

Equity Watch 2014

Challenges and Prospects for Dalits Securing their Right to Education in Bangladesh





EQUITY WATCH 2014

**CHALLENGES AND PROSPECTS FOR DALITS
SECURING THEIR RIGHT TO EDUCATION
IN BANGLADESH**



Nagorik Uddyog
and
Bangladesh Dalit and Excluded Rights Movement (BDERM)

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Nagorik Uddyog &
Bangladesh Dalit and Excluded Rights Movement, 2015

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Series Editor

Edwin, Open Space, India

Published by

Nagorik Uddyog &
Bangladesh Dalit and Excluded Rights Movement (BDERM)
8/14, Block-B, Lalmatia, Dhaka – 1207
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GLOSSARY

BDERM	Bangladesh Dalit and Excluded Rights Movement
BDHR	Bangladesh Dalit Human Rights
BRAC	Bangladesh Rural Advancement Committee
CBD	Caste based Discrimination
CEDAW	Convention for Elimination of Discrimination against Women
CRC	Child Rights Convention
CSO	Civil Society Organization
DET	Dalit Education Trust
DHRD	Dalit Human Rights Defenders
EFA	Education for All
FGD	Focus Group Discussion
HSC	High School Certificate
ICERD	International Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination
ICESCR	International Covenant on Economic, Cultural and Social Rights
IDSN	International Dalit Solidarity Network
MBA	Master in Business Administration
MCom	Master in Commerce
MDG	Millennium Development Goal
MoE	Ministry of Education
MoPME	Ministry of Primary and Mass Education
MSc	Master in Science
MSS	Master in Social Science
NEP	National Education Policy
NFE	Non-formal Education
NGO	Non-government Organisation
NPA	National Plan of Action
RMG	Ready Made Garment
ROSC	Reaching Out of School Children
SSC	Secondary School Certificate
UCEP	Underprivileged Children Education Program
UNESCO	United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisation

Dalits in Bangladesh: Status of Education

The State shall adopt effective measures for the purpose of (a) establishing a uniform, mass-oriented and universal system of education and extending free and compulsory education to all children to such stage as may be determined by law; (b) relating education to the needs of society and producing properly trained and motivated citizens to serve those needs; removing illiteracy within such time as may be determined by law.

(Article 17, Constitution of Bangladesh)

PREFACE

Before a decade, caste based discrimination and social exclusion against Dalits did not come into the focus of development discourses. Significant efforts of Dalit led organizations, human rights activists and individuals has brought the issue to light recently. Positive changes have been made as the State has taken a good number of initiatives for their socio-economic development. Though inadequate, allocation in the national budget under social safety net program, housing for urban Dalits, quota in public universities, drafting of Anti-Discrimination Act etc. are remarkable achievements for Dalits. But, these actions by the State can be termed as token interventions as the problems of Dalits are multifaceted. No disaggregated data on different aspects of Dalit, including demography is yet to be made by the State which is important to take positive actions to promote the situation of Dalits under different Government Schemes.

This study report is made with a view to understand the caste based discrimination against Dalit in the context of Education. The Government of Bangladesh is about to achieve 100% enrollment in primary education as pledged to the MDG. On the contrary, Status of education of Dalits, from primary to higher education, is shocking. The report is the outcome of the study to explore discrimination on Dalit in accessing education, challenges faced by them and possible ways forward to ensure their inclusion in Education and it's contribution towards achieving State's goal, thereby. We hope that this Study report will provide ample opportunities for the State and development agencies to understand and learn about the situation of Dalits in relation to Education in order to implement positive interventions for the promotion of Education for Dalits. The report will hopefully work as an important tool for accelerating Advocacy both at the National and International level to bring an end to caste based discriminations, especially in relation to better access to Education of Dalits.

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Bangladesh has adopted various policies, laws and strategies, and has committed to different international treaties to ensure education for all. Article 17 of the Constitution of Bangladesh proclaims free and compulsory education for all citizens and asks the state to adopt effective measures for the purpose of establishing a uniform, mass oriented and universal system of education and extending free and compulsory education to all children. However, the Dalit communities in Bangladesh are the most deprived with extremely poor literacy status.

There are many reasons for their lag in educational development, foremost among them being the practice of untouchability, social exclusion and economic hardship. They draw scant attention of state and non-state actors to their vulnerable socio-economic status, poor enjoyment of rights and entitlements, including education, even when compared to the ethnic minority or indigenous communities.

Education of Dalit: According to multiple sources the literacy rate among the Dalits is extremely poor. Though there has been significant improvement in the literacy rate in recent years, there remains an immense gap between the literacy rates of Dalit and non-Dalit children. Education is particularly expensive for Dalit families. Therefore it is important for them to be assured that it will result in employment. Their caste adversely impacts on their ability to access education, jobs, hospitals, the legal system and the right to choose where to live,

where to work, who and how to worship, and who to marry. This entrenched and systematic poverty, exclusion and marginalisation which result in physical and social segregation, restrictions on occupations, the humiliating notion of pollution and purity, and physical abuses have prevented them from acquiring the education that is so crucial for their development.

Despite the valuable social and cultural contributions that Dalits made to society, this is often overlooked or taken into little account in official statistics or academic research. As a result there is very little data available on the demographic or social aspects of the Dalits who face discrimination based on work and descent. The paucity of data and information increases their deprivation in terms of accessing services of the government and non-government sectors since there is no acknowledgement of the scale of the problem or even that it exists, thereby leading to continued discrimination.. Therefore, evidence based research and study papers on Dalits, particularly on their education situation, is very rare. In this context this report focuses on educational status of Dalit community with the understanding that education is the principal means to fight poverty, untouchability and caste based discrimination.

This status report uses the research and studies on Dalit communities done so far, namely Caste based Discrimination in South Asia: A study of Bangladesh and Dalits in Bangladesh-A Study

on Deprivation. To explore the present education status of Dalit communities in Bangladesh, the data and statistics of the study report of Nagorik Uddyog and BDERM (Parvez, Altaf and Mazharul Islam, 2014, *Bangladesher Dalit Somaj: Boishommyo, Bonchona O Osprisshota (Dalits in Bangladesh: Discrimination, Exclusion and Untouchability)*), is also used as it is the latest report drawing from both primary and secondary sources. For primary sources, the study writers interviewed members of Buno, Rishi, Jola, Kol, Rabidas, Dom, Bashphore, Rikiason, Naik, Hela, Jele, Hari, Kolu, Bede, Kaora, Telegu and Domer communities living in Bangladesh. A total of 632 individuals (33% female, 67% male) from the above mentioned communities were interviewed in 21 districts (Jessore, Gaibandha, Srimangal, Bogra, Khulna, Pirojpur, Rangpur, Dinajpur, Dhaka, Sherpur, Barisal, Tangail, Jaypurhat, Faridpur, Narayangong, Panchgar, Satkhira, Chapainawabgong, Lalmonirhat, Nilphamari and Gazipur). Five focus group discussions (FGDs) were conducted in five districts (one each in Moulovibazar, Kustia, Nroshingdi, Munshigonj and Dhaka).

Structure of Bangladesh Education system:

The introduction of formal education started in Bangladesh dates back to 1854 during the British regime through primary education. The Government of Bangladesh made primary education free and compulsory under the Primary Education (Compulsory) Act 1990. Intensive activities have been undertaken following the World Conference on Education for All (EFA) held in Jomtien, Thailand. The EFA concept resulted in remarkable progress in basic education in terms of formal free and compulsory primary education and literacy and non-formal education.

The educational structure consists of a formal sub-system and a non-formal sub-system. Both the sub-systems also have parallel religious streams. Bangladesh offers formal education at

four levels: an informal early childhood education in formal schools, primary education, secondary education (comprising junior secondary, secondary and higher secondary) and tertiary education from bachelor's onward. Madrasah or Islamic religious education follows the same structure. 'Non-formal education' (NFE) is a purposeful and systematically organised form of learning that generally occurs outside of formal educational institutions.

Over the years, government and non-government (NGO) projects and activities have resulted in significant developments in the field of primary education. The net enrolment in primary schools has reached 96.7 percent. Primary school children reaching class VI is 55.0 percent and the completion rate (of the five year primary school cycle) is 50.7 percent. In terms of access, the high enrolment rates achieved for both boys and girls do not yet equate to covering all the children in Bangladesh. According to government statistics, there are more than 2.6 million out-of-school children in the country. The government's various strategies, schemes and planning help in attaining the target of education for all as per commitment to the national and international standards. However, the exclusion of the Dalits due to not formally recognising them or their needs on the one hand, and the community's own uncertainty about the benefits of education in future on the other hand, contribute to poor educational standards among Dalits.

International Standard: Bangladesh has signed or acceded to a number of international standards for promoting education, i.e. Jomtien conference on Education for All (EFA)- the largest campaign of the world on education, to make primary education accessible to all children and to massively reduce illiteracy before the end of the decade. Bangladesh also agreed to Dacar Framework for Action which comprises strong and serious commitment to include

the excluded. Article 13 of the International Covenant on Economic, Cultural and Social Rights (ICESCR) declares that the States Parties recognise that, with a view to achieving the full realisation of the right to education, that primary education shall be compulsory and available free to all. Article 28 of the Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC) states that every child has the right to education and States Parties shall make primary education free and compulsory for all. Article 5(e)(v) of the International Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination (ICERD) states that States Parties undertake to prohibit and to eliminate racial (caste) discrimination in all its forms and to guarantee the right of everyone, in particular the right to education and training. Article 10 of CEDAW states that States Parties shall take all appropriate measures to eliminate discrimination against women in order to ensure to them equal rights with men in the field of education.

National Standard: Article 17(a) declares that the State shall adopt effective measures for the purpose of establishing a uniform, mass-oriented and universal system of education and extending free and compulsory education to all children to such stage as may be determined by law. Article 28 (3) declares that no citizen shall, on grounds only of religion, race, caste, sex or place of birth be subjected to any disability, liability, restriction or condition with regard to access to any place of public entertainment or resort, or admission to any educational institute. The National Plan of Action II commits the government to institute a well-organised and coordinated programme of early childhood care and education for the most vulnerable and disadvantaged children. The National Education Policy 2010 (NEP) includes to remove socio-economic discrimination irrespective of race, religion and creed and to eradicate gender disparity; to develop non-communalism, friendliness, global fraternity, fellow-feeling and respect for human rights; NEP Article 25(2) states that existing discrimination

will be minimised in phases. To this end, special programmes will be undertaken to extend special assistance to schools in the rural and backward areas so that the situation improves within some years.

Gaps/ compatibility of national policies/ laws with international standards:

In Bangladesh, education is not recognised as a fundamental right. As a result, the state is not obliged to protect and fulfil the right to education for its citizens. Moreover, there is no basic law for education in line with the fundamental principles and objectives enshrined in the Bangladesh Constitution. The Primary Education (Compulsory) Act 1990 deals more with the mechanisms to ensure compulsory education, but not on issues of equity, non-discriminatory access and quality education. The government's existing policies, plans, strategies with regard to education suggest action to promote literacy and education of ethnic minorities, tribal communities, women and poorer sections of the population. Dalit communities are not specifically addressed in any of the government mechanisms to ensure their educational development or to link them to existing services. Besides, no disaggregated data is produced on the literacy and educational status of the Dalit population by the government.

Status of Education of Dalit: Bangladesh has attracted the focus of the international community for some of its vivid successes—primary education being the crown among them. Despite significant achievement, however, some groups and communities, especially the Dalits, are still found to have poor educational development levels. The study 'Dalit Community in Bangladesh: Discrimination, Exclusion and Untouchability' revealed that the literacy rate among the selected Dalit respondents was 56.61 percent. According to the study 44.9 percent of the respondents never attend school and 36.4 percent attended only up to primary

school. Furthermore, 12.5 percent of the respondents attended up to the secondary level, 4.3 percent to the higher secondary level and only 1.9 percent attended graduate level or more education. What is alarming in the findings is that 28.5 percent of Dalit children remain out of school, which is very divergent from the national net enrolment of 96.7 percent. Among the school going children, a good number drop out of school after attending 2nd or 3rd grade due to various reasons.

According to the study, community-wise data show that some of the communities are still not interested to educate their children despite the country commitment to achieving MDG-2 before 2015. The study found that Domar, Telegu, Bende, Kaiputra, Hela and Kolu communities are advanced in education while Jele, Hari, Robidas, Karigor, Buno communities lag behind. Around 90 Dalit of the Jele community respondents said that they have never gone to school in their lives. There was no member with higher education in those families. On the other hand, Telegu, Bede, Domar, Kaiputra, Hela and Kolu communities had made significant progress in education. Among them enrolment was the highest in the Telegu community (around 63 percent). The highest percentage of attendance at secondary school was found in the Hela community. Many students from the Domar, Kaiputra and Kolu communities were found studying in higher secondary and graduate levels, as compared to other communities. The study finds non-formal education (NFE) and pre-primary education are not common among Dalit communities. Their lack of interest and lack of awareness contribute to weak enrolment in non-formal and pre-primary education.

The status of secondary education was very poor among Dalit that is 12.58 percent participation at the high school level. The literacy rates among the Dome, Basfore, Das and Domar communities remain between 15 and 16

percent. No students from the Jele community were studying in high school. Though a portion of the primary passed children attended high school, most of them dropped out before class eight and very few attended the Secondary School Certificate examination. According to the study on forms of CBD, only 4.76 percent of the 17 Dalit communities were found in the higher secondary level. The Kaiputra community had the highest participation in the higher secondary level, with 19.4 percent. Though the participation in the higher education was only 2.18 percent, the number of Dalit students in higher education (graduate and post graduate level) was increasing. At the graduate level the highest participation was from the Domer community (19.2 percent). In the study, 37 students of higher secondary and graduate level were interviewed, of whom 46 percent were in undergraduate studies. The introduction of the quota system encourages many Dalit students to pursue higher education, in his opinion. During the academic year 2012-13, four Dalit students got admission in public universities under the quota system. However, these students may have to face the challenge of finding gainful employment after completing their education. Among the 17 communities surveyed, the Domar had the highest participation (19.2 percent) in the graduate/undergraduate level. The participation of other communities was only 1-3 percent. Eleven communities had no children studying in the graduate level.

Women of the Dalit community have to confront double discrimination—on the basis of their gender among their own community, and on the basis of their caste outside. This contributes to their poor education status even within the community, though studies have found a trend of increasing education among Dalit girls. The study Dalit in Bangladesh – A study on Deprivation found very little difference between male and female literacy rates—in some communities, such as the Kaiputra and the

Bagdi, the women were more advanced than the men in terms of literacy: among the Kaiputra the female literacy rate was 21.55 percent compared to 18.56 percent for men; among the Bagdi the female literacy rate was 16.23 percent and for men it was 10.40 percent.

Reasons for poor literacy rate and educational development: Almost all the studies found economic hardship is the major reason for the low literacy rates and poor educational development of the Dalit community. According to the study on forms of CBD, 84.3 percent of the respondents said poverty is the reason for their inability to attend school while 74.30 percent said dropouts occur because of poverty. In many cases young boys and girls have to give priority to earning their living than to attending school. In such dire circumstances, the parents have no choice but to let their children start contributing to the household income.

