

Human Rights of Marginal People and Role of Union Parishad

Venue: VIP Lounge, National Press Club, Dhaka

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With a mission of establishing good governance and human rights through strengthening democratic institutions like Union Parishad (UP), Democracywatch has been working on it from the inception of its voyage to building democracy. In consequence, Democracywatch arranged a dialogue at National Press Club on 09 November, 2009. The program was moderated by Mr. Mohammad Jahangir, the executive director of CDC. He began to moderate the dialogue with due respect and humble introduction.

In her inaugural speech, Taleya Rehman, the executive director of Democracywatch, welcomed everyone present in the dialogue to make it significant. She pointed out some of the anomalies existed in the life of UP level which usually violate human rights of marginal People, e. g. violence against women, domestic violence, malnutrition, healthcare, etc. Though all these protection of human rights are recognized and guaranteed in the constitution of Bangladesh, they have



not come into implementation yet. At local level, democratically elected UP representatives have to serve people with closer association from dawn to dusk. However, UPs have been becoming more marginal day by day. In order to make UPs active, capacity as well as solvency are inevitable through allocating resources and decentralizing power. At the same time, the question of allocating resources is parallel to involve with the issue of transparency and accountability. It has been already proved under the project People's Reporting Center (PRC) that UPs are building more capacity in terms of development and participation through tax collection and open budget analysis. PRC has been working in 28 UPs to make them effective in terms of capacity building, service and development. Only upon participation of all, human rights of marginal people can be ensured. Local government representatives must be treated and recognized with precise dignity. The limit of jurisdiction of power and intervention of both parties, *i. e.*, UP and UNO, shall be well defined. There are no causes for being frustrated, because people are fundamental for all sorts of power.

The main article entitled "Human Rights of Marginal People and Role of Union Parishad" was presented by Mr. Md. Mamunur Rashid, program officer of PRC, Democracywatch. He highlighted on various laws and regulations as to the performance of UP and the current scenario of their implementation. Human rights are violated due to illegal political interference, prejudice, religious extremism, and various norms. The forms of violation of human rights in UP include children and women suppression, trafficking, fatwa, injustice in *salish*, inhumane and humiliating punishment, insufficient or blockage to service fundamental to human life. There is existence of mismanagement, corruption, political patronage, illegal nexus in distribution of relief, VGF, TR, etc. There

is also allegation of absence of accountability and transparency is making this problem more extreme. Inactive village court can not enable UP to ensure justice. Inefficient standing committees due to resource constraint do not meet the need of people. In his informative presentation, Mr. Md. Mamunur Rashid introduced ten vital recommendations to ensure human rights in UP level. The main features of recommendations included proper direction, awareness building, deploying the network of human rights commission to grass-root level, providing award and recognition for human rights activities, activation of village court, capacity building of UP officials, coordination and cooperation among various groups, participation of common people in decision-making, allocating resources to protect the incidents of violation of human rights, ensuring access to information according to Information Act, 2009, ensuring accountability and transparency, planning follow-up and monitoring programs, providing service specially to minority and disadvantaged groups, initiating a victim support centre at least in every Upazilla for legal, physical and psychological assistance.

Special guest Dr. Salauddin M. Aminuzzaman noted three points in which human right is violated at UP level, e. g., right in local resources; access to traditional service; and role in decision-making. Freedom is perceived in terms of development through participation, access and dignity. We have several organizations and institutions to monitor and protect people from being victimized of violation of human rights, but the challenge is to implementation. There are incidents of human rights violation in informal arbitration (*salish*), while *salish* and village court are meant in different sense. He questioned to the liability for misappropriation of distribution of VGA, TR and other services provided from central government to UP. He exhorted to ensure publication of Citizen Charter, Information Act, 2009; to ensure participation of minority group and thus upholding human rights.



Abul Hossain, the Director of Multi-sectoral Program for Violence against Women, emphasized to resolve the misunderstanding between government and non-government sector to development. Two core issues are important to ensure the establishment of human rights – (a) awareness about rights, and (b) communal effort to make it into reality. For this purpose, the establishment, stability and endurance of democratic government are pre-requisites.

There was an open forum to discuss in the seminar for elected representatives of UPs. Participants in discussion alleged the government as to undermining power usually

exercised by the UP. There is no precise direction of jurisdiction of power limit among elected and administrative officials. They demanded much financial support directly to UP. Standing committees in UP can not come into action due to resource constraints. Elected representatives of UPs demanded to increase their power in planning and development process.

Mr. Manoar Hossain Chowdhury, MP and member of parliamentary standing committee regarding local government, added few more field to uphold human rights, i.e., human trafficking, early marriage, polygamy, fatwa, etc. Local government has to work together irrespective of political concern. Resource allocation and institutionalizing strong and active village court can ensure the protection of human rights.



Advocate Mr. A. K. M. Mozammel Hoque, MP and president of parliamentary standing committee regarding land, emphasized on capacity building and resource allocation to UP. As 90 – 95 percent disputes or cases are resolved in local level, village court needs to be strengthened. Decentralization of power is utmost necessity for good governance. Certain specific provisions to compel the authority to hear the advices of standing committees are very necessary. Media could be used for awareness building and mobilization of perception of general people. Local government should keep an eye on issues relating to violation of human rights. Everyone should be accountable to people.



In the closing session Ms. Taley Rehman committed to work on building democracy and promoting human rights. She demanded that the voices of UP should be considered sincerely as human rights at grass-root level consisting of majority population is associated with UP.