

**Consultative Meeting
on
the situation of Dalits in Bangladesh**

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Full Report

The Consultative Meeting was organised by Bangladesh Dalits' Human Rights (BDHR) in cooperation with the International Dalit Solidarity Network (IDSN)



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1. INTRODUCTION

1.1 In memory of Mr. B.G. Murthy

It was with great sadness and shock that the information of the sudden death of Mr. BG Murthy on 24 October 2006, the late President of Bangladesh Dalits' Human Rights (BDHR), was received less than one week after the conduction of the consultative meeting. Mr. Murthy was the leading figure in the Dalit movement in Bangladesh as the Founder and President of BDHR. His efforts to promote Dalits' rights in Bangladesh were unique; he worked tirelessly to bring awareness and recognition to the cause in a national as well as international context.

The information about his tragic death immediately was received with heartfelt condolences from collegial friends in the Dalit movement worldwide. The condolences unanimously reflected the general feeling that Mr. Murthy was a highly recognised and respected person. A common message was that the loss of Mr. Murthy is a loss not only to BDHR, but to the Dalit movement in Bangladesh as a whole.

1.2 Background Information

The consultative meeting was organised by Bangladesh Dalit's Human Rights (BDHR) in cooperation with the International Dalit Solidarity Network. The consultation brought together approximately 60 persons from civil society in Bangladesh including Dalit leaders, Dalit organisations, representatives from international NGOs, researchers and journalists. The meeting was the first of its kind to bring together so many stakeholders concerned with Dalit's issues in Bangladesh with representation from different regions such as Dhaka, Kushtia, Satkhira, Narayangonj, Narsingdi and Syedpur.

The consultative meeting documented that although there may be a general perception that discrimination against Dalits does not exist in Bangladesh, discriminatory practises exist to a wide extent both in Hindu and Muslim communities. Various forms of discrimination against Dalits were identified through previous research studies, case studies, plenary and group discussions. The participants also identified barriers and possible solutions to the problems encountered by Dalits in Bangladesh. Among the recommendations were the urgent need to produce data and statistics about the situation to document atrocities against Dalits; and the need to create awareness about this form of discrimination among political decision-makers at national and local level, among NGOs and among Dalits themselves as a first step to protect, promote and implement the rights of Dalits.

1.3. Objectives of the Consultative Meeting

The Consultation was conducted with a view to share information and to explore initiatives related to the situation of Dalits in Bangladesh. The main objectives of the consultative meeting were to address the following points:

- The situation of Dalits in Bangladesh
- Provide information on caste-based discrimination for the UN study on discrimination based on work and descent (caste-based discrimination) under the UN Sub-Commission on the Promotion and Protection of Human Rights
- Explore possibilities for national and international level advocacy for Dalit human rights;
- Identification of further measures for the promotion and protection of the rights of Bangladeshi Dalits and their inclusion in development

2. THE SITUATION OF DALITS IN BANGLADESH

Bangladesh is a country with 140 million people and it is one of the least developed countries in the world. There is an estimated 5.5 million Dalits living in 63 districts in Bangladesh although numbers vary much according to different sources. Although these people play a significant role in the country's economical, environmental and social development, the Dalit community is one of the most economically marginalized and socially excluded groups in Bangladesh.

Bangladesh Dalits Human Rights (BDHR) is a non-governmental organisation (NGO) working to ensure basic rights for Dalits and improve the standard of living of around 45 different types of professions and castes. This section explains how Dalits are economically, socially and politically excluded in Bangladesh from the perspective of BDHR members, and how BDHR works to restore of the fundamental rights of Dalits and provide them with a dignified life.

2.1. Issues and context

Since the time of the British and Pakistan rule, Dalits have been regarded as belonging to a lower caste and an excluded social stratum. Most Dalits migrated to Bangladesh from South India back in the 1830s. The forefathers of Dalits were brought to Bangladesh by the British colonial regime to provide menial services for them. Most Dalits believe in Hinduism and some are Christians, and they mainly speak in Hindi, Telegu, Urdu, Jabbalpuri and Bangla. The major Dalits groups which can be identified in Bangladesh are: Lalbagi/ Vulmiki, Kanpuri, Talagu, Hela, Dome, Domer, Mithal, Bansphor, Phasi, Rishi (Tanner), Kolu, Mosuwara, Cobbler, Potter etc.

In terms of socio-economic conditions, Dalits are often referred to professions which are considered impure and filthy such as sweeping, sewerage cleaning, tea garden laboring, burying of dead bodies, processing of mastered oil, gardening, shoe and leather work, drum beating, washing, etc. During the British regime almost all Dalits were engaged as sweepers and cleaners. But due to unfavorable policies of the Government, bureaucratic hassles and non-cooperation among concerned authorities, Dalits have started losing jobs, which is aggravating the sufferings of this vulnerable group. Beside this it is almost impossible for Dalits to get other jobs with their limited education.

“Dalits have no access to enter restaurants. They are served tea in milk containers; the practice of untouchability is so deeply rooted in society that it should be discussed widely. The problem is that some see themselves as Dalits and others as Harijans. This problem should be resolved immediately by working together to find a common understanding between different groups of people.”

Lovely Talukder, Ain O Salish Kendro (ASK)

Basic provisions like shelter, food and water are not adequately provided for in areas where Dalits live. Most Dalits have no access to the facilities that are required for a dignified standard of living, incl. health clinics, because they cannot afford to go there. The environment in Dalit colonies and slum areas is unhygienic, and inhabitants do not have access to safe drinking water. There are no proper health care facilities for Dalits; although local authorities provide advanced health care facilities, Dalits have no access to these facilities due to financial constraints. As a result, malnutrition and other diseases like diarrhea, cholera, TB, pneumonia, etc are common among Dalits, and many die every year due to lack of medical treatment. In terms of access to education, there are no schools available for Dalits and therefore no opportunities for Dalit children to be

taught in their own mother language. The illiteracy rate among Dalits is striking; it is estimated that only 5% of Dalits can read and write.

On top of all this, various forms of discrimination are widely practiced in the surrounding communities. In the public sphere, Dalits are 'socially hated' by other communities and they are treated as untouchables. Dalits are never invited by other communities to participate in public events. There are some sacred or religious places where Dalits can not enter (so-called non-Dalits entrance). Though Dalits are playing a significant role in the country's economic, environmental and social development, Dalit communities are some of the most economically marginalized and socially excluded groups in Bangladesh.

