

BANGLADESH

Poverty Watch Report 2022



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The Bangladesh Poverty Watch Report 2022 is the first of its kind prepared jointly by Institute for Inclusive Finance and Development (InM) and Center for Inclusive Development Dialogue (CIDDD).

The objective of the Report is to ensure that grassroots voices of 'left behind' and extremely poor population groups are heard, and their voices are reflected in policies. The Poverty Watch Report 2022 summarises some current aspects of poverty including testimonies, reflections and 'stories' of individuals from selected 'left behind' groups experiencing poverty in Bangladesh.

The analysis brings out emerging priorities for policies as well as challenges faced by individuals experiencing poverty in Bangladesh. It also covers best practices for reducing poverty and social exclusion, and recommendations for policy makers which are intertwined throughout the Report emerging from testimonies, reflections, proposals and stories of persons experiencing poverty and exclusion.



 Institute for Inclusive Finance and Development (InM)
and
 Center for Inclusive Development Dialogue (CIDDD)

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Poverty Watch Report 2022

Ending poverty is a political choice

 Institute for Inclusive Finance and Development (InM)
and
 Center for Inclusive Development Dialogue (CIDD)

First Published in December 2022

Published by:

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Cover and Illustration:

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Printed by:

Chaya Prokashon
34, Bangla Bazar, Dhaka, 1100

Price:

BDT 670
US \$ 10

ISBN 978 984 35 3534 4

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Acronyms

Acronyms

ADP	Annual Development Programme
BBS	Bangladesh Bureau of Statistics
BDT	Bangladesh Taka
BEES	Bangladesh Extension Education Service
BIPF	Bangladesh Indigenous Peoples Forum
BSCIC	Bangladesh Small and Cottage Industries Corporation
CBN	Cost of Basic Needs
CHI	Coefficient of Human Inequality
CHT	Chittagong Hill Tracts
CHTRC	Chittagong Hill Tracts Regional Council
CIDD	Center for Inclusive Development Dialogue
DHS	Demographic and Health Survey
EBSAT	East Bengal Estate Acquisition and Tenancy
FAO	Food and Agriculture Organization
FEI	Food Energy Intake
FGD	Focus Group Discussion
FGT	Foster Greer Thorbecke
GDP	Gross Domestic Product
GMPI	Global Multidimensional Poverty Index
GNI	Gross National Income
HDI	Human Development Index
HDR	Human Development Report
HDRO	Human Development Report Office
HIES	Household Income and Expenditure Survey
HIV	Human Immunodeficiency Virus
HSC	Higher Secondary Certificate
IDF	Integrated Development Foundation
ILO	International Labour Organization
InM	Institute for Inclusive Finance and Development
IPL	International Poverty Line
KII	Key Informant Interview
LFS	Labour Force Survey
LGBT	Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual and Transgender
LGIs	Local Government Institutions
LMICPL	Lower Middle Income Class Poverty Line
LNOB	Leave No One Behind
MFI	Microfinance Institution
MPI	Multidimensional Poverty Index

Acronyms

MSEs	Micro and Small Enterprises
NGO	Non-Government Organisation
NSDC	National Skills Development Council
NUPL	National Upper Poverty Line
OPHI	Oxford Poverty and Human Development Initiative
PG	Poverty Gap
PMUK	Padakhep Manabik Unnayan Kendra
PPP	Purchasing Power Parity
RMGs	Readymade Garments
SDGs	Sustainable Development Goals
SEGCI	Small Ethnic Group Cultural Institute
SMEs	Small and Medium Enterprises
SPG	Squared Poverty Gap
SRH	Sexual and Reproductive Health
SSC	Secondary School Certificate
STIs	Sexually Transmitted Infections
SVRS	Sample Vital Registration System
SWASA	Sex Workers and Allies in South Asia
UDHR	Universal Declaration of Human Rights
UMICPL	Upper Middle Income Class Poverty Line
UN	United Nations
UNDP	United Nations Development Programme
UNU	United Nations University
VGF	Vulnerable Group Feeding
WHO	World Health Organization
WPATH	World Professional Association for Transgender Health

The Bangladesh Poverty Watch Report 2022 is the first of its kind prepared jointly by Institute for Inclusive Finance and Development (InM) and Center for Inclusive Development Dialogue (CIDD).

The main objective of the Report is to ensure that grassroots voices of 'left behind' and extremely poor population groups are heard, and their voices are reflected in policies. The Poverty Watch Report 2022 summarises some current aspects of poverty including testimonies, reflections and 'stories' of individuals from selected 'left behind' groups experiencing poverty in Bangladesh. As the Covid-19 pandemic is 'supercharging' existing poverty and inequalities, there are new and unequal risks for the poor and disadvantaged peoples in society.

The central part of the Report consists of the voices and opinions drawn from face-to-face meetings with individuals of disadvantaged communities experiencing poverty who participated in the discussion groups organised in August and September 2022 as part of the preparation of this Report. In their stories, the participants shared their experience of having found themselves in poverty, exclusion and extremely difficult conditions re-inforced by systemic errors and structural inequalities.

During the discussions, selected participants 'wrote' their own life stories; the biggest value added of which is the insights into the 'making of poverty' in their communities. This has been the first step in framing of recommendations for empowerment, inclusion and recognition of individuals experiencing poverty as key stakeholders for designing of policies and measures for the elimination of poverty and social exclusion.

The Report begins with poverty dimensions in Bangladesh and how poverty is defined and measured globally and in Bangladesh including social exclusion, and some statistics related to poverty and deprivation at the national and regional levels in Bangladesh.

The analysis brings out emerging priorities for policies as well as challenges faced by individuals experiencing poverty in Bangladesh. It also covers best practices for reducing poverty and social exclusion, and recommendations for policy makers which are intertwined throughout the Report emerging from testimonies, reflections, proposals and stories of persons experiencing poverty and exclusion.



1

Poverty in Bangladesh

Since independence in 1971, Bangladesh is doing fairly well in reducing poverty compared with its South Asian neighbours and other developing countries. Yet there are millions of individuals in this country – termed as a ‘role model’ of development – who struggle for survival. In spite of efforts, the number of people living in poverty and in the low-income groups at risk of poverty remains high.

In reality, poverty is not only about lack of income and material resources. Poverty has many other dimensions such as lack of opportunities and choices, power and voice, and security. Thus, a person living in poverty is not only resource-poor, but may be poor in one or several of these other dimensions.

Understanding of these complexities and how poverty is manifested for different groups of people is fundamental to defining effective policy measures and approaches to reduce poverty. In most cases, multiple deprivations interplay to push people into poverty. Being poor in income and resources imply being poor in terms of many other dimensions. Being poor in terms of security may result poverty in terms of opportunities. Being poor in one dimension may also aggravate poverty in another dimension. Conversely, improvements in one dimension may reduce poverty in another dimension.

For effective intervention, the poor should be at the centre of analysis. It means that the situation, needs, preconditions, and priorities of the poor are the starting point, as seen through the poor people’s perspectives. Asking who lacks resources; who lacks opportunities; who is insecure; and who lacks power and voice, and capturing inequalities between different groups in these dimensions opens up the window for understanding how poverty impacts different groups of people in various dimensions.

Moreover, the process of identifying the poor in different dimensions varies with gender, age, sexual identity, ethnicity, religion, indigenouness, disability and other social attributes. Gender dimension always matters; further gender intersects with other social attributes. When several layers of discrimination and deprivation overlap, poverty deepens. It is also important to consider geography, the urban/rural divide, migrants and forcibly displaced people and people affected by conflict and natural disasters.

Poverty is not only multidimensional; its manifestations vary across locations and groups of population as well as by their levels of development. The poor are mostly identified, in terms of private consumption below an objective ‘poverty line’, but those considered non-poor in terms of current consumption and income may be poor in terms of capabilities and welfare.

Such non-linearities between consumption levels and other aspects of welfare and capabilities are more prominent in ‘hard-to-reach’ areas and ‘left-behind’ population groups where limited access to markets, basic services, and information to knowledge and technology can lead to drastically different levels of welfare and capabilities, not necessarily reflected in current consumption levels.

Living in or near poverty also affects a person’s vulnerability to different types of risks and disasters that can push them into poverty, deepen their existing poverty or push them into perpetual poverty. These

Poverty in Bangladesh

Understanding contexts of poverty

links between poverty and vulnerability are not linear; rather complex and dynamic. These depend on how people are poor in various dimensions, their capability to withstand risks, available resources and opportunities and their ability to manage risks, and how these affect their exposure to risks.

Thus, understanding risks and vulnerability is an important component of understanding the multidimensional nature of poverty among women, men, girls and boys. When people are poor in multiple dimensions, there is an increased likelihood that they will not have—or not have access to—the resources and opportunities needed to manage risks and maintain their well-being when exposed to shocks. Furthermore, different risks are more likely to have a severe impact on people living in poverty.

When the poor people are exposed to floods and droughts, they might lose their belongings or may have to make choices with detrimental long-term effects, such as withdrawing children from schools, cutting down trees, selling off cattle or reducing health care expenditures. People living in poverty are in many cases also exposed to risks due to unpredictable income, poor access to health services, and other social inequalities. The complex relationship between poverty and vulnerability means that we need to understand in what dimensions women, men, girls and boys are poor, their exposure to risks, and how their poverty affects their capacity to cope with risks.

Understanding contexts of poverty

For understanding causes of poverty and risks that could aggravate poverty, and identifying opportunities and pathways to move out of poverty, it is important to understand the context in which a poor person lives. The contexts are shaped by various dimensions such as economic and social context, political and institutional context, environmental context, and governance context.

For strategic purposes, such a multidimensional poverty analysis will ensure relevance to how poverty is manifested and experienced by different groups, who is poor and in what dimensions, and underlying causes of poverty, risks and vulnerability. The strategy formulation process needs a comprehensive multidimensional poverty analysis along with a regular revisit of the analysis.

For operationalising the poverty reduction strategy, the process has to support the development of theories of change to ensure the design of a portfolio within the strategy that supports areas that are critical to reducing poverty in multiple dimensions. The regular revisit will assist in reviewing earlier analysis and theories of change and assessing relevance of the portfolio for the result areas, given the changes in poverty and development context during the intervening period.

In Bangladesh, successive governments since 1971 have prioritised poverty reduction as the major aim of their policy agendas, and have adopted multiple approaches for addressing poverty and the risk of poverty and exclusion. While income growth, human development and vulnerability reduction efforts have been the major elements of the country's poverty reduction strategies, Bangladesh still faces daunting challenges with about 22 million people living below the poverty line.

Job creation is the country's top development priority and Bangladesh needs to create more and better jobs for more than 2 million youth who enter the job market every year. To create decent jobs,

Understanding contexts of poverty

Poverty is also self-realising

Bangladesh needs to remove the barriers to higher and more inclusive growth posed by low access to higher and quality education and health/nutrition services, lack of reliable and affordable energy, poor transportation infrastructure, limited availability of serviced land, uncertain and complex business regulations, rapid and unplanned urbanisation and vulnerability to climate change and natural disasters, among others.

Along with creating better economic opportunities in the Bangladesh economy, equitable access to these opportunities as well as to the benefits of development by all groups of people in society are the priorities due to high level of social exclusion and economic inequalities that persists in the country. This indicates a clear imperative to tackle the challenges with policies for inclusivity covering all segments of the population.

Further, globalisation, digitalisation, demographics and climate change are rapidly transforming the way the economy works creating new opportunities as well as new challenges for inclusive development. This also raises the risk of deeper exclusion and inequalities if the gains are not evenly shared among the population and geographic regions.

The compulsion for Bangladesh is to focus on achieving higher productivity and income growth along with addressing exclusion and inequalities through embedding both in the design of policy. The expanding opportunities in future could be better leveraged through adopting an inclusive development framework that is beneficial to all and leaves no one behind.

Obviously, there may exist trade-offs among many of these policies, but policies may be adopted to create win-win situations, such as investing more in skills of labour and young children of marginalised groups, reskilling and up skilling of workers, and promoting diffusion of technologies and innovation across all enterprises irrespective of firm sizes, location and other characteristics.

The keys will be to focus on accelerating inclusive growth and removing structural bottlenecks, fostering social inclusion by building on human and social development; modernising agriculture; improving basic social security; and strengthening climate and environmental management for enhancing resilience to natural disasters and improving water and natural resource management.

At present, Bangladesh is at an important juncture: with right policies and timely action, the country can move up to the upper middle-income bracket by 2031 and transform itself to a high income country by 2041 for realising Vision 2041.

Poverty is also self-realising

Poverty is more than just material deprivation; money and statistics cannot provide a full picture of poverty. Self-realisation and individual experiences are also important dimensions of poverty. Self-categorisation can sometimes be more compelling than what a researcher – or any other person analysing the criteria to decide who is poor – can observe as critical for the poor. Nor do persons living in circumstances of great scarcity necessarily see themselves as poor.

Poverty is also self-realising

Without the inclusion of self-categorisation and personal experiences, views on poverty and poverty analysis itself would be rather 'bleak and cold' with many relevant aspects of poverty remaining in the dark. One is unlikely to understand a situation which he/she has not experienced personally, so that the real experiences of living in poverty remains unearthed. If you have never fallen seriously ill, you won't understand what one feels when one is seriously ill, because 'we all have our limitations'. If you haven't experienced poverty yourself, it is rather easy to say what you think about poverty.

When you are poor—over days, year after year, and over generations--you are speechless. How can you describe the exhaustion, hopelessness, sense of being stuck, depression, falling down and scrambling up again? The fact is that not everyone is able to cope with such a life. Many family tragedies have their origin in such everyday experiences of poverty. But people are determined to keep going. When it becomes too much, they may take rest for a while. And then, they go on for a better living. This is the enduring story of humankind over centuries.

In addition to poverty analysis at national and regional levels, this Report depicts the 'stories' told by people from selected 'left behind' groups who are experiencing poverty and exclusion in Bangladesh. From the social equality perspective, these people need to be heard in society and their views need to be taken into consideration in making policy decisions.

The background of the image is composed of various triangular shapes in different shades of blue (light blue, medium blue, and dark blue) and white. These shapes are arranged in a way that creates a sense of depth and movement, with some triangles pointing towards the center and others pointing outwards. The overall effect is a modern, geometric pattern.

2

How is Poverty Defined and Measured?

Development, Poverty and Inequality

Development: A new interpretation

How is Poverty Defined and Measured?

There are different concepts and indicators that are used to define and measure poverty. Obviously, each has its own strengths and weaknesses. In reality, a comprehensive view of poverty is needed using multidimensional concepts and measurement methods.

Development, Poverty and Inequality

The concepts of development, poverty and inequality are different, but these are intrinsically connected. These three concepts are at the heart of Bangladesh's future vision, and they all have an impact on people's well-being.

Development: A new interpretation

Development has traditionally been associated with economic growth. But, over time, development has acquired a broader connotation and is interpreted as a process that creates growth, progress, desired transformation and positive changes covering physical, economic, environmental, social, demographic and other components in society and economy.

The focus of development has expanded over time with the growing realisation that economic growth alone does not necessarily lead to a rise in the level and quality of life for populations. The need is to place an emphasis on specific policies that would channel resources and enable social and economic mobility for various layers of the population.

The purpose is a rise in the level and quality of life of all populations, and the creation or expansion of income and employment opportunities, without damaging the resources of the environment. Development is visible and useful, and includes aspects of quality changes and the creation of conditions for sustaining these changes.

Over the years, the conceptualisation of development has proceeded along different lines, along with varying relative emphasis on its various components. Among all these contributions, Amartya Sen's 'capability approach' introduces a paradigm shift in the concept of development (Sen 1985).

The new development paradigm is based on two fundamental changes in the traditional approach—first, development focuses on 'person' as the unit of analysis instead of the 'economy'; and second, the space in which progress is assessed is made of capabilities and freedoms instead of income.

From the capability perspective, the basic question to ask when comparing countries and societies is: 'What is each person in the society able to do and be?' In effect, Sen's approach goes beyond the total average well-being in a society, and looks at the opportunities available to each person; and defines development as a tool enabling people to reach the highest level of their ability, through granting freedom of action, i.e., freedom of economic, social and family actions in all spaces.

The practical consequence of this paradigm shift means moving from the concept of development towards the concept of human development. The multiple dimensions of human development are flexible, meaning that every cultural and national context may have a different set of relevant dimensions (Sen 2004). To this end, policy making also has to change drastically as it has to be

Conceptualising poverty

oriented towards improving several dimensions to advance human development, such as education, health, living conditions, and not just increasing the income levels in the economy.

The recent interpretation of human development involves expanding people's freedoms, where freedoms entail worthwhile capabilities people value, and empowering people to engage actively in development processes on this shared world. Capabilities are the actual ability to achieve something. For instance, the capability to enjoy healthcare requires a health clinic with staff and medical supplies, and that patients are not refused treatment due to gender, race, age, or religious reasons.

However, enlarging of people's freedoms and empowering of people are not enough to conceptualise human development. The pursuit of advanced and long lasting human development has to be achieved within the context of several constraints including resources, time, information, technology, political will, uncertainty, and institutional capacity. Consequently, the introduction of some procedural principles is needed (Sen 1996).

For instance, if there is a policy that is able to generate gains for the very poor while keeping outcomes of the richest unchanged, that policy should be preferred. Procedural principles help to set priorities and to rule out undesirable outcomes (Alkire 2002; Sen 2009). Examples of these principles are poverty reduction, efficiency, equity, sustainability, respect for human rights, and responsibility.

Appropriate policies to improve human development may cover a number of areas. Economic growth is not strictly necessary, and it is not sufficient (Bourguignon et al. 2010). Complementary policies to achieve durable and long-term human development include stronger institutions, formation of sustainable development networks, strong and vocal civil society, strong national accountability through countervailing powers and increased global governance and responsibility, and increased international assistance in some contexts (UNDP 2005).

Conceptualising poverty

The concept of poverty is traditionally defined using only one monetary dimension – typically, income level or consumption. In this one-dimensional approach, poverty is defined and measured as the percentage of the population whose income level (for instance, the per capita family income or the equivalence adjusted family income) is below certain poverty line or threshold defined in monetary terms.

The conceptualisation of poverty also changes under Sen's capability approach. According to Sen, poverty is a complex and multidimensional concept which needs to take into consideration people's diverse characteristics and circumstances. The poor generally lack not only income, but education, health, justice, credit and other productive resources, and opportunities. Thus, poverty should be seen as deprivation of capabilities, which then limits the freedoms to achieve something, rather than lowness of income.

Sen argues that social evaluation should be based on the extent of the freedoms that people have to further the objectives that they value. Poverty in this framework thus becomes a 'capability failure' –

Dimension of inequality

Measuring Poverty

people's lack of the capabilities to enjoy key 'beings and doings' that are basic to human life. The concept is thus inherently multidimensional.

Such a conceptualisation of poverty as the deprivation of capabilities brings into the forefront two important consequences. The first is the recognition of a negative association between poverty and human development, and ultimately between poverty and people's well-being. The second is a practical one that entails measurement issues. Conceiving poverty as a multidimensional phenomenon implies several challenges in terms of both information requirements (e.g. data on several dimensions are needed in order to calculate multidimensional poverty) and value judgments (relative importance of various dimensions needs to be defined).

Dimension of inequality

The concept of inequality refers to how certain attributes are distributed among persons, groups of persons, or countries. Traditionally, inequality focuses on measuring the spread of the distribution of outcome variables, such as level of income, educational achievement, or health status, using well known measures such as the Gini coefficient (and Atkinson index, Theil index, percentiles ratios or other measures).

The concept of inequality, under the capability approach, does not aim the equalising of outcomes as a goal, since not all people convert outcomes into well-being using the same manner. The relation between outcomes and people's well-being depends on circumstances beyond people's control, such as age, gender, family background and disability. It also depends on social conditions, like health care systems, educational systems, prevalence of crime, and community relationships, among other factors.

Thus, the goal should be to equalise the opportunities people have to practice their freedoms, and not the outcomes people obtain. In this framework, inequalities of opportunities are seen as constraints to people's choices and freedoms, impacting negatively on their human development and well-being (UNDP 2005).

In this new framework, human development, poverty and inequality are all essentially multidimensional and people-centred concepts. They all focus, although in different ways, on people's capabilities having an ultimate impact on people's well-being. Human development involves expanding the set of capabilities; poverty refers to the deprivation of capabilities, while inequality entails people having different abilities to choose and different freedoms. All these concepts have been shaped by Sen's capability approach, which has brought significant changes in policy making and has surfaced important measurement challenges.

Measuring Poverty

Differences in the estimates of global poverty usually take place due to a number of factors at the country level, e.g. use of different poverty lines; use of different purchasing power parity (PPP) exchange rates to convert incomes in local currencies into a common international currency, which is

Measuring national poverty: Poverty lines

particularly problematic; different approaches to estimating within country distributions of income; and different calculations of mean incomes within countries.

These differences arise out of disagreements over the best way to measure poverty (Anand et al. 2010). The cost of enough food and other essentials is different in different countries, which is reflected in the absolute poverty lines. These need to be converted in order to compare poverty internationally. For the purpose, a common currency is established using PPP exchange rates. On principle, one PPP dollar should buy the same basket of goods in Bangladesh, China or the US, or in any other country.

National poverty lines can be used to measure trends in countries but cannot be used for comparisons across countries. The choice of poverty line can differ from country to country, in different parts of a country, or based on family composition.

Measuring national poverty: Poverty lines

Direct measures of poverty that look at deprivation and living standards have a long history, in which the living conditions of the poor have been investigated to establish those who live in poverty. However, measures of deprivation are not the same as measures of income – they relate to how people live. Deprivation is the consequence of a lack of income and other resources, which cumulatively can be seen as living in poverty. The relative deprivation approach to poverty examines the indicators of deprivation, which are then related back to income levels and resources.

The concept of poverty involves qualitative and quantitative measures as an indicator for social deprivation. Poverty can be absolute, relative, income-based, consumption-based, or entitlement-based. The variation in the concept of poverty reveals its dimensionality. However, these dimensions are conceptually interrelated and complementary rather than substitutable. The concept used to define poverty determines the methods employed to measure it.

Since independence in 1971, population and poverty dynamics has been inherently complex in Bangladesh. Changes in population size and its structure and spatial distribution have a profound impact on economic, social and environmental aspects of sustainable development. Poverty is influenced by – and influences – population dynamics, including population growth, age structure, and rural-urban distribution. Investments in better health, including reproductive health, are essential for individual security and for reducing mortality and morbidity, which in turn reduce poverty and improve a country's productivity and development prospects.

Bangladesh is currently passing through the phase of demographic dividend that has emerged in 2007; with a fairly young population with 30 per cent aged 15 and younger and just 5 per cent aged 65 and older. At present, more than 65 per cent of the population is of working age, between 15 and 64; creating enormous economic growth and poverty reduction potential in Bangladesh (Mujeri and Mujeri, 2022).

The ultimate development aim of Bangladesh has always been to improve the living conditions and quality of life of all population, especially of the poor and deprived sections in society. In the Bangladesh

Measuring national poverty: Poverty lines

Constitution, one of the fundamental principles of state policy states that:

‘It shall be a fundamental responsibility of the State to emancipate the toiling masses the peasants and workers and backward sections of the people from all forms of exploitation’ (14. Part II; Fundamental Principles of State Policy).

Thus, development in Bangladesh will have to lead to sustained reductions in poverty in its different forms and inequality in all aspects of human lives. With respect to inequality, the empirical analysis on economic growth nearly always is associated with a reduction in absolute poverty; while the relation between changes in inequality and rate of economic growth or between changes in inequality and level of national income is ambiguous. Hence, the decisive factor in determining whether inequality increases or decreases is not the rate of economic growth, rather the quality of growth.

Moreover, no statistically significant relationship exists between inequality in the initial distribution of income and subsequent economic growth. This suggests that countries need not maintain unequal income distribution to grow rapidly. In general, high initial levels of inequality limit the effectiveness of growth in reducing poverty while growing inequality increases poverty directly for a given level of growth. As such, special attention is needed to reducing inequality in countries where income distribution is especially unfavourable.

People living in poverty struggle to meet basic needs, including having limited access to food, clothing, healthcare, education, shelter and safety. People affected by poverty may also lack social, economic, political or material assets and resources. This shows that poverty is a complex web of circumstances that hinders the very survival of people around the world. The World Bank’s definition of people living in poverty is those living on less than US\$1.90 a day, but poverty isn’t just low income – it is a lack of access to essential goods and services as well.

Across the world, poverty is a significant human rights challenge; and the poor are socially excluded and lack the basic capability to participate actively in social, cultural, and political life of their communities. People in poverty need voice to obtain recognition of rights and demand respect. They need representation and participation. Without human dignity and empowerment, the poor are unlikely to get out of poverty.

Two basic approaches to the concept of poverty are used in economic literature, namely, absolute poverty and relative poverty. The concept of absolute poverty is based on absolute norms for living (measured in terms of consumption expenditure) laid down according to specified minimum standard and all such individuals or households whose consumption expenditure is found to be below this standard are classified as poor. This concept is directly related to the minimum level of consumption.

Under the relative concept of poverty, a household (or an individual) is deemed to be poor if its level of income or consumption expenditure falls below a predetermined level. Then, the income distribution of the population in different fractile groups is estimated and a comparison is made between the level of living of people in the bottom layer and the top layers of the population to assess the relative standard of poverty. The concept of relative poverty is considered more suitable for developed

Some conceptual matters

countries while the absolute concept is relevant for the developing countries.

Some conceptual matters

Poverty exists when people lack the means to satisfy their basic needs; so that the key is to determine what constitutes basic needs. One can define basic needs narrowly as ‘those necessary for survival’ or broadly as ‘those reflecting the prevailing standard of living in the community’. The problem of definition is further compounded by the noneconomic connotations that the word poverty has acquired over time.

Poverty is associated, for example, with poor health, low levels of education or skills, an inability or an unwillingness to work, high rates of disruptive or disorderly behaviour, and improvidence. While these attributes are often found to exist with poverty, their inclusion in the poverty definition may obscure the relation between these attributes and the inability to provide for one’s basic needs.

But the key issue is: Although the history of poverty is as old as human history, poverty has changed its significance considerably over time. In the traditional modes of production, widespread poverty was accepted as inevitable since, even if the total output of goods and services is equally distributed, still that would be inadequate to provide comfortable standard of living by prevailing standards for the entire population.

However, technological innovation and productivity growth associated with Industrial Revolutions and industrialisation have changed the above equation completely--national outputs are now considered sufficient to raise the living quality of the entire population to a comfortable level if necessary redistribution could be arranged without adversely affecting output.

Thus, in the simplest term, although poverty is a state where one lacks access to basic needs such as food, clothing and shelter; it also refers to the situation of a person whose living conditions prevent him/her from being able to acquire education, seek medical help, secure a decent job, and participate in other social activities due to a lack of access or money. As such, poverty is not just about money, though. It is a bigger conversation about marginalisation, exclusion, and domestic and international economic and social deprivations. Whatever is the definition, effects of poverty are harmful to both individuals and society.

Despite the breadth of concerns, economists still find it useful to focus on poverty largely as a lack of money—measured either as low income or as inadequate consumption. One reason for focusing on money is practical: inadequate income is clear, measurable, and of immediate concern for individuals. Another reason is that low incomes tend to correlate strongly with other concerns that are important but harder to measure. Those in the worst health and with the lowest social status, for example, tend also to come from the bottom of the income distribution. Lack of money serves as a rough but quantifiable proxy for a host of deprivations.

Even within the narrow sphere of money-based measures, substantial questions remain relating to how to proceed; and practices differ widely across countries. There is no consensus, for example, on

Some conceptual matters

Issues in measuring poverty

whether money-based measures should focus on income levels or on spending patterns. Poverty can be measured either by a lack of income or by a shortfall in expenditures. While they are closely related conceptually, they can sometimes be quite far apart quantitatively.

The ability to spend is primarily determined by one's income. But spending and income are not identical since households also borrow, sell assets, or draw on savings when income is low. Conversely, households often save when times are especially favourable. Measuring poverty as a shortfall in spending takes into account these kinds of coping mechanisms and households' general abilities to 'smooth consumption' over time.

The usual next step is to identify a poverty line. A poverty line typically specifies the income (or the level of spending) required for purchasing a bundle of essential goods (typically food, clothing, shelter, water, electricity, schooling, reliable healthcare, and other essentials). Identifying the poor as those with income (or expenditures) below a given line brings clarity and focus to policy making and analysis. Having a poverty line allows experts to count the poor, target resources, and monitor progress against a clear benchmark. Communicating the extent of poverty becomes easier, and explaining the notion of deprivation simpler.

A poverty line indicates deprivation in an absolute sense, i.e., the value of a set level of resources deemed necessary to maintain a minimal standard of wellbeing. With such a definition, poverty is eliminated once all households command resources equal to or above the poverty line. The \$1/day per capita poverty line is one example of an absolute poverty line, but most countries determine their own absolute poverty lines as well.

It is, however, important to bear in mind differences between concepts and reality. The fact is that a poverty line (below which one is poor and above which one is not) has little empirical correspondence in the daily lives of the poor. Researchers analysing data on households see no clear breaks or discontinuities in the relationship of income and health or nutrition, and certainly no systematic breaks in living standards that correspond to poverty lines as the term is used. Yet, poverty measures based on poverty lines serve an important descriptive purpose and should be seen in that light.

Issues in measuring poverty

It is important to measure poverty in order to, among others:

- (i) Keep the poor people high on the agenda;
- (ii) Identify the poor people and thus be able to target appropriate interventions;
- (iii) Monitor and evaluate programme and policy interventions geared to the poor people; and
- (iv) Evaluate the effectiveness of institutions whose goal is to help the poor people.

Essentially, three steps are needed to measure poverty: First, define an indicator of welfare; Second, establish a minimum acceptable standard of that indicator to separate the poor from the non-poor (the poverty line); and Third, generate a summary statistic to aggregate the information from the distribution

Issues in measuring poverty

of this welfare indicator relative to the poverty line.

The construction of a poverty line is no doubt a difficult task in measuring poverty. In the literature, three methods are available:

- Cost of basic needs (CBN) method that estimates the cost of acquiring adequate food for required nutrition plus the cost of other essentials (such as clothing and shelter);
- Food energy intake (FEI) method in which expenditure or income per capita against food consumption, in calories per person per day, are used to determine the expenditure or income level at which a household acquires enough food; and
- Subjective evaluations, e.g. finding out the minimum income level needed just to make ends meet. The poverty line may be thought of as the minimum expenditure required by an individual to fulfill his or her basic food and nonfood needs.

Absolute poverty lines can be used at the national level, as well as globally. However, absolute poverty lines may change to reflect changes in consumption patterns (roughly every ten years or so) if this remains comparable to past absolute poverty lines.

For fighting poverty, the definition of poverty matters. To begin with, the definition sets the standard by which one can determine whether incomes and living conditions of the low income people in society are acceptable or not. Definitions of poverty are also important, since these explanations influence the way interventions and policies addressing poverty are shaped. Despite the importance, significant ambiguity persists as to how the term 'poverty' is used and, as a consequence, a range of definitions exists--further influenced by different disciplinary approaches, views and ideologies.

Thus, the earlier definitions of poverty centred on the inability to obtain adequate food and other basic necessities. At present, although the main focus continues to remain on material deprivations (i.e. failure to command private resources), the narrow focus of the notion of economic welfare reflecting individual well-being is being expanded to enlarge the concept of poverty.

In this context, one direction is to use household surveys and community-based questionnaires to ascertain a population's access to basic services, irrespective of household incomes. A second direction is collecting data on household-level deprivations along dimensions other than money. Researchers, for example, focus on social deprivations: the inability to fully participate in communities and, perhaps, in cultural life.

They also focus directly on physical deprivations, such as those caused by disability, disease, and under-nutrition. And, increasingly, policy makers recognise that one part of what it means to be poor resides in a sense of vulnerability to devastating loss--living on the edge of adequacy with its attendant uncertainties.

Not surprisingly, one finds that a single, all-encompassing measure of poverty remains beyond reach. One response is to turn to methods like 'participatory rural assessments' (which can be applied to urban areas as well). This approach asks members of a village or neighbourhood to define their own poverty

Issues in measuring poverty

Setting poverty lines

standards and identify who would be judged poor according to their own notion (e.g. self-perception of poverty).

The appeal of this approach is that it accommodates local ideas and conditions; the disadvantage is that it could produce various, non-comparable standards. Moreover, the results typically yield only a reckoning of who is poorer than who, rather than an absolute measure of poverty against a fixed benchmark.

Recognising the trade-offs, the trend is now to seek compromises by integrating qualitative and quantitative indicators to enrich the analysis. While important in itself, qualitative data can also provide helpful checks on robustness of lessons learned from traditional quantitative analyses. The key challenge is how to capture important elements of poverty in transparent, reliable, and practical ways

Setting poverty lines

For setting absolute poverty lines, the most common procedure is to begin with a 'cost of basic needs' (CBN) approach. The basic is to choose a nutritional threshold to reflect minimal needs for a healthy life; adjustments are then made for non-food expenses (e.g., housing and clothing). To set a poverty line, typically a basket of foods is identified that will deliver the minimal nutritional requirements.

Assumptions about the underlying nutritional requirements vary considerably across countries; although international standards are mostly used in setting the food threshold, set by the World Health Organisation and Food and Agriculture Organisation (WHO/FAO).

Differences arise in part since the WHO/FAO standards are specified by age, gender, weight, and activity level—but only age and gender are collected in typical household surveys. There is thus considerable scope for variation in choices since different assumptions about the activity levels and average weights of the population will lead to different calorie standards.

An individual's weight is important to calorie requirements since it determines their basal metabolic rate (BMR). This is the amount of energy consumed merely to get through the day, before extra calories are spent for specific activities. Experts estimate that the basal metabolic rate accounts for 45 to 70 per cent of total energy expenditures for a person of a given age and gender. So adjusting for weight (and thus for BMR) is a critical part of determining the minimum calorie needs of an individual.¹

The balance of energy expenditure is determined by the person's activity level. A WHO/FAO/UNU report estimates that a moderately-active 25 year-old man requires at least 2,550 calories per day if he weighs 50 kg. At 70 kg, his minimum requirement rises to 3,050 calories per day. However, a 70-kg man who is sedentary requires only 2,550 calories per day. So, activity level also matters greatly in defining how much food one needs and therefore in setting poverty lines.

