

BDERM Bangladesh Dalit and
Excluded Rights Movement
বাংলাদেশ দলিত ও বঞ্চিত জনগোষ্ঠী অধিকার আন্দোলন



IDSN International Dalit Solidarity Network
WORKING GLOBALLY AGAINST CASTE-BASED DISCRIMINATION

নাগরিক উদ্যোগ
NAGORIK UDDYOG
CITIZEN'S INITIATIVE

**Alternative report
to the United Nations Committee on Economic, Social and
Cultural Rights, 63rd session, 12-29 March 2018**

**SOCIAL, ECONOMIC AND CULTURAL STATUS OF
DALIT COMMUNITY IN BANGLADESH**

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Bangladesh Dalit and Excluded Rights Movement (BDERM)

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In association with

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I. Introduction

1. This report has been prepared jointly by Bangladesh Dalit and Excluded Rights Movement (BDERM), Network of Non-Mainstreamed Communities (NNMC) and International Dalit Solidarity Network (IDSN), in association with Nagorik Uddyog, to bring attention to the issue of caste-based discrimination in Bangladesh for the 63rd session of the Committee on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights.

2. Bangladesh Dalit and Excluded Rights Movement (BDERM) is a national platform of Dalit and excluded communities in Bangladesh established in 2008. The aim of BDERM is to build an equal society free from all forms of discrimination against Dalits and socially excluded communities, where all citizen, including Dalits, will live with dignity, security and prosperity. To secure the rights of Dalits, BDERM leads national campaigns and engage in awareness raising, mobilization, capacity building and advocacy – both at the grassroots, national, regional and - international level. BDERM has a nationwide presence with 52 district committees and 7 divisional committees. In addition, BDERM is a member of International Dalit Solidarity Network (IDSN), Asia Dalit Rights Forum (ADRF) and facilitates the Asia Parliamentarians Forum on Dalit Concerns (APFDC), where the regional parliamentarians are united on Dalits cause. Contact: bdermb@gmail.com. Web: <http://www.bderm.org/>

3. The Network of Non-mainstream Marginalized Communities (NNMC) is working for the rights and empowerment of Dalits and Adibashis in the Northwestern part of Bangladesh. The journey of NNMC was initiated in 2008 by some CBO's of the marginalized communities and the network has been formally launched in 2013. NNMC now consists of several NGOs working together for the development of Dalit and Adibashi communities. Mainly for the implementation of short term project based activities. As a result, the core focus of the organization is discrimination against Dalit and Adibashi communities. To provide a platform for these communities to raise their voice and take forward these concerns to the policy level. With this objective, NNMC has been initiated by HEKS-EPER in collaboration with local partner organizations, with the aim to establish a bottom up network involving the grass root

organizations fighting for the human rights of Dalits and Adivasi. Contacts: sarah.marandy@nmmcdbd.com. Web: <http://www.nmmcdbd.com/>.

4. International Dalit Solidarity Network (IDSN) is an international network working on a global level to bring attention to the issue of caste-based discrimination. Network members include - national Dalit platforms in caste-affected countries; Dalit Solidarity Networks in seven European countries; and international associates, among others. Contact information: Email: info@idsn.org. Web: <http://idsn.org/>

5. NAGORIK UDDYOG (CITIZEN'S INITIATIVE) is a nonprofit national level development and human rights organisation advocating on fundamental human rights for excluded, poor and underprivileged minorities since its establishment in 1995. As an active member of many national and international development forums and networks, Nagorik Uddyog undertakes lobbying and advocacy activities to promote human rights and good governance. NU has special consultative status with UN Economic and Social Council (ECOSOC).

6. In response to the state party report and based on recent reports and fact-finding missions undertaken by BDERM, Nagorik Uddyog, NMMC and IDSN provides additional information on the situation of Dalits and caste-based discrimination in Bangladesh.

II. Background

7. There is no disaggregated data available on the Dalit population in Bangladesh. Out of a total population of approximately 160 million the estimate number of Dalits in Bangladesh range between 5.5 to 6.5 million¹, who are one of the most deprived communities in socio-economic terms. Traditionally Dalit people are involved in menial jobs like sweeping, cleaning and other considered low jobs. Due to their work and descent, and the so-called caste, they are perceived as “untouchable”, which limits their social and economic development.

