

ULAB Diversity Fellowship Newsletter

Aug 2023



ART EXHIBITION



PHOTOGRAPHY



PODCAST



RESEARCH

AMREETA LETHE



MEET THE FELLOW

Amreeta Lethe is a writer and a gender justice activist who has been fervently engaged in Bangladesh's social justice movements and community organizing from a young age. With an extensive background in both the literary and media space, Amreeta is currently engaged in a collaborative effort with The Dhaka Apologue and Sannoy to spearhead a transformative initiative aimed at revolutionizing digital media and youth culture in Bangladesh. The primary objective of this endeavor is to make substantial progress towards achieving intersectional and collective liberation for the marginalized populations of the country.

HIGHLIGHTS OF ACTIVITIES

Amreeta Lethe leads conversations on intersectional gender justice through her podcast and workshop series. With a range of guests, she delves into feminism and gender inclusion concerning marginalized communities

PODCAST 1 | MARZIA PROVA, WRITER AND ACTIVIST

As part of her fellowship project, she proposed creating a video podcast series consisting of 6-10 episodes and organizing two seminars. The team at The Dhaka Apologue, led by her, has made progress in preparing for the seminars while also completing pre-production with three of their interviewees for the podcast. The first interviewee was Marzia Prova, a writer and activist, who passionately discussed the commercialization of feminist events like International Women's Day. During the conversation, she shed light on the troubling trend of corporations subtly influencing and co-opting feminist messages, which, in turn, has led to the undermining of the feminist movement by both internal and external actors.



YouTube: [এখনকার নারীবাদী আন্দোলন কি ধোপে টিকছে? পর্ব ১ | মার্জিয়া প্রভা](#)

Facebook: [এখনকার নারীবাদী আন্দোলনগুলো কি ধোপে টিকছে?](#)

Instagram: [এখনকার নারীবাদী আন্দোলন কি ধোপে টিকছে? সিরিজের প্রথম পর্বে আলোচনায় ফেমিনিস্ট এক্টিভিস্ট মার্জিয়া প্রভা](#)

PODCAST 2 | ARJYASHREE CHAKMA, INDIGENOUS RIGHTS ACTIVIST



Amreeta's second podcast featured Arjyashree Chakma, an indigenous rights activist and the founder of Indigenous Exclusive, an online news portal focused on sharing news, culture, traditions, issues, and history of indigenous people and communities in Bangladesh. During their discussion, they delved into the topic of tokenism and emphasized the importance of intersectional feminism, particularly one that embraces and addresses the struggles faced by indigenous communities in Bangladesh.

PODCAST 3 | JOYA SIKDER, TRANSGENDER RIGHTS ACTIVIST

Amreeta's third podcast showcased Joya Sikder, a prominent transgender rights activist in Bangladesh. Joya told her about her life and work as a leading figure in the fight for transgender, Hijra, and gender-diverse rights in Bangladesh. Additionally, as was her project objective, she also shared her thoughts on the mainstream feminist movement in Bangladesh, especially since the feminist and SOGIESC movements have always been interconnected.



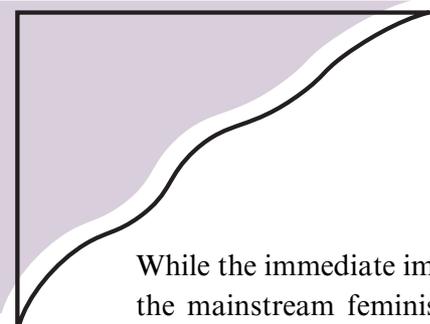
SOLVING PROBLEMS THROUGH THE PROJECT

A pressing issue in Bangladesh's feminist movement for gender justice is the lack of clear direction, accountability, and foresight, exacerbated by challenging circumstances. Mainstream gender advocacy risks neglecting marginalized groups. To address this, Project Urmi aims to initiate vital conversations and question the movement's course, a necessary step to forge progress and common ground amidst changing gender dynamics.

