Mapping and capacity building of tea plantation workers and little-known ethnic communities of Bangladesh

Society for Environment and Human Development (SEHD)
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The Society for Environment and Human Development (SEHD) works for human rights and environmental justice in Bangladesh through research, capacity building, and advocacy. Working closely with communities where the environment and human rights have eroded, SEHD gives the affected communities a voice for protection of their rights and participation in democratic processes.

"Mapping and capacity building of tea plantation workers and little-known ethnic communities of Bangladesh" is a project that has started in May 2013 for three years to engage in participatory research with the tea plantation workers and the little-known ethnic communities of Bangladesh, raise their issues, and build their capacity.

The tea plantation workers and their communities in "tied" situation in the labor lines of the tea gardens are one of the most marginalized and excluded groups of people of Bangladesh. Descendants of the indentured plantation labor force and isolated from the majority community they remain largely unrepresented in democratic and political processes. Among the ethnic communities there are as many as 60 groups, little-known or invisible to the majority community and also to the outside world. Capability deprivation of these communities makes their sufferings and the structural abuses generational.

A combination of participatory inventory, investigations, survey, study, and analysis on wage, work, education, and health condition, vulnerability of women and children and other human rights issues of the final beneficiaries of the project will generate information and knowledge, which published, will give a clear map of these communities. The outcomes of research used as campaign tools will educate the majority community and those who take decisions.
Partner and Associates

- Partner: Gram Bikash Kendra based in Dinajpur.
- Associates: Bagania, based in Srimongol and an organization working among the tea workers; Maulvi Bazar Cha Jangoshthi Adivasi Front (MCJAF) based in the tea gardens and an organization of the tea communities; and Jatyio Adivasi Parishad (JAP) based in Rajshahi working for rights of the Adivasis of North Bengal.

Areas of field research: Tea growing areas in the Northeast and Chittagong; North-center, Northwest, and the Chittagong Hill Tracts (CHT) where the tea plantation workers and little-known ethnic communities live.

Target groups: Community leaders, youth, community-based organizations, human rights defenders, civil society, local elected bodies, politicians, civil servants, Directorate of Labour, tea estate owners, and the media.

Final beneficiaries: The tea plantations workers and their community of some 600,000 people and little-known ethnic communities, their women, youth, and children in particular of some 500,000 people.

The tea production areas and tea communities

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Districts</th>
<th>Upazilas</th>
<th>Valleys</th>
<th>No. of Tea Gardens</th>
<th>Ethnic Groups</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Sylhet</td>
<td>Sylhet Sadar, Jaintiapur, Fenchuganj, Goainghat &amp; Kanaighat</td>
<td>Sylhet</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>Baraik, Bihari, Pahan, Sadri, Telegu, Banai, Bauri, Munda, Been, Bhipuri, Bhumij, Bonaj Chowhan, Gando/Ganj, Gurka, Halam, Kharia, Konda, Madraji, Mushor, Nayek, Noonia, Oria, Panika, Bashfor, Kairi, Bagdi, Kalindi, Rautia, Gola, Gouri, Rajbhar, Mridha, Mahle, Patra, Shabdakar, Pahari, Tel, etc.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Maulvibazar</td>
<td>Maulvibazar Sadar, Srimangal, Kulaura, Kamalganj, Rajnagar and Barlekha</td>
<td>Juri, Langla, Monu-doloi &amp; Balishira</td>
<td>90</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Habiganj</td>
<td>Chunurghat, Bahubal, Madhabpore, &amp; Nabiganj</td>
<td>Lashkarpur</td>
<td>23</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chittagong</td>
<td>Fatikchhari, Rangunia, Banskhali &amp; Patiya</td>
<td>Chittagong</td>
<td>22</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rangamati</td>
<td>Kaptai</td>
<td>Chittagong</td>
<td>1</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Brahmanbaria</td>
<td>Brahmanbaria Sadar</td>
<td></td>
<td>1</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The little-known ethnic communities and their concentration (outside the tea gardens)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Regions</th>
<th>Ethnic Groups</th>
<th>Population</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>North-center: Mymensingh, Tangail, Gazipur, Jamalpur and Sherpur districts</td>
<td>Hajong, Koch, Banai, Dalu, Hodi, Shabar, Rajbongshi/Bongshi, Gurkha</td>
<td>Exact sizes of different little-known ethnic communities are difficult to find. Different sources mention different numbers. The sizes of these communities range from less than 100 to 60,000.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
**Overall objective(s)**

