

Status of Communities Discriminated on Work and Descent

The Situation of
Dalits
in Bangladesh

Country Report 2023



Global Forum of Communities Discriminated on Work and Descent (GFOD)
and
The Inclusivity Project (TIP)



Global Forum of Communities Discriminated on Work and Descent

Global Forum of Communities Discriminated on Work and Descent (GFOD), founded in 2021 is a platform to voice the rights and entitlements of the communities in Africa, Asia, Europe, Latin America and North America discriminated on work and descent. GFOD aims for full realization of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights of the Communities Discriminated on Work and Descent and to ensure access to sustainable development goals (SDGs).

<https://www.globalforumcdwd.org/>

The Inclusivity Project

The Inclusivity Project (TIP) is a non-profit organization founded to advocate for the rights of communities discriminated on work and descent (CDWD) and raise awareness on their issue. TIP works towards Capacity Building, Collaboration, and Research to support CDWD communities by enhancing the Social, Economic and Political Integration and increasing their visibility at the National, Regional and Global platforms. TIP works on the sustainable development goals (SDGs), especially on the monitoring and follow-up/review and providing data and evidence for the nation-state for effective and inclusive programme implementation.

<https://www.theinclusivityproject.org/>

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Glossary

CDWD: The term CDWD stands for Communities Discriminated based on Work and Descent. These people are treated as individuals with lower dignity and their occupations are also treated as menial in the greater society. As a result, they experience marginalization and vulnerability.

Dalit: One of the CDWD communities predominantly belonging to the lower caste of the Hindu religion from South Asian countries i.e. Bangladesh, India, Pakistan, Nepal and Sri Lanka. They can also belong to other religions.

Manual Scavenging: The act of manually cleaning, carrying, disposing of, or otherwise handling human excreta in an unsanitary latrine, an open drain or sewer, a septic tank, or a pit.

Social Discrimination: It involves denying and restricting a group of people to different privileges that are accessible to others living in society.

Forced Labour: The work that has been performed by individuals against their will in a coercive environment.

Bonded Labour: It is a specific form of forced labour that involves individuals in servitude to pay off their debt.

Treaty: The agreements between states that are formally concluded and ratified.

Social Security: Support provided by any state to groups of people who are not able to support their basic needs by themselves. The support may come in the form of monetary assistance or services.

Legal Framework: A set of documents that include the constitution, laws, policies and contracts.

Time-series survey: A research process that involves obtaining observations through repeated measurements over time and analyzing the collected data to understand the characteristics of the study population.

Abbreviation

BDERM	Bangladesh Dalit and Excluded Rights Movement
CBO	Community Based Organisation
CDWD	Communities Discriminated on Work and Descent
CEDAW	Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women
CERD	Committee on the Elimination of Racial Discrimination
CESCR	Committee on the Economic, Social and Cultural Rights
CRC	Committee on Child Rights
CSO	Civil Society Organisation
DWD	Discrimination based on Work and Descent
ESDO	Eco-Social Development Organization
FY	Fiscal Year
GDP	Gross Domestic Product
GoB	Government of Bangladesh
ICCPR	International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights
ICERD	International Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination
IDSN	International Dalit Solidarity Network
ILO	International Labour Organisation
MJF	Manusher Jonno Foundation
NGO	Non-Governmental Organisation
NHRC	National Human Rights Commission
NSSS	National Social Security Strategy
SDG	Sustainable Development Goals
UN	United Nations
UPR	Universal Periodic Review
USD	United State Dollar

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I would like to express my sincere gratitude to Mr. Paul Divakar Namala, Convenor, Global Forum of Communities Discriminated on Work and Descent for his valuable guidance on the DWD communities, their global status and areas of work at national and international levels to protect their rights.

Further, I would like to extend my deep appreciation to Mr. Aloysius Irudayam SJ and Mr. Naveen Gautam for designing the research study and for timely guidance about data collection and the process of report writing. I also would like to extend my gratitude to Ms. Sweta Ghimirey for her constant support and guidance. Moreover, I appreciate the gratefulness of Mr. Zakir Hossain, Chief Executive, Nagorik Uddyog and the leaders of Bangladesh Dalit and Excluded Rights Movement (BDERM) for their valuable guidance and support in understanding the socio-economic condition of DWD communities.

Profound thanks go to Dr. Deepak Nikarhil for meticulously editing the report in limited words and refinement of the report. I would like to acknowledge the efforts of Ms. Ishani Gupta who has proofread the report and has helped in ensuring that we have a refined document.

I would also like to acknowledge the struggle of Dalit Human Rights Defenders who have ensured that the voices of the marginalized are heard at grassroots, national, regional and global levels.

Moreover, I am thankful to report designer Mohammad Yasin and his team for their efforts in designing the entire report.

Sultan Md. Salauddin Siddique
CDWD Rights Expert, Bangladesh

Preface



Paul Divakar Namala
*Convenor, Global Forum of Communities
Discriminated on Work and Descent*

In the mosaic of cultures and communities that compose the vibrant tapestry of Bangladesh, the Dalits, which are the communities discriminated on work and descent, remains a group often relegated to the fringes of society. This report seeks to unveil the challenges faced by Dalits in Bangladesh, exploring the multifaceted aspects of their socio-economic struggles, discriminatory practices, and the urgent need for inclusive policies to break the chains that bind them.

As we delve into the narratives and experiences of Communities Discriminated on work and Descent (CDWD) in Bangladesh, it becomes evident that the echoes of historical injustices continue to reverberate through the fabric of their lives. Discrimination based on caste has persisted, impacting access to education, employment, healthcare, and political representation. Through meticulous research, personal testimonies, and a critical examination of policies, this report endeavors to provide a comprehensive understanding of the issues at hand.

The stories within these pages are not just accounts of adversity but testaments to resilience, courage, and the unwavering spirit of a community determined to overcome the barriers erected by prejudice and discrimination. By amplifying these voices, we hope to draw attention to the urgent need for concerted efforts to address the root causes of Dalit marginalization and advocate for meaningful change.

This report is not intended merely as a documentation of the challenges faced by Dalits but as a call to action for all stakeholders – from policymakers and civil society organizations to the international community – to stand in solidarity with the Dalit population in Bangladesh. The pursuit of justice, equality, and human rights requires a collective commitment to dismantling systemic barriers and fostering an environment where every individual can thrive, irrespective of their caste.

As we navigate through the following pages, let us not only acknowledge the harsh realities faced by Dalits in Bangladesh but also reflect on our shared responsibility to contribute to a society that upholds the principles of inclusivity and social justice. It is our hope that this report will serve as a catalyst for transformative change, inspiring dialogue, awareness, and tangible actions that pave the way for a more equitable and harmonious Bangladesh.

May the insights gleaned from this report foster a deeper understanding of the challenges faced by Dalits, and may it ignite the collective determination needed to break the chains of discrimination, ensuring a brighter and more inclusive future for all in Bangladesh.

Foreword



Zakir Hossain

Chief Executive, Nagorik Uddyog (NU)

Advisor, Bangladesh Dalit and Excluded Rights Movement (BDERM)

Bangladesh is the house to 5.5 – 6.5 million Dalits. The majority of them belong to the Hindu religion along with some representation from other religions including Islam, Christianity, and Buddhism. The caste hierarchy of the Hindu religion considers Dalits as inferior as they belong to the so-called lower caste of the caste pyramid. On the other hand, Dalits of all religions are treated as individuals with lower dignity due to their affiliation with so-called menial jobs such as cleaning, manual scavenging, leather processing, pig rearing, cultivating, tea planting, fishing and many other occupations. Income generation through these jobs is relatively lower and there is almost no financial security in these jobs. Injustice against Dalits based on their birth and occupation identity is historical and is also recognized as Discrimination based on Work and Descent (DWD).

Due to the socially structured and imposed discrimination, Dalits continue to suffer for hundreds of years and have been vulnerable in almost every socio-economic parameter. The constitutional guarantee of Bangladesh could not save Dalits from this systematic discrimination despite being citizens of the country. However, the irony is that the existence of the DWD is treated with utter silence or sometimes even denied.

The Dalit rights movement that started in Bangladesh relatively much later in comparison to its neighbouring countries i.e. India and Nepal is growing and gaining visibility nowadays. The rights of the Dalits, living in Bangladesh, and their participation in the development process have started gaining attention at both national and international levels from the Non-Governmental Organizations (NGOs), Civil Society Organizations (CSOs), and donors. The government of Bangladesh has also taken some steps to bring positive changes in their life. However, there is a long way to go to ensure a dignified life for Dalits in the country.

There is a real dearth of research in Bangladesh in terms of explaining the social and developmental changes happening in the country in relation to the life and livelihood of the Dalits that can play a facilitative role in carrying forward the development initiatives for Dalit and enriching the Dalit literature at the same time. The present report is prepared based on secondary data to map the situation of Dalits in Bangladesh. This report can be really helpful for someone to get an overview of Dalits' current socio-economic status and their struggle for a dignified life.

I would like to thank Mr. Sultan Md. Salauddin Siddique for his sincere effort in preparing the report. I hope this publication will help the readers to comprehend the status of Dalit rights in Bangladesh.

Executive Summary

Bangladesh, like other South Asian countries, have similar social structures of caste system, that defines the structural hierarchies in the social systems. The Dalits are the major DWD communities found in the country. They live in absolute poverty and slave-like conditions. There are various forms of discrimination which is structured upon them. Bangladesh being a Muslim-dominated community, conveniently ignores the caste structures, and thus fails to recognize 6.5 million Dalits.

