

## Capacity building of indigenous women leaders from the Plains of Bangladesh

A two day long regional training programme on capacity building of indigenous women leaders from the Plains in Bangladesh was jointly organized by Kapaeng Foundation and Achik Michik Society with the support of International Labour Organization (ILO) on 4-5 October, 2012 at Shanti Niketan in Modhupur, Tangail. A total of 35 women leaders were present in the training programme and they came from different indigenous communities including Garo, Hajong, Barman, Santal, Koch, Tripura and Chakma.



In the opening session of the training, the guests were welcomed by Garo song and dance. Ms Shulekha Mrong, Chairperson of Achik Michik Society chaired the opening session while Ms Louise Nolle, Associate Expert of ILO PRO 169, Mr Mong Sing Neo, Coordinator of Kapaeng Foundation, Chairman of Jointshai Adivasi Union Parisad Mr Eugin Nokrek, Father Apallo Rojareo and Officer of Modhupur's Women's Bureau Ms Nasima Begum made speeches.

In her speech Ms Louise Nolle explained how the ILO works with indigenous peoples' issues in Bangladesh through the PRO 169 project. An important part of the project is the capacity building of different stakeholders on indigenous and tribal peoples' rights including government officials, indigenous organizations, journalists, students and other relevant groups and organizations. She also mentioned that indigenous women have very little representation in their own

communities as well as on national and international level. Hence the capacity building and strengthening of indigenous women is also an objective of the ILO.

Mr Mong Sing Neo pointed out, that indigenous women are among the most repressed sections of society as they are not only marginalized because of their gender but also because of their ethnicity. Even though Bangladesh has ratified the international Convention on the Elimination of all forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW), women's rights are still neglected in Bangladeshi society. As an example he highlighted the absence of indigenous women rights in the National Women's Policy.



In her speech, Ms Shulekha Mrong said that since the establishment of Achik Michik Society they have worked to strengthen the network and solidarity among indigenous women's organizations as well as indigenous women's rights. This training programme is a great platform to promote networking with indigenous women organizations as well as building leadership skills and knowledge. She also mentioned that the number of incidents of violence against women is increasing day by day which makes it even more important to organize training programmes to build up awareness among the indigenous women about their rights.



The participants of the training programme are only women and this has given them space to discuss their experiences. A number of issues were presented in the training including ILO Convention 169, indigenous peoples' and women's rights, indigenous women in an international context, the National Women Policy and CEDAW, the evolution of women's rights in indigenous society, access to justice and representation of indigenous women (within and outside the customary institutions) as well as land, natural resources and inheritance rights. Ms Selina Ahmed, National Programme Officer at ILO (on the project Promoting Gender Equality & Preventing VAW at the Workplace) was invited as a guest lecturer and spoke on the issue of violence, discrimination and harassment against women.

According to the evaluation and recommendations of the participants the training gave them an important space to share experiences and strengthen their knowledge on

women rights on national and international level. The participants suggested including male participants in the next training so they could also be sensitized on women's rights issues.