

PPRC NEWSLETTER

ISSUE 5

FEATURE :
EXCLUDED GROUPS
OF BANGLADESH



Power and Participation Research Centre
Independent Policy Centre, Bangladesh

MESSAGE FROM THE CHAIRMAN



©Dominic Chavez

The scourge of poverty has been humanity's number one policy challenge. Much has been achieved. Poverty rates have declined, in many countries including Bangladesh, dramatically so. But absolute numbers still remain large. More challenging is to address entrenched poverty experiences whether in neglected and vulnerable geographic pock-

ets or among excluded and marginalized social groups. PPRC, together with its partner organization Society for Environment and Human Development (SEHD) has been exploring the theme of exclusion and how it represents a type of policy challenge not amenable to conventional anti-poverty efforts. Each issue of the PPRC Newsletter highlights one critical theme engaging the intellectual and research attention of the Centre. In this 5th issue, it is this relatively under-addressed theme of exclusion. This issue also marks a re-branding of the newsletter with a new editorial team. We see the newsletter not merely as a progress report on our activities but also as a

sharing platform on what is motivating us as individuals and as a research organization. For PPRC, it is an opportune time to think afresh. We have recently moved to a new address and have also undergone an organizational restructuring. There are new members in the team and a new mood to embrace the challenges and opportunities of a fast-changing national and international landscape. We want to learn and we want to contribute. As always, whatever be the new initiatives and new engagements, the causes of a just and humane society and of an engaged citizenry remain and will remain the drivers of PPRC's agenda.

- Hossain Zillur Rahman

©Imrul Islam

CONTRIBUTORS

Editorial Advisor
Hossain Zillur Rahman

Editor
Umama Zillur

Editorial Team
Sabrina Miti Gain
Joyanta Paul

Article Contributions
Hossain Zillur Rahman
Philip Gain

Cover Photo
Philip Gain

CONTACT US



info@pprc-bd.org
www.pprc-bd.org



www.facebook.com/pprcbd/



+880-2-58155467

CONTENTS

MESSAGE FROM THE CHAIRMAN	2
INSTITUTIONAL NEWS	3
PROJECT NEWS	4
UPCOMING	5
AT A GLANCE	5
FEATURE: EXCLUDED GROUPS OF BANGLADESH	6
WHO ARE THEY ?	6
FACES AND VOICES OF EXCLUDED GROUPS	7
EVENTS	8
ARTICLES:	
On the Margins	10
Bangladesh Middle Class Undergoing Transformation	13
PUBLICATIONS	15

ISSUE 5 | January 2017 - June 2018

Power and Participation Research Centre (PPRC)
House#15, Road#12(old 31), Dhanmondi R/A, Dhaka - 1209, Bangladesh

INSTITUTIONAL NEWS

New Members



Umama Zillur, joined PPRC as a Research Associate. A recent graduate from Mount Holyoke College with an Economics major and Mathematics minor, she will primarily work on the Urban Poverty and Women project.

Sabrina Miti Gain, joined PPRC as a Research Associate on the 'Excluded and Marginalized Groups' project. Miti completed her Masters in Development Studies from BRAC University.



Shajadul Islam Shajjad has joined PPRC as a Data Analyst. He is currently involved in analyzing data from all on-going research projects. Previously he worked in Bangladesh Institute of Development Studies (BIDS).



New location, new changes



After spending a decade at our previous location, on August 2017, PPRC moved to its current location in Road 31, Dhanmondi. The move has also brought about key changes in line with our 'New PPRC' agenda. We have reshaped our organizational structure, streamlined our communication channels and added a Social Media and Web team. We have also established regular institutional activities such as quantitative skills trainings, reading circles, talks and fitness days.

In Memoriam



Iftekhar Ahmed
1960 - 2018

A core member of the PPRC Data Centre - we mourn his untimely demise.

Healthy Bangladesh Comes to PPRC: Weekly Fitness Days



©Md. Mozaffor Hossain



How can we 'fit' exercise into our busy lives? The answer is simple: scheduling exercise programs during work hours! Health-conscious countries like Japan have already set

examples of making their employees more productive by introducing workplace exercises. Every Thursday at 5 pm, all PPRC staff perform warm up exercises and then go walking around

the Dhanmondi-32 Lake. The fitness routine is ended with the Healthy Bangladesh slogan 'আমি ফিট দেশ ফিট'.

