

# Bangladesh Dalit and Excluded Rights Movement Work Statement April 2008 – June 2011



**BDERM**

**Bangladesh Dalit and  
Excluded Rights Movement**

বাংলাদেশ দলিত ও বঞ্চিত জনগোষ্ঠী অধিকার আন্দোলন

***In the past you couldn't even cross the shadow of a Dalit – now we have leadership, skills, rights and dignity.***

Over the past few years the Dalit movement in Bangladesh has gone from strength to strength, and is now a growing and effective force for positive change. There is no quick fix to tackling caste discrimination and there are many challenges ahead in addressing centuries of discrimination, poverty and exclusion. However it is also important to reflect on, and to celebrate the successes so far. Until very recently, the existence of Dalits and caste discrimination in Bangladesh was denied, and now we see the issue being seriously addressed by both national and international policy makers and practitioners. Attitudes amongst Dalit communities are slowly transforming, and for the first time in their history people are speaking out and not hiding their identity. As a direct result of our lobbying, Dalits and excluded communities are now included within the national Poverty Reduction Strategy Paper; in the recent election manifestos of all major political parties and in the priorities of the European Commission and other major donors. A strong national movement has been established, combining community organising with public awareness raising and campaigning, lobbying, legal interventions and international advocacy.

Caste discrimination is still a relatively new issue but our work to date illustrates that it is an issue of fundamental concern affecting the day to day lives of millions of people across Bangladesh. Despite entrenched patterns of discrimination and extreme poverty, a new generation of courageous Dalit leaders and activists are starting to organise their communities and demand justice. What we thought would take generations has started to change in just a few years. We would like to take this opportunity to thank our partners and friends and to encourage your continued support so we can work together to end caste discrimination and untouchability practices in Bangladesh.

We would also like to give specific thanks to Nagorik Uddyog for their secretarial support and commitment to the Bangladesh Dalit and Excluded Rights Movement.

It is a great privilege and pleasure to introduce this report which aims to capture some of the successes and strategies of these critical and inspiring past few years.



*In solidarity,*

**Mukul Shikder**  
Chairperson, BDERM

**Bothanki Solomon**  
General Secretary, BDERM

*BDERM Council Members*

## Background

*The state shall not discriminate against any citizen on grounds of religion, race, caste, sex or place of birth. Constitution of Bangladesh, Article 28(1), 1972*

*Every day we face discrimination - people say, "Don't stand next to me because you are dirty and you are Dalit."* Baby Rani

On paper, Bangladesh has a progressive Constitution which guarantees the equal rights of all citizens; irrespective of sex, caste, religion, ethnicity, or race. Bangladesh has ratified all major international human rights treaties and conventions including the International Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination, the International Covenant on Economic, Social, and Cultural Rights, and the International Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women.

However Dalits and other minority communities across the country continue to experience caste discrimination, social exclusion and practices linked to untouchability.

Caste discrimination is a systematic human rights abuse that leads to poverty, violence, inequality and exclusion. Perceived as polluted or inferior, Dalits are prevented from participating in political, economic, social and cultural life. The word 'Dalit' literally means *broken* or *oppressed* and has been adopted by people who were formally known as *untouchable*, *outcaste* or *Harijan* across South Asia.



Estimates vary but sample surveys indicate that there are approximately 5.5 million Dalits and people from socially excluded communities in Bangladesh. Caste discrimination is a highly complex issue - it results from a variety of often overlapping factors, including caste, religion, place of birth or families/ descendents place of birth and occupation. In a predominantly rural and semi-urban economy, traditional professions (e.g. *fishing, sweeping, barber, washer, dyer, blacksmith, cobbler, weaver, butcher*) play an important role in defining social, political and economic relations - these occupations are usually descent based and these communities often suffer from associated practices of discrimination, segregation and untouchability. Dalits face many complex and overlapping forms of discrimination - social, economic, political, religious and cultural - affecting all aspects of their personal and public lives. For example their caste impacts on their ability to access education, jobs, health care, the legal system and the right to choose where to live, where to work, who and how to worship, and who to marry.