8. Caste systems and what is broadly referred to as untouchability practices are most commonly associated with Hinduism but in Bangladesh these traditions and practices have also been adopted by sections of the Muslim majority.² Historically, Dalits have been oppressed by dominant groups in society and the majority are under-privileged and struggle for job opportunities. Like other caste affected communities, Dalits in Bangladesh are often forced to undertake specific types of labour as a consequence of their assigned caste status and are most commonly associated with the profession of "Jat sweepers" or "Hijra". As a result of their limited access to employment Dalits are almost exclusively working in 'the service sector' performing unclean jobs in urban areas such as street sweeping, manual scavenging and burying the dead. Many Dalits are stigmatized as a result of their profession and experience isolation and social exclusion.³ Within the Hindu community, the Dalit population remains especially marginalized and subject to discrimination not only by the majority population but also by

¹ Since there is no official statistics and disaggregated data on Dalits, it is hard to get a complete assessment of the total number of Dalits. In a Benchmark report on the draft UN principles and guidelines for the elimination of caste based discrimination BDERM and Nagorik Uddyog estimates the number to be between 5.5 – 6.5 million. Uddin, Mohamed Nasir, Nagorik Uddyog- Bangladesh Dalit and Excluded Rights Movement. Benchmarking the Draft UN Principles and Guidelines on the Elimination of (Caste) Discrimination based on Work and Descent. 2015: http://www.nuhr.org/DocFile/134-Benchmarking%20Study_EIDHR_NU_BD.final.pdf (accessed 2 February 2017)

² IDSN Briefing note on Bangladesh, 2015: <http://idsn.org/wp-content/uploads/2015/08/IDSN-briefing-note-Bangladesh-2015.pdf> (accessed February 2017)

³ A/HRC/31/56 (pp. 14)

more affluent, higher-caste Hindus who may, for example, exclude them from certain rituals and from shared spaces such as temples, restaurants and markets.⁴

9. In Bangladesh Dalits face discrimination in their access to housing and land. They are segregated in colonies and unhygienic slum areas and are often systematically excluded from access to water and sanitation.⁵ While members of the Bangladeshi capital's non-Dalit population mostly boil or filter their water, the economically deprived and discriminated Dalits often have to do with unsafe water sources. Although numerous measures by the Government of Bangladesh (GoB) have been introduced to improve water and sanitation services for the general population in urban and rural areas, it had little effect on the country's Dalits, as Dalit issues generally are unrecognized.⁶ The majority of Dalits are landless and their houses are often located in abandoned fields, on khash (government owned) land near roads or pasture. Dalits face widespread poverty, ostracization and food insecurity are subjected to land grabbing, violence and forced conversion.⁷

10. The persistence of multiple forms of discrimination experienced by the Dalit community in Bangladesh constitute an impediment to the implementation of the Covenant. The Government of Bangladesh should, therefore, be recommended to enforce constitutional and policy measures to address this situation, including special legal measures to protect the human rights of Dalits. Priority should be given to develop a national action plan to effectively eliminate discrimination against Dalits and other excluded groups in society. In this process, the government should consider the existing UN framework addressing caste discrimination, including the draft UN principles and guidelines to elimination discrimination based on work and descent – as a model framework for developing such an action plan.⁸

11. With this report we urge the Committee to recommend the Government of Bangladesh to take immediate steps to eliminate caste-based discrimination by speeding up the adoption of the Anti-Discrimination Bill (2015), and hereby improve the legal framework to address discrimination against Scheduled Castes. To provide disaggregated data on Dalits in Bangladesh and ensure access to entitlements under the quota systems and other affirmative action initiatives. We further ask the Committee to address the ongoing discrimination against Dalits in Bangladesh in their questions and recommendations for the state party.

⁴ Minority Rights Group: Under threat: The challenges facing religious minorities in Bangladesh (2016). http://minorityrights.org/wp-content/uploads/2016/11/MRG_Rep_Ban_Oct16_ONLINE.pdf (p. 9)

⁵ A/HRC/31/56 (pp. 16)

⁶ Equity Watch: Access to Water, Sanitation and Hygiene (WASH) for Dalits in Bangladesh: Challenges and Ways Forward. (2015) (p. 27).

