

# Social Security for Dalits and Marginalised People



Prothom Alo and the National Forum for Social Protection organised a roundtable titled "National Social Security Strategy: Inclusion of Dalits and Marginalised Communities" on March 30, 2017. The programme was supported by Manusher Jonno Foundation (MJF) and DFID. Here we publish a summary of the discussions.

Shaheen Anam, Executive Director, Manusher Jonno Foundation



*We have drafted 'Anti-Discrimination Act' to eliminate every form of discrimination. We urge the government to pass it in the upcoming parliamentary session.*

In Bangladesh, social security schemes are complicated as these programmes are distributed among various ministries. In 2015, the National Social Security Strategy (NSSS) of Bangladesh was approved in the cabinet under a social development framework. With the goal of streamlining the chaotic situation, the programme has brought all the social schemes of the government under one umbrella. The most important issue for us is the rights, equality and justice aspect, which this initiative will ensure.

It does not only cover the backward community but also other marginalised communities such as untouchables, sex workers and transgender communities. But there is always a gap between policy and implementation. However, the government is currently sketching the road map to implement the strategy. Manusher Jonno Foundation is implementing the civil society part of the SGSP project with its 12 associated organisations. We have established a National Forum for Social Protection (NFSP). Its main aim is to engage and ensure the communication between local level beneficiaries and government officials so that the problems and experiences can be shared with the authorities. We are using social accountability tools in this regard and piloting the Grievance Redress System (GRS). It has yielded a positive result.

Today, we are talking about inclusion and empowerment of Dalits and marginalised communities. They suffer due to harsh attitudes of the society towards them. We have drafted the 'Anti-Discrimination Act' to eliminate every form of discrimination. It has already been submitted to the Ministry of Law, Justice and Parliamentary Affairs. We urge the government to pass it in the upcoming parliamentary session. Our Constitution clearly speaks of equal rights and dignity for all. We urge the government to increase budgetary allocation to improve the condition of these marginalised communities. The government allocates huge funds for different social security projects. But there is a lack in monitoring of how these funds are spent. We need strong monitoring mechanisms to ensure proper distribution of these funds to the target population.

Khandakar Rezwanul Karim, Program Coordinator, Manusher Jonno Foundation



*We do not have any clear statistics about the number of Dalits. According to the Social Welfare Ministry, however, there are 6.368 million Dalits in different districts of Bangladesh.*

Dalit community in Bangladesh is neglected and deprived and the cause of this deprivation is enrooted in their identity at birth. We do not have any clear statistics about their number.

According to the Social Welfare Ministry, however, there are 6.368 million Dalits in different districts of Bangladesh. We conducted a study on 2,000 households of seven marginalised communities and found that their access to social security programmes is only 7.31 percent while the national coverage rate is 24.57 percent. In the 2016-2017 budget, the total allocation in this sector was Tk. 45, 230 crore, which is 13.28 percent of the total budget. It is increasing gradually. The number of total beneficiaries of the social safety programmes is around 4.42 million people. The social security strategy follows a life cycle approach which covers all the aspects of a person's life. The Social Security Strategy paper 2015 is aimed at streamlining scattered projects into five clusters while demanding a special programme for them. The government has provided various quota facilities for candidates from the dalit communities.

In a recent study conducted by Manusher Jonno Foundation, we found that they face problems such as discrimination in being selected for benefits or getting services due to religious, ethnic and professional identities. Moreover, financial corruption, lack of representation of Dalits, lack of mobilization of the community and lack of adequate information about these communities.

We recommended that people from these backward communities should be included in the selection process of beneficiaries of the social security programmes. They should be given preferences in these schemes. In the implementation process of these programmes, the government can also involve NGOs. There should be massive campaign create awareness among the people of marginalised communities. There should be a grievance management system in place to address the sufferings of these people.

Nirmal Das, General Secretary, Bangladesh Horijan Oikya Parishad



*Despite being qualified, our children do not get jobs due to their social identity. There should be a mass campaign to remove such social stigmas.*

The total number of Horijans in Bangladesh is around 1.5 million. We are socially ostracized. We do not get access to hotel and housing facilities. Most of the members of our community are engaged as cleaners. Unfortunately, our tradition job of cleaning is also being encroached upon by others. Though the current prime minister committed on a reservation of 80 percent quota for this community in cleaning works, it is not being implemented properly. A similar situation exists in social security programmes. Though there are quotas for Horijans in these programmes, they are largely deprived of it due to widespread corruption.

We have scant job opportunities in other sectors as well. Despite being qualified, our children do not get jobs due to their social identity. There should be a mass campaign to remove such social stigmas.

We applaud the government's decision to build housing facilities for sweepers of Dhaka city corporations. But there are some gaps in this project. Under this project, housing facilities will be provided only to permanent employees of the city corporations. So under this project, a large number of Horijan people will be left homeless. That's why when the plan was being prepared, representatives from our community should have been engaged.