¹See, [ftp://ftp.fao.org/docrep/fao/007/y5686e/y5686e00.pdf](http://ftp.fao.org/docrep/fao/007/y5686e/y5686e00.pdf).

Adult equivalence and scale economies

However, in typical household surveys, neither activity level nor weight is collected. Thus, while adjustments can be made for age and gender, there has to be good guesses about the average activity levels and weights of individuals—and different assumptions would lead to different nutritional thresholds. Given the wide use of WHO/FAO standards, an important step towards comparability of poverty approaches would be to reach a consensus on assumptions about weights and activity levels used to establish food requirements standards by age and gender.

Adult equivalence and scale economies

Another area of concern is related to finding consensus on adjustments for age and gender. As discussed above, at the conceptual level, poverty is most often seen as a condition specific to individuals. However, all members of the same household may not be equally poor. For instance, a grandparent or a child might face deprivation within a household that has adequate resources. To capture this kind of data, the need is to collect data on individuals, and poverty measurement would have to take place at the individual level.

In practice, the unit of analysis, however, is rarely the level of the individual. Doing so greatly raises logistical hurdles and survey costs. Even if all members of a household could be identified and surveyed (each in full detail), it is often too difficult to allocate particular flows of income, e.g., the value of crop production of a farming family to one member or another, just as it is hard to determine who consumes what part of the total volume of rice cooked in common for all family members of the household. In practice, however, the benefits of individual specificity are seldom judged to outweigh the extra costs of data collection.

Instead, data are collected on households as collective units (where households are often defined in surveys as those who share meals together or live under the same roof). The question then asked is: Does the household command adequate resources to provide for all members? The simplest way to proceed is to consider the per capita income of the household, calculated by simply dividing total household income by the number of household members (the same method is also applied to total expenditures if one works with expenditure rather than income). This approach is taken, for example, in calculating the widely-used \$1/day and \$2/day per capita poverty lines.

These per capita calculations weigh all household members identically. A forty five year-old man is equally weighted as his seventy-five-year-old mother or his ten-year old daughter. And a household with four adults is judged equally poor as another with identical income but with two adults and two young children.

Nor are adjustments made for cost savings that might benefit larger households relative to smaller ones. The cost of a second child, for example, may not be as great as the cost of the first. And the cost of adding a fourth person to the household often exceeds the cost of adding a fifth.

The \$1/day approach, though, like many other approaches, fails to account for such changes. Creating weights that reflect 'adult equivalents' helps address the first problem, and adjusting for economies of

Adult equivalence and scale economies

Adjusting for non-food requirements

scale helps respond to the second. The most common approach to establishing adult equivalence standards is to weight, for example, a 45-year old male as “1” and to weight others in proportion to the resources they require. His teenage daughter may take a weight of 0.7 and his elderly mother takes a weight of 0.8. These weightings reflect the fact the daughter and her grandmother consume less than the man to meet their basic needs. In reality, however, it is far from clear how to set specific weights.

One method is to examine the relative consumption patterns of people of different ages and genders and to use the ratios of consumption levels as weights (or to use a similar approach based in observed consumption patterns). The approach would solve the adult versus baby problem, but it runs into limits.

A particular problem is that using actual consumption patterns to determine ‘needs’ could introduce elements of discrimination into the analysis, particularly differences in consumption between women and men of similar ages and, to a degree, children versus adults. If, say, 25 year-old men are observed to eat twice as much as 25 year-old women, should this mean that the needs of men are twice as great as women? The answer, however, is certainly not.

Making adjustments for children can matter particularly when comparing changes in poverty over time. If parents give birth to a baby in a given year, per capita income or per capita expenditures will fall substantially for the family since the baby’s needs would count as much as anyone else’s. But with adjustments that reflect adult equivalence, the addition of the baby to the family—while adding costs—is counted in line with the baby’s actual needs.

One implication of considering income on a per capita basis-- instead of an adult equivalent basis-- is that a population experiencing a rapidly declining fertility rate (fewer babies born in successive years) will experience a faster decline in the short-term poverty reduction. Conversely, environments with rapid fertility increases will show exaggeratedly rising short-term poverty rates when age-adjustments are not made.

Adjusting for non-food requirements

The food poverty line is just one part of the overall poverty threshold. There are two common approaches to making adjustments for non-food needs. First is the ‘direct method’, conditional on constructing a poverty line using the CBN approach. The direct method parallels the way in which the food poverty line is constructed. First, necessary items (e.g. house rent, clothing, fuel, transport, education, health costs etc.) are selected; and after the list is determined, the goods are priced and the non-food line is formed.

The second is the indirect procedure that examines data on food consumption and total expenditures. With a food poverty line in hand, the method entails finding the level of non-food expenditure that would be typical of a household whose food consumption is just at the food poverty line. There are two main ways to do this. The first way is to begin by calculating the ‘Engel coefficient’, the ratio of food consumption to total expenditures, and then to run a statistical regression that allows prediction of the Engel coefficient for the household whose food expenditure is at the food poverty line.

Adjusting for non-food requirements

Setting and updating prices

A second approach is to calculate the average Engel coefficient for households whose food consumption is in the vicinity of the food poverty line (commonly above or below by 10 per cent). In either case, once the appropriate Engel coefficient has been obtained, the overall poverty line can be found by multiplying the food poverty line by the inverse of the Engel coefficient.

Setting and updating prices

With the calorie thresholds in place, a basket of foods can be identified that will provide those minimum needs at least cost. Here, again, there is considerable variation in practices. The food baskets, for example, vary considerably in size across countries. Size and composition of the basket affect the accuracy of the overall poverty line.

The trade-off in moving to a larger food basket is mostly given by the added costs of collecting price data. Collecting a moderate-sized food basket (say, with 25 items) but obtaining high-quality price data is likely to enhance accuracy over either smaller or larger food baskets, especially if the latter makes it more difficult to update prices.

The final step in constructing a food poverty line involves pricing the goods in the basket. Again, practices differ considerably, and another set of choices must be made here. One can adjust commodity prices to account for the fact that the poor often pay higher prices than wealthier individuals since they tend to purchase lower quantities in a single purchase and may have fewer choices of retail vendors.

In addition, one may like to make adjustments for the likelihoods that poor households make purchases at different price points than richer households. When updating the cost of the food basket from one year to the next, it is far more common to use the general consumer price index than a price index adjusted for a basket of goods more typical of the consumption patterns of the poor. The use of general consumer price indexes considerably reduces the costs, but it undermines the reliability of the measures.

Some adjustment for these concerns is implicit in setting separate poverty lines for urban and rural areas and for different regions. Having multiple poverty lines can add precision, especially in geographically diverse countries, although it drives costs up.

Box 2.1: Measuring income poverty in Bangladesh

Box 2.1: Measuring income poverty in Bangladesh

For measuring income poverty in Bangladesh, the concept of absolute poverty is used, based on absolute norms for living (measured in terms of consumption expenditure) laid down according to specified minimum standard and all such individuals or households whose consumption expenditure is found to be below this standard are classified as poor. This concept is directly related to the minimum level of consumption.

Bangladesh's official poverty measure uses money-metric poverty or poverty measured on the basis of a money value of expenditure, adopting the more commonly used headcount ratio (the number of the poor as a proportion of the population), which are derived from the familiar poverty line approach. Bangladesh's poverty line is anchored in a 'nutritional norm'; it is based on notions of what is a basic minimum of nutrition an individual must obtain every day in order not to be considered undernourished.

The national poverty line in Bangladesh is a monetary threshold below which a person's minimum basic needs cannot be met, taking into account the country's economic and social circumstances. The poverty line is also revised as the country develops. The government tracks how many people are living on less than the national poverty line so that it can monitor its development progress. The official statistics on poverty and inequality are provided by the Bangladesh Bureau of Statistics (BBS), the government statistical agency, using data from the Household Income and Expenditure Survey (HIES) series. These surveys are designed by BBS to make them comparable over time (e.g. in terms of methodology, questionnaire content, interviewing procedures, and others) and are carried out usually at five-year intervals. The BBS uses the cost-of-basic-needs (CBN) method to derive poverty lines and poverty measures which entails three main steps.

First, a food bundle yielding 2,122 kcal per day per person is chosen comprising rice, wheat, pulses, milk, mustard oil, beef, fresh water fish, potato, other vegetables, sugar, and bananas. The prices of various food items in this bundle are estimated for 16 different geographic regions to ascertain the total cost of consuming the bundle in different parts of the country. The second step is to estimate the cost of basic non-food needs. For the purpose, two non-food allowance components are calculated: the first obtained by taking the amount spent on non-food items by those households whose total consumption is equal to their regional food poverty line (corresponding to the lower poverty line), while the second is obtained by taking the amount spent on non-food items by those households whose food consumption is equal to the regional food poverty line, corresponding to the upper poverty line. The third step in calculating the lower and upper poverty lines for each region entails simply adding up the cost of purchasing the food bundle in each region to the respective non-food allowance components. The lower poverty lines thus incorporate a minimal allowance for non-food goods (the typical non-food spending of those who could just afford the food requirement) while the upper poverty lines make a more generous allowance (the typical non-food spending of those who just attain their food requirement).

The poverty measures used in Bangladesh are drawn from the Foster-Greer-Thorbecke class of functions written as:

$$P_{\alpha} = \sum_{y_i < z} [(z - y_i)/z]^{\alpha} / n \quad (1)$$

where y_i is the consumption of the i th household or the j th class of household, z is the poverty line, n is the population size, and α is a non-negative parameter. The headcount ratio, H —given by the percentage of the population who are poor—is obtained when $\alpha=0$. The poverty gap index (PG),

Box 2.1: Measuring income poverty in Bangladesh

International poverty line

given by the aggregate income shortfall of the poor as a proportion of the poverty line and normalised by the population size, is given by $\alpha=1$, and the squared poverty gap index (SPG) is obtained when $\alpha=2$.

Since prices and consumption patterns vary across different geographical areas, poverty lines are estimated for 16 different geographical areas separately. For obtaining poverty estimates for previous years, the current poverty lines are deflated by price indices to represent identical purchasing power for all years. Estimates using alternative methodologies, which serve as important sensitivity checks for poverty trends, reveal similar trends for a wide range of methods for estimating and updating the poverty lines.

Source: BBS

International poverty line

In the present world, poverty measures are used for two major purposes: first, to compare progress across different countries (where the need for international comparability is paramount); and second, progress in poverty reduction within a single country (where it is possible to customise the approach and definitions).

The United Nations and World Bank have adopted \$1/day and \$2/day per capita poverty lines for international comparisons, although national poverty lines may be more appropriate for comparisons within a specific country. On the other hand, those living on between \$1.90 and \$3.10 per day are classified as the 'moderate poor'. This number is based on the monetary value of a person's consumption rather than income alone.

The World Development Report 1990 introduced the dollar-a-day international poverty line. From the beginning, the idea was to measure income poverty with respect to a poverty line which, first, reflects the standards of absolute poverty in the world's poorest countries and, second, corresponds to the same real level of well-being in all countries. The first requirement needs to anchor the international poverty line on the national poverty lines of very poor developing countries. And the second requirement needs to use purchasing power parity exchange rates (PPPs) – rather than nominal ones - to convert the line into US dollar and, more importantly, into the currencies of each developing country.

The UN \$1/day line was not constructed based on a notion of an international basket of goods required to achieve basic capabilities; rather it was chosen as a simple and somewhat arbitrary threshold that could be used to set goals and monitor progress. From the above, it may hardly be emphasised that, given the challenge of constructing a consistent poverty line for any given country, arbitrariness is not surprising when constructing a line meant to apply globally.²

One limit of the international lines is that for richer countries,³ the \$1/day line (or even the \$2/day line) captures few of those considered poor in these countries. Another limit of the \$1/day line involves the translation of the international line (denominated in US dollars) into country-specific poverty lines (denominated in local currency).

² The poverty line was originally set at \$1 per day per person valued at 1985 international prices but was subsequently updated to \$1.08 per day in 1993 international prices.

³ For example, the poverty line in the United States is roughly ten times higher than the \$1/day line.

International poverty line

The simplest approach would be to use official exchange rates. But many goods consumed by the poor are not traded, and official rates can also be distorted by government interventions. It is thus broadly accepted that official exchange rates cannot be relied on to give the appropriate conversion of purchasing power when welfare comparisons are made. These issues have led to a search for alternative methods of conversion.

The United Nations and World Bank use a set of exchange rates calculated as part of the International Comparisons Project. These rates are designed to be used for comparing national income of different countries, and similar to consumer price indices, these rates are calculated based on the relative prices of a set basket of goods in each country. The idea is to calculate conversion factors that aim to equalise the purchasing power of currencies in different countries (that is why they are termed ‘purchasing power parity’—or PPP--adjustments).

In practice, the PPP numbers are difficult to calculate, and corrections and refinements to the method continue. A set of numbers is available for a large number of countries, however, and the UN and the World Bank rightly favour them over official exchange rates. The differences between PPP and official exchange rates are considerable for the countries.⁴

For the SDGs, the UN currently measures ‘extreme poverty’ as people living on less than US\$ 1.90 a day. The global extreme poverty line was adjusted by the World Bank in 2015 from US\$ 1.25 (PPP) a day (used since 2008) to US\$ 1.90 (PPP) as a result of recalculations using new PPP data. But it is important to remember that this economic deprivation – lack of income – is a standard feature of most definitions of poverty.

But it does not take account of the social, cultural and political impact of poverty. Besides deprivation of economic or material resources, poverty is also a violation of human dignity. Poverty erodes economic and social rights such as the right to health, adequate housing, food and safe water, and the right to education. The same is true of civil and political rights, such as the right to a fair trial, political participation and security of the person.

⁴ For Bangladesh, the PPP Conversion Factor to Market Exchange Rate: Price Level Ratio data is reported at 0.382 per cent in 2020. The overvaluation of official rates means that the PPP-adjusted figures raise the value of \$1/day poverty lines when denominated in local currencies—and thus the PPP method shows more poverty in the world than would a \$1/day line translated into local currencies at official exchange rates. Although PPPs are more accurate than official exchange rates, PPP exchange rates were not originally designed for adjusting poverty lines. In particular, they are not based on a bundle of goods typically consumed by the poor. As a result, there are potential biases that result from including expensive luxury items and other goods typically consumed only by the richer citizens. At present, ongoing work aims to create a set of PPP rates that can better reflect the spending patterns of poor populations.

Box 2.2: US\$ 1.90 (PPP) international poverty line

Measuring multidimensional poverty: MPI

Box 2.2: US\$ 1.90 (PPP) international poverty line

The World Bank's currently used international absolute poverty line of USD 1.90 a day has been estimated based on the recalculated 2011 purchasing power parity (PPP) estimates of the average of the national poverty lines of 15 very poor countries. The increase to 1.90 dollars is an adjustment for inflation so that the real standard of living it represents remains the same. PPP is used to convert to a common currency the amount of money needed in each country to buy the same amount of goods and services in the domestic market.

Some concerns over the use of PPP relate to the consistency of PPP rates over time as a result of methodological concerns over price surveys; the differences in actual consumption patterns of the poor in different countries; and the contrasting results produced by the use different data sources for PPP adjusted GDP data. The 2014 Asian Development Bank (ADB) report on key indicators for Asia and the Pacific highlights the problems with using the conventional PPP poverty line for all regions. The poverty line is inadequate as it underestimates the costs required to maintain a minimum living standard in Asia.

PavcalNet, World Bank 2021

Although these requirements are sensible, they do have some implications. In particular, the need is to adjust the line every time a new set of PPPs is produced.⁵ The dollar-a-day line used the 1985 PPPs. When a new set of PPPs was published in 1993, the line changed to \$1.08 per day. The PPPs were revised again in 2005, and the line was correspondingly rose to \$1.25. Every time this happens, there are real comparability challenges, and international poverty rates are revised for individual countries and for the world.

With the publication of a new set of PPPs for prices collected in 2011, the need for another revision to the international poverty line was created. The \$1.25 line was originally defined as the simple average of the national poverty lines for fifteen very poor countries (see Ravallion et al. 2009). For updating, those same lines (expressed in local currency units at 2005 prices), were taken which were inflated to 2011 using each country's own consumer price index. Then, these 2011 prices were converted to the US dollar using the 2011 PPPs, after which the simple average has been taken. The result of these two operations yields \$1.88 per person per day, which was rounded up to \$1.90 – the new international poverty line at 2011 prices.

Measuring multidimensional poverty: MPI

The Oxford Poverty and Human Development Initiative (OPHI) has provided an international measure of poverty – the multidimensional poverty index (MPI) – for the UNDP's Human Development Report (HDR). The index goes beyond the traditional focus on income to reflect multiple deprivations that a poor person faces with respect to education, health and living standard. Along with multidimensional poverty, poverty dynamics are also important attributes that are important in designing appropriate

⁵The PPP exchange rates are currently produced by an independent consortium called the International Comparison Program (ICP), which periodically revises its estimates – reflecting both changes in relative price levels across countries and methodological changes.

Measuring multidimensional poverty: MPI

MPI—measuring different dimensions

interventions to eradicate poverty.

Vulnerability describes the likelihood of falling into poverty or into greater poverty. It is related to exposure to risks and the capacity to respond to prevent, mitigate or cope with risks. Poor people are particularly vulnerable to shocks and stresses and their resilience in resisting or recovering from the negative effects of a changing environment is particularly low, as they lack assets, entitlements and capabilities that would be required to deal with shocks and stresses.

Policy interventions to address the vulnerabilities of the poor people include: social assistance, inclusive economic growth, human development of the hard-to-reach population groups (i.e. because of age, gender, geography, ethnicity, etc.), and transformative social change (i.e. change in norms, values, and social relations that underpin development processes).

Although the common perceptions of poverty consider income and consumption alone, MPI includes other basic factors since money alone does not tell the whole story. Typically, when the poor describe their poverty they do so in ways that go beyond simply not having enough money.

The MPI measures poverty across three dimensions—health, education and standard of living. The three dimensions are further subdivided into 10 indicators: (i) nutrition; (ii) child mortality; (iii) years of schooling; (iv) school attendance; (v) cooking fuel; (vi) sanitation; (vii) drinking water; (viii) electricity; (ix) housing; and (x) assets.

Wellbeing, poverty and inequality can also be defined in terms of assets. Three practical measures of asset-based poverty look at poverty related to a (i) household's wealth; (ii) their real and financial asset holdings; as well as (iii) their access to the credit market. They include: income-net worth measures, asset-poverty, and financial vulnerability (Brandolini et al. 2009). Those who are asset poor are not always the same as those who are income poor.

The importance of income and wealth differs depending on the situation in a country. For example, wealth (indicated by assets) is less important in countries with secure employment and benefits, where regular income flows ensure that living standards are maintained. Personal wealth can provide a cushion against shocks and uncertainties.

MPI—measuring different dimensions

Sen's capability approach provides a new paradigm to understand human development, poverty and inequality which also implies a shift in the measures used to capture these concepts. As a consequence, new and innovative measures have been introduced since the beginning of the 1990s. Most of these share the features of allowing cross-country comparisons and including multiple dimensions in their calculation. Some of them are the Human Development Index (HDI), Coefficient of Human Inequality (CHI), and the Multidimensional Poverty Index (MPI).

MPI—measuring different dimensions

The HDI is a ‘size-type’ measure and is based on GNI per capita, average years of schooling, average school life expectancy, and average life expectancy. Each of these dimensions is the average achievement across the population of interest. On the other hand, indices like the Gini index, Atkinson index, Theil index, or 90:10 ratios are all ‘spread-type’ measures which provide information on the inequality of achievements in a society.

A recent example of a spread-type index is the CHI, which is included in the Human Development Reports alongside the HDI since 2014. This index is computed as the unweighted average of the inequality observed in the three dimensions that compose the HDI (education, health and income), where this inequality is measured by the Atkinson index.

The MPI is a ‘base-type’ measure which captures the nature and magnitude of overlapping deprivations in health, education and living standard for each household. The distinction between size, spread and base-type measures is important. In practice, they provide information on different aspects of a population’s achievements and most importantly, there is no need to choose among them. On the contrary, they complement each other.

These new measures also differ in their core structure to include four methodological features: dimensional analysis, decomposition, linkages across dimensions, and weighting scheme. Regarding the dimensional analysis, the HDI launched in 1990 was the first measure using multiple dimensions in its calculation. In addition to income, it included information on education and health.

With the passing of time, the variables used to describe human development extended to include other topics such as political rights, freedom of action, productivity, gender parity, and sustainability, among others (Alkire 2010).

The decomposition feature of a measure refers to the possibility of disaggregating it by relevant variables, such as gender, age group, ethnicity, rural-urban area, and disability, among others (Alkire and Foster 2016). Such decompositions are highly needed by the policy makers who, using information on the intra-country variation of a measure can shape their policy responses. Moreover, the decomposition feature is needed to define who are the poorest among the poor and how their situation is changing. This is critical to fulfill the SDGs, and its premise of ‘Leaving No One Behind’. The MPI is an example of a measure satisfying the decomposition property as it can be disaggregated by any subgroup for which the data are representative.

The methodological feature of linkages across dimensions comprises the analysis of which achievements are simultaneously enjoyed by which persons or groups. This feature is present in counting-based multidimensional measures, such as the MPI. This index is an overall aggregate multidimensional measure which can be broken down to show which people are experiencing which deprivation at the same time.

This is possible because the construction of the MPI begins at the level of the individual or household, and builds a profile of their deprivations for each dimension and person. From this profile, a person is then identified as poor/not poor. In contrast, composite measures offer only an indirect understanding

MPI—measuring different dimensions

of the linkages between dimensions because they combine different aggregated indicators which may come from different surveys. The HDI is an example of a composite measure.

Another significant methodological feature of the measures refers to the weighting vector applied to aggregate the different dimensions. In practice, people may disagree about which weights to use. People are diverse, and values may differ across people and for the same person over time. However, it is not necessary for people to agree on a set of weights. The important aspect is that any policy recommendation must be robust to a range of plausible weights, and the weighting vector used should be made explicit and should be easy to understand.

The MPI methodology uses a general framework for measuring multidimensional poverty. It is based on the counting approach, which makes adjustments to the traditional FGT family of indicators to bring it to a multidimensional space. This methodology introduces two cutoffs in the identification stage of the poor. First, the set of indicators which will be considered in the multidimensional measure is selected. Data for all indicators should be available for the same household.

The achievement matrix contains the level of achievement of each household in each indicator included in the measure. Then, the deprivation cutoffs for each indicator are set – namely, the level of achievement considered sufficient (normatively) in order to be non-deprived in each indicator. After applying these cutoffs, each household is identified as either deprived or non-deprived in each indicator. The second threshold defines who is multidimensionally poor and who is not based on the minimum number of weighted indicators in which a household must be deprived to be considered as multidimensionally poor.

In particular, the proportion of people who have been identified as multidimensionally poor in the population is computed first. This is the headcount ratio of multidimensional poverty H , also called the incidence of multidimensional poverty. Then, the average share of weighted indicators in which poor people are deprived is computed. This entails adding up the deprivation scores of the poor and dividing them by the total number of poor people. This is the intensity of multidimensional poverty, also sometimes called the breadth of poverty.

Finally, the MPI is computed as the product of the two previous partial indices. This means that the final measure of MPI considers the headcount of poverty in the traditional way, but adjusts it by the intensity of poverty to get a more complete picture of poverty.

Several properties of MPI are important for policy. The first is decomposability, which allows the index to be broken down by population subgroups (such as region, gender or ethnicity) to show the characteristics of multidimensional poverty for each group. The MPI satisfies population subgroup decomposability.

Thus, the poverty level of a society is equivalent to the population-weighted sum of subgroup poverty levels, where subgroups are mutually exclusive and collectively exhaustive of the population. Another practical advantage of MPI is that it can be implemented with ordinal data. This is critical for real-world applications. It is relevant, for example, when poverty is viewed from the capability perspective, since many key functionings are commonly measured using ordinal variables.

Global MPI in practice

Table 2.1: Dimensions, indicators and cutoffs of the global MPI

Global MPI in practice

The Global MPI is an internationally comparable measure of acute poverty in over 100 developing countries. The Global MPI was developed by the Oxford Poverty and Human Development Initiative (OPHI) and the UNDP's Human Development Report Office (HDRO) and launched in 2010. It has been updated annually and bi-annually by OPHI since then. The aim of the Global MPI is to inform policy through comparable information on multidimensional poverty for the developing world.

The Global MPI is alike the US\$ 1.90/day measure of monetary poverty by the World Bank, providing an international benchmark and allowing for comparability. This measure uses the household as the unit of identification, meaning that indicators are defined at the household level and all members share the same status of deprivations.

The Global MPI includes three dimensions and 10 indicators (Table 2.1). Each dimension has equal weight and indicators within dimensions receive an equal weight. The poverty cutoff is defined as one third, meaning that a person is multidimensionally poor if he/she is deprived in at least 1/3 of the weighted sum of deprivations.

Table 2.1: Dimensions, indicators and cutoffs of the global MPI

Dimension	Indicator	Deprivation cutoff	Weight
Education	Years of schooling	No eligible household member has completed six years of schooling.	1/6
	School attendance	Any school-aged child is not attending school up to the age at which he/she would complete class 8.	1/6
Health	Child mortality	A child under 18 has died in the household in the five-year period preceding the survey.	1/6
	Nutrition	Any person under 70 years of age for whom there is nutritional information is undernourished.	1/6
Living standards	Electricity	The household has no electricity.	1/18
	Sanitation	The household has unimproved or no sanitation facility or it is improved but shared with other households.	1/18
	Drinking water	The household's source of drinking water is not safe or safe drinking water is a 30-minute or longer walk from home, round-trip.	1/18
	Housing	The household has inadequate housing materials in any of the three components: floor, roof, or walls.	1/18
	Cooking fuel	The household cooks using solid fuel, such as dung, agricultural crop, shrubs, wood, charcoal, or coal.	1/18
	Assets	The household does not own more than one of these assets: radio, TV, telephone, computer, animal cart, bicycle, motorbike, or refrigerator, and does not own a car or truck.	1/18

Source: OPHI's webpage

The global MPI 2021 compares acute multidimensional poverty for 109 countries in the developing regions. These countries are home to 5.9 billion people, three-quarters of the world's population. Of these people, 1.3 billion (21.7 per cent) are identified by the 2021 global MPI as multidimensionally

Global MPI in practice

poor. The 2021 global MPI shows both who is poor – in terms of their age group, subnational region, and whether they live in an urban or rural area – and how they are poor – in terms of which overlapping deprivations they face.

The 2021 Report, *Global Multidimensional Poverty Index 2021: Unmasking disparities by ethnicity, caste and gender*, examines inequalities along the lines of ethnicity, caste and gender across multidimensionally poor people globally. These disparities are likely to have been further exacerbated by the Covid-19 pandemic. Using the data that are available, the Report presents disaggregations by the gender of the household head for 108 countries, and by ethnicity or race or caste for 41 countries. The analysis aims to highlight groups that are being left behind and show which interlinked deprivations hinder progress in poverty reduction, so that the global community can act effectively.

In terms of gender findings, the report provides an intra-household analysis of multidimensional poverty relating to girls and women's education in 109 countries and household headship in 108. It shows that:

- Two-thirds of multidimensionally poor people – 836 million – live in households in which no girl or woman has completed at least six years of schooling.
- One-sixth of all multidimensionally poor people (215 million) live in households in which at least one boy or man has completed at least six years of schooling, but no girl or woman has.
- One in six multidimensionally poor people live in female-headed households.
- The incidence of multidimensional poverty is positively associated with the rate of intimate partner violence against women and girls.

The Report also explores the data available for ethnicity, race and caste in the global MPI (41 countries and 291 groups) finding stark inequalities among ethnic groups in some countries in the developing regions. In terms of ethnicity, race and caste findings, important results highlight that:

- Nearly 128 million people belong to ethnic groups in which 70 per cent or more of the population of those groups is multidimensionally poor.
- Indigenous peoples are among the poorest in all Latin American countries covered. In the Plurinational State of Bolivia indigenous communities account for about 44 per cent of the population but 75 per cent of multidimensionally poor people.
- The two poorest ethnic groups in Gambia – the Wolof and the Sarahule – have roughly the same MPI value but different compositions of multidimensional poverty.

The composition of multidimensional poverty around the world provides important updates on global multidimensional poverty levels and trends:

- Across 109 countries 1.3 billion people— 21.7 per cent—live in acute multidimensional poverty.
- About half (644 million) are children under age 18.
- Nearly 85 per cent live in Sub-Saharan Africa (556 million) or South Asia (532 million).
- Roughly, 84 per cent (1.1 billion) live in rural areas, and 16 per cent (about 209 million) live in urban areas.

Global MPI in practice

- In 43 of the 60 countries with both multidimensional and monetary poverty estimates, the incidence of multidimensional poverty is higher than the incidence of monetary poverty.
- More than 67 per cent live in middle-income countries, where the incidence ranges from 0.1 per cent to 66.8 per cent nationally and from 0.0 per cent to 89.5 per cent sub-nationally.
- Of the 80 countries permitting study of trend data, covering roughly 5 billion people, 70 experienced a statistically significant reduction of the MPI value during at least one period.
- Of the 20 countries that reduced their MPI value the fastest, 14 were in Sub-Saharan Africa, 3 were in South Asia, 2 were in East Asia and the Pacific and 1 was in Latin America and the Caribbean. The fastest reduction was in Sierra Leone (2013–2017) during the Ebola epidemic, followed by Togo (2013/2014–2017), Mauritania (2011–2015) and Ethiopia (2016–2019).
- In 24 countries studied for trends there was no statistically significant reduction in multidimensional poverty among children (individuals under age 18) during at least one period.
- In 15 countries the MPI among children did fall but fell more slowly than the MPI value among adults during at least one period.

Thus, the regional disaggregation of the index indicates that Sub-Saharan Africa and South Asia are the regions with higher shares of world multidimensional poor people: 43 per cent live in Sub-Saharan Africa and 41 per cent in South Asia. While comparing the level of the MPI index in these regions with the traditional US\$ 1.90/day poverty measure, it is seen that In South Asia, 13.1 per cent of the population is multidimensionally poor, while the extreme income poverty measure is 19.2 per cent.

In Sub-Saharan Africa, multidimensional poverty affects 28.6 per cent of the population, while the monetary measure of poverty is 43.7 per cent. When countries are classified according to their income levels, the disaggregation of the MPI indicates that about two-thirds of all multidimensionally poor people are located in middle income countries, and the remaining one-third in low income countries.

Poverty Trends in Bangladesh

Trends in poverty: National poverty line

Table 2.2: Poverty headcount rates in Bangladesh

Poverty Trends in Bangladesh

Trends in poverty: National poverty line

Poverty in Bangladesh has declined remarkably since the early 2000s, as a result of decades of accelerated economic growth and development. It is widely recognised that, after independence in 1971, Bangladesh's poverty rate was extremely high estimated at more than 80 per cent in 1972. According to the HIES data, national poverty headcount rate has declined to 24.3 per cent in 2016 (Table 2.2).⁶ Based on the current rate of poverty reduction, Bangladesh is expected to succeed in reducing extreme poverty to very low levels within 2030, the first nation in South Asia expected to do so.

Table 2.2: Poverty headcount rates in Bangladesh

	% of population below upper poverty line					% of population below lower poverty line				
	1991-92	2000	2005	2010	2016	1991-92	2000	2005	2010	2016
National	56.7	48.9	40.0	31.5	24.3	41.1	34.3	25.1	17.6	12.9
Urban	42.8	35.2	28.4	21.3	18.9	24.0	19.9	14.6	7.7	7.6
Rural	58.8	52.3	43.8	35.2	26.4	43.8	37.9	28.6	21.1	14.9

Source: HIES reports, various years

National poverty headcount rate declined by more than 57 per cent (32 percentage points) between 1992 and 2016. In 1991-92, nearly 57 per cent of Bangladesh's population was poor (per capita consumption below the upper poverty line) as compared with 24 per cent in 2016. The percentage decline in poverty rate was almost similar in urban (nearly 56 per cent) and rural areas (55 per cent).

A notable feature of recent poverty reduction is a sizeable decline in the incidence of extreme poverty. The percentage of population under the lower poverty line--the threshold for extreme poverty--fell by nearly 69 per cent (or 28 percentage points) between 1992 and 2016. A fall of 68 per cent (or 16 percentage points) occurred in urban areas and 66 per cent (29 percentage points) in the rural areas (see Table 2.2). The percentage decline in extreme poverty rate is thus more than that in the poverty rate, which shows higher growth in per capita consumption for the bottom two deciles.

During the period, the fall in poverty headcount rates was large enough to significantly reduce the number of people in poverty or extreme poverty. The size of the population below the upper poverty and the lower poverty lines declined by 23.3 million and 22.9 million respectively between 2000 and 2016. However, it must also be remembered that an estimated 39.6 million Bangladeshis are still below the (upper) poverty line in 2016, and 24 million among whom are below the lower or extreme poverty line.

The depth (poverty gap) and the severity (squared poverty gap) of poverty have shown significant improvements as well; falling by 61 per cent and 67 per cent respectively (BBS 2017). The rates of

⁶The estimates of poverty are not available after 2016 since BBS has not published any Household Income and Expenditure Surveys afterwards. However, the Planning Commission estimates that the percentage of population at the national level below the upper poverty line is 20.5 per cent while similar percentage below the lower poverty line is 10.5 per cent in 2019. However, no rural and urban disaggregation is available. See, PC 2020, Table 1.8, p. 11.

Trends in poverty: National poverty line

Figure 2.1: Poverty and extreme poverty headcount in the 2000s

decline are similar for urban and rural areas – the poverty gap declined by 57 per cent and 61 per cent and squared poverty gap by 64 per cent and 65 per cent for urban and rural areas respectively.

