



# Pandemic Portraits

Capturing experiences of people with disabilities in Bangladesh and Liberia during COVID-19

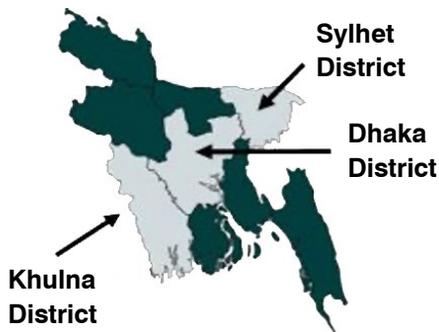


# Introduction

COVID-19 has changed the world as we know it. However, the pandemic has significantly affected the lives of people with disabilities with many facing additional barriers in access to services, increased isolation and increased risks of poor health and social outcomes. Understanding the impact of COVID-19 on people with disability from their own perspective is essential to strengthening pandemic responses now and in the future.

This study took place in Bangladesh and Liberia, where 14% and 16% of the population are thought to live with disabilities respectively.<sup>1-2</sup> However, there is a lack of data on the needs and experiences of this population group. To date (03/08/21), there have been 1,296,093 confirmed cases of COVID-19 in Bangladesh, with 5,459 confirmed cases in Liberia.<sup>3</sup>

## Study Sites



People with disabilities are often excluded from being actively involved in research. This project aimed to prioritise the views of people with disabilities and caregivers to document their own lived experiences of COVID-19. We used photovoice as a creative participatory method whereby experiences and perspectives are presented through photographs taken directly by co-researchers within their communities. We refer to people with physical and psychosocial disabilities, as well as caregivers as co-researchers because they are participants with lived experiences, who conducted data collection and analysis as they directly shared their stories and captured their experiences of living through COVID-19 in this project. Photographs were shared remotely via WhatsApp with the research teams and followed up with conversations on their context.

Through highlighting challenges and experiences of people with disabilities who are often marginalised from research, we hope to add to an evidence base to inform inclusive responses to pandemics.

1. International Labour Organisation (ILO). 2020. Disability inclusion in the Bangladesh skills system [Online]. Available from: [https://www.ilo.org/wcmsp5/groups/public/---asia/---ro-bangkok/---ilo-dhaka/documents/publication/wcms\\_543298.pdf](https://www.ilo.org/wcmsp5/groups/public/---asia/---ro-bangkok/---ilo-dhaka/documents/publication/wcms_543298.pdf)
2. Liberia Institute of Statistics and Geo-Information Services (LISGIS). (2017). 2017 Population and Housing Census: Final Results. Monrovia.
3. WHO Coronavirus (COVID-19) Dashboard. [Online]. Available from: <https://covid19.who.int/>





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**Meet our  
Liberian  
Co-Researchers**

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I am Heylove R. Mark Sr. and I am a young man and I work with the National Union of Organizations of the Disabled (NUOD) as Treasurer.

I am a student of the African Methodist Episcopal University. I am single with one son. I live in Montserrado County.



Francis C. Sibley is my name. I am 32 years old and I work with the Liberia Election Observation Network. I am visually impaired. I am single and a university graduate.



My name is Boakai A. Nyehn, Jr. a young physically challenged male. I am a college student reading Public Administration Major. I am married, and I am also a social worker. I'm so happy to share my stories.



My name is Jochebad Morweh.  
I am a 26 year old person with  
disability and a college student. I  
am single with one child and I live  
in Monrovia, Liberia.



I am Benjamin Ballah. I am 40 years  
of age and married to Klubo Jackson-  
Ballah, we have three children. I work with  
Cultivation for User Hope which is under  
the Carter Center. I am a psychologically  
disabled person. I live at Paynesville.



My name is Sadiatu Kamara, I am 26  
years of age and a disabled female  
and senior student at the AME Zion  
University reading Accountancy. I have  
developed a great passion in working  
with the disabled community and this  
project. I am so happy sharing my  
stories in this booklet.



My name is Rose Dargbe, I'm 31 years old and physically challenged. I'm not married and have one beautiful daughter. I work with the National Commission on Disabilities as a disabilities focal person and also a focal person for a newly established political party in Liberia. I am a senior student at the Stella Marie Polytechnic, and I am happy sharing my stories.



I am Susan K.C.Nyehn, a 29 year old Liberian. I'm married to Mr. Boakai A. Nyehn, Jr. and we have 3 beautiful children. I am a caregiver. Life is challenging during this Covid-19 period as it relates to the level of discrimination many people with disabilities encounter.



My name is Eric Solomon Biawogee. I am 46 years old. I am married with 4 beautiful children and I am a caregiver to my best friend who is physically disabled.



My name is David Hne Wallace. I am 68 years old, a father of 10 children and several grandchildren. I live at Matadi with my wife and children. I am a disabled which was caused by a car accident.



My Name is Patience Duonnah, a visually impaired female whose work with the National Commission on Disabilities as a Receptionist. I am 29 years of age, I am married with 2 beautiful children. I am happy to share my stories with you.

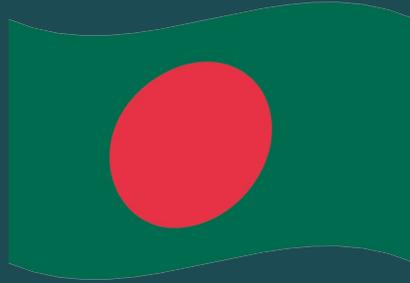


My name is Jonathan Corlon. I am 23 years old. I am a caregiver to my relative with disabilities. I am a college student attending the University of Liberia.



My name is Janet M. Kai. I am 30 years old. I am a service caregiver for persons with disabilities. I am single with three children, and these children are by a disabled fellow. I live in Montserrado County.





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**Meet our  
Bangladeshi  
Co-Researchers**

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My name is Ashraful Alam, I am a 32 year old man and I am physically disabled. I am a graduate and unmarried. I work as a garment worker and I live in Dhaka.



I am Marjana Binte Forhad. I am 22 years old and I am physically disabled. I am a BSc student and I live in Faridpur.



I am Ataur Islam, a 40 year old man and I am physically disabled. I live in Narayanganj. I am married and I work as a primary school teacher.



I am Delowar Hossain and I am 26 years old. I completed my primary education. I am married and I work as a shopkeeper. I live in Khulna.



My name is Halima Akter, I am 24 years old and physically disabled. I am single and a graduate. I live in Dhaka.



I am Shomoy Chowdhury and I am 31 years old. I am physically disabled. I am single, I completed my primary education and I now work as a businessman. I live in Dhaka.



I am Sonia Akter. I am 25 years old and I am a mother. I take care of my daughter who is 1 year and 7 months old and she has cerebral palsy.



My name is Fatema Rahman Sumi, I am 32 years old and I am a caregiver of Munni, my sister in law who has a psychosocial disability.



My name is Mehedi Hasan Bokul. I am a 30 year old man and I take care of my 16 year old brother who is speech and hearing impaired.



I am Bisshojit, a 22 year old male who is a caregiver to my older sister who has multiple disabilities.



I am Nasrin Begum and I am a 35 year old mother. I take care of my 20 year old son who is disabled.



I am Bithi Akter, I am 30 years old and I take care of my 5 year old son who has cerebral palsy.



