

# brattyajan

Marginalized and Excluded Communities of Bangladesh



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## Books Explain Tea Workers' Deprivation



Guests at the book launch show the books launched.

The majority of the tea plantation workers of Bangladesh are non-Bangalee, lower caste Hindu, Adivasis, Bihari Muslims, and their ethnic composition is unique. Society for Environment and Human Development (SEHD) has been closely following the tea workers and the tea industry for two decades now. Its latest two books—*Cha Sramiker Katha* (The Story of the Tea Workers) edited by Philip Gain and *Cha Sramiker Mojuri: Maliker Labh, Sramiker Loksan* (Wages of Tea Workers: Owners Win, Workers Lose) authored by Philip Gain—were launched on 11 November 2023.

While *Cha Sramiker Katha*

is about the overall condition of the tea workers and the tea industry of Bangladesh, the other book concentrates on the tea workers' wage issues and their unprecedented 19-day strike in August 2022 in demand for a daily cash pay of BDT 300.

A group of tea workers including their top leaders traveled to Dhaka to attend the book launch ceremony and narrated their ordeals. A panel of economists, academics, and trade union leaders spoke strongly in favour of the tea workers. They concurred with messages that the books transpire and added their insights.

“Soon after the release of the



second edition of *Cha Sramiker Katha* in 2022, an unprecedented 19-day strike appeared as an upheaval in the tea gardens. The strike came to end only after Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina intervened and fixed the daily cash wage of workers at BDT 170, a rise from BDT 120. Although this increase did not fulfill the tea workers' demand of BDT 300 in daily cash pay, the tea workers accepted it and went back to their work. *Cha Sramiker Mojuri: Maliker Labh, Sramiker Loksan* reviews and analyzes the events leading up to an unprecedented strike and thereafter," said Philip Gain, author and editor of the books and director of SEHD.

Fair wage is always the most pertinent issue and concern of the tea workers. "It is at the incitement of the owners of the tea gardens that increase of wage fell much short of what we demanded," said Nripen Paul, the acting general secretary of Bangladesh Cha Sramik Union (BCSU), the lone trade union in the tea industry. It is also the largest trade union in Bangladesh.

"We are deprived of our legitimate benefits including legal entitlements and protection," added Sreemoti Bauri, vice president of Juri Valley of BCSU, one of the seven valleys in the tea growing districts.

The second book on workers' wage and unprecedented strike of August 2022 that brought the tea industry to a standstill elaborately discusses the wage issues of the tea workers. In this book, the author explains how the owners' calculation of daily wage of a worker that amounts to more than BDT 500 (USD 4.5) is seriously flawed. Benefits that the labour

legislation allows to be added to the cash pay is less than BDT 300 (USD 2.7).

This wage is around half of what an agricultural worker in Bangladesh gets and lot less than what the lowest grade workers in other sectors get.

"The employers unjustly calculate the wages. They ignore the labour law in their calculation," said Barrister Jyotirmoy Barua, a lawyer practicing in the supreme court of Bangladesh. "This attitude of the employers must change."

On the minimum wage issue, Professor M. M. Akash, Chairman of Bureau of Economic Research (BER) of Dhaka University said, "Whenever it comes to increase the tea workers' wage, the owners say it is not possible. It is an eyewash." He directed a question to the owners, "Why, you big companies, are taking over the tea gardens if you are not making good profits? If you do not make profit, why would you invest in the tea industry?"

"Tea workers' job requires hard work. So, they should be paid enough so that they are able to nourish themselves adequately to be strong enough to work for eight hours. This major issue has to be taken into account while fixing their minimum wage," Prof. Akash added.

"An audit of profit and loss of each tea garden must be carried out and made public before the owners claim 'we are unable to pay more than this'. Because their luxurious lifestyle is telling something else," remarked the editor of United News of Bangladesh (UNB), Mr. Farid Hossain.

Prof. Akash also pointed out

how the poor economic status of the tea workers affects their fate. "If the workers had been financially well-off their 19-day strike would have lasted longer and workers could secure BDT 300 instead of BDT 170. Unfortunately, they are the 'poorest among the poor'."