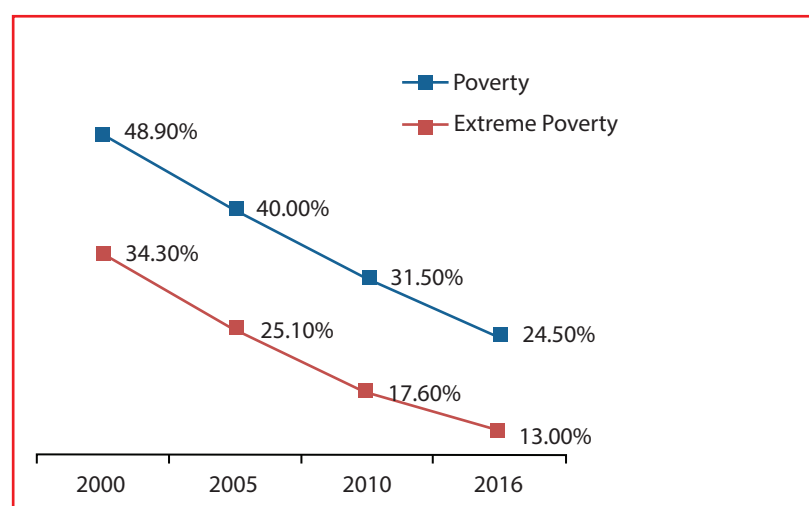
These trends suggest significant improvement among those below the poverty line. A fall in poverty gap indicates that the average consumption of the poor has improved, while a decline in squared poverty gap implies more equitable distribution of consumption among the poor. These improvements have also taken place at similar rates for the urban and rural poor.

It may, however, be noted that, while the rural-urban gap in poverty rate is narrowing down, the gap still remains considerable. The rural poverty rate in 2016 was 26.4 per cent compared with the urban poverty rate of 18.9 per cent. Thus, although the rural areas account for about 64 per cent of the total population of Bangladesh, they are home to more than 71 per cent of the poor people in the country.

The above shows that Bangladesh has experienced a substantial poverty reduction over the last 24 years (between 1991-92 and 2016), with the pace accelerating during the 2000s. Since national poverty is measured by consumption based indicators in Bangladesh, rapid growth in consumption is the primary contributing factor.

However, since there exists a large disparity in the initial distribution of consumption between the poor and the non-poor, even similar growth rates for all consumption groups would necessarily imply an increase in the average size of the gap in consumption between the poor and the non-poor.

Figure 2.1: Poverty and extreme poverty headcount in the 2000s



Source: HIES, various years.

The HIES data show that absolute inequality or the size of the gap in consumption between different groups has expanded for the country as a whole (World Bank 2008). For rural areas, consumption growth has been the dominant force in reducing poverty; whereas in urban areas, a marginal reduction in inequality has also had a sizeable poverty reducing impact.

Regional Poverty in Bangladesh

Poverty estimates at division level

Table 2.3: Poverty rate at division level, 2016

Regional Poverty in Bangladesh

The analysis of poverty, its determinants and assessing impact of poverty-reducing interventions requires a focus on poverty information at the appropriate regional level. Bangladesh is divided into eight administrative divisions and 64 districts which are further divided into 492 upazilas and 85 metropolitan thanas. Through implementing the Small Area Estimation for Poverty Mapping methodology, poverty estimates can be made up to the upazila level in Bangladesh.⁷

Poverty estimates at division level

The poverty estimates at the division level derived through the poverty mapping exercise is given in Table 2.3.

Table 2.3: Poverty rate at division level, 2016

Division	Poverty rate (upper poverty line), %
Barisal	26.49
Chittagong	18.43
Dhaka	16.00
Khulna	27.48
Mymensingh	32.77
Rajshahi	28.00
Rangpur	47.23
Sylhet	16.23

Note: The numbers are based on small area estimates by poverty mapping methodology by BBS.

Source: BBS 2020

The district level (small area) estimates of the proportion of population below the upper poverty line 2016 is shown in Figure 2.2. Similarly, the upazila level (small area) estimates of proportion of population below the upper poverty line are given in Figure 2.3. The distribution of upazila level poverty groups by division can be seen in Table 2.4.

⁷ Poverty mapping is a methodology of providing spatial distribution of poverty and inequality within a country which, In Bangladesh, combines individual and household (micro) survey data from the Household Income and Expenditure Survey (HIES) and Population and Housing (macro) Census data for estimating poverty for specific geographic areas such as upazilas. For details on the methodology, see BBS 2020.

Table 2.4: Distribution of upazilas by poverty group

Trends in poverty: International poverty line

Table 2.4: Distribution of upazilas by poverty group

Division	Very low <12%	Low 12 - 20.44%	Moderate 20.44 - 29.36%	High 29.36 - 39.66%	Very high >39.66%
No. of upazila					
Barisal	0	6	13	18	5
Chittagong	22	26	29	12	29
Dhaka	77	28	19	10	12
Khulna	3	14	19	23	6
Mymensingh	0	1	5	16	13
Rajshahi	4	17	21	22	9
Rangpur	1	1	2	13	41
Sylhet	8	23	7	1	1
Bangladesh	115	116	115	115	116

Note: The numbers are based on small area estimates by poverty mapping methodology by BBS. The upazilas have been grouped into five homogeneous groups using a quintile-based segregation. The five groups are formed by identifying the upazilas that are in the bottom 20% in terms of magnitude of poverty, then the next 20% upazilas formed the second group, and so on. Statistically, the 20%, 40%, 60% and 80% percentiles are computed and the groups are formed.

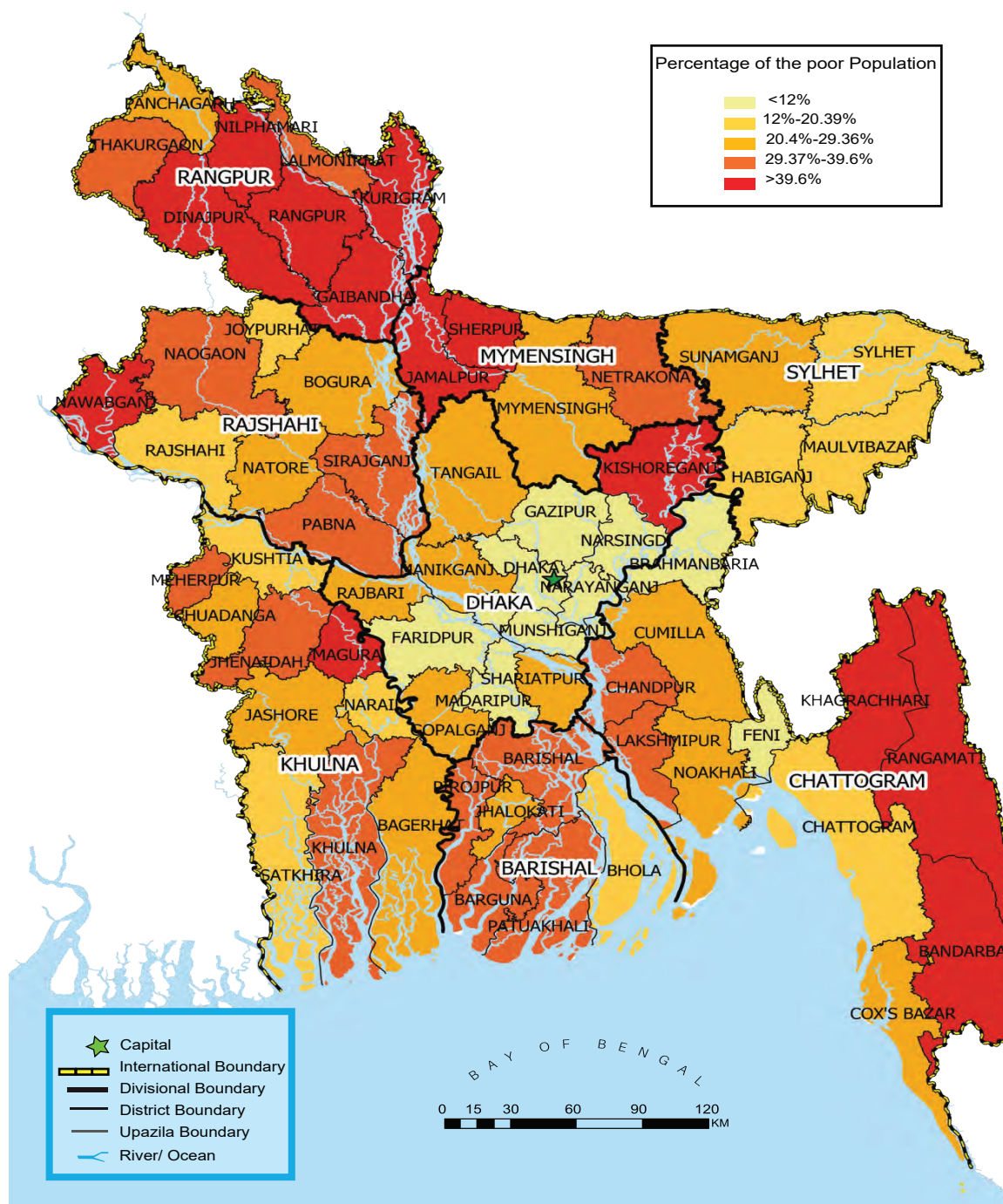
Source: BBS 2020

The above regional poverty estimates suggest that: (i) inequality in terms of poverty groups at the upazila level (within the division) is very high in Chittagong division; (ii) no upazila in Barisal and Mymensingh divisions exists in the very low poverty group; (iii) only one upazila in Rangpur division belongs to very low poverty group but 41 upazilas fall in the very high poverty group, while only one upazila in Sylhet division belongs to the very high poverty group; and (iv) although a total of 77 upazilas in Dhaka division belong to the very low poverty group, 12 upazilas in the division fall in the very high poverty group.

Trends in poverty: International poverty line

The proportion of the population living on less than \$1.90 a day measured at 2011 international prices, adjusted for PPP, shows decreasing trend in poverty over the last 30 years. In Bangladesh, the population living below the international poverty line dropped to 14.8 per cent in 2016 from 44.2 per cent in 1992. However, despite notable progress in poverty reduction, a large number of populations are still poor in Bangladesh.

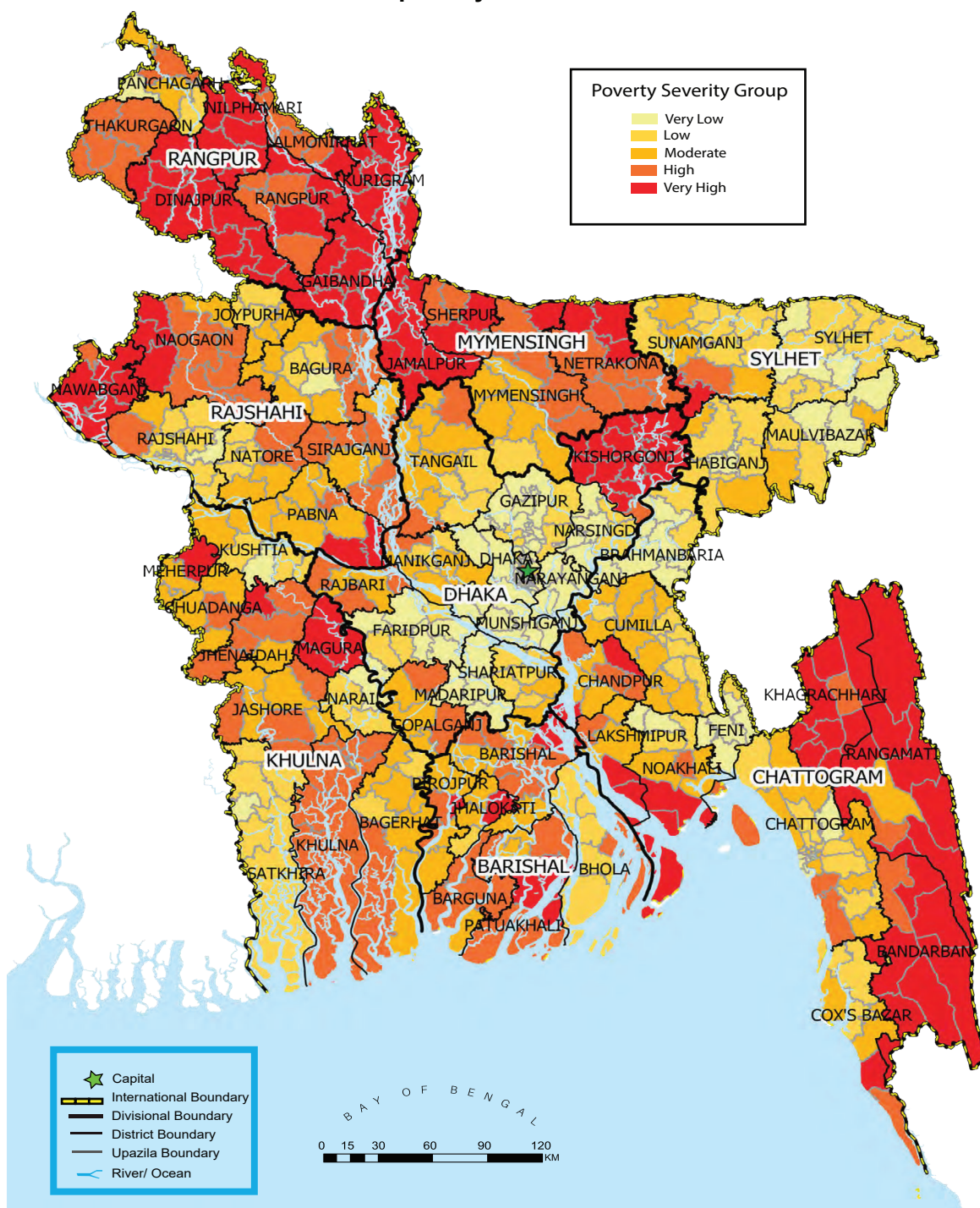
Figure 2.2: district level (small area) estimates of proportion of population below upper poverty line 2016

Figure 2.2: District level (small area) estimates of proportion of population below upper poverty line 2016

Source: BBS 2020

Figure 2.3: Upazila level (small area) estimates of proportion of population below upper poverty line 2016

Figure 2.3: Upazila level (small area) estimates of proportion of population below upper poverty line 2016



Source: BBS 2020

Table 2.5: Percentage of population below the international poverty line

Figure 2.4: International poverty headcount (\$1.90 PPP 2011 international prices)

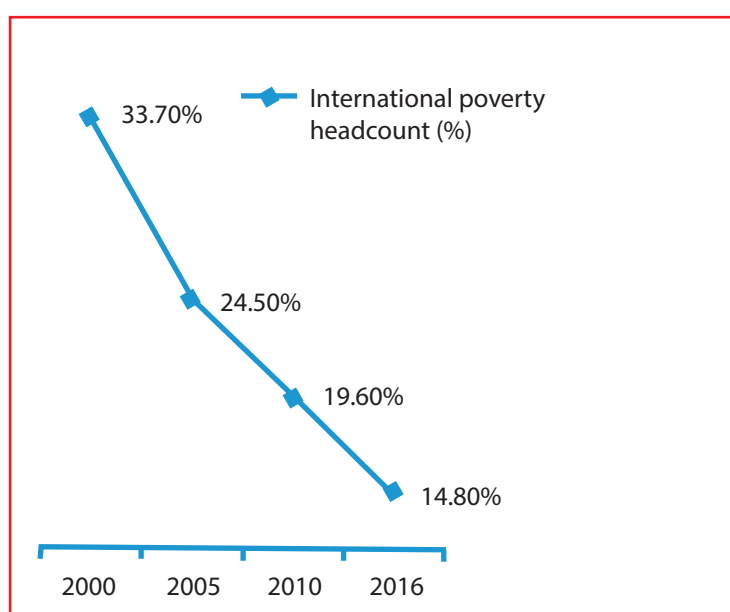
Trends in poverty: Multidimensional poverty index

Table 2.5: Percentage of population below the international poverty line

	1992	2000	2005	2010	2016
\$1.90 a day	44.2	33.7	24.5	18.5	14.8

Source: PavcalNet, WB 2016

Figure 2.4: International poverty headcount (\$1.90 PPP 2011 international prices)



Source: World Bank 2019

Trends in poverty: Multidimensional poverty index

The Planning Commission has constructed multidimensional poverty index (MPI) for Bangladesh using data on people's deprivations across three key dimensions – health, education and living standards, lacking amenities such as clean water, sanitation, adequate nutrition or primary education (MICS 2019). Those who are left behind in at least a third of the MPI's components are defined as multidimensional poor. The MPI has gone down from 41.7 per cent in 2014 to 37.5 per cent in 2019 (Table 2.6).

Table 2.6: Trends in multidimensional poverty index, 2004-2019

Table 2.7: Global MPI in Bangladesh

Table 2.6: Trends in multidimensional poverty index, 2004-2019

	2004	2007	2014	2019
MPI				
National	0.365	0.292	0.198	0.18
Urban	...	...	0.103	...
Rural	...	...	0.233	...
MPI head count, %				
National	67.2	57.8	41.7	37.51
Urban	...	...	23.0	...
Rural	...	...	48.6	...
MPI intensity (% of deprivations suffered by each person on average), %				
National	54.3	50.4	47.5	46.84
Urban	...	...	44.9	...
Rural	...	...	47.9	...

Source: OPHI Country Briefing Bangladesh different years; GED 2019.

The global MPI, constructed by OPHI covering over 100 countries, gives the Bangladesh's MPI and the latest Bangladesh figures are given in the Country Briefing in October 2021 (Table 2.7).

Table 2.7: Global MPI in Bangladesh

Area	MPI	H, %	A, %	Vulnerable, %	Severe poverty, %	Population share, %
National	0.104	24.6	42.2	18.2	6.5	100
Urban	0.060	14.5	41.6	14.7	3.4	21.6
Rural	0.116	27.4	42.3	19.2	7.3	78.4

Note: The MPI is calculated by multiplying the incidence of poverty (H) and the average intensity of poverty (A) where H is the proportion of the population that is multidimensionally poor, while A is the average proportion of dimensions in which poor people are deprived. MPI reflects both the share of people in poverty and the degree to which they are deprived.

Source: OPHI 2021.

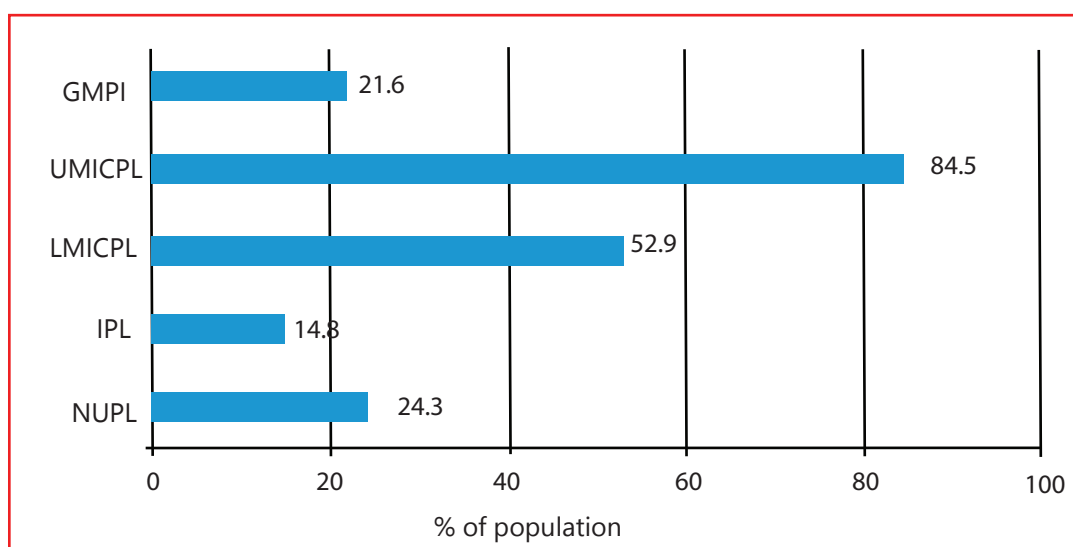
The headcount ratio is also estimated for two other ranges of poverty cutoffs in Table 2.7. A person is identified as vulnerable to poverty if he/she is deprived in 20–33.33 per cent of the weighted indicators. In addition, a person is identified as living in severe poverty if he/she is deprived in 50–100 per cent of the weighted indicators.

A comparison of the headcount ratios of the global MPI and the monetary poverty measures can be seen in Figure 2.5. The percentage of people who are MPI poor is 21.6 per cent; while the percentage of people who are poor according to \$1.90 a day international poverty line and \$3.20 a day lower middle income class poverty line are 14.8 per cent and 52.9 per cent respectively. For the upper middle income class poverty line of \$5.50 (2011 PPP) per day per capita, the headcount ratio of poverty is 84.5 per cent. On the other hand, the percentage of people who are poor according to the national poverty line is 24.3 per cent. All the above figures refer to the year 2016 after which no HIES data are available.

Figure 2.5: Headcount ratios under different poverty measures

In addition to providing data on multidimensional poverty at the national and urban-rural level, the MPI can also be computed by subnational regions (e.g. divisions) to show disparities in poverty across divisions. Table 2.8 gives a summary of the global MPI statistics by divisions in Bangladesh. The last column of the table gives the population share of each division. The population-weighted divisional figures on MPI, H and A add up to the national figures. Figure 2.6 shows how the MPI varies across divisions.

Figure 2.5: Headcount ratios under different poverty measures



Note: NUPL is National Upper Poverty Line; IPL is International Poverty Line which is 61.6 in Bangladesh taka (2016) or \$1.90 (2011 PPP) per day per capita; LMICPL is Lower Middle Income Class Poverty Line which is 103.7 in Bangladesh taka (2016) or \$3.20 (2011 PPP) per day per capita; UMICPL is Upper Middle Income Class Poverty Line which is 178.2 in Bangladesh taka (2016) or \$5.50 (2011 PPP) per day per capita; and GMPI is the Global Multidimensional Poverty Index (2016).

Source: Poverty & Equity Brief, Bangladesh, World Bank, April 2020.

Table 2.8: Global MPI in Bangladesh by division

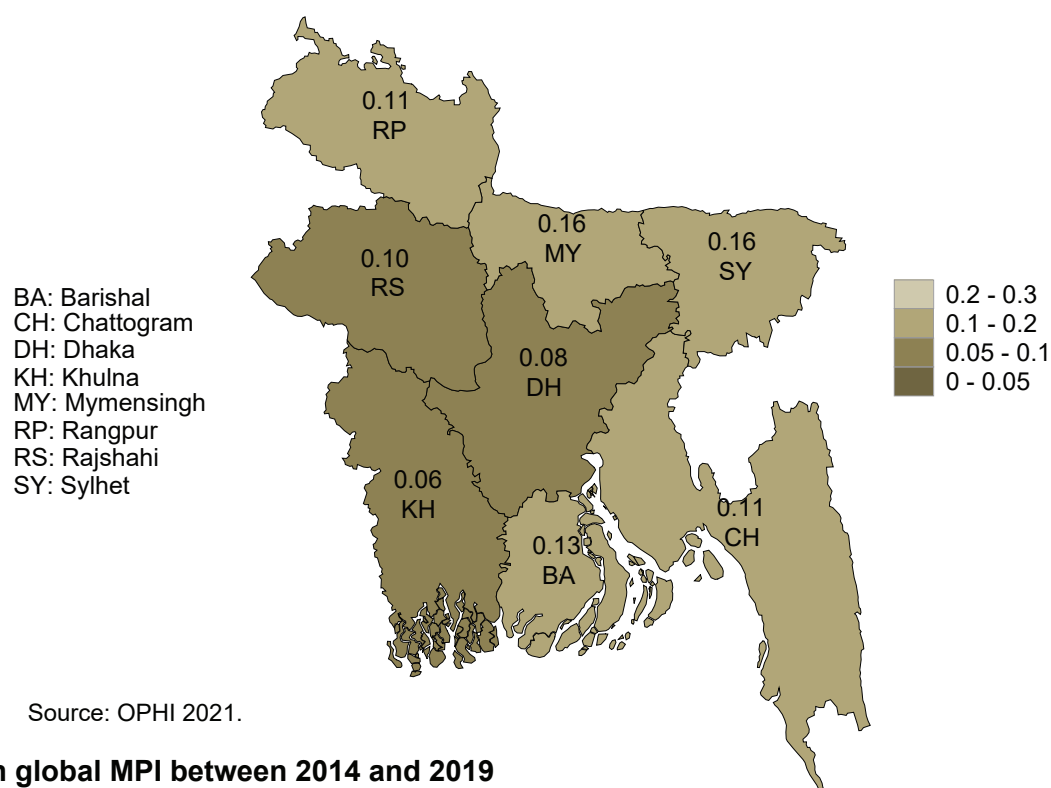
Figure 2.6: Mapping MPI value by division

Changes in global MPI between 2014 and 2019

Table 2.8: Global MPI in Bangladesh by division

Division	MPI	H, %	A, %	Vulnerable, %	Severe poverty, %	Population share, %
Barisal	0.125	29.4	42.6	23.0	7.5	5.7
Chattogram	0.114	25.8	44.1	19.3	8.4	19.4
Dhaka	0.079	19.0	41.5	17.1	4.7	24.2
Khulna	0.063	15.9	39.4	17.5	2.4	11.5
Mymensingh	0.163	37.7	43.4	18.7	11.6	7.3
Rajshahi	0.097	24.0	40.2	17.0	4.5	13.1
Rangpur	0.105	26.0	40.5	17.5	5.0	11.4
Sylhet	0.160	35.7	44.9	18.9	13.3	7.5

Source: OPHI 2021.

Figure 2.6: Mapping MPI value by division**National MPI 0.104**

Source: OPHI 2021.

Changes in global MPI between 2014 and 2019

The trends in multidimensional poverty for Bangladesh between 2014 and 2019 using a harmonised version of the global MPI Multidimensional Poverty Index (MPI) are given in Table 2.9.⁸ Table 2.9 shows the levels and changes in MPI values, incidence and intensity of poverty between 2014 and 2019 for Bangladesh. This gives an indication of the speed of MPI poverty reduction in the country.

⁸Harmonisation seeks to make two or more MPI estimations comparable by aligning the indicator definitions. In practice, harmonisation, where necessary, re-creates the indicators in the global MPI so that they are using the same information and deprivation cutoffs across the survey years. See, Alkire et al 2021.

Table 2.9: Trends in harmonised global MPI over time

Table 2.10: Changes in global MPI by divisions

Table 2.9: Trends in Harmonised Global MPI Over Time

Year	MPI	H, %	A, %
2014	0.175	37.56	46.51
2019	0.101	24.06	42.01

Source: OPHI 2021.

One limitation of the above national results is that it masks inequalities in poverty reduction across different geographical regions of the country. Recognising the importance of inequalities, the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development pledges that the underlying theme is to ensure that ‘no one is left behind’ in the process of realising the SDGs.

The changes in global MPI between 2014 and 2019 are given in Table 2.10. It is seen that, over the period, Sylhet division has achieved the highest annualised absolute reduction in MPI followed by Rangpur, Dhaka, Rajshahi, Barisal, Khulna and Chittagong divisions.

Table 2.10: Changes in global MPI by divisions

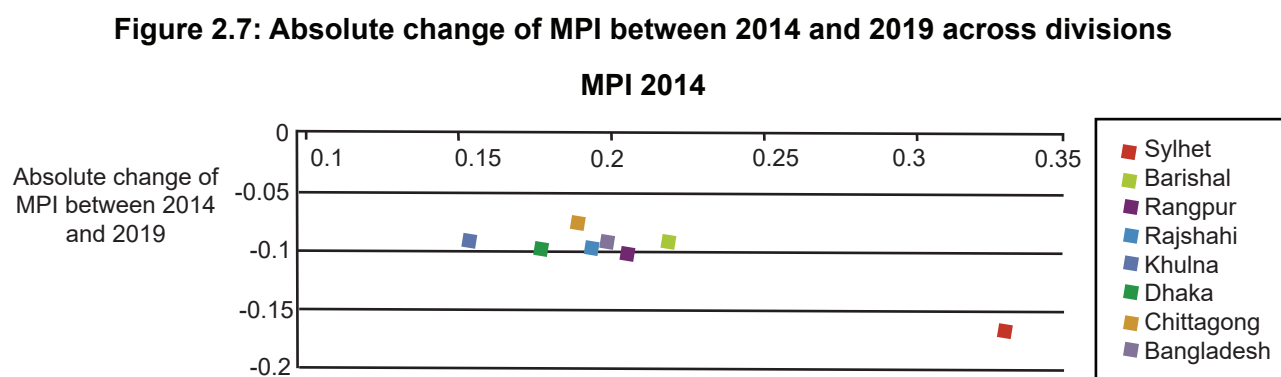
	MPI in 2014	MPI in 2019	Absolute change of MPI between 2014 and 2019	Annualised absolute change in MPI	Ranking of Divisions
Barisal	0.220	0.125	-0.095	-0.019	5
Chittagong	0.189	0.114	-0.075	-0.015	7
Dhaka	0.178	0.079	-0.099	-0.0198	3
Khulna	0.154	0.063	-0.091	-0.0182	6
Mymensingh	...	0.163	...	...	...
Rajshahi	0.194	0.097	-0.097	-0.0194	4
Rangpur	0.205	0.105	-0.100	-0.020	2
Sylhet	0.329	0.160	-0.169	-0.0338	1
Bangladesh	0.198	0.104	-0.094	-0.0188	...

Source: OPHI, Country Briefing Bangladesh different years

Figure 2.7 shows the difference in the absolute reduction of MPI across different divisions in Bangladesh between 2014 and 2019. The horizontal axis measures the level of MPI in 2014 for each division, while the vertical axis gives the rate of absolute reduction in the given division over 2014 and 2019. A pro-poor pattern at the division level exists (such that the poorest divisions are observed to reduce multidimensional poverty at the fastest rates – thus not being left behind) if there exists a diagonal trend such that the poorest divisions lie towards the bottom right of the graph while the least poor divisions lie towards the top left. In general, the poorest divisions (e.g. Sylhet, Barisal, Rangpur, and Rajshahi) tend to lie towards the bottom right (with Sylhet at the farthest of the bottom right) showing a relatively prominent pro-poor pattern.

Figure 2.7: Absolute change of MPI between 2014 and 2019 across division

Concluding Remarks



Notes: Absolute changes are expressed in units of MPI and annualised.

Source: OPHI, Country Briefing Bangladesh October 2021.

This shows that an analysis by subnational (division) level can help to assess whether poverty reduction in the country targets the poorest region, that is, the poorest regions experience the fastest poverty reduction and reduce inequality among regions.

Concluding Remarks

Despite the progress, one major deficiency that still exists is that high-frequency poverty measures allowing more real-time information on poor people's well-being are not well developed in all countries including Bangladesh, as evidenced by the difficulties in tracking poverty as the Covid-19 pandemic unfolded. Information on several social indicators such as health, nutrition and education poverty can be measured by looking at the nutritional status of children, incidences of specific diseases, life expectancy, and level of literacy for which real time data are needed.

Although various in-country data on poverty can be gathered from relevant agencies, such as statistical offices, local government institutions (LGIs) or administrative records of different government ministries and agencies, one must overcome a number of limitations. For example, in some contexts, responsible agencies and/or relevant information may not exist, or there may be challenges with capacity and quality of data collection and analysis.

The background is a light gray gradient. It is decorated with several sharp, angular shapes in two shades of blue: a medium blue and a darker blue. These shapes are primarily located in the corners and along the edges, creating a dynamic, crystalline effect. In the center of the image, the number '3' is displayed in a large, bold, black serif font.

3

Challenges of 'Left Behind' Communities: Dignity and Inclusion

In every country, there exist some communities that confront barriers forcing them to remain 'left behind' and disadvantaged relative to the mainstream population; and preventing them from fully participating in political, economic, and social life. These groups may remain excluded not only through legal system or land and labour markets, but also because of discriminatory or stigmatising attitudes, beliefs, or perceptions. Disadvantage can often be based on gender, age, location, occupation, race, ethnicity, religion, citizenship status, disability, sexual orientation and gender identity, among other factors.

Such social exclusion prevents individuals to lead a normal and secured life in society, access social and economic opportunities and ensure a dignified and better life. It is important therefore to address the root causes of structural exclusion and discrimination such that sustainable and inclusive development is ensured to achieve the SDGs including the overarching theme of 'leaving no one behind'.

In human societies, these groups also experience a higher risk of poverty, social stigma, hatred and violence than the general population. These groups include--but not limited to--ethnic minorities, migrants, people with disabilities, transgender people, isolated elderly people, women and children and other disadvantaged communities. The vulnerability to discrimination and marginalisation of these groups is a consequence of social, cultural, economic and political conditions; and is not a quality inherent to these groups of persons. These groups are not vulnerable by nature, but suffer from imposed disadvantages in society.

These groups tend to be economically and socially disadvantaged, especially compared with the mainstream populations. In many cases, this is the result of historical discrimination; often these groups are segregated geographically. As the society progresses, these disadvantaged groups usually fall further behind the rest of the population along with high risk of being increasingly locked out of opportunities.

People from these groups often suffer multiple disadvantages including poor outcomes in educational attainment and employment, and barriers to accessing healthcare. There are several factors that may contribute to this, including deprivation, social invisibility, stigma and stereotyping. The situation is exacerbated by a lack of evidence on experiences of these groups, which makes it difficult to analyse and address the problems. This also hides them and their issues from the decision-makers who set priorities and shape services. Unless there are inclusive actions to address their deprivations and provide more intensive support for these disadvantaged groups, the risks of creating greater unfairness and social exclusion as well as putting community cohesion in jeopardy will be increased, pushing further behind the goal of achieving an equitable society.

