

# brattyajan

Marginalized and Excluded Communities of Bangladesh



## Contents

Brattyajan Resource Centre (BRC)  
Launched

The Project: Brattyajan Resource  
Centre

Coordination Meetings of Working  
Committee

Rights Defenders and Development  
Actors Trained

Journalists Trained on Research-  
based Reporting on Excluded and  
Marginalized Communities

Consultations for Research-based  
Community and Issue-centric Agenda

Consultation on Sustainability of  
Brattyajan Resource Centre (BRC)

Consultation for Study of Social  
Protection

## INVESTIGATION

Unprecedented Strikes in the  
Tea Gardens, Extremely Difficult  
Conditions for Women Tea Workers,  
Why an Artificial Lake in Modhupur  
Forest? and Ending Deforestation by  
2030: An Empty Promise?

Unity is Key to Resist Violence against  
Women

Annual Meeting of BRC

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## Brattyajan Resource Centre (BRC) Launched



The dignitaries and community representatives are showing the books launched.

**D**edicated to the marginalized and excluded communities of Bangladesh, a long-cherished national entity—Brattyajan Resource Centre (BRC)—was officially launched on 28 May 2022 in Dhaka. Eleven books and monographs and a documentary film on the marginalized communities were also launched at the event. These books, monographs and documentary film were published and produced with support from the European Union and ICCO Cooperation. Financial support for BRC comes from Caritas France and MISEREOR through a project, “Promoting human rights of marginalized groups in Bangladesh through Brattyajan Resource Centre”.

The official launching of the project, BRC and the publications marked a day of great joy for

SEHD, PPRC, a great number of other organizations and communities that are associated with these and have been coming together for three decades. A strong message aired at the launching is that BRC is anchored with SEHD and PPRC but the marginalized communities are its integral part. At least 140 representatives of all nine groups of marginalized communities the center is devoted to, human rights defenders, community organizations, civil society, economists, trade union leaders, academia, journalists and foreign diplomats joined the launching. A true festive atmosphere filled the air of the conference hall of CIRDAP in Dhaka the launching venue.

The organizers of the event—SEHD and PPRC—welcomed the audience with a message





Dr. Hossain Zillur Rahman

that communities with different vulnerabilities have come to a celebration of working together for decades and that we should not see them as victims. They have many potentials, strengths, diverse culture and language.

In his keynote address Philip Gain, the program director of BRC, explained the background of BRC, how the communities it is devoted to are its bona fide participants, its goal and mission.

The communities that Brattyajan (meaning marginalized people) Resource Centre is devoted to include but not limited to are Adivasis (ethnic communities), tea workers (80 communities), sex workers, transgender, Bede, Harijan, Rishi, Kaiputra, Jaladas and Bihari.

“The launching of BRC and books is a big celebration because it is founded on concrete knowledge resources—books, monographs, investigative reports, documentary films, photographs, etc. that anyone can easily access” noted Gain. “These knowledge resources are outputs of our investigative reporting, action research, survey, video documentation, photography and analysis.” He explained how these

have been developed with active participation of communities and all other stakeholders and what are contained in these publications. The most significant aspect of these publications and productions on which BRC is founded is that SEHD and partners have mapped and defined almost all communities it is devoted to, issues and unique situations they face. That these publications and productions have had an influence on policies and strategies of World Bank, Asian Development Bank, United Nations, state agencies and NGOs in some areas (forest, fisheries, open pit, tea workers’ wages, etc.) are supported by evidences. These also reflect the trust of communities, academia and professionals at different levels.

Now the mission of BRC is to keep updating knowledge resources on the excluded and marginalized people, develop group- and issue-specific agenda, carry out research and investigation to expedite access of the excluded and marginalized communities to social protection, scale up skills and capacity of different actors, facilitate dialogues and interactions at different levels, fill in the information gaps, build right attitude towards information and scale up the use of knowledge resources at all levels, contribute to changes for better in the lives of excluded and marginalized communities, etc.

Community voices shared by 10 speakers from nine groups was a striking part of the launching celebration in that they all shared their personal and community experiences with SEHD and PPRC in research, investigation, building knowledge resources and how knowledge resources



Prof. Dr. Wahiduddin Mahmud

have strengthened them and their communities. Their unanimous trust: with accurate information and knowledge in hand they can assert their rights and can influence the state- and non-state parties who make crucial decisions. BRC can play a precise role in assisting them with information and guidance. They also shared their expectations from BRC.

The community voices at the launching were represented by Rambhajan Kairi, executive adviser, Bangladesh Cha Sramik Union; Saud Khan, Bede leader, Munshiganj; Eugin Nokrek, president, Joyenshahi Adibashi Unnayan Parishad; Zuam Lian Amlai, human rights activist, Chittagong Hill Tracts; Shiung Khumi, human rights activist, Chittagong Hill Tracts; Aleya Akhter Lily, president, Sex Workers’ Network; Milan Kumar Das, executive director, PARITTRAN; Krishna Lal, president, Bangladesh Horijan Yokkho Parishad; M. Shoukat Ali, general secretary, Stranded Pakistanis General Repatriation Committee; and Ivan Ahmed Katha, Shachetan Hijra Adhikar Shanga. (For summary of what

they shared see Annex in the bottom of this report).

Professor Wahiduddin Mahmud, the chief guest at the launching, criticized the government for not doing enough for the marginalized communities and spoke on the ethics and strategies on their protection.

“The government has failure in making right policies and plans for protection and progress of the marginalized communities,” said the leading economist of the country Prof. Mahmud. “The marginalized communities are far left behind than the average citizens of the country because the government failed to adopt appropriate policies and measures for them.”

“The idea and development process reach the average Bengali citizens easily regardless of their classes. However, when it comes to the indigenous communities and other marginalized groups, identities and class barriers pose a huge problem. This is a failure of our government,” observed Prof. Mahmud.

