

Annual Human Rights
Training and Study Session –
Bangladesh: Summary
Report

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Nagorik Uddyog, Department of International Relations – Dhaka University and Asian Institute for Human Rights organized the ‘Annual Human Rights Training and Study Session’ in Bangladesh from 30th October – 11th November 2010 at Sonargaon, Narayanganj, Bangladesh. The present document gives a brief summary of the details of the Study Session and the planned follow up.

A. Objectives of the program

The objectives of the program were to provide young activists and students a framework for their activism by providing them with knowledge and skills required for human rights work. The specific objectives of the program were

- To enable participants to gain an understanding of history and development of human rights norms and standards;
- To enhance understanding of international human rights law and the bill of rights;
- To provide and understanding of the concept of gender equality;
- To facilitate reflection on the Constitution of Bangladesh vis a vis international human rights norms and standards;
- To facilitate reflection on contemporary issues of human rights concerns in Bangladesh;
- To enhance knowledge and skills for devising effective strategies for addressing human rights issues and concerns;
- To facilitate reflection on values and attitudes required for human rights work;
- To facilitate increased solidarity and linkages amongst those working for human rights.

B. Participants

The Study Session was attended by 26 participants. There were 9 students from the universities including, 5 students from Department of International Relations, Dhaka University. There were 17 participants from civil society organizations working on different issues such as, legal aid, rights of indigenous people in Chittagong Hill Tracts, rights of dalit people, farmers, gender and human rights.

C. Description of the course

The curriculum of the study session was divided into 6 parts. Details of the different sessions were as follows;

Part I: Introductions

This section included an introduction of the participants, the facilitating team, discussion on the expectations of the participants and presentation of the outline of the course.

Part II: Clarifying Concepts, Understanding the Rights

The objective of the section was to provide a conceptual framework for understanding and addressing violations of human dignity. The different sessions under Part II were;

a. *History and Development of Human Rights Norms and the Fundamental Principles of Human Rights*

The objective of this session was to trace the development of human rights norms and standards and to clarify understanding on the basic principles of human rights such as indivisibility, interdependence, inalienability and equality and non discrimination. Dr. Faustina Pereira, Director, Human Rights and Legal Service Program of BRAC was the resource person for the session.

b. *Introduction to the International Bill of Rights*

The objective of the session was to introduce the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, the International Covenant on Civil Political Rights, the International Covenant on Economic Social Cultural Rights and the other core international human rights treaties to the participants. The session also included discussion on the treaty making process. The session was facilitated by Zahirul Islam and Kalpalata Dutta from AIHR.

c. *Struggles in Human Rights in Bangladesh*

During this session the participants worked in four groups and traced the major events relating to human rights during the decades of 1970-1980, 1980-1990, 1990-2000 and 2000-2010. The objective of the session was to facilitate reflection and understanding of events, social movements, conflicts that created the space for transformation, change and recognition of rights in Bangladesh.

d. *Discussing Gender*

The objective of this session was to facilitate understanding on the concept of gender, the tool of gender relation analysis and reflect on the need of gender mainstreaming. During the session, the resource persons through group work initiated discussions on the impact of laws and policies on women, the different ways in which society construct the roles of men and women and

the impact of such social constructions on the status and rights of women within the family, community, market institutions and state institutions and structures. The resource persons summarized the discussions by giving inputs on the three models of equality (formal, protective and substantive), the dynamics of power, concept of practical gender needs, strategic gender needs and gender mainstreaming.

