

Locally led adaptation of indigenous peoples in pandemic

JEL Classification Y30 · Y50

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There has never been any doubt that the Covid-19 pandemic would reinforce economic inequalities in the country as the poor, marginalized groups would be disproportionately affected. There are several marginalized groups in Bangladesh—including people from chars, haors, coastal and slum areas; Dalits; indigenous people; people with disabilities; micro, small, and medium entrepreneurs; and returned migrant workers.

Indigenous peoples are nearly three times as likely to be living in extreme poverty compared to their non-indigenous counterparts. Indigenous peoples live in jungles and protect the nature, they live in hills and protect the biodiversity, they live along the major water resources and protect water, living organisms and they live in deserts and devote all their efforts to maintain much needed ecology of desert.

The theory of a "Decent life system" is based on a democratic state system, which puts loyalty to nature at the front position. All socio-economic and political foundations should be built on the basis of the influence of nature. The fundamental objectives of the theory of decent society are accelerating the process of human enlightenment; creativity promoting knowledge system; instilling high sense of solidarity; process of making human rationality up; making people free

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from all forms of inequality; free from rent-seeker; making a state for 100 per cent peoples ownership and master less civic governance.

Professor Abul Barkat presents 11 principles to renovate decent Bangladesh from covid-19 impacts. (1) We want development-welfare-progression, but the development would be nature- environment oriented. (2) We need economic growth. We don't need environmentally harmful, socially unjustified, human resources destructive growth. (3) Growth should be inequality reducing. (4) Growth must be employment-creation oriented. (5) Per capita income or growth domestic product is not development. It must be ensure healthy life of women-children-old- marginal-poor-deprived-isolated people. (6) We want to transform the power of youth to real resources. (7) We want positive social impact. (8) People's ownership on natural resources (land, water body, forest, space resources, coal, gas and mineral) on behalf of nature. (9) We want to uphold human security and equal opportunity for state-society-economic development. (10) Promote inequality reducing home grown development philosophy. (11) We want to extract the taste global economic opportunities.

As we fight against the spread of the Covid-19 pandemic, it is more important than ever to safeguard indigenous peoples and their home-grown knowledge. Their territories are home to 80 per cent of the world's biodiversity and they can teach us much about how to rebalance our connection with nature and reduce the risk of future pandemics. Indigenous peoples are always seeking their native solutions to this pandemic. They are taking action and using long-established knowledge and practices such as voluntary isolation, and sealing off their territories, as well as deterrent measures.

Most of the local people, native and indigenous tribes possess a cherished knowledge of nature, wildlife and their environment. Millions of the so-called backward people in tropical and sub- tropical regions of the world hardly need any environmental education. Taboos, traditions and religious believes, deeply rooted in native populations, have been an effective instrument of conserving nature and wildlife since times immemorial.

In Bangladesh, there are 45 indigenous groups--khiyang, khumi, chak, chakma, tripura, tanchyanga, pangkhoya, bwam, marma, mrow, rakhayin, oraow, nunia, polia, pahan, vhuimali, mahato, mahali, munda, mushor, robidas, rajoar, rajbanshi, rana kormokar, lohora, saotal, kondo, kurmi, Koch, kharya, khasia, garo, dalu, nayek, panyong, patro, bormon, bin, bonaj, bhumij, monipuri, shobor, hajong, hajong and halam. They are merely 1.10 per cent of total population of Bangladesh.

It's not a matter of fact about their percentage but they have indigenous capacities to plant trees, protect wild animals, knowledge to extensive cultivation, cultivate within valley, restore to health diseases through medical plants, look after hill and hilly land and conserve water, forest and ecological settings. But these healthy traditions, taboos, capacities and believes are fading away in many parts of the world. Globally, in the development process, political, social, cultural, psychological and economic rights and freedom of indigenous peoples were never ensured. Economist Abul Barkat mentions--they are becoming un-people day by day as they are the victim of demographic engineering, statistical politics, marginalization, exploitation, distress, destitution, deprivation, inequality and alienation.

Indigenous peoples' traditional lifestyles are a source of their resilience and can also pose a threat at this time in preventing the spread of the virus? For example, most indigenous communities regularly organize large traditional gatherings to mark special events like harvests and coming of age ceremonies etc. Bangladesh is a guiltless sufferer of covid-19 and climate change. People are suffering by health shocks, environmental crisis, land crises and water pollution. Agricultural systems are constantly being changed in the name of green revolution. Desertification is escalating; people of coastal areas are struggling with cyclones, salinity intrusion and toxic crops.

According to the International Union for Conservation of Nature (IUCN), the only other wildlife species known to be living with Corona viruses similar to SARS-CoV-2, which causes Covid-19, are pangolins--a scaly mammal that looks like an anteater. It so happens that pangolins are also the most illegally traded mammal in the world. Also mentions, there is strong evidence that Covid-19 originated in bats. How the virus moved from bats to humans is still unclear, but many believe an intermediate host was involved.

We may set aside the indigenous peoples not only give back to their rights but also use their capacities for ecological, forest and wildlife, climate and environmental security. Context demands to prepare a Covid-19 response package that will financially support marginal communities and indigenous peoples in nature conservation. It is sturdy to unbutton the distressing suffering that the Covid-19 pandemic has caused. But by investing to protect biodiversity and empowering indigenous peoples we can set a sustainable and inclusive future.