

brattyajan

Marginalized and Excluded Communities of Bangladesh

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Editor: Philip Gain

Assistant Editors: Fahmida Afroze Nadia and Rabiullah

Layout: Borsha Chiran

Advisor: Dr. Hossain Zillur Rahman

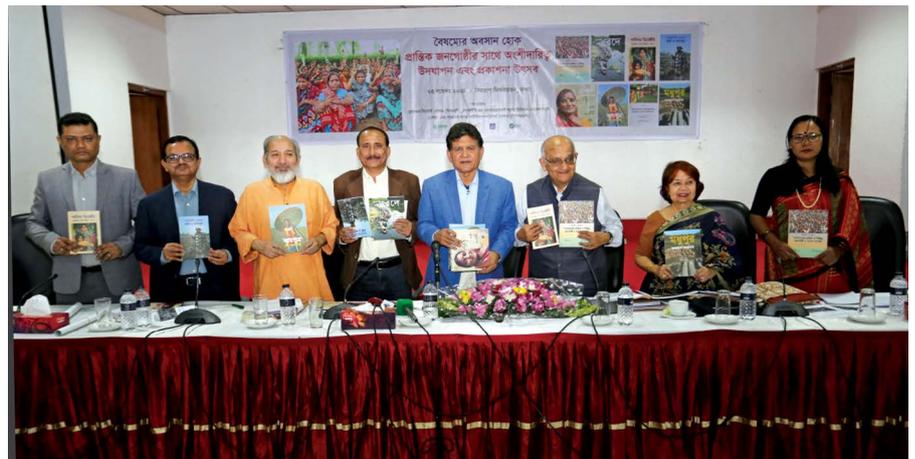
Published by

Society for Environment and Human Development (SEHD)

Green Valley, 147/1 (2nd floor), Flat No. 2A, Green Road, Dhaka-1215

T: +880-2-58153846, E: sehd@sehd.org
www.brattyajan.org & sehd.org

Discrimination Marginalized and Excluded Communities Face and their Reform Agenda



The dignitaries and community representatives are showing the books launched. Photo: Prosad Sarker.

Dedicated to Bangladesh's marginalized and excluded communities, a long-cherished national entity, Brattyajan Resource Centre (BRC), was officially launched on 28 May 2022. At the end of the three-year project phase, a final workshop celebrating solidarity and partnership with marginalized groups was organized on 23 November 2024 at CIRDP, Dhaka. Eight new publications were launched at the event piggybacked with discussion and an information fair on the marginalized communities of Bangladesh. The event was organized by Society

for Environment and Human Development (SEHD), BRC and Power and Participation Research Centre (PPRC).

A strong message aired at the event was that discrimination should end in all forms. At least 130 representatives from all ten beneficiary groups of BRC, human rights defenders, community-based organizations, civil society organizations, economists, trade union leaders, academia, and journalists joined the day-long event.

The organizers of the event welcomed the audience with a





(from left) Prof. Rehman Sobhan, Prof. Rounaq Jahan, Dr. Hossain Zillur Rahman, and Mr. Rambhajan Kairi.

message that communities with different vulnerabilities should not be seen as victims. They have many potentials, strengths, diverse cultures and languages.

In his welcome note, Prof. Zakir Hossain Raju, head of the department of Media and Communication, Independent University, Bangladesh, and Executive Committee member, SEHD shared his concerns over the exclusion of marginalized people at the policy-level discussions. “The presence of marginalized communities is not seen with apt attention in the policy-making sphere in Bangladesh,” said Prof. Raju. Quoting from Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak’s original essay ‘Can the Subaltern Speak?’ he observed that there is no place for the subalterns or the lower-class population to express their opinions.

With the change of the regime in August 2024, he expressed his wish to see a pluralistic society free from all discrimination. “We are hopeful of positive reforms. At the same time, we must also strengthen our partnership with these communities,” noted Prof. Raju.

In keynote address, Mr. Philip Gain, director of SEHD explained

the background of BRC, its goal and mission, and how the communities it is devoted to—Adivasis (ethnic communities), tea workers (include 80 ethnic communities), sex workers, transgender, Bede, Harijan, Rishi, Kaiputra, Jaladas and Bihari—are its bona fide beneficiaries.

“All citizens of the country are equal, and no one can be discriminated based on identity or occupation or anything. Such a desire has been in people’s minds for a long time, which was expressed through the July uprising,” noted Mr. Gain. “Now we have got an interim government. We expect that this government will make every effort to build a Bangladesh free from discrimination as far as possible. Hopefully, they will come up with the right roadmap.”