I am Israt Jahan Isha, and 18 years old. I take care of my big sister Marjana who is physically disabled.



My name is Saddam Hossian, I am a 25 year old man with physically disabilities. I am single and currently unemployed. I live in Manikganj.



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# Impact on Livelihoods and Opportunity

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Livelihoods were disrupted significantly due to COVID-19 across both settings. Many participants expressed that they could no longer work; this included businesses being shut, no longer being able to tutor and unable to work on farms and loss of livestock. COVID-19 was described as posing an additional barrier to opportunities for both participants in Bangladesh and Liberia; a metaphor of a closed door to opportunities was used to express obstructions to education and careers. Participants expressed their distress at no longer being able to support their families; a mother described how she is no longer able to afford medicine for her son with cerebral palsy.

Food insecurity was experienced widely across participants, due to loss of income in already fragile contexts. Many often relied and depended on friends and relatives for support. Lower middle-income families in Bangladesh were also described as experiencing financial crises that they felt unable to share with others. Financial hardships also meant that many faced barriers in implementing hygiene measures as hand sanitisers and buckets were expensive and not accessible or affordable for all.



I have dreamt of touching the sky since my childhood. But due to my disability that dream did not come true. After a few years, I started dreaming again. The COVID-19 pandemic stands as an obstacle to making my dreams come true. **Now I am just waiting to see when the pandemic will end...**when the night will end... when I will be able to take a deep breath in the morning, and walk on the path of dreams.

**Marjana Binte Forhad, 22 year old female, Faridpur, Bangladesh**

**The door of opportunities before me...this was held back from me because of COVID-19.** My job, my school, and many other things which I should have achieved were all stalled and crumbled down.

**Heylove R. Mark, Sr. young male, Liberia**





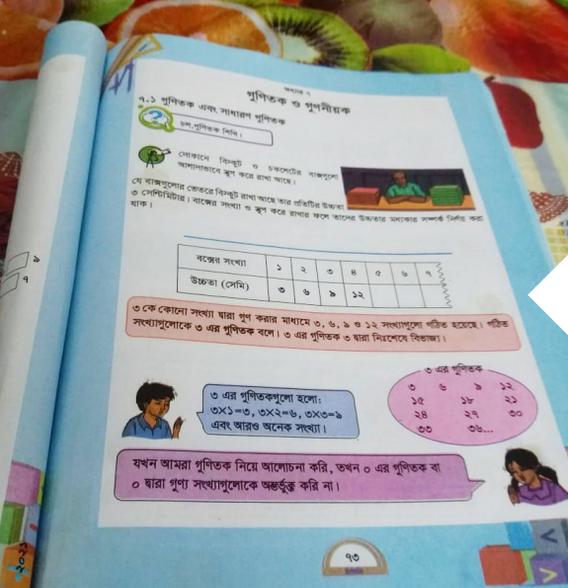
One day during the lockdown, we had only a half cup of rice left in the bag for meal. Imagine a disabled person that could navigate when there was free movement. **Life becomes very difficult for people with disabilities during natural disasters or pandemics.** The fact remains, many persons with disabilities cannot do very hard labour work to earn money that will keep them and their families going. I am a million times grateful to my good neighbour who provided me 10 cups of rice that kept my family and I for a period of time.

**Boakai Nyehn, young male, Monrovia, Liberia**

Prior to the outbreak of the corona virus in the country, Liberia, I was able to support my family from small scale farming. However, during lockdown, **the farm was completely destroyed, depriving my family of the much needed means of the livelihood.**

**David Hne Wallace, older male, Liberia**





I taught students Mathematics for many years. It helped me to earn money. Students have not been able to come to my tuition since the lockdown. As a result, my income decreases. Now I miss them and want to get back to them.

**Halima Akter, 24 year old female, Dhaka, Bangladesh**

This image shows a barbershop that is owned by a person with disabilities who cuts hair for a living. When the COVID-19 outbreak started, it was passed by the government that all barbershops should be closed.

**Jonathon Corlon, younger male, Monrovia, Liberia**





We have been in a financial crisis since last year due to the COVID-19 epidemic. Living in a lower middle income family, we cannot share our problems with others. **We have faced trouble to afford my son's regular medicine for his special needs.** I joined as a Nursing Officer in Dhaka Medical College at last year but still I did not get any salary from there. Now I cannot go to work due to the lockdown.

**Bithi Akter, 30 year old female, caregiver of son with cerebral palsy, Bangladesh**



During the COVID-19, the price of the hands washing buckets and sanitizers sold were very expensive and I could not afford to get them.

**Patience Duanah, 36 year old female, Monrovia, Liberia**

This is my sister's kitchen. **But coronavirus has destroyed us. Often now nothing is cooked on this stove.** My father doesn't get work like before. I am a student. So we cannot take good care of her now.

**Bisshojit, 22 year old male, caregiver of sister with psychosocial disabilities, Bangladesh**



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# Inaccessibility: Mobility and Communication

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Inaccessibility was mentioned in terms of both communication and mobility.

Participants in Liberia mentioned how masks can often isolate the deaf community as it is impossible to lip read or see facial expressions. Barriers to accessing public health information was also highlighted as many health messages were broadcast on radios and tv, without any interpreters.

Mobility challenges were captured across Bangladesh and Liberia; wheelchair users are unable to access roads during the rainy seasons, or access banks. Many participants highlighted how inaccessibility creates further distance and disparities between communities. Shomoy, living in Dhaka city described how a wheelchair ramp in front of his house through the help of his parents, has enabled him to move independently. In contrast, Saddam living in the village described lack of disabled friendly washrooms and therefore having to rely on his mother for bathing. Halima reflected on whether lockdown made her family consider how she felt locked in her room due to her disability.



**During the lockdown, the wearing of masks makes it difficult for people who are deaf to get needed information or communicate freely.**

It is very difficult for a person with hearing impairment to be able to read someone's lips or know what their expressions are when using masks.

**Rose Dargbe, younger female, Liberia**

The image of water that disconnects two communities. Coronavirus pandemic vs disability and hardship: We are already challenged with mobility problems. **The COVID-19 pandemic has added more problems to our existing problem which is mobility.** The water disconnects two communities making it inaccessible for persons with disabilities.

**David Wallace, older male, Liberia**





Health information was a serious problem for deaf persons during the COVID-19 because they had no one to interpret to them.

**Patience Duannah, 36 year old female, Liberia**

When it rains, this road is flooded and this makes it inaccessible for the wheelchair users like me. This street is waterlogged due to an hour's long rain. For this reason, I cannot go outside in the rainy season.

**Shomoy Chowdhury Shobuj, 31 year old male, Dhaka, Bangladesh**





The locked door has been very familiar to me since my accident as the surrounding areas in my house are inaccessible to me. But my family were also imprisoned in a locked room during the nationwide lockdown. It was a very difficult time for everyone. They felt very upset and uncomfortable. **I just wondered if they could realise how I have been spending time in a locked room due to my disability.** It was also a hard time as I was dependent on them, I felt I was burdening them more as they were stressed about their loss of work.

**Halima Akter, 24 year old female, Dhaka, Bangladesh**

This ATM booth is near to my house. When this booth was developed, I suggested that they should keep a wheelchair ramp for the disabled persons. But they didn't and now we cannot go inside the bank to withdraw money.

