

Citizen's Consultation Meeting Rangpur

A Brief on Development in Rangpur

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Rangpur Division

Rangpur is the northernmost division of Bangladesh, formally recognised as the seventh division of Bangladesh on 25 January 2010. Before its formation, Rangpur was part of the Rajshahi division. According to the Population and Housing Census 2011, Rangpur was the fourth largest division with a population of 15, 787, 758. The division comprises eight districts where Rangpur district has the highest population of 2,996,336 and Dinajpur has the largest area coverage of 3,444 km². The native minority groups of the division are Santal, Munda, Oraon, Rajbanshi, Kaibarta, and Koch.

In recent years, prior to the COVID-19 pandemic, the economic situation in Rangpur division persisted in the negative trends. Nonetheless, contrary to divisions with lower poverty and better socio-economic standards, Rangpur division has achieved noticeable progress in particular areas of social, environmental, and governance.

Division Outlook

Rangpur division had the highest incidence of poverty in 2010, which increased further by 5 percentage points to 47.2 per cent in 2016, measured by the upper poverty line. The national poverty rate was at least 50 per cent lower than the divisional estimate in 2016. The rise in poverty could be attributed to the significant increase in urban poverty over the six years, precisely 13.6 percentage points. The increasing poverty of the division could also be explained by its high rate of informality and low monthly household income.

Rangpur division also had the highest rate of informal employment at 89 per cent in 2017. Although proportion of both male and female informal employment was higher than national averages, female informal employment rate was higher than the male counterpart in Rangpur division, and the rate was the highest among all divisions. The monthly nominal income in Rangpur division was the lowest compared to the national average and across divisions in 2010. The situation persisted in 2016, and the gap between the national monthly income and that of Rangpur division further widened in 2016 compared to 2010. The division also had the highest unemployment rate in 2017, close to 7 per cent and almost 11 percentage points higher for females than males.

In contrast to the economic indicators, Rangpur division demonstrated considerable progress in the social and environmental indicators. For example, the 2019 primary school completion rate was nearly 86 per cent which was higher than the national average resulting in Rangpur division having the third-highest rate of primary school completion. Similarly, the division had the fourth-highest upper secondary education completion rate, greater than in Dhaka, Chittagong, Mymensingh, and Sylhet. Furthermore, Rangpur division attained tremendous progress in reducing the prevalence of early childbearing and stunting of under-5 aged children. In 2013, approximately 31 per cent of women aged 20-24 years gave birth before age 18 in Rangpur division which was one of the highest proportions among all divisions. However, the rate reduced drastically to 2 per cent in 2019, which was 22 percentage points lower than the national estimate. This could be due to the government's efforts to enhance the capacities of Union Health and Family Welfare Centres and community clinics in raising awareness and delivering improved family planning services. Also, in 2019 the prevalence of stunting of under-5 aged children fell by more than half to nearly 27 per cent, which was lower than the national average and that of Dhaka and Chittagong. The improvement could plausibly be traced to the interventions of international development organisations and non-governmental organisations in vulnerable sub-districts of

Rangpur, which aim to reduce malnutrition, address nutritional requirements and aid the government in implementing nutritional plans.

Likewise, Rangpur division was ahead of the national averages for the environmental indicators of safe drinking water and improved sanitation. In 2019, 70 per cent of households used safe drinking water. The use of improved sanitation in Rangpur division in 2013 was greater than the national average, and the proportion rose further to 87 per cent in 2019. The government's execution of sustainable wash programmes to provide pure drinking water, sanitation facilities, and sewerage systems in poor communities of Rangpur region could have driven the positive changes.

For the indicators of governance, although the division improved the birth registrations of under-5 aged children from 48 per cent in 2013 to almost 55 per cent in 2019, the division was markedly behind the national average and had the lowest rate among all divisions in terms of the proportion of households with internet (18 per cent) and use of internet among women aged 15-49 years at least once a week during the last three months of the MICS survey in 2019.

As presented in the following section, a scrutiny of the district-wise statistics provides an overview of the disadvantaged districts and the condition of the marginalised groups in terms of the economic, social, environmental, and governance factors.

LNOB Outlook

Geography

Among the eight districts, Kurigram, Dinajpur, and Gaibandha lagged. The proportion of population under the upper poverty line was the highest in Kurigram at nearly 71 per cent in 2016. Income inequality was also high, as evident in the second-highest Gini coefficient among the districts. The use of safe drinking water in Kurigram was lower by 16 percentage points than the divisional estimate, and proportion of households using improved sanitation was the lowest in 2019. However, the rate of improved sanitation increased from 51 per cent to 80 per cent from 2013 to 2019. Moreover, proportion of households with internet was the lowest in Kurigram in 2019. Nevertheless, the under-5 mortality rate in Kurigram was the third-lowest, lower than the divisional average and that of Panchagarh and Thakurgaon, which had relatively lower poverty rates.

