

1 Support for the Social Victims: An ESDO Experience

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Introduction

As I see it, social work should be ... a catalyst for thinking in new ways about ourselves and those with whom we work, helping us to articulate major policy issues, generating more just alternatives, and evoking reflections on issues that define its as a profession. It should challenge taken-for-granted beliefs ... and promote new forms of understanding and practice. (Roberts and Brownell: 1999)

Social Justice is one of the core values of social work. According to the encyclopedia of social work, Flynn (1995) defined social justice as *the embodiment of fairness (reasonable treatment), equity (similar situations dealt with similarly), and equality in the distribution of societal resources*. As political theorist Iris Young (1990) argued, however, *social justice may involve distribution of resources, but may also refer to other ways in which social institutions inhibit or liberate persons*. The *Code of Ethics of the National Association of Social Workers (NASW Code of Ethics), 1999*, speak of social justice in terms of “meaningful participation in decision making for all people”.

The mission of the social work profession is rooted in a set of core values. These core values, embraced by social workers throughout the profession's history, are the foundation of social work's unique purpose and perspective: Service, Social justice, Dignity and worth of the person, Importance of human relationships, Integrity, Competence (NASW Code of Ethics (1999)).

According to *The National Association of Social Workers (NASW) Code of Ethics*, value of social justice ensured through the following Ethical Principle: *Social workers challenge social injustice. Social workers pursue social change, particularly with and on behalf of vulnerable and oppressed individuals and groups of people. Social workers' social change efforts are focused primarily on issues of poverty, unemployment, discrimination, and other forms of social injustice. These activities seek to promote sensitivity to and knowledge about oppression and cultural and ethnic diversity. Social workers strive to ensure access to needed information, services, and resources; equality of opportunity; and meaningful participation in decision making for all people.*

Restorative justice very closely relates to social justice or fairness in that the victims and offenders each have their interests represented in the proceedings. Restorative justice as a holistic approach moves beyond simplistic either/or, winner-take-all modes of settling disputes into the realm of negotiation and the attempt to be fair to both parties. Third-party solutions can maximize benefits for all and minimize social costs. When lawyers are involved, they work with each other rather than against each other.

Eco Social Development Organization is one of the pioneer non-government organizations of Bangladesh with the leadership of professional social worker. ESDO has worked for with the vision of an equitable society free from all discrimination. ESDO has launched a program on 2006, named Promotion of Rights for Adibashis and DALITS Improvement Programme (PRADIP) for ensuring and promoting rights of extreme minorities of Bangladesh. The ESDO management has successfully promote the Paraprofessional social work and through this approach the project has successfully ensuring enabling environment for social victims (the rights and access of extreme minority) and appropriate way forward for inclusion of extreme minority in the society. The present article has given the ESDO's experience on promotion of rights on Social Victims and the interrelations with professional social work.

Social Exclusion the Root Cause of Social Victims

Social Exclusion is the common term on the context of social science and especially on social work. Social exclusion has different dimension, In Bangladesh country context social exclusion has directly linked with caste, racial and occupational aspect. The extreme minority community has faced different social exclusion, unfortunately which has created by the social elites and state never be taken any action against such types of offence. According to the Constitution of Bangladesh, state responsible for all forms of discrimination free Bangladesh. But, caste, gender and occupation based violence has been continuing and the *Dalit* community-extreme minority segment of the society experienced with various forms of social exclusion including exclusion from land, security, human rights and social access.

In Social Work, social exclusion has defined as “marginalization of people or areas and the imposition of barriers that restrict them from access to opportunities to fully integrate with the larger society “(Barker, 2003, 403). In

Bangladesh, little initiative has been continuing to remove the social exclusion, especially for the *Dalit* Communities. Eco Social Development Organization (ESDO) a Bangladeshi national NGO has successfully initiated a program titled 'Promotion of Rights for Adivashi and *Dalit* Improvement Program (PRADIP)' with the financial assistance of HEKS-Switzerland for reducing and eliminating social exclusion and using some unique social work intervention.

Conceptual Framework

Dalit

Dalit is a designation for a group of people traditionally regarded as "untouchable". *Dalits* are a mixed population, consisting of numerous castes from all over South Asia; they speak a variety of languages and practice a multitude of religions.