Dr. Hossain Zillur Rahman, a senior economist and chair of the book launch, talked on how important it is to pay just wages to the tea workers. "We are dreaming of turning Bangladesh into a middle-income country. To see that dream come true, we must free our policy-sphere," said Dr. Rahman. "We cannot become middle-income country with cheap labour such as the tea workers."

Slashing of tea workers' arrears is another facet of deprivation alongside their unjust wage. After prime minister fixed their daily cash pay at BDT 170, on average, a tea worker was supposed to receive around BDT 30,000 in arrear for 20 months. Each got BDT 11,000 instead. "Such a big slash has been possible because of maneuvering of the employers and failure of the union leaders in the tea sector," Prof. Akash observed.

"The tea workers do not have much liberty to choose their work independently outside the garden. To try that they have to leave their houses inside the plantation, which they cannot afford because the country outside the tea gardens is unknown to them and they are completely landless," remarked Prof. Akash. "All these factors compel them to remain tied to the tea gardens at least to secure a place to live. This condition restricts them from competing for jobs with others



outside the plantation.”

Barrister Barua echoed this land rights issue in his discussion: “If owners follow Section 32 of labour law diligently, then why do they not pay heed to the benefits provided by Fifth Schedule of the Labour Rules 2015? Law cannot be used only to the employers’ convenience. The industry will develop in the right direction only when owners will consider workers as assets, not just the gardens.”

“Two books that are launched today are encyclopedic for journalists,” observed Mr. Farid Hossain. “While exploitation and hardships of the tea workers

are documented in these books, some of their success stories are also highlighted. Our journalists should also focus and report such human-interest stories of the tea workers.”

On the significance of struggle of the tea workers in the field, Dr. Hossain Zillur Rahman said, “When the fight in field is joined by the fight with knowledge at the national level, the voice of the tea workers gets stronger. And I think with the books launched today, we have set the stage for such a collaboration. So, let us leave this publication ceremony with a feeling of strength.”

## International Women’s Day, 2023 Celebrated in Tea Garden

A discussion and cultural programme was organized in cooperation with the premier cultural group (Pratik Theatre) in the tea estates on the occasion of International Women’s Day on 8 March 2023 in Deundi Tea Estate of Habiganj district. This celebration brought together and introduced the women tea workers with the women from the matriarchal Garo society of Modhupur and gave them an opportunity to exchange their stories.

While women tea workers from nearby tea gardens shared their stories full of sufferings, three successful Garo women entrepreneurs from Modhupur spoke about the ups and downs they faced while establishing their businesses. Caritas Bangladesh joined the program and brought 10 widows of Deundi Tea Estate and honoured

them with crests.

The local dignitaries and guests invited to the event including writer, journalists, trade union leaders and representative from MISEREOR shared their thoughts on what

“The books launched have unveiled the tea workers situation,” said Tapan Datta, a life-long labour leader and adviser to BCSU since 1970. “These publications are another struggle like that of tea workers. It is for SEHD that tea workers’ land rights issues have come to the fore.”

Among others who spoke at the book launch included Prof. Tanzimuddin Khan and Prof. Sanjida Akhter of Dhaka University; Dhona Bauri, BCSU leader; and Abdullah Kafee of CPB. □

*Report by Fahmima Afroze Nadia with Philip Gain*

should be done for change in lives of these marginalized women.

The artists of Pratik Theatre showcased their colourful cultural performance—dance, songs, recitation and stage drama—depicting the hardships of the tea workers and the cultural riches of the tea communities. □



Artists of Pratik Theatre performing on stage. Credit. Philip Gain

# Research and Analysis



Research staff interviewing Harijan women in Rajshahi.

**B**uilding research-based community and issue-centric agenda is a key activity of the project. Eight community-based agenda will be developed on Adivasis (ethnic communities), tea workers, sex workers and transgender, Rishi and Kaiputra, Harijans, Bede (gypsies) and Bihari. Two areas of issue-centric agenda are land rights and forests and commons and identity, state recognition and discrimination elimination. Other research and study on beneficiaries are also carried out in parallel under BRC.

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

Consultations have been organized with (i) Bede (gypsy), (ii) Harijan (cleaners) and (iii) Adivasis (ethnic communities) for building three community agenda in the second year of the project ending in November 2023. During the first year of the project, consultations had been

organized with (i) tea workers, (ii) Rishi (cobbler) and Kaiputra (pig rearing community), and (iii) sex workers and transgender. Two consultations and adequate number of FGDs and KIIs have been organized for each agenda.