Left Behind and Disadvantaged Communities

The disadvantaged groups in society have both external and internal causes for their social exclusion. External causes are beyond the reach and control of these excluded groups. These include, for example, the labour market, social policy of the state, and lack of access to opportunities and discrimination. On the other hand, the internal causes (that result from the actions of specific people affected by social exclusion) include the inability (which is often forced by circumstances) to effectively manage limited resources and finance, apathy, low motivation, and compulsion on the immediate satisfaction of basic needs rather than investments on sustained improvement in quality of life. Often these compulsions push these people to the margins of society. They suffer from several forms of disadvantages including spatial, economic, social and cultural handicaps.

Left Behind and Disadvantaged Communities

‘Leave no one behind’ (LNOB) is the central and transformative promise of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and the SDGs. LNOB entails reaching the poorest as well as combating discrimination and rising inequalities including addressing their root causes. Often, barriers in accessing services, resources and opportunities are the result of discriminatory laws, policies and social practices.

Recent approaches to conceptualising and measuring disadvantages adopt several key theoretical and practical tools. Disadvantage is much more than low income and lack of access to decent employment; it represents interactions of a complex set of factors that make it difficult for some people to achieve positive life outcomes. Disadvantage occurs from the interplay between the individual shortcomings of members of specific communities and their social and environmental contexts, including ‘place effects’ or ‘neighbourhood effects’ such as weak social networks, poor role models and a lack of opportunity.

The government, policy makers and service providers can improve the lives of population of the disadvantaged communities by adopting policies and programmes to effectively ameliorate the causes of disadvantages. However, in order to be effective, the responses need a sound understanding of the disadvantages. Traditionally, disadvantages are associated almost solely with economic factors such as incomes and poverty status. However, such a conception has serious limitations since economic measures do not connect with those who are socially excluded and have an unacceptable low standard of living.

In recent years, several new perspectives on disadvantages have emerged which view disadvantages as multidimensional problems. At the community level, the concept of social capital refers to strong and healthy social norms and networks, and the numerous benefits that they engender. Alternatively, social exclusion is a multidimensional problem, and includes reference to issues such as restriction of life opportunities, limitations on people’s ability to capitalise on existent opportunities, and social and economic dimensions of exclusion.

Both the above concepts recognise that positive social connections contribute to overall wellbeing, and a lack of such relationships contributes to disadvantages. However, the social exclusion model is broader and places stronger emphasis on characteristics of community members (e.g. employment),

Left Behind and Disadvantaged Communities

while the social capital tends to concentrate more on ‘place effects’ and social norms.

The capabilities approach of Amartya Sen, on the other hand, offers a unique way of conceptualising disadvantages and wellbeing. At its basics, the approach is concerned with people’s ability to engage in actions and activities that have value and meaning to them. It seeks to provide all people with the ‘substantive a freedom - the capabilities - to choose a life one has reason to value’ (Sen, 1999: 74). One of the defining characteristics of this approach is its scope; the whole realm of human experience is included in its conceptions of advantages and disadvantages.

In the capabilities approach, disadvantages are conceived as restrictions of people’s capabilities. For example, a disadvantaged community may be one in which a large number of citizens have inadequate standards of health, are subject to physical or sexual assault, have their emotional lives blighted by fear and anxiety, do not have a chance to interact freely with their peers and have little control over their circumstances.

Although the above and similar perspectives do not form a unified theory or approach to disadvantages, these attempts to understand and overcome the marked disadvantages of individuals and communities reveal some very important insights that are relevant to disadvantaged communities in general. These include, for example:

Ongoing influence of historical events: The negative effects of highly traumatic events can be passed from one generation to the next which may be termed as inter-generational (or trans-generational) trauma. This inter-generational trauma may often have its roots in historical dispossession, marginalisation, and racism, as well as past policies of forced removal and cultural assimilation.

Relevance of culture: When tackling disadvantages, culture is significant in two important ways. Firstly, an understanding of, and connection to, cultural traditions can act as a vital protective factor for disadvantaged individuals and communities. Secondly, cultural competence is a necessary prerequisite for those working with disadvantaged individuals or communities; if services do not adapt to their existing cultural contexts, they have little chance of efficacy in the long-term.

Need for a ‘bottom up’ approach: Service provisions in disadvantaged communities are most effective when the communities are heavily involved in both the planning and implementation stages. Community members are often best able to distinguish the most important needs of the community and the most appropriate methods of service implementation.

Moreover, one potential pitfall that often occurs in these contexts is the ‘ecological fallacy’ that arises when one makes assumptions about specific individuals, families, or even minority populations based on the characteristics of the population of the area in which these individuals or groups live. The ecological fallacy relies on the assumption that communities are homogenous: that everyone in a disadvantaged community suffers the same degree of difficulty. In fact, the communities, in general, are highly heterogeneous.

Left Behind and Disadvantaged Communities

Disadvantaged Communities in Bangladesh

In fact, different ways of measuring disadvantaged communities highlight the complex, multi-dimensional nature of disadvantages which have a number of important implications for policy makers and practitioners. Firstly, neither policy nor practice will be effective if it fails to recognise the multi-dimensional nature of disadvantages. When the policy makers have an understanding of the dynamics that operate in disadvantaged communities (e.g., social isolation, limited opportunities, lack of trust etc.), they are more likely to suggest public policy that meets the needs of these people and the issues it is intended to target. Informed methods of identifying causal dynamics of disadvantaged communities also increase the chances of producing policy capable of affecting real and long-lasting change.

For practitioners, insight into the scope and complexity of disadvantages engenders effective communication and rapport between the service providers and service users - when service users feel that their situation and difficulties that they face are understood, they are more likely to trust and build successful relationships with service providers.

Service providers could also employ broad, multi-dimensional measures of disadvantages in the evaluation of their own services. Service provision in highly disadvantaged communities can be complex, and progress is often slow and difficult to demonstrate. A multi-dimensional approach would lead to more nuanced and realistic service evaluations, and would allow providers greater flexibility in demonstrating progress. Finally, theoretical frameworks such as the capabilities approach can lead practitioners to ask important questions that are seldom included in measures of disadvantaged communities.

Disadvantaged Communities in Bangladesh

It is a fact that there exist a large number of marked disadvantaged communities in Bangladesh; and this is at odds with Bangladesh's spirit of national character. Although Bangladesh has a long history of combating social disadvantages and disparities, it is evident that in some areas or with some groups, traditional strategies (such as economic redistribution) are largely ineffective on their own. The approaches to conceptualising and measuring the root causes of marginalisation and exclusion of the disadvantaged communities have to be effectively applied across communities by the policy makers, service providers and practitioners in order to transform Bangladesh into a country with a more equitable society where no one is left behind and where all individuals are given a 'fair go'.

In Bangladesh, social inclusion and empowerment of the disadvantaged groups continues to be on the priority list of the country's developmental agenda, as these groups still lag behind the rest of society due to their social and economic backwardness. Recognising the relative backwardness of these weaker sections of society, the Constitution of Bangladesh guarantees equality before the law (Article 27). It also empowers the State to make special provision in favour of women or children or for the advancement of any backward section of citizens {Article (28(4))}.

Disadvantaged Communities in Bangladesh

Disadvantaged communities: Patterns of social exclusion

For Bangladesh, social inclusion is the right policy to follow; and it also makes good economic sense for the country. Left unaddressed, the exclusion of disadvantaged groups can be costly. At the individual level, the most commonly measured impacts include the loss of wages, lifetime earnings, poor education, and employment outcomes. Discrimination also has physical and mental health costs. At the national level, the economic cost of social exclusion can be captured by foregone gross domestic product (GDP) and human capital wealth.

Exclusion, or the perception of exclusion, may cause certain groups to opt out of markets and economic activities with costs to both individuals and the economy. Globally, the loss in human capital wealth due to gender inequality alone is estimated at \$160.2 trillion. Afro-descendants continue to experience significantly higher levels of poverty (2.5 times higher in Latin America). 90 per cent of children with disabilities in developing countries do not attend school. Over time, exclusion can also contribute to social tensions and even risks of violence and conflict, with significant long-term social and economic costs.

Social inclusion is vital to achieving Bangladesh's twin goals of ending extreme poverty and boosting shared prosperity. The country's policy framework emphasises that social inclusion is critical for all development interventions and for achieving sustainable development. Moreover, Bangladesh has prioritised an inclusive recovery from the Covid-19 pandemic and has taken the crisis as an opportunity to focus on rebuilding more inclusive systems that allow society as a whole to be more resilient to future shocks including health, climate, natural disasters, or other internal and external adversities.

Disadvantaged communities: Patterns of social exclusion

In reality, deprivation dynamics is inherently complex in Bangladesh; and changes in population size including its structure and spatial distribution have a profound impact on economic, social and environmental aspects of sustainable development. Poverty is influenced by – and influences – demographic dynamics, including population growth, age structure, and rural-urban distribution.

The issues of deprivation are closely linked to marginality in which disadvantaged people fail to gain access to resources and full participation in society. Marginalisation is a process that emerges and evolves uniquely under distinct socioeconomic and geo-political environments. Marginalised people are usually discriminated against, stigmatised, ignored, and often socio-politically suppressed by the mainstream on the basis of ethnicity, gender, age, culture, religion, occupation, education, and socioeconomic status.

Marginality can be closely related to vulnerability of both people and the environment. In addition to physical factors of vulnerability (e.g. fragile ecosystems and scarcity of natural resources), social factors of vulnerability are particularly important to marginality; for example, gender, age, and disability are important components of vulnerability to marginality. Further, voices of the marginal are less represented in the centre of national development processes, policies, plans or programmes given the base reality of their nature and type of marginality.

Disadvantaged communities: Patterns of social exclusion

Only by understanding the causes can the designing, implementing and evaluating interventions for attacking marginality issues begin. In designing the programmes, it is important to incorporate the perception of marginality as articulated by the poor people themselves. This may lead to begin by implementing income generation measures in some cases; but in the case of others, this may lead to begin by reducing the variability of income, or strengthening women's autonomy, or improving the quality of services the poor receive at the health centres. In practice, it is the multidimensional issues that matter for policy.

Moreover, the micro perspectives can provide the elements of a sustainable graduation approach for the disadvantaged people and regions which need to blend together elements of livelihoods, social protection, financial inclusion, and social integration. For the marginal and extreme poor people, the multi-dimensional support approach should address both immediate needs of participants using grants, interest-free loans, and asset transfers, as well as long term investments in life skills and technical skills, training, enterprise and entrepreneurship development, positive behaviour change, savings, and financial planning.

In addition to the poor as defined by the head count ratio, the lagging population groups in Bangladesh include three broad categories of the marginal poor—those who live in areas that are remote and agro-ecologically unfavourable; socially marginalised groups such as, beggars, abandoned older women, disabled adolescent girls; and those who are alienated, excluded, and/or adversely incorporated based on their social identity, such as poor members of ethnic minorities, street children, and hijra (transgender). The people who are left behind thus belong to quite diverse, heterogeneous and geographically scattered groups of people. It is quite challenging to identify and specifically target these groups who need special attention in relevant policies.

The marginality issues in the context of Bangladesh thus have multifarious dimensions and risk factors; such as occupational and minority identities and living in the remote char (vegetated islands and sandbars) or hill areas, which clearly create the necessary ingredients for being marginalised and denied basic public services. The marginalised in Bangladesh are powerless and less organised than other citizens to claim their civil rights. The dynamics of power and privilege are also key determinants of connectivity with the mainstream, and the disconnected people are the marginalised.

Discrimination occurs when particular groups of people/communities lack the choices and capabilities that enable others to participate in or benefit from development. For policy purposes, it is useful to distinguish between two types of deprivation: (i) absolute deprivation, where people live in multidimensional poverty or below other minimally accepted standards of security, income, public services, infrastructure or well-being; and (ii) relative deprivation, where people face exclusion, discrimination and/or entrenched inequalities; are less able to gain influence, get educated, survive setbacks, acquire wealth, access job markets or modern technologies.

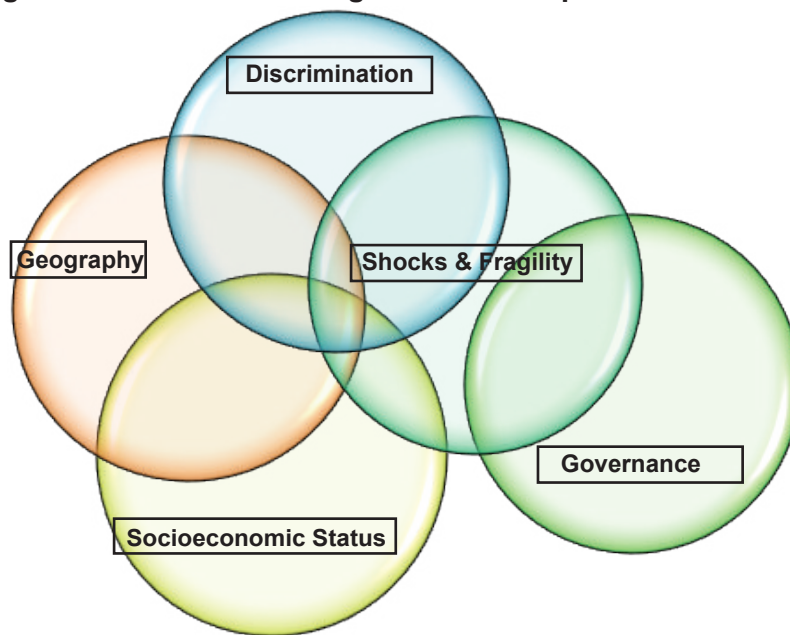
Sources and multiplicity of deprivation

Discrimination

Sources and multiplicity of deprivation

A convenient framework for conceptualising deprivation (originally developed for LNOB by UNDP 2018), suggests five intersecting factors that are essential to understand who is being marginalised and why, and shape solutions accordingly (Figure 3.1). All persons living in extreme poverty can be taken as marginalised, as can be those who endure disadvantages or deprivations that limit their choices and opportunities relative to others in society.

Figure 3.1: Five Intersecting Factors of Deprivation



Source: UNDP, 2018

Using the framework, whether or not people are marginalised can be explained by one or more of five factors: (i) discrimination; (ii) geography; (iii) socioeconomic status; (iv) governance; and (v) shocks and fragility. The key factors for deprivation are not one-dimensional rather these are multidimensional and are not mutually exclusive. In Bangladesh, the manifestation of the five intersecting factors can be seen in different contexts:

i. Discrimination

• Ethnic minority groups

Since the ancient times, many tribal communities have settled in the plain lands that now comprise Bangladesh. Most of these tribal people are landless and belong to different groups like Santal, Oraon, Mahali, Pahan and others. These communities have their own distinct identities, unique languages, separate culture and food habits. Traditionally, the livelihoods of these plain land indigenous groups are based on their access to the surrounding natural environment and its resources.

However, the penetration of the market economy and degradation of the environment due to unsustainable exploitation of the natural resources have disrupted their livelihoods. Moreover, these

Discrimination

ethnic communities mostly live in resource-poor and food-insecure fragile areas resulting from encroachment of their land by the mainland communities making them a part of the ultra-poor. It is estimated that more than 80 percent of the ethnic population live in the rural areas and depend on agriculture and natural resources for their survival.

These tribal societies are characterised by interactions of their social, institutional, technological and economic arrangements through which the community seeks to enhance their materials and social well-being. In the process, there is always an interaction between the environment in which the community lives and their practices that sustain their livelihoods. More importantly, the natural environment surrounding the people provides several goods, services and amenities to these groups.

The exact number of tribal people in Bangladesh is difficult to estimate due to practical difficulties. The Bangladesh Khudra Nregosthi Sankskritic Prothithan Ain 2010 mentions that there are 27 different tribal groups spread out across Bangladesh, mostly in the north, north-west and north-east, and southeast regions.

Ethnic minorities⁹ living in Bangladesh can broadly be categorised into two groups: plain land ethnic minorities and those in the Chittagong Hill Tracts (CHT)¹⁰ regarded as Hilly land ethnic minorities (Dhamai 2014).

Ethnic minorities are located mainly in the border regions in the northwest (Rajshahi-Dinajpur), central north (Mymensingh-Tangail), northeast (Sylhet region), south and southeast (Chittagong, Cox's Bazar and Barisal region). According to the Preliminary Report of the 2022 Population Census, about 1.0 per cent of the Bangladeshi population belongs to ethnic minority groups totalling 1.65 million. The majority of these populations live in the plains of the north and southeast, as well as the CHT region. The predominant groups are Chakma, Marma and Tripura. The government recognises 27 ethnic groups (Table 3.1).

⁹ The Constitution of Bangladesh does not directly recognise the 'Indigenous Peoples' (in Bangla 'Adibashi'). Under Article 28(4), the Constitution allows the state to take steps for the advancement of any 'backward section of citizens'. The 15th amendment of Bangladesh Constitution in 2011 has added a new article (23-KA) which provides that 'the culture of tribes, minor races, ethnic sects and communities: The state shall take steps to protect and develop the unique local culture and tradition of the tribes, minor races, ethnic sects and communities.' At different times, indigenous peoples have been identified under different categories, namely 'ethnic groups', 'ethnic peoples', 'small ethnic groups', 'small minority groups', 'tribal peoples', 'small tribes' and the like. Whatever may be the reasons, these peoples are indigenous peoples and have their own indigenous identity, religion, culture, customs and traditions, and socioeconomic status and suffer from extreme disadvantages and exclusion.

¹⁰ Ethnic minority groups in the CHT are also popularly known as 'Pahari' (meaning hill people). On the other hand, plain land indigenous groups particularly those in the north-western greater Rajshahi region used to be known as 'Adivasi', meaning aboriginal or indigenous. However, the government maintains that there are no indigenous peoples (Bengali: Adivasi) in the country and prefers to use terms such as 'tribe' and 'tribal' ('upajati' in Bangla) instead of 'indigenous'. The debate between indigenous and non-indigenous has come into greater focus following the declaration on the rights of indigenous peoples by the United Nations in September 2007. The declaration highlights (i) the right to self-determination; (ii) the right to be recognised as distinct peoples; (iii) the right to free, prior and informed consent; and (iv) the right to be free of discrimination. The Small Ethnic Groups Cultural Institution Act 2010 mentions the phrase 'khudro nrigoshthhi' (small ethnic groups) to refer to indigenous peoples.

Table 3.1: Ethnic minorities of Bangladesh

Table 3.1: Ethnic minorities of Bangladesh

Ethnic group	Source	Population (2022 Census)	Principle residence by district
Chakma	CHT Regulation 1900 & SEGCI Act 2010	483,299	Rangamati, Khagrachari, Bandarban, Chittagong & Cox's Bazar
Marma	CHT Regulation 1900 & SEGCI Act 2010	224,261	Rangamati, Khagrachari & Bandarban
Tripura	CHTRC Act 1998 & SEGCI Act 2010	156,578	Rangamati, Khagrachari, Bandarban, Sylhet, Chittagong, Rajbari, Chandpur & Comilla
Mro	CHTRC Act 1998 & SEGCI Act 2010	52,455	Rangamati & Bandarban
Tanchangya	CHTRC Act 1998 & SEGCI Act 2010	45,972	Rangamati & Bandarban
Bawm	CHTRC Act 1998 & SEGCI Act 2010	13,195	Rangamati & Bandarban
Pangkhuia	HDC Act 1998 & SEGCI Act 2010	1,857	Rangamati & Bandarban
Chak	CHTRC Act 1998 & SEGCI Act 2010	3,077	Rangamati & Bandarban
Khyang	CHTRC Act 1998 & SEGCI Act 2010	4,826	Rangamati & Bandarban
Khumi	CHTRC Act 1998 & SEGCI Act 2010	3,780	Rangamati & Bandarban
Lushai	CHTRC Act 1998 & SEGCI Act 2010	380	Rangamati & Bandarban
Koch	EBSAT Act 1950 & SEGCI Act 2010	13,702	Mymensingh, Tangail, Sherpur, Netrokona, Gazipur
Santal	EBSAT Act 1950 & SEGCI Act 2010	129,049	Dinajpur, Rajshahi, Naogaon, Bogra, Chapainawabganj, Rangpur, Panchagarh, Natore, Thakurgaon & Sylhet Tea Gardens
Dalu	EBSAT Act 1950 & SEGCI Act 2010	386....	Mymensingh, Sherpur & Jamalpur
Rakhain	BIPF 2005 & SEGCI Act 2010	11,195	Cox's Bazar, Barguna & Patuakhali
Monipuri	Population Census 1991 & SEGCI Act 2010	22,978	Moulvibazar, Sylhet, Habiganj & Sunamganj
Garo/Mandi	EBSAT Act 1950 & SEGCI Act 2010	76,846	Mymensingh, Tangail, Sherpur, Netrokona, Gazipur, Rangpur, Sylhet, Sunamganj, & Moulvibazar
Hajong	EBSAT Act 1950 & SEGCI Act 2010	7,996	Mymensingh, Sherpur, Netrokona, Sylhet, Sunamganj
Khasi	Population Census 1991 & SEGCI Act 2010	12,421	Moulvibazar, Sylhet & Sunamganj
Oraon	EBSAT Act 1950 & SEGCI Act 2010	85,846	Dinajpur, Rajshahi, Naogaon, Bogra, Chapainawabganj, Rangpur, Panchagarh, Natore, Thakurgaon & Pabna
Khotrio Barman	BIPF 2005 & SEGCI Act 2010	44,657	Dinajpur, Rajshahi & Gazipur
Mal Pahari	Population Census 1991 & SEGCI Act 2010	8,801	Dinajpur, Rajshahi, Naogaon, Bogra, Chapainawabganj, Rangpur, Panchagarh, Natore, Thakurgaon & Pabna
Munda	EBSAT Act 1950 & SEGCI Act 2010	60,191	Dinajpur, Rajshahi, Naogaon, Bogra, Chapainawabganj, Rangpur, Panchagarh, Natore, Thakurgaon & Tea Gardens of Sylhet
Kol	BIPF 2005 & SEGCI Act 2010	3,822	Rajshahi & Sylhet

Note: The Small Ethnic Groups Cultural Institutes (SEGCI) Act 2010 recognises 27 out of more than estimated 50 Indigenous ethnic groups in Bangladesh. Two ethnic groups (Usai and Mong) included in the list of 27 ethnic groups do not exist in reality, while another group named Usui mentioned in the list is one of the clans of Tripura. The table contains 24 groups. The SEGCI Act 2010 is Small Ethnic Group Cultural Institute Act 2010; HDC Act 1989 is Hill District Act 1989; EBSAT Act 1950 is East Bengal State Acquisition & Tenancy Act 1950; CHTRC Act 1998 is Chittagong Hill Tracts Regional Council Act 1998; BIPF 2005 is Bangladesh Indigenous Peoples Forum's List 2005. Source: Chowdhury 2014.

Geography

Socioeconomic status

• Transgender Communities

According to the Preliminary Report of the 2022 Population Census, there are 12,629 hijras in Bangladesh. Due to lack of social recognition, these people are often excluded from basic rights associated with citizenship such as property rights, inheritance, employment, education and health care. The government has recognised the legal status of hijras and granted the 'third gender' status in 2013.

ii. Geography

• Chittagong Hill Tracts (CHT) region

The CHT region is the home of different ethnic groups including Chakma, Marma, Tripura, Tanchangya, Mro, Lushai, Khumi, Chak, Khyang, Bawm, and Pangkhua. They collectively identify themselves as the Jumma people, the first people of the CHT. Besides them, a very small number of descendents of Ahamiya, Gorkha and Santal also live there. The total population is around 0.99 million. In addition, there are the coastal region, haor areas, barind areas, and river erosion areas which form parts of unfavourable geography.

iii. Socioeconomic status

• People living in extreme poverty and poverty

As per the Household Income and Expenditure Survey (HIES) 2016, nearly one in four people (24.3 per cent) live in poverty and 12.9 percent live in extreme poverty in Bangladesh.

• Women and adolescent girls

Adolescence is a transitional stage of physical and psychological development that generally occurs during the period from puberty to legal adulthood. There are about 16 million adolescent girls in Bangladesh. Although the health and well-being of this group is critical to the country's future, issues surrounding sexual and reproductive health (SRH) remain a cultural taboo, especially for adolescents and young unmarried people. Adolescents in Bangladesh too often enter their reproductive years poorly.

• Elderly and disabled

Women and older people are significantly more likely to report having disabilities than men and younger people. For middle and rich families, there is a 14 per cent lower likelihood of reporting disabilities than for the poor families. Changes in the probability of having disabilities are negatively correlated with increasing wealth. In addition, some significant factors affect disability, namely, age, sex, education, marital status, and place of residence (urban and rural).

Governance

Shocks and fragility

• Marginalised population groups

Marginalisation is the process of pushing a particular group or groups of people to the edge of society by not allowing them an active voice, identity or place in society. Some individuals may become part of multiple marginalised groups and experience further marginalisation as a result of their intersecting identities. The country's marginalised communities include cleaners/sweepers, transgender people, slum dwellers, tea-garden labourers, sex workers and ethnic groups in the hills, traditional fishing folks, members of dying occupations, and others.

• People living in slums

According to the census on slum dwellers and floating population conducted by the Bangladesh Bureau of Statistics (BBS) in 2014, 2.23 million people live in slums across the country. Of them, 1.14 million are males, 1.09 million females, and 1,852 transgender people. The Preliminary Report of 2022 Population Census counts 0.88 million people living in slums in Dhaka division, followed by Chittagong, Khulna and Rajshahi divisions with 424,179; 130,863; and 65,526 slum dwellers respectively. The slum population is 92,470 in Rangpur, 127,584 in Sylhet and 38,877 in Barisal divisions.

iv. Governance

• Rural population

For the rural population in Bangladesh, who form nearly 65 per cent of the total population, governance is a vital issue which affects every sector of development. Elements of bad governance such as corruption, inefficient service delivery, weak policy setting, and limited participation of the poor in decision making have a significant negative impact on their wellbeing. Indicators of good governance covering accountability, transparency, participation and predictability have important implications for the welfare of the marginal and left behind populations.

v. Shocks and fragility

• Disaster affected people

There is a growing awareness of the economy-wide significance of natural disasters and the problems they pose for long-term development in Bangladesh. The issues of natural disaster 'shocks' and their severe human consequences are closely intertwined with those of widespread and intense poverty in the country. Pressure of population has pushed farming and increasingly other economic activity, as well as settlements, into many marginal and sub-marginal lands, where large numbers of people, especially the poorest, are almost continuously exposed to risks of crop damage, other disruption to livelihoods, loss of assets and lives. The complexity of the physical environment creates multiple ways in which different physical processes result in extreme disastrous events.

Shocks and fragility

Bangladesh has the single largest concentration of people in a highly disaster-prone environment, with most of its 166 million people at significant risk to more than one form of natural hazard. In terms of area, number of people directly affected, losses of output and disruption to economic activity, productive and non-productive assets damaged and destroyed, all these have been most important since independence in 1971 covering floods, cyclones and associated storm surges, river bank erosion and drought.

There are also disasters that have more localised impacts, tornadoes and line squalls, landslides and hailstorms. From an economic perspective, pests and diseases are threats to agriculture and other activities based on renewable natural resources. Severe earthquakes have been rare, but are a potentially catastrophic hazard. Salinity and arsenic concentrations in ground water are environmental hazards, but are often excluded from consideration as being slowly developing, insidious problems, rather than the source of a natural disaster as a time-bound, physical shock to the economy and society.

Given that deprivation is a complex and multifaceted phenomenon, a broad set of variables covering economic, social, ecological, and other dimensions of human well-being are needed to understand the extent and sources of deprivation. If anyone is deprived of any of the above dimensions, the particular dimension is the source of his/her deprivation. It is therefore possible to align the deprivations with the SDGs, such as ending poverty (SDG1) and hunger (SDG2), good health and wellbeing (SDG3), quality education (SDG4), reducing inequality (SDGs 5 and 10) and reducing climate change related vulnerabilities (SDG13).

Social discrimination occurs when a person/community is deprived of opportunities based on race, ethnicity, caste, occupational status, sexual orientation and other social issues. The identification of socially excluded or marginalised groups in Bangladesh is crucial to realising the 2030 Agenda at the national level. In Bangladesh, poverty--and extreme poverty in particular-- manifests one of most important forms of deprivation and leaving behind dimension.

On the basis of poverty, inequality and other socioeconomic and cultural characteristics, Annex Table 3 gives a summary profile of disadvantaged and lagging communities (though overlapping) who presently remain at the margin of development and need to be brought into the mainstream of development for realising equitable development in Bangladesh.

The above makes it clear that attributes such as age, gender, ethnicity, race, and migration and disability status continue to affect the risk of being left behind in Bangladesh and preclude the full participation of certain groups in society. Yet the risk each of these groups' experiences does not result in uniform disadvantages: the extent of exclusion and its outcomes depend on the economic, social, political and environmental context that each group faces, including national and local institutions, norms and attitudes as well as laws and policies in place.

Poverty Watch Reports

In the Poverty Watch Reports, InM and CIDD intend to examine the outcomes of exclusion of different disadvantaged groups of Bangladesh with respect to three major domains: (i) denial of opportunities, with a focus on disparities in access to education, healthcare and other basic services; (ii) limited access to employment and income earning opportunities; and (iii) uneven participation in social, political and civic life.

While the analysis will be centred mainly on disadvantages, the important point to recognise is that these groups are not homogeneous; and place of residence, asset ownership, and other socioeconomic attributes intersect with individual group's socio-cultural characteristics which determine their heterogeneity and pattern of social exclusion. It is also important to note that there are many other social groups who are at risk of exclusion. These groups remain largely invisible in social analysis and may be at the highest risk of being left behind.

In addition, individual possibilities of improving the quality of life within these groups depend significantly on group-based performances in access to education, healthcare, infrastructure and employment as well as extent of social and political participation which are pervasive and symptomatic of exclusion of these groups. These disadvantages reinforce one another: lower levels of healthcare and education persist with higher levels of poverty and unemployment, and often also with less voice in political and civic life. Thus progress in one domain alone is not adequate to address social exclusion.

While discrimination continues to play a major role in holding back these groups, past inequalities also have a direct effect on these groups' opportunities and outcomes. These groups, suffering from discrimination over generations, start off with less assets, low social capital and thin political participation. Thus, whether rapid progress that Bangladesh is achieving over the past decades is leaving some people behind – and consequently whether it is promoting social inclusion – depends on the context as well as on how far these disadvantaged groups have been included in the development process. This highlights the need to monitor progress in different dimensions of social inclusion for these groups.

While concrete strategies to promote social inclusion and empowerment of these groups have to be context-specific, creating the enabling conditions for their meaningful participation requires an inclusive approach that expands opportunities by promoting universal access to key good-quality services, such as healthcare, employment and education. There is also a need to actively address discrimination and special needs of these groups that face the greatest challenges in overcoming exclusion and ensure that social, economic, political and legal institutions are open and inclusive.

Annex Table 3: Typology of disadvantaged and lagging community/region in Bangladesh

Annex Table 3: Typology of disadvantaged and lagging community/region in Bangladesh

Well-being dimension	Nature and extent, national average	Disadvantaged/Lagging community/location
Income/Expenditure		
Poverty rate	24.3% in 2016	Poverty rates of 36 districts (out of 64 districts) exceed the national average. Kurigram district has the highest poverty rate (70.8%). Most of the country's poor are concentrated in the north western and south central zones of the country.
Extreme poverty rate	12.9% in 2016	Extreme poverty rates of 31 districts exceed the national average. Kurigram district has the highest extreme poverty rate (53.9%). The extreme poor people are concentrated in north western zone and the northern region.
Income inequality, Gini	0.48 in 2016	A total of 12 districts have greater income inequality than the national average. Among them, Khulna district has the highest Gini (0.834). Income inequality is mostly concentrated in south western, north western and western zones.
Monthly nominal household income per capita, BDT	BDT 15,988 in 2016	In five divisions (Barisal, Sylhet, Mymensingh, Rajshahi and Rangpur), monthly household per capita income is below the national average. Rangpur division has the lowest average monthly household nominal income (BDT 10,547)
Monthly nominal household expenditure per capita, BDT	BDT 15,715 in 2016	In 47 districts, monthly nominal household expenditure per capita is below the national average. In three districts (Kurigram, Dinajpur, and Magura), monthly household nominal expenditure is below BDT 10,000. These districts are mostly concentrated in south western, north western and western zones.
Social/human development		
Labour force participation rate 15+, %	58.2% in 2016-17	Four divisions (Dhaka, Chattogram, Barisal and Sylhet) have lower labour force participation rate than the national average. The Sylhet division has the lowest rate (49.8%).
Female labour force participation rate 15+, %	36.3% in 2016-17	Four divisions (Khulna, Dhaka, Barisal and Sylhet) have lower female labour force participation rate than the national average. Sylhet division has the lowest rate (21.9%).
Mean age at first marriage (female), years	18.6 years in 2018	A total of 35 districts have lower female mean age at first marriage than the national average. Among them, Naogaon has the lowest mean age (16.8 years). These districts are mostly concentrated in western and south central zones.
Adult literacy rate, 15+, %	73.9% in 2018	A total of 41 districts have lower adult literacy rate than the national average. Bandarban has the lowest rate (50.1%). These are mostly concentrated in south eastern and south central zones.
Net primary school enrolment rate, %	97.85% in 2018	In total, 20 districts have lower net primary school enrolment than the national average. Cox's Bazar has the lowest rate (94.59%). These are mostly concentrated in south eastern and north eastern zones.
Infant mortality rate, 1,000 live births	21.6 in 2018	In total, 26 districts have higher infant mortality rate than the national average. Bandarban has the highest rate (56.2). The districts are mostly concentrated in south eastern, north western and western zones.
Under 5 mortality rate, 1,000 live births	29.2 in 2018	A total of 27 districts have higher under 5 mortality rates than the national average. Bandarban has the highest rate (78.7). These are mostly concentrated in south eastern, north western and western zones.

