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Social Justice : Assistive and Affordable Technologies

Unlocking the potentials: conceptual framework for the education of the indigenous people through open and distance learning

**Introduction:**

The constitution of Bangladesh guarantees equal rights for men and women, prohibits discrimination on the basis of sex, race, caste and religion and strives to promote social and economic equality. Access to information is the basic rights of the people of any country. We know that knowledge is power and knowledge imparted through education is more powerful... In our country people are devoid of their basic rights and they are considered as disadvantaged group, based on their needs, culture, environment and economic status. Promoting open and distance learning is a crying needs especially in the context of Bangladesh. Bangladesh is a country where approximately forty-five ethnic minority groups live alongside... They have lesser opportunities in education and skill development than their mainstream counterparts, illiteracy is high. Indigenous peoples mainly live in isolated areas, outside the mainstream of national economies and development support. The areas they inhabit are even more likely to lack of basic infrastructure such as roads, markets, schools and health facilities, than the other areas of population. This paper attempts to develop a conceptual framework for the education of the indigenous people of Bangladesh through Open and distance Learning.

**Rationale:**

The challenges of providing secondary education in Bangladesh are many, but perhaps one of the most challenging aspects is that an inclusion.

**Methodology:**

Based on critical review of exiting documents on indigenous people.. Questionnaire is developed for the indigenous teacher of the Chittagong Hill Tracts who are working as a tutor of BOU.

**Role of BOU;**

BOU has the golden Opportunity to overcome the below mentioned problem of the indigenous people. Bangladesh Open University is the only university in Bangladesh which is imparting education through distance mode. Its main objective is to reach the unreached. Distance and open learning allows us to increase access to education, inclusive education, control the cost of education and also quality education. At present BOU is serving the most disadvantaged people of the country. Those are disadvantaged economically, socially, geographically and culturally. Among the total target groups, women are benefited more from BOU. Many indigenous students are studying in BOU. But the issues did not get priority and separate entity. Time has come for more inclusiveness in education for development. Our Honorable Prime Minister is giving emphasis on inclusive education, special focus on the indigenous people in education. There are diversified problems in indigenous community in Bangladesh. Bangladesh Open University has unlimited opportunity, access and supports to take the issues of the indigenous people into consideration.

**Who are indigenous people?**

There does not seem to be one definite definition of indigenous people, but generally indigenous people are those that have historically belonged to a particular region or country, before its colonization or transformation into a nation state, and may have different—often unique—cultural, linguistic, traditional, and other characteristics to those of the dominant culture of that region or state. Throughout the world, it is widely recognized that indigenous peoples represent some of the most marginalized and vulnerable groups. The history of the indigenous peoples around the world has often been marked by oppression and exploitation. Today with the development and strengthening of indigenous people's organizations and establishment of structures within the UN such as the Permanent Forum on indigenous issues, there is a real opportunity to bring indigenous issues-and in particular, indigenous children's rights to the forefront of both national and international agendas.

### **Indigenous Peoples in Bangladesh**

In Bangladesh, indigenous people (IP) are often referred to as *Adibasi*, small ethnic groups, ethnic communities, hill people (pahris) and forest people. Historically, IP plains communities have remained at a disadvantaged position due to their geographical, social and political positioning and therefore have been economically marginalized, with low access to education or other social services and denied access to power. In recent times, the situation has improved to some extent where constitutional safeguards have been provided through either reservations or affirmative action for such groups. Still, their negotiation capacity to benefit equitably from the development activities remains weak compared to the majority Bengalis; and in many parts of the country they are in a continuing struggle for formal recognition of their communal and private land ownership as well as their traditional rights to forest resources.

### **Inclusive Education**

Inclusive education based on the idea that education is a basic human right for all children. Based on EFA, it focuses on the principle that all learners have right to education irrespective of their individual characteristics or difference. An inclusive policy does not only mean the right to access to school, but the right to be included on an equal basis within the mainstream classroom. It is a total approach to overall school development. Its definition of inclusive education is, "All children and young people with and without disabilities or difficulties being together in ordinary schools and colleges and universities with appropriate networks or support. Inclusion means enabling all students to participate fully in the life and work of mainstream settings, whatever their needs.

### **Ministry of Chittagong Hill Tracts**

The Chittagong Hill Tracts (CHTs) Accord of 1997 provides for the establishment of a Ministry of Chittagong Hill Tracts Affairs headed by a tribal Minister, Article 19, part 4 of the Accord reads:

"19. A ministry on Chittagong Hill Tracts affairs shall be established by appointing a minister from among the tribals. Ministry of Chittagong Hill Tracts was established in 1998. The main objectives of the Chittagong Hill Tracts Accord of 1997 was to protect the rights of the people of Chittagong Hill Tracts. Emphasis was given to political rights, social rights, cultural rights, educational rights and economic rights. For implanting the objectives of the Accord, 3 Chittagong Hill Tracts District council was established and to carry the other issues the regional council was established to help the development board.

