



Inclusive Futures
Promoting disability inclusion



Learning Document: Towards inclusion of persons with disabilities within BRAC's Skills Development Programme

March 2023

“Skilling up people from marginalized communities and placing them in economic activities. BRAC has this expertise. [...] In the Disability Inclusive Development project we wanted to learn: if we want to include all kinds of disabilities in the STAR model, does it still work the same? What needs to be changed in the model?” [BRAC HQ staff member]

Introduction

BRAC, the world’s biggest NGO which focuses on the eradication of poverty, has inclusiveness embedded into its core values¹. Over the past years, the organization has been taking steps towards becoming more welcoming and inclusive of persons with disabilities, anchoring this disability mainstreaming within the organization through its 2021 Disability Inclusion Strategy. Aiming to further give disability mainstreaming a push, BRAC partnered with Light for the World – a disability and development organization specialized in supporting mainstream services and organizations to include persons with disabilities. The organizations chose one of BRAC’s programmes to focus on, namely the STAR programme: an apprenticeship programme training disadvantaged youth in a trade in the informal sector. The partnership intended to make this apprenticeship programme, where youth are matched with a master craftsperson for training, inclusive for learners with disabilities. The STAR programme is embedded in the Skills Development Programme: a BRAC department focusing on skills training and employment. In their partnership with Light for the World, BRAC-SDP would be able to learn which actions they would be able to take to embed the inclusion of persons with disabilities not just in the STAR programme, but also into their core organization.

This report presents the learnings that the two organizations developed between 2018 and 2022 on how BRAC-SDP itself could become a more accessible organization for persons with disabilities. We start with sharing what actions were taken and then present what the organizations learned about becoming more inclusive, organized per organizational domain, namely: Governance, Programme Management Practices, Human Resources, Financial Resources, Accessibility and External Relations.

What happened in the programme?

“BRAC from the beginning is focused on disability and gender inclusion. [...] From the beginning we have had the target to include [a percentage of learners] with disabilities in the STAR training. [...] So working with these consortium partners and technical assistance from Light for the World, we got to learn how to increase the quality of inclusion.” [BRAC HQ staff member]

¹ <http://www.brac.net/vision-mission-values>

Two main things were implemented to support the Skills Development Programme (SDP) – in upgrading their ability to include persons with disabilities in their work and organization. First, Light for the World arranged training on disability awareness and inclusion with the BRAC staff and introduced the SDP team to the (Disability Inclusion Score Card²), DISC. The DISC, developed by Light for the World, is a tool that helps organizations³ to benchmark inclusion across six domains: Governance, Programme Management Practices, Human Resources, Financial Resources, Accessibility and External Relations. Through a facilitated self-assessment, organisational management better understands their organisational strengths and weaknesses in terms of disability inclusion. After concluding at what level they score per domain – ranging from 1 (not accessible) to 4 (completely accessible) - the organization develops an action plan to take steps in becoming more inclusive. This process is re-iterated several times, noting progress and adapting action plans along the way.

Disability Inclusion Facilitators

Disability Inclusion Facilitators are young people with disabilities who, through their lived experience, raise awareness on inclusion and support organizations in becoming more inclusive.

Together with the DISC, Light for the World introduced the Disability Inclusion Facilitators (DIFs). People with disabilities were hired as DIFs to support learners with disabilities included in the STAR programme, one of SDPs main programmes which places young learners in the workplace as apprentices, under the guidance and training of a master craftsperson. Each DIF was assigned to around 20 learners with disabilities, assisting the learners, their families and their trainers with any issues that came up during the training period.

The learnings presented in this document were collected from official programme documents and reporting, reports of monitoring visits and training, interviews with BRAC and Light for the World staff – both at SDP headquarters and at the field level – and interviews with the Disability Inclusion Facilitators. In this document, we will first cover some general learnings, and then some learnings per domain of the Disability Inclusion Score Card.