Caste based discrimination is the second leading cause of their lack of equal access to educational institutions and enjoyment of the facilities provided by government and non-government organizations. The Dalit children have to study in a hostile environment, with abusive words, teasing and taunting on the basis of their caste identity being the norm. This has a significant impact on the impressionable minds of Dalit children, leading to drop outs from the primary level of education. Around 26 percent of the respondents said that they face obstacles in getting admission in the non-community schools due to their family and caste identity. In many cases the Dalit children have to hide their identity to get admission in school. Among the Dalit students in different educational institutions, 30 percent said that they have faced abuse or hatred from their classmates and others, while 30 percent had experienced hatred from teachers. Moreover, 6.5 percent of the respondents said that they still have to sit

on separate benches in school. Discrimination in using common materials like drinking from the same glass, having food in the same plates and using the same toilets still remain obstacles for the Dalit students to continue their studies. They are also deprived of educational privileges and entitlement like scholarship/stipend and opportunity to participate in cultural program, sports and other recreational activities; i.e. in most cases the Dalit students are not given due chances to prove their talent or perform. Another deterrent to the education of Dalit children is the environment surrounding their neighborhoods. Dalits are pushed to live in small houses in densely populated areas without any civic facilities. According to the CBD study, 54.3 percent of the respondents said that they live in one room with all family members; only 30 percent had homes with two rooms; and only 16 percent live in houses with more than two rooms. In almost all the cases, the families live in a very tiny room, which is full of chaos and commotion. It is not possible for the children to concentrate on their studies in such circumstances. The CBD study data showed that one of the major reasons for dropping out of school is the language of instruction. 17.10 percent dropped out from school because they do not understand Bengali language sufficiently well.

The professional demands of the traditional occupations in some Dalit communities like Bede etc. contribute to their low literacy rates and educational development. A lack of awareness of the importance of education among parents and guardians is among the contributory factors to the poor educational status of Dalits. Employment uncertainty contributes to the poor education status of Dalits. Many parents and guardians discourage their children from further studies because they think occupational mobility through education will be very difficult.

Among the contributory factors to Dalit girls' backwardness in education, early marriage is a significant one. In the study on CBD, 76 percent of FGD respondents said that child marriage is prevailing in the community and in 76 percent of the cases girls were married before reaching 18 years. Sexual and mental harassment also discourages Dalit girl to attend schools or colleges. Frequent eviction is another important obstacle to the educational development of Dalit communities. When a family is forcefully displaced, it is difficult to cope in the new environment. Moreover, rehabilitation is time consuming. In such a situation, children are affected most especially in terms of education. NGOs are very visible in the Dalit habitat. Though they have significant opportunity to contribute to ensuring the fulfillment of the right to education for Dalits but they put their focus on micro-credit activities on a priority basis.

Best practices for promoting education among Dalits: Despite significant constraints with regard to education, the studies and research discussed above show the spread of literacy and the growing desire of Dalits for education, as well as the obstacles they face to realising their right to education. The findings of the latest study on forms of CBD in Bangladesh shows increased interest and awareness among Dalit families for education despite severe economic hardships and an unfavourable environment. The increased attention of human rights organisations and individuals towards CBD and its manifestations has created a wider sensitivity on the issue, which contributes to the educational development of Dalits. The increased concern of state and non-state actors regarding the rights of Dalits is an opportunity to maximise their educational development.

Recommendation/ way forward

- Ensure both the enrolment and regular attendance of Dalit children in primary education with all facilities provided by the government.
- Introduce curriculum in the mother tongue for non-Bengali speaking Dalit students, at least in the primary schools.
- Take administrative steps for ensuring quotas in the educational institutions along with public universities for Dalit students.
- Establish at least primary schools adjacent to Dalit colonies or residences.
- Increase coverage of the social safety net programmes and income generating activities to overcome the economic hardship Dalit families face, in order to enable them to spend for their children's education.
- Ensure constitutional measures and specific legislation are enacted and effectively enforced to protect Dalits from discrimination in educational institutions.
- Constitute an 'Equity Working Group' within the Ministry of Education to continually devise and monitor targeted education schemes for Dalits.
- Guidelines on non-discrimination in education should be issued to all schools, and teachers and school management trained on it.
- A mass awareness campaign is required to generate awareness against caste based discrimination in general and education in particular.
- A coordinated campaign at the national level should be initiated among CSOs, government and the media to create awareness among Dalits regarding their right to non-discriminatory access to, and enjoyment of, education.

- Encourage CSOs to focus on the education of Dalits, including setting up schools, midday meals, stipends and other facilities. This should be alongside organising the community to raise their voices on issues of Constitutional and legal rights and entitlements.
- Adopt measures to remove gender disparities within the Dalit community, ensure equal participation of Dalit girls in education and ensure no child marriages take place.



1

INTRODUCTION

1.1 Dalits in Bangladesh

It is estimated that there are 5.5 million¹ Dalits (3-4% of total population) living in 64 districts in Bangladesh, though there are no official statistics so far. They live in acute insecurity in terms of livelihood, health, nutrition, water, sanitation, land, housing and education. Most Dalits have no access to the facilities that are required for a dignified standard of living due to financial constraints. On top of all this, various forms of discrimination practiced in the community deprive them of the chance to enjoy their rights and entitlements as well as opportunities to climb out of deprivation.

Dalits in Bangladesh can be divided into two groups. One group which was brought from the then India during the British regime to do menial jobs and the other group belonging to the local community who are treated as 'lower' caste and involved with specific professions such as fishermen, barbers, washers, blacksmiths, cobblers, oil-pressers, boatmen, weavers, butchers, hunters, sawyers, gardeners, tailors, snake charmers and drum beaters.

Both groups are treated as 'socially hated' and 'untouchable' by the dominant castes and others in the society. They are rarely accepted in public events and even have no access to religious places or rituals. Though they play a significant role in the country's economic, environmental and social development, they remain one

¹ Full report, Consultative Meeting on the Situation of Dalits in Bangladesh, International Dalit Solidarity Network (IDSN) and Bangladesh Dalit Human Rights (BDHR), October, 2006.

of the most economically marginalised and socially excluded groups in Bangladesh. Their marginalisation is acute in the several fields, including education.

1.2 Education and Dalits

Bangladesh has adopted various policies, laws and strategies, and has committed to different international treaties to ensure education for all. It is also committed to achieving 100 percent enrolment in 2014, a year before² the 2015 target of the Millennium Development Goals. Article 17 of the Constitution of Bangladesh proclaims free and compulsory education for all citizens and asks the state to adopt effective measures for the purpose of establishing a uniform, mass oriented and universal system of education and extending free and compulsory education to all children. However, many ethnic, indigenous and small communities still lag behind in educational development. Among such disadvantaged groups, the Dalit communities in Bangladesh are the most deprived with extremely poor literacy status. There are many reasons for their lag in educational development, foremost among them being the practice of untouchability, social exclusion and economic hardship. They draw scant attention of state and non-state actors to their vulnerable socio-economic status, poor enjoyment of rights and entitlements, including education, even when compared to the ethnic minority or indigenous communities.³

² Five years progress report, Ministry of Education.

³ The indigenous community (though the Government of Bangladesh recognizes them as ethnic minority) in the Chittagong

According to multiple sources⁴ the literacy rate among the Dalits is extremely poor. A study⁵ conducted by One World Action and Nagorik Uddyog found that 96% of the Dalits are illiterate. Though there has been significant improvement in the literacy rate in recent years, there remains an immense gap between the literacy rates of Dalit and non-Dalit children. The study also finds very few Dalit boys and girls have completed their high school and even fewer have completed college degrees or professional courses. Financial hardship has been identified as one of the main reasons for these children failing to complete their education.

Education is particularly expensive for Dalit families. Therefore it is important for them to be assured that it will result in employment. With no assurances from the state, it is unlikely that Dalit communities will choose education over trying to make a living. This is especially true for Dalit girls who will be married at an early age and for whom parents think education is not a necessity. Their caste adversely impacts on their ability to access education, jobs, hospitals, the legal system and the right to choose where to live, where to work, who and how to worship, and who to marry. This entrenched and systematic poverty, exclusion and marginalisation which result in physical and social segregation, restrictions on occupations, the humiliating notion of pollution and purity, and physical abuses have prevented them from acquiring the education that is so crucial for their development.

Hill Tract, greater Sylhet and Garo hill area has drawn wider attention and enjoyed better services than the indigenous people of the plains and the Dalit community.

⁴ Caste based discrimination in South Asia: A study of Bangladesh, Chowdhury, Iftekhar Uddin 2009; Dalit in Bangladesh: A Study on Deprivation: Research and Development Collective, 2010, A study on forms of Caste based Discrimination, Nagorik Uddyog, 2013.

⁵ Islam, Farzana (2011), Dalit Women in Bangladesh: Multiple Exclusions, Nagorik Uddyog and One World Action.

1.3 Why this report

Despite the valuable social and cultural contributions that Dalits made to society, this is often overlooked or taken into little account in official statistics or academic research. As a result there is very little data available on the demographic or social aspects of the Dalits who face discrimination based on work and descent.⁶ The paucity of data and information increases their deprivation in terms of accessing services of the government and non-government sectors since there is no acknowledgement of the scale of the problem or even that it exists, thereby leading to continued discrimination. Moreover, Dalits in Bangladesh have come into the development discourse and have received attention in development programmes only very recently. After a long period of advocacy by many CSOs like Nagorik Uddyog, Bangladesh Dalit and Excluded Rights Movement (BDERM), Bangladesh Dalit Human Rights (BDHR), Horijon Oikka Parishad, Antoj Parishad and other Dalit rights organisations, the present ruling party, Bangladesh Awami League, used the word 'Dalit' for the first time in 2008 in their election manifesto. Therefore, evidence based research and study papers on Dalits, particularly on their education situation, is very rare. In this context this report focuses on educational status of Dalit community with the understanding that education is the principal means to fight poverty, untouchability and caste based discrimination.

As the purpose of this report is to explore the education status of Dalits in Bangladesh, the report focuses on:

- Identifying and examining the situation of Dalits who are subject to disadvantage in education.
- Identifying the barriers in the education system in Bangladesh (if any).
- Analysing international and national

⁶ 'Discrimination based on work and descent' is the official UN and international terminology for caste based discrimination (CBD).

standards and recommendations on the education of Dalits.

- Identifying and analysing gaps/ compatibility of national policies/laws with international standards.
- Exploring the status of caste based discrimination (CBD) in the country in relation to education and the responses of state and non-state actors (2013-14).
- Analysing good practices from CSOs/DHRDs in monitoring and intervening in CBD on education
- Generating recommendations for ensuring the right to education to Dalits.

1.4 Methodology

Since Dalits are not treated as a specially deprived community (like, for instance the indigenous population), their status in education is also not segregated in any national survey or statistics. In the absence of such nationwide disaggregated data, it is difficult to generate evidence of the education status of this community. Individual or institutional research is the only source to learn about their socio-economic, cultural and other characteristics. Moreover, the number of research and studies conducted on the situation of the Dalits is also very limited. Even where present, in most cases only a few communities (9-10) have been covered by those researches.

Against this backdrop, this status report explores the ground situation of education among Dalit communities in Bangladesh. The report analyses the general situation of education of Dalits, the country context and structure of education, national and international standards on education, the reasons that impede the educational development of Dalits, some positive initiatives for the education of Dalits, and provides a set of recommendations to improve their educational status. In order to do so, both

primary and secondary sources of information have been used. Individual interviews were conducted among Dalit students and community leaders. Available literature was reviewed though, as mentioned above, resources are very limited. Daily newspapers also were analysed to get information on discrimination against Dalits in education.

This status report uses the research and studies on Dalit communities done so far, namely Caste based Discrimination in South Asia: A study of Bangladesh⁷ and Dalits in Bangladesh-A Study on Deprivation.⁸ To explore the present education status of Dalit communities in Bangladesh, the data and statistics of the study report of Nagorik Uddyog and BDERM (Parvez, Altaf and Mazharul Islam, 2014, Bangladesher Dalit Somaj: Boishommyo, Bonchona O Osprisshota (Dalits in Bangladesh: Discrimination, Exclusion and Untouchability), is also used as it is the latest report drawing from both primary and secondary sources.

For primary sources, the study writers interviewed members of Buno, Rishi, Jola, Kol, Rabidas, Dom, Bashphore, Rikiason, Naik, Hela, Jele, Hari, Kolu, Bede, Kaora, Telegu and Domer communities living in Bangladesh. A total of 632 individuals (33% female, 67% male) from the above mentioned communities were interviewed in 21 districts (Jessore, Gaibandha, Srimangal, Bogra, Khulna, Pirojpur, Rangpur, Dinajpur, Dhaka, Sherpur, Barisal, Tangail, Jaypurhat, Faridpur, Narayangong, Panchgar,

⁷ Chowdhury, Iftekhar Uddin, 2009, Caste based discrimination in South Asia: A study of Bangladesh, published by Indian Institute of Dalit Studies, Working Paper Series, Volume III, Number 07, 2009.

⁸ Prof. Mesbah Kamal, Dr. Monirul I Khan, Dr. Khaleda Islam, Ms. Shreen Khan, Dalit in Bangladesh: 2010; A Study on Deprivation, conducted by Research and Development Collective (RDC).

Satkhira, Chapainawabgong, Lalmonirhat, Nilphamari and Gazipur). Five focus group discussions (FGDs) were conducted in five districts (one each in Moulovibazar, Kustia, Nroshingdi, Munshigonj and Dhaka).

1.5 Main findings

- The government's existing policies, plans, strategies with regard to education suggest action to promote literacy and education of ethnic minorities, tribal/indigenous communities, women and poorer sections of the population. Dalit communities are not mentioned nor considered in any of those government initiatives as marginalized communities.
- Dalit communities are not specifically addressed in any of the government mechanisms to ensure their educational development or linking them to the existing services. Besides, no disaggregated data is produced by the government on the literacy and educational status of the Dalit population.
- The education status of the Dalit community is still very poor. When asked, 28.5% of parents responded that their children were not enrolled in schools. (This is contrary to the national enrolment status, which is 96.7%). Moreover, 63% of respondents informed about the drop out of their children from education. Strikingly, 90% of the respondents from the Jele community said that their children have never gone to school.
- It was revealed that Dalit children are not yet welcomed in educational institutions on equal par with the welcome extended to mainstream children. They face discrimination in access to education due to their caste and family identity. For 26% of the respondents, they faced discrimination in getting admission due to their caste and family identity. 32% of the respondent spoke about the adverse behaviour of the teachers and other staff of the educational institution. Teachers do not cooperate in helping Dalit children to understand lessons, access stipends, recreational activities, etc. In many cases Dalit students are not allowed to sit in the front row of benches, nor to use the common plates and utensils for having food during lunchtimes.
- 84.3% of respondents said poverty is the major barrier for their access to education. Besides, untouchability, discrimination based on their caste and family identity, and the language of the curriculum are other important impediments for their educational development.
- Female education is often ignored in the Dalit community. 76% of the respondent said that Dalit girls get married before reaching 18 years. Physical insecurity and patriarchal attitudes prevail in the community, which contribute to the poor education status of Dalit girls.
- Employment insecurity and caste based discrimination and untouchability in the workplace discourage Dalit parents and guardians from educating their children.
- NGOs have paid little attention to the education of Dalit children; rather, they are more interested in micro-credit activities.
- The recent measures by state and non-state actors for promoting the education of Dalits will contribute to the educational development of this community.

