



Extreme Poor Adivasis and the Problem of Accessing Social Safety Nets

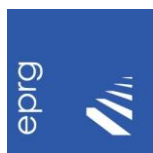
shree working paper 4



Extreme Poverty Research Group (EPRG)

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The data used in this publication comes from the Economic Empowerment of the Poorest Programme (www.shiree.org), an initiative established by the Department for International Development (DFID) and the Government of Bangladesh (GoB) to help 1 million people lift themselves out of extreme poverty. The views expressed here are entirely those of the author(s).

The paper has been peer reviewed by colleagues in either the Chars Livelihood Programme (CLP), the UNDP Urban Partnerships for Poverty Reduction (UPPR) and BRAC's Challenging the Frontiers of Poverty Reduction – Targeting the Ultra Poor (CFPR-TUP) programmes – all part of the DFID/UKaid extreme poverty portfolio in Bangladesh.

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CONTENTS

Executive summary	v
1. Introduction.....	1
1.1. Objectives of the Study	2
1.2. Review of Literature	3
2. Methodology	4
2.1. Safety Net Supports in the Selected Unions.....	5
2.2. Research Locale	7
2.3. Demographic Composition of Research Locale.....	7
3. Scale of exclusion from safety nets: eligibility vs. actual receipt	8
3.1. Eligibility for Safety Nets and those actually received	8
3.2. Denied higher quality safety nets	9
4. Information: the exclusion of Adivasi from information	10
4.1. The way information should be distributed to rural poor	10
4.2. Lack of information in extreme poor regions.....	11
4.3. Patron-client relationships underpin Adivasi's accessibility of information	11
4.4. Public announcements exclude homebound vulnerable poor	11
4.5. Markets as A key SSN information source.....	12
4.6. The ways information is concealed from adivasi	13
4.7. Knowledge of SSN Entitlement	13
4.8. Understanding safety nets through Netz group meetings	13
5. Selection: The politics of Adivasi exclusion from safety nets	14
5.1. How is selection supposed to operate in practice?	14
5.2. Generic Political Problems	15
5.2.1. Error in age recording – Voter ID.....	15
5.2.2. Political connections with elite	16
5.2.3. SSNs and bribes.....	18

5.3. Specific Political problems	19
5.3.1. Absence of Adivasi representation in the selection committee	19
5.3.2. Weak political participation of Adivasis	19
5.4. Cultural Labeling and prejudice	20
5.4.1. "Adivasi women can move anywhere and find work"	20
5.4.2. "Adivasis are all drunkards"	20
5.4.3. "Adivasis are supported by NGOs and churches"	20
5.4.4. "Adivasis move from place to place"	21
5.5. Economic basis for Adivasis political and social exclusion	21
6. Conclusion.....	21
7. Recommendations	22
7.1. Reflections on potential solutions	22
7.1.1. Survey to calculate the exact number of Adivasi	23
7.1.2. Need assessment before distribution of allocation	23
7.1.3. Inclusion of Adivasi in Selection Committee	23
7.1.4. Non-partisan selection committee	23
7.1.5. Selection validation by communities	24
References.....	25
Annex-1	26
Annex-2	27

ACRONYMS

AMADER –Advancement of Marginalized Adivasis Deprived of Economic Resources

BDT- Bangladeshi Taka (currency)

BHH- Beneficiary Household

CMS – Change Monitoring System

EP- Extreme Poor

FHH- Female Headed Household

GoB- Government of Bangladesh

HH – Household

IGA- Income Generating Activity

PESP- Primary Education Stipend Programme

PNGO- Partner Non-Government Organization

SHIREE- Stimulating Household Improvement Resulting in Economic Empowerment

SSN – Social Safety Net

UHO- Upazila Health Officer

UNO- Upazila Nirbahi Officer

UP- Union Parishad

UPC- UP Chairman

VGD - Vulnerable Group Development

WC- Ward Commissioner

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Under the auspices of AMADER Project, this study was conducted in two unions of the high Barind area in Naogaon District in Bangladesh. Efforts were made to explore the factors behind the extremely poor Adivasis' (meaning indigenous people) scarce access to government-funded social safety nets. Our quantitative analysis reveals that the number of recipients of SSNs is small in the two studied Unions – Shapahar and Goalā – standing at 3 out of 74 deserving BHHs and 4 out of 65 deserving BHHs respectively.

Three key problems define Adivasis' exclusion from SSNs– their exclusion from information, the fact that they are not considered politically important, and the on-going cultural labelling of Adivasis as 'underserving poor'. It was found that the Adivasi communities do not receive information on SSNs disseminated by the state system. This is in part because they are not accustomed to modern dissemination processes but also because information is rarely disseminated to their locality. Moreover, non-Adivasi people are reluctant to pass accurate information to Adivasis. In addition, Adivasis' literacy rate is very low compared to non-Adivasi beneficiaries (the former have a school attendance of only 17% and 11% for boys and girls respectively).

Despite these difficulties, some recipients were able to access information on SSNs. However, this happened only in areas where rising labour scarcity, resulting from tube-well development, encouraged elites to maintain better relationships with labourers by offering to connect them political elites who could offer their families safety nets. In exchange, Adivasis are expected to offer political loyalty to their patrons. Thus, there were two costs for these who managed to receive SSNs: lower wages and their vote.

The political problem surrounding Adivasis' access to SSNs is two-fold – generic and specific. One of the generic problems is constant reports that Ward Commissioners (WCs) cover certain recipients across each para under his/her ward since this helps to increase their support base for future political gain. However, the number of potential recipients is not same in all paras. So, a highly deserving person might be excluded in this highly politicized selection process.

Another problem relates to recorded age in voter ID cards which is regarded as the benchmark for old aged allowance, VGD cards, and the 40 days' work programme. However, with incorrect ages recorded on ID cards, many Adivasis cannot claim their SSNs, even though the actual age of many Adivasi is appropriate for obtaining safety net measures.

A specific problem identified was the poor representation of extremely poor Adivasis in the SSN selection committee and their weak political participation. There were no elected political ward commissioners (UP Members) or chairpersons (UP Chairmen) from Adivasi communities in the study area.

The practice of cultural labelling to justify the exclusion of Adivasis is prevalent. Extremely poor Adivasis are excluded from SSN coverage because they are culturally stigmatized. Accusations of drunkenness, women moving freely around, and of Adivasis being a displaced community are common. Behind these labels stand a political objective: poor

non-Adivasis and rich alike simply do not want Adivasis to gain access to SSNs. Competition between Adivasis and non-Adivasis intensifies in a situation of resource scarcity created by the state. Moreover, wealthy non-Adivasis – who are not patron-employers - fear that giving Adivasis access to SSNs will discourage extremely poor Adivasis from migrating, thus leaving them less scope to capture abandoned homesteads and land left in their absence. Such land has more value as a result of the homestead gardening interventions of NETZ.

With the view of identifying solutions to improve the SSN coverage of the extremely poor Adivasis, recommendations have been drawn from the interviews with gate-keepers and informants. The major points of recommendation are:

- a) Inclusion of extremely poor Adivasis in the beneficiary selection committee and distribution of SSNs;
- b) Non-partisan selection committee formation;
- c) Selected beneficiary lists should be validated people in communities;
- d) More funds need to be allocated to cover the excluded and deserving extreme poor.

1. INTRODUCTION

“tomader ki dekeche, tomader jonno to ashe ni”

Who told you to come; it was not meant for you

This is what Adivasis were told when they went to the UP during Eid-ul-Azha in 2010 for some rice, and this is also what Adivasis face on a daily basis when they approach the UP offices for social safety nets (SSNs). This study was designed to understand the nature of the existing Government SSNs in the rural areas of the high Barind region in Bangladesh, and to obtain a first-hand account of the dynamics of access of extreme poor (EP) Adivasis to this support system. It focuses on how EP Adivasis approach local authorities in an attempt to try to obtain support available either in the form of cash or in material/kind. Simultaneously, the findings provide us with a more precise idea about the sort of strategies that beneficiaries apply in order to gain access to SSNs and what factors have contributed to their success or failure.

