sometimes become a barrier, when there is a lack of flexibility or adaptation to meet the needs of an applicant with disabilities. Adapting job descriptions so they are easier to understand, working on alternative interview formats and setting roles into smaller, manageable tasks has helped a lot [31]. Very little information exists about the employment of persons with disabilities in the private sector [17]. The mode of dissemination of information on new job opportunities has been found to be limiting and inaccessible, as many advertisements are via print or social media, which many persons with disabilities may not be able to access [4]. For example, traditional interview styles or phone interviews prove difficult for persons with developmental disabilities, especially when applicants must decide whether or not to disclose their disability. This can serve to inhibit an individual from a successful interview, regardless of whether they have the technical skills and/or expertise for the job [13].

There is clear evidence of direct discrimination in the recruitment process, which has been demonstrated by matching pairs of applications from a disabled and non-disabled applicant. Evidence on discrimination in employment presents many examples of discrimination against disabled persons in recruitment, dismissal, promotion, harassment and unfair treatment [18]. Employers are more likely to select workers with disabilities based on the same requirements as normal workers [30].

## IV. Historic and family factors

Besides discrimination in the employment process, persons with disabilities access to employment can be severely limited by societal, material or environmental barriers outside the workplace. It encroaches on their lives directly and frustrates participation and self-actualisation. Disability often affects families that are already poor, and parents in remote rural locations often feel that they are so poor that they have nothing to offer. It takes a lot of persuasion to encourage them to participate in the activities of parents' associations, since they feel trapped in the vicious cycle where, poverty is taken as a function of disability and vice versa. Parents of children with disabilities often make assessments and conclude that their child will not be able to cope in such an environment. Thus, they

choose not to send the child to school at all or they take him/her out of school: Lack of education most often means lack of opportunities for employment [48].

In Bangladesh the acceptance and importance of individuals in the family as well as the community is primarily dependent upon his or her economic status and contribution [47]. Attitudes of the general public do not favour disability employment in Bangladesh. Persons usually possess sympathetic attitudes towards persons with disabilities. However, neither the general public nor family members of persons with disabilities perceive that persons with disabilities should be employed in public offices. Because of such perceptions about persons with disabilities, politicians and policy makers also show negligence to implement the laws to ensure their participation in the formal labour market. Negative attitude of wider society towards persons with disabilities reduce their value within the social structure and therefore, they do not get equal access to the social opportunities. They often denied education as parents and other family members do not consider children with disabilities as worthy as children without. Subsequently, persons with disabilities in Bangladesh can be deprived of employment opportunity along with many other rights and opportunities [10].

The employment rates in the intersection of disability and gender -in an analysis of the World Health Survey results for 51 countries reflect these barriers, with 19.6percent of women with disabilities employed compared with 52.8 per cent of men with disabilities, and 29.9 per cent of women without disabilities employed compared with 64.9 per cent of men without disabilities [1].

In Kenya, some challenges that women with disabilities face in employment opportunities in the Public Civil Service are contributed by the culture, behaviour, status, or background of an individual or family members and relatives [44]. There are often far reaching and mistaken assumptions that women with disabilities do not need to work, that their financial security will be provided by their families and that their main role will be at home because their capacity to do much else is limited [38]. In many occasions women with disabilities expected and encouraged to work in traditional female jobs or may be seen as less effective at work because of needing to also manage domestic responsibilities. One effect of this multiple discrimination is likely to be even further restricted pay and career progression [18]. Social norms in Bangladesh dictate that men are preferred for employment over women. Women with disabilities are not regarded as having the capacity to work and are usually expected to stay at home and do domestic chores or not participate in work at all. The lack of inclusive transport and physical accessibility issues are also barriers to the inclusion of women with disabilities in the workforce [4]. It is observed that strong domestic forces are absent in Bangladesh to press the government for ensuring

employment for persons with disabilities as the general public see disability as a charitable issue [4,10]. In Kenya traditionally women do not inherit land or livestock but in most tribes, girls move away from their natal household and to the husband's homestead upon marriage. Marrying and moving away from one's own family means that the control over the woman's labour capacity is transferred to the family of the husband [49].

In Kenya, the families and the persons with disabilities themselves endure the shame and guilt of being less than perfect in the eyes of other Kenyans. Due to this misinformation, families, the government and other stakeholders tend to provide minimal basic needs like food and shelter but no opportunities for health, education, employment, training and other essential support services that would make persons with disabilities develop their full potential. This shows that persons with disabilities have limited access to education and are typically considered last even by their own families. Discrimination against persons with disabilities is widespread in all sectors of the economy [46].

