

A Summary Report on Dalit Women Rights Conference-2012

July 28, 2012 Dhaka, Bangladesh



Bangladesh Dalit and Excluded Women's Federation

বাংলাদেশ দলিত ও বঞ্চিত নারী ফেডারেশন

Background: Work and Descent based discrimination is one of the most serious human rights issues in the world today, affecting more than 260 million women and men worldwide. The majority are Dalits (or outcastes) living in South Asia. There are an estimated 5.5 million Dalits in Bangladesh (or about 4% of the population). The majority of Dalits in Bangladesh is landless and live in chronic poverty in rural areas and urban slums. They are deprived of, or activity excluded from schools, hospitals, adequate housing, employment and participation in public and political life. Approximately 96% of Dalits in Bangladesh are illiterate. Dalit communities experiences daily insecurity and violence with usually no recourse to justice. Caste discrimination is not only a serious violation of human rights but also a major obstacle in achieving Dalit community people’s development in Bangladesh.

In Bangladesh, the more concerned issue is the dreadful situation of Dalit women; they face the heaviest burden of both gender and caste-based discrimination and violence from both men in wider society, and from men within their own communities. These Dalit women cannot enter to the attention of the government & non-government development organisations and the “mainstream society”. And no effective measures have been taken for their development from the government and non-government side still.

In this situation- in July 28, 2012 the Bangladesh Dalit and Excluded Women Federation (BDEWF) and Nagorik Uddyog organised the National Dalit Women Rights Conference-2012 with the slogan “End Work and Descent Based Discrimination: Enacting Effective Law against Untouchability” in Dhaka. The conference was supported by Minority Rights Group International (MRG).

Dalit women have been overlooked in the development and rights discourse in Bangladesh and have only recently been able to raise their voices and mobilise for their rights. They have started to engage with the government and international donors, and to place the issues of, gender, caste, work and descent based discrimination in Bangladesh on the national and international agenda. This conference was an important part of this wider movement for establishing Dalit rights.



The aim of the conference was to strengthen the national platform for Dalit women and Dalit women lead organisations across Bangladesh to come together exchange their experiences and raise Dalit Women Rights. It focused on promoting, protecting and campaigning for Dalit women rights and aimed to raise awareness and gain commitment for action from policy makers, civil society, donors and the mass media both print and

electronic.

For many of the 400 Dalit women participants with 10 Dalit women lead organisations of BDEWF got the opportunity to meet with Dalit women from other parts of Bangladesh. In the conference

BDEWF national council was held and 17 members consisted of national working committee was formed.

Cultural sessions were also held by different Dalit women groups and three days photographic exhibition was held titled **Dalits Struggle** as part of the conference. A reception ceremony was also held in the conference. 25 Dalit female students who are studying in the university level got that reception. In the conference the female students talked about their life-struggle in their education sphere & within their family.

The Chairperson of BDEWF Moni Rani Das spoke on the situation of Dalit women and their life-struggle. She told on the miserable condition of Dalit women and urged them to fight against patriarchy and caste based discriminations they face in their daily lives. She demanded the proper implementation of all national and international policies and principles in regarding women rights and development.

General Secretary of BDEWF, Bonani Biswas presented a paper on the situation of Dalit women in Bangladesh. She focused on the International Conventions on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW) & National Women Development Policy and demanded to the government to enact effective law and policy to protect Dalit community people as they are suffered mostly by untouchability and work & descent based discrimination. She also focused on the social and political empowerment of Dalit women to eliminate gender discrimination from the society through development, and ensuring that development and empowerment of Dalit women becomes a national priority.

The conference particularly focused on experiences of Dalit women and different forms of untouchability and discrimination faced by them. The existence legal rights of Dalit and Excluded communities also focused in the conference. The Dalit women conference received widespread national media coverage on Television channels and in newspapers.

Professor Dr. Sadeka Halim, Commissioner, Right to Information, Professor Dr. Helal Uddin Khan Arefeen, University of Dhaka, Professor Dr. Farzana Islam, Jahangirnagar University, Barrister Sara Hossain, eminent human rights activist and lawyer of Bangladesh Supreme Court, Zakir Hossain, Chief Executive, Nagorik Uddyog, Architect Salma A. Shafi, urbane development specialized, Gobinda Chanra Shaha, TOF Consultant, BftW, Livia Sarcadia, Global Advocacy Programme Assistant, MRG and Bangladesh Dalit and Excluded Rights Movement (BDERM) President Mukul Sikdar and General Secretary Bothanki Solomon were present among others in the conference and given solidarity speeches.

Barrister Sara Hossain

Human Rights Activist &
Lawyer, Bangladesh Supreme
Court

Once upon a time Dalits in Bangladesh was unrecognised and overlooked. But Dalits people have able to build up their own organization by self endeavor. Now they will have to go forward to change their social and economic condition in resisting the state and social discriminations that they face. If they get education, facilities and respects they will enable to do positive changes of their social position.

Moni Rani Das

Chairperson, BDEWF

In a democratic country, Government should take initiative to eliminate the discriminations based on caste-gender and work. As a member state of the United Nations, Bangladesh Government ought to be implemented sincerely the international human rights instruments.

From this conference, we demand to the government to take immediate measure to demolishing all forms of discriminations against Dalit women and ensure our development as priority agenda.

Professor H KS Arefeen

Dhaka University

The practice of patriarchy and untouchability in our society need to be smashed for the development of Dalit women.

Education should be given first priority for establishing human rights of Dalits.

Government should take special measure for Dalit girl child education that will ensure their sustainable development in future.

In the conference participants lifted up the following demands:

- Enact a law to resist untouchability practices towards Dalit and excluded community. Take effective measures to alleviate social, cultural and gender discriminations that Dalit women are facing.
- Strictly invoke the International Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW) and other international human rights instruments.
- Ensure the basic health services for Dalit women.
- Provide scholarship and admission quota for Dalits students in academic institutions (schools, colleges and public universities).
- Formulate policies and programmes to improve position and condition of Dalit women in society and family.
- Include poor and marginalized Dalit women in the government run social safety net programmes.
- Political parties need to take initiative to include eligible Dalit women in their party committees and nominate them for local and national elections.
- NGOs and Donors need to promote socio-economic activities to alleviate the poverty and inequality that Dalit women communities face.

BDEWF Council and National Working Committee Formed:

In the conference the national council of Bangladesh Dalit and Excluded Women Federation was held. 17 members consisted of BDEWF National Working Committee was approved in the council meeting. Moni Rani Das and Bonani Biswas were elected chairperson and general secretary of that committee. The newly elected committee list is given in the bellow.

Dalit women should be assertive on their rights within their family and in society. They should be involved in the political process to achieve political empowerment.

BDEWF National Working Committee

Name	Designation
Moni Rani Das	Chairperson
Putul Mosumder	Vice-Chairperson
Banani Biswas	General Secretary
Usha Rani Das	Join-Secretary
Babi Rani Das	Treasurer
Sonu Rani Das	Organizing Secretary
Prova Rani Baraik	Secretary, Campaign & Publicity
Sathi Sarker	Secretary, Education
Shefali Rani Das	Secretary, Employment
Jhorna Rani Das	Secretary, Culture
Tuthia Rani Das	Member
Diba Das	Member
Ankapelli Mari	Member
Shanti Rani Das	Member
Dara Devi Das	Member
Tamanna Sing Baraik	Member
Madhabi Das	Member



BDEWF
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