2.2. Bangladesh Dalits' Human Rights

2.2.1. BDHR's objectives

In 2002, Bangladesh Dalits' Human Rights (BDHR) was established by a group of progressive Dalits. The overall goal of BDHR activities is to ensure the development of Dalit communities in Bangladesh by promoting their basic human rights. The objectives of BDHR are as follows:

- Facilitate that Dalit communities effectively communicate with government and non-government agencies to preserve their professional rights
- Facilitate that Dalit boys and girls become skilled manpower by ensuring general and practical education
- Advocate and lobby the Government to improve hygienic housing facilities for Dalit communities
- Work to ensure permanent housing/ shelter for the Dalits
- Support Dalits communities in practicing and developing their own language, culture and traditions
- Create a positive attitude towards Dalits in the public sphere by raising awareness about the contribution of Dalit communities in the social, economical and environmental development of Bangladesh
- Act as a network organization for Dalits
- Strengthen cooperation with Dalit movements globally

2.2.2. BDHR Activities 2001-2006

In 2001, the late BDHR President B.G. Murthy attended the Global Dalit Conference in New Delhi, India and shared his experience with Dalits leaders from the region. In 2003, BDHR focused its activities on institution building and lobby efforts to secure jobs for Dalits as 'professional' sweepers at Dhaka City Corporation. In 2004, new activities were included; BDHR organized a protest rally at Shabagh, Dhaka and submitted a memorandum to the Prime Minister of Bangladesh demanding the employment of Dalits as professional sweepers along with the demand of the implementation of CERD recommendations. BDHR representatives also participated in the World Social Forum (WSF) in Mumbai, India in 2004.

In 2005, BDHR submitted an application to the Mayor of Dhaka City Corporation to appoint unemployed professional sweepers and cleaners. BDHR members also prepared a plan and a questionnaire to conduct a baseline survey among Dalit communities in Bangladesh. Finally, BDHR handed in a paper with the demand to include development issues of Dalit communities in the Poverty Reduction Strategy Paper (PRSP) of Bangladesh. In 2006, BDHR conducted training on Human Rights and Leadership Development for members in the organization. Representatives also participated in the 6th World Social Forum Polycentric Conference, and observed Land Day celebrations. BDHR held an area-based community meeting in Dhaka City and organized a reception for Dalit students that had passed S.S.C. exams.

2.2.3. BDHR partnerships and networking at national and international level

BDHR works together with a different range of network members, including Access to Justice and Information Network (AJIN), WSF Bangladesh and Partnership of Women in Action (PaWA). BDHR is supported by a number of organizations in Bangladesh, including Nagorik Uddyog (NU), the Association for Land Reform and Development (ALRD), Alliance for Development Support and Cooperation (ADSC), SAMATA and Nijera Kori. Advisors from NU and others provide substantive input and advice to BDHR.

In April 2006, a women's organization was formed under BDHR because women constitutes the most deprived and isolated group among Dalits. The Dalits' Women Forum (DWF) formed to specifically address Dalit women's issues, is a member of Partnership of Women in Action (PaWA) initiated by Nagorik Uddyog.

BDHR has also a wide range of networking and communication with international level such as IDSN-Denmark, NCDHR- India, NACDOR- India, DNF- Nepal, World Dignity Forum, South Asian Dalit Forum, Safai Karmachari Andolon – Hyderabad, Shakti- India, Asmita- Hyderabad, India, Buddha Smriti Sansthan- Delhi, TRDP-Pakistan, Schedule Caste Federation of Pakistan (SCFP)-Pakistan, Human Development Organization- Srilanka, Minority Rights Group International – UK.

“Dalits had a dream and aspiration that they would be able to live with dignity in the newborn country, and that socio-political injustice and deprivation would disappear. But the dream has remained unfulfilled so far. Social discrimination and economic deprivation exist in all forms in Bangladesh, especially for Dalits and other socially excluded groups.”

Mr. B.G. Murthy, Late President of BDHR

2.2.4. Possible solutions

A member of BDHR, Mita Rani, presented possible ways to solve the problems encountered. One of the most important things is to bring Dalit communities together and increase Dalit's participation in BDHR's activities to create a momentum for the Dalits movement in Bangladesh. This can only be achieved by building awareness on human rights, social justice and good governance. In order to raise awareness, it is important to collect and disseminate information to document the situation of Dalits.

The role of BDHR should be to act as a Dalit networking organization and promote specific key issues. There is a real need for building local institutions in Dalit communities and provide skill training for income generating activities. Another important activity was to advocate and lobby for permanent residence and employment for Dalits. Awareness about activities and events could be raised in a publication (e.g. newsletter, poster, leaflet etc). BDHR should also give more emphasis to mutual cooperation with national and international human rights and development organizations. This, however, depends on the development of skills of BDHR's central and local level leaders.

2.3. Case studies

Being victims of the inherited caste system for centuries, Dalits in Bangladesh are more deprived and oppressed than other people of the country, bound to lead a sub-human life in the prevailing socio-economic and politico-cultural context. As an illustration of the forms of discrimination experienced by Dalits in Bangladesh, two Dalits presented their stories in a very honest and educative way.

2.3.1. Miloon Das

Milos Das, Director of the organisation Parittran, explained that he grew up in Sathkhira district where 33% of the population is Dalits in a predominantly Hindu community. His father was a van driver, and the family lived a subhuman life as an outcaste with a low economic status. When he was 12 years old, Milon visited a restaurant together with his friends and noticed that his friends' food was served in plates except his own. His food was served on a piece of paper, and the owner of the restaurant didn't even want to serve him a glass of water. He told Milon that he was a son of a Muchi (Dalit), and if he served him nobody would ever come to his restaurant. This statement shocked Milon, and full of anger he cried out: "There is no need of a glass that cannot fulfill the thirst of a child!" He was then beaten by the restaurant owner without anybody protesting it. In a public hearing, Milon Das was fined and threatened that his family would be excommunicated if it happened again. Milon explains that generations after generations have suffered and continue to suffer from caste discrimination. Legally, he said, they have no protection and they are exploited economically and physically. Against all odds, Milon Das completed his primary education and decided to fight against social barriers and the curse of untouchability. Throughout his life, he has struggled to establish the rights of Dalits and became the founder of a Dalit organization fighting oppression against Dalits in his region.

2.3.2. Sreemati Ramna

Sreemati Ramna is a retired sweeper and widow. Ramna joined Dhaka Municipality (Now Dhaka City Corporation) together with her husband as a sweeper when Bangladesh was still part of Pakistan. In 1978, Dhaka City Corporation (DCC) fired them from their jobs because there were too many workers in the city corporation. At that time, several hundred Dalits working as sweepers lost their job. Later Ramna joined as a sweeper at T & T (Bangladesh Telephone & Telegraph Office, Dhaka). She appointed especially for the T & T colony. But the problem mounted when the authority requested her retirement in 2001 and gave her only 20,000 BDT as group insurance and medical allowance. The authorities didn't provide her pension and gratuity as per government service rule. When Ramna asked for the reason, the authorities answered: "Your file report is bad and some of your documents were lost or destroyed, so you don't get the money". After that, she started lobbying with different persons of the authorities but nothing worked. At last she communicated with a non-government organisation called Ain-O-Shalish Kendra (ASK) for remedy. According to the advice of ASK, she filed a law suit. The suit has now been underway for four years and she still hasn't received a verdict.

