

Report for the Assessment of Project Progress and Learning of BRAC's Integrated Development Programme for Indigenous Peoples of Plain Land

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Acronyms

CHT Chittagong Hill Tracts

DM District Manager

FGD Focus Group Discussions

IDI In-depth Interviews

IDP Integrated Development Programme

IDP IP Integrated Development Programme for Indigenous Peoples of Plain Land

IGA Income Generating Activity

KII Key Informant Interviews

NGO Non-Government Organisation

PO Programme Organisers

RED Research and Evaluation Division

1. Introduction

Indigenous communities within Bangladesh continually face discrimination and extortion, with very little social awareness or avenues for gaining help. To address some of the issues affecting these very vulnerable groups of people, BRAC has initiated a pilot project under its Integrated Development Programme for Indigenous Peoples of Plain Land (IDP IP). The core priorities of the project have been 'livelihood security, community mobilisation, capacity building, health, education, human rights violation, advocacy and networking' as mentioned in the programmes yearly progress report (July 2013-June 14). An assessment was conducted by the BRAC Research and Evaluation Division's Impact Assessment Unit to assess progress and learning related to the programme objectives, and identify scope for improvement. Qualitative methods were used for this purpose and some number based information from the project MIS. This is the second phase of the report based on the continuous research conducted between January 2015 to July 2016 on the progress and learnings from the IDP-IP.

2. The Integrated Development Programme for Indigenous Peoples of Plain Land

This section describes the programme in brief including its components, objectives and goal.

Goal and Objectives

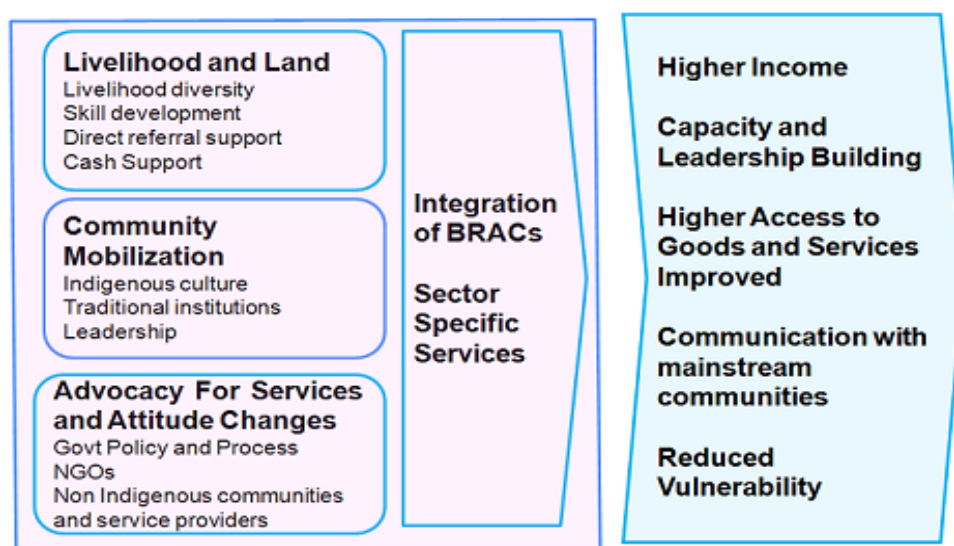
The overall goal of this project is the empowerment of indigenous peoples through improved livelihood opportunities, leadership and cultural practices, and the provision of advocacy supports in an integrated development approach.

The specific objectives include:

- To improve livelihood condition through skill development, relevant entrepreneurship and referral supports.
- To promote indigenous leadership among indigenous men, women and youth enabling them for more developmental role.
- To protect and promote indigenous culture, language and their traditional institution.
- To create awareness on and advocate for indigenous peoples' issues among non-indigenous community, service providers and policy act or set different levels.

Strategic Priorities of the IDP IP

IDP IP has three key areas as strategic priorities; Support for Livelihood Security, Community Mobilisation and Capacity Building, and Advocacy and Networking.



1IDP IP Inputs and Outputs

The programme has several interventions under these strategic priorities, through which it aims to increase the connectivity of *adibashi* communities not only with BRAC, but also with other government and non-government service providers.

Components of the Programme

The IDP IP has several components/intervention strategies, including:

- I. Support for Livelihood Security
 - Entrepreneurship and Income Generating Activity (IGA) training
 - Emergency support
- II. Education support
- III. Health and family planning
- IV. Community Mobilisation and Capacity Building
 - Leadership training for community leaders
 - Strengthening traditional community institutions
 - Courtyard meeting
 - Leadership training for youth
- V. Organisational capacity and networking
- VI. Indigenous youth conference
- VII. Observation of Indigenous culture and traditional festivals
- VIII. Addressing Human Rights Violation
- IX. Media advocacy on human rights violation:
- X. Supporting victim/survivors of human rights violation
- XI. Advocacy and Networking
 - Mapping out BRAC's services for indigenous peoples:
 - Information, education and communication (IEC) materials
 - Coordination meeting with NGOs
 - Day observation
 - Solidarity meeting at Union Parishad and Upazila level

Programme Coverage

This three-year pilot project covers the three districts of Dinajpur, Joypurhat and Naogaon, and four upazilas and twenty unions (five unions per upazila) within these districts. A detailed breakdown of the coverage area is as follows:

	District	Upazila	Union	Village	Household	Population
1	Naogaon	Patnitala	5	50	1719	6600 (M:3227 and F:3373)
		Mohadevpur	5	46	2623	11664 (M:5807 and F:5857)
2	Joypurhat	Pachbibi	5	48	2412	10793 (M:5352 and F:5441)
3	Dinajpur	Nababganj	5	64	1856	8141 (M: 4123 and F:4108)
Total	3	4	20	208	8610	37198

Table 1 Programme Coverage

Programme Structure

The IDP-IP's programme structure has gone through some modifications during the course of the implementation. At the field level there were two Programme Organisers (PO) per Upazila working to implement the activities of the programme. There are now three such POs. These POs were and are still supervised by the District Managers (DM) who sit at the district level. While the POs work on the front line of the programme the DMs are responsible for the overall supervision of the field activities as well as the management of the programme components that require building liaison with the local government administration and NGOs. There is also a trainer responsible for the different trainings and a Sector Specialist who assists with the Income Generating Activities component of the programme. Both of them are based in Joypurhat and are reportable to the District Manager of Joypurhat. A Team Leader based at BRAC Head Office is responsible for the overall management, supervision and administration of all project activities under direct supervision of the Director, Community Empowerment Programme, Gender and IDP. The District Managers will report directly to the Team Leader based at the head office.

3. Assessment of Project Progress and Learning of BRAC's Integrated Development Programme for Indigenous Peoples of Plain Land

Rationale of the Study

Though an integrated development approach is not new to BRAC this is the first time that the NGO is exclusively working with IP communities with all members of the staff from IP

communities as well. Therefore, it is necessary to develop a thorough understanding of the operation and management of the programme, before any evaluation is designed. Furthermore, BRAC has almost no previous experience of working with the indigenous communities in the North-western part of Bangladesh through its mainstream operations. Hence, as an organisation, there is very little knowledge accumulated about the indigenous local community, unlike in BRAC's other operational areas. Therefore, it is fundamental to understand the context, which is made even more crucial due to the lack of adequate literature on indigenous communities in the plain lands of Bangladesh.

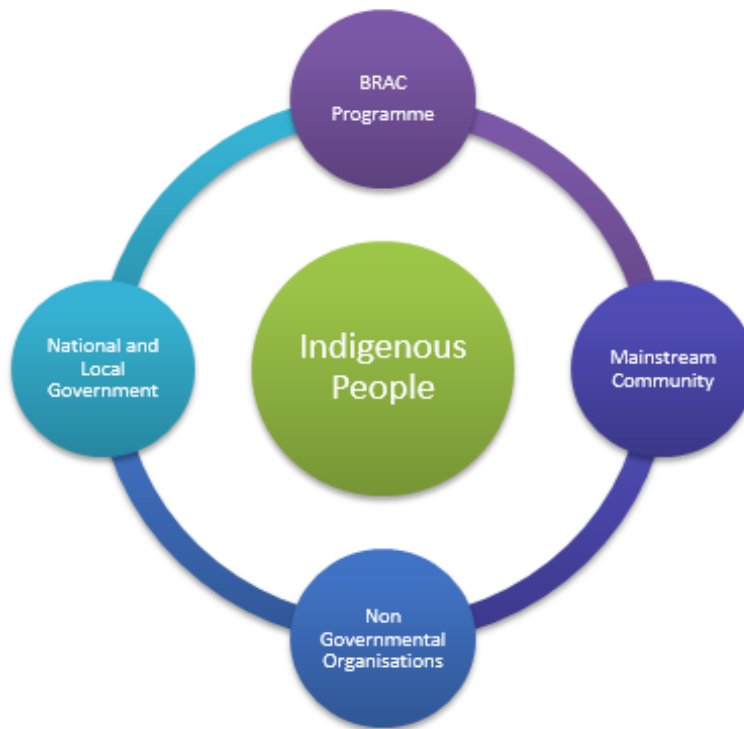
Key Research Questions

How can the key aspects of the project be improved to better achieve the project goals identified in the theory of change? These include:

- Improved livelihood of the indigenous population;
- Promotion of indigenous leadership;
- Promote of indigenous culture, language and traditional institutions.
- Advocacy for indigenous peoples' issues

Method and Research Plan

The IDP-IP project is working with five different actors with indigenous peoples in its locus. Here, from rights-based approach, indigenous peoples are the rights holder and the national and local government being the duty bearer.



2 IDP IP's involvement with different stakeholders

One way to look at the project is to think of it as an attempt of the programme to create awareness and avenues to incorporate the mainstream community in the advocacy for deterring systematic deprivation of the indigenous peoples in the national policies. The whole process will take place with the help of BRAC's mainstream programmes and other national and international NGOs and civil society organisations.

Reconnaissance and Familiarisation

Two reconnaissance trips were carried out before finalising the detailed plans for qualitative research check-lists. These provided structured opportunities for understanding the social and economic context of the programme's target population groups.

Project and Document and MIS analysis

Key project documents and reports as well as of key sector reports and related policies were reviewed. The data from the initial survey for the programme titled "Exploring Livelihoods of Plain Land Indigenous People in Bangladesh: Baseline Findings of Integrated Development Programme for Indigenous People" will be used for greater understanding of the context in the treatment and control areas. Also, internal investigation results will be used together with the mapping of BRAC sectoral activities in the target areas.

Key Informant Interviews with Project Staff, other BRAC Staff and other Experts

To understand how a project is doing and what the challenges are, communicating with the project staff is essential. Moreover, since everyone in the project comes from several different indigenous communities it is an amazing opportunity to get their insights on the '*adibashi*' context as well as their opinion on what works and what does not. However, considering the urgent need for different services in the programme areas, it is obvious that a holistic approach to development support is needed. In that case it would be necessary first off to know how and why BRAC has not been able to cover the project area with its sector specific services until now. Once the underlying causes are identified it would be ideal to engage in further discussion with BRAC staff to analyse and to introduce pathways that would allow for greater BRAC coverage in indigenous villages and to address any existing stigmas among the staff. Finally, given the scarceness of previous research on indigenous people of plain land in Bangladesh, it will be of great help to be able to talk to experts who are working on different issues surrounding indigenous people.