² Available at: <https://wecanwork.ug/download/disc-tool/>

³ Besides development organizations, there are also Disability Inclusion Score Cards specifically designed for use in Technical and Vocational Education and Training (TVET), Micro Finance Institutions, and government organizations.

General Learnings

Using the DISC matrix provided an understanding of where action could be taken

The DISC, as described above, makes concrete what inclusion could look like, where an organization stands, and helps team members take ownership of improvement by developing their own action plans. Scores are intended to support the process towards inclusion, rather than evaluate a specific level of inclusiveness. Inclusion of people with disabilities, and specifically what that could look like for an organization, can be a vague concept.

The BRAC team indicated that taking part in the DISC process has helped them assess the current situation, identify areas for improvement, and systematically plan actions towards change.

“I like the DISC very much. This is very scientific and gives a numeric overview of your position. When we talk about disability inclusion and accessibility... These are all subjective things. We cannot quantify the situation. With this tool, with a specific score, we can show leadership and management where we stand. And where we need to be and what should be done to reach that milestone. From that perspective, this has been really effective.” [BRAC HQ staff member]

Working through the DISC provides an understanding of what points the organization could focus on, as well as providing an understanding of what inclusion is and what steps could and should be taken.

“The DISC matrix helped a lot to understand the points on which to focus.” [BRAC HQ staff member]

Programme participants with disabilities benefited from having support available

Within the STAR apprenticeship model, Programme Organizers (POs) are, amongst many other tasks, responsible for matching potential learners with master craftspersons, guiding them through the apprenticeship, and supporting the master craftspersons if any issues came up with the learners. Each Programme Organizer supports around 72 learners. Over the past two years, Disability Inclusion Facilitators (DIFs) were selected to take up a role in guiding learners and supporting master craftspersons specifically for new learners with disabilities. DIFs were chosen, in part, because of their lived experience with disability, which proved beneficial in the relationship with the learners. In addition, the low caseload (an average of 20 learners per DIF), enabled them to offer in-depth support to learners. These DIFs were thus able to support learners with disabilities and address any issues that came up between the learner and their trainer during the process as they had both the time and the expertise to do so.

“We now have DIFs who provide extra support that participants would need. Otherwise, with regular programming we could not cover this kind of support. Inclusion of DIFs really helped us understand the needs of participants. From the participant’s point of view, they have someone to discuss challenges with.” [BRAC HQ staff member]

“The MCPs [master crafts persons] feel that if they are facing a challenge to train the learners with disabilities, then they can call the DIFs to help them. [...] And the same thing with the families. If the families have any difficulties, they immediately communicate with the DIFs.” [Light for the World staff member]

Particularly if it is the first time that persons with disabilities are being included in a programme, it can prove beneficial to have someone available to discuss concerns with, to continuously advocate for the person with disabilities, and who has time and mandate to find practical solutions to issues that come up. The master craftspersons who had agreed to take a learner with disabilities into their workshop indicated that having someone they could call and ask for advice made it much easier for them to choose to train a learner with a disability over one without disabilities.

Giving a staff member with expertise in disability inclusion the time and responsibility to support persons with disabilities and those around them made it significantly easier for persons involved in the programme to take steps to include persons with disabilities. This experience was even better when the staff member had lived experience with disability as well.

“When they [the Disability Inclusion Facilitators] visit a workplace, their suggestions and their feedback and their opinions are actually much helpful when we have to make the workplaces disability inclusive. Because they can relate from their experience.” [BRAC HQ staff member]

Understand the people you are aiming to include

Inclusion has always been within the remit of BRAC, and in all their programmes they aim to target 10% persons with disabilities. However, BRAC staff indicated that earlier they had been unsure of whom that 10% were supposed to be. Who is a person with a disability? When is someone disabled, or not, and what support do we need to give them?

“When it comes to calling someone a person with a disability, and someone who is a person with a disability... these are two different things. We have seen instances where someone using glasses is targeted as a person with a disability. This is due to lack of knowledge.” [BRAC HQ staff member]

Over the past two years, as they have been working with an increased number of learners with disabilities and involving the expertise of disability organisations, BRAC staff have increasingly gained an understanding of the people that they are trying to include and what is needed to support them.