a. Promoting the rights, fundamental freedoms, and representation of tea plantation workers in "tied" situation and of little-known ethnic communities in the wider socio-cultural and politico-economic contexts in Bangladesh.

**Specific objective(s)**

a. The target groups become more aware about plights and rights of final beneficiaries and promote their participation in democratic and political processes.

b. Civil society organizations and the state promote human rights, access to resources, and fundamental freedom of the excluded groups (particularly the final beneficiaries) of Bangladesh.

**Expected results**

a. Information and analysis developed on exclusion, capability deprivation, and rights provide useful tools to the target groups and final beneficiaries to claim rights. These will also add significant value to the literature and discussion on social exclusion, capability deprivation, and rights of the excluded groups in Bangladesh.

b. Participation and representation of the target groups and final beneficiaries in political and democratic process strengthened. Dialogues, seminar, monitoring of implementation of international/regional instruments and national laws, solidarity actions, and awareness activities will bring the targets and the final beneficiaries face to face with the elected members in the local government, members of the parliament, officials of civil administration, justice systems, owners of the tea gardens, and Directorate of Labour (relevant for the tea workers) among others.

c. Deprivation of final beneficiaries becomes an agenda to civil society, human rights groups and the state. The final beneficiaries, their plights, unprecedented wage deprivation and captive situation of the tea workers in particular compared to their Indian and Sri Lankan counterparts known to a wider public due to project actions will have an influence on the civil society, human rights groups, and the state.

d. The final beneficiaries are treated with respect. There is no doubt that the tea workers and many of the little-known ethnic communities are among the "socially excluded" groups of Bangladesh living on the fringe. Exclusion has serious effects in the lives of those excluded, as illustrated by Amartya Sen in his paper on social exclusion: "being excluded from social relations can lead to other deprivations as well, thereby further limiting our living conditions. For example, being excluded from the opportunity to be employed or to receive credit may lead to economic impoverishment that may, in turn, lead to other deprivations (such as malnourishment or homelessness). Social exclusion can, thus, be constitutively a part of capability deprivation as well as instrumentally a cause of diverse capability failures" (Sen 2004). Exclusion and capability deprivation of the final beneficiaries will be better understood by the majority community, the first step towards treating these communities with respect.
Key activities

a. Mapping, inventory, and investigations of situation of the tea plantation workers and little-known ethnic communities of Bangladesh.

b. Campaign and advocacy on wage, work, education, and health condition, access to land, and deprivation of the final beneficiaries.

c. Training in capacity building of different stakeholders [including the media] and developing training modules and manuals.

d. Publication and production of a good number of books, survey reports, manuals, photography exhibition, documentary film, newsletters and dissemination of information through seminars, dialogues, conventions, and solidarity events.

e. Monitoring of implementation of international/regional instruments and national laws providing decent work condition and political protection.

f. Solidarity networks established among the targets and final beneficiaries.

g. Awareness activities on effective participation in national elections.

Methodology: It is a participatory initiative. Together with the applicant the partner, associates that represent the final beneficiaries, project staff, scholars, other targets, and the final beneficiaries will participate in implementation of different actions and activities. Significant part of the actions under the project relate to mapping, inventory, and investigations of situation of the tea plantation workers and little-known ethnic communities of Bangladesh and generation of information and knowledge about communities that are excluded and marginalized. These communities generally witness top down approach ("etic") on them. But in mapping these communities, their issues, concerns, and needs, the approach will be "emic", which refers to "insider" or "bottom-up".