## Poverty and Human Rights:

The majority of Dalits live below the poverty line, lagging behind in all development indicators (e.g. *maternal mortality rates are much higher amongst Dalit women*). In urban areas Dalits usually live in so called 'colonies' in slum like conditions with often three generations of 8-12 people living in one small room. Around 60,000 Dalits living in Dhaka have inadequate water and sanitation. The majority of Dalits are landless and in rural areas live in houses built with straw and mud, often on common land, under constant threat of eviction.

Dalits and excluded communities experience daily insecurity, uncertainty and violence and cases of physical abuse, rape and murder are regularly reported. For example in Jessore in July 2009 a Dalit teenage girl was raped by a group of men. In the majority of cases the perpetrators are not brought to justice due to discrimination within the police service or the lack of priority given to the case, political lobbying by the perpetrators or the victim or the victim's family lacking funds to pursue the case. Victims and their families are also often fearful of potential repercussions. Unlike in India there are no quotas for Dalits within politics and political representation is very low - less than 0.5% of national and local level seats are held by Dalits.

## Dalit Women:

Dalit women face multiple forms of discrimination and violence as a result of both their caste and gender, and are particularly vulnerable. Dalit communities are often deeply patriarchal with severe restrictions placed on women's rights, mobility and freedom, particularly in relation to marriage. Many girls marry young, are unable to leave their homes without being accompanied and have no financial independence. Dalit women who are allowed to work are mainly sweepers or cleaners and face regular abuse from both employers and the public. The standard government maternity leave is 4 months but Dalit women often are denied leave or only receive 2 months.

## Employment:

Dalits and excluded communities usually work in the most menial, low paid dangerous jobs. Unemployment and underemployment are major issues particularly given the lack of skills, training and education. In a recent survey of the cobbler community it was found that 53% earn between 2,000-3,000 taka a month. Dalits who live and work in tea plantations face specific forms of discrimination. Many live in bonded labour or are paid extremely low wages (approx 30 Taka per day) and are unable to afford adequate food, health-care or to educate their children.

## Education:

Most Dalits do not complete formal education, with the majority attending for one or two years. One study showed school enrolment rates were 10%, with drop out rates of those that did attend school at around 95%, (*national enrolment rates are 85%*). Poverty and caste discrimination within schools from both teachers and students are key reasons why Dalit families choose for their children to work rather than attend school. In one survey 82% of Hindu Dalits and 84% of Muslim Dalits had experienced discrimination by the time they had started school and many experience discrimination in schools, for example being forced to sit on the floor or to clean toilets. Despite the Government's recent education policy which committed them to educate children in their mother tongue, this is still not being implemented. Also there is no provision made for Dalit children to learn Bangla which is also a major barrier to them attending schools.



## Bangladesh Dalit and Excluded Rights Movement

**There are two broad categories of Dalits in Bangladesh:**

**Bengali Dalits** (both Hindu and Muslim) found across the country.

**Non-Bengali Dalits** who previously migrated (or were forced to move) from India to what was then East Bengal. Though this migration began at the beginning of the 17th century a considerable number of Dalits migrated from 1835 to 1850 during the British colonial period. They were brought by the British to do menial jobs such as sweeping, working in the tea plantations and at railway stations. These communities are now mainly living in urban areas or on tea plantations, and are both Hindu or Christian.

The current Dalit movement began in Bangladesh in 2002, founded by B.G. Murthy whose vision established Bangladesh Dalit Human Rights (BDHR). Many organisations were working at the local and national level to reduce the levels of discrimination against Dalits and other excluded communities, however they were mostly isolated with no visibility at the national level. On April 22nd 2008, at a national consultation, organised by BDHR and Nagorik Uddyog, the national movement *Bangladesh and Excluded Rights Movement* was formed. In January 2009 BDERM and Nagorik Uddyog co-ordinated Bangladesh's first national Dalit conference where 260 Dalit and representatives from excluded communities came together for the first time for two days of workshops, rallies and strategy sessions. This historic conference received widespread media coverage and was a milestone for the Dalit rights movement, capturing the attention of national and international agencies. The conference accelerated the national platform. BDERM intentionally widened the focus of BDHR to unite and include other excluded communities who although they experience caste or descent based discrimination, do not identify with, or recognise the term Dalit.