These communities face various forms of modern slavery systems, such as bonded labour, forced labour, child labour, sex work, manual scavenging and other forms of menial and indecent work. They are forced into these job categories so that there is very little space for social mobility and development. The concept of purity and pollution exists within the social connections, as there is visible spatial segregation and associated discrimination to demark the Dalits from others. Further, there is a prohibition for Dalits from entering public spaces and religious places. They face prohibition in inter-dining, inter-caste marriages, buying land, selling products, renting houses and even sitting together in a public space.

The government has taken some progressive steps to address systemic discrimination through affirmative actions and targeted development policies for protection against violence. A key step in 2022, was the introduction of the Anti-Discriminatory Bill, to prevent discrimination to ensure respect for the human entity, equal rights, and dignity for all. National Social Security Strategy is targeted towards the most marginalized like Dalits, who are receiving benefits such as different allowances, stipends, housing, and other development initiatives. Furthermore, the

budget allocation for improving Dalits and other marginalized has been steadily increased by the government.

The government needs to implement policies towards ensuring Dalit issues are addressed and implemented properly. In order to ensure the protection, prevention and development of the DWD communities in Bangladesh, we recommend:

The State to produce disaggregated data on Dalits to design and implement comprehensive development initiatives backed by necessary funding.

1. The State to produce disaggregated data on Dalits to design and implement comprehensive development initiatives backed by necessary funding.
2. Allocate a reasonable amount of budget for Dalits by mentioning the word 'Dalits' so that they can come directly under the benefits
3. Formulate a policy for the comprehensive development of Dalits in Bangladesh backed by a sufficient amount of budgetary allocation.

Dalit schoolgirls are playing during the class break
in a Dalit neighborhood of Dhaka city



Photo: Md. Mahtab Hossain



Chapter 1

About Bangladesh

Bangladesh, a nation that bridges the vibrant cultures of South Asia, is a land of paradoxes and harmonies. Its name, derived from "Bangla" (the language) and "desh" (land), encapsulates the essence of a nation shaped by its linguistic and cultural heritage.

Bangladesh is strategically located in South Asia, sharing borders with India to the west, north, and east, and Myanmar (Burma) to the southeast. To the south, it boasts a coastline along the Bay of Bengal, offering a vital gateway to maritime trade routes. The country's geographic features are marked by the sprawling delta of the Ganges, Brahmaputra, and Meghna rivers, making it one of the world's largest riverine regions. This unique geography not only nurtures lush greenery but also presents both opportunities and challenges for its population.

The majority of the population identifies as Bengali, and Bengali (Bangla) is the official language. The nation's culture is characterized by its traditional music, dance, literature, and art, with a vibrant mix of influences from Hindu, Buddhist, and Islamic traditions.

The history of Bangladesh has embraced diverse civilizations and seen the rise and fall of numerous dynasties, including the Mauryas, Guptas, Mughals, and British. The struggle for independence from British colonial rule and later from West Pakistan in 1971 led to the birth of the independent nation of Bangladesh.

Currently, the country is home to 165 million people¹ comprising , 91.04 % Muslims, 7.95% Hindus, 0.61% Buddhists, 0.30% Christians, and the other 0.30% individuals of other religions. Among this population, 81,712,824² (82 Million) are men which is 49.5% of the total population. On the other hand, 83,347,206³ (83 Million) are women constituting 50.5% of the total population. The number of children (individuals under 18 years old) in Bangladesh is 53,823,652⁴ (53 Million) constituting 32.6% of the total population.

Bangladesh progressed remarkably in socio-economic development over the past few decades. Despite starting as one of the world's poorest countries, it has seen significant improvements in areas such as agriculture, industries, and manufacturing. In 2022, Bangladesh has become the 35th largest economy in the world based on Gross Domestic Product (GDP)⁵ . Most of the income in Bangladesh comes from the service sector⁶ which is 51.3% of the total (GDP). Agriculture is the second highest sector that contributing 33.32% of the total GDP. Industry⁷ is the third highest sector bringing 11.63% of the total income to the country's GDP.

¹ BANGLADESH BUREAU OF STATISTICS (2022), Population and Housing Census 2022 Preliminary Report, Retrieved from: [https://sid.portal.gov.bd/sites/default/files/files/sid.portal.gov.bd/publications/01ad1ffe_cfef_4811_af97_594b6c64d7c3/PHC_Preliminary_Report_\(English\)_August_2022.pdf](https://sid.portal.gov.bd/sites/default/files/files/sid.portal.gov.bd/publications/01ad1ffe_cfef_4811_af97_594b6c64d7c3/PHC_Preliminary_Report_(English)_August_2022.pdf)

² Ibid.

³ Ibid.

⁴ <https://data.unicef.org/how-many/how-many-children-under-18-are-there-in-bangladesh/>

⁵ Visual Capitalist (December 29, 2022), Top Heavy: Countries by Share of the Global Economy, Retrieved from: <https://www.visualcapitalist.com/countries-by-share-of-global-economy/>

⁶ World Bank Data Bank (Statista, 2023), Bangladesh: Share of economic sectors in the gross domestic product (GDP) from 2011 to 2021, Retrieved from: Bangladesh - share of economic sectors in the gross domestic product 2022 | Statista

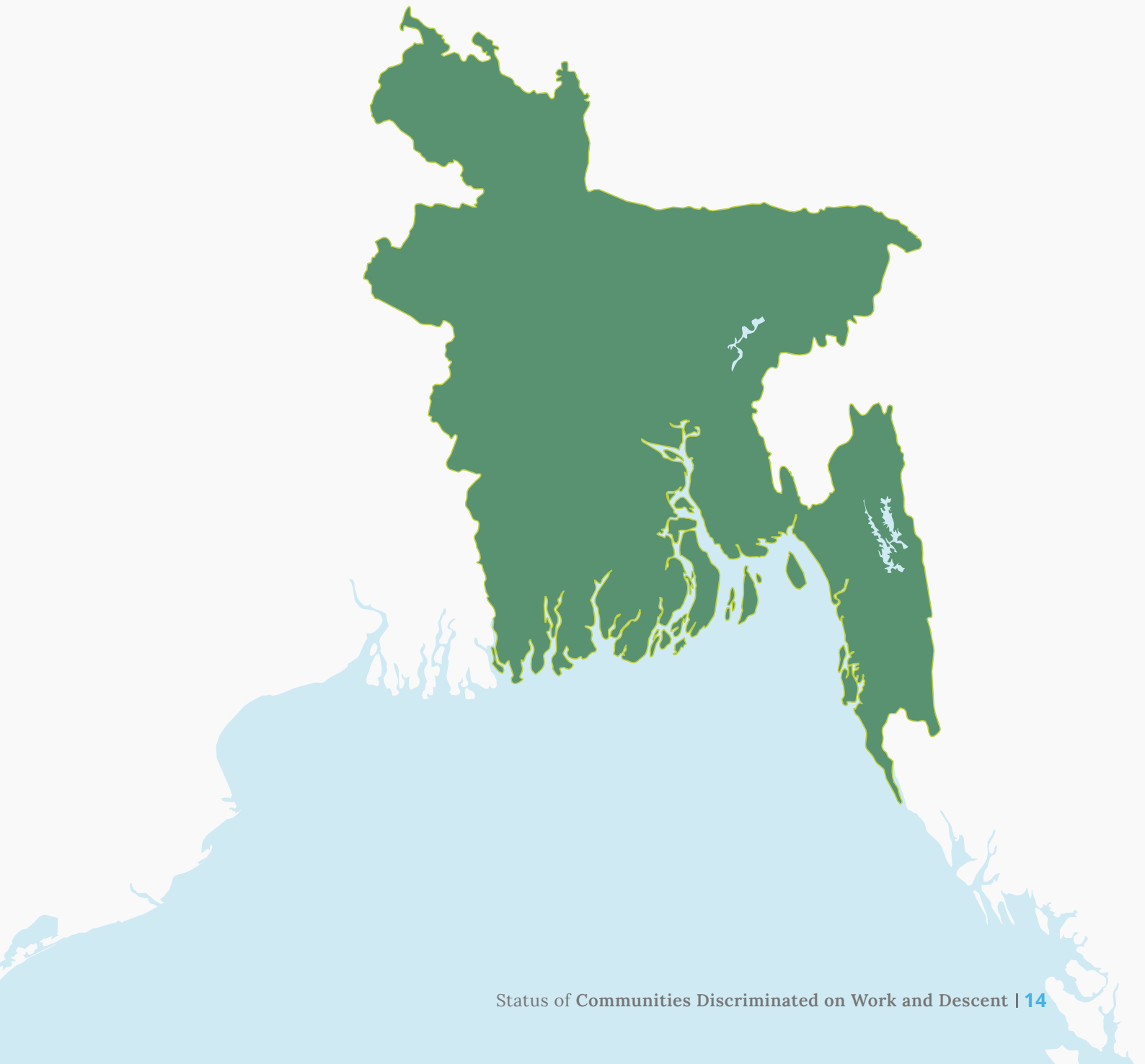
⁷ Ibid.

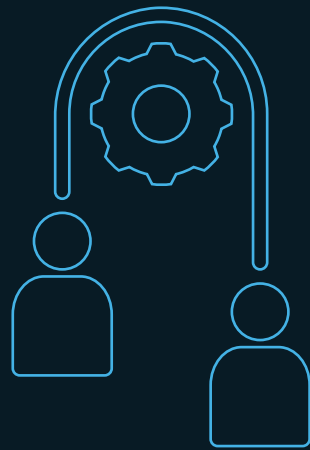


Bangladesh is a South Asian Muslim-majority country with more than **165 million** people.