1.6 Key recommendations

- Ensure both the enrolment and regular attendance of Dalit children in primary education with all facilities provided by the government.
- Introduce curriculum in the mother tongue for non-Bengali speaking Dalit students, at least in the primary schools.
- Take administrative steps for ensuring quotas in the educational institutions along with public universities for Dalit students.
- Establish at least primary schools adjacent to Dalit colonies or residences.
- Increase coverage of the social safety net programmes and income generating activities to overcome the economic hardship Dalit families face, in order to enable them to spend for their children's education.
- Ensure constitutional measures and specific legislation are enacted and effectively enforced to protect Dalits from discrimination in educational institutions.
- Constitute an 'Equity Working Group' within the Ministry of Education to continually devise and monitor targeted education schemes for Dalits.
- Guidelines on non-discrimination in education should be issued to all schools, and teachers and school management trained on it.
- A mass awareness campaign is required to generate awareness against caste based discrimination in general and education in particular.
 - A coordinated campaign at the national level should be initiated among CSOs, government and the media to create awareness among Dalits regarding their right to non-discriminatory access to, and enjoyment of, education.
 - Encourage CSOs to focus on the education

of Dalits, including setting up schools, midday meals, stipends and other facilities. This should be alongside organising the community to raise their voices on issues of Constitutional and legal rights and entitlements.

- Adopt measures to remove gender disparities within the Dalit community, ensure equal participation of Dalit girls in education and ensure no child marriages take place.



2

COUNTRY CONTEXT: EDUCATION IN BANGLADESH

2.1 A short history

Education is the basic requirement for any development – socio-economic, cultural, and political – and these cannot be achieved without education. Moreover, education is a fundamental factor in achieving equity in access to basic rights and entitlements for any disadvantaged group. Agenda 21 of the Rio Summit describes education as an essential tool for achieving sustainable development.⁹ It is also said that education is one of the most important investments a country can make in its people and its future, and is critical to reducing poverty and inequality. Realising the significance of education, it is the duty of the state to ensure education for all irrespective of gender, caste, ethnicity, religion or any minority or disadvantaged status.

The introduction of formal primary education in Bangladesh dates back to 1854 during the British regime. The literacy rate in the country was only 16.8 percent at the time of independence (1971). But after that, Bangladesh has made remarkable progress in education. The Constitution of the People's Republic of Bangladesh, adopted in 1972, acknowledged education as a basic need of the people and enjoined the state to ensure the provision of universal and compulsory free primary education to all children, relating education to the needs

⁹ Agenda 21, Rio Summit, 1992, <https://sustainabledevelopment.un.org/content/documents/Agenda21.pdf>, accessed 14 September 2014

of the society and removing illiteracy. The government nationalised and took over 36,165 primary schools in 1973, regularised them under the Primary Education (Taking Over) Act of 1974, and declared 157,724 primary school teachers as government employees.¹⁰

The Government of Bangladesh made primary education free and compulsory under the Primary Education (Compulsory) Act 1990. Intensive activities have been undertaken following the World Conference on Education for All (EFA) held in Jomtien, Thailand. The EFA concept resulted in remarkable progress in basic education in terms of formal free and compulsory primary education and literacy and non-formal education. More remarkably, Bangladesh has already achieved the MDG goal of gender parity in primary and secondary education (ratio of boys and girls enrolment in primary school is 50.31 and 49.68)¹¹ in 2012 itself, three years ahead of schedule (the target year of achieving MDGs is 2015).

2.2 Structure of Education

The educational structure consists of a formal sub-system and a non-formal sub-system. Both the sub-systems also have parallel religious streams. The Ministry of Primary and Mass Education (MoPME) is responsible for basic education, comprising formal free and

¹⁰ National Plan of Action, Bangladesh in the EFA context: A historical overview: http://www.mopme.gov.bd/index.php?option=com_content&task=view&id=452&Itemid=472, Accessed 5 September 2014.

¹¹ Primary School Census Report 2012.

compulsory primary and literacy and non-formal education. The Ministry of Education (MoE) is responsible for secondary and higher education; it also looks after the madrasah (Islamic) and other formal religious streams of education. More than 700 NGOs are active in non-formal education, with some of them organising and managing formal primary schools as well. The private sector manages the English medium schools.

Bangladesh offers formal education at four levels: an informal early childhood education in formal schools, primary education, secondary education (comprising junior secondary, secondary and higher secondary) and tertiary education from bachelor's onward. Madrasah or Islamic religious education follows the same structure. Primary education covers a cycle of five years (grades I-V) and secondary education covers seven years (grades VI-XII). A Bachelor's degree takes two years (pass course) and Honours' degree three to four years. Some of the universities have recently introduced a 4-year bachelor's honours course. It takes two years to get a Master's degree (MSS, M. Sc, M. Com, and MBA) with a bachelor's (pass) and one year with a bachelor's (honours) degree. A post-Master's degree in education takes two to five years, depending on the discipline pursued. Financing of education is mainly a government responsibility in Bangladesh. However, the private sector bears a considerable share of the total cost of education, particularly at the secondary and tertiary levels. It covers part of the salary support, the allowances of teachers and other employees, land for school/institution premises and materials for the non-government schools and colleges.

2.2.1 Non formal education

'Non-formal education' (NFE) is a purposeful and systematically organised form of learning that generally occurs outside of formal educational institutions. It is designed to meet the learning needs of educationally disadvantaged persons of different ages and backgrounds, flexible in terms of organisation, time and place and may cover basic and continuing educational programs to impart basic literacy, including life skills, work skills, general culture, and facilitates lifelong learning and enhancement of earning capabilities for poverty reduction. It ensures equity in access and human resource development; it may or may not follow a 'ladder' system, and may be of varying duration'. It provides an alternative channel, a second chance to dropout and non-enrolled primary school-age children as well as adolescents to go to mainstream education; and adults who missed formal education, to acquire basic literacy and life and employable skills to improve their social and economic conditions. Both the government and NGOs organise and manage NFE programmes for different age groups as indicated above.

2.2.2 Primary education

According to the five-year progress report¹² (2009-2013) of the Ministry of Primary and Mass Education of Bangladesh, there were 104,017 primary level institutions of 13 categories in the country. These are government primary schools, non-registered private primary schools, laboratory schools, Ebatadia Madrasahs, kindergartens, community primary schools, NGO schools, primary school related to higher level Madrasahs, joint primary schools through to higher secondary schools, BRAC schools, ROSC schools, Shishu Kollayan primary schools and others primary schools. The

¹² 5 years progress report, Ministry of Primary and Mass Education, http://www.mopme.gov.bd/index.php?option=com_content&task=view&id=890&Itemid=594, accessed 9 September 2014.

enrolment was 19,003,210 pupils with 449,799 teachers. Among the students 50.20 percent are girls and 49.8 percent are boys, signifying gender parity. All types of primary schools

are free of cost except kindergartens, which are expensive. The NGO run schools attend to communities which need special services. Besides, many other services like midday meals are provided by the schools to prevent dropouts. In recent years the government has been emphasising the establishment of schools in the areas of ethnic minorities in order to increase their enrolment.

2.2.3 Secondary, higher secondary and graduate level

According to the Bangladesh Bureau of Educational Information and Statistics (BANBEIS)¹³, there are 19,208 secondary schools of three categories in the country: 2,869 junior secondary schools, 318 government secondary schools and 16,021 private secondary schools. A total of 7,937,235 pupils are in those schools, of which 4,229,292 are girl students (53.28 percent). There are a total of 3,547 colleges: 136 are school and college/intermediate colleges, 1172 degree colleges, 316 honours colleges and 123 masters colleges. There are 3,044,320 students in the higher secondary and graduate level, of which 1,384,643 are female students (45.5 percent). Besides, there are public universities of different categories like engineering, agriculture etc., though there are no statistics on the number of students or teachers. While courses in a public university require very nominal cost, the private universities are expensive. In recent years the public universities (e.g. University of Dhaka, Sher-E-Bangla Agricultural University, Dhaka) have introduced quotas for Dalit students.

¹³ <http://banbeis.gov.bd/data/index.php>, Accessed 8 September 2014.

Over the years, government and non-government (NGO) projects and activities have resulted in significant developments in the field of primary education. The net enrolment in primary schools has reached 96.7 percent¹⁴. Primary school children reaching class VI is 55.0 percent and the completion rate (of the five year primary school cycle) is 50.7 percent.¹⁵ In terms of access, the high enrolment rates achieved for both boys and girls do not yet equate to covering all the children in Bangladesh. According to government statistics¹⁶, there are more than 2.6 million out-of-school children in the country. The government's various strategies, schemes and planning help in attaining the target of education for all as per commitment to the national and international standards. However, the exclusion of the Dalits due to not formally recognising them or their needs on the one hand, and the community's own uncertainty about the benefits of education in future on the other hand, contribute to poor educational standards among Dalits.

¹⁴ 5 years progress report, Ministry of Primary and Mass Education, http://www.mopme.gov.bd/index.php?option=com_content&task=view&id=890&Itemid=594, accessed 9 September 2014

¹⁵ http://www.unicef.org/bangladesh/Quality_Primary_Education%281%29.pdf accessed 19 January 2015

¹⁶ Impact Evaluation Study of Reaching Out of School Children (ROSC) Project of the Ministry of Primary and Mass Education



3

INTERNATIONAL STANDARDS AND RECOMMENDATIONS ON EDUCATION

Bangladesh has signed or acceded to a number of international standards for promoting education, as discussed below.

3.1 Access to education for all

3.1.1 Jomtien Declaration

Bangladesh joined Education for All (EFA),¹⁷ the largest campaign of the world on education, to make primary education accessible to all children and to massively reduce illiteracy before the end of the decade. The World Conference on Education for All in Jomtien, Thailand, adopted a World Declaration on Education for All, which reaffirmed the notion of education as a fundamental human right and urged countries to intensify efforts to address the basic learning needs of all. The Framework for Action to Meet the Basic Learning Needs defined targets and strategies to meet the basic learning needs of all by the year 2000. However, the Jomtien EFA targets were not achieved by the year 2000.

3.1.2 Dakar Framework for Action

In April 2000, the World Education Forum adopted the Dakar Framework for Action, Education for All: Meeting Our Collective Commitments. This document reaffirms the goal of education for all as laid out by the World Conference on Education for All and other international conferences. It commits

¹⁷ Agreed at the World Conference on Education for All in Jomtien, Thailand (5-9 March 1990). <http://www.unesco.org/new/en/education/themes/leading-the-international-agenda/education-for-all/the-efa-movement/jomtien-1990/> Accessed 5 September 2014

governments to achieving quality basic education for all by 2015 or earlier, with particular emphasis on girls' education, and includes a pledge from donor countries and institutions that 'no country seriously committed to basic education will be thwarted in the achievement of this goal by lack of resources'.¹⁸

3.1.3 International Covenant on Economic, Cultural and Social Rights

Article 13 of the International Covenant on Economic, Cultural and Social Rights (ICESCR)¹⁹ declares that the States Parties recognise that, with a view to achieving the full realisation of the right to education, that primary education shall be compulsory and available free to all. Secondary education in its different forms, including technical and vocational secondary education, shall be made generally available and accessible to all by every appropriate means, and in particular by the progressive introduction of free education. Higher education shall be made equally accessible to all, on the basis of capacity, by every appropriate means, and in particular by the progressive introduction of free education.

¹⁸ <http://resourcecentre.savethechildren.se/library/dakar-framework-action-education-all-meeting-our-collective-commitments> Accessed 5 September 2014

¹⁹ <http://www.ohchr.org/en/professionalinterest/pages/cescr.aspx> Accessed 5 September 2014

3.1.4 Convention on the Rights of the Child

Article 28 of the Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC)²⁰ states that every child has the right to education and States Parties shall make primary education free and compulsory for all; develop different forms of secondary education, including general and vocational education, and make them available and accessible to every child, including financially accessible; make tertiary education accessible to all on the basis of capacity by every appropriate means; encourage regular attendance at schools and the reduction of dropouts.

3.1.4 UN Child Rights Committee Concluding Observations on CRC, 2009

The Bangladesh state should define strategic budget lines for children in disadvantaged groups or social situations that may require affirmative social measures (such as early childhood care and basic education) and ensure that those budgetary lines are protected even in situations of economic crises, natural disasters or other emergencies.²¹

3.2 Non- discrimination

3.2.1 Dakar Framework for Action 2000

The Dakar Framework calls for an uncompromising commitment by governments, civil society and the international community for including all who are discriminated against or excluded as full participants in high quality comprehensive basic learning processes. Six major principles underlie the content of the Framework, including a strong and serious commitment to include the excluded. Clearer analyses must be made of reasons for exclusion, including issues such as language of instruction,

²⁰ <http://www.ohchr.org/en/professionalinterest/pages/crc.aspx> Accessed 5 September 2014

²¹ <http://www2.ohchr.org/english/bodies/crc/docs/co/CRC-C-BGD-CO-4.pdf>, para 31(d), accessed 3 September 2014.

and there must be more innovative approaches made to address these reasons.²²

3.2.2 International Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination

Article 5(e)(v) of the International Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination (ICERD)²³ states that States Parties undertake to prohibit and to eliminate racial (caste) discrimination in all its forms and to guarantee the right of everyone, without distinction as to race, colour, or national or ethnic origin, to equality before the law, notable in the enjoyment of the economic, cultural and social rights, in particular the right to education and training.

3.2.3 General Recommendation 29 of CERD, 2002²⁴

1. Measures of a general nature: (f) Adopt special measures in favour of descent-based groups and communities in order to ensure their enjoyment of human rights and fundamental freedoms, in particular concerning access to public functions, employment and education;
2. Multiple discrimination against women members of descent-based communities (l) Take all measures necessary in order to eliminate multiple discrimination including descent-based discrimination against women, particularly in the areas of personal security,

²² <http://unesdoc.unesco.org/images/0012/001211/121147e.pdf>, Universal basic education; Regional objectives and strategies; The Dakar Framework for Action-Asia and Pacific region, 2000, accessed 4 September 2014.

²³ <http://www.ohchr.org/EN/ProfessionalInterest/Pages/CERD.aspx>, accessed 4 September 2014.

²⁴ Committee on the Elimination of Racial Discrimination, General Recommendation 29, Discrimination Based on Descent (Sixty-first session, 2002), U.N. Doc. A/57/18 at 111 (2002), reprinted in Compilation of General Comments and General Recommendations Adopted by Human Rights Treaty Bodies, U.N. Doc. HRI/GEN/1/Rev.6 at 223 (2003) http://tbinternet.ohchr.org/_layouts/treatybodyexternal/Download.aspx?symbolno=INT%2FCERD%2FGE.C%2F7501&Lang=en, accessed 4 September 2014.

employment and education; 3. Segregation: (o) Undertake to prevent, prohibit and eliminate practices of segregation directed against members of descent-based communities including in housing, education and employment; 7. Economic and social rights (pp) Take measures to address the special vulnerability of children of descent-based communities to exploitative child labour; 8. Right to education: Ensure that public and private education systems include children of all communities and do not exclude any children on the basis of descent; Reduce school drop-out rates for children of all communities, in particular for children of affected communities, with special attention to the situation of girls; Combat discrimination by public or private bodies and any harassment of students who are members of descent-based communities; Take necessary measures in cooperation with civil society to educate the population as a whole in a spirit of non-discrimination and respect for the communities subject to descent-based discrimination; Review all language in textbooks which conveys stereotyped or demeaning images, references, names or opinions concerning descent-based communities and replace it by images, references, names and opinions which convey the message of the inherent dignity of all human beings and their equality of human rights.

