

Bangladesh: Indigenous/Tribal Population and Access to Secondary Schools (Draft)

Introduction

There are about 45 distinct indigenous communities in Bangladesh. The Population Census of 1991 puts tribal/indigenous population at around 1.21 million, and the current estimate is around 2 million. The largest concentration is in the Chittagong Hill Tracts but other areas in which these communities live include Chittagong, greater Mymensingh, greater Rajshahi, greater Sylhet, Patuakhali and Barguna. Chakma, Garo, Manipuri, Marma, Munda, Oraon, Santal, Khasi, Kuki, Tripura, Mro, Hajong and Rakhain are some of the well-known adivasi/ethnic minority communities of Bangladesh.

Indigenous peoples of Bangladesh

Indigenous peoples in Bangladesh call themselves ‘Adivasi’ (GOB PRSP uses the term indigenous people / Adivasi). The indigenous peoples are geographically located in five major areas or regions in Bangladesh. They live mostly in remote areas.

The distribution of 45 distinct indigenous peoples in Bangladesh is given in Table 1, below. In addition, there are other minority communities often identified as indigenous peoples or ethnic minorities living in the greater Rajshahi division and tea estates in the greater Sylhet. Including them, the number and population of indigenous communities in Bangladesh will be higher.

Table 1: Location and distribution of Indigenous People in Bangladesh (Source: Solidarity 2002, Bangladesh Adivasi Forum).

SL No	Location	Indigenous Communities
1.	Greater Mymensingh (Mymensingh, Tangail, Netrokona, Jamalpur, Sherpur district)	Garo, Hajong, Koch, Barman, Dalu, Hodi, Banai, Rajbangshi
2.	Gazipur	Barman, Garo, Koch etc.
3.	Coastal Area (Patuakhali, Barguna and Coxsbazar district)	Rakhain
4.	South-West (Jessore, Satkhira, Khulna district etc.)	Bagdi (Buno), Rajbangshi, Santal

SL No	Location	Indigenous Communities
5.	Chitagong Hill Tracts (Bandarban, Rangamati and Khagrachari district)	Chakma, Marma, Tripura, Bawm, Pangkhu, Lusai, Tanchangya, Khiang, Mru, Asam, Gurkha, Chak, Khumi
6.	North-Bengal (Rajshahi, Dinajpur, Rangpur, Gaibandha, Noagaon, Bagura, Sirajgonj, Chapainawabgonj, Natore district etc.)	Santal, Oraon, Munda, Malo, Mahali, Khondo, Bedia, Bhumij, Kole, Bhil, Karmakar, Mahato, Muriyar, Musohor, Pahan, Paharia, Rai, Sing, Turi
7.	Greater Sylhet (Sumangonj, Mouvlibazar, Sylhet, Hobigonj district)	Monipuri, Khasia, Garo, Hajong, Patro, Kharia, Santal, Oraon etc.

Tribe	1991	2001*
Bangshi	2,112	3,126
Bawm	6,978	10,327
Buna	13,914	20,592
Chak	2,000	2,960
Chakma	252,986	374,419
Koch	12,631	18,694
Garo	68,210	100,951
Hajong	11,477	16,985
Harijon	63	93
Khasi	13,412	19,850
Khyang	2,345	3,471
Khumi	1,241	1,837
Lushai	662	978
Mahat/Mahatoo	3,534	5,230
Marma	154,216	228,240
Monipuri	24,902	28,562
Munda/Mundia	2,112	3,126
Murang	22,178	32,823
Muro/MO	3,211	4,752
Pahari	1,853	2,742
Pankue/Pankoo	3,227	4,776
Rajbangshi	5,444	8,057
Rakhain	16,932	25,059
Santal	202,744	300,061
Tanchangya	21,057	31,164
Tipra	1,242	1,838
Tripura	79,772	118,063
Urang	11,296	16,718
Uruo/Urua/Uria	2,481	3,672
Others	261,746	387,384
Total	1,205,978	1,784,847

To get the figure of 2001, the figure of 1991 is multiplied by the growth rate 1.48. (Second Primary Education Development Program (PEDP-II)).

Indigenous People in the Constitution and PRSP

In Article 27 of the Constitution of the Peoples' Republic of Bangladesh states that all citizens are equal before law and are entitled to equal protection of law. The national Constitution also outlaws discrimination on grounds of race, religion and place of birth (Article 28) and provides scope for affirmative action ("positive discrimination") in favor of the "backward section of citizens" (Articles 28, 29). Consequent upon these provisions, a small percentage of public sector jobs and seats in a number of government educational institutions are reserved for indigenous persons.