The session was conducted by Sannaiya Fahim Ansari, Deputy Director, Gender and Social Justice, Ain o Saalish Kendra (ASK). She was assisted by Taufiq Al Mannan from Gender and Social Justice, ASK.

e. National Constitutions and Human Rights

The objective of this session was to enhance understanding about the rights guaranteed in the national constitution of Bangladesh. During this session, the participants worked in groups to examine the chapters of the national constitution that articulated rights of the people and compared them with the international human rights treaties. The participants also reflected on the difference between the ‘fundamental rights’ and ‘guiding principles of state policy’. The session was facilitated by Zahirul Islam and Kalpalata Dutta.

f. Understanding the content of rights and nature of state obligations

The purpose of the session was to enhance understanding of the content of the different human rights standards and the corresponding state obligations. During this session the participants worked in groups on different case studies and tried to understand the violations or human rights concerns and the corresponding human rights. Following this, the resource persons gave a presentation on ‘state obligations’ and the participants strengthened their understanding by working on case studies to analyse the nature of state obligations. The session was facilitated by Zahirul Islam and Kalpalata Dutta.

g. Film screening on the ‘Right to Information’ campaign by MKSS in India

Part III: Applying Rights Framework to Contemporary Issues

The objective of this session was to facilitate analysis and reflection on contemporary issues in Bangladesh by using the rights framework (framework of rights and corresponding state obligations). The different issues discussed under this section were

- a. *Environment and Livelihood*: Dr. Mahabuba Nasreen, Dhaka University, discussed the impact of destruction of the environment in Bangladesh on the livelihood rights of the people.
- b. *Environment, Rights and Legal Action*: Taslima Islam from Bangladesh Environmental Lawyers Association (BELA) presented the laws and policies

that regulate the destruction of the environment. She also shared information about initiatives taken by BELA to protect the rights of the people.

- c. *Provision of Essential Services and Consumer rights*: Md. Zahedur Rahman, Joint Secretary, Bangladesh Poribesh Andolan – BAPA (Bangladesh Environment Movement) gave a presentation on the impact of polluter and adulterated food on the rights of the people, the legal framework to ensure the availability of quality food and the rights of the consumers.
- d. *National Policy on Women, its Strengths and Weaknesses*: Resource Person, Altaf Parvez, an independent researcher, discussed the national policy on women, its strengths and weaknesses, the politics surrounding it and the position of the women’s movement regarding the policy.
- e. *Status of Civil Liberties in Bangladesh: Protection from Torture, Arbitrary Detention, Extra Judicial Killings*: Advocate Abu Obaidur Rahman, ASK, gave a presentation on the use of torture, arbitrary detention and extra judicial killings in Bangladesh, the protections available within the legal system against such violations, the available remedies and the legal initiatives taken by ASK to protect the rights.
- f. *Issues faced by workers in the unorganised sector*: Resource Person, A.B.M Sajjad Hossain, the founding member of Bangladesh Institute of Labour Studies, discussed the rights of labour within the national legal framework.

Part IV: Monitoring Violations

The objective of this section was to enhance knowledge and skills about the range of strategies and mechanisms that can be used to seek accountability for human rights violations. The different sessions under this section were as follows:

- a. *Fact-Finding and Documenting Violations*: the objective of the session was to enhance the skills of the participants to analyse a given situation, identify the violations, collection of information, recording and reporting. The participants worked in groups on given case studies, did fact finding through interviewing and presented their reports in a human rights perspective. The session was facilitated by Zahirul Islam and Kalpalata Dutta.
- b. *Introduction to the human rights mechanisms at the international level*: the purpose of this session was to enhance knowledge about the human rights mechanisms available at the international level; the mechanism of universal periodic review, treaty bodies and the special procedures such as thematic working groups and special rapporteurs.

Sayeed Ahmed, ASK conducted the session on human rights mechanisms. Barrister Sara Hossain gave inputs on strategic civil society engagement with the international human rights mechanisms.