**Shomoy Chowdhury Shobuj, 31 year old male, Dhaka, Bangladesh**





As I have no disabled friendly washroom in my house, I always take the support from my mother for bathing. **I live in a poor income family and you know that there are no special opportunities for us in village.** So this is a daily scenario for me.

**Saddam Hossian, 25 year old male,  
Manikganj, Bangladesh**



What does the distance look like? Long or short?  
The distance seems too much to me even though this distance is short for my other family members. **It takes a long time to cross the verandah in my condition.**

**Ataur Islam, 40 year old male, Narayanganj, Bangladesh**



There was no wheelchair ramp in front of our house while we rented the house. But my parents requested to our house owner to develop a wheelchair ramp for me. **Now I can move around without anyone's help.**

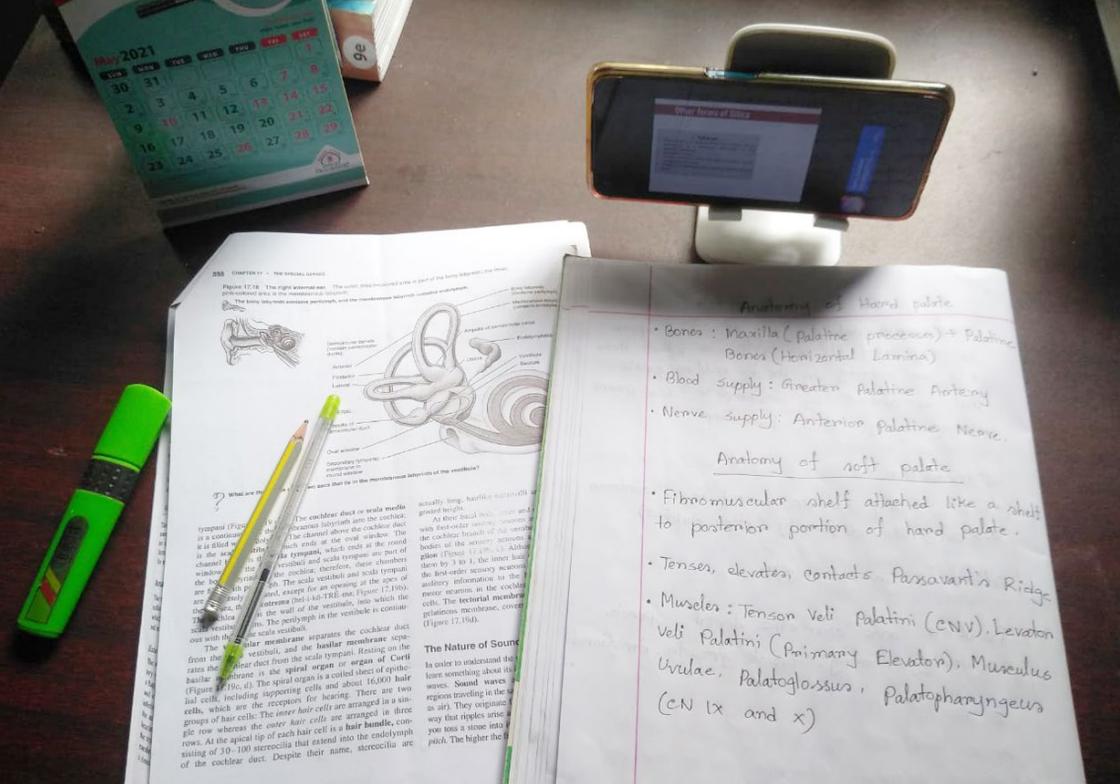
**Shomoy Chowdhury Shobuj,  
31 year old male, Dhaka,  
Bangladesh**

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# Adaptability: Technology and Education

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Many younger participants in Liberia and Bangladesh illustrated how technology, such as Zoom and online platforms help them to adapt, through online learning and working from home. Halima in Bangladesh mentioned how learning free courses online helps pass her time and reduce stress. However, Marjana described difficulties in online learning, and missing face to face contact with teachers. Benjamin described how he was able to represent Liberia at a global mental health advocacy event through Zoom as it had moved online whereas he had travelled to Kenya the year before.



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Figure 17.18 The right ear canal. The outer ear (pinna) leads to the part of the bony labyrinth in the cochlea called the cochlear duct. The cochlear duct is the middle ear cavity.



What are the three parts of the cochlear duct? The cochlear duct or scala media is a fluid-filled space within the cochlea. It is bounded by the stria vascularis, the spiral organ, and the spiral ganglion. The spiral organ is the organ of Corti, which sits on the basilar membrane. The stria vascularis is the outer wall of the cochlear duct, and the spiral ganglion is the inner wall. The cochlear duct is the middle ear cavity. The cochlear duct is the middle ear cavity. The cochlear duct is the middle ear cavity.

**The Nature of Sound**  
In order to understand the least something about the way that sound waves travel in the air, they originated in a way that makes sense to you. You see a stone into a patch. The higher the...

Anatomy of Hard palate

- Bones : Maxilla (Palatine process) + Palatine Bones (Horizontal Lamina)
- Blood Supply : Greater Palatine Artery
- Nerve Supply : Anterior Palatine Nerve.

Anatomy of soft palate

- Fibromuscular shelf attached like a shelf to posterior portion of hard palate.
- Tenses, deviates, contacts Passavant's Ridge
- Muscles : Tensor Veli Palatini (CNV), Levator Veli Palatini (Primary Elevator), Musculus Uvulae, Palatoglossus, Palatopharyngeus (CN IX and X)

Online classes started at the April last year. After looking at the mobile or laptop screen for one and a half to two hours, can students keep full concentration on the online classes? I cannot do this. In the offline classes, we took part in the class in front of the teachers. By looking student's faces, the teachers could also see whether students have understood the work but in online classes, this is not possible.

**Marjana Binte Forhad, 22 year old female, Faridpur, Bangladesh**

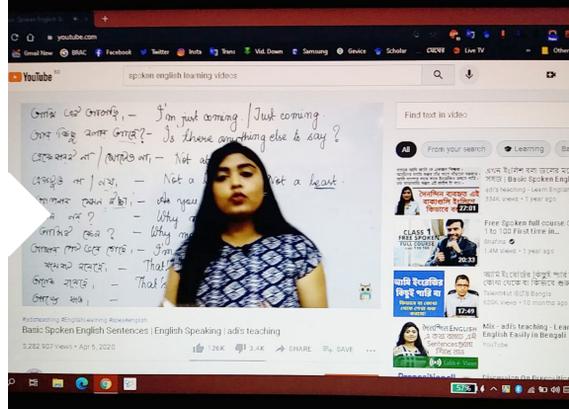
After the outbreak of COVID-19 pandemic in Bangladesh, initially I spent the days in a lot of frustration and despair. I was feeling bored then I had decided to learn a lot of digital skills. It was a great time to learn free courses uploaded on YouTube.

**Currently, I am trying to learn speaking English. This is a better way of passing the lockdown time... Even it helps to reduce mental health stress.**

**Halima Akter, 24 year old female, Dhaka, Bangladesh**

The lockdown has made a very good use of technology since people were observing social distancing and working from home.

