

Leave no one behind: Post COVID-19 Challenges for Plain Land Ethnic Minority Group in Bangladesh

- Increasing opportunities for Income Generating Activities would help to reduce food insecurity, malnourishment, loan taking behaviour, etc. and to reduce poverty of the plain land ethnic minority group.
- Establishment of Special Digital Centres (SDCs) would make information and services available and accessible, community level training on using online information for services possible, allow building awareness, end digital divide and would get them engaged.
- Policy and legal provision of participation of members of ethnic groups in matters of their development would ensure timely, necessary, appropriate, sustainable intervention, service, supports for them.
- Generating nationwide authentic desegregated data of the ethnic minority groups would ensure appropriate distribution, necessary monitoring and evaluation of all the government, NGO and others supports and services for the plain land ethnic minority group.
- Especial trainings and opportunities of income generating activities would reduced vulnerability and empower persons with disability within the plain land ethnic minority group.

What is the Issue?

More than 476 million indigenous live in 90 countries of the world who are historically marginalized, discriminated and excluded. They constitute 6.2% of the world's population face injustice. In Bangladesh, the plain land ethnic minority group is no exception.

Bangladesh government is a signatory of relevant international conventions and has undertaken many and policy and legal obligations along with many projects and programs for the equitable development of the plain land ethnic minority group. However, when considered for 'Leave No one Behind' (LNOB), the government also recognizes that along with some other groups of people, ethnic communities and marginalized people might also be left behind.ⁱ COVID-19 pandemic has posed unique additional challenges for all the people of Bangladesh. The government undertook many initiatives to address the multiple impacts of the pandemic on our society and economy and widened coverage of the social safety nets to protect the poor people who lost their jobs and income and faced food insecurity^{ii,iii}. However, COVID-19 pandemic caused severe decline in livelihoods of plain lands ethnic minority group in Bangladesh; the options for livelihoods reduced and additional 28% had no more than a single source of income that is physical labour (See Table 1).

Table 1. Main sources of income before and after COVID-19

Before COVID-19 N (%)	After COVID-19 N (%)
1. Day labourer 250 (63%)	1. Physical labour 215 (54%)
2. Farm products 104 (26%)	2. Left with no other option 111 (28%)
3. Left with no other option 223 (56%)	3. Left with no other option 231 (58%)

For the plainland ethnic minority group food insecurity was prevailing even in the before COVID-19 situation; however,

the severity of food insecurity and especially, the case of no food during and after COVID is very high (See Box).

Box 1 Food security related findings
• A negative shift is evident for all male, female and children for breakfast, lunch and dinner of the respondent households between before COVID and during lock down situation.
• Food insecurity was prevailing even in the before COVID situation; however, the severity of food insecurity and especially, the case of no food during and after COVID is too high.
• The percentage of male, female and children for no food saw the increased the most. 160% increase of male, 271% increase of female and 32% increase of children for no lunch during COVID was asserted by the respondents at the household level.
• Increase of percentage of female was 333% and male was 260% who had no dinner.
• Among 71% of households of Satkhira followed by 60% in Rajshahi experienced moderate food insecurity.
• Prevalence of high food insecurity 23% was found in Sylhet only.
• Moderate food insecurity was experiences among 77% urao households followed by 69% Munda households.
• 66% of Khasia households experienced high food insecurity.

The government provided supports to the plain land ethnic minority group before COVID-19 and during the pandemic especial supports for the poor citizens was provided. However, for useful, sustainability of benefits and appropriateness of the supports from the government, perception of the recipients of plain land ethnic minority group is mostly that of middle range, somewhat useful or somewhat correct. Unfortunately rate of negative perception is rather big. Also, the rate of positive perception of the recipients for the availed supports for usefulness, sustainability and appropriateness is strikingly very low (See Table 2).

Table 2. Level of usefulness, sustainability of benefits and appropriateness of the government services/support

Usefulness of Government service/ support	Somewhat useful	Not at all useful	Very useful
	67.75%	23.25%	9.00%
Sustainability of benefits of service/ support	Somewhat correct	Not at all correct	Completely correct
	60.50%	36.75%	2.75%
Appropriateness of the received service/ support	Somewhat correct	Not at all correct	Completely correct
	48.00%	51.00%	1.00%

Why are livelihoods, food security and government services of plainland ethnic minority group important?

Bangladesh is a State Party to the ILO Convention no. 107 on Indigenous and Tribal Populations; the government takes part in consultations on the ILO Convention no. 169 on Indigenous and Tribal Peoples 1989, adopted the UN Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples in 2007^{iv}, and recognizes the responsibility to protect and develop the unique local culture and tradition of the ethnic minorities as asserted in the 15th amendment to the constitution that has inserted Article 23 A of the constitution.^v Thus it is the government's constitutional and international obligation to address the challenges facing the plain land ethnic minority group to ensure not to leave any one behind.

ⁱ Bangladesh, Voluntary National Reviews (VNRs) 2020, Accelerated action and transformative pathways: realizing the decade of action and delivery for sustainable development

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ⁱⁱ Covid-19 and its impact on the livelihood of indigenous peoples of Bangladesh

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ⁱⁱⁱ A Rapid Assessment Report The impact of COVID-19 on Indigenous and Tribal Peoples in Bangladesh

<https://www.iwgia.org/en/news-alerts/news-covid-19/3814-kapaecng-covid-19-ra.html>

What should policy makers do?

- Ensure Policy and legal provision of participation of members of plainland ethnic minority groups in matters of their development
- Increasing opportunities for Income Generating Activities
- Establish Special Digital Centres (SDCs) for ethnic minority group
- Ensure availability and accessibility of information and services, community level training on using online information for possible services, for awareness building, for ending digital divide and for getting them engaged.
- Generating nationwide authentic desegregated data of the ethnic minority groups
- Especial trainings and opportunities of income generating activities for persons with disability within the plain land ethnic minority group.

^{iv} The ILO Convention on Indigenous and Tribal Populations, 1957 (No. 107) and The Laws of Bangladesh: A Comparative Review,2009

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^v Human Rights Council Working Group on the Universal Periodic Review Sixteenth session Geneva, 22 April–3 May 2013

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