Mr. Gain discussed the findings of the books launched in this context. Considering those findings, he proposed some areas of reform—protection of the identity, language and culture of these communities; reform in wage structure; proper implementation and monitoring of labour legislation; reforms in the tea industry; equal opportunities and positive discrimination for select communities; ensuring social

security and justice; distribution of khas land among the landless marginalized and poor people; implementation of the peace accord in the CHT; implementation of international conventions and ending legal discrimination; and protection of the environment, forest and forest dwellers.

Special guest Prof. Rounaq Jahan, distinguished fellow, Centre for Policy Dialogue (CPD), gracefully shared her thoughts after listening to the community voices. Observations from communities astonished her. “If I did not come here, I would never know that amendments in legislation can be a matter of worry for some communities,” she noted.

Stressing the inclusion of community representatives to the reform commission, she said, “Now is the time to think about how to connect these communities with the interim government. Organizations like SEHD, PPRC, and CPD can play a leading role in this regard.”

She also stressed the importance of generating proper statistical data on these marginalized population and figuring out a way to best preserve the diversity of these communities while ensuring equal respect and dignity for them.



(from left) Prof. Syed M Hashemi, Barrister Jyotirmoy Barua, Syed Sultan Uddin Ahmed, and Prof. Zakir Hossain Raju.

Another special guest, Prof. Syed M Hashemi, BRAC University, delivered that “living a dignified life is more important than economic rights.”

“You must make your voice louder. Otherwise, change will never happen,” said Prof. Hashemi. “Discussions are being held in narrow circles. We have to spread it around. If we cannot put pressure unitedly, all our efforts will go in vain.”

Barrister Jyotirmoy Barua, a lawyer of Supreme Court of Bangladesh reflected on legal issues relating to the rights of the marginalized communities. “According to the official report there are good amount of khas (public) land unutilized. The government has an ample ground to distribute such land among marginalized and landless communities,” said Barrister Barua.

He also highlighted the constitutional rights of the transgender community, Biharis, and ethnic minorities. On misuse of the constitution in restricting the use of the term ‘Adivasi’ he said, “The function of the constitution is to ensure rights, not to define identity. This identity politics needs to be stopped.”

Barrister Barua strongly urged the government to sign the ‘Indigenous and Tribal Peoples Convention, 1989’ which ensures fundamental human rights of these population as well as protect their identities, languages and religions within the framework of the states they live in.

Prof. Rehman Sobhan, an eminent economist and chief guest at the event shared from his lifelong work experience of economic development, frustration and pathway for progress of the people economically downtrodden and left behind. A teacher of economics of Prof. Yunus who is now heading the interim government, Prof. Rehman Sobhan hoped “Professor Yunus will do the right thing.”

On miseries of tea workers, he said, “I have been hearing about their problems since 1960. It seems with time passing new dimensions are getting added to their already existing problems.” To bring economic relief to the tea workers he suggested, “Give them a share in the tea gardens and land they live on and till, no matter how small it is. This will give them an entitlement and effectively contribute to their economic upliftment.”

He proposed some probable

solutions to the problems of marginalized population. He suggested a ‘basic income’ for all people including the marginalized groups who are in need of help to migrate out of destitution. “It will help to lead a decent life for the destitute people,” said Prof. Sobhan. “This is a national solution that I am proposing.”

Finally, he urged the community representatives, “You may approach Prof. Yunus to form a separate reform commission for you. Even if the interim government does not form a separate commission for you, the road does not end here. You can form a civic platform and share your demands. Hope the Chief Adviser will take note of that.”

In summarizing the discussions, Dr. Hossain Zillur Rahman, chair of event and facilitator concluded that the condition of the marginalized and excluded communities needs to be changed at three levels which are interconnected and should be followed to end discrimination. In the first level, their struggles should become visible through research and analysis. At the second level community voices should get louder and heard. Then their active participation in the policy making process has to be ensured.

Article 14 of 'Indigenous and Tribal Peoples Convention, 1989 (No.169)

1. The rights of ownership and possession of the peoples concerned over the lands which they traditionally occupy shall be recognised. In addition, measures shall be taken in appropriate cases to safeguard the right of the peoples concerned to use lands not exclusively occupied by them, but to which they have traditionally had access for their subsistence and traditional activities. Particular attention shall be paid to the situation of nomadic peoples and shifting cultivators in this respect.
2. Governments shall take steps as necessary to identify the lands which the peoples concerned traditionally occupy, and to guarantee effective protection of their rights of ownership and possession.
3. Adequate procedures shall be established within the national legal system to resolve land claims by the peoples concerned.

Community Voices

Five community representatives spoke in the first session. They all are defenders of rights and active in their respective communities. They all shared their personal and community experiences.