**Rose Dargbe, younger female, Liberia**



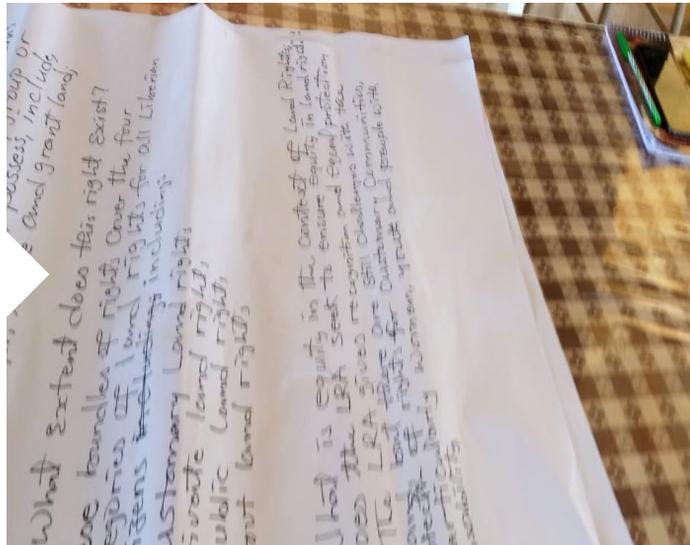


At about this time last year before the COVID-19 outbreak, we travelled to Kenya for the Speak Your Mind Global Annual Planning meeting. Due to COVID-19, we had to do this meeting via Zoom.

**Benjamin Ballah, 40 year old male, Liberia**

This photo reminds me of how I was home doing my studies as we were observing social distancing during the heat of the COVID-19.

**Sadiatu Kamara, 29 year old female, Liberia**



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# Barriers to Healthcare

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Barriers to accessing healthcare emerged across Liberia and Bangladesh. With increased pressure on healthcare systems due to COVID-19, access to healthcare for persons with disabilities are often not prioritised, especially considering accessibility and affordability.

Rosie mentioned how lockdown created challenges for people with disabilities in accessing appropriate treatment and assistive equipment.

Fear of contracting COVID-19 in hospitals or travelling on public transport resulted in many participants not attending health facilities or services. Lockdown and financial difficulties also prevented participants from accessing treatment on time; Delowar in Bangladesh explained having to resort to treatment from a government hospital and expressed his concerns of contracting COVID-19 while admitted.



The lockdown has come with diverse challenges for persons with disabilities, ranging from getting medical treatments and some essential supplies.

**Rose Dargba, younger female, Liberia**

I had a brain stroke during the lockdown for coronavirus disease. I did not get proper treatment after my stroke during the initial phase of COVID-19. I passed a very bad time then. I could not go to the hospital immediately due to the lockdown and also due to my financial crisis. Due to my financial instability, I received the treatment from a government hospital. But there was no practice of hygiene maintenance to avoid corona in the hospital...

**Delowar Hossain, 26 year old male, Khulna, Bangladesh**





Sometimes I am forced to become bed bound. I have been spending the whole days in bed for the last 3 days due to severe pain in my legs.

**I do not even go to the doctor for the fear of coronavirus spreading from the hospital.**

**Ataur Islam, 40 year old male,  
Narayanganj, Bangladesh**

Due to the lockdown, I was not able to take my son for treatment as early as possible. The road is blocked... there is a strict restrictions on public movement. Since last year, we are facing this challenge. I cannot take him anywhere for treatment...

**Bithi Akter, 30 year old female,  
caregiver of son with cerebral palsy,  
Bangladesh**





Centre for the Rehabilitation of the Paralysed\* (CRP) provided me with this push-up stand. Using this I can practice a few therapies. After losing all hope, we came to the CRP and could finally see the light path, I made progress and made friends, it felt good to share my experiences with other people like me. We feel that CRP is part of our blood now. But in this pandemic, I cannot go to the CRP for taking my treatment because I am afraid if I will be infected with corona during the use of public transport and travelling.

**Saddam Hossian,**  
**25 year old male,**  
**Manikganj, Bangladesh**

*\*Centre for the Rehabilitation of the Paralysed (CRP) is a non-government organisation of Bangladesh which provides medical treatment, rehabilitation and support services to the persons with disabilities.*

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# Stigma

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Stigma was often deeply felt and experienced by participants, including caregivers. Francis in Liberia uses a blue wall to illustrate his emotions and describes the discrimination faced by many people with disabilities and how this has made it difficult to get support from their own relatives and the community. This emphasised their exclusion from pandemic responses within the community as a result of this. Many participants described feeling helpless and highlighted how structural and social barriers often result in many people with disabilities having to be dependent on others to survive. Halima in Bangladesh described how she faced discrimination from others in the community as they believed wheelchairs would increase the risk of infection. This experience of external stigma resulted in Halima withdrawing from society and isolating herself, leading to feelings of sadness and internalised stigma. Mothers in Bangladesh described facing stigma as caregivers to their sons with cerebral palsy, expressing how they are often blamed for their child's disability. Sonia describes how despite this impacting her mental health negatively, she continues for the happiness of her son. Anticipated stigma was illustrated by participants and caregivers, depicting being reluctant to go outside or events to due to fear of being discriminated or looked at differently within the community.



This image and the blue wall defines the numerous challenges and obstacles and barriers that we were faced with, during corona. With disability being a ground for discrimination in most communities in Liberia, the photo explains how getting hand-outs from community dwellers and immediate family members was difficult. **The picture signals how helpless COVID-19 made me, compared to my regular mobility before the outbreak of coronavirus...breaking through to earn a living seemed very impossible.**

**Francis C. Sibley, younger male, Liberia**



**Sometimes I feel depressed about my son's uncertain future.** I have to do a lot of work the whole day...I have to spend more time to take care of my baby compared to his peers without disabilities. Sometimes it hurts me a lot...then I feel upset. Even some relatives and neighbours said that “my second child will also be disabled...there is a chance for this...” Even my in-laws family do not like me. There is ongoing a separation between me and my husband after my son's birth. They think that I am responsible for my son's disability.

**Bithi Akter, 30 year old female, caregiver of son with cerebral palsy, Bangladesh**

When the sun does not rise in the sky, darkness descends on the earth. In the same way, if we do not support our sister, darkness will come down in her life. She often feels embarrassed to go any family programs or invitations. So my mother or I also can't participate any program as we stay with her to take care of her.

**Israt Jahan Isha, 18 year old female, caregiver of sister with physical disability, Bangladesh**



We rely on wheelchairs. During the initial phase of COVID-19, we used to face negative comments from the general people about using wheelchairs. Some people thought that wheelchairs could increase the risk of spreading the infection. They advised me to stay out of their contact to stop the spread of the infection. **When I heard this, I felt very sad and considered myself harmful to mankind. At that time, my coping strategy was to ignore and avoid mixing with people.**

**Halima Akter, 24 year old female, Dhaka, Bangladesh**



I do not like to go out...In our society, no one likes a disabled child. **I feel like that they look at my son with different eyes. I do not like this.**

**Bithi Akter, 30 year old female, caregiver of son with cerebral palsy, Bangladesh**



It is beautiful to see flowers in a tree. If the flowers are torn off, its beauty is ruined – like how **people’s suffering cannot be understood from the outside**. How difficult it is for a mother to raise a disabled child. **No one understands this pain except a mother. I have to listen to bad and negative comments from other people about my child.** The community say “my baby is disabled because of my fault” I have to face many questions about my child. Why does the baby look like different? This impacts on my mental health and wellbeing. But only for keeping the smile on my baby’s face, I work tirelessly to overcome all the obstacles.