Healthy Bangladesh is a PPRC-led civic platform to bring the multidimensional health agenda to national attention

PROJECT NEWS



Analysis of WASH Budget: Allocation and Expenditure

PPRC, in collaboration with WaterAid, has been working on a project analyzing trends in budget allocation and expenditure on WASH related projects. Secondary data on annual government WASH budget allocation was used to report on efficiency and gaps related to this issue.

PRERONA: Regional Dialogues On UHC Advocacy

Between July, 2017 and May, 2018, PPRC undertook eleven regional dialogues on UHC advocacy as part of its PRERONA project funded by USAID's Health Finance and Governance Project. The dialogues were undertaken in partnership with the civic platform Healthy Bangladesh and Municipal Association of Bangladesh (MAB) and were held in Bera (Pabna), Jhenaidah, Nilphamari, Satkhira, Sylhet, Rangamati, Manikganj, Noakhali, Patuakhali, Dhamrai and Dhaka city. The next issue of PPRC Newsletter will feature the learnings of the project.

Safety Nets Spot Checks

Given the scale of the poverty challenge in Bangladesh and newer risks emerging from rapid processes of urbanization, global economic integration and climate change, extending the reach of Social Safety Nets and ensuring their greater efficacy remains a policy priority. PPRC has been entrusted by MoDMR to do a third party assessment of five SSNPs. Using a mixed-method approach, PPRC has completed four spot checks over the last two years.

Commercial Viability of Jute Pulp Factories

This study, funded by Dhaka Chamber of Commerce & Industry (DCCI) is an assessment of the opportunities of jute paper and commercial viability of small-scale jute pulp factories in rural Bangladesh. It focuses on the potential of jute and its alternative uses as a new growth driver.



Policy Baseline on Food Systems for Healthier Diets



Chairman Hossain Zillur Rahman with the participants in the expert brainstorm session.

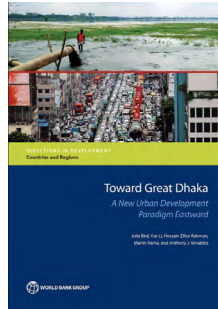
Funded by Wageningen University

Working on an analytical framework of Actors-Narratives-Interests, this study is part of a three-country international study to establish a policy baseline that will be reviewed in 2022. Five policy themes are under focus: Food & nutritional security, Land & water-use, Climate change, Urbanization and Agro-marketing/Value chains.

AT A GLANCE



Remembering Late Dhaka North Mayor Anisul Huq, speaking at the idea session on transforming Dhaka in June 2017. The World Bank publication, 'Toward Great Dhaka' was published a year later.



Dr. Mohammad Abdul Wazed, former DG of BBS, joined PPRC as a resource person and Senior Fellow. He is currently coordinating the WASH and Targeting studies and advising on the upcoming Urban Poverty Project.



How do we help the poor? PPRC hosted a mini brainstorm with Syed Hashemi to explore the many answers to this question. While debates are important, even more important is commitment.



RMG and Remittance drove growth in Bangladesh over the last 25 years. Where are the next growth drivers? Bangladesh Bureau of Statistics shared the district volumes of the Economic Census 2013.



Dr. Hossain Zillur Rahman gives a lecture at the National Defence College on 'World Economic Scene.' He has been conducting lectures at NDC since 1999 on politics, economics & security.

UPCOMING PROJECTS

Building Evidence on Multidimensional Poverty and Inclusive Growth in Dhaka

Funded by World Bank

Strengthening Social Policies for Children: Addressing the Emerging Challenges of a Middle Class Income Economy

Funded by UNICEF

Provision of Professional Services to Conduct Policy Analysis, Policy Dialogue and Implementation Research on Issues Related to UHC

Funded by ICCDR,B

Towards a Sustainable and Scalable National School-Meal Program

Funded by WFP

FLASHBACK: 1990



Chairman Dr. Hossain Zillur Rahman with the-then BIDS (Bangladesh Institute of Development Studies) colleagues communing with S.M Sultan, departed titan of the Bangladesh art scene.