“It is quite impressive that [BRAC] are not just doing the easy-to-reach stuff. [...] They do not shy away, they are not just taking on the easy-to-reach tick-box.” [Light for the World staff member]

This also means increasing the organisation's understanding of what a learner can and cannot do and matching their (potential) skills and abilities with the right placement. Taking up learners with disabilities who are not suitable for apprenticeship training, simply because they fall into your target group, can also lead to frustration as the placement does not work: this demotivates both the learner and the (potential) employer.

Role modelling can demonstrate capacity that might otherwise not be seen by an organisation, thus contributing to a change in mindset

In this programme, a conscious choice was made that all hired Disability Inclusion Facilitators were persons with disabilities themselves; these persons with disabilities became part of the BRAC team. BRAC staff gave multiple examples of being sceptical of people with disabilities being able to work, particularly about being able to work at an organization like BRAC. Being confronted with new colleagues with disabilities was uncomfortable at first, but helped changed their minds once they realized that the disability did not impact their new colleagues' ability to do their work.

“[They] were not that much aware of disability when I joined. They accepted me very cordially but were confused about my performance. They were not sure about how I'll do my activities including field visits, how I go through the stairs etc. The Programme Organizer- PO checked different activities how I'm working. He supported me very much, sent me to different shops and followed me whether I could perform. Now his understanding changed and is very happy with me. He shared me the positivity by saying. And asks my assistance for different works now.” [Disability Inclusion Facilitator]

“I worked with [a blind colleague]. [...] He can do everything that we do! [...] He read all the documents and knows more than us. So at that time, I realised that it does not matter if you can see or cannot see. So this realization came when we started working with persons with disabilities.” [BRAC HQ staff member]

“When people started working on a large scale with people with disabilities. They had this stigma, this fear before. Like persons with disabilities might not be suitable for all kinds of work. But now they have been working with so many persons with disabilities for a long time, I feel they now have overcome their fears to some extent.” [BRAC HQ staff member]

Positive role models can therefore play an important role in demonstrating what being an inclusive organization could look like. Having people with disabilities on staff was an opportunity for the organisation to see what needs to be done to become more accessible to persons with disabilities.

“I feel it would be easy for a person with disabilities to work with BRAC in future. Because our staff, people in work location has seen our work and meet [our colleague with disabilities]. That gave them positive understanding.” [BRAC field staff member]

Governance

The domain of governance discusses whether the organisation’s strategy, leadership and policy are inclusive of persons with disabilities. Learnings in the governance domain are noted in this section.

Invest in ownership over the process

Ensuring sustainable changes within the organization requires all parties to be committed and own the process. Although the involvement of Light for the World provided BRAC with expertise on disability, the pitfall of this was that it was easy to shift the responsibility for the work related to disability to the expert organization. Initially, for example, DIFs were viewed by BRAC as Light for the World staff members. This posed problems as it implied that disability inclusion was the responsibility of Light for the World, rather than both organizations. The danger of this is that once the expert partner leaves, the non-expert partner could feel that they are unable to continue the process towards becoming more inclusive. This could be mitigated by ensuring that all partners are invested in the process equally.

Involve the right people

At all levels, it proved important to think about which persons would need to be included at each step and to ensure that they were involved and committed to the process. For example, respondents indicated that sometimes it was difficult to make decisions and implement action points because the wrong department or individuals had been present at meetings and other decision-making events.

“Our observation is that if we could have the people from those sectors in the DISC assessment [...], that would be more fruitful because now the participants who joined, they had to share that with the respective people and [those] who have joined, they all are not actually involved in the decision-making process or the activities directly implementing STAR model.” [Light for the World staff member]

On the other hand, when the right people – those that are the decision-makers and advocates - were involved and committed, the process went much more smoothly. For example, during the selection of master crafts persons to train learners with disabilities, MCPs were chosen who would be more likely to be supportive towards learners with disabilities, ensuring a positive experience for the new learners with disabilities.

