

**National Consultation on
Dalit and Socially Excluded
Communities:
Problems and Possible Way Forward**

April 20-22, 2008
WVA auditorium, Dhanmondi, Dhaka

Organised by:
**Bangladesh Dalit Human Rights
&
Nagorik Uddyog**

INTRODUCTION

Dalit and other Excluded communities in Bangladesh become victims of severe discrimination despite the constitutional declaration that protects citizen's equal right regardless of their race, caste, religion. They live in every village, city and districts of Bangladesh. In general, Dalit and Excluded people, belong to Bengali national, are mostly cobblers, sages, barbers, washer man by profession and they can be found everywhere in the country. The other part of Dalit and Excluded community were brought to Bangladesh in between 1835-1850, from different parts of North and Andhra province of the then India by the British colonial regime to serve menial jobs. Though Dalit and other neglected communities are like other citizens of Bangladesh, but they have always been deprived of their constitutional rights and consequently fall victims to severe social discrimination. They couldn't stand up as a strong and influential community in our society obviously because they lack privileges of education, opportunities and rights of owning a property, As a result they have never become as a strong pressure group to realize their rights.

Recently, different organizations have started to work at local and national level for reducing discrimination against Dalit and other Excluded communities and thereby improving their living. If these individually working organizations are brought together, then establishing the rights of Dalit and other Excluded communities of Bangladesh will be much easier as well as unity and understanding among the organizations will be strengthen. With this view Bangladesh Dalit Human Rights (BDHR) and Nagorik Uddyog coloboretly organized a national consultation titled 'Dalit and Socially Excluded Communities: Problems and Possible Way forward" in WVA auditorium, Dhaka from 20 to 22nd April. 42 representatives from different organizations working to establish the rights of Dalit and Excluded communities in different parts of Bangladesh participated in this workshop.

OBJECTIVES OF THE WORKSHOP :

- Identification of the problems of Dalit and Excluded Communities and determine the possible way out.
- To strengthen the organizations involved with the development of Dalit and Excluded people in Dhaka and other areas of Bangladesh, enhance interaction among the Dalit and Excluded people scattered all over the country, increase organizational capacity and initiate a country-wide movement to realize the rights of Dalit and Excluded community people.
- Determining strategies to initiate movement at local, national, and international level to eliminate caste-based discrimination.
- Identifying the way to lobby with and pursuing the government taking steps for establishing the rights of Dalit and Excluded community by placing the discriminatory situation against them.
- To take possible initiative for creating a national platform of Dalit and Excluded Community people of their own.

Session-1.1. Inauguration, workshop events and expectation identification

The workshop was inaugurated on 20 April with registration of participants, introduction and greetings among the participants and facilitators, and singing the national anthem all together. The chairman of Bangladesh Dalits Human Rights (BDHR), Mr. B. Salomon and the Chief Executive of Nagorik Uddyog, Mr. Zakir Hossain delivered the welcome speech in the inauguration ceremony of the workshop.

Introduction of the objectives and identification of expectations

The facilitators Mahabuba Sultana and B. Saloman, chairman of BDHR informed the participants about the events and agenda to be discussed. The participants were asked to express their expectations from the workshop. The participants suggested that the following issues should be brought up in the workshop:

- Identification of strategies to create opportunities for proper education of the children of this fallen behind community.
- Establishing rights of Dalit and Excluded women.
- Providing quotas in job sector.
- To preserve a seat in the National Assembly for Dalit and Excluded community as a selected member.
- To establish a common platform of Dalit and Excluded Community organizations for united movement.
- Ensuring easy medical treatment for them.
- Establishing their dignity like in the society as human being
- Ensuring participation of this community in different social events.
- Ensuring accessibility in every place like other citizens

Session-1.2. Organizational and Community based presentation:

The participants representing different organizations shared different information about their organizations to increase understanding of each others activities in this session of the workshop. The key information determined to share as follows:

1. Name of the organization/Name of the representative
2. Information about other excluded communities of the participants' working areas.

3. Identification of discriminations against Dalits and Excluded community in the areas where participants live and work. (For example- education, health care and discrimination relating to social and professional etc.)
4. Possible way out of the problems described by the participants.

The participants were divided into some groups and each group prepared presentations based on the issues mentioned above. Their presentation depicted the following issues-

- Discrimination in getting job
- Deprivation from the rights of education
- Not recognized as human being with dignity
- Facing obstacle in accessing to public place
- Discrimination in right to health care
- Lack of representative organizations of Dalit and Excluded people at national level.
- They are not allowed to borrow loan from bank.
- Internal disputes among different Dalit and Excluded community.
- The threat of drug addiction among the Dalit and Excluded community.
- Lack of job opportunity increases the number of unemployed educated people in Dalit and Excluded communities that make the young generation averse to education
- No fruitful initiative from the government for the development of Dalit and excluded community.
- Lack of adequate information about Dalit and Excluded communities in government and non-government organizations.
- Marking the Dalit and Excluded community as the lowest caste of people in the society, and they always face humiliation by the other mainstreaming people

After pointing out the problems in group presentations, participants openly discussed about the possible way out of those problems. The participants opined about the following steps that could be taken in order to minimize the problems:

1. Social negligence and discrimination should be regarded as punishable acts and laws should be enacted and enforced accordingly by the government.
2. Ensuring health awareness and health care for the Dalit and Excluded communities. Encouraging them to live a healthy life. Facilitating safe drinking water, sanitation, gas and electricity in every slums/ living place in every city/town.