This paper is structured in the following way. The first chapter provides a background to the study along with an overview of its objectives and a brief review of the literature. In the second chapter, we discuss our methodologies, research locale and the demographic composition of our research participants. In the third chapter, we provide an overview of the various supports available to the poor in the form of social assistance and social protection¹, shedding some insight into the scale of Adivasi exclusion from safety nets. The fourth chapter explores Adivasis' exclusion from information, illustrating experiences of EP Adivasis' perceptions of SSNs and their common sources of information. In chapter five, we examine the politics of Adivasi exclusion in the selection process. Political difficulties are divided into two types – a more generic pattern, and a specific one of EP Adivasis' experiences of cultural labelling which is used to legitimise their continued exclusion. The final chapter is devoted to the policy issues arising from the research with recipients and non-recipients², and includes findings from the FGDs, along with recommendations for 'gate keepers' regarding how to move towards a sufficient and suitable coverage system for EP Adivasis.

This research is about the deprivation of EP Adivasi people from safety net measures. The term Adivasi is contentious to some extent in the light of political context of Bangladesh. The adherence to the concept of Adivasi (meaning indigenous people) varies from person to person as well as among the political parties. However, for the present study, the following definition of Adivasi/indigenous people is used:

Indigenous Peoples can be identified in particular geographical areas by the presence in varying degrees of the following characteristics:

¹ Social protection covers a wide array of social assistance. For example, assistance schemes such as pension and insurance schemes are types of social safety nets (Source: *Social Safety Nets in Bangladesh: An Assessment; Bangladesh Development Series - Paper No. - 9* by the World Bank Office, Dhaka, January, 2006).

² Non-recipients include those who have tried to get at least one support but failed to obtain access.

- a) close attachment to ancestral territories and to the natural resources in these areas;
- b) self-identification and identification by others as members of a distinct cultural group;
- c) an indigenous language, often different from the national language;
- d) presence of customary social and political institutions;
- and e) primarily subsistence-oriented production.

Source: World Bank (operational directive 4.20, 1991).

1.1. OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY

The main objective of this study was to identify the factors underpinning the poor access of Advasis to safety net supports in two unions of the Naogaon district under the AMADER project area. Two key factors triggered the uptake of this study:

- a) The life history studies undertaken as a part of Change Monitoring System 5 tool (CMS5(S))³ in October 2010 revealed that SSNs can help beneficiaries maintain a better livelihood, especially during the lean season, and reduce the risk of loss of productive assets. It was found that despite insufficient returns from their main IGAs (petty trade); beneficiaries with access to SSNs (i.e. old age allowance) consumed two meals a day during the lean season – *the months of Ashwin and Kartik (September and October)*. This enabled the concerned beneficiaries to not only maintain their physical ability to work but also encouraged them not to sell their assets in times of distress (e.g. selling their assets such as sheep and ducks). Considering the livelihood benefits of SSNs, it is important that EP Advasis can access to SSNs. This can only occur if the underlying causes of their exclusion are recognised and addressed.
- b) The household profile of the AMADER project shows that 231 HHs (7.7%) out of 3,000 selected BHHs have access to SSNs. 129 receiving households were Advasis (55%) and 102 households were non-Advasis (45%). The total number of Advasi and non-Advasi households stands at 1970 (66%) and 1030 (34%) respectively. Out of the 1970 Advasi households, only 6% are gaining support (though Advasi households constitute a major portion (66%) of total BHHs). On the other hand, of 1030 non-Advasi households, 10% have access to SSNs even though they constitute smaller portion (34%) of total households. In terms of the actual number of Advasi households, Advasis are accessing SSNs at a lower rate compared with the non-Advasi population.

SPECIFIC OBJECTIVES

The specific objectives of the research were to generate knowledge about:

- a) The numbers of SSN receivers among the beneficiaries from the two selected unions.
- b) Characteristics of the SSN recipients from the Advasi communities.
- c) Contributing factors to the exclusion of Advasis from safety net supports.

³ CMS5(S) is one of shiree-designed qualitative longitudinal tools being conducted by 6 Scale-Fund NGOs to document the dynamics of extreme poverty as it is experienced in beneficiaries lives every four months.

- d) Effectiveness of the efforts made at the group and individual level to increase accessibility to SSNs.

IMPORTANCE

This study attempts to unravel the dynamics behind the exclusion of extremely poor Adivasis to government SSN programmes particularly in AMADER Project areas. It is anticipated that the findings will be helpful in adopting fruitful steps to increase the safety net coverage rate in general. The present study aims to identify relevant advocacy issues that can impact on policy formulation and address the root causes of limited accessibility. Lastly, the findings will further strengthen project activities, which eventually improve beneficiaries' access to SSNs.

1.2. REVIEW OF LITERATURE

The literature reviewed shows that there is little qualitative enquiry into the unique economic, social and political conditions underpinning Adivasis experiences in trying to access SSNs.

One of the most recent studies on safety nets and access is ***Safety Net Programs in Bangladesh: Assessing the Performance of Selected Programs*** by M. A. Mannan (2009). The focus of this study is on the selection process of the hardcore poor who are eligible for safety net support and on the leakages in the distribution of safety nets resulting from poor governance. However, the hardcore poor in this study actually possess 12 decimals of land on average. The author does not explore in detail the situation of groups with less property and land. Extreme poor Adivasis usually have no land and are compelled to live on khas (government-owned land) or their landlords' land. The unique problems they and other marginalized groups face, such as social and political exclusion and hindered access to safety net support, remain unexplored in this study.

NETZ Magazine: issue no. 3/2010 reveals that there are about 27 official safety net programmes⁴ in Bangladesh which are designed for poor people like widows, elderly people and other vulnerable groups. It focuses on the barriers which prevent access to safety net programmes among marginalized groups, like Dalits, and the complexities arising out of poor governance and bribery.

The household profile (CMS 1) of the AMADER project sheds light on the problem of Adivasis' exclusion from SSNs and the numbers excluded, but reveals no qualitative evidence which could help us understand why Adivasis are excluded.

Another significant study is ***Social Safety Nets in Bangladesh: An Assessment; Bangladesh Development Series - Paper No. 9*** by the World Bank Office, Dhaka, January, 2006. This is a quantitative study drawing on data from different sources on current safety net programmes in Bangladesh. It covers budgetary allocations, limitations of the targeting, monitoring and evaluation systems, and an analysis of the leakage of existing programmes like the VGD. The study reveals some interesting findings:

- In the last three decades, Bangladesh has spent 3% of its public expenditure on SSNs. This represents less than 1% of its GDP. Moreover, due to leakages and mis-targeting a

⁴ See Peter Davis' article on Government services and social safety measures for the extreme and chronic poor (March, 2010).

significant number of non-eligible households gained access to SSNs, while only 6 to 7 per cent of the poor enjoyed safety net support (though the target was to reach 10 per cent of the poor).

- The study also suggests that 35% of the public expenditure of Bangladesh is required to ensure the full coverage of all people entitled to social safety net support.

Many programmes target beneficiaries based on household, community or geographical characteristics which can lead to exclusion errors. Under the GoB targeting approach, each household's position of land ownership and employment in casual labour is considered. Participants are selected with the help of community and village leaders whereas the geographical criteria count the number of food insecure households in each Upazila. The selection of participants through the application of such criteria in isolation from other characteristics, such as social exclusion, sustains mis-targeting. The study illustrates how poor coordination among different implementing ministries and inadequate monitoring and evaluation contributes to the continuation of mis-targeting and leakage. Leakages occur at various stages of the distribution process of food-based programmes since beneficiaries are provided less than the stated amount of rice/wheat. Finally, a number of recommendations are drawn to overcome the shortcomings of the present system. These recommendations entail some administrative measures such as the formulation of a National Safety Net Policy, inter-ministerial cooperation to minimize overlaps, outsourcing of operation activities to agents working at local level, and introduction of external monitoring and evaluation. More procedural measures include the preference for cash transfers over in-kind and voucher based transfers, minimizing the number of intermediaries in the distribution process, the use of income-based criteria instead of land ownership, and the need for a unified targeting process across programmes.