⁷ Minority Rights Group: Under threat: The challenges facing religious minorities in Bangladesh (2016). http://minorityrights.org/wp-content/uploads/2016/11/MRG_Rep_Ban_Oct16_ONLINE.pdf (p. 9)

⁸ The draft UN Principles & Guidelines for the effective elimination of discrimination based on work and descent were published by the Human Rights Council in an annex to a report (A/HRC/11/CRP.3) at its 11th session in May 2009. As an overarching principle the draft P&G establish that all states, including Bangladesh, have a duty to make sincere efforts to dispel the prejudicial beliefs that constitute, support and reinforce discrimination based on work and descent, including notions of “untouchability”, pollution and caste superiority or inferiority, as well as to prevent actions taken on the basis of such beliefs. The principles and guidelines suggest the specific measures to be implemented for the effective elimination of this form of discrimination, including all necessary constitutional, legislative, administrative, budgetary and judicial measures and appropriate forms of affirmative action and public education programmes to prevent, prohibit and provide redress for discrimination based on work and descent in both public and private spheres; and ensure that such measures are respected and implemented by all state authorities at all levels.

III. International legal framework on caste discrimination in Bangladesh

12. Various human rights bodies have mentioned caste-based discrimination in their questions and recommendations for Bangladesh related to the ongoing discrimination against Dalits, with emphasis on an urgent need for disaggregated data on the social and economic conditions for minorities and a strengthening of the legal framework for the elimination of discrimination. Herewith a short overview of the most important observations on caste-based discrimination in Bangladesh.

- For all UN references to caste see: [Compilation of UN references to caste-based discrimination by UN treaty bodies, Universal Periodic Review, and UN Special Procedures \(prepared by IDSN\)](#)

13. The Committee on the Elimination of all forms of Racial Discrimination adopted General Recommendation XXIX in 2002 wherein the Committee explicitly included “caste” within the scope of the Convention. “Strongly reaffirming that discrimination based on ‘descent’ includes discrimination against members of communities based on forms of social stratification such as caste and analogous systems of inherited status which nullify or impair their equal enjoyment of human rights”. Identifying several factors that could lead to discrimination on the basis of caste and analogous systems of inherited status including “inability or restricted ability to alter inherited status; socially enforced restrictions on marriage outside the community; private and public segregation, including in housing and education, access to public spaces, places of worship and public sources of food and water; limitation of freedom to renounce inherited occupations or degrading or hazardous work; subjection to debt bondage; subjection to dehumanizing discourses referring to pollution or untouchability; and generalized lack of respect for their human dignity and equality”.⁹

14. CERD had noted the lack of information on the demographic composition of the population in Bangladesh already in 2001 where the Committee expressed a wish to receive disaggregated data on the economic and social status of minorities as well as their participation in public life¹⁰ and reiterated its recommendations to the State Party that racial discrimination was not explicitly prohibited and penalized in criminal law.¹¹

15. The Committee on the rights of the child has continued to raise their concern over the continued discrimination against children from minority groups in Bangladesh¹². In 2015 the Committee noted that discrimination against certain groups of children, particularly girls, children with disabilities, children of ethnic and religious minorities, in particular Dalit and indigenous children, children living in rural areas, refugee and asylum-seeking children and children in street situations still exists in practice. The committee expressed particular concern for Dalit children, and indigenous children who face discrimination and violence, and lack access to quality education, in particular to education in their mother tongue.¹³

16. In 2011 the Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination Against Women expressed their concern at the very limited information and statistics provided on disadvantaged groups of women and girls, including minority women such as Dalit women and that those women and girls often suffer from multiple forms of discrimination, especially with regard to access to education, employment and health care, housing, protection from violence and access to justice.

⁹ CERD General recommendation XXIX on article 1 para. 1, of the convention (Decent).

¹⁰ CERD/C/304/Add.118 art. 8

¹¹ CERD/C/304/Add.118 art. 11

¹² CRC/C/BGD/CO/4 para. 32 and CRC/C/15/Add.221 para. 79

¹³ CRC/C/BGD/ CO/5 section C. and I.