Community representatives, local politicians, government officials, and human rights defenders came together in these consultations, brainstormed, and had elaborate discussion on their difficulties, needs and aspirations, and put forward recommendations to state agencies, non-government organizations, academics and universities, researchers, and for themselves. A survey among each community has followed the consultations to generate quantitative data in support of qualitative data and case documentation.

One out of two consultations on issue-centric agenda on identity, state recognition and

discrimination elimination was held during the second year in Dhaka. Twenty-eight participants represented Rishi, Kaiputra, Bede, Adivasi, sex workers, transgender, and Harijan (cleaners) communities. Civil society organizations and organizers represented Caritas Development Institute (CDI), Power and Participation Research Centre (PPRC), Dhaka University, and SEHD. Participants shared their insights on difficulties, needs and recommendations for all stakeholders. Previously, two consultations on land rights and forests and commons were organized during the first year of the project.

## **Validation Workshops for Community Agenda:**

Two validation workshops for community agenda—one on sex workers and transgender and the other on Rishi and Kaiputra—and one on issue-centric agenda on land rights and forests and commons were organized during the second year of the project. A validation workshop is the final consultation with the respective community members before making a community-based or issue-centric agenda final. The outline of each agenda that accommodates data, analyses, insights, life stories, etc. derived from consultations, FGDs, KIIs and survey was presented in each of the day-long validation workshops. The participants shared their opinions, observations and added new points and gave their consent for making the agenda final.





Group work during consultation with Bede community in Savar.

### Consultation on

**Sustainability of BRC:** Thirty-three persons representing the tea workers, sex workers, transgender, Adivasis, Rishi, Kaiputra, Bede, Harijan, Bihari, different community-based organizations (CBOs), civil society organizations (CSOs) and project personnel joined a day-long consultation on community potentials on September 5, 2023 in Dhaka.

All these communities have potentials indeed. Their representatives shared their knowledge, experiences and thoughts on their potentials. No matter how marginal and excluded a community such as Kaiputra (who rear pigs in the open field), Rishi (cobbler), Bede, Bawm, Garo, Khasi, sex workers, Bihari and transgender may be, each has its own technologies, education, history and occupational skills that can be utilized for their empowerment. Research and documentation on these potentials, an important action of BRC, has been building knowledge resources, that properly used, also has business potentials and selling points.

The diverse communities that BRC partners with, have demonstrated skills and innovations in agriculture, craftsmanship,

fishing, raising cattle including pigs, revolutionizing beauty industry (Garo women playing pioneering role), manufacture of Benarashi (special skills of the Biharis), tree plantation for timber (particularly in the Chittagong Hill Tracts), manufacture of made tea (tea workers' exclusive skills) and cultural riches. The participants were guided in discussion on how they can engage in research on these skills so that special skills and potentials that each community possesses are not lost and can be fully utilized for their economic, social and cultural benefits.

The participants also had a discussion on how to promote community potentials and how the knowledge outputs generated from research can be shared with communities and marketed with wider public. This consultation is one of five (three are pending) in a series that will lead up to preparation of a sustainability strategy paper for BRC.

### Consultation for Study on Social Protection

Consultation for a study on social protection of the excluded and marginal communities was held on 9 September 2023. Twenty-eight participants including government officials from Department of Disaster

Management (DDM), United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), academics as well as representatives of marginalized communities and their community-based organization (CBO), staff of Society for Environment and Human Development (SEHD) and Power and Participation Research Centre (PPRC) attended the consultation.

The key objective of the consultation was to discuss and solicit ideas and insights about the objective of the study, its methodology, key issues involving the access situation of the excluded and marginalized communities of Bangladesh to social security programmes (SSPs) and the time frame. While the programme director Philip Gain gave an introduction to the study, Dr. Hossain Zillur Rahman, research advisor of the programme, briefly explained the goals of the study and moderated the discussion. Participants shared their insights and suggestions on sampling, variables for the questionnaire, data collection method and training of enumerators.

