Defining the excluded groups, mapping their current status, strengthening their capacity and partnerships
The moral urgency of Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) lies in four fundamental words—LEAVING NO ONE BEHIND. While Bangladesh has commendable progress on many fronts, the twin problems of marginalization and exclusion continue to haunt a wide range of ethnic minorities, particularly from the plains land and other excluded groups.

Society for Environment and Human Development (SEHD) in partnership with Power and Participation Research Centre (PPRC), Christian Commission for Development in Bangladesh (CCDB) and Gram Bikash Kendra (GBK) and with support from the European Union and ICCO Cooperation have launched a three and half year initiative from February 2016 to define the excluded groups, map their current status, and strengthen their capacity and partnerships. The ultimate mission of the initiative is to set up a national resource centre to address the issues of excluded communities with intellectual clarity and prudence.

**Implementing organizations:** Society for Environment and Human Development (SEHD), works for human rights and environmental justice in Bangladesh through research, capacity building and advocacy. Working closely with the excluded communities in particular where the environment and human rights have eroded, SEHD gives the affected communities a voice for protection of their rights and participation in democratic processes. Power and Participation Research Centre (PPRC), is a research organization and known for its innovative research on poverty issues in which it pays attention to excluded and hard-to-reach groups. Christian Commission for Development
in Bangladesh (CCDB) is a development organization paying great attention to ethnic communities. Gram Bikash Kendro (GBK) is a North-Bengal based development organization having different initiatives devoted to the excluded communities.

**Target groups:** The community leaders and organizations that represent the excluded communities, human rights defenders, civil society, elected representatives, government agencies and the media.

**Associates:** Jatyio Adivasi Parishad (JAP), based in Northwest and an umbrella body of all ethnic communities in this region; Jayenshahi Adibashi Samaj Kallyan Shangstha and Achik Michik Society (AMS) based in Modhupur in Tangail district; Maulvibazar Cha Jangoshthi Adivasi Front (MCJAF) and and Bagania based in tea gardens and working with the tea workers and their communities.

### Final Beneficiaries

**Ethnic communities of the plains:** Outside the Chittagong Hill Tracts (CHT) and the tea gardens the ethnic communities are concentrated in 16 districts in the Northwest, seven districts in the North-centre and two districts in the Northeast. According to population census and Khudra Nri-gosthi Sangskritik Pratisthan Ain, 2010, the ethnic communities in this regions are: Barman (Rajbongshis use Barman as their surname), Kol, Malpahari, Munda, Oraon, Pahari (Paharia), Saontal (Santal), Garo (also known as Mandi), Hajong, Koch, Dalu, Monipuri and the Khasi. A large percentage (around one-third) of approximately 650,000 Kshatriyas in this region [who identify themselves also as Rai, Barman, Sing, Sarker, Rajbangshi, etc.] believe that they are Koch or related to Koch identity. According to the findings of extensive mapping by SEHD the number of ethnic communities [outside the tea gardens] on top of official records is 37. These communities are: Bakti, Baraik, Bhuiyami, Bhuiri, Bhumi, Bindumondol, Chowhan, Ganju Singh, Ghatual, Gorait, Hajra, Hari, Kadar, Kairi, Kalowar, Karmokar, Kol, Kora, Kumar, Kurmi, Mahle, Malo, Modok, Mushohor, Noonia, Rajbhar, Rajwar, Robidas, Tanti, Teli, Turi. Banai, Hodi, Lyngam, Patra and Shobdokor.

**Tea communities:** Around 122,000 tea plantation workers with a combined population of some 500,000, live on the tea estates in Sylhet, Hobiganj, Moulvibazar, Chittagong and Rangamati districts. There are as many as 80 communities on the tea estates. These communities are: Almik, Bakti, Bangalee, Baraik, Barma, Bashphor, Bauri, Been, Bha, Bhokta, Bhuiri, Bhumi, Bihari, Bunerjee, Chacha, Chatri, Dusad, Goro, Ghatuar, Giri, Goala, Ganju, Gorait, Goswani, Gour, Goyashur (also known as Ashur), Hajra, Jhore, Kahar, Kairi, Kail, Kalowar, Kanu, Karmokar, Keot, Kharia, Khodal, Kol, Kondo, Kora, Kumar, Kurmi, Lohar, Mandraji, Mahale, Majhi, Mal, Marma, Monipuri, Mridha, Munda, Mushohor, Nayek, Nepal, Noonia, Oraon (also spelt Orang), Painka, Pashi, Patro, Phulmani, Pandit, Pradhan, Rajballobh, Rajbhar, Rajbongshi, Rajgor, Rajwar, Rautia, Reli, Robidas, Sadhu, Santal, Shabor, Sheel, Suklaboiddyo, Shobdokar, Tanti, Teli (also known as Pal), Tongla and Tripura.

**Sweepers or Horizons and Rishis:** Also known as Dalits, these communities constitute approximately 1.5 million people. They are considered the most marginalized, deprived, broken, exploited, oppressed and excluded groups of people among the minorities of Bangladesh. They are the poorest of the poor and their “poverty is extreme, persistent and inter-generational”.