Annex Table 3: Typology of disadvantaged and lagging community/region in Bangladesh

Underweight children (6–59 months), %	22.96% in 2017-18	Three divisions (Sylhet, Mymensingh and Rajshahi) have higher underweight children rates than the national average. Sylhet division has the highest rate (32.7%)
Children stunted (<=60 months) %	31.9 6% in 2017-18	Four divisions (Sylhet, Mymensingh, Chattogram and Barisal) have higher children stunting rates than the national average. Sylhet division has the highest rate (42.7%)
Children wasted (12-59 months), %	8.55% in 2017-18	Four divisions (Sylhet, Barisal, Mymensingh and Dhaka) have higher children wasting rates than the national average. Sylhet division has the highest rate (10.4%)
Maternal mortality rate, per 1,000 live births	1.69 in 2018	Three divisions (Barisal, Rangpur and Sylhet) have higher maternal mortality rates than the national average. Barisal division has the highest rate (2.55)
Disability rate, %	8.5% in 2018	In total, 34 districts have higher disability rate than the national average. Bandarban has the highest disability rate (20.2%). These are mostly concentrated in south eastern, north western and western zones.

Marginalised communities

Ethnic minorities of hilly region and plain land

They face severe discrimination in terms of lack of legal recognition, physical & sexual violence against ethnic minority women, access to land and resources, forced language assimilation, political underrepresentation, access to health care etc. These communities are most vulnerable in terms of income and employment opportunities, poverty, housing, health, water, sanitation, education and intercommunity confidence. The majority of the ethnic minority people are engaged in agricultural activities. However, due to burning of the trees (*jhum* cultivation), the hill area faces huge environmental damage. Moreover, land becomes incapable of producing crops after *jhum* cultivation has been performed a few times. The status of entrepreneurship among the ethnic minority people is poor, especially in the hilly areas. Though there are many industries that are contributing to the economy of hilly areas, the control of these industries is completely in the hands of the Bangalis. The situation of education is also vulnerable. As these ethnic minority people mainly live in relatively remote areas, they lack the basic infrastructure needed and, in many cases, they are neglected from the mainstream development activities. The ethnic minorities of hilly areas are also severely deprived of health facilities. The Health and Demographic Survey (2018) shows that the highest rate of infant and under 5 mortality prevails in Bandarban; one of the largest inhabitants of ethnic minorities of the hilly region.

According to a 2017 ILO Report, the ethnic minority population consists of 1.6 million people. The Chittagong Hill Tracts (11 ethnic minority groups /'jumma' people or highlanders), northwest (Dinajpur, Northeast of Greater Sylhet region), central north (Mymensingh, Tangail) and South/Southeast (Cox's Bazar, Barisal) of Bangladesh (40+ ethnic minority group) regions are main geographical location for ethnic minorities. Some 80% of the ethnic minority population live in the plain land districts, bordering India, in the north and east of the country and the rest live in the Chittagong Hill Tracts, bordering Myanmar, in the south east of the country.

Annex Table 3: Typology of disadvantaged and lagging community/region in Bangladesh

Tea garden workers	Tea garden workers are socially and economically excluded, and thus have negligible opportunities to find alternative work. Socially, they live and work in the tea gardens and have hardly any interaction with the mainstream population, who also look down on them because they are typically low caste people. The payment system for the tea leaf workers is extremely harsh. The workers have to reach daily targets (typically 23 kg) to meet their daily wage (as low as BDT 85) and have their wages cut if they fall short – many thus work longer hours or rope in family members (e.g. children) to ensure they meet the target. Lack of education and employment opportunities further confine them to the tea gardens. Levels of literacy are very low among tea garden workers. An ILO report (2017) which studied almost 300 workers across ten tea estates, found that only 35 per cent of respondents are literate. Without education and skills, there are few alternative employment opportunities for them. Most tea leaf pickers are women, who face further constraints with regard to mobility and the need to care for their children.	Mostly they are concentrated in Maulvi Bazar, Habiganj, and Sylhet. They are also found in Chittagong, Panchagarh, Brahmanbaria, and Rangamati. One ILO report (2016) mentions that a total of 359,085 people live in tea garden areas, including 89,812 registered workers and 19,592 casual workers.
Cleaners/sweepers	Cleaners/sweepers are generally excluded in public places such as restaurants and shops. They are severely marginalised in terms of education and access to land. A survey conducted by Equity Watch in 2014 suggests that among the cleaner/sweeper, almost half (44.9%) never attended school. Cleaners/sweepers have been historically oppressed by dominant groups in society and the majority is underprivileged and struggle for job opportunities. Like other caste affected communities, cleaner/sweeper in Bangladesh are often forced to undertake specific types of labour as a consequence of their assigned caste status and are most commonly associated with the profession of 'jat sweepers' or 'horijons'. As a result of their limited access to employment, cleaners/sweepers almost exclusively work in 'service sector' performing unclean jobs in urban areas such as street sweeping, manual scavenging and burying dead bodies. Many cleaners/sweepers are stigmatised as a result of their profession and experience isolation and social exclusion	The cleaners/sweepers have been mostly living on railway land for generations. They are mostly concentrated in the north western region of Bangladesh mainly in Joypurhat, Nilphamari, Bogra and Dinajpur. As per Rahman (2016), available estimates suggest that the total number of cleaner/sweeper would be around 3.5 to 5.5 million.

Annex Table 3: Typology of disadvantaged and lagging community/region in Bangladesh

	within the Hindu community, Cleaner/sweeper population remains especially marginalised and subject to discrimination not only by the majority population but also by more affluent, higher-caste Hindus who may, for example, exclude them from certain rituals and from shared spaces such as temples, restaurants and markets. The majority of cleaner/sweeper are landless and their houses are often located in abandoned fields, on khas (government owned) land near roads or pastures. Cleaners/sweepers face widespread poverty and food insecurity and are subjected to land grabbing, violence and forced conversion.	
Landless peasants and agricultural day labourers	Agricultural labourers have been historically living in poverty. Vulnerability among them is closely associated with insecurity of employment and seasonality of demand. Around 18 per cent of the agriculture workers live in extreme poverty (HIES, 2016) which is the highest among all occupations in Bangladesh. In terms of other indicators of well-being, agricultural labourers are also in the worst situation amongst various occupational groups. Data from HIES (2016) indicate that the head of household as well as other adult members of agricultural labour households have, on average, less education compared with those in other occupations. In fact, it is lack of these resources that push these workers to become agricultural labourers. Moreover, the difference among households' ability to improve these endowments explains why poverty incidence in this group is so high.	As per LFS (2016), Rangpur and Rajshahi division have the highest number of population primarily involved with agriculture. This indicates north western region have more peasant farmers than other regions. Moreover, Rangpur division has the lowest agricultural wage rate among all divisions and Gaibandha offers the lowest wage to the agricultural workers.
Transgender community	They are socially and economically marginalised, excluded from housing, adequate medical and educational facilities, employment, exclusion from a number of government services, They also face violence, harassment and physical abuse on a regular basis. Although the government has recognised transgender as the 'third gender', this recognition does not ensure the social acceptance of these people. They	The Department of Social Welfare survey in 2013 shows that there are about 10,000 transgender people in the country. They are found in all districts but mostly concentrated in Dhaka city due to better opportunities of earning. In Dhaka city they are mostly concentrated in Old Dhaka and Mirpur.

Annex Table 3: Typology of disadvantaged and lagging community/region in Bangladesh

	cannot study in schools as the fellow students and the teachers do not treat them well; they do not get jobs because of the sexual orientation and lack of education. Even the jobs that do not require literacy are not offered to transgender as the employers and other workers cannot approve of their presence at the workplaces. They do not get medical facilities as the doctors and staffs feel uncomfortable to serve them and sometimes maltreat them. According to Global Information Society Watch 2015 report, transgender people in Bangladesh face extreme discrimination when it comes to government services such as health, housing and education, as well as in areas such as employment and immigration. Moreover, sexual violence against the third gender community is often brutal, and occurs in public spaces, and public service areas such as police stations and prisons.	
Commercial sex workers	The main concerns of this community are: housing (constant fear of eviction), inaccessibility in law and social practice, health care, alternative employment opportunity and sex trafficking. The sex workers find it extremely difficult to access their human and fundamental rights. The structural violence further aggravates discrimination in their lives. It creates a fertile ground for social exclusion and denial of rights. As a result of their inaccessibility in law and social practices, sex workers face difficulties accessing health care, housing, and supplementary employment opportunities.	According to SWASA (2016), there are almost 200,000 sex workers working in Bangladesh in 2016. There are 14 official Brothels in Bangladesh; concentrated in Dhaka, Khulna, Faridpur, Tangail, Rajbari, Jessore, Kandipara, Mymensingh, and Sylhet.

Annex Table 3: Typology of disadvantaged and lagging community/region in Bangladesh

Environmental refugees

Poor people in ecologically fragile areas such as coastal districts, haor and char areas, river bank erosion areas, barind areas

The ecologically fragile areas have some common vulnerability such as livelihood difficulties, lack of access to safe drinking water, health and sanitation and housing problems and lack of proper infrastructure. In barind areas, sudden weather changes in recent years is increasing the frequency of diarrhoea, fever, cough, flux and skin diseases, malnutrition especially among children. The haor region gets inundated for several months, having serious implication for the agriculture sector, health, and food security of the people in the region. The southern coastal areas have been experiencing frequent cyclones in the recent years.

The southern coastal areas and northeast haor basin are the most ecologically fragile zones in Bangladesh followed by northwest drought-prone areas. The southern coastal areas have been experiencing frequent cyclones in the recent years. In 2007, the cyclone SIDR severely affected Bagerhat, Barguna, Patuakhali and Pirojpur districts and moderately affected eight districts Khulna and Barisal divisions. After a couple of years, cyclone 'AILA' again affected the southern coastal region with highest severity in Satkhira and Khulna districts.

Other excluded communities are traditional fisher folk, religious minority, artisans, chronically ill poor people, rural poor particularly women, homeless and unemployed and their families, persons with physical and mental disabilities, and poor female-headed households.

Source: Authors' Compilation from BBS: HIES 2016, SVRS 2018, LFS 2016, DHS 2018

The background of the image is composed of various geometric shapes, primarily triangles, in shades of blue and white. These shapes are arranged in a way that creates a sense of depth and movement, with some shapes appearing to overlap others. The colors range from a deep, dark blue to a light, almost white blue. The overall effect is a modern, abstract design.

4

Socioeconomic Analysis of Marginalised Community

Selected Plain land Ethnic and Transgender Community

While no firm estimates are available, some figures suggest that there live about 25 to 30 million marginalised people in Bangladesh having diverse categories including cultural identities, races and ethnicities. These groups are mostly victims of rights violation such as violence, discrimination, vandalism, threats and other socioeconomic injustices. They are also victims of hostile socio-political conditions. Their employment opportunities are limited, livelihoods are fragile and social identity and status is low. Often institutions mandated to protect the rights of every citizen do not operate equitably for these groups.

Despite some positive changes during the last few decades, these groups remain mostly ignored by the policy makers, politicians and the mainstream populations. Women in these groups also face additional marginalisation and have little recourse to access education, socioeconomic opportunities or social justice. The goal of the Poverty Watch Report is to gather evidence to highlight their socioeconomic and human rights situation and bring their situations to the attention of the policymakers, development analysts and the general public to influence equitable policy formulation and their more effective implementation in Bangladesh.

In the Poverty Watch Report 2022, two specific disadvantaged population groups have been covered for review and analysis: (i) Plain land Ethnic Communities who live in three administrative divisions of Bangladesh—Rajshahi, Rangpur and Mymensingh; and (ii) the members of Transgender Community. These two are distinct communities that experience discrimination and social, economic, political and cultural exclusion because of unequal power and socioeconomic relationships in society.

As well as individual interviews, the research for this study involved focus group discussions (FGDs) and individual observations allowing for qualitative analysis of socioeconomic life of the target communities. Ethnographic methods were adopted to gather firsthand knowledge and information through the application of different tools and techniques. The information collection techniques included rapport building through initial contact, participant observation, surveys with structured questionnaires, ethnographic interviews with open-ended questionnaire and collection of genealogies in order to understand the processes and dynamics of socioeconomic changes at both individual and community levels. Key informant interviews (KIIs), case studies, informal discussions and visual methods using video and photography were also applied for the study. Secondary data and information were sourced from different books, journals, statistical reports of relevant government organisations and other institutions accessing through the internet and libraries. Online journals and books have also been used as an important source of secondary data and information.

Socioeconomic Analysis of Marginalised Community

Plain land ethnic communities

However, all research is confronted with both difficulties and limitations. The present study is no exception. Difficulties and limitations were faced at different stages of this study, including in the selection of the study areas, contacting the research participants and getting their informed consent, securing resources and collating quality data and information. However, the Research Team was able to overcome many of these limitations with spontaneous assistance from InM's partner NGO-MFIs who have their branches in the selected study locations along with microfinance related programmes. In particular, Padakhep Manabik Unnayan Kendra (PMUK) in Netrokona, Bangladesh Extension Education Service (BEES) in Dinajpur, Integrated Development Foundation (IDF) in Rajshahi provided the Team with assistance to undertake the required activities and collect quality information.

Plain land ethnic communities

Since the ancient times, many tribal communities have settled in the plain lands that now comprise Bangladesh. Most of these tribal people are landless and belong to different groups like Santal, Oraon, Munda, Malo, Mahali, Khondo, Bedia, Bhumij, Kole, Bhil, Karmakar, Mahato, Muriyar, Musohor, Pahan, Paharia, Rai, Sing, Turi and others who live in Rajshahi, Dinajpur, Rangpur, Gaibandha, Naogaon, Bagura, Sirajganj, Chapainawabgonj and Natore districts of Rajshahi and Rangpur divisions. In Mymensingh, Tangail, Netrokona, Jamalpur and Sherpur districts of Mymensingh division, there are Garo, Hajong, Mandi, Koch, Barman, Dalu, Hodi, Banai and Rajbangshi and other communities. These communities have their own distinct identities, unique languages, separate culture and food habit. Traditionally, the livelihoods of these plain land indigenous groups are based on their access to the surrounding natural environment and its resources.

For official statistical information about ethnic communities in Bangladesh, one has to depend on the Population Census Reports of Bangladesh Bureau of Statistics (BBS). Since the Reports of Population Census of 2001 and 2011 do not provide accurate and separate demographics on the ethnic communities, the summary details from the 1991 Population Census and Preliminary Report of 2022 Population Census are shown in Table 4.1.

Table 4.1: Ethnic population in Bangladesh

Table 4.1: Ethnic population in Bangladesh

Ethnic community	Population Census	
	2022	1991
Plain land ethnic communities		
Santal	129,049	202,744
Oraon	85,846	11,296
Bunai	2,851	13,914
Koch	13,702	12,631
Garo	76,846	68,210
Hajong	7,996	11,417
Harijon	...	1,132
Khasi	12,421	13,412
Mahato	19,271	3,534
Manipuri	22,978	24,902
Munda	60,190	2,112
Paharia	8,801	1,853
Rajbangshi	...	5,444
Rakhain	11,195	16,932
Uria	...	2,481
Kora	816	...
Kondo	1,898	...
Kol	3,822	...
Kharia	3,099	...
Kharoar	312	...
Gonju	4,137	...
Gorait	2,727	...
Gurkha	100	...
Dalu	386	...
Turi	3,792	...
Teli	2,082	...
Patro	3,100	...
Baraik	3,444	...
Barman	44,657	...
Bagdi	12,092	...
Bedia	7,207	...
Vil	95	...
Bhuimali	1,930	...
Bhumij	9,664	...
Malo	14,771	...
Mahali	6,614	...
Mushor	4,600	...
Lohar	3,418	...
Rajoar	2,327	...
Shobor	1,980	...
Hudi	1,503	...
Ho	223	...
Plain land Total	591,942	392,014
Ethnic communities in the Chittagong Hill Tracts (CHT)		
Bawam	...	6,978
Sak	...	2,127
Chakma	483,299	239,417
Khyang	4,826	1,950
Khumi	3,780	12,341
Lusai	380	662
Marma	224,261	142,334
Mro	52,455	3,227
Murong	...	22,178
Pankhoa	1,857	3,227
Tonchonga	45,972	19,211
Tripura	156,578	61,129
Chak	3,077	...
Bom	13,193	...
CHT total	989,678	514,781
Other ethnic communities		
Other ethnic communities, both in the plains and CHT	68,538	261,747
Total	1,650,158	1,168,542

Source: BBS, Population Census 1991 and Preliminary Report of Population and Housing Census 2022

Plain land ethnic communities

Box 4.1: Plain land ethnic communities in Bangladesh

Table 4.1 shows that the total number of ethnic minority population has increased by more than 41 per cent between 1991 and 2022 from 1.17 million to 1.65 million. Over the same period, the number of people of plain land ethnic communities has also increased.

However, it is important to note that the penetration of the market economy and degradation of the environment due to unsustainable exploitation of natural resources over time have significantly disrupted their livelihoods. Moreover, these ethnic communities, being marginalised, mostly live in resource-poor and food-insecure fragile locations due to encroachment of their lands by the mainland communities making them a part of the ultra-poor. It is estimated that more than 80 per cent of the ethnic population still live in the rural areas and depend on agriculture and natural resources for their survival.

These tribal societies are characterised by interactions of their unique social, institutional, technological and economic arrangements through which the community seeks to enhance their materials and social well-being. In the process, there is always an interaction between the specific environment in which the community lives and their practices that sustain their livelihoods. More importantly, the natural environment surrounding the people provides several goods, services and amenities to these groups.

The exact number of tribal people in Bangladesh is difficult to estimate due to practical problems. The Bangladesh Khudra Nregosthi Sankskriti Prothithan Ain 2010 mentions that there are 27 different tribal groups spread out across Bangladesh, mostly in the north, north-west and north-east, and south-east regions of the country.

Box 4.1: Plain land ethnic communities in Bangladesh

According to the preliminary report of the Population and Housing Census 2022, there are 1.65 million people belonging to the ethnic minority groups in Bangladesh. They constitute around 1.00 per cent of Bangladesh's total population. There are two broad categories of ethnic minorities in Bangladesh: (i) groups that reside in the CHT in the southeastern Chattogram division; and (ii) groups that reside in the northern divisions, often referred to as plain land ethnic groups.

While the indigenous and tribal communities living in the CHT, Sylhet and Netrokona regions are relatively well-known, the ethnic minorities living in the country's plain land are less visible. Their skin colour is dark, but their overall complexion resembles that of the mongoloid stock. They are found in every corner of Bangladesh, mostly in the northern and south-western parts of the country.

These plain land ethnic minorities have long been living accepting the land as their own. A handful of them arrived in the eastern part of Bengal from West Bengal, its northern part in particular, during the ancient times. A few also migrated from Bihar and Orissa regions. According to ethnologists, the Santals could be considered the earliest inhabitants of the soil. In course of time, other ethnic minority groups joined the Santals in shaping the mainland people's day-to-day life patterns. These communities included Oraons, Mahalis, Pahans, Barmans and a sprinkling of Mundas and Koras.

At present, except a small section of Santals, most of the ethnic groups belong to the marginalised sections of society in Bangladesh. With low literacy and education, they are mostly engaged in agriculture, fishing and handicraft making. Few tribal people have croplands. This plight forces them to work as farm labour in the plots

Plain land ethnic communities

Box 4.1: Plain Land Ethnic Communities in Bangladesh

of the local rich farmers. As a natural rule, they continue to be short-changed, and they are being deprived of their due wages.

Only a handful of these people own tiny crop fields. Ironically, they cannot exert ownership on their ancestral agri- or residential plots. Influential mainlanders invariably grab their croplands. The grabbers do not have any qualms in evicting the indigenous people from their lands. These people can be defined as being the most helpless in Bangladesh.

These plain land ethnic groups are historically, socially and economically marginalised and excluded in all respects; reside in isolated and largely impoverished areas; and receive little attention at the local or national levels.

The ethnic minorities have histories, identities and traditions that are distinct from mainstream Bengali society. Although some ethnic minorities are Muslims or Hindus, many are Christians, Buddhists, and animists or hold a mixture of religious beliefs. They speak their own languages and often have unique cultural practices, including dance, food and drink, clothing and social structure (several are matrilineal). Since many of these ethnic minorities emigrated from China, Burma and India, their facial features and skin colour are often different from Bangalis, making them easily identifiable.

In Bangladesh there were more than 400,000 ethnic households in 2004, spread over in about 11,000 villages (wards) and constituted about 1.5 per cent of total population of the country. These ethnic groups can be identified in a particular geographical area by the presence of the following traits/characteristics in a varying degree: (i) a close attachment to ancestral territories and natural resources in the area; (ii) language often different from the national language (Bangla); (iii) presence of customs and primarily subsistence-oriented production; and most importantly (iv) self-identification and identification of others as members of a distinct cultural group. In fact, social and cultural identity distinct from the dominant society makes them vulnerable to being disadvantaged in the development process.

On the other hand, ethnic groups have been identified as indigenous population groups by the Bangladesh Bureau of Statistics (BBS); and BBS identified 30 indigenous population groups in Bangladesh in the 1991 census. They are from different ethnic communities and commonly identified as representatives of different tribes and the Bangladesh Population Census identified them as Tribal people. The distribution of different indigenous population groups by division is shown in Table 4.2.

Table 4.2: Location of ethnic peoples' concentration in Bangladesh

Transgender community

Table 4.2: Location of ethnic peoples' concentration in Bangladesh

Location of Ethnic population (EP)	Predominant EP group	Share in total EP, %
Plain land		
59%		
Rajshahi Division: Naogaon, Rajshahi, Chapainawabganj and Joypurhat districts	Santal, Munda, and Oraon	20
Rangpur division: Rangpur and Dinajpur districts	Santal, Munda, and Oraon	16
Sylhet division: Moulavibazar and Habiganj districts	Khasia, Manipuri, Patro, Garo, and Tripura	8
Dhaka Division: Madhupur Area	Garo/Mandi	7
Barisal Division: Patuakhali district	Rakhain	2
Khulna Division: Sundarbans	Munda	2
Chittagong division: Cox' Bazar district	Rakhain	4
Hills		
41%		
Chittagong division: Chittagong Hill Tracts districts	Chakma, Marma, and Tripura	41
Total		100

Source: BBS, Statistical Yearbook of Bangladesh 2008

Out of about 1.5 per cent of the national population, there are about 41 per cent of the country's total ethnic people who live in three CHT districts--Rangamati, Bandarban and Khagrachari. There is a high concentration of ethnic groups in North Bengal (Rajshahi and Rangpur divisions) which covers about 36 per cent of the ethnic population which is dominated by Santals.

Transgender community

The term 'transgender' was first used in the 1970s to denote individuals whose individual characteristics falls around in the range of 'transvestite', who sporadically turns into the attires of the so called other sex and 'transsexuals', who has completely changed genitals for the sake of the membership of another gender which was not assigned at birth. In the Indian sub-continent, the cultural definition recognises hijra as neither man, nor woman. However, hijras mostly identifies themselves as women in behaviour and attitude in the Bangladeshi culture.

From the ancient time, transgender people have existed in the world as stigma for society and their family. They were considered as a curse with abnormality so that the society was not willing to consider the transgender as human being (Human Rights Watch 2018). They have been killed, abused, treated brutally and identified as criminals in criminological views.

After the Second World War, concerns about human rights issues became popular irrespective of race, sex or religion; and from the human rights perspective, equal treatment of all genders developed and changed the mindset of people across all countries to accept transgender people as human beings. In 1948, United Nation's General Assembly adopted the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR, General Assembly Resolution 217A) to ensure and protect the fundamental human rights universally. It

Transgender community

declares a born free and equal rights and dignity of all human being.

In undivided India, transgender persons had been a part of society. There was historical evidence of recognition of “third sex” (popularly known as hijras) or persons not confirm to male or female gender in ancient India. The concept of “tritiyaprakriti” or “napumsaka” had been an integral part of the Hindu mythology, folklore, epic and early Vedic and Puranic literatures. Hijras played a famous role in the royal courts, particularly in the Ottoman empires and the Mughal rule in Medieval India.

With the onset of colonial rule from the 18th century, the situation changed drastically for the hijras. In the second half of the 19th century, the British colonial administration vigorously sought to criminalise the hijra community and to deny them the civil rights. The Criminal Tribes Act 1871 included all hijras who were concerned in kidnapping and castrating children and dressed like women to dance in public places. This pre-partition history deeply influenced the vulnerable circumstances of hijras in contemporary India and Bangladesh as well.

Since the beginning, hijras of Bangladesh live a hostile and disadvantageous life due to social stigma and non-acceptance. As their families get to know about their physical changes, they seldom live with their families. Normally, none is willing to accept them as tenants, as employees, and as students. Consequently, most of them leave their families and live with the transgender community in designated areas. In fact, different sexual minority groups, such as lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender (LGBT) groups in Bangladesh, show the stigmatisation and social exclusion of the transgender people. The LGBT rights seem way too tabooed and paradoxical in Bangladesh.

According to the Preliminary Report of the Population and Housing Census 2022, the total number of hijra persons in Bangladesh is 12,629 of whom 6,283 live in rural areas and the rest 6,346 in urban areas.

Hijras or the transgender in Bangladesh face the challenges of having equality and social inclusion, although the government has recognised them as third gender in 2013. The Constitution of Bangladesh proclaims that the state shall not discriminate against any citizen on grounds only of religion, race, caste, sex or place of birth (A. 27). As a citizen, the transgender has the right to enforce the laws for inheriting their parental property, taking minimum standard education and working and living in a decent environment.

Although the Constitution of Bangladesh provides that all citizens are equal before the law, the paradoxical social structure precludes them from availing their rights. As a consequence, they persist at the edge of society; as they are usually precluded by the family members to own their parental property,¹¹ and accessing prospective opportunities. Further, the group remains unsuccessful to complete education and develop skills, so that they also remain deprived of their employment rights. Suffering from severe financial crisis, they earn money through begging, extortion, dancing, and

¹¹ In Bangladesh, inheritance of property is governed by personal laws. There is fallacy that rights of the transgender people are not specifically defined. The Succession Act of Bangladesh (Act No. XXXIX of 1925) is applicable for the people who are not followers of Islam, Hinduism or Buddhism. The rules of inheritance are based on gender in these laws. As a consequence, the transgender people are deprived of inheriting their property.

Transgender community

Box 4.2: Official status of hijras

engaging themselves as sex workers for their livelihood. Sometimes, they also get involved in different crimes and illegal activities for earning livelihood.

Despite the fact that their basic human rights are secured under international conventions and treaties and the country's Constitution; being the sexual minority group, they remain grossly neglected in society, whereas they should be treated equally through the enforcement of constitutional and international human rights obligations. In particular, the employability condition of transgender people in Bangladesh is extremely limited including job availability for transgender.

Box 4.2: Official status of hijras

On 11 November 2013, hijras were recognised as a separate gender by the Government of Bangladesh. Under the decision, along with males and females, hijras will be identified as a separate gender on official documents. Preliminary report of the Population Census 2022 shows that there are 12,629 hijras in the country. Despite this, Bangladesh does not have policies outlining measures individuals must undergo to legally change their gender on their official documents, nor is there clarity about who may qualify as a hijra.

In December 2014, the Ministry of Social Welfare invited hijras to apply for government employment. In January 2015, the Ministry of Health issued a memorandum requesting that 'necessary steps are taken to identify hijras by conducting thorough medical check-ups'. These check-ups resulted in hijras having to publicly strip naked and have their genitals touched. Photographs of these check-ups were later released to the media who then claimed that hijras are 'really men' (Human Rights Watch, 23 December 2016). In July 2015, after a hijra witnessed the murder of a secular blogger, and successfully helped in the arrest of the perpetrators, who were Islamic radicals, the Bangladeshi government announced plans to recruit and enlist hijras as traffic police (Dhaka Tribune, 19 May 2015). In April 2019, it was reported that Bangladesh will allow the hijra to cast vote under their proper gender identity, as officials have introduced hijra as a third gender option on voting forms for the first time.

Source: Collected Reports

Data from the FGDs have been analysed using coding procedures. During the meetings, the participants discussed and shared their experiences as well as challenges that they had been facing in trying to improve their livelihoods and access services particularly access to land, economic opportunities, education, product marketing, health services, credit and information. Several key informant interviews (KIIs) were also conducted to get additional information on access to livelihoods and services. The KIIs involved community leaders, teachers, and development and rights activists.

Plain Land Ethnic Communities

Applying any conceptualisation of poverty and deprivations, it can safely be said that the plain land ethnic minorities are some of the poorest and most marginalised population groups in the country. Most importantly, alienation from land is their blatant reality, cultural assimilation with the mainstream is an ever-present threat, and the vast majority of these people fare far below the national average on all counts of socioeconomic wellbeing.

Historically, important factors related to land explain a significant part of the relative impoverishment of the ethnic minorities in the plain lands. These processes have resulted in ethnic minorities being excluded from development intervention, facing ethnic violence, and suffer land dispossession (Barakat et al. 2009). However, the way in which ethnic groups in the plain land lost their lands is unique. In reality, land dispossession is both a result of poverty and a cause of poverty.

For the plain land ethnic minorities in Bangladesh, there are very few laws relating to land. In many ways, the relation to plain land ethnic communities is governed by location and land dispossession (Barakat et al. 2009). The Mymensingh region, for example, was a partially excluded area until 1962 inhabited mostly by Mandi or Garo, Hajong, Koch and Hadi. Since 1950, the number of non-indigenous people living in the area has grown rapidly partly in response to government invitation or patronage (Roy 2009). At present, the majority of the plain land ethnic communities live in small pockets or enclaves scattered among a predominantly Bangali populated area.¹²

However, there is no substantive law for plain land ethnic communities that seek to protect their distinct culture, language or tradition. As a consequence, the plain land ethnic minorities are highly insecure in terms of land-grabbing, threats, and evictions. The eviction of plain land ethnic minorities from their ancestral lands began in the late 1960s, and they now live in small pockets or enclaves dominated by Bangalis. Relations between the plain land minorities and the Bangalis tend to be discriminatory and exclusionary (Dhamai 2014). Plain land ethnic minorities are also affected by Government policy (Roy 2012).¹³

Available information shows that there are other ethnic groups such as Mahato, Gond, Gorait, Malo, Turi, Teli, Bedia, Boraik, Bhumij, Musohor, Mahali, Rajuar, Lohar, Bhil (Vil), Bhuimali, Kormokar, Pahan, Muriar, Rai, Singh, Chai, Jarhi, and Bhuiyan in Rajshahi and Rangpur divisions; Bagdi and Boraik in Khulna division; Banai and Hodi in Mymensingh division; Khond, Patro, Shobor, Ho, Korha, Kharia,

¹²The East Bengal State Acquisition and Tenancy Act of 1950 is the only major law for regulating the administration of land in the areas inhabited by the plain land ethnic minorities. Section 97 (1) (2) of the Act restricts the transfer of lands of 'aboriginal castes and tribes' to any other than '(aboriginals) domiciled or permanently residing in Bangladesh'. The other law relating to plain land indigenous peoples is the Drugs and Alcoholic Substances Control Act 1990 that exempts 'tribals'-both in the plains and in the CHT-along with tea estate labourers and the castes of 'Muchi' (cobbler), 'Methor' (sweeper) and 'Dom' (fisher-people or cremation ground cleaners) from criminal prosecution for consuming traditionally brewed or distilled alcoholic beverages.

¹³Some examples in which the ethnic minorities have lost out because of government directive include the 'eco-park' project in the Garo/Mandi-inhabited Madhupur forest area, the 'national park' project in the Khasi-inhabited parts of Maulvibazar district, and the eviction of Santal people in Dinajpur district in the name of 'social forestry' (Chakma and Maitrot, 2016).

Plain Land Ethnic Communities

and Assam in Sylhet division, and Ghorkha in CHT region.

Traditionally, the ethnic peoples living in the study locations have occupancy rights on the homestead. But, customary land rights acquired from the Zamindari era as passed down from generation to generations are often not recognised since only legal documents are accepted. Thus, lands belonging to the ethnic peoples have often been declared as 'khas' lands or state lands or some are classified as reserve forests, eco-parks, and others.

Under the government policy to distribute Khas lands to the landless people, the ethnic people of the plain land are entitled to get lease on the lands to live or for cultivation since they are landless. Although a few of them have got entitlements of khas land, most of these people have very limited scope of accessing directly and easily for applying and completing the formalities relative to the landless people of the mainstream community. As such, the khas land distribution policy may be reviewed to give priority and special preference for the ethnic communities so that it becomes easier for them to access khas lands especially in locations where they live.

Similarly, while planning to establish echo park and introduce social forestry programmes, specific focus has to be given on the issue of displacement of ethnic communities from their ancestral home and create opportunities to integrate them as participants and partners in the programmes.

In the past, there had been several episodes of their land dispossession periods and processes:

- i Out migration during partition of India in 1947 and 1965 war between India and Pakistan when communal tension increased. On their return, they found that some of their lands had been grabbed by the Bengalis and some lands had been declared as enemy property by the government;
- ii Migration during the liberation war in 1971 and, on return to independent Bangladesh, many of them could not get back their land. Some of their lands were declared as vested property by the government while many others lost due to encroachment by Bengalis;
- iii A continuous in-built social process of forcible land grabbing by the Bangali vested interest groups having close contact with local politicians and unscrupulous government officials resulting in forcible eviction using terror and threat;
- vi Serious problems in retaining possession over their lands since, although these communities live in specific locations for generations, many of them do not possess any legal documents on ownership and no government has properly acknowledged the traditional land rights systems of these communities;
- v Declaring their traditionally occupied and used land as khas land including reserve forests without consultation with these peoples and proper land surveys where these peoples had been living. As a consequence, they have faced eviction during implementation of social forestry programmes in different parts of North Bengal;
- vi Most of the ethnic peoples do not have functional literacy; and often they become victims of frauds. They lose land due to differences between verbal agreements and written ones in purchase/sale of lands, and being ignorant about land related laws, rent, and land tax, they become victim of substituting the name of one tenant in place of another in the rent roll leading to loss of land.

Plain Land Ethnic Communities

The Mandi community

The above shows that various processes are in operation that results in the dispossession of land by the ethnic peoples living in the plains. This systematic socioeconomic deprivation forces these people to live in perpetual poverty and deprivations.