**Sonia Akter, 25 year old female, caregiver of son with cerebral palsy, Bangladesh**

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# Independence and Overcoming Assumptions

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Many participants expressed how they are often underestimated by their families in being able to independently complete tasks, such as cooking and helping with chores. Lockdown and time at home resulted in many participants showing their relatives that they could prepare food; Asharful in Bangladesh reflected on how helping grind spices made him appreciate the work mothers and wives do in providing food for their families. Overcoming assumptions and the barriers of both gender and disability by health professionals was also highlighted by Marjana as she explained an incident when she took her dad to the hospital where the staff assumed she was the patient; her father explained that disabled girls are not burdens to their parents and can also be successful with support.



During lockdown period, I am bored and isolated from others. That's why I try to cook some food for my family. I said to my mother I want to fry some eggs. Though my mother told me not to do this in case the hot oil falls on my legs. But I said **what's wrong with trying**. I fried the eggs and also boiled milk to pass my time and for refreshment.

**Shomoy Chowdhury Shobuj, 31 year old male, Dhaka, Bangladesh**



**Cooking is another secret talent of my sister but we did not realize it before the lockdown.** When all markets including sweets shops were shut down due to the lockdown I wanted to eat milk sweets. Then my sister made this delicious milk sweet after watching a dessert making video on YouTube. Now when we want to eat sweets we make them ourselves. The sweet taste is very good.

**Israt Jahan Isha, 18 year old female, caregiver of sister with physical disability, Bangladesh**





My father had a mild stroke and I took him to the hospital for his treatment. There was crowd around the ticket counter at the hospital and it was so tough for us to maintain social distance. **Seeing the elbow crutch in my hand everyone thought that I was the patient. No one could have imagined that a disabled girl could take her sick father to hospital. And the interesting thing was the doctor thought that my father had a brain stroke because he was worried about me.**

At one point he asked me why I don't get married. **My father replied that not all disabled girls are burdens for their father. And if we support the disabled child like other children, they too will be successful in their life.** They will also be able to take the responsibility of their parents.

**Marjana Binte Forhad, 22 year old female, Faridpur, Bangladesh**

Due to the COVID-19 outbreak, we are not allowing our cleaner to come to our house. **Munni likes to do some household chores even though we tell her not to do anything.**

**Fatema Rahman Sumi, 32 year old female, caregiver of sister in law with psychosocial disability**



I am grinding the spices during this lockdown which is a new experience for me. **Before doing this, I thought that I cannot do it but everyone can do anything if they try. It helps me realise the kind of tough jobs wives and mothers regularly do to prepare food for us.**

**Ashrafal Alam, 32 year old male, Dhaka, Bangladesh**

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# Restrictions, Responsibility and Fear

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As new variants and cases rise, the fear of contracting COVID-19 was commonly expressed. The enforced lockdowns and restrictions in Liberia and Bangladesh often also led to state violence from authorities. One participant in Liberia experienced violence from the police while enforcing curfews. Fatima expressed her fears as her sister-in-law with learning disabilities refused to wear a mask as she doesn't understand COVID-19 precautions. Many participants voiced feeling trapped in lockdown; Aatur in Bangladesh used the analogy of feeling like a captive bird. Fears and vaccine hesitancy was also stated by a participant in Liberia who had concerns on the efficacy of vaccines and believed that his faith will protect him. Caregivers conveyed their sense of responsibility, as siblings and mothers who hope for independent futures for their relatives.



I am clustered in a box with my liberty being ceased. The joined security forces are deployed all over watching for someone who to violate the restrictions so that they are arrested and punished. **The hunger has developed a wave of anger inside of me and I am praying to break loose and be free. COVID-19, please go away because disabled people are suffering.**

**Janet M. Kai, 30 year old female, caregiver, Liberia**

**Whenever it was curfew time during the lock down, the police will come into the communities and beat anyone they meet sitting outside or in front of their homes to make them go inside.** This day they came and while running to get inside, as a person with disabilities, this was what happened.

**Patience Duanah, 36 year old female, Liberia**



The cry of persons with disabilities has become a regular sound in the ears of the government. **The new variant of COVID-19 is high on the increase like Mount Wuteve in Liberia and is causing misfortune in the community of disabilities.** Can Article 11 of the United National Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities save their community, with the different colours of masks that are hiding the identities of people?

**Heylove R. Mark Sr., younger male,  
Monrovia, Liberia**

I did not force my sister-in-law to stay home today because she was stubborn to go out. I gave her a mask and told her to wear it before going to outside. But she went outside without wearing it. We are always worried about her health condition which can worsen during this pandemic. **She doesn't understand any precautions of COVID-19. So we worry at any time she will be infected with coronavirus. This is also risky for my little sons and elderly father and mother-in-law.**

**Fatema Rahman Sumi, 32 year old female,  
caregiver of sister in law with  
psychosocial disability**



**Many people work together in garments, I was very scared that day.** But I really needed the job. We wear personal protective equipment (PPE) and in order to reduce the crowd of workers at canteen, the lunch hour has been split into two specific times. I always go to the garment factory by driving myself using my motorized wheelchair. The bus is inaccessible for a disabled person. This is a big challenge for me and I am not satisfied with this job. But for my livelihood, I am doing it. I always feel like that I did not get any job according to my standards.

**Ashrafal Alam, 32 year old male,  
Dhaka, Bangladesh**



**Though face masks may help prevent the spread of COVID-19, sometimes it is so difficult to use face masks and eye glasses together.** Because sometimes inhaled steam dulls the glasses and makes it difficult to see and control the wheelchair.

**Halima Akter, 24 year old female,  
Dhaka, Bangladesh**

There are many peoples in our society who are forced to confine themselves within the four walls. All of them have a desire to fly in the open sky like a free bird. **Let the life of every disabled person's be like an open bird.**

**Due to my disability and COVID-19 lockdown, my life has been locked like the captive birds.** Birds always try to break the cage and go towards nature but in reality the situation is in the opposite position.

**Ataur Islam, 40 year old male,  
Narayanganj, Bangladesh**





He is my younger brother. **No one can understand that he has speech and hearing impairments by looking at him.** He always tries to help other people. Sometimes he has many demands which we can't meet due to our lower income. **He was born in my mother's womb so he is my blood and Allah has created him...what problem is it if he is disabled? He is my brother. I was with him...I am with him...and I will be with him in future.**

**Mehedi Hasan Bokul, 30 year old male, caregiver of brother with speech and hearing impairment**



I want live and see the fruits of my labour. I want to live in a world where I can see my children grow up in a peaceful and happy environment and they are free to move about.