3. Taking steps to ensure formal and informal education facilities for Dalit and other Excluded communities and to bring in small scale industrial projects to increase their income. Ensuring quotas for them in all stages of education.
4. Ensuring the improvement of habitation and facilities of being citizens of the Dalit and Excluded communities. Ensuring rehabilitation of the landless Dalit and Excluded community in the government owned land (khas land) in cities and villages.
5. Setting up a commission at the national level on behalf of the Dalit and Excluded communities. This commission will work for initiating policies in favor of Dalit and excluded community.
6. Implementation and maintaining of 'International Covenants on the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination (CERD).
7. Preserve a seat in the National Assembly for a representative of Dalit and Excluded community and establishing quotas in local government.
8. Facilitating quotas in job sector (In accordance with their education and skills for the Dalit and Excluded community as they have been fallen behind in getting the mainstreaming job)
9. Improving human rights situation, especially women rights, human rights and dignity against the existing castism, prejudice and other similar existing misconception in the society. Carrying out community based counseling and human rights educational workshop especially on women's right, and creating a public opinion in favor of marriage between man and women from different casts or races and to carry out legal and social movement to protect the dignity of the married persons
10. Carrying out publicity against the fallacy of "Untouchability", taking steps to bring Dalit and Excluded people close to the mainstreaming people of the society.
11. Bringing up the issue of overall situation of Dalit and excluded community at policy making level and pursue the policy makers to take steps for the development of the community, bringing up the issues of Dalit and excluded community to national level, pursue the government to create a cell in the ministry of women and children affairs as well as same in the local government for the development of Dalit women.
12. Creating awareness among Dalit and excluded communities toward building organization. Trying to bring the existing organizations closer and to make them more active; prioritize the organizational responsibility above all forms of cast and racial discrimination.
13. Making the local governments in different cities around the country aware and encouraged to take steps for improving Dalit and Excluded communities. Creating opportunities for the people of Dalit and Excluded communities to be elected in local government in the areas where a significant number of Dalit and excluded people live.

Session-1.3.The Rights of Dalit and Excluded Communities as described in the Constitution of Bangladesh and in CERD:

In the beginning of this session a documentary film on the life of Dr. Ambedkar, the pioneer to establish the rights of Dalit and other excluded communities in India was shown to the participants. Then facilitator Mahabuba Sultana discussed about the constitution of Bangladesh and the ‘International Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination- CERD’. The facilitator prolifically explained the formation, preservation and the basic rights declared by the Constitution of Bangladesh. 18 basic rights described in a total of 19 articles from 26th to 47th of the third part of the constitution of Bangladesh were discussed and analyzed before the participants.

After the presentation on Bangladesh Constitution, the facilitator discussed about all forms of racial discrimination described in the ‘International Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination – CERD’. She explained that this convention was accepted and opened for signing and ratification according to the decision 2106 a. (20) made by the general committee of United Nation on 21 December, 1965. This came into effect in January 4th, 1969 according to the 19th act of the convention. The facilitator then discussed about the accord regarding CERD made by the agreed countries, rights of citizens, social and cultural rights and its preservation and protection etc. in detail.

Rights of Citizen, social and economical rights as described in the CERD covenant are presented below:

| Rights Of Citizens | Economical, Social And Cultural Rights |
|--|--|
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Living and freedom of movement within the territory of the state. • Right of leaving any country including one’s motherland and the rights of returning. • Rights as a citizens • Matrimonial rights and right of choosing a partner. • Right of ownership individually or collectively. • Right of inheritance • Right to freedom of thought, conscience and religion. • Freedom of speech and expression. • Right to perform any public gathering and organizing peacefully. | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Right to work, freedom of choosing a profession, right to have a proper and favorable working environment and right to have unemployment benefit. • Right to have equal salary for equal work, right to have justified and favorable salary. • Right to form trade union and to join in. • Right to have a place for living. • Public health, health service, social security and social service • Right to education and training • Right to equal participation in cultural activities. • Right to access in any construction or services built for the purpose of public use like transport, hotel, restaurant, café, theater, and park. |

The responsibility of states for the preservation and protection of CERD covenant were described in this session. It is as follows:

- The states would be able to do anything within their jurisdiction by utilizing the power of high court/supreme court or any other state bodies in case an act against racism rather creates a negative impact and goes against this covenant and is a threat against basic rights, human rights; the state would also be responsible to ensure safety of its citizen by demanding a proper and justified compensation from the court, in case of any damage caused by such ambiguous act.
- States would also ensure that education, culture, and information will not be biased by preconceptions and prejudices that are responsible for creating racism. It will also be responsible for increasing understanding, tolerance, and closeness among different race, caste or indigenous communities. The states will also widely advertise and publicize all objectives and policies against racism declared by the united nation, universal human rights declaration. The state would also be responsible to take practical and prompt steps on these regards.