### Scoping study on tea workers of Bangladesh:

A study, 'Tea Workers in Bangladesh: Realities and Challenges' in collaboration with NAZDEEK Inc. and SEHD was completed in the early 2023. The study based on survey of 400 tea workers—294 of them women—has generated robust database on the tea workers in Bangladesh, their work and work conditions, challenges they face at work, wage deprivation, violation of labour legislation, health conditions and medical care and social security in tea gardens and recommendations were developed for the concerned actors and authorities. □

# Investigation

**Social Forestry and its impact on Modhupur sal forest:** Social forestry to grow fuelwood and timber in Modhupur sal forest and other forest areas is very controversial initiated back in 1989-1990 with funding support from Asian Development Bank. Such social forestry, which is actually plantation, required clearing of patches of natural sal forest. In the trail of its study of forestry projects, the underlying factors for deforestation, SEHD initiated an investigation into controversial and the largest ever forestry project, Sustainable Forest and livelihoods (SUFAL) funded by the World Bank. An investigative op-ed was published in the most leading national daily English newspaper, *The Daily Star* on 21 March 2023. Internet link to the report: <https://www.thedailystar.net/opinion/views/news/expand-social-protection-the-new-year-3210336> Internet link to the Bangla edition of the report also published in *The Daily Star* online Bangla: <https://bangla.thedailystar.net/opinion/views/news-436106>.

**Tea workers' arrears slashed by two-thirds:** In the trail of investigation into the unprecedented strike from August 9 to 27 in 2022 that resulted in a wage increase, the project staff closely followed the arrear issue. The labour ministry, to the great shock of the tea workers trimmed a tea worker's average arrear to Taka 11,000 (USD 100) from Taka 30,000 (USD 270). This arrear for around 100,000 workers is calculated for nearly 20 months from January 1, 2021 to August 27, 2022. An investigative op-ed on this arrear issue was published in *The Daily Star* on 29 January 2023 Internet link to report: <https://www.thedailystar.net/opinion/views/news/no-justice-paying-tea-workers-arrears-3232926> Link to the Bangla edition of the write-up also published in *The Daily Star Bangla* online: <https://bangla.thedailystar.net/opinion/views/news-445531>

**Social protection:** Social Safety Net Programmes (SSNPs) are specific schemes to provide support in finances and services to the marginalized people. There are allegations of anomalies and irregularities in terms of selection of beneficiaries, disbursement of the cash/benefit, budget allocation for non-poor, etc. Specific cases were investigated, SSNPs dedicated to the excluded and marginalized communities were analysed and recommendations for expansion of social protection have been developed for the government to consider. An investigative op-ed was published on 1 January 2023 in *The Daily Star*. Internet link to the



A social forestry participant at harvest time on her plot. Credit: Philip Gain

**Reproductive health risks for women in tea gardens:** Fifty-one percent of 138,000 tea workers in 159 tea gardens in the Northeast and Southeast of Bangladesh are women. These women, who work in indecent conditions due to the routine violation of the labour legislation in several counts, work harder and longer hours than men. They are the ones doing the most laborious job in the tea gardens—plucking the tea leaf. They 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). This long and laborious work make these women tea workers susceptible to reproductive health risks. An investigative op-ed on this was published in *The Daily Star* on 8 March 2023. Internet link to the English report: <https://www.thedailystar.net/opinion/views/lets-talk-about-it/news/why-do-women-tea-gardens-face-higher-reproductive-health-risks-3265511>

Internet link to the Bangla edition: <https://bangla.thedailystar.net/opinion/views/news-458306>

**Tea workers' wages finalized:** After the unprecedented 19-day strike in tea gardens in August 2022 led the prime minister to make move





Mithila Nayek is sitting on the root of a mahogany tree waiting for a CNG with her newborn an hour and half after the delivery. Credit: Philip Gain

and fix the daily cash wage of the tea workers at Tk 170 per day for ‘A’ class gardens, Tk 169 for ‘B’ class and Tk 168 for ‘C’ class gardens. But a gazette formalising the wage structure was published only on 10 August 2023, almost a year after the prime minister’s decision going into effect on 28 August 2022. Why did the Minimum Wage Board take so long to publish a gazette? An investigative op-ed was published in *The Daily Star* on 24 August 2023. Link to the English report : <https://www.thedailystar.net/opinion/views/news/owners-win-workers-lose-3402171> Link to the Bangla edition : <https://bangla.thedailystar.net/opinion/views/news-508676> □

