

Report on the Gaps in Existing Policy and Laws of Domestic Violence and Protection of Plain Land Ethnic Minorities in Bangladesh



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Introduction

Bangladesh is a diverse country with many languages and cultures. The Constitution of Bangladesh, in the 15th Amendment on 30 June 2011, the Article 23A states, “The State shall take steps to protect and develop the unique local culture and tradition of the tribes, minor races, ethnic sects and communities.”

According to the Ethnographic Survey of the International Mother Languages Institute of the government, there are 41 mother tongues in Bangladesh. Among them 39 are ethnic minority languages. Government has recognized that 14 ethnic minority languages have been disappeared. According to indigenous organizations, at least 25 indigenous languages are at high risk of extinction.

According to the Cultural Ministry’s gazette on 23 March 2019, there are 50 ethnic minority communities in Bangladesh. The 2011 population census included only 27 ethnic communities according to the Small Ethnic Minority Cultural Institution Act 2010 and the total population of ethnic communities was 1,586,141. In 2019 the government made revision of the gazette and found 50 ethnic communities. It is hopeful that the 2021 Census will bring a true figure of the population of ethnic communities. The digital format of the census 2021 included the names of 50 ethnic communities.

Indigenous peoples’ organizations claim that more than 3 million ethnic communities live in Bangladesh. Lack of disaggregated data on ethnic communities is a big challenge. ethnic communities are one of the most marginalized and vulnerable groups in the country. Historically they have been facing multiple discrimination, exclusion and violations of human rights. They are regarded as one of the vulnerable segments of the society. Lack of participation of ethnic communities in development combined with the loss of access to land and resources have in many cases marginalized them.

Constitutional Recognition

Indigenous peoples of Bangladesh have been demanding for the Constitutional recognition for many years. Indigenous organizations have raised this demand to the government and political parties many times. Some socialist and leftist political parties have supported this demand and included this demand in their election manifestos. In many ways our Constitution recognized ethnic minorities as citizens of the country. The Constitution of Bangladesh, Article 19 (1) states, “The State shall endeavour to ensure equality of opportunity to all citizens”.

Article 27 states, “All citizens are equal before law and are entitled to equal protection of law.”

Article 28 (1) states, “The State shall not discriminate against any citizen on grounds only of religion, race, castes, sex or place of birth.”

Article 28 (4), “Nothing in this article shall prevent the State from making special provision in favour of women or children or for the advancement of any backward section of citizens.”

Article 32, “No person shall be deprived of life or personal liberty save in accordance with law.”

Article 39 (1), “Freedom of thought and conscience is guaranteed.”

Article 41 (1.a), “Every citizen has the right to profess, practice or propagate any religion.”

These Articles are the positive points in asserting the rights of ethnic minorities in Bangladesh. Besides them, the Constitution of Bangladesh allows its citizens to enjoy freedom of movement, freedom of assembly, freedom of association, freedom of thought and conscience, and of speech, freedom of religion etc.

Indigenous peoples’ rights are a human rights. As citizen of Bangladesh, they have the full right to enjoy the Constitutional rights and provisions in the laws. They are entitled to claim and assert all the rights given in the law. They face the challenges like many other citizens who are being marginalized and excluded in the process of decision making bodies. For many reasons, ethnic minorities cannot enjoy the full rights given in the laws at the ground.

According to the “Indigenous Peoples, A Global Quest for Justice, A Report for the Independent Commission on International Humanitarian Issues,” published by Zed Books, London in 1987 stated in the Prologue, “Government officials, executives of transnational corporations and officers of development Banks have often only a limited knowledge of indigenous societies. Yet the projects these officials authorise – dams, roads, relocations of population – affect irrevocably the peoples who lie in their paths. It is not just a case of ignorance; a basic change of attitude is required.”

The UN System and Indigenous Peoples

The rights of indigenous peoples’ have been progressively given more attention by the UN system. Yet, indigenous peoples continue to be left behind and suffer disproportionately from climate change, environmental degradation, high levels of poverty, poor access to education, health, and broader human rights violations.

The UN Permanent Forum on Indigenous Issues (UNPFII) is a subsidiary body of the UN Economic and Social Council (ECOSOC) established by the General Assembly in 2000. It has mandates to discuss six indigenous issues related to economic and social development, culture, the environment, education, health and human rights. The UN Secretary General Kofi Annan, terming the First Session of the UN Permanent Forum on Indigenous Issues in 2002 “historic”, proclaimed to the world’s indigenous peoples “You have a home at the United Nations.”