## **BDERM'S GOAL:**

**To build an equal society by eliminating all forms of discrimination against Dalit and excluded communities on the basis of equality, dignity, prosperity and security.**

### **Objectives:**

To build awareness amongst Dalits and excluded communities of their socio-economic, cultural, and political rights.

To build public awareness against discrimination based on work and descent.

To make policy makers (both government and non-government) sensitive and responsible to meeting the rights and needs of Dalit and excluded communities.

To ensure access of Dalit and excluded communities to development, basic services and benefits.

To establish unity and harmony, to strengthen the capacity of Dalit run organisations and to play a catalytic role for communication amongst Dalit groups.

**BDERM is now a strong and vocal national platform, a social movement and a membership organisation - which is spearheading the fight for human rights for Dalits and excluded communities and uniting excluded groups and communities.**

**This report aims to capture some of the successes and outcomes of this vibrant and growing movement over the last two and half years - from its launch in April 2008 up until June 2011.**



## I. Building and Strengthening the National Movement

BDERM now has 25 member organisations in 10 districts and has established Local Committees in 35 districts, (there are 64 in total). BDERM is self financing through its members and has established democratic and inclusive governance structures based on its Constitution. Successes so far have been founded on this broad based national movement. Highlights include:

**Holding a series of divisional workshops** in Khulna, Rajshahi, Barishal, Chittagong and Sylhet to discuss the concerns of Dalit communities, to mobilise, strategise and to identify local leaders.

**Leadership and human rights training** has been held to develop and strengthen the leadership, organisational capacity, and understanding of human rights amongst Dalit leaders. Five two day training sessions were held in Khulna, Barishal, Sylhet, Rangpur and Rajshahi, covering 38 districts. Specific training was given to Dalit women from Dhaka and Narayangang, and to young people.

**Developing the leadership of Dalit Women** at a two day workshop in March 2011 which trained 28 representatives from 11 Dalit women's organisations. The participants developed an action plan to develop Dalit women's leadership, and to facilitate networking and sharing.

Training workshop on leadership, development and human rights





**Annual General Council Meetings** - The first meeting after the launch of BDERM was held on 9th October 2009 in Dhaka. A National Working Committee of 15 was elected and 73 representatives, from 60 different districts were present. Solidarity messages were given by Bethan Cobley (*One World Action/Dalit Solidity Network, UK*), Dr. Ali Arsalan (*Pakistan Institute of Labour Education and Research*), Dr. Farzana Islam (*BDERM Advisor*) and Zakir Hossain (*Executive Director, Nagorik Uddyog/ BDERM Advisor*). Organisational regulations and procedures were presented and approved.

The second meeting was held in November 2010. The meeting again elected a National Working Committee with the mandate from the general council to run activities over the next year. About 100 representatives, from 46 different districts attended with solidarity messages given by Rikke Nöhrlund, (*Director, International Dalit Solidarity Network*), Bethan Cobley (*One World Action/Dalit Solidity Network, UK*), Zakir Hossain (*Executive Director, Nagorik Uddyog*), Dr. Farzana Islam (*BDERM Adviser*) and Manjula Pradeep (*Director, Navsarjan, India*).

*A country can not develop if one community is left in the dark. We all need to understand the situation of Dalits and to be enlightened - we all need to stand together to make this movement successful.* Dr Farzana Islam

*BDERM Annual General Council,  
November 26th, 2010*



*Seminar on Dalit housing  
and the national budget.*





**Launch of the National Dalit Women's Federation** in November 2010 in Dhaka. This united the following community based organisations working for the rights of Dalit women: *Dalit Women Forum, Avijan, Institute of Social Advancement, Dalit Nari Parishad, Mothers Club Forum, Auntoj Nari Parishad, Harijon Nari Kollyan Samitee, Shreemongol Upazila Indigenous Development Samitee, Young Monipuri Association, Ashru Mochon Dustho Mohila O Shishu Unnyon Sonstha.*



**Ongoing visits, solidarity and networking** have been carried out by BDERM leaders to conduct fact finding and build the capacity of Dalit communities throughout the country - this has been vital for building the movement, community organising and sharing information.

