

Staff Reporter

Sightsavers Bangladesh has launched a petition calling for the UN and the Bangladesh government to meet the needs of people with disabilities, the worst affected victims of the COVID-19 pandemic.

It's part of Sightsavers' Equal World campaign seeking to amplify voices of people with disabilities and highlight the rights and dignity that they deserve, the organisation said in a statement on Monday.

Campaigners say the lives of people with disabilities are being put at greater risk due to insufficient action from governments around the world during the pandemic.

"They ... require positive recognition and ... assistance from our government and development organisations. They are human too and their lives matter as well," said Amrita Rejina Rozario, Country Director of Sightsavers Bangladesh.

People with disabilities are reporting discriminations such as not getting priority in receiving health care; not having vital information in accessible formats; difficulties in securing essential personal support and various obstacles for women and girls seeking sexual and reproductive health rights.

'For the most vulnerable'

"COVID-19 has exacerbated discrimination and exposed existing inequalities for people with disabilities," said Ayon Debnath, Advocacy Lead at Sightsavers Bangladesh.

People with disabilities are facing livelihood crisis in a scale never seen before and are not also getting equal treatment in accessing existing government safety-net programmes, he said, noting that during disaster like this pandemic, people with disabilities are the hardest hit and the least supported.

"The disability rights movement is in a strong position to influence the UN right now. Its new Disability Rights framework could ensure the needs of people with disabilities are recognised and met across the entire UN system, including within its emergency health responses," said Natasha Kennedy, Campaign Manager of Equal World from Sightsavers in a statement.

Equal World campaign urges the UN and member states to step-up their efforts to make this happen. This cannot be put on the backburner. "We are in an international crisis and there are up to 1 billion people with disabilities who are trying to survive without the recognition or support they need," Sightsavers said.

Equal World will collect petition signatures until July 15. To sign the Equal World petition visit www.sightsavers.org/equalworld