

Helpdesk Research Report: Social Exclusion in Bangladesh
Date: 30.05.08

Query: What are the key characteristics of social exclusion in Bangladesh?

Enquirer: DFID Bangladesh

1. **Overview**
2. **Key Documents**
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 - People with disabilities
 - Migrants
 - Other groups
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1. Overview

There is no comprehensive study on social exclusion in Bangladesh, and research on the extent of social exclusion, and in particular its outcomes, is limited. A large portion of the existing research focuses on women (this is dealt with in a separate GSDRC Helpdesk Research Report on 'Gender Inequality in Bangladesh'). Much of the remaining research focuses on ethnic minorities (indigenous peoples), who are concentrated in rural areas and variably excluded from social, political, and economic arenas. These groups have experienced lack of recognition, fear and insecurity, loss of cultural identity, and social oppression. Other excluded groups include sex workers, people with disabilities, street children and urban-rural migrants. Whilst it is widely cited that people with HIV and AIDS are also excluded as a result of social stigma, it seems that there are no specific studies on how people with HIV and AIDS experience social exclusion in Bangladesh.

A common form of exclusion for the above groups is exclusion from wider social (support) networks, which can be essential in areas where state services are lacking. The impact of this exclusion is felt both in terms of economic disadvantage and loss of moral support. Other common manifestations of exclusion are; unequal access to employment opportunities; unequal access to formal services such as health and water and sanitation; and landlessness, which is often cited as a particularly damaging form of discrimination. A major area of concern in terms of the impact of social exclusion seems to be the exclusion of children from education. Studies have found that processes of marginalization in the wider society extend into the classroom and the result is that several groups of children have little or no access to education.

Various factors are cited as drivers of social exclusion in the literature. Among them are: long held discriminatory beliefs and stigma; social institutions such as the caste system; and the hierarchical organization of societies according to dominant cultural values. Political exclusion and unequal access to resources are more often discussed in the historical context of the formation of Bangladesh and its colonial past.

Social exclusion and poverty are widely considered to be closely related and overlapping. There is evidence that the exclusion of groups from wider social networks reduces their economic prospects. Poverty is highest in areas in which indigenous peoples are concentrated (mainly in the Chittagong Hill Tracts). Broadly speaking, social exclusion keeps people poor.

2. Key Documents

Ethnic minorities

- Shafie, H. and Kilby, P., 2003, 'Including the Excluded: Ethnic Inequality and Development in Northwest Bangladesh', *Labour and Management in Development Journal*, Vol. 4, No. 3
<http://dspace.anu.edu.au/bitstream/1885/42127/1/4-3-shafiekilby.pdf>

This paper discusses the processes of discrimination and exploitation that have led to the exclusion and marginalization of indigenous communities (Adibashi) in Northwest Bangladesh. It finds that ethnic identities in the region are hierarchically ranked, creating barriers to indigenous people's inclusion in wider social networks. Cultural/social exclusion derives from the majorities' (Bengali) insistence on certain value preferences which are different to the Adibashi's. Moreover, the enforcement of the notion of 'national unity' seems to aim to eliminate the particular cultural and political values of indigenous peoples. The result is that Adibashi's are socially isolated, with little access to mainstream economic and political spheres.

The complex interplay between ethnic inequality, enduring discrimination, lack of education, little access to land (and water), and lack of employment has resulted in increased poverty amongst these indigenous groups. The paper considers the connection between social exclusion and the idea of 'poverty as capability deprivation'. It argues that social exclusion can be better understood when placed in the broader context of inequality (economic inequality, lack of opportunity and inequality of choice). Policy options for Adibashi development are explored with a focus on analyzing the relationship between ethnicity and labour and financial markets.