CHANGES THAT ARE HAPPENING WITHIN THE COMMUNITY

As the outcomes of Project Urmi have only recently started being published, a comprehensive long-term impact assessment is yet to be conducted. However, the project has a larger impact in mind, which aims to spark conversations and raise awareness about the mainstream feminist movement. The ultimate goal is to foster a movement that is not tokenistic but genuinely inclusive and intersectional. This objective represents a longer-term aspiration for the organization, of which Project Urmi serves as an initial step.

The primary aim of Project Urmi is to create a greater consciousness surrounding the feminist movement within the community. By initiating conversations and promoting dialogue, the project strives to bring attention to the need for an inclusive and intersectional approach. It seeks to encourage not only the project participants but also other activists and social workers to actively contribute to the development of a more comprehensive and authentic movement.



While the immediate impact assessment is still pending, the organization envisions a transformative shift in the mainstream feminist movement. The intention is to move beyond superficial gestures and embrace genuine inclusivity. Through Project Urmi, the organization lays the groundwork for future initiatives and collaborations that will further advance the cause of gender justice.

Project Urmi serves as a catalyst for change, aiming to challenge the existing paradigms and norms within the feminist movement. By raising awareness and engaging various stakeholders in meaningful discussions, the project aims to drive sustainable and long-lasting transformations.

SUSTAINABILITY OF THE PROJECT

The sustainability of Project Urmi is deeply tied to The Dhaka Apologue's enduring mission of engaging Bangladeshi youth in often overlooked socio-political conversations. As a continuation and evolution of their four-year work, Project Urmi represents both consistency and innovation. Amreeta co-created Project Urmi due to her personal connection and passion for the cause.

Driven by a vision of intersectional feminism and collective liberation, Amreeta's commitment goes beyond the fellowship's scope. The fellowship validates and amplifies her ongoing efforts, providing a platform to address crucial issues. Building on this foundation and harnessing fellowship momentum, Project Urmi is poised for sustainability, aligned with The Dhaka Apologue's overarching mission.

Project Urmi is committed to a lasting impact on feminism, emphasizing inclusivity, awareness, and collective action. Through engagement, dialogue, and resource mobilization, it aims to catalyze enduring change in societal structures and attitudes.

SCALE ACHIEVED

Collaborating with her team at The Dhaka Apologue, Amreeta Lethe is sharing the results of this fellowship primarily with the organization's social media audience. This encompasses a Facebook following of 19,462 and an Instagram following of 5,367 individuals. In terms of workshops and seminars, the objective is to involve over 50 university students, fostering peer networks that enable them to exchange insights from their ongoing projects with fellow students.

JOYEE CHAKMA



MEET THE FELLOW

Joyee Chakma is an enthusiastic individual driven by a deep passion for understanding and addressing social, environmental, and climate issues. She has completed her bachelor's degree in Chemical Engineering, majoring in Environment and is pursuing a Master's degree in Environment Science and Management. She is actively contributing as a Youth Representative (CAP-RES) at the International Center for Climate Change and Development and a Deputy Lead role in Environment Policy Network at Youth Policy Forum (YPF). Through her research, work, and involvement, she aims to contribute meaningfully to the advancement of social and environmental justice and change.

HIGHLIGHTS OF ACTIVITIES

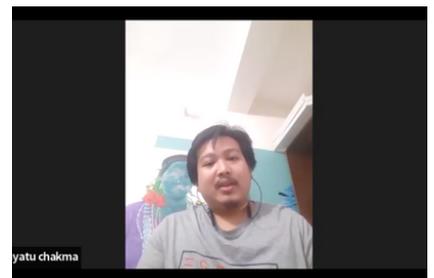
Joyee Chakma's podcast features the achievements and contributions of Bangladesh's indigenous people. Her interviews highlight impactful individuals in fields ranging from food and art to fashion and textiles.

Cuisine Podcast: Arpon Chakma (Co- Owner and Chef of BBQ Express)



Art Podcast: Sabyasachi Chakma (Comic book artist of Dhaka Comics)

Art Podcast: Jayatu Chakma (Independent Artist)



Fashion and textile Podcast: Tenzing Chakma (Fashion designer and owner of Sozpodor Indigenous Textiles)



Fashion and Textile Podcast: Khaidem Sithi (Owner of Engellei)

SOLVING PROBLEMS THROUGH THE PROJECT

The 'Beyond the Hills' CES diversity fellowship program addresses the underrepresentation and lack of recognition of indigenous communities in Bangladesh. It provides a platform for these communities to share their unique perspectives and experiences, often overlooked in mainstream society.

