

A Case Study on

*“Risks and Impacts on Persons with Disabilities:
Bangladesh Distribution System Upgrade and
Expansion Project”*

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Executive Summary

Bangladesh aspires to be a middle-income country by 2021. Government of Bangladesh has identified electricity supply as a major constraint on GDP growth, and overall economic development. To increase availability and sustainability of the power supply, Bangladesh government has initiated to upgrade the two existing power grids supported by the Asian Infrastructure Investment Bank from July 2016-June 2019. To address the main message of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs)—“no one will be left behind”—persons with disabilities need to be included very systematically in all development projects, including the Bangladesh Distribution System Upgrade and Expansion Project.

The objective of this study is to assess the implementation of the provisions of the AIIB’s Environmental and Social Framework (ESF) that are specifically relevant to persons with disabilities in the Bangladesh Distribution System Upgrade and Expansion Project, the AIIB’s first project in Bangladesh. The study identifies project impacts on persons with disabilities, and assess the project’s contribution to SDG 10 and reducing equality. The study concludes with recommendations to AIIB and to the Government of Bangladesh.

Information was collected through desk review, field visits, and focus group discussion. The issue of disability, which is mentioned in the AIIB’s ESF, has not been reflected in the project documents. Project documents do not address the employment of persons with disabilities in the project, and do not mention inclusion of persons with disabilities in the consultation process. Crucial findings derived from the field visit include: no persons with disabilities were invited to attend the stakeholder outreach meeting; websites of implementing agencies like DESCO and BREB are inaccessible, making it impossible for persons with disabilities to apply for project jobs and submit grievances related to the project; safety measures and risk mitigation are very poor; and the physical infrastructure that houses grievance redress mechanisms is not accessible for persons with disabilities. Uttara and Bashundhara power grids are very close to the residential area which may cause health hazard, environmental pollution, etc. After reviewing Environmental and Social Framework of AIIB, some gaps were also identified with respect to best practices and lessons learned from other IFIs. There is a definition of vulnerable group in the ESF but persons with disabilities are included which is not specified ESF is not in line with UNCRPD, persons with disabilities are not mentioned in the M&E framework, handicapped conversion cost has not been considered for involuntary resettlement.

Finally, some recommendations have been given on the basis of findings to AIIB and GoB for the improvement of the policy documents and implementation process. AIIB can formulate an additional guidance note on how to ensure disability inclusion in the AIIB finance projects to address disability issues. AIIB should specifically address the needs and rights of people with disabilities, ESF should be in line with UNCRPD, train AIIB staff on disability inclusion, people with disabilities should be ensured throughout the project life-cycle; PWDs should be included in M&E frameworks as well as performance indicators and participated in the meaningful consultations. On the other hand, Bangladesh Government should follow existing disability related laws, policies and plans and implement employment quota, concerned agencies should ensure their services inclusive for persons with disabilities and maintain standard safety measures to mitigate risks etc.