17. In 2016, the Committee paid special attention to the situation for Dalit women and stated their concern that disadvantaged groups, hereunder Dalit women face multiple and intersecting forms of discrimination due to their gender, health, caste and socio-economic status. The Committee was particularly concerned about: *“Abductions, sexual harassment, rape, intimidation and lack of access to public services and resources for Dalit women”*.¹⁴ Further in 2016 - the Committee recommended the GoB to accelerate the adoption of the Anti-Discrimination Law, which is in compliance with the Convention within a specific time-frame¹⁵. The Committee recommended that the State party take measures to collect data in all areas covered under the Convention. The data should be disaggregated by sex, age, ethnicity, religious background, socio-economic status, including caste, marital status and others.¹⁶

18. In 2017, the Human Rights Committee reviewed Bangladesh and in its concluding observations noted that although the constitution prohibits discrimination based on caste, the caste-based system persists and limits employment and housing opportunities for *“people from the so-called lower castes who experience extreme poverty, social stigma and marginalization”*¹⁷. The Committee recommended to the GoB to ***“take measures to end the de facto caste systems and ensure that individuals from so-called lower castes are not relegated to caste-based employment and have equal access to all rights guaranteed under the Covenant, without discrimination”***, as well as, ensure that the ***anti-discrimination bill 2015 protects against direct and indirect forms of discrimination in private and public sphere, including based on caste***¹⁸.

19. In 2013 at the 4th session of the Universal Periodic Review 2 states made recommendations related to caste discrimination in Bangladesh. The GoB was recommended to adopt an action plan to address the situation of Dalits and eliminate discrimination against them, including by ensuring access to safe drinking water and sanitation (Slovenia)¹⁹ and to *“continue improving the conditions of children, women, Dalits, indigenous people, refugees and migrants taking into account the special situation and difficulties that those groups have to overcome”* (Holy See).²⁰ Similarly, in the first report of the UPR Working Group on Bangladesh (2009), the Holy See had noted a number of cases of discrimination against religious minorities including Hinduism and Christianity and had recommended the GoB to *“investigate complaints concerning discrimination against members of minority religions, while developing educational and awareness programmes addressing these human rights violations”* (Holy See).²¹

IV. Article 11: Right to an adequate standard of living

20. Dalits in Bangladesh usually do some of the most menial, low paid dangerous jobs such as cleaning toilets, sweeping streets, and emptying septic tanks. A study from 2014²² shows that 43% of Dalits make their living from sweeping and cleaning jobs. 22% of them work in agriculture sector and 14% of Dalits' livelihoods depend on the tea gardens. The study also found that a monthly income of 42% of Dalit families ranges between 3 and 6 thousand taka, 18% live on less than 3 thousand taka, 17% live on 6-9

¹⁴ CEDAW/C/BGD/CO/8 para 40 8 (c.)

¹⁵ CEDAW/C/BGD/CO/8 para. 11. C.

¹⁶ CEDAW/C/BGD/CO/8 para 45

¹⁷ [Concluding observations](#) of the HRC, 2017, page 3, para 11(d).

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, para 12.

¹⁹ A/HRC/24/12 (rec. 130.15.)

²⁰ A/HRC/24/12 (rec. 130.23)

²¹ A/HRC/11/18

²² Parvez, Altaf and Mazharul Islam (2014), *Bangladesher Dalit Somaj: Boishommyo, Bonchona O Osprishota* (Dalit Communities in Bangladesh: Situation of Discrimination, Exclusion and Untouchability).

thousand taka and 12% of Dalit families earn between 9-12 thousand taka. Only 11% Dalit households are able to earn more than 12 thousand taka a month.

21. Despite the skills and education that Dalits have they often stick to their traditional occupations, entrapped in a chronic poverty, due to various social and economic restrictions instituted by the dominant social actors. Recently a lot of non-Dalits started taking the traditionally Dalit jobs and put Dalit livelihoods and economic opportunities at further risk. Caste-based identity of Dalits impedes their ability to switch to more skilled professions even when they have enough skills or education. This socially constituted entrapment leaves Dalit livelihoods vulnerable. Moreover, the Prime Minister's directives securing 80% quota for Dalits and Harijans in sweeping and cleaning post in the government and autonomous agencies²³ lacks implementation.