- Bal, E., 2007, 'Becoming the Garos of Bangladesh: Policies of Exclusion and the Ethnicisation of a 'Tribal' Minority', *South Asia: Journal of South Asian Studies*, Vol. 30, Issue 3, pp. 439-455
<http://www.informaworld.com/smpp/content~content=a786629084~db=all~order=pag>
[e](#)

It was not possible for the GSDRC to obtain access to this article in order to review it for this research report.

Abstract: "This paper focuses on the relation between state policies and ethnicisation in the borderland of Bengal. On the basis of a case study of the lowland Garos of Bangladesh, the paper argues that attempts by the successor states of Bengal, East Pakistan and Bangladesh to 'other', and even 'exclude', the Garos have significantly impacted on Garo self-perception and organisation, resulting in the formation of a close-knit ethnic community. The paper focuses on three twentieth-century episodes in the lives of the lowland Garos. The first is the 1936 British administrative reorganisation of Mymensingh District which resulted in the emergence of a notion of a separate Garo homeland in Bengal. The second is the mass exodus of Garos across the international border into the Indian hills which took place in 1964. This traumatic experience pushed the Garos to unify. The third is the Independence War of 1971 and the birth of Bangladesh. All three episodes are directly related to state policies which excluded the Garos (as well as the neighbouring minorities) from the dominant discourse of Bengali/Bangladeshi citizenship. The paper concludes that the Garos of Bangladesh are a close-knit ethnic community—not in spite of these state attitudes—but rather as an outcome of them."

- Roy, R., 2002, 'Indigenous Rights in Bangladesh: Land Rights and Self-Government in the Chittagong Hill Tracts', Paper submitted at Indigenous Rights in the Commonwealth Project South & South East Asia Regional Expert Meeting, Indian Confederation of Indigenous and Tribal Peoples (ICITP), India
http://www.sdnpsbd.org/sdi/international_days/Indigenous-people/2004/indigenous_people_bd/document/Devasish.pdf

This conference paper discusses the historical evolution of the semi-autonomous status of the Chittagong Hill Tracts region, where indigenous peoples from different ethno-linguistic backgrounds form the majority. Their autonomy is seen to be eroded by the denial of land rights and transmigration of Bengali settlers into the region. The paper argues that these indigenous peoples are neglected and oppressed in much the same ways as indigenous peoples in the lowland regions of Bangladesh.

- Sarker, P. and Davey, G., 2007, 'Exclusion of Indigenous Children from Primary Education in the Rajshahi Division of Northwestern Bangladesh', International Journal of Inclusive Education, September 2007
<http://www.informaworld.com/smpp/content~content=a782140941~db=all>

Although education provision has recently improved in Bangladesh, low priority has been given to the education of indigenous children. This research surveyed indigenous children's primary school attendance and dropout rates in North-western Bangladesh during 2004. It found that few indigenous children (22%) completed a year of primary education, and an additional 18% attended some school but dropped out. It is likely that a large percentage of indigenous children never experience or complete primary education, and probably do not attain even basic literacy skills.

Poverty, child labour, and other factors such as ignorance toward education, language (schools use Bengali or English, whereas indigenous people use tribal languages), cultural alienation, and parents' seasonal migration account for the low rates of school attendance. The indigenous people are poor and rural-based, and education is not their first priority. Children are often required to find employment, or take care of siblings whilst their parents work, and therefore cannot attend school. The problem is exacerbated by the fact that indigenous people live in dispersed remote villages and small hamlets where there are no educational facilities. In addition, discrimination against indigenous people extends into the classroom environment, where indigenous children sit separately from children from the dominant groups. The paper discusses the link between poverty and education outcomes, concluding that reducing or eliminating the costs associated with education should be a priority.