“It is not just that the government failed to bring development discourses to the marginalized communities, it has not thought judiciously even to slightly change ideas and life skills for their life and livelihood. Many plans and measures have been adopted in Bangladesh for

development, but instead of taking plans for economic development of the marginalized communities, barriers have been put in place,” explained Prof. Mahmud.

“An irony is that environmental preservation is prioritized in sustainable development goals (SDGs), but these communities whose occupations are directly linked with nature and environment are neglected and deprived,” further explained Prof. Mahmud.

In this intricate nature of deficient policies and practices for progress of the marginalized communities Prof. Mahmud directed his thought to them: “The goal of our work is that you are not called marginalized in the future. You shall be considered integral part of the mainstream population without losing your diverse and unique culture, languages and identities. And believe you have been constructively contributing to the development of Bangladesh.”

On research and publications launched Prof. Mahmud said, “The publications that have been presented today are very informative. These are not outputs of conventional research. These are authentic documentation after intensive field-based observations and analyses on your life and livelihood which make the follow-up research and documentation

easy.”

“The publications of SEHD and PPRC have brought many policy issues in the front and have led to dialogues with the government. The government bodies engaged in various surveys and producing data should compare the kinds of data and analyses of BRC for best results,” stressed Prof. Mahmud who chairs and advises many government bodies. “I will be part of BRC” affirmed Prof. Mahmud.

Jeremy Opritesco, Deputy Head of Mission, Delegation of the European Union to Bangladesh, spoke as a special guest at the event. “The launching shows a strong involvement of the communities in BRC and participants at this launching event,” said Mr. Jeremy. “With the SDG goal, leaving no one behind, the BRC has been launched at a perfect time. The marginalized communities are left behind. It is important to fight for their rights and inform them of their rights. We are proud that EU has supported this initiative. The knowledge outputs will be helpful for strategic actions. Discrimination based on gender, religion, sexual orientation, community, language and occupations exists. We also emphasize food security of the marginalized communities.”

Dr. Lilly Nicholls, High Commissioner of Canada to



Jeremy Opritesco



Dr. Lilly Nicholls



Khushi Kabir



Prof. Md. Golam Rahman

Bangladesh, another special guest gracefully shared her thoughts after listening to the community voices. She directed her messages to the marginalized communities as, “Thank you for teaching me about the discriminations you face for your language and cultural identities. The most impressive is that you are putting forward suggestions. We are deeply committed to elimination of discrimination, exclusion and feminist approaches.” On her country she said, “Canada is a country, where people take shelter, fleeing from violence. It has high tolerance towards diversity.”

Khushi Kabir, a noted feminist and development actor applauded the launching of BRC and said the centre is inclusive of communities and other stakeholders. “The research SEHD conducts is highly involved with the communities. It is an important centre for conveying information to society, policy makers and journalists,” said Ms. Kabir, “and these can be very useful in organizing in-depth discussions with communities and targets.”

Khushi Kabir further observed BRC should pay special attention to land rights of the marginalized



Prof. Tanzimuddin Khan

communities. Many do not own any land and do not own home they live in. “I will be part of BRC,” was her precise commitment.

Professor Md. Golam Rahman, editor of Ajker Patrika, former chief information commissioner and a member of SEHD talked particularly on inclusiveness and integration of the marginalized communities who are generally isolated because of their ethnic identities and occupations. “We all are people of this country and everyone should get equal attention, but those who are left behind deserve preferential discrimination,” observed prof. Rahman. “Movements bring the problems in the forefront, but the root causes and purposes sometimes get lost in the process of change. Bureaucracy inhibits the revitalization and mobilization of these causes. Building true databases, a commitment of BRC, can play a significant role here.”

While Prof. Tanzimuddin Khan of Dhaka University and member of SEHD gave the welcome address, Dr. Hossain Zillur Rahman, research and resource adviser of BRC, executive chairman of PPRC and Chairman



Philip Gain

of BRAC Bangladesh chaired and facilitated the discussion.

Dr. Rahman’s summary of discussion highlighted some of the pertinent issues with the excluded and marginalized communities, many of them invisible. In his introductory remarks, Dr. Rahman said the launching is an occasion for communities to come together and talk about the challenges they face. One obvious challenge is to make them visible to the mainstream population and also to make their strengths and capabilities visible.

“We want concrete progress for these people through research and result-oriented actions. We are celebrating the work of the last thirty years,” said Dr. Rahman. “However, we need to keep in mind that they are different in their vulnerabilities. Yet they are united by their marginality. BRC highlights the nature of their unitedness.”

He emphasized on the keynote speaker Philip Gain’s contention that BRC is a learning and collaboration centre. A clear expectation from BRC is that it will be a knowledge centre and a platform of voices.

In relation to tea workers’ condition he said, “We need to understand the economic dimension of wage deprivation. In relation to Bede, we need to understand social discrimination and deprivation. The Bedes need a new footing in the age of urbanization and development.”

On the concerns of the forest people he observed that the forest-dwelling communities have been alerted about the importance of data. This is a great realization that we have brought to them.

On Milon Das’ deliberation on

Rishi community, Dr. Rahman pointed out, “He has highlighted additional issues. They have been stereotyped as fit for menial jobs. Social discrimination happens based on social perception. There has been continuation of social discrimination to their next generations.”

On Milan Das’ suggestion that a lifestyle museum for saving their culture be established apart from their statistical representation he said, “In future this can be an additional task for BRC.”

On Harijans, his observation: Every community faces different facets of discrimination. Harijans are the traditional city and municipality cleaners. Most recently, the discrimination they face is the loss of jobs. This job was reserved for the community—now they are not the priority anymore. Harijan leader Krishna Lal’s expectation is right representation of their community in the BRC. They hope for an accurate population count in the upcoming census”.