Rambhajan Kairi, former general secretary, Bangladesh Cha Sramik Union (BCSU)

Several discriminations in the

labour legislation are concerning for tea workers. We get worried every time we hear about an amendment is made to the labour law. Tea workers are not entitled to casual leave like in other industries. Gratuity was scrapped for us in the amendment of 2018. My question is, whose purpose do these amendments serve? They do not necessarily serve us. We have serious trouble with election of BCSU, the lone trade union in the tea industry and the largest in the country. The two-year labour agreement between the owners' apex body Bangladesh Tea Association (BTA) and BCSU depends on the owner's wish. The agreement is always signed post-facto. On the other hand, the last election of BCSU was held in 2018. As a result, the union is getting weaker and owners are taking advantage of it. One of our key concerns is low wages. We hope the interim government pays attention to the tea workers reforming the existing minimum wage structure considering the current market prices.

Eugin Nokrek, president, Joyenshahi Adibashi Unnayan Parishad

Social forestry projects have been destroying natural forest in Modhupur. Biodiversity has been massively destroyed in sal forest. We can no more collect wildy grown vegetables and herbs from the forests.

Our main problem relates to land rights. Most of us living in the forest villages do not have title deeds for land we live on and cultivate. As a result, we are always in fear of eviction. In Modhupur, we need low-interest loans, which we do not get from banks. As a result, many of us do not cultivate

our land ourselves; we lease them to Bengalis. We also demand quota for the first and second class government jobs for the Adivasi communities.

Joya Tripura, president, CHT Women Headman-Karbari Network

The main problem in the CHT relates to land. We, indigenous women in the Chittagong Hill Tracts, are the worst affected for rapidly shrinking of our traditional agriculture—*jum* cultivation. Factors such as development projects; plantation of timber trees, rubber, and tobacco; and Bengali settlement have led drastic loss of land available for *jum* cultivation. The land commission set up after the 1997 CHT Accord to settle land disputes remain non-functional to date. Yet, we are optimistic and we hope that the interim government will include representative from the CHT in reform commission.

Milan Das, executive director, PARITRAN

I represent Rishi community. Our existence in this world feels like a curse. When I was in the 5th grade in school, I used to get *singara* served on a paper at the market next to our school where my friends used to have it on plate. Even today, 30 years later, that discrimination continues.

We are shocked that after July-August uprising that toppled the government of Sheikh Hasina, Hindus came under attacks. Seventy-seven of our Rishi students actively took part in the movement at Dhaka University. They were not affiliated with any party. Yet, they were attacked after 5 August 2024.

We demand social recognition and equal dignity as others in the society. The interim government

should accommodate us in each of the 10 reform commissions to consider our needs.

Krishnalal, president, Bangladesh Horijon Yokkha Parishad

We are bound to become cleaners generation after generation. My father was a cleaner, I am a cleaner and my children are cleaners. We are as if born to live with garbage. Even though we are educated, we do not get right jobs, because we are Harijans and untouchables.

We are frustrated, because despite raising our voices for the last 23 years and holding seminars and discussions, difficulties we face at work and society have not been solved. Nobody listens to us because there is no political agenda.

Open Forum

In an open forum in the afternoon chaired by Syed Sultan Uddin Ahmed, executive director, Bangladesh Institute of Labour Studies (BILS) and facilitated by Philip Gain, more community representatives shared their thoughts for formulation of a draft reform agenda for the marginalized and excluded communities. Seven community leaders spoke on the community demands and solutions.



(from left) Ms. Joya Tripura, Mr. Nripen Paul and Joya Sikder.

The topmost of their demands and solutions were related to land, fair and equal income, legitimate rights of the tea workers, social recognition, social security, standard education, etc.

Mr. Nripen Paul, acting general secretary of Bangladesh Cha Sramik Union (BCSU) spoke on tea workers' right to land, discrimination in the labour law for tea workers and violation of its important sections. He cited two examples—the tea workers getting no casual leave and gratuity—to explain how the tea workers are discriminated. He mentioned a current concern—12 gardens of the National Tea Company (NTC) are not paying wages to tea workers for weeks. He demanded that the interim government steps in to solve the issue.

Aleya Akhter Lily, president,

Sex Workers' Network (SWN) stressed on the recognition of sex work as a profession. She said many workers undergo torture. "Recently, 1,300 sex workers have been subjected to torture," reported Ms. Lily. "Children of sex workers are not given jobs because of their mother's identity. We want this discrimination to end. We want social security and development-oriented programs."

Speaking of her community's acceptance in society, Joya Sikder, a transgender activist, questioned, "Why cannot our society accept our identity when different countries of the world can? How are we supposed to achieve SDG 5 without it?" She stressed, "If society, family, and state accepted us with due dignity and respect, everyone could live happily. For this, we need to stand together," she further stressed.