<p>"The illiterate and unconscious Dalits are always cheated in their working place like me. This practice should end immediately"</p> <p style="text-align: right;">Sreemoti Ramna</p>

Ramna has four sons and one daughter and all are married. She is now living with her younger unemployed son B. Solomon having six family members, and she only receives 1500 BDT a month from her husband's pension money. The whole family depends on the little pension money she gets and they are forced to live a very inhumane life. She stated with regret: "I am living in extreme poverty because I don't get sufficient food and cloth. What will be the benefit if the Government pays my due after my death?" Ramna concluded by saying: "The illiterate and unconscious Dalits are always cheated in their working place like me. This practice should end immediately".

2.4. Research on Caste-Based Discrimination in Bangladesh

A research project on caste-discrimination in Bangladesh will be conducted in 2007 by Dr. Iftekhar Uddin Chowdhury, Professor of Sociology, University of Chittagong in Bangladesh as part of a regional research project in association with the Indian Institute of Dalit Study in New Delhi and IDSN. The purpose of the research is to examine the nature and extent of untouchability, descent-based discrimination and social exclusion in contemporary rural Bangladesh through first-hand investigation. Mr. Chowdhury explained in this presentation the conceptualization of caste, the complexity of caste issues in Bangladesh and methodological considerations in the future research project.

2.4.1 Historical background

Traditionally, three major religions, Hinduism, Islam and Buddhism have had a deep influence on the socio-cultural formation of South Asian societies. The community living in this region is unique due to the inheritance, first of all, from these religions and, secondly, from many races of far-off countries. In Bangladesh, the dominant feature could be termed as a combination of Bengali culture predominated by Hindu and Buddhist heritage along with Muslim traditions brought specially by Muslim missionaries and Arab traders. Social stratification or the grading of people into horizontal layers has thus been influenced by the prevailing religious dogmas particularly among the Hindu and the Muslim. As a result, stratification represents institutionalized inequality in the allocation of reward. In the Constitution of Bangladesh, equal rights for all people irrespective of any race, caste, creed, and religion are established. However, social exclusion is manifested in the physical structure of the villages throughout the country in the rigid form of social stratification in which the individuals are divided into a number of hereditary groups mutually exclusive to each. Others are arranged in a status of hierarchy. Both primary and secondary relationships and also the economic interactions of the broken people, i.e. Dalits, are restricted by religion, caste and occupation.

When social mobility is conspicuously absent within a society, where inherited inequality prevails, we speak of a *caste system*. However, when mobility proceeds independently of social origin, where equality of opportunity prevails, we speak of a *class*. Prof. Chowdhury mentioned that there are many different definitions of caste.

“The Dalit issue is a human rights issue. Minority communities like Hindus and indigenous peoples are also deprived of their rights, but Dalits are the worst victims. The Harijan communities cannot get other employment than sweeping; however these jobs are captured by Bangali Hindus or Muslims, sometimes by bribing the authorities. In this way other groups are depriving the livelihoods of Harijans.”

Bharoti Nandi Sarker, Ex-Member of Parliament, Government of Bangladesh

2.4.2. Hindu communities

The Hindus of Bangladesh are divided into various upper, lower and scheduled caste groups. These groups are internally homogeneous but heterogeneous to each other, and arranged in hierarchical order. Each caste usually follow a particular hereditary occupation such as the agriculturist caste (Hakil Gopes and Baruis); the artisan caste (the goldsmiths, blacksmiths, potters, carpenters, dyers, oil-men, confectioners, spice-dealers, cotton weavers, silk weavers); the most despised castes including hunters, boat-men, barbers, sawyers, fishermen, date-palm juice collectors, watchmen; and untouchables like Harijans/Methors/Domer (Sweeper and cleaner), Dom (curing of diseased spleens), the Muchi/Chamar (cobbler) and so on with different names like: Bashpor, Lalbegi, Vulmiki, Kols, Korengs, Pasi, Risi, Telegu etc. The latter are the most discriminated and untouchable lower caste sub-groups in the Hindu Community. The lifestyle of these people has been the portraits of outstretched deprivation in regard to ‘homogeneous economic activity’ from the second half of the 20th century.

Caste-based discrimination in Bangladesh includes practices of untouchability imposed by the high caste Hindus and Muslim communities; denial of access to upper caste/Muslim houses, temples, and restaurants/teashops; social boycott and forced labor. The most discriminated castes (sub-groups) are living in a polluted environment either in public housing provided by the municipality, the City Corporation, the Government offices or privately arranged housing in the slums in and around the urban centers and in rural areas of the country. The primary cause of the severe state of their livelihood is intense pressure of population; lack of institutionalized support for employment; lack of human, social, natural, financial and physical capital; and the perpetual chain of poverty. These communities often become indebted. As a result of caste-bond social organization and constraints on occupational mobility along with other socio-economic factors, the dependency to borrow from money-lenders at a high rate of interest has increased. This mechanism of indebtedness and borrowing system is highly responsible for the pauperization and degrading of the livelihoods of these communities.

2.4.3. Muslim communities

Muslims in Bengal patterned its stratification among four major castes: Syed, Mughal, Sheikh, Pathan. All castes are noble, indeed, but the former two, who are representing the tribe of Prophet Mohammad and the direct progeny of Ali, his son-in-law, are pre-eminent. Socially speaking, the community has had the misfortune to inherit the traits of both their Hindu and Muslim forefathers. These caste prejudices have left their mark upon many. Up until the early part of the 20th century, Muslims, especially members of higher divisions, used to divide the Muslim society in Bengal into three broad divisions: 1) Sharif or Ashraf (i.e. noble born/foreign Moslems); 2) Atraf (i.e. low-born) and 3) Ajlaf or Arzal (i.e. lowest of all) all signifying extreme contempt. Like higher caste Hindus, foreign Muslims (e.g. Arabs, Persians, and Afghans) and their descendents used to consider it degrading to accept menial service or to handle the plough. They looked with contempt on all other ranks of Bengal Muslims whom they call 'Ajlaf' i.e. functional groups such as weavers, cotton-carders, oil-pressers, barbers, tailors, etc. The Arzal consisted of the very lowest castes such as the Helalkhor (sweepers, latrine and garbage cleaners), Lalbegi, Abdal and Bediya with whom no other Muslim would associate. They are also forbidden to enter the mosque and use the public burial ground.

Islam preaches egalitarian principles and equality by saying that 'there is no deity but God' and that oneness of God is meaningless without the belief in oneness of man. Reality, however, is very different from theory – caste-based discrimination is practiced in Islam. The Muslims, not only in Arab nations but also many other countries, are divided in a number of hierarchical strata. Recent studies also endorse that caste exists among Muslims in rural Bangladesh. Muslims in the villages are broadly divided into Khandan (high status Muslims), Girhasta (low status Muslims) and Kamla (labourers/lowest status Muslims), and there are cases of discrimination and exclusion in most villages in the country.

2.4.4. Harijans in Chittagong

Harijans is a group considered to be outside of the caste system as ritually polluted and despised "untouchables" upon whom Gandhi bestowed the euphemistic name 'Children of God'. In Chittagong, like in other parts of this region, they are called 'Methor' (in Persian: prince or administrator) which according to the City Mayor in Shebok means 'service provider'. With this change in terminology, it is hoped that they are promoted in terms of status and acceptance in the community as human beings.