3.2.4 UN Child Rights Committee Concluding observation on CRC, 2009

The principle of non-discrimination should be fully and vigorously applied by the Bangladesh State and integrated into the implementation of all other articles to guarantee, without discrimination, the rights set out in the Convention. The Committee further recommends that the Bangladesh State take the necessary measures to ensure that efforts to address persistent discrimination and reduce disparities are adequate and effective in the family, schools and other settings, and in particular among

marginalised and excluded children, including girls, children of ethnic minorities and refugee children.²⁵

3.2.5 United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisation

Articles 1 and 3 UNESCO Convention against Discrimination in Education 1960²⁶ state that States Parties shall eliminate discrimination in education that has the purpose or effect of nullifying or impairing equality of treatment in education and in particular (a) depriving any person/s of access to education; (b) limiting any person/s to education of an inferior standard; (c) maintaining separate educational systems or institutions for persons (subject to Article 2); or (d) inflicting on any person/s conditions which are incompatible with human dignity.

Article 3:6 of the UNESCO Salamanca Declaration and Salamanca Framework for Action 1994²⁷ emphasised that schools should accommodate all children, regardless of their physical, intellectual, emotional, social, linguistic or other conditions.

3.3 Gender Equality

3.3.1 Convention for Elimination of Discrimination against Women

Article 10 of CEDAW²⁸ states that States Parties shall take all appropriate measures to eliminate discrimination against women in order to ensure to them equal rights with men in the field of education.

²⁵ <http://www2.ohchr.org/english/bodies/crc/docs/co/CRC-C-BGD-CO-4.pdf>, para33, accessed 4 September 2014.

²⁶ <http://unesdoc.unesco.org/images/0014/001459/145922e.pdf>, accessed 3 September 2014.

²⁷ http://www.unesco.org/education/pdf/SALAMA_E.PDF, accessed 3 September 2014

²⁸ <http://www.un.org/womenwatch/daw/cedaw/text/econvention.htm#article10>, accessed 5 September 2014

3.3.2 Millennium Development Goals

MDG-2 states that governments will 'ensure that, by 2015, children everywhere, boys and girls alike, will be able to complete a full course of primary schooling'. The Special Rapporteur on the Right to Education noted that governments should remove known barriers to the enrolment and retention in school of young and teenage girls belonging to all castes that are discriminated against.²⁹

²⁹ Girls' Right to Education (Special Rapporteur on the Right to Education (2006). UN Doc. E/CN.4/2006/45, paras.80–85 &140) <http://daccess-dds-ny.un.org/doc/UNDOC/GEN/G06/106/70/PDF/G0610670.pdf?OpenElement> accessed 10 January 2015.

4

NATIONAL STANDARDS ON EDUCATION

Bangladesh has enshrined the right to education in its constitution. There are several laws and policies to actualise this right, especially for those from the most disadvantaged sections of society.

4.1 Access to Education

4.1.1 Constitution of Bangladesh

Article 17(a) declares that the State shall adopt effective measures for the purpose of establishing a uniform, mass-oriented and universal system of education and extending free and compulsory education to all children to such stage as may be determined by law.³⁰

4.1.2 The Primary Education (Compulsory) Act 1990

This law made the five-year primary education free in all primary schools. It committed the government to ensure that no child shall be deprived of education for lack of teaching, learning materials and adequate space; and no child shall be subject to disparities of access to primary education arising from gender, income, family, cultural or ethnic differences and geographic remoteness.

4.1.3 National Plan of Action II³¹

The National Plan of Action II commits the government to institute a well-organised and

coordinated programme of early childhood care and education for the most vulnerable and disadvantaged children, using both formal and non-formal channels, with emphasis on family and community-based programmes. It should also bring all primary school-age children, particularly girls, the disabled, child labour, in difficult circumstances and belonging to ethnic minorities, remote areas and enable them to complete primary education (already free and compulsory) of good quality. Further, it should establish programmes of appropriate learning, life and work skills to meet the learning needs of all young people and adults, and ensure their access, participation and successful completion of relevant courses. The government should also increase adult literacy rate (among persons aged 15 to 45 years) from 62 percent in 2000 to 90 percent by 2015 (reducing adult illiteracy by half, MDG), especially for women, through equitable access to quality basic and continuing education for all youth and adults.

4.2 Non-discrimination

4.2.1 Constitution of Bangladesh

Article 28 (3) declares that no citizen shall, on grounds only of religion, race, caste, sex or place of birth be subjected to any disability, liability, restriction or condition with regard to access to any place of public entertainment or resort, or admission to any educational institute.³²

³⁰ http://bdlaws.minlaw.gov.bd/pdf_part.php?id=367 accessed 2 September 2014.

³¹ <http://www.mopme.gov.bd>, accessed 5 September 2014.

³² http://bdlaws.minlaw.gov.bd/pdf_part.php?id=367, accessed 2 September 2014.

4.2.2 National Child Policy 2011³³

The best development and growth of the children shall be ensured by providing needed standard services to children and adolescents irrespective of their age, sex, religion, and occupation, social, regional and small ethnic group identities in matters of rights concerning education, health, nutrition, safety, recreation and other rights.³⁴

Primary education shall be free. For economically disadvantaged or otherwise small ethnic groups, their children shall be given special incentives including education material. Necessary steps shall be taken to bring all children under secondary education and to bring an end to dropouts at the primary and secondary levels. Measures shall be ensured for reflection of the constitutional guarantee in all levels of education and making the children aware of the independence, sovereignty and integrity. Special steps shall be taken at the primary and secondary level so that children and the adolescents can attain proficiency in English alongside the mother tongue. All forms of physical and mental punishment in educational institutions shall be prohibited and a child friendly system of imparting lessons introduced so that the children and the adolescents do not have any physical and mental injury. The prevalent systems of education in the country shall be coordinated to allow all students have equal opportunity of receiving higher education enabling them to fill in the need of national development.³⁵

³³ <http://www.mowca.gov.bd/wp-content/uploads/National-Child-Policy-2011.pdf>, accessed 5 September 2014.

³⁴ National Child Policy 2011, Aim and Objectives-5.1.

³⁵ National Child Policy, Aims and objectives, Child Education, 6.5.1-6.5.7.

4.2.3 National Education Policy 2010³⁶

The National Education Policy 2010 (NEP) include the following in its aims, objectives, goals and principles:³⁷ to remove socio-economic discrimination irrespective of race, religion and creed and to eradicate gender disparity; to develop non-communalism, friendliness, global fraternity, fellow-feeling and respect for human rights; to create unhindered and equal opportunities of education for all as per learners' talents and aptitudes, irrespective of geographical, social and economic situations; to establish a society that is free from discrimination; to resist use of education as a commodity to reap profits; to develop some uniform and basic ideas amongst all learners; to establish a sense of equal status amongst all citizens of the country; to implement a uniform curriculum of certain basic subjects at the primary level schools of diverse delivery systems; to prescribe and ascertain the learning of some uniform textbooks to attain that; to initiate some method of teaching in some basic subjects at the secondary level to achieve similar objectives; to promote and develop the languages and cultures of the indigenous and small ethnic groups; to initiate special measures to promote education in the areas identified as backward in education.

NEP Article 24(2) mentions that special provisions like free admission, free education materials, free lunch at schools and stipends will be arranged to attract and retain street children and extremely marginalised children in schools. Effective measures will be taken for their safe protection within the schools as well.

NEP Article 25(2) states that existing discrimination will be minimised in phases. To this end, special programmes will be undertaken to extend special assistance to schools in the

³⁶ http://www.moedu.gov.bd/index.php?option=com_content&task=view&id=338&Itemid=416, accessed 5 September 2014.

³⁷ Aims and Objectives 7, 8, 14, 2

rural and backward areas so that the situation improves within some years.

NEP Article 9(4) commits to providing appropriate facilities similar to the steps noted in the primary education section to ensure equal opportunities for the students who suffer from some limitations in accessing secondary education. Regional discrimination will be dealt with accordingly.

NEP Article 2 (8) affirms that measures will be taken to provide residential facilities, special help and scholarships for the children of freedom fighters, of small ethnic communities and socially backward groups for their higher education.

4.3 Gender Equality

The National Plan of Action II³⁸ commits to sustaining and enhancing the present gender-parity in primary education and improving parity for girls in secondary education to achieve gender equity in education by 2005 and gender equality by ensuring full and equal access of boys and girls to and achievement in basic education of good quality by 2015.

4.4 Gaps/ compatibility of national policies/laws with international standards

In Bangladesh, education is not recognised as a fundamental right. As a result, the state is not obliged to protect and fulfil the right to education for its citizens. Moreover, there is no basic law for education in line with the fundamental principles and objectives enshrined in the Bangladesh Constitution (NB: the Education Act 2013 is in draft status). The Primary Education (Compulsory) Act 1990 deals more with the mechanisms to ensure compulsory education, but not on issues of equity, non-discriminatory access and quality education.

The government's existing policies, plans, strategies with regard to education suggest action to promote literacy and education of ethnic minorities, tribal communities, women and poorer sections of the population. Dalit communities are not specifically addressed in any of the government mechanisms to ensure their educational development or to link them to existing services. Besides, no disaggregated data is produced on the literacy and educational status of the Dalit population by the government. Looking at the following specific government measures, identified gaps are as follows:

- National Education Policy 2010 is not enough to promote education because the policy only articulates how the government values education, the ideological position it takes, and of course interprets the course of action and guiding principles for achieving the goals of the policy.
- The government's flagship programme for achieving the goals of primary and elementary education is supposed to focus on marginalised people's education in principle, but it does not have any specific programmes for Dalit children.
- The Education Act 2013 is still a draft. However, it has attracted much criticism with regard to its content. Article 5(1) of the draft law mentions that primary education will be recognised as a right for every child. This, however, does not actually ensure that the state will be accountable for the fulfilment of the education rights of all children. Moreover, the proposed law does not clearly define the duties, responsibilities and obligations of different parties like the state and government, local government, school authorities, parents, learners, teachers and communities. Therefore, the law needs to clearly define the right to free and compulsory education where there will be no charges, direct or indirect, for pre-primary and primary education. Education

³⁸ <http://www.mopme.gov.bd>, accessed 8 September 2014.

must gradually be made free at all levels. Moreover, non-discrimination provisions must be clearly built into this law.

- There remains a gap between the government programme for reaching education to all and the existence of opportunities for Dalit children to receive an education. According to the Dakar Framework for Action, the state should have serious commitment to include the excluded or, if not so, clearer analyses must be made of the reasons for exclusion. However, the Bangladesh government does not consider the status of education of Dalits a serious issue on par with that of ethnic minorities, and so no innovative or special measures have been taken by the government in accordance with the Dakar Framework for Action.
- Schooling opportunities are also very limited for some specific groups such as working children, disabled children, indigenous children, those in remote areas, or living in extreme poverty. The UNICEF 2006 Multiple Indicator Cluster Survey reports that only about half of the children living in urban slums attend school compared to a national average of 81 percent net attendance, and about 24 percent of slum girls have never enrolled in any form of formal or non-formal school. Even for those who are enrolled, completion of the primary education cycle is a critical issue. Only 55 percent of children eventually reach Grade 5. The Ministry of Primary and Mass Education records a 26.2 percent dropout rate in its 5-year progress report (2009-13) in primary education.

5

STATUS OF DALIT EDUCATION

Bangladesh has attracted the focus of the international community for some of its vivid successes—primary education being the crown among them. Despite significant achievement, however, some groups and communities, especially the Dalits, are still found to have poor educational development levels.

The studies done so far³⁹ confirm that Dalit students are still not welcomed in schools as society is still permeated with the sense of their ‘untouchability’ based on occupation and caste, though there has been some significant developments. Poverty is another major impediment. Thus they are struggling within an unending cycle of untouchability, illiteracy and poverty. There are various government and non-government initiatives to spread the boon of education. Unfortunately, however, Dalits still lag behind in education. As a result, they remain excluded from the fruits of development. This is a notable hurdle to achieving the MDGs for Bangladesh.

5.1 Types of school associated with the Dalit population

For many years the Dalit community has had limited access to mainstream educational institutions due to a fear of facing untouchability

³⁹ Chowdhury, Iftekhar Uddin, 2009, Caste based discrimination in South Asia: A study of Bangladesh, published by Indian Institute of Dalit Studies, Working Paper Series, Volume III Number 07, 2009; Prof. Mesbah Kamal, Dr. Monirul I Khan, Dr. Khaleda Islam, Ms. Shreen Khan, Dalit in Bangladesh: 2010; A Study on Deprivation, published by Research and Development Collective (RDC). and Parvez, Altaf and Islam, Mazharul (2013), Bangladesher Dalit Somaj: Boishommyo, Bonchona O Osprisshota (Dalits in Bangladesh: Discrimination, Exclusion and Untouchability).

and caste based discrimination. Many Dalits do not attend mainstream educational institutions. In many cases their children study in community run schools. In general three types of schools can be seen in Dalit colonies in Dhaka—those run by the City Corporation, NGOs and clubs. In some cases the clubs use the infrastructure of the city corporation schools. The Dalit colonies in urban areas have such community schools. As a result, children have some opportunity to attend school. But in the rural areas, there are no community run schools for Dalits. So they have no option but to attend the public educational institutions, where they face discrimination based on their social identity, including hatred from classmates and teachers, which discourages them from continuing studies. As primary education is free, enrolment is highest in primary school. But as secondary and higher secondary education are expensive, Dalit parents have to take tough decisions in continuing the schooling of their children.

5.2 Curriculum of the school

In the government or NGO operated schools out of the community, the Dalit students have to study in the curriculum written in Bengali. However, in the community run schools they have the opportunity to study in their own language. Some of the schools in Dhaka, especially in the Nzariabazar, Ganaktuli and Wari, and the club operated schools use Telegu, Kanpuri and Hindi as the medium of instruction. They even use the textbooks written in Telegu, Hindi and Kanpuri and follow the curriculum of the education of India. This support these

children, especially in primary school, to learn effectively.

5.3 Data analysis on the status of literacy and educational development of Dalits

5.3.1 Status of Dalits in education

The study 'Dalit Community in Bangladesh: Discrimination, Exclusion and Untouchability' revealed that the literacy rate among the selected Dalit respondents was 56.61 percent. According to the study 44.9 percent of the respondents never attend school and 36.4 percent attended only up to primary school. Furthermore, 12.5 percent of the respondents attended up to the secondary level, 4.3 percent to the higher secondary level and only 1.9 percent attended graduate level or more education.

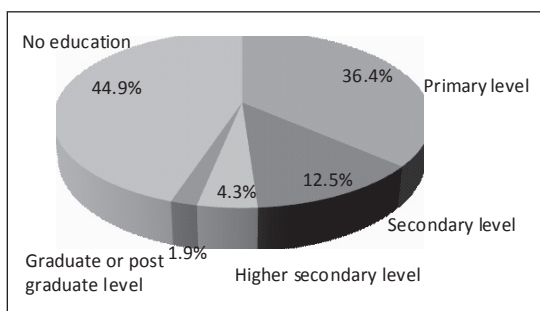


Figure-1: Education status of the selected Dalit Communities

For 71.5 percent of the respondents who never attend school, they states that their children go to school. What is alarming in the findings is that 28.5 percent of Dalit children remain out of school, which is very divergent from the national net enrolment of 96.7 percent.⁴⁰ Among the school going children, a good number drop out of school after attending 2nd or 3rd grade due to various reasons.

