

Past Fellows

Equality Fellow

Name: Md. Motiur Rahman

Education: BSS (Hons.), MSS, Jagannath University

Research Topic: The Difficulties in Secondary Inclusive Education for Children with Disabilities in Educational Institutions of Dhaka City

Previous Experience: Md. Motiur Rahman is a physically challenged person. Academically, he has carried out research on "Presentation of Women in Advertisement: A study of Electronic Media" and "Accessibility and Position of Disabled Students in Educational institutions: A study on selected institutions". As a challenged person, he empathetically feels the pains of that community and is willing to work for them. That is why in his student life, he engaged himself in diverse organizations working with disabilities like volunteering in 'Bangladesh Society for the Change and Advocacy Nexus (B-scan)' and 'Protibondhi Nagorik Songstha Porisad (PNSP)' since 2013. He received training on human rights and leadership titled "Human Rights of Person with Disabilities" and attended workshop on "Youth with Disabilities Leadership Development" successively.

Research Background: In the educational system of Bangladesh, facilities for children with disabilities are very limited and sometimes they face fatal discriminations in getting opportunities of general schools. More than 3,83,437 disabled people are living only at Dhaka in Bangladesh. Generally, children with disabilities are considered as unqualified or less qualified for schools in general or mainstream schools, even when they are otherwise qualified and competent. Education for children with disabilities is considered as a matter of charity. Consequently, there are limited opportunities at mainstream schools for the children with disabilities. Laws relating to the rights of education for these children are not properly followed in general schools or mainstream schools. So they go to inclusive education. Motiur is going to make a comprehensive study on the right to education of the disabled students. He will carry out a study on the condition of children with disabilities in general school and problems faced by them while getting admitted to those schools. He will find out the problems of existing inclusive education system to identify the causes behind drop out of disabled children of Bangladesh. Recommendations will be made to ensure and increase equal access of children with disabilities in the general schools and protect them from the risks of drop outs from every aspect.

Equality Fellow

Name: Kajal Rani, Equality Fellow.

Education: LLB (Honors) and LLM, Southeast University.

Previous Experience: Kajal Rani, a practicing (junior) lawyer in Mymanshingh judge court, owes her origin to Koch community, one of the smallest communities of indigenous people of Bangladesh. She is highly enthusiastic to her academic and professional carrier and dream to work for upholding the rights of the people of her community. As a young leader, she worked in 'Koch Adivasish Chattra Parishad' (Koch Community Student Union) where she planned, organized, and implemented several programs. Furthermore, Kajal also received training under 'Service Solution Limited'. She is the first one of her local community who completed graduation. She is interested to work to facilitate her back footed community and thus develop their living standard.

Research Topic: A study on the Land Rights of Indigenous Koch Community in Bangladesh.

Research Background: People of Kochethnic community are living in the Bangladesh since Mughal period or even earlier. In Bangladesh they are very small in number nowadays. According to population census of 2001, there are 152528 Koch people in Bangladesh. They are mainly farmers. They work either in their own land or as agriculture labor in the lands of others. Koch's live in the forest and hilly areas of border. Culture of the Koch community cannot be preserved without a certain degree of control over land and natural resources. However, indigenous Koch peoples lost ownership and control over most of their ancestral lands and from the end of the 19th century onwards the existence of inherent indigenous land rights is seriously prejudiced by the land grabbers, political leaders and state acquisition. This massive and gradual loss of land has led them to loss of identity, total marginalization, and high rate of poverty. As a result, indigenous Koch people have turned to a disadvantaged community by almost every standard compared to the dominant society, including income, education, housing, standard of health, and life expectancy. In her research, Kajal will make an appraisal of the indigenous land rights protections provided by existing laws and policies for the Koch community in Bangladesh and look at the question of how land rights of the indigenous Koch People can be realized in consonance with various national and international standards.

Community Justice Fellow

Name: Kazi Abusaleh

Education: BSS (Honors) and MSS in Social Welfare, University of Dhaka (2015).

Previous Experience: Saleh has strong academic background and achieved his BSS and MSS degrees securing 1st class 2nd position successively. He was 'Data Enumerator' of a research on 'Democratic Practices in Political Parties of Bangladesh' under 'BRAC Institute of Governance and Development (BIGD)' of BRAC University. Besides, academically he has also carried out three researches on 'Unban Culture', 'Child Laborer', and 'Tuberculosis' issues. As a representative of Bangladesh, Saleh has delegating experiences of his home country to 'Rui-Bin Arts and Character Education Camp-2016' held on New Taipei of Taiwan and 'Torch Rally for Peace and Integrity-2015' held on Kolkata in India. Furthermore, he awarded nationally and internationally for his writing excellence. In his student life, he had diverse engagement with leadership practicing organizations like YES member in Transparency International Bangladesh (TIB), Secretary General of Salimullah Muslim Hall English Forum- a platform of English Debate, Co-convenor of Social Welfare Debating Club etc. He also carried out two internships, each one covered 60 working days, in Dhaka Ahsania Mission (DAM) and Association for Realization of Basic Needs (ARBAN). He wants to be a renowned researcher/academician in his carrier.

