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ABSTRACT

The present paper highlighted on the causes of marginalization and real livelihood challenges of the tea garden laborers in the context of Sylhet. The complex social problem that is linked with multiple causes and multidimensional aspects. The tea garden workers are openly denoted as one of the backward population leading poor living standard year after year. The tea business of Bangladesh is worldwide recognized but the labors of the gardens are deprived from their minimum standard of labor rights. We need to include relevant stakeholders in the process and to create a social space for recovery of their social mainstreaming problems in a multiple way such as skill development, education, health, employment opportunity etc. Finally, it emphasized on three-fold recommendation and measures for scaling up their standard, society and community readiness and service readiness. The readers of the report will be known about the major challenges towards the development of the community.

INTRODUCTION

The tea industry in Bangladesh is significant: the country is the tenth largest producer of tea in the world, and the ninth largest exporter (Ahmed & Hossein, 2016). There are over 160 tea gardens spread over seven districts, and covering a total area of around 115,000 hectares (Ahmed & Hossein, 2016). Sylhet is a major tea producing area in Bangladesh where a large number of low-income workers involved with the industry from generation to generation for their livelihood (Ahmed, Begum, & Chowdhury, 2010), There are 162 tea gardens in Bangladesh (Al-Amin, Hossain, M. I., & Parveen, 2017) and most of them situated in the Sylhet. around 358,550 workers are employed in the tea gardens in Bangladesh, and 75% of them are women (Jalil & Oakkas 2018). The poor and marginalized tea plantation workers are being neglected in so-called prosperous of Bangladesh in recent years. The community looks like darkness under the lamp. They are one of the most deprive and exploited community with working hours morning to night by receiving only 85 BDT in a day which equivalent to 1.02 USD. Wages are often below the World Bank's poverty line whether they are on certified or non-certified estates. In the production, consumption and trading of tea, those who remain least attended are the tea plantation workers who live in the labor lines within the tea garden. They are the one who keep the tea industry alive. They are economically and socially excluded from the mainstreaming community. Economically and socially excluded groups live within the gaps in health, education, access to essential social services, adequate shelter, and generally see their rights unfulfilled globally (Köhler, Cali, & Stirbu, 2009). The tea industry is very different from other industries. The production of tea involves agriculture and industry. For a sustainable growth of a country like Bangladesh more inclusive benefit to all because social exclusion reduces the rate of poverty reduction as a

whole (Ali, 2013). It is clear that tea garden workers are exploited and excluded. In this situation, it is important to find out the main sources of exclusion. The study is investigate the key issues associated with their exclusion utilizing primary and secondary data.

METHODOLOGY

With the objectives of an in depth exploration social exclusion status in terms of wages and fringe benefits, control over resources, working condition and safety, poor health condition and malnutrition, literacy, access to water and sanitation, political freedom, vulnerability to shock, violence and crime the research project used both primary and secondary sources. The secondary data was being collected through the study and analysis of data that has already been published for use. As part of primary data collection, ten focus group discussion (FGD) and twelve key informant interview (KII) with Tea plantation workers , Cha Sramik Union (Tea labor trade Union), Members of Panchyeet (Communal Administrative System).

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Different features of Social Exclusion and poverty

Wages and Fringe Benefits:

Income is very easy way of measuring poverty although poverty has multidimensional phenomenon. According to the World Bank, that income below USD-2, is considered below the poverty line. The tea plantation workers in Bangladesh are much lower paid compared to other tea producing countries like India, Srilanka and Kenya. Their wages are fixed on the basis of the memorandum of agreement signed between employer's representative and Bangladesh tea association and the tea plantation workers represented by Cha Sramik Union. The agreement generally fixed for two years. As per the latest memorandum, the maximum daily cash pay for daily rated workers is 85 takas equivalent to 1.02 USD for a day's work from sunrise to sunset and permanently registered workers gets some so-called fringe benefits like home, ration, health care facilities, school for their child etc. Temporary tea pickers are paid with a fixed rate per kilogram of green leaf picked and some gets daily bases and don't get any other benefits. The cash remuneration of tea plantation workers is calculated weekly based on daily performance. A plucking worker is required to pluck 23 kg (varies from 18 kg to 24 kg) of leaves a day and if they fail to achieve the target or Nirik, remuneration may be cut proportionately. If their performance is higher than target, additionally 2 to 3 taka (BDT) per kg is paid for additional plucking. (Ahmmed & Hossain, 2016). The entire daily worker lives support below the poverty line. As most of them live below the poverty line (Barkat, et al., 2010) and their poor income (Ahmed and Chowdhury, 2014; Majumder and Roy, 2012) often lead them to live without basic entitlements.