Through interviews, oral history documentation, cultural events, and multimedia content, the project amplifies indigenous voices, fostering understanding and empathy. By promoting cultural understanding and inclusivity, it seeks to drive social change and create a more harmonious society.

CHANGES THAT ARE HAPPENING WITHIN THE COMMUNITY

The podcasts hosted by her have made a significant impact on our targeted community across multiple dimensions. Firstly, the invitations and discussions she initiates have garnered positive responses from the guests, enabling them to share their knowledge, experiences, and viewpoints with a broader audience. This platform facilitates the dissemination of valuable insights that may not have been previously shared, particularly with younger audiences. Consequently, intergenerational learning is promoted, fostering a deep appreciation for indigenous heritage and culture. Furthermore, by actively involving and encouraging young individuals, she cultivates informed and engaged community members.

The podcasts' impact is manifold, as they serve as a platform for guests to express their perspectives, foster intergenerational learning, and inspire youth to actively contribute to their communities.

SUSTAINABILITY OF THE PROJECT

Ensuring project sustainability remains a top priority for the team. Since the inception of the podcasts, even preceding the fellowship, their core motivation has been amplifying the voices of marginalized indigenous communities. The COVID-19 pandemic accentuated the project's importance, prompting a shift to online platforms.

To secure long-term sustainability, the team has meticulously devised plans for expansive growth and venturing into untapped domains previously constrained by the fellowship's timeline. Recognizing the need for careful planning and seamless coordination, the team is committed to extending the project beyond the fellowship's duration.

Her unwavering commitment remains focused on providing a resilient platform for indigenous voices, fostering meaningful dialogues, and catalyzing lasting change within the communities she serves. Through strategic planning, continuous community engagement, and an unwavering dedication to amplifying indigenous voices, she firmly believes that the project will not only endure but also broaden its scope and deepen its impact. She places great importance on cultivating strong partnerships with key stakeholders and securing the necessary resources to ensure the ongoing success and expansion of her initiative.

Remaining attuned to the evolving needs of indigenous communities, she incorporates their feedback and adapts her approach, ensuring ongoing relevance and a lasting impact. Furthermore, she actively seeks collaborations with kindred organizations and pursues funding opportunities to fuel the sustained growth and advancement of her project.

SCALE ACHIEVED

Despite not having released the podcasts yet, she has conducted an impact analysis which revealed 10k views without any boosting. With the support of her guest network and her promotional efforts, she aims to surpass 8k views, as stated in the agreement.

MONON MUNTAKA



MEET THE FELLOW

Monon Muntaka is a visual storyteller and communications professional based in Dhaka, Bangladesh. Her practice focuses on social concerns, culture, women, and gender, as well as documenting them through films and video art. She has studied media studies, journalism, and communication at the University of Liberal Arts Bangladesh. Her interactions with various individuals have had a profound impact on her life. She has participated in various exhibitions in Bangladesh, including the British Council's Artists Make Space, Goethe Institute Bangladesh's KAHICAL exhibition, the Dhaka OIC Youth Capital 2020-21 etc.

Her work has been featured at ArtIQulate, LensCulture, Inonica, femlens and Al Jazeera. Monon is an Adenauer Fellow and has won the "Breaking the Silence" short film grant competition in 2022. Since 2018, she has been working as a communications consultant photographer and story writer for The Daily Star and different NGOs.

HIGHLIGHTS OF ACTIVITIES

Monon Muntaka's art project portrays the cultural diversity and rich heritage of Dinajpur's Oraon, Bihari, and Marwari communities. Through her photography and storytelling effort, the project signifies the harmonious coexistence of diaspora, showcasing diversity as a strength, not a challenge.