Research Topic

A Study on the Traditionally Practiced Panchayat System among Ex-enclave Dwellers in Bangladesh

Research Background

Though Bangladesh got its independence in 1971, the history of enclave traced back since many years before of its origin. These enclaves are the consequences of the historical partition of Indian subcontinent awarded by Sir Redcliff in 1947. Since 1947 to 2011, several efforts were made to settle down enclave issues though all these efforts got fired by unstable bilateral relations, unfair domestic politics, and ultimately remained unimplemented. At the stroke of midnight on 31 July 2015, world people observed the historic enclave exchange that begotten the exchange of more than 150 pockets of land, giving more than 50,000 people the right to citizenship where 111 Indian enclaves, with nearly 37,000 inhabitants, became part of Bangladesh while 51 Bangladeshi enclaves, with 14,000 inhabitants, became the part of India. In legal proceedings, ex-enclave dwellers

were deprived from all sorts of state services and legal sanction. The lax administrative system led to high rate to criminal activities, arson, and violence while fleeing criminals got their safe home in enclave areas after committing crimes. To deal with all administrative issues, ex-enclave dwellers had to form Local Council System (Panchayat system). The council acted as courts, organized public works for the welfare of enclave dwellers, and negotiated all issues on behalf of the enclave dwellers. Saleh will investigate into the traditionally practiced Panchayat system, and the settlement of nowadays inner disputes and state of judicial services system in those arenas.

Community Justice Fellow

Name: Moumita Das Gupta

Education: LL.B. (Honours), LL.M, Department of Law, University of Chittagong

Previous Experience: Moumita Das Gupta is a legal practitioner and a member of Chittagong District Bar Association since 2012. She is an alumna of tenth Human Rights Summer School, organized by ELCOP. In college life she acted as a deputy youth chief of Red Crescent Youth of her college branch and organized and participated in several welfare programs and campaigns being so. Later, along with her professional works she became involved with YPSA, a local NGO, through their social activities. With the support of YPSA and Displacement Solutions, an international NGO, a new organization Lawyers' Initiative for Displacement Solutions (LIDS) is established very recently by young lawyers of Chittagong aiming to ensure legal rights of climate displaced persons of Bangladesh of which she is nominated as the founding vice-president for 2016-2017 term. Before joining at BLAST she has participated in couple of research workshops of which one was organized jointly by Department of Law, University of Chittagong and HEQEP, Bangladesh University Grant Commission and the other by SAILS.

Research Topic: Quest for Legal Enactments Ensuring Social Welfare for Climate Displaced Persons of Bangladesh

Research Background: Presently all over the world effects of climate change and global warming are giving place to loss of homestead and loss of livelihood of the people residing in the affected areas. These people are being compelled to desert their habituated locality to secure their existence by migrating to any other apparently suitable area and thereby being displaced, which is commonly known as climate displacement and these people are being marked as climate displaced persons. This displacement or migration can be occurred within territory or out of territory. But primarily it occurs within the territory of the affected country. Bangladesh is one of the countries most vulnerable to climate change and displacement due to that as well. Between 2008 and 2014 it is estimated that 4.7 million people were displaced due to disasters in Bangladesh. Here it is the poorest and most marginalized, who are at the highest risk of climate displacement and once displacement occurs, their vulnerability often increases. Climate displaced persons, being poorest section of the society, are in the highest need of distress alleviation, effective mobilization and specific services for social welfare. Being a major part of the society their requirements can not be ignored by the State. This study is tended to discuss about present condition and future vulnerability of the climate displaced persons of Bangladesh. At the same time, here it will be an endeavor to suggest adequate social welfare measures to be ensured to facilitate these people in need.

Past Fellows

Fellowship Period: 01 February 2016 to 31 July 2016

Equality Fellows

Name: Bipul Promitheus Shangma

Education: BBA from IBAIS University (2010), MDS from BRAC University(2016)

Biography: Bipul is from the Garo indigenous community and is involved in the Garo Student Union (GASU) which has been fighting since the 80s for the cultural and human rights uplifting of Garo students and indigenous peoples living in Bangladesh. He has served as GASU's Vice President of Dhaka Metropolitan Branch in 2010-2011 and General Secretary of Central Committee in 2014-2015. Bipul has also previously worked at Dhaka Shishu ADP, World Vision as a supervisor of Child Monitoring Facilitator in sponsorship project management. Through this position Bipul worked with different community based organizations and Child Forums, arranged different meetings and workshops, dealt with different sponsors, monitored and supervised the CMFs of six compartments.