Apart from this, a detailed discussion on how united nation works, what is meant by basic human rights within the context of a nation and what it means internationally and the difference between basic needs and basic rights also discussed in this session.

Session-1.4. The condition of Dalit and Excluded communities in Bangladesh:

This session was facilitated by Mazharul Islam and the aim of the presentation ‘The Dalits and other fallen behind communities in Bangladesh’ was to give the participants information about the Dalits and socially Excluded communities living in different areas of Bangladesh as well as to make easy the participants to share their experiences in this regard. The facilitator presented about the origin of Dalits, their language and other characteristics of Dalit and excluded communities in Bangladesh, political discrimination over the Dalit communities in the Indian subcontinent during different period, the saga of their discrimination and deprivation, economical, social, religious, cultural discrimination, and political, legal issues relating to the anarchy against Dalit and Excluded community. An open discussion was carried out in regard with the facilitator’s opinion regarding the way out of the problems.

The facilitator presented that Dalit and Excluded people live in slums or villages in all 64 districts of Bangladesh. Generally, Dalits could be divided into two groups. One of the groups is comprised of Bangladeshi nationals who live in villages, in general. They are mainly known as sage, cobbler, washer man, Dom, sweeper, Paroi, Kaiputro, Kawra, Beara, Nikari, Shikari, Kapali, Hari, Poad, Kulu, Chamar, Bauri, Bagdi, Naom, Shiali, Kaybarto, Kahar, Keshra, Nalua, Dhani, Bagol, Basar, Meso, Kotal, Vogmene, Chondal, Charal, Antoj, Namashudro etc. Before they were identified as Namashudro in the census carried out in 1891, these ethnic communities used to be known as Chamar and Chondals.

During the period of 1835 to 1850, a part of Dalit were brought to Bangladesh from different provinces, especially from north and Andhra provinces in the then India, to do the menial jobs like cleaning bushes and wastes, to carry away dead animals etc. These people are known as Bashpuri, Dom, tea workers, Domar, Maithal, Balmiki, Fasi, sweepers, Chamar, Mala, Madiga, Chakali, Dewali etc. They are also known as Kanpuri, Telegu or Madraji based on their language and their place of origin in India. Presently, according to the government statistics, Bangladesh has a population of about 150 million including 5.5 million Dalit and Excluded communities. But the specialists said that there could be more number of Dalit and other Excluded people in Bangladesh.

In order to depict the discrimination against Dalits, the facilitator presented that Dalits and other Excluded communities couldn't resolve the identity problems that exist among them severely. They have been suffering caste based discriminations for many decades only because of their profession. In explaining the meaning of the word 'Dalit', the facilitator said, "It's a Marathi word that means a person who is broken." So the word 'Dalit' is meant that the people of this community are totally demolished by the social and caste based discrimination. In other definition shows that the word 'Dalit' means the communities who are not allowed to participate in mainstream society because of their profession; they are identified as "Untouchables".

The facilitator also added that Dalit were never been satisfied with the identification mark such as 'low caste'. Realizing this dissatisfaction among the Dalit, Gandhi attempted to solve this problem. He said, 'Dalit are the offspring of 'Hari' (A God worshipped by Hindus)'. That way, all these people from low caste would be identified as Harijon in the entire continent. At this point, another problem was introduced. Many Harijon were taking Christianity as their religion – and they were not anymore agreed to be identified themselves as the offspring of 'Hari'. Rabindranath Tagore had different opinion about changing the identity of 'low caste' people. He believed that in this approach of identify them as Harijon; there was a hidden sympathy toward that specific community of people, which was insulting for them. He said that 'Durgato' (vulnerable) would have been a better ward to identify them.

As days passed by, people of low caste again started to find a new identity. And as a recent answer to their quest they got their new identity the 'Dalit'. In India, they were mentioned as the 'scheduled cast' by the government – who were supposed to have special care from the state on education and training. In India, a member of Dalit Community became the president, whereas in Bangladesh they are totally ignored in any political and economical affairs.

He also added that different communities in our country that are fallen behind or left behind don't want to reveal themselves under the identity of 'Dalit'. But this should be noticed that the word 'Dalit' don't resemble any cast or race. The word 'Dalit' is rather used to commonly identify the community of people who are pushed away from mainstream society.