In December 2007, the UN Human Rights Council established the Expert Mechanism on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples (EMRIP). Its mandate is to assist the Council by providing thematic expertise and making proposals pertaining to the rights of indigenous peoples.

The United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples (UNDRIP) was adopted by the General Assembly on 13 September 2007, as a triumph for justice and human dignity following more than two decades of negotiations between governments and indigenous peoples’ representatives. The Declaration is the most comprehensive instrument detailing the rights of indigenous peoples in international law and policy, containing minimum standards for the

recognition, protection and promotion of these rights. It establishes a universal framework of minimum standards for the survival, dignity, wellbeing and rights of the world's indigenous peoples.

The Declaration addresses both individual and collective rights; cultural rights and identity; rights to education, health, employment, language, and others. It outlaws discrimination against indigenous peoples and promotes their full and effective participation in all matters that concern them. It also ensures their right to remain distinct and to pursue their own priorities in economic, social and cultural development. The Declaration explicitly encourages harmonious and cooperative relations between States and indigenous peoples (iwgia.org).

The Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) and the related indicators did not address the situation of indigenous peoples, and there is a risk that in SDGs too they may again be left behind if special measures are not taken into the implementation and review processes for the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development.

Bangladesh has ratified several international treaties and conventions including ILO Convention on Indigenous and Tribal Population 107 in 1972. However, it is yet to implement the provisions of this convention properly in order to bring positive change in the conditions of indigenous and tribal peoples.

In December 2015, the UNGA 3rd Committee adopted by consensus the report including recommendations regarding indigenous peoples' rights. In this report, the 3rd Committee recalling the commitment expressed in the Outcome Document of the World Conference on Indigenous Peoples, to continue the consideration of ways to enable the participation of indigenous peoples' representatives and institutions in meetings of relevant United Nations bodies on issues affecting them.

Norwegian Saami community expert Ole Henrik Magga, Former Chairman of the UN Permanent Forum on Indigenous Issues said, "Indigenous peoples are proponents and representatives of

humanity's cultural diversity. Historically, however, indigenous peoples have been marginalized by dominant societies and have often faced assimilation and cultural genocide. In the multicultural societies growing up around them, indigenous peoples seek an end to such marginalization and fringe dwelling. They have much to contribute to society, and they bring to both national and international debates valuable advice about the great issues facing humanity in this new millennium."

Bangladesh government's Policies and Ethnic Minorities

The Education Policy 2010 and the Women Development Policy 2011 recognized indigenous peoples' issues. The 8th Five Year Plan, Promoting Prosperity and Fostering Inclusiveness included ethnic minority issues as "the ethnic communities in Bangladesh are the most deprived of economic, social, cultural and political rights, mainly due to their ethnic status. Ethnic identities are creating barriers to ethnic minority people's inclusion in wider social networks. Enforcement of the notion of 'national unity', which is not nuanced and sensitive to minority groups, has brought about an elimination of the particular cultural and political values of ethnic minorities. The result is that ethnic people are socially isolated, with little access to mainstream economic and political spheres. A complex interplay of ethnic inequality, enduring discrimination, lack of education, little access to land and lack of employment has resulted in increased poverty amongst these groups. One of the major problems for all minority communities is land grabbing by influential people from the mainstream population. Policies to protect the land of ethnic people have not been adequate."

This Five-Year Plan recognized the lack of comprehensive understanding of the problems of the ethnic communities. In the strategy for ethnic population, this plan states that the government is committed to ensuring socio-economic and political rights, fundamental human rights, and social security, while enabling tribal people to retain their social, cultural, and traditional identities. This Plan also stated that the government will consider implementing the UN Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples and ratifying the ILO Convention 169. This plan

has mentioned about the land rights, empowering ethnic communities, access to health, nutrition and population services, access to education, developing perspective plan, agriculture and rural development, livelihood, human resource development, access to social protection, development tourism, adaptation to climate change, afforestation etc. In the election manifesto, government made commitment to form a separate Land Commission for the plain land indigenous peoples in 2008 and to form a Minority Commission in 2018. Government documents including SDGs recognized the need for special measures for the advancement of ethnic minorities in the country. The Monitoring and Evaluation Framework of the SDGs Bangladesh Perspective, Ministry of Planning, April 2020 stated that By 2030 eliminate gender disparities in education and ensure equal access to all levels of education and vocational training for indigenous peoples.