After the formation of the 'Committee for the Sanitary Improvement of the town of Chittagong' in 1856, long before of the establishment of Chittagong Municipality in 1863, the administration was forced to take measures to engage sweepers in the town. Harijans were contacted and brought to the town through different agents from Hamirbag and Kanpur in India. They were appointed to clean toilets and collect waste under the condition that they would be given proper salary, free housing, travel allowance, leave, etc. to make their coming lucrative.

2.4.5. Research

The following will be the primary objectives of the research:

- To review the available secondary information and conceptualize Broken people and Caste;
- To review the constitutional provisions, legislation and policies in relation to caste-based discrimination and social exclusion;
- To identify the perception of caste discrimination and delineate the social history of the broken people/caste patterned communities;
- To determine the existing situation/nature of untouchables and discrimination;
- To examine the changes in regard to oppression, caste practices, occupational mobility, migration, ethnicity;
- To examine the extent of discrimination and exclusion on the basis of different survey indicators/format of questionnaire;
- To identify the existing mechanism for protecting common caste interests and conflict resolution;
- To develop capacity of researchers and NGOs for the continuation of the research and generating activities for improving the livelihoods of discriminated communities.

The study will be conducted using a participatory approach involving the representatives of the different discriminated groups of both Muslim and Hindu Communities. A total of 5 villages from Southern, Central and Northern districts of Bangladesh will be selected for the study. The participants will be identified on the basis of social mapping and occupational ranking with a focus on the demographic status of each village. In the first phase, 20-30 participants will be engaged in social mapping and caste based occupational ranking. In the second stage, another session will be organized with caste-based discriminated people/marginalized groups (Harijans, fishermen, potter, Bede, washer men, cobbler etc.) in which the designed questionnaire will be used. In-depth interviews will be conducted with respondents from different occupational representations. Three case studies, i.e. one Muslim, one Hindu and the other from mixed Muslim/Hindu community, will be undertaken.

2.5. Plenary discussion

The recognition of the need for common action was a central message in most comments. Dr. Zafurallah Chowdhury from Gonoshasthaya Kendra opened the floor by saying that it is a duty and privilege to fight for Dalit's rights. He underlined that it is time to claim these rights. Rawshan Jahan from Association for Land Reform and Development (ALRD) encouraged participants to separate areas between different organisations in order to work on different goals and use different organisational strengths in this newly created forum. ALRD, for example, is focusing on land rights. Her message was that all actors need to work together to develop a framework to ensure progress at all policy levels. Dr. Hameeda Hossain, a prominent human rights activist and Vice Chair Person of NU said that Dalits can start by using advocacy as a tool to find out how the organisations and individuals can work together.

The Christian Aid Representatives in Bangladesh, Ms. Tanja Haque, thanked the organisers for the meeting and said that she was there to learn more about the situation of Dalits. Tom Crick from One World Action, UK asked for clarification on the definition of "Dalits". He referred to the UN terminology, 'discrimination based on work and descent'. He said that in order to convince policy makers and donors about the specific forms of discrimination against Dalits, there is a need for a clear definition to make a strong point.

The Coordinator for HEKS in Bangladesh, Ms. Shameema Akhter Shimul in her opinion said that the issue of Dalits in Bangladesh should identified by Dalits themselves and plan of action and strategy should make by themselves.

“Dalits are socially hated by other communities and they are treated as untouchable. Dalits are never invited by other communities on public occasions. If you go to Non-dalits house owners for house rent , they refused us for being we are Dalits. Though Dalits are playing a significant role in the country’s economic, environmental and social development, Dalit communities are some of the most economically marginalized and socially excluded groups in Bangladesh.”

N. Ramu, Joint Secretary of BDHR

Pannalal Bashphor from Fair Foundation explained that his organization had conducted a baseline survey on the situation of Dalits in Bangladesh. The survey showed an alarming pattern in severe forms of discrimination against Dalits:

- Employment: Competition is increasing, which means that many Dalits are losing their jobs (because Muslims are taking over jobs)
- Awareness: Dalits lack knowledge on their rights
- Organisation: There is no organization providing a platform to raise and unify Dalit voices
- Unsociability: Dalits are not respected by others in society, e.g. entering hotels and restaurants can be a problem
- Education: School drop-out is a common phenomenon among Dalit youth due to lack of knowledge of education, and other students bullying them in school
- Medical treatment: Service in hospitals is poor, and some doctors will not treat Dalits.
- Residence: When employment opportunities are decreasing, housing opportunities are also diminishing. Dalits don’t get other jobs (than sweepers)
- Health: Lack of water and sanitation facilities
- Alcoholism: Dalits work while consuming alcohol to endure the working conditions
- Mortality rate: Many people are dying at a low age (40-45 years) due to poor health

Dependra Sarker from SEBA, Syedpur added that Dalits women are particularly vulnerable due to lack of security and participation in the communities. He said that the main problems experienced by Dalits were low salaries, low employment rates and low education rates. Two other speakers underlined the problems with employment and said that Dalits are deprived of jobs, particularly in the sectors where they are victims of discrimination.

Panna Lal Jamader (Bashphor) from FAIR Foundation in Kushtia also commented on the lack of employment opportunities. He said that people from Harijan communities work in municipalities and city corporations all over Bangladesh. But they have nothing; they are deprived of fundamental rights and basic needs as human beings. In the workplace they have no right to casual leave, maternal leave, extra allowances etc. Their salary is very poor and they get no festival allowance either. Dalit women are the worst victims of discrimination. To overcome these obstacles, he said, we need to raise awareness and organize Dalits so they can raise their voices and claim their rights.

2.6. Affected Dalit communities in Bangladesh

After the plenary discussion, the participants were divided into working groups according to four regions in Bangladesh: Kushtia, Sathkira, Dhaka and Nilphamari (Syedpur). Each group was asked to discuss four topics: 1) List of affected communities; 2) Number of affected people; 3) Types of discrimination; and 4) Barriers in eliminating caste discrimination.

2.6.1. Dalit communities in Bangladesh

Altogether the four groups identified 16 Dalit communities in Bangladesh: Kanpuri, hela, dome, lalbegi, cobbler, rishi, buno/bono/bagddi, mesuwara/mosuwara, telegu, bashpor /bashfore/ bashfuri, muchi, sanashi, bede, nagarichi, fishermen/nikari and kowra. However, the number of communities is based on a brief recollection of existing communities according to the knowledge of the participants. Previous studies have shown that there are up to 40 different Dalits communities in Bangladesh.

