

Annual Project Report

Empowerment and inclusion of Urdu Speaking Bangladeshis in the main stream society



December, 2020



Executive summery

‘Bihari’ a term which refers approximately 500,000 non-Bangali Urdu speaking Bangladeshi who mostly remain stranded in camps popularly known as Geneva Camps in Bangladesh. Currently, they are living in 116 camps of 13 regions across Bangladesh in urban settings. Most of them originated from the north Indian state of Bihar, Uttar Pradesh and Rajasthan as internal migration in undivided India due to the fear of communal riots. After the 1971 war of liberation in Bangladesh, the Biharis have been kept in refugee-like camps situated all over Bangladesh. In 2008, the High Court finally ruled that the Urdu speaking camps dwellers were Bangladeshi citizens. Though the citizenship issue was settled down by the Apex Court, they remain deprived of social, economic, political and cultural rights.

International Republican Institute IRI is an independent, nonpartisan organization committed to advancing democracy and freedom. IRI established in April 1983 in USA. IRI is working in more than 100 countries with 564 programmes in all over the world and more than 30 years IRI has been helping to strengthen democracy, women empowerment, civil society development, youth development and public opinion research. Due to the intensity social & political discrimination and poverty visible among the Bihari communities in Bangladesh, IRI undertakes a Project named “Empowerment and inclusion of Urdu Speaking Bangladeshis in the main stream society” focusing on the effective citizenship of The Bihari camp communities. The aim objective of the project is empowerment of the community based organization CBO and organized series of advocacy, community dialogue and round table on effective citizenship and inclusion in the main stream society of Bangladesh.

Background

It is often claimed that more than two hundred years ago ancestors of Biharis migrated from Bihar and permanently settled down in Bangladesh. When a railway workshop was built in Saidpur, the British brought nearly 7,000 men from Bihar to augment its workforce in those early days of 1870. However, the outburst of migration happened after the partition of India-Pakistan in 1947. During the partition of British-India in 1947, around one million Urdu-speaking Muslims from the present day Indian provinces of Bihar, Uttar Pradesh, Madhya Pradesh, Rajasthan, and Calcutta moved to East Pakistan, which later became Bangladesh in 1971.

From 1947 to 1971, the Biharis used to be equal citizens of Pakistan. In the beginning, when Bihari immigrants came to East Pakistan, leaving behind their possessions, their familiar environments, and professions, they found themselves totally alien in the new surroundings in terms of language, customs, traditions, and cultures, except for religion. As Pakistan's official language was Urdu, they felt as a minority in the majority Bangali-speaking East Pakistan. Basically Biharis identified themselves more closely with West Pakistan, from which gradually they received more privileges and advantages from the Central Government. While Bangalis were employed in the agricultural sector, the Biharis were involved in the industrial sector, small business, trade, and commerce. In this way, they enjoyed citizenship rights of Pakistan until 1970. In addition, between 1947 and 1971 these two regions also witnessed frequent political turmoil. Language movement of 1952 and liberation war of 1971 were watershed moments that changed political history of Bangladesh and Pakistan. After the emergence Bangladesh as independent country in 16 December 1971, the Biharis have been kept in refugee-like camps situated all over Bangladesh. No sincere efforts have been made either by any concerned country or the International community to find a long term resolution of the so called Biharis. According to article 15 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR), everyone has a right to a nationality and that no one shall be arbitrarily deprived of his nationality. But Biharis in Bangladesh still treated as second class citizens. In 2003, in the landmark decision of the Supreme Court of Bangladesh in *Abid Khan and others v Bangladesh* held that the ten Urdu-speaking petitioners born both before and after 1971, were Bangladeshi nationals pursuant to the Citizenship Act of 1951 and the Bangladesh Citizenship Order of 1972, and thereby the court

directed the Government to register them as voters and then in 2008 that the High Court finally ruled that the Urdu speaking camps dwellers were Bangladeshi citizens.

