

UN Human Rights:  
ASIA AND THE PACIFIC REGIONAL SEMINAR

**Lenen's Statement:** Despite all the development in Bangladesh over the past decade, Bangladesh is facing an inequality designed by cultural and historical structures to deprive people living in poverty.

Though the Constitution of Bangladesh allowed everyone equity in all aspects.

We participated in a research project carried out by ATD Fourth World and Oxford University in six countries. This international research found new dimensions of poverty discrimination which I want to mention in this international conference on THE CONTRIBUTION OF DEVELOPMENT TO THE ENJOYMENT OF ALL HUMAN RIGHTS.

As a practitioner from a root level NGO over 20 years we experience institutional maltreatment in a significant area which is relevant for the enjoyment of Human rights aspects in Bangladesh.

I would now like to give the floor to Jalal, who grew up in poverty and is now works with me in MATI.

**Jalal's statement:** *Good morning/afternoon to everybody. My name is Jalal Uddin. I am from Bangladesh. I am an NGO officer. Mati, the NGO where I am working since 2005 in poverty reduction and organic agriculture department. I am very happy and feel proud to participate in such an international seminar addressed on human rights. I am very thankful to the UN human rights department people who gave me the opportunity to join this international seminar. I would like to share with you about sad stories/strategic situations that many families living in poverty have to face, including myself and my family. People living in poverty in Bangladesh suffer from many violations of their human rights, that prevent them from living in dignity, and to contributing to the development of their communities and of the country.*

*They are affected from childhood. Even though I have completed my Bachelor degree but it was very difficult and challenging for me. Many times, I could not go to school because I didn't have a uniform. One day, I sat for the exam. But before the exam started, my teachers got out me of the exam hall. Because my parents did not pay my school fees. Because of poverty, I never bought new books.*

*I have visited/still visit many poor families in my working areas/other places. I have seen that in many poor families, girls are aged enough to get married but they can't get married because their parents can't give dowry. Many parents said that they could not afford to send their daughter to*

*school because of poverty. This is the reason why their girls are not getting any jobs, any income and to get married an income-less girls needs a dowry.*

*Girls suffer from the dowry tradition. I have 7 sisters. Among them, 4 are older than me. One of my older sisters named "Fozila" got married without a dowry. After she gets the marriage, her husband and his family members started to torture my sister to get a dowry.*

*Poor people do not get treatment in health-care facilities because of the expenses. I have seen that we/our family members were struggling all the time for food/clothes/accommodation /health care treatment/education costs. My father was a marginalized farmer and my mother was a housewife. We had some cultivation land which was the main income source of our family. We had no other income opportunity.*

*Due to insufficient financial ability, my father used to take out a loan from a lender with 10% interest per month to cultivate rice on our land by the river water. After the harvest, very soon he had to sell the rice at a cheap price in order to pay off the debt. But one season, the temperature got very high and the river water has dried up but at one point in the river, there was a big hole where water was available for our and our neighbor's rice fields. But the neighbor, who was rich and more powerful, said that the water is not enough for 2 families' rice fields, therefore, they are not allowed to use water in our rice field from this hole. At the end of the season, the lender forced my father to return the entire loan with interest. We had a rather large hut made of tin and wood. My father had no other option he decided to sell the hut to pay the money to lender. After that, my father somehow made a hut with bamboo and straw which would not keep out the rain and we had to eat wheat flour instead of rice (the price it was cheaper than rice) for at least 4 months until the next harvest.*

*The government has provided assistance programs and assistance to the poor people such as VGD (venerable group development) cards, old aged cards, widow cards; children allowance cards, disability cards, etc. The poor people should get these facilities under the cards. It is their right but the reality is that the poor people can't enjoy their rights under the cards. The rich and powerful people take the cards/reliefs and distribute them among their relatives or they use for themselves.*

*Most of the time, the poor are deprived of institutional support, which leaves them powerless and affects their lives. Public expenditure on health, education, and sanitation benefits the non-poor more than the poor.*

**Lenen's Statement:** Our recommendation will be that government officials need to be more friendly and provide a special service point for people living in poverty to ensure their access to the basics right based safety net program of Bangladesh government.