**BDERM leaders have also participated in training** run by other organisations, for example International Voluntary Service, Savar Hope Centre and the Society for Environment and Human Development. In November 2010, BDERM representatives participated in the Annual Human Rights Study Session, organised by Nagorik Uddyog in collaboration with Dhaka University and the Asian Institute for Human Rights. BDERM actively participates in the National Budgetary Alliance which monitors the national budget, demanding special allocation for socially marginalised groups in Bangladesh. In September 2010 BDERM participated in a workshop organised by the National Campaign on the Right to Information held in collaboration with the Commonwealth Human Rights Initiative, learning practical skills on how to implement the Right to Information Act.

*Training workshop for women's group  
March 28-29th, 2011*





## 2. Mobilising at the District Level

BDERM members and District Committees have made great progress at the local level with activities focusing on community organising, capacity building, raising visibility and taking action against atrocities. Highlights include:

**Conferences, training and community mobilisations** have been held across Khulna, Sylhet, Borishal, Rangpur, Rajshahi and Chittagong. Livelihood and skills training have been carried out in Jessore.



**Co-ordinating events to encourage people to break taboos.** For example where hotels and restaurants have segregated sitting areas Dalits have gone in and sat with non- Dalits to eat.

**Providing legal support.** For example in Jessore members have protested to government officials when people set fire to a Dalit house, and their intervention in a rape case resulted in a Dalit girl receiving compensation and the perpetrator being sent to prison. In Khulna action was taken against the eviction of a shoe making community. In Monirampur in December 2010, 71 Dalit students were prevented from participating in their National Day event. As a direct result of BDERM protests the teacher was transferred. The case received mass media coverage and highlighted caste discrimination within education.

**In Jessore,** during the World Cup, women from the Dalit community formed two teams - mothers and daughters. Despite opposition from community leaders they held a football match (*Mothers 4 vs. Daughters 1*). Four thousand people came to watch, including the Deputy Commissioner and the game received national media coverage.

In Sylhet, a book about tea garden workers was launched at a seminar attended by 150 workers. Members held a special event involving 600 workers from around 200 gardens, to commemorate a massacre on 20th May 1921 when British soldiers opened fire in a train station when tea workers tried to board trains to India. Members are campaigning for better housing and increased wages for workers, and as a result, wages have been increased from 32 to 48 taka per day. Sweepers from tea gardens were previously not allowed to take meals in hotels and restaurants but this has now changed, as a result of members' protests.

*We went with excluded people into hotels and said these are human beings and they are here to take food and so are we and so the taboo was broken.*

In Joypurhath, BDERM leader and advocate Babul Rabi Das, issued a memorandum to his Deputy Commissioner. As a result the administrator built a community centre and school for sweeper's children.

In Barishal, BDERM leader, Uttam Kumar Bhakta presented the Barishal City Corporation with requests to provide secure housing, increase in wages, fresh water and death certificates for sweeper community. As a direct result the Mayor increased wages from 600 to 1500 taka per month.

*BDERM marked World Dignity Day 2010 by forming a human chain and rally at Shahbagh in Dhaka*







### 3. Popular Campaigning and Public Action

There is now tentative recognition from the government, donors, media, civil society and academics that there are Dalits and excluded communities living in Bangladesh who face discrimination and poverty. BDERM has undertaken both reactive and proactive campaigning, using a range of different strategies and tools. Human chains - *where people stand by the side of the road with festoons and photographs* - have been a vital tool to raise visibility and gain media coverage. Human chains have been held to mark international days; to call for specific demands (*e.g. for inclusion in election manifestos*) and to protest against atrocities. For example in July 2009 a human chain was held in protest against the sexual harassment of a Dalit girl. 80 activists demanded the right of women's security in the workplace.