Focus Group Discussions and In-Depth Interviews with Project Participants

As the project has primarily focused on the community mobilization and advocacy services components, it was decided to conduct a qualitative evaluation. However, MIS data and report from the programme were used for supporting the qualitative findings. In the qualitative study tools like Focus Group Discussions (FGDs), In-depth Interviews (IDIs), Key Informant Interviews (KIIs) and Case Studies conducted in the field as well as Direct Observation were used. . Specifically, it is provisionally planned that FGDs, IDIs and KIIs will cover:

- The impact of training and financial support of IGAs;
- Support in education and health;
- The impact of community mobilization through leadership training;
- Community institutions and cooperation with local government.

Some of these elements were considered for the interviews:

- Having representation from all the indigenous groups.
- Accommodating issues such as seasonal difference in livelihood situation.
- Access to market and overall level of development of areas while looking at successful verses not successful cases of IGA beneficiaries.
- Presence of church or socio-political representation that might contribute to indigenous community development.
- Coping mechanism of indigenous peoples during the lean period.

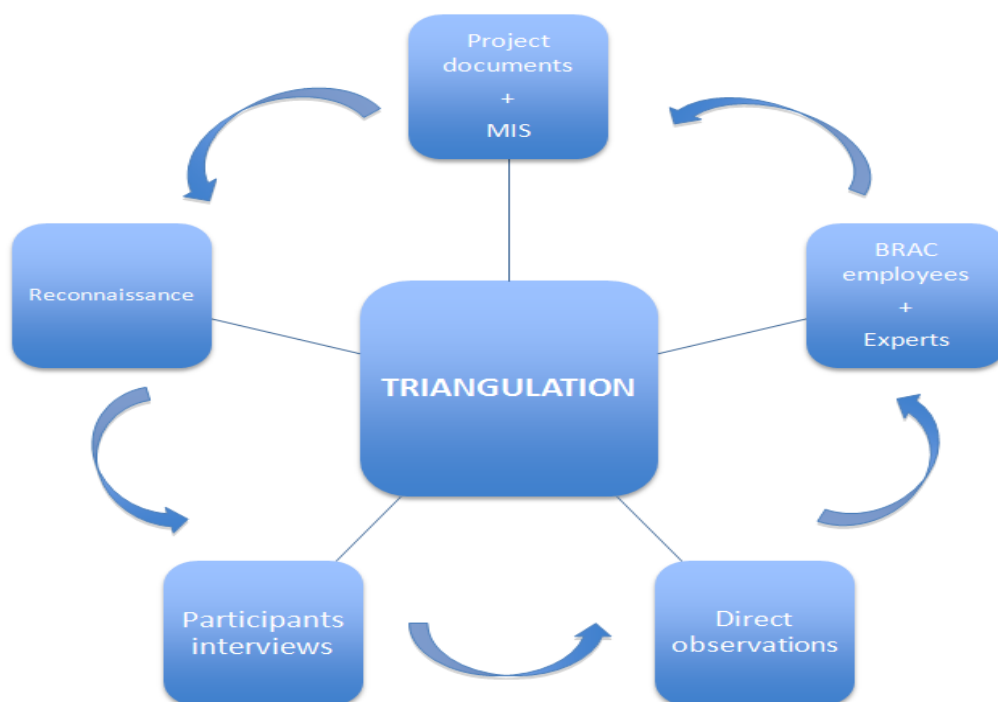
The intervention districts were selected for this study. There are twelve different indigenous group in those districts. During the study it was ensured that data is collected from all the different indigenous groups in those areas who are getting IDP IP support. Two non-intervention upzilas were also selected for data collection in order to acquire a detailed understanding of the IPs in that region. Therefore, the findings from both intervention and non-intervention areas were treated as the same and specially used in explaining the '*adibashi*' context in the report where findings from the intervention areas are focused on for illustrating the learning from the programmes pilot initiative.

Direct Observation

Given the unique nature of the project and its target population it was absolutely crucial to understand the context and direct observation would be able to provide detailed answers to questions like how are the livelihood of marginally poor indigenous households different from an average Bengali marginally poor household in that locality. How the faith, meaning system, physical set up of the villages differ and perhaps contributes to the indigenous people's cultural heritage which can be an important tool for their further development.

Triangulation

The whole research project was an iterative process involving the five different components of the research plan, as illustrated in the figure below.



3 Research plan

4. Adibashi Context

The IDP-IP's beneficiaries and their context are quite different from BRAC's normal programme participants. Understanding the unique *adibashi* context is therefore instrumental in designing interventions that can bring about a real impact in IP communities.. Our understanding of this context has been shaped through literature, interviews with experts, as well as data/observations from the field studies. These are discussed in detail below.

Poverty has become a universal part of the indigenous narrative around the world. It is a condition that has become synonymous with indigenous identity, both in the developed and the developing world. In almost all instances, it is characterised by low living standards, higher risk of disease and early death, limited access to education and constrained political voices (John-Andrew McNeish, 2005). Indigenous or *adibashi* groups in Bangladesh like many of their counterparts around the world live in poverty stricken communities, doomed to their condition as

a result of generations of land grabbing, institutionalised discrimination¹ and mainstream society's general indifference. It should be noted that the Northern belt of Bangladesh is lagging behind the rest of the country when it comes to key economic indicators, as well as education. Consequently, *adibashi* communities have even less access to resources, including education compared to their counterparts in other parts of the Bangladesh. They lack the means needed to pull themselves out of poverty. Like any other marginalised groups or people in hard core poverty these indigenous communities lack the physical as well as the human capital that could have possibly allowed for diversifying their income opportunities from agro based activities to more non-land centric ventures. Moreover, their condition also suggests that they do not have the access to education and hence lack skills and awareness in many aspects that is seen in the slightly better off or middle income groups in a society. Society's discrimination and indifference also make it virtually impossible for *adibashi*s to acquire these skills and resources. They are trapped in a seemingly endless vicious cycle of discrimination, marginalisation and poverty.

Poverty in the *adibashi* communities is a multifaceted issue with its own set of causes and reinforcing factors. These are discussed below:

Lack of constitutional recognition: Perhaps the biggest challenge facing *adibashi*'s in Bangladesh is the lack of recognition by the state. The Constitution of Bangladesh does not recognise *adibashi* groups as 'indigenous people', but rather after the 2011 Amendment, classifies them under "tribes, minor races, ethnic sects and communities" (Foundation, 2014). Additionally, according to noted writer and *adibashi* activist, Sanjeeb Drong there are currently 3 million *adibashi*s in Bangladesh but according to national statistics this number is around 1.7 million (Drong, 2016). This sort of underrepresentation and lack of official state recognition sets the precedence for discrimination against *adibashi*'s, and perpetuates practices such as continued violence and land grabbing by the mainstream population. Consequently, in this situation, the prospect of *adibashi* development becomes all the more challenging.

The issue of recognition is even more acute in the case of the *adibashi*'s of the plain land as the popular understanding of *adibashi*'s of Bangladesh mostly paints a picture of the Chittagong Hill Tracks (CHT) and the IPs in the hills. The IP's of plain land are almost lost in plain sight aside a number of incidents of human rights violations that are reported by the popular media. There is a separate ministry dedicated for the development of the IPs of the CHT which plays a crucial role in terms of advocating their rights and needs related issues in the national level policy making.

Dependence on agrarian livelihoods: *Adibashi* communities have traditionally been agrarian societies and this is true even today. Agriculture is the chief source of livelihood for many in Bangladesh, and this is particularly true for *adibashi*s. They have been engaged in this work for many generations, to a point where doing anything else is unimaginable. Many *adibashi* communities were brought into Bengal during colonial times to carry out physical labour intensive work, including farming. Historically therefore, reliance on agrarian livelihoods has been an essential part of the *adibashi* lifestyle. The mechanisation of agriculture however has meant that the niche services of agrarian labour being offered by the *adibashi* communities is

¹National Poverty Reduction Strategy Paper IMF 2015, 'institutionalized discrimination' could be replaced with 'systematic discrimination'

slowly losing its demand. This is limiting the economic opportunities available to them. This has turned their regular yearlong income into a seasonal one

During the lean periods the agri-income dependent *adibashi* communities are left with little or no choice for supporting themselves. Their lack of access to education and proper skills training means that they cannot go out and seek alternative livelihoods in situations like this (refer to interview with NGO + other interviews which talk about the increasing severity of the lean seasons).

A study done by Sadia Halim on 10 plain land *adibashi* communities uncovered the following data on their monthly employment situation.

Bengali Yearly Employment (as informal day labourers in the plain lands)²

Month	Monthly employment opportunity
Baisakh (April 14 – May 14)	14
Jaishtha (May 15 – June 14)	7
Ashar (June 15 – July 15)	30
Shraban (July 16 – Aug 15)	30
Bhadrya (Aug 16 – Sep 15)	30
Ashwin (Sep 16 – Oct 15)	No work
Kartik (Oct 16 – Nov 14)	No work
Aghrayan (Nov 15 – Dec 14)	30
Poush (Dec 15 – Jan 13)	No work
Magh (Jan 14 – Feb 12)	20
Falgun (Feb 13 – March 14)	10
Chaitra (March 15 – April 14)	No work
Total	172 days

Table 1 IP's employment pattern broken down into months

As indicated by the table above, plain land *adibashi*'s go without any work for 4 months out of the year. They only have 30 days of employment during 4 more months, with the rest of the year being spent with sporadic employment. This is not an ideal situation, especially for communities depending on day to day earnings, and highlights the need for alternative livelihood options.

Land grabbing: In the book, Indigenous Peoples and Poverty – An International Perspective, Robyn Eversole talks about the uniform nature of indigenous discrimination in the global context. Among other factors, she mentions land loss as a prime driver of indigenous poverty (Robyn Eversole, 2005) . In agrarian societies, land is the most important physical capital. As with most indigenous communities around the world, the plain land *adibashi* s of Northern Bangladesh, have seen this essential physical capital diminish over the years. Land grabbing by multiple parties, ranging from local elites to even the authorities has deprived these communities of their lands, and the very resources they need to survive. The aforementioned study by Sadia Halim on 10 plain land *adibashi* communities found that these communities had lost 202,164 acres of land to land grabbing. The estimated value of this dispossessed land is around BDT 62 billion or USD 0.9 billion (Halim, 2015).

Lack of education and skills: It has been mentioned before that the *adibashi* communities in Bangladesh are far behind their counterparts across the country, when it comes to access to

²Halim, Sadia, Land Loss and implications on the plain land Adivasis (2015)

resources for developing their human capital. Based on the current context where the *adibashi* communities need to move out of their land-centric livelihood activities, the lack of access to both education and any sort of vocational training stands as a barrier to this change. Lack of education by itself, limits the ability of individuals to gain knowledge and awareness regarding many important aspects including their civil and social rights, as well as health care options. For the *adibashi* communities, that have been facing systematic land grabbing from generation to generation, the overall situation is further exacerbated by the fact that they are further behind than their Bengali counterparts in terms of education.