The facilitator presented the following types of discriminations against the Dalit community:

- Economic discrimination
- Political discrimination
- Social discrimination
- Legal discrimination
- Religious and cultural discrimination
- Violence against Dalit and Excluded Women

Session- 1.5. Open discussion – Ways to resolve the existing argument regarding Dalit and Harijon in Bangladesh and establish unity

T. James carried out an open discussion to analyze the situations and positions of Dalit and Excluded communities of Bangladesh. The issues of the open discussion were – Who will be identified as Dalit and Excluded, the problems they are facing and what could be done in order to eliminate those problems. In this case the following comments were made by the participants –

“Most people of the excluded community are not aware of their rights”

Uttam Kumar Bhakto
Harijon Oikko Parishod, Barisal

“Dalit is not a new caste among the existing caste. Nama:shudra belongs to Shudra caste. Avoiding the religious opinion if we consider the social context, the people who are excluded and neglected, either he/she is cobbler or sweeper or from other profession, is regarded as Dalit, At first, it should be determined as to whether they should be called as Bengali/Bangladeshi/Non-Bengali – or with other name considering their language. In this regard I will identify myself as a Bangladeshi. If we like to talk about discrimination, we are facing discrimination in all spheres – discrimination in job sector, we don't have a secured future, we are living in a very tiny shattered room which has no partition walls, and the cover is made of cloths. We are living like this way for generations. Our children are not allowed to study in a good school. We need a common platform to carry on a movement all together. I think the government lacks the interest to publicize the rights that are included in the covenant of United Nation to grow awareness among people. Most people of the excluded community are not aware of their rights.”

‘Our demands will surely be attainable if we are united’

Shamlal
Vice president, BDHR

“Regardless of our race, caste or religion, we all are citizens of Bangladesh. Many Dalit people fought and sacrificed their lives during the liberation war of this country. But the sacrifices of Dalit people in the war have never been acknowledged. Our demands will surely be attainable if we are united.

“We have to form our own platform”

Gurucharan Das,
Jubo Kallyan Sangha, Chittagong

I used to think that Harijan/Dalit meant the people who are sweepers, cleaners, sewerage cleaner etc. But my impression has changed after attending this workshop. We to build out own platform to establish our rights and to solve various socio-economic problems for our own interest not for any vested interest. With this platform we have to build network at national and international level and all have to be united with this view.”

‘Civil society should be united for this movement’

Kartik Das
Image, Chittagong

“Dalits/Harijan, all belong to Hindu, Muslim, Buddhism, and Christianity. They are not from other religions. So, they have all the rights to live like any other human being on earth rather than to be considered as untouchables. Civil society should be united for this movement.”

‘Dalits never got the acknowledgment for their sacrifice in the liberation war’

SP Appa Rao
TCDS, Dhaka

“Gandhi named them as ‘Harijan’ as they were religious. Saying this he wanted to prove that they were not untouchables. That’s why we shouldn’t look down upon this name. In different periods, different pressure groups took advantage of Dalit communities’ helplessness to gain their own interest. Dalits never got the acknowledgment for their sacrifice for the freedom of our country in the liberation war. We work for other people in the society, but they rather call us as Methor, Chondal etc. There’s no other alternative to be united against all these wrongdoings.”

‘We want to be identified as Dalit’

Milon Das
Poritran, Sathkhira

“Those who earn their livelihood with physical hard labor are called ‘low cast’ while others who enjoy the fruit of their labor are called ‘higher caste’ – I propose that we should use the right explanation from our religion as a weapon against such discrimination. I think all the community people should have to be identified by the same name. Whatever the name is or not, the main purpose of the movement would be to involve the Dalit and Excluded community with the mainstream society.”

'Harijan Oikko Parishod is a national based organization'

Krishnolal Das
Chairman, Harijon Oikko Parishod

"There creates confusion among us regarding identify ourselves as 'Dalit' instead of 'Harijon'. Harijon Oikko Parishod is a national based organization. That's why we can't just give up our identity as 'Harijan'."

'The concept behind 'Harijan' is small, but the concept behind 'Dalit' is much bigger'

Panna Lal Bashfor
Fare, Khustia

"We should resolve the confusion regarding the names, 'Harijon' and 'Dalit'. Harijon concept (only consist of 8 caste) is small and Dalit concept is much bigger. That's why it is more reasonable to form the common platform naming it as 'Dalit'."

'Everyone should be made involved in the mainstream society and activities'

Ashok Das
Mukti, Jessore

"We can not afford a name to be an issue of dispute in the way of movement in this crucial time. Everyone needs to get united rather than just sticking to his/her own caste based individuality."

'The word 'Dalit' has more international acceptance.'

Father Shedjo Targa

"Rather arguing over choosing a name between 'Dalit' and 'Harijon' we can consider a new name like 'Antoj'. The name 'Harijan' has a religious influence. Muslims don't call themselves 'Harijan'. However, since the word 'Dalit' has more international acceptance so it would be easier to claim our demands under this name."

Session-1.6. Problems and organizing women of Dalit and other Excluded communities:

Dalit and other Excluded communities are victims of constant discrimination and deprivation. But the women of these communities suffer the most. To inform everyone about the situation and condition of Dalit and Excluded women, Mallika Sarkar and Moni Rani Das facilitated this session on "Women of Dalit and other Excluded community: in Bangladesh context". They also discussed about the steps that could be taken to improve

the condition of these women. The facilitator mentioned, “Women have always been suffering discrimination in male dominated society. These women of fallen behind communities suffers the most in this male dominated society. These women are suffering discrimination in three ways: firstly, being a woman, secondly, being a Dalit and Excluded, and thirdly, being a poor. Women of Dalit and excluded communities fall victims of following discriminations in Bangladesh:

| Classification of discrimination | Nature of Discrimination | |
|---|---|--|
| Economic | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Poverty • Lack of ownership right in land • Imbalanced wages for labor • Deprivation from labor right | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Labor based on contract (crop land and other profession) • Unemployment • Cheap labor • Force labor |
| Social | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Discrimination in education (admission etc.) • housing • Deprivation from Health care | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Sanitation • Deprivation from basic rights |
| Social, Religious And Cultural discrimination | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Untouchability • Male domination (Patriarchy) • Violation of Religious right (expel from one’s religious faith) | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Linguistic problem (do not know Bengali language) • Internal wedding custom • Prejudice |
| Political issues | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • No participation in institutional and political decision making. • Insecurity | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Absence of women representative in governmental and institutional sector. |
| Legal issues | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Lack of facilities in getting legal support | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Lack of legal measures of punishment for violating rights. |
| Violation and torture against women | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Domestic violence • Rape • Political Oppression • Highly patriarchal control | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Disrespect • Lack of sensitivity and sympathy on violence against women |

The facilitators then presented the activities of Dalit Women Forum that was formed in 2006 by the assistance of BDHR and Nagorik Uddyog to establish and preserve the social dignity and providing support to make them financially independent.

- To develop Dalit Women Forum a stronger organization in establishing rights of Dalit women.
- To work for growing conscious about different issues among Dalit women

- To work for creating equal opportunities for Dalit women in the sectors of education, health and permanent residence.
- In order to improve the working skills of Dalit women arranging different training and facilitating employment opportunities.
- Carrying out research on Dalit women and to aware Dalit women about their rights
- To work for creating quota system in government and private educational institutions to facilitate Dalit women's education.
- Working for making national policies in favor of the women of Dalit and excluded communities.

Session-1.7. The linkages of international Dalit and Excluded Communities Rights Organizations

The Chief Executive of Nagorik Uddyog, Mr. Zakir Hossain discussed about the context of creating relation and improving communication among Bangladesh Dalit Community and regional, national and international organizations. He said that we have been trying for a long time to improve the communication between Bangladesh Dalit organizations and other regional and international Dalit organizations in order to draw the attention of regional and international bodies. In connection with that, a network of Dalit organizations has been formed in this region named Asia Dalit Rights Movement (ADRM). In different time, members of BDHR and other Dalit organizations participated in international conferences on Dalit Rights issues. He spoke about Bangladeshi Dalit organizations that have been attending important seminar, symposium, and conference both nationally and internationally and presented the organizations' mutual exchange of information and experience etc.

Description of meeting, seminar, conference and tours intended for sharing of experience at international level:

- BG Murti, ex- chairman of Bangladesh Dalits Human Rights (BDHR) attended an International Conference in Delhi in the year 2001.
- BG Murti and Babulal Sardar attended an International Dalit Conference jointly organized by International Dalit Solidarity Network (IDSN) and Dalit NGO Federation (DNF) in 2004.
- Five members of BDHR attended a conference arranged by World Social Forum (WSF) in Mumbai, India during 16-21 January, 2004.
- In 2006, BG Murti, the Chairman of Bangladesh Dalits Human Rights (BDHR), visited different Dalit organizations in Hyderabad and Andhra Pradesh in India and shared views and experiences.
- Four members of BDHR participated in the World Social Forum's 6th Polycentric event, held in Karachi, Pakistan from 24 to 29 March 2006.

- B. Solomon from BDHR and Chief Executive of Nagorik Uddyog, Mr. Zakir Hossain attended Asian Dalit Rights Movement (ADRM) consultation meeting held in Bangkok, Thailand, in 2007.
- A team of five representatives from BDHR participated in a peace conference arranged by REDS in Tamkur, Konartok, India in October, 2007.
- In March, 2008, Zakir Hossain, advisor of BDHR attended a council meeting of International Dalit Solidarity Network (IDSN) and other meetings with different missions of United Nation Human Rights Council in Geneva, Switzerland.
- Moni Rani Das and Mollika Sarkar from Dalit Women Forum attended a workshop on International Dalit Women Working Group conducted by Feminist Dalit Organisation (FEDO) in Kathmandu, Nepal in February, 2008.
- Mallika Sarkar representative of Dalit Women Forum participated in South Asian Women Consultation of Excluded Groups organized by Action-Aid Asia in Bangkok, in March 2008.

International Dalit Organizations' Visit to Bangladesh and Sharing Of Experience:

- A team with fifteen members of Nepal Dalit NGO Forum (DNF) visited BDHR and Nagorik Uddyog on 15th February, 2006.
- Riki Norlind of IDSN and Special rapporteur of UNHRC Prof. Chung Chin-Sung participated a Dalit Consultation meeting held in October, 2006 in Dhaka.
- Babulal Sardar from BDHR and Mazharul Islam from Nagorik Uddyog participated in a workshop named 'Caste based Discrimination South Asia' organized jointly by IDSN and IIDS in November, 2007.

Mr. Zakir Hossain presented the introductory information about International Dalit Solidarity Network (IDSN) and briefly described its activities:

Objectives of IDSN:

- Working against racial and professional discrimination
- Working for the development of Dalit's Human Rights
- Working for making policies with different government and international organisations favoring the interest of Dalit.
- Working with European Union and with different organisations of United Nations.