The word "*Dalit*" comes from the Sanskrit, and means "ground", "suppressed", "crushed", or "broken to pieces". It was first used by Jyotirao Phule in the nineteenth century, in the context of the oppression faced by the erstwhile "untouchable" castes of the twice-born Hindus.

According to Victor Premasagar, the term expresses their "weakness, poverty and humiliation at the hands of the upper castes in the Indian society."

Mohandas Gandhi coined the word Harijan, translated roughly as "Children of God", to identify the former Untouchables. The terms "Scheduled castes and scheduled tribes" (SC/ST) are the official terms used in Indian government documents to identify former "untouchables" and tribes. However, in 2008 the National Commission for Scheduled Castes, noticing that "*Dalit*" was used interchangeably with the official term "scheduled castes", called the term "unconstitutional" and asked state governments to end its use. After the order, the Chhattisgarh government ended the official use of the word "*Dalit*".

The term Chandala is used in the Manu Smriti (codes of caste segregation) in the Mahabharata. In later time it was synonymous with "Domba", originally representing a specific ethnic or tribal group but which became a general pejorative. In the early Vedic literature, several of the names of castes that are referred to in the Smritis as Antyajas occur. They have *Carmanna* (a tanner of hides) in the Rig Veda (VIII.8, 38), the Chandala and Paulkasa occur in Vajasaneyi Samhita. *Vepa* or *Vapta* (barber) in the Rig Veda. Vidalakara or Bidalakar are present in the Vajasaneyi Samhita. *Vasahpalpuli* (washer woman) corresponding to the Rajakas of the Smritis in Vajasaneyi Samhita. Fa Xian, a Chinese Buddhist pilgrim who recorded his visit to India in the early 4th century, noted that Chandalas were segregated from the mainstream society as untouchables. Traditionally, *Dalits* were considered to be beyond the pale of Varna or caste system. They were originally considered as *Panchama* or the fifth group beyond the fourfold division of Indian people.

Dalit is a designation for a group of people traditionally regarded as Untouchable. *Dalit* status has often been historically associated with occupations regarded as ritually impure, such as any involving leatherwork, butchering, or removal of rubbish, animal carcasses, and waste.

Social Exclusion

Social exclusion is defined in The Social Work Dictionary as the "marginalization of people or areas and the imposition of barriers that restrict them from access to opportunities to fully integrate with the larger society" (Barker, 2003, 403). Social exclusion applies to both countries that lose out in global competition and to classes of people within nations in the grip of poverty or living with mental or physical disabilities.

The concept of social exclusion goes beyond the mere words "social" and "exclusion" into the political realm. Embodied in this concept is a framework concerning political and economic process. The beauty of this formulation as opposed to the pejorative earlier term, the underclass, is its placement of the onus on the people who are doing something to other people. The central tenet of the underclass or culture of poverty argument, in contrast, is that miserable conditions are self-induced—the poor do it to themselves (Byrne, 1999).

Van Wormer (2004) discusses sexism, heterosexism, racism, classism, ethnocentrism, ageism, and sectarianism as forms of social exclusion.

The definition of Social Exclusion or inclusion has summarized by Ruth Levitas, Christina Pantazis, Eldin Fahmy, David Gordon, Eva Lloyd and Demi Patsios (*January 2007, The Multi-Dimensional Analysis Of Social*

Exclusion, Department of Sociology and School for Social Policy Townsend Centre for the International Study of Poverty and Bristol Institute for Public Affairs, University of Bristol) on the following way:

Table 1: Definitions of social exclusion or inclusion

1.	... a shorthand term for what can happen when people or areas suffer from a combination of linked problems such as unemployment, poor skills, low incomes, poor housing, high crime environments, bad health and family breakdown. (SEU, 1997)
2	Social exclusion occurs where different factors combine to trap individuals and areas in a spiral of disadvantage. (DSS, 1999, p 23)
3	Social exclusion is a process, which causes individuals or groups, who are geographically resident in a society, not to participate in the normal activities of citizens in that society. (Scottish Executive, nd)
4	The notion of poverty that has guided the development of this report is where people lack many of the opportunities that are available to the average citizen.... This broad concept of poverty coincides with the emerging concept of social exclusion. (NPI, Howarth et al, 1998)
5	The processes by which individuals and their communities become polarized, socially differentiated and unequal. (ESRC, 2004)
6	The dynamic process of being shut out from any of the social, economic, political and cultural systems which determine the social integration of a person in society. (Walker and Walker, 1997, p 8)
7	...social exclusion is often regarded as a 'process' rather than a 'state' and this helps in being constructively precise in deciding its relationship to poverty. (Gordon et al, 2000, p 73)
8	An individual is socially excluded if (a) he or she is geographically resident in a society but (b) for reasons beyond his or her control, he or she cannot participate in the normal activities of citizens in that society, and (c) he or she would like to so participate. (Burchardt et al, 2002, pp 30, 32)
9	Inadequate social participation, lack of social integration and lack of power. (Room, 1995)
10	Social exclusion is a broader concept than poverty, encompassing not only low material means but the inability to participate effectively in economic, social, political and cultural life and in some characterizations alienation and distance from mainstream society. (Duffy, 1995)
11	(Social Inclusion) The development of capacity and opportunity to play a full role, not only in economic terms, but also in social, psychological and political terms. (EU Employment and Social Affairs Directorate)
12	An accumulation of confluent processes with successive ruptures arising from the heart of the economy, politics and society, which gradually distances and places persons, groups, communities and territories in a position of inferiority in relation to centers of power, resources and prevailing values. (Estivill, 2003, p 19)

Janie Percy-Smith (ed) (*Policy Responses to Social Exclusion towards Inclusion? Open University Press, Buckingham, Philadelphia, 2000*) has perfectly described the dimensions of social exclusion on the following way:

Table 2: Dimensions of social exclusion

Dimension	Indicators
Economic	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Long-term unemployment • Casualization and job insecurity • Workless households • Income poverty
Social	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Breakdown of traditional households • Unwanted teenage pregnancies • Homelessness • Crime • Disaffected youth
Political	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Disempowerment • Lack of political rights • Low registration of voters • Low voter turnout • Low levels of community activity

Dimension	Indicators
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Alienation/lack of confidence in political processes • Social disturbance/disorder
Neighborhood	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Environmental degradation • Decaying housing stock • Withdrawal of local services • Collapse of support networks
Individual	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Mental and physical ill health • Educational underachievement/low skills • Loss of self-esteem/confidence
Spatial	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Concentration/marginalization of vulnerable groups
Group	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Concentration of above characteristics in particular groups: • elderly, disabled, ethnic minorities

Social exclusion has been defined in a number of different ways which may include all or some of the following elements: disadvantage in relation to certain norms of social, economic or political activity pertaining to individuals, households, spatial areas or population groups; the social, economic and institutional processes through which disadvantage comes about; and the outcomes or consequences for individuals, groups or communities.

Dimensions of social exclusion of *Dalits* Community in Bangladesh

Exclusion from goods and services:

Exclusion in terms of low consumption levels, education and health care is the common phenomenon of *Dalits*. Due to the mistrust from non-*Dalit* Bangladeshi society, *Dalits* often prefer to stay within their community and with their 'own' people.

Poor economic conditions do not allow *Dalit* people to live outside their colonies. Even if some families can afford it they are denied accommodation, as non-*Dalits* are unwilling to rent a house to a *Dalit* individual or family.

The majority of *Dalits* live in houses that are no more than a room. They have been living in these small spaces for many generations. The size of the families have increased manifold but they have been forced to accommodate themselves in the same small housing. If a *Dalit* family was provided with housing 40 years ago, they have continued to live in the same small house despite two new generations being added to the family. Consequently 12 to 14 family members are sometime squashed into a tiny space.

Dalit colonies are often unclean and unhygienic with open sewers, lack of toilets and bathrooms and uncollected garbage blocking water ways. Along with cramped living spaces, the lack of water and electricity compound to make their lives yet more miserable. Sometimes *Dalits* have to wait for water until late morning. A significant part of a *Dalit* woman's life is spent in collecting water. This is not only time consuming, it is often the cause of conflict with other households.