Health: Poor health is a natural consequence of poverty, and this is no different for *adibashi* communities. The baseline findings of a study done for the NETZ Advancement of the Marginalized and Deprived of Economic Resources (AMADER) project shows a high prevalence of common illnesses among *adibashi* communities, in addition to low usage of sanitary latrines.

A 2013 working paper published by Shiree also explored the issue of *adibashi* health in the north western Barindra region of Bangladesh. One of the main findings of this paper was that *adibashi* communities were not well informed on proper health care options. Whatever limited information they had, were from traditional village healers. Furthermore, accessing mainstream health care services was not a viable option, as they often faced discrimination and misdiagnosis in places like upazila health complexes.

Most of the poor indigenous houses that were visited during this study had a large courtyard in the middle with neatly leppa mud house with hand painted decorations. While this appeared to be sufficiently sized for a single family, they were in fact occupied by multiple families, with as many as 15 to 20 people living in one house. Most of the homes visited did not have a sanitary latrine. The ones that did, most commonly had clean and tidy mud ones or a bamboo and straw structure with a basic ring slab. Several NGOs were offering ring slabs for installing sanitary latrines in the IDP IP area but this has not been a very popular option.

“Ek poribabre achi colony’r moton. Paka chara kacha hobe na kintu. Ekbar latrine bebohar korle, porer jon ke methor er moto porishkar korte hobe.” – Interview with Female Santal leader, Santal village, Golabari, Nawabganj

Overcrowded living conditions, along with inadequate sanitation facilities add to the already poor health conditions of these communities.

Representation: Historically, *adibashi* men and women were sought after and employed for their physical prowess. Their capacity for physical labour is something that persists to this day. *Adibashi* men and women both work in the field, unlike their Bengali counterparts; where women rarely work outside their homes. Ironically, this is something that nowadays, appears to work against their interests.

“Amra toh kore miley khai, eijonno bole, amader VGD ba VGF card lagbe na” – Interview with a Santal community member, Santal village

As indicated by the quote above, there is a perception that *adibashis* can do without the support provided by government safety net programmes, since men and women in the community both work. Often, their poor socioeconomic situation, is attributed to their cultural practices and

inherent nature. This perception appears to be ingrained in every level of mainstream Bengali society, from the general public to government representatives.

While conducting an FGD in a Santal village in Nawabganj, a Bengali neighbour commented on how the Santals in his community were poor, despite men and women both working full time, because they do not know how to save. A similar perception was reflected by a local UP Chairman, who had represented his community for over 19 years.

“If these people want to improve their position in life, they have to start paying attention to the way they live. When there is a marriage or any sort of celebration in the community, they celebrate for 5 days, indulging themselves in drinks, and not doing any work.” – Interview with UP Chairman, Daudpur Union, Nawabganj

The above quote shows that the mainstream Bengali population views *adibashis* based on established pre-conceived stereotypes. This oversimplifies the reality of their complex socioeconomic condition. This general attitude, is perhaps best summarised by the following quote

“Eder moddhe shikhar prochondo obhab, Khaddabhashe adimotar lokhon, edur khay. Aker khabar songrohit hole kaker kotha bhab na. Era neshao beshi kore. Era Bhuiya.” – Interview with Union Parishad Chairman, No. 3 Khajur Union, Mohadebpur, Naogaon.

The representation of *adibashi*'s in the mainstream consciousness appears to be largely based on certain established stereotypes that are not necessarily accurate. *Adibashis* who have experienced success also appear to have bought in to this notion to a large extent. Therefore there is a problem of representation not just among the mainstream communities, but among the *adibashi* communities themselves. In general a lot of *adibashi* targeted development initiatives focus on ending the culture of alcohol production and consumption. Alcohol consumption among *adibashis* is often popularly identified as a major problem and reason behind their misery based on anecdotal evidence. We have found no firm evidence that it is a contributing factor in the communities whom are the subject of this programme. In the mainstream Bengali culture alcohol consumption is perceived negatively and often considered a taboo. Furthermore, based on the aforementioned quotes, the common perception, is that *adibashis* are poor due to their shortcomings like laziness or lack of financial management. These views often resonate very puritan idea of poor is poor because they are lazy. And thus ignores the more crucial issues connected to *adibashi* poverty and instead simplifies it to a single stereotype. In fact many of the times in the FGDs people from the IP communities mentioned that it is absurd to blame their misery on alcohol production and consumption when they can't even afford to cook enough rice for three meals.

5. Findings based on the programme activities

Livelihood Security

IDP IP offers a variety of Income Generating Activities to help indigenous communities diversify their income sources. There are types of IGA Support provided by the programme. These include IGA skills training, support and referral services some of which are discussed with case studies below.

- IGA Training + Support

Under this scheme, the programme provides training on activities including livestock rearing, fisheries, embroidering, packaging, homestead gardening, to name a few. In addition to the training the programme provides support to the beneficiaries. For example, in the case of cattle rearing/beef fattening, the POs select and purchase the cow for the beneficiaries. They also follow up with them, and advise them on the best time for selling. This type of support system is provided in various forms for the IGAs under this first category.

Case Study on Duck Rearing

“Rearing 100 ducks is not an easy job for a single person, especially if you do not have any experience with this sort of activity” remarks Niroti Linda, as she tends to the two sheep and single pig owned by her family. Until quite recently, Niroti, who belongs to the Orao community in the village of Lokhpara in Naogaon was the owner of 100 ducklings. She received these from BRAC after taking part in a training session on duck rearing, as part of IDP-IP. She had heard about this training from her local BRAC PO at a courtyard meeting in her village. “We were given basic training on duck rearing. We learned how we should care for them and feed them, and about common diseases and their treatment. We were also told to arrange a pond for ducks and to build them a coop.” After returning from the training Niroti built a coop with her own money and rented out a small pond for the ducks. With the help of the IDP PO she got 100 ducklings, along with duck feed and medicine. “One month into rearing these ducklings, I started running into problems, and began to realise that I may have taken on more than I could handle.” Niroti first lost two ducklings when they were snatched up by foxes. She then started losing ducklings to disease. She found out from the local veterinarian that this was due to the polluted water they were drinking from the pond; which it turned out was far too small for all her ducklings. 2 months into her duck rearing venture she was down to 78 ducklings, almost out of duck feed and unable to buy more. “I turned to the PO didi for help, and she suggested that I start selling off some of the ducklings. I sold off 68, and got Tk. 8,000 for them. On didi’s advice I invested this money into buying in two sheep and a pig.” Niroti lost a few more of her remaining ducklings and was ultimately left with only 2. Her first foray into duck rearing was not very successful, but this has not left her discouraged. “I am going to try my hand at duck rearing again. This time I am not going to buy more than 25. I realize the mistakes I made the first time, and next time I will plan accordingly. My neighbours have started to become interested in this venture too, they all come to me for advice.”

The case study above highlights a success story for the programme. It also offers some key lessons to be learned:

- A feasible assessment of the beneficiary’s situation: Tailoring the IGAs, to the beneficiary’s specific situation can lead to better returns. In the duck rearing case, the beneficiary was given too many ducklings initially, and experienced setbacks. This emphasises the need for thorough assessment of the beneficiary’s context and situation, before providing IGAs.
- The importance of follow up support – Although Niroti experienced some setbacks initially, the follow up support services provided by IDP IP helped her recover. This underlines the importance of regular follow ups and support from the programme, especially after the beneficiary has started the IGA. This also came up during a discussion with the Sing community in Depkhonda, Pachbibbi, where many stated that IGAs would be more helpful if the programme focused on preparing their beneficiaries mentally and gave them hands on guidance on how to

work or run their income generating ventures, in addition to the existing provision of training and support. This is a good practice that the programme has already adopted, and one that it might consider emphasizing on more in the future.

- IGA Support

The programme also provides support for business ventures. This includes both fresh and existing businesses. Some of the IGAs in this category include vans, milk selling, salon, and vendors (feriwallas). The van in particular has been a successful IGA. Individuals who previously had to rent vans, were provided one by the programme. This allowed them to increase their daily earnings. It also opened up avenues for income diversification, as these new van owners can now rent out their vans and bring in additional income. This is particularly helpful during times of illness and when seasonal higher paying opportunities become available. IDP IP has also identified and worked with select micro entrepreneurs, who have used the programme's support to successfully expand their existing businesses.

In some cases, the IGA support is not in kind or cash but in the form of referrals or networking. This allows the programme participants to explore professional and entrepreneurial opportunities that they may not have been exposed to under normal circumstances. The programme staff mentioned that a number of *adibashi* youth were referred to different industries in Gazipur for work. Some of them are working well while a few came back. Several issues compelled them to come back. For example, some were missing their family too much and could not stay away, for others they are heavily dependent on a lifestyle of daily income they just did not know how to save a run a month with their salary and while for some others the mainstream culture and the seemingly constrained ambiance of factories that are worlds apart from their quiet village was just too much to take.

Hair Salon

Polash started working as a barber while he was still in school. He worked for a long time in salons owned by others, and eventually started thinking about opening his own business. Around this time, he attended a leadership training session offered by IDP IP. After this session, he approached the programme staff, and shared his business idea with them, seeking their support for this venture. The programme in turn helped him out by providing him with all the equipment needed to start off his own hair salon. Today, Polash runs his own hair salon in Joypurhat, along with two other employees. As a young college student, Polash is not able to always work full time at his business. He has capitalised on this opportunity to expand his income. He does this by renting out his chair to other barbers, when he himself is unavailable. The money raised from these rentals are sufficient to cover a large portion of his businesses' operating costs.

The above case study is another example of a successful IGA approach employed by the programme. Some key lessons to be learnt here are:

(i) Identifying and nurturing young talent: Polash's story is a good example of how the IDP IP programme could identify and successfully work with a skilled young entrepreneur with potential. With the support of the programme, Polash was able to set up a business in his local market. This is an exceptional achievement, given how most *adibashi*s are afraid of even working in areas that are dominated by Bengalis. In such a situation, Polash is successfully running his own business in one such area, where he is a minority

Challenges and further findings:

As a pilot programme, IDP-IP faces its fair share of challenges. These are discussed, along with some additional findings, below

Recommendations for future directions:

As the programme moves forward it would be best if the IGAs are tailored to the strengths and unique characteristics of the indigenous communities. This is where the importance of community feedback/involvement comes into play. At the end of the day, the communities themselves are perhaps most ideally placed to identify what would work best in their given context. Therefore, the best IDP-IP can do as a development initiative, is to identify the scope within the communities and work as a catalyst through which these communities can leverage themselves out of poverty in a sustainable manner.

IGAs playing to a Community's Strength

The Mahali lifestyle is intricately linked to agrarian livelihoods and bamboo craftsmanship. During the lean periods, between planting and harvesting work, they concentrate on their bamboo craft. They make dala, kula, chalni, tupri, jhaka, changari, jhuri, khacha, topa, pigeons nest, chicken coop, kholoi and others. It acts as a livelihood source that Mahalis can identify with culturally.