“The Biharis, confined to camp life, are victims of political discrimination. They have specific problems. We have scope of advocacy with the government for their rehabilitation and education,” observed Dr. Rahman.

He put emphasis on the keynote speaker’s argument that BRC is a driver of results. It is not limited to any project. It will continue to exist beyond projects.

The timing of the launch of BRC is perfect as eight years are left before SDGs’ timeframe comes to an end. Leaving none behind is a priority agenda of SDGs. It will be a huge step forward for their visibility if they are included in the census. □

## **Rambhajan Kairi, executive adviser, Bangladesh Cha Sramik Union**

We have been working for the progress of our tea communities. But we have limits, particularly in exposing our condition and difficulties through research work. Research is difficult but crucial to highlight our needs and rights. BRC can help us raising our voice and reaching the concerned government bodies. A tea worker’s daily wage is stagnated at Tk.120 (1.36 USD) since 2019. The minimum wage board set up in 2019 to fix the minimum wages for the tea workers, has been frozen to date (June 2022) after a failed attempt to even reduce existing facilities and wages we, tea workers, get. This is a shame. The right to paid leave was previously unknown to the workers. They started getting the weekly paid leave only from 2017.

What is unique of SEHD is it has been giving priority to our communities for the last 15 years in its research and investigative work. The tea workers need protection of their rights and benefits. In general, they are not aware of their rights. BRC can play a precise role with information in communicating with the state- and non-state organizations.

## **Saud Khan, Bede leader, Munshiganj**

The people of the Bede (gypsy) community are victims of violence and neglect without end. We gained the right to vote only in 2007. Our social image is poor. People look down upon us. They see us as inferior beings. We are Muslims and Bengalis. We have learned through research that we are deprived of our rights. We need education and diverse job opportunities to migrate out of our current condition.

We do not have land for cultivation. We need help from the government and NGOs. We have little interaction with the educated people. Educated Bedes ignore their own community to avoid getting labelled and losing their jobs.

Today I can speak in a forum like this because of my participation in research and because of such events. Our aim is to get our voices and demands heard and considered by the state- and non-state actors.

## **Eugin Nokrek, president of Joyenshahi Adibashi Unnayan Parishad**

We, the Garo and Koch of Modhupur forest villages, consider ourselves to be autochthons in the area. But sadly enough we are denied of our customary rights. In Modhupur forest villages there are around 20,000 Garos almost entirely converted to Christianity and 3,500 Koch, all



Rambhajan Kairi



Saud Khan



Eugin Nokrek



Zuam Lian Amlai

Hindus. We see Philip Gain treading the forest villages from 1980s. He and SEHD have been deeply involved in research and investigation on forestry issues and our condition. SEHD's recent book, Modhupur: The Vanishing Forest and Her People in Agony, is a landmark publication for us. It provides comprehensive information on Modhupur and its first people. As we use the book, we realize the significance of research, investigation and analysis.

We, however, lack skills of generating and using knowledge to properly represent our communities and our demands. SEHD has been training us on research techniques and gathering data from the field. Now we are better oriented in using the books, reports, documentary films and photos on Modhupur. These are very helpful for meaningful advocacy. I trust, with BRC established, SEHD, PPRC and we can work together for our rights. We now better understand how to have an influence on state agencies with information in hand.

**Zuam Lian Amlai, Bawm representative and human rights activist, Chittagong Hill Tracts (CHT)**

I am involved with SEHD from 1997-1998 and familiar with its research on the CHT environment, culture and people. Its survey on Chak and Khumi and publications on these communities give us baseline data. We want similar surveys on other

communities such as Mro and Bawm. We can efficiently administer our villages with baseline data in hand. If we have primary information in hand, we can make informed opinions and better engage in movements for rights.

The documentary film, 'Chokoria Sundarban: A Forest without Trees' of SEHD is a stunning articulation of realities of horrible destruction of mangrove forests and those in the CHT and elsewhere. We, in the CHT, are in a state of panic. We have serious issues with the CHT Regulation that has been drastically scrapped. We know BRC cannot solve all our problems but research and publications of SEHD can educate the CHT people on their rights. We cannot play an effective role without information.

Shiung Khumi, a representative of the Khumi community, added to discussion of Zuam Lian Amlai. SEHD carried out a household survey on our Khumi community. Our main difficulties include but not limited to are we are left behind in education because of remoteness, our economic condition is poor and we are losing our land. According to the 1991 government census, the Khumi population in Bangladesh was 1,241, but according to the SEHD study conducted in 2014 the Khumi population was 2,899. The people of the Khumi community are concentrated in Thanchi, Ruma and Roangchhari upazilas in Bandarban Hill District. Ten Khumi families live

in Bilaichhari upazila in Rangamati district and just one family in Bandarban Sadar.

**Aleya Akhter Lily, president, Sex Workers' Network (SWN)**

We are involved with SEHD for years in research. I was personally involved with a study on brothel-based and street sex workers. Our sufferings are endless. Our life is a war. We are constantly subject to violence. The sex workers and their children are excluded from the mainstream society. The children of the sex workers face many difficulties to get admission in schools. I hope that sex workers will gradually be accepted in the mainstream society. BRC should function as a repository and it should play the role of a facilitator for us to become equal and dignified citizens. SEHD is indeed a pioneer in research and publications on the sex workers.