Bangladesh has come **35th** largest economy in the world based on Gross Domestic Product (GDP) in 2022 with a key contribution from the **'service', 'agriculture', and 'industry'** sector.





Chapter 2

DWD Communities in Bangladesh

The DWD communities in Bangladesh mainly comprise the Dalits. There is no official data about the number of Dalits in Bangladesh. According to the International Dalit Solidarity Network (IDSN), there are 6.5 million⁸ Dalits in Bangladesh. However, the disaggregated data about the number of men, women, children, and persons with disability are unavailable. Most of the Dalits in Bangladesh are followers of the Hindu religion. According to the Hindu caste system, they belong to the lowest caste stratum and are also treated as 'out-caste'. They can also be Muslim, Christian, or Buddhist. According to a study report⁹, 78.8% of Dalits are Hindus, 19% are Muslims, 1% are Christian, and the rest 1% are Buddhist. According to the leaders and activists of the Bangladeshi national level Dalit rights campaigning and movement network 'Bangladesh Dalit and Excluded Rights Movement (BDERM), there are more than 100 sub-groups among Dalits living in different geographical locations in Bangladesh.

In Bangladesh, the Dalits experience different slavery-like experiences. Especially the groups among the Dalits who are engaged in sanitation work, tea plantation, leather processing & shoe mending, pig rearing, and brick kiln work are the worst sufferers as the working environment and payment of these jobs are sub-standard and the individuals engaged in these jobs often experience discriminatory behaviours from the society. A list of groups is presented below who are more likely to experience slavery-like practices.

Sl.	Occupation	Name of the groups/ communities	The geographical location of living
1	Sanitation workers	Raut, Hela, Hari, Dome, Domar, Telegu, Maghaia, Lalbegi, Bansphor, Dusad, Chhatraira, Balmiki, and others	Mainly in urban areas (big cities i.e. Dhaka, Chittagong) along with rural areas across Bangladesh.
2	Tea plantation	Bangalee, Bauri, Robidas, Tanti, Khodal, Karmokar, Bhumij, Bihari, Nayak, Mridha, Bakti, Chasha, Ghatuar, Goala, Gour, Kumri, Mushohor, and others	Tea gardens of Moulvibazar and Sylhet districts.
3	Leather processing & shoe mending	Robidas, Rishi, and others	Mainly in rural areas, and also in urban peripheral areas across Bangladesh.
4	Pig rearing	Kaiputra (Also known as Kawra)	Mainly in rural areas, and also in urban peripheral areas across Bangladesh.
5	Brick kiln work	Kol, Rajbhor, and others	Across the country

⁸ IDSN (n.d.), STATISTICS: Dalits in Bangladesh, Retrieved from: <https://idsn.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/10/Bangladesh-Dalit-statistics.pdf>

⁹ Christian Aid, Nagorik Uddyog & Research Development Center (2017), Dalits in Bangladesh: An action research for an evidence-base for the Dalit population in Bangladesh, Found in: <https://drive.google.com/drive/u/1/folders/1dBRvigodDOOWFKMEkUwcKBw8m1U434c1>



Chapter 3

**Socio-economic Status of
CWD Communities in Bangladesh**

A Dalit women is making dress using sewing machine
in a tea garden of Moulvibazar district



Photo: Sultan Md. Salauddin Siddique

The socioeconomic status of the DWD communities i.e. Dalits in Bangladesh has been explored by reviewing the secondary data. These data were collected from the national population census, government documents and different research reports.

3.1 Literacy Rate

According to the Household Income and Expenditure Survey 2022 of the Bangladesh Bureau of Statistics (BBS), 74.66% of people (7 years and above) do have basic literacy in Bangladesh¹⁰. There is no data available about the literacy rate among DWD communities in Bangladesh. There is no official data about the literacy rate among Dalits. It is found in a study report¹¹ that the literacy rate among male and female Dalits is 48.3% and 38.7% respectively which is far behind the national rate. From the existing literature, the causes behind the phenomenon are evident. For instance, less than 30 % of Dalit children are reported to be in school¹². Again, 80 % of Dalit children experience discrimination in admission to school¹³. Moreover, 30% of Dalit students experienced abuse or hatred from their classmates and others, including teachers¹⁴.

3.2 Employment Rate

The employed population (15 years+) in Bangladesh is 60.8 million¹⁵ which is 37% of the total population. However, there is no data available about the employment rate among Dalits in Bangladesh.

3.3 Unemployment Rate

The unemployment rate in Bangladesh is 4.2% and the size of the unemployed population is 2.6 million¹⁶. However, there is no data available about the unemployment rate among Dalits in Bangladesh.

3.4 Mortality Rate

The infant mortality ratio (per 1,000 live births) is 21 and the maternal mortality ratio (per 1000 live births) is 1.65 as of 2019 in Bangladesh¹⁷. No specific data has been found about the mortality rate among Dalits in Bangladesh.

3.5 Life Expectancy

The life expectancy at birth is 72.6 years in Bangladesh where the life expectancy is 71.1 years for males and 74.2 years for females¹⁸. No specific data has been found about the life expectancy at birth among Dalits in Bangladesh.

3.6 Different Forms of Occupation

The occupational engagement of Dalits is traditional and informal. Their main traditional occupations include sanitation work (cleaning, removing human waste, and sweeping), tea plantation, fishery, leather processing and shoe making, brick kiln work, and agriculture. However, the Dalits are currently getting engaged with mainstream jobs like services and small businesses. No data has been found about the number of individuals engaged in a specific occupation.

3.7 Ownership of Land

The ancestors of the Dalits are brought to Bangladesh during the British period. Since then they have been living in the designated housing settlements built on common land i.e. Khas land. Therefore, the majority of them are landless. Some of them bought land or received a small piece of land from the government. There is no official data available about the land ownership of Dalits in Bangladesh. According to a study report¹⁹, 56% of Dalit households do not have any land. The same study says that among 44% of households with land ownership, 78.9% do not have any cultivable land; they only have their homestead land.

¹⁰ BANGLADESH BUREAU OF STATISTICS (2022), Population and Housing Census 2022 Preliminary Report, Retrieved from: [https://sid.portal.gov.bd/sites/default/files/files/sid.portal.gov.bd/publications/01ad1ffe_cfef_4811_af97_594b6c64d7c3/PHC_Preliminary_Report_\(English\)_August_2022.pdf](https://sid.portal.gov.bd/sites/default/files/files/sid.portal.gov.bd/publications/01ad1ffe_cfef_4811_af97_594b6c64d7c3/PHC_Preliminary_Report_(English)_August_2022.pdf)

¹¹ Siddiqui Rahman PhD (2016), An Ethnographic Journey Through the Lives of Urban Dalits in Bangladesh, Retrieved from: <https://bdplat-form4sdgs.net/wp-content/uploads/2016/08/An-Ethnographic-Journey-Through-the-Lives-of-Urban-Dalits-in-Bangladesh.pdf>

¹² IDSN (n.d.), Caste and Gender Justice: Delivering on the UN Global Goals for Dalit women and girls, Retrieved from: <https://idsn.org/wp-content/uploads/2019/06/Caste-and-Gender-Justice-Low-Res2.pdf>

¹³ IDSN (2015), Discrimination against Dalits in Bangladesh, Retrieved from: <http://idsn.org/wp-content/uploads/2015/08/IDSN-brief-ing-note-Bangladesh-2015.pdf>

¹⁴ IDSN, Nagorik Uddyog & BDERM (2018), Joint NGO submission related to the review of Bangladesh at the 30th Universal Periodic Review session in 2018, Retrieved from: https://idsn.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/03/NGO-report-_UPR_Dalit-rights-in-Bangladesh-2017.pdf

¹⁵ BANGLADESH BUREAU OF STATISTICS (2020), Bangladesh Statistics 2020, Retrieved from: https://bbs.portal.gov.bd/sites/default/files/files/bbs.portal.gov.bd/page/ald32f13_8553_44f1_92e6_8ff80a4ff82e/2021-05-14-06-22-47723b0e1476ed905d1c121f8f07d935.pdf

¹⁶ Ibid.

¹⁷ Ibid.

¹⁸ Ibid.

¹⁹ Christian Aid, Nagorik Uddyog & Research Development Center (2017), Dalits in Bangladesh: An action research for an evidence-base for the Dalit population in Bangladesh, Found in: <https://drive.google.com/drive/u/1/folders/1dBRvigodDOOWFKMEkUwcKBw8m1U434c1>

3.8 Housing Rate and Housing Conditions

There is no official data available about the housing rate or the housing conditions of Dalits in Bangladesh. According to the findings of a survey²⁰, 95% of the Dalits possess a home. In another study²¹, it was found that 37% of Dalit houses are comprised of only one room and 42% are two-room houses. The same study found that the roofs of 81.7% of households are made of tin, the roof of 7.4% of households are made of concrete, the roof of another 7.4% of households are made of dried paddy sheaves and bamboo, and the roof of rest 3.5% of households are made of other materials. The finding of the study also states that the walls of 15.1% of the households are made of dry paddy sheaves and bamboo, the walls of 38.2% of the households are made of tin, the walls of 33% of the households are made of brick, the walls of 10% of the households are made of mud, and the walls of the rest 3.5% of households are made of other materials

3.9 Access to Water

There is no official data found about Dalits' access to water in Bangladesh. According to a study report²², 23.6% of Dalit households depend on the piped water supply, 68.8% of them depend on tube wells, 0.2% of them depend on pits, and the rest 7.4% of them depend on other water sources for drinking water. The same study report also stated that 62.4% of Dalit households rely on a shared community source of water for drinking water.