Nowadays this craft is becoming difficult to sustain. Prolonged deforestation has meant that bamboo groves are becoming scarce. This means that the average Mahali has to travel greater distances, and spend greater cost and time in collecting bamboo. The scarcity of bamboo has also driven up its price, which further complicate the situation for Mahali craftsmen.

On average, Mahali craftsmen have to pay around 100-150 taka for a single bamboo stick. In case if the sources are far away they can only carry back one bamboo stick at a time, which is not very practical. It is more feasible if bamboo sticks are acquired in bulk. However, this requires additional expenditure on transportation. The products made from this bamboo can usually be sold for 220-250 taka. This provides a decent profit for the Mahali craftsmen.

Bamboo craftwork is financially rewarding and culturally relevant for the Mahali communities. The IDP IP's Mahali beneficiaries themselves believe that support for this kind of work, can help create sustainable livelihoods for them. The programme can provide them with financial assistance for buying the necessary raw material needed to craft bamboo products. This initiative can be complemented with livestock rearing to increase their sustenance. For men over 40 it would be better if they are given this sort of support rather than support that requires them to go far away from their homes.

The case study above is an example of how tailoring IGAs to the unique strengths of the *adibashi* community, can be a sustainable option for livelihood improvement.

One of the biggest challenges facing IDP-IP is the lack of resources, particularly in terms of personnel. This makes it very difficult to conduct regular IGA training and support. Moreover, it creates a sizeable time lag between the actual training and the follow up support. Sometimes this gap might be as large as nine months, during which time the trainees are likely to forget the training.

For example, a single Sector Specialist (SS) and eight POs oversee the programme in 3 three districts, covering a beneficiary population of 25,000. This single SS is in charge of overseeing the IGA training and support in this area. They cannot possibly cover all the villages and communities where the intervention is running on a regular basis. The SS is responsible for organising and providing the training, conducting regular follow ups and cross checks with the trainees, addressing technical issues related to the training and most importantly, establishing market linkages for IGA trainees involved in marketable products like detergents, shopping bags, and packaging for sweet shops. It becomes rather difficult for a single SS to oversee all these components, and this naturally creates gaps in certain areas, and results in inadequate support for the trainees. This problem is neatly summarised by this quote from the SS in charge of the IGA training;

"I oversee the IGA training and support 4 Upzilas across three districts. Pachbibi is one these upazilas, and there are 49 villages here alone where we conduct the training. If a single upazila has 49 villages, imagine the number of villages in all four upazilas combined. I allot one week per upazila every month, but even then it becomes logistically difficult. It is the same for the POs. We are stretched quite thin in terms of resources and personnel, and this limits the amount of attention and support we can give to our programme participants. Naturally, the programme itself suffers because of this, and the IGA training does not have the impact that it should"

The findings suggest that IGAs that offer quick short term returns appear to be working better than those requiring longer term investments and commitment. For example, families that were given a van were able to generate income in a very short period of time, while families who were given cows, could not benefit as much from the asset in the short term. This is because; livestock requires regular investment in terms of food and time commitments for proper rearing. This has proven to be expensive for many households and logistically difficult for households where both adults are working full time. One must remember that in *adibashi* communities, both men and women in a household work as day labourers, and cannot spare the time to look after livestock. Furthermore, the MIS data showed that families who could add some of their own savings to the IDP fund could buy a relatively bigger cow as their investment and in turn their profit margin was higher too.

Therefore, profiling the beneficiaries before giving away IGA support could be an effective mechanism that will increase the allocation efficiency of the IGA support.

A lot of the IGA training is targeted toward men but the courtyard meetings through which the selection should be ideally done takes place often in the time of the day when most male members are out at work. In fact, since within indigenous communities both male and female work outside the chances of having young male and female household members being available for the sessions are low. In the case of asset distribution for example, it is possible to have people's presence in the meetings before the assets are given. However, once the asset

distribution is done their presence afterwards in the meetings is very low. This makes it difficult to follow up and offer proper support and guidance to the programme participants.

Some of the IGAs offered by IDP IP such as detergent making, and packaging for sweet shops require establishing market linkages with different suppliers, commercial agents and customers. Without such linkages, it becomes impossible for the indigenous community to bring in income from these activities. This is an area in which the programme could be focusing on. The communities IDP IP works with are generally shy and often wary when it comes to interacting with mainstream society. They are also inexperienced in business matters and more likely to be cheated in such situations. Therefore, the programme needs to be placing emphasis on creating further market linkages, as without these linkages there is risk of severely limiting the success of the IGAs provided.

In addition to insufficient support in terms of market linkages, certain IGA component also requires clear long term plans. Detergent manufacturing, which has been mentioned as an IGA offered by the programme, is a prime example that emphasised the need for this. In Bangladesh, any detergent being sold to the consumer needs to be approved by the Bangladesh Standards and Testing Institute (BSTI). This is clearly beyond the scope and abilities of the communities manufacturing the detergents at present. Moreover, how the *adibashi* manufactured detergent will compete against established market brands such as Surf Excel or Wheel to name a few. In the end, it was not possible to compete with the market. Another issue was that the group members for this investment were from different villages as that is how they were chosen during the training and the distance between the factory they set and their home was quite far for some of the members. This example was given by several programme staff and is a good example of how the programme learnt through the experiments during the pilot phase of the programme.

The initiatives that have been successful usually tend to be low investment initiatives such as the provision of vans to programme participants, or initiatives related to skills such as barber training. The skill based training is useful as it allows the trainees to find employment in the field, or to set up their own business.

Community members who received vans can use it as a regular source of income, given the constant demand for transport in rural areas where the programme operates. A van owner can earn around Tk. 200 every day during normal times and this figure jumps up to around Tk. 500 during harvesting season when farmers must transport their produce. As a low skilled occupation that requires very little investment, the van is a success story for the IDP IP's IGA component.

IGAs that develop skills have also worked out well for the programme. These include training for barbers and electricians. Teaching programme participants a specialised skill expands their employment opportunities, and at the same time gives them the option of going into business themselves. This has also worked out better when the required level of investment and commitment are low, as in the case of salons and electrician businesses.

IGAs form one of the most crucial components of the IDPIP, as they represent the means of creating long term self-sustainability within the *adibashi* communities. In order to have a meaningful long term impact, these IGAs must be tailored to the needs and the strengths of the communities as well as the experience gathered through the pilot phase of the programme.

Education

IDP IP provides education support in two ways. One is to organise seminars where they give out information about higher education opportunities like scholarships for IPs, college and university entrance examination procedures and dates as well as experience sharing from IP students who are currently studying in different colleges and universities. This awareness building session has been quite successful with participants and has encouraged them to pursue higher education.

The other component of the IDP IP education support entails financial support for students in need. This support goes towards tuition fees payment, during admission of students at college and university and registration of national exams like SSC and HSC.

One of the FGD participants from the santal community in Matkumpara, Nawabganj mentioned that her daughter who is a college student now, received 2000 taka bursary from IDP IP during her admission. It was of big help to us. Without the support, we would have had to borrow money.

An administrative issue regarding bursaries for SSC and HSC exam registration that came up from the field is that the rule from BRAC accounts is that unless there is a money receipt of registration the beneficiaries will not receive the bursary. Consequently, they are borrowing money from friends and family and at times from money lenders at a high interest to be able to pay the registration fees. In this case may be the students can bring proof of passing their 'Test Exam' that is the pre-requisite for registering for the national exams and IDP IP POs can directly be present at the registration process.

Health and Family Planning

The emergency health services component of IDP IP provides financial support to community members seeking medical help. Bhodon Krishko received a latrine with ring slab and water seal. Around that time he was ill with typhoid. Though his wife is involved in agricultural labour he is the main earning member for his family of seven. Hence with him being ill the family was in a dire situation. Then the IDP IP PO arranged for emergency support and admitted him to the hospital. Thanks to the support he got better and was back at work again.

The process for getting this support however is described by a few people as lengthy and complicated. The programme criteria requires all health care related money receipts and prescriptions to be handed over, in order to claim health support. Most beneficiaries find this process rather cumbersome. Consequently, those in emergency cases do not come to IDP IP. It would be good to address the issue so that people can be provided with impromptu support in the case of emergencies.

Community Mobilisation and Capacity Building

Courtyard meetings

Courtyard meetings are organised once a month to discuss various socio-economic issues with the participants, particularly relating to livelihood, wage discrimination, problems, local leadership, human rights and information on available services/assets. The meetings are also meant to serve as preparatory and follow-up tools of the project activities.

In fact, in most FGDs for this study the participants were able to mention some of the awareness related issues that are discussed in the court yard meetings. Sumbi Hembrom from Nawabganj's Mahali community commented that

- "Amader gram a IDP khub bhalo kaj kortese. Amra sobai Uthan Baithak a ongsho grohon kori."
- "IDP is doing a great job in our village. We all take part in the uthan baithak."

The findings from the field suggest that typically, courtyard meetings were held one to three months apart. The POs use the Courtyard meetings as a platform for disseminating health, WASH, family planning, citizen's rights related information, and for selecting participants for different programme components including training and benefits. One to one and group interaction between the communities and development workers has been the key to BRAC's success, however due to limited number of field staff, this is not always possible for the IDP-IP. This presents a challenge in terms of both communicating knowledge to the programme beneficiaries and helping them transform this knowledge into practice.

Looking at the programme coverage it can be deducted that on average there are 52 villages per office. Therefore, a single PO would have to work at around 26 villages per month, assuming there is an equal distribution of work between the POs. Since there are 20 working days in a month if the POs were to concentrate on court yard meetings they will need to visit at least two villages per day including a number of individual beneficiary visits. However, the POs job description also includes office work, asset procurement and distribution, arrangement of solidarity meetings, arrangement for different training and other activities of the programme.

Given the targeted population and multidimensional nature of the interventions that adds up to a long list of activities for the POs, it is no surprise that they were not able to spend much time with the communities. This limited interaction time between the programme and the beneficiaries it would most likely not have much effect on the attitude components as well as operational complications. In fact, the findings from the field suggest that some of the POs have designated people in the community that they call to arrange attendance for IGA support, leadership training and other activities. This in some cases has led to favouritism, discontent and divides within the community. It is important to note here that most other BRAC programmes have a designated platform and people become members in the platform and the members and POs jointly elect a leader who helps in arranging the meeting and selection process for different trainings and benefits. Therefore, in that sense the individual POs having designated person is quite rational. However, it will be better if there is a process in place so that the selection is done through consensus among the community. Often the participants of the courtyard meeting are mostly female. The low percentage of male presence is also something to look at.

Therefore, in order to cover IDP IP's target area, ensuring that the level of human resources is adequate is a must. Moreover, this situation becomes further complicated in times of unexpected setbacks. An example of one such case was seen when a PO had to go on maternity leave, and the programme could not hire a temporary replacement due to administrative complications. Therefore, there is a need to take into account extenuating circumstances while designing the programme's action plan so that the activities do not suffer in case of unexpected setbacks.

