



Ensuring Access to Water Transport of Persons with Disabilities

“ —

I missed an interview for a job in Dhaka. Travelling from Barisal means that either I have to take a bus or a launch to reach Dhaka. There was no way I could have done it by myself. Our public transport is not accessible for wheelchair user like me

— ”

– Farhad, a fresh graduate and wheelchair user.

Farhad is not alone. Over a million people in Bangladesh live with a disability. They live a life of limited mobility, facing difficulties in accessing public spaces. Access to public transport is critical for people with disability in order for them to participate fully in community life and the economy.



Introduction

In a riverine country like Bangladesh, journey by water transport is considered to be cheap, accessible and comfortable compare to other transport services. According to Bangladesh Inland Water Transport Authority (BIWTA) data, 71.34 million travels took place in the various water transports in 2017-18 only through the Dhaka Sadarghat terminal, while the number is a staggering 280 million all over Bangladesh. Among these 71.34 million travels, around 4.5 million journeys have been undertaken by Persons with disabilities only through Shadarghat and Barishal launch terminal.

Keeping this massive number in mind, an audit was necessary to understand the current situation of launch terminals to make them accessible and user friendly for the persons with disabilities. The audit team consisted of two officials (one male, one female) from BRAC, two female official from National Human Rights Commission (NHRC), one disability expert (female) and one BIWTA official (male). A checklist was prepared to understand the current scenario starting from the pre travel status to the vessel.

Issues to be considered



After audit, we came up with a few recommendations for Ministry of Shipping and BIWTA. These recommendations align with ideal case scenario and replication of international best practices up to some point. We understand that these recommendations will be time consuming and may need to involve several authorities. These are:

1. Pre-journey planning information:



- Tickets are available online. The websites can be made user friendly by maintaining all the timetables, prices and other relevant information in one website.
- Telephone bookings can be introduced.
- Information center is available. But trained station personnel should be clearly identifiable and available to answer questions of persons with disabilities.

2. Parking:



- There is no reserved parking available for persons with disabilities. At least 1 parking space need to be available at the parking area.
- There is no directional signage on the way to the gangway or the pontoon to ride to the vessel.
- Announcements need to be done regarding the timing, position of the vessels, washroom facilities etc.
- Access from parking areas to terminal was relatively good in Dhaka terminal than in Barishal terminal. Extra-wide flap gates for entry is needed at the Barishal terminal to allow wheelchairs through.

3. Ticket counter:



- At least one dedicated ticket counter should be available for persons with disabilities.
- The counter should not be more than 34 inches high from the floor.
- Visual display/ pictograph symbols need to be included.
- Helpful and knowledgeable personnel are needed to provide information and improve confidence for travelers with disabilities.

4. Washrooms:



- There is no washroom available for persons with disabilities.
- Toilet needs to be wide (at least 66x70 inch which is a minimum turning space of wheelchairs)
- Height of the toilet should be within 18 inch.
- Grab bar should be in the height of 29-33 inches from the floor.

5. Embarkation/ gangway:



- Wheelchair is available for general people to use.
- Ramps are available, but the slope needs to maintain 1:12 ratio (maximum).
- Ramps need to be minimum 36 inches wide.
- The floor and ground surfaces need to be slip resistant, stable and firm.
- Bright color of the path needs to be added to help people with low vision to better see the paths. These paths do lead people right to the places like ticket counters, toilets, platforms etc.
- Handrails are not available. If the ramp has a rise greater than 6 inches or a horizontal projection greater than 72 inches, the ramp must have handrails on both sides.

6. Lifts/ Elevators:



- Terminal building doesn't have any lift/ elevators.
- Elevator doors needs to be minimum 36 inches wide.
- Maximum height of buttons need to be 53 inches.
- Buttons should be brailed for the visually impaired persons.
- Visible and audible signal needs to be provided inside the elevator.

7. Vessel/ Passenger decks:



- The pontoon is not accessible by the wheelchair users. Portable pathway can be introduced for better accessibility of persons with disabilities.
- Doorways of the vessels are wide enough to maneuver wheelchairs.
- There is no lift/ elevators available for the wheelchair users.
- Onboard accommodation is not user friendly for wheelchair users. The doors of the cabin are too narrow to enter. Certain number of cabins can be introduced at a regular price especially for persons with disabilities with all the facilities needed.
- Tactile Pathways need to be introduced throughout the vessel and gangways to help guide the persons with visual impairment.
- Visual and audio announcements need to be introduced to help the visual and hearing impaired persons.
- No washroom is available inside the vessel for the persons with disabilities.

Immediate action to be taken



However, some immediate action can be taken which can create high impact within a shorter period of time. These actions might not seem ideal, but can ensure better accessibility of persons with disabilities in Sadarghat and Barishal Launch Terminal. These are:



1. Introduce Assistant Service:

Initially, a group of 5 people can be introduced to assist persons with disabilities at the launch terminal. They can also provide support to the old aged and pregnant women to get on board for the journey. Those 5 people needs to be sensitized and trained for assisting persons with disabilities.



2. Rescue station for persons with disabilities:

In case of emergency, it is almost impossible for a person with disability to get life jacket or rubber tube among the others. A special station can be arranged for providing emergency services to the persons with disabilities.



3. Washroom specially designed for persons with disabilities:

Currently, there is no washroom available for persons with disabilities. With the assistance of “Bhumijo”- an innovative approach to introduce hygienic, secure and sustainable washroom in public places.



4. Incentive to pilot:

BIWTA may mobilize launch owners and incentivise them to introduce inclusive service in selected vessels as a pilot.

The aim of designing any transport facility should be to respond the widest range of population possible. Most recommendations mentioned above can be accessible for everyone else too. Organizations working on policy issues of persons with disabilities need to be more vocal and aware of raising the accessibility issues and work with the Government for successful policy implementation. All these facilities can also be introduced at a low cost. In a riverine country like Bangladesh, ensuring accessibility at the water transport will increase the mobility of persons with disabilities thus will have a greater impact on the total economy of the country.

For more information & feedback, contact : Moon Moon Hossain, Policy Analyst, BRAC
moonmoon.h@brac.net

FOLLOW US