National workshop focused on reform agenda of the marginalized groups. Photo: Prosad Sarker.

Mortuza Ahmed Khan, Bihari representative from Geneva Camp, Dhaka said in grief, “We are enormously deprived of basic human rights. After 1971, we had been treated inhumanely.” He stressed on the need of mapping of the Bihari camps, and estimating the Bihari population size. “The Biharis often time face eviction threat,” said Mr. Khan. “We really do not want to live in camps. What we want is respectful rehabilitation.”

Liton Das, president, Uttar Chattola Upokuliya Motshojibi Jaladas Samabay Kalyan Federation in Chattogram talked about the plights of the Jaladas, a sea-

faring Hindu fishing community, concentrated in Chattogram and Cox’s Bazar. “We, Jaladas, are suffering heavily from economic crisis. We do not get bank loans and without other options left, we are compelled to take loans (*dadon*) from local businessmen at very high interest rates,” said Mr. Das. He stressed on scaling up social security for the Jaladas community and said, “Government should ensure adequate benefits for widows and healthcare facilities for women.”

Modon Kumar Mondol, a representative of Kaiputra, a pig rearing community concentrated in Satkhira, Jashore and Khulna districts, raised the insurmountable

difficulties his community faces. “The majority of Bangladesh do not know who we are and the terrible time we go through in our trade with pigs,” said Mr. Mondol. “We should be able to access bank loans.”

Hridoy Harijan, a Harijan youth from Dhaka, said, “We want complete elimination of wage inequality among Harijan cleaners and between Bangali and Harijan cleaners.” He also demanded employment based on merit and secured housing, healthcare facilities, and risk allowances for cleaners and their families.

Report by Fahmida Afroze Nadia and Tabassum Nuha with Philip Gain □

Capacity Building and Coordination



Adivasi leaders and rights workers in residential workshop.

Adivasi Leaders and Rights Workers Trained on How to Protect Forest and Forest Villagers: Twenty-one members of Marma, Chakma, Bangalee, Mro, Tripura, Khumi, Bawm, Chak, Koch and Garo representing their civil society organizations, community-based organizations, women’s organizations, CHT Headman-Karbari Network, Rangamati Press Club, research organizations, etc. attended a residential workshop in

Dhaka from 6 to 8 September 2024. The theme of the workshop was protection of the forest communities from drastic forest loss, plantation economy and landgrab.

SEHD organized the workshop to engage the participants in in-depth discussion and group work in mapping the state of the forest and forest commons in the Chittagong Hill Tracts (CHT) and north-central districts (Tangail, Gazipur and Mymensingh), massive destruction

of forest and its underlying factors, consequences of forest destruction on the indigenous peoples (IPs) and other forest dependent peoples, landgrab in forest areas, and how to generate baseline on these issues. They were also engaged in an open discussion on building strategies for study and interventions including policy reforms for the state and non-state parties.

Two top forest officials spoke on the state of customary rights, map of forest destruction and strategies including legal reform and policy change for protection of forest and people living on the forest land. Barrister Jyotirmoy Barua from Bangladesh Supreme Court followed on discussion by the forest officials and stressed on legal instruments for the protection of customary rights on forest and forest commons.

Prof. Tanzimuddin Khan of University of Dhaka shared his critical thoughts on root cause of forest destruction including global instruments, initiatives and management practices.

Additionally, Buddhajyoti Chakma, journalist and Lelung Khumi, development worker from Bandarban ran a session on best practices in the CHT for protection of forest and environment.

Facilitated by Philip Gain, director of SEHD, each session in the three-day training were interactive and participatory in nature. The workshop ended with formation of a solidarity network on land and forest and distribution of certificates.

Harijan Community Leaders and Youth Trained:

A two-day Residential workshop on mapping the Harijans, analysis of their situation and difficulties and strengthening their capacity was held on 26-27 October 2024 in Dhaka. Twenty-two Harijan participants from Dhaka, Chattogram, Gazipur, Khulna, Sirajganj, Mymensingh, Gaibandha, Narshingdi and Moulvibazar joined the event. In addition, six project staff and five resource persons participated.

Workshop kicked off with an introductory session by the program director of SEHD, Mr. Philip Gain. Advocate Utpal Biswas, a lawyer at Bangladesh Supreme Court and general secretary of Minority Rights Forum, highlighted how former regime attempted at several illegal evictions of Harijan colonies without ensuring proper rehabilitation even though the



Participants in the residential workshop with the Harijan.

Constitution of Bangladesh talks about equal fundamental rights for all citizens.