Programme Management Practices

This section notes learnings on the domain of programme management practices: the area that covers how persons with disabilities are being included as programme beneficiaries within a development organization.

Set a target that drives people

Almost all respondents indicated that having a target to work towards was a crucial element to motivate them to work on inclusion.

“Many people [...] just deliver the project deliverables. If there is a target, they do it. [...] If we don’t have this target, then usually people don’t work with people with disabilities. Because it brings additional challenges for them.” [BRAC HQ staff member]

Programme managers prioritize their work based on what they are expected to deliver. Setting targets provides a driver for them to take steps towards inclusion and clarifies what goals they are working towards. As one staff member noted, without clear goals they were torn between whether the expectation towards them was to reach as many people as possible or to reach a certain type of people.

Take the time and space to purposefully look for participants with disabilities

Currently, the SDP team finds potential learners or other programme beneficiaries through door-to-door visits. Within this programme, staff intentionally looked out for young persons with disabilities that they could include in the programme. This was done through the household visits, but also by contacting organisations for persons with disabilities, Upazila Social Service offices and other organisations that have experience with disability. The team found that this requires extra effort on the part of the field team and that it was therefore useful to be given the time and space to make this extra effort to find suitable potential learners with disabilities.

Provide persons who are expected to work with and actively include persons with disabilities with extra orientation and support

Although being inclusive of persons with disabilities is important for everyone, within a programme there are often some individuals who are expected to work more closely with persons with disabilities. In this programme, for example, that included the trainers of the technical trainings, and the master crafts persons who had agreed to take on an apprentice with disabilities. Over the past two years, these persons were provided with additional training to ensure that they had the tools necessary to support and guide the learners with disabilities that they were expected to train. Respondents agreed that this was one of the activities that they viewed as valuable and aimed to continue in the future, as it helped MCPs to understand what disability is and changed their mindset on how to address their (potential) apprentices.

“Sessions are conducted on techniques to improve inclusivity [...]. The main objective is to equip MCPs with the most appropriate tools and communication methods for interacting with learners with disabilities. It includes details on potential additional support needs, considerations during training, and introduces MCPs to the additional challenges learners could face in the workplace.” [DID Task Order 12 Annual Report July 2021 – June 2022]

Be flexible in criteria and requirements

Another learning was that it was helpful to be flexible in criteria and requirements where necessary. Some changes are easy to make but can make a big difference to the individual with disabilities placed for training. For example, giving learners with disabilities extra time to learn was mentioned by several to be a simple but extremely helpful adaptation. Another adaptation in the criteria mentioned was the age limitations, as learners with disabilities generally start school at a later age than children without disabilities would.

“Time is a very important thing to consider. Generally, non-disabled learner works for 8 hours, but we flexible the time for disabled learners [who need it] and lessen the time (during job placement). The system is disability friendly.” [BRAC field staff member]

“If we [are flexible with] the system for them, it will be helpful to include them more. For example be flexible with the age limitations, or with the specific distance criteria to select learners. If we are flexible with the limitations it helps.” [BRAC field staff member]

Human Resources

For an organization to be inclusive, it also needs to be accessible to individuals with disabilities to join the organization as staff members. This domain covers whether the policies and practices of the organization enable persons with disabilities to work within the organization.

Consider reasonable accommodation provisions for staff members

One important learning is that it is crucial to be able to provide reasonable accommodation to (potential) staff members with disabilities. Reasonable accommodation is a modification or adjustment to the job or work environment which enables an employee with disabilities to perform the essential functions of the job. Reasonable accommodation, in many instances, can be very simple and low-cost, and only require being flexible enough to adapt the status quo.

