



Citizen's Platform for SDGs, Bangladesh
এসডিজি বাস্তবায়নে নাগরিক প্ল্যাটফর্ম, বাংলাদেশ

Background Note on Thakurgaon

For consideration at the Citizen's Discussion Meeting for Thakurgaon
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1. District Overview

Thakurgaon district is located in Rangpur division at the north-west region of Bangladesh. Thakurgaon is bounded on the north by Panchagarh district, east by Dinajpur and Panchagarh district, and south and west by West Bengal State of India. The total area of the district is 1809.52 sq. km of which 6.43 sq. km is riverine and 9.06 sq. km. is under forest. The district has a population of 1,642,967. Thakurgaon subdivision was created in 1860 under Dinajpur Zila. It was upgraded to a district in 1984. The district consists of 5 upazilas. The upazilas are Baliadangi, Haripur, Pirganj, Ranishankail and Thakurgaon Sadar. Thakurgaon's economy is primarily agricultural. Out of the district's total 297962 holdings, 66.76% are farms that grow a variety of crops, including native and HYV paddy, wheat, jute, potato, sugarcane, mustard, various vegetables, spices, pulses, and other small crops. The principal rivers of the district are Tangon, Punarbhaba, Nagar and Tentulia.

2. Outlook

2.1 Achievements

The poverty rate in Thakurgaon, measured by the upper poverty line was 23.4 per cent in 2016 which is half of Rangpur division's average. The poverty rate was lower than the national average by 0.9 percentage points.

The adult literacy rate increased to 79.3 per cent in 2016 which was 37.5 percentage points higher than the adult literacy rate in 2001. The rate is slightly higher by 4.9 percentage points compared to the Rangpur division. However, the percentage of girl students in school was 54.0 per cent which was one percentage point lower than the division average in 2016.

Thakurgaon district exhibited progress in reducing prevalence of early childbearing and stunting of under-5 aged children. In 2019, the early childbearing rate was 27.9 per cent and severe stunting prevalence was 4.1 per cent. The corresponding divisional averages were 28.9 per cent and 9.0 per cent respectively.

In 2019, Thakurgaon was ahead of the national averages of improved sanitation by 1.1 percentage points. 85.7 per cent households in the district used improved sanitation that year. However, it was lower than Rangpur division's average by 1.2 percentage points.

2.2 Challenges

In 2020, the infant mortality rate in Thakurgaon was significantly high (50 per cent). The rate had raised by 14 percentage points in the last ten years. The mortality rate was second highest among the districts of Rangpur division and 28.8 percentage points higher than the national average.

The proportion of under-5 aged children whose births were registered with civil authorities reduced from 2013 to 2019 in contrast to most districts of Rangpur division. The share was 8.0 percentage points and 9.3 percentage points lower than the division and national averages respectively, which was the third-lowest rate across the districts.

The proportion of households using improved sanitation facilities was the second-lowest in Thakurgaon compared to other districts in Rangpur division. In 2019, 85.7 per cent of household members reported using improved sanitation facilities. The proportion was 1.2 percentage points lower than the divisional average.

Crop yield dropped in Thakurgaon between 2010 and 2016. The net cropped area of total crop-able area reduced from 88.94 per cent in 2010 to 86.59 per cent in 2016. However, the rate was higher than the divisional average which was only 75.49 per cent.

3. LNOB Outlook

3.1 Geography

The small Lachchhi river at Pirganj Upazila's Birholi village in Thakurgaon overflows in the monsoon, flooding the arable lands on its banks and preparing them for the

cultivation of Aman paddy. However, volatile changes in weather patterns over the last decade have created uncertainty, particularly for those who cultivate Aman paddy.

Furthermore, the low-lying riverine terrain of Thakurgaon possess a challenge for the rural road works in the district, a large number of these projects were under food-for-work programs, which do not allocate funds to construct cross-drainage structures.

3.2 Women

The literacy rate among women aged 15-24 years in Thakurgaon was 93.1 per cent, the second highest percentage in the division in 2019. The percentage was higher than the divisional and national averages by 3.1 percentage points and 4.4 percentage points, respectively.

In terms of maternal health care, only 53.8 per cent women of Thakurgaon received the opportunity of institutional deliveries. The proportion was 4.3 percentage points higher than the Rangpur division (49.5 per cent) and 0.4 percentage points higher than the national average of professional births.

In 2019, about 56.8 per cent of young women aged 20-24 years were married before age 18 in the district. The rate was higher by 5.4 percentage points than the national average. Incidents of sexual harassment and violence against women and young girls have recently reached an alarming level in Thakurgaon. A 9th grade schoolgirl was gang raped on January 2022 in Dholarhat of Thakurgaon Sadar upazila. On September 9, a class IX student, was abducted and raped by five people at a warehouse in Gabindanagar Ikkhuroad area while she was travelling by a three-wheeler to Thakurgaon town from her village at Baliadangi upazila.

3.3 Children

In 2019, the attendance to early childhood education (children aged 36-59 months) in Thakurgaon was the second lowest (10.1 per cent) in the Rangpur division. This percentage was also lower than the national average (19 per cent). However, the primary school completion rate in the Thakurgaon district (85.6 per cent) in 2019 was slightly higher than the national average (82.6 per cent).