Moreover, the recovery process of dispossessed land by the plain land ethnic peoples is a complex and arduous task for them. Many had made attempts to recover lost lands and had gone for land litigation seeking justice and sought local influential people's support to get back their lands, but only a few succeeded. Since most of these people have little resources and links with local influential people, they have little capacity to fight the injustices in the absence of personal insecurity and lack of resources. Under the prevailing socioeconomic structure which is highly unequal and biased against these disadvantaged population groups, the ethnic households who lost their lands and other assets have little incentives to fight for justice, and in the process, they become poorer and more marginalised.

Available studies identify low economic opportunities, specific geographic locations, exclusion, deprivation and dispossession of lands as the main drivers of poverty among the ethnic minorities in Bangladesh (Barakat et al. 2009; Kamal et al. 2001). Among ten plain land ethnic communities in Sylhet and Mymensingh regions, 60 per cent of the indigenous people are reported to be absolute poor compared with only 39.5 per cent of rural Bengalees. Hardcore poverty among plain land indigenous peoples is also significantly higher (24.6 per cent) than the hardcore poverty (17.9 per cent) in rural Bangladesh (Barakat et al. 2009). Poverty levels vary among different ethnic groups as well; with the Oraon, Santal, Pahan and Khasia communities in the plain land suffering from more severe forms of poverty than the Hajong, Garo and Rakhain communities among the plain land ethnic minorities (Barakat et al. 2009).

In the present study, primary information on plain land ethnic minorities was collected through FGDs/KIIs from three districts—Dinajpur, Netrokona and Rajshahi. In Dinajpur, the ethnic minorities are: Santal and Mal Paharia; while in Netrokona, three groups—Garo, Hajong and Mandi—are covered. In Rajshahi, the groups covered include: Santal, Oraon and Munda.

The Mandi community

Mandis are generally known as 'Garo', but they call themselves 'Mandi'. In their 'A'tchik' dialect 'Mandi' means 'human being'. Mandi is one of the largest marginalised ethnic communities with a total Mandi population of 64,280 (Bangladesh Population Census 1991). According to the Preliminary Report of the 2022 Population Census, the total number of Garo population in Bangladesh is 76,846. Even though the Mandis are Christian, their cultural values are still distinctive. Cultural values include community, joy, peace, celebration of life, honesty, and living in the presence of God.

The Mandi community

Box 4.3 : Plight of Parvati and the Mandis

Box 4.3 : Plight of Parvati and the Mandis

Parvati (not her real name), a resident of a remote village in Durgapur of Netrokona district, tells her enduring story of hardship and struggles since her early days. Parvati is a strong woman with vision. She is a Mandi -- a matriarchal tribal society and a Christian by faith. In Mandi society, although the property rights are held by women, but the land is shared amongst brothers and sisters. Parvati is 52, and her daughter goes to a college in Durgapur. Her husband works at a poultry farm near Comilla.

Parvati was fortunate to complete her primary and secondary education in Durgapur; afterwards she worked in a factory in Savar EPZ for eight years. When her mother died, she left the job and came back to her village. Parvati says: "Job opportunities are rare for tribals in nearby villages and we have to struggle for meeting our basic needs. I work as a day labourer in agricultural activities and raise homestead livestock for livelihood. I have very little arable land of my own which is inadequate to meet my family's food and basic needs. I get Tk.500 per day by working as a day labourer but the job is not available every day. On average, I can earn between Tk.200 and Tk.300 per day, but my daily expenditure exceeds Tk.400. Thus, I do not have enough for my living but, tell me, what option I have. I am concerned about my daughter's education and her future. I do not want my daughter to share the same fate like me".

Parvati describes her social condition as more or less similar as the local Bengali poor people. The tribal people are not harassed by the local community. They can avail local opportunities, but what they lack most are education, skills knowledge and information. Besides, their land holdings are very small. Most of them use some khas land for living and agricultural activities; but they are afraid they might lose the land any time. Parvati says: "I wish I have a pond where I can cultivate fish. But I don't have the money. We cannot save money in the banks as our savings are very low, we do not have the knowledge about banking facilities, and we have to travel long distances to go to banks. Some of our people save in MFI. I, along with some others in our community, have taken a loan from the MFI for repairing our houses, farming, and raising homestead livestock. But this is not enough. We need support from the government or the NGOs for educating our children".

Parvati says that one MFI used to run different programmes related to education, health, and skill development for the community but this does not exist anymore. The NGOs now operate microfinance programme only. Social activities are seldom undertaken; although the community lives in poor social conditions.

Regarding Covid-19 pandemic, Parvati holds that although the pandemic has hardly affected the Mandi community in Durgapur, but their job availability had significantly declined due to the lockdown. They are yet to come back to the pre-Covid situation. The community has been vaccinated with all three doses. The present price hike of food and other necessities has put the community in a very precarious situation. Parvati says: "In our locality, about 1,800 Mandi and Garo people live. There are hardly 25 people who are relatively better off. All others are poor and struggle to survive. During the pandemic, we got only 5 kg of rice per family from the government which was inadequate to survive even for 3-4 days".

It appears that the tribal community of Durgapur is fighting to change their socioeconomic conditions and improve their living standards. They lack capabilities and equal opportunities. They need access to education, health and nutrition services, skill training and employment especially in formal activities. Parvati says that the government and the NGOs should take targeted initiatives for them in these areas. Most of the community members face difficult living conditions, including poor housing, unsafe drinking water and insecurity. Parvati holds: "We face poverty as the main problem. Because of that, we can't get good education. Those who are slightly more educated have a job; they can educate their children even if it is only slightly more than themselves. But the others can't".

Parvati and her community live in a remote area and are socioeconomically and politically marginalised. The group faces prejudices, difficult living conditions, failing government services and land dispossession. With limited representation at the local and national level, the ethnic group has few voices to advocate on their behalf.

The Mandi community

Box 4.3 : Plight of Parvati and the Mandis

The Hajong community

The International Day of World's Indigenous Peoples is observed on 9 August of each year to protect the rights of indigenous people worldwide, as on 23 December 1994, the UNGA has decided that this day should be observed on 9 August each year during the International Decade of the World's Indigenous Peoples.

The Constitution of Bangladesh ensures affirmative action for indigenous peoples and prohibits discrimination inter alia on grounds of race, religion or place of birth, Article 23A of which provides, “the State shall take steps to protect and develop the unique local culture and tradition of the tribes, minor races, ethnic sects and communities”. It also spells out in Article 28 (4), “nothing in this Article shall prevent the State from making special provision in favor of women or children or for the advancement of any backward section of citizens”.

Though the indigenous people retain the economic, social, cultural and political characteristics that are different from those of the dominant societies in which they live, a major portion of them continues to be deprived of the basic socioeconomic rights. Bangladesh has acceded to a number of global human rights treaties, but effective implementation of those treaties through taking legislative, administrative and judicial measures has to be ensured.

Source: FGD, Durgapur, Netrokona, 2022

Mandi women and men usually work as day labourers, in agricultural operations and livestock rearing through which they earn about Tk. 300 per day. Their education levels are low with some formal education at primary or secondary levels. The Mandis, in general, takes food thrice daily although most of them face food shortages during 3-4 months in a year. They usually live in houses made of mud/thatched materials and do not have access to safe drinking water. Access to hygienic sanitation facilities is also poor. During sickness, they mostly use traditional medicine or visit local quacks as the local health clinics are usually too far off and lack of finance.

The Mandis face multiple deprivations including no/little income, high volatility in income and inadequate/low paid informal jobs. In addition, they do not have good education and skills and suffer from frequent diseases and ill health. Inadequate access to housing and basic services and lack of government support programmes and legal and social services constrain their livings. The community members always live in poverty due mostly to lack of earning opportunities, no ownership of land and other productive assets and no education and skills to pursue good jobs. Some of them are members of NGO-MFIs through which they get saving and credit facilities. They also access loans through informal channel especially to meet unexpected emergencies. A few of them have received food support under the Vulnerable Group Feeding (VGF) programme.

The Hajong community

The Hajong community is mostly scattered in the wide and plain switch of land in the foothills in greater Mymensingh and Sylhet districts of Bangladesh. According to the Preliminary Report of the 2022 Population Census, the total number of Hajong population is 7,996. Their presence is more visible in Komlakanda and Durgapur upazilas of Netrokona district and in Dhobaura upazila of Mymensingh district.

The Hajong community

The Hajong as an organised kin group lives in hamlets, a small settlement comprising five to twenty households which are considered to be the primary socioeconomic unit of Hajong life. The Hajongs are basically a farming community. They also have developed indigenous knowledge system of their own in practicing the special type of utilisation pattern of forest products. Like most other indigenous communities, the Hajongs live on agriculture since ancient times. Although the community was self-reliant through farming, at present their economic condition is extremely poor. Bangla is the main language of the Hajongs living in Bangladesh. Their children receive education at school in Bangla and communicate with other children in the same language. However, Hajongs have their own language which they use among themselves. Since they do not have any alphabet, they use the letters of Asamiya. It is observed that the Hajong children mostly attend schools up to primary or mostly secondary level after which they drop out from education mostly due to financial constraints and unfavourable environments in schools.

Their houses of four-thatched roofs have different varieties and in their homestead, they have different houses such as: dwelling house, separate house for cooking, cowshed, courthouse, etc. The Hajongs are primarily non-vegetarian and rice is their staple food. They are fond of fish. They rear domestic animals to cultivate land and for milk. The Hajongs are Hindu traditionalists by religion, and they separately perform some of their ancient customs.

The Hajong society is patriarchal. Sons inherit family property, and daughters receive nothing. Hajongs maintain a joint-family, though nowadays they are becoming more inclined to nuclear family. Their occupations mostly involve working as daily labourer, farming and livestock rearing. The average daily earning is between Tk. 200 and Tk. 300.

Rice is the staple food of the Hajong community members; which they take three times in a day. Rice mostly comes from the farmer's own agricultural lands and the local market. Fish mostly comes through fishing in the water bodies in and within the forests. Along with high subsistence orientation, most Hajong households face food shortages at least during 3-4 months in a year. With respect to access to healthcare services, most households report that, in addition to rural health clinics, they also visit village quacks and use traditional medicine during illness mostly due to financial constraints.

Their poverty and deprivation experience is also severe. They report of multiple deprivations with the major ones being little income, income volatility, and inadequate availability and access only to low paid informal jobs mainly due to low level of education and absence of employable skills. Other deprivations that they suffer include: frequent incidence of diseases and ill health; sense of insecurity and subject to violence/crime; inadequate access to housing and basic services; unhealthy living environment; social apathy and absence of adequate social support mechanisms; no access to government support programme and needed legal and social services; and cultural and social exclusion.

According to the self-perception, the people of Hajong community always live in poverty along with lack of earning opportunities and having little or no land and productive assets and possessing low education and skills to pursue productive earning opportunities. They have intentions to persuade community members to get higher education as they realise that lower educational attainment is responsible for low

The Garo community

Family structure and cultural practices

status in society and rejection from society which makes life less dignified and preclude them from getting formal and government jobs which will enhance prestige, dignity and social acceptability.

The Garo community

The 'Garo' community is one of the larger ethnic minority groups living in Bangladesh. Basically, two groups of Garos are found in Bangladesh, namely Achick or Hill Garos who live in thickly clothed forest areas and Lamdani or plain Garos who live at the base of Garo Hill in the greater Mymensingh district. They started living at the Garo hills of Mymensingh where they lived until the 13th century under the 'Garo Empire'. This area of Bangladesh was covered by deep forest which attracted them as they like to live in the hill areas which is also suitable for zoom cultivation (shifting agriculture practiced in the hill areas). The Garo Empire expired with the assassination of the last King Baissa Manda in 1280. Afterwards, they moved to different parts and Garos now live in some hill areas of Mymensingh, Netrokona, Tangail, Gazipur, Sylhet, Sunamganj, Jamalpur and some other places of the country. According to the Preliminary Report of the 2022 Population Census, total number of Garos living in the country is 76,846. Garos hold a distinct cultural tradition in that they have matriarchal family system whereas family structure of mainstream Bangali people is patriarchal.

Under the present study, FGDs and KIs were conducted with the members of Garo community at different locations in Durgapur upazila of Netrokona district. There were an equal number of males and females comprising a total of 30 Garo community members. In terms of age structure, two-thirds belong to the age group 18-49 while the rest are above 50. All of them are married and they mostly live in joint families.

Family structure and cultural practices

According to the traditional values of Garos, there is no scope for the newlywed couple to form a new family. A person is supposed to go to his wife's house after getting married. In some cases, the husband lives permanently in the family of wife and becomes the member of that family. The family of Garos is matriarchal in nature. Women are the head of family and also owner of family property. Apart from enjoying high social status, Garo women occupy significant role in the labour force. Garo women's level of education is higher than their male counterparts'.

Their participation in socio-cultural and economic activities is also greater than male Garos' (Islam et al. 2009). Garo women work outside the family to earn livelihood along with performing domestic duties within the family. Garo families are like an institution of informal education. Family is responsible to provide basic education to the children regarding their own norms, values, religious pursuits, etc. Children learn their own traditional cultural pattern in the family. They also get habituated to practice various religious functions. Families teach children about socially acceptable behaviour and the rituals of Garos.

Occupational characteristics

Occupational characteristics

The main occupation of the Garos living in Bangladesh is agriculture. Most of them are landless. They are sharecroppers. Major portion of Garos earn their livelihood through working as daily labourers. Among the male members, nearly 94 per cent work as day labourers while only 6 per cent are involved in informal jobs. In the case of women members, about one-fifth is involved in petty trade and business, while most others are engaged in informal jobs and household and related activities. Only a very few Garos work at schools, NGOs and are engaged in small-scale businesses.

When the population was sparse and land was covered mostly with forests, Garos used to earn their livelihood through zoom cultivation. But, nowadays, most of them are not interested in zoom cultivation, as it is economically unprofitable, and is also highly labour-intensive requiring hard physical labour. Moreover, there is no available hill-land which is essential to cultivate Zoom. The Garos now mostly cultivate rice as share croppers in rented-in land. Those who are educated, mostly work in government services or in the NGOs. The daily income of most male members is around Tk. 300 while the females earn much less—about Tk. 100 per day. The Covid-19 pandemic did not affect their livelihood much with only a few reporting job losses although all have experienced rising expenses after Covid-19.

In terms of formal education, about 40 per cent among the males have secondary level education and 30 per cent have primary education. Among the females, similar shares are 27 per cent and 47 per cent respectively. The main reasons for their drop outs are their perception that education does not help in improving their livelihoods and inability to meet the required expenses. Only a few of the Garos pursue education up to SSC or HSC levels, but they seek job afterwards and hence are involved mostly in low-paid jobs. Among the Garo community, both husband and wife are involved in economic activities. Female Garos also cultivate land and work as day labourers. In some cases, females work harder than their male counterparts.

There seems to exist a historical reason for the Garos that work against pursuing education for the community. During the end of the 19th century, Christian missionaries came to the Garo hill of Mymensingh for the purpose of propagating Christianity. Apart from propagating Christianity, they also had set up several primary schools in Garo inhabited areas. Since Christian missionaries were able to influence the educated Garos with the ideology of Christianity, many Garos are afraid of educating their children to higher levels.

At present, each Garo community has a primary school run by the Christian missionaries. In addition, Christian missionaries run a few high schools in the Garo inhabited areas. Apart from these schools, there are some government primary schools adjacent to the Garo inhabited areas. Garo children also get the opportunity to receive education from the government schools. That is why primary education is well spread in the Garo community. But higher education is very low among them.

Food and nutrition

Shelter and access to health services

Poverty and deprivations

Food and nutrition

The staple food of Garos includes rice, fish, meat, split peas and vegetables. But dry fish is the most popular food item of Garos. Garos eat meat of different animals. But pork is most attractive to them. During social and religious festivals, pork is served to the guests. Garos usually take meals three times a day. Some of them take bread in the breakfast. Some poor Garos eat potatoes as substitute of rice. The average expenditure of food per family is around Tk, 200 per day. The community members face food shortages during 3-4 months in a year especially during the lean seasons.

Shelter and access to health services

The Garo community mostly lives in mixed type of houses e.g. houses made of mud/thatched materials, tin shed and thatched materials or blanket of mud and tin roof. Only very few can afford semi-pucca or pucca houses. Although they have access to water, most of them do not have hygienic toilet facilities.

In the case of access to health care services, only a small share (about 20 per cent) visit local health clinics, while the majority either take traditional medicine or visit the local quacks. The main reason is their difficulty in meeting medical expenses and, to a certain extent, distant locations.

Poverty and deprivations

In terms of self-assessment, all members consider themselves as living 'always in poverty' or 'living in poverty over generations'. They suffer from multiple deprivations with varying degrees of incidences. In terms of their assessment, no or little income, income volatility and inadequate/low paid informal jobs are their major problems followed by lack of education/skills and government support programme/legal and social services. The other major deprivations include: inadequate access to housing and basic services; unhealthy living environment; frequent incidence of diseases/ill health; sense of insecurity and violence/crime; social apathy/no social support/loneliness; and absence of cultural and social participation. They also suffer from regular incidence of natural calamities including floods and landslides. They consider lack of income earning opportunities as their main cause of poverty followed by lack of ownership of land and other productive assets, and absence of education and employable skills. According to their assessment, nearly 93 per cent of the Garo community members are poor.

During the discussion, all members of the community expressed their belief that their present state of life is not a fate and they intend to change as they are capable of doing so. Further, they believe that the channel for transformation is to pursue education as their lower educational attainment is responsible for low status in society and rejection from society which makes life less dignified.

Social and political participation

The Garo community enjoys a social life which is mostly confined to their own community with not much interaction with the mainstream Bengali community. However, as traditional joint family system of Garos are shifting to small nuclear family and joint families are also unable to maintain their previous roles,

Social and political participation

The Munda community

traditional social culture of Garos has also started changing to a great extent. Nuclear families of educated Garos have developed a different culture which is somewhat similar to the family pattern of mainstream Bengali community. Some Garos live in urban areas and have become accustomed to the urban culture of Bangladesh. Their family culture is getting mixed up with the cultural system of mainstream society.

The Garo people in Bangladesh are a 'left behind community' with little exposure to modern approaches and technologies. They are mainly dependent on agriculture and daily wage labour. Lack of education has also caused many problems for them. Few Garo people have higher education although primary education has spread well among them. The Garos have political participation which is mostly restricted to casting votes in general and local elections. They have very limited financial access. Most of the Garos, however, have access to NGO-MFIs for availing saving and credit services. A large majority of them also access informal credit from local moneylenders. In most cases, informal credit is used for repaying loans, repairing houses and meeting educational expenses. They also use bKash and Nagad services for money transfers.

Garos hold a distinct cultural tradition and different family patterns that is different from the family pattern and cultural tradition of mainstream Bengali people. The special feature of Garo ethnic minority in Bangladesh is their matriarchal family structure. Although Garos have acquired many cultural traits from mainstream Bengali people and ideology of Christianity, many traditional practices are still present in their cultural life.

The Munda community

The Mundas, an ethnic community living mostly in the southwestern and northern parts of Bangladesh, are well known for their cultural diversity in terms of social institutions, tradition, language, customs and rituals. The community has common ancestral beliefs and occupational status and identity. However, the Mundas now face crisis in cultural and ethnic identity with the migration of plain land mainstream people to the Munda settlements forcing them to acculturate with mainstream culture. According to the Preliminary Report of 2022 Population Census, the total number of Munda people in the country is 60,191 of whom 30,427 are females and the rest are males. The Mundas constitute 3.65 per cent of the total ethnic population of the country. In the northern part of the country, the Mundas are distributed over Rajshahi, Naogaon, Jaipurhat, Dinajpur and Bogra districts in the Barind region.

The Munda community

In the Barind region, the Mundas really are not outside of Bengali society; rather they are a group that exists in the Bengali society. Yet they are unlike the Bangali people in their uniqueness, their custom and their livelihood. With expansion of irrigation facilities in the Barind region, widespread intensification of agriculture has resulted in commercialisation of rice agriculture and higher demand for agricultural labourers. This has created more job opportunities for Mundas outside of their own villages in agricultural and other sectors. In the existing power structure of their villages, the majority Bengali cultivators control lands and Munda labourers are more or less dependent on the patronage of the landowners.

The Life cycle of Munda people is full of traditional beliefs and rituals. The rituals and taboos incorporate the individuals in the community. For the present study, participatory meetings and KIIs have been conducted with members of Munda community in Gopalpur and Matikata in Godagari upazila of Rajshahi district. The members included both females and males. The members of Munda community are mostly involved in farming while a few are involved in nonfarm jobs as well. Their average daily income varies between Tk. 300 and Tk. 500. In terms of education, wide variations are observed. While a sizeable portion does not have formal education, others have either primary or secondary education, while a few have higher education as well. Unfavourable school environment, absence of school location in proximity, and financial constraints are the main reasons for drop out at primary and secondary levels.

The Mundas usually have three meals a day with rice as the staple food. They usually take meat or fish 2-3 times per week and normally face shortages of food during 3-4 months in a year. Their houses are usually made of mud and thatched materials and have access to safe drinking water and hygienic toilet facilities. Their access to qualified doctors or healthcare centres is limited and, during illness, they usually visit village quacks, medicine shops and use traditional medicines. The main difficulties in getting modern medical care and medicine are difficulties in accessing due to distant locations and high medical expenses.

Their self-perception points to multiple nature of deprivation that they suffer from including little income; lack of education and skills; income volatility; inadequate and low paid informal jobs; lack of access to government support programmes and legal and social services as well as sense of insecurity and often being subjected to violence and crime; inadequate access to housing and basic services; unhealthy living environment; an environment of social apathy along with absence of social support culminating in loneliness; and exclusion from cultural and social participation in mainstream society. Many of the Mundas consider themselves as always poor while a few are seasonally poor. As per their opinion, the three most important causal factors of their poverty and low income are: absence of earning opportunities, lack of education and skills, and no ownership and access to land and other assets.

In general, the Mundas have limited financial access with formal institutions. Only a few have access to banks and NGO-MFIs for savings and credit facilities. Most of them save informally and borrow from village moneylenders mostly to meet emergencies. The credit from the banks and NGOs was utilised in agriculture and livestock development activities. A few also have access to different financial

The Oraon community

services such as access to payment services, mobile financial services, online banking and agent banking.

A few of the Mundas received government food support under the VGF programme while a few others received microcredit and access to health and education programmes from NGO-MFIs. They identify their lower educational attainment as the main factor responsible for low status in society and rejection from society which makes life less dignified and hence they emphasise on pursuing higher levels of education. They believe that if they can avail formal and government jobs, their prestige and dignity in society will be enhanced along with social acceptability.

The Oraon community

The Oraons are an ethnic community who mostly live in the Barind region of Rajshahi division. According to the Preliminary Report of the 2022 Population Census, there are 85,846 Oraons who live in the country. Oraons are socially and culturally distinct from the Bengali society although they are entangled with the Bengali people as well as people of other ethnic minorities.

In Oraon society, families usually constitute households, although not all members of a family necessarily live together under the same roof or share the same kitchen. Although the household head takes the decisions and works to support all family members, others also contribute to perform household functions both economically and otherwise. This also applies to women headed households. The dwellings of Oraons have specific features. The walls of their houses are usually made of thick mud while the roofs are either made of corrugated tin sheets or straw thatch.

In the past, agriculture was their main economic activity and worked as tenants of local zamindars. After the abolition of zamindari system in 1951, they lost tenant rights to zamindars and worked as sharecroppers. Some Oraons also had their own land. Over time, most of them have lost their land to influential locals and moneylenders; and at present, almost all Oraons are landless and work as day labourers. Oraons supplement their agricultural activities with fishing, craft making and raising livestock. They also involve themselves in petty trading. Some Oraons engage themselves in nonfarm activities as well such as van/rickshaw pulling, barbering, driving vehicles and in construction work. Most of them find it difficult to manage expenses of food, shelter, medical expenses and education. Thus almost all Oraon households lead a life of hardship.

It is observed that more than half of the Oraon population is illiterate. Although the children attend schools, many of them drop out early because of economic hardship, unfavourable attitude towards education of family members, children's lack of interest in schooling, compulsion to get involved in earnings for the family, and absence of educational institution in close proximity. Although most Oraon children attend local primary/elementary school, very few goes to attend secondary schools and colleges.

The Oraon community

Box 4.4: Joblessness of an Oraon

Rice is the staple food of Oraons along with fish, meat, vegetables etc. The well-off Oraons usually take three meals a day, but others can barely consume two meals. The daily income of Oraons who are engaged in wage labour varies over space and season and most labourers cannot work all year round. Usually, their daily income from agricultural labour is only for three months during the two peak agricultural seasons in a year while, for the remaining nine months, some Oraons stay home jobless while others travel to distant places in search of jobs.

Box 4.4: Joblessness of an Oraon

Subash Minji (aged 45, not his real name) lives in Rajshahi district. He is illiterate and has about 10 decimals of homestead land. With no cultivable land, he works as an agricultural day labourer in the rich land owning Muslim farmers. By earning this meagre income which is around Tk. 200 per day, he subsists with his family of three. But he can barely work only for three months during the two agricultural seasons in a year. During the rest of nine months, he mostly remains jobless as there is not enough job opportunities especially for the Oraons. During this Covid-19 crisis, he finds it extremely difficult to manage his family's subsistence.

During most of this time, he survives by searching—gleaning for food including potatoes, eggplants and paddy that are left after harvest in the fields of local Bengali land owners; fishing in nearby ponds and water bodies, hunting for tortoises, rabbits, and rats in neighbouring forests and jungles; and looking for something to eat.

Besides, sometimes he goes to nearby villages and towns looking for odd jobs and earn something for the family. This is a hard life, he believes, and by all means he tries to eke out subsistence. He laments: "Today, we lead a hard life, but life was not so hard in the past. Our economic situation is so harsh; we cannot manage three meals a day. Sometimes, we all starve. We live by hand to mouth. We want to work throughout the year, but there is no job. How can we survive in this situation? If we fall sick, we have nothing in hand and we have to sell our trees or cattle. Or, we have to borrow at high interest rate from the local moneylender".

Source: Case Study

Although many Oraons have now accepted different religions including Christianity, Hinduism, Buddhism and Islam, they still practice many of their age-old beliefs and traditions and common socio-cultural practices which define their identity as Oraons. For example, the membership of a Gotra (clan/lineage) is an important identity marker for the Oraons. Oraon women work hard in the family and the economic sphere of their community. They work in the fields as agricultural labour and perform household work; but Oraon customary law excludes women from land ownership and cannot participate in the religious festivals of the community.

Apart from landlessness and economic crisis, the Oraons face social discrimination and exclusion in the mainstream society. The marginalisation process takes multiple forms including deprivation and dominance of local community leaders and local administration; inadequate government support for the Oraons; and a lack of state assistance and patronage. The Oraons are often discriminated in payment of daily wages for working as agricultural labourers and the Oraon children face discrimination in the schools. The local government institutions (e.g. Union Councils) also discriminate against the ethnic

The Oraon community

The Mal Paharia community

groups in distributing government support and facilities. The Oraons state that they have hardly ever received any support and relief materials e.g. under VGF and elderly and widow allowance programmes of the government.

It appears that the factors that have led to the deterioration of the socioeconomic situation of the Oraons as a minority ethnic group in Bangladesh over time are manifold including land dispossession to the influential landlords and the moneylenders. At present, most Oraons do not have any cultivable land and they manage subsistence by working as agricultural day labourers. This hardly provides them regular work throughout the year. Although borrowing is common among the Oraons, it appears that most Oraons are caught in a permanent cycle of indebtedness', along with a 'cliental relationship' with local moneylenders.

The Oraons have deep resentment against their marginalisation, and seek equal participation in all aspects of Bangladeshi society and economy. They also seek cooperation from the mainstream Bengali community and support and assistance from the government and the NGOs for their socioeconomic advancement. They urge that the development programmes should be formulated in accordance to the priorities and needs of their community and be consistent with their culture and traditions. This should include their resettlement and compensation for illegal grabbing of their land, adequate year round employment opportunities, credit and support for farming and income generating activities, and access to education, health care and social support services. In effect, the Oraons consider themselves as an oppressed community in Bangladesh.

The Mal Paharia community

Mal Paharia (also known as Paharia) is a small ethnic community, very thinly dispersed in northwestern Bangladesh. The Paharias are engaged in cultivation and primitive gathering from forests. Paharias of Bangladesh are one of the two Dravidian-speaking ethnic groups, the other being the Oraons. There is, however, no clear distinction between them. Paharias are divided mainly to two divisions: Sauria (also known as Maler) and Mal. According to the Preliminary Report of the 2022 Population Census, the Pahari/Malpahari population in Bangladesh is 8,801 concentrated mainly in Rajshahi, Dinajpur, Bogra and Pabna districts. For the present study, primary data on Mal Paharia community have been collected from Shohorgachi, Kajirbari and Kalopukur, Borobila in Ghoraghat upazila of Dinajpur district.

In view of their smallness and dispersion, the Paharias in Bangladesh find it difficult to maintain their indigenous identity. They use Bangla in their daily transactions, although they still use Pahari language within the family circle. Under the changing social structure and because of closeness in religious beliefs, most Paharias identify themselves as Hindus. They have their own history, tradition and culture. For a long time they have lived separately. They practice their own custom, belief, language, festival etc.

Traditionally, the Paharia community was dependent on their agricultural land. Agriculture activities were the central livelihood activity in their life. But, over time, they have become landless. The dominant

The Mal Paharia community

Bengali community has taken away most of their land due to different causes. The local people regularly grab their land because they are powerless and belong to the minority community. Local people always harass them and pressurise them to sell their land properties. Occasionally, they were also forced to sell their land due to economic hardships. They also involve themselves in raising domestic animals such as cattle, poultry, pigs etc. for earning supplementary income. Their daily income varies a lot and is between Tk. 200 and Tk. 300 on average.

The Paharia people generally do not have access to education. Those who have converted into Christianity, usually get a chance to become educated. The majority does not have formal education, and only a small share of the Paharia population has education up to the primary level. The Paharia people cannot speak in Bengali well and face problems in communication with others as well as in getting education from the Bengali schools. Many Paharia children avoid schools or are not able to complete primary school due to the language barrier. But the major problem for education is poverty. Due to poverty, most children cannot continue their educational life as the parents have no capacity to meet the expenses of education.

The Paharias take food usually three times a day with rice as the staple food. They can afford to have fish/meat about 2/3 times a week during normal times. On average, the Mal Paharias suffer from inadequate availability of food for 3-4 months in a year when they face very difficult times. Usually, they live in houses made of tin shed and thatched materials. They have access to safe drinking water (e.g. tube wells) but mostly do not have hygienic toilet facilities. During sickness, they cannot afford to visit health clinics or qualified doctors due to location at long distances and lack of affordability to meet medical expenses. They usually go to local traditional quacks or visit pharmacies to get medicine.

Overall, their deprivations are multiple. The Mal Paharias consider inadequate and low paid informal job (mostly wage labour) as their principal source of deprivation followed by little income, income volatility and no education and skills. Other deprivations include: absence of any government support programmes and legal and social services; unhealthy living environment; frequent diseases and ill health; sense of insecurity and subject to violence and crime; inadequate access to housing and basic services; social apathy, absence of social support system and feeling of social loneliness; and exclusion from cultural and social participation in the mainstream society. They also suffer from discrimination in the job market and market transactions. The Mal Paharia community always lives in poverty. Regarding their main causes of poverty, their self-assessment identifies their lack of education and employable skills as the major causal factor followed by lack of earning opportunities and no ownership and access to land and productive assets.

Some members of the community received food support under government programmes (e.g. VGF) and microcredit from NGO-MFIs. Those who have access to microfinance save with the MFIs while others have some informal savings. They do not have any access to mainstream financial institutions (e.g. banks) and mobile financial services.

The Paharias always face discrimination from the local people; and persistence of social discrimination,

The Mal Paharia community

The Santal community

ignorance and negligence of local people has created ever-widening socioeconomic disparities. The Paharia women face various kinds of oppression, both as being females, as belonging to an ethnic community, and as day labourers. They are hard workers but do not get equal wages and face problems both as women and as ethnic people. Usually, the Paharia women work in the fields as day labourers to supplement family income which is inadequate to meet all household expenses. Paharia women face multiple problems, such as safety issues, unemployment problem, harassment at workplace and others. However, the heads of the family (usually the husbands) control the income and are in charge of taking all decisions. Women traditionally have no role in family decisions. Women are also excluded from inheriting and owning any property.

For the Paharias, their distinct physical characteristics, indigenoussness, minority status, cultural difference and poverty are all sources of their problems and socioeconomic discrimination. Although they have been living in these lands for generations, they are ignorant and do not possess any legal documents and they have no knowledge about land-laws and land taxes; hence they lose their lands. The local influential and elite people grab their land on different contexts. As a consequence, they have lost all their lands including their homestead land. Both Paharia males and females now mostly depend on day labour. Sometimes they have to work free because they are staying on other's land. Particularly, Paharia women are harassed by the local people and they are not paid fair wages.

The Paharias believe that their lower educational attainment is responsible for their low status in society and rejection from society which makes life less dignified. They would like to get access to higher education which will help them to get formal and government jobs which will enhance prestige, dignity and social acceptability of their community.

The Santal community

The Santals are one of the major ethnic groups in Bangladesh and mainly live in districts of Rajshahi and Rangpur divisions. The Santals have a historical inheritance of segregation and clash. As Santals live isolated from mainland people, they were tortured and oppressed both by colonial and post-colonial rulers, which led them to launch many resistances. But the fact remains that the Santals are still struggling to uphold their sociocultural tradition and equal rights in society. The Preliminary Report of the Population and Housing Census 2022 shows that the total members of Santal community is 129,049 in Bangladesh which is 7.82 per cent of total ethnic minority population of Bangladesh (BBS, 2022). Total Santal male comprises of 63,640 and total female is 65,409.

In the present study, the situation of the Santal community has been highlighted covering their socioeconomic status, livelihood characteristics, access to finance and cultural features. For primary information, FGDs and KIs were conducted with male and female members of Santal community at different locations in Ghoraghat upazila of Dinajpur district and Godagari upazila of Rajshahi district. There were an equal number of males and females comprising a total of 60 Santal community members. In terms of age structure, among the female members, 80 per cent belong to the age group 18-49 while the rest are above 50; and among the male members, 67 per cent belong to the age group

The Santal community

Family structure and cultural practices

Occupational characteristics

18-49 while the rest are above 50. Among the male participants, 90 per cent are married and among the female participants, 93 per cent are married and the rest of them are single.