The focus of the **Operational Context Study report** of the AMADER project (2009) focused on the socio-economic and political conditions under which Adivasis are living. It shows that the existing power structures do not contribute positively to the development of Adivasis' livelihoods despite attempts among a number of NGOs to help the Adivasis. Due to their appalling socio-political positioning, Adivasis do not receive the social safety net support they deserve. The inter-relationship of the socio-economic conditions of Adivasis is linked to the exclusion of Adivasis from SSNs. However, here the linkages are not explored in-depth.

This study attempts to address some of the gaps in the literature through a detailed qualitative look at the economic, social and political causes of the EP Adivasis' exclusion from the available SSN packages.

2. METHODOLOGY

At the outset of the study, a field test was undertaken to finalise the checklist for data collection. Four members from Adivasi communities participated in the field test. Of them, three were eligible for safety net support but were excluded and one was enlisted for the disability allowance in the short-term. The data collection was accomplished by applying three key methods:

- **Case studies:** 8 female beneficiaries – 4 recipients of SSN support and 4 non-recipients – were chosen to provide information concerning their experiences regarding access to support measures and to identify the stakeholders or gate keepers who played a distinct role in the safety net distribution process. During the case studies, efforts were made to grasp the inter-related factors behind the beneficiaries' unmet and met needs, and to comprehend the effectiveness of efforts taken by both recipients and non-recipients. In doing so, 4 cases of non- recipients were studied which reflected four distinct support scenarios: 1) allowances to widows, deserted and destitute women; 2) allowances for physically challenged; 3) poverty alleviation programmes for the extreme poor (40 Day Employment Generation Programme) and 4) allowances for elderly women. Simultaneously, 4 recipient cases were chosen to explore the factors behind the successful accessing of support. Most of the non-recipients were eligible for more than one type of social safety net measure.
- **Informal Interviews:** Based on the available information, 8 gate keepers were tracked who were recognised as playing a role in the distribution of SSNs (directly or indirectly). The interviews with the gatekeepers were conducted in a more informal manner maintaining the anonymity of all studied cases that provided basic information regarding the gatekeepers. On the basis of the cases studied, three categories of gatekeepers were located for informal interviews: 1) community/village leaders who have access to the selection committee due to their political connections with the ruling party; 2) elected representatives in the lowest tier of local government (i.e. Ward Commissioner and UP Chairman) and 3) government office bearers responsible for SSN support allocation at the Upazila and Union level (i.e. Upazila Women's Affairs Officer, Social Welfare Officer, and UNO). Lastly, the project staffs at field level (Field Organisers) were also interviewed.
- **Focus Group Discussions (FGDs):** In order to identify the obstacles faced by individual beneficiaries and on a group level, two FGDs were conducted in two Unions of Shapahar Upazila. The first FGD was conducted with a group of 10 beneficiaries who had access to SSNs. In the second group, none of the 7 beneficiaries had access to such support. In the FGDs, efforts were made to analyse the effects of group mobilization to access the SSN.⁵ The findings of the FGDs were triangulated with those of the case studies and with the interviews of the gate keepers.

2.1. SAFETY NET SUPPORTS IN THE SELECTED UNIONS

The data collection for the study was carried out in two selected Unions of the Naogaon district in the AMADER project working area. The beneficiaries of the project belong to the marginalized and extreme poor segment of the population (see Annex-1 for details of the selection criteria). The project aims to help them gain access to available SSN support. More than 27 safety net programmes are available in Bangladesh. The most prevalent SSNs in rural areas are detailed below.

⁵ Under the framework of the AMADER project, groups are formed at the village level. These discuss relevant issues concerning their marginalization and take according actions (e.g. mobilization efforts to access SSNs).

TABLE 1: SSNS AND QUALIFYING CRITERIA

Name of Social Safety Net Programme	Type of allowance	Qualifying criteria
Old Age Allowance	Cash allowances of BDT 300 per month	Over 65 years of age; yearly income is below BDT 3,000.
Allowances to Widowed, Deserted and Destitute Women	Cash allowances of BDT 300 per month	Women who are either widowed, deserted or destitute
Allowances for the Distressed Persons with Disability	Monthly cash allowances for persons with disability	Above 6 years of age; annual income is below BDT 24,000
Vulnerable Group Development (VGD)	Monthly food ration for 24 months; Provided together with skill training for the management of income generating activities (IGAs)	Especially provided to female headed households consuming less than two full meals per day
Vulnerable Group Feeding (VGF) s	Short term relief in form of food and basic necessities	Disaster victims
100 Days Employment Generation Program:	Creation of short term income opportunities	Men and women between the ages of 18 and 60 affected by Monga, river bank erosion, water logging, etc. with preference to unskilled labourers.
Maternal Health Voucher Scheme	Monthly cash allowances for 2 years; the allocation for each month is 250 BDT for provided at best two times in one's lifetime.	Starting from the third month of pregnancy for women aged 20 years and above who have no homestead or family

NUMBER OF SSN RECIPIENTS IN THE STUDY UPAZILA: The total number of SSNs recipients in Shapahar Upazila is 8,898. Of them, the highest number of the recipients has been covered by the VGD programme, while the lowest number is supported by the maternal allowance, introduced recently. The following table contains segregation of SSNs recipients in the study.

2.2. RESEARCH LOCALE

The data collection for the study was carried out in two selected unions of the Naogaon district in the AMADER project working area: the Union of Goala and the Union of Shapahar. Goala is about 12 kilometres from the main town; whereas the Union of Shapahar is situated at the main town of the Upazila headquarter. These two Unions were explicitly chosen to understand whether the geographical location of Unions (with respect to their distance from the Upazila headquarter) is a determining factor concerning access to information on SSNs.

TABLE TWO: SOCIAL SAFETY NET COVERAGE IN SHAPAHAR UPAZILA IN 2010-11 (FISCAL YEAR)

Name of Safety Net	No of Recipient	Benefits Provided	Duration
VGD	2,600	30kg Rice or Paddy and Training for IGA	Two years(Once per month)
Old Aged Allowance	2,960	900 taka	Until Death(every three month)
40 Days Work	1,833	150 taka	40 days
Widow Allowance	1,397	900 taka	Same as old age allowance
Maternal Allowance	108	250 taka per month	Two years(once per month)
Total Recipients	8,898 people in the whole Upazila		

2.3. DEMOGRAPHIC COMPOSITION OF RESEARCH LOCALE

Adivasis are a minority comprising of no more than 2% of the total population in the study region. According to the National Population Survey in 2001, the total population of the two studied Unions is 56,506. With 32,227 people, Goala has a larger population than the Shapahar Union which has 26,279 inhabitants. There are 5,971 HHs in the Goala union, out of which 102 are Adivasi (1.7%). The percentage of ethnic/Adivasi households is even smaller in Shapahar (1.2%), which is home to 64 Adivasi HHs out of 5,539. Muslims form the majority among the non-Adivasis in Goala (5,520) and Shapahar (4,869), with the remaining people being Hindu, Buddhist and Christian (see Annex-2).

However, among NETZ beneficiary households, Adivasis form the majority. This is because despite them being a minority in the overall population, they comprise a majority of those who are extreme poor in the area. In Goala there are 100 selected beneficiaries, of which 55 are Adivasi. In Shapahar, there are 98 selected beneficiaries of which 55 are Adivasi.

3. SCALE OF EXCLUSION FROM SAFETY NETS: ELIGIBILITY VS. ACTUAL RECEIPT

This section highlights the fact that in reality, very limited support is distributed to extremely poor beneficiaries, and from this, very few Adivasis manage to secure support. The scarcity of support triggers fierce competition between the elite and the extremely poor Muslim and Adivasi population. In this contest, the extreme poor Adivasis lose out since they have little economic, social or political power in this region.

3.1. ELIGIBILITY FOR SAFETY NETS AND THOSE ACTUALLY RECEIVED

The household profile of the AMADER project shows that out of 9,380 family members (from 3,000 beneficiary households), only 2.7% of household members (8.23% of households) received government safety net support during the survey period (25-8-2009 to 21-12-2009). However, 97.4% of the household members (i.e. 91.77% of BHHs) are eligible for support. In Goala, 74% of Adivasi households are eligible for SSNs based on the criteria of age, physical disability, or from being a female-headed household (from being either widowed, divorced or deserted). In Shapahar, the number of eligible people amounts to 65 (roughly 66%). In reality however, only 3 people in Goala and 4 in Shapahar received safety net support (3% and 5% respectively).