**Marking International Days** - Events, rallies, human chains and awareness raising events have been held across the country to mark International Human Rights Day, World Dignity Day, International Women's Day, Day for the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination, National Victory Day and International Mother Tongue Day. For example on 5th December 2009 human chains and rallies were held in 11 districts. Leaflets and posters were distributed, events received national and local media coverage and highlighted caste based discrimination to new audiences. In Dhaka around 100 representatives from different Dalit colonies gave speeches and held a human chain in front of the national museum. Again on March 21st 2009 BDERM celebrated the International Day for the Elimination of all Forms of Racial Discrimination with a large gathering outside the National Museum and human chains were organised in 11 different districts.

In December 2010, similar events were held in 29 districts - calling for specific action to be taken to end discrimination; to introduce a specific law on caste discrimination; to establish a special desk for Dalit women within the Ministry for Women and Children; to improve education, social security benefits, health care, access to land for Dalits and excluded communities; and to implement a quota system for education, employment and political parties.





**Popular action to strengthen policy demands** - On October 8th 2010, a human chain was held to demand special provision for Dalits within the constitution. Women and men from various Dalit colonies gathered with festoons and banners, despite incessant rains, to demand their constitutional protection. The event was covered in all Bangladesh's main papers including the Daily Star, New Age, The Independent, Bangladesh Today, The Daily Sangbad, Amader Shomoy and Jonota.

**Seminars for Policy Makers and Practitioners** - BDERM has organised a series of seminars to raise visibility and to put pressure on the Government to adopt specific policies. These have been mainly held in Dhaka at the National Press Club and featured high profile politicians, activists and academics.

**Topics have included:**

The Situation of Dalit Human Rights

Problems of Dalit housing – calling for the re-allocation of the national budget for Dalit housing.

Draft United Nations Principles and Guidelines for the Effective Elimination of Discrimination Based on Work and Descent.

A seminar on the situation and demands of tea workers held on the anniversary of the massacre of tea garden workers by the British Indian Authorities.

Dalit Rights Movement in South Asia and International Solidarity. Development of Bangladesh Dalit Human Rights and Elimination of Discrimination.

Dalit Women Rights Movement in Nepal – lessons for Bangladesh and steps forward.

Socio-economic Impact of Work and Descent Based Discrimination, where Kazi Reazul Haque, of the National Human Rights Commission was chief guest.

**Citizen's Rights Fair** - In January 2010 BDERM participated in a Citizen Rights Fair organised by BRAC Development Institute. BDERM displayed materials and put on cultural shows to raise awareness about the Dalit movement and its cultural heritage to human rights organisations and wider civil society.

BDERM have invested a great deal of time participating in events held by human rights and development organisations to both bring Dalit issues into the mainstream and to make these issues visible to new and potentially supportive audiences and allies. For example three Dalit students participated in the recent National Youth Parliament.



## 4. Lobbying and Advocacy

In a relatively short space of time BDERM has achieved tangible policy successes. The Prime Minister, Sheikh Hasina recently issued a message to mark the International Day for the Elimination of Racial Discrimination. She stated that as a signatory of the Convention of the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination and member of the UN Human Rights Council, Bangladesh is working incessantly to eliminate caste and all forms of discrimination. The Social Welfare Minister, Enamul Hoque Mostofa Shaheed has made initial positive statements in relation to the introduction of quotas within education and employment. Law Minister Barrister Shafiq Ahmed recently pronounced during a seminar that an anti-discrimination law should be formulated. Other highlights include:

The inclusion of Dalit concerns within the **election manifestos of all eight major political parties.**

**Success in Budget Advocacy** - BDERM submitted a **Memorandum to the Finance Ministry** demanding specific allocation of funds in the national budget to develop the housing facilities of Dalit communities. In response the Ministry allocated 10 crore taka (2011-2012) for this purpose. Dalits and excluded communities were also referred to in the Budget Speech made by the Finance Minister on 10<sup>th</sup> June 2011.

Influencing the national **Poverty Reduction Strategic Paper** and the **National Human Rights Commission** to seriously address Dalits and excluded communities.