Control over Resources:

The tea workers are so much cornered that they depend solely on the companies for food, accommodation and education. They have no choice about their life and amenities. (Gain, 2009). They do not have land, homesteads and houses of their own. They live in the company provided house located in the lobar line of the garden. If husband and wife are work in the same garden, they get just one house. When they retired, the house goes to their children on condition that one of their children will work in the same garden. Living conditions in houses in the labor lines are generally unsatisfactory and outrageous in many instances. Typically, in

a single room accommodates 6 to 10 people. Human being and cattle are living together in the same room, the room also uses for cooking and dine.

Working Condition and safety:

The tea plantation workers are much more oppressed than the garments workers but they did not hit the headlines of newspaper or did not draw the attention of policy makers. This issues frequently moved by powerful images. Conditions of the tea garden workers are very grim due to touch work and poor living condition. Although they have no specified working hours, works from sunrise to sunset. Women are mostly employed as tea leaf pickers because they have more skilled and nimble fingers than man and man tea workers are assigned to plants tea, clear Jungle and other jobs. (Gain, 2009), A group of tea workers worked under a Sardar or supervisor. Tea gardens are run by a hierarchy-driven system. The owners belong to the highest tier. Then the management (which includes the manager), Tea garden workers are exploited by the first, second and third class employees, and live in extreme poverty. (Arif, 2018). Tea picking is very tough job; they spray insecticide without any mask or safety measure. The garden management does not provide any mask, apron, gloves, spectacles or gumboots for spraying insecticide in the garden to prevent them harmful side effect of pesticide.

Poor Health and Malnutrition:

They live in very pathetic condition in a very small unhealthy house, the poor housing has the consequences on human health in the labor line, Infectious diseases spread out very quickly form one person to another person. The occurrence of leprosy, tuberculosis, malaria and anemia is much higher in tea garden area (Gain, 2009).The workers spray insecticide, commonly faced their eye problem, pain in chest, feels nausea and loses his appetite. The pesticide effects women workers as well, they make constant contract with tea plants while picking up tea leaf, their hands lower abdomens in particular get in touch with plants, as a result, pesticide affect them too. They suffer in different kind of skin diseases. A female tea plantation worker works at stretch for 7-8 hours standing under the open sky. She is burnt in the hot in summer and soaked in monsoon, as a result she faces several physical problems, her toes skins damages or swells and loses its smoothness, keens and ankles swells up, and she suffers permanent pain, pregnant women get sick at work (Salam, 2009). Awareness on general health and healthy life style was superficial, knowledge on common illnesses and their prevention poor and treatment-seeking behavior not conductive to the maintenance of health (Ahammed, 2011). Due to poor wages, they spend total income only to manage regular food but all other needs remain unfulfilled. Even they have to fight to maintain minimum food requirement with their little income. Their low income is the cause behind the lower calories intake. Pregnant women and children are in the high risk of health hazard and affected by malnutrition. There have a maximum number of SAM affected children compared to other hard to reach area in Bangladesh.

Literacy Condition:

Education is an important ladder for transformation of a community or society for betterment is at the root of the social exclusion of the tea garden workers (Chandra & Roy, 2012). There are company provided primary school consist of a single room. Class one to class five students are studying in the same classroom. Some have government school, which is very limited in terms of requirement. The quality of education provided by those schools remains

to be concerned. Students are dropout from school before completing primary level of schooling and enter in to the tea garden as labor. There are almost 60% tea estate workers without having any literacy and only 1% have completed above secondary level of education (Chandra & Roy, 2012). It is a matter of concern that female literacy rate is very poor than boy, adolescent is often asked to look after their younger brother and sister.