TABLE 3: ELIGIBILITY FOR SAFETY NET ASSISTANCE AMONG AMADER BENEFICIARIES: DEMOGRAPHIC TRENDS IN GOALA BY ETHNICITY

Ethnicity	FHH	Aged (65 Above)	Physically Challenged	Widow	Diserted / Divorced	Total
Adivasi	16	5	2	21	1	45
Non – Adivasi	8	9	1	9	2	29
Total	24	14	3	30	3	74

Source: Household Profile, AMADER, NETZ-shiree collaborative project/ 2009

TABLE 4: ELIGIBILITY FOR SAFETY NET ASSISTANCE AMONG AMADER BENEFICIARIES: DEMOGRAPHIC TRENDS IN SHAPAHAR BY ETHNICITY

Ethnicity	FHH	Aged (65 Above)	Physically Challenged	Widow	Dissered / Divorced	Total
Adivasi	14	5	6	10	1	36
Non – Adivasi	14	3	2	8	2	29
Total	28	8	8	18	3	65

Source: Household Profile, AMADER, NETZ-shiree collaborative project/ 2009

TABLE 5: SAFETY NET SUPPORT ACTUALLY RECEIVED IN GOALA BY ETHNICITY

Ethnicity	VGF	40 Days Work	Widow	Old Age (65 Above)	Physically Challenged	FFW	Cash for Education	Total
Adivasi	1	0	0	1	0	0	1	3
Non – Adivasi	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Total	1	0	0	1	0	0	1	3

Source: Household Profile, AMADER, NETZ-shiree collaborative project/ 2009

TABLE 6: SAFETY NET SUPPORT ACTUALLY RECEIVED IN SHAPAHAR BY ETHNICITY

Ethnicity	VGF	40 Days Work	Widow	Old Age (65 Above)	Physically Challenged	FFW	Cash for Education	Total
Adivasi	1	0	0	0	0	0	1	1
Non - Adivasi	0	0	0	0	0	3	0	3
Total	1	0	0	0	0	3	0	4

Source: Household Profile, AMADER, NETZ-shiree collaborative project/ 2009

3.2. DENIED HIGHER QUALITY SAFETY NETS

Households deserve SSN support not merely because they are extremely poor, but also because they are highly vulnerable as a result of their age, gender or disability. Given the susceptibility of these HHs to vulnerability, there is a provision that enables them to access

certain services such as VGD, VGF, FFW programmes and allowances for being elderly, physically challenged, widowed, divorced or deserted.

- In Goala, 3 out of 74 households received support, yet none of them received quality benefits, such as the 40 Day Employment Generation Programme or FFW (Food for Work) which help reduce hunger during the lean season and help decrease potential threats to asset loss.
- In Shapahar, 4 out of 65 eligible households (6.2%) received support. Among these 4, only 1 Adivasi received support and this was VGF support which provides very short-term food assistance. The other three non-Adivasi recipients managed to secure access to the FFW programme which is longer-term and considered to have a greater impact on livelihoods.

The above evidence indicates that extremely poor Adivasis have very limited access to government-provided SSNs despite their clear eligibility and heavy presence among the population of the extreme poor. The following discussion explores the factors contributing to such significant and obvious exclusion.

4. INFORMATION: THE EXCLUSION OF ADIVASIS FROM INFORMATION

4.1. THE WAY INFORMATION SHOULD BE DISTRIBUTED TO THE RURAL POOR

In most cases, the Adivasi population has no or only limited access to SSN-related information disseminated by governmental institutions. Information about safety nets for Adivasis and non-Adivasis should be provided through village meetings arranged by Ward Commissioners on behalf of the UP chairman at the para (hamlet) level. Public announcements should be made at the village level by the UP office in order to allow physically challenged persons to become aware of the available SSN support. Community leaders should follow up with the dissemination of this information. Furthermore, information about SSNs should also be disseminated through mosques, temples and churches by religious leaders. Churches would be particularly important for Adivasis, many of whom practice Christianity.

From our interviews, three main reasons were identified which indicate the constraints experienced in the information sharing process:

- In practice the Ward Commissioners do not visit Adivasi communities;
- Announcements are often made only in mosques, not in the churches or temples of the Adivasi community;
- Information meetings are often held in Muslim paras where Adivasis are not present.

As a result, Adivasis rely on informal sources for information, including patrons, elites (who have little incentive to help the poor) and on markets as a platform for information exchange. Moreover, information is actively concealed from Adivasis – reflecting cultural prejudices and political neglect. We explore this point later.

4.2. LACK OF INFORMATION IN EXTREME POOR REGIONS

The saying that "information is power" is particularly true for Adivasis since they lack crucial SSN-related information and thus feel powerless in this regard. In spite of the aspirations of the Bangladeshi Information Commission to ensure a free flow of information regarding the distribution of social benefits in rural areas, marginalized people still largely lack access to the necessary information. Most modern communication technologies, such as print and electronic media, are not accessible for the extremely poor segments of the population, including the Adivasis. In addition, the low school attendance rate among Adivasis (17% for boys and 11% for girls⁶) coupled with a high rate of illiteracy⁷ contribute to the problem. As a consequence, extremely poor Adivasis are forced to rely on information from community people, who often chose not to disclose correct SSN-related information to Adivasis. To a great extent, this is because elites need to manage resources. If everyone knows about the resource, demands increase. Most recipients of social safety net supports among the study population received SSN-related information from informal sources (mostly local elites who showed them how to locate political leaders involved in the selection process).

4.3. PATRON-CLIENT RELATIONSHIPS UNDERPIN ADIVASI'S ACCESSIBILITY OF INFORMATION

Adivasis with limited employment opportunities largely depend on employers of agricultural labour. Such well-off farmers provide them with agricultural work which lasts only for a short period of time owing to seasonality. Land owners often lend Adivasis money in the lean season and are assured of labour at a cheap price in the peak season through which Adivasis pay back their loans. This arrangement is a debt trap in which Adivasis gain insurance for consumption at the expense of the possibility of retaining cash savings (Wood, 2003). Furthermore, as a result of tube-well development and NETZ project support, the labour mobility of extremely poor Adivasis' has increased as they are tending to move to other places for work and are borrowing money from richer people less frequently⁸. This tendency might act as a stimulant to the break-up the typical patron-client relations making extremely poor Adivasis less constrained by such debt traps. To overcome this, some elites seek to maintain their relationships with the Adivasi labour force by offering them information on how to connect with political elites in order to eventually access SSNs.

4.4. PUBLIC ANNOUNCEMENTS EXCLUDE HOMEBOUND VULNERABLE POOR

The information dissemination system of the local government (Union Parishad or UP) appears to be quite deficient in the researched area since it actively disadvantages marginalized Adivasis. The UP appears to be reluctant to disseminate information to rural people. It was found that public announcements by the UP regarding the distribution of social benefits are limited to only a few types of social safety net measures (e.g. old age allowance) and are mainly made in locations, which are not usually occupied by Adivasis. The announcements regarding the old age allowance in the researched area were limited to the main roads of

⁶ See Shiree Baseline Survey, 2009.

⁷ See CMS3 of Shiree.

⁸ See CMS5(S) (Intervention Reflection of Madhabi).

the market place, which are rarely visited by old people with limited mobility. Furthermore, announcements were made at the local Mosque limiting access to information to Muslims and thus to the mostly non-Adivasi segments of the local population.

4.5. MARKETS AS A KEY SSN INFORMATION SOURCE

The market seems to be a good source of information for potential recipients of governmental social benefits. It was found that Adivasis who have access to the market place also have some access to SSN-related information, especially when the UP office is situated near the market. In Shapahar, where the UP office is situated in the surroundings of the market place, information on governmental social benefits was disseminated quite freely among the market visitors. Two Adivasi recipients of social benefits among the study population (one a beggar and the other a sweeper) accessed SSN-related information quite easily due to the fact that they were physically present at the market.