- c. *Using the Courts for Promotion and Protection of Human Rights:* In this session, Barrister Sara Hossain discussed social action litigation and the different ways in which it has been used to challenge discrimination and ensure equality. Through presentation and case studies, she discussed the meaning of social actions litigation, the ways in which it has been used by human rights lawyers and civil society groups for - progressive expansion of rights, to seek accountability from public authorities and to create public awareness. She also reflected on some of the challenges of using the strategy of public interest litigation and presented some suggestions of overcoming these challenges.
- d. *National Human Rights Commission of Bangladesh:* In this session, Advocate Fauzia Karim Firoze, Commissioner, National Human Rights Commission (NHRC) of Bangladesh, discussed the mandate and role of the NHRC in promoting and protecting human rights. She also shared the different ways in which civil society organisations could engage with the NHRC.
- e. *Social Movements:* Under this session the participants discussed the role of social movements in promoting and protecting rights using the examples of movements in India and Bangladesh on exploitation of mineral resources through mining activities. Manoranjan Pegu, a participant from India, led the discussion.
- f. *Indigenous Peoples in Bangladesh – Struggles for Human Rights:* Sanjeeb Drong, General Secretary, Bangladesh Indigenous Peoples Forum, in his presentation discussed the concept of ‘indigenouness’ and reflected on the question – ‘who are indigenous peoples’? He also elaborated on the distinctive features of the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples 2007 and discussed the specific problems faced by indigenous peoples in Bangladesh. He also discussed the position of the Bangladesh State on indigenous peoples by referring to the Constitution, Laws, Policies and the Chittagong Hill Tract Peace Accord of 1997. At the end he shared some initiatives taken by civil society organisations to support the struggles of indigenous peoples in seeking recognition and protection of their rights.

- g. *Using Media for Human Rights Advocacy and Monitoring:* Robaet Ferdous, Associate Professor, Department of Mass Communications and Journalism, Dhaka University discussed the scope and potentiality of using media as a tool for human rights monitoring and advocacy. He also had a discussion on media ethics and the challenges of using media for advocacy purposes.
- h. *Using Photography for Promoting and Protecting Human Rights:* Md. Main Uddin, Faculty Moderator, Pathshala, DRIK, gave some conceptual inputs on the ways in which photography can be used for promoting and protecting rights and shared experiences of DRIK as well as other photographers from different parts of the world.

Part V: Special Lectures

- a. *Challenges posed by Globalisation:* Monower Mostafa, Research Director, Development Synergy Institute, gave a lecture on globalisation – its defining features, characteristics, its trend and catalysts, and its impact on the rights of the people. At the end of the lecture, there was an open discussion on the challenges posed by globalization and the possible strategies for meeting such challenges.
- b. *Understanding the Human Rights Approach:* Sultana Kamal, Executive Director, Ain O Salish Kendra, discussed the difference between development work and human rights work by sharing the experience of the women’s movement. She also stressed that human rights get recognition through the lived experiences of the people. The human rights framework was like a living tree which was constantly in the process of development – its norms and standards getting crystallized through the struggles of people. At the end, she also stressed that each and every human being also had a duty and responsibility to respect the values of human rights and practice them.
- c. *Building a Spirit of Voluntarism in Human Rights Work:* Zakir Hossain, Chief Executive, Nagorik Uddyog, discussed the work of social movements such as BAPA to highlight the importance of voluntarism in human rights work. He also discussed the challenges of building the spirit of voluntarism in the present context of Bangladesh.
- d. *MDGs and Human Rights - The Linkages:* The objective of this session was to reflect on the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) and reflect on whether they should be transformed into Millennium Development Rights. Professor Amena Mohsin, Department of International Relations, Dhaka

University gave a presentation on the Millennium Development Goals. At the end of her lecture, the participants worked in groups to study the achievements in MDGs of some countries and analyse whether such achievements were compatible with the rights framework.