22. Since 2012-13 fiscal year, the GoB has been allocating scholarships, income generation training and social security, including an old age and maternity allowances for Dalits, Bede and Harijan people. In 2014-15 around 90 million BDT was allocated to the program aiming to benefit 14,427 Dalit people. In 2015-16 fiscal year only 1.8 million, in 2016-17 2.3 million and in 2017-18 fiscal year 2.17 million were allocated to the programme. However, due to the long-standing exclusion of Dalit communities, the lack of knowledge about their rights and stigma, Dalits have been unable to access these programmes. Since 2015-16 fiscal year Dalits are no longer mentioned in the allocation, which has been allocated to minority groups in general. Unfortunately, non-Dalits often enjoy the benefits allotted especially for Dalits²⁴. For instance, the tea garden package of 5000tk (including Saree, lungi, food item like flour, edible oil, sugar etc.) has been allotted for the tea workers (during 2016-17), which faced immense criticism for sub-standard of goods.

RECOMMENDATIONS:

- Take measures to end the de facto caste systems and ensure that individuals from so-called lower castes are not relegated to caste-based employment and have equal access to all rights guaranteed under the Covenant, without discrimination.
- Accelerate the adoption of the anti-discrimination bill 2015 and ensure that it protects against direct and indirect forms of discrimination in private and public sphere, including based on caste.
- Recognise Dalit as a 'distinct' community, produce disaggregated data along with a head-count poverty status of this community, and introduce a targeted employment and livelihood development program for Dalits.
- Continue with the budgetary allocation for Dalit and increase the coverage of the social safety net program to include skills development training for Dalits.
- Provide alternative skills training and financial support for Dalits to transition into alternative work.
- Introduce reservations (quotas) for Dalit in the government and autonomous jobs and ensure discrimination free environment in the workplace.
- Secure Dalit employment in their traditional jobs (according to the directive of the Prime Minister's Office) along with a non-discriminatory access to other skilled jobs.

²³ In 2017, three non-Dalit are appointed in the sweeper post in the Office of superintendent of Police of Bhola District despite many Dalit candidates applied for the post. Likewise, in 2015, in Barisal Medical College, among the 217 post for sweepers, cleaners only 21 was appointed from the Dalit and Harijan Community

²⁴ In Bhola district, under social safety net program, the department of Social Welfare received allocation for 518 Dalits (skill building training and other allowance). However, BDERM leaders in FGD, shared that not more than 20% from Dalit community enjoys this privilege.

V. Article 11: right to housing

23. In urban areas Dalits usually live in slum like ‘colonies’ without an adequate access to water, electricity or sanitation. Often three generations of 8-12 people live in one room. Urban Dalits used to be the cleaners or sweepers of the City Corporation, railways, autonomous industries, government hospitals or municipalities, brought to the city during the urbanization by the British colonial rulers. They were provided with a small piece of land for living without any amenities. A number of Dalits in urban areas increased over time but they had to manage their shelter within the given land. Moreover, frequent due to evictions Dalits had to settle in a reduced space.

24. Dalit colonies predominantly are old, two or multistoried (in few cases, especially in the Dhaka city) buildings. Often a family is allotted a single room of 10-12 feet space and due to an increased population many families have to live in a fence made huts inside the colony. Urban Dalit colonies are known as the dirtiest and crowded places: dirty, dilapidated walkways, overflowed drainage systems, stagnant water, plastic bamboo made rooms encroached the open space. For example, around 5.000 people live at Nazira Bazar Colony at Central Aga Sadek Road in Dhaka, which can accommodate a maximum of 1.000 people.

25. Dalit colonies do not conform to an adequate standard of living conditions. It gets even worse when colonies are evicted due to urbanization projects, which happens frequently. For instance, in 2013, the government planned to build 1148 flats for sweepers of Dhaka city and last year the city corporation issued a notice to the dwellers of the colony to shift their house temporarily (with a compensation) to allow a construction of a building. Yet, among the 2000 Dalit families in the colony only 150 work in the Dhaka South City Corporation and, if implemented, the project will leave many of the dwellers homeless.