**Milan Das, executive director, PARITTRAN**

People of the Rishi community are generally considered untouchables by mainstream Bengalis. We, 400,000 Rishis, live in Satkhira, Khulna and Bagerhat districts. We are considered untouchables and are victims of routine deprivation and repression. We have not been able to be part of any large scale research or report to date. We do not have access to education. Our children are compelled



Aleya Akhter Lily



Milan Das



Krishnalal



M. Shoukat Ali



Ivan Ahmed Katha

to do menial jobs such as cleaning toilets at schools, even though there are cleaning staff. This is an insult to our children that puts pressure on their psyche. From 2007 we demanded discrimination elimination law but what the government has given (anti-discrimination law) us is not helpful at all. We make significant contribution to revenue but we do not get what we should. We want a museum for preserving our culture that is near extinction. Our expectation from BRC is that it gives our community a visibility.

### **Krishna Lal, president, Bangladesh Horijan Yokkho Parishad**

We call ourselves Harijans. We use this word instead of Dalit because we consider the word 'Dalit' as an insult. We have been cleaning Dhaka and other cities for generations. Yet, currently only 30 percent of the cleaners in Dhaka City Corporation are Harijans. Day by day we are losing our traditional jobs. In paper we are to get 80% of the cleaners' jobs in municipalities but in reality we get only 8%. We sent letters to the government regarding this. We live on government land. We are a totally landless community. The Dhaka City

Corporation promised us to give apartments in building on state-owned land. However, only those who have jobs as sweepers can access these apartments.

### **M. Shoukat Ali, general secretary, Stranded Pakistanis General Repatriation Committee**

We, Biharis, live in 70 camps in 13 districts. Our living condition was good before the liberation. In camp life, we do not have dignity as human beings. In camps a family generally gets a small room (8 feet X 8 feet). We have no privacy. Around 5,500 families living in the Geneva Camp alone who use 150 common bathrooms. For six camps in Mohammadpur area of Dhaka city including Geneva Camp there is just one school. The children do not get proper learning atmosphere. Yet, I am hopeful that the prime minister of Bangladesh will keep her promise to rehabilitate us.

### **Ivan Ahmed Katha, Shachetan Hijra Adhikar Shangha**

Bangladesh government recognized

the Hijra community and gave us the third gender status in 2013. We do not know the budget of the government for us. We want to be informed of how much funds we are entitled to and how much we have actually received. I am doubtful we are getting the financial benefits allocated for us. The Hijra community should be able to continue their key traditional occupations that include but not limited to—badhai tola (collection of money in exchange of blessing to newborn through performing dances and songs); cholla manga (collection of subscription from market) and sex work—without barriers. Now the Hirjas collect money from busses and other vehicles. They also beg subscriptions in different festivities. We cannot buy land and houses. We rarely have enough food. Another important point is I have been involved in census and I have seen that there is no mention of any gender other than men and women. (BBS however, informs that in the population census of 2022 the Hijras will be enumerated separately). □

## **Brattyajan Resource Centre (BRC)**

Dedicated to the protection of Marginalized and Excluded Communities

***Brattyajan* is a Bengali word (*Bratty* meaning devotee+*jan* meaning people) that well defines the excluded and marginalized groups and communities of Bangladesh. From ancient times (Vedic age), the word means people who are devout, honest, simple and peace-loving. When we get close to the indigenous communities and all other marginalized and excluded groups we see they are simple, honest, religious, devout, craftsmen and peace-loving. However, they have fallen behind and they are generally poorer than others, facing human rights abuses and do not get respect they deserve, largely because of their simplicity, honesty, humbleness, minority status, ethnic identities, casteism, occupations considered to be low and lower level of education than the majority community. They are generally considered 'others' by the majority community, pushed to the edge and it is hard for them to migrate out of their current status.**

Marginalized and excluded communities including the indigenous peoples constitute a significant percentage in the hugely Bengali-majority Bangladesh, a country of around 170 million people. Those excluded, socially and economically, and discriminated against, for their identity, captive situation, occupations, casteism, culture, geographical locations, and various other reasons, come from among both religious and ethnic minorities and the majority communities. Many of them live on the fringes of the country, deprived of equal opportunities and facing wide-ranging social, economic and political disadvantages.

The marginalized and excluded among the citizens of Bangladesh include different occupational communities who are victims of casteism, ethnic or indigenous groups, tea plantation workers and their communities, Bede (gypsy), Bihari, sex workers, transgender (Hijra), Kaiputra or Kawra (a pig-rearing community), Jaladas (a seafaring fishing community living in the coasts of Cox's Bazar and Chattogram), disabled and other smaller excluded groups. These communities remain largely excluded and marginalized because they do not equally enjoy their legitimate rights as citizens. They face triple challenges of poverty, vulnerability and exclusion in terms of leading normal life, secure jobs and income, resources, access to loans, housing, education, skills, cultural capital, welfare state, citizenship and equal rights in the eyes of law, democratic participation, human treatment and dignity.

In attention to the poor and extreme poor, what is not adequately attended can be called poverty's

third frontier—excluded and marginalized communities that the SEHD, PPRC and partners have worked with for the past two decades. SEHD and PPRC (applicants) scaled up their attention to these communities and extensively studied them for nearly seven and half years with support from the European Union and ICCO Cooperation. Many of these communities are considered social outcasts or untouchables facing ill-treatment and deprivation of opportunities that are instrumental for the poor and ultra-poor to migrate out of poverty. As a result, they progressively fall behind in the run for development.

Brattyajan Resource Centre (BRC) has been initiated through the project, “Promoting human rights of marginalized groups in Bangladesh through Brattyajan Resource Centre” funded by MISEREOR and Caritas France that are committed to promoting social justice, human rights and sound environment.

There are hundreds of government and non-government organizations that provide services to the marginalized and excluded communities. Yet, many of these groups remain invisible because of dearth of information. SEHD and PPRC will run BRC through formulation of research-based group- and issue-specific agenda and training to enhance capacity and life skills. The ultimate goal of BRC is to contribute concretely to the protection of the marginalized and excluded communities and work unitedly with all stakeholders to assist them become equal and dignified citizens of the country.