At the end, Mr. Zakir Hossain provided the following information about the regional international network and connection with BDHR and Nagorik Uddyog –

- International Dalit Solidarity Network (IDSN), Copenhagen, Denmark
- NACDOR-India
- Dalit NGO Forum – Nepal
- Novoshurjon
- Feminist Dalit Organisation (FEDO)
- Safai Karmachari Andolon and Asmita, India
- Shakti-India
- REDS-India
- TRDP-Pakistan
- Indian Institute of Dalit Studies (IIDS)
- National Campaign on Dalit Human Rights (NCDHR)
- Schedule Caste Federation of Pakistan (SCFP)-Pakistan
- Human Development Organisation (HDO) – Sri Lanka
- Minority Rights Group International – UK
- Dalit Solidarity Network, Germany, UK, France, Netherlands etc
- Asia Dalit Rights Movement (ADRM)
- Dalit SAARC Assembly

Day Two: April 20, 2008

Session-2.1. Previous Day's Discussion and Evaluation:

The second day started with the National Anthem and previous day's discussions' with expressing and sharing each others feelings. While expressing their feelings participants said that – the first day's discussion of the workshop gave them a clear concept of the situation of the socially excluded communities. They felt the need for a common platform to work with. Everyone should be identified as only 'Human' and there should not be any caste and race based discrimination but only be humane dignity. They had a clear concept regarding name and identity. They have been united and had courage to fight for their dignity. Mahabuba Sultana facilitated this session.

Session-2.2. To develop the status of Dalit and Socially Excluded Communities:

Through participatory discussion, the participants identified what to be done for developing the existing situation of Dalit and Excluded community and what initiative should be taken at local level, national level and international level in this view. The decisions were unanimously accepted by all –

- This community will be identified as Dalit and Excluded Community. But other identities can be remained
- A national platform needs to be formed to claim their demands;
- On April 22, a press conference will be held at Dhaka Reporters Unity, and new platform will be declared through the conference

Session-2.3. Determining strategically activities:

Chief Executive of Nagorik Uddyog, Mr. Zakir Hossain proposed some names for the national platform. After a long discussion, all the participants came to a decision that the common platform will be known as 'Bangladesh Dalit and Excluded Community Rights Movement' (BDREM). In Bangla its name is 'Bangladesh Dalit O Bonchito Jonoghosthir Adhakar Aandolon'. The participants also unanimously accepted the guiding principles of BDREM. To carry out the BDERM activities, a National Working Committee has been formed for one year term.

Members of the National Working Group of BDERM

| SL. | Name | Position | Current status |
|-----|-------------------------|---------------------------------|---|
| 1. | Babular Sardar | Chairperson | General Secretary, BDHR. |
| 2. | Rajkumar Das | Vice - Chairperson | Chairperson of Harijon Oikko Parishod, Dhaka. |
| 3. | Milon Das | General Secretary | Director, Poritran, Sathkhira. |
| 4. | Gurucharan Das | Joint Secretary | Chairperson, Jubo Kolyan Songstha, Bandel Harijon Colony, Chittagong. |
| 5. | Mukul Shikdar | Treasurer | Namashudro Rights Movement, Salikha Magura. |
| 6. | Ashok Das | Organizing Secretary | Director, Dalit Empowerment Foundation, Monirampur, Jessore. |
| 7. | Advocate Babul Robi Das | Press and Publication Secretary | Lawyer, District Judge Court, Joipurhaat. |
| 8. | Moni Rani Das | Women's Secretary | Co-ordinator, Dalit Nari Forum, Dhaka. |
| 9. | Shanti Mondol | Member | Member, Antoj Chatro Unnyan, Tala, Sathkhira. |
| 10. | Sojol Dibedi | Member | General Secretary, Bagania Samshernagar Tea Garden, Moulavi Bazaar. |
| 11. | Uttam Kumar Bhakto | Member | Member, SCOPE Barisal. |

To assist the Bangladesh Dalit and Excluded Rights movement (BDERM), a national advisory body has been formed with distinguished citizens of Bangladesh. The members of the advisory body are as follows:

| SL. | Name | Current Status |
|-----|---------------------------|--|
| 1. | Dr. Hameeda Hossain | : Human Rights Activists |
| 2. | Khushi Kabir | : Co-ordinator, Nijera Kori. |
| 3. | Selina Hossain | : Writer and novelist |
| 4. | Shamsul Huda | : Executive Director, ALRD |
| 5. | Dr. Meghna Guho Thakurata | : Executive Director, Research Initiative Bangladesh (RIB) |
| 6. | Dr. Farzana Islam | : Professor, Department of Anthropology, Jahangirnagar University. |
| 7. | Zakir Hossain | : Chief Executive, Nagorik Uddyog |

It is decided that two members from the National Advisory Committee will be included in the National Working Committee. These two members are Dr. Meghna Guho Thakurata and Zakir Hossain. Furthermore, the national working committee takes the decision that

primarily for the next two years Nagorik Uddyog will work as a secretariat for BDERM. Nagorik Uddyog will appoint a person responsible to manage the activities of BDERM.