**I want to live in a place where I am not forced to take a vaccine before I am can move from one community to another. I cannot take a vaccine that does not guarantee my safety in the heat of the COVID pandemic. I believe my religion is all I have to keep safe.**

**Heylove R. Mark Sr, younger male, Liberia**

**Everything seems to be stalled in this pandemic like this closed tea stall.** I have been studying in the same class for 2 years. When will I complete my Higher Secondary examination? **When will I be able to take the responsibility of my family?**

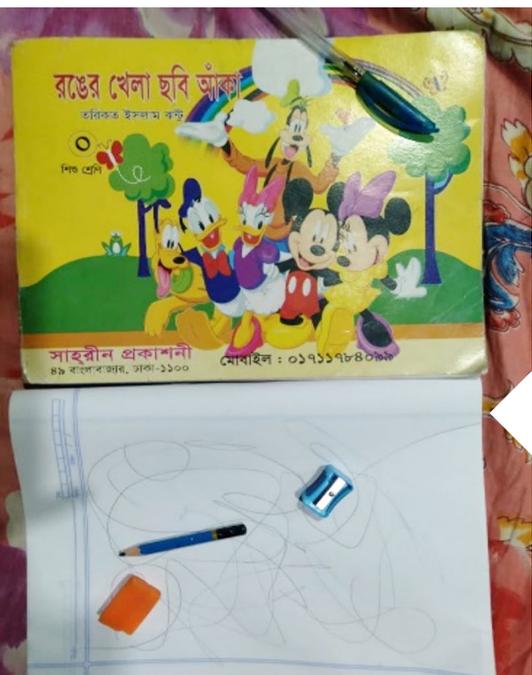
**Bisshojit, 22 year old male, caregiver of sister with learning disabilities, Bangladesh**





Munni wants to get married. She often tells us that she wants to get married... she wants to do bridal make up. **We feel that she does not have a clear idea about what marriage is.** But she says 'I will get married like my sister-in-laws'. I am her elder sister-in-law. I have taken care of her for around 8/9 years. However, we don't want to let her get married to someone. She cannot understand anything properly...how will she take care of a family? Is it possible? We do not want to ruin her life.

**Fatema Rahman Sumi, 32 year old female, caregiver of sister in law with psychosocial disability, Bangladesh**



Kids of my son's age can study, but my son lags behind everyone else due to his illness. We are trying to teach him. **Despite having illness, we want to see him be able to do his own work in the future. We don't want him to have to depend on other people.**

**Bithi Akter, 30 year old female, caregiver of son with cerebral palsy, Bangladesh**

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# Social Connection

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Participants expressed that lockdown enabled them to spend more quality time together with friends and family, which led to strengthening relationships. However, while many participants seem happy about the additional social connection that COVID-19 has brought with family members, they also feel a sense of loss and social connection from peers and friends. This is particularly emphasised for some participants with communication difficulties as friends and support group services seem to understand them. Loneliness was felt by many, with many support services being halted which had a negative impact on mental wellbeing.

This photo remind me of the COVID 19 outbreak in Liberia, **how we were not moving around, and because of that we had much more time to share fun and ideas.**

**Jochebah Morweh, 26 year old male, Liberia**



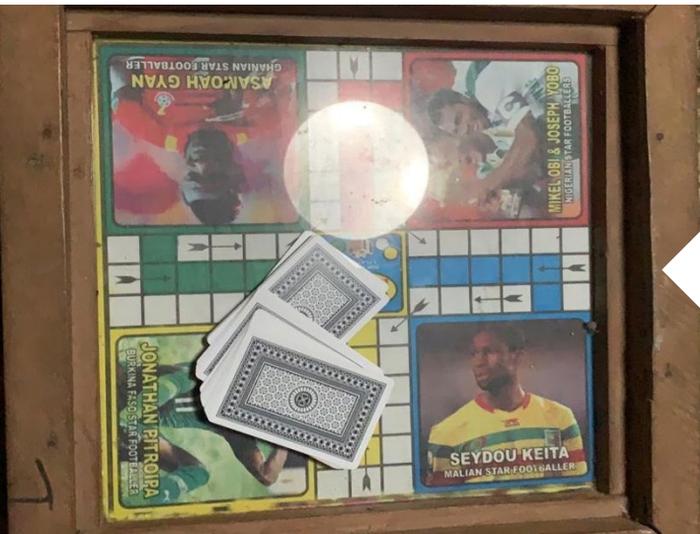
My father is my hero. He is a heart disease patient. Before the outbreak of COVID-19, I lived in a hostel and I could not return home for 6 months. All the time I was worried about my father. I called him to give him reminders to take his medicine on time. **Now, I am home because of lockdown, I can give medicine to my father on time and I get the chance to take care of him again.**

**Marjana Binte Forhad, 22 year old female, Faridpur, Bangladesh**



Since I cannot go out and meet my peer groups because of lockdown, now I am passing my free time playing ludo with my family members.

**Saddam Hossian, 25 year old male, Manikganj, Bangladesh**



This was how we entertained ourselves as a family in order to keep the day going during the lockdown.

**Patience Duonah, 36 year old female, Liberia**



**This pandemic situation gives me the opportunity to things I love. I love to bake.** I can also give more time to my family and also have fun with my children. My sister-in-law also loves my cakes. As I am a working woman, I am usually always so busy.

**Fatema Rahman Sumi, 32 year old female, caregiver of sister in law with psychosocial disability**

I've never received any strong family support in my life. I never saw them realise or understand my situation. Although my family never stopped me from doing anything, they also never encouraged me to do something. As they are busy to earn their livelihood, they can't give me time let alone to other family members. **But due to COVID-19 pandemic, I now get some time from them as they are also at home now.**

**Halima Akter, 24 year old female, Dhaka, Bangladesh**





This is a picture of playing basketball in the afternoon. We are homebound in this COVID-19 period. So I try to spend good time with my family. **If there was no lockdown, we would have been busy and I could not spend quality time with my sister. I am happy to see the smile on her face.**

**Israt Jahan Isha, 18 year old female, caregiver of sister with physical disability, Bangladesh**

**I spent some time with my friends who live close to me during the lockdown so that we can keep our mental health well.** I have not seen my friends for a long time, we cannot meet with each other regularly. So I told them please come to my place one day... Many of them did not agree to come here because they thought that the community people may take it negatively. I said there is no problem, please come by following all the precautions of COVID-19. We arranged biriyani like a picnic...and it refreshed our minds.

**Shomoy Chowdhury Shobuj, 31 year old male, Dhaka, Bangladesh**





Photography is my hobby. Since I run a small shop I don't have that much free time to take pictures. **During the COVID-19 lockdown, I get enough time to take photos of nature. Sometimes I can't capture many pictures due to my disability.** It is very difficult to take photos without standing.