In Bangladesh, there are now approximately, 300,000 Biharis are living in 116 slums like camps in different parts of Bangladesh. They continue to survive in abysmal and degrading living condition. An ever growing population with meager resources, poor drainage and sanitation system, poor health care facilities, level of hygiene and lack of education or schooling form the major every day concerns for the Biharis. The camps have become slums, the largest of which is crowded and undeveloped; families up to 10 people typically live in a single room, one latrine is shared by 90 families and no more than five percent of the population has a formal education. Health and sanitation problems persist due to poor drainage and sewage systems, and the economic condition has been extremely poor. About 94 percent of the Biharis are illiterate, according to the Refugee and Migratory Movements Research Unit. A report (2013) by Al-Falah reveals that 12.9% of them are illiterate, 18.9% of them are basic literate, 39.6% have completed Primary education, 5.1% have educational qualification up to lower Secondary (Class VIII) level, 3.1% have completed their Secondary School Course (SSC), 2.6% passed Higher Secondary Course (HSC), 1.2% are Under Graduate while only, 0.2% have completed Graduation course. Similarly, only 0.2% of the respondents are Master Degree holders. This picture shows the high rate of dropout in each level of education.

Project overview:

The project “Empowerment and inclusion of Urdu Speaking Bangladeshis in the main stream society” is focusing on effective citizenship within The Bihari camp communities. Following a 2008 high court decision, Biharis are recognized as citizens and most of all have obtained national ID cards, which provide the basic proof of citizenship. The aim of the project is empowerment of the community based organization CBO and organized series of advocacy, community dialogue and round table on effective citizenship and inclusion in the main stream society of Bangladesh.

Challenges: The challenge was Covid-19 which is global pandemic we have maintained all health safety protection before during and after meeting. We have sanitized the meeting hall including chairs and tables. We have checked body temperature of the participants and after that we have sanitized hand and body of the participants and provided hand sanitizer, gloves, mask and hair cap to each participants. Also we have maintained 3 feet social distances in the meeting room and after the meeting one by one participant leaves the room to protect himself / herself and others.

Project activities:

- Formation of Community based organizations CBOs
- Inaugural meeting
- Capacity building training for the CBOs
- Community advocacy
- Community dialogue
- National seminar

Al-Falah Bangladesh and Council of Minorities jointly started this advocacy project name “Empowerment and inclusion of Urdu Speaking Bangladeshis in the main stream society” in October 2019 and end of the project in December 2020. This project was designed to formation of community based organization CBOs and series of advocacy meeting with community, civil society and NGOs. According to the project work plan we have started our project activity.

Formation of Community based organizations CBOs

At beginning of the project activities, we have established 3 community based organizations CBOs in Adamjee, Khulna and in Chittagong and also we have partnered with 2 established CBOs in Mirpur and Saidpur. The CBOs are as below:

- Urdu Speaking People Youth Student Movement USPYSM, Mirpur
- Urdu Speaking Rights Movement USRM, Adamjee
- Urdu Speaking Camp Development Committee USCDC, Saidpur
- Urdu Speaking Rehabilitation Committee USRC, Khulna
- Urdu Speaking Bangladeshis Rights Movement USBRM, Chittagong

All these CBOs have executive committee and general body. They organize monthly meetings and discuss about the camps issue, community activism and way of rehabilitation. CBOs are also engaging in different type of social activities in their respective areas. The CBOs are now popular within the camp community. CBOs are also started to build a good relation with the government authorities including ward counselor, City Corporation and Member of Parliament MPs.

Inaugural meeting

From November 2019 to January 2020 we have organized inaugural meetings with our CBOs partners in Mirpur, Adamjee, Saidpur, Khulna and in Chittagong.

Meeting Agendas

- Introduction of project implementing organizations
- Introduction of the project activities and donor
- Partnership with CBOs and implementing orgations
- Project activities and role of CBOs
- Identify the major issues of camp based Urdu Speaking Bangladeshis

Discussion:

The inaugural meetings opened with the introductory speech of Khalid Hussain, project lead. He has welcomed to all EC members and leaders in the five inaugural meetings in five areas and briefly described about the project and partnership activities of the project. The members and the leaders were described the issues which they are facing including,

- Camp eviction
- Disconnect of electric supply
- Unhealthy sanitation system
- Unemployment
- Lack of safe drinking water

The members and leaders of all CBOs shown their commitment to work with us as partner and will make some affirmative changes in coming future.



Capacity building training of CBOs

The training was held from 9 to 10 of February 2020 at Chelakotha Training center, Lalmatia, Dhaka. It was a residential training held from 9 am to 5 pm every day.

Objectives: The objectives, contents and timelines of the course were finalized through a meeting between the senior level staff members of COM and AFB and the facilitator prior to the training. The training was conducted with the objectives like:

- to examine and enhance the clarities on Human Rights, Minority Rights and the verdict of the High Court of 2008 regarding the voting rights of Urdu speaking Bangladeshis as citizen.
- to enhance the capacity of facilitating successful advocacy initiatives for effective citizenship issues of Urdu speaking Bangladeshis .
- to motivate and to use PAR as a tool for involving the community to formulate their demands to claim equal rights as citizen.