Research Topic: Sexual exploitation of Garo working women at Dhaka City

Research Background:

In Bangladesh indigenous people are among the most disadvantaged and socially excluded people and Garo is one of the largest among them. Garo people used to live in the forest and hilly areas, however day by day these forests and agricultural lands are lost or grabbed by the others. So they are moving to urban areas for their livelihoods. However, in urban areas they face numerous barriers and discrimination as their physical characteristics and language indicates that they are minorities. Moreover most of the Garo women are involved with some challenging professions such as beauticians, nurses, sales and professional household activities (nanny, domestic workers) etc. and their educational qualification are at a very primary level. So they are in higher risk of sexual violence, most importantly sexual exploitation. The sexual violence and exploitation on Garo women in Bangladesh especially in a large city like Dhaka shows an alarming trend. Most of the incidents were not disclosed and very few publicly. As the sexual violence and exploitation that they face are often not told to anyone, this silence turns into cancer.

To address this grave issue, Bipul's research aims to answer the following question: What is the socio economic background of Garo working women who are sexually exploited, what is the process in which they are recruited in their workplace, the types and the causes of such sexual exploitation and violence, and the way forward to address this issue?

Name: Babita Rani Sinha

Education: Jahangirnagar University, BSS Honors and MSS in Anthropology

Biography: Babita belongs to the Bishnupriya Manipuri society and has written her dissertation on 'An Ethnography on Bishnupriya Manipuri religion'. She has also conducted ethnographic research on Bishnupriya Manipuri property and customary law. Babita has also worked at BRAC as a Research Assistant for various projects including "Research, Impact evaluation of the DFID programme to accelerate improved nutrition for the extreme poor in Bangladesh, phase-2" and for BRAC's Urban Development Program through which she has investigated the socio-economic profile of slums. In addition, she was a research associate for Prof Zahir Ahmed (Jahangirnagar University) conducting research on 'parliament, public engagement and poverty reduction in Bangladesh.'

Research Topic: Inheritance Rights in Bishnupriya Manipuri Women: Practice and Control

Research Background: As an indigenous society, Bishnupriya Manipuri has different cultures and customs. In her research Babita wants to find out what is their inheritance system how they get it. In Bishnupriya Manipuri society, they follow the Hindu law and women are not getting the same inheritance and control over inherited property as men. Specifically Babita will study Moulvibazar and Sylhet area where these Manipuri women live. Moreover Babita wants to find out the social, cultural

conditions that Manipuri women live in and how women are alienated because of not getting inheritance.

Community Justice Fellows

Name: Mohan Rabidas

Education: BSS (Hons) & MSS (Public Administration) University of Dhaka (2014)

Biography: Mohan is a son of a tea worker and belongs to the Dalit (tea garden) community, one of the most marginalized and socially excluded communities in Bangladesh. He is the first person to graduate from University of Dhaka from among 4.5 million Dalit people and 1.5 million peoples of 167 tea gardens of Bangladesh. Determined to ensure the rights and welfare of his community, he has grown as a leader for his community, undertaking various social activism, research and advocacy work.

He has worked for the human rights development of tea community for 7 years during which he formed numerous CBOs including the Tea Workers Women Forum, VumiRokkhaKomiti, JAGORON Youth Forum (for which he was awarded the Joy Bangla Youth Award in 2015), LRSYM, BRDC, UTSA, DYSA, and BRSC. Furthermore, he worked as a research assistant at NagorikUddyog for various research works including a study titled "Dalit Community of Bangladesh: Discrimination, Deprivation and Untouchability." In addition he has worked as a research assistant for Center for Human Rights Studies (CHRC) on "Status of Dalit Community in Bangladesh."

