



# The State of the Marginalised in Bangladesh

## Background

Over the last decades, Bangladesh has undergone many social and economic changes. It is evident now that the country has achieved remarkable advancement in many of the social and economic indicators. It has also achieved the status of a lower middle-income country (LMIC) recently. As a democratic and developing state, the country intends to establish an economy and society free from inequality and discrimination of any kind, and a sustained culture of democracy and respect for human rights and dignity for all. The country is also serious about establishing rule of law and social justice.

However, it has become a common place that the government — led by any political party — tends to use and abuse laws as tools to dominate and control state mechanisms with the intention of holding on to power. This creates a serious impact on the realisation of human rights by the citizens. As a result, poverty and inequality stand endemic in society, particularly among the communities who are marginalised.

The issues of marginalisation tremendously affect people's lives and well-being through a process of gross violations of rights in Bangladesh. Marginalised people are those disadvantaged sections of the society, who struggle to gain access to resources and services and to full participation in social and economic life. In other words, marginalised people are socially, economically, politically, culturally and legally ignored, excluded or neglected, and are therefore vulnerable to livelihood changes. Marginalisation is often linked with the experience of being outside the mainstream, and it may also be linked to social disadvantage, low social status and exclusion of varying degrees.

The marginalised people in Bangladesh are not homogenous; rather largely diverse in terms of culture, religion, profession, identity, ethnicity, and physical and social dimensions. There are number of groups who are conspicuously different from each other due to occupational condition (e.g. Dalits, Harijan, fisher-folk, sex-workers), minority situation (e.g. religion, caste, or ethnicity), dwelling in extreme vulnerable or hard to reach areas (e.g. *char*, *haor* or hill areas), disability, sexual orientation, gender identity including transgenders, etc. The human rights situation of different marginalised communities remains serious; but the government and non-government responses against these problems are inadequate.

The marginalised communities in Bangladesh have always been and still are subjected to severe socio-economic discriminations. In other words, they are largely deprived of and excluded from having access to many basic services, such as health, education and social security. Their employment opportunities are very limited, and their social identity and status are very low. They are quite often displaced forcefully from their own land. These groups are victims of rights violation such as discrimination, violence, humiliation, threats and oppression. Their demands are often ignored by the policymakers, politicians and even by the mainstream population.

Against this backdrop, Manusher Jonno Foundation (MJF) took on a study to explore the present state of the 'marginalised people of Bangladesh', so that the socio-economic and human

rights situation of the most disadvantaged population comes to the forefront for development discussion, policy formulation, planning and implementation. The study titled “The State of the Marginalised” not only reports the status of the marginalised communities in the country, but also contributes to monitoring the achievements of SDGs and Seventh Five Year Plan (7FYP) reflecting long-term social development targets of the country.

## Methodology of the Study

It is important to note that marginalisation has political reality because it is linked to powerlessness, helplessness and exclusion in which marginal people are denied to control crucial aspect of their lives. In the marginalisation process, political economy has a significant contribution to make lives and livelihoods of marginalised people vulnerable.

This is why the study has employed both quantitative and qualitative research methods. Data was collected both from primary and secondary sources. Primary data were collected through field surveys and qualitative methods like focus group discussion (FGD), case studies and expert interviews. Household survey has been carried out using structured questionnaires to assess the status of the households and its members on various indicators. FGDs have been carried out with the respective communities to explore the underlying causes of marginalisation in the country. In addition, case studies have been prepared some of the marginalised communities of special characteristics (e.g. persons with disabilities, sex workers, etc.) that are otherwise difficult to capture through household surveys.

Secondary data regarding national level indicators were collected from various published documents for comparison. The survey covered 2,000 households that included 40 field sites of 18 districts of seven administrative divisions across the country. Fifteen marginalised communities, were selected purposively.

## Analysis and Findings

The main aim of the study was to explore marginalised people’s experience of discrimination, exclusion, rights violation and overall process of marginalisation. It has evidently been found that marginalised communities in Bangladesh are more vulnerable in terms of economic status, are concentrated in poor residential areas with substandard housing conditions, lack employment opportunities, have inadequate access to basic services, etc.

