



# e-Newsletter

Manusher Jonno Foundation

October-December 2021

During October-December 2021, Manusher Jonno Foundation (MJF) accelerated its regular activities and advocacy efforts for effective measures taken by the government and relevant agencies to improve overall conditions of women & children and most marginalised people of the country. Besides, several projects' activities continued with the beneficiaries to make them aware on different issues to claim their rights and entitlements.

This e-newsletter highlights some of the major activities undertaken during the mentioned period of Oct-Dec 2021.

## Observed World Rural Women's Day 2021

Manusher Jonno Foundation organised a webinar titled, 'Rural Women as Climate Actors,' to observe World Rural Women's Day 2021. The international day was observed all around the world on October 15 with the theme of, 'Rural women cultivating good food for all' with an aim to recognise the works of rural women in the world's food systems.

Rural women and girls play a significant role in enhancing agricultural development and building climate resilience despite facing challenges like malnutrition, food insecurity, poverty, and more. Governance experts have urged the recognition of the contribution of women and girls in agriculture and their importance as actors in effectively adapting to climate change.

As Chief Guest, Saber Hossain Chowdhury, Chairman of the Standing Committee on Ministry of Environment, Forest and Climate Change, said, "When we discuss the development of Bangladesh, we cannot ignore the huge contribution of women in rural development and food security. But studies show women are 14% more affected than men due to climate change, so we have to help them." He added that the government has formed a national adaptation plan where gender discrimination issues have been addressed and given priority.

At the programme, Swedish Ambassador to Bangladesh, Alexandra Berg von Linde, said that as Bangladesh was vulnerable to climate change, different projects should be taken as climate change survival strategy to eradicate poverty. "Despite their contribution, they are unrecognised and sometimes face discrimination. The climate change impact has made the situation worst for them, especially for rural women. In accordance with SDG-5, gender discrimination has to be stopped," the ambassador added.

Shaheen Anam, Executive Director, MJF said that contributions by women remain unrecognised or under-recognised as their works were mostly not marketed and due to lack of recognition, they became recurrent victims of domestic violence. She added, rural women and girls play a significant role in

enhancing agricultural development and building climate resilience despite going through challenges like malnutrition, food insecurity, poverty, and more. Yet, they are excluded from decision making, which affects gender inequality and the greater resource allocation required.

The British high Commission's Development Director, Judith Herbertson and the Swiss Embassy's Deputy Head of Cooperation Corinne Henchoz Pignani and UN Women's Disaster Risk Reduction, Climate Change and Humanitarian Actions Programme Specialist Dilruba Haider and others also present in the webinar as Special Guests.

## Ambassadors visited Khagrachari to observe MJF's works



Swedish Ambassador to Bangladesh, Alexandra Berg von Linde, and Ambassador of Switzerland to Bangladesh Nathalie Chuard, went to Khagrachari District on 26 October 2021 to observe MJF's activities in the field.

With the support of Swiss Agency for Development and Cooperation (SDC) MJF along with implementing partners is implementing a project for improvement of ethnic women and children's economic and health conditions. The team visited Khagrachari Sadar Upazila and talked to the women group members. While talking with the women Alexandra expressed her satisfaction that the group members have increased their ability in cash earning within a very short period and Nathalie said it seems like a dream of watching their improvement by her own eyes.

In the team there were also present UNDP's Resident Representative in Bangladesh Sudipto Mukerjee, Senior Programme Officer (Gender Equality Human Rights and Democracy) of Swedish Embassy Rahena Khan, Senior Political Economic and Communication Officer Khaled Chowdhury of Swedish Embassy, Assistant Resident Representative of UNDP Prosenjit Chakma, Shaheen Anam, Executive Director, MJF along with partner NGO and MJF's staff.

## Webinar: Covid increases fresh school drop-out

A discussion, titled 'Bringing Children Back to Schools after Pandemic', was jointly organised by the Citizen's Platform for SDGs, Bangladesh and Manusher Jonno Foundation. In the discussion officials of government and non-government organisations said that a coordinated effort is needed to bring back the fresh school dropouts produced by the Covid-induced closure of educational institutions to the classrooms. Ms Shaheen Anam, Executive Director MJF presented a keynote paper.

Between April and October 2020, at least 13,886 girls between the ages of 10 to 17 were forced into child marriages and 8,140 children were sent to paid work, found in a survey conducted by MJF with the support of UNFPA, UNICEF and Plan International in 21 districts of Bangladesh. After the reopening, many female students of Class IX and Class X have not come back to the schools.

An MJF telephone survey on the child labour situation from April 2020 to June 2021 showed that 2,400 children were forced into hazardous works with lower wages than before the pandemic.