Members from different levels of 'Bangladesh Dalit and Excluded Rights' Movement:

| SL. | Full Member Organizations | SL. | Associate Organization |
|-----|---|-----------|---|
| 1. | Bangladesh Dalits Human Rights(BDHR) | A. | National Organisations |
| 2. | Dalit Jubo Forum | 1. | Nagorik Uddyog |
| 3. | Dalit Women Forum | 2. | Association for Land Reform and Development(ALRD) |
| 4. | Poritran, Sathkhira | 3. | Nijera Kori |
| 5. | Antoj Parishod | 4. | Research Initiative Bangladesh(RIB) |
| 6. | Mritoshilpo Karigor Unnyan Samity, Khulna | 5. | Ain O' Salish Kendro(ASK) |
| 7. | Telego Community Development Society, Dhaka | B. | Local Organisations |
| 8. | Mukti, Jessore. | 1. | Seba, Nilfamari |
| 9. | Bangladesh Namashudro Adhikar Aandolon | 2. | CDMS, Norshingdi |
| 10. | Bagania Moulovi Bazaar | 3. | USS, Nilfamari |
| 11. | Harijon Samaj Seba Songha, Narayanganj | 4. | Fair, Khustia |
| 12. | Uddyann Jubo Songha, Gopibag, Dhaka | 5. | BUCOS, Rajshahi |
| 13. | Telego Samaj Kolyan Songha, Wari, Dhaka | 6. | SAS, Barisal |
| 14. | Bangladesh Harijon Oikko Parishod | 7. | SCOPE, Barisal |
| 15. | Harijon Sebok Samity, Dhaka | 8. | BCDP, Chapainobabganj |
| 16. | Samaj Kolyan Jubo Songha, Dhaka | 9. | IMAGE, Chittagong |
| 17. | Ontoj Chatro Unnyan Parishod, Sathkhira | 10. | STEP, Chittagong |
| 18. | Jubo Kolyan Songha, Bandel Harijon Sebok Colony, Chittagong | | |
| 19. | Udoy Jubo Songha, Porbo Madarbari Harijon Colony Chittagong | | |

Aims and Objectives of Bangladesh Dalit and Excluded Community Rights Movement (BDERM)

Aim:

Building a discrimination free society by eliminating all forms of discrimination against Dalit and Excluded Community on the basis of equality, justice and dignity.

Objectives:

- To build awareness among Dalit and Excluded community people on social, economic, cultural, education and political rights.
- To assist in enhancing leadership capability and establish equality among Dalit and Excluded community women in all level.
- To work against social deprivation, discrimination towards Dalit and Excluded community as well as against all active, methodological and social agony.
- To make the policy makers sensitive and responsible for establishing the rights of Dalit and Excluded on both government and non-government levels.
- To ensure access of Dalit and Excluded community in development and wealth
- To increase and maintain harmony and communication with Dalit and Excluded Community's movement in regional and international level.

Session-2.4. Exchange of opinions with national advising body and civil society's representatives:

The members of the national advisory body and representatives of civil society participated in the last day the workshop. The person present at the workshop were Dr. Hamida Hossain, Vice president of Nagorik Uddyog, Ms. Khushi Kabir, Co-ordinator of Nijera Kori, Dr. Farzana Islam, Executive member of Nagorik Uddyog, Shamsul Huda, Executive Director of ALRD, Zakir Hossain, Chief Executive of Nagorik Uddyog, Rezanul Karim from Manusher Jono Foundation, Shekhar Chondro Rai from SHED, Meuri Begum representative from Gram Bangla Unnyon Songstha and Rubaiat Omi from Christian Aid. Participants in the workshop exchanged their opinions and views about Dalit and Excluded Community in Bangladesh. Mr. Milon Das and Mr. B. Solomon facilitated this session.

Mr. Shamsul Huda, ED of ALRD, expressed his opinion, *"This unity will improve the speed of our work for establishing rights of Dalit and excluded which will bring a fruitful result for practical development."* He encouraged other participants not to bend before any obstacles and work with full efforts to take the movement forward. He also promised to provide all kinds of assistance.

Ms. Khushi Kabir, Co-ordinator, Nijera Kori, attributed this attempt as a historical one and said, *"With this effort we will be able to bring all the disintegrated groups of Dalit and*

Excluded community together. There are some socially established persons who are originally Dalit, but now they feel ashamed to expose their so called low caste origin. So now with the support of this platform we will be able to change the misconceptions of the government and prove that many people are suffering cast based discriminations". She expressed her hope that through the support of this national platform Dalit and Excluded will be able to establish their rights one day.