Family structure and cultural practices

Male dominance among the Santal families is prominent although the role of women in the family is also very significant. Santal women play a vital role in income generating activities or in earning livelihood or in farming work. After marriage, the bride leaves her family and stays at the groom's house. Santals give 'bride price' which varies across regions.

Among the unique minority groups in Bangladesh, the Santals hold a rich cultural heritage and their language, 'Santali', bears their unique cultural identity. The Santal society is still ruled by traditional Panchayet system. The Santal community is divided in twelve gotras (clans). In common practice, marriage between a man and a woman of the same gotra is forbidden. They are also not allowed to marry outside their tribe. But these rules are not so operational at present. Traditionally, the Santal community maintains a joint family system with strong family bonding with each other. But nowadays both the nuclear and joint family systems are found.

They are very fond of festivities and celebrate many festive occasions around the year. Their year starts with the month of Falgun (approximately, 15 February-15 March). Almost each month or season has a festival celebrated with the pomp of dances, songs and music.

Occupational characteristics

Due to lack of higher education, the Santals barely get any employment opportunity in the formal sector. The main occupations of the Santals living in Bangladesh include farming, working as day labourer, and livestock rearing. Most of the Santal members are involved in multiple occupations for survival. However, the agriculture is the main source of income for Santals as both primary and secondary occupations. Most of them work as day labourers in the agriculture sector. Only a few Santals are involved in petty trade or business. Both Santal men and women are engaged in the labour force. Among the participants of the FGDs, all male participants are involved in the labour force while 87 per cent females are involved in labour. In terms of daily earnings, Santal women earn about half as much as Santal men. The average daily earnings of females in Dinajpur vary between Tk. 201 and Tk. 300 while that for males are between Tk. 301 and Tk. 500. In Rajshahi, similar earnings for females are between Tk. 100 and Tk. 200 while for males the range is between Tk. 301 and Tk. 500. Additionally, although being very hard working along with making significant contribution to the family, Santal women are not allowed to inherit property.

In terms of education, males and females have almost similar levels of education; however, slightly higher percentages of females pursue higher education compared with males. Around 27 per cent of Santals have no formal education. However, the results show significant differences in levels of education across regions. About 33 per cent Santals living in Dinajpur has no formal education, whereas

Occupational characteristics

Food and nutrition

this is 17 per cent in Rajshahi. The secondary school completion rate is 57 per cent in Rajshahi which is only 20 per cent in Dinajpur. However, 20 per cent respondents from Dinajpur have completed higher education, which is 10 per cent for Rajshahi. The government needs to adopt different measures, such as establishing community schools, introducing accelerated learning opportunities for out-of-school children etc. to improve the level of education for the community. Christian missionaries have established schools in and around Santal villages, which are providing huge inspiration to the Santal children to go to schools.

Food and nutrition

The food of Santal people is very simple. Unlike mainland people, they do not use much oil and spices in their food. Rice is the staple food in their diet but the way of cooking and eating rice is different. After the rice is cooked they don't pour out the water from rice instead, they take it whole and it is called 'Da Madi' in Santali, where 'Da' means water and Madi means food. They are fond of green leafy vegetables, fish and meat. They love spinach and eggs of tortoise. They eat meat of chicken, cattle, duck, pork and goat. Squirrels, crabs, tortoises, rabbits, rats, snails and red ants are also found in their menu. 'Hariya', the rice beer is their favourite drink. They make beer from rotten rice and sometimes from palm juice.

Among the respondents most of the families eat fish or meat or other protein food only 1-2 times per week. The average expenditure of food per family is above Tk. 200 per day for 87 per cent respondents and the rest of them spend Tk. 100-200 per day. The community members face food shortages during 3-4 months in a year especially during the lean seasons.

Shelter and access to health services

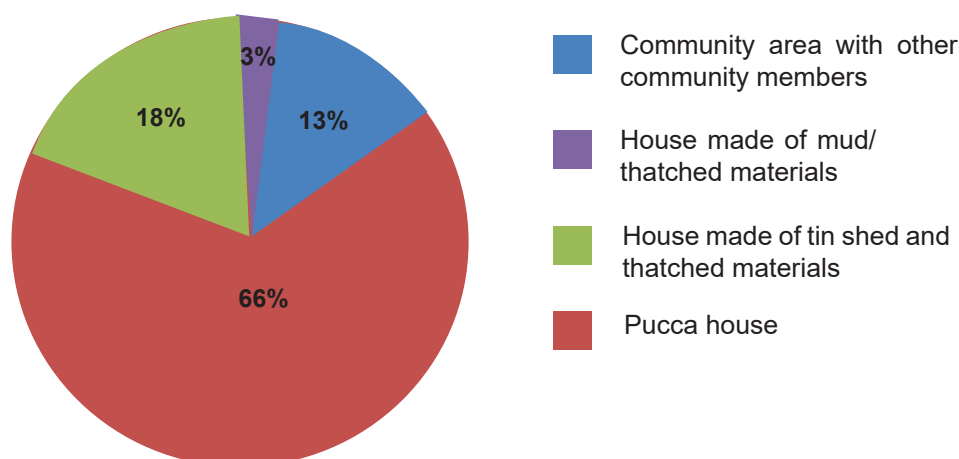
The Santal families (around 66 per cent) mostly live in houses made of mud/thatched materials (Figure 4.1). Around 18 per cent live in houses made of tin shed and thatched materials. Only very few (only 3 per cent) can afford semi-pucca or pucca houses. Although they have access to water, around 35 per cent of them do not have hygienic toilet facilities. Most of the respondents (95 per cent) got Covid-19 vaccine.

In terms of access to health care services, they consult qualified doctors at local health clinics/hospitals. They also use traditional medicines. However, about half of the respondents mention about difficulty in meeting medical expenses and, to a certain extent, distant locations as difficulties that they face in getting medical care.

Figure 4.1: Houses/Shelters of Santal families

Poverty and deprivations

Social and political participation

Figure 4.1: Houses/Shelters of Santal families

Poverty and deprivations

The majority of Santals (around 92 per cent) live a poor life. They are compelled to sell their labour at a very low price. In terms of self-assessment, all members consider themselves as living 'always in poverty'. Their major problems are poverty, landlessness, illiteracy and exploitation. They suffer from multiple deprivations with varying degrees of incidences. No or little income, inadequate or low paid informal jobs, income volatility and no education or skill are their major problems followed by ill health and no government support programmes and absence of legal and social services. The other main deficits include: inadequate access to housing and basic services, sense of insecurity and violence or crime, social apathy or no social support or loneliness, and absence of cultural and social participation.

All the participants in the discussion meetings feel that lack of earning opportunities and lack of education are the main causes of their poverty. Further, the other main reasons for their low status in society are ill health and no access to land. All of them want to improve their condition by getting formal or government jobs which will enhance prestige, dignity and social acceptability.

Social and political participation

Majority of the respondents (around 75 per cent) claim there is no restriction for them in society. However, around 25 per cent report that they face discrimination based on religion and ethnicity, little or no voice and participation in local and social decision making, very limited social interactions

Social and political participation

Access to finance

outside own community, limited social and cultural interactions as most people in society are unwilling to do so as they belong to the tribal community. Local influential people and bustle of land grabbers compel the Santals to lose their land and property. Almost all Santals cast their votes in general and local elections, which is around 85 per cent for the females living in Dinajpur.

Access to finance

Due to poverty and being in a minority group, the Santals face social, economic and natural challenges. They face difficulties in accessing formal financial services. Among the respondents, only 3 per cent of the respondents have access to formal savings in banks and around 73 per cent save in NGO-MFIs. All of them have informal savings. Only 10 per cent of the respondents save more than Tk. 300 per month and 90 per cent of them save between Tk. 100-200 per month. Around 77 per cent of the respondents have borrowed from NGO-MFIs; 60 per cent of the respondents use mobile financial services for financial transaction or sending money to their children. Most of the respondents have very limited knowledge about formal financial products due to their limited access to those institutions.

Transgender Community

Socioeconomic life of transgender people

Transgender Community

The social construction of gender in Bangladesh society strictly follows the male/female binary classification of individuals, which restricts the 'non-binary' gender existence by providing two selected gender identity. This binary idea is deeply rooted in social institutions beginning from the family and is practiced in all institutions of society. Thus, the transgender (a person who is born biologically as a male or a female but identified as a member of the opposite gender) is a challenge to the traditional norm-driven process in society about gender identity based on biological sex alone.

Due to their cultural roles, socially expected roles, gender identities, sexual orientation and most importantly the life histories of transgender people, it is difficult to clearly define the hijra community. Although the cultural definition denotes hijras as neither man nor woman, most of these people identify themselves as women in their behaviour; some of them are emasculated in their early age and become hijra. Both these groups who are emasculated and who are born that way are considered as hijra.¹⁴

Besides, such identity puts the person in a continuous conflict with society where the person has to compromise with gender identity and the transgender people (known as hijra) are looked down and treated inhumanly as they do not have a 'socially accepted' gender identity.¹⁵ They are most vulnerable, among the poorest in society, and mostly deprived of basic education, healthcare facilities and employment opportunities due to their gender identity. Further, transgender people are mostly excluded from basic rights associated with citizenship such as property rights, inheritance, and other social and economic basic rights. They remain mostly unprotected against crimes committed by perpetrators motivated by hatred towards the sexual orientation or gender identity of the victim. Their social status represents a violation of basic human rights and promotes social inequality, deprivation and exclusion.

Socioeconomic life of transgender people

Traditionally, the social and cultural life of transgender people is distinct along with the nature of harassment they face in society. Over centuries, these people were involved in singing, dancing and begging. Many of these people are also known as sex workers. The government also lacks special-need based and transgender-inclusive policy.

Since ancient times, most of hijras used to perform (singing or dancing) during the time of wedding or blessed newly married women so that they can give birth to baby boys. Hijras also worked as faith healers in the rural areas and the main reason behind this profession was their cultural acceptance as people used to believe in superstitions. Nowadays they are also involved in 'hijragiri' --extorting money from shops in the marketplace and singing and dancing for new-born baby. Besides, they also collect money by begging on the street as a group or as individuals.

¹⁴ The terms 'transgender people' and 'hijra' are used interchangeably in the present analysis.

¹⁵ This discrimination persists although the government has recognised this group of people as 'third gender' in 2013. Article 28 (1) of Bangladesh Constitution has protected the rights of individuals by stating that the state shall not discriminate its citizens on the ground of religion, race, caste or sex.

Socioeconomic life of transgender people

Box 4.5: Bangladesh's third gender

Box 4.5: Bangladesh's third gender

While recognition of genders outside male and female has only recently been discussed in Western societies, in Indian society, people of non-binary gender expression have played important roles for over 2,000 years. Called the third gender, evidence on their existence in Hindu society can be found in the Ramayana and the Mahabharata. Third gender people have often been revered throughout South Asian history; for example, Muslim rulers of the Mughal Empire in the 15th to 19th centuries were generous patrons of third gender Indians. In undivided India, hijras figure prominently especially in Muslim history, serving as the sexless watchdogs of Mughal harems.

While the third gender includes a few different groups in South Asia, the most common are the hijras. Hijras are often born male but look and dress in traditionally feminine ways. Many, but not all, choose to undergo a castration ceremony, removing their male genitalia. Other hijras are born intersex. Often called transgender, Indian society and most hijras consider themselves to be third gender—neither male nor female, not transitioning. They are a different gender altogether. However, hijra identity is complex, and recently some have identified as transgender and sought gender reassignment procedures. By 2014, India, Nepal, and Bangladesh had all officially recognised third gender people as citizens deserving of equal rights.

Today hijras in Bangladesh, who include transgender and intersex people, are hard to miss. Dressed in glittering saris, their faces heavily coated in cheap makeup, they sway through crowded intersections knocking on car windows with the edge of a coin and offering blessings. They crash fancy weddings and birth ceremonies, singing songs and leaving with Takas. Many people believe hijras have the power to bless or curse, and hijras trade off this uneasy ambivalence.

Dr. Khan, a psychiatrist who has studied the hijra community, recalls the time when a troupe showed up -uninvited at his nephew's birth. "The first thing people said was, 'Oh my God, the hijras are here.'" Then there was a nervous pause, he says. Then laughter. I still remember, he says, "There is this mixture of negativity and positivity; and laughter and fear".

Behind these, there are often sad stories — of the sex trade and exploitation, cruel and dangerous castrations, being cast out and constantly humiliated. Within the marginalised communities, the hijras maintain their own somewhat secretive subculture.

In the Bangladesh society, traditional family and societal values set the roles of individuals (as males or females) including socially defined gender roles. As such, the disgrace of being a 'third gender' starts from the early childhood from the family. The present ethnographic exploration suggests that the childhood inclination of a biological male to 'female outfits' and 'female manners' and domestic works is the key reason of inattention and disgrace in the family causing sexual harassment by close relatives. The respondents also mention incidents of mocking by neighbours, creating unpleasant experiences for the family members.

Overall, they face inequitable treatments in the family relating to food, education and other family affairs. They also report discriminatory environments in their schools due to this feminine behaviour by classmates, teachers, and school staffs. Most of the respondents report unsupportive school environment to continue their studies as they had to face sexual harassment and physical assault due

Socioeconomic life of transgender people

Box 4.6: My struggle with a dual life

to their feminine attitudes. Eventually they had to end up education at a premature stage lessening their prospects in future job opportunities.

Box 4.6: My struggle with a dual life

When I realised I am a transgender, I had to constantly fight within myself with two different life styles--one in the family where I pretended to be a man, while the other within myself where I was a woman. As a result, I had to constantly struggle to ensure a balance with my emotions and biological sex. This is painful and horrifying which made both my mental and physical health vulnerable, and made me indifferent about safe sexual behaviour. In my community, most people have faced similar trauma, and many have fallen prey to HIV or STIs in their later lives.

In my family, there was nobody to give me the mental support needed in dealing with this dilemma, and I had nobody even to talk to regarding my problems. When I could not bear this stress any more, I decided to leave my family. That's how another chapter of my life began with the hijra community although I very much wanted to live with my family. But I was unable to struggle any more with my 'dual life'.

In my new life with hijra community, I have the 'hijra guru' who gives me shelter. There are many others who are the disciples of my guru. In return, some of us are involved in sex trade--some willingly as they have nothing else to do for living. I heard that many of them had been raped by the 'hijra guru'.

Our life is full of struggles. We face constant difficulties in renting a house on our own, even though we have the money to pay the rent regularly. The landlords, in most cases, are not willing to rent out house to us as we are hijras. In such cases, sometimes we had to live in slums, parks or streets with the constant danger of facing sexual harassment, robbing by goons and harassment by the police. We cannot live safely anywhere!

Source: KII with participant from hijra community, Dhaka, 2022

The transgender people attending the meetings shared their experiences of discrimination when they were in school. They said that bullying and harassment in schools from fellow students and school employees was exacerbated by several factors e.g. school uniform requirements and dressing in a feminine manner. This created a hostile school environment that made it difficult for the transgender students to concentrate on studies or participate in class works which contributed to low grades and frequent absenteeism. Apparently, transgender students had no school authority to turn to for support or to hold other students accountable for their verbal harassment.

Furthermore, transgender people in Bangladesh are ill-treated in the health care services. Due to social exclusion, they face disparities in receiving basic health facilities in government hospitals. Also they do not feel comfortable to go to hospitals due to socio-cultural perceptions about them. Additionally, the health service providers have little understanding about the diverse sexual identities and are not very sensitive in dealing with them.

With regard to employment opportunities, transgender people find it difficult to get mainstream jobs as they are not well educated, along with disadvantages originating from their non-conforming behaviours

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which are considered unacceptable in the workplace. Even those who could enter in jobs, are eventually terminated due to their feminine attitude which is considered to ruin the work environment and the reputation of the enterprise. Those who are engaged in jobs, complain of facing verbal harassment almost every day for which they do not get any justice.

Another critical phase of transgender life is the old-age when they mostly have to live alone due to being socially outcast. As they cannot work during old age and live without any family bondage, these persons are forced to fight with poverty and illness every day.¹⁷

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For the transgender people, the FGDs were conducted in Dhaka and the total number of respondents was 20. These people come from rural, urban, and sub-urban areas of different districts in Bangladesh. The age of the respondents ranges from 18 to 60 years. Among the respondents, 30 per cent attended school up to secondary level and another 30 per cent have completed only primary schooling (up to grade five) while the rest 40 per cent never attended any school. The vast majority (85 per cent) of those who attended schooling reported that the main cause of their school 'drop out' was unfavourable school environment (including bullying and sexual harassment) at school while the rest had to leave school because of parents' financial limitations. All respondents reported that they had to earn for their living but were not involved in any fixed profession. They subsist on begging and singing and dancing (and sometimes extortion) and even in crime and illegal activities for survival.

From the respondents, we wanted to know which sex they prefer to be regarded as. Although in most of the official documents there is no option to mention sex other than male or female, the responses reveal that all respondents feel comfortable to be called third gender. Although the government has recognised third gender as a separate category, it is yet to be fully implemented in all documents and in the forms of schools, colleges or universities. The capability deprivation of the transgender people thus starts from the very early stage of their life through forcing them to choose a gender which they do not prefer to be called by. This also creates a choice problem for the transgender children in the case of applying for education allowances since with exclusive option of choosing between male and female, a transgender child faces the dilemma of how to express gender while applying.

Income earning status: Income is one of the most important indicators of wellbeing of individuals. For the SDGs, the UN currently measures 'extreme poverty' as people living on less than US\$ 1.90 a day. According to the participants, 95 per cent have a monthly earning between Tk. 5,000 and Tk.10, 000 while 5 per cent has a monthly income which is below Tk. 5,000. During the Covid-19 pandemic, all respondents experienced decline in their monthly income levels while their expenses increased.

Although most of the respondents have income-earning capability, none of the participants is satisfied with their current profession and levels of income. Most respondents prefer to work in formal and public sector jobs where, although the remuneration may not be very high but, they think, these are dignified, carry social prestige and are secured. However, they are mostly not eligible for such jobs due to low educational attainments. They urge the need for reservation of jobs in government services for

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transgender people so that they have an opportunity and incentives for pursuing education for availing these jobs (positive discrimination).

Educational status: The findings on the capability of the transgender people in accessing education provide interesting results. While bullying or sexual harassment in the schools is no doubt an important reason for leaving schools of these people at an early age, some also identify parent's financial condition as an important reason for discontinuing formal education. Although primary schooling is free, parents need to bear several educational expenses, such as transportation, food and other expenses (pen, pencil, notebook etc.). Among the people in the FGDs, none has completed secondary school certificate (SSC) level. Regarding bullying or sexual harassment, most of the respondents stated that in almost all cases no action was taken by the responsible authorities despite filing complaints by themselves or their parents. As a consequence, they had to discontinue their studies despite their eagerness to continue their studies. In most cases, they lost their interest in formal schooling afterwards due to previous horrible experiences.

Many of the respondents also shared some significant events in their school life which are mostly related with their good achievements, such as earning good grades, participating in primary scholarship examination, receiving prizes in annual sporting events, participating in annual cultural events and fashion shows in schools and friendship with fellow classmates. Apparently, they still seem to cherish their enjoyable social life with their school friends and their families, which they have lost now due to their gender identity.

Food and nutrition: Without any certainty in the flow of income due to uncertain nature of their livelihood, the respondents' food and nutrition situation is extremely volatile. During normal times, around 60 per cent of the respondents could manage three or more meals per day while the rest 40 per cent subsist on two meals. However, they usually take fish or meat one or two times a week and one half could manage other protein items (e.g. eggs) three to five times a week while the rest could take only one or two times a week. All of them suffered drastic reduction in their food intake during the Covid-19 period. Relating to seasonality of food intake, 50 per cent reported that they normally could not manage enough food to take during a period of less than a month over the year, while the rest would suffer from inadequate food intake during three to four months in a year. While the majority (about 85 per cent) normally spends between Tk.100 to Tk.500 per day on food, 15 per cent of them could spend less than Tk.100 per day.

Access to healthcare services: One of the basic fundamental rights is to have access to healthcare services which is a prerequisite to remain well-nourished and lead a healthy life. However, for the transgender people, even reasonable earnings to bear the cost of healthcare services cannot guarantee the freedom of accessing healthcare services when needed. In the case of health-related services, all respondents reported that they usually had to go to the pharmacies rather than health complexes or hospitals when they fall sick or ill (to buy commonly used medicines without consulting a doctor) for any kind of health-related problems. The main reason behind this is the discrimination that they face in health clinics and hospitals to get health services due to their gender identity; and these are not necessarily related to lack of finance for procuring the services. In the case of Covid-19 vaccination, 60

Box 4.7: Transgender community struggles with covid-19 pandemic

per cent reported that they had taken booster doses, 30 per cent got second dose, while only 5 per cent was not vaccinated at all.

Box 4.7: Transgender community struggles with covid-19 pandemic

With the lockdown and slowdown of economic and social life in Bangladesh during the Covid-19 pandemic, transgender people were faced with a heightened risk of poverty and ill health because they existed on the margins of society, eking out a living mostly through extortion and begging.

During the pandemic, the transgender people were among those worst hit because many used to make their living on the streets. They also did not have the social privilege of operating within a distant 'online' world when their lives were precariously balanced on the thread of social interaction and functions. Despite recognition of equal rights for all in the country, prejudice against them persists and they are often rejected by their families and denied jobs, education and healthcare.

Many transgender women survive through begging at busy intersections and on buses and trains, performing at social functions such as weddings or selling sex. During the pandemic, they barely had any work and were burning through their limited savings buying the food they need to survive.

Transgender people often face discrimination in accessing housing, forcing many into slums. There is an urgent need to protect transgender people from discrimination in education, employment, healthcare and housing. As one transgender woman laments, 'Everybody in society talks about the labourers and the poor; but why is no one talking about us? We are just invisible to everybody'.

Housing facility: The housing status of the respondents of the present study at the outskirts of Dhaka city seems to be quite unsatisfactory. All of them live in bustee (slum) with shared amenities with 65 per cent sharing the house with others (60 per cent with transgender friends and rest 5 per cent with family members). Most (65 per cent) of them have their personal rooms while 35 per cent share their rooms with others. All of them live in rented premises. It is seen that most of these people live with their transgender friend in the same house, while only about a third live with their family. They usually face difficulties in hiring accommodation since the owners are usually reluctant to rent out houses to the transgender people.

Self-perception of deprivation: The transgender people's deprivations are multiple. During the FGDs, they identified lack of education and skills as their most critical deprivation followed by lack of government support programmes and legal/social services for improving their economic and social conditions. Other deprivations in order of priorities are no recognition from parents/families, low incomes, inadequate access to housing and basic services, unhealthy living environment, social apathy along with no social support and loneliness, no cultural and social participation, income volatility, sense of insecurity and subject to violence and crime.

The group was also vocal about their sufferings from a number of structural inequalities to which they persistently suffer. These refer to: residential and social segregation; inequalities in getting health care services; discrimination in educational institutions, labour market and work place; exclusion from

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participation in social and cultural events; lack of power, control, resources, and opportunities to better living conditions; and discrimination in government offices and public places. While half of the respondents considered themselves as always poor, the other half termed themselves as 'permanent poor and poor over generations'. The participants also indicated that there are about 250 members living in their group, and all of them are poor. For their poverty and deprivations, they consider that their lack of education/skills and discrimination for being transgender are the most important causal factors followed by lack of land and assets and physical harassment, inadequate job opportunities, and ill health.

Social life: An important aspect of an individual's living with a dignified life in society is to remain a part of social network or having the social support as needed. All the respondents reported that they had to pursue an extremely restricted social life. They have: less freedom of movement, difficulties in hiring accommodation, limited social and cultural interactions as most people in society are unwilling to do so as they belong to transgender community, little or no voice and participation in local and social decision making, no or little participation in local and general elections as the gender identity is an impediment to participate in elections, and little involvement in cultural or social organisations with only very limited social interactions outside own community.

Among the respondents of this research, about a third have accepted their present life as a fate and do not intend to change anything as they believe that they are not capable of doing so due to their gender identity; while the rest two-thirds want to change their present lives. About 50 per cent of the respondents--who are relatively younger in age--want to pursue education as they think that lower educational attainment is responsible for their low status in society and rejection from the family and society which makes their life less dignified. They also report less freedom of movement, difficulties in hiring accommodation, and limited social and cultural interactions as most people in society are unwilling to do so as they belong to the transgender community. Two-thirds of the respondents reported that they usually cast their votes during general and local elections with no other involvement.

With education, they would like to enter formal/government jobs which, they believe, will enhance their prestige, dignity and social acceptability. About 40 per cent of the respondents wish to migrate to the US or other western countries where the transgender people can lead a life with more freedom and human rights which is not possible in Bangladesh. Most of them would like to receive government support such as homestead land and housing, income generating assets (like livestock, poultry etc.) and skill development training to pursue sustained livelihoods.

Financial inclusion: Only 15 per cent of the respondents have access to banks (savings services), 5 per cent to NGO-MFIs (microfinance), 90 per cent to bKash and 10 per cent to Nagad for money transfer services. For savings, only 15 per cent have access to banks while all have informal savings. The main constraints for not maintaining formal savings include: finding an acceptable guarantor; no spouse; ignorance relating to bank transactions; small amount of savings (very small amounts, only 5 per cent save between Tk. 100 to Tk. 500 per month); and lack of knowledge and information. While no one has any access to formal credit, about 50 per cent of the respondents have access to informal

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Box 4.8: What does transgender community want?

credit mostly for treatment, consumption and personal use purposes.

It appears that the transgender people, being members of a marginalised group, have little voice and participation in local and social decision making. Some report that they sometimes participate in local elections for campaigning in support of other candidates (in return of money) and none of them have ever participated in local and general elections as they think that their gender identity is an impediment to participate in the elections. Sometimes they cast votes if they desire so. They also are seldom involved in other cultural or social organisations and have only very limited social interactions outside their own community. The respondents reported they had never received any kind of support from the government agencies and NGOs for improving their socioeconomic conditions.

Overall, it is evident that the transgender people in Bangladesh suffer more from social exclusion and 'cruel' social attitude and dealings due to existing socio-cultural norms rather than absolute poverty. They are highly vulnerable, prone to life cycle poverty especially during old ages, and are deprived of basic education, healthcare facilities and employment opportunities due to their gender identity. The

Box 4.8: What does transgender community want?

Article 28(1) of the Bangladesh Constitution provides that state shall not discriminate against any citizen on grounds only of religion, race, caste, sex or place of birth which guarantees the transgender people their fundamental right of equal citizenship under the Constitution.

Shreya, a boy in her childhood and now a transgender woman, expresses her love for traditional dresses. As she goes back into her childhood, she regards her attraction to dresses as something that defined her personhood. She grew up watching television programmes with actresses wearing colourful and dazzling costumes. Shreya's femininity became a problem for everyone as she grew older and proclaimed her desire to be a woman.

Shreya ran away from her house when she was 12. After running away, Shreya found her way into the Hijra community, as the transgender minority is usually known. It consists of transgender persons who are biologically male but identify as women or "neither man nor woman" or "not man." Hijras, most of whom are forced to leave their families due to social stigmatisation, live together in communities under the guidance of a guru, a spiritual teacher. They have 'gharanas' (households), each led by a guru/mentor.

With her new family, her new household, Shreya reached Keraniganj in the suburb of Dhaka city. "At Keraniganj, there's a place that had numerous Hijra households. I felt a sense of freedom there. I did not need to hide myself anymore. There, I was called feminine names, and I felt I had discovered what was missing in my life," she says.

Shreya, who now works with an NGO, recalls her time in a Hijra household where days were spent begging at traffic signals, living in poverty, and serving others tirelessly. She continues, 'We leave our families, the security and safety of our homes, only to plunge into poverty and destitution. All this so that we can wear a saree.'

Transgender persons face various forms of gendered violence, harassment and discrimination both at home and in public spaces. 'I have witnessed a lot of violence where ones' own family and relatives were often perpetrators along with the common public against transgender people', Shreya says.

Shreya believes that the Hijra community is the family she, like almost every other member of the community, found when they had nobody to call their own. For Shreya, gender-sensitisation needs to work in parallel with

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legal reforms. It is also essential, according to her, that the transgender community holds internal debates and addresses issues that cause discrimination within the community.

Shreya thinks that social movements that talk about marginalised people must urgently include transgender persons. She believes that every movement stays superficial when it comes to asking real questions about the rights and dignity of transgender people. “There are NGOs and social organisations working with oppressed communities that are actively engaging with transgender people. This is a good beginning and voices are coming out from intersections of oppressed community and gender identities. However, a lot more needs to be done to completely integrate the two,” she opines.

Bangladesh has a long road ahead to social and gender justice, and the transgender community wants concerted efforts made to bring about legal and social reforms so that transgender people are as free and empowered in their public and private lives as any other citizen of the country.

Source: FGDs

transgender people in Bangladesh have incomplete and low educational attainments mostly due to sexual harassment or bullying (because of their gender identity and girl like attitudes) and thus they end up with very low level of employment opportunities.

Most of the transgender people of this study do not live in abject poverty. In fact, some earns reasonable amounts (mostly as sex workers and through begging and extortion). However, their access to healthcare services is extremely limited as they usually cannot go to hospitals or clinics even if they have the affordability because of hostile attitudes towards them and this actually forces them to take healthcare facilities from the local pharmacy or quacks.

Moreover, the transgender people--being members of a marginalised group--have little voice and participation in local and social decision making. They sometimes participate in local elections for campaigning in support of other candidates (in return of money) and none of them have ever participated in local and general elections as they think that their gender identity is an impediment to participate in the elections.

At present, the stark reality is that the transgender people in Bangladesh suffer from substantive levels of social, economic, cultural, governance and all other forms of deprivations and enjoy limited freedom in their social participation and decision making. The respondents have also identified their needs in order to uplift their existing socioeconomic conditions for which they prioritise the role of inclusive social policies. They also identify the necessity of adopting and implementing their social, legal and political recognition in the real sense (such as recognising the rights of third gender category in all respects) for creating opportunities and improving their current conditions.

The picture of their status and life that emerges from the study shows that they are a marginalised segment in society. The transgender community in Bangladesh is facing the challenges of having equality and social inclusion although the government has recognised them officially as third gender in 2013. But in reality, although they are a part of our society, the society treats them inhumanly. They are mostly disowned by their own family and excluded from availing opportunities. They are unsuccessful in inheriting parental property, accessing education and building employable skills and are deprived of

Box 4.9: Through my eyes: Living as a transgender by bobby hijra

Box 4.9: Through my eyes: Living as a transgender by bobby hijra

"When the entire world was trying to find a male inside me, I was very much happy portraying myself as a female", says Bobby Hijra, a transgender guru. Bobby was born an intersex biologically but at an early age, she realised gender dysphonia. She was named Abu by her parents, who ensured no one ever knew about her gender identity. At the age of seven, Abu, now Bobby, started cross-dressing and expressing feminine traits as it came naturally to her. Born on the outskirts of Dhaka, and having lost her father at an age of 3, Bobby's mother was her sole companion while growing up. However, the search for gender identity garnered stigma and discrimination from society for the mother-daughter duo. Bobby says, "My birth brought nothing but shame to my father and sorrow to my mother; I was nothing but a disgrace for them. "Recalling her growing years as a boy, Bobby, now 50-year-old, says, "In the initial years, neither did we have access to information nor education on sexuality. I wasn't sure what was happening to me. I was an aloof child. Soon I realised, because of my traits, my mother was tortured. Bobby Hijra says, "Our neighbours often used to fight with my mother saying, 'your child is a transgender'. My mother then used to cry. That's when I left home". She also narrates the experience of another transgender whose hands and feet were brutally chained and she was about to be sent to the mental hospital. Bobby rescued her and now she lives with her. Bobby says with hurtful feelings, "The society doesn't see us in good eyes; it hates us and does not consider us as human beings, Society stands as the main hitch".

My mother wanted me to study, get a government job and start my own family. There were a lot of aspirations. Over time, Bobby became a victim of several hate crimes at school. The adolescent boy was sexually harassed by seniors to create fear. Recalling those horrific incidents, Bobby recalls, "I was unhappy, scared and didn't want to go to school. I would weep but never tell my mother because she was already suffering because of me. Even in markets, people used to throw stones at me and call me by varied names including hijra". Because of the transition, Bobby's mother would blame her upbringing, her fate and the heaven above.

Cultural stigma and conservatism towards the transgender community in Bangladesh forces people like Bobby to lead a dual and undignified life. Being raised in a boy's guise, her childhood went by being constantly bullied for acting feminine. She had no one to trust, no one to confide in. Her only wish was to find a place to be her true self and not be afraid. But deep down, she knew there was no such place.

After losing her mother at the age of 12, she started doing physical work for survival. One day, she met with one member of the hijra community and she was invited to perform with them. Over time, she became more and more accustomed with the hijra community and transformed herself from Abu to Bobby. Now at 50, Bobby Hijra is a guru of eight of her community members, but that doesn't mean her fight against the stigma is over.

About a month ago, there was an arson attack at their residence. She strongly believes her residence was attacked because of her identity; this is not the first time her residence had been damaged. Bobby says: "Residents in other houses don't like us because we are hijras; sometimes the local mastaans try to forcibly enter our house, but we resist them."

With a strong will and hard work, Bobby and the inmates survive in this harsh community. Bobby and her friends eagerly wait for changes in society so that they can feel liberated and can live in a safe space. They believe that a safe space in society can have a great impact on mental wellbeing of the hijra community in the long run. Regarding their uncertain livelihood, Bobby says, "We are poor. We earn on a daily basis and our earnings are very uncertain. If we are able to earn, we can eat, or else we simply

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have to borrow and eat. We have none to rely on”.