“Signing in the office register was difficult for me and need assistance to pinpoint the row in the register, and they help me to do that.” [Disability Inclusion Facilitator]

Other accommodations may require more costs, which were not provided for in the past few years. This sometimes made it difficult for staff with disabilities to perform their work duties on the same basis as their other colleagues. For example, taking public transport alone was difficult for some staff with disabilities. Solutions to counter this could have been to budget for personal assistants or support them to take alternative transportation. Another effective measure could also have been to reconsider whether all travel movements are necessary and to reduce travel where possible.

“They [staff members with disabilities] always have to use the public transport, and the public transports are not accessible. So there is a high risk, and we are not able to ensure their reasonable accommodation. Sometimes they need some assistive devices [...] or

personal assistance. We don't have any budget or something like that." [Light for the World staff member]

Provide new staff with orientation on disability at onboarding

One topic that regularly came up was the advice to provide new staff with information on disability and inclusion when they join the BRAC team. Current Disability Inclusion Facilitators, who were persons with disabilities themselves, mentioned that their colleagues at BRAC were sometimes confused about the role of the DIF within the organization, and about how a person with disabilities was capable of working there.

"An orientation for their staff is necessary on attitude and how to communicate with persons with disabilities in their induction and regular trainings; e.g. the instruction while introducing any place, they could have this in their induction and mandatory for all staff etc... If they have this in their regular training or policies, there will be no need of thinking disability inclusion separately." [Disability Inclusion Facilitator]

"I think not all branches have the same facilities like my branch and may face the attitude at the beginning like me. That might demotivate other persons with disabilities to work. So, I think if there is a system from BRAC for orientation with the staff during the start of work and as regular basis to orient people in meetings will be helpful." [Disability Inclusion Facilitator]

Attitudes and misunderstands about disability are often one of the biggest barriers to inclusion. Orientation would be a good tool, according to respondents, to create a common understanding of what values the organization has, basic information on how to interact and communicate with persons with disabilities, and knowledge on how persons with disabilities are included in BRAC programmes.

"Now safeguarding and inclusion is being mainstreamed in [the orientation programme]. Like: your project participants may be learners with disabilities, and how to deal with certain [...] people, how to interact with them." [BRAC HQ staff member]

Financial Resources

Working inclusively becomes easier if there are financial resources assigned towards inclusion by the organization. This section discusses lessons learned about financing for inclusion.

Budget for flexibility

Every person's needs are different, and issues come up as the programme is running and programme managers are learning. Respondents indicated that when it comes to finances, it is not necessarily about having to budget more, but it is about being able to adapt and use the budget as seen as necessary. The current programme, for example, had predominantly budgeted for assistive devices. This meant the staff was only allowed to spend money on assistive devices

but realized in some situations it would have been more useful to have a budget for medical assessments, medication, adaptations in the workshop or alternative venues.

“I think there should be separate budgets in programs for ensuring overall accessibility, not only for devices. Sometimes it is difficult to arrange an accessible venue for the lack of budget provision.” [BRAC field staff member]

Budget for assistive devices

“Assistive devices are extremely important. These people [learners with disabilities], they are extremely poor and have very little educational attainment. Some have no educational background at all. Most never even went to a doctor. They never got checked. Having a budget allocated in the project beforehand allows us to take the participants to a medical practitioner with a little support: a looking glass, a hearing aid, a supportive chair or an electric sewing machine to enable a person to work. We have provided more than 150 assistive devices in this phase. So this is extremely important.” [BRAC HQ staff member]

Having the ability to provide assistive devices to learners and staff with disabilities, if they need any, proved paramount. Respondents indicated that without assistive devices, learners with disabilities “sometimes can’t join the training⁴” or “might not be able to receive the training properly if those devices are not given⁵”. Having a budget and the network available to provide adequate and appropriate assistive devices, including the assessment of what an appropriate device would be by a professional, greatly improves the ability of persons with disabilities to participate at an equal level as their peers.