Main contents of the training:

The Course curriculum was divided in to 3 (three) different Modules as follows:

Advocacy: Concept, Rights, Entitlements and Claims, Defenders, Right holders and Duty bearers,Duties and responsibilities of Public servants and Citizens
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Communication: Concept, barriers and ways to overcome those.

Participatory Action Research (PAR): Concept, importance and some techniques.
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Output of the Training:

- The participants have expressed their commitment to spread out the learning among their community especially to the young leaders.
- They have decided to use the 2008 verdict of High Court as a tool of advocacy.
- All the participants documented the key learning through writing poetry, daily notes or drawing a picture.



Community Advocacy

We have organized community advocacy meeting in Mirpur, Adamjee and Saidur in February 2020 and Khulna and Chittagong we have organized advocacy meeting in July 2020 due to Covid-19 pandemic and lockdown in Country.

Objective of the advocacy meeting:

The purpose of the meeting was to identify the exiting problems inside the camps and community and way forward to the rehabilitation with dignity. The recommendations identified in this meeting would be the basis of future community dialogue, round table and media advocacy discussion.

Problems Identified:

During open discussion of the advocacy meetings in each working areas the camp residents identified some most vibrant problem which they are facing in their daily life. Problems of the all working areas are as below:

Problem	Cause	Demand
Lack of adequate Housing	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Camps are small in size but a large number of Camp dwellers are living• There are no any government initiative to resolve the housing problem of the Camp dwellers	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Construction of existing house and lane of the camps• Permanent rehabilitation with dignity
Toilet & Latrine	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Large population and less toilets• Lack of proper maintenance• Old construction and unstructured	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Construction of the new toilets• Increase the number of new toilets
Sewerage and drainage	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Sewerage lines are disconnect• Drainage are open and overflowed	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Construction of the sewerage line and drainage

Cut off electricity	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Overuse of electricity • Using without pay 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Government should provide some subsidiary on electricity bill • Stop load shedding
Lack of Health facility	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Government hospital is far away from the Camp • Due to poverty they can't afford privet clinic or Doctor. • Camp dwellers are dying without proper treatment 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Establish a community health clinic • Mobile health clinic with and medicine support
Quality Education	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Camp dwellers are living in the poverty line so that it is quite impossible to bear education expenses for their kids • Due to child labour kids are dropout after primary level • Due to economy crisis camp students can't afford coaching and extra tutorial class 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Establish a tutorial or coaching centre inside the camps • Provide educational scholarship

Out Come of the meetings

- Community collectively identifies the problems
- Community brainstorm the solution
- Some NGOs committed to resolve some of the problems
- Community people organized to resolve the problem s with the support of community and NGOs
- Camp community realized their existing problems



Community Dialogue

In August and September 2020 Al-Falah Bangladesh and Council of Minorities organized 3 community dialogues in Dhaka, Khulna & Chittagong. Camp dwellers, community leaders, civil society, NGOs, media representatives and government representatives attended the meetings. Before these community dialogues our CBOs partners conducted participatory action research PAR in their respective camps in Dhaka, Khulna and Chittagong.

Objective of the meeting:

The purpose of this community dialogues were to present the exiting problems inside the camps and community and way forward to the rehabilitation with dignity. The recommendations identified in this meeting would be the basis of future round table and media advocacy discussion.

Participatory Action Research:

Our CBOs partners conducted PAR in Dhaka, Saidpur and in Chittagong. They invited camp representatives and discuss about the camps problems and they listed the existing camp problems and within these problems they have identified most 3 vibrant problems and its solutions through participatory action research PAR. The most 3 vibrant problems in 3 areas are;

Problem	Potential solution
Poverty	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Provide skill training to the youth and women• Provide training on entrepreneurship• Provide soft loan without interest to start small business
Health	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Open health clinic inside the camps• Start weekly health camp inside the cam
Education	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Provide scholarship to the camp students• Open a tutorial center inside the camp• Establish library and study room inside the camp
Camp Eviction	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Advocacy with concern authority to stop the camp eviction
Water Sanitation	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Install deep tubewell• Constriction of wash room and toilets inside the camp.• Constriction the drainage line

Statement of the government representatives in the community dialogue

“Now time has come to raise voice of rehabilitation. Saidpur camp dwellers are mostly living in Railway land so it is good opportunity to discuss the matter with railway ministry in Dhaka and for that I am always ready to become a delegate with the camp dwellers”.