⁴⁰ Five years progress report, Ministry of Primary and Mass Education, Bangladesh, www.mopme.gov.bd, accessed 5 September 2014.

Dalits in Bangladesh – A Study on Deprivation,⁴¹ published in October 2010, generated some statistics on the education status of eight Dalit communities in Bangladesh - Bagdi, Kaiputra, Dhopa, Robidas, Joldas, Nomoshudra, Jele and Horijon communities. The location of the study was in Dinajpur, Sunamganj, Dhaka, Rajbari, Magura, Jessore, Bogra, Chittagong and Satkhira districts. The total sample size of the study was 1844. According to the study, the literacy rate among Dalits was 30.96 percent.

FAIR, a social development research organisation based in Kushtia district, conducted another study in January 2008 on 68 Dalit colonies situated in 28 Districts of Dhaka, Khulna and Rajshahi Divisions. The communities covered by the study were Vuimali, Bashfor, Hela, Raut, Dome, Lalbegi and Balmiki. The study found that 92 percent of the 489 Dalit households were illiterate. 383 children were enrolled in the community and government primary school. Of them 257 had dropped out for various reasons.

5.3.2 Community based education status

According to the study on forms of CBD, community-wise data show that some of the communities are still not interested to educate their children despite the country commitment to achieving MDG-2 before 2015. The study found that Domar, Telegu, Bende, Kaiputra, Hela and Kolu communities are advanced in education while Jele, Hari, Robidas, Karigor, Buno communities lag behind. Around 90 Dalit of the Jele community respondents said that they have never gone to school in their lives. There was no member with higher education in those families. On the other hand, Telegu, Bede, Domar,

⁴¹ Kamal, Prof. Mesbah Dr. Monirul I khan, Dr. Khaleda Islam, Ms. Shreen Khan, Dalit in Bangladesh: 2010; A Study on Deprivation, published by Research and Development Collective (RDC). <http://en.calameo.com/read/0014748560a3b2175a665>. The study was conducted on 8 communities in 9 Districts in Bangladesh. Accessed 3 September 2014.

Community	Education level				
	Never went to school	Primary	Secondary	Higher secondary	Graduate/post graduate level
Dome	33.3	42.0	15.9	5.8	2.9
Basfor	39.5	44.7	15.8	0.0	0.0
Robidas	61.2	24.5	14.3	0.0	0.0
Das	53.4	27.6	15.5	1.7	1.7
Buno	68.3	28.3	3.3	0.0	0.0
Karigor	70.0	13.3	10.0	6.7	0.0
Jele	90.0	10.0	0.0	0.0	0.0
Rikiason	53.3	40.0	6.7	0.0	0.0
Hari	76.7	13.3	10.0	0.0	0.0
Domar	26.9	26.9	15.4	11.5	19.2
Kolu	28.1	34.4	18.8	15.6	3.1
Kaiputra	19.4	54.8	3.2	19.4	3.2
Kole	53.3	30.0	16.7	0.0	0.0
Telegu	20.0	63.3	10.0	6.7	0.0
Bede	9.7	80.6	6.5	3.2	0.0
Hela	13.8	34.5	37.9	6.9	6.9
Naek	20.7	62.1	13.8	3.4	0.0

Kaiputra, Hela and Kolu communities had made significant progress in education. Among them enrolment was the highest in the Telegu community (around 63 percent). The highest percentage of attendance at secondary school was found in the Hela community. Many students from the Domar, Kaiputra and Kolu communities were found studying in higher secondary and graduate levels, as compared to other communities. The following table details the education status of the communities found in the study on forms of CBD.

The study *Dalits in Bangladesh – A Study on Deprivation* found that the Dhopa community ranks first in literacy rate (39.87%) among the Dalit communities. Among the eight communities (Kaiputra, Bagdi, Bormon, Dhopa, Horijan, Namasudra, Joldas, Robidas) the lowest literacy rate was found among the Bagdi (only 17.07 percent). The study found that their strong inclination for earning income from an early childhood might be the reason for their poor literacy rate. The Dhopa community leads in terms of literacy and many of them have education up to the post graduate level along

with medical graduates as well. Attendance of Dhopa children in the schools was found to be high, with many having positive attitudes towards education. The Bormon came second with a literacy rate of 36.88 percent. The study finds that the eagerness of the Bormons to change their traditional profession of fishing has encouraged them to go for education. The study revealed that the high dropout of Bormon girls from education was due to gender discrimination.

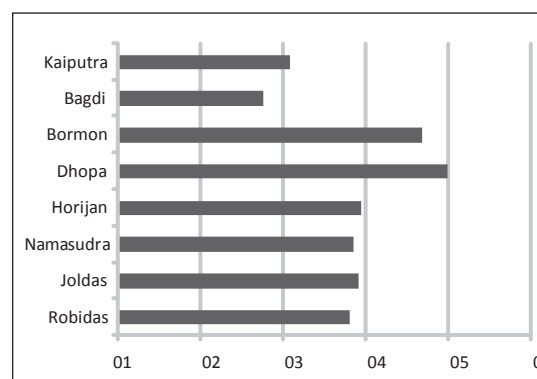


Figure-2: Education status the selected Dalit Communities under the study of Dalit in Bangladesh- A study on Deprivation

The 29.49 percent literacy rate of the Horijon community is the result of different educational programmes of government and non-government organisations, though a large portion of the community still is not interested in education. Among the Namasudra the literacy rate was found to be 28.57 percent, and many Namasudra families were found to be interested in education. It was found that many in these families had passed SSC or High School Certificate (HSC) examinations. Even a post-graduate was found among them. Among the Jaladash the average literacy rate was 29 percent. The trend of attending primary school was good among the children, although the girls lag behind the boys. The Jaladash children, however, dropped out from school owing to economic problems. The boys got engaged in fishing and rickshaw driving in order to earn an income and the girls took up household chores. The literacy rate among the Robidas community was 28 percent. The elders of the community had different opinions on the factors responsible for their children not being interested in completing their education.

5.4 Participation in different strata of education

The literacy rate is not enough to understand the educational development of the Dalit community. An analysis of their participation in the different levels of the educational structure is required in order to get a better picture.

5.4.1 Non-formal and pre-primary education

According to the study on forms of CBD, non-formal education (NFE) and pre-primary education are not common among Dalit communities. Their lack of interest and lack of awareness contribute to weak enrolment in non-formal and pre-primary education. The study Dalit in Bangladesh – A study on Deprivation revealed that only 3 percent of the respondents

received non-formal education. Non-formal education is supposed to cover people without literacy. However, this form of education does not reach the Dalit community. Very few of them had attended non-formal education in order to learn reading and calculation.

5.4.2 Primary education

In recent years enrolment in primary education has increased among Dalits. The study on CBD recorded 36.4 percent enrolment in primary education. Among the respondents 72 percent said that their children now attend school. They said that they do not have a specific plan to get their children educated in future, but they thought it would be beneficial if the children learned counting, writing and reading. Almost all the respondents said that there was a primary school near their locality run by the government, City Corporation or NGOs (e.g. BRAC schools) and they do not face difficulties to send their children to primary school, though untouchability and other discriminatory behaviour still prevail.

The study on forms of CBD found that the net enrolment in primary education of the 17 communities is 37.08 percent. The highest enrolment in primary education was from the Bede (80.6 percent), followed by the Telegu (63.3 percent). The Jele have the lowest enrolment (10 percent) at the primary level. Among the communities having over 40 percent enrolment are the Rikiason (40 percent), Kaiputra (54.8 percent) and Naek (62.1 percent). The study Dalit in Bangladesh – A study on Deprivation found the net enrolment rate in the primary level of the eight communities studied was 10.8 percent. The highest was among the Kaiputras (95.8 percent), followed by the Jalodas (93.3 percent), Robidas (81 percent), Bagdi (80 percent) and the Bormons (67.6 percent).

However, the respondents in the study on forms of CBD mentioned that 29 percent of children of Dalit families did not go to school and 63 percent had discontinued their schooling before completion. Various, common reasons like financial hardship, discrimination based on social identity and child marriage resulted in the poor school enrolment and high drop out rates. In rural areas, eviction of Dalit colonies often pushed their children out of the schools.

5.4.3 Secondary education

All the studies found that the status of secondary education was very poor. The study on forms of CBD found 12.58 percent participation at the high school level. The highest participation was from the Hela community (37 percent). The Kolu remain in the second position, with 18.8 percent literacy. The literacy rates among the Dome, Basfore, Das and Domar communities remain between 15 and 16 percent. No students from the Jele community were studying in high school. Though a portion of the primary passed children attended high school, most of them dropped out before class eight and very few attended the Secondary School Certificate examination. The study Dalit in Bangladesh – A study on Deprivation found only 7.8 percent attendance at the high school level. The Dhopa community had the highest participation in the secondary level while the Bagdi community was the lowest with 1.9 percent participation.

5.4.4 Higher Education

According to the study on forms of CBD, only 4.76 percent of the 17 Dalit communities were found in the higher secondary level. The Kaiputra community had the highest participation in the higher secondary level, with 19.4 percent. Though the participation in the higher education was only 2.18 percent, the number of Dalit students in higher education (graduate and post graduate level) was increasing. At the graduate level the highest participation was from the

Domar community (19.2 percent). In the study, 37 students of higher secondary and graduate level were interviewed, of whom 46 percent were in undergraduate studies. According to Gautam Kumar Das, a graduate in Mathematics from the Government Karmichael College, Rangpur, there were 8-10 students studying at the undergraduate level in the Government Karmichael College and Begum Rokeya College. He said that if the quota system was introduced earlier, then he would have had the opportunity to study in a public university, such as the University of Dhaka. According to him, the Robidas community is more interested in education when compared to other communities. The introduction of the quota system encourages many Dalit students to pursue higher education, in his opinion.

During the academic year 2012-13, four Dalit students got admission in public universities under the quota system. In 2014, 85 Dalit students across Bangladesh appeared in the admission test in public universities.⁴² However, these students may have to face the challenge of finding gainful employment after completing their education. Among the 17 communities surveyed, the Domar had the highest participation (19.2 percent) in the graduate/undergraduate level. The participation of other communities was only 1-3 percent. Eleven communities had no children studying in the graduate level.

5.5 Gender Equality

Women of the Dalit community have to confront double discrimination—on the basis of their gender among their own community, and on the basis of their caste outside. This contributes to their poor education status even within the community, though studies have found a trend of increasing education among Dalit girls.

⁴² According to Mohon Rabidas, a graduate level student of Public Administration, University of Dhaka, who has taken responsibility to groom Dalit students across Bangladesh to get admission in the public university.

The study Dalit in Bangladesh – A study on Deprivation found very little difference between male and female literacy rates—in some communities, such as the Kaiputra and the Bagdi, the women were more advanced than the men in terms of literacy: among the Kaiputra the female literacy rate was 21.55 percent compared to 18.56 percent for men; among the Bagdi the female literacy rate was 16.23 percent and for men it was 10.40 percent.

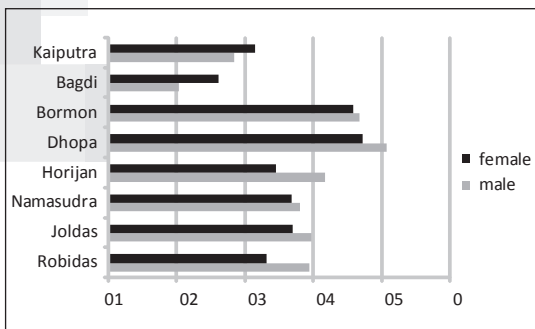


Figure-3: Literacy rate in the male and female of the Dalit community

6

REASONS FOR POOR LITERACY RATE AND EDUCATIONAL DEVELOPMENT

Almost all the studies found economic hardship is the major reason for the low literacy rates and poor educational development of the Dalit community. Caste based discrimination is the second leading cause of their lack of equal access to educational institutions and enjoyment of the facilities provided by government and non-government organisations.

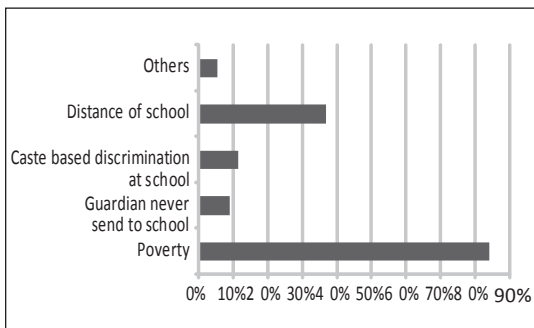


Figure-4: Reason for poor literacy rate among the Dalit community

The study on forms of CBD found several factors working against Dalits becoming literate. The FGD respondents blamed poverty (84.3 percent) as the foremost reason for their lagging behind in education. It is evident that caste based discrimination contributes to their poor economic status as well. Moreover, 11.6 percent of the respondents said discrimination based on their caste identity barred them from going to school. The lack of awareness of parents and guardians was also responsible for the low literacy rate. 85 percent of the respondents said that though there were schools near their community,

they did not attend schools because of lack of awareness.

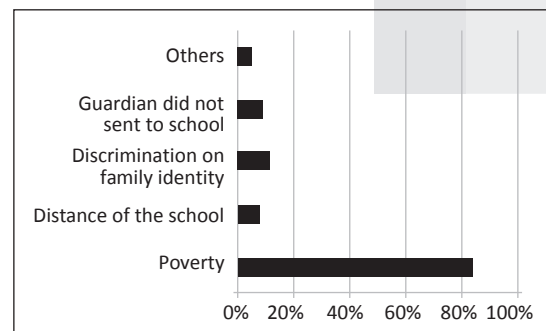


Figure-5: Reason for drop out

The dropout rate was found to be very high among Dalit communities, especially at the elementary level. Though in recent years school enrolment has increased significantly, the dropout rate is still a cause for concern. In the study on CBD, 28.5 percent of the respondents said that their children did not go to school, while 62.8 percent said their children had dropped out. Figure-5 presents some reasons mentioned by the respondents for this situation.

The study Dalit in Bangladesh – A study on Deprivation found that compared to social discrimination and lack of security, financial hardship was the major problem that impacts on access to education for Dalit children. All the Bormon community respondents (100 percent) reported that owing to poverty or the lack of money, it becomes difficult to continue the education of their children. A similar intensity

Status of education of the Dalits in Bagerhat District

Dipu Rabidas, a cobbler of the Dalit community in Bagerhat, earns Tk. 100-150 daily. With such a small income he has to maintain a family of six. He said that he could not even think of educating his children, though his eldest daughter studied till class seven. He said that along with the school tuition fee, one has to spend more on private tutor fees, school uniforms, educational materials, etc., which he could not afford. So his daughter had to leave school.

The Dalits in Bagerhat District are the vulnerable among the vulnerable. They have no housing facilities provided by the government or municipality. They used to live on the embankment of a river, under ward 17 of Bagerhat municipality. Laksmi Rani Das, from the same community, said that she heard about educational scholarships for girls provided by the government, but the students from their community never got these scholarships.