Dr. Farzana Islam, Executing Member of Nagorik Uddyog, expressed, *"This is the first opportunity for this fallen behind community to get united."* She added that, *"Dalits will have to influence the government for their own interest with or without assistance of others. Rights can not be attained without an organizational platform. That's why this event is a historical for the Dalit rights movement in Bangladesh."*

Dr. Hameeda Hossain, eminent human rights activist and vice president of Nagorik Uddyog, said, "The organization that has been formed by the representatives of 33 organizations will take the Dalit and Excluded far ahead." She expressed the importance of women's involvement in the movement. She also said that it is important to include in the textbooks about the history of suffering of Dalit and Excluded people due to discriminations. She added that the hierarchical discrimination amongst Dalits should be eliminated. The Dalit children need to be educated. She expressed that since the Dalits are still fallen behind, so they can still use some help from others. She strongly advised to increase the campaigning and publicity of these awareness issues through print and electronic media.

Session 2.5. Closing of the Workshop:

The two days long workshop came to a formal conclusion on April 21st which was facilitated by Ashok Das. Ashok Das reiterated the discussed issues and decisions from last two days sessions and introduced the members of the newly formed platform. He specially expressed his appreciation to Nagorik Uddyog and BDHR for organizing this workshop. Milon Das, Mukul Shikdar, Krishna Lal and Moni Rani Das expressed their feelings at the closing of the workshop session. They said, this workshop has created an opportunity to facilitate movement jointly and they expect the participation of civil society in this movement.

At the general secretary of BDHR, Babulal Sharkar and Mr. Zakir Hossain from Nagorik Uddyog announced the conclusion of the workshop by thanking everyone and wishing the success of all the leaders of the newly formed BDERM.

Resource person and Facilitator of the workshop are as follows-

1. Zakir Hossain
2. Mazharul Islam
3. Mahabuba Sultana
4. T. Gems
5. B. Saloman
6. Mollika sharkar
7. Moni Rani Das
8. Farhana Islam

Day Three: Press conference

22 April, 2008

Venue: Dhaka Reporters' Unity auditorium

22 April 2008, the newly formed alliance 'Bangladesh Dalit and Excluded Community Right Movement (BDERM)' organized a press conference titled 'Dalit and Socially Excluded Communities: Problems and Way forward' in Dhaka Reporters' Unity auditorium. General Secretary of BDERM, Milon Das presented a written speech while other participants in the press conference were Babulal Sardar, Chairman of BDERM, Ashok Das, organizing secretary, Mukul Sikder, Treasurer, Gurucharan Das, joint secretary, Ms. Shanti Mandal and Uttam KumarVakta, member of BDERM.

The speakers said in the press conference that the people of Dalit and Excluded community live in every town and different areas of 64 districts of Bangladesh. They are mainly known as sage, cobbler, washer man, Dome, sweeper, Paroi, Kaiputro, Kawra, Beara, Nikari, Shikari, Kapali, Hari, Poad, Kulu, Chamar, Bauri, Bagdi, Namo, Shiali, Kaibarto, Kahar, Keshra, Nalua, Dhani, Bagol, Bachar, Mecho, Kotal, Vogmene, Chandal, Charal, Antoj, Namashudro etc. Some of them also known as banspuri, Tea labor, Lalbegi, Maithal, Fansi, Chamar, Mala, Madiga, Chakali, Dewali etc. These people are also known as Kanpuri, Telegu or Madrazi based on their ancestral living place and language. These ethnic communities were known as Chondal or Charal till they were introduced as Namashudro in the census of 1891. In between 1835-1850, a part of Dalit communities were brought to Bangladesh from different parts of North and Andhra province of by then India by the British colonial regime to provide menial services like cleaning bushes, garbage cleaning, carry away dead animals, etc. There are about 5 million Dalit and Excluded people in Bangladesh.

"Dalit and other Excluded communities in Bangladesh become victims of severe discrimination despite the constitutional declaration that protects citizen's equal right regardless of their race, caste, religion"— the speakers added. In order to launch united movement for establishing the rights of Dalit and Excluded community, 30 different organizations from all over Bangladesh, especially involved with the development of Dalit and excluded Community directly or indirectly, participated in a national workshop held in Dhanmondi WVA auditorium from April 20-21, 2008. From the workshop, a national platform of Dalit and Excluded community has been formed named 'Bangladesh Dalit and Excluded Rights Movement- BDERM'.

The speakers placed the following demand in order to improve the existing vulnerable status of the Dalit and Excluded community:

1. "Untouchability" and its social discrimination should be recognized as a punishable crime by the government.
2. Implementing and keep special caring of " International Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination - CERD"

3. To form a commission for the Dalit and socially Excluded people in national level which will make policies in the favor of Dalit and Excluded people
4. To take steps for expansion of housing and other citizens' right and opportunities of the Dalit and Excluded community people as well rehabilitate landless Dalit and socially Excluded people in government owned land (khas land).
5. To take special initiative for formal and informal education for Dalit and other excluded communities as well as arrange small scale industrial projects for income generating activities.
6. To take initiative for spreading health education, ensure health care of Dalit and Excluded community people as well as raising awareness on living healthy life, to supply safe drinking water, sanitation, gas and electricity facilities in every Dalit colony.

The press conference was covered by Journalists from major print and electronic media of the country and the news was printed in the top national dailies with due importance. Even the news of the conference as well as interviews of some Dalit leaders was also aired by major TV channel in Bangladesh.