

Bangladesh: «Upasshak» Project

Hostels and secondary education for youth from ethnic minorities



Project location

[Bandarban Hill Tracts](#)

[Bandarban City](#)

Project duration

ongoing

Project budget 2024-2025

CHF 250'000

Background

The Bandarban Hill Tracts in southeastern Bangladesh are home to eleven ethnic groups (hill tribes), who are socially and culturally very different from the majority of Bangladeshis. The government actively promotes settlement of Bangladeshis in the homeland of the indigenous minorities. This led to a civil war in the 1970s. Ever since, the area has been occupied by the Bangladeshi military and is subjected to military administration. The hill tribes suffer discrimination, marginalization, underdevelopment and poverty. Most of them earn their living with traditional slash-and-burn agriculture and occasional odd jobs. Neither the ownership of their land and pastures nor their villages are legally recognised. Very few health facilities and schools are accessible to the hill tribes. Diseases such as malaria, diarrhea and jaundice are widespread. A safe existence, health care, education and participation in community development, although fundamental rights, are not granted. The literacy level of the indigenous population is low and the national education system is showing no effort to change this. Illiteracy rate in Bandarban stands at 36%. The low level of basic education and the lack of knowledge and skills is one of the main reasons for the underdevelopment. There is an urgent need for basic education for children and youths to give the hill tribes and their culture some perspective and hope for the future. The two subsidised boarding homes and the secondary schools the young people attend are located in the town of Bandarban, the capital of the region of Bandarban.

Goals

- Access to secondary education for promising young pupils of indigenous background
- Running two boarding homes for secondary school students (gender divided)
- Support the students to succeed in their studies offering various extra-curricular activities as well as study support.
- Fostering personal development and indigenous culture

Partner organisation

Humanitarian Foundation (HF) was founded in 1999 by members of the hill tribes.

Vision: Positive change for the indigenous population of the Chittagong Hill Tracts.

Thematic focus: Poverty reduction, basic and professional education, women's and children's health, strengthening of civil society, protection of natural resources.

www.hf-cht.org

Beneficiaries

- 2 boarding homes, 70 youths, 10 employees (carers, teachers, cook, security)
- 260-300 families and community members of the villages

Activities

- Running two boarding homes for secondary school students from remote villages of ethnic minorities in the district capital (one for boys and one for girls)
- Partial covering of cost of schooling, including equipment, food and lodging
- Support of students with extracurricular activities such as IT education, additional tuition in Bengali and English, "life skills" such as health, hygiene and sex education as well as competitions for innovative project ideas from secondary schools in Bandarban city

Results of previous activities

- Since 2012 a total of 81 youth completed the first level (GCSE/SEK) - of these 30 went on to complete the second level (A-Level/Gymnasium)
- Around 80% continue with their education after completing their basis education. In order to sustain themselves they study part-time. A number of school leavers have found a post in their local region as a teacher (on the job training). Others have taken up work for local or national NGOs
- The boarding houses have an excellent reputation. It is well known that here pupils from deprived backgrounds and poor rural villages get a unique opportunity to continue their schooling. Thanks to the qualified staff (amongst them teachers), the students benefit immensely for their educational results and personal development.
- The solidarity level and support amongst peer has a positive effect and helps dealing with fears and challenges like feeling homesick

Sustainability

It is a challenge to ensure that the permanent running of the boarding homes sustainably. We have taken steps by launching the following revenue generating projects in the past years:

- Income from fees: since 2013 most families have paid a small affordable admission fee thus contributing to the school fees
- Income through diverse agricultural activities such as fruit production (mostly dragon fruit) and meat and dairy product (mainly cows)

In 2022 agricultural activities generated a profit of CHF 13'000. These funds are a welcome basis for the project. However, donations and partnerships remain crucial for financing the project.



The boys boarding home



In the boys' boarding home



In the girls' boarding home

CO-OPERAID is engaged in the international children's right to education in East Africa and South Asia. The association was founded in 1981, is politically and denominationally independent and ZEWOCertified since 1998.

Vision: Qualitative good education for children and youths as a basis for a self-determined and dignified life.

Thematic Focus: Basic education and vocation training with complementary elements such as fighting poverty, farming income projects, furthering girls, Aids prevention, health.

www.co-operaid.ch