A development consultant, Mr. Harun-Or-Rashid, explained building blocks or pillars of any organization and how organizational capacity can be strengthened. Mr. M M Mahmudullah, additional director of the Department of Social Services (DSS) shared information on different social security programmes (SSPs) that the DSS runs among the marginalized and disadvantaged population. He stressed how to access them and also mentioned several shortcomings that the department still has.

On second day Mr. Gain led a discussion session on how communities can participate in and contribute to research and investigation; Mr. Musa Ali, cleaning inspector of Dhaka South City Corporation (DSCC) talked on the roles of city corporations in the overall welfare of Harijans in cities across the country; Prof. Tanzimuddin Khan of Dhaka University reflected on interconnectedness of social exclusion, marginalization and discrimination; and Mr. Krishna Lal, president of Bangladesh Harijan Yokkha Parishad shared his thoughts on a roadmap for an effective mapping of Harijan colonies in Bangladesh.

The two-day workshop wrapped up with distribution of certificates among the Harijan participants.

International Workers' Day, 2024 Celebrated: Spotlight on Tragic Wages of Harijans and Tea Workers:

A discussion and cultural programme was organized on 30 April 2024 in Sreemangal to celebrate the

International Workers' Day, 2024. Harijan cleaners and the tea workers told their stories of wage deprivation. More than hundred individuals representing Harijan cleaners and leaders of Bangladesh Horijon Yokkha Parishad, the country-wide organization of the Harijans; tea workers and the leaders of Bangladesh Cha Sramik Union (BCSU), the lone trade union of the tea workers; government officials; journalists; academes; economists; researchers; CBOs; CSOs; human rights defenders, cultural artists from Protik Theatre, a cultural organization of the tea workers and SEHD staff came together in the event.

Sukon Bashfor, a woman Harijan sweeper in Sreemangal and other delegations from the Harijan community from Moulvibazar and Sreemangal spoke to share their horrible stories of deprivation. They reported 36 Harijan sweepers in Sreemangal get monthly salary of Tk 550. Employed by the Sreemangal municipality, these Harijans do not get any health protection, pension and even any compensation or leave in emergencies such as accidents.

In the keynote address, Philip Gain, director of SEHD highlighted the wage deprivation of both Harijans and tea workers. On tea workers' wages, he noted that the current daily wage of a tea worker (Tk 170), which was fixed by the prime minister in the backdrop of an unprecedented strike in the tea garden in August 2022 is still inadequate.

After the community voices heard, a panel of researchers, academic, lawyer, government official took part in discussion on the root cause analysis and shared their thoughts on what needs to be done to pull the Harijans and



Participants at celebration of ‘16 Days of Activism against Gender-based Violence’.

tea workers out of their current appalling condition. The speakers at this session included Mohammad Mahbubul Hasan, Deputy Inspector General of Department of Inspection for Factories and Establishments (DIFE), Katyayani Chandola, a lawyer from India represented NAZDEEK, a US-based advocacy group supporting work with tea workers in India and Bangladesh, Prof. Tanzimuddin Khan of University of Dhaka, and representatives of tea workers’ trade union.

Dr. Hossain Zillur Rahman, the chief guest at the celebration said, “It is very important to specify the problems of our marginalized groups and work on solutions through strategic thinking.”

The artists of ‘Pratik Theatre’ showcased their colourful cultural performance—songs, dances, recitation and drama—depicting the hardships of the tea workers and their inner cultural riches to kick off the celebration and amazed everyone in the audience.

16 Days of Activism against Gender-based Violence Celebrated:

Society for Environment and Human Development (SEHD), Brattyajan Resource Centre (BRC) and Power and Participation Research Centre (PPRC) organized a day-long book launch and discussion event at

BRAC Learning Centre (BLC) in Sreemangal to celebrate ‘16 Days of Activism against Gender-based Violence’ on 28 November 2024. The event focused on ‘Violence and Discrimination against Women Tea Workers and Other Working Women’. Around 75 participants representing the targets and stakeholders of BRC attended the meeting.

SEHD’s newly published, research and survey based, 152-page book titled, *Tea Workers of Bangladesh: Realities and Challenges* was opened for the tea garden areas at the event. The book presents analysis on tea workers’ socio-economic conditions, work environment, violation of labour legislation in gardens, wages, health, violence against women, social security etc. with a special focus on women tea workers.

Women voices from marginalized communities at the event who spoke about difficulties and discriminations marginalized women face included Razia Sultana, working for sex workers; Jesmin Akter, vice-president, Bangladesh Cha Sramik Union (BCSU); Sreemati Bauri, vice-president, Jury Valley, BCSU; Evan Ahmed Kotha, transgender activist; Sukon Bashfor and Basonti Bashfor, representatives of Harijan women from Sreemangal and Moulvibazar.