EXCLUDED GROUPS OF BANGLADESH

PPRC, in partnership with SEHD, started a project titled, 'Defining the excluded groups, mapping their current status and strengthening their capacity and partnerships', in 2016. The project, funded by the European Union, focuses on various marginalized communities. Under the project, PPRC carried out extensive research on Harijans, Bede, Bihari, Rishi and Jaladas. These communities are plagued by social discrimination, high rates of illiteracy, landlessness, and lack of access to social safety nets, which hold them back from advancing the poverty ladder. A major barrier to the advancement of these communities is the lack of baseline data on socioeconomic factors such as population size, social status and economic conditions. A comprehensive framework defining the excluded communities as well as statistical representation are therefore major demands of human rights actors, researchers and policy makers. PPRC's research findings will soon be published in a series of monographs.

BIHARI

Originally from the Indian state of Bihar, there is currently an estimated population of 300,000 Urdu speaking Biharis who live in 70 camps in 51 districts of Bangladesh. They remained stateless until May 19, 2008 when about 150,000 Bihari refugees who were minors during 1971 as well as those born after the war were given citizenship and voting rights. However, they still live inferior lives in the camps without a permanent address and basic facilities.

WHO ARE THEY?

BEDE

The Bede are a Muslim nomadic community who travel around the country 10 months a year to earn a living. The community only very recently received voting rights in 2008. A floating community, majority of the Bedes are completely landless. There are different occupational sub-groups or *gotro* among the Bedes: traditional healers, *sapure* (who catch snakes and sell them), magicians etc. Extremely low literacy rate means that the community is plagued by prevalent child marriage and superstitious beliefs.

RISHI

The Rishis (cobblers), an occupational group of the Shudra community (the lowest rung among the Hindus) and found predominantly in South-western Bangladesh are considered as Dalits by their majority neighbours. They face the crude realities of the caste system. With very low literacy and meagre income, the Rishis remain social outcasts. They face all kinds of deprivation and restrictions. They are not allowed to freely enter hotels, collect water from tube wells or walk across the land of the majority people.

HARIJANS

Harijans are an occupational group or community who are also traditionally known as 'sweepers'. Also referred to as 'Dalits' Harijans are involved in cleaning work in the city corporations and municipalities in all districts of Bangladesh except for three districts in the Chittagong Hill Tracts (CHT). They are considered 'untouchables' not only by the upper caste Hindus but also by Muslim Bengalis. Harijan families face social stigma and barriers to access land to live on, and mostly depend on government for settlement.

JALADAS

The Jaladas are a fishing community living in coastal districts of Bangladesh who belong to lower castes of Hinduism. The Jaladas community have been traditional marine fishermen for generations. This community in particular is extremely vulnerable to natural calamities as their lives and livelihood depend on the sea. Introduction of free market economy and commercial fishing brought about significant economic and social changes to the Jaladas profession causing further marginalization.

FACES AND VOICES OF EXCLUDED GROUPS

“They tell us to migrate, convert to other religions or change our titles. But that is not the solution. Education is the only way to escape the discrimination. Unless we are educated we do not have emancipation.”
- Harishakar Jaladas



“A Muslim Dalit is at least allowed to sit in a shop to drink tea. But a Hindu Dalit is not allowed to that even if he is educated. We do not want money from anyone. We want the respect as human beings.”
- Ashok Das



EVENTS

National Workshop: Leaving no one behind - exclusion and marginalization challenges in Bangladesh

The workshop, which was a major advocacy event on the exclusion issue, took place in Dhaka on 22 August, 2016. It brought together 166 participants representing 22 ethnic communities and excluded groups, and 61 CBOs & CSOs. The interactive workshop involved participant engagement in understanding the causes of exclusion, sharing insights and developing recommendations. Top government officials, development actors, human rights defenders and community representatives came together to support the key message of



the workshop that excluded communities shall not be left behind in Bangladesh's race for development.