The participants were also asked to estimate a total number of Dalits in their respective regions in Bangladesh. The following numbers are only indicative of the number of affected persons in Bangladesh:

Kushtia district:	25,000
Dhaka district:	30-50,000
Sathkira district:	30% of the population in the district
(Nilphamari) Syedpur district:	45-47,000

2.6.2. Forms of discrimination

The situation of Dalits in Bangladesh is heavily affected by various forms of discriminatory practises in society, which the presentations by the working groups clearly reflected. According to the four groups, the main forms of discrimination against Dalits in Bangladesh are experienced in the employment sector and in public places. The practise of untouchability is experienced in places like schools, markets, hotels/ restaurants and hospitals where Dalits are denied the same rights as others. One of the groups pointed out that in some situations, lack of access to public places can be a first obstacle to making use of such facilities.

In schools, Dalit students encounter discriminatory behaviour on a daily basis. One group pointed to the fact that because children are bullied in schools access to education is neglected by their parents. With regard to formal employment, the groups identified various forms of discriminatory practises e.g. discrimination in service rules, wages, and lack of alternative employment opportunities. Altogether the diminishing number of jobs available for Dalits results in lower income and an increased poverty level. The general lack of safety net programs and government development programs targeting Dalits makes them even more vulnerable to such changes.

Housing is a major problem; all groups underlined that Dalits face a general need for adequate shelter and sanitation facilities. The densely populated and congested housing situation is a desperate sign of the inadequate living conditions. One group mentioned that land rights are a problem and explained that evictions/ shifting of housing by the City Corporation and land-grabbing is a common practise. This group furthermore pointed out that there is no place for burying the dead.

One of the key issues was what one group termed “no access to power/ politics/ decision making”. The denial of civil and political rights, e.g. the freedom of speech, the right to public participation, discrimination in voting rights, etc. were common forms of discrimination experienced by Dalits. Lack of access to these basic rights is a result of the repression by high-caste communities and local authorities; equally lack of access to legal remedies and human rights mechanisms was underlined as an element affecting people’s right to political participation and a fair legal process. The same group pointed out that the lack of adequate statistics for Dalits (aggregated data on population, education, shelter, health, etc) was another indirect form of discrimination and repression.

The enjoyment of cultural rights, such as the right to practise/ learn one’s own culture and language, was also identified as a common form of discrimination. One of the groups said that the right to preserve their mother

language was denied, as well as the celebration of social festivals. The groups pointed towards such trends affecting people's everyday lives as a direct barrier to the right to live a dignified life.

“Although the constitution and other laws in Bangladesh guarantee that all are equal irrespective of religion or caste and creed, Dalits are discriminated against in practise. Dalits do not only come from Hindu or Christian communities, but also Muslim communities and there they are more discriminated against and neglected. In the southern part of Bangladesh, especially in the Satkhira region, the educational status of Muslim Dalits is the worst. While some Dalit students from Hindu communities have passed examinations, no Muslim Dalits have done so.”

Achinto Saha, Bhumij Foundation, Satkhira district

2.6.3. Barriers to overcome discrimination

The last discussion point addressed by the groups was the barriers as well as solutions to overcome the forms of discrimination already identified. The groups focused on the structural barriers to overcome such deeply rooted forms of discrimination in Bangladeshi society. Several determining factors were mentioned for example illiteracy, social division or lack of unity in communities. Other factors pointed towards lack of awareness and social stigma as an underlying factor influencing the mind-set of Dalits. External factors, such discrimination by upper castes and lack of governmental policy measures were also highlighted as barriers to overcome such discriminatory practises.

As a solution to the forms of discrimination experienced in formal employment, one of the groups mentioned that bribery as a means to obtain jobs is practised widely and should be prohibited. Another group chose to look ahead and suggested that a first step to overcome barriers were to organise themselves internally as well as externally in order to support the neglected communities. As a final recommendation and hope, the group suggested that Dalit organisations and individuals should start working together immediately to promote the rights to live a dignified life.

References to Dalits in PRSP Bangladesh 2005

During the consultation, the PRSP process was mentioned as illustration of the lack of an adequate policy framework in relation to caste-based discrimination in Bangladesh. In the drafting process of the Poverty Reduction Strategy Paper (PRSP) in Bangladesh, consultative meetings were held with civil society organisations. Dalit organisations were strongly represented in the consultative meetings, and BDHR handed in a 3-page paper about the situation of Dalits in Bangladesh. In the final strategy paper, PRSP 2005, there is a brief mentioning of Dalits as an out-caste group in Bangladesh. However, this concern did not result in any policy changes nor any specific action.

PRSP Bangladesh (2005), Chapter 5.F.5: Other Disadvantaged Groups

“5.420 In Bangladesh there are some small groups of extremely disadvantaged poor people with very distinct characteristics. They belong to some specific occupation, and are a community isolated and disconnected from the mainstream population. Although in Bangladesh there is no caste system per se, these groups are treated the way lower castes are treated as untouchables in a caste system. Some of these communities are *Bawalies* (those who live of the resources of the Sunderban forest areas) and *mawalies* (honey collectors in Sunderban areas) *Bede* or river gypsy (engaged in snake charming and small trade in the rural areas); *Methor*, *Dalich* (sweepers, sewerage cleaners and scavengers); *Mymal* (fisherman on the big water bodies); *Muchis* (cobbler and shoe makers); *Nagarchi* (Traditional folk singers); *Kulies* (*tea garden worker originally brought to Bangladesh from various parts of India*). These communities have been living a segregated life, parallel with the mainstream population, for many years. People from these communities are spread all over the country. They constitute parts of extreme poor and live in totally sub-human physical and social environments.”

2.7. Summary of findings

Although the Constitution of Bangladesh provides equal rights for all people irrespective of any race, caste, creed, and religion, Dalits are still socially excluded and repressed by higher-caste people in both Hindu and Muslim communities. This is manifested in the physical structure of the villages throughout the country, where individuals are divided into a number of hereditary groups mutually exclusive to each other and in a status of hierarchy. Both primary and secondary relationships and also the economic interactions of Dalits are mostly restricted by religion, caste and occupation.

There is a lack of mainstreaming in government development programmes and lack of implementation of legislative provisions in the Constitution. Although the PRSP policy 2005 acknowledges that caste-based discrimination exists in the country, government development programmes are still not designed to take special measures to protect Dalits and ensure inclusion on par with the rest of the population.. The same applies to civil society organisations and society as a whole. There is little public awareness about the problems Dalits are facing, and serious efforts are yet to be made at all levels to identify and implement measures for the inclusion and equal treatment of Dalits in society.

3. INTERNATIONAL ADVOCACY

3.1. International Dalit Solidarity Network

The role of the International Dalit Solidarity Network (IDSN) is to bring caste-based discrimination onto the international agenda. IDSN has since its inception been targeting the UN and EU institutions with the overall aim to contribute to the elimination of this form of discrimination globally. In this presentation, the coordinator of IDSN, Rikke Nöhrind, explains how IDSN is working to influence the United Nations, the European Union, multilateral and bilateral institutions and the private sector through its advocacy efforts.