The upper secondary completion rate of the children in Thakurgaon district was the second lowest (25.8 per cent) in the Rangpur division and 3.6 percentage points lower than the national average.

3.4 Adibashi and Minority Communities

There is a plethora of indigenous communities living in Thakurgaon district, such as Santal, Oraon, Munda, Mushor and Rajbanshi. These tribal communities live in Pirganj, Ranishankoil, Haripur, Baliadangi and Thakurgaon Sadar upazilas of the district.

The Santal people in this district have low access to education and are deprived of adequate information regarding land issues. They may have possessed the land for generations, but many of them don't have necessary documentation. Moreover, there is a demand for reallocation of *khas* land among the landless indigenous people but a solution has not been reached in this regard.

A minority family was attacked and their house was vandalised over a land dispute on September 2022 at Haripara village under Haripur upazila in Thakurgaon district. The cases of attacks on government allocated lands for minorities and later being denied protection from local administrations is a recurring issue in the region.

3.5 Youth and Employment

In 2016, the youth (aged 15-29 years) employment rate in Thakurgaon was 59 per cent. The percentage was higher than the national average (49.3 per cent) but slightly lower by 0.5 percentage points than the divisional average.

Young migrant workers' outflow has increased in Thakurgaon. According to the data available at the Bureau of Manpower Employment and Training (BMET), a visible majority at the labour force migrate to Middle-Eastern countries for better economic opportunities.

3.6 Persons with Disabilities

According to a survey report of Bangladesh Bureau of Statistics in 2015, 1.48 per cent people in Thakurgaon were found to have prevalence and pattern of disability. The

prevalence of disability rate in the district is slightly lower by 0.13 percentage points than the divisional average. Out of the PWDs in the district 12.80, 21.62 and 11.48 per cent had speech, vision and hearing impairment respectively. Additionally, 4.72 per cent of the people with disabilities in Thakurgaon were reported to have autism spectrum disorder. The Eco-Social Development Organization in Thakurgaon is directly working with the PWDs in the district.

4. COVID-19 Management

As of 21 June 2022, 66 per cent of the population of Thakurgaon received the second dose of the COVID-19 vaccination; the rate was similar to that of Chittagong division but lower than in Dhaka and Rangpur. However, the rate was slightly lower than the national average (69.78 per cent) specifically by 2.78 percentage points. The proportion of population with complete vaccination is 12 per cent which was notably less than the national average (23.8 per cent).

5. Other Local Challenges

5.1 Flooding

The water level of the Tangon river in Thakurgaon district has been on rise due to the heavy rainfall and onrush or hilly water, inundating low-lying areas of the district. It was also reported that the water level of Kharkharia river has been flowing 6cm above the danger level, setting a record of being the highest in 2020, damaging the Syedpur embankment. The people of Ranisankali upazila of Thakurgaon are facing immense suffering for want of a bridge over Kulik river.

5.2 Agriculture

Thakurgaon was once prominently known for its wheat production. But amid a gradual drop in the district's wheat crop, farmers have been struggling to meet production goals recently. According to the district DAE, farmers have consistently failed to achieve the production target for 20 seasons preceding 2022. Due to the lack of urea in the area, Aman

growers are forced to purchase expensive non-urea fertilizers during the current growing season.

However, the acidic soil and climatic condition of Thakurgaon's Pirganj upazila make the district suitable for orange and tangerine cultivation. Orange farming was introduced in northern districts under the government's 2006-2011 Orange Orchard Development Project (ODP). At present, a total of 130 hectares of land have been brought under orange and tangerine cultivation in the district. According to a report from 2019 of DAE, the vegetables produced in the district were being exported abroad after meeting the local demand.

5.3 Forestry

The forest land in Dinajpur district is separated into four ranges: Charkai, Madhyapara, Dinajpur Sadar, and Thakurgaon, according to the forest department. The villages of Thakurgaon were known to be embowered in greenery; clumps of wild bamboos were to be seen on all sides and the banks of the rivers and old tanks were overgrown with thickets of shrubs and brambles. Unfortunately, at least 32% of the district's total forest acreage has been unlawfully occupied, according to a report of 2022.

Leopards, fox, rabbit, mongoose were seen in many parts of the district as they could get cover in the neighbourhood of villages in old graveyard, ruined remains of temples, mosques and dwelling houses. Nilgai and barn owl are notable among the endangered species of this district. The locals were reported for rescuing them from the brink of extinction.

5.4 Inefficient Stimulus Allocation

Digitised government-to-person (G2P) payments, which involve little to no physical touch, have gained significant traction, particularly during the Covid-19 outbreak. However, the government did not distribute the five million recipients of the scheduled financial transfers, which affected Thakurgaon as well. In the initial list of receivers of digital relief, it was discovered that a sizeable portion of the entries were questionable. Bangladesh lacks an updated, correct, and disaggregated national database to distribute different types of support in the district level including Thakurgaon.

5.5 Infrastructure

Permanent establishments in Thakurgaon create employment opportunity for 24% of the population. A 115MW independent power plant (IPP) belonging to Energypac Power Venture Thakurgaon (EPV Thakurgaon) – a subsidiary of Energypac Power Generation – has finally gone into commercial operation two years behind schedule owing to the Covid-19 pandemic and other adversities. Thakurgaon airport, which has been abandoned for a considerable amount of time, is stated to suffer from inadequate infrastructure and critically low demand.