The government has recognised hijras as the ‘third gender’. This legal recognition is certainly a step forward, but not enough to ensure a safe space and social acceptance that the community rightfully deserves. Bobby admits with confidence, “We too have the potential to do something good for society. We used to live a life in our own realm, now the time has changed a lot. We are keen to pursue education and get good jobs like others in society. We want opportunity to pursue higher education and acquire employable skills to get good jobs”.

While saying good bye, Bobby guru gave us a simple message and said, “Don’t say I feel sad for this community; please do something. Help us to get education, give us employment, don’t hate us, befriend us, and help us with reservation, social openings and mainstreaming opportunities. We are a part of society like anyone else”

Source: FGDs

their employment rights. Most of the community members suffer from severe financial crisis and earn livelihood through begging, dancing and often are forced to earning through extortions or engaging in illegal activities. Being a sexual minority group, they are neglected in society in all respects.

The Constitution provides provisions for positive discrimination by enacting special rule in favour of any backward section of citizens for the purpose of securing their adequate representation in the services of the Republic (Bangladesh Constitution, A. 28(4), 1972). As members of a gender minority population, transgender people encounter challenges as regard to sexual identity. In consequence, they fail to pursue a dignified life with education and employment.

Most of the members of this socially secluded community face discernment and even violence when they try to do something which is considered as ‘unconventional’ to them. Unsupportive workplace environment and unfriendly attitudes from both co-workers and management most often become a source of emotional and physical pains for the few transgender people who could join the workforce. This discourages them to participate in the work force and civil activities.

The economic hardship that transgender people undergoes primarily due to their inability to participate in the workforce further complicates their life styles. Being mostly deprived of participating in formal jobs and denied of right to work, they are forced mostly to be involved in professions like begging, dancing and entertaining during festive occasions and even extortion and other illegal activities.

The government needs to enact legal provisions to spell out the fundamental rights of the transgender people, including inheritance, education, employment, vote, holding of public offices, health, public assembly, access to public spaces and property. Moreover, it should guarantee their right to be officially registered according to the identity they choose.¹⁶ Such a law might prove effective to protect the rights of hijras as well change the attitude and outlook of the people towards them. Providing equal access to housing, education, public facilities and employment opportunities, and developing and implementing

¹⁶ For example, Pakistan has enacted an act called the Transgender Persons (Protection of Rights) Act in 2018. In India, the Transgender Persons (Protection of Rights) Act 2019 has the objective to provide for protection of rights of transgender people, their welfare, and other related matters. It has been in effect since 10 January 2020. However, the Act has been criticised for overlooking the demand of transgender community for reservations in the matter of appointment. The Act also provides for punishment up to two years for sexual abuse of transgender persons which is significantly less than that for sexual assault of women.

Barriers to employment

antidiscrimination laws and policies that give social protection to the transgender people, including guaranteeing their safety and security, are essential to ensure that transgender individuals are treated as equal human beings in society.

The reality is that the transgender people mostly do not have the right education and skills to join the formal job market as their access to education and skill development is limited. Their legal rights and social acceptance are extremely limited and they do not get adequate facilities (such as education, employment, social inclusion etc.) for pursuing normal livelihoods.

Barriers to employment

Due to widespread prejudice, transgender people face significant barriers in securing employment when their gender expression does not match the gender listed on their official documentation, including ID documents and diplomas. Formal wear in Bangladesh is gender specific and wearing men's dresses can be treated as unprofessional for women. Further, transgender people who could secure employment, often face harassment from other colleagues.

The harsh reality of finding alternative employment leads these individuals to endure discrimination and exploitation in the workplace. Despite being unhappy in the current job, one transgender says: "I can't leave because I can't find any other job easily. Further, I have to face similar discrimination wherever I go." All transgender people attending the meetings expressed that their future is bleak because they would face extreme difficulties in getting a job because of 'clothes and gender expression'. As one participant lamented: "We hijras are always considered as degraded and uncivilised in society. We are hated by everyone and even our families do not want us to be members. People believe that we are the curse for society". It has become a common practice for the hijras to live with the help of others; ironically, getting jobs for them is extremely difficult in the community.

It short, one may summarise the economic conditions of transgender community in Bangladesh as disgraceful. They belong mostly to the poorest section in society, and they are leading impoverished lifestyle. They are deprived of inherited property as they are often abandoned by the family. Their presence in businesses and formal employment is extremely low. But the transgender community is fighting to be empowered and join the ranks of others in society. One participant shared his experience: "Now, I am fifty. Since my young age, I was begging and dancing with my fellow friends and earn some amounts which I had to give to my guru with whom we were living. But I was worried about my future means of survival. One day, I was talking to my transgender friend named Lisa who told me to learn tailoring job and start a tailoring business. I liked the idea and learned tailoring and sought assistance from banks and NGOs. But no one helped me except my friend, Lisa".

Financial support for startups and access to jobs for transgender people are extremely difficult at present in society. Their access to public and private jobs is low both due to lack of required education and skill as well as discriminatory attitude and behaviour towards the transgender people.

One of the transgender respondents in the FGD complained that her co-workers often treated her differently and some of them tried for sexual intimation. They face humiliation at their work places. In

Accessing transition-related health care

Harassment and prejudice in families

reality, the transgender people in Bangladesh face hardship in getting education and skill development opportunity, in accessing jobs as well as enjoying the right to social dignity.

Although transgender people in Bangladesh face bundles of challenges and socioeconomic disparities, several organisations have come forward in recent years to help them gain employable skills. The SME Foundation, Bangladesh Small and Cottage Industries Corporation (BSCIC), National Skill Development Council (NSDC) and the Ministry of Industries, among others, have started offering skill development programmes for the transgender people, and encouraging them to become entrepreneurs along with providing financial and technical assistance. One NGO, the Bandhu Social Welfare Society, is giving technical support, skill development and capacity building training to the transgender people. However, very few transgender can avail these opportunities because of their limited scale and other constraints.

Accessing transition-related health care

Transgender people face significant difficulties in accessing medical care and mental health facilities. Many of these people, during the interview, admitted that they had attempted to commit suicide at least once and, in some cases, a few times in their lives. One of them lamented: “On many occasions, I thought I'd better be dead. The mental stress is too much. Can you tell me where can I live with some peace? How can I endure so much agony? It is the same at home, at school, at work, and wherever I go. I have nothing left in my life, Can you tell me, what's the point for me to live?” All respondents reported that they had to struggle to access medical and mental health care from skilled providers and very few succeeded. They reported that specialists who could deal with LGBT issues were not available. “Doctors don't understand what transgender people or hijras are. They don't understand that they belong to different categories. How can they help us?” –said one participant.

For assisting the transgender people, medical colleges needs to include formal education about medical and mental health care for transgender individuals within their curriculum, which should adhere to the World Professional Association for Transgender Health (WPATH) standards of care. Without any meaningful inclusion of transgender identities that adheres to WPATH standards of care in the curriculum for medical and mental health providers, the situation will not improve for the transgender individuals.

Harassment and prejudice in families

Transgender people attending the discussions reported varying degrees of openness about their gender identity amongst their families. Some had feared their family's rejection and hid their identity. Others were more open with their parents from a younger age. One participant told: “When I was about 20, I attempted to explain what it means to be transgender to my parents. But my parents struggled to accept me. They regularly cry and say, ‘Why Allah has done this to you? What's going to happen to you?’

Harassment in public places

Need for legal reform

What future do you have?’ I also feel dismayed”.

For most of the transgender people, stigma and discrimination start at their home. One respondent said: “If our families accept us, then the society and everyone else will also accept us. If our families don’t, no one else will accept”.

Harassment in public places

All interviewees said they almost always had faced harassment or had been ridiculed when walking down the street because of their gender expression. Verbal abuse and harassment are quite common and indicate that the general people always despise them. This reinforces concerns about their safety and forces them to show aggressive behaviour in public places for self-defence. Further, they realise that being called a hijra carries a negative connotation as they are marginalised in society and are perceived by many as belonging to a lower-caste group. The interviewees admitted that verbal harassment has reinforced their feelings of inferiority and isolation.

Need for legal reform

While the government has taken steps to legally recognise hijras as a third gender category-- an important positive development—actions are needed to extend protections to transgender individuals who are not hijras. In January 2014, a gazette notification was issued “recogniz[ing] the Hijra community of Bangladesh as a Hijra sex.” The circular marked a significant step forward in establishing a range of human rights for hijras in Bangladesh. However, proper implementation of the decision needs clarity on related issues (e.g. who qualifies as hijra) along with speedy implementation of the policy.

It is to be realised that the perception of hijras and transgender men in Bangladesh society is vastly different. Hijra is an identity category that predates centuries and carries a unique socio-cultural significance. As a result, hijras constitute a category that is different from that of transgender men. Legal protections afforded to hijras do not apply to transgender men, who do not have any legal protections. At present, transgender men in Bangladesh are unable to change their gender on any legal documents due to non-existence of a mechanism for legal gender recognition. As a consequence, transgender men in Bangladesh are currently unable to change their gender on any legal documents. The lack of any legal recognition mechanism compounds their isolation and the insecurity that they feel.

The government needs to ensure that transgender individuals are not discriminated against on the basis of their gender identity. To ensure this, an Anti-Discrimination Law may be enacted with the inclusion of gender identity and sexual orientation as a basis for non-discrimination.¹⁷ Such a law can create the enabling conditions for protecting the transgender people against all forms of discrimination. As one member of the community says during the meeting, “please, give us a platform, give us hope and some respect as humans. Allow us to be educated and enlightened. We are as normal humans as you are, we can be as creative as you are, a few are studying in universities, with opportunities and compassion, we can definitely work and live a normal life”.

¹⁷ The draft of such a law has been prepared in 2014 along with the inputs of human rights NGOs and civil society organisations to the Ministry of Law, Justice and Parliamentary Affairs. The Ministry is yet to move the proposed legislation forward and begin the process of enacting the law.

The background of the image is composed of various triangular shapes in different shades of blue (light blue, medium blue, and dark blue) and white. These shapes are arranged in a way that creates a sense of depth and movement, with some triangles pointing towards the center and others pointing outwards. The overall effect is a modern, geometric pattern.

5

Key Findings and Recommendations

Both the plain land ethnic minorities and the transgender community in Bangladesh share some common features in their livelihoods and living styles in society:

- Both communities suffer from social exclusion that makes them extremely vulnerable. The plain land ethnic minorities also have diverse categories, cultural identities, races, livelihood patterns, social customs, and ethnicities.
- These groups suffer from forced displacements, threats and insecurity, exclusion from mainstream community support mechanisms and services, structural barriers to socio-political participation and decision making processes, unfavourable market forces, and exclusion from human development efforts and economic opportunities.
- Both groups are victims of violation of basic rights including violence, social discrimination, hostile socioeconomic conditions and social threats.
- Income vulnerability and institutional deprivations are high among these groups while social and cultural threats make their livelihoods vulnerable and volatile. Their access to traditional livelihood activities is dwindling, while they do not get access to new livelihoods due to discrimination and their lack of access to education and needed skills.
- Their employment opportunities are extremely limited, existing livelihoods are highly fragile, and social status and identity is low and unrecognised.
- The legal, administrative and other social institutions do not usually operate equitably to protect their rights in society; their voices remain mostly unheard and their representations in political and social institutions are almost non-existent.
- Most women and children in these groups face additional marginalisation, rights violation, and have fewer opportunities to access education, health, economic opportunities, protection and justice.
- These communities are unorganised and remain highly segregated in social, economic, cultural and political dimensions. More often, they are socially and culturally stigmatised.
- For Bangladesh, the realisation of the theme of 'Leave No One Behind' (LNOB) of the 2030 Sustainable Development Agenda will remain unfulfilled if the specific disadvantages and causes of marginalisation of these groups are not addressed.
- For realising the LNOB vision, the key will be to adopt evidence-based policies to address strategic and other causal factors behind their socioeconomic marginalisation and human rights violations and implement targeted programmes formulated and implemented based on specific ground realities of these groups.

The approach adopted towards empowering these groups has to be holistic in nature, to accomplish their all-round development through (i) social and political empowerment; (ii) economic empowerment; and (iii) social justice with an inter-sectoral focus and inputs from both the government and non-government organisations. The efforts need to include, among others: education and productive skills; health and family welfare; labour and employment; women and child development; livelihood development; providing secured access to land and productive assets; social justice and

Key Challenges

Plain land ethnic communities

empowerment; political participation and involvement in decision making processes; and adoption of special legislations and protective programmes.

Key Challenges

Plain land ethnic communities

Plain land ethnic communities living in remote areas of Rajshahi, Rangpur and Mymensingh divisions of Bangladesh (who have been covered in the present Report) are socially, economically, culturally and politically excluded and marginalised in all respects. These groups face discrimination, social prejudice, difficult living conditions, lack of government support services and land dispossession which have deep historical and cultural roots. With limited social and political participation and representation both at local and national levels, plain land ethnic communities have practically no voice in the decision making and policy and programme formulation process. Some of their key challenges are:

- **Large scale land dispossession:** Preserving their land is a key challenge, including lack of legal documentation to fight claims to ethnic lands, illegal encroachment on ethnic areas and lack of legal recourse.¹⁹
- **Social exclusion and discrimination:** Despite some improvements, persistence of social exclusion and discrimination of plain land ethnic groups from mainstream Bengali society.
- **Unhealthy living conditions:** Being distinct ethnic groups, they live in isolated areas and mostly rely on other community members with no or little government or external assistance. As a result, most ethnic people face difficult living conditions with houses made of mud, tin or thatched material; lack consistent access to safe drinking water; suffer from lack of hygienic sanitation facilities; live in endemic poverty along with no access to quality education, acute incidence of child marriage, and persistent insecurity.
- **Little or non-availability of basic government services and benefits for most of the plain land ethnic minority populations:** In terms of accessing basic government services and benefits, plain land ethnic communities face two key exclusions: remote location of most ethnic communities and discrimination. Ethnic communities have access to the government health care system but poor services at health facilities with inadequate medicine and qualified doctors. Further, there prevails discrimination in the provision of health services based on ethnicity and class. Allowances for vulnerable groups including the elderly, mothers and widows are often out of reach for ethnic people because of excessive illegal payments, remote location of government offices, or discrimination.
- **Plain land ethnic communities are mostly ignored by the formal social and political institutions:** National and local social and political institutions including the mainstream political system and local government institutions mostly remain unaware of the needs and demands of these ethnic communities. Ethnic people generally do not participate in social and political institutions and have hardly any representation at the local or national level.

¹⁹ Land dispossession of plain land ethnic minorities is also affected by government policy. Prominent examples where the ethnic minorities have lost out because of some government directive include the 'eco-park' project in the Garo/Mandi-inhabited Madhupur forest area, the 'national park' project in the Khasi-inhabited parts of Maulvibazar district, and the eviction of Santal people in Dinajpur district in the name of 'social forestry'. See. Chakma and Maitrot, 2016.

Transgender community

Transgender community

Transgender people are one of the most vulnerable groups in Bangladesh society. They face violence, discrimination, and hostile behaviour from the mainstream people in every sphere of their life. Members of the transgender community face bullying at schools, barriers to employment, difficulty in accessing health care, as well as harassment and verbal abuse in both public and private spaces including fear for their safety. The government has taken steps to legally recognise hijras as a third gender category—which is an important positive development.²⁰ This marks a significant step towards securing a range of human rights for hijras in Bangladesh, although the implementation process of the decision requires clarification regarding issues such as who qualifies as a hijra.²¹ For the transgender people, some of the main challenges are:

- **Threats, vulnerability and a climate of hostility in society:** The climate of fear is exacerbated by social marginalisation as well as impediments to accessing employment, health care, and education. These barriers and the climate of insecurity leave the people feeling extremely frustrated and fuel emotional distress.
- **Exclusion from education and skill development:** Transgender people face bullying and harassment from fellow students and school officials creating hostile school environment that makes it difficult for these students to concentrate on school education. Some policies reinforce stereotypical gender roles and the transgender young are unable to pursue educational opportunities and fall victim of drop out, mostly from school.
- **Working barriers for transgender people:** With low level of education and skills, the policy gap is one of the main obstacles for transgender employment rights. There is no determined policy regarding their employment and no clarification by the state on how they will contribute to society. Educational status is very low and lack of education is a major factor for not having access to the formal job sector. Policies are needed for guaranteeing education of transgender people and legal provisions are needed to remove discrimination and exploitation of transgender people in the workplace.
- **Discriminatory practices in society:** The transgender people routinely face extreme discrimination in every aspect of their lives, from accessing healthcare to applying for a job. Society has yet to understand and recognise the multidimensional aspects of gender-identity discrimination and the physical and emotional effects of stereotypical perceptions experienced by transgender people. Ongoing programmes and initiatives designed to reduce extreme poverty should prioritise the inclusion of these people. This will allow for redesigning policies in education, health and employment, which is necessary to promote social integration and reduce stigma and discrimination. There persist low and restricted opportunities for accessing education, skills and employment; deprivation from inherited property and financial exclusion hindering self-employment activities; no decent job offer and discrimination in blue collar jobs; and harassment and humiliation in workplace.

²⁰In January 2014, Bangladesh adopted a policy decision “recogniz[ing] the Hijra community of Bangladesh as a Hijra sex.”

²¹ In Bangladesh, the term ‘hijra’ is used as an umbrella term to designate a group of individuals that may include intersex individuals, castrated men, and transgender women (assigned male at birth). This group lives as a community or ‘family’ under the guidance of a community leader or ‘guru’. Therefore, hijra is not a gender, rather a community. This is where the adopted policy fails in Bangladesh, since it does not clearly define the diverse gender categories under the term ‘hijra’. Individuals with different gender identities, such as transgender women and transgender men, are excluded because they are not part of the hijra culture – yet they remain vulnerable to societal shame, discrimination, and violence. Hijra is an identity category that predates colonialism and carries a unique socio-cultural significance. The government needs to ensure that transgender individuals are not discriminated against on the basis of their gender identity by ensuring the passage of an Anti-Discrimination Law, with the inclusion of gender identity and sexual orientation as a basis for non-discrimination.

Key Recommendations

1. Policy interventions by the state

- Political commitment is imperative to install an equitable development process. Several actions by the state may be considered:
 - i. Adopt new laws and policies to protect the rights of these marginalised communities.
 - ii. Create space for inclusion of specific interests of these marginalised communities in the policy framework. Ensure access to education, health, nutrition and other basic services through adopting administrative measures; adopt special measures for specifically recognising the rights/interests of these marginalised communities (e.g. inter-ministerial committee, separate ministry/division etc.); adopt specific social protection/safety net programmes.

2. Restructure markets

Adopt policies to make all markets (e.g. labour, credit and financial, input, output etc.) responsive to the interests of the poor and the marginalised groups through ensuring their access to efficient market services and providing products/services suited to their specific needs and demands.

- ii Adopt measures to create access of these groups to required education, employable skills, and capacity development.
Create scope for banks, MFIs and other financial institutions for ensuring financial
- iii inclusion of these groups and design special credit and financial services schemes specific to the needs of these groups.
Enhance market linkages and adopt measures for linking entrepreneurs of these
- iv marginalised groups to supply chains for procuring modern inputs, management services and technologies, and marketing outputs in domestic and external markets.
Adopt measures for accessing labour market information, skill requirements and job opportunities by these groups.

3. Adopt marginality-sensitive social policy

- i Facilitate knowledge sharing on social diversity and social acceptance of marginalised groups as equal members of society as well as on building social harmony, integrations and social inclusion for all.
- ii Engage LGIs and the media to promote public opinion against social discrimination and use NGOs and civil society to promote an inclusive society.

Specific Recommendations for Plain land Ethnic Minorities

4.Implementation of special mechanisms to ensure flow of funds/benefits

- i Adopt innovative strategies and effective mechanisms to ensure flow of funds/benefits for these groups. For the purpose, earmarking of funds for the development of these groups from the general development sectors may be introduced.

Specific Recommendations for Plain land Ethnic Minorities

- **Address systemic and structural weaknesses of plain land ethnic communities:** These communities suffer from a number of systemic and structural weaknesses including unequal treatment compared with mainstream Bengali citizens; absence of technical knowledge and skills in pursuing modern and more productive income-generating activities; health related complications, particularly premature aging due to hard manual labour; rapid depletion of natural resources in their living areas precluding them from availing alternative sources of food and ways to earn livelihoods. Ongoing structural transformation, technological innovation and rapid introduction of modern technologies are shrinking work opportunities for plain land ethnic minority communities as they mainly belong to the agrarian working class. The need is to provide them with education and technical skills to pursue alternative and more productive nonfarm livelihoods including formal job opportunities.
- **Address impact of development interventions on plain land ethnic communities:** In the ethnic community dominated locations, any development interventions should assess and address the impact of any development intervention on the ethnic communities in terms of (i) customary rights of use and access to land and natural resources; (ii) socioeconomic status; (iii) cultural and communal integrity; (iv) health, education, livelihood, and social security status; (v) recognition of social security status; (vi) recognition of indigenous knowledge; and (vii) level of vulnerability of the affected ethnic communities. In case the ethnic households are affected, they need to be provided with assistance, which would help them improve their living standards without exposing their communities to disintegration. As these are vulnerable groups, they should also be provided with assistance not only to restore their livelihoods and improve their income levels, but also to maintain their distinct cultural identity.
- **Form a separate land commission for plain land ethnic communities:** The need is to form a separate land commission for the plain land ethnic communities to secure their rights to land. The eviction of plain land ethnic minorities is a major concern as different excuses exist to uproot these people from the lands where these people have been living for ages. There are various ways through which these ethnic communities lose their lands--acquisition of land by the government and autonomous bodies; forceful eviction from their homes and lands through excuses that they do not have papers to prove their ownership and these are khas land; and process of land transfer.
- **Ensure coverage of plain land ethnic communities in national social security strategy and social safety net programmes:** Plain land ethnic communities need to be covered under the national social security strategy and social safety net programmes. The vulnerable members should be

Specific Recommendations for Plain land Ethnic Minorities

supported through food and income assistance and provided with training in various income-generating skills and investment fund and business support in pursuing income generating activities.

- **Formulate target specific action plans to increase income levels and access to productive resources of plain land ethnic communities:** Along with extending coverage under the national social security strategy, customised employment guarantee schemes are needed for the plain land ethnic communities for raising income levels and provide income security. Further, discriminatory provisions and practices, including statutory or customary barriers to access or ownership of assets, should be addressed along with using affirmative policies for improving income-generating opportunities of these groups, providing access to credit and microenterprise loans, and removing barriers to participating in productive employment.

- **Address limited access to education, health and nutrition services for plain land ethnic communities on a priority basis:** Limited access is observed in health, nutrition and education services for these communities. The action plans should focus on improving child and maternal health, reducing disparity regarding health care services and educing out of pocket expenditures. Focus should be placed on sectors, geographic locations and groups that are more isolated and disadvantaged by increasing availability and quality of social services and programmes for the poorest and these most excluded groups. In the education sector, along with enhancing access to education, the quality of education available should be considered as a matter of concern. Also more efforts should be directed towards secondary and technical education. Action plan should also focus on reaching the out of school children particularly the specific groups facing greater constraints such as working children, disabled children, and children living in remote locations or living in poverty,

- **Increase socio-political participation of plain land ethnic communities through adopting integrated approaches:** Along with ensuring economic participation of the plain land ethnic communities, specific efforts should be undertaken to enhance their socio-political participation in respective localities and local level institutions. The action plans should also focus on participatory decision-making, rights to property and reducing all forms of violence within households and communities. Moreover, rigorous promotion of 'non-discrimination' at every level as per the constitution should be promoted.

- **Establish a separate ministry for plain land ethnic communities:** Similar to the Ministry of Chittagong Hill Tracts Affairs, there is a need to establish a Ministry of Plain land Ethnic Communities Affairs that would look after all issues and interests of these ethnic communities.

- **Adopt an integrated strategy to develop a national database and introduce explicit budgeting for plain land ethnic communities:** The need is to develop a national database on community-specific disaggregated data on plain land ethnic communities to support effective planning of interventions and monitoring of progress on their status at disaggregated level. This should be accompanied by block allocation in the annual development programme (ADP) for the creation of a 'Plain land Ethnic Communities Strategic Development Fund' for implementing strategic policies/actions to support each specific community. The national database identifying the groups and

Specific Recommendations for Plain land Ethnic Minorities

Specific Recommendations for Transgender Community

their socioeconomic characteristics will provide the needed community-specific disaggregated data on these ethnic communities. This will help design concrete strategic actions/programmes to address exclusion and reduce inequalities. Related statistics are also needed to effectively monitor the progress. In this regard, community specific representative surveys could be conducted by the national statistical agencies or other institutions.

The Fund should support strategic actions for removing constraints that limit the progress of specific plain land ethnic community to expedite their catching up process. Depending upon specific contexts, these may involve basic and technical education and skill training, access to employment and other constraining elements with the aim of ensuring greater accessibility for the community to the wider economy.

- **Address climate change impact on plain land ethnic minorities:** Agriculture and related activities are the main occupation of most members of the ethnic minorities, but climate change has left most of them adversely affected especially in the barind region. Ethnic minority farmers who cultivate rice as sharecroppers face extreme difficulties as they can make little investments in purchased inputs (e.g. water and modern inputs) and the land owners are mostly reluctant to lease out farmlands to the ethnic minority farmers. These ethnic are increasingly falling victims to climate change induced weather uncertainties.

The impact of stresses and shocks (such as droughts or floods) are felt keenly by the plain land ethnic communities, who depend directly on food system outcomes for their survival, with profound implications for the security of their livelihoods and welfare. Although such stresses and shocks are often associated with seasonality, and are embedded in their traditional practice of agriculture and there is considerable experience of coping and risk management strategies among these people. However, with climate change, the magnitude and frequency of stresses and shocks is changing and approaches such as social protection, disaster risk reduction and climate change adaptation are needed to bolster local resilience and supplement the experience of these communities.

Specific Recommendations for Transgender Community

- **Address the transgender community's persistence at the extreme margin of exclusion:** The transgender community is living at the extreme margin of exclusion for centuries having no sociopolitical space where they can lead life of a dignified human being. Their deprivations are grounded in society's non-recognition as a separate gendered human being beyond the male-female dichotomy. Being outside the norm has prevented them from positioning themselves in society with human potential and security. They are physically, verbally, and sexually abused. Extreme social exclusion diminishes self-esteem and sense of social responsibility. The transgender community needs to be given due space in society as citizens of Bangladesh and part of society's diversity, have gender, sexual and citizenship rights, that need to be protected.

Specific Recommendations for Transgender Community

- **Employment opportunities:** The stark reality is that the transgender people in Bangladesh suffer from substantive levels of social, economic, cultural, governance and all other forms of deprivations and enjoy limited freedom in their social participation and decision making. The need is to create opportunities for higher education; introduce marketable skill development programmes; provide integrated technical, financial, and business development support to initiate start-ups and micro and small enterprises (MSEs); initiate training programmes for acquiring specific skills e.g. chefs, crew members and in creative jobs such as tour guide, working in RMGs sector, beauty parlours, etc.
- **Need for legal and procedural reform:** In the formal job sectors, there is no mention of transgender people and also the quota system in the government sector does not have any separate quota for them. The national budget for FY2021-22 provides special tax incentives to companies or working institutions that employ third-genders. While this is a welcome change, but a comprehensive transformative change is needed for their survival in society as human beings. Many changes and clarifications are needed in the legislative and judicial sector to secure the fundamental rights of the transgender community.²¹ The employment policies need to be revised and changed as well. They still face ostracism in their everyday lives. Although they are now gaining legislative protection laws, these laws still cannot save or protect them from the social stigma and risks they face. It is high time they should live in society just like any other human being without any fear of discrimination, hostile behaviour, social stigma and any other kind of obstructive behaviour.²² Similarly, a legal framework is necessary so that people of the transgender community can inherit family property and have access to government jobs under a quota system.

The Ministry of Social Welfare has been implementing several social inclusion programmes for hijras as part of the social safety net programme, which includes a monthly allowance for people aged 50 years and above, scholarships for 'hijra children', and skills and capacity development training to engage the youth in income-generating enterprises.²³ The important aspect is to adopt well-targeted

²¹ With the recognition of the hijra community of Bangladesh as a hijra sex, in addition to 'male' and 'female', national ID cards now have a 'hijra' category. Other than 'male' and 'female', the Bangladesh passport features a third category: 'other'. 'Third gender' is now an option on several government forms (such as those for opening a bank account at state-run institutions). Although this may seem a move forward, this misses out the fact that how unaware the government institutions are about sexual orientation and gender identity. This, in turn, deepens many deep-rooted misconceptions about the term 'hijra' among the common people.

²² For example, the lack of awareness during physical examinations carried out requiring "authentic hijras to be identified through medical check-ups" by the Ministry of Health and Family Welfare resulted in many trans individuals being harassed and asked inappropriate questions about their gender identity and sexuality. This resulted in members of the hijra community shying away from getting their national verification IDs as the citizens of Bangladesh, barring them from opening bank accounts, having passports and, most importantly, getting jobs. As a result, most trans individuals and members of the hijra community, despite wanting to have access to better opportunities, resort to begging to survive.

²³ According to ministry sources, among a total of about 13,000 members of the hijra community, 1,920 members have received training during FY2021-22. Only those aged 50 years and above are being given an allowance of Tk 600 per month. But these are mostly mis-targeted; and members of the hijra community claim that they have hardly ever received this allowance or the skills training from the government agencies.

Specific Recommendations for Transgender Community

policies and build gender consciousness in the government institutions to adopt proper policies for the transgender people.

- **Address social vulnerability:** Overall, the analysis indicates that the transgender people in Bangladesh suffer more from social exclusion and 'cruel' social attitude and dealings due to existing socio-cultural norms rather than absolute poverty. They are highly vulnerable, prone to life cycle poverty especially during old ages, and are deprived of basic education, healthcare facilities and employment opportunities due to their gender identity. Moreover, the transgender people--being members of a marginalised group--have little voice and participation in local and social decision making.

- **Structured and prioritised approach:** For ensuring all civic rights to the transgender community, the approach needs to be structured and prioritised covering all relevant dimensions of society. Combined initiatives by the government, NGOs, employers and all other stakeholders are essential. More importantly, awareness among the transgender themselves is needed regarding their civic and employment rights and the benefit of being formally employed. For raising their competency level and employability, human development programmes and trainings are needed. The government can adopt targeted measures to create opportunities in public services and reform the quota system for them to ensure their fair representations. It also can provide credit and business development services so that the transgender people can start their own businesses and enterprises.

- **Need for forming coalition:** In Bangladesh, social relations and norms rather than government directives are more important in dictating everyday life. The challenge of creating inclusion for transgender people in these contexts is such that it requires considerable multidimensional efforts in society beyond the activities of single organisations. This indicates that relevant organisations—both government and non-government--will have to work together in the fight against transgender discrimination. Likewise, this also highlights the importance for civil society organisations to work with relevant law enforcing agencies in the fight against discrimination of the transgender people.

To move forward, all relevant institutions must acknowledge the existence of structures of social relations and norms, including how to take advantage of them. The main challenge is to acquire the ability to capture the consent of groups of influential individuals in society and incorporate their voice in the collaborative efforts to shift social behaviours to protect the basic rights of the transgender community. Further, it is evident that just recognising the members of transgender community as citizens is not enough, what is important is to create effective channels for them to access opportunities like other citizens.

Concluding Remarks

Concluding Remarks

Along with analysing the socioeconomic status and dynamics of survival of two marginalised groups — plain land ethnic communities and transgender community in Bangladesh -- the Report suggests several priority actions for speeding up their catching up process in society. The key, however, will be to craft these policies/actions within the broader inclusive development strategies of the government that cover cross-cutting and national level issues, such as strengthening inclusive growth, ensuring financial inclusion, reducing income and social inequality, accessing quality education, health, nutrition and other basic services, adopting appropriate macroeconomic policy, addressing pockets of lagging social groups/regions, and adopting initiatives at the local level along with effectively managing micro-macro transmissions.

For moving forward along these lines, Bangladesh needs to adopt macro and sectoral policies that facilitate employment-centred structural transformation. This requires greater public investment in infrastructure; adequate development finance to channel required credit to specific productive activities including CMSMEs. Bangladesh also needs to use effective governance capacity to transform the structure of employment, nurture mutual interdependence and symbiotic relationship between industry and agriculture through supporting expansion of agri-based industries and fostering demand and production linkages, generate remunerative employment and productive occupational opportunities, and social policies that improve health, nutrition, education, skill levels and well-being of these lagging population groups and regions.

Along with eliminating all forms of discrimination, policies are needed to underscore the intrinsic value of inclusive development in Bangladesh. For practical reasons, the adopted policies will have to put more emphasis on equality of opportunities relative to equality of outcomes. The action framework needs to strive to install fair processes and interventions to protect those who have fallen behind and emphasise on investments in equal opportunities to produce a more equitable society in future.

Further, regular monitoring of progress is important to assess the degree of convergence between the left behind and the relatively advanced population groups and the lagging and the well-off regions of Bangladesh. In addition to reviewing progress measured by appropriate multi-dimensional indicators adopted for the purpose, trends in policy implementation and government allocations need to be assessed as well. For success, timely availability of data on the indicators disaggregated by different population groups and geographic locations is a major challenge and special efforts are needed to overcome the data availability issue.

Finally, these left-behind communities have issues that are directly or indirectly related to the daily work of the local governments and local institutions. For implementing the agenda, one important element will be to utilise the potential of local action to drive development and create appropriate legal and financial frameworks to support all local partners in playing their part in the achievement of the integrated and universal inclusion agenda.

Concluding Remarks

Local government and other local institutions (e.g. NGO-MFIs) are the catalysts of change and are best placed to link the left-behind communities' agenda with local communities. The key is to empower all local stakeholders especially the local government institutions, aimed at making sustainable and inclusive development more responsive, and therefore, relevant to local needs and aspirations.

The goals will be reached only if local actors including these left-behind communities fully participate, not only in the implementation, but also in the agenda-setting and monitoring processes. Participation requires that all relevant actors are involved in the decision-making process, through consultative and participative mechanisms, at the local and national levels within the overall inclusion framework.

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