**Delowar Hossain, 26 year old male, Khulna, Bangladesh**



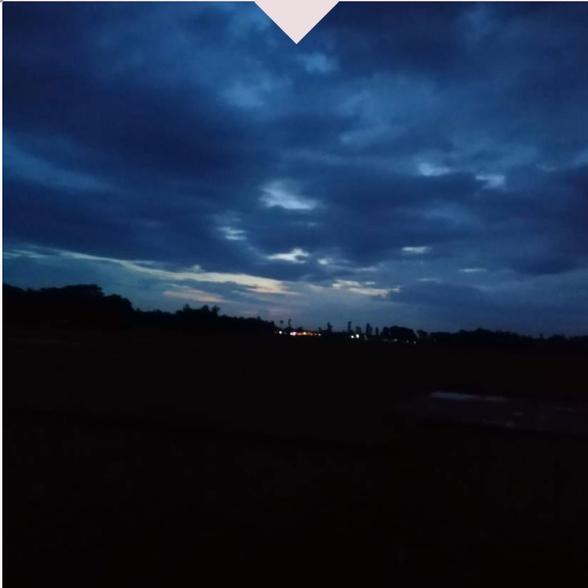
We are experiencing loneliness during the current coronavirus pandemic. Now we cannot meet with relatives, neighbours or friends to talk about our feelings. **Though we are now having a good time with family members, but we are missing our unlocked life. Now we have to rely on technology to communicate with others.**

**Israt Jahan Isha, 18 year old female, caregiver of sister with physical disability, Bangladesh**

**After class, I would have lunch together with my friends and gossip during the afternoon tea break. Now none of this happens.**

We do not communicate with each other through online properly which creates a gap in our friendship. However, I cannot forget those lost days. So I spend some time looking at the sky and remembering those days during the twilight.

**Marjana Binte Forhad, 22 year old female, Faridpur, Bangladesh**





During the lockdown, all doors were closed unto me because I was not able to get to my families and friends who are my sources of encouragement.

**Sadiatu Kamara, 26 year old female,  
Monrovia, Liberia**

Experiencing loneliness during this time makes me believe the danger attached to COVID-19 as I remain in the chair sitting in one place for hours during the crisis.

**Boakai A. Nyehn Jr. younger male,  
Monrovia, Liberia**

You see he uses the mobile phone by using his legs. **In this COVID-19 lockdown, he cannot meet with his friends that's why he is trying to call them. He has many friends in the CRP, they are also disabled persons. Though he cannot speak properly but his friends understand his language.**

**Nasrin Begum, 35 year old female, caregiver of son with physical disability, Bangladesh**





This is a photo of people living in recovery from mental health conditions. These people are in Bong County they have group themselves to farm as you can see in the photo. This is helpful for their recovery management. Due to the COVID-19 these people were not able to do this.

**Benjamin Ballah, 40 year old male, Liberia**

My home district is Narail. I love to play cricket because it helps us to keep our body and mind well. **I wanted to develop a cricket organization for the disabled persons we can use in our district but it did not happen due to the COVID-19 pandemic.**

**Delowar Hossain, 26 year old male, Khulna, Bangladesh**



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# Support and the Role of Organisations

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The important role of organisations of persons with disabilities was highlighted throughout the data. Many participants mentioned relying on support from organisations, where participants networked and developed skills. For example, Cultivation for User's Hope, an organisation supporting persons living with mental illnesses as well as the World Food program provided food and stimulus packages in Liberia. However, there were barriers in accessing social protection for participants in Bangladesh, particularly those living in rural areas. Caregivers also illustrated the support they provide for their relatives, particularly in the absence of available services. These were perceived as particularly important to support mental wellbeing.

**This is the intervention by Cultivation for User's Hope (CFUH\*) during the heat of COVID-19 giving hope to persons with mental health conditions in the West point community, Montserrado County.**

**Benjamin Ballah,  
40 year old male,  
Monrovia, Liberia**

*\*CFUH is a Liberian organisation established and run by mental health service users, supporting persons living with mental illnesses at all levels through advocacy, capacity building, empowerment, awareness and stigma reduction.*



The lockdown made the Liberian government use the World Food Program to give stimulus packages to several organization to help persons living with disabilities in Montserrado. This photo shows the food they distributed.

**Sadiatu Kamara, 29 year old female, Liberia**



I am trying to give him different types of therapies like speech and language therapy, occupational therapy, and physical therapy. I am seeing that now he is improving a lot. He can eat his own food with a spoon in his hand. He can also wear his own shoes now.

**Bithi Akter, 30 year old female, caregiver of son with cerebral palsy, Bangladesh**





We did not get any financial aid or food aid from the government.

**We have heard that the government is providing food assistance to the poor during the coronavirus but we have not got this yet.**

**Bisshojit, 22 year old male, caregiver of sister with learning disabilities, Bangladesh**

We organized this discussion for the persons with disabilities. **We discussed how we can protect ourselves from COVID-19 and how we should stand for every disabled person in this pandemic.**

**Shomoy Chowdhury Shobuj, 31 year old male, Dhaka, Bangladesh**





SHOT ON MI 5X  
MI DUAL CAMERA

My sister in law goes through menstrual cycle in each month. But she doesn't tell us about this issue. I have requested her many times to use menstrual pads but she refuses to use it because she doesn't feel comfortable to use them. She uses old clothes during her period which was unhygienic for her health. Recently, I have found this sanitary pads on a Facebook page which is made of soft cloth. Now she has started to utilize this.

**Fatema Rahman Sumi, 32 year old female, caregiver of sister in law with psychosocial disability**

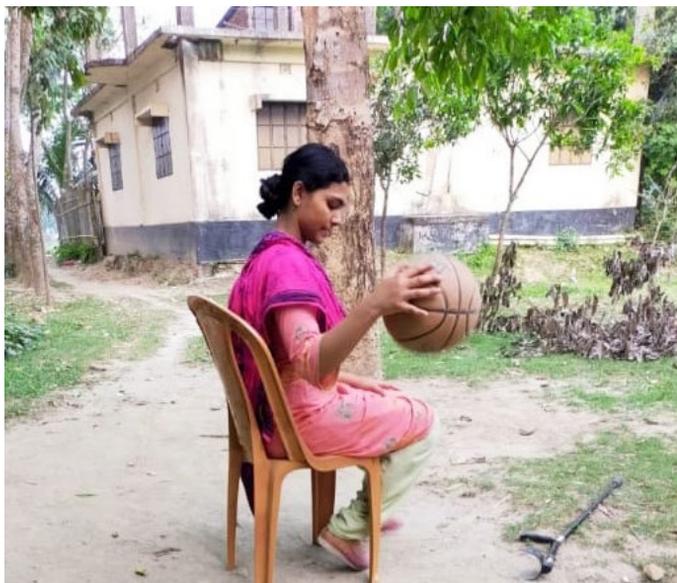
Bittu is one of my best friends. I cannot go outside like before that's why I spent most of the time with my pet cat during this corona pandemic. **I feel very happy when I spend time with Bittu. It reduces my mental stress a lot.**

**Shomoy Chowdhury Shobuj, 31 year old male, Dhaka, Bangladesh**



After her illness, my sister became mentally weak and depressed but now she can think like an independent girl. The first picture was when my sister started playing basketball in 2016. The second picture is when she is practicing at home during the lockdown. We always support her and give her courage to do everything so that she does not feel inferior due to her disability. **I am playing with her so she can continue her practice in lockdown because I wanted her to understand that we are always with you no matter what the situation is.**

**Israt Jahan Isha, 18 year old female, caregiver of sister with physical disability, Bangladesh**



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# Loss and Faith

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Many participants experienced grief and bereavement of their loved ones during COVID-19; participants described the loss of their friends and grandparents during the pandemic, particularly emphasising the loss of many of their disabled friends. However, faith was often mentioned as a source of strength and peace. Participants in Bangladesh and Liberia expressed their sadness at not being able to attend their places of worship. Some participants also relied on their faith to protect them from COVID-19, through prayers and worship.