Research Topic: Land Rights and Current Situation of Tea Workers in Bangladesh

Research Background:

There are 1.5 million people living in 241 tea gardens of Bangladesh. At present the workers are in such a vulnerable situation where they get only Tk 69 a day for working from morning to evening. Though 1.5 million people of tea gardens are citizens of Bangladesh, they are not getting adequate government facilities. Though the tea garden workers play a great role in the economic development of the country through the tea industry, the government is negligent about ensuring their social welfare. The main cause of their underdevelopment is illiteracy. In tea gardens, there are no colleges, high schools, and there are only a few govt. primary schools in 167 tea gardens. There are no initiatives or mechanism to preserve and develop their languages, cultures and tradition. Though the tea workers have been living in Bangladesh for almost 180 years, they still don't have the right to land. They are alien in their own country. Their poor wages can't meet their family expenses. Hence, they cultivate paddy as well as vegetables to earn a little extra money. As they don't have documents or registration, their cultivable lands are being grabbed by the powerful classes. As land problem is very much acute in tea garden, Mohan has decided to conduct his research work on land rights of tea workers of Bangladesh.

Name: Nusrat Sharmin

Education: LL.B. (Hon's), University of Dhaka, M.S.S. in Victimology & Restorative Justice, University of Dhaka.

Biography: Nusrat is an advocate. Nusrat has practiced as a lawyer from August, 2015 to February, 2016 in the Dhaka District Judge Court. As a lawyer she wants to apply my skills to research and advocate for the rights of marginalized communities, specifically the sweeper colony because caste-based segregation is such a discriminatory mindset of our society as a result of which sweepers and people from lower caste are suffering severely. Her aim is to focus on their adequate housing rights which are not fulfilled in the urban sweeper colonies.

Research Topic: A Case Study on Inadequate Housing Problems in the Sweeper Colonies in Dinajpur, Jaypurhat&Nilphamari.

Research Background:

In Bangladesh the sweeper community also known as 'Harijan' are discriminated and socially excluded. The Harijan people face many complex and overlapping forms of discrimination. They face different types of problems, among them inadequate housing is a major problem for them. In urban areas, they live in so called 'colonies'. These colonies are in slum like conditions without adequate water, electricity or sanitation with often three generations of people living in one tiny room. The majority of these Harijan people don't have their own land. They live in the Government's Khas land and even then are frequently threatened with eviction. They have no proper access to water or sanitation with very few toilets. They use common latrines that are sometimes hanging latrines which are unhygienic and that deprives women and girls of their privacy. The sweeper colonies of our country do not meet the conditions which must be met to constitute 'adequate housing'. Though there are many elements to constitute 'adequate housing', Nursat will focus on the habitability and availability of services, materials, facilities and infrastructure in the sweeper colonies.

Past Fellows

Fellowship Period: 5 August 2015 – 5 January 2016

Equality Fellows

Name: Md. Firoj Uddin

Education: LLB (Hons.), LLM, University of Rajshahi, (2013)

Previous Experience: Firoj practiced as a legal apprentice from December 2014 in the Sirajganj District Court. He received training on Public Interest Lawyering through a programme organized by BLAST Rajshahi Law Clinic in March, 2014, and wrote a research monograph on "Right to Information in Bangladesh: Law and Practice" under supervision of Dr. Hasibul Alam Prodhan of the Department of Law, University of Rajshahi.

Research Topic: Right to Employment for Persons with Disability in Bangladesh and its Implementation in Public Sector: A Case Study in Two Dhaka City Corporations

Research Background:

The scope of employment for persons with disability is very limited in Bangladesh and sometime they face discrimination in getting public sector jobs. Generally, persons with

disability are considered not considered fit for employment, even when they are otherwise qualified and competent. Employment for persons with disability is considered as a matter of charity. Consequently, there are limited opportunities for employment for person with disability. Laws relating to the protection of employment for persons with disability are not followed in relation to public service. No comprehensive study has been made on the right to employment for disabled persons. Firoj therefore aims to address the following questions: What are the government commitments to ensuring the employment right of disabled people? What are the limitations for the government in carrying out these commitments? What is the work environment for disabled people in the public sector? How will disabled people get a remedy in case of discrimination by the government? As a former Secretary of RUDO (Rajshahi University Disable Organization) and a former member of PDF (Physically Challenged People Development Foundation) Firoj has long been concerned about equality issues and rights for disabled people. He believes it is crucial that disabled people's rights to equal access to employment is realized and wishes to increase such access of persons with disability in the public sector through his research and advocacy.

Name: Probhat Tudu

Education: Bachelor of Social Science, (B.S.S) from Notre Dame College, National University (2010); Bachelor of Law (LL.B) from Daffodil International University, Bangladesh (2014)

Previous Experience: Probhat worked for Social Mobilization & Communication Management at Voice for Interactive Choice and Empowerment (VOICE) from June 2012 to July 2014. He has also served as the chairman of the Lutheran Youth and Children Ministry (LYCM) under Bangladesh North Evangelical Lutheran Church (BNELC) and secretary of the Santal Lekhok Forum.