3.10 Access to Electricity

There is no official data found about Dalits' access to electricity in Bangladesh. According to a study report²³, among the Hindu Dalits, only 54% have access to electricity, compared to 32% for the Muslim Dalits.

3.11 Access to Sewage Facilities

There is no official data found about Dalits' access to sewage facilities in Bangladesh. However, in a report²⁴, it is mentioned that the Dalits are deprived of modern sewage and drainage facilities although they constitute the majority of the employed cleaners

3.12 Toilet Facilities at Home

There is no official data found about the toilet facilities of Dalits at their homes in the context of Bangladesh. According to a study report²⁵, 57% of Dalit households have a toilet at their houses, 23% of Dalit households use joint toilets (one toilet used by multiple households), and 14% of Dalit households use community toilets. The same study also revealed that 51.3% of Dalit households use pit toilets, 44.1% of Dalit households use sanitary toilet, and the rest 4.6% of Dalit households depend on open space for defecation.

3.13 Traditional Culture and Art Forms of Dalits

The ways of wearing a dress, speaking a language, worshipping god, having faith, and eating different kinds of food items- all these things together form a way of living. This way of living is termed as culture. It varies from group to group and from place to place. Within cultures, there are both similarities and dissimilarities. There are numerous communities among Dalits in Bangladesh. Each community does have their language, way of dressing, food preparation, religious rituals, means of entertainment, and traditional set of beliefs about themselves which makes them unique from others. In Bangladesh, the culture and art forms of Dalits are still untouched areas of investigation. There are scopes to work in these areas.

²⁰ Mujibul Anam (2009), Baseline Survey on Dalits Community 2009: For Recognition, Establishment and Protection of Human Rights for the Dalit community People Project, Dhaka: Paritran and Manusher Jonno Foundation, Retrieved from: https://idsn.org/wp-content/uploads/user_folder/pdf/New_files/Bangladesh/Baseline_Survey_On_Dalits_Community_2009__2_.pdf

²¹ Christian Aid, Nagorik Uddyog & Research Development Center (2017), Dalits in Bangladesh: An action research for an evidence-base for the Dalit population in Bangladesh, Found in: <https://drive.google.com/drive/u/1/folders/1dBRvigodDOOWFKMEKUwckBw8m1U434c1>

²² Ibid.

²³ Iftexhar Uddin Chowdhury (2009), Caste Based Discrimination in South Asia: A Study of Bangladesh, Working Paper Series, Volume 3, Number 07, 2009, New Delhi: Indian Institute of Dalit Studies, Retrieved from: https://idsn.org/wp-content/uploads/user_folder/pdf/New_files/Bangladesh/Caste-based_Discrimination_in_Bangladesh__IIDS_working_paper_.pdf

²⁴ Nagorik Uddyog & BDERM (2015), Access to Water, Sanitation and Hygiene (WASH) for Dalits in Bangladesh: Challenges and Ways Forward, Equity Watch Series, Retrieved from: <https://bderm-bd.org/wp-content/uploads/2019/01/Equity-Watch-WASH.pdf>

²⁵ Christian Aid, Nagorik Uddyog & Research Development Center (2017), Dalits in Bangladesh: An action research for an evidence-base for the Dalit population in Bangladesh, Found in: <https://drive.google.com/drive/u/1/folders/1dBRvigodDOOWFKMEKUwckBw8m1U434c1>

The literacy rate among male and female Dalits is **48.3%** and **38.7%** respectively which is far behind Bangladesh's national literacy rate of 74.66%.

Most of **the Dalits** live in designated housing settlements built on common land i.e. Khas land and **56%** of Dalit households do not have any land.

37% of Dalit houses are comprised of only one room

62.4% of Dalit households rely on a shared community source for drinking water

Dalits are deprived of modern sewage and drainage facilities although they constitute the majority of the employed cleaners



Hundreds of people have to depend on a single water source in the Dalit neighborhoods of Dhaka city

Photo: Bindia Rani Das



Chapter 4

Different Forms of Modern Slavery Found in Bangladesh



A Dalit man is putting garbage on a waste van

Photo : Jacob Carlsen

Dalits living across the country are engaged in different occupations. These are mostly traditional jobs with low incomes. Some of the jobs are also treated as menial as well. In most cases, Dalits do not have the opportunity to be engaged in alternative occupations for not having employable skills and higher education. Even if some of them possess employable skills and have higher degrees, their access to mainstream occupations is denied on the ground of their caste-based birth identity and the notion of 'purity and pollution'. Therefore, they are compelled to be engaged in these occupations. In some cases, they are doing the same job generation after generation. It is important to mention that the Dalits experience slavery-like practices in the forms of discrimination as well as violence in these jobs.

In the next table, efforts have been made to represent the occupations in which Dalits are engaged and experience slavery-like practices in the forms of discrimination and violence across Bangladesh.

Forms of Modern Slavery and Slavery-like Practices	Modes of Discrimination/Violence	Geographical Locations
Bonded Labour	Physical, Financial	Brick kiln workers across the country
Child Labour	Physical	Across the country
Sex Work	Physical	The number is very small. Mostly found in urban and semi-urban areas.
Manual Scavenging, Village/City cleaning, Working with Waste or Recycling	Inter-generational, Physical, Financial	The number of people engaged in this occupation is higher in urban areas, specifically in the big cities i.e. Dhaka, Chittagong, and other cities. Also, people engaged in this occupation live in rural areas across Bangladesh.
Gutter cleaning /manhole cleaning	Inter-generational, Physical	The number of people engaged in this occupation is higher in urban areas, specifically in the big cities i.e. Dhaka, Chittagong, and other cities. Also, people engaged in this occupation live in rural areas across Bangladesh.
Handicraft Industry	Financial	Rural areas across the country
Garment Industrial Labour	Physical, Sexual (women)	Dhaka city and neighbouring areas where most of the garment factories are located.
Brick Kilns	Physical, Sexual (women), Financial	Across the country
Construction (building, roads, etc.)	Physical	Across the country
Agricultural /Farm, Bonded Labour	Physical, Financial	Across the country
Labour in Tea Gardens	Inter-generational, Physical, Financial	Tea garden workers in the Sylhet region
Forced Marriage	Physical, Sexual (girls)	Across the country
Leather Tanning	Inter-generational, Physical	Across the country
Drum Beating	Inter-generational, Financial	Across the country
Pig Rearing	Inter-generational	Mainly in rural areas, and also in urban peripheral areas across Bangladesh.

Discrimination and segregation against Dalits in Bangladesh is exhibited in multiple ways including designating the ghettos for their housing, discriminating in allocating political positions, showing discriminatory attitudes in the workplace, and exploiting them economically by not paying deserved financial benefits for their work.

Dalits experience prohibitions from entering public places and religious facilities, renting houses outside the housing settlement designated for them, and marrying so-called 'upper-caste' individuals.

A Dalit man with a drove

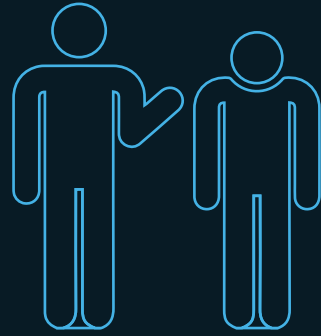


Photo: Jacob Carlsen

Dalits are still highly dependent on **physical labor** intensive traditional jobs with **low incomes** and substandard working environments, in some cases under **slavery** like conditions, due to the lack of employable skills and education.

They experience denial in getting into white collar jobs on the ground of their **caste-based birth identity** and the notion of 'purity and pollution' even after having required qualifications.





Chapter 5
**Forms of Discrimination
Faced by Dalits**

5.1 Social Discrimination and Segregation against Dalits

The Dalits face multiple economic, social, cultural and political, and religious forms of discrimination and segregation. Those are as follows:

- a) The Dalits live in ghettos or colonies designated for them. These settlements usually lack facilities such as water, sanitation, electricity, and other supplies in comparison to non-Dalits' housing. The non-Dalits also do not feel comfortable visiting these areas as these areas are treated as unclean like the way Dalits are treated as unclean based on the notion of 'purity and pollution'. **(Social)**

- b) Only for the Dalit identity, the competent and deserving political Dalit activists are not provided with influential positions in different political committees at different levels. The non-Dalits do not like to take orders from a Dalit individual even if the Dalit individual is competent over them. **(Political)**

- c) Dalit individuals face discrimination at their workplace. Their colleagues do not accept them cordially. Sometimes, they have to use separate plates and glass for having food at the workplace. **(Social)**

- d) The starting salary of the lowest grade (20th grade of the national pay scale) in Bangladesh is BDT 8,250 along with other benefits. However, the Dalits engaged in sanitation jobs in different government institutions are paid far lower. **(Economic)**

5.2 Prohibitions against Dalits

Dalits also face multiple economic, social, cultural and political, and religious prohibitions due to their social identity in Bangladesh. Some of the examples are as follows:

- a) Dalits are prohibited from entering to public places such as restaurants, barber shops, etc. in some areas of Bangladesh. This type of prohibition is still found in the northern part of Bangladesh i.e. Rangpur division. **(Social)**

- b) Dalits are not welcomed, sometimes prohibited, to live in the same building as the upper-caste Hindus as well as Muslims. Therefore, they have to face difficulties in renting out houses. **(Social)**

- c) Dalits are prohibited to enter some of the religious facilities i.e., temples, which are mainly run by the upper-caste Hindus. **(Religious)**

5.3 Discriminatory practices against Dalits based on the concept of purity and pollution

Different forms of discriminatory practices are shown towards Dalits by the upper caste Hindus as well as by the Muslims which involve the concepts of purity and pollution are as follows:

- a) Prohibiting Dalits from entering public places and religious facilities such as restaurants, barber shops, temples, etc.
- b) Not having food with Dalits.
- c) Not sitting with them side by side.
- d) Not purchasing goods from a shop run by a Dalit individual.
- e) Not selling land to Dalits.
- f) Not renting out houses to Dalits.
- g) Not providing Dalits with catering services.