**Final Beneficiary groups of BRC:** (a) Ethnic communities or Adivasis—according to the

government list there are 50 ethnic communities (11 in the CHT and 39 in the plains). According to SEHD research findings there are a good number of small ethnic groups in the plains not included in the government list. (b) Tea workers and their communities—There are 158 tea gardens in Bangladesh (excluding those in Panchagarh where tea cultivation started only recently). The majority of 138,366 tea plantation workers and their total population of around half a million are non-Bengali. (c) Harijan— Harijan is an occupational group or community, traditionally known as sweepers and many of them consider themselves as social outcasts or ‘Dalit’. The Harijans with a population of around 100,000 are one of the most marginal communities who are afflicted with a variety of social and economic problems. (d) Bede—The Bede is a Muslim gypsy (floating) community of Bangladesh. Many Bede leaders estimate their population in Bangladesh at around 500,000. (e) Sex workers and transgender—The sex workers are foremost among the social outcasts in Bangladesh and socially most marginal community cut off from social relations. A survey that SEHD carried out in 2018 found 3,721 female sex workers (FSWs) working in 11 brothels. However, the total number of FSWs is much bigger in the country—around 93,000. (f) Kaiputra (pig rearing community)—Also known as Kawra, this community with a guesstimated population of 12,000 are despised in the society because they rear pigs, an animal ‘filthy’ to the Muslim majority. (g) Jaladas—Occupationally marginalized and suffering from a degree of social untouchability, Jaladas are a traditional fisherfolk



community—mainly seafaring but also engaged in riverine fishing in the coastal districts of Chattogram and Cox’s Bazar districts. (h) Rishi—Historically the Rishis of Bengal are cobblers, leather workers and instrumentalists for generations. (i) Bihari: Approximately 300,000 Urdu-speaking Biharis live in 70 camps in 13 districts of Bangladesh. Of these camps 28 are located in Dhaka. (j) Other excluded and special communities: There are a number of smaller groups found among both Muslims and Hindus who are considered to be outcasts. These groups are: Teli (oil presser), Napit (barber), Dhopa (washer-man), Tanti (weavers from Pakistan who speak Urdu), Darjee (tailor), Hajam (unqualified doctors for circumcision), Majhi/Khottra (boatmen), Behara (carrier of bridal carriage), Kasai (butcher), and so on. Some of these groups such as Teli, Napit, Dhopa, Tanti, Darjee, and Hijra are also found among the Hindus.

**Goal of BRC:** The marginalized and excluded communities including the indigenous peoples are better protected and become equal and dignified citizens of the country.

## Objectives of the Initial Project of BRC

1. BRC brings the final beneficiary groups to work together in building group-specific agenda and strategies to claim their legitimate rights.
2. The targets of BRC widely use knowledge resources and tools developed and improved to maximize their social protection by increasing access to the state-funded Social Safety Net Programmes (SSNPs).
3. The BRC targets and stakeholders develop skills to replicate methodologies to generate knowledge resources and use them.

## Key Activities of BRC in the initial three years:

- a. Research, investigation, survey and analysis—research-based group-specific and issue centric agenda building:** Areas of eight group-specific agenda—the ethnic communities of the plains, tea communities, Bede, Harijans, Jaladas, sex workers, Kaiputra (pig rearing community), Rishi, and Bihari will develop their respective community agenda. Areas of issue-centric agenda: land rights and forests and commons and identity, state recognition and discrimination elimination. Investigations into human rights abuses and reports out of these investigations will be contributed to national newspapers media. An investigative film on challenges of social protection of select excluded communities will also be made.
- b. Study of Social Security Policy Support (SSPS) and social safety net programmes (SSNPs) and access situation of the marginalized communities in these state-financed programmes.**
- c. Mapping of actors:** Map of the CBOs, CSOs, cultural groups, state agencies, international NGOs, donors, missionary organizations, human rights organizations, academic and research organizations and alliances that are active within the targets and final beneficiaries of BRC is presented in a partner directory.
- d. Building repository on the excluded and marginalized groups.**
- e. Training and workshop to develop skills and capacity:** Organizing trainings and workshops is a key activity to scale skills and

capacity of representatives of the final beneficiary groups, cultural activists, journalists, CBOs and CSOs working with the marginalized communities and human rights and development workers.

**f. Convention, festival and dialogues:** A convention and festival associated with dialogue, cultural programme and photography exhibition will be organized in 2024.

**g. Assistance to access justice:** BRC does not have a legal aid programme, but it connects the victims of human rights abuses with organizations (government and non-government) that provide legal aid to the poor and marginalized.

**h. Small grant support to CBOs and cultural groups:** Small grant support will be provided to eight CBOs for organizing cultural groups, writing research papers on languages and cultures and developing community-based repositories making the community participation meaningful.

**i. Publications, productions and documentary film:** A series of community- and issue-based agenda, books, strategy papers, monographs, reports, posters, brochures, leaflet and newsletters will be published.

**j. Collaboration, solidarity and partnerships:** BRC will establish collaboration and interface with concerned state actors (ministries and agencies) particularly those that administer the Social Safety Net Programmes (SSNPs) and generate data (BBS in particular), international organizations, and national bodies that promote culture and heritages. Besides, solidarity networks will be established among different final beneficiary groups and targets. □

## Coordination Meetings of Working Committee



Participants of the first coordination meeting. Photo: Prosad Sarker

The first of five coordination meetings of the working committee was held on 24 April 2022. Twenty-eight participants representing ethnic communities (from the Chittagong Hill Tracts and the plains), Bede, Bihari, sex workers, Transgender, Harijan and Rishi, local government institution, Caritas Bangladesh and project staff participated in the meeting. While Philip Gain, program director, facilitated the

meeting and made a presentation on the project, Dr. Hossain Zillur Rahman, research and resource adviser of the project reflected on background and significance of BRC. Prof. Tanzimuddin Khan of International Relations of Dhaka University and executive committee member of SEHD attended the meeting and shared his insights. Most of the participants of coordination meeting are members of the working committee.