National Convention: Land, forest and social rights of the marginal and excluded communities

The first national convention took place during 16 and 17th November, 2017 in Rangpur. The convention was the first in a series of three theme based conventions. While findings of research and investigations were shared from the organizers' end, 249 representatives of some 20 communities and groups and some 60 CSOs and CBOs assembled to discuss their deprivation and human rights conditions. An important aspect of the convention included cultural exchange from the different communities. The marginal and excluded people of Bangladesh—approximately eight million—are among the poorest of the poor. They face multi-dimensional exclusion and poverty challenges. While there are many common challenges, each community faces unique barriers towards progress.

In all plenary sessions, keynote presentations, research papers and investigative reports were shared to engage the participants in effective debate and discussion.



An important part of the convention was the incorporation of cultural programs. Nine cultural groups from among the Santals, Mushohors, Oraons, Garos, Mahles, Koras and Turis performed their unique traditional songs and dances in these cultural programs.



Partnership and Capacity Building Workshop for Biharis and Harijans in Dhaka

The capacity building workshop was organized in Dhaka from 23-24 January, 2018. Twenty-five representatives of Stranded Pakistanis General Repatriation Committee (SPGRC), the sole Bihari organization that advocates for the rights and demands of the Biharis in Bangladesh and members of Bangladesh Harijan Yokkha Parishad, an organization that works to achieve the economic, social and political rights of the Harijans (sweepers)

Need Assessment Workshop



A need assessment workshop was organized on 25 January, 2018 in Dhaka to assess the specific needs of the Bihari and Harijan communities and their organizations. These communities suffer from extreme poverty, meagre wages, lack of employment opportunities, serious habitation crisis, inadequate latrine facilities, exclusion from social protection and untouchability.

Twenty-five participants attended the workshop including the executive heads of Stranded Pakistanis General Repatriation Committee (SPGRC), the sole Bihari organization that advocates for the rights and demands of the Biharis and of Bangladesh Harijan Yokkha Parishad (Harijan Unity Council), an organization that works to achieve the economic, social and political rights of the Harijans or 'sweepers'.



participated in workshop. The key objectives of the workshop were to scale up their organizational capacity and leadership skills so that they can represent themselves in different processes of the state. The participants of the workshop interacted among themselves, discussed their socio-economic and political problems with experts and developed recommendations for engaging in solving their problems.

Training of Bede community leaders



A residential workshop was organized from 17 to 19 December, 2017 in Dhaka with a select group of the Bede (gypsy) community to map and understand their issues and strengthen the capacity of the community leaders and the organizations that work for them. Twenty participants to the workshop included Bede sardars (group leaders), community leaders from Savar and Munshiganj, young representatives from the community and one journalist. In addition, project staff attended the workshop. The key objectives of the workshop were mapping the current status of the Bede community in Bangladesh, building capacity of the participants, identifying their socio-economic issues and finding possible solutions to their problems.

On the Margins: Adivasis and Excluded Communities

Philip Gain

The marginal and excluded people of Bangladesh—approximately eight million—are among the poorest of the poor. While Bangladesh has made 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.

These marginal and excluded groups – ethnic communities, Harijans (sweepers), Bedes (gypsies), Jaladas (fishing community in seashore), Kaiputra (pig rearing community), Rishi (cobblers), sex workers, Biharis and other smaller communities – face multi-dimensional exclusion and poverty challenges. While the majoritarian culture and religion have been trying to shape them according to their own image or likeness, these communities are struggling to establish their identities, languages, cultures and customary rights to land and forest. Social and political protection is also equally difficult for them to achieve.

While some difficulties that these communities face are common, many are unique to each community. Many of the Adivasi communities such as Garos, Santals, and Oraons are deprived of right to forest and land that used to be their commons. The forest-dwelling Adivasis still live in forest villages but without right to the very land they live on. Many groups such as the tea communities, Harijans, Bedes, sex workers and Jaladas are completely landless or have little access to crop land. Those who live among their Bengali neighbors face land grabs and physical violence including killing and rape. All these anomalies lead to progressive denial of rights to land and forest commons and thus perpetuate continued impoverishment of the marginal and excluded communities that is generational.