5.4 Marriage Norms

Generally, in Bangladesh, a Dalit is not allowed to marry a so-called “high-status” upper-caste Hindu or Muslim and vice-versa which means that the marriage between a Dalit and an upper-caste Hindu or Muslim is still prohibited. In a few cases, upper-caste Hindu males are found to marry Dalit women in Bangladesh. However, marrying off an upper-caste female to a Dalit is rare.

A decade earlier, marriages between different sub-groups among Dalits were also restricted in Bangladesh. However, currently, marriages between two different sub-groups among Dalits are taking place. For instance, there are ample examples of marriage between the *Hari* and the *Hela* among Dalits in Bangladesh. Also, there are multiple examples of marriages between the *Hela* and the *Bansphor* among Dalits in Bangladesh.

5.5 Repercussions in the Case of Inter-caste or Inter-community Marriage

If a Dalit individual, be it a man or a woman, marries, attempts to marry or runs away with a so-called “high status” upper-caste Hindu, the individual and his family are usually threatened. Sometimes a false case of rape, robbery, or theft is filed against him or his family to harass them. Extreme atrocities like murder or burning houses rarely take place in Bangladesh.

On the other hand, if a Dalit individual, be it a man or a woman, marries, attempts to marry or runs away with a Dalit from a different community, both the male and female along with their family face a social boycott by their respective sub-groups. To get rid of the boycott, the families have to compensate their respective sub-groups by organizing a feast for them and also seeking pardon from the community leaders. Sometimes, they have to face physical abuse like pulling their ears by themselves as well as verbal abuse.

5.6 Bonded Labour

No official, as well as unofficial data has been found, indicating the number and percentage of Dalits who are bonded labourers in Bangladesh.

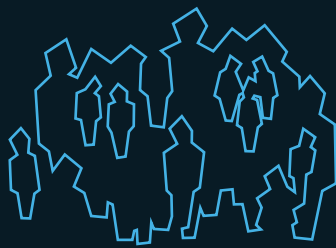
5.7 Atrocities and Violence Against Dalits

There is no official or unofficial data available about the number of atrocities and violence against Dalits in Bangladesh. Accordingly, data is also unavailable in terms of convictions of non-Dalit perpetrators. However, from the published news in the different national newspapers, it is evident that the Dalits experience physical, psychological, and sexual violence as well as atrocities in Bangladesh. For this mapping study, a total of five (5) cases of atrocities and violence against Dalits have been collected which are represented in the next chapter of this report.



Hundreds of people have to depend on a single water source
in the Dalit neighborhoods of Dhaka city

Photo: Bindia Rani Das



Chapter 6
**Cases of Discrimination
and
Violence Against Dalits**

There is no official or unofficial data available about the profile of the perpetrators inflicting discrimination and violence against Dalits in Bangladesh. For this study, a total of five (5) cases of atrocities against Dalits have been studied. To portray the scenario of discrimination and violence against Dalits in Bangladesh, a total of five (5) case stories have been collected. The case stories are as follows:

Case Story 1
Dalit students are denied to get admission in schools
<p>The parents of four Dalit children, from Dalit villages in Ibrahimnagar and Jahangirnagar Moholla of Parbatipur sub-district of Dinajpur district, approached the UNO²⁶ office on January 12, 2023, claiming that the children were taken to two government schools and one private school in the city for admission but were rejected and sent back in various pretexts. The investigation revealed that Barsha Rani Banshphor, Ishika Banshphor, Sadhoni Banshphor, and Josna Banshphor were all taken to the same school for admission to the fourth and second grades, respectively. However, the headmasters of these educational institutions rejected their admission on the grounds of their caste identity.</p> <p>Mo. Mahmudul Hasan, acting UNO of Parbatipur Upazila, accepted the written complaint from the parents of the Dalit children and instructed the primary education officer of the Upazila to admit the affected students to their respective classes. The parents of the children expressed concern about their children's education and the country's agitation against caste discrimination. The Primary Education Officer of the Upazila intervened to resolve the issue, and all five students who were denied admission to the schools could have been able to get admission.</p>

Case Story 2
Dalit students are denied to get admission in schools
<p>On December 11, 2022, an incident of assault and harassment took place at a restaurant (Asia Hotel) in the Santahar sub-district of Bogra district, where Mithun Banshphor (23), a Dalit youth, was pushed into a pan of boiling oil. Mithun Banshphor suffered burns on his right hand due to getting dipped in the hot oil. He was initially treated at the Adamdighi Upazila Health Complex and later transferred to the Burn Unit of Bogra Shaheed Ziaur Rahman Medical College Hospital. Notably, Mithun Banshphor had come to his relative Pintu Banshphor's house in Majhipara in the Adamdighi sub-district from Rajshahi.</p> <p>According to eyewitnesses, on the evening of the day, Mithun Banshphor and Pintu Banshphor, along with a few others, went to the restaurant to have biryani. After they ordered biryani, a dispute broke out between them and the hotel staff when the hotel staff refused to serve the curry with the Biryani which is usually served to others. At this time, the staff started beating them with sticks and batons. Amid the beating, one hotel employee pushed Mithun, causing him to fall into the pot of hot oil. As a result, his right hand from the wrist to the fingers got scalded.</p> <p>Bangladesh Dalit and Excluded Rights Movement (BDERM) hold a news conference and took steps along with other local Dalit leaders to file a case. At a point, the case was taken up by Adamdighi Police Station and the accused has been arrested.</p>

²⁶ UNO (Upazila Nirbahi Officer) is the Chief Executive Officer of Sub-district Administration in Bangladesh

Case Story 3

Dalit students are denied to get admission in schools

In the Udakhali Union of Fulchhari sub-district under Gaibandha district, Maynal (38 years), a resident of the same union, had been sexually assaulting and exploiting the disabled Dalit girl for a long time capitalizing on her vulnerable situation. At one point, when the girl became pregnant, Maynal took her to his father-in-law's house and forced her to have an abortion. On October 8, 2022, when the victim's health deteriorated due to the abortion, she was admitted to Gaibandha Sadar Hospital, where the local people came to know about the incident. The victim's maternal uncle, Nirab Ravidas, filed a complaint at Fulchhari Police Station. Till now, no trial has taken place.

Case Story 4

Abduction of a Dalit Girl, Forced Marriage, and Religious Conversion

On Monday morning, January 17, 2022, Nupur Mohonto's father, Ajol Mohonto, went to the 'Best Care Diagnostic Center' in Upashahar in Dinajpur district for treatment. He returned home around 9 PM. His daughter Nupur Mohonto served food and medicine to him. After that, Nupur went to her grandmother's room to sleep. During that time, Nupur's grandmother noticed Rubel lurking around the house. After taking the food and medicine, Ajol Mohonto fell asleep. Suddenly, around 11 PM, Ajol's mother i.e., Nupur's grandmother came and said, "Ajol, where is your daughter? She is not at my house". Then, Ajol's younger brother Gautam Mohonto took his nephew on a motorcycle and they searched for Nupur in the surrounding area. However, they couldn't find any trace of her. Finally, they learned from a local nightguard in Madilahat that Rubel Mia (33), along with his accomplice, picked Nupur in a microbus.

On the next day, January 18, 2022, the elected Chairman of Betadighi Union Mr. Shah Md. Abdul Kuddus and the elected Ward Member Mr. Asad assured that they will look into the matter to get Nupur back. On January 19, 2022, Wednesday, the victim's father lodged a complaint against Rubel Mohonto and five others at the police station (Case No. 6/06) for the alleged abduction of his daughter. On the same day, the police from Fulbari Thana summoned Ajol Mohonto and took him to the police station to show him the accused's house. The police failed to find any of the accused that day. Meanwhile, Rubel, with the help of his accomplices, forcefully married her in Joypurhat after creating a fake birth certificate of Nupur. Bangladesh Dalit and Excluded Rights Movement (BDERM) organized press conferences, and human chains in the demand for justice. Due to the continuous pressure on the local administration, at one stage, the administration seriously looked into the matter. Later, the accused were arrested from Ashulia, Dhaka.

Case Story 5

Arpita Rani Das Murder Case

On June 28, 2013, around 1:00 PM, Arpita Rani Das (12), a fourth-grade student and daughter of Swapan Chandra Das and Shilpi Rani Das from Guabariya village of Morichal in Pirujpur district, went to buy Jhalmuri from a shop in front of her house. On the same day, around 8:30 PM, her body was found behind her house. On June 29, 2013, the mother of the victim, Shilpi Rani Das, filed a case under the Women and Children Repression Prevention Act 2000, amended in 2003, Section 9(2), for assault and murder. A charge sheet was submitted to the court in 2019. According to Shilpi Rani Das, the suspects who killed her daughter were arrested. However, due to their influential position, they were released by the police within a few hours and were even exempted from the charge sheet. She added the individuals whose name was mentioned charged are our neighbours and close relatives. She believes that the main culprits

are still at large. She also added that she was not even informed about the review process of the charge sheet that had to be done within the next 29 days after the submission. She demanded exemplary punishment for the perpetrators who mercilessly killed her daughter. She also said that the accused people threatened them in a way that forced them to leave their homes and live as refugees for a few years after the incident. According to her, they are still living in fear and terror with their two daughters.

