

IC Bangladesh Case Study 2

Improving the housing and sanitation problems facing Dalits in Bangladesh.

Description of the practice:

What was/is the background to the practice? Describe any key events or actions that led to it?

About 5.5 million Dalits and excluded people live in Bangladesh. The majority of Dalits live below the poverty line, lagging behind in all development indicators. 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. 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. Untouchability and caste discrimination often prevent Dalits from renting houses outside the colony. Dalits are severely restricted in buying land, even if they have money. Dalits can rarely access common or government owned land, known as *Khas* land.

What was/is the title/name of the practice?

Improving the housing and sanitation problems facing Dalits in Bangladesh.

What was/is the aim/purpose of the practice?

Housing and sanitation have been identified by Dalit communities as a major concern and therefore this has been a focus area for BDERM's advocacy and campaigns. This case highlights the strategies, approach and outcomes of BDERM to improving housing for Dalits and excluded communities in Bangladesh.

The purpose is to ensure Dalits and excluded communities live in safe and healthy environments and to tackle caste discrimination. Meeting the following two objectives of BDERM:

- 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.

What was/is the target group(s)?

Targets for lobbying and advocacy are municipal authorities, government ministries, donors and UN.

Who were/are the partners involved (e.g. community based, NGO-based, government institutions, and other related stakeholders)?

BDERM and members. Community based Dalit organisations. Supported by NGOs (Nagorik Uddyog and IDSN in relation to international advocacy).

What was/is the duration of practice?

Ongoing

Legal and institutional frameworks:

National and international frameworks and policies in relation to adequate housing, water and sanitation have been used in campaigning for these rights and to try to hold governments and local authorities to account.

Implementation of the practice:

BDERM have taken action on these issues locally (e.g. claims for specific communities for direct and immediate improvements), nationally (e.g. for resource allocation from governments and donors and to gain visibility of the problems) and internationally (e.g. with UN Special Rapporteurs). Activities and outcomes include:

National

- BDERM co-ordinated a programme of seminars in Dhaka to discuss the problems of housing and sanitation. Dalit leaders presented issues to officials, academics, the media and NGOs. Events received widespread media coverage.
- Based on their research and findings BDERM submitted a memorandum to the Finance Ministry demanding specific allocation of funds in the national budget to improve the housing facilities of Dalit communities. As a direct response the Ministry allocated **100,000,000 taka in current fiscal year (2011-2012)** budget to this purpose. Dalit and excluded communities were also referred to in the Budget Speech made by the Finance Minister on 10 June 2011. On 30th October 2011, BDERM submitted an application to the Local Government Ministry under the Right to Information Act to find out the status and progress of this allocation

Local

- BDERM have engaged in ongoing lobbying of the Dhaka Municipal Authorities to improve housing, water and sanitation. BDERM briefed the Deputy Commissioner of Dhaka on the situation of Dalit communities and requested immediate measures be taken. As a result the Commissioner committed to take 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.
- Following the announcement from the Finance Ministry, BDERM leaders in Narayanganj City submitted an application to the Narayanganj City Corporation asking to build multi-storey housing for the Tanbazar Sweeper Colony. As a result the City Corporation of Narayanganj applied to the Local Government & Rural Development Ministry to grant a fund to build 5 six-storied buildings to improve the desperate housing shortage in the colony.
- In February 2011, three Dalit families at Suapur village of Dhamrahi in Dhaka district were evicted from their houses by local land grabbers. BDERM immediately investigated and compiled reports that were then followed up by the National Human Rights Commission and District Administrator. After this intervention the family were resettled on their own land.
- In March 2009, another land grab incident happened and Dalit families in Sutrapur in Dhaka were evicted. BDERM organised a human chain at Shahabag on 9 April and a press conference at Dhaka Reporters Unity on 13 May. This incident received widespread coverage in the print and electronic media and as a result the land grabbers then left the Dalit families houses alone.
- In October 2011, the Housing Ministry issued an eviction notice against Pongu PWD sweeper colony in Dhaka. BDERM organised a human chain and demonstration on 9 October 2011, demanding the withdrawal of the eviction notice and asking for alternative shelter to be provided. As a direct result the Prime Minister's Office communicated with the community and agreed to seek alternative housing.

International

- Since March 2009, BDERM have attended the United Nation Human Rights Council meetings in Geneva. In 2010 BDERM representatives have spoken to the council about caste discrimination in Bangladesh, particularly the need to improve housing, water and sanitation.
- 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.

Describe the successes and challenges to implementing the practice, if needed with inspiration from the following guiding questions:

- *How was this practice innovative?*

- *Identify three key recommendations for similar practices/initiatives that can be replicated in the future. How could the process have been improved and sustained?*

There have been some immediate successes but the majority of Dalits still live without adequate housing and sanitation. The following observations and recommendations can be made in relation to this case:

- Vital to link claims for services to **budget allocations and national/international agreed policies**.
- **Budget Monitoring** could be a vital tool for advocacy in this area but needs technical skills and budget information to be available.
- Action on **individual cases requires vast amounts of time, patience and resources**. Dealing with local officials is frustrating and action is usually slow. It is very difficult for BDERM to support every Dalit community so more thought is needed to think about how best to facilitate and support local activists. (e.g. separate fund for legal aid).
- How can we scale up or replicate improvements made so far – can they act as pilots to catalyse wider change?
- **Following up pledges and promises** made by local officials and parliamentarians is essential.
- Dalit communities **need to see tangible improvements in their own lives to build trust in the wider movement**. Expectations and hopes have been raised before so seeing immediate improvements has been vital to strengthen the movement.
- Need to find **creative ways to fund infrastructure improvements** (what can Dalit communities do themselves rather than relying on slow, bureaucratic, corrupt or discriminatory government officials and donors).
- Bearing witness – Inviting and taking **officials and experts to visit communities** and see first-hand the problems has been very effective.

Publicity:

Can IDSN use this case publicly, e.g. on an open conference website or in a conference report? Yes