**Pig rearing community (kaiputra):** Also know as kawras, this community of roughly 100,000 people, most of them Hindus, are scattered throughout the country. Treated as Dalits, they are one of the most despised communities because they rear pigs, an animal filthy to majority people of the country. They are considered ‘untouchables’ and unwelcome to the majority in the society.
**Bede (gypsies):** A community of estimated 0.8 million (according to Grambangla Unnayan Committee report, 2009), mostly Muslims, the Bede or, as they are commonly referred to, ‘water gypsies’ are a group of extremely poor people.

**Jaldas (water slaves):** A Hindu fishing community concentrated in the coast of Chittagong are known as Jaldas, literally meaning ‘slaves of water’. They actually live with water venturing the rough Bay of Bengal with small boats and trawlers. The Jaldas are one of the most marginalized communities and in society are look down as untouchables.

**Sex workers:** Sex work remains to be a disgraceful choice in Bangladeshi society and women engaged in this work are referred to by abusive terms, all meaning that a sex worker is a ‘fallen woman’. Different sources estimate the sex workers in Bangladesh at about 100,000.

**Biharis:** Approximately 300,000 Biharis, who, since a High Court verdict of 18 May 2008 are citizens of Bangladesh, live in 71 camps in 51 districts with their largest concentration in Geneva camp in Dhaka. The Biharis are a distinct Muslim minority in present-day Bangladesh who immigrated to this land after the partition of India in 1947.

**Other excluded communities:** Teli (oil presser), Napit (barber), Dhopas (washer-man), Tati (weavers from Pakistan who speak Urdu), Darji (tailor), Hajam (unqualified doctors for circumcision), Mazi/Khottra (boatmen), Behara (carrier of bridal carriage), Kasai (butcher), etc.

**Overall objective**

Promoting participation and representation of the socially excluded groups in social, cultural and political organizations.

**Specific objective(s)**

a. The targets and final beneficiaries identified work together to define the socially excluded groups, their needs and constraints.

b. Tools and strategies are developed in defence of the human rights defenders, scaling up the representation of the excluded groups and promoting inclusiveness and pluralism in society.

**Expected results**

a. Comprehensive map, analysis and intellectual clarity developed on social exclusion in Bangladesh become strategic tools for the human rights defenders and organisations working with the excluded groups. For the socially excluded groups, the challenges are at once economic, social and political. Exclusion can emanate from social stigma, disappearing occupations, dispossession from land rights, physical disabilities, ethnic marginalisation and other causes. Developing intellectual clarity on such dynamics will strategically empower efforts and organizations that work with excluded groups.

b. Political protection and representation of the excluded groups become a policy discourse to the civil society and the state. Establishing a perspective on social exclusion, the empirical and analytical work on the excluded communities will
help to energize a policy discourse within civil society and state that prioritizes the political protection and representation of the excluded groups.

a. New generation of human rights defenders and partnerships developed to address the issues of social exclusion. A large number of individuals (as many as 400) including youths from among community based organizations, civil society and the media, trained and orientated through capacity building workshops and engagement in participatory mapping and research, will further widen and strengthen a new generation of human rights defenders.

b. The final beneficiaries are treated with respect in their social life. There is no doubt that the excluded communities of Bangladesh are living on the fringe. Different events in which members of the excluded communities and the majority community will interact, the literature to be developed and media coverage of different events will show the enormous value of cultural diversity and riches these communities add to this country. This will have an impact in the minds of the majority community and the ‘upper’ class Hindus to better understand these excluded communities and treat them with respect. Change in the psyche of the majority takes time. The national resource centre to be developed will play an important role in educating the majority.

**Key activities**

a. Participatory research, survey, review and analysis of the socially excluded groups and actions and actors engaged with them.

b. Publications and production of books, documentary films, photography exhibitions, newsletter; posters, etc. and their dissemination through workshops, conventions, festivals, dialogue, advocacy and solidarity events.

c. Investigations of contemporary and structural human rights abuses against the excluded groups.

d. Monitoring of implementation of international instruments and national laws that provide safety nets and political protection to the excluded communities.

e. Promotion of legal actions for retention/recovery of commons and land.

f. Organizing conventions/festivals, dialogues and advocacy to promote solidarity, partnerships and unique cultural riches of the excluded communities.

g. Capacity building training for the journalists, final beneficiaries and their organizations.

h. Initiating a national resource centre to serve alliances, organizations and any entity dealing with excluded communities and to document best practices.

**Methodology**

It is a participatory initiative. The applicants, together with associates that represent the final beneficiaries, project staff, scholars, other targets, and the final beneficiaries will implement the project activities. The project combines research, investigation, dissemination of knowledge products and sharing skills and efforts to promote participation and representation of the socially excluded groups of Bangladesh. Research attention to the excluded groups is not unique but what will be unique of research under this action are developing an analytical typology and methodology that will not only ensure effective mapping of the excluded groups but also help to put into sharper focus their specific predicaments and requirements. A challenging activity will be to initiate a national resource centre focused on exclusion.
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