- Goswami, H., 2004, 'Everyday Forms of Discrimination Experienced by the Minority: an Exploratory Study in a Village in Bangladesh', Journal of International Development and Cooperation, Vol. 10, No. 2, pp. 121-150
<http://home.hiroshima-u.ac.jp/idec/contents/publications/journal/vol10-no2-2004.pdf#page=126>

This study analyses the discrimination experienced by the Hindu religious minority in Bangladesh in their everyday interactions with the Muslim religious majority. The analysis is focused on the concept of power and how power affects intergroup relations. The article notes that previous studies on discrimination against religious minorities in Bangladesh have focused mainly on the institutional aspects of discrimination. It discusses the historical context for relationships between religious groups in Bangladesh.

The main discriminatory patterns identified through the study are: criticism of rituals and practices; verbal harassment; offering poor services; exploitation of labour and money; verbal threats; physical attack; obstructing the celebration of festivals; and land dispossession. The study found that participants from lower socio-economic backgrounds were more prone to receiving discrimination than those from the upper groups. Land grabbing was found to be the most damaging element of discrimination.

- Dyrhagen, G. and Islam, M., 2006, 'Consultative Meeting on the Situation of Dalits in Bangladesh', International Dalit Solidarity Network/ Bangladesh Dalits' Human Rights http://www.idsn.org/Documents/asia/pdf/Bangladesh_full_report.pdf

This report argues that although there may be a general perception that discrimination against Dalits does not exist in Bangladesh, discriminatory practices *do* exist to a wide extent in Hindu and Muslim communities. The manifestations and effects of this caste-based discrimination are discussed with historical context.

The paper describes how Dalits are excluded from public and social spheres. It argues that basic provisions like shelter, food and water are not adequately provided for in areas where Dalits live, and that they have inadequate access to health care facilities and education. They also lack housing, employment and access to political spheres. Dalits are 'socially hated' by other communities, excluded from public events and religious spaces. The paper concludes that although Dalits are playing a significant role in the country's economic, environmental and social development, Dalit communities are some of the most economically marginalized and socially excluded groups in Bangladesh.

People with disabilities

- Foley, D. and Chowdhury, J., 2007, 'Poverty, Social Exclusion and the Politics of Disability: Care as a Social Good and the Expenditure of Social Capital in Chuadanga, Bangladesh, *Social Policy & Administration*, Vol. 41, No. 4, pp. 372-385 <http://www.blackwell-synergy.com/doi/pdf/10.1111/j.1467-9515.2007.00559.x>

This study explores how people labeled with disabilities in Chuadanga, Bangladesh, are denied equitable access to social support networks and formal services as a result of the stigma that is culturally ascribed to disability. Social networks are essential community-based systems of support in situations where formal state services are lacking. Exclusion from these networks, and from the 'social solidarity' they provide, deprives people labeled with disabilities (and their families) of moral well being. It also makes it far more difficult for them to break out of poverty and ill health in the longer term. People labeled with disabilities are excluded from microfinance schemes, own less land and are less likely to be involved in any economic activity. The vast majority of them have to leave employment (87% of the study participants labeled with disabilities had left full-time employment within the first year of their disabled status). Moreover, "although people labeled with disabilities are identified as a particularly vulnerable category of people, their own knowledge and perspectives are conspicuously absent from policy formation and implementation". (p.373) The paper also finds that the circumstances of those labeled with disabilities depend not only on the financial situation of the household, but also on how economically significant the member labeled with a disability is within the household composition.

- Ahsan, M. T. and Burnip, L., 2007, 'Inclusive Education in Bangladesh', *Australasian Journal of Special Education*, Vol. 31, Issue 1, pp. 61-71 <http://www.informaworld.com/smpp/content~content=a779311011~db=all>

It was not possible for the GSDRC to obtain access to this article in order to review it for this research report.

From abstract: "This article reports on inclusive education in Bangladesh for children with special needs. Bangladesh is not behind other developed countries in enacting laws and declarations in favour of inclusive education, but a lack of resources is the main barrier in implementing inclusive education. Special education and integrated education models exist in Bangladesh. The difference is that almost all school age children with disabilities in developed countries such as Australia are in education, whereas, 89% of children with disabilities are not in education in Bangladesh. New initiatives for Bangladesh are described, and further initiatives are suggested, such as link programmes between regular and special schools, dual placement provisions, development of special units in regular schools, initiation

of model schools for others to follow and inter-ministerial and inter-agency collaborations to improve inclusive education practices.”