Access to Water and Sanitation:

According to the Labor Rules the companies were supposed to provide latrines for the tea workers and their families accommodated on the estates. But till now latrines are almost absent. They are habituated in using open place or waterside for defection (The Daily Sun, 2013). Even children defection feces are generally disposed to nearby water bodies or throwing in the jungle. (Chowdhury, Hasan, & Karim, 2011) Open defection causing various excreta relates disease. During FGD, one of the female respondents shared that, there have only one toilet in the labor line. Only five tube-wells exist for more than 183-registered household. Those tube well provided by a NGO. Due to shortage of tube-wells and absence of proper facility, they use different sources of water for various use. Even both human and animals use the common water body and in most the cases they habituated in throwing their household waste on those water source (Chowdhury, Hasan, & Karim, 2011).The use of improved water source in tea garden area is low (88%) compared with national coverage (97%). Proper hand washing practice is very poor in tea garden area. As per HFNSP 2011 the proper hand, washing practice is only 10% in the Sylhet division and only 4% in tea garden area (Hossain & Chowdhury, 2018).

Political Freedom and Voice:

Most of the tea plantation workers are forcedly migrated from Hindu low cast or Dalit community of Bihar, Madras, Orissa, Andhra Pradesh, Madhya Pradesh, west Bengal, Uttar Pradesh and other places of India by the British companies in at the earlier stage of tea garden establishment. Now they are citizen and voter of Bangladesh. But the community till today excluded from the mainstreaming community. Tea gardens look like a separate state into a state. They have no such courage to demand any things from the garden management (Baul, 2014). Although the strong voice of minorities in the democratic process may lead to great progress in frightening poverty (Council of Europe, 2012). Most of the tea plantation workers do not have any idea about political parties of Bangladesh (Das & Islam, 2016). They just know the name of Hasina and Khaleda. They think that the politicians tried to buy their vote during the election. They are not equally treated with the mainstream people often looked down and treated as untouchables by the outsiders.

Vulnerability to Shocks, Violence and Crime.

Tea plantation workers are the most vulnerable community in natural socks live in a miserable condition with their family and cattle's in a single room. Those houses are generally made of mud thatched and bamboo, which was not repaired for a long time. In monsoon, Water come in to the house and the mad floor is flooded with water, in winter; they shiver in the chilling cold. They face violence, abuse, discrimination and deprivation in different form. Tea plantation workers are considered as personal and domestic servant. They are bond to do whatever they asked. (Jones, 1986).Women tea workers face harassment of different types. Young girls are called for household works in the manager's bungalow offer at the risk of sexual harassment. In the garden, there is open access to alcohol (Bangla Mod)

which was limited for only tea garden workers for their recreation. However, currently peoples from mainstreaming community or outsiders enter in to the garden for Alcohol and other illegal activities and crime.

CONCLUSION

Tea is the most popular beverage in the world after water. A major export item and thus sources of national income. Tea plantation workers keep the industry alive but they get a superficial wages and fringe benefits considering their basic needs and rights. The tea plantation workers are very less paid compared to our neighbor tea producer countries. They earn only 1.02 USD per day for working sunrise to sunset. It is support that all workers are living below the World Bank defined poverty line. They do not have any choice in regards to their life and amenities. The workers are very dependent on companies for food, accommodation and education of their children, health service and so no. The working environment is also hazardous for their health thus they suffer in different kinds of diseases. The community is out of the light of education except a very few which consider the root of social exclusion. They are excluded from the mainstream community. The mainstream community looked down and treated as untouchable. Social exclusion from the mainstream community of a particular group of people reduces the poverty reduction rate as a whole. The tea plantation workers lead a miserable life but a very few number of micro level studies on tea plantation workers have been down so far. Large scales research need to capture the real-life condition of tea workers to make sustainably sound export-oriented tea industry. In this reality, Government should take comprehensive inactivates. Moreover, garden authority should be more conscious about legal provision and rights of tea plantation workers. Along with institutional actions and support of GOs, NGOs, it is necessary to change their attitude and thinking toward the deprived community who lives in the labor line of the garden.

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