Subash Halder, another representative of the Dalit community in Bagerhat, said that 'though we have some access to go to school with the rest of society, due to financial hardship we cannot afford the education expenses of our children'. He said one of the missionary schools took responsibility for his son's education, but he could not think how to bear the educational expenses of his daughter.

Sudhir, a Dome at the Bagerhat Hospital, said that seeing the doctors at the hospital makes him dream of making his three sons doctors in future. But his dream will never come true due to his financial inability to continue their schooling. Besides, his children could not continue schooling due to untouchability and negligence in the government schools. He said that like other districts of Bangladesh, if the municipality or government establish a colony for them in Bagerhat District, 'we would have a place to live and we also can establish a school for our children'.

of poverty preventing children pursuing their education was also reported by the Kaiputra and Horijon communities. The study found that more than three-quarters of other communities reported poverty as a significant cause for their poor educational status. Only four communities mentioned discrimination based on caste identity as affecting their children's education.

In terms of the poor literacy development of the Dalit community, many other factors are explored and a brief discussion of those factors is presented below.

6.1 Access to education

'Because of social hatred our children cannot cope with their studies in school. When I go to the Dalit colony I see many children playing in the courtyard or on the road. When asked, they often told about the discrimination they faced in school based on their family (social

identity. They told that in the school other students teased them by calling them 'Kaora'. Being humiliated, they did not feel interested in going to school. I, with other members of the community, arranged for 50 children in a school and ensured a safe environment there. Such initiatives should be taken for the Dalit students in other places', says Mujibar Rahman, FGD participant from Jessore.

6.1.1 Admission to educational institutions

The quote above has some positives. Dalit children are not unwanted in schools as in the past, but their acceptance is not the same as the non-Dalits. The Dalit children have to study in a hostile environment, with abusive words, teasing and taunting on the basis of their caste identity being the norm. This has a significant impact on the impressionable minds of Dalit children, leading to drop outs from the primary level of education.

The study on forms of CBD found that in terms of admission, though equal access has not been ensured, there has been significant development compared to the past. Around 26 percent of the respondents said that they face obstacles in getting admission in the non-community schools due to their family and caste identity. 74 percent of the respondents said that they did not face any obstacle in getting admission in the school, college or university. In the FGDs for the study on forms of CBD, the respondents said that when their identity is disclosed during admissions, the school or college authority do not deny them admission directly, but discourage them indirectly. In 40 percent of cases, the school/college authority shows dissatisfaction about their admission.

The Dalits do not have the courage to protest, though they are often victims of discrimination while admitting their children in school. Instead of protesting, they compromise. They think that protesting against such discriminatory practices may ignite untouchability among the non-Dalits, which will block their children's access to education. In Rangpur district, a student seeking admission in class three in a reputed secondary school was denied admission on the grounds of his social identity although he scored well in the admission test. When the Dalit leaders challenged the school authorities, they agreed to admit him on condition that the leaders would not pursue the case further in the name of racial discrimination. Though such incidents of denying admission happen frequently, very few come to light. Therefore, action cannot be taken against the perpetrators. For instance, the Daily Janata of 7 September 2007 reported that 'Horijons have to hide their identity to get admission in school', and the Daily Ittefaq of 9 November 2010 reported that 'they have to hide identity at school'.

6.1.2 Access to stipend, scholarship and entitlements

In the urban areas Dalit students have some access to educational stipends, while in the rural areas the lack of information or discrimination by the teachers often impede them availing of such facilities provided by the government. The government provides educational scholarships for the poor and meritorious girl students up to the intermediate level. However, it is an open secret that the teachers or school authorities often exclude poor and meritorious students and instead provide scholarships to the children of influential families or embezzle the money of the scholarship themselves (Daily Samakal, 12 November 2014). In such circumstances, Dalit students have little chance to include their names in the list for educational scholarships. The school committee shows irregularities for allocating scholarships to the Dalit students. There are also irregularities in the selection for sports and games; i.e. in most cases the Dalit students are not given due chances to prove their talent or perform in the schools.

A head teacher of one of the secondary schools in Moulovibazar is from the tea-garden (Dalit) community. He reports, 'My daughter was a primary school student. When she got the scholarship from the talent pool in Class 5 last year, one of the parents went to the head teacher and asked him how a tea-garden girl could get the scholarship from the talent pool. The head teacher and other teachers replied to the parent, 'Why not? Her father also got a scholarship long ago, in 1963, when he was a student. You see, the discrimination and stigmatising attitudes are still there, but in a more decent way'.

6.1.3 Acceptance by the dominant and non-Dalit classmates

Although Dalit children are not blatantly treated as untouchables in the educational institutes

as occurred in the past, their presence is not accepted nor are they made to feel as welcome as the non-Dalit children. Dalit children are not overtly unwanted in educational institutes, but very often they are discouraged indirectly. Such findings are detailed in the study on forms of CBD. In the study, 11.6 percent of the respondents blamed teasing by their classmates or others as the cause for them leaving school and 6.6 percent mentioned hatred by the teachers of their social identity.

The dominant caste students tease the Dalit students, and oftentimes behave rudely by abusing and insulting their family identity, family profession and their caste. Among the Dalit students in different educational institutions, 30 percent said that they have faced abuse or hatred from their classmates and others, while 30 percent had experienced hatred from teachers. Moreover, 6.5 percent of the respondents said that they still have to sit on separate benches in school. Discrimination in using common materials like drinking from the same glass, having food in the same plates and using the same toilets still remain obstacles for the Dalit students to continue their studies.

Amit Das, a graduate youth of Ganaktuli city colony, Dhaka, reported that during his studies in college he never disclosed his family identity. In his school life the classmates knew he was from the Dalit community and he experienced many a humiliating behaviour from the students, teachers and other staff of the school. Such experiences made him hide his Dalit identity in college and he never took any of his classmates or friends to his home at Ganaktuli. According to him, if his college friends knew about his identity, it would have been difficult for him to continue studies, being ostracised and humiliated.

Sumitra Rani still can hear 'You are Buno, sit in other places'

Sumitra Rani is from the Buno community. She was the student of class 3 of Pratima Girls School in Khorshedpur village. She said when she attended school other students used to neglect her due to her caste identity. The students from Kutipara used to say, 'You are Buno, do not sit with us'. They also used to taunt her by reciting 'Hindu Hindu Tulshir Para, Hindura khay gorur matha' (Hindus are like the leaves of the tulsi plant, Hindus eat the head of the cow). She did not confront them due to fear. 'I used to be very upset on hearing such words. Whenever I informed the teachers, they did not take action. Instead, they suggested that I remain silent. After such experiences I used to think of not attending school. I was very upset being the target of such behaviour from the students'.

A study conducted by Research Initiative Bangladesh⁴³ revealed that children from socially excluded communities, particularly from the Dalit sweeper and Rishi communities, usually are not allowed into schools. Even after the introduction of compulsory primary education, some have been admitted, but they are treated differently: they are made to sit at the back of the classroom, away from other students. As a result, in Tala Upazila of Satkhira district, only one Rishi child had succeeded in passing the HSC examination. The elders in the community were not eager to send their children to schools because they were afraid that the children would be treated badly and also because they did not see the opportunity cost of education accruing to them. Many Horijon children said they were

⁴³ Begum, Suraiya. (2007). Annual Report 2007-08. Dhaka: Research Initiatives Bangladesh.

afraid to go to school as they felt isolated and were humiliated by both teachers and students.

The Daily Bhorer Kagoj of 25 March 2010 published news of an incident where Ruhi Jolo Das, a student of class 2 in Char Aminullah Government Primary School situated in Subarnachar sub district, Noakhali, was beaten and thrown out of the class only because he was a Dalit. Similar headlines from other newspapers are not encouraging. The Daily Prothom Alo of 4 July 2010 reported that 11 Saontal students left the hostel of Tanor Degree College of Rajshahi district as they were compelled to have food in separate plates from other students.

6.1.4 Acceptance by the teachers and authority

'You are the son of 'lower' caste, you must get out': so saying, the headmaster and other teachers of Vojgati Government Primary School, Monirampur sub-district of Jessore barred 70 Dalit students from the Independence Day event, as reported in The Daily Prothom Alo on 3 April 2010.

A state of ignorance and abhorrence still prevails among teachers with regard to Dalit students in all levels of educational institutions. The study on forms of CBD showed that 32 percent of the respondents experienced atypical behaviour from the teachers and other staff of the institutions only because of their caste or family identity. Some 16.7 percent of the respondents said that their teachers actually discouraged them from attending school, while 41.7 percent reported that their teachers did not help them to understand the lessons. Additionally, 50 percent said that they experienced abusive comments from the teachers and 33 percent said that they were never allowed to sit in the first row in the class.

When we went to school the teachers often discouraged us by negative comments. They used to say that Dalit children do not need education because in future they have to take their parents' profession. They would say that we will not get good jobs like the others. They would snidely remark that banks, corporations and other firms will not employ us, then what is the use of our education (i.e. it was a total waste of their and our time and resources). Due to such comments Dalit families are demotivated from sending their children to schools for education.

- Binoy Rani, a woman of the Gabtoli Sweeper colony, Dhaka

6.2 Poor economic status

Economic discrimination against Dalits has contributed to their poverty. Poverty is linked to untouchability and discrimination based on their family/caste identity in the trade and labour markets. It is also closely related to powerlessness, being dependent on non-Dalits for work and employment, which inherently has greater possibilities for exploitation. These factors not only deprive them of educational development, but also health and other social benefits and their voices are constantly suppressed.⁴⁴ Poverty reduces economic capacity and makes it difficult for Dalit families to buy books or pay tuition fees for schooling. Such difficulties often result in frequent dropout from the schools. Sometimes it pushes these children into the labour market to earn income for survival.

⁴⁴ Islam, Farzana and Mohammad Nasir Uddin. (2009). 'Intricate Tale of Social Exclusion: Dalit Women's Experience of Caste, Class, Citizenship and Gender in Dhaka City', The Jahangirnagar Review, Part II: Social Science, Vol. 32, pp. 15-32.

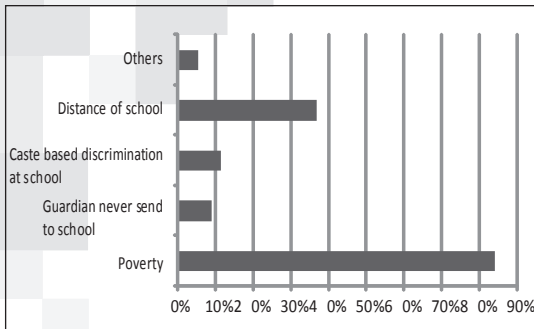


Figure-6: status of income of the Dalit communities

According to the study on forms of CBD, 84.3 percent of the respondents said poverty is the reason for their inability to attend school while 74.30 percent said dropouts occur because of poverty. 'We start our cleaning work early at dawn but get only Tk. 800 to Tk.1200 as wages. With that money, it is quite impossible to bear our children's educational expenses', reported Sajal Kumar Roy, Secretary General, Horijon Parishad.

According to the study on CBD, the average monthly income of the majority of Dalits is between Tk. 3000 to Tk. 6000, which is far below the national average monthly income of Tk. 7933.⁴⁵ Among the respondents 18 percent said that their family income is between Tk. 1000 to Tk. 3000, 41.8 percent said that their income is between Tk. 3000 to Tk. 6000. Only 11.9 percent of families have a monthly income of more than Tk. 12,000. Dalit families have three or four members on average; 34.2 percent have five to six members; and 21.4 percent have seven or more members. Looking after so many family members on such a small income, including the provision of education to children, is extremely difficult.

With such scanty income they cannot afford education expenses after meeting the basic

necessities of the family. For instance, a Dalit tea labourer earns Tk. 67 a day while the lowest paid worker in the Readymade Garment (RMG) sector earns Tk. 177. In the agricultural sector wages are Tk. 200 to Tk. 300 per day. With this poor income it is very difficult to fulfil daily needs, let alone provide education for children. As a result, in the tea garden and at the village level, the rate of SSC passed among Dalits was no more than 5 percent. There are few schools in the tea gardens. As a result, Dalits remain illiterate generation after generation. The perpetual struggle to fight poverty makes Dalits more vulnerable to greater discrimination and oppression. The CBD study showed around 18 percent of Dalit children drop out of the school to augment their household income, while 74 percent never had the opportunity to attend school because of poverty.

Although primary education is free and compulsory in Bangladesh, there are substantial private and opportunity costs that parents must meet for their children's schooling. These costs include examination fees, private tuition, uniforms and notebooks in the upper grades of primary school, and for some foregone earnings from employment. A study⁴⁶ revealed that the average cost per child per year of attending primary school is Tk. 3,812. Households which have less than Tk. 2,000 income per month send almost 25 percent fewer children to school than those who are in the Tk. 8,000 and above income group. The study also revealed that rates of dropout and the proportion of children who had never been enrolled are inversely correlated to the increase in family income: 12 percent of children from households living on incomes below Tk. 2,000 per month had never been enrolled in schools, while a quarter had started school but dropped out. In families earning more than Tk. 8,000 per month, 2.6

⁴⁵ <http://bdnews24.com/economy/2014/05/21/bangladesh-s-per-capita-income-1190> Accessed 22 September 2014

⁴⁶ Poverty, Equity and Access to Education in Bangladesh, December 2010, http://www.create-rpc.org/pdf_documents/PTA51.pdf Accessed 27 September 2014

percent of children had never been enrolled and 10.6 percent had dropped out of school. This is evidence of the inverse causal relationship between poverty (as household income) and the literacy rate and educational development of Dalit communities.

Moreover, a large percentage of the Dalit population do not have permanent income sources. The study on forms of CBD found that only 38 percent of the Dalit population had specific jobs. Others had to depend on whatever work they could get. Such financial vulnerability complicates the expenditure on the education of children and in most cases Dalit children leave schools early. In many cases young boys and girls have to give priority to earning their living than to attending school. In such dire circumstances, the parents have no choice but to let their children start contributing to the household income.

Traditional expenditure patterns also contribute to the poor education of Dalit communities. In terms of expenditure, most of the expenses are incurred on festive occasions and on recreation like feasts/drinks/movies and other forms of entertainment. Some of the income often goes to bribes to secure employment, both in rural and semi-urban areas. Given the circumstances, Dalit parents cannot even think of spending any part of their meagre income for the education of their children.

6.3 Curriculum and language difficulty

There are more than 70 Dalit communities in Bangladesh.⁴⁷ Many of the communities have their own language. The most used languages are Telegu, Chachari (Relli), Kanpuri (Hindi), Bhojpuri, Deswali and Nagri. Some communities have lost their mother tongue and now have

⁴⁷ Parvez, Altaf and Romen Biswas, (2008), Boichitro O Samajik Bonchona: Bangladesher Prantik Jonogosthir Akkhyan (Diversity and Social Exclusion: A Tale of Marginalised Community in Bangladesh), Dhaka: BDERM and Nagorik Uddyog.

become accustomed to Bangla. However, many communities still use their own language. Among the communities, the largest are the Kanpuri and Telegu who speak Hindi and Telegu respectively.

Such Dalit children have few opportunities to have education in their own language. There are some schools in Dalit colonies in Dhaka where Telegu is used as a medium of instruction. Some community schools use books written in Telegu, Kanpuri or Hindi, which follow the Indian curriculum. However, a majority of the schools use Bengali as a medium of language. In most cases the teachers in Dalit schools are Bengali speakers. As a result, communication between students and teachers often remains weak and the children lose interest, being unable to understand the subject well.