Part VI: Developing Action Plans

At the end of the course, the participants worked in pairs to select an issue of human rights concern in Bangladesh, analyse it in the human rights perspective and prepare an action plan for addressing it. While preparing the action plan, the participants were requested to highlight the actions that should be taken by the state as well as actions they, as individuals and organisations, could take. The action plans were presented by the pairs before an external resource person, Professor Farzana Islam, who commented on the plans and gave suggestions for improvement. The topics of the action plans are as follows;

- Empowering tea estate workers through human rights education
- To integrate human rights in the Chittagong Hill Tracts Peace Accord
- Integrating social relations and human rights
- Child labor and human rights in universities
- Promoting the right to health of people affected by Aila cyclone
- Gender discrimination in educational institutions
- Contesting the devils lens: addressing cyber pornography in Bangladesh
- The culture of eve teasing in Bangladesh – its impact and solutions
- Ensuring rights of labor affected by accidents in the workplace
- Ensuring economic development of farmers and agricultural workers
- Social and cultural development of dalit/marginalised people
- Ensuring right to education in Chittagong Hill Tracts

D. Resource Persons

The study-session was facilitated by Zahirul Islam and Kalpalata Dutta who were present the entire duration of the course. They helped in conducting a recap of the previous day's learning by the participants at the beginning of each day and also facilitated a group discussion at the end of every day to review the discussions of the day. The resource persons included academics and activists widely known for their contributions in the field of social justice and human rights.

E. Awarding of Certificates

Professor Farid Uddin Ahmed, Dean, Faculty of Social Sciences, University of Dhaka awarded the certificates to the participants. The certificates were jointly issued by Department of International Relations – Dhaka University, Nagorik Uddyog and

Department of International Relations – Dhaka University. The certificate giving ceremony was held at the Senate Building of Dhaka University.

F. Evaluation

From participants: At the end of the course, the participants did an evaluation of the course. The participants commended the course and said it was an important opportunity for them to learn about human rights theory as well as human rights problems and concerns in Bangladesh. All participants found the sessions on examining national constitution and understanding the content of rights and scope of state obligations particularly useful. The participants also gave the feedback that the duration of the course should be increased. The participants also requested for follow up courses on specific issues such as economic social cultural rights, women's rights etc.

From the organisers and resource persons: the participants which included students and activists working on a wide range of issues created a very rich learning atmosphere and provided the space to learn from each other. It helped to create more understanding about the problems faced by different groups in Bangladesh and build solidarity amongst the participants.

G. Follow -up

The organisers will follow up with the participants by inviting them to different events organised in Bangladesh. The organisers will also follow up on the action plans developed by the participants and extend support, if needed, in the realization of these action plans.

H. About the Organisers

Nagorik Uddyog: Established in 1995, Nagorik Uddyog (NU) strives towards strengthening governance initiatives in Bangladesh. It focuses on the promotion of access to justice, democratizing the system of 'salish', a traditional dispute resolution system in Bangladesh, promoting rights of urban, informal labor and the rights of dalit people by raising awareness and building of people's capacities to pursue and realize their rights. NU also conducts programs amongst the youth to raise awareness about human rights.

Department of International Relations, Dhaka University: The Department of International Relations, University of Dhaka, had its early journey in July 1947 while the subcontinent was still the part of the union of territories under the erstwhile British Commonwealth and Empire. That perhaps conferred it a unique distinction of being the first academic department in the entire region of South Asia to offer the subject of international relations and in that it may lay a claim to pioneer IR teaching in the subcontinent. From its very inception, the Department was committed to promote multidisciplinary knowledge and skills to cater for the human resources in diplomatic, political and international administrative/business/social services.

Currently, the Department offers four-year undergraduate, one-year Masters', M.Phil, Ph.D. and Post-graduate Diploma in IR programs.

Asian Institute for Human Rights: The Asian Institute for Human Rights, based in Bangkok, strives to strengthen the theory and practice of human rights activism, facilitating linkages between academics and activists and contributing to a continuous process of action and reflection. The Institute functions as a resource organization for human rights activism in the Asian region and also strives to bring in experiences from other regions of the world.

Conclusion

The organizers thank Taiwan Foundation for Democracy and One World Action for granting support to the Annual Human Rights Study Session in Bangladesh and enabling the organizers to contribute towards the capacity building of activists in Bangladesh.