Private toilets are nonexistent and public ones are very few, overused and filthy. This encourages many to use common open spaces to defecate, adding to public health threats.

Dalit people's meager livestock such as pigs, goats and chickens, cohabit with them in these unhygienic surroundings, further increasing the public health risk.

Illiteracy is widespread among *Dalit* people. Again it is difficult to provide corroborating evidence as the census so far has not addressed the issue of caste. Exact numbers of *Dalits* who are illiterate remain unclear but sample studies indicate this is around 96%. The educational prospects for the next generation of *Dalits* are not looking promising. *Dalit* parents who were interviewed believe strongly that their girls and boys are not interested in going to school. Very few *Dalit* boys and girls have completed their A-levels and even fewer still have actually completed college or a professional course.

Financial hardships have been identified as the main reason for children failing to pursue their education. In many cases young boys and girls have to give priority to earning a living rather than attending school. Parents want their children to go to school but are often unable to earn enough, and are therefore forced to ask their children to supplement the household income.

Education being a particularly expensive commodity for *Dalit* families, it is important for them to be assured that it will result in employment. With no assurances from the state it is unlikely that *Dalit* communities will choose education over trying to make a living. This is especially true for *Dalit* girls who will be married at an early age and for whom parents think education is not a necessity

Labour market exclusions:

For most households of the *Dalits* they are excluded from general labour market, even in many cases they also excluded from their traditional occupation (Sweeping) due to socio-political interferences of mainstreamed people.

Dalits in Bangladesh today are mainly sweepers or cleaners. Due to their low social status, *Dalit* have been relegated to the most menial tasks even by the state. City Corporations often hire *Dalits* to carry out cleaning jobs. With the job market not being a level playing field, it is no wonder that *Dalits* often find that the only jobs open to them are the most menial cleaning jobs, although even non-*Dalits* are beginning to take on these jobs if it is a government post, further reducing the opportunities for *Dalit* employment. Over a long time this occupational identity has contributed to their lower and neglected social status. *Dalits* want to move beyond this occupational identity but find it almost impossible due to social and economic reasons. With no state support in this endeavor it is difficult to envisage how the *Dalit* community will be able to escape its low social image.

Some *Dalit* men are engaged in professions like 'sweeper', 'barber', 'bede (water gypsy)', 'medicine seller', 'hawker' etc. A few *Dalit* women are also engaged in similar traditional income generating activities. A small number of *Dalit* women are becoming active in politics and taking up nongovernmental organization (NGO) jobs.

Exclusion from land:

The exclusion from land is a critical issue and widely associated with poverty and insecurity. Most of the cases of *Dalits*, they are totally excluded from land even they have no entitlement on their homesteads and they are most vulnerable landless segment of the society.

Exclusion from security:

Insecurity is the common concern of *Dalit* communities and the adolescent girls and young *Dalits* ladies faced insecurity on sexual harassment and violence. *Dalit* women and men suffer from different forms of violence and insecurity instigated by the non-*Dalit* Bangladeshi community. *Dalits* feel helpless either to take action or to complain to the police.

Exclusion from human rights:

Violation of human rights is the unfortunate regular painful experience of *Dalits* communities. They have nothing opportunities to formal and social justice, legal wage opinion sharing, protection from violence and so on. For a *Dalit* woman, her home can be the most dangerous place. The levels of violence and insecurity that she experiences in her home are rarely matched outside. Even if she manages to protect herself from outside harassment, she cannot escape the violence within her home. Women feel that it is not their right to question their husbands, especially as their religion forbids it. A key factor to their silence and acceptance of their situation is often their socio-economic dependence on their husbands. Gender discrimination and violence at home also affects them professionally and economically.

Exclusion from Social Access:

Dalit women and men often believe that their *Dalit* identity has a lesser status compared to non-*Dalit* people, in some ways internalizing their caste oppression. The non-*Dalit* community, while always aware of their supposed higher status, does not necessarily openly exhibit their perceived superiority. The reiteration of their superiority and higher status comes to the forefront when it involves marriage or other social interactions.