Leadership Training

The leadership training is given for two different groups. One is for the *adibashi* youth and another is the community leaders. The youth leadership is given in mixed groups of girls and boys or for only girls. Similarly, for the leadership training for community leaders it is arranged for mixed groups and in female only groups as well. Refresher meetings are also arranged for the communities so that people can continue to implement their learning from the leadership training.

It is a two and a half day training course that includes sessions covering information about BRAC and how its services can be accessed, what IDP IP is and why this separate programme exists despite there being similar BRAC services. However, the main aspect of the programme includes sessions on the concept of leadership and social structure, indigenous history of Bangladesh, the concept of empowerment, RTI act, indigenous rights and other issues. The training is a mix of lectures and group work and even includes a cultural night.

IDP IP leadership training participants were asked about their experience and what they learned from the training as well as the activities and the consequent changes that took place at an individual and the community level. Men, women and youths from indigenous communities were chosen for this training and it would be rational to assume that the level of internalisation, reaction, retention and the scope of utilising the learning from the training would be different for men and women as well as youths and adults. In fact, the very experience of getting to the venue itself created a lot of value for the participants. For a lot of the participants this was the first time they travelled so far away from their villages. It seemed from the accounts of the respondents that the level of anticipation in them was very high and they were hoping to learn something new. One of the participants from Matkumpara Santal village of Nawabganj vividly described his impression of the BLC, where the training took place.

"Amer boyoshe ami ai prothom ato sundor jaygay gelam. Amer kache tokhon sopno mone hoyechilo. Prothom din jayoar por ami sobkichu chuye chuye dekhtam."

"I have never been to such beautiful place in my life. Everything was so nice that it felt like a dream."

Some selected outcomes of the leadership training that are worth highlighting are mentioned below:

In Mohipur, Joypurhat in the Shing community, following Youth Leadership training the young participants formed a youth club namely, 'Jubo Unnayan Shangstha' in their village. The club took initiative to stop Chuwani and Haria drinking in the village. They even took harsh steps like breaking the cook stove and pots of the existing haria and chuواني makers. While strict steps are necessary to stop alcohol addiction, it is important to ensure that this does not encourage vandalism. The livelihood of the people who rely on selling alcohol needs to be taken into consideration. The club members also took initiative to ensure that every child in the village is going to school.

Very similar thing happened in Koyergoni's Santal community and in Kodompur's Orao community in Nawabganj. After the youth leadership training, once back in the village the issue of alcohol consumption was discussed with the Manjhi Haram. As a result, it was decided that no one can produce haria or chuواني unless there is a specific personal event or festival. Furthermore, it was decided that if someone brews alcohol aside traditional festivals or personal

events like weddings, funerals they will be fined (Koyergoni they decided on the fine to be Taka 500).

In both these fields people are trying to send every child in the village to school. In Khoyergoni, according to FGD participants, people have decided to pay attention to children's education and currently all the kids in the village are going to school. It was mentioned that there was a boy in the village who dropped out after 8th grade and now he is back in school and has started 9th grade.

One positive output of the leadership training that warrants special attention are the changes in attitude in people. Indigenous people are often known for their shyness and unease in expressing themselves and their views outside their respective communities especially when it comes to talking to UP members and claiming support and benefits or even being able to communicate properly in different offices. They mentioned that thanks to the training they are communicating with people from different communities. Now they can interact with the UP members without hesitation and state their rights and demands whereas previously they had to pay up a dalal (middle man). For instance, one of the participants went to the Union Parishad after having received the training and took three people there with him too. One of them was able to get a VGD card as well.

Leadership training participants from Koyergoni, Nawabganj mentioned that thanks to the training they are now aware of their rights and have been taking initiatives to use their newly acquired knowledge into practice. One of the participants in the FGD mentioned that they could feel the changes in them due to the training. Now they are aware of the importance of having birth and death registration and education which they have tried to spread among the villagers as well. However, their preaching went largely unheard. Therefore, they think that if more men and women from their village were to get this training the learnings would be better applied and positive changes would bring on development for the community.

While the leadership training appears to be largely successful, there are some areas of concern. The scope of working with the community leaders are much narrower compared to youth participants, as it seems that there is a communication gap between the programme and the community leaders (traditionally referred to as village headman). Though the PO and DM should communicate with them but it hasn't happened effectively. Moreover, most of the headmen work as day labours or agricultural labours with a daily income of 300 to 400 taka. However, when people come for the leadership training the daily compensation is only 100 taka. As a result, often even if they are interested in participating in the training they cannot afford to do so.

The success of the leadership training component shows that it is possible to have some influence over the thoughts of people over a two and a half days training. However, it is not possible to create leaders with such short training. One of the trainers in the programme suggested that the training period should be increased to at least five days.

Strengthening Local *Adibashi* Organisations

IDP IP has provided support for a number of different existing local initiatives as well as helping in initiating local self-help groups. Two examples are given below.

<i>Harirampur Maldah Chalnipara Pioneer Youth Club</i>
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- *Maldah, Nawabganj , Dinajpur*

When there is a will there is always a way, and the organisers of 'Harirampur Maldah Chalnipara Pioneer Youth Club' couldnot have proven the accuracy (alternative word) this classic proverb any better. The club does not have any permanent establishment or land, if and when needed the meetings are held in the club president (Shobhapoti) Edward Shore's house. The club was formally inaugurated in 2010 but actually it has been in action informally for the past two decades. Initially this club was for organising football tournaments for people then in 2010 Mr Shore turned this initiative into a formal club and people started contributing 10, 20, 50 or however much money they could. Eventually the organizers decided to use this platform for the livelihood development of the locals as well. When IDP IP came to work in the area in 2013 they applied for grant from IDP IP. The club eventually received 120 thousand taka in grants for purchasing a Power Tiller. However, between the time they applied and actually received the grant they were required to revise the clubs format and paperwork into a more formal one thus IDP IP not only contributed through grants but also through being the catalyst of structural changes.

Currently it is used for farming in the nearby villages for both Bengali and adbashi farmers. Though there are two power tillers in the area they are both used for personal use only. Therefore, farmers were able to use better technology which made it cheaper for the farmer as they provide a comparatively cheaper price and the farmers only pay for the diesel cost during plantation and the rest is paid off after harvesting. In the last two seasons since the tractor was bought the net income from the tractor is around 26000 taka. The cost involved in it is the driver's salary and diesel. Diesel is paid by the farmer and the driver cost is cheaper than other places. The club members are saving the profit from this year's income to buy a trolley for using the power tiller for transporting goods during off season. If that is done, then it will provide employment for two extra people during the lean period who will work as the helper of the driver.

Currently the club committee is trying to get government registration for the club. They believe that once registered the club will get government funding which they wish to use in development of their area and being the first of its kind the club members also aspire to be an example for people.

Things that need to be dealt with caution: the club is said to have been giving out small loans on the basis of 50 taka interest on per thousand per month. Perhaps there is a greater scope for BRAC Microfinance, however people's trust in local organisations is probably greater than big NGOs like BRAC.

Mushthi Chal Society
- **Joypurhat**

The motivation to create the society was provided by IDP-IP POs and then some of the villagers with the leadership of the respondent created the society. The concept of the society is that a handful of rice will be saved aside during cooking rice every meal daily by the participating families. In this way, they can save up to 1 to 1.5 Kg rice per week. The society currently has 25 members who meet every week. The saved rice is then collected from the members and stored in the leader's house and later sold in the market. The leader mentioned that she keeps the weekly rice collection safe as no one else wants to take the responsibility for it. A joint bank account has been opened where the money is being saved for future use. They would invest once there is a substantial amount of money collected and may also use it for emergencies. The records of rice and money is kept in an accounts book and all the meetings minutes are taken in a separate book. Both these books are maintained and kept with the society's leader.

Though in the first instance saving rice instead of cash for micro savings seems counter intuitive it is after all simple yet a very effective method for savings in the given context. As an explanation, the

leader told us that one may not have any cash at home at all but one must eat to survive so even in the direst of cases the savings process can continue. Also, putting aside one 'muth' or handful of rice each meal is not going to make a huge difference in the household consumption. This concept is very easy to follow through once a family is convinced of carrying on with the idea.

This idea was first pitched in an 'Uthan Baithak' of IDP IP and the PO involved in the village provided them with constant motivation and assistance which was of great help in constructing and continuing with the activities of the society. It was quite difficult to convince people to join the society as it was not easy to explain the whole point of it to them. However, once the society took off and now that they have been able to collect a good sum of money and have been able to work harmoniously within the society for a while, the members are highly motivated. Their current savings is around 17500 taka. In fact, the concept has caught on so well that people from other villages are also replicating the Mushthi Chal society.

It was mentioned by one of the programme staff that initiating these sorts' activities like clubs or self-help groups have real potential for community mobilization in a sense that though at the beginning it takes some outside assistance overall the community is well motivated and whole process is takes place under the community's initiative and control.

[IDP IP Advocacy and Networking](#)

[Solidarity Meetings](#)

FGD participants from the programme communities mentioned, that while the courtyard meetings and trainings increased their knowledge and awareness, it was the solidarity meetings that helped them transform this knowledge into action. Now the community members know their local UP representatives better and do not feel as shy to seek them for help. It was mentioned a number of staff members as well as the community FGDs that most adbashi's are very shy to express their needs and concerns. Also, they are not well aware of different government facilities that they can get from the Union Parishad. It was described that there have been incidences when somebody from the *adibashi* community went to the UP office waited outside but couldn't buckle up the courage to go inside. It is remarked that there is plenty of scope for making the involvement of DMs in organising the solidarity meetings proactive.

[Local and National level advocacy by IDP IP](#)

Aside from the solidarity meetings at the local level IDP IP is also involved in a number of regional and national level indigenous advocacy activities. For example, IDP IP has been holding meetings and dialogue on indigenous issues at the Upazila and even national government bodies and meeting has been held with National Coalition of Indigenous Peoples (NCIP), National Parliamentary Caucus on Indigenous Peoples, Bangladesh Indigenous Peoples Forum, Research and Development Collectives (RDC). The Director of IDP IP is the vice chairperson of NCIP putting her in an important position to hold important policy dialogues on behalf of the community and IDP IP's initiatives. As a member of NCIP, BRAC provides funding for some of its activities. Thus, far the programme has organised several different advocacy dialogues and has participated in different national meetings on important IP issues.

[Networking with other BRAC Programmes](#)

The programme created a very useful Excel data set on request of the research team which revealed that although the intervention areas have a high coverage of BRAC services, in most cases, the *adibashi* communities are not included in this coverage. Consequently, one of the

key objectives of the IDP IP programme is to link these neglected communities with BRACs mainstream services.

The project aims to link indigenous peoples with sectoral BRAC services. However, the findings from the field suggest that level of interaction of IDP IP employees with staff from other BRAC programmes is very low aside a few examples. Heavy workload of the IP POs is a contributing factor. Moreover, there is scope for making the networking process smoother by putting some official procedures in place to encourage this. Therefore, it is recommended that the programme takes formal initiatives to link with other programmes through a mechanism that would connect different BRAC Programmes with IDP IP at the head office that will be systematically translated at the field level. One of the initiatives could be to use an updated version of the excel sheets that shows BRAC Programme coverage in the IDP IP area and getting into discussion on how to start a collaborative work in those areas.