The largest number of affected people lives in India, i.e. 167 million, however affected countries include Nepal, Pakistan, Bangladesh, Japan, Yemen and some African countries. Patterns of discrimination also exist in diaspora communities, for example in some European countries. It is estimated that approximately 270 million people are affected by this form of discrimination worldwide. In Bangladesh, there is still uncertainty about the actual number of affected people. One estimate is that there are 2-3 million Dalits in Bangladesh, but the uncertainty calls for more documentation and reliable data to support such estimates.

“The objectives of IDSN are to ensure global recognition of Dalit rights which is an issue that has been neglected for too long in UN circles and other international institutions such as the EU. IDSN aims to fight caste discrimination and similar forms of discrimination by raising awareness and building solidarity.”
Rikke Nöhrind, IDSN

3.2.1. Influencing international and intergovernmental institutions

In March 2000, IDSN was formed as an international network and since 2003 a small secretariat in Copenhagen has coordinated its activities. IDSN is a network consisting of different categories of members. National advocacy groups currently consist of the National Campaign for Dalit Human Rights in India, the Dalit NGO Federation of Nepal and the Human Development Organisation of Sri Lanka, as well as the Buraku Liberation League of Japan (represented through IMADR). Dalit platforms are also emerging in Pakistan and Bangladesh. Dalit Solidarity Networks have formed in the US, Germany, the UK, the Netherlands, France, Denmark and Sweden and new platforms are emerging in Norway and Belgium. The solidarity networks work nationally to create awareness of caste discrimination and to influence government policies. A number of international associates, i.e. international and regional human rights and development organisations, contribute their expertise and other forms of support for example lobby initiatives toward UN human rights bodies such as the Sub-Commission on the Promotion and Protection of Human Rights, the Committee on the Elimination of Racial Discrimination, the former Commission on Human Rights and UN Special Rapporteurs.

In response to a question raised concerning the definition, Rikke explained that the UN has decided upon the terminology “discrimination based on work and descent” to cover caste-based discrimination and similar forms of discrimination. This definition implies that this form of discrimination is linked to a caste – distinction, which is hereditary, and to specific forms of occupation, accompanied by a notion of impurity and pollution.

The objectives of IDSN's work is to ensure global recognition of Dalit rights, which is an issue that has been neglected for too long in U.N. circles and other international and intergovernmental institutions such as the European Union. IDSN attempts to influence policies of governments, international bodies and institutions through its four areas of work: 1) Networking and coordination, 2) U.N. and other multilateral bodies, 3) EU

and 4) Private sector. IDSN helps facilitate international advocacy of Dalits and other affected communities towards the UN human rights bodies and special procedures, with IDSN members from the region providing substantive research, documentation and recommendations.

3.2.2. Why the U.N.?

The United Nations (UN) has been instrumental in developing and consolidating international human rights standards, and it is a forum which offers many opportunities to influence the decision-making. The UN is where IDSN has had most success in achieving widespread international recognition of discrimination based on work and descent. There are many ways to potentially influence the UN, and IDSN has utilised a number of the human rights mechanisms. IDSN has actively supported the UN study process on discrimination based on work and descent, which Prof. Chin-Sung Chung is conducting together with Prof Yokota, also a member of the Sub-Commission.

There have been some important milestone events. Caste-based discrimination has been substantively documented in so-called shadow reports to UN bodies monitoring the international human rights treaties (e.g. India, Nepal, Nigeria, Yemen, etc). In 2002, the Committee on the Elimination of Racial Discrimination (CERD) issued General Recommendation no. 29, which makes recommendations to States Parties on how to prevent descent-based discrimination at national level. In 2004, IDSN facilitated an International Consultation in Nepal, which resulted in the adoption of the Kathmandu Declaration that makes different recommendations to governments, international organisations and alike.

IDSN is purely a lobby and advocacy network, therefore IDSN does not fund national level activities. More information about IDSN's work can be found on IDSN's website: www.idsn.org

3.2. UN Study on Discrimination Based on Work and Descent

Professor Chin-Sung Chung is a Special Rapporteur of the UN Sub-Commission on the Promotion and Protection of Human Rights. Together with Special Rapporteur Professor Yokota she is conducting a study on discrimination based on work and descent. She participated in the consultative meeting to learn about the situation of Dalits in Bangladesh compared to other caste-affected countries and to explain the meeting participants about the UN system and international/national efforts on the issue.

3.2.1. UN mechanisms

In a UN human rights framework, there is interplay between the various actors; the governments, UN bodies (General Assembly, Sub-Commission, etc), the special mechanisms (such as the UN Special Rapporteurs), national human rights institutions, NGOs and affected communities. The main arena at UN level, where human rights issues are discussed, is the Commission on Human Rights – which is now replaced by the Human Rights Council - and the Sub-Commission on the Promotion and Protection of Human Rights. CERD was the first UN body to take up caste-based issues. When other UN bodies realized that it was an issue affecting more than one country, other bodies began to take the issue into consideration as well.

3.2.2. UN Sub-Commission process

On April 19, 2005 the United Nation's Commission on Human Rights adopted a resolution mandating two Sub-Commission members, Prof. Yokota and Prof. Chung, to conduct a comprehensive study on discrimination based on work and descent and to prepare a draft set of principles and guidelines for the effective elimination of this form of discrimination. This process involved a request for contributions from Governments, National Human Rights Institutions, UN bodies and specialised agencies, UN special procedures, and NGOs. Questionnaires were distributed by the Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights. Disappointingly, only ten governments replied — and countries like India, Bangladesh, Nepal, Pakistan did not reply. But the

responses from NGOs were very rich and systematic. Prof. Chung said that IDSN made a lot of effort to give vivid information and organized field visits for her to Nepal, Japan, Pakistan, India and now also Bangladesh.

At the 58th session of the Sub-Commission in August 2006, the two Special Rapporteurs handed in a progress report based on responses of the questionnaires and findings from visits conducted to caste-affected countries. In the report, discrimination based on work and descent is defined as a form of a double-discrimination based on work *and* descent (not just work (ILO term) or descent (CERD term)). The most important nature of discrimination is untouchability, as well as the notion of purity and pollution is also important.

The reform process of the UN human rights mechanisms is making it difficult to put an exact timeline for the process. In 2006, the Sub-Commission passed resolution 2006/14 which stated that the Special Rapporteurs should submit a final report, including Principles and Guidelines. NGOs are also requested to comment on the draft framework for these principles and guidelines. Prof. Chung ended her presentation saying the appropriate utilization of these Principles and Guidelines is the most important thing for the future. Further steps must be discussed after the submission of the final report.

3.3. Dalits' Rights Movements in India and Nepal

India and Nepal provide useful examples of long-term advocacy efforts against caste-based discrimination through an active Dalit movement. In this presentation, Rikke Nöhrliind gives a brief historic perspective on the key strategies and solutions to achieve Dalit rights in India and Nepal.