Special guests and discussants at the event included Mohammed Mahbubul Hasan, deputy inspector general, Department of Inspection for Factories and Establishments (DIFE), Sreemangal; Mr. Rambhajan Kairi, former general secretary, BCSU; Nripen Paul, acting general secretary, BCSU; Mohammed Suyeb Hossain Chowdhury, upazila social service officer, Sreemangal; Dr. Satyakam Chakraborty, retired

civil surgeon; Idris Ali, journalist; Makhonlal Kormokar, president, BCSU; and Poresh Kalindi, treasurer, BCSU.

Coordination meeting: Thirty-two participants representing marginalized communities, working committee members for BRC, CSOs, CBOs and project personnel came together in the fifth coordination meeting in Dhaka on 20 October 2024. The participants were provided with updates on the progress of project activities and key achievements of the project. Representatives from the final beneficiaries shared what they have learned from the project and gave their insights and suggestions for efficient implementation of the activities ahead, including those planned for the second phase.

The participants also shared their insights on how their skills and capacities have been beneficial to them. They can say quite confidently that the objectives of BRC, a collective initiative, have been achieved. The feeling of the participants was that a large number of marginalized communities are now well connected and BRC now stands strong.



Participants at coordination meeting.

Third Annual Meeting: Twenty-five participants representing mostly tea communities, members of final beneficiary communities, CBOs, working committee members and project staff came together in Sreemangal on 28 November 2024 in the third annual meeting of the

project.

The meeting was piggybacked with the celebration of 16 Days of Activism against Gender-based Violence, book launch and discussion on issues concerning the tea workers and Harijans. Progress in the on-going phase of BRC and its plans for the second phase were discussed in the meeting. The meeting ended with participants sharing their insights and suggestions.

Solidarity Networks: Solidarity (Community) networks have been established in five clusters among the final beneficiary groups—(a) ethnic communities (Adivasis), (b) Bede, Biharis and Jaladas, (c) sex workers and transgender, (d) tea workers, and (e) Rishi, Kaiputra and Harijans. More than 120 representatives from these five clusters are members of these networks with 20 to 30 people in each cluster.

These networks are key contacts of SEHD and its community empowerment wing, Brattyajan Resource Centre (BRC), to deal with marginalized and excluded communities. The members of the networks have been participating in research, investigations, trainings and different other activities under the project. These networks are helpful in facilitating dialogues among communities and other state and non-state bodies and actors.

The grounds for solidarity networks and partnerships among different clusters of the final beneficiaries were developed during the past decade when SEHD and partners implemented EU-supported actions. The solidarity networks also connect members of the majority community, CSOs, CBOs and other state and non-state parties. □

Research and Study

Building research-based group-specific community and issue-centric agenda has been a key activity of the project. Areas of eight research-based community agenda have been Adivasis (ethnic communities), tea workers, sex workers and transgender, Rishi and Kaiputra, Harijans, Bede (gypsy), Jaladas (fisherfolk) and Bihari. Two areas of issue-centric agenda are forest and forest-dependent communities and identities and discrimination elimination.

Consultations for Research-based Community and Issue-centric Agenda: Consultations have been organized with (i) Bihari and (ii) Jaladas (fisherfolk) for building two community agenda in the third year of the project ending in November 2024. Consultations with Adivasis (ethnic communities), tea workers, sex workers and transgender, Rishi and Kaiputra, Harijans, and Bede (gypsies) had been held in the first and second year of the project. Two consultations and an adequate number of FGDs and KIIs have been organized for each agenda.

Community representatives including members from their CBOs, locally elected politicians, and human rights defenders came together in these consultations, brainstormed, and had elaborate discussion on their difficulties, needs and aspirations, and put forward recommendations to state agencies, non-government organizations, academics and universities, researchers, and for themselves. FGDs and KIIs with case documentations from each community have followed the consultations to generate more

in-depth and elaborate data and insights.

Last of the two consultations on issue-centric agenda on identity, state recognition and discrimination elimination was held during the third year in Mymensingh. Twenty-two participants represented Adivasi, transgender, and Harijan (cleaners) communities. Participants shared their insights on difficulties, needs and recommendations for all stakeholders. Previously, two consultations on land rights and forests and commons, and one on identity, state recognition and discrimination elimination were organized during the first two years of the project.

Validation Workshops for Community Agenda:

Three validation workshops for community agenda—one on Adivasis, one on Harijans and another on tea workers—were organized during the third year of the project. A validation workshop is the final consultation with the respective community members before making a community or issue-centric agenda final. The outline of each agenda that accommodates analyzed and synthesized data, insights, life stories, etc. derived from consultations, FGDs, KIIs and surveys was presented in each of the day-long validation workshops. The participants shared their opinions, observations and added new points and gave their consent for making the agenda final.