Bikash Das, Project Coordinator, Paritran



*We demand formation of a parliamentary caucus to discuss the problems faced by dalits. There should be reserve seats for Dalit communities in the parliament.*

Though our Constitution ensures equality for all, we do not see it in practice. There is no legal mechanism to address discrimination. In an incident in Keshabpur, the body of a member of the Risi community was not allowed to be cremated in the public crematory. There are also stories of students from the Dalit community being forced to clean toilets in a school. When we take these issues to Court, we do not get proper justice as there is no law regarding discrimination faced by these marginalised communities.

When we nominate candidates from our community for election, we face vehement opposition from the majority community. And still, we have successfully elected 11 UP members in the recent elections.

Still we do not know the exact quota for dalits. Where will the students go if there is no reservation in the job sector for these people?

People of the Dalit community face various kinds of sexual harassment. This is worse in the rural area as they are scared to even speak about it.

We demand formation of a parliamentary caucus to discuss the problems faced by dalits. There should be reserve seats for Dalit communities in the parliament and specific mention about the Dalit community should be made in the Five-Year plan.

NIDs should include the professions of the Harijan and Dalit communities so that they can be identified easily.

Moni Rani Das, General Secretary, BDERM



*We are landless people. If under the housing scheme the government provides us land we can repay the money in installments.*

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The situation of Dalit women is worse. There is high prevalence of child marriages in this community. Dalit women are also economically disempowered. There should be special schemes to address the plights of Dalit women. They should be given training on various skills.

We urge the government to pass the anti-discrimination law immediately. There should be reserved seats for women from our community in the Parliament so that we can voice our demands.

Adv. Ruhi Naz Subhan, Research Initiatives Bangladesh



*We need to sensitise government officers and local government representatives about the rights of marginalised people.*

We conduct participatory action research among the marginalised communities to have a clear idea about their concerns and to identify priorities. We found that though there are many good proposals in the paper there is little implementation of it at the grassroots level. Recently, I visited a remote village in Rangpur and found that there were only two toilets for 70 marginalised families in the area. When we talked to the local administration, they seemed completely unaware about the plight of this community. That's why we need to sensitise government officers and local government representatives about the rights of marginalised people.

We also need to empower the marginalised communities to raise their voice. We have to encourage them to use the RTI Act, as this will help ensure accountability and monitoring in the implementation of social security net projects.

Abdul Awal, Executive Director, NRDS, Member, National Forum for Social Protection (NFSP)



*We urged the government to establish a single registry system for social security programmes. It will help avoid duplication and ensure proper distribution.*

It is definitely an achievement to have a social security strategy to address the sufferings of marginalised communities. Despite efforts from the government and non-government organisations, a large number of marginalised people are deprived of social security facilities. There are also gaps in coordination among different social security projects. We urged the government to establish a single registry system for social security programmes. It will help avoid duplication and ensure proper distribution. At the local level, local representatives control distribution of quota facilities. There is no accountability system in this process. There should also be a system through which marginalised people can apply for social security benefits. The list of the applicants and beneficiaries would be presented in a public forum. The government should also increase its allocation for social security programmes to three percent of the GDP.

Shafiqul Islam, Country Director, ADD International Bangladesh chapter, Member, National forum for social protection (NFSP)



*People with disability among the marginalised community are treated even worse. We do not have exact data about their total number.*

There are also Muslims in Dalit community, who are often excluded from the discourse. We need to also consider these people when focusing on this issue.

We need to take this discussion to the local level and create awareness about the rights of the Dalit community.

There is also stratification among the marginalised community. People with disability among the marginalised community are treated even worse. We do not have exact data about their total number. We need disaggregated data to ensure proper targeting. Maybe we could conduct mapping of the Dalit community all over the country so that we can identify the concentration of these communities and focus on their specific problems.

Sanjib Drong, President, Indigenous Peoples Development Services (IPDS)



*We urge the government to employ honest and sensitised officers in tribal areas.*

Special efforts should be made to empower the marginalised communities. We have been demanding for the adoption of a tribal policy for the indigenous communities of plain land for a long time. People from the community should be involved in formulating the policy. There should also be a separate land commission for them because the indigenous community mostly suffers from land related problems.

We have observed that government officers are often transferred to tribal areas as 'punishment'. As the officers lack compassion to the reality of indigenous people, it exacerbates the problem. We urge the

government to change this practice and employ honest and sensitised officers in tribal areas.

Dr. Nazneen Ahmed, Senior Research Fellow, Bangladesh Institute of Development Studies (BIDS)



*We should include a chapter on communal harmony and elimination of discrimination in our school syllabus.*

In my research, I always focus on the issue of Dalits, and that should be the case in all development research work.

We should include a chapter on communal harmony and elimination of discrimination in our school syllabus.

We now have a database at the upazila level. The list of beneficiaries should be uploaded in the database so that we can avoid corruption. There should be a quota in skill training centres because many marginalised students cannot even hope to study in higher educational institutions.