- Article 27 of the Constitution of the Peoples' republic of Bangladesh states that all citizens are equal before law and are entitled to equal protection of law.
- To meet the challenge of EFA that all children have access to completely free and compulsory primary education of good quality means that all schools should be able to accommodate all children regardless of their physical, intellectual, social, emotional, linguistic or other conditions. This should include disabled and gifted children, street and working children, children from remote or nomadic populations, children from linguistic, ethnic or cultural minorities and children from disadvantaged groups.

### **There are four reasons of low school enrolment of ethnic children. These are:**

- remoteness of school
- instruction in other language
- impoverishment compelling children to engage in familial farming ventures
- Unavailability of the qualified ethnic teachers from within community

### **Potentials barriers of Education for CHT adolescents' education ;**

The qualitative baseline on Adolescents of the CHT, Fariduddin Ahmed, PhD & Helal Mohiuddin, PhD, Chittagong University, UNICEF, Bangladesh, 08 December 2007

- Teachers crisis
- Shortage of women teachers, so girl cannot get counseling at times of their private and special problems,
- Unwillingness of skilled, efficient and qualified teachers to come and stay in the CHT
- Shortage of teachers from within the community

- Linguistic barriers between communities and non-ethnic school teachers
- Mistrust, enmity and separatist attitude between *Bengali* and *ethnic* students
- Eve-teasing by non-ethnic (often Bengali male persons) people.

### Educational Status of the Household members in the Three Districts

Educational status	Bandarban %	Rangamati %	Khagrachari %	Average CHT %
No education	75.2	55.4	44.9	57.5
Class V	17.2	24.0	35.2	22.4
VI-X	6.3	18.6	24.4	17.0
SSC	1.32.	2.0	5.5	3.0

The status of female education is even lower. Seven out of every ten women in the CHT have received virtually no education.

Distribution of Household Members by educational status and Sex

Educational Status	Male %	Female%	Average%
No Education	45.8	70.0	57.5
Class V	30.7	13.6	22.4
Class VI-X	18.6	15.4	17.0
SSC	4.9	1.0	3.0

Among the ethnic groups, Chakmas have the highest percentage of educational population at 40.8% while the marma, Mro, Bawm, Tripura, and Tanchangya have very low rates of literacy. Very few Jumma children are attending schools regularly.

**Bangladesh Open University is able to include the Indigenous students successfully? If not please put your recommendation**

**Table-1**

Response	No	%
Yes	50	100
No	00	100
No Response	00	100
Total	50	100

100% respondents believe that Bangladesh Open University is able to serve the Indigenous students successfully. To make it more effective, they put some recommendations.

- Establish more tutorial centre in the remote areas and close monitoring by BOU.
- Introducing technology that is available for them. Training is necessary for the tutors to handle the Indigenous students carefully.
- More publicity is necessary for the inclusion of more Indigenous students in the Bangladesh Open University
- Drop out students are getting second chance to continue their education in BOU.
- Admission and course fee is high for the Indigenous people. Their poverty level is high.
- Deprived people are getting chance of education innovative policy should be included in the National education policy to include the indigenous people in secondary education by considering their cultural diversity and language problem

**Language diversity, cultural diversity, remoteness of school, shortage of Indigenous teachers affects the mainstream education of the indigenous people.**

**Table-2**

Response	No	%
Yes	35	70
No	10	20
No Response	05	10

Total	50	100
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35% respondents agree with the statement, 10% disagree and 5% did not response to the question.

- Most of the tutors should be indigenous. Emphasis should be given in selecting tutors to almost all significant tribes.
- Specific policy for the indigenous people should be incorporated in the national education policy. Experts from indigenous group, distance education expert and the policy makers should be included in the committee.
- Only BOU could solve the problem of language diversity. Community radio may be one of the options.
- Monitoring, quality teaching, quality indigenous tutors and sufficient publicity could develop the situation.
- Ongoing training is necessary to the indigenous tutors in Bangla language to handle the situation successfully.

**Information regarding admission, examination and other information do not always reach to the students in time.**

Table-3

Response	No	%
Yes	42	84
No	06	12
No Response	02	04
Total	50	100

- Not reach in time
- Needs publicity and availability of the information in their own language
- If there is a tutorial centre in every upazila, the indigenous could collect the information timely.
- Information could be imparted through radio, television, poster and local newspaper.
- In remote areas, helpline or information centre of BOU could be established.
- Union Council member can take part in this process.
- Lack of coordination between coordinator, tutor, BOU Regional office and the students.

**Students are benefited from the Radio and Television Program**

Table-4

Response	No	%
Yes	24	48
No	26	52
No Response	00	00
Total	50	100

- Radio broadcasting and television of BOU program is insufficient. Most of the students do not know the program schedule.
- More television program is desirable. Duration of the television program should be extended.