Ethnic Minorities in the Plain Land: Major Issues and Challenges

According to the Cultural Ministry, Government of Bangladesh, more than 38 indigenous communities live in the plain land. They are the Santals, Oraons, Munda, Mahato, Malo, Garo, Hajong, Koch, Khasi, Monipuri, Rakhain and other small indigenous communities. They mainly live in greater Rajshahi, Rangpur, Dinajpur, greater Mymensing and Sylhet division. Some indigenous communities live in Gazipur, Comilla, Chittagong, Cox's bazar and other districts. Thousands of indigenous peoples live in the big cities like Dhaka and Chittagong. They are migrant workers.



The lack of disaggregated data on ethnic minorities is a big challenge in Bangladesh. This is the reason for “development gap” and attitude of exclusion and lack of proper knowledge. According to indigenous organizations, it is estimated that out of 50 ethnic communities, more than 38 communities live in the plain land and the population is more than 2 million. Despite many commitments and inclusion of ethnic issues in several government documents, they have been facing serious exclusion from decision making process, violation of human rights, dispossession from land, deprivation of natural resources, loss of mother tongue and culture, livelihood, etc. This has brought the result in the denial of their very right to life. Ethnic minorities continue to suffer discrimination, extreme poverty and exclusion from political and economic power. Their way of life, traditional institutions, distinct cultures and languages are threatened, even to the point of extinction. According to the International Mother Language Institution, 14 indigenous languages have fully been disappeared and many are at risk.

Indigenous people’s organizations are demanding for a separate National Policy for indigenous peoples in Bangladesh. The Parliamentary Caucus on Indigenous Peoples prepared a draft Act titled “Bangladesh Indigenous Peoples Rights Act (BIPRA)” and this was presented to the Parliament for discussion a few years ago.

Some policies in Bangladesh have incorporated ethnic issues such as the Education Policy, Women Development Policy, Tribal Health Policy, the Five-Year Plan, Draft Cultural Policy (2020), the Poverty Reduction Strategic Paper (PRSP), National Budget Documents, Prime Minister’s Office documents on ethnic communities, the SDG documents and land and forest documents etc. These national policies recognize that the majority of ethnic minorities face challenges posed by poverty and discrimination. Ethnic minorities continue to live below the poverty line, have poor literacy rate, suffer from malnutrition and disease and are vulnerable to displacement.

Access to Land Rights, Forest and Natural Resources

In April 2022, Indigenous Peoples Development Services – IPDS organized four community workshops in Mymensingh and Moulvibazar district. Total 38 community Chiefs and Headmen,

youth, women, religious and cultural leaders, human rights defenders, elected local members participated in these workshops. The participants made the priority list of the challenges ethnic community faces. The access to land rights and right to forest and natural resources are the major challenges in their life. In the Garo hills

area in northern border of Mymensingh, Modhupur forest and national park area in Tangail district, and Kulaura in Moulvibazar district, right to land and forest is the main concern for them. In these areas, the Khasis, Garos and other indigenous peoples have been living for centuries. According to their culture of land ownership, they have the ancestral and traditional land rights. This is the



customary right in their culture. But in the course of time, governments declared these lands and forests as the national parks, reserve forest or protected areas without their consent. In some indigenous areas, government granted lease of these lands to the tea companies. For decades, land conflict is making ethnic communities vulnerable. Hundreds of false forest cases were filed against indigenous forest dwellers and they faced endless harassment. They have lost their lands and territories. Many indigenous villages were disappeared.

In the North Bengal, more than 80% Adivasis became landless, according to indigenous organizations. A study based on a survey of 10 Adivasi communities from plain lands led by Dr. Abul Barkat shows that they have been dispossessed of 202,164 acres of land.

Extreme Poverty and Lack of access to Social Services

Indigenous peoples had a glorious past with their own lands and territory. Santals and other Adivasis fought for the freedom against colonial rulers. In 1971 many indigenous peoples fought for the independence of Bangladesh. This history was not properly written and published. At

present, the majority members of ethnic communities are extremely poor. They face lack of access to education, health care, clean water, proper food, hygiene and sanitation.

In some areas, ethnic community members are receiving benefits from the safety net programme such as VGD, VGF, Test Relief, special cash transfer, widow allowance, old age allowance etc. This safety net programme needs to have a clear policy for inclusion of ethnic community members so that the authority must follow it.