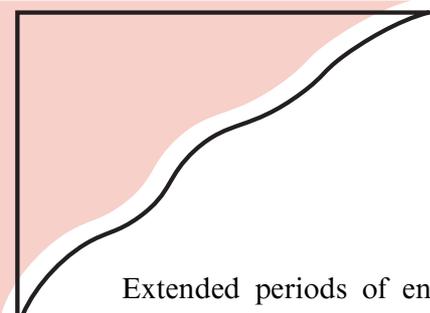
SOLVING PROBLEMS THROUGH THE PROJECT

Perspective on linguistic, religious, and cultural diversity often tends to be unfavorable. Some exploit these differences in religion and culture to manipulate and garner support, particularly among the youth, for personal gain. Through this initiative, the aim is to spotlight the unique cultural attributes of the Oraon, Bihari, and Marwari communities in the Dinajpur area. Despite cultural distinctions, these groups coexist harmoniously, resulting in greater strength. The core objective of this campaign is to underline that diversity enriches our nation's beauty without presenting challenges. The overarching goal is to convince everyone that our tranquil way of life is a reflection of our commitment to liberalism.

CHANGES THAT ARE HAPPENING WITHIN THE COMMUNITY

Given her limited engagement with the communities, spanning only a week-long visit over the course of three months, it is understandable that she anticipates difficulties in identifying any significant changes or impacts within the community. The brevity of her presence may limit her ability to observe and assess the long-term effects of her work or initiatives.

To effectively gauge community changes, it is crucial to establish a more sustained and immersive presence within the target communities. Building trust, fostering relationships, and understanding the context and dynamics of the community are essential elements for accurately assessing the impacts of interventions or initiatives.



Extended periods of engagement allow for a comprehensive understanding of the community's needs, challenges, and aspirations. It provides an opportunity to identify the subtle shifts and transformations that may occur over time, often resulting from multifaceted factors and interactions within the community itself.

Moreover, an extended duration of involvement enables the establishment of ongoing dialogues with community members, key stakeholders, and local leaders. These conversations provide valuable insights into the community's perceptions, feedback, and suggestions regarding the interventions, thereby facilitating a more accurate assessment of their effectiveness and impact.

Moreover, having a longer-term presence enables the implementation of monitoring and evaluation in frameworks that capture both short-term and long-term outcomes. This systematic approach helps track progress, identify areas of improvement, and ensure that interventions align with the community's evolving needs and aspirations.

To overcome the challenge of limited time, she can consider adopting a participatory approach to community engagement. By involving community members in the planning, implementation, and evaluation phases, she can gain a deeper understanding of their experiences and perspectives. This participatory approach fosters ownership, empowering the community to actively contribute to and sustain the desired changes.

SUSTAINABILITY OF THE PROJECT

The sustainability of Project holds great promise in shaping the community's perception and appreciation of diversity and its inherent benefits. While the project's creator acknowledges the importance of hosting interactive activities in Dinajpur, she regrettably cannot fulfill this during her fellowship due to other commitments that must be fulfilled by the end of August. Nonetheless, she is actively considering this as a viable course of action for the future.

Monon is diligently constructing the project based on a well-defined roadmap, with the intention of expanding its reach to an international scale. To achieve this, she plans to engage potential sponsors or partners who share similar interests and goals. Despite being her first independent project, Monon is committed to going above and beyond to ensure its sustainability.

SCALE ACHIEVED

She spoke with three distinct communities for this project. There are six families, two from each community. Additionally, she spoke with community researchers and resourceful people. Food, festivals, songs, literature, language, lifestyle, religion, and other aspects of their culture were discussed. In-depth interviews were used to acquire the majority of the data. According to her knowledge, the number is balanced, and the data she has gathered is authentic and credible.

MD. MUTIUL ISLAM



MEET THE FELLOW

Md. Mutiul Islam is a Clinical Speech and Language Therapist (CSLP) at Autism Welfare Foundation, providing clinical services for children and adults with communication disorders. He promotes social inclusion and equity for special needs, with a graduation and post-graduation degree from Department of Communication Disorders, University of Dhaka. He is actively engaged in disability research and already has two articles published.