CONNECTION TO THE MARKET MATTERS

Swasti Mardi, 72 years old, lives alone on other people's land in Goala of Shapahar Upazila. Her husband left her more than 13 years ago and just one year later her only daughter died of pneumonia. She has a small hut made out of tin, straw and mud. She received some utensils and cattle (cow and sheep) from the AMADER Project. After her daughter died she struggled to earn a living. She chose to beg in the local market during Hat day (weekly market). In an attempt to diversify her income sources, she took on work as a sweeper in the market. She worked as a sweeper twice per week on Hat days. In exchange, she received vegetables, edible oils, salt and fish from the traders.

For the last five years, she has been receiving 900 BDT every three months through the old aged allowance from the government. When asked how she had succeeded in obtaining the allowance, she explained that other people working at the market supported her case and asked the UP chairman to grant her the allowance. The people from the market referred to her ill health and old age as the main reasons why she should receive the support. Before getting the card, she was unaware that the allowance existed.

4.6. THE WAYS INFORMATION IS CONCEALED FROM ADVIASIS

For the non-recipients, obtaining information is difficult. It was found that information is sometimes delivered to Adivasis purposely only after the safety net assistance has been distributed, so that the elite can formally fulfil their obligation to disseminate information. Arpana from Shapahar, one of the Adivasi non-recipients, reported that she acquired information about an SSN programme when she observed that one of her non-Adivasi neighbours had received a VGD card. In order to apply for the same support she repeatedly went to the UP Chairman. However, on all occasions she was told that the support could not be granted since the deadline had passed. Her non-Adivasi neighbour provided her with detailed information on how to secure assistance. She found out that the meetings for the selection of potential safety net support receivers had been organized in non-Adivasi paras (hamlets), enabling the non-Adivasis to be aware of SSN programmes before the Adivasis. If Adivasis do not have the information on time, they cannot submit the required applications.

Furthermore, non-recipients complained that the UP does not provide accurate information when asked about SSN assistance. This is due to the fact that most UP representatives, who are involved in the distribution process, are Muslims, and choose not to deliver correct information to Adivasis because of cultural prejudices.

4.7. KNOWLEDGE OF SSN ENTITLEMENT

When asked about the criteria of targeting, both the recipient and non-recipient beneficiaries tended to express their own opinion, rather than the actual rules and regulations of the targeting and distribution processes of SSN assistances. Their statements reflected very little understanding about the targeting and selection criteria.

For instance, one elderly widow currently not receiving support said that *“poor and vulnerable people who don't have sons and daughters to take care of them should get safety net support.”* One recipient beneficiary argued that they only receive social safety net support after the quotas of non-Adivasis are fulfilled. However, there are no quotas for the distribution under the present targeting and selection criteria. Many of the interviewees lacked knowledge on the targeting and selection processes of SSNs.

4.8. UNDERSTANDING SAFETY NETS THROUGH NETZ GROUP MEETINGS

After the formation of the village-based groups under the framework of the AMADER project, beneficiaries are encouraged to share the issues and challenges which are being experienced towards their livelihoods, and to develop strategies to overcome these. They discuss at least one issue per week in group meetings, facilitated by Field Organizers. In this regard some groups have developed a strategy to visit the UP offices as a collective to strengthen their bargaining power. In doing this, they realized that the acquisition of detailed information from the UP would enhance their chances of being successful when claiming support. The groups still need to translate their strategies and determination into action. Overall, it can be observed that the beneficiaries are seriously frustrated due to the empty promises given by the political decision-makers of the UP, and that they realize that they are still in need of a broader strategy that strengthens their negotiation power when claiming social benefits. This is reflected in the following statements:

“Shahajjo ashle janabo, tomader ashte hobe na.”

“We will tell you whenever safety net support is available. You do not need to come here.”

“Ora janabei na, karon amaderke dam dey na, amder kotha bhalo bhabe sune na.”

“They will never tell us. They do not care for us and do not listen to us properly.”

5. SELECTION: THE POLITICS OF ADIVASI EXCLUSION FROM SAFETY NETS

5.1. HOW IS SELECTION SUPPOSED TO OPERATE IN PRACTICE?

In many support structures, the selection of beneficiaries is based on an application process which severely disadvantages poor Adivasis with limited access to the relevant information. Moreover, the selection process heavily depends on the decisions of a number of officials and members of the selection committee (allowing maximum scope for discretion and abuse).

In the present system, the UP should make public announcements prior to the selection process in order to inform potential recipients. After the public announcements, applicants need to submit the required documents (e.g. their Voter ID card) to the UP. Then a Ward based committee headed by the WC will hold a meeting with the villagers to compile the list of beneficiaries. For VGD, VGF and Maternity Allowances, Ward Committees will hold village meetings with the participation of all inhabitants to compile the list of potential recipients whose homes are visited for verification. Then the UP submits the list/application to the Upazila Social Welfare Officer and Women Affairs Officer who verify and then send to the UNO for approval. With regards to the Maternity Allowance, applications with recommendation of the UP should be submitted to the Upazila Maternity Allowance Committee which is responsible for the verification and monitoring of allowance distribution. With the help of the UNO, the MP of the concerned constituencies select beneficiaries for the 40 Day Employment Generation Programme through a Union committee (Annex 2).

In general, there is a committee at the Upazila level headed either by the UNO or the Upazila Chairperson which distributes the SSNs within the Unions. All UP chairmen are members of this committee. The UP chair forms a Union based committee to select beneficiaries for SSN support. However, it was found that public announcements made before the distribution, failed to convey adequate information to EP Adivasis. Furthermore, we found that extremely poor Adivasis do not have the necessary information and documents to apply for SSNs. Even if they possess the right documents, they are not familiar with the process of producing the required papers needed to obtain support.

Adivasis in the study area are secluded from the wider society not only because they are disconnected from key information, but also because of the prevailing political culture. At this level we can distinguish between generic problems which are common for most extremely poor households and specific challenges faced by extremely poor Adivasis.

5.2. GENERIC POLITICAL PROBLEMS

The allocation of safety net support is used by political decision makers to build future vote banks. In the fiscal year 2009/2010, the government allocated almost 2.5 per cent of GDP, for social safety nets and social empowerment programmes.⁹ According to a World Bank study (2006), Bangladesh spends about 4 percent of its public expenditure budget on the distribution of social assistance. Considering the high prevalence of extreme poverty in Bangladesh, the study estimates that about 35% of public expenditure would be required to cover all eligible people under SSN programmes. Given such inadequate allocation of public expenditure, local Ward Commissioners tend to equally select recipients from each para of a village to ensure widespread political support in the villages under their working Wards. It was found that some political representatives believed that the votes of Adivasis can be secured without offering social safety-net measures. In other words, the political support of the Adivasis is 'less expensive' than that of the non-Adivasis.

Such practices undermine the basis for a fair distribution system. Although the overall number of poor people who are eligible for SSNs is high, poverty is unequally distributed in villages and paras. However, those allocating the resources follow a different logic. They need to use SSNs to cover as many villages and locations as possible, rather than targeting those in the most need. This became evident in a FGD with the Ward Commissioners in the Shapahar UP office, when one participant commented that they needed to cover all paras and villages irrespective of need:

"Agei para proti ekta korei card ditam."

"Before I gave card to every para."

5.2.1. ERROR IN AGE RECORDING – VOTER ID

Voter ID cards are considered the most important documents in the distribution of long-term social safety-net measures. The ID cards were introduced by the caretaker government in 2007/2008 in order to ensure free and fair elections. However, the introduction of the new cards represented a challenge in terms of competence and time. As a result of these challenges, mistakes occurred including the recording incorrect ages for many people. Many safety net support measures are limited to certain age groups (e.g. old age allowance). With incorrect ID cards, many Adivasis and non-Adivasis are not able to obtain the support they are entitled to despite being formally eligible. It is not easy to correct the situation, as one Filed Officer commented:

"Sujog ney oder kotha bolar, katha bolei dosh hoy naki – ei chintai thake."

"They don't have the opportunity to speak, they think that even if they speak they will be blamed."

⁹ Source: Budget Ministry of Finance; See PDF Document http://www.mof.gov.bd/en/budget/10_11/safety_net/en.pdf?