RECOMMENDATIONS:

- Ensure an adequate standard of living and housing for Dalits, including adequate civic amenities such as water, sanitation, drainage, electricity etc.
- Allocate land to accommodate Dalits from the overcrowded colonies.
- Introduce a new legislation in the housing policy to ensure an adequate standard of housing is accessible for Dalits communities.
- Stop evictions of Dalits from colonies and provide permanent and adequate standard housing to Dalit communities.
- Implement effectively the allotted money for Dalit housing.

VI. Articles 11 and 12: right to water and sanitation

26. Dalits in Bangladesh face severe water and sanitation crisis in urban and rural areas. Urban Dalit colonies usually are situated around unclean locations, on the periphery of cities, with overflowing or choked drains, open sewers, lack of latrines and bathrooms, and near garbage dumping sites. Urban Dalits depend largely on water reservoirs to access water, which are not cleaned regularly, thereby making water unsafe for direct consumption and causing vector borne diseases. In rural areas, water crisis is acute due to the lack of water sources but also because Dalits are often prohibited from using common water sources. Tube wells often are situated in a non-Dalit locality and as Dalits do not hold land titles for their houses, often they are considered ineligible for an allotment of sanitary latrines by the government. The lack of developmental assets coupled with the consistent threat of eviction by the government or unauthorised dwellings, makes it an unviable option for Dalits to invest in sanitary

latrines. Thus, the perceived notions of caste hierarchy have resulted in Dalits' inability to rent or buy their land from other communities to construct houses or sanitary latrines.

27. In the 2015 studyⁱ, conducted by BDERM and Nagorik Uddyog, we found that 89% of rural Dalits use shared (common) latrines and 43% of their toilets are hanging latrines. 90% of the respondents used latrines without a roof or had a broken roof, which restricted their use during the rainy seasons. The absence of electricity in the latrines raise safety concerns for Dalit women in using the latrines in the night. The latrines constructed of tin shed and plastic besides cause serious privacy issues for girls and women, which are also unhygienic and pose various health hazards.

28. On the average, 16 households or 84 people use one water point in Dalit colonies in Dhaka city, and 8 households or 40 people use one latrine. 21% of Dalit households in rural areas have their own tube wells and 65% share common tube wells. The remaining 14% use surface water for drinking and other purposes. Both in rural and urban areas, many Dalit colonies do not have legal water points and are forced to use unauthorized connections. Additionally, even the most fortunate Dalits cannot even dream of getting 20 liters of water a day, affecting worst women and children.

29. The national development interventions have not yet prioritised the issue of water and sanitation for Dalits. Despite the government's initiatives in place the GoB has a long way to go to ensure dignified life and access to adequate and suitable water and sanitation services to Dalit communities. The lack of gathering of caste disaggregated data on the availability and access to water and sanitation results in the lack of attention to the issue not only from the government but also from civil society, academics and experts.

RECOMMENDATIONS:

- Collect an adequate data on hygiene and sanitation of Dalit communities and prepare tailored programmes to address the issues.
- Ensure that Dalit communities benefit equally from the WATSAN project.
- Allocate specific budget for Dalits to ensure an adequate access to water and sanitation for Dalits.
- Ensure inclusion of Dalit communities in the National Strategy on Water and Sanitation for Hard to Reach Communities by undertaking needs assessments, including through comprehensive surveys of urban Dalit colonies.

VII. Article 12: right to health

30. Dalits face discrimination in accessing medical amenities in public, private and even NGO facilitated centers. The study undertaken in 2014ⁱⁱ shows that 21% of Dalits face discrimination in getting medication from hospitals. 15% of the respondents said that doctor and dispensary did not provide them an adequate treatment or medicine due to their caste and professional identity. 26% said that a doctor or a midwife refused to visit a patient in their house.

31. Currently there is no official recognition that specific groups, like Dalits, are particularly vulnerable to ill-health, and therefore, deserve special protection and access to health entitlements. Health surveys and research programmes on the national public health situation do not pay a particular attention to child and maternal health conditions in the colonies and settlements where Dalit communities live. Due to the lack of attention to the specific health needs of Dalits, the issues that they face in accessing affordable health care remain unreported and unattended to.

RECOMMENDATIONS:

- Introduce special measures to ensure that Dalit communities achieve the highest attainable standard of physical and mental health, and have an equal access to healthcare and safe living environment.