## V. Lack of implementation of law and policy

There is a lack of political commitment towards the issues related to the persons with disabilities in Bangladesh until recently. The little changes in the public sector employment for persons with disabilities in Bangladesh are because of a perception of persons in general and elites in particular. The position of politicians and others involved with policy making process, elites, is particularly tricky as they did not oppose in policy formulation and enactment of laws in favour of disabled persons but progressed very slowly when question of its implementation [10].

In Kenya poor monitoring and enforcement structures also contribute to non-compliance with the 5 percent quota for employment of persons with disabilities. Awareness of the legislation on inclusive employment and disability in general is low. Companies' human resources (HR) policies often do not encourage employment of persons with disabilities, and many feels there is a lack of technical support from disability organisations and experts. Employers are more likely to employ persons with disabilities if they know them or are familiar with their disability through prior experience, or sometimes for reasons of charity or corporate social responsibility. There is also a lack of clear budget allocations to guide employment strategies for persons with disabilities [4]. A study identified that addressing discriminatory laws and practices, and social development programs could facilitate employment in Kenya especially for persons with mental health disabilities [ 62].



## VI. Increased unemployment under COVID-19

In both countries the overall economic impact of COVID-19 is significant and increased by short terms contracts, limited social protection and unemployment support. In Bangladesh, persons in the ready-made garments (RMG) sector are expected to lose jobs and significant number of factories are at risk of shutting down despite anticipated increase in business diverted from China, orders from US and Europe reducing, broad employment freeze, challenges with social distancing in high density work environments. Sectors like garments, leather and crafts are severely affected [51,52,53]. Within these sectors return to work is hampered by social distancing and companies are reluctant to allow persons with disabilities to return to work due to a perception of increased health risks to these employees. NGOs also perceive significant risk of high unemployment. Perception that persons with disabilities will find it harder to find alternative employment. There is an increased psychological impact of anxiety related to job loss and economic impact. Reports indicate that persons with disabilities in Kenya have been negatively affected by COVID- 19. They have been left behind in the response and many of the current protection measures, especially around transport and social distancing, make their usual means of support and independence risky and challenging to access. Persons with disabilities livelihoods have been disrupted and they face increased food insecurity [17].

A survey conducted in 2020 by Leonard Cheshire showed, in Kenya, more than 92 percent of respondents said their daily lives had been affected, pinpointing factors such as limited transport, restricted movement, a lack of available necessities, lack of contact with others at school, church and social functions, reduced income and the loss of their job or income. In Bangladesh, 100 percent said their lives had been changed by the pandemic. Many respondents surveyed in both Kenya and Bangladesh have faced employment and job insecurity. They were most concerned about their finances, due to a lack of access to government benefits and the impact of unemployment. In Kenya, 68 percent of persons with disabilities reported not being able to work, while 65 percent felt insecurity in their current jobs. In Bangladesh, 80 percent reported not being able to work and more than 85 percent felt insecurity in their current job [50].

## Discussion

Employment of persons with disabilities is one of the most powerful indications of social inclusion. It is the most effective and efficient way of eradicating poverty among persons with disabilities and ensuring their participation in mainstream development activities [10]. Equal access to employment

has benefited both from advances in accessible technology and disability rights policy [61]. Overall, there are a range of areas where appropriate ICT have been identified to offer potential solutions to barriers as follow [56]:

ICT enables and empowers persons with disability to do almost all types of work and contribute to society. In particular, advances in technology, including mobile connectivity, have increased opportunities for persons with disabilities to be included in employment. People with physical disabilities who are employed to work remotely, an affordable and reliable connection is a pre-requisite [56].

Although not specifically referring to mobile enabled technology ICT is increasing the inclusion of persons with disabilities in the world of work. For example, persons with disabilities can be included in communications and interactions with clients and colleagues through mobile instant chat platforms and real-time text displays facilitate communication for persons with hearing and speech impairments. Text and video telephony can also be used to facilitate internal and external phone calls through an interpreter. As mobile devices facilitate remote working, persons with disabilities can use the technology to work more flexibility, allowing for needed breaks, medical provider visits and other appointments. Remote work platforms and policies allow employees schedule flexibility. They also allow employees to work from physically accessible and convenient locations [56] (see

Table 1).