## New Arrivals

### Modhupur—Aronner Artonad:

It is an updated Bangla edition of the book, *Modhupur—The Vanishing Forest and Her People in Agony*, published in 2019. It compiles findings of a baseline survey carried out in 2017-2018, reportage, features and photographs taken from early 1990s. The survey

of 44 core forest villages present baseline data and analyses on the current demographic features. The reports, features, and photographs show unprecedented devastation of the Modhupur sal forest. Pages 172, PBK, Price: BDT 500.

### Bangladesher Prantik O Bichhinno Jonogoshthi O Tader Challenge (Report O Bisleshon):

It is an updated Bangla edition of *State of the Excluded and Marginalized Communities*. It compiles research articles, investigative reports, opinion pieces and analyses focused on ethnic communities, tea workers,



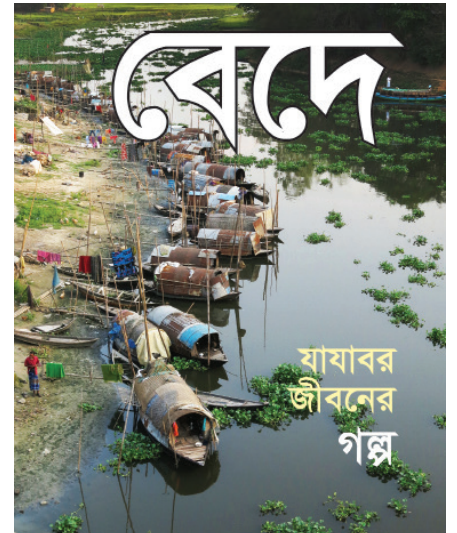
Bede, Rishi, Harijan, Jaladas, sex workers, transgender, Kaiputra (pig rearing community) and Biharis. The contributors to this report participated in research and investigation on these communities and have based their write-ups on analyses and findings from the field. The write-ups, therefore, are original, full of anecdotes and present information, analyses, insights and facts about situations and structural abuses that these communities have been facing for generations. Pages 256, PBK, Price: BDT 400.

### Bede—Jajabar Jiboner

**Golpo:** It is Bangla edition of the monograph, *Bede—The Nomadic Existence*. It presents findings of a study on the demographic and socio-economic conditions of the community, which is a valuable addition to the academic and public understanding of the Bede of Bangladesh. Pages 64, PBK, Price: BDT 100.

### Kaiputra—Shukor Chorano

**Gosthi:** It is Bangla edition of the monograph, *Kaiputra—A Pig Rearing Community*. It compiles fresh finds from a study on the life and struggle of the Kaiputras who rear pigs in the open fields and their







community. A good number of investigative reports and features compiled show human interest aspects particularly of the owners of the pig herds and the rakhals, who live with the pigs. Pages 80, PBK, Price: BDT 100.

**Cha Sramiker Katha:** This is an updated second edition (Bangla) of the book (first edition published in 2009). The book is on the overall condition of the tea workers and the tea industry of Bangladesh. This is for a wide range of users and actors who want to understand the issues relating to the tea plantation workers and how the tea industry is run. Pages 448, PBK, Price: BDT 400.

**Cha Sramiker Mojuri—Maliker Labh, Sramiker Loksan:** This book compiles the investigative op-eds and write-ups that the author

has written since the formation of the Minimum Wage Board in 2019 to fix the tea workers' wage structure. The information, analyses and opinions found in these writings, a keynote paper that author shared in dialogue and reports of two dialogues compiling opinions and insights of various parties and individuals, including the owners of the tea gardens, help understand the complexities of the tea workers' wages.

The author has highlighted in various ways the significance of implementation of the labor legislations, responsibility of the concerned state agencies to do away with discrimination in the labor law and the employers' obligations. The author has also highlighted the sympathy we have seen among many, including the prime minister, towards the tea workers. Pages 128, PBK, Price: BDT 200. □



## Training and Coordination

Aiming at strengthening understanding and thinking ability about exclusion challenges, exploring solutions and building skills in research and documentation, five residential trainings were organized during the second year of the project. The participants to these trainings were mostly community leaders, officials of CBOs and CSOs, researchers, human rights defenders, trade union leaders from the tea gardens and women sex workers and transgender. Brief reports follow:

### Trade Union and Panchayet Leaders in Tea Gardens

**Trained:** A three-day residential workshop on “Strengthening skills and capacity of the tea workers in securing rights” was organized from 28 to 30 May 2023 in Sreeemangal of Moulvibazar district.