We have to also change our attitude toward marginalized communities, and this change starts from home.

Dr. Shantanu Majumder, Associate Professor, Dhaka University



*The government has to take a political decision that the social security fund is not embezzled for political interest.*

The government has to take a political decision that the social security fund is not embezzled for political interest.

A research conducted showed that there is very little communication between students of the majority and minority communities. This needs to change. We should first focus on public universities to create awareness and sensitise students, as these young men and women are our future leaders.

Aroma Dutta, Executive Director, PRIP Trust



*Women from marginalised communities should be given priority when disbursing SME funds.*

The discrimination suffered by marginalised communities often results into their economic disempowerment. The government should channel its funds to create economic opportunities for these people. Women from marginalised communities should be given priority when disbursing SME funds.

The rights issues of marginalised people should be included in our national curriculum. There should also be a parliamentary caucus to address the problems of marginalised communities.

Naved Chowdhury, Poverty and Social Protection Adviser, DFID-Bangladesh



*The most pressing need is access to nutrition. I would urge the government to ensure that marginalised communities get proper nutrition.*

We have provided training to many government officials in the last five years. I feel that we have to invest more in creating awareness and sensitising them, because if they do not treat every person equally, we will not be able to effectively implement our social safety net programmes. This initiative should come from the top level of the administration.

We also need an effective grievance mechanism system. There is provision for this in the A21 programme.

At the moment, I think the most pressing need is access to nutrition. I would urge the government to ensure that marginalised communities get proper nutrition.

Abu Mohammed Yusuf, Joint Secretary Director (Program), Social Welfare Department



*I firmly believe that NGOs can help us achieve the goal.*

We are trying to gradually increase the allocation for marginalised communities in the social security programme.

## RECOMMENDATIONS

- Immediately pass the Anti Discrimination Act to eliminate every form of discrimination.
- Allocate more funds for socially excluded and marginalised people.
- Implement special preference condition for marginalised people in social security programmes.
- Establish a separate user friendly Grievance Redress System (GRS) for social security programmes.
- NGOs should be involved in the implementation of social security

- programmes.
- Ensure housing facilities for the marginalised people.
- Form a parliamentary caucus to discuss the problems faced by Dalits.
- Establish a single registry system for social security programmes to avoid duplication and to ensure proper distribution.
- Conduct mapping of the Dalit community.
- Ensure access to proper nutrition for

First, we need to change the mindset of the public. Under the guidance of the Cabinet Division, the social security strategy has clearly directed how we can work to achieving this goal. We cannot do it alone. I firmly believe that NGOs can help us achieve the goal.

Rasheda K. Choudhury, Executive Director, CAMPE, Convener, National Forum for Social Protection (NFSP)



*We have to expand stipend facilities for maginalised communities in the unreachable areas. The government should allocate a budget for the project.*

It is an achievement that now we are more aware about the problems of the Dalit people. We need to do more, however, particularly when it comes to their inclusion in school curricula. We have included the issue in our teacher's training curriculum but have to do so in our civil administration training curriculum.

We have to expand stipend facilities for maginalised communities in the unreachable areas. Some NGOs are working there, but the government should allocate a budget for the project. The government should allocate more funds for the schools of marginalised people.

We further urge the government to increase funds for research in the social security sector, as we need disaggregated data on these communities.

The government should also finalise the policy for plain land indigenous people. We have to ensure participation of the marginalised community when preparing policies for them. This forum is fully agreed to support the government in this aspect.

M A Mannan MP, Honorable State Minister, Ministry of Finance and Planning



*The government is expanding the mid-meal programme in schools to address nutrition issues. In the next budget, we will allocate more funds for socially excluded and marginalised people.*

Recently, the ECNEC passed a proposal for a project submitted by the Mayor of Dhaka North City Corporation to build a multi-storied building for the cleaners of the city corporation, which would include a high school and playground for children. Thus, I believe we are in the right track.

I think that the RTI Act is an important tool and it should be used to make the marginalised communities aware about their legal rights.

I will definitely look into the concern of discrimination against these communities. Non-discrimination against marginalised communities is not an act of charity but rather their right.

We have to also strengthen our monitoring and research system so that we can correct our approach to tackling this issue. For this we could work with civil society members.

The government is expanding the mid-meal programme in schools to address nutrition issues of children, especially those belonging to marginalised communities. Moreover, I can assure that in the next budget, we will allocate more funds for socially excluded and marginalised people.

Abdul Quaiyum, Associate Editor, Prothom Alo



*Media can play a big role in creating awareness about the rights of Dalits and other marginalised groups.*

I want to thank all the discussants for their useful comments and recommendations. I hope the government will sincerely consider these suggestions. We believe that the government should allocate more funds for social security programmes. There should be strong collaboration between government and non-government initiatives in this regard. Media can also play a big role in creating awareness about the rights of Dalits and other marginalised groups.