My request will be international Bilateral development partners who are actively in partnership with the government support the safety net program to ensure the service for the people.

This can be done by participation of the people living in poverty by including them in the designing the project and listening to their concerns.

Our experience shows a massive neglected attitude by the rural and urban based safety net name listing process for the people living in poverty.

People living in poverty cannot come to the list.

Even the allocation is big but the decision-making process by choosing the name for the VGD, Old support, disable and occasionally support programs of the government is still in the line of old structured nepotism.

Institutional maltreatment in

Food distribution, Health services, education and law enforcement could be also minimized by the digital program.

In this regard we obviously need to mention that Bangladesh declared digital Bangladesh to be a smart Bangladesh and we see how the people living in poverty get behind by not using this modern device or app.

We also observed the need for educational support for modern life for the people living in poverty.

Due to the educational and financial disadvantages, the modern digital Bangladesh is depriving people living in poverty

.  
Digital Bangladesh means "With the ultimate goal of improving people's lives, "Digital Bangladesh" is defined as the protection of people's democracy and rights, transparency, accountability, establishing justice, and ensuring the delivery of government services to citizens' doorsteps through the use of technology"

We also want to mention the situation of the old and middle age working people with different kinds of work-related injuries.

We meet many middle-aged people who are unable to work due to injury but have no chance to get an old support program.

The safety net program of the government of Bangladesh needs to be more open to people who are in need of basic human rights.

Our recommendation goes strongly to children living in poverty and affected by climate change and environment degradation.

The international ATD Oxford research found the panic and scared daily life situation of children in the city areas which is relevant to mention because of the living conditions with the great waste of our modern development.

Meanwhile the rich people are able to produce enough waste to destroy not only nature but the future of children living in poverty.

The children's future with this fearful life is against human rights.

The story of my colleague Jalal actually reflects Mati's daily work situation with the deprived people in Bangladesh.

### **A description of MATI's work**

MATI is a registered NGO that works from five village-based stations. It has a full-time staff of 70 along with volunteers. MATI trains young men and women to be "field motivators", who work with the villagers to pass on their knowledge in areas such as organic agriculture, environmental protection, health care, water and sanitation, nutrition, family planning, child care, quality education, etc. in weekly meetings with the villagers.

The women's groups also function as savings groups, which enables the members to gain access to loans for income-generation activities such as livestock or a rickshaw, or for much-needed hut repair, health care, or an education loan for their children. To date, there are more than 180 women's groups, each with 15-25 members.

From the beginning, Mati has also worked to ensure inclusive and equitable quality education and promote lifelong learning opportunities for all. Education is the most powerful weapon which you can use to change the world and the most effective way to break out of the cycle of poverty. We have several programs related to education and human resource development. For example, an eco-primary school which includes a school savings programme. Every student has his or her own school savings book, depositing 100 takas a month on their book, which they can then use for their admission to a government school when they reach sixth grade.

Mati has also been conducting some vocational training programmes since 2005. The general objective of the programme is the development of the human resources of Bangladesh with a view to expediting the economic development of the country. The specific objective is to empower

poor young men and women from rural areas and urban slums with vocational training at affordable costs so they could find good employment and pull themselves and their families out of poverty. It also provides scholarships to young men and women for training as paramedics, to respond to the lack of health care services in rural areas.

MATI was responsible for conducting a study to identify the national “dimensions of poverty” in Bangladesh. This research was implemented both in the global north (France, UK, and USA) and the global south (Bangladesh, Bolivia, and Tanzania) at the same time and with the same objectives; all research activities and research techniques were directed by the University of Oxford and ATD Fourth World.

Funds provided by overseas sponsors enables MATI to protect girls from the threat of child marriage. MATI has a Girls Sponsorship programme through which financial aid is provided to parents who choose school instead of marriage for their daughters.

These are some examples of the programmes that we provide to empower people living in poverty to improve their lives and provide better opportunities for their children.