Furthermore, according to the views of local government representatives, due to deprived livelihood conditions, the Adivasi population is aging faster than non-Adivasis. Many Adivasis suffer from long-term health conditions and diseases caused by undernutrition. Compared to other Shiree-supported Scale-Fund NGOs¹⁰, the nutritional status of the Adivasis is much lower. For example, their consumption of flour and fresh fish is lower and levels of anaemia are higher. These factors mean that Adivasis have a lower life expectancy than non-Adivasis. In this light, age-related benchmarks for SSN programmes (e.g. age of 65 as a precondition to receive old age allowance) seriously disadvantage Adivasis.

5.2.2. POLITICAL CONNECTIONS WITH ELITES

Connections with local affluent and political party-affiliated people, as well as connections with political figures who are affiliated with the SSN distribution process, are considered crucial to the process of SSN allocation. For extremely poor Adivasis, the chance of having connections with people is low and will only exist if they are involved in long-term patron-client relationships. In Goalā, it was found that one influential local leader who allowed 22 Adivasi families to build thatched houses on his father's land, worked to make sure that one of them was put on the list of potential SSN beneficiaries and advised the person to maintain close communication with political leaders and the WC. The Adivasi was finally selected for the 40 Day Employment Generation Programme during the lean period.

¹⁰ At present six Scale-Fund NGOs are working with *shiree* to eradicate extreme poverty in Bangladesh. See www.shiree.org.

RELATION WITH MONDOL EARNS AN SSN

Mrinmoi Murmu has been married for the last fifteen years. Her family (her husband, a son of 10 and girl of 6 years) lives in a small hut made out of mud, bamboo and a corrugated steel sheet. Aside from some utensils, her family owns nothing to call their own. Both Mrinmoi and her husband work as agricultural labourers. Her only productive asset is a cow and a few ducks, bought with money from the AMADER project fund. For the last 14 years the family has been living on the land of a rich farmer who is regarded as a *Mondol* (Adivasi community leader) in their locality. The father of the present *Mondol* was well known because he owned large amounts of land and donated some to build a number of secondary schools. Her father-in-law used to cultivate the late *Mondol*'s land. In view of the long relation between the two families, she was allowed to erect a thatched hut. In exchange, her family agreed to look after the mango groves and work at *Mondol*'s home whenever needed. During the listing for the 40 Day Employment Generation Programme in 2009, a meeting was held in the near-by Muslim para and the present *Mondol* attended. He put Mrinmoi's name on the primary list. In addition, he asked her to communicate with one member of the Union level selection committee who holds an important position in the Upazila committee of the incumbent political party. This two way communication helped her to be enlisted for the 40 Day Employment Generation Programme. During the last two lean seasons (Chaitra-Boisakh and Ashwin-Kartik) she was employed for earth cutting and road renovating, and earned BDT 150 each day. She earned around BDT 6,000 each season. This helped to smooth household food consumption. During the last Kartik, she neither lent nor accepted advance payment from farmers. Her household consumed at least two meals a day, while previously they would either consume one meal, or were forced to eat *Chalvaza* (fried rice), or starve. Her husband saved 8.50 mounds of paddy during the harvest period. She bought two ducks for consumption. Also, on the occasion of *puja*, she bought 2 kg of puffed rice and 3 coconuts at 25 taka.

Local government representatives were found to commission the selection process to politically likeminded and party-affiliated people. These commissioned agents, who are mostly picked from the Union committees of the major parties, prefer to recommend those who are known and well connected to them. Sometimes they only rely on kinship ties to nominate someone. Moreover, with the view to enhance their own image in the wider society, they choose to arrange the selection meetings in non-Adivasi inhabited paras. As a result, the information sharing in the Adivasi communities decreases leaving them uninformed about the exact rules and regulations of SSN assistance.

However, it was also found that there are important shifts in labour dependency patterns in the study area. Agricultural labourers from the study area frequently migrate to near-by areas during the harvest periods where they can earn more income. As a result, labour has become scarcer in the study area especially during the peak seasons. The EP Adivasis tend to make labour agreements with the local elite only after they have received assistance in obtaining SSN support. Formerly, advanced payment and promised employment

opportunities were regarded as the main basis of the patron-client relationships. EP Adivasis were therefore much more dependent on the rural elite. Thus, there has been a significant shift in labour relations and the dependency of the EP Adivasis on elites which has, to some extent, decreased. However, it is yet to be investigated whether such a shift helps to improve the livelihoods of EP Adivasis in the long-run.

5.2.3. SSNS AND BRIBES

Prompt and steady communication with the local WCs helped a few community members receive the old age allowance, widow allowance, and be enlisted for the 40 Day Employment Generation Programme. However, according to recipients this only happened when the concerned WC was found to be honest in carrying out selection. During the research, this happened to three recipients who contacted the concerned WC and community leaders on their own.

The study furthermore reveals that in many cases the Adivasi failed to obtain SSN support as they could not come up with the bribe (cash or in-kind) demanded by UP representatives or other leaders. Thus, non-Adivasis, who on average are less eligible for SSN programmes, get priority access to these programmes, because they can pay bribes. A community leader reported that the name of one agreed Adivasi recipient was taken from the list and replaced with a person who is from the non-Adivasi community.

NO BRIBE NO GAIN

Reshmi lives with her three daughters in a small village of Goala Union. Her husband left her six years ago and never returned. In order to earn a living, Reshmi usually works as an agricultural labourer during the paddy plantation and harvest period. She manages to work around 4 months a year with a wage of BDT 100 and 1.50 Kg. of rice per day. Her elder daughter (15 years) also works with her, but not regularly. Coupled with her daughter's income she can afford two meals a day for six months of the year. To supplement her family's food requirements during the lean season, she collects vegetables, crabs, snails and small fishes. When her hardship is severe she seeks food or monetary support from her brothers, but her brothers are also poor.

After her husband left her, on several occasions she went to the local WC for an allocation for the allowance for widows, deserted or distressed women, or at least a VGF card. However, the WC ignored her appeal. She was told that she can earn enough to maintain her family's living expenses as she was not old and because Adivasi women can easily find work anywhere. Subsequently she convinced her well-off neighbours to pay a visit to the incumbent UP Chairman. When she met the UP Chairman with one of her neighbours she was told to contact the concerned WC. The WC was the same person who had refused her request before. This time the WC asked her to come up with a few ducks as a bribe. According to Reshmi, she tried to meet the request but could not deliver these. For this reason, she was not given SSN support despite her efforts. She has now abandoned any hope of receiving support from the UP.

5.3. SPECIFIC POLITICAL PROBLEMS

5.3.1. ABSENCE OF ADIVASI REPRESENTATION IN THE SELECTION COMMITTEE

For the allocation of governmental SSN measures, 4 types of local committees exist and operate at different levels: the Upazila Committee, the Union Committee, the Ward Committee and the Monitoring Committee. The Upazila Committee is headed by the Upazila Nirbahi Officer or Upazila Chair and is mainly responsible for the Union-wise approval and distribution of SSNs proposed by the Union Committee. The Union Committee is headed by the UP Chair and includes 9 Ward Commissioners, 3 Women Ward Commissioners and 2 persons responsible for the preparation of the primary list of potential recipients. A Ward Committee is formed to select the recipients of VGD cards, VGF cards, old age and widow allowance. It comprises 4 people: 2 Ward Commissioners, 1 official from the respective department and 1 person who enjoys the respect of the concerned community. The committee consults with the community people at a local level. The monitoring committee consists of a government official and a number of people who are in charge of the quality of implementation.

None of the above mentioned committees in the working area include Adivasi representatives. Even the Ward Committee which works at the very local level to prepare the lists of potential beneficiaries does not have representatives from the Adivasi communities. Most of the committee members are chosen from among the non-Adivasi community which are mainly Muslim and tend to distribute SSNs among their own community members. Furthermore, all the committees lack a supervisory body which audits operations and decisions. This allows for mismanagement through mis-targeting and nepotism, for example.

5.3.2. WEAK POLITICAL PARTICIPATION OF ADIVASIS

Most Adivasis in the Barind tract live in a rural secluded environment, which offers only limited information about national political trends. The study showed, however, that most Adivasis in the area were to some extent familiar with the political activities of the local government. Nevertheless, no preserved quota for Adivasis as a disadvantaged category in the existing local government bodies could be identified to expedite their political participation at the local level beyond their participation in Upazila and national elections. In the study area, none of the WCs and chairpersons were from an Adivasi community.