The Adivasis and other excluded communities experience multifaceted deprivation in their daily lives; evidence of which can be found in research findings, reports and testimonies given by the victims. Communities that still live on the forest land are made to engage in conflict with the Forest Department that was created by the state. The Garos, Santals, Oraons and many other communities have been living in the forest since long time before the Forest Department was created. The British colonial rulers started taking control of the forest in



©Philip Gain



©Imrul Islam

the interest of the state. They started reservation of forest, an act considered 'immoral' by the forest dwelling communities. The subsequent states created many institutions that continued reservation and commercial exploitation of the forest resources.

Eugene Nokrek, a Garo and the president of a premier local organization of the Garos and Koch in Modhupur sal forest area told the story of atrocities inflicted on them by the Forest Department. "To the Forest Department, we, the first people of the Modhupur sal forest, are illegal residents in the forest," informed Nokrek. The most recent reservation of forest land with 14 villages within have made their life frightful on land they have been living on from time immemorial. "Seven thousand Adivasis are spending their days under eviction threat since the fresh reservation of 9145.07 acres of land in 2016." Nokrek accuses that the process of reservation was completed without their knowledge, which is unlawful. Moreover, plantation projects have caused massive destruction to natural forests.

According to Rabindranath Soren, president of North-Bengal based Jatiyo Adivasi Parishad (National Adivasi Council), natural sal forest has been destroyed in Rangpur and Rajshahi divisions due to plantations. The Adivasis of the North Bengal go through immense sufferings due to progressive

land grabbing and acquisition of land by the state.

"Nawabganj Upazila in Dinajpur was once only a Santal-inhabited area. Broja Soren and Mongla Soren, two Santal brothers had 1800 bighas (594 acres) of land. Today their successors work as day laborers on other people's land. This is how the Santals have seen their land grabbed," reported Soren who also accuses, "the land grabbers burn Adivasi houses, kill them and rape their women to grab land. The influentials, politicians and even the state agencies have rendered them landless. Insecure, many have left the country." There are many such testimonies of the torments the Adivasis, Harijans, sex workers, Bede and Biharis went through in the recent past.

One appalling case among them is the killing of two Santals at Bagda Farm in Gobindaganj in Gaibandha district. The Santals and others were demanding that the land of their forefathers that was acquired for Rangpur Sugar Mill be given back to them because the land was not being fully used for cultivation of sugarcane it as acquired for. On 6 November last year they were led into a fierce battle with state security agencies and two Santals were killed. Cases were filed but the victims report that there is no progress in the cases.

The marginalized people face social humiliation on a regular basis as well. Needless to say

political protection of these communities depends much on the state and politicians who form governments. But social protection of the excluded people depends much on the people of the majority community. If the majority community plays an effective role in establishing equal dignity and social justice for all, political protection becomes easier.

Moreover, the majority community should be aware of the cultural diversity added by the adivasis and other communities. In a country of overwhelming Bangalee majority, there are as many as 115 communities among the Adivasis, tea workers and Harijans and there are at least 40 languages aside from Bangla spoken by these communities. The diversity added by lan-

to be established, defining all communities, making them visible and engaging communities in production of accurate statistics on each community are crucial. Although according to the government source, the number of the ethnic communities in Bangladesh is 27, Society for Environment and Human Development (SEHD) has mapped 110 different communities in the country (except those among the Harijans).

Each of these communities has an ethnic identity, belief, language and culture. In understanding identity, it is important to examine what are defined in laws, its relevance and what more needs to be done. This will assist each community in their efforts for self-determination, which is very important.



©Imrul Islam

guages, education, indigenous technologies, cultural heritage, history and food habits of these communities is the root of the enriched culture of the country.

“The Bengali language has hugely benefited from many languages spoken by different Adivasi communities. Bengali culture is also deeply indebted to other cultures,” informed Dr. Masudul Hoque, a professor of Bangla of Dinajpur Government College. “But the matter of great regret is the Adivasis and other marginal communities who are not Bengalis remain impoverished although they still hold their unique languages and cultural heritages.”

