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Press Release

**Young Researchers Highlight Inclusion and Equality in Justice System**

At the 'Equality and Community Justice Fellowship: Research Dissemination and Closing Ceremony' held at the Daily Star Center today, eight young people who had won Equality and Community Justice Fellowships presented their research findings.

In Bangladesh, persons from socially excluded and marginalized communities including those facing discrimination on grounds of disability, ethnicity, religion, or caste, are often denied access to justice. As noted by Dr Shahnaz Huda, of Dhaka University's Law Faculty, *"Intersectional discrimination needs to be tackled. For example, disabled persons who are subject to Hindu law are unable to inherit property just because of their disability."* Very few persons from such communities are represented within the justice system, whether as judges or lawyers, and existing research does not address the key concerns regarding barriers to justice for these communities.

BLAST and Research Initiatives Bangladesh have undertaken an innovative fellowship programme through which Equality Fellows and Community Justice Fellows undertake research on particular issues facing marginalized and socially excluded communities, and also secure placements with legal service and development organisations and with law chambers. Fellowships to date have focused on accessibility to legal information for people with visual impairments, barriers to employment in city corporations for people with disabilities, land rights of Santals and the Mru community, the rights of Garo workers in kaolin extraction, the rights of Dalit tea garden workers, the inheritance rights of Marma women, economic rights of the Rakhine community.

*"This fellowship programme is a path-breaking initiative and will help us to focus campaigns for protection of our rights, and give young people from our communities a chance to enter the profession"* said Sanjeeb Drong, General Secretary of the Bangladesh Indigenous People's Forum. Kazi Reazul Hoque, Permanent Member of the National Human Rights Commission said *'We invite collaboration with young researchers to develop strategies to ensure access to justice for those facing discrimination on grounds of caste, gender, ethnicity and disability.'* Commending the researchers for working on subjects which remain largely unexplored in mainstream research, Dr Meghna Guhathakurta said *'The Fellows have taught us as scholars and practitioners to think about being more inclusive and accessible in our own work'*

Four Equality Fellows, Menuching Marma, Md. Al Amin, Md. Firoj Uddin and Probhat Tudu and two Community Justice Fellows Md. Razu Ahmad Masum and Sthiti Sangma presented their research studies. The programme was chaired by Dr. Meghna Guhathakurta, Executive Director, RIB. Ms Fatema Rashid Hasan, Deputy Team Leader of the Community Legal Services Programme, Ms Sara Hossain, Hon. Executive Director of BLAST, and Ms Fatema Rashida Hasan, Deputy Team Leader, Community Legal Services Programme supported by the Department for International Development.

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