Twenty-five participants to the workshop included mostly tea workers and leaders of Bangladesh Cha Sramik Union (BCSU), the lone trade union in the tea sector and community leaders and health

workers from 10 tea gardens in Moulvibazar and Habiganj districts. Of 21 participants 15 were women.

Skills and capability of actors are crucial in claiming rights. The participants engaged in exercise to identify their challenges and needs, raise voice and be bold, think clear, educate themselves, understand own condition, engage in action research and analysis, dialogue and build capacity.

SEHD officials, a senior trade union leader, a local CSO official





Two government officials with participants of workshop for tea workers.

and four government officials from the Department of Inspection for Factories and Establishments (DIFE), Upazila Women Affairs' Office, Department of Social Services (DSS) and Divisional Labour Office (Sreemangal) ran different sessions to refresh the participants about their rights and the responsibilities of the state agencies and different other parties to lift the tea workers out of their current condition.

The participants also visited a tea garden that had as many as 80 leprosy cases at some point for case documentation and writing report. This was a hands-on training for developing skills in documentation.

### **Rights Defenders and Development Actors Trained:**

A three-day residential workshop on “Skills in Research-based Approaches in Services to the Marginalized Communities” was organized from 25 to 27 September 2023 in Dhaka. This was a hands-on training for developing skills in research and documentation. Of 25 participants seven were female and 18 male representing community based organizations from among the Garo, Khasi, Munda, Rishi, Jaladas, Bihari, Paharia, Chakma,

Mandraji, Oraon, Santal and Gour communities and officials from the Rangamati Khudra Nrigoshthi Sangskritik Institute and a few national NGOs.

That developing skills in research and analysis is crucial to work efficiently with the marginalized and excluded communities was discussed at length. The participants were engaged in exercises and discussions to identify their challenges, needs and potentials in work with the marginalized communities, develop intellectual clarity about exclusion challenges in Bangladesh, learn how to engage fruitfully in research and documentation, think clear, and learn strategies of research-based advocacy.

SEHD director, executive chairman of PPRC, a development consultant, two lawyers of the Supreme Court of Bangladesh, a former director general of Bangladesh Bureau of Statistics (BBS), additional director of Department of Social Services (DSS) ran different sessions to refresh the participants about the condition of the marginalized and excluded communities and shared skills in research, investigation, documentation and understanding

local and international laws and instruments. Other issues explained and the participants engaged in were importance of building knowledge resources, organizational capacity building, social security, and capacity building.

### **Bede Community Leaders**

**Trained:** Twenty-one Bede (gypsy) community leaders—12 from Savar and nine from Munshiganj district—joined a three-day residential workshop from 15 to 17 October 2023 in Savar, Dhaka. The participants including seven women represented sardars (leaders), students and community leaders.

Analysis of the unique situation and difficulties of the community overwhelmingly landless and facing unique challenges in taking advantage of the country's progress was the focus of the workshop. Then the participants were oriented on action research, case documentation, necessity of organizational capacity, and social security issues.

On the final day of the workshop each participant got engaged in an actual survey and KII. They went around four Bede hamlets in Ward No. 1 of Savar Municipality and Uttaran Palli (a government-financed housing scheme) and interviewed 40 individuals



A Hijra leader speaks in the workshop of sex workers and Hijra.



Participants in the residential workshop of the Kaiputra and Rish.

with structured questionnaires. These questionnaires, along with another 60, will be tabulated and the data will be used for building a community agenda on the Bede.

SEHD director, executive chairman of PPRC, a development consultant, an official of the Department of Social Services (DSS) and a Bede leader who is also the lone ward councillor from the Bede community ran different sessions at the workshop.