Budget time and resources for sensitization

One of the big challenges to being able to include persons with disabilities within mainstream programmes and organisations is the mindset that people with disabilities are not able to work or learn. Changing society’s understanding of disability is a long process. One of the things that worked well in this programme was that enough time and resources were budgeted to spend time talking to the people involved in the programme and convincing them of the capabilities of persons with disabilities. This could be in the form of organizing meetings with stakeholders or community members, but also simply staff being able to take the time to talk to parents of learners with disabilities to take away any concerns they may have.

“At the beginning, families, communities and persons with disabilities as well didn’t take it positively to send them to the [apprenticeship] training. We shared the positive result

⁴ BRAC field staff member

⁵ BRAC HQ staff member

of previous learners to encourage the families. We also had to visit their home.” [BRAC field staff member]

“The biggest challenge is to set them in a shop for training. Because not the all MCPs are interested to train them as other people bully not only the learner with disabilities but also the MCPs. To overcome this, we organize orientation with the MCPs, share information, show video clips etc. to change their mindset. We do the same thing also in the market committee meeting for awareness-raising.” [BRAC field staff member]

“We did the Behavioral Change Communication (BCC) campaigns [...] and I like that much and it has a good effect on people. At before the families were hesitated to bring their disabled family members in public, now they realize that persons with disabilities shouldn’t be hid[den].” [BRAC field staff member]

Budget and plan for transport

One of the challenges for both staff members and learners with disabilities to take part in the work and training was the transportation to the location of training or work. As one of the Disability Inclusion Facilitators said, “many of us are facing challenges during transport and arranging that focusing on our [needs].” This may be because public transport is not (easily) accessible to them, or because the high cost of (public) transportation is not adequately covered by the (often) lower salary that persons with disabilities receive.

“So actually when they [the Disability Inclusion Facilitators with visual impairment] are frequently moving from MCP to learners soft-skills classes, to their home locations. They are moving there alone and they have to use public transport. Yeah, because of that transport cost and the salary, what we are providing then is very minimum considering the country’s situation. So they always have to use public transport and public transport is not accessible.” [Light for the World staff member]

Transport was also a concern often mentioned as a reason why persons with disabilities would not be able to take up a job within BRAC, as staff members move around a lot, particularly if they are responsible for a large region. For example, “one person actually oversees at least five to six districts. But if some person have some sort of disabilities, their movement might be a concern to accomplish their task.”⁶ Respondents indicated that this could be solved by providing adequate financial support for transport, either to take private transport or to take a personal assistant with them where transport is inaccessible. Another more budget-friendly solution could be to look at where movements could be reduced, and being flexible in which travel is necessary: is

⁶ BRAC HQ staff member

there a shorter route that someone could take, or could they attend certain meetings online to avoid travel?

Accessibility

Accessibility is about more than whether the office location is wheelchair-friendly. This domain also covers all learnings regarding access – both physical access as well as communication and information access.

Consider where accessibility adaptations could be made: what can be done

As many respondents pointed out, the physical accessibility of BRAC offices and training locations was still a barrier to many persons with disabilities. Over the years, BRAC has been making choices towards more accessibility: “the new branch offices we are building at this moment, those are disability-inclusive.”⁷ Many BRAC locations are still old office buildings or rental spaces. However, changing what is possible, and considering the needs of persons with many different types of access needs, is important. A workplace accessibility checklist, with information on the correct measurements for adaptations (such as ramps), is helpful in deciding what changes can still be made in the office buildings.

“We are making our infrastructure, both at headquarters and branch office, accessible to people with physical.. or any kind of.. disability. The strategy was finalized this year, but not a lot has been done. Small steps have been taken.” [BRAC HQ staff member]

Adapting modules made for a better learning experience for all learners

As part of the Skills Training for Advancing Resources programme, learners are expected to follow technical trainings in the subject which they are studying. In the past two years, the BRAC SDP team adapted several of the training modules to make them a more accessible and easily understood learning experience. Changes included changing the font and contrast in the text and adding more images. Plans also include making audio versions of the training modules. The adapted modules were well received by the learners and were also considered to be beneficial to learners without disabilities.