- Ensure that the health and nutrition policies in Bangladesh pay attention to the conditions and situation of Dalit communities and provide a framework to improve their health and wellbeing.
- Establish specialised health and medical centers for Dalit communities and tea garden workers.
- Prohibit the manual scavenging practice in Bangladesh.
- Provide an adequate safety equipment to sweepers, cleaners and tea garden workers.

VIII. Article 13: right to education

32. Literacy and access to quality education remains a significant concern for Dalit community. Although primary education is compulsory, school enrollment has not reached a satisfactory level among Dalit children. School dropout rates are very high among Dalit children and Dalit boys and girls rarely continue their education beyond primary school. Caste-based discrimination is a significant cause of low school admission and retention of the Dalit childrenⁱⁱⁱ.

33. Dalit children study in a hostile environment, regularly facing abusive words, teasing and taunting on the basis of their caste identity. It has a significant impact on the impressionable minds of Dalit children, leading to drop outs from the primary level of education. The study undertaken in 2014^{iv} found that around 26% of the respondents face obstacles in getting admission in the non-community schools due to their family and caste identity. In many cases Dalit children have to hide their identity to get admission to schools. The study found that 30% of Dalit students experienced abuse or hatred from their classmates and others, including teachers. Moreover, 6.5% of the respondents said they still had to sit on separate benches in school.

34. Dalit students are also deprived of educational privileges and entitlement like scholarships/stipendium and an opportunity to participate in cultural programs, sports and other recreational activities. Additionally, an early marriage is a significant factor to Dalit girls' backwardness in education. A study from 2014^v indicates that 76% of the respondents said that child marriage is prevailing in their community and girls get married before reaching 18 years of age. Dalit girls also often face sexual and psychological harassment in educational institutions, which discourage them from attending schools or colleges. The recent study^{vi} shows that only 5.9% of Dalit girls complete secondary level education and no Dalit girl completed Higher Secondary Certificate.

35. The Government's education programme is supposed to focus on marginalised communities' education, yet it does not have any specific programmes for Dalit children^{vii}. According to the Dakar Framework for Action^{viii}, the state has a serious commitment to include the excluded, or if not so, clearer analyses must be made to ensure full inclusion. However, challenges in education faced by Dalits are not considered a serious issue in comparison with other ethnic minorities. No innovative or special measures have been initiated by the government in accordance with the Dakar Framework for Action.

36. Although an affirmative action quota was introduced for Dalit students in some public universities, the lack of legal recognition of their identity prevents them from taking this privilege. In 2014-15 academic year, many Dalit students were refused a certificate from the Deputy Commissioner as there was no official gazette published recognising Dalit as a separate identity. Consequently, since 2015-16 academic year, the number of Dalits seeking admission under the quota privilege has significantly reduced.

RECOMMENDATIONS:

- Take an immediate action to end discrimination and 'untouchability' practice in schools. These actions should include a directive from the Ministry of Education prohibiting discrimination based on any social identity including caste, in educational institutions, trainings teachers about caste-based discrimination, and including information on Dalits in school textbooks.

- Ensure and monitor Dalit children enrolment and attendance in primary schooling.
- Introduce quotas for Dalit students in all educational institutions, including at public and private universities.
- The Government should issue a directive to the local administration to certify Dalit students so that they can benefit of the quotas at public universities.

ⁱ Equity Watch 2015, Access to Water, Sanitation and Hygiene (WASH) for Dalits in Bangladesh: Challenges and Way Forward, Nagorik Uddyog and BDERM

ⁱⁱ Parvez, Altaf and Mazharul Islam, 2014, Bangladesher Dalit Somaj: Boishommyo, Bonchona o Osprisshota (Dalit Communities in Bangladesh: Situation of Discrimination, Exclusion and Untouchability).

ⁱⁱⁱ Ibid.

^{iv} Ibid.

^v Ibid.

^{vi} Rowshan, Rabeya, Riazuddin Khan (2016), Bringing Dalit Women to the Forefront: Realities and Challenges, Nagorik Uddyog & BDERM

^{vii} Equity Watch 2014, Challenges and Prospects for Dalits Securing their Rights to Education in Bangladesh, Nagorik Uddyog, BDERM

^{viii} See here: <http://unesdoc.unesco.org/images/0012/001211/121147e.pdf> (Accessed 1 February 2018).