*Table 1: Table of barriers to inclusion and ways ICT can help (Source: Major barriers to inclusion and how ICT can help [56])*

Major barrier to inclusion	How ICT can help
When traditional written or verbal communications are the only forms of communication available, they can be completely inaccessible to persons depending on type of disability.	Individuals can use the form of communication that works for them - voice, text, video - to understand and contribute information in face to face or remote interactions.
Specialized, standalone, assistive technology used to increase, maintain, or improve the functional capabilities of individuals with disabilities can be cost prohibitive for persons with disabilities without external financial supports or subsidies.	How ICT can help: Accessible functionalities in mainstream, off-the-shelf, ICT are rapidly reducing the cost barriers to technology solutions for persons with disabilities, while becoming attractive features for all users irrespective of disability.
Many persons with disabilities will need more than one type of assistive technology	The growing number of apps and web-enabled services make it possible to bundle and access multiple assistive features within a single or limited

solution to enhance their independent living and socioeconomic participation.	number of devices thus increasing affordability, efficiency, and portability.
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Findings of a study in Bangladesh have addressed the impact of ICT in the lives of persons with disabilities. The result shows that persons with disabilities who use ICT, have access to jobs, are self-dependent, and also can contribute to their family which may impact the economy positively. Therefore, awareness and application of ICT might be of crucial importance to solve the unemployment problem of the persons with disabilities [59].

Assessing who has access to technology can be complex. It may not be as simple as either being fully connected or not at all connected. The situation may be complicated, for example, by some people having two mobile phones, but still not having reliable access to either calls or Internet for a number of reasons. Assessing connectivity using the five 'A's of technology access (Roberts 2016): Assessing the availability, affordability, awareness, ability and accessibility of technology will develop an understanding of who has access and who does not [56]. See Figure 2: Assessing Technology (credit: Roberts and Hernandez [56,60]).

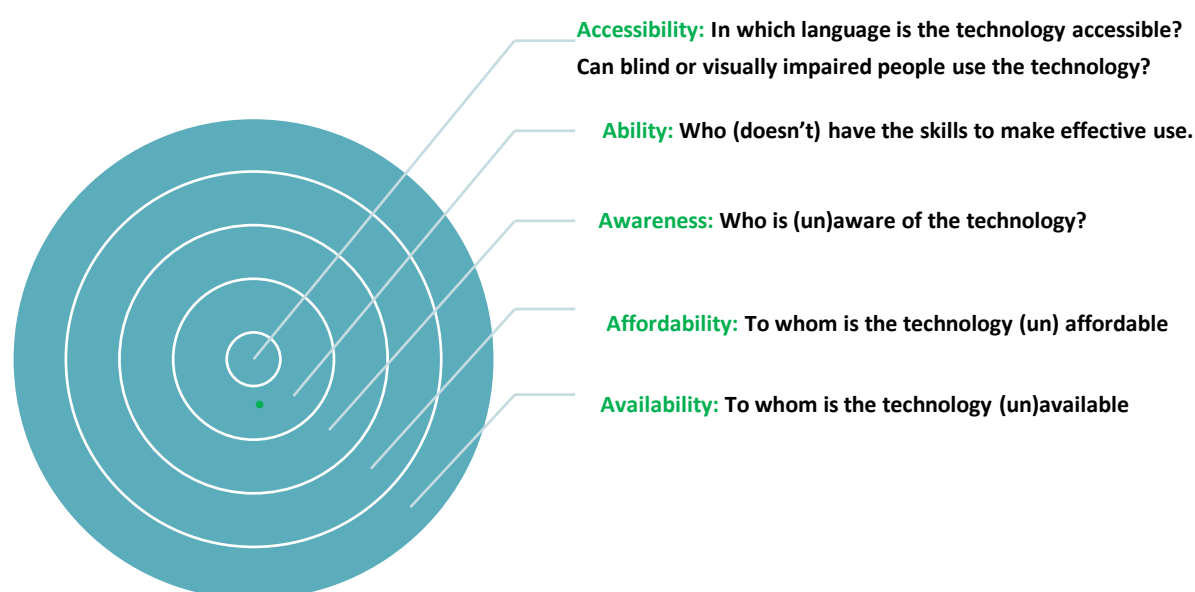


Figure 2: Assessing Technology (credit: Roberts and Hernandez [56,60])

Whilst there are many challenges in the current context there are also opportunities and potential solutions. The potential of a digital platforms for employment of persons with disabilities including the following aspects may address some of the key barriers with the right support. Categories include 1)

Online job platform-database for employees and employers, 2) Online sensitization training for employers and employees, 3) Online skills development and 4) Remote working support.

An online job platform-database for employees and employers may help address the most difficult stage in the employment process which is often entering the labour market for the first time or obtaining a job after a period of unemployment or inactivity. Because of direct discrimination and other barriers, this may be particularly difficult for disabled persons [18]. There is a social enterprise in Kenya that is attempting to do something similar [65].

