Training on Strengthening Organizations of Tea Workers and Adivasis

There are numerous non-government and religious organizations active among the adivasis, little-known ethnic communities and tea workers. These communities also have their organizations promoting social, cultural and political rights. However, the difficulties these communities face are insurmountable. Most of these organizations have no registration, lack financial capability and work with no paid staff or depend only on volunteers.

It is in this context that the Society for Environment and Human Development (SEHD) and Gram Bikash Kendra (GBK) organized a residential workshop from 16-19 April 2015 in Parbatipur in Dinajpur. The key objective was to strengthen the scopes and capacity of the rights-based organizations dealing with ethnic, marginalized and excluded communities.

The workshop is part of the project, ‘Mapping and capacity building of tea plantation workers and little-known ethnic communities of Bangladesh’.

Twenty-two executives and staff, including five women, attended the workshop. They represented 16 organizations of the adivasis, tea communities and tea workers.

In his reflection on the tea workers’ condition, Rambhajan Kairi, the general secretary of Bangladesh Cha Sramik Union (BCSU), said, “The tea workers are living a miserable life. They are deprived of most of the basic civil rights. It is necessary for the tea workers to develop their skills and capacity in order to expose their problems to the policy makers, media, and people in general.”

Challenges of CSOs and CBOs among adivasis and tea workers: In group work [on the second day], the participants focused on the civil society organizations (CSOs) and community-based organizations (CBOs) in the light of the condition of the organizations they represented, the challenges they face, and what they need in dealing with their condition and challenges. The key challenges they identified their organizations face include legal status (of the 16 organizations represented at the workshop only five had primary registration and none had NGO Affairs Bureau registration); lack of organizational infrastructure; lack of skills to build resources; geography (many are located in remote areas); lack of communication with others (including the media and administration) and networking; lack of planning; lack of credibility and transparency; lack of participation of women in the activities of the organizations; lack of unity; lack of adequate political awareness and protection; inefficiency in preparing reports; lack of state recognition of the adivasis and other communities who are not Bangalees; hardship; lack of knowledge about ILO conventions that define rights and protection of adivasis and occupational groups; lack of capacity to engage in effective lobby and advocacy; lack of good governance; lack of capacity to be sustainable, lack of ability of mainstreaming the marginalized communities; lack of knowledge about government policies and mechanisms (including their analysis and updates); lack of capacity to study and interpret national and international laws and instruments that relate to trade unions, tea communities and adivasis; and hostility of the people of majority community.

Overcoming the challenges: The participants also discussed what they think about overcoming such wide-ranging challenges. Some of them are: securing registration of the organizations with appropriate legal authorities; updating and putting the constitution of the organization in practice; proper use of IT; organizing special training on research; documentation and publication; engaging in research and publication; collation and preservation of traditions, traditional knowledge and cultural elements; syndicating reports on deprivation and abuses; training and orientation of organizations of adivasis and tea communities on national and international conventions and laws related to their rights and sharing national and international instruments; establishing legal aid mechanisms; organizing skill and capacity training on...
specific issues; engaging in issue-based campaigns and scaling up skills for such campaigns; establishing networks among organizations of tea communities and little-known ethnic communities; increasing communication with stakeholders (governmental, non-governmental and donor agencies); training on project formulation and fund raising and developing funds with local resource, etc.

Bhupesh Roy, head of program of GBK, talked about how to improve organizational capacity and accountability. He discussed the essential instruments of an organization. The foremost of these instruments is the constitution (memorandum and rules and regulations). He reflected on how to develop an organizational constitution and how an organization becomes accountable at different levels.

Ahsan Ali, director, finance and administration of PRIP Trust talked about setting up of financial management of an organization in the last day of the workshop. He shared practical tips on different methods and techniques of effective financial management.

Developing Capacity Building Tools (manual): At a session, the participants brainstormed to outline the contents of a capacity building toolbox (or manual) for CSOs and CBOs.

In the last session of the workshop on the third day, Moazzem Hossain, the chief executive of GBK encouraged the adivasis to strengthen their own organizations to fight for rights and protection of diverse cultures.