This situation seems unlikely to change in the near future as *Dalits* find it very difficult to send their children to school due to financial constraints. This forced backwardness in education prevents younger generations of *Dalits*, from taking up new professions or moving away from traditional caste defined professions. It is particularly challenging in the case of *Dalit* girls. Recently a few *Dalit* girls started attending school, but many dropped out early due to numerous factors such as household work, the need to supplement household income, early marriage, verbal abuse at school etc.

Perceptions of hostility regarding the outside environment reinforce structural exclusion and create an environment in which both women and men feel discouraged to get engaged in public spaces. This discouragement lays the foundations for *Dalit* women and men not taking an interest or being involved in politics.

The extreme exclusion and deprivation that feature in the everyday lives of *Dalit* people in general and *Dalit* women in particular, fully impacts the way they interact and engage with society. *Dalits* live a harsh life, marginalized and stigmatized. Attempts at improving their lives would have to first address the various discriminations based on caste, class and gender that *Dalit* women and men experience on a daily basis.

The double burden of caste and gender that all *Dalit* women face puts them in a particularly vulnerable position and has to be understood within the overall plight of *Dalit* people in Bangladesh. Any policy or plan of merit would need to address the structural and systemic discriminations that *Dalits* have faced for many generations now in a country that has even forgotten their existence

A Short view of ESDO:

Eco-Social Development Organization (ESDO) started its journey in 1988 with a noble vision to stand in solidarity with the poor and marginalized. Being a peoples' centered organization, ESDO envisioned for a society which will be free from inequality and injustice, a society where no child will cry from hunger and no life will be ruined by poverty. Over two decades of relentless efforts to make this happen, ESDO has embraced new grounds and opened up new horizons to help the disadvantaged and vulnerable people to bring meaningful and lasting changes in their lives. During this long span, ESDO has adapted with the changing situation and provided the most time-bound services especially for the poor and disadvantaged. A community focused and people centered approach has been adapted by ESDO while consideration was given to the national policy and millennium development Goal (MDG) as its guiding principle. ESDO is one of the most dynamic organizations expanding its development interventions across 103 upazilas under 23 districts of Bangladesh covering over 6.5 million poor and vulnerable people.

In this age of globalization, people have been facing many new challenges concerning their livelihood and their quest towards development. ESDO feels that, those who are termed as 'vulnerable' and 'marginalized', hold great potential to change their fate if they can join their hands together and receive necessary assistance from government agencies, national and international development organizations, public representatives and the larger-cross sections of people. ESDO's endeavors and achievements in the last 25 years in the fields of social development, food security and disaster management, agricultural development, rights and governance, education, health, nutrition, environment and microfinance and entrepreneurship development have transformed the lives of hundreds of thousands of people in building their capacity and attain self-confidence, leading to self-reliance.

The Achievement of ESDO for Promoting Rights for Social Victims: The ESDO Experience through PRADIP Project:

In countries like Bangladesh, poor and extreme poor people have long been suffering from an extremely limited access to basic amenities. Their fundamental human rights are often violated and they are subjected to different kinds of discriminations and oppressions. Among these people, the status of ethnic minority groups, especially *dalits* and *adivasi* (indigenous) people is particularly distressful. With an aim to bring meaningful and sustainable changes to the lives of these people, ESDO has been implementing the Promotion of Rights for Adibashi and Dalit Improvement Programme (PRADIP) project in selected areas of Thakurgaon and Dinajpur districts. By addressing the core causes of the violation of human rights and empowering the vulnerable people to protect their human rights on a sustainable basis, the project has succeeded in creating a favourable atmosphere in the project areas where the vulnerable ethnic minority groups can hope to lead a happy and prosperous life free from all kinds of discriminations.

The project has created a favorable atmosphere for Dalit and people of Ethnic minority groups to improved livelihoods. Through successful implementation of the project, human rights violation has significantly reduced and human dignity increased. Their accessibility in labor market, right to land, social dignity, unity and cooperation among themselves, relationship with people in the mainstream, and overall the improvement of the livelihood through functioning and formation of different committee and forums; health seeking behavior and involvement in different IGA programs etc. are other outcomes of this project.