Access to Education and Health

Lack of proper data and information about the education rate of ethnic community is a big issue. The positive thing is that government decided to introduce six ethnic languages at the primary level. They are Santal, Garo, Oraon (Sadri), Chakma, Marma and Tripura. Books were printed in five indigenous languages except the Santals. Yet, not new teachers were recruited for this purpose. Still the books are not in use because of the lack of proper instruction and guidelines.

Ethnic community members face serious lack of health care services in many countries. Lack of hospitals, clinics and health care centers close to their habitat is a major challenge. In Bangladesh, many ethnic community members live in the remote areas, hills, mountains and forest. Lack of good road and communication are one of the difficulties for them. On the other hand, ethnic community members are not aware enough about the modern health care system.

The situation of Ethnic Women

Ethnic women are particularly vulnerable by lack of access to education, economic and employment opportunities, decision making and access to justice. The social exclusion of ethnic communities has led to inadequate mechanisms to address gender-based violence, which tends to be higher than national averages in many countries. In Bangladesh, ethnic women face multiple discrimination as women from ethnic community, as poor, as a member of residing in remote areas, and as a migrant when they need to leave their homes because of violation of human rights. Many indigenous women and girls have migrated to the cities for searching jobs and better life. No adequate research or study have been done on ethnic migrant workers in

Bangladesh. A major group of ethnic women is working in the garment factories, Export Processing Zones (EPZ), as domestic workers, beauticians, as sales women and girls and other informal sectors. Often they face sexual harassment and other exploitations. Ethnic women are not aware about their rights as labours.

National Women Development Policy 2011 included ethnic women's issues. The Article 38 emphasized on the need for Special Program for Small Ethnic and Backward Group Women. The Article 38.1 committed to ensure all the rights of the small ethnic and backward groups of people for the development and growth of their womenfolk.



Article 38.2 states, "To take initiative for the development of small ethnic group women by sustaining their own heritage and culture."

38.3 states, "To undertake special program aimed at development of backward women."

It is very crucial how ethnic minority women will be benefited from this Women Development Policy 2011. A clear framework mechanism is essential for meaningful participation of ethnic women in the implementation of this policy.

The Editorial of the Indigenous World Book 2022 wrote: Indigenous women play crucial roles in their communities as breadwinners, caretakers, knowledge keepers, leaders and human rights defenders. While indigenous women have made small but significant progress in being part of decision-making processes in some communities, have risen to leadership in communal and national roles and stood on the frontline of protests to defend their lands and bio-diversity, the reality remains that they are massively under-represented, disproportionately negatively affected by the decisions made on their behalf without their valuable input, and all too frequently the victims of violence and sexual assault.

Indigenous women continue to disproportionately face intersectional discrimination and multiple expressions of violence – in a world where one in three women experiences violence – and are often excluded from decision-making processes and leadership positions.”

In this regard, a special measure is essential to empower ethnic community women to raise their voices and claim for rights.

Traditional Social Institutions of Ethnic Minorities in the Plain Land

Ethnic minorities in the plain land in Bangladesh had their functional and active distinct social institutions in the past. Historically these social organizations used to play important role to run their society. In the past years, ethnic minorities had their full control over their social and economic life. Their own traditional organizations were strong and active. In the modern state, lack of proper recognition of these indigenous institutions and organizations, they became weak and non-functional in many communities.

During the British regime, the Government of India Act, 1919 was amended and replaced by the Government of India Act, 1935. This Act declared the five Thanas under Mymensingh district as Partially Excluded Area. They are Kalmakanda, Durgapur, Haluaghat, Nalitabari and Sribardi. Under this Act of 1935, the CHT was declared as Excluded Area.

An ‘excluded area’ (and later, a ‘tribal area’) denoted an area almost exclusively inhabited by indigenous peoples, where general laws and regulations were very sparingly applied, and whose administrative features were unique to the territory. A ‘partially excluded area’, on the other hand, denoted a comparatively mixed, but still predominantly indigenous people-inhabited territory, whose administrative system was more integrated into the regular administration of the province ((than was the case with excluded areas), and a higher number of laws of general application was allowed to function therein.”