- Indigenous people's interview or participation are not presenting in radio and television of BOU program.
  - Community radio will be important agent to fulfill their needs.
  - Govt. and non-govt. could take initiatives to give one radio to one pare or community.
  - Time of radio and television program is not suitable for the students and working person. Re telecast is necessary to solve the program.
  - The program should be more indigenous student friendly and relates to their interest. Learning materials and example should be familiar to them

**Textbooks of BOU reach timely to the students.**

Table-5

Response	No	%
Yes	18	36
No	27	54
No response	05	10
Total	50	100

- Do not reach in the ChittagongHill tract due to communication problem. So the textbooks of the CHT should send earlier than other places.
- At the time of admission , students should get the syllabus, textbooks, students guide and radio, TV program guide.
- Authority should be more accountable in distributing the textbooks.
- Involving the local administration, the problem could be solved.
- In distributing the textbooks of BOU, the coordinator or the teacher in charge sometimes take money from the poor students. There should be accountability, transparency and strong monitoring system.

**Textbooks of BOU is Easy and Interesting for the Indigenous People**

Table-6

Response	No	%
Yes	32	64
No	18	36
No Response	00	00
Total	50	100

- The textbooks of BOU were presented in a easy language and easy way
- To make it more interesting to the indigenous people picture of different tribes and stories from their real life should be included
- Conduct a study to understand the necessity, interest and difficulties of the indigenous `students to learn the books.

**After completion of SSC and HSC from BOU, what happened?**

Table-7

Maximum students search job
Go for higher studies
Up gradation of the existing job
Increase social prestige
Business and self employment

Table-8

**BOU is alternative to mainstream Education**

Response	No	%
Yes	29	58
No	21	42
No Response	00	00
Total	50	100

- After drop out from mainstreaming education, open and distance learning become the second chance for their education.
- Course fee is little bit high, it should be lesser.
- National examination system has adopted creative question system. Feedback is very encouraging; students merit could be properly utilized and justified. As a result, quality education will be achieved. BOU could adopt the policy of creative question; as a result it will become alternative to mainstream education. The student of BOU will become competent in the job market as the mainstream students.
- Quality learning material and qualified tutors comparable to mainstream education should be incorporated. In every upazila of Chittagong Hill Tracts, tutorial centre should be established.

Table-9

**How to popularize the distance learning for the indigenous students**

Sensitize the indigenous people that there is no alternative for the drop out students other than BOU
When the examination results of the mainstream education will be equivalent to the result of BOU students.
Awareness building through radio and TV, so that the indigenous students are attracted. The duration of the radio and TV program should be increased.
Field level discussion with the indigenous academic person before setting curriculum and developing textbooks. it will help to portray the indigenous people properly and will create interest for the indigenous people to study at BOU
Removing language barrier in collaboration with GOs and NGOs. Donor agency could play a effective role to increase the participation of the indigenous students at BOU by giving some scholarships and incentives.
Enhancing the quality of the tutorial system, training of the tutors on open and distance learning and also training on how to handle the indigenous students.
Recruiting more indigenous teacher with high quality and training

Table-10

**In future BOU will be able to empower the indigenous students by giving them proper education**

Response	No	%
Yes	27	54
No	18	36
No Response	05	10
Total	50	100

- Desire from govt. part
- Quality increase by removing the barriers mainly language and cultural diversity.
- Massive awareness campaign
- Increase and develop the number of community radio near to the inhabitants of the indigenous people.

Suggested conceptual framework from the above Findings:

- Incorporated the issues of the indigenous people in the national education policy.
- Bangladesh Open University needs to set the criteria for the inclusion of the indigenous people in the secondary education with the support of education policy.
- Needs feasibility test and profound research in this area is needed , so that in implementing the issues will be practical oriented.
- Innovative curriculum should be developed with the help of National Curriculum and textbook Board considering the need and accessibility of the opportunity and interest.
- More tribal tutors should be appointed for the tribal area.
- Developing attitude for inclusive education so that BOU could fulfill their goal.
- Awareness building through radio and TV
- Time of radio and television program is not suitable for the students and working person. Re telecast is necessary to solve the program.
- Establish more tutorial centre or supplementary class in the same tutorial centre in the remote areas and close monitoring by BOU.
- Lower the course fee and admission fee for the indigenous students and incentives for the meritorious indigenous students.
- Regular training to the indigenous tutors in Bangla language to handle the situation successfully.
- In remote areas, helpline or information centre of BOU could be established
- Community radio will be important agent to fulfill their needs. BOU could introduce community based on the local needs as far as possible.
- The program should be more indigenous student friendly and relates to their interest. Learning materials and example should be familiar to them
- Separate examination schedule for the indigenous students should be set considering the agricultural season, when they involved in agricultural work.
- Pro poverty strategy should be developed by BOU to identify the poor students and giving them support by exempting examination fees and course fees.
- Collaboration with NGOs and donor agency could promote the actives of BOU in fulfilling their target to reach the indigenous people.

- BOU has the golden opportunity to democratize the education system, so it is only the desire which is needed.

**Expected Outcomes:**

It is expected that the framework will be benefited for the policy maker on the issue of indigenous people to implement inclusive education focused on the indigenous people. BOU has the golden opportunity to democratize its education through distance learning including the most vulnerable indigenous people in the education system