



Background Note on Rangamati

For consideration at the Citizen's Discussion Meeting for Rangamati

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1. District Overview

Rangamati is the largest district of Bangladesh with an area of 6116 km². It is a land of natural beauty and cultural heritage. It was upgraded as a district from a subdivision in 1983. It is situated on the south-eastern side of the country and a part of the Chattogram hill tracts. The current population is Rangamati is estimated to be 7,05,291, 52 per cent of which belong to the indigenous community such as Chakma, Marma and Tripura. The economy of Rangamati is dominated by the agriculture sector. For its beautiful landmarks, Rangamati is one of the popular tourist attractions in Bangladesh.

2. Outlook

2.1 Achievements

In 2016, the poverty rate in Rangamati measured by the upper poverty line was lower than in many other districts of the Chattogram division. However, the rate is higher than the divisional average (18.40 per cent) as well as the national average (24.30 per cent).

In 2016, the infant mortality rate in Rangamati was the second lowest (29.20 per cent) in the Chattogram division. It is also the fourth lowest district in infant mortality rate throughout Bangladesh. The only districts that had lower infant mortality rates are Cox's Bazar, Faridpur and Madaripur.

In 2019, Rangamati had the highest percentage (95.10 per cent) of women aged 15- 49 years who feel safe walking alone in their neighbourhood after dark. The rate was significantly higher than the national average (74.00 per cent).

2.2 Challenges

In 2016, income inequality in Rangamati was the third highest in the Chattogram division. The Gini coefficient of 0.44 was lower than the national average of 0.48. The only districts in the Chattogram division that had higher inequality rates than Rangamati were Cox's Bazar, Cumilla, and Feni.

In 2016, the disability rate (9.00 per cent) of Rangamati was higher than the national average (8 per cent). Among the 11 districts in the Chattogram division, it had the fifth highest rate of disability. The only four districts with higher disability rates were Bandarban, Chandpur, Khagrachhari and Lakshmipur.



The literacy rate of Rangamati in 2016 was lower (69.00 per cent) than in many other districts of the Chattogram division. The rate was significantly below the national average (75.20 per cent).

In 2019, the proportion (31.00 per cent) of basic drinking water, sanitation and hygiene service in Rangamati districts was the third lowest in the Chattogram division. The proportion was also lower than the national average (50.70 per cent).

3. COVID Management

72.00 per cent of people received the first dose of vaccination in Rangamati which is significantly lower among most of the districts in the Chattogram division. However, this rate is higher in many other districts of the country. The completion rate of the third dose of vaccination (10.00 per cent) in the Rangamati district is the second highest in the Chattogram division. It is also significantly higher among most of the districts of Bangladesh.

4. LNOB Perspective

4.1 Geographic Challenges

Climate change is affecting the indigenous community of Rangamati to a great extent. People of Chattogram hill tracts are going through several complex climate hazards such as extreme heat, drought and reduction of groundwater. As a result of these hazards, the sanitation and hygiene of the hill tract areas of Rangamati are deteriorating. These situations also create challenges regarding the health of indigenous people such as heat stress conditions and different infectious diseases. In addition, the climate situation also negatively affects the social, political and economic situation of the indigenous community of Rangamati.

4.2 Land Rights of Locals

Land revenue is one of the major income sources of indigenous communities in Chittagong Hill Tract. They used to earn from cultivating these lands. However, the land of indigenous people was not registered. Currently, most of the lands of Chittagong hill tracts people have been taken over by the Bengali settlers. According to a Daily Star report, 2,00,000 to 4,50,000 Bengali settlers migrated to Chittagong hill tracts. A recent report in Daily Star has illustrated that the land ownership of CHT people has decreased by 51%. Non-indigenous people are leasing or buying lands with fake documents and building resorts, restaurants, and hotels on their land. As a result, original land



owners are evicted from their houses. Rather the existing 'Chittagong Hill Tracts Peace Accord' that was signed back in 1997 is not getting enough attention from the government.

4.3 Youth & Employment

In 2016, the labour force (age 15-29 years) was 1,98,000 which was the second lowest number in Chattogram district and the third lowest all over Bangladesh. The only other districts in the country that had a lower rate of youth employment were Bandarban and Narail.

The low rate of youth employment is creating many challenges in the Rangamati area. This has resulted in the youth getting engaged in socially disruptive behaviour. For example, a 21-year-old young boy was caught red-handed for selling drugs at Kaptai Upazila. Some youths are also involved in other unwanted activities such as theft, wildlife trafficking etc.

4.4 Marginalised Community

4.4.1 Women

Women in agricultural labour in the Rangamati district get lower wages (291 Taka) than their male counterparts (415 Taka) which is evidence of the vulnerable status of women in the Rangamati area. The labour wage of women in Rangamati is the fourth lowest in the country. The only districts that have a lower wage for women than Rangamati are Bandarban, Khagrachari and Gopalganj.