Ambulance shows the issues which always brings tears to my eyes when I think of the day my close disabled friend was taken to the hospital during the COVID-19 and unfortunately, he couldn't make it.

**Eric Solomon Biawogee, 46 year old male, caregiver, Liberia**

One of our neighbours died a few days ago and this was a mourning meeting for him. I joined this meeting and we prayed to Allah for him. He was a person with disability and died of coronavirus. In our area, we have a strong connection with all the disabled people. We try to help each other in any crisis moment. Always we discuss about our problems with each other. **We get hurt when we see someone in crisis. He was our senior and he was a good hearted man. It hurts me a lot.**

**Shomoy Chowdhury Shobuj, 31 year old male, Dhaka, Bangladesh**





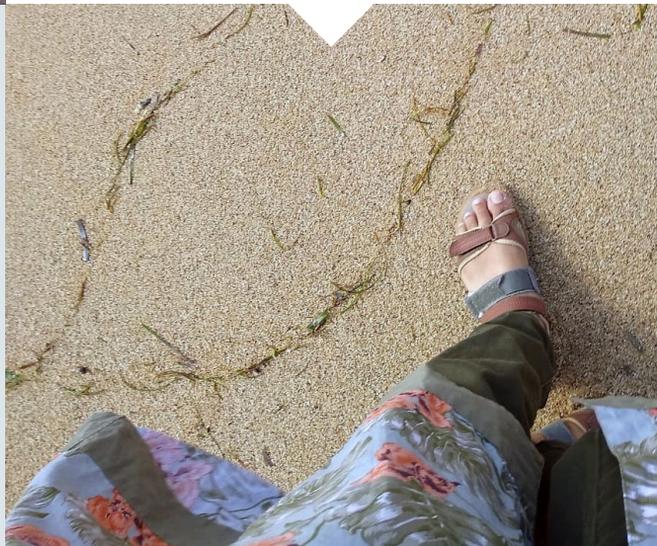
**Relying on Allah and without caring about COVID-19, I went to the Eid gathering for saying my Eid prayers with everyone.**

We all prayed to Allah so that we can save ourselves from COVID-19. This was a different experience for me.

**Ashraful Alam, 32 year old male, Dhaka, Bangladesh**

Grandparents are the ones who teach us to walk by holding our fingers after our parents. I lost my grandfathers in my childhood. But I got all his love from my grandmother. She was also my close friend. After the accident, I have to walk with the help of my elbow crutch. But when my grandmother was by my side, she would extend her hand. I lost her hand now. **Due to the COVID-19 pandemic, I have lost her hands. It's been almost one month, she was infected with coronavirus and left us forever.**

**Marjana Binte Forhad, 22 year old female, Faridpur, Bangladesh**





A tulsi tree is planted in front of our household. We believe that tulsi plant has sacred power. **The tulsi leaves also can reduce our illness such as cold, cough and asthma related diseases by its healing power so my mother and sister try to worship it every day.**

**Bisshojit, 22 year old male, caregiver of sister with learning disability, Bangladesh**

My daughter loves to see the rain. She wants to go to the window, when it rains. **I always pray that my daughter's illness will go away as rain water washes the nature.**

**Sonia Akter, 25 year old female, caregiver of daughter with cerebral palsy, Bangladesh**



**Despite my willingness, I have not been able to perform my daily five times prayers in Mosque since last 1 and half years due to the COVID-19 situation.** Even I cannot participate in Salat al-Jumu'ah as instead of the Zuhr prayer at Friday afternoon. That's why, I am trying to say my prayers at home.

**Ataur Islam, 40 year old male, Narayanganj, Bangladesh**





In the evening, my family members worship (*puja*) to God. My sister also participates in this regular worship despite her disability. It is our 'Sandhay Aarti' puja. We apologise to God and pray for keeping ourselves safe from the evil power. **Due to the coronavirus, we cannot go to the temple (Mandir) like before for maintaining social distance.**

**Bisshojit, 22 year old male, caregiver of sister with learning disability, Bangladesh**



**This indicates a place of hope.** When our lives were at stake from the pandemic, this is where I come to have a peace of mind.

**Rose Dagbe, younger female, Liberia**

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# Hope, Healing and Nature

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Participants in Liberia and Bangladesh described interaction with nature as positively impacting mental wellbeing. Nature, gardening and green spaces were portrayed as providing safe spaces for reflection, hope and peace of mind. However, Saddam in Bangladesh described how the pandemic has separated him from nature due to lockdown and therefore he can now only view photos on his phone. Fruit was also captured by participants who emphasized the importance of nutrition for strengthening immune systems to protect them from COVID-19. Plants and flowers were often used as metaphors for connection and growth if they are in supportive environments. For example, Rose in Liberia used the watering of flowers as an analogy for encouragement and support to be reconnected to society while Delawar and Ataur used plants as an example of people with disabilities being able to flourish and be established with the right support and opportunities in the environment.



Samsung Quad Camera  
Shot with my Galaxy A71



My time is not passing on this ongoing coronavirus pandemic. **I am feeling lonely all the time. So I plant a variety of trees in front of my house and I feel very happy when the flowers of papaya trees bloom.**

**Delowar Hossain, 26 year old male, Khulna, Bangladesh**

Looking at the beautiful weather through the window this morning shows a feeling of hope for life.

**Susan K. C. Nyehn, 29 year old female, caregiver of husband with physical disabilities, Liberia**

With the opportunities and cooperation, a disabled person can establish himself in this society by overcoming any obstacle. He needs a little help and support.

**Ataur Islam, 40 year old male,  
Narayanganj, Bangladesh**

This picture of these fresh flowers reminds me of connection and growth. Whatever life's situation is, once we are being watered by encouragement, we will still get reconnected.

**Rose Dargbe, younger female, Liberia**





As it is our duty to keep the base of the tree clean and give it a chance to grow. Similarly, **it is the responsibility for our society and family to support the disabled persons so that they can lead a better and healthier life.**

**Delwar Hossain, 26 year old male, Khulna, Bangladesh**

**In this pandemic, my family members and I have tried to eat various types of fruits because we all know that it helps to strengthen our immune system.** That's why, we are trying to eat native fruits with vitamin C. And I want to say everyone to eat more fruits and plant more trees in this corona pandemic.

**Saddam Hossian, 25 year old male, Manikganj, Bangladesh**



I like nature very much and a light air makes my mind feel better. But **this corona pandemic separates me also from the nature.** This tree is now locked in my phone, I have not gone there for a long time.

**Saddam Hossian, 25 year old male, Manikganj, Bangladesh**



Sometimes I go to many places to visit because it refreshes my mind. Today I went to a lake for spending some time with nature.

**Shomoy Chowdhury Shobuj, 31 year old male,  
Dhaka, Bangladesh**

The flowers bloom and will fall again...will the lockdown end at all? Nature draws me very close.

**I like being in nature a lot which reduces my depression, anxiety and stress. In my busy life, I didn't get time to spend with nature. So I am trying to get in touch with nature in this COVID-19 pandemic.**

**Marjana Binte Forhad, 22 year old female,  
Faridpur, Bangladesh**

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