State Acquisition and Bengal Tenancy Act 1950

The State Acquisition and Bengal Tenancy Act, Article 97 (1) states, “The Government may from time to time, by notification, declare that the provisions of this section shall, in any district or local area, apply to such of the following aboriginal castes or tribes as may be specified in the notification, and that such castes or tribes shall be deemed to be aboriginals for the purposes of this section, and the publication of such notification shall be conclusive evidence that the provisions of this section have been duly applied to such castes or tribes, namely:-

Sonthals, [Banais] Bhuiyas, Bhumijes, Dalus, Garos, Gonds, Hadis, Hajangs, Hos, Kharias, Kharwars, Kochs (Dhaka Division), Koras, Maghs (Bakerganj District), Mal and Sauria Paharias, Maches, Mundas, Mundais, Oraons and Turis.”

This is a safeguard for protection of land rights of indigenous peoples in the plain land. However, proper implementation of this Act is a big challenge. Indigenous organizations are demanding for appoint a special officer from ethnic communities at the district level like in the past.

National Education Policy 2010 and Indigenous Peoples

The Education Ministry, Bangladesh government adopted the National Education Policy 2010 and included indigenous issues properly. Indigenous leaders and experts joined the consultation workshop and meeting before the finalization of this Policy.

From the Policy, I quote, “The directives as noted in the Constitution of the People’s Republic of Bangladesh (Annex1) have been taken into consideration in the formulation of National Education Policy 2009. The UN Child Rights Convention that emphasizes the ensuring of rights of children in every member state has been a further area of consideration. The primary objectives of this policy are directed toward the cultivation of human values. It seeks to prescribe ways through which citizens can be groomed to become leaders in pro-people development programs and progress of the society. They will become rational and intellectually accomplished human beings with ethical perceptions, who have respect for their own religion as well as for others’

faiths. Education will help them to grow up as non-communal, patriotic and efficient persons free from superstitions. And simultaneously, it is only education that can equip the nation to acquire the qualities and skills that will strengthen Bangladesh to work with equal capacity and pace of the global community. This education policy will work as a basis for an education system suitable for the delivery of education which will be pro-people, easily available, uniform, universal, well planned, science oriented and of high standard according to the constitutional directives and it will also work as a strategy to counter all problems. With this idea in view, the aims, objectives, goals and principles of the Education Policy will be as follows.

1. to reflect the Constitutional guarantee at all levels of education and make learners aware of the freedom, sovereignty and integrity of Bangladesh;
2. to stimulate the intellectual and practical qualities of the learners so that moral, human, cultural, scientific and social values are established at personal and national levels;
7. to remove socio-economic discrimination irrespective of race, religion and creed and to eradicate gender disparity; to develop non-communalism, friendliness, global fraternity, fellow-feeling and respect for human rights;
8. to create unhindered and equal opportunities of education for all as per learners' talents and aptitudes, irrespective of geographical, social and economic situations to establish a society that is free from discrimination; to resist use of education as a commodity to reap profits;
9. to show tolerance for different ideologies for the development of a democratic culture and to help develop a life-oriented, realistic and positive outlook;
23. to promote and develop the languages and cultures of the indigenous and small ethnic groups.

The objective of Primary Education is to facilitate learning in the mother languages of the indigenous peoples and small ethnic groups at the primary level of education.

Children of ethnic groups

18. Measures will be taken to ensure the availability of teachers from ethnic groups and to prepare texts in their own languages so that ethnic children can learn their own indigenous languages. In these initiatives, especially in preparing textbooks the inclusion of respective indigenous communities will be ensured.

19. Special assistance will be provided to the marginalized indigenous children.

20. There are areas where no primary school exists. Primary schools will be set up in these areas inhabited by ethnic people, both in hilly or plain lands. In some areas, there is a thin ethnic population. So the schools may suffer from dearth of children. So, in order to create opportunities of enrollment of sufficient number of children, residential facilities for teachers and learners have to be created. This also claims necessary attention.

Devastating Covid 19 Impact on Ethnic Communities

The Covid pandemic has impacted the life and livelihood of ethnic communities severely in Bangladesh. An NGO Indigenous Peoples Development Services – IPDS conducted a study at the beginning of the Covid 19 in July 2020 among ethnic communities living in the plain land. The Study Report was published in the website of the Office of the High Commissioner of Human Rights (OHCHR). This study found that 92% of indigenous family's income was decreased during the pandemic and 72% of them became "new poor." Many ethnic community members who used to work as domestic workers, security guards, beauty parlor workers, garment workers, sales persons, car drivers and so on lost their jobs. Many of them still could not fully come back to their jobs. Ethnic children dropped out during the pandemic could not fully go back to school. The economic situation of ethnic communities was seriously deteriorated in the pandemic and still they are struggling to recover the loss.