In 2020, the percentage of school-going girls (53.00 per cent) in the Rangamati district was the lowest in the Chattogram division. The percentage of college-going girls (47.00 per cent) in the Rangamati district in 2020 was the second lowest in the Chattogram division. These numbers are also lower than the national average (55 per cent & 51 per cent).

It is a great matter of regret that most of the women in the Rangamati area are unprotected. Incidents of sexual harassment and violence have become prevalent in the past few years. Lately, a girl has been raped while going to her friend's house for attending Biju festivals. The incident was also recorded on the mobile phone by the culprits. Sadly, the local police refused to take the case. When the girl went to the district level for seeking help, she was forced not to file a case by local powerful people. On February 2018, two sisters of Bilaichari upazila were raped but didn't get any justice for their misfortune.



4.4.2 Children

In 2019, the attendance to early childhood education (children aged 36-59 months) in Rangamati was quite higher (23.90 per cent) in the Chattogram division. This percentage was also higher than the national average (19 per cent). However, the primary school completion rate in the Rangamati district (82.10 per cent) in 2019 was the third lowest in the Chattogram division. Additionally, the rate was also lower than the national average (82.60 per cent).

4.4.3 Indigenous Communities

Historically, Rangamati has been home to several different ethnic and indigenous communities. However, several issues have disrupted the harmony of the religion in the past few years. These indigenous communities are frequently deprived of their social, political and economic rights. A recent report on Daily Star has shown that the indigenous people of Rangamati are being excluded from employment opportunities due to the lack of educational opportunities. Most of them are getting the job as day labourers with low wages. The result of this situation is leading them to extreme poverty. Unfortunately, only three per cent of these people can get the chance of continuing their studies at the tertiary level.

5. Other Local Challenges

5.1 Landslide

Thousands of inhabitants of the Rangamati district are facing challenges due to landslides. A large number of people from low-income groups live on hilltops or slopes that are threatening their livelihood. 35 locations have already been marked as hazardous by the district administration. There are several reasons behind the landslide. Heavy monsoon during the rainy season is one of the major causes of landslides in Rangamati. However, most of the dwellers of Rangamati are still living in their houses overlooking the associated risk. In 2017, almost 120 people died as a consequence of the landslide whereas a large number of families became homeless.

5.2 Deforestation

Rangamati is currently going through environmental degradation as evident by the large scale of deforestation. Jhum cultivation is one of the major causes of deforestation in the Rangamati district. Rapid illegal lodging is another reason for deforestation. The evidence of forest land grabbing can be noticed on the roadsides of Rangamati town. Most of the reserved forests are covered by fruit orchards, hotels, resorts, and other private monuments. The residents of Rangamati who has the



actual ownership of the forests are unfortunately used as a workforce for creating orchard garden. Besides these reasons, the cultivation of tobacco, ginger, and turmeric are other reasons for the deforestation in the Chattogram Hill Tracts according to United Nations Climate Change Organisation's survey report on the Bangladesh government in 2021.

5.3 Brick Factories

Illegal brick factory construction has become a major challenge for the locals of Rangamati. Allegedly, most of the constructors process a false Environmental Clearance Certificate (ECC) with the signatures of a former director of the Chattogram divisional office of the Department of Environment (DoE) who left their job 12 years ago. Currently, there are seven brick factories in Rangamati that are run by the influential locals of Rangamati. Though the high court ordered razing of these illegal factories, they are running operations by exercising their power.

5.4 Water Scarcity

Life of Rangamati locals is becoming harder due to the scarcity of water. During the dry season, this problem becomes adverse. Local families of villages in the Rangamati district have to fetch water from springs in the hills by walking four kilometres on hilly paths. Some people even collect water from dug-up holes without knowing whether it is safe or not. In 2016, the major sources of water in Rangamati were canals, rivers, and ponds. However, these major sources have become dried up in the dry season. In 2016, Rangamati had the lowest number of tube wells (108) in Bangladesh which shows a lack of the pure drinking water source in Rangamati. Local people have blamed deforestation and a large number of stone extraction from stream areas as the major causes of water blockage. Some people have left their own houses for migrating to other villages for finding a sip of water.

Jurachari is an agriculture-dominated upazila of Rangamati. Every year 70-80 hectares of land are uncultivated due to the lack of water. The farmers of that area suffer from the lack of water as a consequence of frequent drought in that area. Recently, solar power is implementing all over upazila for the promotion of pump water.

5.5 Tourism

Rangamati is a place of several mesmerising tourist spots including Kaptai Lake and Hanging Bridge. Despite having huge potential in developing tourism, the progress in the tourism sector of Rangamati is not much visible for the past few years. The tourism sector is going through a massive



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challenge as a consequence of the COVID-19 pandemic and emerging environmental issues such as frequent landslides.