The day-long coordination meeting was organized to refresh the working committee members on Brattyajan Resource Centre (BRC), understanding of the 36-month project supported by Caritas France and MISEREOR and plan the kick-off workshop.

The second consultation or coordination meeting was held on 16 July 2022. Thirty participants representing ethnic communities and all other final beneficiary groups attended the meeting. The programme director presented the report of implementation of activities so far. The participants agreed with Dr. Hossain Zillur Rahman, “We are on track in implementing our activities up to November 2022. The kick-off workshop went very well. Most important part at the launching was community voices. We got direction. The community representatives and others shared their thoughts very well.”

The participants engaged in discussion on how to effectively organise trainings, consultations, research and publications ahead. □

## Rights Defenders and Development Actors Trained



Participants of the training. Photo. Prosad Sarker

Twenty-six human rights defenders and development actors were trained in ‘Skills and Capacity Building in Work

with Marginalized Communities’ from November 15 to 17, 2022 at Caritas Development Institute (CDI) in Dhaka. Of 26

participants six were female, two hijra or transgender and 18 male representing CBOs from Garo, Khasi, Rishi, Bangali, Hijra, Oraon, Munda, Koch, tea communities and a few national CSOs.

On the first day, participants shared their learning expectations, viz., to learn about research process, government policies, rights of the marginalized communities etc., at the beginning of the workshop. Philip Gain, director of SEHD and programme director of BRC, ran the first session introducing knowledge resources on the marginalized

communities and their use in developing intellectual clarity on exclusion challenges in Bangladesh.

During the second session, Dr. Mohammad Abdul Wazed, former director general of Bangladesh Bureau of Statistics (BBS), talked on significance of official data as well as explained social protection schemes for the marginalized and excluded communities. At the end of first day, Barrister Jyotirmoy Barua, advocate, Supreme Court of Bangladesh, ran a session on laws and instruments that relate to marginalized and excluded people of Bangladesh stressing on

Articles 26-44 of the constitution along with some other Acts of this country.

Second day started with an interactive session by Md. Harun-Or-Rashid, a development consultant, on audit and sustainability of CBOs and CSOs working with marginalized communities. This session was followed by an insightful story-telling session. Five representatives from sex workers and transgender, Bede, santal and Mro communities told their stories struggling with discrimination and overcoming them. Later, Mr. Z.I. Khan

Panna, advocate, Supreme Court of Bangladesh and president, Jatiyo Ainjibi Parishad, talked on limitations of the state and non-state parties providing legal aid stressing on the fact that law serves the wealthy better than the poor.

On the last day of the workshop, the participants shared what they learned. Philip Gain then discussed simple research techniques, case documentation and reporting in depth and its significance. The workshop came to an end with distribution of certificates among the participants. □

## Journalists Trained on Research-based Reporting on Excluded and Marginalized Communities



Participants of the journalists training. Photo. Prosad Sarker

Nineteen journalists from print and electronic media (national and local), two research staff of the project and one TVET professional came together in training on 'Research-based Reporting on Excluded and Marginalized Communities of Bangladesh' organized

and facilitated by Society for Environment and Human Development (SEHD) and Power and Participation Research Centre (PPRC) from 27 to 29 September 2022 in Dhaka.

The key objectives of the workshop were (1) sharing knowledge resources and

experience of research and investigative reporting on excluded and marginalized communities of Bangladesh, (2) improving skills in action-oriented research, investigation and writing good journalistic reports on exclusion challenges in Bangladesh, and (3) addressing critical issues of the excluded and marginalized communities.

The workshop started with sharing of resources on the excluded and marginalized communities of Bangladesh. While Dr. Hossain Zillur Rahman, the research adviser of BRC, talked elaborately on necessity of research-based reporting on excluded and marginalized communities and essential tools of research, Philip Gain, programme director gave an overview of the excluded and marginalized communities and discussed how media can fruitfully engage in investigative and research-based reporting. Md. Alamgir Hossen, deputy director and SDG focal point of Bangladesh Bureau of Statistics (BBS) explained data

## Consultations for Research-based Community and Issue-centric Agenda



A participant speaking at the journalists' training. Photo: Prosad Sarker



Some of the workshop participants in Modhupur. Photo. Philip Gain

literacy, data availability and research-based reporting.

On the second day, the participants visited three spots—brothel and Harijan pallis in Tangail town and forest villages and select spots of commercial plantations in Modhupur sal forest—to get a firsthand idea of two hotspots of human rights abuses and severe environmental problems. After the field trips, participants wrote their individual features and reports.

Julfiker Ali Manik, a senior journalist, discussed essential skills needed for writing good journalistic reports and features. Nasimun Ara Haque Minu, president, Bangladesh Nari Sangbadik Kendra (BNSK) talked on gatekeeping in media and difficulties journalists face in engaging in research-based reporting. Philip Gain facilitated the workshop. The workshop came to an end with certificate distribution among the participants. □

**C**ommunity agenda: Building community and issue-based agenda is a key activity of Brattyajan Resource Centre (BRC). Eight community-based agenda will be developed on Adivasis (ethnic communities), tea workers, sex workers and transgender, Rishi and Kaiputra (pig rearing community concentrated in Jashore, Satkhira and Khulna districts), Harijan, Bede (gypsy), Jaladas and Bihari.