The survey also found that 3,240 new children from rural areas came to the city to work as child labourers and 2,500 working children who were enrolled at primary schools earlier went back to paid work again.

Nazma Sheikh, Deputy Secretary of the Primary and mass Education Ministry, said that a portion of the students did not come back to class after the reopening for different reasons, including child marriage and child labour. Centre for Policy Dialogue distinguished fellow and Citizen's Platform for SDGs, Bangladesh convener Debapriya Bhattacharya said that many female students became victims of child marriage due to the increasing social and financial insecurity as of the pandemic.

Rasheda K Choudhury, Executive Director of Campaign for Popular Education and former adviser to the 2007-2009 caretaker government, said that the data gap was a very acute problem in solving these problems. She said that implementation of the existing laws for the education sector needed coordination of all stakeholders, including government, non-government organisations, students, guardians and teachers.

Jasmine Nahar, Nilphamari Sadar Upazila Nirbahi Officer, said they are working round-the-clock to stop child marriage, but on many occasions, marriage registrars, the local religious leaders and even the teachers found non-cooperative regarding the matter. Both Debapriya Bhattacharya and Rasheda K Choudhury proposed special incentives besides stipends for keeping and bringing back all married girl students to school.

While presenting the keynote paper, Shaheen Anam said, "Maybe, the parents thought of marrying off their girl child and sending their boy child to work as a coping mechanism." She added, "Many children entered the workforce for the first time to support their families. Those children had to work because their families did not have enough food and their parents lost jobs when businesses were shut down."

The programme was attended, among others by CPD distinguished fellow Professor Mustafizur Rahman, senior research fellow Towfiqul Islam Khan and government and non-government organisations' officials from different districts.

## Human Rights Day 2021 Celebration

To celebrate the International Human Rights Day 2021 Manusher Jonno Foundation organised day long programmes at Bangabandhu International Conference Center on 13 December 2021. MJF has been celebrating this day since long. On the 10 December 1948, the United Nations adopted the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. To commemorate the day, the United Nations declared the 10 December as the International Human Rights Day in 1950. This year MJF organised the HR Day programmes differently highlighting the achievements of MJF's implementing partner NGOs and showcased the diversity of MJF supports to marginalised people. All these demonstrated through fair, photo exhibition and cultural programmes. In addition, project beneficiaries shared their experiences of how their lives have changed with the support from MJF and its partners.

Dr. Gowher Rizvi, prime minister's international affairs adviser was present in the event as Chief Guest. He said, "We haven't been able to achieve all human rights and we need help from all, especially for mobilising public opinion. We have to work more with minority rights, the anti-discrimination act needs to be passed, and the minority commission needs to be set up."

British High Commissioner to Bangladesh Robert Chatterton Dickson, who was present at the event as a special guest said, "The British government firmly believes that only by achieving the rights of all people can a country be truly democratic."

K M Tariqul Islam, Director General (Grade 1), NGO Affairs Bureau, Alexandra Berg von Linde, Ambassador of Sweden to Bangladesh and Nathalie Chuard, Ambassador of Switzerland to Bangladesh, was also present as special guest. Aroma Dutta, member of the parliament, former advisers of the caretaker government, Hossain Zillur Rahman and Rasheda K Chowdhury expressed their solidarity, as many others attended the event.

Shaheen Anam, Executive Director, MJF, who presided over the programme, said, "MJF has been working for the past 19 years to help the marginalised people in Bangladesh to have access to government facilities and to enable the country's people to exercise their human rights freely."

## Global Affairs Canada representative visited Women's Voice and Leadership Bangladesh Project

Global Affairs Canada (GAC) representative's visited to Women's Voice and Leadership Bangladesh (WVLB) Project's implementing partner's working area in November 2021. Phedra Moon Morris, Head of Development Cooperation for the Canadian High Commission; and Sylvia Islam, Project Team Leader, GAC-Bangladesh visited to understand the Women Rights Organisation's works at field level and visited Dalit Empowerment Foundation (DEF) at Satkhira District. They were pleased and acknowledged the DEF's works to empower Dalit women and girls at the locality.

The Project also organised its 3rd project Advisory Committee meeting where Phedra Moon Morris, Head of Development Cooperation for the Canadian High Commission, Shaheen Anam, Executive Director, MJF, Md. Anwar Hossain, Director-Finance & Admin, MJF, Sylvia Islam, PTL (WVLB), GAC-BD,

Angur Nahar Monty, Joint News Editor- News 24, and Mohuya Leya Falia, Programme Coordinator, WVLB Project, MJF were present. In this meeting they discussed about project progress, challenges faced by the project and suggested alternative ways for a smooth continuation of the project activities.