### **Training of Sex Workers and Hijra on Social Security:**

Leaders of sex workers, Hijra and transgender were given a training on social security on 30 and 31 October 2023 in Dhaka. This was a hands-on training for developing skills in study, analysis and documentation. The participants included nine office bearers of brothel-based CBOs, nine Hijra and transgender representing nine of their organizations and three sex workers.

Shared expectations of the participants included learning organizational capacity building skills and research techniques, understanding social security issues and laws and policies related to the protection of the sex workers and transgender,

exploring ways and means of rehabilitation and alternative employment among others.

The participants indeed learned some lessons, skills and techniques for building their individual and organizational capacity, writing simple reports, engaging in action research, raising voice, and understanding laws and policies that relate to them.

SEHD director, executive chairman of PPRC, country director of the UNAIDS, an official of the Department of Social Services (DSS), a senior journalist and researcher and a development consultant ran different sessions at the workshop.

### **Rishi and Kaiputra Leaders**

**Trained:** Twenty community leaders including six women from among Rishi, Kaiputra, Poudra and Bangalee communities joined a residential workshop in Dhaka on 25 and 26 November 2023. They included officials of 14 CBOs, one CSO, community leaders and one journalist.

Developing skills in research, analysis and case documentation, building knowledge resources and community empowerment

are crucial to work efficiently with the marginalized and excluded communities. The participants were engaged in this hands-on training to articulate their expectations and challenges and analysis of their strengths and weaknesses, and situation. A significant part of the training was devoted to imparting skills in study and case documentation, learning how to engage in research-based educational activities and push for rights-based approaches.

SEHD director, executive chairman of PPRC, a development consultant, a lawyer of the Supreme Court of Bangladesh, an official of the Department of Social Services (DSS) and a development consultant ran different sessions of the workshop.

### **Coordination meetings of working committee of BRC:**

Two coordination meetings scheduled for the second year were held on 15 April and 30 November 2023 respectively. Fifty-five participants attending the meetings represented communities, academics, CSOs and CBOs. All project personnel also attended these meetings. These routine meetings were organized to update the working committee members and the staff on the progress of the project activities and solicit suggestions and insights for their effective engagement in research, analysis, training, consultation, and other events. Lessons learned so far, sustainability challenge of BRC and its actions, formalizing solidarity networks, monitoring and evaluation of the project were also discussed in the day-long coordination meetings. □



## Annual Meeting of BRC



Participants at annual meeting

Thirty-five participants representing the tea workers' trade union, community-based organizations (CBOs), civil society organizations (CSOs), working committee members and staff of Brattyajan Resource Centre (BRC) came together in Dhaka on 12 November 2023 for the second yearly annual meeting of the project. While Dr. Hossain Zillur Rahman, research adviser to BRC, chaired the meeting, Philip Gain, programme director of BRC, facilitated it.

The participants were appraised of the progress of the project during the second year. Some outstanding issues including sustainability and evaluation of BRC and ideas for the next phase of the project were also discussed with participants. They shared their suggestions on these outstanding issues and on activities during the third year.

BRC is a project anchored with Society for Environment and Human Development (SEHD). The participants felt there are challenges of institutionalizing BRC as a national center and ensuring equal participation of communities that BRC serves. A proper evaluation and design of actions in the right direction in the following phase are important, felt the participants. □

## The Project: The Year Ahead

The third year of the project, 'Promoting human rights of marginalized groups in Bangladesh through Brattyajan Resource Centre' is going to be eventful. Here are highlights of what are going to be happening:

**Research:** The single most important research is a study on access situation of the final beneficiary groups of the project to Social Security Programs (SSPs). The study with a sample of 2,500 from eight community clusters will be a joint research with communities led by PPRC and SEHD. Three studies left for building community agenda and issue-centric agenda for the third year are on (i) Jaladas, (ii) Biharis, and (iii) Identity, state recognition and discrimination elimination. Significant studies for the third volume of the 'State of the Excluded and Marginalized Communities' will also be carried out.

**Publications and productions:** Key publications and productions during the third year are: (1) six group-specific agenda on Adivasis, tea workers, Harijans, Bede (gypsy), Jaladas and Bihari, (2) two issue-centric agenda on land rights and forests and identity, state recognition and discrimination elimination, (3) third volume of State of the Excluded and Marginalized Communities, (4) research paper on social protection in Bangladesh, (5) research report on the access situation of BRC final beneficiary groups to SSPs (6) one documentary film on social security of Kaiputra and Rishi

in particular, (7) one exhibition catalogue and three posters, (8) strategy paper on sustainability of SEHD and BRC as its trust, (9) partner directory for use of human rights defenders within Bangladesh and outside.