Sustainability of BRC: Consultation on Fund Raising:

Twenty-five participants came together on 14 February 2024 in a

consultation in Dhaka on resource mobilization for sustainability of work on the marginalized communities and Brattyajan Resource Centre (BRC). The 25 participants represented different community-based organizations (CBOs), civil society organizations (CSOs), development consultant, web developer, academia and SEHD staff. This was the last consultation for sustainability of BRC. Key objectives of this consultation were: (i) how BRC can become, if not fully, partially self-reliant through generating revenue, and (ii) draw ideas from experts as well as participants regarding what activities should be included in proposal for the next phase of project for SEHD and BRC.

Consultation included a brainstorming session and taking suggestions from different experts as well as community representatives present at the meeting on how to make BRC sustainable through resource mobilization and another session focused on ideas for writing the next phase of the project proposal for SEHD and BRC.

Study of Social Protection:

The study on the access situation of BRC final beneficiaries to state-funded Social Security Programs (SSPs) took place in the third year of the project. A sample of 2,000 households from the final beneficiary groups has been surveyed for this purpose. PPRC and SEHD jointly conducted the survey.

Twenty-one participants including 15 surveyors were given a training of the surveyors on 13 February 2024. Project staff along with field research staff from PPRC imparted the day-long training with an eight-page questionnaire in

hand. Surveyors gave suggestions, which were accommodated into the questionnaire. Each surveyor was given four questionnaires for pilot test following the training programme. The questionnaire was further updated after getting responses from the pilot test in March 2024.

After finalizing the questionnaire, the project staff of both SEHD and PPRC went to specific locations to meet the surveyors and gave them a final orientation on the questionnaire. An expert team from Bangladesh Institute of Development Studies (BIDS) has already analyzed data following the survey and the final report will be published very soon. Along with an assessment of the access situation, this report will also present a methodology and a set of recommendations for periodic monitoring of access situation of BRC's final beneficiaries to the major SSPs. □

Investigation

Rubber: A Death Sentence to Natural Forests: Tangail-Sherpur rubber zone in the Northcentre of the Bangladesh has been a hotspot for rubber plantation outside the Chittagong Hill Tracts (CHT). This plantation may bring some economic benefits to the state and private entrepreneurs, but in general it has not been beneficial rather has become a threat to the natural forest and vegetation as well as ethnic population and wildlife. An investigative report on rubber plantation and its impact was published in *The Daily Star* on March 21, 2024.

Spotlight on Tragic Wages of Harijans and Tea Workers: The Harijans are an occupational



Unproductive rubber trees in Pirgachha Rubber Garden in Modhupur being felled, 2024. Photo: Philip Gain

group or community who have traditionally been working as sweepers or cleaners in cities. Many of them consider themselves as Dalit, a term used to define the lower status of those who are outside the four varnas in Hindu Casteism and many consider them as untouchables. In Sreemangal, their monthly salary is Tk 550 (April 2024)! On the other hand, tea workers in Bangladesh have always been deprived of just wage since they arrived in this country. An event to celebrate International Workers' Day highlighting wage deprivation of these two communities was held in Sreemangal. An interpretative report on this event was published in *Dhaka Courier* on May 10, 2024.

Kaiputra: The Untold Story of A Discriminated and Excluded Community: Kaiputra is a community that rears pigs in the open fields throughout the southwestern districts of Bangladesh, especially Satkhira, Jashore, Khulna, Kushtia, Faridpur, Gopalganj, Barishal and Narail. Society for Environment and Human Development (SEHD) has been following the herds of pigs along with the rakhals (who rear pigs) in a few districts since 2016 for research interest on Kaiputra. There is no such other community



Female tea workers on a rainy day submitting their collection of green tea leaves at an open collection centre. Photo: Philip Gain



A Kaiputra rakkhal is feeding a herd of pigs in a beel. Photo: Philip Gain in the southwest of Bangladesh so isolated, ostracised, broken, impoverished and socially excluded. An investigative report on Kaiputra, their life, livelihoods and struggle, was published in *The Daily Star* on June 1, 2024

Stop the Exploitation of Tea Workers in Bangladesh and Fix the Industry: National Tea Company (NTC) is a public limited company that owns 12 tea gardens in Moulvibazar, Habiganj and Sylhet districts. In the hands of the government management, the NTC gardens are badly managed and have been immersed in losses. After regime change on 5 August 2024, the board of the company collapsed and the workers did not get their regular wages for weeks. This has put the tea workers in great misery. There are many other badly managed gardens where the workers and their communities suffer most. An investigative op-ed on the condition of the NTC and a few other badly managed gardens was published in *The Daily Star* on October 7, 2024. □