Consultations have been organized with tea workers and their communities, sex workers and transgender and Rishi and Kaiputra for building three research-based community agenda in the first year of BRC ending in November 2022. Two consultations and adequate number of FGDs and KIIs have been organized for each agenda. The consultations brought together community representatives, trade union leaders, local politicians, government officials, human rights defenders and civil society actors who shared knowledge and insights on communities, difficulties they

face, their needs and aspirations and roles of different actors who take decisions impacting their life and livelihoods. The participants have contributed significantly in the design of structure of each community and issue-centric agenda. A survey among each community will follow the consultations to generate quantitative data in support of qualitative data and case documentation.

Each community agenda will include (a) an analytical introduction to the community, their geographic locations, migration history, etc. (b) pertinent issues of the community, (c) unique and insurmountable difficulties the community faces, (d) needs and charter of demands of the community, (e) recommendations for the state and non-state actors and the community itself. Each agenda will also include excerpts from the constitution, national laws and international instruments.

Issue-centric Agenda on



Participants at the consultation in Modhupur. Photo: Prosad Sarker



Participants at Sreemangal consultation.



Some of the participants at Kamalganj consultation.



Participants at Keshobpur consultation.



Morjina Begum speaking at Daulatdia consultation.

land and commons: Two areas of issue-centric agenda are land rights and forests and identity and discrimination elimination. Two consultations took place—one in Modhupur, Tangail from 24-25 October 2022 and another in Bandarban town from 30-31 October 2022—were organized in order to build issue-centric agenda on land and forest commons. Participants shared their insights and experiences about their issues and difficulties they face. They also shared what they think about their strengths and weaknesses as well as how the state and non-state organizations and actors should act in dealing with issues concerning land and forest. □

## Consultation on Sustainability of Brattyajan Resource Centre (BRC)

The working committee members of BRC, development experts, academics, human rights defenders and social researchers (30 people) came together in a day-long consultation in Dhaka on 23 November 2022 to initiate discussion on sustainability of the new entity. Dr. Hossain Zillur Rahman, executive chairman of PPRC and research and resource adviser of BRC reflected on its background and defined it as a coalition of the willing with the objective to nurture the strengths of communities. Four dimensions of strengths-based work are information and research, collective strength, strategic thinking and long-term sustainability.

Md. Harun-Or-Rashid, a development consultant, explained five sustainability models—donor dependency, self-reliance, mixed, partnership and trusteeship. He placed importance on identifying

demand size to get a clear picture of the market. He suggested that BRC and SEHD explore components of their sustainability—continued research, training and consultancies and promotion and diversification based on core competencies. Morjina Begum, founder of Mukti Mohila Samiti (MMS) shared her success story and stressed on fixed assets to get donor funds. Professor Tanzimuddin Khan, a professor of Dhaka University and a member of SEHD's board, emphasized on determining the characteristics of BRC. Philip Gain, director of SEHD, moderated the consultation and also shared SEHD's experience of use of knowledge resources that it has published. To sum up, the best sustainability approach seemed to be timely search of donors or partners, preparation of proposals, working on fixed revenue and assets, and branding and marketing of core competencies. □



Participants at consultation on sustainability of BRC. Photo. Prosad Sarker

## Consultation for Study of Social Protection

PPRC organized a consultation for study on social safety net programmes on 24 November 2022. Fifteen participants

including government officials from Department of Disaster Management (DDM), Bangladesh Bureau of Statistics (BBS),



Consultation for study on social protection.

Directorate General of Family Planning (DGFP) as well as community representatives, consultant, PPRC and SEHD staffs attended the consultation.

A study on the access situation of excluded and marginalized communities of Bangladesh to social safety net programmes (SSNPs)—what they are getting, inclusion and exclusion errors—will be conducted in the third year of the project by PPRC in association with SEHD. The first of two consultations was held to initiate discussion on SSNPs and research methodology for this study. While

the programme director Philip Gain gave an introductory presentation on BRC and the study, Dr. Hossain Zillur Rahman, research advisor of the programme, moderated the discussion. Government officials and other participants shared their insights and experiences about social security programmes. They also shared their suggestions on how more people from the excluded and marginalized communities can access these programmes. At the end of consultation, Dr. Zillur Rahman presented a tentative framework and methodology of a survey for this study. □

wages. They demanded a daily wage of Tk. 300, which was Tk 120 back then. The non-violent strike shook the country and the tea workers drew massive support from the local and international communities. It was at the intervention of the prime minister who set the daily wage at Tk.170 that the strike came to an end and the tea workers went back to work. SEHD and BRC carried out a series of investigations and analyses into the events during the strike and published a series of investigative op-eds published in *The Daily Star*. Here are the links to read the full write-ups:

1. **Why are the tea workers on strike?** <https://www.thedailystar.net/opinion/views/news/why-are-the-tea-workers-strike-3094846>
2. **Fairer wages, or more broken promises for tea workers?** <https://www.thedailystar.net/views/opinion/news/will-the-tea-workers-get-the-wages-they-deserve-2196126>.
3. **Tea workers' strike ends. What's next?** <https://www.thedailystar.net/opinion/views/news/tea-workers-strike-ends-whats-next-3110056#lg=1&slide=0>.

## INVESTIGATION

### Unprecedented Strikes in the Tea Gardens

In an unprecedented move, Bangladesh Cha Sramik Union (BCSU) and around 138,000 tea workers of 158 tea gardens in Sylhet, Moulvibazar, Habiganj and Chattogram districts went on a strike from 9 to 27 August 2022. From 9 to 12 they observed a 2-hour abstention from work every day; from 13 August they went on a full-



Tea workers on strike. Photo. S. Kairi. day strike. The key message of the tea workers and their union to the owners was they were fed up with the owners' position regarding their

### Extremely Difficult Conditions for Women Tea Workers

Fifty-one percent of 138,000 tea workers in 158 tea gardens are women. These women work in indecent conditions primarily because some important sections of Bangladesh Labour Law 2006 and the Labour Rules 2015 are routinely violated. The settings of the tea gardens are such that women tea workers, most of them tealeaf pickers, are made to work harder and longer hours than men. They



Women tea workers heading for tea-leaf plucking. Photo. Philip Gain

also perform most of the household chores. Average work hours for a woman tea worker is 12 to 14 hours a day (in the field and at home). Yet, women demonstrate their perseverance. A muckraking op-ed resulting from series of field trips (investigations) and published in the leading English daily newspaper of Bangladesh, *The Daily Star*, highlighted the issues relating to women tea workers' work condition and violation of the labour law. The exposé has ignited a debate among parties involved around women tea workers' issues.

