

Expert Mechanism on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples
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Right to Education

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Mr. Chairperson, honorable indigenous brothers and sisters.

More than 50 indigenous ethnic communities with a population of nearly three million have been living in Bangladesh for centuries. The children of indigenous peoples have been deprived in learning education in mother tongue. There is no word on education of indigenous peoples in the constitution. Very recently present grand alliance government amended its constitution but the rights of indigenous peoples has not been included in the amended constitution.

Having to study in the national Bengali language – which is not the mother tongue of the indigenous peoples – is known to lead to learning difficulties. The Constitution of Bangladesh also stretches the importance of advancing the backward section of the citizens with special arrangement. Moreover, the CHT Accord of 1997 provides for the introduction of primary education in the languages of the indigenous peoples, but concrete measures to reform the school curricula are yet to be taken. No similar arrangements have been proposed for the plain lands. These omissions are contrary to the provisions of the ILO Convention No. 107 and the Convention on the Rights of the Child, both ratified by Bangladesh.

Drop-out of indigenous children is one of crucial barriers for education of indigenous peoples. In most cases, language barrier, acute poverty among the indigenous society, inconsistent of school timing to work season like traditional *Jum* season, long distance of school from the home, lack of awareness among guardians etc are the main causes behind drop-out of indigenous children from primary and secondary level.

Awami League-led present grand alliance government formulated a new education policy in 2010. The education policy mentioned to provide special supports to the marginalized indigenous children. Primary schools will be established in all adivasi-inhabited areas where primary school does not exist. But no measure has been taken so far as per this education policy.

In the fields of higher education the scenario is also unsatisfactory. Under the provisions of the constitution, the government undertakes some affirmative actions in favour of indigenous peoples including quota reservation in the government jobs and educational institutions for 'tribal' students. However, government does not have any written policy of quota reservation. In some cases, it is totally dependent on the discretion of the authority of the concerned educational institutions.

The situation of indigenous women in this section is more vulnerable. The absence of constructive policies in the universities is affecting the indigenous women more than men as they are more discriminated against. In addition to that, no measure has been taken on the part of the government to provide scholarship to the indigenous students for higher education and research studies in foreign countries.

EMRIP and Human Rights Council can support Bangladesh government to deliver on commitments to indigenous education through policy advocacy and sensitization initiatives, with particular focus on-

- To introduce education through mother tongue for indigenous children.
- To fully implement the CHT Accord 1997
- To strengthen local capacity for locally relevant, participatory education which values indigenous cultures and languages
- To formulate national policy according to international conventions that Bangladesh ratified.

Thank you Mr. Chairperson.