Dalits experience physical, psychological, and sexual violence as well as atrocities in Bangladesh due to their vulnerability.

A old Dalit women
in a tea garden of Moulvibazar district

Photo: Sultan Md. Salauddin Siddique





Chapter 7

Protection and Development Mechanisms for Dalits in Bangladesh

7.1 Constitutional Provisions of Bangladesh for Upholding, Protecting, and Promoting the Rights of Dalits as well as for Combating Modern Slavery

It is clearly stated in Article 34(1) of the constitution of Bangladesh that "All forms of forced labour are prohibited and any contravention of this provision shall be an offense punishable in accordance with law"²⁷. Again, Article 32 of the Constitution explicitly states that no person shall be deprived of life or personal liberty²⁸. Moreover, Articles 27²⁹, 28³⁰, 29³¹, and 41³² of the Constitution of Bangladesh guarantees equal protection of the law, prohibit discrimination based on religion, race, caste, sex, or place of birth, provide equal opportunities in public employment, and guarantee religious freedom, respectively. Furthermore, Articles 14³³, 28³⁴, and 29³⁵ provide for the advancement of "backward sections" concerning the mandates of those provisions but do not define what such measures entail. However, the constitution of Bangladesh failed to recognize Dalits specifically as a class needing special protection.

7.2 Special Legislations for Upholding, Protecting and Promoting the Rights of Dalits as well as for Combating Modern Slavery

Bangladesh has ratified several major international human rights treaties, including the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR) in 2000, the International Covenant on Economic, Social, and Cultural Rights (ICESCR) in 1998, and the International Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination (ICERD) in 1979³⁶. Bangladesh has also ratified the Forced Labour Convention, 1930 (C029), and the Abolition of Forced Labour Convention, 1957 (C105) in 1972³⁷.

²⁷ Constitution of the People's Republic of Bangladesh (ACT NO. OF 1972), Retrieved from: <http://bdlaws.min-law.gov.bd/act-367/section-24582.html>

²⁸ Constitution of the People's Republic of Bangladesh (ACT NO. OF 1972), Retrieved from: <http://bdlaws.min-law.gov.bd/act-367/section-24580.html>

²⁹ Constitution of the People's Republic of Bangladesh (ACT NO. OF 1972), Retrieved from: <http://bdlaws.min-law.gov.bd/act-367/section-24575.html>

³⁰ Constitution of the People's Republic of Bangladesh (ACT NO. OF 1972), Retrieved from: <http://bdlaws.min-law.gov.bd/act-367.html>

³¹ Constitution of the People's Republic of Bangladesh (ACT NO. OF 1972), Retrieved from: <http://bdlaws.min-law.gov.bd/act-367/section-24577.html>

³² Constitution of the People's Republic of Bangladesh (ACT NO. OF 1972), Retrieved from: <http://bd-laws.minlaw.gov.bd/act-367/section-24589.html>

³³ Constitution of the People's Republic of Bangladesh (ACT NO. OF 1972), Retrieved from: <http://bdlaws.min-law.gov.bd/act-367/section-24562.html>

³⁴ Constitution of the People's Republic of Bangladesh (ACT NO. OF 1972), Retrieved from: <http://bdlaws.min-law.gov.bd/act-367.html>

³⁵ Constitution of the People's Republic of Bangladesh (ACT NO. OF 1972), Retrieved from: <http://bd-laws.minlaw.gov.bd/act-367/section-24577.html>

³⁶ UN Treaty Body Database, View the ratification status by country or by treaty, Ratification Status for Bangladesh, OHCHR, Retrieved from: https://tbinternet.ohchr.org/_layouts/15/TreatyBodyExternal/Treaty.aspx?CountryID=14&Lang=EN

³⁷ International Labor Organization, Ratifications for Bangladesh, Retrieved from: https://www.ilo.org/dyn/normlex/en/f?p=1000:11200:0::NO:11200:P11200_COUNTRY_ID:103500

It is important to mention that to prevent discrimination and ensure respect for the human entity, equal rights, and dignity, the Anti-Discrimination Bill is in the process of being passed by the government of Bangladesh for enactment. The draft of the long-awaited Anti-Discrimination Bill was placed in Parliament on April 5, 2022, after years of advocacy with the Government. The Bill is now under the review of the Parliamentary Committee of the respective ministry for further examination.

7.3 Specific Development Policies for the Advancement of Dalits in Bangladesh

In 2015, the government of Bangladesh approved the National Social Security Strategy (NSSS)³⁸. Under this policy, several social security schemes have been brought under one umbrella and distributed among various ministries. Dalits are receiving benefits under some of these schemes such as different allowances, stipends, housing, and other development initiatives, along with other backward communities, including Bede (river gypsies) and transgender communities. Since there is no separate allocation for Dalits under the policy, the benefits received by Dalits under these schemes are not sufficient.

7.4 Specific Development Projects or Programs for the Advancement of Dalits in Bangladesh

In every fiscal year, the government of Bangladesh undertakes some projects and programs and allocates money for these projects and programs for the advancement of the Dalits. For instance, in the last fiscal year of 2022-2023, the government undertook multiple projects and programs through which Dalits are being benefitted. These are as follows:

- ▶ Development of socio-economic status through employment training for the helpless, destitute, widows, backward, and impoverished
- ▶ Construction of Colony for the Cleaners of the City Corporation
- ▶ Development of the Living Standards of the Marginal Communities of Bangladesh
- ▶ Improving the living standards of tea workers (Cash/Material Transfer)
- ▶ Stipend for Improving the Livelihood of Transgender, Bede and Disadvantaged Community
- ▶ Program for Improving the Livelihood of Transgender, Bede and Disadvantaged Communities (Cash Transfer)

³⁸ Planning Commission of the Ministry of Planning (2015), National Social Security Strategy (NSSS) of Bangladesh, Retrieved from:

https://socialprotection.org/discover/legal_policy_frameworks/national-social-security-strategy-nsss-bangladesh

7.5 Specifically Mandated Commissions or Committees in Bangladesh for Addressing the Concerns of Dalits in Modern Slavery

The National Human Rights Commission (NHRC) Bangladesh was established in 2009 to protect and promote human rights for the citizens of Bangladesh. There is a thematic committee for working on the rights issues of religious minorities and disadvantaged communities. This committee works for protecting Dalit rights and there are also Dalit representations in this committee. As this committee works for multiple communities in Bangladesh, their work is not intensive on Dalit rights issues.

However, no commission or committee exists in Bangladesh to address the concerns of Dalits in modern slavery. It is important to mention that the economy of Bangladesh has flourished based on the cheap labour of poor people like Dalits and other disadvantaged groups. These groups of people are compelled to sell their labour at cheap prices and work in a sub-standard environment, because they do not have any other alternative. The same phenomenon is taking place year after year. As a result, it has become normalized and gone out of focus. Therefore, the phenomenon of modern slavery and forced labour needs to be investigated critically.

7.6 Specific Judicial Mechanisms Constituted in Bangladesh to Address the Concerns of Dalits in Modern Slavery

There is no judicial mechanism in Bangladesh that has been formed to address the concerns of Dalits in modern slavery.

7.7 Government Official Reports in Bangladesh on the Status of Dalits

No official report has been found that is published by the government of Bangladesh on the status of Dalits.

Despite the constitutional guarantee of being treated equally as other citizens of Bangladesh, Dalits continue to experience discrimination in different spheres of their lives.

The constitution of Bangladesh failed to recognize Dalits specifically as a class needing special protection even after committing to putting efforts into the advancement of ‘backward sections’.

Dalits in Bangladesh still have to go through slavery-like experiences even with the constitutional guarantee and ratification of the Forced Labour Convention, 1930, and the Abolition of Forced Labour Convention, 1957.

The enactment of the long-awaited Anti-discrimination Act by the GOB with provisions for properly addressing discrimination as a criminal offense can be instrumental in upholding the rights and dignity of the Bangladeshi Dalits.

The lack of targeted policies and comprehensive development initiatives is hindering the Dalits in Bangladesh from receiving the benefits of real development.

There is no dedicated institutional mechanism in Bangladesh to protect the rights of the Dalits and address their concerns.



Huddle for taking bath: Scenario of the water source in a Dalit neighborhood of Dhaka city

Photo: Prothom Das



Chapter 8

National Budget Allocations and Expenditure for Dalits in Bangladesh

It is difficult to determine the exact budgetary amount for Dalits in the national budget of Bangladesh because there is no separate budgetary allocation for Dalits in government budget documents. The terms such as backward, marginal, underprivileged, and disadvantaged are used in the budget document. Moreover, it was difficult to find any document that explains how much amount for Dalits are being financed by the local government using their budgetary resources. Therefore, it is a challenging job to analyze the trend of budgetary allocation for Dalits in Bangladesh.