*BDERM representatives met the Prime Minister's representatives at her Government Residence on January 5th, 2011*



**Lobbying for Constitutional change.**BDERM submitted a memorandum to the special parliamentary committee to amend the constitution on October 5th 2010, demanding special provision in the constitution to protect the Dalit community and make more explicit reference to caste based discrimination. Copies were sent to all 340 MPs. BDERM had a positive meeting with the Co-chairman of the Constitution Review Committee.

**Positive meetings have been held with various MPs** (e.g. *Shuranjit Sen Gupta*) **and Ministries** held to request quotas, a specific law against untouchability and more priority to be given to the issue. In January 2011 BDERM leaders met with the Prime Minister, her sister Sheikh Rehana and her niece Tulip at her Government home. They discussed the overall situation and some solutions to the current problems – including the need to include caste within the national census. She assured representatives of her Government's commitment to improve the situation of Dalit and excluded communities based on the electoral manifesto of the ruling alliance.

Ongoing lobbying of the Dhaka Municipal Authorities for improved housing, water and sanitation for Dalit communities. BDERM briefed the **Deputy Commissioner of Dhaka** on the situation of Dalit communities and requested positive and immediate measures be taken. As a result he committed to taking action to develop these communities according to the rules and regulations of government and human rights norms. BDERM representatives met with the Managing Director of the Water and Sanitation Authority in Dhaka in September 2010 to ask them to take immediate measures for Dalit slums in Dhaka. As the result the Authority supplied water to Rainkhola Colony.



*UN Special Rapporteur visiting  
Gonaktuly Colony*

**BDERM have held a series of meeting with the Danish, UK and German Embassies, and with the European Commission and United Nations Development Programme** to raise the visibility of the issues and to make recommendations for how Dalits and excluded communities can be included within wider development programmes. In September 2011 BDERM will be making a presentation to programme staff at the UK Department for International Development in Dhaka.



*Rikke Nöhrlund (International Dalit Solidarity Network), Abul Bashir (Co-ordinator, BDERM Secretariat) and Moni Rani Das (Dalit Women's Forum) meeting at the German Embassy Dec. 2010*

In 2009 BDERM submitted a letter to the **UK Foreign and Commonwealth Office** asking for an apology to the Dalit communities who were forcibly moved by the British administration to what was then East Bengal.

Although the **2011 Census provided an unprecedented opportunity** to capture national data, categories related to work, descent and caste were not included. Unfortunately BDERM meetings and submissions during December 2010 which aimed to influence both through the Bureau of Statistics and the European Commission who helped fund the census were not successful. The lack of concrete national data contributes to the invisibility, marginalisation and disempowerment of Dalits and excluded communities and also hinders claims for special measures.





## 5. Press and Media Coverage



BDERM have gained widespread media coverage and have built strong relationships with supportive journalists, who are now key allies of the movement. Numerous press conferences have been held to highlight events, contribute to lobbying and to raise awareness about specific human rights violations. Successful and supportive media coverage, *print, TV, radio, new media*, have played a major role in the growing visibility of this issue.

For example a conference was held in October 2010, at Dhaka Reporters Unity, to highlight BDERM's demands to change the Constitution. Representatives from around 20 newspapers heard BDERM leaders, eminent citizens and human rights activists express their solidarity. Retired Justice of Apex Court, Gholam Rabbani, stressed the need for a special rule in the code of procedure to prohibit discrimination. Rabbani suggested introducing the provision of 6 months to 3 years imprisonment to anyone found impeding Dalits from receiving education, treatment and other fundamental rights.



*BDERM organised a press conference demanding a special provision in the constitution to protect citizen rights, dignity of Dalit community.*



## **6. Legal Assistance, Fact Finding and Securing Justice**

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BDERM have developed the mechanisms and skills to quickly respond when incidents of abuse, violence or discrimination occur. Members now regularly conduct fact finding, lodge complaints and accompany cases through to the court. For example:

In February 2011 Dalit families were evicted from their homes by local land grabbers. BDERM immediately investigated and compiled reports that were then followed up by the National Human Rights Commission and the District Administrator.