The second-highest poverty rate in 2016 was in Dinajpur at 64 per cent. Dinajpur had the highest income inequality, with a Gini coefficient of 0.5 greater than the national average. The proportion of households with access to safe drinking water in 2019 was lower than in Gaibandha, Panchagarh, Rangpur, and Thakurgaon. However, the under-5 mortality rate was one of the lowest in Dinajpur in 2020, and the proportion of households using improved sanitation also increased from 80 per cent to 86 per cent from 2013 to 2019. Also, 27 per cent of the households had internet connection, higher than the divisional average.

The incidence of poverty in Gaibandha was the third-highest in the division at 47 per cent in 2016. Under-5 mortality rate (37 per cent) was also one of the highest in the division. On the other hand, the use of safe drinking water was higher than the divisional average, and proportion of households using improved sanitation rose from 78 per cent to 88 per cent from 2013 to 2019. Furthermore, around 18 per cent of households had internet connectivity, higher than in Lalmonirhat and Panchagarh.

Women

Women of Gaibandha were worse off than those of other Rangpur districts in terms of indicators of marriage and reproduction. The highest proportion of women in Gaibandha was married off by age 15 and had early childbirths. The proportion of early childbirths increased from 28 per cent in 2013 to 36 per cent in 2019, with the proportion being higher than both the national and divisional averages. The early births could be due to the relatively lower use of modern contraceptives by women aged 15-49 years than in other districts. Gaibandha also had the lowest rate of uptake of antenatal care, which was only 22 per cent in 2019.

Children

The highest prevalence of stunting among under-5-aged children was in Panchagarh in 2019. The rate was reduced by the slightest percentage point over 2013-2019 relative to other districts. Also, the proportion was almost more than half of Kurigram, where the poverty rate was the highest.

In terms of education, Nilphamari had the lowest completion rate of primary and upper secondary education, which were 78 per cent and 22 per cent, respectively, in 2019. Although Panchagarh had the highest primary school completion rate, children aged 7-14 years with foundational reading and number skills were the lowest.

Child labour, on the contrary, was the highest in Kurigram among all districts of Rangpur division which could be owed to the high poverty incidence of the district.

Youth

Rangpur was the fourth largest division of female NEET youths in 2017. The urban female youths of the division faced significant institutional and social barriers to participating in labour market activities, as indicated by 63 per cent of female NEET youths, which was 7 percentage points higher than the rural counterpart.

Indigenous community

A section of Santals demanded to stop the construction of an EPZ in the Shahebganj-Bagdafarm area (land previously belonged to the ethnic Santals before being requisitioned by the government for a sugar mill), and their ancestral land returned. Human rights activists also echoed their sentiment, demanding that no one is evicted from the land. A procession was held in Dinajpur town, encircling the deputy commissioner's office. They put forward 16-point demands, highlighting their poor human rights conditions and forceable evictions from their land. They demanded their rights be recognised by the constitution, with formation of a special ministry for the indigenous people of the plainland.

COVID-19 Management

Given a centralised health system and the resulting concentration of vaccination in the capital, COVID-19 management in Rangpur division has been relatively well especially compared to Dhaka and the national aggregates. The proportion of population administered the second dose of vaccination in Rangpur division was the second-highest among the eight divisions at nearly 69 per cent and close to the national average. Although the percentage of population who received the booster shot was the third-highest among all divisions, the rate was comparatively lower than in Dhaka division and almost 4 percentage points below the national rate. Moreover, Rangpur was one of the divisions with the minimum number of oxygen concentrators available (only 734, which was less than in Dhaka, Chittagong, Rajshahi, and Khulna divisions).

Across the districts, the administration of second vaccine doses was close to the national proportion of 69 per cent or even higher such as in Gaibandha, Nilphamari, Panchagarh, and Rangpur. Anyhow, for the third dose, the percentage was largely lower than the national average in Dinajpur, Gaibandha, Kurigram, Lalmonirhat, Nilphamari, and Rangpur.

In light of the weakening economic situation of Rangpur division, the marginalisation of specific districts, and certain its LNOB groups, the COVID-19 pandemic is expected to exacerbate the pre-existing vulnerabilities and create new challenges. However, in 2022 several favourable developments in the division, to some extent, could offset the induced socio-economic difficulties. For instance, tea and sunflower cultivation in Rangpur division are replacing tobacco due to high profitability. For decades, tobacco was the most cultivated cash crop deemed harmful for land and farmers. Several districts, including Nilphamari, Kurigram, and Dinajpur, are leaning towards sunflower cultivation as domestic demand for sunflower oil has risen nationally. Similarly, cotton production across the districts is increasing due to the higher cotton prices. Furthermore, the Gangachara Sheikh Hasina Teesta Bridge and Sheikh Hasina Dharla Bridge improved communication networks in Rangpur, Lalmonirhat, and Kurigram, enhancing living standards and ensuring fair prices of agro products even during the pandemic.

The key will be to ensure the participation of youths and females in the economic activities. Tea production is another potential area to generate youth entrepreneurship by providing fair prices and controlling input costs. In addition, the market prices of cow feed will need to be regulated as farmers, particularly the small farms, are forced to sell their cows because of the high cost of inputs and economic losses. Plus, low-income workers such as waster pickers who receive a monthly salary of Tk2,200 and fish cutters in wet markets will have to be given economic security through income raises and social safety nets.
