

Bangladesh Dalit and Excluded Rights Movement

A national platform, the Bangladesh Dalit and Excluded Rights Movement (BDERM), was established in 2008 to cover all Dalit organisations in the country supported by a small secretariat run by Dalits. The Advisory Board of BDERM is composed of key human rights actors, which gives strength and recognition to the platform. After national level consultations BDERM has also conducted local level consultations to let other Dalit groups know that there is a national Dalit platform. Approximately 300 people were contacted in 2008 to promote awareness about the national platform.

As a result, the platform is now an organisation that people are starting to recognise. It publishes a quarterly newspaper and 2000 copies have been distributed in 64 districts, covering all of Bangladesh. This has tremendous impact. People are telephoning wanting to join the platform. Moreover human rights organisations are increasingly interested and they are submitting applications to become associate members.

BDERM is also recognised by other development NGOs in Bangladesh. Among other things, human rights organisations invited BDERM to join the drafting of a comprehensive NGO report for the Universal Periodic Review (UPR) of Bangladesh in 2009. In addition, BDERM contributed actively to the preparation of a specific UPR submission on caste-based discrimination in association with IDSN. The report is based on documentation from the national research project on caste-based discrimination in Bangladesh, and it is therefore the first national report submitted to the UN on this particular issue. In the compilation of stakeholders' information, prepared by the OHCHR, there are several specific paragraphs on Dalit issues based on information from the two submissions. This report serves as an active input to the review of Bangladesh by the Human Rights Council in February 2009.

At national level, BDERM has organised a housing rights campaign to celebrate the 60th anniversary of the Universal Declaration on Human Rights. The platform members took to the streets with a rally of 300 people raising their demands before the national elections in December. On this occasion a national human rights conference was planned by BDERM, but it had to be postponed until January 2009. All in all, the platform is a major political achievement; some political parties have even included Dalit issues on their political manifestos, which is a first in the country's history.