In Jessore members protested to government officials when people set fire to a Dalit house, and their intervention in a rape case resulted in a Dalit girl receiving compensation and the perpetrator being sent to prison.

A press conference was organised to demand legal action and the arrest of perpetrators, in 3 separate incidents of murder in Jessore and Jhenaidah districts.



## 7. Documentation and Research



BDERM have researched, produced and commissioned a range of publications, reports and documents. These have been produced in both English and Bangla and disseminated to a range of international and national audiences.

BDERM also produces a twice yearly newsletter called *Dalit O Bonchito Shomachar*.



### Publications include:

- Report from first Dalit Human Rights Conference
- Report - Bangladesh's Universal Periodic Review Session
- Factsheet - Problems of Bangladesh's Dalits
- 'Why Ambedkar is needed in Bangladesh?' by Altaf Perves
- Bangla version - Draft UN Principles and Guidelines
- Booklet - Patriarchy, Untouchability and Poverty
- Booklet - Diversity and Social Exclusion
- A range of leaflets, posters, desk calendars, New Year cards
- Academic Research



Written in partnership with One World Action:

- Dalit Rights are Human Rights
- Dalit Women in Bangladesh, Multiple Exclusions

*BDERM launched the draft UN Principles and Guidelines for the Effective Elimination of Discrimination based on Work and Descent, in both English and Bangla at an event on 6th February 2010, in Dhaka.*





## 8. International Advocacy, Networking and Awareness Raising

In 2009, **BDERM** joined the **International Dalit Solidarity Network** and as a result both the issue and the movement have become much more visible and influential at the international level. **BDERM** now regularly participate in **IDSN** Council meetings and lobbying - so jointly influencing the **UN Human Rights Council** and the **European Union**. **BDERM** have also participated in the **Universal Periodic Review Forum**, submitting a well received and influential alternative report. **BDERM** also participated in the **Durban Review Conference** and have held a series of meetings with the **Bangladesh** delegation in **Geneva**.

**UN Human Rights Council** - Since March 2009, **BDERM** have attended the **United Nation Human Rights Council** meetings in **Geneva** participating in joint lobbying events. In 2010 **BDERM** representatives spoke eloquently to the council about caste discrimination in **Bangladesh**, particularly the need to improve housing, water and sanitation.



*BDERM General Secretary Bothanki Solomon speaks at the UN Human Rights Council in Geneva.*



## Exposure Visits and Exchanges

BDERM have facilitated visits by both UN Special Experts researching the issue of caste based discrimination and with Special Rapporteurs on Water and Sanitation – in both cases experts visited Dalit colonies in Dhaka and as a direct result their independent reports highlighted issues facing Dalit communities.



*Above Right -  
Head of European mission in Bangladesh  
Stefan Frowein visiting Pongu colony in Dhaka.*

*Above - British MP Bridget Phillipson visiting  
Gonoktuly Dalit colony in Dhaka.*

In June 2009, European Union representatives visited Dalit colonies in Dhaka and a workshop was organised with representatives of European Union and key donor agencies in Dhaka.

In December 2010, UK MP Bridget Phillipson visited Dalit communities in Dhaka. Later in the month the Chair-person of the Dalit Women's Forum, Moni Rani Das visited Bridget in London and made a presentation to the UK All Party Parliamentary Group of MPs, to the Bangladesh High Commissioner, and the Department for International Development.



*Chair-person of the Dalit Women's Forum,  
Moni Rani Das*

BDERM have hosted various delegations from Dalit organisations in India and Nepal to share strategies and to observe and compare the situation of Dalits in Bangladesh. In November 2009, representatives from the Indian National Campaign for Dalit Human Rights and the Centre for Social Equity and Exclusion met with BDERM and Dalit Women Forum. In December 2008, eight BDERM representatives visited India to exchange experiences, meeting with Shongram Shomiti in Calcutta, and the National Campaign on Dalit Human Rights and Safai Karmachari Andolan in Delhi.