Research Topic: Protection of Land Rights of Santal People

Research Background:

The Santals are one of the oldest and largest indigenous communities living mainly in the northwestern belt of Bangladesh. Despite the fact that they are generally descendants of the original inhabitants of such lands and for generations have passed down traditional knowledge of their lands, natural resources and environment, day by day they are losing their lands. Sometimes it is as a result of actions by the state or sometimes by land grabbers. Land Rights is a vital problem in Santal community without which Santal people's life security and socio-economic and political livelihood is at stake. In fact, many have suffered insecurity, torture, murder and forced migration due to the land grabs and in many cases the state has failed to ensure their safety. Consequently, their numbers are decreasing day by day. Many Santal people have been unable to reclaim these lands due to being illiterate and unaware about their rights and available remedies. Through his research and as a member of the Santal community himself, Probhat will investigate of Santal people's inability to preserve their land rights, advocate for and raise awareness in the Santal community of their rights. He will also seek to identify the necessary steps which the state may take in order to implement and enforce laws and regulations needed to preserve the land rights of the Santal peoples.

Community Justice Fellows

Name: Md. Razu Ahmad Masum

Education: BSS (Hons) & MSS, Anthropology, Jahangirnagar University (2014)

Previous Experience: Razu has been working as a researcher for 3 years. He started ethnographic research on Dalit community, specifically their culture and rituals under the supervision of Dr. Farzana Islam, Professor and now Vice Chancellor of Jahangirnagar University. He then worked with dRi (Development Research Initiative) as a junior research associate (from September 2014 to August 2015) where he took part in several studies including 'Analysis of Poverty and Food Insecurity Dynamics in Cox's Bazar, Bangladesh, and their Implications for Women and Adolescent Girls' of WFP, and 'Needs Assessment of Children Living in and around Daulatdia and Faridpur Brothels' of Save the Children. In every study, he conducted field research, analyzed data and drafted reports. Razu has also worked on conference documentation for the Action Aid Policy Programme & Campaign Team, and was a Research Assistant at Nagorik Uddyog from February 2013 to September 2013.

Research Topic: Rights of Dalit Tea Garden Workers in Sylhet, Bangladesh

Research Background:

According to the Tea Board of Bangladesh, approximately 118,000 workers are based in more than 166 different tea gardens in the country with most of them being from the 'Dalit' community. The Labour Law 2006 aims to "protecting laborers' rights all over the country," yet it is unclear whether this is actually realized in the case of these workers.

With his expertise on qualitative research methodology and through study of Alinagor Tea Garden in Srimongol Upazila and Vurvuria Tea Garden in the same Upazila, Razu will try to assess compliance with the labour law in a specialized working environment. He will also try to understand how and whether Dalit tea garden workers face caste based discrimination.

Razu has a track record in the area of participatory action research particularly on labor condition of sex workers, Dalit community of Dhaka region, which exemplifies his commitment to research and advocacy, specifically for the rights of marginalized people in Bangladesh. Continuing with this commitment Razu aims to identify existing justice mechanisms for the Tea Garden workers; provide a guideline to duty-bearers about revising the Labour Act to address as a priority the concerns and issues faced by marginalized workers; and find a more realistic way to ensure labour law implementation with new dimensions of including advocacy activity on the rights of Tea Garden Dalit workers.

Name: Sthiti

Sangma

Education: MSS & BSS (Political Science), Anandamohan College, Mymensingh

Previous Experience: Sthiti worked as a volunteer at World Vision Bangladesh in a sponsorship program and has participated in their various programs including seminar, workshop, and awareness sessions, etc. She has also participated in a 4 days training program organized by Asian Human Rights Study and Ain O Salish Kendra (ASK) on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights on 16 to 19 April 2012.

Research Topic: Challenges and Adverse Effects Faced by the Kaolin ('China Mati') Extracting Garo Workers

Research Background:

Garos indigenous communities are increasingly marginalized and are made powerless as the poor are evicted from their land. The *SadaSona* (White Gold) hills are located at Bijoypur, Susong Durgapur in Netrokona District near of the border of Meghalaya ,India. Indigenous communities such as the Mandi (Garos), Hajong and others live in the Upozila. Bijoypur provides one of the main sources of the country's china clay (sadamati) used for various ceramic goods. The majority of the clay mine workers who work here are Garos and Hajongs, both male and female. Women's earnings are lower than men's earning. There is no occupational health and safety management system. Clay mine workers have limited knowledge of their rights and laws and rely on their employers as they have no other source of work.

As a member of the Garo community herself, through her research, Sthiti aims to identify the problems and challenges of Garo workers engaged in china mati extraction in the Bijoypur village, and to identify the measures required to ensure access to justice.