Most of the time when employers talk about wanting a diverse workforce, they typically mean workers of different cultures and ethnicities, and rarely think of increasing diversity by hiring persons with disabilities [18]. Negative attitudes often result in discrimination and low self-esteem at the workplace [24]. Persons with disabilities in Kenya face stigma and discrimination that leads to enduring and humiliating stereotypes and prejudice, seeing them as a curse and a burden on society, as well as undermining the human rights principles that are key to inclusion. Stigma excludes persons with disabilities from economic and social activities, thus trapping them in a cycle of poverty [4]. Online sensitization training for employers and employees can help address major barriers often faced by persons with disabilities are access to and within the workplace, harassment and discrimination at work, and lack of positive attitudes among co-workers.

Hiring practices and stigma among employers are thus common concerns for persons with disabilities. Stigma is often the result of employers' lack of knowledge and understanding of disabilities as well as fear of the unknown. On many occasions employers do not know how to hire someone with a disability, how to interact with them, how to handle their daily issues or how to accommodate them without being disrespectful. They prefer to avoid these issues [13]. This relates to one of the major concerns that there is little awareness of disability issues and a lack of sensitivity amongst society and persons without disabilities. This lack of knowledge and awareness translates into inappropriate and discriminatory behaviour. Derogatory names and terms are still being used [26]. Thus, awareness raising, sensitisation, education and training on disability are essential.

To enhance the employment opportunity of persons with disabilities in formal sector reasonable accommodation is essential which could manifest in the simplest of things such as restructuring a job to enable persons with disabilities to work efficiently, modifying work schedules to include any special needs and acquiring or modifying equipment to allow persons with disabilities to work well. An

alternative is to provide indirect access by having the entity support to use of a person's assistive device technology to achieve access (e.g. screen readers) [6]. A key finding regardless of context is that leadership from the top is needed when implementing change for persons with disability [64].

Types of accessibility include access to information, transport, buildings and health care. Assistive technology can be either low or high technology. It is very important to provide effective assessments of assistive technology needs [37] and link between worker and employer in identifying and implementing assistive technology. In many cases simple low-cost adaptations will facilitate inclusion. However, in some cases a considerable amount of expense is necessary to making adjustments for an ideal work environment for persons with disabilities. This refers to measures with fiscal implications that should and are sometimes taken up by employers to help persons with disabilities work or to take part in training on the same basis as individuals without disability. Therefore, the laws must take this into consideration, allowing for incentives and subsidies for employers and families of persons with disabilities.

Online skill development can help address the skills gap. It is important that persons with disabilities have equal access to quality education and training opportunities, without which it is difficult to break out of the pattern of low skilled, low paid jobs, unemployment or withdrawal from the labour market altogether [18]. For young persons with disabilities, developing initial work skills through education and training is particularly important. A focus on training as a solution may overlook the existence of structural discrimination in the labour market [18].

Remote working support opportunities have been advanced globally due to disruption caused by the outbreak of Covid-19. While many organisations are struggling to keep their businesses operational while ensuring the safety of their staff many have invested in technological solutions to enable remote working and virtual meetings [21]. Remote working is becoming more common, which affords workers with disabilities a greater degree of opportunity, accessibility and confidence as many physical barriers are removed. Depending on a number of different factors, many persons who live with a disability will find it difficult to come into the workplace every day of the working week. These barriers are amplified when there is lack of transport, poor infrastructure and an absence of additional support. Remote working options are becoming more and more popular amongst many industries for both disabled and non-disabled workers, with several studies showing that employees who are given the option to work from home are more motivated and satisfied in their job. Disabled employees have benefited from remote working for a variety of reasons - travel is often disproportionately difficult for persons with

disabilities, and office environments themselves can be disabling. Since the outbreak of COVID-19, many persons with disabilities have taken to social media to express their frustration at how employers who had previously denied them the reasonable adjustment of working from home are now making it a priority for all of their staff. Eileen Hopkins, Executive Director of Ai-Media, points out that COVID-19 is to some extent levelling the playing field between disabled and non-disabled employees, as workers must find a way of accessing content remotely, attending meetings and having their voice heard virtually and digital solutions come to the fore and provide a way of keeping business going [21]. A similar argument was also proposed in the paper [63], purpose the COVID pandemic was a severe blow to all workers, but it may ultimately have a silver lining for some workers with disabilities if it makes work from home easier and more acceptable. In addition, the pandemic is shaking up traditional workplace structures and causing employers to rethink how essential tasks can be done, which may broaden their views of workplace accommodations.