One World Action working in partnership with BDERM co-ordinated two UK journalists, from The Guardian and Independent to visit Dalit colonies and as a result high profile articles were featured in the popular UK press.

*Moni Rani Das with UK M.Ps,  
One World Action staff and the  
Bangladesh High Commissioner to the UK*



## **International Visibility**



*Dalit women's leader, Sonu Rani Das*

Dalit women's leader, Sonu Rani Das participated in the international conference, For a Better Urban Future held in March 2010 in Brazil organised by UN-HABITAT.

BDERM attended a conference, 'Envisioning New Nepal: Dynamics of Caste, Identity and Inclusion of Dalits' in Nepal in June 2010.

BDERM attended a seminar, 'Minority Issues and Social Exclusion in South Asia: Challenges and Responses by State and Civil Society, Positive Practices, Learning and Future Tasks,' held in December 2010 Delhi, India.

Two graduate students, Tamanna Sing Baraik and Pinki Rani Das participated in the Global Exchange Programme - spending three months in Scotland.

In 2010 One World Action awarded their Sternberg Award to the Dalit Women's Forum in recognition of the Forum's work, vision and success in tackling caste discrimination and poverty amongst Dalit communities in Bangladesh.





## 9. Celebrating Dalit Culture and Contribution



BDERM have co-ordinated a range of cultural and musical programmes to celebrate the contribution of Dalit culture to music, theatre and the arts in Bangladesh. For example:

An event in December 2010 in Dhaka featured traditional songs sung by Dalit women. A drama show, called *Amra Dalit (We are Dalit)* has been shown in Dhaka and in communities, performed alongside a photographic exhibition.

BDERM have organised receptions and celebrations for Dalit students who have passed their examinations to encourage and inspire them.

A short film called *Defiant Voices* – featuring photographs and music from Dalits living in Dhaka has been viewed over 1,200 times on YouTube – see [www.youtube.com/watch?v=eli1BBbQQ-k](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=eli1BBbQQ-k)



A photo exhibition featuring photographs from this exhibition was held at the UK Department for International Development in December 2011 in London to coincide with celebrations around international human rights day.





## 10. Looking Forward

### **BDERM Priorities and Actions for 2011/2012**

To continue to strengthen and expand a united, effective and broad based national movement.

To legislate and enact both quotas for employment and education and a specific anti-discrimination law against untouchability.

To conduct national level surveys and data on caste based discrimination and accurate numbers of Dalits and excluded communities in Bangladesh.

To include a special provision within the constitution.

To secure specific benefits and programmes within government and donor budgets to tackle poverty and exclusion for Dalit and excluded communities.

To establish adequate health care, housing, sanitation and education facilities for all Dalit colonies and communities.

*If you are not considered to be human,  
human rights do not apply to you.*  
Moni Rani Das



*We should not be silent when we have a chance to speak.  
Silence is one type of treachery. Those who understand the  
situation of Dalits should not be silent anymore.*

Azid Abul Kalam



*I hid my identity because our family faced so much discrimination and torture. Since then my life has been better but I no longer want to hide myself. Now I am proud to say what I do and who I am - this is the success of this movement.*

BDERM Member

*Throughout my life I faced discrimination, violence and attacks but now women are strengthening their position within their families and communities. We are coming into the light.*

BDERM Member

### **BDERM Executive Body**

Mukul Sikder	President
Moni Rani Das	Vice- President
Master Kanailal Rabidas	Vice- President
Bothanki Solomon	General Secretary
Sunil Mridha	Treasurer
Suraj Kumar Das	Asst. General Secretary
Banani Biswas	Asst. General Secretary
Uttam Kumar Bhakta	Organising Secretary
Bibhutoosh Roy	Secretary, Information and Research
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Jhorna Rani Das	Secretary, Woman Affairs
Aseem Samaddar	Member
B. David Raju	Member

Secretariat:

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**BDERM**

**Bangladesh Dalit and  
Excluded Rights Movement**

**বাংলাদেশ দলিত ও বঞ্চিত জনগোষ্ঠী অধিকার আন্দোলন**