“Inclusive modules are mostly pictorial. And pictorial modules are also useful for non-literate people.” [BRAC HQ staff member]

“We have changed the font, and we have added some features. We have changed... make changes some in the contrast. So these are some changes that wasn't there in the STAR model before. So I think going forward [...] we will change the rest of our modules of STAR.” [BRAC HQ staff member]

⁷ BRAC HQ staff member

External Relations

The domain of external relations covers topics such as whether persons with disabilities are represented in external communications and fundraising, and whether organizations work together with organizations representing persons with disabilities.

Partner with organizations of persons with disabilities (OPDs) to identify potential learners and staff members with disabilities

“So firstly, when we got the target of engaging persons with disabilities, our program organizer started looking for them by their own, but they were being confused of distinguishing the different disability type and they were also become unconfident of which persons with disabilities can get the training and in which trade they should be fitting. So those were various confusions in the first stage. So after that, when we signed an agreement with the OPD members and we started counselling with them and taking their help. [...] Their lists [of persons with disabilities] were very much helpful for the entire program. [...] Also family members need to be convinced, [...] and for these cases, the OPD members were really helpful.” [BRAC HQ staff member]

“Working with OPDs, having that network within community level, has helped us to identify who are in the community with disability.” [BRAC HQ staff member]

Working together with persons with disabilities and their organizations proved beneficial in the programme to find and identify potential learners and staff members with disabilities. BRAC’s programme organizer sometimes didn’t know where to find or approach persons with disabilities, and what to look for during the selection process. OPD members were able to help them through their wide network, and their knowledge of where young people with disabilities lived that might benefit from participating in an apprenticeship programme. The involvement of the Disability Inclusion Facilitators, who all had lived experience with disability, helped in building relationships with organizations for persons with disabilities, as well as acting as a bridge between BRAC and the disability community.

Conclusion

Over the past decades, BRAC has been working hard to ensure that young men and women in Bangladesh can access vocational training, employment and increased income through the Skills Development Program (SDP). But to achieve their commitment towards inclusion, and to contribute to the national achievement of the Sustainable Development Goals, persons with disabilities needed to be included. To gain learning on how to ensure that persons with disabilities can partake in the programmes developed by BRAC, the organisation partnered with Light for the World in a concerted effort to include young people with disabilities in an apprenticeship programme. In this partnership, Light for the World supported BRAC, through the use of the Disability Inclusion Score Card, in deciding which actions to pursue to promote further inclusion of people with disabilities. In addition, Disability Inclusion Facilitators, individuals with lived experience of disability, were placed within the organization and played a key role in advising and advocating within BRAC. The two-year Disability Inclusive Development programme offered the partners the opportunity to pioneer and learn with regards to what does and doesn't work in becoming an organisation that is accessible to persons with disabilities. And much has changed along the way!

“Previously we understand that the inclusive infrastructure is the only thing. If we do that our facilities will be disability inclusive, but it is not like that. Our mentality, our perception, the way we behave.... Everything needs to be inclusive. Inclusion is a holistic or 360-degree approach. So this understanding I learned from the DID project.” [BRAC HQ staff member]

“For the higher management here in head office level, I can say their mindset has been changed.” [BRAC HQ staff member]

“So what we see now is that people are much concerned now and they have that eagerness to learn or what can work better or what cannot work better and how to make their projects more inclusive.” [BRAC HQ staff member]

BRAC has always been focused on including the most marginalized individuals, including people with disabilities. But working in the DID programme, with the specific aim of understanding how inclusion could work, proved beneficial to build dedicated learnings on what could be done to become more accessible. Becoming more inclusive is a long-term goal, and not one easily achieved in a short-term project. But this programme has demonstrated that focused effort on inclusion does have an impact; it develops learnings and makes actions easier to repeat. Taking targeted time to learn more about inclusion and to take steps towards becoming more inclusive for persons with disabilities, does make a difference.