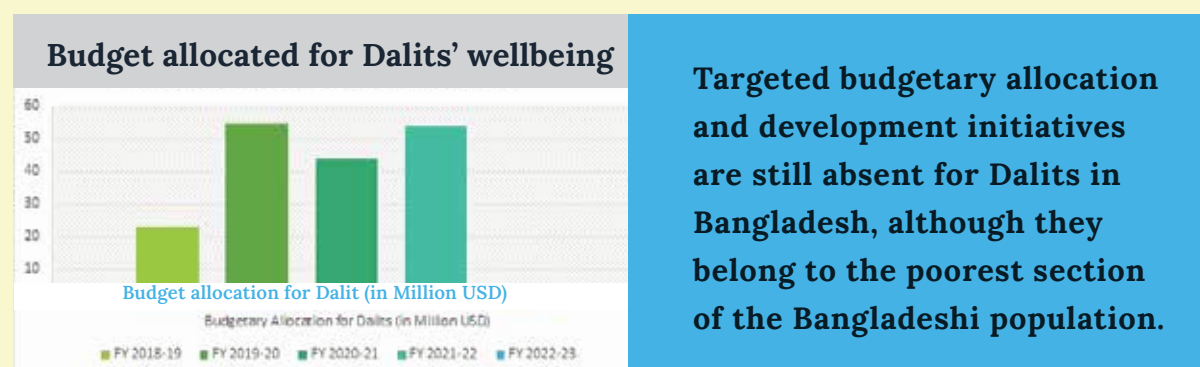
To determine the budgetary allocation for Dalits, some programs and projects have been identified through which the Dalits are being benefitted. The programs and projects include the following:

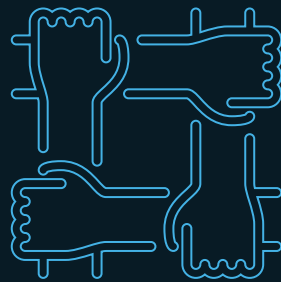
- ▶ Program for Improving the Livelihood of Transgender, Bede, and Disadvantaged Community (under the Ministry of Social Welfare)
- ▶ Program for Improving the Livelihood of Transgender, Bede, and Disadvantaged Community (under the Ministry of Social Welfare)
- ▶ Improving the Living Standards of Tea Workers (under the Ministry of Social Welfare)
- ▶ Development of the Living Standard of the Marginal Communities of Bangladesh (under the Ministry of Social Welfare)
- ▶ Construction of Colony for the Cleaners of City Corporation (under Local Government Division)

It is important to mention that all the above-mentioned projects and programs are under the social security program of the Bangladesh government.

Based on the analysis, the budgetary allocation for Dalits in the national budget of Bangladesh has been represented below. However, the expenditure of the allocated budget could not be tracked and reported.

Fiscal Year	FY 2018-19	FY 2019-20	FY 2020-21	FY 2021-22	FY 2022-23	Total in 5 FY	Average Allocation per FY
Budgetary Allocation for Dalits (in Million USD)	23.05	54.85	43.87	48.86	54.08	224.71	44.942





Chapter 9

Responses of National level NGOs

The 'Dalit rights' discourse is comparatively new in Bangladesh if it is compared with neighbouring countries i.e. India and Nepal. A few organizations in Bangladesh have been working to protect and promote the rights and entitlements of Dalits in Bangladesh for years. Their continuous efforts helped to realize others, including the government, CSOs, donor agencies, academics, media, and other stakeholders to work for Dalits in the country. The name of those organizations and their key areas of intervention are mentioned below:

Sl.	Name of the NGOs	Major Areas of Intervention
1	Dalit	Education, health, water sanitation, creating employment opportunities
2	Eco-Social Development Organization (ESDO)	Dalit human rights, empowerment, alternative employment, education, health
3	Manusher Jonno Foundation (MJF)	Providing small grants to grassroots CBOs/ CSOs, research, advocacy, networking, campaign
4	Nagorik Uddyog	Dalit human rights, Dalit women rights, education, creating employment opportunities, research, advocacy, networking, campaign
5	Parittran	Dalit human rights, climate change, advocacy, campaign, education, health

Dalit students are taking lessons at a pre-primary education center run by Nagorik Uddyog in Kurigram district

Photo: Bokul Hossain





Chapter 10

Responses of UN and

International Human Rights Organizations

Regarding Dalits in Bangladesh

Different human rights mechanisms under the UN including treaty bodies, Universal Periodic Review (UPR), and special procedures (Independent Experts and Special Rapporteurs) provided their observations and uttered for taking measures to uphold the human rights of Dalits in Bangladesh. In addition to that, international human rights organizations such as Amnesty International, Human Rights Watch, and others also expressed their observations and concerns about the rights of Dalits. In this chapter, efforts have been made to illustrate these responses.

10.1 Responses of the UN Treaty Bodies about the Rights of Dalits in Bangladesh

Treaty Bodies	Observations	Key Issues Addressed about Dalits in Bangladesh
Human Rights Committee (CCPR)	HRC Concluding Observations – Bangladesh 2017 CCPR/C/BGD/CO/1 ³⁹	Persistence of a caste-based system results in limited employment and housing opportunities for people from so-called lower castes who experience extreme poverty, social stigma and marginalization.
Committee on the Elimination of Racial Discrimination (CERD)	CERD Concluding Observations – Bangladesh 2001 CERD/C/304/Add.118 ⁴⁰	Disaggregated information on the economic and social status of all ethnic, racial discrimination, religious and tribal minorities, interpretation of ‘descent’ including caste.
Committee on the Rights of the Child (CRC)	CRC Concluding Observations – Bangladesh 2015 CRC/C/BGD/CO/5 ⁴¹	Discrimination and violence faced by children from minority groups, in particular Dalit children, and indigenous children, and the lack of accessibility to quality education, in particular to education in their mother tongue.
	CRC Concluding Observations – Bangladesh 2009 CRC/C/BGD/CO/4 ⁴²	Non-discrimination, discrimination against children based on social origin, or other status of their parents, marginalized and excluded children.
	CRC Concluding Observations – Bangladesh 2003 CRC/C/15/Add.221 ⁴³	Non-discrimination, discrimination against children based on social origin, or other status of their parents, marginalized and excluded children.

³⁹https://tbinternet.ohchr.org/_layouts/15/treatybodyexternal/Download.aspx?symbolno=CCPR/C/BGD/CO/1&Lang=En

⁴⁰https://tbinternet.ohchr.org/_layouts/15/treatybodyexternal/Download.aspx?symbolno=CERD/C/304/Add.42&Lang=En

⁴¹http://tbinternet.ohchr.org/_layouts/treatybodyexternal/Download.aspx?symbolno=CRC%2fC%2fBGD%2fCO%2f5&Lang=en

⁴²https://tbinternet.ohchr.org/_layouts/15/treatybodyexternal/Download.aspx?symbolno=CRC%2FC%2FBGD%2FCO%2F4&Lang=en

⁴³<https://undocs.org/CRC/C/15/Add.221>

Treaty Bodies	Observations	Key Issues Addressed about Dalits in Bangladesh
Committee on Elimination of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW)	CEDAW Concluding Observations – Bangladesh 2015 CEDAW/C/BGD/CO/8 ⁴⁴	Adoption of the Anti-Discrimination Law, which complies with the Convention within a specific time frame; Abductions, sexual harassment, rape, intimidation and lack of access to public services and resources for Dalit women; Collection of disaggregated data (sex, age, ethnicity, religious background, socio-economic status, including caste, marital status and others) by the states
	CEDAW Concluding Observations – Bangladesh 2011 CEDAW/C/BGD/CO/7 ⁴⁵	Multiple forms of discrimination, Dalit women, disadvantaged groups of women, disaggregated data, special measures, access to justice, protection from violence and abuse
Committee on the Economic, Social and Cultural Rights (CESCR)	CESCR Concluding Observations – Bangladesh 2018 E/C.12/BGD/CO/1 ⁴⁶	Elimination of discrimination against Dalits in employment and facilitating their employment outside their traditional job categories; Limited access to affordable healthcare services by disadvantaged and marginalized groups including Dalits and ethnic minorities

10.2 Universal Periodic Review (UPR) and Dalit Rights in Bangladesh

The number of overall recommendations to Bangladesh has increased throughout the three UPR cycles, however, any language including Dalits has effectively decreased since the 2nd UPR submission.⁴⁷ Although a recommendation of incorporating awareness programs and investigating complaints concerning religious minorities was noted in the first UPR cycle, the first mention of Dalit issues was during the 2nd cycle of UPR where the Government of Bangladesh (GoB) accepted both recommendations made by the Holy See and Slovenia. The two recommendations explicitly speak to Dalit issues, using them by name. Slovenia made specific references to “ensuring access to safe drinking water and sanitation” for Dalits while the Holy See included the improvement of conditions for children, women, indigenous people, refugees, migrants, and Dalits.⁴⁸

⁴⁵https://tbinternet.ohchr.org/_layouts/15/treatybodyexternal/Download.aspx?symbolno=CEDAW/C/BGD/CO/7&Lang=en

⁴⁶http://tbinternet.ohchr.org/_layouts/treatybodyexternal/Download.aspx?symbolno=E%2fC.12%2fBGD%2fCO%2f1&Lang=en

⁴⁷Library • UPR Info (uwazi.io)

⁴⁸1802898 (upr-info.org)

Out of 256 recommendations made during the 3rd UPR cycle (2017-2021), there was merely one acknowledgement of Dalit issues. Peru submitted a recommendation to “*step up efforts for indigenous peoples, especially the Jumma and the Dalit, to fully enjoy their human rights*”, which was not enjoyed or, noted by the Government of Bangladesh.⁴⁹ The usage of the terms ethnic minorities, religious minorities, and indigenous was prevalent in 6/7 recommendations involving descent-based discrimination; of those 6, only half were supported while the others were not enjoyed, or noted. During the 2018 3rd cycle, the GoB accepted three recommendations regarding anti-discrimination legislation as follows⁵⁰:

- ▶ 147.25 Further accelerate the process of adoption of the anti-discrimination legislation (Georgia)
- ▶ 147.26 Expedite the formulation of the Elimination of Discrimination Act (Thailand)
- ▶ 147.27 That the anti-discrimination law be drafted to protect the rights of marginalized communities and that it be consistent with the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development (South Africa)

It is important to mention that the supported recommendations do not adhere to the SMART principles and are simply too difficult to monitor as these recommendations do not contain a timeline.