The CBD study data showed that one of the major reasons for dropping out of school is the language of instruction: 17.10 percent dropped out from school because they do not understand Bengali language sufficiently well. In the family and the neighbourhood they communicate in their own languages (Telegu, Kanpuri or Hindi). So it is difficult for them to study in Bengali language. Moreover, the language difficulties multiply their problem in understanding lessons, especially mathematics and English.

6.4 Traditional occupations as Impediments to education

The professional demands of the traditional occupations in some Dalit communities contribute to their low literacy rates and educational development. For instance, the Bede community in Bangladesh are nomads and their children move with the family from place to place. As a result, these children cannot stick to a single school. For this reason schools also do not like to admit these children for fear of

frequent dropouts. An article⁴⁸ on the Bede community shows that they live in 65 places in a year. Their average length of stay in a place is about two months at a time. If a school is set up in each of these places (65 schools in 65 places), then the Bede children could be enrolled in schools wherever they are. Due to the lack of suitable options, however, the Bede have the highest illiteracy rate among Dalit communities.

6.5 Physical environment

Another deterrent to the education of Dalit children is the environment surrounding their neighbourhoods. Dalits are pushed to live in small houses in densely populated areas without any civic facilities. According to the CBD study, 54.3 percent of the respondents said that they live in one room with all family members; only 30 percent had homes with two rooms; and only 16 percent live in houses with more than two rooms. In almost all the cases, the families live in a very tiny room, which is full of chaos and commotion. It is not possible for the children to concentrate on their studies in such circumstances.⁴⁹

Almost 175 people from 35 Telegu families who were evicted in 2007 from the Mohammadpur Town Hall of Dhaka city now live near Gabtoly Beribad. Around 5000 people live at Nazira Bazaar Pakistani Colony on Central Aga Sadek Road in Dhaka. Except for a few who have proper (though small) houses, most live in shabby huts. In one instance, 22 members of a family were found living in one room allotted by the government in Nazira Bazar colony. The number of new faces is continuously increasing, but the size of the house remains unchanged.

The situation in Rabidash Para at Wari in Dhaka is the same: 105 families live in two hamlets divided by a road. Each family has

⁴⁸ Sikder, Abdul Gaffar, Bikrampur Bede Sompraday, Amader Bikrampur, March 2014.

⁴⁹ Bashar (2012), An unpublished study of NagorikUddyog.

been allocated one room of 225 square feet (15 x 15 feet). Three generations live in each room. While living in such cramped and overcrowded circumstances, it is unrealistic to think of separate rooms or places of study for the children. Besides, the dirty and chaotic environment outside the houses does not help in concentration. Dalits in rural areas experience the same—and suffer some additional disadvantages: they are deprived of electricity, water supply and educational institutes near their communities.

6.6 Lack of awareness/ignorance

A lack of awareness of the importance of education among parents and guardians is among the contributory factors to the poor educational status of Dalits. In the study on CBD, 9.1 percent of the respondents mentioned the lack of awareness of their parents – ‘nobody, parents, guardians or elders encouraged us or sent us to school’, said a respondent. The study also revealed that 85 percent were not interested in going to school though there were schools near their community. This also indicated the lack of awareness among parents and guardians regarding the value of education. According to Gautam Chandra Das, an educated youth from the Rabidas community, in Rangpur city 90 percent of children from the Rabidas community go to school while the rate is between 50 to 60 percent among the Horijon community. The reason behind the poor enrolments among the Horijons is that their parents and guardians still do not value education or understand its importance. As a result, they are becoming disempowered by the day and losing the opportunity to apply for jobs in government offices to other communities.

In Ganaktuli city colony of Dhaka, the Under-Privileged Children’s Education Programme (UCEP) established a school in 1992 only for the education of Dalit children. Due to a lack of

interest in education, the Dalit children gradually dropped out from the school and now a majority of the students are non-Dalits. 'Our guardians were not interested in education, so the children also did not study well. They did not attend school regularly, did not know the class timings or the exam times. As a result, the teachers lost interest in our children. Thus the enrolment of the Dalit children dropped and non-Dalit children occupy the school now', reported Moni Rani Das, Vice President of BDERM.

Food for the Hungry International, a NGO, used to run a school in the Wari city area for more than 25 years. While in operation, the NGO told the local Dalit community to pay tuition fees to initiate a culture of payment for the future survival of the school. The community did not heed the appeal. In 2012, when the NGO stopped running the school and handed it over to the community with some savings, the community could not run the school as they could not afford the expenses. The number of teachers and students has already decreased.

Ultimately, though, it is the duty of the government to fulfil the right to education for all its citizens. The Government of Bangladesh has initiated various schemes for increasing the enrolment and retention of children in schools. However, if awareness cannot be created among the parents and guardians, Dalit children will not be able to enjoy the privileges or avail of the services, and will continue to remain poor.

6.7 Employment uncertainty

Employment uncertainty contributes to the poor education status of Dalits. Many parents and guardians discourage their children from further studies because they think occupational mobility through education will be very difficult. Though various initiatives from within and outside the community help increase the number of educated Dalits in urban areas,

caste identity keeps them disadvantaged. This separate identity prevents them from getting jobs according to their qualification. Their lack of self-confidence when they appear with non-Dalits in any competition for jobs does not help either. 'Seeing the last name of the Dalit applicant, the employer thinks s/he is eligible only for the post of sweeper', commented a Dalit organiser in Narshingdhi district wryly. Among the FGD respondents of the study on CBD, 42 percent said that they had to face neglect or hatred in the workplace on account of their caste identity. Some persistent Dalits have succeeded in acquiring a graduate or post-graduate degree, but are deprived of well-deserved jobs—their birth (i.e. caste) identity being the sole obstacle.

Though there are many educated youth among us, what is frustrating is that they do not get jobs according to their educational qualification. In the past, when a child grew up, he used to get a job in the city corporation. Now such opportunity is rare. For people who get an education with a view to changing their family profession, unemployment makes them upset. As a result, many educated unemployed youth are found in the Dalit communities. Seeing this frustration, parents are no longer interested in the education of their children. This enhances the negative attitude towards education among Dalit population.
- Nirmal Chandra Das, Dalit Activist

For example, in 2011, the Daily Samakal newspaper⁵⁰ published a feature on the hostile attitude of one Chairman of Jalalabad Union Council of Kolaroa sub-district, Satkhira, who yelled at the Dalit applicants and made them go out of the room saying, 'you son of a cobbler, how dare you ask for a decent job?!'

⁵⁰ The Daily Samakal, 15 November 2011.

Overt discrimination against Dalits as a religious minority community (Hindus) and of 'low caste' casts its shadow in every sphere of socio-economic and political life in Bangladesh society. Until 1993, not a single member of the minority community held the post of chair or director in the government, semi-government or autonomous organisations. In the banks or financial institutions, they did not hold any managerial post. There was only one minority representative as a general manager among 37 general managers in the nationalised banks.⁵¹

'My sons and daughters don't go to school. What can I do? They go for showing their skills with serpents so that they can earn a few Takas. When would they get the time for reading and writing? Only a few Dalit boys and girls are going to school — and they won't get a good job. A boy from our neighbourhood is now studying in a college. If he doesn't get a good job, other boys will lose interest in education. Education is not for us — especially not for our daughters'

- a woman from Ganaktuli City colony, Dhaka

6.8 Gender disparity

It is a relatively recent development that a few Dalit girls go to school. Nevertheless, in most cases, they fail to carry on their studies for long. Dalit women face discrimination, exclusion and violence as a result of both their caste and gender. The majority of Dalit girls drop out of school and miss one of the most crucial opportunities for escaping poverty.⁵² The patriarchal control of the family and community works behind the poor education status of the Dalit girl child. Though in some cases the female literacy rate is higher than the male literacy rate

⁵¹ Chowdhury, Iftekhar Uddin, Caste based discrimination in South Asia: A Study of Bangladesh.

⁵² Dalit Women in Bangladesh, Multiple Exclusion, published by BDERM and Nagorik Uddyog, March 2011.

— e.g. among the Kaiputra, the female literacy rate is higher (21.55 percent) than for males (20.90 percent), overall the literacy rate of Dalit girls is below that of Dalit boys.

Dalit girls face two major hurdles in their attempt to continue their education: one is patriarchal norms (the male domination in the family and the community) and the other caste based discrimination and violence (physical and mental harassment by non-Dalits). Those who are lucky to get admitted in primary school are rarely able to reach secondary school by overcoming such hurdles. Moreover, poverty affects the schooling of girls more than that of boys. Parents prefer spending on boys than girls in education, according to Moni Ranid Das, Dalit organiser from Dhaka. Some specific factors that work against Dalit female educational development are discussed below.

6.8.1 Child marriage

Among the contributory factors to Dalit girls' backwardness in education, early marriage is a significant one. In the study on CBD, 76 percent of FGD respondents said that child marriage is prevailing in the community and in 76 percent of the cases girls were married before reaching 18 years. According to the Bede community, they are not interested to educate their girls and most are married off early. They think that if the girls become educated it will be harder to find an equally educated groom for them.

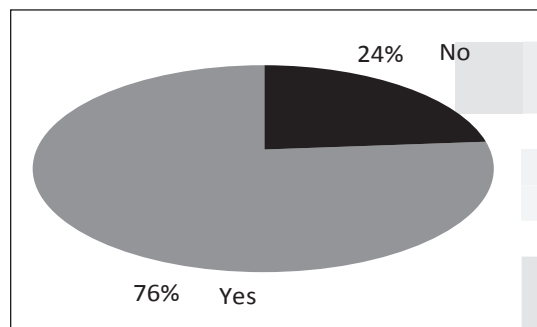


Figure-7: Child marriage

Violence against Dalit girls is a barrier to their right to education

Twelve-year-old Suman Roy (name changed) was a student of grade 6 in a secondary school in Botiaghata, Khulna district. Her father was a school teacher who often dreamt that his daughter should become educated and have a name in the village. Unfortunately, her education was abruptly halted when she was abducted by some Muslim boys while returning home from school in 2013. Her abductors used to tease and harass her on her way to and from the school. Immediately after the abduction, Suman's father filed a case against four of the accused at Botiaghata police station. Suman was rescued around two months after the abduction. The accused were arrested but set free on bail within a few days and they then started to threaten Suman's family to withdraw the police case.

This incident has severely changed Suman's life. After her rescue, she could not return to her village and family members. She was sent to her aunt's house located in the remote Sundarbans. Though she took admission at another school there, her dream of becoming highly educated is under threat. Her aunt's family is always scared of the perpetrators. They do not allow Suman to move alone even in that remote village. The school is not as good as that one Suman was used to earlier, and she has lost all her courage and is still traumatised by her abduction.

6.8.2 Insecurity

Bengali men, particularly boys, mistreat Dalit girls in different ways whenever they are seen—on city streets or roads or passages of the locality. Dalit girls feel insecure since they have observed that, on many occasions, Bengali boys physically touch or push a Dalit girl when they see her on the street. Sexual and mental harassment is very common for Dalit girls. The CBD study found that 41 percent of the female respondents experienced physical and mental torture by boys. This insecurity holds the girls back from going outside their house.

A Dalit girl of Ganaktuli, Dhaka reported that whenever Dalit girls go to school or college, they hear many abusive comments from the boys. Thousands of non-Dalits live around their residences. The non-Dalit boys consider it their right to tease the Dalit girls. The school and college going Dalit girls had informed the panchayet several times but the panchayet did not take any action. This is because the

panchayet thinks the non-Dalit community is powerful and they do not have the courage to go against them.

The CBD study found that most Dalit girls left school before completing the primary level. Guardians were reluctant to send girls to school further because of the frequent sexual harassment the girls faced on the way to school. At the local level, though Muslim girls also face the same problem, they can protest, but when a Dalit girl protests such abuse the entire Bengali Muslim community tends to unite and support the perpetrators over the victim. Then the Dalit family hastily begins arrangements for the marriage of the victim Dalit girl and thus she becomes another dropout. Where there is a missionary school the Dalit girls have some chance to study. However, rumours of conversion to Christianity often make the Dalit community hesitant to make use of such opportunity.

6.8.3 Superstitions

Dalit men are reluctant to send girls and women of their household outside for work or education. The study on CBD recorded girls facing severe deprivation and inequality in the family as well as in the educational institutions. Elders and decision makers in the community are of the opinion that women's education is useless and they would be better off learning household jobs. This opinion is reinforced by certain superstitions working against Dalit girls' education. For instance, Dalits of southern districts (Jessore, Khulna) believe that 'if girls become educated, they would be widow soon after marriage' and 'if the girls are educated nobody would marry them', etc. Parents and guardians of Dalit girls commonly believe that if the girls get a late marriage due to their education, they would suffer in having children. There are also Dalit communities who strongly believe that girls should not remain unmarried after the start of their menstrual period.

6.9 Eviction from the habitations

Frequent eviction is another important obstacle to the educational development of Dalit communities. When a family is forcefully displaced, it is difficult to cope in the new environment. Moreover, rehabilitation is time consuming. In such a situation, children are affected most especially in terms of education.

For example, in 2007 more than 200 Dalit families were evicted from the Madrasi Sweeper Colony behind Mohammdapur Town Hall of Dhaka city and rehabilitated in Gabtoli area – a place out of the city. They were provided only 23 city corporation constructed rooms (of which one was occupied by a non-Dalit on the day of handover). When in Mohammadpur, 90 percent of children used to go to a school run by a church at Rayerbazar area and other schools located near the community. In their new place at Gabtoli only four or five children go to school

because there is no accessible school near the community.

There is a government primary school at Amin Bazar near their community. As the school authority never had Dalit students, so when Dalits tried to get their children admitted into the school the teachers at first hesitated and then discouraged them. The families are not particular to send their children to the Amin Bazar School because of heavy traffic along the route to the school that causes fear for their children's safety. Gabtoli has the largest bus and truck terminal of the city. If any child wants to go to the school at Amin Bazar, Mazar Road or Mirpur area they have to cross a busy intersection which is not safe for children. As a result, the number of school going Dalit children reduced significantly. The children instead now stay at home and help in household chores or contribute to the family income.

Pangu sweeper colony experienced the same. The Dalits there were evicted several times, but rehabilitated in the same place. Some families went to other settlements. When asked about the education status of their children, they reported that about four or five children might be attending school. Those living in Dalit habitations in urban areas always live in anxiety and fear of eviction. As a result they do not think about their children's education, but instead think of ways to induct the children into their parent's profession when they grow up. The daily Sangbad in its 4 October 2004 issue reported that only 10 to 12 children from Pangu Sweeper Colony go to the MCIW school (popularly known as Mother Teresa School). This is much lower enrolment than prevailing 10 years ago.

6.10 NGOs give less priority to Dalit education

NGOs have significant opportunity to contribute to ensuring the fulfilment of the right to education for Dalits, especially in non-formal, pre-primary and primary education. Besides, they can play an important role in creating awareness among parents and guardians of the importance of education. Although they have many programmes regarding education, their main focus is microcredit. Their interest in, and contribution to, education is inadequate and is only seen as an add-on programme to microcredit. The study on CBD found that there are NGO activities in 98 percent of Dalit communities. Among the respondents, 70 percent said that they take some service from the NGOs. Regarding the activities of NGOs, however, 27 percent respondents mentioned education while 84 percent mentioned the microcredit programme.

