WELCOME

Dr. Lawrence Besra

National Coordinator—Knowledge Management and Research
World Vision Bangladesh

Email: lawrencebesra@hotmail.com
The impact of linguistic policy and planning on inclusive education for the indigenous children in primary education in Bangladesh
Ethnic Communities in Bangladesh

- Bangladesh is diverse with 45 different ethnic communities comprising 2.5 million of the 160 million of total population.
- All ethnic communities have distinctive mother tongues, customs, and cultures.
- They are often regarded as tribal.
- They are struggling to be recognized as Indigenous People according to UN Declaration on IPs 2007.
The Santal comprise one of the largest tribes in the Indian sub-continent (Bangladesh, Nepal, and India).

They live in Northern Bangladesh (Rangpur and Rajshahi Division).

According to the census in 1991, the Santal population was over 200,000 (Barkat et al, 2009, p. 244).

The Santal community is a patriarchal society and they have unique traditional administrative institutions and customs.
The Santal community living in the plains of North-Bengal in Bangladesh are politically marginalized and socio-economically disadvantaged (Barkat et al. 2009, p. 21).

The process of marginalization began with the dispossession of their ancestral lands, heavily impacting their livelihood and life chances (Kamal et al. 2003, p. 12).

The systemic discrimination and deprivation has made their existence increasingly tenuous in the country.

Exclusion from the governance structure; lack of representation at National Forum.
It is assumed that the life of the Indigenous people is associated with marginalization, minoritization and discrimination in the areas of accessing rights to land, education, health care and other basic social services (Kama et al. 2001, p. 17).

Even the plights and sufferings of the plain-land indigenous people are not properly represented at the national and international level like as CHT.
## The Santal Population in the Sub-Continent

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Country</th>
<th>SANTAL Population</th>
<th>States/Provinces/Districts</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Bangladesh</td>
<td>385,000</td>
<td>Rangpur and Rajshahi Division, Sylhet Region (Tea gardens)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>India</td>
<td>8,192,000</td>
<td>Bihar, Jharkhand, Chhattisgarh, West Bengal, Orissa, Assam, Tripura, Madhya Pradesh, Arunachal, Andaman &amp; Nicobor</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nepal</td>
<td>71,000</td>
<td>Districts Jhapa, Morang and Oraon in Kosi, Mechi, Janakpur, Sagarmatha, Narayani Provinces</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: [http://www.joshuaproject.net/people-profile.php](http://www.joshuaproject.net/people-profile.php)
Why Literacy level is Low

- According to the 1991 Census, only 14.1% were found to be literate in the Santal community
  - Female literacy rate is only 7.41%
  - Male literacy is 20.5% (UNESCO, 2005, p. 141).
- Poverty and unaffordable education materials
- Discrimination in the schools
- Social exclusion by broader community
- Language barrier to overcome because neither medium of instruction nor textbooks are available in their mother language
Why Literacy level is Low (Cont’d)

- Furthermore, Santal are not represented in curriculum design
- Teachers are not recruited from Indigenous communities.
The essence of inclusive education is that it promotes the opportunity and right of every child to be accommodated in the mainstream primary education irrespective of religion, caste, and ethnicity or physical and mental challenges.

Inclusive education is a growing concern, not only in Bangladesh but also across the globe, as a sustainable strategic process to ensure quality education for all learners including children with disabilities, children from ethnic and language diversity, children who are from socially disadvantaged and regardless of gender (Ahsan, 2014, p. 1).
Inclusive education is still at a conceptual stage in Bangladesh.

A very few NGOs are working in this area.

Most interventions are isolated, fragmented and not coordinated (Unicef, 2003, p. 1).

The hegemonic linguistic policy of the state and the lack of attention to the needs of the ethnic languages and cultures appear to be impediments to achieving inclusive education in Bangladesh.
To ensure quality basic education for all children from diverse background irrespective of religion, caste, and ethnicity, and for physically and mentally challenged students:

- Universal Declaration of Human Rights
- United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO)
- SDG 4: Agenda 2030
- The global commitment to Education for All (EFA)
- Constitutional commitment of Bangladesh Government
- National Education Policy 2010
- Compulsory Primary Education Act 1990
- Primary Education Development Program (PEDP- III)
Education of Ethnic Children in Bangladesh

- Only 44.5 percent of Indigenous children aged 6-10 years in Bangladesh are enrolled in primary schools (Durnnnian, 2007, p. 14).
- A large percentage of Indigenous children never enroll due to a lack of schools within appropriate walking distance (2 kilometers).
- The majority of these dropout children are either living in isolated rural communities or from marginalized Indigenous communities (Ardt et al. 2005, p. 6).
The existing education system is ‘not relevant, appropriate, flexible, or inclusive’ (Kosonen, 2005, p. 87) with regard to the needs of indigenous children in Bangladesh.

Government primary schools are cynical about receiving indigenous children, erroneously labeling them as ‘uncivilized’, ‘not speaking Bengali’, ‘incapable of learning’, ‘too old to be admitted’, and soon to drop out of the school’ (Oxfam, 2006, p. 18).
The Government of Bangladesh has taken pragmatic initiatives to provide preprimary education for indigenous children in their mother tongues, primarily in the 6 languages identified in 2014 (to be implemented starting 2017).