Internet link to the report: <https://www.thedailystar.net/views/opinion/news/the-strong-women-tea-gardens-2926126>.

## Why an Artificial Lake in Modhupur Forest?

Bangladesh Forest Department's attempt to dig a small lake on land in Modhupur forest that a few Garo families have been using for generations, has caused unrest among the Garos. The lake is part of a guest house under a project, 'Modhupur eco-tourism development and sustainable management with the help of local people and tribals.' The 'tribals', a government term used to identify the indigenous people, do not want the lake and they have little faith in the intention of the project because projects financed by the government, Asian Development Bank or World Bank have been found to be causing horrendous damage to the forest



Proposed lake site in Modhupur. Photo. Philip Gain

and local community interest. A muckraking op-ed resulting from a series of field visits and published in *The Daily Star* has given interpretation about the lake and other larger issues. *The Daily Star* and other newspapers have followed up the issue and it is likely the government authority will backtrack from its decision to dig the lake. Internet link to the report: <https://www.thedailystar.net/views/opinion/news/why-do-we-need-artificial-lake-modhupur-forest-2995811>.

## Ending Deforestation by 2030: An Empty Promise?

SEHD and BRC have been following on the current condition of the forest in Bangladesh since the COP26 in Glasgow, where the world leaders promised to end deforestation by 2030. The prime

minister of Bangladesh turned out to be one of the five top dealmakers at the COP26. The realities with deforestation in Bangladesh particularly with financial support from the Asian Development Bank (ADB) and World Bank do not bring any good news. The plantation projects have ruined natural forest already severely fragmented. Besides, industrialization, construction of roads and highways, and establishment of human habitation among other things have expedited deforestation. There is no doubt, the number of trees have increased in the rural areas, but deforestation on the public forest land has been phenomenal. All these factors have been explained in two pieces—one published in *The Daily Star* (leading English daily newspaper of Bangladesh) and one published in *Kaler Kantha* (leading Bangla newspaper). The pieces alert the forestry professionals and policy makers and help them explore the right direction while thinking and taking decisions.

Internet link to The Daily Star report: <https://www.thedailystar.net/views/opinion/news/ending-deforestation-2030-empty-promise-3009596>

Internet link to the Kaler Kantha report: <https://www.kalerkantho.com/online/>



Harvest time of planted forest in Modhupur in 2012. The area had good coverage of sal forest even in the 1980s. Plantation projects funded by Asian Development Bank (ADB) has led to this condition. Photo. Philip Gain

## Unity is Key to Resist Violence against Women

## Annual Meeting of BRC



Participants with dignitaries. Photo. Prosad Sarker

Around 80 victims of extreme violence from among sex workers based in brothels and working on the streets or hotels, Hijra (transgender), tea workers, Bede, rights activists and journalists gathered in Dhaka on 30 November to celebrate ‘16 Days of Activism against Gender-Based Violence’, a campaign that runs globally from 25 November to December 10.

The victims told their stories of facing violence, discrimination and deprivation. The community leaders, lawyers and human rights defenders shared insights about the roots of gender-based violence and expressed commitment to provide assistance, including legal support, to the victims.

The event turned into a celebration with amazing cultural show of the Hijra community. Through songs, dances, recitation of poems and mini-drama the transgender artists showcased their talents to communicate a message that all women, irrespective of their occupations and discrimination they face, have strengths and potentials. Thus the message transpired,

if united, women and girls can resist violence in many fronts. Thus this year’s theme, ‘UNITE! Activism to End Violence against Women & Girls’, got a meaning at celebration.

On the significance of the story telling session and discussion, Dr. Hossain Zillur Rahman, chair of the discussion said, “Telling stories is powerful means. So, the victims’ voices must be strengthened in telling their stories to build resistance against social, mental and physical violence.”

Those telling stories included Joya Sikder, Hazera Begum, Aleya Akter Lily, Moni Goala, Moni Kol, Falguni Tripura, Titna Khatun, and Kumli. The special guests were Advocate Salma Ali, Morjina Begum, Mithila Farzana, Tandra Chakma and Nasimun Ara Haque Minu. Philip Gain gave an overview of the groups the story tellers represented. □

Twenty-six participants from different community-based organizations (CBOs), civil society organizations (CSOs), working committee members and staffs of Brattyajan Resource Centre (BRC) came together on 29 November 2022 in Dhaka to mark one year of BRC. While Dr. Hossain Zillur Rahman, research adviser of BRC, chaired the meeting, Philip Gain, programme director of BRC, facilitated it.

With the distribution of BRC’s first issue of newsletter among the participants, Philip Gain, programme director briefly explained the specific activities carried out during the year. The participants shared their feedback on activities carried out and gave their suggestions for the following year.

“Today’s meeting is marking transformation of BRC from concept to a physical entity. It is a coalition of willing building on collective ownership and continued discussion and dialogue in order to create confidence in human resource,” observed Dr. Hossain.

The website of BRC, [www.brattyajan.org](http://www.brattyajan.org) was officially launched at the annual meeting. □



Participants at the annual meeting.

**Website dedicated to the marginalized and excluded communities of Bangladesh**

**[www.brattyajan.org](http://www.brattyajan.org)**