At the same time, the rapid transition to remote working can be a significant challenge for persons with disabilities, as well as those without disabilities, from getting to grips with new technologies, balancing work and childcare and protecting one's mental health in a period of social distancing. Many persons with disabilities use a range of assistive technologies, and these may only be available on their work computers, not their devices at home. Even if an employee does have that technology at home, if their company rolls out a new virtual collaboration software to all staff, the training resources or the programme itself may not be compatible with screen readers, creating a huge barrier for visually impaired or dyslexic employees [21]. Technology can take up too much space in some person's lives, but access to digital resources are still limited for many persons with disabilities. Those who do have reliable internet often find that some websites are inaccessible. Also, there is a fear from persons with disabilities that working from home will become the default easy option for companies to appear "inclusive" when they're actually benefitting from diverse skills yet managing to exclude and isolate [54]. Therefore, it can be argued that remote working might be one of the suitable solutions but not an ultimate option. The intention should be how best we can integrate persons with disabilities into the workforce without making discrimination by making all options equal.

The impact of family support or discrimination and stigma is amplified by remote working. Where there is a supportive environment this creates new opportunities but where there are negative factors these may be exacerbated. Families play an important role in the quality of life, adjustment and health outcomes of persons with disabilities. Families can provide informal care that ranges from general psycho-social support to job-related skills training. The ethnic group and culture to which the person

with a disability belongs may have an impact in how strongly family influences consumer life choices and decisions, with some groups and cultures emphasizing independence more than others. Individual differences and context may also influence the degree of independence from family a person with disabilities displays. However, the influence of family support on employment outcomes appears to be uneven. Some investigators have found positive associations of family support to favourable employment outcomes, others have reported negative associations of family support to favourable employment outcomes [22].

## Conclusion

Studies indicate that persons with disabilities perceive they need to work harder to get a job compared to those without a disability [12]. Pertaining to employment, discriminatory stereotyping is a pervasive negative attitude that focuses on a person's disability rather than on a person's ability. Negative social attitudes have fuelled the unemployment and underemployment of persons with disabilities. Poor treatment at work and lack of opportunities are significant barriers to continuing and successful employment for some persons with disabilities. Ignorance and wrong beliefs surrounding disability, compounded with a negative and derogatory attitude of the community (including family members) have contributed to the marginal development in the disability formal employment sector in Bangladesh and Kenya.

On the other hand, studies also indicate that there is a lack of skilled candidates among persons with disabilities which left them in inferior job categories and created discouragement. For persons with disabilities, employment is particularly important, because having a disability often means being socially isolated [1]. Being employed is one opportunity to reduce this isolation and an important tool to reduce poverty [11,14]. Research evidenced that work remains important and meaningful for persons with disabilities and keeps its health promoting effects over the time [11,15].

Policies and legislations (for example, affirmative actions) needed to increase access to employment are non-existent in many countries. Where they exist, they are either poorly enforced or are not enforced, making policies and legislations on employment for persons with disabilities in many countries, especially in low-income countries, worthless [58]. As barriers to employment for persons with disabilities are multi-factorial policy solutions to address these barriers need to be wide-ranging and fall under the responsibility of multiple sectors for implementation. This calls for cross-sectoral collaboration using a 'Whole of Government' approach. A systemic change and collaborative approach

among different actors are vital to enhance the employability of persons with disabilities in Bangladesh and Kenya. How to employ such a whole of Government' approach and develop cross-sectoral collaborations among a wide range of stakeholders with different ideas/values, interests, and institutions, remains an important area of future innovation and research [13].

In the current context where the global pandemic is breaking barriers to remote working there is a need and unique opportunity for meaningful research and piloting of solutions. This needs to be done on how to promote and facilitate remote working for persons with disabilities and what are the important aspects that need to be considered for this to be effective. One part of the solution will be to empower persons with disabilities with digital skills and creating digital platforms more accessible and inclusive for persons with disabilities. ICT integrated training, with access to education in various social development organizations, would provide opportunities for the majority of PWDs to be empowered, in both urban and rural areas [59]. A systematic audit of the available technology and the dimensions of the digital divide among persons with disabilities is vital. The experience gained throughout the pandemic could also teach us how listening to and embedding the needs of people with disabilities in non-pandemic times might allow us to create systems that are better for everyone, and potentially more responsive in times of crisis. The opportunities this may have to further the acceptance and application of inclusive design, of both physical and digital space, remain to be seen [39].



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