Way Forward

Ethnic minorities are one of the most vulnerable and marginalized community in the country. Social, economic and political exclusion made them too vulnerable to stand for their fundamental freedoms and human rights. Without support and positive attitude of majority community towards ethnic minority community cannot survive with dignity. Government, UN agencies, development partners, civil society, NGOs, media and other key stakeholders need to come forward to address indigenous issues including economic and social development, education, health, culture and human rights.

Indigenous peoples often lack formal recognition over their lands, forests and natural resources and face multiple barriers to participate fully in the formal economy, enjoy access to justice, and participate in political processes and decision making. This legacy of inequality and exclusion has made indigenous communities more vulnerable to the impacts of climate change and natural hazards, including to disease outbreaks such as COVID-19. Vulnerabilities to the pandemic are exacerbated with the lack of access to national health, water and sanitation systems, the shutting down of markets, and mobility restrictions that have greatly impacted their livelihoods, food insecurity, and well-being.

Recommendations

IPDS organized four community workshops at local level in Mymensingh and Moulvibazar. Total 41 participants attended the workshops. They are village Chiefs, community leaders, women and youth, religious leaders and NGO representatives. Islamic Relief Bangladesh and IPDS jointly organized a seminar on 19 May 2022 at national level on SDGs Leave No One Behind: Inclusion of Ethnic Minorities in the Plain Land. Policy makers including Member of Parliament, Member of National Human Rights Commission, representatives from Parliamentary Caucus on Indigenous Peoples, UN representatives, professors, civil society, NGOs, media and indigenous community leaders participated in this event.

Here the key recommendations are given below:

1. Support for capacity building of ethnic communities and their organizations to advocate and claim for their rights;
2. Special measures for economic and social development of ethnic communities in the plain land;
3. Ensure meaningful participation of ethnic communities in the implementation of the SDGs;
4. Support ethnic community women and youth for income generating activities, especially for vocational training and skill development;
5. The Covid 19 affected ethnic communities severely. They need support for ensuring health services, employment, food security, education etc.;
6. Support for Income Generation Activities for ethnic communities, especially for women;
7. Support for employment creation at local level and support for entrepreneurship;
8. Provide stipend and other support for children at schools and colleges;
9. Build awareness among ethnic communities to claim for access to health services;
10. Support providing clean drinking water, sanitation and hygiene;
11. Support for advocacy and lobby work to ensure their rights and services from service providers;
12. Support strengthen traditional ethnic community organizations for building linkage, relationship and networks with government administration, local elected bodies and other stakeholders;
13. Promote dialogue for social cohesion, harmony and peace in the society;
14. Build the larger coalition to fight intolerance among young people, both ethnic and majority Bengali community for promoting tolerance and nurture cultural diversity;
15. Initiate special steps for building responsible active citizen for inclusive tolerant Bangladesh;



16. Awareness for overcoming cultural barrier and build education;
17. Support for agriculture, water and alternative livelihoods;
18. Build capacity for strong coalition of ethnic community members so that they can advocate for inclusion of their community members in various committees at local level;
19. Build capacity for inclusion of persons with disability among ethnic communities;
20. Strengthen the initiative of working with government, UN agencies, development partners, civil society, NGOs and media on indigenous issues.

Conclusion and Closing the Gap

It is recognized that throughout the world indigenous peoples are the most marginalized and vulnerable. From the discussion and recommendations of the FGDs and national consultation organized the IPDS and Islamic Relief Bangladesh, it is confirmed that an integrated development project with holistic approach is essential for their socio-economic progress. Human rights-based approach to development with focus on the livelihood and economic, social and cultural development can make a difference to close the gap in their life. Special step needs to be taken for solving the land rights and access to forest and natural resources in their areas. Education will be a strong initiative for reducing inequalities in the society. Participation of ethnic minorities in decision-making processes should be a key point. Promoting the scope for meaningful and regular dialogue between ethnic communities and government officials, civil society, media and other key stakeholders are crucial. Before taking any project that has impact on the life of ethnic minorities needs to ensure the policy of Free, Prior and Informed consent. Development activities should consider the social, environmental and cultural impact of ethnic community. Dissemination of information, in a manner and form of understandable by the members of ethnic communities is crucial to ensuring transparency and accountability of the projects. A separate National Policy for Ethnic Minority is solicited from the community for years. Government, UN agencies, development partners, NGOs and other key stakeholders need to come forward to address the gaps between policies and practices pertaining to ethnic minorities.

Acknowledgements:

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