In addition, there are some specific laws that make reference to indigenous peoples. In the plains, the only one of such laws is section 97 of the East Bengal State Acquisition and Tenancy Act, 1950 which forbids the transfer of lands owned by "aboriginals" to non-aboriginal persons without the express consent of the Government's District Officer. The CHT in contrast has a far

larger body of laws that refers directly to indigenous peoples. Some of these laws recognize indigenous peoples' customs regarding the ownership and use of lands and other natural resources. The most important of such laws is the CHT Regulation of 1900. Other laws include the Hill District Council Acts of 1989 and the CHT Regional Council Act of 1998. The last-mentioned laws were passed after the signing of the "peace" accord of 1997, which ended more than twenty years of armed conflict and provided a framework for the recognition and strengthening of the CHT self-government system. The PRSP recommends the forming of a National Commission or Advisory Body consisting of indigenous peoples and representation from indigenous organizations (CHT Regional Council, Circle Chief, Bangladesh Adivasi Forum etc) and funds should be directly channeled to these communities (PRSP final version).

The government of Bangladesh has a special affairs division under the Prime Minister's Secretariat, which looks after the development of indigenous population outside CHT. The Special Affairs Division provide fund for indigenous populations for their development including stipends for students. The stipend is given once a year for purchase of books, tuition fees etc. Mainly students of colleges and higher classes get the stipend.

A positive step is that government has recognized the vulnerable situation of indigenous peoples in the PRSP document. Indigenous peoples were invited to participate in the consultations organized by government. Consultations have pointed out the need for giving special attention to the problems and development needs of the indigenous people. To improve the condition of indigenous people, suggestions have been made to restructure the Ministry of Chittagong Hill Tracts Affairs by expanding its scope to include other plain-land indigenous people, undertake measures to preserve the language of the indigenous people, to take up a special program for poverty reduction among the indigenous people, to incorporate their culture in the national curriculum of education, and to formulate a policy for the development of indigenous people and implement laws. The PRSP suggests that it is necessary to provide education to indigenous people with a curriculum that allows learning in their own language at the primary level.

The PRSP has recommended in taking effective recognition of Adivasi/ethnic minority communities and their specific needs in all relevant government policies and programs. This is necessary towards improving the socio-economic conditions of these communities. It also recommends in providing education to Adivasi/ethnic minority people with a curriculum that allows learning in their own language at the primary level. Affirmative actions at higher levels of education and skill training to facilitate entry into job markets will have to be strengthened to promote their inclusion in mainstream economic life.

Status of tribal children

Indigenous peoples mainly live in isolated areas, outside the mainstream of national economies and development support. The areas they inhabit are even more likely to lack basic infrastructure such as roads, markets, schools and health facilities, than the other areas of population. Extreme poverty, low levels of education, poor housing conditions and low levels of physical assets are some of the features that characterize these households.

There is a lack of information on education of the indigenous population and data from 1991 census and other micro studies indicate that literacy and school enrolment of indigenous groups are low. A study conducted by an NGO Research and Development Collective, titled Baseline Survey on Indigenous Peoples in North-West Bangladesh, published in November 2000, Report No. 15 shows that the literacy rate of Santal, Koch, Mahalis are 22%, 17% and 25% respectively. In terms of school-age children, some estimates put the population of 11-15 age-group at

300,000 in and less than ¼ are in secondary school – that translates into approximately 20,000 children from tribal households that are possible beneficiaries.

What the project should do for these children (proposed recommendations)

- **Organizing social awareness**

Education awareness and social mobilization component of this project could have a special focus on this population group. A sound strategy could be in place to make these households aware about the poverty-targeting scheme. Participating schools in the project could emphasize the importance of attracting such population into the schooling system for both children into classes but also parents into SMCs/PTAs.

- **Provision of stipends and tuition support**

Because poverty incidence is very high among tribal households, the pro-poor targeting scheme in the project possibly covers most, if not all, of these tribal children that are already in a position to enroll at secondary school. Stipends and tuition program would help in attracting eligible students from these population groups and retaining them in the schooling system. Stipend would help with direct costs of uniforms, books, transport, and other items.

- **Monitoring**

Data monitoring system in the project could be in place to track the student beneficiaries by IP status. This would help in looking at the progress in access and quality of schooling.