New Arrivals

Brattyajan: Social Security

This is a catalogue of a photography exhibition on the condition of the excluded and marginalized communities—Adivasi, tea workers, Bede, Rishi, Kaiputra, sex workers, Hijra, Harijan, Jaladas and Bihari—and discrimination, insecurity and injustice they face. The government has Social Security Programs (SSPs) to help reduce poverty and income inequality. The final beneficiary communities of Brattyajan Resource Centre (BRC) receive benefits directly from nine SSPs. They also receive or may receive benefits from other around 20 SSPs. The SSP budget increases almost every year, but on one hand many eligible candidates remain excluded and on other, benefits that the beneficiaries of SSPs get are too little. There are many complaints about the anomalies related to SSPs. This catalogue gives an overview of the SSPs and brief narratives on these programs for the select excluded and marginalized communities. Sixty-seven images printed in the catalogue are mirrors of the key excluded and marginalized communities of Bangladesh. Bangla, Paperback, 72 pages, Price: Tk 150

Community Agenda: Rishi and Kaiputra

Around three percent population of Bangladesh are not only poor and marginalized because of their religion, ethnicity, and occupation, they are also victims of discrimination, exploitation and social exclusion for generations.



Many of them are considered 'untouchables'. Such two communities in this country are Kaiputra and Rishi.

Kaiputra is a pig-rearing community. On the other hand, Rishis are skimmers, leather workers, cobblers and musicians. The Kaiputra and majority of Rishis are hindu and some of them consider themselves as 'Dalit'. They are largely excluded from social justice and social security.

The community agenda covers the state of these two communities, their recent changes, and needs and aspirations. Some life stories of Kaiputra and Rishi have been incorporated into this agenda. This agenda will be beneficial for the communities and

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will become a useful tool for rights defenders, organizations, and policy makers who work for them. Bangla, Paperback, 80 pages, Price: Tk 150

Partner Directory: Prantik Jonogoshthir Pashe

The Partner Directory: Prantik Jonogoshthir Pashe—a publication which contains list, addresses and brief summary of state, non-state actors and international agencies working with indigenous people, tea workers, and other marginalized communities including Rishi, Kaiputra, Bede, Harijan, Jaladas, Bihari, sex workers and transgender. This publication will become a guide for human rights defenders, civil society organizations, community-based organizations, journalists, researchers and academicians who work with these communities. Bangla, Paperback, 200 pages Price: Tk 400



Tea Workers of Bangladesh Realities and Challenges

Team Leader and Lead Writer
Philip Gain
Associate Writer
Fahmida Afroze Nadia

Tea Workers of Bangladesh: Realities and Challenges

Nearly 140,000 tea workers, more than half of them women, work in 160 tea gardens in Sylhet, Moulvibazar, Habiganj, Chattogram, and Rangamati Hill District. Around 95% of the tea workers in this Muslim majority country are non-Bengali and most of them are low caste Hindus and Adivasis. They are, indeed, among the lowest paid, extreme poor, most marginalized and excluded people of Bangladesh. English, Paperback, 152 pages, Price: Tk 250



রিপোর্ট ও বিশ্লেষণ বাংলাদেশের প্রান্তিক ও বিচ্ছিন্ন জনগোষ্ঠী ও তাদের চ্যালেঞ্জ

সম্পাদক
ফিলিপ গাইন

মুখবন্ধ
হোসেন জিব্বুর রহমান

State of the Excluded and Marginalized Communities

This is an analytical report on

the state of the excluded and marginalized communities of Bangladesh—ethnic communities, tea workers, bede, Rishi, Harijans, Jaladas, sex workers, Kaiputra (pig rearing community) and Biharis. These communities constitute around three percent of the population of Bangladesh. They face discrimination, and exclusion—socially, economically and politically—for various reasons such as their ethnic identity, situations close to slavery, occupation, casteism, culture, geographical location, landlessness and eviction from their land.

The contributors to this report participated in research and investigation on these communities and have based their write-ups on analysis and findings from the field. The write-ups, therefore, are original, full of anecdotes and present information, analysis, insights and facts about structural abuses that the excluded and marginalized communities have been facing for generations. The last section of the publication compiles reports of a series of workshop, convention, dialogue, photography exhibition and cultural programs in which the excluded communities had eye-level exchanges with the members of the majority community including civil society organizations, high-level officials of different state agencies, politicians, researchers, top economists of the country, academics and human rights defenders. This report is a tool for work on exclusion challenges in Bangladesh both in the field and at thinking level. Bangla, Paperback, 268 pages, Price: Tk 400 □