Adivasis typically have their own community leaders known as *Manzi* or *Mondol*. The activities of these leaders are to a large extent found in the non-political sphere, such as celebration of cultural practices or the arbitration of intra-communal disputes. The Adivasi leaders are supposed to be notified and consulted during the distribution of SSN support since representatives from the Adivasi community and other minority groups are not present in local government bodies (i.e. the Union Parishad). In the framework of the study, no case could be identified where such notifications or consultations took place. Generally, the interviewed Adivasis expressed the idea that their voices are not heard by local political decision-makers. For example, in one FGD with non-recipient Adivasi beneficiaries, one of the participants noted:

"The leaders do not listen to our word. When we went alone, they never gave us any time. We need to go all together."

5.4. CULTURAL LABELLING AND PREJUDICE

Cultural labelling and prejudices play an important role in the further seclusion of Adivasis from mainstream society and in their exclusion from SSN support. The study revealed numerous prejudices and cultural labels uttered by both public representatives of local government and concerned officials to justify the exclusion of Adivasis from SSNs. The most common labels are highlighted below:

5.4.1. "ADIVASI WOMEN CAN MOVE ANYWHERE AND FIND WORK"

The assumption that Adivasi women are mobile and can easily find work both in the public domain (e.g. in the paddy fields) and the private domain (e.g. as maids in the homes of rich people) without being restricted by their family or societal forces, was found to be the most common prejudice used to justify the Adivasis' exclusion from SSN support. In most rural families in Bangladesh, women are traditionally encouraged to remain within the domestic sphere. It is assumed that Adivasi women are not that restricted by their husbands and therefore can act as additional bread winners for their families. However in reality, this is entirely unfounded, and socially it has no base. Here, gendered stereotypes held by the non-Adivasi population are attributed to Adivasis to justify their discrimination. A statement of a non-recipient from the FGDs articulates this view:

"They (the leaders) told us that women in the Muslim community do not work, so, they are needy and deserve more support."

5.4.2. "ADIVASIS ARE ALL DRUNKARDS"

The traditional cultural practices of Adivasis often involve the consumption of alcoholic beverages during different festivities (e.g. marriages and funerals). In Bangladesh – a country that strictly prohibits alcohol - this behaviour is frowned upon. The study showed that the consumption of alcohol among Adivasis is used to justify their exclusion from SSNs. Legally speaking, there is no reference of drinking habits in the exclusion criteria of SSN support, but, in practice, the drinking habits of Adivasis are often used to justify their exclusion.

5.4.3. "ADIVASIS ARE SUPPORTED BY NGOS AND CHURCHES"

Another popular argument put forward is that a) different churches and NGOs exist in the study area that offer exclusive support to Adivasis, b) that all Adivasis of the area have access to those support structures, and c) that these support structures are sufficient to fully satisfy the basic needs of the Adivasis. In addition, it was also mentioned that the Government is helping EP Adivasis through the AMADER project by transferring productive assets and skills. Thus, the alleged support from NGOs, churches and the Government were considered as a valid reason to exclude Adivasis from SSNs, irrespective of the extent and frequency of such support.

5.4.4. "ADIVASIS MOVE FROM PLACE TO PLACE"

About 91% of the BHHs under the AMADER Project are living either on khas land or other people's land. It is presumed by the local authorities that Adivasis will not stay in their present homes for a long time since they do not have the formal papers for the land they are living on. For a number of SSN programmes (like FFW or 40 Day Employment Generation Programme) the concerned recipients' physical labour is required for infrastructural development work. Since it is presumed that the EP Adivasis will move out of their own areas in times of severe scarcity, it is anticipated that they will not be around for the work and that this will jeopardize the smooth running of the programmes. Consequently, Adivasis are sometimes excluded from such action based programmes, while this assumption remains largely unfounded.

5.5. ECONOMIC BASIS FOR ADIVASIS POLITICAL AND SOCIAL EXCLUSION

In terms of existing demand, the allocation of SSNs is not adequate. Due to scarce resources or assets, the poor are desperate to secure any form of support. When demand outstrips supply, it can lead to competition among the poor. A similar process was found by Foster's classic study (1965) of a rural community in Mexico. There he argued that peasants believed that someone's improvement in life threatened the prospects of others. This engendered a sense of competition among the peasants. Such competition was alleged in the study areas in many forms including tactically using kinship ties or appeasing the member of the selection committee. The non-Adivasi extremely poor also strive to access SSN support at the expense of extremely poor Adivasi. Different groups in the study area are quite explicit about the zero sum dimension of the competition. Extremely poor non-Adivasis are better informed and connected and therefore try to keep SSN-related information secret in order to stay one step ahead of the extremely poor Adivasis.

In North-West Bangladesh, Adivasi land dispossession occurs frequently (Abul Barakat and Sadeka Halim, 2009). During our research, we found numerous cases where local elites, usually in collusion with local government authorities and administrations, have taken over the land of extremely poor Adivasis. These elites also fear that access to SSNs will discourage extremely poor Adivasis from migrating during hard times and as a result, they will have less scope to capture abandoned homesteads or lands. Adivasi participants in the FGD at Goala expressed concerns in this regard:

"Amra to boka lak, Musulmanra dekhbei na."

"We (Adivasi) are fools; Muslims will not take care of us."

6. CONCLUSION

The study revealed that social safety net measures play a crucial role in securing the livelihoods of extremely poor Adivasis. Respondents of the study confirmed that SSN support

contributes to increased food intake and helps bridge hunger gaps during periods of distress. This decreases the need to sell or give up productive assets and increases the ability to invest in human capital building. This explains why extremely poor Adivasis are keen to secure access to SSNs.

The process of accessing SSN support was found to be quite challenging - especially for extremely poor Adivasis. A number of factors come into play. The unavailability of information and the difficulties encountered in securing SSN-related information is a major reason why Adivasis in the study area felt they could not access SSNs. On the one hand the consequences of the Adivasis' marginalization (e.g. unfamiliarity with modern means of communication, high rates of illiteracy etc.) and inadequate arrangements to disseminate information to Adivasis prevent access to SSNs. In most cases, the lack of effort to disseminate is deliberate – information is actively concealed.

The most serious problem lies in the politics which underpin the selection process. Many eligible Adivasis were excluded from SSN support while less eligible non-Adivasis were able to access the same support. This overall scenario is not helped by the fact that Adivasis do not have representation on the committees responsible for the selection of beneficiaries and distribution of SSN support. Furthermore, the non-selection of Adivasis is further justified by a number of prejudices and cultural labels which reinforce the marginalization of Adivasis.

Overall there is no panacea to stop the Adivasis' exclusion from social safety net measures - except the gradual creation of a more inclusive society. Based on the selection criteria of the AMADER project framework, all BHHs are eligible for at least one kind of social support. The gatekeepers tracked in this study were of the opinion that Adivasis are more vulnerable and at least half of them should receive social safety net support. However this remains a long-term challenge. In the meantime, short-term measures are required. These should include:

- More budgetary allocation to capture the excluded extreme poor;
- Corrections to Voter ID Cards to make sure these reflect people's actual ages;
- The involvement of NGOs in the selection and distribution system;
- A proper information dissemination system in all villages.

Long term measures call for:

- An increase in the literacy rate;
- Education-related supports for Adivasi students to decrease drop-out rates;
- Strengthening of local government to be freed from the influence of political parties;
- Fighting corruption;
- Employment generation through the installation of small industries.

However, in the long run it is imperative that more pivotal issues be addressed, which foster the development of a model of inclusive citizenship.

7. RECOMMENDATIONS

7.1. REFLECTIONS ON POTENTIAL SOLUTIONS

Reflections on potential solutions have been drawn on the basis of the interviews with the gatekeepers and the studied cases. From a general point of view it can be stated that a proper allocation of SSN programmes is not only a matter of qualitative factors (as laid out below), but also of quantitative factors: more public funds need to be spent on SSN support and this needs to be extended to all eligible extremely poor.