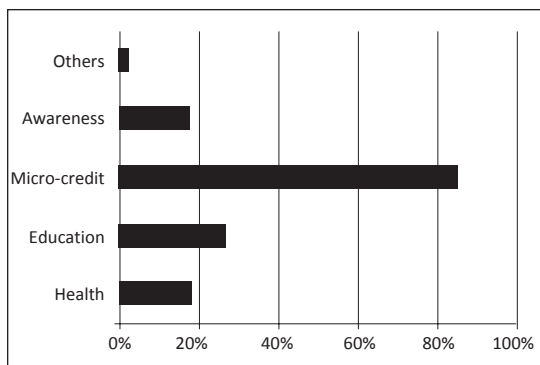


Figure-7: NGO programmes with the Dalit communities



7

SOME GOOD INITIATIVES FOR PROMOTING EDUCATION AMONG DALITS

Despite significant constraints with regard to education, the studies and research discussed above show the spread of literacy and the growing desire of Dalits for education, as well as the obstacles they face to realising their right to education. The findings of the latest study on forms of CBD⁵³ in Bangladesh shows increased interest and awareness among Dalit families for education despite severe economic hardships and an unfavourable environment.

The increased attention of human rights organisations and individuals towards CBD and its manifestations has created a wider sensitivity on the issue, which contributes to the educational development of Dalits. The increased concern of state and non-state actors regarding the rights of Dalits is an opportunity to maximise their educational development.

- Some statements on, and initiatives for, the development of the Dalits through education by institutions and individuals are mentioned below.
- 'Education for Dalits is not an opportunity; it is their right. And rights are to be claimed. The efforts should be ongoing until the rights are achieved. The governments should be forced to provide the recognition. We must keep forcing until our rights are achieved' – statement of the Additional District Commissioner (LA) in a workshop

organised by Nagorik Uddyog on 9 February 2014 in Dhaka.

- 'The Dalit community has a right to education. It is the duty of the state to ensure such rights by any means. We should not take the issue of education for Dalits in the sense of charity or kindness. Rather, we should press the government to fulfil their rights' – statement of the Chairman of the National Human Rights Commission in a workshop of the Dalit Women's Forum on 30 January 2014 in Dhaka.
- 'Not a single child from the Dalit community in Dumuria, Fultola Upazila will be deprived of education due to untouchability and caste identity. If this occurs, the perpetrators will be severely punished' – statement of Mr. Narayan Chandra Chand, State Minister, Ministry of Fishery and Livestock at CSO Advocacy Meeting with NHRI and elected representatives on 24 October 2014, held at Dumuria Upazila, Khulna District.
- 'If Dalit children are deprived of their educational stipend, scholarship, free text books or other facilities of the government, please inform the Upazila administration any time. The issue of the Dalit students will be addressed on a priority basis' – statement of the Upazila Nirbahi Officer of Dumuria Upazila at CSO Advocacy Meeting with NHRI and elected representatives on 24 October 2014, held at Dumuria Upazila, Khulna District.

⁵³ Bangladesher Dalit Somaj: Boishommyo, Bonchona O Osprishota (Dalits in Bangladesh: Discrimination, Exclusion and Untouchability), Nagorik Uddyog and BDERM, October, 2014.

- The Bede community lags behind in education due to their nomadic life style. One research found that they stay in 65 places in the country. The maximum duration of stay in any one place is two months. As a result, they cannot admit their children in school. They need mobile schools in the 65 places where they stay. The Gram Bangla Unnayan Committee started such an initiative in 2005. They operate seven schools in a big boat, which covers one place at Amin Bazar in Dhaka city. Other places are Munshiganj, Narayanganj, Brahmin Baria, Kishorganj, Comilla, Chandpur, Barguna, Bhola and Patuakhali. Such an initiative has contributed to an increase in Bede

literacy rate and enrolment in schools, as documented by the study on CBD: 185 Bede students were being given education in seven mobile schools. Among them, 47 had been admitted into government primary schools and residential madrasahs. This proves that the literacy rate can be improved if such mobile schools can be operated in other places of the country.

- Sunita from the Rishi community has set a glittering example in education. She is a student of class IX at Dhalgram Secondary School. She is the first among the 58 students—a position she has retained in all her classes. Dhalgram, the residence of Sunita, is one of the nine unions of Bagharpara Upazila of Jessore District

Asha's struggle to continue her studies

Asha Rani Basfore hails from Syedpur, Nilphamari District in the northern region of Bangladesh. She is a Dalit from the Basfore community. She started her education in a school run by NGO Gram Bikash Kendrea, which is for the Dalit community. She studied up to grade-II there. In 2008 she intended to get admitted into Syedpur Ideal Kindergarten in grade-III, but was denied admission. The school authorities did not allow her admission due to her caste/family identity and profession of her parents. Asha, however, did not lose hope.

Through the help of her parents and relatives, Asha got admitted into Syedpur Islamia Kindergarten. But she faced another problem there. She was not allowed to drink water using the common glasses and often was told to bring a glass from home. Her mother used to work as cleaner in the same school, but did not protest such behaviour for fear of losing her job.

'My parents and relatives used to encourage me to drink in the same glass used by others. Though frightened, I started to use the common glass for drinking water. I thought if they got angry with me, they would bite, scold or oust me from the school- nothing more. My firm stand for my rights helped me to overcome the problem. I passed the Primary Completion Examination in 2010 and got admitted in Syedpur Ideal Girls' School and College in grade-VI', she recalls.

Now she is in grade IX. Asha says that though she succeeded in overcoming caste based discrimination, many Dalit girls and boys do not dare to continue schooling after facing such discrimination. So the educational development among Dalit is very poor.

where 70 Rishi families live. Their literacy rate is 30 percent. Some of the educated persons in the community work in the government. Some of the community study at the graduate level too. Debashis Biswas and Tapos Biswas are graduating in management at Victoria College, Narail. Besides, there are 12 SSC passed and eight HSC passed students in the community. Their increased inclination towards education is to break free from subjugation and prove their ability to the wider society. Education has enhanced the sense of empowerment among this community. It has enabled them to fight against a 100 year old practice of untouchability. Earlier they were not allowed to have food in the restaurants of Dhalgram Bazar. Education supported them in successfully communicating with the district and Upazlia administration and the police to overcome this century long barrier.

- The introduction of a quota system in public universities opens new horizons for Dalit students in higher education. The University of Dhaka introduced a quota system for Horijon and Dalit students for the first time in 2013. However, the circular of Dhaka University did not clarify how many Dalit students could get admission under the quota system. One Dalit student got admission into Dhaka University under the quota in 2013-14. In the 2014-15 around 20 students have been selected for admission in this university. Due to frequent advocacy initiatives by BDERM, Jahangirnagar University has taken special 'affirmative action' for Dalit students and three students have got admission there under affirmative action in 2013-14. In the academic year 2014-15, Patuakhali University of Science and Technology, Islamic University, Kushtia and Ser-e-Bangla Agricultural University both have introduced

a quota system for Dalit students. Jagannath University has not formally introduced a quota system yet, but they have given assurances that they would consider the admission of the Dalit students who pass the admission test.

- In Bangladesh, until recently no NGO or government institute provided scholarships for Dalit students. Through a recent initiative of BDERM and Nagorik Uddyog, BDERM provides scholarships to poor Dalit students through the Dalit Education Trust (DET), which works for the welfare of Dalit students. DET has initiated a scholarship programme from January 2012 for Dalit students with the support of Jamil-Sarwar Trust. At present, 40 Dalit students get this scholarship of Tk. 1,000 each per month. In addition they get Tk. 3,000 annually to buy educational materials.
- In rural areas, many Dalit children do not receive a proper education as they are excluded from the common schools. There are very few schools in the Dalit hamlets and the tea garden areas of Sylhet region of Bangladesh. Hence, BDERM has started operating 10 informal schools (Uddyog Education Centres) in Dhaka city, Moulvibazar (Sreemongal and Komolgonj Upazila), and Barisal and Bhola districts from January 2012. About 300 Dalit students are being given free education in these schools.
- In Tanbazar, Narayanganj Municipality, there was a school named 33 Methorpotti (Cleaners' zone) Primary School. The name of the school was very embarrassing for the community. Being organised and becoming aware as a consequence of interventions by BDHR and BDERM, the community has since demanded that the municipality change the name of the school. Due to repeated community advocacy, Narayanganj City Corporation changed the name of the school

to 33 City Corporation School.

- Several Dalit organisations are working with Dalit communities for social recognition and access to educational opportunities. Organisations such as Friends Association for Integrated Revolution (FAIR) in Kushtia, Gram Bangla in Munshiganj and Savar, Gonogobeshona o Unnayan Foundation (GOUF) in Jessore, Udayonkur Sheba Sangshtha (USS) in Nilphamari, Poritran in Sathkhira, SEBA in Sayedpur, etc. advocate for the right to education for all Dalit children. They have formed a network which publishes a quarterly newsletter, with write-ups by members of their own communities. FAIR operates seven primary school centres in three Upazillas in Kushtia District for the children of Horijons, in preparation for admission into the local Kindergarten School. Recently, Horijon Oikka Parishad and FAIR provided financial assistance to 203 Dalit students. Among them, 97 students at the secondary level were provided Tk. 5,000 each, 87 students of higher secondary level with Tk. 6,000 each and 19 students at the honours level were given Tk. 7,000 each. Twelve workbooks and 10 pens were included in the stipend for each student. An agreement was signed with the recipients that they would, in turn, take care of the education of 10 students of the community.
- Dhruva, a Khulna based Dalit CSO, in collaboration with an American organisation 'Speak Up', has been providing scholarships to Dalit girl students from 2012. After the problems of the Bede community ('water gypsies') were publicised in the media, initiatives were taken by the government and private actors to design alternative learning models – one example being the mobile learning boats. In recent times, there have been more demands for affirmative action for Dalits. Organisations such as

Action Aid Bangladesh, Plan Bangladesh, Save the Children International, Manusher Jonno Foundation and Nagorik Uddyog have demanded action to facilitate Dalit children's access to educational institutions with support and scholarships for them.

- The Dalit children of Dhalpur Outfall of Dhaka city could not cope with their studies in the schools due to language barriers. At home the children used to speak Telegu or Kanpuri, but in school they had to study in Bengali. As a result they could not understand lessons well and lost interest in studies. In this situation, Food for Hungry (FH), an NGO, came forward to resolve the language barrier and introduced a system where children have the opportunity to have education with fun. Their initiative emphasised education in the mother tongue. In 2005 the organisation trained some educated young Dalit boys and girls on the Multi-Language Education System. These Dalit youth learned how to make educational material in Telegu and Kanpuri, to understand child psychology and offer appropriate education. Along with the special education they also provided general education following the national curriculum. There are four stages in the system. In the stage-1, nursery level, children are given education only in Kanpuri and Telegu language. In the stage -2, kindergarten level, they are given education 75 percent in their mother tongue and 25 percent in Bengali and English, according to the national curriculum. In the 3rd stage, Class-1, children are given education in Bengali and their mother tongue equally. In the 4th stage, Class-2, they are provided general education following the national curriculum in Bengali. This can be a good model to increase enrolment and retention of Dalit children in education.
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Given the number of obstacles that lie in the way of fulfilling the right to education for Dalit children in Bangladesh, there are number of actions that are urgently required in order to remedy this situation.

8.1 For the government

- Ensure the participation of Dalit children in primary education through campaigns, raising awareness, increased educational scholarship/stipends and other facilities. In addition, introduce curriculum in the mother tongue for non-Bengali speaking Dalit students, at least in the primary level.
- Formulate and implement special administrative measures by the Ministry of Education and University Grants Commission to ensure a mandatory quota system for Dalits in all public and private educational institutes at the primary, secondary and tertiary levels along with other government privileges like stipends/scholarships, etc.
- Constitute an ‘Equity Working Group’ within the Ministry of Education to continually devise and monitor targeted education schemes for Dalits. These schemes should be devised in consultation with Dalit communities and CSOs.
- Establish at least one government primary school in every district for Dalit children adjacent to their habitations. Allocate a separate amount in the budget for the education of Dalits for producing educational materials like textbooks in their mother tongue and teacher training for Dalits.
- Produce disaggregated data on the Dalit population, including gender and caste data on Dalit boys’ and girls’ education status – i.e. access, retention and learning outcomes – to enable the monitoring of Dalit children’s enrolment, dropout and completion rates in school education.
- Ensure constitutional measures and specific legislation are enacted and effectively enforced to protect Dalits from attacks, harassment and harmful behaviour in relation to education and educational institutions.
- Identify and develop activity-based modules to promote diversity, equity and social inclusion in classrooms and schools, and include them in teacher training modules. Time should be allocated within the school schedule for such processes and activities.
- Guidelines on non-discrimination in education should be issued to all schools, and teachers and school management trained in tackling non-discrimination, promoting equity and inclusion in schools.
- National and local governments should run a public campaign to raise awareness among the public and government officials, teachers, and media on discrimination based on work and descent and implement a policy of zero tolerance for overt or covert CBD practices. Areas of attention should include the print and broadcasting media and alternative avenues of information

dissemination such as local oral information through theatre and, songs, as well as information via the internet, mobile phones and other social media.

- National and local governments should take effective measures to reduce dropout rates and increase enrolment rates of Dalit children at all levels of public and private schooling.
- Education is a key factor in socio-economic development, which in turn contributes to education in a virtuous, self-reinforcing spiral. Special measures are needed for the socio- economic development of Dalits, and one of the key factors is supporting their education. For economic development ensure the income security of Dalits through measures to ensure the employment of educated Dalits in decent jobs as per their qualifications. Moreover, increased coverage of social safety net programmes and income generating activities would help Dalits in overcoming their economic hardships, at least partially. For social development, ensure permanent land tenure and titles, housing with adequate rooms, necessary drinking water, sanitation, medical and other basic amenities required for ensuring an atmosphere conducive to education.

8.2 For civil society, NGOs and INGOs

- Civil society, in collaboration with government and the media, should initiate a national campaign to create awareness among Dalits and other marginalised communities regarding their right to non-discriminatory access to, and enjoyment of, education.
- Create mass awareness against CBD in general and education in particular. Establish monitoring of CBD in school, and prevent dropouts due to CBD, helping to increase enrolment and retention.

- Increase programmes for the education of Dalits including setting up schools, midday meals, stipends and other facilities. Moreover, link Dalit students with facilities (stipends, etc.) provided by the government.
- Introduce alternative income generating opportunities through technical education.
- International NGOs should invest in promoting the education of Dalits through providing educational scholarships, stipends, midday meals, education materials, training of the teachers and infrastructure development of community schools.

8.3 For the Dalit community

- Understand the significance of education for socio-economic and cultural development, and ensure schooling of all Dalit children using government and non government facilities.
- Organise against discriminatory practices in educational institutions and create wider sensitisation against caste based discrimination among non-Dalits.
- Remove gender disparity within the community, ensure equal participation of girls in education and ensure no child marriages take place.
- Organise and raise the collective community voice to ensure rights and entitlements according to the constitution and law, especially to demand disaggregated data on Dalits in official statistics of the government.

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বাংলাদেশ দলিত ও বঞ্চিত জনগোষ্ঠী অধিকার আন্দোলন

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