For identities of different ethnic communities

Care about languages and cultures is considered to be of great significance. Taking advantage of government, state and state processes (i.e. statistics, laws and safety net program) is essential. Training of government officials needs to be carried out to make them aware about the issues and difficulties of the communities. A national resource center is now under consideration to serve the communities and everyone else with information and guidance about the marginal and excluded communities.

Philip Gain is the director of Society for Environment and Human Development (SEHD).



Bangladesh Middle Class Undergoing Transformation

Hossain Zillur Rahman

Bangladesh has seen a major transformation of Bangladeshi middle class in the recent decades – change that has resulted in development of a vibrant market replete with opportunities for businesses. However, defining this new middle class is challenging. In contrast to the earlier middle class, the new economic middle class is facing certain contradictions in creating its social self-images despite their prominent presence as a consumer class. Both the emergence of this new economic middle class and its failure to create new social self-images is an absorbing topic that is yet to be analyzed adequately.

Historically, the middle class in Bangladesh was more of a social and cultural phenomenon. The assertion of the middle class virtually began during the colonial era, with the so-called white-collar job. It was fundamentally a value system, dominated by propensity for education and refinement of citizens and their families. It was a middle class which set the national agenda including movement for independence and democracy and social progress. So, the concept of middle class was also part and parcel of a constant cultural movement in society.

In contrast to the socially and culturally defined middle class of the earlier era, today's middle class is more of an economic phenomenon. It is

In contrast to the socially and culturally defined middle class of the earlier era, today's middle class is more of an economic phenomenon.

no longer value system-based social middle class, rather the economic feature of the middle class has become prominent nowadays. It is a class more defined by its disposable income and this class is also driving a consumer revolution. The Asian Development Bank has come up with a figure of Bangladesh middle class of 37 million people with income ranging between \$2 to \$20 per capita per day. This is a middle class which is demanding services of various kinds for their consumption.

The difference between the earlier and present-day middle class is mainly defined by consumerist standard. Otherwise, the concept has its contradiction and vagueness, in view of lack of clear definition, other than economic feature. And again, the economic middle class involves a large range – lower middle class, middle-middle class or upper middle class which is even close to upper class. The earlier middle class was self-defining, who could

build their image and had a unified position in society. So for example, a writer or cultural activist who built image of the middle class represented the class himself or herself. Education was the top priority of that middle class. Unfortunately, education is no more a criterion for defining the new middle class. This new middle class cannot build its own image, nor can they properly identify themselves. The most dramatic difference between the earlier and current middle class is perhaps expressed in the changing role of education. In the earlier era, education was the great vehicle for social mobility. Now quality divide in education has become the new driver of inequality. Quality education has become the preserve of the upper class.

trap of poverty. A vibrant domestic market has been created as a result. Demand for services from this class is driving a consumerist revolution. But the cultural groups who earlier articulated middle class aspirations, have now become the beneficiaries of either the power elites or the state. An economic middle class has come into existence but it is adrift in terms of acquiring any assertive social identity.

The new middle class represents a vast domestic market that has been a key driver of growth. Bangladesh growth story has not been like the export-driven Chinese or Korean model. Bangladesh development has been propelled by a combination of factors – exports, domestic economic activities

Quality divide in education has become the new driver of inequality. Quality education has become the preserve of the upper class.

