

## **Assessing the Education Status of Ethnic Communities**

### **Background of the study**

Bangladesh is one of the most densely populated countries in the world, has population about 160 million possess a variety of ethnic groups. In Bangladesh, there are at least 75 ethnic communities of whom at least 35 have their own languages (MLE report, 2012). They are one the most socially and economically disadvantaged and vulnerable sections of the population. It is a matter of fact that the people of most of these ethnic groups are remain illiterate and they are about to loose their own written scripts or alphabets or even their mother tongues. Because, different studies prove that one of the main reasons of these condition is their inability to start their initial studies in their mother tongues.

To remove this vulnerable situation of ethnic minority educating them in their mother tongues is needed as learning is best in mother tongue. The Millennium Development Goals (MDG) and 'Education for All (EFA)' supports this needs by stating that access to relevant basic education for every child regardless of their ethnic, cultural or religious background is the rights of all children. Article 28 of the constitution of Bangladesh also clearly mentioned to refrain strictly from any kind of discrimination (e.g. religion, cast and community, birth). Moreover, Article 15 and 16 also strongly stated the equal rights of education for all that include the ethnic minority children. PEDP III and PRSP are also recommending educating ethnic minority children in their mother tongues.

In Bangladesh, some local and international organizations initiated Multilingual Education (MLE) programmes to remove the barrier of mother tongue by introducing mother tongue as medium of instruction and/or in textbooks for the ethnic communities. These programmes are running only at pre-primary and primary level in the country. No MLE programme was found for secondary level or onwards (MLE report, 2012).

### **Objectives of the study**

Right to education is a crucial one which defines their access to knowledge, resources and participation in development. Bangla is the medium of instruction in all levels of the public education system as it is the state language of Bangladesh which ignoring the rights of non-Bengali speakers to study and learn in their own languages. To achieve the MDG, EFA and inclusive education, it is necessary to take the ethnic minority to the mainstream. And the study was trying to assess the education status of ethnic communities to assist for achieving the goal.

The specific objectives of the study were-

- a. identify the socio-economic condition of ethnic communities,
- b. identify the instructional materials for education of ethnic communities in Bangladesh,
- c. explore the obstacles create problems to avail educational opportunities in the ethnic areas.

### **Methodology of the study**

The study used both qualitative and quantitative method to collect data from primary and secondary sources. A multiple instrumental approach was adopted for this study. The primary data was collected through questionnaire, classroom observation checklist, interview schedule and FGD. The study methodology consisted of the following activities:

### **Population of the study**

The people of ethnic communities of three Upazilla of three districts were the population of the study.

### **The Sample**

The study covered three different upazilas of Bangladesh where ethnic communities are living considering different geographical locations. Thus, the sample categories were as follows:

- 3 upazilas were selected purposively from different geographical locations to cover 3 different ethnic communities.
- From 3 ethnic groups 45 households were selected randomly (15 from each group) to collect data about the families.
- From 3 ethnic community areas 6 primary schools and 6 Secondary School were selected conveniently (4 from each area) where ethnic children are studying to identify their instructional materials and education status.
- 24 school teachers were selected purposively from the classrooms and interviewed to know their opinion about the instructional materials and teaching practices.
- A total of 42 students (6-8 from each school) were selected randomly to know their opinion about their education practices.

- 6 Local representative were interviewed to find out the education status of the ethnic communities.

## **Major Findings**

The data analysis and interpretation recognized some findings in this study. The major findings based on collected data and their analyses are given below:

- The fathers of the ethnic children were playing their roles as guardian of the families. Majority of the parents of the ethnic children had lower educational qualification in terms of their level of academic background. Very few of the ethnic children had parents of having Bachelor and/or Higher educational degrees. The fathers were mainly farmer, labour or in jobs in different organizations/offices whereas the mothers were involved mainly in house hold works.
- The ethnic children had a family of 3-5 members in majority of the cases. In most of the cases they were living in their own houses although one-fifth children were living in rented houses. Majority of the ethnic parents were of low income groups whose yearly income was up to 60,000.00 Taka.
- Data revealed that almost equal number of boys and girls were studying in the Primary schools of the respective areas although girls' proportions were to some extent higher in all areas. It was surprising that very few ethnic students were studying the general Primary and Secondary schools where they were living. It was found that only 18.37% ethnic children were studying in the general Primary schools in which 51.19% were girls. In considering the Secondary school students, less than one-third (31.16%) students were from ethnic families in which 54.8% were girls. It also indicated that more ethnic girls were studying in both primary and secondary schools in the ethnic areas.
- Data showed that very few teachers (16.68%), working in the primary schools located in ethnic areas, came from ethnic communities to teach the ethnic children. This scenario was slightly better (25.97%) in considering the proportion of ethnic teachers working in secondary schools.

- Data surprisingly showed that majority of the Head Teachers and Assistant Teachers thought the number of ethnic children studying in the primary and secondary schools were sufficient. However, the mode instruction in both types of schools was only the national language-Bengali. The schools also followed the textbooks provided by NCTB and written in Bengali. It was noticeable that there was no provision to use ethnic languages in teaching or even for making the students understood although they had students came from different ethnic families.
- Data showed that the students came from ethnic families faced difficulties in language. They also faced problems of poverty, communication from home to schools and lack of supports at home for study. Therefore, a good number of students were dropped out from general schools. School uniform had also created problem for the ethnic children as their families were suffering for poverty.

### **Recommendations:**

The recommended some initiatives to make educational opportunities viable for the ethnic children so that they can enroll in schools and continue their study. The following recommendations have been made based on the finding of this study:

- Establish ethnic language as the Mode of instruction at all levels of education. At least there should be a provision of using ethnic language with the Bengali language.
- In recruiting the teachers for the schools located in the ethnic areas, teachers' came from ethnic communities should be considered first and with high emphasis.
- If possible, separate arrangement of teaching or discussion should be scheduled in all schools specifically for ethnic students.
- Sufficient social security should be ensured and safe communication system should be developed in the ethnic areas so that children can avail the opportunities of education.
- Finally social awareness should be increased through different awareness building programs such discussion, procession, and meetings with ethnic communities.