6. Expert Interviews

Interview with Anna Minj

Director, BRAC Integrated Development Programme
(21.03.2016 and 29.03. 2016)

Background

Anna Minj, the Director of the BRAC IDPIP is one of the only two people from her village with a Master's Degree. In the context of *adibashi* s in Bangladesh, especially the plain land IPs; this is not a rarity. Plain land IPs are far behind the mainstream population in terms of access to basic needs like health, and education. The plain land IPs are primarily from the northern parts of Bangladesh; a national poverty hotspot. As this region is quite far behind economically in the national context, by extension therefore, the plain land *adibashi*'s of this area are also way behind compared to their counterparts in other parts of the country.

Poverty is a large part of the *adibashi* existence, and this in itself acts as a huge impediment to their development. A lot of young *adibashi* s drop out of school at the primary and secondary level, due to poor grades and financial challenges. Because of poverty, the average *adibashi* youth does not have the resources needed to travel to major cities to live and study at university. The plain land IPs also cannot make use of the special quotas in public universities, as these are usually taken up by CHT *adibashis*; further illustrating that even in the wider *adibashi* context, plain land IPs are far behind.

Note that CHT *adibashi*'s benefitted from the international attention brought about by the CHT Peace treaty. Before this there were no donor/development funds exclusively for *adibashi* groups in Bangladesh. After the peace treaty a lot of donor/development funds started flowing to

CHT *adibashi* groups. These groups have managed to capitalise on this and improve their socioeconomic situation unlike their plain land counterparts.

The problem of *adibashi* poverty is closely linked to the issue of land grabbing. Land grabbing has been, and still remains a pressing problem in *adibashi* communities. The recent experience of the Santal community highlights the ongoing land issues that cripple the development and security of indigenous communities. Since Bangladesh's liberation in 1971, *adibashi* families have been losing their land to local elites and other influential factions. This has reduced them to selling their labour to earn a living. Traditionally, *adibashi*s have been very nature-centric; they would collect food from the forests to survive. As these forests also started disappearing they moved on to physical agri-based labour. The issue of land grabbing has served to further escalate this situation, to a point where physical agriculture based labour has become the primary source of income for the plain land IP communities.

Challenges of designing development programmes for IPs

Plain land *adibashi*s have survived on agrarian labour for generations, up to the point where it is sometimes the only thing they know. This presents a major challenge in terms of designing interventions that can have an effect on *adibashi* development. For example; a plain land *adibashi* might sell off a cow they get from a development programme, and return to agrarian labour, because they find it easier. The concept of long term investment and gains is not predominant among these groups. One other major problem when it comes to development initiatives aimed at *adibashi*'s, is that these initiatives rarely look at the bigger picture – giving an *adibashi* individual microfinance is useless if he/she does not have the education or financial literacy to use this loan. The issue of *adibashi* poverty and lack of education once again comes into play.

For any development initiative aimed at plain land *adibashi*'s, the biggest challenge lies in mainstreaming these *adibashi* communities. Generations of land grabbing and other discriminatory practices by the mainstream Bengalis have made *adibashi* communities generally distrustful of outsiders. Often *adibashi*'s do not speak with people who do not speak their language; this presents a challenge for Bengali development workers. BRAC sometimes avoids working in *adibashi* villages, since they think they cannot get proper access (e.g. BRAC Community Health Worker might do a visit to Bengali villages in an area, but avoid a neighbouring *adibashi* village). This highlights the need for advocacy even within development organisations like BRAC. BRAC's IDPIP programme is working towards the development of plain land *adibashi*'s, however this has not been an easy task. Bringing *adibashi*s out of their agrarian labour lifestyle is a challenge. Additionally, the plain land IPs themselves are from very tight knit communities, and their distrust of the outside world makes it difficult to get them away from their villages. "*BRAC taka khoroch kore onek ke niye esheche Dhaka training er jonno, kintu ederke rakha jae na. Koyekdin thekei bari ferot jawar jonno, osthir hoye jae, ar training shesh hobar agey graame ferot chole jae.*" says Anna Minj when talking about her programme's experiences with bringing plain land IPs to Dhaka for training. The IDPIP focuses on youth leadership, income diversification and education support, however the very nature of

the *adibashi* way of life has made this a constantly changing process, which the programme itself is still trying to figure out.

Adibashi youth are a segment that the IDPIP is working with proactively. Many of these youths who complete school do not go on to attend college or university, due to a lack of knowledge on how to go about this, and also because of the high costs associated with the process. Without any available options, these young men are likely to turn to the practice of 'kamla kaj' and become trapped in the intergenerational cycle of poverty. IDPIP is attempting to address this by teaching these young students about international scholarships, helping them enrol in local universities and trying to arrange employment placement opportunities for them. Here too however, the closed off nature of the IP communities poses a challenge according to Ms. Minj, as she says these youths are not good at seeking out and asking for help. "*Bar bar knock korte hoy eta bujhe na*", she says, referring to the fact that the IP youth do not understand that getting anything done requires persistence on their own part. Furthermore, she added that it is often difficult for *adibashi*'s to hold down a regular job for long, as they have a difficult time adjusting to mainstream social norms.

The entrepreneurial spirit is not predominant in *adibashi*'s. They are dedicated and hardworking when it comes to physical labour. Unfortunately, this makes them vulnerable to exploitation by others. Mainstream Bengalis are fine with the practice of hiring *adibashi* labourers to work their fields at minimal pay, however if an *adibashi* individual sets up a store in the local market, mainstream Bengalis have reservations about doing business with them. Sensitising mainstream communities to the needs and challenges of the *adibashi* communities is an area of high priority; The IPs cannot advance in a country where the majority does not accept them.

***Adibashi* identity in the national context**

Adibashi development requires a very comprehensive and holistic approach, but this is only possible if resources are available. Currently, *adibashi* development is not a national development priority for Bangladesh. Therefore, very little or no local and foreign donor funds get allotted into this area. The Government of Bangladesh does not officially recognise *adibashi*'s. There is no accurate official statistics on the *adibashi* population in Bangladesh. This official stance on *adibashi* groups further complicates the issue of *adibashi* development, and makes it difficult to include these groups in national developments priorities. It should be noted also, the MDGs did not specifically include any development priorities specifically aimed at *adibashi*'s – the problem on non-recognition has existed on a global scale also. Currently, the SDGs are more broadly defined a present scope for integrating *adibashi* development issues. The question then arises: will Bangladesh include this in its development priorities? This appears unlikely, unless *adibashi*'s receive some form of recognition from the state itself.

The issue of identity and recognition is important, as it adds legitimacy to the *adibashi* cause. Currently, violence and discrimination against *adibashi*'s is an issue no one appears to be concerned with. The lack of identity, acts as a precedent for this type of behaviour. Cases of violence against *adibashi* women for example do not receive any sort of media attention.

Neither the state nor the people step in to defend *adibashi* rights in situations like this. As long as the state does not officially recognise *adibashi*'s, there will always be an 'us vs. them' mentality that will inhibit all attempts at meaningful development.

While the *adibashi* issue is often side-lined at the policy maker level, it should be noted that there is a branch of the government called the 'Special Affairs Division', a special branch under the Prime Minister's office that is responsible for distributing government allotted funds for *adibashi* s at the upazila level across Bangladesh. While this is a good initiative, a study done by Albert Mankin found on the Special Division Affairs found:

- a weak monitoring system
- ineffective representation from the *adibashi* groups
- not all funds went to IPs
- evidence of favouritism in fund distribution
- the system did very little to help *adibashi*'s

Advocacy at the national and grassroots level

"*Amader kotha toh keu shune na*" is what Anna Minj had to say when the issue of advocacy came up. Official recognition of *adibashi*'s is a key issue that needs to be addressed, if any sort of meaningful development work is to be done for plain land IPs. However, it should be noted that this is not the only issue that needs to be considered. Anna Minj herself is an active voice in the dialogue on *adibashi* rights in Bangladesh, but she believes that currently there is too much focus on the matter of '*adibashi* identity', and not enough focus on the other pressing issues at hand, including the access of the IP communities to services like health and education, as well as the orientation and sensitisation of mainstream communities on the *adibashi* issue. The diversity in *adibashi* groups across Bangladesh however presents a challenge in this regard. It also highlights the need for a common platform where all *adibashi* groups can take collective action for their joint development. There are a few advocacy forums including the Bangladesh *Adibashi* Forum and the National Coalition for Indigenous People (NCIP). A core focus of these forums is integrating *adibashi* s into the country's national development priorities. One approach to this is working on a sectoral basis. The Government of Bangladesh is looking to ensure access to education and health for all, and these forums are attempting to bring *adibashi* groups under this umbrella of accessibility. This also involves creating allies from the mainstream population, who can help champion the *adibashi* cause. While these forums are working for greater *adibashi* development, they themselves are constrained by funding limitations. Booking venues for meetings, and making travel arrangements for participants, all require regular financial expenditures, but many member organisations cannot afford this (especially regional level groups). The larger member organisations like BRAC and Save the Children sometimes bear these expenses, but this is neither a realistic or sustainable long term solution. Additionally, as with all types of forum of this nature also, there are certain political elements at play, which can potentially hamper the work being done.

In addition to the work being done by national level advocacy forums, there is also a need for action and mobilisation at the grassroots level. This includes work on sensitising mainstream

Bengalis and teaching IPs their rights. A lot of IPs do not know how to access social services such as VGD/VGF cards for example. They cannot even imagine going to their local Union Parishad to ask for services like this, to which they are legally entitled. There is also a lack of official representation for these groups. In areas with large *adibashi* populations, there are hardly any local elected representatives that are *adibashi*'s themselves. This further adds to the existing practice of marginalising IP communities from different facets of the social and public sphere.

At the government level, Anna Minj believes there needs to be a separate ministry dedicated to addressing plain land *adibashi* issues, particularly land related cases (similar to the Ministry for CHT).

Interview with Lawrence Besra

National Coordinator- Knowledge Management and Research at World Vision Bangladesh

Adibashi livelihood is mostly dependent on land. However, throughout history due to a number of factors they are becoming landless. The major reasons are:

- Out of poverty IPs are selling land.
- Land grabbing by local elites
- Social Forestry Project by the government

Adibashis who mostly depend on their land for their livelihood often fall into the vicious cycle of poverty as they tend to sell whatever little land they have left in the times of extreme hardship.

In the colonial era their livelihood and specially their land ownership that is distinctively different from Bengali's were recognised by the 'Common Property Act' which allowed for communal ownership of land and property. Consequently, they did not have individual wills or papers stating their rights to the land. In a lot of the cases even the chieftains of these IP did not have papers of the communal ownership. Therefore, later it put these groups into a very vulnerable position. The separation in 1947 and the war in 1971 caused geographical displacement of a large number of *adibashis* through which many of them who had their property will, lost their documents. Many of them who went to India for shelter during the liberation war of 1971 could not claim their land and property back once they returned after the war.