It is estimated that 167 million people affected by caste-based discrimination in India. Unlike Bangladesh, the Dalit movement has a long history of political mobilisation and level of organisation which is very high, particularly in the Southern part of the country. There are many grassroots movements, NGOs, and human rights organisations monitoring and documenting abuses and violence against Dalits. The forms of discrimination experienced by Dalits in India are potentially much more physically violent than those problems encountered in Bangladesh. Unlike Bangladesh, there are various Dalit Commissions in India, as well as a National Human Rights Commission which Bangladesh still doesn't have. One could ask if this there is a similar need to establish such commissions with monitoring mechanisms in Bangladesh.

“The way forward should be guided by *dialogue*. Questions like how to use our resource persons and how to move forward are important to ask ourselves. We can not achieve everything in one or two meetings but we have to think about this move; the network idea is a good initiative, but how and who will be operating it? It should be a programme made by Dalits without forcing them to build something they do not want.”

Speaker at informal meeting

3.3.1. National Campaign for Dalit Human Rights - India

In 1998 the National Campaign for Dalit Human Rights (NCDHR) was founded in India as a democratic secular forum led by Dalit female and male activists. In the beginning, NCDHR focused mainly on providing documentation and functioned as a national advocacy forum. Then the campaign went through different phases, each of which built on previous experiences of what was important in the fight to eliminate this form of discrimination. First of all, raising visibility became one of the focus areas for the organisation. Visibility of the problems is needed both externally and internally in the country. NCDHR focus on monitoring rights violations, research and documentation, acts as a facilitating and advocating body. At an early stage, NCDHR started to internationalise Dalit complementary to national level activities. An overall aim of NCDHR is to hold the national government and state level administrations accountable for their international and national obligations to promote and protect human rights.

For more information about NCDHR, see their website: www.dalits.org

3.3.2. Dalit NGO Federation - Nepal

Dalit NGO Federation (DNF) was established in 1998 as an umbrella organisation with five regional level organisations and 270 NGOs as members. DNF is a registered organisation with various programmes, such as advocacy and lobby (for reservations), documentation, capacity building with membership organisations and information sharing. DNF has been successful in raising visibility about caste discrimination and in influencing government and donor policies.

For more information about DNF, see their website: www.dfnepal.org

3.4. Concluding remarks

Mr. Hossain thanked IDSN for taking the initiative to organise the consultative meeting in Bangladesh. He especially thought that the experiences from other countries such as India and Nepal were important learning exercises. He emphasised that this even was the beginning of a longer process and that they as organizations dealing with the issue should meet some time before December to discuss possible ways forward.

Mr. Murthy said he was honoured to have such distinguished delegates participating in this meeting, and he thanked IDSN and Professor Chung for coming to Bangladesh to understand the situation of Dalits in Bangladesh. For BDHR, it felt like a victory day for Dalits. With combined effort, he said, the Dalit issue of Bangladesh will be resolved. To do this, national and international level coordination and alliance building are very important.

Mr. Huda said that although Bangladesh is not essentially a caste-based society, everyone participating in the consultative meeting knows that this form of discrimination exists. He explained that discrimination based on political and social factors as well as gender exists in all forms in society. In this context Dalits communities are the worst affected, which underlines the importance of this discussion. Mr. Huda stressed that the consultative meeting was organized by Dalits communities themselves, and that it was successful only due to Dalit mediators. He assured that supporting organisations like ALRD and NU would be with those mediators in the future to help them achieve and establish their rights. He said: “Unless we will make noise, no one will care to listen. This is a significant beginning of the Dalits movement in Bangladesh.”

He emphasised that the experience brought by IDSN and the UN Special Rapporteur was important to know. He said that if it was not for the initiative by IDSN, this event would not have happened. Finally, he extended his thanks to BDHR and all Dalits communities for organizing and attending this event, and for sharing their experiences. He concluded the meeting by saying that the presentations had increased the awareness of all participants about the Dalit movement, and that this knowledge would take them forward into the future.

4. THE WAY FORWARD

After the broader consultative meeting, there was a brief, informal session involving BDHR members, Dalit leaders and individuals, NGOs representatives working with Dalits and IDSN discussing possible ways forward. Ideas about how to link the work of Dalit organisations in Bangladesh with international level organisations were discussed with IDSN, and how Dalit individuals and organisations in Bangladesh could link up for more concerted efforts.

4.1. Discussion with Dalits civil society organisations in Bangladesh

Rikke Nöhrind was first asked to explain a bit more about the experiences from other caste-affected countries. Rikke Nöhrind recommended that in forming a network or an alliance, it is important to define a goal and find out what should be achieved. In Pakistan, which is in a situation somehow similar to Bangladesh, there are no Dalit organisations apart from the Federation of Scheduled Castes. In terms of number of organisations, however, Bangladesh has more organisations and a broader network especially at regional level. In Pakistan the support organisations and Dalits activists did not set up an organisation with well-defined objectives as such, but a network is emerging. One of the learning experiences from Pakistan and elsewhere is, that research will help bring forward the issue.

Increased awareness and the need for more research on the situation of Dalits were particular concerns of the participants. A.K.M. Maksud from Grambangla Unnayan Committee said that there would be an exploratory phase where research on excluded communities in Bangladesh should be undertaken. After the first phase, the organisation could contact other organisations working with people who were socially excluded. In 2005, five organisations developed a network called “Network for socially excluded communities”, which issues a newsletter and organise different programs. He said that this meeting was a very good momentum for developing the network and that it was a good opportunity for Dalits to come together.

Shamlal Sarder from BDHR added that conducting a survey is necessary. He said that very little time is remaining to solve the problems of the sweeper community; he warned that if sweeper communities stop their work/ services even for one day, this would create a huge problem for the country! “If we raise our voice the government must hear us”, he said. Along the same lines, Panna Lal Bashfor from FAIR in Kushtia said, that an effective and wide network is very important. He emphasised that a baseline survey is needed to explore the exact situation of Dalits, including the enumeration of Dalits by castes. He stressed the importance of developing capacity of Dalits who can then work independently. He emphasised the need to developing leadership *by* Dalits and not *for* the Dalits.

Dipendra Sarker from SEBA, Syeddpur said that if we can work together and organise ourselves at national level, the movement will be strengthened. He proposed to form a national level forum in the immediate future. Milon Das, who presented his own case earlier, added that there were other similar cases of people coming together to fight for their rights. In the housing sector, workers were working individually but they felt the need to build an alliance in order to make an impact at the national level.

The General-Secretary of BDHR, Mr. Babulal Serdar, thanked IDSN and UN representatives for assisting this type of work. He asked for continuing assistance and corporation by IDSN.

One of the final topics discussed was the difference between the identities of Dalit and harijans. Milon Das said that the name and identity for the socially excluded people should be fixed. It could either be Dalit or Harijan, but there should be a common name to make it easier for communities to understand their identity. He

referred to the extensive debate regarding different identities and pointed out that awareness is rapidly increasing among Harijans about their rights. He emphasised the importance of enhanced coordination between different organisations, leadership and external systems. It should be a collective struggle to achieve the dignity of Dalits as a whole, rather than a series of individual programs or projects.

