



## ACCESSIBLE WEBSITE A SMALL STEP TOWARDS INCLUSION

### Background:

Disability inclusion is a strategic priority for BRAC. We are addressing the issue from both policy and implementation levels. Accessibility to public transports, infrastructure, and information are the three most important areas to ensure inclusiveness for persons with disabilities and thereby creating an inclusive society. Earlier this year, we reached a milestone when the Ministry of Shipping issued an official circular to make every port in Bangladesh accessible for people with disabilities and Metro rail assured to be accessible by Persons with disabilities. While digital platforms are still inaccessible for most of them, BRAC considered this area to be one of the most neglected yet potential one to explore. Thus web accessibility being a part of BRAC ASC's core policy priority, we started working in this area for quite a few months now. BRAC always believes that "Charity begins at home" and without making our own digital platforms accessible to all, we thought it would be unjust to preach the message. With the vision of inclusion in mind, BRAC ASC and Communication programme with the full assistance of Mr. Vashkar Bhattacharjee started working on making BRAC's website accessible by people with disabilities. Mr. Vashkar Bhattacharjee is a National Consultant for Accessibility at a2i and also working at YPSA on digital accessibility.

It all started with a policy adda arranged for selective BRAC employees on disability inclusion. From that adda, we realised the urgency to attempt initiatives to ensure disability inclusion at BRAC however possible. As a part of the initiative, a training session was arranged on web accessibility for selected BRAC staffs and BRAC Communication team to orient them with web accessibility tools. Then with continuous supervision of Mr. Vashkar and support of BRAC communication team (especially Partha Sarathi Karmaker and Sameeha Suraiya Choudhury) BRAC website ([www.brac.net](http://www.brac.net)) has been made accessible



*BRAC launches disabled-friendly features on website in the presence of DG, NGOAB, Chief Technical Adviser of the Human Rights Division, UNDP, Vashkar Bhattacharjee, Director, Communications & Outreach, BRAC & BRAC International and Executive Director, BRAC.*

for all. A post-audit has been conducted by Mr. Vashkar to ensure all features are working properly.

### Re-launching of BRAC's website:

A major impact expectation from this initiative is that other organizations adopting this, replicate and make their websites and digital platforms accessible to all. Thus we organized an event titled: "Accessible Website: Small step towards inclusion" to re-launch BRAC's website and disseminate the information to as many people as possible. The event was chaired by Mr. Asif Saleh, Executive Director, BRAC. Director General of NGO Affairs Bureau, K.M. Abdus Salam graced the event as Chief Guest and Ms. Sharmeela Rasool, Chief Technical Advisor, UNDP was present as a Special Guest. Development practitioners and influencers representing donor organizations, Disabled People's Organizations (DPOs), peer NGOs, BRAC staffs and media personnel were present at the event.

The event started with a brief on BRAC's activities to institutionalize disability inclusion across all programmes. To expedite the process, BRAC disability inclusion working group having representation from all BRAC programmes and BRAC disability inclusion leadership group were formed in 2018 reflecting BRAC's commitment towards disability inclusion. BRAC held consultations with DPOs to understand the underlying issues further and to earn knowledge through cross-learning.

Mr. Vashkar then shared his view on BRAC's initiatives and the significance of accessibility for persons with disabilities. "The emerging technological advancement has reduced the differentiation between persons with disabilities and others in

terms of accessing information. The Government of Bangladesh has amended the laws to adopt inclusiveness, thus it is the society's responsibility to ensure that all people have access to information."- said Mr. Vashkar Bhattacharjee.

**“BRAC, as one of the leading organisations, took initiatives to make its website accessible by all and I am very happy and proud to be a part of this. There are various software and technology available to convert the existing reading materials disabled-friendly and mentioned government's commitment towards inclusive social development - Vashkar Bhattacharjee, National Consultant for Accessibility at Access to Information (a2i) and Programme manager, YPSA .”**

Ms Sharmeela Rasool, Chief Technical Adviser of the Human Rights Division of UNDP shared her thoughts on this noble initiative by saying “The initiative of BRAC is indeed remarkable. The sustainable development goals (SDGs) are designed to promote inclusive growth. Bangladesh is the 8th country that has ratified to Optional Protocol of CRPD aligned with which Bangladesh adopted a National Disability Plan; Bangladesh's progress was reviewed by four countries and Bangladesh has agreed to the review feedback.”

“90% of the 15% person with disabilities reside in the developing nations. Along with technological and infrastructural challenges, the existing social taboos and social acceptance related issues are higher in the developing countries compared to that at developed nations. So all development practitioners need to work together to change the existing charity-based narrative to a more human rights-based approach which will ease the government to implement the disability inclusive policies and regulations. Also, development partners, practitioners, influencers and donor organisations can play a key role but the host Government needs to take the lead in mainstreaming persons with disabilities” She further added.

Ms. Moutushi Kabir, Director, Communications & Outreach for BRAC and BRAC International congratulated the entire team associated with the transformation of the BRAC website (www.brac.net) to make it accessible by all. She also mentioned that BRAC is committed towards providing equal opportunity to people of all strata and as such the task has been a learning process of BRAC and a small step towards building an inclusive organisation.

“BRAC's official website now has a number of

features that would enable persons with disabilities to use it. These include thoughtful navigation and minimum number of buttons so it can be operated with keyboards only; support of navigation through voice command; and variable font sizes. Persons with visual impairments can also adjust the screen to high-contrast colours”- she added.

Honorable chief guest Mr. K.M. Abdus Salam, Director General of NGO Affairs Bureau applauded BRAC for taking the initiative to make its website accessible by all.

**“Disability inclusion and inclusive growth are priority sectors of the government. Referring to the dramatic advancement in the digitization sector, the disability inclusion agenda will advance quickly as well under the leadership of the government - Mr. K.M. Abdus Salam, Director General of NGO Affairs Bureau.”**

Mr. Salam mentioned that one of the pledges of the Bangladesh government's Vision 2021 is to ensure internet access for all despite their physical ability or economic status. According to the World Health Organisation (WHO), around four million visually impaired people in Bangladesh cannot use digital platforms. The UN convention on the rights of persons with disabilities also endorses right to accessibility, freedom of expression and access to information. The World Wide Web Consortium's (W3C) web accessibility initiative stipulates that websites should be inherently designed so that people with disabilities can perceive, understand, navigate and interact with the web.

Mr. Salam promised that all websites under NGO Affairs Bureau will be made accessible and thanked BRAC for taking the initiative at the initial stage. He concluded by saying that BRAC now has the capacity and knowledge to support other organisations to make their websites accessible for all.

Mr. Asif Saleh, ED, BRAC Bangladesh thanked everyone associated with the initiative He shared a story of his visit to a museum in Germany named “Dialogue in the Dark”. Visitors here are guided by visually impaired guides in absolute darkness. He mentioned that his perception about persons with visual impairments transformed drastically after going through the simulations. He realized that we all are able if given proper tools and disable without certain facilities and attributes. He accentuated that BRAC is willing to collaborate with the government and other organisations by providing technical assistance to make their websites accessible.

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