

# Bangladesh: «Upasshak» Project

Primary and secondary education for children from ethnic minorities in the mountain area of the Bandarban Hill Tracts



**Project location**

[Bandarban Hill Tracts](#)

**Project duration**

Phase I: 01.01.2009–31.12.2014  
Phase II: 01.01.2015–31.12.2019

**Project budget 2015–2019**

CHF 970,000

## 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, whose origins are Indian and who are actively settled by the government in the home of the indigenous minority. In the 1970s this policy led to a civil war that ended in 1997. Since then, the area has been occupied by the Bangladeshi military and is subject to military administration. The hill tribes suffer from discrimination, underdevelopment and poverty. Most of them earn their livelihood from slash-and-burn agriculture and odd jobs. Neither the ownership of agricultural land nor of the land on which their villages stand is legally recognised. Very few health facilities and schools are open to the hill tribes. Diseases such as malaria, diarrhea and jaundice are widespread. A secure livelihood, health care, education and participation in community development, although fundamental rights, are not guaranteed.

The literacy level of the indigenous population is low. The national education system is making no effort in the region. In the immediate project area of the Thanchi district literacy remains low, but has increased from 15% (2001) to 27% (2013) thanks to the work of NGOs. The low level of basic education and thus the lack of knowledge and skills is a major reason for the communities' lack of development. There is an urgent need for education of the coming generation to give the hill tribes and their culture some hope for the future.

## Goals

- Access to primary and secondary education for children and young people from oppressed hill tribes (children's rights to education)
- Fighting poverty through alternative agricultural income sources (fruit gardens, animal husbandry)
- Improved health, hygiene and increased food security for the indigenous population
- Strengthening the culture of ethnic minorities

**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](http://www.hf-cht.org)

## Beneficiaries

- 15 village primary schools with about 550 children and 30 teachers
- 2 residential homes with 50 secondary school students, 4 carers and 2 cooks
- Around 2,100 inhabitants of the 15 project villages

## Activities

- Maintenance and operation of 15 primary schools in hill tribe villages. Employment and training of teachers. Provision of teaching materials, school supplies and school uniforms
- Running of 2 residential homes for secondary school students from minority villages in the district capital. Room and board, supervision, additional teaching and payment of school fees
- Start of income projects for the families. Provision of increased alternative income in addition to the relatively unproductive slash-and-burn agriculture
- Improvement of nutrition, health and hygiene in the villages. Medical examinations at the village schools, latrines, water filters, rice bank
- Promotion of self-organisation by committees (teacher-parent committees, rice banks). Setting up local stakeholders to communicate the value of education, run the village school and develop the community
- Promotion of the minority culture through events

## Results of previous activities (project phase up to the end of 2014)

- 95% of village children are attending primary school. Virtually no drop-outs. Previously, these children worked with their parents on the field
- 85% of secondary school students who live in the residential homes pass the annual exam. School performance has improved considerably. The hill tribe children have become more confident
- Around 300 families of the villages have obtained between 100 and 150kg of rice from the rice bank. The village population is no longer suffering from hunger and is in better health. Fruit gardens have been planted and are thriving
- 80% of the village population participate in the school meetings. The village population provides board and accommodation for the teachers
- An external project evaluation in 2014 showed positive results. It emphasized the innovative approach: holistic project approach; teachers from the relevant tribal group and bi-lingual education. Parents appreciate and support the project. The following points in particular were frequently mentioned: (i) the classes are held regularly, (ii) the children like to go to school, (iii) the schools organise sports and cultural events, (iv) there is the opportunity for the children to undergo subsequent training at secondary school level

## Sustainability

In Phase 2 of the project, the emphasis is on sustainability. In the first phase of the project, contributions by the villagers to the teachers, school fees and income projects (orchards) for the schools were introduced. In addition, the families were supported economically by income projects. Under these conditions and through the increased responsibility of the committees, the schools are to be guided to independence from 2015 to 2019.

This path is not easy because the environment is poor and very challenging. Sponsorship of the hill tribes by a local aid agency and inclusion of the rural population are the most important sustainability components. Long-term sustainability will be provided by a better-educated youth who can win an equal place in the society of Bangladesh.



Project school in the village Ada.



Mother with child, ethnicity der Mro.

**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 ZEWO certified 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](http://www.co-operaid.ch)