Migrants

- Afsar, R., 2003, 'Internal Migration and the Development Nexus: The Case of Bangladesh', Paper prepared for the Regional Conference on Migration, Development and Pro-Poor Policy Choices in Asia, Dhaka, 22-24 June
http://www.livelihoods.org/hot_topics/docs/Dhaka_CP_6.pdf

This paper provides an overview of the problems faced by rural to urban migrants in Bangladesh. These include physical insecurity, poor housing, poor access to basic services, and discrimination by government officials. They consequently have poorer health and greater vulnerability compared to the general urban population. More than half (53%) of poor migrants live in private slums and 44% squat on public land. Generally, a family of five lives in the space of about 14 square metres, 2.7 square metres per capita. A non-slum resident has almost six times as much space. Poor living conditions also give rise to various health problems, particularly given the combination of mud floors, flimsy walls, heat and humidity, torrential monsoon rains, and poor access to water and sanitation services. Nearly three-quarters of slum dwellers depend largely on outside water taps, which are shared by five to six families. To fetch water for drinking and cooking, a female slum resident must travel an average distance of 69 m daily. Nearly 90% of the slum dwellers use hanging and other types of non-sanitary toilets in Dhaka city, whereas 90% of non-slum residents have modern toilets and 25% of households in small and medium towns have septic tanks.

Other groups

- Human Rights Watch, 2003, 'Ravaging the Vulnerable: Abuses Against Persons at High Risk of HIV Infection in Bangladesh', Human Rights Watch
<http://www.hrw.org/reports/2003/bangladesh0803/>

This Human Rights Watch report details the abuses and social stigma endured by sex workers, men who have sex with men and injection drug users in Bangladesh. It focuses on the violence perpetrated towards them by the police and powerful thugs termed *mastans*. It finds that these groups are regularly abducted, raped, gang-raped, beaten, and subject to extortion by the police and *mastans*. This violence reflects broader social attitudes which stigmatize both sex workers and men who have sex with men, who are ostracized by their families and communities and denied access to education, employment, housing, and health care. The paper argues that these groups are portrayed as inherently “bad” and face constant attacks on their dignity. This social stigma is discussed using evidence from interviews;

- Sex workers (p.31) report facing discrimination from neighbors, landlords, doctors, and health care providers among others. Religious conservatives can sometimes be the source of this stigma and violence. In addition, cemeteries have traditionally refused to bury sex workers.
 - Men who have sex with men (p.37), like women sex workers, are stigmatized in many aspects of their lives, excluded from employment and suffer harassment.
- Plagerson, S., 2005, 'Attacking Social Exclusion: Combining Rehabilitative and preventive Approaches to Leprosy in Bangladesh', *Development in Practice*, vol. 15, no. 5, pp. 692-700
<http://www.informaworld.com/smpp/938745165-54232280/content~content=a713993851~db=all~order=page>

This paper discusses how people affected by leprosy in Bangladesh suffer economic and social disadvantages as a result of the disease. Whilst the incidence of Leprosy is now below 1 in 10,000 (the threshold below which leprosy is likely to be eliminated by natural means), the paper argues that improved levels of knowledge and treatment are not matched by changes in attitude and behaviour.

Different groups are affected by leprosy in different ways, experiencing different processes of exclusion and outcomes of deprivation: the problems experienced by women with leprosy are more keenly felt than men, particularly in terms of jeopardising their chances of marriage. For men, unemployment is a frequent trigger of social exclusion. The paper concludes that both Health Education Campaigns and Socio-economic Education are necessary for addressing social exclusion.