The state has been systematically discriminating against the IPs throughout history. There are a number of acts that directly affected the livelihood of IPs whereas there are a number of ones that were made use of to extort *adibashis* off of their lands. After the Indo-Pakistan war the Pakistan government passed the Enemy Property or Vested Property Act for Hindus. A certain group of people used this act to grab *adibashi* land. A lot of *adibashi* s were framed as Hindu's and their land was declared enemy property and taken away. High prevalence of illiteracy meant that the IPs did not have much clue as to what was going on. In fact in lot of the cases when IPs go to sell their land the buyers write 10 bigha instead of 1 bigha and people not knowing what is written in the will loses multiple fold larger area of land. It is common

knowledge that roguebuyers entertain landowners with chuyani and gain their trust only to rip them off.

After independence, the 'Kash Land act' was passed where individuals could not be in possession of more than 21 acres of land. Once again a lot of *adibashi* land was shown either as vested property or kash land and taken away from them. Another wave of *adibashi* land grabbing happened when the vested property act was passed in 2011. The *adibashi* land that was not taken as vested property were shown as one and ultimately went into the hands of land grabbers.

These forms of land grabbing happened through the lack of implementation of the Bengal tenancy act of 1950 that states that buying and selling of IP land cannot take place without the permission of the district magistrate as well as abuse of the abovementioned laws. However, the social forestation act alone took thousands of acres of *adibashi* land in Dinajpur and surrounding areas.

Interview with Professor Meshba Kemal

Professor, Department of History, University of Dhaka

“BRAC’s IDP IP is a welcome development.”

So far BRAC’s work with the IP communities were in the periphery level with BEP’s MTB approach. However, the current approach of working directly working with IP communities in different issues is important as education is not their only concern. And the multidimensional approach of this programme covers all these issues as well.

“*Adibashi* jiboner somoshhata sudhumatro livelihood er na but political. In fact it’s applicable to all minorities.”

In Bangladesh plurality is not recognized. In 1971 while trying to accommodate for language and culture against Pakistani ideology of a country for Muslims only people in the country learnt to be tolerant of other religions. However, when it comes to ethno-linguistic differences people’s tolerance and ability to accommodate is very low.

“Dhormer kothay je manush ta udar jater proshne sai manushtai biddeshi hoye jay”

“People who are tolerant in the question of religion seems to lose it when it comes to the question of ethnicity.”

There are a few sayings in the IP political circle that describe the reality of the state of acceptance and tolerance regarding ethnic diversity and differences. One of them is that,

“Bamponthirao jokhon parbotto chotto gram a jay se manush thake na, bangali hoye jay.”

“Even leftists are not beyond ethnic compartmentalisation and labelling when they are in the hill tracts.”

“BRAC tends to avoid addressing the core political debates and issues regarding IPs. In fact not only BRAC but most NGOs do so. Consequently, the main problems remain unresolved.”

“Since the passing of the constitution in 1972, the state has been mainstreaming the IPs. Hence at the end of the day the question of IP rights and recognition is a political one indeed.” The state has been promoting homogeneity said professor Mesbha Kamal. It is interesting to note that while he believes that mainstreaming of the IPs are a way of oppressing them of their identity, Ms Anna Minj emphasises the need accommodating the IPs with the mainstream economic structure and society. Therefore strongly pointing the need to discuss, analyse and identify a midway that would be the fine balance between improving the socio-economic situation of the IP communities without losing their cultural identity.

A state as well as accommodative of multi religion should also be able to nurture different ethnicities. Promotion of plurality and diversity is a healthier approach to nation building and stability. There should be a list of ethnic groups in the constitution. For at the end of the day IPs want their recognition.

There are two main aspects for advocacy for IP issues, one is the IPs constitutional recognition and another is ensuring their rights to their lands.

As for the question of studying on their (IPs) own language, if they were able to educate themselves in their own language then a part of their life would have been reflected in their studies. This in turn would have made learning easier to grasp as well as continuing at least the language part of their culture. The state has not done much in this regard. The education policy of 2010 is expected to be implemented in 2017. Given the context BRAC has the scope of prioritising or at least paying some attention to MTBMLE.

In the question of policy advocacy Prashanta Kumar Tripura mentioned that given the current context and the ongoing crisis with radicalisation of Islam in the country it is difficult to highlight the IP issues. In response to that, Professor Mesbah agreed that it is true that it would be rather difficult to grab attention currently but also mentioned that in the times of crisis is more of a call for promoting IP related advocacy.

The trick with advocacy is to continuously be active in organising dialogues and activities and only then it will gain media attention. However, most of the cases organising such meetings and gatherings require funds and the IP advocacy bodies are small most of the time and cannot quite afford it. BRAC can play a role in this. Though it is not quite BRAC's style to get involved in direct policy advocacy or it is not something BRAC specialises in but they can collaborate with other big or small NGOs who can do that on behalf of BRAC.

Though BRAC's activity in local level advocacy in the villages is quite important it is nearly not enough. In a country like ours that is so centralised that even the transfer of a school teacher requires the education minister's permission, making big changes regarding IPs issues through union parishad that is the lowest tire of the governing and political body is not possible.

[Interview with Prashanta Kumar Tripura](#)

Consultant IDP IP and Lecturer atBRAC University

He mentioned that the indigenous issues are pretty much well known so there is not much to discuss. As for the BRAC programme for IPs he worked as a consultant for a few months and

looked at the design aspect of the programme. It was not analysed from an evaluator's point of view.

In the interview he said that ideally the programme could work on refining their activities a bit. One of the major suggestions he made is to introduce a community platform that is pretty standard for most of the other BRAC programmes. The main motivation behind it would be that even after BRAC ISP IP stops working in a certain area the activities initiated by IDP IP could go on.

The IGAs are quite diversified and seem to have been popular with the communities in the field. The fact that the POs themselves are indigenous helps a lot as they have a better understanding on the context. Identifying the right IGAs is a very crucial issue.

[Interview with Sanjib Drong](#)

General Secretary, Bangladesh Indigenous Peoples Forum

Representation and recognition

Establishing the rights of the IPs are crucial. At the moment, there are about 3 million *adibashi's* in Bangladesh but the government statistics is about 1.7 million so there is an underrepresentation of the size of the IP population.

In the question of formal recognition of the *adibashi's* as Indigenous peoples the 2011's 15th amendment of the constitution changed the IP related legislation and introduced terms like tribes, minor races, and ethnic sects to identify *adibashi's* instead of indigenous peoples. The introduction of these colonial terms came with the deterrence of the term indigenous. In fact, this term cannot be used formally like NGO bureau registration.

Interestingly enough though in the legislation it is forbidden to use the term indigenous there are still various legal documents under different government directorates and legislation where the term indigenous is still in use. For example, the 'Bongio Proja Sotto Ain' of 1950's appendix 1, annexure 1 mentions aboriginal presence in the region and identifies 22-23 groups of the plain land as aboriginals. This law was originally created in the 1881. Like many other existing laws in Bangladesh this one too was taken from the original British law and has not been changed since liberation.

It is a rather curious case how and why so many years after liberation the IPs are denied their formal recognition. Even during the unrest in CHT before the peace treaty was made they were still recognised as IPs. Therefore, the question of why now becomes obvious.

Lars Anders Bairs from Sweden did a study on the situation in the CHT for UNPFII which was submitted in ECOSOP. The researcher spoke to a number of high level government officials, ministers and army personals. The report revealed the conflict between *adibashi's* and the army in the CHT and presented the extent of human rights violation quite vividly. Bangladesh Army is one of the most reputable and largest in number in the UN peace mission. So publication of this report was not in their favour. In fact, even after the peace treaty they are still in the operation

mode in the CHT under the name operation Uttoron. This operation to a large extent justifies their continuous presence in the CHT. However, if this territory is declared as indigenous then according to the UN Declaration of the rights of the IPs UN can come and directly intervene in the activity there if IPs seek UN's support. Therefore, despite the will of a number of supporting parliament member's *adibashi's* in Bangladesh lost the legislative recognition of identifying themselves as indigenous.

The CHT though facing a lot of hostility still occupies a strong hold in their lands and territory and can unify themselves in need. Hence they pose a threat in the eyes of the military. However, the plain land *adibashi's* are scattered and do not have much or any land left. In fact, he said "Plain land IPs, they don't have the strength or will to voice their rights even. The generals think that IPs in the CHT are different."

In the question of what defines IP, UN did not give any specific definition of IPs. Rather they have noted a set of characteristics that are common in different IPs.

NGO bureau registration of projects specifically targeting IPs without mentioning the word indigenous is possible. Other facilities are also available for IPs. However, the question of the legislative recognition is not only about being able identify oneself as an IP. It has an even higher implication as it sends the wrong message to people. Their lack of recognition signals that they also do not have their rights which are frequently used by groups to exploit poor and vulnerable *adibashi's*. A lot of the cases the *adibashi's* are threatened and repeatedly told that they are not Bangladeshi and should therefore, go to India. A lot of the plain land *adibashi's* left for India to save their lives. It is ironic since some of these *adibashi* groups like Santals have been in this land even before the Bengali race was created even. Another example is that there might be ethnic cleansing or systematic replacement going on. In the 1947 census there were 80 percent non-Muslims in the CHT and a survey in the 90s show that half of the population is Muslim. Now people have not been converting that means the government and army have been installing plain land Bengalis in the hills thus fuelling the conflict there.

Land rights

The plain land *adibashi's* in the north Bengal unfortunately have hardly any land left however modhupur, Garo Hills, Sylhet and CHT *adibashis* still have a substantial area under their territory which needs urgent protection. In most IP communities, they practice collective or customary land rights as in they jointly own a large area where their social order is maintained by their chief. For example, in the Kashi Hills their chief leads the community of 40 -50 families. However, since they do not have individual papers of their land they are very prone to landgrabbing. Even the government has evicted them from their ancestral lands by declaring their land as Kash land or reserve forest. Unfortunately land grabbing, forceful migration, attacks and killing are taking place all the time and actions need to be taken to stop it.

Indigenous Peoples issues

Many IPs are losing their language and cultural identity in the face of poverty and marginalisation. There are a few initiatives for CHT IPs but no law or ministry for plain land IPs. *Adibashi's* tend to follow the chief or Nokma system where a leader of chief leads the clan. In their 1900 CHT Regulation Act. The British government formally recognised this system. In their peace accord with the CHT *adibashis* the *adibashi* kings have a role that has been observed

traditionally. One of the example is Rajpurna, an auspicious day when all the subjects come to visit the king with the token of gift in other word it is nominal collection of taxes. However, currently in the face of poverty they are unable to follow a lot of the customs and festivals. It is something to note that in 2010 there was a new law called ' Khudro nrigosothi protisthan ain' was passed.

In an impoverish area *adibashis* are normally the poorest of the poor. Moreover, IP women are often abducted, abused, raped and killed. Kalpana Chakma has been missing for over two decades now. *Adibashis* are suffering from poor health and in the absence of health services specifically targeted to them it is difficult to improve their situation. Sanjeeb Drong described the situation as a repeat of historical discrimination in the name of equal rights. There are a few quotas for *adibashis* which is a good initiative but they should not have to rely on quotas forever. In fact there are questions on whether the quota is maintained properly or not. The *adibashi* communities are suffering from lack of education as they often do not have access to schools.