Significant findings of the study with regard to some major marginalised communities in Bangladesh are the following:

- There is a huge difference in the status of land ownership among the marginalised communities and the average rural household. About 38.71 per cent marginalised households do not have any land as against 9.6 per cent national average.
- On average, 68.69 per cent of all groups of marginalised households do not own any cultivable land as against 38 per cent of the national average.
- Country’s growth and expansion of economy do not ensure active and satisfactory participation of marginalised people in the labour market who are victims of discrimination. Many of them are bonded labour at extremely low wages pay.
- Employment opportunities and employment potentials are very limited for the marginalised people. Dalits have limited access to employment beyond their ‘traditional’ profession.
- Only 6.58 per cent marginalised households are engaged in formal sector jobs, while the rest 93.42 per cent work in informal sector jobs. On the other hand, only 2.30 per cent marginalised people are in government service.
- The number of agricultural wage labourers is significantly high among the marginalised communities (15.35 per cent) compared to that of the rest of the rural households (4 per cent).
- Remittance is now an important and stable source of income for the households of which the marginalised communities are grossly deprived. It is only about meagre 0.3 per cent as against 7 per cent national average.
- It has been found that a significant number of Adivasi women in both the hills and the plains are involved in economic activities; but only a handful of them can contribute to the households’ economic decision.
- The study also found income disparity within the specific community. Sex workers are the highest income earner group (average monthly household income of Tk. 11,503), while the fisher-folk community’s average monthly household incomes are the lowest (Tk. 5,445). For the Dalit people, the average monthly income is Tk. 6,728 which is lower than the average income of religious minority (Tk. 8,498), person with disability (Tk. 6,755) and plain land Adivasi (Tk. 6,859).

## Policy Recommendations

### *For State*

- Political commitment of state is imperative to promote equitable development in terms of SDG goals.

- Ensure effective protection against discrimination through adopting new laws and policies.
- Revisit existing policy frameworks of different marginalised communities.
- Augment accountability and transparency of the service institutions towards marginalised communities.
- Set up special mechanism for taking care of marginalised people's affairs (e.g. inter-ministerial committee, separate ministries/departments).
- Ensure constitutional recognition and identity of Adivasi communities.
- Pay greater attention to allocate more budget (for education, health, food security, employment generation) for particular marginalised communities and to ensure that allocated budget is used efficiently.

#### *For Market*

- Need to formulate market-based solution to overcome inequalities and poverty.
- Should be responsive to create job opportunities for marginalised communities.

- Facilitate and promote skills and capacity development of marginalised communities.
- Public and commercial banks, specialised banks and microfinance institutions should design special credit and finance schemes for marginalised communities.
- Restructure labour market for marginalised communities by providing information, technologies and scope of full participation.
- Need to draw market-led coherent policy analysis for marginalised people (e.g. rapid changes of occupation, wage discrimination, lack of capacity, and external control).

#### *For Society*

- Facilitate recognition and acceptance of diversity in society.
- Give greater emphasis on building social harmony, integration and inclusion.
- Make it as everybody's responsibility in addressing discrimination against marginalised communities.
- Use civil society effectively as a counter balance.

This Brief has been prepared based on a study titled “The State of the Marginalised” carried out by Manusher Jonno Foundation (MJF). The study findings were presented in a dialogue titled গবেষণা প্রতিবেদন উপস্থাপন: প্রান্তিক জনগোষ্ঠীর জীবনের চ্যলচিত্র jointly organised by MJF and Citizen's Platform for SDGs, Bangladesh on 6 April 2017 at the BRAC Centre, Dhaka.

# Citizen's Platform Briefs

## Citizen's Platform Brief 1

টেকসই উন্নয়ন অভীষ্ট অর্জনে সুশাসন ও গণতন্ত্র মূল চাবিকাঠি

## Citizen's Platform Brief 2

টেকসই উন্নয়নে বেসরকারি খাতের অংশগ্রহণ জরুরি

## Citizen's Platform Brief 3

SDG Priorities for Bangladesh

## Citizen's Platform Brief 4

CSOs in SDG Implementation in Bangladesh

## Citizen's Platform Brief 5

Aligning SDG 4 and 7th Five Year Plan in Bangladesh: Prospects and Challenges

## Citizen's Platform Brief 6

Bridging Climate Action and Sustainable Development Goals in Bangladesh

## Citizen's Platform Brief 7

Quality Education: Is Absence of Accountability and Participation a Villain in the Scene?

## Citizen's Platform Brief 8

Localising the SDGs in Bangladesh

### About the Citizen's Platform for SDGs, Bangladesh

The **Citizen's Platform for SDGs, Bangladesh** is a civil society initiative, taken at the national front, to contribute to the implementation of globally adopted 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development. The Platform was formally launched in June 2016, at the initiative of a group of individuals; the objective has been to track the delivery of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) in Bangladesh and enhance accountability in its implementation process. The concept of the Platform was inspired by the participatory and multi-stakeholder approach promoted as a vital element for success in the attainment of all the SDGs. The Platform currently includes 74 Partner Organisations working on SDG issues across the country.



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