10.3 The Rights of Dalits in Bangladesh in the UN Special Procedures of Human Rights

The special procedures of the Human Rights Council of the UN refer independent human rights experts with mandates to report and advise on human rights from a thematic or country-specific perspective. Human rights issues and the vulnerability of Dalits in Bangladesh are addressed in some of these reports. For instance, the joint report⁵¹ of the independent expert on human rights and extreme poverty, Magdalena Sepúlveda Cardona, and the independent expert on human rights obligations related to access to safe drinking water and sanitation, Catarina de Albuquerque based on their visit to Bangladesh during December 3 - 9, 2009 addressed the issue of discrimination against Dalits and their acute state of vulnerability. The report also recommended that “*The Government should explicitly recognize the discrimination experienced by Dalits and take more concrete steps to redress it, including through the enforcement of existing laws and the establishment of a special commission with a mandate to address concerns particular to Dalits*”⁵². Moreover, the end of the mission statement⁵³ by Mr. Olivier De Schutter Special Rapporteur on extreme poverty and human rights based on his visit to Bangladesh during May 17 - 29, 2023 also addressed the discriminated state of Dalits and the need for strengthening the legal and institutional framework to address discriminatory practices.

10.4 The Response of International Human Rights Organizations

International human rights organizations such as Amnesty International, Human Rights Watch, Minority Rights Group, and other organizations have been working to promote the rights of Dalits globally as well in Bangladesh through their work in the field of research, lobbying, advocacy, and other sectors.

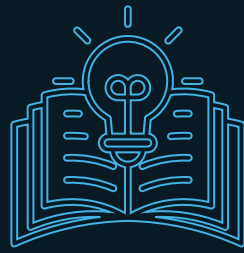
⁴⁹ <https://www.ohchr.org/en/hr-bodies/upr/bd-index>

⁵⁰ Ibid.

⁵¹ <https://reliefweb.int/report/bangladesh/joint-report-independent-expert-question-human-rights-and-extreme-poverty-and>

⁵² Ibid., p. 46.

⁵³ https://bangladesh.un.org/sites/default/files/2023-05/EOMS_Bangladesh_Final_0.pdf



Chapter 11

Overall Major Findings and Learnings

The major findings of this mapping study are as follows:

- ▶ Caste-based disaggregated data to depict the actual scenario of Dalits is not available in Bangladesh.
- ▶ In all the socio-economic aspects, the Dalits are deprived in Bangladesh.
- ▶ The phenomenon of social discrimination against Dalits and their marginalization is either directly or indirectly influenced by the 'purity and pollution' notion.
- ▶ The concept of forced labour and modern slavery needs to be critically explored.
- ▶ There is no legal framework as well as the mechanism in Bangladesh for protecting the rights of Dalits in Bangladesh.
- ▶ There is no comprehensive development plan, policy, and plan targeting the Dalits for their advancement.
- ▶ The budgetary allocation for Dalits in the national budget of Bangladesh is not sufficient as in most of the projects and programs, Dalits are not exclusively targeted, and treated as one of the disadvantaged communities. However, the reality is that they are the most disadvantaged community in Bangladesh.

The mapping study helped to learn the following:

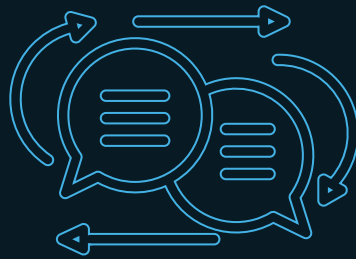
- ▶ Time-series survey in a certain interval i.e. every five (5) years could help to track the status of Dalits in every country.
- ▶ Developing country-wide repositories of existing documents related to Dalit work could help in carrying out further research and evidence-based advocacy initiatives.
- ▶ It is high time to conduct intensive research on how caste-based birth identity along with occupational identity is related to forced labour and modern slavery.



Scenario of discrimination at a hotel in Kurigram district:

Dalits are not allowed to dine in, they are even not allowed to have food on the plate

Photo: Bokul Hossain



Chapter 12

Recommendations

Sl.	Themes	Specific & Concrete Recommendations
1	Enacting Government Policies	Formulate a policy for the comprehensive development of Dalits in Bangladesh backed by a sufficient amount of budgetary allocation.
2	Passing Legislations	Pass and enact the anti-discrimination law in line with international standards to protect the rights of Dalits.
3	Formulating Programs and Projects	Produce disaggregated data on Dalits to design and implement comprehensive development initiatives backed by necessary funding.
4	Making Budgetary Allocations	Allocate a reasonable amount of budget for Dalits by mentioning the word 'Dalits' explicitly so that they can come directly under the benefits.
5	Setting up Organizational Mechanisms (commissions, committees, departments, national mechanisms for reporting and follow-up etc.)	Establish a national Dalit commission for protecting and promoting the rights of Dalits.
6	Setting up Review Committees/ Commissions	Set up a separate review committee under the National Human Rights Commission (NHRC) Bangladesh for reviewing the overall human rights situation of Dalits by conducting fact-findings and investigation into the happenings of atrocities and violence against Dalits across Bangladesh.
7	Others	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▶ Create alternative occupations for Dalits through skill development programs to reduce poverty. ▶ Ensure land rights for Dalits by allocating houses and common (Khas) land.

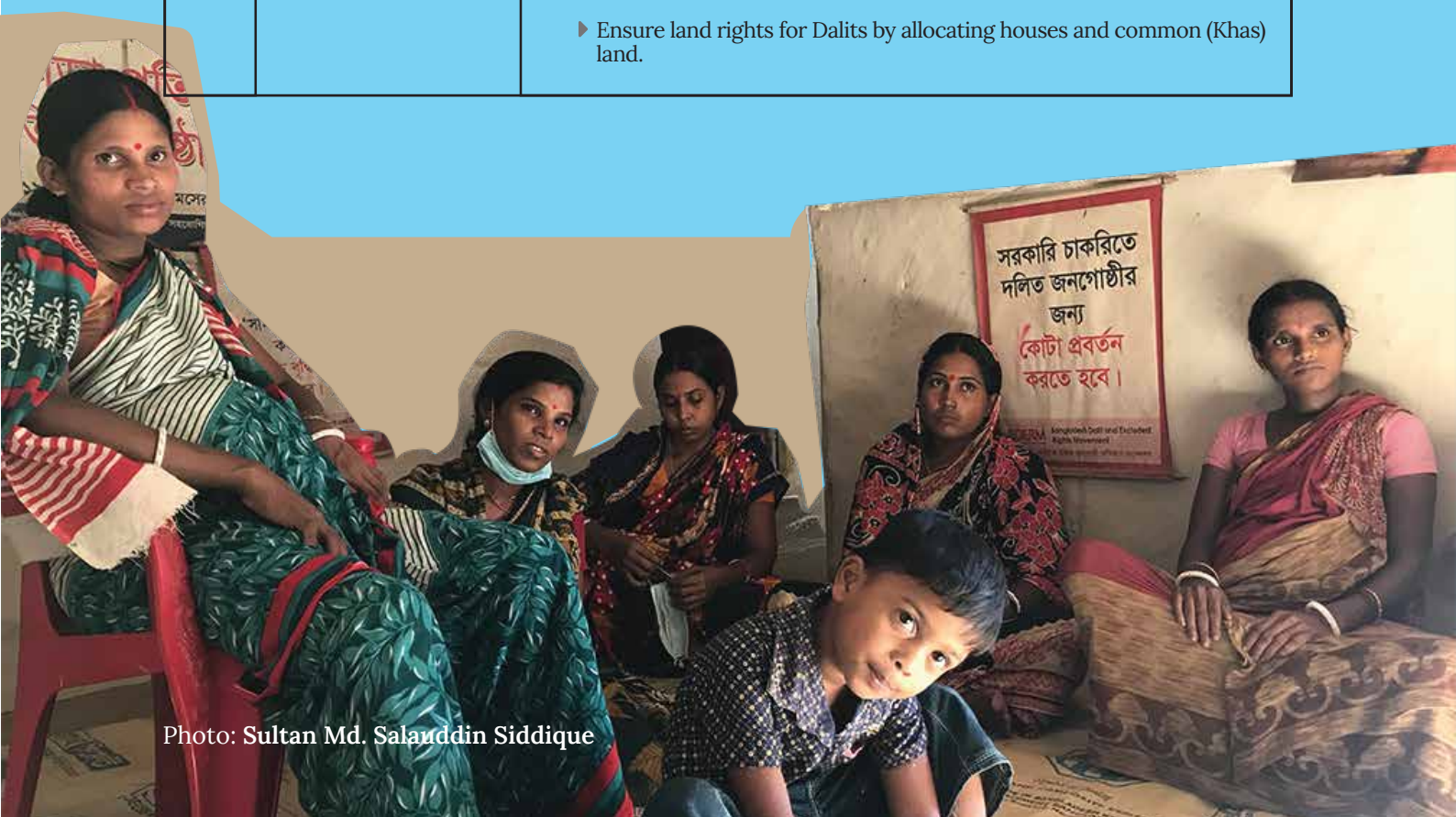


Photo: Sultan Md. Salauddin Siddique



Chapter 13
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Photo: Jacob Carlsen

Discrimination based on Work and Descent (DWD) is the UN terminology used for communities who are traditionally and intergenerationally discriminated based on their identity, social-hierarchical positions, the work associated with their positions, and their lineage and descendants.

The Global Forum of Communities Discriminated on Work and Descent (GFOD)
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