These publications and productions added to the ones from the past two years will guide community leaders, human rights defenders and other actors to engage with enough understanding and intellectual clarity with the marginalized and excluded communities.

**Investigations:** Areas of fresh investigations include but not limited to: labour and wage issues in tea industry, maternal health and human rights concerns in the tea gardens, leprosy in the tea gardens, follow-up of World Bank-funded SUFAL (attention to Modhupur and Sylhet Division), life and plights of the Harijans, and Kaiputra (pig rearing community) at a crossroads.

**Capacity building:** Three capacity building workshops will be organized—one with CBOs, CSOs and activists among indigenous and marginalized communities, one with Harijans, and one with cultural groups from among the Adivasi and marginalized groups.

**Celebration of the labour day:** Probable celebration of the international day is Labour Day (1 May 2024) to highlight the post-slavery innovations enslaving people or communities. The tea workers tied to the tea gardens and sex workers trapped in modern slavery will be highlighted

during the celebration.

### **Convention, cultural festival, and photography exhibition:**

A convention piggybacked with cultural festival and photography exhibition will be organized in the fourth quarter of the year ending in November 2024. This will be an event for sharing of knowledge resources and celebration of accomplishment. This event will also commemorate 30<sup>th</sup> anniversary of SEHD.

**Small grants:** Joyenshahi Adivasi Unnayan Parishad in Modhupur, Prothik Theatre based in Deundi Tea Garden, Paritran, and Koch Community Development Association have received small grants so far. Each grant is Tk 125,000 (one lac twenty-five thousand). Another four grants can be awarded during the third year. Organizations interested can apply in prescribed form.

### **Coordination meeting:**

One coordination meeting will be organized during the third year. The probable time for this meeting is May. The working committee members of Brattyajan Resource Centre (BRC) and select expert will join the meeting and advise the project staff to successfully complete the activities with precision. □



Academics, economists and policy makers at a consultation for study on social protection at PPRC.

## **SCCF Officials Visit Tea Gardens**

Three officials of Caritas France (SCCF)—Francesca Bombi (Head, Department of Asia and Eastern Europe), Benoit Xavier (Director, International Action and Advocacy Division), and Rediet KABETA (Project Manager, Department of Asia)—visited the tea gardens and the office of Society for Environment and Human Development (SEHD) on 12 and 13 September 2023.

Accompanied by four SEHD officials—Philip Gain (Director), Fahmida Afroze Nadia (Researcher), Rabiullah (Program and Resource Officer), and Prodip Paul Rozario (Accounts Assistant)—and the field staff, Caritas France officials, on the first day, visited the labour lines of Deundi Tea Estate, had meeting with the beneficiaries of the project and visited a spot

in Chandpore Tea Estate where the government wanted to build an economic zone in 2015-16, but retreated in the face of tea workers' non-violent resistance.

On the second day, they visited the SEHD's local office in Sreemangal, had a meeting with the project staff and volunteers, had discussion on the progress of the project, success, uniqueness thereof and challenges. The team had an opportunity to visit a second tea garden in Sreemangal (Zareen Tea Estate), its factory and met the manager, a remote top management official of a tea garden. The team was highly pleased and amused to see the entire made tea production process in a factory. In a meeting with the central committee leaders of Bangladesh Cha Sramik Union (BCSU), the team got an impression of SEHD's presence and impact among the tea workers and their communities. □



Caritas France officials during their visit to Deundi and Chandpore Tea Estates.

## **Solidarity with tea workers on May Day 2023**

The officials joined the May Day assembly organized by Bangladesh Cha Sramik Union (BCSU), the largest of the trade unions in Bangladesh on May 1, 2023, the International Workers' Day. Around 5,000 workers assembled on the occasion organized in Sreemangal. Support [including financial] was also provided to another assembly of around 6,000 tea workers to commemorate 'Mulluk Cholo Andolon' on 21 May 2023.