But, unfortunately the Santals could not be incorporated in this scheme, as a decision on which font, Bengali or Roman Script, should be used in preprimary education in the Santali language could not be reached.

Acceptable Alphabets (Social, Religious, cultural and Political Influence)
Paul Olav Bodding (1889–1933)
Rationale for My Paper

- The children of ethnic communities have their own distinctive mother languages and do not speak Bengali (the standard medium of instruction) as their first language.
- They are gradually and deliberately pushed out of the mainstream school system because schools are not sensitive to their learning needs, styles and backgrounds (Kisanji, 1999, p. 2).
- This paper is based on my PhD Study and Contemporary Secondary Information/Sources.
Research Location Map
Life and Livelihood
Key Challenges for Inclusive Education in Bangladesh

- Poverty and unaffordable education materials
- Medium of instruction: a dominant monolingual policy
- Discrimination in the schools and social exclusion by broader community
- Unavailability of textbooks in their respective mother languages
- Lack of recruitment of teachers from Indigenous communities
- Lack of quality education and recreational activities
Indigenous Children at School
Challenges Faced by Indigenous Children

Financial incapacity and a need to help their parents

- Poorer families from the marginalized ethnic communities are unable to meet the basic requirements, such as cost of uniforms, private tutoring, additional fees and educational materials such as notebooks, pens and pencils for students (Chowdury et al. 2000, p. 8).
- Students from poor families do not get stipends due to nepotism and corruption (Shekh, 2005, p. 3).
- One of the FGD participants from Buski village commented that:
  
  “The children from needy family cannot go to schools as their parents can’t bear educational expenses for them due to poverty. Even though we hear primary school is free, we cannot bear the expenditures for education materials and school fees. Very often, parents engage their children in household chores like as looking after cattle or goats, fetching water, and wood for fuel rather than sending them to school”.
Medium of instruction: a dominant monolingual policy

- The monolingual language policy in Bangladesh does not recognize any ethnic language except the national language Bangla. Neither the Constitution nor any Bangladeshi law specifically recognizes nor protects indigenous people and their right for education in mother languages (Rahman, 2010, p. 346).

- The existing education system has denied the special needs of indigenous children to learn in their mother tongues.

- One of the FGD participants from Srirampara village insisted that;

  “We do not have teachers and textbooks in our mother languages. Our children cannot communicate with teachers from dominant majority and can’t understand what is written in the books. So, how can we educate our children? Education in mother languages should be introduced in Class I to III. If bi-lingual education up to class III is ensured, children from our community could attend schools regularly”.
Discrimination against the indigenous children

- Indigenous children endure “derogatory remarks” against their cultural identity, their true history, lifestyle, and food habits which discourage them from attending the school.

- One of the FGD participants from Panchpukur village has claimed that;

“The contents of the textbook are objectionable. There are derogatory descriptions of the indigenous people’s lifestyle, culture, and food habits IN THE TEXTBOOKS, something that discourages them from attending in school”.
Lack of teachers from Indigenous Community

- Since independence in 1971, the consecutive process of teacher recruitment in government primary schools is inconsistent with education policy and delivering quality primary education with regard to children from Indigenous communities.

- One of the FGD participants from Buski village commented that;

“We don’t have teachers from our own community. Our children don’t get support from Bengali teachers. If there were teachers from our own community, they could interpret and help our children in understanding Bangla. At the same time, our children would feel empowered and encouraged to go to schools. As there are no indigenous teachers, our children feel alienated in the schools”.

Challenges Faced by Indigenous Children, Cont’d
Challenges Faced by Indigenous Children, Cont’d

Lack of quality education and recreational activities

- Quality of education in the primary sector is at stake due to various factors, from the classroom environment to top level management (Rabbi, 2005, p. 31).
- There is little emphasis on developing analytical, practical, or vocational skills, which results in low achievement and high dropout and repetition rates” (Unicef, 2009, p. 3).
- Lack of interactive and creative teaching methods using the prescribed textbooks.
- In addition, the lack of recreational activities demotivates indigenous children from going to school. One of the FGD participants from Khidirpur village commented that;

“Our children do not want to go to schools because there are no recreational facilities in the school. So they lose interest in going to school. Another factor is that children do not have an interest in education. They like to hang around here and there and they spend time in playing and want a free life”.

Challenges of MTB-MLE

- Dominant Linguistic Policy
- Social Exclusion and Marginalization
- Unavailability of Textbooks or Curriculum Materials
- Lack of Recruitment of Teachers
- Poverty and Multiple Vulnerabilities
An immediate implementation of primary education in mother tongues could combat the high-dropout rate and non-completion of primary education of the two Indigenous children in the North-Bengal of the country.

The recruitment and deployment of primary school teachers from the ethnic communities could escalate higher enrolment and completion rate of universal primary education in Bangladesh.

Bangladesh Government and Non-Government Organizations (NGOs) should work for promoting and sustaining an inclusive implicitly in Bangladesh.
Conclusion and Recommendations, Cont’d

- Grassroots level Advocacy, Activism, Pursuing (local to national) of MBT-MLE
- The government of Bangladesh needs to translate the policy of mother tongue-based education for the indigenous children into practice.
THANK YOU