

ENGLISH TRANSCRIPT OF FRONTIER DIALOGUES PODCAST EPISODE XX: MOHAMED MAZIN

This week on Frontier Dialogues - we have with us, Mohamed Mazin (Mazin) to speak about enabling and inclusive work places for persons with disabilities.

Mazin himself is blind and a tireless advocate for the rights of persons with disabilities. He is one of the founders of the Blind and Visually Impaired Society of the Maldives as well as the Wellness Association. He has served as a member of the National Disability Council as well as the Youth Council. He also represented the Maldives and won a Bronze medal from the 100-meter Paralympic category in the 2019 Indian Ocean Island Games.

Mohamed Mazin (MM), was interviewed for the podcast by Khady Hamid (KH). This episode is hosted in Dhivehi by Khady Hamid, our Head of Solutions Mapping.

KH: Assalam Alaikum Mazin.

MM: W'alaikum Assalam.

KH: How are you, Mazin?

MM: I am very good. How are you?

KH: I am also doing very well. Mazin, thank you so much for agreeing to take part in this episode of Frontier Dialogues. Shall we start with a quick introduction? It will be great if you could also highlight your own experiences in the labour market.

MM: Assalam Alaikum. My name is Mohamed Mazin. I was born in Male'. I am a person with a disability, I am totally blind. In 2010, I found an NGO called the Blind and Visually Impaired Society of Maldives, and was the president of that organization for nine years. Now I have also found another NGO called Wellness Association of the Maldives and currently the chairperson of that organization. In terms of employment, my first job was as a Communications Officer for Damas. While I was there, I got an opportunity from Public Service Media (PSM) - Dhivehi *Raajjeyge Adu* (Maldives Radio). I am still working there. In terms of other service contributions, I am very active in the disability sector. In February this year, I completed a five-year term on the National Disability Council, as a representative and advocate for persons with disabilities (PWDs) This April, I completed my term as a member of the National Youth Council, where I was also advocating on behalf of persons with disabilities. In addition to this also, I am very active in everything that happens in the disability sector. In terms of employment and livelihoods, I have been trying very hard to start my own business. Haven't been successful in doing that yet. But my hope is to start my own enterprising initiative, and become self-employed and self-sufficient.

KH: Mazin, you have noted that you yourself is a person with a disability. Could you speak about the challenges faced by persons with disabilities in the labour market as well as when trying to engage in other livelihood opportunities?

MM: We have also been advocating that even persons with disabilities can contribute to society. However, their contribution can be enabled only if we facilitate employment opportunities for them. Even persons without any disabilities struggle to find employment. So, you can imagine how challenging it would be for persons with disabilities to find employment. The reality is that it is very difficult for us to find employment opportunities. However, of recent, there has been some initiatives opening up about some two hundred job opportunities for persons with disabilities. However, I would like to note these opportunities were given out indiscriminately without any consideration for individual capacities and investing in training and development. For instance, when you give an opportunity or someone with autism to work in a pharmacy without proper training, that is a bit hard to accept. What we are advocating for is that – give us opportunities in areas that we are also interested in and invest in training for us as well.

KH: You have highlighted training as an important area to focus on when facilitating employment opportunities for persons with disabilities. Training is important for everyone. But could you speak a bit more on the considerations that has to be taken into account when thinking of employment training for persons with disabilities?

MM: This is very good question. Let's look at how this is done in other countries. What you see is that government institutions and private organization, they usually allocate a certain quota for persons with disabilities. For instance, let's say they will say that 3% of this company's workforce will constitute of persons with disabilities. In this regard, they may allocate some jobs, let's say the job of a call operator, for persons with disabilities, and they will first train interested persons with disabilities for that job. And then they will select the most competent and capable candidates for the job. Such a system will ensure that they are trained, and they also have opportunities to develop professionally and build a career. This is the system we would like to see in the Maldives too, as it will not only guarantee jobs for persons with disabilities, but also provide them an opportunity to excel in their jobs, build a career and thrive. Currently the system in the Maldives is rather ad-hoc – opportunities are announced, but there is not enough investment in training. So even those persons with disabilities that manage to secure these opportunities, they are not able to perform in their jobs and no prospects for professional development. This then leads to a lot of struggle, demotivation and then eventually they leave the job and stay at home. So, we need a more holistic system, where there is a quota system, investments in training and opportunities for persons with disabilities to enter into fields that they also have an interest in. If we enable such a system, through policy, then all of our challenges will be addressed.

KH: You have already highlighted some of the policies that are needed to create more enabling and inclusive work places for persons with disabilities. But in addition to that, what other policies do we need and also what are some of the things that individual employers can do to create more enabling work places for persons with disabilities?

MM: In my earlier response too, I have highlighted some of the policies needed. I want to highlight again the importance of quotas. For instance, the Civil Service Commission could have a quota for persons for disabilities, or there could be a policy that says that a certain percentage, let's say 1% of jobs within the government will be allocated for persons with disabilities. If we

can revise our legislations and policies to provide such allocation, this would make a huge difference. I am sure that if opportunities are facilitated for persons with disabilities, through such a holistic approach, I am sure they will work really hard and make huge contributions. I am not in any way looking down on persons without disabilities, but what I am saying is that if you give a person with a disability an opportunity that will work a lot harder to ensure that they are retained. So, what I am saying is that, change our legislations and policies to facilitate meaningful opportunities in a holistic manner – and I am sure persons with disabilities in the Maldives will not have to depend on the MVR 2000 disability allowance provided by the government. They will be able to thrive and make contributions to the country.

KH: What are some of the things that individual employers (either at an organizational or individual level) can do to create more enabling work places for persons with disabilities?

MM: It is very important for employers to encourage persons with disabilities. To let them know that these opportunities are there within the organization, and that once they have secured an opportunity, to show them the heights they could reach and to show them pathways. Many of us who are disabled, we remain at home. It is only a few who are out there and trying to do something. Most persons with disabilities, don't know what opportunities are available, and think that they would be able to make contributions and lack confidence. So, employers need to do more to create awareness about the opportunities available and also to show persons with disabilities), that their organization is also a place where persons with disabilities can thrive at and give the guarantee that the employer will create an enabling environment and also hold their hand and provide the needed assistance and support. Most of the time, these things are not communicated well. If these things are communicated well – a lot more persons with disabilities will be ready to engage in the employment.

KH: Mazin, is there anything else you would like to highlight before we conclude?

MM: Yes, I would like to very briefly highlight a few key points that I always highlight. My first message is to parents of persons with disabilities. My message to parents is that the first support for persons with disabilities need to come from parents. Parents need to tell their children that even they could do a lot, and contribute. The second message is to children/persons with disabilities. My message is that opportunities are there, even if limited. Opportunities will not come to you. You have to try hard to make use of the limited opportunities available. This is the only way that we could make a push for the expansion of the existing limited opportunities. So go out there, make use of the opportunities and show everyone what you can contribute.

KH: Mazin, thank you so much for time and what you have shared. You are an inspiration for not only persons for disabilities, but for all of us. So again, thank you!