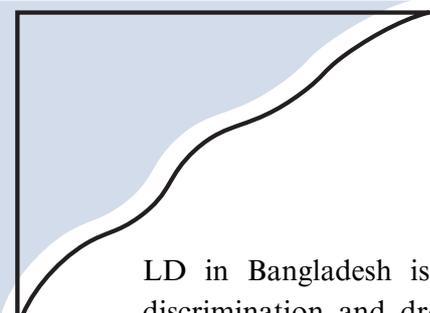
He worked with several organizations related to disability care, inclusion and rights. He was an active facilitator at “Down Syndrome Self Advocacy Program in Bangladesh”, a speech and language trainer at “Program for Autistic Children and Women through Pilot Training center” under the Ministry of Women and Children Affairs, as a linguistic data validator at “Sentiment Analysis” project implemented by Giga Tech Limited and Ministry of ICT and with many more. He is also very passionate in improving the quality of life for those with special needs.

HIGHLIGHTS OF ACTIVITIES

Mutiul Islam's initiative focuses on enhancing understanding of learning disabilities (LD) among students and promoting social inclusion. He has launched a social perception survey that identifies existing obstacles and paves the way for contextual intervention. Aligning with Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) 4 and 10, this project has the potential to reshape societal views on LD, fostering the provision of tailored education, employment opportunities, and social integration.

SOLVING PROBLEMS THROUGH THE PROJECT

Many students struggle with learning and academic challenges. They experience enormous Learning Difficulties (LD) including reading, writing, mathematics, social skills, and other areas causing them to fall behind peers and hinder their progress, despite efforts to overcome them. Teachers and family members often misunderstand these issues and have incorrect perceptions. Despite their average or above-average intellect and academic hardship, they face different physical and psychological negative treatments including bullying, harassment, mockery, etc. Negative treatment, low self-esteem, and social isolation lead to psychological issues, dropout rates, unemployment, and social exclusion. By raising awareness of people's learning challenges, his current initiative encourages social and educational inclusion.



LD in Bangladesh is often overlooked due to a lack of awareness and knowledge, leading to discrimination and dropout rates. Despite efforts by professionals, schools, and organizations, LD remains the most deprived case, causing mental stress, unemployment, and financial crises. With proper implementation, his project has the potential to alter society's perception of LD for the better, dispelling stigma and misinformation. It encourages need-based education, employment, and social inclusion, lessens family burden, and achieves SDG 4 and 10, targets leaving no one behind, guarantees quality education, and reduces inequalities in Bangladesh.

CHANGES THAT ARE HAPPENING WITHIN THE COMMUNITY

Mutiul is currently reviewing the responses from the survey launched, with the expectation that individuals who have read the questionnaire or heard about LD from him will gain a basic understanding of LD and its prevailing social conditions. The majority of respondents have provided feedback highlighting predominantly negative aspects. These responses underscore the need for widespread awareness campaigns aimed at altering community perceptions. Furthermore, suggestions have been put forth to introduce changes in educational policies and curricula, provide essential study resources and materials, and implement suitable teaching strategies.

SUSTAINABILITY OF THE PROJECT

To ensure the sustainability of the project, a comprehensive awareness campaign will be implemented utilizing both online and offline modalities. The deployment of posters and banners within the Dhaka University campus will serve as a persistent source of information on learning disabilities (LD) over an extended period. Additionally, online platforms such as Facebook will be utilized to share informative posts, as well as soft materials including pictures, posters, and banners, which can be widely disseminated by a large number of individuals, thereby contributing to the sustainability of the project.

Furthermore, the active involvement of motivated school teachers and parents during the physical campaign will play a crucial role in knowledge dissemination. Their understanding of LD and willingness to share this knowledge with other teachers and parents, particularly during teachers' training sessions or school meetings, will contribute to the longevity and impact of the project. The aim is to ensure the widespread dissemination of knowledge and awareness about LD throughout the country.

Moreover, it is imperative that a positive mindset toward every student with learning disabilities remains ingrained in the education system for an extended period. This will enable the creation of an easily accessible and supportive social-educational environment, ultimately leading to the eradication of stigmatization and the promotion of an inclusive society.

SCALE ACHIEVED

A campaign was conducted to raise awareness about learning disabilities and promote social and educational inclusion for students. A survey questionnaire was designed to collect information on studying disabilities, peer relationships, mental health, economic and social challenges, and potential remedial measures. Information for the project was gathered from various books related to learning disabilities.

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