

BRIEFING NOTE

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HOUSING SITUATION OF DALITS IN BANGLADESH: CONSEQUENCES OF DEPRIVATION AND VULNERABILITY



There are around 6.5 million Dalits living in Bangladesh. This community is the victim of discrimination due to their work and descent. Dalits are as 'Bangladeshi by birth', they have their national identity card, voting rights, and their names are also included in many state documents. Hitherto they are deprived from their basic citizens' rights.

The constitution of Bangladesh has secured equal rights, status and opportunities for all its citizens. However, Dalits are deprived of all these constitutional commitments. Bangladesh is the signatory of almost all international human rights conventions. But the position and role of state is frustrating in the question of preserving and ensuring the rights of Dalits. There is no plan for the overall improvement of their condition. Current GDP rate of the country is around 5% and poverty reduced at the rate of around 1%. Due to the imbalanced distribution of income, poverty rate is not reducing in relation with the increased national income. The Dalits are the worst victim of this unequal system of distribution.

Most of the Dalits are landless and homeless, untouchable to the so-called upper class. Above all, they are deprived and suppressed due to their work and descent. Their deprivation and vulnerability can be understood by visiting their colony, it seems to be a different world. The colony is detached from the mainstream society. Dalits are not even allowed to live outside the colonies; mainstream people deny giving them rent as they are untouchable.

Thus this large Dalit community is bound to reside at the colony for years which were built in the government's khash (government owned) land in the villages and towns. This densely populated unhygienic colonies with almost no air and light are known as Rabidashpalli, Rishipalli, Horizonpolli, Methorpotti, Dompura, Sweeper colony, City Colony, etc. These colonies have some varieties according to its location at village or city.

Situation of Dalit colonies in urban

The buildings of Dalit colonies are predominantly one or two storied. As these buildings are very old, these are very risky and could be collapsed at any time. Rooms are mostly 8-10 feet in size where last generations are living together. There are around 175 people of 35 families of Telegu community living in the city colony of Gabtoli, Beribadh, Dhaka. These families were evicted from Mohammadpur town hall and were rehabilitated in this small piece of land.

The Gonoktuli city colony is under Hazaribag Thana (administrative area) of Dhaka. Inhabitants of this colony were rehabilitated here during the construction of Eden Girls College. Almost 450 to 500 families live in this colony. Some of them are living in buildings and some of them are living in fence made small shelter-homes.

Around five thousand people live at Nazira Bazar Pakistani Colony at Central Aga Sadek Road in Dhaka. Except few brick built houses, most of the houses of the community are shabby huts. Despite the continuous population growth, sizes of the house remain unchanged.

The Rabidashpara at Wari, Dhaka is a Dalit colony. The early inhabitants of this colony were the victims of the communal conflict during British period. The community got lease of the land from the then government. Scenario of this colony is same as other colonies. There are around 105 families live in this colony and each family has owned a room of 225 square feet.

The scenario of Rural Dalit habitats

The rural Dalit communities live in small homesteads situated nearby river, pond, swamp or abandoned fields or on khash land (government owned) nearby the road or grazing land. In general, they live in one/two rooms huts made of bamboo, straw, and mud. Most of the villages depend on pond, river or well for water. But rural Dalits are not allowed to use these common water sources of the village. Consequently, they have to rely on distant water sources away from the so called 'village of the elites', which creates extreme sufferings for them. The people of Dalit community have to use same water sources for shower, washing clothes, clean utensils etc.

Government Initiative

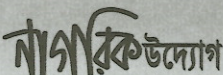
BDERM has successfully attracted the attention of government on the Dalits housing problem. National budget of 2013- 2014 has allocated 12 crore 30 lac taka for Dalit, Bede and third gender community. There was an allocation of 10 crore taka in the 2012-2013 national budget for Dalits housing. The government has decided to construct 1148 apartments for the cleaners of Dhaka City Corporation under the 'Construction of Cleaner Colony of Dhaka City Corporation' project. It was decided on the meeting of Executive Committee of National Economic Council (ECNEC) held on October 1, 2013.

Immediate tasks


- Arrange allotment of khas land (government owned) for the rural Dalits as priority basis;
- Conduct proper monitoring for the effective use of already allotted budget for Dalits housing and ensure their permanent allotment;
- Develop long term program to solve the Dalits housing problem after conducting country-wide research and study;
- Include Dalits in mainstream development agenda through necessary amendment of national policies and strategies.

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