The following points were drawn from the interviews as solutions towards a better qualitative coverage of the extremely poor Adivasis:

7.1.1. SURVEY TO CALCULATE THE EXACT NUMBER OF ADIVASIS

The Bangladeshi population census of 1991 does not provide sufficient information on the correct number of Adivasis in Bangladesh. No clear differentiation between religion and ethnicity was drawn in this census. With regard to the total Adivasi population, the numbers of the census do not coincide with the numbers provided by the Bangladesh Adivasi Forum, a formal association of Adivasis working to achieve their rights. As a first step for the proper rollout of SSN programmes, a survey needs to be conducted in Adivasi areas to capture their exact number, locations and other socio-economic data. The information on the Adivasi population then can be used to formulate a more comprehensive policy for SSN support distribution.

7.1.2. NEEDS ASSESSMENT BEFORE DISTRIBUTION OF ALLOCATION

Currently the Upazila Committee, which is above the UP committee, allocates the total number of SSN supports for every Union. In order to make a Union wide allocation the UP committee analyses the Union-wise population and area size. In most cases, the allocation is carried out without any needs assessment or assessment of the exact requirements of the extremely poor segment of the population, and thus doesn't consider the demand side. However, the consequent consideration of requirements of the extremely poor would enable the local government authorities to rollout demand-oriented SSN programmes, which avoid mis-targeting and which will then be better tailored for the needs of the population and minorities in particular. Needs assessments could be commissioned to an independent agency together with the participation of the local government. This will also contribute to the capacity building of the UP.

7.1.3. INCLUSION OF ADIVASIS IN SELECTION COMMITTEES

Four committees formed at Upazila, UP and Ward level are entrusted with the distribution of SSN measures. The representation of extremely poor Adivasis was not observed anywhere in these committees. The inclusion of representatives from minority groups including Adivasis could lead to a fairer and minority-oriented allocation of SSN support, as well as highlight minority-specific issues in the distribution process.

7.1.4. NON-PARTISAN SELECTION COMMITTEES

In the present structure of the selection committees, political persons are included in the guise of a so called respectable person. The presence of political personalities can easily result in the exclusive allocation of SSN support to politically likeminded people. Furthermore, their position and political ties to forces of the local power structure can prevent the rigorous

exposure of mismanagement within the committee. The independence and impartiality of all committee members should be stressed. Selection committees truly need to be formed comprising of non-partisan and honest persons.

7.1.5. SELECTION VALIDATION BY COMMUNITIES

In the current system only the selected beneficiaries are notified by village watchmen, leaving other support seekers uninformed. This leaves the scope of mis-targeting unaddressed. The introduction of a validation of prepared recipient lists by the community will not only enhance the transparency of the selection process for the population, but also utilize the knowledge of the communities in regard to their member's socio-economic situation. Thus, the targeting process could be seriously improved and the participation and acceptance of the whole community could be increased.

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TABLE 7: SSN RECEIVERS AND SELECTION PROCESSES

Name of the Safety Net	Preferential receivers	Selection Process
Old Age Allowance	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. 65 plus aged populations which yearly income is not more than BDT 3000. 2. Physically challenged, widow, divorced. 3. Freedom fighters. 4. Abandoned, destitute. 5. No land ownership, no children or separated from family. 	Public announcement is made to invite applications. The applications are sorted using Voter ID cards and submissions to the Upazila Social Welfare Officer are completed. A Ward based committee is formed in every Ward of the Unions to undertake the selection of potential recipients.
Allowances to Widowed, Deserted and Destitute Women	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Aged, destitute and divorced women. 2. Helpless, landless and widowed women who have two children under sixteen years old. 3. Destitute, widowed and divorced or abandoned women who are physically challenged or ill. 	The Ward Committee makes public announcements to invite applications which will be received by either the chair of Ward Committee or member secretary. The list of potential recipients is submitted to the UP and forwarded to the Women Affairs Officer.
Allowances for the Distressed Persons with Disability	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Physically and Mentally Challenged. 2. Above 60 years old. 3. Annual income is not more than BDT 24000. 4. Aged women and men. 5. Homeless and landless. 	Applications for the entitlement need to be submitted to the UP which then forwards them to the Upazila Social Welfare Officer.
Vulnerable Group Development (VGD)	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Food insecurity is high i. e. skips at least one meal a day. 2. Landless or have less than 0.15 acres of land. 3. Dwelling condition is very bad. 4. Female Headed Household without any earning male member. 	After receiving a briefing about selection from the Upazila Women Affairs Officers or Programme Implementation Officer, a Ward based committee is formed. The committee is headed by a Women Ward Commissioner and has only four members. This committee holds village meetings to compile the list of potential recipients whose homes are visited for verification. Then the Union Committee collects the list from Ward based committees and submits this to the Upazila Committee. Afterwards, the Upazila VGD committee

		physical verifies 15% of the list and submits to UNO for approval.
Vulnerable Group Feeding (VGF)	<p>1.Day labourers who earn very little due to seasonality.</p> <p>2.Very limited scope of earning regularly.</p> <p>3.Landless men and women or less than 0.15 acre land ownership.</p> <p>4.Women with physically challenged husbands.</p>	The Union VGF committee is formed to formulate lists of potential beneficiaries. After checking the list in the light of the criteria, the Union committee submits the final list to the Upazila committee for approval. Upon approval of Upazila committee, Union committee displays the list of selected beneficiaries on the notice board of the UP office.
100 Days Employment Generation Program	<p>1.No work opportunity for at least 5 months of a year.</p> <p>2.Within 18 to 60 years old male/female.</p> <p>3.Unskilled labour i.e. agriculture/ day labourer.</p> <p>4.Landless or possessing less than 0.5 acre land or less than.</p> <p>5.No pond for fishing or few livestock to be used productively.</p> <p>6.One third of the beneficiaries are to be women.</p>	The Upazila Nirbahi Office receives applications. At present, MPs of the concerned constituencies with the help of the UNO office are responsible for the selection and management of this programme.
Maternal Health Voucher Scheme	<p>1.The main income earner of family is a woman.</p> <p>2.Monthly earning is less than BDT 1500.</p> <p>3.Only have homestead or living on others land.</p> <p>4.No cultivable land or water bodies for fishing.</p>	With the support of the women Ward Commissioner, Union Social Worker, Family Planning visitor, a responsible NGO representative will undertake the primary selection of beneficiaries. The information is then taken from the land registration office, the marriage registrar and other sources to verify the concerned beneficiary's land ownership, income, marriage and number of children. The pregnancy certificate collected from UHO and adhered by Upazila Family Planning Office is then submitted to the Upazila Maternity Allowance Committee which is responsible for the final verification and monitoring of the allowance distribution.

TABLE 8: POPULATION BY SEX

Union	No. of Male	No. of Female	Total
Goala	16436	15791	32227
Shapahar	13786	12493	26279

Source: Population Census Report 2001, BBS.

TABLE 9: POPULATION OF GOALA BY RELIGION

No.	Muslim	Hindu	Buddhist	Christian	Other	Ethnic	Total
HH	5520	364	31	0	56	102	5971
Popula	29987	1804	133	1	302	545	32227

Source: Population Census Report 2001, BBS.

TABLE 10: POPULATION OF SHAPAHAR BY RELIGION

No.	Muslim	Hindu	Buddhist	Christian	Other	Ethnic	Total
HH	4869	436	63	2	169	64	5539
Popula	23076	2128	291	5	779	367	26279

Source: Population Census Report 2001, BBS.

TABLE 11: BHHS OF GOALA AND SHAPAHAR BY ETHNICITY

Name of Union	Ethnicity of BHH		Total Households
	Adivasi	Non-Adivasi	
Goala	55	45	100
Shapahar	61	37	98

Source: Household Profile, AMADER, NETZ-shiree collaborative project/ 2009.

TABLE 12: NO. OF BENEFICIARIES IN GOALA AND SHAPAHAR BY SEX

Union	Adivasi			Non-Adivasi		
	Male	Female	Total	Male	Female	Total
Goala	81	99	180	61	84	145
Shapahar	96	106	202	50	63	113

Source: Household Profile, AMADER, NETZ-shiree collaborative project/ 2009.



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