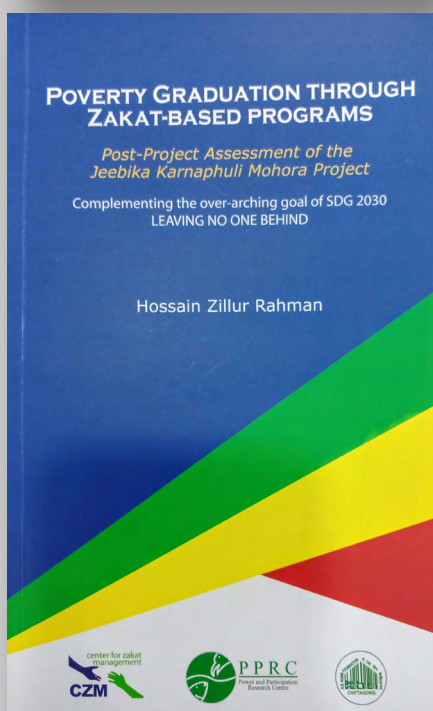
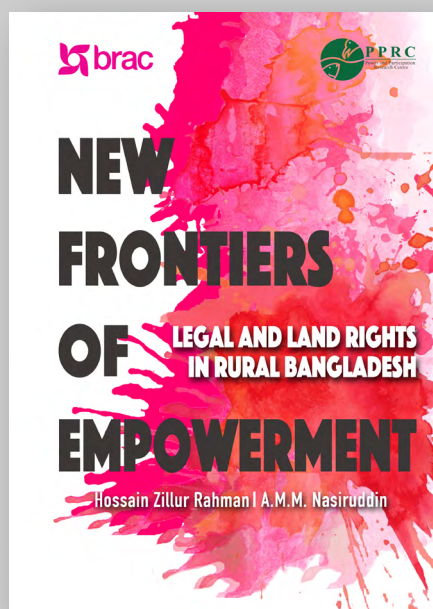
The economic middle class people have their serious problems and limitations in social and cultural articulation. They cannot set the social agenda. Earlier middle class nurtured an intelligentsia who constructed robust self-images and role models that established a kind of social hegemony of the middle class. But not so the new middle class. They are yet to come up with compelling role models and self-images of the new middle class citizen. The challenge of articulating the aspirations of the middle class in terms of transformative social and cultural agenda thus remain a largely unfulfilled one. We see economic development in urban areas, but not the cultural refinement. A classic example is the poor records of public representatives in city-centric local government institutions.

It is true many people have come out of the

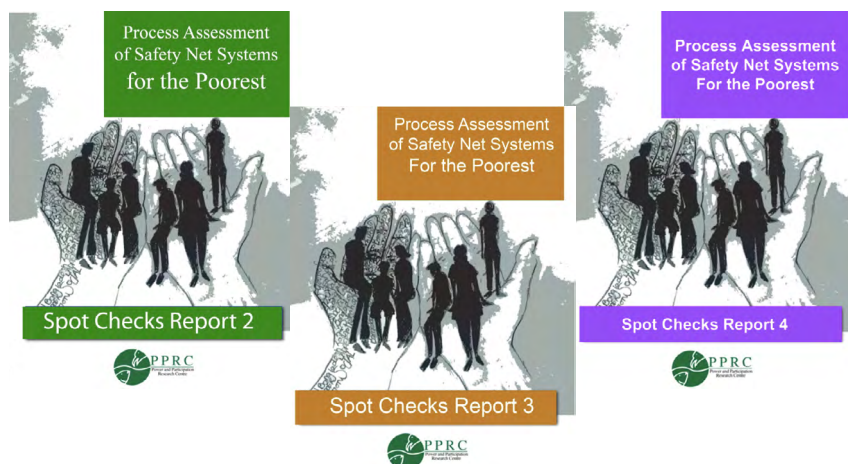
and also remittances. The women in readymade garment sector have also emerged as consumers and so do families of the remittances earners. In our growth in 1990s and 2000s, alongside exports the domestic market played a vital role and it has been a vibrant market. It was not an export versus domestic market issue. Overall, it is a fast-moving consumer class which has been reflected in the behaviour of the economic middle class.

To blossom and play its role for the much-touted ‘middle income’ future, what the middle class needs is congenial atmosphere, proper infrastructure and a political governance environment that values merit and fair opportunities in the economic marketplace. There are vast untapped opportunities for all in this process of growth of the new middle class.

PUBLICATIONS



Completion of 2 year Spot Check Project on Safety Nets



Two New WASH Reports In Partnership with WaterAid and UNICEF



Click on the links below to check out our previous issues!



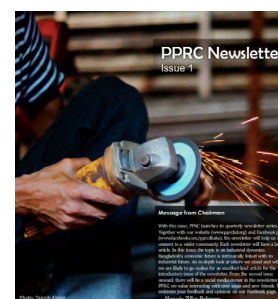
[Newsletter 4](#)



[Newsletter 3](#)



[Newsletter 2](#)



[Newsletter 1](#)