Processes and agents of exclusion for people with Leprosy are presented under three headings:

- **Rights:** Leprosy services are now integrated into the Government of Bangladesh's (GoB) General Health Services and whilst there was some resistance, this has had been overcome through discussion and practical demonstrations of leprosy care.
 - **Relationships:** Typically, people with leprosy may not be permitted to eat or sleep with their families, and are denied access to festivals, formal and informal gatherings, markets, employment, local water supply, and other public facilities. Their children may be denied schooling and later be forbidden to marry. However, on the whole, exclusion appears to have decreased greatly, particularly within family units.
 - **Resources:** Many studies have reported how leprosy patients have suffered financially. This occurs both directly as a result of their disease, when disability prevents them from working or performing household tasks, and indirectly as a result of stigma.
- Nasreen, M. and Tate, S., 2007, 'Social Inclusion: Gender and Equity in Education SWAPs in South Asia – Bangladesh Case Study', UNICEF Regional Office for South Asia, Kathmandu

[http://www.unicef.org/rosa/Unicef_Rosa\(Bangladesh_cash_study\).pdf](http://www.unicef.org/rosa/Unicef_Rosa(Bangladesh_cash_study).pdf)

Section 4 (p.45) of this report discusses how certain groups of children are excluded from quality education on the basis of gender, class or ethnicity. These marginalized groups include: indigenous communities; low caste groups; disabled children; and children in especially difficult circumstances. Children in especially difficult circumstances are children who are 'multiply vulnerable': they live in extremely difficult conditions, may have no family support at all, or might live in families that are extremely poor, vulnerable or exploited. These include working children; children living in urban slums; child domestic workers; orphan and refugee children; children of socially vulnerable groups (children of sex workers); children of special occupation groups; children living in remote and disaster prone areas; children in conflict with the law; trafficked children; and many more. The particular social and economic reasons for the exclusion of these groups is discussed. The report argues that these children constitute a 'hard-to reach' category, who, in the short term, are unlikely to benefit from broad 'pro-poor' policies alone unless there is also specific consideration of their particular life situations and needs.

Additional Resources

- Zohir, S. et al, 2008, 'Exclusion and Poverty: An Analytical Approach for Understanding Exclusion and Assessing Programmes Targeting the Very Poor in Bangladesh', BRAC/ Economic Research Group, Dhaka

http://www.bracresearch.org/publications/Exclusion_and_Poverty%20.pdf

This research proposes a conceptual framework for understanding social exclusion and uses this framework to evaluate programmes targeting the 'hardcore poor' in Bangladesh. The framework separates the attributes (characteristics of individuals, households or communities) that lead to exclusion in one or more spaces) and spaces of exclusion to assess development interventions. A programmes' success can be assessed in terms of its achievements in including the poor in the mainstream, or in a segmented space, or not being

able to include the poor in relevant spaces in any meaningful way. The paper notes that “although there have been extensive studies on poverty in Bangladesh, there is no comprehensive study on exclusion.” (p. 2)

- Ali, A. and Shafie, H., 2005, ‘Entitlement and Deprivation: Selected Cases of Discrimination in Bangladesh’, UNESCO Office Dhaka
Not available online. See publication details at: <http://unesdoc.unesco.org/ulis/cgi-bin/ulis.pl?catno=152468&gp=0&mode=e&lin=1>

It was not possible for the GSDRC to obtain access to this monograph in order to review it for this research report.

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Websites visited

ActionAid Bangladesh, Bangladesh Institute of Social Research, Bangladesh Institute of Development Studies (BIDS), Social Development Foundation, UNESCO, UNDP Bangladesh, Eldis, Google, Google Scholar, Centre for Analysis of Social Exclusion (London School of Economics), UNICEF Bangladesh, USAID Bangladesh, Centre for Research on Inequality and Social Exclusion (CRISE), Centre for Development Research, Bangladesh, Ingenta, Informaworld, UNAIDS Bangladesh.

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