Mr. Murthy explained that the background for the differences in perception of identities. Naming someone Harijan implies that the person is a 'son of God' i.e. a person without a father (born by a prostitute or sexual worker), whereas Dalits means 'the oppressed people'. According to him, it carries more stigmas for people to label themselves Harijans. The people who are sweepers and cleaners also recognise themselves as Harijans, but since 2001 the people of Bangladesh have introduced the term 'Dalits'. Now there is a conflict because the elderly have always identified themselves as Harijans. In November, BDHR was planning to organise a dialogue to have a discussion among different fractions in order to resolve the conflict among themselves.

Mazhar from Nagorik Uddyog (NU) said that the way forward was to establish a people's movement as a way to raise concerns about Dalits rights. He expressed his confidence in obtaining this objective which could be promoted with the help of NU and other support organisations. He concluded by saying that NU would organise a consultation at end of November, and that the consultative meeting represented the 'starting day'. Md. Sarwar from ADSC said that the way forward should be guided by *dialogue*. Questions like how to use resource persons (from support organisations) and how to move forward are important: He recommended the various involved parties to carefully consider this move; the network idea is a good initiative, but raises the questions about how and who would be operating it. He emphasised that it should be a programme made by Dalits without forcing them to build something they did not want.

Summing up, Rikke Nöhrind repeated the importance being specific in terms of objectives and identifying what to achieve. It is important, she said, to ask: Where are we and how can we play a role? She finished the informal gathering by emphasising the need for more documentation and targeted information, and reminded everyone of the national consultation which will be held sometime in April/May reviewing the draft report based on the findings of the upcoming research study.

5. ANNEXES

Annex A: Programme

Consultative Meeting on the Situation of Dalits in Bangladesh

PROGRAMME

Venue: WVA Auditorium, Dhaka, Bangladesh
18th October 2006

- 09:00 Introduction and Welcome** – B.G Murthy, BDHR
- 09:10 Introductory Remarks** - Rikke Nöhrind, Coordinator, International Dalit Solidarity Network (IDSN)
- 09:25 Introduction of Participants**
- 09:40 The Situation of Dalits in Bangladesh** – BG Murthy, N. Sree Ramu and Mita Rani
- 10:20 Case Study** - Milon Das, Director, Parittran
- 10:30 Case Study** - Md. Sarwar, ADSC and Md. Mazharul Islam, Nagorik Uddyog
- 10:45 Tea Break**
- 11:00 Research - Dalits in Bangladesh**
Research Project on Caste-Based Discrimination - Prof. Iftekhar Uddian Chowdhury, Chittagong University
- 11:25 Plenary Discussion**
- 12:00 Working groups**
- 12:30 Introduction to the International Dalit Solidarity Network**
Rikke Nöhrind
- 12:50 UN Study on Discrimination Based on Work and Descent**
Prof. Chin-sung Chung, Expert of the UN Sub-Commission on the Promotion and Protection of Human Rights
- 13:20 Dalits' Rights Initiatives in India and Nepal**
Rikke Nöhrind
- 13:40 Reflection of Advisors**
- Shamsul Huda, Executive Director, ALRD
- Zakir Hossain, Chief Executive Officer, Nagorik Uddyog
- 14:00 End of Programme - Lunch**
- 15:00 Way forward – discussion among Dalit Organisations**

Annex B: List of Participants

BDHR representatives:

1. B G Murthy- President
2. Shamlal- Vice-president
3. Sree Laksmi Das - Vice President
4. Sree K. Ramu – Vice President
5. Babu Lal Sardar- General Secretary
6. N Sree Ramu – Joint Secretary
7. K. Joseph- Organizing Secretary
8. Moni Rani - Women Affair Secretary and founder of Dalit Women Forum
9. B. Soloman- Cultural Secretary
10. B David Raju- Youth Secretary
11. Robi Kumar
12. Mita Rani
13. R.V Ramna
14. U. Prishant
15. N. Saimon
16. Khokon Saha
17. T. James

Representatives of Support Organisations:

18. Shamsul Huda, Executive Director , Association for Land Reforms and Development (ALRD)
19. Zakir Hossain, Chief Executive Officer, Nagorik Uddyog
20. Rowshan Jahan, Program Coordinator, ALRD
21. Md. Sarwar, Programme Officer, Alliance for Development Support and Cooperation (ADSC)
22. Md. Mazharul Islam, Senior Program Officer, Nagorik Uddyog
23. Sardar Zahidul Islam, Nagorik Uddyog

Representatives of Dalit Organizations:

24. Mr. Milon Das - Director, Paritran
25. Mr. Achinta Saha – Coordinator, Bhumija
26. Mr. Pannalal Bashpuri- Coordinator, Fair Foundation
27. Mr. Babul Chandra Das – Founder, Horijan Yakko Parishad
28. Mr. Rajendra Kumar Das- General Secretary, Narayangonj Sweeper Colony
29. Mr. Maksudur Rahman, Gram Bangla Unnayan Committee
30. Dependra Sarkar, SEBA , Syedpur, Nilphamari

Resource Persons:

31. Dr. Zafurallah Chowdhury- Director, Gonoshasthaya Kendra
32. Dr. Hameeda Hossain – Human Rights Activist
33. Professor Meghna Guha Thakurta- Executive Director, Research Initiative Bangladesh (RIB)
34. Prof. Iftekhar Uddin Chowdhury (PhD); University of Chittagong
35. Ms. Tanja Haque - Bangladesh Representative, Christian Aid
36. Mr. Tom Crick - Coordinator, Asia and Pacific, One World Action Representative-Asia Pacific
37. Ms. Shameema Akhter Shimul- Coordinator for HEKS in Bangladesh

38. Mr. Abul Hossain- Trade Union Leader
39. Mr. Fazlous Sattar- Coordinator, Global Network for the Prevention of Torture
40. Ms. Safura Begum, Executive Director, CDMS
41. Mr. Alamgir Kabir- Coordinator, Green Voice
42. Mr. Md. Feroz Ahmmead- National Coordinator, Youth Citizen's Rights Alliance
43. M.B Das Liton, CDMS, Narsingdi
44. Lovely Talukdar, Ain O Salish Kendra
45. Lucille Sircar, SEHD
46. Al Asad Mahmudul Islam, Bangladesh Legal Aid & Services Trust (BLAST)
47. Suraiya Begum, RIB
48. Swapan Kumar Saha, Angikar
49. S. K. Saha- Angikar
50. Qumrunnessa Nazly, Ain O Salish Kendra
51. Bharati Nandi Sarker, Ex-Parliament Member
52. Md. Golum Mostafa, Gono Shastha Kendra

Journalists

53. Mr. Tarun Sarker- The Daily Jai Jai Din
54. Mr. Mujib Masud – The Daily Jugantor
55. Ananta, The Daily Jai Jai Din

UN / IDSN team:

56. Prof. Chinsung Chung, UN Sub-Commission, Special Rapporteur on Study on Discrimination based on Work and Descent
57. Jiewuh Song, Assistant to Prof. Chung
58. Rikke Nöhrind, Coordinator, IDSN
59. Gitte Dyrhagen, IDSN