In the question of human rights CHT at least have some institutions but for plain land there are no institutions or legislation.

Normally NGOs and similar other organisations go for a development approach while working with *adibashis* and the government is generally pleased with it. However, as for the rights based approach the government will not like it.

Identity, human rights ... these are big words to the IPs who are struggling to survive. They do not know anything or much about these concepts or the related policy debates. Interventions should be based on listening to what are they asking for and should be catered to their needs. However, the interventions should not also ignore the rights and other policy issues altogether. There should be a link between the gaps in the priorities of the *adibashis* involved at the policy level discussion with the ones at the grassroots. And actions should be taken so that this gap is minimised.

Whereas the IPs in the CHT is internationally known since independence in 1971 the IPs of north Bengal are mostly unheard of are not organised. Hence the issue of the rights of the IPs are taken seriously and even our Asian counterparts are doing better than us in this aspect. India, Philippine, Nepal are good examples to name a few. Bangladesh has a long way to go.

Barriers to the improvement of IPs in Bangladesh

Main barriers to addressing the important IP issues in the lack of political will. This is further added with the lack of appropriate legislation, limited or absence of implementation of international obligations in this subject matter, ILO convention 107, from 1957 was ratified by the Bangladesh government in 1972 but is not implemented as there were no national law following this.

In fact, there should be a separate law for the IPs. India has a tribal policy law from 1957, which is very *adibashi* friendly. There is a Bangla Academy so why not establish a national *adibashi* academy after all diversity is beauty and part of our cultural heritage.

All the beauty parlors have Garo girls working there. Though there are reserve quotas for IPs it's not working. Nursing is another sector where a lot of Garo women are coming in and in the EPZ. In fact, for a lot of professions IPs are preferred for their honesty and trustworthiness.

Livelihood

In the question of alternative IGAs Mr Drong mentioned that it is very important to assist the IP communities to take up IGAs that would reduce their dependency on land. However, he also mentioned that IPs in general are not good in business. Their level of familiarity and understanding of the market is very low and is a daunting concept to them. Consequently, even though they are good at a certain IGA if the final stage requires selling the item in the market their profit goes down substantially. This could be one of the explanations behind why *adibashis* tend to revert back to their original agricultural day laboring activities having tried something else for a while.

Integrating adibasis with the market is crucial. Ensuring that if they start selling things in the market, people will buy is essential as they feel high level of insecurity over it. Furthermore, the bargaining skill of IPs in general are very weak. In most places, they are not part of the bazar committee or hawker committees.

Suggestions for the improvement of IP communities

A possible way to do something about the IP issues is to start dialogue among stake holders like the government, civil society, policy makers, NGOs, donors and media. Discussions about indigenous issues will help highlight the ongoing challenges faced by them as well as bridging the gap. It is essential to provide human rights education in educational institutions from elementary to University level. People need to be aware of these issues at an early and impressionable age for them to be able to feel for the IPs and work towards mitigating the gap.

Indigenous peoples have a strong tie with the nature and land. He further said that if IPs were living by the banks of Buriganga or Sitalakkha the rivers would never come to this stage that it is today. Indigenous philosophy on par is about respecting nature and putting the needs of others before their own. It is about Samarpan as in to give in rather than to conquer. This concept is prevalent in their treatment of tangible assets like land which is owned jointly to relationships where love is considered as an act of offering oneself to the other. Women have a higher regard, right and respect in traditional indigenous cultures and men and women work side by side. It is important that this aspect of IPs are presented to the young Bengalis for their understanding and empathizing the IP cultures.

7. Summary of key findings and recommendations

Based on our own research and interviews with experts, one important finding is that the IDPIP works best with a certain degree of flexibility. Typically, when BRAC implements a programme, it does so using a strictly defined target based approach. This type of approach it has been found is not necessarily applicable for the IDPIP. The programme's beneficiaries and their context are quite different from BRAC's normal programme participants. What works well for normal programmes, may not necessarily work for IDPIP. This is a philosophy that has been

adapted by the IDPIP, which is why the programme is constantly evolving and trying out different approaches. It is a constant learning process.

- Leadership training is having a visible positive effect especially among the youth population of the indigenous communities. Given the effectiveness of this component, it may be worthwhile to extend the training period from 2 days to 5 days, and to increase the number of these trainings as well.
- Skill based and IGAs requiring low capital investment are working well among the communities. The results show that in cases where the IGA is designed to play to the strengths of the *adibashi* communities, the initiatives were successful. It would be best to identify both the needs and strengths of the community as well as individual beneficiaries, and design IGAs accordingly. Perhaps it would be a good idea to bring about activities that highlight the tradition, craftsmanship and rich cultural heritage of plain land indigenous communities, that is largely unexplored in Bangladesh.
- BRAC IDP IP has supported a number of existing local institutions and have helped in making new ones as well. These have had a good effect in the development of the local community and in some cases are being replicated by other nearby villages as well.
- The IDP IP education mentoring and education support has received good feedback from the communities and so is their emergency support mechanism.
- As a combined effect of the solidarity and leadership meetings a lot of the typically shy *adibashis* are being able to buckle up the courage to negotiate with their local UP members and get benefits like VGD, VGF cards and participation in Kabikha.
- Though the intervention areas have a high coverage of BRAC services, in most cases, the *adibashi* communities are not included in this coverage. The advocacy within BRAC could be set as one of the priorities in the programme. If it is well defined as to how this would take place in IDP IPs action plan the internal advocacy will be more.
- The programme's target area itself is too large and the targeted population could be better defined. It would be recommended to redesign the action plan by allowing for higher human resource and more manageable programme coverage targets. It might be more efficient to focus on specific awareness and advocacy related issues that are particular to the indigenous communities. The other issues can be addressed by ensuring the presence of BRACs mainstream activities in the programme area.

Further suggestions for improvement of IDP IP.

A review of the academic literature relating to the economic development of indigenous people has provided some ideas or methods for improving the livelihoods of indigenous people. Two particular papers have salient points and examples worth noting that could be applied to IDP IP. The first is a report by the World Bank, which examines lessons learned from working with Indigenous people in Ecuador. The work is of course not a perfect fit for Indigenous people in Bangladesh but the philosophy of ethno development could be applied more strongly within IDP IP. As a starting point ethnocide is the deliberate and systematic destruction of the culture of an ethnic group. Ethno development in contrast builds on the positive qualities of indigenous cultures to promote employment and growth. Positive qualities include a strong sense of identity, close attachment to land and capacity to mobilise resources. Indigenous groups in

Bangladesh do not appear to meet all of the criteria the World Bank suggests are necessary to start development but the same principles could still be applied. Indigenous people need to own development rather than having development imposed on them³. BRAC need to be mindful of this to ensure that they do not become the equivalent of colonisers.

Another report was produced by AIPP on shifting cultivation and food security⁴ amongst indigenous people in Asia. Lessons learned from the cases studies include;

- Improve current systems of agriculture
- Imposing sedentary agriculture failed because of lack of land rights and security, lack of trade and lack of infrastructure.
- Externally conceived development planning failed.
- Producing one crop or livestock does not meet local food needs.
- Cash crops require financing and marketing infrastructure.
- It is better to recognise and support traditional innovations.
- It is better to make small changes to improve livelihood than trying to move people too far, too fast.

The final point seems to be crucial in the case of IP in the plain land. They need small realistic improvements that try and harness their current situation. Bigger improvements may not be sustainable.

One program from the case studies that has succeeded is the Nagaland Environment Protection and Economic Development (NEPED) project. A joint venture between the governments of India and Canada and implemented by the government of Nagaland across the state, the NEPED project focused on people, their knowledge systems and traditional shifting cultivation. Both Sungratsü and Chuchuyimpang Villages were project villages and farmers say that even though this was implemented through government departments, the difference was that it built upon traditional knowledge and practices and focused largely on enhancing soil productivity and improving fallow management practices. Such interventions helped farmers increase productivity and build capacities to engage with markets and external players.

What changes could be made to IDP IP?

- Consult with indigenous people on their terms and ask them how they want to develop. This should not be isolated to asking them with IGA they want to participate in but actually asking them as a collective community what services or issues are most important to them.

³Defining Ethnodevelopment in Operational Terms: Lessons from the Ecuador Indigenous and Afro-Ecuadoran Peoples Development Project, 2000, Latin America and Caribbean Region Sustainable Development Working Paper No. 6, The World Bank Latin America and Caribbean Regional Office Environmentally and Socially Sustainable Development SMU

⁴Shifting Cultivation, Livelihood and Food Security New and Old Challenges for Indigenous Peoples in Asia Published by the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations and International Work Group for Indigenous Affairs and Asia Indigenous Peoples Pact, Bangkok, 2015

- Consider how to strengthen their current livelihoods. Is this by strengthening the community? By making small changes to current practises?
- What development priorities does the community have?

The plans could be created using IDP as a framework. Using IDP as a framework you could then ask Indigenous communities what priorities they have and how they would like to implement them. Therefore, creating a development plan that the community owns. This therefore means you would need to create a tailored plan for each community which would not doubt be resource intensive and time consuming. According to the literature there is no other alternative to speed up the process. However, a key benefit would be that time spent consulting with communities and taking in to consideration their needs may well improve trust between the communities and BRAC. BRAC has an excellent reputation for scaling up programmes but it seems that in the case of working with Indigenous People it might be better to scale down programmes and tailor them to specific needs of IP communities.

8. Conclusion

IDPIP is a much needed programme for addressing a section of Bangladeshi society that has been strategically marginalised by the system. Some of its components have been found to be relevant for the target population. Over the years, the indigenous communities have been victims of systematic marginalisation, but despite that they have survived for centuries with dignity due to their hard work and persevering attitude, while still holding on to their own rich cultural heritage. Understanding this strength is essential and using it in designing and implementing the different components IDP IP will lead to further success of the programme in future.

9. Post Script

The following steps were taken by the programme based on the first draft of the report:

- IDP-IP has linked sever activities such as BEP- providing information of the need of establishing school, Linking Indigenous clients with HRLS, Courtyard meeting with Sasthya Sebika , linking with Micro finance and HNPP, Sanitation work is continuing with the consultation of WASH Programme during installation and procurement of ring and slub .
- Observed International Indigenous Day-2015 as a first time with BEP at BRAC Centre to sensitize BRAC staffs on the importance of International Indigenous Day Chaired by ED, BRAC. IDP-IP Presented a key notes paper on IP issues in national and international context.
- In order to reduce the workload for POs one more PO is added with the teams in each upzila.

- Project Implementation including courtyard meeting Guideline is prepared through arranging workshop and distributed among staff.
- Monitoring system of field level activities has been developed and implemented. IP staff will monitor on IGA by monthly and IDP monitoring unit will monitor issue base twice in a yea. Furthermore, at least one IDP HO staff will participate in IP staff meeting at field level and will visit IP field activities, while BRAC's central Monitoring and Investigation unit will be conducting issue based yearly monitoring .
- Staff capacity development and Refreshers workshop has been arranged to increase quality work.
- Wealth ranking have been completed to identify the right beneficiaries.

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