The main attention of the project: inclusion of extreme marginalized *Dalits* and people of Ethnic minority groups through lobby, advocacy, and awareness build-up, sensitization of influential stakeholders as well as skill development training, health, education and promoting of value chain for improved their livelihoods and as result a long-term sustainability on context of communal harmony, peace promotion and up gradation of livelihoods ha significantly achieved.

Outcomes

- Strong networks and alliances has developed to raise voices of children and marginalized people.
- Improved voices and rights of the women and marginalized groups in access to critical livelihoods resources.
- Improvement in child rights situation among targeted children.
- Reduction of human rights violation among targeted women, in particular violence against women.

Project highlights

- Extensive community mobilization and linkage was made between service providers and the beneficiaries’.
- Greater support and ownership has been mobilized through regular meetings with human rights protection committees at union and upazilla levels
- IGA capacity development training were provided on beef fattening, poultry rearing, pig and goat rearing, nursery development and block boutique to the project participants.
- Marketing promotion linkage has ensured.
- Educational and recreational materials have been distributed among the targeted beneficiaries.
- Students were mainstreamed to government primary schools.
- Access to health services has ensured through GO-NGO health service providers.
- Health hygiene practice has remarkably increased.
- Widely legal aid supports ensured for social victims. .
- Entitlement of microfinance has ensured.

Strategies

The state of human rights, especially women and child rights continues to be a cause for concern in spite of many progresses achieved under different indicators. Child labour, women and child trafficking and women abuse are some of the areas which need urgent attention if the state of human rights is to be improved substantially. Human rights, especially children and women tights and ethnic minority rights have been two major focuses of ESDO since its beginning and most of the program activities of ESDO have components aimed at the promotion of human rights. Vulnerable people, especially ultra poor people and ethnic minority groups have received special attention so that their basic human rights could be upheld through sustainable social inclusion and empowerment. ESDO’s ongoing program interventions – all have made significant contributions in the building of a society free from social injustice and conducive to the realization of human rights for the underprivileged communities. This has also instilled a strong sense of commitment among the ESDO staff members for the protection of human rights and has bolstered their abilities to engage in human rights campaign with a spirit of voluntarism.

Recommendation:

In the future, ESDO needs to strengthen its rights-based activities to cope with the increasing demands from the grassroots communities and adapt with the socio-political realities of a changing time. The following strategies will be need to undertaken to promote human rights for social victims:

- i) Consolidating and strengthening the community networks for raising concerns about human rights at the grassroots level; integrating them with the existing network of ESDO.
- ii) More Sensitization of local government bodies and civil society groups for implementing pro-poor human rights campaigns.

- iii) Capacity building of network partners and stakeholders for carrying out pro-women and pro-children program interventions.
- iv) Continuous advocacy and policy lobbying at local, regional, national and international level for the protection of human rights, especially children and women rights.
- v) Social awareness rising on human rights issues among targeted groups of people through volunteers and opinion leaders targeting unfavorable social values and customs.
- vi) Strengthening mass media, community information centers and local forums for highlighting locally relevant human rights issues and integrating them with the mainstream human rights campaigns.
- vii) Coordinating advisory and consultation services to vulnerable people and consolidating existing linkages between them and legal service providers.
- viii) Strong and reliable information support systems for assisting human rights campaigns.
- ix) Networks of issue-based volunteers for acting expeditiously for preventing all kinds of human rights abuse.
- x) Greater coordination with law enforcers and civil society leaders at all levels.

Conclusion

Rights are inalienable, inherent, intolerant, and not negotiable. ESDO puts especial attention towards rights oriented activities for establishing human rights, legal rights, family laws, women rights and gender rights. It has made rights and governance programmes from its inception and especially in the north-west region of Bangladesh. More than two decades of development journey, it has been able to understand the deep-rooted causes of deprivation as well as successfully facilitated, communicated and ensured communication, coordination and understanding with appropriate audience. ESDO has used the basic values of social work for promoting human rights for the social victims and empower these marginalized and disadvantaged groups and as a result the social victims are mainstream and empower themselves for the betterment of their livelihoods as well as create enabling environment for their inclusion in the main segment of the society. Issues has addressed by this project are- social inclusion; improvement of livelihood and economic status; access to the health, education and social status and enabling environment to protect and promote rights and live peacefully and ensured harmonization with neighboring communities.

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