Mohammad Akter Hossain Badal,
President Upjela Awame League and ex Mayor Saidpur
Municipality

“It is long hanging issue of the Bharis but our present government is very willing to resolve the all issues of the camp dwellers. I am requesting you all camp dwellers to unit yourself and sit with us we will together raise the voice of rehabilitation”.

Mohammad Mobarok
Councilor, Ward No. 7 Chittagong



Outcome of the meetings

- Camp problems have been identified
- Government representatives realize the issues of the camp community
- Government authorities shown their wiliness to raise the voice of rehabilitation of the camp based Biharis



Round Table discussion on Poverty Eradication, Camp Condition and Rehabilitation

In September and October 2020 AFB and CoM organized round table discussion on poverty eradication, camp condition and rehabilitation of the camp based community. Camp community, camp leaders, NGO representatives, media representatives and government representatives attended the meetings in Dhaka, Saidpur, Khuna and in Chittagong.

Objective of the meeting:

The purpose of the meeting was to present the exiting problems inside the camps and community in Chittagong and way forward to resolve the problem and make an action plan for the rehabilitation with dignity.

In these meetings CBOs presented the camp situation and poverty level of the camp community living in different part of the Bangladesh. Camp representatives described the issues of the living condition of the camps, economical condition of the camp dwellers and need of the rehabilitation with dignity of the Biharis in Bangladesh.

“Rehabilitation is big challenge but not impossible we have to discuss with the prime minister and have to present the current sufferings of the camp dwellers then I think our government will be willing to start process of rehabilitation”.

Talukdar Abdul Khaleque, Mayor Khulna City

Outcome of the roundtable discussion

- The need of the rehabilitation highlighted
- Some NGOs promised to start livelihood And education project for the Biharis
- Government representatives promised to discuss the rehabilitation issue with the concern authorities



National Seminar on Rehabilitation

On December 12, 2020 Al-Falah Bangladesh and Council of Minorities organized a national seminar on rehabilitation of camp based Urdu Speaking Bihari community in Dhaka reporter's unity. This national seminar was the last project activities of this project .Representatives from all over Camps, NGOs, Media and civil society representatives attended the seminar .Camp representatives from all over camps presented the camp issues and way forward to the rehabilitation in Bangladesh. Camp representatives demanded to start policy strategy on permanent rehabilitation of the Biharis. Representatives form all over camps raise the issues of housing, camp eviction, cut of power supply, toilets and water sanitation and they mentioned these problems are need to resolve as soon as and they also believe the only solution is rehabilitation with dignity.



Two architects from two different housing rehabilitation projects presented their working experience in our seminar to share their experience with our community. Community development led project is working in Geneva Camp and Adamjee camp. Currently there are conducting camp house hold survey and camp mapping and after that they will organize several workshops with the camp community to design the rehabilitation plan.

Another rehabilitation project has been done in Jinaidha by Platform of community action and architecture POCAA a local organization. They have build low cost housing for the marginalize community in Jhinida in Bangladesh. These two rehabilitation presentations gave the better ideas to community to understand the way forward of their rehabilitation in Bangladesh.

Recommendations for 2nd phase

In the first phase of this project we have established CBOs and building their capacity, mobilized the camp community and leaders and also find out the most vibrant camp and community problems. Now for the next steps we are recommending here as below;

- i) Establish a renowned civil society delegates group those will work as advisory committee for the rehabilitation and they will also lobby with the government and bureaucrats.
- ii) Capacity building and skill development of the community leaders to participate in the national politics in Bangladesh. We will identify the camp leaders those are engage in the national politics and then we will provide them series of capacity building and skill development training.
- iii) Establish a common platform for the youth of Bihari and local Bengali where they will exchange their views and culture. We will try to understand the perceptions of the Bengali youth regarding the Biharis.
- iv) Leadership and community activism training for the camp youth. Where we will empower them on leadership, community activism, small entrepreneurship, scope and opportunities for scholarship to study in abroad.
- v) Policy advocacy with the government and bureaucrats on rehabilitation
- vi) Research on existing camp land and feasibility of rehabilitation
- vii) Research on good practices and economical contributions of the Biharis in the national economy
- viii) Baseline survey on the poverty level of the Bihari community and prepare a strategic paper to eradicate the poverty level
- ix) Seminar on national budget allocation for the Bihari separately in national budget
- x) Documentary film and photo exhibition on the camp life and future of the Bihar's.
- xi) National seminar after all activities before ending the project.